

On the relation between Herder's idealism and his theory of the soul-body relationship

It is both a great pleasure and a great privilege to contribute to this volume in honour of Marion Heinz. This is for two reasons. The first is because of my experience of Marion Heinz as a person. The fact that this volume is a *Festschrift* notwithstanding, this is not the place to expatiate on this experience in detail. Suffice it to say that Heinz is one of those rare philosophers I have had the good fortune of knowing who embodies and lives the qualities I perhaps naïvely expect anyone who does philosophy to embody and live. But this brings me to my second reason: Marion Heinz the philosopher. In 1994, Heinz published a book on the philosophy of the young Herder entitled, *Sensualistischer Idealismus: Untersuchungen zur Erkenntnistheorie und Metaphysik des jungen Herder (1763–1778)*. This study was and still is a watershed in Herder scholarship. Through careful and detailed analyses as well as simply outstanding reconstructions of the arguments of several of his key philosophical writings situated in their historical context, it has like no other book on Herder, unlocked and opened up his philosophical thought. None of my own work on Herder would have been possible without it. But it is also the book's deep humanity and generosity that makes it so compelling—qualities, to be sure, that characterize Herder's philosophy itself, but which, one cannot help but feel in reading the book, could only have been brought out so vividly because they are shared. It is in part for these reasons, that I will focus on this book in the following paper.

I. Introduction

At the very beginning of her book, in the Introduction, Heinz briefly mentions the motivational framework within which Herder's early philosophical writings obtain their *raison d'être*: »er [i.e., Herder] hat die philosophischen Grundlagen, von denen er seinem Selbstverständnis als Lehrer der Menschheit entsprechend in seine Zeit hinein wirkte, in kontinuierlicher Entwicklung konsistenter und gründlicher durchgeklärt.«¹ Heinz provides a source for this claim about Herder's self-conception, referring the reader to his one and only letter to his teacher and mentor during his years at the University of Königsberg

¹ Marion Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*, Hamburg 1994, xiv–xv.

² Herder, *Briefe*, (eds. Wilhelm Dobbek/Günter Arnold), Weimar 1984, vol. 1, 120.

(1762–1764), Immanuel Kant. After eagerly declaring that he would have so much to tell him if only he knew Kant would have the patience to reply, Herder writes:

Zweifel wider manche Ihrer Philosophischen Hypothesen u. Beweise, insonderheit da wo sie mit der Wissenschaft des Menschlichen gränzen sind mehr als Spekulationen: u. da ich aus keiner andern Ursache mein geistliches Amt angenommen, als weil ich wuste, u. es täglich aus der Erfahrung mehr lerne, daß sich nach unsrer Lage der bürgerlichen Verfassung von hieraus am besten Cultur u. Menschenverstand unter den ehrwürdigen Theil der Menschen bringen laße, den wir Volk nennen: so ist diese Menschliche Philosophie auch meine liebste Beschäftigung.²

This letter dates from November 1768, two years after Herder had already publicly expressed his doubts about Kant's »philosophical hypotheses and proofs« in his review of the latter's 1766 treatise, *Träume eines Geistersehers*, which we shall examine below. Like Kant, Herder developed his own philosophical hypotheses, but his claim here that his love for a »human philosophy« stems from his educational duties (he was a teacher and minister) points to the practical motivation for his philosophical reflections. Indeed, this connection is clearest in his *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769*. Throughout this work, Herder enumerates his various plans and ideas concerning education and cultural formation with an energy and enthusiasm that is palpable. Underlying and unifying these diverse projects, however, is a fundamental object of investigation that will form their basis: the human soul. Towards the beginning of his diary, Herder writes: »Die Menschliche Seele, an sich und in ihrer Erscheinung auf dieser Erde, ihre sinnlichen Werkzeuge und Gewichte und Hoffnungen und Vergnügen, und Charaktere und Pflichten, und alles, was Menschen hier glücklich machen kann, sei meine erste Aussicht.«³ By the soul's appearance on earth, Herder means the range of socio-cultural products of human beings throughout history which in turn give shape and determination to souls that are initiated into them. But Herder's study of the soul extends beyond this. A few pages later, he declares:

Wenn ich ein Philosoph sein dürfte und könnte; ein Buch über die Menschliche Seele, voll Bemerkungen und Erfahrungen, das sollte mein Buch sein! ich wollte es als Mensch und für Menschen schreiben! es sollte lehren und bilden! die Grundsätze der Psychologie, und nach Entwicklung der Seele auch der Ontologie, der Kosmologie, der Theologie, der Physik enthalten! es sollte eine lebendige Logik, Ästhetik, historische Wissenschaft und Kunstlehre werden! aus jedem Sinn eine schöne Kunst entwickelt werden! und aus jeder Kraft der Seele eine Wissenschaft entstehen!⁴

Herder is convinced that his wide-ranging practical interests, his desire to be an agent of *Bildung* in the widest sense, must be rooted in a profound understanding of the human soul.

² Herder, *Briefe*, (eds. Wilhelm Dobbek/Günter Arnold), Weimar 1984, vol. 1, 120.

³ Herder, *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769*, in: *Werke in zehn Bänden* (eds. Günter Arnold et al.), vol. 9/2, (ed. Rainer Wisbert), Frankfurt am Main 1997, 30.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 33f.

It is *this* connection, I would like to contend, that is the inspiration for, and catalyst of, his philosophical reflections as well as the reason why these reflections are centred on the soul.

Two key aspects of Herder's understanding of the soul that explain why his practical interests as an educator lead him to accord it such central importance are his conviction that morality, culture, and even human knowledge in general are rooted in the lower, sensuous regions of the soul as well as the belief on which this conviction in turn rests, that is, that the soul and body interact.⁵ These will both figure prominently in the discussion below, but my primary concern in this essay lies in their relationship to something else, namely, to Heinz's interpretation of Herder as an idealist. I should say at the outset that I do not wish here to take issue with or to reject this interpretation, but what I do wish to do is to provide a reconstruction of parts of Herder's idealism that (i) is based on Heinz's pioneering analyses in her book of several key short pieces dating from the mid to late 1760s, and (ii) sees this idealism through the lens of (what I contend is) his overarching philosophical interest in the human soul. My central thesis is that, if Herder's practical interests in *Bildung* are what underlay his philosophical interest in the human soul, it is his related prior belief in soul-body interaction that in fact motivates his idealism. The seemingly paradoxical nature of this position can only be resolved if we can show why idealism was Herder's only viable option for explaining interaction and how Herder developed his very own brand of idealism—which Heinz terms »sensualistischer Idealismus«⁶—in order to do so.

