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CULTURE AND HISTORY: HERDER AND ENLIGHTENMENT

BY

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ABSTRACT

Johann Gottfried Herder has been rightly seen as initiating a new form of historical and cultural understanding. Its central tenet was that other cultures were incommensurable and uniquely individual and as such could only be understood in their own context. However the nature of this contextual understanding has been obscured by a traditional interpretation which has seen him replacing the static Enlightenment conception of human nature and history with a conception of human nature as variable according to time and place. This variable human nature was the manifestation of a deeper spiritual power and the meaning of history could only be understood through a non-rational process of empathy. The contention of this thesis is that Herder's naturalistic understanding of history and human development, as well as his rejection of the Enlightenment comparative approach to culture, has its source in his anthropology. Thus I have focussed on the development of Herder's conceptions of culture and human nature in reaction to various Enlightenment theories of culture, the human mind, and history. Previous interpretations have failed to put Herder's thought in its proper context, and I have attempted to show how Herder, despite his blanket condemnation of the Enlightenment, formulated

theories with surprising similarity to the Enlightenment positions. I have also tried to demonstrate the actual differences between Herder and the Enlightenment which have not been revealed in previous interpretations. Central to Herder's conception of human existence is the idea that man's relationship to the world and to other human beings is always culturally mediated. Human beings as a distinct species have always had culture. It is wrong, therefore, to argue, as some Enlightenment philosophes did, that humanity had developed from a pre-cultural to a cultural state. For Herder, culture is constitutive of human existence. Without the tools and techniques, including language, which were acquired through a process of cultural education, humans would not be able to survive because the human mind could not work. Herder's ideas foreshadowed the modern pluralistic concept of culture and he was a forerunner of the practice of modern anthropology which is relativistic and non-judgmental in its explanation of human diversity.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

We cannot clearly know what we possess until we have the means of knowing what others before us have possessed. We cannot truly and honestly enjoy the merits of our own time if we do not understand how to appreciate the merits of the past.(1)

Johann Gottfried Herder was born in Mohrungen, East Prussia in 1744, the son of a poor cantor and schoolmaster. In 1762 he went to Königsberg to study medicine but after having fainted at his first dissection, he switched to the more congenial Faculty of Theology.(2) In Königsberg he met two individuals who were to have a decisive if contradictory influence on his development.(3) The first was the philosopher Immanuel Kant, who introduced him to the writings of the philosophes of the Enlightenment including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, Charles-Louis de Montesquieu, and Georges-Louis, comte de Buffon. As

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- (1) J.W. Goethe, Preface to the Theory of Colours, Gedenkenausgabe Der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche, (Zürich und Stuttgart, 1949-53), xvii:13-14.
- (2) Robert T. Clark, Herder: His Life and Thought, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1969), p. 41.
- (3) H.B. Nisbet, Herder and the Philosophy and History of Science, (Cambridge, 1970), p. 1.

well, by allowing the poverty-stricken Herder to attend his lectures without paying the customary fee,(4) Kant introduced him to philosophy, logic, astronomy, and mathematics.(5) Herder was profoundly influenced by Kant's lectures on physical geography in which he investigated the effect of climate and geographical conditions on human development.(6) But the most important aspect of Kant's influence was to give him "...a discipline derived from the study of nature..."(7) As a result, Herder received a thorough grounding in Enlightenment thought which attempted to explain the world of nature and the world of man naturalistically.

Herder could never have received such discipline from the second of his mentors, Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) whose mysticism and enthusiasm were the polar opposite of Kant's enlightened rationalism. Hamann stressed the primacy of experience which could not be comprehended by a priori ratiocination.(8) Hamann introduced Herder to the

(4) Clark, Herder, p. 45.

(5) F.M. Barnard, Herder's Social and Political Thought, (Oxford, 1967), p. xi.

(6) Alexander Gillies, Herder, (Oxford: 1945), p. 12.

(7) Lewis Beck White, Early German Philosophy, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969), p. 384.

(8) Clark, Herder, p. 48.

works of Francis Bacon, and both men found in Bacon's empiricism a reinforcement of "...their own belief in the concrete world, in the world of the senses, which they exalted in opposition to the abstractions of German Enlightenment philosophy." (9)

Herder attempted to reconcile the contradictory influences of his two mentors by combining Kant's Enlightenment naturalism with Hamann's desire to extract metaphysical meaning from the processes of the empirical world. This unholy alliance was the cause of much of the confusion that characterized Herder's thought. Thus there is a deep conflict in Herder's thinking between metaphysics and naturalism, a conflict of which he seemed blissfully unaware.

After occupying several positions as a Lutheran minister, Herder was offered a position in Weimar in 1776 as Superintendent of Schools, Chief Pastor, and Court Preacher and remained there until his death in 1803. Herder would be assured of an honoured place in literary history, if only for the influence he had on the young Goethe who recalled Herder's decisive influence in his autobiography: "And so thanks to an unexpected acquaintanceship, I could

(9) H.B. Nisbet, "Herder and Francis Bacon," Modern Language Review, 62 (1967): 268.

count myself lucky that all the smugness, desire to preen, vanity, pride, and arrogance that was either latent or active in me was exposed to a very hard test, which was of a unique kind, thoroughly out of keeping with the time, and thus all the more penetrating and painful."(10)

Goethe was a member of the literary movement known as Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress). This group reacted against what they perceived as the mechanistic abstract philosophy of the Enlightenment, its overwhelming emphasis on the power of human reason, and the deprecation of feeling and the non-rational aspects of human life such as religion, literature, and national feeling. Opposed to the influence of French literature on Germany, they tried to create a German literature based on its historic national traditions. By stressing the individuality and uniqueness of human life, as well as the cultural and national basis of literature, Herder was the most important theorist for this group. His pioneering essays on Ossian and Shakespeare proclaimed that German literature did not have to depend on the imitation of foreign literary models but could find their source in their German folk traditions and history. Authentic literature was a product of its own unique cultural and environmental context. Herder taught

(10) J.W. Goethe, From My Life: Poetry and Truth, Book 10, Goethe: Collected Works, (New York, 1983-), iv:298.

Goethe and the other Stürmer und Dränger that poetry was not "...the privilege of a few distinguished cultivated men."(11)

As well, by his championing of folk poetry Herder influenced the development of German romanticism. His publication of one of the first collections of German folk songs (Volkslieder) had a continuous influence throughout the nineteenth century on the study of folklore and helped spur the rediscovery of the folk-song tradition of various nations.(12) While Herder is best known for his influence on the development of nationalistic ideas both in Germany and elsewhere, the cultural and linguistic nationalism that he advocated was a far cry from the narrow chauvinistic nationalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.(13)

But it was as a literary critic that Herder first gained recognition by practising what René Wellek has called his "natural method".(14) Herder's interpretation of literature was based on the idea that a work of art was the product of the particular time and place in which it

(11) ibid., p. 303.

(12) Clark, Herder, pp. 259-60.

(13) Georg Iggers, The German Conception of History, (Middletown, Connecticut, 1968), p. 41.

(14) René Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950, (New Haven and London, 1955), I, p. 185.

was created. As he proclaimed in the Fragments on Recent German Literature (1766-77): "The most indispensable explanation, especially of a poet, is the explanation of the customs of his age and nation."(15)

While this historical method was not unique in literary criticism, Herder's extension of this method to all human phenomena was his greatest achievement. Herder viewed all human phenomena--art, literature, politics, morality, religion, philosophy, and science--historically; that is to say as the creations of human beings who lived at a specific time, in a particular place and were part of a unique culture. The recognition that men were different in different cultures--that their values, motivations, and actions, their social, political, religious, and cultural practices varied according to time and place--had been well known before Herder. His unique contribution was his view that these cultural artifacts could only be understood within the context in which they were created. Therefore any attempt to impose ideas, values, or beliefs onto past or contemporary cultures was intellectually and morally wrong. Other cultures must be accepted as autonomous

(15) Herder Fragments on Recent German Literature, Second Edition ii:161, quoted in Wellek I, p. 185. Quotations from Herder's Sämtliche Werke edited by Bernhard Suphan 33 volumes, (Berlin, 1877-1913, Reprint Hildesheim, 1967), are cited by volume and page.

rather than be judged by absolute timeless standards. "If the Greek could already so misjudge the Egyptian; and the Oriental could already so hate the Egyptian; it would seem to me, that our first thought should be to study him strictly in his own place. Otherwise we will see nothing other than the most distorted caricature, especially from the vantage point of Europe."(16)

Herder made this insight the centre of his historical, social, and political understanding. But the source of this insight, which I call contextual understanding, has been a matter of much dispute. The controversy has centered around the relationship of Herder's thought about man and society to the dominant intellectual outlook of his age. The traditional interpretation of Herder has seen his historical approach developing in opposition to the mechanistic, soulless rationalism of the Enlightenment, especially in its French version. In this view the philosophes' application of the scientific method reduced man to the status of a machine.(17) This interpretation is, of course drawn from Herder's own view of the matter as

(16) J.G. Herder, Yet Another Philosophy of History for the Education of Humanity, translated by Eva Herzfeld, (New York, 1968), p. 166; cf. p. 194. Quotations from this translation will be cited as Herzfeld.

(17) Isaiah Berlin, "The Counter Enlightenment," in Against the Current, (London, 1980), p. 12.

expressed in Essay on the Origin of Language (1772) and Yet Another Philosophy of History (1774).(18) However, the most influential interpretation which sees Herder in this light is Friedrich Meinecke's Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook.(19)

Meinecke, although not entirely insensitive to Herder's intellectual debt to the Enlightenment, saw him as part of the rise of what he called historism, which culminated in the German historical school of Leopold von Ranke in the nineteenth century. Meinecke viewed historism as a reaction against the western intellectual tradition, especially that of the French Enlightenment. Meinecke argued that the Enlightenment had attempted to understand history and society through the use of general laws derived from a conception of invariable human nature. "Man, it was maintained, with his reason and his passions, his virtues and his vices, had remained basically the same in all periods of which we have any knowledge."(20)

(18) J.G. Herder, Yet Another Philosophy of History; J.G. Herder, Essay on the Origin of Language, in Herder on Social and Political Culture, translated and edited by F.M. Barnard, (London, 1969), pp. 198-9. Quotations from this anthology will be cited as Barnard.

(19) Friedrich Meinecke, Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook. (London: 1972). Originally Die Entstehung des Historismus (1936).

(20) Meinecke, Historism, p. lv.

The result of this conception was that the thinkers of the Enlightenment were unable to grasp the individuality and variability of human existence because their conception of natural law and the uniformity of human nature imposed a uniformity upon history. The "...changes occurring in the field of history were now also brought under the strict control of mechanical causality to such a degree that even the internal changes in human nature appeared to be no more than rearrangements, under the influence of strict causality, of the same everlastingly recurring pattern of basic material."(21) He contrasted this generalizing approach with the individualizing approach of historicism(22) which saw history as a process in which "...the deepest-moving forces of history...[were]...the human mind and soul..."(23) The special quality of history could not be expressed in statements of general laws, but through the understanding of the individuality of human life and the infinite variety of individual historical forms through the passage of time.(24)

(21) ibid., p. 4; cf. pp. 59-61, 112.

(22) ibid., pp. lv-lvi; cf. Georg Iggers, "Historicism," Dictionary of the History of Ideas, (New York, 1968), II p. 457; Iggers, German Conception, p. 216.

(23) Meinecke, Historism, p. lv; cf. Iggers, German Conception, p. 31.

(24) Hans Meyerhoff, "Introduction," to The Philosophy of History in Our Time, p. 10.

For Meinecke it was this notion of individuality which was the key to historicism and the inability to comprehend individuality had vitiated prior attempts to understand history as a process of development. Historical development was the result of activity of these individualities which were the "...unique and irreplaceable manifestation of spiritual existence..."(25) They had their own innate principles which governed development and which were the manifestation in the material world of underlying ideas. These individualities could only be grasped through a supra-scientific method of intuition or empathy.(26) It is wiser, Meinecke believed, to use this method than to apply the methods of science which "...must lead inevitably to false results."(27)

While Meinecke was correct in arguing that Herder rejected the ideas of an invariable human nature and law-governed development in history, his interpretation failed to do justice to Herder's thought. As Allan Megill has shown, Meinecke based his interpretation on concepts

(25) Friedrich Meinecke, "Values and Causalities in History," in The Varieties of history from Voltaire to the Present, (New York, 1973), p. 283.

(26) ibid., p. 270; Georg Iggers, New Directions in European Historiography, (Middletown, Connecticut, 1984), p. 21.

(27) Meinecke, "Values and Causalities" p. 270.

and categories which arose out of a later and more metaphysical stage of historism.(28) The unwarranted imposition of these concepts creates a serious distortion of eighteenth century historical thought.(29) According to Megill, historism needs to be understood in its own context rather than in terms of the nineteenth century historism of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Leopold von Ranke which had attributed a metaphysical uniqueness and ineffability to all historical phenomena. While it may be true that the nineteenth century German historicists abandoned the use of causal explanation, this is certainly not true of Herder. He rejected neither causality nor determinism in favour of an irrationalist theory of intuitive understanding which would reveal the inner meaning of historical phenomena. Rather he distinguished causality in the natural world and causality in the human world.(30) Herder rejected the use of what he called the mechanical causality of the Enlightenment in the human world because human actions cannot be understood as conforming to causal laws in the same way as natural objects. Rather they must be understood in terms

(28) The later version of historism is often called historicism.

(29) Allan Megill, "Aesthetic Theory and Historical Consciousness in the Eighteenth Century." History and Theory, 17 (1978): 31;

(30) Barnard, Herder, note 14, p. 112.

of the intentions and desires of the agent. Human events have to be understood as deliberate actions and "...the ends or purposes which are involved will constitute the reason for their occurrence." (31) An explanation was needed of the ends or purposes for which human beings strive, rather than one in terms of the causes that preceded their activity. (32)

In contrast to the natural sciences which dealt with repeatable and unchangeable phenomena governed by the laws of nature, the objects of the human studies were different because they dealt with individual, culturally-bound motivations, intentions, and desires. Since human actions are motivated, not caused, the understanding of the human world cannot be gained by subsuming the actions of human beings under natural laws. (33) Herder's position differed from that of nineteenth century historicists like Ranke who also explained historical development in terms of motives in that for Herder motives were not grounded in unchangeable metaphysical ideas, but were learned through a process of social and cultural education.

(31) ibid., p. 114; cf. Isaiah Berlin, Vico and Herder, (New York, 1976), p. 154.

(32) Barnard, Herder, pp. 53, 115; Robert Brown, The Nature of Social Laws, (London, 1984), p. 2.

(33) Brown, Social Laws, pp. 2, 253.

But the essential issue here is Meinecke's claim that Herder in rejecting the causality of Enlightenment naturalism created "...a new ideal of historical research, namely to study historical structures such as poetry and see them as the products of an innermost necessity. Yet for the youthful Herder, this necessity could never be of a mechanical, but of a living kind, which could only be understood by a process of sympathetic identification."(34) It was through this method that Herder "...attempted to grasp the individuality of history..."(35) But empathy (Einfühlung) for Herder was not some mystical intuition or some irrational shortcut to knowledge or a forerunner of "thinking with one's blood."(36) Rather it was the necessary psychological preparation for the understanding of history and society and not some magical metaphysical method with which to appreciate the metaphysical individuality of historical phenomena or the idea lying behind the appearance. Only by assimilating Herder to the later historicism of Humboldt or Ranke was it possible for Meinecke to argue that Herder replaced the mechanistic conception of

(34) Meinecke, Historism, p. 311.

(35) ibid., p. 334; cf. p. 297.

(36) F.M. Barnard, "Sensibility, Self-Understanding, and Self-Redemption," Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, 1 (1977): 110. See below Chapter Six, pp. 149-50.

causality of the Enlightenment "...with a fabric of metaphysical and vitalistic forces."(37) Meinecke's interpretation of Herder's thought is fatally flawed because of his belief that all that was necessary was for historical understanding was empathetic understanding. He totally disregarded Herder's theoretical presuppositions about human nature and anthropology in favour of his irrationalist belief that it was possible to gain an understanding of the deeper meaning of historical realities through empathy which "...can give us an understanding of them, can give us a sympathetic sense of them through unmediated seeing."(38) Thus for Meinecke, theoretical structures or philosophical principles were not necessary for historical understanding, only "unmediated seeing".

This assimilation of Herder to nineteenth century historicism has led to a misinterpretation concerning his view of the state. Individuality for historicists was not limited to human individuals but was extended to collectivities, in particular the nation-state which Ranke conceived as "... a living being which by its nature incessantly grows and irresistibly progresses."(39) Georg

(37) Meinecke, Historism, p. 320.

(38) Meinecke, "Values and Causalities," p. 270; cf. Iggers, "Historicism," p. 460.

(39) Leopold von Ranke, A Dialogue on Politics (1836), in

Iggers, for instance, is incorrect when he attributes this view of the nation to Herder. "They possess a morphology; they are alive; they grow. They are not rational in character, but dynamic vital; things in themselves, not means. It is the historian's task to understand them. Nations have the characteristics of persons: they have a spirit and a life span. They are not a collection of individuals but are organisms."(40) It is only by assimilating Herder to the tradition of historicism that such an egregious error could be made. What constitutes a nation or in Herder's term a 'Volk' was the common cultural and linguistic tradition that they shared.(41) Every "...distinct community is a nation, having its own national culture as it has its own language."(42) Herder did not limit the Volk to what we would call the nation-state or the large political units of human history. All distinct human groups no matter how small or primitive form a

Theodore H. von Laue, Leopold Ranke: The Formative Years, (Princeton, 1950), p. 178.

(40) Iggers, German Conception, p. 35.

(41) F.M. Barnard, "National Culture and Political Legitimacy: Herder and Rousseau," The Journal of the History of Ideas, 44: (1983): 248. For a discussion of the difference between Herder's organic metaphor and the organicism of the political romantics see F.M. Barnard, "Metaphors, Laments, the Organic Community," Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, 32 (1966): 281-301.

(42) Herder, Ideas, 7.1, Barnard, p. 284.

national culture. The members of a Volk felt themselves to be part of a community whose identity was found in the possession of a common language, culture, traditions, and history. "Even the smallest of nations in any part of the globe, no matter how undeveloped it may be, cherishes in and through its language the history, the poetry and songs about the great deeds of its forefathers. The language is its collective treasure, the source of its social wisdom and communal self-respect." (43) The Volk was the natural unit of human society whose source of unity and legitimation was cultural, historical, and linguistic. (44) It was not any sort of metaphysical entity which existed independently of the members who made it up. (45)

In a similar way, Meinecke's interpretation has had the unfortunate effect not only of distorting Herder's thought but also of promoting a distorted view of Enlightenment thought on history and human nature. This interpretation of the movement and development of Herder's thinking

(43) Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 165.

(44) F.M. Barnard, "Introduction," to Herder on Social and Political Culture, (London, 1969), p. 7.

(45) Berlin, Vico and Herder, p. 198; Barnard, Herder, p. 164; Barnard, "Herder and Rousseau," p. 248; G.A. Wells, "Herder's Two Philosophies of History," The Journal of the History of Ideas, 21 (1960): 530-1.

has been widely accepted in some form by such influential figures as Ernst Cassirer.(46)

Cassirer maintained that Herder broke the spell of analytic thinking and the principle of identity in social and historical understanding by rejecting the use of abstract generalizations in favour of an understanding based on an awareness of the individuality and uniqueness of historical phenomena. "History dispels the illusion of identity; it knows nothing really identical, nothing that ever recurs in the same form....Every human condition has its peculiar value; every individual phase of history has its immanent validity and necessity."(47)

Robert Clark in his biography of Herder accepts Meinecke's definition of historicism as the "...replacement of a generalizing consideration of human-historical forces by an individualizing consideration."(48) In contrast to Herder who made the center of gravity of history the individual and the individual epoch, "...the center of gravity of the typical Enlightened philosophy of history

(46) Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, (Princeton, 1951), p. 231; Ernst Cassirer, The Problem of Knowledge, (New Haven and London: 1950), note 1, pp. 217-8.

(47) Cassirer, Enlightenment, p. 231.

(48) Clark, Herder, p. 191.

still lay outside the individual man and the individual epoch. It lay outside the entire course of history itself, and was therefore metaphysical."(49) Lewis Spitz claimed that: "With his grasp of historic individualities Herder opened up a new world for the historian."(50) Spitz sees Herder's relationship to the Enlightenment as adversarial, since Herder attacked the pride in reason of the Enlightenment. "The fossilized rationalism of the century, he felt, had been remiss in the promotion of real human values. Marked by a decline in faith and morality, by virtues stemming from weakness, by artificial art and insipid literature, it had but little of which to boast."(51) This is nothing more than the repetition of what Herder himself had to say in the Yet Another Philosophy of History about the lifeless, rationalistic, mechanistic world-view of the Enlightenment and is just another example of the tendency to accept Herder's own criticism of the Enlightenment uncritically.(52) K. Michael Seibt argues that Herder's method of explanation is made possible "...through the

(49) ibid.

(50) Lewis Spitz, "Natural Law and the Theory of History in Herder," The Journal of the History of Ideas, 16: (1955): 459.

(51) ibid., p. 453.

(52) ibid., p. 458.

principle of individuality and feeling."(53) With this new hermeneutic tool Herder broke with the Enlightenment principle of identity.(54) Similarly he believes that "...Enlightenment historiography had seen very little development in history. The Enlightenment had insisted that history conformed to natural laws which did not develop but rather were eternal and unchangeable."(55) Trygve R. Tholfsen, argued that Herder "...launched a frontal attack on historiography of the Enlightenment and called for a different approach to the past, which he expressed in terms of the historicist ideas of individuality and development."(56) In a recent paper Brian Whitton again repeats the view of the Enlightenment that was propagated by Meinecke. "Against the static, ahistorical conception of human nature espoused by the philosophy of the Enlightenment, Herder opposes a radical new developmental account of human nature and reason....Human nature is an ever-changing, constantly developing substance

(53) K. Michael Seibt, "Einführung, Language, and Herder's Philosophy of History," in The Quest for the New Science: Language and Thought in Eighteenth Century Science, (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois, 1979), p. 22.

(54) ibid., p. 23.

(55) ibid., pp. 20-1.

