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The Soul-Body Relationship and the Foundations of Morality: Herder contra Mendelssohn

I. Introduction

Herder never developed a systematic and universal moral theory like that of his mentor, Kant. This article attempts to shed some light on the reasons for this. Central among these is Herder's whole approach to philosophy and his conviction that it needed to become more genuinely anthropological, in part by studying the whole human being, *der ganze Mensch* (cf. Schings 1994; Zammito 2002). In this, Herder reflected the spirit of his age with its turn to sensibility or *Sinnlichkeit*. With respect to moral philosophy, the ideas of Rousseau and eighteenth-century moral sense theorists resonated with him deeply, but, as an *Aufklärer*, he also remained committed to a certain theology and metaphysics that other Enlightenment thinkers downplayed or even dispensed with. The same can be said of Mendelssohn. This is why a comparison of Herder and Mendelssohn, which includes their intellectually rich epistolary exchange, provides such fertile ground for an exploration of Herder's ideas on the foundations of morality: both thinkers saw a close connection between the soul-body relationship and how morality is to be understood. It is primarily on this metaphysical level that we see Herder engaging with Mendelssohn in order to argue for his own understanding of the soul-body relationship, which ultimately grounds his correspondingly divergent beliefs about the nature and role of sentiments or feelings (*moralische Gefühle*) in moral philosophy. In a word, Mendelssohn's views on morality derive from his conviction in our true nature as immortal souls striving towards perfection, while Herder wholeheartedly rejects the dualisms implicit in this perspective: human beings are not a union of two distinct kinds of substance, nor are the sources of cognition to be divided into the sensible and intelligible realms. The starting point of Herder's philosophy is his unique neo-Aristotelian conception of the soul-body relationship, grounded in his conception of *Kraft*, and his related theory of knowledge according to which all human cognition, from the sensible and physiological to the intelligible and mental, lies along one and the same spectrum. Both Herder's critique of Mendelssohn and his alternative conception of morality and its foundations can only be understood against this background. The structure of the paper follows from this. First, I will lay out Mendelssohn's understanding of morality and moral foundations. Second, I will outline Herder's conception of the soul-body relationship and its related conception of human cognition. Third, I will show both how this underlies Herder's letters to Mendelssohn, in which he confronts the latter over his theory of the soul, and how it informs Herder's own conception of the foundations of morality.

II. Mendelssohn on morality

In line with the Wolffian tradition, Mendelssohn conceives the purpose of human life to be the striving of the soul towards ever greater perfection (cf. Albrecht 1994, 49 ff.).¹ And in line with the Wolffian doctrine of the soul, the object of this perfection is the so-called higher powers of the soul or higher faculty of knowledge. In the *Rhapsodie, oder Zusätze zu den Briefen über die Empfindungen* (1761), Mendelssohn asserts that if the essence of a spirit consists in thinking and willing, then that spirit must itself become more perfect the more perfect its concepts become and the more perfect the objects it imagines become (JubA 1, 407).² What is arguably the central claim of his earlier treatise, *Über die Empfindungen* (1755), with respect to the nature of beauty, depends on this construal of the soul. Speaking through Palemon (and later Theocles in the revised edition – Mendelssohn explicitly links his treatise to Shaftesbury's *The Moralists*), Mendelssohn recognises and accepts the Baumgartenian definition of beauty as the indistinct representation of a perfection, or, more specifically, the perception of unity in multiplicity (JubA 1, 43–4, 48, 50). However, he then proceeds to claim that the only reason our notion of beauty is linked to obscure concepts is because of the inherent limitations of our soul. The very fact that beauty requires the perception of unity in a multiplicity demonstrates this, for why shouldn't the direct and distinct perception of a multiplicity not also be beautiful? The answer is that our soul is simply not *capable* of perceiving a multiplicity distinctly. For this reason Mendelssohn rejects the belief that obscure feeling must be the source of all happy sentiments (JubA 1, 55). What he is in search of is a conception of the pure gratification of the soul which is grounded in the positive powers of the soul and not in its incapacity (JubA 1, 55–56). This he finds in the concept of perfection, as conceived by reason, as opposed to beauty, as conceived by the senses (JubA 1, 59–60). The intellectual perception of perfection involves the enjoyment of the harmony (rather than the unity) of a multiplicity, for example, in the appreciation of the order and harmony of the universe. Mendelssohn does go on to outline a third kind of pleasure in purely sensuous gratification; intellectual perfection, however, remains the highest form of pleasure. It is, in short, the only kind of pleasure we also share with God (JubA 1, 81–3, 61).

Sentiments or *Empfindungen* also have a role to play in ethics. But for Mendelssohn, the pioneering work of Edmund Burke and Francis Hutcheson in this regard remained incomplete. In his review of Burke's *A philosophical enquiry into the origins of our ideas of the sublime and the beautiful*, Mendelssohn writes:

Die Theorie der menschlichen Empfindungen und Leidenschaften hat in den neuern Zeiten, da es mit den übrigen Theilen der Weltweisheit nicht mehr so recht fort will, die meisten Progressen gemacht. Unsere Nachbarn, und besonders die Engländer, gehen uns mit philosophi-

1 For a recent and original interpretation of Mendelssohn's philosophy that takes issue with the standard view of him as a rationalist in the Leibniz-Wolffian tradition (as also reflected in the present article) and instead sees Mendelssohn as having more faith in common sense or sound reason, which, with theoretical reason, are only different forms of the same, one reason, see Freudenthal 2012, esp. ch. 1. The purpose of theoretical or demonstrative reason, on this view, is to fend off attacks on common sense by skepticism or sophistry (ibid, 30).

2 All references to works by Mendelssohn are taken from the *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe* and are indicated by the abbreviation JubA followed by the volume number.

schen Beobachtungen der Natur vor; wir folgen ihnen mit unsern Vernunftschlüssen auf dem Fuße nach, und wenn es so fort geht, daß unsere Nachbarn beobachten, und wir erklären, so können wir hoffen, mit der Zeit eine vollständige Theorie der Empfindungen zu bekommen, deren Nutzen in den schönen Wissenschaften gewiß nicht geringe seyn wird. (JubA 4, 216)

In this vein, Mendelssohn acknowledges in the *Rhapsodie* that ethics has long since moved beyond the neglect of sensuous pleasures and the exclusive focus on the prescription of duties. The education of feeling, he says, has now become an important aspect of a human life, in addition to the improvement of the powers of understanding and willing (JubA 1, 393). At the same time, however, he is once again at pains to keep this new element within its proper bounds as determined by Wolffian philosophy. Shaftesbury's attempt to ground moral philosophy in the natural affections (as a means of demonstrating that even atheists can feel the call to virtue) or Hutcheson's reduction of moral evaluation to an innate moral sense are both grounded in feelings or sentiments as opposed to reason. Mendelssohn leaves no doubt as to his position on this matter.