II. Herder's review of Kant's *Träume eines Geistersehers* (1766)

Herder's belief in soul-body interaction can be seen across a great number of writings from the 1760s and 1770s; nowhere does he ever express a belief in any other kind of theory explaining the relationship between the soul and the body. In fact, in his 1768 set of paraphrased excerpts from Leibniz's *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*, entitled,

⁵ I have explored Herder's theory of soul-body interaction in Nigel DeSouza, "Leibniz in the eighteenth century. Herder's critical reflections on the *Principes de la nature de la grace*", in: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20 (2012), 773–795. That paper analyzes Herder's short piece, *Ueber Leibnizens Grundsätze* (1769). In what follows, I focus on other relevant pieces from 1766–1769, which, in addition, reflect Herder's idealism.

⁶ The term »sensualistic idealism« was first used by Manfred Baum. See Manfred Baum, Herder's Essay on Being, in: *Herder Today* (ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer), Berlin 1990, 129. Herder can thus be seen to adopt a form of idealism as early as 1763, the year he wrote his *Versuch über das Sein*. But the (sensualistic) idealism to be found there is not the particular form of (sensualistic) idealism I believe he was motivated to develop that I consider below.

Wahrheiten aus Leibnitz, Herder scrupulously excises each and every mention Leibniz makes of the pre-established harmony of the soul and the body.⁷ Herder's very first philosophical engagement with the question of the soul-body relationship is to be found in his review of Kant's *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (1766) which appeared in the *Königsbergischen Gelehrten und Politischen Zeitungen* in March 1766, just a few months after Kant's treatise was published.⁸ In *Träume*, Kant had sought to ridicule Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) and his reports of his visions and supposed paranormal powers as detailed in *Arcana caelestia* (1749–1756), and to show just how far one could go with hypotheses, in this case about spirits (*Geister*), that were not grounded in experience.⁹ Kant's argument in Chapter One of *Träume* draws on two kinds of experience he thinks we have: on the one hand, we have internal experience of our own thinking and willing which we can attribute to the activity of an immaterial substance such as our soul or spirit that has a power of thought; on the other, we have external, spatial experience of material substances as impenetrable bodies, which possess the forces of attraction and repulsion, and of their movement and interaction as governed by the laws of motion that derive from these forces. We do not have external experience of spirits, however, because they do not display the only form of experience we have of activity in space, which is that of bodies.¹⁰ As far as the soul-body relationship is concerned, Kant admits that we may recognize the *phenomenon* of our thinking and willing moving our body, but he claims that all judgements that try to explain how this occurs can only ever be fictions (*Erdichtungen*) because, given our two types of experience, there is no way for us to conceive of soul-body interaction short of inventing (*dichten*) relations of cause and effect to explain it.¹¹ In the first part of his treatise—which he subtitled »dogmatisch«¹²—Kant starts from the doctrine of certain modern philosophers according to which »[e]in Geist [...]

⁷ Herder, *Wahrheiten aus Leibnitz*, in: Herder, *Werke* (ed. Wolfgang Proß), Munich 1987, vol. II, 35, 36, 37, 39, 41. Hereafter citations from this edition of Herder's works will be denoted by »HWP« for »Herder Werke Proß«, followed by the volume number.

⁸ The following draws on my analysis of Herder's review in *Herder Handbuch* (eds. Heinrich Clairmont/Stefan Greif/Marion Heinz), Paderborn, forthcoming 2015 and on Marion Heinz's analysis of the review in Chapter Two of *Sensualistischer Idealismus*.

⁹ Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*, in: *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (ed. Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften), Berlin 1910ff., vol. II, 350. Hereafter citations from this edition of Kant's works will be denoted by »AA« for »Akademie Ausgabe«, followed by the volume number.

¹⁰ Kant, *Träume*, AA 2, 320ff.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 371.

¹² *Ibid.*, 319.

ein Wesen [ist], welches Vernunft hat«¹³ and proceeds to investigate its other features, e.g., that it is immaterial, that it does not occupy space, etc., that distinguish it from material substance. On this basis, Kant gives free rein to his philosophical imagination in Chapter Two and hypothesizes the existence of two parallel worlds operating according to two sets of causal laws: a material world, full of dead matter possessing solidity, extension, and shape and operating according to laws of contact and impact, and an immaterial world, inhabited by immaterial beings or spirits that are spontaneously active principles, which operate according to what Kant calls pneumatic laws.¹⁴

Of course this is not the whole story, because Kant also recognizes another role for immaterial beings: they are »de[r] Grund des *Lebens* in dem Weltganzen«.¹⁵ But this function would clearly involve an interaction between material and immaterial substances. In this »dogmatic« part of the treatise, however, Kant has a solution on hand according to which immaterial beings »durch innere Thätigkeit sich selbst und überdem den todten Stoff der Natur rege machen«.¹⁶ This connection to material beings in nature gives rise to a new set of causal laws that Kant calls »organic« and which he describes as governing the effects of immaterial beings in the material world insofar as corporeal beings are the mediating causes of those effects.¹⁷ What is important here is that Kant construes this relationship of immaterial beings to material ones as entirely contingent, not necessary: »Denn mit welchem Grunde der Wahrscheinlichkeit wollte man wohl behaupten, daß dergleichen Wesen von einander ähnlicher Natur nur vermittelst anderer (körperlichen Dinge) von fremder Beschaffenheit in Gemeinschaft stehen könnten, indem dieses letztere noch viel räthselhafter als das erste ist?«¹⁸ But although it may be more mysterious, Kant does have an explanation of how immaterial beings stand in community with material ones by their inner activity, and it is an explanation that Herder paid close attention to. A few pages earlier, in his analysis of the concept of a spirit, Kant turns to the question of the human soul. Whereas it is hard, but not unintelligible, Kant says, to imagine a spirit-substance occupying a space, when it comes to the soul, its location is easier to specify: »Wo ich

