

Herder, Folklore, and Modern Humanism

Lael Weissman
University of Pennsylvania

William Wilson's article "Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism" presents the dominant view in folklore that the roots of our discipline are tied to nationalistic motives:

[Serious folklore studies] were from the beginning intimately associated with emergent romantic nationalistic movements in which zealous scholar-patriots searched the folklore record of the past not just to see how people lived in by-gone days—the principal interest of the antiquarians—but primarily to discover "historical" models on which to reshape the present and build the future. (1973:819)

Certainly it is true that these romantics were trying to effect change in their political climate by reformulating the past, but ideology governed this reformulation. Wilson simplifies romantic nationalism as "the wistful dream of scholars and poets who endeavored through constant education and propaganda to rekindle the spark of national consciousness in the hearts of their fellow countrymen" (1973:820).

In Germany, this dream of romantic nationalism was born out of a new world conception, a mythology if you will; and, as mythos it was comprised of both immediate and ultimate concerns. To ignore the mythological aspect of the origin of our own field is to pretend in effect that we are myth-free. We must apply to our own history the realizations we have gleaned from the study of others.

Nationalism was part of a larger movement, loosely called *modern humanism* (Schütze 1920). Modern humanism contains as an essential characteristic a conflict between the ideal and the actual: romantic nationalism, as product of these ideas, contains the same tensions. This movement strove to manifest the ideal nation in the actual world; thus folklore began as a reformist endeavor. Herder's philosophy was essentially a critique of his times, and his concept of nationalism emerged out of that

critique. "Herder's attack on his own century can no longer be of so great interest as his revolutionary idea of the autonomy of each individual culture. In the eyes of its author, however, the idea was probably a by-product" (Clark 1955:196).

An examination of the historical currents of the eighteenth century helps to create a contextual backdrop for evaluating Herder's work. German intellectual life was more advanced than the country's social and political development. The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, a loose confederation of small states, was still in existence, and aside from one or two exceptions, Germany had no statesmen who could act to change this fragmentation. Constant comparison occurred between countries on the Continent, a situation which may be difficult for Americans to imagine. At this time cultural relativism was being invented and its implications thought through. Modern humanistic ideology is largely responsible for our ability to conceive of different conditions in each country as historical and cultural rather than as more or less advanced; that is, it may be this line of thought that moved us beyond notions of evolution.

Germany had suffered the disruptions of the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, and the Thirty Years War all during the seventeenth-century; it was divided into 1,800 different territories with an equal number of rulers. Among the elite, foreign influences dominated; in fact, most elites spoke languages different from those in lower classes, making communication impossible. Aristocrats imitated the court life at Versailles, and these French habits were filtering through to the middle classes. German writers not only used French as their medium of expression but also adopted French and classical models to shape form and content. Similarly, the language of the intellectuals was Latin, used exclusively in the schools: during this period, Kant, in a revolutionary act, lectured in German for the first time.

Through modern humanism, a shift in understanding had been accomplished. Until that time, foreign influences were not seen as demeaning but as uplifting what some saw as a backward culture. Germans did not consider themselves as an autonomous culture, but instead the upper and middle classes evaluated themselves in relation to other cultures which they considered superior. Through modern humanism, Germans began to conceive of themselves as having an independent and valuable cultural heritage. Clearly, this shift occurring in the intellectual class was related to the Enlightenment in France and Britain.

There was much intellectual and artistic exchange between these countries. With the Enlightenment had come another set of abstract ideals by which knowledge was measured, and what was not rational according to this measurement was considered irrational and thus false. Herder revolted

against the Enlightenment and its emphasis on reason and argued for the importance of the emotions, which united feeling with reason. Clark sums up Herder's aim as being "the destruction of what may be called the caste system in eighteenth century philosophic anthropology" (1955:249). Great changes were occurring in the intellectual and the political worlds. The French and American revolutions helped to characterize the period as a time of action: the *Sturm und Drang* movement has been termed by Ergang, "the German form of the French revolution" (1966:192).

Many view Herder's work and involvement in intellectual movements in a cursory way, emphasizing his association with great philosophers and literary figures of his day, and overlook his profession as a preacher. Born in East Prussia in 1744 to a poor family, he was able to develop a good hand for calligraphy and came to work for his teacher, Trecho. Herder began to satiate his desire for knowledge in Trecho's library. Through Trecho, he met an officer who offered to support his medical training, but Herder could not stand the sight of blood and so enrolled as a theology student; legend has it that he was so poor that he survived on no money and lived for some time on only bread and water.

