

Herder's Science of Man: The Origins of Anthropology in the Philosophy of Language

by

William Eck

BA in Philosophy, Harvard University, 2011

MA in Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh, 2015

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This dissertation was presented

by

William Eck

It was defended on

April 2, 2019

and approved by

Robert Brandom, PhD, Distinguished Professor

Stephen Engstrom, PhD, Professor

Richard Moran, PhD, Professor

John McDowell, Distinguished University Professor

Mark Wilson, PhD, Distinguished Professor

Dissertation Director: Robert Brandom, PhD, Distinguished Professor

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William Alexander Eck, PhD

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Herder is one of the historical figures most responsible for the establishment of cultural anthropology as its own discipline. Before Herder, anthropology was conceived of as a science more closely related to biology and anatomy. Early anthropologists such as Ernst Platner proposed to answer philosophical questions by means of an examination of our physical bodies and nervous systems. Questions in logic, epistemology, and the theory of action were transformed by these anthropologists into questions concerning the workings of our nervous system and sensory organs. The central claim of this dissertation is that this transformation of anthropology from an empirical study of anatomy to an empirical study of culture and history was motivated by a new picture of the relationship between mind and language developed together by Hamann and Herder in the 18th century.

The development of anthropology from a medical science into a study of culture in the work of Herder and Hamann was largely instigated by Kant's critiques of Platner's anthropology. Concepts central to philosophy, such as freedom and reason, are, on Kant's view, fundamentally normative concepts, and therefore cannot be meaningfully investigated by means of an empirical study of the body. Hamann, however, develops a conception of reason as dependent on language, and therefore social and historical, and he comes to the thought that, just as languages are particular to a given community and a particular point in history, so must reason be. What this meant was that the study of reason not only could but must be made responsible to empirical evidence. Anthropology could then be rehabilitated into a study of reason and free action by means of the empirical study of language

and culture. In Herder's work, rehabilitating anthropology into an empirical discipline capable of drawing conclusions concerning reason, meanings, and values meant coming up with an understanding of normativity consistent with both empiricism and naturalism. I reconstruct Herder's arguments for *Einfühlung*, a method of "feeling one's way" into the culture under study, as providing an answer to the former problem, and his social conception of normativity, which provides an answer to the latter.

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Preface

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1.0 Introduction

One of the most pressing issues facing Kant's philosophy, and Post-Kantian philosophy in its wake, consists in the question of how to address the relationship between the normative dimension and the empirical world of experience, or, in Kant's terminology, the noumenal and the phenomenal.¹ On Kant's view, our capacity for practical reason brings with it a set of responsibilities and obligations to act in certain ways, just as our capacity for theoretical reason brings with it a set of responsibilities and obligations to judge and believe in certain ways. The relationship between these responsibilities and obligations, on the one hand, and our material bodies, on the other, however, is left mysterious. On Kant's view, the study of practical reason is the study of how we ought to act, and the study of theoretical reason is the study of how we ought to think, while the study of how we do act and do think is left as of merely psychological interest. Even someone highly sympathetic with this anti-psychologistic stance, however, may be left with some concern for the question of how we, psychological, social, and biological beings that we are, relate to the obligations imposed on us by our rational nature, and how these obligations relate to us as psychological, social, and biological human beings. In other words, how are material, animal beings like ourselves capable of the freedom to think and act, and how do we become subject to the normative laws that govern our thought and action while simultaneously remaining subject to the causal laws of physics and, potentially, biology?

¹ While there are a number of interpreters of the German Idealists who share my thought that the central issue for the Idealists is an account of the relationship between normative and non-normative facts, a number of interpreters disagree with this reading. See Kreines (2015) for an example of a noteworthy interpretation of Hegel which runs against this reading of German Idealism and Brandom (2019) for one which accords with it.

Likewise, the relationship between our social practices, in the public exercise of reason in the form of language as well as in the political and ethical, and the normative commitments that go with these practices, is left underexplored in Kant's work. Kant's most substantive effort to unite his thought on empirical psychology and social practices with his moral and political philosophy occurs in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Here, Kant treats anthropology as that discipline which studies the fact of the matter concerning human constitution, behavior, and practices— the empirical facts concerning human nature— insofar as these facts can be exploited in bringing human behavior closer to the moral order and the good life.

By now, most philosophers interested in this variety of thought are quite familiar with the approaches to this problem explored by familiar figures in German Idealism such as Fichte and Hegel, and potentially by the Neo-Kantians such as Cassirer, but, despite a recent resurgence in interest in the English-speaking world in Herder's philosophy of language, championed by Charles Taylor and Michael Forster, Herder's approach to this issue remains under-explored.² Towards the beginning of his career, in 1765, Herder calls for a revolution in philosophy which would transform the discipline into what he calls "anthropology." The language Herder uses here, either anticipating Kant's usage in the first *Critique* or deriving from his lectures, uses the Copernican revolution as a model for the transformation he envisages:

All philosophy which is supposed to belong to the people must make the people its central focus, and philosophy's viewpoint gets changed in the manner in which out of the Ptolemaic system the Copernican system developed, what fruitful developments must not occur here, if our whole philosophy becomes anthropology. (Herder, "How Philosophy Can Become More Universal" 29)

² While the centrality of the issue of normativity to German Idealism is somewhat contentious, its importance to the Neo-Kantians is not. See, for instance, Beiser (2009) for some insight into the significance of normative readings of Kant for Neo-Kantianism.

Although what Herder comes to mean by “anthropology” changes over the course of his career, the central idea of this passage remains a constant throughout his writings: philosophy must be transformed in such a way that it considers man as the unity of his rational and animal nature, and philosophy must take this unity as its starting point. The reification of reason in the Wolffian Enlightenment philosophy of his time had made philosophy too abstract and too distant from the concerns of everyday life. Herder therefore speaks of logic as a “quite wrongly separated part of psychology” in the essay, calling for a philosophy which attends to how we do think and how we do act, even as it develops a vision for how we ought to think and act (“How Philosophy Can Become More Universal” 9). While this bit of Herder’s writing precedes Kant’s critical writings, it responds to the philosophical climate which engendered these writings and the dualisms which blossomed into Kant’s distinction between the world of experience and the noumenal realm. Herder’s desire in anthropology is to provide a unified account of man, developing an account of our capacities to reason and act freely without losing sight of our nature as animals in the material world. While Herder shares Kant’s thought that anthropology ought to study the facts of the matter concerning human nature, largely from an empirical standpoint, as well as his thought that anthropology ought to be an edifying discipline in some sense— one which brings us closer to how we ought to live in practice— he diverges from Kant sharply in his belief that we may reach theoretical conclusions concerning the nature of reason and ethics on the basis of empirical evidence. Herder’s anthropology, as an empirical discipline which begins from a picture of man as rational, social, and animal all at once, therefore comprises a unique response to the challenge of uniting the two sides of the Kantian dualism.

It is the goal of this project to reconstruct the development in thought which took place from the thought of early anthropologists, such as Ernst Platner, to that of Kant, and finally to Hamann and Herder, with a view towards how the resulting discipline of anthropology aimed to account for the relationship between the natural world and the values and commitments we take on as we inhabit

it. Impressed by the progress of the natural sciences, as well as the empiricism developed by natural philosophers such as Hume, early anthropologists aimed to develop a philosophy of man consistent with a naturalistic stance on the world and an empiricist methodology. The challenge they faced—one which both Kant and Hamann urged on Herder in different ways—was how to account for normativity in a manner that was consistent with his naturalism and empiricism.

There are two distinct components of this question which I will take up in turn in this project. The first is how to make sense of the existence of values and normative statuses at all in a manner consistent with Herder's naturalism. Early anthropology, as I will argue in the following chapter, struggled to make sense of the normative nature of rationality, values, and action due to a crude naturalist standpoint which led to the equation of rationality with processes occurring in the nervous system. In speaking of the normativity of rationality I have in mind the distinction between normative laws, such as the laws of logic, which dictate how we *should* think, and physical or biological laws which may or may not determine how we *do* think. If we know that Jane believes in the truth of the sentences "A" and "If A, then B", the laws of logic, as normative laws rather than causal laws, tell us that she ought to believe "B", not that she does in fact believe "B." Likewise, if we know that the act of stealing for the sake of pleasure is wrong, we know that Jane ought not steal for the sake of pleasure, but we do not know that she will not. Early anthropologists, such as Platner, who aimed to reduce philosophy to the study of the nervous system, could not hope to capture the *ought* of these laws of thought and action because the study of the nervous system could only capture how we do, in fact, think and act. The question of how to make sense of this "ought" in a manner consistent with Herder's naturalistic worldview is the metaphysical question of normativity.

The second is how we can come to perceive and appreciate values in a manner consistent with Herder's empiricism. Considerations from Kant led Herder to question the possibility of an empiricist theory of values: no matter how many times we observe an action and its consequences, we cannot

perceive the necessity involved in the claim that this action *ought* to have occurred or *ought* not to have occurred. Insofar as Herder's anthropology promises to provide an empiricist account of systems of values and obligations, he will need to provide an account of how empirical data can lead to conclusions concerning the ethics and values of a people. This is the epistemological question of normativity.

It is my hope that my reconstruction of Herder's answer to these questions can bring to light a unique response to a problem central both to Kant's own philosophy and the German Idealist movement which came in its wake: how to overcome the dualism between normative and non-normative facts. I further hope that my reconstruction of the methodology Herder proposes to overcome this distinction in the practice of anthropology illuminates new possibilities for philosophers interested in the integration of empirical data into the theory of value.

Although Herder's work is the primary focus of this dissertation, I am particularly interested in the influence Hamann had over Herder's work, a point which has been strongly contested by recent scholarship. I would like, therefore, to take note of where my reading of Herder and Hamann diverges from contemporary scholarship concerning this period of intellectual history.

1.1 The Importance of Hamann

It is my view, to be argued in the following several chapters, that it is only under the influence of his mentor Hamann that Herder came to understand and overcome the challenges that face an empiricist and naturalistic account of normative phenomena. Although Isaiah Berlin's *The Magus of the North: J.G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism* as well as his *Vico and Herder*, which largely introduced the English-speaking world to the works of Hamann and Herder, share with this work a

vision of Herder's thought as molded by his engagement with Hamann, more recent scholarship on Herder, particularly by Michael Forster and Vicki Spencer, has largely served to undercut this reading of their relationship.

Forster attributes a great deal of influence to Herder's philosophy, regarding him as the father both of hermeneutic theory (*After Herder*, 9) and cultural anthropology (*After Herder*, 199) as well as the source for a number of views in the philosophy of mind and language which have only recently received their due treatment. Forster provides three principles which characterize Herder's contributions to the philosophies of mind and language. The first of these is the view that thought is dependent on language, or, as he writes, that "one cannot think unless one has a language and one can only think what one can express linguistically." (*After Herder*, 56). The second view that Forster attributes to Herder is a use theory of meaning, or the view that meaning is to be found in the use of a word and should not, or at least not universally, be equated with the reference of a word. (*After Herder*, 65). Finally, he attributes to Herder a "quasi-empiricist" theory of meaning, according to which the content of all our concepts is based in perception (*After Herder*, 71). For the first two of these claims, Forster rejects claims from interpreters such as Berlin and Beiser concerning Hamann's influence on Herder, claiming instead that Herder was the originator of the views and that Hamann only came to hold these views under Herder's influence. It is clear that Herder holds the first of these views, and he may have held a weak form of the second view. In what follows, however, I will argue that Forster misses Herder's most significant advancement, the conception of the capacity to speak language as a normative status, in part because he underrates the influence of Hamann on Herder.

The contemporary vision of Herder's relationship with Hamann is largely justified by Charles Taylor's reading of Herder's "Treatise on the Origin of Language" in "The Importance of Herder",

one of the most important works in the English language on Herder's thought.³ In this essay, as in Taylor's later *The Language Animal*, Taylor develops a reading of Herder as an important source of "constitutive expressive" views of language, as opposed to the "designative-instrumental" conception of language (*The Language Animal*, 4). According to the instrumental conception of language, words are attached to ideas, which exist and are intelligible independently of language, and facilitate our use of ideas, both in thought by allowing us to combine ideas in novel ways, and in communication. Condillac, one of Taylor's examples of the designative-instrumental approach to language, conceives of language as providing us with the ability to focus on whichever ideas we wish to, rather than being dominated by the ideas present in our immediate experience. Herder's constitutive approach to language surpasses the instrumental approach in its appreciation for the creative powers of language as well as the normative elements of the use of language. The constitutive approach is characterized by a picture of language as engendering novel forms of behavior, thought, and meanings that are not intelligible in terms of our nonlinguistic lives. This is most clear in discussing the normative nature of the use of language. Taylor speaks of the particular form of "rightness" which goes along with the use of language. We can evaluate the use of language as appropriate or inappropriate, correct or incorrect, in a way that is impossible with nonlinguistic activity. It is incorrect, for instance, to refer to a triangle as a "square", and this incorrectness should not be understood in the same terms as the dog who,

³ This is not, however, to say that Taylor, like Forster, denies that Hamann does have a significant role to play in Herder's intellectual development or the picture of language he attributes to Herder. In fact, Taylor (2016) deems the constitutive theory of language he attributes to Herder the "Hamann-Herder-Humboldt" theory. My point here is that, in locating the substance of Herder's mature views in this relatively early essay, before Hamann's critiques led Herder to substantively alter his position, Taylor's essay enables views like Forster's and Spencer's, which minimize Hamann's importance.

having been trained to bark at the sight of a cat, fails to bark at the right time. At least part of what distinguishes these cases is that, in the former case, it makes sense to ask for someone's reasons in calling a shape a "square" in evaluating their behavior. Taylor refers to the perspective of the language-user in this instance as recognizing or seeing a triangle *as* a triangle, and he refers to Herder's view here as "constitutive-expressive" because he reads Herder as seeing our expressive capacities as constituting the possibility of, for example, seeing a triangle as a triangle.

While Taylor's reading of Herder in "The Importance of Herder" and *The Language Animal* does serve to characterize the advancement in Herder's philosophy of language over his predecessors, I believe one of the most significant advancements Taylor attributes to Herder in the "Treatise", the conception of the status of being a language-speaker as an essentially normative status, is a view that Herder only arrives at later in his work, under the influence of Hamann. In saying that the status of being a language-speaker is a normative status, I have in mind something closely related to the view I read Taylor as attributing to Herder. Regarding the status of being a speaker of some language as a normative status means that categorizing someone as a speaker of a language entails subjecting them to new forms of evaluation: they become responsible for justifying their stated beliefs, as well as the immediate consequences of these beliefs, with reasons. Making a judgment involves making a claim on the world, that the world is *so*, and therefore potentially being wrong about the way things are. Taylor's misreading of Herder's "Treatise" is understandable because Herder's path towards this thought is surprising, particularly when compared with the path taken by his contemporaries and those who came in his wake. On a familiar story, German Idealism takes as its starting point the thought that rationality must be understood in normative terms in Kant's work, and only afterwards comes to see that it must be social, and finally that it must be understood as secondary to the capacity to use language. Herder, however, begins from the thought that reason should be understood as nothing over and above an abstraction from the use of language, and only afterwards moves to the thought

that reason is inherently social and normative. Herder is carried along this somewhat unusual course because his primary concern in the “Treatise on the Origin of Language” is to create a naturalistic understanding of the capacity to reason by explaining it in terms of a natural, empirically observable phenomenon: the use of language. It is Herder’s empiricist and naturalistic leanings, not an appreciation for the social or normative dimension of language, that lead him to analyze reason in terms of language in the “Treatise.” It is only when Hamann criticizes the picture of language Herder develops in the “Treatise” that Herder comes to see the use of language, and therefore the use of reason, as a normative phenomenon.

One of the most significant reasons for considering Taylor’s reading of the “Treatise” to be misguided along these lines is that Herder himself seems to have taken Hamann’s criticisms to heart and revised his position from the “Treatise” in later works. In later works such as the *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, Herder shifts away from the naturalistic vocabulary of the “Treatise”, and, to a certain extent, towards Hamann’s picture of the divine origin of language. Although I will argue that there is a sense in which Herder retains his naturalism even in this phase, only employing religious vocabulary metaphorically to develop an understanding of the normative aspects of the use of language, this movement is undeniable and must be accounted for. Locating Herder’s developed view in the “Treatise” makes it difficult to understand both Hamann’s critiques of the “Treatise” and Herder’s responses to them in his later work. Forster often disregards Herder’s leanings towards Hamann in his later period as the product of a misguided mysticism.⁴ Spencer describes Herder as being “genuinely bemused” by Hamann’s critique of the “Treatise”, partly because it is hard to see how the view she and Taylor ascribe to the Herder of the “Treatise” could be vulnerable to the criticisms raised by Hamann in the *Herderschriften* (Spencer 51). Even readings of this period more

⁴ See Forster (2010), pp.289-290

sympathetic with Hamann, such as Frederick Beiser's, fail to see the development in Herder's thought in the wake of Hamann's criticisms of the "Treatise" as representing serious developments in the fundamentals of Herder's philosophy of language. Although Beiser acknowledges a shift towards Hamann's "mystical road" in Herder's writings, he largely attributes it to a religious crisis that was driven partly by Herder's loneliness in the early 1770s and partly by a dissatisfaction with an inconsistency Herder's genetic methodology led him to in his reading of the Old Testament.⁵

These readings struggle to make sense of the substantial shift towards Hamann's mode of thought in Herder's philosophy in the period following Hamann's critiques. In doing so, they miss the genuine progress made in Herder's thought during this period. Hamann pushes Herder to reconsider his account of language and reason to better appreciate and account for the normative dimension of these phenomena. He instills in Herder the importance of instruction in language as a form of induction, one which both subjects a child to new forms of evaluation and makes the child capable of making such evaluations on her own. He also urges onto Herder an account of the essentially social nature of the use of language. Herder's "Treatise" presents a naturalistic account of the use of language and reason at the cost of representing language solipsistically and of lacking the sophisticated understanding of the normativity of reason present in Kant's work. It is only in his later period, when Herder's conception of the status of speaking a language as a normative status fully develops, that Herder truly advances past the Kantian dualisms rather than simply pushing aside the issues the dualism responded to, and it is only with the help of Hamann's critique that he arrives at his mature views.

⁵ See Beiser (2011), pg. 128.

1.2 The Shape of the Project

There are thus three distinct, but closely related, aims to this project. First, I wish to reconstruct the development of Herder's theories of mind and language, with a view towards how these theories respond to the dualisms present in Kant's philosophy. Because this issue was central to debates both within the German Idealist movement and in Neo-Kantian philosophy, Hamann's critiques of Kant's dualisms, as well as Herder's responses, are of interest both to the history of modern philosophy and to contemporary philosophers working within a Kantian framework.

I am also interested here in the closely related question of how the unique form of empiricism developed by Herder presented new methods of investigation to the theories of value and of theoretical reason. The emergence of anthropology from philosophy, in this period of German history, was the product of new pictures both of mind and language and of the possibilities made available by these pictures for empiricism, and Hamann and Herder played pivotal roles in both of these developments. Insofar as these questions are still live today, this project consists in an investigation of the way philosophy of language intertwines with the philosophy of mind as well as philosophical methodology. Contemporary readings of Herder, particularly by Michael Forster, attribute to Herder a proto-Wittgensteinian picture of mind and language, and there are certainly elements of Herder's philosophy that support such a reading. However, Herder saw this picture of mind and language to have drastic consequences for the way we conceive of philosophy; philosophy had to be transformed, on Herder's view, into the empirical, historical, and cultural discipline of anthropology. Although there are some connections between this aspect of Herder's work and ordinary language philosophy, philosophy influenced by the work of the later Wittgenstein has largely avoided making the methodological conclusions Herder drew from his perspective on mind and language. It is therefore

worthwhile to investigate Herder's reasons for taking this step, to see if contemporary Wittgensteinians have reason for thinking more seriously about an anthropological methodology.⁶

But there is also a historical element to my goal in this project: to secure Hamann's place as a significant player in the development of this early period of German philosophy of language and anthropology. Recent philosophical scholarship on Herder has moved away from Hamann, and I believe that the new reading of the relationship between Herder and Hamann in this work provides good reason to question this re-construal of Hamann's influence. Understanding the developments in Herder's later work as responsive to Hamann's critiques in the *Herderschriften* allows us to see the progress from his early empiricist work to his later anthropological work in a new light.

Chapter 2 of this project, below, focuses on the status of German philosophical psychology and anthropology in the time immediately preceding Kant's critical period, as well as Kant's criticisms of early anthropology and his own positive anthropology, as it was presented in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. The aim of this chapter is to present an overview of empirical philosophical psychology as it existed in Kant's time, and to see how the emerging discipline of anthropology situated itself with regard to this area of philosophy. It is also to develop the understanding of the limitations of early anthropology, so that we may later see how Herder came to overcome them. I thus begin with a brief overview of Hume and Baumgarten's empirical psychologies, concluding that each conceived of the primary form of evidence for empirical philosophical psychology to be introspection. I then move to Platner's anthropology, which presents new varieties of empirical evidence and a new

⁶ Contemporary ordinary language ethics anthropologists, such as Veena Das and Michael Lambek, have recently done interesting work which does extend Wittgenstein's thought into an empirical, anthropological anthropology not unlike Herder's. It may be worthwhile to consider how their rationalizations for extending Wittgenstein's work in this manner compare to Herder's, and this is a point I will return to towards the end of this project.

methodology for empirical psychology, or, as he calls it, anthropology. Platner's proto-neuroscientific research purports to answer philosophical questions concerning epistemology and theory of action by means of a study of anatomy. I then move to Kant's argument that empirical anthropology of Platner's form cannot establish conclusions concerning rationality nor free action, which is the crux of this chapter, as it provides the motivations for Herder's reconceiving of the discipline later on. I conclude with a brief overview of Kant's own vision for anthropology and the limitations he imposes on it.

The third chapter develops a reading of Hamann's philosophy of language and the challenges he posed to Kant in his "Metacritique". The aim of this chapter is partly to establish the key elements of Hamann's philosophy of language and mind which will be central to what follows, and partly to demonstrate the reasons Hamann saw this picture of mind and language to require a new variety of empirical philosophy, a reconfiguration of anthropology as Platner conceived it. Hamann's understanding of reason as an abstraction from the use of language leads him to believe that the study of reason must be, in some sense, empirical. Language and reason are essentially cultural and therefore essentially historical, and so the study of reason cannot function *a priori*, as in Kant's work, but rather must empirically examine the development of a particular manifestation of reason in a particular historical moment. This thought leads directly into Herder's new conception of anthropology as he rehabilitates the discipline.

Then, in Chapter 4, I move to Herder's early philosophy of mind and of language, up to and including the "Treatise" and Hamann's critiques of it. Of particular interest here is the conceptual holism Herder develops in his early work, which remains with him as he, later on, develops his anthropology. On my reading of the "Treatise", Herder there attempts to naturalize reason by presenting a naturalistic account of language and presenting a picture of how the capacity for reason is developed together with our capacity to speak a language. Hamann's critiques of Herder's conception of language and reason in this essay all stem from Herder's failure, on Hamann's view, to

represent language and reason as essentially normative. It is an appreciation of Hamann's critiques that lead him to rethink the shape of anthropology; he now comes to see that the study of man must be a study of man's cultures and histories.

Herder's positive anthropological program, developed in the wake of Hamann's critique and heavily indebted to it, is the subject of Chapter 5. The new picture of mind and language Hamann and Herder develop necessitates a new variety of philosophy, one which examines the evolution of values, reason, and meanings as cultures develop. This new variety of philosophy is what Herder calls "anthropology." Here I present Herder's conception of national character as embodying the unique standpoint on the world, including both a system of values and a particular form of reason or thought, held by a community. Herder's conception of national character is designed, in part, to provide an account of reason and of values that is consistent with naturalism. Herder sees national character as emerging in a particular linguistic community at a particular point in history by means of people's interactions with one another, their history, and the environment which they inhabit. In providing an account of how people, naturalistically described, could come to have a particular national character, he also provides an account of how values and meanings could emerge within a linguistic community. I also present Herder's anthropological methodology for studying national character. This new methodology transforms the disciplines of epistemology as well as aesthetics and ethics, making them accountable to empirical evidence. I pay particular attention to the role of empirical data in Herder's anthropology, as this is largely what differentiates Herder's program from the traditional philosophy of his time. I also attend to the question of how this discipline could be seen to replace philosophy, whether its questions are the same as those asked in philosophy or whether it comes with its own unique questions.

I then move, in Chapter 6, to a closer examination of Herder's notion of *Einfühlung*, a methodological technique for anthropologists to "feel their way" into another culture and gain insight

into their unique forms of thought and values. The substance of the preceding chapters has been on Herder's response to the metaphysical question of how values, and normativity more broadly, could come to exist in a world conceived naturalistically. This chapter aims to remedy the situation by focusing on the epistemic question of how we can come to a theory of values from the standpoint of Herder's empiricism. Borrowing from Davidson's writings on radical interpretation, I develop a reading of *Einfühlung* as an act by which the philosopher maps their own values and meanings onto the behavior of the subject of interpretation

I conclude by relating Herder's thought more directly to several philosophical traditions which arrived in its wake. I begin by discussing the influence of Herder on Humboldt, understanding some of the core issues in Humboldt's thought as arising from a tension between the influence of Herder on his thought and his Kantian leanings. I also relate Herder's views to the problems faced by the Neo-Kantians, arguing that Herder's understanding of normativity would have allowed the Neo-Kantians to avoid a number of difficulties which plagued their work. I then move to a consideration of why Herder, whose conception of mind and language closely resembles several positions held by the later Wittgenstein, came to believe that the only future for philosophy was anthropology, while contemporary philosophers still under the influence of Wittgenstein's thought have largely put anthropology to the side. I consider the influence of anthropology on Wittgenstein's own thought, as displayed in his "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough", and I contrast the form of investigation used in Wittgenstein's considerations of language games with Herder's anthropological methodology. I finally consider the kinship of spirit between Hamann and Herder and contemporary anthropologists inspired by Wittgenstein's thought, such as Veena Das and Michael Lambek. I argue that the considerations raised in this project should lead philosophers to take the work done by anthropologists such as these ordinary ethics anthropologists more seriously as providing a kind of philosophical ethics.

This project reconstructs the development of anthropology as a distinct discipline from philosophy in Germany in the 18th century, and it thus leads into the work done by Humboldt and those who wrote in his wake. The central claim of this dissertation is that the picture of mind developed by Hamann and Herder, which emphasizes the constitutive role of language in understanding, the primacy of language over reason and thought, and a conception of language as essentially social and cultural, was seen by them to necessitate a rethinking not only of the content but also of the methodology of philosophy. Although 20th century philosophers, under the influence of the later work of Wittgenstein, came to conclusions concerning mind and language that closely resembled Herder's, they did not take these considerations to necessitate the transformation of philosophy into an empirical, anthropological study of culture. Re-treading the paths Hamann and Herder took may suggest new paths of research for contemporary philosophers still held under the sway of Wittgenstein's thought.

2.0 Early Philosophical Anthropology and the Empirical

In his discussion of Kant's *Anthropology*, Foucault describes anthropology, as it came to exist in the 18th Century, as positioning itself simultaneously as "the science of man" as well as "the science of that which founds and limits man's knowledge for him" (117). One may need to look back to the foundations of anthropology to see the aptness of such a description. Early anthropologists, such as Ernst Platner, conceived of anthropology as a discipline which treated the relationship between the soul and the body from the perspective of medical science. Platner aimed to transform the philosophical study of epistemology into a proto-neuroscientific account of the process by which our senses transfer information to our brain, to transform the study of philosophical logic into the study of how the nervous system processes and transforms information, and to transform practical philosophy into a theory of how our nervous system produces action in the body. Thus, anthropology served as a "science of man" in the sense that it provided an empirical, naturalistic study of the nature of man and an account of his capacities, but it also thereby provided an understanding of the limitations of man's capacity for knowledge and action. Platner's work aimed to reduce logic and epistemology to a primitive form of empirical neuroscience, and so his account aimed to give an empirical account of what man is capable of knowing or doing. Insofar as this science captures the causal laws which govern the capacity to know, it also describes the limitations of what is knowable. We can conceive of this study as one which both founds and limits knowledge in the same sense that Hume's *Enquiry* does. Hume gives an account of our ideas in terms of impressions and the associations we form from these impressions via processes which may be as simple as repeated exposure or may be more complex. In doing so he limits which kinds of ideas it makes sense to have, and what kinds of knowledge we can aspire to. Platner's work gives a closely related account grounded in biological

science – the notion of impression in Hume is substantiated in Platner with discussions of the mechanisms of the sensory organs and the transmission of their intake into the brain by Platner’s “nerve fluids”, a liquid Platner believed traveled through our nerves carrying information. The consequences, in terms of our limitations, remain largely the same.

But Foucault’s description holds for Kant as well, albeit in a distinct way. Of course, Kant’s critical work serves as a study of the limits of our capacity for knowledge just as it studies the foundations of our capacity to know, but the *Anthropology* tackles these questions from another angle. In the *Anthropology*, Kant is interested in investigating how best, given the physiological limitations imposed on man by his physical body, to live a free and moral life. Kant’s *Anthropology* expands the resources available to the anthropologist; it takes not only psychology, but also literature and ethnography as potential sources of anthropological knowledge. But Kant’s hope is not to use the knowledge of the biological sciences, psychology, and ethnographic anthropological research to characterize the bounds or nature of our freedom, but rather to use the knowledge *pragmatically* to help his students and readers actualize their potential as free beings. It is by and large a study of how man can cope with his limitations as a finite being and best actualize his rational character.

And yet another reading of Foucault’s words can give us insight into the conception of anthropology developed in the wake of both the medical anthropologists and Kant’s work: that of Hamann and Herder. Their philosophical tradition is characterized by its emphasis on the role of language in structuring cognition. Guided by the thought that reason is nothing over and above an abstraction from the use of language, Hamann and Herder come to see the philosophical study of disciplines such as aesthetics, logic, and the theory of values moreover, as open to a new variety of cultural and empirical study. The analysis of historical texts, literatures, and ethnography, insofar as it grants insight into the historical cultural development of distinct values and modes of thought, provides an empirical method for studying both theoretical and practical reason. Because reason is

only an aspect of the use of language, we can study it directly by examining the use and practice of language. This tradition also undertakes a kind of “science of man.” The medical anthropologists, such as Platner, see man as a physical, biological organism, capable of reason and thought, and take thus their scientific inquiry into man to be a form of biological investigation. Kant takes man to be defined by his imperfectly rational character: while we contain the capacity to reason, we are limited by our instincts, our sensible character, and our desires. Kant’s anthropology therefore studies those empirical limitations on our rational character, while *a priori* philosophy shows us our true nature as rational beings. For Hamann and Herder, man’s linguistic character entails that man is essentially a cultural, historical animal, and thus that a discipline which aims to understand man must examine our cultures and our histories. The great insight of the tradition set off by Herder and Hamann is that there is a mode of empirical work in philosophy that acknowledges, and indeed attends to, the essentially normative character of human discursive activity.

But this turn, in Hamann and Herder’s work, towards linguistic and cultural analysis also implies an essentially perspectival nature of at least some aspects of our knowledge. Granting that values in, for instance, aesthetics, are the product of cultural forces, and that perhaps moral values are likewise culturally and historically contingent, limits the kinds of knowledge that can be claimed by judgments concerning the beautiful and the good. Moreover, bringing reason down to earth with the claim that it is only a feature of our capacity for language, with its own historical character, may be seen to restrict even our empirical judgments and logic with another form of perspectival relativism.

These three conceptions of anthropology represent three distinct attempts of understanding the role of the empirical in developing a philosophical account of the mind. Anthropology strives, at least in this early period, to provide a scientific understanding of man. The development of the sciences – be it Newton’s progress in physics for Kant, or developments in biological and medical research for Platner – left a deep impression on Enlightenment philosophers, and with that came the desire for

more rigorous philosophical investigation into man as a whole. The question of what kind of discipline philosophy ought to be in this new age went hand in hand with the question of how we should understand man himself.

The medical anthropologists and the tradition of Hamann and Herder each took anthropology to be an empirical discipline capable of replacing traditional philosophy, while their intermediary, Kant, saw anthropology as a supplement to philosophy, serving distinct ends with distinct means. It is our goal, in the following chapters, to characterize the manner in which Herder and Hamann redeemed anthropology as an empirical discipline capable of investigating the questions philosophy purports to answer. In order to arrive at this point, we must understand what kind of discipline the early medical anthropologists envisioned, as well as Kant's reasons for coming to doubt the potential reaches of this discipline. Because the discipline of anthropology, as Platner envisioned it, consisted in a variety of empirical psychology, it will be helpful to consider its relationship with the popular philosophical psychology of his time. Hume's work was an enormous influence on Platner as well as Kant, and a brief discussion of Hume's epistemology will better situate an understanding of Platner's contributions. But it will also be worth examining the rationalist understanding of the role of psychology in philosophy, particularly as their work laid the foundations for Kant's work on anthropology. For this purpose, I will take as my example Baumgarten's psychology, as found in his *Metaphysics*. Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* was tremendously influential on Kant's anthropology, as its section on psychology provided the textbook for Kant's lecture course on anthropology, so a closer look at Baumgarten's work will serve a dual purpose here.

My discussion, in what follows, will focus primarily on methodology, either as made manifest in the work itself, or as stated by the philosophers in question, as my primary interest in this chapter is to trace the role of the empirical in the emerging discipline of anthropology. Of course, these

methodological distinctions will go hand in hand with starkly different views on epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics, as well as distinct conceptions of man more broadly.

2.1 The State of Philosophical Psychology: Hume and Baumgarten

While Hume's skepticism concerning causality famously awakened Kant from his "dogmatic slumber", the epistemology contained in Hume's philosophical psychology also inspired the German anthropological tradition by way of its reception and uptake by Platner (*Prolegomena* 4:260). The relevant aspects of Hume's epistemology and methodology will likely be familiar to the reader, so I will be brief in my discussion.

In the *Treatise*, Hume describes his work, as Platner does after him, as a "science of man", and he notes that this study "must be laid on experience and observation" (xvi). Yet Hume's reader will struggle to find the details, or the results, of anything resembling an experiment in his texts, despite the obviously scientific leanings of Hume's work. Rather, Hume tends to proceed by reflection and careful consideration of his own immediate experience. In the *Enquiry*, Hume speaks of the methodology employed in the text when discussing our capacity to observe the mind's operations. While the workings of the mind are obscure and evade the unscrupulous eye, we can improve our capacity to observe our own mind through reflection and practice. He writes that these operations "must be apprehended in an instant, by a superior penetration, derived from nature, and improved by habit and reflection," and he goes on to say that it is an important and difficult part of his proposed science to "know the different operations of the mind, to separate them from each other, to class them under their proper heads, and to correct all that seeming disorder, in which they lie involved, when made the object of reflection and enquiry" (13 [8]). Hume's work proceeds by taking immediate

experience and reflecting on it, and it can only have taken place, on Hume's account, once his own capacity to recognize the operations of the mind as they occur had been well-practiced. Thus, although Hume's work is empirical as opposed to *a priori*, it proceeds by self-observation and reflection rather than the experimental, objective method Hume claims for his thought.

Hume's epistemology begins with impressions, which are the immediate products of our sensory experience and which linger on in our memory as ideas. Impressions are our current sensory experiences: for the reader, the image of the ink upon this paper, or, perhaps, that of the light reflecting from the monitor, is an impression you now bear. Ideas are the after-effects of these impressions, which may be called back to mind at will. Our ideas become associated in various ways – notably, the repeated conjoined exposure of two similar kinds of impressions – and this will lead to our forming beliefs concerning the objects we take these impressions to correspond to. We may also form more complex ideas by joining together others. Hume's epistemology regards our beliefs as caused by such factors as repeated exposure to certain impressions and habit. Thus, the primary mode of explanation for Hume is one of psychological causation; psychological entities such as impressions are put to work in explaining our beliefs, actions, and speech, and Hume spends much of the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* describing how these simple impressions can come to generate increasingly complex ideas, beliefs, and even actions.

Baumgarten, a rationalist philosopher working in the Leibniz-Wolff tradition, takes on a particular relevance to our story due to his influence on Kant, and in particular Kant's anthropology. While the sections of Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* concerning ontology, cosmology, and rational psychology served as the basis of Kant's lecture course on metaphysics, those pertaining to empirical psychology formed the basis of his lecture course on anthropology. In the *Metaphysics*, psychology is divided between its empirical and rational forms. Baumgarten characterizes empirical psychology as “deduc(ing) its assertions based upon experience that is nearest to hand,” while rational psychology

“deduces its assertions based upon the concept of the soul through a longer series of arguments”(198 [§503]). In principle, the distinction is only a methodological one: empirical psychology takes its knowledge from experience and develops a more systematic understanding of the soul from these observations, while rational psychology begins with definitions and principles and derives its theories from these. But the methodological distinction corresponds to a divergence in content. Baumgarten’s rational psychology examines philosophical questions such as the immortality of the soul, its origins, and the distinction between the souls of human and non-human animals. Largely, the empirical psychology identifies and describes aspects of our everyday mental life, such as reason, the imagination, and our capacities for pleasure and displeasure, in a somewhat systematic way. It is rare that the empirical psychology presents itself with the task of explanation or justification at all; Baumgarten’s main concern there is to botanize the elements of our psychology as we experience it.

Baumgarten uses the term “anthropology”, as Kant and Platner do after him, to refer to the study of man. In the chapter on rational psychology, Baumgarten writes, “The human being consists of a finite soul and a finite body, and hence is internally alterable as well as being a finite and contingent being. Therefore, philosophical and mathematical knowledge of the human being is possible, i.e. philosophical ANTHROPOLOGY and mathematical anthropology, or ANTHROPOMETRY, just as is empirical anthropology through experience” (263 [§747]). The terms “philosophical anthropology” and “empirical anthropology” map somewhat cleanly onto his uses of “rational psychology” and “empirical psychology”, although this use appears only in this section of the text.

Baumgarten’s understanding of man as a finite, or limited, being, is equated on his view with our “imperfection”, and he writes that to be “limited” is to bear “that degree of reality in comparison with which a greater is possible” (146 [§248]). He also holds that this limited aspect of our nature is responsible for our capacity for evil (146 [§250]). It is worth emphasizing that Baumgarten’s view is decidedly not that we have a perfect, rational soul, which is limited by its containment in a physical

body. Our souls as well as our bodies are limited.

Baumgarten's empirical psychology bears little resemblance to what we would consider psychology today. Rather, it consists largely in a botanization of the elements of the soul along with some description of the function of these various elements. He begins from the notion of consciousness, noting that, if he can be conscious of something, he must have a soul (198 [§504]). From here he moves to his capacity for self-consciousness, and to the faculty of sensation. He divides the senses between those of external sense, which represents "the state of [his] body" and those of internal sense, which represent "the state of [his] soul" (205 [§535]). Baumgarten's psychology thus functions by employing the internal sense to examine the workings of his own soul. It is significant, as noted by Corey Dyck, in his *Kant and Rational Psychology*, that Baumgarten takes empirical psychology to be based primarily on our experiences of our own soul. Baumgarten himself is not transparent about the precise methodology at work here, but his student Georg Meier expands on this topic in his work. Dyck provides the following translation of a relevant passage of Meier: "...empirical psychology is that science of the soul which is derived in a more proximate way from experience. In this psychology, we collect all of the experiences that we can have of the effects and alterations of our own soul" (Dyck 47, Meier §474). This means that empirical psychology consists in a form of self-knowledge for Baumgarten. Each of Baumgarten's topics in his empirical psychology is thus arrived at through the process of reflecting on his conscious experience. The faculty of judgment, for instance, is in the first instance arrived at in the following manner: "I perceive the perfection and imperfection of things, i.e. I JUDGE. Therefore, I have a faculty of judging" (223 [§606]). Baumgarten notes that he has experienced himself judging, and concludes that he must have a faculty for judgment. He moves on to characterize the different elements of this faculty as well as the different kinds of judgment, taking care to name each as he proceeds. This process functions largely by way of Baumgarten's

reflection on his own experience; he decomposes the elements of the soul by analyzing his experience of it into its parts.

Despite the apparent divergences in method between the empiricist and rationalist tradition, and the clear divergences in conclusions, empirical philosophical psychology in each of these traditions began and ended with self-observation and self-understanding. Whatever we should like to call this “science of man”, its object of study was the self. Although there is a sense in which those who follow in this anthropological tradition conceive of their study as one of the self, one of the clear breaking points in Platner’s work, maintained by Kant as well as Herder and Hamann’s tradition, was their requirement for new forms of evidence in the pursuit of anthropological study which turn the discipline outwards. Henceforth the anthropological science of man was the science of mankind rather than the science of the self.

2.2 Platner’s Medical Anthropology

Although Platner’s work is relatively unknown in the analytic philosophical community, his work was highly influential in Kant’s time, and Kant’s own position in his *Lectures on Anthropology* and *Anthropology from a Pragmatic View* comprises, at least in part, a response to the success of Platner’s *Anthropologie für Aerzte und Weltweise*. Platner, but also a number of philosophers writing in his wake, such as Schulze and Maimon, undertook a reductive project, inspired by Hume just as much as it was driven by developments in the empirical science of biology, of understanding the mind by understanding the functions of the nervous system. Platner is principally interested in the question concerning the mechanisms by which man moves, senses, and thinks.

Platner defines anthropology as “the science of men, and other organic bodies, and their minds” (iii). Noting that medicine was originally taken to be part of philosophy in the time of Hippocrates, Platner laments that the study of the soul has been relegated to philosophy alone, while medical doctors have pursued the study of the body, with the two disciplines proceeding independently. He continues, “Man is neither body nor soul alone; he is the harmony of both, and the doctor, it seems to me, should, just as little as the philosopher, restrict himself to either” (iv). This statement echoes Baumgarten’s discussion of anthropology as the study of man as both body and soul, but Platner’s meaning is quite different, and it bears more radical implications. On Baumgarten’s view, viewing man as a body involves attending to his non-rational nature – considering his senses, but also his desires, and his capacities for pleasure and pain. To Platner, regarding man as body means to regard him as flesh and blood, and thus taking the science of man to consist as much in an anatomical study as it does in a psychological study. Platner’s aim in this work is to re-unite the disciplines of medicine and philosophy, which in this context ultimately means making doctors aware of the questions provided by philosophy, and making philosophers aware of the means of answering questions provided by empirical biology and anatomy.

Platner understands the nervous system as consisting in a series of canals containing a fluid, referred to as both as “nerve fluid” and “spirit of life”, which transmits information from the sensory organs, including the eyes, ears, tongue, and nose, but also skin, to the brain. The brain functions as the center of the nervous system, but it also provides a meeting-place between the body and the soul. Platner provides an epistemology by describing the transmission of stimulations from the sensory organs to the soul via the nerve fluids. Building on Hume’s discussion of the reception of sense impressions and their transformation into simple and complex ideas, Platner correlates the psychological notions of impressions and ideas with their physical counterparts in the nervous system to provide an empirically verifiable psychology based on a largely naturalistic worldview.

Although Platner takes the soul to be immaterial, his writing emphasizes that the soul can only be understood by empirical research and experience rather than *a priori* philosophizing. He compares the question of the influence of the soul upon the body to the question of how any simple element might interact with another (§309). Platner claims that the medical sciences have neglected the study of psychology due to the apparent immateriality of the soul. He writes:

The neglect of the study of the soul amongst physicians arises, in my opinion, out of a certain modesty on the part of those who may have possessed the talents for an investigation of this kind. This modesty arises also from the prejudice that the soul is entirely hidden, and its communion with the body is an impenetrable mystery, and consequently that all efforts to make this mystery manifest result in futile, improbable, and indeed harmful speculation... But can we then observe and record nothing of the reciprocal relations of the soul and body, which would be both interesting and useful for man? (ix-xi)

In addition to clarifying Platner's aim of re-uniting philosophical psychology with medicine, this passage reveals the primary method of investigation used throughout the text. Platner finds himself struck with a dilemma: he wants to transform philosophy and psychology into legitimate, empirical disciplines under the title of "anthropology", but he believes that the soul itself is immaterial, and thus that it evades straightforward empirical investigation. His solution is to make use of what we can study: the nervous system, and to learn about the soul by investigating its interactions with the nervous system. Although we cannot immediately observe the soul, we can observe its interactions with the physical world, and therefore we can perform a legitimate empirical investigation of it by means of a study of its effects on the physical nervous system. The effects of the soul manifest themselves as the nervous system brings into effect our actions, and the effects of our senses on the soul can be studied as we investigate the transmissions of the nervous system to the brain and the resulting outputs.

Thus, in addition to raw descriptions of the working of the nervous system in basic cases such as motion, much of Platner's *Anthropologie* is concerned with the means by which the soul interacts with the body. Typically, the nerve fluid is described as stimulating or perhaps transmitting information to the brain. A characteristic passage may assist here:

When I say the nerve fluid, whose motion in the brain is necessary for attention, and consequently, for the mental image, is effective in the soul, I do not mean by this that the inner sensuous impression is brought into the soul by the nerve fluid, as an object is presented to an eye. I believe only that these movements of the spirits of life in the brain, which have been proven by experience, move the soul into motion. (§310)

There are a number of striking features of this passage. Perhaps first is that Platner seems highly unsure of the actual workings of this system. The nerve fluids seem to be transmitting information from the sensory organs to the soul, but Platner would rather describe the situation as one of a stimulation of the soul rather than a presentation to the soul. Platner may be avoiding a worry concerning a regress here: rather than concluding his theory of representation with a presentation of an inner object to an inner eye, he deliberately avoids the language of presentation and representation in describing the actual functioning of the nerve fluids.

But Platner's use of the expression "proven by experience" is also worth noting. Although the leading idea of Platner's book is that empirical investigation into the workings of the soul is possible, very little empirical evidence in fact goes towards the development of his own theory. Of course, this partly arises from Platner's own belief in the immateriality of the soul, in addition to his view that thought takes place in the soul itself. He writes, "On the basis of the testimony of my own clear sensation, it is evident that I am something different from my body... So that which thinks and is conscious of what it is is not a part of my body" (§53). Insofar as empirical evidence can give us knowledge of the soul, in Platner's view, it does so indirectly, by illuminating the workings of nervous system and granting insight into the manner in which the nerve fluid stimulates the soul. Even once we understand this, however, it is clear that Platner's theory goes beyond immediate empirical observation. While Platner may have observed the structure of the nervous system, and seen the web of tissue connecting our sensory and motor organs to the brain, what he offers here is primarily speculation concerning the functioning of these tissues.

It would be ungenerous, however, to maintain that this is the primary role of the empirical in Platner's work. Much of Platner's writing concerning the interaction between the nervous system and the soul concerns the possibilities of breakdown in these connections, and here we can see some genuine progress. Given Platner's medical background, it should be unsurprising that these breakdowns are often studied as they manifest themselves in mental illnesses. Platner holds that it is possible, for instance, to over-work one's brain with extensive thought, which can potentially lead to damage in the canals that compose the extended nervous system. But these kinds of breakdown are not limited to the explanation of mental illnesses; Platner also explains potential errors in reasoning and perceptions with physical breakdowns in the functioning of nerve fluids. In a chapter dedicated to the topic of how the physical body enters into the process of reasoning, he writes, "When the movement of the nerve fluids is proper, the corresponding idea in the soul is correct. Otherwise, it is incorrect", and he continues to write, "All natural conditions which make the movement of the nerve fluids disordered in the brain must be resisted, either invariably or as long as conditions and symptoms last" (§573-574). There is a certain pragmatic aim to Platner's writings which betrays his background in medicine, but it also lends insight into the manner in which he believes empirical insight into the soul is possible. A number of Platner's claims in psychology are *testable*, which gives his view a clear advantage over its predecessors in terms of its use of empirical evidence. One can see if Platner's proposed remedies for illnesses in fact treat them, and in principle could observe whether or not the nerve juices are orderly or disorderly in subjects exhibiting symptoms described by Platner. Whereas one could not hope to observe the transition from one of Hume's impressions to an idea in the mind of another, Platner gives us a number of physical events we can expect to see in the external world to confirm or disprove his theory.

