NATURE, SCIENCE, AND SUBJECTIVITY IN THE AGE OF GOETHE

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My dissertation project examines the relationship between the emergent discourse of the life sciences at the end of the 18th century and the influence of this discourse on the literary production, moral philosophy, and philosophy of history of the time. Specifically, I demonstrate how the paradigm shift in the natural sciences in the second half of the 18th century, from a mechanist understanding of nature to a vitalist one, allowed for a fundamental reevaluation of the status of the human being as a natural organism. Unlike the dominant Enlightenment and Idealist discourses of the 18th century, which typically viewed human reason as grounded in a divine or transcendental source and consequently, understood the human being as something fundamentally different from other natural organisms, the vitalist discourse in the biological sciences provided a theoretical framework within which the human being and its cognitive faculties could be understood according to fully naturalistic premises.

The emergence of this strand of naturalism, I argue, is central to the development of a much different theory of subjectivity than that usually associated with developments in literature and philosophy around 1800. As opposed to Kantian and the other universalizing tendencies of the era, I argue that Herder utilized cutting edge vitalist developments in the natural sciences to develop a naturalistic theory of subjectivity that saw all thinking as inextricably imbedded with a horizon of language, culture, and individuality, and hence, as always in some sense "perspectival". This naturalist theory of subjectivity, I argue, not only offered a fundamentally different path for theorizing the human being compared to the more universally oriented theories

of Kant, but exercised a equally great influence on the developments of the time as did those of Kant.

The dissertation investigates and develops these central themes in four chapters plan an epilogue. In Chapter 1, I lay out the scientific context within which vitalism emerged and which established the essential fulcrum point on which the major theoretical decisions of the time were made. In Chapter 2, I trace Kant and Herder's response to this scientific context and show how their differing responses to the emergence of vitalism and the "crisis in the mechanical sciences" structure their subsequent theories of subjectivity, with Kant looking to secure a space of objectivity and universality while Herder embraced the historical and individual perspectivism that was a consequence of his naturalism. Having established this foundation, I then investigate the influence of naturalist tendencies on the theories of subjectivity of Schiller and Goethe. Finally, I end the dissertation with an epilogue in which I investigate the legacy of naturalism on Adalbert Stifiter's classic *Bildungsroman, der Nachsommer* with the help of a meditation on notions of historical time in Alexander von Humboldt.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Stephen Klemm received his BA in Philosophy with a minor in Ancient Greek from the University of Iowa in 2008. He continued his education by receiving an MA in the Humanities with a concentration on Philosophy from the University of Chicago in 2010. Stephen received an MA in German Studies in 2016 and completed the program with a Ph.D. in 2020. Since Fall, 2018, Stephen has been a NTT Assistant Professor of German in the Comparative Studies in Literature and Culture at Occidental College and will begin as an Assistant Professor there in the Fall of 2020.

In memory of my mother Gretchen Elizabeth Klemm and for my daughter Charlotte Frances Klemm

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INTRODUCTION

Mind, Matter and the Intellectual Context Around 1800

Literary criticism and the history of philosophy have a fairly standard story to tell about the development off German literature and philosophy around 1800. According to this story there were three major movements that cut across literature and philosophy, which, themselves, were always intertwined: Classicsim, Idealism and Romanticism. What all three of these movement have in common, so the story goes, is that they are all reactions to the ground-breaking, epoch shifting philosophy of Immanuel Kant and as such, some version of "Idealism". Matthew C. Altman sums up this position the *Palgrave Handbook to German Idealism* when he states that, "Kant's "Copernican revolution in philosophy" – the idea that the world must conform to our representation of it, rather than vice versa – inaugurated a movement that philosophers could take up or argue against, but that could not be ignored."[1] Kant's shift to Transcendental Idealism, the story goes, set up a constellation of ideas that overturned and delegitimized previous paradigms and to which any intellectual who hoped to maintain relevance had to respond. For Kant's contemporaries, the question, in other words, was no longer whether Kant was correct in directing philosophy towards the spontaneous powers of the rational subject but how to respond. Or in the words of Dieter Henrich, the question post-Kant now became: "how can we improve the framework established by Kantat while maintaining its most important results?"[2] How

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[1] Altman, Matthew C., "Introduction", in Altman, Matthew C., ed. *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 1.
[2] Henrich, Dieter, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein: Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992, pp., 1, my trans.

exactly one responded has typically been used as the criteria for determining exactly what "school" subsequent intellectual movements belonged to.

The "Classicists", Goethe and Schiller are typically said to have responded to Kant by developing the aesthetic project of "Weimar Classicism", theorized by Schiller, executed by Goethe, and characterized by what has come to be known as "Aesthetic Humanism".[3] According to this reading, while Kant had succeeded in establishing the universal principle of morality, what he had failed to do was account for the sensible side of human existence. Famously, for Schiller, in the *Aesthetic Education of Mankind* it became the role of art to save the Enlightenment project by bridging the gap between reason and sense, transforming the subject into a model of universal humanism. And in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, scholars have often seen the counterpart to this aesthetic theory with the *Bildungsroman* read as the tale of the slow steady progress towards rationality and integration into bourgeois society.[4] Classicism has, thus, traditionally been read as a commitment to a *universalist* and normative conception of subjectivity with the Greeks serving as naïve yet normative exemplars to be achieved again on a higher historical level. "Classicism" therefore, is typically seen as an aesthetic/ethical category committed to a set of univerasal moral and aesthetic norms, which deserve the right to commands to all subjects, regardless of time, place, culture, language. And, the *Bildungsroman* (and Aesthetic Humanism in general) has been brutally and repeatedly criticized on precisely

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[3] For an overview of the period as defined by "Aesthetic Humanism" see Saul, Nicholas, "Aesthetic Humanism (1790-1830)", in *Cambridge History of German Literature*, edited by Watanabe-O'Kelly, Helen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[4] See Franco Moretti's classical study of the *Bildungsroman* in, Moretti, Franco, "The Way of the World: The *Bildungsroman* in European Culture". New York: Verso, 2000. The *Bildungsroman*, thus, has for Moretti, a "strong *normative* vocation: events acquire meaning when they lead to *one* ending, and only one". In case of *Wilhelm Meister*, heteronormative marriage, pp., 7. See also, Boes, Tobias, "Modernist Studies and the *Bildungsroman*: A Historical Survey of Critical Trends" in *Literature Compass* 3/2 (2006) pp., 230-243, for a good overview of the scholarship on the *Bildungsroman* in general as well as his recent book, Boes, Tobias. *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Bildungsroman.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012.

these grounds, as a piece of "aesthetic ideology" making appear as universal what is actually contingent and local, all for the sake of power.[5]

And "Classicism" has often said to find its philosophical counterpart in "German Idealism". The reason for this is that "Idealism", like "Classicism", is typically seen to have responded to Kant's Transcendental Idealism by expanding the realm of objective knowledge, transforming all of nature and human history into a developmental path in which the spirit comes to an awareness of its own essence as rational autonomy.[6] Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* can thus be read as the philosophical companion of Goethe's *Willhelm Meister*, with a normative, ratio-centric model of *Bildung* conceived of as the aim and goal of individual and world historical development.[7] Both, so the narrative goes, are a continuation of the Enlightenment project with its commitment to absolute knowledge and universalism.

It is "Romanticism", which has historically been seen as representing the great "break" from the "Enlightenment" and its universalist representational schemes by developing an ethics of fractured subjectivity and non-teleological progression with an aesthetics of irony and incompleteness.[8] Yet even this movement, according to a the ground breaking work of Manfred Frank, ought to be seen as fundamentally post-Kantian. The reason why this unique aesthetic

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[5] To pick just two of the criticisms most influential in the researching of this dissertation, see, Redfield, Marc, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and The Bildungsroman*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996. Behler, Constantin. *Nostalgic Teleology: Friedrich Schiller and the Schemata of Aesthetic Humanism.* Bern: P. Lang, 1995.

[6] The only standard scholarly narrative of the time I don't take issue with is that of idealism. I, too, read idealism as a foundationalist project that sought to overcome Kantian dualisms by grounding philosophy in an "absolute" point of identity between subject and object (Hegel and Schelling) or in the spontaneity of the I (Fichte). For an account of this movement, see Beiser's phenomenal study, Beiser, Frederick C. *German Idealism: the Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002.And in terms of it's relation to Hegel, Beiser, Frederick C. *Hegel.* New York: Routledge, 2005.

[7] Voβkamp draws this parallel in, Voβkamp, Wilhelm, *Der Roman eines Lebens. Die Aktualität unserer Bildung und ihre Geschichte im Bildungsroman*. De Gruyter, 2009.

[8] See, Saul, Nicholas., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

theory could be developed, so Frank, was because Early German Romanticism was essentially anti-foundationalist, emerging out of a critique of Fichte.[9] For Frank, Novalis, Schlegel, and Hölderlin rejected Fichte's claim that reason could come to know its own metaphysical grounding (the absolute I), while accepting the notion that at the heart of the matter, subject and object- are deeply intertwined and, in fact, identical. The result is the unique mixture of romantic longing (*Sehnsucht*) and striving (*Streben*) and its aesthetic of incompleteness. For the Romantics, the absolute can only be attained in non-conceptual fashion, by means of aesthetic feeling, a longing for that which one once had but has lost.

What these stories have in common is, therefore, their Kantian or "idealist" starting point. Kant's conception of the subject provides this classical narrative with the default horizon against which every move is made is. The stories are, therefore, either stories of reason realizing itself through individual and historical *Bildung* or a rejection of the absoluteness of rationality. This framework, in turn, is what allows for the vast body of anti-universalist, anti-Enlightenment literature to unload its criticisms on the Neo-Classical Humanism that is supposedly embodied in the literature and philosophy of "Classical Germany".

And my dissertation research began with this narrative as its guiding framework. I had initially set out to write a dissertation on "Romantic Ethics", which is actually the project that still interests me the most. I was interested in taking the Frankian point one step further and asking: Since we cannot know absolutes, then how do we live? What does it mean to live a life for which the guiding principles of reason are no longer valid? And despite the fact that there are

[9] Frank, Manfred. *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.

no "Romatnics" discussed in this dissertation, this question nonetheless remained the guiding question of the project.

The reason for this was that as I started to research Schlegel, Hölderlin, and Novalis and delve into the intellectual context and historical constellation of the figures around 1800 in more detail, I started to sense that there was a current that could not be explained and cannot be squared with the framework of Kantian Idealism and its notion of reson as grounded *a priori*. What tipped me off to this undercurrent was a striking naturalism (something Kant and especially Fichte, I knew, abhorred). The plethora of naturalist language, the metaphors of plants unfolding and progressing (everywhere in Schlegel), the intimations, like in Hölderlin's *werden im vergehen* that mind and matter are not separate entities but unified in a nature that was constantly in the process of growth, decay, and transformation, were simply not Kantian.

These considerations led me first to an examination of Goethe's morphology and its reception in reception in Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and then (within the English-speaking world) to a study of the lesser known figures, the brother's Humboldt, Wilhelm and Alexander.[10] What this study did was convince me that there was a distinct, non-Kantian strand of influence that ran through the intellectual context of the time. Its fundamental features were, furthermore, fundamentally naturalistic, yet non-teleological. Nature, human, and culture, on this picture were constantly seen as wrapped up in a process of change, transformation, and sedimentation in a temporal process that could not be subsumed under any Idealist schema, but was always the product of contingent processes of change that had to be analyzed and understood in terms of the specific sets of cultural, historical, and natural circumstances at hand. This naturalist

[10] This essay was very important the development of this research project, Nassar, Dalia, "From a Philosophy of Self to a Philosophy of Nature: Goethe and the Development of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*" *Archiv für die Geschichte der Philosophie* 92. Bd., S. 304–321.

undercurrent, it seemed to me contained within it a much different theory of subjectivity than that of the Idealist subject of the Kantian-Fichtean variety. It rejected universal norms and instead saw the subject as thrown into the contingent world of language, culture, and place, seekinig and striving to interpret its life without any clear guideposts. What struck me, in other words, was that there wasn't one version of subjectivity that was being developed at the time and which set the horizon of interpretation, but two: One idealist and one naturalist. This dissertation is the product of this reformulated research project. It is my attempt and contribution to the now robust scholarly movement looking to diversify the narrative of the development of German literature and philosophy around 1800, and, as such, discover the roots of a romantic, non-Kantian and naturalized ethics.

The central claims of this dissertation are fourfold. First, that the lineage of this naturalist lineage around 1800 is the product of the influence of the massively underappreciated Johann Gottfried Herder. Long having languished (especially within English language scholarship) as either unimportant or a nationalist/racist, Herder scholarship is currently experiencing a renaissance as his extraordinary importance and unique philosophical outlook is starting to be re-discovered.[11] Herder's central goal was to develop a theory of nature, according to which everything about the human being and her characteristic activities, religion, art, philosophy,

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[11] While I get into the debate and the literature in more detail in the next chapter the following works must be cited here. Within the English-speaking world, the central works that sparked this renaissance were the works of John Zammito, Zammito, John, *Kant Herder and the Birth of Anthroplogy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002; and Frederick Beiser in Beiser, Frederick, *Thee Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987. My research in this dissertation is very much indebted to the path the opened up. The continued revolution in Herder scholarship can be seen by the recent publication of two texts by philosophers, one by the long term Herder scholar and philosopher of language Michael Forster and one by the excellent philosopher Rachel Zuckert. Forster, Michael N. *Herder's Philosophy.* First edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018; Zuckert, Rachel. *Herder's Naturalist Aesthetics.* Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019. This appreciate of Herder, however is still, in many ways, lacking with in literary scholarship and German studies.

science, could be explained according to fully natural yet non-reductionist principles. He did so by developing a vitalist monism that saw nature not as dead, inert substance controlled by causal laws but as a fundamentally living power. In other words, Herder saw spontaneous organization and the ability to interpret one's surrounding according to a horizon of self-understanding as a fundamental feature of all life. According to this schema, mind is not separate from matter, but matter is seen as proto-intelligent. This assumption turns the story of the world into a story of dynamic evolution in which life constantly organizes and re-organizes itself in ever different ways. The result is a radical theory of nature and subject as constantly wrapped up in a process of imminent, non-teleologically oriented transformation. On this picture, contra Kant, reason is not viewed as a non-natural, universal property, but as the product of the specific set of physiological changes that enabled the human being to develop language. As such, reason, and with it, world views can and must change depending on the time, place, culture and language from w ithin which any interpretation of life occurs.

Second, as the first point suggests, Herder's theory of subjectivity cannot be separated from the scientific context of the time and in particular, the vitalist response to what Peter Hanns Reil has called the "crisis in the mechanical sciences".[12] As Reill has documented, by 1750, the mechanical sciences were undergoing a crisis of legitimacy based on their inability to explain the origins of the teleological forms that Cartesian mechanism had banished from the realm of nature. The failures of preformation to convincingly solve this problem led German and French vitalists to suggest that we must posit a "vital force" in order to account for the unique features of biological organisms. What they suggested, in other words, was that mind and matter could not be viewed as strictly separate. This suggestion, in turn, lead to a dissemination of various

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[12] Reill, Peter Hanns, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*: Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

theories of how the two related to one another with the school of French vitalist developing the most radical. It is by embracing these theories of vitalism and transforming them into an ontological principle that Herder was able to develop his unique philosophy of nature.

Yet it is precisely this scientific context that simultaneously helps to account for Herder's long and obstinate neglect and this on two fronts. First, positivist versions of the history of science have long considered "vitalism" an embarrassment to legitimate science, citing it as an almost paradigmatic example of pseudo-science. Yet in order to understand the very odd terminology and presuppositions with which Herder is operating one must understand what is for most of us a very foreign discourse. It also means that Herder's theory of culture is built on a rather odd vitalist naturalist metaphysics. This first reason leads to a second reason why Herder is, for many, difficult to access. Herder is an unabashed naturalist. He believes that cultural forms are grounded in and intimately related to "physical material". Taken from the perspective of common theories of nature, this sounds a lot like "essentialism". How could mental, physical, and cultural states be grounded in nature without there being a form of cultural and natural determinism/essentialism at hand?

And here again, Herder's answer to this question lies with his quite radical theory of vitalist nature. For Herder, not even the densest matter is "fully determined". Rather, the specific organization of any matter both comes into being as a result of a set of malleable conditions and transforms itself as those conditions change. This general principle holds even more true for the human being, who is, for Herder more but not absolutey, free. Hence, Herder's central theses concerning the "determinism" of the subject are actually more similar to those of social construction theorists with a hint of body trauma theory than they are to any theory of natural determination. Just as social construction theorists, in general, believe that selves have no

"essential qualities" but are constructed by means of contingent social, historical, cultural, and linguistic conditions; selves, for Herder are not pods of autonomy but fully embodied social beings who are largely shaped by their social and cultural contexts.[13] In this sense, Herder, I will argue, is an early forerunner to theories of "perspectivalism". And it his naturalism, in fact, that gets him to this position. It is because matter, for Herder, is not set, bound, and determined by unconditional causal laws, but always adjusting to its environment that the self is simultaneously extremely malleable. Selves, for Herder, are always embodied selves that are psychically and physically constructed in conjunction with a specific time, place, history, and language. As such, body and mind are not separate, but the body, as in trauma theory, actually holds portions this material-social experience within it, with bodily interpretation preceding and pre-structuring whatever "logical" and "rational" activity may follow. Yet this dynamic is not set, but always subject to change and transformation.

Herder's philosophy of nature and its relation to theories of subjectivity, in other words, end up at the place where most social constructivist theories end up as well, namely with the conclusion that there is nothing "determined and set by nature" but that everything is determined in terms of the specific historical dynamics of a specific place, time, and language. Herder gets there, however, without making the highly implausible claim that human mental and cultural life is radically disconnected from nature or by not asking about the connection between nature and culture. Herder was an 18th century philosopher and though seeming unsystematic, he in fact had highly systematic reasons for his lack of systematicity, his vitalist naturalism being foremost

[13] See, Amanda Jo Goldstein's excellent essay for an account of the relation between Herder's theory of sense and its social construction. Goldstein, Amanda Jo. "Irritable Figures: Herder's Poetic Empiricism", in *The Relevance of Romanticism: Essays on Early German Romanticism*. Edited by Dalia Nassar. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp., 273-295.

amongst them. The point being, however, that Herder's theory of culture cannot be understood without or separated from his vitalist naturalism, which grounds it systematically and logically.

Third, an awareness of this Herderian context and his line of influence can, I believe, have a substantial effect on the understanding of the development of German literature and philosophy around 1800. Far from being a merely post-Kantian epoch, Herder's naturalism and Kant's Transcendental Idealism presented two fundamentally different ontological options with two fundamentally different understandings of human subjectivity and culture. Central to this divide is the standard 19th century claim that in order for a judgement to be considered a piece of objective knowledge that that judgment must be grounded *a priori* in a non-empirical capacity of pure reason itself. Herder's naturalist project, however, simply denies that any aspect of the human soul is grounded *a priori* and in doing so, he draws the soul down into the contingencies of language, history, culture, and time. There is, in other words, no such thing for Herder as an objective faculty of reason that analyzes an objectively given world. Instead, all reason is, for Herder, is a certain linguistic capacity to interpret the world from with in a specific time, place, perspective.

Kant avoided this fate, famously, by appealing to an ontological dualism. That is the point of the Copernican Revolution. Reason supplies its own categories by virtue of its own spontaneity and, in doing so, justifies the use of those categories. It is by menas of this move that Kant's transcendental idealism is able to claim universality, necessity, i.e., objectivity, within the domains of science and morality. This has a massive effect on the discourse that follows. If one is committed to a straightforward universalism, as is claimed of "Classicism" and "Idealism", then one must either be a dualist or find another solution to problem of the relationship between mind and matter (as do Hegel and Schelling). Thus, when Goethe and Schiller are called

"Universal Humaninists" what is implicitly assumed is that they are dualists. What is quite clear, however, in the case of Goethe (Chapter 4) and (as I argue in Chapter 3) also Schiller, is that they are not. Goethe, instead, is quite clearly a substance monist. Yet as a substance monist in the tradition of Herder, it is not at all obvious that Goethe believes in the existence of rationally grounded, universal ends of morality. Yet if this is the case, then towards what "Universalism" does *Bildung* necessarily strive?

What becomes apparent from this context, I believe, is that, "universalism" in the post-Kantian context was a problem and a problem towards which one could take multiple stances. One could reject vitalism and claim that nature is mechanistic, structured *a priori* by reason as do Kant and Fichte; one could accept vitalism and reject universalism as does Herder; or one could find another solution (Schelling's identity philosophy, for example). These options, in turn, allow themselves to be developed in a variety of different ways. For example, as Michael Forster has shown, the development of linguistically oriented hermeneutics of Schleiermacher, Humboldt, and Schlegel, are clearly influenced by the naturalist linguistic theory of Herder.[14] Hermeneutics, in other words, far from being Kantian and Idealist, is better understood as Herderian and naturalist. It is because the self is rooted in nature, culture, and language that interpretation supersedes any vision of "objective reason." The same thing can be argued of "Early German Romanticism". Perhaps, as earlier scholarship has suggested, the reason why the Early Romantics rejected Fichtean foundationalism is because they were influenced by Herder's naturalism. More incompatible positions than Fichte-Herder cannot be developed.

[14] See Forster's two books on the topic, Forster, Michael N. *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. Forster, Michael N. *German Philosophy of Language: from Schlegel to Hegel and beyond.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

And my claim is that this skepticism concerning universalism is true of the supposedly most universal of the universalists, Goethe and Schiller. Once one sees this context, I believe that it becomes clear that even during the heart of their "Classical" period, that both Goete and Schiller were influenced in significant ways by the naturalistic, relativistic tendencies of the Herderian strand of thinking so prominent at the time. It could not have hurt to have the Humboldt brothers, both enthusiastic vitalists, in Jena at precisely the time of the development of "Aesthetic Humanism".[15] Perhaps the development of a universalist ideology wasn't what was happening in the tandem projects of the *Aesthetic Letters* and *Wilhelm Meister* at all. With chapters devoted to the effect of this naturalist/vitalist strain on both Schiller and subsequently Goethe, this dissertation seeks to contribute to a reevaluation of the period conceived of as a time of Universal Humanism.

And fourth, what is at stake in the project is, finally, a discussion and genealogy of two radically different theories of subjectivity, one the legacy of Kant and the other the legacy of Herder. For the theory of subjectivity developed by Herder is anything but universalist. For Herder, reason, instead, is fundamentally linguistic, wrapped up in the cultural, historical and individualistic contingencies and idiosyncrasies of human life. On this picture, the human does not possess a faculty that allows her to transcend her individuality and reach an objective conclusion about a state of affairs, because cognition is always, in some way, perspectival. It always occurs out of a pre-structured horizon which is unique to a culture, place, social status, and individual. The result, for Herder, is a hermeneutics of selfhood in which every individual must seek to interpret their lives from within a context that is opaque to them. Within this schema, there are, for Herder, no normative universal ethical commands that we can appeal to in

[15] See Ziolkowski, Theodore, *Das Wunderjahr in Jena Geist und Gesellschaft 1794/95*. Stuttgart: Clett-Kotta, 1998.

order to help us guide and organize our lives. Each individual is thrown into the world and must make decisions based on the limited perspective in which they dwell.

And while incompleteness, non-universality, and a certain amount of relativity are currently quite fashionable. It is not the point of this dissertation to simply defend this position. Rather, as we will see in Chapter 2, I believe that Kant's grounding of morality in the structure of spontaneity itself is quite possibly the greatest achievement in the history of philosophy. One can only hope that human beings strive to treat others according to the precepts of Kant's categorical imperative, even if they choose to champion a cultural relativism. As Kant is well aware, it is not at all clear how to ground the universality and objectivity of moral judgments. To do so is a remarkable feat and one that should not be so lightly dismissed. The same, I believe holds for the basic schema of fundamental concepts of reason, including science.

The point of the dissertation is, instead, to sketch out these competing theories of subjectivity and to trace their origins through the history of science and the crucial dividing point, the Kant-Herder debate. Doing so, I believe, is not only inherently worth doing, as it reveals a core set of options for how we human beings can understand ourselves. Rather, I believe that it can also open up new vistas of interpretation not only of the period around 1800, but of the history of 19th-20th century literature and philosophy. For, what is revealed in Herder is the starting point of a naturalist-hermeneutic tradition that runs not only from Herder to Schiller but from them to Humboldt to Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. This dissertation aims to tell the origins of this story in 4 chapters plus an epilogue.

In Chapter 1, I set up the Kant-Herder debate by presenting the scientific context out of which their fundamental disagreements emerged. This involves a discussion of the foundations of "mechanistic" conceptions of nature in Descartes as well as the crisis of legitimacy brought

about by mechanism's inability to explain teleological form. I then discuss the various vitalist responses to this crisis, ending with an analysis of Maupertuis's most radical visions of nature in his *Earthly Venus* from which Herder's theory of nature emerges.

In Chapter 2, I analyze the Kant-Herder debate from the context of the crisis of legitimacy in the mechanistic sciences. I argue that Kant's philosophy of nature, despite often appealing to and promoting historicist tendencies often associated with vitalism, was anything but vitalist, and instead sought to restrict and limit what he perceived as a threat to his system. I then discuss why Kant perceived vitalism as a threat and argue that he was right to do so. A naturalized version of subjectivity does carry with it the consequences that Kant feared, central amongst them, the inability to ground judgments of science and especially morality in universal principles. In the second half of the chapter, I discuss how Herder enthusiastically endorsed the vitalist revolution, utilizing vitalist findings to develop an utterly unique theory of sensory cognition in *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul*. I then show how Herder subsequently ontologizes these principles to develop an astonishingly original theory of nature conceived of as a "workplace of organizing forces" striving towards maximal diversity in his *God: Some Conversations*. I conclude by arguing that this picture sets the stage for his story of the development of human reason now interpreted as a linguistic capacity in his monumental *Ideas on the Philosophy of History of Humankind*.

In Chapter 3, I turn my attention to the influence of this vitalist theory on the "Classicists" starting with Schiller. Here, I follow a suggestion made by Wilhelm von Humboldt that Schiller's "Kantian" writings should be viewed of as more of a mistke than as representative of Schiller's own thought and seek to discover what Humboldt suggested was "unique" to Schiller's thinking. I argue that when one analyzes Schiller's medical studies from the

Karlsschule in light of this vitalist context, a strong vitalist, anti-dualist feature can be discovered which again re-emerges in letters 11-16 of the *Letters on Aesthetic Education*. I then argue that in these letters one finds a quite radical shift and break from Kant. Centrally, I argue that Schiller actually subordinates practical reason and, therefore, morality, to what he now conceives of as the higher, non-rational faculty of aesthetic judgment. With this faculty in charge of guiding human life, Schiller reinvisions the idal of humanity away from a cognitive-rational core and instead argues that the ideal human will develop themselves in as many different ways as possible, pursuing the world of the senses and the world of the mind equally and at home in as many different places in the world and with as many different people as possible. This ideal, and most importantly, the recognition of the insufficiency of practical reason to guide and give meaning to one's indivudiual life, represents the beginning of an ethical movement whose influence can be seen most clearly in the existentialist ethics of Soren Kierkegaard.

In Chapter 4 I turn my attention to Goethe. Against the interpretaioon of Gothe as a Universal Humanist, I argue that Goethe's natural philsosophy leads us to a different interepretation. Rather than believing that there was a single normative standard for aesthetics and *Bildung*, I argue that Goethe, especially post 1805, became centrally concerned with the specificities of local and cultural developments. This shift occured, I argue, because Goethe lost faith in the Idealist narrative of Weimar Classicism and came to embrce the theory he had been working on in his morphological writings, namlely, that life always determines itself in complex co-determination with its environment, absent any teleological goal or guiding post.[16]

Finally, in the Epilogue, I turn my attention to the influence of this vitalist naturalism on Adalbert Stifter's *Nachsommer*. Here, I argue that far from being a classic-conservitive utopia attempting to instantiate universal norms, that Stifter's novel is fundamentally aware of its own historicity and is, in fact, built on a bed of dynamic change. I argue for this position by inquiring about the role of Alexander von Humboldt in the novel and analyzing the multitude of Humboldtian dimensions in the novel vis-à-vis his theory of dynamic historical time. This understanding of history as dynamic change is, I argue, paradoxically central to the *Nachsommer*. The text, aware of its own historical eclispse, represents a monument to a specific time and place and is simultaneously a time capsule, a reminder to future generations of mode existence now long gone.

CHAPTER ONE

The Scientific Context of the Kant-Herder Debate: Mechanism, Vitalism and the *Gigantomachia peri tes Ousias*

To suggest Herder's importance next to Kant as one of the primary impulses of Romanticism and Idealism around 1800 is anything but revolutionary. In many ways it is, in fact, quite commonplace and old. In his study published in 1969, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his predecessors*, Lewis White Beck simply states that, "Eighteenth Century thought was fed into nineteenth century through two channels: Kant and Herder. Its idealism sprang from going beyond Kant, in directions pointed out (but warned against) by him. Its naturalism, historicism, nationalism, monism, and near mysticism...were developments from Herder's ideas. If the Romantic philosophers can say, with Faust, that two souls dwell in their breast, we know how to label each: one was Kantian, the other was Herderian."[17] For White Beck, it is straightforward and obvious that Kant and Herder fed equally into the development of German philosophy and literature around 1800. It is precisely this attempt to fuse these two fundamentally incompatible thinkers that produced a certain incoherence and tension within subsequent philosophical and literary movements.

White Beck's position, however, is anything but common in the scholarship of the last quarter century. As opposed to White Beck, the dominant scholarly discourse has come to see the developments in German literature and philosophy around 1800 as simply "post-Kantian". As the name suggests, this scholarship tends to see Kant not as one important player among

[17] Beck, Lewis White. *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors.* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969.

others, but as establishing a fundamentally new paradigm, whose basic positions subsequent thinkers could not disagree with, but only "move beyond". Dieter Henrich, whose excellent work has been central to this Post-Kantian turn, sums up this position succinctly in his work on Hölderlin, writing: "Classical German philosophy took Kant as its starting point. Up through Hegel, the study of Kant's works, the assumed attachment to them and the maintaining of their fundamental results were the fundamental presuppositions for every thinking, which wanted to be contemporary and hold claim to any possibility validity and truth." [Von Kant hat die klassische deutsche Philosophie ihren Ausgang genommen. Bin hin zu Hegel waren das Studium seines Werkes, der selbstständige Anschluß daran und die Bewahrung seiner wesentlichesten Resultate auch Grundvoraussetzungen für jegliches Denken, das Gegenwärtigkeit und mögliche Wahrheit für sich in Anspruch nehmen wollte].[18] The key word in this passage is *jegliches*. For Henrich, Kant's Copernican turn exploded the philosophical classifications of the time so absolutely, that the premises of his *transcendental idealism* become the starting point for "any thinking". What is explicit in this claim is now the implicit structuring claim of upon which the majority of scholarship focused on the period around 1800 is based. [19] Namely, that Kant's transcendental move radically transforms the philosophical and cultural landscape of its time in

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[18] Henrich, Dieter, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein: Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992, pp., 1.

[19] With the exception of Frederick Beiser's book, one thing these studies agree in fthe lack of relative importance of Herder. A sample of some of the major studies in Post-Kantian philosophy have been: Beiser, Friedrick, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003. Förster, Eckart. *Die 25 Jahre Der Philosophie: Eine Systematische Rekonstruktion.* Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2011. Pinkard, Terry P. *German Philosophy, 1760-1860: the Legacy of Idealism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Ameriks, Karl, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism.* Second edition. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Altman, Matthew C., "Introduction", in Altman, Matthew C., ed. *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Frank's central claim is that Kant's epistemology established the series of questions out of which Early German Roamanticism grew Manfred Frank, in, Frank, Manfred *Unendliche Annäherung: Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik*. Frankfurt a.M.: Shurkamp, 1997. In each of these studies, Herder remains a *Nebenfigur* of much lesser, if any importance.

such a way in such a way that it simultaneously succeeds delegitimizing all competing philosophical discourses. [20]

This view has had serious effects on the history of Herder scholarship for obvious reasons. Herder not only failed to make this turn but in many ways staked his philosophical reputation on being a polemical anti-Kant.[21] And the consequences of failing to make the critical turn cannot have been more severe. As Tilman Borsche puts it, “insofar as the turn that separates pre-critical from post-critical thinking counts as radical, comprehensive, and unavoidable, this removes subsequent generations from the admittedly difficult task of grappling with Herder.” [insofern aber die Wende, die vorkritisches von kritischem Denken trennt, als radikal, umfassend und unumgänglich gilt, enthebt das die nachfolgenden Generationen der in der Tat mühevollen Pflicht, sich philosophisch mit Herder zu befassen].[22] If Kant’s critical turn is considered a moment of absolute philosophical victory where no competing options are viewed as philosophically legitimate, the history of philosophy is left with no other option than to see Kant’s supreme opponent as philosophically inferior. And this is precisely the narrative that became canonized already in 1875 at the hands of Herder’s first great biographer, the Kantian Rudolf Haym. In that biography Haym casts Herder as amateur philosopher who, famously, remained a Kantian of the pre-critical Kant: “thus, Herder, over the course of his life, never got

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[20] As an example of the dominant of the Post-Kantian narrative see, Boyle, Nicholas, *The Impact of Idealism: The Legacy of Post-Kantian German Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. In support of using Kant as his paradigm shift, Boyle, Boyle in the introduction, quotes Goethe’s claim in *Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert,* published in the year of Herder’s death in 1805 that, “no scholar…has with impunity rejected, opposed or scorned…that great philosophical movement begun by Kant.”[20] It should be noted that Goethe’s apparent endorsement of Kant as paradigm setter was originally published in a text entitled, “Winckelmann and *his* century” (emphasis, sk).

[21] This poemical attitude occurs primarily in his long, pedantic, and unsuccessful critique of Kant in his, *Metakritik zur Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1799).

[22] Borsche, Tilman, “Vorkritisch oder metakritisch? Die philosophische Aktualität Herders” in *Herder im Spiegel der Zeiten: Verwerfungen und Rezeptionsgeschichte und Chancen einer Relektüre*, ed. by Tilman Borsche, (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006) pp., 126-141, here 126.

beyond that period of not yet mature philosophizing…a philosophical dilettante…he was and remained a Kantian of the year 1765" [so kam Herder Zeitlebens über jenes unreife…Philosophieren nicht hinaus … Ein philosophischer Dilettant…(e)r war und blieb…ein Kantianer vom Jare 1765."[23] For Haym, Herder fails to make the turn for the very simple reason: That compared to Immanuel Kant, Herder is just not a good philosopher.

Given these developments, it is not surprising that Herder's reputation long languished. As a recent appeal from top Herder scholars for the need of a reevaluation Herder's reputation has summed up it, Herder is still often thought of in one of three ways: As a "perennial forerunner" of seminal importance for developments in the *Sturm und Drang* but who primarily served as a precursor to literary Romanticism.[24] As a second rate philosopher and primarily "poetic thinker".[25] Or, as a member of the "Counter-Enlightenment" with a reputation for irrationalism and nationalism.[26] This association with the Counter-Enlightenment has even contributed to Herder's still lingering reputation as a proto-fascist and proponent of nationalism, cultural essentialism, and racism.[27]

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[23] Haym, Rudolf, *Herder*, vol 1. Berlin: Aufbau, 1954, pp., 55.

[24] Hans Adler and Wulf Köpke rue this interpretation in, Adler, Hans., and Wulf Köpke, eds. *A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder.* Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2009, 3-4. Klaus Berghan also views Herder's importance as a short stage in literary history between Lessing and Schiller in, Berghan, Klaus, "From Classicist to Classical, 1730-1806" in *A History of German Literary Criticism, 1730-1980*, ed. by Peter Uwe Hohendahl. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press 1988, pp., 70-98.

[25] See Ulrich Gaier for an account and defense of Herder against this charage. Gaier, Ulrich, *Herders Sprachphilosophie und Erkenntniskritik*. Stuttgart: Frommann Holzbloog, 1988, pp, 8. as Ulrich Gaier has put it: Herder is often conceived off as a "poetic thinker" with "mangelnde Konsistenz im Begriffsgebrauch, mehrfache und wiedersprechende oder auch nur analogische Argumentation statt der strengen begriffsanalytisch oder empirisch induktiv vorgehenden Domnstrationen.".

[26] This was an interpretation largely developed by Isiah Berlin. What exactly the counter Enlightenment is and whether Herder belongs to it is a complicated question largely involving how one defines these terms. For a debate on the subject see the debate between Robert Norton and Steven Lestition. Norton, Robert, "The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment" in, *Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Oct., 2007), pp. 635-658*. And, Steven Lestition, "Countering, Transposing, or Negating the Enlightenment? A Response to Robert Norton" *Journal of the History of Ideas; Oct 2007; 68, 4*.

[27] Wolfgang Welsch has gone the farthest in accusing Herder of these tendencies, esp in: Welsch, Wolfgang, "Transculturality - the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today" in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. by Mike

Within recent scholarship, however, this reputation has started to be challenged in what has been recently called the "Revolution in Herder scholarship."[28] In particular, this scholarship has looked to emphasize Herder's unique contribution to three areas: His seminal influence on the development of the cultural and social sciences, anthropology, history, and hermeneutics;[29] his importance within the history of linguistics and the philosophy of language;[30] and his involvement and innovative use of the natural sciences of his time.[31] What has emerged is a picture of Herder as a philosopher who by no means should be superseded by Kant but rather who represents a genuine *philosophical alternative* (*philosophische alternative*) to Kant.[32]

Central to this philosophical alternative has been the emerging scholarly consensus that Herder developed a conception of human reason that was fundamentally linguistic and situated. In doing so Herder opposed Kantian universalism with anthropologically oriented understanding of the human that was fundamentally historicist.[33] As the work of Charles Taylor, Jürgen Trabant, and Michel Forster has documented, Herder's rejection of Kantian notions pure reason

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Featherstone and Scott Lash. London: Sage, 1999.There he writes that Herder's concept of culture is defined by, Herder's concept of culture, for Welsch, is "characterized by three elements: by social homogenization, ethnic consolidation and intercultural delimitation." More recent Herder scholarship is almost unanimous in its rejection of the view of Herder as a cultural essentialist.

[28] John H. Zammito, Karl Menges and Ernest A. Menze, "Johann Gottfried Herder Revisited: The Revolution in Scholarship in the Last Quarter Century" Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 71, No. 4 (October 2010), pp. 661-684.

[29] Zammito, John, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002. Gjesday, *Herder's Hermeneutics: History, Poetry, Enlightenment* . New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

[30] Gaier, Ulrich, *Herders Sprachphilosophie und Erkenntniskritik* (Stuttgart: Frommann Holzbloog, 1988); Forster, Michael, *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. Taylor, Charles. *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016.

[31] Pross, Wolfgang, "Naturalism, Anthropology, and Culture" in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Political Thought*, edited by Mark Goldie and Robert Wolker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 218-248. Zammito, John H. *The Gestation of German Biology: Philosophy and Physiology from Stahl to Schelling*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

[32] Gaier, Ulrich, "Hamann und Herder—eine philosophische Alternative zu Kant?" in *Herder im Spiegel der Zeiten: Verwerfungen der Rezeptionsgeschichte und Chancen einer Relektüre*, edited by Tilman Borsche. München: Fink Verlag, 2006.

[33] This is the fundamental thesis of Zammito's 2003 book. Within the English-speaking world, this book has been incredibly influential in sparking a reevaluation of Herder within the scholarly community.

in favor of a linguistically oriented theory of human thinking, what Taylor calls Herder's "constitutive theory of language", was of seminal importance in this historicist and anthropological turn. By equating reason with language, these scholars have shown how Herder was able to inaugurate his own, "linguistic turn" by drawing human reason down from the transcendental heights and locating thinking within never fully compatible language systems. In doing so scholars have argued that Herder rejects straightforward Enlightenment notions of reason as a capacity to make universal judgments that transcend their specific cultural and historical contexts. Instead, the consensus has developed that all thinking, For Herder occurs within the specific cultural, geographical, and historical context within which linguistic communication exists.

The result of this reevaluation has been an emerging picture of Herder as "very much a thinker for our time",[34] whose very criticisms of ratio-centric Enlightenment are valuable not just for historical reasons, but on theoretical grounds. In particular, a picture has started to emerge that Herder, as Frederick Beiser sums up, should be read as "an apostle of cultural diversity, a champion of pluralism who not only tolerated but celebrated human difference for its own sake."[35] Counter the traditional reading, Jonathan Noyes and others have argued that Herder's historicism, his rejection of universalized *a priori* components of thinking, enabled him to become a spokesperson *against* Enlightenment imperialism.[36] Against the traditional charge of

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[34] Waldow, Anik and DeSouza "Introduction" in *Herder: Philosophy and Anthropology*, edited by Anik Waldow and Nigel DeSouza. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

[35] Beiser, Frederick C., "Herder and the Jewish Question" *Herder: Philosophy and Anthropology.* Edited by Anik Waldow and Nigel DeSousa. First Edition. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp., 240-256, here 214.

[36] Noyes, Jonathan, *Herder: Aesthetics Against Imperialism*. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2015. Or as Noyes puts it, the idea of Enlightenment was "intimately related to the idea that a dominant culture can impose its own sense of social form, its own value system and its own economy on another." Herder, Noyes argues, fundamentally rejects this position. See too, Muthu, Sankar, *Enlightenment Against Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, esp., Chapter 6.

nationalism, For Vicki Spencer, it is Herder who developed a a pluralist conception of culture, which would align him with "contemporary proponents of a politics of recognition and multiculturalism."[37] For Noyes, Spencer, and much of recent Herder scholarship, the justification of pluralism, diversity and multiculturalism lies at the very center of Herder's philosophical project.

This reevaluation in Herder scholarship has been welcome and necessary and I do not mean to challenge the fundamental findings sketched above. Instead, in this chapter and the next, what I propose to do is build on its main conclusions, analyzing the epistemic procedures and philosophy of nature that grounds this pluralist understanding in Herder. This, in turn, will require an intervention into Herder's status as a vitalist naturalist where there has been less consensus in the scholarship. While many scholars, especially in literary criticism, have tended to focus solely on the humanistic side of Herder's theories, i.e., his philosophy of language, politics, or aesthetics, I will argue that Herder's thinking is fundamentally and inextricably rooted in his naturalism, and, importantly, his specifically vitalist naturalism.[38] My central claims are twofold. First, that it is precisely Herder's utilization of vitalist principles applied to nature and epistemology that allows him to develop the unique aesthetic, political, and linguistic theory that recent Herder scholarship has admirably explicated. This move, in turn, is predicated on a rejection of only Early Modern science and the dualism that supported it. In contrasts to

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[37] Spencer, Vicki A. *Herder's Political Thought: a Study of Language, Culture, and Community T*oronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp., 217, 17.

[38] The interpretation of Herder first as a naturalist has been most extensively developed by John Zammito, esp. in his *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* and Beiser in Beiser, Frederick C., *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant and Fichte*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987. It has also been developed more recently by Dalia Nassar and Daniela Helbig in "The Metaphor of Epigenesis: Kant, Blumenbach and Herder" in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science, 08/2016, Volume 58* and Rachel Zuckert in "Herder and Philosophical Naturalism" in *Herder Yearbook: Publications of the International Herder Society, 01/2014, Volume 12*.

commonly held views of nature at the time, Herder does not see nature as dead and controlled by universal causal laws, but believes that even the most basic bits of matter are themselves proto-cognitive, interpreting and shaping themselves always in relation to a specific context and environment. It is this deeply rooted vitalist naturalism, I will argue, which allows him to develop this unique, telic yet non-teleological understanding of of *Bildung* and ethics which he does. Second, I believe that this naturalist vision with its telic yet non-teleological was of fundamental importance to the development of German literature and philosophy around 1800. By developing this argument I, therefore, hope to contribute to a continued reevaluation of the development of German thinking around 1800. Far from being a solely Kantian project, my claim is that vitalism, and Herder's non-universal, non-teleological vitalism was massively influential at the time. The period around 1800 was influence, in other words, by two strictly contradictory discourses of subjectivity, one Kantian and universal, the other Herderian, relativist, and vitalist.

This task will require two connected yet independent chapters. The purpose of this first chapter will be to establish the scientific context against which Herder and Kant developed their thinking. This scientific context is essential, because, as we will investigate in detail next chapter, it is the question of the ontological status of the newly emerging discourse of vitalism, which most fundamentally distinguished Kant and Herder during the second half of the 18th century. As we will see, the short-lived emergence of vitalism in the second half of the 18th century allowed for a re-conception of the human being and its relation to nature in ways that fundamentally broke with the dualistic paradigms that dominated the 18th century.

Yet in doing this, Herder was not developing a theory *ex nihilo*. Rather, as the work of Peter Hanns Reill has shown, Herder was, in fact, building on a vitalist discourse that was

gaining dominance in the second half of the eighteenth century.[39] Contrary to a popular, monolithich story of the Enlightenment as characterized by universal, mathematically oriented positivism, Reill has convincingly argued that the "mechanical sciences" were, by the middle of the 18th century, in fact, "in crisis".[40] Central to this crisis was the the inability of mechanist paradigm to deal the problem of organized, biologically grounded life. This inability, for Reill, opened a theoretical space for a alternative theory not predicated on a mind-body dualism and the mechanistic conception of inert extension inaugurated by Descartes. Rather than view matter in Cartesian terms, as inert extension opposed by the autonomous spontaneity of the mind, the vitalists suggested that matter itself possessed a limited amount of freedom and could utilize this freedom to adapt itself behaviorally and physically better suit specific environment. This redefinition of matter carried with it three major consequences that together have come to be known as the temporalization of nature.[41] The first is the temporalization of physical geography, i.e., the rejection of the rationalist-theological notion that nature is an eternal, unchanging mechanical clock and the recognition that the earth undergoes major historical transformations over geological time. Second, the temporalization of species, meaning the possibility that species are not timeless natural types, but categories that are open to change and may evolve over historical time. These considerations, in turn, opened up the third possibility that the human being is not *categorically* distinct from the rest of nature, but nothing other than the product of this evolutionary history. Herder's philosophy of language must be understood out of this context. By arguing that reason is not grounded transcendentally, but is equivalent to the

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[39] Reill, Hans Peter, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*. Bekeley: University of California Press, 2005.
[40] See too, Reill, Hans Peter, "Anti-Mechanism, Vitalism and their Political Implications in the Late Enlightened Scientific Thought" in *Francia* Vol. 16 iss. 12 (Jan 1, 1989): 195. And Reill, Hans Peter, "Science and the Construction of the Cultural Sciences in Late Enlightenment Germany: The Caseof Wilhelm von Humboldt" in *History and Theory*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Oct., 1994), pp. 345-366.
[41] Matussek, Peter. *Goethe Und Die Verzeitlichung Der Natur.* München: C.H. Beck, 1998.

linguistic capacity of the human being, Herder, I will argue, thinks the thought of vitalism through to the end. Herder's philosophy of language, is, in other words, logically predicated on his naturalist project and his attempt to find a natural explanation for human reason.

This debate over naturalism was the crux of the disagreement between Kant and Herder and the origin point of two fundamentally different understandings of subjectivity. For, once Herder denies that human reason possesses any *a priori* components and locates it in the complex dynamic of geographical, historical, and cultural settings in which language systems arose, then there is no universal component outside competing language systems capable of arbitrating a debate on absolute terms. And this is a position that Herder embraces. For Herder, there is nothing about Being that is still or ontologically set. Instead, nature, culture, and individual are always in the process of *werden im vergehen*, of transforming, sedimenting, and retransforming to create something new.

Kant, on the other hand, understood very well that this vitalist monism represented a fundamental threat to the ambitions of the critical project. For the central goals of the critical enterprise was to secure from skeptical critiques the laws that govern "the starry skies above and the moral law within." As Kant was well aware, at the philosophical discourse of the time, it is only by grounding the laws of science and morality *a priori* that Kant would be able to is able to secure the universality and necessity that he believes are constitutive of knowledge as such. For Kant, the strict separation of intellect and matter was, therefore, a constituent feature of the critical enterprise. By drawing reason into the realm of empirical nature, Herder both abandons any hope of philosophical grounding epistemic judgments in strict universality and necessity and instead opens thinking to the contingency and limitation of finite human perspectives. In doing so, he offers a fundamentally different vision of the human subject than does Kant.

Yet these ethical distinctions cannot be understood outside of the context of the natural sciences and the central relationship between vitalism and the mechanical sciences. For that reason, I will address how Kant and Herder responded to the emergence of vitalism in the next chapter with a specific eye to the consequences for their theories of *Bildung*. Given this goal, the chapter will be split into two parts. In the first, I will focus on the systematic foundation of the mechanical sciences which helped generate “crisis of the mechanical sciences”. This contextualization will focus on an analysis Descartes foundation of Early Modern science, which I take to be the central features of what I will call the “mechanical sciences”.[42] In the second part, I will examine how the inability of the mechanical sciences to account for the teleology, i.e., both the teleological design and activity of and in living organisms, led to this crisis. Central to this will be an examination of how French vitalists such as Voltaire, Diderot, and in particular Maupertuis, established the theoretical context in which Herder developed his larger metaphysical and *Bildungstheorie* and which threatened the Kantian project to the core.

I. The Crisis of the Mechanical Sciences and the Emergence of Vitalism

The fundamental claim of Peter Hanns Reill’s 2005 study, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* is that the canonized narratives of the history of science are wrong and that what Enlightenment Science in the 17th and 18th consisted in was much more diverse than is usually thought. According to the standard story, Enlightenment Science, represented above all by the figures of Descartes and Newton, sought to transform all of nature into a giant, fully determined

[42] For the sake of convenience, I am calling the Cartesian-Newtonian scientific paradigm the “mechanical” or “mathematical-mechanical” sciences, because, despite Newton’s advances on Descartes, I side with Reill in thinking that the ontological premises remain the same.

machine. This position was itself predicated on two fundamental premises. First, a definition of matter that excluded the occult and teleological qualities and redefined matter as inert extended substance. And second, that matter was itself governed by unconditional causal laws that are mathematical and mechanical in form. The result of these moves was the inauguration of what Foucault has described as the "Classical Episteme" and Adorno and Horkheimer as the "Enlightenment Project", whereby everything in nature is governed according to mathematical-mechanical laws and therefore, can be predicted and controlled.[43]

As evidenced by Fichte's "continual battle" (*dauernden Kampf*) between the I and the not-I, this standard story is, in many ways, absolutely correct. There was a universalist and positivist thread that ran through the 17-18th centuries that was the dominant tendency of the age. In his excellent intellectual biography, Anthony J. La Vopa has shown just how much Fichte's desire to escape this determinism motivated his subjective idealism of freedom.[44] Within this context, it was Kant's own dualism that showed him the way. His quest to reduce even the seeming independence of nature to a reflection of the autonomus self generating subject can be read as symptomatic of his extraordinary fear of empirical determinism.[45] The fact that Fichte, writing in 1794, viewed the philosophy of autonomy as the only way to escape brute natural determinism is strong evidence of how dominant the mechanistic paradigm was.

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[43] Peter Hans Reill sums up the mechanistic philosophy of nature in the following way: "Mechanical natural philosophy, in its various guises, had been guided by the imperative to transform contingent knowledge into certain truth, to reduce the manifold appearances of nature to simple, quantifiable principles. Mathematics was seen as the tool that would enable one to achieve this feat: it became the eye of natural philosophy and its language of exposition. Reill, Peter Hans, "Anti-Mechanism, Vitalism and their Political Implications in the Late Enlightened Scientific Thought" in *Francia vol 16, 1989, pp., 195-212,* pp., 197.

[44] For an elucidation of the relationship between mechanistic science and Fichte's Moral philosophy see, La Vopa, Anthony J., *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy 1762-1799.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp., 90-93.

[45] Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*. Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, pp., 63. In Fichte's own language: "the purpose of all formation is the following for reason to subordinate all of nature to it" [der Zweck aller Bildung…ist der, die Natur…der Vernunft zu unterwerfen].

