

JOHANN GOTTFRIED VON HERDER
IDEAS TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF THE HISTORY OF MAN (1784-1791)

BOOK III¹

Chapter 5 "Organic Difference Between Animals and Man"

Here, Herder argues that it is untrue that the "human species" (255) possesses "in the most perfected form all the powers and capacities of every other species" (255). The view that man is a "degenerate type of animal who, forever striving for perfection, has in the process wholly lost the characteristics originally peculiar to him" (255) also "flies in the face of . . . all the evidence that human biology and history provide" (255). Herder distinguishes man from animal: "no animal has a language, still less writings, traditions, religion or rights and law of its own making" (255). "Whilst animals on the whole remain true to the qualities of their kind, man alone has made a goddess of *choice* in place of *necessity*" (256). How exactly "man came to differ in this way" (256) is a question "essentially historical in orientation" (256). Herder argues that what distinguishes man from animals is that man has learned to walk "upright" (256) which has become the "organising determinant of man's activities and the characteristics which distinguish him from all other species" (256). His "peculiar organisation of powers" (257) derive from the "erect posture . . . by which alone, he became man" (257).

BOOK IV

Chapter 1 "Man is Organised with a Capacity for Reasoning"

Herder begins here by pointing out the many similarities between man and monkey. This prompts the question: "What is it, then, that the humanlike creature lacks to be fully human?" (259). Herder traces the difference to the "*parts pertaining to walking*" (259). Herder argues that it is man's "erect posture" (260-261) which is responsible for "man's superiority" (260) which in turn "can be attributed to the structure of his brain" (260). Though the "ape has every part of the brain which man possesses" (261), everything depends on the "*direction* in which head was formed in relation to the organisation of the whole body" (261).

The physiology of the human brain accordingly determines the particular "manner in which ideas are formed" (259). He is of the view, firstly, that the brain functions holistically, that is, that the "*indivisible process of the formation of ideas*" (259) is not linked to "individual material parts distributed in the brain" (259):

We name the powers of thought according to their different relations, imagination and memory, intellect and judgment; we distinguish the impulse of desire from the pure will, and the power of sensation from that of movement. . . . [T]hese faculties are not locally separated as if judgment resided in one part of the brain, memory and imagination in another, the passions and sense perception in a third. For the thought processes of our mind are undivided entities, producing in their totality the diverse effects or manifestations which we treat as separate faculties. (259)

This makes it difficult to detect the "complex inter-connections of all our ideas, senses

¹All quotes in the following sections are from "Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind." J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture. Trans., ed. and intro. Frederick M. Barnard. Cambridge: CUP, 1969. 253-326.

and perceptions" (260). He describes the brain as the sacred laboratory of ideas, where these and the senses converge, not unlike a womb in which the embryo of thought invisibly takes shape as one indivisible whole. If the womb is sound and healthy, it affords the embryo not merely adequate psychological and physiological warmth, but also ample space and favourable conditions in and through which the invisible organic power (*kraft*) pervading everything, can thoroughly penetrate and engulf the perception of the senses and of the whole body, and combine them . . . within that luminous point which we regard as clear *consciousness*, then the finely organised creature becomes capable of reason, provided . . . external circumstances, such as education, help to facilitate the awakening and development of ideas. (260)

Chapter 3

"Man is Organised for More Complex Sense Perception, for the Exercise of Art and the Use of Language"

If man were "closer to the ground, his senses would be confined to a narrower sphere" (261). For this reason, the senses of smell and taste gave way to that of sight. Because of his upright gait, his hands are free to "manipulate objects and feel his way . . . towards new and clear ideas" (262). The "freedom of his hands has made man a tool and weapon-making creature" (262) making "art . . . his most powerful weapon" (262). These capacities and skills are set in motion by speech: by the divine gift of speech dormant reason was aroused or, more precisely, the very capacity of reasoning which by itself would for ever have remained dead acquired through speech vital power and efficacy. Only by speech did the eye and the ear, nay the perception of all the senses, become united, thus giving rise to creative thoughts, to which the hands and other members were subservient tools. . . . The delicate organs of speech must, therefore, be considered as the rudder of our reason, and speech itself as the heavenly spark that gradually kindled our thoughts and senses into flame. (263)

Chapter 4 "Man is Organised for Finer Instincts and Hence for Freedom"

Far from being deprived of the instincts of other animals, man has them all albeit in "*repressed*" (264) form. How does this repression come about?

Before the child learns to walk, he learns to see, hear and grasp things, and to practice the delicate mechanism of his sense apparatus. In this he is no different from the animals, since he exercises his senses in the same instinctive manner, only in a more delicate fashion. And he does so *not* as a result of innate skills or aptitudes. . . . Being able to do everything without having to learn it, he would learn nothing of what constitutes his human essence. Either reason must be born in him as an instinct . . . or he must come into the world feeble as he does *in order to acquire reason*. . . . (264)

Reason is, he argues,

something *formed by experience*, an acquired knowledge of the propositions and directions of the ideas and faculties, to which man is fashioned by his organisation and mode of life. . . . Man's reason is the creation of *man*. From infancy man compares the ideas and impressions, particularly those of his finer senses, according to delicacy, accuracy and frequency of his sense perceptions, and in proportion to the speed with which he learns to combine these. The result of these combinations constitutes thought, a newly created unity. And the result of the various

combinations of thoughts and perceptions constitutes the process of distinguishing the true from the false, the good from the bad, the beneficial from the harmful. This ongoing process, which fashions our lives as human beings, is reason. Instead of viewing it, then, as an inborn *a priori* faculty, we have to see it as the accumulation or product of the impressions that are received, the examples that are followed, and the internal power and energy with which they are assimilated within the individual mind. (264-265)

"If Nature deceived us by false perceptions of the senses, we have to suffer the natural consequences. All those affected in this manner would share the same experience" (265) and none of us would be the wiser. By the same token, if "men deceive us, and we lack organs or faculties to perceive the deception and order our impressions in more correct proportion, our reason is crippled, frequently for life" (265).