Platner has little to say to substantiate his notions of "correct" ideas or "proper" movement of the nerve fluids. Because Platner conceives of perception in terms of the stimulation of nerve fluids,

our access to the external world, on his view, is quite limited, and the objective world, on his view, may or may not bear a deep resemblance to our perception of it. One may be able to provide an Aristotelian story on Platner's behalf concerning the proper functioning of the nervous system, but it is not present in the text. There is a legitimate question concerning whether or not Platner is entitled to employ normative notions such as these in his work.

Despite its limitations, Platner's work had a far-reaching influence, and even those skeptical of precisely the extent to which Platner's theory was based on empirical evidence, such as Marcus Herz, who notably wrote a favorable review of the text, were largely excited by the prospects of the new science of man Platner aspired to create in anthropology.⁷ This is surely in part due to Platner's efforts to substantiate the claims of earlier forms of philosophical psychology with a concrete empirical methodology. Hume and Baumgarten take self-knowledge to be the raw material from which we can construct an empirical psychology, as well as potentially an epistemology. This leaves psychology on a somewhat shaky basis compared to Newtonian physics as well as the biology of their time, and Platner's major contribution is a framework in which legitimately scientific empirical research could be applied to the questions of philosophy and psychology. Not only does Platner connect philosophical questions to established domains of scientific research, such as anatomy, he provides the possibility of empirical sources of knowledge for a philosophical psychology which go beyond self-observation. Hume's notion of impressions, as well as his understanding of how these impressions become ideas, can be translated from a psychological vocabulary to a biological, and therefore potentially physicalist, vocabulary by following Platner's model.

Anthropology, as Platner conceived it, is a new science whose subject is man, conceived of as the harmony of a physical, biological body and the soul. Its methods are empirical, a combination of

⁷ See Herz (1773).

anatomy and primitive empirical psychology. Ultimately, Platner aspires to provide a scientific epistemology and theory of action on the basis of the anatomical theory present in the text. Where the philosophical psychology discussed in Hume takes as its elements sense impressions and ideas, Platner provides a physical, observable entity which performs these functions, and thus opens the possibility of an entirely new form of philosophical investigation.

2.3 Kant and the Limits of Medical Anthropology

As mentioned above, Marcus Herz, despite his reservations concerning aspects of Platner's text, published a largely positive review of the text. This review prompted a response from Kant in the form of a letter delineating his own conception of anthropology and its aims. Kant writes, "I have read your review of Platner's *Anthropologie*. I would not have guessed the reviewer myself but I am now delighted to see the evident progress of his skill. This winter I am giving, for the second time, a lecture course on anthropology, a subject I now intend to make into a proper academic discipline" (*Correspondence* 10:145). One can discern a certain disappointment in Kant's tone with Herz's positive reception of Platner's book as he begins to contrast his own work, which he claims will finally establish the discipline as one worthy of study, with Platner's.

He writes that his intention in his lecture course on anthropology is "to make known the sources of all the [practical] sciences: of morality, of skill, of social intercourse, of the methods of educating and ruling human beings, and with that everything practical." He continues to explain that he is searching for "phenomena and their laws, rather than the ultimate conditions of the possibility of the modification of human nature in general" (*Correspondence* 10:145). While the former statement is likely intended to contrast with Platner and those in his tradition, the latter contrasts the project of

the anthropology with that of Kant's own theoretical philosophy. On Kant's view, anthropology cannot be a theoretical discipline of the kind envisioned by Platner, and ought instead to examine man from a practical perspective. Although it will examine laws of human nature, Kant's anthropology will consider these laws on the level of observable behavior, rather than the internal causes or reasons for this behavior (be they scientific laws concerning the nervous system, or transcendental conditions of rational activity). He continues with a relatively transparent jab at Platner, writing, "Hence the subtle, and to my view, eternally futile inquiries as to the manner in which bodily organs are connected with thought I omit entirely" (*Correspondence* 10:145).

Perhaps due to the politeness of Kant's exchange with Herz, and perhaps because he does not yet have the philosophical apparatus to clearly argue for his view, Kant has little to say concerning his reasons for regarding Platner's investigations as "futile." At the risk of anachronism, we may, all the same, develop Kant's worries by considering the positions he arrived at on related topics in the first *Critique*. There are two lines of thought I would like to develop here: one, concerning Platner as an epistemologist, and another, regarding Platner as a practical philosopher.

Insofar as Platner intends his empirical observations concerning the movement in nerve fluids corresponding to sensory impressions to provide an epistemology, Kant will be somewhat skeptical of its potential in this domain. In the first *Critique*, Kant contrasts empirical psychology with rational psychology by means of their subjects. Rational psychology considers the cogito alone; he describes the self as an object of inner sense as "soul" or the thinking subject. He writes, "...the expression "I", as thinking being, already signifies the object of a psychology that could be called the rational doctrine of the soul" (B400). Rational psychology can take no more than this "I think" as its subject, for the reason that its subject would otherwise become the contingent psychology of a particular species, rather than thought in general. He writes:

If more than the *cogito* were the ground of our pure rational cognition of thinking beings in general; if we also made use of observations about the play of our thoughts

and the natural laws of the thinking self created from them: then an empirical psychology would arise, which would be a species of the physiology of inner sense, which would perhaps explain the appearances of inner sense, but could never serve to reveal such properties as do not belong to possible experience at all (as properties of the simple), nor could it serve to teach apodictically about thinking beings in general something touching on their nature; thus it would be no rational psychology. (*Critique of Pure Reason* B405)

Of course, it is no criticism of Platner that he is engaged in a project called empirical psychology rather than rational psychology, and he would agree with such an assessment. However, we can see from Kant's perspective that Platner regards his object as both the "thinking being" and as body at the same time. In other words, Platner's anthropology, insofar as it comprises a form of epistemology, must take as its subject not only the causal formation of beliefs in the brain, but also the justification of beliefs with reasons. The notion of a reason for belief, however, is normative; in stating our beliefs we must be capable of providing good reasons for holding them to be true, and these justifications are subject to the evaluations of our peers. Epistemology is not concerned with the causal formation of beliefs, but with the justification of beliefs, and Platner's proto-neuroscientific model of epistemology cannot bridge the conceptual gap between the motion of fluids in the nervous system and the notion of something's counting as a reason for believing something. Even if he could give a comprehensive account of the causal laws which govern the motion of the nerve fluids in the formation of beliefs, he would not yet have an account of the sense in which this belief is either justified or not justified, nor would he have an account that distinguishes true beliefs from knowledge. The difficulty arises for Platner, as soon as he takes himself at his word in establishing anthropology as a potential replacement for philosophy, that he will have to employ his biological, empirically-based theories toward the explanation of thought, and with that notion that of a reason for belief. Platner clearly takes himself to be providing something more than an anatomy, and once he passes beyond the causal, anatomical story into that of the philosophical questions he aspires to answer, he will have to merge the "I" with the body for his theory to be of any use. Although he often evades discussions concerning the physical

manifestations of reason, we have already seen that his discussions employ notions of proper ordering and functioning of the brain and nerve fluids to explain the potential correctness or incorrectness of an impression, and even in this limited deployment Platner fails to provide a substantial basis for these normative evaluations.⁸

In the domain of action, Platner encounters a related issue, on Kant's view, in his inability to describe human action as free while remaining consistent with his aspirations. One of two discussions of anthropology in the *Critique of Pure Reason* contrasts two ways of regarding the actions of man: by their empirical character, and by their rational character. If we had a perfect psychology, Kant muses, and therefore fully understood the causal mechanisms which determined our decisions, we could predict any given action on the basis of the conditions of the agent. He writes, "Thus in regard to this empirical character there is no freedom, and according to this character we can consider the human being solely by observing, and, as happens in anthropology, by trying to investigate the moving causes of his actions physiologically" (B578). By contrast, an evaluation of this action according to reason, rather than causal laws, will "find a rule and order that is entirely other than the natural order" (B578). It is only once we evaluate the action as belonging to the realm of reason that we can consider it as one which was *decided upon* or *willed* rather than merely caused, and it is only from this perspective that the possibility of freedom arises.

Again, there is a sense in which this criticism may fall flat when we examine the content of Platner's theory without considering the aspirations that go with it. Platner may happily agree with Kant to a degree, attributing freedom to the soul and noting its independence from the laws of material

⁸ I should note that this reading of Kant, according to which normativity is the central notion which must be made sense of in thinking of both theoretical and practical reason, though it is central to my project, is not an uncontroversial one. See Brandom (2009) for a reading along the lines I have suggested.

causation. Once he does this, however, Platner gives up the possibility that his form of anthropology can grant us any insight into the important questions concerning human action and practical philosophy more broadly, and he leaves himself with only the harmful speculation he condemns in his work to answer these questions. If Platner wishes anthropology to be of use in practical philosophy, he must regard man as acting freely, and if he does this, his study of the nervous system will be of no use. Platner's anthropology can only study action insofar as this action belongs to the causal order.

Ultimately each of these criticisms amount to the same issue: Platner's study intends, insofar as it wishes to replace philosophy, to answer questions concerning man's rational nature, but it proposes to do so by regarding his rational nature – his soul, as Platner conceives of it – as an object belonging to the causal order. With regard to Platner's epistemology, his work, at best, can explain how we come to form certain ideas as a matter of fact, but it cannot explain how we come to have *knowledge*, nor can it provide any insight into reason itself. And with regard to his discussion of action, Platner's theory, even if it develops to the point of successfully predicting and causally explaining action, fails to regard this action as *free*. Thus the "man" of Platner's "science of man" fails to be capable of knowledge, just as he fails to be capable of free action.

This leaves open the question of what kind of empirical study called "anthropology" Kant *could* find useful, as he clearly maintains an interest in the discipline. Metaphysics and epistemology consider man as a rational agent, and thus take no interest in empirical contingencies concerning the psychology of our species. Practical philosophy, Kant stresses, is concerned with what ought to happen, rather than what does happen, and thus Kant writes in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, "it is not necessary to inquire into the reasons why anything pleases or displeases, how the pleasure of mere sensation differs from taste... for all this belongs to an empirical psychology" (4:427). The contingent features of our human nature are not relevant to the metaphysics of morality, nor are they relevant to its foundations.

From Kant's letter to Herz we begin to see an answer to this question. Kant takes anthropology to relate to the practical sciences, and so to answer questions such as how best to govern man. Platner's anthropology certainly has practical elements; its interest in breakdowns of the connection between the soul and the body stems partly from an interest in the cures of mental illnesses, and its interest in experimental method is more practical than speculative. But, to Kant, conceiving of anthropology as a discipline related to the practical sciences means conceiving of it as one related to the free action of man, and Platner's discipline cannot aspire to this.

2.4 Kant's Pragmatic Anthropology

As far as its content goes, much of Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* bears a deep resemblance with the empirical psychology present in Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*. A cursory glance at the table of contents of the latter will reveal that the very same topics discussed in the former – the senses, the imagination, pleasure and displeasure, and desire, among others – are enumerated in Part I of the former, and a more thorough glance will see that these discussions, though often more substantial in Kant's work, share much of their content.

Methodologically, however, there are two important breaking points between Kant's anthropology and Baumgarten's psychology which establish the former as a major development for anthropology. The first is that Kant clearly takes the potential of sources of knowledge for anthropology to go far beyond self-observation. Kant mentions travel as a significant source for anthropological knowledge, including the reading of travelogues, but he stipulates that "one must have acquired knowledge of human beings at home" before the knowledge that can be gained by travel will be of any use (*Anthropology* 7:120). His reasoning on this matter is that one must already know a good

deal about humanity generally before one can learn much concerning the differences between cultures, writing, “*General* knowledge always precedes *local* knowledge here, if the latter is to be ordered and directed through philosophy” (7:120). Our acquaintance with our own culture by way of our experiences of our people begins to give us a general picture of man, and as we go on to study foreign cultures, we can come to appreciate which aspects of our picture are contingent features of the people of our homeland and which are shared aspects of man’s behavior and modes of thought more generally. He later enumerates history, biography, and literature as potential sources of anthropological knowledge as well. Like Platner, Kant expands the scope of evidence for anthropology beyond self-reflection, but rather than drawing primarily from biology, Kant tends more towards the study of culture and literature in substantiating his anthropology.

Kant’s discussion of the inclination towards freedom provides a characteristic example of the use of various forms of data in his *Anthropology*. He writes, “Whoever is able to be happy only according to *another* person’s choice... rightly feels that he is unhappy. For what guarantee has he that his powerful fellow human being’s judgment about his well-being will agree with his own?” (7:268). These opening remarks consist in a form of reflection as well as a variety of common-sense psychology. Kant takes a general observation and moves to a psychological diagnosis of this observation. He continues with this methodology in discussing the inclination towards freedom present in a child at birth, writing, “Even the child who has just wrenched itself from the mother’s womb seems to enter the world with loud cries, unlike all other animals, simply because it regards the inability to make use of its limbs as *constraint*, and thus it immediately announces its claim to freedom (a representation that no other animal has)” (7:268). Again, Kant presents a general observation with a psychological explanation of it. Children cry when they are born because they feel their dependence on their mother and the lack of freedom that comes along with it. Kant is already here diverging from Baumgarten’s psychology, and, to a certain degree, Hume’s, in taking general observations concerning behavior in addition to

reflection on one's own psychology as relevant points of data. This passage occurs in Kant's description of the faculty of desire, as a characterization of the way a particular, important human passion can manifest itself. While Kant's discussion of desire elsewhere in the *Anthropology* does proceed largely by reflection on his own inner experience, here Kant is interested in how this passion is actualized, and he thus largely employs observations of the behavior of others. He moves on to consider the manifestation of the impulse towards freedom in various cultures:

Nomadic peoples, for example, the Arabs, since they (like pastoral peoples) are not attached to any land, cling so strongly to their way of life, even though it is not entirely free of constraint, and moreover they are so high-spirited, that they look with contempt on *settled* peoples, and the hardship that is inseparable from their way of life has not been enough to dissuade them from it over thousands of years... Thus it is not only the concept of freedom under moral laws that arouses an affect... but the mere sensible representation of outer freedom that heightens the inclination to persist in it or to extend it into a violent passion, by analogy with the concept of right. (7:268-9)

Kant here attempts to explain the behavior of Nomadic peoples, in holding to a mode of life according to which they are not tethered to any particular area of land, in terms of the more general inclination towards freedom. This is not an example of the inclination towards Kant's positive conception of freedom, which consists in action that derives from the moral law, but rather towards his negative conception of freedom as freedom from constraint. Kant's use of observations of other cultures here provides an example of a particular manifestation of the passion he is attempting to explain, the inclination towards freedom. Elsewhere in the text, Kant uses literature, observations of his own culture, and self-reflection for similar purposes.

The second major shift between Kant's work here and that of Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* consists in its understanding of the aim of anthropology. And it is with this shift in aim that Kant addresses the question of how conceiving of anthropology as a supplement to *a priori* philosophy can allow it to remain an empirical study with philosophical significance without veering into the errors of Platner's work. Kant urges that his work has a pragmatic aim in this book, and he contrasts pragmatic

knowledge of man with physiological knowledge. “Physiological knowledge of the human being concerns the investigation of what nature makes of the human being; pragmatic, the investigation of what he as a free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself” (7:119). Kant continues to give an example of the particular way in which empirical research can serve this pragmatic end, contrasting the use of knowledge of the function of nerves in anatomy in a purely theoretical method with the pragmatic use, writing of the scientist, “But if he uses perceptions concerning what has been found to hinder or stimulate memory in order to enlarge it or make it agile, and if he requires knowledge of the human being for this, then this would be a part of anthropology with a pragmatic purpose” (7:119). Kant’s aim here is to make use of patterns and, potentially, laws of human psychology, for the purpose of assisting man in living better, more free lives. An anthropology with a pragmatic aim does not hope to provide theoretical knowledge concerning our freedom, rationality, or ethics, but rather uses an existing body of empirical and philosophical knowledge with the purpose of helping man come closer to achieving a free life. Coming to understand our limits will allow us to better work around them, both in our own day to day lives and in considerations relating to how best to govern a free people. Kant therefore sees anthropology as edifying, though only in a very particular sense. The aim of anthropology is to put a body of knowledge – some from philosophy, some from empirical psychology, and some from ethnography – to work in helping man come to live more morally and more ethically. What it means to live more morally and more ethically, however, is left to philosophy proper. Our above discussion of the inclination towards freedom is not supposed to provide any insight into the nature of freedom itself, either on its positive or negative conceptions, but rather into a particular desire man has for freedom. It may be possible to use this knowledge in coming to a better understanding of how to govern men, or how to act with regard to one’s own desires, but it will not provide theoretical insight into freedom itself.

On Kant's understanding, then, anthropology is not a self-standing domain of philosophical knowledge as Platner envisioned it. While it may provide an understanding of how man does, in fact, think, it cannot give us an understanding of how we *ought* to think, and it is this latter form of knowledge that is relevant to the practice of philosophical epistemology as well as of philosophical logic. This former variety of knowledge is useful only insofar as it can guide us to methodological principles which can allow us to, perhaps via instruction or introspection, bring ourselves closer to the modes of thought we ought to follow rather than the ones we are naturally led to. While Kant does speak above of anthropology as including a study of what man "should" make of himself, he does not mean to say that anthropology can demonstrate the content of the moral law, but rather that it can demonstrate what practices, habits, and actions, considered instrumentally, can bring us closer to the manner of life that a metaphysics of morals demonstrates the form of.

In fact, the two major methodological breaks with Baumgarten I have listed go hand in hand. Surely part of Kant's view that travel and literature can be sources of anthropological knowledge comes from his view that anthropology serves as an empirical study of what a free man can, does, and should do with himself. Acknowledging human activity as the product of freedom, and taking the products of this freedom as an object of study, will lead to an interest in the wide divergences in the actualizations and perceptions of freedom found in other cultures. Thus, Kant's discussion of desire goes far beyond the introspective psychology of Baumgarten, discussing the manifestation of the desire for honor, vengeance, and so on, as they manifest themselves in society.

In the end, Kant's anthropology serves as a primarily empirical study which considers man as a free being insofar as it can contribute to the growth of this freedom. Yet it serves this purpose by limiting its own aspirations severely, particularly when compared to those of Platner. In establishing anthropology as a discipline with pragmatic rather than theoretical aims, Kant barricades this form of empirical enquiry off from the realms of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics, which

remain pure, *a priori* disciplines. Part of Kant's rationale for this move derives from his monolithic conception of reason as pure, and this will be the subject of Hamann's attack, as he begins to make room for a new form of anthropology, discussed in the following chapter.

3.0 Gnawing on the Bone: Language and Reason in Hamann

The difficulty Kant saw facing Platner's anthropological program was that the epistemic, ethical, and metaphysical questions Platner aspired to answer must regard man as free, and Platner's empirical approach could not provide insight into man considered as a free being. While we can learn, from experience, facts of human nature concerning what hinders and advances their freedom, as well as how men tend to express their freedom in different circumstances, we cannot thereby learn what free action consists in, nor can we learn what rational, free thought consists in. This is due in no small part to the normative nature of freedom and rationality on Kant's picture.

While Kant takes these facts of human nature to be worthy of investigation and pursues them in his *Anthropology*, he leaves the investigation of reason, in both its practical and theoretical guises, to the transcendental investigations of the three *Critiques*. The thought that empirical evidence could lend insight into matters such as logic and ethics results in a psychologistic view of these topics, on Kant's view, leading to a picture of logic as the study of how man does think rather than how he ought to think, just as ethics becomes a study of why man acts as he does rather than a study of how he ought to act.

At least part of the worry that restricts reason from legitimate empirical investigation, on Kant's view, is the is-ought problem. As Hume argued in the *Treatise*, relations whose links involve normativity, such as "X ought to Y", cannot be deduced straightforwardly from non-normative relations or states of affairs. Knowing how the brain produces our actions, even knowing the process that causes the actions on the basis of our desires and motives, will not tell us how we should act. The worry holds for theoretical reason as well: neither a psychological study of how men tend to think under various circumstances nor a neurological study of the processes which occur in the brain will

capture the sense in which one who knows the truth of the propositions “A” and “If A, then B” *ought* to infer the truth of “B.” A defense of the anthropological conception of philosophy, then, will require an account of normativity that makes sense of this leap from the “is” of empirical observation to the “ought” of logic and ethics.

On the view of the tradition I am interested in discussing here—that of Hamann and Herder—language will be the bridge between the world of sensuous experience and the realm of normativity, which will allow empirical observation to provide insight into topics such as ethics, aesthetics, and logic. Hamann’s critique of Kant’s conception of reason paves the way for this vision insofar as it establishes the deep connections between reason and language, which, on his view, lead to a view of reason that is essentially cultural and historical.

Although Hamann’s conceptions of language and reason build towards the naturalist anthropological program found in Herder’s work, Hamann was not himself a naturalist, and his criticisms of the Enlightenment conception of reason often read as religiously dogmatic or fundamentalist. Kant and Hamann shared a deep, long-lasting friendship, but fundamental disagreements on issues of faith and reason consistently resurged between them, leaving periods of silence between them. This conflict between Hamann and Kant manifested itself vividly when Kant requested Hamann’s assistance in the production of a natural philosophy textbook for children, a part of a general program intended to educate the youth according to the principles of the Enlightenment. Rather than simply declining Kant’s offer, Hamann responded with snide criticism of Kant’s aims in the text, which Hamann saw to be unfit for young people. He suggests instead that a child’s book on natural philosophy ought to tell the story of genesis, writing, “Nature in the six days of its birth is therefore the best scheme for a child” (“Letters” 243). Here Hamann reads not just as a counter-Enlightenment philosopher, but as a religious reactionary, hostile to the philosophical and scientific developments of the Enlightenment, clinging to an old dogmatism.

Hamann's critiques of Enlightenment philosophy, as well as his positive philosophical views, are thus poorly situated for a sympathetic reading in the largely secular world of analytic philosophy. No doubt this partly explains why, even as Herder experiences a resurgence in interest today, Hamann's work remains largely under-explored. Contrary to initial appearances, however, Hamann's doubts concerning the project of the Enlightenment often stem from his unique form of empiricism rather than his dogmatism.

Hamann's impulse towards empiricism leads him away from the abstract constructions found in the philosophy of his time. Hamann does not see evidence of man's unchanging, universal rational nature in his experience of himself or his observations of others. He charges his opponents with a Platonistic view of rationality and urges that they attend more to concrete, sensuous experience. This pull towards empiricism leads him to attend to language in his investigations of reason. While we cannot observe *pure* reason, we can see how reason is manifested in the use of language. The study of language, Hamann thinks, is the only way to observe reason; philosophers have no higher access to a reason which precedes it. According to Hamann's empiricism, if we can only observe reason insofar as it is expressed in language, reason is best thought of as nothing more than an aspect of language use. He famously writes, in a letter to Herder, "Reason is language, logos. This is the bone I gnaw at, and shall gnaw myself to death over" ("Letters" 246). The fact that languages evolve historically and vary culture to culture leads Hamann to a picture of reason that cuts against the universalistic picture of Kant and his peers. He writes, "Is all your human reason anything other than tradition and inheritance?... Is not your human reason an indeterminate organ, a nose of wax, a weather-cock?" ("New Apology" 162). Reason, just like language, is malleable on Hamann's view, passed on as a cultural institution. It reflects not, as in Kant's view, a timeless rational nature, but rather the circumstances and environment that gave birth to it.

The development of this picture of reason, as well as its corresponding conception of language, will be the topic of this chapter. Hamann's writings were almost always critical; rather than completing systematic works or essays, he produced pamphlets, letters, and reviews, typically targeted at a particular work or popular idea he took issue with. Arriving at an appreciation of his views, then, will require an engagement with the occasions of Hamann's writings. I will begin with a discussion of Hamann's critique of Enlightenment, primarily as it appears in his first major work, *Socratic Memorabilia*. I then move to Hamann's discussions of language, prioritizing the role of instruction in his work. It is with this notion of instruction that Hamann captures the idea that speaking a language involves taking up a certain normative status, forming the beginning to a response to the Kantian worries discussed above. I then move to Hamann's criticism of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the place where he most clearly presents his thoughts on the relationship between language and reason. Throughout this essay I will make it a point to relate Hamann's thoughts to his unique form of empiricism, one which is more expansive than not only Platner's, but also Hume's and Hutcheson's, in its account of the social realm and its role in constituting normative statuses.

Before continuing, a note must be made concerning the particular challenges posed by Hamann's style. As his letter to Kant displays, Hamann writes with an acerbic wit in his criticisms, but his writings often lack transparent argument. Further, his thoughts are often cloaked in metaphor and allegory, which can make it difficult to parse his already distinctive views. Goethe described the "strange garment of language" covering Hamann's thoughts, which make the reader "tired and confused by so many riddles" (*Annals* 351). Yet he also describes the "great pleasure" with which he worked through the "Sybilline pages of this modern Magus" ("Letter to Charlotte von Stein"). Hegel, whose own social and historical conception of reason is foreshadowed in Hamann's writings, describes Hamann as making a "balled fist" in his writing, leaving the rest – "the only part of merit for science" – to the reader. Yet this fist contained "the balled core of truth", if only Hamann had stretched his

fingers out for our sake (39). These challenges will mean that the work done in this chapter will, of necessity, often involve interpretation of images and metaphors, often in counter-intuitive ways. It is my hope that the reader will, as Goethe and Hegel did before them, find some reward in unclenching this fist.

3.1 Hamann's Response to Enlightenment

The revolutionary character of Hamann's conception of reason as social and historical can only be understood in contrast within the intellectual context his writings: the Enlightenment. No philosopher embodies this style more clearly than Christian Wolff, who preceded Kant as the preeminent German philosopher of Enlightenment. He aimed to make philosophy into a science with the rigor and certainty of mathematics, employing only principles innate to human reason, such as the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Methodologically, Wolff believed philosophy should begin from empirical knowledge and analyze it to its simple components. It then produces definitions of these simples and synthesizes these components to re-build the empirical, revealing with greater clarity the causes and structures underlying the empirical phenomena. The principles of reason involved in these deductions are seen to be essential to, or presupposed by, human thought.

Lewis White Beck notes an ambiguity in Wolff's work with particular relevance to the skepticism Hamann will later approach it with: "[In Wolff's work] 'Reason' means both a faculty of the mind, an insight into the connection of truths, and the *ratio*, or *causa*, of judgments about things and things themselves" (266-7). Although Beck takes this ambiguity to betray the fact that Wolff's central arguments are little more than a "pun", a more generous reading might take the double-use of

this word as demonstrating a fundamental premise of the work: that our reasons or justifications for belief in some proposition might be the same as the reason for that proposition's being true. On this view, our rational nature mirrors the rational structure of the world. Wolff expresses a thought of this form in the *German Logic*, writing:

Man 'tis true, has a natural aptitude or disposition to produce the operations of the Understanding, and Rules are prescribed to it, by which it regulates itself, without understanding them; just as Bodies move by certain rules or laws, and a Man, in walking, and in other Motions, observes a set of Rules, which he does not understand. The Rules prescribed by God to the Understanding, and the natural Aptitude to act accordingly, constitute the natural Logic... (XVI.iii)

These rules, of logic, physics, and perhaps biology, are all of a kind. Man is blessed with an innate capacity to think according to these laws, to reason syllogistically, just as the world has been created so as to act according to laws. One can see in this passage an acknowledgment of a kindred spirit between the alethic modality found in the world and the deontic modality found in reasoning. The Wolffians took as their motto the Latin phrase "Sapere aude", or "Dare to know"; it is this attitude of confidence in the capacity of human reason to uncover the truth about the world that characterizes Enlightenment thought. The world is out there for the knowing, if only one would reach out and grasp it. In the case of Wolff, this is partly due to the fact that the world is made so as to be known; it was created by God to mirror our own rational structure. But we must not be led, by this thought, to ignore that Wolff's systematic philosophy serves also as a threat to religious doctrine. The motto "Dare to know" must be understood with its implicit undertone of "Do not simply believe what you are told by the church and the state." This ambiguity in the religious status of Wolff's writings leads Hamann to describe him as "a Maltese *neutrius generis*", or a neutered Maltese, presumably because he stands between the secular world and the religious.

The implicit challenge to belief in Wolff's "Dare to know" was made explicit in Kant's famous essay, "What is Enlightenment?" Although it arrived twenty years after the writing of the *Socratic Memorabilia*, Hamann's sustained critique of Enlightenment philosophy, the vision of Enlightenment

the text responds to is Kant's, first and foremost, and this essay contains his clearest expression of that vision.⁹ Here Kant defines Enlightenment as "mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity."

He continues:

Immaturity is the inability to make use of one's own understanding without the guidance of another. *Self-incurred* is this inability if its cause lies not in the lack of understanding but rather in the lack of the resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another. *Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your *own* understanding! is thus the motto of enlightenment (58 [8:35]).

It is cowardice concerning our own exercise of our powers of reason that has prevented us from maturing; Enlightenment marks the process of overcoming this cowardice and learning to think for ourselves. This cowardice allows for, and is facilitated by, the rise of "guardians" who do our thinking for us. "If I have a book that has understanding for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a doctor who judges my diet for me, and so forth, surely I do not need to trouble myself," Kant writes (58 [8:35]). As Wolff before him, Kant understands Enlightenment in terms of the use of reason to come to objective, certain knowledge, although Kant's emphasis on the thought that this reasoning must be free and independent is his own. To be Enlightened is to free oneself from the guardianship of public opinion and of one's church and come to knowledge by the exercise of reason alone.

Yet the free exercise of reason Kant encourages must also be limited, he warns. Kant distinguishes here between the public use of reason, which "must at all times be free", and the private use, which may be "restricted without the progress of enlightenment being particularly hindered" (58-59 [8:37]). The public use of reason is understood as the scholarly use, one which is ultimately placed "before the entire public of the *reading world*" (60 [8:37]). The public use of reason then resembles the

⁹ The primary reason for taking Hamann to be responding primarily to Kant in his thought on Enlightenment is their longstanding friendship, and the troubles brought into this friendship by fierce debates concerning the influence of the Enlightenment.

freedom of the press; the spread of Enlightenment requires that we allow the free dissemination of ideas, not so others can blindly accept them, but so they can be debated, and therefore accepted, rejected, or modified, with justification. The private use of reason consists in exercise of thought in one's role *as* a member of society. This latter use must be restricted to some degree for society to function efficiently. A soldier may, employing reason in its public use, write an article critical of the leadership in her army, but in the heat of battle she must obey his superior officer, whether or not she agrees with a given order. Likewise, a preacher may write articles critical of certain doctrines of the church, but her sermon, which must be delivered *as a preacher in his church*, must not contradict the orthodoxy. Kant's essay serves as a defense of Frederick II, who cultivated the proper climate for Enlightenment to thrive in Germany through both a free press and protections for freedom of religion. Of Frederick, Kant writes, "Only one ruler in the world says: '*Argue*, as much as you want and about what- ever you want, *but obey!*'" (63 [8:41]). An apt leader for Enlightenment must both stimulate the flourishing of intellectual discourse and maintain control of the state.

Hamann reacted to Kant's essay with a deep cynicism and distrust, particularly aimed at the relationship between the guardians Kant criticizes and the submission to authority he advocates in the private realm. In a letter to Christian Kraus, Hamann accuses Kant of conceiving of himself, as well as Frederick the Great, as guardians not unlike those Kant speaks disdainfully of in his essay. He writes, "Why does the chiliast [Kant] deal so fastidiously with this lad Absalom [Frederick the Great]? Because he reckons himself to the class of guardians and wishes thereby to attain a high reputation before immature readers" ("Letter to Kraus" 146). Kant's claim to universal truths, and particularly his claim to the capacity to determine which exercises of reason are necessary for the welfare of the public and which are capable of being dispensed with, positions him as a guardian. Part of Hamann's sense of dread relating to Kant's vision of Enlightenment is rooted in a realistic stance towards Kant's distinction between the public and private use of reason. He describes it as "comical" before writing,

“What good to me is the *festive garment* of freedom when I am in a slave's smock at home?” (“Letter to Kraus” 148). For all the discussion of the significance of the free exercise of reason in Kant’s article, the picture ultimately defended is one of obedience in action without a significant opportunity for dissent. The public use of reason is restricted, ultimately, to a small class of people who are capable of writing and publishing articles, while the majority of the population toils in what Hamann describes as an “indentured servitude to the state” (“Letter to Kraus” 148). What this ultimately means is that Kant’s restrictions on the private use of reason will reinforce a system of guardians who do the thinking for the masses, while the rest are unable to exercise reason privately to dissent.

To Hamann’s eyes, the claim to authority which stands behind the decrees of Frederick is not founded on justice or correctness, but on power. He asks Kant, in defense of the public against the charges Kant raises upon them, “With what kind of conscience can a reasoner... accuse one of *cowardice*, when their blind guardian has a large, well-disciplined army to guarantee his infallibility and orthodoxy?” (“Letter to Kraus” 147). The obedience to the state Kant deems necessary in the private realm is ultimately grounded by the threat of force. Part of the force of Hamann’s critique here is to undermine the distinction between the free exercise of reason praised by Enlightenment and the blind obedience to authority it claims to condemn. The pursuit of the free public use of reason only applies to a limited class of guardians after all, and their status as guardians is secured not by open debate, but by violence and force.

In some ways, this critique of Hamann’s might seem distant from the central themes we are investigating; Hamann is here primarily concerned with the political ramifications of Kant’s distinctions between the public and private use of reason, and with the obedience to the state Kant endorses at the end of his essay. But this worry of Hamann’s is an expression of his skepticism towards the Enlightenment’s conception of reason. Most clearly, he condemns the arrogance of the Enlightenment stance towards the world, a recurring theme throughout Hamann’s writing, as we will

shortly see. But Hamann's rejection of Kant's distinction between the public and private use of reason is also revealing. Kant's distinction between the public and private use of reason also displays theoretical reason, in its most essential form, as something inert and removed from everyday activity. The pinnacle of the use of reason here is that of the scholar writing a critical essay, but the everyday decisions one may make in their roles in life are dictated for them, immune from the doubt of a critical reason. It is the scholarly deployment of reason which is to be protected, on Kant's view, at the cost of the everyday.

But Hamann's most sustained critique of Enlightenment thought occurs in the *Socratic Memorabilia*, a pamphlet consisting in a biography of the ancient philosopher. To see how this brief biography of Socrates serves as a response to Enlightenment, one must first appreciate the role the image of Socrates played in Enlightenment thought. Socrates was championed as the fore-father of the Enlightenment: his commitment to reason and the pursuit of knowledge made him a martyr in an age where dogmatism and ignorance prevailed. Voltaire expressed his skepticism towards organized religion and the government of his time with *Socrates*, a play centered on the trial and death of the classical philosopher, likening their mutual causes, and a number of prominent figures at the time, including Diderot, were either compared with Socrates or compared their peers to him, claiming Socrates as a herald of the movement.¹⁰

Rather than emphasizing Socrates's pursuit of the truth and exercise of reason, Hamann characterizes Socrates by way of his own self-professed ignorance. Hamann implicitly compares the Enlightenment motto: "Dare to know" with the maxim inscribed at the Temple of Apollo: "Know thyself!" (161 [70]). On Hamann's interpretation, Socrates knew himself well because he knew that he knew nothing. Where Voltaire and his peers made Socrates a model for reason standing against

¹⁰ See Gouldborne (2016) and O'Flaherty (1967) for more on the Enlightenment's relationship with Socrates.

dogmatism, faith, and ignorance, Hamann depicts him as a humble man looking out to the world with curiosity. Enlightenment rationality approaches the world to systematize and conquer it, to discern its principles and lay them out clearly, a stance that is totally foreign to Hamann's Socrates. To Hamann, the philosophers of Enlightenment more closely resemble the Sophists than Socrates himself; he writes of "present-day Socratics" that they "deviate infinitely from the charter of his ignorance" (173 [76]).

To Hamann, this claim to ignorance stems from a form of humility in his stance towards the world as well as a lack of confidence in the ability of one's own exercise of reason to determine the truth to a suitable degree of certainty. Hamann distinguishes Socratic ignorance with the skepticism of his day with this distinction in attitude. He writes, "The ignorance of Socrates was sensibility. But between sensibility and a theoretical proposition is a greater difference than between a living animal and its anatomical skeleton. The ancient and modern skeptics may wrap themselves ever so much in the lion skin of Socratic ignorance; nevertheless, they betray themselves by their voices and their ears" (167 [73]). Cartesian skepticism is based on a confidence in the capacity for knowledge, and the use of reason to discern it. One begins from that which is least susceptible to doubt, and regains confidence in the existence of the external world with the use of reason. The Socrates of Hamann's *Socratic Memorabilia* has no such ambitions for his ignorance.

On Hamann's view, the proper response to skeptical concerns is not the construction of a defense of belief by means of reason, but rather a kind of blind faith. He writes, in a letter to Kant, in praise of Hume for his acknowledgment of this point: "The Attic philosopher, Hume, needs faith when he eats an egg or drinks a glass of water. He says that Moses, the law of reason, to which the philosopher appeals, condemns him. Reason is not given to you in order that you may become wise, but that you may know your folly and ignorance" ("Letters" 241). Here Hamann is referring to passages such as those from the end of the *Enquiry*, where Hume acknowledges that the philosopher

cannot help but act as though the external world exists and behaves in a lawlike manner, despite the fact that he has arrived at the conclusion that this belief ultimately has no justification:

When he awakes from his dream, the sceptic will be the first to join in the laughter against himself and to admit that all his objections are mere amusement and can only serve to show how odd and freakish the situation of mankind is: we must act and reason and believe, but however hard we try we can't find a satisfactory basis for those operations and can't remove the objections that can be brought against them. (83 [I.12])

Hume here, on Hamann's reading, accepts that an acknowledgment of the limitations of reason in providing firm justifications for belief, in certain essential cases, entails a sort of blind faith in those beliefs rather than an abandonment of them. As the letter continues, Hamann scolds Hume for failing to extend this notion of groundless belief, of faith, to religion; while he acknowledges the necessity of faith for everyday life, he criticizes religious belief for lacking a grounding rationalization, failing, on Hamann's view, to appreciate the possibility of a similar leap of faith being adequate for the case of religion.

Hamann sees Enlightenment thought as winding in on itself; while, on the one hand, it aspires to employ reason precisely to gain certainty over the knowledge it pursues, the strict requirements it places on justification can lead only to skepticism. Hamann will later remark on Kant's attempt to overcome the skeptical challenges posed by Hume, in a letter to Herder, "Our countryman keeps on chewing the cud of Hume's fury against causality, without taking this matter of belief into account. That does not seem to me to be honest" ("Letters" 244). Those who attempt to overcome skepticism by means of rational proof are deceiving themselves, playing word games. The solution Hamann suggests is to accept the lack of a deep rational justification for everyday beliefs, taking them instead on the direct testimony of experience.

Although the *Socratic Memorabilia* does not focus on language use explicitly, it will be impossible to ignore important features of Hamann's views of language, which only receive explicit statement later on in his work, in this early piece. It should be noted that this text, published in 1759, predates

Hamann's relationship with Herder, which ought to give pause to interpretations which take Hamann to be indebted to Herder for his view of language.¹¹ Hamann's characterization of Socrates's claim to ignorance already displays a subtle appreciation for the practice of language use which will become more explicit in his later work. In analyzing Socrates's statement "I know nothing", he begins by noting the significance of context in evaluating meaning, writing, "Like numbers, words derive their value from the position which they occupy, and their concepts are, like coins, mutable in their definitions and relations, according to time and place" (163 [71]). Hamann is not just speaking of an ambiguity between various (non-context-sensitive) concepts a single word might express in one context or another; it is a feature of concepts, on this view, that they are context-sensitive. Coming to understand what precisely Socrates meant in claiming to know nothing will involve more, then, than simply translating the words in isolation. On Hamann's view it will involve placing oneself in the place of Socrates, considering the relations he had with those he told he knew nothing, with the occasions of his utterance. He develops this last point, on the ways in which relations with the audience can determine meaning, as follows:

...every sentence, even if it proceeds from the same mouth and heart, is subject to an infinite number of subordinate notions, which are given to it by those to whom it is addressed, in precisely the same way as rays of light become this or that color in our eyes depending upon the surface from which they are reflected. (165 [72])

It is easy to read Hamann here as giving a relativist view of meaning: he writes of the audience as "giving" meaning to the statement as they perceive it. But the image, rather, suggests that the addressee can change the meaning of a given statement objectively, rather than merely altering their perception of it. The use of color in Hamann's analogy does not involve any potential subjectivity concerning our perception of color, but rather the fact that light does in fact, objectively, reflect off of different

¹¹ See Forster (2010) for one notable interpretation along these lines.

surfaces in different colors. On this reading of Hamann's analogy, the meaning of a sentence is determined, in part, by its context of utterance. Hamann develops this thought with an example of two distinct uses of the statement "I do not play." A newcomer to a game will say "I do not play" to a group of experienced players to inform them that he doesn't know the rules, or can't play well, and might perhaps be met with instruction. Yet an expert may make the same remark to a group of known cheaters, and here he will mean something like "I do not play *with people like you.*" He or she will be condemning the abuse of the rules by his or her potential challengers. What is distinctive about Hamann's description of meaning here is that he does not seem to credit these shifts in meaning to the intention of the speaker alone, but to the context of utterance as a whole. It is the fact that "I do not play" was uttered to *these people* by *this expert* that gives it the meaning it has, not the fact that the expert had a prior intention to deride his targets with his remark. This is what Hamann means by saying that the meanings are given by the addressees.

Hamann applies the context-sensitive approach to language to the issue of Socrates' ignorance through a further analysis of Socrates's statement "I know nothing." On his reading, Socrates resembles the experienced player from the prior example in addressing the sophists. He rejects the game of word-play he takes the sophists to be engaged in: if this is what knowledge, or the pursuit of it, looks like, then I know nothing. Thus, Hamann's Socrates stands to the Sophists as Hamann does to Enlightenment; in renouncing knowledge, he rejects the structure of argument and reasoning of his opponents, and thus cannot claim knowledge within the language game being played, but this does not lead him to an abject skepticism. He relies rather on his senses and on faith for knowledge of a different sort, one which may not be grounded or justified within the system his opponents have constructed, but nonetheless serves him well.

3.2 Instruction, Imitation, and Reason

As we have already begun to see, Hamann contrasts his work with that of the German Enlightenment with his distinctive blend of Humean empiricism with religious thought and considerations concerning the use of language. In this section, I would like to develop the particulars of Hamann's thought on reason and language to prepare the way for his critique of Kant, which will follow. One of the challenges one confronts in discussing Hamann's conception of reason in comparison with those of Wolff and Kant, for instance, arises from the fact that Hamann has a much more expansive conception of reason. Wolff shares with Mendelssohn, whose work Hamann engages with more directly, a view of reason as the capacity to think through syllogisms, and Kant develops his own thorough and detailed account of the faculty of reason in both its theoretical and practical exercises. It is natural to wonder, when Hamann claims against them that reason is an essentially cultural phenomenon, how nearly his words reach to the text of his opponents. A careful consideration of what Hamann means by the term "reason", as well as the relationship he sees between reason, tradition, and experience is thus in order.

In his description of the acquisition of knowledge, Hamann emphasizes the role of experience in constituting all knowledge, almost resembling Platner in his physicalist description of the process. He writes, "Presumably the senses stand in the same relation to understanding as the stomach does to the vessels which secrete the finer and higher fluids of the blood, without whose circulation and influence the stomach could not perform its office. Everything that is in our understanding has previously been in our senses..." ("Philological Ideas" 116). This language provides an almost medical description of the production of knowledge from the senses. Like Platner, Hamann's epistemology is based on a naturalized version of Hume's psychology. Impressions and ideas are caused directly by experience, but these impressions and ideas are understood in terms of their physical correlates rather

than remaining abstract psychological terms. Often when Hamann attacks the philosophers of his time, he cites the distance between the constructions employed in their philosophical musings and experience. He calls for a muse at one point, who "...will dare to purify the natural use of the senses from the unnatural use of abstractions, by which our concepts of things are as maimed as the name of the Creator is suppressed and blasphemed" ("Aesthetica in Nuce" 79). He sees theoretical philosophy as distortive of the concepts given by experience; the further thought goes from its roots in experience the less coherent it becomes. Hamann's empiricism seeks to tie the content of all concepts to their source in experience as well as their context in everyday uses.¹²

Yet Hamann's empiricism diverges from a more traditional empiricist picture in his account of reason. Hamann continues, from his above account of knowledge, "The stamina and the menstrua of our reason are thus in the truest understanding revelations and traditions which we accept as our property, transform into our fluids and powers, and by this means we become equal to our destiny, both to reveal the critical and archontic office of a political animal and to transmit it" ("Philological Ideas" 116). Part of the thought here is that reason is something we develop in response to experience, just like ordinary empirical knowledge. In the case of reason, however, the relevant experience comes in the form of tradition and revelation. More will be said concerning Hamann's concept of "revelation" in what follows, but for now I would like to focus on tradition and the exact manner in which we become rational, on Hamann's view. Unlike ordinary empirical knowledge taking up the capacity to reason involves undergoing a transformation of our powers and fluids. The transformation Hamann describes is unique to reason, as a form of thought as opposed to content. There is a "taking

¹² It should be noted how close this view of Hamann's comes to the empiricist theory of concepts that Forster attributes to Herder in *After Herder*. It may be the case that Herder arrived at this view partly by way of the influence of Hamann.

up” of tradition involved in coming to reason. The use of “fluids” here refers back to Hamann’s comparison between the activities of the stomach and those of the understanding, but it also harkens to Platner’s discussion of the nervous fluids. Rather than “stimulating” the nervous fluids, as occurs on the taking up of ordinary empirical knowledge on Platner’s view, becoming rational in the uptake of one’s culture transforms their function. Our capacities to perceive and understand the world are thus fundamentally altered and structured as we take in the cultural traditions of our linguistic community and become members of this community. It is noteworthy that Herder here ties the development of the capacity to reason to our nature as a “political animal”, mirroring Kant in conceiving of reason as composed both of theoretical reason and practical reason, but also calling to mind the essentially social nature of this transformation of our capacity to know. Coming to reason involves taking in the tradition of our culture and thereby transforming our epistemic capacities. We come to think only by coming to think as those in our culture think.

In a mirror of the pseudo-historical accounts of language and reason provided by Rousseau and Condillac, Hamann considers the development of reason from the perspective of the *tabula rasa*:

Suppose that man comes into the world like an empty skin. Then this very absence makes him all the more capable of enjoying nature through experiences and of sharing in the community of his race through traditions. Our reason at least has its source in the twofold instruction of sensible revelations and human testimonies, which are communicated through similar means, namely distinguishing marks, and in accordance with similar laws. (“Philological Ideas” 117)

Here Hamann is quite clear that the experience involved in taking up a tradition, becoming a member of a community, and therefore becoming rational, is fundamentally linguistic. Leaving aside the role of revelation for now, Hamann emphasizes that the transformation we undergo in becoming rational creatures is due, in part, to the role of human instruction by language. The “distinguishing marks” he refers to here consist in the means by which we differentiate objects from one another in language. In the case of the instruction of language, they thus refer in part to ostension, by means of which we separate one object from the others in teaching the name of *this* object rather than the ones which

surround it. The relevant point of contrast for this conception of reason as something received, partly by means of tradition, would be Kant's, and the Enlightenment's more generally, picture of reason as an innate faculty with a universal structure. On Kant's view, the shared structure of our capacity for reason is what grants us the possibility of inhabiting the same world, a world subject to the same laws. Further, this shared capacity for reason is what allows us to understand this world and intelligibly communicate with one another inside it. Hamann's blank slate comes into the world without reason, and one can only be inducted into the realm of rational beings by taking in the tradition of her linguistic community by means of linguistic and cultural instruction and education.

