

Herder: (Biblical) Poetry & Philosophy

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	v
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Herder's Methodology in <i>This too</i>	21
1.1. The Ages of Humanity & the Senility of Enlightenment	
1.2. Development in History & the Analogy of the Painting	
1.3. The Orient and the Origin of Humanity	
1.4. Poetry & the Historical Artist	
Chapter 2: Hebrew Poetry and the Ancient Mind	43
2.1. The Bible Understood as a Poem	
2.2. Herder and the Historical Context of the Old Testament	
2.3. Religion, Language, and Epistemology	
2.4. Divinity & The Origin of Language	
Chapter 3: Poetry and Purpose	72
3.1. Poetry & Historical Development	
3.2. Poetry & Psychology	

Chapter 4: Nature and Poetry	94
4.1. The Forces of the Soul	
4.2. The Natural and Poetic Origin of Forces	
4.3. Forces, Mind-Body Interaction, and the Problem of Causality	
4.4. The Relationship Between Herder's God and His Forces	
4.5. The Form and Telos of Humanity	
Conclusion	141
Works Cited	146

Abstract

The goal of this thesis is to elaborate the place of J.G. Herder's concept of poetry within his philosophy. Through a discussion of his study of the Old Testament, *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, I examine the relationship between J.G. Herder's poetics and his naturalism. Herder's hermeneutic, developed in the context of his literary criticism, is at the heart of his philosophy. I interpret Herder's views on poetry as an integral part of his criticism of 17th century rationalism, and one that he develops in union with the conclusions he draws from philosophy and the natural sciences.

Isn't the true poet or painter a seer? Isn't he, actually, the only seer we have on earth? Most apparently not the scientist, most emphatically not the psychiatrist.

-John Salinger, *Seymour – An Introduction*

It is ever a stroke of luck for the poet and a stroke of bad luck for the philosopher that the first inventors of language were not philosophers and its first developers were mostly poets.

-Herder, *Fragments*

Introduction

Herder's philosophy can be generally understood as a response to Enlightenment rationalism represented by Descartes and Spinoza. Like his essay on *Shakespeare* and *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*, Herder's interpretation of the Old Testament is also a critique of rationalism. This study examines Herder's concept of poetry in order to discern how Herder both criticizes and provides an alternative to the rationalist interpretations of the Bible, and thus to the problem of rationalism more generally. This serves as a practical example of Herder applying his interpretive methodology, out of which springs his specific natural and poetical understanding of the Bible, religion and the world. Herder's response to the problem of rationalism revolves largely around his naturalism and his poetics; in *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* he treats the Old Testament as a human document of poetry and considers its language of fables and poetic parallelism as the first language of mankind.

It is these two aspects that Dilthey describes when he calls Herder's hermeneutics a 'historical-aesthetic orientation,' or when Gadamer calls him the 'forerunner of historicism in the field of aesthetics' (Dilthey 1996a, 65; Gadamer 2006, 24). In *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* Herder attempts to illustrate artistically this 'spirit' of Hebrew poetry in the context of his own time. In chapter one, I expose Herder's general hermeneutical principles, especially as they are found in *This too*, and in chapter two to three I breakdown his attempt to apply them to the Old Testament into two elements. The first is Herder's historical treatment of the Hebrew people as a nation, understanding the Old Testament as an expression of this people relative to their historical age and natural circumstances — this is Herder's historicism informed by his studies of nature. Secondly, and coexistent with the first, is the Old Testament understood as a creative expression of the spirit of this nation, i.e., as a collection of literature and poetry. This is the

method behind *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, to seek out the relationship between historical-natural conditions and poetic expressions. These two elements are not distinct in Herder's writings. Rather, it is the essence of Herder's philosophy to reconcile them. In chapter four, I finish by interpreting Herder's God and his doctrine of forces as an example of this reconciliation; Herder's God, understood as the ground of forces, is therefore the ground for the harmony of natural forces and the human force of language. Language is inherently figurative and symbolic, meaning it cannot be reduced to a depiction of nature. Instead, language reveals archetypal relations of the mind and their development in time.

Though it remained unfinished, *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* is possibly Herder's most detailed hermeneutical investigation. While the *Ideas* is a much grander and detailed work which touches on virtually all aspects of Herder's philosophy, with *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* we have Herder applying his hermeneutical techniques to a specific set of texts, the Old Testament. As a result, I do not limit myself to a close reading of *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*. Rather, I use this text to problematize the central features of his hermeneutics, namely his conception of poetry, the tension between naturalism and theism, and the problem of rationalism – which remain the focus of this thesis. Herder understands the Old Testament naturally, but he tries to avoid an interpretation which would reduce poetic creations into fictions which disguise natural or historical truths. Through this hermeneutic Herder attempts to grasp truths that, for him, are unavailable to the rational interpretations he consistently criticizes. The Old Testament is, for Herder, an entirely human document, he considers it as a natural expression of a specific culture's development in ancient history — being one of the rare documents from this age — and his interpretation reflects this. But the Old Testament is also a kind of artistic creation, so in his interpretation we find a detailed attempt to apply a hermeneutic that is at once naturalistic,

historical, while also poetic in its understanding of literature and language. While the Old Testament is a product of its historical and natural context, it is, in the first place, a product of human creativity: a poem. Our interpretation, then, cannot begin in terms of historical or natural facts, but must approach the Old Testament in terms of symbolic developments in human consciousness. This is a large part of Herder's framing of the Old Testament as coming out of the 'childhood' of mankind, i.e., a specific moment in the overall development of human consciousness. Herder is a naturalist in so far as he considers things within their own particular empirical context. But he is not a naturalist in that he does not think the sum of this natural context can explain the poetic artefacts of humanity. It is my intention here to demonstrate that Herder's interpretation of the Old Testament is a specific example of his lifelong project of criticizing the disembodied logos of rationalism, and thus his attempt at its 're-embodiment.' In *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* Herder tries to resolve the problem of rationalism through his treatment of the Old Testament as a linguistic creation of human minds, as a specific expression of historical circumstances, and as an example of Humanity's relationship with God and Nature. This is, in effect, an attempted re-embodiment of reason through these three intertwining axes of language, history, and nature.

Instead of a critique of reason on the basis of itself, as Kant would attempt, Herder gives rather a physiology of reason. Herder grounds human rationality in the world, whether it is its basis in language as natural expression of Man, as in the *Treatise*, or his erect posture, as in the *Ideas* — Herder refuses to abstract rationality from the world and nature (Herder 2002, 79-88; Herder 1800, 71-79; DeSouza 2018b, 147; Hampton 2018, 133). For Herder, these natural conditions *are* the a priori of human rationality; our being, including reason, is necessarily grounded in its empirical context. As a result, reason is not to be purified transcendently, but is

to be understood through analogies to nature and physiological studies. But this is an understanding of Herder that is extremely naturalistic. What is missing is Herder's understanding of poetic expression and mythology as a basic, if not the most basic, function of the mind (Herder 1800, 98-105; Herder 1833 II, 6-9 Herder 2002, 103, Herder 2015, 82-84; 145-148). The fact that his scientific method is largely analogical is indeed a hint to this fact, and it is precisely this 'poetical spirit' that Kant argues invades his philosophy and natural studies (Bollacher 2017, 212; Kant 2007, 138). For Herder, perhaps paradoxically, there is always something beyond ratio in human 'rationality.' And in this sense, poetry can actually inform philosophy; Herder laments that in his age it does not, and instead that a poetical spirit has been lost through excessive 'grammar and reasoning about language,' saying, "...there is loss to our poetry, in which the imagined value evaporates and only the natural value counts, where therefore abstract words only count insofar as one can represent them sensually. – The art of poetry can hence gain nothing through our philosophers..." (Herder 2002, 35-37). What Herder is saying is that even if poetry is necessarily derived from the natural word and sense perception, what it expresses is not reducible to this. The reason poetry is the 'mother-tongue' of humankind is not simply because of specific biological realities, but because it reveals the fundamentally imaginative and creative character of humanity (Herder 1800, 253-254; Herder 1833 I, 27-28; Herder 2002, 111-112; Herder 2015, 134).

In contrast to some of Herder's more popular, and specifically philosophical, works, in *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* we find Herder acting as a literary critic *as well as* a philosopher and polymathic naturalist. This is what forces him to try and reconcile the imaginative, and sometimes divine, quality of language that he associates with religion and poetry, with his kind of naturalist conception of the world and language. When talking about poetic fables, Herder

says, “The ground of every fiction is for the most part a truth in natural history, so that we have not so properly pure fiction, as truth under the garb of fiction” (Herder 1833 II, 19). One could almost conclude, then, that this fictional ‘garb’ could simply be discarded after the discovery of the ‘truth in natural history.’ But elsewhere we find him saying, “No poet will or should, by his descriptions, furnish details for a work on Zoology, since poetry aims not to give particular traits with distinctiveness, but to give power and effect to the combined whole.” (Herder 1833 II, 11). Perhaps this kind of ambivalence should not be surprising coming from someone who learned his Francis Bacon alongside Shakespeare through Hamann (Nisbet 1967, 267-68).¹ That is to say, Herder’s thought is always polymathic; his treatment of literature is informed by his historical and natural studies and vice versa. This is something that goes back to Herder’s problems with rationalism.² Herder wants to translate the importance of mythological, poetic thinking to his contemporaries — the rationalizing *philosophes*. What is at stake is the problem of rational mechanism in nature. If mechanistic naturalism makes nature ‘dead and lifeless’ — something Herder criticizes particularly in Descartes— Herder wants to imbue nature with the very life and movement he sees everywhere (Herder 1800, 107-123; Herder 1949, 105, 122 & 163-172). A large part of Herder’s argument concerns physiology and his doctrine of forces — which I will touch on when discussing *God: Some Conversations* in chapter four — but another aspect is Herder’s treatment of mythology and poetry, found chiefly in his studies on the Bible, and which is the main subject of this project.

This tension between natural reality and poetic creation — i.e., is poetry simply a garb around a natural truth, or does poetry reveal a truth beyond this — is not unique to Herder.

¹ Robert Clark tells us that Hamann taught Herder English through a reading of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (Clark 1955, 56).

² Which was perhaps represented best by *Schulphilosophie* associated with Christian Wolff.

Rather, he sees it as inherent to the story of the Fall of Man. This is what Herder means when he calls the history of the Fall ‘the first aberration of the reasoning faculty,’ or when he describes enlightenment rationality as a refining of the knowledge of good and evil (Herder 1833 II, 15; Herder 2004, 91).³ The Fall is portrayed not as a historical fact, but as a parable revealing the first ‘aberration’ [*Verrirung*]⁴ of human reason. This is a conception that can be related to William Blake’s mythological interpretation of the Bible, where the Fall engenders the creation of ‘Spectre,’ meaning Selfhood, or reason disembodied from Imagination (Blake 2008, 229; Frye 1990, 73 & 127-129). Though Herder and Blake differ greatly in their method, they are similar in that both attempt a critique of Ratio through world mythology. This tension of reason and language is expressed by Blake in his poem ‘*There is No Natural Religion.*’ On the one hand, the rationalist argument is boiled down to the axiom: “The desires & perceptions of man untaught by any thing but organs of sense, must be limited to objects of sense.” On the other hand, the Poet says: “Mans perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception, he perceives more than sense (tho’ ever so -acute) can discover...He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only” (Blake 1989, 2-3). If we cannot say that Herder must have agreed with the entirety of Blake’s argument, what we can say is that Herder would have found something to the idea of the Poet perceiving what is ‘more than sense tho’ ever so acute.’ When Herder describes poetic creation and genius, he assigns it a quality that goes beyond an aggregate of material perceptions, and instead speaks of something stirring the heart and soul (Herder 2004, 81-82; Herder 2006, 363; Clark 1955, 216). Thus, to create a compelling poem, the poet must, paradoxically, go beyond observation and categorization, in order to express the actual unity of

³ Herder identifies the progression of rationality in his day with the aberration associated with the Fall, i.e., the knowledge of good and evil; the rationalism he criticizes simply specializes this knowledge. Herder says the result of this is that our more sensuous principles are lost, meaning those principles from the earliest periods of humanity, which he associates with the image of paradise and the Orient (Herder 1833 II, 15; Herder 2004, 91).

⁴ See: Herder 1826 II, 17. [*Was wir, „Geschichte des Falls“ nennen, war die erste Verrirung seiner Vernunft...*]

the senses and mind (Herder 1833 II, 194-196). This is how Herder understands the parable of Adam naming the animals in Genesis 2:19. Adam is in direct ‘intercourse’ with nature and is able to immediately express the unity of subject and object in language by the act of naming, becoming, in effect, ‘a second Creator’ (Herder 1833 I, 128-130; II, 7 & 14-15). This harmony of subject and object is what the symbol of Paradise represents, and it is the power of poetry to clarify it in our heart. It is also the explicit object of Blake’s poetry. He says it is his goal to ‘Restore what the Ancients calld the Golden Age’ (Blake 2008, 555). Herder is much more reserved about the possibility of this kind of paradisaal poetry because he thinks it necessitates, in some sense, that humans become Gods — i.e., ‘creators of other worlds’ (Herder 2006, 365).⁵ According to Herder, humans can only ‘conjoin images and ideas’ through analogy; thus, Blake’s dichotomy of the naturalist and the poet cannot stand. Herder wants a reconciliation of the two; he wants to develop a hermeneutic that understands nature poetically and poetry ‘naturally.’⁶

Literature Review

In general, anglophone readers have been introduced to the work of J.G. Herder through Isaiah Berlin in the context of Romanticism and ‘irrationalism’ (Berlin 2013a, 208-300; 2013b 73-84; Taylor 1991; 1997; Forster 2013, 102-13; 2013, 178-218; Englander 2013). However, the scholarship of today is in some ways characterized by an attempt to distance itself and go beyond this previous interpretive work (Beiser 2011; Gjesdal 2017; Norton 2007; 2008; Piirimäe 2015;

⁵ Herder says “In real and absolute terms, the human being can neither poeticize nor invent, for otherwise in doing so he would become the creator of another world. What he can do is conjoin images and ideas, designate them with the stamp of analogy, thus leaving his own mark on them.”

⁶ However, it is important to note that Blake also eschews a dichotomy between imaginary and real. As Harold Bloom said, “Blake is neither naturalist nor supernaturalist, for he refuses to accept the given human body as reality, yet he insists that the body is the path back to the real. The soul, for Blake, is the real or unfallen body; the body is all of the soul that fallen Man possesses” (Bloom 1961, 28).

Sikka 2011, 12-43 & 87-106; Yack 2013; Zammito 1992; 2002; 2006). In contrast to Berlin's conception of an irrationalist Herder — whom he associates with Vico, Hamann, and Jacobi — contemporary Herderian scholarship emphasizes his rich conception of language, his naturalism, or his understanding of philosophy as anthropology, and his writings on history (Zammito 2002; 2006; 2009; 2016; Beiser 2011; Sikka 2011; Spencer 2012; Gjesdal 2017; Waldow & DeSouza 2017; Forster 2018; Zuckert 2019). This scholarly trend is not for nothing; it is necessary to refresh our conception of Herder with new, and less one-sided depictions. But if this task is largely succeeding — the rise of Herder studies in the anglophone world is, I think, evidence of this — it is also necessary to square the 'modern' Herder with the 'irrational' Herder. Both terms are, of course, inadequate, but if Zammito underlines Berlin's erroneous characterization of Herder's role in a 'counter-enlightenment' with his teacher Hamann, Herder's relation to the Magus and his concept of poetry must nonetheless be understood (Zammito 2006, 52-54).

One of the reasons this remains a tension in Herderian scholarship is because of the lack of integration between Herder's religious ideas and his philosophy. As Rachel Zuckert remarked, in her work on Herder's 'naturalist aesthetics,' "It must be acknowledged generally, I think, that any interpretation of Herder as naturalist will require leaving out other aspects of his thought and, specifically, choosing one side of this widely recognized tension in Herder's thought" (Zuckert 2019, 43). Herder's writings are challenging. They are often open-ended, and, as Wulf Koepke noted, his, "texts exhibit structures which urge readers to respond, to take a stand, to agree or disagree. In short: to be anything but neutral or 'objective'" (Koepke 1982, 152; see also Binoche 2013, 195-196). One of the challenges Herder presents to his readers is that of imagining how he could have conceived of overcoming these 'tensions' that many scholars have correctly recognized. This cannot be achieved without a better understanding of Herder's views

on religion and their relation to the rest of his writings. As the editors of *Herder and Religion* remarked, “Herder regarded his naturalistic outlook as compatible with his transcendent belief” (Bengtsson et al, 2016). It should be kept in mind that a part of Herder’s problem with rationalism is the fact that it seemed to dissolve the particular meaning of religion or the Bible. Herder’s interpretations of the Bible are not distinct but form an integral part of his hermeneutical project, as well as his philosophy, which puts him in the Protestant lineage of biblical hermeneutics that goes all the way to David Strauss (Bunge 1994, 259; 1996, 238-239; Schweitzer 1950, 35; see also Beiser 2020).

Though Herder’s philosophy of language and hermeneutics have garnered increased attention in recent years (e.g., Forster 2018; Gjesdal 2017) these studies largely neglect the role of specific theological assumptions in Herder’s responses. This is a topic that is mostly limited to specialized literature. For example, Trabant (2009) notes the importance of the Christian concept of Logos in Herder’s philosophy of language. While DeSouza (2012a) analyzes the relationship between Herder’s doctrine of forces, as well his notion of the world as a divine thought, to the general argument in the *Treatise* and its historical context. Finally, Frank (1982) and Betz (2009) expose the intertwinement of Herder’s and Hamann’s thought in the debate on language. In terms of the history of ideas, this relationship between Herder and Hamann was especially fruitful in the 1770s, leading Betz to go as far as to describe Hamann’s critique of the *Treatise* as “the right hand correcting the left” (Betz 2009, 109). Other scholars, however, have distanced Herder from Hamann (Forster 2013; 2018; Frank 1982; Wells 1986). It is not my task here to get into the question of Hamann and Herder. I agree with John Zammito that Frederick Beiser gets it ‘just right’ when he says, “In the end, it was the influence of Kant that proved victorious...Herder was won over to the cause of the Aufklärung by the young Kant. All his life,

though, Herder was a deeply self-critical Aufklärer, and he was so largely due to the influence of Hamann” (Zammito 2006, 70 note 14; Beiser 1992, 192). I would add that Herder kept portraits of Lessing, Luther, and Hamann in his room; while Hamann, in 1777, had pictures of Herder, Lavater, Christoph Kaufmann, and Luther in his room (Arsleff 1981; Betz 2009, 171). I think this, also, gives a fair representation of their differences. Herder was not some kind of anti-rationalist, nor did he give the kind of explicit Christological arguments found in Hamann. But ultimately, as Nisbet has remarked, it was not Herder’s object to distinguish religion from “secular knowledge,” rather, it was his, “whole ambition to reconcile the two” (Nisbet 1967, 278).

A dismissal of Herder’s ‘ambition’ here results in the one-sidedly secular interpretations one finds in Forster, for example. He remarks, in his chapter on Herder’s philosophy of language, that “...*our* interest in Herder’s side of the argument is of course likely to lie in its compatibility with secularism” (2018, 17). The categorization of this ‘our’ says little about Herder’s thought and more about Forster’s desired readers. If one is to study Herder and see that his thought is inevitably influenced by religious ideas, such as his conception of God, it is shortsighted to dismiss these subjects as outdated in the face of modern ‘truths.’ Daniel Weidner describes this issue in his article treating Herder’s supposed secularization of scripture, where he is forced to re-define what secularization means in order to relate it to Herder (Weidner 2005, 191-93). As he remarks, “Herder’s reading [of the Old Testament] does not try to save the content of the Bible by rationalizing or replacing the *idea* of creation. Rather, it makes the biblical text readable and meaningful once again” (192). This is where Weidner directly hits the mark: Herder’s critical readings of the Bible sought to reaffirm its importance, not to analyze it skeptically, rationally, promoting a ‘secular’ understanding and stripping it of its singular

importance.⁷ If Forster prefers to bring out the modern and ‘secular’ aspects of Herder’s philosophy of language, he does not make sense of the seeming contradiction between this ‘secular’ naturalism and the religious ideas integral to Herder’s philosophy.

This is essentially the crux of herderian scholarship: Herder as naturalist, or Herder as theologian and metaphysician (Clark 1955, 224-228 & 300-301; Dilthey 1996a, 89-90 & 180; Zammito 2006; Zammito 2009; Norton 2007; Sikka 2007, 526-528 & 534-535; 2011, 75-83; Englander 2013; Zuckert 2019, 9-10 & 41-50; Wildschut 2019, 10-11). Herder’s concept of language demonstrates the ways he attempts to reconcile these two positions. Herder’s conception of language and his notion of poetry has been emphasized by scholars like Sonia Sikka and Charles Taylor (Taylor 1991; 1999, 13-36; Sikka 2004). What I hope to add here is Herder’s concept of poetry in the context of his theology; this is a position which explicitly requires him to try to reconcile his naturalistic treatment of language and his theological or metaphysical considerations. Herder wants to find a way to describe poetry in accordance with its specific natural context without, at the same time, reducing it to this (C.f. Waldow 2017). Rachel Zuckert, in her recent work on Herder’s naturalist aesthetics, goes a long way in clarifying the significance of naturalism in Herder’s philosophy (Zuckert 2019). She argues that Herder’s aesthetics, his ‘philosophy of art,’ is inseparable from his natural studies, noting that: “Aesthetic experience is, for Herder, an exemplary, revelatory instance of the individual organism’s flourishing, of such formation [*i.e., environmental, natural, social, and historical formations*] by and responsiveness to environment” (Zuckert 2019, 249-250). The ‘naturalism’ of Herder, in Zuckert’s words, corresponds to Herder’s view that, “human beings are organisms, furnished with a range of capacities to be actualized, active within, and conditioned by an

⁷ See Wildschut (2019, ch’s. 5 & 6) for the way this limits the possibility of relativist reading of Herder.

environment, part of a dynamically changing nature” (Zuckert 2019, 22 & 41). The strength of her work is how she interprets Herder’s aesthetics in the context of Herder’s naturalism, his understanding of humans as ‘embodied beings,’ and thus demonstrates Herder’s view that art and the aesthetic experience is a necessary and ‘natural’ part of humanity (Zuckert 2019, 216). At the beginning of the work, Zuckert identifies two problems with treating Herder as a naturalist: that of theism and hermeneutics (Zuckert 2019, 41-50). The problem is that, while Herder “shares with twenty-first century philosophical theoretical naturalists an empiricist orientation and philosophical modesty,” he still attempts, “to combine explanatory and normative naturalist projects,” something that is rare today (Zuckert 2019, 41). Zuckert argues that Herder’s theism and his hermeneutics are part of the way he attempts this combination, and thus present “interpretive challenges” to the view of Herder as naturalist (Zuckert 2019, 42). Zuckert is entirely correct to point out these tensions, and the fact that, in the first place, these tensions may not be as strong as they seem (Zuckert 2019, 43). Herder prefers to investigate natural causes over supernatural ones, but he says that these ‘natural causes’ reveal a divine order ordained by God (Zuckert 2019, 43-44).

According to Zuckert, the tension between Herder’s hermeneutics and his natural doctrine is, “[a] tension [that] is less documented and discussed than that between Herder’s naturalism and theism; thus to my knowledge scholars have not taken sides explicitly on it, nor has it coalesced around particular opposed position” (Zuckert 2019, 46). In the following, I hope to fill some of the gap Zuckert identifies, and I describe this tension as that between the concepts of poetry and nature. Herder’s concept of poetry is central to his epistemology, and it is integral to the form of any natural studies that are to take place. Herder’s ‘poetic naturalism’ is inevitably tied into theological considerations, namely through his concept of God, as well as his doctrine

of forces, which are themselves conceived poetically (Baildam 1999, 60-62 & 71-74; Bultmann 2009, 239-240; Bunge 1990a, 308-309 & 312 & 314-315; 1993, 20-30; 1996, 236 & 241; DeSouza 2018a, 113-115 & 120 & 123; 2020, 37-44; Kessler 2009, 248; Koepke 1982, 139 & 146-147; Nisbet 1970, 8-16; Wildschut 2017, 133-134 & 152-155; Zammito 1992, 323-341; 2009, 80-83). In his doctoral dissertation, Wildschut sets out to explore the importance of Herder's religious ideas, remarking that Herder, "conceives of the human and the divine as hardly separable," while also citing Wulf Koepke's advice to, "proceed from [Herder's] theology – if the term can be used – to his other concerns, instead of the other direction" (Wildschut 2017, 133; Koepke 1982, 153). Finally, he reminds us of the important fact that, though the biblical hermeneutics of the 18th and 19th centuries increasingly sought to apply a critical-historical instead of a theological method, this "cannot simply be subsumed under a linear narrative of secularization" (Wildschut 2017, 135).⁸ Herder wants to avoid a 'theism' that is dogmatic or supernatural, and that appeals to God to fill the gaps of our understanding. But he also wants to avoid a rationalistic interpretation that reduces the Bible to fanciful tales surrounding natural truths. The result is an understanding of the Bible as poetry that expresses humanity's imaginative relationship with the world and God. Herder's concept of poetry was developed in the context of his interpretation of the Bible, among other literature, and is essential to his attempt at combining what we now view as the separate realms of theology and natural science.

As many have concluded, to distinguish philosophy and theology in Herder is particularly difficult (Büttgen 1998, 337; Wildschut 2019; Zammito 2009, 81), and perhaps it is a misguided endeavor in the first place (Schmidt 2017, 186). Rather, for Herder, the two were intimately

⁸ See also Sheehan's book *The Enlightenment Bible*, as well as Stephen Prickett's *Words and the Word* for the development of the development of this literary-historical understanding of the Bible. Dilthey's texts on the development of hermeneutics in the 18th and 19th centuries also demonstrates the fact that the development of biblical hermeneutics away from theology did not necessarily, or even usually, imply the kind of modern secular thinking of today.

related and necessarily implied one another. For example, Herder's concept of *Bildung* and his philosophy of history were tied to related theological concepts such as the golden rule, as well as a Providential understanding of history (Bunge 1990b; Wildschut 2019, Ch. 7; Zammito 2009, 69-70).⁹ But the tension between Herder's frequent naturalism and his particular faith was also cause for apparent inconsistencies in his philosophy. For example, John Zammito remarks that Herder's religious ambitions 'compromised' his 'path-breaking naturalism' (2009, 80). I agree with Zammito that these two spheres of Herder's thought were rarely consistent or rigorously maintained; this is the case, for example, when trying to reconcile his elaboration of a sort of Spinozist God in *God: some conversations*, with his understanding of Jesus as Christ (Bunge 1993, 32; McGiffert 1904; Clark 1955, 386).¹⁰ But it is clear that Herder's religious ambitions cannot be definitively counterposed with his naturalism. As Zammito has noted elsewhere, Herder: "wanted to reconcile his immanent naturalism with his transcendent (religious) aspirations" (Zammito 2016, 20). Herder's naturalism and his theology can be distinguished to some degree, but not separated.

It was not Herder's religious thought that 'weakened' his philosophy. It was his engagement in teleological analogies where he implies a strict natural method. Herder's collection of natural evidence is often tied together only by fundamental analogies, for example his 'analogy of nature' (Moser 1982, 105; Fink 1982, 94-95; Beiser 1987, 152-158; Bollacher 2009, 212-216; Zammito 2009, 77-78; Gaier 2009, 176-177; Spencer 2012, 104; Herder 1800, 1-

⁹ Zammito remarks that "philosophy of history was for Herder always theodicy..." (Zammito 2009, 70).

¹⁰ Herder, though he does consistently refer to Jesus as 'the Son of Man,' emphasizing his human nature, also asserts the resurrection as truth through faith, and denies that later generations could rationally prove or deny the writings of the apostles (Herder 1993, 176-200; Clark 1955, 393; Bunge 1990b, 141-146; 1993, 32; 1994; Bultmann 2009, 240-242; Kessler 2009, 255-258). This obviously differs from Spinoza's understanding of Christ, who does not view him as Son of Man — though Spinoza does consider Jesus unique in his relationship to God — as it would create a flaw in his system to consider him divine; see for example Mason (1997, 209-220) on Spinoza's Christ, see also Cooper (2006) on the place of Christ in pantheism and panentheism.

71; 2002, 214). Though Herder may find this to be perfectly adequate, according to Kant, he has not demonstrated why this *must* be the case. Herder has not proven that an argument by analogy can be applied to natural studies in a manner beyond hypothesis, supposition, or in Kantian terms, a reflective judgment (Fricke 1990, 56-57; Zammito 1992, 224-26; Kant 1987, 277-279). Kant criticizes Herder for this; he says that Herder ascribes purpose to nature and holds this purpose as necessary when he has not clearly demonstrated this very necessity (Kant 2007, 124-143). This goes back to a proof of God: there must be an ‘artificer’ who has created the ‘artefact’ of the world such that humans can cognize its purpose and consider it holistically. Herder, again in contrast to Kant, asserts the existence (necessity) of this God without demonstration. He calls God the most basic idea of humanity and does not even conceive of a possibility of God’s non-existence (Herder 1949; Kessler 2009, 248; Crowe 2009, 263). This illustrates both the importance of God and theological concepts in Herder’s philosophy, as well as the importance he ascribes to poetic language. In Herder’s view, the fact that God cannot be demonstrated with apodictic certainty does not take anything away from His necessity, but rather demonstrates the very limits of rational demonstration. As Crowe remarks:

“Herder's point is that religion depends on natural theology neither for its origin nor for its support. Prior to any demonstration, an "inner feeling" both produces belief in God and convinces one of its veracity. Indeed, Herder suggests that in the absence of such "inner feeling" these demonstrations would have no purchase, no ability to produce conviction. (2009, 63).

Herder’s God *is* a great source of inconsistency in his philosophy, but this inconsistency is not simply a result of his theological ideas diminishing his natural studies. Herder’s view of the Divinity informed, and was informed by, his writings on natural science as well as his biblical hermeneutic. This is not two distinct modes of thought grinding against each other — God, religion, versus naturalism. Rather, both the ‘compromised’ and ‘path-breaking’ naturalism Zammito refers to arise out of the same inconsistency in Herder’s God concept, the tension

between a Christian ‘panentheistic’ God, and a pantheistic God closer to Spinoza — that is to say, the difference between identifying God with nature, and understanding God as immanent to nature, but not reducible to it (McGiffert 1902, 709-710; Clark 1955, 320-321; Beiser 1987, 158-163; Bunge 1990a; Cooper 2006, 79 & 89 & 265; Popejoy 2016, 175). At the heart of this problem is determining how Herder combines explanatory and normative claims, or natural evidence with theology — and this ultimately occurs through analogies, that is to say, through poetry.

