
On the Value of Happiness: Herder contra Kant

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Introduction

In November of 1785, Kant published a highly unsympathetic review of the second part of Johann Gottfried Herder's *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind*.¹ Herder had once been Kant's pupil, and had greatly admired his teacher, but the content of this review shows how profound the philosophical differences between them had by then become. A central area of dispute emerging from the review concerns the nature of happiness, and its place within the 'destiny' or 'vocation' (*Bestimmung*) of the human race. Kant is responding, in particular, to a section of the *Ideas* entitled: 'The happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) of human beings is everywhere an individual good; consequently, it is everywhere climatic and organic, a child of practice, tradition, and custom.'² Although Kant is not mentioned by name in this section, it clearly contains critical rejoinders, often quite harsh in tone, to aspects of his practical philosophy

1 *Kants Werke*, Akademie Ausgabe (henceforth, AA) (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1902-), 8, 58-66. Kant had earlier written an equally critical review of the *Ideas*; see AA 8: 45-55.

2 Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, *Werke in zehn Bänden* (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag 1985-), 6: 327. Henceforth, *Ideen*.

and philosophy of history, as Herder understands them. Against any idea that happiness requires extrinsic justification, for instance, Herder insists that 'every living creature takes delight in its life; it does not brood and ask, why is it there? Its existence is to it an end and its end is existence' (*Ideen*, 330). Against the view that true happiness lies only at the end of a history whose completion belongs to European states, he writes: 'it would be ridiculously presumptuous to think that the inhabitants of all continents must be Europeans in order to live happily' (*Ideen*, 327), and he strongly opposes those who would see the destiny of the human race in the achievement of some final political condition. What, he asks, could it mean to say that man is 'made for the state, as the end of his race and all of its generations, made in fact only for the last generation, which sits enthroned on the decayed frame of the happiness of all previous ones?' (*Ideen*, 332) For his part, Herder claims that happiness is an 'inner condition' whose measure must be sought 'in the breast of every individual being' (*Ideen*, 327).

These remarks are specifically directed at Kant's essay 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent,' which had appeared the previous year, in 1784. Indeed, Kant's defensive response to Herder, in his review, emphatically reaffirms the position he had developed in that essay. In the first place, objecting to the worth Herder places on an individualistic and relativistic notion of happiness, Kant counters Herder's question about the state with a question of his own. 'What if the genuine goal of history were not this phantom of happiness, which everyone creates for himself,' he asks, 'but the continually progressing and increasing activity and culture that is thereby set into motion, whose maximum possible degree can only be the product of a state organized according to concepts of human rights, and thus the work of human beings themselves?' (AA 8:63) Kant also objects to Herder's suggestion that a happy existence is self-justifying, arguing that Herder needs to address the issue, not merely of the worth of a given condition among existing beings, but of the worth of their existence itself. At this juncture, Kant poses a second question to Herder:

Does the author mean to say that, if the happy inhabitants of Tahiti were never visited by more civilized nations, and were destined to live for thousands of years in their quiet indolence, one would receive a satisfactory answer to the question of why they exist at all, and whether it would not have been just as good if this island had been inhabited by happy sheep and pigs as with these people happy in mere enjoyment? (AA 8:65)

In light of this exchange, some commentators have tended to assimilate Herder's position to that of the earlier Rousseau, judging that while Kant places ultimate value upon the struggle to achieve a just moral and political order, a struggle motivated by various forms of *discontent*,

Herder prizes most highly the simple pleasures of life in (imagined) primitive societies. Allen Wood, for instance, claims that 'human beings for Herder were destined by God for a life of harmony and innocent contentment.'³ Catherine Wilson thinks Herder echoes Rousseau in believing that 'man was not made for citizenry and the civil state ... but for family and tribal life' and that 'sensitivity of the heart is more important than the depths of ratiocination.'⁴ She finds support for this view in Herder's identification of happiness with 'the simple, deep, irreplaceable feeling of existence' common to all living beings (*Ideen*, 331), as well as in his proposal that happiness is 'more a quiet feeling than a glittering thought,' so that 'a head overfull of knowledge, be it even golden knowledge, oppresses the body, narrows the breast, darkens the eye, and becomes to him, who has to bear it, a sickly burden upon life' (*Ideen*, 330).