The problem with this narrative, according to Reill, is that “The Enlightenment” was not a singular intellectual or historical event. And while the positivist attitudes in the natural sciences and the Cartesian metaphysics they were founded on may have been culturally dominant at the time, recent research in the history of science has suggested that the mechanical paradigm came under heavy attack starting around the middle of the 18th century.[46] This paradigm shift has, however, largely been overlooked, primarily because of the positivist narratives of the twentieth century, which have tended to eschew vitalism as a scientific embarrassment and, in fact, unscientific. According to this twentieth century narrative, vitalism, with its belief that the explanation of life forms require positing some force beyond the physio-chemical mechanisms of life, was found guilty of metaphysical excesses and, subsequently, ‘discredited’.[47] Consequently, the basic rationalist assumption that all of life could be explained according to a reductionist paradigm once again come to dominate the philosophy of science and has largely remained so.[48] Yet regardless of its scientific merits, a central claim of this dissertation is that this delegitimizing and discrediting of vitalism as a scientific paradigm has skewed our understanding of importance of the discourse of biology on development of the literature and philosophy in Germany around 1800. Yet before we sketch out the basic features of vitalism is

[46]The central texts demarcating this shift are: See, Reill 2005, 1989; Beiser, 1989; Richards, Robert, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. Zammito 2002, 2018.

[47] Malaterre, Christophe “Life as Emergent Phenomenon: From an Alternative to Vitalism to an Alternative to Reductionism” *in Vitalism and the Scientific Image in Post-Enlightenment Life Science, 1800-2010*. Dordrecht: Springer Science, 2013. Pp., 155-178.

[48] Allen, Garland E. “Mechanism, vitalism, and organicism in late nineteenth and twentieth-century biology: the importance of historical context” in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences 36 (2005) 261-283.* Thomas Nagel has also recently argued against the success of any “reductionist paradigm” in the natural sciences, for very similar reasons that vitalists gave for rejecting Cartesian approaches to reductionism. How consciousness emerges from inert matter and how organized form emerges and evolves isn’t, it turns out, easy to explain. This doesn’t mean that vitalism is right, by any stretch of the imagination, the point is simply that vitalistic considerations weren’t prima facie ridiculous then and aren’t now. Nagel, Thomas*, Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Conception of Nature is almost Certainly False.* New York. Oxford University Press, 2012.

necessary to sketch out the foundations of the mechanical theory with which it took issue. That story starts with Descartes.

i. Descartes and the Mechanical Sciences

Descartes has tended to serve as the boogeyman within Continental philosophy at least since Heidegger. According Heidegger, Descartes' philosophy begins from a place of certainty (the apodictic *Cogito*) and extends its jurisdiction outwards by means of clear and distinct ideas to subsume all exterior phenomena under a set of necessary rules. According to this theory, the external world, despite its manifold of different appearances, actually consists in a ubiquitous underlying substance (inert, extended matter) whose changes are governed by unconditional causal laws. Within this schema, everything becomes knowable by means of the faculty of reason, which is now defined primarily by means of its capacity to think in universal concepts.[49] Taken from this perspective, much of Continental philosophy can be viewed as attempting to right what Descartes supposedly got wrong. The self is not a stable substance excluded from the uncertainty of finite historical reality, but inherently unstable; Being does not correspond to the mathematical framework, but we impose that framework onto the world; space is not measurable extension, but an active life world. Far from being neutral, the suggestion of Continental philosophy has been that Descartes's philosophy, in transforming the world into a grid, had done great harm.

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[49] See Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. New York: SUNY, 1996, esp., Chapter III, pp., 66-113.

Yet perhaps surprisingly, long before Heidegger formulated it, this is a description of Cartesian science and the rationalist Enlightenment project was one with which Herder would have largely agreed. And while it is not my intention to criticize this popular reading, I must a admit that I find Descartes' thinking to be astonishing and admirable. Far from being an ideologically driven tool, Descartes was the original deconstructionist always and ever working to think behind the ideological appearances of his time. For this reason, I will reconstruct his thought from within its historical context. Once one does that, what is clear is that Descartes, even if one disagrees with the result, was a thinker of extraordinary critical capacity whose willingness to critique common ideological views of his day is largely unsurpassed within the history of philosophy.

As Dennis Deschenne puts it, Before Descartes "it is difficult now to imagine an intellectual landscape so thoroughly dominated by one figure as was that of the Schools by Aristotle."[50] The world in which Descartes intervened was not a world in which Kant's famous *sapare aude* was a call to think and know for oneself, but a world in which epistemological validity was guaranteed first and foremost by tradition. For every realm of human knowledge, a different institution and authoritative: "In matters of faith, God was the highest authority, whose judgements were given to us in the Bible…Aristotle in philosophy, Galen in medicine Thomas in theology." Descartes by contrast, "held that human understanding, assisted by method and freed from the bonds of prejudice, can effectively replace authority in the pursuit of knowledge."[51] Descartes' Foundationalism, i.e., his project of complete doubt followed by a systematic reconstruction from first principles must be understood within this context, as a form of ideology

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[50] Des Chenne, Dennis, "Aristotlean Natural Philosophy: Body, Cause, Nature" in *A Companion to Descartes,* ed. By Janet Broughten and Joh Carriero. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2008, pp., 17-32, here 17.
[51] Both Ibid., 18.

critique in which transmitted and institutionalized authority was questioned and a new foundation for was sought, independent of external authority.

In relation to the natural world, this critique of Aristotelian Scholasticism applied principally to the bloated handbag of Aristotelian metaphysics. This handbag supported a living conception of a universe shot through with "qualities, appetites, sympathies, and desires", in which animals and plants were not viewed dead aggregates of mass but as active agents striving to realize themselves in a divinely created world.[52] The natural world was governed furthermore, not by singular form of all-encompassing causality, but a multiplicity of causalities (material, formal, efficient, final) and spheres (earthy and celestial) that overlapped and intermingled within a divinely created realm that included not only the intentionality of non-human organisms, but and a teleological order of place in which beings belonged. The result, DesChennes describes is that, "(i)n the Aristotelian world ends are everywhere" and nature is not meaningless but "is saturated with purposiveness."[53] As an internally purposive world, the divine harmony of the scholastic system differed greatly from what would become the divine harmony of Leibniz and the rationalist philosophers. The Scholastic world was one of overlapping systems with different forms of reasoning and justification that maintained proper places within naturally existing hierarchies. The rationalist world, in contrast, would become one in which that internal purposiveness is not viewed as result of the internal harmony of independent systems, but as a product of exterior, rational design.[54] Within rationalism, in other words, God as designer overtakes the supporter and maintainer of beings.

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[52] Reill, 34.
[53] Des Chenne, 26, 28.
[54] For a detailed account of the transformation from the Medieval to the Early modern understanding of the cosmos see, Lovejoy, Arthur O. *The Great Chain of Being: a Study of the History of an Idea.* New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2009.

The primary aim of Descartes's skeptical project was to doubt the metaphysical assumptions upon which this Scholastic picture of nature was built. Within this project, there are two moves that are of particular importance for the vitalist debates. First, his redefinition of matter and, second, his change in the "methodological and explanatory procedures" which could contribute to valid argumentation.[55] In both cases, what Descartes what after was a brush burning, an elimination of what he deemed to be the excessive aspects of Scholastic theory and a reduction of that theory to what he took to be its essential elements: substance and material cause.

This method can be nowhere better seen than in Descartes's critique of substantial form. Within the Aristotelian tradition, a body is not a mere aggregate of mass but a synthesis of two substances, a (non-physical) form and a physical substrate capable of taking on the shape and activity of provided by the form. Central to the concept of a substantial form was, furthermore, the notion of a *telos* or an end. The purpose of this end was to supply (or give a philosophical account) of the basic functions of growth, development, reproduction, and ultimately to serve as an ethical standard that establishes the norms for what each type of thing is supposed to be. A good chicken, for example, is a chicken who does those things that a chicken does, well. Consequently, each organism was viewed as endowed with a set of "inherent powers" (locomotion, appetite, seeing, hearing, sensing, etc), and a physical form (the organization of the chicken), which mutually enabled the organism to fulfill its end. The shape of a cat, for example, its specific sleekness (or the angle of its ears, the shape and perceptivity of its eyes, nose, etc.) is how it is because it is informed by its substantial form. It is this substantial form, in other words,

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[55] Reill, 34, summing up the goals of the mechanist program says it proposed "three interrelated goals…a new definition of matter, established methodological and explanatory procedures to incorporate this definition into a viable vision of natural philosophy, and evolved an epistemology that authorized these procedures.

which provides the explanation of why the cat is organized in such a way both physically and behaviorally so as to allow its specific powers and qualities to be activated. For only if the parts work together with the behavioral capacities of the organism will the cat be able to fulfill its end (z.B., of catching mice).[56] The point is that substantial form, within the Aristotelian system, does quite a bit of work. It is no exaggeration to say that the remnant of substantial form accounts for more or less what we now associate with the "Dogness" of the dog. However, substantial forms are philosophically suspect. Where are they? How are they? Pre-Descartes, however, this question was rather trivial. Substantial forms are natural, ontologically established types that are ultimately grounded in the intellect of God. As such, they are ontologically distinct from the material substrate with which they fuse in the creation of any given organism.

Substantial form was a primary target of Descartes's critique, something which he held for, "an idle wheel in the machinery of physics".[57] Instead, Descartes famously sets out to rid the material world of all lingering metaphysical categories except for *res extensa*, i.e., figure, size, motion. The result, as he summarizes in his *Principles of Philosophy*, is a fundamental reinterpretation of matter: "(matter) consists not in its being something which is hard or heavy or colored, or which affects the senses in any way, but simply in its being something which is extended in length, breadth and depth."[58] The consequence of this reinterpretation of matter could not have been more extreme. Referring to Descartes first systematic presentation of his

[56] Des Chene, 22-24. House pets are an interesting instance which shows us how much we still rely on the notion of substantial form in everyday discourse. My Chihuahua, for example, possesses none of the qualities that would be associated with her "substantial form" (catching squirrels, even foraging for crumbs), and when her nose goes directly over a piece of cheese I've thrown her way, I am still inclined to say: "what a pathetic dog". Yet when I have her out in an open field in Ithaca and I see her run, dart, change directions on a dime, I must admit, I am quite impressed. The dog, as Gina likes to put it, is in her element.
[57] Ibid., 22.
[58] Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Vol I*, trans by Cottingham, et. all. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp., 224.

physic, *The World,* Desmond M. Clarke highlights this extremity stating that: "Within a few short paragraphs…Descartes had proposed relegating the whole complex scholastic network of prime matter, forms, and qualities to a failed enterprise…substituting hypothetical models that assume nothing more than the size, shape, arrangement, and motions of parts of matter."[59]

The impact of this redefinition of matter, however, did not stop there. Rather, by eliminating substantial forms and the "powers" that resided within them, Descartes is forced to simultaneously redefine the entire network of causal relations. Since natural organisms consist in nothing but inert extension, they can no longer be viewed as guided by internal purposes, as striving (and potentially failing) to fulfill their own ends. Rather, and crucially, the very concept of desire, i.e., of end-oriented action is eliminated from the realm of nature and restricted to the realm of rational minds. The result is that if in the Aristotelian world, "ends are everywhere." Now, "(i)n the Cartesian, there are ends only where there are minds."[60]

The elimination of intelligence from the realm of nature will carry with it massive consequences for the history of Western philosophy and culture, the effects of which we are still felt today. As opposed to a world in which animals and even plants are viewed as possessing an intelligence which, though less sophisticated than human intelligence, is not categorically, ontologically distinct, the organic world is reinterpreted as dead, a machine. Matter on this interpretation is viewed as inert: utterly passive and incapable of movement generated from within itself and its own internal powers.

This move necessarily carries with it a redefinition of the concept of causality. Since matter is inert, physical change cannot be understood as purposively oriented, "directed change",

[59] Clarke., pp., 117.
[60] DesChennes, 28.

(in Aristotlean lingo, final causality), but must be reduced to the type of change that mechanically effects matter absent any prior representation.[61] This effects of this shift cannot be underestimated. For Aristotle, efficient causality played a "minor, marginal" role within the broader schema of causes.[62] The efficient cause explained merely the mechanism by means of which a formal, intentional cause is pursued. For example, in the machinations of the specific muscle movements that enable a Chihuahua to chase after a squirrel. The intention, however, was a necessary part, a horizon of intelligibility against without which the merely efficient cause is largely senseless. With Descartes's redefinition of matter, however, these pockets of intelligibility and interpretation are necessarily eliminated. The great chain of being and with it the differences between animal, plant and inorganic material is collapsed. Everything becomes ontologically characterized by the primary features of mass and extension.

On a side note, it should also be noted that the central problems of German idealism and its philosophy of autonomy spring directly from this move. When Fichte demands that, "the I is only that, which it posits itself" [(d)as Ich ist… nur das, als was es sich setzt. Das Ich soll ursprünglich Tendenz sein],[63] Fichte is responding to the problem that Descartes establishes. If matter possesses *no* capacity for spontaneity, then the I must be that thing which grounds itself, i.e., that thing which, by definition, consists in nothing but its own spontaneity. As such, concept-oriented activity, i.e., the ability to act based on the *representation* of an end becomes a feature of the world that is limited to rational minds. As we will see, this problem of the relation between intelligence and matter becomes the primary problem that mechanistic philosophy

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[61] Des Chene, 25.
[62] Ibid., 26.
[63] Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, *System der Sittenlehre nach Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. by Hans jürgen Verweyen. Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1995, pp., 39.

cannot deal with and represents the impasse over which Kant cannot step in the third *Critique*. He is unwilling to extend the prospect of concept-oriented activity to natural organisms.

Far from backing away from the most radical conclusions that his premises seem to suggest, Descartes, in *The World*, draws the connections himself. As he puts it: “I suppose the body to be nothing but a statue or machine made of earth.” And, just like the movements of any machine can be explained by breaking down its component parts, Descartes argues that what appears to be intentional activity within nature is not best explained by referring to the soul of the mover, but by demonstrating the mechanical motions that necessitate that movement. Descartes clarifies this point by drawing an analogy between the music playing automatons in the royal gardens and the apparently intentional movement of animal bodies. Just as these machines were able to play instruments or pronounce certain words by relying on a complex hidden system of hydraulic pipes, so, Descartes proposed, could the movements of apparently organic phenomena be explained according to a mechanical substructure whose specific constitution we did not yet know with certainty. Thus, if human invention was capable of creating “clocks, artificial fountains, mills, and other such machines, which although only man-made have the power to move of their own accord in many different ways”,[64] it seems reasonable to infer that organic bodies, conceived of as machines made by God, would be more than capable of producing all the motions, sounds, and behaviors usually attributed to intentional action.

Having reduced the material substrate to a single substance, the next move in the new science was to determine the nature of the laws that governed the motion of that substance. Here, Descartes answer is straightforward. Efficient laws operate according to the “principles of

[64] Descartes, Principles, part 2 nr 16.

geometry and mechanics."[65] Descartes identifies three laws --the continuity of force, the transference of motion through impact, and the law of rectilinear motion—which, he believes are able in principle to explain every all change and transformation in the physical world. And with these three moves, Descartes transforms the Aristotelian world, with its overwhelming complexity of overlapping systems of intentionality, into a monocausal system. A clock in which everything is reducible to a singular substance and determined by unconditional causal laws that can be known by means of geometry and mathematics.

ii. The Problem with the Mechanical Sciences

The most obvious problem with Descartes's "Fabulous New World" is famous: the mind-body problem. If the physical world consists in a ubiquitous substance determined by unconditional causal laws, then human beings are either determined by physical necessity or the mind does not exist in the same ontological realm as the body. Descartes's claim that the mind must be considered a non-physical substance is his famous (yet clearly still provisional) solution to this problem. If the mind exists in some sort of other realm and is therefore, not subject to the laws that govern the physical world, then the mind is not necessarily determined. Descartes thereby secures the freedom for the rational subject, whose spontaneity and essence is now seen as separate from and opposed to a mechanically determined world.

The importance of this dualist position and the way in which it framed the intellectual discousrse in the eighteenth century, cannot be overstated. For that reason, it is important to briefly reflect on why what appears to be such an odd theory has had such extraordinary staying

[65] Descartes, Principles, 228

power. In the 18th century, the primary reason for dualism's quick success was that it served three essential ideological functions within Early Modernity. First, this fully regulated vision of nature allowed for the European sciences to flourish in hitherto unprecedented fashion, which enabled the sciences to be enlisted in the service of economic trade and aspiring political-colonial ambitions. Second, it served a crucial *theological* function by creating a vision of the world that, somewhat paradoxically, is *more* dependent on transcendent theological explanations than is that of Aristotle. Who, after all designed this machine? Who provides it with power for movement? Who designed and maintained all of those very intentional-looking organisms? All of these questions seemed to require a rational, omniscient, and transcendent God who rules over his creation like an absolutist monarch. And third, because Cartesian Dualism became the *epistemological* ideology of the 17-18th centuries.

This third point is worth elaborating on, because Descartes establishes a paradigm for epistemological justification that will prove immensely important to Kant. In short, it is only on account of his dualistic program that Descartes is able to argue that human reason comes programmed with a certain set of innate concepts that guarantee a 1-1 relationship between the rational mind and the ontological structure of the world. It is by placing reason outside of the mess of the empirical world, in other words, that Descartes is able to claim that reason is uninhibited by the contingencies of history, culture, change, and is, therefore a fully objective, purely rational faculty. Thus the non-empirical status of the mind supplies Descartes with an opportunity to build into the mind the concepts necessary for reconstructing the world in mathematical terms. Or, as Lex Newmann puts it, for Descartes, "(i)n the final analysis, the mind's treasure house of innate ideas provides the metaphysician's holy grail (as it were):

cognitive access to ultimate truths about the nature of reality."[66] It is by transforming the empirical world into an ironclad machine of necessity that Descartes is simultaneously able to find a space in which rationality is freed from any empirical contingency. Separating the transcendental from the empirical allows Descartes to argue that the human mind comes hardwired with the concepts that enable the it to know it with certainty.

As a final thought on this section, it is perhaps the possibility of securing absolute knowledge grounded in indubitable first principles that allowed Descartes and his rationalist philosophers to accept the mind-body problem as a consequence of the new physics. As we will see, the desire to secure the knowledge a) of moral freedom and b) of the objective laws that govern nature becomes the central characteristic of rationalist philosophies *including that of Immanuel Kant*. Despite his Copernican Revolution and rejection of rationalist realism, Kant's critical philosophy is centrally interested in grounding objectivity in the fields of science and morality. From this perspective, the purpose of the critical philosophy is, in many ways to save the fundamental results of the Rationalist project from the empirical skepticism of Locke and Hume. The price to pay for this objective knowledge, however (in Cartesian rationalism as well as Kantian Transcendental Idealism) is mind-body dualism, something that Kant was very well aware of. It is precisely this dualism which comes under attack in the "crisis of the mechanical sciences" and with it, the possible emergence of vitalism. Yet it was not the mind-body problem nor the problem of free will which were the central problems that emerged within the vitalism debate, but the problem of life.

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[66] Lex Newman, "Descartes Rationalist Epistemology" in *A Companion To Rationalism* edited by Alex Nelson (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 178-205, here 193. Newmann elaborates these concepts as not only the spontaneity of free will but also, "concepts in mathematics (e.g., number, line, triangle, etc.), logic (e.g., contradiction, necessity, etc.), and metaphysics (e.g., identity, substance, causality, etc.)" that derive "solely from the nature of the mind."182.

II. The “Crisis in the Mechanical Sciences” and the Emergence of Vitalism

Despite the theoretical success and institutional dominance of the mechanical paradigm introduced by Descartes, this paradigm faced a major problem, what Dalia Nassar has called the problem of “form”.[67] The structure of the problem is the following: If nature consists in nothing but inert extended substances and the efficient causal laws that govern it, then what accounts for the seemingly end-oriented activity of biological life? This problem had two interconnected aspects, the problem of the nutrition, growth, and development of individual organisms and the problems of the reproduction of the species. In both cases, the central questions remained: Where did the form of what appeared to be an intelligently designed organism come from and what maintains it over generations?

Both of these questions had previously been answered by Aristotelian notions of substantial form and teleological causality. Whereas substantial form explained how an organism got its shape, teleological causality explained how matter could move in what appeared to be a purposive fashion. Descartes’s brush clearing, however, had scourged philosophy of recourse to such dubious causal and ontological entities. In which case, the question remained: What accounts for the form of biological organisms, i.e., what accounts for the appearance of intelligent design in nature? It was in response to this question, as we will see, that Preformation emerged as a theory of embryology, whose failings, in turn, opened up the door for the embryological theory of epigenesis with it the broader scientific orientation of vitalism.

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[67] Nassar, Dalia, “The Critical Function of the Epigenesis of Reason and is Critical Relation to Post-Kantian Intellectual Intuitionn”. *Philosophy Today,* Volume 61, Issue 3 (Summer 2017), pp., 801-809, here 803.

Yet before we get to that, it is crucial first, to clarify the exact problem: the incompatibility of mechanical and teleological causality since it is this contradiction which lies at the heart of the discourse of vitalism.

i. Kant and the Contradiction of Efficient and Teleological Causality

Published in 1790, the second half of Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* represents one of the most substantial contributions to what was then known as the debate between Epigenesis vs Preformation. And despite the fact that Kant's text is often referred to as an epoch making text, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that Kant's 1790 contribution arrives at the debate quite late.[68] That said, as usual, what one does find in Kant is the most astute analysis of the logical structure problem that the epigenesis vs preformation debate was intended to solve: the incompatibility of teleology and mechanical causality.

The problem Kant deals with in the second half of the *Critique of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*) is the problem of the apparent purposiveness of natural organisms. Per Kant, it is impossible to cognize a natural organism, without presupposing some organizing concept that lies behind and guides the production of the generation, development and reproduction of a natural organism. How, for example do the particles that come to construct the Chihuahua know to place themselves such that the proteins and bones come together to create precisely that angle, which will give the Chihuahua its characteristic speed? This is such a problem, because mechanical causality as Kant understood it, could never produce objects that have such complex,

[68] Important texts that place Kant at the center of the debate surrounding the life sciences are: Lenoir, Timothy, *The Strategy of Life*. Chicago: Chicago University Press: 1989. For a critique of Lenoir's thesis see Zammito, "The Lenoir thesis revisited: Blumenbach and Kant" *Stud. Hist. Phil. Biol. & Biomed. Sci. 43* (2006).

intentional-looking forms as do natural organisms. However, following Descartes and Early Modern science, mechanical/efficient causality is the only type of causality available to philosophy to explain the nature of events in the natural world. In other words, per the hypothesis, while mechanical causality should be able to explain the biological processes of growth, nutrition, and reproduction, it, in fact, cannot.

The reason it cannot is because, as Kant defines it, mechanical causality is a linear, forward moving process that can only explain how one thing directly causes the next thing that follows it and does so according to a universal law. Or as Kant puts it, efficient causality, "is a connection that constitutes a series (of causes and effects) that is that is always descending". What the descending nature of efficient causality entails, for Kant, is that the effects of any causal chain cannot simultaneously be thought of as causing that chain in the first place. Such that, as Kant continues, "the things themselves, which as effects presuppose others as their causes, cannot conversely be the causes of these at the same time."[69]

Kant's point is that mechanical causality can only explain a chain of events by explaining any event C, in terms of a preceding cause B, and then A so as to establish the preceding causal links A->B->C. For example, if one finds a boulder lying on one's car at the bottom if a hill (state C), efficient causality can only explain state C by moving backwards to the causal states that preceded it A (a tree branch falling on the rock in a heavy storm) and B (the rock rolling down the hill). In this case, the event is causally explained in terms of the previous events and the natural laws that governed them. In such a causal link, there is no need to refer to any form of intention or intelligence, because the causal effect (state C) is not simultaneously a cause of the

[69] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. By Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

original causal chain A. The bits of matter moving which constitutes the event are pushed blindly forward by natural laws. Nature did not intend to destroy your car.

However, it is possible to conceive of a totally different type of causality. If a person pushed the boulder with the intention of having it land on my car, then the representation of C is presupposed in the causal chain and is determinative of it. Or as Kant puts it, "in contrast, however, a causal nexus can also be conceived in accordance with a concept of reason (of ends), which, if considered as a series, would carry with it descending as well as ascending dependency, in which the thing which is on the one hand designated as an effect nevertheless deserves, in ascent the name of cause of the same thing of which it is effect."[70] As any insurance company knows, in this latter case, the concept, i.e., the person's desire to have a boulder land on my car, must be presupposed in order to explain the causal chain. And in fact, legal culpability will depend upon the ability to prove the intention of the subject in generating this causal chain.

This principle of causality, in "accordance with a concept of reason", can be seen even more clearly in the case of objects of design. Kant's favored object is a hexagon drawn on the beach. If, as Kant puts it someone were to see a "regular hexagon, drawn in the sand in an apparently uninhabited land," Kant argues that that this person couldn't but assume that it was created by a human mind. Or to put it in Kant's words, this person couldn't help but "become aware of the unity of the principle of its generation by means of reason…and thus...not be able to judge as a ground of the possibility of such a shape the sand, the nearby sea, the wind, the footprints of any known animals, or any or heh non-rational cause, because the contingency of coinciding with such a concept…would seem to him so infinitely great that it would be just as

[70] Ibid., 244.

good as if there were no natural law of nature".[71] Kant, in other words, is suggesting that the possibility of mechanical causality creating something within nature that is as specific and intentionally designed as a hexagon is so miniscule that were it in fact a product of nature that that randomness would actually undercut the very universality of mechanical causality. The chances of the ocean or some other natural cause creating a perfect hexagon are about as good as are the chances of a giant magnet going over scrap metal creating a Michelangelo. The mind must, therefore, assume a different type of causality created the hexagon, namely, a rational mind that proceeds in accordance with ends.

However, natural organisms, for Kant, are much more like the hexagons example than they are like the boulder. A bird, for example, is organized in such a way that it is impossible to imagine how all the pieces could be put together if it were not built according to an idea. The hollowness of its bones and the angle of its parts lend it the appearance of intentional-seeming organization to such an extent that it is impossible to understand how the bits of matter could come to form the bird, absent some prior blueprint or plan.[72] Natural organisms, in other words, display an internal purposiveness analogous to the purposiveness of objects of human design. The Cartesian picture of nature, however, was predicated, built upon the expulsion of intelligent, end-oriented activity from the realm of nature. Yet if this idea did not come from human mind then where did it come from?

ii. Preformation and Epigenesis

It was in search for an answer to this question that the obscure field of Embryology became, "the master narrative for interpreting the life sciences in Germany in the eighteenth

[71] Ibid., 242.
[72] Ibid., 233.

century".[73] The reason for this is that rationalist philosophy, in its attempts to eliminate the metaphysical baggage of Scholastic Aristotelianism, failed to secure any imminent understand of natural development. Hence, the solution was found in a theological explanation, which now became the standard embryological theory of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the theory of preformation. This theory holds what appears to modern eyes to be an utterly flabbergasting thesis, namely that God, in the original moment of creation, created all the organisms that would ever be born in fully formed yet miniature size.[74] According to the theory, organisms would not develop but simply get bigger, unfolding according to mechanical stimuli like a dehydrated sponge. Given the transparent absurdity of the theory, the pressing question is really: "Why were some of the finest minds of the century attracted to it?"[75] The answer was that preformation was the only theory that explained how teleologically organized forms could exist in a mechanical universe. Or, as Shirley Roe has put it: "The theory of preformation offered the only account of embryological development consistent with this view of a divinely created, mechanically operating world."[76] Preformation, in other words, was an ideological front that

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[73] Zammito, John H., "'Method' versus 'Manner': Kant's Critique of Herder's *Ideen* in Light of the Epoch of Science, 1790-1820", in *Herder Yearbook*, 1998, 1-25, pp., 7.

[74] Because it can be sometimes hard to fathom how anyone in their right mind could have supported preformation, here is an example of how seriously someone of the intellectual stature of Albrecht von Haller believed preformation to be true. Here are two quotes by Haller contextualized by Richard Aulie: "(Aulie) Embryology was thus one of the few spheres in which he (Haller) erred, for there preformation carried him quite away. In his monumental *Elementa* he wrote: "There is no new development; no part in the animal body is formed before the other; all are created at the same time." He further affirmed that: "The ovary of an ancestress will contain not only her daughter, but also her granddaughter, her great grand-daughter, and her great-great-granddaughter, and if it is once proved that an ovary can contain many generations, there is no absurdity in saying that it contains them all." And he went on to compute that the ovaries of Mother Eve must have contained 200,000 million fully formed diminutive human beings." Quoted in Aulie, Richard, "Caspar Friedrich Wolff and his 'Theoria Generationis'" *in Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences, 04/1961, Volume 16, Issue 2*, 124-144 here, 135-137.

[75] Reill. 2005, 61

[76] Roe, Shirley A. *Matter, Life, and Generation: 18th-Century Embryology and the Haller-Wolff Debate.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.pp., 9.

guarded both the metaphysical edifice of the Scientific Revolution and theological conceptions of an omniscient and omnipotent God.

And despite this, the arguments for this position were anything but unsophisticated. In the middle of the 18th century, the most prominent proponents of preformation were the Swiss poet and anatomist Albrecht von Haller and Charles Bonnet. Their arguments for preformation rested on an interesting *Reductio* that was predicated on the lack of quality experiential data. The argument (not unlike Kant's) starts by pointing to the complexity of biological organisms and simultaneously pointing out that that such organisms could not possibly have been the product of merely mechanical laws. From this they concluded that all organisms must have been, in fact, designed by an intelligence whose name is God.[77]

Here, for example, is Albrecht von Haller's argument *against* the version of epigenesis promoted by the French naturalist Buffon, which was published in Haller's introduction to the German translation of Buffon's hugely influential *Universal History of Nature* (*Allgemeine Naturgeschichte*). Here, Haller uses the impossibility of providing a mechanical explanation for teleological forms as the main premise in arguing for divine creation. Haller writes:

> Even if we would presume for a moment that the exact copies of the interstices of the eyes, ears and bones were able to assemble themselves in the seminal fluid; or even if we could presume that there they preserve the resemblance to the body from which they arise, we would see, however, that these organized particles swim without order in the seminal fluid; and Mr. Buffon has not yet made know the cause which puts them in order…In brief, [what is the cause] which arranges the human body in such a way that an eye is never attached to the knee, an ear is never connected to the hand, a toe never wanders to the neck, or a finger is never placed at the extremity of the foot, as happens all the time in the crystallization of salts.

[77] This critique was originally published in Haller's introduction to the German translation of Buffons *Historie Naturele*, in the *Göttingen Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen* on February 24, 1752. Haller, Albrecht von, "Haller on Buffon's Theory of Generation" trans. by Phillip R. Sloan, in *From Natural History to the History of Nature*, edited by John Lyon and Phillip R. Sloan. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, pp. 312.

Given that matter is nothing but inert extension, Haller argues, how could the appropriate parts that will come to make up the body possibly locate one another to create and organism? The order of the human body is far too exact for the process of constructing a body to be left up to mechanical chance, as particles colliding fluid. Rather, Haller, as Kant will argue, suggests the complexity of organized bodies can only be explained by recourse to a rational cause who designed them. And since this rational cause cannot lie in dead, mechanical nature, it must, therefore, lie in the intellect of God. The result of this clever piece of reasoning is the very strange thesis of preformation: that God created every entity that will ever come into existence at the moment he created the world, encasing them like Russian dolls in either the male sperm or female ovaries (a matter of heated debate) of the first members of their species. Consequently, minds as sophisticated as that of Albrecht von Haller are able to utilize the premises of Cartesian physics to argue for a literalist biblical account of the direct descendance from Adam and Eve.

As such, preformation was very much a theory of its time, one steeped in the odd combination of rationalist philosophy and deep religious devotion. This had both religious and scientific consequences. First, in terms of the sciences, by transferring the sole act of intelligence out of the realm of material nature, preformation supported the “mechanistic definitions of matter as passive and indestructible” and in doing so established one of the central pillars of the new mechanist world view.[78] It did so, however, while leaving essential features of this mechanically

[78] Reill, 59.

regulated world dependent upon "the mechanist idea of God as a supreme architect who could not err."[79]

iii. The Temporalization of Nature

The theory of preformation simultaneously had a huge impact on the broader cosmological vision of nature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Specifically, it grounded what was then the dominant discourse of *Naturgeschichte*, somewhat confusingly conceived of as the observation and documentation of the categories or types of things that currently exist in nature. These categories were, furthermore, taken to be more or less eternal and static. The theory of preformation grounded this static understanding of nature, because the idea that God created all organized life in fully formed seeds of a species strongly suggests that the amount of variability, transformation, and transmutation within nature will be limited. Species mutation, for example, would require a form of "monstrous birth", a leap or gap in the lineage of species that would seem to contradict God's essence and intention in creating a species in the first place.

Rather, within the framework of Preformation, what was largely assumed was that the species that make up the natural world constitute as Phillip R. Sloan has put it, a "logical 'system' of nature", which consists in a distinct and static taxonomy of species types, the

[79] Ibid., 59, For Reill, this accounts for Preformation's huge religious support: "It is no surprise that the divines of almost all major Christian sects in Europe, with the possible exception of the Pietists, who believed in spiritual 'rebirth' and 'leaps' embraced preformation.

discovery of which is the job of the natural historian.[80] Thus, it was considered the job of "Natural History" to classify the works of nature not by telling a history of how nature came to be what it appears to be now, but describing things as they are. John Harris's *Lexicon Technicum* (1710) makes the older use of this term quite clear. He writes that: "Natural history is a Description of all the Natural Products of the Earth, Water or Air, such as Beasts, Birds, Fishes, Metals, Minerals, and Fossils".[81] Linnaeus's system of taxonomy (completed before the midpoint of the 18th century) is the most famous example of the belief that the description of nature as it stands now could lead to the discovery of "*abstract* logical categories" that revealed the static and eternal categories according to which God designed the natural world. Nature, on this view, is seen not as something that develops over historical time, but as a logically closed system whose laws and natural classifications can be known with accuracy by the human observer.[82]

Within this context it is also worth noting that, as late as 1823, when Goethe suggests in his *Morphologische Heften*, that: "Nature does not have a system, she has and is life and consequence from an unknown center to an unknowable boarder" [Die Natur hat kein System, sie hat, sie ist Leben und Folge aus einem unbekannten Zentrum, zu einer nicht erkennbaren Grenze],[83] Goethe is staking his position on this very debate concerning the historicity of natural species which is still being waged nearly a century later. As such, divine preformation created a

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[80] For a description of the shift from taxonomical to historicized understanding of biological species, see the work of Phillip R. Sloan, esp., Sloan, Phillip R., "Buffon, German Biology, and the Historical Interpretation of Biological Species *The British Journal for the History of Science, Vol. 12, No. 2* (Jul., 1979), pp. 109-153.

[81] Quoted in Lyon, John, and Sloan, Phillip r., "Introduction" in *From Natural History to the History of Nature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981, pp., 2.

[82] For more on this shift between a taxonomical and historicist interpretation of biological species, see, "the Buffon-Linneaus Controversy" in, *Isis, Vol. 67, No. 3* (Sep., 1976), pp. 356-375. concerning the historicity of nature and our ability to come to know it. Goethe, Zur Morphologie, Band II Heft 1, 1823.

[83] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang "Einwirkung der Neueren Philosophie" in *Werke Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden, Band 13*. München: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag,

vision, in Reill's words, of a "fixed, static universe, in which there were no leaps in nature."[84] To attack preformation was, therefore, not only to "attack mechanism at its heart", but to call into question an entire cosmological world view.[85]

iv. Epigenesis in the German Context

"By the end of the eighteenth century, however, a remarkable change had taken place in natural history."[86] At the center of this change was the attack on preformation lead by Caspar Friedrich Wolff and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. Within German Studies, the outlines of the epigenetic response to preformation within the German context are pretty well known, thanks to the work of Helmut Müller-Sievers.[87] In outline, that story runs as follows: The first attack on Preformation came from Caspar Friedreich Wolff in his 1759 *Theoria Generationis* (translated into the German *Theorie von der Generation* in 1764). Much of Wolff's argument against Haller's preformation was simply empirical. With the advance of microscopic technology, Wolff's arduous and detailed empirical experiments failed to uncover what, according to the preformationist theory, they should have: A fully preformed seed. Instead, they seemed to reveal something quite different, namely the epigenetic formation of an organism from previously unformed parts. Yet to observe this phenomenon was simply to beg the same question once again: What is guiding the bits of this matter in its gradual formation?[88]

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[84] Reill, pp., 59.
[85] Ibid., 61.
[86] Lyon and Sloan, "Introduction" in *From Natural History to History of Nature*, pp., 2.
[87] See his Müller-Sievers, Helmut. *Self-Generation: Biology, Philosophy, and Literature around 1800.* Stanford, Calif. Stanford University Press, 1997, esp. chapter 1.
[88] For an account of Wolff's theory of epigenesis see Roe and Zammito, 2003 pp., 305-306.

In order to answer this question, Wolff argued that it was necessary to posit a primitive vital force, what he called a *vis essentialis*. Under the right circumstances, Wolff argued, a vital force would (somewhat mysteriously) infuse dead matter with a given form, directing the bits of matter to their appropriate locations during embryonic formation which served to subsequently maintain that form throughout life. Wolff argued for this force by appealing to Newton's argument for gravity. Just like Newton posited gravity as a simple force, a feature of nature not reducible to further explanation, so too Wolf argued that the *vis essentialis*, "shows up as an 'emergent' force, for one cannot assign a determining reason for it beyond the phenomena it manifests itself by."[89] As such, Wolff was not trying to radically overturn the mechanistic world view, but add a law, so to speak, which governed the specifically biological aspects of nature.

Blumenbach argued in a similar vein to Wolff, renaming the *vis essentialis* in his hugely important 1781 treatise *Über den Bildungstrieb*. The 1789 edition of *Über den Bildungstrieb*, Blumenbach makes this point quite clear, introducing his theory as precisely the solution to a failed theory of preformation:

> That no preformed seeds pre-exist, rather, that a particular drive becomes active (*rege*) in the previously raw and unformed conjugal material of organized bodies after it has developed to fruition and reached the necessary place and determination, and that this drive accounts for organism taking its original form and then for maintaining it through its life, indeed, even if it has been injured, and, if possible, rebuilds it…a drive…which one can designate with the name formative drive (*Bildungstrieb*).
>
> Dass keine präformierten Keime präexistiren: sondern, dass in dem vorher rohen ungebildeten Zeugungsstoff der organisirten Körper nachdem er zu seiner Reife und an den Ort seiner Bestimung gelangt ist, ein besonderer, dann lebenslang thätiger Trieb rege wird, ihre bestimmte Gestalt anfangs anzunehmen, dann legenslang zu erhalten, und wenn sie ja etwa verstümmelt worden, wo möglich

[89] Duchesneau, Francois, "'Essential Force' and 'Formative Force'", in *Self-Organization and Emergence in Life Sciences*, edited by Bernard Feltz, Marc Crommelinck, and Philippe Goujon (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), pp., 171-286, here 173.

> wieder herzustellen…Ein Trieb…den man…mit dem Namen Bildungstriebes (nisus formativus) bezeichnen kann.[90]

According to this formulation, the *Bildungstrieb* is something that becomes active (*rege*) at the moment of conception and transforms the raw and unformed conjugal material (*rohe ungebildeten Zeugungsstoff*) into something that now takes on shape. In doing so, it imposes the specific form (*ihre bestimmte Gestalt*) of the organism by directing the unformed matter to take form both originally and through gradual embryological development and over the course of its life. This life force is what then underlies and explains the process of development, nutrition, reproduction and, where possible, reconstitution of a living organism, serving as quasi Newtonian law akin to gravity. In this formulation we can simultaneously see the ongoing tension, on the one hand between an emergent vitalism, fueled by the admission that mechanical sciences cannot account for organic life, and, on the other, the desire to be a part of the Cartesian-Newtonian legacy of the mechanical sciences. As Peter McLaughlin puts it: “the vitalist at the end of the 18th century were Newtonians. Their Vitalism was the old mechanism plus “something added”, namely, a life force” [die Vitalisten des ausgehenden 18. Jahrhunderts waren Newtonianer. Ihr Vitalismus war der alte Mechanismus plus “etwas Hinzugefügtem”, nämlich einer Lebenskraft]. [91]

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[90] Quoted in McLaughlin, Peter, “Blumenbach und der Bildungstrieb: Zum Verhältnis von epigenetischer Embryologie und typologischem Artbegriff”, in *Mmedizinhistorisches Journal* Bd. 17, H.4 (1982), pp., 365.

[91] McLaughlin, Peter, “Blumenbach und der Bildungstrieb: Zum Verhältnis von epigenetischer Embryologie und typologischem Artbegriff”, in *Mmedizinhistorisches Journal* Bd. 17, H.4 (1982), pp., 357-372, here pp., 360. John Zammito has also emphasized how the developing life science actually saw Newton as their model, rather than wishing back an alchemistic understanding of the magical powers of nature. Zammito, 2018, esp., Chapter 2, pp., 37-70. The point is that vitalists were not, as their reputation often holds, backwards looking regressives, but actually on the cutting edge of the development of the empirical sciences with Preformation holding the mantle of Religious dogma.

The goals of the epigenisists in Germany were, in other words, still aligned with those of Early Modern science, though they had taken a decisive step in breaking from them. By uncovering the failures of preformation and suggesting that biological life could not be explained absent some sort of vital force vitalizing dead matter, Wolff and Blumenbach's epigenisis represent a decisive step beyond the mechanist understanding of nature while simultaneously stopping well beyond the full vitalist ontology that Herder will ascribe to. What remains unclear in the epigenesis of Wolff and Blumenbach is their answer to a series of fundamental questions.[92] First, if the *Bildungstrieb* connects ideational form with dead matter, where did the form come from in the first place? And second, what is the ontological status of the *Bildungstrieb*? Or to put it differently: What is the ontological status of teleology? As we will see next chapter, it is in response to these fundamental questions that Kant and Herder will respond with diametrically opposed answers which ultimately structure their vision of the human being and her ethical vocation.[93] Yet before we turn to Kant and Herder's response to these questions, it is important to touch on one more aspect of the scientific context, because, as John Zammito has recently shown, Herder was not only influenced by the German epigenesists, but primarily by the school of *French* vitalists and in particular, Didert and Maupertuis.[94]

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[92] For an account of the debate on how far Blumenbach goes in these questions see Zammito, John. "The Lenoir thesis revisited: Blumenbach and Kant" in *Studis in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 43 (2012) 120-132. Zammito argues that Blumenbach absolutely takes the *Bildungstrib* to be constitutive of nature.
[93] For the importance of these questions pertaining to the Kant-Herder controversy, see Zammito, 2003, pp., 302-307.
[94] Zammito, 2018

v. French Vitalism and the Transformation of Species

Motivated by Buffon's natural history, Locke's skeptical criticisms, and a distrust of the dominant Cartesianism, it was in fact Voltaire, Diderot, and most importantly Maupertuis who developed the most radical version of vitalism in the mid eighteenth century and entertained the most radical reinterpretation of nature that followed from it. For Maupertuis matter is not blind, inert extension, as Descartes suggested, but at its most basic level matter possesses the ability to make reasoned choice, adapting itself to better fit its environment. The consequences of this idea are enormous. If this is the case, then perhaps complex form can be explained from within the internal resources of nature itself, in which case nature is perhaps capable of changing itself in the future.

Like in the German context, the emergence of the vitalist theory came from a recognition of the failures of preformation. One of the earliest and most influential attacks on preformation can be found in *The Earthly Venus* (1744-45, second ed., 1752), a text written by the future director of the Berlin Academy (1746) who will issue the prize contest on the origin of language that will launch Herder's career, Maupertuis. The young Maupertuis had originally been a fairly standard Enlightenment mathematician and Newtonian and was even inducted as a member of the prestigious French Academy in 1743 in what represented, at the time, a victory of Newtonianism over the hitherto staunchly loyal Cartesianism.

The publication of *The Earthly Venus*, however, "marks the start of a significant new stage in his intellectual biography, a stage characterized by an increasing interest in the qualitative and organic phenomena neglected in the science of mechanics together with a searching critique of and growing dissatisfaction with the narrowly defined Newtonian approach

to nature."[95] Central to this change was a growing dissatisfaction with the mathematical rigidness of the Newtonian universe and its quest for an absoluteness of knowledge cashed out in mathematical and geometrical formulas. Against the Newtonian world, the vision of the natural world that Maupertuis began developing in this work was one that didn't view nature as fully and unconditionally determined, but as flexible, mutable, and potentially unpredictable. Following Locke's skeptical empiricism, Maupertuis took empirical observation as his starting point—and with it a recognition of the fallibility of human cognition--and was reluctant to move from general, observed principles based to absolute categories and unconditional laws.

The central purpose of *The Earthly Venus* is to attack the theory of preformation and in doing so, the static conception of nature that underlies it. Maupertuis does so primarily by engaging, like Haller, in a type of *reductio ad absurdum* by showing how the basic premises of preformation can't account for obvious, uncontroversial facts of reproduction. Among the phenomena Maupertuis points to are birth defects (the existence of monstrosities as it was known then) and bi-parental resemblance. Any sane theory of embryology must, Maupertuis argues, be able to account for these basic reproductive and hereditary phenomena that are transparent to the empirical eye. Yet in both cases, the theory of preformation leads to obvious contradictions. For example, if God designed and created every organism at the moment of creation, encasing them in either the sperm or the egg, then why do birth defects exist at all? Would not God prefer for each creature to be born without defects? Or did he make a mistake? And why, furthermore, would a new baby resemble both parents, each child in a seemingly unique way? Did God foresee every possible coupling? Prefer one mix to another? And while of course answers to such

[95] Hoffheimer, Michael H, "Maupertuis and the Eighteenth-Century Critique of Preexistence" in Journal of the History of Biology, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Spring, 1982), pp. 119-144, here 120.

questions could and were often given (God did foresee each coupling, and some defects are a good thing), such answers tested the credulity of even 18th century theology.

Rather than getting caught up in the specific debates, the strength of Maupertuis treatise was to suggest that if such questions needed to be answered, then something was very wrong with the theory that generated them. Given the inability of preformation to account for some of the most basic aspects reproduction, Maupertuis proposed a theory that, he believed, could. This involved suggesting that conception and generation occurred through the mixing of the male and female seminal fluids and that this mixing led to the to the gradual formation of a complex organism out of previously unformed parts. Each animal, Maupertuis had an "innumerable multitude of parts" that were ear marked, so to speak to combine with parts of the opposite sex in order to build up the various portions of the body by their unique combination.[96] This theory, Maupertuis argued, could account for both objections to preformation. Questions of hereditary appearance could be explained because offspring is a combination of parts from both parents and monstrosities were accounted for by means of a certain type of mechanical malfunction in the building process.[97] Yet Maupertuis's theory also begs the question posed by Albrecht von Haller: If the offspring is the product of a combination of parts, then a) How do the parts know where to go and b) What accounts for *this specific* combination of parts and not another?

It was in response to these questions that Maupertuis introduces the most radical aspect of his reproductive theory, the incorporation of the chemical notion of *Wahlverwandscahft* or elective affinity. In doing so, however, Maupertuis attacked not just preformation as an embryological theory, but its underlying metaphysical commitments: the inertness of matter and

[96] Hoffheimer, 126.
[97] Ibid., 126

universality of causal laws. Thus the problem lies not just with the theory of preformation, but in the grander vision of nature, i.e., the "faultiness of reducing her [nature's] operations to the common laws of motion."[98] Instead of mathematical causal laws, Maupertuis suggests that one must take "recourse to forces which…would be more able to be received under the name of *relations*." By relation, what Maupertuis means is that particles of matter are not fully determined such that they must interact with a predetermined causal part, but rather, that within certain set boundaries, particles of matter are able to opt amongst alternatives. Put differently, matter is not just determined by external causal laws, but particles, in fact, can be motivated by *eros.* Particles, in other words, are drawn towards other particles to which they "*have a stronger attraction*".[99]

By introducing the concepts of relation and attraction into his theory of generation, Maupertuis places his theory into the budding discourse of chemistry and, in particular, in relation to the non-mechanistic theories of Stahl. The purpose of engaging this discourse was specifically to make use of explanatory theories that did not claim to know unconditional causal laws but sought to understand nature in terms of the probable. Or, as Reill puts it: "Stahl's attraction…lay in his attempt to formulate a non-mechanistic theory of chemical combination that sought to account for the seeming complexity and seeming capriciousness of chemical reactions."[100] The notion of an elective affinity was central to this explanatory framework: "Drawn from pre-mechanistic theories of natural philosophy…the idea of elective affinity or *Wahlverwandschaft* incorporated the ideas of resemblance, analogy, and sympathy in to a unified

[98] Maupertuis, Pierre-Luis Moureau de, *The Earthly Venus*, translated by, Simone Brangier Boas (New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corporation), pp., 55.
[99] Ibid., 55.
[100] Reill., 76

"law" of chemical reactions…They were composed of elements that possessed a set of desires and aversions to combine with or repel other elements from other compounds. When these compounds were brought together under certain conditions, these inherent desires asserted themselves, generating a chemical reaction."[101] In this new language of chemistry, material interactions, in other words, are not grounded in the collision of particles governed by force and magnitude, but by the seemingly anthropomorphic quality of *desire*.

By introducing the concept of elective affinity into the debate on generation, what Maupertuis is actually doing is sliding some notion of teleologically oriented activity back into the formal definition of matter. If preformation is in such a dismal theoretical state that it can't explain the most basic features of reproduction and the Cartesian definition of inert, blind matter can't account for complex organisms, then Maupertuis suggest, matter must be more complex than it is conceived of under mechanism. The element of *Wahl* in the German *Wahlverwandschaft* clearly hints at the telic component of freedom that comes to be seen as *inherent within nature itself*. Elements are not merely determined but *choose* on the basis of strong bonds of attraction characteristic of the odd, necessitating freedom of falling in love. As the component of *eros* suggests, the material universe, in this case, is not viewed as dead, but as infused with an energy that enlivens all its component parts, bringing them into contact with one another not on the basis of blind mechanism, but choice based on the inclination and attraction. This unification is not something, furthermore, which is only apparent at the stage of elementary particles. Rather, foreshadowing Schelling, Maupertuis sees the distinctive cognitive traits of higher-level organisms displaying the *same* fundamental force as the attraction of particles on the smallest level: "Does not that instinct, found in animals causing them to seek what suits them

[101] Ibid., 77

and flee from what harms them, also exist in the animal's smallest particles?"[102] Far from being inert mass, the most basic particles of matter, for Maupertuis, possess a telic component. They "*seek what suits them and flee from what harms them*."[103]

The core results of Maupertuis attack on Preformation were threefold. The first was a rejection Cartesian mind body dualism, summarized concisely by Voltaire.: "Confess (you Cartesians, sk) at least that you know as little as I. Your imagination no more than mine can conceive how it is that a body should have ideas…You comprehend neither matter nor spirit; how then do you dare affirm anything?"[104] With no clear and distinct idea of either matter or mind, why, argues Voltaire, is it not possible to think of matter as endowed with the property of mind? Second, this rejection Cartesian matter and the integration of the concept of *Wahlverwandschaft*, simultaneously destabilized the foundation upon which the unconditional mechanical-mathematical laws were built. If matter is not simply determined, but opts amongst alternatives, then it is absurd to believe that the knowledge attained in the natural science could possess the epistemic status of universality and necessity hoped for by the mechanists. Instead, as Reill puts it, for "late eighteenth-century chemists, chemical knowledge was probable knowledge."[105] Once intelligence is fused into matter and variability taken to be an inherent part of the natural world, then the very notion of a static, mechanical universe governed by necessary, unchanging laws is simultaneously placed into question.