As Gjesdal has noted, other than works which examine Herder from a theological point of view, and her own work — the relationship between Herder’s hermeneutic, his interaction with literature and poetry, and his natural-scientific studies, has received little attention in the scholarship (Gjesdal 2017b; Wildschut 2019, 131-161). This is even more so the case in terms of the relation here to Herder’s particular theology. In recent years, there have been great studies that interpret Herder’s philosophy while noting its relevance in contemporary terms (Spencer 2012, Sikka 2010, Gjesdal 2017a, Zuckert 2019). But there is still a need for further research that incorporates Herder’s theological ideas within his philosophy. This is mostly found within specifically theological contexts. For example, Marcia Bunge, a theologian at Gustavus Adolphus College, underlines the interrelated nature of Herder’s religious writings and those concerning language and history. This is emphasized in the Herder volume she edited, where his theological writings are included alongside his general philosophy (1990;1990b;1993). Betz, also a professor of theology, provides one of the most thorough examinations of Herder and Hamann on language (2009). In recent years, other scholars have also examined the ‘theological’ side of Herder and have emphasized the importance of such an interpretation — particularly as it regards a harmony between the religious and the philosophic. Martin Kessler has outlined the meaning of

theology to Herder; Christoph Bultmann has examined Herder's readings of the Bible, and Johannes Schmidt has demonstrated the way Herder's anthropology is related to his religious ideas (Bultmann 2009; Kessler 2009; Schmidt 2017). My point here is not to emphasize a particular religious dimension to Herder; by using *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, I demonstrate that Herder's biblical hermeneutics was no different from the method developed in *This too* or *Shakespeare*. Herder's interpretation of the Old Testament reveals his attempt to develop a hermeneutic for a most difficult text, the Bible — which birthed the science of hermeneutics themselves — and which, as Northrop Frye remarked, cannot be considered a history, or a fiction (Frye 1982). Herder attempts to absolve the Bible of the natural or rational critique through its treatment as poetry and the earliest example of human *reason* in its original and unified condition. This is not only of particular theological concern but is essential to Herder's philosophic project. If myth and poetry sit at the roots of human thinking and 'reason,' then a transcendental project based on abstraction, which treats poetry as superfluous, or a thoroughgoing naturalism, which treats poetry as fiction, becomes suspect. Herder satirizes the 'rationalizers' for over-reliance on only one function of the mind; what is specific to poetry, is that it is the artefact of human language that expresses the mind in its unity.

Chapter Outline

While I do not focus my attention on Herder's philosophical metaphysics, for example in his essay *On Being*, what I will touch on is the metaphysical quality he sometimes assigns to poetry, specifically his idea of force (Clark 1955, 96-97; Norton 1991, 141-154; Moore 2006, 10-11). When Herder describes 'poetic truth' there is a tension between ultimately reducing this truth to the nexus of natural and historical circumstances which are to produce this poetic expression, and the imaginative creativity required by the poet to express this truth in language.

He often implies that, if this poetic truth could not be reduced to a collection of natural facts, it might be reducible to physiological phenomena in the brain of the individual poet (Herder 1800, 48-55 & 64; Herder 2002, 178-186, 205-207). And yet, Herder remains uncertain — we can recall the earlier quotation where he remarks that poetry goes beyond mere sensual representation — but he also says, “If physiology should ever get to the point where it demonstrated the science of the soul – which I very much doubt that it will, however – then it would cast many a ray of light on this phenomenon from the dissection of the nerve structure.” (Herder 2002, 66). The tension in Herder’s thought that I describe is rendered explicit here; he expresses wonderment at the new physiological sciences but qualifies this with the ‘I very much doubt that it will.’ Herder is in danger of violating the Leibnizian principle expressed by his idea that, even if one were to build a one-to-one model of the brain in the size of a mill, which one could walk around in, one would still never find ‘de quoi expliquer une perception,’ that is to say “la Perception et ce qui en dépend, est inexplicable par des raisons mécaniques” (Leibniz 1991, 83).¹¹ In short, for Leibniz, consciousness cannot be ‘found’ with mechanical and material means. Herder is aware of this problem. For example, when speaking of consciousness, Herder says, “General mechanical laws are of no help here, for, as I have said, what we see in external objects does not lie merely in the things themselves but is primarily dependent on the organ that perceives them and the inner sense that becomes conscious of them” (Herder 2006, 360).¹² Here we have again this tension between the organ of perception and the ‘inner sense’ of consciousness. This is simply a microcosm of the problem I have outlined; Herder hopes to

¹¹ Many popular science books cite Leibniz saying: “If you could blow the brain up to the size of a mill and walk about inside, you would not find consciousness.” Which is actually quite an accurate aphoristic rendition of what Leibniz means, but it is not actually found in the *Monadology*, see for example: (Hoffman 2012, 5; Kaku 2015, 41).

¹² See also his remark concerning Haller’s physiological studies, where Herder says: “[They] show how futile it would be to seek the indivisible work of the formation of ideas in substance and distributed among the material parts of the brain...” (Herder 1800, 77).

sidestep Leibniz by treating the organ of perception, not mechanically, but with a vitalist physiology. Herder postulates a harmony between inner sense and organ, between mind and body, through a holistic account of the linguistic expressions of the inner sense and the historical and natural context that surrounds it.

I begin, in chapter one, by examining Herder's hermeneutics in *This too*, which I read largely as a methodological text for the interpreter to correctly understand history. What Herder wants is to be able to disclose truth in history that is not one-sided; he does not want to fall victim to the prejudices of his own age. This is why the antipode of his 'withered,' overly rational age, is the Orient, the land of paradise and the origin of humanity (Herder 2004, 87). In contrast to his contemporaries and their rationalistic explanations, Herder brings in the Orient and its ancient poetry as the origin of human thinking (Herder 2004, 3-11).

In chapter two, I show how this method is applied to the Old Testament. Herder's general hermeneutics is not distinct from his biblical hermeneutics, as we find in *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*. Herder understands the Hebrew people and their particular historical context as existing in a purposive relationship in a similar way to his conception of 'Providence' in *This too*. Mythology and religion become a necessary expression of this purpose and Herder sets it as his objective to examine this relationship, especially as he describes the development of poetic images within and through the specific character of Hebrew poetry. I relate this interpretation to an elaboration of his historical hermeneutics outlined in *This too*, and I will demonstrate the ways Herder attempts to distinguish himself from strictly rational or natural biblical interpretations (see Strauss 1902, 44-50).

This leads me to discuss the next fundamental aspect of Herder's treatment of the Old Testament: his understanding of the Old Testament as an epic poem concerning the Hebrew

people and their relationship with God and the world. In chapter 3, I analyze Herder's conception of poetry and its place in his philosophy of language. I argue that Herder's framing of the Old Testament as a collection of ancient literature is something more than an observation specific to the Hebrew people, but is rather a comment on the origin of human thinking as it is found in the oldest human documents. Herder is attempting to avoid the pitfalls of mechanical naturalism hermeneutically; he relies on the analogical character of thinking to argue that even natural studies have their source in a kind of poetry.

In chapter four I conclude by examining Herder's attempt, in *God: Some Conversations*, to reconcile his naturalism and his religious beliefs through his conception of God. Herder's attempt here revolves around his concept of force, which is the ground for the particular effect of poetry, the harmony of mind and body, and these forces are furthermore witnessed in nature. Though Herder is not entirely consistent in his use of his concept of force — he can be criticized on Kantian, or Leibnizian grounds — it is an example of the synthesis of poetic, philosophic, and scientific concepts at the heart of his philosophy, and as the foundation for his conception of God (Nisbet 1971, 8-16).

Chapter 1

Herder's Methodology in *This too*

Before we can get into Herder's interpretive study of the Old Testament, it is necessary to examine how he describes his own methodology. In *This too* we find his well-known formulas of 'feeling yourself in' and treating everything within its own 'center of gravity' (Herder 2004, 24 & 29; Clark 155, 191; Forster 2002, xvii-xviii; Beiser 2011, 136; Berlin 2013a, 24 & 261; Gjesdal 2017, 113-118). But Herder also uses a number of figures of speech that undergird his overall methodology in the essay. These are his guiding analogies and metaphors; primarily Herder's 'analogy of nature' and his use of the 'Ages of Humanity' metaphor (Herder 2004, 12 & 31). The first describes Herder's view that human knowledge is fundamentally analogical, and so human history must be analogical to natural history (Greif 2009, 147; Nassar 2015, 241-248).¹³ The second idea describes the history of mankind as the life of a single Man, that is to say, just as every individual has his childhood, adolescence, maturity, and so on, as does the entirety of Humanity. Herder also describes this 'Man' of Humanity as being comparable to a growing tree (the boyhood as the trunk, the seniority as the thin branches at the top). There is an entwinement between these ideas; not only is the development of Humanity analogous to the life of a single individual human, but it is also analogous to the growth of a single tree (or Nature).

Robert Clark describes *This too* as having two sides, a positive and a negative. The negative side is summed up as an attempt at, "destroying the shallow rationalistic attitude toward history." While the positive is the view of *This too* as, "the first statement of the new philosophy that was to revivify European historiography" (Clark 1955, 191). The latter is primarily where we can find Herder's hermeneutical ideas. But these two sides cannot be examined discretely —

¹³ Herder says, "What we know we know only through analogy" (Herder 2002, 188).

it is necessary to examine both elements of Herder's essay, the polemical with the philosophic. The best example of this dynamic in *This too* is Herder's use of the metaphor of 'Ages of Humanity.' It serves both an ironic purpose within the essay itself, as well as a polemical re-interpretation of those rationalist philosophers he criticizes. In the first place, he uses this idea as a heuristic in order to describe overall trends in the philosophy of history. He wants to describe man's 'childhood' in the Orient, his 'boyhood' in Phoenicia and Egypt, his 'youth' in Greece; but the metaphor becomes explicitly ironic in the third part of the essay, where he describes the 'senility' of Man, that is to say Enlightenment Europe. This last part is a response to rationalist philosophies of history that presented Man's 'childhood' as brutal and tyrannical, while exalting the confident 'manhood' of European Enlightened rationality (Bruford 1962, 194-195; Voltaire 1759, 34; Kant 1988, 41; Montesquieu 2014, 59).¹⁴ Herder is satirizing the very use of this analogy at the same time as he is ascribing to it some sort of hermeneutical merit. He says, "An exact comparison of the Oriental and the Egyptian spirit should show that my analogy with the life-ages of man is no mere child's play" (Herder 2004, 12). This is what makes Herder's use of the analogy complex; it is 'negative' in an ironic and polemical sense, but it is 'positive' in its analytic use to understand world-history. Herder does not disagree that the Orient of antiquity is the birthplace of humanity and the residence of its 'childhood,' but he says that we have not understood the child for what it is (Herder 2004, 6-10).¹⁵

¹⁴ For example, Montesquieu says of Asia, 'Asia, where despotism is, so to speak, naturalized.' Or when Kant opens his essay on Enlightenment describing it as the 'emergence from self-imposed immaturity.' In all this there is the same idea of Humanity aging and maturing out of a kind of 'bad' childhood.

¹⁵ To those chastising the Orient for its 'despotism,' Herder says, "O, it is you who is the worst, most foolish child! You would rob [a child] of his better inclinations, of the bliss and foundations of his nature; you would turn him—if your absurd plan were to succeed—into the most monstrous thing in the world: into an old man of three years." (Herder 2004, 11).

The Ages of Humanity & the Senility of the Enlightenment

By casting the enlightenment as the period of senility in the Ages of Man, Herder removes the basis for its claim as the universal rational perspective at the ‘End of History.’ Despite the fact that senility does imply that we are nearing some sort of ‘End’ of history (the ‘senile old man’ of Humanity implies the nearing of the end of the life of Man as Mankind): the idea that this end discloses a universal understanding of history is denied (Herder 2004, 72-78).¹⁶ Indeed, this is the whole *raison d’être* of Herder’s essay. Herder is telling his opponents that they cannot claim this universal perspective without a real understanding of history. This means one has to abandon the idea of historical epochs as simply means toward a final end (Binoche 2013, 203). Instead, for Herder, “everything is both means and end” (Herder 2004, 43). Herder does not deny that there is some sort of ‘progression’ [*fortgang*] within history, he simply reserves complete knowledge of this providential course to God (Binoche 2013, 198-207). One of the ironic implications here is that to become a true historian, — i.e., to have knowledge of this course — one would in essence have to become God (Herder 2004, 30-45). However, it is important to note that Herder attempted to rebuke his use of this schema of the ‘Ages of Humanity’ in the *Ideas*. There, in the preface, Herder says his use of the childhood, infancy, and manhood metaphors were only figurative expressions in order to point out a ‘highway’ for the history of cultivation. He goes on saying it was only meant to apply to a few nations and that it could say nothing with certainty concerning the philosophy of history at large (Herder 1800, v). Herder does not say the analogy is useless or incorrect; he wants to emphasize his skepticism in general towards the possibility of such a project as a philosophy of history, which necessarily

¹⁶ At one point Herder remarks, concerning his age’s place at the heights of the tree, that this does not mean having the perspective of an ‘eagle on the mighty tree of the father of all’ but rather one is simply a ‘minute leaf’s fiber from this tree’ (Herder 2004, 73).

requires a kind of certainty in order to write it.¹⁷ Herder finishes the preface by remarking that since there is no standard for cultivation, it is impossible to trace the development of a universal spirit (Herder 1800, x). Now, what this really amounts to for our reading of *This too* is to show that Herder retains a hermeneutical skepticism. When he uses the analogy of the Ages of Man, he does not want the reader to idolize this concept, nor does he mean it as a determinative judgment. He uses it as a hypothetical principle that will lead to further investigation. (Herder 2004, 25-26 & 55 & 72).

Herder has no problem with the general schematic of a historical development in history as ‘Ages’ or the growth of a tree; what he takes issue with is that his fellow philosophers have not grasped the implications of their ‘enlightened’ perspective which ‘see[s] so far’ (Herder 2004, 69). When describing his own age as the ‘lofty’ branches of the tree of Humanity, he remarks,

If there is any regard in which our age can be used for something noble, it is by its lateness, its height, its view!...Philosopher: if you wish to honor and put to use the height attained by your age, the book of its prehistory lies before you! Secured with seven seals, it is a wondrous book of prophecy: the end of days awaits you! Read! (2004, 74)

This is clearly an allusion to the Bible, and the editors of Herder’s essay, Evrigenis and Pellerin, are correct to refer to the Book of Revelations in their footnote. In his vision, John describes the ‘Lord on the throne’ as holding a book in his right hand that is ‘sealed with seven seals’

(Revelations 5:1).¹⁸ This sealed book, and its ultimate unsealing by John, form an integral part of the symbolism in the Book of Revelation (Farrer 1986, 37 & 101-116; Frye & Macpherson 2004, 240-4). What Herder is saying is that the height upon which his age stands and the perspective it grants necessitates a historical investigation into humanity’s most ancient history. The Bible is not to be discarded as archaic, but Herder implies it has become even more relevant in his own

¹⁷ The kind of certainty we find in Hegel’s philosophy of history, for example.

¹⁸ All references to the Bible are made to the King James Version.

day. Later in the essay, Herder directs our attention to the Orient, the ‘cradle of the human species and religion,’ and says that even if religion is ‘despised’ in the cold world, “its Word, the spirit of flame and fire, is still travelling thence” (Herder 2004, 74). And in a footnote accompanying this last passage, Herder makes explicit that he is referring to the Bible, saying, ironically, “The despised book—the Bible!” Herder is casting the Bible as the archetypal literature of humanity’s greatest antiquity, and he is directly contrasting it with his own ‘mature’ age, calling on his contemporaries to use the philosophical and historical perspective afforded to them and study Man’s childhood, i.e., the Bible. If we are now in a mature age of great perspective, but we have become blinded, and ‘senile’ through our own hubris, the resolution lies in a closer study of history, particularly our ‘childhood’ and by extension the Bible.

Herder’s use of the Ages of Humanity analogy is predicated on the fact that he, as a historical observer, is also in this ‘mature,’ or rather, ‘senile’ age. It is only from this perspective that it is possible to look back on one’s childhood and youth. The ‘childhood’ of mankind, the Orient, was not a ‘child’ to itself, but rather can only be understood as a child *from* the mature or senile perspective. It is senility to condemn the child, but it is mature to engage in a sincere study of this ‘childhood.’ This is implied in Herder’s use of the analogy, when he describes ancient Greece as the ‘youth’ of Man, which is to say the years we fondly look back upon as a ‘golden age’ of our life (Herder 2004, 18). The fashionable and obsessive admiration of Greek and Roman culture is, in Herder’s view, simply a shallow nostalgia for a lost adolescence (Herder 2004, 27-28). At the age of maturity, however, it is not the time to continue reveling in well-known and exaggerated memories of adolescence — this would be senility. Maturity is, rather, the ‘end of days’ in which the book of History can begin to be unsealed at last (see Wildschut 2019, 212-214; Koepke 1982, 145; Cohn 1970; Herder 2004, 74).

Continuing with the analogy, Herder says that if we tend to become enraptured with memories of adolescence, the same cannot be said of one's childhood, since, for one, it is rare that we even remember our undeveloped childhood (Herder 2004, 18). If this is the case for a single human's life, it is also the case for one's understanding of the entirety of humanity. The childhood of humanity is, for Herder, what is most misunderstood and poorly treated — it is chastised by the bitter old man — and in *This too* he goes a long way in trying to correct the prejudiced treatments of, for example, Winckelmann's interpretation of Egyptian art (Herder 2004, 15-16; Clark 1955, 192; Gjesdal 97-98). But a large part of his argument here is towards a hermeneutic of the Bible in the historical and cultural context of the 'Orient.' We have to keep in mind that this is the time of the rise of antiquarian studies and the development of new biblical hermeneutics (Strauss 1902, 44-57; Prickett 1986; Dilthey 1996b, 235-238; Dilthey 1996c; Sheehan 2005). As Binoche points out, Herder stands in contrast to his contemporaries by casting the Patriarchs of the Old Testament as the origin of mankind (Binoche 2013, 195). The childhood of man is not a savage one, supposedly analogous to cultures of the New World: it is analogous to the life of the Patriarchs. To my knowledge, Bertrand Binoche is one of the only ones, along with Niels Wildschut, who raises this point (Binoche 2013; Wildschut 2019, 97). Binoche also notes that there are a number of Christian metaphors throughout *This too*, he says, "Herder uses also the evangelical, Christian metaphors of leaven and fermentation, thus crossing the language of the Enlightenment with that of the Bible" (Binoche 2013, 199). Even the central metaphor of the tree has, according to Binoche, "clear evangelical undertones" (Binoche 2013, 214).

There is perhaps too little written on the relation between Herder's biblical hermeneutic and the one developed in *This too*. As Wildschut has pointed out, contemporary reviews of *This*

too criticized Herder for being *too* religious in his conception of a providential history (Wildschut 2019, 206-208). He remarks that Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz — a reviewer of *This too* and a contemporary ‘*Sturm und Drang*’ author and playwright — agreed with Herder’s critique of the Enlightenment but was perplexed by how his alternative was any less monistic. Wildschut says, “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” (Wildschut 2019, 208). The idea that the Orient is the origin of human culture, and its most ancient artefact is the Bible plays, obviously, no small part in this providence. Herder does not deny that there is a specific origin, or that there is providence, development, and progression in history; his entire objective in the second section of *This too* is to trace this development out (Herder 2004, 26-45). Herder satirizes the distortionary and rational schemas of his opponents and encourages them to read the Bible in order to truly understand the origin of mankind in its most primeval history.

The Christian undertones of *This too* are present throughout in the form of biblical allusions. But perhaps this aspect of the essay can be best explained with the epigraph at the end of the essay: two verses from the thirteenth chapter of Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians. Here Paul says, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” The providence of history, its progression, is observed only ‘through a glass darkly.’ ‘Face to face,’ hints at the *imago dei* and the fact that it is through our distinctive quality as humans, language and reason, that we must be able one day to arrive at a History that is analogous to God’s providence — knowing even as also I am known. I have mentioned that Herder conceives of religion only as a human phenomenon. Some have

commented that this implies a kind of naturalism or secularism (Forster 2018, 294-295; Zuckert 2019, 43). But we have to look no further than Origen of Alexandria to see that this is also a Christian understanding of Scripture and history. As he remarks, “We can never say that God is apprehended by any other means than through the intelligence which is formed in His image, though now, in the words of Paul, ‘we see in a glass obscurely, but then face to face’” (Origen 1995, 626). Herder rejects any historian who, through hubris, gives himself the God perspective. But he affirms, with Paul and Origen, that God is ‘knowable,’ if obscurely. There is no ‘God of the gaps.’ Rather, historical interpretation is predicated upon that fact that we are limited beings, relative to God, but that we can come to know Him in history by virtue of the *imago dei*. Wildschut’s conclusion that there is a Christological dimension to *This too* speaks to this and can be corroborated by examining Tertullian’s commentary on this same verse from Paul (Wildschut 2019, 222-223). The Carthaginian Father tells us that the idea of seeing God ‘only obscurely’ relates to the conception of God from the Prophets. He says this applies to instances like Exodus 33:11, “the Lord spoke face to face with Moses,” and Genesis 32:30, “I have seen God face to face.” ‘Face to face,’ here, is meant as a kind of theophany; not a direct gaze upon God, but rather a presence before and with Him (Laird Harris et al 1980, 727, s.v. #1782; Brown et al 2000, s.v. פָּנֵה).¹⁹ In the Christian doctrine, it is only with God’s Incarnation in Jesus that we can, perhaps one day, possibly ‘know’ God ‘face to face’ (Tertullian 1995, 608-609; Binoche 2013, 211). A recognition of providence in history can thus be understood to have a kind of Christological dimension. We come to know Christ, i.e., God Incarnated, when we Know

¹⁹ This goes back to the Hebrew word for face and the expression ‘face to face’ itself, ‘panim el panim.’ This did not necessarily mean looking at someone’s face but rather could imply speaking with them or having an intimate relation with them. For example, Laird Harris et al remark that, “The phrase ‘to hide one’s face’ means to show aversion or discuss and to ‘turn away the face’ is to reject” (Laird Harris et al 1980, 727). To come ‘face to face’ to God, or to ‘turn away the face’ from God, did not mean that one had seen God’s face but was meant figuratively in terms of one’s relationship with God.

history; a philosophy of history becomes a knowledge of God's ways in time. Herder ends his essay with verses from Paul concerning the recognition of God in order to portray the historical task as a kind of revelation (see Koepke 1982, esp. 145).

Development in History & The Analogy of the Painting

If we think of human finitude in this light, we can clarify one of the more compelling analogies in *This too*. Towards the end of the first section, Herder makes the analogy between the historian and the observer of a painting. This comes after Herder initially sketched out the historical development of the ancient world and the individuality of its cultures. After finishing with Rome, Herder begins a new subsection and remarks "No one in the world feels the weakness of general characterization more than I" (Herder 2004, 23). Herder is beginning a response to the criticism that his previous schema is simply that: a weak and general characterization. Following this, Herder makes his proclamation that we must 'feel' our way into a culture in order to apprehend its individuality (Herder 2004, 24-25). This is why Herder remarks that to discuss, "the quintessence of all ages and peoples," is foolish (Herder 2004, 24). Herder is certainly laying great emphasis on the unique individuality of each culture; he says that, despite the fact that each culture has an almost infinite potential, there is still a chasm between it and some other culture. Herder uses an individual person as a microcosm of this problem, and says that even a, "cowardly scoundrel," has a "faint disposition and potential for the most magnanimous heroism," but that there is still a "chasm" between this 'disposition' and the actual existence of this character in someone else (Herder 2004, 24). Herder says, after this, "I am...preparing myself for petty objections out of the great detail of peoples and ages" (Herder 2004, 25). That is to say, the idea that even the image of an individual culture would seem to be simply a phantom: a general characterization of little value. Herder agrees that this is, in part,

true, he remarks that “no two moments are ever the same,” and that therefore even individual cultures are in a state of flux, of growth, blossoming, and decline. He says Greece was composed of a number of ‘lands,’ the Athenians, Spartans, Corinthians, etc, who were “anything but the same” (Herder 2004, 25). And that, though he described Phoenicians as the ultimate commercial nation at the beginning of the essay, he asks himself: “Did not the Egyptians once trade just as well as the Phoenicians?” (Herder 2004, 25). Finally, he says, irritated at the series of questions he has posed himself, “Were all Egyptians, Greeks, Romans—are all rats and mice—the same? No! But they are still rats and mice!” (Herder 2004, 25). Herder is not denying that each individual, person, or culture, is itself infinite in its variety, but they are still all part of a developing humanity.²⁰ Directly after, Herder says he thinks that using infinite variety as a form of criticism against tracing historical development is a “petty objection,” and that it is, “annoying,” to address an audience that, “cannot distinguish right from left” (Herder 2004, 24-25). This is where Herder makes the analogy to the painting. He says,

“Can there be any general image without mutual subordination and integration, or any broad perspective without elevation? When you keep your face close to the picture, fumbling with this splinter or groping at that speck of color, you will never see the entire image—you will see anything but an image!” (Herder 2004, 25).

Bertrand Binoche calls this “perhaps the most important” passage of the essay (Binoche 2013, 207). However, in contrast to his reading, I do not interpret Herder to be presenting us this metaphor in order to portray the “impossible tableau,” that is a philosophy of history analogous to God’s providence (Binoche 2013, 208-211).

Herder certainly, as Binoche points out, views humans as finite before God. But the context of this metaphor is not to emphasize human finitude. It is rather to satirize the critiques

²⁰ Even this idea of ‘growth, blossoming, and decline’ is something that can be related to the narrative structure of the Bible. Northrop Frye drew a diagram illustrating this as recurring U-shaped pattern that is essentially a tragicomic “pattern of loss and return” (Frye & Macpherson 2004, 20-23).

of his imagined opponents who appeal to the great diversity of cultures so as to deny any development in history, or even the image of a single unique culture. The image of the historical observer's face too close to the picture, ignorant of anything but his own little "speck of color," is not a universal condition in a skeptical way. Herder is ultimately calling those who look too closely at the painting "petty objectors," not that this is the position we are condemned to. If you want to be a philosopher of history, you must learn to stand back, and humbly examine the entire image; indeed, this is the precise advantage of the 'mature' age at the top of the tree. This is why, following this citation, Herder makes his criticism against the idea of a *Favoritvolk*; when one becomes obsessed with a single group or culture, one is stuck in looking at a tiny corner of the entire image, examining only one "speck of color" (Herder 2004, 25-26). To Binoche's point, even though Herder encourages those narrow-minded historians to, "read first and learn to see," he still maintains that any "general image" is, "but abstraction," and that it is only the "Creator alone...who conceives the full unity of any one and of all nations" (Herder 2004, 26). But again, the point was not to underline human finitude as Herder, after bringing up this very finitude, says, "Away, then, from these petty objections that miss all purpose and perspective!" (Herder 2004, 26). The result is not an overwhelming skepticism before the infinite variety of historical content, but rather the awareness that, as image of God, Man can and must attempt to grasp at the "purpose and perspective" of history — despite its infinite variety. Instead, infinite variety is only meaningful in the context of the principle of its ultimate unity. We must be humble before the vastness of history, but we must not therefore resign ourselves to incomprehension. As Herder says, the book of history is there before us, waiting to be unsealed.

The Orient and the Origin of Humanity

If Herder laments the lack of historical self-awareness of his contemporaries and their enlightened histories, what is it exactly that he finds in the ‘childhood’ of humanity which could help this problem? For the answer, we must turn again to Herder’s development of the metaphor of the Ages of Humanity as the growing of a tree. If, at the top of the tree, there is great perspective and height, these ‘branches’ are also, according to Herder, ‘thin, tottering branches’ (Herder 2004, 69). Herder contrasts these thin branches that characterize humanity’s seniority with the trunk and roots that are to be understood as humanity’s childhood and its first foundation. As a corollary to his analogy of the Tree of Man there is the idea that the roots and trunk of this tree are filled with ‘sap,’ which is to be understood as a kind of life-force, and which the haughty branches at the top of the tree desperately lack (Herder 2004, 50 & 68). It is this development of the analogy that contains the solution to our question and a fundamental aspect of Herder’s critique of the Enlightenment. If the thin branches of the Enlightenment grant a great perspective towards the whole, what they lack is the life and active-force of previous epochs. He explains the lack of this ‘sap’ in his own age as resulting from an over-reliance on reason at the expense of happiness and human feeling (Herder 2004, 54).²¹ Herder uses a number of examples to demonstrate this idea. For one, he takes the example of war and the invention of firearms. He says, “With the invention of firearms, what nerves of raw physical prowess and strength of soul in war were not slackened, what courage, loyalty...what old world’s sense of honor exhausted!” (Herder 2004, 49). Herder’s argument is that “every unused power goes to sleep,” such that with the invention of firearms, war becomes increasingly impersonal and lacks the feelings associated with it in other times. For Herder, the mind is composed of a variety of

²¹ See also (Sikka 2007).

forces, or ‘powers,’ and he criticizes the fact that, in his age, we create an idol of only one of them, reason.

The childhood of Man in the Orient, however, does not suffer from such reason-worship. When we examine Man’s prehistory, we find a state of mind that is far more integrated in its activity, and it is this that Herder wants to draw our attention to with his analogies.²² He says, “Reasoning that is spread too carelessly, too uselessly—might it not weaken the inclinations drives, and activity of life...? Dear feeble, irritating, useless free-thinking, the substitute for everything of which they [the enlighteners] would perhaps need rather more—heart, warmth, blood, being human, life!” (Herder 2004, 52). The error is that we have mistakenly identified the powers of the soul directly with the capacity for reasoning, which, for Herder, is only one of the soul’s powers. This identification has in turn weakened other powers of the mind, of which we find great evidence for in things like ancient mythology or the Bible (Herder 2004, 78-79). Herder is trying to tell us that the origin of mankind is not irrational; the first documents of mankind exhibit the origin of *rational* thinking through a particular mythological structure. Ancient documents like the Bible should not be skeptically examined and submitted to the laws of abstract reason — one must ‘feel oneself in’ and understand them according to their historical context, as well as their particular symbolism. By raising this point, Herder hopes to arouse a sincere historical awareness, which is also meant to erode prejudicial analyses against both the Bible, as well as the cultures of the ‘New World.’ What is most distinctive in the human mind is the unification of the manifold — not infinite distinction. Herder is not simply satirizing his contemporaries or arguing for an empathetic interpretive stance on particular human cultures. He is also arguing that the Orient of antiquity is the origin of mankind and is the “Urmodel of human

²² Herder describes the inclinations of the Orient, i.e., humanity’s first inclinations, as ‘the most natural, strongest, simple ones,’ which form ‘the eternal foundation for the education of mankind in all ages’ (Herder 2004, 5).

sociality” (Wildschut 2019, 215). The Bible must therefore be understood as a collection of ancient wisdom concerning the origins of human society and thinking. By treating the Orient this way in *This too*, Herder can understand the Bible as a primordial text without resorting to dogmatics or supernatural explanations. Furthermore, because Herder identifies rationalism as a kind of senility, he is symbolically contrasting it with its antipode, childhood, arguing that a study of this antipode might reconcile the excesses of his current age. At the end of the essay, Herder laments that there is no ‘Socrates’ of his own day who might accomplish this. And he remarks specifically that, “philosophy fosters blind, short-sighted unbelief,” again implying that its opposite, the pious belief of the Patriarchs, could serve as an antidote here (Herder 2004, 5 & 26 & 93). But it must be admitted that Herder is far from giving a straightforward answer as to how this might occur, or an exact methodology for ancient texts from the Orient, for example. Herder, particularly in *This too*, does not lead the reader by the nose, but uses a number of analogies, metaphors, and questions, so we are forced to think for ourselves and consider their meanings.

