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Abbreviations

AA	Kant, Immanuel. 1900-. <i>Kant's gesammelte Schriften. Akademieausgabe</i> . 23 vols. Edited by Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Berlin.
AWE	Herder, Johann Gottfried. 1985-1990. <i>Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelausgaben</i> . 2 vols. Edited by Regine Otto. Berlin: Aufbau Verlag.
DA	Herder, Johann Gottfried. 1977-2016. <i>Briefe. Gesamtausgabe 1763-1803</i> . 18 vols. Edited by Wilhelm Dobbek and Günter Arnold. Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger.
FHA	Herder, Johann Gottfried. 1985-2000. <i>Werke in zehn Bänden</i> . 10 vols. Edited by Günter Arnold et al. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag.
HWP	Herder, Johann Gottfried. 1984-2002. <i>Werke</i> . 3 vols. Edited by Wolfgang Proß. Munich: Carl Hanser.
KrV	Kant, Immanuel. (1781, 1787) 1976. <i>Kritik der reinen Vernunft</i> . Edited by Raymund Schmidt. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.
N	Hamann, Johann Georg. 1949-1957. <i>Sämtliche Werke. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe</i> . Edited by Josef Nadler. Vienna: Herder Verlag.
SWS	Herder, Johann Gottfried. 1877-1913. <i>Sämtliche Werke</i> . 33 vols. Edited by Bernhard Suphan, Carl Redlich and Reinhold Steig. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung.
WA	Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. 1887-1919. <i>Goethes Werke. Herausgegeben im Auftrage der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen</i> . 133 vols. Edited by Louise Sophie. Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlau.
ZH	Hamann, Johann Georg. 1955-1979. <i>Briefwechsel</i> . 7 vols. Edited by Walther Ziesemer and Arthur Henkel. Wiesbaden: Insel Verlag.

Introduction

This study engages the tensions in Johann Gottfried Herder's (1744-1803) early thought between the One and the Many, between unity and diversity, and the universal and the particular. I will interpret the young Herder's psychology, hermeneutics and philosophy of history in dialogue with the reception history of Herder as a historical relativist. Within German historicism particularly, he has been heralded as the originator of the historical mode of thought. Importantly, this appraisal was, from the beginning, also a strategic move within the polemics over the 'crisis of historicism' (Troeltsch [1922] 1977; Meinecke [1936] 1946, *Vorbemerkung*; cf. Wittkau 1992, 190-196). In the Anglophone history of ideas, Isaiah Berlin has likewise popularized Herder as one of the first thinkers to recognize the incommensurability of value-systems and to challenge the universalist foundations of Western thought (1976, xxii-xxiv). Apart from the label 'relativism', Berlin connected Herder's ideas to the philosophical doctrine 'pluralism' ([1980] 1990). Both subsequently found their advocates in the secondary literature on Herder's views on human nature and the historical and cultural diversity of moral, political and aesthetic values.

I will argue that Herder is not best interpreted as a relativist, and that his pluralism is of a more deflated sort than the theoretically loaded pluralisms figuring in more recent political philosophy. I will chiefly pursue two strategies. First, I will bring out the elements of human-historical existence that Herder does treat as universal. I will examine the manner in which he conceives of their universality and the way these universal elements ensure that the unities of humans and their experiences are recognized. Furthermore, I will discuss the key methodologies and models Herder relies on in making sense of these unities as reflected or contained in the particular, as unities in diversity. After assessing these manners of reconciling the One and the Many, I will conclude that overall, he subscribes to a monistic ontotheology which underlies his anthropology and informs the universal humanistic ethical imperative that guides his philosophy of history. This is why I conclude that Herder is not committed to historical relativism.

Second, I will examine Herder's responses to contemporary views, issues and themes that appear connected to relativism. Let me provide a brief overview of the views and problems that I will include in this category and indicate how I interpret his reactions to them. In eighteenth-century Europe, the figures most closely resembling relativists were skeptics and historical Pyrrhonists. Authors such as Michel Montaigne, Pierre Bayle, David Hume and Voltaire relied on skeptical arguments for their criticism of popes and kings. Their skepticism

had real effects on the social status quo and was discredited and incriminated correspondingly. In the first half of my study, I will make evident that, negotiating with British aestheticists and skeptics and French *philosophes*, Herder formulated a decidedly anti-skeptical philosophical project. By interpreting Herder's conception of the aims and methods of philosophy, I will explain how he took up sensualist, empiricist and historical discourses while denying that skeptical doubt plays a (fruitful) role in philosophy. That is, I will exhibit (in Chapters One, Two and Four) that Herder consistently denied that skeptical conclusions follow from any of his stressing of context-dependence, historical change and diversity.

Relativism and pluralism are both younger concepts, and, in the interpretation of Herder, only analysts' categories. Pluralism is frequently considered a less radical position than relativism, allegedly retaining more of the normativity sought for by philosophers and political theorists (e.g. by Spencer 2012b). Relativism has the older and more venerable historical tradition, uniting anthropological, historical, sociological and psychological research programs. Theorists of these disciplines have often taken their inspiration from Herder (Iggers [1968] 1983; Vermeulen 2015, 321-325, ch. 7; Sikka 2011, 41-42; Forster 2010, ch. 6; Zammito 2002). Nonetheless, it may appear anachronistic even to ask whether Herder faced the philosophical problem of relativism, or whether he subscribed to pluralism. Herder did not theorize these notions, neither their problems nor their promises. I will challenge a simplified argumentative pattern where he is described as facing relativistic threats, or slippery slopes of tendencies toward "extreme relativism" (Stadelmann 1928, 59; Beiser 2011, 138).¹ According to this pattern, Herder must adopt counter-strategies to avoid the relativistic implications of his historical thought. In response to this, I will identify those features in Herder's thought that preclude the 'problem of relativism' from becoming pressing in the first place.

Nonetheless, the historical tradition of relativistically-inclined theorists addresses various separate issues and themes. Examples of these themes are diversity, tolerance, historicity, incommensurability, contingency and equal validity. While I will argue that Herder's positions on these themes are different from how they have been perceived in this tradition, they nonetheless form a bridgehead for discussing his relation to relativism. In the second half of my dissertation, I will interpret those hermeneutic, theological and metaphysical views of Herder that explain why he approaches *prima facie* relativistic themes from a different

¹ Georg Iggers provides a clear example of this reasoning when he identifies a slippery slope within Herder's concept of history as a benevolent process: "To be sure, there are the seeds of relativism in this concept, for it assumes that all knowledge and all values are related to concrete cultural and historical settings. Such a supposition could lead to the anarchy of values" ([1968] 1983, 36).

perspective. I will argue that his views on these issues express metaphysical and religious certainties. The historicity of human experience, for example, Herder traces back to humankind's divine capacity for shaping one's own existence, and to the general providential development of the *Bildung* (education, formation) of humanity. The diversity of ways of life, Herder approaches as the reflection of the harmonious organization of creation. Apart from his monist position, Herder's approach to relativistic-sounding themes diverges from later historicist positions. I will claim that it is more fruitfully interpreted as a theological humanism.

In fact, Herder constitutes an example of an early historicist thinker who did not face the same problems as philosophers of history did around 1900.² My thesis supports the more general hypothesis that historical relativism really became perceived as a philosophical problem only when (neo-Kantian and phenomenological) philosophers started to treat it as a threat to their philosophies (Kinzel 2017, forthcoming; pace Beiser 2011; Iggers [1968] 1983). The text at the center of my thesis will be *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit: Beitrag zu vielen Beiträgen des Jahrhunderts* (1774). On the one hand, discussions of Herder's relativism have centered on this text, singling it out as his most radically historical work, the "Grundbuch des Historismus" (Stadelmann 1928, 28; Meinecke [1936] 1946, 408; Litt 1942, 83). On the other hand, Herder formulated the monistic pillars of his anthropology, ontotheology and philosophy of history in the same phase of his career. *Auch eine Philosophie* thus suggests itself as the most suited center of attention for my task. I will discuss aspects of this text in Chapters Three, Four and Six, before I dedicate the concluding chapter to a comprehensive interpretation.

Furthermore, in the first and second halves of my thesis, I will reconstruct those features of Herder's position (his psychology, his theological anthropology, and his hermeneutic method) which are in tension and interplay in *Auch eine Philosophie*. In Chapters One to Three, I will emphasize Herder's resolve to acknowledge the systematic importance of the empirical, historical and particular in human experience and historical understanding. From Chapter Four onward, I will analyze his efforts to recognize the connections, unities and stabilities of human-historical existence, as well as their relation to the divine. My interpretation of *Auch eine Philosophie* thus builds on the results of the previous chapters and assesses their systematic interconnection.

² In the final chapter, I will identify some of Herder's ideas indicating that he was an example of (and indeed helped establish) a wider current of religious, humanistic and romanticist views that connect e.g. Wilhelm Humboldt, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Leopold Ranke and Johann Gustav Droysen.

Before I outline my chapters, I will discuss some general interpretative problems, sketching how my account relates to the scholarly literature. First, philosophical discussions of Herder have, in the past, been dominated by the Kantian assessment that Herder is a ‘pre-Critical’ thinker; a ‘dogmatic empiricist’ with unrestrained metaphysical propensities. Herder indeed went far in his adoption of empiricist methodology, yet without becoming correspondingly modest ontologically. In the scholarly literature, both aspects of Herder’s philosophy – ‘empiricism’ and ‘metaphysics’ – have been analyzed and advocated.³ Likewise, some have interpreted Herder as a “thoroughgoing naturalist”, while others have retorted that this does not do justice to the religious dimension of Herder’s philosophy (HWP 2, 1028-1216; Zammito 2016; Cordemann 2010; Schmidt 2017).⁴ John Zammito presents this situation as a dilemma between “historical” and “presentist” considerations in deciding how to weigh Herder’s positions of “thoroughgoing naturalism” and “a Providential notion of creation” (Zammito 2016, 20-21). His conclusion is grim: “We can, of course, simply find Herder hopelessly inconsistent, find the Lutheran minister and official schizophrenically tied to the naturalist philosopher of history like some gruesome Siamese twin. That would leave Herder scholarship in a hopeless dead end. But how can we think them *together*?” (21-22). In a review of the *Herder Handbuch* (2016), Zammito finds the same problem concerning empiricism and metaphysics. While he admits that, historically, both “a robust empiricism as well as an emphatic metaphysical-theological framework” are part of Herder’s philosophy, he claims “that these positions, while Herder may have held them simultaneously, present unworkable congeries for interpretation from our own cultural frame” (Zammito 2017, 306). His proposition is that, after admitting that Herder could hold these positions together, “[p]resentism will have its claim”: we should “*choose* which Herder we wish to retrieve” (307).

Presentist considerations influence which questions we ask of historical texts, and which projects we pursue. But should they lead us to censure a tension in Herder’s philosophy which scholarship has established in great detail; which had been identified already during his lifetime; and which, after all, can be identified in countless other positions in the history of philosophy? I think it is more rewarding both historically and systematically to embrace the historical fact that Herder remained a card-carrying pre-Critical thinker throughout his life, and to confront his Janus-faced oeuvre in its full complexity (Heinz 2016a, 46-47). More to the point: The

³ Examples are Norton (1991) and Adler (1990) on the one hand, and Heinz (1994b) and vom Hofe (1984, 1986, 1987, 1989) on the other.

⁴ Unfortunately, Rachel Zuckert’s (2019) study of *Herder’s Naturalist Aesthetics* was published after I finished the chapters of this dissertation; it could have improved my judgment on this issue. I did profit from her (2014) and (2015) articles.

philosophical relevance of texts depends on the questions asked them. The main question of this dissertation concerns the issue of relativism. Hence, it is essential not to smoothen out those aspects of Herder's philosophy where there seem to be tensions. In order to find out how Herder thought the particular and the universal, the empirical and the metaphysical, and the anthropological, historical and natural and the religious could be reconciled, their being in tension in his work should become maximally manifest. Discussing relativism directs the interpreter to those aspects of Herder's philosophy that stress the particularity, diversity, and general historicity and relativity of human subjects, languages and cultures, and to those that assert most boldly their unity. And even though Herder's proposals for reconciliation might seem unconvincing or even inconsistent, they explain why Herder could embrace historical diversity to the extent to which he did – perhaps as radically as no one (who was *not* a radical skeptic) had done before (Berlin [1965] 1976, 208-211; Beiser 1987, 143-144).

For example, Robert Norton's (1991) account of Herder's early aesthetics and philosophy of history reveals the ultimate limitations of opting for empiricism and leaving out the metaphysical issues. Norton omits from his account the positive reasons why Herder thought that a very extensive empirical inquiry into historical and psychological phenomena, together with their particular contexts, could approach the ideal of a universal science of humankind (50, 156-157, 184). Norton concludes, "[t]oday, when much more of the material that Herder sought is available, we may smile at his seemingly naive belief in the certainty that such a final conceptual synthesis [...] would have been possible at all" (157). Norton admires, but also leaves unaccounted and does not motivate, Herder's belief that "scrupulous fidelity to the particulars of historical circumstances could alone provide the foundation for a legitimate historical anthropology" (157). I will argue that this fidelity was not "alone" at all. Rather, Herder's optimism about his inquiries was guided by metaphysical and theological assumptions that must play their roles in the interpretations of his philosophy.

A second interpretative problem concerns Herder's concept of humanity. Many scholars agree that in order to arrive at an accurate interpretation of his pluralism or relativism, Herder's anthropology and his concept of humanity are essential.⁵ Their interpretations of this concept and its systematic implications diverge: Vicki Spencer recognizes a normative concept of humanity in Herder's political philosophy. This concept safeguards the "thin universalism" of a "minimal moral framework" assuring human welfare and the freedom to develop human

⁵ Among those who disagree with this assumption regarding the systematic importance of Herder's humanism are Rudolf Stadelmann (1928, 28ff.) and Michael Forster (2018, 218-219).

capacities in culturally specific ways (2019, 212, 2012b, 126). The historical and cultural plurality of (possibly incommensurable) values and ways of life derives from this framework and expresses the universal human drive to realize one humanity within the possibilities of a particular context. Spencer calls this Herder's pluralism and distinguishes his position from relativism (2012b, ch. 4). Sonia Sikka (2011) agrees with Spencer that a "minimally common human nature" (22) supports Herder's universalist normative project of promoting "human flourishing" (19-20). However, she stresses that according to Herder, these commonalities (and differences) can only be determined empirically (41). Because of this, also "moral and political questions [...] can be decided only through knowledge of the various types of human societies [...] only, that is, through anthropology" (41). Sikka concludes that Herder is committed to a qualified version of relativism, where "goodness of individual lives is relative" (4) to cultural values and ideals that cannot be ranked, because "there are no *transcendent* norms to which individuals in every culture could have access" (33). John Noyes (2015) similarly highlights that in Herder's "aesthetics of human nature" (13), "common humanity [must] be developed out of experiences of difference" (134). Noyes suggests that Herder turns the problem of relativism, and the tensions between universalism and relativism, into (unresolved, but unceasingly important) problems of any "aesthetics against imperialism" (15-16).⁶

Contributing to this literature on Herder's humanism and his pluralism or relativism, I will argue that his humanism is informed by his biblical hermeneutics and part of a theological anthropology. As a result, the shared core of common human nature appears as the absolute potential of all human developments, and the universalism of Herder's humanism as based on the monistic character of (the origin and essence of) humanity. Because of this, my conclusions regarding pluralism and relativism will deviate from Spencer, Sikka and Noyes.

The two lines of argument that I will pursue ask for reflection on my methodology. First, in reconstructing Herder's position on views, issues and themes connected to relativism, my interpretation starts from a systematic interest, informed by philosophical discussions of a problem that came to be perceived as particularly pressing around 1900. By confronting Herder's philosophy with this problem and asking why he responded differently to the tensions in his views on psychology, history and religion, I am pursuing a presentist concern. The methodologies that I apply in order to achieve this goal, however, are historical. For example, I aim to interpret Herder's views in different fields as responses to contemporaries and as contributions

⁶ Noyes thus conceives of his study of Herder as a contribution to postcolonial theory. Apart from the three authors mentioned, I will discuss multiple other positions on Herder's concept of humanity, e.g. by Adler (1994b), Leventhal (1994), Muthu (2003), Frazer (2010) and Gjesdal (2017).

to eighteenth-century debates. I attempt to render his arguments *intelligible as responses* to these debates, and not *defensible as solutions* to twenty-first-century problems (thence the long sections on historical context particularly in Chapters One, Two and Five). Furthermore, especially regarding Herder's 1774 works, I seek, in my interpretation, to explain why his contemporaries responded to his works the way they did. Thus, I present the reactions of e.g. Johann Georg Hamann, Immanuel Kant, Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz and Matthias Claudius, and motivate their readings of Herder's texts. Regarding *Auch eine Philosophie*, this procedure leads into a direction that diverges from various recent interpretations (e.g., Gjesdal 2017, ch. 6; Piirimäe 2015; Zammito 2009).

Moreover, on occasion, I have tried to trace the history of ideas and motifs back to their much older sources in order to uncover their broader significance. My analysis of the mythical figure of Proteus, in Chapter Four, is an example of how *longue durée* history of ideas may help to recognize the multiplicity of systematic roles that this myth has in Herder's arguments. Finally, my reconstruction of Herder's philosophy is systematic in the sense that I seek to identify those theses that explain, beyond individual texts, how Herder responds to philosophical problems. In order to facilitate an overall assessment of Herder's philosophy of history, I will assume that certain of his 1774 theses fulfill similar systematic roles already in his 1769 writings. I work on the presupposition that my corpus of texts warrants this procedure.⁷

Outline of the dissertation

In Chapter One, I engage the young Herder's relation to skepticism and assess his reception of Hume's *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. Rather than comparing Herder's Hume reception with later German engagements with Hume's theoretical philosophy, I sketch some of the main reactions around 1750, and situate Herder's response with respect to these. I argue that his understanding of human sensation and belief leads him to asserting that philosophy should consist in an anti-skeptical analysis of common sense. Furthermore, I argue that Herder seeks to direct philosophical inquiry away from the building of metaphysical systems and toward the science of human nature.

⁷ I thus question that a 'Bückeburg turn' affected a radical break in Herder's intellectual biography, turning an "Enlightenment free-thinker" into a "mystic" (Beiser 2011, 127-132). This received narrative stems from Haym ([1880] 1954, 531ff.); see Otto (1989) for an overview of the biographical assessments and for a philologically based counter-argument highlighting the continuities between drafts of Herder's biblical hermeneutics between 1766 and 1774.

In Chapter Two, I analyze Herder's *psychology*. I interpret his approach as being empiricist and genetic. I proceed by interpreting Herder as a contributor to the German debates on '*Sinnlichkeit*' and as a critical interrogator of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's aesthetics. The central problem of Herder's psychology is the following: Whereas he relies on a Leibnizian conception of the human soul, he seeks to uncover the intricate web of contingencies and developments driving the history of human knowledge. His genetic psychology must navigate the tensions between historically understanding the diversity of human beliefs, and tracing judgments and concepts back to their psychological origins.

Chapter Three stages the transition from psychology to *history*, i.e., to historical hermeneutics and to the philosophy of history. In this chapter, I argue that Herder's conception of historical understanding relies on his psychological account of the capacity to recognize resemblances to oneself. By connecting his account of the sensuous belief in the general analogy of nature with his view of empathy, I qualify the sense in which, for Herder, historical cultures adhere to incommensurable sets of values. To this end, I interpret Herder's psychological analyses of prejudice, of empathetic understanding and of the comparative method in historiography. I discuss his criticisms of various ways in which he sees his contemporaries ethnocentrically assuming various particular values and manners of thought to have universal validity. I conclude that according to Herder, historical understanding and empathizing are grounded in the human ability to recognize analogies between different modes of experience.

In Chapter Four, I analyze Herder's attempts at reconciling the unity and difference of the historical products of humanity, i.e., of languages, literatures and aesthetic and moral values. I proceed by analyzing the young Herder's use of the Proteus myth in conceiving the historical change of human forms. I argue that previous interpreters have not fully appreciated the richness of connotations and implications connected by Herder to this central metaphor of his historical thought. His relying on it has often been interpreted only as a way of stressing radical historical difference. By outlining the reception history of the Proteus myth in Antiquity, the Renaissance and Early Modernity, I show that Herder also appeals to various features that are more positive. These include Proteus' hidden, but stable identity, as well as his capacity for divination. I will distinguish between three strategies for reconciling diversity and unity recognizable in Herder's Protean understanding of humanity. First, Herder aims for a comparative synthesis of all the historical forms of humanity in order to recognize that Proteus' identity is reflected in all particular forms. Second, Herder has high expectations of the exhaustive causal-genetic chase of the shape-shifting human subject. Third, he stresses that the value of

the historical existence of finite human beings lies in the malleability of human nature and in the plurality of forms of humanity that it produces. Working toward an understanding of the structure of world history must attest to the general *Bildung* of Protean humanity.

After having thus set out some of the pillars of the young Herder's philosophy of history, I return to a hermeneutic project of his. By analyzing Herder's biblical hermeneutics and philosophy of *religion*, Chapters Five and Six provide a fuller understanding of his conceptions of humanity, history and revelation. I thus delineate the theological presuppositions of Herder's philosophy of history. In Chapter Five, I situate Herder's early biblical studies within contemporary projects of historical and poetic Bible exegesis. Herder proposes to interpret the Bible as a product of humans living in particular historical contexts and as a collection of poetic documents. Still, I argue that Herder understands the Hebrew poets' manner of sensuously documenting nature as expressing divine revelation. I particularly stress that he traces the capacity to emulate a sensuous view of nature in the poetry of peoples around the globe. I conclude that this sensuous intuition of nature is the universal on which Herder relies in explaining why humans have been able, in different ages, to develop authentic forms of religion.

In Chapter Six, I continue to elaborate on Herder's conception of religious experience. I analyze the hermeneutic approach that he brings to the text of Genesis 1 in his 1774 *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts*. I venture to disentangle the dynamic interaction, theorized by Herder, between historical understanding, the interpretation of nature, emulating the ancient Hebrews' aesthetic expressions, and recognizing certain parallelistic connections between the images of the biblical text, triggering, in turn, the religious experience of God's presence in nature. Herder understands the parallelism of Genesis 1 as a hieroglyph. From his hieroglyph hypothesis, he infers theological conceptions of creation, humanity and history. They involve infusing history with normativity and conceiving the history of human culture as having evolved out of a single origin, connected to a primordial revelation. In my interpretation of *Älteste Urkunde*, I pay special attention to its controversial reception. I stress that Herder understands his hieroglyph hypothesis as a historical discovery, derived from emulating the right hermeneutic perspective upon the biblical poetry and the historical context of humankind's primeval natural religion. Nonetheless, Herder's hypothesis involves an ontotheological monism with a very thin, but stable structure for nature and history. Herder aims to historically prove that God's instruction is inscribed in the structure of nature and forms the source of human culture.

In Chapter Seven, I interpret *Auch eine Philosophie* not just as criticizing contemporary philosophy of history, but also as presenting an alternative concept of history as the unified and providential development of humanity. To show this, I flesh out the concrete structure that Herder envisions for universal history. I argue that Herder's critique has the function of clearing the ground for finding the right hermeneutic standpoint upon history. And I engage the question whether the structure of history is itself hieroglyphic. Furthermore, I claim that Herder's conception of history includes a systematic function for a certain transcendence and expresses eschatological hopes for the future. I substantiate this claim by analyzing the apparent tension between Herder's claim that the nations colonized by Europeans may defeat their colonizers, and his Christian ideal of a future humanity integrating all human forms into a fuller existence. I conclude that Herder holds on to a non-Eurocentric form of eschatology.

I derive the following more general conclusions from my interpretation of Herder's 1774 philosophy of history. First, it is within his theology of history that Herder appreciates the historical, individual and diverse, and formulates his main historicist ideas. Herder's philosophy of history has a monist foundation in theology, and his theses on the value of history show that his view is distinct from relativism. Second, regarding relativistic themes like historicity, individuality, incommensurability, equal validity, *Einfühlung* and tolerance, Herder's view clearly diverges from later historicist positions. His theses express his religious aspirations of intimating the (complex and never fully visible) providential course of human development and of recognizing the worth of all of human-historical existence. Furthermore, in tracing and advocating the general *Bildung der Menschheit*, Herder pursues a humanistic ethical imperative that derives from his theological anthropology and that applies across the changing shapes of humanity. I end by concluding that Herder should not be interpreted as a relativist, and by reflecting on some of the wider implications of this result.

1. Sensualism versus skepticism

To begin my discussion of Herder's early philosophy and its relation to the problem of relativism, I focus on Herder's anti-skepticism. When the early Herder sees a danger lurking that we would call relativistic, he considers the train of reasoning, which leads to it, to be an instance of skepticism. Therefore, his response to skepticism is crucial for my argument. Herder's anti-skepticism is particularly important because the young Herder also partly embraces the very critical stances toward philosophy of Hume, Shaftesbury, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot and many others (see Noyes 2015, 11-15; Zammito 2002, ch. 4; HWP 2, 1128-1216). Herder aims to lead philosophy into an empiricist direction. He proposes to center philosophical inquiry on the human being's sensuous forces and their historical development. In the first part of my dissertation, I will highlight Herder's preoccupation with the empirical, psychological and historical. By presenting Herder's theses on these fields, I will indicate why Herder has at times been interpreted as a skeptical empiricist (by Rudolf Haym, 1880) and a historical relativist (by Rudolf Stadelmann, 1928). In the second part, I will then expound, and make more explicit, the universalism that Herder also adheres to, and which supports his empiricism.

First, however, I will argue that the young Herder relies on an anthropological universalism in his anti-skepticism. For this purpose, I focus on one aspect of a very early fragment by Herder, *Versuch über das Sein* (1763/1764): his reaction to philosophical skepticism, and his understanding of the relation between philosophy and everyday life.⁸ This will also help to understand Herder's general epistemological position.⁹ I will try to understand Herder's early epistemology and metaphilosophy as a response to the issue of how to deal with Hume's version of philosophical skepticism. Particularly, I will analyze how Herder relies on considerations regarding the use of philosophy for life in claiming that human subjects should trust their sensuous certainties. In explanation, I will point out that Herder considers skeptical doubt a real-life threat rather than a methodological device.

⁸ I will not extensively engage here central aspects like the status of the concepts of Being, space, time, and force, or the issue of idealism. For analyses of these topics, see Baum (1990), Heinz (1994b, ch. 1, 2018) and Desouza (2018).

⁹ In the secondary literature, Herder's epistemology has been discussed from two perspectives. On the one hand, scholars in the neo-Kantian tradition of Rudolf Haym have interpreted Herder in the terms of Kant's pre-Critical and Critical philosophy. They have connected Herder's philosophy to empiricism and idealism (Haym [1880] 1954; Cassirer [1916] 1975; Irmscher [1987] 2009, 142-150; Beiser 1987, ch. 5; Norton 1991, ch. 1; Heinz 1994b; Zammito 2002). On the other hand, scholars have attempted to present Herder's philosophy as a legitimate alternative to Kantian philosophy, for example by interpreting him as a pragmatist, a naturalist, a phenomenologist, or a vitalist (Gaier 1988, 1994; Menges 1990; Leventhal 1990; Adler 1994; Sikka 2011, ch. 6, 2018).

I will proceed as follows. I first quote some of the central passages of *Versuch* to give an impression of the problem. Subsequently, I provide some historical context on anti-skepticism in the late 1750s. I will then turn to interpreting *Versuch*'s main claims. The first central passage is the following:

Das Sein unerweislich – kein Dasein Gottes erweislich. Kein Idealist zu widerlegen – alle Existentialsätze [sic], der größte Teil der menschlichen Erkenntnis nicht zu beweisen – o alles ungewiß, nein nicht ungewiß, auch nicht im Erweise ungewiß: sondern gewiß und gar nicht zu erweisen. Das Sein so wie wirs genommen haben hat niemand geleugnet: überstudierten Philosophen kam der Gedanke des Zweifels ein, und sie suchten es zu beweisen. (FHA 1, 19; cf. Noyes 2015, 49)

The concept of Being is taken from Kant's discussion with Crusius on the nature and number of unanalyzable concepts and 'unerweislichen Grundwahrheiten' that should ground metaphysics (Baum 1990, 132, Heinz 1994b, 5-8). But Herder relies on an everyday-life perspective in stating that the indemonstrability of the concept of Being (and of God) does not imply that human beings doubt existence. Rather, he grants a concrete and existential significance to what he considers the human being's sensuous certainty of Being:

Je sinnlicher also ein Begriff desto Unzergliederlicher – und gibts einen der am meisten sinnlich ist, so wird man nichts in ihm zergliedern können – so wird er auch völlig ungewiß sein – ja wenn wir ganz Philosophen ohne Menschen wären: – Aber sind nicht die sinnlichen Begriffe gewiß! – haben sie nicht eben die *Überzeugungskraft* so wie die zergliederten gewiß sind; weil sie eine *Beweiskraft* haben. (FHA 1, 11)

Herder contrasts the *Überzeugungskraft*, which sensuous concepts naturally carry, with the artificial *Beweiskraft* of fully analyzed (and thus distinct) concepts. He then states that, whereas philosophers doubt our natural certainties, the (common) human being doubts the certainty of philosophical demonstrations (11). And when Herder states that Being is the center of all certainty, the suggestion seems to be that our natural certainties are better guides for us (15, 19). He finally proposes that a "subjektive Philosophie" should collect and order our sensuous concepts along degrees of sensuousness and hence unanalyzability (12, 20; cf. FHA 1, 112).

Many interpreters of Herder's epistemology have taken up this early text in order to work out positive accounts of a Herderian conception of *Seinsgewißheit*, *Gefühlsgewißheit*, or *Leiblichkeit*, and to claim that Herder developed a strikingly modern 'alternative account of

human rationality’ (Adler 1990; Gaier 1988, 43; Irmscher 2009, 188; Menges 1990, 138). These interpreters have attached much weight to Herder’s idea of changing the perspective of philosophy by way of a ‘Copernican turn’ toward anthropology (FHA 1, 134). Rather than interpreting this ‘turn’ as a radical break in eighteenth-century philosophy, I will approach it as a continuation of various already existing trends (see Norton 1991, ch. 1). Toward this end, I will focus on his reception of Hume, for an aspect that has not yet received the attention that it deserves, is Herder’s anti-skepticism. In her interpretation of the *Versuch*, Marion Heinz (1994b, 14) notes that Herder separates Hume’s insights into the limits of human knowledge from their skeptical consequences. My question is how Herder aims to defend such a separation.¹⁰ I therefore want to investigate his reasons for denying the legitimacy of skepticism, and how these reasons relate to his conception of philosophy. I will argue that Herder seeks to direct philosophical inquiry away from the building of metaphysical systems and toward the science of human nature.

First, I will sketch some of the main German responses to Hume’s *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748), namely, the reactions of Johann Georg Sulzer, Moses Mendelssohn and Johann Georg Hamann. Second, I will zoom in on Herder’s responses to Hume and to these German readers of Hume, and explain why Herder takes skepticism to be the natural corollary of a mistaken philosophical practice. I will expound in more detail Herder’s sensualism, his anti-skepticism, and his focus on common sense and everyday life (in section 2.1.), and I will explore how he aims to theorize into the historical and psychological diversity of human certainties and beliefs (in 2.2). I will finish (in 2.3) by returning to the idea of an ‘anthropological turn’ in Herder’s philosophy and announce how the following chapters will engage the projects of his that rely on his conception of philosophy.

1.1. Anti-skepticism in the late 1750s

In eighteenth-century intellectual culture, different forms of skepticism were very much alive and fiercely responded to. Bayle’s dictionary was one of the most widely owned books in France and reintroduced Sextus Empiricus to the public (see Popkin 2003, ch. 18). The notoriety of this book led authors such as Crousaz and Formey to “equating Pyrrhonism with a dangerous disease that was spreading through society like an epidemic” (Matytsin 2012, 75-76; Laursen 1996, 263-266). The French *philosophes* (Diderot, Voltaire, d’Holbach, d’Alembert) took up

¹⁰ Heinz problematizes this separation in the context of Herder’s combining empiricism with metaphysical positions. I will bring to the fore the principled reasons that he formulated in favor of it.

many of the Pyrrhonist strategies in their attacks on religious and philosophical dogmatism (see Tonelli [1971] 1997, 35-50; Popkin [1992] 1997, 157-172). One of those strategies was historical Pyrrhonism, which centered on the certainty of historical knowledge, and on the skeptical import of the historical diversity of moral values and metaphysical beliefs (Barth 2012, 39-41; cf. Matytsin 2015). Furthermore, Hume presented a very subtle use of philosophical skepticism in the service of a more general critique of metaphysics.

Coming up with a response to skepticism has, for most of the history of philosophy, been something very different from solving a neutral, technical puzzle. Rather, it has often been felt to be a moral duty that involves extinguishing a real-life threat to knowledge, faith and society. Correspondingly, the means for defeating or discrediting skeptics were not restricted to philosophical arguments. Yet at the same time, in the period between Wolff and Kant, the notion of skeptical doubt as a useful philosophical tool was on the rise. Authors were increasingly in two minds on whether to accept skepticism as a legitimate philosophical practice. On the one hand, they took an interest in the arguments of Bayle, Hume and Voltaire, and agreed that too much superstition was sold under the guise of rigorous philosophy. On the other hand, they feared a rising *Zweifelsucht* and *Freigeisterei*, not to speak of atheism (Laursen 1996, 268-269). It thus seems fitting to speak, as Matytsin does in his (2016) monograph, of a “*Specter of Skepticism in the Age of Enlightenment*”, qualifying the sense in which this was the age of unlimited trust in the powers of human reason.¹¹

The scholar of ancient skepticism Myles Burnyeat formulates an interesting hypothesis regarding the nature of this specter, viz. regarding how the two conflicting tendencies are interrelated. In his (1984) study of “The sceptic in his place and time”, Burnyeat suggests that as long as skepticism was experienced as a real existential threat, it proved difficult to accept its philosophical legitimacy, and engage it in a calm and detached way. Yet once skepticism was recognized as a legitimate philosophical problem and tool, the notion of ‘the sceptic’ lost its reference to real historical figures and became a philosophical fiction. Burnyeat’s thesis is that it was Kant’s distinction between empirical realism and transcendental idealism which affected the “insulation” of philosophical doubt from everyday beliefs (1984, 245-251).

Burnyeat’s thesis heavily depends on his interpretations of both the ancient Pyrrhonists and of the role of skepticism in Descartes, Berkeley, Hume and Kant. However, his notion of

¹¹ On this topic, cf. the essays collected in Popkin, De Olaso, and Tonelli (1997), and Laursen (1996, 261-262).

‘insulation’ may help to understand the German reception of Hume’s theoretical philosophy in the second half of the eighteenth century.

As Günter Gawlick and Lothar Kreimendahl observe in their (1987) monograph, *Hume in der deutschen Aufklärung*, it was difficult for German authors to appreciate Hume’s philosophy. This is because of the link between skepticism and irreligion (Gawlick and Kreimendahl 1987, 6). Specifically concerning Hume’s epistemology, Gawlick and Kreimendahl frequently take note of “einer geradezu erstaunlichen Oberflächlichkeit” of its reception (91). They lament: “Eine vorurteilsfreie und nicht von ihren als schädlich eingestuften Folgen her motivierte Prüfung des Humeschen Systems ist in der ersten Rezeptionsphase noch nicht möglich” (84). And they conclude that nobody, not even Kant, managed to appreciate the processual and methodological character of Hume’s mitigated skepticism. Instead, philosophers reduced Hume’s skepticism either to a destructive and pathological tendency toward doubt, or to a limited set of theses like Hume’s semantic empiricism and his critique of causality (112).

In the following paragraphs, I will present some early responses to Hume’s *Enquiry* by Sulzer, Mendelssohn and Hamann. I will highlight the mentioned tension between the two different stances towards skepticism. Yet in contrast to Gawlick and Kreimendahl, I wish to bracket the evaluation of these two stances as either “genuinely philosophical”, or a mere “theological prejudice”.¹² This is because it is precisely the lack of insulation between the societal and philosophical dimensions of skepticism that helps to understand Herder’s treatment of Hume’s skepticism: while Herder applauds Hume as a demolisher of metaphysical systems, he has no room for Hume’s skepticism within his own anthropologically oriented conception of philosophy. Against the background of the debates over the certainty attached to unanalyzable and sensuous concepts, Herder’s anti-skepticism allows him to approach the empirical from a more positive perspective. As a result, Herder argues for the crucial anthropological value of ‘genetically’ inquiring into the history of human knowledge.¹³

Hume’s *Enquiry* was brought to the attention of the German lands in 1755 by Sulzer. To us, the assessments of Hume’s skeptical arguments by Herder’s contemporaries are remarkable, since most of them seem to completely miss the point. I will illustrate the German Hume reception referring to the examples of Sulzer, Mendelssohn, and Hamann, and

¹² I agree with Manfred Kühn’s (2005, 104) assessment of this distinction as an “obvious anachronism [...] which, by the way, pervades their entire book”.

¹³ Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to several of Herder’s procedures as ‘genetic’ when they concern a phenomenon’s (phylo- and ontogenetic) development. This is common practice in the German literature and has also been adopted by Beiser (1987, ch. 5.4.) and Forster (2018, 247). Herder himself explicitly advocates ‘genetic explanation’ already in 1764 (HWP 1, 10). I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter Two and passim.

subsequently compare their positions to Herder's. Sulzer's edition of the German translation of the *Enquiry*, with Sulzer's commentaries, forms the reference point for all three.¹⁴

Both Sulzer and Mendelssohn perceived Hume's analysis of the validity of the principle of causality as the fundament of his skepticism.¹⁵ Therefore, I will start by briefly setting out what came to be known as 'Hume's problem'. Suffice it to let Hume summarize the central arguments, and comment on its main theses:

We have said, (1) that all arguments concerning existence are founded on the relation of cause and effect; (2) that our knowledge of that relation is derived entirely from experience; and (3) that all our experimental conclusions proceed upon the supposition, that the future will be conformable to the past. To endeavor, therefore, the proof of this supposition by probable arguments, or arguments regarding existence, must evidently be going in a circle, and taking that for granted, which is the very point in question. (Hume [1748] 1975, 35-36; my numerals)

In enquiring into the foundations of our reasoning regarding empirical 'matter of fact', Hume points at the following circle: (1) All reasoning aimed at extending our beliefs beyond past experience relies on the principle of causality. This principle (2) is built on our habit of experiencing a constant conjunction of pairs of events as cause and effect. We perform this conjunction based on a similarity between cases. Yet this similarity (3) is itself only based on past experience, i.e., on what we directly perceive plus what we causally infer. Therefore, this similarity only suggests that the future may resemble the past. This presupposition cannot secure that causal reasoning will predict future events. Hence, we also cannot (1) rely on the principle of causality in aiming to extend our beliefs beyond past experience.

In other words, Hume argues that no *a priori* deductive method exists that would prove the principle of causality. As a result, all our experiential knowledge relies on induction. Yet induction itself relies on a supposition – stability of nature over time – which can only be proven inductively. By consequence, the aspect of necessity, which would characterize both successful induction and the relation of cause and effect, cannot be proven. All our arguments concerning

¹⁴ Under the title *Philosophische Versuche über die Menschliche Erkenntniß. Als dessen vermischter Schriften Zweyter Theil. Nach der zweyten vermehrten Ausgabe aus dem Englischen übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen des Herausgebers begleitet* (1755). I refer to the facsimile edition by Heiner Klemme: Hume ([1755] 2000).

¹⁵ Sulzer makes this explicit in his commentary (see Hume [1755] 2000, 91). Mendelssohn announces that he will focus on the fourth section of the *Enquiry* ([1756] 1929, 156). See Gawlick and Kreimendahl (1987, 110-112) for the range of possible interpretations of the alleged core of Hume's skepticism at the time.

matters of fact – including the existence of an outside world, the stability of nature, and the existence of an active ego – thus never reach more than contingent truths.

1.1.1. Sulzer

In the preface to his edition of the *Enquiry*, Sulzer praises Hume as a “Wohltäter der Philosophie”, who may help to interrupt the “schädlichen philosophischen Frieden” in the German lands. Sulzer’s hope is that Hume’s doubt could help to again sharpen the weapons of German philosophers. Hume provides them with a challenge to defend more solidly, and to present more distinctly, the metaphysical systems that they formulate so confidently (Hume [1755] 2000, Vorrede des Herausgebers).

And yet, in his commentaries on the individual sections, Sulzer discredits Hume by relying on traditional stereotypes of the skeptic, among them dishonesty, self-contradiction, libertinism, laziness, blind faith, as well as practical irrelevance. Furthermore, while at least some of these accusations appear mutually exclusive – if skepticism were practically irrelevant, then why combat so vehemently skeptical libertinism? – they often appear in tandem (cf. Matytsin 2012). Anti-skepticism – precisely because of the lack of insulation of skepticism from everyday life – traditionally proves a movement in which ideology and philosophy strongly overlap. Sulzer provides no exception: He states that a huge danger resides in Hume’s “mediocrity”, and in his “giving up too quickly” in his metaphysical investigations (Hume [1755] 2000, 90). Furthermore, Sulzer criticizes Hume for making too much of a virtue out of his (in Sulzer’s eyes absurdly extreme) philosophical humility (136). Moreover, Sulzer accuses Hume of introducing custom and belief as obscure qualities in his skeptical solutions (133). He claims that Hume has thereby earned the reputation of “eines der gefährlichsten Zweifler unsrer Zeit”, and describes Hume’s skepticism about causation as “das eigentliche Fundament aller künftigen Zweifel und Verwirrung [...], welche Herr Hume über einige sehr wichtige Materien der Philosophie ausgestreuet hat” (91).

Why does Sulzer hold Hume’s skepticism to cause confusion, when he had before called him a possible “Wohltäter der Philosophie”? I shortly summarize Sulzer’s reasons: First, Sulzer is open to the idea that we should examine how our actual causal reasoning works. However, for him this only shows that we have easy and quick ways to arrive at the conclusions that are in accord with our metaphysics of causation (22-27). Philosophical analysis shows the reasons that we follow, even if they are only implicit in our conduct. Moreover, since these reasons can

be deduced within a system of metaphysics, their necessity need not be tested in experience (100-101). For Sulzer, experience seems to merely illustrate, and not (dis-)prove, the metaphysical principle of causation (96, 98). The principle has a logical validity which, in application, may help to explain our (everyday) experience, but which experience is not in the position to refute.

Second, against Hume's principles of custom and belief, Sulzer explicitly defers to his compatriots' understanding of the workings of rational psychology:

Ich traue meinen meisten deutschen Lesern so viel zu, daß sie von selbst einsehen, daß die von dem Verfasser angegebene Gewohnheit, Beyfall und Glaube, bloße Wörter sind, die weiter nichts erklären und auch nicht erklären können, wenn man darunter nicht soll eine Folge von Begriffen verstehen dürfen. Und was sollte das Gefühl, vermöge dessen man die Wahrheit von der bloßen Einbildung, seiner Meinung nach, unterscheiden soll, anders seyn, als der Erfolg der Gründe, welche wenn man sie alle deutlich entwickelte, die Wahrheit des einen und die Erdichtung des andern deutlich beweisen dürfen? (132)

In thus questioning Hume's "skeptical solution", Sulzer retains his position that implicit processes of reasoning may always be identified when human beings distinguish fact from fiction. According to Sulzer, the way that concepts are logically ordered will usually explain why humans form certain beliefs. Thus, our natural and habitual judgments on issues like whether effects follow from certain causes, and whether the future will be conformable to the past, are reflective of an objective necessity (93-98). Sulzer thinks the foundation of such processes of thought can only be rendered distinct through the philosophical analysis of concepts. He thus denies Hume's claim that we cannot rely on *a priori* reasoning regarding empirical and contingent issues, such as associating causes to their effects, or assuming analogies between empirical objects. Nor does he see any value in the "principle of human nature" which Hume identifies as his skeptical solution.

Finally, in his commentary on the final section of the *Enquiry*, Sulzer does not seem genuinely interested in using skepticism to improve the rigor of German philosophy. Rather, he claims that many of Hume's doubts "sind so beschaffen, daß sie der practischen Überzeugung und den Handlungen nicht den geringsten Abbruch thun, und also unter unnütze Subtilitäten zu zählen, womit müßige Philosophen die Wissenschaften ekelhaft gemacht haben" (373). This expresses a focus on action and on empirical science that also characterized the dismissal of

radical skepticism by the French *philosophes* (see Popkin [1963] 1997, 8-11). But it does not seem to cohere very well with Sulzer's earlier diagnosis of the state of German philosophy. Finally, Sulzer concludes his commentary by giving an overall impression of Hume's moral integrity. Sulzer intimates "daß der Verfasser oft wider seine eigene Erkenntniß spricht, daß es scheint, es sey ihm oft weniger um die Wahrheit zu tun, als um das Vergnügen etwas zu sagen, das den gemeinen Begriffen der Weltweisen widerspricht" (Hume [1755] 2000, 374). In conclusion, Sulzer takes Hume's skepticism to be practically useless and morally dishonest. This matches well with the contemporary positions of sworn enemies of skepticism like Jean-Pierre de Crousaz, Johann Heinrich Samuel Formey and Albrecht von Haller: the skeptic is not really allowed in the philosophical arena as a worthy adversary (cf. Laursen 1996, 263-268).

1.1.2. Mendelssohn

In his 1756 *Gedanken von der Wahrscheinlichkeit*, Mendelssohn exhibits a different response to Hume. According to Mendelssohn, Hume doubts "die Richtigkeit aller unsrer Experimentalschlüsse" (230) and seems out to destroy our "physische Gewißheit" ([1756] 1929, 157). Mendelssohn aims to counter these doubts by showing that, in fact, human beings may very effectively predict future events, even if they lack complete certainty. Mendelssohn sketches a theory of probability in order to show that our judgments concerning experience, analogy and induction can still have a high probability (156). It thus seems as if Mendelssohn accepts that there exists no *a priori* foundation for the principle of causality and that causal reasoning is founded on experience alone.

Hume had of course never doubted that we can reach high probabilities in prediction (Hume [1748] 1975, 56-59). It remains unclear whether Mendelssohn recognizes that Hume's target is our ability to account for the *necessity* of the causal relation. The possibility remains open that Mendelssohn, like many *philosophes* and members of the Berlin Academy, settles on securing experimental knowledge while admitting the weakness of reason in metaphysical matters.¹⁶ As a result, Mendelssohn does not produce the kind of reasoning that Hume demands as foundation for extending past experience into the future. Applying mathematics to experience does not seem to help solve the more principal issue of whether the future will conform to the past.

¹⁶ Of course, in many of his other writings, Mendelssohn does not argue independently from all systems and asserts much more positive metaphysics, granting it mathematical certainty, as argued in the 1762 prize-essay. On the *philosophes* and members of the academy, see Popkin ([1992] 1997, 160-161) and Tonelli ([1971] 1997, 35-50).

Another way to make sense of Mendelssohn's response is to assume that he does not, in fact, think that Hume's skepticism is a threat to metaphysics. In a 1758 letter to Lessing, Mendelssohn argues that Hume's doubt regarding causation merely reflects the Leibnizian position that, while causation cannot be empirically established, it is metaphysically accounted for in the system of pre-established harmony ([1756] 1929, 21; cf. Kühn 2005, 107-108). Furthermore, in *Gedanken von der Wahrscheinlichkeit*, Mendelssohn argues that the logical category of the probable is necessary in order to apply the rules of metaphysics to concrete cases (Mendelssohn [1756] 1929, 149). That is to say, just as for Sulzer, it is merely in the process of application that the general principles of metaphysics must rely on less certain statements about experience. The way Mendelssohn works out his theory of probability also raises the question whether he really accepts that causal reasoning has no metaphysical ground. Mendelssohn defines probability in contrast to truth: A judgment is true if, when we apply a certain predicate to a subject, (1) all determinations of the subject necessarily have this predicate as their consequence, and (2) all of these determinations are known to us. If only a few of these determinations are known to us, the judgement is merely probable. In other words: "Aus dem Verhältnisse der gegebenen Wahrheitsgründe zu denjenigen, die zur völligen Gewißheit gehören, wird der Grad der Wahrscheinlichkeit bestimmt" (151). This might sound circular: we would not accept a quantity of 'full certainty' as a guide in fields where it is precisely unknown in what such a quantity should consist. But Mendelssohn thought that such quantities existed, consisting in the principles of mathematics, the rules of logic and some principles in metaphysics and ethics (151).

In Mendelssohn's theory, probability changes from a vague notion of imperfect certainty, connected to "moral reasoning", or "*cognitio historica*", to a mathematically calculated notion delineating a very precise degree of certainty (Tonelli [1967] 1997, 78-79). Mendelssohn uses this notion to bridge the gap between experience and *cognitio philosophica* (cf. Zammito 2002, 47, 51, 65, 78). Even though Mendelssohn insists that probability can never fully provide such a bridge – for this would require an infinite repetition of experiments – we can *approximate* full certainty to a point where, humanly, nothing more could be demanded from us.

Unsere Experimentalschlüsse haben also einen sichern Grund darauf sie sich stützen. Wir kommen durch öfters wiederholte Erfahrungen, und durch das glaubwürdige Zeugniß anderer, die eben diese Erfahrungen angestellt haben, der mathematischen Evidenz immer näher, ob es gleich ausgemacht ist, daß wir sie

selbst, niemals vermittelt der Erfahrung erreichen können. (Mendelssohn [1756] 1929, 160)

Mendelssohn seems to conclude that we do not need a principled foundation of causal reasoning in order to approximate complete certainty regarding particular causal relations. This is because we may, through repeated experiment, make inferences about the degrees of certainty regarding connections between events. Of course, Hume would reply to this by saying “this, I must confess, seems the same difficulty, couched in different terms. The question still recurs, on what process of argument this *inference* is founded? [...] To say it is experimental, is begging the question. For all inferences from experience suppose, as their foundation, that the future will resemble the past” ([1748] 1975, 37).

Despite this difficulty – viz. in understanding how Mendelssohn provides a response to Hume’s problem – Mendelssohn does venture to meet the skeptic on his own ground. That is, Mendelssohn observes that skeptics have traditionally aimed their doubt at truth while they intend to live by probabilities ([1756] 1929, 149). By philosophically accounting for the skeptic’s “Stützen der Wahrscheinlichkeit”, Mendelssohn indirectly pays tribute to skepticism as a legitimate stance within philosophy.

1.1.3. Hamann

Hamann’s reception of Hume’s theoretical philosophy was certainly unique (cf. Brose 2006, 334-335, 354-357; Kondylis [1981] 2002, 572-575; Berlin [1977] 2013, 204-235). Hamann was not dependent on German translations of Hume; he taught Herder English during his Königsberg years (from 1762 to 1764). But Hamann did respond to Sulzer’s edition, welcoming his commentaries but lamenting his Wolffian hostility to Hume’s free-thinking and eclecticism (Hamann to Lindner, 01.06.1756, ZH 1, 205). Furthermore, in his 1759 *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*, he relied on Hume’s notion of belief to express his own fideistic position.

Contrary to Sulzer and Mendelssohn, Hamann applauds Hume’s skepticism about our ability to philosophically demonstrate our most basic beliefs. He also appreciates Hume’s skeptical solution, the theory of belief.¹⁷ Of course, the way Hamann interprets Hume’s notion of belief as *Glauben*, the divinely inspired foundation of epistemic and religious belief in one, turns Hume’s skepticism into a very different direction. Whereas on Hamann’s interpretation,

¹⁷ This stands in sharp contrast to Sulzer’s calling custom and belief occult qualities that lack explanatory value (Hume [1755] 2000, 131-132).

Hume still intends to undermine many of the philosophical and metaphysical convictions of Hamann's contemporaries, the threat of irreligion is gone.¹⁸ Rather, Hamann claims that Hume is himself inconsistent in not transferring his theory of belief up to the higher level of the Christian faith in the transcendent. Nonetheless, within the context of philosophical theorizing, Hamann accepts Hume's radical conclusions and does not resort to moral arguments against skepticism. Hamann embraces Hume's conclusion that "the observation of human blindness and weakness is the result of all philosophy" (Hume [1748] 1975, 31, cited in Hamann to Lindner, 03.07.1759, ZH 1, 355). His reaction, however, is to amplify the Christian tones of this conclusion, and put our trust in a source of certainty that has nothing to do with philosophical system and rational demonstration, namely: faith.

Hamann's productive misinterpretation of Hume's skeptical solution leads him to adopt a quite particular view on skepticism and on the insulation of philosophy from everyday life. Hamann does not really consider Hume's skepticism an existential threat, but neither does he recognize it as a legitimate philosophical problem. I will briefly illustrate Hamann's epistemological and meta-philosophical position before I turn to Herder's metaphilosophical view.

First, the way in which Hamann equates the Christian faith with Hume's notion of belief leads to a very tolerant epistemological position. According to Hamann, genuine faith is closely connected to divine revelation. Hamann infers from this that all genuinely sensuous instances of belief are equally divinely inspired (N 2, 73). The theological background of this inference becomes explicit in Hamann's understanding of creation. Hamann holds that scripture, nature and history may equally affect us and reflect God's revelations: "Die Einheit des Urhebers spiegelt sich bis in dem Dialecte seiner Werke; – in allen Ein Ton von unermäslicher Höhe und Tiefe!" (N 2, 204). This dialect hence mirrors God's speaking through all of creation: "Ihre Losung läuft über jedes Klima bis an der Welt Ende und in jeder Mundart hört man ihre Stimme" (198).

This brings Hamann to inquire into the history of religion with a very tolerant disposition. He thus states about the way ancient myths, oracles, and religion contrast with astrological prediction:

¹⁸ See Brose (2006, 359) for the role of Hume in Hamann's efforts to find for himself a distinctive position within the German intellectual field.

Daß, [...] wenn alles gleichartig erlogen und erdacht ist, dennoch der Wahn, die Einbildung und der Glaube daran zu ihrer Zeit und an ihrem Ort wirklich grössere Wunder veranlaßt habe und veranlassen könne [...] In diesem Verstande sollten aber die Zweifler mehr Recht als unsere Empyriker behalten, weil es menschlicher und Gott anständiger aussieht, uns durch unsere eigene Grillen und Hirngespinnste, als durch eine so entfernte und kostbare *Maschinerey* wie das Firmament [...] zu seinen Absichten zu regieren. (N 2, 69)

This eccentric affirmation of what was combatted at the time as superstition had its own risks. But it explains why Hamann could read Hume's 1757 *Natural History of Religion*, and *positively affirm* that religion is a matter of fear, passion, custom, and authority.

Second, the manner in which Hamann pitches faith against reason in the end leads him to very negatively assess the exercise of inducing skeptical conclusion via intricate arguments.¹⁹ For all his praise of Hume as a critic of philosophers, Hamann pitches a Socratic ignorance, based on feeling, against skeptical argument:

Die alten und neuen Skeptiker mögen sich noch so sehr in die Löwenhaut der sokratischen Unwissenheit einwickeln [...] Wissen sie nichts; was braucht die Welt einen gelehrten Beweis davon? Ihr Heucheltrug ist lächerlich und unverschämt. Wer aber so viel Scharfsinn und Beredsamkeit nöthig hat sich selbst von seiner Unwissenheit zu überführen, muß in seinem Herzen einen mächtigen Widerwillen gegen die Wahrheit derselben hegen. (N 2, 73)

Hamann suggests that the philosopher's need to stick to the practice of rational demonstration – even when what is demonstrated is our ignorance – may be explained psychologically. He argues that the skeptics seek their *ataraxia* in the wrong way. Instead, Hamann holds that demonstrations do not really affect our beliefs at all: “Was man glaubt, hat daher nicht nöthig bewiesen zu werden, und ein Satz kann noch so unumstößlich bewiesen seyn, ohne deswegen geglaubt zu werden” (N 2, 73). For Hamann, *Glauben* is constitutively insulated from philosophical argument, and so an authentic Socratic ignorance should be nursed by attending to this feeling of faith, and not by refuting arguments. The fact that Hamann insulates philosophy from belief in this way might suggest that, on Hamann's view, there is room for

¹⁹ This move was rehearsed before Hamann by various skeptics and/or fideists, such as Pascal and Bayle. Popkin notes that when liberal Protestants tried to save Bayle from being expelled from the French Reformed Church of Rotterdam, “he turned on them because they were using reason to defend their faith” (2003, 295). Tonelli ([1967] 1997, 84) observes that the fideistic appraisal of skepticism fits the German pietist tradition.

skepticism as a useful philosophical tool. To the extent that Hume debunks the high aims of the philosophers, Hamann does applaud Hume's skepticism. For Hamann, Hume reaches the right result, but this result only shows Hamann that Hume's own skeptical philosophy, qua reasoning about matters of fact, is powerless (ZH 1, 355-356). To conclude, Hamann in the end isolates one aspect of Hume's theoretical philosophy only to employ it against Hume's procedure of skeptical enquiry and against his deistic critique of superstition.

1.1.4. Conclusion

I finish this section with a short summary of the views of Sulzer, Mendelssohn and Hamann regarding Hume's skepticism. First, it proved difficult for German philosophers around 1750 to recognize the epistemological force and reach of Hume's argument. Hume's contention that his argument undermined the metaphysics of causation, and hence also of both the (ideal and real) influx between mind and body, was denied or overlooked. Instead, Sulzer's commentaries show a determination to stick to the premises that are being questioned, and to morally rebuke Hume for his skeptical attitude. Furthermore, Mendelssohn sets out to defend a theory of probability to show that Hume's doubts do not affect experimental knowledge, yet he does not actually consider Hume's arguments a threat to the metaphysical principle of causation. Thus, even though Sulzer and Mendelssohn intend to grant more significance to the empirical sciences, and to the lower faculties of the soul, they do not seriously reconsider whether empirical evidence could trump their metaphysical principles.²⁰ Hamann, by contrast, does appreciate the full import of Hume's skepticism in this respect. But then again, he completely changes the auspices under which Hume's arguments against metaphysical knowledge are interpreted.

1.2. Herder's sensualism and anti-skepticism

Apart from publishing the German edition of Hume's *Enquiry*, Sulzer was also of importance for Herder's first philosophical essay in a different role. In 1761, Sulzer announced a prize-question of the German Academy of the Sciences on the question whether the principles of metaphysics could achieve the same level of certainty and distinctness as the truths of

²⁰ Which is understandable considering the way the divide was set up between *cognitio historica* and *cognitio philosophica*. Cf. Tonelli ([1967] 1997, 71) on the positive notion of being dogmatic, and Zammito (2002, 50-52) on rational and empirical psychology.

geometry.²¹ Sulzer's essay competition seems to have partly been motivated by the question of how to react to Hume's challenge to metaphysics (Vivian 1993, 61-75; HWP 1, 844-845). Since the prize-essays of Mendelssohn, Kant and Lambert were important texts for the young Herder, I will read the *Versuch* as at least partly responding this problem. While Herder discusses the different metaphysical definitions of Being proposed by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, Kant and Christian August Crusius, his Humean point is that the vivacity of sensuous impression gives us reason to direct philosophical enquiry away from the building of metaphysical systems and toward the science of human nature.

In this section, I will expound how Herder understands the status of metaphysics and the proper aims and methods for philosophy.²² I will claim that Herder's sensualism, his conception of philosophy as the science of human nature, and his critique of metaphysics can be explicated by making visible how he received Hume's theoretical philosophy. Yet I will also argue that, although Herder imagines a more positive function for philosophy than Hamann does, his assessment of Hume's skepticism resembles Hamann's. In this way, I will identify the anthropological direction and limitation that Herder seeks to place upon philosophy. I will proceed as follows. I will first present two theses that Herder formulates in the commentaries concluding his notes on the *Enquiry*.²³ These are Herder's *sensualism* and his *anti-skepticism*. Subsequently, I will discuss those passages in Herder's *Versuch* where he elaborates on these theses, while referring to corresponding statements in the *Enquiry* notes. Thus, I aim to show that Herder's reception of Hume's theoretical philosophy is indeed of central significance to his early philosophy. Furthermore, this may contribute to the growing recognition that Herder is neither simply a pupil of Kant (and thus a rationalist Enlightenment thinker) nor a disciple of Hamann (and irrationalist Counter-Enlightenment figure).²⁴

²¹ Mendelssohn won the prize with an essay arguing for a positive answer, exhibiting that Hume did not in fact affect his trust in the truths of metaphysics. Kant received the second prize with a less optimistic contribution.

²² I will quote from Herder's notes on the first four chapters of Hume's *Enquiry*, that is, up until the point when skeptical doubts concerning the understanding are first introduced. These notes are in Herder's *Nachlass* in the Staatsbibliothek Berlin under catalogue number NH XXV. 54. 1-4. I will refer to them as *Nachlass* 1-4, while also referring to the transcription published by John Vivian (1993, 97-109).

Basic textual evidence that Herder relies on the *Enquiry* includes his invoking Hume's copy-principle at FHA 1, 12, and his making a distinction between the philosopher and the "Pöbel" (11; cf. Hume [1748] 1975, 7, 18-19). Furthermore, Herder stresses that it is impossible to be only philosopher, and not human, "da Menschen eher gewesen sind als Philosophen" (15; cf. Hume [1748] 1975, 9).

²³ Herder demarcates summary from commentary by adding "Anmerkung" in the margin. In his commentaries, Herder shows considerable autonomy by reviewing Sulzer's manner of evaluating Hume's position, and by adjudicating between their different perspectives. For example, Herder suggests that Sulzer conflates Hume's notion of 'vivacity' with the Leibniz-Wolffian notion of distinctness and thus fails to appreciate Hume's reasons for attaching great significance to the *origin* of ideas.

²⁴ Key documents of this recognition include Norton (1991, 1-10, 2007), Zammito (2002, 4-8, 145), Zammito, Menges, and Menze (2010) and Gjesdal (2017, 1-18).

1.2.1. *The philosophy of subjective (but common) sensuousness*

The first thesis concerns Herder's agreeing with Hume that all human concepts are of empirical origin, including the concepts of space, time, force, Being and God. These are "ganz sinnliche Beziehung"; Herder infers from this that propositions involving them are "nie zu beweisen" (*Nachlass* 2; Vivian 1993, 102). This is because such "Existentialpropositionen" have no predicate that one could *a priori* recognize as already implicit in the subject (FHA 1, 17; cf. Baum [1990] 2018, 84-85). Herder understands proving as the procedure of analyzing concepts and recognizing that subject and predicate correspond. Furthermore, he adheres to the Leibnizian denomination of sensuous concepts as indistinct, i.e., not recognizable in virtue of certain 'marks'.²⁵ Herder concludes from this that the more sensuous concepts are, the least one can further analyze them into constituent units. In other words, 'sensuous' and 'unanalyzable' are synonyms (FHA 1, 11), and propositions involving unanalyzable concepts cannot be demonstrated (17). As a result, arguments concerning existence cannot proceed from *a priori* reasoning or analyzing and thus lack the necessity characteristic of purely logical demonstration (19). In extending their beliefs beyond past experience, human beings may analyze their concepts to a certain extent, yet they must ultimately rely on basic, unanalyzable units of sensuousness, such as force and Being.

However, Herder states that the group of concepts which proves most unanalyzable, is in fact "sinnlich höchst gewiß, und fast ein theoretischer Instinkt, die Grundlage aller anderen Erfahrungsbegriffe und völlig indemonstrabel" (FHA 1, 12; cf. *Nachlass* 4, Vivian 1993; 108). Herder here alludes to Hume's notion of an "infallible instinct" that does not depend on the workings of the understanding (Hume [1748] 1975, 55). This instinct is part of human nature and thus shared by all human subjects. Herder calls the kind of certainty that we derive from it 'subjective'. And he contrasts it with the search for objective certainty through metaphysical demonstrations (FHA 1, 12, cf. Adler 1990a, 72; DeSouza 2018, 146). Simultaneously, he treats the sensuous concept (or simply: impression²⁶) of Being as the "Grundlage alles unseres Denkens" and "das Element, mit dem wir umhüllt sind" (FHA 1, 14). This is why Herder is a sensualist.

The second thesis relates to his anti-skeptical position. In his commentary on Hume, Herder does not attempt to challenge Hume's arguments. Nor does he suggest that the principle

²⁵ I will discuss this way of categorizing concepts (cf. Leibniz [1684] 1989, 291) in Chapter Two.

²⁶ Baum is correct that "since there is no distinction between concepts, thoughts, images, sensations, impressions etc., the notion of concept means just the same as representation or distinct representation" (2018, 82). Furthermore, when Herder speaks of the most sensuous concept, "Realsein", he stresses the immediacy of this "Vorstellung" and claims that no abstraction or copying is involved in its production (12; cf. Heinz 1994b, 11).

of causality nonetheless carries a certain necessity or mathematical certainty. He agrees with Hume that all arguments concerning existence and matter of fact rely on a habitual form of reasoning. Nonetheless, he does not follow Hume in his skeptical conclusions. Instead, while remarking on Sulzer's commentaries, Herder argues that skeptical doubt and metaphysical demonstrations are two sides of the same coin. That is, Sulzer argues that metaphysics resolves doubt and brings quiet and security. But Herder retorts: "Die Zweifel kommen bloß [sic] von ihr [der Metaphysik, N.W.]: sie gibt also Feinde, um Ruhe zu geben und die Feinde, sind ihr selbst oft zu stark, die doch von ihr kommen; folglich ist sie selbst hierin schädlich" (*Nachlass* 4; Vivian 1993, 109). Herder reasons as follows: The quest for objective validity is based on mistaken premises on what the human mind can possibly achieve. Hence, it leads to doubt and disillusionment. Yet this is only because of its unrealistic aims. For Herder, investigating how the human mind actually behaves in different contexts should make it clear that it is not designed to perform metaphysical demonstrations. Yet, Herder suggests that, due to the character of the finite human being's intellect, its ordinary sensuous certainty does not require such demonstrations.²⁷

In *Versuch*, Herder exhibits the same attitude when going through "einige Irrwege des Philosophen" in seeking for metaphysical analyses of the concepts of 'something', possibility, and force (FHA 1, 12-19). Herder's general point is that, since these concepts are ultimately empirical, they cannot be demonstrated by invoking certain ways in which concepts are logically ordered. That is, the way in which Being sensuously affects us – its "gemeine Begriff", the "Eindruck der Natur" (12) – always precedes our activity of applying the logical predicates of nothing, something and possibility (13, 16).

Herder's way of assessing the arguments of Baumgarten and Kant ends with very negative conclusions concerning the possibility to conclusively demonstrate metaphysical propositions. Yet, Herder does not affirm the effected uncertainty. Instead, he dismisses seeking for metaphysical demonstrations as a philosophical goal. In denying that sensuous certainties need such demonstrations, Herder seeks to embrace the insight into the subjective character of the (finite) human being's experience. Yet he ventures to reinterpret the meaning of this subjectivity within a general inquiry into human nature, involving psychology, history and aesthetics. His starting point is that "die Mutter Natur" always already convinces humans of

²⁷ This does not imply that realism is correct. In fact, for Herder, this claim also implies that idealism, or egoism, cannot be theoretically refuted. His Humean point is rather that human beings cannot theoretically settle the issue of the ultimate causal forces affecting them (cf. Heinz 2018, 120).

their sensuous certainties (FHA 1, 13). For human beings, the concept of Being is absolutely central. “Es ist der erste, sinnliche Begriff, dessen Gewißheit allem zum Grunde liegt: Diese Gewißheit ist uns angeboren, die Natur hat den Weltweisen die Mühe benommen zu beweisen, da sie überzeugt hat: – er ist der Mittelpunkt aller Gewißheit” (19). If anything, Herder in *Versuch* does not let Hume’s learned doubt commence. Instead, Herder embraces the subjective and *a posteriori* status of the concept of force, and castigates the *überstudierten Philosophen* who started to doubt and attempted to demonstrate. That is to say, of crucial importance are Hume’s presentation, in the fifth section of the *Enquiry* ([1748] 1975, 41, 49, 55), of *custom* as a principle of human nature, of *belief* as a vivid feeling, and of an *instinct* implanted in us by nature. The genetic priority and natural *Überzeugungskraft* of a few of the human being’s sensuous concepts is the starting point of Herder’s essay, and it is its conclusion (FHA 1, 12, 19; cf. Baum [1990] 2018, 86).

Furthermore, in contrast to Hume, the conclusions of Herder’s own arguments against attempts at defining Being appear less humbling as soon as it is clear that human sensation is, due to its very nature, not in need of proof. Hume ends his “skeptical solution” by stating that nature has implanted in us an instinct that allows us to habitually form the sentiment which Hume names “belief”. In the *Versuch*, by contrast, Herder invokes this human instinct in order to forego the skeptical phase. That is, he qualifies the Leibnizian idea that the sensuous and ‘obscure’ would be uncertain, by stating: “ja wenn wir ganz Philosophen ohne Menschen wären: – Aber sind nicht die sinnlichen Begriffe gewiß!” (11). Here, Herder relies on Hamann’s theses “[dass] *Glauben* so wenig durch Gründe geschieht wie *Schmecken* und *Sehen*” (N 2, 74), and that a qualitative difference applies between “*Empfindung*” and “*Lehrsatz*” (73). Herder follows Hamann in understanding skepticism as an activity of rational doubt. He reflects Hamann’s point on Socratic ignorance when he states: “Ich möchte meinen Zweck ganz vereiteln, wenn ich um zu beweisen daß das Sein unerklärlich wäre, mit einer Erklärung davon anfinge. Der gemeine Begriff, der Eindruck der Natur davon erklärt es genug” (FHA 1, 12). Herder insists that the concept of Being is always already presupposed by the philosophers, and that their analyses do not really demonstrate this presupposition, because their definitions necessarily remain imperfect.

Herder does agree with Hume that tracing back philosophical concepts to their origins in human sensation is the only way to secure their meaningfulness. In subsequent works, Herder states that a “negative Philosophie” (FHA 1, 557), or a “negative Logik” (114), should investigate the metaphysicians’ *a priori* principles. By means of a reduction to experience, it should

exhibit the meaninglessness of much of the jargon of metaphysics (cf. *Nachlass* 2; Vivian 1993, 101-102, and FHA 1, 557-558, with Hume [1748] 1975, 12, 22). Herder formulates this argument in *Über die neuere deutsche Literatur. Fragmente. Erste Sammlung. Zweite völlig umgearbeitete Ausgabe* (1768). His general theses in this context are that sensuous human beings learn to think via words and that thought sticks to expression. He infers from this that language determines the limits and contours for all human cognition (FHA 1, 557). These limits should be investigated by pointing at ideas that, in a historical process of overextension of our concepts, have lost reference to concrete thoughts and impressions. Herder states about the effects of such a critique of philosophy: “[W]ie vieles würde man hier ausfegen können, was wir sagen, ohne daß wir was dabei denken: falsch denken, weil wir es falsch sagten: sagen wollen, ohne daß wir es denken können” (557).