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 329.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 329f.

empfinde, da *bin* ich.«¹⁹ Kant gives several examples of how one can feel oneself in different parts of one's body and concludes that the soul *permeates* the body: »*Meine Seele ist ganz im ganzen Körper und ganz in jedem seiner Theile.*«²⁰ This experience and that of the natural world, especially of animals, leads Kant to claim that he is very inclined to assert the existence of immaterial natures, such as his soul, which are principles of life. But Kant is also keenly aware of the problem this poses with respect to conceiving the interaction between immaterial and material substances, to which he immediately turns his attention. He asks:

Denn wie sollte wohl eine immaterielle Substanz der Materie im Wege liegen, damit diese in ihrer Bewegung auf einen Geist stoße, und wie können körperliche Dinge Wirkungen auf ein fremdes Wesen ausüben, das ihnen nicht Undurchdringlichkeit entgegen stellt, oder welche sie auf keine Weise hindert, sich in demselben Raume, darin es gegenwärtig ist, zugleich zu befinden?²¹

And he replies:

Es scheint, ein geistiges Wesen sei der Materie innigst gegenwärtig, mit der es verbunden ist, und wirke nicht auf diejenige Kräfte der Elemente, womit diese untereinander in Verhältnissen sind, sondern auf das innere Principium ihres Zustandes. Denn eine jede Substanz, selbst ein einfaches Element der Materie muß doch irgend eine innere Thätigkeit als den Grund der äußerlichen Wirksamkeit haben, wenn ich gleich nicht anzugeben weiß, worin solche bestehe.²²

In a footnote, Kant provides a justification for this theory by referencing Leibniz and his claim that the inner ground of all the external relations and inner changes of a substance is its power of representation (*Vorstellungskraft*).²³ This is the hypothesis, to which we will return below, that Herder will explicitly approve of in his review.

Herder begins his discussion of the first chapter of *Träume* with the definition Kant had cited of a spirit as a being endowed with reason. He immediately characterizes this definition as »willkürlich« and »unbestimmt« and will throughout the review display his antipathy towards this modern concept of spirit.²⁴ As he will later make clear in the 1775 version of *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele*, Herder associates this concept with Descartes, who »das Denken zu seinem ganzen zweifelnden Ich machte«, and after whom, Herder adds, one more unnatural system after the other followed, each of which had the objective of explaining the soul-body relationship for the sole reason that the interaction between two such fully heterogeneous, immaterial and material, substances was

¹⁹ Ibid., 324.

²⁰ Ibid., 325.

²¹ Ibid., 327f.

²² Ibid., 328.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Herder, Rezension von Kants *Träume eines Geistersehers*, in: Herder, *Sämmtliche Werke*, (ed. B. Suphan), Berlin 1877–1913, vol. I, 127.

inconceivable.²⁵ It is no wonder, then, that Herder subjects Kant's hypotheses about spirits as independent immaterial substances to a barrage of criticism. Although he only rejects the very idea of a spirit in his commentary on the second chapter, his comments on the first chapter must be read in light of this later rejection.²⁶ Herder sarcastically claims that Kant's analytical method, which has defined what a spirit is only negatively²⁷ (i.e., as not impenetrable), has succeeded in giving its distinction from matter »eine bisher unbemerkte Klarheit«.²⁸ He continues:

So wie Körperliche Begriffe uns aber so sehr umhüllen, daß wir uns schwerlich eine Art der Würksamkeit in einem Raum gedenken können, ohne daß das Principium der Würksamkeit wenigstens in Absicht auf ein anderes Wesen, das in seiner Natur mit ihm identisch wäre, eine Art von geistiger Undurchdringlichkeit hätte: so wird freilich diese Hypothese alsdenn erst eine Philosophische Gewißheit erhalten, wenn der Begriff des Raums völlig zergliedert, und der Begriff der Kraft *a priori* eingesehen werden wird.²⁹

Herder is here acknowledging that *if* we start from the concept of a spirit, Kant is right to assert that it is difficult to imagine how it might be active in space, and that we might thus be inclined to attribute to spirits something analogous to the kind of force we find in bodies in the form of a »spiritual impenetrability«. Here, Herder is clearly referring to Kant's hypothesis in the second chapter of *Träume* that the moral feeling that manifests itself as altruism, benevolence, or duty, whereby we sense an impulse to harmonize our will with the general will, operates in spirits in a manner analogous to how Newtonian gravitation draws particles of matter closer to each other.³⁰ However, Herder refuses to start from this concept of a spirit, whose doubtful origins he emphasizes by repeating Kant's own claim that it is perhaps owed to »ein Wahn der Einbildung« (Herder writes that the concept »gar nicht einer Philosophischen Erfindung, sondern einem Wahn seinen Ursprung zu danken hat«³¹).

Herder's own position on the soul is finally revealed in his comments on Chapter Two of Kant's treatise in which Kant presents his hypothesis of a spirit world with its own set of pneumatic laws, as we saw above. Herder summarizes this theory in his review and then makes his opinion of it perfectly clear:

Diese neue Geisterwelt, zu der der V[erfasser] und vielleicht einige ausser- und überordentliche Genies den Schlüssel haben möchten, ist allerdings ein Gebäude einer schöpferischen Philosophischen Einbildungskraft,

²⁵ Herder, *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele*, in: HWP II, 583f.

²⁶ Cf. Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*, 36.

²⁷ Cf. Kant, *Träume*, 351.

²⁸ Herder, Rezension, 128.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Kant, AA 2, 334–335. Cf. Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*, 36.