Though Herder does not necessarily say it explicitly, it is evident that what he has in mind when he describes the Orient is the Hebrew people of the Old Testament (Bruford 1962, 194-195). It is during this period that wisdom and piety first arose and set the foundations for the education of mankind (Herder 2004, 5). Herder thinks taking a sincere look at the purpose and determinate context of this age serves as the most potent check on the unbelief that characterizes philosophy of his day (Herder 2004, 90). Instead of treating the origin of religion as a primitive and fearful reaction to the incomprehensible, Herder, while granting this point to some extent, thinks we should rather understand the earliest forms of religion as a kind of ‘historico-physical philosophy’ (Herder 2015, 82; Crowe 2009). Religion does not arise out of “slavish fear and

senseless stupidity,” but is an organization of sensual phenomena out of, “awe-struck adoration,” and is man’s, “comforter and guide through the dark and dangerous mazes of life” (Herder 1833 I, 50; Herder 1800, 103). In his essay *On the Earliest Documents of Mankind*, Herder describes religions as, “ancient theological-philosophical-historical national traditions [that] were enwrapped in a sensuous, image-rich language, which could arouse the curiosity of the people, charge its imagination, guide its inclinations, and amuse its ear” (Herder 2015, 84). He describes this as a language full of images, yet entirely devoid of abstractions and scholarly concepts. The latter are precisely the qualities he finds to be overexaggerated in his own age. The problem with rationalist criticism of ancient mythology is that it approaches these texts as repositories of various historical facts rather than understanding them within their own ‘center of gravity.’ That is to say, rather than understanding them as what they are: “poetic documents of the Morn, drawn from the sagas of earlier times” (Herder 2015, 93). Here is not the place for, “rigid demonstration or historical documentation,” but for the critic to, “give their ear to the tone of the piece” (Herder 2015, 93).

Poetry and the Historical Artist

For Herder, these early documents demonstrate the ultimate unity of the mind’s powers. In his essay on Shakespeare, written a couple years after *This too*, Herder describes something similar. Just like the most ancient poetry of mankind, the plays of Shakespeare are a natural expression of a particular age. Rather than an attempt at an artistic recreation according to established dogma — e.g., the rules of Greek drama we find in Aristotle’s *Poetics* — Shakespeare builds upon his own national tradition of historical dramas and puppet plays (Herder 2006, 297-298). When Herder says, “In Greece the drama developed in a way that it could not in the North,” he is touching at the heart of his argument in *This too* (Herder 2006,

292). In order to understand something, we need to abandon prejudices and forms of mental idolatry that prevent us from ‘feeling our way in,’ and treating it within its own particular web of effects and causes (Herder 2004, 25-26 & 43-44; Herder 2006, 292-294). Understanding the genius of Shakespeare helped Herder a great deal in arriving at this idea, and Herder will continue to say that this is because it is poetry that best expresses a culture or epochs particularity.²³ On the importance of Shakespeare to Herder’s thought, Robert Clark remarks, “...it can be said that Herder’s philosophy of history developed out of his recognition of Shakespeare as the great poetic genius of the self-contained age of world history” (Clark 1955, 151). Herder criticizes those who dismiss Shakespeare for not abiding by the Greek rules of drama in the same way as he criticizes those who render ancient Greece into their own ‘Favoritvolk’ in *This too* (Herder 2004, 79; Herder 2006, 294-296). By making plays that rigidly abide by Aristotle’s dramatic rules — as was done in French plays or even in the German and French translations of Shakespeare’s works — Greek culture is treated as if it is a universal and trans-historical schema that is integral to the concept of ‘plays’ themselves (Clark 1955, 150-152; Gjesdal 2017, 134). What Herder celebrates in Shakespeare is ultimately very similar to what he describes in ancient poetry or the poetic expressions of other cultures; it is that he does not force his expression into a mold of Greek, or other, rules, but directly expresses a particular time and place according to his own individual genius (Herder 2006, 297-298).²⁴ Herder celebrates Shakespeare’s ability to create a “wondrous whole” out of a great diversity of characters and circumstances. He says that the plays are not meant to follow the logic of a single

²³ Herder continually refers to Shakespeare as a poet or ‘dramatic poet’ throughout the essay. At one point he remarks, “And Shakespeare is not a dramatic poet? He who embraces a hundred scenes of a world event in his arms, orders them with his gaze, and breathes into them the one soul that suffuses and animates everything; he who captivates our attention, our heart, our every passion, our entire soul from beginning to end...” (Herder 2006, 300).

²⁴ This is why Herder says, of Shakespeare, “Who can conceive of a greater poet of northern man and of his age?” (Herder 2006, 299).

story but are meant to make us feel the ‘human spirit’ and to convey archetypal relations between various personalities (Herder 2006, 299-303).²⁵ This is one of the unique qualities of poetry and why it cannot be reduced to a number of empirical phenomena. It is through poetic genius that we go beyond the numerically infinite and unify the manifold in language.

When Herder criticizes those who do not understand Shakespeare and his transcendence of formal rules, he criticizes rationalism in another form. In terms of artistic expression, it is the use of formal rules as if these are a constitutive part of art itself.²⁶ He thinks the rationalizers do the same thing with the faculty of reason; that is to say, according to Herder, they treat the reasoning capacity as if it is unencumbered by history and is, as a result, abstracted from the unity of the soul. But this is not really how thinking proceeds. This is why Herder wants to express what he finds in ancient poetry, and even Shakespeare, to his contemporaries, because this demonstrates that there is more to the mind than abstraction or philosophizing. The intended effect is to reveal the unity of the mind’s forces to an audience that has deluded themselves with reason. Poetry, and especially the Bible, which, as Urtext, is the origin of poetry, reveals the forces of the mind in harmony with creation. Herder is not an ‘irrationalist’ who dismisses reasoning *tout court* (see Steinby 2009, 61). What he wants to see is a use of demonstration that does not limit itself to *one* power of the mind (c.f. Zammito et al 2010). This is the idea behind his maxim of ‘feeling your way in.’ It does not mean the abandonment of critical historical

²⁵ It is this same quality that Harold Bloom is referring to when he subtitles his book on Shakespeare ‘The Invention of the Human.’

²⁶ Milton is also an example of such an artist. In his short preface to the revised edition of *Paradise Lost*, ‘The Verse,’ Milton describes his choice of verse without rhyme as a resistance to the rule of rhyme. He says “The Measure is English Heroic Verse without Rime, as that of Homer in Greek, and Virgil in Latin; Rime being no necessary Adjunct or true Ornament of Poem or good Verse, in longer Works especially, but the Invention of a barbarous Age, to set off wretched matter and lame Meeter; grac’t indeed since by the use of some famous modern Poets, carried away by Custom, but much to thir own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse then else they would have exprest them” (Milton 1674, ‘The Verse’). According to Herder, Milton is an example of a great artist, along with Homer, Shakespeare, and Dante (Herder 2002, 204 & 226).

analysis, but it is the recognition that world history itself is, in the words of Schiller, something of a ‘sublime object’ that defies our ability to understand it as a discrete set of causes and effects. As a result, any critical historical analysis requires an aesthetic orientation (Schiller 1902, 147; Heinz and Clairmont 2009, 48). Herder’s ideal historian is thus described as a ‘real historical artist’ and the “painter of a grand portrait of the most fitting composition, he is the historical genius, the true creator of a history!” (Herder 2015, 226).

Though Herder is too much of a skeptic to believe any single historian could portray the myriad of history’s events according to a purposeful relationship and live up to this standard of a ‘historical artist,’ it is important that ideally this is what the historian should be, and he often tasks himself with accomplishing this history. He remarks in *This too*, that it is his ‘great subject’ to trace a ‘plan of striving onward’ in the history of mankind (Herder 2004, 30; Menges 1995, 13-14). This is part of why the Orient or great artists like Shakespeare are important for Herder — because he thinks historical work is a kind of artwork. In order to construct this historical art, it is necessary to grasp the imaginative power of language. Herder assigns a special importance to the language of the Old Testament — especially the first chapters of Genesis — because he considers the Orient as the ‘cradle of the human species,’ and the Old Testament as the artistic expression of the origin of mankind (Herder 1833 I, 47-50; Menges 1995, 9-10; Bultmann 2009, 238; Wildschut 2019, 144-162 & 173-192; Nisbet 2021).

The examples which the ‘historical genius’ must inevitably build upon are poetic and have developed genetically from their origin in the ancient Orient and the Bible. The way Herder makes fundamental use of figurative language in his own philosophy is a hint that he was himself attempting to disclose this character of the mind and language through his writing. The anecdote of Herder rendering Kant’s lectures into verse during his early years as his student is also an apt

example of this quality in Herder (Zammito 2002, 140). As we turn to his book on Hebrew poetry, we encounter a similar idea. The entire first volume is written in dialogue form, and both volumes are accompanied by numerous of Herder's own translations of passages from the Old Testament and Milton. (Gjesdal 2017, 69-72 & 185-186). Herder calls his translations in *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* the 'fruit' of the text, while his criticism and commentary are simply the shell (Herder 1833 I, 18; Herder 2002, 57-64 & 73). The argument is that a purely demonstrative exposition of Old Testament poetry could not accurately express this 'spirit' to the reader. It is mainly through the imaginative reconstruction, necessitated by the act of translation, that Herder hopes to illustrate the true spirit of the Old Testament and its importance for his time. Herder continually refuses to limit himself to demonstrative language, and it is not by chance that his most well-known works were essays, a form of writing that is particularly receptive to his figurative style. The character of language as religious, mythic, poetic, reveals something universal about humanity itself and the way thinking develops; human consciousness does not begin from a totally logical standpoint but is rather poetic in its logic from the beginning, as illustrated in the Bible.

Herder's use of the Ages of Humanity metaphor in *This too* fits into this context as well. Herder uses a well-known metaphor in order to point out its flaws, while at the same time presenting a new version of it that has interpretive value. Herder uses natural analogies of growth and development alongside allusions to biblical metaphors. When Binoche remarks that the tree metaphor has a Christian subtext, he cites Matthew 13:32 and Luke 13:19, two versions of the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Binoche 2013, 214, note 85). Jesus makes the comparison between a mustard seed and the kingdom of heaven, suggesting that both arise out of humble beginnings. There is certainly much more to it than that, but in terms of Herder's use of it in his essay, we

can identify the mustard seed's growth into a great tree, akin to the kingdom of Heaven, to Herder's providential view of history as the growth of a single tree.²⁷ At the end of *This too*, Herder says a "perspective" that, 'surveys the whole species' would observe the "ripe harvest of the seeds that we dispersed among the people" (Herder 2004, 97). A philosophy of history that "binds together the most disparate scenes" is thus a reconstruction of the seeds God has planted in time. But the beginnings of the great tree as a small mustard seed, less than all seeds on earth,²⁸ is also analogous to the enlightenment treatment of the Bible as childish dreams, which misconstrues the humble beginnings of Man. Furthermore, the Parable of the Mustard Seed can also be interpreted as an allusion to the humble beginnings of Jesus, who is the 'seed' that was planted and became a great tree through the spread of his Word. Herder's attempt to develop a historical context for the Bible as the essential document of man's origin has the analogous effect of 'planting the seed' in his contemporary age of "unbelief," i.e., arguing for the relevance of the Bible in terms of its historical context in the Orient (Herder 2004, 90). This attempt to create a real basis for the study of the Bible is part and parcel of his more general critique of the enlightenment, and it is only possible according to the hermeneutic developed in *This too*.²⁹ Herder understands the Bible as a poetic expression of a particular epoch, and this allows him to preserve a place for the Bible beyond both the rationalist and dogmatic criticisms (Baillam 1999, 54-56).

²⁷ Compare also with Hamann's similar formulation in his *London Writings*, "The whole of creation is the trunk of a tree that is spread out with countless branches. Taken together, the whole of the human race must appear depicted to us in the same way, and every single nation in it, yes, every person, as a seed of grain which contains the entire design of all creation" (Hamann 2021, 359-360).

²⁸ Mark 4:31, another version of the same parable.

²⁹ It should be noted that Herder ultimately wants to create a real basis for the study of any cultural expression, not only the Bible. However, the Bible holds special significance for Herder because he views it as the 'oldest document of mankind,' as mentioned earlier, but also due to the more general fact that biblical hermeneutics were more directly related to philosophical problems in Herder's time.

Figurative and poetic language are not any less relevant than the rational-scientific mode of thought in terms of truth value (Godel 2016, 33-36). This is something that is, at least in part, inspired by the Bible itself. As Northrop Frye remarks, the language of the Bible is not logical and scientific but metaphorical and anti-logical (Frye & Macpherson 2004, 21). By understanding the Bible and other ancient poems as specific expressions of human culture, Herder avoids applying his own contemporary skepticism or rationalism to this text, i.e., what is necessarily foreign to the subject being studied. Rational criticism on the basis of a distinct faculty of the mind is not sufficient or even applicable to a proper understanding and interpretation of history, religion, and poetry. Instead, Herder develops his hermeneutics by bringing forth the underlying figurative and metaphorical character of language itself, of which the Bible provides a seemingly inexhaustible source.

The importance of *This too* is not simply in Herder's 'historicism,' or his principle of cultural individuality. It is also necessary to understand his critique of rational philosophies of history in the context of the Bible and *its* depiction of the origin of man. This was not a brutal and primitive age, but the conditions in which God first taught man. As we turn to *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, we see that Herder uses this historical framing of the Orient in order to interpret the Old Testament. We must understand mythopoetic texts as a kind of historiography; they are depictions of a specific worldview. The interpreter must therefore consider, above all, historical context — both in terms of particularity, and in terms of the overall development of humanity. This requires a hermeneutic that reconciles 'natural facts' to their place within linguistic artefacts. Herder seems to think he has found this kind of perspective within the ancient mind that produced the Bible. Despite the allusions to a kind of relativism, Herder does, at the same time, assign special importance to the Bible in terms of its historical identification

with the origin of man, as well as the place of Christianity as the “religion of the universe,” which expresses God’s providence in history (Herder 2004, 36-37).

Chapter 2

Hebrew Poetry and the Ancient Mind

I have sketched out the general interpretive principles Herder develops in order to properly understand the Orient in *This too*. Now we must turn to the specific critical-historical techniques he elaborates for the Bible. Here Herder wants to create a basis for an ‘enlightened’ study of the Bible. He is, on the one hand, dissatisfied with those free-thinkers, whom he criticizes in *This too*, who demote the Bible to a series of fragmented fictions from a bygone age. On the other hand, Herder cannot be satisfied with the rational interpretations of the Bible either. This is the idea that, for example, Jesus was a great moral teacher, and that these moral teachings can be abstracted from the Bible to provide a universal morality. In Dilthey’s seminal text on Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics, he identifies Kant with this position. He remarks: “...[I]n an age when...historical observation meant fragmentation, Kant could only succeed by resorting to an inflexible idealism that attempted to impose unity on Christianity from the outside, rather than immersing itself in the heart of Scripture, and thereby coming to grips with its true roots” (Dilthey 1996a, 96). These roots are what Herder hopes to identify in *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*. It is imperative that we understand the actual historical Jesus and we do not abstract him from this particularity.³⁰ Herder wants to show a way to interpret the Bible that does not dissolve its historical context nor its universality. It is for this reason that Sheehan, in his book *The*

³⁰ Herder’s position is much like the German theologian that Bolano refers to in his novel *By Night in Chile*. The short passage is worth quoting and exemplifies Herder’s conception of Jesus: “One day the Pope is having a quiet conversation with a German theologian in one of the rooms of the Vatican. Suddenly two French archaeologists burst in, very agitated and nervous, and they tell the Holy Father they have just got back from Israel with some very good news and some rather bad news. The Pope beseeches them to come out with it, and not to leave him in suspense. Talking over each other, the Frenchmen say the good news is they have discovered the Holy Sepulchre. The Holy Sepulchre? says the Pope. The Holy Sepulchre. Not a shadow of a doubt. The Pope is moved to tears. What’s the bad news? he asks, drying his eyes. Well, inside the Holy Sepulchre we found the body of Christ. The Pope passes out. The Frenchmen rush to his side and fan his face. The only one who’s calm is the German theologian, and he says: Ah, so Jesus really existed?” The passage is in *By Night in Chile* published by ‘New Directions’ in 2003 - it is found on page 79.

Enlightenment Bible, remarks that, while Herder did seek to detach the Bible from theological dogmatics, he did not seek to “demote the Bible to irrelevance” (Sheehan 2005, 172).

Herder’s argument in *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* addresses specific debates within biblical hermeneutics. It should be noted that the modern idea of hermeneutics really derives itself from debates on the correct way to interpret the Bible. Dilthey describes the fact that the flowering of the ‘historical mind’ in the 18th century arises out of these concerns (Dilthey 1996a, 34).³¹ In philosophical terms, the overall problem that biblical hermeneutics sought to address was that of universal truth (Dilthey 1996a, 54). The question was: what hermeneutical techniques could derive the universal basis of the Bible and Christianity as the ‘true religion of humanity,’ as Herder calls it (Herder 2002, 303; c.f. Herder 2004, 36).³² But also, how could a single individual reveal this truth through their own reading. In cruder terms, a correct hermeneutic of the Bible would reveal both the ‘one’ in the ‘many,’ and the ‘many’ in the ‘one.’

The Bible Understood as A Poem

Herder thinks he can resolve this problem by treating the Bible as a piece of literature and, in the case of the Old Testament specifically, a *national* piece of literature. Herder is inserting himself directly into the critical-historical tradition of Protestant hermeneutics with thinkers like Lowth, Michaelis, and Lessing. Herder makes this evident in the introduction to the first volume of *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*. He remarks that Lowth’s study of the Old Testament, *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum*, is a ‘beautiful and justly celebrated’ work on the subject (Herder 1833 I, 13; Bultmann 2009, 234). Now what was important in Lowth’s book, evident in the title itself, was that he popularized the idea of interpreting the Old Testament as a

³¹ Dilthey remarks, “The science of hermeneutics actually begins with Protestantism...”

³² Forster translates “true religion of humanity,” while Pellerin and Evrigenis translate to “the actual religion of mankind.”

form of poetry. In his lectures he developed an interpretation according to the tradition of literary analysis and classical poetry (Lowth 1835, 1-28 & 29-35; Clark 1955, 27; Legaspi 2010, 107-116). What is most relevant for us here is that Lowth found parallelism to be the particular style of Hebrew poetry (Lowth 1835, 200-216; Prickett 1988, 109-110; Sheehan 2005, 149; Weidner 2005, 180; Legaspi 2010, 111-116). It is these two general points that were of most importance for Herder, and he opens the first volume with his mention of Lowth's book. Herder is not doing this as a kind of prostration before an important predecessor; he is trying to carve his own place and indicate his innovation in the hermeneutics of the Old Testament. The problem with Lowth's analysis was that he did not sufficiently ground his interpretation within the national and cultural traditions of the Hebrew people (Dilthey 1996a, 89; Steinby 2009, 61). There was an inherent worry in treating the Bible simply as a piece of literature; in that the arguments concerning the universality of the Bible seemed to be tied up in questions of divine authorship, which would become irrelevant in the face of Lowth's critique (Clark 1955, 28; Wildschut 2019, 139-144). Herder's solution to interpret the Old Testament as not simply poetry, but Hebrew poetry, had the objective of trying to quell these doubts by arguing for the universal import of the Bible in terms of it being the most ancient national poetry of humanity and the first expression of monotheism (Herder 1833 I, 57; Herder 2015, 90-95; Clark 1955, 326; Baildam 1999, 90; Crowe 2009, 270). This is part of the significance behind the title of Herder's earlier, and much maligned work, *The Oldest Document of Mankind* (Clark 1995, 164-166; Gjesdal 2017, 186-187; Nisbet 2021).

If the Bible is to be understood as literature — and is thus open to the 'secular' tools of literary criticism — the idea of its 'divine inspiration' would be no different from the inspiration of geniuses like Homer, Virgil, or Shakespeare. Herder, the preacher and philosopher, was aware

of this problem. To account for it, he approached the Bible, not as some sort of supernatural text, but rather as a text written by humans, for humans. He says, “One must read the Bible in a human way: for it is a book written by human beings for human beings” (Herder 1993, 218). Religion, and thus the Bible, is, as Herder says, “meant to accomplish nothing but purposes for human beings, through human beings” (Herder 2004, 38). If divine inspiration means nothing more than human genius, this is perfectly acceptable for Herder. In fact, it is the only way to approach the problem. Concerning Herder’s interpretive stance here, John Baildam remarks, “As literature, the Bible did not lose its character as revelation or as an inspired book, but it was divinely inspired revelation only in the same way that all literature—and nature itself—was also divinely inspired revelation” (Baildam 1999, 94). When Herder’s friend and mentor Hamann says: “To me every book is a Bible,” he is getting at a similar idea (Sparling 2011, 48-49). Divine inspiration is always *human* inspiration. However, unlike Hamann, Herder does not rely on an explicit Christological typology for his argument. Nor does he retreat to a ‘*salto mortale*’ like Jacobi. Herder is trying to reconcile the Bible with rationalism and the enlightenment itself. God, the Bible, rationalism — can be reconciled and revealed in their true nature only through historical investigation. Just as Herder holds the idea that both Shakespeare and Leibniz are ‘poets,’ he also thinks, for example, the truths of the Bible could be revealed scientifically.

The first volume of *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* is almost entirely in the form of a dialogue between two characters, Euthyphron and Alciphron. Throughout the book, Euthyphron is attempting to disclose the quality of the Old Testament; he wants to undress Alciphron’s prejudices towards Hebrew poetry and show him its true character. Most commentators of *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* understand Euthyphron to be a representation of Herder’s point of view (Clark 1955, 296; Gjesdal 2017, 190). But Gjesdal correctly notes that, as with any

dialogue, the meaning is ultimately meant to be conveyed through the interplay of the characters (Gjesdal 2017, 155 & 186). For the most part, Euthyphron is in essence a Herderian critic, while Alciphron is almost a caricature of what Herder perceives as the prejudices of the Enlightenment. The first volume is a series of ten dialogues concerning mostly the Creation story and the Book of Job, and more generally the character of the poetry in the Bible itself. In this volume, Herder directs the most attention to the Book of Job; and he understands it, along with the Books of Moses, as one of the oldest books of the Old Testament (Herder 1833 I, 81). In the fourth dialogue, Euthyphron finds his friend Alciphron reading the Book of Job. Alciphron is surprised by the intelligence he finds in the book and inquires to his friend about its dating. While Euthyphron confirms that the book is of the most ancient times, remarking that when he reads it, he listens to a voice that comes from ‘perhaps three or four thousand years ago.’ He also tells his friend to, “Pass over, if you please, the consideration of time and authorship, and confine yourself to the work, as it is, in its poverty and its richness” (Herder 1833 I, 81). However, Alciphron is persistent, and in the next dialogue he asks again to explain the time and place in which the author of Job lived (Herder 1833 I, 103). Euthyphron says that if we really want to know the only way is by first finding out ‘where Job dwelt.’ Questions of authorship cannot be simply answered on the basis of dogma or tradition, nor should one’s enquiry be clouded by anachronistic concepts — they must be addressed based on an historical investigation of the text itself.

Herder takes Job 1 for granted: “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job.” Alciphron believes this refers to the valley of Damascus in Syria, however Euthyphron warns him that the character of Job is not of specifically Syrian, but Arabian and Egyptian. The idea of Uz being a city in Syria might go back to the work of Flavius Josephus. Josephus finds another Uz, one of the descendants of Shem in Genesis 10:23, and says that he founded two

cities in Syria, Damascus and Trachonitis (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk., 1, Ch., 6:4). Euthyphron similarly uses textual analysis to determine the location of Uz. He says, take a look at Genesis 36:28. In this chapter, the genealogy of Esau is laid out, and verse twenty-eight refers to a descendent named Uz. Euthyphron uses various other biblical verses to argue that the land of Uz ultimately refers to Idumaea, or the land of Edom (Herder 1833 I, 103-105).³³ He goes on to say that other prophets in the Bible describe the land of Edom as a classical land of ‘Oriental and Arabic wisdom’ (Herder 1833 I, 104). The culmination is Herder’s picture of Job as an ‘Eastern Emir.’ As a result, Euthyphron remarks that Job does not even recognize the Laws of Moses and that the text should instead be related to the style of an ‘Oriental tribunal.’ Oriental here simply means: “the general notion of what belongs to the Hebrew in common with its kindred dialects” (Herder 1833 I, 105).

Herder wants to put Job in the context of Oriental symbolism, and, for example, he argues for an understanding of the Behemoth in Job as representing the hippopotamus. He says that the word behemoth is probably a Hebraic transliteration of the Egyptian ‘p-ehe-mouth,’ which refers to the hippopotamus (Herder 1833 I, 107). Northrop Frye says that the word Behemoth comes from the Hebrew word for beast. However, Frye also remarks that the word probably developed out of the idea of a hippopotamus and, in a strikingly similar tone to Herder, he says that the Leviathan and Behemoth, “...are both Egyptian animals, and it is perhaps significant that Job, although he observes the Israelite law, comes from Uz in the kingdom of Edom, and so is strictly speaking outside the jurisdiction of the Biblical countries” (Frye & Macpherson 2004, 187-188). The principle here is that Herder analyzes the symbols in Job according to their broader historical and natural context. Herder distinguishes the Book of Job

³³ Herder continually uses Idumae instead of Edom, the former “is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Edom, as found in the Septuagint.” Strong’s Greek 2401 Ἰδουμαία.

for its ‘oriental’ style and seeks clarification within this cultural tradition. He discerns a direct conjunction between questions of style and specific natural circumstances. The move to Egypt is effected by the style of the text, and the common symbolism therein relates directly to a particular natural phenomenon, here a hippopotamus. This is a perfect microcosm of Herder’s hermeneutics. Herder wants to identify the correspondence between a text’s empirical reality and its expression as literature. He thinks that the function of this literature is thoroughly rational, in that it is an attempt at ordering reality and disclosing its coherence. The Bible is far from irrational, on the converse, it is a rational expression of a specific community’s relation to God in the furthest antiquity. Herder does risk a circular argument, in that the question could be raised as to how the particular religion of one people in history could be raised to universality. He does not directly answer this question. In *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, he is content to stay at the level of interpreting Hebrew poetry within its own context; elsewhere he argues for the universality of Christianity on the basis of its syncretic character and the teachings of Jesus (Herder 1993, 229-230; Herder 2004, 37; Schmidt 2017, 193-194). In the latter case, the universal importance of the Old Testament people is still unclear on historical grounds. To this, I believe Herder would be satisfied to say, with Blake, “The antiquities of every Nation under Heaven, is no less sacred than that of the Jews. How other antiquities came to be neglected and disbelieved, while those of the Jews are collected and arranged, is an enquiry, worthy of both the Antiquarian and the Divine” (Blake 2008, 543). The enquiries of the antiquarian cannot be necessarily solved on their own; but this is just another clue pointing to Herder’s interpretation of the fragmented character of the Bible — it is a book composed over many years, and in the context of a myriad of cultures and their development. The Bible is not to be preserved against historical or literary criticism on the basis of divine authorship or any other appeal to dogma. Herder believes that using these

critical ‘secular’ tools does not imply the dissolution of Christianity, or religion, because he thinks this a part of its spirit — to see God through a knowledge of humanity. It is important to note that using literary criticism or appealing to natural causes is not necessarily secular in the way we might understand it: as a kind of disjunction with religion. As we saw with Dilthey, this is not really the case because much of this literary criticism arose out of a study of the Bible, and many theologians appealed to natural causes to explain miracles in the Bible.³⁴ We might say that Herder is ‘reconciling’ his naturalism with his theology, but he is really starting from a theological viewpoint in the first place; hence Koepke’s suggestion to begin with the latter in our study of Herder.

In the fourth dialogue, Euthyphron asks Alciphron who he thinks authored the Book of Job. Alciphron gives the traditional answer that Moses composed it while he was with Jethro. However, Euthyphron contradicts this and says that he finds no evidence to prove Mosaic authorship of the book. Earlier in the book the two interlocutors agree on the Mosaic authorship of the Book of Genesis, so the distinction here is quite relevant (Herder 1833 I, 55-56). Not only does Euthyphron say there is no positive evidence towards Mosaic authorship of the book of Job, but he also finds that it bears no similarity to the other books attributed to Moses. Euthyphron remarks that he has ‘studied the poetry of Moses without prejudice,’ but that the ‘concise, lofty, and heroic’ style of Job is foreign to the ‘flowing and gentle’ style of Moses (Herder 1833 I, 108). The idea is again that only the analysis of a polyhistor can get at the actual truth behind questions of things like authorship. This analysis would combine historical research with literary analysis and philological studies. Moses, and the author of Job, composed their books out of the specific sensuous reality they inhabit. This means that the interpreter has to, in a sense, artifice

³⁴ See Charles Bonnet for example (Beiser 1987, 78-79).

the totality of this particular reality in order to properly interpret the text at hand. It is for Herder absurd for Moses to have authored Job, not because Moses is not a reliable figure, but because his historical and cultural influences are at odds with the content of Job.

Herder and The Historical Context of the Old Testament

Earlier, in the second dialogue, Euthyphron and Alciphron discuss the nature of the ‘Elohim’ found in the first chapter of Genesis (Herder 1833 I, 55). The significance of this word is that it differs from the word used for God in the second chapter. The first two chapters of Genesis are often understood as parallel accounts of the act of Creation. When the word ‘God’ appears in the first chapter of Genesis of the King James Version, it is a translation of this Hebrew term Elohim. In contrast, in the second chapter, you find the translation ‘LORD God’ appear again and again, something that is absent from the previous chapter. ‘LORD’ in the KJV is a translation of the Hebrew term ‘Jehovah’ the well-known name for the Hebrew national God, which we also know as Yahweh. This phrase ‘LORD God’ can be rendered as ‘Jehovah Elohim’ if we use the Hebrew terms. The point here is that there seems to be a strange inconsistency in the appellations of this ‘God’ in the Creation stories of Genesis — why is Jehovah absent from the first chapter? Herder’s method depends on such questions. As we will see, a philological study of the varying names of God in the first two chapters of Genesis can reveal the historical context in which these texts were written. The point here is not to solve for the meaning of Elohim, but to demonstrate the intersection of questions of philology with those of theology and historical criticism. As Frye reminds us. Elohim is a plural form of *’ēlôha*, meaning God. This was a source of controversy as it was thought to imply an existence of a multiplicity of Gods. However, the ‘im’ of Elohim is, as Frye remarks, “what is known as an intensive plural, a plural of majesty or impressiveness” (Frye & MacPherson 2004, 32). This is why Jehovah Elohim is

rendered to LORD God; it is a compound name where ‘elohim’ functions as a kind of emphasis on the word Jehovah, denoting Jehovah as *the* supreme God (Smith 2001, 71-72).³⁵ It is probable that Herder is aware of this, but he does not dismiss the possible influence of earlier forms of a kind of Eastern polytheism on this use of language, because it fits within the broader historical context of the Old Testament (see Herder 1800, 274). Here it would be absurd to appeal to authority in order to deny the existence of earlier mythologies exerting an influence on the Bible. Herder, as a Protestant, believes a study of the Bible’s material and historical context is one of the pressing tasks of his own age. Herder hopes that with such a study he could eventually support his argument that the Old Testament is one of the oldest texts of Man and that its cultural context is that of the Orient.

