The Review of Politics 69 (2007), 79–105.

DOI: 10.1017/S0034670507000320 Printed in the USA

In Defense of Herder on Cultural Diversity and Interaction

Vicki Spencer

Abstract: Diversity and unity are pivotal to the thought of the eighteenth-century German philosopher, Johann Gottfried Herder. Yet despite the enormous influence of his thought on the late Isaiah Berlin in the development of his own pluralism and Berlin's urging for those interested in cultural diversity to learn from Herder, many commentators fail to heed Berlin's equal recognition of Herder's radical antidualism. Thus, while an increasing number of theorists now note Herder's contribution to philosophical and political thought in being one of the first to recognize the value of cultural diversity, many fail to grasp fully the complexity and subtlety of his understanding of culture. Contrary to what is becoming the orthodox view in Anglo-American political theory, Herder was fully aware of the diversity existing within any given cultural community and promoted cultural interaction and interchange in a spirit of cooperation. He only opposed the cultural domination of indigenous populations.

Since the publication in 1980 of the late Isaiah Berlin's highly influential essay on Johann Gottfried Herder[1] and the general pluralist turn in Anglo-American political theory, acknowledgement of the importance of this eighteenth-century German philosopher's role in the history of ideas has increased significantly in the English-speaking world. The link between Herder's ideas and the recent wave of multicultural thinkers is particularly apposite. Charles Taylor openly acknowledges his indebtedness to Herder,[2] while Fred Dallymayr recognizes not only his salient role in the development of modern hermeneutics but takes Herder's desire to balance unity with diversity as inspiration for his own political philosophy.[3] But notwithstanding the contributions of these thinkers, their message for those attempting to

[1]Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980).

[2]Charles Taylor, "From Philosophical Anthropology to the Politics of Recognition: An Interview with Philippe de Lara," *Thesis Eleven* 52 (February 1998), 105, cited in Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor* (Teddington: Acumen, 2000), 7. Also see: Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition,"* ed. Amy Gutmann (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 30–32.

[3]Fred Dallymayr, *Alternative Visions: Paths in the Global Village* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).

grapple with the demands of cultural pluralism to heed Herder's relevance to their concerns remains, too often, marred by long-standing misconceptions about his thought.

Foremost among these misconceptions is the claim that while Herder was one of the first thinkers to appreciate fully the diversity between different cultures, he was oblivious to the diversity existing within cultural communities. He is, then, generally depicted as a thinker with either a highly deterministic view of culture or with a fatalistic conception of the laws of nature, which leaves little room for critical thought and human freedom. It is a view, moreover, that often leads to the equally erroneous claim that he favored a policy of cultural purity and isolation over interaction. These misinterpretations have been commonplace in nationalist studies.[4] Given Herder's significance in the history of ideas as one of the first thinkers to recognize the interrelationship between language, culture, identity, and recognition, and its significance for our conceptions of justice and the way we ought to live together as moral and ethical beings—issues that have come to the forefront of contemporary political theory in recent years—it is particularly worrisome that these misinterpretations are becoming orthodoxy also among Anglo-American political theorists.[5]

Despite the continued necessity for Herder scholars directly to challenge the appropriateness of seeing Herder strictly in modern nationalist terms,[6]

[4]This is in large part due to the highly influential interpretation by Elie Kedourie in his *Nationalism*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), which was originally published by Hutchinson in 1960. For more recent examples, see Joan Cocks, *Passion and Paradox: Intellectuals Confront the National Question* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 99–101; Paul Gilbert, *The Philosophy of Nationalism* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 48–50, 53–56; Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), c. 4.

[5]See Bikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 67–79; Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 260; Damon Linker, "Herder's Reluctant Pluralism," *The Review of Politics* 62 (Spring 2000): 289–92; James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 70; Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 113–24.

[6]See Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, 153, 156–63, 180–85; Ernest A. Menze and Karl Menges, "Introduction" in J. G. Herder, *Selected Early Works: 1764–1767* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 1; Vicki Spencer, "Herder and Nationalism: Reclaiming the Principle of Cultural Respect," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 43, no. 1 (1997): 1–13. Further critical of Berlin for nevertheless claiming in his *Against the Current* that Herder sowed the "seeds of nationalism" is Christoph Bultmann, "Die Urgeschichte in Herders Geschichtsphilosophie. Anmerkungen zur Suche nach den Ursprüngen des Nationalismus" in Regine Otto, ed. *Nationen und Kulturen Zum 250. Geburtstag Johann Gottfried Herders* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1996), 387–94. While F. M. Barnard, the foremost

my focus in this article is on the above misconceptions that have generally underlined this categorization and yet sometimes remain evident even when this point is conceded.[7] Central to this task is recognition of Herder's antidualism. Herder's attempts to mediate between apparent mutually exclusive opposites such as unity and diversity, the universal and the particular, individual freedom and determinism, have often meant that he has been seen as a highly unsystematic and contradictory thinker.[8] Such a conclusion is bound to occur if one approaches his thought from the perspective of the dichotomous thinking inherited from the Enlightenment. Just as contemporary philosophical thought has, however, increasingly challenged the validity of conceiving apparent opposites as mutually exclusive dichotomies, Herder scholars have come to recognize that many earlier studies of his thought suffered precisely as a consequence of a failure to grasp sufficiently his holism.[9]

commentator on Herder's political thought, has consistently pointed out that Herder's nationalism is without any aggressive or racist tendencies (see *Herder's Social and Political Thought: From Enlightenment to Nationalism* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965], 71, 172), only recently has he noted that Herder is not a nationalist in the way this term is used today. Yet he continues to employ this problematic categorization. See F. M. Barnard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity and History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), esp. 19–26, 37–49, 64, 74, 178.

[7]For example, Linker in "Herder's Reluctant Pluralism" accepts that Herder is not a "rabid nationalist" (270 n. 9) but, nevertheless, ignores many of the other recent insights in Herder scholarship. Similarly, Bikhu Parekh in his *Rethinking Multiculturalism* acknowledges Herder's importance in the acknowledgment of cultural diversity (67, 72) but then repeats the above errors.

[8]While Herder rejected systems theory, the claim that he was an unsystematic thinker is consistently challenged. See John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 318; Michael Forster, "Introduction" in Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ix–x; Marian Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus: Untersuchungen zur Erkenntnistheorie des jungen Herder* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1994), xiv; Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 128, 140.

[9]For discussions of his holism see Elías Palti, "The 'Metaphor of Life': Herder's Philosophy of History and Uneven Developments in Late Eighteenth-Century Natural Sciences," *History and Theory* 38, no. 3 (1999): 322–47; Ernst Behler, "Historismus und Modernitätsbewusstsein in Herders Schrift *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*," *Études Germaniques* (July–September 1994): 267–84; Menze and Menges, "Introduction," 1–19; Robert Norton, *Herder's Aesthetics and the European Enlightenment* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 1–2; Hans Adler, "Johann Gottfried Herder's Concept of Humanity," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 23 (1994): 55–74; Hans Adler, "Herders Holismus" in *Herder Today: Contributions from the International Herder Conference (November 5–8 1987)* (Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 1990), 31–45; Michael

This was particularly evident in the difficulties commentators had in trying to reconcile his apparent cultural relativism with his continued commitment to universal values.[10] While Herder scholars have long recognized that Herder never abandoned the Enlightenment entirely, many serious studies of his thought continue to confuse relativism with pluralism, as if they are interchangeable terms.[11] Yet, as contemporary pluralists maintain, it is precisely a commitment to a minimal framework of universal values combined with a deep respect for difference that distinguishes pluralism from both relativism and absolutism.[12]

Maurer, "Die Geschichtsphilosophie des jungen Herder in ihrem Verhältnis zur Aufklärung," *Studien zum achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, 9 (1987): 141–45; Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 16–18, 21–24.