The third consequence, however, brings us back to the notion of the historicity of nature. Once it is admitted a) that there is no categorical difference between mind and matter and that b)

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[102] Maupertuis, 85.
[103] Ibid., 85
[104] Voltaire. *Philosophical Letters.* Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961., 57
[105] Reill., 84.

material particles are not fully determined, but have the capacity to join with other particles in new and original ways, then would prevent the possibility of particles combining in hitherto unseen ways? If so, then what could prevent the possibility that particles of matter behave differently in different contexts and, subsequently, that species evolve over time? Already in 1753, Diderot, in his *Interpretation of Nature* suggests so much:

> What is to prevent elementary, intelligent parts that are capable of sensation from producing endless variations in the pattern that constitutes the species? Nothing: hence the infinite number of animal species that have sprung from the first animal, the infinite number of beings that have emanated from the first being. There was only one single act on the part of nature.[106]

Diderot here draws the connection between the destruction of Cartesian dualism, the historicization of nature, and the emergence of natural history as story of the evolution species. With these moves, in the words of Lyon and Sloan: "Natural history was no longer to be an inquiry dedicated to the collection of facts, but a science concerned most broadly with the 'history of nature.' The category of 'nature' itself, which for seventeenth century science had functioned as an inert, divinely ordered system of bodies in mathematically describable motions, had become a vital, almost teleological entity, historically changing, and endowed with self-actualizing and self-realizing powers which were presumably sufficient to explain the origin of organic beings and even the apparent miraculous order that had led seventeenth century naturalists into paens over intelligent design."[107]

The stakes of this debate were not lost on Albrecht von Haller. Rather, the consequences of this doctrine are, to him, obvious: materialism, atheism, and ultimately nihilism. And Haller

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[106] Diderot, "On the Interpretation of Nature" in *Diderot Selected Writings*, edited by Lester G. Crocker, trans. Derek Coltman (New York: The McMillan Company, 1966), pp., 80.
[107] Lyon and Sloan, 1981, 3.

makes no secret of his fear of the vitalist doctrine put forth by Buffon, Maupertuis, and the French vitalist:

> Certain supporters of Providence consider the hypothesis of Mr. Buffon and Mr. Needham as dangerous. Matter, according to these learned men, has the power to form itself. By certain universally distributed expansive and attractive forces, is produced the divine structure of a Theresa or a Newton. The force which can create men is likewise suitable to construct the planets, and these necessary and eternal forces of Nature free us from a creator. They are sufficient without him to develop for us the order and beauty of the world. To banish this proof of Divinity (the cosmological argument, sk) is to deprive mankind of a conviction which, by its clarity, has been apparent to all peoples…Is it to the choice of matter, which has been initiated into the mysteries of sublime geometry, that must be attributed the proportion observed in the length of man's fingers?[108]

The possibility of matter as self-forming eliminates, for Haller, the need for God. Nature, in such a case, would represent a causal order sufficient to itself. The consequence, for Haller would be materialism. There is no divine and transcendent source of meaning. No special purpose and place (*Sonderstellung*) for the human being reserved within the cosmos. Rather, humans and their accomplishments would be conceived of as a mere conglomeration of material parts no different than plants, animals and planets.

III. Conclusion

This was the context in which the debates over epigenesis entered the intellectual discourse in Germany, disseminated through the writings of Wolff, Blumenbach, Herder, and ultimately Kant. At stake, however, is not just a philosophy of naturalism. Rather, the prospect of this vitalist naturalism posed a serious threat to the project of Enlightenment rationalism. As we

[108] Haller, Albrecht von "Reflections on the Theory of Generation of Mr. Buffon", trans by Phillip R. Sloan, in *From Natural History to the History of Nature*. Bloomington: Indiana University press, 1981, pp., 315-316.

saw above, the success of the rationalist program—as well as the commitment and willingness of the scientific giants of the time to stick with the theory of preformation--was deeply connected to ontological dualism. This dualism served the purposes of both science and religion. It was by excluding the mind from the realm of the empirical and contingent that Descartes was able to secure objective knowledge and Haller his objective God. The vitalist project threatened these the foundations up ono which these beliefs were built.

This is the context and these are the stakes in which Kant and Herder will engage with the central problems of vitalism. Is the human a part of nature? Is objective knowledge possible or is everything the product of context, situation, particularity? The prospect of naturalizing the human threatened the fundamental pillar of the rationalist enlightenment: Improvement through objective knowledge. No one has ever argued that animals possess objective knowledge and real insight into the fundamental structure of the world. Yet if the human is nothing but an animal, then where does that leave us? In the next chapter we will investigate how Kant and Herder respond to the problem of vitalism in diametrically opposed ways and the impact their responses had on their vision of the human being.

CHAPTER TWO

Kant and Herder: the *Gigantomachia peri tes Ousias* or the Battle among Giants for the Fate of Being

In the last chapter we sketched out the context of the mechanism-vitalism debate in the natural sciences against which Herder and Kant's ethical systems were built. There we saw that by the middle of the 18th century the mechanist conceptions of nature had fallen into a crisis of legitimacy. As we saw, the central point of contention was the problem of teleological form. The mechanistic sciences had built their methodological foundation on the expulsion of teleological forms and causality. Yet in reducing nature to a giant clock, the mechanistic sciences were unable to explain how biological organisms got their shape and what could account for their growth, development and reproduction. It was in response to this problem that vitalist scientists such as Wolff and Blumenbach suggested that the only way to account for such biological features was to "vitalize" matter, infusing dead matter with an inherently intelligent, telic component that allowed it to organize and shape itself. This, in turn, opened up number of genuinely radical possibilities. If nature is not a static, dead machine, but matter is infused with a vital energy, then why not think that nature is capable of creating and transforming itself? As Diderot put it:

> What is to prevent elementary, intelligent parts that are capable of sensation from producing endless variations in the pattern that constitutes the species? Nothing: hence the infinite number of animal species that have sprung from the first animal, the infinite number of beings that have emanated from the first being. There was only one single act on the part of nature.[109]

[109] Diderot, "On the Interpretation of Nature" in *Diderot Selected Writings*, edited by Lester G. Crocker, trans. Derek Coltman. New York: The McMillan Company, 1966, pp., 80.

Diderot's quote makes clear what is actually at stake in the debate. If matter is not strictly separated from mind, then what is to prevent nature from forming and transforming itself over historical time, creating new species along the way. And if this is the case, then what is to prevent the possibility that the human being itself is nothing more than a part of the historical development of nature? The context of the vitalism debate, in other words, opened the very real possibility that human reason was nothing but a contingent product of historical evolution.

This scientific context allows us to see the inadequacy of the standard story of Kant's role within the history of philosophy.[110] According to that story, Kant responded to the two predominant philosophical schools (awaking from his dogmatic slumber), rationalism and empiricism, by synthesizing the two in transcendental idealism.[111] Transcendental idealism thus clips the wings of speculative rationalist philosophy by suggesting that no knowledge is possible that transcends human experience except those concepts which can be shown to be the necessary conditions for the possibility of experience.[112] These concepts, famously, then serve to ground objective knowledge in science and morality. In doing so, Kant fundamentally transforms the

[110] As Zammito, Menges, and Menze have put it, "The "rationalist" reconstruction of German Enlightenment with Kant as its overweening hero now appears to have cast into unwarranted shadow many other endeavors towards Enlightenment—including Herder's—that current historiography is recovering. True Enlightenment was emphatically not just Kant's critical philosophy. We must pluralize our notion of Enlightenment. In John Zammito, Karl Menges, Ernst A. Menze, "Johann Gottfried Herder Revisited: The Revolution in Scholarship in the Last Quarter Century" *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 71, No. 4 (October 2010), pp. 661-684, here 662.
[111] See the "Introduction" to the *Critique of Pure Reason* for a standard account of the way in which Kant's critical philosophy develops out of its rationalist and empiricist predecessors. In Guyer, Paul "Introduction", in Kant, Immanuel *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp., 22-66.
[112] See, for example, the introduction to altman's discussion of the origins of German Idealism. "Kant's "Copernican revolution in philosophy" – the idea that the world must conform to our representation of it, rather than vice versa – inaugurated a movement that philosophers could take up or argue against, but that could not be ignored." And while this is true, it is also true of Herder. The two were in a battle, a battle, as Altman's genealogy shows, won decisively by Kant. Altman, Matthew C., "Introduction", in Altman, Matthew C., ed. *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 1.

philosophical landscape through his Copernican Revolution, introducing the concept self-generating spontaneous subject. And while this narrative is largely true (for Kant, especially in preparation for the first edition of the first *Critique*) the problem with this narrative is that it oversimplifies the intellectual context by ignoring vitalist developments in the natural sciences and any possible ontology that could ground them. However, such an ontology, as we will see, was not only theoretically possible and capable of being legitimated, but opened up pathways for a genuinely new vision of the human being vastly different than those envisioned in rationalism or empiricism.[113] Understanding the scientific context, therefore, changes the broader philosophical context out of which we can view Kant's admittedly radical shift towards transcendental idealism. Kant was not the only philosopher of the time coming up with a radical new vision of the human. Rather, Kant was not just developing his critical philosophy in relation vis-à-vis rationalism and empiricism, but he was structuring the critical enterprise to subtly limit vitalism, pacify it and delegitimize it as a genuine ontological possibility. In doing so, Kant simultaneously sought to delegitimize that vision of the human being entailed by this vitalist picture.

This chapter is dedicated to telling the story of how both Herder and Kant responded to the "crisis in the mechanical sciences" and the visions of human subjectivity that developed out of responses. These responses were, furthermore, not just a matter of academic philosophical dispute but a battle for the soul and vision of the human being. 150 years before the publication of *Being and Time*, and Heidegger's self-proclaimed insertion into a "battle amongst giants for

[113] In English scholarship, the work of John Zammito and Frederick Beiser has been central to complicating this narrative. See especially, Zammito, John H. *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 and Beiser, Frederick C. *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987.

the fate of being" (a *gigantomachia peri tes ousias*), Kant and Herder were, in fact, engaged in what turns out to to be a very similar battle. Will the German philosophical scene be oriented towards Kant's more universalist conception of the human in serach of secure and absolute knowledge or will it shift towards the relativist, cultural, and linguistic discourse of Herder? And while the scholarly narrative has suggested that Kant has won, this story, one of the central arguments of this dissertation is that this story is clearly in need of revision. As subsequent chapters will argue, Herder and his naturalist cultural relativism was at the time, equally innovative as Kant's transcendental idealism and equally influential on the development German literature and philosophy around 1800.

Crucially, however, the cleavage point between Kant and Herder the one which made the theoretical stakes clear, was the scientific context of the time. It was this context which provided the logical fulcrum point from which a system could be developed. On the one hand, one could embrace vitalism and its radical implications of a fully naturalized, historicized human being. Or one could commit oneself to the mechanistic-Newtonian world view and build a philosophical system that re-grounded it on the other side of its empiricist and vitalist critiques. One's response to these options, furthermore, turned on the fundamental question of how one conceived of the relationship between nature and intelligence, mind and matter. Does the raw matter of nature contain within it a telic or proto-intelligent capacity? Or is matter, as Descartes saw it, nothing but dead, utterly inert substance governed by universal causal laws? Or, to phrase it slightly differently in the language of Kant's most direct engagement with the subject, the *Critique of Judgment*, the choice came down to a fundamental question: What is the ontological status of vital force whether it be called a *vis essentalis, Lebenskraft, or Bildungstrieb*?

Kant and Herder answered this question in diametrically opposed ways. As we will see, Herder enthusiastically endorsed the latest findings in the natural sciences, extending vitalist principles to metaphysics by developing a fully naturalistic explanation of the origin of human reason. In his monumental work: *Ideas for a Philosophy of History of Mankind* (1781-1787), Herder takes up the project suggested by Diderot and tells an evolutionary story of how the earth transformed itself from nebular chaos to the development of plant and animal species culminating in the human being. The vision that Herder develops there is one in which nature constantly strives to diversify itself, to create new forms with organisms determining themselves always in dynamic co-constitution with their environments. Human reason, according to this story, is not viewed as categorically distinct from the rest of nature, but as the product of natural evolution with a distinct physiological basis: the ability of the human to stand upright.

The vision of the human being that emerges within this project is quite radical. Contra standard Enlightenment stories, Herder simply denies that human reason possesses a universal and transcendental core with a set of concepts that allow it to transcend the empirical and historical particularity in which it finds itself and judge matters according to a single standard.[114] Rather, reinterpreted naturalistically, reason, for Herder, is fundamentally hermeneutic, with language considered constitutive of human thought.[115] As such, Herder views thinking as always already embedded in both a social, historical, cultural, and ultimately geographical context. For Herder, there is, in other words, no singular "end" or universal goal at which human history and

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[114] See Adler's article for a view of how this pluralism fits in with Herder's claim that history and culture move towards the universal "humanity". My view is that Herder is fundamentally pluralist and that the universal is really empty. Adler, Hans, "Johann Gottfried Herder's Concept of Humanity" *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture,* Volume 23, 1994, pp. 55-74.

[115] Charles Taylor's has developed this "constitutive view" most thoroughly in, Taylor, Charles. *Philosophical Arguments.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995, esp., chapter 5 and Taylor, Charles. *The Language Animal: the Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, esp., chapter 1.

morality aim, except for the diversity of human cultures and life forms. Life, for Herder, is not about development towards a singular goal, but the transformation and re-transformation of self and culture so as to explore the multiplicities of being itself. The result, I will argue, is that Herder is an early champion of a certain form of “perspectivalism”, both individual and cultural. There are, for Herder, no strict universals but only the individual spaces of uniquely tinted cognition in which individuals and cultures interpret their existence and develop their values absent any ultimate guiding orientation.

Kant’s response to the “crisis in the mechanical sciences” is, on the face of it, more ambiguous. Traditionally, Kant has been understood as the keystone of the German Enlightenment and a central defender of Newtonian philosophy.[116] Much recent scholarship, however, has suggested that this story is in need of revision. Far from being a straightforward defender of Newtonian conceptions of nature, Kant instead has been placed closer to the Romantic natural scientists (*Naturphilosophen*) that followed him. These scholars have argued that Kant’s analysis of epigenesis in the *Critique of Judgement* provides the central impetus for Romantic and Idealistic philosophers that follow him,[117] with Eckart Förster arguing that section

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[116]See Beiser for a nice summary of the positivist interpretation of Kant vis-à-vis the *Naturphilosophen* According to this reading, it is precisely the regulative constraints that Kant places on teleology in the Kritik der Urteilskraft, which distinguish his philosophy of science from the subsequent Romantic *Naturphilosophen* perceived as, “the worst kind of dogmatic metaphysics”, in Beiser, Frederick, *The Romantic Imperative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003, pp., 153

[117] This reevaluation in many ways starts with Timothy Lenoir’s claim that Kant’s “teleo-mechanism” becomes a central pillar of the research program of Blumenbach and the Göttingen School. Lenoir, Timothy. *The Strategy of Life: Teleology and Mechanics in Nineteenth Century German Biology.* Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1982. Mensch, Jennifer. *Kant's Organicism: Epigenesis and the Development of Critical Philosophy.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013. Beiser, Frederick C. *German Idealism: the Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002. Förster, Beiser, and Mensch are all recent examples of scholars who have emphasized the importance of epigenesis on Kant’s philosophy and drawn a path of greater continuity between his stance on teleology in the third *Kritik* and subsequent developments in Romanticsm and Idealism.

76 represents the crucial paragraph in the development of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*.[118] These connections have led to a reevaluation of Kant and his relation to the emergence of the life sciences of his time and even the suggestion that Kant's Critical philosophy was fundamentally influenced by the vitalist discourse.[119]

Yet despite these developments, there is little doubt that Kant was not looking to launch a vitalist research program. Rather as John Zammito has convingingly argued, Kant's intensive engagement with epigenesis had quite the opposite purpose. Kant intervened in order to "police" the boundary between spirit and matter.[120] And the reason for this is clear: The vitalist prospect of *naturalizing* reason *threatened* the Kantian project to its core.[121] Herder's speculations that the emergence of reason can be explained by means of the evolution of natural species were ideas, as Kant puts it in his 1784 review of the text, "which are so monstrous that reason shudders before them" [die aber so ungeheuer sind, daβ die Vernunft vor ihnen zurückbebt].[122] Why did Kant feel so strongly about this point? According to Robert Richards the reason is quite simple: "These

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[118] Here, it must be noted that Kant, for Förster, is absolutely no vitalist, just the inspiration for the vitally inflected Schelling. Förster, Eckart*, die 25 Jahre der Philosophie*, esp., pp., 226-251. Here the critical passage: "In Kants übersinnlichen Substrat müssen Geist und Natur genauso unzertrennlich eins sein, wie in der einen Substanz Spinozas (*deus sive natura*). Mit einem wichtigen Unterschied, Für Kant ist die Vereinbarkeit von Geist und Natur in überesinnlichen Substrat nur ein Gegenstand der reflektierenden Urteilskraft und die Verbindung von übersinnlicher und sinnlicher Welt philosophisch zwar denknotwendig, aber prinzipiell unerkennbar. Aber genau aus diesem Grund konnte Schelling nun aber, trotz seiner Begeisterung für ss. 76 der dritten *Kritik*, nicht Kantiner werden".

[119] Mensch, 2013.

[120] Zammito, John, "»Method« versus »Manner«? Kant's Critique of Herder's Ideen in the Light of the Epoch of Science, 1790–1820" in *Herder Yearbook* 1998, pp., 1-25. Scholars who have pushed back against the trend of associating Kant with the vitalists to come from the history of science and emphasize Kant's aversion to epigenesis. See Zammito 2003 and "The Lenoir thesis revisited: Blumenbach and Kant" in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 43 (2012) 120-132, and Richards, Richards, Robert J. *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

[121] Zammto, 2003, 306-307. The Key quote: for Kant, "the very idea of emergence or evolution in our sense *frightened* him. Nothing was more important to him, metaphysically or methodologically, than to police the boundaries between the organic and the inorganic, and, again, between man and animal."

[122] Kant, Immanuel, *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädogogik 2*. Edited by Wilhelm Weischedel. Frankfurt: Shurkamp, 1994, pp., 792.

ideas had dangerous implications for two fundamental Kantian convictions: "the mechanistically necessary structure of scientific law…and human freedom, which certainly could not emerge from the interactions of material nature."[123] The suggestion that human reason, in other words, is not grounded *a priori* in a non-empirical source threatened the core purpose of the critical project: to ground objectivity in morality and the natural sciences.

Seen from within this context, the vitalism controversy posed a significant problem for the Critical project. It places Kant in the position of needing to defend himself and his philosophical project from a competitor with whom there can be no compromise. If Herder is right and teleological causality is constitutive of nature, then Kant and his project of transcendental idealism is wrong. What makes matters worse (from Kant's perspective) is that from an empirical, scientific perspective, the theory of epigenesis was, in the 1780s, the more plausible theory. The weight of scientific evidence was on the side of epigenesis and not on that of preformation. This context, I believe, can help shed light on Kant's ingenious but ambiguous solution to the problem of teleological causality that he lays out in second half of the third *Critique*; the unusual claim that though we *must* judge organisms *as if* they are the products of teleological causality, though we cannot consider teleological causality as a constitutive of nature. It is this solution, I will argue, which allows Kant to both acknowledge the strength of the epigenesist argument but do so in such a way as to deny its central claim to authority: the constitutive status of teleological causality. With this move, Kant is able to hold onto his "modest" systematic ambitions and maintain the objectivity of human judgments at least within

[123] Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Llife*, pp., 224-225.

the realms of morality and science.[124] Within these domains, for Kant, the human being is able to transcend their limited cultural horizon and attain to genuinely universal knowledge.

In this chapter, I will examine these claims by investigating Kant and Herder's responses to the vitalism and with an eye to its role the development of their understanding of the core features of human subjectivity. I'll proceed in in two main sections with subsections. First, I will sketch out Kant's response to the vitalism debate, focusing on the questions we addressed last section, the historization of nature and species, embryology, and the question of the ontological status of teleological causality. I will then address the larger systematic role these considerations played in his critical project. In the second part, I will contrast Kant's response with that of Herder's by showing how Herder embraced vitalism in his *On the Cogniton and Sensation of the Human Soul* (*Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele*) and his *God: Some Conversations* (*Gott: Eigene Gespräche*) and utilized these vitalist principles to develop an astonishingly original theory of cognition, ethics and subjectivity. Finally, I will look at how he utilized these vitalist principles in his Magnum Opus the *Ideen* in order to naturalize reason and historicize the human being.

I. Kant's Dualism and the Objectivity of Morality and Science

Like most things in Kant, his relation to the vitalism debate is complicated and nuanced. And while it is well known that Kant's most systematic response is made in the second half of the *Critique of Judgement* published in 1790, Kant had extensively engaged themes that were

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[124] See Karl Ameriks for an account and defense of Kant's "metaphysical yet modest" system. Ameriks, Karl. *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

central to the vitalist debate much earlier in his career and done so with great influence at the time, often staking out positions that failed to align perfectly with either mechanist or vitalist narratives. Contra popular mechanistic preformationists like Haller, Kant, for example, rejected the theory of individual preformation and its Cosmo-theological vision of nature as timeless and static, instead adopting from very early on a modified version of the core vitalist premise that nature, including species, are not static and timeless, but develop and transform over historical time.[125]

It is Kant, in fact, who goes so far as to make the crucial distinction between the ambivalent meanings of *Naturgescshichte* (description of nature and history of nature). [126] Whereas prior to Kant, the term *Naturgeschichte* primarily designated the description and empirical taxonomy of nature without reference to the history of how nature came to be as it is, it was Kant who, in a footnote to his 1785 essay on race suggests that this distinction is completely inadequate. Instead, Kant suggests that the term *Naturgeschichte* should be designated to refer to what he calls a still largely non-existent science, which "would teach us about changes in the shape of the earth, and also the changes that the creatures of the earth (plants and animals) have undergone".[127] *Naturbeschreibung*, on the other hand, should be reserved for the description and classification of things as they are now. The importance and radicality of this distinction cannot be understated. In making this distinction, Kant is actively upending the still commonplace

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[125] This was probably due to his early and ardent reading of Buffon. See Sloan for an account of the relationship between Kant ad Buffon. Sloan, Phillip R. "Kant on the history of nature: The ambiguous heritage of the critical philosophy for natural history". In *Studies in the History f Philosophy, Biology and the Biomedical Sciences* 37 (2006) 627-548.
[126] For an account of *Naturgeschichte* and its relationship to the anthropological discourse of the time see, Lepeneis, Wolf, "Naturgeschichte und Anthropologie im 18. Jahrhundert" in *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 231, H. 1 (Aug., 1980), pp. 21-41.
[127] Sloan (2006), 635.

visions of nature as static, divinely created harmony and replacing it with a genuinely *developmental* concept of biological organization.

Yet Kant's contributions to the natural scientific discourse were not restricted to matters of logical clarification. Rather, Kant also contributed to the *historicizing* of nature by making substantial contributions to the ongoing debate about the origins and development of the earth and its species. Two texts deserve mention in this context. The first is Kant's first major publication the, *General Theory of Natural History and the Theory of the Heavens* (*Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels*), published already in 1755. There Kant paints a genuinely historicist picture of the development of cosmology. Not unlike Herder will do latter, Kant here describes how the planets and greater solar system came into being, forming themselves out of the swirling forms of an original chaos, whose motions were governed by a set of Newtonian laws. It was the regularity of these laws, which slowly allowed matter to take form and the universe to become stabilized and regular.

And in 1785 essay, *Von der verscheidenen Rassen der Menschen*, Kant moves from the developmental history of the physical world to a development theory of the origin of biological species. There, opposing polygenists such as Voltaire and Linneaus, Kant argues that all human beings belong to a singular species which have diverged over historical time into what he coins as different races (*Racen*).[128] Within the context of the essay, the question of species and their capacity to develop over time is actually central. The question Kant is actually interested in is, in

[128] For a good overview of Linneaus and his relatinshp to historicizing traditions see, Sloan, Phillip R., "The Buffon-Linnaeus Controversy" *Isis*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (Sep., 1976), pp. 356-375.

other words: How and how much can species alter themselves, differentiate themselves in terms of physical attributes, while remaining the same species?

Kant's answer to this question is fascinating and sheds light on many of the ambiguous answers Kant gives to tricky biological questions in the third *Critique*. He answers by appealing to a more complex version of preformation. The human being, Kant argues, like every other species, comes into being with what we would now call a preformed genetic code, what he calls an *Anlage*. The *Anlage* performs all of the teleological aspects necessary for making sense of biological organisms, organizing the structure of the body, governing the nutrition, growth, development, and accounting the reproduction of the species, thus responding to vitalist objections that there must be *some* force other than mechanical causality responsible for such teleological activity. The teleological form and activity is accounted for by the preformed seed, universal to the species as such.

The crucial move of the argument, however, is Kant's suggestion that *Anlagen* do not contain just one, singular code that reproduces more or less the same thing every time, but that *Anlagen* come loaded with a number of hereditary germs (*Keime*). These *Keime* can then be expressed in different ways depending upon environmental conditions. It is this, therefore, this relationship between *Anlage* and *Keime*, which allows for Kant to explain how species change over time to take on new physical characteristics, while still remaining within strict, unbridgeable boundaries.[129] Different *Keime* are expressed in different ways, given the environmental triggers of different climatological contexts. Differences in the physical features

[129] For an account for Kant's how Kant's mechanistic biological thinking on species influences his understanding of culture see, Cohen, Alix, "Kant on epigenesis, monogenesis, and human nature" in *Studies in the History, Philosophy, Biology & Biomed. Sci*. 37 (2006) 675–693.

of races, therefore, for Kant, can be explained as expressing the different variations of the *Keime* that are inherent with the common genetic code, but within different environmental conditions. These differences, however, do not fundamentally effect the *Anlage*, which is universal and unchanging. This entire process can, furthermore, be explained according to strictly mechanical laws in its entierety. The *Keime* simply follow the rules programmed into them by virtue of the code of the *Anlage*.

This balancing act of change within stasis, however, simultaneously allows us to see a tension that will run through Kant's biological thought. On the one hand, we can see that Kant is open, if not eager to tell a developmental story of nature. Yet on the other, Kant desperately wants nature to *maintain itself* within certain set boundaries. Kant, in other words, never wavers on the central question of whether nature can genuinely transform itself. In fact, in the case of both physical and biological development, the primary goal of Kant's theory is to synthesize the core findings of his own nuanced understanding of *Naturgeschichte* with his commitment to Newtonian mechanism. In the case of the development of species, this is particularly clear. By reverting to preformation on the level of the species instead of the level of the individual, Kant is able to incorporate a developmental narrative of history into his broader Newtonian worldview, yet one which simultaneously establishes firm boundaries between not only animal species but most importantly the animal and the human being. The preformed *Keime* here do all the work. They allow for strength of epigenetic arguments to hold while limiting them from their most extreme ontological consequences. Yes, the argument goes, the earth does have a developmental history, as do species and individual organisms. However, Kant can argue, this development occurs according to Newtonian laws and within hard and fast boundaries. Species cannot be created nor transmuted beyond a firm and hard boarder. And, because species are preformed with

no further explanation as to their origin, there is no reason to think that the mind is reducible to the body. On the level of the species, Kant simply doesn't explain how teleological forms come into being in the first place.[130] And in this, mind remains separate from matter while positive findings of epigenesis are worked into his system.

In the second half of the *Critique of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*) we find that Kant utilizes a nearly identical strategy for limiting the scope of arguments for vitalism. Here too, he admits of the strength of the argument while shying away from its ontological conclusions. As Rachel Zuckert has shown, the third *Critique* as a whole is organized around a central problem, namely that of purposiveness. [131] As we discussed last chapter, there are certain objects, Kant argues, that we encounter in experience that we cannot help but think are the product of rational design. In the case of artworks and artefacts, the specific purposiveness of such figures is so complex that in order to figure out how the parts fit together, it seems that one must assume an understanding of an end, a blueprint or plan that guides the creation of the object. And, in the case of such objects (with works of art being a more complicated case) that is exactly how we explain the possibility of such objects. They are intelligently designed. Yet for Kant, this realm of purposive objects is not restricted to human creations but extends also to natural organisms. They are what he calls, "Natural purposes" or *Naturzwecke*", an object whose parts, like artefacts, "reciprocally produce each other, as far as both their form and combination is concerned".[132] Yet as Kant's use of the term *Naturzweck* suggests, the very idea of a *natural end*

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[130] For a great overview of the species discussion See, Sloan, Phillip R., "Buffon, German Biology, and the Historical Interpretation of Biological Species" The British Journal for the History of Science, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Jul., 1979), pp. 109-153.

[131] For an excellent analysis of the concept of purposiveness and its crucial role uniting the first and second half of the text see, Zuckert, Rachel. *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the Critique of Judgment*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

[132] Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. By Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp., 242.

seems to contain a contradiction. It implies that an object of nature must simultaneously be an object of intelligent design.

Kant elaborates on this apparent contradiction in the "antinomy of the power of judgment" in section 70. There he suggests that when dealing with natural organisms we are confronted with two incompatible yet equally necessary cognitive presuppositions. On the one hand when cognizing nature, Kant argues that we must assume that everything that occurs is determined by unconditional causal laws. Or as Kant puts it: "the generation of all material things and their forms must be judged as possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws".[133] On the other hand, however, Kant also argues that natural organisms *cannot* be judged in this way. Rather, when cognizing them, Kant argues, we *must* view them as if they were the product of rational design: "Some products of material nature cannot be judged as possible according to merely mechanical laws".[134] However, as opposed to human artefacts made by human design, we have no reason to believe that nature is rational or can operate according to concepts. The question, therefore, is how we are supposed to account for this paradox? How is nature able to shape itself into such complex organization?

Kant's answer to this paradox is ingenious and utilizes the strategies we saw above, of admitting key vitalist results while also holding firm on established boundaries. Famously, Kant argues that, despite the fact that we *must* judge natural organisms as if they were teleologically organized, we cannot lend constitutive status to teleological causality. Rather, at best we can think of teleology as a *regulative* principle that can help guide natural scientific investigation (ss 65&75). Or, to put it differently, though it seems to us *as if* nature acts intelligently and

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[133] Ibid., 258.
[134] Ibid., 259.

according to underlying plans, we are not justified in ascribing to nature an actual form of teleological causality. Thus, despite the fact that Kant claims that we must *necessarily* cognize natural organisms as if they possess an underlying teleological end, we nonetheless, are not permitted to say that teleological causality is real. So why not?

Kant makes two major arguments in the third *Critique*, against the constitutive status of teleological causality. Kant's first argument focuses on epistemological limits and as such, is something of a passive, agnostic argument. Kant argues that we have no way of knowing whether teleological causality is actually operative within nature, because we can never experience "primary internal ground" of nature itself.[135] Rather, all we can know is our own mental activity and the mere fact that we (rational creatures) are able to act according to ends and must cognize nature as such. This recognition of, "**the peculiar constitution of my cognitive faculties**", in no way, for Kant legitimizes the claim that nature operates in the same way as our mind. To suggest so much is to claim to make an objective determination about the object, when it is not at all clear that one is not just projecting onto nature something that is only true of the human mind.[136] Such a move, for Kant, would be to argue illegitimately from analogy.[137] And since we cannot know through experience whether nature is acting according to a representation an end, Kant argues, we cannot know whether nature is acting according to teleological

[135] Ibid., 269.
[136] Key quote: "To say that the generation of certain things in nature or even of nature as a whole is possible only through a cause that is determined in accordance with intentions is quite different than saying that **because of the peculiar constitution of my cognitive faculties** I cannot judge about the possibility of their generation except by thinking of a causefor thes acts in accordance with intentions." Ibid., 68.
[137] Or, as Frederick Beiser puts it, for Kant, "we understand the power to act from purposes only through our own *human* experience, and more specifically when we create something according to our will…If, therefore, something cannot act according to ideas, we have no right to assume that it has the power to act for ends" Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 158.

principles.[138] For our purposes, the key point here is to recognize the fact that this argument against teleological causality *leaves open the possibility* that nature is, in fact, teleological.

Kant, however, supplements this first argument with a much stronger one in which he argues that it is not just that we don't know, but that nature *cannot be* teleological. Aimed at the doctrine of *hylozoism* (living matter) Kant, argues that the very idea that nature acts according to ends contradicts the essential concept of nature. Kant puts this point in unambiguous terms saying that "the possibility of a living matter (the concept of which contains a contradiction, because lifelessness, *inertia*, constitutes its essential characteristic) cannot even be conceived."[139] In saying that the fundamental characteristic of matter is "lifeless, *inertia*", Kant is refers back to the Cartesian understanding of matter that he develops in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Nature* where Kant argues that matter consists in an inert extension in which, "every change in matter must have an *external* cause".[140] Yet hylozoism, for Kant, is defined by the very opposite, namely, the possibility that nature moves itself according to the representation of some end. It is precisely this possibility, however, which Kant is ruling out in the strongest of possible terms. As opposed to the first argument, which leaves open the possibility of a teleological causality operating in nature without us being able to know it, he is here making the much stranger claim nature cannot be teleological.[141]

This second argument reveals much more about Kant's motivations in limiting the scope of vitalistic ideas than the first. In denying teleological causality constitutive status, Kant is not

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[138] Kant makes this argument most strongly in section 75, where he argues that it is because of the "the peculiar constitution of my cognitive faculties (that) I cannot judge about the possibility of those things and their generation except by thinking of a cause for these acts in according with intentions" 268-269.
[139] Ibid., 265.
[140] Beiser, 159.
[141] Beiser, 160. Beiser puts this point succinctly when he says that "matter for Kant is essentially *lifeless*; for he defines life as the faculty of a substance to act from an *internal* principle, its power to change *itself*."

merely making a philosophical argument aimed at enforcing sharp epistemological standards. Instead, in restricting teleology to regulative status, Kant is looking to secure the radical distinction between the (living) spontaneity of mind and the dead, deterministically governed inertia of matter. Thus, despite the extraordinary concessions that Kant seems to make in relation to epigenesis in the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant is actually centrally concerned with maintaining an unbridgeable gap between mind and matter. Teleological causality, for Kant, cannot be ascribed constitutive status of nature not only because we cannot know it, but, more importantly, because such an ascription would contradict the very definition of what nature, for Kant, is. Thus, far from potentially *entertaining* the possibility that nature may be teleological, Kant, in the *Critique of Judgement* is attempting to keep mind and matter separate.

So it seems that we are again at something of an impasse. While admitting of the problem of teleology, Kant virulently denies the obvious solution to this problem, namely, hylozoism. This, in turn, leads us to another question: Why was Kant so interested in reconciling these principles? What did he accomplish in doing so? Here I would suggest that doing so allows Kant to both engage in the scientific discourse on a seemingly neutral level while also maintaining the ontological distinction that was of utmost importance to him: The radical split between mind and body. As we saw last chapter, by 1790, vitalism was on the ascent. A genuine “paradigm shift” was at hand. And this, because the overwhelming amount of empirical evidence, favored some version of epigenesis, a fact which Kant more than recognized.[142] It was becoming impossible for non-dogmatic thinkers to deny the plausibility of this basic account.

[142] Kant, in fact, goes as far as to speak of the, “great advantage that the defender of ***epigenesis*** has over the other side in the matter of experiential grounds for the proof of his theory” on account fo the fact that Blumenbacnn “rightly declares it to be contrary to reason that raw matter should originally have formed itself according to mechanical laws”. Ibid., 292

With this heuristic strategy, however, Kant is able to admit what the evidence suggested. Individual organisms do form in teleological fashion from previously unformed parts. The earth is not static, but physical geography and biological species do develop and change over historical time. Kant was too good a philosopher not to see these evidential truths that the paradigm shift from mechanisms to vitalism had started to reveal. Crucially, however, Kant's reversion to the preformation of the species allowed him to admit these empirical claims while denying the underlying *principle* upon which vitalists--and Herder in particular--were basing these claims, namely, the *constitutive, ontological status of teleological causality*.[143] This principle, for Kant, had to be rejected. The preformation of the *species* allowed him to do this. Species come preformed, whether by an act of God or spontaneous generation, Kant does not say. Regardless, the preformation of the species, just like its naïve individualist predecessor, takes the act of creative intelligence out of nature by implanting it in a seed which operates on unformed nature mechanically, imbuing on it its genetic code. Thus, mind and matter remain separate. Or, as John Zammito puts it: "There were few ideas Kant struggled to keep divided more than life and matter. It is the idea of *hylozoism*–of any radical spontaneity in matter itself—that Kant could not abide."[144]

i. Vitalism and the Threat to the Kantian Project

[143] This was a common strategy, taken up, for example by Blumenbach as well. For an analysis of the relationship between epigenisis and second order preformation (preformation of the species) see McLaughlin, Peter, "Blumenbach und der Bildungstrieb: Zum Verhältnis von epigenetischer Embryologie und typologischem Artbegriff" in *Medizinhistorisches Journal*, Bd. 17, H. 4 (1982), pp. 357-372, here, pp., 369.
[144] Zammito, *Lenoir Thesis*, pp., 122

In the last section, we saw that Kant, despite flirting with and often integrating epigenetic conceptions of into his philosophy of nature, nonetheless, was staunchly committed to Cartesian conceptions of matter and causality. This leaves us with a question: Why did Kant wish so desperately to keep mind and matter ontologically distinct? The answer to this question, I will argue is quite simple: Because the infusion of mind into matter threatened to undermine the central goals of the critical project.

As the traditional narrative makes clear, the critical project saw its major task to lie in securing the epistemological foundation for judgments in the natural sciences and morality from the devastating critiques of Locke and Hume.[145] Locke and Hume had precipitated a crisis in Enlightenment rationalism by arguing that we possess no concepts that are neither analytic (A bachelor is an unmarried man) nor gained from experience. As such, this criticism was aimed at attacked the trove of innate *a priori* concepts that rationalists had used to justify the objectivity of newly grounded mechanistic sciences. Absent these innate concepts, however, the epistemological justification for Early Modern science was seriously shaken.[146] Kant's critical philosophy was, therefore, first and foremost concerned with securing an epistemological foundation which could ground the validity of a certain set of *a priori* concepts. The vitalist infusion of mind into matter, however, threatened to undermine that project just after it had gotten its most sophisticated formulation in the first edition of Kant's first *Critique*. In order for

[145] This is the uncontroversial, and correct, story told of Kant in the history of philosophy. For example, it is the one appealed to by Guyer in his introduction to the Cambridge Companion. Guyer, "Introduction: The starry heavens and the moral law" in *Cambridge Companion to Kant*. New York: 1992, pp., 1-2. "Like many philosophers from the time…Kant tried to explain the the possibility of the new scientific knowledge, which had culminated in the mathematical worldview of Isaac Newton, and the possibility of human freedom."Also, see Beiser, Frederick. *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, esp., pp., 1-15.
[146] For a summary of the relationship between Hume's critique and Kant's response see, Irwin, Terrance, 2009, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study, Volume III: From Kant to Rawls*, Oxford: Oxford University Press and MacIntyre, Alasdair C. *A Short History of Ethics.* New York: Macmillan, 1966, pp., 190.

the Critical philosophy to get off the ground, in other words, a strict dualism was necessary. And, as we will see, the prospect that certain crucial features of reason were not *transcendental*, in Kant's new formulation of the term, but *empirical*, i.e., the product of a natural evolutionary history, threatened to derail the Critical project almost before it even began. And Kant, it seems to me, was fully awawre of this threat. Thus, to see these stakes, a brief overview of some of the more basic assumptions of the Critical project, especially as formulated in the Second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787) and Kant's *Groundwork* (1784) both written once Kant had become sufficiently aware of the treat and imminence of vitalism, is necessary.

ii. The Structural Foundations of Kant's Critical Philosophy

This empiricist criticism threatened the epistemological foundation of Early Modern science for a straightforward reason. For Kant (as for all of the 18th century), in order for any judgment to carry with it the necessity and universality required of objective knowledge, such judgments *cannot* be grounded in empirical experience, but *must* be grounded *a priori.* Kant tells us why in the second section of the introduction of the B edition of the first *Critique*, following Hume's argument exactly:

> Experience teaches us, to be sure, ,that something is constituted thus and so, but not that it could not be otherwise…Experience never gives its judgments true or strict but only assumed and comparative **universaity** (through induction), so properly it must be so: as far as we have perceived, there is no exception to this or that rule…Empirical universality is therefore only an arbitrary increase in validity.
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> Erfahrung lehrt uns zwar, daβ etwas so oder so beschaffen sei, aber nicht, daβ es nicht anders sein könne…Erfahrung gibt niemals ihren Urteilen wahre oder strenge, sondern nun angenommene und komparitve *Allgemeinheit* (durch Induktion), so daβ es eigentlich heiβen muβ: soviel wir bisher wahrgenommen

> haben, findet sich von dieser oder jener Regel keine Ausnahme…Die empirische Allgemeinheit ist also nur eine willkürliche Steigerung der Gültigkeit.[147]

Experience can only tell us how things have been in the past and, therefore, what is reasonable for us to expect in the future. What experience cannot do, however, is *guarantee* that things will in fact remain the same. No matter how many times an effect B has followed from a cause A, it remains possible, Hume famously argues, that two billiard balls will simply remain put when colliding, even though I have experienced the lawful ricochet of these two objects a thousand times before. There is nothing *in the experience* of A colliding with B that guarantees the necessity of this causal reaction. Experience, in other words, can never bridge the gap between probability and necessity.

Yet for Kant, it is precisely this gap which must be bridged if a proposition is to be considered genuinely objective. Real knowledge, Kant argues, carries with it the marks of necessity and strict universality. Or as Kant puts it in the *Groundwork*: "Every person must admit, that a law…must carry with it the characteristic of absolute necessity." [Jedermann muβ eingestehen, daβ ein Gesetz, absolute Notwendigkeit bei sich führen müsse].[148] Strict necessity, however, can only be found in those judgments that are grounded *a priori*. As Kant puts it in the *Preface* to the B edition: "Necessity and strict universality are, therefore, certain features of a cognition *a priori*" [Notwendigkeit und strenge Allgemeinheit sind also sichere Kennzeichen einer Erkenntnis *a priori*, und gehören unzertrennlich zu einander].[149] Given this confluence of factors, the central task of the critical philosophy is, therefore, to explain how is it possible to

[147] Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason.* Trans and ed. By Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 137 , (B3). Kant, Immanuel. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Edited by Jens Timmerman. Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1998.
[148] Kant, 389.
[149] Ibid., B 3

ground judgements within the domains of science and morality *a priori* given the empiricist critiques?[150]

Kant's answer to this question marks the revolution in thinking that his philosophy ushered in. Rather than suggest that we come equipped with concepts that give us objective access to the world as it is in itself, Kant flips the script, claiming as Paul Guyer puts it that "the validity of both the starry skies above as well as the moral law within had to be sought in the legislative power of the intellect itself."[151] What Kant argues, in other words is that the human mind brings with it a set of concepts *a priori* as a tool bag of pure reason, which it uses to organize the intuitions of the external world that it receives through senses into a coherent experience in the first place.

It is the task of the first two critiques and the *Groundwork*, famously, to argue, that it would be impossible for us to have the type of coherent experience that we do in fact have if we did not assume that we brought with these central organizing concepts with us to experience. The result, famously, is Kant's transcendental idealism. *A priori* concepts, for Kant, are no longer conceived of as transcendentally real concepts that grant us objective rational insight into an "objectively perfect world."[152] Rather, Kant rethinks the nature of *a priori* concepts, reconceiving them as transcendental, i.e., as conditions of the possibility of rational experience, rather than as transcendent, i.e., concepts that track the ontology of things as they are in themselves. This reconception also organizes the structure of the critiques and introduces the notion of a "Transcendental Deduction". A transcendental deduction becomes the argumentative

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[150] Or, to put it in Kant's language: How are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible?
[151] Guyer Paul. "Introduction". In *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. Edited by Paul Guyer. New York: 1992, pp. 2.
[152] Guyer, 2.

method that moves from given of empirical experience (and possibly the experience of the moral law) and argues backwards from that given to the conditions that must be necessary if such experience can be had at all. In the first *Critique*, therefore, the "Transcendental Deduction" moves from the given of coherent experience back to the conditions of the possibility of that experience, which Kant famously argues, are the 12 categories, including the concept of causality, as well as the pure intuitions of space and time. While in the *Groundwork* Kant and second *Critique*, Kant argues in a similar fashion by moving from our common, everyday understanding of morality to the conditions that must be in place if morality is to be considered a normative command governed by a law. This condition, famously, is that a portion of the human being must be transcendental, i.e., not be subject to the lawful determinations of space, time and causality imposed by the subject itself and, therefore be capable of determining its own will according to a pure law of rationality.

It is this turn to transcendental idealism that Kant utilizes to save the objectivity of science and morality from the threat of Humean skepticism. Contra Hume, the concept of causality is not grounded in the association of mere experience, but *a priori* in the structure of rationality itself. And while it is still the job of the empirical investigation to discover the exact nature of the causal laws, Kant can argue that the origin of the concept of causality itself and, therefore, the foundational feature of the natural sciences, is not the product of mere experience.[153] Whatever the specific laws of causality as they are empirically determined by

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[153] See Michael Friedman for an analysis of the relationship and gap between the principle of causality and specific causal laws. In Friedman, Michael. "Kant's Concept of Causality". In *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. Edited by Paul Guyer. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp., 161-199.

science, they can, with justification, be said to carry with them the absolute necessity and universality of objective statements of knowledge.

Given this context, it should be easy to see why vitalism was so threatening to critical project. It threatened this project because it threatened to naturalize reason, explaining it as a product of natural evolution. As such, it brought the core *a priori* status of non-empirical reason into question. For, if the core attributes of reason are not independent of empirical nature, but the product of nature, then reason will not contain any aspect that is genuinely *a priori* and independent of all empirical content.

In such a case one of two options would be available for explaining how to get from empirical contingency to universality (and here I'm focusing on questions of morality), both of which I believe can find their origin and Hume and both of which Kant would reject. On the one hand, one could argue with Hume and subsequent evolutionary ethics, that the physiological constitution of the human being (its genetic code), supplies an adequate basis for grounding the universality of some judgments. Or, one could argue that morality is either a matter of common human feeling (moral sentiment theory) or that we have evolved in such a way that being moral is ultimately beneficial. And while these approaches might seem sufficient from our perspective, Kant would reject such approaches on two fronts.

First, Kant would argue that a command grounded in human sense never carries with it the type of necessity that moral commands must carry with them. Though generally universal, human sentiments are remarkably flexible. What, then, are we supposed to do with someone who does not take pleasure in the observation of moral good and who, unlike like Hume suggests, is more than happy to "walk across the street to step on a gouty man's toe"? For Kant, grounding

moral sentiments in the faculty of desire, like Hume does, could at most lift morality up to the level of what he describes as the "agreeable" in the third *Critique*. In such a case, there is no arguing with someone on matters of taste, because their taste is grounded in physiological constitution of their sensory apparatus. If a moral judgment is a judgment grounded in sensation, then if one person's sensations are different from ours, on what grounds do we argue? This is precisely Kant's argument against grounding morality in happiness in the *Groundwork*.[154] The conceptions of human happiness are far too diverse for it to be a meaningful concept and the various constitutions of the human being far too variable for it to be considered a universal basis of judgment. Such arguments that address what we as humans *ought* to feel and the good we *ought* to pursue would have to appeal to a higher court, for Kant, than that of mere sensation.

And second, if universality morality were grounded in some evolutionary benefit to the human species, then this fact would run quite obviously against Kant's rather insistent demand that the laws of reason are not just valid for *human beings* but apply to *every rational being*. Kant makes this point clear as day in the *Vorrede* to the *Groundwork*, which we quoted above:

> Everyone must grant that a law, if it is to hold morally, that is, as a ground of an obligation, must carry with it absolute necessity; that, for example, the command "thou shalt not lie" does not hold for only human b eings, as if other rational beings did not have to heed it, and so with other moral laws properly so called; that, therefore, the ground of obligation here must not be sought in the nature of the human being or in the circumstances of thee world in which he is place, but *a priori* simply in concepts of pure reason.
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> Jedermann muβ eingestehen, daβ ein Gesetz, wenn es moralisch, d.i., als Grund einer Verbindlichkeit gelten soll, absolute Notwendigkeit bei sich führen müsse; daβ das Gebot: du sollst nicht lügen, nicht etwa bloβ für Menschen gelte, andere

[154] As Kant puts it in the *Groundwork*: "Alle Prinziplien, die man aus diesem Gesichtspunkt nehem mag, sind entweder *empirisch* oder *rational*. Die *ersteren*, aus dem Prinzip der *Glückseligkeit*, sind aufs physisicne oder moralische Gefühl…*Empirische Prinzipien* taugen überall nicht dazu, um moralische Gesetze darauf zu gründen. Denn die Allgemeinheit, mit der sie für alle Wesen ohne Unterscheid gelten soll…fällt weg, wenn der Grund derselben von der *besondern Einrichtung der menschlichen Natur* oder den zufälligen Umständen hergenommen wird, darin sie gesetzt ist (441-442)."

> vernüftige Wesen sich aber daran nicht zu kehren hätten; und so alle übrigen Sittengesetze; daβ mithin der Grund der Verbindlichkeit hier nicht nur in der Natur des Menschen oder den Umständen der Welt, darin er gesetzt ist, gesucht werden müsse, sondern *a priori* lediglich in Begriffen der reinen Vernunft.[155]

Here Kant brings together the various strands of the argument. In order for X to be a moral law, then X must carry with it an absolute necessity and apply not only to human beings but to *all rational creatures*. And the reason for this has to do with the ground of its "binding" (*Verbindlichkeit)*. If the grounding of the law is sought either in cultural circumstances or in the physiological constitution of the human being, then the law will never be able to command absolute necessity and strict universality precisely because it will be open to the contingency of empirical experience. Kant's insistence on the applicability of *a priori* concepts to *all* rational beings draws these laws out of our realm and puts the emphasis on the fact that, for Kant, the human being in fact possesses a non-empirical portion of the self. And Kant is not using this language metaphorically, but he is serious in the language that he uses. Moral laws must be grounded *solely* in the concepts of pure reason and this reason must be wholly and completely distinct from "anything empirical whatsoever" (*irgend etwas Empirisches*). This literalness is particularly clear in the *Groundwork*. The whole project of the *Groundwork* is to lay out the conditions that must obtain in order for something like a moral law to exist whatsoever. The primary condition, famously, is that at least the possibility must be open that the human being possess a "*pure* will" (*reinen* Willen) that is not subject to the empirical causal laws of either the world or one's own body. Only then, the conditional structure of the argument continues, can one ground a genuine *law* of morality.

[155] Kant, Immanuel, "Ground of the Metaphysics of Morals" in *Practical Philosophy*. Trans and ed by Mary J. Gregor. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp., 44 (Kant, 389).

This context also allows us to see the central role that dualism plays within Kant's systematic philosophy, for dualism is not an incidental feature of his system but a defining one. It is only because the core features of the mind are not empirical, but *a priori* that Kant is able to respond to the empiricist criticisms of Locke and Hume and secure the two most important goals of his systematic philosophy: A) The objectivity of judgments in the natural sciences/morality and B) the freedom of the subject from causal determination. Dualism and the metaphysical commitment to the ontological distinction between mind and matter is central to this project. It is for this reason that I side strongly with Karl Ameriks's interpretation of Kant's systematic approach as "Metaphysical but Moderate". Against a current of phenomenological or humanistic reading of Kant, that look to "minimize the embarrassment" of Kant's metaphysical commitments, I side with Ameriks's position that Kant absolutely does have a certain number of metaphysical commitments. First and foremost amongst these is the actual existence of a rational self that is not subject to empirical conditions but imposes those forms onto experience itself. Or to put it in Ameriks's words: "Kant's Critical Philosophy at its very core was committed…to taking an assertive stand on the *existence* of absolute freedom".[156] Regardless of how it now appears to either philosophers who want to shy away from metaphysical commitments or to literary scholars who shy away from systematic philosophy and focus simply on "human experience", Kant was a systematic thinker whose system was organized around the problem of grounding objective knowledge in the areas off science and morality. The project required him to take a strong stance on the metaphysical distinction between the empirical and the rational.

In order for thinking to be objective and free, for Kant, there must be a part of it that is not subject to the causal determinations of nature and the contingency of history and culture.

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[156] Ameriks, 18.

Were this not the case and were thinking the product of fully empirical features, then the human being, Kant believes, would be dependent upon the contingent cultural features of empirical concept formation for her attempts to make sense of the world. And it was Herder's work which supplied him with a test case against which he established himself. As we will see shortly, Herder's unification of mind and matter led him directly to a conviction of the extraordinary *flexibilty* of moral beliefs and forms of human life. And Herder's logic follows that of Kant's quite exactly. Since there is no common core of reason that transcends the empirical but only expressions of thought that occur within different cultures, places and periods, what is the criteria that will allow us to mitigate, judge, distinguish between these periods? For Kant, the answer was simple: there is none.