Herder's anthropology and philosophy of history are, however, significantly more nuanced than such remarks suggest.⁵ Herder actually accepts that history involves salutary forms of struggle to improve the lot of humanity, and that it manifests a kind of progress. He also does not simply reject reason. On the whole, as recent scholarship has stressed, he is much more a child of the Enlightenment than is often assumed.⁶ Accordingly, the opposition between Kant and Herder on the subject of happiness is also more complex than one might think, touching upon a host of questions in metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. Kant and Herder hold sharply contrasting views of the relation between mind and body, between reason and perception, and between means and ends within various spheres of teleological understanding. They also differ on the nature and role of the emotions, and on the status of the 'natural' as a category applying both to an aspect of human subjectivity and to the objective world. As I will demonstrate in this paper, all of these differences are implicated in the dispute between them on the character and value of happiness, a dispute which cannot help

3 Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999), 228

4 Catherine Wilson, 'Savagery and the Supersensible: Kant's Universalism in Historical Context,' *History of European Ideas* 24 (1998) 315-30, at 319

5 In the case of Wilson, I am referring here only to her portrait of Herder. My analysis supports a number of the points she raises in relation to Kant, on the other hand, while building a better appreciation of Herder's critique.

6 See, for instance, Frederick C. Beiser's *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1992), 204.

but have serious consequences for social and political practice, given that it involves judgments about the very purpose of human existence.

While my primary aim is to provide a better understanding of Herder's own position, I also propose that his criticisms of Kant are more sophisticated than they are taken to be in accounts presenting Herder merely as a champion of primitive simplicity. Herder offers a contemporary challenge to Kant that not only anticipates important current objections, but that calls into question the entire framework of Kant's practical philosophy, its most basic categories, distinctions and value judgments. In spite of some recent attempts to defend and rehabilitate Kant's ethical thought, I believe that these criticisms are still valid, and that Herder's proposed alternatives at least merit closer consideration than they have received to date. Although a thorough assessment of Kant's and Herder's respective positions lies outside the scope of this paper, I hope to take a few steps in this direction.

I The Idea of Happiness

Kant defines happiness in a number of ways: as pleasure (*Lust*),⁷ as the satisfaction of inclinations (*Neigungen*),⁸ and, generally, as 'the state of a rational being in the world in the whole of whose existence *everything goes according to his wish and will*' (CPrR, 104/AA 5:124). On earth, the concept applies exclusively to human beings, the only beings in this world who are 'rational but finite' (CprR 23, AA 5:25). In his *Lectures on Anthropology*, Kant claims that only a being who can say 'I' is capable of happiness or unhappiness; animals can only be said to feel pleasure and pain.⁹ Happiness, then, belongs only to beings who can represent their condition, with its needs and desires, to themselves, and work to

7 *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), 19; henceforth, CPrR. AA 5:22.

8 Kant sometimes describes happiness as the satisfaction of *all* inclinations, and sometimes as the satisfaction of a *system* of inclinations. In the *Groundwork of a Metaphysic of Morals* (trans. Mary Gregor [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997]; henceforth, Gr) he speaks of happiness as 'the sum of satisfaction of all inclinations' (p. 12/AA 4:399), while, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he defines it as the satisfaction of 'all the inclinations together ... which can be brought into a tolerable system' (CPrR, 63/AA 5:73). For a discussion of this distinction, see Victoria Wikes, *Kant on Happiness in Ethics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 1994), 6-7.

9 *Vorlesungen über Anthropologie*, first half, AA 25.1:11-12, 422

achieve a more agreeable one. It belongs only, that is, to beings who are capable of prudential reasoning.

It is, moreover, an essentially 'indeterminate' (Gr, 28/AA 4:418) and 'unstable' concept.¹⁰ Kant shares Herder's relativistic conception of happiness, according to which it is an end whose content varies among individuals, and whose achievement can only be measured in relation to this variable content. From this common feature of their conception, however, Kant draws much more pessimistic conclusions than Herder does. For one thing, he argues that individuals can only know what will make them happy through experience, yet 'for the idea of happiness there is required an absolute whole, a maximum of well-being in my present condition and in every future condition' (Gr, 28/AA 4:418). The result is that all human beings want happiness, but, in doing so, they do not really know what they want. Additionally, given that the idea of happiness is vague, shifting, and variable, no principles can be formulated for how society, or even nature, could possibly be organized in order to meet this general human demand.¹¹ The concept cannot serve as a basis, therefore, for any ethics or politics.