Although Hamann does not provide a definition of reason in his work, we can see a connection between what Hamann describes as "mode of thinking" in his early work and his later claims concerning reason. In his "Essay on an Academic Question", which appeared a year after the publication of the *Socratic Memorabilia*, Hamann addresses the question of the "reciprocal influence of language on opinions, and of opinions on language." Hamann at first appears to reject the question due to the ambiguous nature of the terms "language", "opinion", and "influence", but eventually he settles on an appropriate meaning for the terms. He writes, "That there exists a relationship and a connection between our soul's faculty of knowledge and our body's faculty of ostension is a rather familiar perception, but little has yet been attempted about the nature and limits of that relationship and connection" (12). The "faculty of knowledge" referred to here can be read as referring to the capacity for reason, as here Hamann acknowledges a connection between the role of ostension in instruction and the development of our rational capacities. Hamann goes on to provide a tentative definition for language or linguistic activity, according to which linguistic actions are those which have their purpose "as the means to communicate our thoughts and to understand the thoughts of others". In his description of the mutual influence of the faculty of knowledge, or mode of thought, and language, he writes:

Universal history as well as the story of individual peoples, societies, sects, and men and women, a comparison of several languages and of a single language in different associations with time, place, and objects, yield here an ocean of observations which a learned philosopher could reduce to simple principles and general classes. If our conceptions are oriented around the point of view of the soul, and if this point of view in turn is determined, in the opinion of many people, by the condition of the body, then something similar may be applied to the body of an entire people. The lineaments of a people's language will therefore correspond with the orientation of its mode of thinking, which is revealed through the nature, form, laws, and customs of its speech as well as through its external culture and through a spectacle of public actions. (13)

Hamann recognizes extreme divergences between the ways of life found in different societies, both diachronically and synchronically, and attributes this variety to distinctive modes of thought which can be held by various linguistic communities. These differing modes of thought are then, in turn, understood in part by the different languages spoken by different communities. The mode of thought Hamann describes as potentially diverging between cultures is much more robust than what we would standardly call reason. It is whatever stands behind these divergences in customs and laws between cultures, and which may in turn be influenced by these manifestations of them. One may wonder, however, how separable formal reason is from this more robust notion. These forms of thought guide concept formation, and it is not obvious that formal reasoning precedes the material reasoning involved in forming judgments concerning experience in the development of language. This thought is developed in much more explicit detail by Herder, as discussed in the following chapter, into a more robust account of reason as material rather than formal. According to the material account of reason that Hamann here begins to develop, reason is best understood not, in the first instance, as a formal calculus, but rather in its manifestation in ordinary thought. Reason as a calculus is nothing but an abstraction of our ordinary mode of thinking from its contents, and the material use of concepts in thought is conceptually prior to its abstract use in syllogistic reasoning.

It is striking that in this passage Hamann seems to lay out a methodology which Herder's anthropological program will later take up. The practices of a society become the manifestation of their form of thought, and thus the investigation of practices, languages, and customs becomes the

primary method for empirical investigation of thought and reason. The methodology laid out by Hamann in this essay paves the way for Herder's later anthropological and historical writings, both in its emphasis on the role of language in constituting thought and in its ethnographic, empiricist leanings in describing the historical development of reason.

Above, I promised to return to the notion of revelation, to which Hamann attributes great significance in the development of reason. Hamann's understanding of revelation is most clearly presented in his discussion of Adam and Eve in the essay "Knights of the Rose Cross." Here Hamann again mimics Rousseau in a presentation of the origin of language, employing the story of the Garden of Eden to do so. He writes:

Every phenomenon of nature was a word,— the sign, symbol and pledge of a new, mysterious, inexpressible but all the more intimate union, participation and community of divine energies and ideas. Everything the human being heard from the beginning, saw with its eyes, looked upon and touched with its hands was a living word. (108)

Hamann here presents a view not unlike that of Wolff, discussed above, concerning the rational structure of the world. There is a divine harmony between the world of experience and the realm of thought which ensures that we are capable of knowing it. The thought that objects are "word", within this metaphorical manner of speaking, refers both to this shared structure of thought and object, but also to the already social status of ordinary empirical knowledge. Coming to know something about an object requires "participation in a community." He writes, "To speak is to translate – from an angelic language into a human language, that is, to translate thoughts into words, – things into names – images into signs" ("Aesthetica in Nuce" 66). When Hamann speaks of revelation through the senses in his account of knowledge, he is referring to both the knowledge of fact we can gain from the senses and the development of our capacity to reason through experience, which can only occur because the world shares this structure with our mind. The divine nature of the accordance between thought and reality accounts for the normative status we take up when we become language-speakers, and therefore reasoners. Coming to name an object or know something about it involves a three-way relation

between the object, man, and God, rather than the two-way relation of object and knower or object and namer. We participate in the divine by coming to name the world and appreciate its form.

This idea is deeply connected with the significance Hamann attributes to the notion of divine condescension. In Christian theological texts, “divine condescension” refers to the process by which God lowered himself to the level of man by manifesting his son as human, but to Hamann it serves as a model for our development of our linguistic capacity.

And what a proof of divine omnipotence and humility that he was both willing and able to breathe into the babbling and confused tongues of human ideas, with their servant's form, the depths of his mysteries and the treasures of his wisdom. Thus as a man ascends the throne of heaven, there to rule, so human language is the royal language in the praised fatherland of the Christian. How blessed we are! For he created us after his image, and because we lost it he took on our image, flesh and blood, and like a child learned to weep, to stammer, to talk, to read, to speak like a true son of man. He imitated us, that he might encourage us to imitate him. (“Aesthetica in Nuce” 67)

Here Hamann emphasizes the normative status we take on as language-speakers: coming to speak is coming to rule, ascending a throne. By analogizing the position of language-speaker to that of political and even religious office, Hamann is taking note of the fact that the status of being a language speaker is a normative status. Making a judgment entails being responsible for the truth of that judgment, and being capable of providing reasons for it. We determine that the world is *so*, mirroring God’s determination to make the world *so*. This is unlike the response, for instance, of the ape to cry out upon spotting a dangerous snake, in that, while the ape may have been mistaken – perhaps the ape has confused a branch for a snake – he cannot straightforwardly be *wrong* because he has not made a claim concerning any state of affairs in crying out. Human language does make claims on how the world stands, and when we are correct, the world is simply the way we have claimed it to be.

There are two forces which make us capable, on Hamann’s view, of making these kinds of authoritative claims on the world by means of language. The first of these is tradition. As we come to speak a language, we are instructed, partly by means of ostension, and we develop the capacity to

reason as those in our community do. We learn to make the distinctions our community makes, and to engage in the social practices that they engage in. This inducts us to the normative order. It makes it possible for others to evaluate our actions and linguistic activity as correct or incorrect, and for us to evaluate the actions and linguistic activities of others as correct or incorrect. The fact that others in our linguistic community treat us as having authority in regarding us as language speakers itself constitutes a form of authority. We recognize the authority of others and in turn are recognized as authoritative. Second, revelation provides us with an understanding that the distinctions we do have in our language are the correct ones for us to have. It shows us that the language that we have come to speak provides an appropriate framework by which to understand the world. This revelation is to be understood partly in terms of Hamann's conception of instruction, with the exception that it is the world revealing to us its own structure, rather than another speaker of our language.

Before moving on to Hamann's critique of Kant's conception of reason in his noted "Metacritique on the Purism of Reason," I would like to return to the reactionary letter discussed at the beginning of this chapter, in which Hamann harshly rejects Kant's request that he assist in the production of a textbook for natural philosophy. A more generous and thorough reading of the letter reveals that Hamann is not suggesting that there can be no mathematical understanding of the world, but rather that a book aimed at children will be unable to convey this understanding if it presents it literally. He explains, "The chief law of method for children consists in lowering oneself to their weakness; becoming their servant if one wishes to be their master; following them if one wishes to rule them; learning their language and soul if we want to move them to imitate our own" ("Letters" 242). The language employed here is nearly identical to that of Hamann's discussion of divine condescension, suggesting that Hamann understands the role of divine influence on our capacity to reason on the model of human, social instruction. This thought will be essential as we continue to Herder, as he develops a secularized form of Hamann's views of reason and language.

3.3 Kant's Purisms of Reason

Kant's thought, just like Hamann's, developed between the late 1750's, when their disagreements gave birth to Hamann's *Socratic Memorabilia*, and the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. Hamann's introduction of Hutcheson and Hume's writings to Kant famously awakened him from his "dogmatic slumber", leading him away from the Wolffian leanings of his earlier work to examining the foundations and possibility of metaphysics (*Prolegomena* 4:260). As is well known, Hume doubted the necessity we attribute to causal relations: no amount of observation of one ball rolling after being hit by another can justify a claim to certainty that the ball will roll when hit again. Kant set out to justify our claims to knowledge and provide a foundation for the natural sciences. In framing his problem, Kant divides theoretical judgments across two axes. On the one hand, they may be analytic, if they provide an analysis of a single concept, or synthetic, if they involve the combination of two distinct concepts. They may also be either *a priori*, in the case that the knowledge expressed in the judgment is independent of any particular experience, or *a posteriori*, in the case that the knowledge is derived from experience. Kant's understanding of Hume's challenge leads him to believe that *a posteriori* knowledge cannot justify belief in any causal relations, as direct experience cannot serve as a justification for the kind of necessity involved in causal laws. If we have knowledge of causal relations, they must involve knowledge which is both synthetic (as the relation between the two distinct events of cause and effect will be expressed in a synthetic rather than analytic judgment), and *a priori*, as it will contain lawlike relations. He thus describes the aim of the first *Critique* as to provide an explanation of the "possibility of a synthetic cognition *a priori*" (*Critique of Pure Reason* Bxix).

Hamann calls the essay in which he responds to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* the "Metacritique on the Purism of Reason", and it is worth pausing to consider what Hamann means with his use of

the term “metacritique.” Kant intends his text as a critique in the sense that it investigates both the condition of and the limits of reason; in providing an account of the activities and structures of reason, he also provides an account of its proper and improper use. Hamann writes in a letter, in the wake of the publication of Kant’s *Critique*, “All metaphysical studies have recently, on account of the Critique of Pure Reason, become almost as loathsome to me as they were formerly on account of Wolff’s *Latin Ontology*. For me the question is not so much ‘What is reason?’ as ‘What is language?’ It is here I suspect the source of all paralogisms and antinomies can be found which are ascribed to reason: it comes from words being held to be ideas, and ideas to be things themselves. In words and ideas no existence is possible. Existence is attached solely to things” (“Letters” 249). On one reading of Hamann’s title, Hamann provides a critique of Kant’s work in the sense that he shows that Kant has provided insufficient consideration to the conditions of reason. Hamann believes that the status of being a rational being presupposes that of being capable of language-use, and Kant has paid insufficient attention to the social pre-requisites involved in coming to speak a language in his consideration of reason as pure. His work thus stands as a metacritique in the sense that it serves as a critique of Kant’s *Critique*; it undermines his project of delineating the conditions of rational thought by showing that there are further preconditions of rationality which Kant had not considered.

However, one may also read with emphasis on the reflexive nature of Hamann’s text; he is showing Kant’s text to be internally inconsistent. In this case, the “metacritique” will not mean “critique of the critique”, but rather “internal critique.” On this reading, Hamann is using Kant’s own resources against him. Hamann’s argument here would relate to the status of our knowledge of pure reason on Kant’s view. Kant famously remarks on the necessity of intuition for knowledge, writing, “Thoughts without intuitions are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” (*Critique of Pure Reason* B75). Hamann holds that our observation of reason can only come from the experience of listening to and speaking language; we never observe reason in its pure form. He writes, “Pure reason and good

will are still words for me whose concept I am not in a position to arrive at with my senses, and for philosophy I have no *fidem implicatam*” (“Letter to Scheffner”). We have no intuitions of reason that are not intuitions of the concrete use of language. This line of criticism likewise returns to the role of language in constituting rational thought, but it remains distinct insofar as Hamann is here applying Kant’s own criteria against him. It is likely that Hamann has both meanings in mind; He frequently employs the use of puns and deliberate ambiguities throughout his work. Ultimately, both readings point to the same conclusion: a failure to consider the relationship between language and reason undermines Kant’s attempts to reveal the conditions of rational thought.

The worry, discussed above, that Hamann’s conception of reason is sufficiently distinct from Kant’s that his critique fails to apply may re-emerge here. Kant’s conception of reason as a capacity to infer, concerned primarily with formal reasoning, may be innate and universal while the content of thought could be dependent on culture and tradition in a robust sense. Nonetheless, we can see the thrust of the essay as engaging Kant head-on; Hamann’s aim in the essay is to argue, against Kant, that the capacity to judge, and to think, is dependent on one’s participation in the social practice of language, and that the contingent and divergent history of this practice (or practices) challenges the possibility of a philosophy which aims to propose universal laws of thought such as the categories.

Hamann’s worries in the “Metacritique” often take the form of a doubt in the possibility of firm distinctions of the kind Kant envisions, such as between the intuition and the understanding, between reason and sensibility. This worry stems in part from Hamann’s empiricism. Certainly, we have some experience of our capacity to reason; we can “hear” our thoughts with our inner senses, and, in a way, see and hear the thoughts of ourselves and others in reading, speaking, and listening. But we have no experience of reason aside from its manifestations in language, either via our inner or outer senses. Kant himself holds that the empirical reality of concepts is only given by sensible intuition, but experience only provides us with the unity of reason and sensibility, and the entities he

abstracts away from experience cannot be perceived distinctly. The issue is not only that the division between the two faculties is somewhat artificial, but that Kant, in the tradition of philosophers before him, has abstracted from the *process* of reasoning to form an *entity* called reason. Hamann describes the process of abstraction as “tearing up what nature has joined and uniting what it has divided,” maintaining that philosophical analysis and abstractions of Kant’s variety create divisions where they like, rather than simply looking to see how things are (Berlin 358).

There are a number of features of Kant’s conceptions of reason and the understanding that Hamann shares, however. First and foremost, Hamann shares something of Kant’s view that our standing as rational beings consists in a normative status. As Brandom emphasizes in his *Reason in Philosophy*, one of Kant’s great insights in the first *Critique* is that making a judgment consists in taking up a normative stance. In judging that Φ , I commit myself to the truth of Φ .¹³ This essentially involves the obligation to be capable of providing reasons for believing that Φ . Although Hamann’s form of this thought lacks the sophistication of Kant’s, it is clear that he sees linguistic relations as an essentially normative phenomenon. Rather than employing the model of beliefs and reasons, Hamann takes the promise as his example. In the passage from the “Rose Cross” essay above, he describes the first word as, “the sign, symbol and pledge of a new, mysterious, inexpressible but all the more intimate union, participation and community.” By taking the promise as the paradigm for the kind of normativity involved in the use of language, Hamann emphasizes the essentially social nature of language. It is not obvious whether the conceptual apparatus involved in having reasons for belief is social or not – to Kant, it does not seem to be, although he may have been mistaken. The promise, on the other hand, is an essentially social relation, and thus Hamann takes it as his paradigm. Further, the relation of promising is a constructive one – we promise to *make something the case*. Because Hamann emphasizes

¹³ See Ch. 1 in particular

the constitutive role of language in structuring thought, the constructive nature of the promise makes it an apt metaphor for his conception of language.

Hamann diagnoses three distinct errors in Kant's *Critique*, which he labels the "purisms of reason." The first of these consists in the abstraction of reason from place in culture and history. He describes this as Kant's "partly misunderstood, partly failed attempt to make reason independent of all tradition and custom and belief in them" ("Metacritique" 207). Kant's conception of the categories and principles of inference as the laws of thought takes aspects of certain social practices – for instance, those governing the practices of asking for and giving reasons for the belief that Φ and those of taking something to be a cause of some effect – and turns them into aspects of an essentially timeless reason. Again, we see elements of Hamann's view that *reasoning* is prior to *reason*, or that the latter is an abstraction from the former. When we see reason as an abstraction from a set of practices with their own histories, we can see that reason itself has a history. Further, the claim has a subtle relation to the ideas of reason as presented in the antinomies; here, Kant presents certain topics of long-standing philosophical debate in his tradition, such as the immortality of the soul, as stemming from the nature of reason itself. Rather than representing these philosophical debates as the product of a somewhat contingent historical tradition, or even features of, for instance, the German language, he attributes these contradictions which give rise to these debates to human rational nature itself.

The second purism consists in Kant's abstraction of reason away from its everyday use. Hamann recognizes that reasoning is something we all do, and indeed must do, constantly. Yet in his study, Kant removes reason from its ordinary applications and distorts it beyond recognition. Hamann writes, "The second is even more transcendent and comes to nothing less than independence from experience and its everyday induction. After a search of two thousand years for who knows what beyond experience, reason not only suddenly despairs of the progressive course of its predecessors but also defiantly promises impatient contemporaries delivery" (207). I include the following sentence

because I believe this criticism is often misunderstood. Forster, for instance, takes Hamann to be criticizing Kant's conception of reason on the basis of "purity from experience" here, but I find this reading places Hamann's criticism as either flatly wrong or irrelevant. If Forster means to include the faculty of the understanding under the heading of reason here, Hamann would be missing the significance of experience in providing substance for the concepts of the understanding. If he does not, the criticism has little weight, Kant can insist that the role of everyday inference concerning the objects of experience is filled not by pure reason but rather by the understanding.

Whereas in the prior purism, Kant's failure to regard reasoning as prior to reason leads to his neglect of its history, here, it leads him to distort the capacities of reason in removing it from its everyday context. I take the following remark to be a development of this thought:

However, while geometry determines and fixes even the ideality of its concepts of points without parts, of lines and surfaces even in ideally divided dimensions, by means of empirical signs and figures, metaphysics abuses the word-signs and figures of speech of our empirical knowledge by treating them as nothing but hieroglyphs and types of ideal relations. Through this learned troublemaking it works the honest decency of language into such a meaningless, rutting, unstable, indefinite something = X that nothing is left but a windy sough, a magic shadow play, at most, as the wise Helvetius says, the talisman and rosary of a transcendental superstitious belief in *entia rationis*, their empty sacks and slogans. (210)

In contrast to Euclidean Geometry, which begins with concepts that are fixed purely by stipulation, metaphysics begins with ordinary words, which are essentially tied to the roles they play in everyday conversation, and takes them out of their natural setting, distorting their meanings in the process. I take this criticism to be a significant precursor to the variety of criticism of traditional philosophical metaphysics and epistemology found in the Ordinary Language tradition of philosophy. For instance, Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia* charges various sense-data theorists with having constructed their theories on the basis of fundamental confusions concerning the use of various words that arise when these words are removed from their ordinary contexts. Austin notes that phrases such as "to appear" and "to seem", when they are applied in their ordinary contexts, contain an implicit understanding that

there is something manipulating our perception of things. For instance, a straight stick may “appear” or “seem” to be bent when it is partly submerged under water, but, when we remove it from the water, we can come to appreciate that it *really* is straight. When sense-data theorists arrive at the view that all we perceive are “appearances” or “seemings”, they have removed these words from their proper contexts and, therefore, fail to make concrete sense. The established use of words such as “appear” only licenses its application when it makes sense to think of seeing something how it really is, but in the sense-data theorist’s view, there is no way to perceive the world beyond the way it appears to us.

While mathematicians and geometers construct their concepts from scratch, and provide them with rigid definitions for specific purposes, the metaphysicians borrow their concepts from the everyday and strip them of their context. The issue arises that it is no longer clear what remains of the meaning of the word once the context has been removed. Because, on Hamann’s view, Kant has taken words such as “reason” and “intuition” from their everyday use and placed arbitrary stipulations on them, they have lost the meaning that they carry in their ordinary context. Without the connection to their typical context of use, the words lack meanings aside from the ones stipulated by Kant. This means that Kant’s investigations do not correspond to reason as we experience it, but rather consist in an empty game where he draws the conclusions necessitated by the definitions and axioms stipulated. We may be fooled by the use of the word “reason” into thinking that Kant’s investigation relates to the same capacity we refer to when we say “She reasoned her way to an answer to the question”, but we are only being fooled by superficial appearances, on Hamann’s view.

Hamann's final criticism explicitly relates to the abstraction of reason from language. He writes, “The third, highest, and, as it were, empirical purism is therefore concerned with language, the only, first, and last organon and criterion of reason, with no credentials but tradition and usage” (208). Kenneth Haynes notes that the mention of credentials here is meant to contrast to Kant's thought, in the *Prolegomena*, that the capacity of pure reason to provide an answer to the question concerning the

possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge provides its credentials. Thus, the attack concerns not only the abstraction of reason away from language, but also in the idea that claims to knowledge *need* an ultimate foundation. For Hamann, if we understand claims to knowledge as elements of a historical practice, we will not seek an ultimate justification beyond the practice itself. This claim holds both for broader claims to knowledge and more specific instances. The practice of taking something to be the cause of something else tells us that in certain conditions (for instance, of repeatedly observing events of one kind follow events of another), we are licensed in saying that the first event is the cause of the later. In certain circumstances, it may make sense to speak of the practice as a whole as being justified or unjustified (for instance, if we begin to make observations which conflict with the inferences we draw within the practice), but typically it is a mistake to believe that there must be an ultimate justification external to the practices themselves.

With regard to the division between the sensibility and the understanding, Hamann again faults Kant for failing to recognize the role of language. Hamann holds that, consistent with his own definitions, Kant should have recognized words as pure empirical concepts and intuitions, and that, if he did so, he would have recognized both the essential unity of sensibility and understanding, and the foundational role of language in the production of reason. Words are both sensible objects – empirical objects which can be seen or read – and belong to the understanding insofar as they are the bearers of meaning. He writes that they are empirical “because the sensation of vision or hearing is effected through them”, yet pure “inasmuch as their meaning is determined by nothing that belong to those sensations” (215). To make sense of this latter claim, we should note the contingency inherent in linguistic conventions in assigning one set of sounds some meaning rather than another – the meanings of words are not fixed by their sounds, although they must be realized by *something* perceptible. In claiming that words are pure empirical intuitions, Hamann is showing Kant that, even in his own terms, language is foundational in explaining the connection between reason and experience

in at least as significant a manner as space and time. Language shows the essential unity of Kant's two faculties, and, on this basis, Hamann wishes to undermine the distinction altogether. He writes, "The sensibility and the understanding arise as two stems of human knowledge from One common root, in such a way that through the former objects are given and through the latter thought: to what end is such a violent, unjustified, willful divorce of that which nature has joined together!" (212). This remark predicts much of the post-Kantian struggle against Kant's dualism, but, on Hamann's view, it is Kant's failure to realize the role of language in constituting rationality that provides its basis.

One may object, at this juncture, that it is possible to acknowledge an intimate connection between the use of language and reason, as well as to wish to undermine Kant's dualism between our rational and animal natures, without thereby committing oneself to a conception of reason according to which it is an inherently social and historical construction.¹⁴ Arguably, Hegel provides a compelling example of this form of thought. Hegel, even in providing a quasi-historical, social account of reason, and in insisting on the unity of the faculty of reason with our sensible natures, does not thereby necessarily commit himself to a project of describing the particular form reason takes as it exists in a particular group of German-speakers at a particular point of history. Rather, Hegel may be read as providing an account of the demands of reason on human beings in general. Although I will not be able to provide a substantial argument defeating a project of this nature, I can, at least, provide Hamann and Herder's reasoning in rejecting it as a plausible alternative. Hamann and Herder are both fundamentally empiricist thinkers, and Hamann's thought that reason must be understood in terms of its relationship to language comes from the thought that language is an empirically observable manifestation of the capacity for reason. Because languages display diverging structures and forms, Hamann concludes that there is no use in positing a universal form of reason underlying these distinct

¹⁴ I am indebted to the helpful comments of John McDowell for an appreciation of this point.

structures. We do, of course, share a human nature, and, as we will later see in Herder's work, this shared human nature does have an explanatory role to play in an account of our capacity to speak. The question is whether something like a universalistic, formal picture of reason bears more explanatory value than the material picture of reason Hamann here begins to develop and Herder carries through on. If we have no need for a universalistic conception of reason in explaining the empirical manifestation of reason in language, then we have *prima facie* reason to prefer the material, social, and historical conception of reason from the perspective of empiricism, as it posits nothing beyond the observable phenomena.

3.4 Anthropology as an Edifying Discipline

Although he rejects Kant's theoretical apparatus, Hamann shares with Kant the view that anthropology should be an "edifying" discipline, indeed extending this notion to philosophy as a whole. Hamann had plans to publish his works under the title "Saalbadeiren", a term which refers to curative baths given at a salon, the profession of his father (Betz 31). In his discussion of the potentials for confusion in language, Hamann represents his work as a treatment for the desire to abstract philosophically. Hamann writes, "Not only the entire ability to think rests on language... but language is also the crux of the misunderstanding of reason with itself" (Dickson 531). Language leads to confusions; we tend, he writes, to "confuse words with concepts, and concepts with real things" (Berlin 287). Hamann's form of edification, then, is one of easing away confusions, whereas Kant's anthropology was edifying in the sense that it used the theoretical knowledge expressed in it pragmatically, to help the reader or listener come to live a better life. As with the later Wittgenstein, Hamann rarely provides a standard philosophical argument for his claims, hoping rather to dissuade

his reader from the impulse towards a certain way of thinking, almost as a kind of therapy. Hamann's philosophy is therefore edifying in the sense delineated by Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, where the point is to contrast edifying philosophy with systematic philosophy. On Rorty's view, edifying philosophy begins from a "suspicion about the pretensions of epistemology" and "wants to keep space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause" (369-370). Edifying philosophies function to dissuade us from the thought that we know or can know everything there is to know except from a particular point of view, from a particular vocabulary which expresses this point of view.

We now move to the views of Herder, who studied with Kant and came to see Hamann as a mentor. Hamann describes the theme of "tradition, language, and experience" as "the egg I brood upon, my one and all, the idea of mankind and its history, the goal and jewel which is pinned to [their] common authorship and friendship" ("Letters" 247). While Hamann and Herder share the sophisticated, socially-minded empiricism that leads them to a historically-minded brand of philosophy, Herder lacks the religious outlook that universally permeates Hamann's work. This leads to a significant early conflict between the two, which will be the focus of the following chapter. Above, we saw that Hamann addressed the need for an account of the normative dimension of language use with his notion of divine condescension. Given the challenges Kant posed for Platner on the basis of the normative statuses involved both in theoretical and practical reason, the formation of an adequate understanding of these statuses, even understood as aspects of the practice of language-use, will be crucial for the success of Herder's account.

4.0 The Field, the King, and the Son: Hamann and Herder on Language

In the preceding chapter, we have seen the centrality of the philosophy of language in instating the new conception of reason developed by Hamann in contrast to Kant, and his Enlightenment contemporaries more generally. In Herder's hands, this conception of language will lead to a revitalization of the project of anthropology as an empirical form of philosophy capable of studying reason and ethics in the wake of Kant's objections to Platner's anthropology. The central challenge posed by Kant towards Platner's program was that empirical investigations could not provide insight into freedom and rationality due to their fundamentally normative character. Hume's problem proved a fatal blow for Platner's aspirations for his new discipline. In what follows, we will see a variety of the same worry applied to Herder's early attempts in the philosophy of language and mind, albeit posed by Hamann rather than Kant.

I begin this chapter with a study of Herder's early views on mind and language. I argue that Herder begins with a form of conceptual holism characterized by its pragmatism. In calling Herder's conception of language pragmatic, I mean that Herder sees words, and the judgments that they belong to, as tools; we divide the world into those pieces which are useful or relevant to us, and form corresponding concepts in naming those pieces. Herder's conception of concepts is holistic as he sees these concepts to be defined by their relationships with one another. He notes a deep connection between language and reason, and he argues for a kind of philosophy called "anthropology" which is composed of an empirical study of these concepts as they manifest themselves in language as well as an empirical science of the mind. Herder's early anthropology is heavily influenced by Hume and the sentimentalists, and it is centrally concerned with making philosophy center around the human being considered as a whole, pushing back against the rationalist conception of philosophy. Herder wishes

to make philosophy useful for the people, and he believes the way to do so is to rid it of anything abstract and move it towards the concrete of day-to-day life.

I then move to Herder's famous "Treatise on the Origin of Language", an essay in which Herder provides a naturalistic account of the genesis of language and reason. While Herder's essay constitutes a genuine advance in the philosophy of language in its account of the constitutive role of language for thought, its picture of language is fundamentally solipsistic. I move to Hamann's critique of the "Treatise", which develops this thought to reveal Herder's failure to account for certain normative features of the use of language and concepts more generally. Herder, on Hamann's view, fails to sufficiently distinguish the human use of language from the either instinctual or conditioned responses to stimulation characteristic of animal behavior.

In the wake of Hamann's criticisms, Herder comes to appreciate the essentially social nature of language. This moves Herder from his earlier psychological holism closer to what Vincent Descombes, following Fodor and Lepore, calls "Anthropological Holism." This holism is distinguished from the other "only insofar as it concerns the relation between language and its intentional background – that is, the relation between language and the cultural background of beliefs, institutions, practices, conventions... upon which, according to anthropological holists, language is ontologically dependent" (Fodor and Lepore 6). This leads Herder to the historical and cultural investigations that characterize his later works. As he comes to appreciate the radically different conceptual structures that can be present in different linguistic communities, he comes to regard the empirical investigation of social practices and language as essential to the understanding of the concepts philosophy aspires to illuminate. Centrally, these concepts will include reason, freedom, the beautiful, and the good.

This reading of the dispute between Herder and Hamann runs against much of the significant English-language commentary on these philosophers. Taylor (1995) and (2017) represents Herder as

already having overcome the challenge of understanding normativity, and assigns little credit to Hamann generally except as a mentor of Herder. Forster in particular credits Herder as the sole origin of a number of the ideas I attribute to his engagement with Hamann, writing, “For example, it was mainly Herder (not, as has often been claimed, Hamann) who established fundamental ideas concerning an intimate dependence of thought on language which underpin modern philosophy of language” (*After Herder* 9). Throughout his illuminating book, Forster makes a point of minimizing Hamann’s role in the story, writing, “Hamann’s influence on Herder’s best thought has been greatly exaggerated” (*After Herder* 13). Thankfully, I do have some company in my perspective; Berlin’s *The Magus of the North* and *Vico and Herder* credit Hamann with an enormous influence on Herder, and I will follow suit.

Typically, historians of philosophy will represent the development of the linguistic turn taken by continental thought in this period as beginning with an appreciation for the normative features of reason in Kant. In Hegel, the normative understanding is taken up and developed into a social account of reason. Then, this picture is developed into a linguistic account of reason, either by Hegel himself, as in Brandom’s reading of Hegel, or by another thinker from this period, perhaps Nietzsche or Schlegel. Thus, historically, we see a development from the normative, to the social, and resulting in the linguistic. Herder, however, arrives at these thoughts in the reverse order. He begins from the view that reason is essentially intertwined with language and only afterwards comes to see that both language and reason are essentially social and belong to the normative order. This may be what leads Taylor and Forster astray in appreciating Hamann’s contribution to Herder’s philosophical development. In identifying the linguistic conception of reason present in the “Treatise on the Origin of Language”, they may assume the natural: that Herder sees language as a social practice and has gained from his studies with Kant an understanding of the normative nature of reason. On my reading, Herder’s move towards a linguistic conception of reason in the “Treatise” is indebted to his aspirations

for a naturalist understanding of reason. In identifying reason with language, he wishes to transform reason into something subject to empirical investigation and to demystify its place in the natural world. The social nature of language is an afterthought in this piece. It is only in the wake of Hamann's critiques that he comes to appreciate the interconnectedness of his holism with a normative conception of language and concept-use.

4.1 Herder's Early Holism

Although Herder's *Critical Forests* primarily take aesthetics as their topic, a good deal of the work develops Herder's views on cognition and concept formation, as Herder is interested in developing an understanding of the way in which the beautiful and the good become potential objects of perception. The "Fourth Grove" takes up Riedel's *Theory of the Beaux Arts*, which argues that man possesses a *sensus communis* which allows him to perceive and cognize "without rational inference" the good and the beautiful, as its opponent (177). Herder takes particular offense to Riedel's omission of inference from a discussion of the concepts in question, and he develops a form of conceptual holism in his opposition to Riedel. He argues that abstract concepts such as the beautiful and the good are produced by inference and comparison, and that their meanings are tied up with the more basic judgments from which they are formed. The form of holism developed here bolsters Herder's view that language is essential to cognition; the capacity to form certain kinds of judgments and inference is a pre-requisite to the formation of concepts such as the beautiful.

We should take some care in the use of the phrase "holism", particularly in ascribing it to a figure from the 18th century. By the word "holism", I will here mean the view that the meanings of all

of the words in a language are interdependent.¹⁵ The view contrasts with atomism, the view that the meanings of the words in a language are largely independent of one another. While an atomist may hold that knowing the meaning of the word “square” consists in being able to discern whether or not a given shape or object is a “square”, and thus simply in recognizing squares as squares, a holist will claim that knowing the meaning of “square” also involves understanding what shapes are, knowing what straight lines are, and having all of the concepts involved in recognizing that a square has four right angles. Concepts, on this view, are necessarily linked with one another, and sustain one another in their meanings.

Herder’s holism comes with his notion of reflection, as well as his prioritization of language in cognition more generally. He claims that cognition already involves judgment, and thus, against Riedel, always involves reason:

To cognize a thing with even the least degree of clarity means that one has already distinguished it; but there is never distinction without judgment, and a judgment is no longer an immediate feeling. And then to cognize something distinctly even requires a clear knowledge of its subordinate concepts as such, as the distinguishing marks of the whole, and consequently involves the activity of the inner workings of reason. (178)

The degrees of clarity in cognition Herder admits here form an attempt at addressing a potential issue faced by holism, one pressed against holists to this day by philosophers such as Fodor and Lepore.¹⁶ The worry is that, if developing a concept or learning the meaning of a word involves developing or knowing its relationship with other concepts or words, one can never get the process started: one needs already to speak a language to learn a word. Thus, Herder distinguishes between the basic cognition of a language-learner to that of a fluent speaker. He maintains that any cognition at all involves judging that some thing is some way, or distinguishing it from other things. This is the basic

¹⁵ This definition is borrowed from Jackman (2014)

¹⁶ See Fodor and Lepore (2001)

level of cognition, a pre-requisite for naming. In the most basic case – a child forming its first concepts – the distinction involved will be distinguishing *some object* from the rabble of experience. This act of distinguishing involves placing the potential object in a logical space, placing it in logical relations with other objects, actual or possible. But the kind of cognition typical of a mature language user also involves recognizing the web of connections with other concepts one utilizes in recognizing the object. The mature language user has more concepts, and so his act of distinguishing in reflection will cut more precisely. He will recognize that it is a square *because* it has exactly four sides meeting at right angles, and that it is *therefore* a shape. He will recognize that, in virtue of being a square, it cannot be a triangle. On Herder's view, this holism leads to a view on which all cognition is based on judgment and inference; he writes with amazement at "how many secret connections and distinctions, judgments and inferences an infant must make in order to store within himself the first ideas of external bodies, ideas of figure" (194).

Herder argues for his holism through an examination of the process of language learning. He holds that a child forms their concepts of "color, figure, and breadth of bodies" by "juxtaposing single sensations." We first form concepts corresponding to simple objects, and through the process of reflection distinguish their defining features, and after developing adequate conceptual backgrounds, begin to develop more complex and abstract concepts (180). Because these concepts are built up from more basic ones, he compares them to a "knot", writing, "the various fibers have been woven together so tightly into a single thread that if we do not take it apart with care, then the eye really can take it for a simple filament" (180). It is easy to confuse concepts such as magnitude for simple ones rather than complex ones. Precisely because of their level of abstraction and generality, we may take them for the building-blocks of concepts rather than the product of abstraction from concrete concepts. Adding to this confusion is that, Herder believes, we may genuinely perceive beauty and goodness in a given

object. We can neglect the hard work taken in the construction of a concept when we observe it as “simple, immediate sensation” (180).

Herder emphasizes that, although we need not go through the process of reasoning and abstraction involved in the generation of an abstract concept such as color each time we employ the concept, the concept carries this inferential chain with it in its use. He compares a child’s deduction of the concept of color to one of Newton’s mathematical proofs, and notes that a fluent mathematician will be able to skip and discard steps and premises involved in the latter work once he has gained an acquaintance with the concepts and aims of the work in question. He asks, rhetorically, if these steps and concepts are thereby abolished by the mathematician, and then continues, “Or are they not rather still present in the chain, showing themselves to be indispensable to the eye of the solitary, inquiring commentator, of the slowly learning pupil? And if the soul of a child... seems, through long habituation, ultimately to judge, to infer habitually, without always being conscious that it is distinguishing, does that mean that the distinction as such ceases to be?” (181). On an ungenerous reading, one might attribute to Herder the view that each application of the concept “color” requires a spontaneous genesis of the concept from judgments involving more basic concepts on each use, which simply becomes more rapid as it becomes more habitual. I think, however, that we may attribute a more novel and interesting view to Herder on the basis of this passage: that the inferential chains by which a concept is generated remain central to the meaning of the concept after its genesis. On this view, concepts resemble nodes on a web, linked to one another by threads of inference, rather than standing independently after they are produced by abstraction.

4.2 The Young Herder's Vision for Anthropology

As noted in the introduction to this project, Herder concludes his important early essay, “How Philosophy Can Become More Universal and Useful for the Benefit of the People”, by comparing the transformation of philosophy he wishes to enact to the Copernican Revolution, writing, “...if philosophy’s viewpoint gets changed in the manner in which out of the Ptolemaic system the Copernican system developed, what new fruitful developments must not occur here, if our whole philosophy becomes anthropology” (29). Although the essay appears in 1765, predating Kant’s first *Critique*, the use of the phrase “Copernican” here is likely drawn from Kant’s lectures, which Herder often attended as a student. In the first *Critique*, Kant described his own Copernican Revolution as considering the problem of how we come to know certain things about the world from the perspective that the objects we experience must “conform to our cognition”, rather than asking how our knowledge can conform to those objects (Bxvi). In other words, Kant understood the Copernican turn to consist in beginning philosophy with an examination of our capacity to know the objects we perceive, followed by a demonstration of how this capacity plays a role in the constitution of these same objects. If Herder did borrow the phrase from Kant’s lectures, it must be noted that it is likely that Kant did not have the full sense of his own Copernican turn at the time of delivery. In Herder’s mouth, the Copernican turn consists in making philosophy center around the human. The point of contrast, to Herder, is the rationalist Wolffian philosophy. To Herder, rationalists have made philosophy too abstract to be of use to ordinary people, and the forms of ethics, logic, and epistemology that the rationalists have arrived at are not proper for the human being considered as the unity of our sensible and rational natures.

As a whole, the essay puts forth a wide-ranging critique of both theoretical and practical rationalist philosophy for their distance from everyday concerns, urging philosophers to make

themselves useful to the public. Herder represents metaphysics and philosophical logic, as practiced in his time, as idle word-play, with too far a distance from the actual goings-on of our experiences and mental lives. He does, however, present concrete philosophical positions of his own. Against the abstract logicians, Herder defends a psychologistic conception of logic in the essay, claiming that philosophers have “wrongly separated” logic from psychology, and he urges that philosophers reunite it both with everyday thought and with the body itself (9). Certainly a part of his thought that philosophy must become anthropology is that he takes rationalist philosophy to have neglected the human and concrete in favor of the rational and abstract. He writes, “If philosophy is to become useful for human beings, let it make the human being its center” (21).

In contrast with the metaphysical abstraction of philosophers, Herder presents the “healthy understanding”, which seems to consist in a mixture of common sense and empirical learning. The healthy understanding represents the thought of the ordinary man, unpolluted by the traps of academic philosophy. This is not to say that the healthy understanding is immune to confusion, but Herder urges that the solution to the confusions of the healthy understanding do not come from philosophy, at least as it was practiced in his time. He writes, “All the shortcomings of the healthy understanding must be capable of being removed by itself” (11). Whether it is a new situation in our personal lives, a moral dilemma we can’t easily settle, or even a scientific discovery that doesn’t fit easily into our conceptual apparatus, there will be times when our everyday understanding fails to provide us with a solution, but abstract theorizing in a philosophical vein will not bring clarity, or if it does, it will be a momentary, illusory clarity. The solutions must come from attending to the specifics, remaining grounded in the practical consequences of the situation, dilemma, or discovery, and adapting. Herder thus calls for “a philosophy which is immediately useful for the people: a philosophy of the healthy understanding” to aid in circumstances such as these (19). Herder’s anthropology, in this early period,

is meant to provide people with the tools they need to navigate their lives with clarity, rather than to confuse or bore them with archaic systems or structures.

On the side of ethics, Herder defends a form of sentimentalism in the essay. He objects to rationalist ethics partly because of their abstraction, and partly because of their lack of efficacy. He writes that the laws provided by philosophers are “mostly too general to be applied in individual cases”, suggesting that even if one believed in and was motivated by the laws of rationalist ethics, these laws would not be able to determine which course of action to take on their own. He also charges that they are “too flaccid to oppose a whole stream of bad dispositions and form a people’s whole manner of thought” (14). Herder, like Hume, sees the actions of man as being largely determined by habit and feeling. The moral laws produced by philosophers are ineffective because they are incapable of transforming our dispositions and habits. Most people do not determine which action to take by comparing their possibilities with a set of moral laws and determining which course of action best fits these laws. We act largely without explicitly considering the alternatives, according to the habits we formed early in life and our feelings and desires. Because Herder believes philosophy must become more useful to people, he sees no purpose in constructing a system of laws which will not change anyone’s course of action. Herder’s preferred practice of ethics will involve training one’s dispositions and honing one’s moral feeling. In his discussion of the philosophy of the healthy understanding he writes, “Instead of Logic and moral theory, this philosophy with a philosophical spirit forms the human being in independent thought, and in the feeling of virtue” (19). The role of ethics is to transform and strengthen the sense of virtue which is already a motivational force in our psychology. This mode of philosophy can, Herder believes, transform our actions because it identifies the sentiment responsible for ethical motivation and serves to refine it.

If we were to consider the positions defended by Herder in the paper in isolation, he would seem to be a Humean. He supports psychologistic views of epistemology and logic, and he attacks

rationalist ethics from the perspective of a form of sentimentalism. Just like Hume, he seems to take these views to be a consequence of a form of empiricism. If this were the entire story, it would be rather grandiose of Herder to describe the program he calls for as constituting a kind of Copernican Revolution. Herder's statement of his proposed revolution appears after a lamentation of the disconnect between the people (here Herder uses the German word "Volk", emphasizing that he is referring to the common man) and philosophy, culminating in the following lines: "The word 'people' has died out for the philosophers since the moment these had to construct an anthill of their own, and since the moment the distinction came into force that the intellectual world is heaven, the people's republic earth – so to speak two sides of one and the same coin" (29). Herder's Copernican turn is one which begins philosophy from empirical observations of man and his behavior, considering logic and ethics as products of our psychology. And like Hamann's conception of philosophy and Kant's of anthropology, Herder's proposed anthropological philosophy is one which is concerned first and foremost with its application and its practical consequences. Herder aims to make philosophy accountable to the people, and he evaluates its success according to the services it provides the public rather than the soundness of its proofs.¹⁷ The young Herder's vision of anthropology, then, is not far from Platner's in its empiricism and naturalism, but its aims and audience diverge from his, and his methodology focuses on behavior and psychology rather than anatomy.

That said, it is not long after writing this essay that Herder's interests shift towards the philosophy of language, which begins a shift in his methodology from psychology alone to something

¹⁷ It should be noted that this essay is situated firmly in the *Popularphilosophie* movement, the debates surrounding which provide further context for Herder's concerns here. The curious reader will be well-served by Zammito's *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*, the early sections of which discuss in great detail this movement as well as Kant's positioning with respect to it in this period.

more like sociology. The “Fragments on Recent German Literature” from 1767 introduces thoughts of this variety to his system. It should be noted that at this time Herder, who arrived at the study of philosophy from a background of training in medicine, had become well-acquainted with Hamann, whose interests and thought on language were discussed in the previous chapter, and it is likely that the “Fragments” already bear Hamann’s mark on them. In this essay, Herder responds to a commentary in *Literaturbriefe* concerning the proper application of the term “kaloi k'agathoi” in ancient Greece. The term was, roughly, applied to those who are well-brought up, but the particularities and range of application are up for grabs in the debate. Some commentators take the term to roughly mean that one bears “a good, fair manner”, while others take more seriously the details that certain Roman scholars note in terms of the particularities of good upbringing in the Greeks (45). For instance, some hold that all who are “kaloi k'agathoi” can recite Homer from memory, which would not only mean that there is a relatively specific training regimen in question here, but also that the term refers more to a certain form of adeptness or cultivation rather than (or perhaps in addition to) something we would call a moral quality.

From the perspective of the critic Herder addresses in the essay, the question of the meaning of “kaloi k'agathoi” is of interest primarily as a matter of historical fact. If we take the term to refer to a specific training routine and hold historical texts to their word, we will have a remarkably different picture of what the youth of ancient Greece looked like, how they acted and interacted, than if we take it to describe a character or personality trait. Herder quotes from the article the question, “Is it true that the ancient Greeks taught their youth wisdom from *Homer*? And was Homer even understood by all those who received the epithet *kaloi k'agathoi*?”, a question to which the author responds in the negative (44). The critic takes the term to apply to a moral temperament, disconnected from aesthetic values, arguing that one attributes too much to the Greeks in claiming that such training was common.

For Herder, however, this debate becomes an opportunity to consider how language can

reflect the radical differences fundamental concepts such as those involved in ethics can have between distinct cultures and historical epochs. For our purposes, this is immensely important for two reasons: the first is that it demonstrates a shift in methodology; Herder's appreciation for language as a methodological tool for investigation of the nature of values begins to replace the psychology he borrows from Hume's philosophy and Kant's anthropology. But it also demonstrates how far Herder has settled against the Enlightenment universalistic project. In the psychological picture of "How Philosophy Can Become More Universal", it seems somewhat plausible that human sentiments will look somewhat similar across cultures and historical eras, that ethics are the product of our psychologies *qua* human beings and nothing else.

He writes, of the debate, "Both parties can preserve their claim to be right", meaning, in part, that the critic and his opponent have erred in assessing the possibilities. Against the critic of *Literaturbriefe*, Herder cites a passage from *Theages* in which Socrates connects a *kaloï k'agathoi* upbringing with "writing and lyre-playing and wrestling", practices entirely disconnected from the modern sphere of the moral (122e). Yet Herder also doubts that the memorization of Homer, for instance, was as common as the other side would hold. Herder sees the presented options – either the term refers to a purely moral attribute, or the term refers to a particular aesthetic training regimen – to be the product of a contemporary inability to detect a certain kind of value present in the ancient Greek world. The aesthetic, physical, the true, and the Good, are united in this term. The term is ethical, in a sense, but it is ethical in a way that is foreign to us. The choice presented in this historical debate is the product of a false interpretive dilemma.