Herder worked as preacher but his orthodoxy was often challenged, despite his strong commitment to leading his congregation to spiritual regeneration. He felt called to restore harmony between the world and the will of God; he considered the absence of this harmony to be the origin of spiritual degeneration of his day (Gillies 1945:58). And though his peasant congregation did not always understand him and often wanted a more orthodox approach, Herder delivered brilliant sermons (Gillies 1945:58). Chronicler Alexander Gillies summarizes their content:

The existence of a divine purpose in the world, which is inscrutable and cannot be fully revealed until the end; the activity of God throughout all nature; the demand that life should obey the divine laws of nature, and fulfill the powers that have been given to it; the condemnation of sins, unnaturalness, or a falling-away from God's purpose; a Peagian assumption of the innate purity in man; the assertion that the one central factor in all human effort is religion and that religion is founded upon revelation and faith—all these are themes that Herder is constantly expanding and stressing. (1945:62)

This message was not exclusively religious for Herder but penetrated each subject he took up; he read widely and attempted to rebuild various areas of study by giving them new spiritual and philosophical foundations.

All of Herder's vast work bore the same sub-structure: an examination of humans as moral and spiritual beings. Herder assumed that people evolve spiritually; he termed the ultimate end of this evolution *Humanität*

(humanity). "Humanity," he wrote, "is the character of our race . . . we do not bring it ready-made into the world. But in the world it must be the goal of our strivings, the sum of our exercises, our guiding value" (Herder quoted in Wilson 1973:823). With this assumption, he proceeded with his reinterpretation and formulated a dissertation which consciously included the idea of humans having both purpose and destiny.

His conception of nature illustrated his assumptions; it was based on the unification of different forms of knowledge. He saw, for example, no reason why purely scientific investigation should embarrass religion, which he considered the palladium of truth (Clark 1955:275). He saw nature as "a universe filled with the spirit of God, progressively revealing Himself and completing His work through nature and man" (Herder in Gillies 1945:54). Awareness of matter resulted from the recognition of this omnipresence of divinity. "Through the similarity of the effects of this 'energy' or 'force' in nature to its effects in us we become aware, according to Herder's psychology of 1778, of what we call matter" (Clark 1955:223). God speaks to people through nature by analogy—that is, in understandable terms. Herder conceived of nature as an artist and therefore brought the natural sciences more closely together with aesthetics, bridging the already-established dichotomy between science and art.

Nature, the greatest artist of all, economically re-uses its protoforms as the human artist re-uses the fundamental structures of all art, and the over-all effect is that of an ascending series culminating in man, who is thus akin to all creation but not derived from it by any process of physical transformation. (Herder in Clark 1955:306)

Herder conceptualized evolution as symbolic rather than temporal.

Just as in nature, Herder saw artistic genius in poetry, which was to him the mechanism of the universe.

[For Herder] Shakespeare was more than divinely inspired; that he was god-like, a creator in miniature, whose work followed and illustrated the same process of Creation itself. . . . The poet's function is to make known God's purpose; to interpret nature or the universe, of which he is a part, by making it live again, by reconstructing and reproducing its modes of operation, by re-creating it, as it were, before the eyes and ears of his fellow-men, so that they may perceive and comprehend its workings. (Gillies 1945:49-50)

Herder similarly considered philosophical systems as poetry (*Dichtung*) unless they could be applied (Clark 1955:178).

He linked poetry with revelation in several ways. Herder suggested that "poetry was originally theology," but he later inverted this notion when

he conceptualized theology as poetry. "The oldest and most venerable heathen poets, lawgivers, fathers and educators of mankind, Orpheus and Epimenodes and all the fabulous names of early time, sang of the gods and gave rapture to the world" (Gillies 1945:55). The Old Testament was for him a kind of poetic folk song. "One can see," he wrote, "that I am not here using poetry to mean falsehood; for in the realm of understanding the significance of the poetically composed symbol is truth" (Herder in Clark 1955:297). Neither does he deny the possibility of the role of history in shaping the quality and content of the poetry. The universe, for him, was permeated by God: "history and revelation were thus identical" (Gillies 1945:54).