[10]For example: F. Meinecke, *Historism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 309–10; R. T. Clark, *Herder: His Life and Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955), 56, 251; F. MacEachern, *The Life and Philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 33; Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought*, 90, 97, 149. Linker's recent critique of Herder's pluralism in "Herder's Reluctant Pluralism" is based on a false dichotomy between monism and pluralism that he attributes incorrectly to Berlin. In his *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), lii–liii, Berlin acknowledges the existence of certain universal values, albeit in a minimalist form.

[11]See, for example, Barnard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity and History*, who first refers to "Herder's pluralist approach" followed in the next sentence by "his cultural relativism" (103), his "relativist, pluralist, and process-centered approach" (134), and his "relativist and pluralist conception of culture" (145); Zammito, *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology* (335), who attributes a radical "relativism" to Herder's thought and then later refers to his "pluralism" (345); Fink's reference to Herder's "theory of cultural pluralism" (55) followed by his reference to Herder's "cultural relativism" in "Storm and Stress Anthropology," *History of the Human Sciences* 6, no. 1 (1993): 65; and Gerald Broce's observation that "Herder had a relativistic and pluralistic conception of culture," "Herder and Ethnography," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* (1986): 22, 150. This confusion is also evident in B. J. Whitton, who refers to "Herder's relativistic conception of cultural community", but says he intends to outline the basic contradictions in "such radical arguments for cultural pluralism," "Herder's Critique of the Enlightenment: Cultural Community versus Cosmopolitan Rationalism," *History and Theory* 27, no. 2 (1988): 147. Problems also exist due to Isaiah Berlin's interpretation. Although he later came to reject his categorization of Herder in *Vico and Herder* as a relativist (208–9), it remains the most influential of his essays on Herder. See *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (London: John Murray, 1990), 74–90.

[12]See Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, xlix–lvi; Berlin, *Crooked Timber*, 74–89; Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, 63–73; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*: *The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4; Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 395–99, where he distinguishes between a weak pluralism that accepts minimal universals and a strong pluralism that

According to many contemporary political theorists,[13] increased intercultural interaction accompanying globalization means the need to balance a concern for unity and diversity is one of the most pressing political challenges facing modern states in the world today. All those interested in the value of cultural membership and accommodations of cultural difference through public recognition without abandoning a commitment to forging minimum universal principles will thus find in Herder a precious ally. Herder is the first thinker in the Western tradition to grapple with these issues seriously. Yet to appreciate fully the extent to which Herder anticipated the concerns of contemporary thinkers, it is first necessary to counter the above misperceptions of his thought. In this article, I demonstrate that Herder was fully aware of the heterogeneous nature of cultures, and that he warned against any oversimplification of their dynamic nature by mistakenly portraying any culture as a tightly knit and unified whole. I then show that, far from conceiving the laws of nature so that there is no room for individual freedom, Herder developed an open teleology that was mediated by free will. Rather than adhering to Leibniz's theory of monads as self-contained entities, his conception of culture is more aptly likened to Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblances between language games. Although a champion of the rights of indigenous cultures to pursue their own way of life free from colonial domination, Herder positively promoted cultural interaction on the basis of mutual respect. Finally, I show that far from being a conservative, Herder regarded an authentic life as one committed to the constant reinterpretation of traditions.

Culture

Herder used the term "*Cultur*" to refer to all creative, human enterprises. Art, industry, commerce, science, political institutions, and literature, as well as ideas, beliefs, customs, and myths were all recognized by him as constituent parts of a community's culture.[14] He, therefore, is credited with employing

accepts no transcultural values and is in this respect the same as relativism; Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Arguments at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 11–12.

[13]Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 171–72, 196, 206; Dallymayr, *Alternative Visions*, 271–72; Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 143, 148, 152; Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton, and Will Sanders, "Introduction" in Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton, and Will Sanders, eds., *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 21; Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, 63; James Tully, "Cultural Demands for Constitutional Recognition," *The Journal of Applied Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (1995): 114–15; William Galston, "Two Concepts of Liberalism," *Ethics* 105, no. 3 (April 1995): 518.

[14]J. G. Herder, *Sämmtliche Werke* (henceforth cited as *SW*), ed. B. Suphan 33 vols. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1877–1913), 14: 228.

culture for the first time in the modern anthropological sense to denote a particular way of life of a people, period or group.[15] Although English readers may be misled due to T. Churchill's incorrect translation of "Cultur" in Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* as "civilization,"[16] Herder consistently rejected the approach of thinkers such as Voltaire whose conception of culture was linked to notions of civilization and good taste. In his early *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte*, he vehemently criticized the linear conception of progress that informed this methodological approach to the study of other cultures:[17]

> As a rule, the philosopher is never more of an ass than when he most confidently wishes to play God; when with remarkable assurance, he pronounces on the perfection of the world, wholly convinced that everything moves just so, in a nice, straight line, linear progression, according to *his* ideals of virtue and happiness.[18]

Later, in the *Ideen*, he insisted again that since no natural scientist would judge a sloth for failing to perform the activities of an elephant, equivalent comparisons are also out of place in the study of history.

In Herder's view, it was simply the most ridiculous vanity for Europeans to believe that all people in the world must live like Europeans to possess either culture or happiness. "Why," he rhetorically asked, "should the western corner of our northern hemisphere possess culture alone?"[19] It was also highly insensitive to the material conditions pertaining to different eras. Happiness, like identity, is an internal disposition that is intimately tied to the language and culture of one's community. It is, at all times, historically specific. It follows that "each nation has its own centre of happiness within itself, just as every sphere has its own centre of gravity!"[20] Just because these standards differ, Herder argued, there is no concrete basis to presume

[15]Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, revised ed. (Glasgow: Fontana, 1983), 87–89.

[16]As this remains the only full translation of Herder's text, it was a particularly unfortunate error. See J. G. Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, trans. T. Churchill (London: J. Johnson, 1800).

[17]*SW*, 4: 524; Turgot and Condorcet were the main developers of this theory of progress in the Enlightenment, although the histories written by Voltaire in, for example, *La Philosophie d'histoire par l' Abbé Bazin* and Iselin, who Herder attacks directly, were informed by the same world view. See Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, 190; F. E. Manuel, *Shapes of Philosophical History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965), 103; Meinecke, *Historism*, 57–80; A. N. de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, trans. J. Barraclough (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955).

[18]J. G. Herder, *J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture*, trans. and ed. F. M. Barnard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 214; *SW*, 5: 557.

[19]*SW*, 18: 290; my translation.

[20]Herder, *J. G. Herder*, 186; *SW*, 5: 509.

their inferiority from the outset, as was the general practice of his contemporaries. Only with a repudiation of the practice of judging cultures on the basis of one's favorite *Volk* was it possible to appreciate the manifold diversity characterizing humankind. The first task he set the historian was, thus, to engage in the most detailed of empirical investigations.