While this is very akin to Hume’s empiricist critique of metaphysics, Herder adds observations regarding developmental psychology and the history of language. That is, Herder approaches the science of metaphysics as a historical product of the human use of language in particular contexts and for different purposes. For handed-down jargon, a reduction to experience is hence not so straightforward: the inheritors of this jargon are always already socialized to think according to its concepts and naturally tend towards accepting its perspective (558-559). Hence, the ‘negative philosopher’ must consider a whole web of handed-down opinions, associations and attitudes, and evaluate their use in their particular historical context (559). Thus, Herder proposes that any empiricist critique of metaphysics must involve historical understanding as well as an extensive grasp of how languages historically evolve. Nonetheless, he still pictures this critique as an analysis of philosophical concepts into more basic concepts (see Norton 1991, 44-50). This analysis should ultimately lead back either to their sensuous origins, or to the discovery that they are not actually grounded in any experiential reality or Being (FHA 1, 557, cf. FHA 1, 20). Herder thus takes it to be principally possible to investigate the limits and contours which language imposes on human cognition at different times. He alludes to Hamann when stating that, upon identifying a limit beyond which human beings are destined to remain ignorant, the negative philosopher could reach the “höchste Sokratische Wissenschaft”.

In the 1765 *Wie die Philosophie zum Besten des Volks allgemeiner und nützlicher werden kann*, Herder makes more explicit the direction in which he aims to lead his subjective philosophy: a negative logic should guide philosophers into analyzing and improving human sensation and imagination as a “Logik des gesunden Verstandes” (FHA 1, 115). Herder

formulates this idea in analogy to Rousseau's idea of negative education (cf. Gaier 1988, 41). He claims that the aim of such a logic is not to impose rules, but to support self-development and educate the people to think for themselves (FHA 1, 114, 122). Philosophy should reconnect with the *Volk* by becoming a philosophical analysis of common sense. Similarly, the passage from *Versuch*, quoted at the start of this chapter, treats both metaphysical demonstration and philosophical skepticism as *societal* problems that can only be solved by reorienting philosophy. Thus Herder is criticizing a particular form of learned culture when he insists: "Das Sein so wie wirs genommen haben hat niemand geleugnet: überstudierten Philosophen kam der Gedanke des Zweifels ein, und sie suchten es zu beweisen [...] die Natur hat den Weltweisen die Mühe benommen zu beweisen, da sie überzeugt hat" (FHA 1, 19).

Herder will retain this conception of philosophy as analysis of human nature, of sensation and of the 'healthy understanding'. Furthermore, while his engagement with Baumgarten's aesthetic would occasion him to increase the complexity of his analyses of the 'lower faculties' of the human soul, Herder stuck to the anti-skeptical sensualist position that he had formulated very early on. Within Herder's genetic analysis of human cognition, the issue of sensuous certainty merely counting as 'subjective' increasingly moved into the background. A review of the German translation of a work by James Beattie, which Herder wrote for the 1772 critical efforts of the rising *Sturm und Drang* movement, may attest to this. By discussing this review, I will illustrate how Herder's anti-skepticism relates to Hume's own adversaries in Scotland.

As Manfred Kühn (1984, 153-156) argues in his monograph on *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768-1800*, Herder used a review of Beattie's 1770 *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* to make amends with Hamann after their disagreement regarding Herder's *Treatise*.²⁸ Herder indeed suggests that Hamann's 1759 position vis-à-vis Hume in his *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* accurately sums up Beattie's position and may even be superior to it (SWS 5, 462). Herder compares Hamann's distinction between reason and *Glauben* with Beattie's distinction between reason and common sense (cf. Beattie 1770, 32). I think this shows that Herder retains important aspects of Hamann's skepticism also in the 1770s. However, at the same time, the manner in which Herder appreciates Beattie's common-sense position exhibits that Herder is not satisfied with Hamann's fideistic attack on philosophy tout-court.

²⁸ The dispute concerned Herder's thesis on the human invention of language (see Brose 2006, 486-550; Beiser 1987, 130-141). Haym ([1880] 1954, 531) first interpreted the review as a renewed approximation to Hamann.

Herder praises Beattie's philosophizing "für *den ganzen Menschen*" (SWS 5, 456), agreeing with him on the dangers of the metaphysician's separating reason from common sense. Herder exhibits his anti-skeptical sensualism when he praises Beattie's discussion of the "gesunden Sinne an der Wahrheit, diesem simplen und starken Nerven und Triebe der Menschheit" (458). Herder interprets Beattie's 'common sense' as a "sicherer Instinkt" and "Sinn des Wahren" (457) and he affirms Beattie's thesis that "alle Evidenz am Ende anschauend wird" (458). He thus fully subscribes to the standpoint of common sense, or, as he formulates it himself, "der eigentliche Standpunkt des Menschen" (458). Herder thus repeats the central theses of his *Versuch* regarding the natural certainties of common human sensuousness.

Herder indicates that, even if his German philosophical contemporaries were to find fault with Beattie's common sense philosophy, they should nonetheless be able to grant "Schullob" to his psychological contribution to the "Enzyklopädie der menschlichen Logik", that is, "zur Logik des *untern* Stockwerks der Seelenkräfte" (459).²⁹ In addition, Herder complains that, internationally, the philosophical spirit of Voltaire, Hume, Helvetius and Bayle was the fashion of the century. And he praises Beattie's "sehr kräftige Predigt gegen solches Schattenspiel von Zweifeln und Vernünftleien" (SWS 5, 457). Nonetheless, Herder also criticizes Beattie, and here he shows his agreement with Hamann. Herder insists that one should not attempt to *refute* skeptical philosophers, because the practice of refuting philosophical arguments only increases the insulation of philosophy from life. Furthermore, if Beattie truly believes that philosophical speculation does not affect common sense, then there is no need to formulate counterarguments against speculative philosophy and doubt. Rather, Herder suggests such philosophy can be more naturally explained by approaching it as a social and psychological problem. He argues that common sense should be strengthened through social reform rather than theoretical refutation. This is because philosophers suffer from a "Schwäche gewisser Nerven der Menschheit, mit Sachen zu spielen und nur spielen zu können, die man brauchen und nicht besehen sollte", as well as "Ekel des Herzens, Mangel an Theilnehmung, der sie da stillstehen und mit dem Fernglase gucken macht, statt daß sie hinlaufen und umarmen sollten" (460).

Herder understands philosophical systems as figments of the human imagination or "*Dichtung*" (461). This leads him to disagree with Beattie over the alleged danger of philosophical positions like idealism and Spinozism. For Herder, the abstractions involved in their

²⁹ This was probably an accurate assessment of the judgment of authors like Sulzer and Mendelssohn, and it was indeed what Heiner Klemme calls "the rationalist view" on Beattie, as expressed in *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* in 1776 (see Beattie [1772] 2000, vii-viii).

theorizing renders these extraordinary positions insulated from our sensuous certainties and affects. Hence, they also cannot directly inflict harm upon our everyday life beliefs. This tolerance toward ‘philosophical poems’ stands in stark contrast to his stance toward skepticism. Regarding this “Modegespenst des Jahrhunderts”, Herder warns:

Und da doch dies immer ein häßlich Gespenst ist – auf solche Art an Allem! Wahrheit, Güte, Tugend, menschlicher Bestimmung u.s.w. zweifeln zu können – da es für Menschen, die nur “dies Komplement zum Bösen” brauchen, ein sehr verführendes Phantom ist, das auf eine steile Felshöhe lockt und in den Abgrund stürzt – da es endlich für die, die es nicht so weit bringen kann, wenigstens ein sehr unbehagliches lüftiges Gerippe ist, das sie nur immer vom Wege zerret – *hic et ubique*. (457)³⁰

The reason for this is that skepticism undermines common sense, whereas philosophical systems are merely disconnected from it – and thus allow the philosopher to remain in tune with common sense in everyday life (SWS 5, 461). Herder admits the skeptical provenance of this idea (like Mendelssohn [(1756) 1929, 149], he points to Bayle as the popularizer of the idea that skeptics assent to what is probable, SWS 5, 460). However, Herder states that the probability of common sense should not be put forward as an excuse to skeptically question propositions that we naturally believe.

To sum up, whereas Herder praises Beattie’s strong sermon against philosophical skepticism, he is not content with Beattie’s own philosophical refutations of systems and hypotheses. This is because Herder is worried that Beattie turns the perspective of common sense (“die *Herrlichkeit seiner Wahrheit*”) into particular doctrines (“*Affengestalten*”) (462). He concludes that Beattie leads the reader toward the right conception of philosophy, focusing on real-life human beings. However, he argues that Beattie should not go on to philosophically demonstrate the certainties of common sense (459).

The time has come to draw some conclusions regarding Herder’s relation to skepticism. First, Herder argues that the sensuous concept of Being is the center of human certainty, and that philosophical demonstration tends to lead us astray and fall prey to skepticism. By contrast, our natural certainties should be genetically analyzed, ordered and developed. Consequently, Herder’s anti-skepticism comes down to a critique of the kind of philosophy that *produces*

³⁰ With “here and everywhere”, Herder probably refers to the oath proposed by Hamlet to Oratio and Marcellus, namely, to never speak about the ghost that Hamlet was confronted with (act 1.5, strophe 113ff., in Shakespeare 2003, 122-126).

skeptical doubts. Rather than distinguishing between a legitimate form of philosophical doubt and real life, Herder explicitly invokes real-life concerns in order to deny legitimacy both skepticism and the sort of philosophical dogmatism that produces it. Where does this lead Herder's subjective philosophy? On the one hand, Herder follows Hume and Hamann in their negative stance toward metaphysical demonstrations, especially as executed in German *Schulphilosophie*. He particularly appreciates the linguistic aspect of Hume's skeptical empiricism. And he follows Hamann in not being too worried about giving up the school-philosophical discipline of metaphysics altogether. On the other hand, and unlike Hamann, Herder does propose a positive conception of philosophy. This program does not pursue metaphysical demonstration, and it thus recognizes no special merit in skeptically attending to the insufficiency of such demonstration. Hamann embraces this skepticism as support to his fideism. To Herder's science of human nature, it is not welcome. As a skeptic, Herder only mentions Hume in his early writings as a remarkable contemporary phenomenon and as a threat, not as an inspiration.³¹

At this point, the difference between Herder and Hamann consists in the fact that Herder sticks to the Humean element of custom in his notion of belief or *Überzeugung*, whereas Hamann stresses the miraculous aspect of faith. As I explained above, Hamann criticizes Hume for not carrying his principle of belief over into practices that are more profound than eating and drinking – into religious faith. Herder, by contrast, lays emphasis on the natural and commonsensical nature of sensuous certainty. In conclusion, he is not only a pre-Critical thinker in Burnyeat's sense. In his metaphilosophy, Herder also formulates principled reasons against insulating philosophical theorizing from the everyday life of human beings and their history, culture and language. Hence, it is not very surprising that Herder in the 1780s takes a stance against Kant's way of insulating 'empirical realism' from 'transcendental idealism'. For Herder, taking philosophy to the transcendental level comes down to generating a poem full of abstractions, and losing sight of the actual cognitive processes that are responsible for all human productions.³² He thinks that poems such as these are still less threatening to common sense than straight skeptical doubt. Nonetheless, Herder from the start aims to redirect philosophical analysis away from *a priori* principles and toward common sense. I will finish this chapter by

³¹ This stands in contrast to all the praise Hume earns in Herder's writings as a historian and political critic. Cf. e.g. FHA 9/2, 27.

³² This made Herder a part of the 'meta-Critical' camp, which argued that Kant's very enterprise of critique was itself based on historical, societal and linguistic presuppositions from which one may not abstract away. Rather than taking on a transcendental 'view from nowhere', the meta-Critical thinkers sought to situate processes of criticism within their concrete contexts.

clarifying Herder's take on the concept of probability and his anthropological reorientation of philosophy. Finally, I will compare his metaphilosophical position with the figures that I discussed in this chapter.

1.2.2. *The diversity of certainties*

In his 1769 *Journal meiner Reise*, Herder announces the plan for a theory of probability (FHA 9/2, 28-29).³³ This idea brings together some of the central features of his early philosophy. Herder relates this idea to Mendelssohn's theory. The latter's attempt marks an interesting shift in the understanding of different forms of logics. The notion of a *logica probabilium* was traditionally a logic of "imperfect (or moral) certainty" (Tonelli [1967] 1997, 78). This logic was concerned with the plausibility (*verisimilitudo*) of opinions, *phaenomena*, custom, national taste, analogy and authority (79). By formulating a mathematical theory of probability, Mendelssohn interpreted it as a "perfect mathematical (probabilistic) certainty" (78).

Herder, in turn, wants to direct the theory of probability toward superstition, the human faith in myth and other cultural beliefs. The way Herder wants to inquire into the human being's unique feelings of probability shows how Herder's subjective philosophy is meant to bring out the diversity of human certainties. That is, Herder engages the effects of perspective on (historical) representation.³⁴ Furthermore, when discussing the individual character of the German language, Herder ventures to recognize how languages develop according to particular social and historical practices and according to particular aims (FHA 1, 217-218). He concludes that the "Denk- und Seharten" of finite and sensuous human beings heavily depend on the "*Ordnung der Worte*" that they have been socialized into (559, 218). In this way, Herder's remarks on probability provide a bridge from the programmatic metaphilosophical theses (discussed above) into his more elaborate arguments in the fields of historical psychology and aesthetics (which I will discuss below in Chapter Two).

Herder's view of probability can be understood as an adoption of the philosophical use of the notion introduced by Mendelssohn. However, Herder also approaches the human feeling of probability from the Hamannian-sounding assumption that all ways of relating to the world reflect divine providence. But then, in contrast to Hamann, Herder aims to formulate a "Philoso-

³³ Other projects he announces there include a universal history of the human soul, a yearbook for anthropology and "Aufweckung der Menschheit", and a pedagogic reform (FHA 9/2, 19, 31, 36ff.).

³⁴ For example when discussing Johann Winckelmann's 1763 *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (FHA 2, 13-14) and in his letter to the Göttingen historian Johann Christoph Gatterer (AWE 2/1, 684-691). On this episode, see Zammito (2002, 336-339).

phische Theorie” with the purpose of philosophically accounting for the human faith in myth and in fable (FHA 9/2, 26).

K.H. Frömmichen diagnosed in 1773 that the epistemic category of the *probabile* and probabilistic mathematics had been confused with each other. In his *Reisejournal*, Herder exploits this ambiguity. He had learned the traditional concept of probability from Kant’s 1762/1763 lectures (Tonelli [1967] 1997, 80; Kant AA 24, 5). Furthermore, Herder mentions Mendelssohn’s theory of probability as a source of inspiration. Yet his reference disguises that he is interested in something quite different from an epistemological assessment of the amount of “Wahrheitsgründe” in relation to a hypothetical state of complete certainty (Mendelssohn [1756] 1929, 151). Herder ponders how humans produce mythologies and fables; he proposes a philosophical history of the workings of the “Einbildungskraft”; and he concludes by observing “wie eine relative Sache die Wahrscheinlichkeit oder Unwahrscheinlichkeit sei” (FHA 9/2, 26). This certainly takes Mendelssohn’s mathematical theory into a different direction. Herder intends to survey the whole field of human cognition – different cultures and religions, different philosophies, and the natural certainties and hypotheses of “der Pöbel” – and he refuses to hierarchically adjudicate between certainties. Instead Herder is searching for a philosophical theory that explains belief in mythology and fable by referring to a basic human disposition to believe.

After shortly enumerating historical, cultural, and disciplinary differences, Herder points out that there are very diverse and individual ways to assess or measure particular feelings of probability. He suggests that the different sorts of felt probability are qualitatively different. Because of this, the “eigne Gestalt” of measuring probability can itself not be measured quantitatively (27). Hence it is not self-evident that the rigorous philosopher may lay claim to higher probabilities than the people may. Herder concludes:

Descartes [sic], wie zweifelnd, wie mißtrauisch und welche Hypothesen? Es gibt also eine eigne Gestalt des Gefühls von Wahrscheinlichkeiten, nach dem Maß der Seelenkräfte, nach Proportion der Einbildungskraft zum Urteil, des Scharfsinns zum Witze, des Verstandes zur ersten Lebhaftigkeit der Eindrücke, usw. welche Theorie der Wahrscheinlichkeit aus der Menschlichen Seele hinter Hume, Moses [Mendelssohn, N.W.], Bernouille, und Lambert. (27)

According to Herder, the individual form that feelings of probability take depends on various aspects of our psychological constitution. A theory of probability would therefore need to

provide a psychological explanation of this feeling just to understand the individual shape that it takes in diverse circumstances. Thus, Herder seeks to understand how people acquire the beliefs that they have. He thereby embraces the notion of probability, but without using it to increase certainty. Rather than engaging in such an epistemological project, he intends to investigate the diversity of feelings of probability out of a psychological and anthropological interest.

I thus agree with Heinz' (2017, 32) assessment that "Herder converts epistemological problems into psychological ones". In the next chapter, I will discuss Herder's psychology in more detail. Nonetheless, according to his theory of probability, there is still a certain epistemic normativity to the human being's feelings of probability. The strength of these feelings attests to the efficacy of "Seelenkräfte", which are the result of the relative strength of impressions, imagination, custom, as well as "Zeiten, Sachen, Menschen" (FHA 9/2, 26-27). Herder aims to inquire into the diversity of human certainties and beliefs. He seeks to explain how these feelings depend on the history of their development. A theory of probability should seek to understand their dependence on psychological and historical circumstances.

1.2.3. Vantage point: philosophy as anthropology

After establishing, in the *Versuch*, that it is pointless to attempt to metaphysically demonstrate Being, Herder suggests that we focus on a 'subjective philosophy'. Relying on the sensualistic account of human cognition that I have presented in this chapter, Herder thus planned to revise philosophy. For Herder, the central connotation of 'subjective' is heuristic: the aim of philosophy should be to investigate the sources of the human subject's certainty. However, a sense of the certainty characteristic of human sensation being 'merely subjective' does play a role as well (cf. Zammito 2002, 153; Heinz 1994b, 5-9). Furthermore, Herder's subjective philosophy starts from the assumption that experiences should be collected and ordered – not in relation to a logico-metaphysical starting point, but "in Beziehung auf uns" (FHA 1, 12). Human nature is to become the center of philosophy. Herder makes it clear that the concepts which are to be collected and ordered should be looked for in an extremely wide field: all of history, literature, and science. He sums up his plans for philosophy when he discusses, in 1765, the possibility of an "Einziehung der Philosophie auf Anthropologie" (FHA 1, 132).

In the following chapters, I will engage some of Herder's projects that rely on this conception of the aims and method of philosophy. These projects include a psychology and

aesthetics analyzing the complex processes of development of most human judgments and concepts (see Chapter Two); an exploration of the workings of sympathy, empathy and historical understanding (Chapter Three); and an anthropological inquiry into the diversity of taste, opinions and modes of experience, analyzing the workings of prejudice (Chapter Four). In parallel to these projects, Herder devises a general history of human understanding from its earliest beginnings, searching for the “Ursprung des Menschengeschlechts, der Erfindungen und Künste und Religionen” (FHA 9/2, 17). Furthermore, he conceives of a general anthropology, locates a universal core of human nature and circumscribes how the diversity of human forms grows out of, and relates to, this core.³⁵ I will discuss these projects also in Chapter Four, preparing the ground for the final chapters on biblical hermeneutics and the philosophy of history. Thus, while the first three projects tend to highlight the diverse, contingent and relative character of human modes of experience, the latter two bring out (what I take to be) the strong universalist in Herder. This contrast will also be reflected in my dissertation. It roughly divides my chapters into two main parts, turning around the axis of Chapter Four. In the first three chapters, I focus less on the universalistic assumptions that guide Herder’s endeavors in psychology, aesthetics and historical understanding. In my later chapters, I will add the theological dimension to Herder’s anthropology and highlight the metaphysical ideas that support his subjective philosophy. I will explain that a monistic theology in fact supports the dive into diversity proposed by him. All of this is meant to highlight the tension between the universal and the particular in Herder’s philosophy, in order to then present and interpret his attempts at reconciling them.

Despite these differences, Herder’s philosophy is best characterized as a form of philosophical anthropology, seeking to identify the essence of human nature by engaging the historical diversity of human forms. Herder’s demand “[dass] unsre ganze Philosophie Anthropologie wird” intends to encourage an investigation of the human being as it appears through the lenses of psychology and history. Herder programmatically states in 1765: “Unserer Weltweisheit fehlt so lange noch *Plan zur Bildung*; man nehme aus der Philosophie den Menschen, und wende ihn auf alles übrige an [...] *Geschichte der Menschheit* [...] Kern die Psychologie [...] *Verschiedenheit* der Leiber, und der Gemüter etc. der Meinungen und der Geschmäcke, der Empfindungen” (FHA 1, 132). According to Herder, contemporary school-philosophical vocabulary does not do well in accounting for “den Menschen”. Its main deficits concern the treatment of psychology and history: it does not acknowledge properly how

³⁵ For Herder’s plans for a general “Geschichte der Wissenschaft”, see Irmischer (1963, 278).

psychological functions develop out of a core sensuousness, and how the individual character of our cognition arises out of the way we are situated in a particular culture (FHA 1, 132). To amend the understanding of human nature, it is essential to attend to the diversity of human forms as they manifest themselves both corporeally, in nature and history, and mentally, in language, art and learning (Heinz 2016b, 68; Gjesdal 2017, 102-104).

Herder's 1765 claim regarding philosophy as anthropology has been the topic of some debate (Gaier 1988, 40-42; Leventhal 1994, 170-172; Zammito 2002, 171-174, 344-345; Gjesdal 2017, ch. 1; Heinz 2016b, 2017). Kristin Gjesdal (2017, 19-21) criticizes John Zammito for interpreting this claim as evidence that Herder wishes to reduce philosophy to (strictly empirical) social science. On the other hand, Marion Heinz (2017, 42-45) points out that Herder retains various ideas from German school-philosophical faculty psychology, and that he does not propose to completely abandon philosophy's more abstract and critical investigations (cf. FHA 1, 122). In addition, I want to stress that Herder's rhetorical gesture of proposing a 'Copernican turn' for philosophy suggests less of a radical break with eighteenth-century philosophy than e.g. Ulrich Gaier and Zammito claim. Herder's idea, of turning philosophy into anthropology, reflects the historical context of Enlightenment humanism (Alexander Pope, Rousseau) and the German movement of *Popularphilosophie* (see Schneiders 1985, 73-88). Even Sulzer, for example, advocated that both a Wolffian metaphysics and a "Philosophie der Welt" should be practiced ([1759] 2014, 156-157). After 1750, popular philosophers demanded that philosophy should serve the needs of society, that it should existentially engage the reading public and promote their capacity for "Selbstdenken" (Schneiders 1985, 82). In the learned journals of the German *Gelehrtenrepublik*, and especially in more innovation-driven projects like the *Briefe die neueste Literatur betreffend* (1759-1765), philosophical eclecticism became the norm.

Furthermore, I think that Hume's understanding of moral philosophy as the science of human nature provides the right context for determining the direction of Herder's meta-philosophical program. Within the British and French contexts, the anthropological orientation of philosophy is less controversial (see Kondylis [1981] 2002, ch. 1, ch. 3.b; Cassirer [1932] 2007, 3). Shaftesbury had in *The Moralists* taken a similar position ([1709] 2000, 232), and Rousseau started his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755, 1) by calling the issue of the nature of humankind the most important philosophical question. Accidentally, these are the philosophers Herder refers to when he discusses the question of how to make philosophy useful for society (FHA 1, 108, 114). So, Herder does not

claim that philosophy should simply give in to the demands of society that it should be of direct practical use. Rather, philosophy should start from a more general point of departure – the whole human being – in order to reconcile the demands of philosophy and of society, and to redefine the kind of use that philosophy could provide (see Heinz 2016b, 62; Gjesdal 2017, 59-65).³⁶ The central term used by Herder to denote this use is *Bildung*: the edification of feelings, modes of experience, practices, use of language and manner of thought (FHA 1, 122, 126). Whether it was in his psychological, aesthetic, historical or religious writings, the *Bildung der Menschheit* was Herder's central concern from his earliest writings on, up until the 1774 pamphlet *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*.

³⁶ Incidentally, Hamann gave Herder the following advice regarding this plan: "Glauben Sie es mir zu Gefallen, daß es keine so allgemeine und nützliche Philosophie giebt, und kein so glücklicher Anfang der Weisheit als die Furcht des HErrn [sic]; denn sie hat die Verheißung dieses und eines künftigen Lebens" (ZH 2, 331). Herder did not, in this case, follow Hamann's advice.

2. Herder's genetic psychology

In the previous chapter, the young Herder's reception of Hume's skepticism in 1764-1765 has brought into view the epistemological theses (on the nature of human cognition, on different kinds of certainty, and on different methodologies) and the metaphilosophical or existential theses (on the relation between philosophy and life) on which Herder relied to argue for a reform of philosophy. This reform was directed at psychology and anthropology. In this chapter, I will analyze Herder's conception of human psychology in order to develop in more detail his sensualistic account of human cognition. The best place to look for this is the young Herder's critique of Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*, his "Wissenschaft der sinnlichen Erkenntnis" (Baumgarten [1750] 2007, §1; FHA 1, 659-676). In formulating this critique, Herder relied on an extensive list of British and French empiricists and sensualists.³⁷ Instead of tracing any particular line of influence on Herder's writings of 1766-1769, in this chapter, I exhibit a form of argument which Herder applied in his psychology and which I identify as empiricist and genetic. Some of the instances where Herder uses this argument perfectly fit the denomination of a Lockean "Historical, plain Method" (Locke [1689] 1975, 44). However, Herder's applications of it to different manners of thought and modes of experience – to different modifications of human nature – present convincing support for the argument that it is here that empiricist analyses show that all human cognition is historical.

Another core aspect of Herder's position, however, reflects its roots in the psychologies of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Christian Wolff, and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten; specifically, in their conception of the soul as a monad or *Vorstellungskraft*, which mirrors the universe within itself. In *Kritische Wälder, oder Betrachtungen über die Wissenschaft und Kunst des Schönen. Viertes Wäldchen, über Riedels Theorie der schönen Künste*, Herder argues vehemently against the notion that the soul is compartmentalized into *innate faculties*. However, his reception of Leibniz points at the fact that he does adhere to the idea that human sensation reflects the infinite (on this reception, see Dreike 1973; Irmischer 2009, 145; Kondylis [1981] 2002, 615-636; Adler 1988; Heinz 1994b, 43-108; DeSouza 2012). The question in need of an answer is how Herder reconciles these two aspects of his position. That is, it needs to be asked how Herder sees empirical and historical approaches to human cognition, in all its manifest diversity, as enriching our picture of the human soul, and as contributing to our understanding of the ultimate unity of the human soul and its historical development. The

³⁷ Apart from the earlier mentioned authors, these include Francis Bacon, Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, Henry Home, Étienne Bonnot de Condillac and Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon. For a discussion of important sources for Herder's *Viertes Wäldchen*, see Irmischer (2009, 159-161).

answer, it seems, lies in his conception of *feeling* as a sensuous connection to the universe, which, from a particular perspective, reflects the infinite. Here, the Leibnizian conception of representation is decisive for finding an answer to the question how Herder expects a genetic method to uncover the most sensuous aspects of human cognition, and yet to touch upon a universal core of human psychology.

Another way to approach this question, how the Lockean and the Leibnizian strands combine, is by engaging the tensions in German faculty psychology between empirical and rational psychology. Wolff and Baumgarten themselves formulated positive accounts of how empirical psychology filled out the basic structure deduced in rational psychology, and of why empirical psychology could have this role in metaphysics.³⁸ Herder radicalized the revaluation of the sensuous, and he was adamant that the investigation of the soul should proceed on the basis of empirical data. On the face of it, this seems a farewell to rational psychology at large, and even a very strict anti-essentialism concerning the hypotheses guiding the empirical investigation of the soul. For example, Herder states – with respect to his sources from both empiricist philosophy and natural history – regarding the functions of the soul:

Wir lernen mit vieler Mühe sie im Gebrauche zu trennen – in einem gewissen Grunde aber würken sie noch immer zusammen. Alle Zergliederungen der Sensation bei *Buffons*, *Condillacs* und *Bonnets* empfindendem Menschen sind Abstraktionen: der Philosoph muß Einen Faden der Empfindung liegen lassen, indem er den andern verfolgt – in der Natur aber sind alle die Fäden Ein Gewebe! (FHA 1, 744-745)

As post-Kantian readers, we might expect in Herder's writings an awareness of the epistemological implications of full reliance on the empirical – especially in the area of study which is itself devoted to the phenomena related to human cognition. This area was traditionally the focus of *logic*, but had since Wolff been called psychology, “die Wissenschaft dessen, was durch die menschliche Seele möglich ist” (Wolff [1728] 1996, 71).³⁹ In Herder's psychology,

³⁸ Whereas Zammito (2002, 51-52) problematizes the ultimate consistency of Wolff's ‘marriage’ of the empirical and the rational, Wolff formulated explicit proposals to meet the challenge (see, e.g., the editors' introduction to Baumgarten 2003).

³⁹ Note that the distinctions between these fields of philosophy were never clear-cut. Some examples: Wolff also recognized logic as the part of philosophy that teaches about the use of the cognitive faculties. Johann Heinrich Lambert 1764, X) made “die Lehre von den Gesetzen, nach welchen sich der Verstand im *Denken* richtet” the first part of his *Neues Organon, oder Gedanken über die Erforschung und Bezeichnung des Wahren und dessen Unterscheidung vom Irrthum und Schein*. Condillac ([1746] 2001, 3) called his *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* an attempt in metaphysics. And Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis called certain physical experiments, concerned with the human mind, “metaphysical experiments” ([1752] 1988, 55-56). Compare Zammito's (2002, 49-53) account.

however, the investigation of the sensuous domain of the human soul on the one side, and the epistemological or rather metaphysical worry that empirical knowledge will never reach beyond mere probability, on the other side, seemed quite separated matters. Rather than worrying about this, Herder was certain that through attention to sensuousness, philosophy would be better able to account for all features that separate and connect humanity.

As I showed in the previous chapter, Herder had meta-philosophical reasons to preclude the inference of skeptical conclusions from certain states of affairs (such as the *a posteriori* status of all our concepts, or the diversity of opinions). I will show in this chapter that he indeed went very far in his adoption of empiricist methodology, yet without becoming correspondingly modest ontologically – rather, the assumptions underlying his epistemological optimism are themselves ontological. Furthermore, I aim to show how Herder developed his psychological position by means of a close reading of two of his polemics: against Alexander Baumgarten on the one hand, against Friedrich Justus Riedel on the other. I start with a sketch of Baumgarten’s innovations in the area of aesthetics (section one) – the theory of sensuous knowledge – and give a general overview of how Herder intended to further revise this discipline (section two). In the third section I then go into more detail regarding Herder’s genetic argumentation against Baumgarten and Riedel. I finish by drawing the consequences of his genetic psychology regarding historical diversity.

2.1. Baumgarten’s aesthetics

The German eighteenth-century efforts to free the notion of ‘*Sinnlichkeit*’ from its precarious philosophical and theological connotations has received plenty of scholarly attention.⁴⁰ An overview of all the twists and turns in the German academic climates at different universities, and different movements of ‘rationalism’ and ‘empiricism’, lies beyond my reach as well.⁴¹ Recently, the philosophy-historical nexus of Leibniz – Baumgarten – Herder has received special attention for constituting the origin of modern aesthetics and of the “modern concept of

⁴⁰ Two central early twentieth-century philosophical historians of this topic were Cassirer ([1916] 1975) and Baeumler (1923). Cassirer ([1932] 2007, ch. 7) revisited the topic by stressing the international and humanistic character of German eighteenth-century aesthetics (implicitly countering contemporaneous nationalist currents of German *Geistesgeschichte*, among them Baeumler’s). Recent interpretations, taking up and modifying the narrative of the *Aufwertung der Sinnlichkeit*, include Kondylis ([1981] 2002), Adler (1988, 1990), and Menke (2017). On interpretative problems related to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century German tradition of scholarship, see Buchenau (2013, 4-7).

⁴¹ See Werner Schneiders’ (2005) collection of articles on Wolff versus Thomasius, orthodox Wolffianism, anti-Wolffianism, and eclecticism. Also see Engfer’s (1996, 256-283) chapter on Thomasius and Wolff in his monograph, devoted to a historiographic critique of the empiricism/rationalism dichotomy.

subjectivity” (Adler 1988, 1990; Menke 2017). I will introduce Baumgarten by presenting and commenting upon this narrative as presented by Christoph Menke. According to Menke, the *Aufwertung der Sinnlichkeit* was a liberating process, doing away with rationalistic and otherwise reductive approaches to human subjectivity, and allowing for a richer form of human self-understanding through anthropology, aesthetic and art (Menke 2017, 14-16, 20-21). He convincingly locates in Leibniz’ account of ‘minute perceptions’ an inner principle that exclusively belongs to human sensuousness (30-33). Various aspects of Leibniz’ approach proved fertile in eighteenth-century German philosophy. For example, an infinite reservoir of minute perceptions in individual monads obscurely represents all of the universe. These perceptions, which mostly escape attention, might be triggered by chance occasions and explain the particular characters of individual human subjects (Leibniz [1765] 1996, 57). However, we may succeed in making them more distinct through analysis. Furthermore, minute perceptions lie at the basis of our reasoning and insight into the universal necessity of certain truths (50-51). Finally, they form the individuality of every substance: they cause our desires, and determine our behavior, always depending on our particular point of view relating to all others (58).

Thus, Leibniz in his *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* argued against Locke “that at every moment there is in us an infinity of perceptions, unaccompanied by awareness or reflection; that is, of alterations in the soul itself, of which we are unaware” (53). Leibniz’ argument for a vast range of implicit representations in the soul gave these perceptions a special significance. For Leibniz, who denied the physical influx of impressions into the soul, the confused representations of sensuousness were characterized merely by a decreased level of the soul’s activity, not by passivity (cf. Cassirer [1916] 1975, 76). Still – or rather, precisely because of their spiritual origin,

[t]hese minute perceptions, then, are more effective in their results than has been recognized. They constitute that *je ne sais quoi*, those flavours, those images of sensible qualities, vivid in the aggregate but confused as to the parts; those impressions which are made on us by the bodies around us and which involve the infinite; that connection that each being has with all the rest of the universe. (Leibniz [1765] 1996, 54-55)

While Leibniz thus provided an argument for the principal innateness of all mental phenomena, the minute perceptions presented the picture of the human mind as an infinite stream of sensuous and unconscious activity. Similarly, while the pre-established harmony of all monads

was a principle expressing the intelligent creation of the universe, this principle also gave new significance to the individual point of view and its obscure perceptions. A German ‘*Aufwertung der Sinnlichkeit*’ may thus be found right in the heart of its rationalist tradition. Baumgarten is rightfully seen as the philosopher who gave this revaluation a systematic formulation.⁴²

However, philosophical *attention* to *Sinnlichkeit* does not yet imply an empiricist philosophical methodology, or even an empiricist theory of knowledge. Much philosophical attention has been spent on perceptual knowledge ever since Descartes – to point out its uncertainty and inadequacy for philosophical knowledge. Besides, it appears implausible that the development of the revaluation of sensuousness would have been accomplished so exclusively among authors who otherwise aim to ban its contingency from their philosophical systems; especially if Herder is placed at the epitome of this development. In Menke’s account, for example, it seems astonishing how, compared with Baumgarten, Herder is able to put through so many radical innovations via an internal critique of the former (Menke 2017, 54-58). Furthermore, concerning reliance on experience as a method for philosophy, Baumgarten is not the right *Gewährsmann* for Herder at all. Wolff’s metaphysics was more empirically minded than Baumgarten’s.⁴³ And in fact, all the aspects of sensuous cognition that came to good use in Herder’s conception of aesthetics (e.g. habitualness, speed, interaction of the different senses, and intensity in combination with affect) are easily identified in the British and French texts that Herder studied. Rather than portraying Herder as a radical innovator, as Menke does, I attempt to show that Herder productively adopted empiricist arguments in order to argue for his genetic psychology. I hope this will also help to keep observing the distinction between a philosophy which analyzes sensuousness, and a philosophy which is sensualist or empiricist in its methodology.

Baumgarten’s achievement consisted in turning the investigation of the sensuous into an autonomous and systematic philosophy, and in precisely determining the logic of sensuous representations, and the methods available for promoting and correcting their workings.⁴⁴

⁴² This is a *topos* in studies on the ‘literary anthropology’ of the German Enlightenment, e.g. *Der Ganze Mensch: Anthropologie und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert* (Schings 1994) or *Hermeneutik literarischer Sinnlichkeit* (Laak 2003). As such, this research interest is quite straightforwardly a product of the postmodern rediscovery of the body, as attested e.g. by Zeuch (2000) and van Laak (2003).

⁴³ While Wolff’s analysis of *cognitio historica* and his empirical psychology were not as central to his work as psychology and aesthetics were to Baumgarten, his conception of the right method for philosophy was much closer to empiricism than Baumgarten’s. That is, whereas Baumgarten attempted to increase the plausibility of his metaphysical theses through the coherence of his system of metaphysics as a whole, Wolff was much more restrained by empirical evidence, and by the everyday conceptions of what Wolff called our “natural ontology” (Baumgarten 2014, 17-21; Wolff ([1728] 1996, XIX-XXXVI).

⁴⁴ At least Herder was of this opinion (see FHA 2, 260-261).

Furthermore, Baumgarten's conception of aesthetics as (1) a science of sensuous cognition, (2) a metaphysics of the beautiful, and (3) a philosophy of the arts brought together fields that had not been philosophically synthesized before (e.g. discussions of literary criticism and the metaphysics of the sublime, or epistemological analyses of perception and discussions of artistic genre and medium; Baumgarten [1750] 2007, XXVI-XXVII). Even if it should not be reduced to its *Wirkungsgeschichte*, the subsequent career of the notion – via Kant's transcendental aesthetics (as a "Wissenschaft von allen Prinzipien der Sinnlichkeit a priori", KrV A21/B35) through the art-philosophies in German Idealism and Romanticism – definitively adds to the significance of Baumgarten's project.

Baumgarten sought to make room within faculty psychology for a theory of sensuous cognition and of the fine arts, which he called '*aesthetica*'. Whereas he had formulated in his dissertation on the poem in 1735 the rationale for such a project – i.e. that the ancient distinction between *noeta* (intellectual things) and *aistheta* (perceptible things) warrants autonomous analysis of the latter – Baumgarten still felt it necessary to counter a considerable list of objections in the introduction of the *Aesthetica* (cf. Baumgarten [1750] 2007, XXV-XXVI). Although no concrete adversaries are named (it cannot be ruled out that Baumgarten lets a mere straw man speak), these objections give a good insight into the resistance against his project that Baumgarten imagined had to be overcome.

Some examples of these objections include: the sensuous and imaginative are "den Philosophen unwürdig [...] und unter ihrem Horizont"; the indistinctness of sensuous cognition causes error, hence this type of cognition should not be advocated; focus on the lower faculties causes "das Land der Vernunft und der Gründlichkeit einen Schaden"; aesthetics is an art and cannot become a science (§§6-12). Finally, to make the moral-religious dimension of rationalism more explicit: "Die unteren Vermögen und das Fleisch müssen eher besiegt als aufgeweckt und bestärkt werden" (§12).

Baumgarten dealt with these objections in relatively moderate terms. He responded: philosophers are also human beings, and should attend to all aspects of human knowledge; indistinctness is a necessary condition of finding truth, and should be tended in order to prevent error; leaving the lower faculties unattended might cause equal harm to reason; art and science form a continuum, and aesthetics can be proven scientifically out of principles of rational psychology; and finally: the lower faculties will not be *incited* through aesthetics, but will merely receive proper guidance (§§6-12). The second of these responses is probably the most crucial: here Baumgarten asserts "[dass] die Natur keinen Sprung macht aus der Dunkelheit in

die Deutlichkeit” (§7). That is, we have to work with degrees of obscurity, because they form the condition for all our knowledge, and furthermore, some confusion will always accompany human cognition. In general, Baumgarten’s responses exhibit that he attempted to meet on their own ground those who would object to aesthetics as a science. Through his efforts, the study of *Sinnlichkeit* became an independent object of philosophical attention in the German lands.⁴⁵ I now list some of the *Aufwertungen* of sensuousness.

Following Leibniz’ categorization of different levels of knowledge – in clear/obscure, and confused/distinct representations – Baumgarten refers in his *Metaphysica* ([1738] 2011, §511) to the whole collection of obscure representations as the *Grund der Seele*. This notion of ground of the soul (*fundus animae*) implies that obscure representations are foundational to all the others (Baumgarten [1750] 2007, XXXVII; Menke 2017, 53; Adler 1988, 206). This means that, whereas the higher faculties attempt to render representations distinct, all knowledge arises out of obscure representations. This class of obscure representations is not just marked by its deficit regarding distinctness: in Baumgarten’s philosophy, it has features of its own, such as being sensuous, *poetic*⁴⁶, and the product of a separate faculty of cognition, of the “unteren Erkenntnisvermögens” (Baumgarten [1750] 2007, XXXIX). And although this faculty is called ‘lower’, it comes first in all of Baumgarten’s treatises, and receives more space (XXX). Finally, the *Psychologia Empirica* chapter of his *Metaphysica* shows another new feature of sensuous cognition. There, Baumgarten states that obscure representations can be more powerful than clear ones if they contain more elements ([1738] 2011, §517). Sensuous representations – defined as indistinct – can therefore nonetheless have an *extensive clarity*, which is *vivid* (§521, 531). Further, they are attributed a “sinnliche Gewißheit” (*certitudo sensitiva*).⁴⁷ This certainty, combined with clarity, vividness, and distinctness, adds to the quality of a representation. And because these criteria are now on par, it becomes conceptually possible that a vivid representation is stronger even than a distinct one (§532). So, more conceptual space becomes available to constitute aesthetics as the science of sensuous knowledge, providing a logic of the lower faculties of cognition. This logic is meant to correct and secure our natural sensuous knowledge (*aesthetica naturalis*) on the basis of a complex of rules (*aesthetica artificialis*).⁴⁸ Within this theory, the lower faculties of cognition should be analyzed according to an *analogon rationis*:

⁴⁵ The specific modifications which Baumgarten made in comparison to Leibniz and Wolff have been well documented by Adler (1990), Menke (2017), and by Mirbach in the introduction to Baumgarten (2007).

⁴⁶ Herder highly appreciated Baumgarten’s definition of poetry as “sinnlich vollkommene Rede”, “weil diese Erklärung mich am weitesten in die Seele hineinführet, und mich gleichsam das Wesen der Poesie aus der Natur des menschlichen Geistes entwickeln läßt” (FHA 1, 683).

⁴⁷ Cf. Schwaiger (2004, 257-259) on “Versinnlichung” in Baumgarten.

⁴⁸ See Adler (1990, 32-35) on how Baumgarten sought to establish aesthetics as a *philosophical* discipline.

on analogy with the logic of the higher faculties, the lower should receive their own logic (Adler 1990, 24, 27-48).

I want to finish this section by making one qualification. Whereas Baumgarten's categorization of obscure representations as sensuous is significant, he nonetheless relies on Leibniz' and Wolff's explanations of what it means, metaphysically, to be such a representation. Metaphysically, the monad's *petites perceptions* (Leibniz) are the media through which it (in this case, the soul,) mirrors the entire universe. Although they represent their object confusedly, universal ideas are nonetheless contained in the representation. After all, this is secured through the system of pre-established harmony. This metaphysical explanation of sensuousness does not rely on much empiricist or inductive methodology.

2.2. Herder's revision of aesthetics

Baumgarten's aesthetics led to a widespread consensus that the lower regions of the soul deserved more attention than they had been given so far. Combined with sources like Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Rousseau, Baumgarten established a lively German discourse on *Empfindung* and *Gefühl*, which also Kant joined in 1764 with his *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*. Other by now familiar authors who joined this discourse were Mendelssohn and Sulzer (Mendelssohn [1755] 1929, 41-125; Sulzer 1762). Almost with a touch of irony – although technically correct – Baumgarten's work made it possible for Sulzer to present Wolff's *Psychologia empirica* (1732) as the groundwork for the psychology of the lower faculties. And Sulzer agreed: this psychology should be expanded by paying attention to “die dunkeln Gegenden der Seele (wenn man so reden kann) [...]; wo sie durch sehr undeutliche und dunkle Begriffe handelt” (Sulzer 1762, 159). Furthermore, Sulzer suggests that much of what happens in these areas does not reach our attention, if it were not for *traces* – “entfernte Veränderungen, die von ihnen herrühren” – of their existence in effects lying more on the surface of the soul (157-158).

Herder fervently applauded the revaluation of the reservoir of obscure perceptions in the soul – the *fundus animae*, or *Grund der Seele* – that Baumgarten undertook. He saw Sulzer as the heir to Baumgarten, and appreciated the distinctions, drawn by Mendelssohn in his *Briefe über die Empfindungen*, between different sorts of sensuous perception (FHA 1, 198, 670; FHA 2, 257). In contrast to Baumgarten, Mendelssohn, and Sulzer, however, Herder had a different expectation of *what* there was to be found in these obscure regions of the soul. Rather than

being a mere reservoir of representations waiting to be rendered distinct, human feelings have an efficacy of their own, which is not just qualitatively different from that of distinct representations, but also in most cases stronger. What is more, Herder asserts that human feeling, as object of an aesthetics that really sticks to the *aistheta*, receives a special significance for the science of man on the basis of being ontogenetically *earlier*. The logic of assessing concepts according to their degree of *distinctness*, therefore, is juxtaposed with a competing logic, which assesses concepts according to how they have *developed*. As such a logic, aesthetics is foundational to the logic of the higher faculties of the soul.

This has some consequences for Herder's understanding of the discipline of aesthetics, demanding further elaboration in comparison to Baumgarten. For this, Herder's commentaries on Baumgarten and his *Viertes Wäldchen* are central. In the present section, I therefore give an overview of the material on Baumgarten, and sketch in general terms how Herder intended to revise his aesthetics. In the next section, I will explore in more detail how Herder put his genetic method into practice, and what its consequences are regarding his conception of the human soul, and his assessment of the influence of historical contingencies in the soul's development.

Herder worked on Baumgarten in the context of a few different projects. Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* had already been the basis of the lectures of Kant that Herder had attended in Königsberg.⁴⁹ Then from 1765, Herder attempted to compose a poetics, relying on Baumgarten's dissertation on poetry (1735), on his *Aesthetica* (FHA 1, 1233-1234). The most relevant body of work for my purposes, though, was composed between 1767 and 1769. The main project to which it was supposed to contribute was a new aesthetics. Herder planned a fourth collection of *Fragments* devoted to this, which never appeared. He also planned a eulogy to Baumgarten (who died 1762), produced a commentary on the first 25 paragraphs of the *Aesthetics*, and wrote about his writing style for the first collection of *Fragmente* (FHA 1, 653-694). Finally, his *Critical Groves* were subtitled *Reflections on the Art and Science of the Beautiful*, and were supposed to contain the real work on aesthetics. However, only the fourth *Grove* deals directly with *aesthetics* in Baumgarten's sense of forming a theory of sensuous cognition, rather than literary-critical polemics and reflections on different art forms. It was this *Grove* which Herder in the end did not publish, after reaching sufficient distance from the polemics with the Klotz school during his trip abroad in 1769.⁵⁰ As a result, only the remarks

⁴⁹ The notes that Herder took there ("Metaphysik Herder") form an important source in the *Akademieausgabe* with respect to determining Kant's metaphysical position in the early 1760's (AA 28, 1-166).

⁵⁰ Herder in his travel journal (FHA 9/2, 11-15) vividly confessed the revulsion he felt about the authorship he had developed in the past years, and renounced all useless literary criticism and learnedness.

on Baumgarten in the first collection of the *Fragments* were published at the time. All other material now published in the critical editions – *Baumgartens Denkmal*, *Von Baumgartens Denkart in seinen Schriften*, the second, fully revised edition of the first collection of *Fragmente*, and *Viertes Wäldchen* – was never published during Herder's life (FHA 1, 541-694; FHA 2, 247-442). Nonetheless, parts of this material contain quite elaborately worked-out arguments – the first and second part of *Viertes Wäldchen* are more systematic than anything Herder had written before – which would prove lasting for Herder's later thought. Moreover, a range of scholars from the 1990s onwards has found in these and other unpublished works and fragments from this early period original positions in epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of language, and philosophy of history, which are worked out much more consistently than the late works stemming from the polemics with Kant (Gaier 1988; Adler 1990; Norton 1991; Heinz 1994b). The interpretation of this material has in this way decidedly helped to bring about the “revolution in Herder scholarship” in the following two decades (Zammito, Menges, and Menze 2010).

The orientation of *Viertes Wäldchen* (1769) is slightly different from the earlier texts. The text was written in the first months of 1769, as a refutation of the work on aesthetics by one of Christian Adolph Klotz' disciples, Friedrich Just Riedel (Haym [1880] 1954, 269). In his criticism of Riedel's popular and eclectic style, Herder attempted to prove the superiority of a Baumgartian aesthetics. Consequently, Herder is much more appreciative about at least the heuristic value of *Vernunftlehre* in this text than in others, and claims that the philosophical analysis of concepts, with the help of technical vocabulary, is necessary for providing the theory of sensuous cognition with systematic order (FHA 2, 251, 276). Furthermore, while he primarily aimed to use the opportunity to put forward his own aesthetics, this also implied a defense of the work of Sulzer's and Mendelssohn's analyses of the lower faculties of cognition. That is, Herder presents Mendelssohn's *Briefe über die Empfindungen* (1755), and Sulzer's *Theorie der Empfindungen* (1762) as valuable continuations of Baumgarten's project (392, 389). In the following, I attempt to reconstruct Herder's general argument by combining the stances he takes in this body of work.⁵¹

⁵¹ For discussions of these texts on their own, see Adler (1990, 63-87). His discussion has the disadvantage, however, that it leads Adler to focus on internal tensions in Herder's position on Baumgarten that – from the perspective of a general interpretation of his complex argument – appear less grave. Besides, a discussion of single texts like Adler's would definitely need to pay more attention to the different text-genres and pragmatic aims (from a 'Denkmal' to private notes never meant for publication) than Adler does (see 1990, 70, 73, and for the 'aporia' concerning Herder's relation to Baumgarten, 83-88).

2.2.1. *Exploring the dark ground of the human soul*

Herder starts his commentary on Baumgarten's aesthetics by distinguishing between an objective and a subjective understanding of aesthetics as the science of sensuous cognition (FHA 1, 659). On my interpretation, the main reason for Herder to fault Baumgarten's system as a whole consists specifically in not observing this distinction. Taken subjectively, aesthetics consists in a tool to improve sensuous cognition. Its aim is hence prescriptive: it departs from the assumption that, in analogy to the rules of logic for the higher categories, it is possible to formulate a set of rules which could govern aesthetic activity. Taken objectively, aesthetics is a philosophical analysis of sensuous cognition, a descriptive and explanatory science. In this sense, it ventures to better understand how the lower faculties function. Herder thus identifies two distinct aims and corresponding methods of aesthetics.

Herder argues as follows: He suggests that Baumgarten conflates these two aims and methods. Therefore, he also misconstrues the relation between the two sorts of aesthetics that he distinguishes himself. These two sorts are *aesthetica naturalis* and *aesthetica artificialis*. On analogy with *logica naturalis* and *logica artificialis* in metaphysics, these two intend to refer to two kinds of *objects* of analysis: a natural aesthetical skill, untouched by theory (i.e., the natural workings of the senses, imagination, etc.), and an artificial aesthetical discipline, grounded in a theory of aesthetics that prescribes rules to the aesthetician. The latter is what Baumgarten aims to develop in his science: both as a systematic description of the lower faculties of cognition, and as a tool for their improvement. The term 'logic' refers to both of these enterprises. As a logic of the lower faculties, then, artificial aesthetics analyzes our natural aesthetical constitution in terms of the technical vocabulary of metaphysics, translates its findings into artificial rules, and implements these again on the level of *aesthetica naturalis*.

Herder finds fault with this procedure because he deems Baumgarten's vocabulary too abstract and too far removed from concrete aesthetic practices (FHA 1, 672-673). I will focus in the next section on Herder's empiricist critique of Baumgarten's top-down method, and of the Wolffian vocabulary which he transported into aesthetics. However, Herder also formulates a more substantive criticism. The general gist of his argument is that the step from natural to artificial aesthetics is only legitimate on an objective understanding of aesthetics, and that on this objective understanding, Baumgarten's final aim, prescribing rules, is not warranted.

Herder does not deny that artificial aesthetics develops out of natural aesthetics as soon as it is systematized as a science: Baumgarten's own aesthetics, for Herder, is an example of how this could be executed productively (661; cf. Adler 1990, 83-88). However, Herder denies

that this aesthetics can be used *subjectively*, to improve the aesthetician's natural aesthetics. Conversely, subjective aesthetics may attempt to correct our sensuous cognition, yet it cannot do so on the basis of the rules abstracted from natural aesthetics into objective aesthetics. Rather, it can only rely on itself, and the practice of its own skills (FHA 1, 662). Its functions are habitual and escape distinct determination (FHA 2, 268). This is why for Herder, the subjective side of Baumgarten's aesthetics is much less productive, and Baumgarten's conflation – application of rules to natural *aisthete* – is ultimately harmful to the natural feeling of beauty: “sie *schwächt* die *Kunst* durch das Bewußtsein der Regeln [...] sie *schwächt* die *Empfindung*; und ist dem *Genusse*, und unserem Leben also schädlich” (FHA 1, 664). In short, Herder applies his distinction between subjective and objective aesthetics to Baumgarten's differentiation of natural and artificial aesthetics, and concludes that Baumgarten conflates two aims of aesthetics.

According to Baumgarten, our natural aesthetics – i.e. the sensuous capacities with which we are born with and which we train, simply through their use – can be aided by a clearer and better devised artificial aesthetics ([1750] 2007, §11). That is, he considered it possible for aesthetics to educate the artist via scientific rules. In this respect, Herder is rather protective of the artist's autonomy: his ‘genius’ is not led by rules (see Chapter 5.2.). To the contrary: while aesthetics may learn from the analysis of artistic productions how the human mind works, genius artists cannot learn from such analysis. This is because in such analysis, the artist's sensuous activity is translated into a discourse of distinct concepts. This discourse may capture the relations between the feelings and impressions at issue more or less correctly, yet it inevitably changes them into something they are not (namely distinct concepts). To sum up, Herder is both protective of natural aesthetics, since this should remain untouched by dogmatic theorizing, as well as enthusiastic about objective aesthetics as a science of human nature. He considers the two to be essentially distinct operations. I will use the rest of this section to explain how natural and artificial aesthetics relate to each other, and to present Herder's proposal for innovation.

Herder approves of the way Baumgarten has opened up the lower faculties of the soul to philosophical inquiry, ordered them, and determined how they are related among each other (FHA 1, 662). Yet he claims that it should be kept in mind that, as an object, natural aesthetics – the art of using *aisthete* – is essentially opposed, and genetically prior to philosophical cognition (660). Herder submits:

Daher ist [...] die *künstliche* aus der *natürlichen entstanden*; dies muß also aus dem *Menschen* zu erklären sein – als ein *eignes* und *wichtiges* Naturphänomenon. Alle Menschen Haben aestheticam *connatam*, da sie *alle* als *sinnliche* Tiere geboren werden, und weil sie mehr Tiere als Geister sind[.] (660; cf. Noyes 2015, 35)

Herder understands this explanation as the main task of objective aesthetics, which in this way consists of “ein Stück von der *nötigsten* Anthropologie, da in dem *Grunde* der Seele unsere *Stärke* als *Menschen* besteht” (FHA 1, 665). Ultimately, this aesthetics requires much more empirical work than Baumgarten offers. Here Herder refers approvingly to Mendelssohn’s and Sulzer’s proposal to pursue the traces of obscure feelings, their effects on the surface, so to speak, of which we are conscious. Herder’s ideal, however, is to pursue these traces all the way back to their origin. I quote a long and eloquent passage to give an idea of how he imagines how such an aesthetician after Baumgarten should go about:

Die menschliche Seele liegt vor ihm, ihrem *sinnlichen*, d.i. ihrem wirksamsten und lebendigsten Teile nach, wie ein ungeheures Weltmeer, das auch selbst bei seiner stillen Zeit voll Fluten scheint, die an die Wolken reichen: da stelle ich dich, o Philosoph des Gefühls, wie auf einen hohen Fels mitten unter den Wellen. Nun siehe in den dunkeln Abgrund der menschlichen Seele hinunter [...] siehe herab in den Abgrund *dunkler* Gedanken, aus welchem sich nachher Triebe und Affekten, und Lust und Unlust heben. [...] Bist du es, der einen Gedanken und ein Gefühl zählen, mässen und wägen kann; so bestimme den Reichtum, die Erhabenheit und Würde einer menschlichen Känntnis. Kannst du den Sonnenstrahl eines Gedankens und einer Empfindung teilen: so teile jene schwangere, jene nachdrucksvolle Vorstellung [...] und sondre sie von dem Schimmer der Rede. (685-686)

Whereas it is clear that Herder demands a more empirical approach, he does not abandon the tools of Baumgarten’s artificial aesthetics in favor of mere intuition. Aesthetics has feeling – the domain of natural aesthetics – as its object, but not as its method. This becomes clear in Herder’s defense of Baumgarten against Riedel and others in *Viertes Wäldchen*. There, Herder applies his distinction between a subjective and an objective aesthetics in order to save Baumgarten from objections which are merely based on the expectation that the latter can *improve* the former. Herder explains:

Die künstliche Ästhetik, oder die *Wissenschaft* des Schönen setzt die vorige *voraus*; aber gar nicht auf demselben Wege *fort*; ja sie hat gar das Gegenteil zum Geschäfte.

Eben das Gewohnheitsartige, was dort schöne Natur war, löset sie, so viel an ihr ist, auf, und zerstörts gleichsam in demselben Augenblick. Eben die schöne Verwirrung, wenn nicht die Mutter, so doch die unabtrennbare Begleiterin alles Vergnügens, löset sie auf, sucht sie in Deutliche Ideen aufzuklären: Wahrheit tritt in die Stelle der Schönheit. (FHA 2, 268-269)

To the extent that Baumgarten's aesthetics is such a science, Herder approves of its results. However, it is important for Herder to keep in mind that the *result* of the scientific analysis of feeling has itself developed into a more general, complex and abstract form of knowledge. The aim of Herder's aesthetics is to explain how this development proceeds: to prove that all of our higher cognition was originally based on feeling, and to trace its development into memory, judgment and rational inference. In order to do this, it is necessary to attempt to reach back as far as possible into the 'depths' of the human soul and its history:

Der ganze Grund unsrer Seele sind dunkle Ideen, die lebhaftesten, die meisten, die Masse, aus der die Seele ihre feinern bereitet, die stärksten Triebfedern unsers Lebens, der größte, Beitrag zu unserm Glück und Unglück. Man denke sich die Integraltheile der menschlichen Seele körperlich, und sie hat, wenn ich mich so ausdrücken darf, an Kräften mehr spezifische Masse zu einem sinnlichen Geschöpf, als zu einem reinen Geiste: sie ist also einem Menschlichen Körper beschieden; sie ist Mensch. (272)

Aesthetics aims to analyze the soul as human, and not in abstraction. As human, the soul is individualized on earth, and hence different from others. Therefore, abstractly determining its forces may be either too general to be informative or it does not correspond to actual reality. Instead, aesthetics should search for the anthropological, genetic and natural factors that determine how we process sense data and turn them into (ordinary and artistic) representations. Its method consists in empirically collecting all the different instances of human cognition – through history, cultures and climates – in order to learn about the stabilities and diversities of human psychology.⁵² As Herder states himself, this aesthetics is a science focused on improving human self-understanding by examining experiences and sensations (FHA 1, 687). As a scientific description of the sensuous domain of human subjectivity, Herder sees objective aesthetics as a key feature of subjective philosophy.

⁵² It has therefore rightly been interpreted as a "last philosophy" (Zammito, Menges, and Menze, 2010, 674) as well as a form of methodological naturalism (Zuckert 2014).

2.2.2. Conclusion

Herder's way of applying the distinction between subjective and objective aesthetics – but more fundamentally between object and method of aesthetics – allows him to respond to the prejudices against the sensuous in a different way than Baumgarten does. Herder considers Baumgarten's way of responding to the listed objections “langweiliger [...] als es uns nötig sein wird” (FHA 2, 270). Compared to Baumgarten, Herder's reactions to the same exhibit the different outlook at which he arrives. First, Herder is not in the least worried that feelings might be below the horizon of the philosopher. To the contrary, the discipline of aesthetics “ist ja selbst die strengste Philosophie über einen würdigen und sehr schweren Inbegriff der Menschlichen Seele und der Nachahmungen der Natur: sie ist [...] ein schwerer Teil der Anthropologie, der Menschenkenntnis” (270). If philosophy wishes to become anthropology, the obscure foundation of the soul must form the center of analysis. Second and third, aesthetics has nothing to do with the nurturing of confusion, and no harm to reason can come of it either. Aesthetics studies indistinct concepts to render them more distinct.

The main thrust of the argument is very similar to Herder's argument for subjective philosophy in the first chapter: the point of this philosophy is not to let subjective fancies decide on objective (metaphysical) matters. Rather, its aim is to inquire into the subjective side of cognition (the workings of sensation, the operations of the soul) in a manner that is thoroughly philosophical and *wissenschaftlich*, and at the same time strictly a science of human nature (FHA 1, 659).

My interpretation of Herder's criticism of Baumgarten has led me to a different conclusion than some other interpreters. As I have construed it, Herder's disagreement with Baumgarten principally is more a methodological disagreement – about how to do aesthetics, and about what to do with the results of its analysis – than a completely different conceptualization of the *aistheta*. Because of this, I am not entirely convinced by John Noyes' use of the confrontations with Baumgarten and Riedel to support his claim that it is Herder's view that “philosophy needs to understand that truth can only be negotiated aesthetically”, or that “truth becomes a matter of aesthetics” (Noyes 2015, 28, 34). Of course, Herder aims to increase the anthropological significance of feeling and intends to revise the hierarchical model of faculty psychology. However, Herder does not simply defer to feeling as a methodology for philosophy. Such a reading of his aesthetics seems too epistemological and inconsistent with

his call for philosophy as anthropology.⁵³ Furthermore, as will become clear below, Noyes' interpretation of Herder's critique of Riedel as a criticism of Riedel's "naturalization of judgments" seems off the mark; especially since Noyes also lines up Riedel on the side of the Wolffian rationalists (Noyes 2015, 31-32).⁵⁴ To the contrary, I consider it apt to describe Herder's aesthetics as part of a naturalistic project (Zuckert 2014; Zammito 2002, 320-321; Heinz 1994b, 23; HWP 2, 1133ff.).

Second, I do not follow Hans Adler in his assessment that Herder criticizes artificial aesthetics in general. The result of Herder's revision is not the embrace of an intuitive and simple *Seinsgewißheit* and *Prägnanz des Dunklen*, which defies all further analysis as a "Null-Punkt, die ontologische Origo für Herders Philosophieren und für seine Erkenntnislehre" (Adler 1990, 56). This would imply a reduction of aesthetics to *aesthetica naturalis*, and a philosophy which is closer to *Fundamentalontologie* than to historical anthropology (Adler 1990, 74, 86, and cf. 88-90 for Adler's own presentist interests). Moreover, Adler extends these notions of *Seinsgewißheit* and *Prägnanz* from basic subject constitution to all empirical knowledge gathered from the sciences, whereas it is not clear whether Herder at all speaks about methodology of the sciences in the texts on which Adler relies (1988, 217-219). If this were Herder's position, it would be difficult to understand why he should disagree with Riedel in *Viertes Wäldchen* (as I will show in the next section).

Menke (2017), finally, interprets Herder's stress on the *dunkle Grund der Seele* as an attempt to reach behind subjectivity and discover there *der Mensch*, who resides in the human subject, yet as its other. Menke formulates a Herdorean 'aesthetic genealogy' that traces the emergence of subjectivity out of "den Menschen als die Szene, den Prozeß des Bildens des Subjekts" (56). The dark ground of the soul is the home of this scene, accommodating "dunkle Kraft", "eine vor-, ja gegensubjektive Kraft, die den Menschen ausmacht" (65). I take this interpretation to make the *dunkle Grund* slightly *too dark*: Herder indeed aims to liberate aspects of being human from a psychology that celebrates a particular conception of rationality, and he indeed states that some of these aspects are not rationally controllable. However, he

⁵³ Depending on what is meant by "truth becomes a matter of aesthetics", Noyes also misinterprets Heinz and Clairmont (2009, 46-47), whom he cites as evidence for this claim. On their interpretation, the problem of truth is not left to aesthetics, but rather abandoned completely (as out of reach for the human understanding) in favor of "an unbiased description and analysis of the nature of the human mind" (45).

⁵⁴ Noyes means by "naturalization" a rigid determinism, according to which functions of human nature immediately determine cognitive output. However, what Herder really criticizes in Riedel is the problematic immediacy assigned to mental functions that are too high up in the chain of cognitive activities not to rely on series of other processes. It is therefore much more correct to brand Herder's account a "naturalization of judgment" (2015, 31).

adheres to a conception of feeling and of sensation that he identifies with common sense, *der gesunde Menschenverstand*, and with sets of historically acquired habits and skills. Furthermore, as I will explain below, Herder retains a conception of the ultimate origin of mental activity that is more positive than the Nietzsche-Foucault notion of *Herkunft* that Menke uses (2017, 56). He has a further reason to expect that the ground of the soul is not our Other in a twentieth-century sense, which relies on the belief that “des Menschen eigne Welt weit kleiner ist, als Gottes Welt im Menschen” (FHA 1, 668; see Chapter 6.3.).

2.3. “Jetzt näher an die Erfahrung” – “Lasset uns seiner Genesis nachspüren”⁵⁵

Apart from all his praise for Baumgarten’s innovation, Herder’s revision of aesthetics is really based on his critique of metaphysics (as I analyzed in Chapter One). Hence also about Baumgarten’s aesthetics, Herder claims: “Es ist [...] ihr erster Fehler, daß sie alles zu sehr a priori und wie aus der Luft hernimmt, und sich also auch in die Luft allgemeiner Sätze verliert, die oft zu weit sind, um sich mit Einzelheiten füllen, oft zu eigensinnig sind, um, was man will, an sich anpassen zu lassen” (FHA 1, 692; cf. 672-673). As a scientist of feeling, Herder aims to stay close to experience. Rather than claiming that the human mind is not capable of settling disputes in this field of inquiry (as he did for metaphysics), Herder ventures to show that the field of aesthetics, contrary to the opinion of some Wolffian school-philosophers, does allow philosophical analysis. So, rather than showing that no sensations could be aligned to the concepts of the philosophers, Herder seeks to exhibit that certain phenomena, which had escaped philosophical attention in Germany – but not the attention of physiologists, natural historians, literary critics, historians, artists, and philosophers in Britain and France – can better explain how sensuous cognition functions (Cf. Zammito 2002, 313-315 on Herder’s sources).

In order to display this line of argument, I will analyze Herder’s criticism of Baumgarten’s concept of beauty, and of Riedel’s postulation of three *Grundkräfte* of the soul, namely for the true, good and beautiful. In both cases, it is Herder’s aim to exhibit that the respective concepts and objects can be deduced from prior phenomena. What Herder criticizes is the tendency to accept certain definitions of concepts as starting points of philosophical analysis, or certain forces of the soul as foundational (as *Grundkräfte*). Herder expects that, rather than truly grasping the object of enquiry, determining such primitive concepts and forces

⁵⁵ These are quotes from FHA 2, 252 and 282 respectively.

allows for too much arbitrariness. As a result, these concepts are in danger of being too imprecise in referring to the phenomena. Or worse, their universality may be a feigned one, excluding phenomena that are not accounted for in their definition. In this way, Herder aims to prove empirically that the so-called *a priori* reasons to determine a concept in a certain way might lead the philosopher astray. A development of the same concept on the basis of a collection of sufficient and relevant empirical data should do better.

I will use Herder's confrontation with Baumgarten to explain what it means for Herder's psychology to be *genetic*. And I discuss his criticism of Riedel mainly to show how Herder's genetic account is able to accommodate the empirical fact of *diversity* (at least better than Riedel's). I start with the first.

2.3.1. Against Baumgarten

Baumgarten commences the first chapter of his *Aesthetica* with the following definition: "Der Zweck der Ästhetik ist die Vollkommenheit der sinnlichen Erkenntnis. Dies aber ist die Schönheit" ([1750] 2007, §14). In his commentary on this paragraph of the *Aesthetica*, Herder complains that a determination of the concept of beauty should be the end-result and peak of aesthetics, not an arbitrary start (FHA 1, 670). Herder denies that this matter could be settled on *a priori* grounds. Furthermore, Baumgarten's '*a priori*' is not neutral, but rather "ein Auswuchs der falschen philosophischen Wurzel: Das Wesen der Seele ist das Erkenntnisvermögen" (670).

According to Herder, the concepts used in the definition, '*perfectio*' and '*cognitionis sensitivae*', are not apt to commence an aesthetic analysis of the concept of beauty. In the case of *perfectio*, this is because it is a mere formal requirement of beauty, which does not help to determine its material content. And such content, Herder claims, presupposes feeling, just like the material content of any other concept relies on sensation. Regarding *cognitionis sensitivae*, the problem lies in the substantive, in German 'Erkenntnis': Herder regards *Erkenntnis* as an end-result of a series of judgments applied to sensations: "So wie das Denken nicht das 1ste am Menschen ist: so auch nicht die schöne *Erkenntnis* der Anfang der Ästhetik. Der Mensch, das Tier, *empfindet erst; dunkel sich selbst*" (670). Hence, knowledge cannot form the starting point for the analysis of the feeling of beauty. Herder concludes: "Weg also cognitio [...] Gefühl macht eine besondere *Gattung* aus" (671). If it wants to become true to its name, aesthetics

should become a philosophy of feeling; a philosophy of *aistheta* as against the *noeta*, which are the objects of logic.⁵⁶

What is the alternative conception of beauty at which Herder arrives in this way? A first thing to note is that in comparison to Baumgarten, Herder in *Viertes Wäldchen* adapts the definition from “Vollkommenheit der sinnlichen Erkenntnis” to “sinnliche Vollkommenheit” (FHA 2, 276). This is not meant to merely provide yet another arbitrary foundational definition. Rather, sensuous perfection is merely one of the more technical but still ‘convenient’ expressions that should define the concept of beauty (272). Combining multiple concrete and empirical approaches should result in determining its content: “Die Erfinder der Benennungen stiegen von unten hinauf: sie bemerkten und benannten einzeln: so müssen wir ihnen nachsteigen, alsdenn sammeln, alsdenn übersehen” (289; cf. Norton 1991, 157, 184).