In der ausübenden Sittenlehre kann man also den Grundsatz von der angenehmen Empfindung ohne Gefahr dulden, und so gar vermittelst desselben bey einem Menschen die Liebe zur Tugend erregen, indem man sein Gefühl schärft, und der höhern Wollust fähig macht, die er nirgend anders, als in der Ausübung des Guten findet. Aber in die Theorie muß man ihn nicht hinübertragen, allwo kein falscher Grundsatz, ohne falsche Folgen seyn kann. (JubA 1, 404)

Thus sentiments are fine in practical ethics, but have no major role in theoretical ethics or moral theory. The reason for this is quite simple: our highest good consists not in pleasant sentiment but in perfection (JubA 1, 405). Pleasant sentiments are merely a clear but indistinct intuition of perfection. And for Mendelssohn, perfection as a process, as we have already seen, far from having anything to do with sentiments, has for its object the higher powers of the soul or faculty of knowledge, that is, our reason.

All this Mendelssohn lays out again more clearly a few years later in his prize-winning essay, *Abhandlung über die Evidenz in metaphysischen Wissenschaften*, published in 1764. In the fourth section of this essay, which treats the first principles of ethics, Mendelssohn draws on the ancients to show how the law of nature is grounded not just metaphysically but also in our very nature as human beings. »Haben wir Menschen das Erkenntnisvermögen mit einander gemein, spricht *Marcus Aurelius*; so haben wir auch als vernünftige Geschöpfe, die *Vernunft* gemein. Ist dieses; so haben wir auch die Vernunftgründe gemein, die uns vorschreiben, was zu thun oder zu lassen ist, und folglich haben wir auch ein *gemeines Gesetz*« (JubA 2, 315-16). Reason, then, and not feeling is the source of ethics, the first law of which Mendelssohn derives in keeping with Wolffian philosophy: »*Mache deinen und deines Nebenmenschen innern und äussern Zustand, in gehöriger Proportion, so vollkommen, als du kannst*« The concepts of moral philosophy, including all duties, rights, and responsibilities can all be unpacked, Mendelssohn marvels, from this single, universal law of nature, which in turn is based on the single definition of a being endowed with free will (JubA 2, 317, 318).

Having successfully shored up the Wolffian ethics of perfection, Mendelssohn proceeds to his treatment of practical ethics. The conscience (*das Gewissen*), acting in tandem with the sense for truth or *Wahrheitssinn*, is the stand-in for reason in those cases where reason would just not be quick enough. »*Das Gewissen*«, Mendelssohn explains,

ist eine *Fertigkeit, das Gute vom Bösen, und der Wahrheitssinn* [sic], eine *Fertigkeit, das Wahre vom Falschen durch undeutliche Schlüsse richtig zu unterscheiden*. Sie sind in ihrem Bezirke das, was der Geschmack in dem Gebiete des Schönen und Häßlichen ist. Ein geübter Geschmack empfindet in einem Nu, was die langsame Kritik nur nach und nach ins Licht setzt. Eben so schnell entscheidet das Gewissen, beurtheilet der Wahrheitssinn, was die Vernunft nicht ohne mühsames Nachdenken, in deutliche Schlüsse auflöset. (JubA 2, 325)

The conscience, then, might seem to be just Mendelssohn's term for Hutcheson's moral sense. This is not, however, the case, for Mendelssohn's conscience consists entirely of principles that have at some point been learned and then incorporated into one's temperament by constant practice (JubA 2, 325; cf. Altmann 1969, 372). Through practice the rules attain the level of a second nature, and it is this second nature that constitutes one's conscience. This kind of habit-forming is only one of four ways Mendelssohn adduces for making practical ethics more effective, more capable of moving one to action. The accumulation of compelling reasons, the support of pleasant sentiments, and the use of intuitive knowledge form the other three. Under the support of pleasant sentiments, he has in mind the fine arts and sciences – if perfection is the mainspring of reason, he says, pleasant sentiment is the bait of the imagination, and in this the fine arts and sciences obtain their usefulness for ethics (JubA 2, 327–28). These four elements converge in rooting the principles of practical ethics in the lower parts of the soul. As Mendelssohn puts it, »Die Ethik giebt uns Mittel an die Hand, wodurch die Uebereinstimmung der niedern Seelenkräfte mit der Vernunft zu erhalten ist« (JubA 2, 326). Through these means there emerges the conviction of the heart, he claims, that is our ultimate and most eminent purpose in ethics. He remarks that it might be the case that probable proofs (as opposed to distinct ones) of practical principles are all that the soul sees. This does not necessarily pose a problem, however, because the resulting lack of *rational* conviction can, as we have just seen, be made up for by the approval provided by the imagination, by habit, example, grace – in a word, by the approval of the lower powers of the soul from which spring a sweeter peace of mind and satisfaction, Mendelssohn asserts, than from some cold conviction of spirit. He hastens to add a cautionary note, however:

Diese Betrachtungen haben keineswegs die Absicht, den Nutzen der demonstrativen Sittenlehre in Zweifel zu ziehen. [...] Eine jede Erkenntnisart hat ihren Werth. Wo Zweifel zu heben, Widersächer zu bestreiten, theoretische Feinde der Tugend zu beschämen sind, da bleibt kein ander Mittel, als zu den strengsten Beweisen seine Flucht zu nehmen. (JubA 2, 328–29)

Thus, although Mendelssohn took practical ethics and moral psychology seriously, and placed greater emphasis on them than Wolff ever did, he remained firmly committed to the necessity of a rationalist, theoretical ethics as the inescapable foundation of ethics.³

Some important connections which have emerged can now be explicitly defined. Just as our conception of beauty is based on a limitation of the soul, that is, on the soul's inability to perceive a multiplicity distinctly, so too is the field of practical ethics. For if we were able to reason more quickly and if our soul were able to be as

3 Both Michael Albrecht and Alexander Altmann make just these points in their respective discussions of Mendelssohn's ethics: see Albrecht 1994, 50; Altmann 1969, 371, 387–388. See also Dumouchel 2003, 136, 138–139.