Kant also doubts, on anthropological grounds, that man is capable of ever achieving happiness, because 'his nature is not of the sort to call a halt anywhere in possession and enjoyment and to be satisfied' (CJ, 298/AA 5:430). As this statement indicates, Kant's pessimism about the possibility of achieving happiness is connected with his way of defining it. Because he considers happiness to be a state of complete rest, in which all desires are fulfilled, he cannot see how a finite being in the world could ever, even in principle, achieve such a condition. This judgment is buttressed by Kant's equation of all desire and need with a form of pain. 'Pain must precede every gratification,' he writes later, in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, and it is 'the incentive to activity,' where only in activity do we feel our life.¹² 'To feel one's life, to enjoy oneself, is then nothing else but to feel constantly impelled to pass beyond the present state (which, consequently, has to be a

10 *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000), 297; henceforth, CJ, AA 5:430

11 See *The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), 9-10/AA 6:215-17 (henceforth, MM); 'On the Proverb: That May be True in Theory, but is of no Practical Use' (1793), in *Perpetual Peace and other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett 1983) (henceforth, PP), 72/AA 8:290; CJ, 297/AA 5:430.

12 *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press 1978), 131-2; henceforth, APPV, AA 7:231

frequently recurring grief)' (APPV, 133/AA 7:233). Given this way of perceiving the relation between desire and satisfaction, the latter can only be, at best, a brief interlude between bouts of pain, and Kant tends to conceive of satisfaction negatively, as the cessation or diminution of pain. This conception is especially prominent in his 1781-82 *Lectures on Anthropology*, where he explicitly defines happiness as 'that which frees us from pain' (AA 25.2: 1075).¹³ Commenting on these lectures, Susan Meld Shell observes that, by this point, Kant has firmly reached the conclusion, in agreement with Count Verri, that life is primarily pain, both in the sense that enjoyment is experienced exclusively as the absence of pain, and in the sense that 'the total sum of pain always outweighs the total sum of enjoyments.'¹⁴

Similar sentiments are expressed in Kant's published writings. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, he suggests that the value of life is 'less than zero' if assessed 'merely by *what one enjoys* (the natural end of the sum of all inclinations, happiness).' 'For who would start life anew under the same conditions,' he asks, 'or even according to a new and self-designed plan (but one still in accord with the course of nature), which would, however, still be aimed merely at enjoyment?' (CJ, 301/AA 5:434). Kant makes a similar point in 'Speculative Beginning of Human History,' claiming that 'one must have a poor understanding of life's true value if one can still wish that it should be longer than it actually is, for that would only prolong a permanent game of struggling with toil and trouble' (PP, 58/AA 8:122). His advice is that one should focus on goal-directed tasks instead, 'filling one's time with harmoniously progressive activities, which have an important and intended purpose in view' (APPV, 135/AA 7:234), while cultivating a measure of indifference towards the fulfillment of inclinations. The latter, in any case, only 'change, grow with the indulgence one allows them, and always leave behind a still greater void than one had thought to fill.' Consequently, they are always '*burdensome* to a rational being' who would rather be free of them altogether (CPrR, 99/AA 5:118).

For Kant, then, the best strategy for achieving inner peace is to aim, not at the hopeless end of satisfying one's ever-increasing desires, but at a form of 'contentment with oneself' (*Selbstzufriedenheit*) consisting

13 But see also the following remark, from lectures given in 1772-73: 'When we enjoy satisfaction, do we increase happiness? A little, but even that only in the beginning. Satisfaction uses itself up, it has no means of renewing itself ... the happiness of human beings consists in the absence of pain and dissatisfaction' (AA 25.1:171).