Examples of these approaches, which Herder pursues in *Viertes Wäldchen*, are to attend to the use of the word in different languages, and to search for concepts related to beauty in the way we speak about the input of our different senses (FHA 2, 289-299). The use of the concept in everyday life should be one of the starting points for the philosophers. Yet also etymology may play a role: Herder for example draws an etymological connection between the German word *schön* and words connected to visual perception, like *schauen* and *Schein* (289). Finally, he suggests that, as a philosophy of feeling, aesthetics should reevaluate the role of touch (*Gefühl*) as constitutive to visual perception (292-298). Aesthetics should hence be a “Physiologie der Sinne und sinnlichen Begriffe” tracing general concepts back to the different senses, to the communication between them, and to the further operations of the soul that process and store impressions (301). Its presupposition is that, like all general and abstract concepts, beauty

ist ein schwerer, langsamer Begriff; er muß aus vielen einzelnen Datis und Bezeichnungen abstrahiert werden: alle diese können nicht genugsam gesammelt, gefeilt, geordnet und verfeinert werden, um aus ihnen die Analyse des Schönen überhaupt zu geben; und eben diese ist das letzte Produkt von allen einzelnen Phänomenen. (300)

⁵⁶ As Baumgarten had defined it in his 1735 dissertation on the poem (Menke 2017, 35). Herder here reproaches Baumgarten for not sticking to the original meaning of *aistheta*, and for focusing on *cognitionis sensitivae*. He argues that, in Baumgarten’s work, ‘aesthetics’ has become a “mere metaphor” (FHA 2, 298).

Herder is adamant that, in order to analyze general concepts, a vast empirical endeavor must precede before any content can be determined. There is no *a priori* way to develop an aesthetics out of a concept of beauty.

For my present purposes, the most relevant of these different empirical approaches is Herder's foray into developmental psychology. In this context, he determines how the complex concept of beauty as sensuous perfection ("sinnliche Vollkommenheit") can be traced back to simpler concepts and more primitive operations of the soul (FHA 2, 272-279). In sections five and six of *Viertes Wäldchen*, Herder attempts to show that the concept of beauty is something we acquire only after a long development of our souls, through a history of applying our sensuous capacities. For this, Herder relies on physiological and psychological sources, as well as on the work of Leibniz, Mendelssohn and Sulzer. Rather than engaging in a detailed discussion of these sources, however, Herder presents the reader with histories of the development of the forces of the human soul in interaction with sensations.

These histories have different dimensions, which, Herder argues, are analogous to such a degree that it is fair to say that they contribute to one history of the human soul. At least four of them can be identified in his works from the period. First, Herder sketches a logical sequence in which self-feeling, sensation, and judgment function in order to form concepts, as had been common at least since Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (252-255). In addition, Herder presents a developmental psychology of the soul in early childhood (274-279). As a natural next step, then, he suggests multiple ways in which this process can vary and have very different outcomes: according to the objects we are presented with, to the individuality of our souls, to climates, and to levels of *Ästhetischen Bildung* in different times and nations. Finally, in e.g. the *Fragmente* and *Auch eine Philosophie*, a grand narrative is meant to capture all these different micro- and macroscopic developments: the life-stages (*Lebensalter*) of humanity as a whole.⁵⁷

The aim of these histories is to convey to the reader the plausibility, indeed the necessity, of this story being able to explain the genesis of even the most abstract and complex concepts that philosophers like to define *a priori* (cf. FHA 4, 38). This is why some of Herder's texts, in presenting an up-close depiction of their objects' development, appear to develop with the objects that they describe. In the case of the concept of beauty, Herder sketches how it is formed

⁵⁷ Beiser (1987, 129) is hence correct to observe that Herder's "interest in history derived from his preoccupation with the mind, for he saw history as the key to the mind. He was convinced that he could understand the mind only by observing its growth and development, which could only be traced through history." It is just that the claim is also true in the opposite order, for the mind is just as much the key to human history.

in childhood – after the child has learned to distinguish between an inside and an outside, and still before it learns to distinguish between fantasy and memory:

Die Seele entwickelt sich weiter. Da in ihrem Vorrat von sinnlichen Eindrücken [...] das Eins und das mehr als Eins, schon ihr eingeprägt; da der Begriff von Ordnung und sinnlicher Wahrheit schon dunkel in ihr ist; wie? wenn sie ihrer beständigen Wirksamkeit, Ideen zu erlangen, zu vergleichen, zu ordnen, darauf kommt, in diesem und jenem den Grund von einem Dritten zu erblicken, anschauend zu erblicken; siehe! da ist die Wurzel zum Begriffe des *Guten*, offenbar durch die zusammengesetzteste Schlußart gebildet. Er lernt Dies und Jenes unterscheiden, was auf *Ihn* diese und jene Zusammenstimmung zum Wohlgefallen hatte, mehr als einmal zum Wohlgefallen hatte: und so lernt sein *Gut* erkennen: so bekommt die Begriffe von *Ordnung*, *Übereinstimmung*, *Vollkommenheit*, und da die Schönheit nichts, als sinnliche Vollkommenheit ist, den Begriff von *Schönheit*. (FHA 2, 275-276)

The storehouse of sensuous impressions provides the basis for all our most complex concepts. While the soul is unceasingly active, it relies on a continuous stream of sensation – recall: “ein ungeheures Weltmeer” of sensuousness – for the formation of all its concepts. A “zusammengesetzteste Schlußart” hence is involved as well in the formation of general concepts out of this stream, which takes place already in early childhood.

To sum up, Herder’s argument amounts to a redirection of aesthetics toward the phenomena – the material of our different senses, their modification in feeling, the formation of concepts – that Herder thinks should form its object. Herder’s theses are: (1) these phenomena will better account for the workings of our sensuous capacities and the development of taste, and (2) since they are mostly located in the ‘lower faculties’ of our soul, and since they developed early in the history of our soul, these phenomena need to be uncovered empirically and historically, rather than defined *a priori*, in relation to other abstract concepts. In order to further analyze this final point I will turn to Herder’s criticism of Riedel’s postulation of three *Grundkräfte* of the soul. Here it will become evident that Herder did not merely open up to philosophical enquiry the lower faculties of the soul – this sensuous domain is also showed to be occupied, in a much greater degree than was held before, with judgments and other goal-oriented activities of the soul.

2.3.2. *Against Riedel*

During the intense polemic with Riedel, Herder claims not just to refute Riedel's *Theorie der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften*, but also to provide an error theory. This way, Herder suggests, "Ich bin nicht bloß Philosoph *gegen*, sondern auch *über* ihn geworden: nicht bloß sein unförmlicher Körper sondern auch die Entstehungsart dieser Mißgestalt ist augenscheinlich" (FHA 2, 253). In the introduction of his book, Riedel postulates that the human subject has three inner feelings that connect her immediately to three objects, namely, to the true, the good, and the beautiful (Riedel 1767, 7). Herder aims not just to deny that Riedel's foundational principles are innate, but also to explain how we arrive at these principles (or at principles very similar to them) through natural operations of the mind. In an unpublished fragment from the period, Herder justifies this method in the following way. By analyzing errors, he explains how they could be thought up by minds like ours. And this *possibility* of a certain error is its most important aspect, Herder argues: "da er in dem Geiste meiner Natur sich zutrug; und dessen Entstehungsart ich wissen muß" (SWS 32, 145). This is why a "Geschichte der Meinungen", (or more poetically in the *Reisejournal*, a "philosophische Geschichte wachender Träume", FHA 9/2, 26) is of the utmost anthropological importance: it teaches us about the possibilities of the human in different historical and geographical contexts (SWS 32, 145).

Herder had formulated the desideratum (and the difficulties) of *genetic* explanation very early on, in his 1764 *Versuch einer Geschichte der lyrischen Dichtkunst* (HWP 1, 9-15). Facing criticisms of his hypothesis of the *Lebensalter* of language in the first collection of *Fragmente*, he added a rewritten version of the same demand to his fully revised second edition (FHA 1, 601-605). Its central claim is this:

Mit dem Ursprunge einer Sache entgeht uns ein Teil ihrer Geschichte, die doch so viel in ihr erklären muß, und meistens der wichtigste Teil. Wie der Baum aus der Wurzel: so wächst Kunst, Sprache und Wissenschaft aus ihrem Ursprunge herauf. In dem Samenkorn liegt die Pflanze mit ihren Teilen; im Samentier das Geschöpf mit allen Gliedern: und in dem Ursprung eines Phänomenon aller Schatz von Erläuterung, durch welche die Erklärung desselben *genetisch* wird. Woher sind so viel Verwirrungen entstanden, als weil man den spätern Zustand einer Sache, einer Sprache, einer Kunst für den ersten nahm, und den Ursprung vergaß? Woher so viel Irrtümer, als weil *ein einziger* Zustand, in dem man alles betrachtete, nichts anders als *einseitige* Bemerkungen, geteilte und unvollständige Urteile geben mußte? (602)

This genetic method would lie at the basis of Herder's philosophy of history.⁵⁸ Crucially, it relies on the existence of ultimate origins of all phenomena, that are, however, maximally thin, amorphous or hidden. I will further analyze Herder's stance on origins in chapters Four and Six. In the context of psychology, Herder argues that Riedel's philosophy is a good candidate for a genetic explanation. This is because Herder interprets him as having committed exactly the fallacy from which Herder saw so many confusions arise. I will first formulate the basics of Riedel's position, and then sketch Herder's immediate response, in order to subsequently work out Herder's genetic error theory.

Riedel postulates three *Grundbegriffe* as final ends of humanity – the true, the good, and the beautiful – and aligns them to three *Grundkräfte* of the soul. These forces allow us to intuit immediately, without the use of judgments of reason, what is true, right, and beautiful:

Der Mensch hat dreyerley Endzwecke, die seiner geistigen Vollkommenheit untergeordnet sind, das *Wahre*, das *Gute* und das *Schöne*; für jeden hat ihm die Natur eine besondere Grundkraft verliehen, für das Wahre den *sensus communis*, für das Gute das *Gewissen* und für das Schöne den *Geschmack*; alle drey Grundkräfte sind Aeste der Empfindung, alle drey beruhen auf den nothwendigen Gesetzen zu handeln, denen die Seele so wohl, als eine andere Substanz unterworfen ist[.] (Riedel 1767, 6-7).

According to Riedel, human beings are naturally inclined to intuit the true, good, and beautiful. Furthermore, Riedel relies on a form of sentimentalism according to which human nature remains thoroughly the same through history. Riedel does not attempt to present rules or a unified theory of aesthetics. He presents useful tips from different philosophers, while at the same time stating that our own taste in the end is our only guide, and that judgements will not help.

In immediate response, Herder points at two conflicting implications of Riedel's position: (1) if everyone has immediate access to these universals, and can be convinced in all particular cases whether they obtain, then nobody seems ever to be wrong; (2) yet if there are differences in convictions, then the "letzte Proberstein" resides within individual human subjects, which may persist in their contradicting opinions (FHA 2, 256-257). Herder claims

⁵⁸ Beiser (1987, 141-145) interestingly connects the quoted passage from the *Fragmente* with the project of *Auch eine Philosophie*. However, he too quickly equates genetic explanation with "his doctrine of historical and cultural relativity" (143). After all, Herder's genetic explanation is not just about how things have *become*, but mainly about their *origin*, which Herder in many contexts connects to their *essence*. That is, it is necessary to discover a thing's origin in order to *bypass* the difficulties caused by historical change (HWP 1, 10).

that Riedel is at the same time overly optimistic about our capacities to attain objective validity and completely subjectivist (and skeptical, Herder adds) about how our aesthetic judgments are executed (279-283). In the case of the beautiful, Riedel strikingly affirms, in the 1774 edition of the same work, the subjectivist consequence with which Herder takes issue: “Die Schönheit ist also relativischer Natur, und bloß eine [sic] Verhältniß, in welcher uns etwas gefällt” (1774, 20).

Robert Norton observes in his chapter on *Viertes Wäldchen* the “odd twist of irony” of Herder’s vehement opposition to a position that has later so often been ascribed to himself (1991, 172). However, Riedel only really considers beauty to be of a relative nature. His distinction of three individual faculties separates aesthetic, moral, and epistemic/metaphysical discourse, and since Riedel is only concerned with aesthetics, he is happy to admit that, in this field, actual diversity of taste shows that beauty is not objective. Yet this does not imply that, in the other two fields, Riedel is not satisfied just to posit that common sense and moral feeling lead to objective truth and goodness. In fact, as Norton rightly observes, one of Herder’s arguments against Riedel is to stress the interdependence of the three alleged separate faculties, and to show that the operations of a single human soul can be identified in all three areas. Herder intends to account for diversity also concerning truth and goodness (FHA 2, 280-281). Nevertheless, he wishes to counter the *relative nature* of beauty, on which the mere subjective relation of liking an object presents the final word in all cases of conflict.

Herder’s strategy certainly is not to push the universalist epistemological assumption (1) against his own version of (2), namely the empirical fact of psychological and historical diversity. Rather, regarding Riedel’s relying on an immediate feeling for truth, Herder warns of the consequence of a mere “Du so; ich fühle anders – wir gehen aus einander [...] aller Widerspruch hört auf!” (258). Herder does not approve of the arbitrary way Riedel aligns an abstract concept of truth to primitive feelings of individual subjects (421). This precludes a philosophical exploration of the meaning of the concept of truth, and it takes away from individual human subjects the common basis needed to explain how both convergence and divergence of convictions emerge (cf. Norton 1991, 164-165). Herder finds this basis in human nature and in a reservoir of sensuous material, the hidden and dark ground of the human soul. He argues that, with his separate *Grundkräfte*, Riedel assigns *letzte Probersteine* at arbitrary points. A more empirical account can *explain* how disagreement arises *and* (at least at times) adjudicate who is right. Herder presents the different factors that affect the development of taste. In this way, he goes through the possible causes of diversity in taste, in order to show that

we can philosophically account for differences, and do not need to stick to our feigned *Grundgefühle*. He submits: “Lasset uns die Erfahrung und die Natur fragen: so bleibt kein so grober Widerspruch: alles erklärt sich; von allem sehe ich Grund und Ordnung” (FHA 2, 282). I will evaluate later on whether this accounting for differences really dissolves all tension between the universal and the subjective.⁵⁹ First, I will present the alternative psychology that Herder uses to explain Riedel’s error.

2.3.3. Herder’s genetic account of cognition

As a philosopher of Riedel’s error, Herder explains that the *Grundkräfte* of the soul, which Riedel postulates as primitive faculties and inner feelings, are in fact the end-products of a long development of repeated sensations and comparisons, and of the formation of the most basic concepts (FHA 2, 251-255). The three alleged objects of these inner feelings, furthermore, are “zusammengesetzte, feine, verflochtne Abstrakta”, and as such, we have no immediate access to them (251). Rather, we need to understand the complex process in which we acquired these concepts in order to understand their meaning. Herder hence also takes issue with Riedel’s claim that the *Grundgefühle* of the true, the good, and the beautiful are *innate*. He states that these feelings cannot be innate, because first, they are not primitive, but rather products of multiple preceding operations, and second, they do not consist entirely in *feeling* either (252-255). Simple feelings, Herder explains, convey only particulars. Hence, the complex abstractions that are involved cannot be felt in any direct way, let alone immediately and infallibly. Concerning common sense, then, Herder asks:

wo ist denn das innere Gefühl der Seele, das jedem Menschen so viel Wahrheit lehrt, als er braucht? bei mir finde ichs nicht. Ich finde eine immer wirksame Kraft in mir, Kenntnisse zu haben; und wo diese hat wirken können, worin ich Gelegenheit gehabt, viel Begriffe zu sammeln, Urteile zu bilden, Schlüsse zu folgern, da lebt auch mein Sensus communis [...] ich sehe also keinen innern, unmittelbaren, allgemeinen, untrüglichen Lehrer der Wahrheit; ich sehe eine Fertigkeit, Erkenntniskräfte anzuwenden, nach dem Maß, wie sie ausgebildet sind. (280-281)

⁵⁹ Norton in his chapter relies on the fact that Herder opposed Riedel’s relativism in venturing to save Herder from any association with the term. Norton’s (1991, 164-165, 172-176) arguments for this are compelling, yet I take it that the notions of diversity and change which Herder wants to appreciate can be construed a bit more radically than Norton does. Hence the contrast with Riedel cannot decide on the issue of relativism on its own.

On this account, any philosophical concept (or *Grundgefühl*) should be traced back to the pattern of judgments that led to it. However, in order to explain how Riedel arrived at his erroneous view, Herder also needs to account for the fact that, in our ordinary experience, many of our convictions do appear *as if* they are immediately felt, without the help of any complex of judgments and concepts (255). Hence, developmental psychology is required to bridge the gap between the philosophical analysis of human cognition and our everyday awareness of what we do. It must be explained, first, how a complex sequence of judgements leads us to the notions of the true, the good, and the beautiful, and second, how this sequence later appears differently, so that we do not experience it any more as such or in its entirety. Finally, Herder also argues that, for reasons of effectivity, it is for the better that we are not fully rationally transparent to ourselves in this sense.

Herder's account looks as follows. First, he accepts only two immediate feelings, namely, "daß ich bin, daß ich mich fühle", and "daß Etwas außer uns sei" (252). The anti-Cartesian implications of this have been widely observed: feeling rather than thinking assures us of our own existence.⁶⁰ Furthermore, Herder explicitly states that this "Basis von Empfindung" is exempt from doubt: "der Skeptiker, der sie einen Augenblick leugnen, d.i. der die unmittelbare Überzeugung eines Gefühls in Urteilen und Schlüssen erwiesen haben wollte: der wäre um einen Grad ein größerer Tor, als es der entschlossenste Egoist und Idealist sein können" (252). Cartesian skepticism is thus misguided on two counts. First, it errs in pretending that it is possible to doubt *that* we feel. Second, it is flawed in preferring a rational demonstration of our own existence, whereas any demonstration really can only be deduced from this primitive feeling of our own existence.

After the feelings of ourselves and of something outside, then, repeated sensation ushers the notion of sameness, and subsequently allows comparing and recognizing also the particularity of sensations. Herder describes a process where sensations give rise to more complex activities, which are then stored again as basic certainties:

Mit wiederholten gleichen Empfindungen wird das erste Urteil gebildet: daß es *dieselbe* Empfindung sei. Das Urteil ist dunkel und muß es sein; denn es soll Lebenslang dauren, und als eine ewige Basis in der Seele bleiben. Es muß also die Stärke und so zu sagen Konsistenz eines innern Gefühls erhalten: es wird als

⁶⁰ The earlier mentioned primacy of the sense of touch (*Gefühl*) coincides with this; the related project of a theory of *Plastik* has received a lot of attention in the literature (see Zeuch 2000; Heinz 1994b, 81-108; Norton 1991, 203-232; Adler 1990, 101-125; Irmischer 2009, 121-138).

Empfindung aufbewahret. Der Entstehung nach wars indessen schon Urteil, eine Folge der Verbindung mehrerer Begriffe; nur weil es durch Gewohnheit entstand, und die Gewohnheit, es gleich anzuwenden, es aufbewahrte, so verdunkelte sich die Form der Entstehung, nur das Materielle blieb; es ward Empfindung. (274-275)

In this passage, Herder distinguishes between the genesis of sameness – a judgment on the basis of repeated sensations – and the way it is preserved and experienced by us. This distinction explains why phenomena, which are displayed in the lower regions of the soul, might appear different after philosophical analysis than they did at first sight. It is also a way of arguing why such philosophical analysis is productive (276).

How radical does this render Herder's position regarding the innateness of ideas? First, it is important to note that, according to him, all concepts that were considered basic are actually based on the connection and separation of sensation: "durch viele einzelne Gefühle, durch das lange Gegeneinanderhalten derselben, durch Vergleichung, und Urteil" (253). This connecting of feelings presupposes a previous process of judgment-formation. So, even those ideas, which Locke considered to be perfectly simple, Herder asserts, are the product of previous activity (Locke [1689] 1975, 119ff.). In his developmental psychology, Herder moves from the child's judgment of *sameness* to stressing "wie viel geheime Verbindungen und Trennungen, Urteile und Schlüsse ein werdender Mensch machen muß, um nur die ersten Ideen von Körper außer sich, von *Figur, Gestalt, GröÙe, Entfernung* in sich zu lagern" (FHA 2, 275). It seems that Herder here must answer in the affirmative Leibniz' question to Locke, "can it be denied that there is a great deal that is innate in our minds, since we are innate to ourselves, so to speak, and since we include Being, Unity, Substance, Duration, Change, Action, Perception, Pleasure, and hosts of other objects of our intellectual ideas?" (Leibniz [1765] 1996, 51). At least, Herder denies that these notions are primitive universals. All ideas are the products of a development of the soul in exchange with sensation.

Second, Herder does not start from a conception of the soul as a *tabula rasa*. Rather, the feeling of one's own existence is immediate and absolutely basic to human consciousness. A core of common sensuousness provides all the material for psychological development. Recall, this core of Being is itself unanalyzable, but nevertheless the center of all certainty and shared by all human subjects. As I cited him above, Herder thinks of this core as a collection of "sinnliche Kräfte" under the heading of one single positive force (FHA 2, 273). He describes it in the following way:

Alles liegt in ihm, aber als in einem Keim zur Entwicklung, als in einem Schrein, wo sich eine andre Fähigkeit, wie ein kleinerer Schrein findet: alles aber wird aus Einer Grundkraft der Seele, sich Vorstellungen zu verschaffen, sich eben dadurch, durch diese Entwicklung ihrer Tätigkeit, immer vollkommner zu fühlen, und sich eben dadurch zu vergnügen. Wie schön wird eben damit die Menschliche Seele! Einheit im Grunde, tausendfache Mannichfaltigkeit in der Ausbildung, Vollkommenheit in der Summe des Ganzen! (280)

This is a Leibnizian conception of the soul reflecting the All. Crucial to this conception, again, is *development*: the seed of self-feeling is hidden, and only becomes visible by developing in a particular way: “alle Empfindungen keimen aus diesem Pflanzengefühl, so wie auch in der sichtbaren Natur der Keim den Baum in sich trägt, und jedes Blatt ein Bild des Ganzen ist” (274). Furthermore, only external influences *occasion* the soul’s development (274). Nonetheless, it seems correct to interpret Herder’s notion of a reservoir of obscure perceptions in the ground of the soul as an innate, yet obscure, mirror of the universe (Cf. Heinz 1994b, 51-52).

Still, Herder does not intend to postulate a set of ideas as innate. Rather, his claim is that the ground of the soul is full of (sensuous) material the analysis of which would show that the history of the human soul is far more complex than both the schematic sensualist (Riedel) and the metaphysician (Wolff, Baumgarten) had it.⁶¹ Far from providing us with eternal truths about the structure of reality, Herder claims:

Zu Tausenden liegen solche dunkle Ideen in uns: sie bilden das Seltne, Eigne, und oft so Wunderliche in unsern Begriffen und Gestalten von Schönheit und Vergnügen [...] sie sträuben sich oft gegen später erlernte Wahrheit, und hellere, aber schwächere Überzeugung, gegen Vernunft und Willen und Gewohnheit: sie sind der dunkle Grund in uns, der die später aufgetragnen Bilder und Farben unsrer Seele oft nur gar zu sehr verändert und nur schattieret. (FHA 2, 278)

This is a version of Leibniz’ notion of the *petites perceptions* that populate the soul. But it is not thereby an argument for a core of universal ideas that would lie at the heart of human rationality. Rather, the obscure ideas in the depths of our soul are the mainsprings of our

⁶¹ Regarding Herder’s stance on Wolff’s failure to do justice to the lower faculties, see *Über Christian Wolffs Schriften*, HWP 2, 10. For a nuanced positioning between Wolffians and anti-Wolffians via an affirmation of Baumgarten’s project, FHA 2, 260-261.

individuality, indeed even the source of many beliefs that were fought at the time as prejudices (see Chapters Three and Four).

In explaining the genesis of the higher faculties, Herder confirms the genetic priority of sensuousness. Recall, it was Herder's aim to explain why Riedel's *Grundgefühle* were in fact the product of judgments. These judgments were subsequently explained as having developed into the state of sensation because of a process of habituation. In genetically accounting for judgment itself, however, Herder explains that its source is sensuous: "das *Urteil* wird eben so sinnlich gebildet, als seine Vorgänger. Die Form, wie es sich bildete, erlöscht; das Ausgebildete bleibt, und wird Fertigkeit, wird Gewohnheit, wird Natur" (278).

To sum up, in the obscure ground of the soul, many judgments are in fact performed, even though we are merely aware of them in the form of obscure feelings. Hence the storehouse of sensuous impressions is not merely a reservoir of materials for cognition. Rather, a drive for continuous development affects constant connections between representations, synesthetic fusions of impressions from different senses, and mutations of chains of judgements into hardly noticeable feelings. In this process, we reach a more complex form of awareness which ultimately can be laid down in a set of rules – as the metaphysicians in fact did when they formulated artificial logics. Hence, for Herder, the description of this process results in a genetic explanation of logic. In this way, metaphysics would become "das Resultat aller Erfahrungswissenschaften", with logic as "eine ExperimentalSeelenlehre der obern Kräfte" (FHA 9/2, 49).

So, also for Herder, reasons are implicit in our everyday experience (compare Sulzer's response to Hume in Chapter One). These reasons must be discovered through genetic psychology, however, for they cannot be tracked by a metaphysical deduction. Furthermore, rather than carrying logical validity as reasons, these operations of the soul are habitual judgements and associations, formed contingently in the directions for which individual constitution, presented objects, geographical location, tradition and time allowed. Herder's history of the human soul is meant to be an empirical description, based on data from the sciences, and attentive to differences which may result from individual character or from historical situatedness (FHA 2, 273).

2.4. Conclusion

Baumgarten and Riedel present as two different opponents to Herder's genetic psychology. Against Riedel's sentimentalism, Herder ventures to prove that what Riedel takes to be an immediate and foundational feeling, is in fact the product of a long history of operations of the human soul. As a result, on Herder's account, the efficacy of feeling appears more open to serious empirical and philosophical enquiry, and less arbitrary and unexplainably subjectivist: our souls have histories open to psychological inquiry in the service of studying the nature of humanity, and increasing our self-understanding (FHA 2, 258). Against Riedel, Herder concludes: "Durch welche lange Auswicklungen und Zusammensetzungen, Fehltritte und Übungen ist also das, was unsre Sentimental-Philosophers Grundgefühl nennen, erst geworden!" (FHA 2, 279).

Against Baumgarten's rationalistic methodology (if his understanding of human psychology is not itself ultimately rationalistic as well), on the other hand, Herder's genetic account asserts that not only can and should the realm of feeling be studied – our sensuousness also provides the basis for all the more complex operations of the soul. Against this opponent, then, another conclusion stands out: that judgment and reason itself are functions of the soul which themselves have a history of development out of a sensuous core. On the basis of this conclusion, Herder could attack the status of the rules of logic, and indeed of any other form of apriorism (cf. Zammito 2002, 320).

From these two polemics, then, it can be concluded that Herder's version of the *Aufwertung der Sinnlichkeit* is more empiricist than Baumgarten and more historical than Riedel. The complex history of the human soul also exhibits, against Riedel, that Herder was not after a simple subjectivism about taste and cognition. Still, Herder fully intends to uncover the intricate web of contingencies, dependencies and developments driving the history of human knowledge. He thus faces various challenges. On the one hand, the dark ground of the soul unifies cognition by maintaining an "Einheit im Grunde". On the other hand, the "Keim zur Entwicklung" develops a "tausendfache Mannichfaltigkeit" and accounts for "das Seltne, Eigene, und oft so Wunderliche". How should this diversity of individualities be traced back to its seed, and the "Vollkommenheit in der Summe" be recognized? Herder relies on a Lockean genetic method in order to trace the development of all of the concepts and operations of the human soul. His genetic psychology assumes that the only way in which the soul can be studied fruitfully is by attending to how it has become. He will pursue this question both within the course of one human life and in the history of the human species at large. As a result, most of

human cognition and praxis seems contingent on historical factors, such as the stage of development of the soul, and the (natural and cultural) environment with which it interacts. However, underlying Herder's genetic method, his conception of humanity suggests that all results of empirical enquiry will be apt for integration into a more general theory, and can thus be understood as contributing to a better grasp of the intelligent organization of the human species. In the following chapters, I will pursue how Herder interprets these tense relations between One and Many in understanding historical and cultural others and in developing a general historical anthropology and philosophy of history.

3. Analogy, empathy, incommensurability. Herder's conception of historical understanding

One manner in which Herder's historical thought has often been criticized is by arguing that, through his heavy use of historical '*Einfühlung*' in order to reach an internal understanding of cultures and epochs, he loses any (normative) point of orientation is.⁶² In this chapter, I will interpret Herder's conception of historical understanding. Since I interpret his hermeneutics as strongly grounded in his psychology, I will continue to approach his views on historical understanding and historiographical method from the perspective of his psychology. Simultaneously, in spelling out what Herder thinks allows human beings to (historically) understand others, I will start to highlight the systematic significance of theological ideas.⁶³

Recent scholarship has aimed to correct the image of Johann Gottfried Herder as a mere virtuoso of limitless *Einfühlung* who eclipses his own historical standpoint to traverse world history (see Irmscher [1973] 2009). Most interpreters of Herder now agree that the way in which he balanced the universal and the particular went beyond crude forms of historical/cultural relativism, while studies on Herder's hermeneutics and political philosophy have stressed that for him, empathetic understanding and criticism were closely intertwined (Gjesdal 2017; Spencer 2012b; Sikka 2011; Muthu 2003, 210-258). A notion that plays a key role in these discussions, particularly in the context of Herder's critique of ethnocentrism, is 'incommensurability'.⁶⁴ It is generally defined as the impossibility of finding universal standards for ranking or comparing cultures, values, practical ends or ways of life.⁶⁵ While two main protagonists of the relativism/pluralism debate, Vicki Spencer and Sonia Sikka, use the concept slightly differently, they agree on two counts. First, the term 'incommensurability' should be applied with care and precision (e.g., we should specify which phenomena we are investigating and which values, precisely, are being identified and assessed). Second, the incommensurability of values and of (recognizably human) ways of life does not entail that Herder has no normative

⁶² Meinecke ([1936] 1946) presented the classic picture; Staiger (1962) provides an example of a similar diagnosis.

⁶³ It will thus become more explicit that Herder's sensualism and anti-skepticism are supported by certain ontotheological views (that I will fully explain only in Chapter Six).

⁶⁴ Note that 'ethnocentrism' here is a pejorative analysts' concept. Furthermore, despite affirmation of this label by Richard Rorty, I take Sikka and others to be correct in their interpretation of Herder's anti-ethnocentrism from the angle of anthropological theory (Sikka 2011, 42; Spencer 2012b, 71, 101).

⁶⁵ Sikka (2011, 37) defines the "deep form of evaluative incommensurability" as the idea that "there is no scale on which all societies can be weighed as wholes against one another, taking *happiness* as the unit of measure". Spencer (2012b, 126) relies on Joseph Raz for the definition "it is neither true that [A] is better than [B] nor true that they are of equal value", so they "cannot be ranked".

resources for identifying wrongs; indeed, he does condemn various kinds of practices that hamper human flourishing.⁶⁶

In this chapter, I wish to approach the question “what does it mean for two ends to be non-comparable?” from a different angle (Spencer 2012b, 126). In order to understand the role of incommensurability in Herder’s philosophy, it is necessary to first analyze his own answer to the question “what does it mean to compare?”. Herder attempted to answer this question in his early writings on aesthetics, human psychology and philosophy of history. In these writings, he stresses the ability of humans to recognize themselves in different (historical, cultural) forms. Humans recognize themselves in others by identifying analogies between their own experiences and those of others. Furthermore, by relying on their capacity to give their own existence a specific shape, human beings are able to feel themselves into different ways of life. I will argue that, according to Herder, it is also on this basis that ways of life – the phenomena studied in Herder’s “*Geschichte des menschlichen Verstandes*” (FHA 1, 373) – can principally be compared.

I will also question Michael Forster’s (2018) thesis that Herder’s conception of *Einfühlung* does not centrally rest on self-projection. Forster argues that such projection could lead to problematic forms of assimilation which Herder emphatically rejects. However, I will argue that Herder balances the idea that a certain amount of self-projection is *necessary* with the imperative that interpreters should at all times critically reflect on their immediate sympathies and antipathies, and should aim to *expand* their horizons of familiarity.

In the following sections I present the psychological and metaphysical preconditions of Herder’s account of how the workings of human empathy rely on analogy. I examine some aspects of the role that analogy plays for Herder, namely: analogical understanding as a fundamental feature of human cognition; the correct use of identifying analogies between peoples (*Völker*); and feeling one’s way into the languages of historically distant cultures. I intend to establish the hypothesis that these different aspects are strongly connected, because Herder saw them all grounded in a basic human psychology. First, I will show that Herder regarded the practice of analogical understanding as fundamental to how human beings relate to their surroundings. Second, I will give some examples of how this practice is applied in Herder’s historical inquiry and historiographical method. I will attempt to elucidate how Herder

⁶⁶ Thus Sikka (2011, 22) argues “a minimally common human nature underlies Herder’s judgments”, and Spencer (2012b, 100) states that practices “are incommensurate only when they each embody the universal principles contained in [Herder’s] concept of *Humanität*”.

balances psychological description with normative historical methodology. Third, I will examine the function of empathy in tracing the history of language, in order to assess how investigations on the basis of analogies can yield accurate historiographical accounts. Finally, I will recapitulate the implications of my interpretation of Herder's psychology of analogy and empathy regarding the role of incommensurability in Herder's philosophy.

3.1. Herder's psychology of analogy

Herder wrote the treatise *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele: Bemerkungen und Träume* in response to Sulzer's 1773 prize-question for the Berlin Academy of Sciences, about the relationship between cognition and sensation (knowing and feeling) and their respective functions.⁶⁷ Recall, Herder goes further than Sulzer, Mendelssohn and Baumgarten in considering a sensuous core foundational to all of human cognition. Herder claims that all higher cognitive functions and concepts have *developed* out of this sensuous core, in a process of trial and error and in interaction with other human beings and languages. As an important consequence, he asserts that these developments can only be traced empirically, by observing how the human soul develops in childhood, as well as in the context of different languages and in the whole of human history. In this section, I elaborate on Herder's genetic psychology only to the extent that I can evidence the significance of analogy and similarity even in the most elementary functions of human psychology. Afterwards, I will argue that the basics of Herder's 'psychology of analogy' also come to light in his analyses of the preconditions and limitations of human empathizing.

In *Vom Erkennen*, Herder puts his empiricist and genetic principles into practice in determining the starting-point for any analysis of human psychology, i.e. the origin of all human psychological development. He explains why he starts his psychological theory from Albrecht von Haller's physiological analyses of irritability ("Reiz") by stating: "Tiefer können wir wohl die Empfindung in ihrem Werden nicht hinabbegleiten" (FHA 4, 331).⁶⁸ Irritability is the physical function of muscle fibers to contract upon being touched. Relying on Haller's experiments, Herder states that it is a physiological law that the touch of something foreign causes pain and makes us contract in order to prepare for resistance. By contrast, the presence

⁶⁷ See the prize-question in the annotations of FHA 4, 1076-1077. Herder made two attempts at winning the prize (1774, 1775) and published a third version of the treatise in 1778. I focus on the final version. For the historical context, see Heinz (1994b, 109-113).

⁶⁸ See also Herder's empiricist statement in defense of a psychology as physiology that 'elevates' Haller's physiological work into psychology, FHA 4, 340. In addition, cf. Heinz' (1994, 147-154) assessment of how Herder took up Haller's theories of irritability and sensibility and conceived of the former as seed/germ of the latter.

of something analogous to us attracts us, and makes us expand towards it (FHA 4, 332-333, 335).⁶⁹

In a universe which is immensely *diverse*, the question arises what causes anything to be analogous to anything else at all. Herder answers this question as follows: “Der Schöpfer muß ein geistiges Band geknüpft haben, daß gewisse Dinge diesem empfindenden Teil ähnlich, andre widrig sind; ein Band, das von keiner Mechanik abhängt, das sich nicht weiter erklären läßt, indes *geglaubt* werden muß, weil es *da ist*, weil es sich in hundert tausend Erscheinungen *zeigt*” (FHA 4, 334-335). Herder calls this ‘spiritual bond’, which brings objects into relation (e.g. with subjects), “die große Analogie der Schöpfung” (360-361). This bond allows us to religiously trust the “Gefühl von dem Einen, der in aller Mannigfaltigkeit herrschet” (331). This is the way in which Herder postulates that we have sensuous access to the structure which connects all diverse parts of creation. Sensuous belief in the intelligible order of creation precedes human cognition as its precondition (Adler 2016, 33).⁷⁰ As a result, Herder claims that we have to rely on those analogies that exist between us, our Creator, and creation. Why and when these analogies obtain cannot be further explained nor predicted (FHA 4, 334-335, 337-338, 344).⁷¹ However, because of his stated trust in the general analogy of nature – i.e., the existence of identical relations across different pairs of objects – Herder urges us to rely on observation, and to trace the concrete history of actual (webs of) analogies and their development in interaction with different environments.

From the depths out of which sensation developed, Herder moves on to discussing more complex functions of human cognition, like the different senses, the imagination, the nervous system, and finally to cognition, volition and language. I cannot treat any of these accounts in detail here, nor can I assess the validity of his manner of expanding Haller’s theory of the irritability of muscle fibers.⁷² Instead, I once more draw attention to one crucial feature of Herder’s psychology in *Vom Erkennen*. That is, Herder keeps relying on the structure of the law of irritability in discussing all these different psychological functions. They are all based on the “Analogie der Schöpfung” in the way they unify and relate sensations. Furthermore,

⁶⁹ Note that Herder explicitly formulates this physiological law itself again in analogy to the oppositions between expansion and contraction and warmth and coldness in lifeless nature.

⁷⁰ Also see Godel (2007, 218-220) on how a faith in the organic unity of nature legitimizes analogical inferences.

⁷¹ On the actuality or facticity of the analogy of nature and of force and life, see Barnard (1965, 35-39) and Reill (1996, 17-19, 2005, 186-191).

⁷² See, e.g., FHA 4, 346: “Der Nerve beweiset feiner, was dort von den Fibern des Reizes allgemein gesagt wurde, er ziehet sich zusammen oder tritt hervor nach Art des Gegenstandes, der zu ihm gelanget”. For more detailed interpretations of Herder’s 1778 psychology, see Buchenau (2017), Heinz (2016c, 122-140), Beiser (1987, 127-164).

Herder conceives of these functions as continuous, because of the fact that all more complex functions have developed out of the “Samenkörner” of irritability, and thus exhibit an analogous structure to it (FHA 4, 331). Thus Herder states that for the different senses and the imagination there are also mental bonds or “media” enabling them to reach the objects of perception (FHA 4, 347). For instance, light and sound function as such media for sight and hearing respectively. And in the case of the more complex operations, the nervous system and language have mediating functions. Herder summarizes the workings of these media when he states that the deity has created these modes of perception through “Wege und Kanäle [...], die immer empfangen, läutern, fortschwemmen, mehr einigen, der Seele ähnlicher machen, was ferne ihr noch so unähnlich war” (353).

Finally, Herder describes the relationship between cognition and volition. Since they have developed out of the same origin as sensation, their workings also rely on analogy. The ultimate aim of both cognition and volition, Herder claims, is to establish an intimate relation with single sensations picked out of the ‘sea of sensations’ that confronts human beings. In order to achieve this aim, the soul unites sensations into images and compares these to its own image. And since the human being is created in the image of God, Herder states that its cognitive forces are organized so that it would become a “Sensorium seines Gottes *in allem Lebenden* der Schöpfung, *nach dem Maße* es ihm verwandt ist” (361). In other words, humans feel for other beings to the extent in which they are related or familiar to them. According to Herder, this feeling is the driving force behind what is known as ‘conscience’ and ‘moral feeling’. He defines it as a product of the dynamics between self-feeling (“Selbstgefühl”) and other-feeling (“Mitgefühl”), in which human beings rely on analogies to themselves in order to feel for others. He states: “Im Grad der Tiefe unsres Selbstgefühls liegt auch der Grad des Mitgefühls mit andern: denn nur uns selbst können wir gleichsam in anderen hinein fühlen” (361). In this way, Herder presents (cognates of) sympathy and empathy as being intimately related and mutually supporting.⁷³ Note that self-feeling should be the starting-point for nurturing a more general feeling for humanity. Herder writes in the same passage: “Menschheit ist das edle Maß, nach dem wir erkennen und handeln: *Selbst-* und *Mitgefühl* also, (abermals Ausbreitung und Zurückziehung) sind die beiden Äußerungen der Elastizität unseres Willens [...] sich in andre hinein zu lieben [...] ist moralisches Gefühl [...] das wahre Erkennen ist *lieben*, ist menschlich *fühlen*”

⁷³ I follow Frazer (2010, 147, 159) in translating Herder’s “Mitgefühl” as “sympathy” and “Einfühlung” as “empathy”.

(FHA 4, 360). The same dynamics between attraction and repulsion that govern sensation thus support moral feeling. I will shortly return to how ‘humanity’ is its measure.

First, here are some examples of how, according to Herder, cognition depends on perceiving analogies: Which sensations we receive depends on what appears as analogous to the workings of our senses and media. When we have formed images of objects out of these sensations, we search for analogies between ourselves (e.g. as moving bodies) and these images of objects, e.g. our images of movements and developments of plants and animals. Sympathy arises when these analogous manners of relating to one’s environment and of developing are confirmed.⁷⁴ Subsequently, the same law of attraction and repulsion can be applied to the interpersonal sphere: Recognizing resemblances promotes interpersonal sympathy, and thus allows prejudice to have a positive role in understanding.⁷⁵ Furthermore, we also project this way of relating to sensations on the whole of nature and history, and find that it resembles our structure of activity. We understand the flower which grows towards the sun as longing for and expanding towards that which is good for it (i.e. in analogy to the movements associated with human longing) (FHA 4, 335). Furthermore, whole civilizations deal with cultural heritage in a similar way: the useful is appropriated, the foreign left aside (FHA 4, 39-40; see Irmscher 2009, 204).

In previous discussions of Herder’s psychology and epistemology of analogy and comparing, a crucial issue has been whether he relies on the distinction (or even contradiction) between an ‘objektive Ähnlichkeit’ between all of creation on the one side, and the ‘subjective’ and ‘poetic’ character of human cognition on the other.⁷⁶ On the one hand, Herder assumes that the spiritual bond of the *Analogie der Schöpfung* consists in an objective similarity which underlies the human capacity to make comparisons. On the other hand, Herder defends the thesis that objectivity can only be a product of human sensuousness and should be anthropologically explained.

Here, it is important to keep in mind that the idea I spelled out above – namely, of faith in the analogy of creation as a precondition of human cognition – remains essential for Herder’s

⁷⁴ So, it is the relations (between A/B and between C/D) that are analogous.

⁷⁵ On the conceptual proximity of analogy and prejudice, consider Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s definition of prejudice, in the polemical part of the theory of color, as “eine Bejahung oder Verneinung dessen, was unsre Natur anspricht oder ihr widerspricht; es ist ein freudiger Trieb unsres lebendigen Wesens nach dem Wahren wie nach dem Falschen, nach allem, was wir mit uns im Einklang fühlen” (WA 2/2, 18). See also Menze (2002, 83), who quotes the passage from Grimm’s *Wörterbuch*.

⁷⁶ Irmscher (2009, 251-253, 1996a, 86-87) identifies such a distinction; Adler (2016, 28-36) critically discusses it; Heinz (1994b, XVII-XXV, 4-6, 141-143) explains how Herder attempted to relieve the tension between the two poles.

epistemology.⁷⁷ His positive assessment of the certainty of human sensuousness hence cannot be separated from his metaphysical account of the human condition.⁷⁸ Furthermore, although Herder might have balanced differently in different periods and texts the particular dimensions of this idea – treating it more as an anthropological given, an eschatological hope and faith, or an onto-/theological principle – its function remained relatively straightforward.⁷⁹ Before moving on to the role of analogy in history, I will illustrate this point on the basis of Herder’s methodological remarks in the introduction of *Vom Erkennen*. After giving examples of everyday descriptions of nature, for example of calling gravity a longing for the center, and magnetism the love and hate of bodies, Herder makes a key programmatic claim. It confirms the strong interdependence of analogy and empathy in his account of human cognition:

der empfindende Mensch fühlt sich in Alles, fühlt Alles aus sich heraus, und druckt darauf sein Bild, sein Gepräge. [...] Aber wie? ist in dieser “*Analogie zum Menschen*” auch Wahrheit? Menschliche Wahrheit gewiß, und von einer höhern habe ich, so lange ich Mensch bin, keine Kunde. [...] Was wir wissen, wissen wir nur aus Analogie, von der Kreatur zu uns und von uns zum Schöpfer. Soll ich also dem nicht trauen, der mich in diesen Kreis von Empfindungen und Ähnlichkeit setzte, mir keinen andern Schlüssel, in das Innere der Dinge einzudringen, gab, als mein Gepräge oder vielmehr das wiederglänzende Bild seines in meinem Geiste; wem soll ich denn trauen und glauben? (FHA 4, 330)

In these passages Herder contrasts human truth with the “überirdische Abstraktion” that characterizes the ‘*Schulphilosophie*’ of some of the other contenders for the prize-question of the Berlin Academy (330, cf. 340). He claims that human truth is perceived by sensuous creatures who are able to empathize with (“sich einfühlen”) their surroundings, and who are not afraid to connect impressions of these surroundings to what they are most acquainted with: themselves. These creatures, Herder maintains, are placed in the center of creation and are created in the image of God; they must relate to both and put their trust in the relations they conceive. In Chapter Six, I will explain how Herder, within his ontotheology, understands the human “Bild” and “Gepräge” as a prototype of all intelligent organization. As the first sentence of the last quote already indicates, sensuous human beings are involved in a dynamic of a feeling-into everything, and a feeling-out-of themselves. Herder considers this dynamic to be

⁷⁷ Adler does not contend this point, see (2016, 33, 1990, 100).

⁷⁸ For a concise formulation of this point, see Heinz and Clairmont (2009, 51-53).

⁷⁹ On the ‘eschatological limit’ on the harmony of all, see Herz (1996, 16-19, 23). Godel (2007, 218-220) also reads these different dimensions together.

supported by relations of mirroring that obtain between different human forms because of the *imago Dei* residing in all of them.⁸⁰ Human beings are placed in a “Kreis von Empfindungen und Ähnlichkeit”, and have to relate themselves to this circle of similarity, because it reflects the divine.

3.1.1. *Darkness and distance*

A general metaphor that Herder adopts to describe the process of human cognition is bringing light into the darkness or dusk of the soul’s sensuous core. Finite human beings strive to render their perceptions distinct. In many passages in *Vom Erkennen*, Herder refers to our limitations in doing so and to the reservoir or even abyss (“Abgrund”) of obscure perceptions that needs to remain imperspicuous, hidden near the ground of the soul (see, e.g., FHA 4, 345, 347). He considers this beneficial for the functioning of cognition; God has held most of the infinite qualities of creation, of our own soul, and of other minds at a distance from us (343, 345, 355). Thus, after stressing the great diversity of the different aspects of creation, and that they all need to be actually felt in order to understand them, Herder concludes:

Trefflich auch, daß [...] die tiefste Tiefe unsrer Seele mit Nacht bedeckt ist! Unsre arme Denkerin war gewiß nicht im Stande, jeden Reiz, das Samenkorn jeglicher Empfindung, in seinen ersten Bestandteilen zu fassen [...] ohne daß sie es mit Schauer und Angst, mit der Vorsorge aller Furcht und Kleinmütigkeit umfinge und das Steuer ihrer Hand entfiele. Die mütterliche Natur entfernte also von ihr, was von ihrem klaren Bewußtsein nicht abhängen *konnte* [...] sie steht auf einem Abgrunde von Unendlichkeit und weiß nicht, daß sie darauf stehe; durch diese glückliche Unwissenheit steht sie fest und sicher. (345)

For the purpose of analyzing how Herder understands analogy and empathy in history, I want to point at a remarkable similarity between this passage and various passages in *Auch eine Philosophie*. These passages concern both processes of intercultural contact and of writing history (FHA 4, 35, 39, 106). They reveal that Herder saw a strong continuity between everyday activity and historical and intercultural understanding, insofar as they are both affected by the finite human condition. Therefore, I want to suggest – and I will attempt to corroborate this in the following sections – that for Herder, the respective darkness of the hidden depths of our

⁸⁰ For an analysis of this topic in the context of Herder’s theological work from the same period, see Bellmann (2016, 43-61).

own soul, the totality of history, and the distance of what lies beyond our cultural horizon, all confront us with the necessary limitations of human cognition (Muthu 2003, 221-222; Gjesdal 2017, 171-174).

In discussing the malleability of human nature in its interaction with different environments and traditions, Herder describes how horizons are formed through analogies and differences. Again, as Herder states, the “mütterliche Natur” has taken good care of humankind:

Sie legte Anlagen von *Mannigfaltigkeit* ins Herz, nun *einen Teil* der Mannigfaltigkeit im Kreise um uns, uns zu Händen: nun *mäßigte* sie den menschlichen *Blick*, daß nach einer kleinen Zeit der Gewohnheit ihm dieser Kreis, *Horizont* wurde. Nicht *drüber zu blicken*: kaum drüber zu *ahnden*! Alles was mit meiner Natur noch *gleichartig* ist, was in sie *assimiliert* werden kann, beneide ich, strebs an, mache mirs zu eigen; *darüber hinaus* hat mich die gütige Natur mit *Fühllosigkeit, Kälte und Blindheit* bewaffnet [...]. (FHA 4, 39)

Herder describes how different peoples are only able to understand, and strive for, what is sufficiently similar to them. By saying that nature has arranged this well, he suggests that this tendency to rely on prejudices is ‘healthy’, or natural. Prejudice is useful for fruitfully adapting foreign languages, values and works of art to the interests and purposes of the present. Moreover, in the same passage, Herder states that prejudice has the purpose “mich *auf mich selbst* zurückzustößen” (39; cf. Irmscher 2009, 202-204). In this way, prejudice helps to secure the “Selbstgefühl” that, according to Herder’s psychology of analogy, is a necessary precondition for experiencing “Mitgefühl”.

3.2. Analogy in historical inquiry

Turning to Herder’s reflections on historical method, it is clear that for him, prejudice should not be constitutive for the writing of historiography. Instead, the aim of historical method is to critically assess prejudices and to expand the reader’s horizon. A first step toward this goal is to recognize that one’s own perspective provides resources for one particular interpretation of the past only and not for the final one. The motifs of distance and darkness thus have descriptive and prescriptive aspects in Herder’s position on prejudice (FHA 4, 39-40).⁸¹ However, on what

⁸¹ The literature on Herder on prejudice is divided over stressing affirmative and critical aspects of his view. By distinguishing between Herder’s historical method and the psychological theory underlying it, I try to explain both sides (cf. Godel 2007, 214-236; Gjesdal 2017, 83, 86-91, 172; Spencer 2012b, 104-105). In his reading of *Auch*

grounds does Herder deny the historian behaving in ways that in other contexts are fully natural? To answer this question, I will examine Herder's attack on Enlightenment historiography, and explain how he puts his analyses of the human psyche to normative work.

In the 1774 treatise *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder dissects and criticizes the presentist style of Enlightenment historiography. He particularly counters what I will refer to as the 'progressivism' of contemporary authors like for example Isaak Iselin, namely, the idea that it is possible to discern in history a straight line of technological, economic, political and moral progress toward an enlightened Europe (and that one could infer one form of progress from another).⁸² Herder considers it misleading to interpret the past as if it were only a progression towards particular eighteenth-century ideal forms of virtue, happiness, and perfectibility. While he is able to psychologically *explain* the human tendency to accept familiar values as universally and exclusively valid, he vehemently criticizes the historiography which relies on this tendency when depicting world history. In order to explain how Herder's critique of ethnocentrism can be compatible with his psychology of analogical understanding, I will take another look at his ideas on the role of prejudice, and make explicit the distinctions on which Herder's argument relies.

In the second section of the treatise's methodological interlude, Herder writes:

Schöne *Dichtkunst*, ein *Lieblingsvolk* der Erde in übermenschlichen Glanz zu zaubern – auch ist die Dichtkunst *nützlich*, denn der Mensch wird auch durch schöne *Vorurteile* veredelt – aber wenn der Dichter ein *Geschichtschreiber*, ein *Philosoph* ist, wie es die meisten zu sein vorgeben und die denn nach der *einen Form* ihrer Zeit – oft ist sie sehr klein und schwach! – *alle Jahrhunderte modeln* – *Hume! Voltaire! Robertsons!* klassische Gespenster der Dämmerung! was seid ihr im *Lichte der Wahrheit?* (FHA 4, 38)

In *Auch eine Philosophie*, we can see Herder's psychology of analogy at work: Poetry here refers to interpreting according to familiar human forms and developing sympathy for them by idealizing these forms. Furthermore, prejudice is the kind of understanding we achieve if we consider only what is similar to our nature.⁸³ However, Herder now discredits the modelling of the past according to one familiar image as a historiographical method. On the one hand, he

eine Philosophie, Mertel (2016) seems to have failed to notice any of the positive aspects of Herder's concept of prejudice.

⁸² See Piirimäe (2015, 529-537) for a thorough contextualization of Herder's criticisms of his contemporaries, and see Sikka (2011, 84-125) for an excellent interpretation of Herder's overall position on progress.

⁸³ See also FHA 1, 283 on "Nationalvorurteile" as "Nationalvorteile" for the *poet*.

considers the poet's practice of creating ideal forms of humanity useful, even to the point where he accepts prejudice as ennobling. On the other hand, the quoted passage suggests that when the *cognition* of the immensely rich diversity of phenomena of history is concerned, following the poet and describing history according to one's idealization would be mistaken and problematic.

What, exactly, is subjected to criticism here? It is not the act of comparing itself, since reference to familiar features is a necessary element of understanding. Rather, the problem is that prejudices are used to 'model' past ages in a certain way and to exert judgment on figments of the imagination rather than on history.⁸⁴ Instead of being accepted as a starting point of understanding, prejudice is presented as its result. Herder explains why the historians he criticizes commit this error: it is because they hold the (ethnocentric) belief that the prejudices in question are not actually the product of a particular set of analogies, but rather that they represent a universal standpoint (FHA 4, 81-83). That is, the worst form of prejudice is the one that conceals its own status as a prejudice (Gjesdal 2017, 147).

Herder's criticisms of various such positions show that the error of presenting as universal what is only particular can be committed in multiple ways. Thus, we might simply take our own manner of thought to represent the only possible expression of the triad of the true, beautiful and good. Or we appropriate human forms of the past and present them as the universal and exclusive ideal of humanity (the paradigmatic example being ancient Greek values and ways of life).⁸⁵ Or we might insist that the unchanging triad is the product of a purely philosophical demonstration, or of fundamental feelings, or that it has a divine origin.⁸⁶ Or we assume that our national language represents a metaphysical ordering of concepts; or that our alphabet is a divine invention.⁸⁷ Some of these cases are generalizations of empirical data, others look like *a priori* deductions. In rejecting all these different ways of thinking, Herder's point is that they all are in fact empirical overgeneralizations made while exclusively relying on eighteenth-century ideals. To uncover the error, Herder attempts to trace how manners of

⁸⁴ In *Älteres Kritisches Wäldchen*, Herder had stated that he valued Hume's historiography as a source of insight into Hume's values and judgements, but *not* as an account of history (FHA 2, 21).

⁸⁵ These are criticized by Herder in e.g. in *Von der Veränderung des Geschmacks* (1766), in *Älteres Kritisches Wäldchen* (1768), and in his 1772 review of Schlözer's *Vorstellung seiner Universalhistorie*, SWS 5, 438.

⁸⁶ These ideas Herder criticizes respectively in *Wie die Philosophie zum Besten des Volks allgemeiner und nützlicher werden kann* (1765), in *Viertes Wäldchen. Über Riedels Theorie der schönen Künste* (1769), and in *Versuch einer Geschichte der lyrischen Dichtkunst* (1765).

⁸⁷ Criticized in the first collection of *Fragmente über die neuere deutsche Literatur* (1768) and in *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772).

thought have historically developed. Awareness of historicity should thus prevent misguided uses of prejudice.

A further problem which becomes visible in Herder's criticism is that the historian deems it right to use only a *single*, favorite form to model the past. As examples, Herder mentions the "*Lieblingsvolk*" of the classicists, who evaluate all of history according to the ideals of ancient Greece. Likewise, Herder targets Iselin's "*Lieblingsidee*" of "*Aufklärung*" and the measuring of progress according to narrowly eighteenth-century definitions of general categories like happiness and virtue (FHA 4, 37, 40, 81). Herder claims that, instead of only relying on their own understanding of these terms, historians should search for new and diverse analogies beyond the ones that were initially used for passing the first judgment. In this way, they may come to appreciate that ideals of happiness and virtue are historically diverse (82; Sikka 2011, 34-38). Finally, while Herder may at times appreciate the cultural-anthropological function of the dismissal of all that is foreign in the case of ancient civilizations, he is adamant that in modern times of increased cultural interaction, it is unacceptable.⁸⁸ Herder insists that, in his age, by becoming aware of the actual diversity of cultural forms, historians and philosophers should expand the possible sets of analogies that they employ in their thinking and writing.

Far from relying on just one form or ideal, Herder, in his own historiography, uses many different images to bring into view the historical diversity of human forms. These images – e.g., history depicted as a stream, tree, drama or chain – contradict each other when they are all interpreted as world-historical laws. As Hans Dietrich Irmischer (1981, 73-75) already noticed, though, this contradiction only constitutes a major problem when we think that these images really make up their objects. By contrast, if we accept that they are images that invite new perspectives on history, then we can appreciate their real function: to start the process of investigation and understanding. Herder's different images of historical developments allow his readers to recognize that different objects develop in analogous ways. The images suggest new sets of analogies. Thus, Herder's manner of alternating images in *Auch eine Philosophie* is not meant to reduce the object to the image at hand. The aim is rather to find concepts for historical changes and developments – i.e., to conceive of similar relations between images of historical objects – and to properly dissect and capture phenomena that might, ultimately, be recognized as individual. The *Lebensalter* analogy, which posits the similarity between the growth and

⁸⁸ See Piirimäe (2015, 546-557) for an explanation of this point in the context of Herder's own conception of the world-historical development of humanity.

development of individual human beings in different stages of their lives and of humanity as a whole in different historical periods, is an example here. As Michael Frazer (2010, 156) explains, by evoking memories of his reader's own past, Herder in his historiography seeks to bring the reader to appreciate, and empathize with, the diversity of human forms. As a historian, Herder adopts familiar images in order to increase the sympathetic understanding of unfamiliar practices by pointing out that they are in fact familiar forms of human existence.

Furthermore, for Herder, the goal of creating analogies is pragmatic: through testing and trial and error, we detect connections between things.⁸⁹ The set of these analogies forms our horizon. If this horizon is coherent enough for us to practically live our lives and practice arts and sciences, then we should accept it.⁹⁰ After all, this is the kind of human truth – acquired in our circle of feeling and similarities – which we cannot but rely on. Moreover, Herder's psychology of analogy suggests that the use of various different resemblances to us has a methodological advantage: these resemblances start the dynamic of self-feeling and fellow-feeling. They attract us, and thus help us to *expand* our gaze into different historical realities. Herder notes, for example, that once the contemporary partiality in favor of the Greeks has calmed, and the history of Arabia and of the Middle Ages, as well as the collected material about newly encountered peoples are seriously studied, it will be possible to find in history the resources for an empirically rich conception of universal humanity: “Unsre Zeit wird bald mehrere Augen öffnen: uns zeitig gnug wenigstens *idealische Brunnquellen* für den Durst einer Wüste zu suchen treiben. – – Wir werden Zeiten schätzen lernen, die wir jetzt verachten – das Gefühl *allgemeiner Menschheit* und *Glückseligkeit* wird rege werden” (FHA 4, 89).

The assessment of the result of analogical understanding carried out in this section also provides an interesting angle on Herder's criticisms of Enlightenment progressivism. This is because what is problematic about measuring progress toward enlightenment are not the values (education, humanity, enlightenment, etc.) themselves. Sikka correctly observes that Herder, too, in his own way aims to promote these values (Sikka 2011, 24-25; cf. Gjesdal 2017, 171-173). Instead, Herder criticizes that his adversaries go astray in assessing historical forms of humanity only in terms of a one-sided group of values, narrowly derived from their own present concerns. The progressivist thus reduces concrete and individual phenomena to mere quantities, measurable only in one respect. Furthermore, progressivism suggests that the analogy to one's

⁸⁹ Herder states this about his own method in *Vom Erkennen*, FHA 4, 331, and about the learning-process of children in *Plastik*, FHA 4, 249. A more complicated example would be language development, which I will discuss below. See FHA 1, 773-776.

⁹⁰ See Gaier (1994, 2-6) for an analysis of the roles of coherence and consensus for the “Wahrheit der Analogie”.

own present is a universal measuring device capable of presenting a final verdict on the relative value of different ages. The structure of progress towards the present proves to be a false application of analogies because it hypostatizes them into universal principles.

We can now also understand why Herder's historiography is strikingly comparative. In his earlier critique of Johann Joachim Winckelmann's overly narrow focus on the Greeks in his 1764 *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*, Herder already relies on the analogies between peoples to point out the *chain of communication* ("Kette der Mitteilung") between them (FHA 2, 31, 38-39). He argues for the general historicity of all human inventions *via* asserting such a chain of communication. This chain, in turn, can only be recognized in history by noticing parallels in line with the general "Analogie in der Natur" (FHA 4, 41). *Auch eine Philosophie* is one elaborate exercise in comparing historical periods, cultures and developments; to ourselves, with each other, and according to analogous movements in nature. Herder employs these analogies to find new angles for empathizing with human forms underappreciated in his time. Recognizing analogies to us thus sets in motion the process of historical and cultural understanding. This process may result in a better understanding and, ultimately, a maximally impartial evaluation of the historical phenomena (see Sikka 2011, 26-30; Frazer 2010, 160-161). The analogies adopted in this process should not bring about a hasty modelling of the past according to the one-sided value-scheme of the present. There is a sense in which, for Herder, the connections we apply between ourselves and other cultures, and between other structures of creation, give hints of "die große Analogie der Schöpfung". The existence of this divine unity may be intimated, for example, in the images of religion and the productions of poetic genius (Adler 1990, 148; cf. Chapter Five). However, Herder is adamant that it is only grasped in its *totality* by God, and that claiming such a perspective for oneself only amounts to a misguided cultural arrogance (FHA 4, 83-84). As an aspect of human thought and as a tool for historical research, analogy is not intended to actually reach this superhuman truth – nor to feign to be able to condemn other cultures for not reaching it.⁹¹

3.3. Empathy and objectivity in tracing the history of language

In *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder famously raises serious questions about the possibility of correctly depicting concrete historical reality. He complains:

⁹¹ See also passages in *Auch eine Philosophie* where Herder ridicules contemporary historiography for placing its own time at the summit of history: FHA 4, 81, 83. For an excellent survey of other forms of historical judgment that Herder did allow and exercise, see Sikka (2011, 32-33, 36).

Niemand in der Welt fühlt *die Schwäche des allgemeinen Charakterisierens* mehr als ich. Man malet *ein ganzes* Volk, Zeitalter, Erdstrich – *wen* hat man gemalt? [...] *wen* hat das schildernde Wort getroffen? – Endlich man faßt sie doch in Nichts, als ein *allgemeines Wort* zusammen, wo jeder vielleicht denkt und fühlt, was er will – unvollkommenes *Mittel der Schilderung*! wie kann man *mißverstanden* werden! (FHA 4, 32)

According to one particular interpretation of Herder's notion of the '*Analogie zum Menschen*', it may be skeptically questioned as to how misunderstanding could even be recognized. A strong *homo mensura* thesis would have it that when two people characterize a historical period differently, there is no (objective) way to decide which one is more accurate.⁹²

I shall argue that this interpretation does not fit well Herder's own position. Admittedly, according to his description of human knowledge as based on analogies, our understanding always starts from and has its original (but not exclusive) reference point in the human being and the way it is situated geographically, historically, and culturally. However, Herder decries the weakness of general characterizations, particularly in capturing the specific character of nations, periods and regions. This suggests that there is something about these characters – their individuality, their authentic nature – that Herder is keen to preserve in his historiographical accounts. The subsequent passage in the same section of *Auch eine Philosophie* reveals exactly this kind of concern:

Wer bemerkt hat, was es für eine *unaussprechliche Sache* mit der *Eigenheit* eines Menschen sei, das *Unterscheidende unterscheidend sagen* zu können, wie *er* fühlt und lebet, wie *anders* und *eigen ihm* alle Dinge werden, nachdem sie *sein* Auge siehet, *seine* Seele mißt, *sein* Herz empfindet – welche *Tiefe in* dem Charakter nur *einer Nation* liege, die, wenn man sie auch oft genug wahr genommen und angestaunet hat, doch so sehr das *Wort fleucht* und im Worte wenigstens so selten *einem jeden* anerkennbar wird, daß er verstehe und mitfühle [...] man müßte erst der Nation *sympathisieren*, um eine *einzig*e ihrer *Neigungen* und *Handlungen*, *alle zusammen* zu fühlen, Ein *Wort finden*, in seiner Fülle sich alles *denken* – oder man lieset – *ein Wort*. (FHA 4, 32-33)

⁹² This seems to be the interpretation of for example Knodt (1996, 5), or Leventhal (1994, 173), who claims that Herder advocated "philosophy as an analysis of the *construction* of truth".

Herder asks how descriptions of historical periods could possibly be accurate descriptions of these past ages in all their individuality. Is it even possible to experience, and to subsequently portray, the individual nature of particular human beings, let alone of whole nations, in history's distant pasts? In this section, I will attempt to explain how Herder aimed to arrive at a non-skeptical answer to this question. I will sketch out how, according to him, the language we use in writing history could principally depict historical realities as they were lived and experienced. Furthermore, I will argue that this is not a question of finding a detached perspective, outside of history.⁹³ Rather, the malleability of human nature allows human beings to analogically feel their way into different times and places. I now turn to *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772) to explain how Herder proposes that an empathetic feeling into other cultures could help to find the appropriate words for describing them.

In *Ursprung der Sprache*, Herder shows how humans have come to reflectively assign words to the distinguishing elements of sensations. He explains why all connections between impressions and words have their history. According to Herder, our first words imitated sounds of (animal) nature (FHA 1, 734-735). From this primal assignment of verbs to activities, language develops in a synesthetic cooperation of our senses through feeling, ultimately finding connections of all sorts of impressions to feeling evoked in sounds (744-746). Our linguistic abilities thus allow us to both unite and transport input from different senses and to separate specific elements and attach distinguishing marks. This "Analogie der Sinne" extends to the level of connections between words in order to form new and more complicated concepts by metaphorically extending the content of more sensuous notions (751-752). Thus, languages develop historically through a process of metaphorical extension on the basis of the need to express or capture a certain phenomenon, feeling, or an abstraction from these.

In ancient languages specifically, Herder observes that it is often unclear how input from the different senses was stored in words. He explains that this is because the metaphorical connection between impressions happened in the face of acute needs. The genesis of words in these times required a creativity and spontaneity for which all the functions of human cognition needed to work directly and in unison (778). The inventors of the first languages which are still preserved were driven by the need to capture, and directly express, elements of the stream of sensation (752, 754). Moreover, Herder sets out that the needs of peoples in particular (natural, social) situations also determined how words were combined into syntactic structures and

⁹³ See Imscher (2009, 183-185) for a summary of how Herder's concept of understanding had appeared from the standpoint of the historicism of Friedrich Meinecke and Rudolf Stadelmann.

eventually registered in fine-tuned grammars (755-758). As a result, Herder stresses how difficult it is in the case of these old languages to find “a true etymology” (753). One would have to follow how people used words differently in various contexts, according to different needs, and in adapting their psychological capacities to different climates and societies. Principally, this pursuit should lead all the way back to the roots of words. At such a root, an original connection was established between the word and a particular sound, activity, or synesthetic combination of sensory input through feeling. As I explained in the previous chapter, Herder considers this first judgment, regarding the sameness of sensations, to be itself stored in the soul in the form of a feeling (FHA 2, 274-275). Reaching the dark ground where these connections are made, however, is not easy. Furthermore, these connections will be most idiosyncratic, depending on particular sensations, environments and needs. Herder writes about such an etymological root:

Die so verschiedene Bedeutungen *eines* Radicis, die in einer Stammtafel abgeleitet und auf ihren Ursprung zurückgeführt werden sollen, sind nur durch so dunkle Gefühle, durch flüchtige Nebenideen, durch Mitempfindungen verwandt, die aus dem Grunde der Seele steigen und wenig in Regeln gefasset werden können! Ihre Verwandtschaften sind ferner so national, so sehr nach der eignen Denk- und Sehart des Volks [...] Da sie ferner von der Not erzwungen und im Affekt, im Gefühl, in der Verlegenheit des Ausdrucks erfunden wurden – welches ein Glück gehört dazu, dasselbe Gefühl zu treffen? (753)

Difficult as this may be, it could be very rewarding, because words are not merely dependent on the contingencies of history.⁹⁴ Just as Herder relies on human psycho-physiology to explain the possibility of a human invention of language, he also uses it to account for the historical development of ancient languages. By being able to account for the historical phenomena – like the abundance of synonyms in Arabic (FHA 1, 756), or the heavy reliance on metaphors in ancient Hebrew (752-753) – this psychological theory gains in plausibility. Therefore, when, with a considerable degree of luck, we get to the bottom in etymology, a more generalizable insight into the human soul looms:

⁹⁴ In contrast to Leventhal (1994, 150-152, 175-176, 185) I do not read Herder as putting forward “a criticism of the very idea of ‘origin’”. Rather than pursuing an “ironic strategy of discursive polemics”, Herder in *Ursprung der Sprache* finds in the history of human language the resources to sketch a continuous historical development of the human soul from its very early beginnings. This is the topic of the text’s second part, which Leventhal does not discuss.

Welch ein Scharfsinn, in diese Umstände und Bedürfnisse einzudringen, und welche Mäßigung, bei den Auslegungen verschiedner Zeiten darin maßzuhalten! Welche Kenntnis und Biegsamkeit der Seele gehört dazu, sich so ganz diesen rohen Witz, diese kühne Phantasie, dies Nationalgefühl fremder Zeiten zu geben und es nach den unsrigen zu modernisieren! Aber eben damit würde auch nicht bloß in die Geschichte, Denkart und Literatur des Landes, sondern *überhaupt in die dunkle Gegend der menschlichen Seele eine Fackel getragen, wo sich die Begriffe durchkreuzen und verwickeln! wo die verschiedenste Gefühle einander erzeugen; wo eine dringende Gelegenheit alle Kräfte der Seele aufbietet und die ganze Erfindungskunst, der sie fähig ist, zeigt.* (753-754)

This passage emphasizes the potential of the dynamic of analogical understanding – “eindringen”, “sich geben”, “modernisieren” – for the study of humanity. Inquiring into the origin of words might help to reactivate the “*Kräfte der Seele*” that supported human beings in the invention of language all around the globe. Thus it is possible to trace the connections between the words of a historical period and its needs and inclinations. This is because the feelings of human beings depend on a core of sensuous forces and a reservoir of obscure perceptions (see Chapter 2.3.). Words come into use through the universally felt need to capture sensuous experiences in utterances. According to Herder, it is a shared human ability to creatively assign new onomatopoeic sounds to combinations of feelings and concepts. Of course, Herder does not think that eighteenth-century humans still have the same skills that were required for the first invention of languages: their own lives in modern society demand rather different types of knowledge and action (776-778; cf. Piirimäe 2015, 540-542). Nonetheless, they do have the ability to feel themselves into the situation where these skills were required. By drawing on the analogy of how children learn language, for example, they are able to imagine how the stream of sensation forced the first humans to develop themselves and to develop language (FHA 1, 771).