powerfully moved by the driest knowledge as it is by sentiments, then theoretical moral philosophy could quite easily dispense with the need for practical ethics. In both cases, it is the attachment of the soul to the body that is the problem. In relation to pleasure, Mendelssohn writes: »das gereinigte Vergnügen, wenn es von seiner fleischlichen Begleiterin, von der sinnlichen Wollust abgesondert wird, müßte in den positiven Kräften unsrer Seele, und nicht in einem Unvermögen, nicht in der Einschränkung dieser ursprünglichen Kräfte gegründet seyn« (JubA 1, 56). Freed from its body, the soul would find pleasure only in the highest form thereof, namely, intellectual perfection. Similarly, the freed soul would act in conformity with the principles and laws of moral philosophy without the need for any kind of sensuous support from the lower powers of the soul, for that moral philosophy, as we have already seen, is based on and derived from the single definition of a creature with free will, and not on a creature saddled with feelings and passions. The conclusion therefore couldn't be clearer: the body is the culprit. The body, it would appear, is the sole obstacle to our unhindered striving for perfection.

III. Herder on the soul-body relationship

All this represents what Herder, from his very first writings, sought to resist and reject. He rejected the dualistic conception of the soul-body relationship as well as the related theory of the vocation of the soul as lying in the pursuit of an eternal perfection. Herder clearly sided with an Aristotelian understanding of the soul-body relationship, with the soul conceived of as the principle of life, but yet with a modern inflection insofar as the soul is considered to be primarily a representational force, a thought force.⁴ Herder lays out his basic ontology over the course of a series of short pieces from the late 1760s (*Grundsätze der Philosophie; Über Leibnizens Grundsätze der Natur und der Gnade; Plato sagte, daß unser Lernen bloß Erinnerung sei*). The following picture emerges. As with other *Aufklärer*, theology is front and centre. In contrast to Leibniz, Herder maintains that God did not create the world according to an act of will, nor did he choose from between many different possible worlds. Rather, Herder held, like Spinoza, that there is only one possible divine idea; however, he differs from Spinoza in further holding that God, in order fully to realize himself, *must* externally realize that divine idea, by creating a physical world (HWP 2, 52 ff.). By analogy – a form of reasoning central to Herder's philosophical method (cf. Irmscher 1981) – the human being primordially consists of a soul which is also construed of as one thought or idea that in turn can only fully realize itself through its external manifestation in a body through which it can interact with a world. The soul builds itself this body by harnessing the forces of attraction and repulsion (HWP 2, 53; Herder 1994, 175). Ontologically basic here in Herder's theory is not substance but rather force or *Kraft*, his differentiated conception of which has many sources. The soul is both a »thought-force« (*Gedenkkraft*) and an entelechy, a principle of life – both of

4 For a more detailed discussion of the young Herder's theory of the soul-body relationship, see DeSouza 2012b.

these draw on Leibniz (HWP 2, 52, 49 ff.). The physical universe operates according to the forces of attraction and repulsion and the laws of motion that emerge from these – here Herder's source is the pre-critical Kant and his revised Newtonianism as enunciated, above all, in *Die Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (1755) whose very subtitle is revealing in this regard: »Versuch von der Verfassung und dem mechanischen Ursprunge des ganzen Weltgebäudes nach Newtonischen Grundsätzen abgehandelt« (KAA 1, 225). Finally, the anthropologically inspired analogy between God and the world and the soul and its body is not entirely Herder's own. It is rather most likely taken from Shaftesbury, whom Herder praises in his letters for his particular understanding of Providence (Herder 1977, 119, 217). In *The Moralists*, Shaftesbury draws from the governance of the body by the soul the physico-theological conclusion that some spirit or mind is responsible for the entire world and its order (Shaftesbury 1999, 302–304, 307).

Explaining how Herder is able to justify and explain his non-dualistic theory of the soul-body relationship is beyond the scope of this paper; but what is important for our purposes in this respect is the fundamental ontological identity of both soul and body insofar as both ultimately reduce to the same kind of thing: *Kraft* (cf. DeSouza 2012b, 788 f.; Heinz 1994, 104). The soul acts on the body not like something material, in a physicalistic push and pull manner, but rather by acting on the inner principle of matter, a hypothesis Kant entertains in *Die Träume eines Geistersehers*, and of which Herder approves (KAA 2, 328; SWS 1, 128). Now, philosophically, this theory of interaction is far from clear. But I think at least one reason why Herder did not make more of an effort to work out these difficulties – which is perhaps reflected in the fact that his metaphysics and epistemology in the 1760s consists exclusively in short sketches and outlines – is that this kind of systematic philosophy was simply not his primary concern. The long multi-part works on literature and language from this period, and especially the *Journal meiner Reise*, reveal a deeper concern with the whole human being, with anthropology – the practical motivation for this concern being his interest in and preoccupation with *Bildung*. While Herder's writings show a clear commitment to metaphysics, its importance lay in how it grounded and justified his anthropological convictions, not in its systematic pursuit independently of these and worked out within a framework of rational principles à la Leibniz. There is a profound connection between Herder's theory of the soul and his anthropology.

In a striking few pages from the remarkable Preface to the 1775 version of his treatise, *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden, den zwei Hauptkräften der Menschlichen Seele*, Herder engages in a critical assessment of previous theories of the soul-body relationship. What is particularly interesting here is that Herder sees natural science as a co-culprit with philosophy in seeking to explain the human soul only in terms of »was sie im Allgemeinen seyn könnte oder seyn sollte« with no attention paid to the individuality of each soul, and to »die weite Region der Empfindungen, Triebe, Affekten« of the lower regions of the soul that is »das Herz unsres Daseyns« on which everything rests and from which even the soul's most abstract functions proceed (SWS 8, 265). This deeper understanding of the soul depends on an accurate conception of the connection between soul and body, Herder's own conception of which forms the foundation of his philosophical anthropology. Herder squarely lays the blame for the failure to grasp this connection properly at Descartes' footstep and on his equation of the soul with the

mind: »Seit Des-Kartes das Denken zu seinem ganzen zweifelnden Ich machte, welche Systeme sind aufkommen, eins unnatürlicher als das Andre.« Herder then recounts the systems of Cartesian dualism and occasionalism, Spinozist monism, and Leibnizian pre-established harmony, and concludes: »Welche tote, hölzerne Uhr ist nun Seele und Seelenlehre geworden« (SWS 8, 266).