Continuing with the discussion of the Elohim, Alciphron asks Euthyphron what he makes of their appearance in the ‘most ancient hymn to the creation,’ i.e., the creation story in Genesis. Euthyphron responds that since Moses was ‘the great enemy of polytheism,’ and thus would ‘certainly’ not have introduced the use of the term, then he must have found the term in some other, more ancient, ‘picture of creation’ (Herder 1833 I, 55). Herder is asserting the existence of an Ur-poem that stands behind the creation stories of Genesis. Genesis 1-2 is not an individual creation of Moses’ but is rather a collection of the most ancient creation stories which he is supposed to have edited together.³⁶ This helps explain the seemingly parallel accounts of creation that we find in these first two chapters. Herder does not understand ‘Mosaic authorship’ to be a rigid rule that the Pentateuch in its entirety is an individual creation of Moses. He understands this to refer to a specific connection between these books and the character of Moses (Herder

³⁵ See Strong’s concordance H430.

³⁶ In *On the Oldest Document of Mankind*, Herder describes the author of Genesis 1 as the ‘ancient sage of nature’ (Herder 1993, 108).

1833 I, 55-56). This is what allows him to assume the seemingly heretical idea — that Moses collected ancient tales of creation and edited them together — while at the same time, Herder believes himself to be advancing a specifically Christian position.

Euthyphron explains that Elohim probably originally referred to the various nature spirits of antiquity. He says, “To the bodily eye the theatre of the world is destitute of causes, and yet intensely filled with effects.” It is only natural that these effects were originally determined to be causally motivated by a specific spirit, which would in turn be attributed to various works of creation: a tree, an animal, or a plant, for example (Herder 1833 I, 56). According to Euthyphron, and presumably Herder, this is not polytheism but a doctrine of spirits akin to angelology. He says that in the psalms of David the Elohim are understood to be a class of spirits only somewhat superior to man, which ultimately came from ancient Oriental poetry (Herder 1833 I, 57). This has been corroborated by some more recent scholars, who understand the Elohim as referring to local nature Gods that the Israelites fused with their God Yahweh after the invasion of Canaan (Eissfeldt 1956, 26). Finally, he remarks that monotheism was a direct development out of these conceptions of spirits, which became “the most ancient obstacle to the progress of idolatry” and which allowed Man to understand the world as a ‘united whole’ (Herder 1833 I, 57). Herder does not immediately dismiss the presence of some kind of older conception of spirits in the Book of Genesis on dogmatic grounds, nor does he simply reduce it to a reproduction of natural phenomena. He places the appearance of this word within both the text itself and what he knows of its historical context. The personification of natural phenomena occurs within the Oriental context of the oldest biblical texts, as well as the Egyptian context of Moses. This does not reduce the ‘truth’ of the Bible but places it within the overall development of mankind.

Today we have even more clues as to this historical development. In 1928, archaeologists discovered a store of cuneiform tablets written in an unknown semitic language. These tablets were found in North-Western Syria, and eventually this language came to be known as Ugaritic and the tablets were dated to around 1200 BC. Among these tablets there were a variety of literary texts. John Huehnergard, in his introduction to these texts, remarks, “Ugaritic literary texts are poetic in the fashion of Biblical Hebrew poetry; that is, they use of parallelism, formulaic epithets...” (Huehnergard 2012, 85). Among the most well-known of these Ugaritic poems is the so-called ‘Baal Cycle.’ This is a series of myths concerning a god Baal and his struggle for power. In the cycle there is a kind of divine council that is led by the God El who is the father of Baal and another god Yam, who Baal is fighting.³⁷ Now what we need to note here is that El is used throughout the Bible and is often translated simply as God — the term Elohim is the plural form of El (Anderson 2017, 264).³⁸ It is therefore very likely that the language in the Bible describes the development of these conceptions of God, and in direct relation to the preceding or parallel forms of religious worship. There is a great deal of corroborating evidence for Herder’s view that the Old Testament was created within the context of other Oriental mythologies, but unlike a great deal of scientific work on these traditions today, Herder approached this issue with a theological purpose. Herder used this influence to suggest that the creation stories in Genesis contained the oldest records of human wisdom concerning the creation of the earth, and this is precisely what he says in the *Ideas* (Herder 1800, 274-279). Thus, in order to understand Herder’s position here, concerning the creation and nature of the earth, it is necessary to, at first, apprehend the determinate context of the Old Testament, which provides us with the first poetic depictions of its inner harmony and order. This suggests

³⁷ See (Smith 1994) for a translation and commentary on the poetic texts of Ugarit.

³⁸ In Strong’s Concordance 433 it says eloah originates as a prolongation of el.

Herder's principle of interpreting cultural artefacts not only within their own particular context, but within the context of the myriad of other cultures it interacted with. A single culture must not be interpreted simply on the basis of its own 'uniqueness' but within an overall historical nexus. The discovery of other ancient mythologies, new biblical texts, and so on can only serve to further evidence the ways of God with man. This type of analysis eschews appeals to supernatural causes, because it affirms that the Bible's content is a historical mythology. At the same time, because it is myth, it is not irrational, nor is it a mirage in front of scientific facts. Myths are creations that symbolically reveal ideas in a historical form. The historical form allows the interpreter to engage in the context of a myth's development, while the representational content describes fundamental aspects of the human mind (see Beiser 2020, 66-71).

When Herder examines the Bible, he does not want a 'top-down' approach abstracted from historical particularity. If biblical episodes find their context in previous mythologies, all this does is give us a deeper understanding of the most ancient parables and examples of humanity. Cultural particularities are individual, but they are not intelligible in some kind of vacuum — they must be understood within the purposive development of mankind. Cultures always develop *within* humanity. Just as in *This too*, there is some kind of teleology at play. It is providence that our childhood was in the Orient and that we retain knowledge of it particularly through the Bible. It is also providence that in this mature age we now have the privilege to examine human history from the 'top' of the tree. Interpretation does not solely rely on the subject being studied and its specific historical context. We must also critically engage with the particular age we inhabit as the historical observer, which necessarily mediates how we examine history. History is a dynamic unfolding, always in flux; this is what makes it difficult, but all the

more rewarding, to trace its protean development (Wildschut 2019, 101-130). Herder says it was his ‘great subject’ to, “[bind] together the most disparate scenes without entangling them, to show how they are mutually related, growing out of one another, losing themselves in each other, all only moments in the particular, mere means towards a purpose through progression...” (Herder 2004, 32; Gjesdal 2017, 162-163).

In Exodus 6:2-3, where Moses dialogues with God concerning the fate of the Israelites in Egypt, God says: “And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the Lord: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them.” Now if we render the appellations of God to their Hebrew form, as Herder does in his own translations, we get something like: “Elohim also spoke to Moses and said to him, I am Yahweh. I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of El Shaddai, but by my name YAHWEH was I not known to them.” Here we have three different terms for God. We have already discussed the significance of the term Elohim (Anderson 2017, 262). El Shaddai is another appellation that refers to the God El, and the meaning of Shaddai is an epithet which exalts the God El with this title that is translated in the KJV as ‘Almighty.’ The idea is that the early patriarchs did not worship Yahweh — ‘but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them’ — but rather venerated El Shaddai, the Most High: אֱלֹהִים שַׁדַּי (Smith 2001, 141-148). In turn, the relationship between these two gods, Yahweh, and El, is problematized. The consensus is that either Yahweh grew out of El, or that it eventually merged with El in a kind of syncretic development (Day 2000, 13-17; Anderson 2015, 100-102; Anderson 2017, 362). As the Old Testament scholar, Otto Eissfeldt remarked, “...there is no lack of evidence to show that Yahweh who invaded Canaan, the sphere of El in the first instance, acknowledged the superior status of El but then progressively supplanted him and so became the

highest and even the sole god” (Eissfeldt 1956, 26). This syncretic development of God also led another scholar to conclude: “If God does not change, our understanding of God does” (Anderson 2017, 266).³⁹ Just as Herder conceives it, this is not a conception of God as some superfluous entity used in order to problematize the individuality of a specific culture. The relationship between a conception of God and its literary or symbolic construction does not relativize God but demonstrates that history is not static and our conception of the Deity is perhaps the greatest testament to this development. Again, the point here is not to corroborate Herder thesis with modern biblical scholarship, but to excavate the historical context of humanity’s childhood, which Herder views as supplying the ‘simplest’ images of God’s education of mankind concerning things like language and the creation of the world (Herder 1833 II, 28-29). The language of God develops in time and necessitates some kind of immanent development according to the protean development of history we found in *This too* (Bunge 1990, 309-313). This is not relativism but a recognition of God’s ways in time as a revelation of the book of nature and history.

Throughout his philosophy, Herder attempts to reconcile his historical and natural principles with his religious beliefs. When Herder approaches religious texts like the Book of Job or Genesis, he thinks that all the tools of criticism are available to him. This is the logic behind his attempt to relate the Gospel of John to Persian Myths, those of the Old Testament to Hindu myths, and his attempt to find an ‘Ur-poem’ behind the first chapters of Genesis (Herder 2015, 72-80 & 90-91; Clark 1955, 207-210). In this final case, for example, when Herder studies these Egyptian and Oriental myths and concludes their relation to an Ur-poem that Moses drew upon

³⁹ Kojève puts this in better terms: “Man projects onto God what he discovers – more or less unconsciously – in himself, in such a way that he can be studied while studying ‘his’ God” (Kojève 2014).

for the first two chapters of Genesis, he does not think this erodes the truth of Genesis or the Bible generally (Steinby 2009, 56-62). He thinks that this comparative study is actually proving the basis for his understanding of Genesis as a collection of the most ancient wisdom concerning the origin of the world. The result is that a study of the Bible cannot limit itself to the text but must be understood in the context of world-history and the syncretic development of human culture. This was, as we saw, part of the logic behind Herder's use of the Ages of Humanity metaphor in *This too*. While he asserts the individuality of each culture he describes, they also develop according to syncretism. As he remarks, "No one is alone in his age; he builds on what has come before, which turns into and wants to be nothing but the foundation of the future...The Egyptian could not exist without the Oriental; the Greek built upon them, the Roman lifted himself atop the back of the entire world—true progression, progressing development" (Herder 2004, 31). The history of the Old Testament, and thus Christianity, is impossible without a thorough investigation into comparative mythology and the relation between, for example, the ancient Hebrews and adjacent or preceding cultures.

For Herder, this comparative method has the direct effect of eroding prejudice against the Bible. He says it is absurd for critics of the Bible to extract a verse or two in order to 'make fun of it.' Instead, "the authors of the Bible had to conform to the customs and the way of thinking of those times in order to be understood" (Herder 1993, 207). This is what allows him to engage with the religious mythology of all cultures, not just in order to clarify the Bible, but humanity itself — it is only natural that each culture would develop its own religion according to time and place. Religions and mythologies should not be mocked or derided but should be understood in their specific context. This becomes an almost endless task for the interpreter; the principle of understanding something within its own particular context necessitates understanding the

particularity of adjacent things acting upon this first thing, and so on. For example, Herder says that to understand the New Testament it is necessary to understand the Old Testament (Herder 1833 I, 22).⁴⁰ But as he shows in *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, in order to understand the Old Testament, one must be familiar with the ancient world more generally, with Canaanite and other Oriental religions, which produces an ostensibly infinite chain of research. This reflects one of Herder's favourite slogans *hen kai pan*, or 'one and all,' as well as the seemingly paradoxical idea we get from Leibniz that each individual monad is entirely unique at the same time as it is a 'perpetual living mirror of the universe' (Leibniz 1991, 24; Trabant 2009, 122-124). Though this may be a form of circular argumentation, Herder can rely on Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason in order to justify the slogan on rational terms (Bultmann 2009, 237; Trabant 2009, 137). The idea that the 'one' is in the 'all,' and vice versa, signifies that all things are interrelated and thus can explain one and other. All the 'all's' contain the 'one' — there is some rational connection between all things. In Herder's case, each particular culture expresses a universal in that it can be infinitely clarified according to the entirety of human history. The result is equally as paradoxical: each cultural whole must be treated distinctly at the same time as it must be understood according to its relation to whole of humanity and its particular cultures.

We can find an example of this technique in the second volume of *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*. Here Herder spends a great deal of time on David and the Psalms. It should be noted that the form of dialogue is abandoned in this volume; Herder says that if he continued to use it, it would only have been 'burdensome' and would 'weaken the impression that is intended to be produced' (Herder 1833 II, 3). Herder discusses the development of poetry from Moses through the Prophets to David, and remarks that it was in, "the time of David [that] the lyric

⁴⁰ Herder says, "The basis of theology is the Bible, and that of the New Testament is the Old."

poetry of the Hebrews attained its highest splendor” (Herder 1833 II, 222). Herder says that despite this fact, not all the Psalms can be directly attributed to David. Just as with the Proverbs and Solomon, the question is not about direct authorship but of David’s or Solomon’s character in the Hebrew imagination. David was known for his harp and his gift for poetry, so much so that the name David becomes, among the Hebrews, ‘synonymous with a beautiful song’ (Herder 1833 II, 224). This meant that later Poets and Prophets would necessarily ‘follow in the example of their king,’ and attribute their songs to David himself. Instead of ‘finding a psalm for every trifling event in the life of David,’ the interpreter should rather study the specific language of the psalms, the particular objects that are represented, the overall feeling of the piece, its style, and so on (Herder 1833 II, 229). Accordingly, Herder develops an argument as to the development of style in Hebrew poetry, remarking that there is a determinate difference between the Mosaic style and the style found in the Psalms. He discusses this development in the context of political and economic relations. For Herder, the reason that Hebrew poetry reaches its ‘highest splendour’ in the time of David is because of increased political and national organization. As he says, “The scattered wild flowers of the country were now gathered and planted, as a royal garland, upon Mount Zion” (Herder 1833 II, 222). This had direct implications on the style of the poetry, in that it was not as frequently composed in the context of war or national strife. Herder says, “The warlike trumpet was softened to a milder tone by the song of the shepherd’s flute, and the more touching harp of the mourner” (Herder 1833 II, 224-225). The wanton attribution of Davidian authorship ignores these political developments which, according to Herder, made it such that poetry and song flourished throughout the tribes of Israel and immediately became related to their beloved King David. An over-reliance on biographical data at the expense of symbolic developments often arises out of a radical distinction between creative expression and

empirical reality. Northrop Frye remarks, “The readiness of even sympathetic readers to confuse a poet’s life and his imagination seems to be based on the assumption that the life is real and the poetry a by-product, so that to search for biography in poetry is, from this point of view, searching for the reality under a disguise” (Frye 1990, 326). Herder certainly believes that ‘reality’ in this regard can greatly inform us as to the meaning of poetry. But he does not believe that poetry is simply a disguise of this reality; this would be a kind of skeptical empiricism that his conception of poetry forbids (see Wildschut 2019, Ch.2). Rather, Herder rejects a sundering of empirical reality from the mind and vice versa (Goldstein 2014, 282). He thinks these two things exist in a unity, and that poetry is the linguistic expression of this unity. He wants to reconcile poetry with reason by reframing it as a form of rational thinking. This is part of why Herder so forcefully argues that the earliest forms of religion were actually examples of the rational search for cause and effect (Herder 1800, 103; Steinby 2009, 56).

For Herder, religious thinking is the characteristic expression of human thinking in its most ancient formulation. He remarks: “the first and last philosophy has ever been religion” (Herder 1800, 103). One of the ways he argues that the ‘first philosophy was religion’ is by describing the character of human understanding. Herder says that the understanding is the most ‘noblest endowment of man’ and that it is the business of the understanding to ‘trace the connexion between cause and effect, and to divine it where it is not apparent’ (Herder 1800, 103). Religion is the first philosophy in that it provides a means for the understanding that enables one to conceive of the coherence of reality. This develops under a specific natural and historical context; Man is faced with a wave of sensations effected from various forces pertaining to these contexts, and religion is an attempt to organize these impressions into a worldview (Herder 1833 I, 52-54). But this is not simply a fearful reaction to ignorance. This is rather a

creative and dynamic process of linguistic creation according to the inner sense. Its character is not to be distinguished from, but to be associated with, the rational and scientific creations of modernity. According to this understanding of religion, there is really nothing particularly ‘irrational’ about it at all.

Religion, Language and Epistemology

In order to fully expose Herder’s conception of religion it is necessary to outline his epistemology. This will also help clarify what exactly Herder means when he wants to treat religion ‘in a human way’ (Herder 1993, 218). Though, like much of Herder’s philosophy, there is no precise statement of his views on epistemology, we find many clues in his *Treatise on the Origin of Language*. Here Herder describes something called *Besonnenheit*, or Man’s capacity for ‘reflection.’ Herder identifies this capacity for reflection as the basis for human rationality and language; it is precisely what makes humans unique, and it is necessarily connected to a linguistic capacity (Herder 2002, 163). Herder’s argument is that Man is faced with an interminable wave of sensuous impressions on the mind, and that it is the capacity for reflection that allows humans to distinguish a single characteristic out of this wave of sensations, what Herder terms a ‘characteristic mark,’ into a word or phrase (Herder 2002, 98-106; DeSouza 2012a, 226-228). Herder treats this as the unique ‘instinct’ of humans. Unlike other animals, whose sphere of instinct is directed towards a particular task, human ‘instinct’ is characterized by its universal sphere (Herder 2002, 78-88 & 127-129). This is formulated in the paradoxical axiom that ‘humanity’s instinct is that it has no direct instinct’ (Herder 2002 80; DeSouza 2012a, 225-226). Herder remarks, “Since he [the human] does not fall blindly on one point and remain lying there blindly, he becomes free-standing, can seek for himself a sphere for self-mirroring,

can mirror himself within himself. No longer an infallible machine in the hands of nature, he becomes his own end and goal of refinement” (Herder 2002, 82).

This lack of ‘instinct’ is also what makes Man free. Herder argues that, because human beings lack a specific and delimited ‘instinct,’ the ‘faculty’ of reason cannot be understood this way either. According to Herder the faculty of reason is not distinct at all but is rather “an orientation of all forces that is distinctive to his species” (Herder 2002, 85). This is how Herder describes the actual origin of language itself. Herder renders the origin of language into a thought-experiment where the first human is faced with a sheep. He says, because of this universal instinct, the human being does not focus on a specific part of the sheep — as, say, a ram would, who only sees the sheep as ‘the object of its pleasure’ — but rather the human being sees the sheep “exactly as it expresses itself to his senses” (Herder 2002, 88). In terms of the origin of language, Herder says it is this ability of awareness or reflection that allows the human to continually observe the sheep as it is and eventually associate it directly with the sound it makes. The human remarks ‘Aha! You are the bleating one!’ (Herder 2002, 88). It is this ‘taking-awareness’ that underlies the first word; it provides a distinct concept for the object, here the sheep, and it is ‘the first judgment of the soul’ (Herder 2002, 88-89). Language is thus construed as the distinct characteristic of mankind in a seemingly rationalistic process that directly expresses the unity of the soul and the sensuous impressions which provoke it.

It is important to note, however, that this story of the sheep is explicitly a thought-experiment and is only meant to convey the relationship between what Herder sees as humanity’s lack of specific instinct and its linguistic ability. For Herder tells us that it is concretely impossible to imagine a human without language, as this would not be a human, and therefore the story of a human being ‘taking-awareness’ and creating the first word becomes necessarily

circular. As Herder remarks, “If, that is to say, reason is no compartmentalized, separately effective force but an orientation of all forces that is distinctive to his species, then the human being must have it in the first condition in which he is a human being” (Herder 2002, 85). This is essentially the problem of origins and Herder is aware that he cannot give a necessary answer as to what exactly caused or effected language in humans (Clark 1955, 136). As the historian, Marc Bloch, said, “...les origines sont un commencement qui explique. Pis encore : qui suffit à expliquer. Là est l’ambiguïté, là est le danger” (Bloch 2004, 20). In light of such difficulties, Herder can only remark, with his characteristic enthusiasm, “If no reason was possible for the human being without language, good!, then the invention of the latter is as natural, as old, as original, as characteristic for the human being as the use of the former” (Herder 2002, 91). This is the objective behind the *Treatise*, Herder wants to argue that what is usually referred to as ‘reason’ is really just the unified powers of the mind which expresses itself as language (Sikka 2004, 188-189).

The question posed by the academy for the competition was problematic for Herder from the start. They asked, “Supposing men abandoned to their natural faculties, are they in a position to invent language? And by what means will they arrive at this invention?” (Herder 2002, 64 & 127). The problem was that this implies the existence of separate rational and natural faculties, which Herder rejects. An under-appreciated aspect of Herder’s argument here is the way he counter-poses the idea of ‘a natural language’ with the aforementioned capacity for reflection that he views as the basis for rationality (Herder 2002, 65-75 & 77-87; Morton 1982, 45).⁴¹ Morton remarks that Herder does seem to make a radical distinction between these two forms of

⁴¹ It is in connection to this that Robert Clark goes as far as saying that the *Treatise* possesses, “Some of the qualities of contrapuntal music: the various themes are set off against one another in a way that can only command admiration” (Clark 1955 135-136).

language; one is immediate and sensual — examples of this are emotively charged onomatopoeias — while the other is “the distinctive rational quality of man” (Morton 1982, 47; Norton 1991, 40). However, this would be odd in the context of Herder’s understanding of things like poetry and religion. Morton’s conclusion is that this disjunction is meant to convey the paradoxical nature of the question itself (Morton 1982, 48). There is no such thing as a ‘natural’ or ‘rational’ faculty of the mind distinct from one another. What Herder is pointing to is the ‘continuity and discontinuity’ in the unity of the mind (Sapir 1907, 12; Morton 1982, 48; Koepke 1987, 24-27). This can be further demonstrated with his example of the sheep. On the face of it, the story describes the origin of language in rational terms; it is necessarily the first example of a human ‘taking-awareness’ and using ‘reason.’ The mind distinguishes a characteristic mark which serves as a symbol to organize reality; the human says “Aha! You are the bleating one” (Herder 2002, 98). But Herder also describes this first characteristic mark as a eureka moment which combines both the idea of a rational insight and an immediate sensual reaction (Herder 2002, 88). Herder opens the essay saying, “Already as an animal, the human being has language” (Herder 2002, 65). He goes on to describe the ‘natural language’ of humans which is, with this opening sentence, likened to animals, and is largely composed of interjections and emotionally charged onomatopoeias (Herder 2002, 65-74). Herder says that, while these sounds are not the “roots” of language, they are the “juices” which enliven the roots (Herder 2002, 68). By describing the origin of language as beginning with the interjection “Aha!” Herder is drawing our attention to the fact that the origin of language is a moment of unity between these two forms of language: the immediate and sensual “juices” — onomatopoeia, interjections — and the roots of language, our reflective capacity, i.e., ‘*Besonnenheit*’ — ‘you are the bleating one!’ The concept that conveys this unity is poetry. This why Herder says, “[W]hat was this first language

but a collection of elements of poetry?” (Herder 2002, 103). Herder argues that reason and language are strictly co-original, and that the first language was a language of poetry and mythology (Herder 2002, 101-103; Morton 1982, 49; Koepke 1987, 26; Greif 2009, 157). This is the seeming contradiction that is meant to be conveyed by the structure of the *Treatise* itself; the origin of language is a process that is rational, at the same time as it is immediate and sensual — language is poetic at its origin. As we have seen with *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, each language has its own metaphorical structures, something Herder thinks is most apparent in the earliest forms of language (Land 1974, 69). Language is created directly in the context of a particular sensuous reality and is an attempt to make sense of it. Herder says this is why, for example, Phoenician has an abundance of terms for trade and numbers (Herder 1833 I, 31). Herder states this idea in the form of a principle in the *Treatise*, remarking, “Just as the human soul can recollect no abstraction from the realm of spirits that it did not arrive at through occasions and awakenings of the senses, likewise also no language has an abstractum that it did not arrive at through sound and feeling. And the more original the language, then the fewer abstractions, the more feelings” (Herder 2002, 118). While Herder’s method in the essay is thoroughly that of a naturalist — Herder develops a series of axioms in the first part and four natural laws in the second part⁴² — the overall argument is not entirely consistent from this perspective. As we saw with the example of the sheep, there is a movement back and forth between two varying but ultimately unified conceptions of language. This is what led Robert Clark to comment that Herder never intended to answer the question of the academy (Clark

⁴² But even this ‘naturalism,’ has to be qualified. Trabant is able to identify these four ‘natural laws’ with specific biblical episodes about language: *lingua adamica*, the parable of Adam and Eve, the Confusion at Babel, and the Pentecost (Trabant 2009, 130). Here we have a clear example of Herder considering his religious ideas within his naturalistic arguments.

1955, 136-137).⁴³ I do not think this is entirely the case — but Clark is correct to point out the ‘contrapuntal’ qualities of the *Treatise*. This is an aspect of Herder’s essay that Michael Morton perfectly sums up, “The structure of the treatise describes a great circle, and in so doing obliges the reader to move continually back and forth...between the two languages, with poetry functioning alternately as the touchstone of the fundamental difference between them and the embodiment of their unity” (Morton 1982, 53). The same can be said of the diversity of languages themselves. They exemplify human diversity at the same time as they illustrate what is common to all of humanity. Trabant, in his article on Herder’s philosophy of language, uses this to argue that “Herder is undeniably a thinker in the spirit of the Pentecost: one (Holy) Spirit unites humanity in its different languages. All languages proceed together in history from the same origin in a shared world. Despite all the diversity among languages, humanity has also one and the same language” (Trabant 2009, 132). This is in essence the same tension between particularity and progress we identified earlier in *This too*. As was the case there, Herder uses theological concepts within his philosophical essays to attempt to reconcile this tension. In terms of the anglophone study of Herder, there is a lack of research to determine how exactly he uses these concepts, particularly when they are portrayed with such importance — as in Trabant or Wildschut, for example (Trabant 2009; Wildschut 2019). Trabant reminds us that Herder was a Christian, and that he would necessarily relate questions of language with the Word as Logos described by John (Trabant 2009, 118). Language cannot be reduced to a formal system of concepts any more than it can be reduced to a mere biological mechanism (Trabant 2009, 120). The Bible presents language as an analogy to the divine act of creation that occurs through His Word: ‘He said, It was’ (c.f. Benjamin 2002; see Goldstein 2014, 279).

⁴³ This is also what Hamann concluded (see Hamann 2007, 132; Clark 1955, 136 & 158-162; Beiser 1987, 137).

Divinity and the Origin of Language

Herder finishes the essay with a criticism of the divine origin of language, saying “A higher origin has nothing speaking for it, not even the testimony of the Eastern text to which it appeals, for this text clearly gives language a human beginning through the naming of the animals” (Herder 2002, 163). Herder is saying that those theologians who force the origin of language into a supernatural schema cannot even use the Bible for their argument since, according to the Bible, the origin of language is found in Adam’s sovereign naming of the animals in Genesis 2:19. Herder is unsatisfied with the divine origin of language insofar as it implies man in a state *without* language — something he finds inconceivable. As Betz tells us, Herder was not critiquing the divine origin of language in order to discard religious ideas from questions of nature or philosophy; but in order to discard an explanation he found unsatisfactory (Betz 2009, 141-142). The ‘divine’ aspect has not disappeared; rather, it is correctly apprehended. As Herder says, Sussmilch’s notion of divine origin is not even compatible with the ‘Eastern text’ — the Bible — which is supposed to have inspired it. Adam’s naming of the animals is a creative event and a reflection of Man’s place as the image of God — not a dumb child before an omniscient parent (Betz 2009, 142). Herder criticizes supposedly ‘biblical’ conceptions of language by appealing to his interpretation of Genesis 2:19 (Betz 2009, 145). He criticizes the argument on its own terms. Adam is not an inactive recipient of language, rather, he was a poet who created an image of each animal that corresponded to its essence (Herder 1833 I, 128-130; II, 7 & 14-15). This is parallel to God’s act of creation, God *spoke* Reality into Being,

he did not calculate it. Herder's characterization of Adam is that of an "imitator of the Divinity," "a second Creator," "a creative poet," and a "true ποιητής⁴⁴" (Herder 1833 II, 7).

Herder asserts God as immanent to his creation, incarnate in the individual of Jesus Christ, and immanent through special revelation to His favored creation, mankind. One could say then that God is directly immanent *in* Man, indeed this is the example Jesus gives, and Herder also exclaims that Jesus is the human *qua* human, reminding us of *imago dei*, and giving us a visibly human example of how to achieve this (Herder 1993, 187-194; Bruford 1962, 213-214; Bunge 1990b, 141; 1993, 30-31; 1994. 268-269; Schmidt 2017, 192-194).⁴⁵ This is also something implied in the creation of man through the divine breath of God in Genesis 2:7, again an example of man's proximity to God, but it also points us to the importance of speech for mankind, especially when considered with the following story of Adam naming the animals in Genesis 2:19: "and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof." Herder's humanism and his scientific studies are not of a secular character, but a Christian, religious character, in the tradition of a Leibniz, or even the Christian Neo-Platonists; many of his ideas are related fundamentally to the character of his God and biblical images (Nisbet 1970, 13 & 287; Büttgen 1998, 332).⁴⁶

Just as Adam, the "second Creator," so too is man's existence inseparable from, and inconceivable without, the 'breath of life' that is his language. Herder says, "Did people need a thousand generations to understand for the first time what language is? The first being

⁴⁴ Meaning a 'maker' or the composer of a poem.

⁴⁵ Schmidt cites Herder asking, "What did Christ call himself? The son of man, i.e., a common, pure human being. Cleansed of dross, his religion can be called nothing other than the religion of pure human kindness, human religion" (Schmidt 2017, 194).

⁴⁶ See for example Antognazza (2013) on Leibniz's Christian theology, as well as Almog (2016) and DeSouza (2012b) on the relationship between Herder's God and Leibniz's.

understood it when he thought the first thought” (Herder 2002, 136). There was no ‘brute’ man without language; language is integral to the very concept of humanity itself. Herder proves this through his natural studies in the *Ideas*, but it is also evident within the story of Adam. Not only was man’s first action the use of language, but he is also formed in the image of God and animated with His breath (Gen. 2:7). Herder describes the story of Adam naming the animals as a cultivation of man’s: “faculties of perception, of comparison and abstraction, his reason and language” (Herder 1833 I, 128). To make the analogy between Adam and mankind is certainly an unorthodox position for, as Hans Aarsleff remarks, Herder is rendering the ‘semidivine’ Adam into a human like anyone else (Aarsleff 2006, 477-478). Muddying things even further is the fact that Herder also alludes to the Bible several times in the essay with the intention to directly support his naturalistic arguments. For example, Jurgen Trabant remarks that the four natural laws that Herder describes in the *Treatise* “correspond to the four Biblical episodes about language” (Trabant 2009, 130). However, Wulf Koepke gives us a great clue as to how Herder conceives of reconciling these seemingly contradictory arguments. He says, “The human being is part of nature, but is endowed with the potential for reason, which is a divine gift. Language is human, but it is also the medium to receive God’s revelation” (Koepke 1987, 26). Herder understands the nature of language to be paradoxical, but this paradox is ultimately reconciled as a primordial revelation from God which occurs only humanly through the senses.