Nonetheless, it is man's "high *rational destination*" (265), a function of his "great gifts of *reason* and *freedom*" (265), to be "set free" (265) and "weight up good against evil, truth against falsehood; he can explore possibilities and choose between alternatives" (265). Man, "by his very nature, is and remains a free creature. In error and in truth, in rising and in falling, he still remains man: feeble indeed, but freeborn; not fully rational, though capable of reasoning. His human essence – *Humanität* – is not ready made, yet it is potentially realisable" (266). Every "possible variety in the use of these gifts" (266) are "to be found upon our globe" (266) to the point where one "can trace a progressive scale from the man who borders on the brute to the purest genius in human form" (266). The

nobles plants of reason and freedom have produced beautiful fruits when nourished by the celestial beams of the sun in spite of the many wild branches. . . . [T]o what heights human reason has ventured, attempting not merely to trace but also to imitate the creating and sustaining deity. In the chaos of beings, which the senses reveal, it has sought and discovered unity and meaning, order and beauty. The most hidden powers, of whose inner forces reason admittedly has not notion, have been observed in their external manifestations in terms of motion, quantity, duration, efficacy and substance. (266-267)

Freedom too "has produced noble fruits in mankind, revealed both by what men pursue and by what they shun" (267):

men have renounced the unsteady reins of blind appetite, and voluntarily assumed the bonds of marriage, of friendship, of social cooperation and loyalty unto death; . . . they have given up their own wills to be governed by laws; . . . they are prepared to establish and defend with their own life's blood *the rule of man over men*, imperfect though it is; noble-minded men have devoted their lives to their *country* . . . to confer what they at least thought to be welfare and peace on a blind ungrateful multitude; . . . divinely inspired visionaries voluntarily submitted to slander and persecution, poverty and want, from a noble thirst for *truth*, *freedom*, and *happiness*, cherishing the idea that they were promoting the highest boon of which they were capable, for the benefit of their brethren. (267)

Chapter 6 "Man is Constituted for Humanity and Religion"

Humanität is Herder's term for "that which expresses the essence of himself as a human being" (267), to be precise, the "noble constitution of man for reason and freedom, finer senses and impulses" (267). Herder here briefly sketches man's "structure and constitution to trace his nobles duties" (268), arguing that his "whole organic structure" (268) is "most carefully adapted" (268) to the two "basic instincts" (268) of "*self-preservation* and *sympathy*" (268). He then proceeds to discuss man's

body as ideal for self-defence; his "sexual instinct" (268) as the basis of "*voluntary social alliance*" (268); his "sympathy" (269) and "empathy" (269); the crucial role played by "maternal love" (269) in fostering "ties of blood, mutual trust and love" (270); his conception of "*justice and truth*" (270); his "*decorum*" (270), that is, the "cultivation of inward form and wholesomeness. True beauty is nothing but the pleasing manifestation of such inner perfection" (270); and, last but not least, religion:

The human understanding is the most exquisite gift of man, the business of which is to trace the connection between cause and effect, and to divine it where it is not apparent. The human understanding does this in every action, occupation, and art, for even where it follows an accepted practice, some understanding must originally have settled the connection between cause and effect, and thus have established it. To be sure, we cannot discern the inner cause of natural phenomena. There is little or nothing that we know about how things operate even within ourselves. In a sense, therefore, all the phenomena around us are but a dream, a conjecture, a name, though we regard it as reality if and when we observe the same effects linked with the same occasioning circumstances, often and constantly enough. This is how philosophy proceeds, and the first and last philosophy has always been religion. (271)

"Where man could see no visible author of events, they supposed an invisible one" (271), the goal of religion being "to search into the causes of things" (271), to "seek an understanding of given phenomena, to venture into the unknown by conjecture" (272).

BOOK V

Chapter 2

"No Power in Nature is Without an Organ; but the organ is not Power Itself, but merely its Medium"

Here, alluding to Descartes' dualism, Herder argues that we know of "no spirit capable of operating apart from, or without, matter" (272). Moreover, "we observe in matter so many powers of a spirit-like nature, that a complete *opposition* and *contradiction* of these admittedly different elements strikes me as at least unproven if not self-contradictory" (273). All powers in operation are inherent, Herder argues, in some organ. Any particular power is perceived by the senses only through "its manifestations in and through material forms" (273). The "more complex the organisation of a creature, the less recognisable is what we call its seed or genetic origin. It is *organic* matter which, in order to attain the form of the prospective creature, requires the addition of vita powers or life forces" (273). What takes place is "*creative and total development* or *genesis*, i.e., the operation of internal powers within a mass which Nature supplies" (273). There are a number of characteristics in this regard which are worth noting: firstly, powers and organs are "*intimately connected, but they are not one and the same thing*" (274); secondly, each power "*operates in harmony with its organ*" (274); and thirdly, though the organ may change, the essential power remains.