But this is not just a question of an arcane theory of the soul that can simply be dismissed. For it has serious deleterious consequences on how human beings understand themselves:

Bis in Leben und Handlung hat die kalte, Empfindungslos denkende Seelenlehre ihren Trug getrieben. Welche Romantische Systeme von Freiheit und Vollkommenheit der Menschlichen Seele, die sich wo anders als in den Lehrbüchern? finden! Die Kraft zu denken, nach Ideal der Vollkommenheit zu handeln ist Wesen der Seele; Empfindungen und Triebe, nach denen sie doch handelt, sind nur als Zugaben, gar als Unordnungen betrachtet worden, nach denen sie nicht handeln sollte. So ward ein heuchlerisches Hirngespinnst, das der Metaphysiker Menschliche Seele nennen, in den düstern Glanz seiner Abstraktionen kleidet; das sich aber nur bei seiner Zauberalampe zeigt. (SWS 8, 267)

The soul conceived of as mind, as thinking substance alone leads to a fundamentally false conception of the human being and its capacities, the representative example here being that of moral philosophy and its fundamental principle of the pursuit of the perfection of the soul.

For Herder, in contrast, the tight connection between soul and body, which is rooted in the ontological continuity between them, is something to which we have direct access. »In ihrem vielartigen, tausendfach organisirten Körper fühlt sich die Seele mit allen ihren Kräften lebend« (SWS 8, 266) is the way Herder formulates it in the 1775 Preface we have been discussing. But already in the 1760s, in a short piece entitled *Zum Sinn des Gefühls* (1769), Herder shows how our access to our soul *qua* force is primarily not through its mental qualities, but rather through the sense of touch that manifests its Shaftesburian *forming power* as the key to grasping the connection between the thinking- or representational-force and the forces of attraction and repulsion (cf. Solms 1990, 152 ff.). »Ich glaube,« Herder declares,

daß es für einen Blinden möglich ist, den ganzen Körper in seinem Gebäude auf Kräfte der Seele zu reducirern. Ich glaube, daß ein geborner Blinder sich gleichsam *erinnern* kann, wie die Seele sich ihren Körper bereitet, wie aus jeder Kraft jeder Sinn gleichsam gebildet wurde. (FHA 4, 236)

We sighted people with our »Erscheinungen« are too scattered, »zu zerstreut, zu sehr aus uns geworfen« to search deep into our souls in this way (FHA 4, 236).

Now this theory of the soul-body relationship, which is distinctive for its attempt to bridge the physiological/physical and the mental/metaphysical through a concept of force that manifests itself at both ends of the spectrum, has an epistemological counterpart to it. We have in fact just encountered the first epistemological ramification of the soul-body theory in the sense of touch. In a contemporaneous piece, *Plato sagte, daß unser Lernen bloß Erinnerung sei* (1768)⁵, Herder explains how the soul unfolds

5 *Plato sagte* engages in part with Mendelssohn's interpretation of the Platonic theory of recollection in his *Abhandlung über die Evidenz in metaphysischen Wissenschaften*. For discussion, see Heinz 1994, 44 ff.

its unique thought through the body and initially, how this thought expresses itself through touch or feeling that has a cognitive aspect to it. »Die Seele tritt auf die Welt: Vorstellungskraft ist ihr Wesen: aber sie ist *sich selbst* ganz ihr Gedanke – der dunkle, aber lebhafteste Begriff ihres Seyns erfüllt sie ganz. [...] Dieser Gedanke ist ein dunkles, aber Einziges lebhaftes Gefühl.« This thought corresponds to the Leibnizian monad which already contains all its representations in itself, »alle übrige künftige, auch sinnliche, und noch mehr Abstrakte Begriffe in ihm liegen« (Herder 1994, 175). But as *feeling-like* (*Gefühlhaft*), Herder points to the essential and real (i. e., not merely expressive) connection of the *not* windowless soul-monad to its body, through which it will develop these concepts and representations. Only via sensuousness can the unfolding of the one thought of the soul be accomplished.

In the language of *Schulphilosophie's* theory of knowledge, Herder sees a special and fundamental continuity between the lower and upper capacities for knowledge, a continuity analogous and intimately related to that between body and soul. The result is Herder's participation in the widespread *Aufwertung der Sinnlichkeit* of his era, expressed in his emphasis on and valuation of »die dunkelsten Gegenden der Seele«, which he notes were left »unbeleuchtet« by Christian Wolff (HWP 2, 10). Herder thought he had found a natural ally and model from within the tradition of *Schulphilosophie* in Baumgarten and his aesthetic project. But his hopes were eventually dashed. Chief among his several criticisms was that, insofar as Baumgarten's aesthetics seeks to understand the lower regions of the soul, i. e., to be a natural aesthetics, it is »im höchsten Grade unphilosophisch: da sie alle philosophischen Begriffe der Aesthetik, die sie entwickeln soll, der Metaphysik voraussetzt, sie ihr nachbetet, und eine Menge leerer, falscher, zu feiner Folgerungen herauszieht« (FHA 1, 673). This constitutes for Herder Baumgarten's most disappointing error: although he had correctly recognized the importance of sensuous knowledge and of the lower regions of the soul, Baumgarten developed no genuine »gnoseology« because he conceived of it too much through the lens of the upper cognitive faculty and also construed this upper faculty as independent of the lower.⁶ When Baumgarten speaks of logic as »die ältere Schwester der Ästhetik«, Herder's immediate response is that, in fact, (natural) aesthetics or »die untern Erkenntnisvermögen [...] weit eher entwickeln, und auch eher müssen entwickelt werden« since logic is dependent on them (FHA 1, 666).