There is a direct analogy between the way Herder describes the origin of language and religion. The difference is simply that of levels of organization. Language arises through the unique interaction between the human mind and the ‘flood’ of sensations it is faced with, while religion organizes these sensations and their linguistic characteristic marks into a purposive whole according to metaphorical and symbolic structures (Herder 2002, 87). Just as a single

word is a unity embodying the manifold sensations associated with a particular object of the mind, religion is a unifying structure for the understanding. According to Herder, the most ancient religions combined things like history, natural science, morality, and so on. It is in this unifying capacity that Herder thinks he can identify the origin of thinking itself, and he says this is something that virtually all the world's religions have in common (Herder 1800, 103-104; Herder 1833 I, 50). As I have remarked, Herder interprets religion as a direct response to the myriad of natural phenomena that seem to be causally motivated but do not offer necessary evidence of a causal relationship. These causes and effects are then attributed to different gods or become known as expressions of God's qualities. In the first volume of *On the Spirit*, Herder ostensibly asserts this universal character of religion. He has Alciphron, the 'antagonist,' say: "the poetry of every people is characterized by the influence of the climate in which it is formed" — on the face of it this sounds like the essence of Herderian interpretation. However, in the dialogue, Herder has Euthyphron reply "I could say much against such theory [of the dependence of poetry on climate]" (Herder 1833 I, 50). Instead, Euthyphron wants to describe those features of poetry which are 'everywhere the same.' These he describes as the 'most childlike intuitions and feelings of the human mind.' This leads to a discussion of creation and the earliest notions of a God or the 'Great Spirit' as motivating the natural world. The crux of the argument here is that while Herder certainly upholds a direct influence of natural particularity on cultural expressions — meaning that no two cultures are the same — he also thinks that there are specific notions common to all of mankind that can be identified through their origin in poetry.

Chapter 3

Poetry and Purpose

In the last chapter, I briefly discussed the relation between poetry and Herder's epistemology. Now it is necessary to consider Herder's concept of poetry on its own, in order to better grasp the meaning of 'Hebrew poetry,' and to understand how this concept functions in his general philosophic arguments. Poetry is not the license to lie but is rather a function of what he calls the 'inner sense.' It is a characteristic mark that provides a "seal of truth" to sensuous impressions (Herder 2002, 188-189; Goldstein 2014, 287). In an essay from 1787 called '*On Image, Poetry, and Fable*,' Herder relates the imagination and the development of literature to epistemological questions. Herder describes Man as 'the measure of all things' and a 'microcosm,' in that humans occupy a middle position between God and creation and stand-in as the latter's interpreter (Herder 2006, 357; Wildschut 2019, 185).⁴⁷

This is essentially an empirical doctrine of the senses. Herder describes 'images' as representations of the objects of perception according to our taking of consciousness of these objects, chiefly through the eyes and ears. This is the same story as the *Treatise*: instead of a 'wave of sensations' it is a 'forest of sensible objects' in which the human becomes 'master' by distinguishing and categorizing these objects (Herder 2006, 358). This production of images, therefore, is to be closely identified with Herder's concept of *besonnenheit* and taking-awareness, in that they describe the distinctive and primordial character of the human mind. Herder describes this process specifically as a creation of 'unity in diversity,' further adding that it can veritably be termed a kind of poetics (Herder 2006, 358). One could say, then, that what is

⁴⁷ Wildschut interprets this as another allusion to Adam. He says, "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. Herder thus alludes to the idea of the human being as microcosm" (Wildschut, 2019, 185; see also Gaier 2009, 177).

distinctive to humanity is its poetry, and further that consciousness, language, and poetry, are all co-original. Herder tells us, “Our whole life, then, is to a certain extent *poetics*: we do not see images but rather create them” (Herder 2006, 383).⁴⁸ This is, again, entirely consistent with the story of Adam and is what led Walter Benjamin to later remark, “Man is the knower in the same language in which God is the creator” (Benjamin 2000, 68). As we saw in the last chapter, Hebrew poetry was not simply a collection of observations concerning sensual impressions, but an imaginative creation that related these impressions into a poetic whole. Humans are not passive observers before the world, but creative ‘knowers.’

It is also through poetry that the consciousness of a particular people can be most accurately expressed, such that the people themselves develop a new way of thinking. When Milton writes *Paradise Lost*, he is giving a history of The Fall hitherto unknown, a history of The Fall that discloses the reality of English society at this particular moment.⁴⁹ Throughout the two volumes of *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, Herder includes a great variety of Hebrew poems that he has translated himself into German. But he also includes a section from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. This he has also translated himself from the English (Herder 1833 I, 79). In terms of the arrangement of Herder’s book, this translation has the objective of giving an example of the way literature in has developed in a biblical context and given rise to a national consciousness. Milton gave a voice to the English imagination through an interpretation of the biblical Fall story in the context of his own time. Herder celebrates Milton for having ‘interwoven’ the Oriental style of the Bible into his ‘immortal poem’ (Herder 1833 I, 79).

⁴⁸ Compare with Shelley: “Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be ‘the expression of the imagination’: and poetry is connate with the origin of man” (Shelley & Peacock 1965, 26).

⁴⁹ See (Rivers 1993, Bennet 2015; Forsyth 2015; Loxley 2015; 307-312; Poole 2017).

When Milton uses the story of the Fall as a basis for his poem, it is not just a question of a fictional symbol for him to play with, but it is part of his attempt at disclosing the coherence of reality with the objective of developing, or literally creating, consciousness in time. Even Milton's formal considerations reveal this objective. His neglect of rhyme is a deliberate choice inspired by the 'heroic verse' of Homer and Virgil, as well as more recent Italian and Spanish poets.⁵⁰ Milton remarks that his neglect of rhyme is "[not] to be taken for a defect though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar Readers, that it rather is to be esteem'd an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recover'd to Heroic Poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of Rimeing" (Milton 1674, 'The Verse'). The influence of Milton's example can be found in the poetry of William Blake, who styled himself a second-coming of Milton (Blake 2008, 115). In the preface to his *Jerusalem*, Blake describes his own contemplation on whether to write in a 'monotonous cadence,'⁵¹ that is to say with metered lines. Blake ultimately decides to go a step further than Milton and says that meter itself is derived 'from the modern bondage of rhyming.' He says that meter is not an indispensable part of poetry and decides instead to produce a variety of cadences in his lines, according to his own particular taste and genius, Blake remarks, "Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place" (Blake 2008, 145-146). Frye describes Blake's decision here as arising out of a 'respect for the imaginative integrity of poetry' (Frye 1990, 115). This is quite similar to the unifying and creative character Herder continually associates with poetry, as well as what he celebrated in Shakespeare. But the implication of both Milton and Blake's critique of formal rules also implies a creative development in the human mind. According to these English poets, poetry had arrived at a moment in time when it was possible to use rhyme or meter imaginatively, transcending their use as 'rule.' Though Milton's

⁵⁰ Some have argued that 'The Verse' at the beginning of *Paradise Lost* is a response to Dante's *Epistle to Cangrande* (Robert Hollander 2009, see < <https://www.princeton.edu/~dante/ebdsa/hollander040609.html>>).

⁵¹ That is to say the English blank verse which was often metered by iambic pentameter.

style recalls the poetry of the Bible, it is important that his choice to avoid the use of rhyme ‘in the tradition of Homer and Virgil’ occurs within its own historical context: the formalization of rules as essential to artistic creation. This was not necessarily the case in antiquity but is particular to the development of modernity. Milton, Blake, or in Herder’s day, Klopstock, illustrate the way that poetry is able to ignore contemporary idols in order to express the unity of the mind in a particular time and place (Clark 1955, 37 & 65).

Herder does not understand poetic genius to be the adherence to tradition or rule; genius is rather an imaginative interpretation of reality, which is to include ‘tradition.’ Shakespeare’s genius was not in his imitation of Greek drama, but his oeuvre is not radically distinct from the history of theatre either. This question of genius and rules is what led Kant to remark that the work of a genius and nonsense are not far removed (Kant 1987, 188-189, §50; Zammito 1992, 145). There is a fine line between flouting rules and being a genius and doing the same thing and being an idiot. According to Kant, the difference here is really a matter of discipline and taste, there must be some ‘rule’ to genius — Herder, who views genius as rather the resistance to rules, has trouble distinguishing taste and genius at all (Kant 1987, 173-189; Herder 2006, 308-313). John Zammito has described in detail the significance of debates on the character of genius relative to Kant and Herder in his book on Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (Zammito 1992, 124-147). The importance Herder ascribes to someone like Shakespeare, who is seen to be going beyond the rules of French or Greek drama, is directly related to what he sees as the necessity of breaking the yoke of French rule in his own culture (Zammito 1992, 136). Shakespeare fulfills the telos of dramatic rules by going beyond them and transcending the prejudices of his own age. Herder understands genius as a kind of movement beyond rules because of the way he sees the workings of the mind itself. The inner sense does not imitate objective reality, but rather

translates and allegorizes perceptions into poetic representations — this is the only way we know of reality (Herder 2006, 359; Goldstein 2014, 275 & 285-285). The formal rules we apply to thinking are not inherent to the mind itself but are abstractions, distinctions, of it. The idea of the ‘mind’ is itself an expression of the unity of a variety of functions that translate reality into linguistic forms. Poetry is, according to Herder, a form of language that has the ability to express truth in a highly accurate manner. As Goldstein remarks “if the very portals of empirical experience are poetic, poetic language might be doing the work of high-resolution representation, rather than inessential adornment” (Goldstein 2014, 288).

This is part of the significance of poetry as an object of hermeneutical inquiry. Herder devoted the majority of his interpretive works to the study of a variety of poetry: the poetry of the Old Testament, that of Shakespeare, the epic of Ossian, as well as his collection of world folk-poetry, the *Volkslieder*. The importance here was not only historical or literary but also psychological. In Herder’s essay on Baumgarten he identifies the analysis of poetry relative to the soul as the latter’s ‘great insight’ (Herder 2006, 43). The ‘mother and companion’ of poetry is none other than the human soul. As a result, the great poets of history have much to tell us about the soul’s functions and vagaries. According to Herder, the purpose of literature — and his concept of literature is general: he includes poetry, along with prose and drama, as well as mythology — is moral and psychological improvement (Herder 2006, 338-339).

Poetry and Historical Development

In chapter two, we saw that extensive historical research was necessary in order to understand Hebrew poetry. This says something to a more general quality of poetry and the requirements of its interpretation. It is an art that develops in time, and, according to Herder, serves a specific purpose in society. Accordingly, while a poem must be treated on its own,

‘within its own center of gravity,’ it must also be interpreted in the context of its place in history, within the overall development of mankind, and the corresponding psychological change or development. This is why it is necessary to understand Ugaritic, or other, Oriental myths in order to understand the Bible. It is also why, for example, it is necessary to read the Bible or Dante to understand Milton. In another of his prize essays, *Causes of the Decay of Taste in the Various Nations Where It Once Flourished*, Herder illustrates the idea of historical development in literary terms. He describes ancient Greece, the Italy of Dante, and the France of Montaigne, as examples of ‘golden ages of taste.’ Herder argues that this was not motivated in the first place by ruling classes; that is to say, Homer came before Lycurgus, Dante before Lorenzo Medici or Leonardo Davinci; and Montaigne did not wait for Louis XIV (Herder 2006, 324-327). The poets were perhaps themselves from upper-classes; but it was their individual genius that produced these works, not the inspiration of kings or Mammon. Herder says, “Louis could rouse not genius but rather taste” (Herder 2006, 327). The implication is that genius is a highly individual phenomena and, through its expression as cultural artefacts, is a motivation behind the development of good taste and morals in society (Herder 2006, 328-329 & 342-343). The political class can be successful in organizing great works of art together, developing taste, but they cannot themselves create the inspiration behind a work of art. The exception to this rule would of course be the King that is also a Poet — the harpist David is an example. The overall point of Herder’s essay is that this is necessarily a story of rise and fall; there would be no such thing as a ‘golden age’ if it never fell, and it is necessary to have dissonances for these ages to stand out (Herder 2006, 329). However, Herder also considers literature and the artefacts of geniuses as essentially a treasure for all of humanity — meaning art and history must be self-referential in some way (Trabant 2009, 121). For example, Herder describes the Renaissance in

Italy as developing directly in the context of a rediscovery and translation of texts from antiquity (Herder 2006, 324-327).⁵² And despite the fact that poetry inevitably ‘declined’ during the 17th century, Herder still calls this ‘sad’ reality ‘an excellent instrument of destiny’ — because it only means these artefacts are left behind for future generations and cultures to develop. Herder says, “Ariosto cultivated Spenser, the Italian satyr Rabelais, the novellas Shakespeare” (Herder 2006, 327). Elsewhere, Herder describes the inheritance of maxims and morals throughout history as a chain of effects that is bound to every individual and that influences the present and future. He says “This is the essence of genuine human immortality. Every other image of immortality is merely a name, a label” (Herder 1993, 59). And in the *Ideas*, Herder describes the afterlife as a ‘beautiful dream’ where we can converse with all the ‘wise and good’ of mankind (Herder 1800, 467). But he assures us that we need not satisfy ourselves with dreams; this kind of afterlife is already available to us through history. Herder says, “Here Plato stands before me: there I listen to the friendly interrogation of Socrates, and participate in his last fate. When Marcus Antoninus confers in secret with his own heart, he confers also with mine...” (Herder 1800, 467). Each individual ‘noble’ use of history is what is behind the protean development of history and things like culture or taste. Herder says in the early pages of his essay on taste that it is his task to trace the development of taste in every age “on its own terms as if there had existed no other taste save this one” — ostensibly advancing a kind of relativism and a denial of historical development (Herder 2006, 315). But, as we have just seen, the tracing of a development even within one age requires considerations beyond the ‘age’ itself. This is the problem of circularity implied in the principle of ‘treating everything in its own context.’ But perhaps, as was the case with the

Treatise, this inconsistency reveals a more salient point. When Herder says to treat each age of

⁵² Because of the fact that Herder sees Italy as having promulgated both Greece learning in Antiquity and the classics again during the Renaissance, Herder calls Italy a “storehouse of the materials of good taste” (Herder 2006, 327).

taste as if no other had existed, it is clearly an exaggeration, and he could not be blamed for failing to live up to this standard. The point of his exclamation, rather, is that as a *first* principle an empathetic identification with the subject being studied is required, such that one can attempt to represent this thing most sincerely, with the least intrusion of prejudices. This does not preclude an understanding of development, but rather warns against hastiness in superimposing a universal history onto particular cultures. In any case, the rises and falls of a particular culture do not occur in their own discrete vacuums but develop over time through some logic of progression according to the very nature of history and the human mind. The attempt to trace this progression is the objective of the philosopher of history, and Herder views this task as not only scientific, but artistic (Zammito 1992, 337; 2009, 71).

In chapter one, we saw that, though it was only an outline, Herder postulated some kind of schema of development in the history of mankind. The same can be said of literature; its progression seems to be necessitated by its nature — i.e., the fact that literature builds upon itself — but this progression remains difficult to discern to a degree of philosophical certainty. Herder is not interested in creating some elaborate scheme for the development of history or taste; he is interested in understanding the way this movement and progression could be philosophically justifiable. Herder could never be satisfied with the idea of history as only a series of accidents according to individual decisions and fancies, but neither could he understand it according to a form of mechanical determinism. The point was to argue for purpose in history in order to avoid both these problems. Herder wants to treat history as a non-mechanical whole, i.e., a whole which cannot be reduced to an aggregate of its parts and is understood as prior to these parts (see Zammito 1992, 244). A historical event cannot be reduced to a discrete set of causes and effects but must be understood as a whole and according to its purpose (see Clark 1955, 192 & esp.

Beiser 1987, 127-128). The keys to this problem are to be found within the poetic artefacts of the human mind. According to Herder, one of the distinctive qualities of Hebrew poetry is its conception of inanimate and animate creation as one whole, such that there is no conception of creation that could be 'inanimate' in the first place. Herder says the Hebrews left 'no part of creation without life' (Herder 1833 I, 91). A few pages later, Herder remarks that the three leading qualities of Hebrew poetry are, "[the] animation in the objects for awakening the senses, interpretation of nature for the heart, a plan in the poem, as there is in creation, for the understanding" (Herder 1833 I, 97). The ascription of a teleology, or purpose, to nature, 'creation,' could not be made clearer. Herder once again makes the analogy between the 'plan' of creation, and the 'plan' the poet is supposed to make for his poem, and he describes the poet as the one to whom the 'veil' of nature has been removed. What is discovered behind this veil is nothing but "connexion, order, benevolence, and purpose" (Herder 1833 I, 97). Herder then continues with his analogy between the purposive whole that is creation, and the process that occurs in the mind to create a poem. He says "His own poetical creation too, like that creation which inspires his imagination, will be a true κόσμος, a regular work, with plan, outlines, meaning, and ultimate design, and commend itself to the understanding as a whole, as it does to the heart by its individual thoughts and interpretations of nature, and to the sense by the animation of its objects" (Herder 1833 I, 97). Just as the poet creates a whole out of a series of images and actions, so must history be understood as a whole composed of numerous moments and ages. Formulated otherwise, an understanding of development in history or purpose in creation is analogous to the psychological process of poetic creation.

If Herder conceives of national literature and poetry as expressions of a development in the mind and history, it seems to imply that they have a specific purpose. That is to say, if we

postulate a development of literature in time with a particular purpose, moral and psychological improvement, as Herder does, then there is the implication that literature develops towards a specific end. This is because the postulation of development, in history, or in literature, immediately engenders the question of: development to and for what? This is indicated by the fact that Herder describes perfection as the first characteristic of Humankind. He describes this perfection as the utilization of the powers nature has given mankind as heritage (Herder 2015, 100). This corresponds to his concept of genius, which he describes as “an aggregation of natural forces” (Herder 2006, 309). The purpose of history in general and the purpose of the genius in society are analogous. The purpose of literature is to express and expand consciousness, which often occurs in a national context, but not limitedly so. When Herder is getting into the epistemological foundations of poetry and the force or power that it ignites through the expansion of the imagination, he thinks that this is an expression of the dynamism and movement that he continually observes in the natural world; the only way to understand the world around us is through translation, ‘metachematizing,’ and analogies, in short, a kind of poetry (Herder 2006, 359; Goldstein 2014, 282-288; Heinz & Clairmont 2009, 42-51; Moser 1982, 102-105). Gregory Moore remarks, in his introduction to Herder’s writings on aesthetics, that what gives the meaning and significance to poetry is, according to Herder, his concept of ‘force’ (Moore 2006, 10-11).⁵³ This concept is quite similar to the idea of sap and life-force found in *This too* (Herder 2004, 5-6 & 50 & 68). In terms of poetry, Herder’s idea of force is a concept which attempts to explain the particular effect of poetry in its animation of a myriad of actions into a linguistic whole. Herder is trying to account for the way poetry seems to express a direct interaction between works of the imagination and the empirical world.

⁵³ The term is *Kraft* in German and Herder’s use of it ultimately arises out of the Latin term *vis* (see, Clark 1955, 81).

Poetry and Psychology

In the *First Grove* of his *Critical Forests*, Herder attempts to distinguish poetry from music and painting. He identifies each art with what he calls the ‘primary concepts of metaphysics’: space, time, and force (Herder 2006, 140). Herder says that painting has its effect primarily through the arrangement of objects in space, music through the succession of tones in time, and poetry through force (Herder 2006, 139-142). Herder remarks, “Through force, which inhabits words; through force, which, though it passes through the ear, affects the soul directly. This force, not coexistence or succession, is the essence of poetry ” (Herder 2006, 140). Here Herder describes the metaphysical concept of force, but as we saw with *This too*, he also describes a ‘life-force’ in human history which is viewed as more active or potent in ancient times. In *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, he describes the way poetry’s union with other arts can increase its power (Herder 1833 II, 192-196). Herder says that because our senses are ‘united and act upon one soul’ it is also possible for the arts to be unified into a single artefact (Herder 1833 II, 193). Despite this possibility, Herder says such a unity between music and gestures, or dances, as expressions of the images of poetry is quite rare and only possibly existed in ‘nations whose feelings are yet fresh and lively’ (Herder 1833 II, 195). This is a reference to the Orient as well as other ‘primitive’ nations, and Herder says a great example of this can be found in the Song of Deborah from the Book of Judges, chapter 5. Herder thinks he identifies a unification of the arts in this poem because its words are accompanied by a choral song and he claims certain monosyllabic words used at the end of lines come from the echoes of a song (Herder 1833 I, 195-196). The arts were thus unified through a poem being represented by song and dance, presumably at the same time as its recitation. Herder thinks this proves the fact that these arts and their accompanying effects on the mind are not entirely distinct concepts but can ultimately be

unified in the soul. He remarks, “the three arts are so interdependent and mutually involved, that even a philosophical distinction of the several conceptions is not possible, without including each within the spheres of the others” (Herder 1833 II, 193). Through an argument by analogy, this ultimately implies that the faculties of the mind are also unifiable. Even though Herder views this union as mostly specific to antiquity and the development of the arts as necessarily one of increasing distinction — he still says that this union would produce the ‘greatest power’ of these arts, and he laments the fact that Germans have been unable to convert this ancient style into one suitable for his age (Herder 1833 II, 194-198). Herder’s stance here is somewhat ironic considering what Goethe said about his reading style. In his autobiography, Goethe describes a time in the early 1770s when Herder came to visit him and introduced him to Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* (Goethe 1897, 368). Over some time, Herder would read the book out loud in its entirety to Goethe. Of Herder’s reading, Goethe says, “Without being monotonous, Herder let everything go on in the same tone, just as if nothing was present before him, but all was merely historical; as if the shadows of this poetic creation did not act livingly before him, but only glided gently by.” (Goethe 1897, 368). Goethe qualifies this statement by saying Herder’s style nonetheless had ‘infinite charm,’ and that through this peculiar style he was able to make a work appear more purely to the audience. In any case, Herder viewed the union of the arts as a latent possibility necessitated by the unity of the human soul and argued that its actual realization as a form of art can be found in the ancient documents of antiquity.

It follows from this principle of the unity and harmony of the soul that we must understand history according to the poetic nature of thought. In a series of lectures, Northrop Frye makes the distinction between the poet and the historian. He says that the historian is above all concerned with making specific and particular statements, while the poet’s work is of an

entirely different kind, one unconcerned with judgments of truth or falsehood (Frye 2011, 27-28). Frye remarks that, “The poet’s job is not to tell you what happened, but what happens: not what did take place, but the kind of thing that always does take place” (Frye 2011, 28). Now, as we know, this kind of distinction cannot possibly hold for Herder; Frye seems to be making a mistake he himself criticizes, in that he is radically severing history from imaginative creation. For Herder the ideal historian *is* an artist, a poet. As we saw in chapter one, the historical artist must not only make ‘specific and particular statements,’ but must incorporate these into a poetic whole of history. The distinction between the particular statements of the historian and the universal depictions of the mind from the poet is the one Herder wants to collapse and overcome. As Vicki Spencer remarks in her book on Herder’s political thought,

“My central point here is that for a thinker, like Herder, whose entire intellectual career is devoted to the ‘One and the Many’...it is simply inadequate to impose a framework on his thought that insists on divorcing universality and particularity into mutually exclusive categories so that he is bound to appear contradictory.” (Spencer 2012, 97-98)

It is easy to get lost in the vagueness of an idiom like ‘the one and the many.’ But this idea is quite important for Herder, and he uses it in a myriad of ways. In terms of human consciousness, we can understand that despite its variety of functions it is ultimately ‘one’ in the soul. The historian must reflect this fact in his own works; this is the ideal of the historian, or even scientist, as a poet (Herder 2015, 226). In terms of purpose in history, the one and the many is illustrated through Herder’s interplay of cultural particularity and universal development of mankind. As Sonia Sikka and Kristin Gjesdal, among others, have amply demonstrated, Herder’s principle of empathy and his sense for cultural particularity occupy a large portion of his writings, and it is also one of his most important contributions to the history of philosophy (Sikka 2011; Gjesdal 2017). But the overall content of Herder’s philosophy of history is ultimately not his excavation of novel facts and events. Its content, reflected by the organization

of the *Ideas*, is rather the sketching out of a general plan of immanent progression in human consciousness through history from ancient times to his own day. Herder seeks to reconcile the ‘many,’ i.e., the variety of historical events, with the ‘one,’ i.e., the unity of history in providence and humanity. Herder emphasizes the particularity of all human cultures, but part of the reason he is able to do this is because he views them as all a part of one humanity. It is in this vein that Herder, in the preface to the *Ideas*, asks himself the rhetorical question: “Is there a people upon earth totally uncultivated?” (Herder 1800, v).

Herder certainly feels confident enough about his scheme of historical development from the Orient to Egypt, to Greece, and then to Rome. It is somewhat simplistic, and it is certainly not original to Herder, but it makes a lot of sense in terms of cultural transmission. It does not make sense, however, in terms of ranking and childish comparison. If the Orient is the childhood of mankind, this does not entail an infantilization of its conditions — as we saw with *This too* in chapter one, Herder satirizes the analogy of life-ages of man to point this out. It is only God who can make these sorts of judgments. Each culture has its strengths and weaknesses and, as Herder says, “every nation has its center of happiness within itself” (Herder 2004, 29). The happiness of the Greeks would mean nothing to the patriarchal shepherds of ancient Israel. And yet there is still development — something is passed on through transmission. Despite the emphasis on the difference in modes of life and forms of art in Egypt and Greece, there are some that are fundamentally related to each other (Herder 2004). As he remarks in *This too*, “The Greek appropriated as much from the Egyptian, and the Roman from the Greek, as he needed for himself: once he is satiated, the remains fall to the floor, and he pursues them no further” (Herder 2004, 29). The legend that Homer is said to have cribbed his poetry from an Egyptian poet named Phantasia, or the fact that Roman culture simply built itself on Greek ideas, illustrates this

idea that cultural transmission spurs historical development.⁵⁴ In connection to this, Blake will go so far as to remark, “No man can believe that either Homer’s mythology, or Ovid’s, were the production of Greece, or of Latium; neither will any one believe, that the Greek statues, as they are called, were the invention of Greek Artists; perhaps the Torso is the only original work remaining; all the rest are evidently copies, though fine ones, from greater works of the Asiatic Patriarchs” (Blake 2008, 531). Herder, unlike Blake, has too much respect for Greek beauty to agree with the English poet here, but it is the essence of the idea that Herder would agree with; transmission and translation is the outward and practical form of purpose in history, and this often occurs directly through the influence of poetry. The transmission of artefacts relative to particular time and circumstance, the interaction of these artefacts with new generations and cultures, and so on — this is what creates the logic of progression in history.

Herder is able to comfortably propose the historical development from the Orient to ancient Greece due to the thousand-year gap between his own era and those encompassed in the scheme. As we saw in chapter one, this was the argument implied in *This too* when he described his own age as being at the top of the tree of humanity. This position, separated from the archaic prejudices of previous ages, has the possibility to, as we saw, “see so far” (Herder 2004, 69). Thus implying that there is, also, the possibility of a more thorough analysis and recognition of history’s movement up to this point. We can see this principle at work through Herder’s treatment of the Middle Ages in *This too* as well. Herder rightly combats the prejudicial epithet of ‘dark’ ages, but he has little to say about the precise development of history during this time (Clark 1955, 192-195; Bruford 1962, 197; Gjesdal 2017, 163-166). As the apocryphal story goes,

⁵⁴ Photios 1 of Constantinople writes, in his *Codices*, “Phantasia, a woman of Memphis, daughter of Nicarchus, composed before Homer a tale of the Trojan War and of the adventures of Odysseus. The books were deposited, it is said, at Memphis; Homer went there and obtained copies from Phanites, the temple scribe, and he composed under their inspiration” (Photios *Codices*, 190). See: https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/photius_copyright/photius_05bibliotheca.htm

when Kissinger asked Zhou Enlai in the 1970s what he thought to be the consequences of the French Revolution, Zhou replied that it was, “too early to say” (Strauss 2006, 855; Ratcliffe 2016, ‘Zhou Enlai’).⁵⁵

Herder never denies the providential character of history, nor that there is an 'End' in which all diversity is united under humanity (Zammito 2009, 69-74). He says, “the human species is a whole; from its genesis it began to organize itself, and it shall consummate this organization” (Herder 1997, 67-69). While Herder thinks that this is certainly a protean development, he nonetheless wants to secure some sort of objective foundation to postulate purpose in history. He is skeptical as to the discernment of this development, but not its existence. Herder thinks the existence of a kind of development is evident through the effects he observes in nature, despite the fact that its causes are unclear. In many ways, the development of history is akin to his concept of forces; its existence is asserted through its effects, but the possibility of demonstrative proof remains open to skeptical attack. We can use two important quotations of Herder’s on the subject of history and physiology to demonstrate this analogy. First, let us consider a passage in the *Treatise* that we have already touched upon. Herder remarks “If physiology should ever get to the point where it demonstrated the science of the soul – which I very much doubt that it will, however – then it would cast many a ray of light on this phenomenon from the dissection of the nerve structure.” (Herder 2002, 66). Herder says this in the context of questions surrounding the interaction between the human mind and the physical world around it (DeSouza 2018a, 126-127). What Herder is describing with physiology is expressed by his following principle, that mankind does not have sensations only for themselves alone, but so that this feeling may ‘resound’ (Herder 2002, 66). Herder is attempting to address

⁵⁵ Even though this story has been ‘debunked,’ the sentiment is quite appropriate.

the problem of mind and body interaction using physiology and his doctrine of forces. He says, from the very nature of mankind and its thinking it is obvious that there is some interaction between the ‘immaterial’ mind and the material world. The reason he says, ‘I very much doubt that it will,’ is because it is a problem that is rather addressed by a metaphysical concept, i.e., forces, which are ultimately supersensible. Herder thinks the interaction of mind and body necessitates some concept of forces that is postulated but not demonstrated according to apodictic certainty. The same can be said concerning purpose in history: it is a postulation that coheres the material of history into a living whole rather than a confusing collection of events. Herder says that the view that there is ‘progression and development’ in history is “wider” than that philosophy of history which “[turns] everything into a game of ants, into a striving of individual inclinations and forces without purpose” (Herder 2004, 32). The attempt to bind together the events of history into a whole is, conversely, a “noble application of human history” and an “encouragement to hope, to action, to belief, even where one sees nothing or does not see everything” (Herder 2002, 32). Just like Herder’s supposition of forces, Herder’s understanding of purpose in history is meant as a propaedeutic to understand reality and to develop further knowledge. This is the significance behind the necessity to hope, even when one does not see everything.

It is not *only* necessary to empathize with historical particularity to arrive at understanding, but also to understand purposes and ends, which exist by virtue of each particular form being a distinct part of humanity. Herder’s demonstration here eschews a scientific methodology and relies instead on an “affective, sensuous-intuitive, and imagination rich diction full of metaphors, comparisons, and analogies” (Bollacher 2017, 212). Herder argues that it is only with this language that one can come to an understanding of the seemingly paradoxical

nature of reality, of history, and the tension of the one and the many. This is Herder's blending of poetic language with natural studies. It means that when we examine the world we must have a keen awareness towards specificity in order to diminish our own biases and consider things according to their specific logic. But this is only the first step towards understanding; on its own it results only in sensitivity without coherence. It is here that Herder's use of analogies is most important, Herder argues that the only way to tie together this vast wealth of diversity is through an analogical method, as Martin Bollacher incisively remarks "analogies function as an organizational and epistemological device for the historiographer in light of the material boundlessness of his object of research and as a helpful category in the assessment of historical individualities" (2017, 212). Herder is, of course, cautious about going too far in using his analogies to make specific connections throughout history, but he understands nonetheless that these types of claims are necessary for any kind of historical study to take place.