Crucially, Herder takes the “Biegsamkeit der Seele” which he requires for this form of understanding to be a constitutive feature of human nature (Irmischer 2009, 189). Thus Herder observes in *Auch eine Philosophie* that human nature is “ein *biegsamer Ton*, sich in den verschiedensten Lagen, Bedürfnissen und Bedrückungen auch verschieden zu *formen*” (FHA 4, 38; cf. FHA 2, 284). This ability is responsible for the diversity of human forms in history. However, Herder thinks this flexibility of the soul *also* allows us “dasselbe Gefühl zu treffen”, recognizing what was expressed through words as instances of human feeling. Similarly, in

Ursprung der Sprache, Herder pursues the “Spuren des wandelnden, sprachschaffenden Geistes” to prove that in all old languages, comparable features of human psychology explain how human beings were able to invent language (FHA 1, 760). The unity of sensuous forces at the dark ground of the soul ensures that this can be proven.

By reconnecting words to primitive impressions, Herder thinks it is possible, in principle, to feel our way into the words and use them accurately to describe the past. For historical understanding in general this implies that the different connections that have been established between words and inclinations must be observed. In this way, they can be reproduced analogically and adapted to current needs. Our descriptions of historical periods are thus effectively informed by the modes of thought embodied in the languages we study. Yet the bits of information that come to us in no way allow a full understanding of these modes of thought, *and* the way we process this information necessarily relates it to how we relate to sensations and relations.⁹⁵ When human beings rely on analogies for increasing their (historical) understanding of others, these analogies primarily concern the different relations to different environments. According to Herder, the soul shapes itself through such encounters with others. It has the flexibility to reactivate hidden dispositions (“Fähigkeiten”) into drives (“Triebe”) and skills (“Fertigkeiten”) (FHA 4, 33). Most of these may be buried in the depths of the soul and difficult to reactivate. But they remain available as possibilities that can be actualized through empathy. In *Auch eine Philosophie*’s central passage on empathy, this idea motivates Herder’s stress on the particularity of the

Ganze Natur der Seele, die durch alles *herrscht*, die alle übrige Neigungen und Seelenkräfte *nach sich modelt*, noch auch die gleichgültigsten Händlungen *färbet* – um diese mitzufühlen, antworte nicht aus dem Worte, sondern gehe in das Zeitalter, in die Himmelsgegend, die ganze Geschichte, fühle dich in alles hinein – nun allein bist du auf dem Wege, das Wort zu verstehen[.] (33)

In stressing that in different cultures, the soul models all perceptions, inclinations, and dispositions according to itself, Herder relies on the psychology of analogy; and in demanding a practice of *Einfühlung* from the historian, he does so too. Moreover, for both analogical understanding and historical empathizing, the nature of the soul is essential: “denn nur uns selbst können wir in andre gleichsam hinein fühlen” (FHA 4, 361). At the same time, the human

⁹⁵ On the idea of adaptation to different circumstances as key to Herder’s concept of imitation, see Adler (1990, 127, 2016, 27).

ability to recognize oneself is shared, i.e.: “Menschheit ist das edle Maß” for all analogical understanding (360).

To sum up, for Herder, historiography can at times accurately capture the object that it attempts to describe. We have to feel our way into past ages in order to increase the accuracy of our descriptions. This procedure is not governed by clear rules, nor is it possible to determine rationally when such accuracy has actually been achieved. The accuracy of our descriptions can only be experienced sensuously.

3.4. Analogy and incommensurability

What does this tell us about the role of incommensurability in Herder’s philosophy? In my interpretation I rely on his early texts and their theories of empathy and historical understanding. In contrast to his later writings, Herder here did not base his normative judgments on those explicitly postulated principles that would later become part of the ethical program of furthering *Humanität*.⁹⁶ Still, I take it that my reading confirms recent Herder scholarship in stressing that much caution is needed when identifying radical or unbridgeable forms of incommensurability in Herder’s historical thought. What stands out in Herder’s early texts is that his genetic psychology suggests that it will generally be possible to find connections between products of the human soul. In relying on the *Analogie zum Menschen*, human beings are principally able to find analogues to themselves even in radically different shapes of humanity.⁹⁷

At the same time, Sikka, Spencer, and others are also right in identifying incommensurability, historical distance, and the perspective of the other as tools for delegitimizing ethnocentrism (also see, e.g., Gjesdal 2017, 86-87; Muthu 2003, 223-224). Herder points toward the incommensurability of different ways of life to warn his readers that their values cannot be used as universal standards, that is, as measuring devices capable of presenting a final verdict on the relative value of different ages, cultures, or nations. In his discussions of happiness and virtue in *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder makes the point that there exists no one single standard for measuring different values.⁹⁸ He is adamant that it is impossible to take up a specific ideal and use it as a cross-cultural standard (FHA 4, 37). As Sankar Muthu puts it,

⁹⁶ Spencer (2012b, 112-117) relies on these to argue that Herder defends a version of pluralism. Likewise, Sikka (2011, 20-23) relies on them to qualify the sense in which Herder is a relativist.

⁹⁷ Regarding the question how radical the early Herder thinks the differences between human forms could be, cf. FHA 1, 79-83, 152-155, 558-560. In the next chapter, I will continue to explore this question.

⁹⁸ This is why Sikka (2011, 34-38) identifies a deep evaluative incommensurability regarding these two specific notions.

the role of identifying incomparability in Herder's political thought is thus always to criticize "the mistake in thinking that any one set of human experiences can furnish the material with which one could judge human experience *as such*" (Muthu 2003, 223). Recognizing *distance* has the critical function of delegitimizing ethnocentric interpretations of historical and cultural others. However, I think it follows from my analysis of the role of analogy in historical inquiry that for Herder, noticing such distance also has a positive function: to invite the search for further analogies in a potentially endless process, and thus arrive at a more balanced understanding of ourselves and others.

Consider the example of how eighteenth-century history dealt with the culture of the patriarchs, as critically discussed by Herder in *Auch eine Philosophie*. Herder invokes an analogy very familiar to us – childhood – to invite a new perspective on the culture of the patriarchs. On the basis of the *Lebensalter* analogy, Herder attempts to correct the eighteenth-century interpretation of this historical period as 'Oriental despotism'. Herder argues that the patriarchs' pedagogy was not despotic, but rather resembled the way in which a child is taught. To evoke a positive attitude toward their method of education – based on felt trust, awe, exemplars and authority – Herder refers to various aspects of how we experience childhood. He further explains why the common eighteenth-century condemnation of this form of education is incorrect:

der menschliche Geist bekam die ersten Formen von Weisheit und Tugend mit einer *Einfalt, Stärke und Hoheit*, die nun – gerade herausgesagt – in unsrer philosophischen, kalten Europäischen Welt wohl nichts, gar nichts ihres gleichen hat. Und eben weil wir so unfähig sind, sie mehr zu *verstehen!* zu *fühlen!* geschweige denn zu *genießen* – so *spotten* wir, *leugnen* und *mißdeuten!* (FHA 4, 17)

According to Herder, our lack of simplicity, strength and loftiness should drive us to search for those characteristics we do have in common. In this way we should approximate the original meaning of a learning culture that later became despotic, but that should not be judged on the basis of this later form. Pointing out a seeming non-comparability of the patriarchs and eighteenth-century Europe thus has a critical force in Herder's argument. But this incommensurability is not necessarily unbridgeable: it is still possible to start understanding and feeling the elements he mentions. In fact, in his discussion of this historical period, Herder aims to allow his reader to empathize with situations "die wir uns aus einem Betrüge unsrer Zeit oft viel zu *fremde und schrecklich dichten*" (15).

Herder's 1774 treatise has the aim of unmasking various misinterpretations of historical periods in order to start a more reflective, empathetic and self-critical process of understanding and evaluating them.⁹⁹ There is no *a priori* way to determine whether in specific cases, more analogical understanding can be gained. As Sikka (2011, 33) puts it, "there are no *transcendent* norms to which individuals in every culture could have access". However, the capacity to recognize resemblances between different human forms is rooted in human beings' sensuous nature. The universality of human sensation and cognition is the psychological grounding of analogy and empathy (Heinz 2016c, 137-139). This grounding assumes a different shape in every time and place and in this way allows human beings enough flexibility for empathetic understanding. However, as I set out in the first section, this grounding is also always secured by the theological notion that all humans are created in the image of God. In the following chapters, I will further analyze both Herder's understanding of the plasticity of human nature and his theological manner of grounding anthropology.

In conclusion, I argue that Herder's conception of a shared human psychology is the central axis around which he organizes his hermeneutics. Because of this, I disagree with Forster's (2018, 79-80, 85, 101-110) argument (1) that self-projection has no substantial role in Herder's conception of *Einfühlung*, and (2) that for Herder, self-understanding is only a product of understanding historical and cultural others, not a prerequisite. I have explained above how Herder thinks that self-projection does play a central role in interpreting historical and cultural others. I have interpreted this role as consisting in a dynamic of self-feeling and other-feeling that is essential to all *Einfühlung*.¹⁰⁰ Crucially, this dynamic involves recognizing historical and cultural distance. It thus provides opportunities for correcting the problematic forms of assimilation which Herder so emphatically criticizes, while maintaining that recognizing resemblances to oneself is an essential precondition of *Einfühlung*, for we can only feel *ourselves* into others. As a result, I also want to question Forster's depiction of self-understanding only as a product of understanding historical and cultural others. For Herder, self-understanding and understanding of cultural and historical others are intricately related in both directions. So, to sum up my discussion of incommensurability: Human beings can only

⁹⁹ See Gjesdal (2017, 154-166) for analyses of Herder's discussions of different ages.

¹⁰⁰ In fact, Forster also notices that for Herder, the common human nature, which the interpreting subject shares with its object, underpins Herder's theory of interpretation. But Forster argues that "this is clearly not his *main* idea", because it would encourage "just the sort of distorting assimilation [...] that he is above all concerned to *avoid*" (2018, 79). Forster might argue that the conception of understanding that I have analyzed is merely an example of what he calls the "exact techniques that Herder advocates" for executing the "task of recapturing the distinctive perceptual and affective sensation of a period, culture, or individual" (106). However, I diverge from Forster in interpreting this technique as the central psychological theory underlying Herder's theory of interpretation.

find out how far analogical understanding reaches through practice and by reflecting on their own practice. This makes it particularly important to point out particular cases where analogies between ourselves and others do not do justice to the peculiarity of other ways of life. But it does not follow from this that in Herder's philosophy of history a particularly radical or ontological incommensurability separates different human forms (as would later be postulated in twentieth-century debates on historicism and relativism, or in work inspired by Thomas Kuhn's notion of the incommensurability of different paradigms).¹⁰¹ To the contrary: the "Analogie in der Natur", or, "das redende *Vorbild Gottes* in *allen Werken*" secures that human beings are able to find their image in all other human forms.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed different aspects of the role of analogy in Herder's psychology and philosophy of history. In his psychology of analogy, Herder analyzes analogy as a human practice to cognize, sympathize, and widen our perspective. Herder maintains that prejudice can have a positive role in this process. Yet he also argues that the historian should be cautious not to interpret a particular set of familiar values as universals before making a serious attempt at empathetically understanding other human forms. Furthermore, Herder's exclamations "incomparable!" do not mean that we should not compare at all. Instead, the awareness of individuality is the final outcome of a process of analogical understanding – a process that starts by searching for similarities and ends in finding a specific unique element. This process is basic to how Herder writes historiography. Furthermore, it seeks to achieve as impartial an evaluation of the variety of human practices as possible, even if complete impartiality can never be attained by humans.

According to Herder's psychology, the capacity to recognize resemblances to oneself is universal. The human soul is in constant development through a dynamic process of reaching out and falling back on itself. Through their malleability, human beings are able to feel their way into different human forms. According to Herder, analogies to familiar experiences are crucial for this process of self-projection. Furthermore, for human beings who are constantly sympathizing with their surroundings on the basis of analogies to themselves, non-comparability arises only rarely. Nonetheless, Herder takes it to be of the highest importance to

¹⁰¹ As seemed to have been the interpretation that was very influential to the discussion of relativism and pluralism in Herder scholarship, namely, by Berlin in *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* ([1965] 1976, 208-209); which he adapted in ([1980] 1990, 79-87).

uncover and examine cases where historical distance as well as certain ethnocentric tendencies of human psychology confront human beings with phenomena that do not immediately fit their expectations and value-schemes. This confrontation should trigger more reflective attempts at using one's standpoint to empathize with others. In Herder's philosophy, noticing the incommensurability between different ways of life aids critique, while comparing serves to bridge the gaps between us and our historical and cultural others.

4. Proteus and the Pyrrhonists. Conceiving the diversity and unity of forms of humanity¹⁰²

I call upon Proteus,/ key-holding master of the sea,/ first-born, who showed/ the beginnings of all nature,/ changing matter/ into a great variety of forms./ Honored by all, he is wise,/ and he knows what is now,/ what was before,/ and what will be in the future./ He has all at his disposal,/ transformed far beyond/ all other immortals/ who dwell on snowy Olympos/ and fly through the air/ and over land and sea,/ for Physis was the first to place/ everything in Proteus.

Orphic Hymns, 0-400 AD (Athanasakis and Wolkow 2013, 23)

The highest spiritual beings were, from the very moment of creation, or soon thereafter, fixed in the mode of being which would be theirs through measureless eternities. But upon man, at the moment of his creation, God bestowed seeds pregnant with all possibilities, the germs of every form of life. Whichever of these a man shall cultivate, the same will mature and bear fruit in him [...] Who then will not look with awe upon this our chameleon, or who, at least, will look with greater admiration on any other being? This creature, man, whom Asclepius the Athenian, by reason of this very mutability, this nature capable of transforming itself, quite rightly said was symbolized in the mysteries by the figure of Proteus.

Pico, *Oration on the Dignity of Man* ([1486] 1956, 8-9)

In his early writings, Herder frequently refers to the ancient Proteus myth in describing the historical development of languages, literatures, values and other products of the human mind. Proteus was a Homeric god of the sea who could prophecy about past and future to those who caught him, but who changed shape in order to escape from his pursuers. The idea of Protean shape-changing pulls strongly in two opposite directions: on the one hand, it can be used to read Johann Gottfried Herder's early texts as a prototype of postmodern analyses that "question the very category of the 'subject' as the locus of representation" due to the inescapability of change and *difference* (Leventhal 1994, 165). On the other hand, the myth of Proteus presents a god

¹⁰² A previous version of this chapter (2018) was published under the title "Proteus and the Pyrrhonists. Historical Change and the Universal in Herder's Early Works." *Herder Yearbook* 14: 65-93. Thanks to the editors and to Synchron Verlag for their kind permission to include this material here.

whose identity is preserved despite the constant change of shape – the identity of a god who could be forced to use his power of prophecy.

In this chapter, I aim to show that Herder's repeated invocations of Proteus did not merely point in the first direction, but very much relied on a web of positive connotations drawn from Proteus' illustrious nature. Undeniably, 'Protean change' fits well into the arsenal of concepts describing the ontological and/or anthropological state of Heraclitean flux, difference and historicity employed by philosophers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. In scholarship on Johann Gottfried Herder's historical thought, his references to the mythical figure of Proteus have mainly been interpreted as referring to this, or more specifically to the advent of historicism and the announcement of the problem of relativism.¹⁰³ My aim is to provide a more balanced understanding of the function of Proteus in Herder's early philosophy of history in the following way. First, I provide the relevant historical context necessary to assess the significance and the different connotations of the myth. Second, and in order to distinguish the different shapes that Proteus takes on in Herder's works, I trace Herder's use of the metaphor of Proteus through his early writings. In my analysis, I identify three different manners in which Herder uses the positive identity underlying Proteus' changes in order to reconcile the One and the Many, and I connect them to different aspects of the historical tradition.

The problem of this chapter can be set out along the lines of *two topoi* of Herder's early philosophy of history: on the one hand the doubting philosophers known as *Pyrrhonists*, and on the other the mythological figure of Proteus. According to Herder, the Pyrrhonists take plain historical phenomena to absurd conclusions that lead to complete disillusionment regarding truth, beauty, and the good. Proteus, by contrast, exemplifies Herder's own *non-skeptical* manner of accommodating the mentioned historical phenomena: Proteus represents both the radical change and the absolute unity of humanity. My main theses will thus be that there is an identity underlying Proteus' different forms and that it is because of his trust in this identity that Herder sees no merit in philosophical skepticism.

Throughout my discussion, I will return to projects and interests of Herder in psychology, aesthetics and historical hermeneutics that I have discussed in more detail in the previous chapters. Apart from adding the angle of his philosophy of history, this chapter ventures to

¹⁰³ I will discuss some of these accounts in more detail below. Herder's references to Proteus are mentioned (but seldom discussed in any detail) by Gjesdal (2017, 51-52), Noyes (2015, 32, 56), Sikka (2011, 38, 250), Beiser (2011, 106-107), Irmischer (2009, 23-24), Herz (1996, 227), Leventhal (1994, 167), Norton (1991, 72, 80), Morton (1989, 41), Heizmann (1981, 42), Meinecke ([1936] 1946, 395).

systematically analyze the attempts that Herder makes at reconciling unity and difference in these fields. Its structure is as follows. First, I will introduce the tension that arises from Herder's various criticisms of misguided universalisms on the one hand, and his anti-skepticism on the other. I will show that for Herder, skepticism is a principally flawed mode of confronting history that diverts the necessary analysis of our natural and historical certainties into a fruitless search for metaphysical demonstrations of particular doctrines. Second, a brief history of the antique and early modern uses of the Proteus figure will show that the proverb of a 'Protean mutability' traditionally had both very pejorative and pristine connotations, drawn from, for example, various myths and from alchemy. In the third section, I will examine Herder's use of the metaphor of Proteus from his 1764 *Versuch einer Geschichte der lyrischen Dichtkunst* up to his 1774 treatise *Auch eine Philosophie*. My analysis in this section is divided into three subsections that each single out a distinctive strategy for reconciling unity and diversity in Herder's texts. This examination is meant to facilitate a discussion of those passages in Herder's early works where he brings out the tension between the universal and the particular most forcefully and seeks to preclude its skeptical implications.

4.1. The problem: situatedness and anti-skepticism

Observations concerning historical diversity Herder already gathers in the 1766 fragment *Von der Veränderung des Geschmacks*. Traditionally, it was the Pyrrhonists who relied on these observations to raise philosophical problems, paradigmatically concerning the general possibility of truth and morality. In his text, Herder mentions "die Pyrrhonisten und die akademische Sekte" as well as "*La Motte de Vayer, Montaigne, und Hume*" (FHA 1, 151). The argumentative "modes" of Pyrrhonism, aimed at inducing "suspension of judgment", included for example "one based on the differences among human beings"; "based on the differences in constitution of the sense organs"; "on the circumstances"; "on positions, distances and locations"; and "on ways of life, customs and laws, mythic beliefs and dogmatic opinions" (Sextus Empiricus 1996, 94). Like the Pyrrhonists, Herder wishes philosophy to be guided by the insights of history (FHA 1, 159; Irmscher 2009, 41-42; Gaier 1988, 42-43). He thus relies on the same observations of diversity and change as they did in their argumentative modes against dogmatism. Nevertheless, Herder's own intention from the beginning is to think through the implications of historical change without allowing skeptical conclusions. He emphasizes in his introduction: "Ich glaube nicht, dieses Blatt für Zweifler zu schreiben: daher lasse ich all vorgedachte Männer in Friede ruhen. Ich will bloß historische Beispiele sammeln, wie weit sich

die Verschiedenheit der Menschen erstrecken könne: sie unter Klassen bringen, und alsdann zu erklären suchen” (FHA 1, 151). Contrary to the Pyrrhonist mode of taking *difference* as signaling the need to suspend judgment, Herder interprets the diversity of phenomena as an *invitation* to collect, order and evaluate them all.

Rather than being an issue of whether the skeptics can ultimately be refuted philosophically, Herder’s anti-skepticism is unequivocally moral and meta-philosophical.¹⁰⁴ Hence, my interpretation will be at odds with Sikka’s assessment that “while Herder occasionally expresses some concern about the possibility of an evaluative ‘skepticism’ that ‘would almost confuse us into not trusting our own tastes and sensibilities,’ the real danger in his society is not such skepticism, but ethnocentrism. It is against this danger that his remarks are most often directed” (2011, 27). Sikka is right in saying that Herder combats various intellectual and ethical sins of his contemporaries by arguing that they ethnocentrically universalize their own standpoint (see Chapter Three). And yet, I will argue that Herder shows an equally strong anti-skepticism.¹⁰⁵ In this section, I first set out the *tension* between Herder’s anti-skepticism and his critique of ethnocentrism. Subsequently, I will argue in the rest of this chapter that, in fact, his arguments always address *both* ethnocentrism and skepticism and that this is because he considers the two to be closely *related*.¹⁰⁶

Basic aspects of the misguided attitude that would later be known as ethnocentrism are presented by Herder as follows: Unaware of how far historical diversity actually extends, people tend to respond to differences in taste and manner of thought with disbelief and dismissal (FHA 1, 149-150). The mistaken belief that there are no real sensible alternatives leads them to think that their own viewpoint is necessary and universal (159). Yet unfortunately, “[z]wei Blicke in die Geschichte zerstreuen dies Vorurteil”, and show that in fact people around the world have the same tendency to dismiss anything that is foreign to their own very diverse beliefs (159). Thus Herder concludes, “so sehen wir unter Nationen und Privatpersonen einen Streit von

¹⁰⁴ My approach is thus slightly different from interpretations of Herder’s philosophy of history venturing to assess whether certain arguments suffice to systematically *refute* the skeptic (e.g. Beiser 1987, 144, 2011, 139; Jacobs 1994, 65, 68). I focus on the meta-philosophical reasons Herder has to preclude skepticism as a viable way of doing philosophy (cf. Kondylis [1981] 2002, 635; Spencer 2012b, 104; Gjesdal 2017, 88-89).

¹⁰⁵ In my analysis I use ‘skepticism’ and ‘Pyrrhonism’ interchangeably and thus ignore the wide *variety* of (historical and contemporary) skeptical and Pyrrhonist positions. For the purposes of the historical reconstruction of Herder’s anti-skepticism, I consider this permissible, because Herder brings them all together under the heading of ‘doubting’.

¹⁰⁶ My interpretation draws on Panajotis Kondylis’ correct assessment that it is precisely in order to remove skeptical doubt about the meaning of history that Herder criticizes Enlightenment progressivism and ethnocentrism (Kondylis [1981] 2002, 635).

Gesinnungen, der einen Weisen stutzig und ungewiß macht, ob alle diese eifernde Personen denn wissen, worüber sie streiten” (150).

The task of history, for Herder, is to battle the tendency to fanaticism by acknowledging the omnipresence of prejudice and intolerance and a better understanding of their respective mechanisms. Herder considers his own century to be in a special situation, with much more information about distant nations and ages available than before. But he finds that his contemporaries still lack a properly reflective attitude toward all these new discoveries in historical documents and travelogues (FHA 4, 88-91; Gjesdal 2017, 166-168). A first step toward achieving such an attitude is to identify the precise point of contention between all different viewpoints. This point consists in the *alleged universality and necessity* of one’s own perspective. Herder suggests that the conflict of viewpoints can be resolved once people understand that they are contending about an allegedly exclusive universal validity of their own viewpoints that does not really exist in this form. In the previous chapter, I have discussed the different ways in which Herder thinks this error can be made. Recall: We might simply take our own manner of thought to represent the *triad* of the true, beautiful and good, or we take one that is actually foreign to us as universally representative and hence ideal. Alternatively, we might insist that the unchanging *triad* is the product of a purely philosophical demonstration, or of fundamental feelings, or that it has a divine origin.¹⁰⁷ Or we assume that our national language represents a metaphysical ordering of concepts; or that our alphabet is a divine invention.¹⁰⁸ Some of these assertions are generalizations from empirical data, while others look like *a priori* deductions. Herder’s point is, in fact, that all are empirical overgeneralizations made from our own historical standpoint.

At the same time, however, he aims to counter the skeptical conclusions that Pyrrhonist philosophers have drawn from the conflict and alteration of perspectives. Philosophically, these conclusions consist of the denial of universal norms for the true, beautiful, and good (FHA 1, 147). For Herder, such skeptical conclusions, qua philosophical theses, are as abstract and ineffective as their positive dogmatic counterparts. Skeptical *Verzweiflung* is a misguided attitude in dealing with the historical facts of cultural diversity (FHA 1, 19; FHA 4, 40). That is, Herder distinguishes between an observed situation, that of historical change, and the perspective of the skeptic. He asserts, “Viele von den zweifelnden Philosophen haben daher

¹⁰⁷ For the case of divine origins, Herder’s critique is concerned with human inventions like e.g. poetry and language, and with morality, but not with beauty and truth – and also on these themes Herder switches back and forth throughout his career; cf. *Versuch einer Geschichte*. I will return to this later; the general tension results from the fact that for Herder, we human beings, and the world, are of divine origin.

¹⁰⁸ Criticized in the first collection of *Fragmente*, second edition, section seven, and *Ursprung der Sprache*.

alle diese Skrupel in einen Knoten zusammengeknüpft, den sie für unauflöslich gehalten” (FHA 1, 150). Herder does not intend to explain away the mentioned phenomena themselves, but neither does he take the tying and untying of Gordian knots to be the right task for philosophy. One year earlier, in *Wie die Philosophie*, Herder complained, “[u]nsre philosophische Vernunft [...] knüpft Knoten, um sie auflösen zu können” (FHA 1, 113-114). And against the use of school logic in philosophy, Herder argued, “da sich unsere Zeiten mit Soriten und Enthymenen nicht mehr waffnen: so ists eine eben so fruchtlose Arbeit, sich mit Knüpfung und Auflösung solcher Knoten zu beschäftigen, als Linsen durch ein Nadelöhr zu werfen” (111). Recall, Herder considered skeptical doubt to be the product of a false conception of what the human mind can achieve. Against the idea of an insulation of philosophy from everyday life, he claimed that while our natural certainties keep us on track, unrestrained curiosity and skepticism necessarily set us on an errant path (see Chapter One). Just as psychology and ethics should not be the battlefields of the metaphysicians versus the skeptics, so should aesthetics steer clear from an all-or-nothing conception of beauty. Instead, aesthetics should collect, order and explain the products of the healthy human understanding (i.e. its judgments concerning taste), so as to improve its natural strength, and more generally, to educate the public via the study of human nature (cf. FHA 2, 270-271; see Chapter Two).

In his *Versuch einer Geschichte*, Herder argues against the assumption that the poetic form of the Bible is of divine origin because, after disproving this, “der Zweifler sogar auf den Irrweg geraten könnte, auch der Inhalt selbst sei eine Folge einer feurigen Einbildungskraft” (HWP 1, 23). In this passage, the religious import of “auf den Irrweg geraten” is manifest: Herder’s anti-skepticism is directly connected to protecting individual souls, and society at large, from irreligion. He also depicts the skeptical result in very concrete terms: “ist denn auch das, was ich für wahr halte, wahr, da Hunderte mit eben so gutem Menschenverstande es für falsch halten? ist denn auch das schön, was ich mir so einbilde? kann ich mir selbst trauen?” (FHA 1, 151). In Herder’s psychology this trust that we have in our natural and sensuous certainties is of the uppermost importance to our lives, and should not be disrupted by philosophical doubt. What is more, Herder’s defense of these certainties in many passages overlaps with explanations of the positive functions of prejudice – at least during certain periods in the past, and for certain uses, such as developing a national literature – and at some points even with direct defenses of prejudice.

Herder's anti-skepticism will culminate in *Auch eine Philosophie*, where he diagnoses it as a cultural disease of the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁹ Immanuel Kant's famous nautical depiction, in the *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*, of navigating the ship of philosophy away from Hume's sands of skepticism, is here prefigured: "Zweifel in hundert *Gestalten*, alle aber mit dem blendenden Titel '*aus der Geschichte der Welt*'! Widersprüche und Meereswogen: man scheitert, oder was man von *Moralität und Philosophie aus dem Schiffbruche rettet*, ist kaum der Rede wert" (FHA 4, 41). Herder's response to this situation is different from Kant's: he does not take the threat of skepticism to necessitate a critique of reason in order to establish metaphysics as a science (like Kant does, for example cf. KrV B22). Yet like Kant, he sees skepticism as arising out of a form of dogmatism, namely, out of the ethnocentric assumption that if certain values differ from ours, they are not values at all. Herder endeavors to explain genetically how skepticism arises as a cultural phenomenon out of expectations about philosophy that are both too high and unhistorical. But this does not yet address the problem raised in the introduction: how does Herder nonetheless positively identify the identity of Proteus, which underlies his different shapes? In the following, I intend to establish that Herder's very conceptions of change and diversity are themselves decidedly anti-skeptical.

4.2. Shapes of Proteus

The Proteus metaphor is only one among many analogies adopted by Herder to delineate the *dynamics* of nature and history.¹¹⁰ Yet its significance for the issue of unity and diversity has not yet been fully appreciated or analyzed.¹¹¹ Herder adopts the metaphor in at least ten texts within the first ten years of his authorship.¹¹² The figure consistently appears where he is most adamant about the radical nature of the effects of historical change. At the same time, I agree with Ulrich Gaier when he states in his commentary (FHA 1, 1002) that Proteus represents the changes of a "substantially identical object", and that it is because of the postulated substantial

¹⁰⁹ Herder mentions by name Montaigne, Bayle, Voltaire, Hume and Diderot (FHA 4, 41).

¹¹⁰ Herder's use of tropes has been studied extensively (e.g., cf. recently Allert 2016; Simon 2014). A classic analysis was undertaken by Irmscher (1981); metaphorical organicism was studied by Schick (1971); an overview of metaphors used by Herder can be found in Albus (2001, 288-399).

¹¹¹ Albus (2001, 374-375) merely lists the different phenomena which Herder called a Proteus; Irmscher (2009, 23-24) does not integrate Herder's use of the metaphor in his systematic interpretation; a range of interpretations (cf. note 1 above) exclusively connects Proteus to radical change.

¹¹² Namely: *Über den Fleiss in mehreren gelehrten Sprachen*, *Wie die Philosophie*, *Fragmente einer Abhandlung über die Ode*, *Von der Veränderung*, the second edition of the first collection of *Fragmente*, *Kritische Wälder: Zweites, Drittes, and Viertes Wäldchen*, *Ursprung der Sprache*, and *Auch eine Philosophie*. Incidentally, the indexes to the complete edition of Herder's letters (section "Mythologie") as well as of the *Herder Handbuch* do not mention Proteus.

identity of Proteus that Herder could block skepticism. I will discuss the main motifs attached to the figure of Proteus that are of importance here, and suggest how they inform Herder's use of the metaphor. Subsequently, I will assess the different ways in which Herder incorporates Proteus in his philosophy of history.

Proteus was a Greek sea-god who appeared in the writings of Homer, Virgil, Euripides, and Ovid. Two important qualities of Proteus are *metamorphosis* and *divination*: "He [...] possessed the gift of prophecy, but was unwilling to disclose what he knew and tried to escape questioners by assuming a variety of shapes, including fire and water and the forms of wild beasts" (Grant 2001, 450-451). Although he was unwilling to use his power of prophecy to help human beings, Proteus was not evil, nor completely unreachable: he could be *forced to help*, if tricked in the right way. Furthermore, his shape-shifting only started in response to being approached by human beings who had already recognized him as the sea-god. Menelaus was able to capture him in his sleep after disguising himself as a seal; Aristaeus caught him at noontide (450-451). As a Homeric metaphor, Proteus has the characteristic of being within reach, despite his shape-changing, as long as he is approached in the right way; and of being able to divine to us the past and the future.

A less positive portrayal of Proteus appeared in Plato's writings, as a characterization of the sophists in *Euthydemus* for example. In accordance with the Homeric narrative, it was Socrates' job to bind the Protean sophists and put an end to their deceitful shape-shifting. Contrary to the fortune-telling of Homer's Proteus, in Plato's representation the end result was merely negative: "Proteus was an appropriate opponent for the seeker of knowledge because his very nature was opposed to truth" (Burns 2001, 971). Likewise, Socrates accuses the rhapsodist *Ion*: "You literally assume as many forms as Proteus, twisting and turning up and down, until at last you slip away from me" (Plato 1925, 542; cited in Giamatti 1968, 463).

In the reception of this ancient myth in discourses on art, science and religion from the Renaissance onwards, the following three figures are of central significance. The first was Pico della Mirandola's use of Proteus for his humanistic thesis that "upon man, at the moment of his creation, God bestowed seeds pregnant with all possibilities, the germs of every form of life. Whichever of these a man shall cultivate, the same will mature and bear fruit in him" (Pico [1486] 1956, 8). Here, Pico used the figure of Proteus to symbolize the *mutability* that humanity acquired thanks to its position at the center of creation. Furthermore, Pico's syncretic approach to the history of philosophy expressed how humanity should find the One in and through the Many (Giamatti 1968, 440). However, it was crucial for Pico that man's power of self-

transformation was not meant to be used for the sake of shape-shifting itself. Rather, it was the task of the human being to use its freedom to choose the highest form of life (and not assume in the great chain of being the position of a plant or an animal).

In a second figure, early modern literary critics and theologians protested against the power of transformation precisely because it violated the stable and lawful order of things. According to a metaphysical conception of life on earth as stably ordered in a chain of being, Protean change was considered (sinfully) transgressive (Zámbóné Kocic 2011, 49-50; Burns 2001, 977-978). Furthermore, as a characterization of human behavior, ‘Protean’ and ‘Proteus’ were used to refer to deceit, hypocrisy, and to an unlawful stepping out of one’s (societal, moral) role – to plagiarism, as well as to perversions of the passions, even to rape (Zámbóné Kocic 2011, 53-58; Giamatti 1968, 460, 467).

The third strand of figures turns the negative connotations of Proteus’ mutability back into their opposite. It was derived from alchemy and natural science, where Proteus stood for the ‘first matter’ of nature (Zámbóné Kocic 2011, 59-61). This matter was denominated ‘first’ matter precisely because of its variety of appearances; for remaining the same in all differences. Francis Bacon used this understanding of Proteus to argue for the necessity of scientific experiment – the willful *manipulation* of nature – to decipher nature’s secrets (Burns 2001, 973-974). And John Milton referred to Proteus as first matter in *Paradise Lost* to describe the sun: “That stone, or like to that which here below/ Philosophers in vain so long have sought,/ In vain, though by their powerful art they bind/ Volatile Hermes, and call up unbound/ In various shapes old Proteus from the sea,/ Drained through a limbeck to his native form” (Milton [1667] 2005, 96). This passage suggests that Proteus’ ‘native form’ is conserved in his different shapes, in the sense of being “[n]ot all parts like, but all alike informed/ With radiant light” (96). The chemical process of draining through a limbeck (a device for distilling) was aimed to retrieve this original form. In her dissertation *Protean Vicissitude and Milton’s Paradise Lost*, Zámbóné Kocic suggests that this passage from Milton can be connected to Pico’s “neoplatonic sentiment” according to which the variety of Proteus’ shapes must be engaged *exhaustively* in order to learn about its essence. That is, another Greek god must be invoked here: “Pan representing the sum of all (‘pan’ being the Greek word for ‘all’), and Proteus, bound and vexed to extremes unfolding the many ‘passages and variations of nature’ (Bacon 1854, 189), are linked in this tradition as embodiments of the unity and multiplicity of nature respectively” (Zámbóné Kocic 2011, 61; cf. Burns 2001, 972). In this way, Proteus indicates the metaphysical theme that became so important for Herder especially after Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi had

criticized Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's alleged Spinozism: *hen kai pan* (FHA 5, 282-294). Furthermore, the myth leaves open conceptually whether it is Pan who "transforms himself into a Proteus" in a top-down manner, or Proteus who through his mutations approximates the totality of possible shapes.¹¹³

Finally, it was suggested in seventeenth-century natural philosophy that Proteus' shape-shifting "paralleled the natural philosopher's ability to imagine himself in the situation of different natural substances and phenomena" (Burns 2001, 976). This idea would later prove very fruitful for historicist conceptions of historical understanding: as a metaphor for humanity, Proteus may represent both the object of inquiry – distant and diverse human forms – as well as the knower, who feels her way into historical realities.¹¹⁴

Johann Georg Hamann had (as always) all the exciting references to start off a spirited appropriation of the myth of Proteus in German Enlightenment debates: in his 1761 *Wolken*, he defended his *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* against a review by presenting *himself* as Proteus, hunted down by his reviewer (N 2, 107). Hamann (in some copies of this work intended for friends) added references to the *Odyssey*, to Plato's *Euthydemus* and *Ion*, as well as to an ancient version of Proteus as first matter in the so-called *Orphic Hymns* (Rudolph 2008, 409-411). The result is highly elusive, yet two aspects stand out. First, Hamann considered Protean shape-shifting a necessary aspect of his authorship, and he certainly connected this to the *topoi* of Proteus as a poet and a seer in his own influential conception of the 'genius'.¹¹⁵ Second, Hamann integrated the figure of Proteus (as well as of Socrates) into a Christology, according to which all of nature and history (including all world literature) can be read as prophetic signs of divine revelation. For Hamann, Proteus is an emblem of God's capacity to show Himself in creation in various shapes – and one transformation of course stands out: His *Menschwerdung*.¹¹⁶ It is no accident that Proteus appears again in a quote from Horace one year later, at the climax of the *Aesthetica in Nuce*, in a series of apocalyptic indications of (an ancient version of) the myth of the Flood (N 2, 216).

¹¹³ The quote is from the Welsh seventeenth-century alchemist Thomas Vaughan (quoted in Burns 2001, 972). Pico is quoted in the same context as having a very explicit opinion on the matter: "He who cannot attract Pan approaches Proteus in vain".

¹¹⁴ Cf. Gjesdal (2017, 114-115) on the connection between the methods of *divination* and sympathy in Herder's hermeneutics. I will expound on this below, but note that Herder used the Latin loanword "Divination" in 1768 and 1778 to denote a special kind of feeling and "*lebendige Lesen*" (FHA 2, 605; FHA 4, 366).

¹¹⁵ Rudolph (2008, 409-410) has some difficulty in his interpretation to explain how Hamann appropriated the Plato passages in a positive way. Proteus' capacity for divination (which Rudolph does not explicitly address) makes this a bit easier (cf. Giamatti 1968, 445-450).

¹¹⁶ In his *Faust*, Goethe would let the *homunculus* be sent to Proteus in order to give this mere spirit a human form. I will return to this below.

It is impossible to precisely identify the sources on which Herder relied for his understanding of the Proteus myth. Apart from the aforementioned classical ancient sources, which he undoubtedly knew extremely well, in 1764, Herder had discussed the character of the *Orphic Hymns* (HWP 1, 32, 38), and had praised Orpheus in 1774 as the genius poet in which “die ganze Seele der Natur lebet” (FHA 3, 63). Furthermore, in 1763 and 1769, Herder had written notes on Bacon’s *The Advancement of Learning* (Irmscher, Adler 1979, 197). He had also taken notes from Plato’s *Euthydemus*, where Socrates goes after the Protean sophists.¹¹⁷ In addition, Milton’s *Paradise Lost* was an exemplar for Herder from his first Königsberg commentary on Hamann’s *Aesthetica in Nuce* onwards (FHA 1, 34, 240, 284, 295). Finally, William Shakespeare’s *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and Alexander Pope’s *The Dunciad* may have given Herder examples of treacherous Proteus figures, who transgressed the natural and/or moral order and misused language to cause confusion (Giamatti 1968, 459-460, 472-474).¹¹⁸

In Herder’s own use of the figure, however, a notion is added that (as far as I have been able to determine) had never been part of any version of the Proteus myth: a ‘*Zauberspiegel*’. The ancient Hellenistic and Judaistic ritual usage of such a mirror, known as ‘catoptromancy’, was carried out for the purpose of divination (Herz 1996, 18). In Herder’s writings, it is either us who attempt to make out Proteus in his different shapes via this magic mirror, or it is Proteus himself who relies on it to take on different shapes. That is, Proteus either appears in constantly changing forms by way of a mirror, or the mirror is used to catch the identity of Proteus that underlies these different forms.

The history of the metaphor of mirroring (and related notions such as the *image* and the faculty of *reflection*) is far too rich and complicated to recount here. Let it suffice to recapitulate key motifs like the *imago Dei* doctrine, Plato’s distinction between ideas and the phenomena reflecting them, and Leibniz’s idea that the monad reflects all of the universe from its particular perspective.¹¹⁹ The latter idea was particularly significant for Herder because it depicted the human soul as an individual *living* mirror – full of particular minute perceptions and simultaneously reflecting all. Notably, Leibniz’s monadology was an effort to combine the greatest

¹¹⁷ They are from a notebook with other notes from 1769, although the Plato editions in the *Bibliotheca Herderiana* are all from the 1780s (Irmscher, Adler 1979, 201; *Bibliotheca Herderiana* 1979, 1666-1673, 1677, 1685, 1697).

¹¹⁸ In a passage of less significance for my overall interpretation, Herder questions Christian Adolf Klotz’ integrity by claiming that “like a Proteus, he speaks in more than one tongue and language” (AWE 2/1, 444).

¹¹⁹ Cf. Herz (1996, 13-19, 23-33) for a well-informed discussion of these and various other motifs relevant for interpreting Herder. Cf. also Konersmann (1991, 75-173) for a more comprehensive history in which Herder plays an important role in the formation of modern subjectivity. Again Rorty has a different narrative, which I cannot confront here, of the epistemological use of the mirror metaphor, but cf. Herz (1996, 22-23, 41) for helpful suggestions.

unity with the greatest diversity; a reconciliation of Pan and Proteus, so to speak. Relying on the *imago Dei* doctrine, one could subsequently make the inference that just like God mirrors Himself in all of creation, so does Proteus (humanity) have the ability to mirror himself in different places *and times* (cf. Konersmann 1991, 148-154).¹²⁰

Incidentally, mirroring is a distinctive trait of human nature both in Herder's anthropological and in his theological writings. First, Herder's 1769 interpretation of *Genesis* 1, day six, makes it clear that according to a primordial act of mirroring, man was created in God's image (FHA 5, 61; Bellmann 2016, 52-54). Second, (and contrary to traditionally stronger interpretations of the Fall), *Ursprung der Sprache* stresses humanity's creative capacity for *reflection* in the following way: the human being "wird [...] freistehend, kann sich eine Sphäre der Bespiegelung suchen, kann sich in sich bespiegeln. Nicht mehr eine unfehlbare Maschine in den Händen der Natur, wird er sich selbst Zweck und Ziel der Bearbeitung" (FHA 1, 717). Thus, Herder's conception of humanity combines Protean shape-shifting with mirroring. In compensation for their lack of animal instinct, human beings have the power and freedom to give their own existence a specific form. The ultimate purpose of humanity is self-refinement through recognizing oneself in a "Sphäre der Bespiegelung", a "sich in sich bespiegeln" (717). As a result, the figure of Proteus may, in natural as well as historical inquiry, refer both to the knowing subject and to the object of investigation. In the case of a historical understanding of human practices, this yields a crucial insight: any hermeneutic engagement with historical others is in fact a *self*-mirroring practice of human beings in different forms (cf. Chapter Three).

Finally, in contrast to Hamann, and like Pico, Herder's Proteus marks the condition of finitude, and of all things human. The notion of the mirror, too, expresses a theological conception of finitude: finite human beings are never capable of reaching behind reflections and appearances into the essential nature of things. Proteus reflects humanity in every single shape he takes on, but always from a different and particular standpoint. Very much like Pico, then, Herder adopts the metaphor to express that man is open to many possibilities. The shape-shifting of Proteus represents the historical change of a single human species.

¹²⁰ Goethe's *Werther* addresses in his fourth letter how human and divine mirroring should mutually reflect each other in the apprehension of sublime nature: "[A]ch könntest du das wieder ausdrücken, könntest du dem Papier das einhauchen, was so voll, so warm in dir lebt, daß es würde der Spiegel deiner Seele wie deine Seele ist der Spiegel des unendlichen Gottes" (Goethe 1774, 9-10; also cf. Konersmann 1991, 116-121, 152).

4.3. Herder's metaphysics of Proteus

In will start this section by outlining how Proteus could, in Herder's early work, refer to both radical change and continuity. Subsequently, I will, in three subsections, identify three different reconciliatory strategies that Herder adopted in order to provide world history with a stable subject in the guise of a malleable humanity. The first two strategies can be found in Herder's works written before he arrived in Bückeberg (1771); the third is most forcefully expressed in his 1774 *Auch eine Philosophie*.

Concerning Herder's earliest works (1764-1766), commentators Gaier and Wolfgang Pross notice a tension and then a shift, from a universalist science of human nature to a more historical approach (FHA 1, 929; HWP 1, 694-695). This tension was certainly there – but nowhere did Herder fully give up on a universalist science of man. Rather than identifying a specific moment when Herder was forced to appreciate the absolute individuality of historical particulars, I find it more useful to make explicit the different strategies Herder adopts to face the problem of how anthropological uniformities and historical differences relate (Irmscher 2009, 149; cf. also Norton 1991, 165, 172). In this context, the image of Proteus appears as an instrument, used to reconcile a universalist anthropology with the full recognition of historical change, and shows that precisely because Herder never gave up on the first, he was able to fully appreciate the second. By consequence, I interpret the function of Proteus in his texts as both anti-skeptical and anti-ethnocentric.

Recall the problem I set out on the basis of *Von der Veränderung*, the problem of how to productively face the fact of historical change without allowing the Pyrrhonist modes of argumentation to induce skeptical conclusions. Herder's question is how we can do full justice to the fact that we are historically situated, and still be reassured that exhaustively engaging historical difference will lead to an integrative account. To encapsulate the philosophical “knot” which the Pyrrhonists presented as beyond untying, Herder refers to the classic triad as a true Proteus:

So bald es erwiesen ist, daß das, was ich mit Gründen für wahr, für schön, für gut, für angenehm halte, ebenfalls aus Gründen von einem andern für falsch, für häßlich, für böse, für unangenehm angesehen werden kann: so ist Wahrheit, Schönheit und moralischer Wert ein Phantom, das jedem auf eine andre Art, in einer andern Gestalt erscheint: ein wahrer *Proteus*, der durch einen Zauberspiegel, immer verwandelt, und nimmer als derselbe sich zeigt. (FHA 1, 149)

Apart from the issue of ethnocentrism discussed above, Herder examines how a range of factors, like time, climate, physiological constitution, custom and tradition, cause diversity in taste and manner of thought (152-156). Herder concludes: “Die Zeit hat alles so verändert, daß oft ein Zauberspiegel dazu gehört, dasselbe Geschöpf unter so verschiednen Gestalten wiederzuerkennen” (159). This passage perhaps pulls most strongly toward the metaphor that expresses the extreme difficulty, if not impossibility, of still recognizing some similarity between historical forms. If Proteus never shows himself as the same, he is more like the deceitful sophists, who hide their untruthfulness by constantly changing shape. But recall that unlike the Pyrrhonists, Herder aims in this text to show “wie im Tale und auf der Ebne Geschöpfe umherirren, die so verschieden sind, daß ihnen kaum ein gemeinschaftlicher Name übrig bleibt: indessen sind sie unsere Mitbrüder, und ihre Geschichte ist die Geschichte unsrer Natur” (150). I will argue that the *Zauberspiegel* refers not merely to the difficulty, but also the possibility of recognizing that common names to describe the human nature of our fellow brothers do exist (cf. Irmischer 2009, 23; Beiser 2011, 107). The common nature of human beings allows them to recognize different forms of (e.g.) the good *as* good in a particular context. The *Zauberspiegel* – or, in more earthly terms, the complete collection of available hermeneutic, historiographic, anthropological and philosophical methodologies – may help to understand how value-terms arise in particular situations out of a core of shared human potential. Thus, the “Geschichte unsrer Natur” may enlighten us both about the historical malleability of human nature and about its core unity, its essential nature and its origin.

This account might sound far-fetched as an interpretation of *Von der Veränderung*. Before I set out the three different strategies for reconciling diversity and unity, Herder’s second very early invocation of Proteus might render my hypothesis more plausible. In Herder’s 1765 *Über den Fleiss in mehreren gelehrten Sprachen*, it is language which is Protean. The historical adaptation of languages on different continents is the reason for Herder to state about language: “So verwandelte sich diese Pflanze, nach dem Boden der sie nährte, und der Himmelsluft, die sie tränkte: sie ward ein Proteus unter den Nationen” (FHA 1, 23). Michael Morton (1989, 41) has identified in his closereading of this text an extra connotation in addition to Proteus’ mutability: since Herder will describe in the essay the proper relationship toward foreign languages as one of appropriation and adaptation, it is suggested we hold on to this Proteus through his various transformations, and bind him, so that he may divine to us the distinctive riches of different languages. Moreover, the identification of language with a plant suggests an organic continuity between different environments, which underlies Herder’s claim “ich verpflanze mich [...] gebe meiner Seele die Ausdehnung jedes Klimas” as well as the idea that

we need our native language as a guiding thread through the labyrinth of languages (FHA 1, 26-28; Morton 1989, 155). It provides fertile soil for transplantation, and suggests that translation of foreign concepts into our native language can be productive. I now start with the first reconciliatory strategy that Herder built on this continuity.

4.3.1. *Protean universals*

In *Fragmente einer Abhandlung über die Ode*, Proteus appears under the heading “Über die Metempsychosis der Ode in Ansehung der Empfindung”. Here, as before, Herder’s starting point is the historical diversity between different nations, which arises not just in the area of custom or second nature, but also, before that, physiologically and unconsciously (FHA 1, 79-83, 152-155). He depicts the effects for the range of products of the human mind that he calls ‘ode’ as follows:

Wenn irgend eine Gedichtgattung ein Proteus unter den Nationen geworden ist: so hat die Ode nach der Empfindung, dem Gegenstande, und der Sprache, ihren Geist und Inhalt und Miene und Gang so verändert, daß vielleicht bloß der Zauberspiegel des Aesthetikers dasselbe Lebendige unter so verschiednen Gestalten erkennt. Indessen gibts doch ein gewisses allgemeines Eins der Empfindung, des Ausdrucks und der Harmonie, das eine Parallele zwischen ihnen allen möglich macht. (FHA 1, 79)

Herder aims to revise and complete the Baumgartian project of aesthetics as a science of human nature. In Herder’s view, this science should collect *all* the different instances of human cognition and artistic production empirically and historically. Furthermore, the science of aesthetics must explain their genesis out of a sensuous core of human feeling. So, “der Aesthetiker” must place all the different poetic arts from different nations and times in front of a magic mirror, in order to recognize the unity of sensibility, of expression, and of harmony between different works, and be able to discuss them historically under the general heading of ‘ode’ (Gjesdal 2017, 51-52). Clearly, the Protean metempsychosis¹²¹ of the ode expresses the difficulty of tracing the unity of sensibility. Nonetheless, these notions, “dasselbe Lebendige” and “ein gewisses allgemeines Eins der Empfindung, des Ausdrucks und der Harmonie” are of crucial importance as preconditions for finding analogies (cf. Norton 1991, 72-73). By

¹²¹ The Greek term for the transmigration of the soul – itself a significant phrasing due to the connotation of infinite subsistence of the object undergoing change.

explaining their functions, I will now demarcate the first of Herder's strategies to reconcile unity and difference. I shall argue that these unifying notions indeed infuse the aesthetician's *Zauberspiegel* with systematic significance. This is because they allow us to see how wide varieties of individuals stand in complex relations of *mirroring* each other, and how they together compose a general "*Analogie der Natur*" as well as an "*Analogie aller menschlichen Seelenkräfte*" (FHA 1, 715, 743).

Herder derives the "allgemeines Eins der Empfindung" from a basic human sensuousness, which was most present in the early stages of history, yet could be regenerated (or mirrored) via various cyclical historical developments.¹²² On this basis of human psychology, Herder grounds a process of analogical understanding. This becomes clear from the works written shortly after the text on the ode, such as *Fragmente* and *Älteres kritisches Wäldchen*: by finding analogies between different cultural forms, Herder intends to point at transfer and appropriation, and eventually at a "*Kette der Mitteilung*" between all the life-stages of humanity (FHA 2, 25, 32, 39). For Herder this results in ways to legitimately *order* the whole of world history, for example with reference to the sequence of ages of poetry, prose, and of science, and to a development from sensuous beginnings toward increasingly more rationality and complexity. Interpreted charitably, this lawfulness of history may be seen to be generalized from historical particulars and the similarities between them (HWP 1, 16; cf. Norton 1991, 74; FHA 1, 996). Yet however this may be, it is Proteus' living essence that safeguards the possibility of finding similarities. If we move a few years ahead, from the Riga works to Strasbourg at the end of 1769, the reason for this should become apparent.

In *Ursprung der Sprache*, Herder argues from analogies between Proteus' different forms to a chain that links different peoples together in a progressive whole. In the treatise's second part, Herder distinguishes for the human being four "Hauptgesetze seiner Natur und seines Geschlechts", under which he subsumes the factors that explain how humanity has been able to autonomously invent language, and how language had to develop historically (FHA 1, 769). While the first two laws discuss features of human nature that promote the invention and development of language in general, the third law explains how a diversity of national languages had to arise. This law centers on those aspects of human group behavior that explain why a continuous unity of language was principally impossible (791-799). Central factors discussed by Herder are adaptation to different natural environments, the importance of

¹²² Examples of such cycles and regenerations of origins would be the analogies between the childhood of humanity, of nations and of individual human beings, and between the *Morgenröthe* of the world and of each day (cf. also Heizmann 1981; and Gaier 1988, 35-40, 49-50).

language to community forming, and the competition and conflict between different communities (cf. Piirimäe 2015; Spencer 2012b, 73-84, 146).

Proteus is used to put the problem – recall: situatedness, and the imperative to preclude skepticism – in the following way:

“Menschen sollen überall auf der Erde wohnen, da jede Tiergattung bloß ihr Land und engere Sphäre haben”: *der Erdbewohner* wird sichtbar. Und ist das, so wird auch seine Sprache *Sprache der Erde*. Eine *neue* in jeder *neuen Welt*; *National-sprache* in jeder *Nation* – ich kann alle vorige Bestimmungsursachen der Veränderung nicht wiederholen – *die Sprache wird ein Proteus auf der runden Oberfläche der Erde*.

Manche neue Modephilosophen haben diesen Proteus so wenig fesseln und in seiner wahren Gestalt erblicken können, daß es ihnen wahrscheinlicher vorgekommen, daß die Natur in jeden großen Erdstrich so gut ein Paar Menschen, zu Stammältern habe hinschaffen können, wie in jedes Klima eigne Tiere. (FHA 1, 794)

Herder accuses the “Modephilosophen” of letting go of Proteus and allowing him to keep changing shape. This leads these philosophers to polygeneticism concerning the human species and its language ability. They use observations about the radical differences of languages (even within the same geographical region) to draw the conclusion that there actually is no similarity whatsoever between different languages, and that different human races do not have a common origin: “[H]ier, schließen diese Zweifler, hört also alle menschliche Untersuchung auf” (795). In contrast to this Pyrrhonist argumentation, Herder intends to continue the investigation and show Proteus’ true form. His suggestion is that the differences between peoples and their languages can very well be explained. Furthermore, in its true form, language can be seen to have been originally shared by all of the human “*Erdbewohnern*”, despite its Protean change later on. And ultimately, the fourth law states that the human species at large can be recognized as “Ein progressives Ganze von Einem Ursprunge in Einer großen Haushaltung [...] so auch alle Sprachen, und mit ihnen die ganze Kette der Bildung” (799).

To explain the disproportionate level of difference between nations that, geographically, are very close to one another, Herder points towards the phenomenon that he calls “*gegenseitige[n] Familien- und Nationalhaß*” (796). In short, Herder relies on this phenomenon to interpret diversity as a product of conflict, and conflict as arising from nations taking each

other seriously as competitors. Thus, the same ethnocentric attitude, problematized by Herder in many of his earlier texts, he now adopts for explaining general historical developments (cf. Irmischer 2009, 204). This explanation *presupposes* that originally all nations were in contact with each other, and became separated only later, through conflict. How Herder affirms the kernel of truth to the myth of Babel attests to the idea that world history must be understood as a continuous development of transfer and conflict (FHA 1, 798). This presupposition is, in turn, based on an empirical generalization that relies on the *Analogie aller menschlichen Seelenkräfte* in the following way.

Defending the fourth law of human nature, the issue between Herder and the skeptic regarding monogeneticism is whether the chain of cultural transfer, which can be observed within individual nations, can be extended to the species at large. That is, the question is whether the sequence of Proteus' different shapes can be recognized as forming a "Kette der Bildung" of the human species as a whole (799). To the skeptic's contention that this chain could not possibly reach beyond the first "Stammvater eines Landes" in a given geographical area, Herder responds: "Ich wüßte nicht, warum sie nur *bis dahin* und *nicht weiter* reichen sollte? Warum diese Landesväter nicht wieder unter sich einen Erdevater könnten gehabt haben, da 'die ganze *fortgehende Ähnlichkeit der Haushaltung dieses Geschlechts* es so fordert'" (802). The requirement emanating from this 'continuing similarity' is crucial, because it is a precondition for identifying both differences and similarities between peoples, and for recognizing cultural transfer. In this way, Herder relies on analogy – i.e., on a certain degree of mirroring – to connect different human shapes in a "Kette der Bildung". Thus Herder binds together Proteus' different shapes into a world-historical development.

In this argument, Proteus appears not to signify incommensurable difference, but rather "*dasselbe Lebendige*", the general unity that allows analogical understanding. By binding this Proteus, and aiming at a comparative synthesis of all the historical forms of human language, the secrets of the history of human language might be unveiled, including the forms of human life that languages reflect (Spencer 2012b, 78). The strength of this argument lies in its positive attribution of value to all of Proteus' transformations. The only way to reach the universal, according to this construal, is by collecting all particulars and appreciating individualities as well as analogies that, in a continuous chain, reveal their manner of being connected.

Furthermore, this role of Proteus in the philosophy of history Herder would later institute in work informed by a more explicitly worked out philosophy of nature, in which all of nature is "formed according to one prototype and at the same time infinitely varied" (FHA 6,

73; quoted in Nassar 2017, 116). The *Hauptform* and *Haupttypus* functioned as “a third, hidden and informing agent that was, in effect, the ground upon which all reality rested”, and guaranteed both the necessity and the efficacy of analogical inferences – in natural as much as in historical science (Reill 1996, 17-19; Nassar 2017, 116-117). However, it is important to recognize that Herder already practiced this form of understanding before he preached about the pantheistic unity of nature (from the 1780s onwards). Throughout *Auch eine Philosophie*, for example, Herder’s conception of world history is infused with *menschliche Kräfte*, which connect seemingly disparate phenomena, and allow analogical understanding. Besides the *Lebensalter* of humanity, it is Proteus who personifies this prototype, and thus functions as the “konkrete Allgemeine”, embodying the whole of human history in the form of individuality (Heinz 1994a, 83). The notion of beauty may serve as an example of a Protean unifying notion. Depending on levels and directions of their *Ästhetische Bildung*, humans formulate different ideals of beauty. Nonetheless, ‘the beautiful’ remains a general notion that is developed everywhere, albeit in different forms, for it depends on the (different ways of) shaping a shared core of human potential.

In Chapter Six, I will elaborate on the notion of the human form as a prototype from the perspective of Herder’s biblical hermeneutics. For now, I want to retain that the Proteus metaphor signifies the mutual reflection of the individual and totality, while none of their commonalities can be pinned down in abstraction. Instead, unifying notions must remain concrete and comparative images; they necessarily never exhaust the range of possible diversity, nor do they reduce the particulars to a (universal) generality. Such notions could be dubbed ‘Protean universals’. Furthermore, Proteus’ Homeric capacity for *divination* here receives a meaning previously analyzed by Peter Hanns Reill as particular to eighteenth-century natural history, but which was already explicit in early modern natural history as the dynamic between Proteus and Pan: grasping the unity of nature in its complexity through a constant dialectic between the individual and totality (Reill 1996, 17; Gjesdal 2017, 114).

This argument is in keeping with one of the central uses of Proteus in a tradition which spans from “Pico’s use of him as a symbol for man’s enormous potentiality”, to Renaissance accounts of Proteus and Pan, all the way to Goethe’s use of Proteus in *Faust*, “as the vehicle for Homunculus in his quest for form and life” (Giamatti 1968, 443). That is, the potential to take on *different* shapes is itself the instance which gives form to *all*. Herder lends Leibniz’s *principium individuationis* a mythological shape, which transfers the problem of how to

combine the greatest unity with the greatest diversity to the stage of the history of humanity.¹²³ Its stable subject is the human being or ‘*homo proteus*’.

Finally, the argument set out in this subsection explains why the skeptic is wrong: the diversity of human forms should not be interpreted as material for Pyrrhonist arguments and as posing skeptical threats to feignedly static universals. Rather, it should be seen as constitutive of the human form in the first place. Diversity hence does not principally threaten our capacity to recognize “unsere Mitbrüder” – on the contrary, it first makes it possible (FHA 1, 150). According to Herder, the observations that inform argumentative modes of Pyrrhonism are *resources* for human self-understanding rather than philosophical scruples that together form a Gordian knot. So, Herder is able to deny the Pyrrhonist’s skeptical conclusions *because* he holds on to an identity underlying Proteus’ shape-shifting.

Herder’s argument also explains why ethnocentrism is wrong. It elucidates why taking our own viewpoint to be universal is a false response to perceiving difference: it makes us blind to “die ganze *fortgehende Ähnlichkeit der Haushaltung dieses Geschlechts*” (FHA 1, 802). Thus, ethnocentrism blocks our recognition of the fact that history does not merely separate different nations, but also ties them together. It makes us mirror to ourself only one form of humanity, rather than letting us use our mirroring capacity to engage with new forms and recognize them as human analogues. That is why Herder’s anti-skeptical argument is simultaneously anti-ethnocentric: the skeptic was misguided in assuming the necessity of static universals to begin with.¹²⁴

4.3.2 Genetic explanation of diversity

The harmonious picture of Proteus does not exhaust Herder’s approaches to history. A central method of Herder in aesthetics, psychology and philosophy of history is to trace the genesis of concepts and inventions back to their origins. The genetic method suggests that, in the face of bewildering diversity and seeming chaos, understanding a thing’s development will help to make the proper distinctions and to avoid evaluating phenomena according to one-sided criteria (FHA 1, 601-603). Herder advocates this method by saying that since no two nations are the same, an extensive “Universalismus” is necessary to view and classify them *all* (HWP 1, 469; cf. Herz 1996, 179). Here I sketch the expectations connected by Herder to this “*Entwicklungs-*

¹²³ This transfer was already analyzed in 1916 by Ernst Cassirer ([1916] 1975, 115-121).

¹²⁴ I explain in section 4.3.3. why this symmetry between skepticism and ethnocentrism works the other way round as well.

gedanke” and explain how he intended to reconcile it with the individuality of human shapes (Meinecke [1936] 1946, 396).

In his discussions of the potential of this method, especially when executed on the macroscopic level as a “*Geschichte des menschlichen Verstandes*”, Herder frequently refers to the “*verschiednen Wanderungen und Verwandlungen*” of the products of the human spirit, as well as to their Ovidian *metamorphoses* (FHA 1, 373, 601). The figure of Proteus in this context seems to refer mainly to chaos:

Die Literatur fremder Völker und Sprachen ist oft als eine fremde Kolonie unter andere Nationen eingeführt: und notwendig hat durch diese Zusammenmischung von Ideen, und Sitten, von Denk- und Seharten, von Sprachen, und Wissenschaften, alles so eine andere Gestalt annehmen müssen, daß die Literatur ein wahrer Proteus zu sein scheint, wenn man sie durch Völker und Zeiten und Sprachen verfolgt. Entlehnte Gesichtspunkte wurden auf eine Art gerückt, geerbte Wahrheiten bis zum Unkännlichen umgeprägt [...]. (FHA 1, 559)

This passage from the second edition of the first collection of *Fragmente* deals with the close intertwinement of language and thought. Herder hence draws the corresponding conclusion concerning ideas and knowledge: “Die drei Göttinnen der menschlichen Känntnis, Wahrheit, Schönheit und Tugen wurden so national, als es die Sprache war” (559). However, he did not go on to conclude from this that we should suspend judgment about truth, beauty, and virtue. Rather, their Protean character invites a more active response on the part of the knower: a chase through all different shapes, which should lead to an insight into the intelligible character of Proteus’ transformations. A key aspect of Herder’s genetic method is to identify the causes that explain why everything had to adopt a different form. Understood as necessary, historical change becomes intelligible. It should be possible to locate some fundamental principles that organize historical change, as well as world history at large (cf. Norton 1991, 72-75).¹²⁵ That is, historical events can be traced back to “*tiefe, allgemeine Ursachen*” which, Herder asserts in a 1773 essay, allow historical explanations of changes to be applied in other contexts (FHA 4, 112).

¹²⁵ In this respect Herder did not fundamentally depart from the Enlightenment tradition of pragmatic history, but rather intended to take it to greater heights. Cf. Herder’s letter to Gatterer (AWE 2/1, 684-691), the *Älteres kritisches Wäldchen* (FHA 2, 11-15, 21-23) and the review of Schlözer (SWS 5, 439), and cf. accounts of Zammito (2002), Leventhal (1990), Norton (1991) and Beiser (2011).

In applying this method, one tendency in Herder's writings is to suggest that disputes can be solved by causally explaining and disentangling apparently conflicting claims. Skeptical conclusions (drawn from unending dispute) are thus prevented by uncovering the actual plurality of criteria to which phenomena ought to be referred (FHA 1, 555-556; cf. also 181). In this context, Herder praises the ideal of a fully catalogued "Enzyklopädie und [...] Geschichte der Wissenschaften" where every field is presented in "seinem eignen Lichte [...] eigne Farbe, eigne Gränzen" (556). During the 1760s, Herder ponders whether ultimately, these fields of knowledge should be traced back to multiple origins, or whether they evolved out of a single absolute origin of all (FHA 9/2, 17-19; cf. Häfner 1994). From both *Ursprung der Sprache* and his 1768/9 biblical studies onwards, however, Herder will develop a monogenetic account of human culture, asserting hermeneutic and religious manners of approximating the origin of history (cf. Chapter Six). Related to this, another tendency in Herder is to take the causal explanation of historical developments to a higher level, and establish general laws of historical change and metahistorical narratives. This was already the case in the *Fragmente*'s theory of the life-stages of languages, where the sequence of stages has its own intelligibility (Irmscher 2009, 25-30). Herder defended this 'comparison' against accusations of coming up with a "*Roman*" by stressing that a phenomenon's nature and its development are inseparable (FHA 1, 600-601). In fact, he stated, many of the ethnocentric fallacies arise due to the hypostatizing of one particular shape of the phenomenon's Protean development (602). Herder had already formulated the desideratum to block such fallacies via genetic explanation in 1764¹²⁶:

Da sich mein Gegenstand immer verändert: so weiß ich nicht, wo ich die Einheit finden soll; so oft ich das Tier auf das Feld das Vergrößerungsglases bringe: erscheint es unter einer andern Gestalt. Nehme ich nun bloß *einen* Zustand, so sind meine Bemerkungen ohnstreitig zu geteilt, und zu unvollständig; nehme ich einen nach dem andern, nur der erste fehlt mir; so fehlt mir ja eben der Knäuel, aus dem ich die folgenden entwickeln kann. (HWP 1, 10)

The Protean character of the subject matter demands of the knower an extra flexibility to chase historical change and bind the underlying subject. That is, since the magnifying glass does not

¹²⁶ The 1768 defense of the *Lebensalter* in the *Fragmente* (that I quoted in Chapter Two) is a revision of the passage from the 1764 *Versuch einer Geschichte* – yet Herder's 1768 way of reformulating the passage in rhetorical questions obscures the point, and the self-reflexive character of his observation gets lost in the polemics against contemporaries.

on its own get hold of Proteus because of his shape-shifting, the knower must follow Proteus through all his different shapes – starting from the very first.

Herder's expectations regarding the positive outcome of insight into the causes of change would only mount in the subsequent years. In *Viertes Wäldchen*, Herder intended an analysis of the range of factors that make human judgments on matters of taste individual and context-dependent to prevent the skeptical conclusion "daß es gar keine gewisse Regeln derselben in den Gegenständen gebe [...] daß alles in der Natur ein Chaos von einzelnen Disharmonischen Stimmungen sei, die nicht zu akkordieren wären" (FHA 2, 283). According to Herder's method, what needs to be explained are the psychological, historical, geographical, and cultural causes of diversity. The aim of this method is to trace the shared core of basic human sensuousness (the "Basis der Empfindung", FHA 2, 252) and the common principle of taste, which underlies all of its alterations. Admittedly, the Protean character of humanity makes it very difficult to delineate concrete and stable features of such a core (HWP 1, 14-16). The original source must itself be maximally thin: "Alles liegt in ihm, aber als in einem Keim zur Entwicklung, als in einem Schrein, wo sich eine andre Fähigkeit, wie ein kleinerer Schrein findet" (FHA 2, 280; cf. Chapter Two). Still, Herder aims to trace back all concepts to their origin in human nature (Noyes 2015, 33-34; Sikka 2011, 21; Irmscher 2009, 201; Herz 1996, 200-201, 211; Beiser 1987, 142-143).

Homo proteus is a historical being full of potential, who can only take on specific shapes in particular historical contexts (Muthu 2003, 238). In addition, immediate feelings, unanalyzable sensuous concepts, and the human *sensus communis* depend on historical circumstances (FHA 2, 280, 284; Irmscher 2009, 148-149; Norton 1991, 50). However, I do not find an ironical dismissal of origins and unities in Herder's texts (cf. Leventhal 1994, 150). Rather, his zeal to get at the origins of things, and to reveal the intelligibility of their development, is informed by the belief that it is principally possible to bind Proteus, and that in the chain of his transformations, the One is reflected.¹²⁷ Herder makes this explicit in the conclusion of the same passage of *Viertes Wäldchen*:

Der Griechische, der Gotische, der Mohrische Geschmack in Baukunst und
Bildhauerei, in Mythologie und Dichtkunst ist er Derselbe? Und ist er nicht aus
Zeiten, Sitten und Völkern zu erklären? und hat er nicht also jedes mal einen

¹²⁷ I take this analysis of the role of Proteus to be one way of going a bit further where Robert Norton's very insightful interpretation of Herder stops: Herder did not only couple passionate empiricism with a belief in the power of origins; he also had metaphysical reasons why it would be possible to get close to a universal science of man, and approximate history in its totality (Norton 1991, 50, 156-157, 184).