The alternative, natural aesthetics sketched by Herder is *genetically* constructed on the basis of soul-body interaction and in which the continuity from obscure to distinct representations is not ideal and internal to the monad, as with Leibniz, but is seen rather as stemming in part from a real interaction with an external world. In several writings from the late 1760s (cf. *Plato sagte; Plan zu einer Aesthetik*; and *Viertes Kritisches Wäldchen*) Herder works out this theory which is fundamentally based on the originally Leibnizian idea of the »pregnancy« of the soul (cf. Adler 1988 and 1990). In his excerpts from Leibniz's *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*, Herder repeatedly brings out the following ideas: the soul is not an empty slate, but rather contains »hidden

6 Friedhelm Solms maintains that Baumgarten's chief aim was to give the fine arts a philosophical foundation and that Herder, in fact, »nimmt die Ansprüche an eine »gnoseologia inferior« ungleich radikaler beim Wort, indem er auf dem Wissenschaftscharakter der Aesthetik insistiert« (Solms 1990, 126).

original concepts« in it which are awoken by the use of the senses; »die Gegenwart [ist] von der Zukunft voll«; we must distinctly explain everything in us (including the concept of being), because the knowledge of essences is developed in us; »[w]ir sind uns selbst gleichsam eingeboren« (HWP 2, 33, 35, 45, 34). In *Plato sagte* it is expressed as follows:

Wie nehmlich bei Gott alles aus einer Eigenschaft: so bei uns alles aus einem Begriff. Nur dort deutlich und leichter: hier aus einem dunkeln, praegnanten Begriff und also schwerer. Dort keine Grenzen, hier ist die Sinnlichkeit die verwirrendste Grenze. (Herder 1994, 176)

According to Herder, natural aesthetics must begin here, engaging with the »most hidden ground of the soul«, with the lower forces of the soul, whose explicit exclusion by Baumgarten is criticized by Herder (FHA 1, 671). Only in this way can it become a genuine science of sensuous knowledge.

The »most hidden ground of the soul« is thus associated by Herder with the obscure concept or thought of the soul that manifests itself originally as an obscure but vivid feeling. Its genetic, even ontogenetic, aspect (which is reminiscent of Condillac's statue) is clear from the outset and explored by Herder in both *Plato sagte* and *Viertes Kritisches Wäldchen*. »Noch empfindet der zum Säuglinge gewordene Embryon alles in sich; in ihm liegt alles, was er auch außer sich fühlet. Bei jeder Sensation wird er, wie aus einem tiefen Träume geweckt« (FHA 4, 274; cf. Herder 1994, 177). The most basic senses of the body, which is teleologically formed from the soul's thought, correspond to the structure of the world that is created from the divine thought. Space as »das Nebeneinander gibt den Sinn des Gesichts«; time as »das Nacheinander gibt den Sinn des Gehörs«; force as »das Ineinander gibt den Sinn des Gefühls«. Thus it is only through its body that »[e]in Kind lernt <die> sich von der Welt, die in ihm liegt unterscheiden« and acquires its first concepts of the world (Herder 1994, 177). First: »Mit wiederholten gleichen Empfindungen wird das erste Urteil gebildet, daß es *dieselbe* Empfindung sei. Das Urteil ist dunkel und muß es sein; denn es soll Lebenslang dauern und als eine ewige Basis in der Seele bleiben« (FHA 4, 274). And then:

Wenn man bedenkt, wie viel geheime Verbindungen und Trennungen, Urteile und Schlüsse ein werdender Mensch machen muß, um nur die ersten Ideen von Körper außer sich, von *Figur, Gestalt, Größe, Entfernung* in sich zu lagern: so muß man erstaunen. Da hat die menschliche Seele mehr gewürkt, und entwickelt, gefehlt und gefunden, als der Philosoph im ganzen Leben seiner Abstraktionen. (FHA 4, 275)

Through this genetic process, Herder is trying to give a naturalistic explanation for the origin and acquisition of our first concepts. At the same time, Herder shows an appreciation for the significance of the first »impacts« (*Anstöße*) for the development of the human soul. »Unsere Seele wird Metaphysisch von innen determinirt aber die determinationen [sic] von außen geben ihr Form. [...] Hierinn liegt Determination auf unser ganzes Leben« (Herder 1994, 178). This process leads just as fundamentally to the emergence and differentiation of the various forces of the soul. »[S]iehe! so tritt sie aus dem Zustande, da ihr alles nur Sensation war: sie gewöhnt sich Eins vor dem Andern durch seine ›innere Klarheit‹ zu erkennen: sie ist auf dem dunkeln Wege zur *Phantasie* und zum *Gedächtnis*« whose differentiation will be achieved only through much practice (FHA 4, 277). The same process holds for the emergence of other »skills« such as astuteness, wit, and judgement (FHA 4, 278). In all this, it is the task

of aesthetics, according to Herder, precisely to investigate this process, whose obvious »products« and »effects« are what we alone actually notice.

Wie viel Weisheiten wären in diesem dunkeln Mechanismus der Seele zu berechnen! wie ungeheuer und schwach die Seele, die hier deutlich handelte! und wie viel ließe sich in der ganzen Bildung der Seele aus diesen so zusammengesetzten Wirkungen im Traum der ersten Morgenröte unsres Lebens erklären! Die Summe aller dieser Empfindungen wird die Basis aller objektiven Gewißheit, und das erste sichtbare Register des Reichtums unsrer Seele an Ideen. (FHA 4, 275)

Now it is in this conception of a natural aesthetics that we find the origins of a deep critique by Herder of the whole method of *Schulphilosophie*. Herder believes that metaphysics and ontology must become »ein Studium unserer Seele« (Herder 1994, 176). On the one hand, we should investigate from the outside how, through external sensuous stimulation, the soul's forces unfold and how the first concepts are acquired – Herder calls this »die Philosophische Erziehung«. On the other hand, we should study from the inside how the soul, through its »innerliches Bestreben sich den Raum der Welt vorzustellen«, requires thoughts in order to develop the different senses (Herder 1994, 178). Herder develops here a concept of individuality which is simultaneously based on universal structures and capacities, on the one hand, and on externally shaped characteristics as well as inner characteristics, on the other.

Hiernach die Proportion Menschlicher Seelen: die immer in der Summe gleich sein mögen, aber in der Qualität ihrer innern Kraft und Bestreben unterschieden, daß sie individuell werden. Hiernach die Proportion der Menschlichen Sinne, die in der Summe [sic] gleich aber in der Qualität nach der bestimmten äußeren Kraft und Bestreben individuell unterschieden sind. (Herder 1994, 178-9)

Thus, first, all abilities and capacities should be understood genetically through the unfolding of the embodied, sensuous, human soul. But second, it is just as important to grasp this unfolding as determined by the inner characteristics and by the spatio-temporal or cultural-historical situation or situatedness of the soul.