Herder argues that history and the world must be understood as a natural whole, filled with life and purpose, where each part reflects the whole in its position as a single part (Heinz & Clairmont 2009, 62; Wildschut 2019, 228). Like Kant, Herder believes it is impossible to derive natural laws or a purpose in human history without this supposition (Kant 1987, esp. 353-359). This whole is essentially guaranteed by the idea of God as a kind of divine artist which warrants the very possibility of purpose in nature and the world as totality (Zammito 1992, 335). But where they differ is the fact that the critical Kant understands this supposition only as an artefact of the mind, a propaedeutic towards further investigation. Herder is ambivalent here. On the one hand, he also treats purpose and the existence forces as simply a reflective judgment. But on the other hand, he often implies that this purpose is real — i.e., constitutive of reality and history — and that it is the very reflection of the necessary 'harmony' or interrelation of mind and body

(Herder 2002, 181-183 & 189-194). For Herder, the dichotomy of poetry and philosophy is an exemplar of this false distinction. This is what leads him to a study of folklore, language, and religion in order to arrive at an understanding of history. Philosophy simply cannot discount the power of poetry to disclose the coherence of reality, it is really only in a blending of the two, so Herder says, that a correct hermeneutic, and therefore historical understanding, can be established.

I mentioned earlier that Kant criticizes this use of analogy as inadequate to demonstrate necessity, here we can start to see that Herder rejects Kant's idea that purpose or necessity within the historical must be *hypothetical* (Kant 1987, 359). Herder instead understands purpose as a necessary part of the historical, which is conceived of as a poem. Herder, contra Kant, rejects the dichotomy that purpose in history must either be demonstrated with apodictic certainty or understood simply as a hypothetical judgment. According to Herder, this purpose can be illustrated by the use of analogies without, at the same time, remaining 'hypothetical.' Thus, necessity for Herder relates more to the Providential character of history, guaranteed by God, than to logical certainty. This has important implications to understand political phenomena and their consequences. When one interprets the historical manifestation of wars, for example, one cannot expect to arrive at an apodictic conclusion concerning their 'cause.' History is not understood through some sort of exhaustive analysis that identifies exact causes for events, but is rather understood according to the development of specific worldviews and linguistic artefacts that make it possible and 'necessary' for such a thing to occur. This is the general character of the development of history according to Herder. It is not an inexorable march 'forward,' but nor is it the skeptics incoherent collection of particular entities. That being said, Herder continually emphasizes that this Providential logic to history is, in terms of understanding, almost

exclusively reserved for the God perspective (Herder 2002, 356-57). The result is that the interpreter must strive above all for deep human knowledge of their area of study in order to come closest to this perspective, but at the same time this must be done with the humble awareness of our relative limitedness. It is in this connection that Herder remarks, in the preface to the *Ideas*, “Thus, great being, invisible supreme disposer of our race, I lay at your feet the most imperfect work that mortal ever wrote, in which he has ventured to *trace and follow your steps* [emphasis added]” (Herder 1800, x).

Herder is being quite modest, and he is somewhat veiling the fact that he has his own particular argument in this ‘imperfect work’ of philosophy of history. In order to advance his theory, Herder has to account for causation, in that he is trying to perceive a causal relation between natural circumstances and historical moments acting on the human mind — essentially the problem of mind and body. In order to explain how this causation can actually take place, Herder elaborates his doctrine of forces with respect to the mind. Herder sees creation as a gradation, and he does not think there is such a thing as inanimate creation. Despite the fact that man is a shepherd of nature, he is at the same a part of nature, and nature is inconceivable as something objective outside of man (Herder 1833 I, 128). When Herder conceives of history or the world as a whole, all these considerations come together. What is peculiar to Herder here is that he retains a kind of tension between conceptions of humanity. Herder often describes man as a kind of exalted being, but this conception is seemingly eroded by the fact that man is also a part of nature. Herder says, on the one hand, that man is a ‘second creator,’ ‘one of the visible Elohim upon earth,’ as well as ‘middle-creature’ of the earth (Herder 1833 I, 78 & 165; Kessler 2009, 258; Adler 2009, 99). On the other hand, Herder’s justification for this distinction comes down to a question of soul, and here Herder postulates the existence of supersensible forces and

distinguishes the mind from matter only in the degree of organization of these forces, which is not really consistent with ideas of the divine man (Herder 2002, 189-195). Herder is open to one of the common criticisms against Spinoza: that he cannot differentiate in qualitative terms between the ‘force’ that characterizes the human mind, and those of nature — it simply becomes a matter of levels in organization (Beiser 1987, 162-163; DeSouza 2018a, 121). Part of Herder’s response is that, since man is understood as a microcosm, an understanding of the soul or mind reveals an understanding of the entire world. This is a dynamic and living world where these forces change and interact with particular moments in time. Here is another aspect of the importance behind cultural particularity. Herder thinks these particularities are analogous to the uniqueness of a single soul, and thus deserve the same dignity and respect as any human being.

It is in this context that Herder’s ambivalence concerning purpose in history should be understood. Herder thinks purposive schemes can easily become the ground for the intrusion of one’s prejudice into one’s work. Perhaps some might say Hegel is an example of this. The problem is that these large schemes present the mind with many opportunities to introduce one’s ‘*Favoritvolk*’ or other kind of forms of idolatry (Herder 2004, 28). Herder rejects the forward nature of historical schemes which inadequately consider particularity. The criticism that one is not sensitive enough to particularity is one you could wield on almost any historian, and this is Herder’s point. This criticism, as trite as it may sound, is almost always correct; there is always more work to be done and more idols to be torn down. At the same time, any history requires some kind of purposive relationship. The foundation of Herder’s argument for purpose is his attempt to account for real interaction between the mind and body, which is ultimately explained by his doctrine of forces. In the next chapter, we will take a look at Herder’s argument as it appears in his essay *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul*, as well as in *God: some*

conversations, so that we can fully expose the consequences of Herder's concept of forces on his hermeneutics.

Chapter 4

Poetry and Nature

Herder's doctrine of forces is perhaps most evidently described in the *Ideas*, his short book on God, *God: Some Conversations*, as well as his essay, *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul*. With his doctrine of forces and mind-body harmony, Herder is presenting a novel solution to the question of mind-body interaction and thus to that of causality (Watkins 1995a;1995b;1998; Zammito 2002, 48-49 & 171; DeSouza 2018a; 2022, 62). While the specific nature of this debate on causality escapes the bounds of this chapter, I will treat Herder's doctrine of forces as a crucial part of Herder's response and I will interpret it as fundamental to both his conception of God and poetry (Clark 1942, 748-750; 1955, 96-97 & 225-228 & 345; Beiser 1987, 158-164; Norton 1991, 141-154; Moore 2011, 10-11; Goldstein 2014, 285-289; DeSouza 2018a, 113-115; 2020, 38-40). As we have seen, Herder describes poetry as a specific form of art, and he describes its effect as occurring through language and his concept of force; he consistently refers to the fact that poetry achieves its effect through forces. Herder says that "actions" are the subject of poetry and that these "actions" within a poetic whole are expressed by "a succession through force" (Herder 2006, 142). Poetry is thus understood as the linguistic expression, produced by the imagination, which articulates human activity. It is human action put into words. Poetry is not limited to a specific sense, but its organ is rather the soul (Herder 2006, 363). This 'force' then, is poetry's ability to arouse the imagination through language (Zumbusch 2017, 351-352). Herder describes this force as being one that "cleaves to the interior of words," and finally refers to this force as a "magic power" that affects the soul. (Herder 2006, 142). As we will see, this connection between poetry and force — the fact that poetry operates "out of space," and "in time" to produce an artistic whole — is quite similar to the way Herder

understands God as necessarily beyond space and time yet evidenced within time through the effects of the forces in nature and on the mind.

In *God: Some Conversations*, Herder remarks that the ‘purest’ conception of creation is that “God conceived the world out of himself.” This is described as pure because there is indeed no “purer activity than that of the thoughts of our mind.” Human thought is then compared by analogy to the divine thought of creation, “The thoughts of our mind, it is said, are in themselves ineffectual images, but the thoughts of God, accompanied by inherent omnipotence, were in the highest degree effective. He thought and it was so” (Herder 1949, 154-155). A single thought or idea is akin to the thought of God, distinguished only by its effectiveness. This is part of the significance behind Shelley’s quip that, “Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man” (Shelley 1965, 73). Herder’s concept of poetry is important here because he also categorizes poetry as amongst the highest use of language in terms of its ‘effectiveness’ and its fidelity to truth (Herder 2006, 362). On this understanding of poetry, Goldstein tells us, “Herder praises poetic language in terms we frequently reserve for the scientific and journalistic prose genres that now monopolize objective description. Poetry excels in “accuracy,” “faithfulness,” “truth” and “minor detail”” (Goldstein 2014, 288). The narrative of creation in Genesis:1 is a perfect reflection of this; it is itself a poem, and one which portrays the act of God’s creation as a linguistic and poetic event. Thus, Herder’s understanding of nature and the world is predicated on the idea that the whole of the world be treated as a poem, which precisely recalls the narratives coming out of the Old Testament.

The Forces of the Soul

We have seen in previous chapters that Herder rejected a distinction of mind and body, or of reason and the world. Now, in order to shed light on his concept of forces, it is necessary to

examine Herder's specific argument for this mind-body interaction. It is with *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul*, that Herder, inspired by Albrecht von Haller's physiological studies, begins to fully develop his forces in terms of providing a solution to the mind body problem (Clark 1955, 58 & 218-226; Beiser 1987, 128 & 147-148; DeSouza 2012b, 788-789; Goldstein 2014, 281 & 291).⁵⁶ This led Robert Clark to remark that if Herder, "Had...read Haller's major work [in the 1760s]...the entire course of the *Fragments* and *Critical Forests* would have been different" and that, "in the final printed work of 1778 Haller is made the pivot of the entire structure of Herder's psychology" (Clark 1955, 58 & 223). Herder viewed Haller's physiological studies on nerve irritations as evidence for the existence of a force within nerves that confirmed his idea of mind-body interaction (Clark 1955, 218-226; Beiser 1987, 147-148). This once again demonstrates the seemingly parallel but interrelated nature of Herder's literary and naturalistic studies; Herder did not need Haller's physiological studies to know that poetry had a 'force' or 'power.' As we have seen, he recognized it immediately in terms of his philosophy of aesthetics and according to his analogy to nature.⁵⁷ What Haller did accomplish, according to Herder, was to uncover empirical evidence of the activity of forces in the most minute biological events. In *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul*, Herder says that Haller's discovery of '*Reiz*,' or irritation — that is to say the expansion and contraction of nerves according to various forces, the demonstration of which was the main import of Haller's work — is probably as far as we can go in tracing sensations to their biological origin (Herder 2002, 189). He says, "without this sowing of obscure stirrings and irritations [referring to Haller's irritations] our most divine forces would not exist" (Herder 2002, 189). Though Haller's studies seem to confirm in biological terms the existence of the activity of forces in the human body, he has not

⁵⁶ Though Herder is already describing his thoughts on mind-body interaction in the 1760s, it is with *On the Soul* that he elaborates his arguments using physiology, as he would continue to do in the *Ideas* (Herder 2018, 55-73).

⁵⁷ This is how describes the existence of life-forces within particular cultures in *This too*, for example.

actually empirically discovered these forces themselves; they remain ‘obscure.’ Herder’s conclusion in *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* is that there is a necessary interaction between the mind and the body — the existence of Haller’s irritation only gives evidence to this in terms of physiology. The source of this interaction is Herder’s doctrine of forces; the entirety of nature is thought to be undergirded by a variety of forces which motivate organic development and an interaction between the world and the mind. The more specific interaction between an individual’s mind and his senses is a smaller version of this same problem. Herder uses the example of Agamemnon’s reaction to Calchas’ prophecies, “...wide-ruling Agamemnon, deeply troubled. With rage his black heart was wholly filled, and his eyes were like blazing fire” (Herder 2002, 190). After hearing from the ‘Prophet of evil’ Agamemnon has a physiological reaction that is directly related to his perception of Calchas’ words. Herder uses a variety of other analogies — the fact that anger ‘shakes’ the heart and ‘drives blood to the extremities,’ while love ‘softens and calms’ making the heart fill up, not to shake in anger, but to ‘blow its soft glow’ onto its object — in order to make it as a principle evident that some kind of interaction is occurring (Herder 2002, 190). It is worth noting that many of Herder’s examples here are poetic in origin; they are used alongside the scientific-poet Haller.⁵⁸

The epigram of Herder’s 1778 submission of *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* is a verse from the gospel of John, quoted in Greek, and which is translated by the King James Bible as, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”⁵⁹ Herder was quite fond of epigraphs, he opens the *Treatise* with one from Cicero, and closes *This*

⁵⁸ While Haller was most known for his physiological studies, he was also a poet. Herder calls him a ‘philosophical poet’ in *God: Some Conversations* (Herder 1949, 158-158; see also Clark 1955, 19 & 45).

⁵⁹ John 3:8

too with a verse from Corinthians (Herder 2002, 65 & 358). In an early draft of *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* from 1775, Herder used a quotation from Virgil: “God is within us, when he stirs us we are inflamed” (Herder 2002, 178). Robert Clark interprets Herder’s use of John 3:8 as signifying the determinism inherent to Leibnizian psychology (Clark 1955, 222). Alongside the Virgil citation from the earlier preface, I take Herder to be using it to tell us of the divinity of our souls, our spirit — i.e., ‘God is within us’ — as well as the obscurity of the soul, and thus, by extension, its ultimate unity in the concept of force, which we ‘canst not tell whence it cometh, and wither it goeth.’ In sum, Herder seems to be hinting that our soul and its forces is a presence of divinity, but that these forces are obscure and escape the eye of rational demonstration.

The Natural and Poetic Origin of Forces

While Haller’s studies provided Herder with great inspiration, it seems that the interaction between mind and body was already evident according to the psychological portraits found in things like poetry. This is why Herder says that the only three paths towards a psychology which is “in each step determinate physiology,” is through, “biographies, observations of doctors and friends, prophecies of poets” (Herder 2002, 196-197). Herder says, “these alone can provide us with material for the true science of the soul” (Herder 2002, 197). Though Herder was certainly enthusiastic that the scientist who uncovered the existence of forces in physiology was also himself a poet, and Herder even cites Haller’s poems in his book on God, Herder had already posited the existence of forces in nature and poetry years before the writings of Haller (Clark 1942, 743; Herder 1949, 158-159). Furthermore, Herder himself admits that the underlying forces which motivate the physiological reactions in the mind, and vice versa, are themselves ostensibly supersensible. He variously describes them as ‘obscure,’ ‘divine,’ the

‘invisible organic power,’ or even ‘the true image of the organic almighty’ (Herder 1800, 78; 2002, 189). The exact character of these forces is unclear as Herder remarks in *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* that he does not know of any philosophy that ‘explained what force is’, and in *God: Some Conversations*, he says that, “We do not know what force is nor how it works. We only see its activity as spectators, and hence construct analogous judgments for ourselves. We can never demonstrate the general laws about it, not even those we find best confirmed” (Herder 1949, 154; Herder 2002, 194). What we can conclude is that Herder believes the empirical sciences can demonstrate the effects of these forces, say in the human body or nature, as Haller did, but that the exact forces themselves, considered as causes, are not necessarily subject to empirical discovery (DeSouza 2020, 42-45). As Nigel DeSouza remarks, “We do not perceive these underlying and ascending invisible forces themselves; rather, we perceive the forms in which they manifest themselves, the ascending scale of natural forms from inanimate to animate: stones, crystals, metals, plants, animals, human beings” (DeSouza 2020, 43). Part of this has to do with Herder’s overall skepticism, which we have seen in how he compares the human’s perspective to that of God. It is also seen in his earlier remark that even the most confirmed general laws are not necessarily demonstrated. This skepticism is indicative of Herder’s description in *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* of the conditions in which this ‘irritation’ occurs. Herder gives a few responses that are meant to be inadequate — ‘something irritates us when we cannot avoid its irritating us,’ etc. — remarking of them: “But what would this all mean? Basically, still just that it irritates when it irritates, and that everyone believes. And it must be believed, that is experienced, sensed, and flees every general word-mongery and abstract prediction” (Herder 2002, 200). According to Herder, irritation, or mind-body interaction more generally, is immediately sensed as the basis of being, it is simply ‘word-

mongery' to try to say otherwise. A few pages later, Herder makes this assumption towards all sensuous cognitions and their resulting irritations. He says that there must be a 'medium' or 'mental bond' that enables the object to reach the sense and vice versa. This bond cannot be entirely demonstrated, but must be believed and trusted (Herder 2002, 202). However, this belief should not be assumed as a leap of faith, rather, it results from the view that the world and mind, and even the character of a thought itself, reveals a divine order necessitating God. Herder takes this as self-evident, and he uses a variety of analogies to nature to justify himself.⁶⁰ Rachel Zuckert, in her book on Herder's 'naturalist aesthetics,' interprets this as a kind secular view of God. She remarks, "Herder could be understood to use "God," then, simply to denote the existence and rational intelligibility of nature" (Zuckert 2019, 44). This could be supported by the fact that, in *God: Some Conversations*, Herder has his main interlocuter, Theophron — like Euthyphro, a loose stand-in for Herder's own position — say that the existence of the equal sign, or music, is proof enough of the existence of God (Herder 1949, 149-150). That is to say, Herder finds a proof of God in the harmony and order of the world, its intelligibility, expressed by things like music or mathematics. But Herder also calls 'reason,' that is to say the necessary relation of truths, the "only essential proof of God" (Herder 1949, 151). Rational intelligibility is the essential proof of God, but God is not necessarily identified with this intelligibility. While the intelligibility of creation *is* evidence of God, God cannot, at the same time, be reduced to the sum of natural laws either (Zuckert 2019, 44). Rather, God is the ground for their being, and their ultimate source (Herder 1949, 122 & 140-141 & 149 & 167-168; Bunge 1990a, 313 & 317).⁶¹

After describing the harmony of music as a proof of God, Herder remarks that the human

⁶⁰ Herder uses both analogies to the physiological reactions associated with emotions, as well as to kind of descriptions he finds in poets like Dante or Shakespeare (Herder 2002, 197-200).

⁶¹ It is worth noting that this conception, at least at the face of it, is consistent with the name "I Am that I Am" under which God reveals Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14.

intellect, which ‘observes and brings together many similarities’ — that is to say, the human intellect that makes the intelligibility of nature possible in the first place — works according to a ‘divine law’ that is analogous to the ‘thought’ of God which created these natural laws (Herder 1949, 150-151). This is why Herder called the soul the “image of the deity,” which, “seeks to imprint this image on everything that surrounds itself, makes the manifold one, seeks from lies truth, from vacillating rest clear activity and effect” (Herder 2002, 209). Indeed, the existence of natural laws alone does not prove God, it is in the existence of the human intellect, capable of observing and organizing these laws, that God is made evident.

Despite the fact that human knowledge, as derived from the process of analogy and sense experience, is necessarily imperfect, its ‘law’ is a divine one (Herder 1949, 150). This is, in effect, the analogy between man and God. Herder never denies the seeming insignificance of man’s knowledge relative to God; what the *imago dei* tells us, instead, is that our process of thinking is analogical to God and His creation — it is thus the aspect of humanity that is, so to speak, closest to God. Although Herder is skeptical as to the extent to which empirical science can discover these forces, he claims that the great poets — here he gives the example of Shakespeare and Klopstock — have “reached through strata and layers of earth” to arrive at a depiction of the most basic forces of the human soul (Herder 2002, 200). This is consistent with the idea of a ‘historical artist’ we saw earlier. Just as the historian must somehow be an artist to truly understand history, as must the psychologist be something of a poet to understand the soul — and Herder finds Shakespeare or Haller to be perfect examples of this. Earlier in the essay, Herder remarks that he is unbothered by those who criticize him for relying on ‘mere’ analogies, he says, “Syllogisms cannot teach me anything where it is a matter of the first conception of truth” (Herder 2002, 188). These first conceptions, which necessarily precede syllogisms, are

rather first apprehended through analogy, and Herder describes his own sensations in this regard as the ‘great spirit’ breathing upon him — perhaps a reference back to the verse from John (Herder 2002, 189). This is the context behind Herder’s statement that, “Homer and Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare and Klopstock have supplied psychology and knowledge of humankind with more material than even the Aristotles and Leibnizes of all peoples and times” (Herder 2002, 189). Why should psychology be totally reliant on empirical sciences, when the soul is, according to Herder, continually depicted by the greatest psychologists of mankind, the poets?

We have seen that there is some indeterminateness to Herder’s concept of force. Herder, seemingly a naturalist, uses empirical data, for example Haller’s experiments on nerves, to argue for the existence of his forces. But we have also just seen that he ultimately views someone like Dante as a ‘superior’ psychologist to Aristotle. Herder’s ambivalence concerning the possibility of a final empirical demonstration of forces, and his appeal to the poets as the ultimate authority on questions of the soul, is part of his attempt to avoid the problem of mechanism in nature. On the one hand, Herder consistently implies that these forces actualize themselves in the empirical world and produce effects in nature that we can observe. On the other hand, Herder conceives of force as a metaphysical concept akin to space or time and relates it back to poetic depictions. Herder is trying to avoid describing his concept of force in a way that would reduce the mind or the world to a kind of machine. If these forces can be demonstrated with certainty through empirical evidence, then it would not really be a basic metaphysical concept in the way Herder describes it. Further, it would not make much sense to say that poetry is affected by a force that inhabits words if he was talking about a concept that relied solely on empirical evidence. In any case, the existence of direct empirical evidence that would demonstrate Herder’s forces seems to be denied in his book on God, *God: Some Conversations*. If God is the Force of Forces, the

ultimate unity for all the forces in the world, then the empirical existence of forces would imply that God has an empirical existence — one could say the world *is* God or a ‘part’ of God, etc. The problem here is complex because Herder does not seem to conceive of empirical reality as objective but entwined with the observer. In some ways, Herder would agree that God *is* evidenced through empirical reality (Herder 1949, 163). But Herder also remarks that God is outside time and space, both of which he views as human abstractions which are inapplicable to God. God is the Force of forces, not limited by time or space, in the same way that poetry is also not limited by time and space — as music and physical art are — but is the linguistic expression of force (Herder 1949, 101; 2006, 140-151).⁶² The question of sensible versus supersensible is, to Herder, incorrect from the start. Herder rejects this dichotomy as constitutive of reality, and the essence of *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* is to posit some kind of harmony. But the force that Herder associates with poetry, language, God, and nature, is necessarily supersensible. Its meaning cannot be exhausted by any empirical demonstration. Herder’s argument for them, then, is tied into his metaphysics in some way. But because language is also conceived as a human, and thus material, phenomenon, and because God is revealed in space and time through both nature and history, this ‘force’ seems to necessarily take on some sort of existence in empirical reality. The problem is not only the exact empirical nature of these forces: it is that Herder is clearly making metaphysical claims while presenting, at times, a seemingly natural argument.

Herder’s forces remained obscure, and we cannot say that Haller’s irritations are a necessary demonstration of the exact kind of forces he is describing. In terms of the history of science and philosophy, Herder thinks Haller’s work is another example of the way the

⁶² Herder remarks that poetry is the only branch of the *belles lettres* that operates through force, and that words themselves contain forces (Herder 2006, 140).

anthropological or physiological sciences point to the same conclusions he finds in his philosophy or even in poetry. But, in the same way that he is careful not to reduce poetry to the sum of natural forces in its context, Herder is aware of the problems that come with positing these forces as ultimately sensible and thus subject to some kind of final empirical observation. However, even in terms of supersensible forces, Herder is still open to the critique of infinite regression, because it is not clear that these forces could not themselves be underlined by a smaller and more specific ‘force,’ and so on (Leibniz 1989, 85; Jorati 2018, 206-207).⁶³ Herder, partly in attempt to resolve this problem, puts the basis for their existence in God. Herder calls God, “the primal Force of all forces” (Herder 1959, 104). It is only God who can trace effects to their exact causes, and so by necessity an empirical demonstration of them will always remain imperfect. When Zuckert describes Herder’s naturalism as being an open task and thus never ending, she is describing Herder’s view of science as lacking final explanatory power (Zuckert 2019, 32-41 & 109-11 & 249-251). This is why Herder describes Haller’s ‘arithmetic calculations’ of the forces in the brain and its nerves as, “valuable, and afford[ing] us some instructive and introductory inferences, though not ultimate conclusions” (Herder 1800, 75). The universe is infinitely explainable and inexhaustible; any human explanation, particularly those of empirical science and rational demonstration, are, therefore, incomplete (Herder 1949, 151-152). As we saw with Herder’s concept of poetry, its specific property was the fact that it created a whole out of a large variety of events and actions. This is quite different from most scientific methodologies, which by definition do not offer final explanations embracing the whole of empirical observations, but rather rely on the infinite cycle of hypothesis and refutation. Just as the poet creates a unity in variety, Herder remarks that God, “created what was possible, and to an infinite reason joined with infinite power, everything possible is possible. This is all, as we

⁶³ (C.f. Sherry & Katz 2012; 2013)

say, united by space and time, that is, by order. Every created thing is defined with a most perfect individuality, and circumscribed by it. Thus neither in the world as a whole, nor in its smallest part, is there contingency” (Herder 1949, 129). The world operates according to a certain divine necessity; there is no such thing as randomness in the world, the world is in perfect accordance with divine laws, and as a whole. Everything can be explained according to infinite reasons, which are ultimately guaranteed by God. As we saw, Herder observes these laws in the harmony of music, the existence of the equal sign, or even the mathematical circle (Herder 1949, 149-151). But this harmony does not exist as ‘objective’ and outside of human thoughts. In response to the question: “what if there were no reckoning mind?” — that is to say, how could this harmony prove God if it is dependent on individual minds — Herder is quick to remark that, “If we do away with all thinking, then there is no object of thought, with all reality, then nothing real” (Herder 1949, 153). This kind of skepticism is, to Herder, a non-starter. Herder asserts the interrelation of mind and body and regards a denial of the necessity of an ‘observer’ as a requirement for the existence of any laws to observe, as ‘sophistry’ (Herder 1949, 153). There is simply no question of an objective nature that is not conceived in direct relation to humans themselves. Even if the divine order is itself asserted, any identification of its causes in the world must remain a kind of hypothesis. Herder remarks, “I derive these ideas from the daily experience of sound reason. But I cannot transplant them to the province of demonstration, because I do not know clearly either what cause or effect is, much less the relation between the two” (Herder 1949, 153). The exact relation of cause to effect is, as in his philosophy of history, reserved for God’s perspective. Just like Herder’s forces and the union of mind and body, the divine order of the world is not subject to final empirical demonstration, but is derived from analogies to daily experience, nature, and elsewhere. It is, in short, ‘believed.’

Forces, Mind-Body Interaction, and the Problem of Causality

I have outlined Herder's elaboration of his concept of force in the context of mind-body interaction, poetry, and Haller's famous studies. But Herder's solution to mind-body interaction really comes out of historic and philosophical debates concerning causality in the writings of people like Leibniz, Spinoza, and Kant. Herder addresses this more technical side of the mind-body debate in *God: Some Conversations*, which can be understood as a commentary on Spinoza and Leibniz on the question of God.

From his earliest readings and critiques of Leibniz, Herder upheld an interaction between mind and body (Herder 2018; DeSouza 2012b; 2018a; Zammito 2002, 170-171). As we have seen with *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul*, his doctrine of forces attempts to account for this interaction. In a similar way to what H.B. Nisbet once did with Bacon and Herder, Nigel DeSouza has elaborated the underappreciated importance of Leibniz on Herder's thought (DeSouza 2012b; 2022; Nisbet 1967). In the English literature, there is very little written on Herder's relationship with Bacon or Leibniz. The article we concern ourselves with here is a discussion of the specific relation between Herder's early doctrine of the soul and his readings of Leibniz (DeSouza 2012b). The wider problem is that of a doctrine of causality which can account for the interaction Herder is positing between the soul and body (Watkins 1995a; 1998; DeSouza 2012b, 784). DeSouza's demonstration of the importance of Herder's reading of Leibniz on his subsequent philosophy, particularly in terms of his doctrine of the soul, speaks to the overall historical context of Herder's philosophy as outlined by Eric Watkins, as well as Frederick Beiser and John Zammito (Beiser 1987; 2002, 29-31; Watkins 1995a; 1998; Zammito 2002). Zammito and Watkins particularly illustrate the importance of the debates surrounding causality and mind-body interaction as at the forefront of philosophy and reflected in three

competing theories of the 17th and 18th centuries (Watkins 1995a, 295-300; 1998; Zammito 2002, 44-49).⁶⁴ What is most important here is Leibniz's theory of pre-established harmony, as well as the theory of physical influx, which developed primarily out of the writings of Martin Knutzen and Christian Crusius (Watkins 1995, 307-338; DeSouza 2012b, 774 & 776-778). By the midpoint of the 18th century, doctrines other than that of physical influx faced mounting criticism. As Frederick Beiser describes it, "The chief problem with occasionalism and the preestablished harmony is that they could not explain the apparent interaction between substances, which seemed to be not only a fact of experience but also a requirement of Newton's physics" (Beiser 2002, 31). But, as Eric Watkins notes, these criticisms, crystallized into a theory of physical influx, occurred in direct conversation with Leibniz's theories which produced the "philosophically interesting story" of German physical influx theory in the 18th century (Watkins 1995a, 296). The importance of Leibniz for Herder's thought is established by DeSouza and others, and that of Kant is self-evident. In sum, Herder's views on physical influx and mind-body interaction developed in relation to his reception of Leibniz's concept of pre-established harmony, as well as the contemporary critique of this concept, found in the physical influx of the pre-Critical Kant (Beiser 1987, 4; Watkins 1995b, Zammito 2002, 48-49). The theory of physical influx postulated a direct interaction between what were thought of as two distinct substances, mind and body — that is to say, it postulated intersubstantial causation (Watkins 1995a, 296 & 311-316; DeSouza 2012b, 776-781). It was asserted that the mind *could* have causative power on the body and vice versa. As DeSouza has demonstrated, and as I have hoped to have shown, from the beginning, Herder rejected any rigid dualism between mind and body, or subject and object (DeSouza 2012b, 775; 2018a, 113). Herder's point, especially in *On the Cognition and*

⁶⁴ These were, the occasionalism presented by Malebranche, the pre-established harmony of Leibniz, and the various theories of physical influx.