Clearly, there is difficulty in discussing one topic in isolation when considering Herder's work. He made connections with disparate realms of thought and aspects of man's nature that had not been central foci of the Enlightenment. The superiority of reason over sensibility was challenged by the new unity of being and purpose which Herder proclaimed. Herder's arguments were persuasively shaped by his revolt against the Enlightenment, for in a significant way its narrow-mindedness inspired him to articulate a more comprehensive philosophy.

One of the best examples of his confrontation with a rationalistic perspective is his criticism of Kant. Kant held that humans were animals who needed a master; Herder posited, to the contrary, that "man is an animal as long as he needs a master to rule over him; as soon as he attains the status of a human being he no longer needs a master in any real sense" (Herder in Barnard 1969:323). In this juxtaposition one can see Herder's main counter-argument to Enlightenment thinking. Whereas the Enlightenment had placed human beings at the peak of history—the dawn of a new age, Herder reinstated the continuity of human life and joined together what could not fit under the umbrella of pure reason—sensibility and will. Thus, he automatically identified not only areas for action—the arts, for example—but also a directive for the will, and an ultimate goal; he preached the possibility that these three aspects of human experience could become unified.

Unification is a central impulse in Herder's work and one of the goals of modern humanism. Several authors have noted Herder's remarkable similarity to Faust and suggested that Goethe must have based this character in part on Herder; Goethe, in fact, did directly quote him. According to Gillies, "Herder shows at this time more than a little affinity with Faust. The desire to grasp the whole of the universe and to set forth its meaning so as 'To help or convert a fellow creature [Faust]' is certain" (1945:61). "His chief aim," writes historian Robert Ergang, "[is] to understand the purpose and destiny of man as an inhabitant of this earth" (1966:82). To

that end, Herder began by looking at mankind, placing him at the center, in order to come to a new understanding.

In his early work Herder posited a new conception of the difference between the human and the animal: the two were distinguished by the fact that humans can speak. Language, for him, was the outward manifestation of *Bessonnenheit* (reflection), while reason was its internal function. "Language is the real external, as reason is the real internal character essential factor to our species" (Herder in Schütze 1925:528). He did not consider reason as a distinct faculty of mind, but indicated that reason could be employed to different degrees: "But does thinking rationally mean the same as thinking with fully developed reason? Does it mean that an infant thinks reflectively or uses logic like a sophist at his desk? It is clear that such an objection does not touch the mental power as such but only different degrees of use" (Herder in Schütze 1925:529). Through the development of reason, people become creators and acquire a kind of freedom within nature. "By virtue of 'Bessonnenheit' every idea ceases to be an immediate work of nature and becomes man's own work. No longer an infallible machine of nature, man creates the motives and purposes of his own constructive efforts" (Herder in Schütze 1925:529). Again, Herder extended the Enlightenment tenet of the human being as a perfected machine of nature to include a will: "Knowledge without will is false and incomplete knowledge. . . . Impulse is the mainspring of being" (Herder in Schütze 1925:536).

In his system Herder offered a primary unity of thought, will, and feeling and so synthesized science and philosophy, two polar modes of thought—rationalism which understood existence to be governed by nerve processes, and vitalistic naturalism which defined being as governed by impulse. He described sensibility, will, and thought as acting reciprocally and argued that each always be interpreted in relation to the other two. "Isolation of genetic conditions, of technique, subject matter, inherent mental, moral, and aesthetic character, is contrary to the unity which functions integrally throughout the activities of the living individual" (Herder in Schütze 1925:541). For Herder, sensibility led to knowledge rather than threatened it: "We must conclude that the strongest passions and impulse properly ordered, are merely the sensible outline of strong reason within them" (Herder in Schütze 1925:547).

Establishing the primacy of human aspects more directly associated with feeling, Herder stated that the arts should not be based on clearly defined models established by the reasoning self; that is, one need not comply with classical rules. Indeed, he challenged the very heart of Enlightenment thinking by suggesting that there are other sources of

knowledge beyond that of pure thought, ways of knowing which precede reason.