Herder sees values as evolving over time, and he takes language to be a vehicle both for the evolution itself and for our understanding of it. He writes, "In every language all words which express the distinctive character of the age must change, and precisely this seems to me true of *kalos k'agathos*," before going into a brief history of the historical appearance of the use of the phrase, its components,

and its development (45). More significant than the details of the account, for our purposes, is Herder's justification of the interest of the history. He writes:

Why, though, so much about a word? About a word which was ever the expression of their character and the summit of their praises one can never say too much. The explanation of such words unlocks for us manner of thought and police, *character* and ethics, in short, the secret of the nation – without which we always make distorted judgments about a people, learn distortedly from it, and imitate it intolerably. (46)

In this passage, we begin to see the holism expressed in Herder's philosophy of mind applied to his newfound interest in culture rather than psychology as a medium for the investigation of concepts. Throughout Herder's cultural studies, he focuses his attention on concepts much like Bernard Williams's "thick" concepts as a way of gaining insight into a culture. Williams characterizes thick concepts as expressing "a union of fact and value", writing, "The way these notions are applied is determined by what the world is like (for instance, by how someone has acted), and yet, at the same time, their application usually involves a certain valuation of the situation, of persons or actions" (129). In English, we can think of concepts such as "courage" and "treachery" as falling under this umbrella. While calling someone courageous does praise their actions as being good, it also provides a layer of description beyond the normative evaluation. We claim that they overcame fear or did something that others might not have done out of fear. On Herder's view, thick concepts such as courage and *kaloï k'agathoi* can provide great insight into the value system and forms of thought of a culture because their descriptive nature provides a somewhat straightforward empirical content and connects the empirical to the normative. Further, his holism leads him to believe that the "thin", more general ethical concepts such as "the good" are composed of these thick concepts. Rather than standing above or behind these concepts, providing them with their normative content, "the good" is an abstraction from the thick concepts; it is whatever they have in common. In any particular "thick" ethical concept, expressed through the use of this word, Herder sees the values and character of a particular community made concrete. In contrast to Hamann, and, as we will shortly see, the later

Herder, however, in this passage and elsewhere in the “Fragments” Herder sees language as a mere reflection and expression of these values. Thus, a kind of psychologistic approach remains in the young Herder’s writings. The content of the concepts in question is determined by the individual psychology of the speakers of a language. It is made up of the inferential relations it bears with related concepts, as Herder describes earlier, like a knot.

Herder also represents a form of perspectivalism as a consequence of the vision of language put forth in this paper. Herder sees the relation of naming an object– for him, indistinguishable from forming a concept of an object –to involve the fixing of a certain perspective on an object. He notes that this perspective is always “one-sided” and “external”, as opposed to God's correct, indifferent perspective, and thus: “truths and errors were preserved and passed on, as advantageous or disadvantageous prejudices: advantageously or disadvantageously, side ideas attached themselves... contingent ideas were confused with essential ones. The three goddesses of human cognition – truth, beauty, and virtue – became as national as language was” (50). Herder begins to present here the pluralistic stance towards ethics and aesthetics that he develops in his later anthropological writings; in claiming that the beautiful and virtue are national, he means to say that they can take radically different, but equally valid, forms in other cultures. Herder here also presents, however, a much stronger view, that truth itself is relative to a given linguistic community. His defense for this view is that our concepts already have a perspective on the world built into them; they are made up of relations they bear with other concepts from our perspective. Although Herder seems to be implying there is a correct “view from nowhere” from which a proper, universal language might have been developed, I don't think we need to take this contrast seriously, as he is clearly emphasizing the subjective, perspectival nature of language in general here.

It is not clear whether or not Herder takes the “Fragments” to embody the anthropology he promises in “How Philosophy Can Become More Universal”, but this work certainly foreshadows the

program set forth in his later “This, Too, a Philosophy of History” and *Outlines for a Philosophy of History*. Herder’s holism has become integrated with an interest in cultural studies rather than psychology as a tool for the investigation of concepts, and he displays a strong appreciation for the potential for concepts, both those of ethical and aesthetic nature and of theoretical nature, to diverge greatly between cultures and historical epochs. Thus, Herder’s major early work on language, the “Treatise on the Origin of Language” can be understood as an attempt to understand, in the naturalistic terms set out by his statement in “How Philosophy Can Become More Universal”, this newfound tool of investigation.

4.3 Herder’s Early Picture of Language

In our survey of Platner’s work, we witnessed a straightforward attempt to naturalize the study of the mind. Despite his apparent dualism, Platner treats the mind, and even the soul, as legitimate targets of scientific investigation. The former can be studied directly via anatomical study, and the latter can be studied indirectly by examining its interactions with the body. This biological approach to the mind was, by no means, the only attempt to naturalize it. Although Hamann was unique, in his time, in taking reason to be dependent on thought, a number of Enlightenment thinkers recognized that man is unique among the animals in his capacity to create and recognize symbols, and sought after a naturalistic explanation of this capacity as an important component of a naturalistic explanation of the mind. Not only would such an explanation bring the Enlightenment one step closer to having a complete naturalistic picture of the world, it would also aid in its self-understanding; the Enlightenment prided itself in its universalistic picture of reason, and language was seen to be the vehicle of reason.

Condillac is one of the more noteworthy figures to have engaged in this project. In his *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, he presents a story of two children in the desert who begin to interact with one another. Each cries out, on the basis of instinct, in reaction to their needs. Condillac writes of these early interactions, “One of them did not say to himself, *I must make such particular motions to render him sensible of my want, and to induce him to relieve me*: nor the other, *I see by his motions that he wants such a thing, and I will let him have it*: but they both acted in consequence of the want which pressed them most” (172-173). The children begin to communicate with one another without having the prior intention to communicate and slowly begin to recognize one another's gestures and cries as symbols. Although these sounds are produced by instinct, they are only understood through the children's capacity, innate in all men, for association. As this process continues, the children begin to associate signs with their meanings through agreement concerning what certain sounds should designate. They thus begin by recognizing each other's capacity to communicate, and continue by agreeing to signify other events and objects with distinct sounds. Although these instinctual utterances and expressions of emotion are foundational, they are foundational not because language is essentially emotive or instinctual, but rather because they reveal the potential for associating sounds with meanings. Condillac's picture is one in which language is founded on convention. This process of assigning arbitrary meanings by convention allows man to coordinate and describe ever more complex situations, and thus the expression of rationality.

On the other hand, Rousseau, emphasizing against Enlightenment thought the role of emotions and feeling in our lives, conceives of language as originating out of the need to express our passions. He argues against the notion that language is developed towards the service of our needs, to coordinate and plan amongst one another, which is implicit in Condillac's conventionalist story, claiming that the needs of men push them apart from one another, rather than bringing them together. He writes, “Fruit does not elude our grasp, one can feed on it without speaking, one stalks in silence

the prey one wishes to devour; but in order to move a young heart, to repulse an unjust aggressor, nature dictates accents, cries, complaints. The most ancient words are invented in this way..." (294). Rousseau continues to emphasize the deep kinship between language and music to provide an account for language as, in the first instance, expressive, rather than aimed at strategizing and representing. For Rousseau, the project of providing a naturalistic account of the origins of language is not a way of providing a foundation for Enlightenment rationality, but for undermining it.

Herder's prize essay, "Treatise on the Origin of Language", is written in response to a prompt on the question of the origins of language, whether it is divine or natural. Following the tradition both of Enlightenment figures like Condillac and Rousseau's Counter-Enlightenment stance, he defends a natural origin. However, Herder is deeply critical of both Rousseau and Condillac: of Rousseau, for underestimating the cognitive elements of language, and of Condillac, for presupposing this cognitive element. To Herder, language and rationality are fundamentally inseparable, and to either deny the centrality of reason, as Rousseau does, or to see language as dependent on a prior rationality, required to form the conventions Condillac founds language upon, is to fundamentally mischaracterize this relationship.

Herder sums up his criticisms of Condillac and Rousseau with the following remark: "the former made animals into human beings, and the latter made human beings into animals" (77). By presenting the children of his fable as already capable of coming to mutual agreement concerning the meanings of words, Condillac turns them into rational men: "In short, words arose because words existed before they existed", Herder writes, dismissively (76). In claiming a direct continuity between the animal cries of pre-linguistic men and fully developed language, Rousseau denies the cognitive, rational elements of language and makes speaking men into moaning animals. Thus, for Herder, a solution to the problem of the origin of language will have to pay due respect to the cognitive functions of language while, at the same time, situating it in the development of man such that the

leap from non-linguistic to linguistic does not presuppose a fully developed capacity to reason, which Herder conceives of as coming along with language.

Herder's naturalism leads him to a form of pragmatism concerning the role of language: he begins by characterizing the capacities and needs of primitive man, in order to determine how these needs could be served by language, and how his capacities could grant it to him. He notes that other animals have quite specific functions and have sophisticated capacities and powers of perception that allow them to perform these functions. Herder contrasts bees, with their intricate constructions in hives and combs, and with their powers of perception in locating pollen, with the crude constructive capacities and relatively insensitive powers of sight and smell of primitive man. While these weaknesses are significant, they are the consequence, on Herder's view, of our freedom – we can locate more than pollen, and build more than honeycombs, and so, while primitive man may be less impressive in its performance of some particular act than a non-human animal, he is capable of taking on any range of acts. We act according to our own free choice rather than instinct. And freedom, for Herder, is not understood purely in terms of this choice to act, but also in terms of cognition. The bee is limited in its understanding and capacity to perceive according to its designated function. Man, on the other hand, can see in many ways, and so make a variety of *distinctions* in order to identify his objects.

Herder calls this capacity to make distinctions “reflection.” Enacting this capacity involves becoming aware of some object or aspect of an object. He writes of this capacity:

The human being demonstrates reflection when, out of the whole hovering dream of images which proceed before his senses, he can collect himself into a moment of alertness, freely dwell on a single image, pay it clear, more leisurely heed, and separate off characteristic marks for the fact that this is that object and no other. Thus he demonstrates reflection when he can not only recognize all the properties in a vivid or clear way, but can in his own mind acknowledge one or several as distinguishing properties. (87)

This ability to attend to certain aspects of the world and distinguish one from the others is what will

allow man to develop language as well as rational capabilities. It is not simply the capacity to become aware of some object or aspect of an object, or to hold it in mind: this capacity situates objects in a *logical space* in distinguishing between objects, and so establishing their lack of identity with one another. Distinguishing an object involves determining not only what it is, but also what it is *not*, and therefore involves placing it in incompatibility relations with other objects. Further, it is a somewhat constructive capacity, which leads to the generation of concepts. It generates the capacity to identify and re-identify some thing via some distinguishing characteristic. It thus allows us to reason about objects by generating concepts by which we can identify them, and by placing these concepts in incompatibility relations with one another.

Due to Herder's vague language concerning reflection, a number of opposing readings have been given to his remarks, leading, due to the centrality of this notion to the picture of language in the "Treatise", to vastly differing readings of the essay. Beiser reads reflection as a synonym for reason, and thus characterizes the essay as providing an account of why "reason must give birth to language", as well as some suggestions as to how it does so (*The Fate of Reason* 146). Forster thinks of reflection as thought, and takes Herder to be giving an argument that "all thought, or 'reflection,' requires language" (*After Herder* 69). It is unclear to me from the text what Forster takes to be the relationship between thought and reason: he characterizes Herder as defending the position that "thought is *internal speech*", but it would be trivial to claim that internal speech is parasitic on language. It is likely that Forster agrees with Beiser on the identification of reflection with reason, although this identification is a cause of the confusion that leads them to opposite conclusions concerning the essay: that reason is the source of language on Beiser's reading, and that language is the source of reason on Forster's. This identification of reflection and reason makes it impossible to interpret Herder's remarks both that "even the first, lowest application of reason was not able to occur without language" (91) and that "The human being, put in the condition of awareness which is his very own, with this awareness

(reflection) operating freely for the first time, invented language” without representing Herder as contradicting himself (87).

Herder, rather than identifying reflection with reason, takes the capacity for reflection to be the source of both reason and language. Thus, in his description of the first acts of distinction made in reflection, he describes the mutual development of reason and language upon the act of distinguishing animals on the basis of their sounds “You bleat! The turtle-dove coos! The dog barks! There are three words, because he tried out three distinct ideas – these ideas for his logic, those words for his vocabulary! Reason and language took a timid step together, and nature came to meet them half-way through hearing” (98). Here we see the capacity for reflection generate both the *concepts* of “sheep” “turtle dove” and “dog” for rational thought, and the *words* at the same time.

Cassirer provides an interesting account of reflection that emphasizes the constitutive aspects of reflection for thought. He writes “reflection is not something external that is merely added to the content of feeling; it enters into feeling as a constitutive factor. It is 'reflection' which makes the ephemeral sensory stimulus into a determinate, differentiated and hence spiritual 'content'” (*The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* 153). Thus, on Cassirer's reading, Herder claims that reflection enacts conceptualization of perceptual experience that allows for the genesis of language, but also locates the conceptual in perception itself. Cassirer sees, in Herder's conception of reflection, something like Kant's “synthesis of recognition”, only it is explicitly tied to language and language-formation (*The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* 152). More pressingly for our concerns, Cassirer attributes to Herder a particular development of the view I earlier attributed to Hamann concerning the role of language in constructing the world for the subject.

There is reason to doubt this reading as well, however. In the discussion of reflection above, Herder does not represent reflection as creating its objects, but as attending to them. Cassirer's misreading is, however, a useful one, in that it emphasizes the constructive nature of the process

Herder envisions. The process of conceptualization involved in the genesis of language as one which must be *earned*.

Herder's critique of Condillac in making an animal into man comes down to the idea that the children of the desert have the psychological contents they express and interpret in one another ready-made for them. In order to recognize the cry of the other child as a cry of pain, the child must already have a concept of pain. This is a distinct achievement over and above the capacity to react to pain by crying out, which may well be instinctual. While Rousseau and Condillac make opposing mistakes – one turns man into an animal, and the other an animal into man— their mistake amounts to the same thing: failing to regard the process of conceptualization involved in learning a language as one in which the thinker or speaker must *construct* their concepts.

Herder goes on to discuss the role of language in primitive life in terms of the transmission of information. While reflection is necessary for individuals to think rationally about the objects of their experience, it is socially useful in granting us linguistic capacities. The social dimensions of language are seen as derivative or secondary. This is an aspect of Herder's thought that Hamann will take issue with. Herder's picture of language is essentially pragmatic: the capacity to conceptualize serves a particular function in helping men survive despite their physical weaknesses, and secondarily it has a purpose in allowing the transmission of information in communication. Hamann holds that certain arbitrary features of culture dominate over pragmatism, allowing for great divergences between cultures as expressions of their own identity, rather than expressions of the circumstances in which they developed. Hamann writes, "As gardens come before the cultivation of fields, painting before writing, singing before speech, metaphors before reasoning..." (Berlin 325). The freedom of individual expression takes priority over the immediate service of needs on Hamann's picture of language.

But this matter will not be focus of Hamann's criticisms of Herder's "Treatise." As we have

seen, there are two ways Herder attempts to address the normative statuses involved in the use of language. First, he conceives of the capacity for reflection, necessary for the development of reason and of language, as that of distinguishing, which places its objects in certain logical relations. In distinguishing we determine that something is *so* and not *so*, and therefore place it in an incompatibility relation. Second, he conceives of the process of conceptualization required for reason and language as one which is not simply given, but rather constructed. Hamann, however, will hold that Herder nonetheless fails to characterize the normative statuses involved in becoming a speaker of a language, partly because of the primarily individualistic nature of his story, and partly due to a misunderstanding of the particular kind of construction which will be required.

4.4 Hamann's Critique: The King of the Field

On Hamann's view, Herder has made little progress in developing an understanding of how man became a language-using, rational animal, as his explanation presupposes the existence of that faculty in nascent form. He describes the Proof as "Platonic", making reference to the conception of learning as a form of recollection developed in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*. On this view, we can only learn from experience what we already know from a past life; we have once known all that we will ever know, and have simply forgotten it at birth. Herder's vision of the development of reason and language echoes this doctrine insofar as the capacity for reflection that we are born with already contains the capacity to speak and reason inside it. We can speak, that is, because we were born with the capacity to develop language. Thus, Hamann writes that Herder's proof amounts to nothing more than "a Greek synonymy" ("Philological Ideas" 127). The synonymy Hamann refers to here is that of reason and language, both referred to by the Greeks with the term "logos." Hamann, as we have seen

in the prior chapter, takes no particular issue with this identification of language and reason. The issue is that Herder seems to attribute a robust explanatory power to this unity because he posits the unity as a prior capacity, that of reflection. He summarizes Herder's view as follows:

...that man thinks and speaks out of instinct – that the positive power to think and to speak is congenital and directly natural—that it like the instinct of the animal is pulled, drawn, and steered toward the single point of a distinguishing mark – that with the first word the whole language was invented... that the invention of language is as essential to man as the web to the spider and the honeycomb to the bee. (“Philological Ideas” 124)

Hamann holds that Herder, despite the constructive nature of reflection, nonetheless regards language as the product of an animal instinct. The web is constructed, as is the honeycomb; the formation of concepts via the exercise of the capacity for reflection seems distinct in name only. Herder is ultimately no different from Condillac; his capacity takes man from brute to rational being in a mysterious instant. While Condillac regards the conceptual framework required for language as already present in the pre-linguistic child, Herder represents an animal instinct as providing this framework.

Hamann develops this criticism with a far more interesting and cutting claim. Because Herder represents language as the product of an instinct, he has no basis for understanding the normative standings between speakers both enacted by language and inherent in the use of language. In “Philological Ideas and Doubts”, after a series of attacks on Herder's essay, Hamann writes:

Man therefore is not only a living field but also the son of the field, and not only field and seed (in the system of materialists and idealists) but also the king of the field, who is to grow seed and hostile tares; for what is a field without seeds and a prince without land and income? These Three in us are therefore One... just as the three profiles on the wall are the natural shadow of a single body illuminated by a double light behind it. (“Philological Ideas” 118)

Hamann acknowledges that man is a “living field” – a natural organism consisting of several distinct components which function in harmony with one another. In describing man as “field and seed”, Hamann seems to call to mind both the material status of man and his animating spirit; a seed carries within it a plan and develops, in normal conditions, according to this plan. I take it that Hamann

attributes a view of this sort to Herder, but sees Herder as having missed man's two roles as "son of the field" and as "king of the field", and further the unity of these three roles in us. With regard to man's role as "son of the field", Hamann here considers us as the farmer as well as the crops; significantly, man must *cultivate* man, and has only become what he is by the cultivation of his predecessors. Herder's pragmatism often leads him to considering us as the products of our surroundings and our contexts, but he rarely considers our role in constituting our own contexts and those of our peers and successors. Instruction is of course central to Hamann's understanding of language and cognition more generally; his own picture of the development of language in Eden uses this model of instruction to portray Adam and Eve's coming to appreciate the world through God's word. Of course, without a God, the model of instruction will not assist us in providing an account of the original genesis of language. However, on Herder's view, the development of the cognitive capacities required for language are *essentially* solitary; it would seem that all we do in teaching a child to speak is provide them with the names *we* have for things. And this is a genuine problem if we regard language and meanings as, in the first instance, social constructions.

Finally, Hamann claims that Herder has failed to recognize that man is also "king of the field", and so stands in normative relations. He emphasizes the status of man as a "political animal" against Herder, writing that "everyone is his own legislator but also the first-born and the neighbor of his subjects" ("Philological Ideas" 115). Herder sees the use of language as a function of an animal-like instinct, which allows him to isolate some distinguishing feature of an object and re-identify it. Although Herder emphasizes that what is unique about man in the *freedom* he exhibits in being able to identify any aspect of any object in this fashion, Hamann does not think that this does enough to separate man from the beasts. In claiming that everyone is their own "legislator", Hamann is emphasizing a particular, normative feature of the use of language: the authority one must take oneself to have on matters in making a judgment and must take others to have in taking their

judgments to be true. In vocalizing a judgment that something is the case we deem matters to be *so* and not otherwise; if we want others to take us seriously, we must be capable of giving reasons for taking what we said to be true. Judgment is not simply a matter of noticing something in our visual field and making the proper corresponding sound, as Herder has represented it. Think here of the contrast between the judgment of a competent language speaker, on the one hand, and the beeping of a smoke detector, on the other. On Herder's view, we are distinguished from a smoke detector on the basis that we can freely choose which features of the environment to detect. Against this, Hamann urges that, unlike smoke detectors, we can be *right* or *wrong*; our judgments are subject to normative evaluations. The smoke detector simply responds to its environment; it does not make a claim on the world, except by metaphor. He writes, "the true character of our nature consists in the judicial and administrative office of a political animal" ("Philological Ideas" 114). In making declarative statements in language we judge that something is the case, and we make ourselves responsible for the truth of this judgment.

At the same time, Hamann's emphasis on the social roles involved in the political realm can be understood on a less metaphorical level. The positions he lists: king, field-worker, and neighbor among them, are concrete examples of the constructive role of language Hamann advocates. If we could not speak, there would be no kings; the concrete social, normative relations that these social roles stand for are constructed only in the use of language. Regarding language as the exercise of an instinct to distinguish fails to appreciate the power language has in creating the world we inhabit.

In responding to Hamann, Herder will have to provide a naturalistic understanding of language which characterizes the normativity involved in the use of language as one which is essentially social; the logical normativity involved in his picture is simply given by instinct, and thus fails to distinguish itself sufficiently from the kinds of distinctions made by the bees in determining which flowers to pollenate and which to not. Hamann's conception of language as an essentially social

practice will provide him with the basis he needs to provide the groundwork for the anthropological philosophy he develops in the works which follow.

4.5 “On the Cognition”: Herder on Normativity

Herder’s writings shift in a number of surprising ways in the wake of Hamann’s critique. In the period immediately following, he seems unsure of how best to handle the criticisms, particularly as it relates to his naturalist project. Forster, who typically downplays the influence of Hamann on Herder’s philosophical development, reports an unfortunate change in Herder’s thought in this period, writing that “there was a spell in the middle, the years 1771-6... during which he fell into the sort of religious irrationalism that is more characteristic of his friend Hamann” (*After Herder* 45). In this period after the completion of the “Treatise”, Herder worked as a court preacher, a surprising development for a naturalist philosopher that could only have been inspired by his interactions with Hamann. On my reading, Herder’s turn towards Hamann’s brand of theology stems from an appreciation of the challenges Hamann’s critique posed for his naturalism, and it thus represents a legitimate turning point in his thought rather than a bizarre misstep. It is no coincidence that Herder, in this period, wrote a number of his formative historical and cultural studies, including “This, Too, a Philosophy of History” and his, collaboratively written with Goethe, manifesto of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, “Of German Character and Art.” Hamann’s critique, while it leads Herder to doubt certain features of his early naturalism, also leads him to a new appreciation of the significance of culture in his conception of man, which ultimately pushes him to develop a more sophisticated form of naturalism with the anthropological holism which characterizes his later work.

Hamann's skepticism concerning the explanatory powers of naturalism in the realm of man's capacity to reason and think lead him to emphasize the roles of tradition and culture, as well as religion, in providing the conditions for cognition. Hamann connects the roles of religion and culture through his particular notion of instruction: he sees man as a vessel for instruction, who in turn teaches others what he has learned. The world itself seems designed, on Hamann's view, to instruct. This is part of the meaning of his remark, in his fable of Eden, that "every phenomenon of nature was a word" ("Knights of the Rose Cross" 108). The world reveals itself to us through God, and we in turn learn from it and pass on this knowledge through our cultural institutions and traditions.

While Herder does not end up endorsing the religious aspects of Hamann's view, his vision of language shifts to incorporate the notions of tradition and instruction in order to respond to Hamann's criticisms. There are three prongs to Hamann's attack. First, Herder's explanation of the origin of language presupposes a built-in capacity for language that is simply activated in experience. Second, Herder's picture of language is largely solipsistic; although he acknowledges the utility of language for communication in social contexts in the later parts of the "Treatise", his picture of the development of language shows a single man applying words and developing his first concepts alone, for the purposes of his own cognition. Finally, Herder fails to appreciate the capacity of language to constitute normative standings and relationships. This last point can refer both to the normative standings involved in claiming that something is the case and those involved in constituting social roles such as king and neighbor.

Herder's only explicit acknowledgment in the development of his view of language in the wake of Hamann's critique appears in his 1778 essay "On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human

Soul.”¹⁸ He asks himself whether the human capacity to reason and understand has “no helper, no staff, on which it supports itself,” and answers his question with “I believe so! – and this medium of our self-feeling and mental consciousness is – *language*” (“On the Cognition” 211). He continues:

People congenitally deaf and dumb show through strange examples how deeply reason, self-consciousness, slumbers when they cannot imitate, and I believe (rather contrary to my previous opinion) that really such a staff of awakening had to come to the aid of our *inner consciousness*, as light to the aid of the eye, that it might see, sound to the aid of the ear, that it might hear. (“On the Cognition” 211)

Herder represents the change as one of priority; he acknowledges that his earlier work in the “Treatise” treats language as a function of a prior mental capacity, and here he shifts his view to place language at the start. In discussing the need for language to awaken the “inner consciousness”, connected as it is with the capacities to see and hear, Herder explicitly disavows his thought that reflection precedes language; insofar as there is a distinct capacity called reflection which allows us to distinguish objects from the “dream of images” presented to us by the senses, it comes to us with language.

Herder also begins to place an emphasis on the social nature of language in this passage. His contrast between mute children and those to whom language comes more easily focuses on the role of imitation in the formation of linguistic capacities and the development of concepts that goes with it. This contrasts not only with the “Treatise” account of the development of language, but also with the account of concept formation in the *Critical Forests*, each of which conceive of concept formation as a primarily solitary activity. As he continues, he connects this imitation with the role of instruction as described by Hamann, writing, “Thus, we see, does the child achieve mental focus, it *learns* to speak

¹⁸ A draft of this piece appeared as early as 1775, so we should not think of this work as arriving in a new period after the middle years criticized by Forster. Rather, we should see it as the fruit of Herder’s engagement with the critiques of Hamann.

just as it learns to see, and precisely in accordance to think... *reason* and *word* are only *a single* concept, *a single* thing: *logos*” (“On the Cognition” 211). The unity of reason and language explicitly echoes Hamann’s work, both in content and vocabulary, as he emphasizes the social nature of learning and instruction requisite for thought and reason.

It is in these sections where he aligns his view most closely with Hamann’s that he begins to discuss the normative notions of correctness and rule-governed behavior more generally. As he continues to discuss the process of language learning, he describes the awakening of a unique aspect of discursive behavior. He writes, “The more one strengthens, guides, enriches, forms this inner language of a human being, then the more one guides his *reason* and makes alive the divine in him, which needs staffs of truth, and raises itself up with them as from slumber” (“On the Cognition” 212). Although Herder is borrowing Hamann’s religious vocabulary here, there is good reason to doubt that his use of “divine” is meant literally. First, Herder is explicitly discussing the process of an adult teaching a child to speak, which is of course not an explicitly religious activity. Second, Herder should be quite careful in addressing Hamann’s criticisms to make some genuine progress on the key charge of Platonism. If Herder were here conceiving of teaching a child to speak as a process of activating a pre-formed innate ability, he would simply be replacing the role of the natural, instinct-like capacity for reflection with a divine source as the source from which man recalls his ability to speak. Although Hamann would almost certainly favor this view over Herder’s earlier one, it fails to constitute genuine progress as far as a genetic account goes.

Finally, we have Herder’s reference to the “staffs of truth” which aid in the awakening of the divine. Here Herder is developing the thought that the notion of correctness is essential to the use of language. Charles Taylor does great justice to this aspect of Herder’s work here in his “The Importance of Herder.” Taylor credits Herder with developing a theory of language which makes sense of the notion of the use of the “right” word in a given context—that is, a theory of language which portrays

speaking a language as taking up a normative status, and therefore being subject to evaluation. Making a judgment commits one to the truth of their claim, as well as the truth of a number of its consequences. On Taylor's reading, this notion is centrally connected with Herder's holism. Applying the word "triangle" to a triangle, on this view, requires the capacity to justify so doing by pointing to relevant features (such as its having three sides, its angles adding up to 180 degrees, etc.), which intertwines the meanings of these terms. Taylor attributes this view to the Herder of the "Treatise on the Origin of Language", but, for the reasons discussed earlier, I think Herder has not yet reached an appreciation of the normative statuses involved in the use of language in the "Treatise", although I do think elements of this view are at work in Herder's thought, even in this period. As the above discussion has made clear, I think the holism articulated in the *Critical Forests* takes the inferential connections noted by Taylor to be essential to the structure of a given concept, but that Herder does not yet recognize inferential connections as having any particular normative significance; rather than holding that applying the word "triangle" to an object commits one to its having three sides, Herder in the *Critical Forests* will cash out the idea in terms of the thoughts we may or do have upon applying or hearing the application of a word to an object. I do, however, believe he arrived at the full form of Taylor's thought in this later period of his writing, with Hamann's assistance.

One way of understanding this shift in Herder's philosophy of language from the phase of the "Treatise" to "On the Cognition" is his newfound interest in the notion of truth, which is entirely absent from his discussion in the "Treatise." Herder's account of language in the "Treatise" is largely subjectivist; the first speaker develops language to distinguish between objects in his own perceptual field, and the genesis of language is an exercise of his cognitive capacities, and his alone. Other people and the external world are an afterthought. Yet here, as Herder develops an account of language-use that is thoroughly social, he places great emphasis on the significance of the notion of truth in the acquisition of language. In making a claim, we conceive ourselves as stating some truth about the

world, and thus hold ourselves subject to certain standards of evaluation. We hold ourselves responsible for the truth of this claim, and may expect others to hold us responsible for it as well. In invoking the image of truth as a staff propping up the divine, Herder is noting the interconnectedness of the stance towards correctness one takes on in the use of language, described by Taylor above, and the distinctive form of normativity involved in discursive activity. In claiming that the staffs of truth are essential to awakening the divine in reason, Herder means that the aspiration to truth found in our judgments is responsible for the normative character of reason and language. If our judgments did not have a claim to truth, to an objective description of the way the world is, the language game of describing the world would not be subject to the normative order, as there would be no need to justify our beliefs or judgments, or to call for the reasons of others.

To Hamann, the divine is the source of the normative, although it is passed on through tradition and instruction. Although this affects Herder's vocabulary, leading him to use the term "divine" for this form of normativity, his account is thoroughly naturalistic. In addressing the question of the origin of our rational capacities later in the essay, he acknowledges that "our cognition did not exist through itself," but rather than turning to a divine origin, he returns again to the staffs of truth ("On the Cognition" 215). In an earlier draft of the essay, Herder makes the secular origin of these staffs explicit, writing, "What late members we are in the human species, and what a composite medium purified through millennia it is that awakens, strengthens, spreads, directs our forces of cognition and of sensation from our first entry into the world!" ("Philological Ideas" 215f). Our capacities to speak and reason were earned slowly over time, and are passed down from our predecessors to us, as we will pass them down to those that follow.

Herder goes on to provide an account of language learning through ostension to describe the genesis of this notion of truth in the language-learner. We praise them for saying the right things and discourage them from saying the wrong things. As Herder notes, this will begin with ostensive

definitions. He writes, "...for our cognition even to arise from sensation, the object still has to come to us... through an *indication* which *teaches* us to cognize. This teaching, this sense of an alien which imprints itself in us, gives our thinking its whole shape and direction" ("On the Cognition" 212). Herder's note on the alien imprint of the other is a way of emphasizing that what occurs in learning a language is an essentially social activity. This process of pointing and naming will result in imitation from the child, and rewards depending on the nature of the imitation. This begins our development of a notion of correctness, along with which we begin to take on the normative statuses involved in genuine conceptual use rather than the conditioned responses involved in mere imitation. This passage further echoes Hamann's discussion of the transformation our capacity to reason and our epistemic capacities undergo when we take up the tradition of our people. As we are instructed in language and come to speak, we become capable of reason and thought by becoming familiar with the reason and thought of our linguistic community.

Herder's last point, on the shape of thought granted by the instructor to the learner, is immediately further developed and clarified. "Regardless of all seeing and hearing and inflow from outside, we would grope about in deep night and blindness if instruction had not early on thought *for us* and, so to speak, imprinted in us ready-made thought-formulas" ("On the Cognition" 212). These ready-made formulas of thought refer to the general concepts of objecthood, events, etc., which we then employ in our acquisition of more particular concepts. This echo of his earlier holism further develops the particular ways in which he thinks learning one's first language is, at the same time, learning how to think. Herder's conception of reason, as we saw in "How Philosophy Can Become More Universal" is not purely formal; material categories and shapes of thought enter into his understanding of logic. Learning the basic categories of one's language allows one to adapt to new situations, come to understand new objects and events.

Herder most clearly distinguishes the secular nature of his discussion of the "divine" from a

religious one when he contrasts this material conception of reason with that of his rationalist peers. He describes the rationalists as finding his tale of the “birth of our reason” distasteful because they “revere their reason as a congenital, eternal, utterly independent, infallible oracle.” He writes, “Doubtless these wise men never walked in children’s smocks, never learned to speak as their nursemaids spoke, or perhaps have no... *mother- and human-tongue* at all. They speak like the gods, that is, they *think purely...*” (“On the Cognition” 212). His conception of reason and language is essentially human rather than divine, grounded in our material, social existence. It is not a gift from the gods. Yet the religious vocabulary is inescapable for Herder in his discussion of our cognitive capacities, in part because it is Herder’s best way of distinguishing the normative practices we engage in from the conditioned and instinctual responses Herder finds in the animal world; Hamann saw Herder as failing to draw a genuine distinction here, and his lapses into Hamann’s vocabulary should be understood as an attempt to respond to the worry in Hamann’s own terminology. Thus, Herder writes, in contrasting us with the nonhuman animals, “Only [man] is *God’s image*, an epitome and administrator of the creation; hence there sleep within him a *thousand* forces, irritations, and feelings; hence *order* must rule in them...” (“On the Cognition” 214). In claiming that man is “in God’s image”, Herder does not make God the source of our conceptual capacities. Rather, he uses God as a model for understanding our capacities to *judge* that something is the case rather than instinctually responding to something’s being the case. The authority that comes with judgment is modeled on God’s authority over his creation, as in Hamann, but while Herder borrows this image of normativity, as well as his model of instruction, normativity is generated here by social relations and instruction.

Despite Herder’s use of the notion of the divine in this paper, his philosophy of mind becomes more committed to a biological, almost reductionist, picture. This essay also contains his most explicit endorsement, and most mature development, of this naturalist philosophy of mind. While Platner regarded the motion of nerve fluids as the cause of our actions, Herder describes our nerves as

contracting and pulling our muscles along with them. He writes, “How much more these tiny, thin fibers pull than crude strings would do according to the laws of mechanism!... Nature has woven together a thousand little, living strings into a thousandfold fight, into such a manifold touching and resisting; they make themselves shorter and longer with inner force... that is what makes the muscle carry and pull” (“On the Cognition” 189). While Platner conceives of the nervous system as consisting in a series of tubes transmitting messages, Herder sees them as strings which pull and contract to cause the motions of the muscles. Under the influence of the medical scientist Albrecht von Haller, Herder introduces the notion of “irritation” as a cause of these contractions. Emotional states and sensations are thought of either as consisting in or corresponding to irritation. Pain, for instance, is understood as forcing a contraction in the nerves, while warmth of spirit leads to nerves to relax.

Even love is described as “the deepest irritation”, although his description more properly refers to lust rather than love, as he continues to describe its role in animal reproduction. (“On the Cognition” 193). This distinction is somewhat relevant, as love is typically conceived of as something much more than a sensation, perhaps involving normative states. As Wittgenstein notes in *Zettel*, “Love is not a feeling. Love is put to the test, pain not”; the reduction of lust to a state of nerves is much more plausible than such a reduction of love (§504). Herder’s writing is somewhat sloppy in distinguishing irritations from more complex feelings, emotions, motives, and states, but the position as a whole is defensible. Irritation is seen as a physical event which corresponds to sensation; these sensations become ordered in the mind by language and reason, and so can become components or catalysts of more complex states. He writes, “Irritation is the mainspring of our existence and it must also remain so in the noblest cognition” (“On the Cognition” 213). While Herder does aim here to connect reason and knowledge with our physical bodies, he means to distinguish the purely physical catalysts for states such as knowledge and the more complex products which resist such a reduction.

The material conception of reason developed in this essay is essential to the new shape of

anthropological study Herder develops. In claiming that Herder has a material conception of reason, I mean to say that Herder sees the relations concrete concepts bear with one another as prior, on his view, to the formal use of reasoning. It is a part of the concept “red” that any object which is red is not green, and that all objects which are red are colored. Formal logical relations are understood as abstractions from concrete material conceptual relations such as these. On Herder’s view, coming to learn a word involves coming to understand the material conceptual relations this word has with other concepts. Only later do we abstract from these concrete conceptual relationships to arrive at the general, formal picture of reason employed in the syllogisms. It is in virtue of this material conception of reason that Herder can claim that his anthropological investigations are genuinely studies into the nature of reason. By empirically studying the concrete application of concepts in a given linguistic community, he is thereby studying the shape of reason in the community.

As Herder comes to appreciate the role of language in constituting thought and reason, as well as the essentially social nature of language and its connection with tradition, historical and cultural investigations much like that of the “Fragments on Recent German Literature” take on a new shape and import. Herder now sees the role of language in constituting, rather than merely reflecting, the concepts he is interested in studying. He also becomes more attuned to and interested in the possibility of radically different conceptual structures and schemes across continents and eras. In this essay, he makes a promissory note for a kind of methodology to investigating these differences, writing that the different “laws, government, [and] manner of life” reflect their “manner of thought,” continuing, “a daughter of the whole, becomes also the witness of the whole” (“On the Cognition” 220). One begins always with empirical investigation, examining records of the laws, government, traditions and practices of a given community, and from there can begin to grasp the differing conceptual structures that another culture may have. In addition to these sources, Herder echoes this “How Philosophy Can Become More Universal” thought that a philosophy of mind must begin with “biographies,

observations of doctors and friends, [and] prophecies of poets”, and, surely, he holds that an examination of the literature and lives of a given community can grant deep insight into their forms of thought (“On the Cognition” 197). Herder also notes the severity with which these forms of thought evolve within a culture over time. He writes, “Let Germany be compared with what it was in Charlemagne’s or Hermann’s times. Would they recognize it if they were to reappear? The greatest change in the world is this *progress and cycle in the realm of minds* in accordance with *changed sensations, needs, and situations*” (“On the Cognition” 221). This last statement contains an echo of the pragmatism we discussed in connection with the young Herder, shifted in light of his newfound anthropological views. While Herder comes to a newfound appreciation for the essentially social nature of language, he retains much of his pragmatism, and begins to apply it to cultures as a whole rather than on the level of the individual alone.

4.6 Herder’s Anthropological Holism: An Introduction

Herder’s “This, Too, a Philosophy of History” is the definitive statement of his new anthropological project, informed by his engagement with Hamann as well as his own philosophical development. His empiricism, intermingled with his views on the significance of language for cognition, the potential for distinct forms of thought across cultures, and the inherent sociality of language and reason, lead him to an empirical, historical study of these thought forms. Herder sees this form of study as a potential replacement for the rationalist and *a priori* philosophical work of his predecessors in the realms of ethics, aesthetics, and potentially logic, if one understands by logic the rather broad notion discussed in “How Philosophy Can Become More Universal.” This kind of work is to be supplemented, on Herder’s view, with a psychology granted by the physiologists (perhaps as

interpreted by a philosopher), which will grant us the philosophy of mind we need to interpret the varying results of our empirical investigations, as well as a philosophy of language.

The essay takes as its question one given from the academy, “Which people in history was the most happy of all?” (40). Herder questions how meaningful the question is: to answer it would be to suppose a notion of happiness which remains consistent across cultures and across vast periods of time. What precisely would it mean to say that the ancient Athenian was more or less happy than the contemporary German? It should not mean that they smiled more often; we need not always smile when we are happy, and a general contentedness in life will not lead us to smile most of the time. Aside from that, we can easily imagine communities who don’t smile at all to show happiness. Perhaps we can imagine a survey being posed to peoples of different cultures. It may be true that people are generally happier in times of peace than of war, and in times of plenty than in times of wanting. Yet could there not be a community that thrives in war, for whom a period of prolonged peace has robbed them of the possibility of finding honor and the pleasures of victory? And certainly we can imagine a community whose excess of commodities has led them to their own malaise. Thus Herder answers the question, “there *never* was *one*.” He continues,

For if, again, human nature is not the vessel of an *absolute, autonomous, and unchangeable happiness*, as it is defined by the philosopher, it nevertheless absorbs everywhere *as much happiness as it can*; given the *flexible disposition* of human nature to *adapt* to the most varying conditions, needs, and trials, the appearance of happiness itself *changes* with every situation and point of the compass – (for what else is it ever but the *sum* of “*the satisfaction of wants, the attainments of goals, and the gentle satisfaction of needs*,” which, after all, in each case grow out of *the land, the time, and the place?*); thus, at the root of it, all *comparison* becomes *precarious*. (40)

Even if we can admit the somewhat universal definition of satisfaction of wants, needs, and goals, as tentative for happiness, the question will remain intensely difficult, if possible, to answer because of how vastly different these wants, needs, and goals can be to different peoples. How can we weigh the significance of each want, need, and goal, once we’ve enumerated them all?

In saying that the wants, needs, and goals of a people stem from their land, time, and place, Herder affirms the commitment to a pragmatic understanding of a culture outlined earlier. Herder often seems to represent the manifestation of cultures almost as a function of their contexts. This thought is expressed in *Scattered Leaves* in more detail, where he writes, “Just as the needle of the compass reacts differently at various locations on earth, and yet is subject to capital laws, so the power of imagination, the taste, the manner of composition of peoples varies, and yet everywhere it is and remains the same humankind” (63). In the “Treatise on the Origin of Language” Herder saw man as developing language to serve certain needs; he is naturally weak, and must use his power of thought in order to survive, and develops language to serve him in the development of concepts for understanding and describing the world. Here, Herder likewise sees our languages, and the forms of thought that go with them, as developing to serve certain needs. Yet it occurs at the level of the culture as a whole rather than at the level of the individual. This will remain a point of contention between Hamann and Herder, the former of whom takes the arbitrary whims of the arts to be essential to the development of a tradition, and so of a culture.

A Kantian may have the feeling that, for all of this work, Herder’s anthropological project never came close enough to the pure philosophical questions to stand as a veritable challenger to the project of the *Critiques*. It may be true that there is no single concept of “happiness” common to all men, but empirical concepts such as happiness, in its various manifestations across different linguistic communities, have little to do with questions concerning the good. Likewise, observations concerning the various psychological tendencies of distinct cultures will be unable to illuminate theoretical reason in its pure form. Indeed, Kant’s own anthropology observes a number of these variations, finding them useful towards the service of helping man achieve the good, and helping him think according to the laws of reason rather than his psychological whims. This objection misses the role of Herder’s holism. “The good” can only be illuminated by its manifestation in thick concepts, such as “kaloi

k'agathoi", with their rich empirical content; it is, indeed, nothing over and above its manifestation in the different concrete applications of these thick concepts. Likewise, reason can only be understood in its manifestation in thought, be it ordinary, religious, or scientific thought.

5.0 Herder's Anthropology as Philosophy

If I have so far presented a reconstruction of the chain of thought that led to the development of Herder's anthropological methodology, I have not provided an account of its workings, nor has this reconstruction constituted a defense of the methodology. I have posed the issue facing Herder as a question of how to account for the distinctively normative element of human discursive behavior in a naturalistic, empiricist philosophical theory, and in the last chapter I argued that Hamann's conception of reason as essentially linguistic allows Herder to reframe this question into the need for a naturalistic account of the use of language. The details of how this account of language justifies the use of a new empirical methodology in the investigation of discursive behavior – in particular, in the realms of value-theory in aesthetics and ethics, but also in metaphysics, and, to certain extent, epistemology – is the topic of this chapter.

Before a defense of Herder's approach can be constructed, a number of clarifications will need to be made. First among these is: In what sense does Herder's anthropology count as empirical? Even in the case of Platner, who claimed to build his theory on straightforward scientific anatomy, a number of questions arise concerning the role of interpretation. Platner observed the material constitution of the nervous system in dissection; he saw the brain and the interconnected webbing of the nervous system. He may have seen that corporeal motion depended on the connection between some part of the body and the nervous system, or, more precisely, that motion ceased when nerves were severed. But he did not see the nerve fluids "move the soul into motion", as he did not observe the soul directly, nor could he immediately observe the causal mechanisms at work in the body (§310). Platner interpreted what he saw in dissections and anatomies and built a theory around these observations, even if we bracket questions concerning the mutual influence of interpretation and observation. Just

as in Platner's case, the answer to the question of the empirical foundations of Herder's anthropology will be highly dependent on the conception of interpretation brought to the table, although the varieties of interpretation at work in Herder's writings are more complex.

Once we have an understanding of the sense in which Herder's anthropology is empirical, we will also need to develop an understanding of the sense in which it counts as philosophy. At the beginning of his career, Herder called out for anthropology to replace philosophy, not to supplement or to branch off from it, as Kant's *Anthropology* serves as a compliment to the three *Critiques*. The discipline must therefore be capable either of answering the questions of philosophy or of eliminating the need for the answer to traditional philosophical questions and providing new questions, approachable within the methodology of anthropology, and answering these new questions. In the discussion of the "kaloi k'agathoi" in Chapter 4, we began to see Herder's approach to this issue. By beginning with an understanding of the use of particular thick concepts in their actual application, we may be able to build up to a better understanding of the thin concepts that owe them their content, such as "the good." And as Herder's "This, Too, a Philosophy of History" emphasizes, the broader concepts that we build up to should not be seen as more than analogous to those of the philosopher's own linguistic community; concepts such as "the good" will differ greatly in different linguistic communities in their content. Being rigid about a potential identity between these concepts will lead to an overly-simplistic understanding both of the general phenomena and of the community being studied, and it may lead to the hierarchical visions of cultures held by Herder's predecessors. Whether this methodology should be seen as providing answers to the questions of philosophy or as replacing them is an interesting and complex question, which will be discussed further below. What has been said should at least point towards an answer to the question of how anthropology could be seen as performing the task of philosophy on a firm, empirical grounding.

Finally, and this will form the beginning of a defense of Herder's idea, we will need to get a sense of how anthropology could provide a better account of the normative nature of human discursive behavior than either his empiricist predecessors, such as Platner, or their most significant critic, Kant, could provide. The answer in the case of Platner should be relatively straightforward: Herder simply accepts Kant's thought that, while the proto-neuroscientific account of mind Platner envisions may eventually be capable of giving a causal account of human motion, it will not be able to account for the normative aspects of concept-use essential both to the use of language and to action more generally. By beginning with a social account of language, and thus of discursivity, Herder can develop an account of the conceptual that is consistent with an empirical approach to philosophy, yet capable of responding to Kant's concerns with the limitations of empiricism in ethics and epistemology. To see the advantages of Herder's account over Kant's, we will have to return to Hamann's critique of Kant, and in particular the claim Hamann makes concerning the advantages of a unified understanding of human life. Kant, on this view, will have only developed an understanding of normativity at the cost of introducing an irresolvable dualism into his system. Herder's naturalistic account will thus bear an advantage over Kant's in its capacity to account for normative phenomena without such a dualism.

A proper defense of the anthropological program will therefore require an answer to at least the following questions:

1. In what sense is Herder's methodology empirical?
2. In what sense does it count as "philosophy"?
3. How does anthropology count as an advancement over philosophy?

Before answering each of these questions, we will need to become clearer on a central notion in Herder's philosophy, that of a "national character." In Herder's most explicitly anthropological writings, such as *Outlines of a Philosophy of History of Man* and *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, this idea is

intimately tied with the language a given community speaks, and it is central to his distinctive empirical methodology. This somewhat nebulous notion is significant not only to Herder himself, however, but also the most noteworthy heir to his program, Humboldt, who went much further than Herder in the actual practice of empirical anthropology. It is in significant part because Herder sees national character as something developed in and expressed in language that he sees the study of language as being capable of answering deep philosophical questions in areas such as ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology. Thus, I will begin with an investigation of this concept before turning to the three questions above.