Diversity *within* Communities

Herder not only celebrated the rich plurality of cultures between different eras and peoples. He wrote with respect about the term "*cultur*": "Nothing is more indeterminate than this word and nothing is more deceptive than its application to entire peoples and times."[21] In distinguishing between "*Cultur*" as the way of life of an entire community, and as particular activities and enterprises in which different social and economic subgroups within society engage, he coined the term "political culture," for example, when analyzing the history of the Hebrew people in ancient times.[22] Fully aware that different cultures coexist within the same community, Herder recognized that different stratums, classes, and castes within a society have the capacity on the basis of the particular activities in which they engage to form cultures that are distinct from the total, or dominant, culture of a community.[23]

Herder, like Bikhu Parekh in his recent and influential *Rethinking Multiculturalism*,[24] understood that a community's culture is far from a uniform body with all its parts changing in unison. Different cultural activities might develop at a faster or slower rate than other elements within a community.[25] The importance placed upon certain cultural activities within a community can also alter during the lifetime of that community.[26] Herder further acknowledged that both negative and positive features characterize any given way of life:

> A nation may have the most sublime virtues in some respects and blemishes in others, show irregularities and reveal the most astonishing contradictions and incongruities.[27]

Thus, he highlighted not only the noble public spirit and great artistic achievements of ancient Greece, for which his admiration was clearly

[21]*SW*, 13: 4; my translation.
[22]Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought*, 118–19.
[23]*SW*, 14: 35.
[24]Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 148–49.
[25]*SW*, 14: 66–67.
[26]*SW*, 8: 209–10.
[27]Herder, *J. G. Herder*, 184; *SW*, 5: 505–6.

immense. He also indicated the often inhumane treatment of helots, foreigners, and colonies by many Grecian states.[28]

Herder's appreciation of the heterogeneity of culture and his insistence on detailed attention to cultural specificity does not mean, however, that generalizations are impossible.[29] Each community is a composite of various powers and influences competing together and limiting one another unsystematically until a kind of harmony and equilibrium evolves. At this point, certain cultural features and activities dominate others. An identifiable and overarching culture is formed that characterizes a particular community at a certain time in history. It is, therefore, possible to single out the spirit of navigation and commercial diligence of the Phoenicians or the refined political maturity of the Chinese as distinctive features of those communities as a whole.[30] This reference to spirit in defining the culture of a community is, as Parekh[31] also notes, reminiscent of Montesquieu's notion of "general spirit." As Montesquieu wrote:

> Many things govern men: climate, religion, laws, the maxims of the government, examples of past things, mores, and manners: a general spirit is formed as a result.[32]

But it would be a mistake on this basis to conclude that Herder possessed an essentialist view of cultures as self-contained entities with a static set of immutable attributes. Energy is at all times dividing into forces of attraction and repulsion:

> No system of forces constructed according to the regular pattern can assume a form where it is not divided into friendly and hostile forces, forming a whole by virtue of the counterpoise of these forces in relation to each other.[33]

This process of repulsion and attraction is an essential part of the life force of nature. Without it, Herder believed, creation would be truly dead.[34] In contrast to Leibniz's theory of a preestablished harmony, Herder described the equilibrium of society as the outcome of a multitude of conflicting powers. Yet equilibrium is also transient. Just as a being that is driven into disequilibrium will again approach order, elements constantly disrupt the harmonious order of nature. Although Herder thought these alternate cycles become less

[28]*SW*, 5: 508; 14: 121.
[29]*SW*, 14: 145.
[30]*SW*, 14: 227–28.
[31]Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 75.
[32]C. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of The Laws*, trans. and ed. A. Cohler, B. C. Miller, and H. S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 310.
[33]Translation in G. A. Wells, *Herder and After: A Study in the Development of Sociology* (Gravenhage: Mouton, 1959), 135; *SW*, 16: 556.
[34]*SW*, 16: 570.

violent over time as people learn to harness their passions and practice less destructive ways to achieve their ends, they never cease. Contradictions and conflict are indispensable forces in social development.[35]

The motive force for linguistic and cultural change lies in the heterogeneous nature of both cultures and individuals. History demonstrates that cultures are continually reinterpreted and changed by the members of a community. In Herder's analysis of human psychology, no person possesses exactly the same sensory perceptions as another. Hence, no two poets or painters see, comprehend, or portray the same object in an identical manner.[36] Nor do we have precisely the same experiences even within the same culture. It follows that rather than being determined by their culture, people respond in various ways to their surrounding cultural influences.[37] Every French, German, or English person also has his or her way of being French, German, or English.[38] Far from being contradictory on this point, Herder's insight that human beings are simultaneously shaped by their culture while they are still agents preempted an important strand of recent social and political theory.[39] Yet, at the same time, the dynamism and diversity contained within cultures, as Parekh argues, does not mean that they possess "no identity" at all. Cultures, like individuals, are distinguishable based on their beliefs and practices, which "form a reasonably recognizable whole."[40] The important point stressed by these thinkers is the danger of taking a one-sided focus on the whole to the neglect of the complexity and diversity contained within. For this reason, Herder rejected Montesquieu's attempt to make universal statements on the basis of his categorization of political systems into three or four types. No two polities within the category of republicanism, he argued, are ever precisely the same.[41]

Teleology and Determinism

Herder was equally critical of thinkers like Montaigne, Bayle, Hume, and ultimately Voltaire and Diderot for adopting a radical skepticism in which history was presented as a series of interchangeable virtues and vices. In this approach, all continuity and links between various stages were ignored. Although they did not depict history as a linear march toward ever-increasing civilization, Herder argued that their failure to acknowledge

[35]*SW*, 14: 213–17, 227, 233.
[36]*SW*, 8: 188–89.
[37]Also see Forster, "Introduction", xiv, xxiv.
[38]*SW*, 14: 210; 18: 147.
[39]Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 99–102.
[40]Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 148–49.
[41]*SW*, 4: 465–66; 13: 386; 18: 318.

the connections between different *Völker* and times also resulted in a distortion of historical reality. He stressed that every culture is indebted to others, indicating that without the achievements of the Egyptians ancient Greece could not have developed the way that it did.[42] As every culture develops out of the framework of previous ones, it is intercultural in its very formation.[43]

Tensions, nevertheless, arise in Herder's thought from his attempt to demonstrate the existence of fluctuations in human progress while trying to avoid a picture of history as an unconnected series of interchangeable states of equilibrium and disequilibrium. No society is a mere means to some ultimate end.[44] For this reason, the historian must seek to present a synthesis between these general links and the particular features of each individual society. In recognizing the existence of continuity and progress, he states explicitly in the *Ideen* that he wants, however, to avoid the idea of the human species operating as a single, uniform mind:

> Our philosophy of history shall not wander in the path of the averroean system, according to which the whole human system possesses but one mind; and that indeed of a very low order, distributed to individuals only piecemeal. On the other hand were I to confine everything to the individual, and deny the existence of a chain, that connects each to others and to the whole, I should run equally counter to the nature of man, and his evident history.[45]

Although he consistently refers to the human species and its history as a "whole," this whole is never more than the aggregate of individual human actions and events "because the whole consists only of individual members."[46]

G. A. Wells suggests that a theoretical confusion between laws and forces has misled some critics to ascribe a fatalist doctrine of history to Herder. This confusion stems from the belief that laws of history, or nature, have an "irresistible" quality that makes the actions and aspirations of individuals who are determined by them meaningless.[47] But historical laws of nature were not understood to be the same as "the ironclad, deterministic laws of modern physics" that Damon Linker recently attributed to Herder's philosophy of history.[48] Wells indicates, instead, that such "irresistibility" is a feature of forces rather than laws. Fatalism, on this basis, was distinguished

[42]*SW*, 5: 511–13.

