

*what morality requires* of us would seem to reiterate, not resolve, the worries about Kantian moralism. Perhaps the central issue here is: how should we conceive of the relation between self-regard and self-concern, on the one hand, and explicitly moral considerations, on the other hand? One natural thought is that the self-concern for which a moral theory ought to allow room should not be circumscribed for the agent in such a narrow way. It is one thing to hold that what an agent does or pursues out of self-concern should be governed or regulated by moral considerations. The idea behind this more modest or minimal thesis is that duty should always function as a secondary motive for the Kantian agent to ensure that she not act out of self-regard when doing so would lead her to violate the moral law. But it looks as if Johnson's account of self-improvement entails a much stronger thesis about the relationship between self-concern and morality, insofar as duty does *not merely govern*, but to a strong degree *determines*, the shape and content of the sphere of self-concern.

These possible reservations aside, *Self-Improvement* is guaranteed to stimulate valuable discussion about self-respect and what we owe ourselves in virtue of the principal Kantian duty to respect our own humanity as an end in itself. Johnson's valuable book is full of insights about the connections between self-concern, personal standards and values and different ways of life. His central claims – that improving oneself involves adopting a way of life and its associated standards and values, and that autonomy and self-respect entail a duty to self-improvement – mark an important and novel contribution to Kantian ethics.

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Vicki A. Spencer, *Herder's Political Thought: A Study of Language, Culture, and Community*

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Vicki Spencer's dense monograph on Herder's linguistic and political philosophy is an ambitious project designed to rescue Herder from those who dismiss him as a rabid nationalist and a member of the counter-Enlightenment.

Against these claims, Spencer develops a nuanced reading the relationships between Herder's philosophy of language and his political arguments in order to position him as an important progenitor of contemporary communitarian and multicultural schools of political philosophy.

Spencer begins by situating Herder's philosophy of language within the broader debates about the origin and purpose of language in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Spencer highlights Herder's rejection of the idea that language is purely an instrument of cognition, emphasizing instead the ways in which thoughts and language are inseparable and intertwined, rejecting any hierarchical view that thoughts are prior to language. Instead, Herder emphasizes that it is through language that we form thoughts, making language essential to our very identity, and giving language a critical role in our cultural and political identifications. Spencer's account of Herder's philosophy of language works to push back against the dominant interpretation of Herder by emphasizing his view of multiple minority cultures within any cultural group. She contends that, while all cultures have their own 'centre of gravity' for Herder, he recognizes that they are internally heterogeneous, with multiple subcultures acting within any given culture. Cultures nevertheless have an identity in a holistic sense, so that even given this internal diversity there remains a recognizable whole. Language is the key to this idea of a recognizable whole: since language and thought are inseparable for Herder, language is constitutive of cultural formation. Spencer, however, places less emphasis on the role of a single language in forming *Volk* identity than Sankar Muthu and others, and her discussion of indigenous communities within multicultural nations suggests that she interprets Herder as allowing for the possibility of linguistic plurality within a given *Volk*.

Spencer positions Herder in a tradition of holistic individualism consistent with both twentieth-century hermeneutics and communitarianism. As she maps Herder's situated self, the individual is embedded in his particular cultural and historical context, but remains committed to values like individuality and subjectivity, which allows the embedded self to remain critical of the cultural context in which he finds himself and to evaluate this context according to universal principles. Spencer holds that, because of Herder's holistic individualism, individuals within a culture adopt the ends of that culture only insofar as those ends are their own.

While Spencer's aim is to draw out the relationship between Herder's philosophy of language and political thought, she admits that this is hampered by Herder's relatively limited engagement with politics, which she attributes to self-censorship on his part. Spencer's account of Herder's republicanism therefore relies heavily on unpublished drafts and careful readings of texts that are not primarily political. She carefully delineates

Herder's definition of *Volk* in order to differentiate it from the forms of nationalism that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, arguing that *Volk* is a naturally occurring community sharing a culture with communal solidarity, and that it ought to be distinguished from the modern bureaucratic liberal state. She contends that, although *Volk* does not mean *ethnie* in Smith's sense, it nevertheless bears a closer kinship to *ethnie* than to the modern civic nation. In her discussion of ethnicity and race in relation to *Volk*, Spencer admits that there are some unpleasant racial assumptions at work but dismisses this as the inevitable influence of the prejudices of the day.