Grundsatz, der nur nicht gnug verstanden, nur nicht mit gleicher Stärke gefühlt, nur nicht mit richtigem Ebenmaß angewandt wurde? und beweiset also nicht selbst dieser Proteus von Geschmack, der sich unter allen Himmelsstrichen, in jeder fremden Luft, die er atmet, neu verwandelt; beweiset Er nicht selbst mit den Ursachen seiner Verwandlung, daß die Schönheit nur Eins sei, so wie die Vollkommenheit, so wie die Wahrheit. (FHA 2, 286)

The context of this passage is very polemical (an attack on Riedel's conception of the 'relative nature' of beauty) and the text is highly rhetorical.¹²⁸ However, of interest here is the suggestion that the *causes* of Proteus' transformations *prove* that beauty is one. Herder's point is that the diversity of tastes can be understood as long as we take its historical change as a natural phenomenon governed by causality (282). Rather than treating change as a threat to the order of nature, the *dynamic* of the natural order adds to its splendor. For it is Proteus who himself proves "mit den Ursachen seiner Verwandlung" that there is one ideal of beauty. Some normative implications follow from this: Herder suggests in the same passage that we can recognize certain natural and cultural factors as 'corrupting' the level of a nation's "Ästhetische Bildung"; we can identify some phenomena that are considered beautiful everywhere around the globe; a basic universal psychological constitution underlies the diversity of human shapes; and principles can be distinguished according to which we can evaluate how well human beings are adapted to their (natural, historical) environment (FHA 2, 284-285; cf. Norton 1991, 165). As a result, the genetic explanation of the diversity of taste has to rely on physiology, psychology and natural history as much as on philology.

In Herder's genetic explanation of diversity, the Proteus of Bacon and Pico appears. They thought that the variety of Proteus' shapes must be engaged *exhaustively* in order to learn about its essence, because *all* of nature (Pan) is Protean. Furthermore, the historian here emulates Bacon's ideal of natural science: to pursue Proteus through all his different shapes, because it is only in forcing nature to go through different passages that its true characteristics may be revealed (Burns 2001, 973-974). The Protean character of truth, goodness, and beauty *necessitates* a historical approach to the study of man.

¹²⁸ Herder stresses the *diversity* in taste in order to show that Riedel's theory (of 'fundamental feelings' for the true, good and beautiful) is unable to account for the phenomena. And he stresses the *objectivity* and ultimate unity of beauty in order to deny Riedel's own skeptical conclusion. Herder's conclusion then reverts to a universalistic ideal of a singular and 'pure' beauty, which is at odds with both earlier and later accounts (FHA 2, 286-287).

4.3.3. *The Bildung of Proteus*

In this final subsection, I outline the additions and adjustments that Herder makes to his Protean conception of humanity from a more affirmative religious perspective in his 1774 *Auch eine Philosophie*. His use of the Proteus metaphor in this text highlights the continuity of the *anthropological* presuppositions that inform Herder's philosophy of history. But his references to the motif of a *mirror* now add a religiously inspired emphasis on the *limitations* to what is reflected to finite human beings. The text's final motto encapsulates this emphasis in the phrase: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face [...]" (1 Cor 13:12; FHA 4, 107).¹²⁹ This mirror may reflect images of divine revelation; but Herder now questions the adequacy and/or attainability of this reflecting. Herder's references to a magic mirror are now balanced by the idea that human cognition relies on a *dark* mirror: the human soul at every single moment in time and space reflects only a fragment of creation (FHA 9 / 2, 86; cf. Herz 1996, 14-19). Nevertheless, I will show that this gives rise to a third strategy for reconciling change and continuity and for countering the Pyrrhonist tendency to infer skeptical conclusions from historical change.

In Herder's criticisms of the various ethnocentric universalizations of ideals of happiness and virtue, the familiar Protean model appears:

Ist nicht das Gute auf der Erde *aufgestreut*? Weil eine Gestalt der Menschheit und ein Erdstrich es nicht fassen konnte, wards verteilt in tausend Gestalten, wandelt – ein ewiger Proteus! – durch alle Weltteile und Jahrhunderte hin – auch, wie er wandelt und fortwandelt, ists nicht größere *Tugend* oder *Glückseligkeit des Einzelnen*, worauf er strebet, die Menschheit bleibt immer nur Menschheit – und doch wir ein *Plan des Fortstrebens* sichtbar – mein großes Thema! (FHA 4, 40)

Herder pitches a Protean transforming and striving forth (*fortwandeln*) of humanity against both the skeptics and the Enlightenment universalists. He explicitly positions himself between these two positions, which could for example be identified with the works of Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet and Voltaire.¹³⁰ Bossuet's universal history represented the naïve faith in the linear and providential progress of a universal morality. Voltaire attempted to present a universal history of human virtues and vices on the basis of the progression of a universal and natural human

¹²⁹ I quote the New Revised Standard Version. In the Authorized Version it says "now we see through a glass, darkly" (cf. Herder 2002, 358). Both a modern German version and the Luther Bible translate "ἐσόπτρου" as "Spiegel" (see Herz 1996, 16).

¹³⁰ Beiser is right that Herder's critique was leveled at work of many of his contemporaries, not just two specific authors (Beiser 2011, 133). But it is nonetheless relevant to concretely identify the two *groups* of opponents at which Herder directed his criticisms.

rationality – but announced chaos and catastrophe when diving into the actual events of history (Kondylis [1981] 2002, 444-451). Voltaire’s observation of human passion and folly lead to skepticism about all morality and philosophy, Herder contends (FHA 4, 41, 104). For Herder, the positions of Bossuet and Voltaire are two sides of the same coin: the search for a straight line of progress in history leads to catastrophe theory.¹³¹ The projection of ideals onto history that are too general and abstract necessarily leads to disillusionment about its meaning. This is why Herder’s anti-skepticism is not, as Sikka suggests, less predominant than his anti-ethnocentrism. He considers the skeptical *philosophes* in Paris and the optimistic German and Swiss *Aufklärer* united by sharing the same mistaken assumptions. I will now elucidate why Herder thinks they are wrong in the way they approach both Proteus and the mirroring quality of creation, before I present Herder’s alternative approach.

Herder accuses his contemporaries of having presented their own form of humanity as a new divinity, allegedly capable of taking on any shape at will. Herder considers this blasphemous, and he portrays his contemporaries as fraudulent alchemists who manipulate human nature according to their own self-indulgent ideals (83-84). He formulates the danger residing in this perverse misinterpretation of the human condition in terms familiar from Pico: “Gemeiniglich ist der Philosoph alsdenn am meisten *Tier*, wenn er am zuverlässigsten *Gott* sein wollte” (FHA 4, 81). The philosophers Herder has in mind attempt to present a *particular* shape of Proteus as if it were a *general* form, which would be exactly contrary to Proteus’ nature. What is more, the philosopher’s ideal of a completely general and pure humanity or reason serves other interests, which Herder ironically describes as another divinity, namely *pecunia* personified: “Wie wissen wir, den einzigen Gott aller Götter, *Mammon*, als einen zweiten Proteus zu *erhaschen*! und wie zu *verwandeln*! und wie alles von ihm zu *erzwingen*, was wir nur wollen!” (FHA 4, 71-72). Those who chase this Proteus do not respect his or their integrity. Rather, they torture and plunder under the false assumption that they hear Proteus divine, and present *themselves* as the “*Spiegel der Allvergangenheit*, und *Repräsentant des Zwecks der Komposition in allen Szenen*! – das altkluge Kind lästert” (84).

Herder’s alternative Protean conception of humanity aligns mutability with finitude, and with the destiny which human beings help fulfill as a tiny element of historical development. The way Herder relies on Proteus’ identity here is consistent with his earlier works in insisting

¹³¹ This “double polemic” has been identified before by Kondylis and Beiser (Kondylis [1981] 2002, 635; Beiser 1992, 208). This is in line with Herder’s general polemic against metaphysicians and skeptics, and supported by the text’s motto, taken from Epictetus: “It is not things that disquiet human beings but dogmas concerning things” (FHA 4, 9).

that “wahrscheinlich immer *Mensch Mensch* bleibe, *nach der Analogie aller Dinge* nichts als *Mensch!*”, and that “von innen [...] unter der vielfach veränderten Schlaube immer noch derselbe *Kern von Wesen* und *Glückfähigkeit* aufbewahrt sein könne” (81-82). Herder describes this core as “*ein unsichtbarer Keim der Glücks- und Tugendempänglichkeit* [...] der *verschiedlich* ausgebildet, zwar in verschiedenen Formen erscheine, aber innerlich nur *ein Maß* und *Mischung von Kräften*” (81-82). In other words, the human being’s receptivity retains an inward measure, based on a nucleus of an essential nature. Furthermore, this nucleus or seed is not distributed through time and space randomly or according to the human’s reason or will. Rather, this distribution depends on God’s providence (82).

The religious acceptance of human finitude – and the trust in the way God has tied all of history together – provides a distinct perspective on the reconciliation of human diversity and unity. In contrast to the *Treatise*’s “*progressives Eins aller Zustände des Lebens*”, achieved through human *reflection*, Herder’s 1774 picture of world history introduces a faith in fate that is crucial especially in those instances where the turns of history appear arbitrary and even cruel (FHA 1, 800). The chain which links together the many phases of Proteus’ *Bildung* depends on a divine instance in which finite creatures should put their trust and hope.¹³² However, this perspective is not systematically at odds with the strategies lined out in the previous subsections. It is still a means to accept situatedness, to bypass the Pyrrhonist argumentative modes by pluralizing value-terms, and to grasp the intelligible order of this plurality as well as of every single of its individual elements. According to this larger vision, Herder allows the historian to assert or recognize the value of each of Proteus’ individual shapes, as well as the contribution that these forms make to one large world-historical development.

The identity which underlies Proteus’ changes is the concept of ‘humanity’, and the providential development of its *Bildung* is its telos. Essential to this way of conceiving a unity in diversity is the notion of world history in its totality. Next to the transcendence of the divine perspective, this totality receives a normative function which is immanent in history, yet transcends any particular historical inquiry. This totality is an infinite task and an object of faith. It is also Herder’s way of holding on to the value of any and all particular. Furthermore, the analogies and harmonies that we are able to recognize from our finite perspective (as discussed above); the attempts to explain historical change, and to recognize different forms of the good as good all do help to intimate world history in its totality. At least it is Herder’s attempt to

¹³² The argument from finitude was not absent from the earlier texts. In *Fragmente*, for example, Herder distinguished between human language and divine thought, and concluded from their difference that language was a Proteus on earth (FHA 1, 557-559).

reveal the meaning of the *Bildung* of humankind: “*Gang Gottes über die Nationen! Geist der Gesetze, Zeiten, Sitten und Künste, wie sich einander gefolgt! zubereitet! entwickelt und vertrieben!*” Hätten wir doch einen solchen *Spiegel des Menschengeschlechts* in aller Treue, Fülle, und Gefühl der *Offenbarung Gottes*” (FHA 4, 88). Herder’s 1774 philosophy of history thus attempts to synthesize the particulars of world history into one large *mirror*. It should show how the human species’ course through history everywhere reflects the human spirit in different shapes. It is now an issue of religious intimation whether it is possible to find the right viewpoint for attaining such a reflection of humanity. Still, already in 1766, Herder had demanded such a mirror for the purpose of recognizing the same humanity beneath diverse shapes. In 1774 as in 1766 Proteus appears as a symbol of the synthesis of radical difference and unity and as an alternative both to forms of skepticism and of abstract universalism. Moreover, the structural relation between Proteus’ shape-changing and his power of divination is remarkably similar the earlier accounts, and allows for harmony through analogy in much the same way as exhibited in *Ursprung der Sprache*:

Groß muß das Ganze sein, wo in jeder Einzelheit schon so *ein Ganzes* erscheint!
in jeder Einzelheit aber nur auch immer so ein *unbestimmtes Eins*, allein aufs
Ganze, sich offenbaret! Wo *kleine* Verbindungen schon großen *Sinn* geben, und
doch Jahrhunderte nur *Sylben*, Nationen nur *Buchstaben*, und vielleicht *Inter-*
punktionen sind, die an sich nichts, zum leichtern Sinne des Ganzen, aber *so viel*
bedeuten! (105-106)

4.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have distinguished three strategies which refer to the figure of Proteus and are adopted by Herder to argue for a unity in diversity. Contrary to what is often suggested in Herder scholarship, the three strategies have in common that Proteus does not merely signify instability, untruthfulness, chaos or the violation of the order of things. Quite the opposite: in Herder’s philosophy of history, Protean mutability is an essential aspect of the natural-historical *order*. What is more, in this dynamic order, many of the positive connotations traditionally attached to Proteus are expressed. Thus the Homeric connotation of a capacity to *divine* the true nature of things to the knower, who manages to bind Proteus, is explicit in Herder’s use of the metaphor. And the humanist conception of an essential mutability of human nature and the responsibility to cultivate (*bilden*) humanity in the right way are also inherent in Herder’s Protean conception of humanity. Furthermore, the Baconian activity performed by the knower

who chases Proteus through all different shapes and the intimate connection between Proteus and Pan (nature, All) both play crucial roles in Herder's approach to world history as a harmonious totality. This totality, which can only be found in all of Proteus' different shapes, was expressed already in the late-ancient *Orphic Hymns* to which Hamann had referred in his *Wolken*: "He has all at his disposal,/ transformed far beyond/ all other immortals/ [...] for Physis was the first to place everything in Proteus" (Athanassakis and Wolkow 2013, 23).

However, the three discussed strategies are also distinct: the providential model of *Auch eine Philosophie* (strategy three) focuses more on the finitude of individual human beings than *Ursprung der Sprache* (strategy one) in order to arrive at a conception of the history of humanity as interconnected in a great chain of *Bildung*. And the causal-genetic pursuit of Proteus' different shapes (strategy two) tends to block skepticism in a manner distinct from the picture of harmonious unity suggested in both strategies one and three. The pursuit of Proteus' changes strives toward either an absolute origin or core, or to multiple *individual* fields or forms, rather than towards analogical connections. Nonetheless, I maintain that both their procedure (recognizing analogies) as well as their result (a world-historical *Kette der Bildung*) unite strategies one and three. Moreover, both results of causal-genetic explanation (individualities as well as the Origin/One) would themselves again be candidates for the procedure of forming connections on the basis of recognized analogies.

Finally, I have argued that all three strategies are part of the same effort of Herder to deny that any skeptical conclusions can be drawn from the phenomena of natural and historical diversity. Herder's (ontological and theological) trust in the ultimate unity of all of Proteus' forms facilitates the engagement of their diversity. It must hence be concluded that Proteus appears as an anti-skeptical device in Herder's texts rather than as an emblem of mere flux and difference. Contrary to the Pyrrhonist mode of taking *difference* as signaling the need to suspend judgment, Herder takes the diversity of Proteus' shapes as an *invitation* to collect, order and evaluate them all. The ontological trust underlying Herder's approach to diversity may not satisfy the modern reader who expects a more technical and charitable engagement with skeptical challenges. Yet it does make Proteus a figure that represents in Herder's writings an anti-skeptical as much as an anti-ethnocentric program: it proves human diversity to be constitutive to any general anthropology and explains why universalizing our own standpoint is a non-starter in the field of human history.

This brings me to the conclusion that a coherent philosophy of history can be found scattered throughout the early works of Herder. That is to say: to rely on analogies in the search

of differences and larger harmonies; to trace the causes of change in order to improve the understanding of diversity; to hold on to broad humanity with a stable core and dynamic notions of truth, goodness, beauty; and to combine these with a religious intimation of the providential development of humanity are efforts that can be made into a consistent philosophy of history. In fact, Herder's treatment of happiness and virtue in *Auch eine Philosophie* hints at ways of reconciling the claims that we only have access to Proteus' particular shapes, and that we nonetheless should hold on to a notion of the good that is stable and yet "*verteilt in tausend Gestalten*" (FHA 4, 40). I will interpret Herder's philosophy of history in more detail in Chapters Six and Seven, after having taken into consideration how his biblical hermeneutics informs his conceptions of (the single origin of) history and of humanity.

In this chapter, I hope to have already shown that Herder's repeated invocation of the mythological figure of Proteus expresses the continuous effort of thinking through the implications of historical change. My analysis has displayed that in order to achieve this, and to make historical diversity potent for a positive anthropology, Herder relies on myth, metaphysics, and theology. His use of metaphors like the one discussed here shows the influence of mythological thinking on systematic issues even in those texts, like *Viertes Wäldchen* and *Von der Veränderung*, which in other respects come closest to a "thoroughgoing naturalism" on Herder's part (Zammito 2016, 21). Hence it is essential that an interpretation of Herder's anthropology does not present seemingly incommensurable fields in "a blunt either / or" manner, but indeed attempts to "think them *together*" (21-22). Attending to the context of these metaphors, and working out the different conceptual possibilities they open, helps to explain how Herder integrated the results of thoroughgoing historical and natural science into a theology of humanity.

5. Herder's biblical hermeneutics and the Enlightenment Bible

As the previous chapter outlined, Herder's strategies for reconciling the One and the Many underwent some changes in his Bückeburg years (from 1772). While the Protean identity underneath humanity's shape-shifting remained central to his anthropology, he reinterpreted this identity in a more affirmative religious manner. The providential character of history in its totality started to play a more substantive role in Herder's conceptualization of historical change. Likewise, Herder conceived of a more affirmative origin of all of history and nature in order to make sense of historical change. The book of Genesis came to stand at the center of Herder's attention.

Genesis 1-2.3 was traditionally held to document the origin of the universe and formed the central body of material for the earliest phases of Christian universal history.¹³³ But the book of Genesis, and the historical period that produced it, had, around 1750, lost much of their cultural and religious authority, both within Protestant theology and in the European Enlightenment discourses about universal history and human civilization. Herder frequently identified "Voltaire and those who are of his opinion" as responsible for the culturally arrogant dismissal of the culture of the "patriarchs", "Orientals", and "Hebrews" (FHA 1, 279-280; FHA 2, 456; FHA 4, 15). Voltaire's 1765 *La philosophie de l'histoire* was the main target of Herder's argument in *Ursprung der Sprache* against skeptics regarding monogeneticism (see 4.3.1.). Contrary to Genesis 1, Voltaire posited that humanity was divided in different races, a claim that Herder would contradict on the first page of *Auch eine Philosophie* (FHA 4, 11; Bouton 2006, 80). Likewise, the notion of a "*Despotismus des Orients*", pictured by Voltaire and Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger, would be at the center of Herder's 1774 polemics against contemporary philosophy of history (FHA 4, 15).¹³⁴

On the one hand, Herder used the case of 'Oriental despotism' for pointing out the ethnocentric assumptions (regarding notions of beauty, poetry, civilization, reason and orthodox religion) which guided many of his contemporaries' approaches to history (see Chapter Three). Herder uncovered the historical development of his contemporaries' own psychological modes of thought as well as the hermeneutic resources of historical change and the continuities between human forms. On the other hand, Herder attached increasingly greater value to finding out the origins of human inventions and to fully tracing back the chains of their

¹³³ See Zedelmaier (2003) for an overview of how various eighteenth-century sciences aimed to enhance, or formulate alternatives for, the Christian account of the beginning of history.

¹³⁴ On Voltaire's Bible criticism, see Weidner (2011, 140-152) and Brumfitt in his introduction to the Oxford edition of *La philosophie de l'histoire* (2004, 50-53, 58-64).

development; and his doubts about the viability of polygeneticism became increasingly principled, as he observed continuity and cultural transfer also between historical periods and peoples.¹³⁵ The Orient appeared as the location of the single origin of historical development; the book of Genesis provided its primeval history.

In the following chapters, I will build on my analyses of Herder's historical method in order to assess the significance of his account of the single origin of human culture. Particularly, I will evaluate its implications for his overall philosophy of history and its relation to different forms of relativism. According to Herder, the absolute origin of history infuses all of human history with religious significance. Thus, in Herder's thought, the distinction between the necessary truths of reason and the contingent truths of experience and history becomes less self-evident. In interpreting his biblical hermeneutics, my general aim will be to analyze how Herder explains, first, how the Old Testament still provides the paradigm exemplar of a primordial revelation which permeates all of creation, and second, how the historian may inquire into all of the particulars of history expecting to find traces of this revelation (without worrying about hypothetical skeptical implications of their historical character).

In this chapter, I will start by tracing the development of Herder's position on the human, historical, and revelatory character of the Old Testament. Contrary to some earlier commentators,¹³⁶ I will generally assume that, despite some clear shifts in the nature and intensity of Herder's religiosity in this period, his 1768-1774 writings on the Old Testament can be interpreted as forming a continuity grouped around Herder's conceptions of revelation, sensuousness and history.¹³⁷ This continuity implies, first, that also Herder's early biblical hermeneutics had apologetic motivations.¹³⁸ Second, it implies that, also during the 1770s, Herder kept arguing against his opponents – even very historically-oriented authors like Johann David Michaelis – by relying on the group of ideas I referred to above and discussed in the previous chapters. Because of this continuity, my discussion and comparison of texts from both

¹³⁵ Häfner (1994, 87-90) convincingly traces Herder's movement towards monogeneticism in the 1760s.

¹³⁶ Particularly Herder's biographers Rudolf Haym and Robert Clark stress the significance of a 'Bückeburg turn' in Herder's thought. E.g. Forster (2010, 45-50) relies on this biographical evidence in arguing that Herder, on his "considered position", "champions a strict secularism" in his biblical hermeneutics that is even "more consistent and radical" than Ernesti, Michaelis and Semler (47). For a more philological examination of different drafts Herder produced in this period, see Otto (1989).

¹³⁷ I share this assumption with Regine Otto, Gerhard vom Hofe, Christoph Bultmann and Thomas Zippert. While Weidner (2005) rejects vom Hofe's taking Herder's Bückeburg work to be fundamental to his hermeneutics, Weidner's (complicated) argument for the thesis that "the fundamental nature of his reading (of the Bible) does not change" (174-175) seems to cohere with my hypothesis.

¹³⁸ Contra some interpreters of texts like *Versuch einer Geschichte* and *Über die ersten Urkunden des Menschlichen Geschlechts. Einige Anmerkungen*, e.g. Gjesdal (2017, 59-65, 186-187) and Beiser (2011, 110-113).

the 1760s and the 1770s aims at arriving at a single (more or less) coherent interpretation of Herder's biblical hermeneutics and of its consequences for the philosophy of history.

Regarding the issue of whether Herder, in the different periods of his career, was more an anthropologist and historian or more a theologian, I agree with Daniel Weidner that “[b]oth interpretations are insufficient, as they tend to force Herder into either theological or profane categories that are, for him, not mutually exclusive” (2005, 175; cf. Schmidt 2017, 198-201; Bellmann 2016, 44; Cordemann 2010, 2; Kumlehn 2008, 20-21; FHA 9/1, 861). That is to say, the complexity of this problem is not fully captured by the idea that, while Herder reads the Bible as a human book, he does sacralize literature in general.¹³⁹ What is needed is an interpretation of his own notions of the human, natural, historical, and revelatory that takes into account the extent in which Herder conceives these categories in biblical terms. The assumption that these categories perfectly correspond to ours is what gives rise to the dichotomy in question. Following his own hermeneutic method, Herder heavily relies on biblical exegesis in spelling out his conceptions of both humanity and divinity. I will explain how he consequently conceives of the human and the divine as hardly separable.¹⁴⁰ I think this should be the starting point for any answer to the question, central to the controversy over Herder's naturalism and his religiosity, “what the very notion of religion *meant* for Herder” (Zammito 2016, 21).¹⁴¹

I think Wulf Koepke reflects this understanding of the problem in his advice from 1982 “to proceed from [Herder's] theology – if the term can be used – to his other concerns, instead of the other direction” (153). In a sense, I will proceed from Herder's theology in order to analyze his anthropology and philosophy of history, and thus take a different point of departure compared to various strands in recent Herder scholarship that have focused on his empiricism, naturalism and anthropology. But Koepke's hesitation regarding the term ‘theology’ indicates that, ultimately, the later demarcation of scientific disciplines and of the sacred and profane fail to do justice to Herder's writings on the Bible as well as on religion and history in general. Hence, I must clarify the senses in which Herder's position was theological and anti-theological with respect to different aspects of his biblical hermeneutics.

¹³⁹ As, e.g., Gjesdal does in a footnote (2017, 182) to her otherwise considerably secular interpretation of Herder's hermeneutics.

¹⁴⁰ The human origin of language is probably the ultimate example where, even in Herder's most secularizing text, the human condition is still conceived in theological terms: Herder refers both the capacity for reflection and the first moments in which humans started using it to God's benevolence (FHA 1, 771).

¹⁴¹ Of course, various theological interpreters of Herder have already given answers in this direction. Furthermore, on some of the central ideas of Herder's philosophy of religion, there exists quite some consensus between accounts by Buntfuß (2005), Bultmann (1999), Bunge (1995), vom Hofe (1989), Koepke (1982), Shichiji (1989), Büchsel (1989).

In the following sections, I first analyze Herder's particular attempts to restore the authority of the Bible in the face of what he perceives as his time's failing apologetic strategies against deists, free-thinkers and skeptics. I will start by situating his biblical studies in the broad field of Enlightenment attempts by theologians, historians and philosophers to reintegrate Scripture in newly developed disciplines and programs. Second, I will highlight the historical and poetic focus of Herder's 1768/9 biblical hermeneutics and compare it to his work on anthropology and folk poetry. Subsequently, I will assess the apologetic arguments he formulated in this period, primarily in *Über die ersten Urkunden des Menschlichen Geschlechts. Einige Anmerkungen* (in section three), and the conception of revelation on which Herder relies (section four). I will argue that Herder's 1769 apologetic strategy of saving the Old Testament by relying on the notion of a divine instruction is rather ad-hoc, and not particularly convincing or significant in its own right. However, the way Herder connects his anthropology with a historicized notion of revelation does lead the way to a universalistic philosophy of religion that is, nonetheless, very open to religious diversity. In its time, this philosophy of religion was both unorthodox and influential. Furthermore, I will interpret Herder's biblical hermeneutics and theology as forming the foundation for his 1774 philosophy of history. As a result, Herder's notion of revelation will dictate how his contribution to historicism should be evaluated.

5.1. Historical and aesthetic Bible interpretation in the Enlightenment

In eighteenth-century Germany, pietistic movements of personal faith and biblical study, deists and rationalists, as well as historical Pyrrhonists (and perhaps even a few real spinozists and atheists) all challenged the strong ties between theological doctrine on the one hand, and the study of the Bible on the other. According to all of them, it could no longer be the main manner of accounting for the religious authority of the Bible to point at how Scripture corresponded with established principles of systematic theology such as the trinity or the immortality of the soul. This form of arguing from theological dogma became more and more suspect. As Jonathan Sheehan writes in his monograph *The Enlightenment Bible*, however, the cutting off of the ties between theological truth and biblical authority in Germany did not turn the Bible into the outdated collection of fairy-tales that some skeptics and deists may have considered it to be. To the contrary: Sheehan distinguishes between four different (and overlapping) "Enlightenment Bibles" – philological, pedagogical, poetical and historical projects – all aiming to reinvest the Bible with significance and authority (2005, 91). These projects reflected different religious

and cultural ideals and gave different interpretations of the texts, but all aimed to provide better (more authentic or more pragmatic) translations and thus a fresh access to Scripture.

As Sheehan formulates it, these enlightenment movements “detheologized” the Bible, and would – from 1800 onwards – create space for the “cultural Bible”, the document perceived by modern Europeans as the cornerstone of their culture. However, all were aimed at rediscovering an authoritative Bible text, which should serve as the foundation of Protestant religious life. Hence the process of separating theological doctrine and biblical study cannot simply be subsumed under a linear narrative of secularization (Weidner 2011, 14-22; Weidner 2005; Sheehan 2005, xi-xiv; Buntfuß 2004, 1-8).¹⁴² In this section I give a brief overview of these movements, paying special attention to the two that had most in common with Herder’s biblical hermeneutics. Subsequently, I explain how the early Herder’s specific project departed from these trends and instead offered an even stronger (if unorthodox) apologetic argument for the authority of the Old Testament.

The *philological* Bible aimed to provide the pietistic reader with the authentic message through textual criticism, comparison of paraphrases and interpretations, and through the practice of pious translation. While this Bible was directed at the ultimate (and single) Word of God, in practice, commentaries and translations were increasingly offered as “variations” and “alternatives” that should help the reader, but lacked the old dogmatic authority (Sheehan 2005, 111). The faithful reader thus gained in autonomy vis-à-vis theological doctrine in interpreting God’s Word (63-64, 90; cf. Carlsson 2012).

The *pedagogical* Bible mainly focused on the moral excellence of the figure of Christ in order to show that the New Testament still presented enlightened Germany with a valid example of (universal) Christian morality. In order to achieve this, however, projects of paraphrasing and translating had to produce a Bible that fully conformed to the discourses of eighteenth-century moralizing. That is, the text had to be freed from miracles and theological doctrine (including even Christ’s divinity) and rewritten in ‘reasonable’ German (Sheehan 2005, 140-141). Although within Frederick the Great’s Prussia, the people behind this project were able to publish, heresy accusations and other threats were never far away (138, 141-143). Lessing’s 1774-1778 publishing of fragments of the late Hermann Samuel Reimarus’ *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes* became the most famous example of

¹⁴² See James Sheehan (1991, 174ff.) for a historical overview of how both German pietists and rationalists wanted to improve Christianity rather than fight it.

the risk involved in valuing pedagogy over orthodoxy (see Bollacher 2016; Nisbet 2013, 537ff.; Thielicke 2011).

5.1.1. *The poetic Bible*

The pietists and the rationalist Enlightenment pedagogues disagreed about almost everything, except for the obsolescence of the Old Testament as an authoritative source for their Bible projects. On the basis of textual criticism, the traditional theological connection between the two Testaments – i.e., the idea that the Old Testament contained prophecies about Jesus – was increasingly discredited. The Hebrew Bible appeared more and more archaic and isolated from the (moral-spiritual and cultural-political) agenda of eighteenth-century Christian religion (Sheehan 2005, 151). At the same time, this archaism sparked the imagination of those German literati who aimed to counter the French classicism of their day. For the authors who applied the themes of the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* to their own context, Hebrew poetry was an attractive alternative to the famous exemplars of classical art.¹⁴³ First, because it was not part of the canon of standards for timeless beauty, Hebrew poetry could function as a serious alternative to the very logic of such universalism. Its historical difference suggested that the text of the Old Testament could only be correctly interpreted and translated if approached in its own historical context. Second, and in contrast to this relativizing tendency, the ‘primitive’ character of this poetry came to suit the sentimentalist currents in British and German literary criticism *and* piety. Both were centered on the significance of human sentiments for aesthetics and religion – and thus found a sentimentalist core of human culture in the passionate verse of the Hebrew Bible.

Thus, at the start of the eighteenth century, poetry and religion were brought into increasing proximity, and Moses came to be perceived as a worthy alternative to Homer. Accordingly, the importance of religion to (the origination of) poetry heavily increased. Combined with the assumption that the Pentateuch was humanity’s first book, Moses became known as the author of a primordial religious poetry (Prickett 1986, 38-41). Interpreting the Hebrew Bible as the poetry of an original humanity became a strategy for overcoming archaism and preserving an intimate relationship to the text based on universally available human sentiments (Sheehan 2005, 152).

¹⁴³ Hamann pointedly expressed this attitude in asking: “Warum bleibt man bey den durchlöchernten Brunnen der Griechen stehen, und verläßt die Lebendigsten Qvellen [sic] des Alterthums?” (N 2, 209).

The main inspiration for the German movement of poeticizing the Old Testament came from England. Robert Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (given between 1741 and 1750 and attended by Michaelis, published in 1753) were perceived as revolutionary in analyzing (parts of) biblical text on the premise that they were pieces of the earliest human poetry.¹⁴⁴ Lowth analyzed the poetic structure of, e.g., the Psalms as consisting of various parallelisms ("synonymous", "antithetic" and "synthetic") and he defended their significance for appreciating the Bible's literary quality as well as for commentary and translation (Norton 1993, 68-73). Parallelism, for Lowth, was not just a poetic device deviating from European verse; it provided basic patterns for memorizing in song the most significant events and emotions of communal life (Prickett 1986, 109-110). Lowth suggested that parallelism was both natural and sublime in providing a tool for memorizing, which did not regiment very much the possibilities for variation (109-110). The structure of parallelism, moreover, could be preserved in literal translations, without imposing on the Hebrew text any modern verse forms or other literary standards.

Crucially, Lowth argued that the parallelism of biblical poetry arose as an affective response to recognizing God in creation (Bultmann 1999, 76, 81). Lowth concluded that "if the actual origin of Poetry be inquired after, it must of necessity be referred to Religion; and since it appears to be an art derived from nature alone, peculiar to no age or nation, and only at an advanced period of society conformed to rule and method, it must be wholly attributed to the more violent affections of the heart" (Lowth [1787] 1995, 37). The idea of "an art derived from nature alone", on which Lowth relies here, is as essential as it is ambiguous. Lowth claims that poetry is the universally shared medium of religion because it is directly based on the state of nature. Accordingly, Lowth interprets the "more violent affections of the heart" as a stable basis of human nature, upon which societies build in instituting their diverging customs and rules.¹⁴⁵

Lowth's lectures were reviewed by Mendelssohn in 1757, published in German with annotations by Michaelis in 1758 and went through multiple editions before 1800 (Sheehan 2005, 150). In his 1787 English translation of Lowth's book (which was originally in Latin), Georg Gregory also included and responded to Michaelis' notes. This resulted in an interesting

¹⁴⁴ Lowth was an Oxford professor of poetry before he became the Bishop of Oxford and later of London. He attempted to reconcile his theory with an orthodox understanding of revelation, but was also highly esteemed by (and friends with) Hume (see Bultmann 1999, 77; Norton 1993, 59-73).

¹⁴⁵ Lowth thus states regarding religion, "However ages and nations may have differed in their religious sentiments and opinions, in this at least we find them all agreed, that the mysteries of their devotion were celebrated in verse" (Lowth [1787] 1995, 38). This 'uniformitarianism' with respect to the human heart was widely spread in the eighteenth century. Even skeptical figures like Hume in "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757, 212: "common sentiments") and Voltaire ([1756] 2004: "Man in general has always been what he is now") expressed it.

dialogue between author and annotators: Michaelis warned the reader about Lowth's excessive classicism, which allegedly led Lowth to being too critical about Hebrew poetry and overseeing its Egyptian sources. Subsequently, the translators cautioned the reader about the "enthusiasm of our Annotator" for Egypt, which brought him to equate too readily biblical literature with other national traditions.¹⁴⁶

In the German reception of Lowth's work, Sheehan distinguishes between different moments. Lowth's ideas were influential, but they were applied with an increased awareness of the difficulties of portraying Hebrew poetry as the universal medium of religion. First, the scholar, preacher and poet Johann Andreas Cramer claimed that the origin of all poetry was enthusiasm and passion, and that religion, in turn, was passionate poetry (Sheehan 2005, 157). Cramer argued that the Hebrew Bible's passion was especially sublime and universally human. By consequence, he claimed that eighteenth-century Germans could properly understand this poetic text as long as the translator produced a literal translation of the Hebrew and the reader managed to sympathetically connect to the text (158).

Second, Herder argued against Cramer by stating that Hebrew passion did not fit the German ear (160; see the first collection of *Fragmente*, FHA 1, 197). Herder proclaimed that the historical distance and the differences in aesthetic conventions needed to be fully acknowledged before poetic adaptations and translations could bridge this distance. He generally relied on the *Lebensalter* metaphor in interpreting the differences between biblical times and modern German culture. On the one hand, Herder made Hebrew poetry look foreign and singular by interpreting it as the product of a childhood of humanity to which modern Germans could never return. On the other hand, relying on this metaphor, he connected Hebrews and modern Germans in a continuous historical development of a single human species. By consequence, sympathizing with the child-like feelings of the Orientals became feasible as a tool for generating a historically-sensitive response to the text, and thus also for historical scholarship (Sheehan 2005, 164; see Chapter Three).¹⁴⁷ Sympathy, however, also led to recognizing the individuality of feelings. For example, the intensity of Hiob's suffering allowed modern readers to sympathize, but also to recognize that they would never suffer just

¹⁴⁶ These eighteenth-century European debates on the (forgotten) influence of Egyptian culture, and on the status of the Jewish Thora in Christian Europe, also carried huge ideological significance. For general accounts of this issue, see Assmann (1997), and Sheehan (2005, esp. 151-181).

¹⁴⁷ Of course the idea of *Lebensalter* of humanity betrays that some unhistorical and Eurocentric assumptions guided Herder's arguing for the need for historical context-sensitivity. For nuanced overviews of eighteenth-century attitudes towards the "savage", "primitive" and "barbarian", see Osterhammel (1998, ch. 9); and Muthu (2003, ch. 2) on Lahontan, Rousseau and Diderot.

like him – especially not due to what these authors thought of as the Germans’ own rationalistic coldness (166-167). Sympathy and poetry seemed to reinstate historical distance as much as they bridged it.

Third, Herder’s very first observation in answering the question whether eighteenth-century Germans could *imitate* Oriental poetry (in the second collection of Fragments) directly spoke to the thesis of Lowth that I cited above: “Die *schöne Natur* des Orients ist nicht völlig die unsrige” (FHA 1, 277). To this observation Herder added similar remarks about the historical, cultural, religious, linguistic and psychological-aesthetic conditions that Oriental poetry built on and addressed (277-292). He concluded that the Germans needed to first fully understand how these conditions diverged from their own. Only then could they possibly imitate or even translate Oriental poetry (292). Only by analogically reproducing the Oriental way of relating to their natural-cultural environment, i.e., by building on and addressing their own circumstances in a similar manner, could eighteenth-century Germans emulate Oriental poetry (Irmscher 2009, 219-225). Sheehan describes this as a means of attempting to dissolve the paradox of sympathy, by affirming the differences between “national literatures” and by connecting good religion to national authenticity.¹⁴⁸ As a paradigm example of national literature, Hebrew poetry became a particular instance of a universal human religion. Like ‘beauty’ and ‘the good’, ‘religion’ thus appears as a Protean universal, too. While the idea of a universal Christendom had collapsed, particular expressions of religion became resources that could be used for self-understanding, adaptation, as well as for recognizing the One in the Many. A final step in this narrative about the rise of the nineteenth-century’s “cultural Bible” asserts that Germans gave up the ideal of a perfect translation of Hebrew poetry, and instead recognized Luther’s Bible as the particular German reflection of a universal revelation (Sheehan 2005, 175-176).

5.1.2. *The historical Bible*

In his commentary to Lowth’s lectures on sacred Hebrew poetry, Michaelis raised an important question: While Lowth claimed that poetry was originally religious, he deferred to orthodoxy in considering both poetry and the Bible to be the products of direct revelation and (hence) as

¹⁴⁸ Sheehan describes the process of translation Herder has in mind here as one of analogical understanding: “[T]ranslations produced a moment of self-confrontation and self-definition. They were that ‘sphere of mirroring’ that Herder talked about in his Essay on the Origins of Language, a tool that allowed man to ‘mirror himself to himself.’ In short, translations converted the Delphic γνῶθι σεαυτόν, ‘know thyself,’ into Herder’s clumsier but perhaps more appropriate apothegm: ‘model yourself after them to become an emulator of yourself’” (2005, 171).

having been in perfect shape from the start. Michaelis retorted that instead, a pre-Mosaic tradition must be assumed that used poetry also for non-religious ends (Bultmann 1999, 81). Michaelis aimed to complement Lowth's analyses by providing the actual history leading up to the writing of the Hebrew Bible.

Michaelis' project of translating and annotating the Bible started publishing in 1769 and continued until 1790. Michaelis thought of philology as having to be backed up by the findings of various empirical sciences. Carsten Niebuhr's expedition to Arabia (1761-1767), commissioned by Michaelis, was meant to provide these. As Sheehan explains, this expedition was meant to open up the archive of biblical culture on which the Arabs were sitting. Also, it should uncover a sublime Hebrew civilization, which, Michaelis thought, stood in contrast to later Jews but formed the basis of the Western tradition (Sheehan 2005, 214-215). This 'archive' did not just consist of literary texts, but included history, geography, biology and anthropology. The Arabian Peninsula provided this history as it was stored in texts, buildings, languages and manners. It only required a careful reconstruction of the archive materials (210). In order to uncover this "familiar place", neither prejudices nor prophesying should block the sight of history as it was. Furthermore, Michaelis attempted to let it appear individual, different and to "let history speak for itself" (198-199). Nonetheless, as Sheehan interprets Michaelis' project, "this was a voyage inward, to the most familiar place in European consciousness, to the homeland of Christianity, Judaism, and everything European scholars called their own (197).¹⁴⁹ Through the discovery of this place, the Bible should become a "communal well of knowledge" for all religious systems (213).

The historical Bible was thus a way of saving the Bible after disconnecting it from a particular system. However, the historical Bible was also a text made alien to the eighteenth century. This alienation was done in order to find the true and authentic archive of religion. But it did not make it less difficult for the Enlightenment public to deal with Michaelis' quite bland translation, or with his lengthy scholarly annotations. For example, Michaelis started his book on *Mosaisches Recht* by stating that this topic did not deserve to remain so "fremde und Asiatisch" to the German public. But his recommendation for changing this was to approach it as "Gesetze eines sehr entfernten Landes" (1770b, 1). Sheehan depicts Michaelis' stance as follows: "On the one hand, Michaelis wanted to ensure that the Law not be alien to theologians

¹⁴⁹ For a general assessment of eighteenth-century European perspectives on Asia and of how they diverged from the nineteenth-century academic discourse that Edward Said dubbed "Orientalism", see Osterhammel (1998, 18-37, 51-63). For a criticism of uncritical applications of Said's paradigm to eighteenth-century germanophone discourses, see Arens (2004).

and jurists; on the other, he wanted to ensure that it be seen as entirely alien, distant from the present in time and space” (2005, 216). This was Michaelis’ paradox, of searching for an authentic historical Bible in order to let it speak more authoritatively, while making it strange to the eighteenth century along the way.

At this point in Sheehan’s depiction of the four Enlightenment Bibles, the absence of one figure in his narrative becomes especially conspicuous. Against Michaelis’ research program, Hamann went on *Kreuzzüge des Philologen* (1762) that were reviewed by Mendelssohn, Michaelis and many others. Hamann’s intervention influenced how a generation of writers known by the name of *Sturm und Drang* approached Michaelis’ studies and translations of the Bible (Jørgensen 1968, 190-191). Hamann polemicized against what he considered the detrimental effects of Michaelis’ historical-physical studies of the Bible (cf. Legaspi 2011, 160-164; Jørgensen 1984). Hamann shared the starting point of some of the authors behind the poetic Bible, namely the idea that the Hebrew Bible’s archaism needed to be overcome through nurturing the right poetic response. But in Hamann, two aspects were added: a vehement polemic against the rationalist, scholarly and critical movements in academies and learned journals that, according to Hamann, was annihilating the spiritual worth of the Bible (and of other aspects of eighteenth-century literature and learning); and an arsenal of mystic and Hermetic sources that should lead the way to a more fruitful stance towards the Bible, creation, and the human condition (Jørgensen 1968, 168-170).

In his *Aesthetica in Nuce*, Hamann argues that the word of Scripture can never be reduced to its significance in and for a specific time and place (N 2, 202). Distinguishing between spirit and letter, Hamann claims that Michaelis’ historical enquiries do not help at all to understand better the Bible’s spirit. Rather, his obsession with the particularities of historical conditions is as detrimental as the theological rationalist’s attempt to philosophically demonstrate religious truths.¹⁵⁰ Rather than taking position himself, however (see Jørgensen 1980, 222, 227), Hamann quotes a passage of Bacon to say the following: The rationalist theologian and/or philosopher assumes that Scripture contains timeless philosophical truths and ends up disappointed when all they find is the theology of a particular historical period. The naturalistic historian, on the other hand, assumes that Scripture is only human and historical, and thus fails to capture how Scripture’s theology, thanks to divine inspiration, speaks to all times and places, albeit in different ways. Referring to Michaelis’ obsession with “physisch[e]

¹⁵⁰ See Lumppp (1970, 67-77) for a detailed commentary on this ‘letter to Michaelis’ that Hamann inserted in *Aesthetica in Nuce*.

Dingen”, Hamann states, regarding the spirit of the Bible, “der Wind bläst, wo er will” (N 2, 203). Thus the precise historical details of the text do not guarantee understanding its spirit. Nor can the timeless validity of Scripture be proven a priori; such a rationalist apologetics ignores the limitations of human finitude regarding divine providence.

Rather, the ways of the spirit must be recognized as blowing through various traditions; and they must be recognized by noticing how those religious and mythological texts that were handed down speak to different periods in different ways. Hamann advocated an eclectic approach to history at large and to the history of religion specifically, expecting hints of revelation everywhere (Jørgensen 1984, 120; 1999). Recognizing connections between religious texts and mythological figures hints to God’s provenience in all of history. But until salvation, these hints may only be believed. Thus Hamann claims: “Kinder müssen wir werden, wenn wir den Geist der Wahrheit empfahen [sic] sollen, den die Welt nicht fassen kann, denn sie sieht ihn nicht, und (wenn sie ihn auch sehen sollte) kennt ihn nicht” (N 2, 202). According to Hamann, the senses should reestablish contact with revelation wherever fragments appear to religious subjects – in Scripture, nature, as well as in traditions of mythology and literature (N 2, 204, 207; Jørgensen 1984, 118). For Hamann, the unity of creation is reflected in various dialects and, ultimately, our understanding of this unity will be lacking until salvation (vom Hofe 1986, 74).

Hamann’s polemics against both Michaelis’ ‘rationalism’ and his ‘naturalism’ proved important for the 1774 Herder. Particularly fruitful was Hamann’s idea that in Bible interpretation, no ‘timeless’ doctrine should be imposed upon the text since the ‘wind’ of Scripture assumes different dialects in different times. But Hamann was only one among many other voices Herder took up and to which he responded. Herder’s Enlightenment Bible shares convictions especially with the poetic and historical lines of thought, but also with the philological and pedagogical.¹⁵¹ In Sheehan’s discussions, for example, Herder often appears as recognizing the limitations of all those strategies for reviving the Bible – ultimately leading to the nineteenth-century reinterpretation of the Bible as a work of culture (Sheehan 2005, 220). In addition, Herder contributes to the discourses on sympathy, national cultures, the problems of historical distance and centrally, the embrace of the Luther Bible as the ‘particular universal’ for German religiosity.

¹⁵¹ Herder shared many principles with the pedagogical project, but he scorned the lack of historical sensitivity with which pedagogues wanted to make use of the New Testament. Here, Herder’s pedagogy was much closer to the later Lessing’s, who claimed that God’s *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* goes through various unrepeatable phases (see Sheehan 2005, 134).

The 1770s Herder, however, had more apologetic intentions with his biblical hermeneutics. I hence cannot follow Sheehan when he states “It was only when Herder pushed beyond artistry and pure aesthetics into the politics of national literatures that the poetic Bible truly found the footing that would make it such an important part of the Enlightenment Bible more generally” (170). Sheehan is correct that Herder’s “poetic Bible” was nothing like the “modern aestheticizing of religion” that turned the Bible into (secular) literature.¹⁵² But rather than promoting national literatures and “the idea of the Old Testament as a *German* book” (172), the early Herder pushed for a religious and world-historical perspective allowing an approach to Hebrew poetry as God’s primordial revelation to humankind.

I cannot assess here the extent in which this work by Herder contributed to the Enlightenment Bible more generally, or compare it with the impact of his (later) reflections on the (Luther) Bible as German literature. However, I will highlight the connections to the eighteenth-century discourses on the Enlightenment Bible. In the following sections, I will discuss Herder’s works leading up to his 1774 *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts*, and indicate where he went further than other Enlightenment Bible projects in his attempts to bridge the historical distance between his time and the primordial revelation preserved in the text of the Old Testament. Centrally, in Herder’s interpretation of the first book of Genesis, a more substantively metaphysical vision of creation and of history replaced the principles of systematic theology in order to defend a revisionist interpretation of the biblical text. On the one hand, this vision supported an anti-theological Bible interpretation, which followed the Enlightenment efforts to reinvest the Bible with significance and authority by focusing on its thoroughly human, historical and poetic character. On the other hand, to the same extent that Herder thus “detheologized” the Old Testament, he also formulated an alternative vision which, even if it should not be interpreted as a dogmatic theology, definitely included a metaphysical view of God and the world, as well as a substantive philosophy of history.

In his 1768/9 attempts, Herder focused on the human character of the book of Genesis. He analyzed its text as consisting of different cosmogonic documents that were compiled by Moses but had existed long before him. According to Herder, primordial humanity had produced these documents by relying on its basic human sensuousness and on God’s instructions. Herder inferred from this account of the human character of Genesis that the meaning of biblical text may be accessed by all humans, that is, as long as they recognize the

¹⁵² See, e.g., Weidner (2011, 11-14); Auerochs (2005); and Bultmann (1999, 8-13) for consolidating refutations of this myth.

sensuous mode of production of these documents and their particular character as Oriental poetry. Apart from the texts and their historical, poetic, and revelatory character, then, Herder's main interest is anthropological and has to do with how humankind is united through common sensuousness.

In the next chapter I will discuss how Herder further developed his biblical hermeneutics in his 1774 *Älteste Urkunde*. In this text, he applies the epistemology of sensuousness to suggest that, when humans emulate the Oriental stance, a range of further truths about creation and history may be recognized. For example, Herder asserts that all of history (understood as an ongoing process of creation) is in a sense revelatory. He finds that a hieroglyph, contained in Genesis 1, guides the *Bildung* of humankind and is mirrored in the human form. Discussing these ideas, I will explicate the sense in which Herder was a theologian of creation (formulating a 'Schöpfungstheologie'), but also of humanity and history, even in his efforts to counter the might of dogmatic theology in interpreting the Bible. In this chapter, I analyze the 1768/9 works, and elucidate Herder's hermeneutic and anthropological approach to the Hebrew Bible (section two), the apologetic arguments on which he relies (section three) and the conception of revelation that is contained in these early works (section four).

5.2. Cosmogonic songs and Genesis 1

Already in the 1767 *Versuch einer Geschichte* and the 1768 *Über die Göttlichkeit und Gebrauch der Bibel*, Herder sought to explain that the Bible's poetic tone, use of images and stirring of affect was intended to meet the Oriental taste and manner of thought. Herder denied direct and/or supernatural inspiration (theopneustie), and posited that all biblical authors wrote according to their own manner of thought (FHA 9/1, 31, 33; cf. FHA 5, 28). Likewise, he affirmed many of the natural and historical explanations of mythological and religious thinking as arising out of fear and a need to make amends with unknown powers of nature (HWP 1, 45, 54-55). Herder insisted that only the anthropological conditions of different nations in their childhood could possibly attest to a revelation having taken place. Hence, attending to the human and thus the historical and poetic character of the Bible was the only way to approximate God's message. The skeptical question, of course, was whether there was anything in the historical material about biblical times and about particular traditions that could demarcate "myth" from "revelation" (or whether it was not rather the assumption that there had been a revelation that directed the interpreter towards identifying signs of it). I will analyze the answers

Herder proposed in the 1760s, before I proceed to his more elaborate position in *Älteste Urkunde*.

5.2.1. “*Wo gerät der hin, der aus dem sinnlichen Anschauen weicht?*”¹⁵³

Herder enthusiastically followed the historical and poetic impulses in biblical scholarship. His 1768/9 unpublished first draft of *Älteste Urkunde*, titled *Über die ersten Urkunden*,¹⁵⁴ associated the tracing of the “Geist urkundlicher Traditionen und Mythologischer Gesänge” with Charles de Montesquieu’s work on the “Geist der Gesetze”, and suggested this could enliven Isaak Iselin’s philosophy of history by leading these documents back into the “nackte, dürftige Menschliche Seele [...], die sich auf solchem Wege zu bilden anfing” (FHA 5, 16; cf. FHA 3, 68). These references betray the early Herder’s ambition of inserting his biblical studies into the heart of the Enlightenment science of man rather than into the university’s theological discipline.¹⁵⁵ For the early Herder, Michaelis and Lowth had shown how this could be done; Herder sent his publisher Hartknoch an ode dedicated to Michaelis in August 1769, praising his gaze in the “Abgrund’ des Ursprungs” (SWS 6, 120; Arnold 1989, 57). Herder himself planned a general “Geschichte der Wissenschaft”, that is, not of particular sciences or their practitioners, but of the “Ursprung und Fortgang” of “Wißenschaft überhaupt” (Irmscher 1963, 278). And while Herder had questioned where to locate this origin, he gradually returned to trusting the accuracy of ‘Moses’, although in an unusual manner (FHA 9/2, 18). He thus conceived of the interpretation of Genesis 1 – “Das Lied von der Schöpfung der Dinge”, as Herder described it in the same disposition – as the main source for this project’s first part.¹⁵⁶

On the first page of *Über die ersten Urkunden*, Herder also appears to affirm Hume’s thesis that according to natural history the first religions were polytheistic and based on fear and superstition (FHA 5, 11; cf. Arnold 1989, 58; Bultmann 1989, 65-66). Nonetheless, as in his epistemology, Herder interpreted Hume from a rather different, much more optimistic angle. While in *Über die ersten Urkunden* this results in a ‘constructive misinterpretation’ –

¹⁵³ This is a quote from FHA 5, 49.

¹⁵⁴ On the history of this manuscript rediscovered in 1980, see Arnold (1989); Bultmann (1989); FHA 5, 1328-1331.

¹⁵⁵ Except for the University of Göttingen, perhaps, where Gerlach Adolph von Münchhausen had appointed Michaelis in order to turn theology into an empirical science. Michaelis published his explicitly Montesquieuan analyses of *Mosaisches Recht* from 1770, two years after Herder had composed this (unpublished) text.

¹⁵⁶ See Häfner (1994, 87-91) for a good historical contextualization of Herder’s early plans for writing a “Werk über das Menschliche Geschlecht! den Menschlichen Geist! die Kultur der Erde! aller Räume! Zeiten! Völker! Kräfte! Mischungen! Gestalten!” (FHA 9/2, 92) and cf. Chapter 4.3.2. Also cf. Arnold (1989, 53-57) and Bultmann (1989, 76-80) on problems in dating and ordering the young Herder’s various overlapping projects and sketches.

monotheism remained primordial for Herder after all, and the first religious believers were far from superstitious – it later formed the basis for harsh criticism of Hume, and of Michaelis as well. Rather than following Hume in using anthropological analysis to ‘unmask’ superstitious and magical ways of thinking, Herder attempted to appreciate these within the possibilities of their own historical situations (12), and also more generally as extraordinary achievements of the human soul in its childhood (11).

Herder’s basic strategy was to rely on historical differences in order to appreciate human practices that Hume had criticized on the basis of what Herder considered were too narrowly eighteenth-century standards. But Herder also in turn explained these practices using his model of human psychological development. Relying on the *Lebensalter* metaphor, he argued these practices may still, in their child-like manner, be laudable. Herder had similarly argued in epistemology for the reliability of the sensuous certainties with which Hume’s *Enquiry* left the reader as its “skeptical solution”. In his writings on the Bible, Herder adds an extra dimension to this argument: humanity in its childhood was particularly capable of receiving and putting sensuous faith in God’s fatherly instruction (HWP 1, 51; FHA 5, 252; 9/1, 102). Thus, while Herder admires Hume’s naturalistic analyses of early mythology and religion, he never gives up the idea of a positive revelation taking place in the same historical period. The issue at stake is how to identify such revelation amidst superstitions while simultaneously approaching all traditions in their own right.

In the introduction of *Über die ersten Urkunden*, ancient nations’ theorizing about the origin of things takes center stage. Herder locates this theorizing in a period *after* the “erste rohe Religion, die fast in allen Sprachen von Furcht den Namen hat” (FHA 5, 12). Herder posits that all nations (Celts, Greeks, Indians, Germans) created their own poetic documents, “*Mythologische Nationalgesänge vom Ursprunge ihrer ältesten Merkwürdigkeiten*” (15-16). Their poetic nature implies for Herder, crucially, that they speak to the senses. But for him, they are also *documents* (*Urkunden*) in an emphatic sense: they documented those origins of things that were otherwise lost or difficult to make sense of. Moreover, in this deep history of uncertain origins, Herder locates what distinguishes the *Ursprungsgesang* Genesis 1 from other national traditions: unlike all the others, this Oriental tradition in fact preserved God’s instructions to the first generations of humankind (27). Hence, the song that was eventually preserved in Genesis truthfully documented the “Göttliche Überlieferung von der Schöpfung” (27), whereas in the case of the other documents, their accuracy remained uncertain (Bultmann 1999, 42).

According to Herder, the “heilige Sage” contained in Genesis 1 was “ursprünglich göttlich” even if, in many other respects, it was just like other oral traditions: a story that gave divine authority to a social institution (the seven-day week) by tracing it back to a primordial divine act; composed by humans in a poetic song according to their national style; and passed on with help of mnemonic tools like simple images, parallelisms and rhythm (FHA 5, 27, 33-35). Herder aims to convince fellow theologians that the divine character of Genesis 1-2.3 does not mean that the *interpreter* should treat it any differently than other human productions (29). Likewise, in his sermon *Über die Göttlichkeit*, it is precisely the venerability of historical interpretation that Herder seeks to transmit to his congregation: the preacher’s official duty of interpretation is so central to communal religious life because God has adapted His means of communication first of all to the ancient Hebrews (FHA 9/1, 30-32). While Herder thus advocates a method that was first introduced to the history of religion by the ‘historical Pyrrhonists’, he simultaneously insists that attending to the historical context of the Bible is the only way to approach the Word of God (on historical Pyrrhonism cf. Barth 2012, 39-42; Matytsin 2015). As I will explain below, Herder’s reasoning in favor of this position relies on the theological trope of the ‘accommodation’ or ‘condescension’ of God to humans and their (historically changing) modes of thinking (cf. FHA 5, 168).¹⁵⁷

Herder thus explains how Genesis 1-2.3 arose out of the Oriental practice of ordering time in weeks and the oral preservation and sanctification of this custom (FHA 5, 31-35). But he concludes:

Sei wer da wolle der ursprüngliche Verfasser; es war eine heilige Person, die auf die heilige Tradition bauete, die die Sage der ältesten Zeiten, die doch ursprünglich aus einem Unterricht Gottes an die Menschen kam, in ein Lied verfaßte deren Gedanken und Worte Gott damals regierte, da sie Verfasser ward; aber deshalb blieb die ganze Lage der Sache, der Welt, des Volks, der Situation, in der sie verfasset wurde, dieselbe. (35)

Relying on this assumption, Herder defends his “Orientalisch-Poetische” hermeneutic strategy against philosophical, mystical, theological, physical and also philological forms of exegesis (40-43)¹⁵⁸, and analyzes (1) the “sinnliche[n] dichterische[n] Parallelismus” (46) of this poem and (2) the “*Schöpfung der Welt nach dem sinnlichen Anblick*” (62) that it presents. In the

¹⁵⁷ For an overview of this notion throughout the history of Christian and Jewish religion, see Benin (1993).

¹⁵⁸ I will discuss the distinctiveness and consistency of Herder’s strategy vis-à-vis the programs that he rejects in Chapter Six.

following I will elaborate on Herder's discussion of the parallelism and the sensuous view, before I turn to his problems in accounting for the divine character of the poem.

The *parallelism* of the poem initially concerns the second and third day of creation as well as the fifth and sixth (45). In a second step, Herder also suggests that days one, four and seven form a parallelism (46). The resulting structure looks as follows: After God brought light to the dark earth on the first day, the second and third days brought the heavens and the earth respectively. Then, on the fourth day, God created the "lights" of sun and moon, and on the fifth and sixth days the creatures of waters and sky and the creatures of the earth (Gen 1; Coogan 2010, 12-13). The seventh day finally forms a parallelism with one and four because of the repetition of contrasts in all three, namely, between light and darkness, the sun and the moon, and the "Ruhe und Heiligung des Sabbats" (FHA 5, 46). Herder argues that the symmetry of this structure dissolves various of the skeptical questions regarding the coherence of the story of creation (questions regarding narrative coherence, physical correctness, theological implications etc.). According to him, the document is nothing more nor less than an "einfacher, dichterischer Grundriß von sinnlichen Ideen" (47) in Hebrew style and should not be judged according to external criteria. Regarding the particularities and oddities of this style, Herder claims: "das Alles ist so sehr für mich, daß wer sich in die alte Natur der Hebräer, und Sprache und Sprachart, und Parallelenkart [...] zurücksetzen kann, diese ganze Struktur nach Orientalischem Sinn für natürlich und fürtrefflich finden wird" (48). Here Herder borrows Lowth's analysis of the parallelism of biblical verse and stretches its application from strophes to the content of whole verses. What is more, Herder follows Lowth in asserting that a historical understanding of how parallelism structured Hebrew language and thought in general helps to appreciate the structure of the poem (cf. Prickett 1986, 106, 110). This is important, because it shows how closely Herder sees the structure of the poem and the Hebrew mode of experience as connected in a "dichterische[m] Grundriß von sinnlichen Ideen" fitting their natural way of life and national tradition of songs (FHA 5, 47).¹⁵⁹ And while for Lowth, the Hebrew poet-prophets are still directly inspired, Herder denies that the biblical poetry was a ready-to-use product of divine revelation (Bultmann 1999, 41). Rather, Herder considered it the product of a particular oral tradition, namely: "sinnlich, National und Mnemonisch" (FHA 5, 54).

Second, Herder argues that the document presents a *sensuous view* of creation that was open to experience for all *Morgenländer*. This is the perspective "between the heavens and the

¹⁵⁹ Herder had theorized the connections between, respectively, Hebrew way of life, history, tradition, religion, poetry and language in the *Fragmente* (FHA 1, 277-291).

earth”; “das sinnliche Weltall” where human beings enjoy light and warmth and fear the dark and cold (49-53; cf. Bultmann 1999, 44). Herder claims the song was composed on such a “freie Ebne der Schöpfung” (FHA 5, 49) where the prophet stood and sung about heavens and earth in his “Orientalische[n] Schöpfungsgesang zur Feier des Sabbats” (63). Herder suggests that this sensuous standpoint can still be taken and thus provides a way of “sich zurücksetzen” into Oriental times (49, 53, 58, 63). Furthermore, from this standpoint, one may grasp nature as an ordered whole; the parallelism of the poem presents a primitive form of knowledge of *nature in general* (cf. Auerochs 2006, 312, 328). What is more, Herder thinks that the great poets of different ages stand out in virtue of their capacity for emulating the sensuous view on creation (although he only mentions Klopstock in this context).¹⁶⁰ And he demands from his contemporaries: “Gehe hin, o Leser, Jahrtausende zurück, in die alte Zeit der Hebräer [...] stelle dich als ein sinnlicher Weltbürger auf eine ihrer Ebenen, oder ihrer Höhen, und siehe ‘die zwei großen Lichter’” (59-60). Herder here presents himself as just as cosmopolitan as many of his contemporaries. But rather than reason or the principles of morality, for Herder it is “*sinnliche Anschauung*” that is universally shared because of the *Eins der Empfindung*, the genetic core at the ground of the soul (63; cf. Chapters Two and Four). Herder’s appeal to his readers is for them to recognize that their capacity for sensuousness connects human beings, otherwise separated by millennia, by pointing at the parallelism of the rising sun and moon. And since this is a parallelism inherent in creation itself, Herder might well think it reflects the general *Analogie der Schöpfung* (see Chapter Three).¹⁶¹

5.2.2. Folk poetry

The proximity of the above claims to projects of Herder that would reach publication in the 1770s, the *Naturpoesie* of Ossian and Shakespeare and the *Volkslieder* of primitive peoples around the globe, is evident. While these texts focus on various aesthetic and anthropological issues I cannot expound on here, I want to draw attention to the overarching theme of how Herder connects the (religious and non-religious) poetry of peoples around the globe and throughout world history; and thus integrates the material of his biblical hermeneutics into his

¹⁶⁰ On the Klopstock cult of the 1770s, which Herder helped establish, see Luserke-Jaqui (2017, 56-57, 130-133) and James Sheehan (1989, 160-163). A particularly relevant discussion of Klopstock for this context appeared in Herder’s second collection of *Fragmente* (FHA 1, 287, 293-302, 312-315).

¹⁶¹ Prickett (1986, 111-123) traces the career of Lowth’s theory of the parallelism in British romanticism, and shows that it was interpreted both as the defining principle of all poetry and human consciousness and as coinciding with the structure of the great chain of being.

anthropology and aesthetics.¹⁶² In its introduction, Herder claims that in their childhood, nations, like people are much more alike than after having been *ausgebildet*: “so enthüllet sich bei Allen [Völkern, N.W.] Einerlei Gestalt der Seele und fast auf Einerlei Art” (FHA 5, 11). Moreover, Herder claims to have found “ohne System und Grüblerei”, i.e., empirically and historically, that all nations compiled such documents and theorized in a similar way about the origins of the universe (FHA 5, 15). He aims to find in the cosmogonic songs of all ancient peoples not just the individual character of nations, but also what they have in common: he states that he searches the “redende Züge zum Bilde des Menschlichen Geistes” and the “wahre Gestalt des sinnlichen Menschen” (16; cf. FHA 2, 456 and FHA 3, 68). This connects to similar statements Herder would make about the ancient poetry of ‘wild peoples’ in his 1773 letters on *Ossian*. There he follows the “Analogie aller wilden Völker” (FHA 2, 455) in order to compare songs from nations around the globe and discover their sensuous spirit “nicht als Seltenheit, als Muster, sondern als Natur” (472).

According to Herder, the true shape of the sensuous human being is to be found among ‘wild peoples’ mainly because the “Geist der Natur” (474) is active in them. Hence Herder proposes to construct a “*Psychologie aus den Gedichten Ossians*”, since this would have great anthropological value (456). Such a psychology would focus on how the senses and imagination are immediately triggered by the active presence of nature (476).¹⁶³ And while the sensuous human necessarily shapes itself in the most national and individual way on the basis of particular impressions and traditions, this shaping capacity of the human soul also accounts for its creative manners of expressing particular sentiments, ways of life and views of the world. Hence Herder is convinced that a psychological analysis of the artistic production of ‘wild peoples’ is key in uncovering both the core of human psychology and the spirit of nature. He treats true art not in opposition to nature, but rather as a continuation of the forces of creation. So, Herder is not merely interested in folk songs as an antiquarian or anthropologist. He argues that his contemporaries should recover from these songs the method of the recreation of nature in sensuous poetry and apply this mimetic method to their own (natural, historical and societal) circumstances. Herder argues this *mimesis* of the *Bildung*-processes of the forces of nature is a

¹⁶² For more detailed explorations of Herder’s idea that poetry paradigmatically expresses the particular characters of peoples and simultaneously unites all of humanity in its exercise, see Menges (2009); Irmscher (1996b); Adler (1996); Norton (1991, 71-80).

¹⁶³ Also compare how Herder describes the “sinnliche[n] Kräfte” of the “Volk” in eighteenth-century German society in the 1774 prefaces to the *Volkslieder* (FHA 3, 24), and connects this to the findings of comparative study of the songs of peoples around the globe (FHA 3, 59-63).

natural aspect of the human being's sensuous relating to nature (vom Hofe 1989, 207). The *Volkslieder* of nations around the globe exemplify this relation.

On the one hand, in his collections of *Fragmente*, Herder had problematized the direct imitation of the poetry of the Orientals, the Greek and the Romans, emphasizing the changing historical, cultural, religious and linguistic conditions that their poetry built on and spoke to (e.g. FHA 1, 277-292). Herder had argued that German poets should focus on and serve their own circumstances and apply what they learn from the ancient classics to their own context (cf. Adler 1994, 126-128; Sheehan 2005, 171-172). On the other hand, Herder's conception of nature as active and dynamic suggests that poetry from all ages may reproduce it in a manner which is analogous to the poetry of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁶⁴ This is because nature is dynamically organized in processes of *Bildung*, and it is these processes (of continuous and active creation) that poets should recognize behind the changed shapes that form the poet's (natural, historical and societal) environment (FHA 1, 448-449; Adler 1994, 137-139; vom Hofe 1986, 76). To the extent that poetic texts from different times and places have it as their aim to recognize the process of creation in the diverse shapes of nature, they may be compared (Irmischer 2009, 221-222, 224-225). In fact, Herder's aspirations were extremely universalistic in that he wanted to collect all such poetry from around the globe and recognize the same spirit, life, creation.

I finish this section by presenting one example of how Herder executed such comparisons, before I return to the religious content of *Über die ersten Urkunden*. A central device for connecting the poetry of early antiquity with the eighteenth-century way of life of Herder's audience may be found in his comparison of Sophocles and Shakespeare. Herder's main claim is that while both poets remained true to nature, their cultural contexts and thus their perspectives upon nature were radically different (cf. Adler 1994, 146-148; Norton 1991, 76-80). Sophocles respected the dramatic unities (of space, time and action) because he drew upon the simple and unitary arrangements of his society. Shakespeare, by contrast, relied upon the more heterogeneous organization of his own society in creating much more complex and messy plots. And yet, in recreating these different 'worlds' in their plays, Herder interprets Sophocles and Shakespeare as reproducing the same genetic forces of nature (viz., processes of creation) in different ways. Indeed, Herder states that only in reproducing nature in authentic accordance with one's own perspective upon it, can one create true poetry.¹⁶⁵ According to Herder,

¹⁶⁴ I will expand on this conception in the context of Herder's theology of creation in the next chapter. For general overviews see Reill (2005, ch. 4) and Lovejoy ([1936] 2001, ch. 9).

¹⁶⁵ In the next chapter I will elucidate how this comparison of poets expands toward scientists, metaphysicians and theologians.

Sophocles and Shakespeare are completely akin in producing illusion “durch dies Urkündliche, Wahre, Schöpferische der Geschichte” constitutive of their “dramatischen Geist” (FHA 2, 515). He adds that the respective worlds that they create fully adhere to their particular spiritual perspectives upon nature. Herder concludes that both Shakespeare and Sophocles remained true to nature, but that the respective perspectives upon nature, suggested by their historical and societal circumstances, have radically changed.

Herder’s comparison of Sophocles and Shakespeare suggests that the spirit of nature is captured both in the Oriental’s *Schöpfungsgesang* and in Shakespeare’s drama. Both document creation in action. As I will explain, Herder understands this action as a continuous process that allows poets to reproduce creation at all times and according to various different circumstances. In as much as poets participate in this reproduction of the forces of nature, they are historians too (Auerochs 2005, 111). In the case of ancient cosmogony, Herder suggests that an important implication follows from this: primordial humanity’s epic poetry about creation contains a condensed historical depiction of the origination of the *Weltall*. First, however, the arguments that lead to these implications must be critically assessed.

5.3. Apologetic arguments

The hermeneutic position which emerges out of the previous considerations connects to many of the young Herder’s main ideas that I interpreted in earlier chapters. For example, he relies on the anti-skeptical character of sensuous certainty, and the trust in the general analogy of creation. In addition, he builds on the anthropological continuity underlying the human being’s shape-shifting in explaining how a historical understanding of biblical text is possible. Yet Herder’s apologetics goes beyond these ideas in asserting that the historical understanding of the poem’s sensuous parallelism yields insight into God’s revelation, His primeval instruction of humanity. Since Herder’s notion of revelation will be important for understanding his optimistic and monistic ontology, I will outline its main aspects here.