³¹ Kant, AA 2, 320; Herder, Rezension, 128.

die auf der Erde eine so systematische Verbindung unsichtbarer Dinge entwirft, als sie vormals am Himmel fand: sie zeigt von dem Scharfsinn und der Aufmerksamkeit ihres Urhebers, sein System auf allen Seiten zu zeigen.³²

Herder is alluding here to Kant's *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (1755)—a work that influenced Herder greatly and in which Kant employed what he called Newtonian principles to explain how the universe was formed by the sole operation of the forces of attraction and repulsion acting on matter—and claiming that Kant is providing a similar theory of spirits that completes his »system«. ³³ Herder explains his reason for his poor opinion of the hypothesis of a spirit world in the sentence that follows: »Allein worauf beruhet es? darauf, daß die Geister, vielleicht auch unmittelbar eine Gemeinschaft haben; möchte nicht aber eine Organische Gemeinschaft gnug seyn, wenn es keine mehr als *Seelen* giebt, und wer weiß von mehrern?«³⁴ Herder rejects the idea of a community of spirits in favour of the belief that there exist only souls joined to bodies. He explains that the moral unity and unselfish feeling that Kant had associated with attraction among spirits should rather be connected with »blos die Welt des Lebendigen« and that in fact his own more limited hypothesis has more beauty than Kant's »wenn sie immer bey Datis bliebe«. ³⁵ Kant ultimately claims in *Träume* that a philosophical theory of spirit-beings is in fact impossible because »die geistige Natur, welche man nicht kennt, sondern vermuthet, niemals positiv könne gedacht werden, weil keine *data* hiezu in unseren gesammten Empfindungen anzutreffen seien.«³⁶ It appears that Herder is thus again using Kant's own ideas against him, here to support the claim that the whole idea of a spirit world is a figment of a creative philosophical imagination for which there is no »Datis«.

What is strange in this critique, however, is that it appears that Herder has taken Kant's proposals about a spirit-world seriously, although it is not clear if he is doing so ingenuously or disingenuously. For Kant makes it quite clear in subsequent chapters of his work that his »anmaßlich[er] Lehrbegriff von der Geistergemeinschaft« is meant to be taken tongue in cheek.³⁷ Indeed, after his treatise was criticized by Mendelssohn, Kant felt compelled to explain to him the central philosophical issue:

Meiner Meinung nach kommt alles darauf an, die *Data* zu dem Problem aufzusuchen: *wie ist die Seele in der Welt gegenwärtig sowohl den materiellen naturen als denen anderen von ihrer Art?* Man soll also die

³² Herder, Rezension, 129.

³³ Cf. Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*, 38.

³⁴ Herder, Rezension, 129.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Kant, AA 2, 351–352.

³⁷ Ibid., 350.

Kraft der äußeren Wirksamkeit und die Rezeptivität von außen zu leiden bei einer solchen Substanz finden, wovon die Vereinigung mit dem menschl. Körper nur eine besondere Art ist.³⁸

Kant then explains to Mendelssohn that we have no experience of such a subject and again explains why: all we experience is »das Gegenverhältnis des *innern* Zustandes der Seele (des Denkens u. Wollens) zu dem *äußern* Zustande der Materie unseres Körpers, mithin kein Verhältnis einer *äußeren* Tätigkeit zu einer *äußeren* Tätigkeit.«³⁹ We have no experience, Kant asserts, of the soul in the various relationships that it might have and which could uncover its external power (*Kraft*) or capacity, and so any judgements about these, as we saw above, fall into the category of »Erdichtung« or »fictio heuristica«.⁴⁰ This would clearly seem to hold for Kant's hypothesis about spirits animating both themselves and dead matter through their inner activity. And yet, this is precisely the hypothesis that Herder expresses approval of in his review. After recounting what he takes to be Kant's definition of a spirit (»ein einfaches Wesen, das zu seinem innern Zustande Gedanken hat, und sich von der Materie äußerlich unterscheidet, daß es nicht undurchdringlich ist«⁴¹), Herder doubtfully asks whether these are spirits, and repeats the objections and doubts Kant himself raises about this idea, including that of how we are to understand the presence of the soul throughout the body if the soul has no spatial location. »Freilich wird alsdenn die Gemeinschaft zwischen Geist und Körper Geheimnißvoll«, Herder reports, because »allein wir wissen auch bloß von Körperlichen Einflüssen«. But then Herder provides Kant's solution to the problem: »die Seele kann dem Körper innigst gegenwärtig seyn, daß sie auf das innere Principium seiner Materie würkt: und diesen innern Zustand können wir uns in Nichts als in Vorstellungen denken.«⁴² Herder immediately adds: »Dies sind des Verfassers neue und sehr lockende Hypothesen.«⁴³ He had, however, in fact been introduced to these hypotheses in Kant's lectures on metaphysics, to which his lecture notes attest. There Herder writes:

Die Seele ist also ein Geist! – und diese Natur *des Geistes*, so fern sie im Raum gegenwärtig, ist völlig, undurchgedacht [...] Sie ist *innigst* gegenwärtig den körperlichen Elementen, da der Körper dem Körper bloß *äußerlich* gegenwärtig nicht also auf die Oberfläche wirken; sondern auf die innere thätige Kräfte. Die Seele kann also auf den Körper von innen wirken, der Körper aber nicht auf die Seele: — Sie erkennt den

³⁸ Kant, Brief an Mendelssohn 8. April 1766, in: AA 10, 71.

³⁹ Ibid., 72.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 71, 72.

⁴¹ Herder, Rezension, 127.

⁴² Ibid., 128.

⁴³ Ibid.

inneren Zustand eines jeden Elements, und wirkt auf jedes innern Zustand so ist sie dem Körper gegenwärtig.⁴⁴

Herder's review shows him to be developing his own position on the soul-body relationship in dialogue with Kant, some of whose ideas he accepts, while others he rejects. Although Kant maintains in his letter to Mendelssohn that his *Träume* was not meant to be taken entirely seriously, it is clear that he *does* think that the problem is one of how the soul as an immaterial substance can be understood to relate to material substances like the body. It is this very starting point, I believe, that Herder resolutely rejects. As we saw in his commentary on the second chapter of *Träume*, Herder rejects the very idea of spirits and a spirit world and claims instead that the organic community—that is, of souls as joined to bodies, on Kant's definition of »organic«—is sufficient and, after all, all that we have »data« for. The corollary of this position of Herder's is that the connection of the soul to the body is *not* merely contingent or, as Kant writes to Mendelssohn, »nur eine besondere Art«. There exist, rather, *only* souls joined to bodies. While it is not clear to what extent Herder misread Kant's sarcasm in the *Träume*, his critique does at least take issue with a premise Kant *does* make, that is, the premise of the soul as an *independent* immaterial substance. For Herder, to start from this premise is to start from a fiction. His argument is that because our *only* experience is that of souls as joined to bodies, our theory must remain limited to explaining *this* reality.