This point gets us back to a fundamental disagreement between two opposing camps. For, if, as Alaisdair MacIntyre argues, following Herder (or for him, Aristotle and Hegel), moral concepts are not ahistorical and universal, but, "embodied in and partially constitutive of forms of social life", then morality will be, in a deep way, relative to the social forms of different ways of life.[157] And while this can lead to the celebration of diversity that we have seen in recent Herder scholarship, it can also point to the difficulty of cultural mediation and open the possibility of a genuine relativism. And Herder, in his early writings, does not shy away from this fact, but concedes that virtue and vice, in many societies, go holistically hand in hand. The point in case for him were the ancient Spartans, a society which Herder believes had a number of admirable traits, but which was also built around slavery. Herder writes: "Is humanity capable of pure *perfection* in a single present condition at all? Peak boarders on valley. About noble

[157] MacIntyre, 1966, pp., 1.

Spartans there dwell inhumanely treated *Helots*."[158] For Herder, we find that the very virtues of the Spartans, their discipline, courage, fortitude, military skills, that is, the very uniqueness of their society, were constitutively associated with their brutal enslavement of the Helots. And while it is not at all clear whether one can separate the one from the other, the even bigger question may be: Without appealing to a neutral standard of reason, on what grounds can Herder legitimately criticize them?

Kant's moral philosophy, on the other hand, is uniquely and self-consciously qualified to deal with this problem. For there is good reason why the *Groundwork* is rightfully called "one of the genuinely great books of philosophy, and not a few hold it to be the most important work that was ever written in the history of ethics" [eines der ganz groβen Bücher der Philosophie, und nicht wenige halten es für das wichtigste Werk, das jemals in der Geschichte der Ethik geschrieben wurde.][159] And the reason for this is simple: Kant's ethics is the only ethics in the history of Western philosophy that is able to give an account of the content and the form of the moral law that is not dependent upon any social and historical context, or a specific conception of the good.[160] Instead, Kant utilized his systematic dualism to locate the moral law in the spontaneous structure of human reason itself. The moral law is binding, for Kant, not because it links to an external state, but because morality is fundamentally rational. And the essence of the human being, as we saw above, is the application of this capacity unto itself. Morality, in other words, is binding because it is constitutive of who we are. When human beings determine

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[158] Herder, Johann Gottfried. "This Too a Philosophy of History" in *Philosophical Writings*. Edited by Michael Forster. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp., 295.
[159] Kraft, Bernd, and Schönecker, Dieter, "Einleitung" in *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* by Immanuel Kant. Hamburg: Meiner, 1999, pp., XIII, my trans.
[160] On the uniqueness of Kant's moral philosophy positively and negatively see, Engstrom, Stephen P. *The Form of Practical Knowledge: a Study of the Categorical Imperative.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009 and MacIntyre, Alasdair C. *After Virtue: a Study in Moral Theory.* 3Rd ed. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

themselves, for Kant, they are not determined by empirical stimuli, but do so autonomously, by means of the moral law. Or as Kant states it in a great summary paragraph from the *Groundwork*:

> An absolutely good will, whose principle must be a categorical imperative will therefore, indeterminate with respect to all objects, contain merely the *form* of *volition* as such and indeed as autonomy; that is, the fitness of the maxims of every good will to make themselves into universal law is itself the sole law that the will of every rational being imposes upon itself, without having to put underneath it some incentive or interest as a basis.[161]
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> Der schlechterdings gute Wille, dessen Prinzip ein kategorischer Imperativ sein muβ, wird also, in Ansehung aller Objekte unbestimmt, bloβ die *Form des Wollens* überhaupt entalten, und zwar als Autonomie, d.i. die Tauglichkeit der Maxime eines jeden guten Willens, sich selbst zum allgemeinen Gesetze zu machen, ist seblst das alleinige Gesetz, das sich der Will eines jeden vernüftigen Wesens selbst auferlegt, ohne irgend eine triebfeder und Interesse derselben als Grund unterzulegen.[162]

In its autonomous willing, the moral law contains both the form and the content of itself. The form of the will, because a decision absent any empirical stimulation is self-determining, and the content, because the essence of reason is universality and its potential universilizabiltiy is the standard for every maxim. Kant, therefore, does not need to appeal to either a concept of happiness or an exterior concept of the Good, because, following his argument, the moral law is *constitutive* of what it means to be a human being.

And while the categorical imperative has been criticized from the day the ink dried on the manuscript, its core message, as Kant was very aware, is extremely intuitive. All Kant is saying is that when acting truly human, human beings treat others as they would like to be treated themselves with justice, fairness, and equality. As such, the content (and usually, though

[161] Kant, Immanuel, "Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals" in *Practical Philosophy*, translated and edited by Maary J Gregor, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp., 92-93.
[162] Kant, Immanuel, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1999, pp., 73.

implicitly, the form too) of Kant's moral philosophy lies at the center of all progressive legislation, movements for human rights, equal treatment under the law, and justice within market economies. It is Kant who can provide deeply rooted philosophical argument for why humans should never be treated as means, or be judged, organized, and discriminated against on the basis of arbitrary empirical characterization such as sex, race, gender identity, and sexual orientation. They should not, because morality applies to the autonomy of the subject, that is, every Other who is human and who must, therefore, be treated always as an end. That is no small feat, and it takes only a cursory acquaintance with various social norms and ethical systems to see that it is also something quite unusual. As much as it may impose a certain universality on a "humanity as such", it is not at all clear, especially in an age where truth is attacked from the highest office in politics, that this universalism is not exactly what is needed.

From within this context, however, we can see quite clearly why Kant responded to the emergence of vitalism as a natural science in the way that he did. Far from flirting with vitalism, Kant saw that vitalism posed an imminent threat to the core of the Critical enterprise. The mixing of mind and matter in vitalistic monism would undercut Kant's dualism and with it the very foundation upon which the Critical project was founded. This, in turn, would destabilize the foundation Kant had built for securing the objectivity of science and morality. At the same time, however, Kant's solution allowed him to remain intellectually and philosophically honest. His own analysis as well as the preponderance of empirical evidence at the time pointed in the direction of some form of vitalism. The very structure of the argument in the third *Critique* reflects this fact. Mechanical and teleological judgment are not just incompatible, but both *indispensable*. We must judge organisms *as if* nature acts according to intelligent ends.

Kant's brilliant argument of a heuristic *as if* allows him to reconcile these seemingly irreconcilable positions. By reverting back to preformation and arguing that teleological causality is not constitutive of nature, but a feature of our uniquely human capacity for reflective judgment projected onto nature, Kant is able to account for both the legitimacy of teleology, why it seems like we *must* judge nature teleologically, while simultaneously denying the constitutive status of teleological causality in nature. With respect to Kant's philosophy itself, this crucial move allows him to hold onto the all-important core of his modest transcendental system. Rationality remains distinct from nature with the consequence that the human, defined as a rational animal, cannot be subsumed into nature and understood as a product of natural evolution. The ontological gap between animal and human remains, for Kant, and not on account of some *physical attribute*, but because of the nature of rational cognition itself. It is this rational remainder, which allows Kant to suggest that though the human being is largely empirically determined (*aus krumme Holz gemacht*) and will largely succumb to selfish desires and pleasure, that reason and freedom can serve as a guide (*Leitfaden*) that can lead the human being towards a world of perpetual peace.

II. Herder's Naturalist Ethics

We saw last section how Kant responded to the "paradigm shift in the natural sciences" by regrounding the validity of the mechanical sciences upon a new epistemology predicated on a strict ontological distinction between mind and matter. It was this distinction, I argued that simultaneously allowed him to maintain the modest yet universal ethics for which he is so famous. Herder's response to this crisis could not have been any more different. Rather than trying to hold back the possibilities inherent in a vitalist system, Herder, as Frederick Beiser puts

it, "(i)nstead…extended the discoveries in the natural sciences to the realms of epistemology and ultimately ontology."[163] Herder, in other words, fully embraced not just vitalism in its scientific context, but extracted the concept from its scientific context with the express idea of transforming it into a principle of speculative, naturalistic metaphysics. This move, in turn, opened up the conceptual space within which Herder could develop not only a naturalist conception of the human being, but one in which differed radically from his empiricist predecessors.

In this section, I will elaborate on these claims by sketching out Herder's project of naturalizing the human being and its consequences. I will argue that Herder used vitalist principles to develop a monist philosophy of nature that rejected any categorical distinction between mind and body, but instead saw nature as intelligent, with organisms seen as interpreting their surroundings and purposively responding to them with the ability to develop new capacities both physically and mentally. In short, a form of proto-evolution with a unique perspectivalist epistemology. Within this framework, Herder saw the human being both body and mind as not categorically distinct from nature, but as a transformation of a property common to all organic life. [164] As such, he sought the origins of human reason not in a transcendental feature

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[163] Beiser, 1993, 127.

[164] Whether the human could be integrated into physical nature by virtue of its *physical attributes* alone was a hotly contested topic at the time, as evidenced by this letter from Goethe. Goethe, of course, saw no categorical distinction between the human and the animal, at least on the basis of their physical attributes. "Herein, I am sending you a treatise on skeletal structures and would love to hear your thoughts on the matter. I have decided to mention already here the idea which Herder points to in his *Ideas*, namely that one can't locate the difference between the human and the animal in anything specific. On the contratry, the human being is most intricately related with the animals" [Hier schicke ich dir endlich die Abhandlung aus dem Knochenreiche, und bitte um deine Gedancken drüber. Ich habe mich enthalten das Resultat, worauf schon Herder in seinen ideen deutet, schon ietzo mercken zu lassen, daβ man nämlich den Unterschied des Menschen vom Their in nichts einzelnem finden könne. Vielmehr ist der Mensch aufs nächste mit den Thieren verwandt.] (17. November, 1784); Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Goethes Briefe I: Briefe aus dem Jahr1764-1786*. Edited by Karl Robert Mandelkow. Hamburg: Christian Wegener Verlag, 1964, pp., 459.

but within a naturalistic framework, by explaining these features according to specific physiological changes which allowed for the development of language.[165] These events have, in turn, led to Herder's now impeccably well researched "linguistic turn" and its radical claim that reason does not grant direct access to world as such, but is always filtered through language.

What is central to this story, however, but which hasn't been paid as much attention to, is Herder's theory of sensation. It is this theory of sense, I would argue, which constitutes Herder's most radical contribution to the anti-metaphysical, individualistic discourses of his day. As opposed to both rationalist and empiricist theories, both of which view sensation as essentially passive, taking in neutral sense data, Herder's vitalist theory of nature allowed him to view sensation as active, already orienting organisms to a world in a unique and individualized manner. The result, for Herder, is that cognition takes on an inherently perspectival tint with each person, language, and culture, seen as individual manifestations of a primordial life force that manifests itself in an infinite number of ways. There is, for Herder, hence, no simple neutral space and single command of reason, but individual, linguistic and cultural perspectives that can never be fully reduced to one another. Applied to ethics, this naturalist understanding of reason leads to a much different picture of the human being than the universalist conception developed by Kant. For it leads especially the young Herder to the admit and embrace of the notion that there is no "transcendental vocation" of the human being, no universal aim at which history and *Bildung* are supposed to aim. Rather, both individual human beings and cultures are constantly wrapped up in the process of formation and transformation. This process always involves a

[165] Herder's own, now impeccably researched "linguistic turn" is, therefore, itself dependent upon Herder's larger naturalism For some of the most important studies on Herder's philosophy of language see, Ulrich Gaier, *Herders Sprachphilosophie und Erkenntniskritik* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1988). Forster, Michael N. *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.Taylor, 2016;

dialectical procedure. Individual humans find themselves already thrown into the specificity of a social and historical situation which has already shaped them both culturally and physiologically from which any interpretation of the world must begin. Yet, for Herder, nothing is set and determined. Rather, humans and cultures alike possess a rather remarkable ability to transform themselves, changing and altering self and culture through exposure to ever changing circumstances. The history of cultures and individuals, thus, for Herder, becomes the history of tracking and understanding these developmenst and, most importantly, of celebrating the various ways in which the vital forces that make up the world can come to be expressed in the diversity of forms of life.

I will sketch out the major outlines of this project with the help of the three texts in which Herder had his most robust engagement (*Auseinandersetzung*) with vitalism and in which his philosophy of nature is outlined: *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* (*Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der Menschlichen Seele*) (1774, 1775, and published in 1778), *God: Some Conversations* (*Gott: Eigene Gespräche*) (1787, 1800), and his *Ideas on the Philosophy of History of Mankind* (*Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*) (1784-1781). In doing so, I will track Herder's project of naturalizing subjectivity in three steps. In the first, I will sketch out Herder's naturalist philosophy of mind in *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden*, focusing specifically on how his vitalist empiricism grounds his claim that cognition is always seen as perspectival, filtered through the lenses of one's individuality, culture, and historicity. I will then show how Herder builds on these innovations by transforming Spinoza's mechanistic monism into a vitalist one in *Gott*. And finally, I will sketch out how Herder utilizes this ontological principle of vitalist force (*Kraft*) in his *Ideas* to tell an evolutionary story of the history of the world in which nature is not viewed as a static substance, but as a laboratory of vitalist forces

within which nature acts upon itself to create new and ever diversifying forms of life. Within this context, human reason is not some transcendentally grounded faculty, but like the other forms of this self- acting potential of nature a tool, a capacity for the orienting and interpreting of a specific, embodied being.

i. Vom Erkennen und Erfinden

As Frederick Beiser put it in, *The Fate of Reason*, one of the early seminal works on Herder in English speaking scholarship, Herder's overarching goal was to explain the paradigmatic activities of the human being, their language, art, science, religion according to naturalistic premises that were "neither reductivistic nor materialistic."[166] Given this goal, the first step in this project is, of courses, a naturalist epistemology and philosophy of mind. And, as the title suggests, *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* (*Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der Menschlichen Seele*) is one of Herder's most sustained attempts at explaining the origins of human thought in naturalist terms.

At the time, Herder could have drawn from one of two epistemological schools of how on which to model his own theory, either rationalism or empiricism, which, at the time, were generally taken to be exhaustive of the ontological possibilities. As a naturalist committed to explaining how cognition can be explained according to strictly *empirical* sources, Herder in *Vom Erkennen*, of course, vehemently rejected ther rationalis camp remarking early on in the text that: "Nothing comes to us again from the realm of Platonic ideas" [Aus der Platonischen Reiche

[166] Beiser, 1987, pp., 127.

der Vorwelt kommt ihr (to the soul) nichts wieder].[167] Having denied that innate ideas are anything but a philosophical phantasma, Herder instead places himself firmly on the empiricist side of the argument, telling us that human beings can know nothing other than what is given to them through senses engaging with the world of a specific here and now: "Now, if we are willing to follow experience, then we see, that the soul spins, knows, cognizes nothing *from out of itself*, but what its universe streams towards it from within and without and God's fingers indicates to it….it has also not put itself in the place where it now stands; it does not even know how it got there. But it does know, or should know, that it only cognizes what this place shows it."[168] [Wollen wir nun der Erfahrung folgen, so sehen wir, die Seele spinnet, weiβ, erkennet nichts aus sich, sondern was ihr von innen und auβen ihr Weltall zuströmt und die Finger Gottes zuwinkt….sie hat sich auch selbst nicht auf den Platz gesetzt, wo sie stehet; weiβ selbst nicht, wie sie dahin kam? Aber das weiβ sie, oder sollte es wissen, daβ sie nur das erkenne, was dieser Platz ihr zeige].[169] Cognition knows neither how it got there nor what came before it. Rather, the only material that human cognition has to work with is the material that is given it to it through the senses in this specific location. Like Locke and Hume, Herder, in other words vehemently denies that the mind contains anything innate or that anything precedes the cognition that arises out of the interactions between the sensing body and the world. We can know only that which is given to us through experience.[170]

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[167] Herder, Johann Gottfried, "On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul" in *Herder Philosophical Writings*, trans by Michael Forster, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp., 209.

[168] Ibid., 209

[169] Herder, Johann Gottfried, "Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele (1778), *in Werke Bd II Herder und die Anthropologie der Aufkläung*, ed., Wolfgang Pross, München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1987, pp., 689.

[170] This empiricist strand in Herder is representative of the significant influence that British empiricism had on the development of vitalism in Germany at the end of the 18th century. This influence went far beyond Hume's influence on Kant, to figures such as Shaftesbury and Ferguson, as we will also see next chapter with Friedrich Schiller. For an investigation of the relationship between Locke and vitalism see, Yolton, John W. *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983 and Zammito, 2002.

Yet, despite this stereotypically empiricist starting point, Herder is no standard empiricist.[171] Rather, Herder's empiricism is a specifically *vitalist* one and it is the specifically vitalist nature of his empiricism which makes the program so radical. Traditional empiricists such as Locke and Hume tended to think of the body in more or less Cartesian terms as a uniform machine, and the mind as a wax tablet. Cognition, for them, would operate insofar as the body would take up such "simple sense impressions" passively, in a mechanical way, and transmit them to a center of activity where those impressions would be aggregated, compared and ultimately, synthesized into abstract ideas. Within this constellation, words come to stand in as symbols that refer or pick out objects in the world.[172]

The upshot is that despite its well-known skepticism about the possibility of absolute knowledge (the senses are too unreliable), classical empiricism lands, far believing that each human occupies a radically subjective viewpoint, on the side of believing that human experience is generally universalizable and communicable; a firm belief in a shared world that can be split up as close to "objectively" as is possible for a creature of our nature. It is, furthermore, the very simplicity of the subject that accounts for the positivistic faith that human beings can make gradual progress towards objective knowledge of the world given through the senses. Because, Locke and Hume argue, human sensation and the wax tablet of the mind operate everywhere in a similar fashion, one can safely go off the assumption that the world that human beings take in is more or less the same. It is this belief in commonality of the senses that allows classical

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[171] The groundbreaking account of Herder's specifically sensualistic empiricism can be found in, Heinz, Marion. *Sensualistischer Idealismus: Untersuchungen Zur Erkenntnistheorie Des Jungen Herder (1763-1778).* Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1994.

[172] For this account, See Locke and Hume's canonical treatises of the origin of ideas in Locke, John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, esp., books 1 and 3 and Hume's concise and brilliant summary of the empiricist method in Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.* Edited by P. F. Millican. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, especially sections 2, 3.

empiricism to develop such strong conceptions of "common sense". Far from giving human beings fundamentally different access points to the world, the senses, for Hume, provide human beings access to the *same* basic building blocks from which they construct the world. What is needed in the case of disagreement is, therefore, a return to the senses, to the basic building blocks from which ideas are generated and, therefore, a return to the space of neutral objectivity.[173] The result, for Hume, is a surprisingly stable and universalist conception of the human being over time and space. As Hume puts it, "mankind are so much the same in all times and places that history informs us of nothing new or strange."[174] For if the assumption is that the underlying world of sensation is one that we share, the biggest question that remains is how we split it up.

As much as Herder is indebted to empiricism, Herder fundamentally rejected the idea that the sensation is passive and takes in in neutral sense data and in doing so, struck a radically different path than his British predecessors. Instead, Herder integrated the most recent discoveries in the natural sciences to vitalize sensation, making end-oriented activity a part of the act of sensation itself. The result is that Herder comes to view the very act of sensing not as passive, but as active, already orienting organisms to a world in a unique manner that is dependent on the physiology of every individual. Herder does so by appropriating and re-interpreting Albrecht von Haller's anatomical discovery of the phenomenon of *Irritation* (*Reiz*), for his own, uniquely un-Halleriain purposes. Ironically enough, it was Haller, who, through a

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[173] See Locke's brilliant discussion of the way in which language, and the association of sensations in conglomerate words, creates confusion and disagreement in Book 3 of the *Essay.* It is for this reason that he is equally hopeful in the possibility of coming to agreement. All we must do is disambiguate terms by breaking their meaning down to their constituent sensible parts. Those words that don't have an empirical referent, are meaningless. This is still more or less the same strategy taken up by Carnap in his 1931 essay, "On the Overcoming of Metaphysics Through the Logical Analysis of Language". Locke's brilliance and longevity is simply astonishing.

[174] Forster, Michael, "Introduction" in *Philosophical Writings* by Johann Gottfried Herder. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp., xiv-xv.

series of brutal live dissections in search of the transition point between living and dead matter, had discovered that even the most subtle bits of organic matter seem to possess the characteristic of *Irritibität*, or sensibility. Yet whereas Haller discovered this feature in the hope of justifying dualism, Herder took the fact that even the smallest fibers contacted as evidence that there were no hard and fast boarders in nature, but that all organic life was enlivened and ensouled, engaging and responding to its environment. Herder then uses this point of *vitalized,* proto-cognitive matter as the starting point for his new vitalized empiricism.[175] The importance of this move however, cannot be understated. For Herder, sensation, at its base, is not neutral and does not simply orient us towards a commonly shared world of objects, but is rather, always already *gereizt,* that is, shot through with a pre-structured horizon of interpretation and orientation.

And this re-interpretation carries with it significant practical/epistemological consequences for Herder. What he takes from this fact is that all life, from the most basic particles of unorganized, to human beings, respond purposively to the world, organizing itself according to a basic law: to expand and energize itself in relation to what an organism takes be good and protect and enclose itself from what an organism perceives threat: “The irritated fiber contracts and expands again; perhaps a stamen, the first little glimmering spark towards sensation…As small and obscure as the beginning of this noble capacity that we call sensation may be—it must be equally important, so much gets achieved through it” [Das gereeizte Fäserchen zieht sich zusammen und bereitet sich wieder aus; vielleicht ein *Stamen*, das erste glimmende Fünklein zur Empfindung…So klein und dunkel dieser Anfang des edlen

[175] Ibid., Or as Herder puts it: “We can probably not accompany sensation in its origination farther down than to the strange phenomenon that Herder has called ‘irritation’” [Tiefer können wir wohl die Empfindung in ihrem Werden nicht hinabbegleiten, als zu dem sonderbaren Phänomenon, das *Haller* >>Reiz<< genannt hat.]Forster, 189; Pross, 666.

Vermögens, das wir Empfindung nennen, scheine; so wichtig muβ er sein, so viel wird durch ihn ausgerichtet."][176] Far from being dead matter that merely impresses itself on a separate human or animal mind, Herder is here claiming that matter *itself* is inherently irritable, meaning capable of responding intelligently and purposively to its environment. This move is so important because with it, Herder collapses the distinction between the mental and the physical and suggests that physical matter, i.e., the physical body is already orienting organisms towards their surroundings in a specific type of way. The body is, in other words, *already always interpreting the world*. The mental, for Herder, is, therefore, not a separate sphere which reflects on stimuli presented to it by the body. Rather, for Herder, the body is already actively engaged in the world, responding to its external environment, orienting the organism in a stance of joy or fear, preparing and readying the organisms for a certain action.

And with this move, Herder is clearly hearkening back to pre-Cartesian, Aristotelian conceptions of nature (especially those developed in *De Anima*) in which nature is infused with telic qualities, are viewed not as determined by mechanical causality, but as actively interpreting their surroundings. Thus, Herder talks about the natural world not as if it is mechanically determined but as actively interpreting. Plants and animals are striving to avoid the bad and pursuing the good in a manner that isn't fundamentally different from that of human beings.

> Observe that plant, the beautiful construction of organic fibers! How it twists and turns its leaves to drink the dew that refreshes it! It lower and revolves its roots until it stands. Each bush, each little tree inclines towards fresh air as much as it can. The flower opens to the arrival of her bridegroom, the sun. How some roots flee their enemy beneath the earth, how they spy out and seek space and nourishment for themselves.
>
> Sieh jene Pflanze, den schönen Bau organinscher Fibern! Wie kehrt, wie wendet sie ihre Blätter, den Tau zu trinken, der sie erquicket! Sie senkt und dreht ihre

[176] Ibid., Forster, 189; Pross, 666.

> Wurzel, bis sie stehet: jede Staude, jedes Bäumchen beugt sich nach frischer Luft, so viel es kann: die Blume öffnet sich der Ankunft ihres Bräutigams, die Sonne. Wie fliehen manche Wurzeln unter der Erde ihren Feind, wie spähen und suchen sie sich Raum und Nährung.[177]

What sounds like absurd anthropomorphizing language here is meant to be taken seriously. Herder's point is that this rich world of human meaning, far from being fundamentally detached from nature, is actually an elevation of a fundamental life force which is already at work inside of the simplest natural organisms. Thus the flower avoids its enemies, digging its roots in search of nourishment and freedom and opens itself to its bridegroom, energized in its own way by the *eros* which animates all life. Nothing here is simply determined. Rather, organisms, for Herder, are always engaging with their surroundings from within a life-world in which some objects are viewed as things-to-be-pursued and some to-be-avoided. In Heideggerian language, in other words, an organism never confronts a meaningless object to which it responds mechanically, but always encounters entities that appear *as something* meaningful to them within their world. The result, is that Herder rejects and strict distinct between sensing, cognizing and willing but rather, that with every act of sensation, every organism is already cognizing, evaluating and willing.

This same basic picture holds of the human as well. The mental "I", on this picture is only the tip of the iceberg of pre-structured, bodily interpretation. Thought, for Herder is not an independent mental activity, but is deeply rooted in the physiological constitution of the body. As Herder puts it, thoughts are nothing but sensations raised to a certain level of clarity: "All sensations, which rise to a certain clarity become *apperceptions*, thoughts; this soul cognizes that it senses." [Alle Empfindungen, die zu einer gewissen Helle steigen werden *Apperceptionen*,

[177] Ibid., Forster, 192; Pross, 669-670.

Gedanke; diese Seele erkennet, dass sie empfinde.][178] The I here is far from autonomous and self-enclosed, choosing amongst options on independent grounds. In fact, for Herder, the opposite is the case. For him, the I, rather than deciding, becomes aware of what it *already* wants, what it is already oriented and attracted to through the very act of sensing. The I is already enmeshed in a world that it has started to interpret through its body through its body.

By suggesting that consciousness is best characterized as an extension and reflective awareness of the cognitive activity that is already present in sense, Herder's theory clearly prefigures a tradition that will run through Schelling, Nietzsche and Freud. Within this tradition, consciousness is only a minimal representation of a profound source of meaningful sensation that is already active in orienting us towards the world. The point is quite simply that for Herder, there is no such thing as an essential rational core that constitutes the essence of the human being. [179] There is no autonomous I that transcends circumstances and stimuli; rather, the I of cognition, for Herder, is largely the product of the circumstances in which it was shaped and formed, co-conditioned by the heavily pre-structured direction in which sensation has delivered it.

And while Herder describes this process in what appear to be species terms, on the level of dogs, cats, palm trees, this process, is, in fact, a highly *individual* process.[180] Sensation is not just different for different species, but different for different individuals depending on both on physiological constitution and the shaping and forming of sensation through experience. This

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[178] Herder, Suphan, pp., 193.

[179] For an elaboration on this point see, Gaier, Ulrich, "The Problem of Core Cognition in Herder" *Monatshefte* Vol. 95, No. 2, Johann Gottfried Herder 1744-1803 (Summer, 2003), pp. 294-309.

[180] For an excellent account for Herder's theory of sense and its relation to individual formation see, Goldstein, Amanda Jo. "Irritable Figures: Herder's Poetic Empiricism", in *The Relevance of Romanticism: Essays on Early German Romanticism*. Edited by Dalia Nassar. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp., 273-295.

carries with it major consequences. Because interpretation is inseparable from sensation and sensation inseparable from physiology, Herder insists that if no two creatures are physically the same, then no two creatures will be oriented towards the world in the same way. Every individual, in other words, will have their own perspectively unique outlook on the world:

> If no two things in the world are the same, if now dissector has ever yet found two identical arteries, glands, muscles, or canals, then let this difference be pursued through a whole human structure right down to each little cog, each irritation and vapor of the mental life-stream—what an infinity, what an abyss! A sea of depths where wave upon wave stirs and where all the abstractions of similarity, category, general order are only boarded walls of neediness or colorful houses of cards to play with.
>
> Sind keine zwei Dinge auf der Welt gleich, hat kein Zergliederer noch je zwo gleiche Adern, Drüsen, Muskeln, und Kanäle gefunden; man verfolge diese Verscheidenheit durch ein ganzes Menschengebäude, bis zu jedem kleinen Rade, jedem Reiz und Dufte des geistigen Lebensstromes—welche Unendlichkeit, welcher Abgrund Ein Meer von Tiefen, wo Welle über Welles ich regen, und wo alle Abstraktionen von Ähnlichkeit, Klasse, allgemeiner Ordnung nur bretterne Wände des Bedürfnisses oder bunte Kartenhäuser zum Spiel sind.[181]

Herder’s logic in this passage runs as follows: First, the entirety of our cognitive world emerges out of our bodily interaction with the world in the specific location we find ourselves. Because all cognition is dependent upon the body’s sensory organs, then if those sensory organs differ, then our cognition will differ as well. Herder takes this point so seriously as to almost deny the usefulness of universalizing concepts in their application to human beings. Universal concepts are merely a “house of cards” with which we play. Far from simply picking out universal features, abstracting concepts, for Herder, are woefully inadequate tools that we use to paper over our radically individual ways of experiencing the world. In this, Herder betrays his commitment to radical, almost nominalistic individuality. Different people sense things

[181] Ibid., Forter 197; Pross, 675.

differently, are attracted to different things and will start to build the world up in fundamentally different and individualized ways.

This thesis carries with it enormous consequences. For, these initial differences in sensory capacity generate enormous differences on the perspective that individual humans take on the world. Herder exemplifies this point by reflecting on the conditions necessary for a figure such as Achilleus to come in to existence: "In the deep abyss of irritation and of such obscure forces lies in human beings and animals the seed of all passion and enterprise. More or less irritation of the heart and of its servants make heroes or cowards…The heart of Achilles was shaken in its plexus by black anger, it required irritability to become an Achilles." [Im Abgrunde des Reizes und solcher dunkeln Kräfte liegt in Menschen und Tieren der Same zu aller Leidenschaft und Unternehmung. Mehr oder minder Reiz des Herzens und seiner Diener macht Helden oder Feige…Das Herz Achills wurde in seinen Netzen vom schwarzen Zorn gerüttlet, es gehörte die Reizbarkeit dazu, ein Achilles zu werden.][182] Herder's point here is, of course, not to suggest that everyone *should* be an Achilleus (a great relief!), but to suggest that it takes an utterly unique physiological constitution to even have the chance of *becoming* an Achilleus. In order for Achilles to develop into the person that he was, he not only needed the right physiological constitution, but the right form of enculturation, the right training, exercising, and habituating of the nervous system that have become habitual parts of his outlook. There is, in other words a deep connection, for Herder between nature, individuality, and enculturation. The eventual world view of Achilleus, his sociopathological anger and violence, are, for Herder, dependent upon the foundational seed which is the organization of the sensory apparatus that mediates Achilleus and the world. And even that characterization is insufficient. We see here that

[182] Ibid., Forster 195; Pross, 673.

the typical subject-object conception is a poor framework for describing what Herder is after. For Herder, there is no such thing as a neutral subject, Achilleus, who faces an objective word of objects which make their mark on him like they would everyone else. Rather, from the very beginning, in the act of sensing itself, there is a mediating, interpreting activity that is simultaneously constitutive of the self that is Achilleus.

And Herder does not shy away from the conclusions that his view of sensation entails. Initial differences in sensory capacity generate enormous and often irreconcilable differences on the perspectives that individuals and cultures will take on the world. Furthermore, he admits that it is incorrect to suggest that there is any one correct or even generalizable outlook that we all "should" share. Rather Herder's theory of sense leads him to the conclusion that an extraordinary diversity of mental activity is an essential part of human life, making no secret of the extremes to which he takes this idea by challenging the very the concepts of madness and sanity: "*In the case of each individual human being*. Whoever goes into a madhouse finds fools raving in a different way, each in his own world; thus do we all rave, very rationally, each according to his fluids and tempers. The deepest basis of our existence is individual, both in sensations and in thoughts." [*Bei jedem einzelnen Menschen.* Wer ins Tollhaus gehet, findet alle Narren auf verscheidene Art, jeden in seiner Welt, rasen: so rasen wir alle sehr vernünftig, jeder nach seinen Säften und launen. Der tiefste Grund unsres Daseins ist individuell, so wohl in Empfindungen als Gedanken.][183] Herder's point here again, is not to fully break down the distinctions between sanity and insanity but point to the deeply individualizing features of human cognition. Each

[183] Ibid., Forster 217; Pross, 697.

being engages with life from a perspective, interpreting their life world from a specific place, time, context and body.

This theory, finally carries with it significant consequences for Herder's understanding of the task of philosophy. Philosophy, for Herder, cannot conceive of itself as a systematic discipline that seeks to comprehend an objectively existing "world" via the faculty of "reason". Why not? Because: "Universal human reason, as we generally understand the term, is but a cloak, a favorite fantasy of ours, an idol, our blindness and laziness. And what genuine human reason, human sensation, and need is and always will be, we close our eyes and ears to that" [Die allgemeine Menschenvernunt, wie wir das Wort gern nehmen möchten, ist Bemäntelung unsrer Lieblingsgrillen, Abgötterei, Blind- und Trägheit. Und was wahre Menschenvernunft, Menschenempfindung und Bedürfniss ist und ewig wird, davor schliessen wir Augen und Ohr.][184] Universal reason, for Herder, is not a metaphysical entity, but a product of ideology. It is an ad-hoc justification of our own, largely physiologically based world-view, applied to everyone.

Yet it is crucial to understand that this process of forming a world view from initial sensory orientation is, for Herder, not a static and mechanical one. In this sense, Herder is anything but a determinist. Rather, the human self and the sensory-cognitive apparatus that supports is always caught up in the process of dialectical co-determination with an environment. Just as Goethe's morphology is dedicated to tracking and seeing transformation, constancy in change, so too the story of developing a self is a story of the transformation of one's sensory and

[184] Ibid., Forster, 217; Pross 697.

cognitive capacities over time. Herder clarifies this point by describing the transformative effects of different sensory environments on different constitutions:

> If we are entirely without irritation—a cruel illness; it is called dessert, boredom, monastery. The fiber so to speak consumes itself, rust eats the idle sword. Thence that checked *hate* which cannot become *anger*; the miserable *envy* which cannot become *act; regret, sadness, despair*, which neither undo nor improve—cruel serpents which gnaw at the human being's heart.
>
> Sind wir ganz ohne Reiz; - grausame Krankheit, sie heiβt Wüste, Langweile, Kloster. Die Faser zehrt gleichsam ann sich selbst, der Rost friβt das müβige Schwert. Daher jener verhaltene *Haβ*, der nicht *Zorn* werden kann, der elende *Neid*, der nicht *Tat* werden kann, *Reue, Traurigkeit, Verzweiflung*, die weder zurückführen noch bessern—grausame Schlangen, die am Herzen des Menschen nagen.[185]

In a passage reminiscent of Nietzschean *ressentiment*, Herder lays out the consequences of what happens when human beings are not allowed to express themselves. As is the fear of every parent who puts their child into daycare will tell you, if you place your child into a daycare where they are not given the opportunity to move, to act on their sensations in a positive way, those interactions will have formative effects on the manner in which they develop physiologically and, therefore, how they learn to express their emotions. Without movement, interaction, play, jealousy festers without being positively transformed, fear becomes a settled disposition rather than something that is overcome, emotions are stunted and hardened rather than transformed.

The point, however, is that the self, far from being determined, is in fact in fact in constant transformation. And fascinatingly enough for the literary scholar, it is because of the problem that the flexibility and transformative capacity of the self presents, that Herder, in this

[185] Ibid., Forster, 191; Pross 668.

text, pitches the very idea of the *Bildungsroman*. Because the self (and one's sensation) is cable of such transformation over time, Herder suggest that what is needed is an aesthetic genre dedicated to the tracking and tracing of this development as it occurs in dialectical co-determination with its environment over time. This, Herder suggest should become the job of the novel (or the biography) to track the story of this development, which will tell the story of the transformation of one's sensory and cognitive capacities over time: "If, now, an individual human being had the integrity and faithfulness to sketch *himself* fully, as he knows and feels himself….to suppress nothing to himself, enough courage to purse himself through his whole living structure, through his whole life… those will be philosophical times, when people write such descriptions." [Hätte ein einzelner Mensch nun die Aufrichtigkeit und Treue, *sich selbst* zu zeichnen, ganz, wie er sich kennet und fühlet…Mit Mut durch seinem ganzen belebten Bau, durch sein ganzes Leben zu verfolgen…Das werden philosophische Zeiten sein, wenn man solche schreibt.][186] Contrary to universalizing conceptions, the self, for Herder is so flexible, the he calls for a new aesthetic genre to try and capture it in its becoming. And this theory of the *Bildungsroman* is a logical consequence of his theory sensation. It is because the self is not autonomous, but always already thrown into the world which it is already always interpreting, becoming and being determined always in co-constitution with the world that it becomes necessary to track the self, to lend form to the chaos of life's time. This process, however, is one which essentially involves tracking the mutual interaction of self and world, a process, as Friedrich von Blanckenburg points out, for which the novel provides a perfect aesthetic genre.

The point, however, is that Herder's vitalized monism and specifically, his vitalist theory of sensation brings about a transformation in the theory of the subject especially when compared

[186] Iid., Forster, 197-198; Pross, 676.

with that of Kant. Herder's ontology clearly leaves no room for rationalist or Kantian views of freedom and the *a priori* status of reason. His theory of sense also goes a long way to undercutting the inductive objectivity that remained a cornerstone in the empiricist tradition. Counter Locke and Hume, the senses, for Herder, do not pick up sensory simples from which the mind then abstracts and combines to produce ideas and propositions that ultimately "refer" to the sense data. Rather, for Herder, there is no singular referent to which these sensations refer. They are rather, already pre-laden with judgement, orientation, perspective. And for this reason there is, for Herder, no such thing as universal reason or a faculty that is able to draw conclusions about the world as such. Cognition, instead, is highly perspectival, dependent upon the individual and the environment in which they develop.

Yet this is only Herder's first step in developing a theory of a fully naturalized human being. While Herder, in *Vom Erkennen und Erfinden* vitilizes all of organic life, he has not yet turned the vitalist principle into an ontological principle. It is this step, I will argue, which is central to his philosophy of history and ultimately to his theory of culture. Cultures for Herder, like individuals, are not static and universal, but dynamic and individual, caught up in an eternal process of formation and transformation. In the next section, I will sketch out this theory as he develops it first in *Gott* and subsequently in his *Ideen*.

ii. Herder's Gott

We saw last section how Herder utilized vitalist principles to develop his own empiricism with an utterly unique vision of sensation. Yet Herder, in 1778, had not yet developed the full-fledged ontological vitalism that he will implement in the *Ideas* with its particular emphasis on

the transformative quality of vitalist *Kraft*. It is for this reason that Herder's theory in *Vom Erkennen* can come off as somewhat deterministic.[187] Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth. Rather, far from developing a static conception of nature and history as if organisms are determined by their original designations, Herder's metaphysics are dynamic, those of change, growth, transformation, *Bildung*.

This point is made explicitly clear in Herder's own contribution to the Pantheism Controversy his *God: Some Conversations,* published in 1787.[188] In this text, Herder contributes to this debate by enthusiastically endorsing Spinoza against Jacobi's central criticisms of atheism and fatalism.[189] Herder does so, however, by modifying and transforming Spinoza, turning him, more or less into a vitalist. Yes, Herder argues, Spinoza was absolutely right in rejecting Descartes's two substance theory (mind-body dualism) and instead locating God in a singular, immanent substance. He was completely wrong, however, in interpreting this substance according to the paradigm of the mechanistic sciences, as fully determined according to mathematical-mechanical laws. Chapter 2 of the text is, in fact, dedicated specifically to the problematic we discussed in Chapter 1: the emergence of vitalism as a solution to Cartesian dualism.

What Herder instead suggests is that Spinoza's immanent monism be updated so as to keep up with the cutting edge discoveries in the natural sciences. In other words, be vitalized.

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[187] Forster, for example claims this in, Forster, Michel, "Herder and Spinoza" in *Spinoza and German Idealism.* Förster, Eckart., and Yitzhak Y. Melamed, eds. Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp., 59-84.

[188] The importance of this text and Spinoza in general on the development of German Idealism was enormous. For a nice overview see,. *Spinoza and German Idealism,* Förster, Eckart., and Yitzhak Y. Melamed, eds. Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 2012.

[189] For an excellent account of both the Pantheism controversy, discussion of the roll of vitalism, and its influence on future generations see in Herder see, Beiser, Frederick C. *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993., esp., pp., 44-91 and 127-164.

Herder then continues to apply the vitalist critique of Cartesian matter discussed in Chapter 1 to Spinoza's system. Contra Descartes, the newest results in the sciences, Herder argues, tell us that nowhere does one find dead matter. Rather, "the more that we have investigated the matter of bodies, the more we have discovered in it active (*wirkend*) or counteractive (*gegenwirkend*) forces (*Kräfte*) and have consequently abandoned the empty definition of extension." [Je mehr man die Materie der Körper physisch untersuchte, desto mehr entdeckte man auch in ihr wirkende oder gegenwirkende Kräfte und verlieβ die leere Definition der Ausdehnung] (162).[190] For Herder, the newest science is showing that the base of all living nature is not dead, inert extension, but *Kraft*. And, as we saw last section, what distinguishes nature conceived of as *Kraft* from dead matter is fact that organic material, is active, it *interprets* its environment and strives to preserve and express itself. When we are in nature, we are not, therefore, surrounded by dead matter which is simply determined, but by pockets of divine organization constantly striving to realize themselves in whatever form they happen to be in. Or, as Herder puts it in almost mystical terms: "In that matter, which we call dead, divine forces are striving in every point, no more nor less: We are surrounded by divinity, we are swimming in an ocean of the divine" In der Materie, die wir tot nennen, streben auf jedem Punkt nicht minder und nicht kleinere göttliche Kräfte: wir sind in der Allmacht umgeben, wir schimmen in einem Ocean der Allmacht].[191] Herder, in other words, like Spinoza, embraces a substance monism in which God is the "*constant imminent cause* of all things" [*bleibende immante Urschache* aller Dinge],[192] but transformed from the mechanical determinism of Spinoza. Rather, for Herder, life in its very essence, is alive, it is self-propelling activity.

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[190] Herder, Johann Gottfried "Gott: Eigene Gespräche" in, Pross, 1987, pp., 762, my trans.
[191] Ibid., Herder, pp., 766.
[192] Ibid., 759.

And Herder does not shy away from drawing the most radical conclusions from his vitalization of Spinoza. If nature does not consist in static inertia governed by a mathematical formula, but self-propelled activity, then the result, for Herder, is that the ontological purpose of life is *the infinite unfolding and expression of life itself*, or as he puts it that "God reveals himself in infinite forces in an infinite number of ways" [daβ sich die Gottheit in unendlichen Kräften auf unendliche Weisen offenbare].[193] And the reason for this has to do with the nature of self-interpreting matter itself. If matter is always active, always striving to express itself in new ways, what this means, for Herder, is that matter i.e., natural organisms, will themselves be capable of coming into being, taking shape, and transforming over historical time. Herder, in other words, draws the human psychological principal of individuality, adaptation to environment, and applies it to nature itself. This is true not just of human life forms in other words, but of the physical forms of natural organisms. The result of this theory is quite astonishing:

> Is not space, is not time, infinite? What countless number of divine forces and forms can, therefore, reveal themselves in them?...What infinity springs from this ever-new, eternally young source of divine beauty?...with what looking glass did Columbus discover for our nation perhaps just now, new armies thereof in a small cloud of fog, hidden from our eyes.
>
> Ist nicht der Raum, ist nicht die Zeit Endlos? Welche unzählbare Menge göttlicher Kräfte und Formen kann sich in ihnen also offenbaren!...welche Unendlichkeit entspringt aus diesem immer-neuen, immer verjüngten Quell der göttlichen Schönheit!...Mit welchem Spiegelglase entdeckt der Columbus unsrer nation vielleicht eben jetzt neue Heere derselbe in einem kleinen, unsern Augen unsichtbaren Nebelwölckchen.[194]

In this remarkable passage, Herder flips Early Modern philosophy on its head. If its purpose was to control and calculate the world, the vitalized world of Herder's universe is one in which a sense of religious devotion is drawn from not only at the amazing infinity of created things, but

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[193] Ibid., 763.
[194] Ibid., 765.

the continued act of creation. The purpose of life is not to remain stagnant, but to go forth and multiply, not along the line of some single standard, but in new and ever-changing forms. Herder's mention of Columbus here serves precisely this point. Far from praising the colonial activity of Spanish imperialism, Herder delights in the diversity of cultural and natural forms that Columbus's voyage opened to the consciousness of Europeans.[195] From this we can simultaneously tell that the destruction of those forms in favor of an imperializing monoculture will not be applauded but strictly denounced. For the theologian Herder, God is not praised by destroying the diversity of her creation but is revealed in the diversity and creation of new forms itself.

The upshot is the following: With this text Herder takes a fundamental step beyond representational metaphysics and its attempt to grasp Being according to what is unchanging and eternal. Rather, by vitalizing Spinoza's substance, Herder transforms the essence of Being to redefine it as creativity: a constant striving to interpret and reinterpret the world in new and original ways.

iii. The Ideen

The metaphysical vision that is outlined in the abstract in Herder's *Gott* is executed in sometimes excruciatingly detail in Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*. This metaphysical vision has concrete physical consequences. Seen as a collection of vital forces, Herder, in his *Ideen*, reinvisions the world as a ball of mutually fluxing forces

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[195] For an account of how Herder's vitalism informs his anti-imperialism, see Noyes, John K. *Herder: Aesthetics against Imperialism.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015 esp. the first 3 chapters.

wrapped up in a process of evolution.[196] According to this vision, the world is not static, but undergoes revolutions and transformations in which plant and animal species emerge within historical time and are transformed or eliminated depending on the concrete empirical circumstances that they face. Within this scheme, the human being is not an outlier but understood as a natural part of this progression. The human, for Herder, does not possess reason because of its transcendental vocation or as a gift from God, but because of a physical alteration—its longer big toe and its consequent ability to stand up. This move, in turn, opens up the possibility for language and with it a genuinely naturalized understanding of human reason and culture. [197] Herder, in other words, is executing precisely what he describes in his *Gott*. He is tracking the way in which *Kraft* modifies itself thorough history by organizing and reorganizing itself in new forms of life: the way in which, "*die Gottheit in unendlichen Kräften auf unendliche Weise offenbare*".

And despite all the manifold of different organisms, Herder believes that this process of change, development and transformation occurs according to a set pattern. The central features of this theory are twofold. First, transferring the principle from his *Gott* and *vom Erkennen und Empfinden*, Herder maintains that the basic feature of life is its drive to organize, i.e., to create or to modify existing form. And second that the formation and modification of life forms, from the

[196] For an account of the relationship between Herder, Goethe and Evolution see, Richards, Robert J. *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life,* 233.

[197] Though I won't be able to address it in detail in this chapter, the question of language was central to this debate. Once it was admitted that there were no categorical *physiological* distinction between the human being and the animal, language became the new point that created a supposedly *categorial* gap between the human and the rest of nature. For extensive analysis of the relationship between theories of language and questions of naturalism, see Ricken, Ulrich, *Sprache, Anthropologie, Philosophie in der Französischn Aufklärung* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1984), esp., 182-194; and Lifschitz, Ari, *Language and Enlightenment-The Berlin Debates of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford, 2012), esp., 165-177.

lowest polyp up to the human being, always occurs always in dynamic co-constitution with the environment. In practice what this means is that organisms develop new capacities from the intentional re-organization of their physical matter for the purpose of better adapting and differently interpreting their environment. These laws, therefore, have important consequences for the way in which the cognition *(erkennen*) and interpretation of the life world of each organism occurs. Central to this is that cognition, for Herder, is always relational, i.e., it is always relative both to the physical organization of each individual species and the environments in which they developed these capacities. Thus, Herder gladly acknowledges that if the original constitution of the climate had been different (as on Mars), then the nature and capacities of plant and animal species that developed there would also be completely different. There is, in other words, nothing about this earth and the creatures that inhabit it that is absolutely *necessary*. Forms of life develop in response to the contingent sets of relations that they find themselves in. In doing so organisms, therefore, develop their unique capacities (behaviorally, instinctually, and physiologically) always in dynamic co-constitution with a specific environment. These general principles will simultaneously hold for the human being, with enormous consequences for Herder's interpretation of human reason.

Herder begins his argument for this radical conclusion on the basis of the very common 18th century observation that environments are characterized by an extraordinary amount of harmony. Plants and animals are seemingly reciprocally related to one another, filling different needs and fitting into different environments as if they were designed precisely for them. As Herder phrases this common physio-theological conclusion: "The plant is made for the ocean, this one for the swamp, this one for the streams and lakes; the one loves the snow, the other the torrential rain of the hot zone; and all of this characterizes their form, their shape (*Bildung*)."

[Die Pflanze ist für das Meer, jene für den Sumpf, diese für Quellen und Seen geschaffen; die eine liebt den Schnee, die andere den übereschwemmenden Regen der heiβen Zone; und alles dies charaterisiert ihre Gestalt, ihre Bildung.][198] Yet Herder's explanation for this harmony stands in direct opposition to the physio-theological arguments so common at the time. In contrast, the harmony of nature, for Herder, is not the result of an intelligent design, but the product of a historical process. It is the result of the inherent purposiveness of nature. The existence of harmonious environments, in other words, is the result of the mutual adjusting of organisms to one another within an environment. This leaves us with a question: How does this process occur?

Herder begins his explanation in the second book by calling the earth "a great workshop (*Werkstatt*) for the organization of different types of creatures" [*eine große Werkstätte zur Organisation sehr verschiedenartiger Wesen*.][199] And workshop is the right word here, because Herder quite literally sees the earth as a place in which new formations, modifications, and organisms are being constructed from the simple bits of matter. This, in turn, is possible, because, the fundamental feature of this matter is its propensity for concept-oriented activity, i.e., *Bildung*. Or as Herder, suggests, even in the smallest *seemingly unorganized* part, there is already, in fact organization: "Thus we perceive even in that, which seems to us to be the smallest and most raw, a determinate existence, a form, a shape (*Bildung*) according to eternal laws" [so nehem wir doch, selbst in dem, was uns das Kleinste und Roheste dünkt, ein sehr bestimmtes *Dasein*, eine *Gestaltung*, und *Bildung* nach ewigen Gesetzen wahr.][200] The point that Herder is making here is that there is no such thing as unorganized matter but rather, that it lies

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[198] Herder, *Werke Bd 3, Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*. München: Carl Hanser, 1987, pp., 57.
[199] Ibid., 49
[200] Ibid., 49.

in the very essence of life to form and organize itself. This *ewiges Gesetz*, is thus, the basic drive of life to interpret its environment by taking on a certain shape, that is, reacting to the world in a specific manner. And Herder sees the origin of all organized life as drawn from and predicated upon this specific capacity. Out of a nebular chaos and an eternal sea, bits of matter spontaneously organize themselves into coherent forms with certain capacities that enable them to survive and reproduce within their environment. These, for Herder, are the first forms of species.

This process, however, quickly becomes quite complex. Life, for Herder does not seek to organize itself in just one form. Rather, Herder views life as the product of a great antagonistic harmony. The various forms of organized life that emerge do so both with reference to one another and in competition with one another, with nature consisting in a great interconnected web in which a specific type of plant comes to be in and through the process of adapting to the soil, climate, other plant and insect life, etc., in that environment. In doing so those organisms also develop the specific physiological capacities which they possess, which are themselves intricately linked to the environmental aim of finding and utilizing the resources available to them. Thus Herder views nature as wrapped up in a productive battle: "The whole of creation is in a war and the opposing forces lie very close to one another. Here, the God-like human is eaten by the plant, there, she is pursued by the insect; here, swallowed by the Tiger… Everything is in battle against everything else, because everything is being crowded out (*bedrängt ist*)" [Die ganze Schöpfung (ist) in einem Krieg und die entgegengesetzte Kräft einander so nah liegen. Der Gottgleiche Mensch wird hier von Schlange, dort vom Ungeziefer verfolgt; hier vom Tiger verschlungen…Alles ist im Streit gegen einander, weil alles selbst bedrängt ist."[201] The point of

[201] Ibid., 61

this passage is that everything is user and used of everything else. The tiger is able to ensure its existence only through the destruction of something, which feeds on it, and so on and so forth. And why did nature do this? Herder tells us, “because nature wanted to create the greatest number of living organisms in the smallest possible space, where, therefore, one overwhelms the other and peace in creation is to be had only in the balance of forces” [weil sie im kleinsten Raum die gröβte und vielfachste anzahl der Lebenden schaffen wollte, wo also auch Eins das andere überwältigt und nur durch das Gleichgewicht der Kräfte Friede wird in der Schöpfung.”[202] The point, however, is that the interconnection and competition of the of the parts furthers the diversification of life forms by opening up the ways in which different types of organisms can adapt themselves to live and survive. Some organisms, for example, will have to adapt themselves to fill a niche that was otherwise not used. Some will develop, for example, the ability to be a carnivore or omnivore, adapt themselves such as to be able to utilize the resource that are unused. This, in turn, opens up the various ways in which nature can adapt itself to maximize the diversity of life.