[43]For a similar argument stating every culture is to a degree multicultural, see Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 163.

[44]*SW*, 5: 527, 554, 564.

[45]Herder, *Outlines*, 226; *SW*, 13: 346.

[46]*SW*, 14: 247.

[47]Wells, *Herder and After*, 268–69.

[48]Linker, "Herder's Reluctant Pluralism," 289–90.

from determinism in the eighteenth century.[49] J. L. Mackie further explains that while the fatalist regards human actions and their results as fixed, irrespective of the wants and actions of individuals, the historical determinist at best explains trends of developments or general patterns in large groups without the additional requirement of deterministic behavior in their individual members.[50] Herder was clearly aware of this distinction when he disassociated his doctrine of laws from the kind of "fatal necessity that crushes all striving and aspiration toward bliss, beauty, virtue in every character, and binds us in chains of blind obedience to the capricious path of fate"[51].

Nor did Herder's belief in a providential plan that comes to the fore in his thinking in the *Ideen* presuppose a doctrine of historical fatalism in which human freedom is sacrificed "on the altar of necessity" as Linker and Barnard claim.[52] According to John Milton, the explanation of natural and historical phenomena by an appeal to laws in the eighteenth century was based on a sharp distinction between God and the created world. God's power was seen as absolute with respect to his creation, but all movements in the general running of the world were understood to be fully natural.[53] This was the case also with Herder's theory of the origin of language. Although God is ultimately responsible for humanity's creation and formed humanity for language—as was similarly believed by John Locke[54]—its creation was, nevertheless, an entirely human affair.[55] Herder believed

[49]Wells, *Herder and After*, 268–69.

[50]J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 216–17, 221.

[51]Adapted from translation in Wells, *Herder and After*, 268–69; *SW*, 15: 270. Also see Zamitto, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*, 164.

[52]Linker, "Herder's Reluctant Pluralism," 291. Though Barnard (*Herder's Social and Political Thought*, 147) agrees that Herder was essentially a "soft" historical determinist, who saw human beings as having the capacity for self-direction, he also argues that Herder possessed a providential conception of history that saw human actions as part of the working out of a grand design and thus presupposed a doctrine of historical fatalism. For Barnard (112), Herder's acceptance of these two potentially irreconcilable ideas was one of the most perplexing problems in his philosophy of history, and it is this view that largely influenced Linker. In his most recent work, Barnard claims that this is not a "fatal contradiction" in Herder's work, but his own confusion remains highly evident. See Barnard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity and History*, 114–18, 129.

[53]J. R. Milton, "The Origin and Development of the Concept of the 'Laws of Nature,'" *Archives europennes de sociologie [European Journal of Sociology]* 22 (1981): 191–95.

[54]John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Dent, Everyman's Library, 1976), 3, 1, 1–3, 205.

[55]It is often pointed out that Herder later came to doubt the validity of this argument in his prize-winning *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*. In 1774 in the first book of his *Ideen*, for example, he openly declares that speech is a divine gift from God. Yet in advancing the view in the preface that nature is God personified, when he asserts

history revealed a divine purpose,[56] but he did not regard particular historical events or human actions as mere instruments of a directing, predetermined purpose.[57] God never interferes directly with human events, but he works out his purpose through general laws of nature and history. Nature was, for Herder, the visible manifestation of God.[58]

The essentialism of Herder's teleology was combined with free will. He was, in Mackie's terms, a "compatibilist."[59] We cannot control at will who we are as if our identities are a piece of plastesine external to ourselves and subject to the manipulation of our hands. He did not think human beings are free in an absolute sense as our choices are limited by our natures and shaped by the cultural and material conditions confronting us. However, as Mackie states, this kind of soft determinism "does not relevantly undermine their reality as choices or their moral significance."[60] In the *Ideen*, Herder continued to argue that human beings were formed to choose[61] just as in his earlier award winning *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* he distinguished human beings from animals by virtue of their *Besonnenheit*. This is normally translated as "reason" or "reflection" but, for Herder, it denoted all our cognitive faculties that, in being unfettered by animal instincts, are subject to the free will only humans possess.[62] We are, nevertheless, limited creatures, if not on the basis of biological instincts, then, due to our *situatedness* within a particular cultural community into which we become incorporated through linguistic acquisition.

that language is a gift from God, he is at the same time saying it is a natural phenomenon. Following his declaration of language as a divine gift, he claims that "nature has formed the human being for language" (*SW*, 13: 141, my translation). Throughout the *Ideen*, he continues to portray the human species as creatures predisposed to see, hear, and reason while indicating that it is necessary for people to learn how to use these innate facilities. Thus, his position on the nature versus nurture controversy remained unchanged. Finally, while God is depicted as the creator of the laws of nature, in the *Abhandlung*, he also conceded that Providence is ultimately responsible for humanity's creation. He questions, however, whether it is the task of philosophy to explain humanity's creation just as later in the *Ideen* he ponders whether it is necessary for humanity to know fully the divine plan. *SW*, 13: ix, 9–10, 344–45; 5: 95. Also see J. H. Stam, *Inquiries into the Origin of Language: The Fate of a Question* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 172–74; E. Sapir, "Herder's 'Ursprung der Sprache,'" *Modern Philology* 5, no. 1 (July 1907): 137–48.

[56]*SW*, 5: 513, 586; 13: 67–71.

[57]*SW*, 5: 527.

[58]*SW*, 13: 138.

[59]Mackie, *Ethics*, 220–21.

[60]Mackie, 223.

[61]*SW*, 13: 146–47.

[62]*SW*, 5: 21–26, 28–31, 47. He was also conscious of appealing to the followers of both Leibniz and Locke in distinguishing humans "as possessing the active and free power of reason." Norton, *Herder's Aesthetics*, 111–12.

In rejecting the theory of final causes that portrayed history as a progressive chain of more perfect stages toward a single, ultimate end, Herder instead developed an open teleology that stood as an alternative to the current teleologies of his day. Human powers advance through history as the human species collectively comes to possess greater knowledge and learn from the advances made by other communities.[63] Whether or not and in what form our *Humanität* is realized as our *telos* depends, however, upon the deeds and choices of individuals in response to their environmental and cultural influences and their own interpretative powers. Every individual and *Volk* has its specific interpretation of *Humanität* and standard of perfection, as I previously noted that they do with the notion of happiness.[64] According to Herder; "[e]verywhere we therefore find humankind in possession and use of the right to form themselves to that type of *Humanität* which they envisaged."[65] Rather than denying human freedom with the development of his concept of *Humanität*, the two are intrinsically linked. If our capacity to interpret our *Humanität* for ourselves is denied, Herder believed that humankind would be unable to achieve what it is capable of becoming because human beings require spontaneity to enable them to learn from their mistakes and successes.[66] Hence, no advantage would be gained through the construction of an ahistorical, definitive *telos* for the entire human species. Herder consistently believed that we can only come to know ourselves through our actions,[67] and since *Humanität* is manifest in the actions of self-constituted human beings, it is by necessity an open *telos*.[68]