III. Herder's theory of soul-body interaction (1766–1769)

Of course the question then still remains of how we are to conceive this connection between the soul and the body, and it is here that Herder finds something in Kant that he can accept, namely, his hypothesis about the soul acting on the inner principle of matter, which, although it would seem from his letter to Mendelssohn that it was one of those hypotheses that he considered to be an invention or fiction, Kant had previously discussed as a viable option in his metaphysics lectures. In any case, this is clearly the initial source for Herder's conception of soul-body interaction, as he would work it out over the next few years. What is important is to understand how Herder made this Kantian hypothesis his own. As we saw above, Kant appeals to Leibniz in justification of his claim that the soul can act on the inner principle of matter. He writes:

⁴⁴ See Kant, *Metaphysik Herder*, in: AA 28.1, 146.

Leibniz sagte, dieser innere Grund aller seiner [i.e., a substance's] äußeren Verhältnisse und ihrer Veränderungen sei eine *Vorstellungskraft*, und spätere Philosophen empfingen diesen unausgeführten Gedanken mit Gelächter. Sie hätten aber nicht übel gethan, wenn sie vorher bei sich überlegt hätten, ob denn eine Substanz, wie ein einfacher Theil der Materie ist, ohne allen inneren Zustand möglich sei, und wenn sie dann diesen etwa nicht ausschließen wollten, so würde ihnen obgelegen haben irgend einen andern möglichen innern Zustand zu ersinnen, als den der Vorstellungen daß, wenn man auch den einfachen Elementartheilen der Materie ein Vermögen dunkler Vorstellungen zugesteht, daraus noch keine Vorstellungskraft der Materie selbst erfolge, weil viel Substanzen von solcher Art, in einem Ganzen verbunden, doch niemals eine denkende Einheit ausmachen können.⁴⁵

Kant is referring here to Leibniz's monadology and, it seems, to the idea that each of the monads in an aggregate that compose a body *qua* well-grounded phenomenon have, at most, only obscure representations, and are together confusedly represented as a body by other monads. From Leibniz's point of view, however, Kant's theory that the soul, with its inner power of representation, can act on the inner principle of another substance or monad and in this manner determine that substance's external activity *qua* body is 1) to fail to heed the "windowlessness" or complete independence of monads or substances, and 2) to confuse the fundamentally real level of the monad or substance and its representations and the purely phenomenal level of bodies and their interaction.⁴⁶ Kant, however, probably also has in mind his own theory, laid out in his *Monadologia physica* (1756), according to which an extensionless physical monad fills space through the activity of its repulsive force.⁴⁷ Earlier in the *Träume*, when he is trying to imagine how a spirit could be active in space without filling it in the manner of a material substance, Kant asserts that it is not unintelligible for an immaterial substance to occupy a space without filling it since, in fact, unities of matter or physical monads are themselves unextended but occupy a space only in virtue of the external effect they produce on other substances via their impenetrability, which in turn is a product of their forces of attraction and repulsion.⁴⁸ Now what Kant seems to be envisioning here is that in the case of both souls or soul-monads and physical monads, each has an inner state that consists of both representations of varying degrees of obscurity/clarity and inner activity, analogous to both the series of perceptions and the appetite that governs their change that Leibniz attributes to the monad, and that the soul's inner principle should be able to affect the inner principle of physical monads, whose external activity is that defined by their attractive and repulsive forces, namely,

⁴⁵ Kant, *Träume*, 328.

⁴⁶ Cf. Leibniz, *Monadologie*, in: *Die philosophische Schriften* (ed. C. I. Gerhardt), Hildesheim 1965, vol. VI, §7, 607–608; and Leibniz, *Système nouveau de la nature*, in: *Die philosophische Schriften*, vol. IV, 477–487.

⁴⁷ Kant, *Monadologia physica*, in: AA 2, 481f.

⁴⁸ Kant, *Träume*, 323f.; *Monadologia physica*, 484.

impenetrability, motion, etc. The problems with this account notwithstanding, it evidently greatly appealed to Herder as a potential explanation of soul-body interaction. But it remained insufficient. For one thing, as mentioned in the earlier quote from Herder's lecture notes, it can only explain how the soul affects the body, not vice versa. What is more, although I have attempted to explain Kant's possible reasoning in reference to his physical monadology, according to which there appears to be at least some similarity between the soul as a type of monad and the body as composed of another, physical, type of monad, in his discussion in *Träume* and in his metaphysics lectures, Kant speaks of the soul as a spirit or immaterial substance and of the body as a material substance. As we have seen, this ontological dualism is unacceptable to Herder. He needs to find a better, more satisfying account of soul-body interaction.