This is therefore the principal law according to which nature has regulated both faculties; namely, that feeling operates where perception cannot yet be; that it introduces a great deal at once into the soul obscurely, so that this latter may clarify it to some extent and discover thereby what its own existence can achieve; that this takes place in the easiest and pleasantest possible way so that the greatest possible amount may be perceived in the shortest possible time, and the soul may be gently led forth outside itself in its operations, as if it were operating in isolation and concerned only with itself. . . . In every minute part of the infinite prevails the truth, wisdom and goodness of the whole; in every perception, as in every feeling is reflected the image of God, there with the rays or the brilliance of white light, here into which the sunbeam is divided. . . . Honour therefore, the genius of mankind and seek to serve it as purely as you can. (Herder in Gillies 1945:71)

Similarly, Herder conceived of reason not as distinct from feeling but "nothing more than something formed by experience, an acquired knowledge of the propositions and directions of ideas and faculties, to which man is fashioned by his organization and mode of life" (Herder in Barnard 1969:264). Rather than viewing reason as an *a priori* faculty, Herder saw 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" (Herder in Barnard 1969:264-265).

Herder's philosophy of history was in effect an epistemological inquiry. His process of reexamination hinges on two central principles: that a people's knowledge is shaped by the environment, and—more difficult to identify—that there is a divine will manifested through the process of Creation, which has its end in Humanity. "Man considered as an animal is the child of the earth and is attached to it as his habitation; but considered as a human being, as a creature of Humanität, he has the seeds of immortality within him and these require planting in other soil" (Herder in Barnard 1969:280). For Herder, people are at once animalistic and human, and they strive to emphasize their humanity. Their mission is what Herder calls "paligenesis [which] means . . . a purification and regeneration of our whole life in this world as a means of winning a higher than earthly life" (Herder in Gillies 1945:99).

Understanding the notion of *continuity* in Herder's work is vital to comprehending his philosophies of history and nationalism. Edgar Schick (1971) reads Herder's work as poetry, identifies the primary images of organicism, and finds a continuity of thought and execution. Herder

described the nature of thought, feeling, and will as being one and articulated a system which united these impulses. Schick further illustrates Herder's consistency of feeling and thought, but more interestingly demonstrates the relationship between these two and the will. We have seen how Herder found unity in every subject he approached, recasting each according to his own longing and faith.

Summarizing Herder's understanding of the relationship between mind, sensibility, and will, Schütze draws the following conclusions: 1) Mind and sensibility are one and can only be separated in words; 2) pure reason is a delusion because it originates and remains in the sensibility and stays there; 3) ridding oneself of the sensibility does not liberate reason; 4) people cannot demonstrate their own immortality; and 5) absolute being, or immortality, is an article of faith, but faith generates its own truth from sensibility rather than reason (1925:550). Faith is not excluded from Herder's thought: it is instead the goal of human will. Thus, we can understand the nature of his pedagogy and his concept of *Humanität*, which he claimed as the foundation of his work.

Herder's thoughts on history and nationalism have a tendency to overshadow their foundation in modern humanism. His main impulse was to synthesize disparate aspects of human knowledge and redefine knowing as involving various facets of the personality and as being shaped by the environment and the genetic force of Divine Nature. This process could be called "creative analogy," beyond mere analogy because it entails more than the breaking down of boundaries between preformulated logical systems. Infusing faith, longing, and will, Herder created a new relationship between different aspects of thought, between preestablished dualisms. Frederick Smith in *Studies of Religion under German Masters* characterizes Herder as "the great master who led his way back into this ancient time" as captured in the folk poetry he studied (Smith 1880:131). "Herder penetrated the recesses of that time when sense and spirit were one, because this was the secret of his own inward life. . . . All his labours, as philosopher, theologian, critic, historian, and scientific inquirer, have this as their aim, to bring man back to the point, whence he started as a child, of harmony within himself and between himself and the universe around him" (Smith 1880:131-132). But Herder could not be called a primitive thinker, for we tend to conceive the primitive as not choosing harmony consciously over other forms of thought.

According to Gillies, Herder's own desire became problematic. The harmony he consciously sought through his pedagogy did not correspond with his own environment:

The trouble arose from Herder's strong pedagogic sense, from the desire to criticize and to improve his own age, and ultimately, therefore, from his own personal dissatisfaction. This clearly conflicted with his historical outlook, as it had done before. Herder was always seeking deficiencies and striving to eliminate them, always seeking and never finding harmony between himself and the world. . . . Humanität was now Herder's consolation in the face of contemporary shortcomings; he clung to it with great—but not unshaken—optimism, and into it projected the qualities he missed so much around him—peace, religion, sympathy, equity, reason, truth. He proclaimed his doctrine, which rested on personal longing, as if it were the law of nature. (Gillies 1945:93)

The nature of Herder's pedagogy was two-fold, critiquing the existing social, political, intellectual, and spiritual situation as well as illustrating the ideal process with which people need to establish contact. Inseparable from these two tendencies, Herder suggested how to realize this pedagogy, nowhere more frequently than in his discussions of the nation.