Herder is at pains to stress that he does not mean by all this that "our *rational mind* forms its structure in the womb by means of its inherent reason" (274) for the simple reason that

though we are born with a capacity for it, we are not capable of possessing or acquiring it by our own unaided power. How could something which is so highly dependent in its maturation on *conscious* human development possibly come into being at a time when the major part of our vital functions are performed without any conscious volition of our mind, when we are wholly incapable of comprehending any part of its

internal or external operations. It was not reason that fashioned the boy, but organic powers. (274)

Indeed, our mind "only acquired reason and an essentially human character (*Humanität*), by means of organic powers such as the brain and the nerves which enable in the first place to learn how to think and feel" (274).

Chapter 4

"The Sphere of Human Organisation is a System of Creative Mental Powers"

Here, Herder argues that no "flower blossoms as a result of the external dust or the mere structure of its material particles" (275). This is why no "single activity of so complex an organisation of powers as the human mind can be simply resolved into the component parts of the brain" (275). It is possible to "posit *specific psychological laws* according to which the mind combines ideas and performs its other functions" (275) and that it performs these functions "in conformity and harmony with its organs" (275). However, the brain is not "self-cogitative" (275), the "neural fluids . . . self-sentient" (275). Rather, he insists, there is "clear evidence of an admittedly organic, but nonetheless self-powered being, acting in conformity to laws of mental inter-relation" (276).

Herder is interested in tracing the "*manner* in which the mind operates" (275) and the "*essential nature of its ideas*" (275). He argues that the "perception, by means of which the mind forms an 'image' of an external object is *something totally different from what the sensation itself conveys to the mind*" (276). The

image in the mind is the product of an intellectual process; it is the creation of the mind itself in response to the stimuli received by the senses. From the chaos of things that surrounds it, the mind calls forth an a configuration (*Gestalt*) on which it focuses its attention and in this manner creates by means of its intrinsic power a unity out of multiplicity, a whole *sui generis*, entirely of its own making. The mind can recall or reconstruct the image, once formed, even when the object to which it refers is no longer present. Dreams and imagination can and do form it according to laws very different from those underlying sense perceptions. (276)

The workings of the mind of the "mentally disturbed" (276) in relation to one "idea" (276) which "dominates him" (276) is not different from but, in fact, paradigmatic of this process of 'reconstruction':

In the light of it he creates a world of his own, a concatenation of thought of its own peculiar kind, and all the wanderings of his mind and the manner in which it combines ideas is *mental* in the highest degree. It is not the result of a peculiar position of the cells of his brain, nor of the sensations as such, but is wholly determined by the affinity other ideas bear to his *idée fixe* and by the degree the latter warps the former. All the associations of our thought proceed in the same way. They are characteristic of beings capable of recalling past experiences by their own energy and of doing so quite frequently with a particular idiosyncrasy. Ideas are connected, not by some external mechanism, but by feelings of internal affection or repulsion. (276)

This is borne out, he feels, by the "*artificial formation of our ideas from childhood on* and by the slow process through which the mind acquires consciousness of itself and the effort it expends in learning the use of the senses" (277). He stresses the "ingeniousness with which a child acquires the idea of colour, figure, magnitude and distance and thus *learns to see*. The sense organ as such learns nothing" (277) for "it is the mind which learns to measure, to compare and to absorb the stimuli of the senses" (277). It is assisted in this regard above all by "language" (277):

That language is an intellectual, and not a material, tool in the formation

of ideas seems to me beyond doubt. . . . [S]ounds and words . . . are as disparate as body and mind, organ and creative power (*Kraft*). A word evokes a corresponding idea and transmits it to our mind from that of another person. But a word by itself is not an idea, anymore than a material organ is a thought. (277)

Our mind is accordingly "enlarged by absorbing ideas" (277) according to specifiable "laws of *assimilation, growth, and production*" (277) in a "mode peculiar to itself" (277). The result is that

within everyone of us an *inner man of intellect* is continuously taking shape, with a nature of his own, who uses the body only as his implement, and who acts in conformity with this nature even if the bodily organs are seriously impaired. The more the mind gets separated from the body by disease or by violent emotional upsets and is thus forced to move as it were within its own world of ideas, the more we can witness its own power and energy in the creation and connection of ideas. (277)

Unable "by its very nature to forego forming ideas, it creates a new world for itself" (277). When the madman's mind is "affected to the extent that one dominant idea can cause his self-awareness to be impaired" (278), he becomes an "actor in a drama of his own choosing whether it be a comedy or a tragedy" (278). Even when he is "thus transported into a region of phantasy, his consciousness is still operative, his internal power of self-determination is still in evidence in however misguided a manner" (278).

Herder argues that the "great distinguishing feature of the mind, clear *consciousness, has been acquired by it only gradually in the course of a process of intellectual humanisation*" (277). Animals do not possess this and children only gradually develop it. Herder is insistent that the body is not primary, proof of which is that the mind is often the cause of physical problems in the body. "Those who are convinced of an *inner life of the self* cannot but regard the external circumstances which continually bring about changes in the body . . . as secondary and transitory factors that do not affect its essence" (279).

Chapter 6

"The Present State of Man is Probably the Connecting Link of Two Worlds"

Man, Herder suggests, is the "last and highest link, closing as it were the chain of terrestrial organisation" (280), the "middle ring between two adjoining systems of Creation" (280). The "peculiar contradiction . . . inherent in the human condition" (280) is that Man is caught between the animal and the divine, between being a "child of the earth" (280) and the having "seeds of immortality within him" (280). He is the "representative of two worlds at once" (281) from which derives the "bipolarity of his nature" (280). By far the "greater part of man is his animal nature. He has brought into the world only a capacity for realising his human essence (*Humanität*). It requires the utmost effort and diligence to transform this capacity into an operative principle of human behaviour" (281), the "realisation of pure immortal humanity" (281) being the "hard-won crown of a ceaseless struggle" (281) for it is "repressed by other powers, by animal drives and appetites, and weighed down . . . by the pulls and pressures of our daily chores" (281). Accordingly, man alone "of all creatures is in conflict with himself and with the world" (280). "This view of things, which supported by all the laws of nature, alone gives us a key to the wonderful phenomenon of man, and hence also to a possible *philosophy of human history*" (280). It is "amply illustrated by the history of our species" (280).