5.1 National Character and Language

Herder's statements on the character of a people are often somewhat vague, or at the very least ambiguous between a number of possible readings. Even in his earliest works, such as the essay "On Diligence in the Study of Several Learned Languages", Herder will speak of languages as expressions of national character. In these texts, it often seems as though Herder sees character as consisting in a number of personality traits common to a group of people, which is then reflected in the language in various ways. In fact, Herder's primary argument in favor of learning the languages of other cultures and reading literatures in their original languages in this essay revolves around this conception of national character. In becoming speakers of a given language we participate in the characters of that language: "I seek to join the thorough English temperament, the wit of the French, and the resplendence of Italy with German diligence. I encompass the spirit of each people in my soul!" (32). The diligence Herder sees in the German people, for instance, may be reflected in the piecemeal construction of complex words from more basic words, or the precision of the case

structure in the language, and by learning to read German and reading German texts in the original, the reader may experience this “diligence” in a way that would be impossible to imitate by reading the text in translation. He writes of in “On the Diligence” of the Romans who spoke “more forcefully” than their predecessors, and who “only later gathered flowers in the garden of Greece to embellish their tongue” (31). The traits of the people are infused into their language, as language is the framework in which they think. Learning to speak a foreign language therefore involves taking on a new stance towards the world, seeing the world from a new lens. If claims such as these were true, it may be quite interesting to historians, sociologists, or psychologists, but studies of these characters and their reflection in language would hardly seem a worthy heir to the Kantian philosophy Herder was engaged with.

However, even in this early period of Herder’s work we can also see a deeper, more philosophically relevant use of the term “national character.” On this use, national character is the embodiment of the shared knowledge of a linguistic community, particularly as it becomes embedded in their language. This conception of national character is intimately related to the conceptual holism we attributed to the early Herder in Chapter 4 above. This reading of Herder’s vision of national character is also supported in “On the Diligence”, where he writes, “Whoever masters the entire scope of one language surveys a field full of thoughts, and whoever learns to express himself precisely in it thereby gathers for himself a treasure of clear concepts” (33). On this view, a national character closely resembles what Wittgenstein calls a “form of life.” National character is both the product of the practices of a community and the framework in which we can understand these practices.

Herder’s conceptual holism makes it impossible to learn the meaning of a word without learning some facts about that object. Learning what a triangle is, for instance, is also learning that triangles have three sides. Understanding the meaning of a statement or judgment involves understanding the consequences of the statement or judgment as well as the circumstances in which

it is appropriate to make the statement or judgment. Similarly, in learning the names of the different classes of mammals in grade school, one comes to learn how to make basic inferences involving animals belonging to these classes. When one learns the meanings of “reptile” and one also learns that the judgment “Snakes are reptiles because they are vertebrates with cold blood, lay eggs, and live primarily on the land” is true, assuming that one knows enough about snakes. The thought that *these* aspects of the snake are particularly relevant in determining how to classify them is one of the thoughts one learns in learning the language English. It is a feature of our national character that we regard this method of categorization as the relevant one.

Although these examples are useful in coming to understand Herder’s thought to some degree, they are also somewhat misleading, as on Herder’s view the thoughts gained in learning a language will go beyond those one might plausibly classify as analytic, or even as *a priori*. We will, therefore, need a more complex example. One can imagine a parent preparing their child for her first day of kindergarten with a toy model bus, explaining “This is the bus. The bus will take you and your new friends to school.” As the child learns what the word “bus” means, she learns what a bus *is* and what a bus *does*.¹⁹ Learning the meaning of the word “bus” thus involves the child coming to an understanding of what the role of a bus is in her culture. A bus is, by definition, a particular form of motor vehicle which is large enough to carry groups of people, but the child also learns a number of facts about it as her parent guides her. She learns that buses take children to school, that buses that do this are often yellow, that children often sit next to one another on the bus, among other basic facts. This aspect of learning is so central to teaching the child that even if the child were capable of

¹⁹ Stanley Cavell makes a closely related point in *The Claim of Reason*, where he writes, “What do we teach or tell a child when we point to a pumpkin and say, ‘Pumpkin?’ Do we tell him what a pumpkin is or what the word ‘pumpkin’ means? I was surprised to find that my first response to this question was, ‘You can say either.’” (170)

defining the word “bus” and recognizing buses on the street after the lesson, it would not be inappropriate of the parent to scold the child and say, “You still don’t know what a bus is!” if the child continued to say that, for instance, she was worried she would get tired on the bus to school because buses don’t often have seats. Being a competent speaker of a language goes beyond knowing meanings of words, if by “meaning” we have in mind the restrictive sense of meaning given in a dictionary entry; one must know the facts that speakers of a language share a belief in.

It is helpful to think of this reading of Herder in the lines of a thought expressed in Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*: “It is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language” (§242). While of course we may have personal disagreements concerning facts in language, a vast amount of agreement is presupposed, and indeed must be presupposed, for meaningful conversation to take place. It is because we agree on so many features of the world (e.g. the fact that tomorrow will arrive after tonight, and that we will remain the same people, the basic facts concerning buses listed above, that the bus takes children to school in the morning, that we want our children to go to school on schooldays, etc.) that we can make plans with one another (e.g. that we should drop our child off at the bus stop to get our child to school.)

A certain kind of philosopher of language may object to the above that the presupposed facts I have adduced are properly understood as members of two distinct classes: definitional or analytic truths, on the one hand, and very general synthetic claims on the other. The proper definitions of personhood will contain conditions of temporal identity, as the definitions of tomorrow will contain its conditions of identity and more general conditions of identity for objects will put the requirements I have mentioned in place without the need of shared knowledge which goes beyond definitions. Likewise, we may share a base-level knowledge of general facts which may be presupposed in conversation, but this knowledge does not count as providing the meanings of words. This knowledge

simply supplies context to ease communication. It would be odd if someone were to get along far in life without realizing that school buses tend to be yellow, but he would not count as failing to know what a bus is, on this view. Neither of these, on this story, will require speakers of a language to learn more than basic definitions in order to speak properly or make coherent plans with one another. The primary thrust of Herder's vision of national character, and the corresponding shared knowledge envisioned within it, however, is to undermine the idea of a genuine distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori*, as well as between synthetic and analytic. The view that learning a language is inseparable from learning a set of facts undercuts the epistemological distinction between the analytic and synthetic, eliminating a privileged set of facts which can be understood as setting the meaning or definition of a given word, and the account of language learning presented threatens the relevant epistemological distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori*. Herder's rejection of these distinctions predicts and mirrors Quine's major argument against the analytic-synthetic distinction in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" insofar as it can undercut the distinction between disagreements concerning matters of fact and disagreements in judgment.²⁰

Evaluating the strength of Herder's position against this objection will depend on how well Herder can undercut these rigid distinctions between disagreements in judgment and disagreements in definition. In ordinary life it is typically straightforward to settle which of these categories a disagreement will fall into. During a storm a child tells her father, "I just saw thunder!" and the father corrects her, "You saw lightning, you heard thunder." A student learning English tells her teacher, "The sky is brown." These are easily identifiable as disagreements or confusions of meaning, but it is our shared knowledge that allows us to identify these disagreements as such. Knowing that human children can't typically see the sound waves caused by thunder, and that their fluency in English is still

²⁰ See Quine (1953).

developing allow us to see that she is mistaken on the name of what she saw rather than which object she perceived. Knowing that the sky is blue rather than brown, and that the student is unlikely to be mistaken about such a plain fact, allows us to identify his mistake as confusion in the meanings of the color words. Likewise, when someone points out a horse in the distance and says, “There’s a donkey over there,” we can disagree by saying “That’s a horse” and feel safe in knowing the disagreement was concerning fact rather than language because the difficulty in distinguishing the two from a distance was a more plausible cause of error than a confusion between the meanings of two common words.

Yet we can think of not altogether unusual cases which blur the boundaries between forms of disagreement. This is especially true in the case of abstract concepts such as “love.” It is not difficult to imagine conversations which begin with “Of course I love you, but I simply can’t...”, which is met with “Then what you feel is *not love*.” Whether these disagreements count as disagreements about *what “love” means* or about *whether A loves B* may depend on context; it may be the case that A is simply manipulating B with claims of love. The point Herder urges us to consider, however, is that there will be cases where too many disagreements between A and B concerning the consequences of A’s loving B can result in a situation in which A and B simply don’t mean the same thing by the word “love.” Thus, from A’s point of view B will disagree on a point of fact (B believes “A loves B” to be false, while A believes it to be true), and from B’s perspective they will disagree on the meaning of the word “love.” Once disagreements on matters of fact go far enough, we come to the threat that we are not speaking the same language, not meaning the same thing by our words. The fact that there are disagreements which can plausibly be understood as members of either variety may be taken to display a context-sensitivity to these evaluations. If that is correct, then the fact that we can make such evaluations with no difficulty in most situations should not be taken as evidence of a hard and fast, philosophically meaningful distinction between distinct kinds of facts (i.e. “meaning” or “definition” facts on the one hand, and facts concerning the way things are in the world on the other), but rather

as evidence that our shared knowledge and shared language makes settling such matters in most cases trivial.

Recent thought on epithet presents a form of thought closely related to Herder's conception of national character.²¹ Tirrell and Brandom use the slur term for German natives, "boche", as an example of a slur, which describes a particular form of cruelty which users of the term ascribe to Germans. On Brandom's account, simply applying the term to a German (which can be described as applying the introduction rule "X is a German, therefore X is a boche") inherently licenses the inference to their cruelty (the elimination rule: "X is a boche, therefore X is cruel".) One must, therefore, agree on the supposed fact that Germans are particularly cruel for the term to find a place in one's vocabulary. If we disagree on the facts presupposed in the use of the word, the word fails to have a meaning for us. If "boche" were to be a word in our language, then the thought that Germans are cruel would be embedded into our language, and the belief that Germans are cruel or have a particular form of cruelty would be a part of our national character.

It must be stressed here that Herder's conception of national character involves a more radical stance than a simple denial of the distinctions between *a priori* and *a posteriori* and between analytic and synthetic. In speaking of a "shared knowledge" involved in national character, Herder has in mind something which often more closely resembles a stance one may take towards the world than lists of facts and meanings. It is not just that learning a language involves learning a set of facts a linguistic community shares a belief in, but also that it involves "cutting up the world" in a way that is relevant to that particular linguistic community. In the above quote, where Herder describes the process of learning a language as one in which we survey a "field full of thoughts" and thereby gather "a treasure of clear concepts", Herder also means in part that learning a language involves generating an ontology

²¹ See, for instance, Brandom (2000) or Tirrell (1999)

(“On the Diligence” 33). A language determines which objects there are for the speakers of that language, and this ontology is largely determined by the needs and practices of this linguistic community. As we learn different measurements of time as a child, days become distinct objects to us, and as we learn months of the year we learn that all months called “December” bear a certain resemblance to one another. The thought that there ought to be a particular word for *these months* which distinguishes them from all others is a thought embedded in our language, and one which the learner of a language grasps when she begins to use the word for such objects. Herder sees the ways different languages cut the world up as driven largely by the needs of the linguistic community at hand. This approach is most clearly laid out and practiced in *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, Vol. 1*, a unique work written in the tradition of Greek dialogues which defends the language of Hebrew as a language of poetry and presents an analysis of the Old Testament as a work of poetry. In one moment of particular interest, Herder takes a pragmatic stance towards the relative lack of adjectives in the language with the claim that if their nouns are particular enough to provide a rich description of the object in question, then they can be said to in fact “have adjectives” (30). He goes on:

For every language has that, which it uses: only we must not judge of it according to our own necessities. There are many names of things, which language has not, because the people neither had, nor knew the things themselves; so on the other hand it has many others, which we have not. In abstract terms it is barren, but in sensuous representations it is rich... The lion, the sword, the serpent and the camel have even in the Arabick... this multiplicity of names, because each of them originally represented the object under a peculiar form, and these streams afterwards flowed together.

It is trivial of course that languages do not have names for things that the speakers of the language have not encountered in any way or have no use for, but Herder’s more interesting claim in this passage is that the abundance of distinct nouns for things like swords in Arabic betrays two features of the language. First, that distinct kinds of swords at some point played a significant enough role in the culture that it was worthwhile to have different words for kinds of swords that had different purposes, and second, that as the language came to develop to a point where abstract adjectives that

were capable of identifying the swords without distinct nouns for each kind, the names lingered as vestigial organs. Herder's point here is that early on in the development of the language the distinct forms of nouns for each sword were immediately necessary as the swords had significantly different roles in the linguistic community, and the fact that these nouns remain in the language after sufficient progress had been made both to describe these kinds of swords succinctly with adjectives and that roles of the distinct forms of swords became less significant to the culture, the point of the particular forms of the nouns dissolved. This led to, on Herder's diagnosis, a number of words which now can be used as synonyms for "sword" and are typically combined with adjectives to describe the more particular forms.

Returning to the example of the months of the year above, on Herder's pragmatic approach to language the utility of distinguishing days in terms of the earth's rotation in, for instance, planning would justify the decision to distinguish days from one another, and the decision to distinguish units of time by cycles of the seasons (i.e. years) may be justified by its utility in planning crop cycles, among other things. These are instances of the process of developing language on the basis of distinguishing traits described in Herder's famous "Treatise of the Origin of Language", discussed above in Chapter 4, with the important distinction that what is there depicted as a solitary endeavor is here described as an essentially social phenomenon. The gauge of utility involved in the determination of what makes a word worthwhile is relative to the needs of a linguistic community rather than an individual. Herder ends his essay "On the Diligence" with a poem which compares the speakers of a given language to bees, communally harvesting knowledge and gradually adding it into the store of their national character by means of language. He describes the speakers of a language:

who in scattered swarms
whisper through the air, and fall upon clover and blossoming plants,
and then return to the hive burdened with sweet booty,
and bring us the honey of wisdom!" (34)

Although Herder, as well as Humboldt after him, often emphasizes the critical role of genius in generating and re-defining a culture, its language, and its character, this passage shows that he largely sees the communal knowledge underlying a language as being generated gradually by a linguistic community as a whole. Returning to *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, Herder defends the language against the charge that it lacked the mathematical sophistication of other languages from its time, “It were unjust to expect of them the language of trade belonging to the Phoenicians, or that of Arabian speculation, since they neither traded, nor speculated... The Hebrew has numerals to an amount that we cannot easily designate, and a multitude of terms for the products of nature, as well as for the forms of fashionable ornament and luxury, with which they were enough acquainted at an early period” (31). The Hebrew language contained the mathematical tools it needed, and the terms of trade needed to meaningfully engage with other cultures in trade, but no more. A language can only be evaluated according to the specific purposes for which it is required by its linguistic community. Returning to the example of “kaloi k’agathoi” discussed above in Chapter 4, the difficulty Herder detects the classical scholars of his time having in handling the term corresponds to the term’s failing to fit neatly into the conceptual schemes present in German. It is a feature of the Greek character, on Herder’s view, that the ethics and aesthetics are not completely distinct categories; being well brought up (in the ethical sense) requires a deep cultural training in literature and art.

National character thus bears three distinct, but intimately related, traits which will be of particular interest to what follows. First, a national character involves a vocabulary, which has been chosen to suit the needs of a given linguistic community. Forming this vocabulary involves a multitude of decisions concerning which concepts are the relevant ones for that community, decisions made over the course of a history of a people. Very often, the vocabularies of different cultures will cut across our concepts rather than aligning with them, whether this be in cases as trivial as the names of different kinds of camels or those as serious as ethical and aesthetic categories. Secondly, it involves a

set of beliefs or judgments shared by the linguistic community. These beliefs fix the meanings (in the expansive sense) of the vocabulary and make meaningful conversation possible. Finally, national character is a fundamentally social construction and has a history. National character evolves as a people evolves and their language must adapt to the situations that arise. With this conception of national character and language in place, we may begin to see how Herder sees an empirical, *anthropological* investigation of these entities may prove a worthy heir to Kantian philosophy. National characters are frameworks for ways of life; they contain a metaphysics, an ethics, an epistemology of a people, but they also contain and are formed largely from the everyday practices a community engages in. It is Herder's belief therefore that the study of language and everyday practices that form, are formed by, and express a national character is the only way of understanding the metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology of this people.

It should be noted, before continuing, just how different Herder's conception of national character leads his picture of man to become from the one he received from Kant and his Enlightenment predecessors. Whereas Enlightenment thinkers emphasized reason as something universal, common to all men, Herder's account, in tethering reason to language, and language to culture, will allow for radical differences between linguistic communities. Kant took pains to distinguish the empirical from the pure in his moral philosophy, in part to determine a moral law which binds all men due to their common trait of being essentially rational, while Herder's conception of national character as primary will allow for radically different systems of ethics in different communities, each of which may be true. This is a point we will return to in Section V below.

Because the notion of national character is so broad as to almost seem all-encompassing at times, it can be difficult to see how Herder envisions a study of any particular national character. Herder, in "This, Too, a Philosophy of History" writes, "Character of the nations! Only data of their constitution and history must decide" (294). Yet this remains somewhat ambiguous: what counts as

data concerning the constitution of a nation or a people, and what of their history? The constitution of a nation consists to some extent of the people that compose it, the practices of this people, and their language, and each of these has its own history, or even histories. Which data counts as relevant, as well as how to use this data, remains unclear at this juncture. It is thus time to turn towards Herder's methodology with particular attention to the relation his anthropological project has to his empiricist predecessors.

5.2 Empirical Data as the Basis of Anthropology

Herder's aim in replacing philosophy with anthropology was at least in part to replace philosophy with an empirical science, but Herder was not himself what we would be likely to call an empirical scientist today. The primary data for anthropology, as Herder practices it, is the text. Very little of his writings involve his own direct observation of the social practices of a given community, though Humboldt, inspired by Herder's writings, eventually carried out such investigations later on. There are three rough categories into which we may group the sources Herder employs in his anthropology. The first, and most prominent in texts such as *Outlines of a Philosophy of History of Man* and "On the Cognition", would be the scientific writings of his contemporaries and recent predecessors. These sources are largely used by Herder in generating a general theory of man; it is important to Herder that we all share both our physical form and some significant part of our history, and insofar as the character of a people includes their bodies and their histories as a whole, this element cannot be forgotten. He titles a chapter of the *Outlines* "The One Species of Man has Naturalized Itself in Every Climate on Earth", and indeed a significant portion of the book is dedicated to the study of how the one singular species of man has developed and adapted himself into the diverse regions of

the planet (142 [VII.2]). This scientific conception of man is of particular interest to Herder as it develops the argument from the “Treatise” for a naturalistic conception of the capacity to speech language, and therefore the capacity for reason. Second, we find histories and proto-anthropological writings and observations of other cultures. Skimming through the bibliography of Herder’s *Outlines* reveals a stunning breadth of travelogues and histories, as well as the writings of missionaries. Texts such as the *Journal of Cook’s Last Voyage*, Roemer’s *Account of the Coast of Guinea*, and Carver’s *Travels* form the substance of his body of knowledge on contemporary cultures outside of Europe. Also included in this section are biographies, to which Herder grants a surprising amount of attention to in his work. Finally, and most importantly to Herder, is the interpretation of primary source materials, particularly the literature, of a given community. Texts such as *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, in which Herder engages with close analyses of the Hebrew language and its literature are some of his most promising anthropological texts for philosophers who wish to carry on something like his project, yet their relationship with the empirical grounding Herder wishes for his system remains the most unclear. In what follows, I will take each of these varieties of sources in turn.

Herder’s *Outlines* is his most comprehensive text in what we, today, would consider something resembling anthropology; its early chapters are dedicated to developing a scientific account of man in general, while its later chapters develop an appreciation for the radical differences between the various cultures throughout the Earth, as well as an attempt to explain and understand these radical differences. It is also the text which most clearly exemplifies his use of explicitly scientific empirical data, particularly in these early chapters where Herder develops his conception of man as a natural phenomenon. The variety of scientific data in question here is empirical in a relatively straightforward sense; insofar as we do not challenge the empirical status of sciences such as anatomy and biology, there is no special concern about the status of this material as empirical. To isolate the methodology Herder develops in his later works, as opposed to the particularities of the theory developed, I will

focus on a topic already familiar to us from earlier chapters, Herder's twin arguments that language is man's distinguishing trait, and that reason is dependent on language.

One of the early goals of this text is to isolate man's position in the animal kingdom, to uncover what distinguishes man from nonhuman animals. While the "Treatise" claims without argument that man is unique in having his behavior determined by free will rather than instinct in forming the relevant distinction, the *Outlines* makes a closely related point with considerations from anatomy and behavioral observations. Herder notes that according to Tyson's *Anatomy*, a text which relates the results of the dissection of monkeys, greater apes, and men, a significant number of organs and bone structures of great apes such as the orangutan are more closely related to those of man than of monkeys. He also notes that the apes, like man, are unlike the rest of animals in that they do not act out of "determinate instinct"; their behavior, he writes, "stands close to the brink of reason" (63 [IV.1]). Although it is difficult to see what kinds of observations on animal behavior could determine that the greater apes do not act out of instinct, it is likely that Herder is speaking in part of the adaptability of these apes, along with their capacity to learn from one another. Indeed, he refers to this position that resembles reason "imitation", noting that these apes learn from one another, for instance, in the use of primitive tools.

There are two features of our anatomy, Herder argues, that provide the basis of our capacity to reason. Man, unlike the greater apes, walks upright, and his head protrudes forward rather than naturally facing downwards towards the ground. This, Herder argues, brings our senses further away from the ground and allows us to survey our surroundings. This lends us a freedom of observation which animals lower to the ground cannot enjoy to the same degree; we can observe far-off mountains and form the wish to visit them, just as we can see the nearby rock and consider the possibilities of using this rock as a tool for crushing. This removed perspective, Herder argues, allows us to consider the possibilities of our actions. This point recalls Herder's argument in the "Treatise" that man, in

being free from the determination of instinct that belongs to the beasts, enjoys a freedom in what he will attend to, except here Herder makes the point on the basis of an anatomical difference rather than the thought experiment employed in the “Treatise.” Walking upright, furthermore, frees our hands, which, Herder writes, then become “the instruments of the most delicate operations and of an incessant feeling after new and clear ideas” (75 [IV.3]). Rather than being mere tools for locomotion, our hands give us the ability to make gestures and express ourselves, particularly in pointing. Our hands become tools for expression and development. Herder also claims our upright stance provides the proper shape within the chest cavity to sustain the prolonged use of speech, claiming that although the apes with curved backs can yell loudly, they do not have the capacity for sustained speech. Herder adds to his anatomical evidence with some anecdotal historical evidence: “Men who have been accidentally brought up among beasts not only lose the use of speech, but in some measure the power of acquiring it, an evident proof that their throats are deformed and that human speech is consistent only with an erect gait. For though several brutes have organs of speech resembling those of men, no one is capable of that continued stream of voice that issues from the free, exalted, human breast, and man’s narrow, artfully closed mouth” (78 [IV.3]). Herder takes the historical fact that men who, as children, developed in the wild tended to lack their upright posture as well as their capacities for language and reason, as well as the fact that these men have difficulty acquiring the capacity to speak with their abnormal posture, as evidence for his theory.

While Herder’s position that our capacity of speech is dependent on our capacity to stand upright may be of little interest to us today, his methodology of using empirical evidence concerning our physical constitution as well as behavioral evidence, particularly with a view towards isolating features of the human being that distinguishes us from the greater apes, is somewhat predictive of work that carries on today by anthropologists such as Michael Tomasello in works such as *Origins of Human Communication*. In Herder’s later texts he no longer thinks the methodology of engaging in

thought experiments concerning primitive man, borrowed from Rousseau and Condillac, is adequate for establishing his claims, and he attempts to ground his characterization of man in the best science of his time. He does not, at the same time, fall prey to a transparent scientism as his recognition of the significance of language and the social, inspired in no small part by his engagement with Hamann, leads him away from the purely anatomical considerations that drove Platner, and instead towards a cultural approach to man. Immediately after this scientific characterization of man's capacity Herder echoes Hamann's language in writing, "Still all these implements of art, brain, senses, and hands, would have remained ineffective even in the upright form if the creator had not given us a spring to set them all in motion; the divine gift of speech" (76 [IV.3]) Hamann's influence leads Herder to consider language and reason from a cultural perspective rather than a biological one, despite his desire to provide a naturalistic account of man's capacity for speech.

As I have argued in Chapter 4 above, when Herder refers to speech as divine, it is a recognition of the fact that calling someone a speaker of a language involves ascribing a normative status to this person, subjecting them to evaluations of what they ought to say in a given situation, and that this status cannot be properly understood in a straightforwardly reductive naturalistic vocabulary. It should not be understood as an admission that the capacity to speak requires a supernatural cause. Herder continues to refine his position in the "Treatise on the Origin of Language" as he continues, ultimately distinguishing man from the beasts by way of his capacity for reason, and writing of language's role in this process:

Speech alone awakens slumbering reason, or rather, the bare capacity of reason, that of itself would have remained eternally dead, acquires through speech vital power and efficacy. By speech alone the eye and ear, nay, the feelings of all the senses, are united in one, and center in commanding thought, to which the hands and other members are only obedient instruments. (76 [IV.3])

While the position somewhat resembles that of other works we have discussed in depth above, what distinguishes this later work from, for instance, the “Treatise” is Herder’s evidence and argument for the position.

Herder’s use of anatomical, biological, and behavioral data, while somewhat ahead of its time, is not of particular interest to us today. Philosophers such as Sharon Street and Alan Gibbard today employ comparable considerations from evolutionary theory and behavioral sciences, either in criticizing the views of their opposition, or in developing positive theories.²² What is of interest, however, is the sophisticated technique with which Herder is here developing a non-reductive yet naturalistic account of the capacity for speech. Herder is not, even in his anatomical writings, pushing, as Platner did, for a purely psychological or biological account of normative statuses such as that of being a speaker of a language. He has learned from Hamann’s critique that such an account will mischaracterize the normative nature of linguistic, and, more generally, discursive activity. But there are two distinct ideas we could refer to with the phrase “capacity for speech”: the first of which is whatever it is, biologically, that distinguishes man from the brutes in making us capable of learning speech, and the latter of which is the status of being a language speaker. Herder’s engagement with biological empirical data is aimed largely at providing an account of the former. As we saw in the last chapter, Herder believes that the normative status of being a language speaker is something we take on through instruction, and is properly understood as a social phenomenon rather than a biological one.

We should therefore distinguish the form of naturalism Herder defends from the cruder form found in Platner’s anthropological writings. Platner’s naturalism aims to reduce its object of study – for instance, ethics – to a neurological phenomenon. On this strongly naturalistic view, ethics is the

²² See, for instance Street (2006) and Gibbard (1990)

study of why certain kinds of perception, understood in terms of their impact on the nervous system, result in certain kinds of activities in the nervous system which result in certain kinds of motion. Herder's weaker form of naturalism aims to understand our ability to gain the power of speech and reason via instruction in naturalistic terms, but does not take the further step of providing a reductive account of speech itself or its various products. Ethics and aesthetics are accounted for as emerging from the social practices we engage with in the use of language, and are thus understood as thoroughly social phenomena. Herder's weaker form of naturalism has the goal of de-mystifying reason and speech by situating them within the natural world, explaining how they could arise without the need for any supernatural intervention, but it does not aim to explain any theory of value in the vocabulary of biology or anatomy.

With this in view, we can turn towards the second form of empirical data Herder employs in his work, observational data drawn from travelogues, biographies, histories, and similar accounts of human behavior, including ethnography. "This, Too, a Philosophy of History", one of Herder's most well-known essays, develops a view on the historical development of man based largely on historical accounts, and the *Outlines of a Philosophy of History of Man*, particularly in its later chapters, largely employs ethnographic studies in its development of a theory of history and of culture. Often Herder engages with this form of data as evidence for his more general conception of national character. The last several chapters of Herder's *Outlines* are largely composed of arguments concerning general human nature on the basis of comparisons of features shared across cultures. Herder sees man as, while one and the same species all over, essentially adaptive, developing in harmony with his climate. What objects and properties we determine to name, how we individuate these objects and properties, and which practices we find worthwhile to engage in are largely a function both of our inner human nature and of our outer circumstances. Cultures that develop in areas with prolonged periods without rain may attribute particular significance to rain, or have a more refined vocabulary for degrees of dryness

than we do in English.²³ They will be, on the whole, better adapted for living through extensive dry periods than we will be, with better tools for preserving the water supply than we do and better tools for finding more water. They will have ingrained cultural knowledge concerning which plants and which animals are best to seek out in dry periods when we are desperate for water. This pragmatic stance amounts to Herder claiming that cultures are to a certain extent determined by the environment they develop in. In arguing points such as these, Herder cites travelogues in his development of this view, writing of practices maintained by the Inuit or African tribes and noting how well-suited these practices are for the environments of their people. Herder also cites extensive passages from missionaries, accounts of natives who became distraught away from their homeland and only became whole again after returning:

In the first place, it is obvious why all sensual people, fashioned to their country, are so much attached to the soil, and so inseparable from it. The constitution of their body, their way of life, the pleasures and occupations to which they have been accustomed from their infancy, and the whole circle of their ideas, are climatic. Deprive them of their country, you deprive them of everything. (144 [VII.2])

In this passage, Herder supports the theory he has developed on the basis of ethnographies with a pseudo-experiment: if it were true that men develop according to the climate of their homeland, then it should be the case that they will feel ill-equipped to live well in radically different climates. Herder takes the empirical fact, confirmed by the accounts of missionaries, as a confirmation of his theory. While such a point may seem somewhat trivial, we must keep in mind that Herder's view that man is essentially cultural is standing opposed to the Enlightenment conception of man which emphasizes our commonality in reason. If man everywhere shares his essential traits, why should he feel so

²³ Herder's view here is remarkably similar to that developed by Montesquieu In *The Spirit of the Laws*, but although he acknowledges and occasionally praises Montesquieu in works such as "This, Too, a Philosophy of History", he does not credit him with this view, nor does he explicitly acknowledge an influence here.

distraught after being severed from his home? He still has the use of his theoretical reason to understand the world and his practical reason to act in it, although he will have to learn a number of facts about the world in order to be able to employ these tools skillfully. Herder's account, in allowing for stark differences between linguistic communities, is better equipped at handling this empirical fact.

Herder also often employs historical data, as well as ethnographic data, to make specific points concerning the history of our shared culture. "This, Too, a Philosophy of History" relies largely on this technique, albeit from a high level of abstraction. In this text Herder looks at the history of civilization metaphorically as the development from a child to an adult, explaining the contingencies of our outlook on the world and morality in terms of their historical development in a manner not altogether unlike the genealogical methodology practiced by Nietzsche in works such as the *Genealogy of Morals*. Herder's use of historical data is typically informed by this vision of man as adaptive; he looks towards particularities of a given historical culture and aims to understand these particularities in terms of the climate of the culture's development as well as its history. Almost universally, Herder uses historical facts as opportunities to gain insight into the character of the culture as a whole. A representative portion of Herder's most well-known text on history, "This, Too, a Philosophy of History" reads:

Egypt was without *livestock pastures and shepherd's life*, hence the patriarchal spirit of the first hut was lost. But, *formed from the slime of the Nile and fructified* by it, there appeared, almost just as easily, the most excellent *agriculture*. Hence the shepherd's world of ethics, inclinations, cognitions became a district of *field-farming people*. The nomadic life stopped; there developed permanent residences, *land-ownership*. Lands had to be measured out... there developed *security of land, cultivation of justice, order, civil administration*, as all this had never been possible in the nomadic life of the Orient; there developed a *new world*. (280)

Herder is, in this passage, explaining large-scale changes in the social practices relating to justice and property between the ancient Egyptians and the cultures that preceded it in terms of the environment inhabited by the Egyptians. There are three different varieties of facts in play here: first, straightforward empirical facts concerning the environments the civilizations in question developed

under, second, matters of fact concerning the social practices of the Egyptians and their ancestors (including the structures of their governments and their practices of agriculture and herding livestock, and, third, those relating to the character of the civilizations, such as the “patriarchal spirit” and the sense of justice held in these cultures. Herder’s understanding of the practices described in the second variety of fact is based largely on historical records, although Herder sees the metaphysical grounding of these practices in the environmental facts of the first variety as well as the history of the culture. The historical data is therefore taken as empirically straightforward to some degree, although it is metaphysically grounded by further historical data and environmental data. The third, while the least empirically grounded, is explained in terms of the other two, and this sense of character is thereafter used to understand other practices in of the second variety.

Herder’s conceptual holism leads him to hold that the only way to fully understand the practices described by the historical data of the second variety of fact is in terms of the whole, which is contained in the national character of the community. This fits with Herder’s own description of the methodology of history, as described in the “Older Critical Forestlets”: “The mere narrator is an annalist, a writer of memoirs, of newspapers; the reasoner about the individual narration is a historical rationalizer; but the man who orders many occurrences into a plan, into a vision—he is... the true historical artist... he is the true creator of a *history!*” (260). It is the work of the historian to present historical practices such that the reader can develop an understanding of the character of a people, and to use this character to inform her understanding of the practices in question. In developing a narrative of history the historian must provide a sense of the character of a people and the historical development of this character. Herder elsewhere justifies this holistic understanding of history in terms of perspective: “If history in its simplest sense were nothing but a description of an occurrence, of a production, then the first requirement is that the description be *whole*, exhaust the subject, show us from all sides” (“Older Critical Forstlet” 258). While seeing a subject “from all sides” may be a dead

metaphor, Herder's point in this passage is that we can only understand the particular components of a culture, a particular practice, in terms of its role in the whole of the culture.

Herder's preference for histories which unite events into a coherent narrative or plan should not be confused with a preference for a psychologistic history which draws its inspiration from thoughts on individual character rather than matters of fact. Herder's writing on biography, as for instance in "On Thomas Abbt's Writings", shows a strong preference for biographical writing focused on facts rather than psychological depictions of character. Herder distinguishes ancient and modern biographies, praising the fact that "the former shows us their subject in actions and deeds which, right down to the smallest nuances, betray his soul, whereas the modern biographers themselves depict for us his character, which is often a fiction of theirs and more often a fiction of their author's" (169). It is important to distinguish, however, matters of psychology from those of the character of a people. National characters are conceptual frameworks, encompassing the language of a people and their practices, their ethics, their ontologies. National characters are, furthermore, the bases of normative roles such as those of language speaker, but also of father, judge, priest, and king. They are built up from social relations, not individual psychologies. In fact, Herder sees the psychology of an individual as something that can only be understood in terms of the character of her community. He distinguishes between individual psychologies and characters in "This, Too, a Philosophy of History":

But did not a patriarch, in addition to the inclinations which "you attribute to him, also have, and have the ability to have, *other ones*?" I say to both questions simply: *certainly!* Certainly, he had other ones, *subordinate traits* which are self-understood from what I have said or not said, which I and perhaps others with me who have his history in mind indeed already recognized in the word, and still more readily that he *had the ability* to have something very much other – in *another* place, in *this* time, with that *progress* in civilization, under those *other circumstances*. (294)

Of course, we all have unique individual psychologies, which may be called "characters", and which distinguish us from one another, but we can only understand these psychologies as what they are within the framework of our collective character. It is the historian or biographer's jobs to depict the

actions of an individual or the events which occur to a community in such a way as to construct a narrative, to connect us with the character of the individual or community in question. Overly psychologizing these individuals risks understanding them in terms of our own character rather than that of their time, of their people, while presenting their deeds allows us to develop a sense of their character.

5.3 Interpretation as an Act of Empathy

To fully appreciate the role of history and biography in Herder's work, however, we will have to move on to the final form of data Herder employs in his texts: primary source material, including the literature, poetry, and philosophy of the culture he aims to study. Herder's theory of interpretation deeply informs, and is informed by, the role of historical, biographical, and ethnographic data in his work. Herder describes the act of interpretation as centrally involving the act of "feeling" or "transplanting" oneself into the text or historical situation. Herder's word for this process, "Einfühlung", is translated sometimes as "empathy", sometimes as "feeling into." This "feeling into" involves an act of imagination and empathy, by which the interpreter places himself into a historical situation and comes to see practices and words as meaningful, as alive. This act of imagination provides the solution to a problem we have been puzzling over through the course of this work. Kant's objections to Hume's conception of ethics, as well as to Platner's conception of anthropology, amount to the fact that nothing we can directly observe, on an empiricist conception of knowledge, will be able to account for the "ought" involved in ethics. While we may observe that, in a given linguistic community, Y doing X results in Y being punished (even this is generous, as the term "punishment" is loaded with normative content, and it may be better to say that Y is harmed), or we may observe

that parents encourage certain forms of behavior in their children and discourage others, we will not be able to observe directly that “Y ought not to do X” nor “Y ought to do Z.” Herder’s imaginative act of feeling one’s way into the situation of the object of a study involves employing empathy in order to gain access to the normative relations in play in the situation one wishes to understand. On Herder’s view, feeling our way into a situation gives us insight into these normative relations, lending empirical observation the potential to contribute to the understanding of discursive activity.

To fully appreciate the role of the particular notion of “Einfühlung”, we will first have to consider the important role more general forms of empathy play in Herder’s philosophy of language and ethics. Especially in Herder’s later works, empathy is essential to his conception of language even at the base level. In *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, he characterizes a form of empathy and projection as driving the early development of language and ethics:

The Hebrew language is full of personifications, and it is undeniable, that this sympathy, this transfer of one’s self into the objects around us, and ascription, as it were, of our own feelings to those objects with which we hold converse, has formed not only the inspiring principle of language, of speech, but to a certain extent also the first development and existence of moral principle. 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 believe in it, so much the more delightful will be my sympathy, and the exercise of it, in accordance with my own sensibilities. (*Hebrew Poetry, Vol. 2* 11-12)

The standard empiricist vision of language in Herder’s time, expressed in the philosophy of Condillac as well as Locke, represents more complex concepts such as humanity as being built up from simpler ideas. We begin by identifying simple ideas or concepts such as color and shape and combine these ideas in understanding first concrete objects, and gradually build up increasingly complex concepts to form an understanding of more complex objects such as other humans. Our understanding of other humans as *like us* is the product of a series of abstractions and comparisons by means of which we develop an understanding of the complex concept of humanity. In the first instance, we regard our sense experience as such, and we go on through the development of concepts to recognize objects as

objects, and ultimately continue to generate the complex concepts required to recognize men as men. Herder is here suggesting that the stance we take towards other human beings is primary; we begin by recognizing other humans as like us, and understand objects, in the first instance, by analogy with ourselves. This initial stance we take towards the world as *like us* is necessary, is the “inspiring principle of language”, because we must recognize others as like us in order to regard them as potential interlocutors. Because Herder sees language and concept use as intrinsically social phenomena, he comes to hold that our capacity to identify other humans as potential interlocutors must be primary, and our understanding of objects as indifferent must come only afterwards. If the formation of concepts in the use of language necessarily involves engagement with other potential language users, we must be capable of recognizing other potential language users as such from the beginning. Herder is restating the important advancement we saw Hamann urge Herder towards after their debate concerning the “Treatise”; language is not something developed by a lone reasoner attempting to distinguish objects from one another, but rather something developed cooperatively between multiple subjects who wish to communicate with one another. The recognition that the other is *like us* in the relevant way is foundational.

It is only by forms of abstraction that we later come to see inanimate objects as lacking humanity. He writes, “It is the nature of the human soul to refer every thing to itself, to think it like itself, and thus to find itself reflected in every thing. That which is agreeable to us we regard as loving us; that which is adverse to us, hates us... that, with which we would delight to hold converse, speaks to us, and its slightest sound... is converted by the power of the imagination into language and intelligent expression” (*Hebrew Poetry, Vol. 2* 11). Herder cites the use of gendered articles in various languages in further support of this thesis, as well as early mythological and religious practices which grant humanity and agency to the inanimate world. Early man sees the world as populated with objects that are person-like in that they are bearers of normative statuses. In representing lightning as hateful

or the apple tree as loving, in regarding the sheep's bleat as meaningful, early man represents the natural world as pregnant with normative significance. "Insofar as the tree loves us," early man may think, "it ought to provide us with apples," and he will come to see a poor harvest as the product of a failure in this relationship. While we later come to view these anthropomorphisms as mistaken, this correction leaves in place our understanding of other persons as the proper bearers of normative statuses. While later we recognize language such as "The sea raged with hatred at the ship" as metaphorical, this is only by means of the achievement of generating a conception of impersonal objects.

This somewhat surprising view predicts an important aspect of Sellars's conception of the development of the "manifest image" of man. In contrast with the "scientific image", the standpoint which seeks an explanation of the world by means of the postulation of more basic entities and theories, the manifest image is the standpoint man takes on the world in ordinary interactions, and particularly in interactions with others. Notably, it is the standpoint by which we regard others and ourselves as being rational, as acting for reasons, and thus as being subject to the demands of normativity. While the scientific image develops from and out of the manifest image, Sellars describes the manifest image itself as developing from a view not unlike the one described by Herder above, according to which all objects are considered as persons:

I am now in a position to explain what I mean when I say that the primary objects of the manifest image are persons. I mean that it is the modification of an image in which all the objects are capable of the full range of personal activity, the modification consisting of a gradual pruning of the implications of saying with respect to what we would call an inanimate object, that it did something. Thus, in the original image to say of the wind that it blew down one's house would imply that the wind either decided to do so with an end in view, and might, perhaps, have been persuaded not to do it, or that it acted thoughtlessly (either from habit or impulse), or, perhaps, inadvertently, in which case other appropriate action on one's part might have awakened it to the enormity of what it was about to do. ("Philosophy and the Scientific Image", 380-1)

As Sellars emphasizes, this standpoint on the world represents all objects as belonging to the normative order, and as this standpoint develops, we come to a conception of inanimate objects only by the process of a “pruning” of this image (381). From Herder’s view, what this means is that there is no special problem in developing a conception of persons, as belonging to the normative order, from inanimate objects. Empathy, which takes its object as subject to the demands of normativity, comes first, and it is only afterwards that we come to differentiate the genuine bearers of values and normative statuses from inanimate objects.

It is worth noting, at this juncture, that Herder’s conception of empathy is already meeting Kantian worries of the variety discussed above. Insofar as our original stance towards the world is one of empathy, one in which we represent the world as loaded with normative significance, there will be no special problem in observing the actions of others as proper objects of normative evaluation. We observe the “ought” from the beginning in the stances we take towards one another and to the world itself. Normative statuses, on this view, are not something that we project onto a dry, meaningless world, but rather something we directly perceive as we come to learn a language, something built into the world we perceive. This is not in conflict with our conclusion in Chapter 4 above that Herder sees the normative relations involved in the use of language to be the products of social relations and practices, that they are learned as we come to speak a language and that instruction in language initiates us into the normative order. Rather, the point being made here is that once we are so initiated, the normative relations in question are perceived directly in the world. The process of the maturation of a language involves restricting the set of objects which we consider the proper bearers of normative statuses, not generating a conception of normative relations via a series of abstractions.

Herder goes on, in the passage above, to note the foundational role of empathy in ethics. Given the influence of Hutcheson and Hume on Herder, his remark on sympathy as foundational to “moral principle” is, in this instance, an echo of a version of sentimental ethics. As discussed above,

his early essay “How Philosophy Can Become More Universal and Useful for the Benefit of the People” proposes a variety of sentimentalist ethics, and this foundation for moral philosophy remains with him in his later works. When we see the outward signs of the pain of another, such as crying out or wincing, we recognize these signs as the same kind as those we make when we are in pain, and understand their pain by analogy to our own. Because Herder, in his later work, comes to see morality as an essentially cultural and social phenomenon, the story of how this sympathy develops into moral principles is more complex than in the philosophies of the sentimentalists.

Although there is a form of projection of the self onto the world, and even onto the other, in these base cases, the act of empathy involved in *Einfühlung* consists in a more complex cognitive exercise. In the act of *Einfühlung*, we interpret a given practice or word by imagining ourselves in the historical situation of someone who engages in the practice or uses the word. There is, however, a distinct continuity between the role of empathy in the foundations of language and of ethics and the act involved in *Einfühlung*; each involves an act of understanding which is developed by way of an analogy between the self and the object of study. In the case of primitive language use, we form analogies between ourselves and the objects in the world we encounter in anthropomorphizing them, and the crucial analogy between ourselves and other humans allows us to recognize them as potential language users. In the moral case, we form an analogy between ourselves and the harmed person who cries out in pain, and understand them to be in pain because it is what we would feel if we were struck and cried out in pain. *Einfühlung* crucially involves an analogy of a similar kind. In interpreting a phrase or a practice of a given culture take in what we know of them: the climate which engendered the culture, their history, and their activities, and ask ourselves what we would mean by this word if we were to use it in the sense that they do, what we would mean by participating in a practice we wish to understand. Herder gives fullest explication of this act in “This, Too, a Philosophy of History”, where he writes:

The whole nature of the soul, which *rules* through everything, which *models* all other inclinations and forces of the soul *in accordance with itself*, and in addition *colors* even the most indifferent actions – in order to share in feeling this, do not answer on the basis of the word but go into the age, into the clime, the whole history, feel yourself into everything – only now are you on the way towards understanding the word. (292)

While the process of feeling one's way into a history centrally involves what we would call empathy, it is critically a cognitive act. The more data we have concerning the facts of life in the people we study the more capable we are of imagining ourselves into their situation. This leads commentators such as Beiser to believe that *Einfühlung* is, in some sense, an endpoint for interpretation. Only once we have a deep understanding of the climate, circumstances, and activities of a people can we truly project ourselves into their situation. He writes, "...Herder is not advising empathy as a surrogate for explanation, still less as a starting point of explanation.... Rather, his point is that empathy should be a supplement for explanation...Herder thinks that all history enquiry should end with an ineffable experience" (*The German Historicist Tradition* 136). However, Herder represents *Einfühlung* as an entry point for history as much as an endpoint. The act of empathizing is informed by our understanding of the culture as a whole, but it also transforms our understanding of the culture and their practices. Our understanding of the habits and practices of a community must be taken into the act of *Einfühlung*, but the process will radically transform our understanding of those habits and practices as we come to a new understanding of the culture; it "colors even the most indifferent actions." Thus, the relationship between the three kinds of historical facts employed by Herder above was already overly simplified. While we can understand certain facts of the matter surrounding historical practices by considering them from a remove, the more visceral cognitive act of interpretation, in Herder's unique sense, is required to grapple with the meaning of these practices.

Herder's holism deeply informs his understanding of *Einfühlung*. "The whole history" must be taken in before one may perform an interpretation, yet this history is itself informed by the act of interpretation. Much like the use of historical data concerning the social practices of a civilization in

the development of a sense of the character of a people, there is an explanatory circle in which the whole is understood in terms of the parts just as the parts are understood in terms of the whole. The situation is analogous to that described by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*, “When we first begin to believe anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole)” (§141). Coming to understand a word in translation, particularly a culture far removed from ours, requires understanding the culture as a whole, but one must also be acquainted with their literature and their practices to understand the whole. Herder develops this holistic stance further:

The whole living painting of mode of life, habits, needs, peculiarities of land and climate, would have to *be added* or to have *preceded*; one would have first to *sympathize* with the nation, in order to feel a *single one* of its *inclinations* or *actions all together*, one would have to *find* a single word, to *imagine* everything in its fullness – or one reads – *a word*. (“This, Too, a Philosophy of History” 292)

The “mode of life” described, composed in part by the habits, practices, and language of a given community is simply their character. There may appear to be a vicious explanatory circle here: we cannot interpret the word or practice of a given culture without having the sense for their mode of life, and we cannot understand their mode of life without understanding their practices or their language. On Herder’s view, these understandings slowly develop together as we immerse ourselves in a culture, and it is largely the act of sympathizing or feeling one’s way into a culture which resolves it. In transposing ourselves into the situation of the other, we borrow from our own understandings of practices we engage in and can thereby feel the normative weight of their cultural practices and their language.