This point also gives us insight, for Herder, into how organisms evolve in two important ways. First, life for Herder will differentiate itself, taking on new and different forms until an equilibrium at a maximal level of complexity is established. Second, and crucially, we can see from this we that organisms develop their capacities *relative and in relation to their environment*. Herder’s discussion of *Hauptformen*, more commonly known in Goethean jargon as *Urtypen* ties these threads together quite clearly. All the different variations of land-animal species, Herder argues, seem to have evolved from a certain: “Main form…which changes in the richest difference. The similar skeletal structure of land animals comes immediately to mind”

[202] Ibid., 61.

[*Hauptform*…die in der reichsten Verschiedenheit wechselt. Der ähnliche Knochenbau der Landtiere fällt in die Augen.][203] And this *Hauptform*, for Herder, extends further than for just land animals: "Amphibians already depart from this main form; birds, fishes, insects, water animals even more, which finally lose themselves in plant or stone creations" [Die Amphibien gehen von diesem Hauptbilde schon mehr ab; Vögel, Fische, Inseten, Wassergeschöpfe nocht mehr, welch letzte sich in die Pflanzen- oder Stein schöpfung verlieren]." The picture that Herder draws here is one that we are familiar with from the theory of evolution, but even more radical. Herder is suggesting that species evolve historically from common ancestors and that in this process of evolution that different species fill in different gaps, develop different capacities both physiologically and behaviorally in ways that allow them to live different *types of life*. In this process, the *Hauptform* becomes modified to adjust and enable to new needs of the organism.

And this context allows us to get to the crucial part of the argument: the context dependent nature of all cognition. Organisms, for Herder, develop not only their specific physiological shape, but their behavioral and instinctual tendencies, always in relation to and in dynamic co-constitution with a specific environment. As Herder puts it: "Every plant demands its climate, to which count not just the make-up of the earth and the soil, but also the elevation, to which belongs the uniqueness of the air, water, and temperature." [Jede Pflanze fodert ihr Klima, zu dem nicht die Beschaffenheit der Erde und des Bodens allein, sondern auch die Höhe des Erdstrichs, die Eigenheit der Luft, des Wassers, der Wärme gehöret.][204] What Herder means by this is that organisms far from being created for certain environments, have *developed* to be able to thrive in dynamic interrelation with these elements. Thus to return to the quote we started with

[203] Ibid., 66
[204] Ibid., 56.

above, when Herder writes that “this plant is created for the sea, that for the swamp”, what he means is that such plants have come to develop the attributes that allow them to thrive in these environments. Organisms, in other words, adapt themselves physically and behaviorally to fit a certain form of life within the constraints of a certain environment. It is for this reason that Herder writes: “the Cayman and the hummingbird, the condor and the pipa, what do they have in common with one another?…each one is organized for his element, each one lives and turns in his elements. No point of creation is without enjoyment, without an organ, without an inhabitant; *every creature has, in other words, his own, a new world*.” [Der Kaiman und der Kolibri, der Kondor und die Pipa; was haben sie mit einander gemein?...jedes ist für sein Element organisiert, jedes lebt und webt in seinem Elemente. Kein Punkt der Schöpfung ist ohne Genuβ, ohne Organ, ohne Bewohner: *jedes Geschöpf hat also seine eigene, eine neue Welt*.][205] Every being has its own world because every being is oriented towards its environment slightly differently, both in terms of the species and, as we saw in *Vom Erkennen* the individual. What Herder primarily means here, however, is that the very faculties that each species has developed for interpreting and engaging with the world simultaneously open them up to life in a unique way. There is not such thing as *one* world, and *one viewpoint*. Rather, the world as such, for Herder, is an intertwining and inter-mixing space of different openings, *Lichtungen*, each unique and yet each organized according to the same sets of principles.

And this idea of nature carries with it enormous implications for Herder’s understanding of two related issues: the origin of reason and the prospect of human cultural flexibility. For, if reason can be viewed in evolutionary terms, then following the logic described above, it will have to be predicated on a specific physiological alteration of the human being. And if it is

[205] Ibid., 81.

predicated on a physiological alteration then it will not be "pure" but relative to the human being and her life world qua biological species. And Herder supplies precisely this missing link at the end of the third book in a section titled the, "*Organic differences between animal and human"* [*Organischer Unterschied der Tiere und Menschen*]. There having discussed how similar the anatomical components of the human being are to the Orangutan, Herder locates their specific difference in the capacity of the human being to walk upright: "The form of the human being is erect; in this he is unique on the earth' [*Die Gestalt des Menschen ist aufrecht; er ist herein einzig auf der Erde*.][206] This capacity, in turn, is predicated on subtleties of alterations of the common anatomical frame that the human shares with the Orangutan. Herder comments:

> Its foot is more firm and wider: it has a longer big toe, where the ape only has a thumb… Its heel is on a level with the soul of his foot. All its muscles are adapted to this position. Its calf is enlarged. The pelvis back, the hips pulled apart… The human being is *Anthropos*, an above itself, a creature that is able to look around.
>
> Sein Fuβ ist fester und breiter: er hat einen längern groβen Zeh…seine Ferse ist zum Fuβblatt gezogen. Zu dieser Stellung sind alle dahinwirkende Muskeln bequemt. Die Wade ist vergröβert: Das Becken zurück die Hüften auseinander gezogen… der Mensch ist *anthropos*, ein, über sich, ein wit um sich schauendes Geschöpf.[207]

Here Herder describes the physiological transformation necessary if a creature is to stand upright. And the reason why the upright gait of the human being is so important, for Herder, is because Herder considers this distance from the ground, the fact that the human being can look around itself and scan its environment, as an the condition of the possibility of *Besonnenheit*, or self-awareness, which is the characteristic feature of the human being. It is by standing up, Herder argues, that a space of light (*Sonne*) is opened up in which the human being is freed from

[206] Ibid., 81.
[207] Ibid., 102.

the determination of instinct characteristic of animal cognition. Other natural organisms, for Herder do not possess this capacity, because their attention is always to wrapped up in and related to the stimuli of the world: "Close to the ground, all the senses of the human being had only a small scope…Smell and taste were as they are in the animal, their pulling leader" [Nah an dem Boden hatten alle Sinnen des Menschen nur einen kleinen Umfang…Geruch und Geschmack waren, wie bei dem Tier, ihre ziehenden Führer.][208] Whereas this closeness to the ground once kept the human, like the animal, wrapped up in sense stimuli, Herder argues that it is by standing up from the ground that the human is able to detach itself from the determinations of instincts. This, in turn, corresponds to a transfer in the sensual basis of human from touch and smell to sight and sound: "Raised above the earth and the vegetation smell doesn't rule any longer rather the eye: it has a further realm around itself…The ear…arrives closer to an inner space in which ideas can be collected" Über die Erde und Kräuter erhoben, herrschet der Geruch nicht mehr, sondern das Auge: es hat ein weiteres Reich um sich…Das Ohr…gelangt näher zur inner Kammer der Ideensammlung.][209] The result, for Herder, is a transformation of the form of engagement with the world in such a way that the human being must become aware of the multiplicity of sense stimuli that they are taking in learn to distinguish amongst them. In other words, the upright gait allows for a realm of consciousness to open up within which a distinct notion of the self as separate from the stimuli acting upon it becomes possible.

It is this space, this awareness of instinct, which also opens the possibility of developing language. Jürgen Trabant sums up the relationship between the releasement from instinct and the development of language in the following way: "*Besonnenheit* is also the capability to distance

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[208] Ibid., 126.
[209] Ibid., 126.

oneself from the object." And in this, these, "tactile, visual, and auditory impressions that the human being…receives from the world…detach themselves…from the object and penetrate the human being".[210] By detaching themselves from the overdetermination of any singular stimuli, human beings, Herder argues, can becoming aware of their sensations and in doing so, organize the complex of sensations according characteristic mark that comes to represent the object. The bleating of the sheep thus provides the natural linguistic mark, which comes to stand for a cluster of sensations such as white, soft, woolly, and eventually, a thing to be sheared or herded. As Trabant summarizes, language, for Herder, is nothing but this awareness of the distinguishing mark: "This inner mark created by *Besonnenheit*, moved by and penetrated by the acoustic stimulus, is language."[211] As the expression of the awareness of the world gained through the upright gait, language, in this way, becomes constitutive of the very faculty of reason itself.[212] There is nothing outside, there is no additional transcendental features over which language language is then layerd. Rather, reason and language, for Herder, are the same.

With this discussion in place, we are in a position to draw the major consequences of Herder's naturalization project. What is apparent from this context is that neither language, and therefore reason, can be strictly universal, but must always emerge out of the *specific life world* in which they developed. And this on two levels. First, because reason is fundamentally interconnected with the physiological constitution of the human, reason must always be viewed as specifically human, biological phenomena. And Herder gladly admits so much from the *Ideen*: "From this, it becomes clear, what human reason is: a name, which, in newer writings is so often

[210] Trabant, Jürgen, "Herder and Language" in *A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder*. Edited by Hans Adler and Wulf Koepke. Camden House, 2009, pp., 117-139, here 125.
[211] Ibid., 125.
[212] Taylor, 2016, Chapter 1.

used as if it were an inborn automata…Theoretically and practically, reason is nothing but something *perceived*, a learned portion and direction of ideas and forces, to which the human being has been built according to their organization and form of life." [Hieraus erhellt, was menschliche Vernunft sei: ein Name, der in den neuern Schriften so oft als angebornes Avtomat gebraucht wird…Theoretische und praktisch ist Vernunft nichts als etwas *Vernommenes*, eine gelernte Proportion und Richtung der Ideen und Kräfte, zu welcher der Mensch nach seiner Organisation und Lebensweise gebildet worden].[213] With a not so subtle dig at Kant, Herder here says outright that practical and theoretical reason, far from allowing the human to transcend their biological condition, only make sense relative to human as biological species and their specific form of life. Dalia Nassar draws the exactly right conclusion from this point in an excellent essay on the origin of reason in Kant and Herder saying: "reason is possible given the structure and environment of the human being. As such it is not something with which we are simply born. Rather, reason must be developed in the right circumstances. Thus… rationality…is not entirely independent of these circumstances. It is not, in other words, self-grounding; rather, it is inextricably linked to the total structure of the human being and their environment."[214] This understanding of reason as a "learned proportion" (*gelernte Proportion)*, is inextricably linked to the local circumstances in which it emerges can hardly be more different than that of Kant.

And second, since reason is also embedded in the human life world and languages originally arise from the human's naming and engaging with objects in a specific environment and environments aren't all the same, it follows, so Anik Waldow, "that the very structures of reason that emerge In the process of naming will vary." the result is that, "the structures of

[213] Ibid, 134.
[214] Helbig, Daniela and Nassar, Dalia, "The metaphor of epigenesis: Kant, Blumenbach and Herder" in *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 58 (2016) 98-107, here 104.

thought and reason that develop out of the engagement with different language contexts will vary too."[215] Thinking, in other words, will ultimately be relative to the contexts in which it developed. There is no neutral perspective, just the various spaces of lighting in their uniqueness.

Applied to ethics, this naturalist understanding of reason leads especially the young Herder to the admission and embrace of the notion that there is no "transcendental vocation" of the human being and the turn toward a somewhat relativistic, linguistically oriented theory of imminent cultural analysis. In his *This too a Philsophy of History* (*Auch eine philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*), written in the early 1770's, Herder enthusiastically endorses the consequence of his vitalist naturalism. Applied to the judging of world history, he vehemently rejecting any single standard capable of judging the "moral virtue" of individuals and cultures over historical time writing, "for both of these (moral virtue and human happiness), we not only still lack a correct criterion , but it could even perhaps be that human nature had such a flexibility and mutability as to be able to form out for itself in the most diverse situation of its efficacy also the most diverse ideals of its actions into what is called *virtue* and the most diverse ideals of its sensations into what is called *happiness*."[216] For Herder, the is no universal standard of ethics. Rather, human reason is nothing but a learned capacity, an orientation in the world that is itself the product of the dynamic sets of circumstances with which it engages. This will hold true of individuals and cultures. There is no transcendent, cross cultural right and wrong but only the different expression of being that are a part of the great force of life constantly striving to diversity itself.

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[215] Anik Waldow and Nigel DeSouza, *Herder: Philosophy and Anthropology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[216] Forster, 270.

III- Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that The Kant-Herde debate represents the schism that generates a great divide in German thinking. The origin of this debate is their response to the question of the constitutive status of teleological causality or, put differently, the question of the ontological status of vitalism. The response to this question generated two competing narratives. On the one hand, Kant and the idealist tradition drew a strict distinction between mind matter, rejecting vitalist attempts to blend this ontological distiniction. They did so for reasons of universality. Kant saw perfectly well that once spontaneous intelligence was not seen as strictly distinct from matter, but as a latent quality of matter itself, that it was only a matter of time until a genetic, evolutionary story could be told whereby reason no longer contained a non-empirical component, but was viewed in completely empirical terms as the product of natural evolution. This in turn, would undermine the Kantian and subsequent idealist quest to ground philosophy's quest for genuine, objective knowledge in a secure first principle. Thus, much of Kant's biological thinking is devoted to clipping the wings of this vitalist theory, keeping it in bounds.

His theory of subjectivity is thus one in which the human being maintains a modest yet nonetheless universal core. This core thus allows her to test moral maxims according to a universal standard and thus, to know what is and is not moral and, therefore, what she should and should not do, despite the complexities, opacities, and intracities of human life. It is because of this that Kant's moral philosophy can also serve as a guide for political activity and benchmark for the development of world history (progress towards the rights of the human being). Human history should (and does, for the most part, Kant thinks) tend towards the ends of justice and

equality. This moderate universality also allws Kant's philosophy to ground a (limited) sphere in which human disputes in the areas of morality and science can be adjucated by means of a neutral faculty. Given the attacks on science, truth, and objectivity that have recently emereged in American politics, we can see that that is no small feat.

It is not at all obvious to me that Herder, on the other hand possesses the ontological tools to stymie staunch relativists. Yet his naturalisit philosophy does contain within it a fascinating theory of subjectivity, and one which strikes me as a highly plausible account of how we finite, empirical beings actually go about engaging with the world in which we live. By locating reason in language and sense, which are themselves constructed in the dynamic process of natural history and individual development, Herder's theory of subjectivity entails a pluralistic discourse, both individually and culturally, that emphasizes the diversity and malleability of human cultural forms. On a cultural and world historica level, reason, on this model, is always born out of and shaped by a local environment and context and, as such, is never fully universal. Rather, languages do not neutrally spit up an objectively given world but respond to it in a unique way. The same is true of indivuals. Human beings never simply take in what is outside through a neutral processing unit, but rather, each individual's world view is the product of a complex psycho-physicial process that attunes and orients each person to the world in a unique way.

The result is that consciousness is reinterpreted as spaces of light (*Besonnenheit* becomes Heidegger's *Lichtung*) in which each individual navigates their world absent objective guidelines and benchmarks. Being, instead, gets transformed into interpretation in which we all strive to reailize our happiness in ways that we cannot know if we will succeed. Life, in this sense, takes on a weight and a potentially lostness, without any clear path, but also a grand joyfulness in the

conception of a subject freed from ontological standards and norms; a subject free to determine themselves in the venture that is every human life. The legacy of this anti-ratiocentric naturalist tradition will lead from Herder to Nietzsche and into Heidegger and existentialism.

CHAPTER THREE

Naturalism in Schiller's Aesthetic Education

Almost immediately following Schiller's death, on the autopsy table itself in fact, an influential interpretation of Schiller started to develop that continues to define the horizon of our understanding of Schiller today.[217] Schiller, this interpretation goes, is the poet of freedom.[218] Central to this understanding of Schiller has been his biographical story. According to this story, the central event of Schiller's *Denkweg* is his engagement with Kant. In Kant, the story goes, Schiller found what he had been looking for since his days at the *Karlsschule*, a philosophical

[217] Interpretation of Schiller have tended in two directions. One pursued mainly by literary critics and the other by philosophers. The first is largely political interpretation wherein Schiller is viewed as a progenitor of a dangerous form of Enlightened, aesthetic totalitarianism. This is usually seen as a lager critique of the politics of "Aesthetic Humanism". According to this reading, Schiller's aesthetic philosophy aims at coercively shaping the subject into the form of universal reason. For one of the stronger forms of this criticism see, Behler, Constantin. *Nostalgic Teleology: Friedrich Schiller and the Schemata of Aesthetic Humanism.* Bern: P. Lang, 1995; and more recently in Behler, Constantin, "The Politics of Aesthetic Humanism: Schiller's German Idea of Freedom" *Goethe Yearbook*, 2013, Volume 20, Issue 1. And also Redfield, Marc. *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996, esp., Chapter 1-2; and Kaufmann, Sebastian, "Was ist der Mensch, ehe die Schönheit die freie Lust ihm entlockt?" Völkerkundliche Anthropologie und ästhetische Theorie in Kants Kritik der Urteilskraft und Schillers Briefen Über die ästhetische Erziehung dedes Menscchen", in *Der Ganze Mensch - Die Ganze Menschheit: Völkerkundliche Anthropologie, Literatur Und Ästhetik Um 1800*, ed, by Menschen Hermes, Stefan, and Sebastian Kaufmann.Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014. The second is the more intellectual-historical reading of the School of Dieter Heinrich and Manfred Frank, who are primarily interested in Schiller's role in the development of German Idealism and Early German Romanticism. In general, this tradition tends to read Schiller as striving yet failing to overcome Kantian dualisms and in doing so, pointing towards, but not himself taking the path taken by Hölderlin and Hegel. For this reading see, Henrich, Dieter. *Der Grund Im Bewusstsein: Untersuchungen Zu Hölderlins Denken (1794-1795).* Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992, esp., 308-329; and "Beauty and Freedom: Schiller's Struggle with Kant's Aesthetics" in *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*, ed by Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp., 237-260. Frank, Manfred, Frank, Manfred. *Einführung in Die Frühromantische Ästhetik: Vorlesungen.* 1. Aufl. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989 and Frank, Manfred. *"Unendliche Annäherung": Die Anfänge Der Philosophischen Frühromantik.* 1. Aufl. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997. For a great overview and commentary on the diverging and conflicting views on Schiller see, Sharpe, Lesley. *Schiller's Aesthetic Essays: Two Centuries of Criticism.* Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995. While I am obviously more sympathetic to the second strain of criticism, I disagree with much of it in terms of its framing. Reading Schiller in exclusively post-Kantian terms, I believe, fails to take into account some crucial aspects of the intellectual context and misses some of his genuine originality. The first reading, I believe, simply misses the mark by misunderstanding and mischarachterizing the project.

[218] And, therefore usually seen as set against Herder, Adler, Hans, "Anthropologie versus Anthropologie", in *Monatshefte*, Vol. 97, No. 3, Begegnungen Mit Schiller / Encounters with Schiller(Fall, 2005), pp. 408-416.

justification of the absolute freedom of the subject.[219] Kant and Schiller are joined at the hip, the philosopher and the dramatist of the moral law. This interpretation only seems to grow in dignity and persuasiveness when one reads the autopsy report of Doctor Huschke, the personal doctor of the Duke of Weimar, Karl-August. As Rüdiger Safranski relates, Huschke reported that, "we found the lungs burnt, mushy, and completely disorganized, the heart was without muscular substance, thee gall bladder and the spleen were unnaturally enlarged and the Kidneys were 'dssolved in their substance and completely fused together" [man fand die Lunge 'brandig, breiartig und ganz deorganisiert', das Herz 'ohne Muskelsubstanz', die Gallenblase und die Milz unnatürlich vergröβert, die Nieren 'in ihrer Substanz aufgelöst und völlig verwachsen'." Huschke's verdict, "In these conditions, one had to wonder how the poor man could have lived so long" [bei diesen Umständen muβ man sich wundern, wie der arme Mann so lange hat leben können].[220] At a time when perhaps the primary philosophical question was how the soul relates to the body, in the case of Schiller, the answer seemed absolutely clear: Schiller's soul existed *despite* his body, his continued existence a matter of autonomy alone.

As the autopsy suggests, this interpretation of Schiller as the poet of freedom was a narrative established already within Schiller's lifetime. As characterized by none other than Goethe himself, the Goethe-Schiller friendship was a synthesis of opposites, freedom and nature. As he puts in the first journal of his *Morphologische Hefte*, published in 1820, fifteen years after Schiller's death, in his little piece entitled, "Einwirkung der neueren Philosophie", Goethe places Schiller directly in the camp of the Idealists, one of the new philosophers who either accepts the

[219] This is central to both Buchwald and Safranski's biographical narrative
[220] Safranski, Rüdiger, *Friedrich Schiller* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2004), 11.

Kantian dualisms or have turned nature into nothing but the product of the absolute I. Given these obvious difference, Goethe notes just how surprising the friendship was:

> How surprising it was became clear as my relationship to Schiller developed…He preached the message of freedom and I didn't want to see the rights of nature restricted. It was because of his friendly inclination towards me probably more than real conviction that he did not treat the good mother with those harsh expressions, which had made hate the essay *On Grace and Dignity* so much.
>
> wie wunderlich es auch damit gewesen sei, trat erst hervor, als mein Verhältnis zu Schillern sich belebte…er predigte das Evangelium der Freiheit, ich wollte die Rechte der Natur nicht verkürzt wissen. Aus freundschaftlicher Neigung gegen mich, vielleicht mehr als aus eigner Überzeugung, behandelte er in den ästhetischen Briefen die gute Mutter nicht mit jenen harten Ausdrücken, die mir den Aufsatz über Anmut und Würde so verhaβt gemacht hatten."[221]

Goethe here, just like Doctor Huschke, marks the line clearly in the sand. Schiller is an idealist whose real philosophical opinion is the one represented in *Anmut und Würde*, which contains his clearest endorsement of Kantian dualism. Those works, such as the *Ästhetische Erziehung*, which present the freedom/nature debate in a less dualistic light, Goethe traces back to himself and Schiller's willingness to do *him* a favor.

Yet the interpretation of Schiller as the poet of freedom probably got its most influential formulation in the figure of Heinrich Heine. For Heine, it is the freedom fighter Schiller in contrast to the bourgeois sentimentalist Goethe who should be the German poet of the 19th century. While Goethe interested himself with questions of aesthetics and nature, Schiller put the drama of human freedom on stage, bringing politics and revolution back into the sphere of the German national theater and providing hope to a country still under the yoke of absolutist Dukes and monarchs.[222]

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[221] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang "Einwirkung der Neueren Philosophie" in *Werke Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden, Band 13*. München: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 200, pp., 29.

[222] Heine, Heinrich, and Helga Weidmann. *Die Romantische Schule: Krit. Ausg.* Stuttgart: Reclam, 1976.

The common thread running through these interpretations, old and new, is Schiller's link to Kant's moral philosophy. What is assumed is that it is his engagement with Kant, which allowed Schiller to ground and develop his poetics of freedom. Yet the vitalist context that we have been discussing in the previous chapters gives us reason to think that a different, non-Kantian interpretation is possible. And we this is precisely the interpretation offered not only by two of Schiller's closest friends, Wilhelm von Humboldt and Christian Gottfried Körner, but Schiller himself. In a letter to Rochlitz dated the 16 of November, 1801, a decade after Schiller's first intense engagement with Kant and five years after Schiller had again taken up his poetic activity again, Schiller reflects on his ow engagement with Kant in a manner that casts doubt on the standard Kantian narrative. Schiller writes:

> The metaphysical-critical epoch, which dominated in Jena in particular, also took hold of me; the need to discover the first principles of art felt pressing (*es regte sich*); it was in this way those essays came about, which I neither want nor can lend any higher value to than to say that they represent a stage of my thinking and research and perhaps a discharge of the metaphysical matter, which, like chicken pox, is in us and must get out.
>
> Die metaphysisch-kritische Zeitepoche, welche besonders in Jena herrschte, ergriff auch mich; es regte sich das Bedürfnis nach den letzten Prinzipien der Kunst; und so enstanden jene Versuche, denen ich keinen höhren Wert geben darf und will, als daβ sie eine Stufe meines Nachdenkens und Forschens bezeichnen und eine vielleicht notwendige Entladung der metaphysischen Materie sind, die wie das Blatterngift, in uns steckt und heraus muβ.[223]

In this remarkable passage, Schiller compares his experience and the intense philosophical activity, especially the study of Kant in and around "Das Wunderjahr in Jena 1794/95", to an inborn sickness like as chicken pox.[224] It is necessary that one be "infected" as it is important to

[223]Schiller, Friedrich, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Siegfried Seidel. *Der Briefwechsel Zwischen Friedrich Schiller Und Wilhelm Von Humboldt.* Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1962, pp., XXXVIII.
[224] Interestingly, Ziolkowski, Theodore in his book *Das Wunderjahr in Jena 1794/5*, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1998) reports not only that both Schiller W. von Humboldt had their children vaccinated for small pox during that year (a

get the "*Blatterngift*" out of one's system, but once it is over, one can look back at the sickness as something of a necessary evil that everyone must go through, but not necessarily as a stage to which one wishes to return. Yet it is not only the fact that he refers to his time of intense philosophical activity as a necessary illness, but that he also seems to denounce the texts he wrote under this influence, namely, the *Callias Letters, On Grace and Dignity,* and *The Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. (*Kallias Briefe, Anmut und Würde,* and *Briefe über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*), calling them a "discharge (*Entladung*), of metaphysical material". This is hardly a ringing endorsement of Schiller's interpretation of his engagement with Kant.

Yet it is not only Schiller's own self-evaluation of his engagement with transcendental philosophy that the harshest rebuke of Schiller engagement with Kant but also the evaluation of arguably his two closest friends, Körner and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Humboldt's all but forgotten essay, *On Schiller and the Course of his Spiritual Development* (*Über Schiller und den Gang seiner Geistesentwicklung*), which served as a *Preface* (*Vorerinnerung*) to the publication of his and Schiller's letter exchange in 1830, serves as evidence for a much more nuanced and complicated relationship between Schiller and Kant's. As many of Humboldt's writings are, his account of Schiller's intellectual development is complex and dense, and at first glance, it could easily seem as if Humboldt is exactly supporting the same position that Goethe did, namely of Schiller as Kantian transcendental philosopher.[225] Twice within the first five paragraphs, Humboldt mentions that "thought" (*Denken*) is the "defining feature" (*Eigentümlichkeit*) of

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very risky move as the study of vaccinations was absolutely in its infancy), so the use of the word *Blatterngift* was poignant, for Schiller. See Ziolkowski, Theodore, *Das Wunderjahr in Jena 1794/95*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta

[225] Schiller often worried that Humboldt's literary style is too dense to appeal to a broad public audience. Humboldt proves Schiller's observation true in his essay dedicated to Schiller.

Schiller's character. Humboldt even goes so far as potentially to suggest that this capacity for thinking went even higher than Schiller's poetic genius, going as far as to say that, "thought ws the element of his life" [der Gedanke das Element seines Lebens war].[226]

Nonetheless, Humboldt is simultaneously very careful to separate the "thinking" that is unique to Schiller from the "speculative thinking" (*spekulativen Denken*) that he associates with critical philosophy.Indeed, Humboldt seems to try to be walking a tightrope evaluating Schiller's relationship to thinking and Kant ambiguously. On the one hand, Humboldt praises Schiller's engagement with Kant claiming that it enlivened his inherent tendency towards theoretical speculation, which had gone into hibernation during his time as a theater director in the mid 1780's. Humboldt writes that Schiller's philosophical interest "was suddenly reinvigorated after years of neglect and taken up with a real enthusiasm in precisely in that time and place where Schiller then found himself. It still pleases the memory to think about it." [plötzlich emporgegangen und jahrelang unbeachtet, wurde sie auβerdem gerade in der Zeit und der Gegend, wo sich Schiller sich damals befand, mit einem Enthusiasmus ergriffen, der noch der Erinnerung erfreut].[227] This "*Gegend*" was, of course, Jena, where Schiller had lived on and off since becoming a professor of History at the University in Jena in 1789. It goes without saying that Jena, between 1790-1803, was the absolute hotbed of German Speculative Idealism and presented Schiller with the perfect opportunity, not only to read Kant, but to read Kant in the company of philosophers of no lesser rank than Reinhold and Fichte.[228] Not only did Schiller

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[226] Humboldt-Schiller Briefweschel, 6-7. Humboldt writes, "aber dies Dichtergenie war auf das engste an das Denken in allen seinen Tiefen und Höhen geknüpft, es tritt ganz eigentlich auf dem Grunde einer Intellektualität hervor". And again, on the very next page Humboldt emphasizes the role of thinking in Schiller's character, claiming that it would be clear to anyone who saw Schiller in action in dialogue that

[227] Ibid., 7

[228] I cite 1803 as the end of the era, because it was the year that Schelling left Jena for a professorship in Würzburg. That move kind of marked the end of the already very fragmented Jena romantic group. The Schelegel's had already left in 1800, Schiller had moved back to Weimar in 1796 and multiple years had passed since Fichte was

engage in the study of Kant and make a move towards speculative thinking at the highest level, but Humboldt also admits that in engagement with the reading of Kant, "there was a new epoch in Schiller's philosophical striving: Kantian philosophy lent him help and stimulus." [(es) wurde…zu einer neuen Epoche in Schillers philosophischem Streben; die Kantische Philosophie gewährte ihm Hilfe und Anregung].[229] The engagement with Kantian philosophy pushed Schiller, Humboldt readily admits. It allowed Schiller the opportunity to refine his already inherent capacities and tendencies towards speculation and abstract thought, which, in turn, allowed him to break into a new epoch in his thinking.

Yet, although Humboldt admits that Schiller's engagement with Kant pushed him into something of a new era, he simultaneously can't help but look back on Schiller's engagement with Kant without a certain type of regret. While he believes that Schiller was always inclined towards philosophical thinking and while the engagement with Kant helped him, Humboldt suggests that it perhaps helped too much. Schiller's engagement with the exactness and logical consistency of Kant's thought, turned Schiller into *too much* of a formal philosopher. As Humboldt writes, "even without a grand capacity for divination, we can see fairly easily, how Schiller, without Kant, would have developed his own uniquely individual ideas. This would have probably helped the freedom of *form*." [ohne groβe Divinationsgabe läβt sich ahnden, wie, ohne Kant, Schiller jene ihm ganz eigentümlichen Ideen ausgeführt haben würde. Die Freiheit der *Form* hätte warscheinlich dabei gewonnen].[230] This word *Form*, which Humboldt emphasizes, is a crucial critical term for him and indicates the balance between material and

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dismissed from the university in 1799 on charges of atheism. Not to mention Hölderlin's abrupt departure in 1795. For a wonderful essay that sketches the historical intracicies of time see, Förster, Eckart, "'Da geht der Mann dem wir alles Verdanken' Ein Untersuchung zum Verhältnis Goethe-Fichte" in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* Berlin 45 (1997) 3, 331-344.

[229] Ibid., 7.

[230] Ibid., 25

thought content within a work. In a letter that Humboldt sent to Schiller from Rome on October 22, 1803, Humboldt criticizes Schiller's *Bride of Messina* (*Braut von Messina*), precisely on the grounds of the presentation being too philosophical in its presentation and *Form*. It is precisely this over-intellectualization that Humboldt criticizes about Schiller's *dramatic* production, which he compared in its genius to none other than Euripides.[231]

For Humboldt, in other words, there was something about Schiller's engagement with Kant that took an inherent capacity of Schiller's, and over emphasized it; sharpened it such that it was just a touch out of balance with his other capacities. Humboldt feel so strongly about this point that, in his private correspondence with their mutual friend Körner, he in fact says that he *regrets* Schiller's engagement with Kant and feels that it inhibited or perhaps hampered his "poetic capacities" (*dichterisches Vermögen*). In his private letter to Körner, dated February 12, 1830, a full 25 years after Schiller's death, Humboldt strikes a different tone then he does in the *Vorerinnerung*. Commenting on the letter exchange between himself and Schiller, Humboldt comments,

> The letters are from a time in which Schiller had fallen into a philosophical path, which while it had a secure and exemplary reason, could have, nonetheless, been taken much differently. Unfortunately, I followed him too much on this path and actually contributed to encourage him on it. You, on the other hand, as some passages of the letters show, always provided whispers of warning.
>
> Die Briefe sind alle aus einer Zeit, in welcher Schiller in einen philosophischen Weg graten war, der zwar in sich einen sichern und vortrefflichen Grund hatte, allein übrigens doch hätte anders geführt werden sollen. Ich bin ihm leider in diesem Wege zu sehr gefolgt und habe dazu beigetragen, ihn darin zu bestärken. Sie haben ihm dagegen, wie einige Stellen der Briefe bezeugen, warnende Winke gegeben.[232]

[231] Ibid., 256.
[232] Ibid, XLIV.

As opposed to Körner, who "warned" Schiller about the possible effects of his venture into transcendental philosophy, Humboldt "followed him too much", a move, which he now regrets. Either way, both friends certainly seem to feel that Schiller engaged in his Kant *Lektüre* with a certain overzealousness.[233]

In what follows, I am going to pursue the line of thought suggested by Humboldt that, "without a grand capacity for divination, we can see fairly easily, how Schiller, without Kant, would have developed his own uniquely individual ideas. In doing, I intend to re-examine not only Schiller's relationship to Kant, but Schiller's own unique philosophical standing.[234] In this chapter, I will argue that to me that if one looks at the *Briefe über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* and compare some of the central components of that text with the main thrust of many of Schiller's earlier, pre-Kantian texts, what one finds is the kernel of a unique and new philosophy that is falsely understood if it is understood primarily out of Schiller's engagement with Kant. This reading goes against the standard philosophical reading which has historically Schiller's main contribution to philosophy as the attempt to combine the Kantian notions of duty and inclination.[235] Contra these readings, I will argue that the philosophical problem that Schiller is dealing with is substantially different than the moral problem Kant was dealing with. Schiller,

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[233] Humboldt even felt so strongly about the Schiller's engagement with Kant as to suggest that the works he wrote while most heavily under the influence of Kant's thinking weren't actually indicative of what Schiller truly believed. Commenting in the *Vorerinnerung* about the *Kallias Briefe* and *Anmut und Würde*, Humboldt writes, A new epoch of philosophizing began for Schiller in *On Grace and Dignity*, grounded primarily through his acquaintance with Kantian philosophy. Those two piece cannot be considered to be representative of the actual opinions of the poet. They belong, however, to the best things we have from him." eine neue Epoche des Philosophierens begann für Schiller in 'Anmut und Würde', hauptsächlich begründet durch seine Bekannschaft mit Kantischer Philosophie. Jene beiden Stücke könnte man nur mit Unrecht als einen Ausdruck wirklicher Meinung des Dichters selbst ansehen, sie gehören aber zu dem Besten, was wir von ihm besitzen.

[234] Friedrich Beiser has recently published and excellent and extraordinarily important "re-examination" of Schiller as Philosopher. My reading is indebted to a close study of Beiser's text, though substantial disagreements remain, which will be discussed below. Beiser, Frederick C. *Schiller as Philosopher: a Re-Examination.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.

[235] See, for example, Larmore, Charles, "Hölderlin and Novalis" in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* ed. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 143.

I believe, was not doing moral philosophy in the same sense that Kant was doing moral philosophy. The main reason for this is because Schiller, in his non-Kantian writings, is ambivalent about the mind-body dualism that so strongly characterizes Kant's moral philosophy. Because Schiller is at least agnostic and at best not a mind-body dualist, it allows him to value the material and unifying strands of human existence as values in themselves in a manner that Kant simply couldn't. As discussed last chapter, Kant supported his transcendental version of mind-body dualism precisely because this and only this strategy secured the universality and necessity of both the moral and causal laws, the two domains Kant was most interested in grounding. The result, however, is that the only source of moral value, for Kant, is the moral law. While it is not inconsistent with Kant's philosophy to suggest that inclination and character must also be cultivated, these features, for Kant, must be cultivated *for the purposes of being moral*. Schiller's position, I will argue, is a different one and it is different precisely because of Schiller's ambivalent relationship to the mind-body problem.

Central to this reading will, therefore, be an analysis of the importance of a vitalist philosophy on Schiller's thought.[236] As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the gigantic shadow of Kant which looms over much of the German cultural production of the late 18th has often allowed us to forget just how rich and varied the intellectual trends of the time were. Thus, even Kant at his own time, was interpreted out of this diverse intellectual landscape and without the advantage of 200 of academic scholarship. We see this complexity in the development of Schiller's thought. Before he ever engaged with Kant at the mature age of 32, had already

[236] Little work has been done on Schiller's theory of nature. One exception is the Michael H. Hoffheimer's wonderful essay on the influence of Schiller's philosophy of nature on Hegel in, Hoffheimer, Michael H, "The Influence of Schiller's Theory of Nature on Hegel's Philosophical Development" in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1985), pp. 231-244.

received a substantial philosophical education at the *Karlsschule* in Stuttgart where he was educated primarily in the medical and anthropological discourses at the time. These discourses, as we have examined in previous chapters, often ran in a direction very counter to the strict mind-body dualism of Kant. At the *Karlsschule*, under the guidance of his favorite professor Jakob Friedrich Abel, Schiller was strongly influenced by the empirical and medical traditions, including the authors of the British Enlightenment (Shaftesbury, Hume, Ferguson), as well as Herder, Ernst Plattner, and the French materialists such as d'Holbach and La Mettrie. Many, if not all of these influences, however, contained strong anti-rationalist tendencies and rejected the strict dualistic metaphysics that underpins it. This follows with what we have seen in previous chapters. Much of the second half of the 18th century was characterized by a rejection of the Cartesian understanding matter and its conception of nature as a machine governed by a unconditional causal laws. Against these theories and informed by the empiricist skepticism of Locke and Hume, vitalists, attacked the epistemological foundations of rationalism with an empirical skepticism, which sought to undercut the strict distinction between mind and matter that characterized the metaphysical dualism of Descartes, infusing mind into matter, vitalizing nature and temporalizing its procedures.[237] Through the figures of Caspar Friedrich Wolff, Herder, and Plattner, this was a discourse with which Schiller, as a medical student, had access, and was thoroughly familiar. Schiller was strongly influenced by this tradition. And it is this influence, I will argue, which allows him, from the very beginning to be skeptical of the Cartesian understanding of nature emphasizing instead the importance of the material, embodied aspects of human existence. Embodied life, in other words, is, for Schiller, a value *in itself*. It is

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[237] See Hans Peter Reill for most systematic explication of this movement in, Reill, Peter Hanns. *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

this value on the material, which subsequently led to his famous emphasis on the unification of the *whole* human being.

When Schiller's later writings, and especially the *Ästhetische Briefe* are understood out of this context, I believe that a much different interpretation of Schiller can emerge. Contrary to the traditional narrative, I will argue that Schiller isn't primarily interested in figuring out how to reconnect the metaphysically distinct substances of mind and body. Instead, I will argue that Schiller is primarily interested in the issue of psychological harmony *geistige Einheit*). This is especially clear the middle sections of the *Ästhetische Briefe,* letters 11-16. There, Schiller does not simply ask the question: How is it possible to unify duty and inclination? But rather, he is much more interested in the question: How it is possible to unify and harmonize the human being and her relation to self and world when she consists in two conflicting and contradictory drives: the real and the ideal?

These different framing of these questions lead to significantly different philosophical results. Rather than viewing Schiller in the Kantian tradition, I believe that Schiller's emphasis on subjective psychological harmony as an ethical standard stands at the beginning of an anti-Kantian legacy that runs from Herder to Schiller to Humboldt and into Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and Heidegger. In this tradition, what is at stake is not the neither the objectivity of morality nor the attempt to addend Kant's objective philosophy by making it compatible with beauty. Rather, I believe that Schiller overturns objective, cognitively oriented theories of morality in favor of a quasi-aesthetic moral standard. In doing so, Schiller also overturns the primacy of practical in guiding of ethical matters for a new type of thinking about life conceived of as aesthetic judgment. For Schiller, the goal of the human being , therefore, is not merely to be moral, as it is for Kant, but to expand one's own capacities into as large and harmonious a whole

as possible: to become a person capable of existing in the world and comfortable in all its modalities.[238] Central to this strand of moral philosophy is the idea that practical reason cannot be the central element of a full bodied ethical thinking. If I am correct in arguing that Schiller's ideal of humanity-which I take to be the most radical expression of his ethical thought-is best understood as a certain type of psychological harmony that subsumes reason and sentiment under it, then it represents a philosophical movement that has its clearest expression in Kierkegaard's subordination of the ethical to faith in both *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness Unto Death*. In both of these works, Kierkegaard recognizes the fact that objective standards that are applicable to every individual being by virtue of their rationality, cannot represent the highest principle in the guiding of an individual's life. Individuality, subjectivity, for Kierkegaard, is irreducible in a way that stymies objective standards. The meaning of a human life and the guiding of it on its meandering path cannot ultimately be comprehended by reason but require something else, a leap of faith granted by virtue of the absurd. This story, I will now argue, starts with Schiller and his attempt to think an ethics outside of a mind-body dualism.

I. Schiller's pre-Kantian Writings

i. Schiller's Path to the Study of Medicine at the *Karlsschule*

When one analyzes Schiller's pre-Kantian theoretical works what becomes clear is that Schiller, from a very early age, was interested in three interrelated themes: virtue, freedom, and the unity the human being. What is equally striking is Schiller's desire not to deal with these

[238] This, I believe, could even go as far as to include instances of moral wrongness. Making moral and ethical mistakes (within reason), breaking from the control of practical reason, it could be argued, is an important part of living a full human life.

issues separately, as if each lay in its own ontological domain, but to deal with them in terms of their unity. Freedom had to be connected to virtue, which had to be connected to pleasure. As the title suggests, in his first work, for example, *Does so much Goodness, Genialiaty and Generosity Belong to Virtue in the Strictest Sense? (Gehört allzuviel Güte, Leutseligkeit und Freigebigkeit im engsten Verstand zu Tugend?*), Schiller defines virtue not only in terms of wisdom, i.e., in the cognitive sense of understanding God's plan, but claims that wisdom must be proportional to the experience of love and pleasure. For the young Schiller, virtue consisted in an equal portion of cognition and pleasure.

Yet in valuing pleasure for pleasure's sake, Schiller is implicitly (and knowingly) taking a position on the most contentious debate of his generation: the mind-body problem. For, if the mind and the body are genuinely different substances and the pleasure of the body arise only from the meaningless stimulation of the machine, then what genuine *moral* value could such pleasure have? For Kant, the answer to this question is ultimately: none. Yet in order to get to this point of contrast, we must first dive into the historical context of the mind-body debates as they would have been experienced by the young Friedrich Schiller while studying medicine at the *Karlsschule*.

Schiller, however, had never wanted to study medicine. Instead, his first-hand acquaintance with the mind-body problem came as the result of the arbitrary desire (*freie Willkür*) of the tyrannical Duke of Wurttemberg, Karl Eugen, a figure whose shadow hovered over Schiller for his entire life. If the name of Duke Karl Eugen of Wurttemberg has entered into history for anything, then it is for one of two reasons. First because Karl Eugen represents an almost comic example of the domestic and international horrors of absolutist rule in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. Karl Eugen's tyranny can be seen no more perfectly than in

Wurttemberg's participation in the Seven Years War (a war in which Schiller's father Johann Kaspar took part). Wurttemberg's participation in the war had little to do with the political or military interests of the Duchy and instead had almost everything to do with Karl Eugen' desire to finance his extravagant pursuit of pleasure.[239] And Karl Eugen financed his pleasure pursuits, to a large extent, by agreeing, on multiple occasions, to sell off his mostly Protestant subjects to fight on the side Catholics with the French Crown against Friedrich the Great of Prussia the defender of Lutheranism. The "recruitment" tactics Karl Eugen employed were notoriously brutal, including having recruitment soldiers storm peasant celebrations and holding the--usually quite inebriated yet war-eligible--men prisoner in whatever barn or pub the celebration happened to be. The men, of course, were free to go once they "freely" agreed to enlist in the Duke's army.[240] Yet these fairly common examples of 18th century absolutist rule probably wouldn't warrant mention outside of southeast Germany if it were not for the second reason why Karl Eugen's name has entered into the history books; his role in "recruiting" the young Friedrich Schiller in his newly established "military plant school" (*militärische Pflanzschule*), aptly named the *Karlsschule*. Not surprisingly, this recruitment, like his military recruitment, represented another example of Karl Eugen's tyrannical spirit, this time perhaps for the good. For without this act of tyranny, Friedrich Schiller would probably have become a Pietist preacher in Wurttemberg and the intellectual movements in Jena and Weimar would look very different.

As a young man, Schiller's first wish had been to study theology at the highest university within the Duchy of Wurttemberg, the *Tübinger Stift*. Schiller's father thoroughly supported his

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[239] Safranski, 145. Safranski tells of one trip to Venice where the Duke racked up so much debt that he was actually forced to flee the city. See also Buchwald, Reinhard. *Schiller.* Neue, bearb. Ausg. [Wiesbaden]: Insel-Verlag, 1953,, pp., 140 on the building and financing of Karl Eugen's *Lustschloss Solitüde*.
[240] Safranski, 20-25

son's education and intellectual endeavors having felt that his own development was curtailed because of his low birth. Born into a peasant family of 8, Johann Kaspar was originally allowed to enroll at the Latin School until the early death of his father forced him to give up school to work for the family in the fields.[241] Five years later, Johann Kaspar was finally able to convince his mother to at least let him study to become a surgeon (*Wundartzneikunst*), a profession which, at the time, was considered within the economic sphere as a simple craft (*Handwerk*), comparable with the skills of the barber and shaver. Though not exactly bitter, Johann Kaspar nonetheless always wanted his son to be offered the educational opportunities that he did not receive. This desire can be gleaned from a note Johann Kaspar wrote in the preface a work that he published shortly before his death, and a copy of which was among Schiller's possessions following his death. In his work entitled, "Arboriculture, considered broadly" (*Die Baumzucht im Großen*), Johann Kaspar writes, "You, being of all beings! I asked you after the birth of my only son that you might grant him the intellectual development, which I could not reach on account of my lack of education, and you heard me. Thank you, good God, that you pay heed to the requests of mortals." [du Wesen aller Wesen! Dich hab ich nach der Geburt meines einzigen Sohns gebeten, daβ du demselben an Geistesstärke zulegen möchtest, was ich aus Mangel an Unterricht nicht erreichen konnte, und du hast mich erhöret. Dank dir, gütigstes Wesen, daβ du auf die Bitten der Sterblichen achtest].[242] The last thing that Johann Kaspar wanted was for his son to suffer the lack (*Mangel*) on education he suffered and fully supported his son's ambitions to study theology at the Duchy's highest academic institution.

[241] Buchwald, 46
[242] Buchwald, 47

Karl Eugen, however, had different plans for the son of one of his most loyal and trustworthy servants, whose son was developing a reputation as one of the most gifted students in the Latin schools of the area. Twice, Johann Kaspar turned down Karl Eugen's "offer" to take the young Schiller into his newly established *Karlsschule* on the grounds that there was no Theology faculty at the *Karlsschule* (Johann Caspar knew quite well that Karl Eugen, himself a Catholic, couldn't possibly offer Protestant Theological study at his educational institution). And while that itself quite a daring feat, the whole family knew that they could not possibly turn down the offer if Karl Eugen came a knocking a third time. And indeed, that is precisely what happened. Looking back at the Schiller family's reluctant acceptance of Karl Eugen's third recruitment attempt, a friend of the family reported that "the friends of the family, just like the family itself, saw only too clearly, what was to be feared, if the third request of the Duke, which was now to be understood as a command, was not followed. And with a heavy heart, they offered the son in order to save the parents from any danger." [die Freunde der Familie, so wie diese selbst, sahen nur zu gut, was zu befürchten wäre, wenn dem *drei*maligen Verlangen des Herzogs das man nun als einen Befehl annehmen muβte, nicht Folge geleistet würde, *und mit zerrissenem Gemüt fügte sich endlich auch der Sohn*, um seine Eltern…keine Gefahr auszusetzen.[243] When Karl Eugen came a knocking for the third time, there was no question that the Schiller's would have to submit to resist the Duke's request. The requisite result, however, may have been a good one: the young Schiller was not going study theology.

Without the possibility of studying theology, Schiller, upon arriving at the *Karlsschule* in January 1773, signed up for the study of law. However, after two years of disastrous results in which Schiller finished at or near the bottom of his class in every subject except Greek, Schiller

[243] Buchwald, 147-148.

accepted Karl Eugen's suggestion to switch his concentration from law to the study of medicine, whose faculty was being inaugurated at the *Karlsschule* in 1775. Almost immediately after switching concentrations, Schiller's standing amongst his fellow students suddenly flipped. Schiller went from being last in most of the studies assigned for the study of law to being first for those in the study of medicine.

While a certain shift in Schiller's own personal motivation seems to evident from correspondences with his friend Wilhelm von Hoven, it is also clear that the study of medicine contained much more of what Schiller had seemingly been hoping to study when he originally expressed the desire to study theology, namely, the ability to study the fundamental questions of philosophy. So much can be gleaned from Schiller's dedication to the Duke Karl Eugen in his third medical dissertation, which also serves as a type of map of the medical landscape at the time. There Schiller writes,

> A doctor, whose hoizon rotates solely around the historical knowledge of the machine, who is acquainted with the crude wheels and the most soulful clocks only in terms of terminology and place, can perhaps perform miracles at the sickbed and be made divine by the masses; however, your wise commands have raised the Hippocratic art out of the restricted sphere of solely mechanical bread-sciences (*mechanichen Brotwissenschaft*) and into the the rank of a philosophical teaching. Philosophy and medicine stand in the most perfect harmony. The latter lends to the from its from its richness and light; the former to the latter to the former its interest, its dignity and allure. This year, I have looked to make myself more acquainted with both; these few pages are the justification of my undertaking.
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> ein Artzt, dessen Horizont sich einzig und allein um die historische Kenntnis der Maschine dreht, der die gröbern Räder des sellenvollsten Uhrwerks nur terminologisch und örtlich weiβt, kann vielleicht vor dem Krankenbett Wunder tun, und von dem Pöbel vergöttert werden; aber *Euer Herzogliche Durchlaut* haben die Hippokratische Kunst aus der engen Sphäre einer mechanischen Brotwissenschaft in den Höhern Rang einer philosophischen Lehre erhoben. Philosophie und Arzneiwissenschaft stehen unter sich in der vollkommensten Harmonie: Diese leihet jener von ihrem Reichtum und Licht; jene teilt dieser ihr

> Interesse, ihre Würde mit Reize mit. Ich habe mich dieses Jahr mit beiden bekannter zu machen gesucht; diese wenige Blätter setien die Rechtfertigung meines Unternehmens.[244]

In this small blub, which is more a dedication to Ernst Plattner than to the Karl Eugen, we see precisely what it was that Schiller enjoyed so much about the study of medicine. Schiller condemns the type of medical training, which focuses on the "machine" and praises the type of medicine, which he somewhat provocatively claims was taught at the *Karlsschule.*[245] This was an understanding of medicine as a discipline intricately linked and in harmony with philosophy. This unique fusion of the medicine and theory was with a new philosophical direction that was emerging in the 1770's and identified under the name of anthropology. Schiller's dedication is also a testament to just how complex and shifting the medical discourse at the end of the 18th century was. The movement that we have been tracing from a rationalist to a vitalist conception of nature had no greater impact on any field of study than on the field of medicine. Since this is the area in which Schiller received a large portion of his theoretical education, it is worth quickly tracking some of the major fault lines of the discipline at that time.

ii. Landscape of Medical Theories in the Late 18th Century

While recent research has shown just how subtle and nuanced the medical discourse at the time was, it seems that there were three basic positions that Schiller could have possibly taken up, materialism, dualism, and the newly developing discourse of vitalism.[246] These three

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[244]Schiller "Schiller, Friedrich, and Klaus Harro Hilzinger. *Werke Und Briefe in Zwölf Bänden, vol. 8.* 1. Aufl. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1988, pp., 120.