This is why Herder concludes, contra Kant in particular, that to the mind, even in its present fetters, *space* and *time* are empty concepts. They only measure and denote relations of the body and do not bear upon the internal capacity of the mind which transcends time and space. (281)

BOOK VII

Chapter 1 "In Spite of Considerable Differences Between Men in Different Parts of the World, There is but One and Same Human Species"

Here, Herder argues that no "two leaves of any one tree are exactly alike in nature; still less two human faces and two human constitutions" (282). "Is not every man, in spite of his external resemblance to other men, in the last analysis (because of his uniquely individual internal structure) a cosmos in himself and, as such, a wholly incomparable being?" (282), he asks. However, notwithstanding important differences, "man is not an independent entity. All elements of nature are connected with him. He cannot live without air, without nourishment from the many product of the soil, without other diverse foods, and without drink" (282). This is why he is something of an "absorbing sponge" (282), "acting and acted upon, by the harmony of the forces surrounding him" (282).

Herder also argues that a man's "life is one continuous series of change and its phases read like sagas of transformation" (282). The

species as a whole goes through a ceaseless metamorphosis. Flowers drop and wither; others sprout and bud. . . . [W]ho can trace the change of matter and its forms through the entire realm of mankind upon earth, by its diverse causes, when not a single point on our diversified globe and not a single wave in the stream of time is like any other? (283)

However, since the human understanding "seeks unity in diversity, and since its prototype, the divine mind, has everywhere combined the greatest possible multiplicity with unity" (283), we are brought back to the fact that "in spite of the vast realm of change and diversity, *all mankind is one and the same species upon earth*" (283). Europeans, he contends, have far more in common with their "brother" (284) the "American [Indian] and the Negro" (284) than with the ape whom he is supposed to resemble more than any other animal.

Herder argues that many use the term 'race' to differentiate between "different members of the human species" (284) on the basis of "regions of origin or complexion" (284). He prefers to use the term 'nation' for

every distinct community is a *nation*, having its own national culture as it has its own language. The climate, it is true, may imprint on each its peculiar stamp, or it may spread over it a slight veil, without destroying, however, its original national character. (284)

It is preferable to speak of 'nations' rather than 'races' for the simple reason that "there are neither four or five races, nor exclusive varieties, on this earth. Complexions run into each other; forms follow the genetic character; and *in toto* they are, in the final analysis, but different shades of the same great picture which extends through all ages and all parts of the earth" (284). The study of nations, on the other hand, belongs to the "anthropological history of man" (284).

Chapter 2 "The Human Species has Everywhere Been Exposed to, and Affected by, Climactic Influences"

Here, Herder argues that, for most people, the "constitution of their body, their way of life, the nature of work and play to which they have been accustomed from their infancy, indeed their whole mentality, are climactic" (285). Many "sensitive" (285) souls are "so much attached to its soil, that they can scarcely live if separated from it" (285). This is true, for example, of the "stolen Negro slave" (285). Herder frequently blasts the evils of colonialism:

What gives you the right, you despicable slave-drivers, you inhuman brutes, even to approach the lands of these unfortunates, let alone to tear them away from it by cunning, fraud and cruelty? For ages these regions were

theirs by heritage; it belonged to them just as they belonged to it. Their forefathers acquired it, paying the highest and heaviest price to preserve their integrity and the integrity of their kind: their Negro constitutions and Negro complexion. (286)

Chapter 3 "What is Climate? How does It Affect Man's Mind and Body?"

Here, Herder says that we do not fully understand the nature of the impact which climate, a "compound of forces and influences to which both plants and animals contribute" (290), have on the individual. Though "we are like pliable clay in the hand of Climate" (289), he argues that we are unsure of the precise "manner in which they [influences] are absorbed and worked up by the human body" (290) and that it is difficult to draw any "general inferences applicable to whole nations and regions, nay to the delicate functions of the human mind and the most contingent of social institutions" (289). There is a lot of work remaining to be done in order to "arrive at a physiological pathology, to say nothing of a climatology, of man's power of thought and feeling!" (290). Herder stresses that the relationship of the individual to the climate is one of "mutual interaction" (290) and that man plays a role "in altering it through his creativity" (290).

In addition to physical factors such as temperature, moisture, etc., Herder is perhaps even more interested in the

topographical characteristics of a region, its natural products, the food and drink men enjoy in it, the mode of life they pursue, their occupations, their clothing, even their habitual attitudes, their arts and amusements, and a host of other circumstances, which by their organic interaction palpably affect men's lives; all these belong to the picture of climate. (290)

Herder concludes that while climate "promotes, but it does not compel, a given course of development. It imparts that elusive flavour which we can certainly detect within the total pattern of the life and manners of indigenous nations, but which it is exceedingly difficult to capture and isolate" (291).