(56) Trygve R. Tholfsen, Historical Thinking, (New York, 1967), p. 127.

altering in response to diverse historical needs and circumstances."(57)

Megill's counter-thesis to Meinecke is that the defining characteristic of historicism is contextual evaluation, which, as noted above, I call "contextual understanding". This approach recognized that the individual historical object must be understood and evaluated within its own context and external standards of judgement cannot be imposed. The later notion of metaphysical individuality is alien to eighteenth century thinkers who had argued that the historian must take account of the particularity or individuality of the object on naturalistic grounds and is not equivalent to Meinecke's "individualizing observation".(58)

Megill sees the source of contextual understanding in what Erich Auerbach called aesthetic historicism. Works of art had to be understood as products of the conditions in which they were created and evaluated by their own standards of aesthetic perfection which were internal to a

(57) Brian J. Whitton, "Herder's Critique of the Enlightenment: Cultural Community versus Cosmopolitan Rationalism," History and Theory, 27 (1988): 150-1.

(58) Megill, "Aesthetic Historism", p. 34.

culture.(59) Aesthetic historism investigated the circumstances of creation of a work of art. Art was thus the unique response of an individual to his own situation.(60) While Meinecke had already argued for the importance of aesthetics in shaping Herder's historical understanding, Megill points out that Meinecke's view of historism and the "new aesthetic sense" as primarily a German movement prevented him from recognizing "...the decisiveness of aesthetics for the historist tradition as a whole..."(61)

But the source, history, and influence of aesthetic historism are no longer in dispute. While I accept Megill's view that contextual understanding is the essence of historism, the problem, which Megill raised without solving, is to explain the change from aesthetic historism to general historism: "...from those thinkers who were concerned with the contextual evaluation of aesthetic objects, to those who were concerned with the contextual evaluation of cultural artifacts in general."(62) The answer to this problem, I believe requires an investigation

(59) Erich Auerbach, "Vico and Aesthetic Historism," in Scenes from the Drama of European Literature, (Minneapolis, (198), pp. 183-4.

(60) Wellek, Modern Criticism, I, p. 124.

(61) Megill, "Aesthetic Historism", p. 59.

(62) ibid., p. 50-1.

of Herder's anthropology, in particular his notion of culture. Herder created a fundamentally new concept of culture which while building on the work of his Enlightenment predecessors transcended the terms in which the debate had been carried out. Like the anthropology of the Enlightenment, Herder's anthropology had its source in a conception of human organization or human nature. The "...organization of the creature itself, constitutes the most sure direction, the most perfect determination, that nature could impress upon her work."(63) It is my contention that the source of his belief in the uniqueness and individuality of human life was based in his anthropology not in a specious metaphysical conception of individuality.

The importance of anthropology for Herder has not gone unnoticed. Isaiah Berlin for instance commented that: "Anthropology, not metaphysics nor logic...is for Herder the key to understanding of human beings and their world."(64) In his recent biography of Herder, Wulf Koepke asserts that his theory of language "...is inseparable from his anthropology and his philosophy of history."(65) Christian Grawe has contended that Herder's "...philosophy

(63) Herder, Ideas, 3.4, Churchill, p. 59; cf.

(64) Berlin, Vico and Herder, p. 170.

(65) Wulf Koepke, Johann Gottfried Herder, (Boston, 1987), p. 25.

of history must be conceived as part of his anthropology."(66) Grawe notes that both Dilthey and Meinecke saw Herder as the forerunner of nineteenth century historicism but this was done "...without investigating the underlying anthropology."(67)

The reason for this, I believe, is that in Herder's earlier work in the philosophy of history, Another Philosophy of History of 1774, which Meinecke considered to be the high point of Herder's career,(68) there were no explicit anthropological propositions about cultural transmission, language, the nature of the human mind or the differences between man and animal---all the central issues of the Essay on Origin of Language which was written in 1770 and published in 1772. Furthermore Meinecke did not mention the Origin of Language in connection with Another Philosophy of History. In the Ideas, which Meinecke considered to be "...a retrograde step as compared with the Sketch of 1774...",(69) Herder outlined his anthropological theory in the early chapters and then used it as the basis of his explanation of the development of history in the

(66) Christian Grawe, Herders Kulturanthropologie, (Bonn, 1967), p. 16.

(67) ibid., p. 113.

(68) Meinecke, Historism, p. 298.

(69) ibid., p. 354.

later sections. While Grawe has noted this parallel structure between the early and late works, he did not investigate Herder's relationship with the Enlightenment inquiry into man and society other than to comment on the influence of Montesquieu's theory of climate.(70) He follows the line that: "Herder superseded the anthropology of constant human nature and put in its place a anthropology of culturally variable human beings."(71)

Herder first expressed his theory of human nature and culture within the context of the Enlightenment debate on the origin of language. This debate was not simply a question of the origin of language, but rather it involved issues concerning human nature and the distinctive qualities that separated man from animal.(72) Herder challenged the widely accepted views of language, human nature, culture, and history. Yet a closer examination reveals that he was working within the same tradition, facing the same problems, and using similar naturalistic methods as the Enlightenment theorists whom he so roundly

(70) Grawe, Herders Kulturanthropologie, p. 112.

(71) ibid., p. 103.

(72) Ulrich Ricken, "Linguistique et anthropologie chez Condillac," in Condillac et les problèmes de langage, (Geneva and Paris, 1982), pp. 81-2; E.J. Hundert, "The Thread of Language and the Web of Dominion: Mandeville to Rousseau and Back," Eighteenth Century Studies, 21: (1987-8): 170; Koepke, Herder, p. 25.

and completely condemned. The traditional view of Herder as the implacable enemy of the Enlightenment while not entirely false, gives one a less than complete picture of the matter. His relationship to the Enlightenment as a whole is a complex and convoluted one and cannot be reduced to a simple formula like Meinecke's, which makes too absolute a dichotomy between Herder and the Enlightenment and which involved significant distortion of Enlightenment views. Many of Herder's seminal ideas about human nature, society, and history developed within the context of the Enlightenment so that the traditional dichotomy, while not entirely incorrect, is misleading. While Herder did advance beyond the Enlightenment, it is necessary to apply Herder's own insight that a writer or thinker does not exist in a vacuum; that his work must be understood in its own context, as a product of a specific environment, as part of a tradition. Hence it is simply not correct to accept Herder's self-evaluation of his relationship to the Enlightenment especially in its French variety. His thought about these issues can be seen as much a continuation of as it is a reaction to the Enlightenment. In the next chapter I shall locate Herder in the context of the Enlightenment project to create a secular, naturalistic account of human history, as well as outline the elements of Herder's two philosophies of history. In that latter

area, his distinctiveness from the philosophes is certainly much more apparent.

CHAPTER TWO

NATURALISM AND METAPHYSICS

Whatever was to move man and make him more human had to be capable of being thought and felt in purely human terms....Even in those instances where God is said to have revealed Himself to man, His words and actions were interpreted in human terms and in accordance with the prevailing temper of the times.(1)

It is no valid objection to the wisdom of Providence, that it carries forward its work by instruments, and attains its Divine purposes by human means.(2)

As I have outlined in the introduction, many critics have claimed that Herder transcended the shallow ahistorical outlook that had been characteristic of the Enlightenment. This interpretation pits Herder against the philosophes, for most of whom "...history was often an interesting idea rather than a deep faith..."(3) Yet such an interpretation fails to recognize the influence that the Enlightenment had on Herder. I am not implying that there

(1) Herder, Ideas, 4.6, Barnard, p. 272.

(2) J.G. Herder, The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, (1782-83), (Naperville, Illinois, 1833, 1971), I p. 269.

(3) R.N. Stromberg, "History in the Eighteenth Century," The Journal of the History of Ideas, 12 (1951): 298; See above Chapter One, pp. 17-20.

were no significant differences, but on such fundamental issues as human activity being the motivating force of historical change, on a naturalistic explanation of historical development, on the notion of cultural development and transmission, Herder and the philosophes were in agreement. Yet it cannot be denied that Herder continued to search for metaphysical meaning in his explanation of the historical process. Thus Herder's conception of the historical process combined elements of Enlightenment naturalism with elements of Christian Providentialism which the Enlightenment generally rejected. Herder's views on history therefore cannot be interpreted simply as a rejection of the Enlightenment viewpoint.(4)

This kind of interpretation depends on a view of the Enlightenment as shallow and lacking historical sense. However, an age which produced David Hume's The History of England (1754-61), Edward Gibbon's The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1776-88), and Voltaire's The Age of Louis XIV (1751), and Essay on Manners (1769), to mention only the most famous works,(5) cannot be dismissed by the vacuous assertion that the Enlightenment was "...not at all

(4) Trygve R. Tholfsen, Historical Thinking, (New York, 1967), p. 128; cf. pp. 7, 136.

(5) Peter Gay, "The Party of Humanity," in The Party of Humanity, (New York: 1964), pp. 273-4.

concerned with history. In fact this enlightenment was characterized by an attitude of profound indifference, not to say aversion, to history."(6)

Neither is it correct to assert that the Enlightenment conception of historical development was simply a continuation or a secularization of Christian conceptions as Carl Becker and others have claimed.(7) Such assertions distort the historical context in which the Enlightenment thinkers were working. Instead of a purported continuity between the Enlightenment and Christianity, Herder himself best exemplified this continuity. It is somewhat ironic that the Enlightenment could be charged with continuing Christian ways of thought when the intention of many philosophes was to destroy the Christian conception of human nature and history. While the Christian explanation of the natural world had been decisively overthrown by the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, the religious outlook had not then been challenged by the new science and

(6) Paul Schubert, "The Twentieth-Century West and the Ancient Near East," in The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East, New Haven, 1955, p. 315.

(7) Carl Becker, The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers, (New Haven, 1932), pp. 31, 102, 104-5, 129-30; cf. Peter Gay, "Carl Becker's 'Heavenly City' Revisited," in The Party of Humanity, (New York: 1964), pp. 206-7; Margaret Hodgen, Early Anthropology, (Philadelphia, 1964), pp. 9, 499, 511; Schubert, "Twentieth-Century West," p. 317.

indeed much effort had been expended in harmonizing the new science and the old religion.(8) Only in the eighteenth century was there the effort to extend the scientific methods to the human world. The task of the philosophers, historians, and aspiring social scientists of the eighteenth century Enlightenment was to replace the Christian account of the human world with a secular naturalistic account of human origin and development. History was no longer the province of the sacred or miraculous but of the secular, human, and natural.(9)

When Gibbon gave his account of the rise of Christianity in the infamous Chapters 15 and 16 of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire he paid lip-service to the traditional notion of the primary cause of this development being the "...convincing evidence of the doctrine itself, and the ruling Providence of its great Author."(10) But he explained the success of Christianity by the secondary

(8) Peter Gay, "The Unity of the French Enlightenment," in The Party of Humanity, (New York: 1964), pp. 122-3.

(9) Richard H. Popkin, "Hume: Philosophical Versus Prophetic Historian," in David Hume Many-Sided Genius, (Norman, Oklahoma, 1976), pp. 83-4, 89-90; Roger L. Emerson, "Conjectural History and Scottish Philosophers," Historical Papers of the Canadian Historical Association (1984): 82.

(10) Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, (1776-88), (New York, 1974), Chapter 15, Volume 2 p. 2.

causes which were "...the passions of the human heart, and the general circumstances of mankind..."(11) Gibbon professed to be shocked by the reception of the pious to his work. "I had likewise flattered myself that an age of light and liberty would receive without scandal an enquiry into the human causes of the progress and establishment of Christianity."(12) No longer was history seen as the unfolding of a Divine plan moved by the hand of God who intervened in human affairs to achieve his ends. The fundamental assumption of this project was the idea that the motivating force in history was human action. Development in history could only be comprehended as human activity in relation to the world of nature and society independently of any supernatural reality.(13)

A more serious criticism of the Enlightenment, which I outlined in detail in the introduction, has been that the belief in invariable human nature made any form of historical understanding impossible. This accusation was central to Friedrich Meinecke's attack on the Enlightenment concept

(11) ibid.

(12) Edward Gibbon, Memoirs of My Life, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1984), p. 159.

(13) G. Christie Wasberg, "'Transcendence' and 'Immanence' in the Philosophy of History from Enlightenment to Romanticism," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 58 (1967): 1829-38.

of the historical process. He argued that the belief in a uniform human nature precluded real historical development and allowed only a rearrangement of the same basic material.(14)

But the use of uniform human nature as a conception in Enlightenment thinking is a much more complicated issue than Meinecke and other interpreters would have us believe. Some form of historical understanding is not automatically precluded nor is a notion of historical development ruled out. Neither does the notion of an invariable human nature imply that nothing substantial had changed in history nor that detailed historical examination was unnecessary.

Meinecke's understanding of the Enlightenment conception of human nature and historical development is fatally flawed. The concept of a basic human nature was not some sort of atomic particle or fixed essence, but rather it was the regular operations and development of mental faculties. "Our first aim, which we ought never to lose sight of, is the study of the human understanding--l'esprit humain--not in order to discover its nature, but to know its operations, to observe with what art they are combined, and how we ought to conduct them, in order to acquire all the

(14) Friedrich Meinecke, Historism, (London: 1972), pp. lv-lvi, 4, 59-61, 112;

knowledge of which we are capable."(15) All the higher operations of the mind were based on these primary operations such as the ability to perceive sensations and form them into ideas or the ability to feel pain and pleasure. Human beings possessed certain potential faculties but these faculties were only developed through experience and the level to which they would develop depended on the particular society. All humans had the same potential physical and mental equipment at birth and any modifications were the result of the effect of the social and physical environment. "A human being, as he comes originally from the hand of nature, is everywhere the same. At his first appearance in the state of infancy, whether it be among the rudest savages or in the most civilized nation, we can discern no quality which marks any distinction or superiority."(16) This sensationalist psychology was used to explain historical development as the interaction of human faculties with the physical and cultural environment.(17)

(15) Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge (1746) (Gainesville, 1971), pp. 6-7.

(16) William Robertson, History of America (1777), in J.S. Slotkin, Readings in Early Anthropology, (Chicago, 1965), p. 427.

(17) Keith Baker, Condorcet, (Chicago and London, 1975), p. 356.

In their attempt to replace the Christian account of human existence with a naturalistic account of human development, many Enlightenment theorists postulated some form of prior pre-human or primitive state. The human race had developed from this primitive state to its present state of civilization.(18) In the earliest stage of human development, which was often identified as the state of nature, humans were more or less uncultured and their mental faculties were undeveloped. "The discoveries of ancient and modern navigators, and the domestic history, or tradition, of the most enlightened nations, represent the human savage, naked in both mind and body, and destitute of laws, of arts, of ideas, and almost of language. From this abject condition, perhaps the most primitive and universal state of man, he has gradually risen..."(19)

Man was naturally endowed with perfectibility or natural inventiveness, "...that wonderful capacity for the improvement of his faculties with which he is endowed."(20)

(18) Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind (1793), (Westport, Connecticut, 1979), p. 8.

(19) Gibbon, Decline and Fall, Chapter 38, Volume 4, pp. 179-80.

(20) John Millar, The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks (1771, 1779), in William Lehmann, John Millar of Glasgow, (Cambridge, 1960), p. 176; cf. Anthony Pagden, "The 'Defense of Civilization' in Eighteenth

As a result of this innate quality of intelligence, man emerged from this pre-cultural state through his invention of language and primitive technologies--the first elements of culture.(21) These discoveries were preserved in culture and passed on from generation to generation. Thus the ideas of cultural transmission and progressive development which were essential to Herder's understanding of human existence were equally essential to many Enlightenment thinkers and can be considered almost commonplaces. "Men on the other hand, have the advantage of being able to communicate all their thoughts. Each one learns from the other, each one adds what he draws from his own experience and he differs in his manner of activity only because he has begun by copying. Thus from generation to generation, mankind accumulates increasing knowledge."(22) Culture was thus conceived of as the accumulation of applied intellec-

Century Social Theory," History of the Human Sciences, 1 (1988): 36; Lia Formigari, "Language and Society in the Late Eighteenth Century," The Journal of the History of Ideas, 35 (1974): 275.

(21) Condorcet, Sketch, pp. 8-9, 14-15; Baker, Condorcet, p. 361.

(22) Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, Traite des Animaux (1755), Oeuvres Philosophiques de Condillac, (Paris, 1947-51), i.379. cf. Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, baron de l'Aulne, Successive Advances of the Human Mind (1751), in Turgot on Progress, Sociology and Economics, (London, 1973), p. 63.

tual effort in solving the problems of life.(23) Progress or development was possible because humans were able to build on the discoveries of the past. They do not have to re-discover fire or the law of gravity every generation.(24) In "...the human kind the species has a progress as well as the individual; they build in every subsequent age on foundations formerly laid; and in a succession of years, tend to a perfection in the application of the faculties, to which the aid of long experience is required, and to which many generations must have combined their endeavours."(25)

As the human race advanced through the development of its mental faculties, it became more cultured or refined. While on the other hand, human faculties could only develop to the prevailing level of culture. The "...disposition and manners of men are formed by their situation, and arise from the state of society in which they live. The moment that begins to vary, the character of a people must change. In proportion as it advances in improvement, their manners

(23) I will discuss the Enlightenment concept of culture in more detail in Chapter Three.

(24) Jean Le Rond D'Alembert, Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot (1751), (Indianapolis and New York, 1963), pp. 14-15, 61.

(25) Adam Ferguson, Essay on the History of Civil Society, (1767), (Edinburgh, 1966), p. 5.

refine, their powers and talents are called forth."(26) Since there was a reciprocal relationship between the development of human faculties and culture, this provided an objective means of determining progress. The higher the level of culture, the higher the development of man's mental powers.(27) "As enlightenment increases, methods of instruction will be correspondingly perfected; the human mind will seem to grow and its limits to recede."(28)

This positive notion of culture or civilization as the accumulation of knowledge or ideas was contrasted with a negative notion which went under the rubric of custom, habit, ignorance, superstition, error, or tradition which was seen as a retarding force which kept man from developing.(29) "Ignorance is the original attribute of man in his uncultured and isolated state; in society it is

(26) Robertson, History of America, Slotkin, p. 429; cf. p. 427.

(27) Condorcet, Sketch, p. 196; Pagden, "Defense of Civilization," p. 39.

(28) Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, Reception Speech at the French Academy (1782), in Condorcet: Selected Writings, (Indianapolis and New York, 1976), p. 7; cf. Condorcet, Sketch, p. 199.

(29) Henry Home, Lord Kames, Sketches of the History of Man (1778), (Hildesheim, 1968), Volume 1, p. 98.

man's most disastrous infirmity."(30) It was the task of the Enlightenment to destroy prejudice and redirect human intelligence "...which had been obliged to follow the false directions imposed on it by the absurd beliefs that were implanted in each generation in infancy with the terrors of superstition and the fear of tyranny."(31)

Progress was thus a natural process driven by the development of man's natural faculties. The processes occurring in the present state of civilization were the same as at the beginning of history only they have become more refined and systematic. "The latest efforts of human invention are but the continuation of certain devices which were practiced in the earliest stages of the world, and in the rudest state of mankind. What the savage projects, or observes, in the forest, are the steps which led nations, more advanced, from the architecture of the cottage to that of the palace, and conducted the human mind from the perceptions of sense, to the general conclusions of science."(32)

(30) Francois Quesnay, "Natural Right" (1765), in The Economics of Physiocracy: Essays and Translations, (London, 1962), p. 55.

(31) Condorcet, Sketch, p. 163; cf. pp. 23-4., 53. "It is in our infancy that we imbibe those prejudices which retard the progress of knowledge, and lead us into so many errors." Condillac, Essay, p. 319.

(32) Ferguson, History of Civil Society, p. 9.

Thus the differences between cultures or cultural stages were the result of a higher cultivation or higher development of human faculties which all men possess in potential but which can only reach their full potential in civilization. Historical development was not simply a rearrangement of a basic human nature, as Meinecke claimed, and human beings were not the same in all periods. Differences between humans were the result of social conditions and historical development. Culture was both the objective record of human achievement and the means by which that achievement was reproduced and continued. Thus the notion of cultural transmission, which was so central to Herder's understanding of historical development, was just as central to other Enlightenment authors.

While Herder shared this notion of the unity of history as a process of cultural development, his conception of the nature of this process was fundamentally different. He rejected the fundamental premise of the Enlightenment model that the history of human development had been its "...progress from the savage state to its highest civilization and improvement." (33) There had never been a time when man was without culture nor were the mental faculties of prior human cultures any less-developed

(33) Kames, Sketches, I p. 1.

than modern man. "The philosopher of Europe cannot name a single faculty of the mind that is peculiar to himself ..."(34) Herder's notion that culture was necessary to human existence is similar to that of modern anthropologists who assert that culture is "...man's principal means of adapting himself to the physical environment..."(35) It was for this reason that Herder rejected the categorization of other contemporary cultures as being less-developed or primitive. He did not place other technologically less-advanced cultures within a framework of cultural evolution nor did he believe that it was the duty of Europeans to civilize them to get them back on the natural course of development from which they had strayed.(36) Nor did Herder classify different elements of a particular culture into positive and negative elements. His concept of culture was holistic and extended to all aspects of human life, not just to the accumulation of knowledge and increasing rationality. Culture for Herder was not higher culture. He did not focus narrowly on innovation and improvement but stressed equally the importance of tradition in culture and he rejected the view that certain

(34) Herder, Ideas, 9.2, Churchill, p. 236.

(35) M.F. Ashley Montagu, "Introduction" to Culture and the Evolution of Man, (New York 1962), p. ix;

(36) Pagden, "Defense of Civilization," p. 34.

values were the culmination of the historical process and could be used to judge the past.

Yet while he rejected this specific idea of development and progress, he accepted the idea of human history as a naturalistic process of cultural development. "Roman civilization hailed from Greece; Greece owed its culture to Asia and Egypt; Egypt to Asia, China perhaps to Egypt, and so on; thus the chain extends from the first link to the last and will one day encircle perhaps the whole world." (37)

Since each succeeding or contemporary culture learns from other cultures, it was necessary to understand this relationship of the individual to the chain of history and culture otherwise, one would "...fail to come to grips with the nature of man and his actual history. For no one of us became man 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 his life, and hence with his countrymen and forefathers." (38) Man is dependent on others and his development as an individual does not occur

(37) Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 173.