Before going any further, it is worth taking stock of Herder’s reasons for needing a notion like *Einfühlung*. Herder’s aim in developing anthropology as a potential replacement for philosophy is to transform the philosophical enquiry into ethics and epistemology into empirical disciplines, consistent both with Kant’s realization that man’s discursive character should be understood in terms of man’s

activities being subject to normative evaluation, and with Hamann's lesson that this discursive character should be understood first and foremost in terms of man's capacity for language. Hamann convinced Herder, particularly in his critiques of the "Treatise", that man is an essentially historical creature, and that values and meaning must be understood as the products of a culture in a particular historical moment. Herder thus decides that anthropology should be a discipline that empirically studies these values and meanings as such. Although Hamann was an empiricist, he was not a naturalist, even in the weak sense we have ascribed to Herder, and Herder's naturalism leads him to higher ambitions for his empiricism. It leads him to the expectation of an empirically-minded understanding of why cultures come to have the values they have in terms of their historical circumstances. Because Kant convinces him that he will not be able to straightforwardly observe the normative content essentially involved in discursive activity, he needs an amphibious notion: one which will take empirical observation and draw content concerning normative relations from it. This is the role *Einfühlung* must play to be successful on Herder's own terms. Through *Einfühlung*, we transform our empirical knowledge of the activities of a given culture, as well as their history and the climate that brought this culture into being into an understanding of the normative content of their practices and languages. By making analogies between our own concepts and practices and those we would have in the circumstances of the other, we come to an understanding of these practices that can penetrate their normative content.

This act of interpretation as empathizing is Herder's most unique contribution to empiricism. Platner, as we have seen, already placed great emphasis on the data of biological sciences in his work, although to somewhat different ends than Herder, just as Kant considers ethnographic data in his *Anthropology*, albeit with more limited aims than those Herder proposed. Herder transforms, however, the role of the interpretation of texts as a source for empirical data with his new notion of interpretation as a form of transposition. By considering ourselves in the situation of the other, we

can use the empirical data surrounding their practices and circumstances to gain an understanding of the normative relations involved in their linguistic and moral practices. Herder's major thought is that we can understand the normative content of meanings and practices by way of analogy if we imagine ourselves in the circumstances of the other. A toy example may assist in understanding the process of analogy here. A researcher, not herself fluent in Spanish, but observing speakers of Spanish may notice the fact that speakers of Spanish tend to say "rojo" more when responding to red objects than objects of other colors. This researcher will not have come to a place of understanding the meaning of "rojo", however, until she realizes that, in Spanish, it is *proper* to respond to red objects with the term "rojo." This distinction roughly mirrors Sellars's distinction between regarding a practice as merely conforming to a rule, on the one hand, and being rule or pattern governed on the other.²⁴ On the basis of observation of Spanish speakers, we can recognize that their behavior conforms to a pattern of responding to colors by using certain terms, but this is not yet recognizing this behavior as linguistic. A heater designed to activate once the temperature drops below a certain temperature conforms to a similar pattern, but this would not be linguistic activity, even if it beeps upon recognizing that the threshold is met. Representing the use of "rojo" as a robust linguistic practice necessitates representing the activities of Spanish speakers as being governed by a rule such as "I ought to respond to red objects by saying 'rojo,'" in part because it is only by doing so that we can recognize that it is *wrong* to respond to such objects with "azul." When the heater activates at the incorrect temperature, is wrong only insofar as we regard it as an object created by a human for a particular purpose; in itself it merely does what it does, indifferent to our desires and its intended purpose. On Herder's view, the recognition that this activity is rule-governed can only come by way of a process of analogizing our own experiences with those of the Spanish speaker. On the basis of our observations of the practice,

²⁴ See Sellars's "Some Reflections on Language Games" for a more complete explanation of this distinction.

as well as, potentially our observations concerning the initiation of children into the practice, and we come to the thought, “Insofar as I am a Spanish speaker, I ought to recognize the color of this object as ‘rojo.’” We cannot observe the rule directly, but we can analogize from our own experiences in rule-governed activity (such as that of using the term “red”) in interpreting the activity of the other as rule-governed. We borrow, so to speak, the normative content of our own practices and linguistic activities when we analogize ourselves with the other, and come to represent the practices as properly rule-governed rather than merely pattern-conforming. This, of course, is a relatively trivial example because the practice of color recognition across these languages is quite similar, but the process will be similar in more complex linguistic as well as ethical practices.

Herder’s way of understanding linguistic behavior contrasts with contemporary accounts according to which we have a common-sense theory of mind, or a folk psychology, that we use to interpret the behavior of others. According to this view, known by Goldman and others as the “theory theory”, we either develop or are born with a basic folk psychology composed of implicit laws and use these laws as a framework for understanding the behavior of others.²⁵ Herder instead presents a “model model” – we use our own behavior and psychology as a model for interpreting the behavior of those foreign to us, and adapt this understanding as circumstances demand. We use our intuitive understanding of the normative laws we are subject to and evaluate ourselves and others by and ask ourselves how these laws would have to be transformed for our behavior to resemble theirs. In the above example, our behavior concerning the use of color words serves as a model for interpreting the behavior of the Spanish speaker, which allows us to map our practice onto theirs and adapt it in the proper way.

²⁵ See Goldman (2006).

One of the fundamental shifts which occur in the transition from Platner's medical anthropology to Herder's is this new conception of anthropology as a discipline which studies rule-governed behavior, including linguistic behavior. While Herder, like Platner, sees anthropology as an empirical discipline capable of coming to replace philosophy, his understanding of the dependence of thought on language, as well as his understanding of language as consisting in a set of normative social practices, leads him to think of the discipline as studying the rule-governed behavior which determines the content of concepts such as the ethical, the aesthetical, and those involved in epistemology and logic. In coming to see social practices, including those involved in the speaking of a language, as fundamentally normative, Herder sees the need for new tools in the study of culture, *Einfühlung* is necessary, on Herder's view, insofar as it makes it possible for us to come to an understanding of the norms which govern the behavior of the subjects of anthropology. By means of *Einfühlung*, the anthropologist uses her understanding of the norms she is herself subject to, as well as her understanding of the circumstances in which the subject of anthropology lived to come to an understanding of the norms which govern the subject's behavior, and thus to an understanding of the concepts which are determined by these norms.

In *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry Vol. 1*, a dialogue concerning the ancient Hebrew representation of God distinguishes the methodology of *Einfühlung* from a psychologistic analysis of language. Herder's interlocutor ascribes early belief in deities to "fear and ignorance", claiming "Slavish terror and brutal stupidity have paid them homage, as powerful but malignant beings... in all languages religion employs terms of fear and dread" (51). Herder's interlocutor interprets ancient religious texts third-personally and psychologically; he seeks a causal story which explains religious sentiment in terms of the psychological character of man and his circumstances. From a certain point of view, this characterization mirrors Herder's anthropological methodology in understanding the meanings of words and practices in terms of their history and circumstances. However, it does so from a removed

perspective, explaining away the practice rather than understanding in its own terms. Herder's protagonist thus responds with an excerpt from a Hebrew poem which characterizes God's terrible power:

For what is a man, against God?
Even the wise, and the powerful,
Who hath understood him and prospered?
He removeth mountains in a moment

and comments, "Power, boundless power, is the attribute, that first fixes the attention of a feeble creature of the earth. He cannot but feel this, and his own comparative weakness, since his breath is in the hands of God, and his very existence but the effect of his will, his to us incomprehensible power" (52-53). Herder is not interested in a causal explanation of the use of a term or a practice, but rather an understanding of its meaning as it was used, internally to those who used it. Whereas his interlocutor considers man from a removed perspective in recognizing God as a manifestation of certain kinds of primitive fears, Herder places himself in the circumstances of the early man, weak and vulnerable to the horrors of nature, and feels the reverence for great power he detects in the poem. It is only by inhabiting the circumstances of the poet that Herder believes we can appreciate this sentiment, and therefore appreciate the full meaning of the poem, which is lost when we look towards a causal explanation of the practice of worshipping God as it existed for the ancient Hebrew culture.

Through *Einfühlung* Herder wishes to transform the data concerning a culture, their climate, their activities, their literature, and their histories, into a form of upbringing or initiation, to transform himself into a member of their community. Herder speaks of *Einfühlung* in terms of initiation in the second volume of *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, which takes the form of an essay rather than a dialogue:

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 affection and passion, the character of their atmosphere, their 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... (28)

Again, we see how Herder takes the straightforwardly empirical data concerning the histories, circumstances, and environment of the culture under study into this act of *Einfühlung*, but here we see the act itself as a form of initiation, a way of becoming one of them. Each of these components of a world: the music, the education, and even the skies, takes on a new meaning as we come to see it as our own. While the imagery invokes the shift in perspective that occurs in *Einfühlung*, in coming to see the world from the perspective of the other, it also reinforces Herder's idea that coming to understand a practice involves coming to an understanding of what it would be like to be subject to the rules of that practice. In coming to see their music, for instance, as they did, we must modify our sense of taste and aesthetic categories so as to conform with theirs.

We must take care to differentiate *Einfühlung* from a merely psychological activity. I have above spoken of *Einfühlung* as constituting a form of initiation, but initiation is inherently a social activity, so there is a serious question as to how the seemingly solitary act of projection involved in *Einfühlung* could do this work. One response to this worry would be to point out the way in which *Einfühlung* relies on the social practices the anthropologist herself is engaged in. In the following chapter, I spell out an account of *Einfühlung* that makes the particularities of how the process relies on these social practices more transparent. Even at this stage, however, it should be clear that the anthropologist takes with her not only a background understanding of the culture in question, but also the normative commitments of her own practices. In the example of the use of the word "rojo", the anthropologist connects her understanding of the practice of the use of the word "red" with the activities of the subjects of study. Neither of these understandings consist in merely psychological states; the former is based on her membership of the social practice of using the word "red", and the latter is based on an engagement with the subject under study. The social aspect of the latter point may be called into question in the case of the historical anthropology Herder practices. It does not follow, however, from the indirectness of Herder's method of engaging with primary texts and "feeling

his way into them” that *Einfühlung* results in a merely psychological understanding of their practices. We rely on the testimony of these historical and literary documents in coming to an understanding of the norms which governed a particular linguistic community at a particular time, and, when things go well, we come to see what it would be like to be governed by these norms.

One might further worry about the political implications of Herder’s conception of *Einfühlung*. Insofar as it serves as a tool for ethnography, Herder can be read, at the point of history that he is writing in, as claiming that it is possible for the colonizers not only to see things from the perspective of the colonized, but also to speak for them.²⁶ Herder writes not only in a crucial point in the development of liberalism, but also in a time of colonialism, and his remark that we must come to see the subject of anthropology as “brothers and compatriots” can be read as invoking a liberal cry for universal brotherhood at the same time as it may be read as erasing the unique perspective of the colonized. At the same time, one might argue that the perspective Herder is urging the anthropologist to take is anti-colonialist in nature; he urges that we take seriously the perspective of the colonized as unique and potentially radically different from our own. Herder clearly sees *Einfühlung* in these terms in writing of the colonialization of Africa:

It is only fair, when we proceed to the country of the blacks, that we lay aside our proud prejudices and consider the nature of this region with as much impartiality as if there were no other in the world. The Negro, whom we consider a cursed son of Ham and the image of the fiend, has equal right to call his cruel despoilers albinos and white satans who so degenerated only because of a flaw of nature, just as several animal species living near the North Pole degenerated to whiteness. (“The Nature of the African Peoples”, 178)

Herder here urges that the European anthropologist must make a serious attempt to see the world from the perspective of the native African, and to take this perspective to be as valid as her own. It

²⁶ I am indebted to a conversation with Richard Moran for an appreciation of the potentially problematic political aspects of Herder’s conception of *Einfühlung*.

may be argued that Herder's position here has a certain arrogance to it, in taking it to be possible for the anthropologist to fully inhabit the perspective of the colonized. At the same time, it does not strike me as wrong-headed to suggest that at least part of what was missing from Herder's compatriots was a genuine effort to get a sense for the perspective of the colonized and to take this perspective as seriously as their own. The point is not to speak on behalf of the colonized, but to understand what they say in their own terms.

The challenge Kant posed for Platner's anthropology, and any empiricist account of ethics to follow it, was how to make sense of the "ought" of ethics on the basis of direct empirical observation. The reader may remain wary of Herder's capacity to answer this challenge with his conception of *Einfühlung* for the reason that Kant's challenge applies just as much to our ability to discern our own ethical commitments as those of other cultures – a tool for ethnography is, at best, tangential to the concerns at hand. Herder's view that empathy is foundational for language – that our original stance towards the world involves taking the world as loaded with normative significance – leads him to the thought that there is no special problem in directly observing the normative statuses present in our own world, the world of our language. We come into the world perceiving normative statuses, and through language re-shape the normative significances we find into those valued by our linguistic community. Because, however, this world is ultimately shaped by our language, the challenge of an empirical study of values arises when we look outwards towards other linguistic communities. *Einfühlung* is a method for coming to understand the practices of other linguistic communities as governed by rules rather than merely pattern-conforming, and allows the straightforward empirical data of ethnographic observation to provide insight and mold our understanding of the values of others.

In addition to re-shaping the methodology of philosophy, Herder's conception of anthropology has drastic implications for the content of philosophy. As the above passage suggests,

Herder's methodology of *Einfühlung* leads him to something which resembles relativism in matters of aesthetics and ethics, insofar as *Einfühlung* compels the anthropologist to a form of brotherhood with the subject of interpretation. If we are to evaluate the practices of a linguistic community from the standpoint of a member of this community, we must, to a certain extent, abandon our own standards. While this view may be unsurprising given Herder's emphasis on the individuality of distinct national characters, it may lead to a worry that acts we should like to condemn as cruel and horrible will be endorsed by the morality of another culture, and therefore not be truly worthy of ultimate condemnation. It also may remain puzzling how Herder can view anthropology as having import to domains of philosophy which go beyond theory of value into questions of metaphysics and epistemology. Both of these worries are addressed below.

5.4 Herder's Pluralism

Part of the goal of *Einfühlung*, as described above, is to shift our standards of taste and our values, insofar as it is possible to do so, in the evaluation of the practices, acts, and character of another time or culture. The religious music of the other culture is transformed, by *Einfühlung* into a meaningful expression of spiritual force rather than a dead piece of mere historical interest, and the success of our act of interpretation is to be gauged in part by how successfully we can feel the aesthetic experience our ancestors felt. Our failures to perceive the beauty in an ancient work of art should be taken not as that piece's failure to live up to the timeless standard of taste, but rather as our own failure of imagination, our failure to properly inhabit the world in which the art work was seen as beautiful. Throughout Herder's work, he is emphatic that we should not judge the practices of earlier cultures

by our own standards. In “This, Too, a Philosophy of History”, he criticizes his Enlightenment contemporaries for evaluating ancient cultures from the standpoint of contemporary reason and taste:

You can pour out as much gall as you like on Egyptian *superstition* and *clericalism*, as for example that amiable Plato of Europe who wants to model everything only too much on a Greek original model has done – all true!, all good, if Egyptian antiquity were supposed to be *for your land* and *your time*. The boy’s coat is certainly too short for the giant! (283)

Herder’s stance that ethical practices, just like aesthetic and linguistic, are to be evaluated relative to a culture and that culture’s history and circumstances leads him to the thought that multiple systems of ethics, multiple aesthetics, and multiple languages, could be equally true. Or, perhaps better, that these systems, which provide the frameworks in which a particular evaluation of the moral character of an action, as well as a particular claim to the beauty of an object, can be true, may be equally adequate. This means that the tints of relativism in Herder’s work are the result of a pluralistic stance towards the realms of ethics, aesthetics, and epistemology. Because different circumstances and different cultural values can give rise to different systems of ethics and aesthetics which are perfectly apt for the cultures which give birth to them, there may be multiple legitimate systems of ethics and aesthetics. Herder is clear that this pluralism is simply the product of the historical evolution of man in different circumstances and climates, writing, “Had the Creator so ordered it, that we had all been born upon the same spot of earth, at the same time, with the same feelings and organs, and under the same outward circumstances, there would have been nothing to object against the uniform standard of taste” (*Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, Vol. 2 11-12). Because different climates called for different practices and ways of life, different systems of values arose, and there are limits to our ability to evaluate the ethics of particular actions or practices from historical cultures from our perspective.

However, as the above passage suggests, Herder does express a form of favoritism to contemporary values. In analogizing the ancient Egyptians to boys and his contemporary Europeans

to giants, Herder maintains that there has been a legitimate form of historical *progress*, that we have made advancements over the earlier states of mankind. This progress is understood in terms of the development of freedom and reason. Herder views freedom as an internal aim for man; in the “Treatise” we see that it is our freedom to distinguish objects according to our aims that underlies our capacity for language, and in the *Outlines* we see that this freedom, and therefore this capacity to reason, is built into our anatomy. Herder sees history as tending towards the free exercise of reason, and as therefore making legitimate advances over our ancestors. Our shared human nature therefore places some restriction on Herder’s pluralism; systems of values which tend towards freedom and the flourishing of reason are more appropriate for our nature, all else held equal. Herder’s most explicit critiques of the cruelty of various historical and contemporary peoples, for instance in the practice of slavery and of war, come from this perspective. Herder’s thought that we are, in some sense, made to be free in virtue of our anatomy and independence from the drives of pure instinct, and made to be rational in virtue of our in-built capacity for language, leads him to think that there are substantive demands human nature will make on coherent systems of ethics. The practice of slavery, for instance, is inconsistent with our human nature; freedom is, in an almost literal sense, in our bones.

In addition to this normative restriction on legitimate systems of ethics, Herder also believes there are practical restrictions on potentially actual systems of ethics that might arise in the world. Herder believes that all languages have a shared origin, and because of Herder’s belief that reason is essentially tied to language, this shared basis of our thought minimizes, to some degree, the potential for radical differences in systems of ethics. Further, Herder’s pragmatic understanding of the development of national character, according to which practices and values arise by way of an interaction between a people and their climate so as to lead to their flourishing, makes it hard to see how systems of values we would regard as genuinely wicked might arise. Relying on the world being arranged in such a way that wicked systems of values cannot arise may strike our ears, having been

hardened by the terrible tragedies that unfolded in the 20th century, as naïve, even if we think Herder's optimism concerning human nature was more realistic in his time. How successful we determine Herder's defense of pluralism to be will largely depend, then, on the success of the normative restrictions he places on legitimate systems of ethics rather than the practical restrictions he sees on systems of ethics that may arise. Certainly, we can agree with Herder that the values underlying the tragic events of the 20th century were inconsistent with a shared value in human freedom and the flourishing of reason, just as Herder condemned the colonialist tendencies of his own time as inconsistent with these timeless values. Herder's pluralism is therefore permissive in the sense that it allows multiple coherent and legitimate systems of ethics, but restrictive in the sense that there are guidelines to preferring one system over another.

The point of Herder's pluralism, then, is not to completely undermine our confidence in our standards and principles of morality and ethics, but rather to lend a spirit of generosity to our interpretation of the acts and works of other cultures. His essay "On the Change of Taste" is critical of the philosophical aesthetics of his time for its bias towards the works of the present:

People who, ignorant about history, know only their own age believe that the current taste is the only one and so necessary that nothing but it can be imagined. They believe that everything that they find indispensable because of habituation and education has been indispensable for all ages, and they do not know that the more comfortable something is for us then the more novel it must probably be. (255)

Aestheticians confuse the tastes of their time for timeless standards of beauty in developing theories of aesthetics. Recognizing these standards as local to our linguistic community, and therefore recognizing these standards as contingent, can help us appreciate the works of art produced in the past. *Einfühlung* can, after an effort of coming to learn the ways of life prominent in the culture which produced a work of art, lead us to a greater appreciation of the work, insofar as we can distance ourselves from the standards of our time and take on the standards of another. This same spirit of

generosity in interpretation leads Herder to surprisingly progressive views concerning the risk of eurocentrism in interpretation and ethnography. As noted above, in texts concerning African tribes he notes that the practices and habits of the European explorers may seem as savage to them as they seem to have to the writers of travelogues.²⁷ It should be noted, however, that Herder was still a man of his time, and his writings on other cultures do, shamefully, contain crudely racist remarks and thoughts, despite the fact that his own framework should lead him away from such thoughts.

While the implications of Herder's methodology on ethics are somewhat straightforward, it may be less transparent at this point how Herder's anthropology aims to make questions in epistemology and metaphysics responsive to empirical investigation. At first glance, Herder's anthropological approach to metaphysics will appear to entail an extremely permissive ontology; we have seen above that national characters contain an ontology including whatever objects a given linguistic community finds useful to distinguish from others. The objects which inhabit the world of a given linguistic community will be those which it has determined to be useful given their climate and the history of their culture. However, we have also seen Herder's commitment to a methodological naturalism; his attempts to create a naturalist understanding of the capacity for speech in both the "Treatise" and the *Outlines* stem from a desire for a naturalist understanding of the capacity of reason. Herder does not explicitly acknowledge a potential conflict between the naturalist metaphysics which governs his conception of man and the pragmatic stance he takes towards the ontology of a given community, but his approaches to ethics and aesthetics hint towards his resolution between these two competing forces. Herder's stance towards ontology is pluralistic insofar as it allows multiple legitimate ontologies to obtain in distinct linguistic communities, but this pluralism is restrictive in limiting legitimate ontologies to those consistent with his weak form of naturalism.

²⁷ See, for instance, Herder's "The Nature of the African Peoples."

This is most transparent in Herder's writings on religion, which offer sociological and genealogical accounts of the practice of religion rather than taking early religious texts at face value. Herder's 1769 essay "On the Earliest Documents of Humankind" represents religion, particularly Christianity, as arising from the needs of a civilization as they begin to develop and feel at home in the world. Each founder of early religions, he writes, "had to find images drawn from his own world, poetry suitable to his own soul, enduring characteristics to suit his own heart, among which he had been raised, which lived within him and needed only to be aroused to live in him forever" (84). Religion thus represents an attempt at understanding the world consistent with the way a people view their world and the shared values of their community. Religious figures found ways of conveying the values of their people in a way that their people could understand by drawing from their communal imagery and that of their environment. Herder insists that Genesis should not be understood as a document of matters of fact; it does not, he claims, "represent a coherent story" (90). Herder's later "On the Monuments of the Distant Past", published in 1792, is explicit that the inconsistency of biblical texts with naturalism poses a serious challenge to literal interpretations of the texts. He writes that we should take these texts "for what they are, the reports of a pastoral people regarding the area in which they lived." He continues, speaking of the origin stories of Genesis, "As little as the six days of creation will resolve for the geologist the question of the structure of earth, as little may the family chronicles – indeed worthwhile in and of themselves – of this people provide satisfaction for all peoples of the earth" (64). Herder asks that we interpret these texts as documents of their time and of their people, and interpret them, perhaps through *Einfühlung*, by feeling the values expressed in these texts, and only drawing historical information from them after determining which aspects of them are best understood as fable rather than literal. Herder does not mean to undermine the divine origin of biblical texts; rather, he characterizes these texts as the only way in which the values expressed in the bible could have been expressed to this particular community in their own time. It is possible for us, from

our current perspective, to look back critically at the ontological commitments made in Genesis and reject them while simultaneously maintaining the necessity of such a representation for a different linguistic community. This process resembles that of criticizing the morality of actions in the distant past; while Herder's social theory of the generation of both ontological and ethical commitments can make sense of how mistaken ontologies and theories of value could have come into being, he restricts the possible legitimate ontologies and systems of ethics by way of an external standard. There, this standard was the development of human freedom and reason, and here it is a form of naturalism. We can understand how linguistic communities may come to have mistaken ontological commitments, but this need not undermine the thought that they are mistaken. Herder's writings on religion therefore reveal a commitment to a naturalist metaphysics that overrules the permissiveness of the ontologies involved in a national character.

This result should be unsurprising given the pragmatic commitments of his conception of national character. Because Herder maintains a form of naturalism, he can only expect that an ontology containing supernatural objects will not prove useful to a fully mature linguistic community. While this may appear to reduce the variations between ontologies to the point that the anthropological approach loses much of its appeal, Herder still expects the worlds of different linguistic communities to have highly distinct ontologies. In speaking of the different numeral systems of ancient languages in *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, Herder allows for different mathematical systems to have value for different cultures depending on their needs, which would result in distinct mathematical objects in the ontologies of different linguistic communities. Further, as we saw with the example of the discussion of the plurality of words for different kinds of swords above, Herder represents the world of speakers of ancient Arabic be populated with many different kinds of swords, and therefore different forms of objects, than their Hebrew counterparts. The difference between the Hebrew and Arabic treatment of swords is not that one had more names than the other, but that one had new kinds of objects, with

different purposes for these objects and distinct practices surrounding these objects, which the other lacked.

Herder's distinctive approach to epistemology, on the other hand, is characterized by his writings on reason as inherently social. As argued above in Chapter 4, Herder has a material conception of reason rather than a formal one; he sees the everyday use of reasoning with our actual concepts as primary, with syllogistic reasoning and formal logic arising as an abstraction from this everyday use. Herder writes, "Theoretically and practically reason is nothing more than something understood, an acquired knowledge of the proportions and directions of the ideas and faculties to which man is formed by his organization and mode of life" (80 [IV.4]). Although our physiology contains within it the capacity to learn language, and therefore to reason, reason is something we learn as we come to speak a language and actualize this capacity. Herder's point of contrast in calling reason "something understood" is with the view that reason is something innate. He continues:

From his infancy he compares the ideas and impressions of his finer senses, according to the delicacy and accuracy with which they perceive them, the number he receives and the internal promptitude with which he learns to bring them together. The one whole thing hence arising is his thought, and the various combinations of these thoughts and perceptions to judge of what is true or false, good or bad, conducive to happiness or productive of misery, are his reason, the progressive work of the appearances of human life. (80 [IV.4])

We begin, as children, by distinguishing the objects of our senses from one another and abstract from the incompatibility relations that obtain between these objects to develop a more formal capacity to combine ideas in judgment. The study of our capacity to reason is the study of our everyday use of reason, and therefore the empirical study of an aspect of national character. Insofar as *Einfühlung* can give us insight into the modes of life of another culture, it can also give us insight into their reason.

As we have seen, Herder's commitments lead him to a vastly different picture of both the methodology of philosophy and its contents. It would not be unfair for the reader to wonder if Herder's anthropology, while potentially a worthwhile pursuit in its own right, fails to answer the

demands of philosophy, leaving it as a distinct discipline rather than a rival worthy of replacing it. This challenge will be the topic of the following section.

5.5 Anthropology as a Future for Philosophy

Herder's vision of anthropology as philosophy leaves philosophy a vast distance from the project Kant envisioned in his three *Critiques*. I think it is appropriate for a reader sympathetic to Kant to ask, at this point, if Herder's project truly deserves the name "philosophy." If anthropology is to replace philosophy, it must be capable either of providing what philosophy promises and fails to provide, or of showing why philosophers should not promise what they do promise and providing what can be promised. Charles Taylor, in an interview concerning his reading of Herder, was confronted with a similar question on Herder's project by Nigel DeSouza: "To play devil's advocate here, what about the response to this that would say, 'That's all very well, but that is not philosophy, that's anthropology, that's sociology, that's literature—those are all things that Kant would have dealt with in his anthropology lectures, but that's not philosophy.'" Taylor's response was, "Well then, the question becomes, 'What is philosophy?'" And I think that philosophy in a certain sense doesn't exist; I know that's a very polemical way of putting it" ("Philosophy as Philosophical Anthropology" 16-17). This answer has merit, both philosophically and interpretively, but it also pushes the answer to the question of whether or not Herder's anthropology counts as philosophy onto that of the question of if something like anthropology is the only kind of philosophy. Another way of asking this question would be to look at the particular questions Herder asks and answers and see how they compare to the questions philosophy asks and answers. On this approach, we can, to some degree, isolate the questions of Herder's methodology from those of content and come closer to an answer to the

question of whether Herder's anthropology counts as philosophy which does not, in some sense, presuppose the misguidedness of the traditional philosophical project.

Herder comes closest to comparing his own work to traditional philosophy in "This, Too, a Philosophy of History", where he takes issue with the question asked by the prize committee to which the essay was addressed, as discussed above in Chapter 4. The question asked was "Which was probably the happiest people in history?" (296). No doubt, this question will not ring as a philosophical one to those with Kantian sympathies, for at least the reasons that happiness is not a pure concept and that the empirical question of which people felt this emotion the most has little to do with philosophy, though it may be related to anthropology in Kant's sense. Herder's answer, however, is still of note for the reason that it has more general implications, and it is therefore worth returning to here:

For if, again, human nature is no container of an *absolute, independent, unchangeable happiness* as the philosopher defines it, but it everywhere attracts *as much happiness as it can*, is a *flexible clay* for, in the most different situations, needs, and pressures, also *forming* itself differently, [and] even the image of happiness *changes* with each condition and region (for what is this image ever but the *sum* of "satisfactions of wishes, achievements of purposes, and gentle overcoming of needs," which, though, all *shape* themselves according to *land, time, and place*?) – then at bottom all *comparison* proves to be *problematic*. As soon as the inner *sense* of happiness, the *inclination*, has changed, as soon as the external *occasions* and *needs form* and *fix* the *new* sense – who can compare the *different* satisfaction of *different* senses in *different* worlds? – the shepherd and father of the Orient, the farmer and artist, the sailor, competitive runner, conqueror of the world – who can compare them? (296)

Herder responds that happiness is not a single immutable concept because what counts as happiness varies greatly between distinct civilizations. Happiness relates to the satisfaction of one's needs and desires, but the needs and desires of a given community depends on their climate and their culture. The problem is not simply the epistemological one of the difficulties of comparing the inner feelings of, for instance, the Christian who is absolved through confession and the tribesman who successfully spears his prey, securing food for his family, but rather the metaphysical one of whether or not these two feelings can really be considered similar enough to compare directly. Happiness is not simply an

inner feeling; when one answers the question, “Are you happy with your job?” one does not search their memories for how frequently they felt a particular sensation called happiness, but rather considers whether or not this job provides satisfactory answers to a number of questions they pose to it, how it fits their desires, talents, and needs. But this set of questions is highly contingent on our contemporary world. A shepherd in the middle ages is not likely to consider how well the role of farming suits his talents and training in considering whether or not being a shepherd makes him happy, and may not consider shepherding at all in answering the question of whether or not he is happy. If we cannot compare inner feelings, as those are largely irrelevant to the question of happiness, nor can we compare the considerations one consults in determining their own happiness across cultures or vast periods of time, we may begin to wonder if there is really a single thing called “happiness” that can be legitimately compared across civilizations.

Herder will take the same line when it comes to more straightforwardly philosophical questions such as “What is ‘the good?’” Even if we take Aristotle’s highly abstract definition of the good as “that at which everything aims” we will see that the ends and means of practices and actions across cultures and periods of time differ so greatly that we are left with a dilemma of the following variety: we hold that there is one invariable thing called the good, the content of which differs so greatly across linguistic communities that the study of it provides little of value for the theory and practice of ethics, or we may say that there is no single thing called “the good” (1094a). If we take the former approach, then Herder’s investigation of “the good” in a given linguistic community as a thin concept by means of the various thick concepts which contribute to its meaning will count as an answer to the genuinely philosophical question “What is ‘the good?’” despite the lack of universality his answer will necessarily have. If we take the latter, Herder’s investigations will not be philosophical for the reason Charles Taylor provides: that there is no genuine philosophical question to answer here.

Another question we may ask of Herder is whether this form of theoretical knowledge provided by anthropology can fully replace the practical role of ethics. Aristotle makes it clear that the goal of engaging in the act of philosophical ethics is not to convince the skeptic of the truth of ethics, but rather for the virtuous citizen to come to a better understanding of his own pursuit of virtue and the good life, and others have followed in this tradition (1095a). It is unclear how a better understanding of ethics in Herder's sense can help us live better lives, particularly with the ethnographic nature of Herder's writings on ethics. Herder's response to this demand on ethics with the thought that the realization that the sources of meaning of life are somewhat contingent on one's culture allows us the recognition that the key to living well is feeling at home in our community, and therefore in the character of our community. Gaining a better understanding of our culture and ourselves in relation to it may help us live better and feel more at home inside it.

5.6 The Advantages of Herder's Anthropology

Now that we have seen how Herder proposes to study philosophical topics with an empirical anthropological program, it is worth asking what advantages this system may have over the Kantian system he rejects in undertaking this project. The greatest virtue Herder's anthropology has over the Kantian philosophy is that it has a story that unifies the realm of normativity and the natural world by means of his naturalist account for the capacity of speech. Because Herder thinks of language, reason, aesthetics, and ethics as the essentially social products of a culture, his account of the genesis of these normative relations attempts to unite the realm of normativity with that of the natural world, and, to a certain extent, with the empirically observable world. He provides a naturalistic account of man which explicitly aims to understand his twin capacities for reason and speech in physiological terms,

and uses this capacity for speech to understand the normative relations in which we stand with one another. In doing so, he resolves an issue raised by Hamann, but also by the German Idealists who came in the wake of Kant's work: the unavoidable dualism in Kant's work between the noumenal and phenomenal realms. Robert Brandom helpfully characterizes a dualism as what emerges when the components of a distinction are "distinguished in terms that makes their characteristic relations to one another ultimately unintelligible" (*Making it Explicit* 615). On Kant's system, the noumenal realm, which contributes the normative relations pertinent to the realm of ethics, stands off from a distance from our practices and habits, to the point where it almost seems a coincidence when these practices align with the obligations we take on by way of the categorical imperative. Anthropology, therefore, seems almost an afterthought to Kant's system; the matters of fact concerning human beings and their practices cannot contribute to the metaphysics of morals in any legitimate sense.

It is perhaps for this reason that Herder's work in the *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* strikes Kant as aimless and indulgent. Upon the publication of the first part of Herder's *Outlines*, Kant published a harsh critical review, condemning both the lack of precision in Herder's philosophical writing and his tendencies towards metaphysics in his conceptions of humanity and the world as whole. The sections of Herder's book available at the time of Kant's review notably include the passages which develop Herder's thought that man's physiological structure (i.e. his capacity to stand upright) are to credit for his capacity for reason, as well as his theories on the development of species. He charges that what Herder refers to as a philosophy of the history of humanity is not, as we might expect "a logical precision in the determination of concepts or a careful distinction and proof of principles, but a glance not dwelling long but much more comprehensive" (8:45). While Kant praises Herder for "a sagacity adept in the discovery of analogies and a power of imagination bold in the use of them", it is difficult to read this with any sincerity given the conclusion to the review, in which he expresses hope that, for the remaining sections of the book, the author develops his work "not

through hints but through determinate concepts, not through conjectured but observed laws, not by means of a force of imagination given wings through metaphysics or through feelings, but through a reason which is expansive in its design but cautious in the execution” (8:55). Kant represents Herder as overly ambitious and imprecise.

In 1784, immediately preceding Herder’s release of the first book of the *Outlines*, Kant published the beginning of his own philosophy of history, the “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim.” The Third Proposition enumerated in this text is of particular interest to us due to its individualistic stance towards the development of man. It reads “Nature has willed that the human being should produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical arrangement of his animal existence entirely out of itself, and participate in no other happiness or perfection than that which he has procured for himself free from instinct through his own reason” (8:19). Kant’s initial point of contrast here in claiming that man must develop himself by his own means is not the thought that man might require the assistance of others but that he might require natural assistance; he compares our hands with the claws of a lion and even the drives of instinct that belong to the lesser animals, concluding that nature has left us to fend for ourselves with our capacity for reason. He concludes, however, by noting that “it remains strange that the older generations appear to carry their toilsome concerns only for the sake of the later ones,” suggesting that the proposition does at least suggest a primarily solitary understanding of our development of ourselves by means of reason (8:20). Kant explains this in terms of the good of the development of the species as a whole, writing, “. . . as puzzling as this may be, it is yet necessary that a species of animals should have reason, and, as a class of rational beings who all die, while the species is immortal, should nevertheless attain to completeness in the development of their predispositions” (8:20). Thus, while it is our own responsibility to develop our capacity to reason on our own first and foremost, our ancestors have laid a foundation to ensure our success.

Herder had read Kant's review by the time he completed the second portion of the *Outlines*, and its influence, as well as the influence of the "Idea for a Universal History", is apparent in the text.²⁸ Book VIII of Herder's *Outlines* appears to directly respond to Kant's Third Proposition, particularly in a section titled "The practical understanding of the human species has everywhere grown up under the wants of life, but everywhere it is a blossom of the genius of the people, a son of tradition and custom" (173 [VII.3]). Here Herder details the ways in which man has learned from animals ("The North Americans relate with gratitude, that maize was brought to them by a bird, and the use of most indigenous medicines was unquestionably learned from animals"), but more importantly from one another (175 [VII.3]). Herder's restatement here of the role of tradition in instating our capacity for reason, in inducting us into the order of the normative, recalls Hamann's work in its affirmation of reason as a product of culture rather than a timeless entity, developed first and foremost by our own solitary powers. It is aimed at undermining the solitary and static conception of reason defended by Kant's "Idea for a Universal History" in restating the significance of tradition and the fluid nature of reason as we develop alongside our climate.

Reading these passages of Herder's *Outlines* as responding to Kant reveals that Herder thinks the view of reason as grounded in tradition, as the product of our use of language, constitutes his primary advancement over the Kantian system. It is the key to his overcoming of Kant's dualism between the noumenal realm and the realm of experience; it unites our moral and aesthetic practices with our moral and aesthetic values and makes sense of how we, physical beings in a material world, come to be the sorts of being which have values and can take on normative statuses. This constitutes

²⁸ I am indebted to Beiser (2011) for this connection between the publication of the second book of Herder's *Outlines* and Kant's review of the first as well as Kant's "Idea for a Universal History".

Herder's response to the metaphysical challenge normativity places on naturalism: how to make sense of values in a manner that is consistent with naturalism and materialism.

One way of understanding Herder's development here is in terms of Huw Price's distinction between object naturalism and subject naturalism. Price understands object naturalism as the view that "the only facts there are are the kind of facts recognized by natural science" (4). It is the view that all meaningful judgments can be translated into a purely physicalistic vocabulary. Subject naturalism, on the other hand, is the view that "begins with the realization that we humans (our thought and talk included) are surely part of the natural world" (5). On this view, so long as we can understand the speaker of a language and the practice of speaking a language in terms that do not invoke supernatural causes, we do not need to concern ourselves with translating the actual content of that speech in naturalistic terms to maintain a form of naturalism. One way of understanding Herder's conception of natural character is as creating a "subject naturalist" picture of ethics, aesthetics, and rationality; he aims to understand the content of these areas in terms of the practices that generate them. His emphasis on the role of tradition and instruction, along with his speculation concerning the manner in which a historical climate generates a set of needs which these practices address, provides the basis for understanding both the circumstances which gave birth to the relevant social and linguistic practices and how these circumstances give birth to normative relations and values. Herder's naturalism does not aim to reduce the fields of ethics, epistemology, or aesthetics to straightforward empirical facts, as a crude version of Platner's project may have, but rather to provide an account of our capacity to engage in social practices and use language that is consistent with the best science of his time, and to understand ethics, aesthetics, and epistemology in terms of this capacity for speech.

The ancient Egyptian sense of beauty is not, on this view, reduced to a set of facts, for instance about the brains and eyes of the ancient Egyptians, but it is also not explained by the evocation of a timeless standard of beauty which exists beyond the natural world, nor transcendental psychological

notions such as the understanding and the imagination, as in Kant. Rather, Herder represents it as flowing from the practices that emerged from a particular people at a particular moment in history in a particular climate. Herder makes sense of the practice a particular people had of evaluating beauty in the way that was relevant for them in a way that is consistent with a naturalistic worldview, and therefore accounts for their aesthetic practices and sense of aesthetics in a manner consistent with naturalism, without ever reducing a particular quality such as “beauty” to a natural property. In doing so, he can explain the normative nature of aesthetic practices without establishing a dualism between natural and normative facts; the interaction between the two varieties of facts is intelligible. Herder may be at fault for not providing serious detail as to how this bridge between the normative and natural is formed, relying heavily on Hamann’s conception of instruction and tradition, but the pieces of such a story are present in his work.

We have focused until now primarily on the metaphysical question of how to make sense of normativity on the naturalist worldview, but we have not yet gone into serious detail on the epistemological question of how to make sense of our capacity to come to understand the values and meanings of others in a manner consistent with his empiricism, aside from the remarks earlier in this chapter on the roles of *Einfühlung* and empathy more generally. However, this epistemic story, which will be the focus of the following chapter, points us to one further virtue of Herder’s system, which is the bounty of new tools it provides to philosophers in the study of normative relations such as the ethical. In allowing some empirical insight into the ethical realm by means of “feeling one’s way” into a given circumstance, Herder provides a new way of performing the task of philosophical ethics, aesthetics and epistemology. Herder’s anthropology provides a concrete methodology for progress in philosophy which remains underexplored to this day. However, Herder’s presentation of *Einfühlung* is somewhat unclear, and he only speaks occasionally of it in works like the *Outlines* and “This, Too, a Philosophy of History.” In the chapter to follow, I would like to make Herder’s notion of *Einfühlung*

more precise by relating it to a theory of interpretation more familiar to contemporary philosophers:
Donald Davidson's thought on radical interpretation.

6.0 Einfühlung Examined

I would like to rephrase both the problem Herder aimed to resolve with *Einfühlung*, and its method of doing so, in part to bring out what makes this notion relevant to problems which continue to challenge philosophers today. Herder is convinced, both by his interactions with Kant and his later exchanges with Hamann, that it will be impossible to license oneself to conclusions concerning thick normative characterizations of behavior on the basis of empirical observation alone. That is: straightforward empirical observation cannot provide the justification for a characterization of an action as, for example, just or unjust, without the assistance of a background understanding of the normative content involved in such a judgment, and the content of a concept with normative content such as “justice” cannot be elucidated by straightforward empirical data. More specifically, Kant showed Herder that empirical observations concerning anatomy, cultural practices, general human behavior, and the psychology one can arrive at by reflection – in short, what Kant called anthropology— cannot figure directly into an understanding of the moral law or of the laws of thought. Kant’s reasoning here is that observation concerning how man does, in fact think, or does, in fact act, cannot grant a conclusion concerning how man *ought* to think or *ought* to act. Hamann showed Herder that an attempt to evade this issue by treating the laws of thought and action as derivative of the capacity to use language, and therefore dependent on the social world and culture, cannot get off the ground without treating the capacity to speak language as a normative status. Hamann stresses to Herder the role of instruction in language as an induction into the realm of the normative, and in so doing leads him to understand that language use, and therefore discursivity, must be understood in normative terms.

Once we accomplish, by way of instruction, the development of our capacity to speak, we can directly observe, on Herder's view, the values and normative statuses expressed by our community. Coming to speak a language involves partaking in the character of one's people, and doing this involves coming to see the world as meaningful from the particular lens of one's community. This background understanding involved in a national character shapes our perception such that we can see acts as just or unjust, for instance, simply by watching them unfold. We can perceive that an act is to be done or not to be done, just as we can perceive that a potential interlocutor is a language speaker. Growing up in a culture involves developing the capacity to respond to its meanings and values, and coming to see others as subject to the relevant normative evaluations.

The question for Herder, therefore, becomes how to perceive or describe the values held by communities other than our own. Herder, like Hamann before him, saw values as dependent on culture and as evolving historically. A significant part of Hamann's lesson that reason is not something which stands behind and drives our capacity for speech, but is rather an abstraction from that capacity, was the idea that reason, both theoretical and practical, is something which takes a particular form in different linguistic communities. Herder and Hamann saw ethical and aesthetic values as determined by a culture in their particular historical context, and thus held a pluralistic stance on both. Because we do not have the background understanding involved in the character of other linguistic communities, Kant's question of how to draw normatively rich characterizations of actions on the basis of empirical observation re-emerges for Herder as he turns his study outwards to the particular shapes ethics and aesthetics have taken both across the world and across history.

Einfühlung is Herder's response to this challenge. It is a process by which we form an analogy between ourselves and the object of study and come to see the world from their perspective, and therefore come to see the meanings and values held by the object of study. We take in empirical data – be it historical, literary, or ethnographic – and use this data as the basis of our imaginative act.

Herder's resolution to his problem can appear to be no better than guesswork: how can we be sure that by imagining ourselves as the Aztec we will be capable of representing their discursive practices and values correctly? If Herder is right that their values may be radically different from our own, the challenge of abandoning our own standards of evaluation in coming to understand the values expressed by their community may appear to be insurmountable, and the possibility of coming to take on the precise values of the other as though they were our own, even by reading their literatures and histories, even if we manage shed our own perspective, seems slim at best. Further, Herder is obscure on how *Einfühlung* can bridge the gap between the empirical data we take in and the normative conclusions we can draw on the basis of this evidence.

I believe, however, that Herder's conception of *Einfühlung*, once properly explicated, both presents a coherent response to the challenges he faced in his time and provides a novel and worthwhile approach both for contemporary philosophers thinking about ethics and aesthetics and for contemporary anthropologists working on ethnographic studies of normatively thick concepts. In what follows, I will develop an account of *Einfühlung* by way of relating it to Donald Davidson's seminal work on interpretation. Davidson understands interpretation as involving a kind of mapping from mentioned sentences in the language under interpretation to used sentences in the language of interpretation, crucially relying on a kind of analogy between the sentences we would say and the sentences the subject of study did or might say. Herder's method of mapping our own normative commitments and values into those of the interpreted subject by way of *Einfühlung* can thus be understood as performing a closely related task.

Davidson sees his theory as implying the denial of a dualism of scheme and content, and insofar as we explicate Herder's view by way of Davidson's, we run the risk of defeating ourselves insofar as this dualism is expressed in Herder's conception of national character. I will thus defend Herder's version of the scheme-content dualism in a way I take to be consistent with the important

lessons we have drawn from Davidson's work, partly with the help of Charles Taylor's defense of the dualism.

6.1 Davidson on Interpretation

Davidson's account of radical interpretation begins with the thought that Tarski's T-schema can be used to provide an account of interpretation or translation. T-sentences are sentences of the form " s is true in L if and only if ϕ " where s some statement in an object language under study, L is the object language, and ϕ is a statement in the metalanguage that gives the conditions under which the sentence s is true. Typically, the statement ϕ will be a sentence in the metalanguage that describes some state of affairs that makes the sentence s in the object language true. "‘Snow is white’ is true in English if and only if snow is white" presents, on Tarski's view, an analysis of what it means for the English sentence "Snow is white" to be true – the English sentence is true whenever snow, in the actual world, is white. Tarski employed these schemata as a part of an inductive account of truth, building from simple sentences such as the above to more logically complex sentences (such as "All snow is white", "Snow is not white", and "If snow is white, then grass is green"). While this result seems relatively trivial in this instance, as English is functioning both as our object language and metalanguage, so long as we have a method for translating our object language into our metalanguage, we should be able to produce less trivial T-sentences involving the use of other languages, such as "‘Schnee ist weiß’ is true in German if and only if snow is white". Having a theory of truth for a language, on Tarski's view, entails being able to produce T-sentences for all meaningful sentences stateable in that language. Thus, Tarski takes the notion of translation between object language and metalanguage for granted and defines truth in a language by way of this translation. Davidson's

fundamental thought with his conception of radical translation is to invert the order of explanation here. He writes, “What I propose is to reverse the direction of explanation: assuming translation, Tarski was able to define truth; the present idea is to take truth as basic and to extract an account of translation or interpretation” (“Radical Interpretation” 134). Roughly speaking: if we know that “Schnee ist weiß’ is true in German if and only if snow is white” is true, we know that “Schnee ist weiß” means the same thing in German as “snow is white” does in English. This account provides us with an understanding of what it means for a given sentence to “mean the same thing” as one in another language.