14 Susan Meld Shell, 'Kant's "True Economy of Human Nature": Rousseau, Count Verri, and the Problem of Happiness,' in *Essays on Kant's Anthropology*, Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003), 215

in the consciousness of virtuous activity and freedom (CPrR 98/AA 5:117). Within the terms of Kant's analysis, this state cannot itself be defined as a form of happiness, 'because it does not depend upon the positive concurrence of a feeling.' It arises from the awareness of independence from, and mastery over, one's inclinations, and is therefore only 'a negative satisfaction with one's state' (CPrR 99/AA 5:118). In truth, though, as we have seen, for Kant *all* satisfactions are primarily negative. He even writes that 'the greatest sensuous pleasure, which is not accompanied by any loathing at all, is found under healthy conditions in resting after work' (APPV, 184/AA 7:276).¹⁵

Kant's judgments here rest partly upon his discomfort with forms of enjoyment that involve being *moved* too much, as he perceives it, ones that disturb the mind's equilibrium by subjecting it to powerful affects. According to Kant's model of the self, only acts of the will are truly one's own, so only their exercise is considered to be self-generated, and therefore autonomous. The rest of the human psyche — emotions, needs, wishes, and so forth — are outside the will, the essence of the rational self under its practical aspect. Being subjected to their influence, in that case, means being moved by something external, the definition of heteronomy. The sensation of feeling a powerful pleasure is therefore experienced as a kind of disempowering self-alienation. In the *Anthropology* lectures, for example, Kant contrasts enthusiastic enjoyment, *Lustigkeit*, unfavourably with the calmer *Zufriedenheit*, describing the first as 'a form of convulsive movement' (AA 25.1:372). Since this distaste for strong feelings is often combined with the sense that, as Kai Haucke puts it, 'human life, precisely because it seeks happiness, is an endless series of disappointments, interrupted only by death,'¹⁶ it is unsurprising if Kant's solution to the problem of life turns out to be a form of Stoic detachment. 'Everything and particularly the brevity of life invites us not to consider life as important,' he remarks. To find contentment, one must keep this in mind: 'that a human being is really not something important, and that only good conduct makes up the true worth of men' (AA 25.1:370).

Again, Kant does not describe this kind of contentment as itself a form of happiness. States of mind involving the exercise of virtue do not

15 At one point in the *Anthropology* lectures, Kant says that 'our best happiness lies here in work' (AA 25.2:1319). Such remarks give an added dimension to Max Weber's claim, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that 'many of [Kant's] formulations are closely related to ideas of ascetic Protestantism' (trans. Talcott Parsons [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1958], 270).

16 Kai Haucke, 'Moralische Pflicht und die Frage nach dem gelingenden Leben. Überlegungen zu Kants Glücksbegriff,' *Kant-Studien* 93 (2002) 177-99, at 190

belong to the sphere of happiness, as Kant conceives of it. This feature of Kant's idea of happiness, where it is utterly distinct from morality, along with his understanding of it as a subjective phenomenon, distinguish Kant's position from that Aristotle. For the latter, *eudaimonea*, 'happiness' in the broader sense of living well, necessarily includes virtue, and is measured objectively, as a sum of human flourishing over the course of a lifetime. James Murphy, among others, points out the opposition between Kant and Aristotle on these two issues. Unlike Aristotle, he notes, Kant sees 'the prudential quest for happiness as compatible with profound immorality.'¹⁷ 'When Aristotle says that no child could be described as happy,' moreover, 'we sense the distance between his objective conception of happiness and Kant's — and our — more subjective understanding.'¹⁸

As I have already indicated, Herder and Kant agree on the subjective character of happiness. Like Kant, Herder does not conceive of happiness as measurable by an objective and universal standard, nor does he think of it as a property attributable only to the whole of a life. On the contrary, he often insists that different kinds of happiness are proper to different stages of life, and that no one of these amounts to a greater overall quantity of happiness than another. 'The youth is not happier than the innocent, contented child,' he writes in *Yet Another Philosophy of History*, 'nor is the peaceful grey-hair unhappier than the powerfully striving man.'¹⁹ This claim about satisfactions proper to different stages of life is also frequently used, as in the passage in which this sentence occurs, as an analogy for different historical stages. Each phase of human history, each form of society and culture, has its own idea of happiness, 'for what is [happiness] other than the sum of "satisfaction of wishes, achievement of goals and gentle overcoming of needs," which are all shaped according to country, time and place?' (APG, 38) When

17 James Bernard Murphy, 'Practical Reason and Moral Psychology in Aristotle and Kant,' *Social Philosophy and Policy* 18 (2001) 257-99, at 266

18 *Ibid.*, 274. Although attempts have recently been made to develop a closer rapprochement between Kant and Aristotle, these focus mainly on the contrast between an ethics of virtue and one of duty, arguing that this contrast has been too sharply drawn in the case of Aristotle vs. Kant. Whether or not these arguments are ultimately successful, they do not, I believe, serve to diminish the differences I am outlining on the idea of happiness. See *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty*, Stephen Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996).