Chapter 4 "The Genetic Force is the Mother of All Creations on Earth: Climate Can Only Contribute Favourable or Unfavourably"

Here, Herder admits that though he cannot define what a "*living organic force . . . intrinsically is*" (291), the "internal nature" (292) of things become "visible, clothed in matter appropriate to itself, and must, therefore, be the prototype of its appearance per se, even if we cannot say how it formed or originated in the first place" (292). Each creature is the "realisation of a latent idea that was inherent in creative and forever actively thinking nature" (292). There is

in all of us a vital force. . . . At length it grows feeble with age and lives in some parts even after death. Whatever this vital force intrinsically is, it is not the faculty of reason. For, assuredly, reason did not by itself fashion the body which it does not know and which it employs merely as an imperfect, extraneous too of its thoughts. But whilst reason must not be identified with the life force, it is undoubtedly connected with it, since all forces of nature are connected. Its product, thought, is as much a force of nature, dependent on the health and organisation of the body. . . . All these are natural *facts* which no hypothesis can shake and no scholastic logic can argue out of existence. (292)

Alluding to Descartes and company, he insists

I know for certain that I think, though I do not know the nature or source of my thinking power. I can see and feel with certainty that I am alive, yet I do not know the nature and source of the life force. This vital power is innate, organic and genetic; it is the basis of my natural powers, the inner genius of my being. (293)

This is counterbalanced by changes external to the individual: "all changes affecting man are organic in origin. Whatever the influence of the [external] climate, every man, every animal, every plant, has its own climate. For every living being absorbs all the external influences in a manner peculiar to itself and modifies them according to its organic powers" (293).

Chapter 5 "Concluding Remarks about the Conflict Between Climate and the Genetic Force"

To this point, Herder says that he has been trying to "draw the boundaries that mark the areas of conflict between climatic and genetic forces" (293):

Both contending forces exert considerable influence, yet each in its own manner. Climate is a chaos of heterogeneous elements, and hence acts in various ways. Gradually these diverse environmental elements penetrate the inner nature of a being, and bring about changes in its genetic and acquired characteristics. Its genetic life force, to be sure, offer resistance of varying duration and intensity in conformity to the uniqueness and inner homogeneity of its own organisation. But as it is not independent of the heterogeneous external factors, it must accommodate itself to these in due course. (293)

Human history is one of migrations: "most, if not all, nations changed their abode at some time or another" (294) for which reason it should be possible to "obtain a *physico-geographical history of the descent and diversification of our species* according to periods and climates" (294). Herder has several words of caution about the effect of migrations: firstly, too "*precipitate transitions to an opposite hemisphere and climate rarely benefit a nation*" (294); secondly, the coloniser is "*not always able to avert the effects of climate*" (295) found in the new location; thirdly, man cannot "*by the sheer power of his will and by the application of his skills arbitrarily turn any foreign region into a second Europe*" (295). Colonisation has had a terrible impact on the natural environment in many countries in the so-called 'New World,' he agrees: "we have changed their country and mode of life, without being able or willing to give them a European nature" (295). This leads Herder to exclaim: "O sons of Daedalus, emissaries of Fate upon earth, how many instruments were in your hands to confer happiness on nations by humane and decent means! But a proud, insolent love of gain led you almost everywhere into a different path" (296).

BOOK VIII

Here, Herder intends to "explore the workings of the mind and to investigate its diverse manifestations" (296). He draws a distinction in this regard between the "metaphysician" (297) who "starts out with a concept of the mind and deduces from it everything that can be deduced, wherever, or under whatever circumstances it may be found" (297). By contrast, the "philosopher of historian" (297), like Herder himself, "cannot start off with an abstraction; his views must be firmly grounded in historical facts. At the same time he has to connect the innumerable facts within some generalising framework in order to arrive a relatively meaningful conclusions" (297).

Chapter 1 "The Sensual Nature of Man Changes in Conformity to Structural and Climatic Factors: But its Truly Human Application Renders it Universally Capable of Promoting 'Humanität'"

Though all people possess the same senses, people respond differently to the "same external stimuli" (297):

Every individual has a particular proportion, a particular harmony, as it were, between all his sense perceptions. . . . Even in the clearest sense,

that of sight, these difference reveal themselves, not only with respect to distance, but also to the form and colour of things. Hence we find that almost every painter sees outlines in his own particular way and differs from every other in his particular style of colouring. (297)

Touch, he argues, is the "most essential sense" (298) and the "basis of all the other senses and constitutes in man his most distinctive organic characteristic" (298), contributing "more to the formation of our ideas than we imagine" (298). However, "how differently developed is this sense among the different peoples, according to its modification by the way of life, the climate, the genetic sensitivity of the body and the manner in which its powers are exercised and employed" (298).

Chapter 2 "The Human Imagination is Subject to Organic and Climatic Factors, But it is Universally Guided by Tradition"

"Of a thing that lies outside the sphere of our perception we can scarcely form a conception" (299), Herder argues. "The conceptions of every indigenous people are confined to its own region" (299) as a result of which each has difficulty understanding others' expressions. A comparison of the various mythologies of different cultures leads to a "complete geography of the inventing mind" (299). But where do these come from? "Have all the different nations invented their own mythology and thus become attached to it as their own property? By no means. They have not invented it; they *inherited* it" (299). He explains:

were all notions as clear to us as those which we acquire by sight, and had we no other ideas than those which we derive from visual objects or can compare with them, the source of error and deception would soon be eliminated since it would be easily discoverable. Most national myths are, however, stories that reach our ears. . . . [T]he ear hears words which explain to it by something unseen the mystery of what is seen. The power of the imagination is aroused and releases by its own imagining the tension that existed before. (299)

Herder is of the view that the "way of life and the genius of each nation have decidedly influenced the emergence and propagation of myths. . . . In short, the mythology of every people is an expression of their own distinctive way of viewing nature" (300), something "essentially determined by their climate and their creative genius" (300). Mythology, he contends, is a "philosophical essay of the human mind which dreams before it is awake" (300). It is often argued that myths are tools used by priests, shamans and others "to blind the people" (301) and thereby control them. But it should not be forgotten that they too inherit certain "traditional beliefs" (301) and become "dupes of myths older than themselves" (301).