Herder's conceptions of nationalism and ideal culture were strongly influenced by his reading of Giambattista Vico's *Scienza Nuova*. From Vico he borrowed two significant ideas. He focused on the existence of different historic ages, which evolve from one another in the continuity of history. He also embraced the notion that each historical epoch forms an independent cultural entity whose various parts are integrally related to form an organic whole. Similarly, Herder borrowed from Montesquieu the idea that cultural types are primarily determined by the physical environment in which the nations are located. From these ideas emerged his philosophy of history which assumes that history is "a stream that flows unceasingly toward the ocean of humanity" (Herder in Ergang 1966:220). While Aristotle had placed the city-state at the end of history, and Vico the idealized civilization, Herder envisioned "Humanity" as the ultimate goal of the historical process.

For Herder, history takes place in terms of organic entities of culture: "Each age, each nation possesses an individuality, with temporal or local characteristics, never to be repeated; it cannot be other than imperfect. It cannot be judged by any standards other than its own, since they are equally imperfect; it carries its own criterion within itself" (Herder in Gillies 1945:65). History is then "an account of ethnic groups or nationalities considered as historical, genetic, organic entities. In each national group there is an active power which, influenced by environment and tradition, effects an orderly development or historical continuity" (Herder in Ergang 1966:220). One is not to study individuals or political events, but "all that the nationalities did and thought" (Herder in Ergang 1966:220). The study is to be undertaken by means of sympathy rather than abstract reasoning;

the subject must be regarded "in the spirit of the age (*Zeitgeist*)" (Herder in Ergang 1966:216).

This ideal notion of the nation as an organic unit proved particularly challenging in the practical world. Other aspects of Herder's conception of nationalism must be considered in close relation to his period. Again, Germany had been exposed to many foreign influences. As Gillies states, "The loss of Charles the Great's folksong collection, the Latin domination of German culture in the Middle Ages, followed by the Renaissance and Wars of Religion—had cheated German literature of its due, so weakened it as to make it subservient to French literature, and made an irreparable breach between the present and its own national past" (1945:51). Meanwhile, contemporary thinkers considered nationality as an obstruction to humanity. In all cases, Herder used *nation* to denote a cultural rather than political distinction. Thus, the nation becomes the central factor in human development but still not an end in itself. Opposing the shallow individualism of his time, Herder clearly articulated how individual needs, selves, and knowledge related to those of the group (Ergang 1966:248). "For no one of us is by himself alone. The whole structure of man's humanity is connected by a spiritual genesis—education—with his parents, teachers and friends, with all the circumstances of life, and hence with his countrymen and forefathers. Indeed, in the last analysis, he is connected with the whole chain of the human species, since some links of this chain inevitably come into contact with, and thus act upon, the development of mental powers" (Herder in Barnard 1969:312-313).

With Herder's thinking about nationality he began to apply his whole abstract epistemology to the concrete world: on this subject he united his most idealistic thoughts and his criticism of contemporary trends. Between these conflicting projects, he proposed techniques for bridging this gap between the ideal and the practical. Even within his work he recognized, and struggled over, the presence of conflicting impulses. In his early travel journal, he showed himself torn between becoming "a man of action" or pursuing his intellectual insights (Barnard 1969). Accordingly, he later voiced concern about the effect and influence of his work—that is, whether it had a substantial *Wirkung*—and wrote "complete truth is always and exclusively *action*" (Clark 1955:230). Ultimately, both his activism and his thought concentrated on the nation.

This activism could not have happened apart from his focus on culture; Ergang outlines three main reasons for a lack of political interest at that time. Government was monopolized by rulers; absolutism was common. Conditions were poor, and minds were turned away: "Political resignation seems to have been widespread." Writings were still censored at this time (Ergang 1966:240). Intellectually, Herder challenged the Enlightenment

view that negated the cultural lines which he believed nature had drawn; "the members of nationality and state are joined together by inner spiritual bonds" (Ergang 1966:101). Herder proclaimed that these differences were decreed by God and must be emphasized rather than ignored or erased (Ergang 1966:92). "In contrast to the division of the German people and the drab political affairs of his time, he [Herder] continually reminded the German people of their common part and of the heritage which must be preserved if German culture was to continue to exist" (Ergang 1966:231-32). Preaching a doctrine of self-realization (at the level of nation), he sought to "eliminate the boundaries between classes by stimulating the national feeling, national consciousness" (Herder in Ergang 1966:52).

