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Herder (YDS 18-271)

In 1974, Frei gave the Rockwell Lectures at Rice University, and planned to speak on Lessing, Kant, and Herder. He may never have reached the lecture on Herder, but some of what he planned to say might well be revealed by these lecture notes from courses he gave in 1973 (CPH 1973b) and 1974 (CPH 1974l)

Lecture on Herder, Feb 26 1973

1. Lecture (on Wed, Feb 21) taken from my Herder section in *Eclipse*; left over: 'Realistic spirit' (simple, childlike naiveté, depiction of immediacy of life) in biblical writings, rather than mythological quality (down to the very semantics!)
 - (a) Denial of rationalism, i.e. allegory and accommodation.
 - (b) Denial that meaning of texts = factual claim of miraculous nature (To that extent at one with Lessing). Yet at same time insistent that no Christianity without these facts. The meaning of these stories is the gradually developing realistic spirit evident in them.
 - (c) 'Humanly is the Bible to be understood, for it is a book written by human beings for human beings.' It is to be understood 'from the Spirit of its time'. He wants to woo you into the atmosphere of every text. Hartlich and Sachs, 57:¹ 'Herder wants to return to the original naiveté of the Bible, appropriate it completely and live within it as one lives within a poetic work. He does not want to be tempted either by the question of the factuality of what is narrated there nor by the question of the necessary reshaping of the temporally conditioned biblical meaning (truth).'
2. His anger reserved for the critical stance. Frustrated because finally he knows he can't leap out of his time, out of his *no longer* naive, direct, realistic apprehension of texts, works, reality – and yet this is precisely what he wants to do! ('History, not categories, is the focus of poetic analysis'²) (Don't know in detail his view of Schiller's *Naive and Sentimental* (Geoffrey Sammons: 'Sentimentive') *Poetry*.³ (He started a letter to Schiller on the subject.) Poetry not to be divided by genre so much as by the kind of sensibility. Hence the genres tend to merge) but he (unlike Goethe) demonstrates the dilemma.
3. (a) Violent anti-Kantianism is in part due to his (unsystematic, unscientific) affirmation that through our experience – inward, outward – we are in touch with the real world. (He relied on Hamann's⁴

reading of the 1st Critique and hoped – like Hamann – to show that sensibility and understanding, intuition and concept are united in language.)

- (b) Like Goethe, he was passionately anti-mechanist, anti-Newtonian at the same time as he respected most profoundly the element of ‘closed efficient system of the world’ which the physicist took as his explanatory structure. An entelechy, of a certain organic development in which a primitive life, life-unity, and active force pervades and grows through the universe: this Herder learned from Leibniz and Goethe⁵ especially at the time of the *Ideen* (Reflections).⁶ It was after the publication of the first part of the *Ideen* that Goethe discovered the intermaxillary bone: man as a total organism, not in individual details, related to the animals – and yet higher than they. Nature and history, for Goethe and Herder both, to be understood genetically: Everything (including understanding) in motion (history!) (for this, Lessing wanted to and could find no adequate conceptual expression!) ‘Goethe viewed nature after the analogy of spirit and history. Herder tried to demonstrate the justification of this way of viewing nature by making it retrospectively the key also for understanding human history.’⁷ (Modify that in Herder’s case!)
- (c) But experience goes further than the ‘real’ world as it appears directly – yet not beyond that ‘real’ world into a super-world of ‘real’ intellectual (in contrast to experiential) knowledge: Dogmatism (Wolff, Leibniz, Spinoza) must be drastically modified (in face of ‘Criticism’), and here Spinoza proved useful, though within limits.
- (d) One of the most important elements in the development of German religious thought from Herder through Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, is the rejection of the ‘Creator God’. This is the most direct expression of the breakthrough of a certain kind of intellectual spirituality into the open area beyond the confines of ecclesiastical piety. (More important positively for their religion than the view of historical revelation in Jesus Christ.) This breakthrough not simply a matter of conceptual change but of sensibility. This is not clearly expressed in Herder and will be in Fichte one way, Schelling the other way, but it’s there.
- (e) God not to be thought of as specific, determinate being who is distinct from and hence related externally to the world, whose substance and attributes would have to be conceived in analogy to created, intelligent being in the world; Spinoza’s monism serves him to claim the immanence of God, the steady presence of spiritual life-force (God = Spirit from here on in) to natural and spiritual being. God not a cause that, having caused, allows a discrete, contingently independent self-life to the effect. But the total immanence also serves to stress the total

otherness/infinity of God. No analogy between eternity and time, God and finite being, such as doctrine of creation in and with time had claimed.⁸ 'The Bible always speaks of God as a present, living active being, alive in all his works, active in each individual work, even in the smallest concern of one life ... Indeed this is the only way to ascertain God, to grasp him and bring him to the attention of others, in short it is the basis of all religion on earth.'⁹