(38) Herder, Ideas, 9.1, Barnard, pp. 312-13; cf. pp. 314-15; Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 165.

in isolation from society. The essential characteristic of history "...is the continuous interaction of individuals. This process alone makes man a human being in the proper sense of the word."(39) It is this chain of development of education that makes it possible for Herder to speak of humanity as a whole and to speak of an education of humanity. Since our status as human beings at any point in the historical continuum is a result of past human endeavours, Herder saw "...the history of mankind is necessarily a whole, i.e. a chain formed from the first link to the last by the moulding process of socialization and tradition."(40)

Herder first asserted this point in 1770 in the Origin of Language essay, presumably in a fit of premature senility, if one accepts Meinecke's interpretation. Education "...provides the chain of continuity between parents and children, so that the succession of the generations forms a chain of unity as well as a chain of continuity, in which each link is only inserted, as it were, between two other links, in order to receive and transmit the cultural heritage."(41) Herder compared human life to animal exis-

(39) Herder, Ideas, 9.1, Barnard, p. 313.

(40) ibid., p. 312; cf. Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 167.

(41) ibid., p. 170.

tence in which "...there is no chain of spiritual progression nor unity in the sense in which nature had ordained it for man...The tie formed by education and the transmission of culture--so essential to man--is missing."(42) Thus while Herder accepted certain aspects of the Enlightenment view of historical development, he rejected the basic conception of an evolutionary or developmental theory of culture in which prior stages were considered to be less-cultured.

If there is this continuity in Herder's approach with Enlightenment naturalism in his understanding and explanation of historical development, why has this continuity has not been seen? First of all, there is his rejection of the generalizing and comparative approach of the Enlightenment in favour of his conception of contextual understanding. Other cultures could only be understood as unique and incomparable phenomena embedded in time and place. The values, beliefs, and ideas of a particular culture could only be understood as they themselves lived them and were motivated by them. Other cultures cannot be classified and judged in terms of supposed external or timeless standards. Secondly, there are his obviously metaphysical views about

(42) ibid., pp. 162-3.

the development of history and to understand this requires an investigation into his philosophy of history.

In general scholars have divided Herder's views on the philosophy of history into two periods corresponding to the two major works in the genre that he wrote: Yet Another Philosophy of History for the Education of Humanity (1774) and the Ideas for a Philosophy of History of Mankind (1784-1791). The interpretation of Herder's philosophy of history has centered around the obvious differences and striking similarities between these two works. In his early period he appears as the opponent of Enlightenment methods of understanding history and as the forerunner of Romanticism and historicism. In this view, he made a great progressive step forward in intellectual understanding through the creation of an entirely new way of thinking about human society and history. Many interpreters see the second half of his career as a return to Enlightenment ways of thinking.(43) They attribute his rejection of the insights of his youth, as F.M. Barnard notes, either to intellectual enfeeblement or to a mature aversion to mysticism or irrationalism.(44)

(43) Meinecke, Historicism, p. 349.

(44) F.M. Barnard, "Introduction," to Herder on Social and Political Culture, (London, 1969), p. ix.

Depending on the point of view of the commentator, one period is generally preferred to the other. The major proponent of the first period was Friedrich Meinecke, who said of Herder's early period that he "...produced his greatest work as a historical thinker and pioneer of historicism." (45) Similarly Rudolf Stadelmann believed that as Herder grew older he lost the historical sense he had shown in Yet Another Philosophy of History, "The Humanitätsbriefe and even the Ideas are further removed from the true historical sense than Herder's youthful works." (46) Both Stadelmann and Meinecke believed that Herder's early works were more metaphysical and therefore preferable to his later works, which they believed were more empirical and scientific in orientation.

Alexander Gillies, on the other hand, condemned Yet Another Philosophy of History and claimed that it "...has really nothing to do with history in the proper sense. It cannot claim to show great historical insight. It is a purely imaginative interpretation." (47) Other writers such

(45) Meinecke, Historism, p. 298.

(46) Rudolf Stadelmann, Der historisch Sinn bei Herder, (Halle/Saale, 1928), quoted in G.A. Wells, "Herder's Two Philosophies of History," The Journal of the History of Ideas, 21 (1960): 527.

(47) Alexander Gillies, "Auch Eine Philosophie Der Geschichte Zur Bildung Der Menschheit," in The Era of Goethe (Oxford, 1959), pp. 72-3.

as G.A. Wells and William C. Lehmann have seen Herder's importance in his contribution to the development of sociology. In this light Wells sees Herder's early work as less important and less coherent than the Ideas. He judges Yet Another Philosophy of History, as "...disappointingly superficial and fanciful. It is vitiated by the attempt to draw parallels between the progress of the human race and the development of organisms."(48) This is, of course, the criticism that Herder himself made of it in the Preface to the Ideas.(49) Wells sees induction, rather than the systematization and mysticism for which Stadelmann had praised Herder, as the main thrust and improvement of the Ideas. He sees Herder as "...torn between two impulses, the one scientific and the other sentimental and even mystical, and that when he wrote his Ideas the former was more often in evidence than when as a young man, he wrote his Auch eine Philosophie. To my mind this makes the Ideas the more valuable work."(50)

Meinecke as well saw a more inductive approach as characteristic of Herder's later work, though he did not

(48) G.A. Wells, Herder and After, ('S-Gravenhage, 1959), p. 14.

(49) Herder, Ideas, Preface, Churchill, p. v.

(50) G.A. Wells, "Herder's Two Philosophies of History," The Journal of the History of Ideas, 21 (1960): 528.

consider this to be an improvement. "What was new...was a firm intention not simply to be content with feeling, but to launch out into vigorous inductive research."(51) W.C. Lehmann argues that while Herder had a strong teleological and religious element, in his writing his "mysticism" has often been overstated and he remained consistently naturalistic in his explanations.(52)

Even a cursory examination of the Ideas reveals, if not mysticism, certainly metaphysics. To say that Herder went from a mystical or irrationalist view of history in his early work to a naturalistic, scientific one in the Ideas is too simple a resolution of a complex issue. Herder was indeed consistently naturalistic in his explanations of historical development not only in his later work but right from the beginning. Herder shared the naturalism of the Enlightenment attempt to construct a secular explanation of history and human development, as I have outlined above.(53) Yet at the same time he deviated from the Enlightenment in trying to understand the meaning of history in supernatural or metaphysical terms.

(51) Meinecke, Historism, p. 343.

(52) William C. Lehmann, "Herder's Contribution toward an Empirical Sociology and Cultural Anthropology," Sociologus, 10 (1960): 18.

(53) Berlin, Vico and Herder, p. 150.

There has been a fundamental mistake made in the understanding of Herder's theory of history, mostly because of the failure to realize that Herder was using two conceptions of historical change. It is the merit of F.M. Barnard's interpretation to give equal weight to the metaphysical and naturalistic elements in Herder's thought and to see the tension between them. The first was a naturalistic philosophy of history which explained historical change purely in terms of natural causation and the other a metaphysical philosophy of history which saw the meaning of history in some extra-historical force outside of history. The confusion is not surprising, since Herder himself never made this distinction and in fact tried to harmonize these two conceptions.(54)

A metaphysical philosophy of history involves questions about the meaning or purpose of history and the direction in which it is developing. It is "...a systematic interpretation of universal history in accordance with a principle by which historical events and successions are unified and directed toward an ultimate meaning."(55) Historical change is the result of Providence or some great

(54) F.M. Barnard, Self-Direction and Political Legitimacy: Rousseau and Herder, (Oxford, 1988), p. 183.

(55) Karl Löwith, Meaning in History, (Chicago and London, 1949), p. 1.

impersonal force such as reason, which reduces human beings to the status of passive pawns whose every action is determined.(56) There is a purpose or power beyond this reality which guides or controls history.(57) The ultimate or real meaning of history can only be given in terms of this higher reality even if it was conceived as a power or force which worked through the actions of individuals. The more sophisticated providentialist theorists such as Bossuet thought that God directly intervened only on some occasions.(58)

A naturalistic philosophy of history, on the other hand, explained historical change and development naturalistically--as the effects of causes in which human agency is the prime motive force. This approach rejected the use of any outside agency or higher power such as Divine will or Providential intervention to explain historical development. Both these views are concerned with the causes of historical change, and both are philosophies of

(56) Isaiah Berlin, "Historical Inevitability," in Four Essays on Liberty, (Oxford, 1979), pp. 50-1.

(57) Hans Meyerhoff, "Introduction," to The Philosophy of History in Our Time: An Anthology, (Garden City New York, 1959), p. 3; G.A. Wells, "Herder's Determinism," The Journal of the History of Ideas, 19 (1958): 111.

(58) Ronald L. Meek, Social Science and the Ignoble Savage, (Cambridge and London, 1976), pp. 23-4.

history, but for a naturalistic philosophy of history the explanation of historical change is found within the historical process, rather than by reference to some power or being outside the natural world. As Herder emphasized in the Ideas, human history is purely natural history and he explicitly rejected any explanation which transcended the natural order: "But as the modern Greeks have become what they are only by the course of time, through a given series of causes and effects, so did the ancient; and not less any nation upon Earth. The whole history of mankind is a pure natural history of human powers, actions, and propensities, modified by time and place."(59)

Yet it cannot be said that Herder held the naturalistic view to the exclusion of the other. As F.M. Barnard and others have observed, there was a parallelism in Herder's thought between his attempts to give a naturalistic account of historical change and a providential view which saw history as the necessary development of transcendental purposes.(60)

(59) Herder, Ideas, 13.7, Churchill, p. 392.

(60) F.M. Barnard, "Herder's Treatment of Causation and Continuity in History," The Journal of the History of Ideas, 24: (1963): 200; W.H. Bruford, Culture and Society in Classical Weimar, (London, 1962), p. 208; Ernst Cassirer, The Problem of Knowledge, (New Haven and London: 1950), p. 218.

As well as this parallel between naturalism and metaphysics, there was a development in his metaphysics of history. In his early philosophy of history, he postulated an extreme providential view which amounted to complete historical fatalism(61) while at the same time explaining the development of history in purely naturalistic terms.

In Yet Another Philosophy of History he argued that there was a higher power which ruled the development of history. The earth is merely the stage upon which humans participate in a drama which encompasses all of human history and which is the expression of a greater purpose. "Could the history of mankind--even with all of its undulating and subsequent developments--have taken place apart from the 'blueprint of almighty Providence?' If the dwelling place down to the smallest detail, attests to its Divine origin--how could this not be the case for the history of its inhabitants?"(62) This view of the meaning of history is not far from the traditional Christian Providentialism in which Herder was raised.

But Herder did not abstain from explaining historical change in naturalistic terms in this work. In fact he

(61) T.J. Reed, "Paths through the Labyrinth: Finding Your Way in the Eighteenth Century," Publications of the English Goethe Society, 51 (1980-81): 85.

(62) Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 263.

insisted that the past could only be understood in terms of the special characteristics of time and place. "Nothing develops, without being occasioned by time, climate, necessity, by world events or the accidents of fate."(63) But Herder was able to find a way of reconciling his view of Providence with his naturalism. In the first draft of his essay on Shakespeare, he proclaimed that the playwright's greatness lay in his revelation of the processes of the world. In his drama he revealed an understanding of how God works through men to achieve his purposes. His characters "...are complete, yet individual beings, each participating, co-operating, acting as a character and in his way in the historical events...Each pursues his purpose, works and creates and lo: unwittingly becomes the blind instrument of a higher design, of a totality created by an invisible poet."(64) It is hard to see how Herder could reconcile this fatalistic idea of Providence with his naturalistic explanation of historical development. Especially since he argued that idea of "...a fatal necessity ...crushes all striving and aspiration, and binds men with

(63) ibid., Barnard, p. 184.

(64) Herder Shakespeare Essay: First Draft, quoted in Victor Lange, The Classical Age of German Literature, (New York, 1982), p. 60; cf. J.G. Herder, Shakespeare (1773), in German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism, (London, 1985), pp. 174-5; Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 262.

fetters of blind obedience to the capricious path of fate."(65) The cause of historical development is either naturalistic human action or the will of God. I cannot see how one can reconcile these two points of view, especially given Herder's stress on the ability of humans to be self-determining.

By the time Herder wrote the Ideas, his notion of Providence changed to one which was more in harmony with Enlightenment naturalism. He argued that it was to take a superficial view of history to invoke Providence as an explanation of historical change.(66) As soon as a thinker starts to meditate on the eternal purposes of God "...he sinks in a sea of fictitious, final causes which he marvels or guesses at, but through which history easily relinquishes the ground of concrete phenomena, and the investigation of the inner nature of the matter itself."(67) The effect of this is to tear "...asunder the chain of nature, and isolating a few of its parts, so that

(65) Herder Scattered Leaves, quoted in Wells, "Herder's Determinism," p. 111.

(66) Herder, Ideas, 15.5, Churchill, p. 392.

(67) J.G. Herder, God: Some Conversations, (1787), (Indianapolis and New York, 1940), p. 128.

here and there an electric spark of arbitrary Divine purpose might appear."(68)

Instead of a force or power acting outside of history and intervening in the historical process, Providence was seen as an immanent force within history. God's will is expressed through the laws of nature. "The work of Providence pursues its eternal course, according to grand universal laws..."(69) These laws were not laws outside of history, but the laws of nature. Man being part of nature, one must discover the laws that God intended man to follow. The essential law of human nature is Humanität¹¹. Herder in conceiving of human beings as teleological beings believed that they pursued not some pre-determined built-in end but a built-in disposition to strive to become human (Bildung zur Humanität¹¹), according to the particular culture into which they are born.(70)

It is the characteristic of our species, but it is only innate in us in germ (in Anlagen) and must really be added to us by education. We do not bring it all complete into the world; but in the world it should be the goal of our effort, the sum of our exercises and what we most

(68) ibid., pp. 128-9.

(69) Herder, Ideas, 16.6, Churchill, p. 435.

(70) Wulf Koepke, Johann Gottfried Herder, (Boston, 1987), p. 20.

value...What is Divine in our species is therefore Bildung zur Humanität (the capacity to train ourselves to Humanität)...."(71)

Humanität is an inner capacity, not an ultimate goal outside of man and it can only be achieved through the individual strivings of human beings. It is not limited to higher cultures, but is in all men. "His human essence--Humanität--is not ready made, yet is potentially realizable. And this is true of a New Zealand cannibal no less than of a Fenelon, of a wretched gypsy no less than of a Newton, for all are creatures of one and the same species."(72)

In this way Herder tried to resolve the tension between a providential view of history and his naturalistic method by locating the telos within man and within history. To understand God's plan one must look for it in history in the strivings of human beings to achieve Humanität. All men at all times have striven to become human. Thus the end of history is the actualization of Humanität, which occurs at all times and places. Human history is characterized by striving for perfection but this striving "...is not divorced from specific circumstances of time and

(71) Herder Letters for the Advancement of Humanity, # 27, quoted in Bruford, Culture and Society, pp. 233-4.

(72) Herder, Ideas, 4.4, Barnard, p. 266.

place; it is not the manifestation of some inexorable supra-historical law, but rather a tendency of human activity in any given social and cultural concatenation."(73) What is Divine is the striving and it was God's intention that we strive to become human. Thus the end of history is within history and by pursuing our natural end, we fulfill God's end. "What every man, therefore attains, or can attain, must be the end of the species: and what is this? Humanity and happiness, on this spot, in this degree, as this link, and no other of the chain of improvement, that extends throughout the whole kind."(74)

While Herder's view about the metaphysics of history changed and developed during his life, his basic naturalistic view of the historical process appeared early and remained consistent. It is a case of his metaphysics adjusting to his physics. It was his failure to separate the two(75) which has resulted in much of the muddle about Herder's thought and which obscured his relationship to the Enlightenment tradition of naturalism. The nature of this relationship will appear more clearly in an examination of

(73) Barnard, "Introduction," p. 43.

(74) Herder, Ideas, 9.1, Churchill, p. 229.

(75) Barnard, "Causation and Continuity," p. 197.

the basic assumptions about human development and culture which underlay Enlightenment speculation about the "history of civil society" and the manner in which Herder challenged these assumptions.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM NATURE TO CULTURE: THE INVENTION OF CULTURE

Man's departure from the paradise which his reason represents as the first abode of his species was nothing but the transition from an uncultured, merely animal condition to the state of humanity, from bondage to instinct to rational control--in a word, from the tutelage of nature to the state of freedom.(1)

The relationship between nature and culture has been a central issue in the study of man and has led to two conflicting views. One view sees culture as an addition or modification to a pre-cultural basic human nature. Man in his pre-cultural or pre-social form is biologically and genetically identical to man in the civilized or cultured state. Human life within culture can be understood as "...the amplification or extension of these pre-existent dispositions by cultural means...."(2) The notion that there had been a transition from nature to culture--from a state in which human activity was governed by instinct or natural appetites to a state in which man's activity was

(1) Immanuel Kant, Conjectural Beginning of Human History (1786), in Immanuel Kant, On History, (Indianapolis, 1963), pp. 59-60.

(2) Clifford Geertz, "The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind," in The Interpretation of Cultures, (New York, 1973), p. 82.

culturally mediated(3) was fundamental to much of the speculation about human development during the Enlightenment. Rousseau, Turgot, Condorcet, Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, Edward Gibbon, to mention only some of the most famous, all based their conjectures about the development of human society on this premise. This tradition was continued in the nineteenth century most notably by the sociocultural evolutionism of E.B. Tylor (1832-1917), and reached its apogee in the work of Sigmund Freud.(4)

Thinkers in this tradition often argued that the aim of the study of man was to discover the enduring pre-cultural characteristics of human nature so as to understand all human activity or to reconstruct social and political life on a rational or scientific basis. "Now without serious study of man, of his natural faculties and their successive developments, one will never succeed in making such distinctions and separating in the present constitution of things, what divine will has done from what

(3) Roy Wagner, The Invention of Culture, (Chicago and London, 1981), pp. 134, 137; E.R. Leach, Social Anthropology, (Oxford, 1982), p. 76.

(4) Sigmund Freud, Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices, in The Origins of Religion, (Harmondsworth Middlesex, 1985), pp. 40-1.

human art has pretended to do."(5) This approach viewed culture as "...a kind of clothing which is separate from the human beings who are clothed."(6)

As well, it was often believed that contemporary primitive cultures were somehow closer to the natural state than modern man and that by studying them it was possible to discover aspects of man's essential nature which had been hidden by civilization.(7)

Others in this tradition believed that man retained aspects of instinct or natural drives shared with animals. They further believed man is not by nature designed or suited for cultural life and is, in fact, uncomfortable in culture. From this point of view culture consists to a large part of mechanisms which curb and control natural inclinations.

(5) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men (1755), cited hereafter as Second Discourse, in The First and Second Discourses, (New York, 1964), p. 97; cf. Lia Formigari, "Language and Society in the Late Eighteenth Century," The Journal of the History of Ideas, 35 (1974): 275, 282.

(6) Leach, Social Anthropology, p. 39.

(7) George W. Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, (New York, 1987), pp. 177, 325; cf. Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo, in The Origins of Religion Pelican Freud Library Volume 13, (Harmondsworth Middlesex, 1985), p. 53.

Once upon a time there was a natural man; then an artificial man was built up inside him. Since then a civil war has been raging continuously within his breast. Sometimes the natural man proves stronger; at other times he is laid low by the artificial, moral man. But which ever gains the upper hand, the poor freak is racked and torn, tortured, stretched on the wheel, suffering, continually wretched, whether because he is out of senses with some misplaced passion for glory, or because imaginary shame curbs and bows him down.(8)

Others of a less pessimistic disposition like Kant, believed at some point this opposition would be completely overcome through the perfection of culture. Culture "...progressively interferes with...[instinct]...by altering the conditions to which it was suited; while, on the other hand, natural impulse interferes with culture until such time as art will be strong enough to become a second nature. This is indeed the ultimate moral end of the human species."(9)

The second approach to culture, which Herder would adopt, argues that human activity and human nature cannot be understood apart from culture. The activity of human beings as a distinct species has always been culturally

(8) Denis Diderot, Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage, in Rameau's Nephew and Other Works, (Indianapolis and New York, 1964), p. 224; cf. Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, in Civilization, Society and Religion, (Harmondsworth Middlesex, 1985), pp. 302-3.

(9) Kant, Conjectural Beginning, pp. 62-3.

mediated.(10) The transition from a state of nature to a state of culture was not a sudden event. Contemporary cultural anthropologists argue that the biological evolution of human beings did not stop at a particular point at which time a being capable of culturally mediated activity emerged; rather "...the final stages of the biological evolution of man occurred after the initial growth of culture..."(11) Human evolution was affected by the emergence of culture among our pre-human ancestors and as a result there is no sharp dividing line between cultureless apes and cultured men.(12) "It is probably more correct to think of much of our structure as the result of culture than it is to think of men anatomically like ourselves slowly discovering culture."(13)

In this view human mental dispositions did not evolve prior to the emergence of culture and the capabilities of

(10) Wagner, Invention of Culture, pp. 134-5.

(11) Geertz, "Growth of Culture," pp. 82-3; cf. 62-3; Maurice Freedman, Main Trends in Social and Cultural Anthropology, (New York and London, 1979), p. 95.

(12) M.F. Ashley Montagu, "Introduction" to Culture and the Evolution of Man, (New York 1962), p. ix; Geertz, "Growth of Culture," pp. 62-3.

(13) S.L. Washburn, "Speculations on the Interrelations of the History Tools and Biological Evolution," in The Evolution of Man's Capacity for Culture, (Detroit, 1959), p. 21.

the human mind are not result of the development of latent faculties through culture. The "...human brain is thoroughly dependent upon cultural resources for its very operation; and those resources are, consequently, not adjuncts to, but constituents of mental activity."(14) Any attempt to determine man's essential character or nature by excluding his activity as a cultural being is doomed to failure.(15) We can never know man in the abstract since all our observations are observations of humans living and acting within a cultural context. There is "...no such thing as a human nature independent of culture."(16)

While Geertz believes this view of culture and the human mind is of fairly recent origin,(17) in fact it was Herder who first developed a systematic anthropology based on the inseparability of human nature and culture. He rejected the idea that "...the essential human nature is an

(14) Geertz, "Growth of Culture," p. 76.

(15) Richard A. Barrett, Culture and Conduct, (Belmont, California, 1984), pp. 61-2.

(16) Clifford Geertz, "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man," in The Interpretation of Cultures, (New York, 1973), p. 49; cf. Franz Boas, The Mind of Primitive Man (1936), (New York, 1965), p. 133.