Sensation of the Human Soul, was to present his doctrine of forces in order to argue that the mind and body were not different substances but that they were both ultimately composed of forces. Thus, Herder rejected Leibniz's pre-established harmony insofar as it did not allow for real intersubstantial causation, something which physical influx allowed for, i.e., physical influx held that causation between the distinct substances of mind and body was possible. But, in so far as Herder rejected treating the mind and body as distinct substances, he differed from previous theories of physical influx. What Herder had to contend with, however, were Leibniz's objections to this kind of interaction. As we saw with Leibniz's analogy of the mind to a mill, the mind cannot be subject to mechanical laws or discovered empirically (Leibniz 1991, 83). A doctrine of physical influx — as in a direct and substantial interaction between mind and matter — seems to give consciousness a kind of reality against that. If the body can act on the mind, say, through Haller's irritations, then it seems to imply that consciousness has a 'reality' as a supersensible energy which interacts with the forces of the body — violating Leibniz's principle that one cannot locate consciousness. Herder does not necessarily disagree with Leibniz's principle here. For example, in the *Ideas*, he remarks, of Haller's physiological studies, "[They] show how futile it would be to seek the indivisible work of the formation of ideas in substance and distributed among the material parts of the brain: nay I am persuaded, did none of these experiments exist, the very manner, in which ideas are formed, must have led to the same conclusion" (Herder 1800, 77). Herder refuses to distinguish mind and body, but in doing so with his doctrine of forces, he seems to give the mind a reality as supersensible energy, as force. The problem here is that, while he is correctly rejecting the possibility of an empirical discovery of the soul, his account for the soul's interaction with the body through supersensible, and almost

unexplainable, forces, seems to amount to an explanation of the effects of this interaction with a concept that simply recapitulates these same effects.

This kind of circularity is why Leibniz had argued that physical influx amounted to an introduction of occult qualities and a transfer of consciousness into matter (Leibniz 2000, 55-56 & 64).⁶⁵ As Leibniz remarked, “If the means which causes an attraction properly so called are constant and at the same time inexplicable by the powers of creatures, yet are true, it must be a perpetual miracle, and if it is not miraculous, it is false. It is a chimerical thing, a scholastic occult quality” (Leibniz 2000, 64). Herder’s response was that it was not a question of transference; Being by its very genesis necessitates a direct union of between mind and body (DeSouza 2012b, 781). For one, this interaction does not occur between two distinct ‘substances.’ According to Herder, mind and body are ultimately one in force, and therefore there is no question as to intra or inter-substantial causation in the first place (Herder 2002, 208). Herder speaks of not a, “harmony between spirit and body but rather a harmony between forces and forces” (Herder 1949, 110). Where Herder perhaps lacked a definitive response was to the exact state of his forces, and whether they really could be classified as occult qualities. If there is no question of ‘interaction’ in the sense of two distinct substances, then the exact basis for their ultimate harmony must be argued for in a way that could also account for the seeming difference in the character of thought and sense. This is really the role of Herder’s doctrine of forces. As we have seen, Herder denied any final empirical demonstration for these forces, and rather preferred to judge them hypothetically on the basis of their effects, which he observed to be self-evident (Beiser 1987, 148-156). Right after Herder describes the harmony of ‘forces and forces’ — i.e., the idea that reality is composed of a variety of forces in harmony, not a variety of substances

⁶⁵ That is to say, a transfer of accidents (Watkins 1995a, 337).

different in kind — he gives the caveat: “For who could, and who indeed can now, explain how force works upon force” (Herder 1949, 110).⁶⁶ Herder is asserting a unity of mind-body in that they are both composed of forces, but he does not claim to explain these forces themselves, and he is even skeptical as to there being any demonstrative explanation of them in the first place. Nonetheless, he argues that these forces are not ‘occult qualities’ because they are immediately apparent to us through sense perception (Herder 1800, ix; c.f. DeSouza 2018a, 124). While this may seem like a dogmatic assertion, and an evasion of the criticism of occult qualities, something Kant would criticize Herder for, it really goes back to Herder’s epistemology (Kant 2007, 131-132 & 310; Beiser 1987, 148-153; Heinz & Clairmont 2009, 51).⁶⁷

At the source of human thinking, we find a kind poetry that is characterized by analogy and metaphors. There are no platonic universals, but words are not reduced to mere names either. Herder wants to collapse this dichotomy. In terms of the soul as ‘material’ or ‘ideal,’ Herder puts it this way, “But then naturally the soul would be material?, or we would even have many immaterial souls?” We have not yet reached that point, my reader; I do not yet know what ‘material’ or ‘immaterial’ is, but I do not believe that nature has fixed iron sheets between the two because I do not see the iron sheets in nature anywhere, and can certainly suspect them least of all where nature united so intimately.” (Herder 2002, 208). Herder’s argument then, is that the analogies he makes to substantiate the existence of forces are entirely consistent with the character of our soul and its thinking. Nigel DeSouza perfectly summarizes Herder’s position here, “our experience of our soul and our observations justify our providing some further explanation of the underlying causes at work...The key methodological tool here is analogy”

⁶⁶ Perhaps only the aforementioned poets of the soul, such as Shakespeare and Klopstock.

⁶⁷ In his review of the *Ideas* Kant called Herder’s doctrine of forces, “the endeavor to want to explain what one does not comprehend from what one comprehends even less” (Kant 2007, 132).

(DeSouza 2018a, 124). According to Herder, analogies are not inconsistent or harmful to philosophy, but lie at its very root and can thus justifiably be used to help us explain causes. Herder's forces may not be entirely reliant on empirical or rational demonstration, but this is because he would argue that their meaning is not exhausted by this kind of inquiry. As we have seen in the first two chapters, this was the very argument Herder used to justify treating cultures on their own terms; they were the product of a distinctive relationship between a human community and the particular world it inhabited. But it also goes back to the idea that thought stands, from its origin, in harmony with sensual perception.⁶⁸ As Kristin Gjesdal puts it in terms of Herder's philosophy, "[The] human being, hence also human understanding, is situated in a historical and cultural context..." (Gjesdal 2017a, 9).⁶⁹ The idea that we can abstract human knowledge from its empirical context is, to Herder, absurd. As a result, he uses mind-body union as a first principle and attempts to draw analogies to the natural and psychological world — as he finds portrayed in literature, and in empirical science like that of Haller's — in order to prove this.

One could say that, in this sense, Herder's argument for forces is as poetic as it is metaphysical and festooned by physiological and natural studies. What this means is that Herder's naturalistic studies were presupposed by metaphysical concepts he developed from his early days, especially that of force. The essence of Herder's naturalism is thus predicated on his argument for the harmony between the mind and the world, which is a metaphysical argument — however much Herder supports it with empirical evidence. This gets to the critique of Kant; Herder is claiming not to do metaphysics, but at the same time he imbues his natural studies with a concept of force that is poetic and metaphysical. If Herder is often accused of 'poeticizing,' his

⁶⁸ As Blake says, "Knowledge is not by deduction but Immediate by Perception or Sense" (Blake 2009, 664).

⁶⁹ See also (Gjesdal 2017b; Waldow 2017).

response would be that this is no insult given that poetry is at the heart of human knowledge. As Herder remarks: “The spirit poeticizes; the inner sense creates images” (Herder 2006, 361). If poetry lies at the source of our spirit’s activity, it must necessarily be reconciled with philosophy, not radically distinguished from it. In this sense, I take Herder’s attempt to connect his notion of language and poetry with his metaphysical concept of force as a solution to the problem of infinite regress and occult forces that could be levelled at his psychology of mind-body interaction. The forces of nature are not occult, nor simply sensible; rather, they are accurately expressed in figurative language, through a breath of the spirit that emerges as sound in time. It is not by chance that Herder describes the power of poetry as occurring, in contradistinction to all the other arts, through a force that “inhabits” words (Herder 2006, 140).

The Relationship Between Herder’s God and His Forces

While Herder’s forces *are* nominally demonstrated through empirical studies into nature, they are also expressed in poetry, and they ultimately come out of technical debates concerning causality. I have briefly exposed some of the Leibnizian and Kantian critiques of Herder’s forces in the context of this debate, and particularly as it relates to forces being an occult or obscure concept. Now we can turn to Herder’s more specific response to these critiques as it is found in *God: Some Conversations* — where Herder attempts to elaborate his concept of forces in the context of the idea of God. Herder’s exact explanation of these forces has obvious importance for his conception of God, who is the ground for their being. In 1787, when he publishes *God: Some Conversations*, Herder was still reckoning with Leibniz’s ideas concerning God and forces in nature. As a response to the ‘Pantheism Controversy,’ Herder published his readings of Spinoza alongside Leibniz, as well as Shaftesbury, to arrive at his concept of God. Herder tells us in the preface that this work was a long time coming. He says, “For some ten or twelve years, I have

had in mind a little essay which was to be called, ‘Spinoza-Shaftesbury-Leibniz’” (Herder 1949, 67). It seems Herder had, in part, used the atmosphere of the Pantheism Controversy, and his debates with Jacobi on Spinoza, as an excuse to finally put to writing his thoughts on these three thinkers, but perhaps particularly the first and the third (McGiffert 1902, 711; Clark 1955, 339). This is somewhat evident in the style of the book, which is again that of a dialogue. During the first two dialogues, a kind of ‘anti-Spinozist’ is convinced to take up a genuine study of Spinoza, and thus we have a dialogue concerning the basic features of the latter’s philosophy as interpreted by Herder. Following this, Herder provides his own interpretation of the two rationalists, where he attempts to correct one with the other, so to speak, arriving at an interpretation that is neither Leibnizian nor Spinozist, but distinctly Herderian (McGiffert 1902, 711; Clark 1955, 274 & 339-342; Beiser 1987, 159-161; 2002, 367-368). Robert Clark remarks that it was ‘true’ that Herder was misinterpreting Spinoza, while McGiffert notes that Herder’s interpretation of Spinoza was “in many ways a misinterpretation” (McGiffert 1904, 211; Clark 1955, 341). This is despite Zuckert’s assertion that, “Herder suggests in *GSC* that he is a Spinozist, though of a particular, vitalist kind” (Zuckert 2019, 44). As Herder has Theophron remark, “I am no Spinozist and shall never become one” (Herder 1949, 81).⁷⁰ It should be noted that this comment ultimately precedes a defense of Spinoza from the labels of ‘pantheist and atheist.’ But here Herder is responding to specific negative readings of Spinoza; Herder gives the example of Johannes Colerus, an early and critical biographer of Spinoza, and later Herder will also refer to the article by Bayle in the same light. Ultimately, like Lessing, Herder’s point here is not to become an ‘ist’ of any sort (Herder 1949, 135). Herder intends to use both Spinoza and Leibniz, as he did before with Haller, to support his own distinct conclusions. The decidedly

⁷⁰ As Robert Clark puts it “If it is wrong to call Herder a Spinozist, it is equally wrong to call Goethe one. Each was able to receive Spinoza’s thought with immense profit, but without loss of his own independence. Indeed, it would seem that both were unconscious of how far from Spinoza they really were” (Clark 1955, 347).

unique character of Herder's interpretation was what made *God: Some Conversations* historically relevant, particularly for the development of German idealism (McGiffert 1902, 711; Clark 1955, 342; Beiser 2002, 367-368).

The main criticism of Spinoza, and the one Herder seeks to address, is that his system was pantheistic, and thus atheistic.⁷¹ As Frederick Beiser put it, "According to Herder, the most serious problems in Spinoza's philosophy stem from his theory of divine attributes" (Beiser 1987, 162). The problem was the existence of God in space, which is, for one, heretical, but also because it seemed to reduce God, as well as Man's consciousness, into crude matter (Beiser 1987, 162). While Herder remarks that the Deity dwells in "the natural constitution of every organism" and that in, "what we call dead matter there converge at every point, no fewer and no lesser divine forces [than an infinite amount]" (Herder 1949, 107). This is not an identification of God with nature, but it is a description of the fact that "we are surrounded by omnipotence," such that, "in very point of its activity [the Deity's] which is a point only for us, it carried all its infinity in itself" (Herder 1949, 107). The point is that God is not limited by space and time, and our conception of 'endless' which occurs under the aegis of these concepts, is inapplicable to God. Herder is making a distinction between the infinite-in-itself, i.e., God, and the endless conceived in the imagination in terms of time and space — the limitation placed upon humans as a part of creation — in order to avoid the result of pantheism (Herder 1949, 107). He remarks, "As limited beings we swim in space and time. We count and measure everything by them, and rise with difficulty from figures of the imagination to the pure idea which excludes all spatial and temporal measure" (Herder 1949, 107). It should be noted that God is not immeasurable simply as a result of human limitedness. Herder remarks, "The essence of the eternal is not

⁷¹ This was the argument of Bayle and was revived with great force by Jacobi in Herder's time.

immeasurable for us alone. By its very nature it is impossible to measure” (Herder 1949, 107). Herder regards the difference between infinite-in-itself, i.e., beyond both space and time, and the endless, occurring in space and time, as analogous to the distinction between ‘infinite reason’ and ‘endless imagination’ (Herder 1949, 107). He says, “His infinite and most real Being [i.e., Spinoza’s God] is no more the world itself than the infinite of reason is the same as the endless of the imagination” (Herder 1949, 107). Now perhaps here Herder is simply emphasizing the difference between God and the world by analogy to the difference between reason and imagination. But the idea that the infinite is ‘immeasurable’ by its nature seems to imply that Herder is also saying that, while God is not known through measurement, i.e., with science, we can, with difficulty, rise closer to Him by thinking beyond space and time. God is not understood in space or time, but as force, which is expressed through the poetic use of language.

In order to support his argument here, Herder appeals to what he calls an ‘old metaphor’ which says, “God is a circle whose center is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere” (Herder 1949, 107). In terms of mathematics, this statement appears to be absurd. Like squaring the circle, it is an idea emanating from the imagination, but one which does not seem to be consistent with the laws of measurement: space and time. God exists everywhere, in all space, and at all times — transcending the very limits of both concepts. This is why Herder says the metaphor ‘remains true,’ because it is consistent with his conception of infinity as a representation of God which is distinguished from the endlessness perceived in time and space.⁷²

Herder does not give a source for his use of the old metaphor; indeed, it has been used by many.

Perhaps its first attestation is in the hermetic *Book of the 24 Philosophers* — a collection of

⁷² It would be interesting in this regard to relate Herder’s distinction here between potential infinity and actual infinity to the philosophy of mathematics we find in Georg Cantor, who was himself trying to account for the problem of pantheism in mathematics, and who also relied on Leibniz and Spinoza. See for example Newstead (2006) and Brancato (2021).

twenty-four aphorisms concerning the nature of God — where this metaphor stands as the second. But it has been expressed in various manners from the likes of Dante, Ficino, Nicholas de Cusa, Giordano Bruno, and Pascal (Bruno 1962, 137; Dante *Vita Nuova*, XII; *Paradiso*, XXXIII; Nicholas of Cusa, 1985; Pascal 1958, 17).⁷³ Dante mentions the idea explicitly in his *Vita Nuova*, citing the metaphor in Latin, but it is his Trinitarian God, depicted as three circles in the *Paradiso*, that will help clarify Herder's use of the metaphor (c.f. Franke 2007, 7-8 & 30).⁷⁴ In the final scene of the *Paradiso*, Dante is gazing upon the divine light when three circles appear to him. These three circles represent the Christian God, and Dante pains himself to understand the 'begotten' circle which 'seemed painted with our effigy.' As Teodolinda Barolini puts it, Dante is "confronting the ultimate mystery of the incarnation." (Barolini 2014). This is to say, Dante is pondering God's human presence in the world; the circle of God 'painted with our effigy.' Dante remarks that his eyes were set on it completely, "as the geometer intently seeks/ to square the circle, but he cannot reach,/ through thought on thought, the principle he needs."⁷⁵ Dante uses a comparison to the intellect's attempt at comprehension, as a geometer, and describes its failure at the face of a comprehension of God, particularly His presence in the world (c.f. Barolini 2014). But the poem does not end with this intellectual failure, rather, "But then my mind was struck by light that flashed/ and, with this light, received what it had asked."⁷⁶ The God who is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere cannot be

⁷³ Pascal, *Thoughts*, #72. In 2012, the University of Warwick held a kind of dramatic performance concerning various iterations of this metaphor titled, "An infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere." I was lucky to have chanced upon their brochure to aid me in tracking down these sources. See: < https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/iatl/funding/fundedprojects/studentperformance/addivinaola/ >

⁷⁴ Robert Clark notes that Hamann and Herder had read Milton's *Paradise Lost* together, and that Hamann, in a letter, mentions plans to read Dante next. Here is Clark: "...in 1764, Hamann left Königsberg on a trip to Southern Germany, he wrote back to his father to greet Herder and to tell him that as soon as he had finished with Milton's *Hell* the two of them would venture into Dante's *Purgatory*. This would imply that Herder had been introduced by Hamann not only to Milton, but possibly also to Dante's *Divina commedia*, a work seldom read in the Age of Reason" (Clark 1955, 46).

⁷⁵ *Paradiso*, 33, 133-135 (Citation given in format canto #, verse #).

⁷⁶ *Paradiso*, 33, 140-141.

found through measurement, the language of the metaphor is an explicit reference to this fact. Rather, as Dante describes it, comprehension of God strikes the mind with flashing light. Herder remarks that the imagination finds no end in space nor in time; that is to say, it is only through figurative language that one can comprehend something beyond space and time — and even then, we are grasping. It follows that it is especially with this same kind of language, that of poetry, that we can come to know God (Herder 1949, 107). For example, Herder says, “Homer gives even the infinite itself human dimensions, and for this reason, and for a thousand others, he is my poet” (Herder 2006, 132). Homer is able to give the infinite, i.e., God, *human* dimensions; this is the significance of Herder’s use of the old metaphor to illustrate his conception of God as infinity. The only way to describe ‘infinity,’ what transcends time and space, *in* time and space, is by using poetry. It is the power of poetry, as Blake put it, “To see a World in a Grain of Sand/ Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand” (Blake 2009, 490). Just as Blake wants to ‘see a World in a Grain of Sand,’ Herder’s God ‘carries all its infinity in itself in every point of its activity.’ Herder’s God is not simply a reinterpretation of the God of Spinoza, but it can be clearly related to ideas of the Divine found in humanity’s greatest poets, including those found in the Old Testament. Herder understands the God of the Old Testament as acting within the world and nature, as we saw, for example, with the patriarchal conditions in which God brought the animals before Adam to name them and develop the human power of reason. At the same time, Herder understands that, for the Hebrews, God was always above ‘nature’ and remained the latter’s master (Herder 1833 I, 74).

As we have seen in chapter three, and earlier in this chapter, Herder uses poetry to shed light on the seeming obscurity of his concept of forces. This is part of an overall theme we have examined in a number of Herder’s writings, from the *Treatise*, to *On the Cognition and*

Sensation of the Human Soul, to finally here in *God: Some Conversations*. Burkhardt mentions in his introduction to *God: Some Conversations*, that the distinction Herder makes here between infinity and endlessness is one of the most interesting parts of the book (Burkhardt 1949, 46). It is the key to his re-interpretation of Spinoza insofar as he is responding to the Pantheism Controversy and Jacobi's charge that Spinozism was equivalent to pantheism and atheism. As Beiser puts it, "Herder...points out that Spinoza's God is not simply the sum of all things; rather, he is the self-sufficient substance in which they all exist. So, although Spinoza's God cannot exist without the world, neither is he identical with it" (Beiser 1987, 161). Herder says God is not to be identified with creation since creation is necessarily conceived of in terms of time and space, something that God transcends. It is important to note that, despite Herder's attempt to justify his interpretation with Spinoza's writings, this is a departure from Spinoza. This has been well established in the literature (McGiffert 1902, 711; Burkhardt 1949, 41-45; Clark 1955, 274 & 339-342; Beiser 1987, 159-161; 2002, 367-368; Steinby 2009, 63; Popejoy 2016, 179).⁷⁷ The question is at once one of philosophy and theology. Herder must respond to the charges of pantheism while at the same time upholding his harmony, or even identification, of matter and mind. Herder's re-interpretation of Spinoza is illustrated through his idea of infinity which is beyond both time and space. Herder says that Spinoza was correct to regard time as a 'symbolic image of eternity' but he wishes Spinoza had gone further in regarding space in the same manner (Herder 1949, 107). In other words, Herder regards God as transcending both time and extension; God is not the Substance of Substances, but the Force of Forces. As McGiffert puts it, "That Herder, by interpreting Spinoza as he did at this point, brought him into better accord with the thought of his own and subsequent days is clear; but that he was reading ideas into Spinoza

⁷⁷ Burkhardt suggests that Herder departs most from Spinoza with his distinction of actual infinity, and his concern with the problem of identifying creation with God, a problem which, Burkhardt remarks, was not meaningful for Spinoza (Burkhardt 1949, 43).

of which Spinoza had not dreamed is equally clear. The fact, however, that he interpreted Spinoza thus, while freeing his system from a serious inconsistency, made it possible at the same time to understand him as teaching divine immanence instead of pantheism, is historically of the greatest importance” (McGiffert 1904, 718). The point of Herder’s book on God was not to become a Spinozist. It was to interpret Spinoza and Leibniz against each other according to his first principle of mind and body union — a principle he found espoused in a philosopher like the Earl of Shaftesbury. This was done in order to arrive at a conception of God that was consistent with a union of mind and body, but at the same time not reducible to nature, as in pantheism (Burkhardt 1949, 4-11 & 47).

At the beginning of the second dialogue of *God: Some Conversations*, Herder is defending Spinoza while comparing him to Leibniz. Of Spinoza, Herder says, despite the fact that his words may, “offend us” and, “sound strange to our ears” meaning they will, “never win a place in our philosophy,” his system still “gives much coherence” and is nonetheless an improvement from Descartes (Herder 1949, 97). Herder then remarks that Leibniz’s pre-established harmony is a response to this ‘offensive’ language in Spinoza, but that, though it, “sounds more pleasant,” it, “also has its difficulties” (Herder 1949, 97). Finally, Herder remarks of both theories, “...there is no heresy in any of these expressions. One is merely more awkward than another, and at bottom we understand equally little by any of them. We do not know what power is, or how power works. Still less we know how the Divine Power has produced anything and how it imparts itself to everything according to its nature. However, that all things must depend upon one self-dependent nature, in their existence, their relationships, as well as in every expression of their powers, no consistent mind can doubt” (Herder 1949, 97). This is a statement of both Herder’s epistemology and his criticism of rationalism. Just as Herder resisted an overly

rational interpretation of the Old Testament in *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, here too Herder holds that something like a rational demonstration of God will not capture His entire meaning. When it comes to matters of first conceptions, like the idea of God, this ‘truth’ is first established by analogy — what Herder calls the “key for penetrating into the inside of things” (Herder 2002, 188). At the beginning of *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul*, Herder asserts that analogy and figurative language are the beginning of understanding. He says, “What we know we know only through analogy, from the creation to us and from us to the Creator. So if I should not trust Him who put me into this circle of sensations and similarity, who gave me no other key for penetrating into the inside of things than my own impress or rather the reflected image of His mind in my mind, then whom should I trust and believe?” (Herder 2002, 188). Just as our mind is analogical to God, we use analogy between creation and our own mind in order to develop our knowledge. That is to say, we observe the world through our senses, and we create analogies between these sensations using our mind. Recall that this was precisely how Herder described the origin of poetry, and he used this fact to arrive at what he saw as a correct interpretation of the Old Testament. The Hebrews created a mythology not through strict rational and demonstrative rules, but by organizing their sense impressions into a poetic whole of analogies and metaphors. Herder calls this process a reflection of the image of the Divine mind in our own mind — recalling the relationship between questions of epistemology and the idea of God or the narratives of the Old Testament. Herder is once again interpreting the *imago dei* at the heart of his epistemology. Herder is arguing that God, the obscure forces of the soul, and even those of nature, are not subject to final explanation through rational means, whether scientific, or philosophical.

Despite the fact that Herder uses a great variety of examples from nature, human biology, geology, and even cosmology to support his doctrine of forces, we have seen he does not think any of this necessarily explains exactly what forces are. If, for example, Haller's discoveries were to be disproven, and there is some *other* kind of force and activity at the root of nerve irritations, this would not shake Herder's belief in the union of mind and body. As I have cited Herder, his response to skeptical claims as to the existence of his forces is that, in the end, "no consistent mind" can doubt them. Herder thinks we are missing the point if we are getting into increasingly sophisticated debates on the nature of God or the soul which amount to questions of terminology. This is the very kind of thinking Herder is consistently arguing against. Herder discards the mathematical methodology of Spinoza, which he regards as being inherited from Descartes and the general historical-philosophical milieu, and imbues his system with his principle of holism — that is to say the idea that the world is not divided by two distinct substances, mind and body, but is one in his concept of force, which he views as distinct from the substance monism of Spinoza (Herder 1949, 101-103; Burkhardt 1949, 44). Herder explicitly describes his concept of forces as the "intermediate" concept between spirit and matter (Herder 1949, 103). And recall that when Herder described Hebrew poetry, he describes it as a kind of play of the mind with nature that infuses it with life and purposes, attributing natural occurrences to God and so on. It can be said that this is essentially what Herder is doing with Spinoza's system. He is subsuming it to his forces, which are expressed by humans through poetry and language, and thereby avoiding the problem of reductionistic materialism (Beiser 1987, 159). Herder is infusing in Spinozism something of the anthropomorphizing spirit that he found in ancient Hebrew poetry.

In the *Fragments* Herder decries the attempt made by philosophers to increase the exactitude of language through excessive rules. He remarks that synonyms, for example, are not “useless slaves” but reflect the distinctive character of a language. For example, the Hebrew language has hundreds of botanical words deriving from the fact that they were shepherds (Herder 2002, 33). Herder satirizes the “stewardly philosopher” who wants to dispense with synonyms in order to arrive at a more rational language (Herder 2002, 35-36). Herder is dissatisfied with the notion that one can achieve more penetrating insight by eliminating the use of figurative language in things like philosophy. He says, let a Baumgarten or a Kant continue the distinctions in aesthetics, “between words that are almost the same,” this *is* an improvement in philosophy and German philosophical language, but, “not for language mastery in general” (Herder 2002, 36). Finally, Herder takes an even more polemical tone, and says: “You cannot determine them all, philological philosopher!...No! Your jurisdiction does not yet extend that far and still less into the land of the poet” (Herder 2002, 36). Herder is telling us that there are concepts and words which are not subject to further distinction — at least not in any way that is really useful. The refusal to acknowledge this is the source of Herder’s polemic here against the ‘philological philosopher.’ The kind of thing Herder has in mind here are concepts like God, the soul, and the language of the poets. As Herder says of God, “We finite beings, encompassed by space and time, can but say of the highest cause, ‘It is. It is active.’ But with these words we say all” (Herder 1949, 130). According to Herder, acting as if we can say anything more of determinate content is purely hubris, because this answer will necessarily be constrained by time and space. This is why Herder uses the old metaphor of God as ‘a circle whose center is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere,’ or enigmatic statements like: “It is. It is active.”

in order to express his God; this is because poetry is the language that most accurately represents the first truth of God or mind-body interaction.

Accordingly, Herder's God is neither extra-mundane, as Jacobi would have it, nor is it the sum of all parts, as Spinoza is accused of putting it. Rather, God is the ultimate ground for the life and activity of creation. Herder, attempting to avoid the problem of pantheism, relativizes both space and time in order to affirm God's transcendence from creation. As Herder says, in a letter to Jacobi, the world is not the body of God, but His soul, the one in all, *hen kai pan* (Herder 1857, 255-256).⁷⁸ And in the *Ideas*, Herder remarks, "Nature is no real entity: but God is in all his works" (Herder 1800, ix). Robert Clark says Herder's God is "pure being," and Nigel DeSouza has outlined the relationship between Herder's God as Force of Forces and his psychology (Clark 1955, 345; DeSouza 2012b, 791-793; 2018a, 113-121). Herder's God is conceived of in direct relation to his rejection of dualism in terms of psychology and theology; just as there can be no dichotomy between mind and body, so too between God and Creation. Herder is trying to avoid a transcendent God which is understood as, say, simply a Paternal Authority, or an Absent Artificer, at the same time as he does not want to *identify* God with creation. Herder's solution is a God immanent to the world, but who is at the same time its transcendent ground.

Herder's conception of God here can be illuminated through his description of God's relation to the natural world in *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*. Towards the end of the second dialogue of the first volume, the two interlocutors are discussing the Book of Job, as well as the Psalms, in their depiction of night, the sun, and the heavens. Herder discusses a variety of verses from the Old Testament here, finally remarking that "Images of this kind give to poetry a

⁷⁸ Letters to Jacobi on the 6th of February 1784 and the 20th of December 1784 (Herder 1857, 251-256 & 261-266).

community of feeling and sympathy between brute animals, men, plants, and all that has life; the Supreme and Eternal Father, is the father of all” (Herder 1833 I, 71). Just as Herder’s concept of force exists throughout all nature, from humans, to plants, to rocks, and so on, the hymns of the ancient Hebrews also express this harmony by developing the “community of feeling” between humanity and the rest of creation — all are ‘children’ of God the Father. Herder conceives of forces as underlying all of the organic life on earth in the same way that the ancient Hebrews ascribed to all nature, including “flowers, plants, and herbs,” varying degrees of the “principles of life,” which are ultimately “nourished” by God, the Father of All (Herder 1833 I, 73). But what is most relevant for us here is when Alciphron asks Euthyphron to show him some examples of Hebrew hymns addressed to the sun. Euthyphron replies that, it is true, such kinds of hymns are absent from the Old Testament (Herder 1833 I, 74). The reason for this, according to Euthyphron, is that any hymns addressed to the sun, or “any other object of nature,” would amount to “idolatry” (Herder 1833 I, 74). Herder appeals to Job 31:26-28, where Job says that it would have been an “abomination” if he kissed his hands for the moon or the sun, since this would imply that he had “denied the God of Heaven” (Herder 1833 I, 74). The sun or the moon are not to be addressed with praise through hymns because they must be understood as “the servants of God” and not God Himself. Euthyphron says this is the “appropriate” use of such natural images, and that the Hebrews still infused the sun or the moon with some kind of animation or life (Herder 1833 I, 75). As Euthyphron finally remarks “The sun, as even its name indicates, is a messenger, but never the original fountain of blessedness and beauty,” which is ultimately reserved for God (Herder 1833 I, 76). Herder describes the Hebrew conception of nature as one that “so profoundly comprehends the nature of things; which binds all objects of creation together in such admirable order...which represents God as the great shepherd of

heaven” (Herder 1833 I, 76). This is a conception that is quite similar to what we have seen with Herder’s doctrine of forces and his conception of God. God is witnessed by his “messengers” — i.e., objects of nature — through the realization of forces and their effects in the world. But these objects of nature and their forces do not, as a result, become God. Herder says that, in Hebrew poetry, the name of God is always attached as a “necessary accompaniment” to poetry discussing creation. When Herder says that we witness God’s infinity in every point of creation this could, *prima facie*, be taken to be some kind of pantheism. But as we have seen, it is directly related to the conception of God in the Old Testament, where He belongs as a “necessary accompaniment” to all points of creation. This is not because God is entirely diffused in nature, but because all of nature is subordinate to God.