On this view, generating a theory of translation involves developing a procedure for mapping the sentences of the object language onto sentences of one’s own language, or the metalanguage. Davidson envisages the procedure as functioning by beginning with finding “the best way to fit our logic” onto their language, and in so doing identifying which terms are predicates, which are singular terms, which are quantifiers, etc., then identifying indexicals, and finally moving on to the remaining sentences whose truth-value is not dependent on logic alone nor responsive to immediate changes in the environment (as those involving indexicals would be) (“Radical Interpretation” 136). Once we have an understanding of how assent and dissent functions in the language, we can distinguish logical truths as those sentences which are always regarded as true, and use the commonalities in these sentences to discern the relevant logical connectives. By watching the patterns which dictate assent and dissent we can begin to map their logical connectives onto ours. Using these tools, we can identify sentences whose truth-values are highly context dependent, and identify indexicals, and thereafter begin to decipher the rest of the language.

This process of translation will eventually result in T-sentences of the following form: “Es regnet’ is true-in-German when spoken by x at time t if and only if it is raining near x at t ” (“Radical Interpretation” 135). In order to arrive at the conclusion that a sentence of the above form is true, we

gather evidence, such as the observation “Kurt belongs to the German speech community and Kurt holds true ‘Es regnet’ on Saturday at noon and it is raining near Kurt on Saturday at noon,” and eventually, upon making enough similar observations, generalizing to “ $(x)(t)$ (if x belongs to the German speech community then x holds true ‘Es regnet’ at t if and only if it is raining near x at t)” (“Radical Interpretation” 135). We begin from a sentence we take it to be plausible for our subject to believe given the circumstances (e.g. “It is raining”, when it is raining) and test their assent or dissent from the sentence we take to be a candidate for translation. Once we have gathered enough evidence to confirm that their linguistic behavior conforms with our translation, we first generalize our evidence and then conclude with the T-sentences. Although Davidson does not himself emphasize this, there is an important transition which occurs when we move from the generalization concerning the German speech community to the T-sentences. Whereas the generalization only states what German speakers in fact hold to be true, the T-sentences state what they *ought* to hold true. Forming a theory of interpretation from the evidence and generalizations of the evidence involves making a leap from facts concerning observed behavior to the rules which govern this behavior.

Davidson holds that radical translation can only occur by presupposing an agreement concerning the vast majority of matters of fact between the translator and speaker. This requirement, known as the “principle of charity” takes as its starting point that we can only begin to interpret someone once we have an idea of what they reasonably might be taken to be saying, and we can only know what they might reasonably be taken to be saying if we attribute a number of shared beliefs to them. Returning to the above example, to interpret “Es regnet” as meaning “It is raining”, it is not enough to know that it is, in fact, raining; we must know instead that the speaker believes that it is raining. The problem, however, runs deeper than that. For us to legitimately translate “Es regnet” as “It is raining”, we must attribute a number of beliefs concerning the nature of rain to the speaker: that rain falls from clouds, that rain wets the ground, that rain is composed of water, etc. Davidson’s

justification for his principle of charity is closely related to a view we have attributed to Herder above, in our discussion of national character: one cannot altogether separate questions of meaning from those of belief. Coming to learn the meaning of a word necessarily involves coming to learn a set of facts about the object the word refers to. Davidson writes of the principle of charity:

This method is intended to solve the problem of the interdependence of belief and meaning by holding belief constant as far as possible while solving for meaning. This is accomplished by assigning truth conditions to alien sentences that make native speakers right when plausibly possible, according, of course, to our own view of what is right. What justifies the procedure is the fact that disagreement and agreement alike are intelligible only against a background of massive agreement. (“Radical Interpretation” 137)

The procedure of mapping the sentences we wish to translate onto those in our language can only function by presupposing agreement both on obvious matters of fact (such as the fact that it is raining) but also on the relevant background. We may eventually come to places where we disagree with the judgments of speakers of a language. For instance, we may hold that it is unjust to kill for revenge, while the tribe we have been studying believes that it is just. We can only understand the word we are translating as “just” to mean “just”, however, if we share a sizable portion of our judgments concerning just and unjust acts.

There is one further feature of Davidson’s conception of interpretation that will be useful in considering its relationship to Herder’s notion of *Einfühlung*: the indeterminacy of translation. Davidson admits that it is unlikely that the evidence will be able to determine a unique theory of translation from one given language to another. Davidson shares Quine’s belief that there will be multiple ways of interpreting a given sentence in a language consistent with all of the linguistic behavior of the community under study. I will focus on the indeterminacy of reference in this paper—the view that there is no method of determining a unique translation of sub-sentential units of reference. In *Word and Object*, Quine hypothesizes that an utterance by a native under study of “Gavagai”, prompted by their noticing a rabbit, may be initially consistent with a number of

translations: “Lo, a rabbit”, “Let’s go hunting”, or, if we think that the tribe believes that rabbits are an omen of a coming storm, “There will be a storm tonight.”²⁹ As we continue to observe their behavior, we can rule some of these out. We notice that they utter “Gavagai” with no clear intention to hunt, and they are unmoved by the lack of a storm. However, there are other ways of translating “Gavagai” that are trickier to rule out. Quine gives as examples “Lo, a momentary rabbit-stage” and “Lo, an undetached rabbit part.” The difficulty with ruling out “momentary rabbit-stage” as an alternative translation to “rabbit” comes in fact that we must also translate our verbs together with the noun phrase. Suppose we ask a member of the tribe a question we take to mean “Is this the same rabbit as before?” in their language, and they assent. We have not ruled out “momentary rabbit-stage” as a translation for “gavagai” because we may also translate our question as “Is this momentary rabbit-stage a continuation of the rabbit-stage from before?” The way we choose to translate the verbs can correct for the way we choose to translate the nouns, making it impossible to settle the question of which meaning “gavagai” has between these contenders. Davidson, following Quine to some degree, thus comes to hold that meaning is whatever is held constant between each legitimate contender for translation. He writes of the matter:

The extent of indeterminacy is determined by the number of ways a speaker can be interpreted consistent with the available evidence. Conversely, what a speaker means is what is invariant in all correct ways of interpreting him. Here I have always thought it useful to make use of an analogy with measurement. In assigning numbers to keep track of the lengths or weights of objects, we take for granted that there are infinitely many sets of numbers that will do the job. What we want to know is what is invariant (the “facts of the matter”) (“Reply to Quine” 81)

There is something held constant between saying something is “one hundred centimeters long” and saying that it is “one meter long”, which Davidson is calling “the facts of the matter”. There is a certain property we are attributing to the object which has identical consequences regardless of unit of

²⁹ See Quine (1960) Ch. 2 for a more complete understanding of Quine’s conception of radical translation.

measurement. From either statement we can infer that the object has the same length as a meter stick, or that it is one-fiftieth of the length of an Olympic swimming pool. Similarly, whether we take “gavagai” to refer to a rabbit or a persisting temporal stage of a rabbit, we can infer the same consequences in our own language from the statement that one is nearby. We can infer that there is a mammal nearby, or that a four-legged animal is nearby. Whether these judgments in our object language are translated as “There is a persisting momentary mammal-stage nearby” or “There is a mammal nearby” is besides the point. Meaning, on this view, is whatever is held constant between all equivalent legitimate translations. This is to say that there is a sense in which nothing is lost in translation, at least where meaning is concerned. Rather than thinking of all the possible translations of “gavagai”, with their identical circumstances and consequences of application, as viable alternatives we cannot ultimately decide between, we should think of them as equivalent.

Davidson’s conception of interpretation therefore has implications for his theory of meaning; the indeterminacy of translation is alleviated by the thought that what is meant is whatever is held constant between all correct interpretations. The process of interpretation functions by mapping sentences from the object language onto those in our language, and therefore stating the truth conditions of these sentences in our own language. It requires, on Davidson’s view, the basic assumption that we are in agreement with the subject of interpretation concerning the vast majority of our beliefs, so that we may interpret their sentences as expressing beliefs we hold it to be reasonable for them to be expressing in the given circumstances.

What differentiates Davidson’s theory of interpretation from Quine’s theory of translation is that what stands on the right-hand side of the T-schema, on Davidson’s view, is not simply a mentioned sentence of the metalanguage, which translates the mentioned sentence from the left-hand side of the schema, but rather a used statement in the metalanguage which specifies the truth-conditions of the mentioned sentence. This used statement specifies the meaning of the mentioned

sentence insofar as its truth-conditions mirror that of the mentioned sentence; it does not simply translate the sentence in the object language into a mentioned sentence in the metalanguage. This statement need not be a single sentence, and may be highly complex, depending on what is called for by the interpreter.

6.2 Einfühlung as Radical Interpretation

Having a theory of interpretation or translation for a given language, on Davidson's view, involves having a procedure for mapping mentioned sentences from the language to be interpreted onto used sentences in the language of interpretation. It is a central feature of this view that we must borrow from our understanding of our own language, and even our own beliefs, in order to make the language to be interpreted intelligible. Davidson makes the rationalization behind this requirement clear in "Radical Interpretation":

The methodological advice to interpret in a way that optimizes agreement should not be conceived as resting on a charitable assumption about human intelligence that might turn out to be false. If we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behavior of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything. (137)

It is only insofar as we can understand a speaker as having beliefs like ours that we can count their behavior as rational. When we receive dissent to our proposed translation of "It is raining", while we stand in the rain, we must conclude that our translation is seriously flawed. If we systematically fail to correlate their sentences with sentences in our own language, we cannot represent their behavior as rational, nor can we render it intelligible. This is not the result of a bias towards our own beliefs, but rather the fact that we have no conception of rational behavior aside from our own and that which can be translated into our own. If we cannot take our interlocutors to believe the sentence "It is

raining” to be true when they are standing in the rain, the project of interpreting their sentences is hopeless.

I would like to represent *Einfühlung* as a process involving a variety of mapping similar to Davidson’s, with the exception that the objects mapped are not sentences, or at least not sentences alone, but rather values and meanings. I should like to say, for instance, that a theory of aesthetics for ancient Egyptian art would consist in a procedure for mapping our own aesthetic values onto those held by the ancient Egyptians. We borrow from our own understanding of the beautiful as well as our understanding of relevant features of Ancient Egyptian culture in order to evaluate ancient Egyptian art from the perspective of the ancient Egyptian. Likewise, a theory of ethics for the ancient Greeks would involve a procedure for mapping our own values onto theirs, such that we can evaluate particular ancient Greek acts as either ethical or unethical from their perspective. Davidson’s principle of charity can be seen as amounting to the thought that we can only interpret another by asking ourselves what we would believe in the circumstances of the other. We borrow not only our linguistic structure but also our own thoughts on what it would be reasonable for the interpreted subject to believe in the given circumstances. Likewise, in forming the analogy between ourselves and the other involved in *Einfühlung*, we ask ourselves how it would be reasonable to feel about a given act or object if we were in their circumstances, if we were part of their linguistic community. We use this analogy to map our own meanings and values onto those of the culture under study.

Suppose we would like to evaluate the truth of a Greek sentence we would translate as “Aristotle was brought up well”, from the perspective of the ancient Greeks. We begin by studying Ancient Greek texts to get a better sense of how the term we would translate as “brought up well” was used. This begins to provide us not only with criteria for determining whether or not the sentence is true, but also methods for determining which kinds of information will be relevant to determining the truth of the sentence. We see that there are particular forms of training involved in one’s counting

as “well brought up”, and that Aristotle underwent such training. But we also must evaluate the sense of aesthetics and ethics instilled into Aristotle by this training in order to evaluate the truth of the sentence, and we must see if it corresponds with what we take to be the relevant ancient Greek sense of aesthetics and ethics. This is where we will need to perform the act of *Einfühlung*, of feeling our way into the ancient Greek sensibility. Doing so will involve borrowing from our own senses of aesthetics and ethics and molding them to correspond to the ancient Greek sensibility. We compare our sense of virtue with the sense of virtue we gather from the ancient Greek texts. Developing an understanding of the concept of “being well brought up”, as it was used by the ancient Greeks, necessitates an understanding of its coordinate concepts, such as virtue. We may notice a number of places of agreement, as well as some of disagreement. In performing *Einfühlung*, we must take notice of the places of disagreement and adapt our perception of the matter. We must not only note that certain acts we judge to be virtuous would not be considered virtuous by the Greeks, but ask ourselves questions such as “If I were to judge these acts to be unvirtuous, what else would I regard as unvirtuous? Why would I regard these acts as unvirtuous?” Through this process we can begin to adapt our own sense of virtue into the Greek sense of virtue, and hopefully become capable of applying the term with the same meaning they did. Herder writes that we must take in “whole living painting of mode of life, habits, needs, peculiarities of land and climate”, or “*sympathize* with the nation” in order to interpret a word or action from the perspective of a given linguistic community (“This, Too, a Philosophy of History” 292). This is because we must understand the context in which a concept was used in order to be able to apply it ourselves. Once we take in this background and begin to grasp the ancient Greek conception of virtue, we can begin to make judgments which employ the concept from their perspective. We can use this new perspective to assess whether or not Aristotle was well-brought up.

To be clear, *Einfühlung* is seen by Herder to be essential for translation and interpretation in general, not just translations involving normative characterizations of behavior. One reason for this is that Herder believes that different cultures have different ways of perceiving the world, and these modes of perception are embedded in and expressed in their languages. In an example from the preceding chapter, we discussed Herder's thought that the plurality of words for different kinds of swords in Arabic betrays the distinct significances and purposes each kind of sword bore in their culture. Coming to understand these terms will require sympathizing with their culture and coming to see these items from their perspective, seeing the swords as forged in some particular way for some specific purpose. Without "feeling our way" into their way of seeing the world, the distinctions between the swords will be lost on us.

However, there is a deeper reason that *Einfühlung* is necessary for interpretation, on Herder's view: judgments concerning the meaning of a particular term describe a normative state which applies to a particular linguistic community. The fact that "Snow is white" is true in English if and only if snow is white" describes a normative state. Coming to believe the truth of this sentence involves ascribing adherence to a rule to all English speakers; it involves deciding whether or not, and under which circumstances, an English speaker is correct in saying, "Snow is white." As English speakers we know the truth of this sentence by intuition, through our linguistic training, but recognizing the truth of "Schnee ist weiß" is true in German if and only if snow is white" involves the ascription of a rule to be obeyed to speakers of German – that they should only utter the sentence if snow is white. Herder's thought is that we can only do this by borrowing from our understanding of our own language. We adapt our understanding of our own linguistic rules to the behavior of the other and modify them until the new rules conform to their behavior. This is, on Herder's view, how we can move from generalized observations of the form " $(x)(t)$ (if x belongs to the German speech community then x holds true 'Es regnet' at t if and only if it is raining near x at t)" to the normatively

loaded T-sentence “‘Es regnet’ is true-in-German when spoken by x at time t if and only if it is raining near x at t .” By forming an analogy between our own linguistic behavior and the behavior of the other we infer to the rule that governs their linguistic behavior.

Although *Einfühlung* is not specific to interpretation of normative characterizations of behavior, it has a particular role in this capacity. In coming to learn our first language, we gain the capacity to provide normatively thick assessments of character from the perspective of our culture. The instruction we undergo in coming to speak this language involves coming to see others as bearers of normative statuses, coming to see our own actions as well as those of others as subject to normative evaluation. However, Herder’s pluralism leads him to believe alternate systems of value obtain in different linguistic communities, which are beyond our powers to perceive directly. The only access we can have to these systems of values, on Herder’s view, is by analogizing from our values to those of the linguistic community under study. *Einfühlung* is therefore fundamental to an empirical theory of value for a given community. It is what transforms empirical studies of behavior into a study of the ethics of a given community.

One might object here that Herder is overcomplicating matters. In undergoing our linguistic training, we gain the capacity to perceive ourselves and others as subject to rules, including the rules which govern our own linguistic behavior. Some of these rules will apply to us, and some not. For instance, we might think that firemen are under a special obligation to find and put out fires that does not apply to us, but there is no special challenge in understanding that the rule applies to them. Recognizing human beings from other cultures as subject to rules can therefore be understood as an extension of our natural capacity to recognize rules and values, even when they do not apply to or are not valued by ourselves. To a certain extent, Herder can agree with this objection and hold that his theory of *Einfühlung* is nothing more than an explication of this capacity to recognize rules. This same act of *Einfühlung* is deployed in cases like that of the fireman, only in a much more straightforward

way. Because we are part of the same linguistic community as the fireman and inhabit roles with similar sorts of commitments (e.g. the commitments of a professor of philosophy to grade papers within a certain time frame, or to write letters of recommendation), we only need to adapt our understanding so far to inhabit the role of the fireman. The further away we get from our own role the more work we will have to do in transforming our values and meanings in interpreting the other. Having been raised in the Episcopal church, it will be easier for me to understand the commitments of an Episcopal priest than a Catholic priest, but both will require less work than coming to understand the system of values held by a Buddhist monk. Herder provides a method of understanding these degrees of difficulty in terms of how much we will have to transform our current systems of values into those of the other. And this is to say that Herder cannot embrace the standpoint of the objection wholeheartedly insofar as the objection undercuts the thought that significant labor must be expended in order to come to an understanding of the rules obeyed by someone with a vastly different background from our own. Herder's theory of *Einfühlung* stems from his pluralistic stance towards values, from his thought that distinct legitimate systems of values, which may and do diverge drastically, exist.

I would like now to return to Davidson's conception of radical interpretation, as a number of connections between this theory and Herder's conception of *Einfühlung* are instructive. Davidson's thought that interpretation can only be successful if we presuppose a vast background of beliefs which we share with the subject of interpretation carries over to the conception of *Einfühlung* as radical interpretation. It is only because we can recognize our conception of virtue in the ancient Greek conception of virtue that we are capable of assessing actions from their perspective. Where we do diverge, even when the divergences are serious – for instance, on Herder's view, on the assimilation of aesthetics and ethics into the conception of being well brought up referred to by “*kaloï k'agathoi*” – we come to an understanding by breaking down the concept until we can recognize the components as resembling our own. Although Davidson stresses that the principle of charity is a metaphysical

constraint on the nature of interpretation rather than a mere methodological assumption which eases the process of translation, he provides a justification for it which fits well with Herder's thought on the matter. He writes:

In my view, what makes communication possible is the fact that many of the same objects, events, and aspects of the world are salient for all humankind, frequently eliciting observably similar responses. As Quine now puts it, evolution has geared us to the same external features of the world, though our internal wiring may differ widely. ("Reply to Quine" 82)

Interpretation is possible because we have developed to share a perspective on the world, or at least key aspects of a perspective on the world, with our potential interlocutors. This is due in large part to our shared human nature: the fact that we share not only our bodies, but also a history. Herder similarly emphasizes that our shared human nature is partly responsible for the resemblances our concepts have to those belonging to other linguistic communities and those present in other phases of history. In the *Outlines*, he represents humanity as one and the same all over, attributing differences in values and modes of life to the human capacity to adapt to different natural environments and historical circumstances. Herder's enduring interest in our shared history is due in no small part to his thought that this history provides a shared foundation for our concepts. It is this shared history that allows us to recognize the Roman sense of justice, for instance, as a conception of justice.

Above I glossed Davidson's response to the problem of indeterminacy of translation as having the consequence that, so long as our translation is consistent with all our observed linguistic data, nothing (or at least nothing connected with meaning) is lost in translation. By borrowing from this thought, we can overcome the objection raised earlier that *Einfühlung* can never take us further than mere guesswork. There is a legitimate question of how useful an act of imagination can be in coming to an understanding of the matters of fact concerning the systems of values and beliefs held by those in the distant past. We do not think that a child pretending to be a dinosaur can grant us any deep insight into the nature of dinosaurs, so why should a philosopher pretending to be an ancient Egyptian

grant us any knowledge concerning the ethics of the ancient Egyptians? There is, of course, a salient difference between the child and the philosopher: the philosopher has read the available data concerning the linguistic behavior of the ancient Egyptians, as well as their history. She understands the needs of the civilization and has a story concerning how they came to have the values they have and how those values evolved into our own over time, by means of the Greeks and the Romans and so on. Even so, there is a question concerning whether or not the value expressed by “*kaloï k’agathoi*” in the philosopher’s analysis can ever be the *same* as the one expressed by the ancient Greek phrase. By borrowing from Davidson, we can provide a response to this concern on Herder’s behalf. Insofar as our translation captures the relevant behavior and use of language, there is no gap between our use of the concept and the ancient one. Whatever is held constant in all meaningful uses of the word is the meaning of the concept; if we can successfully inhabit the perspective of the ancient Greeks and map our concepts onto theirs such that our use agrees with theirs, we are employing the same concept.

At the same time, Davidson’s thought might be seen as posing a potential problem for Herder’s conception of national character. The very possibility of radical interpretation implies, on Davidson’s view, a serious challenge for a dualism between scheme and content. We have relied on the distinction between scheme and content even in our interpretation of *Einfühlung* as a form of radical interpretation. The success of *Einfühlung*, on the reading we have developed, depends on the ability of the interpreter to adapt her conceptual scheme – her conception of ethics and aesthetics, for instance – and mold it into the shape of the subject of interpretation. I will consider Davidson’s attack on the distinction between scheme and content, as well as Charles Taylor’s response, in what follows.

6.3 On Scheme and Content

The dualism between scheme and content consists in a distinction between our conceptual scheme, or the conceptual framework by which we understand the world, and the objects in the world which we come to understand by way of that framework. In a certain sense, Herder also denies such a distinction, but only insofar as he sees our conceptual framework as shaping the world as we experience it. The world of the ancient Greeks included the property of being “kaloi k’agathoi”, which our world lacks, for instance. This is not a matter of simply using different words, to Herder, but of having a world populated by distinct properties and kinds of objects. However, Davidson means something quite different in denying the distinction between scheme and content. Davidson means to deny that there could be distinct, competing conceptual schemes at all, a claim which Herder clearly intends to defend. The direct target of Davidson’s critique are views such as Kuhn’s conceptions of paradigms, according to which distinct paradigms or conceptual schemes are unintelligible in the terms of other paradigms or schemes. On Kuhn’s view in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the transformations a theory undergoes in a revolution are such that the new theory cannot be understood in the terms of the pre-revolutionary language. They are, to borrow Kuhn’s phrase, “incommensurable”; there is no shared basis on which to make a direct comparison of the old theory and the new. For instance, our current theory of combustion cannot be explained in the same vocabulary as the phlogiston theory, as our theory requires terms such as “oxidation states” which have no corresponding terms in the atomic theory in the time of the phlogiston, while on the other hand our theory lacks an ontology containing phlogiston, the substance which was allegedly released from substances when they burned. Paradigm shifts are not to be understood in terms of gradual, evidence-based changes in the laws which compose the theory but rather in terms of radical revolutions which completely overhaul the conceptual framework of a theory. The result is that the

new theory is not quite about the same thing as the old theory; it describes new objects which obey laws that are inconsistent with the old laws, and it rids itself of the old ontology. These shifts, in some ways, resemble the transformations in values Herder describes, for instance, in the transition from the classical Greek era to the Roman era. A new way of seeing the world arises, with its own particular challenges and questions and methods of answering these questions.

Davidson sees the possibility of radical interpretation to undercut the distinction between scheme and content. While Kuhn claims that the old theory is made unintelligible in terms of the new, he nonetheless seems capable of describing the old theory quite coherently; Davidson quips, “Kuhn is brilliant at saying what things were like before the revolution using—what else?²—our post-revolutionary idiom” (“On the Very Idea” 184). Davidson begins by transforming the question of identity of conceptual schemes into a question of translatability:

We may accept the doctrine that associates having a language with having a conceptual scheme. The relation may be supposed to be this: where conceptual schemes differ, so do languages. But speakers of different languages may share a conceptual scheme provided there is a way of translating one language into the other. Studying the criteria of translation is therefore a way of focusing on criteria of identity for conceptual schemes. (“On the Very Idea” 184)

Although Pig Latin contains a different vocabulary than English, there is no reason to believe that Pig Latin expresses a different conceptual scheme than English. We have a clear one-to-one correspondence which allows us to identify an English sentence with identical meaning to the Pig Latin sentence. Similarly, there is no reason to believe that German speakers inhabit a different world or employ a different conceptual scheme than English speakers. We are capable of transforming their sentences into English sentences without significant loss of meaning. Insofar as we are capable of mapping our sentences onto sentences of another language there should be no question of distinct ways of seeing the world; there is one way of seeing the world, expressed in different vocabularies. Davidson therefore continues to write, “The failure of intertranslatability is a necessary condition for difference of conceptual schemes” (“On the Very Idea” 190). Seemingly, Kuhn would agree with

Davidson's assessment of the situation. It is of the nature of paradigms that one is not intelligible in the terms of the other, and therefore that there is no way of, for instance, translating the scientific laws of a given paradigm into the one that preceded it in a way that preserves the full content of these laws. It is not clear, however, that Herder would have to agree with this assessment, and this is a point we will return to later.

The difficulty advocates of conceptual schemes now face, on Davidson's view, is that, on his conception of interpretation, the requisite failure of translatability is incoherent. As we saw above, on Davidson's conception of interpretation, it is only insofar as we can recognize the behavior of the other as like our own that we can recognize them as engaging in rational activity. We must attribute to the subject of interpretation beliefs and desires like our own, and therefore we must attribute to them an ontology like our own, in order to begin the process of radical interpretation. The knowledge of which sentences a speaker takes to be true only counts as evidence in favor of a particular interpretation of these sentences in the context of an assumption concerning their beliefs and the possible objects which may inhabit these sentences. Returning to Kuhn's paradigms, we may say that we can only recognize the new theory as a legitimate heir to our science insofar as we can take its objects and laws to resemble those in the old theory. There will of course be many points on which the old theory disagrees with the new, but these disagreements can only take place in the context of a greater agreement. Davidson explains:

A language may contain simple predicates whose extensions are matched by no simple predicates, or even by any predicates at all, in some other language. What enables us to make this point in particular cases is an ontology common to the two languages, with concepts that individuate the same objects. We can be clear about breakdowns in translation when they are local enough, for a background of generally successful translation provides what is needed to make the failures intelligible. ("On the Very Idea" 192)

Minor breakdowns of translation pose no serious challenge, as we can deploy more complex phrases to capture the intricacies of the divergences between the languages. A language, for instance, which

only had a single term for all cars, lacking distinctions between SUVs, trucks, convertibles, and sports cars, would not pose a serious challenge to translation into English. When translating into English, one could translate their term using our “car”, and when translating from English one could supply descriptions to arrive at a more specific description of the object (e.g. when translating our “convertible” into their language, one could translate the more complex “car with a removable top” instead). We take what is common as basic and build up to what is not shared.

Davidson leaves philosophical frameworks involving conceptual schemes with a dilemma: either we can translate the language of another culture or of another scientific theory into our own, in which case there will be no radically differing conceptual scheme, or we cannot, in which case we cannot regard the behavior of the culture or the scientists developing the new theory as engaging in rational, linguistic behavior. In either case, we have no evidence for the existence of competing conceptual schemes.

We will now return to Herder, to see where Davidson’s dilemma leaves Herder’s conception of national character. In the preceding chapter, I argued that national character consists in a vocabulary, along with its ontology, as well as a set of basic shared beliefs, and that it is a social and historical entity. The vocabulary put to work by a linguistic community, on Herder’s view, expresses a stance on the world insofar as it individuates the objects of the world according to the needs and values of that particular community at a particular time. National character also includes the values shared by this community. Herder’s conception of national character therefore appears to express a version of Davidson’s dualism between scheme and content not unlike Kuhn’s; the uniqueness of the ontologies and systems of value expressed by different linguistic communities can be understood as evidence that distinct linguistic communities bear different conceptual schemes.

Although our focus on Herder’s use of national character has been on how it necessitates *Einfühlung* as a methodology for the empirical study of value, Herder, particularly in “This, Too, a

Philosophy of History” does express an interest in something like paradigm shifts occurring in national characters when he discusses the transition to the values of a rising civilization from those which preceded it. One such shift is described as occurring in the establishment of ancient Greece as they absorbed elements of the cultures which surrounded them. In speaking of the elements of art the Greeks borrowed from the Egyptians, he writes, “Egyptian art had its heavy trade apron taken away, and hence the excessively precise *mechanical aspect* and *artist’s strictness*, for which the Greeks did not strive, were lost as well; the colossus diminished to a *statue*, the *giant temple* into a *stage*, Egyptian *order* and *security* slackened itself in the multiplicity of Greece” (288). As the elements of Egyptian culture were taken up by the Greeks, they were also transformed so as to suit the Greeks, who had their own history, culture, and needs. Borrowed elements from Egyptian aesthetics take on new meanings as they become embedded in a new culture with its own sense of aesthetics and own artistic practices. He writes, “That Greece *received seeds of culture, language, arts, and sciences from somewhere else* is, it seems to me, undeniable... But that the Greeks *as good as did not* receive all this, that they *equipped* it with a quite *new nature*... becomes just as certain from a little continuation of these ideas” (288-289). Although the Greeks received elements of their values from the Egyptians and Phoenicians, these values were transformed when they were taken up into the Greek manner of life. Underlying this picture of the transformation of values as they are taken up by the Greek culture is Herder’s holism; the elements of a culture take on new meanings as they become embedded in a new framework. The assimilation of values necessarily involves a transformation to accommodate their new surroundings.

A question remains concerning how much these shifts resemble Kuhn’s paradigm shifts: is the Egyptian way of life incommensurable with the Greek one? Will it be impossible to translate the vocabulary of the Egyptian culture to the Greek? There is a certain sense in which the answer must be no, as the Greeks were capable of understanding the Egyptians, even as their own systems of values and way of life diverged from the Egyptians’. What we are in need of, then, is a way of making sense

of the divergences between the Greek and Egyptian cultures that does not rely on the incommensurability or untranslatability of the elements of these cultures. If we can make sense of the difference between the characters of ancient Greece and ancient Egypt in a way that does not rely on a failure of translatability, Herder's conception of national character may be able to evade Davidson's attacks.

In an essay directed at Richard Rorty, who joins Davidson in leaving behind the distinction between scheme and content, Charles Taylor provides a useful defense of the use of conceptual schemes in philosophy. Taylor's defense consists in an attack on Davidson's use of the principle of charity to homogenize cultures. A method of translation from one scheme to another does not betray a homogeneity of conceptual schemes, as the difference between conceptual schemes can be understood as consisting in the high degree of complexity of the translation manual. Taylor writes:

The standard danger here is ethnocentrism, misunderstanding the other because he or she is interpreted as operating with the same classifications as we are. The differences in behavior are often simply coded as bad versus good. For the more unsophisticated conquistadors, the Aztecs had to be seen as worshipping the devil. It's simple, compadres, you either worship God or the devil. Ripping out hearts, is that worshipping God? It follows... ("Rorty and Philosophy" 174)

By attributing to the other a scheme which too closely resembles our own, we become incapable of understanding or respecting the radical differences which exist between our own culture and theirs. Interpretation should not take the form of an assimilation. While we may need to attribute shared beliefs to get radical interpretation going, we must also make room for different ways of seeing things, different methods of understanding the world and of perceiving the world. Taylor continues:

What is needed is not the Davidsonian "principle of charity," which means "make the best sense of them in what we understand as sense," but rather coming to understand that there is a very different way of understanding human life, the cosmos, the holy, and so on. Somewhere along the line, you need some place in your ontology for something like "the Aztec way of seeing things" in contrast to "our way of seeing things"; in short, something like the scheme-content distinction. ("Rorty and Philosophy" 174)

It may be possible to generate a robust enough translation manual which transforms our way of seeing the world into the language of the Aztecs, or to translate their way of seeing the world into ours, but it would be a lengthy, complex work. Creating an understanding of a particular religious practice will involve a deep understanding of their religion and morality from their perspective, understanding the underlying justifications for this practice and its function. In short, it will require feeling our way into their world. The claim that the possible existence of a manual which may bring an English speaker to a potential understanding of the world of the Aztecs undermines the existence of differing conceptual schemes misses the point. This book would generate an understanding of their conceptual scheme, not refute its existence. If Herder is correct, an English speaker would use this manual to find the relevant points of continuity between our culture and theirs in order to form analogies between our behavior and theirs and come to an understanding of the rules which govern their behavior and the values which guide it. The fact that we can make other cultures intelligible in our own vocabulary is relatively uncontroversial. The question is what making these cultures intelligible consists in, and how we can achieve it.

This conception of a translation manual, in some ways, resembles Wittgenstein's conception of rule-following as much as it does Davidson's translation manuals. Wittgenstein's writing on rule-following demonstrates that there is no special theoretical worry concerning our ability to catch on to implicit normative practices, or to "follow the same rule" as another, but Wittgenstein does not conceive of this ability as relying, explicitly or implicitly, on a recursive procedure for generating sentences or behaviors. What is important is that we can demonstrate in our behavior, and in particular our linguistic behavior, that we can carry on in the same way as those who demonstrate the application of the rule. The information that we need to be able to carry on, on Herder's view, may include historical, behavioral, and sociological as well as linguistic. It will be whatever we need to conceive of ourselves as drawing the same conclusions as a particular people did in their circumstances.

At the same time, there is nothing in Davidson's conception of interpretation that rules out the possibility of quite complex interpretations, nor does the theory in itself require that what stands on the right-hand side of the T-schema be a single sentence. Above, I quoted Davidson as describing the aptness with which Kuhn characterizes the pre-revolutionary way of looking at the world within the post-revolutionary vocabulary. A sentence written in a book by Newton including the term "mass", when interpreted by a physicist working after Einstein, may require a rather complex series of caveats, and will therefore require much more than the simple sentence in the original text. If the physicist simply keeps the term "mass" in a potential interpretation without such restrictions, the sentence being used as an interpretation will have different truth-conditions from the sentence being interpreted, and thus fail as a legitimate interpretation. All of this is consistent with Davidson's conception of radical interpretation. There may, however, be a question concerning how to specify, particularly in cases like Taylor's above, a recursive method of generating the truth-conditions for sentences involving complex concepts that don't correspond neatly to our own. In extreme cases, we may have to adopt terms from the object language into our metalanguage in order to provide reasonable interpretations, and this may occur by means of a process like *Einfühlung*. It may well be the case that something that can be understood in terms of a recursive method of generating truth-conditions for sentences under interpretation can be arrived at by means of "feeling oneself into" the world of another. Whether this remains a useful way of understanding what is going on in coming to understand the words and the worlds of others once we come to see the high degree of complexity that may be involved in arriving at a translation manual, particularly when we compare it to a Wittgensteinian picture of coming to understand and follow a rule, which remains closer in spirit to Herder's recommendation, is an open question. The utility of Davidson's understanding of interpretation as a form of mapping for understanding Herder's conception of *Einfühlung* does not hinge on an answer to this question.

If Davidson envisions a process like the one above as consistent with his theory of radical interpretation, then the substance of Taylor's objection amounts to the point that, even if radical differences in conceptual scheme amount to nothing more than highly complex translation manuals, the notion of a conceptual scheme still deserves a place in our philosophical discourse. Even if Davidson has a method of understanding the very different ways of looking at the world by means of highly complex translation manuals via his conception of radical interpretation, the notion of a conceptual scheme can remain of value in coming to understand the degree of complexity involved in arriving at a translation or interpretation manual. When words we wish to interpret fail to map straightforwardly onto words in our language, we may wish to invoke the notion of differing conceptual schemes in accounting for the different ways of looking at the world that are involved in the use of these different words. Herder's analysis of the ancient Greek term "kaloi k'agathoi", for instance, as a term which unites aesthetic and ethical values under a single term, provides a useful example of a concept which has no single correlate in English. This may at a glance appear unproblematic for Davidson's view, for the same reason the car example above was unproblematic. We can decompose the concepts into its parts and understand it as a complex involving elements of both our aesthetic and our ethical categories, leaving some aspects of these categories behind. The problem, however, is not that a distinction we have is being missed by the Greeks, but that their entire conceptions of the ethical and the aesthetical are united and intertwined in the concept, which not only transforms the concept of the "kaloi k'agathoi" into something quite unlike what we have, but also makes their conceptions of the ethical and the aesthetic unlike our own. Even if Davidson's interpretations are capable of reproducing this new concept in translation, we may have use for the notion of a conceptual scheme in coming to term with the differences in cultures which this complex interpretation displays.

Herder can maintain his conception of national character against Davidson's attack on the supposed dualism between scheme and content by denying Davidson's thought that untranslatability is necessary for two conceptual schemes or national characters to maintain their distinctness. What is required for doing so is a more robust conception of interpretation, according to which the language and values of a different culture can be understood without being assimilated to our own. This is, of course, the role *Einfühlung* plays in Herder's philosophical system. Like Davidson's conception of radical interpretation, *Einfühlung* consists in a form of mapping, but rather than straightforwardly mapping mentioned sentences onto used sentences, Herder's anthropologist maps values and meanings by transforming her own values and meanings into those which fit the practices, behavior, and circumstances of the subject of interpretation. A manual of translation, as Herder envisions it, will not consist in T-schema, but in the relevant historical, behavioral, and contextual information to make such a mapping possible.

6.4 *Einfühlung* as a Methodology

Einfühlung thus takes advantage of relevant similarities between our rule-governed behavior and the behavior of the subject of interpretation in order to form an analogy between ours and theirs, which allows us to regard the behavior we wish to interpret as genuinely rule-governed. We map our rule-governed behavior onto their behavior to discern the rules and values underlying their behavior, adapting these rules and values as we must to pay heed to the divergences between our own behavior and theirs. In doing so, *Einfühlung* grants us the ability to provide relevant normative characterizations of the behavior on the basis of empirical observation. Empirical observation concerning the practices, history, and environment of a given linguistic community provides us a basis with which to understand

the purposes of their behavior and make the relevant analogies with which to map our discursive practices onto theirs. It would be unfair to assess the behavior of the Aztecs, for instance, as just or unjust while employing our own conception of justice alone. The restrictions Herder places on his pluralism mean that we may be able to level criticism on their behavior on the basis that it is inconsistent with certain fundamental human values, but we are still in need of a richer method for criticizing or evaluating behavior locally, which *Einfühlung* provides; by feeling our way into their culture we can evaluate their actions from their own perspective.

Above, in 4.2, I argued that Herder's method of investigation contains a distinction which roughly mirrors that made by Bernard Williams between normatively thin concepts, which contain only normative content, such as "the good", and normatively thick concepts, which contain a mixture of empirical and normative content, such as "courage." To call someone courageous is not simply to praise them, but also to attribute a flat property to them, such as the tendency to perform actions in situations that provoke fear, despite this fear, and to praise them for it. Herder's holism leads him to believe that we can come to understand thin concepts by investigating the thick concepts with which they are correlated. Herder's method of *Einfühlung* complements this mode of investigation; thick concepts provide us with the empirical content we need to be able to contrast our own system of values with those of the subject of interpretation and begin to adjust our own values as we must in coming to understand theirs. Suppose, for example, we wish to study the values of a particularly warlike historical people. We cannot begin with an interpretation of their thin concepts, as their practices are so different from our own that translating their word of praise with our "good" fails to provide any serious insight into their mode of thought. Instead, we find thick words of praise for particular actions – actions, for instance, which praise cold-hearted and brutal actions precisely for being cold-hearted or brutal. Perhaps, by studying the historical climate in which they developed and the desperate scarcity of resources in which they lived we come to see the need for particularly fierce

acts of war in order to secure the preservation of their families and their people. We come to inhabit the perspective by which we can see these actions as worthy of praise, perhaps by adapting our understandings of patriotism, of dedication to one's family, and of courage to conform to the behavior and practices we have record of. This is not to say that we come to condone their actions, nor that we come to see them as expressing the same values that we have, only put to different tests in different circumstances, but rather that we become capable of recognizing their concepts as moral concepts of a kind with our own by mapping ours onto theirs and making the relevant adjustments. In doing so we may begin to reach towards an understanding of their normatively thin concepts, filling in the content of these concepts by developing a better understanding of the thick ones which provide this content.

Einfühlung, as I have said above, transforms empirical observation concerning the behavior, history, climate, and practices of a culture into a study of their values and ethics, as well as their particular forms of reasoning. It can therefore serve as the basis for what Kant took to be impossible: an empirical study of reason as well as the theory of values. Herder's material conception of reason, as well as his understanding of reason as an aspect of language use, lead him to think of epistemology as a study of reason which begins from the study of everyday language in its historical context. His understanding of aesthetics and ethics as historical and cultural artifacts lead him to believe that these disciplines must be performed, to a large extent, empirically. The questions to be investigated in Herder's anthropological program concerning aesthetics and ethics are how we arrived at the particular aesthetics and ethics we have today and how the thick concepts which compose the relevant thin concepts of our ethical and aesthetic understandings contribute to these thin concepts. Ethnographic studies can also assist here in granting insight into the composition of not only their ethical concepts, but of our own.

Inspired by the works of Hume, Platner's philosophical anthropology aimed to answer traditional philosophical questions in the terms of a scientific, empirical methodology. Kant demonstrated that the anatomical and scientific data drawn into early anthropology could not draw conclusions concerning rationality, ethics, or aesthetics, for the reason that these disciplines contain normative content, and the empirical data drawn into anthropology could not be transformed into the normatively rich vocabulary required to characterize them. Hamann provided Herder with a conception of reason as an abstraction from the use of language, which led Herder to believe that reason could be studied empirically by means of a study of the use of language, and he also showed Herder that such a study must regard the status of language-speaker as a normative status. Hamann's picture of the roles of tradition and instruction in the genesis of values helped Herder come to an understanding of the generation of normativity in a manner consistent with naturalism, and he developed this foundation into his conception of national character, coming to what we, following Huw Price, have called a "subject naturalism" concerning ethics and the theory of values more generally. What Herder required thereafter was an empirical method of studying normative phenomena, a way of gleaning the values and meanings present in the languages and practices of others that was responsive to empirical investigation. By means of *Einfühlung*, the anthropologist draws from empirical research concerning behavior, linguistic and otherwise, and her own understanding of the norms and values which govern her behavior, to map those norms onto the norms which govern the behavior of the subject of investigation.

Contemporary philosophers, like those in Herder's time, continue to debate the role empirical data has to play in philosophical discussions concerning epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics, and insofar as Herder provides a novel response to this question, his work remains worthy of further consideration.

7.0 In Herder's Wake

Herder's thought stands in the history of philosophy as a breaking point, a point of genesis for fields such as anthropology but also hermeneutics which thereafter branched off from philosophy. The former, particularly in the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt and those inspired by him, drew from his thought that an empirical, ethnographic study of culture could stand on its own in investigating the meaning and values present in a particular linguistic community, and the latter, in the work of Schleiermacher and those that followed, drew from his emphasis on the analysis of the text and his holistic approach to language and interpretation. Even within what we would call philosophy, we can see his influence on thinkers such as Nietzsche, whose *Genealogy of Morals* employed textual and historical analyses of Christian moral categories, treating these categories as the product of history and circumstance rather than timeless values. This anthropological point of view, in treating fundamental categories such as the ethical to be the product of a particular linguistic community in a particular historical circumstance, can be seen as a development and application of Herder's program. The influence of this anthropological perspective can be felt even in 20th century continental philosophers such as Foucault.

In what follows, I would like to explore some of the implications of Herder's thought for some of the philosophical and anthropological currents which came in his wake. I have claimed throughout this project that two aspects of Herder's thought provide promising insight for historians of philosophy as well as contemporary philosophers: his unique response to Kant's dualism between normative and non-normative facts, and his conception of interpretation, insofar as it provides new avenues of research for contemporary philosophers and anthropologists. By way of a conclusion, I would like to provide a sketch of the implication of Herder's work for both historians interested in

the anthropology and philosophy which arose in the aftermath of Kant – particularly, the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt and the Neo-Kantians— and for those practicing contemporary Wittgensteinian philosophy.

Concerning the former, of course, we may trace a direct line of influence. Humboldt is heavily indebted to Herder in both his empirical methodology of using language to study the various forms of thought which obtain in distinct linguistic communities as well as the picture of language as constitutive of thought. Many of Humboldt’s innovations can be understood as the products of an integration of these insights of Herder’s within a largely Kantian framework. The Southwestern school of Neo-Kantianism was not directly influenced by Herder, but their conception of philosophy as that discipline which studies the systems of norms which govern our thought and behavior re-instates the dualisms Hamann and Herder objected to in Kant’s system of thought. Our reading of Herder therefore predicts some of the most important problems Southwestern Neo-Kantianism came to face. On the other hand, the Marburg school – particularly, their most prominent member, Ernst Cassirer— was directly influenced by Herder. Just like Humboldt, we can understand Cassirer’s innovations as coming from a reframing of some of Herder’s ideas within a broadly Kantian system of thought.

I believe the significance of Herder’s thought for Neo-Kantianism has been consistently underestimated in part because he, like Hamann, is often characterized as presenting an irrationalist picture of mind and language. While Cassirer acknowledges Herder as a seminal figure in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, it is not clear that he acknowledges how closely he takes his positive view to resemble that of Herder’s. His discussion of the “Treatise” groups Hamann and Herder with Vico in the understanding of “language as an expression of emotion.” Although this vision of language constitutes a form of progress, on Cassirer’s view, over the work of Descartes and Condillac, who viewed language as a mere instrument of rational thought, it fails approximate Cassirer’s positive view, according to which language has a constitutive role with regard to rational thought and the world of experience

(*Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* 147). This may, in part, be due to an emphasis in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* on Herder's "Treatise" rather than later works such as "On the Cognition" and the *Outlines*, in which Herder's theory becomes fully mature. Yet even in his defense of Herder, in his discussion of Kant's critical reviews of Herder's *Outlines*, Cassirer characterizes Herder as a philosopher of emotion rather than system and logic, writing, "Herder as a poet is a philosopher, and as a philosopher, a poet" (*Kant's Life* 230). Cassirer is not alone in his assessment. Taylor echoes this reading of Herder and Hamann as basing their theory of language on feeling and emotion: "The proto-Romantic move to dethrone reason, and to locate the specifically human capacities in feeling, naturally led to a richer concept of expression than was allowed for in Condillac's natural cries, which were quite inert modes of utterance" (*The Language Animal* 39). On the reading of Herder that I have presented in this project, Herder does not aim to replace reason with feeling or emotion as the basis of thought or language, but rather to replace a formal conception of reason with a material one. On Herder's view, the concrete use of reason in everyday language is primary to the formal use of logic in syllogisms, with the latter functioning merely as an abstraction from the former. Reading Herder as presenting a material conception of reason rather than banishing the notion of reason from a discussion of thought and language allows us to see his aims as friendly to those of the Neo-Kantians. His anthropological analysis of the languages and practices of other cultures provides an analysis of their modes of thought, of their particular forms of reason.

Concerning the relevance of Herder for Wittgenstein's thought, and that of those influenced by Wittgenstein, I would like to return to an idea stated in the introduction to this project. Herder saw his picture of mind and language to necessitate the transformation of philosophy into anthropology, yet, despite a number of significant points of commonality between Herder's thought and Wittgenstein's, the latter never expressed more than a passing interest in empirical anthropology. This is largely due to Wittgenstein's therapeutic conception of his own work; his aim is not to establish a

new discipline to rival philosophy— one which studies the contours of our concepts or those of other linguistic communities— but rather to discourage the impulse towards philosophy altogether. This does not mean, however, that Wittgenstein’s philosophy is fundamentally inconsistent with a project along these lines, and indeed contemporary anthropologists, working under the banner of “ordinary ethics anthropology”, have taken up such a project. Thus, I would like to conclude by considering the relationship which obtains between both Wittgenstein’s philosophy and the ordinary ethics anthropologists and Herder’s methodology. It is my hope that an analysis of this relationship will show the relevance ordinary ethics anthropology has to discussions of philosophical ethics and the importance of a framework like Herder’s for this work.