His inspiration in this respect may have come from a philosopher whom he praises in his letter to Kant as »mein liebenswürdiger Philosoph«, namely, Shaftesbury.⁴⁹ In another letter (to J.H. Merck), from September 1770, in defending Shaftesbury against the charge of atheism made by Delisle de Sales, Herder writes:

Shaftesburi ist ihm Atheist, den er immer schimpft, ohne ihn sicherlich gelesen zu haben: denn ein Atheist, der nichts so sehr als Ordnung, Uebereinstimmung, höchste Weisheit im Bau der ganzen Welt predigt, den Optimism zu erst vortrug, daß er ans Herz drang, da Leibniz ihn nur dem Verstande sagte, ja der endlich das große System von Tugend im Kopf hatte, das der höchste Triumph der Providenz wäre – *der* Atheist mit seinem großen Weltgeist (für mich der prächtigste Name für Gott) ist mir mehr als 10. solche Kleinmeister der Philosophie.⁵⁰

Herder is referring to Shaftesbury's *The Moralists*, and although this letter dates from 1770, the influence that the treatise's ideas that he mentions here had on him can be traced, as Marion Heinz has shown,⁵¹ to a short piece Herder wrote in 1766 or 1768 entitled *Plato sagte, daß unser Lernen bloß Erinnerung sei*, that was first edited, published, and analyzed by Heinz in her book, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*.⁵² What Herder found in Shaftesbury was a way to conceive of the soul-body relationship that placed it within a natural, and at the same time providential, order. In *The Moralists*, against the Epicurean view of the natural order as arising »from the sole powers of chaos and blind chance«, Shaftesbury argues by analogy from the experience one has of one's own mind and its power over the

⁴⁹ Herder, *Briefe*, vol. I, 119.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁵¹ Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*, 53f.

⁵² For the text and for the analysis see, respectively, pp. 175–182 and chapter 3 of Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*; on the dating of the text see p. 43.

body to the existence of a »general mind« as nature's principle and source.⁵³ Shaftesbury, speaking through Theocles, concludes:

In fine [...] being thus, even by scepticism itself, convinced the more still of my own being and of this self of mine that it is a real self drawn out and copied from another principal and original self, the great one of the world, I endeavour to be really one with it and conformable to it as far as I am able. I consider that, as there is one general mass, one body of the whole, so to this body there is an order, to this order a mind, that to this general mind each particular one must have relation as being of like substance (as much as we can understand of substance), alike active upon body, original to motion and order, alike simple, uncompounded, individual, of like energy, effect and operation, and more like still if it cooperates with it to general good and strives to will according to the best of wills.⁵⁴

This relationship of God to the »general mass« and of the soul to its body is of central importance in *Plato sagte*, as the following statement by Herder reveals:

Wenn ich mir also die Einwirkung der Allmacht Gottes auf die Welt vorstellen will: so muß ich suchen, die Einwirkung des Wollens der Seele auf den Körper zu erkennen. – Seine Allgegenwart ist ihre Allgegenwart im Körper ähnlich. Seine Schöpfung, der Entwicklung unseres Körpers für uns: Seine Direktion der Welt, der Sorge unserer selbst für unsern Körper.⁵⁵

Herder's language of the soul's »Allgegenwart« in the body is reminiscent of Kant, and indeed, as Heinz claims, Kant is also a source here, as Herder's lecture notes suggest, insofar as Kant spoke of the soul as the »die Gottheit des Körpers«.⁵⁶ Herder does not simply adopt Shaftesbury's analogy, however. In *Plato sagte* and in other key writings from the 1760s, he proffers a dynamic theory of it that is the basis of his idealism (as Marion Heinz has shown through her analyses of these works in *Sensualistischer Idealismus*). We now turn to a consideration of this theory.

Herder starts from the Leibnizian idea of the soul as a power of thought or representation: »Die Seele tritt auf die Welt: Vorstellungskraft ist ihr Wesen: aber sie ist *sich selbst* ganz ihr Gedanke – der dunkle, aber lebhaftste Begriff ihres Seyns erfüllt sie ganz: das ist ihre Welt: in dem liegt alles: so wie die ganze Welt ein Gedanke in dem Seyn Gottes ist.«⁵⁷ Both the soul's thought and the divine thought, however, are only fully realized through their external manifestation in the form of the body and the world, respectively.

Dieser Gedanke ist ein dunkles, aber Einziges lebhaftes Gefühl: so stark und fruchtbar, daß alle übrige künftige, auch sinnliche, und noch mehr Abstrakte Begriffe in ihm liegen. Indem er sie also ganz mächtig

⁵³ Shaftesbury, *The Moralists. A Philosophical Rhapsody*, in: *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (ed. Lawrence E. Klein), Cambridge 1999, 297, 302–304.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁵⁵ Herder, *Plato sagte*, in: Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*, 176.

⁵⁶ Kant, AA 28.1, 146, as quoted in Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*, 54.

⁵⁷ Herder, *Plato sagte*, 175.

erfüllt: so ist eben damit daß sie sich ihr körperliches Daseyn bereitet, wie Gott sich aus dem Begriff seiner selbst seiner Allmacht, Weisheit etc. eine Welt schafft.⁵⁸

With his claim that all future concepts of the soul lie with in, Herder is showing his agreement with the rationalist tradition, but with his claim that the soul must prepare itself a body, Herder accords empiricism a central place. In *Plato sagte*, Herder explains how the soul unfolds itself by building itself a body through whose senses it is able to engage with an external world. While arguably implicit in *Plato sagte*, in *Grundsätze der Philosophie* (1769), Herder will explicitly construe this world the soul engages with, as well as the soul itself, as a manifestation of God's thought. What is fundamental to the combined account of these two pieces is Herder's central and original idea of the structural similarity between the soul's mode of access to this world and the nature of this world.⁵⁹ The basis of this similarity derives from the doctrine of unanalyzable concepts that Herder learned from Kant and Crusius, in particular, of space, time, and force.⁶⁰ First, God's thought is realized externally by the creation of the world in the relations of space, time, and force: »Die Welt ist ein unendliches Continuum durch Raum: eine unendliche Succession durch die Zeit: denn Raum und Zeit sind die Folgen von unendlichen Gedanken Gottes, da er alles Mögliche *neben* und *nach* einander denkt. [...] Seine Kraft dachte alles Mögliche wirklich.«⁶¹ Second, the human soul, via the body it constructs as its sphere of external activity, engages with this world through the body's senses which fundamentally match its structure. »Wenn das Seyn unsere Welt ist: so ist Raum, Zeit, Kraft das Feld unserer Sinne: das Nebeneinander gibt den Sinn des Gesichts, das Nacheinander gibt den Sinn des Gehörs, das Ineinander gibt den Sinn des Gefühls.«⁶² Both the divine thought and the human soul's thought share the thought of »Seyn«, but while for God the whole world is »die Eine deutliche Gedanke seiner selbst«, human beings »baueten dunkel« and can only access this thought and its fundamental concepts by means of the senses that correspond to each.⁶³ Herder provides an ontogenetic account of both the senses and of the basic concepts of space, time, force, figure, extension, magnitude in which the child is represented as seeing, hearing, and feeling its way into the world through the catalyst of sensations through which

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Cf. Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*, xxii.