First, for Herder, creation and revelation are closely intertwined, since creation is a continuous process which links God and the world, and God depends on (but is not identical with) creation as His externalization (in the sense of a panentheistic metaphysical position).¹⁶⁶ God thus reveals Himself by creating and by being recognized as creating. Second, humans

¹⁶⁶ In the following footnotes I will refer to more detailed analyses of the ideas that I sketch. On Herder’s panentheism, see DeSouza (2017, 53-56), Heinz (1994b, ch. 4), vom Hofe (1986), Shichiji (1989).

may recognize revelation through their bodily senses, because God creates human forces in analogy to His own infinite force.¹⁶⁷ Third, by containing all possibilities, creation forms the (historical and simultaneously absolute) source and guiding structure of all subsequent *Bildung* of nature and of humanity.¹⁶⁸ Thus, the idea of divine instruction does not merely apply to humanity's primeval education; it implies the providential *Bildung* of humanity throughout history.¹⁶⁹ In the following sections, I will elaborate on these different aspects as they emerge out of Herder's interpretation of Genesis 1. Yet before that, I will examine how Herder argues that a primordial revelation informs the text of the Old Testament. After all, the universal availability of sensuous views does not yet account for why the cosmogonic song of Genesis 1 is divine, and others not. Various problems remain for Herder to deal with.

A consequence of Herder's conception of revelation seems to be that the divinity of the Bible cannot be deduced from historical evidence about inspiration; nor from the text's high poetic quality (FHA 9/1, 30); nor from the non-mythological, superior and sublime character of its concepts and images (FHA 5, 18). Herder denies that the first is visible in the text or proven through historical evidence; he admits that the second is claimed with equal justification by the Turks of their Koran (see Auerbachs 2006, 308-309); and the third can be denied by the skeptic who argues that the composition of the book of Genesis can be historically explained in just the same manner as all religious and mythological documents (e.g. Hume 1757, 72-73). What then does attest to such a divine character? In *Über die ersten Urkunden*, Herder defends his historical-hermeneutic maxims against other schools of Bible interpretation. But he does not defend the assumption of theological truth on which he relies.¹⁷⁰ All he says about the "stärkere[n] Beweise" that do exist is: "Ich will diese aus unsern Theiken und Bibeleinleitungen nicht ausschreiben; sondern bei meinem Plan bleiben, daß, je ansehnlicher, älter, und authentischer diese Urkunden sind, sie um so mehr Fleiß und Richtigkeit in der Erklärung verdienen" (FHA 5, 18). While Herder does motivate in anti-skeptical rhetoric why it is necessary to believe in a divine instruction, it remains unclear why only the particular ancient documents he analyzes are its direct products (17-18). That is to say: Herder sketches the

¹⁶⁷ See Koepke (1982, 146-148), Buntfuß (2005, 41-45, 57-66), Simon (2016), Kumlehn (2009, ch. 1).

¹⁶⁸ See Nisbet (1989, 1970), Bultmann (1999, 151-160), DeSouza (2017, 55).

¹⁶⁹ See vom Hofe (1989, 1984), Pfaff (1983), Desouza (2017, 54).

¹⁷⁰ I thus question Bultmann's (1999, 42) interpretation that the text is apologetic in a similar way as *Älteste Urkunde*, while agreeing with his assessment of Herder's orthodox reliance on divine instruction. While Herder assumes that Genesis contains a historically accurate account of creation and revelation, he does not attempt to prove this. Principally, this leaves open the possibility that Herder at this time was more interested in furthering the historical, poetic and anthropological research programs dealing with this historical period than in defending revelation. Some philosophical interpreters of this work indeed take this position (cf. Forster 2018, ch. 2; Beiser 2011, 110-113). Legaspi (2010, 163-164) suggests that it may have been Michaelis who had indeed completely lost interest in apologetics.

skeptical consequences of denying divine instruction. He formulates an all-or-nothing dilemma where the skeptic is not willing to know anything about the origins of things, whereas Christians stand on the foundations of a firm historical tradition deriving from the earliest Hebrew documents (18). Herder seems to suggest that the religious certainties provided by this tradition have been preserved in the canonical texts in a form that is still recognizably the same, despite the largescale effects of historical change he also laments (18-21). The skeptic, by contrast, relies on observations regarding the plurality of traditions and their competing cosmogonic myths in order to induce skeptical conclusions regarding our knowledge about origins. Unwilling to further chase this Proteus into deep history, they give up the search for a complete genetic explanation of human knowledge.

Herder stresses that, particularly, our knowledge of the creation of the universe is at stake here. However, the more general authority of the Old Testament depends on whether one accepts or denies the postulate of divine instruction regarding Genesis 1. After all, Herder assumes that this oldest document is itself the origin of the pre-Mosaic tradition, informing all of the other canonical texts as well. In other words, as divine instruction, Genesis 1 is in fact the origin of 'religion' in general. In *Über die ersten Urkunden*, Herder evidently does not fully think through the consequences of accepting a certain cosmogony as historically accurate and simultaneously treating it as on a par with all others, namely, as national poetry.

Despite Herder's ad-hoc claim regarding the principle of divine instruction, at least three of his 1768/9 assertions are suggestive of the more complex apologetic position that he would adopt in the following years. First, he states that the poetic documentation of the workings of nature in the Bible suggest that through historical interpretation, it may be possible to emulate the poetic response to them (and thus recognize its revelatory character). Herder provides a historical argument for this, relying on the ubiquity of sensuousness and on the *Lebensalter* of humanity. This analogy helps to understand why we could emulate comparable feelings as the Hebrews (even if it does not explain why we might not in this manner find traces of revelation in all other traditions as well). Herder relies on it to argue that the Bible's narrative genre is *epic* and recounts actual history. And he argues on its basis that simple feelings such as 'light is good' can be universally recognized (53). By combining the notions of 'sensuousness' and 'primordial religion', Herder constructs a theory of religious belief that has universalistic aspirations, even if it aims to historically trace how the sensuous view on creation changed.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Of course universalist anthropological theories of 'religious belief' like Herder's are in fact far from neutral, as they are themselves the products of specific debates within (early-)modern Christian theology (see Asad 1993, 40-

Second, Herder argues that these documents had the most *effect* in world history; and that such effect is a part of divine providence (18-21, 36, 64-65). In other words, the course of world history attests to the prominence of this particular tradition and not of others. With help of Michaelis, Herder goes beyond Lowth and offers a historical explanation for why Hebrew poetry was the product of a historical tradition, rather than a finished product out of the hands of God. And yet Herder argues that this poetry arose out of divine instruction: namely the teaching of a child by an understanding father. The eighteenth-century historian and Bible exegete may recognize this development as world-historical and its source as revelation. Divine providence ensured that the documents of this tradition were passed on as reminders that there is only one God who created the world; the stars, for example, formed a “Denkmal der ersten Reinigkeit dieser Religionsbegriffe” opposing idolatrous interpretations (36).¹⁷² Herder’s combining the idea of a primordial purity of these concepts with their providential tradition, however, yields an ambivalent picture when looking at the history of religion. On the one hand, the holy tradition providentially passed on the document, so that in fact, all other cosmogonic documents are adaptations (FHA 5, 18-19). However, as adaptations, these documents are less perfect reproductions and increasingly became “entfernter und befremdeter, um so mehr in andre Nationen nationalisiert” (176, 19-21). In Egyptian religion, for example, Herder finds “eine spätere Verfälschung und Mythologismus der reinen Begriffe dieser Urkunde” (65).

Third, Herder claims that the tradition leading up to the Old Testament is the oldest in an emphatic sense: it derived from the actual first encounters of humans with nature, i.e., the encounter that is described in the book of Genesis. He thus affirms the historical validity of the biblical text, and of the existence of a historical Adam, from whom the oral tradition derives its account. Here Herder reasons circularly that, without a source deriving from divine instruction, the historical tradition’s account of creation (i.e. the later theorizing that built upon the primordial revelation) would not have had the world-historical effect that it in fact had (FHA 5, 18-19). Furthermore, Herder grants that the genealogies of Adam, Seth’s and Noah’s families are historical truths, preserved in the first documents. He argues that Genesis 1’s epical portrayal of the creation of the universe recounts God’s presence in nature (Bultmann 1999, 44-

54; Harrison 1990). Cf. Sikka (2011, 234-247) on how Herder’s mature philosophy of religion accounts for religious diversity.

¹⁷² The question remains whether this recognition is ethnocentric in perceiving only the ‘own’ tradition, or merely reflexive of the impossibility of starting from a position other than one’s own (Zippert 1994, 239-244; Prickett 1986, ch. 1). While Herder may have never satisfyingly answered this question with respect to the role of Christianity in world history, in later years he did include more peoples and traditions (Sikka 2011, ch. 3; Schmidt 2017).

45).¹⁷³ This document reports “so großen Merkwürdigkeiten, die auf anderm Wege unerforschlich sind, die aus dem ursprünglichen Unterricht Gottes kamen, und die auf die Gedankenreihe so vieler Nationen, Jahrhunderte und Religionen so viel vermocht haben!” (FHA 5, 19).

Finally, Herder states that ancient polytheistic religions were merely adaptations of the earliest religion stemming from this revelation (FHA 5, 19-20). He thus in the end diverges from Hume with respect to polytheism being the primary religion of humankind: while the monotheistic tradition of *theorizing* about creation started indeed later than other polytheistic forms of religion, these polytheisms were still adapted from God’s primordial revelation regarding creation and its sole author (36). Herder locates the pre-Mosaic tradition that followed from the primordial revelation among certain Semitic-speaking peoples that were the earliest ancestors of Noah.¹⁷⁴ While Herder thinks that parts of this tradition led back to some of the protagonists of its narrative, others are younger (165-166); the tradition as a whole persisted as an antidote to Oriental polytheism. Herder argues that the documents collected in Genesis 1-11 are different from the rest of the Pentateuch in this respect: while Moses may have been influenced by his Egyptian environment, as the seventeenth-century Hebraist John Spencer had argued, the documents that Moses starts his Pentateuch with are older and contain a “reine Orientalische Denkart” (25, 37).¹⁷⁵ Other ancient religions (as well as rest of the Pentateuch) should thus be approached as having been influenced by the oldest document and presenting its core structure in ‘mythologized’ fashion (64-65, 1333; cf. Bultmann 1999, 47). As his resources for demarcating the ‘Oriental’ were quite limited, his main source was the text of Genesis itself (43).¹⁷⁶ Herder’s understanding of the terms “Orientalisch”, “Morgenländer” and “Hebräer” and his interpretation of the text are thus, at least in part, interchangeable.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Herder is thinking about the structure of the seven days of creation, and of the organization of nature as it appears to a sensuous-affective stance or view. I will elaborate on this below when commenting on Herder’s 1774 version of this argument.

¹⁷⁴ That is, “nahe an die Zeiten Sems” (65), or in the case of Genesis 1 even from the “Hand Seths” (165); Herder is aware that these attributions can only be very speculative, but cannot resist them nonetheless.

¹⁷⁵ For Herder’s discussion of the textual differences between the different documents compiled in Genesis, see 22-25. His philological position was close to Jean Astruc and Michaelis; this denying of the textual integrity of Genesis 1-11 was unorthodox and progressive (see FHA 5, 1329, 1333; Bultmann 1999, 43).

¹⁷⁶ Michaelis sought to remedy this situation in a natural-historical fashion. For Herder, it was mainly the differences between Genesis and the rest of the Bible, as well as other ancient religions, that influenced his understanding of the Oriental.

¹⁷⁷ Again see Osterhammel (1998) for different eighteenth-century possibilities for imagining the Orient, and cf. discussions of Herder’s conception of the ‘savage’ and ‘primitive’ by Sikka (2011, ch. 2); Spencer (2012b, 79-84). On the notions of ‘Hebrew’ and ‘Jewish’ in Herder’s political thought, see Gjesdal (2017, 197-201); Beiser (2017); E. Adler (1989); Barnard (2003, ch. 1).

5.4. Herder's concept of revelation

In his study of Herder's early biblical hermeneutics, Bultmann formulates Herder's apologetic argument based on the document's old age as follows: "Da Herder sein Verständnis von Gen. 1 als die menschheitsgeschichtlich 'urälteste' Urkunde mit dem Gedanken eines urgeschichtlichen Unterrichts Gottes verbindet, findet er in der Schöpfungstheologie und theologischen Anthropologie von Gen. 1 die religiöse Wahrheit, nach der er in komparatistischer Perspektive gefragt hatte" (1999, 45). In other words, there is nothing about the particular theology of creation contained in Genesis 1 that would convince the skeptic that it is any different to comparable mythical accounts (even though there is plenty that convinced Herder). But the theological postulate or article of faith regarding divine instruction, combined with the historical thesis that Genesis 1 is the *first* document of that instruction, together give this theology the character of actual history. For Herder, Genesis 1 is not best described as putting forward a particular theological doctrine, but rather as picturing and presenting the actual earliest phases of world history.¹⁷⁸

I take it that, with Bultmann's formulation of it, the interpretation of this text by Herder has reached the ultimate limit on charitability. Obviously, the theological postulate of divine instruction remains a *petitio principii* against skeptics – Bultmann himself calls it dogmatic and "decisionistic" (1989, 75) – and the historical thesis that Genesis contains the oldest document remains a mere assertion in this text (although FHA 5, 64-66 and 176-178 represent the first attempts at a comparative demonstration). Herder presents the faith in divine instruction explicitly as such (FHA 5, 17) and contents himself with hand-wavy references to dogmatic theology and proofs for biblical canonicity (18).

The young Herder's conception of revelation, however, can still be further accounted for. Below, I will work in this direction by interpreting Herder's result of his early biblical studies, *Älteste Urkunde* (1774); this early draft already demarcates some of the main themes. Furthermore, a number of interpreters have already pointed out how Herder's anthropological, historical and poetic theses fit his conception of revelation. For example, the universality of the sensuous view suggests that adopting a particular perspective on creation may principally allow for something like a 'natural religion' that is shared by all of humanity. This universal religion begins with awe for the workings of nature (between heavens and earth) and reproduces them in poetic form as humanity's Sabbath (Crowe 2009, 268-270; Bunge 1995, 14-15; vom Hofe

¹⁷⁸ Herder thus in a new way reinforced the still widely shared idea that the Old Testament was the most reliable source for *Urgeschichte* (Weidner 2005, 187, 192; on primeval history and sacred history see Harrison 1990, chs. 4 and 5; Zedelmaier 2003, 1-21).

1989, 194-196, 207). Furthermore, the isomorphism between the parallelism contained in the oldest poem and the analogy of creation also points at a divine instruction via the order of nature. That is to say, for Herder, revelation has not to do with the direct inspiration of the Word of God, but with humans recognizing creation (both nature and their own soul) to be revelatory (cf. Bultmann 1999, 44; Simon 1998, 82-83, 88ff.; Shichiji 1989, 185).

Herder thus conceives of revelation and of religion in much broader terms than those orthodox Protestants and Enlightenment deists who favor either only Scripture and correct doctrine or mere reason/morality. According to his genetic psychology, all of the human being's faith, reason and morality develop out of sensuous beginnings in the context of particular traditions. Hence religion may look different depending on peoples' stages of development; God adapts His means of communication to different ways of life. As various interpreters have worked out, especially in interpreting Herder's later works where he discusses much more different traditions from around the world, this broad conception of revelation allows for a form of religious pluralism, according to which all religions reflect the (infinite, absolute) truth of religion in different ways (Schmidt 2017; Sikka 2011, ch. 7; Bunge 1995, 1990). Marci Bunge sums up this view by observing that "Herder clearly confirms the radical relativity of theological discourse, and yet he asserts that this discourse is not simply a projection of human thoughts and desires but is a meaningful response to a divine reality" (1990, 318).

Herder nonetheless considers it consistent with this idea that God's provenience guided the composition of the documents that formed the Hebrew Bible. Crucially, among these documents' world-historical effects belongs their attesting to there being only One Creator. This revelation has been expressed and recorded in images, and, particularly, the seven images of Genesis 1 in their parallellistic order. Inferring, then, from the proximity between Herder's conception of revelation and the general interpretation of nature that his relying on the sacral notion of 'revelation' is without consequences in *Über die ersten Urkunden*, seems a mistake (Simon 1998, 83).¹⁷⁹ Herder does state that revealed religion centers on the natural religiosity of humanity in its childhood, and its account of the creation of the universe, yet he still connects this religiosity with being instructed by a Father (Bultmann 1989, 73-75 and cf. Simon's [1998, 83] selective citation of him). Likewise, (and on the basis of my close-reading of *Über die*

¹⁷⁹ In a review of Simon's monograph, Frenz (2000, 313) argues that, on the key issue of whether and how Herder's work is theological, Simon's very abstract terminology turns some of his central claims into unverifiable hypotheses. Admittedly, Simon (1998, 90-91) speaks of an "Übertheologisierung" leading to "Enttheologisierung" via "Remetaphorisierung der theologischen Begriffe", and makes the statement that "die Entscheidung zwischen profaner und theologischer Lektüre zirkulär zwischen den beiden Möglichkeiten pendelt". But it is evident that Simon argues in favor of reducing the significance of revelation in Herder's thought.

ersten Urkunden in section two), I do not concur with Forster's claim that the young Herder proposed a strict secularism in the interpretation of the Bible by "refraining from any reliance on divine inspiration and instead employing normal interpretative techniques" (2010, 48).

Although the mentioned aspects of Herder's conception of revelation become apparent in his text, there exists another interpretive stance I wish to avoid. This stance is exemplified by Thomas Zippert's study with the informative subtitle "*Das Offenbarungsverständnis des jungen Herder als Grundmotiv seines theologisch-philosophisch-literarischen Lebenswerks*" (1994).¹⁸⁰ I am sympathetic with Zippert's highlighting the systematic significance of Herder's conception of revelation. But Zippert's method of interpretation can be challenged in multiple ways. In interpreting a draft that was (most probably) a continuation of the 1768/9 text, *Fragmente zu einer Archäologie des Morgenlandes*,¹⁸¹ Zippert recapitulates the theological doctrines to which Herder alludes. Regarding Herder's exegetical position and his polemics against dogmatic theology, Zippert asserts, Herder "verdeckt nachweislich die ihm bewußten Ziele seiner Arbeit als schriftstellernder Theologe" (1994, 148). In order to support this claim, Zippert presents evidence for substantive theological dogmas to which Herder adheres according to his interpretation. Zippert derives this evidence from Herder's language-use in his exegesis. He points at Herder's using the word "catechism" (149); his referring to Genesis 1 as "unser Schöpfungsgesang" to allegedly signal that the content of the song (creation) continues to have a "sachliche Gültigkeit" (148); and his using the second-person pronoun seemingly to state that Sabbath still has ethical jurisdiction over "us" (151). Zippert concludes that Herder must adhere to the particular doctrines of dogmatic theology that his paraphrases and interpretations of biblical texts connote.

While Herder no doubt addressed his intended audience in comparable ways in both his sermons and his biblical studies, Zippert's evidence may be contested by pointing at Herder's use of imagery and rhetoric. A term like 'catechism' allows less technical and more figurative uses; "unser Schöpfungsgesang" may simply refer to the object of attention shared by Herder and his readers. Furthermore, I do not find attractive Zippert's general stance in dealing with the tensions in Herder's biblical hermeneutics. This is because it is still a different question whether the theological doctrines corresponding to Herder's references and images are supported by his method of exegesis – or whether, as Zippert takes it, his method 'cloaks' his theological aims. The latter argument remains unsatisfying as an interpretative option, being

¹⁸⁰ Full title: *Bildung durch Offenbarung. Das Offenbarungsverständnis des jungen Herder als Grundmotiv seines theologisch-philosophisch-literarischen Lebenswerks*.

¹⁸¹ This is the hypothesis of Arnold (1989), accepted by Zippert and Bultmann.

simultaneously *uncharitable* (in demanding from Herder a sort of theorizing he principally refuses, see p. 251) and *speculative* about Herder's true intentions (in suggesting they *must* always have been directed toward dogmatic theology, see p. 277). The former option suggests that Herder's references to *topoi* of dogmatic theology should be read in a more careful, and perhaps restricted, manner than Zippert interprets them.¹⁸²

In interpreting *Älteste Urkunde*, I will attempt to stay closer to Herder's own aspirations of providing an interpretation of Genesis 1 that would help to free the Old Testament from the jurisdiction of dogmatic theology while reinvesting it with religious significance. I will confront my interpretation with secondary literature as well as contemporary reception. I finish this discussion by pointing out that Bultmann – on whose study I have relied above in interpreting *Über die ersten Urkunden* – in understanding *Älteste Urkunde* as a particularly viable way of doing biblical hermeneutics and biblical science, moves toward another extreme compared to Zippert, especially regarding this work's notion of the *Schöpfungshieroglyphe*. I will attempt to grant this notion, and its implications for Herder's philosophy of history, its due weight in a manner which is sensitive to Herder's own stated intentions.

Before I can set out to try this, however, I must first recapitulate how Herder offered his particular synthesis of the historical and poetic Bible projects that I outlined at the beginning of this chapter. As I have interpreted *Über die ersten Urkunden*, Herder glosses Lowth's poetic Bible in a more historical fashion than Lowth did, by dismissing his interpretation of biblical poetry as the (timelessly perfect) product of direct inspiration. Unlike Lowth, Herder interprets the Bible as a human book that was compiled at a particular time and place. Herder argues that Moses did not himself write the book of Genesis. It was the product of an earlier historical development and tradition. Herder proclaims that attending to the historical context of this tradition is essential to interpreting the biblical text. He relies on the *Lebensalter* analogy in order to explain how this historical context should be understood: as a phase in human development where humans, in their sensuous-poetic songs, preserved their first attempts at explaining the origins of things. Thus, like Lowth, Herder thinks that the Bible should be understood as a particular sort of poetry, namely, free verse based on the principle of parallelism. Furthermore, Herder connects this poetry's parallelism to a sensuous view upon creation, which produces a primitive form of knowledge of nature as an intelligible whole. Subsequently,

¹⁸² Claas Cordemann at many points in his (2010) monography *Herders christlicher Monismus* similarly confronts the interpretative problems regarding Herder's Christology (e.g., 224-231) in a generally careful manner. Still I concur with Schmidt (2017, 199-200) that also Cordemann does not prove that Christology is the exclusive unifying perspective upon Herder's oeuvre.

he states that, at the origin of the pre-Mosaic tradition of sensuous poetry, stands a very *earliest* document, namely, God's revelation in nature. Herder concludes that, through understanding and emulating the sensuous standpoint of the Orientals, all humans may grasp the religious truth of the first documents of humanity.

Thus, Herder also departs from Michaelis' historical Bible project. Rather than merely gathering historical and natural facts about the Oriental context of the biblical text, he integrates Michaelis' idea of a pre-Mosaic tradition into a philosophy of history. By intimating how the tradition's ultimate origin looked, Herder attests that he cannot stay content with Michaelis' attempt at decoupling the scientific study of the Bible's historical context from religious truth. He concludes that the poetry of humankind in its childhood, documented in the book of Genesis, contains the sensuous expression of God's primordial revelation. Herder thus incorporates the historical Bible into a substantive philosophy of history, according to which Genesis 1 is the product of God's education of humankind in its childhood and the start of an immense historical process of the development of humanity. Furthermore, Herder reasons that, while eighteenth-century humanity may have grown up, its childhood memories are never fully forgotten. Rather, humankind still relies on the seeds which God made take root in its early education.

On the whole, Herder's philosophy of history most clearly demarcates his early biblical studies from the Enlightenment Bible discourses on poetry, sympathy, shared human nature and national cultures. In contrast to the Bible projects discussed by Sheehan, Herder incorporates his exegesis of the Old Testament into a piece of historical-metaphysical speculation regarding the providential and ever-continuing *Bildung der Menschheit*. He interprets Genesis 1 as the primeval history of what he declares, on the first page of *Auch eine Philosophie*, to be the "*Ursprung des ganzen Geschlechts von Einem [...] unter den mildesten Einflüssen der schaffenden Vorsehung*" (FHA 4, 11). As I will develop in the next chapter, Herder's philosophy of history thus assumes the role that was traditionally that of dogmatic theology. In his philosophy of history, Herder asserts a notion of revelation both more historicized and absolute.

6. Biblical hermeneutics and the theology of creation

In the years following 1769 and Herder's travels through Northwest-Europe, Herder claimed to have found additional evidence of a primordial revelation expressed in Genesis 1. He saw this revelation preserved in all of ancient history in the form of a hieroglyph – the *Schöpfungshieroglyphe* – which informed all ancient religions.¹⁸³ Relying on this “historical evidence”, he meant to circumvent the field of dogmatic theology, and reinvest the Old Testament with authority as the *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts*. This document Herder now interpreted as the poetic *Urtext* of humankind which guided world history as the prototype and structural criterion of human *Bildung*. Herder's evidence consisted in the omnipresence in space and time of the hieroglyph of creation, and in a psychological argument for human beings' sensuous certainty of the *historical fact* that creation and revelation were intertwined in an all-permeating process. According to him, the hieroglyph helped to substantiate the idea that evidence regarding the historical tradition leading up to (and documenting) Genesis 1 could prove – not just to the believer but also to the free-thinker and skeptic – that, in fact, all of history took part in God's revelation. Furthermore, Herder's psychology of religious experience suggested that, against skeptics and rationalists, the sensuous belief in revelation was in fact the most secure and foundational of all certainties.¹⁸⁴

Before I define the interpretative aims of this chapter, here is a rough schema of Herder's argumentation for the above claims: The universal capacity of sensuousness should principally allow humans the possibility to feel their way into Oriental times, and recognize the particular Oriental sensuous stance towards nature, which immunized the Orientals from skeptical doubt. Subsequently, he suggests, the (overly scientific, civilized, elderly) eighteenth-century readers emulate the Oriental's sensuousness through the *Lebensalter* analogy that exists between them, and also take on the same anti-skeptical stance. Finally, this sensuousness should allow everyone to agree with the Orientals and recognize the presence of God in all of creation, including in themselves. Thus Herder defends the thesis that history shows that Genesis has informed all human culture, knowledge and religion. This thesis is meant to refute challenges to the possibility of divine revelation by pointing out that it is a historically verifiable fact which explains all phenomena following it. Herder intends to support this thesis primarily through interpreting Genesis 1 and comparing the result of this interpretation with all early antique

¹⁸³ Herder first reported his discovery in a 1770 letter to Johann Heinrich Merck (DA 1, 261ff.; see FHA 5, 1357-1360).

¹⁸⁴ In Chapter One I detail the odd trajectory that brought Hume's notion of belief into Herder's philosophy of religion; in the next chapter I explore its implications for doing philosophy of history.

religions. This interpretation, in turn, relies on an anthropological continuity (the ‘sensuous view of creation’ discussed above) as well as on a *hen kai pan* understanding of revelation as omnipresent in creation. In fact, it will turn out that both presuppositions – regarding the nature of the human soul and the relation between God and creation – are part of the same *Schöpfungs-theologie*.¹⁸⁵

Of course, Herder’s 1774 text nowhere expresses any such schematic argument. It would yield the impression that Herder aims to defend a metaphysical theory of everything and/or a dogmatic theology (two things he polemicizes against). It would suggest that Herder takes a God’s point of view in order to think His thought the way He does (DeSouza 2017, 67; Sikka 2011, 222-223). Instead, Herder is adamant that his proof is historical and accessible to all in virtue of the evidence’s sensuous character.¹⁸⁶ In this chapter I explain why Herder did not understand his own biblical hermeneutics and philosophy of religion to consist in dogmatic theology and/or metaphysical system-building. Nonetheless, I also examine the ontological commitments which Herder makes in the course of his arguments.

I will start this chapter by presenting Herder’s critique of attempts to reconcile Genesis 1 with natural science, metaphysical and theological doctrine, as well as historical scholarship. Second, I will expound on the nature of the evidence for his apologetic argument as well as the sorts of argumentation and interpretation involved. Third, I will analyze the conception of

¹⁸⁵ Nigel DeSouza and Marion Heinz systematically examine the philosophical import of Herder’s ideas on God, world, soul and body, primarily as he formulated them in unpublished fragments from the 1760s. My conclusions largely concur with their analyses. However, I also highlight the alternative (historical, anthropological, hermeneutic) methods Herder adopted in attempting to vindicate his philosophical hypotheses. The use of these methods might still shed a different light on the nature of these “metaphysical and epistemological underpinnings” (DeSouza 2017, 52, 66; Heinz 2017).

¹⁸⁶ In this period Herder had met Goethe and Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz in Strasbourg and had joined the efforts at radical criticism of the 1772 *Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen* (led by Merck, see Dahnke 1997). Together they formed a movement that aimed to reform German (literary) culture and society. This movement would later be known as the German *Sturm und Drang*. It has been interpreted as a prototype for many later avantgarde movements (see Bertram 2000, 11-21; Windfuhr 2013, 84; Luserke-Jaqui 2017). Herder’s 1774 *Älteste Urkunde* was a paradigmatic *Sturm und Drang* work to the extent that its style was emphatically anti-academic and very elliptic, aimed at authentically expressing the author’s religious sensibility and triggering affective responses on the part of the reader (Sauder 1989). This affects Herder’s modes of interpretation and argumentation, too: he intends to involve his reader in the uncovering of a forgotten truth about the Bible by removing eighteenth-century prejudices (FHA 5, 183, 267-270, 301). Since the intended result of this has to a considerable extent to do with personal religion, Herder frequently appeals to the reader to follow the author in taking on specific interpretative and religious stances. His manner of presenting empirical evidence is also different from earlier works. This evidence does not merely add up in favor of a hypothesis; it also points at a deeper existential meaning for the reader to gather from hints and intuitions. For this 2018 reader, the systematic reconstruction of Herder’s arguments and the ultimate (considered) theological position Herder arrives at are still central interests in interpreting this text. However, I have also attempted to make visible the hermeneutic effects Herder intended his style to have. I have done so because, first, these effects matter for understanding his interpretative method and how it diverges from rival exegetists, and second, they partly explain how he intended to tread the fine line between anti-metaphysical polemics and substantive theological and metaphysical investments.

humanity which Herder derives from his Bible interpretation and assess how he uses it to reconcile his theses regarding the totality of creation and the individuality of historical forms of humanity. Fourth, I will present my conclusions regarding the relativist and/or pluralistic implications of Herder's anthropology. His concept of humanity is often said to circumscribe the possible extension of historical diversity. I will argue that, when Herder's theological conception of humanity is properly taken into account, this concept appears less "minimal" (Sikka 2011, 22; Spencer 2012b, 116) or "amorphous" (Muthu 2003, 238) than recent interpreters have argued. I conclude by summing up the implications of Herder's biblical hermeneutics for his understanding of the intertwinement of history and revelation.

In particular, Herder's combination of a monistic ontology with the principle of plenitude will set the stage for my interpretation of how he approaches cultural and religious diversity. I will argue that Herder's conception of revelation dramatically changes the stakes in exploring the diversity of phenomena, precluding skepticism motivated by historical diversity. Finding traces of revelation throughout nature and history, Herder formulates an expansive form of universalism. As a consequence, the question regarding Herder's historical relativism appears in a different light. For Herder, there exists no purely descriptive account of historical events, because the historical process is itself normative. Because of this, no normativity is lost by pointing at the historicity of religion and culture. Moreover, he argues that human sensuousness and historical knowledge should principally be trusted; the empirical has its own normativity, out of which norms of reason first develop. Various relativist themes connected to this view remain to be explored. For example, according to Herder, revelation appears always in different shapes, and at first sight, all forms have equal validity. That is, different religions might be able to capture God's revelation equally well. Herder's religious pluralism thus may be interpreted as supporting a form of relativism after all. In the context of adjudicating among religions, however, his Christian apologetics strongly qualify this pluralism.

Furthermore, reconsidering Herder's arguments for the sensuous availability of revelation to all of humanity also changes how Herder's hermeneutics, his empiricism and his naturalism should be conceived. Herder's notion of experience leads him to draw religious (and ontological) conclusions that contemporaries like Lessing and Kant would not accept. Moreover, his conception of revelation motivated him to assess how different cultures all preserved revelation in different ways and to formulate a pluralistic theory of religion. Herder's

theological views thus explain why he could embrace historical diversity to the extent which he did – perhaps as radically as no one (who was *not* a radical skeptic) had done before.¹⁸⁷

6.1. Hermeneutical method

In the following three subsections, I will discuss Herder's criticisms of attempts by his contemporaries to reconcile Genesis 1 with natural science, metaphysical and theological doctrine, as well as historical scholarship. I will explain how he aimed to embed his new apologetic arguments and historical hypotheses into his hermeneutic approach to the 'Oriental-poetic' texts compiled into the Book of Genesis.

6.1.1. Exegesis and physics

Just like in his previous *Über die ersten Urkunden*, Herder frames his 1774 argument in terms of the debate between skeptics and *Freigeister* on the one hand, and apologetic strategies by theologians, philosophers and scientists on the other. He positions himself by diagnosing the inefficacy of apologetic strategies, as they move away from the literal meaning of the texts and toward scientific, metaphysical, allegorical and theosophical directions, and thus lose the interest of the general public (FHA 5, 186). Herder aims to restore the textual and historical integrity of Genesis 1 suggesting that its concepts and images have a simple and straightforward meaning when they are considered in the right web of (historical and intratextual) connections (199, 238-239).

Herder argues that the attempts, by both natural philosophers and theologians, to accommodate the results of the natural sciences with Scripture are mistaken in multiple ways. Not only do they mistake Moses' authorial intention in compiling Genesis when they interpret the story of creation as an early piece of theoretical physics. They also assume that finite human beings would be able to formulate a single, stable cosmology, which peoples in all stages of history could trace in the same way. Herder argues against this assumption by stating, first, that such a cosmology is only available from God's perspective and that the modern sciences, no matter their achievements, should not confuse their theories with descriptions of the world from this perspective (194-195). Second, Herder states that, historically, the human perspective on the natural world evolves with changing needs and interests. Genesis 1 does not conform to the

¹⁸⁷ As observed by e.g. Berlin ([1965] 1976, 208-211), Beiser (1987, 143-144), Meinecke ([1936] 1946, 386-410). Schneider (1994) assesses the pedagogical motivations behind Herder's anti-skepticism.

interests of modern science, but rather expresses the sensuous awe of humanity in its childhood when confronted with creation (193). From this demarcation of biblical exegesis and natural science, two implications follow which, at first sight, are in tension.¹⁸⁸

On the one hand, this argument leads Herder to stressing the historical incommensurability between religion and science. He states they should both be allowed to reveal their view of nature, because these views accord with their historical stages (195). Thus Herder also argues against judging modern physics by referring to the Bible and he advocates Galileo Galilei's freedom: demanding that the Bible and natural science must always be reconcilable is simultaneously mutilating to Scripture and oppressing the sciences. Herder thus states about Moses: "Fand dieser vor [sic] gut, ein Gemälde der Schöpfung nach seinem Sinn in Ordnung und Tagwerke zu stellen – warum sollts nicht jedem *unsrer Zeit Beflißnen* frei stehen, Welten und Sonnen zu schaffen und zu dichten, wie Er wolle!" (195). Herder's speaking of the individual's freedom to create sounds as if he proposes a Protagorean relativism, according to which individuals fully constitute their own world. However, Herder's own understanding of producing and composing poetry suggests a different view. For Herder, poetry is not connected to the modern aestheticist idea of constructing beautiful illusion and falsifying reality. Rather, Herder considers true poetry the authentic expression of sensuous input and of a particular way of life.¹⁸⁹ In being authentic in this way, poetry may truthfully document (empirical, emotional, religious, scientific) reality. Hence, as ways of authentically expressing lived experience and attention to the workings of nature, the Bible and modern science may both in their own ways communicate or express revelation (cf. Chapter 5.2.).

On the other hand, the idea of sensuous awe, expressed in Genesis 1, also leads Herder to claiming that the sensuous view of creation is something that might still be emulated by eighteenth-century readers. He employs the full potential of his *Sturm und Drang* rhetorical style in attempting to persuade his reader

Daß dir dies Stück einige Namen irdischer Dinge; wie du siehst, *ganzer sinnlichen*
Dinge nennt, dir einen Orbis pictus in Ordnung gibt: in Einer Ordnung mußte es

¹⁸⁸ In a chapter mostly dealing with comparable arguments from the later Herder, Sikka (2011, ch. 6) attempts to capture both sides of Herder's position by interpreting the first as a Nietzschean form of skepticism, and the second as Heideggerian realism. The first seems exaggerated to me: for Herder there is no distortion or falsification as effect of language and poetry; his views on sensuousness and analogy preclude this (see Chapter Three). The comparison with Heideggerian realism appears productive (also see Sikka 2018, focusing on Herder's *Versuch über das Sein*).

¹⁸⁹ See Auerochs (2005) and (2006, 340-361) for discussions of Herder's notion of poetry, as well as an analysis of instances where Herder refers to the modern aestheticist notion in a strictly pejorative way.

sein – [...] dir nichts als sinnliche Ansicht zu geben, dich eben damit von Physischer und Metaphysischer Grübeleien abzuhalten [...] Der Jüdische Moses also ist nicht, der deinen Kopf in die warme Werkstatt gärender Schöpfung hineinspalten wollen: er läßt dich in freiem Ansehen ganzer Geschöpfe, tut auf die Ehre, ein Physiker und Metaphysiker deines Jahrhunderts zu sein, völlig Verzicht! (193)¹⁹⁰

According to Herder, every-day experiences of sensuous things may bridge the historical distance between reader and text. The ordered *Orbis pictus*, presented in Genesis 1, still presents readers with an immediately recognizable image of the universe. Herder thus suggests that, despite the historical incommensurability between the images of primordial religion and modern science, the former image is still a familiar view. By pointing at this familiarity, he intends to encourage his readers to start empathizing into the historical context in which it was produced.

To sum up, Herder argues for an incommensurability between different fields of knowledge, such as science and religion, as well as between different historical periods and their needs (for a sensuous view of creation and for cosmological-physical theories respectively). And while he thinks the one should not be used as a standard for assessing the other – Descartes, Newton and Galileo should be allowed to present their own revelations without comparing their theories to Scripture – Herder does consider Scripture's sensuous view still accessible. For Herder, there is thus no tension between *incommensurability* and *sensuous access*. Rather, as I argued in Chapter Three, humans have the capacity to recognize resemblances between different ways of relating to different environments.

A few other difficulties remain to be dealt with, however, which I discuss below. First, Herder must avoid that his theory of the sensuous view becomes a metaphysical standard in the same problematic way as he saw other theories postulated that relied on Scripture in order to present the one true theory about the world. Second, Herder's idea of sensuous familiarity requires an anthropological continuity, assuring that experiences may be approximated and analogies will be recognized. It also demands a historical model that explains why this approximating nonetheless needs a conscious effort and is not already self-evident. Both of Herder's

¹⁹⁰ The *Orbis pictus sensualium* was a 1657 book by Johann Comenius, which made children's teaching in biology, anthropology and religion more vivid with help of pictures and became the first children's textbook. Herder's calling Genesis 1 such a "world in pictures" is especially significant against the background of Hamann's critique of Michaelis, where Hamann states that Comenius' *Orbis pictus* is still too learned for children, and that we should become children in order to receive the spirit of truth (N 2, 202; cf. the commentary in Jørgensen 1968, 102). Herder thus seems to suggest that Moses' *Orbis pictus* is the right picture for those who manage to become children like the Orientals.

candidates for continuity and the model for historical change and seeming non-comparability, in turn, need to be established exegetically and historically. I will argue that Herder sets out to achieve all this through his own hermeneutic recovery of the religious truth of Genesis 1.

6.1.2. *Exegesis and metaphysics*

Herder's argument for the incommensurability between Genesis and metaphysical doctrines is akin to the above, although he amplifies his point regarding human finitude. That is, Herder criticizes as arrogant to think human beings could ever come up with a metaphysics of creation or find it in God's revelations.

Herder argues against the use of Scripture as a standard for assessing metaphysical systems, as well as the use of metaphysical systems for criticizing Scripture. He reasons that it is mistaken to assume that Genesis contains a universally valid metaphysics, first because this does not fit its intention of expressing a sensuous view of creation as it was experienced by the Orientals, and second because the text was written by humans, who cannot formulate metaphysical systems from a God's eye view (FHA 5, 196). In other words, theologians who assume that revelation provides them with the materials for such doctrines do not recognize the limits of human finitude. Scripture does not contain God's thought as thought by Him, but His way of adapting to the human (and thus in this case Oriental) manner of thought.

Herder had already argued in *Über die ersten Urkunden* that doctrines such as the trinity and the *imago Dei* cannot be inferred in any abstract and general way from Genesis 1 (FHA 5, 167-170).¹⁹¹ And he had considered the metaphysical theorizing of such doctrines to have been part of the orthodox dogmatics that had distorted religion in the Middle Ages (20-21). Herder continues this line of thought in his polemics against metaphysical interpretations in the 1774 work. He intends to make an observation about the historical development of religion when he states: "Seit man Einmal dies Stück [Genesis 1, N.W.] aus unsrer Welt, aus dem Horizont Menschlicher Kenntnisse in die Ewigkeit Göttlicher Schöpfungsgedanken setzte – die Himmelsdecke weggerissen, die unsern Blick umzirken sollte – wohin ist man nicht geirrt?" (197).

¹⁹¹ Specifically, Herder asserts that the word for God used there, "Elohim", may have been closer to "angels", and he sees no fault in God adapting his revelation in this way to the Oriental manner of inferring divinity from single forces of nature. Likewise, the *imago Dei* may have mainly consisted in the sensuous shape of the human body rather than dogmatic attributes such as wisdom, justice and divinity.

Herder concludes that all metaphysical cosmogonies transport Genesis 1 into a meaningless fantasy world where the metaphysician poses as God (199).¹⁹²

By ‘metaphysics’, Herder means the philosophical discipline that aligns abstract words in systems and assumes to be thus able to adopt God’s perspective. In fact, he considers metaphysics and theology in this sense synonymous. Herder follows empiricists like Maupertuis and Hume in thinking these disciplines have historically become obsolete, as they still present a form of theosophy (198). But metaphysics and theology are also synonymous in the inverse sense: the ‘theology’ which Herder does positively formulate – his conceptions of revelation, creation and the human condition – is also very much metaphysical, even though he insists it to be non-abstract and based on experience (cf. Sikka 2011, 224; Cordemann 2010, 224-230; Zippert 1994, 251, 267). Hence, Herder must delimit the sense in which his interpretation of Genesis 1 as God’s primordial revelation presents a system of theology/metaphysics. After all, the story of creation clearly involves statements about the structure of the universe in some form.

6.1.3. *Exegesis and historical science*

Herder also polemicizes against those historically orientated theologians – Johann August Ernesti, Johann Salomo Semler, but above all Michaelis – that he had closely followed in previous years. For example, in *Über die ersten Urkunden*, Herder had praised Michaelis’ manner of making Hume’s *Natural History of Religion* compatible with revealed Christianity. At first sight, Michaelis seemed a natural ally in turning away from dogmatic theology and in attending to historical detail. Yet I already indicated in the previous chapter why Herder could not fully support the ‘historical Bible’. The naturalism of the historical research program, its obsession with “physical things” (Hamann) and minute historical details had an alienating effect, contravening Herder’s aim of recovering the religious significance of Genesis 1. Before I turn to Herder’s own method of exegesis, I will exhibit that, apart from the naturalism of his project, Michaelis’ actual commentary on his translation of Genesis betrays other intellectual tendencies of which Herder is very critical. Particularly, Michaelis, despite his searching for an authentic historical Bible, gestures toward forms of accommodation criticized by Herder as detrimental to the goal of reaching an authentic understanding of the Oriental poetry.

¹⁹² Note that Herder in *Auch eine Philosophie* accuses the progressivist philosopher of history of the same form of blasphemy (cf. Chapter 4.3.3.).

In 1769, Michaelis started his grand translation project of the Old Testament, his *Deutsche Übersetzung des A.T. mit Anmerkungen für Ungelehrte*, basing his commentaries on the scientific findings of the Arabia expedition that he had commissioned. In his “Anmerkungen für Ungelehrte” with respect to Genesis 1, Michaelis presents Moses as a historian of the Israeli people, who starts his history as an “allgemeine Geschichte des Erdbodens und des menschlichen Geschlechtes” (1770a, *Anmerkungen*, 1). Michaelis uses this characterization of Genesis 1, as strictly focusing on planet earth, to explain away some cosmological inconsistencies and/or absurdities that natural scientists had found (3); and he stresses those aspects (such as the absence of ‘chaos’ or ‘first matter’ as origins of creation) where the account of Genesis 1 is closer to eighteenth-century science than most other ancient philosophy (4-5). He also interprets “and God saw that it was good” (6-7) as supporting Leibnizian theodicy, and excuses the long paraphrases in his translation for reasons of accuracy and preciseness (12). In other words, Michaelis attempts to make Genesis 1 appear as a sensible work of history, compatible with eighteenth-century science. Importantly, Michaelis wants to provide a Bible translation that is impartial among confessions (13). Thus he denies that the text may adjudicate whether the ‘image of God’ mentioned in Genesis 1 consists in a rational soul, preserved after Sin, or a state of innocence, which was lost (13).

Herder’s understanding of what he calls the “whole spirit of the Orient” diverges from Michaelis’ project of collecting an archive of historical-contextual facts (FHA 5, 210). When Herder develops his own more elaborate apologetic strategy, countering Michaelis acquires a special urgency: Michaelis does not only provide a rival exegesis, but also a methodology that, Herder now thinks, leads to skepticism and irreligion. Herder finds that Michaelis treats Scripture as mere ancient history and mythology of mankind. He faults Michaelis for glossing over the issue of how it was a source of revealed religion (FHA 5, 184, 237).¹⁹³ This becomes evident from Herder’s 1772 review of Michaelis’ *Mosaisches Recht* (1770). Herder criticizes that, because Michaelis does not properly explain Mosaic Law “aus dem orientalischen Geist der Zeit”, he cannot convince skeptics that he authentically presents the spirit of Mosaic Law (SWS 5, 425). Since Michaelis writes too much in his own common-sense manner of thought, he cannot grasp the “Geist der Nation, das wahre Gefühl einer Zeit, eines Klima, eines Volks, die wahre Philosophie eines Gesetzgebers” (426).

¹⁹³ See Bultmann (1999, 133-134, 139) and also cf. Legaspi (2010, 123-127) on how Michaelis countered Lowth’s exceptionalism in favor of the Israelites, and (163-164) for the statement that Michaelis deliberately obstructed confessional interpretation by making biblical text *academic*.

According to Michaelis, finding out and applying historical-contextual facts about the Bible will help to bridge the gap between the eighteenth century and Mosaic times. Herder, however, argues that such facts do not result in understanding the relevant context, namely, the “Oriental spirit”. Herder claims that Michaelis does not appreciate enough the particularity of this spirit and relies on too many of his own time’s categories in interpreting the period. Regarding Genesis 1, Herder also disputes the authorial intentions that Michaelis attributes to Moses (FHA 5, 310-311).¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, Herder criticizes Michaelis’ translations for being neither Orientally poetic nor having a proper German style; and his annotation for adding learned trivialities about astronomy, geography, biology and history that only estrange the reader from the simple feeling expressed in the text (Sheehan 2005, 199-201; FHA 5, 211, 222, 225). More importantly, Herder objects that Michaelis vacillates between excusing Moses’ cosmogony by placing him in his historical context on the one hand, and defending the timeless plausibility of some of his statements on the other hand. According to Herder, Michaelis ignores the opportunity to inquire how the very historical particularity of Moses’ account may indicate that it is the product of divine revelation. In fact, both Michaelis’ “Kenntnis des Orients” and Lowth’s “Poetische[r] Geschmack” are ineffective in reaching the revelatory core of the Bible, because they are not properly directed at the text’s central image (237). Herder claims that Michaelis ultimately only finds the fables of a cultural context that is too far removed from his own (Michaelis’ at least) enlightened and academic environment. Herder cynically comments on this environment’s historical studies: “O Mythologischer neuer schönster *Märchengeschmack*, der zuletzt die ganze Bibel, die heiligsten simpelsten Offenbarungen zu Orientalischen, Arabischen und Aegyptischen Phantasien machen, und alles Wort Gottes als Schaum gelehrter Phrasen verdunsten wird!” (314).

Herder’s polemics is additionally fueled by Michaelis’ conviction that academic commentary, even when intended for lay people, can only consist in accommodating biblical text to human’s best scientific knowledge about history, geography, biology, natural science and astronomy. According to Herder, this betrays the *deist*’s belief that it is actually reason, and not Scripture, which decides theological questions. He thus comments on Michaelis’ project by asking: “Neue Religion haben wir uns schon halb ausgemacht und erfunden, warum nicht auch eine neue Bibel dieser neuen Wasser-Religion gemäß?” (182). About this deist Bible, Herder

¹⁹⁴ In fact, as I have indicated above, Herder denied Mosaic authorship of Genesis 1; *Älteste Urkunde* would only add arguments for this denial (FHA 5, 305-314). But the point here is merely that Herder found the kind of intentions which Michaelis proposed to be too strongly derived from Michaelis’ own interest in pragmatic history and jurisprudence.

claims: “In kurzem wird die ganze Bibel zum besten der Ungelehrten und des gesunden Verstandes die dünneste und lauterste Deistische Wasserbrühe werden” (238). Herder argues this Bible obscures the real revelation contained in Scripture. The mass of Michaelis’ historical and scientific facts needs to be temporarily ignored in order to attend to the message in its simplicity and establish a more productive perspective upon the biblical text.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, Herder states that the text has thus been alienated from everyday religious life, and especially from those religious believers – the “Ungelehrte” – that need professional support in biblical exegesis (FHA 5, 183).

Michaelis is not the only innovative Bible scholar of the eighteenth century that receives this form of criticism from Herder. Herder also criticizes Lowth for projecting eighteenth-century neo-classicist aesthetic categories onto Hebrew poetry. He states that such categories, borrowed from classical literature and its different genres, do not do justice to the historical context of the Bible. Crucially, Herder does not think of the biblical poetry as ‘aesthetic’ or ‘artistic’ in a classical or neo-classical sense (Auerochs 2005, 98). Rather, poetry expresses sensuous feeling in condensed images. And since this sensuousness is universal to humanity, poetry’s intensified representations are not less true than history; indeed, they should be used by the historian.¹⁹⁶ In this way, Herder’s polemics against contemporary scholarship show that it is incorrect to infer from his criticisms of anachronism that he merely stresses the historical particularity of the Oriental spirit.¹⁹⁷ Herder seeks to defend biblical poetry against classicism. While pointing at historical particularity is an important device in this context, two other motifs are as essential: First, the idea that poetry and religion are primordially interconnected, and second, the conviction that a historical development of becoming increasingly prosaic has obscured this origin.

So, to sum up Herder’s position: while physical and metaphysical attempts at accommodation naively treat the Bible as if it contained timeless scientific truths, historians

¹⁹⁵ Bultmann (1999, 133-134) describes this conflict by claiming that it is Michaelis’ *historicizing* that objectifies the tradition which Herder attempts to hermeneutically uncover. However, I read Michaelis not so much as historicizing the Bible, for Michaelis mainly checks the supra-historical validity of the scientific claims made by Moses. Bultmann appears to recognize a Gadamerian form of anti-historicist polemics in Herder. It is true that Herder combats what we may read as Michaelis’ “scientism” or “objectivism”. But I do not consider Michaelis to have much in common with the nineteenth-century historicists that Gadamer attacks. That Michaelis cannot be read that way is also Legaspi’s (2010, 165-166) conclusion.

¹⁹⁶ I will elaborate on the connection with history below, but see Auerochs (2005, 111-113); vom Hofe (1986, 75ff.); Adler (1990, 148); Irmscher (2009, 143-145).

¹⁹⁷ This is occasionally still concluded from similar criticisms Herder formulates, e.g., in *Auch eine Philosophie*. In my interpretation, Herder’s polemics against the historical scholarship of his own century in these two 1774 works show remarkable overlap and have one central aim in common. Hence I will rely on the present analyses also in interpreting Herder’s central concerns in *Auch eine Philosophie*.

make the mistake of treating it merely as a fairy-tale or a work of profane history. That is to say, their expectations of what sort of truth historical texts could possibly express – i.e., either stable theological and (meta-)physical truth, or local fantasies – narrows historians' ability to attend to the simple message of the text in an unprejudiced manner. Herder, by contrast, is after a truth in Genesis that is historically specific and yet divine.

6.2. Genesis 1: natural religion and the hieroglyph of creation

In the previous chapter I have argued that three claims in *Über die ersten Urkunden* were suggestive of the more robust apologetic position of *Älteste Urkunde*. They were the claims (1) that divine instruction took place in the manner of the education of children via the workings of nature; (2) that the world-historical effects of the first documents attest that they were part of divine providence; and (3) that the emphatic old age of the pre-Mosaic tradition suggests that Moses was not directly inspired by God, but rather that he compiled older materials, derived from humanity's actual first encounters with nature. The problem of Herder's earlier biblical studies was that he did not make plausible the idea of divine instruction in a way that was informed by his hermeneutical method. Rather, he still relied on this notion primarily as a mere postulate (of dogmatic theology), which he applied to his interpretation. How did he change this in 1774?

Herder elaborates on the first claim by adding an account of an "Unterricht unter der Morgenröte" (FHA 5, 246-257) that human beings may receive at any time and place (as long as they wake up before dawn; a condition of which the possibility is historically stable, but not the probability). This account has the function of making readers sensitive to the significance of the simple image of Genesis 1 that both physicists and historians had ignored, namely, how the days of creation together display an image of daybreak. The "education under the aurora" also aims at making apparent (1) the continuities between eighteenth-century readers and Oriental poets in being able to sensuously apprehend creation via images such as daybreak; and (2) the stable presence of divine revelation and creation itself in the form of nature as an organization of living forces. The reader's education under the aurora proposed by Herder is at the same time an exercise in nurturing the right religious sensibilities and a hermeneutic attempt to open up to the eighteenth-century reader the "Geist des Orients" (187).¹⁹⁸ Historical

¹⁹⁸ Bultmann (1999, 137) argues that Herder primarily seeks to hermeneutically uncover the "poetic situation" of Genesis 1, which consists in the sensuous view (and that *Älteste Urkunde* is an interesting endeavor in biblical exegesis insofar as Herder stays true to his understanding of the text as a poetic expression needing historical interpretation). However, Bultmann also admits that for Herder, the sensuous view of the world is the 'universal'

empathizing into experiences made by pre-Mosaic *Naturvölker* thus goes hand in hand with emulating a comparable aesthetic response when confronted with the same natural phenomena (Bultmann 1999, 140-142). Herder aims to uncover the Oriental meaning of the biblical text by emulating their perspective on a stable feature or moment of experiencing nature (FHA 5, 200).

Herder starts by pointing out that the eighteenth century and early antiquity approach ‘creation’ and ‘nature’ in different ways: while his contemporaries investigate, analyze and systematically order objects of living and dead nature, the “lebenden, wirkenden Naturmenschen” were confronted with a lively chaos of natural forces (248). In this context, Herder still leaves room for a Humean natural history of religion, according to which these forces are interpreted and negotiated with as autonomous divinities (203, 247; likewise in the earlier text, FHA 5, 167-168). However, Herder’s central concern has to do with identifying the type of education these primordial humans in fact received. He does so by stipulating how their education had to be adapted to their historical-psychological condition and mode of relating to nature. Herder suggests that their education had to present them with a “*Bild, Ordnung, Lehrmethode, die ihm die Schöpfung unbetäubend und doch ganz, nach und nach und doch im Zusammenhange, mit Macht, Einwirkung [...] gebe*” (FHA 5, 248). Herder continues with the remark that this image consists in the “*Aufgehende Morgenröte! [...] die ganze Schöpfung im Anbruche*” (248).

Why daybreak in particular? Herder suggests that it brings the light directly teaching humans to actively engage with nature and practice their perception, memory and language (250, 252, 255). Daybreak presents a succession of images mirroring how the (general process of) creation is structured according to a movement of inner differentiation, namely, by subsequently differentiating between darkness and light, heavens and earth, and sun and moon (cf. Auerochs 2006, 329-331). Furthermore, daybreak evokes an immediate impression of the world, repeated every day and of high existential significance for the first Oriental peoples in their daily struggle for subsistence (FHA 5, 247-248). This impression could be ordered in a mnemonic sequence of “Bilder”, capturing and preserving the essence of their education under the aurora (238). Herder suggests that the Hebrew poets of Genesis 1 used the experience of daybreak to express their natural religion.

that connects reader and text, and the poetic situation is also a world-historical situation (namely the *Urgeschichte* of humankind). Thus it may be too challenging to consistently interpret Herder’s position as poetic-hermeneutic (and not also anthropological, metaphysical and theological), even when this interpretation captures many of Herder’s hermeneutic and polemical motivations.

That is, Herder still thinks of this type of education as the positive education of humanity by God. Herder aims to combine the interpretation of Genesis 1 with an analysis of concrete experience in order to turn the theological postulate of divine instruction into an immediate sensuous certainty for everyone as well as into a historically locatable experience of human *Urgeschichte* (cf. vom Hofe 1986, 76, 80). And while Herder argues that the Oriental perspective has been weakened through eighteenth-century abstraction and analysis, it is not fully lost: children still tend to experience this work of nature in a similar way (FHA 5, 252-256). Furthermore, while primordially, the sequence of images of Genesis 1 was a product of humanity's education under the aurora, eighteenth-century readers may inverse that order of production: they may rely on experiencing daybreak to emulate the Orientals' aesthetic response to nature and to thus grasp the meaning of their poetic way of preserving this impression (Auerochs 2006, 330).

This conviction of Herder motivates his interpretative strategy, namely to release the succession of "Bilder" of the seven days of creation from overly theoretical interpretations. Herder calls this procedure "Einfältigung" and "Entkleidung" of the string of images expressed in Genesis 1 (FHA 5, 239). This procedure is meant to guide the reader into the Oriental's perspective on the first six days of creation – namely: light; heavens; earth; lights; creatures of waters and sky; creatures of the earth – and recognize that they together form the "*Gemälde der Morgenröte, Bild des werdenden Tages*" (239). The structure of this dynamic image follows a dyadic movement where light is followed by sky and earth, then converges into the lights of sun and moon, then branches out again with the creatures of the sky and the creatures of the earth, and returns to one position with Sabbath.

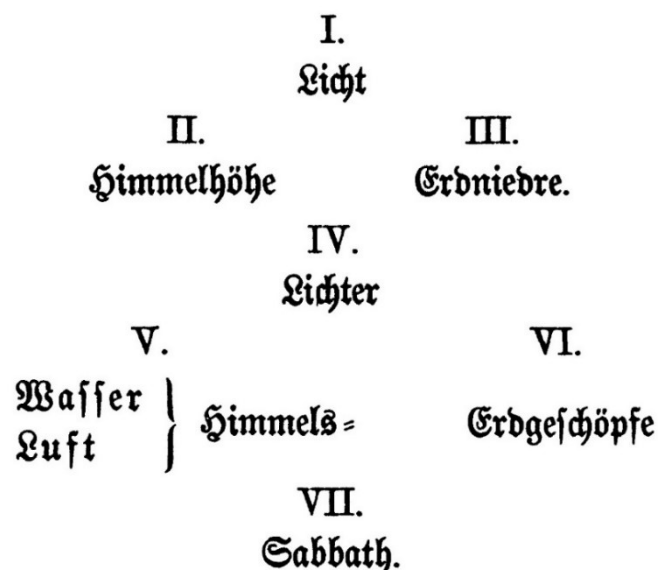


Figure 1: the *Schöpfungshieroglyphe* (SWS 6, 292)

This image was the Hebrew people's expression of the natural forces of creation, and together with Sabbath it organized the temporal structure of their communal life. On the seventh day, God made humans memorize and document the structure of the painting in a hieroglyph (284-285; cf. Bultmann 1999, 159). Herder thus equates the Oriental image of dawn with God's primordial revelation to humanity through His creation. He states that the seven days of creation are parallelistically ordered as a *divine hieroglyph*. This hieroglyph naturally interlocks primordial humanity's first cultural production and divine revelation. According to Herder, the hieroglyph of creation is "dem ersten heiligsten Orakel nicht *unterschoben*, sondern *eingewebt* [...] in nichts als *im Bau Himmels und der Erde selbst gegründet* [...]" (FHA 5, 269). That is to say, creation itself is of a hieroglyphic structure; by pointing humanity's attention to this structure, humanity was educated simply by recognizing creation as divine. Herder argues that the hieroglyph is not an extra mystery adding to the theoretical presuppositions of his exegesis. Rather, the 'oracle' of Genesis 1, provided by the hieroglyph, is already inherent in creation (Bultmann 1999, 154). Herder finds this primordial symbol of humanity's education everywhere in ancient wisdom, and considers it to be the source of all religion, culture and knowledge. He goes on to interpret various theories and phenomena as hieroglyphic, including the human form itself as well as the structure of world history.¹⁹⁹

I will return to this aspect of Herder's hieroglyph theory below. Here, I first sum up his hermeneutic argument: Herder argues against Michaelis, who stresses historical distance and thus makes the Old Testament foreign, by saying, "Die Bilder aber bedeuten *Sachen*, die auch wir *kennen*, und wenn auch nicht alle gleich geläufig dem Erklärer *nachfühlen* können" (FHA 5, 238). The Oriental poetic expression of the awe experienced at dawn bridges historical distances because it represents the universal core of the human being's sensuous grasp of nature's intelligible order. Herder argues this is because at the start of the pre-Mosaic tradition of *Ursprungslieder*, when Adam's eyes were opened by God bringing him light, heavens, earth and the creatures of both, the feelings of humans and the forces of nature were perfectly synchronized (Bultmann 1999, 138, 142-143, 145, 155-156). So, while the specific interpretations of nature (by, e.g., poets and scientists) must differ in every historical period, the basic parallelism of the cosmos remains constant. The human interpretation of nature is always in development – Herder wants to retain his position against reconciling the Bible and modern

¹⁹⁹ On the immense breadth Herder attributes to this idea, also compared with the sources he could have drawn his inspiration from, see Häfner (1995, 237-252) and Nisbet (1989).

metaphysics and science – but the hieroglyph of creation guides this development as a minimal core and structural criterion.²⁰⁰

Against skeptics, of course, the assumption that, during the hermeneutic encounter with Genesis 1 as well as with the forces of creation, humans are able to feel revelation, remains a *petitio principii*. Why should an education under the aurora convince them any more than theological postulates? Herder responds to this by invoking the anti-skeptical considerations that I discussed in Chapter One, in order to argue for the primacy of sensuous certainties over demonstrations (FHA 5, 251; FHA 9/1, 129). Particularly, Herder argues for an anti-skeptical stance on behalf of the Orientals. Surely, he suggests, the philosopher's doubt achieves nothing against their certainty that the light of daybreak supports their cognition and action by bringing them into contact with the 'presence' and 'force' of creation. Herder asks:

Der Gott, der Lehrer dieses Menschen, soll ihn lehren, *wodurch?* Nicht *durch Schlüsse und Abstraktionen* [...] allein *durch Gegenwart und Kraft!* Daß er auf Alles, was um ihn ist, worauf er sich *wie ausgegossen* fühlt, *allmählich geleitet und gelenkt* werde! Daß ihm die ganze Welt *von Bildern*, die sein Auge *bestürmte* oder *bestürmen würde*, in *sanfter Ordnung vorrücke* – und es sodann Jedes in seiner ganzen Gegenwart mit *Sinn und Kraft erfasse* [...]. (FHA 5, 250)

Initially, Herder intends this picture of Oriental psychology to contrast with eighteenth-century readers' self-understanding and thus to make them aware of an alternative to their logical demonstrations for the existence of God (251). He does not pretend that his contemporaries are "poured out" over the universe, or instinctively-divinely "directed and guided" (contra Zippert 1994, 250-251). And yet, emulating the Oriental stance should yield a comparable trust in the presence, force and images of creation. It is the aim of Herder's hermeneutics that "überall Geist des Orients wehe, und doch der schlichte Kopf des Okzidents damit nicht übertäubt sei: daß Gott in jeder Sylbe würdig spreche, und Menschen jede Sylbe Notdringend verstehen und fühlen" (FHA 5, 187). He aims to retrieve the spirit of the Orient and the voice of God in the following way: the universal human capacity of sensuousness should accommodate an *empfinden* into Oriental times in order to discover a particular Oriental sensuousness, which immunizes the Orientals from skeptical doubt. Subsequently, Herder suggests, eighteenth-century readers emulate the Oriental's sensuousness in virtue of the *Lebensalter* analogy con-

²⁰⁰ See Häfner (1994, 91, 95) and Nisbet (1989) for good explanations of this role of the hieroglyph. I will in the next section expand on Herder's conception of the hieroglyph as prototype.

necting them, and also take an anti-skeptical stance. Finally, this sensuousness should allow everyone to agree with the Orientals and recognize the presence of God in all of creation.

Herder claims that the nature of human sensuousness is more open to images than inferences and abstraction, especially in childhood, and that it is only natural that God first revealed himself to humanity in this way (248, 251; FHA 9/1, 84-86, 129). Hence, Herder states that the presence and force of light, heavens and earth were the first educators of humanity:

[S]o sahen die ältesten Morgenländer in dies *große Buch* der Schöpfung. [...] überall wo Kraft *strebt*, wo *Wirkung erscheint* – da der allebende Gott [...]

Und so hier die erste Offenbarung. Er immer darin der Unsichtbare, Unnennbare! aber überall Naturkräfte, der schaffende Elohim! [...] Überall *Sichtbar* und *Unsichtbar*, *allwirkend* mit der größten *Ruhe schaffend* und in die sanfte Morgenfolge sein *Schöpferswort verborgen* – der ists, den Uns die *älteste* und *ewigste Religion* predigt. (FHA 5, 253)

Herder argues that the documents of this natural religiosity form a positive religion, because they were the products of revelation, namely, of God creating (in) nature (246, 285-288; Koepke 1982). Thus, while Herder presents this conception of revelation as the paradigm for a non-doubting religion, it is also an intervention in the debate, between deists and Christian orthodoxy, over natural and revealed religion. Herder agrees with the advocates of natural religion that the mere experience of nature may serve to recognize the existence of God. But he argues this is only because God's positive revelation underlies all (human experience of) creation. In the cosmogony which Herder formulates in his exegesis, he interprets God's acts of creation and instruction as two aspects of the same process. The difference between bringing about the days of genesis ("Tat", "Gegenwart", "Wirkungen") and educating humanity by pointing out their intelligible order ("Lehre", "Wort", "Stimme", "Wink") dissolves in the inaccessible depths of pre-history (cf. Auerbachs 2006, 330-333; Bultmann 1999, 154-158; Zippert 1994, 239-240; vom Hofe 1989, 193-194; Büchsel 1989, 156). This process is paradigmatically preserved in the hieroglyph of creation. Furthermore, since Genesis 1 still contains the purest expression of this hieroglyph, revealed religion remains the key source of all religion. To sum up, Herder presents the hieroglyph of creation as the positive revelation which accounts for all natural religion. He thus attempts to undercut the deists' attempts at establishing a natural religion of mere reason: all religious readings of the "*Buch der Schöpfung*" necessarily rely on positive religion in producing their various reinterpretations

and adaptations of the hieroglyph of creation. This *Schöpfungstheologie* is Herder's monist starting-point in engaging the plurality of religious beliefs.

6.2.1. The reception of *Älteste Urkunde*

With *Älteste Urkunde*, Herder intended to convince the general public that biblical authority could be saved from the Enlightenment skeptics and deists (such as Hume, Maupertuis, and Michaelis) and simultaneously reconciled with its historical, anthropological and even naturalist discourses. The oldest religion, according to Herder, recognized the unity of all of creation. Even if, at times, ancient peoples represented the forces of nature as multiple deities or angles, this religion was close to the *hen kai pan* conception of the divine that he would formulate in reaction to the Spinozism debate in the 1780s.

Herder did not in fact convince the philosophers. They for instance reproached the methodological instability of an "Unterricht unter der Morgenröte". Johann August Eberhard argued it was not very persuading or comprehensible how this very specific way of experiencing nature at dawn could be repeated every day in exactly the same manner, or how the primordial religious human subject could be reconstructed (Eberhard 1775; Sauder 1989, 274). Regarding its general reception, *Älteste Urkunde* was among Herder's biggest failures (see FHA 5, 1377-1379). Its polemics brought Herder many new enemies and intensified older feuds; its positive proposal met with incredulity. Clearly, his account of humankind's primordial religion, as well as the Oriental's anti-skepticism, were far removed from eighteenth-century philosophical culture. Especially Herder's writing style affronted the critics in the learned journals. Their discussions often did not extend beyond scorning Herder's language and pathos.²⁰¹ (As Regine Otto rightly notes about the polemics between Herder and Nicolai and the Wolffians, it is a shame that they mostly avoided interrogating the substance of the argument and stuck to castigating the person and tone (1994, 162).²⁰² Herder was not innocent in this respect either.)

One issue which did receive its deserved attention was the epistemic value that Herder attributed to feeling. While Wolffian reviewers considered it very thin as proof for a theory of

²⁰¹ The theological faculty of Göttingen, Smend reports (1989, 14), expressed in a *Votum* on the appointment of Herder as professor that they honestly had to admit that they could not understand *Älteste Urkunde*.