Yet Herder's teleology was not completely devoid of specific content. The attainment of *Humanität* did not simply refer to the improvement of human powers in a morally neutral sense. For Herder, *Humanität* cannot be promoted equally by ill and virtuous practices provided that such deeds advance human powers in a technical sense.[69] Though he believed that immoral acts ultimately promote *Humanität* because people suffer by their mistakes and learn better ways, he rejected the idea that abuses of human powers directly advance *Humanität*. He tried to capture all that he considered noble and worthy in the human species in his concept of *Humanität*. Yet the proposition that human beings are born with a propensity toward the "good" should not be confused with a claim for the existence of an inborn, intuitive moral conscience. Following Aristotle,[70] Herder believed that moral judgments, like

[63]*SW*, 13: 117–18; 14: 235–38.
[64]*SW*, 14: 227.
[65]*SW*, 14: 210; my translation.
[66]*SW*, 14: 209–10.
[67]*SW*, 21: 152–53.
[68]Adler, "Johann Gottfried Herder's Concept of Humanity," 62–63.
[69]*SW*, 17: 113–15.
[70]Aristotle, *Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson, revised ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 91, 2, i, 1103 a14–b25.

ideas, are not innate but formed. Human beings are born only with a predisposition that makes them capable of and susceptible to moral development. This capacity may, however, become diseased or strong, stunted or expansive, and be well or poorly developed. While disagreeing with Rousseau's pessimistic assessment of human development, Herder, nevertheless, adhered to a similar doctrine of perfectibility. Although human beings have the ability to improve their capacities, they are also capable of taking retrograde steps.[71] Good moral judgments that foster our *Humanität* thus need to be constantly stimulated and encouraged through formative, moral education.[72]

Herder's concept of *Humanität* is both descriptive and prescriptive. As a *telos*, it is best understood as human nature par excellence.[73] It is the goal and ideal of human endeavors toward which human beings strive and for which their entire constitution is formed.[74] Its basic principles can be summarized as follows:

(1) People are by nature imperfect beings with a tendency to strive for the good;
(2) Human beings have an ultimate end—human nature par excellence;
(3) This *telos* is not external to human beings but achieved through self-realization;
(4) This self-realization can only be achieved fully if one's cultural attachments are exercised;
(5) Self-realization requires authenticity to oneself;
(6) Ethically and politically, self-determination is intricately linked to self-realization;
(7) The harming of others and the committing of an inhumane act, while possible, go against and are detrimental to the fulfillment of our ultimate end;
(8) The good life is inconceivable without the law of justice: "*Do not unto others what you would not wish them to do unto you; what you expect others to do unto you, do unto them too;*"[75]
(9) The awareness and acceptance of these limitations are essential to the achievement of the true freedom found through self-realization;
(10) The good life requires that every individual and *Volk* interpret these general principles for themselves according to the social realities

[71]Jean Jacque Rousseau, "A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G. D. H. Cole, revised ed. (London: Dent AND Sons, 1973), 53–53; R. Wokler, "Rousseau's Perfectibilian Libertarianism" in A. Ryan, ed. *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 236–38.

[72]*SW*, 17: 138.

[73]*SW*, 14: 207–8.

[74]*SW*, 17: 138.

[75]*SW*, 13: 160.

that confront them. It follows that the struggle towards the ideal of *Humanität* is, as F. M. Barnard writes, "a *struggle* towards ever emerging ends."[76]

People exist in a state of constant becoming as do their *telos*.[77] Herder's universal principles provide a minimum moral framework for any human being to live by—what Michael Walzer has recently termed a "thin" morality[78]—but they require specific historical content to become a fully developed morality. Within this framework, every individual and *Volk* has its own particular interpretation of *Humanität* in response to the physical and social circumstances that confront it. This means that the goal of *Humanität* does not simply mark the completion of human history as a whole, which is imagined as some utopian society or perfect political constitution. On the contrary, Herder indicated that it can be and has been realized at different points in human history. Examples include the culture of ancient Greece, collective deeds such as the Quakers' opposition to slavery, and the actions of individuals as evident by the Bishop of Chiapa, Fenelon, and the Abbt St. Pierre in their promotion of justice and peace.[79] The peaceful interaction of different cultures was without doubt Herder's objective, and at his most optimistic he tended to overstate his desire for greater justice, peace and equity in terms of a certain end.[80] Yet in his more sober moments, he not only argued that *Humanität* is constantly reaffirmed and fulfilled in our eternal striving toward this goal, which is manifest with each just and humane act,[81] but he also recognised that it can become lost.[82] Progress exists, but it is never linear or guaranteed.

Pluralism

There is no doubt that certain tensions exist in Herder's work. This is not surprising in an original attempt to grapple seriously and sympathetically with cultural pluralism by attempting to combine the universal with the particular. For Herder, nothing is knowable without relations and contrasts. In order to know what inside is, for example, we need a sense of outside. Such apparent opposites are not conceptualized by Herder in a dichotomous sense as mutually exclusive categories. Preempting the linguistic holism at the center of contemporary linguistics and philosophy of language, he argued

[76]Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought*, 134.
[77]*SW*, 17: 122.
[78]Walzer, *Thick and Thin*, 11–12.
[79]*SW*, 17: 354; 18: 238–44.
[80]*SW*, 13: 320–22; 14: 235, 250; 18: 262–74.
[81]*SW*, 17: 115, 122.
[82]*SW*, 17: 138.

that each endows the other with meaning so that their very existence as concepts depends on the other's coexistence.[83] Rather than a one-sided emphasis on the one to the neglect of the other, Herder continually aimed for a synthesis and balance between what are commonly and mistakenly seen as opposites.

It is equally important to comprehend his commitment to a plurality of values within the context of his theory of monads, which he saw as having a propensity toward interaction and not as some recent commentators have claimed, like Leibniz, as closed, self-contained universes.[84] Whereas the relativist tends to distinguish between different moral and cultural worlds as one would distinguish humankind from other primate species or some alien being, Herder's conception of cultures and their different values is more appropriately seen in terms of Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblances" between language games.[85] A particular activity or value may not be manifest in precisely the same form in all *Völker*, but similarities between activities and values of different cultures overlap and criss-cross in the same way as various physical resemblances among family members. Despite the inevitable difficulties involved in understanding and interpreting different cultural practices, these resemblances make it possible for us to understand the aspirations, values, and ends of societies different from our own because they possess a certain common quality by virtue of the meanings that they possess for people who are different from us but who are, nevertheless, human.[86]

This is equally true of both humane and inhumane acts.[87] Although most of us would consider cannibalism an inhumane practice, it is not the case that people who have performed this practice are not human. Herder

[83]*SW*, 21: 178–81; Taylor also notes that his linguistic holism has been one of the most influential, albeit generally unacknowledged, insights. See Charles Taylor, "The Importance of Herder" in E. Margalit and A. Margalit, eds. *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 58.

[84]Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 68; Linker "Herder's Reluctant Pluralism," 280, n. 36. For a highly useful discussion of the differences between Herder's and Leibniz's theories of monads, see Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought*, 37. Also see Beate Dreike, *Herders Naturauffassung in ihrer Beeinflussung durch Leibniz' Philosophie* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1973); Zamitto, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*, 171, 316.

[85]L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 31–32.

[86]Berlin, *Crooked Timber*, 79–80.