[245] somewhat provocatively, because his first medical dissertation was rejected for being too philosophical.

[246] See Reill, 73-74. He would include Stahlianism, the belief, basically, that all the movements of the body are controlled by soul and that medical treatments should focus solely on the soul, but there isn't any evidence to

camps differ from one another mostly in relation to two fundamental issues. Whether all psychic phenomena could be reduced to a material substrate, i.e., whether the soul could be reduced to the body, and whether the material world could be comprehended according to a set of causal laws understood within a mechanical-mathematical framework. The theories, furthermore, are compatible and incompatible with one another in interesting ways. While both materialism and dualism believed that the empirical world was governed by unconditional causal laws, materialists differed from dualists insofar as materialists believed that the soul could be reduced to the body and explained according to fully physical cause (dualists obviously believed in the transcendent, ontological status of the soul). As we examined in previous chapters, vitalists maintained an odd position. While they denied any sort of dualism and, therefore, believed that everything can be traced back to a material substrate, they neither believe that that that matter was dead, nor that the material world can be understood according to strict causal laws.[247] As such, this vitalist position opens up at least the conceptual space for an interaction between mind and body, which allows for local freedom. Organisms, for vitalists, are free to act even though they possess no soul separate from their organized bodies.

That Schiller read and was aware the French materialist tradition, and especially La Mettrie, is apparent not only From Franz von Moors famous second monologue in *Die Räuber*

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suggest that anyone at the *Karlsschule* took Stahlianism seriously and it was quickly surpassed as an explanatory paradigm by its successor, vitalism.

[247] Carl Friedrich Kielmeyer's text--a fellow *Karlsschule* student--, Kielmeyer, Carl Friedrich, *Über die Verhältnisse der organischen Kräfte unter einander in der Reihe der verschiedenen Organisationen*. Basilisken-Presse im Verlag Natur & Text, 1997. provides the classic example of how the vitalists understood organic nature to operate under a set of generally observable "laws", which, however, couldn't be empirically tested with predicative force. The laws relied more on general cross-comparison for their validity. For example, one of Kielmeyer's laws that govern organic matter is, "the variety of possible sensations decreases in the hierarchy of organization, just as the ease and fineness of the other sensations increases in a restricted range" die Mannigfaltigkeit der möglichen Empfindungen nimmt in der Reihe der Organisationen ab, wie die Leichtigkeit und feinheit der übrigen Empfindungen in einem eingeschränktern Reihe zunimmt."see Kielmeyer, Carl Friedrich. Here, these general observations serve as the basis of "laws", though any individual instance may contradict the principle.

where he discusses the materialist conception of the eternal recycling of matter, but also from one of his earlier works, and especially the *Philosophical Letters* (*Philosophische Briefe*).[248] The first half of that text contains a series of letters, in which Julius mourns and longs for the return of his friend Raphael. Raphael and Julius, it seems, had engaged in an intense friendship of awakening, especially for Julius, sparked by Raphael's encouragement that he should, "believe no one except what your own reason tells you. There is nothing more holy than the truth" [glaube niemand als deiner eignen Vernunft, sagtest du weiter. Es gibts nichts heilligres als die Wahrheit].[249] The result of this use of reason is that Julius has been plunged into existential uncertainty. Specifically, what the use of his own reason did was rob Julius of the naive a faith in the existence of a rationalist, creator God. As Julius writes, "you stole from me the belief, which had given me peace. You taught me to despise, where I previous adored. I used to find a thousand things worthy of praise until your sad wisdom stripped me naked" [du hast mir den Glaube gestohlen, der mir Frieden gab. Du hast mich verachten gelehrt, wo ich anbetete. Tausend Dinge waren mir so ehrwürdig, ehe deine traurige Weisheit mir entkleidete].[250] Julius's use his reason has resulted in his questioning the rationalist dogma that had previously allowed him to see the divine in every speck of God's creation. What exactly these beliefs are, are then told to the reader in the second half of the work, namely, the *Theosophie* of Julius in which Julius explains thee standard rationalist position the belief in God and how this belief had grounded his understanding of immortality, and virtue prior to the crisis.

[248] See Neubauer, John, "The Freedom of the Machine: On Mechanism, Materialism and the young Schiller" Eighteenth-Century Studies, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Spring, 1982), pp. 275-290, for an account on the importance of materialism on the young Schiller.
[249] Schiller, VIII, 212.
[250] Ibid., 212

There, Julius also tells us a bit more about the content of Raphael's message and why he had encouraged him to "use his reason". Julius writes, "I am looking for the laws of the spirits—swing myself up to the infinite, but I forget to prove that they are actually present, a clever attack of materialism destroys my creation" [Ich forsche nach den Gesetzen der Geister—schwinge mich bis zun dem Unendlichen, aber ich vergesse zu erweisen, daβ sie wirklich vorhanden sind. Ein kühner Angriff des Materialismus stürzt meine Schöpfung ein].[251] The position that rips Julius to earth from his rationalist/religious *Schwärmerei* is precisely the position staked out by La Mettrie in his materialist manifesto, *L'Homme machine*. In this work, La Mettrie never ceases to emphasize that there is nothing about the so-called functions of the soul, which cannot be explained according to a purely materialist paradigm. It is because of this that La Mettrie insists that the materialist position is the only *rational* position one can take, just as Julius indicates. As La Mettrie puts it, "let us therefore draw the clever conclusion, that the human is a machine. This is not simply a hypothesis…it is neither the work of prejudice nor of of my reason alone…Experience spoke to me for reason, so I unified the two."[252] The conclusion that the human is a machine, La Mettrie argues, is not the result of some speculative ponderings motivated by some depraved atheist, but the product of rational consideration. The preponderance of evidence, and hence, our reason itself, he argues, supports this and only this conclusion.

As evidence for this point La Mettrie presents a systematic attack on those positions that the mind-body dualist had typically taken to be inexplicable by means of a merely materialist analysis. His strategy is to show how each one of these so-called inexplicables not only can be

[251] Ibid., 217
[252] La Mettrie, *Die Maschine Mensch*, (Hamburg: felix Meiner Verlag, 1990), pp., 137.

explained according to a materialist paradigm, but that the physical explanation is the momre *rational* explanation. Among other topics, La Mettrie focuses on the existence of morality, the independence of thought from the body, the existence of language, and even the *a priori* status of mathematics. In each case, La Mettrie argues that if we go off the assumption that animals are machines (an assumption that every mind-body dualist of his age will accept), then he can provide a natural explanation not only of how each of those functions is both perceivable in its *Urform* in the animal, in a way which is not fundamentally different from their human counterparts, but also a story of how the transition from the highest levels of animal organization to that of the human being could occur. La Mettrie moves from the case of language, asking "is it really absolutely impossible to teach this animal (the ape) a language? I don't think so" to the appearance of morality , which La Mettrie clearly sees in it *Urform* in the basic sociability a variety of gregarious animal types, pointing to the clearest example of a dog showing remorse for bad behavior.[253] And since the default position is to understand animals as mere machines, if La Mettrie can explain the movement from the animal to the human, then La Mettrie has by default shown that his materialist program is, if not true, at least more rational. Thus he writes, "the transition from animal to human is no violent one; the true philosophers will agree on that. What was the human being before the invention of words? An animal of its type.[254] If La Mettrie can show that is rational to believe that language is natural, which he believes that he has, then why should one believe in the exceptional status of the human being among God's creation?

La Mettrie combines this gap bridging argument with evidence from human history that he thinks demonstrates the "utter dependence of the soul on its causes" i.e., the body.[255] One of

[253] Ibid., 43-44.
[254] Ibid., 53.
[255] Ibid., 43

the multiple and often hilarious examples La Mettrie provides is the story of the Duke of Guise who was assassinated by the Henry the III during the French Wars of Religion in the late 16th century. Guise, of the Protestant house of Lorrain, had agreed to meet Henry, of the Catholic ruling house of Bourbon, during his stay in Blois. Guise agreed to the meeting, La Mettrie tells us, because he was operating off the assumption that the King would never murder him. He had had so many opportunities to do so often before, why would he change his moral constitution and do so now?[256] Upon hearing of his departure for Blois, however, Guise's councilor Chiverni was reported to have known that the trip would end in assassination. The reason? La Mettrie reports Chiverni as saying, "I have known the King for 20 years…he is by nature good and even weak; but I have observed that whenever it is cold, even the smallest thing can unsettle and put him into a rage."[257] Far from Kant's belief that even the prisoner on the gallows knows fully well that he can always choose what is morally right, La Mettrie's claim is that our moral dispositions are often so determined that even a change of weather is capable of fundamentally changing one's moral them.

The point here is not at all to claim that Schiller is fact a secret materialist along the lines of La Mettrie. Rather, I bring up La Mettrie and his connection to Schiller's *Philophische Briefe* in order to bring the context to light within which Schiller's thinking first grew into its maturity and to elaborate on some of his fundamental influences were. From early on, Schiller took the materialist position seriously and while one could argue that Schiller took that position seriously as a *threat*, I would argue that one ought not to undervalue how much influence a perceived threat can have on one's thinking. Rather than dismissing La Mettrie's materialism, Schiller

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[256] This according to La Mettrie
[257] Ibid., 41

respected the philosophical position enough to suggest that it did, in fact, end his philosophical commitment to a naïve rationalism. The point to take from this is that Schiller did not dismiss the claims of matter out of hand but sought very much to integrate them into a unified picture.

Yet the materialism of La Mettrie was far from being the dominate understanding of the between mind-body at the *Karlsschule*. That honor belonged to a full-blown metaphysical dualism of the Hallerian variety. Yet one of the funny things about the dualist picture, Haller's included, is that with respect to the way in which it deals with the body, materialism and dualism hardly differ. The two positions differ only in terms of way they interpret ontological status of the mind. Yet according to the dualist position, the mind was exactly that thing which couldn't appear within the empirical realm. The restriction of medicine to the mechanical functions of the body was, in other words, a point of agreement between dualism and materialism.

It was within this context that vitalism emerged as a third alternative. As we have previously discussed, vitalist such as Wolf and Blumenbach responded to the "crisis in the mechanical sciences" by vitalizing nature, fusing a telic power into a materialist substrate. The result is a vitalist monism in which natural organism that rejects universal causal determinism and suggests that natural organisms possess limited amount of freedom. A third solution to the mind-body problem was being developed in the medical discourse precisely at the time that the young Friedrich Schiller was a student in that field. In other words, it would not at all have been irrational of him to strive to articulate a relationship between mind and body in which the two are not seen as separate but unified and capable of interacting. Furthermore with the publication of Ernst Plattner's *Anthropology for Doctors and Philosophers* (*Anthropologie für Ärtze und Weltweise*) (1792), Schiller found someone with precisely the same ambitions.

That mind and body not only mutually interact with one another, but are, to a certain extent co-constitutive of one another, is precisely the thesis proposed by Plattner in his *Anthropologie*. A quick look at Plattner's theory of mind-body interaction will suffice to show that Plattner represents the model for Schiller's own engagements with the mind-body problem in his medical dissertations. In the *Vorrede* to his *Anthropologie*, Plattner argues that the worst thing that happened to the discipline of medicine is that it had been separated from the discipline of philosophy.[258] The reason for this, he argues, is that if philosophy is the study of the soul and medicine the study of the body, then the two disciplines should only be done in conjunction with one another. Yet the type of philosophy that Plattner is interested in integrating back into the discipline of medicine is anything but a philosophy of rationalist metaphysical speculations in the tradition of Christian Friedrich Wolff. Instead, Platter finds himself aligned much more with the empiricist and skeptical positions of the British Enlightenment and especially Locke and Hume.[259]

Keeping with the skeptical tradition and contra a figure like Haller, Plattner is simply not interested in speculating about the ontological status of mind and the body. The relationship between the two, Plattner writes is an, "insoluble riddle" (undurchdringliches Geheimnis) that human reason is not capable of resolving. It is precisely this epistemological skepticism, which allows Plattner to take an unorthodox position with respect to the mind-body problem. Instead of

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[258] Plattner, 2-3.

[259] Take Locke's stance on free will as an example, while admitting that morality and mechanism, "are not very easy to be reconciled", and also admitting that many people take the denial of innate principles to mean that humans are nothing but, "mere machines", Locke nonetheless maintains that humans are not mere machines and that contingent moral principles do exist within societies. Locke is able to maintain this position, because he is interested in discovering the *limits* of human knowledge and readily admits that there are some things we cannot know, the exact relation between the mind and the body, and hence, the ontological state of human freedom among them. Locke, John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp, 38.

what Plattner suggests is that medical doctors allow themselves to be led by the empirical evidence before them, always under the auspice of trying simply to help their patients become healthy and happy. Touching on how ontology has to be subordinate to practical considerations, Plattner writes, “whether or not this (mind-body harmony) occurs because of a predetermined harumony or through actual causation, I don’t care, insofar as the question is whether, in each question, I can experience learn something about the happiness of the human being from the relationship of the body to the mind” [ob nun dieses (the mind-body interaction) durch eine vorherbeststimmte Harmonie oder duch einen reellen Einflus geschiet, und was dieser reele Einflus wäre, das kann mir in so weit gleichglütig seyn, in wiefern es die Frage ist, ob ich noch sonst etwas für die Glückseligkeit des Menschen interessantes von den Verhältnissen der Seele und des Körpers erfahren kann].[260] Ontological questions, for Plattner, have to take a back seat to considerations of whether a medical doctor can help make a patient happy.

Having set the metaphysical speculation aside and allowing himself to be led by simple observation, Plattner concludes that there are 3 varying degrees in which the mind and the body interact and these different levels correspond to three distinct disciplines that relate to the human being. First, one can analyze any natural organism, from plant to animal to human based solely on the mechanical, bodily actions of that entity. What Plattner has in mind here are the so-called automatic bodily functions such as breathing, digesting, and the pumping of the heart, which seem to occur completely independently of the intentionality of the soul. In addition to the purely mechanical, Plattner admits the reverse, namely, that there are certain movements of the soul that don’t seem to have any effect on the body, what he calls the area of reason. [261]

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[260] Platner, Ernst, *Anthropologie für Ärtze und Weltweise*. Leipzig, 1772, XII.

[261] Ibid., 12. Far from claiming that reason either large or pure, Plattner defines it in the following way, “die Einsicht des Aehnlichen und Verschiedenen, der einstimmenden und widersprechenden Verhältnisse” The

The third stage of the mental, reason, however, is dwarfed in terms of its theoretical importance the second stage of organization. It is this second stage, according to Plattner, where actual interaction between the body and the mind takes place, a stage that Plattner associates with the study of anthropology. Plattner writes, "finally we can observe the body and the soul together in their mutual proportions, limitations, and relationships" [endlich kann man Körper und Seele in ihren gegenseitigen Verhältnissen, Einschränkungen und Beziehungen zusammen betrachten, und das ist es, was ich Anthropologie nenne]."[262] Granted that Plattner thinks that the mind and the body *can* interact, the next question is the how much they can interact? What, in other words, is the scope of the study of "anthropology"? To answer this question, one must turn to Plattner's understanding of what types of activities are included within each domain of organization. And when one does, it turns out that quite a bit is included within the "anthropological."

Everything, in fact, which Plattner associates with the activity of the "soul". A soul for Plattner is defined in the following way, "the machine is not capable of sensing, cognizing, choosing. This is proven by the following. For that reason animal bodies need recourse to a completely different being, which possesses this ability. This is the soul." [zum Empfinden, Erkennen und Wählen ist der Mechanismus nicht fähig. Dies beweiβt das künftige. Daher bedürfen thierischen Körper der Gesellschaft eines von ihnen ganz verschiedenen Wesens, welche dieses Vermögen besitzt. Dies ist die Seele].[263] The soul, according to this definition, controls a significant section of the cognitive process of the human being. Sensing, cognizing,

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functions that Plattner associates with reason are the same functions that Lock and Hume associate with the mental stages of "reflection" and "comparison", explaining these features according to fully naturalist premises.

[262] Plattner, XVII

[263] Ibid., 14/

and even *choosing* are all defined as features of the soul, both human and animal. By equating the soulful activity of the human being with the anthropological, Plattner thereby grants this middle ground –and with it the area of mind-body interaction-- a fairly significant scope.

Reading Plattner must have made quite an impression on the young Friedrich Schiller. What Schiller finds is someone, contra Haller, who is convinced that the mind and body interact and, most importantly who believes that it is precisely the job of the medical doctor to study and care for those aspects of the human being that include both body and soul. Trained by Abel in the Plattnerian tradition of medicine, Schiller was *not* trained to look at the human being in terms of a fundamental dualism, but in terms of taking care of the *entire* human being, body and soul combined.

iii. The Case of Grammot, Schiller's Plattnerian Medical Treatment

That Schiller took Plattnerian model of medicine as his *Vorbild*, is a clear from the medical report that documents Schiller's treatment of a fellow student of his at the *Karlsschule*, the Elve Grammot, who had been diagnosed with the illness of "hypochondria". At the time, Hypochondria was considered solely a *bodily* disorder. In a somewhat shocking fashion, it is amazing how similar the position of the majority of the leading faculty at the *Karlsschule* held is to contemporary neurological position that interpret any psychological unrest in reductionist neurological terms. Just like many contemporary medical doctors might seek to treat a psychological disorders by locating the biological causes and prescribing psychiatric treatment, treatments of hypochandria at the time were based on a the belief that the mind and the body cannot fundamentally interact in such a way that the mind can actually make the body ill. If there

was a problem, then the origin of the problem had to be located in the biochemical framework, the "machine" of the body and treated according to a physical strategy.

Schiller's initial report documenting whether the patient was "keeping with his treatment" of taking the relevant medicine, going on walks, etc., reveals just how dominant this form of treatment was at the *Karlsschule*. Schiller notes that his friend Grammot, had been holding to the prescriptions of his doctors quite stringently, writing that, "he observes the prescriptions of his doctors with the greatest exactness. He spends most of the time of the day with bodily movements, which primarily consist in rowing, walking, and bathing three times a day" [pmit der gröβten Genauigkeit beobachte der Patienten die Vorschriften seiner Ärtze. Er brachte die meiste Zeit des Tags mit Leibes-Bewegungen zu, welche vorzüglich in Reuten, Spazierengehen und dreimaligem Baden bestanden].[264] As can be gleaned, the solution to Hypochondiria at the time was to work the bad fluid out of the system through movement, sweat, heating, and cooling.

Schiller, however, who, at the time, was writing his second and third medical dissertation and working under the primary medical faculty as a form of student-doctor, took a slightly different approach to the treatment of his friend than that of his superiors--and one which eventually got removed from the case.[265] Rather than understand the illness in purely physical terms, Schiller understood the cause to lie in an existential crisis that had befallen the student. It was this existential crisis, Schiller thought, which then negatively impacted the bodily health of friend Grammot. Schiller diagnoses, "Pietistic enthusiasm seemed to be the reason for the whole event. It sharpened his consciousness and made him extremely sensitive to all things religious

[264] Schiller, *Theoretische Schriften*, ed. by Rolf-Peter Janz. München: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992, pp., 62.
[265] Ibid., 71. Schiller reports in the last letter that he has been "intentionally distanced" from Grammot, despite believing that his "less harsh treatment" was the sole cause of whatever improvements Grammot had shown.

and virtuous and it confused his concepts. The study of metaphysics made him, finally, very suspicious. [Pietistische Schwärmerei schien den Grund zum ganzen nachfolgenden Übel gelegt zu haben. Sie schärfte sein Gewissen, und machte ihn gegen alle Gegenstände von Tugend und Religion äuβerst empfindlich, und verwirrte seine Begriffe. Das Studium der Metaphysik machte ihm zuletzt alle Wahrheit verdächtig].[266] The case, in other words, is nearly the exact same as the one that Schiller describes in his *Philosophische Briefe*.

What is interesting, however, is the way in which Schiller, contrary to his superiors, attempts to understand the illness in terms of both psychological and physical causes. Plattner's influence here is obvious. One shouldn't think, though, that Schiller ignores the physical side of the illness and interests himself solely for the psychological causes. Instead, Schiller understands the mind and the body, die "moral and physical conditions of the patient", to be equally important. Schiller, in other words, was developing a Plattnerian strategy that was part talking cure and part walking cure and one which he takes to have been at least temporarily successful. Despite reporting a noticed improvement in his patient, Schiller nonetheless claims that, "perhaps the moments come, in which the old concerns of our hypochriandrist will reapper…since it is almost a physical necessity of his suffering body…In the meanwhile, the most important thing, is dependent upon him mainting a certain amount of freedom, which he certainly will not abuse." [daβ vielleicht Augenblicke kommen, in welchen die alten Klagen unsers Hypochondristen wiederum aufwachend…den es ist fast eine physische Notwendigkeit seines leidenden Körpers…Indessen kommt das meiste nur darauf an, daβ demselben immer noch gewisse Freiheiten bleiben, die er gewiβ niemals miβbaruchen wird].[267] Here, Schiller

[266] Ibid, 59.
[267] Ibid., 67.

earnestly and sincerely states that Grammot's physical constitution will almost certainly be the cause of another bout of depression. However, the best way to prevent this physical malady is to give the young student a spiritual good, namely the ability to live a much *freer* life than is normally allowed within the strict confines of the *Karlsschule.* Schiller, in other words, diagnosed the body and the soul in tandem, exactly along Plattnerian lines and not in terms of a strict mind-body dualism. From very early on, Schiller was interested and committed to understanding the human being in terms of the *whole* human being.

iv. Schiller's First Medical Dissertation and the Problem of Moral Freedom

Before we turn to Schiller's *Ästhetissche Briefe* and with it his "unique contribution to thinking", we must first turn our attention to Schiller's first medical dissertation. For it is this text which contains Schiller's most direct statement about the mind-body problem and his attempt to solve it with the mysterious entity of a "mediating power (*Mittelkraft*). This will also allow us to address a possible objection. In his groundbreaking and extensive study of Schiller as a *philosopher*, Frederick Beiser argues that Schiller is not only a dualist, but that this dualism can be traced back to his earliest thinking. Beiser argues that, "it is a serious mistake to think that the young Schiller's philosophy is opposed *in principle* to dualism. The very opposite is the case: Schiller explicitly reaffirmed and passionately argued for dualism. His problem was how to explain the interaction between the mental and physical, the intellectual and the sensible, *given that there is a fundamental difference in kind between these entities*." This is important because it makes, "Schiller's later adoption of Kant seems much more intelligible and straightforward. Schiller was happy to accept Kant's dualistic philosophy because his own early philosophy was

already fundamentally dualistic".[268] And the reason this dualism was essential to the young Schiller is that for Schiller, like Kant, there was "one moral idea that Schiller was especially eager to defend on the basis of his dualism: moral freedom."[269] My argument, on the other hand is that Schiller, from his earliest writings, believed that mind-body dualism was a *problem* the he *sought to overcome*. And so while yes, the problematic nature of this relationship *did* open Schiller to Kant's unique solution to the mind-body problem: moral autonomy, my argument is that it is precisely this move to transcendental idealism, which led Schiller away from his own unique path.

Schiller opens his first medical dissertation (which he twice failed) with an admirable sense of youthful confidence, stuffing the crux of his philosophical and ontological argument into the first three sections. Somewhat surprisingly, given that the topic of the dissertation, titled *The Philosophy of Physiology* (*Philosophie der Physiologie*), was supposed to the physiological mechanisms by means of which empirical stimuli give rise to non-material ideas, Schiller's first section is devoted to the question of virtue and the cosmological picture in which that conception is rooted. It is only after the first three sections that Schiller finally turns to what was supposed to be the actual substance of the dissertation and touches on the causal mechanisms linking the mind and the body, the *Mittelkraft*.

This first section, however, is crucial to the argument. Schiller's goal is to establish a cosmological picture that he believes that everyone can agree on and from this position of agreement, to argue that a certain set of conditions that need to be in place in order for this cosmological vision to be possible. Essential to those conditions will be the unity of body and

[268] Beiser, 24.
[269] Beiser, 25

mind at the deepest ontological level. Schiller's argumentative strategy, in other words, resembles an early version of a Kantian transcendental deduction. Schiller starts with a base assumption and moves from there to the conditions of its possibility.

Schiller takes this cosmological vision almost straight out of the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Adam Ferguson, whom Schiller had read via Christian Garve's 1772 translation *Grundsätze der Moralphilosophie*,

> I believe that this much is at least firmly proven, that the universe is the work of an infinite understanding and has been designed according to a perfect plan. And that all the tones of the instrument tone togetehter in thousandfold harmony, in a melody, just as it is now through the divine influence from the original plan and that all the powers work together.
>
> Soviel wird, denke ich einmal fest genug erwiesen sein, daβ das universum das Werk eines unendlichen Verstandes sei und entworfen nach einem trefflichen Plane. So wie es itz durch den allmächtigen Einfluβ der göttlichten Kraft aus dem Entwurfe zur Wirklichkeit hinran, und alle Kräfte wirken, und in einander wirken, gleich Saiten eines Instruments tausendstimmig zusammenlautend in eine Melodie.[270]

This Fergusonian position that Schiller adopts here contains two important aspects, one that is unusual for the German context and one which is not. First, Schiller, like the rationalist school of Leibniz and Wolff, argues that the world consists in one interconnected unity, designed according to God's divine plane. Within this schema, virtue is defined by the uniquely human ability to know as much of this interconnection as possible, "Gottgleichheit ist die (Bestimmung) des Menschen."[271] These claims contain nothing that couldn't be found in a typical rationalist cosmology and *Tugendlehre* from Leibniz to Wolff. For, within the rationalist tradition, the

[270] Schiller *Philosohie der Physiologie*, ibid., 37.
[271] Ibid., 37

vocation of the human being is rooted in his ability to come to know the divine plan of God. Nothing about this picture is yet remotely incompatible with a mind-body dualism.

Yet this is only part of the story. Schiller's next move is to point out that *knowing* can't be separated from the sensation of feeling pleasure. Pleasure and perfection are intimately related to one another. "The sum of the greatest perfections with the imperfections is the sum of the highest pleasures with the least amount of pains." [Die Summe der gröβten Vollkommenheiten mit den wenigsten Unvolllkommenheiten ist Summe der Höchsten Vergnügen mit den wenigsten Schmerzen. Dies ist Glückseligkeit]."[272] The more one knows of God's plan, the more pleasure one must necessarily experience. The reason these ideas are necessarily connected to one another, Schiller argues, is because God, in his divinely ordered plan, established and intended pleasure to be used as a certain type of compass and a compass which is not restricted to human beings, but is a constituent feature of nature itself. Love or better said *eros*, is the force which binds and unifies the disparate parts of nature, connecting the experience of joy with the wisdom of God's created plan: "but such a beautiful and wise plan, connected the perfection o the whole with the happiness of the individual, human with human, yeah, humans with animals, through the general connection of love."[aber so ein schönes weises Gesetz…hat die Vollkommenheit des Ganzen mit der Glückseeligkeit des Einzelnen, Menschen mit Menschen, ja Menschen mit Tieren durch die Bande der allgemeine Liebe verbunden]." Like we see in Herder *eros* connects beings with one another brings organisms together in love and friendship, encouraging beings to engage in a life of love and experience thereby the joy of God's creation. It is for this reason that human perfection cannot consist in mere understanding but is metaphysically linked to the experience of pleasure with happiness the result. And while even this notion of a connection

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[272] Ibid., 38.

between knowledge and pleasure isn't unique, what is unique is that Schiller does not subordinate pleasure to rational cognition. Instead, Schiller, following the influence of the British Enlightenment, deepens the nature of the connection. For Schiller, it quite clear that the pleasure experienced in understanding is not an intellectual pleasure, but the joy in the wonders of embodied, physical existence. In making this suggestion, one can't help but be reminded of the way in which the *Spieltrieb* will serve the exact same function in Schiller's *Ästhetische Erziehung*. Schiller does not want to separate and hierarchize, but to combine and synthesize.

In establishing this metaphysical plan, Schiller, however, has made only the first step in his argument. The ultimate goal of the argument is to argue for the existence of something, which he will call a *Mittelkraft*. The *Mittelkraft*, for Schiller is a substance different than both mind and body, which supposedly mediates between what he *appear to us as* two distinct substances and allows them to interact. And while Beiser understands Schiller's *Mittelkraft* in Cartesian terms, as a physical substance delicate enough to allow for the interaction between mind and body, it strikes me that Schiller, following the monism of Ferguson, is looking to unite the two on the deepest ontological level. With the idea of a *Mittlkraft*, Schiller is hinting at an ontological unification of what appear to us to be two different substances.

Having established the metaphysical unity of love and wisdom in the first section, Schiller makes the following move. He writes, "having established this, I continue. Whenever the ehuman should find the whole out of the singular, then they must sense every single effect. The world must work on them. This is partially in them partially outside." [dies zum Grund gelegt, schreite ich weiter. wann der Mensch das ganze aus dem einzelnen hervorfinden soll, so muss der jede einzelne Wirkung empfinden. Die Welt muβ auf ihn wirken. Diese ist nun teils

auβer ihm, teils in ihm].[273] Schiller argues as follows: if we agree that virtue consists in the unity of pleasure and the cognition of God's plan, then if it is to be possible for the human being to *experience* this love, i.e., "the whole out of the part" then we must assume that a fundamental interaction between the material and the mental is possible. In Schiller's terms, "the world must effect him" [die Welt muβ auf ihn wirken].Schiller's next move is then to establish the *impossibility of this interaction given a metaphysical dualism*. He gladly admits that the "movements of matter" are "impenetrable" (Undurchdringlich), given their definition extension. Thought, however, in principle, is immaterial and "Durchdringlich". Thus Schiller comes to the obvious conclusion, that "Allein wenn der Geist nicht undurchdringlich ist, wie soll die Materie auf ihn wirken, die doch nur auf das Undurchdringliche wirket?" Schiller's question, in other words, is: How is this interaction possible if mind and matter are *ontologically distinct substances*? Were this true, then Schiller argues, it would be impossible for human beings to experience love. We do, however, experience love, and therefore, the dualist assumptions *must be false*. Schiller, in other words, is arguing that if the experience of love is possible then metaphysical dualism and the mind-body interaction that it disavows must be false.

What should be clear by now is that Schiller is not trying to propose a Cartesian solution for how the mind and body can interact. What he is instead trying to do is suggest that, despite the difficulties with the theory, we must assume an identity point between subject and object even though we cannot think that point. Schiller is arguing for a paradigm shift. Mind and body must be thought of as unified even though the young Schiller remains unable to think this

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[273] Ibid., 39

thought with philosophical clarity. Take, for example is original crack at defining the *Mittelkraft*. Schiller writes,

> Or finally a power must be present, which works between body and soul which combines the two. A power, which is transformed by the material and which can transform the spirit. This would be a power, which is part soul and part body, a being which is partially penetrable and partially not. Can such a power be thought- certainly not!
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> That be what it may. There is actually a power (this one, namely, whose effects are represented by us) and is present to the spirit. This power is completely different from the world and the spirit. If I separate them, then the effect of the world on the human is gone.
>
> oder endlich muβ eine Kraft vorhanden sein, die zwischen den Geist und die Materie tritt und beede verbindet. Eine Kraft, die von der Materie verändert werden, und die den Geist verändern kann. Dies wäre also eine Kraft, die eines teils geistig, andern teils materiell, ein Wesen, das eines teils durchdringlich, andern teils teils undurchdringlich wäre, und läβt sich ein solches denken? – Gewiβ nicht!
>
> Dem sei wie ihm wolle, Es ist wirklich eine Kraft zwischen der Materie (dieser nehmlich, deren Wirkungen vorgestellt werden sollen) und dem Geiste vorhanden. Diese Kraft ist ganz verschieden von der Welt und dem Geist. Ich entferne sie: dahin ist alle Wirkung der Welt auf ihn.

Here, Schiller's difficulties are made patently obvious. He insists, on the one hand, that there must be something that mediates between these two incompatible substances, while simultaneously admitting that such a thing cannot be thought. In the second paragraph, however, he comes closer to saying what he really thinks. This *Mittelkraft* can't be just some weird fluid that mediates two substances; rather, it has to be something completely different, namely a *Kraft* that is, "ganz verschieden von der Welt und dem Geist". The whole relation between mind and body, in other words, must be rethought in order for the interaction between the two to be thought of coherently. There are two interpretative options here. Either, Schiller is just stupid, begging the question by pushing the mind body problem into a third sphere in which mind and body are still conceived of as *ontologically distinct substances*, but nonetheless can suddenly

magically, interact; or, one admits that Schiller was trying to conceive of or carve out a conceptual space in which the mind and the body could be conceived unified.

This is precisely where Schiller's unusual, proto-Kantian argumentative strategy becomes interesting. To recap: Schiller's strategy is to establish a point of common agreement, the Fergusonian notion that virtue maximal cognition with pleasure and to argue from there to the conditions that have to be in place for the experience of this vision to be possible. The condition of that possibility is that mind--our cognitive capacity to understand the plan--and body--our capacity to sense and feel virtue--interact and are fully unified. It may be the case that we can't *think* this combination, because mind and body appear to be two separate substance but, we must *assume* this connection, if virtue is possible. This argument is distinctly transcendental and more specifically, idealist. Schiller is making a transcendental deduction that argues from experience to the metaphysical unity of subject and object in a realm unavailable to discursive cognition. It is not a coincidence that this is precisely the argument that will be made in different ways by the young Schelling and the mature Hegel. Schiller, in this sense, can be viewed as a direct precursor to the Ideaslistic attempts to overcome mind-body dualism with a metaphysics of identity.

Given all this, it is no wonder that the *Medizinische Fakultät* at the *Karlsschule*, not only rejected Schiller's dissertation, but were fundamentally confused by it. One of them, the *Fachgutachter* Klein is reported to have said: "twice have I tried to read this meandering and tiring treatise, and to discover the meaning of its author. His somewhat too proud spirit, whose prejudice for new and dangerous theories that claim to know better, sticks on everything, wanders around in these darkly defined wildernesses of scholarly speech, where I don't trust to follow him." [zweimal habe ich diese weitläufige und ermüdende Abhandlung gelesen, den Sinn des Verfassers aber nicht erraten können. Sein etwas zu stolzer Geist, dem das Vorurteil für neue

Theorien und der gefährliche Hang zum besser Wissen allzuviel anklebt, wandelt in so dunkel gelehrten Wildnissen, wo hinein ich ihm zu folgen mir nimmermehr getraut]."[274] While Klein's answer reveals the deep disdain for insubordination and a desire to put students who think too much for themselves into place, I see no reason not to believe him when he says that he truly could not figure out what the young Friedrich Schiller wanted to say. He seems to have read the dissertation twice and in earnest for a student, who at the time, was in good standing. He could not understand it, however, because was striving to think a paradigm shift. He was not operating within conceptual that the professors, trained in the discourse of rationalist medicine, could understand.

Far from being a metaphysical dualist *in principle*, Schiller, throughout his pre-Kantian years recognized all of the problems involved with a metaphysical dualism and attempted through theoretical and aesthetic means to think a system that would reconcile the countervailing tendencies in the human being and unite them in one great harmony. With this interpretation in hand, we can turn to Schiller's *Ästhetische Erziehung* in order to see how this attempt at unity, after a short Kantian hiatus, is taken up and finds its mature formulation in Schiller's thinking.

II. Schiller's Post Kantian writings

Hitherto, I have argued that Schiller's Pre-Kantian works are characterized by a desire to think the unity between mind and body. Following Schiller's engagement with Kant in 1791, however, there is no question that the he enters a period in which he is not just strongly influenced by, but fully committed to Kant's justification of morality and the dualistic

[274] Quoted in Safranski, 81-82.

metaphysics that it entails. This is most clearly evident in Schiller's work *Anmut und Würde*. In that text, Schiller argues against Kant's harsh formulations of the mind body dualism wherein he almost seems to suggest that we *cannot* be inclined to do our duty if we are to be certain that we are acting morally. Schiller corrects this rhetorical mistake by suggesting that we can unify duty and inclination without transgressing the Kantian boundaries. Or As Beiser puts it, *Anmut und Würde* "is less an attempt to correct Kant's moral theory than to complete it. Schiller wants to defend the possibility, which Kant had failed to consider in the *Grundlegung* and the second *Kritik*, that we can do our duty with pleasure, or that we can act on the moral law from inclination."[275] Thus, Schiller, in *Anmut und Würde* is actually suggesting the same thing that so many Anglo-American analytic philosophers argued for in the early 2000's, namely, that there is no logical contradiction in Kant's moral philosophy between the cultivation of character and the dualisms on which Kant predicates his moral philosophy.

This position, however, represents a significant shift in Schiller's moral thinking. In this work, Schiller is clearly committed to both to metaphysical dualism and to the claim that perfection consists in moral autonomy. These principles are, furthermore, quite clearly carried over into certain aspects of the *Ästhetische Briefe*. As is well-documented, the central problem that the *Ästhetische Briefe* seems to be dealing with is the gap that was demonstrated by the French Revolution between the Enlightenment ideals of universal Freedom and the current state of humanity, represented by the reality of the Terror. This gap, it is usually argued, point to a flaw in Kant's moral philosophy that Schiller is looking to fix. While Kant did succeeded in establishing the universal principle of morality, the categorical imperative, he had failed to account for the fact that gap between the command of reason and the pull of desire. The

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[275] Beiser, 81.

Ästhetische Briefe suggests that the only way to fill this gap is through an *aesthetic education* Human beings desires must be shaped so as to coincide with the dictates of reason, only then can the Enlightenment project succeed. Or as Schiller puts it: "if man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom."[276] Art, on this view, saves the Enlightenment project by bridging the gap between inclination and duty. In its capacity as the mediator between sensuality and freedom, the aesthetic, on this picture, is clearly a means to an end of the Kantian goal of freedom. This is quite clearly the role that Schiller assigns to the aesthetic in letters 1-10 and 17-27. Schiller, here, is unquestionably a Kantian. The highest good is autonomous moral self-determination. The aesthetic serves the purpose of educating individuals towards that goal.

However, as is also well known, letters 11-16 do not fit neatly into this paradigm. In those letters, Schiller seems to contradict himself, arguing that the aesthetic is not a means to an end, but an end in itself. The aesthetic, furthermore, should not be viewed as a mouthpiece for the moral law. Rather, Schiller seems to actually subordinate rationality to the aesthetic, arguing from Kant's theory of judgment in the third *Critique*, that aesthetic object cannot be subsumed under any rational concepts. It instead characterized by an overflow, a harmony of sense and reason in their *gegenseitige Steigerung*.

Yet what is so radical about Schiller's *Letters* is the fact that Schiller does not restrict the realm of the aesthetic to works of art. Instead, Schiller extends the Kantian framework to apply to the constitutive features of the human being and, subsequently to ways of living life. As such,

[276] Schiller, Friedrich, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*, trans by. Elizabeth M Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp., 9.

when Schiller suggests that the "Ideal of Humanity" consists not in the realization of the world of Kantian freedom, but in the sublation (*aufhebung*) of the rational into the higher stage of the aesthetic, Schiller moves beyond Kantian dualisms and suggests a stage in which human fulfillment cannot be obtained by ethical duty alone. Instead, Schiller will argue that the two basic components of the human being, mind and body must both be appreciated as values *in themselves*, with the goal consisting in the mutual expansion and recognition of both.

This is a very different position than the Kantian one sketched above. On the Kantian reading, the source of value in life ultimately remains the moral law. Within this picture, the capacities of the sensible are only cultivated insofar as they aid in the development of the moral. Schiller's "Ideal of humanity", however, could not be farther than this. Schiller suggests that one can actually go wrong in *both* areas, by developing a character that is overly reliant on either one's rational capacity and the ability to analyze and make sense of the world, or one's sensible capacity and one's drive for pleasure. The ideal, instead, is a state that is higher than either, a state in which the rational and the sensual are both suspended, spontaneously enacted in the graceful moment of play. Positing this state of play as the ideal of humanity, I will argue, has real consequences for Schiller's ethics. What it entails is a complete reorientation towards one's being in the world. If the ideal state of humanity is one in which one has expanded one's capacities as much as possible *in both directions*, then what it means is that every individual will be called to engage in the world in as many, diverse ways as possible. No longer, in other words, will the good life be characterized by the life of the philosopher. Rather, in his intellectual isolation, Schiller will suggest that the philosopher is actually alienated from himself, incapable of appreciating the world in its material and worldly aspects. The ideal person, will, in other words, be equally as capable of engaging a professor in philosophical conversation as they will at

dancing in a club, just as able to cite Shakespeare as drink beer at the bowling alley. Where Schiller's thinking leads him, in other words, is to envision a person to whom no aspect of the world is a foreign place, but who can engage in the wide spectrum of human activities and the wide diversity of human types with the grace and ease characteristic of play.

It is this ideal, this unique combination of mind and body, which is most characteristic of Schiller's "eigentümliches Denken" and is the result of his long standing attempt to overcome philosophical dualism. With this project, however, Schiller abandons the Kantian moral framework and instead pavs the way for existentialism, a line of influence that will run from Humboldt to Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. In order to make this point I will now turn to an analysis of letters 11-16.

i. Schiller's argument for the ideal of humanity: letters 11-16

At the start of the 11th letter, Schiller shifts from describing how art can be used to cultivate an awareness of moral freedom and turns to an analysis of the basic components of the human being. These components are familiar to us from his pre-Kantian writings as the cognitive and the sensible side of the human being and have only changed clothes to take on something of a more Kantian look. Schiller calls the self-identical part of the human being the person (*die Person*), while that part always subject to change he calls the condition (*der Zustand*). The person, which Schiller connects with the "eternally persisting I" (*ewig beharrenden ICH*), is essentially Schiller's term for the cognitive aspect of the human being.[277] While the person does denote a multiplicity of different types of mental functions, they are all representative of reason

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[277] Ibid., 75.

in some manner, and most importantly, they provide form and structure to that which would otherwise be an unorganized flow of raw sense date.

As opposed to the eternally persisting person, the condition, for Schiller, is the grounding concept of everything in the human being that is associated with change and flow. Sensations in their fleeting temporality, emotions and whims, desires off the body and the striving for pleasure are all grounded in the concept of the condition. In essence, Schiller associates the condition with anything that can be seen as coming from the realm of nature. Sex, drugs, drink, laughter, enjoyment, anything which can be associated with bodily existence, the spontaneous non-reflection of temporal passing is associated with the condition. The condition is, therefore the "something in him which changes in time, on the path of the perceptions. This material which is changing in him." [etwas in ihm Wechselndes in der Zeit, auf dem Wege der Wahrnehmungen. Diesen in ihm weschelnden Stoff].[278] Schiller, in other words, argues that the human being consists of two tendencies: Mind and body/the finite and the infinite.

Schiller's next move is to argue that in order to think the concept human being (*der Mensch*), one cannot think of these two concepts as existing separately, but one must think them together, as synthesized and embodied in a single entity. The human being is quite simply the unity of these concepts, a concept whose essence consists in more than either of its two parts thought separately. Schiller writes,

> For man is not just Person pure and simple, but Person situated in a particular Condition. Every Condition, however, every determinate existence, has its origins in time; and so man, as a phenomenal being, must also have a beginning, although the pure Intelligence within him is eternal. Without time, that is to say, without becoming, he would never be a determinate being; his Personality would indeed

[278] Ibid., 76, my trans.

> exist potentially, but not in fact. It is only through the succession of its perceptions that the enduring 'I' ever becomes aware of itself as phenomenon.
>
> der Mensch ist nicht bloss Person überhaupt, sondern Person, die sich in einem bestimmten Zustand befindet. Aller Zustand aber, alles bestimmte Dasein entsteht in der Zeit, und so muss also der Mensch, als Phänomen, einen Anfang nehmen, obgleich die reine Intelligenz in ihm ewig ist. Ohne die Zeit, das heisst, ohne es zu werden, würde er nie ein bestimmtes Wesen sein; seine Persönlichket würde zwar in der Anlage, aber nicht in der Tat existerien.[279]

Without the condition and its supply of temporal and physical material the person would be nothing but sheer capacity for existence. Without the person the condition would be nothing but a constant flow of raw data in time. The human being however, is neither of these but the unique synthesis of these two component parts. Both condition and person, in other words, are essential properties of the human.

In claiming that both the person and the condition are essential properties of the human we again see how Schiller, though admitting that there are two parts of the human being, nonetheless, insists that both components are essential to the unique nature of phenomenal human existence. In doing so Schiller again plants himself against the tradition of Cartesianism and a tradition of moral philosophy that subordinates the body to the mind that goes back to at least Plato's *Phaedo*. For Schiller, even in his post-Kantian years, it is simply not the case that the human is hierarchically organized with the body subordinated to the mind. Rather, the essence of the human being is not exhausted in the concept of the person. The human being, for Schiller, is a synthesis and necessarily a combination of mind and body, the finite and the infinite, the rational and the material. In other words, an embodied being.

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[279] Ibid., 75.

Schiller doubles down on this point as he introduces the term *existence*, as technical term used to designate the type of being that is unique to the human being. He writes: "Only inasmuch as he changes does he *exist;* only inasmuch remains unchangeable does he exist. Man, imagined in his perfection, would therefore be the constant unity which remains eternally itself amidst the floods of change." [nur indem er sich verändert, *existiert er*; nur indem er unveränderlich bleibt, existiert er. Der Mensch, vorgestellt in seiner Vollendung, wäre demnach die beharrliche Einheit, die in den Fludeen der Veränderung ewig dieselbe bleibt].[280] The human *exists* only insofar as she is a synthesis of the seemingly contradictory parts, always changing while simultaneously remaining the same. Existence, for Schiller, refers to the specific type of thing that we are and the way in which we are and opened to these possibilities through the capacity for reflecting on our material embeddedness. Rocks, for example, do not exist. They are in some way, but because they are not a synthesis. Because they cannot reflect on their embodied being, they cannot be said to exist. So too with plants and animals. Though both plants and animals possess psychic powers, they cannot reflect, and, therefore neither animals nor plants *exist* in Schiller's technical sense. They are not susceptible to change, aware of the constancy of their own temporality.

Having established the two components of the human, Schiller then argues that each part of the human being is governed by its own law, what he calls the, "two fundamental laws of his sensuo-rational nature." [Fundamentalgesetze der sinnlich vernünftigen Natur].[281] Each law, furthermore, places a different demand (*Anforderung*) on the human being. On the one hand, the human is subject to the law of reality, which demands that she should pursue and expand

[280] Ibid., 75.
[281] Ibid., 77.

everything that is temporal, fleeting, associated with the body, in short, pursue the spontaneity of non-reflective pleasure. While on the other, the human is subject to the law of formality, which demands the inverse, that for everything that she does, she is capable of giving a reason, that is, an answer which will stand the test of time, serving as a law not just for the individual, but for every rational being.[282]

The human is, therefore, placed in the grips of a paradox, a dual task (*doppelten Aufgabe*) which seems impossible to fulfill. She is placed under the jurisdiction of two competing laws, each of which she is constitutionally obligated to satisfy. Schiller calls this necessity of striving to satisfy something that is grouonded in one's essential nature a drive (*Trieb*). Thus, the human being Schiller tells us, has two drives, corresponding to the features of the self:

> Towards the accomplishment of this twofold task—of giving reality to the necessity *within*, and subjecting to the law of necessity the reality *without*—we are impelled by two opposing forces which, since they drive us to the realization of their object, may aptly be termed drives.
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> zur Erfülling dieser doppelten Aufgabe, das Notwendige *in uns* zur Wirklichkeit zu bringen und das Wirkliche *ausser uns* dem Gesetz der Notwendigkeit zu unterwerfen, werden wir durch zwei entgegengesetzte Kräfte gedrungen, die man, weil sie uns antreiben, ihr Objekt zu verwirklichen, ganz schicklich Triebe nennt.[283]

Each drive, Schiller argues, demands that the human act upon those objects that satisfy that law of the sensual-rational nature towards which it strives. That drive, which satisfies the demand to turn everything into matter, Schiller calls the material or the sense drive (*Stofftrieb* or *sinnlichentrieb*), while that drive, which strives to turn everything into form, Schiller calls the form drive (*Formtrieb*). In essence, Schiller is arguing that the human being is subject to two

[282] Ibid., 77-78.
[283] Ibid., 79.

very different types of demands. On the one hand, the human is a physical being, subject to emotions, desires, and stimuli, all of which change over time. The sense drive is thus that drive which compels the human to act upon objects that satisfy her sensual nature. On the other hand, and to an equal extent, the human being also possesses a drive to bring order into the material world as well as to structure her thoughts and impulses according to universal and formal laws. Not only does this drive demand that the individual seek knowledge but it demands that she act according to universal principles that guide ethical behavior, bringing the chaos of time and sense under the formal unity of a law. It is this drive towards organization, knowledge, law, and coherence, which Schiller is referring to when he speaks of the form drive. As sensuous-rational beings, Schiller argues, we are subject to both of the laws and it is demanded of us that we satisfy both.

While Schiller's analysis of the human as part sensual and part rational is not particularly radical, Schiller's next step in describing the appropriate relation between the two is. The crucial point here is that for Schiller, neither of these drives can be neglected or suppressed. In practical terms, this means that the sense drive, for Schiller, *cannot* be subordinated to the form drive. Schiller adds in a footnote the crucial qualifier that while it may *appear* as if these two drives contradict each other, we cannot hold that position without sacrificing the idea that the human being can ever exist harmoniously with themselves. Schiller writes

> Once you postulate a primary, and therefore necessary, antagonism between these two drives, there is, of course, no other means of maintaining the unity in man than by unconditionally *subordinating* the sensuous to the rational. From this, however, only uniformity can ever result, n ever harmony, and man goes on for ever being divided
>
> Sobald man einen ursprüngliche, mithin notwendigen Antagonism beider Triebe behauptet, so ist freilich kein anderes Mittel, die Einheit im menschen zu erhalten, als dass man den sinnlichen Trieb dem vernünftigen unbedingt *unterordnet*.

> Daraus aber kann bloss Einförmigkeit, aber keine Harmonie entstehen, und der Mensch bleibt noch ewig for geteilt.[284]

The subordination of one drive under the other, Schiller tells us, amounts to the neglect of an essential aspect of the self. It is by neglecting either drive that the human can fail to hit the mark and thereby "miss their destiny".[285] It is for this reason that subordinating one drive under another can only ever amount to uniformity and not harmony. It is possible either for the form drive to dominate and suppress the material drive, encroaching on the areas of sense or for the material drive to dominate and suppress the form drive, encroaching on the areas of reason.[286] In case A, a person will suffer from a lack of sensual appreciation, depreciating the things associated with their material and sensual existence, whereas in case B, such a person will neglect their rational capacity, allowing themselves to appreciate their sensual and material natures too much. Either way, a human being can never be fully human, for Schiller, in the sense of a living synthesis, if she subordinates one drive under another. This leaves us with an obvious question: How can the human being possibly satisfy both of these conflicting drives?