19 *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit: Beitrag zu vielen Beiträgen des Jahrhunderts*, *Werke*, 4, Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher, eds., 41. Henceforth, APG.

drawing attention to variability among representations of happiness, Kant places the emphasis on individual differences, whereas Herder, in accord with his understanding of the embeddedness of individuals within historical communities, stresses variations from one people or nation (*Volk*) to another. Both, however, see happiness as relative to shifting needs and desires.

Yet while Kant concludes, from this fact of relativity, that people have no clear idea of what they really want when they want happiness, a conclusion that plays a role in his pessimistic assessment of its achievability, Herder finds in the same fact an occasion for celebration. One reason for this divergence is Herder's belief that, although the human heart contains an indefinite number of propensities (*Anlagen*), only a certain number of these are awakened within a given natural and social environment. A limited, culture-specific horizon of wishes is thereby constructed, within which definite forms of happiness are possible. This thesis forms the basis for Herder's claim that 'every nation has its centre of happiness within itself, as every ball its centre of gravity' (APG, 39). He goes so far as to say, in *Yet Another Philosophy of History*, that the nationalistic prejudice which attaches a people to this centre is good, because it increases happiness (APG, 39), although this is an opinion he revises in later works.²⁰ The needs of individuals are not as infinite as are the needs of humanity as such, for 'the European has no concept of the boiling passions and phantoms that glow in the breast of a Negro, and the Indian has no concept of the restless longings that drive the European from one end of the world to another' (*Ideen*, 331). Since happiness is measured subjectively, as the fulfillment of desired ends, the satisfaction of this limited sphere of wishes constitutes its achievement.

It does not follow that individuals ever achieve a condition of complete and constant inner peace. As the reference to boiling passions

20 In the *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity*, composed between 1792 and 1797, Herder writes, against nationalism:

The characters of different nations, sects, classes and people push against one another; each fixes itself ever more firmly to its centre. Mania becomes a national coat of arms, the heraldry of a class, the banner of a profession.

It is terrible, *how firmly this mania is attached to words*, as soon as it once invests them with power. A learned jurist has observed what a series of harmful delusions hangs upon the word *Blut*, *Blutschande*, *Blutsfreunde*, *Blutgericht*; with the words *inheritance*, *property*, *possession* etc., it is often the same.

Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität, *Werke*, 7, Dietrich Irmscher, ed., 699. Henceforth, BBH.

and restless drives in the above-cited sentence suggests, Herder shares Kant's reasonable view that the human heart is not inclined to be perfectly still for very long. Only, Herder's definition of happiness does not require it to meet this standard. 'Nowhere on earth does the rose of happiness bloom without thorns,' he says, 'but what rises from these thorns is everywhere and in all sorts of shapes the admittedly fleeting, yet beautiful rose of joy in human life' (*Ideen*, 332). For Herder, happiness is a condition arising, under favourable circumstances, in the *course* of human life and history, which are nonetheless in perpetual motion. All happiness is therefore temporary, but that does not make it any less genuine or valuable.

There is also a peculiar kind of historicized analogue to Aristotelian teleology in Herder's conception of happiness. Herder believes that human nature is too plastic, and its potentiality too vast, for one to be able to specify, in any detail, what is required for human flourishing (although there are, on the other hand, some basic needs common to human beings, which provide a partial foundation for cross-cultural ethical and political judgments).²¹ On this, again, Herder agrees with Kant. He would not, however, accept the latter's judgment that happiness is therefore, as Kant put it in his review of the *Ideas*, a 'phantom ... which everyone creates for himself' (AA 8/(63). In Herder's view, while it is true that individuals have different ideas of happiness, the general shapes of these are constructed by the combination of natural and social factors that make up a specific culture. That is why the section on happiness in the *Ideas* which Kant criticizes claims, in its title, that happiness is 'climatic and organic, a child of practice, tradition and custom' (*Ideen*, 327). For Herder, human flourishing, of which happiness, subjectively defined, is a component, takes multiple forms, but only a very definite form of it is possible at a given time and place. The struggle to achieve the (relatively) best form of flourishing within a particular set of historical and geographical conditions constitutes the realization of the human essence, and this necessarily limited realization is perfection, as Herder understands it. In the *Letters on the Advancement*