(17) Geertz, "Growth of Culture," pp. 60-1; cf. Geertz, "Concept of Culture," pp. 49, 51; Freedman, p. 95.

original or primitive human nature..."(18) and consequently the idea that language and culture were later accretions or modifications of an essential or primary human nature which existed prior to their development. "Education, art, cultivation, were indispensable to him from the first moment of his existence..."(19) While Herder did not believe in a theory of evolution, his position is similar to modern theories of culture because of his belief that humans had been created at a particular point in time with all their faculties or mental capabilities completely formed.(20)

Herder outlined this view of human nature and culture largely in response to the anthropologically based theories of human development of various Enlightenment philosophers. In my discussion of this issue, I am including, not only those philosophes whose ideas he directly engaged, in particular Rousseau, Condillac, Kant, Hume, Ferguson, Robertson, and Millar, but other figures as well, such as Smith, Gibbon, Turgot, Condorcet, and Degerando, whose work he did not know, so as to illustrate the assumptions

(18) Allan Megill, The Enlightenment Debate on the Origin of Language and its Historical Background, (New York, 1975), Abstract p. 3; cf. p. 267.

(19) Herder, Ideas, 10.6, Churchill, p. 286.

(20) Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, pp. 154-5.

underlying this concept of culture in its most sophisticated forms.

As I have already argued in Chapter Two, one of the chief tasks of the Enlightenment was to construct "...the history of human society."(21) The most widespread view was that the history of the human species was "...a natural progress from ignorance to knowledge, and from rude, to civilized manners..."(22) Given this assumption it is not surprising that the common starting point for this investigation was speculation about man's original condition. While there were differing views about the characteristics of the original state, it was a common belief that in the first state human conduct was motivated by natural instincts or inclinations, rather than by morality or established custom. For Kant man in his natural state was "...guided by instinct alone, that voice of God which is obeyed by all animals."(23) This state was often described

(21) John Millar, An Historical View of the English Government (1787), in William Lehmann, John Millar of Glasgow, (Cambridge, 1960), p. 381.

(22) John Millar, The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks (1771, 1779), in ibid., p. 176; cf. David Spadafora, The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain, (New Haven and London, 1990), p. 253.

(23) Kant, Conjectural Beginning, p. 55; cf. Emile Fackenheim, "Kant's Concept of History," in Kant Studien, 1956-57, p. 386.

as rude, barbaric, or without culture.(24) John Millar referred to it as "...the state of simplicity that precedes all cultivation and improvement..."(25) In the Encyclopédie (1751) savages were described as "...barbaric people who lived without laws, without government, without religion, and who have no fixed habitation."(26) This primal state was often identified with nature, and primitive man was often thought of as belonging "...to the natural order."(27)

The most radical conception of the original state of man was the one that Jean-Jacques Rousseau presented in his Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men (1755). Man in his natural state was without culture, society, and language---a being of extreme simplicity and solitude whose needs were few and easily satisfied. He was a being who wandered alone in the forest, who was "...without industry, without speech, without domicile, without war and without liaisons, with no need of his

(24) François Furet, "From Savage Man to Historical Man, The American Experience in Eighteenth Century French Culture," in The Workshop of History, (Chicago and London, 1984), p. 153.

(25) Millar, Origin of Ranks, p. 184, cf. p. 175.

(26) Encyclopédie, quoted in François Furet, "Civilization and Barbarism in Gibbon's History," in The Workshop of History, (Chicago and London, 1984), p. 145.

(27) ibid.

fellow men, likewise with no desire to harm them, perhaps never even recognizing anyone individually..."(28) Man in the state of nature interacted with the external world purely through his senses without the mediation of ideas. He was an animal limited to "...pure sensations..."(29) and lacked the ability to form any complex mental conceptions.(30) The only distinction between man and animals was that man acquired his instincts rather than being born with them. Rousseau even believed that the orang-outang might possibly be savage man still living in the state of nature.(31)

There were, however, two fundamental and related qualities which distinguished man in the state of nature from other animals. The first was freedom, which for Rousseau meant the lack of the obdurate instincts which determined the activity of animals.(32) The second

(28) ibid., p. 137.

(29) ibid., p. 142.

(30) ibid., p. 117; cf. p. 142.

(31) Christopher Frayling and Robert Wokler, "From the Orang-outang to the Vampire: Towards an Anthropology of Rousseau," in Rousseau after Two Hundred Years, (London, 1982), p. 114.

(32) Rousseau, Second Discourse, p. 141; cf. p. 113; cf. Robert Wokler, "Perfectible Apes in Decadent Cultures: Rousseau's Anthropology Revisited," Daedalus, 107 (1978): 125.

distinguishing feature was perfectibility which was an "...ability to innovate, to react in novel ways to new situations."(33) Only the human animal has this capacity for learning that enables it to improve itself in contrast to animals who acquire nothing and always retain their instinct. Man is subject to senility and loses "...by old age or other accidents all that his perfectibility had made him acquire..."(34) Animals being perfect by nature did not have to learn to exist, since instinct provided them with all they need. Only man must acquire survival skills.(35)

For Rousseau, in the state of nature savage man imitated the actions of animals in order to satisfy his natural needs. This imitation was mentally equivalent to instinct, even if it became the basis for the further development of mental faculties. "Savage man, by nature committed to instinct alone, or rather compensated for the instinct he perhaps lacks by faculties capable of substituting for it at first, and then of raising him far

(33) John Passmore, The Perfectibility of Man, (New York, 1970), p. 282; cf. Robert Wokler, "Rousseau's Perfectibilian Libertarianism," in The Idea of Freedom, (Oxford, 1979), p. 238; Maurice Cranston, Jean-Jacques, (London: 1983), p. 294.

(34) Rousseau, Second Discourse, p. 115.

(35) ibid.

above nature, will therefore begin with purely animal functions."(36)

Development was blocked in the natural state because of a lack of motivation. The natural abundance of the primeval state allowed man to satisfy his natural needs almost effortlessly. Once he satisfied his natural needs then he lapsed into indolence common to all animals. "Everything leads natural man to rest; to eat and sleep are the only needs he knows; and only hunger overcomes his laziness."(37) In addition in the state of nature man learns by himself only enough to survive and any techniques or inventions are not passed on to others. "If by chance he made some discovery, he was all the less able to communicate it because he did not recognize even his children. Art perished with the inventor. There was neither education nor progress..."(38)

Thus learning was purely individual since, in the absence of social relations and language, human perfect-

(36) ibid.; cf. pp. 127-8; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, On the Social Contract or the Principles of Political Right, (1762), in On the Social Contract with Geneva Manuscript and Political Economy, (New York: 1978), p. 55.

(37) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, That the State of War Is Born from the Social State, in The Indispensable Rousseau, (London, 1979), p. 108.

(38) Rousseau, Second Discourse, p. 137; cf. p. 119.

ibility was limited in the state of nature. Every human had to start from zero. The "...generations multiplied uselessly; and everyone always starting from the same point, centuries passed in all the crudeness of the first ages; the species was already old, and man remained ever a child."(39)

For Rousseau the development of human faculties in the natural state was thus limited. The later more extensive development of the mind was the result of accidental changes in circumstance such as overpopulation or natural disasters which decreased the natural abundance of the primitive world.(40) This crisis had forced savage man into developing artificial techniques of survival rather than the simple daily gathering of food and he had to wrest a living from nature by artificial methods of hunting and more complicated forms of gathering.(41) Tools were invented and instead of sleeping under trees or in caves primitive man began to live in huts that he built for himself. Fixed social and sexual relations developed between men and women instead of the accidental matings of savage human beings.

(39) ibid., p. 137.

(40) ibid., pp. 116, 118.

(41) ibid., p. 143.

Rousseau saw these developments becoming cumulative and objectified within culture. Instead of solitary man copying the instincts of animals, humans would learn from their fellow beings. Humans are no longer born into nature but into an existing society and are transformed from natural beings into social beings, at the instant of birth.(42)

Herder rejected Rousseau's vision of a transformation from nature to culture. Culturally mediated activity was characteristic of human existence and in view of the sophisticated mental abilities that a cultural being required in order to survive, it was not conceivable that in the state of nature distinctive human faculties were dormant. Herder rejected the sensationalist psychology on which Rousseau based his reconstruction of the history of human development. The powers of the human mind were not mere capabilities or potentialities which would be called forth by the appropriate experience or level of social and cultural development. Humans have always had the same psychological and mental abilities regardless of time and place since such powers were necessary to human existence.

(42) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Emile or On Education (1762), (New York, 1979), p. 38; Roger Masters, The Political Philosophy of Rousseau, (Princeton, 1968), p. 5.

Consequently, there was no fundamental distinction in mental processes between the civilized and savage humans.

This distinction was also essential for the partisans of one of the most widespread and important theories of human development in the later Enlightenment--the four stages theory.(43) However, unlike Rousseau who believed that the potential human faculties need never have developed, these theorists saw the history of civil society as a coherent process of ordered progression driven by the natural development of human faculties.(44)

This theory is distinguished from other Enlightenment environmentalist theories by the view that the mode of subsistence--the way in which human beings acquire their food--was the determining factor in social, intellectual, political, and cultural development. As the Scottish historian William Robertson (1721-93) asserted: "In every inquiry concerning the operations of men when united together in society, the first object of attention should be their mode of subsistence. Accordingly as that varies,

(43) Ronald L. Meek, Social Science and the Ignoble Savage, (Cambridge and London, 1976), p. 230.

(44) Francis Jeffrey, "Review of John Millar, An Historical View of the English Government, from the Settlement of the Saxons in Britain, to the Revolution in 1688", Edinburgh Review, 3 (1803): 157; Spadafora, Progress, pp. 270-1.

their laws and policy must be different." (45) The more complex the economic activity, the more complex the political and social institutions that men were motivated to create. These theorists thus perceived a direct causal relationship expressible as a law or first principle between the mode of subsistence and the social and political institutions. (46) Thus there was a systematic and scientific attempt to explain the regularities and uniformities of historical development "...in terms of the laws which lay behind social development." (47)

This theory asserted that societies or civilization had progressed from barbarism to refinement through distinctive stages differentiated by the "mode of subsistence"---hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce. Each of these distinct stages was "...usually

(45) Robertson, History of America, Slotkin, p. 428; Ronald L. Meek, "Smith, Turgot and the 'Four Stages' Theory", in Smith, Marx, and After, (London, 1977), p. 19; Meek, Social Science, p. 162; J.G.A. Pocock, "Gibbon and the Shepherds: The Stages of Society in the Decline and Fall," History of European Ideas, 2 (1981): 195, 197.

(46) Robertson, History of America, Slotkin, p. 427; Ronald L. Meek, "Smith, Turgot and the 'Four Stages' Theory", in Smith, Marx, and After, (London, 1977), p. 19; Meek, Social Science, p. 162; Pocock, "Gibbon," pp. 195, 197.

(47) Meek, "Smith, and Turgot", p. 19; cf. Andrew S. Skinner, "Natural History in the Age of Adam Smith," Political Studies, 15 (1967): 46. I will deal with the conception of a social science in Chapter Five.

accompanied with peculiar laws and customs." (48) Thus each stage would have ideas and institutions, customs, and values which were appropriate to the way in which men acquired their means of sustenance. (49) When there was a change in the "mode of subsistence", there was a corresponding change in culture. To use Marxist terminology, the superstructure of culture was determined by the economic substructure. However, changes in the economic structure were brought about by intellectual activity which was made possible by the leisure created by economic activity.

By correlating mental and cultural development with economic development, it was possible to place all cultures which were at the same economic stage on the same cultural level. For example all hunting tribes faced the same situation in their struggle to survive, hence their response to similar situations will be uniform and consequently their motivations, institutions and characteristics will be similar. "If we suppose two tribes, though placed in the remotest part of the globe, to live in a climate

(48) Millar, Origin of Ranks, p. 176; cf. Francis Jeffrey, "Review of John Millar, The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks" Edinburgh Review, 9 (1806): 90.

(49) Meek, Social Science, p. 2; Roy Pascal, "Herder and the Scottish Historical School," Publications of the English Goethe Society, 14 (1938-9): 27.

nearly of the same temperature, to be in the same state of society, and to resemble each other in the degree of their improvement, they must feel the same wants and exert the same endeavours to supply them. The same objects will allure, the same passions will animate them, and the same ideas and sentiments will arise in their minds."(50) Any culture in one of the stages was comparable to others in the same stage. "The character and occupations of the hunter in America must be little different from those of an Asiatic, who depends for subsistence on the chase. A tribe of savages on the banks of the Danube must nearly resemble one upon the plains washed by the Mississippi."(51) This invariability is especially marked in the earlier stages when variations in customs are limited by the difficulty of existence and the limitations of man in his natural state. The "...operation of instinct is more sure and simple than that of reason; it is much easier to ascertain the appetites of a quadruped than the speculations of a philosopher; and the savage tribes of mankind, as they

(50) William Robertson, The History of Scotland (1759), in J.S. Slotkin, Readings in Early Anthropology, (Chicago, 1965), p. 202; cf. John Millar, The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks (1771, 1779), in William Lehmann, John Millar of Glasgow, (Cambridge, 1960), p. 175; Meek, Social Science, p. 162.

(51) William Robertson, History of America (1777), quoted in Meek, Social Science, p. 141; cf. Millar, Origin of Ranks, p. 177.

approach nearer to the condition of animals, preserve a stronger resemblance to themselves and each other. The uniform stability of their manners is the natural consequence of the imperfection of their faculties."(52) The four stages theory stressed the effect of mode of subsistence in limiting the development of elaborate social and moral customs in the savage state. Man in his earliest state was concerned only with his material needs and had not the necessary leisure to develop elaborate customs and manners.(53) "Without provisions, and in the depths of the forests, men could devote themselves to nothing but obtaining their sustenance."(54) As well, those who believed in the four stages theory argued that social relations in the savage state were based on instinct or natural drives. There were no moral rules or legal structures to regulate their conduct. A savage couple "...when impelled by natural instincts, give way to their mutual desires without hesitation or reluctance. They are unacquainted with those refinements which create a strong

(52) Gibbon, Decline and Fall, Chapter 26, Volume 3, p. 74; cf. Pocock, "Gibbon," p. 198; Furet, "Civilization and Barbarism," p. 147.

(53) Millar, Origin of Ranks, p. 176.

(54) Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, baron de l'Aulne, On Universal History (circa 1751), in Turgot on Progress, Sociology and Economics, (London, 1973), p. 65; cf. Millar, Origin of Ranks, p. 183.

preference of particular objects, and with those artificial rules of decency and decorum which might lay a restraint upon their conduct."(55)

Robertson characterized the life of savages as a state of natural liberty with few needs and little mutual dependence. Their customs, their way of life, and the way of educating their children all reflected their passion for liberty and their rejection of subordination. "Every one does what he pleases. A father and mother with their children, live like persons whom chance has brought together, and whom no common bond unites. Their manner of educating their children is suitable to this principle. They never chastise or punish them, even during their infancy. As they advance in years, they allow them to be entirely masters of their own actions, and responsible to nobody."(56) This typology of discrete stages of culture was applied not only to the original condition of humanity and its subsequent development but was used to classify contemporary cultures.(57) The literature is full of assertions about the American Indians, Africans, and other peoples whose social relations, customs, and religious

(55) ibid., p. 184.

(56) William Robertson, The Progress of Society in Europe (1769), (Chicago and London, 1972), pp. 152-3.

(57) Skinner, "Natural History," p. 40.

beliefs were considered to be at the same level as mankind in its earliest state. It was a common belief that modern civilized society had developed from conditions that were similar to those of the primitive tribes of America.(58) "When we survey the present state of the globe, we find that, in many parts of it, the inhabitants are so destitute of culture, as to appear little above the condition of brute animals; and even when we peruse the remote history of polished nations, we have seldom any difficulty in tracing them to a state of the same rudeness and barbarism."(59) These other cultures had somehow been retarded because of environmental conditions or historical accidents and had therefore not followed the normal path of historical development. But they were not excluded from history or humanity in the way that earlier explanations of cultural differences had done by regarding them either as not fully human or as natural slaves.(60)

(58) Meek, Social Science, pp. 2-3, 66-7.

(59) Millar, Origin of Ranks, pp. 175-6; cf. Adam Smith, Lectures on Jurisprudence, (Oxford, 1978), p. 107; Henry, Home, Lord Kames, Essays (1758), (Hildesheim and New York, 1976), p. 103.

(60) On pre-Enlightenment anthropology see Anthony Pagden, The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology, (London, 1982), pp. 25, 27; Richard H. Popkin, "The Philosophical Bases of Modern Racism," in The High Road to Pyrrhonism, (San Diego, 1980), p. 83.

Meek has shown the importance of this idea of the ignoble savage in the development of social science and how this assumption was used to generate conjectures about the nature of man's original state and the course of development.(61) "A glance over the earth puts before our eyes, even today, the whole history of the human race, showing us traces of all the steps and monuments of all the stages through which it has passed from the barbarism, still in existence, of the American peoples to the civilization of the most enlightened nations of Europe. Alas! our ancestors and the Pelasgians who preceded the Greeks were like the savages of America."(62)

In all these accounts of human development the fundamental assumption is that the development of culture is an elaboration or refinement from simple to complex.(63) The idea that cultural and mental development was evolutionary or developmental is true not only of the four stages theorists but of other Enlightenment figures such as

(61) Meek, Social Science, pp. 2-3, 66-7.

(62) Turgot, Universal History, p. 89; cf. Robertson, Progress of Society, p. 152;

(63) Boas, Mind of Primitive Man, p. 159; Bernard S. Cohn, "Anthropology and History in the 1980s: Toward a Rapprochement," in The New History: The 1980s and Beyond, (Princeton, 1982), p. 230.

Rousseau, Kant, and Condorcet.(64) Since they all postulated a cultureless primitive state, logically the first manifestations of culture would be simple, since savage man is starting out without any culture to mould him.(65) But once development has begun and man leaves his original state, human activity began to be governed by different principles and the cultural and mental life of man becomes more elaborate. "The moment they have quitted this primitive situation, and by endeavouring to supply their natural wants, have been led to accumulate property, they are presented with very different motives of action, and acquire a new set of habits and principles."(66)

This notion of cultural development was used as a principle of anthropological interpretation both to classify cultures and to conjecture about the origin and development of specific cultural phenomena. David Hume used this principle to outline the history of religion. "If we consider the improvement of human society, from rude beginnings to a state of greater perfection, polytheism or

(64) Keith Baker, Condorcet, (Chicago and London, 1982), p. 361. Of course for Rousseau, this process was not progress but degeneration.

(65) H.M. Hopfl, "From Savage to Scotsman: Conjectural History in the Scottish Enlightenment," Journal of British Studies, 17 (Spring, 1978): 27.

(66) Millar, Origin of Ranks, pp. 294-5.

idolatry was, and necessary must have been, the first and most ancient religion of mankind."(67) Hume argued that a sophisticated idea such as theism could never have been discovered, as the Deists claimed, "...in more ancient times, before the knowledge of letters, or before the discovery of any art or science...That is, while they were ignorant and barbarous, they discovered truth: But fell into error as soon as they acquired learning and politeness"(68)

The primary consideration for Adam Smith in explaining customs was need and way of life. It seemed obvious to him that savages would have no need of more complex concepts such as higher numbers because of the simplicity of their life. "...in the rude beginnings of society, one, two, and more, might possibly be all the numeral distinctions which mankind would have any occasion to take notice of."(69) Similarly the conception of property of early man was a consequence of their way of life in which they are

(67) David Hume, The Natural History of Religion (1757, 1777), edited by H.E. Root, (Stanford, 1956), p. 23.

(68) ibid. Adam Smith gave a similar account of the origin of religion. Adam Smith, The History of Astronomy, in The Early Writings of Adam Smith, (New York, 1967), pp. 47-50.

(69) Adam Smith, Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages, in The Early Writings of Adam Smith, (New York, 1967), pp. 237-8.

constantly "...changing their place of abode."(70) Since the only property which existed for these hunters consisted of the game they killed and their personal possessions, "...property begins and ends with possession, and they seem scarce to have any idea of anything as their own which is not about their bodies."(71)

The conception of property changed once there was a change in way of life from hunting to pasturage which involved more complex relations with the physical world. Property was extended to their flocks which they owned. "Not only what they carry about with them, but also what they have deposited in their hovels, is their own. They consider their cattle as their own while they have a habit of returning to them."(72) However, as they did not stay in one place but wandered with their flocks, they did not have the idea of land as property.(73) Once agriculture arose and men began to settle in one place, a more sophisticated conception of property could develop. Even this development was not sudden since Smith believed that land had been cultivated in common when agriculture first

(70) Smith, Lectures on Jurisprudence, p. 20.

(71) ibid., p. 460.

(72) ibid..

(73) ibid., p. 21.

developed. Land began to be divided only when men began to live in fixed settlements.(74)

Smith saw a direct relationship between the complexity of a society and the complexity of its economic activity. "The more improved any society is and the greater length the severall (sic) means of supporting the inhabitants are carried, the greater will be the number of their laws and regulations necessary to maintain justice, and prevent infringements of property."(75)

This development from a rude and unpolished state to civilization was seen as normal or natural--a process which all cultures would undergo.(76) This notion of normal or natural development led to the notion that there was one universal culture or historical process which became "...identified with the history of Western civilization."(77) The perception was of a unilinear progressive development from primitiveness to

(74) ibid., p. 22.

(75) ibid., p. 16.

(76) Meek, Social Science, p. 2; Spadafora, Progress, pp. 270-1.

(77) Georg Iggers, "The Idea of Progress in Historiography and Social Thought since the Enlightenment," in Progress and Its Discontents, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1982), p. 44.

civilization.(78) The "...human race, considered over the period since its origin, appears to the eye of the philosopher as one vast whole, which itself, like each individual, has its infancy and its advancement."(79) The history of the human species was seen as a great chain connected by the necessary links of development.(80) For Condorcet the universal history of the human race showed the rise and fall of peoples between the two extremes of savage man and modern civilization in "...an uninterrupted chain between the beginning of historical time and the century we live in, between the first peoples known to us and the present nations of Europe."(81)

Everything which did not fit into that process of civilization had to be explained and brought into the process. Societies which had not achieved normal develop-

(78) Boas, Mind of Primitive Man, pp. 164-5.