²⁰² Also well-intentioned contemporaries of Herder (who were not *Stürmer und Dränger*) were frustrated by the effect of *Älteste Urkunde*'s style on its reception. Georg Friedrich Brandes offered to reprint a paraphrased edition with all polemical passages removed; he was certain that this version would be much more successful (Smend 1989, 11). Häfeli asked Herder's critics: "Ist es denn billig, nur immer gegen die Sprache Feldgeschrei zu machen, und das Publikum bereden zu wollen, als ob in dieser Sprache nichts gesagt würde, das lesenswerth wäre, kein Licht, kein Aufschluß?" (1776, 223).

exegesis and revelation, literary figures like Matthias Claudius, Lenz and Goethe were enthusiastic (see Sauder 1989). Hamann wrote to Herder that he expected Kant and others to suspect “daß Herder den alten Hamann aushamannisiert habe” (Hamann 02.04.1774, in ZH 3, 74).²⁰³ Furthermore, Goethe enthusiastically praised Herder’s sentimental-religious achievement and discussed the work as a sublime work of art. I quote most of his assessment, because it indicates how his fellow *Stürmer und Dränger* read Herder:

Es ist ein so mystisch weitstrahlsinniges Ganze, eine in der Fülle verschlungener Geschöpfssäste lebend und rollende Welt, dass weder eine Zeichnung nach verüngtem Maasstab, einigen Ausdruck der Riesengestalt nachäffen, oder eine treue Silhouette einzelner Teile, melodisch sympathetischen Klang in der Seele anschlagen kann. Er ist in die Tiefen seiner Empfindung hinabgestiegen, hat drinne all die hohe heilige Krafft der simplen Natur aufgewühlt und führt sie nun in dämmerndem, wetterleuchtendem hier und da morgenfreundlichlächelndem, Orphischem Gesang von Aufgang herauf über die weite Welt, nachdem er vorher die Lasterbrut der neuern Geister, De- und Atheisten, Philologen, Textverbesserer, Orientalisten, mit Feuer und Schwefel und Fluthsturm ausgetilget. Sonderlich wird Micha[e]lis von Skorpionen getödtet. (Goethe 04.06.1774, in Sauder 1989, 270-271; FHA 5, 1373)

There were others who lauded Herder’s anti-skeptical proposal of an education under the aurora and the epistemic value that it attributes to feeling. In his defense of Herder’s work, Johann Caspar Häfeli connected his reading of the *Morgenröte* with Goethe’s 1773 *Brief des Pastors zu *** an den neuen Pastor zu *** Aus dem Französischen*. Häfeli concisely expressed their shared conviction:

Dies Morgengemälde! Da gehts mir wie dem Pastor zu ***. Er wußte nicht ob man die Göttlichkeit der Bibel einem beweisen könnte, der sie nicht fühlt. Wenigstens hielt ers für unnöthig. – Und ich weiß nicht, ob sich das Wahre, Natürliche, Ungesuchte dieses Morgengemäldes einem beweisen läßt, ders nicht fühlt. Wenigstens halte ich es für unnöthig – (Häfeli 1776, 209)

²⁰³ In fact, in his exchange with Kant, Hamann played down the importance of Herder’s historical proof. He wrote to Herder about these particular letters (which he published): “Ich wünschte alles [i.e. Herder’s method of exegesis] a priori deduciren zu können; in ihre deduction a posteriori wollte ich mich so wenig als möglich einlassen (Hamann 31.05.1774, in ZH 3, 99). I will suggest below that the Kantian interpretation, which Hamann attempted to rectify, was in fact quite close to the mark.

Häfeli continued by arguing against accusations to the extent that Herder offers no positive alternative to the exegetical methods rejected by him. Häfeli held that the “Thatbeweis” (222) of the aurora should be taken seriously as evidence for the fact that God educated humankind in its childhood through the presence and force of approaching daylight.²⁰⁴

Kant, on the other hand, while preparing to write a review of *Älteste Urkunde* that he ultimately decided not to publish, explained to Hamann that he was “zu der Göttersprache der *Anschauenden Vernunft* garnicht *organisirt*” (Kant 06.04.1774, in ZH 3, 82). As Bultmann correctly notes, Kant failed to recognize the significance of the education under the aurora and thus overlooked that Herder’s conception of revelation is not the conventional one of direct inspiration (Bultmann 1999, 171-172).²⁰⁵ Indeed, his remark about intuiting reason makes it clear that he could not come to terms with Herder’s accounts of natural religion and its sensuous poetry. Nonetheless, Kant did judiciously analyze how Herder conceives of the hieroglyph, its ancient tradition and the text of Genesis 1. He went to great length to correctly depict both how Herder understood the significance of the ‘oldest document’ and how he meant to prove its old age. Kant appreciated that the document’s significance lies in its universal validity as the absolute origin of human culture: “denn der Streit [about the question how ancient religions are historically connected] verwandelt sich sofort in Eintracht, nachdem gezeigt worden, daß es nur so viel verschiedene apparenßen eines und desselben Urbildes waren” (Kant 08.04.1774, in ZH 3, 84). Furthermore, he correctly assessed that if Herder succeeded in showing that only the hieroglyph may elucidate all ancient religious symbols, he thus would indeed prove that it was the *Urbild* of human knowledge (85). Finally, he also correctly evaluated that Herder, as an “[U]ngeweihte[r]” in academic philology and history, would most probably not succeed in convincing the “Meister orientalischer Gelehrsamkeit”, above all Michaelis, that they must accept Herder’s hypothesis (87).²⁰⁶

Herder was well aware that he would not persuade Kant nor Michaelis nor many others; he considered his project an untimely enterprise that would hopefully one day find a better audience (FHA 5, 301; Herder, May 1774, in ZH 3, 90-91). Still, Herder found that the interpretative strategy based on childhood, aurora and hieroglyph provided the resources for reassessing

²⁰⁴ Lenz (1987, 528-529) formulated his own psychological account of Adam and Eve’s *sensation* of God in Paradise in terms very close to Herder.

²⁰⁵ Kant thus did not follow the advice that Herder wrote to Hamann, and that many later interpreters, including the present one, have followed: “halten Sie sich am 1. Th. der Urkunde. Th. 2 und 3. sind Schatte” (Herder, May 1774, in ZH 3, 91).

²⁰⁶ Goethe likewise added to his praise: “Aber ich höre das Magister Volck schon rufen: er ist voll süßen Weins, und der Landpfleger wiegt sich auf seinem Stule und spricht: du rasest!” (FHA 5, 1373).

Genesis 1 and regenerating human religion. Many critics correctly observed that Herder did not merely theorize about a particular form of historical understanding. Rather, Herder followed a practical imperative of his *Sturm und Drang* program for spiritual renewal and cultural reform when he called on his readers to feel their way into Oriental times and emulate primeval religiosity (254).²⁰⁷ The biblical text called upon the eighteenth-century reader, and especially the poet, to make attempts at this hermeneutic achievement and reproduce images of the original totality for eighteenth-century religious practice.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, also Kant recognized that Herder in this context did not intend to expound dogmatic metaphysics, but rather proposed a historical hypothesis. Also as an empirical hypothesis, however, the hieroglyph thesis did not appear less fragile to various contemporaries (Sauder 1989, 274, 276). One reviewer remarked that, since Herder had so many hopes regarding this new discovery, one would expect that, in the section on the hieroglyph, he would try extra hard to clearly communicate in what it consisted. This reviewer was disappointed by Herder: “[G]erade hier ist der Verf. am dunkelsten, und nicht blos uns, sondern allen, die wir darüber zu Rathe gezogen, fast ganz unverständlich” (*Philologische Bibliothek* 1775, 75).

In this section, I have aimed to explain how Herder provides a specific hermeneutic approach to the text of Genesis 1, as well as how this approach is based on psychological and epistemological analyses of human faith. I have also indicated that Herder, on the basis of his exegesis, formulates an ontotheological conception of creation. That is, he interprets Genesis 1 as presenting the pregnant core of a kind of *Schöpfungstheologie*, an ontology of revelation in nature and history. In the following section, I will explain how Herder derives from his exegesis an anthropology of unity in diversity. Furthermore, I will explore how, in their turn, his ontotheology and anthropology inform the hermeneutic method and epistemology of faith that I have analyzed above.

6.3. The human form and the theology of creation

As I interpreted *Über die ersten Urkunden* together with Herder’s *Sturm und Drang* manifesto (see 5.2), Oriental poetry became Herder’s paradigm example of the natural poetry of “wilden Völker” around the globe. Recall, Herder argued these peoples were capable of *documenting* the *Bildung* of nature – as they witnessed manifestations of this process within their own histor-

²⁰⁷ See also FHA 5, 256-7 and other passages where Herder stresses the direct cultural relevance of his biblical studies. Cf. Haym ([1880] 1954, 669-670) on the “ethical-mystical” character of Herder’s biblical studies.

²⁰⁸ See vom Hofe (1986, 86) and Zippert (1994, 148-151) on the “Appellcharakter” of the Bible. This aspect was very positively received by Lenz ([1775] 1987, 182) and the Lavater circle (see Sauder 1989, 283-289).

ical circumstances – because they sensuously recognized nature’s active genetic forces. Because they recognized these shape-bringing forces, their poetry pointed at nature in general as a lively and intelligible organization. Because of this general scope of their expressed sensuousness, Herder found remarkable analogies between the poetry of peoples around the globe.

In this section, I will explain how, in *Älteste Urkunde*, Herder’s interpretation of the creation of humankind supports, in a more principled manner, the anthropology and philosophy of nature behind this conception of poetry. That is, he concludes from his exegesis that the human being is the center of creation. The “wahre Gestalt des sinnlichen Menschen” that Herder aimed to find among Oriental poets already in 1769 (FHA 5, 16) acquires a new significance as the prototype of the human. This is because Herder portrays the Oriental’s sensuous grasp of God’s presence in nature as the direct consequence of God’s own *Vermenschlichung*. Furthermore, Herder interprets humankind’s flexibility and openness for new developments as expressing creation’s tendency toward realizing all its possibilities and achieving the greatest possible diversity of forms. That is, Herder puts forward an anthropocentric version of the idea of plenitude: the human shape appears as the integrating and diversifying prototype of creation (Lovejoy [1936] 2001, esp. ch. 9). Thus he aims to combine and reconcile his anthropology and philosophy of nature in a unified vision of creation in all its fullness, while still basing his claims on the historical interpretation of the documents of Genesis. Before I turn to this attempt at reconciling humankind and creation as a whole, I begin by expounding the problems Herder faces, especially with respect to human finitude.

First, Herder proposes that natural poetry analogically reproduces the natural forces of creation in as broad a manner as human finitude and particular historical conditions allow, so as to represent (and continue) God’s meaningfully ordered process of creation in condensed images (FHA 5, 245, 299-300; vom Hofe 1986, 79, 84-85). The paradigm example of such an image is God’s own hieroglyph of creation, representing the totality of creation in a simple *Denkbild* (cf. vom Hofe 1986, 82). Second, Herder aims to formulate a notion of revelation that is immanent to creation and that always adapts to particular forms of human experience. He seeks to deny that God’s revelations contain a transcendent truth. Indeed, Herder’s picture of creation leaves less and less room for any transcendent realm (one of the reasons why the Göttingen theology faculty expressed doubts regarding his Protestant orthodoxy).²⁰⁹ However,

²⁰⁹ For the controversy, see Smend (1989, 9-16). Cf. Buntfuß (2004, 65) on the notion of immanence, and Cordemann (2010, ch. 2) and Otto (1978) on Herder’s conception of God and the increasing proximity to Spinoza.

despite these moves toward immanence, the question remains how the eighteenth-century individual human being approaches the One and All. Humans never capture creation in its totality, nor do they grasp the full significance of its hieroglyphic structure. The totality and the unity of God's revelation still pose obvious problems for finite creatures. Apart from the method of interpreting the Oriental manner of relating to nature, which I have discussed above, Herder introduces anthropological ideas addressing this issue. He derives these ideas from his interpretation of the sixth day of creation, and particularly, the creation of humans in the image of God.

In Chapter Four, I presented how, in *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder stresses human finitude, but simultaneously contends that world history provides humans with the magic mirror reflecting all of humanity's Protean shapes.²¹⁰ Central reasons for this are humanity's ability of developing in various directions and recognizing analogies between different human shapes. Different human shapes all reflect the human type, which is the potential to take on a specific shape, and the nucleus of all human forms. The figure of Proteus, with his capacities for shape-shifting and divination, offers a manner of conceiving history at large as a unified whole while also acknowledging human finitude and situatedness. In his interpretation of the creation of humankind in *Älteste Urkunde*, Herder offers exegetical and historical support for these anthropological presuppositions. In the course of this interpretation, the *Schöpfungshieroglyphe* takes on a role very similar to the figure of Proteus.²¹¹ However, the hieroglyph suggests a model for world history where the single origin of human culture is clearly circumscribed as primordial humanity's encounter with God. Herder conceives of all human-historical possibilities as primordially contained in the seeds of this revelation. Also the ways these seeds are subsequently developed in world history, are clearly constricted by the hieroglyph. Hence, Herder's Protean model of human unity in diversity must be complemented with the implications of his hieroglyph theory. I will start by explaining how Herder derives these ideas from his exegesis of the sixth day of creation. He also continues his polemics against inferring theological dogma from the simple Oriental phrase "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them" (Gen 1.27; Coogan 2010, 13). Again, Herder takes the

²¹⁰ Recall his statement regarding the ideal of a universal history functioning as a "Spiegel des Menschengeschlechts in aller Treue, Fülle, und Gefühl der Offenbarung Gottes" (FHA 4, 88).

²¹¹ Häfner (1994, 249-251) connects Herder's discovery of the hieroglyph with his studies of a seventeenth-century treatise in anthropology, Johann Sigismund Elsholtz' *Anthropometria*, which discusses humanity as a Proteus and the human body as a symmetric figure. Vom Hofe (1989, 200) argues that the hieroglyph provides the "Universal", the "unter den heterogenen historischen und proteischen Formationen substantiell Identischen" for Herder's theory of history.

Oriental's sensuous grasp of the divine in every part of nature as the criterion for interpreting this phrase.

According to Herder's interpretation of the sixth day in the "epic story" of creation, before the creation of humankind, the whole of creation pauses and still awaits its purpose and unity. God achieves the sensuous unity and purposiveness of All only when he creates humans, who synthesize their impressions and distinguish between present, past and future, and thus connect and order aspects of creation (FHA 5, 231-232). Especially because of their flexibility, their collecting, recognizing analogies, and expanding sympathy and love for aspects of creation, humans give meaning to what would otherwise remain a plethora of unconnected dots (FHA 5, 230; cf. Bultmann 1999, 143-144). Herder states that the human creature is the "*höchste sinnliche Einheit alles Sichtbaren*" (FHA 5, 230) and the human body forms the "*Zauberspiegel*" for the "*gegenwärtige aber verborgne Gottheit*" on earth (231). Humankind creates inventions and continues projects, and thus has the telos of becoming one as a species (232-233). Through their striving towards totality, their organizing and modifying their environments and passing on their (artistic) productions, humans emulate their creator (236). However, because they never fully reach their goals, their divinity remains *hidden*; they are always becoming human, never fully finished (232, 283).²¹²

Up until the creation of humankind, Genesis 1 has a hidden protagonist, whose presence is only implied by His speaking and creating. On the sixth day, Herder claims, the hero takes on a visible shape, namely: "*Bild Gottes und der Schöpfung, der Mensch! unsichtbar noch schallte über ihm der Ratschluß [i.e., God's decree "Let us make humankind", N.W.]; sichtbar steht er da! erkennt sich, wirkt und handelt – der gegenwärtige Gott!*" (FHA 5, 300).²¹³ Herder interprets the creation of humankind in the image of God as God's most condensed expression in creation. He infers from this that the human being is itself the image of creation. In synthesizing impressions and receiving God's positive education through nature, Adam finds that he himself is the hieroglyph of creation (293-294). Herder thus alludes to the idea of the human being as microcosm. But he also qualifies how this notion applies: "[*H*]eiliges und entweihetes Bild Gottes! geschwächter und zerrißner *Inbegriff aller Schöpfung!* Tempel, in dem und an dem sich die Gottheit zuerst [...] zu offenbaren würdigte" (294). With the notion of '*Entweihung*', Herder alludes to the orthodox principle of Sin. In the same passage, he refers to

²¹² The anthropology of Herder's biblical study is thus quite reconcilable with *Ursprung der Sprache*. See Bellmann (2016) and Pannenberg (1983, 42, 47-50).

²¹³ Vom Hofe (1989, 209) points out how this moment of incarnating and becoming visible connects to *Auch eine Philosophie's* depiction of world history as "*Epopée Gottes*". Indeed, the "*Gang Gottes durch die Nationen*" relies on God and humankind retaining the connection that was established on the sixth day of creation.

Christ. While this suggests a qualitative break, separating humankind from its original state, Herder does not actually connect to the Fall a strong notion of Sin. By contrast, he argues that the Fall is a necessary phase in humanity's historical development and the only way in which humans may develop their humanity, so that they may seek to become what they are: divine (604ff.; cf. Cordemann 2010, 203-218; Bultmann 1999, 163-164).²¹⁴ Hence also humanity's reflecting all of creation, its role as the *Schöpfungshieroglyphe*, must be historically developed. In the following, I explain how this notion, of humanity as a divine prototype and ideal, informs Herder's conception of history.

First, while Herder demands of his readers to start imagining Adamic religiosity, he recognizes how they are limited by their own historical circumstances in similarly grasping revelation:

[W]er kann sich in diese Urzeit der Schöpfungsreligion hinfühlen, *als Adam ward, da stand, sahe, Gott überall, sich in ihm, sich als sein Bild fühlte* – Heilige Momente der Ersten Offenbarung! Es ist als ob der *Allanblick*, und die ganze *Stimme der Sphären*, nach dem *Sinne des Menschen gemildert*, ihm *Seele öffnete*, und *Herz und Gebein erquickte*! (FHA 5, 254)

As this passage indicates, Herder conceives of the *Allanblick* as fractured twice: even primordially, it was already adapted to human sensation, and it is further allayed by the difficulty in empathizing into the original human sensuousness. In fact, he qualifies his view of how humans receive revelation when he concludes the first part of *Älteste Urkunde* with the thesis that humanity is the image of the whole of creation, stating that:

Hätten wir Sinn und Blick genug, die ganze Schöpfung zu übersehen, Wohllaut des Schöpfers aus allen einzeln Tönen und Tongebäuden zu hören – Kein Bild in der ganzen Natur wahrscheinlich für uns als wie jetzt für uns *Menschheit* ist! *Bild Gottes* in allen seinen Kräften, Anwendungen und Reizen; zugleich *Sinnbild und*

²¹⁴ Vom Hofe (1986, 72, 74, 83-84) observes that this is where Herder most strongly departs from Hamann's theology, and that their differences stem from diverging interpretations of the Fall. Furthermore, vom Hofe in his interpretations of Herder's theology of creation stresses pantheistic features and claims that Herder is solely focused on origin and not on telos/eschaton (1984, 61, 63, 65, 68). Following vom Hofe, Buntfuß likewise speaks of a Herdorean idea of "Erlösung als Potentialität der Schöpfung" and "das weltimmanent gedachte Heil" (2004, 66). Cordemann correctly counters their inferring a complete lack of eschatology from Herder's thin reading of the Fall (2010, 220-223). Cordemann explains how Herder integrates his interpretation of the Fall into his (1780-1790) Christology, and points at an unpublished 1774 fragment where Herder refers to Christ as the prototype of creation (SWS 7, 322; Cordemann 2010, 234-237). I will return to the theme of eschatology below.

Inbegriff der ganzen sichtbaren und unsichtbaren Welt! So wäre für uns die große Schöpfung Gottes! (298)

I interpret this conclusion as stating that, as a whole, humanity is indeed this hieroglyph of creation, while individual human beings never have enough sense and view to oversee humanity in its totality. I will expand on this in the next chapter, when I discuss how Herder understands this situation within his philosophy of history.

Second, Herder relies on human finitude, and on the idea that humankind depends on revelation for its development, in order to explain why God's primordial revelation had to provide the seeds for all the manifold subsequent developments. I motivate this important point with a longer quote from the same concluding pages. Herder contemplates:

[W]eil aber die Hauptende der menschlichen Erkenntnis und Bildung nicht also in unsrer Hand sind, nur armselig und dürftig – und Gott *der Vater aller Lehre [...] in ein Samenkorn zu verhüllen*, Weltgebäude nach dem *Begriff einer Regel* zu schaffen und zu ordnen, ein Menschliches Wesen, Leib und Seele, so unendlich verschieden an Kräften, Gliedern und Zwecken in das *Unendliche Eine Eines Geschlechts* zu leiten und zu bilden weiß – wie wird die Lehre, der erste Positive Unterricht dieses Gottes an dies ganze Geschlecht sein müssen? *Eins in All!* und *All in Eins!* ein *Universum der Bildung! Samenkorn*, woraus sich alles entwickeln sollte, die Ewigkeiten hinunter! (297-298)

Herder invokes the infinite diversity of human forces and goals in order to suggest that their One origin necessarily contained the seeds for them All. Systematically, the original absolute unity of human knowledge functions as the necessary precondition for recognizing particular developments as instances of human knowledge. Thus Herder's monogeneticism is not simply an expression of the orthodox intention to defend biblical history, but rather has the systematic function of securing the identity underlying all historical diversity (cf. Cordemann 2010, 55; vom Hofe 1989, 200-201). Here it seems most difficult to see how he should not be interpreted as deducing a metaphysical theory on the basis of his exegesis. I will briefly discuss how Herder meant to present these ideas, and compare my own interpretative solution with how two recent scholars have attempted to come up with charitable interpretations of this issue.

Herder argues that the unity of human culture has a verifiable historical location. It can be empirically approximated when using the right hermeneutic method in biblical exegesis combined with a properly extensive history of ancient religion. Herder's enthusiasm about the

significance of the *Schöpfungshieroglyphe*, reflected in the conclusion of the first part, mainly stems from his historical enquiries into all ancient religions (which he puts through in parts two and three). He thinks to have discovered that the hieroglyph's seven-step symmetric structure underlies all these religions' doctrines and symbols. Importantly, however, Herder explicitly censures his discourse on the human form as the microcosm. In the theoretical sections on the hieroglyph, he announces that the second part, devoted to the history of ancient religiosity, "wird mehr davon, aus andrer Leute, *Weisen und Völker*, Munde reden" (293). This slightly qualifies the status of the "One in All" as a principle of a completely monistic metaphysics: Herder presents it more as a mystic intimation which was only addressed to a few initiates.²¹⁵ Of course, according to Herder's hypothesis that history is guided by the hieroglyph, his decision to let other nations speak about the human form as microcosm does not qualify its universal validity. This universality is precisely what he wants his inquiries into the history of religion to corroborate. However, this decision does attest to his resolve not to turn his biblical exegesis into a metaphysical system. Herder namely seeks the empirical confirmation of all ancient religious documents for his historical thesis to gain in probability. He intends his thesis to obtain the character of an empirically verifiable historical truth.

Markus Buntfuß (2004, 63-66) relies on passages like the previous one when he interprets *Älteste Urkunde* as presenting nothing but the "human truth" characterizing modern epistemological caution and what Buntfuß calls the "principle of immanence". As I interpret these passages, Buntfuß is right that Herder's 'Analogie zum Menschen' plays a central role in connecting his interpretation of the *imago Dei* with the hieroglyph of creation (cf. Chapter Three). However, because anthropology and the theology of creation are so intricately related, Buntfuß' separating the immanence of "Individualitätstheorie" from the notion of totality, so central to what he calls the "spinozistisch-identitätstheoretischen Gedankenkomplex" (62), appears artificial, and is not very productive in interpreting Herder's theological anthropology. Just like in *Vom Erkennen*, the 'Analogie zum Menschen' and the 'Analogie der Schöpfung' are so intertwined that the notion of creation as an intelligibly organized whole informs Herder's anthropological theory of cognition. On the basis of his exegesis, Herder formulates the metaphysical view that creation is structured as the development of a single prototype. This prototype allows the greatest possible diversity both in space (as a "Weltgebäude") and in time

²¹⁵ These initiates chiefly consisted of Hamann and the 'Lavater circle' (see Sauder 1989). However, Herder also had hopes that farmers and other members of the *Volk* could sensuously grasp his message (FHA 5, 1374). This immediately shows that his enthusiastic thesis cannot really be qualified so easily, for Herder thinks that all wild *Völker* confirm the conception of religion he lays out.

(as a “Fortgebäude”).²¹⁶ The seven-step figure provides a structural (formal) criterion for recognizing analogies between different historical developments. The parallelisms of this figure form the stable foundation for the ‘große Analogie der Schöpfung’, the ‘Analogie in der Natur’, and the ‘Analogie zum Menschen’. They are all reflections of the One prototype of creation.

Herder thus states: “*Nichts in der Schöpfung eine Monas und in gewissem Betracht Alles eine Monas: die Einheit und Mannigfaltigkeit schlingt und verwirret sich, vom kleinsten Einzelnen bis an der Welt Ende*” (FHA 5, 296). While Herder dismisses the idea of windowless monads, he approves of Leibniz’ attempts to fully reconcile unity and difference. “*Mannigfaltige Einheit*” appears three times in Herder’s own analytic description of the contents of his conclusion of the first part (480). It is the central conclusion he draws from his exegesis of Genesis 1. Moreover, the primal unity of human culture is the precondition for recognizing the individuality of particular human developments: in his philosophy of history, Herder relies on the ‘God’s perspective’, suggested by this original scene, in identifying particular ways of life as instances of a human *Bildung*. So, although a central image of the One and All is *Menschheit*, which must be sought and emulated in this life and not in transcendence, this does not reduce the importance of the notion of created nature in its totality (pace Buntfuß 2004, 66).

For Bultmann, on the other hand, Herder’s hermeneutics of the biblical *Naturpoesie* is central. In his interpretation, Bultmann delineates an essential core of Herder’s achievement, centering on Genesis 1 as a poetic document testifying to primordially revealed religion. Bultmann argues that while Herder does formulate an internally consistent exegesis with respect to this core, his other theses, regarding the hieroglyph of creation, and the human being as microcosm, violate Herder’s own reservations against mixing up exegesis and metaphysics (1999, 169). Bultmann observes that Herder’s history of religion, meant to support these theses, appeared naive already from the perspective of contemporary efforts to establish ancient philology as a scientific discipline (167-168). Herder argues that the shape of the human body indeed informs all ancient religions in the form of a hexagram symbol, which he presents as a philological discovery. His manner of presenting Hermetic and Kabbalistic ‘evidence’ for this thesis, however, does not convincingly support his idea that the (pre-)Mosaic tradition was the primeval tradition of all human culture. Bultmann and others have sufficiently pointed out why this is so: First, the structural similarities which Herder claims to have found in the historical material simply underdetermine the hypothesis that he intends to prove. After all, such

²¹⁶ See Auerochs (2006, 314) and Jørgensen (1984, 114). I will return to how Herder understands history as a *Fortgebäude* below.

resemblances can be accounted for in many other manners. Second, Bultmann and Nisbet (1989) have demonstrated that Herder's sources, regarding the alleged uniform ancient tradition of primeval wisdom and theology (a branch of literature on the so-called *prisca sapientia* or *theologia*, stemming from antique Christian apologetics), were outdated and suspect already in the eighteenth century (see also Häfner 1995, 247-253, 261; Auerochs 2006, 333-336). This tradition had, since late antiquity, attempted to establish the uniqueness of Christianity by arguing that its key doctrines were reflected throughout the most ancient texts and informed all antique philosophy and religion. The Church Fathers claimed that this pointed at the absolute historical priority of Christianity, with Moses or even Adam as the sole father of human culture. The texts they relied on – by, e.g., Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus and Pythagoras – had not by far the actual old age that they ascribed to them, and their arguments readily mixed resemblance and causal influence. Still, important Renaissance thinkers (Giordano Bruno, Pico, Marsilio Ficino), the Cambridge Platonists, as well as various early modern Hebraists and theologians (Pierre Daniel Huet, John Spencer, Athanasius Kircher) kept formulating new versions of the *prisca theologia* idea (Harrison 1990, 130-138).²¹⁷ Herder held that his hieroglyph theory surpassed this tradition in historical certainty, and he scorned the guesswork and deductions of Kircher and Huet (FHA 5, 343). Still, his account of the pre-Mosaic tradition appeared as the continuation of a tradition that had rightly become antiquated already in the second half of the eighteenth century (Bultmann 1999, 167-168).

Regardless of the question of evidence, the idea of the human shape as the hieroglyph of creation has serious implications for Herder's conception of history.²¹⁸ Herder describes the human creature as a microcosm reflecting the All and thus as “Nachbild und Hieroglyphe der Schöpfung” (292) and even as “Vorbild der ersten Hieroglyphe!” (293). As the prototype that is universally reflected throughout creation and history, the Human is Herder's principal unifying notion in connecting all disparate phenomena of world history. Furthermore, his idea that the human being unifies creation also supports his thesis that as much as the *Weltgebäude* is providentially organized, so too the *Fortgebäude* of human *Bildung* over time. What is more, this historical development remains guided by God's primordial revelation in virtue of being a development of humanity. Herder sets up his discourse on the “One in All” in the conclusion

²¹⁷ All referenced discussions of this topic rely on the study *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (1972) by the English historian Daniel Pickering Walker (1914-1985).

²¹⁸ Bultmann (1999, 147-148) may be right that, on a narrowly technical definition of the “eigentliche Exegese” of Genesis 1, the hieroglyph theory does not systematically add anything to Herder's Bible interpretation. However, at least regarding Herder's conception of humanity, I agree with Buntfuß (2004, 59) that the hieroglyph is important. As Bultmann recognizes himself (1999, 133), Herder in fact does not merely present a Bible interpretation, but has anthropological and philosophical aims that extend beyond exegesis.

of *Älteste Urkunde*'s first part by comparing the synthesizing force of human self-awareness with God's primordial synthesis, and argues on the basis of this comparison: "Und das erste Werk Gottes der Lehre, der Unterweisung, sollts nicht so sein können? Was alle Sinne und Kräfte des Menschen beschäftigen, seiner ganzen Seele bis auf Ewigkeiten des Geschlechts hinaus Druck geben und sie leiten, sie in alle sieben- und tausendfache Nutzbarkeit und Wahrheit und Anwendung leiten sollte" (297). Herder concludes that indeed, this revelation had to provide all education at once. But importantly, this revelation keeps guiding humankind in the long run in developing this seed in all possible directions. Hence the notion of the prototype – despite Herder's unconvincing proof for its actual omnipresence – even offers some relief regarding the contradiction between Herder's historical-particularizing hermeneutics and his universalist conception of humanity (i.e., his mixing exegesis with metaphysics). After all, the human prototype contains all human knowledge only as potentiality. It is within history that all its potentials are actualized; and the historical understanding of humankind deals with these actualized shapes and aims at explaining how they have developed. The structural criterion provided by the prototype remains possibly thin; a hidden seed germinating into specific shapes.

Above, I have argued that the young Herder already conceived of the human as a prototype in describing it as a Proteus. Hugh Barr Nisbet (1989, 224-225) points out that the later Herder's theory of the type (*Urbild, Haupttypus*) retains this function of the hieroglyph. Indeed, Herder's conception of the hieroglyph guiding humanity through history matches completely his thesis regarding comparative anatomy in *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*: "[M]it ihr bekommt der Mensch natürlicherweise an sich selbst einen Leitfaden, der ihn durchs große Labyrinth der lebendigen Schöpfung begleite" (FHA 6, 75).²¹⁹ Again, Nisbet is also correct in pointing out that the hieroglyph offers a "timeless natural science" after all, which contradicts Herder's own polemics against physical interpretations of Genesis 1 (Nisbet 1989, 212, 219). However, the weight of this contradiction still depends on the extent in which the structural criterion *predetermines* future developments, and the extent in which the structure may adapt to new circumstances. To sum up: Herder's concrete way of finding the seven-step structure in all religious symbols indeed appears *schwärmerisch* and has irritated readers of *Älteste Urkunde* ever since its first publication.²²⁰ But systematically, the

²¹⁹ Herder also continues to apply this idea to world history as well, stating that the human understanding always finds its own image, because nature and history are part of the same providential organization (FHA 6, 652, 14-17, cf. 666, 669-670).

²²⁰ One other example of this reception is discussed by Bultmann (1999, 167-168) and Häfner (1995, 252-253). They depict the skeptical reaction by Herder's friend Christian Gottlob Heyne, a Göttingen philologist who identified the book more as the product of religious zeal than of philological *Wissenschaft*. (Heyne kindly refused to review *Älteste Urkunde*.)

idea of the prototype remains crucial to Herder's way of reconciling the One and the Many. This idea ensures that the underlying identity of Humanity may be recognized at any time and place. Furthermore, the single nucleus of human culture, being imparted into multiple directions, preserves a form of continuity in world history. In the next chapter, I will discuss how the seven-step structure of the hieroglyph also guides this continuous development. And I will explain how Herder integrates the human prototype into a Christological vision of a possible future state, where the ideal of a fully united humanity will be realized. But first, I turn to my conclusions regarding the alleged relativistic and/or pluralistic character of Herder's theological anthropology.

6.4. Herder's theological anthropology and its pluralism

The debates over Herder's relativism and pluralism often take as a starting point his stressing the historical diversity and individuality of cultures and their values. Scholars generally agree, furthermore, that his concept of humanity – particularly as he develops it in *Ideen* (1784-1791) and *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität* (1793-1797) – circumscribes the possible extension of historical diversity. Berlin influentially argued that for Herder, the “recognizably human” – i.e., whether people are still “fully human for us” – limits Herder's pluralism of values ([1980] 1990, 83-84, 87). Important studies by Vicki Spencer (2012b, 112-128), Sonia Sikka (2011, 19-25, ch. 2), Michael Frazer (2010, 157-167) and Sankar Muthu (2003, 221-238) explore the moral and political dimensions of Herder's concept of humanity. They analyze how Herder reconciles incommensurability with a “minimally common human nature” (Sikka 2011, 22) or “the minimal moral framework provided by [Herder's] concept of *Humanität*” (Spencer 2012b, 126). Furthermore, they develop the ethical principles which Herder formulates within his fundamental normative project of promoting “human flourishing” (Spencer 2012b, 114; Sikka 2011, 19-20).²²¹ These principles revolve around the freedom for human beings to satisfy basic

²²¹ Forster (2018) criticizes Sikka's (and by implication also these other scholars') attempt at reconciling Herder's universalism about humanity as a moral ideal and his moral relativism by claiming this attempt is “not only interpretively problematic (Herder usually just vacillates here without synthesizing), but also philosophically unpromising” (219 n. 39). Forster advocates that we should dismiss the systematic relevance of Herder's notion of humanity as a universal moral value: he argues that the “supposedly universal moral value of *humanity* is in the end little more than a desperate relapse into [...] empirically false moral universalism” (218-219). In the following, I will argue for the opposite view that Herder's central concern is precisely to synthesize humanity's universal moral value with its diverse particular expressions. The tension between the One and the Many is one of the central philosophical problems of Herder's whole oeuvre. It is difficult to see why it is interpretively problematic to reconstruct his attempts at reconciling and synthesizing these extremes (and it sounds peculiar to deny that such synthesizing is a major philosophical concern of Herder).

wants, develop their capacities in a (historically and culturally) particular way and thus realize (what Herder from the 1780s would call) their *Humanität*.

Apart from these approaches in moral and political philosophy, Hans Adler (1994), starting from postmodern discussions of humanity and the problems with ‘master narratives’, interprets Herder’s concept of humanity as entirely immanent to historical experiences of humankind: as “made by human beings themselves” and “experienced in manifestations, in actions of human beings” (62). Nonetheless, Adler concludes that the concept picks out and unifies phenomena: “since the purpose of human nature [...] is the unfolding of abundance, that is, the development of the greatest possible variety of individuals, ‘humanity’ must be viewed as the precondition of this variety which comes before every valuation of its creations” (65). Noyes (2015, 103, 220-221) relies on Adler in arguing that “Herder found himself in pursuit of a new understanding of Humanity” (106). Noyes frames this as an ‘aesthetic’ form of anthropology, where “[i]t is essential for Herder that this common Humanity be developed out of experiences of difference” (134).²²² Kristin Gjesdal (2017) seeks to spell out how for Herder, “feeling represents an openness toward a shared humanity as it is realized by individual others and, as such, it transcends the either-or of subsumption under generalizing laws [...] or a merely particularizing response” (117). In her analysis of this openness, Gjesdal states that Herder does aim for a “move from the particular to the universal, but without a universal at hand by which this move is preordained” (163). Rather, Herder treats humanity as a “notion of a particular (part) that contains, as it were, the universal (whole) within it [...] the ideal of a totality or whole that is seen as dynamic and growing in and through the interaction between its parts” (163). Gjesdal concludes that “the relationship between humanity and its concrete manifestations is that of a unity in diversity, an organic codependency between the whole and its parts” (118).

I think these interpretations capture important aspects of how Herder understands humanity. Gjesdal rightfully stresses the importance of feeling and sympathy; Noyes is correct about the significance of experiences of difference. However, I argue that Herder still holds “a universal at hand” within his theological anthropology. That is, despite their great insight, these studies do not sufficiently expound on the metaphysical nature of Herder’s concept of Humanity, and on its connection to the divine. I will complement them by identifying three additional groups of ideas belonging to Herder’s theology of humanity. *First*, I have argued that

²²² Leventhal (1994, 232-233) goes still further in arguing against a metaphysical interpretation of Herder’s notion of humanity. He concludes it is only a “performative, interpretive hypothesis”, “a way of reading, [...] a way of interpreting the historical, psycho- and sociogenetic linkages between disparate cultures” (233). In my discussion of the systematic function of the Proteus metaphor (in Chapter Four), I have already pointed out why I do advocate the particular interpretation criticized by Leventhal.

Herder's conception of humanity is tightly interwoven with his theology of creation. For Herder, being human means occupying a central position in creation and bringing unity to the whole through searching for the fullest understanding of, ultimately, oneself. As God's image, the human being is an *Urbild* or prototype that organizes the creation and thereby also history. *Second*, Herder circumscribes what it means to be *historical* also with reference to the primordial revelation of all human culture and the tradition that transferred its seeds over time. This tradition accounts for the diverse human cultures all sharing a single origin. In the long run, the seeds of God's revelation necessarily develop creation's richness, i.e., as Adler rightly points out, the greatest possible diversity. *Third*, developing the greatest possible richness of human forms through time and space is part of the telos of humankind as a species. According to Herder, it is thus part of humankind's holy task to learn to appreciate this diversity, and to recognize and, over time, realize its hidden unity.²²³ The task of history, on this view, is to prepare for new forms of human being by investigating the richness of the past and the present. For Herder, this task is religious in two senses: it relies on the idea that God's revelations permeate history, and it is part of humanity's shared aim of preparing for a better future (see FHA 4, 95-97, 101-102).

In this section, I will focus on the first two groups. I will argue that they qualify Herder's value-pluralism by circumscribing how values are created and providentially distributed through history. In Chapter Seven, I will explain how the third group of ideas, revolving around providence and eschatology, further qualifies the sense in which Herder can be said to be a historical relativist. I will argue that, complementing his theological anthropology, he formulates a 'theology of history'.

To begin with, Herder's religious manner of connecting the human prototype and creation in its totality informs his trust that a "scrupulous fidelity to the particulars of historical circumstances could [...] provide the foundation for a legitimate historical anthropology" (Norton 1991, 157). According to him, the diversity of human cultures is in fact a function of the unity of creation and points at its providential organization. This is why an expansive, centrifugal inquiry into all historical phenomena will lead the way to discovering their harmony.

²²³ The German historian Rudolf Stadelmann interpreted Herder's "Humanitätsidee" as a "Säkularisierung und Humanisierung einer bestimmten Art der Mystik", based on "Humanitätsgewißheit" and in search of "Humanitätsvertiefung" (1928, 30-31). Whereas I do not deny that there are mystical elements to Herder's theory, Stadelmann problematically kept this "secularized mysticism" apart from Herder's theology (cf. 57-58, 73-79). While playing down the significance of its explicit theological grounding (59, 73), Stadelmann interpreted *Auch eine Philosophie* as the "Gipfel eines irrationalen geschichtlichen Sinnes" (142) with a "Tendenz zum extremen Relativismus" (59). In the first half of the twentieth century, this extremely positive stance toward anti-rationalist ideas had political connotations (cf. Träger 1979, 36-38).

Furthermore, Herder's idea that God based the hieroglyph on the human form provides a theological foundation to the circular structure of analogical understanding (namely, of relying on self-feeling for achieving sympathy and empathy; cf. Buntfuß 2004, 63). This foundation consists in the certainty that valuable forms of human being abound. This theological certainty informs all the tasks of self-understanding, understanding historical and cultural others, as well as working toward a universal history and an encompassing understanding of humankind in all its diversity.²²⁴ In all these projects, Herder presupposes that human sympathy has an ontological grounding attested by Genesis 1's anthropogony. This grounding accounts for both the shared core of potentials and the flexibility of humanity; Herder's conceptions of understanding and of *Bildung* are founded upon it. Hence it is not "human feeling and sympathy" alone that provide the "magic mirror" in which humans recognize the identity beneath their manifold shapes (Frazer 2010, 154). Herder holds that the 'magic' of the human mirroring capacity was primordially initiated through God's own act of doubling, namely: "*als Adam ward, da stand, sahe, Gott überall, sich in ihm, sich als sein Bild fühlte*" (FHA 5, 254). Because of this, humans may put their trust in perceived analogies and commence the dynamic process of *Einfühlung*. Because the human shape is God's most condensed expression, Herder is convinced that relations of mirroring obtain between different human forms, and that his own "Gepräge" helps to navigate the "Kreis von Empfindungen und Ähnlichkeit" (FHA 4, 330; cf. Chapter Three). Herder's general hermeneutic theory thus builds upon his biblical hermeneutics, including its exegetical exploration of the human condition.

This point extends well beyond Herder's hermeneutics. Turning to *Auch eine Philosophie*, I want to ask: the conception of humanity, which Herder derives from his biblical hermeneutics, and applies in his 1774 philosophy of history – in which sense can it be called pluralistic? He certainly aims to allow for the greatest possible diversity among the human shapes that developed after primordial humanity spread out in different directions. As I explained above, the human striving for new developments is its only way to reach true humanity. "Das menschliche Gefäß ist einmal keiner Vollkommenheit fähig: muß immer verlassen, indem es weiter rückt", Herder specifies, making clear once again that Protean humanity cannot be pinned down by referencing a single universal ideal (FHA 4, 29). However, in *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder presents a specific model or "*Plan des Fortstrebens*" (FHA 4, 40) through which humankind diversifies its shapes. This model, according to which diversity is historically achieved, is thus far from contingent. Herder pictures a movement where different

²²⁴ The central theme of e.g. Gjesdal (2017) and Noyes (2015); pace Forster (2018, 253-254).

ancient peoples effectively transfer and distribute the seeds that the Orientals received for all human culture. This development goes roughly as follows: humanity develops along the axes of a Phoenician tendency toward economic-political expansion throughout the Mediterranean, and the development of a certain *Völkerliebe* (25) on the one hand, and an Egyptian tendency to be self-centered and xenophobic on the other hand (23). Subsequently, the Greek form of government reconciles these extremes of “*Einheit und Mannigfaltigkeit*” (28) into their harmonious whole of city-states. Then Roman imperialism once more expands the reach of the antique tradition by connecting many more peoples into one empire (31), upon which, after Rome’s fall, a new era of increased particularization commences.²²⁵ In the subsequent epoch, Christianity profits from Roman expansionism and partly becomes (or should become) a “*Religion des Weltalls*” (47). In sum, Herder seeks to point at the rough outline of an intelligible and effective plan according to which humankind develops the greatest possible variation through time while also preparing to be unified again.

Herder’s narrative on Early and Classical Antiquity is the background of his famous claim (in the methodological interlude of *Auch eine Philosophie* that follows his treatment of the Romans) that human value is “verteilt in tausend Gestalten” because the human being is a shape-shifter who “wandelt – ein ewiger Proteus! – durch alle Weltteile und Jahrhunderte” (40). The ten-page reflection on methodological problems in the philosophy of history – where Herder polemicizes against comparing generalizations regarding peoples and their notions of virtue and happiness, and criticizes progressivism – has brought *Auch eine Philosophie* its fame as “Grundbuch des Historismus” (Stadelmann 1928, 28; Meinecke [1936] 1946, 408; Litt 1942, 83) and source of historical relativism. In the next chapter, I will expand on these methodological issues. Here, I wish to point out that, in *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder depicts the process of increasing pluralization as a unified development motivated by what it essentially means to be human. This process is itself part of the providential organization of creation, that is, the “Tempel Gottes [...], wie er in seinem *Fortgebäude* ist, durch alle Jahrhunderte hindurch” (FHA 4, 89). Herder explicitly integrates his theology of creation into his philosophy of history.

Wenn das *Wohnhaus* bis aufs kleinste Behör “*Gottesgemälde*” zeigt – wie nicht die *Geschichte seines Bewohners*? Jenes nur Dekoration! Gemälde in einem Auftritte, Ansicht! Dies ein “*unendliches Drama von Szenen! Epopee Gottes durch alle*

²²⁵ On this dynamic between concentration and expansion in Herder’s 1774 account, see Johannsen (2016, 165-167) and (2004), as well as Pfaff (1983). I have discussed this in the context of Herder’s notion of prejudice in Chapter Three.

*Jahrtausende Weltteile und Menschengeschlechter, tausendgestaltige Fabel voll
eines großen Sinns!* (83)

Of course, no historian can take the absolutely right viewpoint on this endless epic and extract its meaning (see Chapter Four and below). Still, the diversity of human forms participating in history is required by the theology of creation. This is because it is the primary way in which God Himself acquires a visible form; nature being only decoration in comparison. What is more, Herder in this quote directly appeals to his interpretation of the creation of humankind, since he considers it to be the moment where the ‘hero’ of Genesis 1 becomes visible, and His “Drama der *Gegenwart*” fully takes off (FHA 5, 300; cf. vom Hofe 1989, 208-209). It is a key feature of Herder’s conception of historical development that he describes this drama as the “Weg des Schicksals” and “*Gang Gottes unter die Nationen*” (FHA 4, 87).

I submit that it is mistaken to interpret Herder’s statements about the providential course of history as marginal to his historicism. Interpreters of Herder’s philosophy of history betray an incomplete understanding of Herder’s theological conceptions of humanity, nature and history when they state that, while God might have perfect oversight of the historical process, this does not alleviate the sense in which humanity is left with nothing but a plurality of individual developments.²²⁶ For Herder, human finitude and the providential development of humanity are essentially connected. When human beings recognize how their own historical existence only makes up a small portion of the immense variety of possibilities for developing a human way of life, they thereby increase their understanding of the providential nature of history (FHA 4, 83-84).²²⁷ This is one way in which human finitude does not render the theme of providence less significant to Herder’s philosophy of history. Connectedly, individual human beings may grasp how humanity and all of creation/history are one even when they do not have oversight over world history at large and over all of God’s intentions. Through enquiring into their own history and through relating themselves to their historical others, they may recognize

²²⁶ Gjesdal (2017, 177, 152-153) relies on the finite human being’s historical situatedness to dismiss the significance of the role of providence in Herder’s philosophy of history altogether. Spencer (2012b, 120-123) sharply distinguishes between God and the created world in order to interpret Herder’s understanding of human action in history as completely autonomous and secular, and to argue that “history is never more than the aggregate of individual human actions” (121). Muthu (2003) similarly states “Although Herder uses the language of providence, humans themselves create, sustain, and transform their diverse cultural beliefs, practices, and ideas” (236). Muthu does not discuss how this language of providence is connected to the fact that “Herder blends his descriptive and normative understandings of humanity” when he states that “the internal disposition towards humanity” was created when God “impressed upon humans his image, religion and humanity” (237-238; Muthu cites the *Ideen* from SWS 13, 256).

²²⁷ This point has been recognized and sensitively analyzed by Theodor Litt (1942, 100-109, 125-131; cf. 1930, ch. 20).

that also their own particular historical situation is part of the divine historical tradition (FHA 4, 102, 105-106).

Again, Herder's insistence (quoted in Chapter 4.3) that "immer *Mensch Mensch* bleibe, *nach der Analogie aller Dinge nichts als Mensch!*" (81), shows that in his philosophy of history, Herder does not separate the nature of the human from the general order of creation. Likewise, he argues for the general continuity of human development through cultural transfer by pointing at analogous cycles of growth in nature. This "fortgehende Entwicklung" attests to a "leitenden Absicht auf Erden" (42). Herder makes it explicit that the ground of his conception of history is "die *Analogie in der Natur*, das redende *Vorbild Gottes* in *allen Werken*" (41-42). Furthermore, Herder in 1774 closely connects God's leading intention for history with His primordial revelation to humanity. After all, in *Älteste Urkunde*, he formulates the aim of this revelation as follows: "*seiner ganzen Seele bis auf Ewigkeiten des Geschlechts hinaus Druck geben und sie leiten* (FHA 5, 297). Hence I disagree with interpreters of Herder who separate his early 'Critical' and/or 'historicist' philosophy of history from his later more speculative vision of history, informed by his more pronounced philosophy of nature (Zammito 2009; Düsing 1984).²²⁸ In Herder's philosophy of history from the 1780s, his philosophy of nature provides the (pantheistic) vision of nature and history as an intelligibly organized unity. In 1774, he draws his inspiration from his interpretation of Genesis. It was Kant himself who, having made preparations for reviewing both *Älteste Urkunde* and *Ideen*, noticed that the latter retained the metaphysical view of a unified nature and history that Herder had held already in 1774 (AA 8, 53-54).

Finally, also regarding the ever-changing notions of happiness and virtue (see Sikka 2011, 34-38), Herder relies on his monogeneticism and the providential plan. He argues

daß es unendlich mehr Fürsorge des Allvaters zeige [...] wenn *ein unsichtbarer Keim der Glücks- und Tugendempfänglichkeit auf der ganzen Erde und in allen*

²²⁸ Zammito suggests this separation has been common from Meinecke's *Die Entstehung des Historismus* onwards. But in fact, Meinecke himself laments that, with the calming of Herder's religiosity in the 1780s, Herder's *theodicy* became less powerful ([1936] 1946, 414-415). That is, Meinecke recognizes how Herder's conception of providence facilitates his historicism. In this Meinecke follows Stadelmann's claim that Herder's "Entwicklungsbegriff" is based on the pantheistic conception of "Gottes Offenbarung als Geschichtswirklichkeit" (1928, 30-32, 58). While Stadelmann and Meinecke indeed demarcate Herder's 1774 religiosity from his Weimar period, they recognize how his theology facilitates his "historical sense". Hence, I also do not concur with Gjesdal's interpretation of Meinecke's reflections on Herder's religiosity as boiling down to the "objection" that *Auch eine Philosophie* is "a metaphysical contribution and, by implication, therefore also a failed historical – and historicist – treatise" (Gjesdal 2017, 152).

Zeitaltern liege, der verschieden ausgebildet, zwar in verschiedenen Formen erscheine, aber innerlich nur ein Maß und Mischung von Kräften. (FHA 4, 82)

Particular peoples and ages develop their individual notions of what it means to be happy or virtuous. Hence their forms of happiness and virtue are relative to how they have developed these notions, and ‘centered’ on their particular way of being historically situated (35, 39). Still, the human ability to develop happiness and virtue in different ways accords with its susceptibility to different forms of happiness and virtue. This is because the different forms of being happy and virtuous are the effects of the underlying capacity for receptiveness. Herder’s way of describing this seed, or “Kern von Wesen und Glückfähigkeit” (82), clearly relies on his theology of humanity. His notion of universal humanity thus gives his ethical-pedagogic project of promoting the general *Bildung der Menschheit* a firm normative basis. Rather than being merely relative to specific historical circumstances, the values relating to happiness and virtue develop out of a single core. This core is itself the product of God’s primordial revelation. Furthermore, the historical process of developing this basic ability is supported by God’s providence. Hence, I conclude that the universalism of Herder’s theological anthropology circumscribes his pluralism about values. I thereby do not wish to deny the relevance of ‘pluralism’ as a label that can be employed in Herder scholarship. The positive meaning of Herder’s pluralism derives from his efforts to appreciate the radical diversity of human forms. These efforts, however, are entirely universalistic, and informed by an ontotheological monism. Therefore, Herder’s pluralism is of a more deflated kind than the theoretically loaded pluralisms figuring in contemporary political philosophy.²²⁹ In addition, Herder’s statements regarding the *incomparability* of notions of happiness and virtue are not best interpreted as tokens of a historical relativism. These notions themselves certainly always depend on historical developments and cannot be treated as universal standards. Yet the theological framework, which makes their behavior – the concrete sentiments and practices of humans who live according to certain values – intelligible and justified, is universal and monistic.

²²⁹ On these pluralisms, and their respective application to Herder, see Spencer (2012b, 100-101) and Linker (2000). Spencer draws on Berlin, Joseph Raz and Michael Walzer; Linker mentions Berlin, James Tully and Charles Larmore.

In her review of Sikka’s monograph, Spencer (2012a) castigates Sikka for calling Herder both a pluralist and a relativist. However, if Sikka intends to use ‘pluralism’ in this more deflated sense, than her way of combining the labels is not principally inconsistent (as Spencer suggests, 2012b, 232). This inconsistency does occur if we follow Spencer’s definitions of pluralism and relativism. However, no matter the merits and weaknesses of these definitions (cf. Sikka 2011, 39-40), my point here is that Herder’s 1774 position is still more deflated even than the “weak pluralism” that Spencer (2012b, 100-101) attributes to Herder.

6.5. Revelation and world history: Herder's universalism

In Chapter Four, I have discussed the difficulties in conducting full genetic explanations of human psychological dispositions as well as human inventions. Herder's biblical studies in fact deal with the same problem as the body of work I analyzed there.²³⁰ Herder starts *Über die ersten Urkunden* with a comparative discussion of how ancient peoples started accounting for the origin of things in mythological fashion (FHA 5, 12). He insists that the book of Genesis should be read as precisely such an account, written by human beings in a particular historical context (22, 27). All the difficulties with assigning the real origins of phenomena – discussed by Herder in *Versuch einer Geschichte* and *Fragmente* – thus still apply. And yet, he argues that the book of Genesis in fact accounts for the origin of all – not through Moses being directly divinely inspired in writing it, but through the hieroglyph of creation being historically passed on and informing the structure of Moses' account. Herder attempts to prove that this tradition conserves God's primordial revelation. In his hermeneutics, the hieroglyph thus assumes the function that Christian apologetics had traditionally assigned to God's directly inspiring the biblical authors. While this is a move of abstracting away from the particularities of the Christian Bible, Herder still considers Genesis 1 the purest preservation of the hieroglyph. His conception of a single revelation for all of humankind (and a concomitant universal religious symbolism scattered throughout the world's religions) universalizes the message of the Hebrew Bible. This conception still holds on to the primacy of the Bible in the face of religious diversity (cf. Auerochs 2006, 324-325, 336; Bultmann 1999, 167). In this section, I will conclude my interpretation of Herder's biblical hermeneutics by recapitulating his proposed solution regarding Genesis 1's historical character and its religious truth. I will sum up the implications of this solution for Herder's notions of history and revelation. And I will finish by pointing at his ambivalent position regarding religious pluralism and the primacy of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition.

First, Herder does not think that his conclusions contradict his methodological statement that biblical exegesis should not be based on the scientific/philosophical theories of the day. Herder claims that it is historically the case that history started with a primordial revelation that is the source of all culture and religion. He suggests that this historical truth may be sensuously

²³⁰ *Versuch einer Geschichte* announced the problems of the study of origins and connected the earliest forms of poetry to religious needs. The *Fragmente* continued the historical enquiry into literatures, mythologies and religions. In these texts as well as in *Ursprung der Sprache*, Herder fought the tendency to ascribe the origin of things we cannot explain to God. Herder's *human* explanations meant to make intelligible how humans were able to function, and invent arts, as they did. Still, while explaining these possibilities, they left open how humans actually invented language, for example (FHA 1, 771), or how lyrical poetry/the ode in fact originated (HWP 1, 11).

grasped by all. Herder claims that scientific and philosophical theories historically develop out of the single origin of all human knowledge. Relying on the hieroglyph hypothesis, Herder describes how the prototype of human knowledge emerges from this origin and develops into particular and autonomous forms. Different forms of knowledge, particular to the different stages of human development, all emulate the hieroglyphic structure of creation. Nonetheless, particular forms cannot be used as standards for evaluating others, since they are always only actualizations of particular possibilities. Herder's seven-step structure, while stable as a *type*, must always appear in different forms. To be sure, he does not sufficiently explicate how the days of creation and the human body obey this principle of maximal diversity. After all, the structure of creation and the human prototype are also the stable unifying notions of Herder's theology. Nonetheless, he does not consider his own hieroglyph theory problematically timeless.

Herder also insists that his conceptions of humanity and history solely derive from interpreting Genesis 1 and empathizing into Oriental times. He does not conceive of these notions as abstract elements of a system of theology or metaphysics. Herder was accused of producing theosophy (Eberhard 1775; Sauder 1989, 273). But he keeps resisting that the "Bilder" and "Sachen" (FHA 5, 238) of his exegesis could be turned into metaphysical principles. Herder is adamant that his argument for the primordial revelation of Genesis is historical (FHA 5, 270, 288): The hieroglyph is a historical discovery; the education under the aurora provides empirical knowledge; the *imago Dei* conception of humanity he derives from the Oriental criterion of sensuous unity. Furthermore, Herder argues that it is anachronistic to judge this Oriental criterion, or the history of ancient religion at large, according to eighteenth-century standards for what is probable or miraculous (or rational). Rather, he hopes to be able to historically prove that God's instruction is inscribed in the structure of nature and forms the source of all human inventions. He formulates these hopes about the hieroglyph thesis as follows: "[D]as Alles könnte *augenscheinlich gemacht*, aus der *Geschichte* des ganzen Altertums, *sieben Völkern* des ganzen Menschengeschlechts bewiesen werden, also bewiesen werden, daß *ohne dies keine Geschichte*, selbst *keine Fabel, Tradition, Wahrscheinlichkeit, Vermutung* mehr bliebe" (FHA 5, 270). Herder argues that the categories of 'history' and 'probability' are not only historically relative (and in this respect akin to truths of reason). They also historically depend on God's primal revelation for their existence. For Herder, it thus makes no sense to infer from the historical nature of these categories that they lack normativity: Herder intends to prove that without their developing out of revelation, there would be no history at all.

Through this interlocking of history and revelation, of the human and the divine, Herder intends to establish the ultimate argument against the skeptic, and particularly against the deist's separation of "Vernunftwahrheiten" from "Geschichtswahrheiten": "Was müßte da für ein sinnlosers, lächerlichers Geschöpf in der Welt bleiben, als der *Religionsleugner*? Er leugnete nicht mehr Religion, sondern offenbarste Geschichte aller Welt!" (270). So, history becomes the realm of the self-evident, the category of the most apparent (the *offenbarste*) due to revelation (*Offenbarung*). In *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder relies on this notion of history in telling philosophers to turn toward the book of history (FHA 4, 85). Hence, I do not think it is correct to describe his genetic method as "showing, in a naturalistic (i.e. non-religious, non-mythical, non-transcendent) way, that and how [outlooks and practices] have developed historically out of earlier origins prior to which they did not yet really exist at all and from which they have emerged via a series of transformations" (Forster 2018, 247). Instead of merely showing this, Herder expects genetic explanation to reveal an "offenbaren Fortgang und Entwicklung [...] aus einer kleinen Quelle" (FHA 4, 41).

The conception of revelation, which Herder formulates in *Älteste Urkunde*, slightly differs from the one I analyzed at the close of the previous chapter. The natural and universal religiosity connected to the human being's sensuous view, he now redirects to a more particular historical and geographical location, following the biblical history. While Herder still holds that God's revelations appear throughout history and nature, the primordial education of humanity receives a heavier weight. The history of humanity consists in diverging developments out of the single origin of the tradition of human culture. This tradition preserves, transfers and also modifies basic truths about the One Creator, the origin of humanity and God's manner of guiding and promoting historical development. The hieroglyph thesis thus suggests that one could genetically trace all chains of development back to their absolute origin, and assess how later images and theories are adaptations and variations of a common theme.²³¹ This is what Herder does in interpreting ancient religions and tracing their hieroglyphic structure, and in searching for the hieroglyphic structure of world history.

Presupposing this conception of revelation, Herder in *Älteste Urkunde* theorizes the world-historical effect of Genesis in a more universalistic way than in *Über die ersten Urkunden*. The main difference is that Herder focuses less on how later religions 'corrupted' the first document, and more on how this primordial revelation did inform them. The primary aim

²³¹ Häfner in his (1994) article traces Herder's developing of a synthesis of the analogical and the genetic method through his early writings (esp. 88-95), and agrees that, for Herder, the 1774 hieroglyph theory completes his notion of a unified history of humanity (98-100).

of Herder's comparative study is to make probable *that* the hieroglyph had this crucial world-historical role. With this aim in mind, he searches for analogies attesting to the presence of this one prototype in all ancient mythology, cosmology and religion (and focusses less on the significance of their individuality).

On the one hand, Herder in this way collects evidence for his historical argument (for example regarding the human body as hieroglyph). On the other hand, his study of all ancient cultures (and his connected anthropology of folk songs of 'wild peoples' around the world in his own day) at least raises the question why eighteenth-century Christians still need the Old Testament, as it is just one possible expression of universal human feelings (cf. Bultmann 1999, 150-152). One would be justified in asking why the other traditions Herder examines (as well as the works of the genius-poets Shakespeare, Milton, Klopstock etc.) are not equally important as ways of preserving God's primordial revelation (cf. vom Hofe 1986, 86; Zippert 1994, 253-254). After all, Herder interprets all of history as deriving from God's education. Still, for Herder, the text of the Hebrew Bible contains the oldest, and thereby the best and purest, expression of God's primordial revelation. The genetic primacy of Genesis 1 secures the Bible's religious significance.

Conversely, one could equally question whether Herder's notion of the unity of all religion truly is a form of religious pluralism, or whether it is an appropriation of the All under the One banner of a Judeo-Christian monotheistic tradition. Principally, Herder thinks the hieroglyph is abstract enough to fit any confession. He wants to allow that all religions are interpretations of God's presence in creation, even when they interpret particular moments of this presence as proof for the existence of multiple deities. Furthermore, Herder still prefers accurately following historically specific notions of humanity and of God – "lieber Atheist, Pantheist, und der Erste Spinoza ante Spinozam" (FHA 5, 423) – over reconciling these ideas with eighteenth-century metaphysics. This seems to support the interpretations of Herder's religious pluralism by Schmidt (2017), Sikka (2011, ch. 7) and Bunge (1995, 1990). These interpreters argue that Herder's conception of natural religion allows the religious experience and documents of all peoples to genuinely reflect God's revelations. Furthermore, they claim that, even though Herder considers Christianity the highest expression of human religiosity, he nonetheless conceives of the essence of Christianity itself in such a way that a perfect religious humanism or *Menschenreligion* might, in the distant future, take over its role (Schmidt 2017, 194-198; Sikka 2011, 237-240).

In Herder's 1774 historiographic practice, however, appointing Genesis 1 an absolute genetic primacy is part of his apologetics for the Christian faith. On the basis of the criterion of the hieroglyph and its *Ursprünglichkeit*, he is not afraid to dismiss religious ideas as less perfect adaptations and even as perversions and superstitions. The exclusion of other traditions, following from this, is most visible in *Auch eine Philosophie*, where Herder models the development of humanity entirely as an affair of Europe and the near East, to which other continents only connect later, as an effect of colonialism. Furthermore, Herder's conception of humanity as the prototype of creation also has a Christological dimension (see, e.g., SWS 7, 322). In addition, biblical history models Herder's philosophy of history in the sense that humanity had to be prepared – by various national religious traditions – for the arrival of Christ and the first truly universal religion, even when also Christianity itself was immediately nationalized again (FHA 4, 46-49; Auerochs 2006, 337). So, although his notion of universal religion allows for a certain religious pluralism, his 1774 way of conceptualizing world history, as well as the historical development of the ultimate universal religion of humanity, is absolutely Christian. This raises the question of Herder's expectations for the future of humankind and of the Christian faith.

7. Herder's alternative philosophy of history and the problem of relativism²³²

Herder's *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit: Beitrag zu vielen Beiträgen des Jahrhunderts* was published in 1774. This short treatise, with its fierce polemic against contemporaneous philosophy of history²³³, has often been considered a foundational text of German historicism. Authors like Wilhelm Dilthey (1901), Rudolf Stadelmann (1928), Friedrich Meinecke ([1936] 1946) and Georg Iggers ([1968] 1983) have identified in this work central ideas that connect him to later historicist positions.²³⁴ They have recognized that, for Herder, historical phenomena have intrinsic value because of their *individuality*; the good in the human-historical world is necessarily *plural*; strong normative implications attach to *diversity*; and while all values depend on broad historical processes, it is illegitimate and suspect to endeavor determining *a priori* standards of truth and historical progress. The historicist interpretation generally concludes that, because of these claims, Herder must have been committed to historical relativism.

In this chapter, I explain why this conclusion is incorrect. Crucial to my argument is Herder's theology of history: I aim to show how his philosophy of history builds on his theology and may with equal right be called a theology of history. Building on the previous two chapters, I argue that, when the "Grundbuch des Historismus" is properly placed in the context of Herder's 1774 theological writings²³⁵, its historicism appears in a different light. This is because Herder's central historicist ideas are motivated by, and normatively based upon, his theological conception of history. I claim that it is only within his theology of history that Herder appreciates the historical, individual and diverse.²³⁶ His theology of history ensures that Herder approaches the diverse and particular from a monist starting point and with the intention of pointing out the ultimate harmony of history.

²³² A previous (and much shorter) version of this chapter (2019) was published under the title "Hieroglyphic Historicism: Herder's and Ranke's Theology of History." In *The Emergence of Relativism. German Thought from the Enlightenment to National Socialism*, edited by Martin Kusch, Katherina Kinzel, Johannes Steizinger, and Niels Wildschut, 9-25. Abingdon: Routledge. While Ranke unfortunately had to step aside here, in the article I argue for commonalities between Herder and Ranke on central issues, suggesting that my argument regarding Herder and relativism can be extended to early historicism more broadly.

²³³ The genre of 'philosophy of history' was still young, the term being coined in 1765 with Voltaire's *La Philosophie de l'Histoire*. Speculation about history in its totality was of course much older, reaching back to the Bible and Saint Augustine. It was heavily practiced by Enlightenment historians and philosophers; Herder understood his tract as a response to a current fad (for overviews cf. Koselleck 1975, 658-678; Kondylis [1981] 2002, 421-468; Löwith 1949, 60-114; Cassirer [1932] 2007, ch. 5).

²³⁴ On the reception of *Auch eine Philosophie* in the context of German historicism, see Otto (1994, 163-166), vom Hofe (1987, 364-371), and Träger's (1979) Marxist criticism of the "Herder-Legende" of German historicism.

²³⁵ In this chapter, the corpus I rely on includes *Älteste Urkunde*, but also the collection of letters *An Prediger. Fünfzehn Provinzialblätter* and the commentary *Johannes*.

²³⁶ For other interpretations that highlight the importance of theology in Herder's 1774 philosophy of history, see Litt (1942); Pfaff (1983); Schichiji (1984); vom Hofe (1984, 1987); Menze (2000).

In *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder famously confronts the methodological and epistemological difficulties relating to this attempt (particularly on pages FHA 4, 32-42, 81-89). Furthermore, he relentlessly criticizes the tendency of his Enlightenment contemporaries to see their own historical standpoints as absolutely privileged, and to consider their value terms as universal tools fit for measuring historical progress. I have analyzed these criticisms in Chapters Three and Four, and I will further engage with Herder's reflections on historical method. However, in order to properly assess this intervention by Herder into eighteenth-century philosophy of history, it is crucial to also take into account his own *alternative* conception of history to what he perceives as his contemporaries' one-sided progressivism. This is why *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* is properly translated with the affirmative *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*, and not with *Another [...]* or *Yet Another*. Behind Herder's ironical and at times satirical polemics against Voltaire, Iselin and many others, *Auch eine Philosophie* presents a substantive alternative philosophy of history.

Herder's alternative consists in a providential model, according to which history is unified as a single development. Herder claims that this development should be understood "in einem höhern Sinne", a sense that is extremely difficult to pin down (FHA 4, 41). Nonetheless, he is confident that history will appear as the "*Gang Gottes über die Nationen*" once it is approached from the right perspective (88). For Herder, identifying this perspective is a religious task. Furthermore, his way of uncovering God's course is remarkably similar to how he points at the right exegetical standpoint for interpreting the book of Genesis. Moreover, Herder relies on his biblical hermeneutics in presupposing that, just as all natural-religious readings of the 'book of nature' necessarily rely on positive religion, so too do all readings of the book of history. From this angle, Herder's philosophy of history appears as a hermeneutics of the signs of God's presence in history.

The interpretation that I will defend is still a minority position in Herder scholarship. Important recent studies deny that Herder's theology has much systematic significance for his philosophy of history (Gjesdal 2017, ch. 6; Noyes 2015; Sikka 2011, ch. 3). That is why I want to preliminarily motivate my view by looking at two contemporary reviews of *Auch eine Philosophie* (for an overview, see Otto 1994). These reviews were written by Claudius and Lenz. They considered themselves allies of Herder's and defended him during the controversy

regarding his stance toward Enlightenment culture.²³⁷ My interpretation must accommodate their way of reading *Auch eine Philosophie*. Thus, I intend to explicate why Herder's contemporary and friend Matthias Claudius could finish his (generally very positive) review of *Auch eine Philosophie* by remarking:

Sonst aber dürfte in dem allen noch viel Ideal mit unterlaufen; denn alles, was man von Vervollkommenung oder Fortrückung und den damit verbundenen Vor- oder Nachteilen behaupten mag, kann nur sehr von ohngefähr zutreffen [...] Vielleicht ist auch gar der Plan Gottes nicht der Länge sondern der Quere nach zu suchen. Es ist nämlich die Wahrheit zu aller Zeiten in der Welt gewesen, so oder anders gekleidet. (Claudius [1777] 1984, 108-109)

Coming from a reviewer who applauded Herder's criticisms of notions of linear progress and of false universalizations of particular values, these two critical remarks show something significant. They exhibit that, despite his strong criticisms of various forms of universalism, Herder was not merely held to have negative intentions. Instead, Claudius skeptically questioned Herder's positive assumptions (1) that it is nonetheless possible to discern humankind's general *Plan des Fortstrebens*, and (2) that God's providence develops in the long run rather than evenly distributing revelation across peoples in all times.

The most heated point of controversy surrounding *Auch eine Philosophie* was Herder's critique of contemporary culture. The often-debated issue of whether Herder belonged to the Enlightenment or to an alleged Counter-Enlightenment movement strongly fed into discussions of his relativism.²³⁸ I agree with those who have argued that Herder's criticisms were aimed at reforming a program to which Herder generally subscribed (Beiser 1992, 197; Norton 2007; Gjesdal 2017, 3-7). However, I will argue that, even if Herder were, in some sense, an irrationalist Counter-Enlightenment writer, this still would not make him a relativist. The connections between these isms are far from obvious. Another contemporary and friend, the most paradigmatic *Stürmer und Dränger* Lenz, may appear as my witness for why this is so:

Wenn ich das bedenke, wie die Providenz einen solchen Mann scheint auf den Punkt hingestellt zu haben, um ihre große Ökonomie gegen diejenigen zu recht-

²³⁷ The most explicitly ideological reviews of *Auch eine Philosophie* came from Christian Heinrich Schmid in Wieland's *Teutscher Merkur* and from an anonymous reviewer in Nicolai's *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* (Otto 1994, 159-162). Schmid also included Lenz' plays in his polemics against what he considered the new "Hamannische Sekte", hence Lenz also defended his own authorship in his polemics.