21 Herder can be defined as a 'relativist' only in a highly qualified sense, and some scholars have argued that his position is better described as 'pluralism.' See Isaiah Berlin, 'Alleged Relativism in Eighteenth-Century European Thought,' in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, Henry Hardy, ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1991), 70-90; Vicki Spencer, 'Beyond Either/Or: The Pluralist Alternative in Herder's Thought,' *Herder Yearbook* 4 (1998) 53-70; and my own article, 'Enlightened Relativism: The Case of Herder,' *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 31 (2005) 309-41. The last two works in particular would address Wood's concern that Herder's frequent appeals to universal values raise doubts about the internal consistency of his views (*Kant's Ethical Thought*, 235).

of *Humanity*, he writes that ‘the *perfection* of a thing can only mean that the thing becomes that which it should and can be’ (BBH, 123). The idea that history reveals the manifold shapes of the human spirit in its quest for perfection anticipates Hegel, with the difference that Herder is deeply pluralistic. Because he believes that every historical advance inevitably involves a concomitant loss, ‘progress,’ he thinks, is never total.²²

In relation to happiness, this thesis has the implication that varieties of it are possible in historically earlier forms of social and economic organization — for instance, in a nomadic culture — that are not possible in later ones — for instance, in a life of settled agriculture (*Ideen*, 312-13). In making this point, Herder’s claim is not that the nomadic culture was *better*, in an overall sense. It is that the prior form of life had its *own* satisfactions, which the later one, which also has its own quite different satisfactions, by its very nature excludes. If happiness consisted in the sum of satisfaction of a potentially infinite set of inclinations, it would indeed be fair to say that no one is ever happy. But the wants of particular individuals in particular societies take shape against a limited horizon, and to be happy, Herder thinks, is to experience the joys envisioned as possible within this horizon.²³

These joys include the pleasure accompanying the exercise of human capacities. In the ‘Universal History’ essay, Kant had suggested that, in the case of human beings, nature appears to have aimed not at happiness but at the development of these capacities. The frugality of nature in depriving man of instinct, he argues, while granting him reason and freedom, provides evidence of nature’s intent that man ‘should produce everything from himself,’ ‘as if she aimed more at his rational self-esteem than at his well-being’ (PP, 31/AA 8:19-20). Herder argues, on the other hand, that, for one thing, health is a necessary foundation for happiness, and if nature wished to provide human beings with this good, she had to impose upon them the necessity for labor (*Ideen*, 328). More significantly, he claims that the sensation of activity in its various forms — physical effort, the use of senses, the exercise of understanding, attention, memory, and decision — makes up what we call ‘the

22 This is the aspect of Herder’s thought that most deeply impressed, and influenced, Isaiah Berlin. See Thomas Nagel, ‘Pluralism and Coherence,’ in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, Mark Lilla, Ronald Dworkin and Robert Silvers, eds. (New York: New York Review of Books 2001) 105-11.

23 I point out in ‘Enlightened Relativism’ (see note 21) that this view still allows condemnation of practices that cause *unhappiness*, in line with Herder’s limited brand of relativism (322).

presence of spirit, our inner life-force (*Lebenskraft*),’ and that such activities are ‘rewarded of themselves with happiness and joy’ (*Ideen*, 329).

Thus when Herder equates happiness with the ‘simple, deep, irreplaceable feeling of existence,’ he conceives of this feeling as including the sensation of force and activity proper to each kind of living being. In the case of human beings, that includes the healthy exercise of reason, but whereas Kant draws a sharp distinction between the rational and the natural, and, correspondingly, between the human and the animal, Herder does not see these as belonging to separate spheres of existence. This difference touches the very heart of the opposition between Herder and Kant. Herder is fundamentally a monist. His metaphysics involves an attempted synthesis of Spinoza and Leibniz, combining the former’s thesis that nature (or God) is a single substance with the latter’s conception of reality as composed of dynamic centres of self-organizing activity. The resulting position imagines reality as a single system of ‘forces’ (*Kräfte*) — the ‘finger of divinity,’ Herder calls them at one point (*Ideen*, 173) — which build themselves into ever more complex forms, from the grossest matter to the most refined intellect. An important corollary of this view is that mind and matter are not separate substances. They are expressions of a single principle, in terms of which they can be explained.