IV. Herder contra Mendelssohn on the soul and morality

These two conditions for a proper study of the soul are what underlie Herder's call for philosophy to be transformed into anthropology (FHA 1, 134). Herder's conviction that the indispensable basis of philosophy is a deep understanding of the human soul leads him to the claim that an aesthetics engaged with »dem *Grunde* der Seele« qualifies as »ein Stück von der *nötigsten* Anthropologie« (FHA 1, 665). Even logic, for example, must be reducible to psychology (FHA 1, 110ff.) and, as we saw above, aesthetics comes before logic and is its foundation. Human abilities and capacities can never be properly understood purely mentally and in abstraction from what makes them possible. *Schulphilosophie* makes the error of marginalizing the above two conditions or of not even grasping them. It thus fails to see the emergence of rational abilities and capacities out of the embodied, sensuous, human soul and erroneously construes the products of these abilities and capacities as universal or transcendental (cf. Adler 1990, 99). In his reflections on Wolff and Baumgarten in the 1760s, Herder explains

that instead of accurately exposing how the concepts and principles we employ in the higher cognitive faculties depend on and are generated from the lower cognitive faculties, both philosophers are guilty of reifying these concepts and principles and seeking erroneously to construct a system from them that is taken to be universal and timeless (HWP 2, 9-13; FHA 1, 653-658). This provides us with a false understanding of the world and of human beings.

This is the essence of Herder's critique of Moses Mendelssohn, the self-confessed⁷ arch-defender of Leibniz-Wolffian *Schulphilosophie* of Herder's day, as enunciated in his letters to Mendelssohn from 1769. This critique was sparked by Herder's explicit rejection of Mendelssohn's conception of the soul in his treatise *Phaedon, oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele* from 1767.⁸ According to Mendelssohn, the »skills« (*Fertigkeiten*) acquired by the soul are »realities« (*Realitäten*) which, in proportion to their formation, are »Vollkommenheiten der menschlichen Seele« that are not restricted to the present world but rather can be further developed beyond the limits of this life (JubA 12/1, 184-185). According to Herder, these skills are only »Modifikationen dessen, was schon völlig da war« (that is, of the soul's obscure thought of being) which only develop through sensuousness (Herder 1977, 178). But that means that an actually acquired ability is to be seen only as an »acquirirte Accidens, was nichts als *Beziehung auf Lage* war« (Herder 1977, 179), where »Lage« is to be understood as the sensuously, spatiotemporally, culturally-historically determined situation of the individual human soul. The conclusion is clear: »Wenn unser Lernen Nichts als Erinnern, wenn unser Vollkommenwerden Nichts als Entwickeln ist, so ist's nichts, als Lernen, Ausbilden, Entwickeln *in und für diesen Zustand*« (Herder 1977, 178). The disregard of this truth is responsible for the philosophical error of taking particular products of human capacities to be timeless and universal.

Nichts in der Welt, glaube ich, hat mehr Meinungen und vielleicht auch mehr Irrthümer erzeugt, als daß man abstrakte Begriffe, als individuelle Existenzen betrachtet und realisirt hat. So realisiren wir das Wort Natur, Tugend, *Realität*, *Vollkommenheit*. Ursprünglich waren diese Begriffe nichts als Abstraktionen, Verhältnisse von dem auf dies, gleichsam Schatten und Farben von Dingen; wir machen sie zu Dingen selbst, und denken uns also Fertigkeiten, die die Seele wie Geldstücke sammle, Realitäten, die ursprünglich nur Relationen waren und die wir uns als Positionen gedenken, Vollkommenheiten die wir individualisiren und der Seele also mitgeben. (Herder 1977, 179-180)

Herder encourages Mendelssohn, through analysis of such concepts, to return to the origin of the words representing them. Herder claims that he will find that these concepts turn out to be simply »*phaenomena substantiata*« or substantiated phenomena (Herder 1977, 180) that is, what are really only *accidens* but which are taken to be subsisting in themselves.⁹

7 At the end of his letter to Herder from May 1769, Mendelssohn wonders whether the source of their dissent is he is »still too much attached to the system«, that is, of *Schulphilosophie*, while Herder has perhaps withdrawn too far from it (JubA 12/1, 187).

8 For detailed examinations of their correspondence see Altmann 1973, 167-179; Heinz 1992; Markworth 2005, 67-110; and Pollok 2010, 531-574.

9 While this concept goes back to Leibniz, Herder was most likely drawing here on the definition in Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*, §193, that he would have been familiar with from his study of the text in Kant's lectures at the University of Königsberg in the early 1760s: »*Accidentia si videntur*

Behind this debate stands the question of the vocation of the soul. For Herder, Mendelssohn's position and that of »most philosophers and theologians« is that »[d]as Befreien von sinnlichen Begriffen, die ganz geistige Vollkommenheit, sind [...] die ersten Quellen der Belohnung des künftigen Zustandes« (Herder 1977, 138). While Mendelssohn does object to this characterization in his reply, insisting that he too (in line with Leibniz¹⁰) believes that the soul cannot exist entirely without a body, he nevertheless holds firm to the conviction that the improvement of the soul's rational capacity is its ultimate calling (JubA 12/1, 182–183; cf. Altmann 1973, 172; Pollok 2010, 556–557). Herder does not believe with Mendelssohn that the vocation of human beings lies in the development of the abilities of the soul, because »[i]n unserer Natur ist gleichsam mehr spezifische Masse von einer Thiernatur als von einem reinen Geist« (Herder 1977, 138). Thus, avoiding both purely sensuous as well as purely intellectual extremes, one should »als eine vermischte Natur denken« and follow one's vocation of »[u]mzirkter, eingeschränkter Genuß innerhalb den Grenzen seines Wesens« of *this* life and for *this* world – or simply, in Herder's short formulation »Genieße hier dein Leben aus!« (Herder 1977, 139, 141, 142). After this life, the soul loses all its »acquired skills« and returns to its original form again: »die nackte menschliche Seele, im Grundstoff ihrer Kräfte und Fähigkeiten« (Herder 1977, 179). Thus the idea that the soul remains always attached to the same body, whose acquired skills it thereby preserves in its linear progress towards perfection, is rejected by Herder. But the soul as separated from a body, as »freed from sensuousness«, as pure spirit is also simply inconceivable for Herder. Hence Herder's belief in palingenesis: »Meine Seele hat sich durch ihre Kräfte eine organische Welt gebaut; diese Welt nutzt sich nach ihren Gesetzen ab und eilet zu Ende; meine Seele fängt sich durch die Triebfeder ihrer Kräfte eine andere an zu bereiten, durch Raum und Zeit und Kraft mit der ersten verbunden« (Herder 1977, 180).