⁶⁰ See, above all, Herder's short 1763 treatise *Versuch über das Sein*, in: *Werke in zehn Bänden*, vol. I (ed. Ulrich Gaier), 9–21 as well as *Metaphysik Herder*, 5, 158.

⁶¹ Herder, *Grundsätze der Philosophie*, in: HWP II, 53.

⁶² Herder, *Plato sagte*, 177.

⁶³ Ibid., 176.

»[d]ie Seele [...] immer mehr *außer sich* gerückt [wird]: aus ihrem dunkeln, ewigen lebhaften Traum.«⁶⁴ Herder even brings out the importance of the earliest childhood experiences and how they will remain »Material auf unsere Lebenszeit.«⁶⁵

Now the question in all of this that concerns us here is: what is the precise nature of the relationship of this soul to the body that it builds for itself? Herder outlines his views on this in several writings from this period, among which Heinz considers *Grundsätze der Philosophie* and *Zum Sinn des Gefühls*, both from 1769. In *Grundsätze*, Herder draws on Kant's account of the formation of the universe in his *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (1755) and Leibniz's concept of the monad to posit two kinds of force in the universe: a »Gedenkkraft« and a »Bewegungs- und Fortrückungskraft« that reduces to the forces of attraction and repulsion.⁶⁶ The forces of attraction and repulsion are what underlie matter, and they have their origin in the necessary creation of the world by God, which also includes the creation of finite, human beings. It is by harnessing the forces of attraction and repulsion that human beings construct bodies for themselves, analogously to how God created the world. »So wie sich Planetenkörper im Universum durch die Anziehungs- und Zurückstoßungskraft gebildet: so auch unsre Seele den Körper: und so Gott die Welt.«⁶⁷ But while planetary bodies are formed through the interaction of celestial bodies with mass, this is not how the soul or God affect matter. Rather, in a manner reminiscent of Kant's account seen above, Herder maintains that the soul and God are present to matter inwardly: »Er [i.e., Gott] ist nur durch Licht von außen und durch die Anziehungskraft von innen gegenwärtig.«⁶⁸ God is present to the world from the outside as light insofar as he is what makes things visible since all things originate from his thought, and he is present to them inwardly as an attractive force in two ways: matter reduces to forces of attraction and repulsion which derive from God's thought, and human beings are thoughts or thought-forces that likewise derive from God's thought and experience a kind of gravitation towards God. Herder explains this as follows:

Unsre Seele dachte, das ist ihre Centalkraft: nach dieser nahm sie einen Raum im Universum ein. [...] Diese Kraft war eingeschränkt. Also nicht Alles unmittelbar wie Gott, Einiges mittelbar, das ward Körper. [...] Der Mensch gravitiert also gegen Alles, selbst gegen Gott. Alles gravitiert gegen ihn: er gibt und nimmt

⁶⁴ Ibid., 177, 178.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 178.

⁶⁶ Herder, *Grundsätze*, 52.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Gedanken vom Universum. Er ist ein Teil von Gottes Gedanke; ein Teil von Gottes Gedanke ist sein Gedanke.⁶⁹

The structural similarity of the human being and the world it inhabits is thus rooted in the fact that both derive from God's thought. Further, both the body and the physical world ultimately consist of forces of attraction and repulsion and exist within the same relations of space, time, and force. As Heinz notes, Herder replaces an ontology of substance with an ontology of forces.⁷⁰ He gives up Kant's dualism of material and immaterial monads and unites the forces of representation/thought and of attraction and repulsion that Kant distributes between them in one *Seiende*—infinite or finite, that is, God and world, or soul and body.⁷¹ On this basis, although Herder speaks of forces of attraction and repulsion and bodies, his position is still idealist. Heinz explains:

Wenn Herder die These vertritt, die Seele bilde sich durch Anziehung und Zurückstoßung einen Körper, dann verläßt Herder nicht den idealistischen Boden, denn unter Körper ist hier nicht der materielle Körper zu verstehen, sondern die Sphäre der Wirksamkeit, die sich die Seele als Kraft im Konflikt mit anderen Kräften des Universums gebildet hat.⁷²

The soul as thought-force obtains an external sphere of activity for itself through a body that consists of forces of attraction and repulsion, which in turn interacts with other finite beings in the universe via the external presence and activity that they similarly obtain.

The underlying ontological identity of the two kinds of forces is further consolidated in *Zum Sinn des Gefühls*. While in the *Grundsätze* Herder considers these forces to be given phenomena that we experience, but cannot explain,⁷³ in *Zum Sinn des Gefühls*, as Heinz has shown, he goes beyond this position and finds in the sense of touch the bridge between the *Vorstellungskraft/Gedenkkraft* and the forces of attraction and repulsion.⁷⁴ In a word, it is through the sense of touch that the forces which formed the body become perceivable to us. Herder's very opening line provides the key: »Es ist sonderbar, daß die höchsten Begriffe der Philosophie von Anziehung und Zurückstoßung, die einfachsten Sachen des Gefühls sind, so wenig wissen wir! das Höchste der Philosophie ist zugleich das Erste und bekannt.«⁷⁵ Herder's model for revealing this is the blind person. »Ich glaube, daß es für einen Blinden möglich ist, den ganzen Körper in seinem Gebäude

⁶⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁷⁰ Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*, xxiii, 102.

⁷¹ Ibid., 101, 102. »Seiende« is Heinz's term.

⁷² Ibid., 101.

⁷³ Herder, *Grundsätze*, 52.