(79) Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, baron de l'Aulne, Successive Advances of the Human Mind, (1751), in Turgot on Progress, Sociology and Economics, (London, 1973), p. 41; cf. George W. Stocking, "French Anthropology in 1800," in Race, Culture, and Evolution, (New York, 1968), p. 26.

(80) Andrew S. Skinner, "Historical Theory," in A System of Social Science, (Oxford 1979), p. 89; Skinner, "Natural History," p. 37.

(81) Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind, (1793), (Westport, Connecticut, 1979), p. 8; cf. Baker, Condorcet, p. 360.

ment were thought to be trapped in earlier stages of development. For Turgot the reason that the native peoples of North America had remained in the first stage of development was that there was a lack of proper animals to be domesticated. "The way of life of hunting peoples is maintained in the parts of America where these species are lacking. In Peru, where nature has placed a species of sheep called llamas, the people are shepherds..."(82) The French geographer Claret de Fleurieu explained away the cultural achievements of West Coast Indians which could not be expected of a people in the hunting stage. He believed they were descendants of more advanced peoples who had fled from the Spanish conquest and who had adapted to the hunting stage while still retaining their culture practices.(83) It was inconceivable in terms of his model of cultural development that primitives living by themselves in the hard conditions of the hunting stage could develop the cultural practices of more advanced peoples.

Adam Smith explained the lack of development in Tartary and Arabia as due to the geographical conditions

(82) Turgot, Universal History, p. 66; cf. Meek, Social Science, p. 74.

(83) Martin S. Staum, "Human Geography in the French Institute: New Discipline or Missed Opportunity," The Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences, 23 (1987): 335-6.

which did not allow the development of agriculture. The "...situation of their country is such that it cannot be improved. The most part of these is hills and deserts which cannot be cultivated, and is only fit for pasturage."(84) Although Smith felt that some nations would not advance to any higher stage, because of the constraints of the physical environment,(85) other philosophes were more sanguine about the possibilities of extending the benefits of civilization to less-developed nations.

The philosopher Joseph-Marie Degerando felt that if domestic livestock could be introduced to savage nations and "...if one found some means to transform savage peoples to the condition of herdsmen or husbandmen, one would, no doubt, open before them the surest route that could lead them to the advantages of civilization."(86) Condorcet saw America as a vast land inhabited by "...tribes who need

(84) Smith, Lectures on Jurisprudence, p. 408; cf. p. 221; Millar, Origin of Ranks, pp. 176-7.

(85) Skinner, "Historical Theory," p. 75; Andrew S. Skinner, "Adam Smith: An Economic Interpretation of History," in Essays on Adam Smith, (Oxford, 1975), p. 155.

(86) Joseph-Marie Degerando, Considerations on the Various Methods to Follow in The Observation of Savage Peoples, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), p. 95; cf. Urs Bitterli, Cultures in Conflict, (Stanford, 1989), p. 172.

only assistance from us to become civilized ..."(87)
Progress would be more rapid because they could receive from us all that we have learned through a long process of trial and error.(88)

In summary, this idea of cultural development portrayed culture as an accretion to or modification of a basic human nature, often postulated as the earliest stage of existence. The process of development brought the species from this primal state to the complexity of modern civilization. The typology of cultures differentiated the stages most frequently by economic development. There was a limited range of cultural differences, and all cultures in the same stage were more or less identical. On this unilinear scale cultures could be placed according to the degree of complexity of their economic, political, intellectual, social, religious and cultural practices. These thinkers identified this natural process as progress which all cultures would undergo whether by themselves or with assistance from the more developed world.

Herder rejected the fundamental premise of this vision of human development by rejecting the notion of a basic human nature prior to culture. Herder argued that all

(87) Condorcet, Sketch, p. 177.

(88) ibid., p. 178.

humans possessed culture and human existence was not possible without culture. The next chapter will outline Herder's concept of culture and locate it in the context of the development of the modern pluralistic concept of culture.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CREATION OF CULTURE

Since human beings everywhere have a marked proclivity for finding reasons to think themselves superior to 'those bastards over the hill who don't even know how to speak properly', it could be held that anthropology of a certain prejudiced sort is as old as humanity itself...(1)

Herder's anthropological speculations have not been properly placed within the tradition of anthropology that began with the Enlightenment and which has continued to the present. Herder's place in this tradition has been obscured by a belief that his notion of culture was organic or idealistic. Yet his explanation of cultural differences was just as empirical and naturalistic as the Enlightenment. His rejection of the Enlightenment concept of culture and his creation of a completely new concept of culture is the basis of his explanation and understanding of cultural differences.

(1) E.R. Leach, "Anthropology of Religion: British and French Schools," in Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West, (Cambridge and London, 1985), Volume 3, p. 215.

While the confrontation between different cultures has been a perennial problem in human history, not until the Enlightenment was a systematic attempt made to understand and explain other cultures as part of a science of man.(2) Despite the eclipse of Enlightenment anthropology by racial typologies during the first half of the nineteenth century, when anthropology emerged as an organized activity in the last half of the nineteenth century, it was based on the paradigms which had been established during the Enlightenment.(3)

Victorian evolutionary anthropology used the same fundamental approach for dealing with other cultures as did the Enlightenment. Indeed, George Stocking has noted that nineteenth century sociocultural evolutionism, in particular that of E.B. Tylor (1832-1917), was in many respects

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- (2) J.W. Burrow, Evolution and Society, (London, 1966), p. 15; George W. Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, (New York, 1987), p. 17; Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Cultural Discontinuity and Economic and Social Development," Structural Anthropology, Volume 2, (Chicago, 1976), p. 313; Leach, "Anthropology of Religion", p. 215; Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, (New York, 1969), II, pp. 167, 319.
- (3) On the eclipse of Enlightenment anthropology see Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, p. 48; George W. Stocking, "Some Problems in the Understanding of Nineteenth Century Cultural Evolution," in Readings in the History of Anthropology, (New York, 1974), pp. 413-14; Burrow, Evolution and Society, p. 17.

closer to the developmentalism of the Enlightenment than to Darwinism.(4)

The essence of this approach was to assimilate other cultures within the context of a universal system of cultural development. Within this developmental framework "...people were more or less cultured, rather than living in different cultures..."(5) Other cultures were placed in this system according to their stage of development within an ascending hierarchy which ranged from savagery to civilization. This approach endured until the end of the nineteenth century when, as is generally accepted by anthropologists and historians of anthropology, a fundamental change in the theory and practice of anthropology occurred.(6)

(4) Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, p. 178; George W. Stocking, "'Cultural Darwinism' and 'Philosophical Idealism' in E.B. Tylor," in Race, Culture, and Evolution: (New York, 1968), pp. 98-9; George W. Stocking, "The Dark-Skinned Savage: The Image of Primitive Man in Evolutionary Anthropology," in ibid., pp. 115-16; Burrow, Evolution and Society, p. 12; Elvin Hatch, Theories of Man and Culture, (New York, 1973), p. 14.

(5) Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, p. 309.

(6) Alexander Lesser, "Franz Boas and the Modernization of Anthropology," in History, Evolution, and the Concept of Culture, (London, 1985), pp. 15-16; David Bidney, "Cultural Dynamics and the Quest for Origins," in Theoretical Anthropology, (New York, 1953), p. 223.

This revolution was brought about by the emergence of the modern anthropological concept of culture.(7) Perhaps its most fundamental innovation was the idea of the constitutive nature of culture.(8) In this view the human mind is dependent on the tools and techniques acquired through culture in order to function, and human activity is always culturally mediated.(9) Transmission of tradition through education played a central role in this idea of culture. The activity of all humans "...regardless of race or cultural stage, was determined by a traditional body of habitual behavior patterns passed on through what we would now call the enculturative process..."(10)

(7) George W. Stocking, "Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective," in Race, Culture, and Evolution: (New York, 1968), p. 203, cf. pp. 201-2, 214; Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, p. 302; Hatch, Theories of Man and Culture, p. 13; Elvin Hatch, Culture and Morality, (New York, 1983), pp. 26; 37-9.

(8) George W. Stocking, "From Physics to Ethnology" in Race, Culture, and Evolution: (New York, 1968), p. 159; Stocking, "Boas and the Culture Concept," p. 200.

(9) Clifford Geertz, "The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind," in The Interpretation of Cultures, (New York, 1973), p. 76; Stocking, "From Physics to Ethnology", p. 159; Stocking, "Boas and the Culture Concept," p. 222.

(10) Stocking, "Boas and the Culture Concept," p. 222; cf. Hatch, Culture and Morality, p. 4. Clifford Geertz, "The Transition to Humanity," in Horizons of Anthropology, (Chicago, 1977), pp. 31.

This particular view of the nature and function of culture challenged the idea that there had been an evolutionary development from a pre-cultural state to the present state of advanced culture or civilization. This latter idea, as I asserted in the last chapter, has long been a fundamental tenet of speculation about human development. As well the modern anthropological concept of culture rejected the idea of cultural grading within a universal system of culture and instead postulated as its guiding idea "...a plurality of historically conditioned cultures in place of a single sequence of evolutionary stages."(11) Instead of a general idea of CULTURE as a continuum on which different specimens could be placed according to their degree of development from savagery to civilization, the paradigm of anthropological research became a multiplicity of separate and autonomous cultures each of which have a unique and distinct way of constituting the world.(12)

However Stocking believes that this conception of culture did not arise until the end of the nineteenth century when Franz Boas (1858-1942) overthrew evolutionary

(11) Stocking, "Boas and the Culture Concept," p. 213.

(12) Stocking, "Boas and the Culture Concept," p. 200; Stocking, "From Physics to Ethnology", pp. 133, 159; Annemarie De Waal Malefijt, Images of Man, (New York, 1974), p. 231.

anthropology. According to Stocking, Boas was the first to speak of culture in this plural sense.(13) As well Boas's special contribution to the development of cultural pluralism, his emphasis on the constitutive nature of culture and the enculturation process, has been widely accepted.(14)

Yet a hundred years before Boas, Herder conceived and applied something similar to this 'modern anthropological concept of culture' in his criticism of the Enlightenment view of culture and human development. Like Boas, Herder attacked the developmental and stadial view of culture which was the foundation of the theory of both the nineteenth century sociocultural evolutionism and Enlightenment developmentalism. Herder rejected the notion of culture as part of a universal process of development leading up to the present state of civilization.(15) Both Herder and Boas rejected the developmental and evaluative view of culture which suggested that the cultural activity of less-developed humans was either inferior to that of

(13) Stocking, "Boas and the Culture Concept," p. 203, cf. pp. 201-2; cf. Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, p. 302.

(14) Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, p. 287; Hatch, Culture and Morality, p. 26; Lesser, "Boas," p. 16; De Waal Malefijt, Images, p. 231.

(15) Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 221.

modern man or was a less complex necessary precursor in the development towards civilization.

Thus there were no fundamental differences between the cultural processes of any group of humans. There "...is not a single people on earth that has been found entirely without some form of religion, just as there is no human society without the capacity for reasoning, without language, without connubial relations, or some traditional morals and customs."(16) In a passage which reads as if it were copied from Herder, Boas asserted exactly the same view of primitive cultures. "Our knowledge of primitive tribes the world over justifies the statement that there is no people that lacks definite religious ideas and traditions; that has not made inventions, that does not live under the rule of customary laws regulating the relations between the members of the tribe. And there is no people without language."(17) No one has previously recognized this parallel between the views of Herder and Boas. In addition Herder's anthropology has been seriously misinterpreted by commentators, including Boas himself.

(16) Herder, Ideas, 4.6, Barnard, p. 271.

(17) Franz Boas, "The Aims of Ethnology," (1888), in Race, Language and Culture, (New York, 1968), p. 627.

Herder believed that man was designed to be a cultural and linguistic being and had always possessed culture and language from the creation of the first man. Herder argued that because humans lacked the natural survival abilities of animals, there must be something to compensate man for this deficiency. They had to have the ability to create their own techniques of survival. Man cannot survive without labour, without tools, without artificial means to acquire his food and shelter. Human beings require the higher mental abilities Rousseau denied them just in order to survive. Herder dismissed the idea that man could have ever existed without culture or that in his original state was uncultivated or cultureless. For Herder there were no humans so destitute of culture that they were like animals. In his Preface to the translation of the first three volumes of Lord Monboddo's (1714-99) Origin and Progress of Language (1773-92), Herder explicitly rejected the idea that distinctive human characteristics were acquired gradually.⁽¹⁸⁾ He saw this as a fatal flaw in Monboddo's system because humans have always had language and culture. "History knows of no nation of animal-men for even the most savage cannibals have language. They learn it just as we do through tradition and education: the Peshieray [of

(18) Herder, Preface to Monboddo (1784), XV:187.

Tierra del Fuego] like the Englishman, the clattering Hottentot like the gently speaking Greeks."(19)

Herder rejected the common Enlightenment view that primitive man possessed only in potential the same mental powers and faculties as civilized man and that the full powers of the human mind could only be cultivated in civilization. Human beings have had the same psychological and mental faculties at whatever era they have lived. There is no fundamental distinction in mental processes between the cultivated mind and the savage mind because both required culture and education to function. "The poor savage, who has seen but a few things, and combined very few ideas, proceeds in combining them after the same manner as the first of philosophers. He has language like them; and by means of it exercises his understanding and memory, his imagination and recollection, a thousand ways. Whether this be in a wider or narrower circle, is little to the purpose; he still exercises them after the manner of humankind."(20) Nor was there a difference between the motivations of primitive or savage and modern man as was claimed. The structure of human motivation was the same in any society. What differed were the particular values,

(19) ibid., cf. Herder, Ideas, 9.5, Churchill, p. 255.

(20) ibid., 9.2, p. 236.

beliefs, and ideas. It was simply wrong to assert that primitive humans were motivated by impulse or feeling and that modern man was superior because reason or morality had replaced instinct or impulse. "Even the most primitive and the most savage peoples display the power of ideas. Irrespective of what they fight for, they fight under the impulse of ideas. The cannibal, no doubt, expresses his craving for revenge and bravery in an abominable manner, but this does not make his craving any less spiritual." (21)

In rejecting the Enlightenment model of culture as a development from simple to complex and the idea of transformation from a pre-cultural to a cultural state, Herder faced a problem that did not trouble the Enlightenment theorists who postulated the gradual emergence of culture. If, as he suggested, culture were essential to human existence, then how was it possible for the first humans to survive long enough to acquire even the minimal cultural tools necessary for survival? It was easy to explain cultural transmission once the process was under way, but how could Herder account for the original creation of culture?

In the Origin of Language essay which, as I have argued in the introduction, must be seen as the anthropological

(21) ibid., 5.4, Barnard, p. 278.

prolegomenon to the philosophy of history presented in Yet Another Philosophy of History, Herder outlined a theory of cultural development which stretched back to the 'first man'.

I entered the world and, in doing so, I entered a world of instruction; so did my father; and so did the son of the first ancestor. And as I develop my thoughts and transmit them to my descendants, so did my father, so my father's father, back to the first of all ancestors. The chain stretches backwards and comes to an end only when the 'first man' is reached. We are all his sons; with him began the race; here originated language and instruction. He began to invent; and we invented after him, he first taught; we learned and taught after him, with more or less success.(22)

But who taught the first man? In his account of the origin of the human race, he temporarily abandoned his naturalistic principles(23) and asserted that "...the commencement of human cultivation arose, not from chance, or the mere throw of contingencies among a brute herd, but from paternal care and a Divine Providence."(24) While he

(22) Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 171.

(23) H.B. Nisbet, Herder and the Philosophy and History of Science, (Cambridge: 1970), p. 218.

(24) Herder, Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, II p. 33. "...that man should have brought himself into the road of improvement, and invented language and the first science, without a superior guidance, appears to me inexplicable..." Herder, Ideas, 5.7, Churchill, p. 129. cf. Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 156.

was not very clear about the nature of this Divine guidance, it seemed to consist in some kind of creative inspiration that set the human faculties in motion--sort of a Divine jump-start. "And as little as I am able or would venture to designate the mode in which this Divine aid was vouchsafed, still less would I venture to doubt or deny its reality."(25) In the Origin of Language essay he asserted that the "...first moments of reasoning and self-direction...must have been governed by creative Providence."(26) This Divine guidance was necessary only until the active powers of the human mind were awakened and the cultural development of the human race had begun. The "...more the human powers have been exercised, the less did they require this superior assistance, or the less they were susceptible to it..."(27) He made it quite obvious that very little Divine assistance was needed since conditions in the primal paradise were arranged to be optimal for the development of the human race. "Imagine a pastoral civilization, in the most beautiful climate in the world, in which a bountiful nature facilitated the satisfaction of

(25) Herder, Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, II pp. 33-4. In a footnote in the Ideas he refers the reader to the account in the Bible. Herder, Ideas, 10.6, Churchill, p. 286.

(26) Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 155.

(27) Herder, Ideas, 5.7, Churchill, p. 129.

all basic needs..."(28) This argument was used not only in his early more "mystical" philosophy of history but in his mature work as well. "The first abode of man was a garden...For new-born man it was the easiest way of life, since every other, that of the husbandman not excepted, requires art and experience of various kinds."(29)

While the explanation he gave of the origin of man and the emergence of culture was exactly the same in both his early and his later works in the philosophy of history, there is more stress on a literal reading of the Biblical account in the early work---a reflection of Herder's response to the attack on the Old Testament by Voltaire and other philosophes.(30) As a result of this literalism there was a significant difference in his view of the development of civilization between the two works. Contrary to the accepted view that Egyptian civilization was older than the Hebraic, in Yet Another Philosophy of History he saw Hebrew culture as the foundation for the subsequent development of civilization. His story of civilization began with the Hebrews who were the direct

(28) Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 152; cf. Herder, Origin of Language, v:137.

(29) Herder, Ideas, 10.6, Churchill, p. 282. This vision of the primal paradise seems more a reflection of the Garden of Eden than of Rousseau's state of nature.

(30) Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 152.

descendants of Adam and ended with the modern age. There was little reference to other cultures and his picture of the development of history scarcely differed from that of Bishop Bossuet (1627-1704) which was Biblical in inspiration.(31)

In the Ideas he did not take the Biblical account to be literally true in the way he had in the early essay. Instead he saw it as the earliest written example of traditional stories which other cultures expressed in the same way in their mythology.(32) Herder argued that the different mythological accounts about the original home and conditions of the human race pointed to the same origin. He asserted that "...there must have been some more simple tradition, and some real fact in primeval history, in which they had their origin. There must have been some cause for the singular fact, that the traditions of the whole world would chance to point towards one and the same region."(33)

As well in the later work he went into more detail in his speculations concerning man's acquisition of specific cultural practices. In a view that is reminiscent of

(31) Roy Pascal, "Herder and the Scottish Historical School," Publications of the English Goethe Society, 14 (1938-9): 30, 32.

(32) Herder, Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, I p. 125.

(33) ibid.

Enlightenment anthropological speculation, he saw primal man acquiring skills by observing animals and learning from nature. They "...learned to make bows and arrows, fishing tackle and clothing, from animals or from nature ..." (34) Once the early humans had learned the first arts in the primal paradise they were able to adapt to more severe climates (35) and in this manner the world had been gradually populated. "There the primitive races could at first live in peace, then gradually draw off along the mountains and rivers, and become inured to ruder climates." (36)

Despite his deviation from naturalism in his account of the origin of the human race, Herder's conception of the early history of humanity shows some similarity to that of the Enlightenment theorists in seeing this early stage as grounding humanity "...in its first customs and inclinations." (37) Where he differed was in his view of the complexity of human cultural activity even in this early period. He also had more complex views about the factors that governed human development which ruled out the use of a stadial theory. As well his approach ruled out the use

(34) Herder, Ideas, 9.5, Churchill, p. 251; cf. 2.3, p. 36; 8.3, pp. 204-5; 9.3, p. 240.

(35) ibid., 4.5, p. 95.

(36) ibid., 1.6, p. 22.

(37) Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 150.

of the ignoble savage theory. This view asserted that the peoples discovered in America or elsewhere were in the first stage of human development and that knowledge about their culture could be used in making conjectures about the early history of man. Thus he explicitly rejected the approach of the four stages theory that the life of primitive man was limited to the struggle for survival and that the complexity of human life was determined by the mode of subsistence. "It is customary to divide the nations of the world into hunters, fishermen, shepherds and farmers, not only to determine accordingly their level of cultural development, but also to suggest that culture as such is a necessary corollary of a given occupation or mode of life"(38)

In addition, he specifically rejected the hierarchical view of the four stages theory that economic development determined cultural development. He argued that "...cultural development or progress does not solely or even necessarily depend on the stimulation of material needs."(39) While material conditions influenced the development of a particular culture, they did not absolutely determine it in the way that the four stages theorists

(38) Herder, Ideas, 8.3, Barnard, p. 302

(39) ibid.

believed. The "...mode of life of a people comes to be determined one way or another by influences and circumstances other than those constituting its material requirements."(40) For Herder there was no correlation between the mode of subsistence and historical or stadial development. He dated agriculture and pasturage back to the beginnings of time. "In many regions of Asia...corn grows spontaneously, and husbandry dates from time immemorial."(41) Although he saw that more complex development depended on the emergence of domestic animals and agriculture, he rejected the correlation between the mode of subsistence and cultural complexity. While it is true that Herder used the categories of the four stages theory to distinguish different societies, he did not see these as distinct stages through which all societies would normally pass. The mode of subsistence was only one factor distinguishing different cultures.(42)

Herder rejected the economic determinism of the four stages theory firstly because it was based on a developmental view of culture and secondly because it could not be harmonized with his much more complex theory of

(40) ibid.

(41) ibid., 10.3, Churchill, p. 267.

(42) Ronald L. Meek, Social Science and the Ignoble Savage, (Cambridge and London, 1976), pp. 196, 198.

human development. Indeed he rejected any uni-causal theory of history in favour of his own pluralistic understanding of human development, based on his anthropological conception of man's nature as a cultural and linguistic being. Human development is rooted in the process of cultural transmission which always occurs in a social setting. Man is not an isolated being and he does not develop his powers in isolation from other men. He learns from his parents and other humans in his society and he continues the process by teaching his children and other human beings. Thus it is not a passive process since each human being increases the treasure through his own experiences.(43) "Since son and daughter in turn pass on the heritage transmitted to them, there is, in a sense, no thought, no invention, no improvement, which is not passed on, which is not extended almost to infinity."(44) Not only did Herder emphasize that human beings were a product of their cultural environment as Enlightenment theorists had known, but he stressed also that they produced it. Thus for Herder the process of history and culture was a dynamic interrelation between individuals and society.(45) This process depended on the idea of cultural education in

(43) Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 163.