Herder conceives of both his ontology and his God within a material world which is considered as somehow constitutive of both. How do we know God, but through our existence in the world? How do we think without analogies to perception? Herder takes the answers to these questions as proof of his doctrine of harmony through forces. Despite the fact that God transcends the limits set upon the world, He is not a cold, inactive God, absent from creation. Herder’s God must necessarily reveal Himself in time. But if Herder is, as he says, advancing a theory of physical influx, the context of God’s immanence must be compatible with his doctrine of forces (Herder 1949, 109). The question is necessarily that of man’s distinction from nature. If the mind is composed of the same forces that motivate the activity and life in nature, how is man’s position as ‘middle-creature,’ ‘microcosm,’ and the ‘animal’ of universal instinct, maintained? Herder had argued in the *Treatise* that human language was different in quality from the ‘language’ of other animals in creation. This seems to imply, by analogy, that humans are then to be understood as different in kind from creation according to a specific quality. As

Herder remarked, “the human species does not stand above the animals in levels of more or less, but in kind” (Herder 2002, 81). What distinguished humans in kind, is reason, taking-awareness, and thus language (Herder 2002, 82-83). But the exact nature of this distinction is rendered somewhat unclear because Herder describes this quality as:

“The single positive force of thought, which, bound up with a certain organization of the body, is called reason in the case of human beings, just as it becomes ability for art in the case of animals, which is called freedom in the case of the human being, and in the case of animals become instinct. [each animal has an ‘art’ i.e., the ‘art’ of the spider is how it weaves its web, etc.] The difference is not in levels or the addition of forces, but in a quite different sort of orientation and unfolding of all forces.” (Herder 2002, 83)

The distinction between man and nature, in terms of animals for example, is not really to be found in this or that empirical fact; the answer is rather teleological, it is the ‘unfolding of all forces.’

The Form and Telos of Humanity

Just as Herder distinguishes God from the categories of space and time in order to avoid the critique of pantheism and atheism, the same thing must be done to distinguish Humanity from nature. The idea is that the corollary to pantheism is that human life is no different from, say, the life of a tree, which seems to be something Herder implies when he describes force as a life-principle not unique to humans but present throughout *all* of creation.⁷⁹ But, as we will see, though Herder wishes to argue for a unity between mind and body, he is also careful not to then collapse the particularity of humanity and its position as ‘microcosm’ on earth. This illustrates the importance of Herder’s study of the Old Testament. Herder is not scandalized by the idea of pantheism — as Jacobi was — but he is careful not to accept it either, as we have seen earlier with his conception of God. The point is that Herder uses similar conceptions of humanity and

⁷⁹ See: ‘The Mast-Head.’ (Chapter 35 of *Moby Dick*). See also: (Zwicky 2023, 21-28).

God from the Old Testament in order to respond to contemporary philosophical problems. He realizes, alongside the ancient Hebrews, that, though nature is certainly animated with life in all its points, an assertion of this fact need not result in pantheism: it can be cohered directly with ideas from the Bible. Thus, in order to fully understand Herder's ideas, the interpreter must be able to place them within this context of the Bible and its particular narratives.

In the *Treatise*, Herder attempts to make some distinctions between human and animal 'language.' Here, Herder must clarify the nature of humanity and its relation to the concept of forces that stands behind all of creation. Herder's argument is teleological, and it relates back to the teleological arguments we saw him make concerning the purpose of literature or concerning development in history. As we saw earlier, the 'end' of mankind is perfection, and this is something that occurs through the development of thinking in time. This was the point of Herder's argument in the *Treatise* when he described man's universal instinct as somehow analogous to the unique instincts of each animal. But, in the *Ideas*, Herder seems to distinguish humanity in terms of a specific biological criteria, its bipedalism and upright posture (Herder 1800, 71-85). However, the argument here does not rely solely on an empirical investigation of one aspect of human anatomy. Rather, it is the "form" of man that is upright, and in this, "he is singular upon the earth" (Herder 1800, 67). This form cannot be reduced to one single anatomic feature but is the entire organization of man, from his "long and great toe," to his "widened breast," and "the hands with fingers endued with the sense of feeling" (Herder 1800 68). The 'crown' of this upright form is the head that is "exalted on the muscles of the neck" (Herder 1800, 68). It is Herder's argument that the upright posture, which delineates the entire organization of humanity, is the material form upon which man's consciousness depends (Herder 1800, 77-79). This gives some context to Herder's analogy of humanity as a tree, as here it is

now understood in natural terms according to a single individual: “Thus, if I may speak figuratively, is the flower formed, that merely shoots forth a sprout in the elongated spinal marrow, but rounds itself forward into a plant full of ethereal powers, which could be generated only in this aspiring tree” (Herder 1800, 81). Before identifying man’s uprightness as his distinct form, Herder remarks that, it is not “language alone,” nor the dependence on a single organ that distinguishes humans, and that, rather, it is our entire form and the organization of our uprightness (Herder 1800, 72). Man is, nonetheless, “organized for Reasoning” and, as Herder describes it in a subsequent chapter, “organized for more perfect Senses, for the exercise of Art, and the use of Language” (Herder 1800, 71 & 85). The upright posture of man is construed as the form of humanity, and reason and language are a part of the necessary unfolding of this form.

Herder interprets the implications of man’s erectness in the same way he had described man’s universal instinct in the *Treatise*. The argument is that, since man’s senses are ‘raised above the earth and plants’ they do not have the ‘narrow’ circle of sensation that is common to the rest of creation (Herder 1800, 85). This erect posture also gives man the freedom to use his hands, and thus mankind becomes “a creature endued with art” (Herder 1800, 87). But, as if aware of the naturalist implications and the absence of language in all of this, Herder remarks, “Still all these implements of art, brain, senses, and hands, would have remained ineffective even in the upright form, if the creator had not given us a spring to set them all in motion, *the divine gift of speech*. Speech alone awakens slumbering reason: or rather, the bare capacity of reason, that of itself would have remained eternally dead, acquires through speech vital power and efficacy” (Herder 1800, 87). This idea of the ‘divine gift’ of speech has been taken to be a ‘reversal’ of the ostensibly naturalistic argument in the *Treatise*. As Vicki Spencer remarks, “Debate exists whether Herder came in later life to doubt the validity of his conclusions in the

Abhandlung” (Spencer 2012, 41). But Spencer, along with Trabant, is correct to note that the notion of language as a divine gift from God “is no less natural,” than the argument provided in the *Treatise*; it is entirely consistent with his argument there (Spencer 2012, 42; Trabant 2009, 134). Spencer says Herder is consistent because he claims, “God is all in His works,” and thus even if language is regarded as divine, it still occurs within nature (Spencer 2012, 42). Luanne Frank, on the other hand, views the choice of Herder’s language here as simply an attempt to ‘mollify’ the radical Christian Hamann, and G.A. Wells views it as a change of opinion which points to the fact that Herder had “become so unsure of his ground,” as a result of the controversy with the Hamann in the 1770s (Frank 1980, 180; Wells 1986, 184).⁸⁰ But, perhaps Bruford put it best when he remarks, on Herder’s ‘divine gift,’ “He [Herder] realizes so fully what a miraculous gift language is that he leaves its origin shrouded in mystery and speaks of ‘this miracle of a Divine intervention’” (Bruford 1962, 209). I argue, agreeing with Bruford, Spencer, and Trabant, that language as ‘divine gift’ is not inconsistent with his earlier philosophy of language. Where I differ, perhaps, is that I take it to demonstrate something about the ‘naturalism’ we find in the *Treatise* and throughout his philosophy.

Herder had already, in his essay *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul*, called reason, sensation, and language ‘God’s three noble gifts,’ which is quite similar to the language in the *Ideas* (Herder 2002, 227). As we have seen, Herder was aware of the problem of a reductionist naturalism; he developed his concept of poetry, his idea of infinity, as well as his doctrine of forces, in order to avoid it. Even during his discussion of the divine gift of speech, he is careful not to reduce language either to the organs which seem to motivate it — which would be the kind of reductionism I am speaking of — nor to a kind of supernatural event. He remarks,

⁸⁰ See (Beiser 1987, 130-141) and (Betz 2009, 141-164) for a discussion of this debate between Hamann and Herder.

“The delicate organs of speech, therefore, must be considered the rudder of our reason, and speech as the heavenly spark, that gradually kindles our thoughts and senses to a flame” (Herder 1800, 87). The organs of speech and man’s erect posture, i.e., the natural basis for reason, are, to be sure, reason’s ‘rudder.’ But this rudder requires the ‘heavenly spark’ to have any movement in the first place. Herder’s attempt at transcending the dichotomy of naturalism and supernaturalism is evidenced by the metaphor he uses here. Herder compares our natural constitution to a ‘rudder,’ matter that is used for steering, and language to a ‘heavenly spark,’ that is to say a supernatural force. It is only through the reconciliation of both the naturalistic and supernatural that language can come to be understood. This point is brought even further when, on the following page, Herder describes the way other animals are grasping for a language like ours; they are ‘greedy for the divine breath of life’ (Herder 1800, 88). But Herder remarks, it is only man that is endowed with ‘those small instruments’ which produce language.⁸¹ There is an apparent inconsistency here again because language has been seemingly identified with perhaps yet unknown anatomical features. Herder even remarks that it is because there are ‘pouches’ on the apes’ windpipe that they are prevented from acquiring human language (Herder 1800, 88). But Herder, aware of the problem, finally remarks that “the father of human speech” has given only humans language such that ‘the divine faculty of speech was not debased’ (Herder 1800, 88). This reveals the crux of the matter. For one, with his metaphors of the rudder and spark, Herder is telling us again that matter and spirit are not to be distinguished but can only be conceived, and are only truly understood, through their union. But, with his comparison to apes and the orangutang on the question of speech, Herder is also explicitly invoking teleology to avoid any question of reductionism. Man’s bipedalism, his speech organs, are not some kind of

⁸¹ These ‘instruments’ are “the head of the trachea, a few cartilages and muscles, and that simple member the tongue” (Herder 1800, 88).

causal mechanism for reason or language, but form a part of the teleological unfolding of Humanity, which includes things like reason, language, or even the development of literature and history (Sapir 1907, 26; DeSouza 2018a, 114-116).

Though Herder attempted to demonstrate the interrelation between humanity and its specific natural context, almost to the point of pantheism, ultimately, as DeSouza remarks, the “crowning glory” of nature was still the human being (DeSouza 2018a, 116; see also, Herder 1833 I, 166). There cannot properly be a question of cause and effect between man’s biological organization and his consciousness or language, because the category of causality implies two distinct substances acting on one another. As we saw, for Herder, mind and matter are ultimately both composed of forces. The result is that the entirety of man’s organization, from the ostensibly immaterial mind to the material body, must be conceived of teleologically according to the concept of man. As DeSouza put it, “In Leibnizian terms, Herder firmly believes, contra Leibniz, that in the living world, final causes are fully capable of really directing efficient causes” (DeSouza 2012b, 789). When Herder says that man’s speech could not be debased through its use in other animals, he is aiming to explain the origin of speech with an idea that is antecedent to the actual unfolding of language, and he is thus appealing to final causes. As a result, the ‘cause’ of language, just like the existence of God, exists beyond a causation conceived of in terms of time and space — that is, unless these efficient causes are conceived of in terms of their direction towards a telos. The ‘cause’ of language is the force of God, the Force of forces, which, as we have seen, is considered in contradistinction to space and time. As a first principle, Herder regards man as ‘organized’ for reason, speech, and religion. Following this, it is possible to recognize the ‘causal’ importance of specific anatomic features towards this telos. This is why the appeal to language as a ‘divine spark’ is rhetorically similar to the arguments

Herder uses for his doctrine of forces; both are at the source of the mind-body union. As Robert Clark remarks, “Herder not only goes beyond physiological authority and classes non-mechanical muscular forces as a component of a supreme governing ‘energy,’ [another word for force] but also concludes that the ‘medium’ of this ‘energy’ or ‘elasticity’ is language” (Clark 1942, 746). If the entirety of nature is composed of forces, including the human mind, the distinguishing feature of humanity is its language — here conceived of as the medium of the ‘forces’ which ultimately find their source in God. Man’s capacity to think, which necessarily occurs in language, is thus a force analogical to God as ‘Force of forces.’ This is yet another example of the way Herder often blends both theological suppositions, as well as his concept of poetry, with his naturalistic studies (DeSouza 2018a, 116; Wildschut 2019). Trabant (2009) showed the importance of Adam’s naming of the animals for the argument in the *Treatise*, and Wildschut has contended that *This too* forms a seven-tiered structure that is meant to reflect the days of creation (2019, 214-217). Finally, Bultmann and DeSouza have noted that Herder attempted to organize the first two volumes of the *Ideas* in such a way so as to reflect the structure of Genesis 1 (Bultmann 2009, 236; DeSouza 2018a, 116, note 17). Herder’s first principle that humanity is “organized” for reason, language, and religion, is directly related to the depiction of humanity in the Bible. As we saw, in Hebrew poetry God is always ‘King’ of nature and creation. In a similar way, and according to the *imago dei* as well as the story of Adam, Humanity is, also, ‘king’ and ‘master’ of the ‘brutes’ or the animals of the earth (Herder 1833 I, 128). What is important to note here is that we see Herder often relying on first principles that are biblically inspired, and which influence the kind of scientific or empirical conclusions he draws. As the Hebrews understood it, and as Herder seems to concur, God cannot be subsumed to nature, and nor can humanity. Naturalism for Herder was never conceived of as something

separate from his theological views, or even his views on poetry. The continued distinction between Herder's naturalism and his religious views results in what Johannes Schmidt called "an uncomfortable compromise" in terms of Herderian interpretation (Schmidt 2017, 186).⁸² Herder uses his concept of poetry in order to overcome this kind of compromise, and this kind of 'solution' necessarily entailed both natural and theological considerations.

We have seen that the efficient causes of man's biological organization are, in the end, demonstrated through an appeal to final causes. The purpose of specific anatomical features are explained through an appeal to the purpose of the whole, humanity, and its ends; reason, language, and religion. Something similar occurs when Herder traces the history of mankind. When Herder describes man as unfolding towards a specific end, he is making a teleological judgment. As we have seen in *This too* and in his discussions on the decay of taste in chapter three, Herder also argues that the purpose of literature and historical study is moral and psychological improvement. In both cases, there is a teleology at play. As we saw in chapter one and two, Herder uses the metaphor of the childhood of humanity in the Orient both ironically and in the context of the telos of mankind. Herder describes the Orient as the childhood of mankind in order to place it within the context of its purpose within the overall development of mankind. Herder does not describe a historical development of infinite proportions, but one that is directed towards the development of humanity's form. In the case of the Orient and the ancient Hebrews, we saw that the ancient tale of their relationship to God was not that of a static relationship, but a progressive and symbolic development which was constituted by its specific historical and

⁸² This compromise is compounded in terms of anglophone research, where the only complete monograph which treats Herder's philosophy on its own and in its historical context is the seminal 70-year-old biography by Robert Clark. To be sure, this gap has been increasingly filled by Frederick Beiser's monographs on German philosophy in the 18th and 19th centuries, John Zammito's books on Herder and Kant, as well as recent anthologies on Herder's philosophy. But it must be said that it is really only Clark's book that treats Herder on his own and thoroughly within his historical context. This is, of course, largely due to the fact that Clark's book is a biography.

cultural milieu. The history of the relation between the Hebrews and their God is not to be understood in purely supernatural or purely natural, terms. Herder describes the development of monotheism in ancient Israel as a kind of progressive development in human conceptions of God (Herder 1833 I, 57; Steinby 2009, 66-67). These ‘revelations’ necessarily occur materially and in time, but their meaning cannot be exhausted by facticity (Koepke 1982, 140-142). As Koepke remarks, concerning Herder’s view of revelation, “If divine revelation is communicated to this human being, it has to take a shape accessible to humans. Herder never doubts that God in fact reveals himself to humans, neither does he deny that the Bible contains God’s revelation” (Koepke 1982, 140). As we saw in chapter two, Herder's view of religion was directly related to his epistemology and was always ‘human.’ Thus, God’s presence in the world is not revealed in mystical or supernatural terms, but in human and sensual terms, according to the nature of perception. Revelation occurs in time and, just like history itself, develops according to some kind of logic.

We can take an example from the second volume of *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* in order to illustrate this kind of teleological development in historical terms. Here, Herder describes the development of Hebrew culture after Moses. He says that Leviticus 1 exemplifies this development. Herder describes the fact that the offering of sacrifices to gods was quite common in Egypt, and he interprets Leviticus 1, which describes how to make an offering to Yahweh, in this light (Herder 1833 II, 108). But this is not simply a direct use of another culture’s practices. Herder says there is a difference in the sacrifices described here in the Bible with those practiced by the ancient Egyptians. God ‘remitted his right’ to the lives of the Hebrew children whom he had spared from the Egyptian plague. God, instead, ‘received a beast for an offering’ (Herder 1833 II, 108). Now what this represents is a move away from pagan practices

of human sacrifice to the sacrifice of animals.⁸³ As Herder says, “We have no sacrificial songs in the Scriptures, such as the pagan used; those which treat sacrifices are all moral and spiritual” (Herder 1833 II, 110). Instead of harboring “secret sins,” the Hebrews offered sacrifices as a form of confession. But finally, Herder says that the “best application” of this idea was in the spiritual offerings given through poetry (Herder 1833 II, 109). Herder mentions Psalm 51, a supplication for mercy from God, as an example of this. This is an even further development of the concept of sacrifice, which Herder identifies as beginning in the time of David, saying, “A publick confession, publick songs of contrition and thanksgiving, David here puts in the place of sacrifices, and maintains, that in so doing, he fulfills the inward and true sense of the law” (Herder 1833 II, 110). Herder uses this as a way to illustrate that the dependence on priestly authority for confession was a later development, and that the real meaning of something like confession or sacrifices is best found in the Psalms, in poetry (Herder 1833 II, 94-107). Sacrifice becomes a figurative signification for a corporeal command — the physical act and ritual of sacrificing something, a cow, or a human — which itself loses its importance. Here we have a symbolic development in the idea of sacrifice that occurs in direct context with contemporary and competing conceptions, and which develops towards Humanity, away from human sacrifice.

God is not a terrifying and unknown authority who must be appeased using dramatic means like bloody sacrifices. This is illuminated by Herder’s interpretation of the Binding of Isaac as a symbol of the friendship between man and God, which Herder defines as a “self-denying, self-sacrificing friendship” (Herder 1833 I, 225). One could certainly understand the Binding of Isaac, or other instances of sacrifice, as literal historical occurrences, something Herder does, for example, when he interprets Exodus and the parting of the sea as a mythical

⁸³ Blake says the same thing about the Binding of Isaac (Blake 2009, 542-543).

representation of the dangerous journey the Hebrews must have taken to cross from Egypt to the Arabian Peninsula (Steinby 2009, 65). But this kind of method does not entirely explain the meaning of the Bible's parables. Herder has Alciphron call stories from the Old Testament "old-wives tales" and Euthyphron responds that, it is not his point to "vindicate" the Hebrew nation, but rather to 'vindicate,' "the Purpose of God in the events of their [the Hebrew peoples] history, and the flowers of that poetick growth, which, in the results of its development has actually,...produced fruits for the benefit of so many other nations" (Herder 1833 I, 220). The purpose of Herder's interpretation is not to specifically celebrate the Hebrew people, nor is it an attempt to exhaustively 'prove' the historical narratives of their Sacred Books. Instead, the point is to identify the providence in the creation of the Old Testament, and to examine the relevance of their poetic symbols as well as the parables we can learn from. The Old Testament myths are not simply poetic representations of natural phenomena, they are also representations of a particular state of consciousness, and one that develops in time. As we saw with the idea of sacrifice: which develops from the pagan practice of human sacrifice to the Hebrew practice of a spiritual offering in the form of a song or poem admitting one's sins. This illustrates the striving onward of humanity from its childhood all the way to its maturity, where the idea of God is still being passionately debated. These debates do not imply the creation of a 'new' God but signify a real development in humanity's consciousness. When Herder discusses the relationship between the idea of force and God in his own time, this is not a discussion that is entirely disconnected or alien to the conceptions of God found in the Bible — it is, rather, an illustration of the very development in human consciousness that we saw him postulating in *This too*.

The telos of mankind is far from observable solely through its efficient causes — one cannot understand the telos exclusively in terms of efficient causes because of the unique

creative power of a culture, as it was in the case of the ancient Hebrews. As we saw in chapter one, this is a perspective afforded only to God. What this telos signifies, in terms of a philosophy of history, is that, for example, ancient Mediterranean cultures contained within them the seeds for the future development of Hebrew culture (see also Herder 2004, 29). Ancient Egyptian or Ugaritic culture had to unfold in a necessary way that explains their influence on the origin of the Hebrew culture. On the other hand, ancient Hebrew culture contains within it the existence of Egypt or Ugarit and its own individual relationship to it. Herder understands the Hebrew people and the Old Testament within a specific historical context. If he considers the creation story of the book of Genesis the ‘oldest document of mankind’ it is not because he considers the Hebrew people and their sacred books to be *literally* the oldest books, but that these are the most well-preserved narratives that contain a history of wisdom concerning the origin of the world. (Herder 1833 II, 18, 33-34 & 88; Baildam 1999, 90; Wildschut 2019, 203). This is the significance of his discussion of the term Elohim and the Behemoth that we saw in chapter two, for example. To say that there are ancient Phoenician or Ugaritic symbols in the Old Testament does not reduce the importance of the latter, nor does it imply a strict causal relationship between the two cultures. While the historical development of the ancient Hebrew people includes its relationship to other, more ancient Oriental cultures, Herder refuses to reduce any culture to its influence on some other culture. In this light, it becomes redundant to appeal to preceding cultures, Ugaritic, or Egyptian, as some kind of antecedent ‘cause’ for the existence of the Hebrew people. Each particular culture, by virtue of the concept of humanity and the analogy in nature, exists by necessity in the context of the world around it; just as Herder rejects Leibniz’s ‘windowless monads,’ so too does Herder refuse to regard cultural wholes as ‘windowless’ (Herder 2004, 31; c.f. DeSouza 2018a, 117). The fact that cultures are connected to one another is self-evident due

to the analogy in nature — no one grows up alone, and no life can be stagnant — hence there is the idea that we are seeing causal relations. But what this really reveals is not a series of distinct causes and effects — which would reduce each cultural whole or historical epoch to a means or cause for the influence on another culture — as much as a testament to the infinite interrelation of the world and the immanent unfolding of concept of humanity. As Ralph Waldo Emerson, who held *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* among his favourite works, remarked, “Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit, cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end preexists in the means, the fruit in the seed” (Emerson 2014, 179; Clark 1955, 295). With his notion of poetry, understood as the organization of sensual impressions into a whole through language and which develops in time, Herder is able to reconcile his attention to historical particularity with his understanding of Providence in history. The growing of the tree of humanity is self-referential, it is an immanent unfolding. Each particularity is both means and end, it reveals itself in its uniqueness, and this uniqueness paradoxically reveals a reflection for the entire development of history.

Myths and religions are thus understood as symbolic developments which occur in time under a larger, but perhaps incomprehensible, development of mankind. Even if we are to consider the ‘myths’ of enlightenment Europe as the sophisticated development of metaphysics in philosophy, or the rhetorical arrangement of empirical facts discovered through the use of new tools in science; they all remain, like the mythologies of old times, linguistic creations. Language is thus the concrete form of human consciousness which is depicted in time by the particular form of its organization. History cannot be understood simply according to the interplay of various natural forces. There are certainly forces at play, but they operate within the context of humanity and its distinctive force, language. When examining human history, we cannot treat

cultural artefacts as simply the expression of some kind of natural event. The myth of the Flood cannot be reduced to the ‘fact’ of a natural cataclysm that has been historically verified. Analysis of natural contexts can surely aid the interpreter, but these natural forces must also themselves be understood within the context of humanity and its development. The fact that a cataclysm which occurred in prehistory took the form of a patriarchal myth, or a trial from God, in contradistinction to the rational interpretation which would reduce said cataclysm to its cause in natural forces, does not simply reveal an increase in the sophistication of our understanding of nature and its effects. It also reveals a development in our consciousness, and thus our linguistic representation of the world.

Herder enjoyed the use of the physical sciences and encouraged philosophy to take them into account; this has often been viewed as one of his great contributions in the history of philosophy (see Waldow & DeSouza 2017). But nature is never conceived of as a system of abstract laws; it is considered as a whole, filled with life and forces that are constantly interacting with each other. Herder rejects mind-body dualism, so there is no question of an objective nature distinct from human minds. Rather, he treats the entire world organically, where the mind and world exist in a kind of symbiotic relationship underlined by forces. Herder uses a metaphysical argument to ground his doctrine of forces, which find their ultimate justification in Herder’s conception of God — demonstrating the importance of his theology within his natural studies. But it is important to remember that this metaphysics and theology was always deeply informed by his numerous studies into world-mythology, literature, and folklore, as well as physiology and the nascent natural sciences. Herder rejects the idea that there is ‘intelligent design’ in nature in so far as it is understood in terms of a hypostatization of abstract reason into the laws of nature themselves. What exists outside of space and time is God, not rational laws. The coherence of

the world according to its basis in God is revealed to humans in time according to language.

Herder celebrates the advancement of the empirical sciences of his day and speaks of a psychology that must almost become physiology (Herder 2002, 196). But, as we have discussed, he also refuses to conclude that the soul has its final explanation in physiology. Demonstrative reasoning and empirical evidence do not exhaust the meaning of truth, and poetry cannot be an ornament around a rational fact. Poetry is instead the essence of thought and conceived of in direct relation to 'reason' as well as man's physiology. If, as Coleridge remarked, "Words are not THINGS but LIVING POWERS," then it is ultimately through language that, in analogy to God, humanity is able to control these forces. This is why Herder calls language "the focal point at which Prometheus's heavenly spark catches fire in the human soul" (Herder 2002, 97). Language is a force among forces; its distinction is that it is the manifestation of human awareness.

Conclusion

This study has largely consisted in a reconstruction of the various ways Herder uses his concept of poetry throughout his philosophy. Using *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* I have shown some of the religious ideas that influence Herder's poetics and appear in his other writings. My aim has also been to show that Herder maintains some level of consistency with this concept of poetry, and that this consistency can only be understood through his synthesis of natural studies and his religious ideas. Herder's writings were always quite creative for a philosopher, but he did not abandon rationalism, nor did he strictly distinguish his religious thinking from his philosophy. There is something lost in Herder's poetics if it is not understood within the context of his biblical criticism and particular religious convictions. According to Herder, poetry is not irrational or fictional, but is the most rational form of language, the one that stamps a seal of truth on sensual impressions. If analogies and poems are at the basis of thought, it is the creation of new poems that reveals the coherence of reality throughout history. Understood this way, poetry seemed to Herder to be a singular force for re-interpreting the rationalism he inherited.

Throughout this work, I have put Herder in dialogue with Northrop Frye, a modern literary critic and interpreter of the Bible, as well as poets like William Blake, Milton, and Dante, in order to clarify the meaning of Herder's concept of poetry in the context of poets themselves, as well as to demonstrate the fact that Herder is also engaging in a kind of poetics. Herder uses a myriad of poetic images in his writings. I have examined an important one in *This too*, the analogy of the tree of humanity, and I have also examined several specific biblical images in some of his other texts. But Herder also borrows ideas from the poets; his philosophy of history was partly inspired by Shakespeare, and his doctrine of forces was inspired by the philosophical-poet Haller. In his own day, Herder promoted poets like Klopstock of *The Messiah*, he was of

great importance to the poetic development of Goethe, and he had a lifelong friendship with the writer-philosopher Hamann.

The Bible and its particular context were, to Herder, one of the more fruitful avenues of investigations. Herder's concept of poetry has obvious biblical connotations, and it is unclear how it would be possible to separate out these sorts of connotations without, as a result, changing his ideas. Thus, it may not always be helpful to attach contemporary secular terms like 'naturalism' to Herder's philosophy in distinction from his 'other' religious ideas. The fact is, Herder did not conceive of his philosophical writings or his natural investigations as somehow standing apart from his individual faith, or his position as a clergyman. The Bible is of almost singular importance to Herder's writings and their context — he published two multiple-volume works on the Bible. *Prima facie*, it seems explicitly ahistorical to interpret Herder without this context. The interpreter of Herder's works must, therefore, not only excavate his thought in the context of his peers and contemporary debates, but in the context of his readings of the Bible and the long tradition of biblical hermeneutics.

While Herder's particular form of Christianity is hard to pin down, the attempt to do so is important for interpreting the philosophical debates engendered by his writings. This is an area of Herder's thought that would benefit from much more investigation. I have hoped to show the importance of some of the theological concepts that relates to Herder's unorthodox Christianity, the *imago dei*, the narrative of Adam naming the animals, etc. In recent years, there has been an increase in studies that examine the nature of Herder's relationship to Kant and rationalism (Zammito 1992; 2002). But if we are to grasp Herder's philosophy in its entirety, the same must be done to examine Herder's religious ideas, including their origin and their subsequent influence on philosophy in general.

This presents some interpretive difficulties as, though there are many well-known theologians with whom Herder can be compared in order to elaborate the context of his religious view — for example Augustine or Aquinas — Herder continually resists being included in this tradition, and he often cites so-called ‘heretics.’ Herder describes Jan Hus and John Wyclif, both executed on behalf of the church, as having planted the “germ of truth” against, “superstition, human servitude, and the insolent and impious clergy” (Herder 1997, 304). In the *Ideas*, Herder describes the infamous heretic Pelagius as “learned and pious” and says that he was treated with far too much severity by Augustine and Jerome; and in *God: Some Conversations* he cites the ‘Atheist’ Vanini to clarify the meaning of God (Herder 1800, 523; 1949, 92, 112 & 149). Herder also lacked a distinct Christology or a doctrine of original sin (Bunge 1993, 36; Forster 2018, 288). Some have taken this to illustrate the fact that Herder’s Christianity was “strikingly enlightened”⁸⁴ (Forster 2018, 288). However, a Christian, Pelagius, was already debating the doctrine of original sin in the fourth century. This puts into question the idea that a general lack of ‘orthodoxy’ — for example, Herder’s ‘skepticism’ towards original sin — is somehow a more modern form of Christian doctrine, or that it means Herder is reducing, “Christianity to its moral significance,” as Forster also suggests (Forster 2018, 288). Part of the challenge to understand Herder’s particular Christianity is to avoid the conclusion that, because he is ‘unorthodox’ on many dogmatic questions, his philosophy should be understood to be as a precursor to modern ideas. In reality, it seems that Herder’s religious ideas come out of a current of Christianity that is not sufficiently understood by interpreters.

There is a confluence of rational philosophy, poetry, and religious ideas, throughout Herder’s philosophy that can become bewildering if not placed in the correct context. We have

⁸⁴ That is to say, it is ‘modern.’

seen that when Herder interprets Spinoza and Leibniz in light of a hermetic metaphor, perhaps drawn from Dante, on the question of God. This demonstrates that poetic notions, whether drawn from the Bible or Dante, can serve as a means to clarify and deepen our knowledge of Herder's arguments. However, this is simply one example, and I hope to have shown that Herder's concept of poetry and its relationship to his religious ideas, as well as his general philosophy, merits further research. Throughout his work, Herder sought to argue against those who insisted upon an inflexible distinction between mind and body and between poetry and philosophy. It is imperative that interpreters of Herder do the same and resist the temptation of dualism in our readings.

Everything divine, however, is also human, because man can neither act nor suffer but by the analogy of his nature, however simple or complex a machine it is said to be.

-Hamann

[We are] infinitely small in relation to the pride that wants to be everything, to know, do, and form it all, but infinitely great in relation to the pusillanimity that does not dare to be anything at all!

-Herder, *This too*.

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