⁷⁴ Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*, 107

⁷⁵ Herder, *Zum Sinn des Gefühls*, in: HWP II, 243.

auf Kräfte der Seele zu reduciren. Ich glaube, daß ein geborner Blinder sich gleichsam *erinnern* kann, wie die Seele sich ihren Körper bereitet, wie aus jeder Kraft jeder Sinn gleichsam gebildet würde.«⁷⁶ It is here that the ontological identity of the two types of forces, the thought-force and the forces of attraction and repulsion, is seen most clearly. The soul as a thought-force, as Shaftesburian »forming power«, ⁷⁷ *feels* its physical presence and its activity in the universe via the forces of attraction and repulsion (and then beyond this, as Herder says, in the ontogenesis of the senses). This points to an intimate relationship between the two kinds of forces. Heinz explains:

Das physikalische Modell wäre also durch ein organologisches zu ersetzen oder zu ergänzen, in dem die Seele als Prinzip des Lebendigen sich Teile der Welt anverwandelt, wodurch sie ihren Körper bildet. Das heißt allerdings, daß Vorstellungskraft und Attraktions- und Repulsionskraft nicht nebeneinander geordnet werden, sondern Attraktions- und Repulsionskraft als »Eigenschaften« oder Modifikationen der Vorstellungskraft gedacht werden.⁷⁸

Again, it is the blind person who is best placed to know this close relationship between the two types of forces, according to Herder, that we *sighted* human beings, who have become »zu zerstreut, zu sehr aus uns geworfen«, are unable to recall.⁷⁹ »Wenn der Blinde auf die Art sich selbst erklärt, hat, wie *sein Gedanke sich im Universum offenbare, d.i. wie er ein Körper geworden ist*: so trifft er in diesem Körper, in diesem fühlenden Ich, *Empfindungen von Außen an*, d.i. das ist seine zweite Philosophie.«⁸⁰ Heinz summarizes how the sense of touch bridges the two kinds of forces in the soul-body relationship as follows:

Das Gefühl repräsentiert die in der Wechselwirkung der endlichen Vorstellungskräfte gebildete Grenze, die die Sphäre der einen Kraft von der anderen trennt. Attraktions- und Repulsionskraft sind hier einerseits als die Kräfte, durch die die endlichen Vorstellungskräfte aufeinander wirken, gedacht, wodurch sich in Analogie zu den physikalischen Verhältnissen eine bestimmte Ausdehnung ergeben soll. Andererseits ist aber die Seele (analog zur demiurgisch-göttlichen) als eine bildende Kraft vorgestellt, die Teile der Materie organisiert und zu ihrem Körper macht; auch dieser Vorgang soll nach Herder auf Attraktions- und Repulsionskraft beruhen.⁸¹

On this model of soul-body interaction then, although the body can be seen as an external expression of the soul and is thus ontologically dependent on it for its very existence, through the sense of touch the body's phenomenological distinctness from the soul is palpably sensed.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 244.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*, 104.

⁷⁹ Herder, *Zum Sinn des Gefühls*, 244.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 244.

⁸¹ Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus*, 105f.

IV. Conclusion

With this theory, Herder has come a great distance in his account of the soul-body relationship since his review of Kant's *Träume*. While his theory certainly preserves fundamental elements of Kant's account from 1762–1766, it recasts them in a manner that is significantly different. From his engagement with Kant's hypothesis of a spirit-soul or soul-monad endowed with the power of representation/thought whose relationship to material substances or physical monads must be explained, Herder has preserved both types of forces, but now conceives of the relationship between them as unproblematic given their ontological identity. Taking inspiration from Shaftesbury and Leibniz, Herder is able to give an account of the soul as a power of representation/thought that is always joined to a body as one *Seiende* possessing both kinds of forces. As Heinz explains: »Wenn faktisch Geistiges nur in Einheit mit Körperlichem, also als Lebendiges gegeben ist, dann muß schon das Wesen des Geistes Gründe für die Bildung des Leibes enthalten.«⁸² Kant had also hypothesized in *Träume* that the soul was the principle of life and that one feels its omnipresence throughout the body, but it is Herder who provides, as we have seen, a detailed account of how the soul builds itself a body, how the soul's *Gedanke* unfolds itself through the senses, how fundamental concepts can necessarily only be acquired by an embodied, sensuously expressed soul. In line with this ontogenesis of the senses, Herder sees human knowledge in all its forms as fundamentally rooted in the lower, sensuous regions of the soul, whose emphasis by Baumgarten Herder found so important.⁸³ This region of the soul Herder frequently speaks of, with Baumgarten, as a »fundus animae«⁸⁴ or an »Abgrund« of drives, instincts, obscure feelings, inclinations that are quasi-physiological in nature. What Herder calls »moralische Gefühle« are an example of such a quasi-physiological feeling: they are the origin and basis of norms and principles into which these moral feelings must be refined upwards if they are to have genuine action-guiding ability.⁸⁵ Now for all of these aspects of human nature and development Herder is able to provide what he believes is a solid, metaphysical foundation through his theory of soul-body interaction. But this is only because this particular theory is able to ground a

⁸² Ibid., xxi.

⁸³ See Herder's several writings on Baumgarten in *Werke in zehn Bänden*, vol. I.

⁸⁴ See Hans Adler, *Die Präganz des Dunklen: Gnoseologie, Ästhetik, Geschichtsphilosophie bei Johann Gottfried Herder*, Hamburg 1990, 40ff.

⁸⁵ For discussion, see Nigel DeSouza, "The Soul-Body Relationship and the Foundations of Morality. Herder contra Mendelssohn", in: *Herder Jahrbuch* 21 (2014), 145–161, here 158.

much more robust form of interaction than that which can exist between two ontologically different substances or types of monads. And Herder's theory is able to ground this more robust form of interaction because it posits an ontological identity between soul and body through its conception of a primary force or power of representation/thought and the forces of attraction and repulsion that can be seen as its modifications. This, in turn, means that, even if it is not recognizably Leibnizian or Berkeleyan, Herder's philosophy is a form of idealism. It has been my contention in this paper that because of his practical interests and convictions with respect to *Bildung*, Herder was from the beginning convinced of soul-body interaction, but was in need of a way to account for it that satisfied both his practical and phenomenological convictions. It is my hope that the story I have tried to tell here, that draws so much on Marion Heinz's work, shows how Herder's commitment to soul-body interaction led him to develop his own particular brand of idealism.