It is the imagination, Herder argues, which is responsible for the production of mythologies:

Of all the powers of the human mind the imagination has been least explored, probably because it is the most difficult to explore. Being connected with the general structure of the body, and with that of the brain and nerves in particular . . . it seems to be not only the basic and connecting link of all the finer mental powers but, indeed, the knot that ties the body and mind together. . . . The question of the existence of innate ideas has long been a subject of dispute. As these terms are usually understood, the answer must certainly be in the negative. But if we take them to refer to a predisposition to receive, connect and extend certain ideas and images, there seems a great deal to be said in favour of such a postulate and very little against it. The history of nations will show how Providence has employed this organic predisposition, as a result of which man's imagination can be so easily, yet so powerfully influenced. But it will show also to our horror how deceit or despotism has abused it by rendering

the limitless ocean of human imagination and fancy subservient to its purposes. (301)

Chapter 3 "The Practical Understanding of Man Has Always Developed in Accordance with the Requirements of his Particular Way of Life: at the Same Time it is also the Blossom of a People's Genius and the Son of Tradition and Custom"

Here, Herder turns his attention to the question of culture, *per se*, arguing that it is not the "necessary corollary of a given occupation or mode of life" (302). In other words, one cannot define a given culture as synonymous with a particular occupation (eg. Greenland with whale hunting). Moreover, cultural "development or progress does not solely or even necessarily depend on the stimulation of material needs" (302). In many cases, the "mode of life of a people comes to be determined one way or another by influences and circumstances other than those constituting its material requirements" (302). However, for the most part, there is a close link between a given culture and the necessity of ensuring one's survival in a physical world. The history of humankind is the history of man's relationship with nature, starting from simple hunting and gathering and becoming more sophisticated with the development of farming, etc.

Chapter 4 "The Feelings and Strivings of Man Conform Everywhere to his Physical Organisation and the Conditions in which He Lives: But at the Same Time They are Governed by Custom and Tradition"

Here, Herder argues that "man is actually formed in and for society, without which he could neither have come into existence, nor grown to maturity. Nature has bequeathed to him a number of characteristics which facilitate social coexistence.

Chapter 5 "The Happiness of Man is Invariably an Individual Good: Consequently it is Everywhere Climatic and Organic and the Child of Practice, Tradition and Custom"

Herder argues that man is the

child of chance; it is a matter of luck where he comes to live, when and under what circumstances. The country, the time, the total constellation of circumstances *happen* to decide both his capacity of enjoyment and the manner and measure of his joys and sorrows. (307)

Herder stresses that happiness is not a function of our education, intellectual activity, or our cultural refinement. Our lives are "far more enriched with love and joy caused by the feelings of the heart rather than by the profound deliberation of reason" (308). Rather, a "simple, deep-rooted feeling of existence . . . is happiness" (308).

BOOK IX

Chapter 1 "Eager Though Man is to Imagine Himself Self-Made, He is Nonetheless Dependent on Others in the Development of his Capacities"

Here, Herder points out once more that philosophers "have exalted human reason to a position of supremacy, independent of the senses and organs. But just as there is no such thing as an isolated faculty of reason, so there is no man who has become all he is entirely by his own efforts, as he is wont to imagine" (311). In the "world of empirical reality" (311), the "whole chain of human development is characterised by man's dependence on his fellows" (311). This is the "essence of the history of mankind" (312). Man's history is "necessarily a whole, i.e. a chain formed from the first link to the last by the moulding process of socialisation and tradition" (312). It is "only by training and experience that our lives as men take shape" (312). "Every individual "only becomes man by means of

education, and the whole species lives solely as this chain of individuals" (312). The "whole structure of man's humanity is connected by a spiritual genesis – education – with his parent, teachers and friends, with all the circumstances of his life, and hence with his countrymen and forefathers" (312-313). Some "links of this chain inevitably come in contact with, and thus act upon, the development of his mental powers" (313). Moreover, we are "not the product of merely local circumstances. Beings like us, wherever they might dwell, contribute to our education. They help to instruct us and fashion our habits and attitudes" (313). This is why Herder speaks of an "education of mankind and of a philosophy of the history of man" (313). Their "essential characteristic is the continuous interaction of individuals. This process alone makes man a human being in the proper sense of the word" (313).

The principles underlying this philosophy of history, Herder argues, are "*tradition* and *organic powers*" (313):

All education arises from imitation and exercise, by means of which the model passes into the copy. What better word is there for this transmission than tradition? But the imitator must have powers to receive and convert into his own nature what has been transmitted to him, just like the food he eats. Accordingly, what and how much he receives, where he derives it from and how he applies to his own use, is determined by his own receptive powers. Education, which performs the function of transmitting social traditions, can be said to be *genetic*, by virtue of the manner in which the transmission takes place, and *organic*, by virtue of the manner in which that which is being transmitted is assimilated and applied. We may term this second genesis which permeates man's whole life, *enlightenment*, by the light it affords to his understanding, or *culture*, in so far as it is comparable to the cultivation of the soil.