7.1 The Influence of Herder on Humboldt

Recent scholarship by Charles Taylor and Michael Forster, among others, has largely represented Humboldt’s work as providing a continuation of the line of thought I have sketched in this dissertation from Hamann to Kant.³⁰ There is good reason for doing so; Humboldt’s understanding of national character as a framework which structures the cognition of a given linguistic community, and his methodology of studying the form of thought by means of a study of language, directly echoes Herder’s thought on mind and language as well as his methodological commitments. While Humboldt goes much further than Herder in the empirical analysis of language and anthropological research, the idea of using this empirical mode of linguistic research in order to gain insight into the particular form of thought present in a community of people can be seen as a natural

³⁰ See Taylor (2016) and Forster (2011)

extension of Herder's program into anthropological practice. Herder's means were limited. His understanding of ethnography was drawn from travelogues, historical texts, and literature, but he put these texts to work in a manner with broadly the same intentions as Humboldt's ethnographic and linguistic research. In addition to developing a reading of the influence of Hamann and Herder on Humboldt's work in what follows, I would like to provide a reading of one of the central tensions in Humboldt's work— between an acknowledgment of the diversity of forms of language and thought, on the one hand, and the notion of a universal grammar underlying these forms of language and thought, on the other— as the product of an unresolved conflict between Humboldt's two greatest influences: Herder and Kant.

Humboldt uses a number of terms for what we, following Herder, have been calling natural character: he speaks of the “mental individuality” of a people, their “worldview”, and their “spirit” as well as their “character”, but these terms carry with them the same fundamental idea as Herder's. In a characteristic passage, Humboldt writes, “The mental individuality of a people and the shape of its language are so intimately fused with one another, that if one were given, the other would have to be completely derivable from it... Language is, as it were, the outer apparatus of the spirit of a people; the language is their spirit and the spirit their language” (*On Language* 46). Different linguistic communities bear different modes of thought, or characters, and these modes of thought are not only expressed by language, but are, to a certain extent, constituted by this language. Humboldt goes so far in a related passage as to identify language with a world-view, writing, “Thus we may now consider language as a world-view, or as a linkage of thoughts, since both these tendencies are united within it, it still always necessarily rests upon the *collective power of man*; nothing can be excluded from it, since it embraces everything” (*On Language* 44). Although this is not the clearest expression of the view defended by Herder and Humboldt, it has precedent in Herder's writings. The character of a people consists in the vocabulary of a language, which contains the ontology of a given people, as well as a set of shared

basic beliefs concerning the objects which inhabit their world. It is this thought that the language of a people contains, expresses, or composes their view of the world that justifies, on Humboldt's view, the project of anthropological linguistics. He writes:

The *comparative study of languages*, the exact establishment of the manifold ways in which innumerable peoples resolve the same task of language formation that is laid upon them as men, loses all higher interest if it does not cleave to the point at which language is connected with the shaping of the *nation's mental power*. (*On Language* 21)

Linguistics, in studying the form and content of a given language, studies the form and content of thought, and as these forms and contents diverge between different linguistic communities, it studies the particular forms thought takes in different peoples. The discipline, then, as Humboldt conceives it, begins from two distinct thoughts of Herder's: the constitutive role of language in shaping thought, and the possibility of radical divergences in worldviews that arises from such considerations. In combination, these thoughts lead to the notion that we can and should empirically study the form thought takes in different linguistic communities by analyzing their language; without admitting the possibility of differing conceptual schemes and forms of thought, the interest of studying the structure and content of different languages is greatly diminished.

Just like Herder, Humboldt has a pragmatic understanding of the formation of the character of a people. Concepts, and therefore words, are developed by a people as the world confronts them with new problems. He writes, "The need for a *concept*, and its resultant clarification, must always precede the *word*, which is merely the expression of its completed clarity" (*On Language* 32). Following Herder, Humboldt is careful to distinguish the capacity to speak language from animal instinct; although language arises from a need to confront and solve problems, it is not a purely mechanical response to said problems:

...the entire view of *language* here presented depends essentially on the fact that it is at once the necessary *completion of thought*, and the natural *development* of a disposition that characterizes man as such. But this development is not that of an *instinct*, which could be explained on merely physiological grounds... it can still belong only to a being endowed with *consciousness* and *freedom*, and proceeds in such a being from the

unfathomable depth of his *individuality*, and from the *activity* of the forces within him.
(*On Language* 214)

In the “Treatise” Herder distinguished our capacity to speak from an animal instinct in terms of our freedom to exercise it as we choose. The capacity for speech stems from what he calls “reflection”, the ability to freely direct our attention and distinguish an object of our choice from the others we may have attended to in our visual field. Although this capacity for “reflection” has a physiological basis, a view Herder continued to develop in the *Outlines*, our physiology does not compel us to individuate the world in any particular way, nor to direct our attention to any particular object over others. The bee, however complex its behavior may be, only represents the nectar as something to be eaten, and it is compelled to represent the nectar as such and to behave according to the content of this representation in flying towards it and eating it. Humboldt follows Herder in understanding our physiology as providing the possibility of the capacity for speech without determining that we actualize it in any particular way. Humboldt, under the influence of Kant, characterizes this freedom in terms of “spontaneity”, but the point largely remains the same: the use of language involves a variety of agency which goes beyond either mechanical determination or instinct. This freedom is partly explained in terms of our capacity to adapt to a multiplicity of environments and solve more complex problems than those which the beasts are capable of resolving on the basis of instinct. Humboldt elaborates on this point elsewhere:

...it is enough for me to point out, merely, that the *power* which truly makes man into man, and is thus the simple definition of his nature, is disclosed in its contact with the *world*, in what we may call the vegetative life of mankind, proceeding somewhat mechanically on a given path, in particular phenomena revealing itself and its diversified endeavors in new shapes that enlarge its concept. (*On Language* 30)

Humboldt takes our capacity to adapt to our circumstances by enacting our freedom in developing the appropriate conceptual apparatus to handle the situation at hand to define our nature as human beings and to underlie our capacity for speech. We are, unlike the beasts, able to develop new representations of objects according to our current needs and the situation at hand, and our

representations do not compel us to act in any particular way. Humboldt goes on, immediately afterwards, to characterize the development of algebra as an example of this power to develop our conceptual apparatus to handle the problems we encounter. Our freedom from the determination to represent the world in any particular way grants us the power to abstract from the concrete representations we encounter in experience and develop more abstract representations and systems of thought. As in Herder, our character is defined by a complex interaction between our natural environments, our own needs, and our free activity.

In characterizing Herder's conception of national character, above, as expressed by both the vocabulary of a language and the shared beliefs a linguistic community holds, I left out an important component. This component is developed much further in Humboldt's work: grammar. In later works such as *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* and the *Outlines*, Herder goes beyond the view that a character is expressed by the vocabulary of a language alone into a somewhat stronger view, that even the grammar of a language expresses a worldview. For example, he characterizes Hebrew as a particularly poetic language due to the plurality of nouns and verbs, as compared to adjectives, in the language: "So the language, that abounds in verbs, which present a vivid expression and picture of their objects, is a poetical language. The more it has the power of forming its nouns into verbs, the more poetical it is" (*Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, Vol. 1* 29). He sees the capacity to transform nouns into verbs as enlivening the language and making it capable of the kind of energy of expression required for poetry, but this capacity built into the language also expresses a particular standpoint on the world held by the Hebrews, one which represents the world as in "a state of living energy" (*Spirit of Hebrew Poetry, Vol. 1* 29). Humboldt, however, in part because his analyses cover a much wider breadth of languages than Herder's, in part because his linguistic research is far more rigorous than Herder's, and in part because the influence of Kant leads Humboldt to think more seriously than Herder about the form of thought, goes much further in carrying through with this idea. Humboldt conceives of the grammatical

structure of a language as mirroring the form of thought in a language, writing, “*Grammatical formation* arises from the *laws of thinking* in language, and rests on the *congruence of sound-forms* with the latter” (*On Language* 140). Grammar is the means by which we impose the form of thought onto the sounds of our language, and it thus reflects the form taken by our concepts. Language, therefore, provides a means by which we can compare the forms of thought present in differing linguistic communities. This means that grammar has a much more significant role in Humboldt’s analysis than in Herder’s, as it is really the structure of a language which is of interest to Humboldt, insofar as this structure provides insight into the form of the thought of a particular linguistic community. Humboldt writes:

The general *relations* for designating particular objects, and the grammatical *word-inflections*, are both based largely on the universal *forms of intuition* and on the *logical ordering* of concepts. There lies in them, therefore, a surveyable system, admitting of comparison with that which emerges from each particular language... (*On Language* 94)

Herder’s thought, in his later work, was that the grammar present in a given linguistic community provides some insight into the standpoint from which they view the world and the purposes towards which they put their language to work. A language heavier with adjectives reflects a more peaceful and potentially scientific people, concerned with precise description, while a language without adjectives reflects a more active and potentially desperate people, more concerned with fulfilling day to day wants than creating a detailed portrait of the world. Humboldt, following Kant, is more concerned with the general shape of our concepts, the form our conceptual thought takes, and therefore his studies of grammar look towards the logical structure present in the grammar of a particular language. While the two thoughts agree on the notion that grammar reflects a worldview, to some extent, Humboldt’s vision is more logically precise while Herder is more concerned with painting a descriptive portrait of the spirit embodied by a language. One way of understanding this difference between Herder and Humboldt on this point is by considering their relationship with the linguistic turn which took place

in analytic philosophy. Dummett famously characterizes the linguistic turn in terms of three developments of Frege's:

Only with Frege was the proper object of philosophy finally established: namely, first, that the goal of philosophy is the analysis of the structure of *thought*; secondly, that the study of *thought* is to be sharply distinguished from the study of the psychological process of *thinking*; and, finally, that the only proper method for analyzing thought consists in the analysis of *language* (458).

While both Herder and Humboldt subscribe to the third of these points, Herder does not think of the goal of philosophy to be a characterization of the *structure* of thought so much as the development of its content, and his writings, if anything, rebel against the anti-psychologistic understanding of thought and reason popularized in his time by Wolff, and later by Kant. Humboldt's interest in grammar stems largely from a desire to understand the *form* and therefore the *structure* of thought. His work in this area is an adaptation of Kant's attempt to characterize the form of thought to Herder's vision of language and, to an extent, Herder's pluralistic stance. Humboldt's vision for linguistics thus stands much more closely with Dummett's characterization of Frege than Herder's does; it consists in an attempt to characterize the structure of thought by means of a study of the structure of language, where each is characterized anti-psychologically.

In fact, one of the tensions in Humboldt's thought stems from the mutual influence of Herder and Kant on his thought. On the one hand, Humboldt's Kantianism pushes him to seek a universalist picture of language and thought: one according to which the disparate forms taken by languages are all explained in terms of a single capacity for language and a single general form of thought or reason. On the other, the influence of Herder leads him to appreciate the possibility of radically diverging ways of looking at the world presented by differing languages and ways of life. It may be surprising, given what we have said of Humboldt thus far, that Chomsky writes that it is Humboldt whose thought comes closest, in the history of philosophy and linguistics, to his own theory of generative grammar (58). At times, Humboldt's writing on the diversity of linguistic forms and the forms of

thought that go with them may appear almost antithetical to Chomsky's view. Yet he also famously emphasizes the idea, later popularized by Chomsky, that language is characterized by its capacity to turn finite means into an infinite number of ends, writing that language "must therefore make infinite use of finite media and is capable of so doing through the power that produces both ideas and language" (*Linguistic Variability* 70). These two ideas do not in themselves conflict with one another. It is possible for radically different languages to make use of radically different pieces to each achieve an infinite number of meanings. But Humboldt elsewhere makes it clear that he, like Chomsky, sees an underlying form common to all languages as standing behind this generative power of language. He writes, for instance:

Since the *natural disposition* to language is universal in man, and everyone must possess the key to the understanding of all languages, it follows automatically that the *form* of all languages must be essentially the *same*, and always achieve the universal purpose. The *difference* can lie only in the means, and only within the limits permitted by the attainment of the goal. (*On Language* 215)

The human mind, the generative power of which underlies all languages, has a single form to its thought, which the languages we have developed attempt to approximate, to varying degrees of success. The "aims of language", the approximation of this form of thought, he writes, provide a standpoint from which we can evaluate "the merits and defects" of a given language (*On Language* 216). While Herder's form of pluralism, as I have argued in 5.4 above, is restricted, the notion of evaluating a language on the basis of how well it conforms to the universal form of thought is antithetical to his conception of mind; language, does not, on Herder's view, mimic the shape of reason. Rather, Herder sees reason to be nothing over and above an abstraction from the everyday use of language. This pull towards a universal, common, form of thought grows out of the influence of Kant on Humboldt.

It is not our place, in this short piece, to evaluate Humboldt's success in navigating this tension in his thought. What I mean, instead, is to suggest a particular lens with which to view Humboldt's

work. Humboldt is inspired by Herder's conception of national character and the shape of his anthropological empiricism, but retains Kantian impulses towards a universalistic, anti-psychological conception of the form of thought. He therefore employs the investigation of language as a means of understanding this universalistic form, but also the particular structures by means of which languages have approximated this form.

7.2 The Neo-Kantian Struggle and Cassirer

In this section, I would like to provide a brief sketch of the impact of Herder's thought on the two schools of Neo-Kantian philosophy, the Southwestern or Baden school and the Marburg school. While Herder's thought was not taken up by the Southwestern school, their work touches on a number of themes which were central to this work, and Herder's method of resolving the problems he finds in Kant's philosophy predicts a key issue which led to the decline of the Southwestern tradition. Windelband will serve as our representative of the Southwestern tradition of Neo-Kantianism. Windelband's teacher, Hermann Lotze, defended a conception of philosophy as the study of the norms which govern thought and action, as opposed to the causes of thought and action, and Windelband developed this picture considerably. While this definition of philosophy provided it with a form of autonomy from the sciences, it also posed a challenge to philosophy: to characterize the distinction between normative and non-normative facts which does not amount to a dualism.³¹ While Herder's work was largely ignored by Southwestern Neo-Kantianism, his writing did have a strong impact on the work of the Marburg school, by way of their most distinguished philosopher, Ernst

³¹ See Beiser (2009), which has provided the groundwork for the discussion of Windelband in this section.

Cassirer. I will thus discuss some of the ways in which Herder's thought was taken up by Cassirer, and elements that were left behind, with some commentary on whether or not the elements left behind really constitute a form of progress over Herder's views.

One of the aims of the Southwestern Neo-Kantian philosophy in the late 19th century was to secure a place for philosophy in a world where the empirical sciences, psychology, and history had largely branched off from philosophy itself and become autonomous disciplines. Doing so involved reviving Kant's motivations for rejecting Platner's anthropology, discussed in Chapter 2 above, and reaffirming the distinction between empirical psychology, which determines the causal laws which govern thought, and philosophy, which determines the normative laws governing thought. Empirical psychology provides us with an understanding of how the world of experience interacts with our sensory organs and brains in causing the formation of beliefs, while philosophy provides us with an analysis of our reasons for belief, the notion of justification, and the laws of logic by which our justifications may be evaluated. Likewise, psychology may provide us with an understanding of the causal process by which our nervous and muscular systems lead to action, but philosophy provides the normative laws by which we evaluate actions as good or bad, proper or improper. Hermann Lotze, Windelband's teacher, characterizes the distinction between logic and psychology in the following manner:

We may presuppose the existence of... perceptions, ideas, and their connexion according to the laws of a physical mechanism, but logic only begins with the conviction that the matter cannot end here; the conviction, that between the combinations of ideas, however they may have originated, there is a difference of truth and untruth, and that there are forms to which these combinations *ought* to answer and laws which they *ought* to obey. (§x)

Lotze's language here recalls Hume's picture of empirical psychology in its enumeration of objects of psychology and the causal relations that obtain between these objects, but it sharply distinguishes the goal of logic from the study of these objects and their relations, rather than taking this causal picture to tell the full story. Logic and philosophy deal with the laws thought "*ought*" to obey, in part because,

in contrast with psychological laws, which are concerned only with how beliefs are formed and transformed by the causal laws which govern the nervous system, logic is concerned with the preservation of truth-values as thought is manipulated and transformed by its laws.

Windelband develops this picture of the relationship between psychology and philosophy in his “Critical or Genetic Method?” The role of philosophy, as Windelband there describes it, is to study the normative axioms or laws that govern thought, moral activity, and the sense of beauty in aesthetics. Beiser describes the major challenge Windelband came to face, upon adapting and developing Lotze’s view into this framework, in the following terms, “After making so many sharp distinctions between the normative and the natural, Windelband is now faced with the problem of connecting them. It is necessary to assume that there is some connection between them, because the whole purpose of norms is for people to act according to them” (“Normativity in Neo-Kantianism” 16). Neo-Kantians then, struggled to overcome the same challenge Hamann posed to Kant’s philosophy: overcoming dualism and providing a unified picture of man. Whereas Hamann saw this to be a problem in itself, this problem manifests itself in Windelband’s work with the difficulty of characterizing the interaction between the two sides of the dualism. “Ought” implies “can”, and insofar as these laws dictate how we should think and act, they must have some effect on our actual, physical capacities to think and act, but the distinction between normative facts and non-normative facts partly amounts to a denial of the capacity for causal efficacy for normative facts, and therefore forbids the interaction one needs to make sense of the dualism.

I have argued above that Herder’s work provides a novel response to this challenge. Herder provides a non-normative characterization of the process by which physiological and cultural forces which make us capable of speech, and he goes on to explain the normative laws which govern our thought and activity in terms of this capacity for speech. This is what I have called, following Huw Price, Herder’s “subject naturalist” story of normativity. Non-normative facts concerning our

physiology and, perhaps more importantly, the instruction we receive in becoming speakers of a language, make us the kinds of beings which may engage in rule-governed behavior, and therefore makes us subject to normative evaluations. Thereafter normative facts are explained in terms of this capacity and the practices we engage in by means of this capacity. Our social practices, in the actual, physical world, as well as our physical constitution, give rise to the particular normative laws which govern our behavior, so there is no mystery concerning the interaction between the non-normative and the normative. Furthermore, Herder can make sense of the manner in which “ought” implies “can” with his pragmatic approach to the development of national character: our codes of ethics develop so as best to cultivate our lives in the particular circumstances in which our linguistic community has developed, and so we will only find value in those possible actions which best suit the needs of our community. Herder’s work can thus be read as having resolved some of the fundamental issues in Neo-Kantianism already, some years before the problems he and Hamann diagnosed with Kantianism re-emerged in the Southwestern tradition of Neo-Kantian philosophy.

While the Southwestern school seems to have largely set aside Herder’s work, perhaps due in part to the psychologism one can detect in his writings, the Marburg school took much from him in their theories of language and of culture. Ernst Cassirer, whose work stands at the pinnacle of the Marburg school of Neo-Kantian thought, frequently cites Hamann, Humboldt, and, especially, Herder as influences for the picture of language he develops in his major work, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* takes as its starting point the thought that man is, essentially, a symbolic animal – one capable of generating meanings. He contrasts the conception of mind which goes along with the symbolic conception of man with the “naïve copy theory of knowledge”, according to which our knowledge simply mirrors the world. Rather than passively receiving the knowledge imparted to us by our sensuous experience, we actively generate a conception of the objects we perceive and impart them with the meanings they have for us. These meanings have taken distinct forms throughout

history in myth, art, language, and the theoretical forms of symbolism used by the sciences. Cassirer's aim is to provide a unified account of these various manifestations of symbolism in man, one according to which each form, in some sense, encompasses and is built from that which precedes it.

Like Herder and Humboldt, Cassirer sees language as having a constitutive role in thought and the formation of the world of experience. Cassirer is particularly emphatic concerning the latter point, in part because his Kantianism gives him a more developed picture of how language could *constitute* a world rather than shape it or our perception of it. While Herder sees language as having a strong role in constituting our perception of the world, as well as in generating an ontology of the world, he does not seem to hold that language constitutes a world in the sense that reason has a constitutive role with regard to the world of experience as in Kant's work. Cassirer breaks from Herder on this point. In *Language and Myth*, Cassirer spells out a potential skeptical conclusion that the "linguistic turn" we have thus far studied may be seen as leading towards. The different "forms" of representation we have in thought – "not only myth, art, and language, but even theoretical knowledge"—insofar as they are actively generated by us rather than received from the world, mirror the structure of our own thought rather than of reality, so that we can never approach the world as it is, in itself. Our conceptual apparatus presents us with the world from a particular point of view, but this means our knowledge stops short of the world and reflects only this perspectival glimpse of it. He responds to this concern:

Against this self-dissolution of the spirit there is only one remedy: to accept in all seriousness what Kant calls his "Copernican revolution." Instead of measuring the content, meaning, and truth of intellectual forms by something extraneous which is supposed to be produced in them, we must find in these forms themselves the measure and criterion for their truth and intrinsic meaning. Instead of taking them as mere copies of something else, we must see in each of these spiritual forms a spontaneous law of generation; an original way and tendency of expression which is more than a mere record of something initially given in fixed categories of real existence. (*Language and Myth* 8)

Like Humboldt before him, Cassirer is here fusing aspects of Herder's thought with Kant's. From Kant, Cassirer borrows the notion that the form of thought does not mirror a pre-existing form that the world takes, but rather constitutes the form of the world. From Herder, he borrows both a pluralistic stance towards the form of thought and the notion that this form is best understood as a feature of language and culture rather than an innate faculty for reason. While Herder does conceive of languages as providing an ontology for their linguistic communities, he lacks the Kantian framework, present in Cassirer's work, for understanding the spontaneous power of language to generate the objects of experience.

One place in which Cassirer exceeds past Herder is in his understanding of the complexities of the forms of thought expressed by a linguistic community. Herder seems to think of national characters as expressing a single, unified stance towards the world, where Cassirer sees that our worldviews entail multiple stances, stances which need not even be consistent with one another. Cassirer, with a view in particular to the sciences, notices that we have multiple frameworks with which to view a particular object, and therefore that it may really be multiple objects:

Even in 'nature', the physical object will not coincide absolutely with the chemical object, nor the chemical with the biological-- because physical, chemical, biological knowledge *frame their questions* each from its own particular standpoint and, in accordance with this standpoint, subject the phenomena to a special interpretation and formation. (*Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* 75)

The laws which govern the cell, conceived of as an object of biology, are not identical with the laws which govern the object considered as a grouping of molecules of particular chemicals, nor with those which govern it when considered as a grouping of atoms, nor can the laws of the former be straightforwardly reduced to the laws of the latter forms. There is therefore a sense, on Cassirer's view, in which these are distinct objects. This is, in some sense, a Kantian modification to Herder's permissive, pluralistic stance towards metaphysics. The different forms by which our language approaches and comes to understand an object, which on Herder's view constitute an aspect of our

world-view, are reframed in terms of Kant's conception of the constitutive role of Kant's categories in forming the world of experience. Cassirer thinks of the possibility of unifying the pluralities of objects given to us by the various sciences into a single understanding of a single object, encompassing all of its biological, chemical, and physical aspects, as a regulative aspiration for the sciences, echoing Kant's language in the third *Critique* (*Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* 77). The sciences strive towards a unified theory of the world, and in doing so strive towards a theory which unites the various forms an object takes into one single object, without undermining the validity of any of the forms which compose it. This means that Cassirer's thing-in-itself is not understood as the cause of the objects we experience, but as an ideal to which our understanding should strive.

It is not clear, however, that we should prefer Cassirer's way of thinking about this issue to an alternative we may reasonably develop from what we have of Hamann and Herder's thought: namely, that there is a single object here, considered from different points of view. In Section 3.1 above, I attributed to Hamann a context-sensitive approach to language, largely on the basis of the *Socratic Memorabilia*, where he writes, "Like numbers, words derive their value from the position which they occupy, and their concepts are, like coins, mutable in their definitions and relations, according to time and place" (163 [71]). Meanings of words are only fixed when they are considered in the context of a whole sentence, or, better, a whole conversational context. Herder, borrowing from Hamann's view, can apply this approach to handle the various conceptual apparatuses with which we may approach an object without positing multiple distinct objects. Within the context of a biologist's conversation, a word referring to an object may have different meanings than it would in the conversation of a chemist or a physicist, as it will be related to different objects in varying ways according to each. This view accords more closely with a common-sense view of the matter: there is one object, considered from multiple points of view.

In 4.3 above, I noted that Cassirer sees elements of his constitutive view in Herder's conception of reflection in the "Treatise." He writes, in the passage quoted above, "reflection is not something external that is merely added to the content of feeling; it enters into feeling as a constitutive factor. It is 'reflection' which makes the ephemeral sensory stimulus into a determinate, differentiated and hence spiritual 'content'" (*Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* 153). While there is an element of truth to this reading of Herder, insofar as Herder sees language as having a constitutive role in thought and experience, Cassirer overestimates the role of emotion on Herder's view at the cost of missing the fruit of Herder's material conception of reason. The process of reflection is one by which, as Cassirer himself notes, an object is distinguished from all others; this differentiation places it in incompatibility relations with the other objects one might have attended to, and therefore places the object in a logical space. It is these relations that give the concept one forms the content it has. It is Herder's view, even in the "Treatise" that these concrete indeterminacy relations are primary to formal logical relations, that the latter is abstracted from the former.

And this brings us to the central point on which Herder and Cassirer disagree: Herder begins from the concrete and moves to the abstract – the character of a nation is built up from concrete relations in the world between man and environment as well as social relations. This is not to deny Herder's holism, but to say that the whole is built from the ground up. Cassirer's forms, like Kant, take a top-down approach; the world of experience is molded to conform with prior, well-defined forms, even as Cassirer locates the thing-in-itself as a regulative ideal rather than a cause of our experiences.

7.3 Wittgenstein's Ethnographic Methodology

As recent scholarship on Herder has emphasized, the later Wittgenstein's picture of language shares much with Herder's. Wittgenstein emphasizes the priority of language over thought, has a fundamentally social conception of language, and he analyzes meaning in terms of the use of language in practice, just as Herder does.³² This shared picture of mind and language leads each to the investigation of thought by means of an investigation of the language and social practices surrounding a given form of thought.

Moreover, Wittgenstein's central notion of "forms of life" has much in common with Herder's conception of national character. Although Wittgenstein's "forms of life" are difficult to define precisely, one way of reading this notion is as consisting in the social practices a community shares, including linguistic practices, and as providing something like a worldview for the members of a linguistic community. Wittgenstein, in a characteristic passage of the *Investigations*, writes, "So you are saying that human agreement decides what is false and what is true?" – It is what human beings say that is false and true; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life" (§241). Here a form of life appears in the shape of a shared vocabulary and a set of basic beliefs held by those who share this vocabulary; it provides the foundation upon which agreement and disagreement may occur, and by which we come to understand one another. Wittgenstein has an idiosyncratic sense of "opinion", "belief" and "knowledge", according to we cannot be said to be said to have an opinion, belief, or knowledge concerning certain basic facts, famously writing elsewhere in the *Investigations* "It can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke)

³² Forster (2010) constitutes the most sustained reading of Herder as presenting a proto-Wittgensteinian view of language.

that I *know* I am in pain”, so there is an inevitable inaccuracy in characterizing forms of life in terms of shared beliefs (§246). Although the terminology I have been employing on Herder’s behalf disagrees with Wittgenstein’s, however, Wittgenstein’s motivation for employing this terminology comes from a place of agreement with Herder. The basic beliefs which constitute a national character, in providing the shared basis from which a linguistic community can make sense of agreement and disagreement, are not up for debate or revision, as other beliefs are, except under very special circumstances. Wittgenstein holds the view that it only makes sense to attribute a belief or opinion to someone if we can make sense of attributing to them the negation of this belief or opinion, and this is not something we can do in the case of the base-level “beliefs” which compose a form of life. Apart from this terminological distinction, Wittgenstein’s conception of “forms of life” shares much with Herder’s “national character”: it provides the foundation for a language, including both a vocabulary and fundamental agreements concerning the nature of a world, and it is built up from the social practices a linguistic community engages in, including, but not limited to, their linguistic activity. Agreeing in form of life means agreeing on a language, but it also means taking a particular stance on the world, which is reflected in the chosen language.

Wittgenstein’s most direct confrontation with explicit anthropological thought comes in his “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*”, where Wittgenstein criticizes the anthropologist James Frazer largely for assimilating the framework by which the tribes he investigated thought to his own English way of thinking. These notes occur at a crucial period of development in Wittgenstein’s thought: having been written in 1931, they stand at some time after Wittgenstein’s presentation of the early views of the *Tractatus* but before the middle and later periods of *Blue Book* and the *Philosophical Investigations*. It is worth considering that Wittgenstein, as his thought turned towards the consideration of “forms of life” and the conception of language as a social practice, looked to empirical anthropology for inspiration. Many of the crucial ideas of the *Investigations* are first found in these notes, as

Wittgenstein's view turns away from logical analysis and towards the study of culture and social practices.

According to Wittgenstein, Frazer's mode of explaining primitive practices, including religious practices, takes the scientific theory as its model. Practices (such as performing a ceremonial dance) are understood in terms of the belief in a certain effect to be brought about by the activity (such as leading the gods to produce rain) and the desire to bring about such an effect. Wittgenstein writes:

Frazer's account of the magical and religious views of mankind is unsatisfactory: it makes these views look like *errors*. Was Augustine in error, then, when he called upon God on every page of the *Confessions*? But-- one might say-- if he was not in error, surely the Buddhist holy man was—or anyone else-- whose religion gives expression to completely different views. But *none* of them was in error, except when he set forth a theory. (119)

Wittgenstein's point here is partly that there are a number of ways of understanding the role a practice plays in a given linguistic community, and even a number of ways of understanding the role a belief plays in the life of an individual. To explain a religious practice by considering it as instrumental, and based on a system of false beliefs, is to wrongly assimilate it to the form of explanation prevalent in the sciences. Religious practices serve distinct functions from scientific practices, and understanding religious practices in terms of beliefs concerning the nature of the world and the desire to bring about specific changes in the world by means of the purported knowledge carried by religious texts can only arise from a misunderstanding of these functions. The "language games" which constitute the tribe's religious discourse must be distinguished from the "language games" played in scientific discourse, to borrow from Wittgenstein's terminology. If we fail to do so, the result is that the practices are seen as erroneous; they are based on a false religious theory and cannot bring about the desired results. This is missing, however, the necessary role that the practices play in the community, in providing structure and uniting the tribe, for instance. Wittgenstein continues to say, "All that Frazer does is to make them plausible to people who think as he does. It is very remarkable that in the final analysis all these practices are presented as, so to speak, pieces of

stupidity” (119). Much of Herder’s work is aimed at resolving the problem Wittgenstein identifies in Frazer’s work: the point of *Einfühlung* in Herder’s work is to navigate a way of understanding the radical differences in the values, practices, and norms of other communities, using only the resources of our own understanding of these as they appear in our way of life, without simply assimilating these values, practices, and norms to our own.

In the “Remarks”, Wittgenstein develops two thoughts which become central to his later work: first, he begins to think of something like “forms of life” as a historically developed, cultural notion which provides a basis for our linguistic activity. In one noteworthy passage, Wittgenstein describes the relationship between man and environment in terms of a community, writing, “It was not a trivial reason, for really there can have been no *reason*, that prompted certain races of mankind to venerate the oak tree, but only the fact that they and the oak were united in a community of life, (*Lebensgemeinschaft*) and thus that they arose together not by choice, but rather like the flea and the dog” (139). Although Wittgenstein uses “*Lebensgemeinschaft*” rather than “*Lebensform*”, which would not appear in his work until later on, it is not unnatural to read the term as a precursor to his later use of the term. This “community of life” is a notion which takes into account the basic practices of a linguistic community in its particular historical and environmental context and builds towards a way of looking at the world. Second, Wittgenstein begins to consider the possibility that different groups of people may have radically different ways of looking at the world. As Wittgenstein comes to see the different roles different beliefs and social practices may have in a culture, he also arrives at the thought that different cultures may have different conceptual schemes and different stances on the world. In a characteristic passage of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein describes part of the role of his philosophy as relating to the reader a sense of the contingency of their ways of looking at the world:

I am not saying: if such-and-such facts of nature were different people would have different concepts (in the sense of a hypothesis). But: if anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize – then let him imagine certain very general facts

of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him (230)

While Wittgenstein refrains from providing a particular explanation for the development of the particular concepts we have, he seems to represent our concepts as the products of historical and cultural forces, only contingently reaching the shape that they now have. Herder's story concerning the historical evolution of our concepts is more determinate than Wittgenstein's, and he does seem to provide an almost causal story in "This, Too, a Philosophy of History" which provides a loose history of our conceptual scheme, but they share an understanding that something like a national character, or a form of life, develops by means of the history of a linguistic community. Each of these two of Wittgenstein's thoughts, arrived at by way of an engagement with anthropology, remain central to his thought as it develops in the *Investigations*.

Despite this interest in anthropology at this crucial point of development in his thought, Wittgenstein's later work largely stays away from empirical anthropology and ethnography, favoring instead his famous treatment of language games. Language games often consist in simplified linguistic practices along with their associated behaviors. Typically, these language games are designed to undercut philosophical tendencies to think that there must be some foundation upon which the language games stand. Wittgenstein emphasizes, by means of these language games, that the kind of instruction that allows us to carry on in following a rule, or in playing a language game, does not require much more of us than the capacity to carry on doing as others do. Learning to obey a rule of classifying objects a certain way, for instance, need not require of us that we be able to classify all imaginable objects under this system, nor that we be able to state the rule in a form that determines all possible future categorizations; we must simply be able to be classify the objects that we might reasonably have to classify, in the context of the language game, the same way that others do. Although Wittgenstein's discussion of language games does not originate in these notes, it is clear that it is developed here as Wittgenstein comes to appreciate the different roles different forms of discourse

can have in distinct linguistic communities and the different roles that beliefs may play, each subject to their own forms of evaluation and resisting a unified theory.

In a note, Wittgenstein characterizes this approach of studying language by means of these language games as taking an ethnographic stance towards language. He writes, “If we use the ethnological approach, does that mean we are saying that philosophy is ethnology? No, it only means that we are taking up our position far outside, in order to see things more objectively” (*Culture and Value* 45). In examining primitive language games which mirror aspects of our own use of language, Wittgenstein looks at a language as from the perspective of the radical interpreter. He provides us with characterizations of behavior and associated linguistic activity, and leads us to ask the question of what, if anything, *must* be underlying these associated behaviors for the activity to make sense. In some ways, Wittgenstein’s approach is the opposite of Herder’s: Herder’s method of *Einfühlung* asks the philosopher to look at another culture as though she were an insider, while Wittgenstein’s asks her to look at her own practices as though she were an outsider. It is surprising that philosophers with such similar stances on mind and language end up with such starkly different methodologies.

There is, of course, a reason for this divergence. Wittgenstein takes philosophy to consist in a form of therapy, famously writing, “The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. – The one that gives philosophy peace... There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies” (*Philosophical Investigations* §133). The impulse to do philosophy is built into our language; we can be tricked by our language into thinking of numbers, for instance, as special kinds of objects, and come to wonder what kinds of objects they are, fooled into believing that they must bear certain kinds of resemblances to the physical objects we encounter in everyday life, and into asking certain kinds of irresolvable questions concerning them. The role of Wittgenstein’s philosophy is to lead us away from that impulse, to remind us that the phantoms we conjure up by means of confusions built into our language need

not correspond to any reality, so long as we can make sense of the practice of using the relevant bits of language, the practice of engaging in the relevant “language games”, without them. Wittgenstein’s philosophy, therefore, does not have a theoretical aim per se; there is no proper field of study for philosophy to divulge for us into a kind of theory. Wittgenstein’s project, therefore, more closely resembles Hamann’s than Herder’s, both in style and in aim.

Although Wittgenstein was more concerned with his therapeutic conception of philosophy than a positive project of studying the content and evolution of “forms of life”, it does not strike me that there is anything fundamentally inconsistent between such a project and Wittgenstein’s work. If this is correct, we may be able to understand this break between Herder’s anthropology and Wittgenstein’s philosophy as the product of different motivations rather than of conflicting systems of thought. In fact, contemporary anthropologists do practice a variety of empirical anthropology that is heavily inspired by Wittgenstein’s philosophy and the ordinary language philosophy that came in the wake of Wittgenstein’s work. In the following section, I would like to consider the relationship between this new branch of anthropology and Herder’s anthropological program.

7.4 Ordinary Language and Ordinary Ethics

Ordinary language philosophers hold that philosophical problems arise when philosophers take words out of their everyday use and everyday contexts, leaving distorted pictures of the meanings of these words, resulting in confusion. By sticking to everyday uses of words and recognizing where philosophers have diverged from this use, ordinary language philosophers hope to dissolve philosophical problems rather than resolving them straightforwardly. This standpoint is familiar to us insofar as it closely resembles Hamann’s stance towards philosophy, particularly in his “Metacritique,”

as I have argued above in 3.3. There, Hamann represented Kant's philosophy as borrowing terms such as "reason" from their everyday meanings and redefining them in order to build a theoretical system which lacks a concrete relation to "reason" in its everyday use. While there can be value in disciplines such as geometry to the practice of providing concrete definitions for concepts in order to construct precise proofs involving these concepts, Hamann holds that Kant trades between the everyday use of reason and his more precise use, with the result that his proofs have no relation to reason as we know it. He writes, "However, while geometry determines and fixes even the ideality of its concepts of points without parts, of lines and surfaces even in ideally divided dimensions, by means of empirical signs and figures, metaphysics abuses the word-signs and figures of speech of our empirical knowledge by treating them as nothing but hieroglyphs and types of ideal relations" ("Metacritique" 210). Kant's system, on Hamann's view, ends up as an intricate webbing of empty signs, deceiving the reader by employing words which have been excavated from the contexts in which they are used meaningfully.

This spirit of kinship between ordinary language philosophers and the tradition of Hamann and Herder that we have been exploring extends to the contemporary anthropologists working under the banner of ordinary ethics anthropology, working largely under the influence of J.L. Austin and Stanley Cavell. Veena Das writes that ordinary ethics anthropologists take Austin and Cavell's tendency to "think of philosophical problems as human problems – elaborated in one way in the philosopher's study and in a different way in ordinary words, gestures, and modes of living that find expression in the everyday" ("Ordinary Ethics" 1). Here Das expresses a desire to think of philosophy as deeply connected to the everyday, to see, for instance, questions concerning the nature of our obligations in moral theory to be deeply connected to the question of what we should do when we stumble into a moral dilemma in our lives. The inner conflict we experience in that moral dilemma must be captured and elaborated in our philosophical reasoning. This too seems in line with Herder's

aims in his early essay “How Philosophy Can Become More Universal and Useful for the Benefit of the People.” As discussed above in Chapter Four, Herder complains in this essay of the distance between academic philosophy and ordinary life. He asks, “And what is moral philosophy?” and complains that his contemporaries take it to consist in, “A collection of rules which are mostly too general to be applied in individual cases, and yet always remain too flaccid to oppose a whole stream of bad dispositions and form a people’s whole manner of thought” (14). Herder’s frustration with the philosophy of his time was largely due to the vast gulf between moral philosophy and moral reasoning, between Wolffian logic and the forms of reasoning employed in everyday life, between epistemology and everyday questions of how we come to know some fact. Part of the appeal of Hume and Hutcheson to Herder in this early point in his career lay in their ability to transform transcendent philosophical questions into questions concerning our nature as human beings. While Herder’s vision for anthropology certainly developed after writing this early essay, and the increasing importance Herder attributes to culture in shaping our nature leads him away from the strict empiricism of Hume and the sentimentalists, this desire to keep philosophy honest by grounding it in our human nature and in our everyday experience stays with him throughout his career. His later anthropological efforts to understand the development of our conceptions of morality, for instance, consist in an effort to understand the historical development of everyday life and the transformation in practices and circumstances that give rise to a transformation in conceptions of the world.

Moreover, the Wittgensteinian influence on ordinary language anthropologists leads them to think of ethics as an aspect of our way of life in a manner not altogether unlike Herder’s conception of ethics as an aspect of a national character. Michael Lambek characterizes the object of description for ordinary ethics anthropology along the following lines:

I would like to discern and appreciate an ethical dimension of living... By living, I mean living with others and over time, everything from minute acts of daily greeting and our tone of voice, the quality of how we engage with others and with the world, through keeping of immediate and long-term commitments and callings, and from the language

by which we describe our immediate conduct through deliberations as to how to live our life. (6)

Lambek sees ethics as “an emergent quality or property of actions” rather than a set of laws or codes; our social practices generate a world in which certain actions are virtuous and others are condemnable (6). The study of ethics, on this view, involves considering the minutiae of life and considering how our broader conceptions of what should be done emerge from these practices, how these details contribute to our broader conception of life and the values that structure it. While Herder certainly has a stronger emphasis on history and climate in his conception of national character, the view of ethics as an aspect of a broader form of life which is defined by the acts and practices which structure a given community is shared between these two traditions. Likewise, the methodology of investigating the use of particular words in their everyday meanings to gain insight into the nature of this broader character fits neatly with Herder’s methodological commitments.

Part of what makes the ordinary ethics approach to anthropology both unique and closely related to Herder’s conception of *Einfühlung* is the particular form of investigation employed by the ordinary ethics anthropologists. Veena Das, in her book on the Partition of India, *Life and Words*, contrasts the role of her work with typical anthropological work in the following terms: “...the book is not *about* these events in the sense that a historian or a psychoanalyst might construe them. Rather, it narrates the lives of particular persons and communities who were deeply embedded in these events, and it describes a way that the event attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary” (*Life and Words* 1). In a way this description of the matter calls back to Herder’s differentiation between the role of the artist of history and the mere narrator; the challenge of the anthropologist is to reconstruct a world by constructing a narrative which makes sense of the events of history as well as the development of the character of a people, partly by looking towards the impact of these events on the everyday lives of a community and the values expressed by these changes. She goes on to characterize the manner in which she interviewed her subjects of study, “I

asked such questions as: What is it to inhabit a world? How does one make the world one's own? How does one account for the appearance of the subject? What is it to lose one's world?" (*Life and Words* 2). While Das does not explicitly make use of an imaginative projection, as Herder does, her mode of investigation involves seeing the world as pregnant with meanings from the perspective of her subjects. The "world" for Das is, again, not something flat or empty which we then project meanings onto, but rather something that carries with it these meanings from the beginning. Insofar as the anthropologist must inhabit the world of the other in order to portray it, to convey the normative content contained within it, *Einfühlung* provides a way of doing so.

By putting oneself in the place of the other, the anthropologist initiates herself into the world of the other, and thereby becomes capable of making claims concerning the normative commitments involved in the world of the other. The point of contrast here, from the perspective of contemporary philosophy, is experimental philosophy, where intuitions on the use of a concept are taken as empirical data towards a concept being used a certain way. Experimental philosophers look to surveys regarding the intuitions of a given linguistic community as playing at least some role in determining the proper position for philosophers to take on a given issue. Philosophers engaged with this project typically take issue with the philosophical appeal to intuition that often occurs in the conceptual analysis performed in the varieties of autonomous philosophy described above. They doubt the authority which philosophers take their own judgments on their concept use to bear, and prefer to look at language use empirically to arrive at less biased conclusions concerning our shared concepts. The central thought here is that the philosopher's claim "In these circumstances, we would say that ϕ " is just a single point of empirical data on the use of a concept in English—the use by that particular philosopher— and that drawing from a wider pool of intuitions will do a better job at grounding a philosophical theory insofar as it provides more empirical evidence towards a concept's being used in some particular way. Thus, experimental philosophers will conduct mass surveys on relevant examples

pertinent to the topic at hand, and examine this data rather than their own intuitions in examining the viability of certain theories. Joshua Knobe, for instance, argues that the distinction between those actions which are performed intentionally and those which are not has a deep connection with the moral character of the action on the basis of a number of surveys he conducted on non-philosophers employing particular examples and their reactions to them.³³ This theory is built up from empirical surveys which gauge the respondent's likelihood to condemn a particular action depending on the amount of intentionality attributed to this action by the text provided in the survey. Each respondent provides a point of data, or several points of data, which is then coordinated to build up a picture of our moral intuitions. One way of understanding the work of experimental philosophers is as coming to certain apparent "conceptual truths"—truths that are rooted in the nature of our concepts, and can be arrived at through an analysis of our concepts—empirically, by understanding the results of surveys as providing empirical evidence that a concept is used in a particular way.

On the view of both Herder and the ordinary language philosophers we have been discussing, it is a mistake to regard our intuitions concerning the use of concepts third-personally, as experimental philosophers must in regarding these intuitions as just another form of empirical data. Cavell, in claiming that the philosopher using statements such as "In these circumstances, we would say that ϕ " is making statements not concerning the use of the English language in general, for instance, but rather "as true of himself (of his 'world, I keep wanting to say) for which he is offering himself, the details of his feeling, and conduct, as authority", is claiming that the cost of being shown to be wrong is not that one is wrong about the facts of the use of words in English but of being "soul-muddled", of not being related to his world in the proper way (179-180). This is partly because ordinary language philosophers, just like Herder, see language as, to some degree, constituting the world of experience.

³³ See Knobe (2004)

The philosopher who claims “We would condemn this action in spite of its apparent unintentional nature” is not shown to be wrong when shown surveys which display English speakers as tending not to categorize the action as condemnable because he is not making a claim concerning a straightforward empirically observable fact that English speakers tend to use concepts in such-and-such way. At worst, he is shown to be out of touch with his linguistic community; he is shown that he is not following the same rules as his peers, and therefore, to some degree, not inhabiting the same world as they are, not participating in the character of his people. While Cavell limits this form of authority to the native speaker using her own language, part of the role of *Einfühlung*, on Herder’s view, is to extend something like this authority to the anthropologist.³⁴ The anthropologist, in “feeling her way into” the circumstances of the subject of anthropology, comes to think of the use of the concepts she wishes to interpret first-personally.

The success of the anthropologist, both on the ordinary ethics approach and Herder’s, depends on their ability to inhabit the world of their subjects, their ability to interpret and perhaps even make judgments concerning the world of that community from their own perspective. Herder’s conception of *Einfühlung* therefore provides a framework for understanding the work of these anthropologists, while their work provides a concrete realization of the goals Herder ascribed to anthropology. Herder’s approach was novel in its time in its aim to transform flat empirical data into normatively rich data, overcoming the challenges Kant posed for anthropology of Platner’s variety without instating Kantian dualism. The problems Herder faced are not unlike those faced by contemporary anthropologists: how to transform the data we gain from interviews, historical records, and cultural observations, into an understanding of the world inhabited by a community from the perspective of that community. It may be the case, then, that *Einfühlung* provides a way of

³⁴ Cavell makes this aspect of his conception of authority most clear in “Must We Mean What We Say?”

understanding the methodology of contemporary ordinary ethics anthropologists. This way of thinking about their work distinguishes their work as anthropology from that of experimental philosophers; the empirical data they draw from interviews and studies of the use of language in a particular linguistic community is not straightforwardly employed as evidence of concepts being used a certain way, but as a form of initiation that grants them a form of authority over the use of a concept.

Herder's work gives us good reason to take the work of ordinary ethics anthropology seriously as a form of philosophy. Contemporary philosophers often take the work of anthropologists to be of secondary interest; in doing a conceptual analysis of our notions of justice or of reasons for action, we need not concern ourselves either with the contingent historical development of particular understandings of justice or with the manifestations of these conceptions in different linguistic communities. Herder's picture of mind and language represents the work of these anthropologists as genuinely philosophical: they trace the contours of our ethical concepts themselves in a way that armchair philosophy simply cannot. At the same time, ordinary ethics anthropology has merit that goes beyond that of Herder's work in providing a more concrete empirical practice that goes beyond historical speculation.

Herder's sensitivity to the question of how to draw conclusions concerning the nature of normative content on the basis of empirical data further provides a way of differentiating between the methodology of a philosophical anthropology and that of existing forms of empirical philosophical research, such as experimental philosophy. Insofar as Herder's anthropology successfully demarcates itself along these lines, it provides a promising framework in which an empirical program of philosophical import can be carried out.

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