Yet, before we move to Schiller's resolution of this paradox, it is important to note that we have already moved beyond the realm of moral philosophy as it was practiced from Plato to Kant. The reason is quite simple, the mind is the only part of the human being capable of *knowing* the morally good and *directing* the will towards the morally good. If the body is a help in this equation, then it is only because the body has been trained by the mind to habitually move towards the good. However, in claiming that the rational drive cannot be subordinated the sensual drive, Schiller alters this paradigm. It is here that one can see that Schiller is dealing with

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[284] Ibid., 88.
[285] Ibid., 89.
[286] See Ibid., 89.

is not merely a moral problem but is dealing with problems of psychology and alienation. By placing both drives on an equal level Schiller has taken virtue out of the realm of the moral and the cognitive. The rational, contra Kant and contra Fichte, is *not* the highest, but only an aspect of the human being that has to be cultivated amongst all the others. Rather, Schiller is suggesting that the goods of the world must be cultivated and engaged in to an equal extent. Yet how can this happen if the rational mind is constantly striving to universalize everything that it does? How can the human act spontaneously in the moment if it must always justify itself? There must, in other words be a way for the rational mind to suspend itself without losing itself. Or, to put it in Kierkegaardian language: Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical? Schiller's answer to this question will be play.

ii. Play and Beauty as the Ideal of Humanity

As we saw last section, Schiller staked out new philosophical territory by claiming that the concept of human being consists in the synthesis of two base components, both of which have need to be satisfied if the human is to reach "the ideal of humanity". And while this was a new and original move, it did put Schiller in something of a tricky position. If the human being possesses two drives that motivate in countervailing directions, the one towards form and the other matter, then won't the human being remain eternally split, always forced in competing and incompatible directions? Schiller, in other words, needs to explain how his suggestion that both drives must be of respected equally doesn't simply result in eternal tension and chaos within the subject.

In letter 15, in an argument that is astonishingly similar to the argument that he made for the existence of the *Mittelkraft* in his first medical dissertation, Schiller addresses exactly this issue. Just as he did in his first medical dissertation, Schiller argues that if the human being is capable of attaining to virtue, then there must be something that mediates between the two components of our existence, which justifies us in positing a state in which these two drives no longer contradict one another, but relate in harmony.[287] The result of this necessary synthesis is a state which Schiller describes as the *Spieltrieb*, or play drive.

Schiller develops this idea first by noting that most of the time, we are aware of a certain dissonance in ourselves and our own motivations. Our reason either necessitates us towards one thing (work, for example), while body does the same towards another (pleasure). The question of how we live life is, accordingly, often a question of how we negotiate these conflicting demands. There are certain moments, however, in which both drives focus on the same object with an equal amount of force (in sport, or the moment one sees a seeing a child after work, or an old friend after a long time apart). In such a moment, Schiller suggests that both drives spontaneously act together in a harmony. On such an occasion, Schiller claims, that a new motivating force would have to be 'awakened' (*aufgeweckt*), in the human being, which would have the right to be called a drive. Schiller calls this force the *Spieltrieb* or play drive. He writes,

> Assuming that cases like this occur in experience, they would awaken in him a new drive which, precisely because the other two drives co-operate within it, would be opposed to each of them considered separately and could justifiably count as a new drive…That drive, therefore, in which both the others work in concert…therefore would be directed towards annulling time *within time*, reconciling becoming with absolute being and change with identity.

[287] Schiller is using a particular Fichtean argument here about how seemingly contradictory principles can be reconciled. See *Wissenschaftslehre*, the synthesis between ss1 and ss2. Fichte's analyses, of course, are always correct.

> so würden sie einen neuen Trieb in ihm aufwecken, der eben darum, weil die beiden andern in ihm zusammenwirken…mit Recht für einen neuen Trieb gelten…. Derjenige Trieb, in welchem beide verbunden wirken…der spieltrieb…würde dahin gerichtet sein, die Zeit in der Zeit aufzuheben, Werden mit absolutem Sein, Veränderung mit Identität zu vereinbaren.[288]

Schiller's reasoning runs as follows: When the human being acts, motivated by both drives simultaneously, this activity can no longer rightfully be called an activity of either the form or of the sense drive. Since, however, those drives are, for Schiller, the sole motivating capacities, then everything, which is done when the two drives are operating in unison, must be described in a different way. For this reason, the *experience* of play, thereby justifies the positing of a third drive that is 'awakened' when the two drives exert equal motivational pressure on the same object.

Whereas Schiller introduces the *Spieltrieb* as a formal criterion or *how* we, as embodied beings, should act, his next move is to show that this formal criteria can also be expanded to serve as a normative goal for individuals' lives and even cultures. This is valid, Schiller argues, because it the very nature of a drive to strive to eternity, never ceasing with one object, but acting as a motivating ground for new objects. Thus it lies in the very nature of a drive to expand, gain as much ground and obtain as many objects as possible. The result of the eternal striving of the mutually competing drives is the idea of perfection,

> Since the world is extension in time, i.e., change, the perfection of that faculty which connects man with the world will have to consist in maximum changeability and maximum extensity. Since the Person is persistence within change, the perfection of that faculty which is to oppose change will have to be maximum autonomy and maximum intensity.
>
> Da die Welt ein Ausgedehntes in der Zeit, Veränderung, ist, so wird die Vollkommeheit desjenigen Vermögens, welches den Menschen mit der Welt in

[288] Ibid., 97.

> Verbindung setzt, grösstmöglichste Veränderung und Extensität sein müssen. Da die Person das Bestehende in der Veränderung ist, so wird die Vollkommenheit desjenigen Vermögens, welches sich dem Wechsel engegensetzen soll, grösstmöglichte Selbstständigkeit und Intensität sein müssen.[289]

For the ideal of the human to be reached it is not only the case that an act has to be done in the appropriate way, namely in play, but it is also the case that the drives in question have had to expand each to their greatest possible capacity. While Schiller's language is abstract, his meaning is really quite clear. The human being has to engage in and test out as many areas of human existence as possible while simultaneously expand their mental capacities to become as smart (or rational, in Kantian terms) as their natural capacities may allow. The result is that the ideal human being will be able to engage in as many aspects of human life while being able to explain why they do so possible and do so with the ease of play. To put this into concrete terms, the ideal human being, for Schiller, will be just as at home discussing theory in the intellectual cafés of Paris as they are dancing line in a barn in Texas or raving in a club in Berlin. Schiller's ideal human being must be equally capable of advanced moral reasoning as they are in engaging in the spontaneity of the erotic. This ideal demands the capacity to engage in all the aspects of human life, both in the sensual and the intellectual dimensions, and do so with the ease of someone who is not being forced, is not alienated, but is at play.

From this, what is clear is that what is at stake for Schiller is less a set of moral demands than the cultivation of a character, a form of the art of living.[290] This person must be characterized by a psychological disposition unalienated both from herself and from the world in which she exists. Schiller's argument also establishes the criteria and the grounds for

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[289] Ibid., 89.

[290] See Nehamas' wonderful book for a discussion of the art of living. Nehamas, Alexander. *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault.* Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998.

determining who such a person would be. This person would be flexible enough to be able engage in such a wide range of human activities with diverse sets of human beings, and be able, in each case, to articulate how, as Hegel puts it, “the real is the rational”. The ultimate expansion of the form and the sense drive would allow a person to grasp the deepest reasons for why things are, while simultaneously embracing the often irrational, ad hoc aspects of spontaneous, embodied being.

Yet to say this is not to say that anything goes. It is a key feature of the *Spieltrieb* that the form and the sense drive are in harmonious balance. So too, will the ideal human have to cultivate a personality characterized by harmony and beauty. Within this context, it is possible to go too far off in one direction. It is possible to believe that one is simply expanding one’s sense drive and realize that one has become a sophisticated esthete. As the sublation of the rational into the aesthetic suggests, there is no set guide for the creation of such a life. For Schiller, each individual will have to strive to balance themselves to become the sort of person whose actions are defined by the joy and ease play and whose life, on the whole, is characterized by a harmony and beauty. That is no small task and one which will involve a reconciliation of self and world. As long as one is raging against the world, constantly criticizing that the world is not as it is in its ideal, this person will be determined by their form drive, their desire to transform material into an eternal law. Yet as long as one does not know how and why the world as it is has failed, then that person will be define by the opposite fault, an overdetermination by the world of sense, a losing of oneself in the world.

It is for this reason that Schiller also believes that the *Spieltrieb* creates a type of norm not only for individuals but for cultures. His critique of capitalism is rooted in just this idea. Advanced capitalism splinters human life by driving individuals towards economic and social

specialization, organizing human beings into class and race-based stratification which makes it specifically unsuited to cultivating the ideal of humanity.[291] The emphasis in our culture on certain intellectual activities, STEM, finance, medicine, is symptomatic of an imbalance, for Schiller, since the society fails at the basic task of providing citizens with the skills necessary to understand and appreciate harmony and wholeness. The same criticism would apply to any devaluation of manual labor. Thus Schiller writes that is the job of culture to watch over the drives and create institutions that allow humans to expand themselves as they see fit: "To watch over these and secure for each of these two drives its proper frontiers is the task of culture, which is, therefore, in duty bound to do justice to both drives equally" [über diese zu wachen und einem jeden dieser beiden Triebe seine Grenze zu sichern, ist ist die Aufgabe der *Kultur*, die also beiden eine gleichen Gerechtigkeit schuldig ist].[292] It is the task of a culture and its institutions to provide the possibility of an individual cultivating their personality in all its manifold different directions.

What should be clear by now is the fact that Schiller is not proposing that sensibility be added as an addendum to the operations of practical reason. The ideal human has to cultivate all of their capacities in order to increase the scope of their world and their understanding. The elimination of limitation and an ability to live at ease in the world are central to this conception. The goal is to be able to experience and enjoy human existence in its multifarious appearances, expanding one's capacity and skills in all of the directions available to the human. As Schiller writes, "The forme facets his Receptivity develops, the more labile it is, and thee more surface it pesents to henomena, so much more world does man *apprehend*…The more power and depth the

[291] See Schiller's famous letter 6 in the *Aesthetic Education*.
[292] Ibid., 86-87.

Personality achieves, and the more freedom and reason attains, so much more does man *comprehend*, and all the more form does he create outside himself" [desto mehr Welt *ergreift* der Mensch, desto mehr Anlagen entwickelt er in sich…je mehr Freiheit die Vernunft gewinnt, desto mehr Welt *begreift* der Mensch, esto mehr Form schafft er ausser sich].[293] The result of Schiller's investigation is the expansion of the life world of the human being and the ease with which that human can engage within their world. The ideal human has worked to expand their boundaries by developing all of their capacities. They do not do this, however, not blindly, but thoughtfully aware of themselves, capable of giving an answer to the question of why.

Schiller is able to develop this broader understanding of the human being, because Schiller takes a different position than Kant with respect to questions of metaphysics and the dualisms that dominated that discourse. Schiller, in other words, can develop this position only because of his views on nature and the philosophical ability to value the natural/sensible in and of itself. Kant cannot possibly hold the position that the development of all of one's capacities is valuable in itself, because only the moral imperative, for Kant, can be the source of value. While one can say that one must cultivate one's character so as to be more moral, this is simply not Schiller's position. From his very first writings, Schiller has always combined pleasure with virtue and conceived of them as necessarily intermingled. In letters 11-16 of the *Ästhetische Briefe*, Schiller returns to this position, reformulating his position in a more sophisticated anthropology of the subject. In the case of the highest virtue, the natural and the rational, the pleasurable and the intellectual must be combined in one great harmony. Schiller, unlike Kant,

[293] Ibid., 87.

gives the natural a value in and of itself and it is precisely this change in relation to nature that allows him to do it.

III. Conclusion

Following the hint of Wilhelm von Humboldt, I have sought to investigate what exactly it was that Humboldt suggested was "unique" about Schiller's thought and what would have revealed itself with or without his engagement with Kant. I pursued this path by trying to show that there was a unity between Schiller's pre-Kantian theoretical works and the letters 11-16 in the *Ästhetische Briefe*. In no way have I attempted to deny that Schiller was not heavily indebted to Kant and that he does not deserve his reputation –in a good way--as the poet of Kantian freedom. My goal, rather, has been to suggest that there is another strain of Schiller's thought that is unique to him, distinctly un-Kantian, and presents a much different vision of the human being and their cognitive and moral activity than Kant.

I have argued that Schiller's "unique" idea is the unity of the human being within the the reconciliation of freedom and nature. It is the ideal of unity and harmony, for Schiller, which must be assumed if we embodied beings are going to be capable of living a full and complete life. This idea was of paradigm setting importance both ethically and ontologically, for Hölderlin, Humboldt, Schelling, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. All to pursue it in very different ways. The strategy that Schiller takes in arguing for this unity, I have argued, was essentially the same in the *Ästhetische Briefe* as it was in his first Medical Dissertation: if the human being is going to be able to become truly virtuous and be capable of living a truly flourishing life, then we must operate off the assumption that freedom and nature are reconcilable at the deepest

ontological level and use that assumption to help us structure our practical lives. Central to this assumption is a re-orientation regarding the scope and nature of practical reason. Far from thinking that the human can establish an indubitable goal with a formula capable of guiding our actions, as Kant tried and succeeded in doing, Schiller's human being must throw themselves into experience, always testing and attempting to expand the boundaries of their lives, but doing so recognizing their fundamental finitude and fallibility.

CHAPTER FOUR

Historicism, Anthropology, and Goethe's Idea of World Literature

This last chapter will investigate the way in which the vitalist and naturalist movement that we have been tracing through this dissertation impacted the world view of the figure who is supposed to be the most notorious and steadfast classicist of the time, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. This belief rests on Goethe's supposed commitment to what are taken, for Goethe to be the two universal princinples that are the central tenants of Weimar Classicism: a belief that aesthetics of classical antiquity represent a timeless and universal standard; and a desire to unify this standard with modern, Kantian autonomy and moral philosophy. The combination of these two principles is often cited as the creation of the classicist program of aesthetic autonomy.[294] Works of art, for the classicists, stand as autonomous structures, there to educate humanity and raise them up to a higher, more universal goal.[295]

Nowhere is Goethe's supposedly lifelong commitment to universal humanism suppoused to be more apparent than in the late Goethe's call for the development of a World Literature (*Weltliteratur*). Goethe famously initiated this project in the famous proclamation to Eckermann on January 31, 1827 when he said that: "National literature doesn't mean much anymore, the

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[294] This combination of the Greeks and Kant in the creation of an "idealized humanity" is a central thesis of much of the scholarship on Weimar Classicism of the last 20 years. See for example, Klaus L. Berghahn's, "From Classicist to Classical Literary Criticism, in *A History of German Literary Criticism*, ed., by Peter Uwe Hohendahl (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1988) pp., 83-88; Reed,T.J "Weimar Classicism, Goethe's Alliance with Schiller" in *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, ed., by Lesley Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) pp., 101-115; and Cyrus Hamlin "What do we mean by 'Weimar Classicism'" in *Weimar Classicism: Studies In Goethe, Schiller, Forster Berlepsch, Wieland, Herder, Schneider* ed., David Gallagher (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), vi.

[295] For a discussion of this classical ideal and its precarious relation to Adorno see, Hohendahl, Peter Uwe. *The Fleeting Promise of Art: Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Revisited.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013.

epoch of world literature is upon is and everyone must do what they can to advance it." [National-Literatur will jetzt nicht viel sagen, die Epoche der Welt-Literatur ist an der Zeit und jeder muss jetzt dazu wirken, diese Epoche zu beschleunigen].[296] Though ambiguous, this proclamation is often understood as an extension of Goethe's humanist universalism and connected to the broader project of European Enlightenment as a whole. This connection has recently by Jeremy Adler, arguing that that the extraordinary resonance that Goethe's concept of Weltliteratur was able to find is intimately connected to "that epochal thought system…that we call the Enlightnement" [jenes epochalen Gedankensystems...das wir Aufklärung nennen].[297] For Adler, Goethe's pronouncement is, "of eminent political importance" von eminent politischer Bedeutung" and should be understood within the European context just after the Napoleonic Wars. With the various European nations isolated and alienated from one another, the circulation of literatures across national and cultural borders could encourage greater mutual understanding by fostering a sense of what transcends national borders and instead, "belongs to all of humanity" [der ganzen Menscheit angehört].[298] The purpose of Goethe's project of Weltliteratur was thus aimed at the standard political end of the Enlightenment, namely, the creation of a globally interconnected society governed by "the principles of humanity and the universality of morality" [den Prinzipien der Humanität und der universellen Moral].[299]

This connection of *Weltliteratur* to universal humanism and the political goals of the Enlightenment has significantly shaped interpretations of not only of Goethe's understanding of

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[296] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, "Gespräche mit Eckermann", in *Sämtliche Werke nache Epochen seines Schaffens: Münchner Ausgabe, Bd. 19*, ed., by Karl Richter. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1986, pp., 206.
[297] Adler, Jeremy. "Der freie Warenhandel und der freie Tausch von Ideen sind Verbündete im Geist." Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 27 August 2017, www.nzz.ch. Accessed 28 August 2017.
[298] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang "Einwirkung der Neueren Philosophie" in *Werke Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden, Band 12*., pp., 362..
[299] Adler.

world literature, but also reinforced the standard interpretive story of Goethe as the classical humanist *par excellence*. Conceived of as part of the humanist project of Enlightenment, the Goethean lineage of *Weltliteratur* is largely taken to consist in the call to create and circulate a network of representative texts intended to be read in translation beyond their national, cultural, and linguistic borders. And while this lineage is often praised on very Goethean grounds for its ability to "challenge our unquestioned assumptions, and promote dialogue and understanding across cultures",[300] it has also been frequently criticized for harboring implicit Eurocentrism on account of its systematic and economic naivete or its lack of attention to problems of the "Untransatable".[301]

An extremely clear articulation of the lingering sense that Goethe was a committed classicist his life long has been made recently by Theo D'haen in the *Routledge Companion to World Literature*. There D'haen connects these threads, arguing that Goethe's understanding of *Weltliterature* is intricately connected to his Universal Humanism and hence, to standard interpretations of Enlightenment and Classicism:

> From the very beginning, for Goethe, *Weltliteratur* and Humanism were closely linked. *Weltliteratur* was to fulfill the role that his own trip to Italy, and his exposure there to the revitalizing influence of classical antiquity, had played for him: to elevate the humanist individual [...] to a higher awareness of what humanity was about, a form of both personal and collective Bildung.[302]

[300] Damrosch, David. *How to Read World Literature.* Second edition. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2018, pp., 2.

[301] For these criticisms see, Moretti, Franco. "Conjectures on World Literature." New Left Review, vol. 1, no. 1, 2000, pp. 54–68, here 55. Apter, Emily S. *Against World Literature: on the Politics of Untranslatability.* London: Verso, 2013. Apter thinks that the naïve circulation of texts in world literature tends to locate cultures and literatures within a universal rubric, thereby tending toward a "reflexive endorsement of cultural equivalence and substitutability", pp., 2

[302] Haen, Theo d'., David. Damrosch, and Djelal. Kadir, eds. *The Routledge Companion to World Literature.* Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012, pp., 33.

If, D'haen, as argues, the moral and political purpose of Goethe's proclamation of *Weltliteratur* is to prepare citizens and societies to become members of a global society governed by the principles of Enlightenment reason, then it is not surprising that Goethe's *Weltliteratur* and its legacy are accused of flattening out cultural difference and ignoring the untranslatable. As D'haen characterizes it, Goethe's humanist project is Platonic in structure. It aims to elevate individual and society above national and historical particularities and toward the universally human, which, in the discourse of Weimar Classicism, meant the ethical laws of reason as understood by Kant. On this interpretation, Goethe's proclamation of *Weltliteratur* is intended as part of a progressive model of ascension from the particular to the universal goals established for humankind. According to this interpretation, Goethe is and should be considered a main target of all universalist critiques of Enlightenment.

It seems to me, however, that this interpretation fails to take into account precisely the context of vitalism, the way in which vitalism offered an alternative path for conceiving of the human being, and the effect of this vitalist discourse on Goethe. My goal in this chapter will be to re-examine this relationship between Goethe's understanding of the term *Weltliterature* and universal humanis and, as a consequence, his suppousedly lifelong commitment to classicism. I will do so by tracking the influence of this naturalist movement on Goethe's thinking and the development of his world view. This will involve situating his use of the term and the logic of his Classical period within the debates around 1800 that we have been tracing, which lie at the intersection of the philosophy of history, aesthetics, and the discourse of anthropology.

In short, I will argue that Goethe's use of the term *Weltliteratur* cannot be easily assimilated into his project of universal humanism because the late Goethe had grown skeptical of idealist views that reason could establish universal claims in morality, history, and aesthetics

and with it, he had become skeptical off the foundations of the "grand narrative" of Weimar Classicism itself. Instead, I will argue that Goethe, following Herder, came to view reason in empirical and anthropological terms as bound and shaped by language. The result of this shift is an awareness that aesthetic and moral judgments cannot be seen as absolute, but must always be understood out of embedded linguistic, cultural, and historical horizons that are never fully coextensive. In other words, when coining the term *Weltliteratur*, Goethe had shifted away from his previous idealist position and was in the process of developing a naturalist theory of subjectivity complete with an anthropological method that was interested first and foremost in understanding the local, historical, and linguistic contexts that shape literatures and cultures.

I will argue for this claim first, by examining a shift in Goethe's later historical thinking away from a neoclassical understanding of history and aesthetics and toward what I understand as a proto-historicism. I will then argue that this historical shift is itself rooted in the ongoing development of Goethe's vitalist, Spinozistic philosophy of nature and its correspondent naturalist understanding of the human being. Following Herder, I will argue that Goethe came to view the human as integrated into an open-ended and historically evolving nature. Like other organisms, Goethe saw the human being as wrapped up in a process of formation and transformation in which its linguistic and cognitive capacities stand in mutual co-determination (*Wechselwirkung*) with their environment, both shaped by it while also continuing to shape it. Consistent with his naturalistic thinking, Goethe also conceived of literature as a natural product and hence as conditioned by and reflective of the specific "world" in which it was produced.

Counter to the standard humanist interpretation of *Weltliteratur*, Goethe's anthropological project sought to understand literatures, cultures, and individuals in their uniqueness as emerging and entangled in specific histories, geographies, and languages with their

own meaning structures and standards that cannot be applied universally. Thinking about the untranslatable aspects of language and culture is, in other words, part and parcel of Goethe's anthropological project. This is not to say that Goethe abandoned any form of humanism or the Enlightenment project defined more broadly. Rather, for the late Goethe, the model has changed from a universal humanism that seeks to ascend toward a singular, universal goal prescribed by reason, to what Leo Kreutzer has called a dialectical as opposed to a universal humanism, one less concerned with ascension and more concerned with "mutual inquiry and ascension" [gegenseitigen Erkundung und >Steigerung<].[303] Attending to this anthropological theory can not only help us reassess the humanist interpretation of Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, but can also provide a historical model for thinking about cultural exchange that is valuable for current debates on world literature today.

I. Goethes Classicism and its Overcoming

Following his return from Italy and during his decade long friendship with Schiller, it is generally admitted that Goethe was committed to the idea that aesthetic products could be grounded in a universal capacity of the human soul and judged according to a single, ahistorical standard. This tendency toward aesthetic universalism is usually seen as part of the larger moral and metaphysical project of Weimar Classicism, largely outlined by Schiller and based on two pillars: first, the idealization of the classical Greeks as naive yet normative exemplars of

[303] Kreutzer, Leo, *Dialektischer Humanismus: Herder und Goethe Und Die Kultur(En) Der Globalisierten Welt* (Hannover: Wehrhahn Verlag, 2015), pp., 31.

humanity and, second, the possibility of rediscovering this ideal of harmonious unity with the help of the critical philosophy of Kant and the program of aesthetic autonomy.[304]

This aesthetic-metaphysical project is perhaps most programmatically and succinctly summed up in the section of Goethe's "Sketches" (*Skizzen*) published in *Winkelmann and his Century* (*Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert*) in a section entitled "Ancient' (*Antikes*). There, while discussing the various merits of the moderns and the ancients, Goethe writes:

> The human can accomplish quite a bit through the purposive use of individual powers, he can accomplish the extraordinary through the combination of many capacity, but he can accomplish the sole, completely unexpected only when the totality of his characteristics unite harmoniously in him. This, was the fortunate fate of the ancients, and especially the Greeks in their best time, we moderns are directed by the first two.
>
> If the healthy nature of the human functions as a whole, if the world were to feel itself as if in a great, beautiful, worthy and valuable totality, if the harmonious contentment allowed him a pure and free pleasure—then, the universe, if it could feel itself, would feel as if it had arrived at its own goal and would marvel at the pinnacle of its own become and essence.[305]
>
> Der Mensch vermag gar manches durch zweckmäßigen Gebrauch einzelner Kräfte, er vermag das Außerordentliche durch Verbindung mehrerer Fähigkeiten, aber das Einzige ganz Unerwartete leistet er nur, wenn sich die sämtlichen Eigenschaften gleichmäßig in ihm vereinigen. Das letzte war das glückliche Los der Alten, besonders der Griechen in ihrer besten Zeit; auf die beiden ersten sind wir Neuern vom Schicksal angewiesen.
>
> Wenn die gesunde Natur des Menschen als ein Ganzes wirkt, wenn er sich in der Welt als in einem großen schönen, würdigen und werten Ganzen fühlt, wenn das harmonische Behagen ihm ein reines, freies Entzücken gewährt— dann würde das Weltall, wenn es sich selbst empfinden könnte, als an sein Ziel gelangt aufjauchzen und den Gipfel des eigenen Werdens und Wesens bewundern.

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[304] See Berghahn 88; Reed, 115.

[305] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Winckelmann und Sein Jahrhundert: in Briefen und Aufsätzen*, ed. by Helmut Holtzhauer. Leipzig: VEB Seemann Verlag, 1969,, pp., 210. Henceforth: "Winckelmann". My trans.

In this passage, Goethe touches on both pillars of Weimar Classicism. On the one hand, he identifies the aim and purpose of nature and history as the harmonious unity of the faculties with the Greeks serving as the symbols of this idealized humanity. This harmony, however, cannot so much be considered an achievement as it was their "fortunate fate" (*glückliche Los*), the product of a naïve historical destiny that enabled the Greeks to reach the pinnacle of humanity. However, modernity, Goethe tells us, suffers from a much different fate than antiquity. Following Schiller, Goethe here reiterates the famous critique that modernity is characterized by precisely a sense of alienation: an awareness of a lack of wholeness and a loss of unity between subject and object, brought about by the fracturing of society into areas of economic specialization, and the fracturing of philosophy into the dichotomies of reason and sense, noumena and phenomena. Thus, Goethe identifies the second pillar of Weimar Classicism as the restoration of this wholeness through the reunification of those aspects of human existence that had been separated in modernity, yet on a dialectically higher level. On this interpretation, the human distilled and unified in its harmonious totality as symbolized by the Greeks, but now under the authority of rational autonomy, stands as the goal, the "peak" (*Gipfel*) of becoming and essence or, in Hegel's terms, the self- realization of God in nature and history. According to this story, history and nature possess an intelligible arc and are organized by reference to a universal goal. The Greeks symbolize that goal, which it is now the task of Bildung to achieve.

As described, the project of Weimar Classicism clearly lands on one side of what John Zammito calls the historiographical debate around 1800 and is more or less congruent with the great projects of universal history (*Universalgeschichte*) such as those of Kant, Fichte, and

especially Hegel.[306] Goethe's coinage of the term *Weltliteratur*, however, coincides with a larger movement in the later third of his life away from a classicist, teleological, or transcendental understanding of aesthetics and history and toward a historicist conception of both.[307] Indeed, against the traditional interpretation, which typically reads *Winckelmann and his Century* (1805) as a continuation of Goethe's classical program, Volker Riedel has argued that precisely this text should be considered the threshold text representing Goethe's movement away from a classicist to a post- classicist period characterized primarily by historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*).[308]

This historicizing tendency can be seen most prominently in two aspects of the text: the historicization of Winckelmann the individual and that of his work. Contra Goethe's most programmatic classicist projects, *The Propylaea* (*Die Propyläen*) (1798– 1800) and the *Weimar prizes in Painting* (*Weimarer Preisaufgaben*) (1799–1805), which represent serious and even coercive attempts to shape contemporary art production according to a Winckelmannian neo-classicist model, Goethe's focus, in *Winckelmann and his Century* shifts away from programmatic concerns and toward biographical ones. Goethe, in other words, no longer focuses on the programmatic claim that products of antiquity should be taken as aesthetically normative. Instead, Goethe's purpose is to introduce Winckelmann to the reader on a personal level by

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[306] According to John Zammito in, "Herder and Historical Metanarrative : What is Philosophical about History?" in ed., Hans Adler and Wulf Koepke, *A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder*. Rochester: Camden House, 2009 pp., 65-93, this debate was between the proponents of *Universalgeschichte* and proto-historicists who attempted to write "particular histories", Herder central among them. The central disagreement between these camps concerned the status of an end, goal, or aim of history and hence a location from which nations and "epochs can be compared, ranked, and evaluated" according to a scale of absolute progress (Zammito, 66).

[307] Nisbet, Hugh Barr, "Goethe und Herders Geschichtsdenken" in *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 110 (1993) 115-130, and Kuhn, Dorthea, "Geschichte begriffen als Beschreibung, als Biographie, und als Historie. Goethes Konzepte," in *Goethe und die Verzeitlichung der Natur*, ed., Peter Matussek, 44-58. München: C.H. Beck, 1998.

[308] Riedel, Volker, "Zwischen Klassizismus und Geschichtlichkeit Goethes Buch *Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert*" in the *International Journal of the Classical Tradition,* Vol. 13, No. 2, Fall 2006, pp. 217-242.

For the traditional reading, see, for example, Voßkamp, Wilhelm, Skizzen zu einer Schilderung Winckelmanns", *Goethe Handbuch Bd. 3*, ed., Andreas Bayer and Ernst Osterkamp. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996., pp., 612-619, who reads *Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert* as a,"klassizistischen Manifest" that continues, "das Programm und Konzepte der *Propyläen*", pp., 613.

producing a characterization or a small sketch of "Winckelmann and his character" as well as the "ways of thinking and conditions" (*Denkweise und Zustände*) that enabled his work.[309] In doing so, Matthew Bell has argued that Goethe's project is primarily "anthropological",[310] namely to engage in empirical psychology by providing a psychological-biographical portrait that enables the reader and posterity to understand how the son of a shoemaker from Stendal, the product of "a lowly childhood, insufficient education in his youth and disrupted, fractured studies in childhood" [eine niedrige Kindheit, unzulänglicher Unterricht in der Jugend, zerrissene, zerstreute Studien im Jünglingsalter],[311] was able to develop an aesthetic ideal and an understanding of the history of classical art for which his youthful environment had given him next to no preparation.

Goethe investigates this problem in a series of *Sketches* in which he sketches out not only the psychological characteristics such as his "Ancient nature" (*Antike Natur*) and "heathen sense" (*Heidnischen Sinn*) that particularly predisposed Winckelmann to a fondness for ancient art, but also the friendships with Mengs and Kardinal Albani, as well as the "coincidences" (*Glücksfälle*) that enabled Winckelmann to pursue his ideal and comprised the context in which his character was able to grow and develop. Goethe goes so far as to admit himself that, unusually for a scholar, he is not as much interested in what Winckelmann said, i.e. his work, but in how he said it:

> If, as is the case with many people and especially with scholars, that which they accomplish appears to be the primary thing and in doing so, their character reveals itself only marginally, then in the case of Winckelmann, the opposite is true, that all those things, which he accomplished, is primarily noteworthy and of vale, because in it, his character is revealed.

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[309] Goethe, Winckelmann, 209.
[310] Bell, Matthew, *Goethe's Naturalistic Anthropology: Man and Other Plants* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), pp., 269.
[311] Goethe, Wincklemann, 210.

> Wenn bei sehr vielen Menschen, besonders aber bei Gelehrten, dasjenige, was sie leisten, als die Hauptsache erscheint und der Character sich dabei wenig äußert, so tritt im Gegenteil bei Winckelmann der Fall ein, daß alles dasjenige, was er hervorbringt, hauptsächlich deswegen merkwürdig und schätzenswert ist, weil sein Character sich dabei offenbart.[312]

Whereas most scholars are interesting not on account of who they are, but because of the knowledge they produce, Goethe here suggests that the opposite is true of Winckelmann. Yet in emphasizing "Winckelmann's life (rather than his work)",[313] Goethe directly inverts Winckelmann's stated scholarly project and implicitly places the normativity of his aesthetic paradigm into question. Winckelmann's monumental historical project was built on the foundational belief that the systematic investigation into the origins and development of classical Greek art could yield a "doctrinal system" (*Lehrgebäude*) or "perfect rule for art" (*vollkommene Regel der Kunst*)" capable of establishing a neoclassical program.[314] This belief, in turn, was based on the conviction of the historical exceptionality of ancient Greek art. However, by focusing on Winckelmann the man rather than the *Lehrgebäude*, Goethe seems to question the very foundation upon which his and Winckelmann's neoclassical aesthetics are built.

These destabilizing features are further enhanced by an implicit intertextual reference. In sketching a psychological portrait of Winckelmann, Goethe models his monument (*Denkmal*) on the explicitly historicist model that Herder establishes in his *Monument to Johann Winckelmann* (*Denkmal Johann Winkelmanns*) (1777) and *On Thomas Abbts Writings* (Über Thomas Abbts Schriften) (1768). In the latter, Herder argues specifically that it is not the systematic knowledge

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[312] Goethe, Winckelmann, 227
[313] Bell, 277.
[314] Winckelmann, Johann Joachim, *Gedancken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Wercke in der Mahlerey und Bildhauer-Kunst*, ed., by Max Kunze. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2013, pp., 11.

of the honored individual that is to be highlighted in any *Denkmal*, but the specificity of their character and the uniqueness of the manner of thinking that is important. Using Francis Bacon as his example, Herder makes clear that the adaptation and acknowledgement of abstract propositions is not of primary importance to him: "what is important to me is not what Bacon thought; rather *how* he thought it". [daran liegt mir nicht, was Baco ausgedacht hat; sondern wie er dachte].[315] Like Herder, Goethe is not interested in capturing what Winckelmann thought but how he thought by presenting the contextualized, contingent psychological and historical conditions that helped shape his thinking. Yet the reason why contextualized knowledge or a grasp of the person's becoming is the goal of any *Denkmal* for Herder is because for him, all knowledge is historically rooted and contextually conditioned. By going back to Herder and framing Winckelmann and his work on antiquity within the process-oriented flow of history, Goethe destabilizes the normative exemplarity of Winckelmann's *Antikenbild*. It, like Winckelmann himself, must be understood as the product of a historically contingent and culturally situated process—as a product of Winckelmann's own historically rooted and creative genius.[316]

The historicist approach that Goethe adopts, perhaps even unconsciously, in his *Wincklemann and his Century* is taken up explicitly in the third, historical part of the *Theory of Color*, the *Materials to a History of the theory of Color* (*Farbenlehre, the Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre*) (1810). Here, as in *Winckelmann*, Goethe refuses to tell the history of Western science as it was typically told at the turn of the nineteenth century, on the model of a

[315] Herder, Johann Gottfried, *Werke in zehn Bänden*: *Band 2- Schriften zur Ästhetik und Literatur 1767-1781*, ed., Gunter E. Grimm. Frankfurt a.M: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1993, pp., 577.
[316] For a counter view see This is still a much debated topic. See Osterkamp, Ernst, *Gewalt und Gestalt: Die Antike im Spätwerk Goethes.* Basel: Schwabe Verlab, 2007,, pp., 14-15.

grand narrative, as if the history of science consists in a history of scientific progress. Instead, in the *Introduction*, Goethe reiterates the importance of the basic historicist insight that discoveries do not simply grasp truths but are context-dependent, reminding the reader, "how important it is to consider the author as a human" and suggesting that the history of science will read much differently when this historicizing aspect is taken into account: "yes, the history of science, insofar as this subject is treated by human beings, reveals a much different and very informative side of itself when it is not treated merely mere row of discoveries and opinions, one after another." [wie höchst bedeutend es sei, einen Autor als Menschen zu betrachten…[j]a eine Geschichte der Wissenschaften, insofern diese durch Menschen behandelt worden, zeigt ein ganz anders und höchst belehrendes Ansehen, als wenn bloß Entdeckungen und Meinungen aneinander gereiht werden]. [317]

Goethe's treatment of Newton—taken by Kant and the majority of the eighteenth century as an example of the historical progress of scientific knowledge par excellence—is perhaps the most representative example of this contextualizing method. In the section titled "Newton's personality", Goethe insists that one must understand a considerable amount about Newton's life and character in order to understand his theoretical production, while accounting for much of what he believes to be his mistakes by explaining them in light of certain psychological dispositions. These individual dispositions, however, are themselves culturally mitigated by "the English nation and its conditions" [der englischen Nation und ihren Zuständen], whose constitution is not rigid, but conditioned by Britain's unique political and world historical situation, "the time in which Newton was born" [die Zeit in welcher Newton geboren ward].[318]

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[317] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, *Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden*, ed., by Eric Trunz. München: DTV, 2000, pp., 10.
[318] Ibid., 170

All of these contextualizing features must be taken into account when at- tempting to understand any scientific discovery.

Yet as opposed to *Winckelmann and his Century*, where the method goes unmentioned, Goethe now explicitly references the historiographical importance of the context-dependent nature of all discovery. Already in the third paragraph of the introduction, Goethe notes that the "progress" (*Laufbahn)* of human history in no way progresses linearly, but cyclically, always with the tendency to return "in areas where it had already been" [jene Gegend, wo sie schon einmal durchgegangen], with the result that "on this path, all views and mistakes are repeated" [(a)uf diesem Wege wiederholen sich alle wahren Ansichten und Irrtümer].[319] Goethe's insistence on the context-dependent nature of discovery has consequences for his understanding of history. Humans are doomed to repeat both their successes and failures because the strongly context-dependent nature of scientific inquiry means that they are unable to transcend their historically limited and psychologically filtered situations and simply grasp "the concept." For Goethe, there is, in other words, a chasm between his Spinozistic belief that "everything in nature is tied and connected in the most thorough way" [(a)lles ist in der Natur aufs innigste verknüpft und verbunden] and the human tendency to combine and organize both natural and historical phenomena in such a way so as to unify "even what is separated in nature" [selbst was in der Natur getrennt ist].[320] Despite Goethe's ontological belief in the unity of all phenomena, human beings cannot see into that unity, but instead combine and connect phenomena in a specific way and from a specific perspective, against a culturally and historically pre-structured horizon.

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[319] Ibid., 7.
[320] Ibid., 81

Goethe's position, however, is different from Kant's in so far as he is not denying access in principle to the *Ding an sich*, claiming, in other words, that our cognitive faculties make access to the thing in itself impossible. Rather, Goethe is making a point about the psychological and historical constitution of the human being. Human beings do make genuine discoveries in science that operate functionally and explain phenomena within given historical paradigms. Yet there is no guarantee that the way in which objects are disclosed within a historical horizon is the only way that they can be disclosed. For Goethe, the Cartesian-Newtonian model of explaining nature entirely in reductionist terms represents exactly such a partial grasping of objects.[321] Perhaps nature can be most thoroughly accounted for in these terms, but doing so forcefully connects organic appearances in one way (as mechanistically-mathematically determined) that precludes their disclosure in a different way (as freely unfolding). Consequently, Goethe feels that this gap between how equally competent and scientifically rigorous scientists can investigate nature and how they do investigate nature must be examined with the help ofa historical, con-textualizing approach.

It is because of this chasm that Goethe rejects the claim that one single epoch or scientist such as Newton can have grasped the truth about nature or color and instead suggests that different discoveries over different historical epochs all share similar merit and suffer from a similar flaw:

> In every century, in every decade even, rigorous discoveries are made, unexpected events occur, excellent men appear, who teach us to see things in new ways…But such events usually only disclose object partially.
>
> In jedem Jahrhundert, ja in jedem Jahrzehend werden tüchtige Entdeckungen gemacht, geschehen unerwartete Begebenheiten, treten vorzügliche Menschen

[321] Heidegger, in Heidegger, Martin, *Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809) .Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Velag, 1995, locates the origins of this critique of scientific positivism in Schelling. Herder would be the more accurate choice.

> auf, welche neue Ansichten verbreiten [...] aber solche Ereignisse (beziehen) sich gewöhnlich nur auf partielle Gegenstände.[322]

Each epoch is capable of producing interesting discoveries. However, the merits of these epochs and discoveries should not necessarily be directly compared and ranked against one another, as if in relation to a neutral standard of scientific truth, because they always approach their object partially and from a certain perspective. Here in the *Geschichte der Farbenlehre* as in his earlier essay on scientific method, *The Experiment as Mediation* (*Der Versuch als Vermittler*), Goethe insists on the fact that human beings are only able to gain partial access to the whole. The result of this perspectival approach is, so Nisbet, that for Goethe, "there is, consequently, no privileged, absolute perspective and all judgments on history are necessarily dubious" [es gibt folglich keine privilegierte, absolute Perspektive und alle allgemeinen Urteile über die Geschichte sind notwendig zweifelhaft].[323] Rejecting *Universalgeschichte*, the only thing that the historian can do is contextualize individual scientific discoveries, allowing the local narratives to speak for themselves with the author resisting the urge to move beyond the perspectival and empirical reconstructions in order to synthesize the particulars into one overarching whole.

This anti-grand-narrative, historicist reading of the *Geschichte der Farbenlehre* is only confirmed by Hegel's response to his reading of the manuscript. Describing what he takes to be the inadequacies of the text in a letter to Schelling dated 23 February 1807, Hegel writes that Goethe, "holds himself completely on the empirical on account of the hatred instilled in him by others who have ruined it, instead of going beyond the empirical to the other side, the concept, which is only able to shine through occasionally" [hält sich aus Haß gegen den Gedanken, durch

[322] Goethe, Farbenlehre, 81.
[323] Nisbet, 40.

den die andern die Sache verdorben, ganz ans Empirische, statt über jenen hinaus zu der andern Seite von diesem, zum Begriff, überzugehen, welcher etwa nur zum Durchschimmern kommen wird].[324] What Hegel finds insufficient in Goethe's manuscript is precisely Goethe's refusal to tell a grand narrative of the history of Western science, that is, to explain the par- ticulars in light of a single concept or overarching goal.[325] Doing so, however, would require Goethe to posit an end in history: a trans-historical goal of history according to which the empirical particulars could be ordered and explained in relation to that end. This, however, is precisely the position Goethe has come to reject. Hegel's critique, in other words, identifies exactly Goethe's own development: his rejection of idealism and his newfound historicism.

By 1819, Goethe seems to admit this shift in method, opening his *Notes and Context for a better understanding of the West-East Divian (Noten und Abhandlungen*), with the lines: "Everything has its time! An adage whose truth one recognizes more and more the longer one lives." [alles hat seine Zeit! ein Spruch, dessen Bedeutung man bei längerem Leben imer mehr anerkennen lernt].[326] He then follows up on this claim in the section *Warnung* with the warning, "we know how to value the poetry of the East and we admit of its great qualities, but one should compare it only with itself and honor it in its own circle and forget, when doing so, that there were ever Greeks and Romans" [wir wissen die Dichtart der Orientalen zu schätzen, wir gestehen ihnen die grössten Vorzüge zu, aber man vergleiche sie mit sich selbst, man ehre sie in ihrem eigene Keise und vergesse doch dabei, dass es Griechen und Römer gegeben].[327] Middle Eastern poetry must be understood out of its own historical context and assess according to its

[324] Goethe, Band 14, 279.
[325] See Weatherby, Lief, "Das Innere Organ und Ihr Natur von Albrecht von Haller zu Goethe" *Goethe Yearbook*, Volume 21, 2014, pp. 191-217, for another account of the relationship between Goethe and Hegel's theory of history.
[326] Goethe, Farbenlehre, 126.
[327] Ibid., 182-183.

own standards. The grand narrative of Goethe's classicist program, in other words, has been replaced with local description of the conditions that influenced and enabled the poetry of the Middle East.

II. Historicism, Nature, and Culture

In the last part, I argued that there is a shift in Goethe's historical think- ing away from classicist-idealist understanding of history and toward a historicist one, starting around 1805. This historicist understanding, I argued, is characterized by an emphasis on the "situatedness of cultural forms" and reflective of the late Goethe's skepticism about absolute aesthetic and historical standards.[328]

In this section, I will argue that his historicism is grounded in a deeply rooted empiricism and a philosophy of nature that sees the human being and its linguistic and cultural capacities as integrated into a single, unified nature, based, as Peter Hanns Reill has put it, on the "core assumption of man's material rootedness in nature."[329] Consistent with this naturalist under- standing of the human being, I view the late Goethe's philosophical and anthropological project as largely congruent with the findings of much recent scholarship on Herder, whose central commitment Rachel Zuckert sees as, "a view of human beings as not endowed with some sort of special mental sub- stance or other metaphysical distinctiveness, but rather as emphatically part of (material, organic) nature."[330]

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[328] Zammito, 70.

[329] Reill, Hans Peter, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, pp., 254.

[330] Zuckert, Rachel. "Herder and Philosophical Naturalism." Herder Yearbook, vol. 12, 2014, pp. 125–44, here 126.

Central to this view is the belief that human beings, their customs, political constitutions, aesthetic products, and even cognitive capacities must be understood as arising out of and in dynamic interaction with their environment in a manner that is analogous to the way in which plants, animals and other organ- isms shape and are shaped by theirs. Goethe's emphasis on the largely pre-structured nature of human cognition, in other words, is heavily indebted to a naturalist anthropology that sees human beings and their cognitive capacities as integrated into a dynamic and changing, natural history. In this natural history, human languages and cultures are seen as originally co-constituted by the geo- graphical climatological conditions in which they developed. Yet for Goethe, the natural products, of language, thought, and culture, do not stop and become ossified, but engage in a *Wechselwirkung* in which they transform both themselves and the environment. For Goethe, in other words, nature, culture, and history must be understood holistically, as arising out of and dynamically transforming one another.

Goethe's *Notes and Treatises* (*Noten und Abhandlungen*) (1819), both a lengthy documentation of the natural and social history of Persia and published with the lyric cycle "For a better Understanding" (*zum bessern Verständnis*) should, I believe, be understood in exactly this manner: as a holistic investigation into the relationship between nature-culture-history, which facilitates a better understanding of the poems. And Goethe, in a "Preparatory Remark" (*Fortleitende Bemerkung*), indicates that he is operating precisely with this climatologically oriented theory of culture in mind. There he remarks that one of the key aspects of the inquiry will be not only to investigate the "physical-climateological influence on the formation of the human form and physical attributes" [Physisch-klimatische Einwirkung auf Bildung des menschlicher Gestalt und körperlicher Eigenschaften], whose influence "no one denies" [leugnet niemand], but simultaneously to engage in such an investigation holistically, asking how climate

and geography condition the basic cultural institutions, religious outlook, and political forms, which are trans- formed into a form of climate themselves. Consequently, Goethe reminds the reader that one must keep in mind, "that the form of government also creates a moral-climateological state of affairs wherein characters are shaped in a variety of different ways" [daß Regierungsform eben auch einen moralisch- klimatischen Zustand hervorbringe, worin die Charaktere auf verschiedene Weise sich ausbilden].[331] The text, in other words, seeks to understand the dynamic Wechselwirkung of nature and culture over time. Such an understanding tracks not only how the physical and geographical climate shape political and cultural formations, but also how these cultural formations establish a new environment for the subjects that live in them, and in doing so potentially alter the natural environment from which they sprung. Only this type of holistic climatological- cultural contextualization, for Goethe, enables a proper understanding of the aesthetic form and the standards inherent within it.

As Goethe mentions, however, the thought that geographical and climatological differences could produce significant variations in both physical features and cultural outlooks was commonplace in the late eighteenth century and central to the anthropological projects of Montesquieu, Winckelmann, and Kant. What distinguishes Goethe and Herder's anthropology from that of their predecessors was a different response to the dilemma that plagued late-eighteenth-century philosophy and had done so since Descartes: the relationship between the mind and the body. If, following Descartes, the paradigm of naturalistic explanation is mechanistic reductionism, then the prospect of naturalizing the mind poses the following dilemma. One must choose, as Frederick Beiser puts it, between either "a material- ism that

[331] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang "Noten und Abhandlungen" in *Werke Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden, Band 2*. München: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, pp., 147.

explained the mind by reducing it to a machine, or a dualism that put the mind in a supernatural realm."[332] The anthropological result of ontological dualism tended to be a half mechanist/half rationalist understanding of the human, according to which the bodily part is understood to be subject to significant varia- tion given that the machine would operate differently in different environments and a rational part that prescribes a universal moral end regardless of empirical difference.

Because of this ontological dualism and the space that it maintains for the moral commands of pure reason, we find that the purpose of many eighteenth- century anthropologies was practical or pragmatic. Thus Kant, in his *Anthropology from a Practical Perspective* (*Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*) (published 1798), is not interested in anthropolog-ical difference in order, as John Zammito puts it, "to discover human nature through a consideration of human variety",[333] but for moral reasons. An awareness of how our bodies and passions are determined by causal laws can help practical reason combat wayward inclination. Kant is therefore interested in "what nature makes of the human being" [was die Natur aus dem Menschen macht] in so far as this information can aid the rational subject in coming to understand "what the human being, as a free, self-determining creature, can or should make from himself." [was er (der Mensch), als freihandelndes Wesen, aus sich selber macht, oder machen kann und soll].[334] The project of rationalist anthropology, in other words, goes hand in hand with the broader project of Enlightenment humanism. Kant and Montesquieu are interested in climatological difference largely in order to aid practical freedom or write laws that can

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[332] Beiser, Frederick C. *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993, pp., 127.
[333] Zammito, John, *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, pp., 209
[334] Kant, Immanuel, *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik II*, edited by Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt:Suhrkamp, 1977, pp., 399.

counteract the natural tendencies and dispositions determined by the environment. Herder and Goethe, however, rejected the mechanistic model of nature that informed both rationalist and empiricist anthropologies of the time in favor of a vitalist model of nature that allowed for a much more nuanced understanding of anthropological difference.

However, as we have discussed in previous chapters, an ever-increasing body of research is now showing that Goethe and Herder should not be understood simply as followers, but as important contributors to the paradigm shift in the natural sciences in the second half of the eighteenth century from mechanism to vitalism. Central to this paradigm shift, according to Peter Hanns Reill, was an attack on the mechanistic understanding of nature "in the name of a reanimated nature... imbued with active, vital forces."[335] Rejecting dualism, vitalists looked to unify these realms by infusing intelligence into matter seeking to, "bridge or dissolve this (mind-body) dichotomy by positing the existence in living matter of active or self-activating forces... Living matter was seen as containing an immanent principle of self-movement or self-organization."[336] The result of this infusion of intelligence into matter is that the forces at work within nature are no longer viewed mechanistically as strictly determined, but as living and organic forces capable of acting and reacting in relation to their environ- ment. In other words, organic types, i.e. plant and animal species, ceased to be understood as static, determined by an act of divine intelligence, but as part of a dynamic and historically unfolding process of evolution.

Along these lines, Robert Richards has recently argued that Goethe's morphological studies not only contributed substantially to the process of temporalizing nature, but that Goethe

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[335] Reil, Peter Hanns, "Science and the Construction of the Cultural Sciences in Late Enlightenment Germany: The Case of Wilhelm von Humboldt." History and Theory, vol. 33, no. 3, 1994, pp. 345–366, pp., 348.
[336] Reill, Vitalizing, 7

should be considered as an important precursor to Darwin's theory of evolution, albeit without suspecting that natural selection plays a role in the evolution of species.[337] In many ways, however, it is precisely the absence of a mechanism of nature able to explain the evolution of organic types that makes Goethe's morphological theory so interesting and his conception of nature so radical. Goethe does not try to explain the unity and diversity of natural forms by recourse to preexisting seeds created in an act of divine intelligence, as do the preformationists, or by means of a mechanical explanation of dormant traits, as does Kant. Rather, Goethe suggests that organisms ultimately gain their shape because of their adaptive response to their environment and, in doing so, reciprocally shape the environment in which they live. Environments and organisms, in other words, are, for Goethe, historically co-constitutive.