Chapter 3 "All the Arts and Sciences of Mankind Have Evolved Through Imitation, Reason and Language"

Language, Herder argues, was invented when man appropriated a "symbol for an object as a distinguishing mark" (314). Language is the foundation upon which all the arts and sciences were subsequently erected. These have been absorbed from many sources: our "intellect and erudition, our artistic accomplishments, the sciences of war and diplomacy, our whole mode of life, are a combination of the thoughts and inventions of others" (314) and come to us from "all parts of the world without any merit of our own" (315). We are all, European and non-European, "born amidst the confluence of . . . inventions and traditions" (315), much of which originate elsewhere.

BOOK XII²

Chapter 6 "The Principal Laws of History"

Here, Herder identifies the "principal law of history" (35) as the principle that "everywhere on our Earth whatever could be has been, according to the situation and wants of the place, the circumstances and occasions of the times, and the native or generated character of the people" (35). He contends that "human powers" (35) are in a "determinate relation to the age, and to their place on earth" (35). "Time, place, and national character alone, in short the general cooperation of active powers in their most determinate individuality,

²All quotes in the following sections are from "Ideas Toward a Philosophy of the History of Man." Theories of History. Ed. Patrick L. Gardiner. New York: Free Press, 1959. 34-49. Gardiner's selection is drawn in turn from Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man. Trans. T. O. Churchill. London: J. Johnson, 1800.

govern all the events that happen among mankind" (35-36).

Herder argues, firstly, that "as man originates from and in one race, his figure, education, and mode of thinking, are thus genetic" (36). Hence, that striking national character, which, deeply imprinted on the most ancient people, in unequivocally displayed in all their operations on the Earth. As a mineral water derives its component parts, its operative powers, and its flavour, from the soil through which it flows; so the ancient character of nations arose from the family features, the climate, the way of life and education, the early actions and employments, that were peculiar to them. The manners of the fathers took deep root, and became the internal prototype of the race. (36)

This is evident, for example, in the case of the Jews who, "in the land of their fathers, and in the midst of other nations, . . . remain as they were; and even when mixed with other people they may be distinguished for some generations downward" (36). The "more secluded they live, nay frequently the more they were oppressed, the more their character was confirmed" (36). In fact, he suggests that, ideally, "if every one of these nations had remained in its place, the Earth might have been considered as a garden, where in one spot one human national plant, in another, another, bloomed in its proper figure and nature" (36).

However, Herder realises that just "as men are not firmly rooted plants, the calamities of famine, earthquakes, war and the like, must in time remove from their place to some other more or less different" (36). And even though

they might adhere to the manners of their forefathers with an obstinacy almost equal to the instinct of the brute, and even apply to their new mountains, rivers, towns, and establishments, the names of their primitive land; it would be impossible for them to remain eternally the same in every respect, under any considerable alteration of soil and climate. Here, the transplanted people would construct a wasp's nest, or anthill, after their own fashion. The style would be a compound arising from the ideas imbibed in their original country, and those inspired by the new: and this may commonly be called the youthful bloom of the nation. (36)

Almost every people on Earth, he points out, "has migrated at least once, sooner or later, to a greater distance, or less" (36). The impact of this migration is shaped by the "time when the migration took place, the circumstances by which it was occasioned, the length of the way, the previous state of civilisation of the people, the reception they met with in their new country, and the like" (36).

Herder envisages at every turn a close relationship between human history and natural history, human civilisation and nature, frequently using the metaphor of a plant and its roots in order to draw an analogy between the two:

Nature has given the whole Earth to mankind, her children; and allowed everything, that place, time, and power would permit, to spring up thereon. Everything that can exist, exists; everything that is possible to be produced, will be produced; if not today, yet tomorrow. Nature's year is long: the blossoms of her plants are as various as the plants themselves, and the elements by which they are nourished. (37)

The historian must accordingly strive to "see with eyes as impartial as those of the creator of the human race, or the genius of the Earth, and judge altogether uninfluenced by the passions" (37). He must cultivate a "mind wholly free from hypothesis" (37) if he is to grasp the meaning of each culture and social order in all its particularity.

The danger in all this is that of deracination and its consequences. "Though the tree lift its head" (37), Herder sermonises, "and overshadow whole quarters of the Globe, it if be not rooted in the earth, a single blast of wind may overturn it" (37). Arguing that the "complexion of a kingdom . . . depend[s] principally on the time and place in which it arose, the parts that composed it, and the external circumstances by which it was surrounded" (37), Herder contends that a "monarchy framed by wandering tribes whose

political situation is a continuation of their former mode of life, will scarcely be of long duration: it ravages, and subjugates, till at last itself is destroyed" (37). This is not the case, however, "with states, which, springing up from a root, rest on themselves: they may be subdued, but the nation remains" (37).

Herder then turns his attention to "*how transitory all human structures are*" (38): the "plant blossoms, and fades; your fathers have died, and moulded into dust: your temple is fallen: your tabernacles, the tables of your law are no more; language itself, that bond of mankind, becomes antiquated" (38). For this reason, he asks, "shall a political constitution, shall a system of government or religion . . . erected solely on these, endure for ever? If so, the wings of Time must be enchained" (38). The customs of various peoples grow so quickly out of date. This leads Herder to criticise the stranglehold of "Tradition" (38) which, though

in itself . . . an excellent institution of Nature, indispensable to the human race: but when it fetters the thinking faculty both in politics and education, and prevents all progress of the intellect, and all the improvement, that new times and circumstances demand, it is the true narcotic of the mind, as well to nations and sects, as to individuals. (38)

The inevitability of change is something which must not be ignored.

BOOK XIII

Chapter 7 "Reflections on the History of Greece"

Herder argues here that, just as the "botanist cannot obtain a complete knowledge of a plant, unless he follow it from the seed, through its germination, blossoming, and decay" (38), so too must the historian seek to understand the uniqueness of the present by reference to its roots in the past. The first principle to bear in mind in this regard is that "*[w]hatever can take place among mankind, within the sphere of given circumstances of time, place, and nation, actually does take place*" (39).