²³⁸ Namely, by associating Herder with a Nietzschean 'irrationalist' movement that arose in the nineteenth century and developed into German *Lebensphilosophie* around 1900.

fertigen, die sie mit ihrer kleinen in ihren engen Köpfchen nicht zusammen reimen können; scheint dahin gestellt zu haben, um den Freigeist selbst, oft die beste Art Menschen, zu überführen, das von ihm verkannte Wesen würke, und würke zu seinem Besten. (Lenz [1775] 1987, 672)

Lenz completely agreed with Herder's critical stance toward Enlightenment values. His plays from the period – *Der neue Menoza* (1774), *Der Hofmeister* (1774) and *Die Soldaten* (1776) – displayed what Lenz considered their detrimental effects. Nonetheless, his response to *Auch eine Philosophie* shows that he did not, for that matter, understand Herder's alternative (to Enlightenment universalism) as less *monistic*. Recent interpreters have described Herder's defense of providence as desperate (Forster 2018, 244; Beiser 2011, 132) or as non-committed and of little systematic importance (Gjesdal 2017, 177-178; Spencer 2012b, 120-123). Lenz, by contrast, amplified Herder's own religious rhetoric by depicting the author of *Auch eine Philosophie* himself as an agent of divine providence. Lenz considered Herder's justification of providence an "überführen" of the freethinker.

The reviews by Claudius and Lenz attest that Herder's alternative to Voltaire's philosophy of history was recognized as unambiguously religious. They saw in Herder "ein[en] Fisch der gegen den Strom angeht" (Claudius [1777] 1984, 108), who decided "seine einzelne Stimme der Stimme des ganzen Universi entgegen zu setzen" (Lenz [1775] 1987, 671). In doing this, Herder provided the literary *Sturm und Drang* with intellectual and spiritual ammunition (see Sauder 1989, 283-290). *Auch eine Philosophie* could be perceived this way because its main historicist ideas were motivated by and normatively based upon his theological conception of history.

In the first section, I start from the theological foundations that Herder took to confer upon history its intrinsic value and existential significance. Thus, I spell out his aims with, and his method for, the philosophy of history. In the second and third sections, I discuss the concrete direction and structure of historical development, as Herder depicts it in *Auch eine Philosophie*. Firstly, I discuss the extent in which he thinks of history as hieroglyphic. Subsequently, in the third section, I explain why the historicist interpretation of Herder is too partial in focusing only on the immanence attributed to his conception of history. In contrast, I will argue that his ideal of the general development of humanity is a Christian ideal and that it involves an eschatological vision of the future.

I aim to establish that, within Herder's theology of history, the problem of relativism does not arise in the same way as it does from the standpoint of German historicism. In the final section, I explore in more detail Herder's views on themes that are often considered relativistic. It is indeed remarkable how many of the relativistic themes identified by Maria Baghramian (in the history of philosophy) and Martin Kusch (in contemporary debates) seem present in Herder's philosophy of history (Baghramian 2004, 50-82; Kusch 2016, 107-108).²³⁹ Nevertheless, I aim to show that, even regarding these themes, his view strongly diverges from later historicist positions. I conclude that Herder should not be interpreted as relativist.

7.1. Reading the book of history

First of all, by calling Herder's contribution a 'theology of history', I do not mean that he simply derives his conception of history from principles of dogmatic theology. Nor does his theology of history consist in a traditional salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*). Herder does not merely refer to a final end of redemption beyond history when he argues for the value of history.²⁴⁰ Herder is a panentheist: he considers God both as present within all of creation and as its Creator, who transcends the sum of all parts. Herder's theology of history argues that God is present in history and intelligibly organizes its course. Herder stresses that finite human subjects (e.g. historians, philosophers) should endeavor to appreciate both the particular character of historical phenomena and their connections in larger patterns. Still, the "*Gang Gottes über die Nationen*" also has a direction and points toward a particular future. Furthermore, in relying on his biblical exegesis, Herder's expectations for the future satisfy Karl Löwith's thesis regarding the dependence of philosophy of history on theology of history (Löwith 1949, 1).

In *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder also relies on his biblical exegesis in another way. His strong polemics in both *Älteste Urkunde* and *Auch eine Philosophie* rely on comparable hermeneutic procedures. In *Älteste Urkunde*, Herder clears the ground by discarding metaphysical and naturalistic forms of biblical exegesis. This should open up the possibility to candidly emulate the Orientals' sensuous grasp of God in nature. In *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder criticizes the assumptions and generalizations of rival Enlightenment philosophies of history. This should redirect his readers' view into a less prejudiced perspective upon history's course.

²³⁹ On Baghramian's list are: empiricism, diversity, respect and tolerance, the identification of reason with practices and language use, tradition and incommensurability. Relevant aspects on Kusch' list are: dependence, plurality, exclusiveness, (some form of) equal validity, contingency and tolerance.

²⁴⁰ Vom Hofe (1984, 65) is right that Herder does not explicitly recur to traditional eschatological apologetics. Yet I will explain in sections two and three why vom Hofe is incorrect in claiming "[dass Herder] die Frage nach dem Ziel der Geschichte [...] kaum berührt" (68).

In both cases, Herder is convinced that the result of this procedure is a religious intimation of the meaning of the text (of the Bible, creation, and history, and particularly: the analogies between them). Thus, he treats history as a book. This book is principally readable, even if its meaning is difficult to decipher for finite human beings and has been obscured by misguided exegetical methods (FHA 4, 84, 85, 106).

Herder's aim with *Auch eine Philosophie* does not solely consist in "critique – drawing the limits and discussing the validity of – the methods, premises, and ideals of contemporary historical-political methods" (Gjesdal 2017, 152). He criticizes the modelling of past peoples and ages because he wishes to free his contemporaries from distortions of history informed by eighteenth-century ideals. But this wish is again instrumental for the aim of preparing his contemporaries for the religious tasks that he connects to the study of history. The parallel with his biblical hermeneutics shows that also Herder's critical review of historiography serves to point toward the "höhern Sinne" of history by nurturing his contemporaries' religious standpoint upon creation and its organization in time.

So how does this organization look? The main organizing principle of Herder's philosophy of history arguably is the hieroglyph of creation (see Chapter 6.3-6.4.). However, since there exist various difficulties in interpreting how he implements the hieroglyph theory in world history, this cannot be the sole piece of evidence I provide for my thesis regarding his theology of history. My discussion of the Proteus metaphor has already shown that Herder also relies on other models that equally depict history as providentially ordered. I shall aim to explain how Herder integrates these models into his hieroglyphic conception of history.

First, however, I must motivate why Herder considers the religious task of history both a viable and an important enterprise. This is because it has been recognized as one of the central achievements of *Auch eine Philosophie* that Herder acknowledges the individuality of historical phenomena. Hence, one might think that he is in a particularly bad position to present general characterizations of history. Indeed, Herder himself famously laments "die Schwäche des allgemeinen Charakterisierens" and he criticizes one-sided modelling and relying on abstract concepts (FHA 4, 32-33, 88). The individuality of manners of thought and perceiving the world, of the characters of nations, let alone "das Weltmeer ganzer Völker, Zeiten und Länder" seems downright ineffable (33). And yet, precisely when he skeptically reflects on these limitations, Herder refers to God's perspective on history. He contrasts finite human subjects and their abstractions with God, "der die ganze *Einheit*, *einer*, *aller* Nationen, in alle ihrer *Mannig-*

faltigkeit denkt, ohne daß ihm dadurch die *Einheit* schwinde” (35). How does this affect Herder’s aim of working toward an alternative philosophy of history?

On the one hand, Herder relies on this religious perspective in reminding his contemporaries to retain their humility in front of the totality of creation and not construct self-congratulatory fictions (40, 81-83; cf. Chapter Three). Herder piously assumes the existence of a divine “*Allanblick*” upon the totality of world history in order to castigate the blasphemy of his contemporaries (see Chapter 4.3.3.). On the other hand, Herder conceives of God as immanent in history and actively organizing its connectedness, not least through His own image on earth. Hence, humans must be able to at least intimate hints of history’s ultimate unity. And Herder indeed thinks they can do this, namely, by learning to recognize the unceasing *Bildung der Menschheit* in history. Because of the presence of God in history, an imaginative and engaged perspective on all of the experiences of humankind can provide us with hints of providence throughout history. Herder aims to uncover a history of revelation where humankind is educated through its own experience (see FHA 9/1, 83-85).

In his 1774 *An Prediger*, Herder insists that a true philosophy of history must conceive of history as a part of the providentially organized creation:

Philosophie der Menschheit, und derselben wahre Geschichte, – niemand als ein Priester Gottes wird sie dereinst schreiben, wird von neuen Seiten durch sie bilden [...] Gottes Ordnung im Menschengeschlechte! Haushaltung Gottes auf Erden! nur auf der Höhe der Offenbarung ist Blick. (FHA 9/1, 127)

Herder aims to discuss, as well as indicate, how such a true history of humanity may be written in support of the *Bildung der Menschheit*. Accordingly, not just his methodological discussions, but also his concrete design of world history is essential. Herder aims to suggest how a true “Priester Gottes”, at some point in the future, might write history. Thus, he must rely on the existence of the standpoint of revelation, even if he himself may not adopt it. In his methodological reflections in *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder explicitly affirms this need for the “height of revelation” when he asks the professional historian August Ludwig Schlözer, “kanns eine weite Aussicht geben, ohne Höhe?” (FHA 4, 35). Herder’s criticism of Schlözer mirrors his polemics against Michaelis when he argues that the academic obsession with historical detail precludes recognizing “das ganze Bild” (35). Remarkably, Herder claims that Schlözer’s way of writing universal history fails to form out of history a “Bild, ganzes Continuum”, and to trace the “stark[e] Kette des natürlichen Wahren” (SWS 5, 439). That is, just like Michaelis

fails to recognize the simple image of daybreak in Genesis 1 because of his unrestrained gathering of historical and scientific facts, so too does Schlözer overlook how history may be pictured as a whole.

In his alternative universal history, Herder makes an effort to understand the particular character of every epoch within its own context. However, Herder always bases his understanding of this context on how it differs from other epochs, builds on previous ones, and prepares future developments. While thus locating individual periods, Herder consistently relies on metaphors for history *as a whole*. This accords with how he conceives of the mirroring relation between individual and totality, “das Ganze [...], wo in jeder Einzelheit schon so *ein Ganzes* erscheint” (FHA 5, 105). Herder appreciates the historicity of every individual because he is determined to find this totality reflected everywhere. It is within his theology of creation that individual historical periods have an intrinsic worth. Furthermore, Herder relies on his conception of how the present builds on all previous historical developments when he pronounces what might be the eighteenth century’s only advantage over previous periods. Recall, Herder conceives of historical development as the ever-expanding reach of a single historical tradition (Chapter 6.4.). As a result, he characterizes his own age as being able to reach an overview over the preceding tradition. His century has this ability because it is connected to, and builds on, the past’s achievements.

Ist unser Zeitalter in irgend einer Absicht edel nutzbar, so ists “seine *Späte*, seine *Höhe*, seine *Aussicht*”! Was Jahrtausende durch, auf dasselbe bereits *zubereitet* worden! wodurch es wieder in so höhern Sinn auf ein anderes *zubereite*! die Schritte *gegen* und *vor ihm* – Philosoph, willst du den Stand deines Jahrhunderts ehren und nutzen: Das *Buch der Vorgeschichte* liegt vor dir! mit sieben Siegeln *verschlossen*; ein *Wunderbuch voll Weissagung*: auf dich ist das *Ende der Tage* kommen! lies! (84-85)

In the subsection starting with this apocalyptic presentation of the book of history, Herder does not specify the supposed content of the “seven seals”, nor does he prophesy otherwise. Rather, he recapitulates the main strokes of his sketch for a universal history. The significance of this move becomes apparent in a letter that Herder sent Hamann in 1774. Regarding *Älteste Urkunde*, Herder there writes that one day, revelation and religion will become “simple Geschichte u. Weisheit unsres Geschlechts”: “[E]in Tag kommt, der durch Facta u. Acta alles entsiegelt” (Herder, in May 1774, in ZH 3, 91). Convinced that only empirical/historical data may unlock the seven seals of the book of history, Herder attempts to indicate what such a

“simple history” should look like. So, apart from reflecting on historical method, Herder in his actual historiographic account intends to *show*, not tell, what the meaning of history may consist in.

To sum up: On the one hand, Herder intends to respect his epistemological restrictions when it comes to philosophy of history. He aims to refrain from evaluating history according to abstract *a priori* value concepts and from presenting one-sided narratives about moral progress. On the other hand, Herder relies on his theology of history in presenting his simple history in accordance with a particular design. He claims this is how the phenomena of history empirically appear. He is adamant that the course of history should exhibit its intelligibility by itself. Nonetheless, he understands the meaning of history’s development as hieroglyphic. Indeed, he intends to point at a way in which the hieroglyph may be deciphered. Herder’s actual way of practicing philosophy of history thus clearly goes beyond some of his most emphatic declamations of the human ignorance of God’s plan. This tension is integral to how Herder generally conceives of God’s immanence and transcendence, especially in his anthropology (see Chapter Six). It is only consistent that his theology of history exhibits it as well.²⁴¹

As a part of Herder’s theology of history, the hieroglyph supports Herder’s attempt at showing the meaning of history. The hieroglyph provides Herder with a certain logic, which allows him

die disparatsten Szenen zu *binden*, ohne sie zu *verwirren* – zu zeigen wie sie sich aufeinander *beziehen*, aus einander *erwachsen*, sich in einander *verlieren*, alle im Einzelnen nur Momente, durch den Fortgang allein *Mittel zu Zwecken* – welch ein *Anblick!* welch edle *Anwendung der menschlichen Geschichte!* welche *Aufmunterung* zu *hoffen*, zu *handeln*, zu *glauben*, selbst wo man *nichts*, oder *nicht alles* sieht. (42)

These objectives are not merely important for a philosophy of history. Rather, they directly inform religious practice and edification (65). Furthermore, the seven-step structure of the hieroglyph provides an organizing criterion that is qualitatively different from the abstract categories of moral progress. Herder understands the hieroglyph as a divine *image*; a *Denkbild* for human sensuousness and imagination, which connects different elements into an organic whole (FHA 5, 281, 297-298; Graczyk 2014, 74-76). By discussing Herder’s way of relying on

²⁴¹ A useful discussion of this tension, between what Herder “says” and what he “does”, can be found in Litt (1942, 164-179). Litt also notices that, ultimately, the ontology of how God and world relate is responsible for this tension (100-109, 144).

the hieroglyph in *Auch eine Philosophie*, I will now explain how his other manners of visualizing the structure of world history connect with it. Subsequently, I will rely on this account in assessing how Herder balances immanence and transcendence as well as contingency and necessity.

7.2. The hieroglyphic structure of history

I have argued in Chapter 6.4. that the general task of humanity is the *Bildung* of a richer and fuller manner of human being. The history of revelation must uncover the greatest possible variation so that the richness of creation comes into full view. Yet the task of history is to discover the underlying unity which makes this diversity possible, while also preparing humanity for renewed unification. God's revelations are "Samenkörner [...] die auf mancherlei Weise verhüllt und gesäet, viel in sich hielten, was erst ein Zeitverlauf und oft ein großer Zeitverlauf entwickeln sollte: aus *dem Verfolge entwickelnder Zeiten* besteht die *Bibel*." (FHA 9/1, 83). Herder seeks to reconstruct this Bible by connecting the results of these developments into a unified history.²⁴² That is to say, while he considers the image of Genesis 1 to be the purest preservation of the hieroglyph, he also takes the story of history to reflect its structure. Therefore, I will now discuss Peter Pfaff's (1983) interpretation of *Auch eine Philosophie* as a "Hieroglyphische Historie". Pfaff's account faces some considerable difficulties. Still, I will maintain with him that the concrete *hieroglyphic plan* of *Auch eine Philosophie* is essential for discussing the philosophical problems and tensions in this text. Recall, the hieroglyph theory has multiple implications. They concern (1) the human being as the prototype and unifying ground of history, and (2) the monogenetic conception of history as a tradition of a single nucleus of human culture. As a result of this conception, the biblical period takes center stage as the origin of human culture. God instructed humanity in its childhood; the hieroglyph's primordial revelation contained the seeds out of which all of humanity's history, culture and education developed (FHA 5, 297-301; FHA 4, 89). Historical explanation thus exhibits how a thing developed out of its divine origin.²⁴³ In this section, I will expand on (3) Herder's view on providence and eschatology in order to delineate the general direction and the structure of historical development.

²⁴² Auerochs (2006, 312ff.) argues that Herder considers the book of the Bible as the model for nature and history, not the other way round. Even though Auerochs is correct in observing that with the hieroglyph, Herder claims to demonstrate the primacy of Scripture, I interpret Herder as finding more symmetries between the three books, especially in *Auch eine Philosophie* and *An Prediger*.

²⁴³ Hence I think that in Herder's case, 'genetic explanation' should be differentiated more sharply from the more general notion of 'historicization' (pace Beiser 1987, 141-142).

Different scholars, such as Staffan Bengtsson (2010, 284) and Ulrich Gaier (1988, 73) have presented competing accounts of how the hieroglyph functions as an ordering principle in Herder's thought and writing. However, Pfaff's (1983) article, which focuses on *Auch eine Philosophie* in particular, seems to reach the most robust result.²⁴⁴ Pfaff identifies, in seven particular notions listed by Herder as characterizing patriarchal culture (FHA 4, 12, 14), the *Urmodell* of human sociality. It is Pfaff's thesis that this model reflects the structure of the main epochs of Herder's universal history.

About the education that the Orientals received for all of humankind, Herder indeed states: "Mensch, Mann, Weib, Vater, Mutter, Sohn, Erbe, Priester Gottes, Regent, Hausvater, für alle Jahrhunderte sollt er da gebildet werden!" (14). Pfaff argues these notions should be divided up in seven main forms of humanity: (1) *Mensch*; (2) *Mann/Vater*; (3) *Weib/Mutter*; (4) *Sohn/Erbe*; (5) *Priester Gottes*; (6) *Regent*; (7) *Hausvater* (1983, 415). And he suggests that these forms together comprise a hieroglyphic dialectic, where (1) *Mensch* is separated into (2) and (3), then returns to one position (4) with *Sohn* and *Erbe* and then splits up into (5) and (6; cf. Figure 1).

Herder does not make any claim about these notions forming such a structure. He does consider the patriarchal social institution the "Urbild aller bürgerlichen Ordnung und Einrichtung" and states that it would form "für alle Jahrhunderte der Menschenbildung die ewige Grundlage" (12). He describes the listed functions as exemplars, which will be emulated in different ways; as the roots of a single tree that will form a whole forest (13); and as the first forms of humanity, developed out of a single seed (11-12). In sum, at the start of *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder historically allocates the prototype of human being of his theological anthropology.

Pfaff goes on to support his way of grouping the seven forms by arguing that, organized in this way, they correspond with how Herder presents the main epochs of his world history. That is, both the order in which Herder discusses his main epochs, as well as the way in which he depicts their ways of contrasting and depending on each other, correspond to these main seven forms. This is indeed a striking homology: Herder presents the succession of ancient peoples as beginning with the Oriental patriarchs, who occupy the first position; the historical development then splits up into an Egyptian (2) and a Phoenician (3) position and returns to one position (4) with the Greek and the Romans. Herder also seems to confirm this homology

²⁴⁴ At least, Pfaff has received the most acknowledgement (e.g. from vom Hofe 1984, 1987; Häfner 1995, 254; Bultmann 1999, 147; Auerbachs 2006, 337) whereas other interpretations are more controversial.

when he portrays the Egyptians and Phoenicians as binary opposites and as the twin descendants of the Orient, who together gave form to Greece (FHA 4, 24, 26). Furthermore, regarding the second run of the hieroglyph, *Sohn* and *Erbe* may refer to Christ and to the spread of Christianity under Roman rule. The Middle Ages (*Priester Gottes*) and the epoch of *Regenten* then take in stages (5) and (6). The final age, of the *Hausvater*, is still to come.

Ostensibly, Herder's epochs indeed correspond to the seven forms of humanity and perform their hieroglyphic dialectic. However, he does not, in his discussions of the different historical periods, explicitly refer them back to the main forms of human sociality.²⁴⁵ Inevitably, a high degree of interpretation is involved in deciding whether Herder really structured his account of world history according to these seven stages and their exemplary ways of being human. From a perspective that is not the esotericism of a Lavater or Lenz, the homology may seem entirely accidental. There exists no conclusive evidence that Herder deliberately composes his universal history in such a way that it reflects the hieroglyph. Pfaff acknowledges this option, as well as the existence of other conflicting passages, but he nonetheless claims that his account distills the essence of Herder's theology of history (see 1983, 409, 417). By contrast, I interpret the hieroglyph as Herder's best guess for a prototypical structure of history, which necessarily varies depending on the (scope of the) historian's standpoint. In fact, this better be the case if Herder wants to retain that history's connectedness must naturally present itself rather than that a model is *a priori* imposed upon it. As a minimal structural criterion for connecting the phenomena of history, Herder's 'hieroglyphic history' may be reconciled with the other analogies on which he relies (see Chapter Three on Herder's use of analogies). Hence, I will assess multiple of Herder's models and analogies and discuss how their interplay gives rise to Herder's (necessarily complex and "shaggy") conception of history (Sikka 2011, 93-94, 105).

In defense of Pfaff, I want to point out that Herder's history of religion in *Älteste Urkunde*, tracing how the hieroglyph of creation was handed down during Antiquity, similarly relies on conspicuously accidental structural similarities. There, Herder attempts to uncover how various different symbols or models may (suddenly, and slightly miraculously,) appear connected. As I have interpreted Herder's biblical hermeneutics, this manner of recognizing that different elements together form an image is precisely the sort of sensuous or imagistic *Gestalt* switch that he intends to achieve in his interpretation (recall how Herder treats the seven days of

²⁴⁵ Rather, picturing the *Lebensalter* of humanity, he describes the Egyptian and Phoenician as *Knabe*, the Greek as *Jüngling* and the Roman as *Mann*.

creation). This is Herder's method of making history attest to divine providence solely in virtue of its own appearance. Furthermore, this account of world history provides an example of a monogenetic development where the human prototype takes on different shapes through actualizing, in different ways, a set of God-given seeds. Moreover, there exist still further analogies suggesting that Herder did have (something like) this structure in mind. The middle axis of the hieroglyph (forms 1, 4 and 7), for example, appears as a Christological model of history structured according to the three stages of (1) the creation of the *Mensch*, (2) the arrival of the *Sohn* and (3) His expected return. In addition, Herder's description of the Roman empire as a tree, spreading its seeds across Europe and preparing the continent for the Christian religion, similarly portrays the middle of world history as *Sohn/Erbe* (FHA 4, 43-45). I will return below to the eschatological aspects of Herder's philosophy of history which suggest that stages (5) and (6) might ultimately unite again in a single and final form of humanity.

In conclusion, I want to retain that, even if Pfaff's interpretation of Herder's use of the *Schöpfungshieroglyphe* involves considerable speculation and cannot be completely vindicated, he does uncover the rough outline of the essential plan of history intimated by Herder. That is, Pfaff is correct that Herder intends to intimate, hint at, and work toward, this sort of vision of history. In order to concretely spell out and interpret Herder's hieroglyphic plan, a bit of divination must be allowed. I thus continue down this road and ask how Herder formulates a philosophy of history on the basis of this plan.

7.3. Immanence and eschatology

The two key categories of German historicism, influentially identified in *Auch eine Philosophie* by Stadelmann and Meinecke, are *individuality* and *development*. In this section I discuss how Herder formulates these ideas. I will point out the main problem which the historicists faced in claiming him for their cause. This is the problem of transcendence, and, relatedly, of eschatology. Stadelmann sought to avoid this problem by isolating what he considered to be Herder's essential contribution, namely, his "immanente Entwicklungsgedanke" (1928, 57). Meinecke arrived at a similar conclusion, yet he was more explicit about the standpoint that he adopted in interpreting Herder. Regarding *Auch eine Philosophie*, he concluded:

Die Kunst der ästhetischen Einfühlung, durch die ihm die Geheimnisse der Individualität und Entwicklung sich erschlossen, ist niemals wieder so eng und organisch mit seinem ethisch-pädagogischen Wollen verschmolzen worden wie

hier. Was ihm freilich nur durch die zusammenschmelzende Kraft des christlichen Heilsplansgedankens möglich wurde, den er in diesen Jahren gesteigerter Religiosität auf sich wirken ließ. Er hat ihn zwar in hohem Grade, durch die Einfügung in seinen Wachstumsgedanken, säkularisiert, aber doch nicht völlig. So daß, vom Standpunkt des späteren Historismus aus gesehen, noch zu viel Transzendenz in seiner Konzeption steckt. (Meinecke [1936] 1946, 408)

Hans-Georg Gadamer addressed the anachronism characteristic of this standpoint of late historicism (1967, 147). It is indeed particularly anachronistic when relied on to interpret the expectations and hopes connected to transcendence in Herder's conception of history. By tuning down the degree of immanence that is characteristic of Herder's notion of development, I counter the historicist interpretation of Herder as historical relativist.

First, a central piece of their evidence regarding Herder's discovery of the "Geheimnisse der Individualität und Entwicklung", Stadelmann and Meinecke derive from how Herder conceives of means and ends within his providential plan for history. Herder himself famously states: "[K]ein Ding im ganzen Reiche Gottes [...] ist allein Mittel – alles Mittel und Zweck zugleich" (FHA 4, 54). Furthermore, Herder expects that the chain of means and ends is so vast and complex that every one of its links serves more ends, and is the product of more means, than any individual link could be aware of (82). Because history consists of this excess of means and ends, historically situated human beings can never oversee how the whole chain is connected. Therefore, they should not pretend that they could rule out the value of a particular link. Rather, humans should start historical inquiry from the assumption that all periods are intrinsically purposeful. Even though Herder finds it is legitimate to assess the function of individual periods, providence should never be justified only by pointing at a certain function. As the product of the historical tradition of human culture out of divine revelation, all ages are already valuable given the trajectory that has led to them (cf. Stadelmann 1928, 56-59, 62-65). In history's "unendliches Drama" (FHA 4, 83), scenes carry meaning both in themselves and in relation to each other.

However, *second*, all means and ends together also strive for ends that are not yet known, in forming a "Hauptvorstellung" which, strictly speaking, is only visible from God's point of view (82-83). Indeed, Herder relies on the finite human being's ignorance about these particular, future ends in justifying providence. He refers to history as a river and depicts its course as continuous, expanding and autonomous (Hinrichs 1954, 144-145). But his description of this river is more complicated, for Herder proclaims about history: "Siehest du diesen Strom

fortschwimmen: wie er aus einer kleinen Quelle entsprang, wächst, dort abreißt, hier ansetzt, sich immer schlängelt und weiter und tiefer bohret – bleibt immer Wasser! Strom! Tropfe immer nur Tropfe, bis er ins Meer stürzt” (FHA 4, 41). This is one of the images which Herder uses to reconcile development (of the *Strom*) and individuality (of the *Tropfen*). Furthermore, the image also suggests that historical development flows autonomously and is difficult to predict. Nonetheless, Herder’s description of the river also has history *falling* from a single source and ending with a *return* to its source.²⁴⁶ Thus, the image carries eschatological connections. The model of fall and return coheres with the *Schöpfungshieroglyphe* and its Christology.

Another way to frame the relation between individuality and development in Herder’s thought, I propose, is with reference to two ontotheological positions: the panentheism according to which God is present everywhere in creation, and the more traditional Christian position that places salvation (and hence the ultimate meaning of history) beyond history. Herder relies on a version of panentheism in arguing that God’s presence in history secures the individual worth of all historical periods. But regarding the future, the principle of development demands a thicker metaphysics: a final end must remain unreachable, the future must preserve a certain promise. This results in a tension between evaluating the particular by pointing at God’s presence within history, and by intimating his intentions for history. I argue that both Herder’s imagery and his concrete expectations for the future show that the transcendent standpoint remains essential in determining the meaning of history. Herder seeks to reconcile the tension between immanence and eschatology by referring to human finitude and by relying on decidedly ambiguous imagery.

First, Herder clearly intends to balance the value of events as the ends of previous causes with their value as means to future ends. He considers the individual character of peoples and ages to be generally shaped by geographic circumstances and previous developments: “Man bildet nichts aus als wozu *Zeit, Klima, Bedürfnis, Welt, Schicksal* Anlaß gibt” (FHA 4, 35). No people has ever built their way of life entirely from resources that were their own from the beginning. Rather, Herder’s historiography presents a unified tradition of cultural transfer and appropriation (see 20, 29, 30, 31, 39). This tradition distributed God’s primordial instruction of humanity and thus further educated different peoples, particularly those who helped shape the

²⁴⁶ Claudius is hence correct to observe, in his review of *Auch eine Philosophie*, how significant the “*Länge*” of God’s plan is for Herder. This significance has not merely been overlooked in secularizing interpretations, but also by e.g. vom Hofe (1984, 65, 68). Vom Hofe claims that Herder completely renounces eschatological thinking because of his theological view of creation as an ever-renewing process.

culture of eighteenth-century Europe. Herder avoids describing this process as deterministic: he speaks of the historical circumstances as “occasions” for the forces of the human heart to achieve certain goals (36). His main point is just that not all potential for human development is always within reach.

Second, also without having to point at particular influences and occasions, the *Lebensalter* metaphor provides a concrete way of conceptualizing humanity’s historical development (Heinz 1994a, 83; cf. Stadelmann 1928, 62-63). This analogy, between how an individual human life and humanity as a whole, paradigmatically shows how individuality and development are reconciled (FHA 4, 16; FHA 9/1, 84; cf. Litt 1942, 174-175). History as described by the analogy is progressive – humanity matures, ages and produces offspring – but the standards for measuring such progress differ with each life-stage. The metaphor explains why Herder thinks his contemporaries should not scorn ancient peoples for organizing their societies according to different values. From all the tendencies and dispositions of human nature, different sets are developed in different contexts (see Sikka 2011, 90-91, 98-104). Peoples in all ages necessarily lack various skills and virtues. This form of privation is necessary to the over-all maturation of humanity. Hence later stages are never simply better (FHA 4, 79, 81). Rather, the course of history attests to God’s benevolence by exhibiting the greatest possible variation of human forms (36-37; cf. Stadelmann 1928, 30-32; Litt 1942, 124-125, 143-146, 162-165).

Furthermore, in his critical assessment of his own century’s old age, Herder also speaks of decline (FHA 4, 61, 64). This suggests that Herder indeed – and in agreement with his critique of contemporaneous philosophy of history – does not posit a single final end of history. Rather, in idealizing the early stages of human development and mourning the subsequent loss of sensuous energy, he sounds pessimistic about the possibility of positive development for his own age. His discussions of its defects and potentials may thus be interpreted as deeply ambivalent about how God’s plan will continue to unfold. One might conclude that Herder, in his conception of universal history, does not include a clear direction.²⁴⁷

I take this conclusion to be mistaken. Herder’s account of historical development invariably points beyond the individual phenomenon at issue, and also judges its value in terms of its effect and contribution (FHA 4, 32, 37, 41-42). He announces the general *Plan des Fortstrebens* as his great theme (40). I have sketched, in section two, what this plan looks like. Furthermore,

²⁴⁷ As various interpreters indeed conclude: see Litt (1942, 176-179), Forster (2018, 244), Maurer (1987, 151-152).

I submit that the structures of the hieroglyph, the tree, the *Lebensalter* and the river all involve paligenetic features like return and reincarnation. Hence, I argue that Herder's discussing forms of decline in his own age is fully compatible with "the hope of rebirth and renewal".²⁴⁸ I will show that Herder's expectations for the future do derive from Christian eschatology. Even though he does not wish to speculate about God's final intention, he does formulate expectations regarding the future which involve Christian tropes and sentiments.²⁴⁹ His expectations may be divided into two main currents.

First, while he criticizes Europe's cultural arrogance as well as the methods of Christian missionaries, Herder does positively discuss Christianity's world-historical role. In virtue of the *generality* of its truths, imperatives and education of the human heart, Christianity is intended to unify humankind (FHA 4, 47). At least, this was Christ's intention: "[S]ie sollte *eigentliche Religion der Menschheit, Trieb der Liebe, und Band aller Nationen zu einem Bruderheere werden*" (46). The diverging courses of history would thus follow the telos of unifying humanity by re-integrating all nations into the Christian tradition.

Second, Herder suggests that the world-historical effects of European colonialism may very well turn against the colonizing agents: "Je mehr wir Europäer *Mittel und Werkzeuge* erfinden, euch andern Weltteile zu unterjochen, zu betrügen und zu plündern – Vielleicht ist's einst eben an euch zu *triumphieren*! Wir schlagen Ketten an, womit *ihr uns* ziehen werdet [...] sichtbarlich geht alles *ins Große*" (100). The fact that Herder includes this scenario as a possible unfolding of God's plan is quite telling. For in this case, there is not merely a tension between "Gleichwertigkeit aller Kulturen" and "Höchstgeltung des Christentums" (Cordemann 2010, 216, cf. 223) – there is a serious possibility that Christianity, as Herder knew it, will not persist. This seems hard to reconcile with his claim regarding Christian brotherhood. While Herder's world-historical model is truly biblical in its beginning and middle (namely, humanity's primordial education and the arrival of Christ), the future seems more open. How does Herder, from within his theology of history, make sense of this?

In order to evaluate the position of his own age, and to stipulate how history may continue to develop, Herder assesses what European colonialism has already brought about. He states that Europeans have transported the 'seeds' for further historical development all over

²⁴⁸ Sikka (2011, 90) mentions this hope at points in her interpretation but does not further develop its biblical background (see 116-125).

²⁴⁹ Herder announces these at the end of the first section (FHA 4, 42), and discusses them in the third, from which I will quote below. Incidentally, my argument contrasts with how Koselleck (1975, 674-675) interprets Herder's conception of history, while it agrees with Löwith (1949, 5-6).

the globe (86-87).²⁵⁰ While their effects are still unknown, Herder claims that it nonetheless suits his own age “ins *Verborgne* und *Allweite* zu säen, ohne daß man selbst Ernte erwartet! und gewiß um so größer die allweite Ernte [...] und wenn einmal alle die Keime aufwachen [...]” (95). Even though he does not wish to prophesy, Herder has hopes for the distant future in which these seeds may blossom (cf. 97, 101, 102, 107). This appears to be a simple induction from the movements of increasing expansion and complexity in past and present: the future will only be more varied.²⁵¹ Therefore, I concur with Stadelmann’s assessment that Herder’s principle of development really is “eine einfache Anwendung der pandynamistischen Metaphysik, welche die Geschichte als Verwirklichungsschauplatz aller Formmöglichkeiten auffassen lehrte” (1928, 65). Nonetheless, I argue that Herder’s way of applying this metaphysics is not as straightforward as Stadelmann thinks. This may become evident from how Herder relies on his 1774 studies of the Gospel of John in speaking of sowing for future generations. With this talk, Herder alludes to John 4 and invokes the biblical prophecy of Christ as the primordial *logos* and *telos* of creation. And with this end in mind, Herder in his commentary *Johannes* reminds his reader, “ob du gleich nicht erntest; denk ans Wort Christi, daß es edler sei für andre zu säen” (SWS 7, 334). While Herder does not intend his biblical interpretation to metaphysically prove any logos-Christology, he does think that history may visualize the gist of the biblical idea. Interpreting John’s dictum “In the beginning was the Word”, Herder describes Christ as the “Prototyp der Schöpfung, der sie übersann, schuf, hält, erfüllet, und entwickeln und vollenden wird in die Ewigkeit hinüber” (322). This clearly includes a substantial world-historical role.

Regarding the course and direction of history, this idea has two significant implications: First, Herder considers Christ “das sichtbare Mittelglied der ganzen Kette” (327; cf. FHA 9/2, 86, 91; FHA 4, 82, 107). With His initial appearance, the various developments of ancient history return to a single point, namely, the traditional center of history (and the fourth stage of the hieroglyph). At this point, history converges, only to diverge and particularize again after the fall of the Roman Empire. However, this time, the human prototype is shaped into a concrete form. Christ functions as a point of orientation for the future. That is, second, Herder states that Christ also is God’s perfect image on earth and thus the “Vorabdruck des, was durch uns werden soll” (SWS 7, 321). As far as God’s providential plan may thus be intimated, the Bible still

²⁵⁰ In this context, Herder thinks of the cultural heritage of Classical Antiquity as having been dried and bottled by Europe, so that it could be globally distributed. He thus combines his negative assessment of Enlightenment culture with hopes for a palingenesis on a global scale.

²⁵¹ This also seems to follow from Herder’s general theology of creation and its principle of plenitude (see Chapter 6.3.).

presents the clearest account of the future. This circumscribes the sense in which Herder conceives of an open future.

In *Auch eine Philosophie*, the Christological model informs Herder's imagery. It explains why Herder expects that the *stream* of his age approximates a great ocean (FHA 4, 95). It also demarcates the direction of the *chain* of means and ends, which will move "*ins Große*", no matter whether the colonizers or the colonized are its agents. Furthermore, the cyclical movement of both the *Lebensalter* and the growing *tree* reassures Herder that the present forms the palingenetic ground for the future. His depiction of history as a tree concurs with this idea.²⁵² According to the tree analogy, history grows out of a single divine seed which, after falling into the earth, first develops in its depths (11). Herder pictures ancient history as proceeding from patriarchal roots along an Egyptian, Phoenician and Greek stem, and then branching out as a result of Roman expansion politics (31). The tree analogy implies that the eighteenth century's high and thin branches allow for a better view of the whole (70, 84, 95, 102). One of the very few advantages, which Herder grants his own century, is that from these unstable branches, new fruits may develop. That is, the seeds which these branches spread out allow for new developmental processes based on previous developments. They thus reincarnate the heritage of the past (42-43).

With this evidence regarding Herder's Christology, his 'hieroglyphic plan' for history overlaps in important respects. Therefore, his 1774 exegetical and historical works appear united in presenting a theology of history. Together, these works indicate what Herder thinks of when he refers to 'sowing for the future'. They explain why it is incorrect to conclude from Herder's "Lasset uns [...] auch *mitten unter der Wolke* arbeiten: denn wir arbeiten zu *einer großen Zukunft*" that Herder resists eschatology (as Forster 2018, 256 suggests).²⁵³ Herder's theology of history relies on a Christian ideal of an "allgemein[e] Bildung der Menschheit", but the seeds for this development may come to blossom elsewhere (FHA 4, 107). That is, also the rise of colonized nations might be reconcilable with a certain form of Christianity as "Religion *des Weltalls*".²⁵⁴ This Christological vision informs Herder's own historical self-understanding,

²⁵² Maurer (1987, 152) argues that Herder's switch from the *Lebensalter* to the tree shows that he avoids decadence theory and salvation history. Maurer ignores that Herder relies on analogies connected to the human's and the tree's modes of reproduction precisely to invoke a form of salvation history.

²⁵³ Herder explicitly affirms the Christian reading of *Auch eine Philosophie* in a letter to Lavater that has troubled various interpreters (e.g. Düsing 1984, 47-48; vom Hofe 1984, 61). I argue that one need not resort to the more whimsical evidence of confessions in letters (especially letters to Lavater) to recognize this point. Between 1773-1778, Herder for instance also works on a commentary and on "Nachdichtung" of the Book of Revelation (see Kohler 2015, 196ff.).

²⁵⁴ Namely, as long as these nations develop according to God's intention to generalize their religions into the "*eigentliche Religion der Menschheit*".

as he documents it in the third section of *Auch eine Philosophie*. Herder does not consider his own age anywhere near the final stage of history. However, he claims that his age prepares for the future, through globalizing its view and influence, and through increasing its historical understanding of humanity. Herder intends to contribute to this project of preparing for the future by deciphering the book of history. He sums up the expectations and hopes connected to this Christian ideal in the following way:

Unsre Zeit wird bald mehrere Augen öffnen: uns zeitig gnug wenigstens *idealische Brunnquellen* für den Durst einer Wüste zu suchen treiben. – – Wir werden Zeiten schätzen lernen, die wir jetzt verachten – das Gefühl *allgemeiner Menschheit* und *Glückseligkeit* wird rege werden: Aussichten auf ein höheres, als *menschlich Hie- sein* wird aus der trümmervollen Geschichte das Resultat werden, uns *Plan* zeigen, wo wir sonst *Verwirrung* fanden: Alles findet sich an Stelle und Ort[.] (89-90)

7.4. Relativistic themes

In 1928, Stadelmann formulated an influential assessment of Herder's philosophy of history. He declared *Auch eine Philosophie* the "Grundbuch des Historismus" as well as the peak of Herder's intellectual achievement (28, 57, 141-143). Nonetheless, he concluded, "man hat es schwer zu entscheiden, ob Herder eher Aufstiegsoptimist gegen besseres Wissen oder Relativist wider seinen Willen gewesen ist" (65). Stadelmann described this as a result of the tension between Herder's "Fortschrittsglaube" and his historical "Gleichgewichtsgefühl". This verdict, of course, merely presented two sides of the same coin: Herder's "better knowledge" was that progress merely consisted in realizing all that was possible; a thought which Stadelmann classified as a "Tendenz zum extremen Relativismus und Geschichtsfatalismus" (59). So Stadelmann concluded that Herder attempted to stay faithful to his optimism, but failed: Herder's "Gleichgewichtsgefühl" was part of his "irrationalen geschichtlichen Sinnes" (142) and overpowered his "anti-relativistic will". Accidentally, Stadelmann thought of Herder as thus doing justice to the factually irrational character of history; and Stadelmann disputed that Herder puts forward a theological conception of history (59).

This form of interpretation, which set off around 1900 with Dilthey ([1901] 1927, 268) and Rudolf Unger (1911), has had an interesting reception history. Within the debates over historicism, especially Herder's alleged ("extreme", "großartige", or "bloße") *Relativismus* has had polarizing effects. Some historicists, among them Dilthey, Stadelmann and Meinecke,

framed (what they considered) Herder's relativism as a major progression in modern intellectual history. But their enemies from different sides decried it as the beginning of the German path toward moral catastrophe (cf. Johannsen 2016; Otto 1994; Träger 1979). This polemic over Herder has, subsequently, been more or less repeated in the Anglophone world after Berlin presented Giambattista Vico and Herder as radical innovators in the history of ideas (for Herder, see Berlin 1976, xxii-xxiv; cf. discussions by Gjesdal 2017, 5-7; Spencer 2012b, 4-6; Sikka 2011, 11-14; Norton 2007).

My aim here is not to discuss the different fronts of this polemic, nor to assess the different Herder interpretations involved in it. Rather, I will recapitulate my own interpretation of *Auch eine Philosophie* to substantiate my claim that the interpretation of Herder as a relativist was mistaken to begin with. Centrally, I will explain how those tendencies, which were interpreted as relativistic by Stadelmann and others, in fact follow from Herder's theology of history. I argue that Stadelmann's dilemma does not get off the ground: Herder's "Gleichgewichtsgefühl" is in fact a theological principle and does not oppose his anti-relativistic intentions.

Incidentally, I also intend to question a certain form of reasoning about the 'problem of relativism'. This may be illustrated by a recent reassessment of the foundational status of *Auch eine Philosophie* for German historicism by Frederick Beiser. While Beiser aims to rectify how the German historicist tradition should be conceived (2011, 1-26, 98-99), his way of nuancing the foundational status of *Auch eine Philosophie* is quite traditional:

There is also a shadowy side to Herder's legacy, which bestowed upon the historicist tradition not only central themes but also basic problems. The worst problem was relativism, i.e., how there could be universal standards if all values are cultural and historical. While Herder clearly sees this problem and struggles to avoid it, he offers nothing toward its solution but religious faith, an appeal to providence. It was a desperate strategy; but also the precedent for Humboldt, Ranke and Droysen. (Beiser 2011, 132)

Beiser exemplifies a general pattern of theorizing about relativism and historicism. According to this pattern, historicists inevitably face the problem of relativism; and every historicist needs to adopt strategies for *countering* this relativism.²⁵⁵ I will defend two connected claims regarding this supposedly necessary connection between historicism and the problem of rela-

²⁵⁵ Other interpreters of Herder who reason this way include Jacobs (1994, 73), Iggers ([1968] 1983, 36) and Linker (2000). Sikka (2011) and Gjesdal (2017) offer alternatives, either by rehabilitating a certain form of relativism (Sikka) or avoiding the all-or-nothing dialectic altogether.

tivism. First, Herder's theology of history provides the monist basis which underlies his view of history. Second, it is misleading to interpret his theology of history as a 'counter-strategy' against relativism. Because of Herder's theology of history, the problem of relativism never became pressing in the first place.

As I have emphasized in the above sections, Herder was strongly optimistic about the worth of all human history. This optimism was inspired by his theology of history. It may have come to appear as a "desperate strategy" to us, and yet it was essential to Herder's conception of history. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explain how Herder's theses on *prima-facie* relativistic themes – historicity, contingency, individuality, incommensurability, equal validity, *Einfühlung* and tolerance – are best understood as *expressions of* religious faith rather than as problems that need to be *countered by* faith. These theses strikingly diverged from what most historical relativists would later claim.²⁵⁶

7.4.1. Historicity

While, according to Herder, events and societies should indeed be approached as the products of history, still, all historical phenomena are primordially the products of God. And although this dependence upon God's provenience should not lead to strict determinism, and notwithstanding that God does not directly interfere in history, this does not leave historical phenomena merely contingent either (cf. FHA 4, 48). As a result, interpreting the meaning of the immense plurality of historical forms becomes a matter of recognizing and defending God's plan.

Herder at times recognizes earthly necessities (regarding particular ways humans had to develop in certain circumstances) that even God must rely on in educating humanity (see Litt 1942, 103-109). For example, Herder explains particular combinations of virtues and vices within cultures by referring to circumstances and challenges which had to be overcome. He links their values to certain proportions and combinations of forces and inclinations, needed to attain their goals (36). This certainly involves a relativization of values to time and place. Herder develops this general relativity as a world-historical *rule* with a divine purpose. "Die Vorsehung [...] hat nur in der Abwechslung, in dem Weiterleiten durch Weckung neuer Kräfte und Ersterbung andrer ihren Zweck erreichen wollen" (37). Herder understands this "fortgehende Entwicklung" as the education of humanity (42). Every moral character, no matter how differ-

²⁵⁶ I cannot provide the ultimate comprehensive definition of historical relativism and so I cannot exclude the possibility that connections to some form of historical relativism remain. But the following discussion of various relativistic themes does aim to distinguish Herder's theses from a fairly wide net of relativist positions.

ent from ours, expresses a stage in, and a contribution to this education, and is thus human and moral. The world-historical principle of the general *Bildung der Menschheit* provides a humanistic ethical imperative that is not itself culturally relative.²⁵⁷ In modern ethical terms, Herder's humanism appears as a species of what Thomas Michael Scanlon calls "parametric universalism", according to which "the moral force of [...] variable practices is explained by appeal to a single substantive moral principle" (Scanlon 1998, 340).²⁵⁸

In his theological anthropology, Herder unequivocally adheres to certain permanent core values. They pertain to the human capacity to develop and give shape to one's own existence, in accordance with historical, geographic and cultural circumstances. The history of humanity has a stable human subject across historical changes; it is this subject which takes on diverse human forms. The *Bildung* of a general *Menschheit*, on the basis of its universal prototype, is Herder's main ethical imperative. Herder bases this imperative on his biblical exegesis in stating that humans should seek to emulate their Creator and *Vorbild* by developing their creative forces.

Furthermore, when the character of a certain people does appear immoral to us, theodicy steps in: Herder praises God's *diverse methods* for the education of the human soul and reprimands his contemporaries' shortsightedness (FHA 4, 15, 51). Furthermore, Herder defends practices that were perceived as immoral by his contemporaries in at least three ways, all of which refer to the divine dimension of world history. First, he places practices within their historical context, and explains why they appear less unethical when appropriately situated (53). This move involves a critique of Herder's contemporaries' tendency to rely exclusively on their own value-system. Herder instead claims that God's wisdom is reflected in the immensely diverse field of human-historical possibilities (106). Second, Herder argues that some evils are necessary for historical development, or for making room for virtues that would otherwise not have been possible (36, 87-88). Their function is to achieve the complete fullness of creation. Finally, Herder refers to our cognitive limitations with respect to "Zufall, Schicksall, Gottheit"

²⁵⁷ Frederick Barnard distinguishes Herder's "historical contextualism" regarding values from "a wholly relativistic ethic", according to which "one value was as good or as worth pursuing as any other". By contrast, Barnard states that "Herder sought to make clear [...] that every generation has to recognize anew what needs to be done to promote humanity" (2003, 103). Spencer (2012b, 114) for this reason calls the ethical imperative an "open telos". She considers it a "universal yet minimal regulative ideal for the good life" (116), which ensures "that 'value' is not reducible to what a culture holds to be of value" (100). I think these points are sound, except that in *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder pictures the telos of humanity in a less open manner than Spencer concludes.

²⁵⁸ This might also structurally conform to the position called "absolutist relativism" by Paul Boghossian (2011, 66-68). But the problem which Boghossian raises for this position, – namely, that it seems arbitrary to accept only some normative principles as absolute while rejecting others – can be addressed by Herder's theology fairly straightforwardly. This is because Herder's non-relative principle of humanism derives from a larger ontotheological framework that accounts for how both the relative and the non-relative values are distributed.

(58): we are incapable of evaluating God's ways regarding world history in its entirety. This is why it happens that, frequently, we cannot, from our perspective, see beyond the seeming contingency of events. But this does not alter the certainties regarding the monogenetic beginning of history, which Herder derives from his biblical exegesis. Nor does the indiscernibility of God's ways affect Herder's basic conviction that the course of history coincides with the "*Gang Gottes in der Natur*" (59).

7.4.2. *Individuality and incommensurability*

According to Herder, the historian's task is to trace the development of human practices, and to understand them in their own context as well as in comparison with others. As a result of this genetic and comparative procedure, some aspects of these practices appear completely individual and are in fact extremely difficult to compare with anything else (see Chapter Three). An important implication of this undertaking seems to be that cultures are understood as isolated wholes and that their values are centered on their nucleus (FHA 4, 39; Berlin [1965] 1976, 206-211). This would make intercultural understanding very difficult at best.

And yet, according to Herder's theology of history, God thinks of all individualities as forming an ultimate harmony. The historian in turn emulates this ideal in searching for the interconnectedness of universal history, and by attempting to delineate a unified world-historical process. Thus Herder confidently asserts, against Voltaire's critique of the Middle Ages, that this period was simultaneously "*nur sich selbst gleich*", an "*einzelner Zustand der Welt*" as well as "in ewiger Veränderung und Fortstrebung – ins *Große*" (FHA 4, 51). In its own way, this period also participated in history's great striving, not the least by spreading what might become the general religion of humankind. Herder relies on the tree analogy to picture the individuality of medieval peoples as self-contained branches that distribute their sprigs and blossom in order to reach a higher connectedness of humanity (56). Furthermore, he interprets medieval practices as expressing the human drive to develop also under difficult circumstances. He thus seeks to appreciate in these practices the universal capacity of human beings to give shapes to themselves and their environment.

Again, Herder is confident that the sequence of history, just like the course of nature, may be justified in terms of theodicy. History's providential organization is visible to the same extent as the order of nature is visible: like the book of nature, history is hieroglyphic, but (ultimately) readable. The historian's task is to connect letters and words into a meaningful

sequence. For this sequence, Herder does express eschatological expectations. Furthermore, within this conception of history, analogies between different forms of the human prototype will exist at any juncture. No radical incommensurability thus separates different human forms. Ontologically, they are part of a single whole.

7.4.3. *Equal value and non-neutrality*

Probably the most notorious aspect of relativism is the idea that all cultural frames are of equal value. This idea can take many forms; here it is useful to distinguish between the metaphysical claim that all value-systems are (in fact) equal, and the methodological imperative to treat them *as if* they were all of equal value.²⁵⁹ Generally, the idea is considered to be motivated by the relativistic reasoning that since there is no absolute standpoint from which cultures can be ranked, they are all of equal worth. To this reasoning, anti-relativists respond with the ‘self-refutation argument’, which takes the form of the question: if there is no absolute standpoint, then from which perspective could we possibly assert that all cultures are equal?

Herder would have no problems at all in answering this question. But this is because he does not share the relativist’s premise that there exists no absolute standpoint. Herder’s philosophy of history retains a God’s perspective from which value is distributed. History is “*Pallast Gottes, zu seiner Allerfüllung*” as well as “*zu seinem Lustanblicke*” (83). For Herder, God’s seeing largely coincides with His pervading creation and history. Hence the absolute standpoint is not fully transcendent. However, Herder still contrasts human finitude with the capacity to adopt this standpoint. He concludes that, unlike us, God is able to appreciate every aspect of creation.²⁶⁰ Accordingly, Herder’s answer to the above question is also slightly different than to what is often assumed. That is, while he does assume that an absolute standpoint exists, *we* cannot assert that all ways of life are equal. While historians must presuppose that nothing is merely a means, they cannot establish anything like a principle of equal validity. Rather, as I discussed in Chapter Three, the apparent non-comparability of values functions as

²⁵⁹ For a taxonomy of other possible versions see Kusch (2016, 107, principle 5).

²⁶⁰ When Herder is thus associated with relativism by attributing to him the principle of equal validity, this contradicts the idea that relativism essentially gets going by negating absolutism (see Bloor 2011, 436). In David Bloor’s terms, Herder would be committed to absolutism *plus* the “foolishness condition” of equal validity (452). Of course this in fact only coheres with Bloor’s portrayal of an honest theological anti-relativism (2007).

This point may be of wider relevance for understanding religious, romantic and idealist ways of appreciating plurality and diversity. What Lovejoy called the “diversitarian assumption” often started from an absolutistic version of the principle of plenitude (Lovejoy 1936, ch. 10). Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder presented an example of this in “*Einige Worte über Allgemeinheit, Toleranz und Menschenliebe in der Kunst*”, explicitly relying on God’s perspective (Wackenroder [1797] 1979, 46; cf. Buntfuß 2004, 136-140). Leopold Ranke would famously repeat this move in stating that God considers all of history of equal value (1964-1975 2, 62-63).

a reminder that we are not in the possession of the ultimate measuring device. This is certainly a relativistic-sounding claim. It suggests that, for us, there exists no neutral way of evaluating ways of life (cf. Kusch 2016, 107). Herder criticizes various of his contemporaries for basing their evaluations of historical periods on one-sided comparisons to their own values (FHA 4, 23, 26, 36-37).

Nevertheless, on Herder's view, two universals dictate that the non-comparability of cultures and periods is never final and should not be extended beyond its function of reprimanding ethnocentrism. First, Herder's concept of humanity ensures that humans will find common ground in their search for analogies between themselves and others. As I explained above, this common ground also allows a certain degree of moral evaluation. Second, from his theological claim that there exists an absolute standpoint, Herder does formulate a methodological ideal. This ideal is to emulate God's standpoint, or, at least, to seek for the 'height of revelation'. Since history is everywhere infused with revelation, Herder's imperative is to start from the assumption that all cultures and religions are also ends in themselves.

7.4.4. *Empathy, tolerance and critique*

The methodological implications of the ideas of equal value and non-neutrality deserve separate treatment. In the debates on historicism and relativism, the ideals of tolerance and impartiality have been identified with the inability to make any value judgments. As a result of the attempt to eclipse all subjective elements of judgment, critical judgment becomes impossible (Beiser 2011, 277; Staiger 1962, 90). Herder's notion of *Einfühlung* has been criticized for this reason. By fully entering the other's perspective, the historian would become interminably tolerant.²⁶¹ Nothing seems left to say except that every party is right according to their own standards (Berlin [1965] 1976, 210-212).

In fact, as I have interpreted Herder on empathetic understanding (in Chapter Three), he does not understand it as a going over into the other's perspective. Rather, relying on his psychology of analogy, he develops a view where we start from recognizing similarities to ourselves, and engage in a dynamic process of self-feeling and other-feeling. In this process, we may constantly adjust both our understanding of ourselves and of others. The goal of this process is to nurture the moral feeling for general humanity.

²⁶¹ Gjesdal (2017, 154-166) formulates an extensive critique of this interpretation of Herder.

Herder does formulate the requirement that a full grasp of the other's historical and cultural context would be necessary for a genuinely sympathetic understanding of their mode of existence (FHA 4, 33). Yet, first, this requirement is part of his project of searching for the fullest understanding of humanity in all its richness. Hence it is as much concerned with uncovering universal humanity as with appreciating human diversity. Furthermore, second, the requirement of *Einfühlung* is an ideal for the future, which requires much preparatory historical and philosophical work. Until they have approximated the 'true history of humanity' (see section one), finite human beings necessarily start from their own perspective in understanding and assessing other forms of life.

Herder also combines tolerance with criticism of those cases where the development of human capacities is inhibited. This criticism is guided by Herder's humanist ethical imperative: Human beings will develop their "*Keim der Glücks- und Tugendempfänglichkeit*" in different ways (82). It is their essential ethical task to actively promote humanity through developing their particular way of life. Herder ventures to assess whether, in a particular context, humans are granted enough possibilities to develop their existence.²⁶² In *Auch eine Philosophie*, he is at pains to evaluate how particular historical periods may have contributed to this general task. As a central tool in this evaluation, empathetic understanding retains a clear normative orientation.

A related form of moral judgment consists in recognizing the divine nature of human historical existence, even when development appears inhibited. This form of judgment is similar to the defense of God's ways in those cases where we see only contingency (7.4.1.): Relying on the conviction that God understands and appreciates all forms of human existence, Herder seeks to combine critique with compassion (e.g. FHA 4, 53). And yet, also this undertaking only presents itself as an ideal, which should be worked toward, but can only be fully realized in a distant future (89-90).

To sum up, Herder identifies the following steps in the historian's judgment. First, he recognizes that we are all situated and prejudiced. Empathy and tolerance are consequently meant to broaden our horizons so that we expand our understanding beyond the received opinions. However, this methodological ideal does not lead *us* to grasping the equal validity of all of historical humanity. We do pass moral judgment according to our grasp of the norms for the *Bildung der Menschheit*. Nevertheless, in the end, we have to attempt to recognize the

²⁶² This is rightly interpreted as a normative project of promoting human flourishing (Sikka 2011, 15-20, 88; Spencer 2012b, 112-118). Also Stadelmann (1928, 28) recognizes that not just from the 1780s, but also in *Auch eine Philosophie*, Herder promotes the ethical project of human happiness as a universal value.

human character and the function in history's providential course even of amoral practices. Herder shows tolerance toward historical and cultural others precisely because he expects to find absolute value spread out across different forms of human life.²⁶³ This monist theological foundation of his philosophy of history makes his views on topics central to the later debates on historical relativism appear in a different light.

7.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Herder's *Auch eine Philosophie* does not merely perform a methodological critique of the philosophy of history, but also presents a substantive alternative philosophy of history. Furthermore, I have explained the sense in which this philosophy of history is connected to Herder's biblical hermeneutics and argued that he adheres to a certain theology of history. I have also expounded on the implications of this theology of history for his conception of history: (1) Herder intimates a hieroglyphic structure beneath the historical process; (2) Herder pictures the historical development as a process of increasing diversity and complexity that, nonetheless, is destined to reunite; (3) Herder formulates eschatological expectations regarding the development of a higher and more general humanity, integrating Christological motifs in his philosophy of history.

Relying on my interpretation of Herder's theology of history, I have ventured to criticize the historicist interpretation of *Auch eine Philosophie*. Particularly, I have attempted to shed a different light on Herder's views connected to relativistic-sounding themes. Apart from non-absolutism, the most important themes are historicity, individuality, incommensurability, equal validity, *Einfühlung* and tolerance. My central argument has been that, as a result of his theology of history, the starting points from which Herder approached relativistic themes were different from how philosophers around 1900 assessed historicist theses. By way of conclusion, I will recapitulate the main ideas that set Herder apart from later historical relativists:

1. Monogeneticism: Herder pictures history as evolving out of a single origin connected to a primordial revelation of God. Since all of history depends on this absolute origin, Herder's understanding of *historicity* has little to do with contingency or with a want of meaning or value. The dependence or relativity of values upon history, uncovered through genetic explanation, is a dependence on an absolute.

²⁶³ This ideal is similarly expressed by Goethe, namely, in the 1773 theological treatise which Häfeli quotes in his review of Herder's *Älteste Urkunde* (see Chapter 6.2.). There, Goethe distinguishes his tolerance from indifference: certain about his own faith, he preaches humility regarding the diversity of religious sects (WA 1/37, 155-173).

2. Revelation: In Herder's theology of history, God's presence in history, and the general connectedness depending on the *Analogie der Schöpfung*, qualify the sense of otherness or *incommensurability* attached to the diversity of phenomena. Their ability to experience revelation further connects human beings.
3. Providence: Herder envisions a providential plan behind the course of history. Within this plan, historical periods and their diverse values and practices are granted value both intrinsically and by fulfilling a certain function. This alters the sense in which historical periods and their values are *contingent*.
4. God's point of view: The God's perspective informs Herder's views on a group of themes surrounding *equal validity*. Unlike the relativist, Herder beliefs in the existence of an absolute standpoint from which cultures are evaluated. Simultaneously, his understanding of human finitude restrains the sense in which human empathy could achieve *tolerance*.
5. Human nature: Herder proposes that a universal human subject underlies the diversity of human forms as its prototype. This qualifies the nature of the *plurality* of human forms. It also enables human beings both to empathetically understand different human forms and to critically evaluate instances where human development is inhibited. While human nature is a flexible clay, it also forms the absolute nucleus for all human forms.
6. Humanity as an ethical imperative: Herder derives the basic foundation for his ethical project of promoting the development of humanity from his exegesis of Genesis 1 and certain parts of the New Testament. He understands it as the ethical task of history and anthropology to develop a fuller and more general manner of being human by engaging the diversity of human forms. This task is based on the idea that the human being occupies a position in the center of creation and should venture to emulate its Creator. Furthermore, this task relies on the eschatological conviction that, in the future, all differences may be reconciled, as Herder pictures an ideal humanity integrating all human forms into a fuller existence.

Accordingly, I interpret Herder's position on the mentioned relativistic themes not as aspects of a relativistic position, nor as strategies for countering a slide into relativism. Herder's philosophy of history had a monist foundation in theology, and his theses on the value of history show that his view is distinct from relativism. When Herder sought to understand and promote the development of humanity in all its richness, he performed a religious task. This task was to uncover the ultimate meaning and direction of history, and to prepare for a better future. It was

a project that ‘we’ later abandoned.²⁶⁴ But for Herder, it was not a “desperate strategy” against relativism. Instead, this religious task formed a crucial aspect of his self-understanding as a philosopher of history.

²⁶⁴ But only after various authors and movements had continued this project and developed it in different directions. I can but name a few main currents here: First, Herder’s religious humanism would resound throughout German romanticism and historicism (e.g., Humboldt, Ranke, Droysen). Second, Herder’s model of history as a process of increasing human self-understanding and his use of the *Lebensalter* were taken up by German Idealists such as Fichte and Hegel. Third, also within the history of Protestant theology, Herder’s historical thought proved a lasting inspiration (on this topic, see Buntfuß 2004; Pannenberg 1983; Barth 1947).

Psychology, history, religion: a concluding postscript

This study has largely consisted in a reconstruction of how Herder's early thought appeared from the perspective of later philosophers and historians. My aim has been to amend their interpretations of Herder's psychology, hermeneutics and philosophy of history by identifying and analyzing those features of Herder's thought which they attributed less systematic weight. I have argued that Herder's conceptions of human experience and of the human-historical world derive from an ontotheological humanism. Herder intended this theology to be distinct from contemporary systems of metaphysics. Nonetheless, I have interpreted his historical and psychological thought as deriving from monistic certainties and universalistic aspirations rooted in his conception of divine revelation and existence. So, while my interpretation has roughly proceeded from Herder's psychology to his history to his religion, I have argued that the latter explains the anti-skeptical and non-relativistic stance that he adopts in all three fields.

Psychology and history were fields of inquiry that, around 1800, would come to be known as sources of contingency, being 'merely empirical' and hence unphilosophical. Herder was a part of the Enlightenment anthropological movement aimed at integrating scientific (physiological, biological, psychological, cultural and historical) knowledge about humanity in order to pursue social and ethical ends. He urged this movement to fully think through the implications of newly gathered material regarding the extent of historical and cultural diversity, and to confront its own ethnocentric prejudices. Herder formulated these requirements, however, because he was confident that exhaustively inquiring historical and cultural diversity, and completing its genetic explanation, would yield the vision of a providential development of humanity out of a single origin. This allowed him to adopt an optimistic perspective upon history, upon embodied human beings and their feelings, and upon the empirical in general. For Herder, all these phenomena were of great value and significance; they were far from contingent or devoid of normativity.

Herder's religion certainly was unorthodox. Questioning original Sin as well as God's transcendence, he developed an optimistic account of the human condition and of the religious significance of the *Bildung* of humanity. Contrary to many later Romantics, for example, Herder did not imagine an absolute original unity that was irretrievably lost to humankind (as Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling and Friedrich Hölderlin did). Instead, he ventured to provide a historical account of how human culture developed out of a divine prehistory. During these earliest stages of the development of humanity, a revelation occurred which could still be approximated. Herder proposed that, through hermeneutic engagements with the Bible, with

history and with the world's poetry, humans could still grasp God's revelations. In general, Herder did not conceive any century or people to be abandoned by God. Still, his theology of history was less straitjacket than the philosophies of history that dominated among authors of the following generation. Herder's conception of religion allowed him to appreciate the plurality of religious beliefs while assessing how different peoples and religions had contributed to the development of humanity.

While Herder's religion motivated his appreciation of history and of cultural diversity, it did not, by that token, lead him to adopt a relativistic position. I have argued that the opposite was the case. The monism of Herder's theology made him optimistic regarding the chances of finding the universal intelligibly distributed across peoples and times. Herder's unorthodox Christianity and his Spinozism motivated his humanistic dive into diversity, but they did not allow him to draw relativistic conclusions from his inquiries (cf. Mack 2010, chs. 3-5; Sikka 2011, ch. 7).

I have understood 'relativism' as the web of positions that historicists and philosophers of history around 1900 discussed under that heading. This is not a clearly defined view with necessary and sufficient conditions, and so I have refrained from formulating such a definition. Instead, I have cast a relatively wide web of relativistic themes, such as non-absolutism, diversity, historicity, incommensurability and a want of normativity in practicing critical judgment. This may appear lacking with regard to precision. But I think it adds to my case that, regardless of the exact definition, twentieth-century historicists and their critics have misrepresented Herder when labelling him a relativist. This is because even without subsuming under that label more contested features like the equal validity of values, cultural (or ideological) determinism, or functionalism about right and wrong, I conclude that Herder's view is distinct from relativism.²⁶⁵

In studying the emergence of relativism as a philosophical problem, the procedure of identifying certain levels of anachronism has a more general import. My results motivate the suspicion that also later thinkers in the historicist tradition, such as Humboldt, Ranke, Droysen, and even Dilthey, share several of Herder's optimistic convictions, affecting their take on (what would come to be known as) the problem of relativism.²⁶⁶ This raises the question whether the

²⁶⁵ These features are debated between Spencer (2012b, 98-99) and Sikka (2011, 39-40); the issue of determinism was invoked by Berlin ([1980] 1990, 89) to distinguish Vico and Herder from certain twentieth-century relativist sociologists.

²⁶⁶ For general accounts of these figures, see Iggers ([1968] 1983, chs. 3, 4, 6) and Beiser (2011, chs. 4, 6-8). I have criticized interpretations of Ranke as a historical relativist elsewhere (2019). See Kinzel (2018, forthcoming) for analyses of Ranke, Droysen and Dilthey, detailing their relations to relativism. For an overview of nineteenth-

rise of historicism really was accompanied by the problem or threat of relativism at all. Perhaps it was not. But accurately demarcating philosophical problems from projected fears is no armchair undertaking; it requires detailed historical study.

century attitudes toward 'psychologism' and related isms like sensualism, empiricism, skepticism, anthropologism, historicism and relativism, see Kusch (1995, ch. 5).

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Abstract (English)

This study engages the tensions between the universal and the particular in Johann Gottfried Herder's early thought. I interpret the young Herder's psychology, (biblical) hermeneutics and philosophy of history in dialogue with the reception history of Herder as a historical relativist and as the father of German historicism.

First, I analyze Herder's conception of philosophy. I explain how he takes up sensualist, empiricist and historical discourses while denying that skeptical doubt plays a (fruitful) role in philosophy. I show that Herder consistently denies that skeptical conclusions follow from his explorations into context-dependence, historical change and diversity. Furthermore, I analyze the elements of human-historical existence that Herder does treat as universal and examine his methods and models in conceiving the identity that underlies the diversity of human forms. I distinguish between multiple ways in which Herder makes sense of these unities as contained and reflected in the particular, as unities in diversity.

Second, I identify those features of Herder's philosophy that preclude the 'problem of relativism' from becoming pressing in the first place, and that explain why he approached *prima facie* relativistic themes – such as tolerance, contingency, incommensurability, and equal validity – from a different perspective. Herder's views on these issues express metaphysical and religious certainties regarding the harmonious organization of history, the ultimate unity of human forms and the development of ever-fuller humanity out of a single divine origin. Herder subscribes to a monistic ontotheology which underlies his anthropology and informs the universal humanistic ethical imperative that guides his historical thought. I conclude that Herder is not committed to historical relativism.

Abstract (German)

Diese Studie befasst sich mit den Spannungen zwischen dem Universalen und dem Partikularen im frühen Denken von Johann Gottfried Herder. In Auseinandersetzung mit der Rezeptionsgeschichte von Herder als historischer Relativist und als Vater des deutschen Historismus werden dazu seine Psychologie, (biblische) Hermeneutik und Geschichtsphilosophie erforscht.

Erstens wird Herders Begriff der Philosophie einer Analyse unterzogen. Es wird erklärt, wie Herder sensualistische, empiristische und historische Diskurse aufnimmt, ohne dabei dem skeptischen Zweifel eine konstruktive Rolle einzuräumen. Es zeigt sich, dass Herder auf konsequente Weise die skeptischen Folgen ablehnt, die sich aus seinen Erforschungen von historischer Veränderung, Diversität und Kontextabhängigkeit zu ergeben scheinen. Ferner werden die Elemente der menschlich-historischen Existenz analysiert, die Herder als universal einstuft, und werden die Methoden und Modelle untersucht, mit denen er es unternimmt, die Identität der verschiedenen menschlichen Formen ins Auge zu fassen. Es werden dabei verschiedene Weisen unterschieden, mit denen Herder Einheiten als im Partikularen enthalten oder reflektiert auffasst; als Einheiten in der Verschiedenheit.

Zweitens werden die Aspekte der Philosophie Herders identifiziert, in denen dem Problem des Relativismus der Boden entzogen wird, und die eine Erklärung dafür liefern, wieso Herder sich manchen Themen, die auf dem ersten Blick relativistisch wirken – so wie Toleranz, Kontingenz, Inkommensurabilität und Gleichwertigkeit – aus einer anderen Perspektive nähert. Herders Denken drückt in diesem Kontext metaphysische und religiöse Gewissheiten aus, die sich auf die harmonische Gestaltung der Geschichte, auf die ultimative Einheit der menschlichen Formen und auf die Entwicklung einer immer reicheren Menschheit aus einem einzigen Ursprung beziehen. Herder entwickelt eine monistische Ontotheologie, die sowohl seine Anthropologie begründet als auch den universellen ethisch-humanistischen Imperativ, der sein historisches Denken begleitet. Diese Arbeit konkludiert deshalb, dass Herder nicht als historischer Relativist einzuordnen ist.