The older Goethe becomes, in fact, the more radical he gets in his willingness to lend independence to nature, freeing its self-formative capacity from any divine or rational teleology. Goethe discusses this flexibility inherent within plant and animal species to shape and adapt their physical features in relation to their particular environment in the expanded 1831 version of his essay *The Author shares the history of his Botanical Studies* (*Der Verfasser teilt die Geschichte seiner botanischen Studien mit*), published with the French translation to his 1790 essay *On the Metamorphosis of Plants* (*Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen*). There, recalling the origins of his theory of metamorphosis, Goethe reminisces that it was his trip over the Alps and the subsequent

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[337] Richards, Robert, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, 476-484. Richards is rejecting long standing teleological interpretations of Goethe's Morphology. For a classical teleological account see: Lenoir, Timothy, "The Eternal Laws of Form: Morphotypes and the Conditions of Existence in Goethe's Biological Thought" in *Goethe and the Sciences: A Re-Appraisal*, ed. by Frederick Amrine, Francis J. Zucker and Harvey Wheeler (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1987), pp., 17-29. And for an excellent critique of this classical account see, See Brady, Ronald, "Form and Cause in Goethe's Morphology", in *Goethe and the Sciences: A Re-Appraisal*, ed. by Frederick Amrine, Francis J. Zucker and Harvey Wheeler (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1987), pp., 257-301. See Eckart Förster, "Goethe Auge des Geistes" in *Detusche Vierteljahresschrift fur Literatur und Geistesgeschichte*, vol 75, issue 1 (2001).

insight into the "changeability of plant forms, which I had followed on their own unique path for quite some" that convinced him that natural types are not set, but endowed with some freedom. Or as Goethe puts it "the plant forms that surround us are not originally determined and pinned down, rather they are allotted…a fortunate flexibility, in order to shape and reshape themselves in all the manifold of conditions that affect them on this earth" [Wechselhafte der Pflanzengestalten, dem ich längst aus seinem eigentümlichen Gange gefolgt] that convinced him that natural types are not set, but endowed with some freedom. Or, as Goethe puts it:

> The plant forms that surround are not original determined and held always the same, rather, a pleasant amount of bendability has been given to them, in order to adapt themselves to the thee conditions over the face of the earth, which effect them and to form and reform themselves according to them.
>
> die uns umgebenden Planzenformen seien nicht ursprünglich determiniert und festgestellt, ihnen sei vielmehr eine [...] glückliche Biegsamkeit verliehen, um in so viele Bedinungen, die über dem Erdkreis auf sie einwirken, sich zu fügen und darnach bilden und umbilden zu können.[338]

Nature's forms, for Goethe, are not fixed and determined by transcendent designs as the believers in preformation were inclined to believe. Rather, following and expanding on the epigenetic theories of Caspar Friedrich Wolff and Johann Blumenbach, Goethe sees organisms as endowed with a certain amount of freedom and flexibility by which they can alter and change their form in order to acclimate and adapt to their environment. Goethe further notes the myriad of fac- tors that influence this change and elaborates that in order to understand the physiological development of plant forms, one must engage in a holistic investigation of interconnected environmental factors:

> in this case the difference in the soil should be taken into consideration; rich in nutrients through moisture, whether dried out through dry elevation, protected

[338] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, *Sämtliche Werke: Briefe, Tagebücher Und Gespräche*, edited by Hendrik Birus, et al, vol 24. München: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985, pp., 748.

> from frost and heat in every way, or unavoidably exposed to both, in each case, the genus can develop into a type, the type to a variety, and this again, through other conditions, can change into infinity (*ins Unndliche*).
>
> Hier kommen die Verschiedenheit des Bodens in Betracht; reichlich genährt durch Feuchte der Täler, verkümmert durch Trockene der Höhen, geschützt vor Frost und Hitze in jedem Maße, oder beiden unausweichbar bloß gestellt, kann das Geschlecht sich zur Art, die Art zur Varietät und diese wieder durch andere Bedingungen ins Unendliche verändern.[339]

Depending on temperature, altitude, humidity, and any number of other factors, not only can one and the same plant develop in completely different ways, but he suggests that these individual changes can allow the species itself to morph, quite radically, "ins Unendliche," while still remaining one species. Organisms, in other words, are granted the capacity to react to sense stimuli in such a manner as to alter their physiological characteristics by adapting to their environment.

These adaptive traits, however, are not just acquired in one lifetime but can be passed down and themselves altered over generations so as to bring about significant change in the shape and orientation of a species over time. The result, for Goethe, is that what appears to be a stable natural species harmoniously placed in a divinely planned world is in fact the product of the self-adaptation of nature: the co-constitution of organism and environment. Goethe addresses the deep temporal rootedness of natural forms in the second part of his *Attempt at a Compartative Anatomy* (Versuch einer allgemeinen Vergleichungslehre), written already in 1794:

> The fish is there for water, to me, expresses much less than the statement: the fish is there in and through the water; since the latter expresses much more clearly, what is only hidden in the former, namely: that the existence of the creature that we call a fish, is only possible under the conditions of the element that we call

[339] Ibid., 748.

> water, not solely to be in water, rather, in addition, to ***develop*** in water (my emp.) The same thing holds of all other creatures.
>
> Der Fisch ist für das Wasser da, scheint mir viel weniger zu sagen als: der Fisch ist in dem Wasser und durch das Wasser da; denn dieses letztes drückte viel deutlicher aus, was in dem ersten nur dunkel verborgen liegt, nämlich: die Existenz eines Geschöpfes das wir Fisch nennen, sei nur unter der Bedingungen eines Elements das wir Wasser nennen möglich, nicht allein um darin zu sein, son- dern auch um darin zu werden. Eben dieses gilt von allen übrigen Geschöpfen.[340]

Rejecting an external intelligence capable of making a fish for the water, Goethe explains the fish, its shape, and its capacities in terms of a dynamic historical development. The fish comes to possess the physical and instinctual traits that it does because it purposively adapts itself in dynamic co-constitution with its environment and, in doing so, shapes the environment for the other organisms that live there. This is not only true of the fish, however, but true of natural organisms as such. The result of this vitalist reinterpretation of nature, according to Herbert Lindner, is that for Goethe and Herder, "nature could now be seen as constantly moving and developing itself. Natural processes took on the shape of a process-oriented character" [d]ie Natur konnte jetzt in ständiger Bewegung und Entwicklung gesehen werden. Das Naturgeschehen bekam einen Prozeß-Charakter].[341] All of life is constantly in the process of differen- tiating itself over time, changing to adapt to circumstances and conditions in which it exists.

By fusing intelligence into nature and granting organisms the capacity to change and evolve over time, Herder and Goethe's vitalist materialism also opened up the possibility of a radically naturalistic anthropology. Herder's 1778 *On Cognitioin and Sensation* is usually seen

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[340] Ibid., 209.

[341] Lindner, Herbert. *Das Problem des Spinozismus im Schaffen Goethes und Herders*. Weimar: Arion Verlag, 1960, pp., 96.

as the most programmatic text of this vitalist philosophy of mind. There, as we saw in Chapter 2, Herder draws the connection between the organic and the human realm explicitly by identifying the phenomenon of *Reiz* as the base phenomenon of all life. In doing so, Herder suggests that the most fundamental processes of organic life are not mechanical ones, but that all sensation already entails a component of proto- intelligence. Organisms do not sense in the body, reflect in the mind, and then react. Rather, Herder suggests that the capacity for sensation in all organisms is already cognized with a view toward maintaining the life of that organism.

This redefinition of the foundations of living matter as Reiz allows Herder to draw a direct connection between sensation and cognition or, as Marion Heinz puts it, "with this, attraction and repulsion, love and hate become moments through which life maintains itself."[342] [Anziehung und Abstoßung, Liebe und Haß werden damit zu Momenten, durch die sich das Leben erhält]. Thus, Herder notices with won- der how the plant actively responds to its environment, claiming, "how the plant turns, how she twists her leaves in order to drink that dew that refreshes her" [wie kehrt, wie wendet sie ihre Blätter, den Thau zu trinken, der sie erquickt].[343] As it is for Goethe, the sensation of the plant is not described mechanically, but its turning expresses an interaction with its environment in a purposive, proto- cognitive manner. The plant turns its leaves toward the dew because it recognizes the benefit and does so for the purpose of preserving itself. On this model, the difference between plant and human being, for Herder, is not one of type, but only of scale. Whereas the plant is unaware of the stimuli that it is responding to, the human is able to become aware of a certain number of those sensations, "all

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[342] Heinz, Marion, *Sensualistischer Idealismus: Untersuchungen zur Erkenntnistheorie des jungen Herder (1763-1778)* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1994), pp., XXV. My translation.
[343] Herder, Johann Gottfried. "Vom Empfinden und Erkennen der menschlichen Seele," *Sämtliche Werke* vol 8, edited by Bernhard Suphan. Georg Olms Verlag, 1967, pp., 175

sensations that rise to a certain clarity become apperceptions, thoughts: the soul reccognizes that it senses." [alle Empfindungen, die zu einer gewissen Helle steigen [...] werden Apperceptionen, Gedanken; die Seele erkennt, daß sie empfinde].[344] Human cognition, as Herder describes it here, is not viewed as something fundamentally different from sensation in plants and animals, but as a continuation and awareness of those sensations.

Fundamental to this vision of a naturalistic anthropology is, of course, a naturalist theory of language capable of explaining the complexity and nuanced nature of language without reference to innate ideas or transcendental concepts. In this project, Herder followed the empiricist theories of Locke and Hume by arguing that all concept formation is grounded in sensation. Yet, whereas traditional empiricists understood sensation as a mechanical process of taking up sense stimuli as building blocks, Herder's theory of language is based on a more robust theory of sensation according to which sensation is already a form of pre-cognition, effectively and volitionally laden and already embedded and responsive to an environment and life world. On this view of sensation, language neither refers to universal rational concepts, nor do words refer simply to objects of the senses. Rather, for Herder, language is rooted in sensations that are themselves precognitions laden with meaning constituted in interaction with the local environment.

Returning now to the *Noten und Abhandlungen*, we can see that this vitalist anthropology and Herder's theory of language are also essential to Goethe's holistic approach there. In a crucial section of the *Noten*, the *Original elements of Oriental Poetry* (*Urelemente der orien-talischen Poesie*), we find Goethe take up the fundamental aspects of Herder's philosophy of

[344] Ibid., 193.

language, elucidating the essential importance of geographical location on poetic production. Goethe here emphasizes the way in which the geo-climatological features of the environment are taken up into the style, rhythm, and connecting elements of the poetry and serve as its fundamental and constitutive features. Thus, Goethe writes that the *Urelemente* of, "mountain and desert, cliffs and flats, trees and plant life, river and ocean and the starry skies" [Berg und Wüste, Felsen und Ebene, Bäume, Kräuter, Blumen, Fluss und Meer und das vielgestirnte Firmament],[345] are not simply to be understood as if they provide a rich treasury of metaphor, which can be equally well translated into another language. Rather, Goethe indicates that these elements are taken up into a language system in which the elements are not conceived of as static entities but understood in terms of their dynamic interaction with the human being and its engagement with its environment. It is the relationship between the natural elements in terms of their dynamic interaction with the human that is reflected in the uniqueness of the poetic language. Emphasizing this point, Goethe continues that, given the relationship between these natural elements, "one finds that in East, everything occurs at once, so that he is used to connecting the farthest elements in one fell swoop and has no problem connecting and deducing contradictory things through the least number of letters and syllables" [so findet man, dass dem Orientalen bei allem alles einfällt, so dass er, übers Kreuz das Fernste zu verknüpfen gewohnt (ist), durch die geringste Buchstaben und Silbenbiegung wiedersprechendes auseinander herzuleiten kein Bedenken trägt].[346] The poetic language preserves not just the sensations involved with the elements, that is, the specific green of the tree, black of the night, but the relationship of the human to those elements. It is the specific expanse of the desert, the practical distance between desert and stream, the interrelation between the tree, root, and flower, and the

[345] Goethe, Noten und Abhandlungen, 179.
[346] Ibid., 179

effect that these elements have on the life world of the region's inhabitants that is preserved in the manner in which the poetic elements are connected and the logic of the thought that is expressed. Sensation, orientation, and thought, in other words, are forged together and constitutively deter- mined by the environment in which the poetry originated and, therefore, cannot be separated from it when trying to understand it.

Michael Forster calls Herder's unique twist on sense-based, empirical theories of language his "quasi-empiricist" theory of language. According to Forster, concepts for Herder are not just grounded in sensations, but "the sensations inevitably undergo a transformation as the concepts are acquired, their final nature being a sort that they can only have along with the concepts."[347] On the Herderian model that Goethe adopts in the *Noten und Abhandlungen*, concepts, though originally rooted in the sensations of a specific geo-climatological environment, are poetically transformed by being brought into a system of usage. The result of this poetic transformation of sensation is that language is under- stood as a system that captures a unique way of understanding the world. Or, as Sonia Sikka puts it in a recent study on Herder, "words [...] are elements whose character is determined by their place within collective patterns of significance. They are pieces of a shared human world, a life-world."[348] For Herder, languages are expressive of world views, because words are neither expressive of things as such, nor of the world as cognized by universal reason. Instead, for Herder and Goethe, human cognitive features are ultimately rooted in the sensations of a specific geo-climatological location, which were poetically trans- formed into a language that consists in an interferential totality. Because this

[347] Forster, Michael N. *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp., 71.
[348] Sikka, Sonia. *Herder on Humanity and Cultural Difference: Enlightened Relativism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp., 168.

totality carries with it not just objective referents of sensations but is expressive of the dynamic interaction of the human beings living within a life world, languages become representatives of unique world views and as such, never fully coextensive. For Goethe and Herder, an element of linguistic perspectivalism, in other words, is a constitutive part of human cognition.

III. Conclusion

At the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, Goethe and Herder were not the only theorists in Germany who were interested in understanding the relationship between language, history, nature, and cognition. Rather, as Forster has documented, German philosophy of language at the time was quite sophisticated, consisting of figures such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, the Schlegel brothers and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Together, the Schlegel brothers and Humboldt largely created the discipline of comparative linguistics in Western Europe, which they based, to a large extent, on the different world literatures and grammars collected by Wilhelm's brother, Alexander. From what I have argued above, the flourishing of German philosophy of language and its relation to collecting world literatures at the turn of the nineteenth century was no coincidence, as it was largely based on the shift from a mechanist to a vitalist understanding of nature and the opportunity that this shift provided to think of reason as an emergent property of nature that is not grounded in a priori features or a transcendental structure, but bound by language. The consequence of this idea is a form of linguistic and historical perspectivalism and, with it, the epistemic privileging of literature. If thought can only occur in and through language and language is itself historically and naturally

conditioned, then there is no single objective reality and one privileged cognitive position capable of accessing it, but perspectives on being that are shaped by different language systems.

I would like to suggest that it is within this nexus of historicism, vitalist anthropology, and Herder's "quasi-empiricist" philosophy of language that Goethe's coinage of the term *Weltliteratur* should be understood. In doing so, I would argue that Goethe's use of the term should not be considered as an extension of his humanist universalism and its connection to the Enlightenment project, because the epistemic ground from which one could tell a grand narrative of history and proscribe a singular end goal of humanity had, for the late Goethe, become destabilized. In contrast to his classical program where the Greeks pro- vide a trans-historical aesthetic and ethical ideal for humanism to emulate, Goethe, in the *Noten*, is interested primarily in linguistic and cultural difference and the question of how to mediate that difference. Central to this mediation is the notion that one can't apply standards from outside, but as much as possible "that one must get to know and appreciate every poet in their language and out of their own, unique place, time, and customs" [daß man jeden Dichter in seiner Sprache und im eigentümlichen Bezirk seiner Zeit und Sitten aufsuchen, kennen und schätzen müsse].[349] In the text, Goethe strives to do this by engaging in a holistic investigation in which he seeks to enter as far as possible into another world, attempting to grasp its history and development, beliefs and values, and even its perceptive and sensual sensations according to its own internal logic and standards. In doing so, Goethe already seems to be applying some of David Damrosch's suggested methods of How to Read World Literature by analyzing the various genre's internally

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[349] Goethe, Noten und Abhandlungen, 246.

and trying as much as possible to acquire the "cultural knowledge" that shape the "artist's and audience's assumptions."[350]

Yet despite these methods, Goethe's anthropological project is nonetheless built on an awareness of linguistic and cultural uniqueness. Goethe is fully aware that languages, cultures, and literatures cannot be exchanged for one another because he rejects the notion that there is any neutral or privileged spot from which cultures and epochs can be compared and history and humanity can be ordered. Rather, every attempt at understanding a form of life always occurs within a heavily pre-structured horizon that reflexively applies back to the inquirer. Yet it is for exactly this reason that the study of *Weltliteratur*, for Goethe, remains an essential part of the project that seeks to understand the mental, cultural, and historical diversity of human life. It is essential, because absent some privileged metaphysical position, the only way to learn about the type of being the human is, is to investigate the different and diverse ways in which human cultural life has manifested itself over time. Such engagement, for Goethe, simultaneously opens the space in which human beings might become aware of their own perspectival cognitive situation and the webs of historical, cultural, and linguistic contingency that determine their consciousness. This, in turn, opens up the possibility of transformation. Such transformation, however, is not a development that involves an ascension towards a preestablished goal, but a process that allows for the possibility of increased self-awareness and enrichment through, as Goethe puts it in a section discussing translation, "the approach of what is foreign and what is one's own, of the known and the unknown" [die Annäherung des Fremden und Einheimischen, des Bekannten und Unbekannten].[351]

[350] Damrosch, 3.
[351] Ibid., 258.

At the same time, this anthropological interpretation of Goethe's pronouncement of *Weltliteratur* is in no way inconsistent with his call for a future, globally oriented literature. Throughout, I have suggested that Goethe's understanding of *Weltliteratur* should be considered as an extension of his morphological project. For Goethe, literature and languages, like natural organisms, are co-constituted by their environment in such a way that they reflect the "world" in which they are produced. Yet it is precisely because literature is rooted in and reflects the circumstances in which it is produced that Goethe also understands *Weltliteratur* as a proclamation for something to come in the future. As we saw, the essence of nature, for the late Goethe, is change. The ability to transform "ins Unendliche." If humans are constituted in dynamic engagement with their environment, then it seems to follow that, given the globalized networks of communication and trade that developed in the nineteenth century, human beings, like other organisms, will have to adapt and constitute themselves in a new way, dynamically engaging with the conditions of their new environment. In this sense, *Weltliteratur* as an anthropological project will also serve to shape the process that expects literature to respond to the possibilities of a new environment in the future.

EPILOGUE

Dynamic Time: Alexander von Humboldt in Stifter's *Nachsommer*

It is a fitting end to this dissertation to briefly look forward to the way in which an awareness of this vitalist undercurrent can potentially alter our understanding of some of the most standardly "classical" texts. Adalbert Stifter's *Nachhsommer* is one of them. Stifter's *Nachsommer* has long been taken to be a prime example of a conservative-classic *Bildungsroman* as utopia, a phantasy which bans the historical and the contingent in favor of a teleologically ordered realm structured by a very specific set of norms and expectations.[352] And given the plotline of the story, it is not difficult to understand this interpretation. The 900 page story follows the formative years of Heinrich Drendorf from the time he leaves his bourgeois family in Vienna, to the time of his marriage to his mentor Risach's adopted daughter Natalie. The main content of the 900 pages, furthermore, depicts in sometimes excruciating detail Heinrich's pedagogical development in relation to three spheres, nature, art, and ethics. In each case, the impression the narrative often gives is that Heinrich slowly comes to understand and integrate himself into a tripartite static order: the divine order of nature, the normative superiority of the neo-classical aesthetic paradigm, and the ethics of an enlightened-aristocratic culture. Additionally, it is often noted, that Stifter's narrative descriptive style seems to support this

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[352] See, Schuller, Mariane, "Das Gewitter findet nicht Statt", Becker, Sabina und Grätz, Katarina, "Einleitung" in *Ordnung Raum, Ritual*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH, 2007. Hohendahl, Peter Uwe, „Die gebildete Gemeinschaft. Stifters Nachsommer als Utopie der ästhetischen Erziehung", in: Wilhelm Voßkamp (Hg.), Utopieforschung. Interdisziplinäre Studien zur neuzeitlichen Utopie , Bd. 3, Frankfurt a.M. 1985, S. 333-356,
[352] Stockhammer, Robert, *Die Kartierung der Erde: Macht und Lust in Karten und Literatur*. München, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2007 pp., 173.

theoretical framework, poetically creating a set order of things that seem to take on a certain form of Thing-essentialism and ontological weight.[353]

More recent scholarship, however, especially the work of Tobias Bulang and Peter Schnyde has suggested that such a teleologically oriented picture just isn't plausible.[354] Bulang, for example, uses the following quotation to cast doubt on the novel's commitment to the normativity of the neo-classical aesthetics. During a conversation in which Heinrich and Risach are discussing the comparative merits of ancient and modern art and Heinrich's judgment comes down heavily on the sided of the ancients, Risach responds in the following way,

> We actually do not know the types of time expanses which history has given us, Who knows, how many types of peoples there have been and how many unknown sources are still unknown to us…Who will still speak of the Greeks, of us in ten thousand years? Completely different understandings will come about, humans will have completely other words, will speak completely different sentences, that we would understand as little as we understand what came before us 10,000 years before.
>
> Wir wissen zuletzt gar nicht, welch Zeiträume es in der Geschichte gegeben hat…Wer weiβ, wie viele Völkerabschnitte es gegeben hat, und wie viele unbekannte Geschichtsquellen noch verborgen sind… Wer wird dann nach zehntausend Jahren noch von den Hellenen von uns reden? Ganz andere Vorstellungen werden kommen, die Menschen werden ganz andere Worten haben, mit ihnen in ganz anderen Säzen reden, und wir würden sie gar nicht verstehen, wie wir nicht verstehen würden, wenn etwas zehntausend Jahre vor uns gesagt worden wäre.[355]

Risach here not only denies the normative validity of the Neo-Classical paradigm, but actually dismisses the Eurocentricism of Heinrich's statement by putting it into comparison with the

[353] See Becker und Gräz in particular for this reading.
[354] Schneyder, Peter "Die Dynamisierung des Statischen. Geologisches Wissen bei Goethe und Stifter" in *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, Neue Folge, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2009), pp. 540-555.Bulang, Tobias, "'Die Rettung der Geschichte in Adalbert Stifters "Nachsommer"", in *Poetica*, Vol. 32, No. 3/4 (2000), pp. 373-405.
[355] Stifter, Adalbert, *Der Nachsommer*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005, 519-520.

larger scale of human history and the mutability of human conceptual frameworks. Yet relativizing statements like these aren't just to be found in the aesthetic realm, but also with respect to nature and the social order. This evidence has lead Schnyder to suggest that the *Nachsommer* is falsely understood as a classic-conservative utopia, but that it actually contains a "knowledge of the relativity of all appearances" [Wissen der Relativität aller Erscheinungen].[356]

In what follows, I will follow the lead of Bulang and Schnyder and investigate this interesting tension in the *Nachsommer* between the seemingly stable and the radically changing. This is a tension which also follows the lines we have been drawing in this dissertation nicely. For, as we have seen, the influence of vitalism on the development on 18-19th century thought served exactly this purpose, to dynamize what had previously appeared to be stable, teleologically ordered structures. This dynamic, I believe, can be seen quite profoundly in the *Nachsommer*. I will do so by tracing Stifter's notion of dynamic-static time back to what I see as their origins in Alexander von Humboldt. For it is Humboldt, the great admirer of Goethe and the magnificent natural scientist who most thoroughly integrated vitalist principles into a full-scale natural research project.[357] Thus, going back to Humboldt and his conception of historical time, I believe, can help us gain a fresh perspective from which we can understand notions of time and normativity in Stifter's *Nachsommer*.

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[356] Schnyder, pp., 554.

[357] For an overview of Humboldt's theory of nature see, Milan, Elizabeth, "The Quest for Seeds of Eternal Growth: Goethe and Humboldt's Presentation of Nature", in *Goethe Yearbook* XVIII (2011), pp., 97-114. Helmrich, Christian, "Geschichte der Natur bei Alexander von Humboldt" in *HiN: International Zeitschrift für Humboldt Studien* 18 (2009), pp., 53-65. And its relation to American Environmentalism: Sachs, Aaron. *The Humboldt Current: Nineteenth-Century Exploration and the Roots of American Environmentalism.* New York: Viking, 2006.

i. Alexander von Humboldt

Upon returning home from his momentous America journey in 1804, Humboldt's first contribution to the German reading public was a work entitled *Ideas for a Geography of Plants* (*Ideen zu einer Geographie der Pflanzen*).[358] This work has be correctly understood as central not only to Humboldt's own thinking, but to indicative of the larger shift in the way in the way in which nature was conceived of around 1800, which we discussed in the first two chapters. To briefly recall: Throughout the 18th century, nature was typically understood as one great harmony arranged and ordered by a divine creator. Species were still understood according to the model of a great chain of being in which every species and entity possesses a specific place and function within a harmonious whole. Of course people had long recognized that a certain equilibrium and harmony existed between organism, environment, and climate, but this harmony was typically thought of as imposed from the outside, conceived of as if everything in nature was created by God for harmonious functioning with respect to everything else. Corresponding to this theological understanding of the world, the primary mode of investigation was known then as *Naturgeschichte*, not in the sense of being a history of the world, but in the sense of being a description of the world. Corresponding to this understanding, Linneus's system of botanical classification was the paradigm of this age and consisted in the collecting, describing, and documenting individual plants according to species and sub-species. To understand nature meant to understand the objects God created in nature and classify them.

Thus, when Humboldt, in the introduction to the *Geographie der Pflanzen*, makes a sharp distinction between his new scientific program and that of Linneus's, Humboldt indicates that he

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[358] Humboldt, Alexander von, Aimé Bonpland, and Mauritz Dittrich. *Ideen Zu Einer Geographie Der Pflanzen.* Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Geest & Portig, 1960.

is moving away from the old idea of *Naturgeschichte* to what Kant called for as a new understanding of *Naturgeschichte*. In contrast to what Humboldt calls the “normal activities” of the Linne-style botanist, Humboldt claims that his, *Geographie der Pflanzen* “considers the organisms according to their relation to their location in climates” [betrachtet die Gewächse nach dem Verhältnis ihrer Verteilung in den verschiedenen Klimaten]. The key shift that Humboldt makes here is the one from understanding plant species in isolation, to one in which species are understood in terms of the internal dynamic of their environment and the relationship of the environments to one another. Thus the goal of the *Geographie der Pflanzen* is twofold: First, to give a full description of the inner dynamics of an environment itself, and second, to explain the complex interworking of the environments in relation to one another.

What it means to give an explanation of the internal dynamics of an environment, Humbolt explains is, to understand all of the elements in terms of their mutual interaction or the “great connection between cause and effect” [grossen Verkettung von Ursachen und Wirkungen]. This great chain of causes and effects include, the “vegetation, animals, geognostic relations, electric tension of the atmosphere” and so on [Vegetation, Tiere, Geognistische Verhältnisse, Elektrische Tension der Atmosphäre].[359] All of these factors, in other words, must be taken into account and explained in terms of the dynamic interrelation and function that each element plays within the environment. Such an explanation would attempt to describe for example, how the geological structures of the area account for the type of soil, how the soil is suitable for the specific set of vegetative species, how these serve the animal population, and so on.

[359] Ibid., 70.

Humboldt produces an example of what such a dynamic environmental explanation would look like when he provides a small *Naturgemälde*, a natural picture, of the environmental region surrounding Lake Victoria in Venezuela. Having first situated the reader within the neighboring climatological regions, Humboldt zeroes in on the valleys Aragura and writes,

> It is because of this unique formation of the earth that the waters of the valleys of Aragua build a system for themselves and run into a basin that is closed off from all sides. They do not empty themselves into the ocean, but rather unite to create an inland lake succumbing to the powerful puss of evaporation and losing themselves in the air. The fertileness of the earth and the success of the agriculture in these valleys is dependent upon these rivers and lakes.
>
> Aufgrund dieser eigentümlichen Gestaltung des Bodens bilden die Gewässer der Tälern von Aragua ein System für sich und laufen einem von allen Seiten geschlossenen Becken zu; sie ergieβen sich nicht in den Ozean, sondern vereinigen sich zu einem Binnensee, unterliegen hier dem mächtigen Zuge der Verdunstung und verlieien sich gleichsam in der Luft. Von diesen Flüsse und Seen hängt die Fruchtbarkeit des Bodens und der Ertrag des Landbaus in diesen Tälern ab."[360]

Typical for Humboldt's style we see the way in which the various conditions of the environment dynamically interact to both support and reinforce one another. It is the geological formation of the area, which first enables the water to be collected in a lake, the evaporation of which effects the atmosphere, which serves to explain the specific levels of humidity. Always explaining human culture out of its natural location, Humboldt hints at the fact that it is precisely this balance of features, which accounts for the specific form of life of the human beings in the area who develop their capacities, skill, and habits (such as fishing and agricultural) in relation to their natural environment. All the aspects of this individual environment, in other words, mutually co-operate to allow one another to exist in the type of relationship that they do, the combination of which create the characteristics of that region.

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[360] Ibid.. 70.

A functioning environment, in which the forces of physical matter, atmosphere, and organisms exist in a balance that allows its cycle to reproduce itself with little to no change of the climatological structures, Humboldt calls an “equilibrium” (*Gleichgewicht*). Environments, as we typically perceive them, are usually characterized by states of equilibrium, which can take on the appearance of a perfectly ordered harmony and, as in the 18th century, can even be interpreted as divinely ordered structures. Humboldt, however, distinctly rejects the idea that environmental equilibrium is the product of some meta-harmony, instead, following Herder understanding the harmony of nature in terms of an internal dynamic of potentially antagonistic forces. Or as Humboldt puts it, “the equilibrium, which rules amongst the perturbation of apparently competing elements, this equilibrium arises from the free play of dynamic forces” [das Gleichgewicht welches mitten unter den Pertubationen scheinbar streitender Elemente herrscht, dies Gleichgewicht geht aus dem freien Spiel dynamischer Kräfte hervor].[361] The equilibrium that governs an environment, arises, for Humboldt, out of the harmonization of independent and free powers. What this means is that environments, which appear to us from the perspective of human time to be stable, are in fact products of dynamic forces that have come together to form an equilibrium. Humboldt, in other words, locates the harmony of nature, not in something imposed from the outside, but in a dynamic structure that is internal to nature itself.

Humboldt’s explanation of environmental equilibrium in terms of the internal dynamic of forces structurally altered the way in which nature was to be understood in two important ways. First, if environments do not consist in ordered harmonies, but in an internal equilibrium of the parts, what this means is that, if something changes within this internal structure, then the environment itself will be subject to change. Second, since Humboldt knew from experience that

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[361] Ibid., 71

such change was possible, it meant, in turn, that environments are subject to change if and when the dynamic forces that govern that environment change. The consequence of this was, for Humboldt, that nature possess a history of that change. On a metaphysical level, Humboldt's reflection on the constitution of an environment turns the entirety of the world into a dynamic ball of forces that come together, stabilize, de-stabilize, only to be stabilize once again. In other words, the free play of dynamic forces and the change that is implied with it, constitutes the essence of life.

And in fact, Humboldt's texts show that this is precisely how he came to see the world, as a dynamic interconnection of environments that are governed by internal laws, and, though usually stable, are subject to change. This change, however, can occur in very different ways, at very different speeds, and almost always occurs at regional and local levels and not according to a universal plan. The one thing all change has in common, however, is that every change always builds on that which was previously there.

Thus, for example in order to explain some of the features of the ecosystems of some Southern Europe countries on the Mediterranean, such as the apes of Gibralter and the presence of plant species native to sub-Saharan Africa, Humboldt tells the story of how the whole region morphed and changed from its original, much more vegetative state, to the more desert like state that we find it in now. Humboldt writes,

> But one forgets that southern Europe had a completely different form when pelagic or carthagic Plant types first established themselves there. One forgets, that earlier forms (*Bildung*) of the human species had deforested much of the forest. The great catastrophe by means of which the Mediterranean Sea, once a growing inland lake, was formed when the dams of the Dardanales and the pillars of Hercules were broken through; this catastrophe appears to have robbed the neighboring countries of a large portion of its top soil.

> aber man vergisst, das südliche Europa eine andere Gestalt hatte, als pelasgische oder carthagische Pflanzvölker sich zuerst darin festsetzten; man vergisst, dass frühere Bildung des Menschengeschlechts die Waldungen verdrängt hatten. Die groβe Catestrophe durch welche das Mittelmeer sich gebildet, indem es, ein anschwellendes Binnenwasser, die Schleusen der Dardanellen und die Säulen des Hercules durchbrochen; diese Catestrophe scheint die angrenzenden Länder ein groβen Theils ihrer Dammerde beraubt zu haben.[362]

Humboldt here describes how the current state of events can only be understood by telling a really long story that includes massive climatological and morphological change. These changes, however, are built layer by layer into and on the phenomena of the present and can be interpreted by the Geographer of plants. The geographer of plants, in other words, learns to read the signs of nature and its history by understanding the dynamic interrelations of the climate zones and comparing the present zones with the other zones within the world. Thus Humboldt reads the apes and the plants as evidence of the state of the environment before the "great catastrophe" that created the Mediterranean, claiming that the presence of certain species in southern Europe can only be explained by means of climatological changes, for example, "as the apes of Gibralter migrated into this region before the great catastrophe (*Durchbruch*)." [wie die Affen von Gibralter, mussten vor diesem Durchbruch eingewandert haben.] The catastrophe, however, changed the entire climate of the region in one fell swoop, leaving remnants and hints of its past form in the structure of the new form itself. Humans then took to the new climate and worked the land to deforest space for agriculture thereby changing the climate further and leaving their mark on the natural landscape. This, however, is only the story of Southern Europe and a different one will have to be told for a different part of the globe.

[362] Ibid., 86.

Yet it is not as if the humans just worked the land. For Humboldt, culture and nature are not separate from one another, but are enmeshed in the same morphological process as is the environment. Humans, in other words are natural products and their development must be understood in the same way as the development of nature, that is, in terms of their local development. Thus Humboldt writes, "The knowledge of the natural character of various world regions is most intimately connected with the history of humankind and its culture. Since, even if the beginning of this culture is not completely dependent upon physical factors, it is nonetheless largely influence by climatological conditions." [die Kentniss von dem Naturcharakter verschiedener Weltgegenden ist mit der Geschichte des Menschengeschlechts und mit der seiner Cultur auf's innigste verknüpft. Denn wenn auch der Anfang dieser Cultur nicht durch physische Einflüsse allein bestimmt wird, so hängt doch die Richtung derselben von climatischen Bedingungen ab].[363] Because humans, for Humboldt, are always rooted in their environment, and because environments are the products of long term historical development and differ substantially from one part of the planet to the other, the story of the human being and our understanding of the human being has to be as flexible as the story of the development of all the environments on earth.

Thus, contra Hegel and most of the idealist tradition, there is, for Humboldt, no single standard by which to judge the development of the human beings. Rather, human civilizations must be understood individually, on their own terms. Or, as Humboldt puts it in his *Ansichten der Kordilleren*, a book devoted to the study of the civilizations of South and Central America, "nothing is more difficult than to compare nations which have taken very different paths in the process of their social improvement. Mexicans and Peruvians may absolutely not be judged

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[363] Ibid., 87.

according to the principles from the history of peoples, which our education always reminds us of (namely the Greeks and Romans, sk)" [Nichts ist schwieriger, als Nationen zu vergleichen, die in ihrer gesellschaftlichen Vervollkommnung verschiedenen Wegen gefolgt sind. Die Mexikaner und Peruaner dürfen keinesfalls nach Prinzipien aus der Geschichte der Völker beurteilt werden, die unsere Bildung unablässig in uns wachruft] (15). Nations cannot be compared with one another by means of the same standard, because, as Humboldt never tires of saying, each climate has its own unique character and with it, its own unique story of historical development. As products and producers of this character, the story of the development of every civilization must be understood and appreciated on its own terms.

Contrary to universalist or teleological interpretations of history, Humboldt's understanding of historical time is one of dynamic stability always understood in terms of its local history. Over the course of millions of years, environments of the earth stabilize and take on a shape, they allow for the development of human civilizations, whose ways of life are both fundamentally determined by them as well as work to change them. Environments and ways of human life are not eternal structures equipped with normative standards, but historically contingent, fragile process of organic growth, decay, and change. Sometimes the history of these changes can be read out of the shape of the earth itself, but often times they are lost forever.

Humboldt tells one such story of a tribe that had once lived in the forests surrounding the Orinoco river in Venezuela and had sketched images of crocodiles and boa constrictors on rock cliffs 80 feet above the current level of that river. Taking these images into consideration, combined with an analysis of the vegetative life of the region, Humboldt concluded that the Orinoco had had a water level that was 80 feet higher than it was at Humboldt's time. This higher water level had enabled a form of life. With the reduction of the water level, however, this

way of life had ceased to exist with the works of art on the cliffs high above the paintings the only remnant of this people and their way of life. The change in the dynamic forces, in other words, had ultimately led to the end of a specific way of life. Reflecting of these spaces of time, whose extent is almost impossible for us to understand, Humboldt writes “thus the races of humans die away.” [so sterben dahin die Geschlechter der Menschen]. And he continues: “The glorious message of peoples rings in through the air. But whenever every flower of the spirit has withered, whenever the works of creative art scatter in the storm of time, just then, eternally new life will spring from the womb of the earth. The blossoms of productive nature unfolds unceasingly.” [Es verhallt die Rühmliche Kunder der Völker. Doch wenn jede Blüthe des Geistes welkt, wenn im Sturm der Zeiten die Werke schaffender Kunst zerstieben, so entsprieβt ewig neues Leben aus dem Schoβe der Erde. Rastlos entfaltet ihre Knospen die zeugende Natur.] (193).” For Humboldt, the essence of nature is change, process, development. Nature settles into an equilibrium, humans pursue their ends, nature is disrupted and humans die off. For Humboldt, however, from the perspective of cosmological time, the human being is just a speck in the development of the organism of the earth, and when human civilizations go, if lucky, they will be remembered in their art, which eventually will go too.

ii. Humboldt and Stifter’s *Nachsommer*

The connections to Alexander von Humboldt in Stifter’s Nachsommer are plentiful, both implicit and explicit. The most obvious reference, however, is the direct intertextual reference that is made when Heinrich picks up a copy of Humboldt’s, *Journey through the Equatorial Regions of the new Continent* (*Reise durch die Äquikonoktial-Gegenden des neuen Continents*)

while waiting for Risach in the reading room, but implicit references to Humboldt abound as well. The cactus, too, which Risach's gardener is so proud of and blooms on Heinrich and Natalie's wedding night, is mentioned in both Humboldt's Reise and in his *Ansichten der Natur* as the only plant that is native to the America's. Here, the dynamism of upcoming globalized travel is already occurring. Yet the most important connection is not a direct reference, but the methodological similarities between what Humboldt is doing in the Geography of Plants and structures at work in the novel both narrative and the level of action within the plot.

The most obvious of these similarities relates to Heinrich's decision to become a naturalist, quite obviously, of the Humboldtian variety. Heinrich's life task, in other words, is to map the local region and its history in Humboldtian form. Using the Rosenhaus as a starting point, Heinrich goes into the mountains every summer in order to collect empirical data. He maps the distribution of the plant life, tests the barometric pressure at various altitudes, and measures the depths of the lakes and the heights of the mountains, attempting, in essence, to create a small geo-biological map of the current state of the local region. This empirical data collection, however, is supplemented by Heinrich's considerations of the *Naturgeschichte* of the earth.

> I rented a small room in an inn and made measurements of the depth of the water at various points…I thought that in this way one could get an approximate understanding of the shape of the lake…These activities led me to thinking about the oddities of the geological form of our earth…The lake fills more and more over the course of millennia and millennia until suddenly, it ma be after hundreds or thousands of years, there is no lake anymore, and upon the layers of stone, a human foot wanders plants grow, and even trees stand. I knew of some places like this, that were once the bottom of a lake.
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> Ich miethete mich in einem Gasthofe ein, und machte mehrere Messungen der Tiefe des Wassers an verschiedenen Stellen…Ich dachte auf diese Weise könnte man annβhrend die Gestalt des Seebeckens ergründen (324)… Diese Bestrebungen brachten mich auf die Betrachtung der Seltsamkeiten unserer Erdgestaltung…In Jahrtausenden und Jahrtausenden füllt sich das Becken immer

> mehr, bis einmal, mögen hundert oder noch mehr Jahrtausende vergangen sein, kein See mehr ist, und auf der ungeheuren Dicke der Geröllschichten der menschliche Fuβ wandelt, Pflanzen grünen und selbst Bäume stehen. So kannte ich manche Stellen, die einst Seegrund gewesen waren.[364]

In truly Humboldtian fashion, Heinrich moves from the measurement and description of the equilibrium of the present in order to tell the history of the lake, how its form changed over time and how, in the future, it will change again. Just as Heinrich knows of forested areas that were once lakes, this lake, Heinrich suggests, will be morphed into the new shape of a thriving forest. Heinrich thus, "learns how to read" the history of the morphological changes through the empirical study of the structure of the earth. Heinrich, in other words, has become a local Geographer of plants.

Yet it seems to me that it is not only with respect to Heinrich's understanding of nature that the *Nachsommer* demonstrates its Humboldtian influence, but that the novel is engaged with the Humboldtian project at a much deeper level. If the job of the Geographer of Plants is to provide a detailed description of the network of interconnected forces within an environment, and to give a historical explanation of how the environment came to be in the shape that it is, then what we find Heinrich as narrator doing precisely the same thing on multiple different levels with his *Nachsommer*. The description of Risach's house and garden are case and point. Heinrich's first tour of the complex of the *Rosenhaus* in which every room and space of the complex are described in almost painful detail, provides and unforgettable sketch of the environment of the house, describing how every force within the house interacts with other forces in order to stand in an equilibrium with everything else. In the Garden, for example Risach has quite literally created a unique natural environment with a dynamic set of interacting forces

[364] Stifter, 324-325.

is in a state of equilibrium, which included the harmonious operation of human nature, natural patterns, and physical material. Risach has built and maintains bird nests and feeding centers to attract the migrating bird population which eat the bugs in the garden and thereby serve as a form of pest-control so that they no longer eat the roses, which, in turn, allows the roses to bloom with a particular beauty. What is described he3r is exactly a *Gleichgewicht,* an equilibrium characteristic of the environment of the Rosenhaus a balance of potentially antagonistic forms.

Yet the layers of equilibrium run deeper. The garden itself has a story of becoming that we are also told. The Garden is there to keep alive the memory of Risach's failed love for Mathilde. The roses are the symbol of that memory. And yet the garden area is only one area in which this method of describing something before telling how it came to take its shapes occurs within the narrative. The whole narrative is consumed with describing this harmony and explaining how it came to be, from the alpine region in which Heinrich lives, to the Rosenhaus, to Risach's life, and ultimately, to the life and harmonic integration of Heinrach's family with Natalie's. On all these levels, same structure occurs and reoccurs, a description of a harmonic environment with the slow, steady explanation of how that harmony was produced.

Humboldt calls the description of such an environment a *Naturgemälde*, that is, a picture that describes and captures the unique feeling of some local geographical location. It seems to me that Heinrich, in the narrative of thee text itself is creating a *Naturgemälde* in exactly this way. And the idea that Heinrich is telling the story of how the environment of the *Nachsommer* comes to be also makes sense in light of Heinrich's determination of his occupation as a "scientist in general" (*Wissenschaftler im Allgemeinen*) who researches "the mountains and the land…to contribute something to the knowledge of remaining and to the production of the history of what has come to be" [die Berge und das Land…und zur Kenntniβ des Bestehenden

und zur Herstellung der Geschichte des Gewordenen etwas beizutragen]. And in the text, Heinrich mentions his own scientific production where he does just that. Yet, once Heinrich's occuapation and Humboldt's methods are made clear, what becomes apparent is that *Der Nachsommer* itself is Heinrich's real contribution to the science of the earth. If the Humboldtian project calls for the absurd task of explaining every appearance as it relates to every other and providing a genetic history that explain both, then Heinrich nearly succeeds in doing so. His story both describes and explains nearly everything that influenced Heinrich, which constituted him as the subject that he is, transformed in the text into that which he constitutes. Heinrich, in other words, is the ultimate Humboldtian scientist and the *Nachsommer* the ultimate Humboldtinan *Naturgemälde*. The text enacts the Humboldian theory, explaining everything about that environment, from the creation of the mountains to his own marriage in the Rosenhaus, to the writing of the text and its own style. The text is the equilibrium of the place recounting the history of its own harmonious state.

It is, therefore, precisely because Heinrich is engaged in the project of creating a *Naturgemälde* that the novel takes on such a weighty feel as if the structure presented consists in a normative order of things. Heinrich is literally describing the dynamic harmony of relations as they obtain within the Rosenhaus at a period of historical time. The environment is teleologically oriented with a set of purposively ordered objects and behaviors. The figures do change their shape to fit and co-constitute the order of this world.

Yet what is simultaneously clear is that this description is never intended to be normative, nor does it claim to be eternal. Rather, I would suggest that the meticulousness with which Stifter constitutes his order rather suggests that the novel is shot through with an awareness of its own historical contingency. The central importance of Humboldt now becomes clear. The text is

predicated on an understanding of the contingency of things and a knowledge that when the context and conditions change, the environment described will dissolve as well. And this is precisely the position we find that Risach takes in one of the central conversations of the novel. Speaking again about the relative quality of historical epochs, Risach speculates,

> What will things be like when we can send news over the whole earth with the speed of a lightening bolt, when we can get to different places in the shortest amount of time? Won't the ease of trade and exchange transform products of the earth into something common, which are available to everyone? Right now, a small country town can sequester itself with that which it has and knows: soon, however, that will no longer be the case…Then that which even the most limited must know and be able to do will be so much greater than now…What transformations of the spirit in its essence will occur.
>
> wie wird es sein, wenn wir mit der Schnelligkeit des Blizes Nachrichten über die ganze Erde werde verbreiten können, wenn wir selber mit groβer Geschwindigkeit und in kurzer Zeit an die verschiedensten Stellen werden gelangen und werden befördern können. Werden die Güter der Erden da nicht durch die Möglichkeit des leichten Austauches gemeinsam werden, dass allen Alles zugänglich ist? Jetzt kann sich eine kleine Landstadt und ihre Umgebung mit dem, was sie hat und was sie ist, und was sie weiβ absperren: bald wird es aber nicht mehr so sein…Dann wird das was der Geringste wissen und können muss, um vieles gröβer sein als jetzt…Welche Umgestaltungen wird der Geist in seinem Wesen Erlangen.[365]

In a world where goods, information, and individuals can move wherever they wish, people and places will have to integrate more knowledge, get outside of their own traditions and adjust the means of production and the way in which production influences a way of life. The world of the *Nachsommer*, however, is one built completely on tradition and isolation. As a consequence, the environment that Heinrich so meticulously describes will, in the span of a short period of time, be subject to a new set of conditions, and take on a new form. If one follows Humboldt, though, then there is no necessary good or bad involved with this change. A new equilibrium will have to

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[365] Ibid., 521-522.

be found, the parts will have to figure out how to function with one another and, if that happens, then a new form of life will emerge and a new *Nachsommer* can be written describing it. The environment described in the *Nachsommer*, in other words, is an example of a seemingly static environment, which actually rests on a bed of dynamic change.

Stifter's understanding of the dynamism of environments goes so far, I would suggest, as to work its way into the title and the historical purpose of the text. If a "Nachsommer", as Risach suggests, represents the possibility of a second blooming period, a time where the blossom blooms, but in a changed shape, I would suggest that Stifter's text is meant to be understood historically in exactly this way. It seems to me that Stifter, in the very creation of the novel, is producing a monument for future generations that elucidates the dynamic set of interrelations of a contingent and historical human environment and the way in which this environment came to take on the form that it did. This form of life is one in which there exists an unbroken tradition from classical antiquity into modernity, which informs the teleological utopia that is the world of the *Nachsommer*. Thus, this social world takes on the appearance of stability and describes the relations amongst the parts as if they constituted an ontological order of things.

But they do not. Not only are all the parts and forms within the book constantly changing their shape, with each member morphing so as to fit into the environmental dynamic; but the presence of Alexander von Humboldt and his understanding of history clearly undercuts the notion that this world as it is described possesses any normative standing. Stifter knows that the world he is describing is on the verge of being historically eclipsed. Stifter's world, like the medieval works of art restored in Risach's house, is on the verge of being forgotten. The novel is a monument to that world that has Stifter believes will recede into the past and potentially be forgotten. The text thus stands as a time capsule against the possibility of seeping into

forgottenness. It provides a full description of the environment and the story of how it came to be. But in this, it is also intended as an opportunity, a seed so to speak, that can be taken up in new generations and provide impetus for helping create a new dynamic equilibrium in the future. Just as for Humboldt, the old is built into the structure of the new, perhaps Stifter's text represents an opportunity for the old to be remembered, appreciated, and restored. The *Nachsommer*, thus awaits a second bloom in which old material has been reshaped to take on a new form and shape.

iii. Final Thoughts

I ended this dissertatioin with a study of Stifter's *Nachsommer*, because that study, in many ways sums up the goals of the dissertation as a whole. The primary goal of this dissertation was to investigate the geneaology, clarify the central logic, and sketch out the main features of two competinig theories of subjectivity that emerged in the latter quarter of the 18th century in Germany, one Kantian and universalist, the other Herederian and relativist. I intended to do this with the hope of destabilizing some standard schoarlay narratives of the development of German literature and philosophy around 1800 and in particular, those narratives that charachterized them as committd to a straightforward, uncritical, humanism.

I felt that this constellation of issues was important for two reasons. First, once placed into this context, I it seems to me that Herder and Kant develop two irreocinciliable yet equally fundamental models for how we can understand ourselves as human beings. As I have argued throughout, I find both of these thinkers and their conceptions of subjectivity to be admirable. And despite their incompatibility, I often find myself drawn to the picture of the human being

painted by both. On many occasion I have found Herder's individualized, perspectivialized theory necessary if I am going to make sense of people's behaviours, cognitive attitueds, etc., and a wonderful description and guide of the disrooted, disjointed path of life. Herder furthermore, develops a genuine metaphysics of pluralism and his philosophy contains a core defense of diversity and the diverse ways in which human beings can engage and experience our shared world. In these respects, I have found Herder's philosophy illuminating and inspiring.

At th same time, however, I have and I believe will always find something about Kant's philosophy to be simply indispensable (*unentbehrlich*). His intellectual rigor, the honesty with which he engages with problems and, above all, his commitment to grounding a modest yet universal ethics is, for me beyond admirable. In many ways, when I feel that I live up to the version of myself that I most want to be, when I comport myself towards others in the way I believe that I should (as ends and never as a means), I find myself more often than not implicitly employing Kant and a Kantian moral framework to guide and inform my being-in-the-world. And while Kant's universalit project has and continues to take a lot of heat, this dissertation research only helped solidify my admiration for Kant as a philosopher. Framing Kant in light of the debates discussed here allows one, I believe to see his drive for universalism in a different light. Kant was not fanatically trying to discipline the subject but to allow philosophy to argue that there is something genuinely universal in the human soul. Fortunately, however, it is not the point of this dissertation to adjudicate between these two wonderful thinkers but to present their theories of subjectivity vis-à-vis the core problem of vitalism.

In doing so, I have simultaneously tried to show that the discourse around 1800 was much more complicated than is usually given credit (and it is usually given credit as being pretty complicated!). Thus, the second half of the dissertation shifts to readinig the way in which this

vitalist discourse complicates standard narratives of classical Humanism. Regardless of how they have been used, it doesn't seem to me that Goethe, Schiller, and Stifter's projects are nearly as pedantically moralistic and universalist as they are often charachterized. Rather, in them they are *struggling* with questions of universality, of relativity, of history, stasis and change. They were often movinig back and forth, changing their positions, holding contradictory positions, just I hold with respect to Kant and Herder. Thus, I have argued that the picture of subjectivity that they develop is much more subtle and nuanced and is so largely because of the vitalist discourse.

As such, I believe that these classical texts have much to offer us not for the reasons given in the standard narrative. For, rather than develop an aesthetic regime intended to shape subects according to a singular standard, these figures were grappling with issues that are hyper relevant today. Questions concerning the relationship between universality and individuality, relativity and truth, the validity of multicultural perspectives and the universality of the claims of justice. These questions, I have argued, were not settled and fixed, but in the process of being thought through. Approaching these texts from this vitalist perspective rather than the perspective of a settled narrative can, for that reason, open us to the possibility of approaching these texts in a new and original ways. And while many of the criticisms of Classical Humanism have been valid, I believe, that this vitalist narrative allows us to ask whether this label should organize our understanding of Goethe, Schiller, Stifter and others, or whether it itself is nothing but a contingent, created category.

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