This understanding of the soul in turn forms the basis both of Herder's rejection of Mendelssohn's model for moral philosophy – which mistakenly takes the norms, principles, or laws of moral philosophy to constitute an immutable and eternal system of their own – and of Herder's own conception of the foundations of morality. This is discussed in several writings from the 1760s and 1770s, but its clearest formulation is to be found in the 1775 version of *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden*. Herder's approach is distinctly bottom-up and finds the origins of morality in the phenomenon of life.

Wallt, was Leben in der Natur ist, zum Leben, beb't jede Saite ihrem Ton und jede Fiber zieht mit ihrer Gespielin; fühlt Thier mit Thier, warum sollte nicht Mensch mit Menschen fühlen? Gib ihm was Thier, Fiber und Saite hat, was allgemeines Gesetz des Lebenden ist in der Schöpfung; gib's ihm in seiner Pflanzen- Thier- und Menschennatur, in seinen Reizen, Empfindungen und höhern Sinnen: siehe sein innigstes Selbstgefühl, jetzt allgemeines Mitgefühl worden, ist Nachbild Gottes, Sensorium alles Lebenden in der Schöpfung. (SWS 8, 296)

per se subsistentia, sunt PHAENOMENA SUBSTANTIATA« (Baumgarten 2011, 130). Cf. Irmischer 1987, 48.

10 Leibniz maintains in the *Système nouveau de la nature et de la communication des substances aussi bien que de l'union qu'il y a entre l'âme et le corps* (Leibniz 1880, 480–481), *Principes de la Nature et de la Grace* §6, and in the *Monadologie* §§72–73 that a soul is never without an organic body or machine, death consisting only of a metamorphosis and of a sudden but continuous diminution – not entire loss – of the body (Leibniz 1885, 601, 619).

Selbstgefühl and *Mitgefühl* are interpreted here as having their roots in the same feelings animals have towards one another, in the analogous activity of a fibre. As Herder puts it in the 1778 version of *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden*, »Selbst- und Mitgefühl also, (abermals Ausbreitung und Zurückziehung) sind die beiden Äußerungen der Elastizität unsres Willens« (FHA 4, 360). Not only, therefore, are these two feelings conceived of as analogous to the forces of expansion and contraction; the human will itself is also conceived in this respect on the model of an elastic fibre. It is this ontologically basic – which in Herder’s naturalistic terms also means physiologically basic – feeling of *Mitgefühl* which underlies the reaction of sympathy (*Sympathie*) that is elicited in the creature who hears another’s cry of suffering, as illustrated at the beginning of the *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*. Just as the sensations of the *sensorium commune* of the human being were believed to be transformatively unified by an inner medium such as ether or electricity, so too is *Mitgefühl* interpreted as the medium of a *sensorium* of the entire living world of creation. *Mitgefühl* has its origins, however, in *Selbstgefühl*; the more ardent or heartfelt (*innig*) the latter, the deeper the former (SWS 8, 297). The two acting together regulate humanity:

Die beiden großen Triebfedern aller Menschenhandlungen sind Selbst- und Mitgefühl, zwei Sprossen Eines Stammes, Äußerungen Einer und derselben Kraft der Seele, der innern Elasticität Wirksamkeit und Freiheit. Sie setzt aus sich und fühlt sich tief in sich wieder: ist Axe und Rad des Weltalls. Je inniger sie, desto tieferes Erkenntniß und Mitgefühl von allem, was uns umgibt; desto tiefere Freiheit und Regsamkeit in uns selbst. Menschen der Art sind wahre Götter der Erde: tief in sich, unwandelbare Axe einer kleinen Welt! und tief und innig in jedem Brudergeföhle. (SWS 8, 295–296)

Selbstgefühl is thus the axis, and *Mitgefühl* the wheel; the former is the ground of one’s feeling of freedom, the latter what unites the moving whole of humanity (the similarity here of *Selbstgefühl* with Rousseau’s naturally free and independent savage who feels deeply the sentiment of his own existence and of *Mitgefühl* with *la pitié* is noticeable).¹¹ And taken to its logical extreme, *Mitgefühl* becomes love; in this human beings come closest to God. »Liebe ist das edelste Erkennen: die Gottähnlichste Empfindung!« (SWS 8, 296) It is through love, as the deepest expression of *Mitgefühl*, and its fruit, that humanity as a species endures (cf. Heinz 1994, 164–166). This contrasts starkly with Mendelssohn’s views on the closely related concept of *Mitleiden*, as reflected, for example, in his *Sendschreiben an den Herrn Magister Lessing in Leipzig* (1756). There Mendelssohn discusses Rousseau’s *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité* (1755) and rejects the idea that pity (*Mitleiden*) is an original inclination in human beings that grounds morality and natural sociability on the basis that there is no explicit determination in us for feeling pleasure at the weakness of other creatures. »Nein!«, Mendelssohn declares, »Mitleiden gründet sich auf Liebe, Liebe gründet sich auf die Lust an Harmonie und Ordnung. Wo wir Vollkommenheiten erblicken, da wünschen wir sie wachsen zu sehen; und sobald sich ein Mangel bey ihnen äusert: So entspinnet bey uns darüber eine Unlust, die wir Mitleiden nennen« (Juba 2, 86). Herder, needless to say, would reject this argument and the very framing of the question. In speaking of *Mitgefühl*, he thereby accentuates its physiological roots and his bottom-up approach vs. Mendelssohn’s rationalistic, top-down approach that begins from the soul’s perception of perfections.

11 For a related discussion of Herder’s relationship to Rousseau, see DeSouza 2012a, esp. 239.

Now for Herder, any moral theory or moral philosophy must be constructed on the basis of these primordial, physiological feelings.¹² In fact, he believes that, in practice, these feelings *must* be cast in some such language for them to be truly effective. He writes, »Liebe deinen Nächsten, dein Nächstes, dein zweites Ich, wo und in welcher Gestalt du es auch siehest, als dich selbst« wird also Flammenschrift im Herzen und Lichtsprache in der Seele: Nachhall jeder zitternden Fiber und Harmoniegesang aller brüderlichen Wesen«. (This is Herder's answer to the Wolffian-Mendelssohnian ethics of perfection; recall Mendelssohn's analogous principle encountered in section I above.) There is, therefore, a pre-reflective manner in which *Mitgefühl* can guide actual human actions. But Herder continues, »Willst du dies Moralische Gefühl nennen; das sonderbare Wort steht dir frei. Vergiß aber sodenn nicht, daß es Nachhall einer zitternden Fiber und eines einstimmigen Nervenbaues sei; enges, dunkles Gefühl, dem als solchem dir dem Menschen, dem erkennenden Gottesbilde blind zu folgen nicht ziemet.« It is thus not appropriate for a human being, who is made in the image of God as a being capable of knowing, blindly to follow a narrow, obscure feeling. Instead, Herder explains, »Helle es [i. e., das Gefühl] auf, erhöhe es zum Erkenntniß und es wird das Gesetz der Billigkeit der Ausbreitung und Liebe« (SWS 8, 296). *Mitgefühl*, therefore, is not just a generalised feeling of fellowship and compassion human beings feel for one another; rather, it is also crucially pregnantly normative, insofar as it contains normative content that must be unpacked, translated/transformed, and articulated.