- (f) The monism of Spinoza only served to affirm the immanence of God: While Herder denied individual personhood to the divine, and externally set final causes, the whole of the universe is a living organism, spiritual and natural, so that God not infinite substance with extension one of its attributes. 'Herder is the first German thinker to try to conceive naturalism as a moment of truth within an evolutionary world system, and to make the place of humanity, the noblest and highest organic system on earth, as the decisive basis of all higher ideal truth. God is the primeval force that penetrates this organism in infinite individual expressions.'¹⁰
- (g) But also in a certain qualitative order, and by means of certain immutable laws: the chaotic, the evil, the partial is always subordinate to and means for the realization of what is harmonious, good, whole. Even war has changed, developed from a wild, chaotic, passionate expression to an art in control by individuals: the art of war in part consumes war itself. (Intense dislike of power, the state, Hobbes, contract, etc.)
- (h) From there Herder swung to the analogy of the spiritual, i.e. the immortality of spirit growing as a climactic reality out of the increasing perfection of inorganic nature which is the fit basis for life (even as pre-formed life), organic life and nature as the chrysalis of man's unique cultural and historical existence. Immortality the climax of it all. Anti-rationalist (but affinity to Rousseau) (1) in the notion of ascending, developing order of reality and (2) in the way this is to be apprehended – the senses, reasoning, and imagination all together – empathy, sense for unique manifestations. Kant – same beliefs (Rationalists usually believed in immortality) but not by analogy from order of visible experience. (Divine transcendence and immanence, unresolved in Herder, seen as a problem in Hegel etc., where person 'anthropomorphism' a moment in the Absolute.)

New Lecture on Herder, October 10, 1974

New lecture beginning Herder as linguistic-cultural theorist: Language as clue to him and to difference between Romantics like him and Rationalists like Lessing.

- (1) Herder connected origin of language and origin of poetry – both intimately connected. Not only is poetry akin to the essence, if not itself the essence of language, but it is so because it is close to the *origin* of language. The preoccupation with origins has two aspects (a) persistence of the nature of anything, especially its true nature, within later developments; (b) a kind of purity not equaled thereafter – primitivism of a sort, albeit modified because the earliest stage also excelled in other respects.
- (2) Almost at random one picks among his writings and the same cluster of themes emerges. E.g., from the mid-seventies ‘Fragment about the finest contribution of a young genius to the treasures of poetic art.’¹¹ Back to the original living source! Use technical aids and concepts, divisions into genres (Lowth!¹²) only as tools, not as real, built-in characteristics.
- (3) His prize essay (late 1770)¹³ one of his most successful achievements, according to Rudolf Haym.¹⁴ There had been about two views of language. Theological-orthodox and enlightenment-rationalistic. (a) Language comes about by divine instruction. (b) Languages come about by deliberate invention and conventional agreement. But in addition (c) Condillac (remnants of Cartesian view of animal as machine) origin of language a natural product of our ‘sensing machinery’.¹⁵ Sounds naturally given off as a result of sensation, these responded to in similar fashion, and thus speech develops. Origin of language neither divine nor human but animal nature.¹⁶ Also anti-Enlightenment. Agrees with Condillac that origin natural, but disagrees that it presupposes some sort of society (But Rousseau leaves undecided whether (organized) *languages* presuppose society or vice versa. But long time lapse between language in state of nature and this state.) People need speech in order to think. From cry of nature (in need of help in emergency) it develops through gesturing into the art of audible, articulated signs, at first each object having a particular name without reference to genus and species. Reversing rationalists, he says that general ideas can come into the mind only with the aid of words.) Against these three hypotheses, Herder grounds speech in the specifically spiritual nature of man, in what distinguishes us from the animals.¹⁷ (What we have here is an early example of that humanism so distinctive of German philosophy, albeit still with a vigorous endeavor – as with early Schelling – to see man as a unique development in, and connected with, nature as driving force.)