In "natural philosophy we never reckon upon miracles: we observe laws, which we perceive every where equally effectual, undeviating, and regular" (39). Man, he contends, "with his powers, changes, and passions" (39) is not able to "burst these chains of nature" (39), i.e. step outside or transcend nature, as a result of which human civilisation is subject to the same rules and principles as is the natural world. Accordingly, the examining mind must exert all its acumen on every historical event, as on a natural phenomenon. Thus in the narration of history it will seek the strictest truth; in forming its conceptions and judgment, the most complete connexion: and never attempt to explain a thing which is, or happens, by a thing which is not. With this rigorous principle, every ideal, all the phantoms of a magic creation, will vanish: it will endeavour to see simply what is: as soon as this is seen, the causes why it could not be otherwise will commonly appear. As soon as the mind has acquired this habit in history, it will have found the way to that sound philosophy, which rarely occurs except in natural history and mathematics. (39).

Such an approach, Herder argues, prevents us "from attributing the facts, that appear in history, to the particular hidden purposes of a scheme of invisible powers, which we would not venture to name in connexion with natural phenomena" (39). Fate, he contends, "reveals its purposes through the events that occur, and as they occur: accordingly, the investigator of history develops these purposes merely from what is before him, and what displays itself in its whole extent" (39).

The modern Greeks, for example, "have become what they are only by the course of time, through a given series of causes and effects" (39). All this is true no less of "every other nation upon Earth" (39) for the "whole history of mankind is a pure natural history of human powers, actions, and propensities, modified by time and place" (39):

Had Greece been peopled with Chinese, our Greece would never have

existed: had our Greeks been fixed where Darius led the enslaved Eretrians [sic] they would have formed no Athens, they would have produced no Sparta. . . . Why did the enlightened Greeks appear in the World? Because Greeks existed; and existed under such circumstances, that they could not be otherwise than enlightened. (39)

Why, for example, did Alexander invade India?

Because he was Alexander, the son of Philip; and from the dispositions his father had made, the deeds of his nation, his age and character, his reading of Homer, etc., he knew nothing better that he could undertake. (39-40)

The danger in all this is if

attribute his bold resolution to the secret purposes of some superior power, and his heroic achievements to his peculiar fortune; we run the hazard, on the one hand, of exalting his most senseless and atrocious actions into designs of deity; and, on the other, of detracting from his personal courage, and military skill; while we deprive the whole occurrence of its natural form. (40)

He who "takes with him into natural history the fairy belief, that invisible sylphs tinge the rose, or hang its cup with pearly dew-drops . . . may be an ingenious poet, but will never shine as a naturalist or historian" (40) for history is the "science of what is, not of what possibly may be according to the hidden designs of fate" (40).

Secondly, Herder contends that "*[w]hat is true of one people, holds equally true with regard to the connexion of several together; they are joined as time and place unites them; they act upon one another, as the combination of active powers directs*" (40). Arguing that the Greeks "have been acted upon by the Asiatics, and the Asiatics reacted upon by the Greeks" (40) who have been "conquered by Romans, Goths, Christians, and Turks" (40), and so on, Herder advances the view that the "whole of the cultivation of our minds has depended precisely upon the most trivial and precarious circumstances" (40). He denies the workings in all the vicissitudes of human existence of any "secret purpose of fate" (40), arguing instead in favour of seeking out the "natural cause" (40) in every instance.

Thirdly, Herder argues, the "*cultivation [culture] of a people is the flower of its existence*" (41); its "*display is pleasing indeed, but transitory*" (40), however. Man, Herder argues, "when he comes into the World, knows nothing, but has all his knowledge to learn; so an uncultivated people acquires knowledge from its own practice, or from intercourse with others" (40-41). However, "every kind of human knowledge' has its particular circle, that is its nature, time, place, and periods of life. The cultivation of Greece, for example, grew with time, place and circumstances, and declined with them" (41). All kinds of human knowledge aim at a "point of perfection, which, when attained by a concatenation of fortunate circumstances" (41) cannot be preserved to "eternity, nor can it instantly return, but a decreasing series commences" (41). In the arts, for example, every "perfect work . . . is the highest of its kind: nothing, therefore, can possibly succeed it, but mere imitations, or unsuccessful attempts to excel. When Homer had sung, no second Homer in the same path could be conceived: he plucked the flower of the epic garland, and all who followed must content themselves with a few leaves" (41). The Greek tragedians "chose another track: they ate . . . at Homer's table, but prepared for their guests a different feast" (41). They too, though, had their day: when the "subjects of tragedy were exhausted" (41), their "successors could do no more than remould the greatest poets" (41). The "essence of time" (41) contradicts any desire to impose an "unnatural eternity" (41) upon things for the "very appearance of the flower is a sign, that it must fade: it has drawn to itself the powers of the plant from the very root; and when it dies, the death of the plant must follow" (41). But out of the demise on one things arises others: "[e]very plant in nature must fade; but the fading plant scatters abroad its seeds, and thus renovates the living creation" (41).

Fourthly, the "*health and duration of a state rest not on the point of its highest cultivation, but on a wise or fortunate equilibrium of its active living powers. The deeper*

in this living exertion its centre of gravity lies, the more firm and durable it is" (41-42).

BOOK XV

Introduction "Perplexities of History"

Chapter 1 "Humanity is the End of Nature"

Chapter 5 "The Noblest Use of History"