It is for this reason that *Mitgefühl* must form the starting point and foundation of any moral theory or moral philosophy. Herder continues:

Schreibest du aber nun Gegenseits der spekulirenden Vernunft zu, was ursprünglich deinem Nervenbau, jeder Fiber und gleichschallenden Saite mitgehört: was denkst du an Vernunft und Gewißen, Recht und Unrecht? läßt es sich von außen hinein spekuliren, wo es nicht innen lebendig liegt? läßt es sich in der Schöpfung finden, wenn es nicht drinn empfunden wird? Arme Spekulation woher nimmst du es denn? und wem wirst du es geben können, dem Gott den Keim dazu nicht im Gewebe, im Reiz, im dunkeln harmonischen Gefühl gab. Regte sich nicht eine Seele der andern gleich; wallte nicht ein schlagendes Herz zum andern; was würde deine Demonstration ersetzen oder würgen? (SWS 8, 296–297)

It is only in virtue of the foundation *Mitgefühl* provides that the abstract concepts of moral philosophy have any force. What is certainly *not* the case is that these concepts obtain their force purely from their rational nature alone. Herein lies the crux of the difference between Mendelssohn and Herder on moral philosophy and its foundations. Mendelssohn argues that the genuine force and credibility of the principles of a moral philosophy derive only from their theoretical demonstration. The embedding of these principles in the lower parts of the soul, which practical ethics effects in order to engender a conviction of the heart through which the principles acquire motivating power, is entirely secondary. For Herder, the normative concepts of a moral theory are not given motivating power by being attached to sentiments or feelings; rather it is because of the inherently pregnantly normative nature of *Mitgefühl* itself that this feeling truly grounds and gives substance to the laws of justice or equity which are constructed on

12 The criticism therefore that while Mendelssohn's belief in the immortality of the soul can successfully ground morality, Herder's rejection of it leads to the relativizing of »die Geltung moralischer Normen« (Pollok 2010, 567) fails to consider Herder's immanent grounding of morality in life itself.

its basis. Mendelssohn's theory fails to make the distinction between moral knowledge which is made to be feeling-analogous and the primordial moral feelings which underpin it. Herder explains his own theory in detail:

Empfindung, Reiz, Leidenschaft ist der Vernunft so wenig entgegen, daß ja die wahre, einzige Vernunft und Tugend allein aus und mit aller wahren Empfindung, Reiz, Leidenschaft handelt. Wohlgeordnete Reize und Empfindungen sind das sinnliche Schema der Vernunft: wohlgeordnete Leidenschaften und Triebe der Tugend einzige Erscheinung. Tiefe Empfindungen müssen also auch immer tiefes Erkenntniß gewähren können, das über jene herrsche: so wie ausgebreitete Empfindungen einer Kraft zugehören, die sie weit umher ordne. [...] Was vom Verstande gilt, gilt auch von Tugend: denn beide sind Eins. Weder Jene noch Diese ist Abstraktion in der Luft; beide werden im Kampf gebohren, jene von Empfindungen, diese von Trieben (SWS 8, 310).

Here we move beyond *Mitgefühl*, to a discussion of the nature of virtue and the drives (*Triebe*) out of which it arises. The same point, however, applies: feelings, passions, drives, can be of a moral nature, i. e., pregnantly normative. This is just one aspect of Herder's broader theory according to which the soul contains within it the »Grundstoff ihrer Kräfte und Fähigkeiten«. It is on this basis that Herder claims that a philosophy which consists of nothing but sad speculation separates what God has bound together, takes away from humanity the power and happiness of its noblest occupation, and destroys all the objects of healthy nature and turns them into shadows and schemes. »Da sehet (um nur Ein Beispiel zu geben),« Herder exclaims, »jene hunderttausend Moralisch-politische Systeme, die unser Jahrhundert überschwemmen – taube Begriffe, Wortkränze, Abstraktionen und Spekulationen, von keiner Empfindung entsprungen, von jeder Erfahrung verlaßen, ohne Wahrheit, Stell' und Ort auf dieser Welt!« (SWS 8, 311, 312).

V. Conclusion

Herder's understanding of morality begins from the unique conception he developed in the eighteenth century of quasi-physiological, pregnantly normative moral feelings (*moralische Gefühle*) that must form the foundation of any moral philosophy. As we have seen, this was in turn based on his particular understanding of the soul-body relationship and human cognition which construed the soul as intrinsically and constitutively bound up with the body and knowledge as originating from and depending on the lower, sensuous regions of the soul. However, Herder never rejects the attempt to formulate morality in conceptual terms. Indeed, as we have also seen, this is an essential step for linguistic creatures such as ourselves who are not meant to follow moral feelings blindly. Rather, what Herder rejects is the severing of the connection between these moral feelings and moral theory, of which Mendelssohn's abstract, rationalist moral theory, which sees itself as having universal purchase and timeless validity insofar as it addresses itself to the immortal and rational soul, is a prime example. Herder strives to do justice *both* to what he sees as the universal and common foundation of morality in our shared, quasi-physiological, moral feelings *and* to the fundamental cultural-historical and contextual conditions of the motivational power and substan-

tive meaningfulness of any particular society's moral framework of mores (*Sitten*), norms, and values. Herder saw the moral theory of his day as striving to be a universal »science of our duties« (*eine Wissenschaft unsrer Verbindlichkeiten*) consisting of principles and maxims (FHA 1, 115). For Herder, such a theory was constitutionally incapable of being reconciled with or doing justice to the actual conditions of moral agency. It is not that there are no common or universal values that can be picked out, but rather that they do not form a *sui generis* »science« of their own. It is for this reason, I believe, that Herder never developed a moral theory like that of Mendelssohn or Kant.

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