A nation's consciousness, thought Herder, should naturally produce its own expressive forms; so the absence of a unique and explicitly German literature troubled him. He explained Germany's lack of literature as a lack of connection to its essential character and happiness:

Thus, from ancient times we have absolutely no living poetic literature upon which our modern poetry might grow, as a branch upon a national stem; whereas other nations have progressed with the centuries, and have shaped themselves upon their soil, from native products, upon the belief and taste of the people, from the remains of the past. In that way their language and literature have become national, the voice of the people has been used and cherished, they have secured more of a public in these matters than we Germans have. We poor Germans were destined from the start never to remain ourselves; ever to be the lawgivers and servants of foreign nationalities, the directors of the fate and their battered, bleeding, exhausted slaves. (Herder in Gillies 1945:52)

Ergang points out that Herder was the first to explain to the German people, "in a way both large and impressive, the idea that literature is the evolutionary product of national conditions" (Ergang 1966:190). Thus, he not only identified the causes for the absence of literature but also, and more importantly, hastened the advent of a cure. Herder states that "there is no absolute poison in nature which might not on the whole be also a medicament and a balm" (Ergang 1966:198). Herder diagnosed the illness (the lack of literature) as a result of Germany's breaking away from her own cultural foundation; only a reconnection to this essential identity could cure the nation.

To connect with this source of culture, people would have to identify the most recent time in German history when the spiritual connection was still present: the Middle Ages. Herder thus recreated the idea of the *volk*; no longer were they the rabble of the streets, but "the body of the nationality." This group, which had remained on its national foundations,

was most in harmony with the national soul (Ergang 1966:195). Folklore was the instrument of his social program; through this medium, one could work to change the present situation. According to Ergang, Herder suggested "that they go back to the sources of their own language and literature and liberate the former power and noble spirit which, unrecognized up to now, lie dormant in the documents of the national past" (Ergang 1966:235). He described the native language as being "filled with the life and blood of our forefathers" and thought that folklore was a treasure to be unlocked to release its spirit and heal his nation (Ergang 1966:253).

The persistence of vestigial elements in culture is balanced by eternal rebirth through 'evolutions' rather than revolutions, through orderly cyclic progressions rather than through violent upheavals. It is the nature of culture that institutions, long since outlived, manage to perpetuate themselves long after loss of their functional value, while from the very embrace of senility arises the promise of a new day. (Herder quoted in Clark 1955:363)

Here again, Herder observed the real workings of culture and contrasts this reality with his ideal.

This contrast is even clearer in his thinking about relationships within and between nations.

It is nature which educates families: the most natural state is therefore, one nation, an extended family with one national character. . . . Nothing, therefore, is more manifestly contrary to the purpose of political government than the unnatural enlargement of states, the wild mixing of various races and nationalities under one sceptre. (Herder quoted in Barnard 1965:324)

Although this statement easily could be read as foreshadowing a racist love of "purity," Herder was in fact referring exclusively to the "unnatural enlargement of states" taken up by government. His emphasis on the importance of remaining on one's cultural foundation conflicted with his goal of not becoming self-contained on the other. "It was not his goal," writes Ergang, "to make the German nationality self-contained. . . . Although he was vehemently opposed to imitation of other nationalities, he wished his countrymen to learn from the example of others, to emulate their great achievements" (Ergang 1966:265). The borrowing, then, would represent an improvement, a deeper understanding: Germans would not just take on the ways of others but find their roots in humanity.

I walk through strange gardens merely to get flowers for my language, the betrothed of my mode of thought. I see strange customs so that I may bring

mine, like fruits ripened by a foreign sun, as an offering to the genius of my fatherland. (Herder in Ergang 1966:160)

Here Herder advocated a method for social action: he did not meditate on the nature of Germany's penchant for imitation, but instead tried to conquer it with his strict focus on the commitment to one's nation. Still the foundation of his nationalism "was human brotherhood. . . he was driven by the desire of . . . having them fulfill their mission to mankind" (Ergang 1966:263). However, he could only suggest preliminary steps to transform his ideal into reality.