(44) ibid., p. 171.

(45) Herder, Ideas, 9.1, Barnard, p. 312.

which he "...anticipates the modern anthropological concept of cultural learning as a major determinant of human behavior..."(46)

Herder recognized how the infant human, born weak and helpless without any instinct to guide its activity, needed the support of its parents to provide its natural needs. This weakness which would be a disadvantage in any other species is necessary to the kind of being that man is.(47) "Man comes into the world in a state of weakness and deficiency, deprived of instincts and natural aptitudes as no animal is, in order to receive a training and education as no animal does, and thereby develop into an intricately connected whole in a manner unknown to any animal species."(48) If humans matured and became self-sufficient rapidly as other animals do, there would not be the opportunity for the long process of cultural education or enculturation (Bildung), which F.M. Barnard has defined as "...an interactive social process in which men influence each other within a specific social setting in which they

(46) De Waal Malefijt, Images, p. 101; cf. p. 242.

(47) In this respect Herder anticipated modern anthropology as well. See M.F. Ashley Montagu, "Time, Morphology, and Neoteny in the Evolution of Man," in Culture and the Evolution of Man, (New York, 1962), p. 326.

(48) Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 162; cf. Herder, Ideas, 9.1, Barnard, p. 312.

both receive from and add to their distinctive historical and communal heritage."(49)

I distinguish between enculturation and acculturation. Enculturation is the process of learning language and the development of the mental faculties that a child undergoes in becoming a member of a social group, whereas acculturation involves human beings who have already acquired a particular culture and have moved to another. Depending on their age, their mental faculties are already developed and they have acquired language. For this reason the younger children of immigrants can adapt more easily to a new culture than either their parents or older siblings can. This process is similar to what an anthropologist undergoes when he studies another culture. He "...is not learning the culture the way a child would, for he approaches the situation already an adult who has effectively internalized his own culture."(50)

Enculturation for Herder was not a passive process in which the prevailing culture was imprinted on the individual. Not only does the acquisition of culture make it possible for a human to be active in the world, but also

(49) F.M. Barnard, "Introduction," to Herder on Social and Political Culture, (London, 1969), p. 12.

(50) Wagner, Invention of Culture, p. 8.

the innate creativity of the human mind develops through learning language and culture. Man recreates what he has learned, rather than passively copying it.

All education arises from imitation and exercise, by means of which the model passes into the copy. What better word is there for this transmission than tradition? But the imitator must have powers to receive and convert into his own nature what has been transmitted to him, just like the food he eats. Accordingly, what and how much he receives, where he derives it from and how he applies it to his own use, is determined by his own receptive powers.(51)

As well there is another sense in which the enculturative process was creative since humans actively recreate the particular responses to reality that have emerged in the past and become tradition. Man makes culture in the sense that he continually recreates through his activity the technologies, religion, art, social and political practices of his culture. The child of the hunter not only learns to hunt and to construct his weapons but also learns the values and ideals, the religion, myths, and poetry of his particular culture which has developed through a long adaptive process. "He learns language from his parents, and with the language he acquires knowledge,

(51) Herder, Ideas, 9.1, Barnard, p. 313. "Parents never teach their children language without the concurrent inventive activity of the child..." Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 138.

information, laws, and rights. The ideas of his father, the precepts of his mother, enter into him with his mother's milk, with his observation of daily habits, with training and youthful games...."(52)

All this would be impossible without language, and Herder shared with modern anthropology this idea of the fundamental importance of language in the cultural process.(53) The creative operation of the individual human mind and the transmission from generation to generation of the cultural heritage through education are both dependent on language.(54) While it might be possible to conceive of culture without language in the sense that certain animals have been observed who use tools and appear to teach their off-spring these techniques, this method is inefficient and unsystematic compared to the human ability to communicate through language the techniques they have learned and discovered, not to mention the transmission of social, political, religious, and artistic practices.(55) Language freed humans from the immediacy of sensation and

(52) Herder, Government and Sciences, Barnard, p. 229. cf. Herder, Ideas, 8.3, Churchill, pp. 203-4.

(53) David Bidney, "Human Nature and the Cultural Process," in Theoretical Anthropology, (New York, 1953), p. 125.

(54) Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 170.

(55) De Waal Malefijt, Images, pp. 343-4.

gave them the ability to interact symbolically and abstractly with the environment in contrast to the direct interaction of animals. "Speech alone has rendered man human, by setting bounds to the vast flood of his passions, and giving them rational memorial by means of words."(56) Language gives man the power to dispose of the operations of his mind and as a result is able to act freely in the world. "His reason and improvement begin from speech; for by this alone does he govern himself also, and exercise that reflection and choice, of which his organization renders him alone capable."(57)

As well language functioned as the medium which linked humans together in a chain of culture as well as the means by which they were integrated into a particular culture which gave them their sense of identity. "This is the invisible, hidden medium that links minds through ideas, hearts through inclinations and impulses, the senses through impressions and forms, civil society through laws and institutions, generations through examples, modes of living and education. It is through this medium that we

(56) ibid., 9.2, Churchill, p. 233; cf. 5.6, Barnard, p. 278; Herder, Origin of Language, Gode, p. 126; F.M. Barnard, "National Culture and Political Legitimacy: Herder and Rousseau," The Journal of the History of Ideas, 44 (1983): 243.

(57) ibid., 4.3, Churchill, p. 89.

actively establish a continuum between ourselves and those that follow upon us."(58)

Through his understanding of language and culture, Herder was able to attain a rich, deep understanding of the function of motivation and goal-directed striving within a society as part of the cultural formative process. He understood how values, ideas, and beliefs function to create ways of life through practices and institutions. These entities were the expression of the total culture and they could not be understood apart from the culture in which they were created and functioned.(59)

For what does a child learn but the values and beliefs, techniques and technologies, the religion, philosophy, and art, the whole way of life of its own culture. The ideals and ends that humans strive for are learned within a culture.

The boy is educated, to aspire to the fame of a hunter; as the son of Greenlander, to seek renown by catching seals: this forms the subject of the discourse, the songs, the tales of famous deeds, that meet his ears; this is presented to his eyes in expressive actions, and animating dances.

(58) Herder, Scattered Leaves, xvi:35, quoted in Barnard, Herder, p. 117; He "...is able to enter into communion with the way of thinking and feeling of his progenitors, to take part, as it were, in the workings of the ancestral mind." Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 163.

(59) Herder, Philosophy of History, Barnard, p. 204.

From his infancy he learns, to fabricate and employ the implements of the chase: weapons are his toys, and women the object of his contempt...(60)

Herder also saw cultures in the same pluralistic sense as the modern anthropological concept of culture as constituting different 'thought worlds' which were the individual and autonomous products of time and place.(61) "The shepherd sees nature with different eyes than the fisherman and hunter. What is more, even these occupations differ with every region and are as divergent in their actual form as the diverse national characters...the mythology of every people is an expression of their own distinctive way of viewing nature."(62) Myths and religion are part of a particular culture and a particular way of life and they have developed over time. They are national, are passed on from generation to generation and give meaning and structure to life.

Herder extended the concept of culture to all aspects of human life, not just to the accumulation of knowledge and increasing rationality. Culture was not higher cul-

(60) Herder, Ideas, 8.3, Churchill, pp. 203-4; cf. 8.5, Barnard, pp. 310-11.

(61) Stocking, "From Physics to Ethnology", p. 159.

(62) Herder, Ideas, 8.2, Barnard, p. 300.

ture. It was not the job of the historian or philosopher to label the practices of other cultures as prejudices or superstition or to see them as primitive. Herder saw that to do so was simply to take one's own culture as the standard of civilization and to deny any validity to other cultures. He rejected any view that regarded "...European culture as the universal condition of our species. The culture of man is not the culture of the European; it manifests itself according to time and place in every people."(63) Each culture had its validity and autonomy and each represented a unique human response to the conditions of life which could only be understood in its own context. In this understanding Herder is a forerunner of the practice of modern anthropology which is relativistic and non-judgmental in its explanation of human diversity. Anthropology no longer attempts to arrange particular cultures into a hierarchical framework, instead "...the proper study of mankind should focus on specific cultures and their mutual interconnections and unique environmental adaptations in place of the philosophic study of culture-in-general."(64)

(63) Herder, Letters for the Advancement of Humanity, xviii:249; Barnard, p. 24.

(64) Fred Voget, "Man and Culture: An Essay in Changing Anthropological Interpretation," in Readings in the History of Anthropology, (New York, 1974), p. 347; cf. Leach, "Anthropology of Religion," p. 221.

It is not surprising that Boas and Herder expressed similar ideas since Herder had articulated his ideas in response to the Enlightenment precursors of the nineteenth century evolutionary anthropology which Boas was attacking. However Boas failed to see Herder as a precursor of the kind of anthropology he was promoting and merely credited him with "...a marvellous aptitude for entering into the spirit of foreign forms of thought and who saw clearly the value of manifold ways of thought and feeling among the different peoples of the world..."(65) The source of Herder's insight was that the "...natural environment was the cause of the existing biological and cultural differentiation..."(66)

Boas grouped Herder among those "...who saw and felt clearly the individuality of each type of cultural life, but who interpreted it not as an expression of innate mental qualities but as a result of varied external conditions acting upon general human characteristics..."(67) Reading Boas's comments on Herder one is inclined to agree

(65) Franz Boas, The Mind of Primitive Man (1936), (New York, 1965), p. 43.

(66) ibid.

(67) ibid., p. 42.

with Kluckhohn and Prufer who stated: "Boas owned a set of Herder, but how much did he read?"(68)

While Boas may have seen Herder as the forerunner of the nineteenth century geographical determinism, other commentators have made a more serious error. Anthony Darcy has asserted that Herder was "...the first to introduce a pluralistic concept of culture."(69) But he believes that Herder's pluralistic concept of culture as individual and autonomous was based on the idealistic notion that each was part of the Great Chain of Being. There "...is no sequential notion of cultures in his work. Each culture was seen to occur in total isolation, for they were, after all, singular parts of the Great Chain of Being."(70) By this I assume that he means that Herder did not see a sequential development from early cultures to the present or that one culture did not influence the cultures that followed it. The preceding and following discussion shows that this view is simply mistaken. Herder's notion of culture is empirical and naturalistic and Darcy makes the common mistake of

(68) Clyde Kluckhohn and Olaf Prufer, "Influences during the Formative Years," in The Anthropology of Franz Boas: Essays on the Centennial of His Birth, (San Francisco, 1959), p. 10.

(69) Anthony Darcy, "Franz Boas and the Concept of Culture: A Genealogy," in Creating Culture, (Sydney and London, 1987), p. 6.

(70) Darcy, "Boas and the Concept of Culture," p. 9-10.

seeing Herder as some kind of idealist or mystic who opposed the Enlightenment in terms of a concept of individuality. As well Darcy follows the usual view in seeing Herder's influence on later thinkers in terms of a transformation of his supposed organic notion of the "volks-society" into a view of culture that was more empirical and scientific.

Robert Ulin as well recognizes that Herder was the first to use culture in a plural sense,(71) but he errs in saying Herder's notion of culture was "...dissociated from lived material practices." (72) Herder stressed the importance of culture as an adaptive mechanism in the sense of tool making and tool using as the replacement for instinct. Herder's concept of culture included material practices and he did not distinguish between material and non-material aspects of culture.(73)

Klaus-Peter Koepping sees Herder's influence on the German anthropologist Adolf Bastian (1826-1905) who was one

(71) Robert C. Ulin, Understanding Cultures, (Austin, 1988), p. 161.

(72) ibid., note 27, p. 183.

(73) F.M. Barnard, "Culture and Civilization in Modern Times," Dictionary of the History of Ideas, (New York, 1968), I p. 618; cf. Barnard, "Introduction", p. 23.

of Boas's teachers, in a similar fashion. "Bastian was admittedly guided by Herder's notion of folk spirit or national character and his inspirational idea of the uniqueness of the collective creations of each ethnic group." (74) Wilhelm M^uhlmann in his history of anthropology sees Herder's concept of individuality as based on the idea that: "Each people has its own development according to inner necessity." (75) Stocking has a similar view and asserts that Herder conceived history "...in terms of the embodiment of the human spirit in organismic ethnic or national forms." (76) He sees Boas's thinking on ethnic diversity which was based on his concept of culture as having its source or inspiration in Herder's 'organismic diversitarianism'. (77) Thus according to Stocking, for Boas ethnic or cultural differences have their basis in his anthropological idea of culture while for Herder the difference was in the organic uniqueness of each 'volks-society'. (78) "Never fully commensurable, these

(74) Klaus-Peter Koepping, Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind, (St. Lucia, Queensland, New York, London, 1983), p. 87.

(75) Wilhelm M^uhlmann, Geschichte der Anthropologie, (Frankfurt am Main und Bonn, 1968), p. 62.

(76) Stocking, "Boas and the Culture Concept," p. 214.

(77) ibid.

(78) ibid.

national spirits were all equally manifestations of divine immanence realizing itself in the spiritual development of humanity as a whole. Formed far in the past, each national spirit unfolded organically from an 'internal prototype'..."(79)

The flaw with these interpretations is that they assimilate Herder's concept of culture to a superorganic concept of culture which converts it "...into an independent ontological entity subject to its own laws of development and conceived through itself alone."(80) Culture conceived in this fashion is independent of human activity which is shaped in a passive and deterministic fashion by culture.(81)

I am not disputing that Herder's nineteenth century successors read him this way. This misinterpretation is understandable given Herder's penchant for deriving metaphysical meaning from naturalistic occurrences and of cloaking his utterances in poetic metaphor. Reading Herder one can sympathize with Kant's remark that one wonders if

(79) Stocking, Victorian Anthropology, p. 20.

(80) David Bidney, "The Concept of Culture and Some Cultural Fallacies," in Theoretical Anthropology, (New York, 1953), p. 51.

(81) De Waal Malefijt, Images, p. 235; Bidney, "Human Nature and the Cultural Process," p. 150.

"...the poetic spirit that enlivens the expression does not sometimes also intrude into the author's philosophy..."(82)

F.M. Barnard has shown how Herder himself contributed to this misinterpretation by his use of organic metaphors of growth and development, but he emphatically rejects an organistic interpretation of Herder's political and cultural thought.(83)

Unlike Kant whom he was criticizing Herder explicitly rejected the idea of a super historical entity which subsumed the individual. "Every individual only becomes man by means of education, and the whole species lives solely as this chain of individuals. To be sure, if anyone, in speaking of the education of mankind, should mean the education of the species as a whole and not that of so many individuals compromising it, he would be wholly unintelligible to me. For 'species' and 'genus' are merely abstract concepts, empty sounds, unless they refer to individual beings."(84)

(82) Immanuel Kant, Review of Ideas, Part III, in Immanuel Kant, On History, (Indianapolis: 1963), p. 60.

(83) F.M. Barnard, Self-Direction and Political Legitimacy: Rousseau and Herder, (Oxford, 1988), pp. 163, 270; See above, Chapter One pp. 15-17.

(84) Herder, Ideas, 9.1, Barnard, p. 312: cf. Kant, Review of Ideas, Part II, p. 51; Emil Fackenheim, "Kant's Concept of History," Kant Studien, 1956-57, p. 381.

Just as Boas did, Herder distinguished cultures or nations (which was the term he normally used) in terms of their own unique national culture which is a product of historical development. The moving force is the activity of individuals interrelating with their cultural and physical environment. If this point is not understood then his conception of the proper method of understanding other cultures and of understanding the development of history is liable to be misapprehended. Because of his anthropological conception of culture, Herder rejected the Enlightenment project of extending the scientific method to the study of man and proposed instead his own alternative method. The contrast between these two views of the human sciences will be the focus of the next two chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE STUDY OF MAN

The problem of culture---hence the problem of the human condition---is to discover the consistent laws underlying the observable diversity of beliefs and institutions.(1)

Since the eighteenth century there have been two traditions of social thought or inquiry. These two traditions have disagreed on the proper method for studying the human world. The first tradition is that of the social sciences or what were generally known in the eighteenth century as the "moral sciences". The second tradition which developed in opposition to the first came to be known as the human sciences or human studies.(2)

The first tradition has its source in the eighteenth century when the philosophes of the Enlightenment attempted

(1) Claude Lévi-Strauss, The View from Afar, (New York, 1985), p. 35; cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, Volume 1, (Garden City, New York, 1967), pp. 21-2; Clifford Geertz, "The Cerebral Savage: On the Work of Claude Lévi-Strauss," in The Interpretation of Cultures, (New York, 1973), pp. 350-1.

(2) Georg Henrik von Wright, Explanation and Understanding, (Ithaca, New York, 1971), pp. 2-3; H.P. Rickman, Understanding and the Human Studies, (London, 1967), pp. 4-5.

to extend the methods of natural science to the human world.(3) "The mathematical sciences, mechanics, and astronomy were studied according to true principles before the end of the last century; we have only extended to other sciences the methods of reasoning already established in them."(4) The philosophes and their disciples believed that there was one and only one method of acquiring knowledge--that of the natural sciences.(5) This method was applicable to the human world because the causality which operated there was in no fundamental way different from the causality that operated in the physical world. "When we consider mankind according to the difference of sexes, ages, governments, conditions, or methods of education; the same uniformity and regular operation of natural principles are discernible. Like causes produce like

(3) David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature (1739-40), (Oxford, 1978), p. xvi; Georg Iggers, New Directions in European Historiography, (Middletown, Connecticut, 1984), p. 13.

(4) Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, Reception Speech at the French Academy (1782), in Condorcet: Selected Writings, (Indianapolis and New York, 1976), p. 15.

(5) Peter Winch, The Idea of a Social Science, (London, 1958), pp. 1-3; von Wright, Explanation and Understanding, p. 3; Roy J. Howard, Three Faces of Hermeneutics, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1982), p. 31.

effects; in the same manner as in the mutual action of the elements and powers of nature."(6)

The second tradition also has its roots in the eighteenth century. This alternate approach rejected the methodological monism of the Enlightenment approach and made a distinction between the causality in the natural world and causality in the human world. While Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) had been the first to formulate the alternative view that the study of the human world required different methods from the natural sciences, his 'new science' remained virtually unknown and without influence until his rediscovery in the nineteenth century.(7) It was only with Herder's attack on the methods and approach of the philosophes that the basis of a radically new approach to the human studies was established.(8) From the viewpoint of the human studies, human action is intentional or purposive and as such cannot be explained in terms of the

(6) Hume, Treatise, p. 401.

(7) Isaiah Berlin, "The Counter Enlightenment," in Against the Current, (London, 1980), p. 6. Georg Iggers, The German Conception of History (Middletown, Connecticut, 1968), p. 30; F.M. Barnard, "Natural Growth and Purposive Development: Vico and Herder," History and Theory, 18: (1979): 17.

(8) Isaiah Berlin, Vico and Herder, (New York, 1976), p. 145.

notion of causality used in natural science.(9) The actions of human beings can be characterized "...as behaviour directed toward a goal."(10) Thus the reason or cause of an action is not something which preceded it as in the case of natural causation or stimulus-response patterns but the reason or cause is the end to which the action is directed. Actions are thus explained by the end that is desired. The action "....occurs "for the sake of" that goal."(11) Thus for the human studies the causality operating in the human world is not like the causality in the natural world but is teleological or goal-directed. Thus the basic assumption of the Enlightenment approach was rejected.

Yet given the triumphs in natural science, it is entirely understandable that the philosophes of the Enlightenment would wish to extend its methods to the study of man and society. Indeed one may say that the paradigm of all meaning for this age was science and anything that

(9) von Wright, Explanation and Understanding, p. 2; F.M. Barnard, Self-Direction and Political Legitimacy: Rousseau and Herder, (Oxford, 1988), p. 161; Charles Taylor, "The Explanation of Purposive Behaviour," in Explanation in the Behavioural Sciences, (London, 1970), pp. 54-5.

(10) Charles Taylor, The Explanation of Behaviour, (New York, 1964), p. 37.

(11) ibid.

did not meet these standards was rejected as nonsensical and meaningless.(12) The philosophes believed that they could achieve the same certainty in the so-called moral sciences as was possible in the physical sciences. As Condorcet proclaimed in his reception speech to the French Academy in 1782: "In meditating on the nature of the moral sciences, one cannot indeed help seeing that, based like the physical sciences upon the observation of facts, they must follow the same methods, acquire an equally exact and precise language, attain the same degree of certainty."(13)

Yet while natural science deals with the unchangeable and repeatable, the human world seemed somehow different. As Turgot observed: "The succession of mankind...affords from age to age an ever-changing spectacle."(14) The uniformity and repetitiveness characteristic of the natural world do not seem to occur in the human world. No one would speak of an atom or a planet or a plant being moved by wishes, or having feelings, or acting for reasons and

(12) Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, (New York, 1969), II, p. 164; Henry Guerlac, "Newton's Changing Reputation in the Eighteenth Century," in Carl Becker's Heavenly City Revisited, (npp, 1968), p. 19;

(13) Condorcet, Reception Speech, p. 6.

(14) Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, baron de l'Aulne, Successive Advances of the Human Mind, (1751), in Turgot on Progress, Sociology and Economics, (London, 1973), p. 41.

making plans; yet any explanation of human behaviour would seem to be deficient if these characteristics were excluded. It would seem that this argument in itself might have invalidated the use of the scientific method. However, this objection can be overcome if one assumed that in some sense the human mind or human motivations remained constant or invariable, or that "...nature had built a certain uniformity into man's basic patterns of growth and behaviour."(15) Hume argued in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding that men will act and feel in much the same way in all times and places and will respond to similar stimuli in a similar way. There is "...a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains the same, in its principles and operations. The same motives always produce the same actions: The same events follow from the same causes....Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular."(16)

The idea of an invariable human nature often meant that there were certain operations of the human mind which

(15) Gay, Enlightenment, II p. 168; cf. pp. 380-1.