[87]For a discussion of Herder's analysis of Shakespeare that argues that he is "Sophocles' brother" because they are inwardly alike, despite being so dissimilar, see Zamitto, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*, 343.

was acutely aware that a commitment to this assertion would make their actions inexplicable. Thus he maintained that cannibals, like all people, possess "Humanität, Vernunft und Sprache" (humanity, reason, and language).[88] It follows that we can discover and understand the reasons for their actions and beliefs:

> No cannibal devours his brothers and children; their inhumane practice is a savage right of war, to nourish their valour, and terrify their enemies. It is no more or less than a gross political rationale . . . .[89]

Significantly, Herder does not conclude from this ability to imagine that such practices have meaning for the people who perform them that they are morally right.[90] Contrary to the relativist proposition that right can only be coherently understood to mean "right for a given society,"[91] Herder believed that the reasons behind inhumane practices in cultures different from our own are just as misguided as inhumane practices performed by individuals within European communities:

> Misguided reason, or unbridled luxury, has engendered many more singular abominations among us. . . . But no-one on this account will deny that the figure of humanity is engraven on the heart of the sodomite,[92] the oppressor, the assassin, though almost effaced by this licentious manners and passions. . . .[93]

The basis for our understanding of inhumane practices in other cultures also lies in the fact that our own moral community is never immune from failing to act in accordance with our *Humanität*. A connection can, therefore, be drawn between such alien practices and our own. While the practice of cannibalism is both foreign to our own way of life and abhorrent to many of us, we can, nevertheless, recognize as human the perpetuation of inhumane practices for the sake of political reasons. Thus, according to Herder, the only distinction is that Europeans overpower their *Humanität* in different ways.[94] The problem is not that people who perform such acts lack the capacity to develop their *Humanität* or that they lack reason. Rather, in these cases, *Humanität* has been overpowered

[88]*SW*, 13: 393.

[89]Adapted from Herder, *Outlines*, 255; *SW*, 13: 393.

[90]Herder argues that certain cultural phenomenon are almost incomparable when they have each attained their own perfection and thus *Humanität* (*SW*, 14: 227–28). This is not the same, however, as the relativist claim that different cultures are equally valid. See Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, 322, 343–44.

[91]Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York, Harper and Row, 1972), 20.

[92]Though we may, too, disagree with Herder's specific interpretation of *Humanität* that sees sodomy as an inhumane practice.

[93]Herder, *Outlines*, 255; *SW*, 13: 394.

[94]*SW*, 13: 393.

by other considerations such as necessity, power, or politics. Given our ultimate interest lies in the realization of our *Humanität*, Herder believed that these other considerations, while understandable, are, nonetheless, based on a misguided conception of their ends.

The method of empathy that Herder developed is, therefore, crucial in the initial collecting and compiling of historical data, but such understanding does not exclude criticism. After explaining in detail, for example, the Hindu social system and form of government, Herder went on to describe not only a number of its positive features, but also what he considered to be its negative features including the treatment of untouchables and the practice of burning wives on the funeral pyre of their husbands, for which he could find no legitimate moral justification other than tacit custom.[95] While he objected to the elevation of one's own likes and dislikes to an absolute and universal standard of judgment with little concern for understanding the experiences of those in different cultures and historical times, he consistently found all forms of human servility as contrary to self-realization.[96] Thus he was also critical of Kant's proposition that in politics man is "an animal who needs a master,"[97] arguing that "[t]he proposition ought to be reversed."[98] Without doubt, Herder was a historicist in the sense that Berlin defined the term as someone who holds "that human thought and action are fully intelligible only in relation to their historical context."[99] However, in accepting the existence of certain minimal universal values while recognizing many valuable ways of life, he was a value-pluralist in the sense coined by Joseph Raz.[100] By contrast, his historical works exemplify few qualities with which a relativist would find satisfaction.

Diversity and Unity

Herder's aim to combine seeming opposites equally informed his notion of good governance. Just as the life force of nature would cease to exist without diversity and conflict,[101] so, too, would political life.[102] Far from wanting "to suppress [life's] internal diversities and differences" as Parekh

[95]*SW*, 14: 30–31.
[96]Dallymayr, *Alternative Visions*, 39–40.
[97]I. Kant, *Kant's Political Writings*, ed. H. Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 46.
[98]Herder, *Outlines*, 249; *SW*, 13: 383.
[99]Berlin, *Crooked Timber*, 71.
[100]Joseph Raz, "Liberalism, Skepticism and Democracy," *Iowa Law Review* 74 (1989): 780.
[101]*SW*, 4: 469.
[102]*SW*, 17: 122.

charges,[103] Herder believed that it is natural for people within a polity to have a diverse range of opinions and interests:[104]

> If the state is what it should be, *the eye of general reason, the ear and heart of general fairness and goodness*: thus it will hear every voice and will stimulate and awaken the activity of people according to their various tendencies, sensitivities, weaknesses and needs.[105]

While Viroli's central purpose in his *Love for Country* is to show that Herder was a nationalist as opposed to a republican, unlike many of his contemporaries, Herder was both a republican and a democrat.[106] His ardent appreciation for Athenian democracy is unmistakable. He realized that the Athenian republic had often been more disordered than the Greek monarchies, but, he argued, it was "preferable to a state of affairs in which men are forced to rot and decay during their lifetime."[107] For Herder, because the Athenian republic allowed people to think about their political constitution, it provided the necessary conditions for people to become fully responsible, self-determining adults and, thus, attain their *Humanität*.[108] Historically, he also found it the system most conducive to the development of education, the arts, and science.[109] Yet, like Rousseau, he recognized that direct democracy would be impossible in the large modern nations that were emerging in Europe. Rather than its precise structure, then, it was the general principles and public spirit of the Athenian system he thought could be adapted to modern times.[110] Although Barnard concludes that some combination of representative democracy with universal suffrage is most compatible with Herder's general principles, institutional arrangements would also need to exist to ensure the majority did not exclude minority voices.[111]

His confidence about the creation of a unified political system based on the co-operation of diverse groups stemmed from his belief that a tendency exists in human society, like nature, for unity to develop from diversity.[112]

[103]Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 73.

[104]F. M. Barnard, *Self-Direction and Political Legitimacy: Rousseau and Herder* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 244.

[105]*SW*, 17: 122; my translation.

[106]Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought*, 10, 81; Menzes and Menges, "Introduction," 3.

[107]Herder, *J. G. Herder*, 191; *SW*, 5: 516.

[108]*SW*, 14: 118.

[109]*SW*, 9: 325–29, 365, 375–76.

[110]*SW*, 14: 99–100, 236–36; 17: 127; 18: 318.

[111]Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought*, 81. The kind of inclusive representation Young calls for in her politics of difference would satisfy this requirement. See Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, esp. c. 4.

[112]*SW*, 13: 26, 255; 14: 213–15.

He possessed a strong aversion to the centralized administrations of his time with their tendency to subjugate increasing numbers of peoples under a single leader.[113] His ideal was, instead, encapsulated in the Mosaic Constitution whereby government was intended as an invisible, rational, and charitable power that would guide on the basis of the rule of law rather than coerce people. His anarchist sympathies are evident in his desire for the state ultimately to become dispensable,[114] and yet, at the same time, he was aware of the danger of too much decentralization leading to chaos.[115] When he came to designing an academy devoted to promoting German history, philosophy, and language, his plans thus included a central institute with branches in every province.[116] The principal function of good governance, he argued, is to maintain the correct balance between diversity and unity:

> Unity and diversity are the perfections which mark all enduring works of nature and its imitator, art; thus it is indisputable that also the highest, most difficult and most necessary art of people, the directing of a nation for the general welfare, must strive and strive unnoticed according to these qualities.[117]

Yet while Herder saw a democratic republic as the most conducive to the realization of individual self-determination and creativity, he denied the existence of a "best form of government" that would suit all communities at once and in precisely the same way. He warned that a government that may be good in one place and time might also become malformed if it is introduced in another situation under the wrong circumstances.[118] Once derided for failing to develop a theory of the state,[119] the advantage of Herder's theory lies in the fact that his attention to historical and cultural specificity meant he rejected the project of the classical political theorists to develop one ideal constitution for humankind in all times and places. Instead, in accord with those contemporary political theorists attentive to cultural pluralism,[120] he recognized that each community needs to interpret general principles for

[113]*SW*, 13: 341.