- (4) Haym says that here, as everywhere, he tries to mediate French–English naturalism on the one hand and rationalistic German philosophy (Leibniz–Wolff) on the other. Here it means working out theory of languages as a natural–spiritual datum.
- (5) Unlike animals, man has no natural, instinctual mode of communication. Man, in contrast to animals, has a universal – not a narrow – *Wirkungskreis*: connected to this is a necessity, not present in the immediate artfulness required for animal’s artful scope, for free *Besinnung*, loosed from immediate object, or *Verstand*, *Vernunft* – his favorite term is *Besonnenheit* – reflexiveness (We can pretty well say self-consciousness! Unlike Schleiermacher self-consciousness and speech directly, not indirectly connected.)
- (6) *Besonnenheit* pervades / governs his *whole* nature; it is not a specific ‘super-added’ power. By means of it, characteristics of external world are separated out, marked inwardly, and become inwardly and outwardly expressed. Mixed with expressionist theory is obviously depictive or sign theory – words are signs naming things. The two, one should say, are mixed: What is important is (a) their coincidence by virtue of the grounding of both in man’s *inwardness and consciousness*; (b) the employment of this theory of origins and nature of language for the explanation of man as language – and hence culture-bearer, not for the sake of language theory in its own right. (‘The first mark of reflectiveness was the soul’s word and with that language was invented. Each thing is noted internally, begets an internal denoting, characterizing word and all human language as a collection of such ... Language would have had to come about even if man had been isolated without society. It’s due to the distinctiveness of human nature. Even unspoken, language would have existed. It was the agreement of the human soul with itself.’)
- (7) The characteristic or chief sense which aids language in developing as inward and outward word is *not* sight but *sound*. The world of objects is first communicated to *hearing* and the first word book of the world is collected from the world’s sounds. But ‘The sounding world appears to sensuous man as living and acting; her personifies nature. What was originally verb becomes noun, and noun again becomes distinguished by gender or sex. Woven into the beginnings of language are the beginnings of mythology and poetry.’¹⁸ The first language was nothing but a collection of poetic elements, a ‘wordbook of the soul which was at the same time mythology and a marvelous epic report of the actions and speeches of all beings – a constant fabulation done with passion and interest.’
- (8) For (a) feeling and relation to outside as well as for (b) the interrelation between various senses, *hearing or sound* is the crucial mediating sense.

Sense of touch too momentary, sense of sight too confusing – a constant simultaneity or side-by-side of many, many things: Hearing on the other hand is best organized, allows orderly successiveness to the soul. (Lessing's *Laokoon*!) At the base of all senses is feeling, and feeling expresses itself naturally and immediately in sound.

- (9) Development of language: (a) Language and reflectiveness mutually supportive into an orderly whole. (Like Schleiermacher precedent *seems* to go to inwardness interior character.) (b) Language is never an individual but a social development because man is social. (c) Language conditioned by the necessary division of the race into differing cultures according to different climates and modes of life. (d) Nonetheless, developments of language in accordance with a higher plan, a unitary development of all mankind, a chain of a many-faceted unitary *Bildung*.

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- ¹ C. Hartlich, and W. Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes in der modernen Bibelwissenschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1952).
- ² Rudolf Haym, *Herder nach seinem Leben und seinen Werken* (Berlin: Aufbau 1880), II, p.683.
- ³ Schiller, *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795–96).
- ⁴ [Johann Georg Hamann (1739–1788), theologian and philosopher.]
- ⁵ Haym, *Herder*, pp.231.
- ⁶ Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–1791).
- ⁷ Haym, *Herder*, p.235.
- ⁸ Herder, *Gott: Einige Gespräche* (Gotha: Ettinger, 1787).
- ⁹ Herder, *Briefe, das Studium der Theologie betreffend* (1784) in *Johann Gottfried Herder Werke 9/1 Theologische Schriften*, ed. G. Arnold et al (Frankfurt a/M: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1985–2000), pp.424–5.
- ¹⁰ Emanuel Hirsch, *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie IV* (Güttersloh, 1952), p.219; cf. Herder, *Gott*, pp.104ff.
- ¹¹ Herder, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan, 9 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877–1913), pp. 541f.
- ¹² [Robert Lowth (1710–1787), author of *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*.]
- ¹³ Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (Berlin, 1772); German text available at <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/herder/sprache/sprache.html>.
- ¹⁴ Haym, *Herder I*, pp.430f.
- ¹⁵ Etienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac (1714–1780), *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances*; a text is available at <http://visualiseur.bnf.fr/Visualiseur?Destination=Gallica&O=NUMM-87990>.
- ¹⁶ For third hypothesis, cf. Rousseau's Second Discourse 'On the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men' in *The First and Second Discourses*, ed. R.D. Masters (New York: St. Martin's, 1964), pp.119ff.

¹⁷ See his critique of Rousseau, *Sämmtliche Werke* 5, p.20.

¹⁸ Haym, *Herder*, pp.433ff.