(16) Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748), in Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals. (Oxford, 1966), VIII.i, p. 83; cf. pp. 88-90.

were invariable. These operations included such things as the ability to perceive sensations and form them into ideas or the ability to feel pain and pleasure. All the higher operations of the mind were based on these primary operations and the degree of development of the mental faculties of any individual depended on the particular society in which he was born. Man has the same physical and mental equipment at birth and any modification of the mind is the result of the effect of the social and physical environment.(17) "Are the manners of men different in different ages and countries? We learn thence the great force of custom and education, which mould the human mind from its infancy and form it into a fixed and established character."(18)

Man is malleable, but this malleability is neither arbitrary nor infinite. Any modifications of a set of fixed qualities can be explained in causal terms because man remains in this sense physically and mentally unchanged. Since humans all have roughly the same capabilities, their reaction to the same phenomena will be

(17) Andrew S. Skinner, "Economics and History--the Scottish Enlightenment," Scottish Journal of Political Economy, 12 (1965): 5.

(18) Hume, Enquiry, VIII.i, pp. 85-6.

identical.(19) "The same senses, the same organs, and the spectacle of the same universe, have everywhere given men the same ideas, just as the same needs and inclinations have everywhere taught them the same arts."(20)

Still there were obvious differences due to the physical, cultural, and social environment in which they lived. "What two men can be more different than a philosopher and a common porter? This difference, however, seems to arise not so much from nature as from habit, custom, and education."(21) A more complex cultural environment would elicit more complex mental activity since the mental powers of humans would not develop any further than the prevailing level of culture.(22)

Following from this assumption about the invariability of human nature and the regularity of its modifications, it was possible to study human beings and human societies using the scientific model of explanation in which

(19) Meek, Social Science, p. 234.

(20) Turgot, Successive Advances, p. 42.

(21) Adam Smith, Early Draft of Part of the Wealth of Nations, in Lectures on Jurisprudence, (Oxford, 1978), p. 572.

(22) Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, (1776-88), (New York, 1974), Chapter 9, Volume 1 pp. 235-6; David Hume, "Of Refinement in the Arts" in Essays, (Indianapolis, 1985), pp. 270-1.

"...repeated events...can be explained in terms of lawful processes regularly producing the same effects from the same causes."(23) The result of this enquiry would be to discover the constant relationships between human nature and the physical and social environment. This constant conjunction between cause and effect would then be expressed in the form of general laws or statements which in turn could be used to explain other events in different contexts.(24)

Perhaps the most important use of this method was in explaining the historical development of human society. As I have outlined previously, the generally accepted view of the Enlightenment was that the history of the human race had been a "...gradual progress of society from the lowest ebb of primitive barbarism, to the full tide of modern civilization."(25) For the social theorists of the Enlightenment this development had not been arbitrary or providential but was the result of a comprehensible

(23) George W. Stocking, "Some Problems in the Understanding of Nineteenth Century Cultural Evolution," in Readings in the History of Anthropology, (New York, 1974), pp. 412-13.

(24) William Robertson, History of America (1777), in J.S. Slotkin, Readings in Early Anthropology, (Chicago, 1965), p. 427.

(25) Edward Gibbon, An Address (1793), in The English Essays of Edward Gibbon, (Oxford, 1972), p. 534.

sequence of cause and effect. This causal analysis was not the capricious piling up of fact as practiced by those "...ignorant compilers, who see nothing in facts but the circumstances of which they are composed..."(26) Rather it was the task of the philosophical genius, as Gibbon called him,(27) to seek out the the underlying general causes which governed historical and social development.(28) General causes were not higher forces like Providence which ruled the development of history from outside, but were "...the regular springs of human action and behaviour."(29)

Hume believed that the regularities in human actions were the result of what he called moral causes---those external circumstances of life "...which are fitted to work on the mind as motives or reason, and which render a

(26) Edward Gibbon, An Essay on the Study of Literature (1761), (New York, 1971), p. 107; cf. p. 12; cf. Francis Jeffrey, "Review of John Millar, An Historical View of the English Government, from the Settlement of the Saxons in Britain, to the Revolution in 1688", Edinburgh Review, 3 (1803): 157.

(27) ibid., p. 113; cf. pp. 89-90.

(28) Gibbon, Study of Literature, p. 113; J.W. Burrow, Gibbon, (Oxford, 1985), pp. 17, 23, 71; Meek, Social Science, p. 141.

(29) Hume, Enquiry, VIII.1, p. 83; cf. David Miller, Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought, (Oxford, 1981), pp. 19-20; Gibbon, Decline and Fall, Chapter 27, Volume 3, p. 196.

peculiar set of manners habitual to us."(30) Thus there was a direct causal link between external circumstances such as the form of government, education, or station in life and human motivation. "A soldier and a priest are different characters in all nations, and all ages; and this difference is founded on circumstances whose operation is eternal and unalterable."(31) Hume further argued this "...conjunction between motives and voluntary action is as regular and uniform as that between the cause and effect in any part of nature..."(32)

Thus it was possible to make a correlation between external circumstances and individual action. If the "experimental method of reasoning" were applied to the phenomena of the human world, it would be possible to discover the constant conjunctions between cause and effect. These regularities were the result of lawful processes which governed the human world in the same way that the laws of nature govern natural phenomena.(33) "So great is the force of laws and of particular forms of

(30) David Hume, "Of National Characters," in Essays, (Indianapolis, 1985), p. 198.

(31) ibid.

(32) Hume, Enquiry, VIII.1, p. 88; cf. Hume, Treatise, p. 404;

(33) von Wright, "Determinism," p. 415.

government, and so little dependence have they on the humours and tempers of men, that consequences almost as general and certain may sometimes be deduced from them as any which the mathematical sciences afford us."(34)

If the partisans of the Enlightenment view tended to concentrate on the universal elements in human nature and to search out those aspects which were cross-cultural and could be used to explain cultural phenomena in terms of laws or general principles, the partisans of the second approach argued that this method was not applicable to the human world. The regularities in human and social behaviour cannot be explained in the same way as regularities in the natural world.(35)

Central to the human studies approach is the idea that human responses were neither the reflection of external circumstances nor the result of the uniform patterns of growth and behaviour built into human nature but were the

(34) David Hume, "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science," in Essays, (Indianapolis, 1985), p. 16.

(35) Georg Henrik von Wright, "Determinism and The Study of Man," in Essays on Explanation and Understanding, (Dordrecht-Holland/Boston, 1976), p. 416. Robert Brown, The Nature of Social Laws, (London, 1984), p. 253.

result of conscious choice and purposive action.(36) Thus the relation between human motives and actions is not like the direct causal connection of stimulus-response.(37)

All human action occurs within a context---a set of existential givens. In this way the regularities in human society can be explained in terms of the shared values, beliefs, ideas, and social rules which are learned within a particular society and which are reinforced by social pressure. If the individuals in a given society pursue the same goals, then what has the appearance of law-governed regularity is in fact a case of rule-following. "Human social life is not only a field of practical action, it is, above all, a field of rule-guided and rule-governed action."(38) These rules of conduct, such as morality, custom, good manners, fashion, and law are the social or external goals to which 'normative pressure' elicits com-

(36) Iggers, German Conception of History, p. 30. Brown, The Nature of Social Laws, pp. 158-9. Ilse N. Bulhof, Wilhelm Dilthey, (The Hague/Boston/London, 1980), p. 27; H.P. Rickman, Wilhelm Dilthey: Pioneer of the Human Studies, (London, 1979), p. 8; Rickman, Human Studies, p. 132.

(37) F.M. Barnard, "Accounting for Actions: Causality and Teleology," History and Theory, 20 (1981): 303; Taylor, Explanation of Behaviour, p. 44.

(38) Brown, Social Laws, p. 252; cf. Rickman, Human Studies, p. 71. A "...rule functions as a determinant of my behaviour. Obedience to it is an externally set object of my intentional acting." von Wright, "Determinism," p. 419.

pliance. "Action conforming to custom and norm can usually be linked with a teleological background. (Otherwise "normative pressure" would not be the important force which it is in the life of communities.)"(39)

Social rules are the replacement for the instinctually governed behaviour that is characteristic of animals. While social rules vary from society to society, the lack of instincts or innate principles to govern human activity makes it necessary for all humans to learn social rules to govern their behaviour and structure their lives. If all the drivers in a given society stop at red lights, it is not because there is some necessary biological or physiological connection between the colour red and the act of stopping; rather they have learned that a red light means stop. If the people in a given society act in similar ways in similar situations it is because "...they are all taking part in the same general kind of activity, which they have all learned in similar ways..."(40) Thus the fact that the individuals in a given society or culture share a similar cultural education is the explanation for the regularity and predictability of human behaviour. Individuals

(39) von Wright, Explanation and Understanding, p. 165; cf. von Wright, "Determinism," pp. 415-16, 419; Brown, Social Laws, pp. 252-3.

(40) Winch, Social Science, p. 86.

"...experience a process of socialization that is sufficiently similar, so that they learn the same general norms, standards, and customs. Accordingly, behaviour in a society approximates a common standard because individuals have learned so many of the same things."(41)

Since human choice and action occur within the existential givens of a particular society, the explanation of the actions of human beings can only be given in terms of an empirical account of the particular society in which they lived. "We can show why people act as they do by referring to religious beliefs, social aspirations, rules and conventions."(42)

The values, ideas, beliefs, the motives, goals, and the means to achieve them which structure human lives are acquired through a process of cultural education--enculturation.(43) Thus we cannot assume that the way in which we see the world is the way that other persons or other cultures do, since each individual and each culture has its own unique way of constructing the

(41) Richard A. Barrett, Culture and Conduct, (Belmont, California, 1984), p. 164; cf. p. 72.

(42) Rickman, Human Studies, p. 133; cf. Barrett, Culture and Conduct, pp. 63-4.

(43) ibid.; Brown, Social Laws, p. 253; Winch, Social Science, p. 55; Barrett, Culture and Conduct, p. 64.

world. We have to accept other ways of life as autonomous and self-sufficient and this approach, which I call contextual understanding, thus requires that we understand their activity in their own context and see them "...as active beings, pursuing ends, shaping their own and others' lives, feeling, reflecting, imagining, creating, in constant interaction with other human beings..."(44)

Thus one should not think that what the human studies approach is proposing is the simple re-creation of reality through a process of empathic understanding. Like the proponents of the natural science approach, the approach of the human sciences is based on assumptions about the nature of human existence. "At the heart of any theory of science and society is an image of man, a conception of him as a creature defined by his powers and abilities, his failings and liabilities."(45) This point is quite clear in Herder's case. Those aspects of his thought which make up his anthropology such as his conception of mind, the replacement of instinct by culture and the process of

(44) Isaiah Berlin, "The Concept of Scientific History," in Concepts and Categories, (Oxford, 1980), p. 133; cf. p. 136; Taylor, "Purposive Behaviour," pp. 59-60; Charles Taylor, "Understanding and Ethnocentricity," in Philosophy and the Human Sciences, (London, 1985), p. 118.

(45) Rom Harré, "Architectonic Man: On the Structure of Lived Experience," in Structure, Consciousness, and History, (Cambridge, 1978), p. 142.

cultural education and transmission were the basis of his understanding of human societies and historical development. The next chapter will deal with Herder's pioneering attempt to create a model of the human studies distinct from and opposed to the natural science model of Enlightenment.

CHAPTER SIX

CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Deign to compare your century to those preceding it. Attempt to see it with the eyes of posterity, and judge it historically. You will see, in those ages whose virtues you mourn, a more primitive corruption uniting with ferocity in human customs, a baser greed showing itself with more audacity, vices almost unknown today shaping the character and the customs of whole nations, and even crime often counted among the number of common and everyday actions.(1)

Herder's aim in studying other cultures past and present was to understand them in their own terms---in their own context. It was only by means of such contextual understanding that the customs and beliefs, values and ideas could be made intelligible. He was proposing a radically new approach to the human studies in which all human phenomena--art, literature, politics, morality, religion, philosophy, and science---would be viewed contextually as the creations of human beings who lived at a specific time in a particular place and a particular culture. Values, ideas, and beliefs as well as social,

(1) Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, Reception Speech at the French Academy (1782), in Condorcet: Selected Writings, (Indianapolis and New York, 1976), p. 15.

political, and religious institutions were not phenomena which could be judged by external or timeless standards. Yet Herder believed that such was the practice of the Enlightenment in its approach to other cultures. While I have argued that there were continuities with the Enlightenment approach on such matters as naturalism and cultural transmission, as well as discontinuities on notions of Providence and metaphysical meaning in history, it was on this issue that Herder decisively broke with the Enlightenment.

Herder argued that the Enlightenment approach failed to capture the living reality of human existence for two reasons. First of all, these authors used an abstract method which derived its conclusions from a few examples torn "...out of their context of time and place..."(2) He rejected any sort of general proposition whether derived from empirical observation or based on deduction from a-priori principles.(3) The results of such an approach were general characterizations which were devoid of content and left out "...the particularity--which is the distinguishing characteristic of man..."(4)

(2) Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 182-3.

(3) Herder, Ideas, Draft for Book 13, Barnard, p. 325.

(4) Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, pp. 229-30.
cf. pp. 237-8.

He accused Montesquieu, who was not insensitive to the differences between cultures and historical eras, of attempting to reduce all governments "...into three or four empty categories, when in fact no two governments are alike." (5) According to Herder, Montesquieu used "...a scissors and paste approach, where examples are assembled at random from all nations, times, and climates..." (6) What was required instead was "...a painstakingly acquired understanding of the needs and actual conditions of the country." (7) Herder considered that the depiction of past ages in general terms produced only empty words in which the living reality of human life is lost. The only way to grasp this living human reality is "...to study him strictly in his own place." (8)

The second objection that Herder had to the Enlightenment approach was that he believed they were judging "...all other cultures according to the standards of...[their]...own age..." (9) The basis of this judgement was the idea that the past was the prelude to the

(5) Herder, Ideas, 9.4, Barnard, p. 325.

(6) ibid.

(7) Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 230. cf. pp. 237-8.

(8) ibid., p. 166; cf. p. 187.

(9) ibid., p. 191.

present---the most enlightened age of all---the end of history. "All of our histories, contributions to encyclopedia of all human knowledge and philosophies attest to this and take pains to show how all threads of development were drawn together from East to West, and from the beginning of time to the present, in such a way as to converge and culminate in this zenith of human culture."(10) Herder did not see history as a linear process which had culminated with the values of the Enlightenment emerging from the darkness and barbarity of the past.(11) "All the books of our Voltaires, Humes, and Iselins are, to the delight of their contemporaries, full of beautiful accounts of how the enlightenment and improvement of the world, philosophy and order, emerged from the bleaker epochs of theism and spiritual despotism."(12)

History becomes a kind of morality play in which good gradually triumphs over evil. The result was not any kind of objective judgement but the distortion of the past. Herder belittled the arrogance of the Enlightenment in thinking that the present enlightened age was the goal to which all history was moving. "He likes to think of

(10) Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 221. cf. p. 231.

(11) ibid., Barnard, p. 214;

(12) ibid., pp. 191-2.

himself as the reflection of the entire past, as well as the executor of the entire purpose of the composition." (13) Herder felt that Voltaire, Hume, and other philosophes who criticized other cultures past or present were not engaged in the kind of objective scientific endeavour they believed they were, but were simply imposing the values of their own age onto others who did not live by them or even know of them. (14) But Herder argued that the values of the present are only valid for the present and cannot be taken out of context and applied to other cultures. (15) To do so was to give the values of the present a special status and reduce other cultures, other ways of life to a dependent status. "Men of all quarters of the globe, who have perished over the ages, you have not solely lived to manure the soil with your ashes, so that at the end of time your posterity should be made happy by European culture. The very thought of a superior European culture is a blatant insult to the majesty of nature." (16)

In rejecting the notion of a unilinear natural development based on intellectual, technological, and moral

(13) ibid., Herzfeld, p. 264.

(14) ibid., p. 187.

(15) ibid., p. 166.

(16) Herder, Ideas, 9.1, Barnard, p. 311.

progress, Herder did not reject development or unity in history. Society as it exists now is the result of a long process of development, since each stage of history "...had to grow out of the preceding one."(17) The Greeks, for example, derived their seminal ideas in culture, language, art, and science from other cultures, yet they did not simply imitate but transformed everything radically. "Nothing Oriental, Phoenician, or Egyptian retained its original characteristics. They transformed everything in accordance with their own ideas, so that it became distinctly Greek...Everything attests to this step by step development...this has been the pattern of development for all nations."(18)

Yet each distinct stage in the development of western civilization was an autonomous and individual entity with characteristic values, ideas, and beliefs--a distinct culture. No two cultures are the same just as no two individuals have had the same experiences. "One can see why no nation, and all that goes with it, can ever be identical to a preceding one, even if all of its means of education were completely alike. No two civilizations can

(17) Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 165.

(18) ibid., p. 178.

ever be the same, because all the influences that impinged upon the older one are now lacking."(19)

If human cultures were exactly the same at every point in history and at every place on the earth, then the method that was used to understand the activity of animals and other natural phenomena would be applicable to man. But this is obviously not the case. Thus the only way to understand other cultures is to understand them in context--to understand their values, beliefs, and ideas as they themselves lived them and were motivated by them. It is a mistake to classify and impose the preconceptions of one's own society, to judge other cultures in terms of our ideas of what happiness or the good life is. "It is doing justice to no people upon Earth, to judge of them by a foreign standard of science: yet this has been done to the Greeks, as well as to many Asiatic nations, and they have often been unjustly loaded both with praise and blame."(20) He did not believe that the complexities of human life could be reduced to a formula and then manipulated. He maintained that such a view is simplistic and fails to take

(19) ibid., p. 270; cf. Herder, Government and Sciences, Barnard, p. 248.

(20) Herder, Ideas, 13.5, Churchill, p. 377; cf. Herder, Philosophy of History, Barnard, p. 187.

into account "...the tremendous variety of motivations and dispositions of a human life..."(21)

Herder's view of the medieval period, which the Enlightenment generally viewed as a nearly unrelieved period of barbarism and superstition, illustrates this point. He argued that one must "...understand the Middle Ages according to its own purposes and values, pleasures and customs..."(22) His intention was not to praise or defend all the negative aspects of the Middle Ages but to show that in the migrations and wars, pilgrimages and crusades "...they themselves always struggled to overcome their limitations and to strive for improvement, more than anything else."(23) But the goals and ideals of the men of Middle Ages were not the same as ideals and needs of the eighteenth century Enlightenment.

It is this understanding of particularity and individuality that marks the genius of Herder's understanding of history. Historical understanding had to be able to capture the specific and individual nature of lived human existence. It was this loss of individuality that Herder rejected in the Enlightenment approach. "If one were to

(21) Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 234.

(22) ibid., Herzfeld, p. 213.

(23) ibid., pp. 215-16.

survey and grasp the ocean of entire people, ages, and countries in one glance, one sentiment, or one word, one will get no more than a dim, partial silhouette! The whole vital portraiture of the mode of life, habits, needs and environment would have to be added, or have been given by way of introduction."(24)

Yet the source of Herder's understanding of the individuality of human life and the infinite variety of human existence in different ages and in different cultures has been a matter of contention. As I have outlined in Chapter One, the standard interpretation is that Herder rejected the Enlightenment view of history and human existence by his conception of individuality.(25) The argument maintains that Herder supplanted the generalizing approach of the Enlightenment by an individualizing approach through which one could have a direct apprehension of the deeper meaning of history through the process of empathy.

According to this view, Herder rejected the Enlightenment view and "...insisted that the historian concentrate his attention on unique historical forms and their development. Instead of judging the past by the standards of his

(24) ibid., p. 183.

(25) See above pp. 17-20.

own age, the historian must strive for an empathetic understanding of every epoch and culture."(26) The source of Herder's sense of individuality was a completely new conception of human nature.(27) Instead of a concept of a fixed or permanent human nature which remained unchanged by time and place, Herder "...emphasized the plasticity of human nature and the formative power of historical circumstances."(28) Thus it is not possible to make generalizations about history and society on the basis of an invariable human nature. If, however, historical uniqueness is based on the idea that human nature is infinitely plastic and shaped by the physical and social environment, I fail to see how one can make a distinction between Herder and the causal environmentalism found in Montesquieu, Hume, or in the four stages theorists. Robertson, for example, argued that "...the disposition and manners of men are formed by their situation, and arise from the state of society in which they live."(29)

(26) Trygve R. Tholfsen, Historical Thinking, (New York, 1967), p. 127; cf. pp. 14, 132.

(27) ibid., p. 136.

(28) ibid., p. 135; cf. Frederick C. Beiser, The Fate of Reason, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1987), p. 143.

(29) William Robertson, The History of America (1777), in J.S. Slotkin, Readings in Early Anthropology, (Chicago, 1965), p. 429.

Adam Smith argued in a similar fashion that: "The different situations of different ages and countries are apt, in the same manner, to give different characters to the generality of those who live in them..."(30) In fact it has been argued that Herder's conception of the incomparability of values was derived from the Scottish historians.(31) One "...society cannot be judged by the standards of another. There is an organic relationship between the values (morals, art, emotions, laws) of a society and its mode of subsistence."(32)

However values are only incomparable between different stages, whereas the values of societies in the same economically determined stage are not only comparable but, in fact, are equivalent since they are determined by the mode of subsistence. To argue that this is the source of Herder's conception of individuality is somewhat misleading since Herder rejected the notion of any cross-cultural comparison.(33) What looks like contextual understanding is, in fact, limited by the sensationalist psychology on

(30) Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, (1759, 1761), (Indianapolis, 1982), p. 204;

(31) Roy Pascal, "Herder and the Scottish Historical School," Publications of the English Goethe Society, 14 (1938-9): 27.

(32) ibid.

(33) Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfeld, p. 172.

which this stadial view of development is based. For Herder, human responses were never simply the reflection of or conditioned by external circumstances. Even at the level of perception the human mind was active in its reaction to the world. It did not simply receive external sensation passively, but creatively. "The sense organ as such learns nothing. For the image is depicted in the eye as faithfully on the first day as on the last, but it is the mind which learns to measure, to compare and to absorb the stimuli of the senses."(34) Man possessed a reflective mind which gave him the "...capacity for freely choosing his activities."(35) He was not limited to the determinism of instinct nor do his actions simply reflect his social conditions. "Man is the first of nature's creatures to be set free...He can weigh good against evil, truth against falsehood; he can explore possibilities and choose between alternatives."(36) Human actions are motivated by the goals or ends they pursue. "No longer an infallible

(34) Herder, Ideas, 5.4, Barnard, p. 277.