[114]Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought*, 65–66; Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 211–14.

[115]*SW*, 12: 117–20.

[116]*SW*, 16: 606–16.

[117]*SW*, 16: 600; my translation.

[118]*SW*, 4: 467; 18: 283.

[119]R. Aris, *History of Political Thought in Germany: 1789 to 1815* (London: Frank Cass, 1965), 235; H. S. Reiss, *The Political Thought of the German Romantics: 1793-1815* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 2.

[120]This approach has been gaining increasing acceptance in recent years as contemporary political philosophers have turned their attention to the reality of cultural pluralism. See, for example, John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and*

good governance to suit its own particular historical and cultural circumstances.[121] More than two hundred years later, Parekh, for example, writes in a remarkably similar vein:

> If we are to develop a coherent political structure for a multicultural society, *we need to appreciate the importance of both unity and diversity* and establish a satisfactory relationship between them. Since different multicultural societies have different kinds of cultural diversity, each needs to develop its own appropriate political structure. Since, however, they all face the common problem of reconciling the demands of unity and diversity, certain general principles apply to them all.[122]

The problem for Herder was that the degree of stratification afflicting Germany in the eighteenth century was so extensive that it was losing all unity. First was the division of Germany into separate, small, and isolated provinces that spent all their time competing with each other rather than uniting around a common purpose with the result that even their dialects were becoming increasingly distinct and incomprehensible to each other.[123] Second was the domination of French over German culture. Herder was critical of the German upper classes not because of their "cosmopolitan . . . fondness for the French culture and language."[124] He knew English fluently, and in his early *Travel Diaries*, he regretted that he was not more proficient in French. But under Frederick the Great's patronage, the use of vernacular German became increasingly confined to the lower classes, causing considerable stratification among the German population.

In Herder's view, a flourishing culture only emerges when indigenous peoples are allowed to be true to their own identity.[125] He campaigned consistently against the forceful imposition of alien cultures and languages upon indigenous peoples. His own experience of the French domination of German culture made him acutely aware of the problem. Noting the many French thinkers who had derided not only German literature but also the German language, he dismissed their judgments as grounded in mere ignorance.[126] The notion that language reflects the character of a people had led the French *philosophes* to attempt to determine the most desirable characteristics in a language. According to Pierre Juliard, they invariably concluded "that

Culture at the Close of the Modern Age (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 4–6, 126; Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*.

[121]*SW*, 4: 465–66; 13: 386; 18: 318.

[122]Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 206, emphasis added.

[123]*SW*, 17: 288–89; 16: 600–601.

[124]Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 73.

[125]*SW*, 17: 58.

[126]Herder, *Selected Early Works*, 128; *SW*, 1: 186.

French was superior."[127] That such judgments had caused Germans to look upon their own language in a negative fashion is poignantly evident in the emphatic tone of Herder's conclusion to the first collection of his early *Fragmente*. While acknowledging that German had learned a great deal from other languages including French, he insisted that "no genius need to be *ashamed* of his mother tongue, or *lament* it, as, at any rate, for every proficient author the thoughts are *sons of heaven*, the *words* are *daughters of the earth*."[128] As Taylor has more recently pointed out, such misrecognition can cause actual harm to people who become locked into a demeaning image of themselves.[129]

Throughout his life, Herder emphasized the need for people to be educated in their own language:

> If language *is the organ of the powers of our mind, the means of our innermost formation and education*, so we cannot be well-educated other than in the language of our people and country. A so-called French education . . . in Germany must necessarily deform German minds and lead to error.[130]

He also applied this insight to the impact of European colonialism. Any attempt to force a new set of beliefs, ideas, and language upon indigenous populations under a homogenizing universalism without regard for their own traditional way of life was, in his view, "mostly futile and also often harmful."[131] A vehement opponent of assimilationist policies, he urged sovereigns of multi-*Volk* states to honor the languages and cultures of all their peoples.[132]

Cultural Interaction and Rooted Cosmopolitanism

These considerations did not, however, lead Herder, like Rousseau and earlier Plato, to adopt a policy of cultural isolation. In direct contradiction to Viroli's claim that Herder's love of national culture "requires cultural purification from alien elements and vigilant defense against intrusions,"[133] he urged that "no people of Europe lock itself away from the others and say stupidly 'with me alone, with me lives all wisdom.'"[134] Far from thinking that cultures

[127]P. Juliard, *Philosophies of Language in Eighteenth Century France* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1970), 84.

[128]Herder, *Selected Early Works*, 165; *SW*, 1: 240.

[129]Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, 25–26.

[130]*SW*, 18: 157-58; my translation.

[131]*SW*, 8: 210; my translation.

[132]*SW*, 17: 58–61; For similar attention to cultural difference in contemporary political philosophy, see Taylor, *Multiculturalism*; James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*; Dallymayr, *Alternative Visions*, esp. 263.

[133]Viroli, *For Love of Country*, 124.

[134]*SW*, 17: 212; my translation.

suffer from close contact,[135] if relations between *Völker* are conducted in a spirit of cooperation, rather than domination, Herder believed they are highly advantageous, particularly for developing countries.[136] He encouraged the Germans to learn from both old and new communities.[137] Rather than denigrating their own *Volk* by attempting to imitate another culture blindly, Germans needed to adapt those things that they learned from other cultures to suit their own circumstances, time, and place. Herder also hoped that by acquainting themselves with other cultures and broadening their field of vision, Germans would learn to appreciate that African, American and Oriental *Völker* possessed valuable skills and talents that Europeans did not.[138] His advice is equally relevant today both to developing countries that wish to take advantage of globalization without losing their cultural distinctiveness and to the West which can still learn to broaden its perspective from engagement with alternative philosophies and sciences.[139]

Herder's particularism and his cosmopolitanism were inextricably linked.[140] In his *On Diligence on the Study of Several Learned Language*s, he emphasized the need to learn one's first language well because it gives one the linguistic ability, surety, and confidence then to learn other languages, but its central theme was to encourage the learning of other languages. Significantly, he directly addressed the potential misinterpretation of his view, that every language has its own distinct character, as a call to confine oneself to one's first language. First, he argued that the material conditions pertaining to modern Europe dictated the need to learn other languages since state policy and commerce meant that individuals from different cultural communities continually intermingled. Second, he noted the advantages that ensue from knowing other languages.[141] Given the gross misrepresentations of Herder's views on this point,[142] it is worthwhile quoting him at length:

> How little progress would we have made, were each nation to strive for learnedness by itself, confined within the narrow sphere of language? A Newton of our land would torture himself striving for a discovery that, for the English Newton, long since had been an unsealed secret. At best

[135]Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 73.

[136]*SW*, 4: 335–56.

[137]*SW*, 17: 212.

[138]*SW*, 17: 58–59; 18: 204–8, 248–50.

[139]Dallymayr, *Alternative Visions*, 271–72.