Spencer's discussion of race in Herder is strikingly brief, and concludes with the claim that his racial views do not challenge her interpretation of Herder as a pluralist, since his minimal universalism ought to override the implications of his raced cultural hierarchies. Her critique engages primarily with those who have connected Herder's views on race to Nazism, and while her account successfully counters this reading of Herder, it does not engage with the more recent scholarship that has emphasized Herder's rejection of Kant's theory of race. Thus while Spencer argues that those who have taken Herder's aesthetic hierarchy as a doctrine of racial purity have read these remarks out of context, and missed his resistance to the idea of race as a fixed feature of humanity, she does not develop an account of Herder's critique of contemporary theories of race. She shows that Herder argued that racial traits are merely superficial, and therefore have no correlation to the designation of a *Volk*, and argues that his rejection of the notion of race turns on his assumption that any theory of distinct races must also be a theory of distinct origins, so that he rejects the polygenist claim that there are multiple origins for humanity. Here of course Herder is in fact in agreement with Kant, who thought distinct races could exist within a single human species. There is, then, an open question here about whether Herder's rejection of race is in fact a rejection of the Kantian monogenetic theory of race, or rather a misunderstanding of Kant's argument, but Spencer does not develop her account of Herder's theory of race sufficiently to answer this question. Instead, she argues that Herder's account of race is a merely aesthetic one shaped by the prejudices of his day and therefore poses no challenge to either his pluralism or his minimal universalism.

Given Spencer's own reliance on Herder's aesthetic views on culture and language as the ground of his political views, however, this dismissal seems inadequate, as does her assertion that Herder's aesthetic hierarchy has no bearing on his moral view of humanity. Her method, which so carefully connects the aesthetic to the political, offers an excellent opportunity for developing a comprehensive account of Herder's critique of Kant's theory of race and its impact on Herder's account of *Volk*, and it is disappointing that she does not take up this question more directly, choosing instead to dismiss Herder's views as a mere prejudice of the age.

Spencer positions herself as pushing back on Sankar Muthu's treatment of Herder, arguing that Muthu collapses most major points of disagreement between Kant and Herder, painting both as anti-imperialists critical of cosmopolitanism and motivated by an interest in cultural diversity. Spencer's arguments, however, do not systematically differentiate Kant's arguments from Herder's any more than Muthu's do. Spencer highlights three main differences between Kant and Herder. First, she explores Herder's critique of Kant's transcendental subject, which is based on his own account of the situated subject. Second, she points to Herder's scepticism about the necessity of coercive law. Finally, like Muthu she points out that while both Herder and Kant were critical of the idea of a world state, Herder was also resistant to the idea of a voluntary federation of states, and emphasized instead the importance of changing individual attitudes towards world peace rather than seeking institutional solutions.

The picture Spencer paints of Herder's political views is often an idealized one that relies heavily on comparisons with contemporary communitarian thinkers in order to present the most favourable interpretation of Herder's work. The result is a Herder who improves upon Mill, Taylor, Kant and others. Spencer's interpretative work is most ambitious in her discussion of Herder's republicanism, where she often relies on contemporary thinkers to explain Herder's views, thus crafting a Herder whose nationalism is a humanitarian project influenced in equal parts by consideration of Western bureaucratic states and non-Western tribal societies, and uninformed by the aesthetic concerns Herder raised about non-Western cultures. Spencer does admit Herder's limitations in these areas, but she does so in order to push past them, employing her own hermeneutic method to present a Herder capable of improving upon the best of twenty-first-century thought on problems of immigration, stateless nations and the rights of indigenous peoples.

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