(35) Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 132; cf. F.M. Barnard, "Introduction," to Herder on Social and Political Culture, (London, 1969), p. 28; F.M. Barnard, "Accounting for Actions: Causality and Teleology," History and Theory, 20 (1981): 292.

(36) Herder, Ideas, 4.3, Barnard, p. 267.

mechanism in the hands of Nature, he becomes to himself purpose and goal of improvement."(37)

This is not to deny that there are limits to human action in the conditions of social life. But the context does not determine human action the way Hume believed, rather the context provides the conditions in which human action is possible. Human choices and human purposes may be limited by the existential givens of the particular time and place in which the individual lives, but without these existential givens human action would not be possible. "Ends or purposes...are not chosen within a contextual vacuum...Actions do not just happen...purposive action in the human realm occurs within institutional structures and systems of rules, conventions, and mutual understandings. Purposes, in other words, are not chosen randomly or out of nowhere. Men choose between alternatives, they do not just choose."(38)

(37) Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 131; cf. F.M. Barnard, Herder's Social and Political Thought, (Oxford, 1967), p. 116. "Man has a will...He is not merely a mechanical link in the chain of nature..." Herder Letters for the Advancement of Humanity, # 29, xvii:143; cf. Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 132.

(38) Barnard, "Accounting for Actions," p. 306; cf. F.M. Barnard, Self-Direction and Political Legitimacy: Rousseau and Herder, (Oxford, 1988), p. 277.

Neither could Herder accept the Enlightenment view that the mind developed step-by-step from lower faculties to higher ones. Nor was the development of the mind dependent on the level or complexity of culture. The human mind has always operated in the same way and has always required language and culture in order to function. Thus there was no functional difference between the mind of primitive and modern humans. No "...European, not to say Grecian, nation has ever been more savage, than the New Zealander or the Peshieray: yet these scarcely human beings possess humanity, reason, and language."(39)

The same sort of criticism can be made about the Ideologue philosopher and anthropologist Joseph-Marie Degérando, who said of savage peoples: "We must try to penetrate what they think, and not claim to make them think as we do."(40) This remarkable statement might be mistaken for contextual understanding. But this aperçu is not based on the idea that all cultures are autonomous, incomparable, and to be understood in their own terms, but on the assumption of sensationalist psychology that among savages

(39) ibid., 9.5, Churchill, p. 255; cf. 4.4, Barnard, p. 266.

(40) Joseph-Marie Degérando, Considerations on the Various Methods to Follow in The Observation of Savage Peoples, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), p. 74.

"...the development of passions and of intellectual faculties is much more limited..."(41)

For Degérando there was a fundamental difference in mental functioning compared with civilized man and as such savage man cannot be judged in the same terms. Because savages were undeveloped mentally and lacked the moral institutions (culture) which in a higher stage would develop their faculties, they were influenced mainly by physical causes. Hence the goal of studying primitive cultures was not to study them for their own sake, but to determine the fundamental laws of the passions and the intellectual faculties.(42) Degérando believed that in the savage state there was little cultural transmission and "...different generations have exercised only the slightest influence on each other ..." (43) Thus the notion of cultural transmission as a universal human process which was central to Herder's understanding of human existence was notably absent from Degérando's view of primitive peoples. Neither did Degérando distinguish among unique qualities of different cultures. Like the four stages

(41) ibid., p. 63.

(42) ibid., pp. 63-4; cf. George W. Stocking, "French Anthropology in 1800," in Race, Culture, and Evolution, (New York, 1968), p. 26.

(43) Degérando, Observation of Savage Peoples, p. 63.

theorists he distinguished between stages of development, each of which was more or less the same and which were comparable to each other.(44)

The point is that the contextualism of the Enlightenment was not the same as the contextualism of Herder because the basis of his contextual understanding was different. Herder's approach to historical understanding developed out of his understanding of culture and the nature of the cultural process. As I have shown in chapter Four, he rejected the comparative method of Enlightenment thinkers who believed that cultural development could be encompassed within a stadial or developmental approach reducing the cultural phenomena of temporally and spatially disparate peoples to common elements. Neither were the motivations of "less-developed" cultures inferior in the sense of being the motivations of men who were mentally less developed. His view of the formation of culture ruled out this notion of progressive mental development that was the basis of Enlightenment thought. The difference between primitive and civilized is technological and intellectual, not mental. Modern man has more knowledge and wider experience, but it is not a difference between cultured and uncultured. "Even the inhabitant of California or Tierra

(44) ibid.

del Fuego learns to make and use the bow and arrow: he has language and ideas, practices and arts, which he learned, as we learned them: so far, therefore, he is actually cultivated and enlightened, though in the lowest order. Thus the difference between enlightened and unenlightened, cultivated and uncultivated nations is not specific, it is only in degree."(45)

While Herder did not dispute the fact that the current state of western civilization was the result of a long process of development, he could not accept the idea that human cultures could be ranked and evaluated in terms of their place on a scale beginning with a pre-cultural or savage state. The fact that primitive tribes were less developed and less sophisticated than modern man, did not imply that they were morally inferior or incapable of development.

There is no such thing as a specially favoured nation (Favoritvolk) on earth...there cannot, therefore, be any order of rank...the negro is as much entitled to think the white man degenerate as the white man is to think of the negro as a black beast...Least of all must we think of European culture as a universal standard of human values. To apply such a standard is not just misleading; it is meaningless. For "European culture" is a mere abstraction, an empty concept. Where does, or did, it actually exist in its entirety? In which nation? In which period? Besides it can scarcely pose as the most perfect manifestation of man's culture, having--who can

(45) Herder, Ideas, 9.1, Churchill, p. 228.

deny?--far too many deficiencies, weaknesses, perversions, and abominations associated with it.(46)

Each culture pursued its own ends and lived their life according to their own conception of the good life. All humans strive to realize their Humanitat through the ideals of what it is to be human that their culture gives them.(47)

Through his understanding of man as a being whose lack of instincts guiding his activity was replaced by culture, Herder was able to see that it was not possible to attribute universal motives to human beings in any meaningful sense. To argue that for instance all men seek to maximize their self-interest or that they seek happiness is not to say very much since their conception of happiness or self-interest will be a product of their education in the values of their culture.(48) In order to understand their motivations, one had to understand them strictly within the context of their own society with its own unique values,

(46) Herder Letters for the Advancement of Humanity, Barnard, p. 24; cf. J.G. Herder, On the Effect of Poetry (1778), viii:392; Herder, Ideas, 9.2. Churchill, p. 236.

(47) See above, chapter Two, pp. 54--6.

(48) Charles Taylor, "The Explanation of Purposive Behaviour," in Explanation in the Behavioural Sciences, (London, 1970), p. 59.

beliefs, and ideals. Happiness is an internal state which varies from culture to culture and Herder understood it as the "...fulfillment of wishes, realization of goals and satisfaction of needs.' which vary according to country time and place..."(49)

What motivated an individual in one society would mean nothing to an individual in a different society whose set of value and beliefs were completely indifferent. "The laurel wreath, the sight of the blessed herd, the merchant ship and the captured field banner are nothing in themselves; what is important is the soul that needed this, that strove for it, that has now attained it and wanted to achieve nothing but this."(50) If we want to know what happiness meant for a Roman or a Greek we have to investigate his conditions of life and history.

Herder's concept of distinct cultures as having their own standards of happiness incurred the ire of Kant who in his review of the Ideas asked:

Does the author mean that, if the happy inhabitants of Tahiti, never visited by more civilized nations, were destined to live in their quiet indolence for thousands of centuries, one could give a satisfactory answer to the question why

(49) Herder, Philosophy of History, Herzfield, p. 192; cf. Herder, Ideas, 8.5, Barnard, pp. 307-8.

(50) ibid, pp. 192-3; cf. Herder, Ideas, 8.3, Churchill, p. 201.

they bothered to exist at all, and whether it would not have been just as well that this island should have been occupied by happy sheep and cattle as by happy men engaged in mere pleasure?(51)

However Herder did not mean that sensual pleasure was the end of life; rather that the meaning of happiness--the satisfaction of desires or the achievement of ends--is defined within a culture, not by presumed universal standards. "In every age--though in each in a different way--the human race has had happiness as its objective..."(52)

Thus because of the nature of the human condition, contextual understanding is the only possible way of gaining knowledge of other cultures. As I have argued above, it is wrong to think that this knowledge can be acquired by empathy.(53) Empathy was the necessary psychological precondition for knowledge but it was not knowledge nor did it provide knowledge. Herder's emphasis on empathy must be understood in the context of the antipathy of the

(51) Immanuel Kant, Review of Ideas, Part II, in Immanuel Kant, On History, (Indianapolis, 1963), pp. 50-1.

(52) Herder, Travel Diary, Barnard, p. 89; cf. Herder, Ideas, 8.5, Barnard, pp. 307-8; Preface, Churchill, p. vi. Herder, Philosophy of History, Barnard, p. 184.

(53) See above, Chapter One, pp. 13--14.

Enlightenment towards values and ways of living that were in conflict with their own. Herder saw this as a failure of imagination which implied a lack of respect for other humans as living beings. We are, he said, "...disinclined to place ourselves in their times, and eager to intrude on them our way of thinking." (54)

Empathy is certainly imaginative, emotional, and non-rational, but it does not allow one to ascend to metaphysical truths which were beyond reason. Historical imagination was like poetic imagination, but disciplined by the factual reality that was being recreated. Like the poet or novelist, the historian was able to recreate the past because of what Isaiah Berlin has called the "inside view". I am not an external observer of human reality but take part in it. I can understand the actions of other humans in different cultures because I myself have feelings, follow rules, and strive for ends. (55) And I can extrapolate my own experiences to other cultures. "Relations of feeling and moral duties cease, where I conceive nothing in a living being analogous to my own being. The more deeply and inwardly I feel this resemblance, and implicitly

(54) Herder, Ideas, 13.5, Churchill, p. 378; cf. Barnard, Rousseau and Herder, p. 204.

(55) Isaiah Berlin, "The Concept of Scientific History," in Concepts and Categories, (Oxford, 1980), pp. 129, 133.

believe in it, so much the more delightful will be my sympathy, and the exercise of it, in accordance with my own sensibilities."(56) Thus an adequate historical explanation depends not on a scientific explanation but "...on our experiences in general, on our capacity for understanding the habits of thought and action that are embodied in human attitudes and behaviour, on what is called knowledge of life, sense of reality."(57)

Empathy was not some magical method with which to appreciate the metaphysical individuality of historical phenomena or the idea lying behind the appearance, as Meinecke claimed.(58) It may be, as Robert Brown has claimed, a weakness of some hermeneutic theorists in believing that the discovery of the meaning of social situations required a "...special ability of imaginative sympathy."(59) But this was not the case for Herder, who would agree with Brown in asserting that what was required was close and intelligent observation. "Much discernment

(56) Herder, Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, II p. 12.

(57) Berlin, "Scientific History," p. 128.

(58) Herder "...attempted to grasp the individuality of history by means of his own method of sympathetic identification." Meinecke, Historism, p. 334; cf. pp. 304, 311.

(59) Robert Brown, The Nature of Social Laws, (London, 1984), p. 253, cf. p. 2.

would be required to penetrate into these circumstances and needs, and considerable discretion to keep the interpretations of different periods within reasonable limits. How much learning and adaptability of mind are necessary to enter into the primitive intellect, the daring imagination, the national feelings of distant ages, and to render them in our own idiom."(60)

Herder may be sometimes guilty of overemphasizing empathy, but a close comparison of his anthropology and Enlightenment anthropology cannot sustain this belief. All those elements of Herder's thought which go into making up his anthropology--his conception of mind, his concept of culture as the replacement for instinct, his conception of enculturation and the transmission of culture were propositions about the human condition and applicable to all human cultures. Their source was in human nature or what Herder called human organization.(61) How man acts in the world, how he goes about living his life is a function of the kind of being he is. History and human existence were only comprehensible if these anthropological propositions about the human nature were understood. "No creature, that we know of, has departed from its original organization or has

(60) Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, p. 148

(61) Herder, Ideas, 3.4, Churchill, p. 59.

developed in opposition to it. It can only operate with the powers inherent in its organization, and nature knew how to devise sufficient means to confine all living things to the sphere allotted to them. In man everything is adapted to the form he now bears; from it, everything in history is explicable; without it, we are left completely in the dark."(62)

Like the Enlightenment notion of human nature Herder's conception of human organization was the organic or biological base for human existence. However, this organic base did not determine behaviour or cultural development in the way that the idea of human nature did so that Herder's anthropology did not provide specific details a priori. All humans have culture, but the content of that culture can only be discovered through empirical research. Since culture is the product of freely creating human beings whose responses to reality cannot be explained solely by their environment, the understanding and explanation of other cultures could not be achieved through the use of generalizations.

In order to judge of a nation, we must live in their time, in their own country, must adopt their modes of thinking and feeling, must see how they lived, how they were educated, what scenes they looked upon, what were the objects of their passion, the character of their atmosphere, their

(62) ibid., 3.6, Barnard, p. 257.

skies, the structure of their organs, their dances and their music. All this too we must learn to think of not as strangers or enemies, but as their brothers and compatriots, and then ask whether in their own kind, and for their own peculiar needs, they had a Homer or an Ossian.(63)

Thus the object of historical study for Herder was not matter in motion but the conscious thought and action of human beings and these could only be discovered through the interpretation of their expressive objectifications in language, art, and other artifacts. Herder believed that understanding how a people lived, thought and felt, what their intentions and desires were, could best be achieved through the evidence presented in art, literature, and mythology. "The songs of a people are the best testimonies of their peculiar feelings, propensities, and modes of viewing things; they form a faithful commentary on their way of thinking and feeling, expressed with openness of heart. Even their customs, proverbs, and maxims, express not so much as these."(64)

(63) Herder, Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, I pp. 27-8.

(64) Herder, Ideas, 8.4, Churchill, p. 216. "For in...[mythology]...we can discern the spirit of the people, their ideas of men and gods, and the direction of their inclinations and passions, in love and hatred, in their hopes on this side of the grave, and their expectations beyond it..." ibid., 18.5, p. 552.

Contextual understanding depended on the acceptance of the common humanity of other cultures. Language and culture were the distinct characteristics of human beings. Herder's understanding of other cultures remained consistent throughout his life because it was based in his anthropology. Herder's thought has not been seen in this light nor has it been considered in the context of the Enlightenment investigation of man and society. It has been the task of this thesis to achieve both these objectives.

CONCLUSION

CULTURE AND HISTORY

Considered as a naked animal without instincts, man is the most wretched of living creatures. Not the dimmest innate instinct guides him towards his natural habitat, his sphere of activity, his sustenance and occupation. No smell or scent forces him to the herbs that will allay his hunger; no blind mechanical tutor builds a nest for him! Weak and submissive, exposed to the struggle of the elements, to hunger and all sorts of dangers, a prey to stronger animals, liable to a thousandfold deaths, he stands, lonely and alone, deprived of maternal instructions and guidance, forlorn on all sides.(1)

Herder's profound insight into culture and the cultural role in human development has long been obscured by a misapprehension of his relationship with the dominant intellectual movement of his time. This traditional interpretation, represented by Friedrich Meinecke, has asserted that Herder overcame the Enlightenment conception of a static human nature and replaced it with a historically variable human nature. This latter concept was the expression of an underlying metaphysical individuality manifesting spiritual powers. According to Meinecke, these individualities could only be understood through a form of

(1) Herder, Origin of Language, Barnard, pp. 153-54.

non-rational intuition which would reveal the deeper spiritual meaning of history. In each period human existence was thus uniquely individual and could not be understood by the generalizing methods of the Enlightenment. Meinecke argued that Herder's conception of the incomparability and individuality of historical cultures was based on a metaphysical conception similar to that of nineteenth century historians like Ranke.

In this thesis, I have reconceptualized this problem and viewed Herder's rejection of the Enlightenment comparative approach to culture and human development in anthropological terms. Thus I have focussed on his conception of culture and human nature and the way in which they developed in reaction to various Enlightenment theories of culture, historical development, human mental development, and language. At the same time I have attempted to show how Herder, despite his blanket condemnation of the Enlightenment, formulated theories with surprising similarity to the Enlightenment positions. I have also tried to demonstrate the actual differences between Herder and the Enlightenment, especially with regard to a concept of culture foreshadowing the modern anthropological approach.

Meinecke was unaware of the anthropological basis of Herder's rejection of certain key elements of the Enlight-

enment view of history and human nature. In particular he failed to take note of Herder's pioneering anthropology in the Origin of Language essay. Further, in believing that Herder's thought could be divided into an early anti-Enlightenment period and a later period when he returned to Enlightenment ways of thought, Meinecke failed to interpret the underlying anthropology as the consistent basis of Herder's understanding of human development at all stages of his life.

Central to Herder's conception of anthropology is the idea that man's relationship to the world and to other human beings is always culturally mediated. Human beings as a distinct species have always had culture and as such it is wrong to argue, as some Enlightenment philosophes did, that humanity had developed from a pre-cultural to a cultural state. For Herder culture is constitutive of human existence. Without the tools and techniques including language which were acquired through a process of enculturation or cultural education, humans would not be able to survive because the human mind could not work. Modern anthropologists, however, argue for a long period of evolutionary development from pre-human to human during which a being capable of culture gradually emerged. Human evolution was itself influenced by culture. Herder, by contrast, believed that humans had been created at a

specific point with all their lasting faculties. Humans are biologically designed to be cultural beings and Herder could not imagine how anyone could assume that human beings could ever have survived without culture. As I have shown, Herder argued for some special tutoring of man at his initial creation, the only point where he diverged from a naturalistic explanation of human development.

Yet while Herder rejected the idea of development from an uncultured to a cultured state, his notion of human development as starting from a less complex state to a more complex state is similar to the Enlightenment. But he did not accept the view that human cultures could be ranked and evaluated in terms of their place on a scale beginning with some pre-cultural or less cultured savage state. Each culture had to be accepted and understood in its own terms as a unique creative response to its time and place. This contextual understanding, as I have called it, had to begin with the realization that these responses were rooted in the indigenous linguistic and cultural traditions of each culture. Yet they could not be reduced to a reflection of culture in the fashion of some Enlightenment environmentalist theories. Human beings were not only a product of their cultural environment as Enlightenment theorists had known, but they were also productive of it. The relationship between individuals and society was dynam-

ic and interactive and the human mind was never simply the sum of its external influences.

Unlike Enlightenment views, Herder's concept of culture did not focus narrowly on innovation and improvement but stressed equally the importance of tradition and education. For the philosophes culture was seen in terms of a process of improvement or progressive development. The human race had started out from an original point of ignorance without technology or culture living on the natural abundance of nature. Through his natural intelligence or reason man was able to acquire knowledge and improve his condition. As a result culture was seen as the accumulation and embodiment of intellectual endeavour. In addition a correlation was postulated between culture and human mental faculties. The higher the level of culture, the higher the level of development of human mental faculties which would reach their perfection in civilization.

A notion of the developmental nature of the human mind was essential to Enlightenment theories of historical development which correlated different stages of development with the development of mental faculties. Thus Herder's attack on sensationalist psychology which postulated a gradual development of mental powers was at

the same time an attack on the theoretical basis of Enlightenment anthropological and historical speculations. Herder dismissed the idea of a step-by-step development from lower faculties to higher ones and argued that the human mind has always operated in the same way and has always required language and culture in order to function.

Herder rejected this hierarchical evaluative notion of culture as a grand process of development, in favour of a view in which all men were equally cultured. Herder's humanism thus transcended that of the Enlightenment because he did not limit culture to those at the top of the scale. While, in general, the Enlightenment may have seen all men as having the potential to be fully human--that is civilized, it was Herder's genius to see all men as equally human and equally cultured wherever and whenever they live. "The naturalist does not presuppose any order of rank among the creatures which he observes; all are to him of equal value and concern. So also the human naturalist. The Black has as much right to consider the White as abnormal, a born vermin, as the White has to consider him a beast, a black animal."(2)

(2) Herder, Letters for the Advancement of Humanity, # 10, XVIII.248; cf. Herder, Ideas, Churchill, p. 228.

Yet Herder did not deny that there has been development in history or that each distinct culture grew out of prior ones. Each culture learned from others. Yet each culture was an autonomous and individual entity with its own set of values, ideas, and beliefs. The individuals in each culture had to be understood as striving to achieve the ideals and goals of their own society. Yet this striving was the driving force of the historical process. This natural propensity or disposition of human beings who pursue the ends of their society, promoted the development of humanity. These strivings were objectified in culture and passed on from generation to generation so that the history of the human race formed one great chain of cultivation beginning with the primal pair. "...the striving never ceases. No one lives in his own period only; he builds on what has gone before and lays a foundation for what comes after." (3) In this manner Herder was able to reconcile his belief in a purpose for history by conceiving it as immanent within the historical process. Every human being by striving to actualize the goals of the particular culture into which he is born furthered the end--which is to become human. Thus the notion that

(3) Herder, Philosophy of History, Barnard, p. 188. "Every individual only becomes man by means of education, and the whole species lives solely as this chain of individuals." Herder, Ideas, 9.1, Barnard, p. 312.

so-called savages were mentally and culturally inferior infuriated Herder. He condemned what he considered to be the arrogant self-centered view of the Enlightenment that the present age was the most enlightened and advanced in human history. Each culture has the right to pursue its own ends and live life according to its own conception of what the good life is. Humans can only act, struggle, and advance within the cultural context in which they are born.

The anthropology which Herder developed foreshadowed the modern pluralistic concept of culture. The concept of culture, the importance of language in preserving and transmitting culture, the process of enculturation, the notion that different cultures are different "thought worlds", unique human responses to the conditions of life, understandable only in context are elements that are the foundation of modern cultural anthropology. Herder was a forerunner of the practice of modern anthropology which is relativistic and non-judgmental in its explanation of human diversity. Yet in view of his diffuse influence, all of his insights into culture, language, and human nature had to be rediscovered in the late nineteenth century. Franz Boas then confronted the evolutionary anthropology that was the heir of the Enlightenment approach.

Herder is a fascinating yet difficult thinker whose works are an enduring legacy. Stripping off the metaphysical framework surrounding his work reveals a thinker whose insights into the human condition are as valid today as they were in the eighteenth century. Although in certain respects Herder may have moved away from the Enlightenment, his humanism and his worldly orientation make him still a member of the "Party of Humanity".

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