[140]According to Michael Forster, the current slogan "Think globally, act locally" aptly captures his position. See "Introduction," xxxii, n. 34.

[141]*SW*, 1: 2–3.

[142]Ellie Kedourie asserted, for example, that "Herder argued that for a man to speak a foreign language was to live an artificial life." See *Nationalism*, 3rd ed. (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966), 64.

> he would traverse a course already travelled by the former; he would have to take a thousand footsteps to spur on his flagging pace.—But now, what a treasure of discoveries is contained in each language of learning. Secrets disclosed by the midnight lamp of the ancients now bask in the sunlight of the noon. Treasures that the sweat of a foreign nation dug from the veins of the depths are shared as booty among other peoples through that nation's language.[143]

Clearly, Herder's recognition of the importance of one's specific language and culture to the formation of personal identity was not an argument, as Viroli claims, "against cultural contamination and impurity."[144] On the contrary, it is precisely the recognition of our historical, cultural, and linguistic specificity and the embedded nature of the self that provide the path for our cosmopolitanism.

Cultural Authenticity and Innovation

For Herder, an inauthentic life consists of the blind imitation of another culture. This was the basis of both his critique of the German upper classes and his objection to French classicism, which attempted to imitate the native simplicity of Greek drama and apply it in an era of intellectual sophistication. Compared to the power of earlier folk literature, the result was a lifeless refinement.[145] He insisted repeatedly that it is impossible either to recreate the historical conditions that gave rise to a culture or transpose its vitality into another time and place through the application of the formal rules of its artistic modes: [146]

> Also the worst Greek artist is according to his manner a Greek: we can surpass him [in the application of the rules]; but we will never attain the entire original nature of Greek art; the genius of those times has passed.[147]

Equally inauthentic was the unhistorical reification of the past practices in one's own culture. Herder's intention, then, was not to urge modern intellectuals and artists to reject the philosophical and intellectual features of their own culture in favor of the simple naivety of earlier folk literature. Instead, he argued that their relationship to their own culture needed to change, in order to capture the complexities and spontaneity in the way of life, language, and character of their own unique culture.

Herder's hermeneutic and, hence, interpretative approach to culture stems from his expressivist theory of language in which language is seen as an

[143]Herder, *Selected Early Works*, 31; *SW*, 1: 3–4.

[144]Viroli, *For Love of Country*, 120. Also see Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 73–74.

[145]*SW*, 5: 164–65; 8: 406–15.

[146]*SW*, 5: 564–65; 11: 292; 14: 99–100, 113, 237; 17: 314.

[147]*SW*, 14: 113; my translation.

active, dynamic process.[148] Constant reinterpretation of meanings, the development of new words, and the replacement of old words with new ones are all signs of a healthy, living language and of the culture in which it is spoken.[149] As he also established the inseparability of language, the senses, and thought,[150] it follows that if language were ever static, thought would no longer progress. A language that is not subject to change is no longer alive. It is a dead artifact, like ancient Greek, which is no longer spoken by a living community.[151] As humans are interpretative beings by nature, tradition is not a dead artifact, but a living, active process that is in a constant state of regeneration.[152]

It follows that despite his deep respect for cultural traditions, Herder was far from a conservative. No apologist for absolute rule, he never employed his organic metaphors as an appeal to nature to protect a system of government from criticism.[153] Far from resisting reform,[154] Herder came to dismiss hereditary rule as the very embodiment of human senselessness.[155] Based on the empirical fact that hereditary government had been nonexistent in the greater part of human history, he argued that it is evidently not a universal law imposed upon humanity by nature.[156] He also rejected the notion of the divine right of rule.[157] Hereditary rule and absolute government, Herder explained, are grounded not upon reason or nature, but upon traditions imposed originally by force. Laws and traditions imposed upon a community by coercive authority, as opposed to laws that emerged from communal customs were, for him, devoid of any real legitimacy.[158]

According to Herder, communal traditions also lose their validity when they hinder "all progress of human reason and improvement according to new circumstances and times."[159] He understood with considerable insight that we ought not to underestimate or disrespect the attachments people

[148]For a fuller discussion of Herder's expressivism see Taylor, "The Importance of Herder," 40–63; Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1: 227–47, 255–92.

[149]*SW*, 5: 134–35; 18: 147; 4: 422; 1: 194; 12: 7.

[150]*SW*, 13: 357; 21: 180–84.

[151]*SW*, 4: 422.

[152]*SW*, 32: 27.

[153]The long-standing myth that Herder was a conservative has been recently repeated. See, for example, Aris, *History of Political Thought in Germany*, 234–39; Michael Freeden, "Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology," *Political Studies* 56 (1998): 762; Gilbert, *The Philosophy of Nationalism*, 53–55.

[154]Parekh, *Rethinking Muliticulturalism*, 78.

[155]*SW*, 13: 375–81.

[156]*SW*, 13: 332–33.

[157]*SW*, 13: 385–86.

[158]*SW*, 4: 466–68.

[159]*SW*, 14: 89; my translation.

possess even, at times, for oppressive traditions, but he did not thereby condone them.[160] For Herder, authenticity presupposes a life committed to the reinterpretation and adaptation of current practices. The good life, as noted previously, is one free of all forms of human servility. By way of contrast, Parekh has recently defined an "authentic life" as opposed to an "innovative life" as one spent narrowly immersed in one's cultural traditions and "scrupulously living up to its ideals."[161] Although Parekh also supports an interpretative and reformist approach to cultural practices, his distinction between an authentic life and an innovative one may well allow greater scope for conservative approaches to tradition in his multicultural politics than is given legitimacy in Herder's thought. Although Herder may thereby be criticized as failing to have a sufficiently deep respect for cultural diversity, it ought to put to rest the erroneous claim that his thought provides an uncritical legitimacy to cultural traditions.

Conclusion

The need to balance diversity and unity identified by Herder as the fundamental principle of good governance remains just as relevant, if not more so, in contemporary politics. The harm Herder predicted from assimilation policies with their one-sided and homogenous focus on unity inflicted on indigenous and other cultural communities within multinational states is now well acknowledged both theoretically and in practice. Recent philosophical initiatives are increasingly taking up the difficult challenge of attempting to respect cultural difference without abandoning universalism entirely. To appreciate fully Herder's role in anticipating many of the initiatives and insights in this important strand of contemporary social and political thought, this paper has argued it is first necessary to recognize that he was a radical antidualist who attempted to synthesize such traditionally drawn dichotomies as the universal and the particular, determinism and agency, and cosmopolitanism and localism.

Once it is also acknowledged that he was fully aware of the heterogeneous nature of cultures and promoted cultural interaction in a spirit of cooperation, it becomes apparent that many of those attentive to cultural pluralism in contemporary political theory have far more in common with Herder's attempt to avoid a homogenizing universalism by stressing the particularity both of individuals and cultural communities than is generally supposed. Herder was not the one-sided nationalist he is often depicted as, but in also not succumbing to a one-sided focus on difference, his thought will find most resonance with those thinkers who call for our respect of cultural traditions without succumbing to either a conservative or a relativist and uncritical acceptance of

[160]*SW*, 13: 381–83; 14: 212.
[161]Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 150.

them. It is unsurprising that in such an early and original attempt to grapple with cultural pluralism tensions exist in his thought. For many, though, the attempt to balance these seemingly contradictory aims remains one of the most pressing challenges facing both governments and political theorists today.