Schütze suggests that Herder's basic purpose was to force people to recognize the centrality of personality, of individuality; this individual is not the shallow, isolated subject of the Enlightenment, but rather one formed by cultural diversity and the depth of history. Herder's work strove to bring this individuality into awareness; he encouraged his contemporaries to offer up the richness of their culture simply because it belonged to them, and not because it passed the test of some abstract and celebrated measurement. So, his work focused on the nation, and he urgently identified ways in which the individual consciousness could be re-awakened in terms of a cultural heritage. In addition to the possibility of changing culture, Herder recognized the importance of the individual.

It was during this period that the individual was first being recognized as an entity. Psychology was just beginning as a science, and there is evidence that Herder read widely in this area, expecting great things from it (Clark 1955:93). So Herder emphasized change at both the national and individual levels:

It is possible to overcome egoism, whether this be innate or acquired from one's environment, to free oneself from the irregularities of too singular a condition, and, ultimately released from the peculiarities of the national, temporal, personal taste, to grasp beauty wherever found, in all times and all kinds of taste. . . . He is initiated into the Mysteries of the Muses and of all times and memories and works. The sphere of taste is unlimited as the history of mankind. Its periphery lies through all the centuries and their works; its center is he. (Schütze 1925:521).

Herder's focus extends beyond culture: "The deepest foundation of our being both in sensibility and in thought is individual" (Schütze 1925:542-43). Since the content of his sermons is not available to us, it is difficult to say to what degree he tried to change individuals. But there is evidence that he preached on the importance of a well-balanced life as a prerequisite to work in the arts and sciences, so that a reform of life must precede a reform of the arts (Gillies 1945:73). "The highest knowledge is undoubtedly

the art of living; and how many men have been robbed by their fine arts of this one thing, this divine art" (Gillies 1945:73). Schütze's brand of modern humanism involves four necessary components: genetic history, biological growth, the social character of man, and the unity of these three in the individual personality (Schütze 1925:549).

Herder came to his conceptualization of humanism by trying to correct the narrow thinking of the Enlightenment and to effect change in his time. He conceived of a holistic universe by applying the precepts of Leibniz and Spinoza, creating a system which releases cultures from domination; thus he unified these different forms of knowledge. In validating the experiences of each culture, he also accommodated intuition, sensibility, and intentionality.

Herder's vast but unifying thought has been taken in bits and pieces; some have said his greatest contribution was the inspiration he gave to Goethe, the Grimm brothers, and other contemporaries. Because German romanticists took Herder's nationalism and adopted it for their own purposes, our understanding of him is filtered through their perceptions (Clark 1955:418). As we consider our own history as a discipline, we must examine the entirety of our roots; we resist the inclination to isolate a single application of a historical work and examine it out of context. The impulse which preceded the "wedding with nationalism," as Wilson calls it, is most profoundly the pursuit of freedom—not in the American sense of civil rights, not political per se—but cultural and individual, especially in the sense of the inner life. For Herder, freedom could always be discovered in culture, as there is only *freedom within law*: "The first germ of freedom is to perceive that one is not free, and to know the bonds by which one is held" (Schütze 1925:539).

To find freedom in our culture, we need to re-examine our intellectual heritage, criticize the ways in which our predecessors applied their insights, as well as understand the fullness and complexity of their inspiration. To learn from Herder's difficulties, we must identify and acknowledge the aspirations which guide our own work today. Three centuries have not bridged the gap between the ideal and the practical.

References Cited

- Andress, James Mace. 1916. *Johann Gottfried Herder as an Educator*. New York: G.E. Stechert.
- Barnard, F. M., ed. 1969. *J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- . ed. 1965. *Herder on Social and Political Thought from Enlightenment to Nationalism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Clark, Robert T. Jr. 1955. *Herder: His Life and Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ergang, Robert Rienhold. 1966. *Herder and the Foundations of German Nationalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gillies, Alexander. 1945. *Herder*. Oxford: B. Blackwell.
- Schick, Edgar B. 1971. *Metaphorical Organicism in Herder's Early Works: A Study of the Relation of Herder's Literary Idiom to his World-view*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Schütze, Martin. 1920. Fundamental Ideas in Herder's Thought. *Modern Philology* 18 (1920):65-78, 289-302. 19 (1921-22):113-130, 361-382. 21 (1923): 29-48, 113-132.
- . 1925. Herder's Psychology. *The Monist* 35:507-554.
- Smith, John Frederick. 1880. *Studies in Religion under German Masters*. London and Edinburgh: Williams & Norgate.
- Wilson, William A. 1973. Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism. *Journal of Popular Culture* 6:819-835.