Exactly *how* such an explanation would proceed is not altogether clear, to say the least. In his review of the first part of the *Ideen*, therefore, Kant had taken Herder to task on the obscurity of the concept of *Kraft* (AA 8:53-54).²⁴ In truth, Herder never satisfactorily resolves this issue, which is to say that he does not manage to solve the mind-matter problem. The success of Herder’s metaphysical theories, however, is not my theme here. I am interested, rather, in the implications of these theories for his understanding of the nature and status of happiness. Herder repeatedly insists, in his writings, that reality is of a piece, manifesting gradual differences and varieties but not sudden, radical changes of substance.²⁵ There is no iron wall, therefore, between the material and the immaterial.²⁶ There also seems to be, for Herder, no iron wall between the divine and the natural; life is itself an expression of the

24 Herder never claimed, though, that he could explain what ‘force’ is. See *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele* (‘On Understanding and Sensation in the Human Soul,’ 1775): ‘I do not here claim to *explain* anything; I have not yet encountered any philosophy which explains what *Kraft* is ...’ *Werke*, 4, Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher, eds., 337.

25 *Ibid.*, 338

26 *Ibid.*, 354

'divine forces' (*Ideen*, 636) that make up the innermost character of the real. These metaphysical and theological theses lead to — or, perhaps, are the result of — a sense that desire and enjoyment, in their proper forms, are not only acceptable and good, but even sacred. Herder's description of happiness as the 'simple, deep, irreplaceable feeling of existence' continues: 'a little drop from that infinite sea of blessedness, which is in everything, and which rejoices and feels itself in everything' (*Ideen*, 331). Likewise, in his dialogue *God: Some Conversations*, Herder has one of the personae say: 'through the enjoyment of life, we enjoy [God] as a real existence full of force and life,' though another adds that thought is equally necessary to this apprehension.²⁷ The term 'pantheism' does not quite fit Herder's position, if this term is supposed to signify a complete identification of nature and God,²⁸ but Herder does feel that the forces of nature, which, in life, achieve varying degrees of awareness, are an aspect of the holy rather than an opponent of it.

Because of this perception, Herder's attitude towards natural desire is strikingly different from that of Kant. To give an example, at one point in *God: Some Conversations*, the discussion broaches the topic of 'how beings assimilate one to another and form a continuous series in the reproduction of their kind.' Theano, the one female participant in the dialogue, asks, at this juncture, if she should leave, but is told: 'In the name of all the graces, no, Theano! For we are discussing the most hallowed and certainly divine law. All things that love one another, become assimilated the one to the other.'²⁹ Kant, by contrast, sees sexuality as a form of animal pleasure in which one is used by another purely as a tool — a relation that poses a problem for human beings, whose inherent dignity demands both that they never be treated merely as means and that they never allow the sensual part of their nature to dominate.³⁰

27 *God: Some Conversations*, trans. Frederick H. Burkhardt (New York: Veritas Press 1940), 163. *Werke*, 4, 765.

28 Defining varieties of belief about the relation between nature and God is notoriously difficult. In his introduction to the English translation of *Gott: Einige Gespräche*, Burkhardt describes Herder's position as a 'dynamic pantheism' (40). H.B. Nisbet, referring to the complex of ideas associated with the term *Kraft* in general, suggests that something of the meaning of this term is conveyed by 'words such as animism, pananimism, panvitalism, panpsychism, panspiritualism, panlogism, hylozoism and the like' (*Herder and the Philosophy and History of Science* [Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association 1970], 11).

29 *God: Some Conversations*, 183; *Werke*, 4, 785

30 The solution to this problem lies, according to Kant, in confining sex to marriage, and subjecting it to the 'natural end' of procreation. See MM, 61-64/AA 6:277-80 (*The Doctrine of Right*) and MM, 178-80/AA 6:424-26 (*The Doctrine of Virtue*). Cf.

Herder also does not find powerful passions to be as troubling as Kant does; on the contrary, he grants to them a positive worth.³¹

On the issue of the 'animality' of desire, the basis for the disagreement between Herder and Kant includes Herder's being more generously disposed towards the natural world, and his view that the differences between living beings are gradual. At the same time, Herder does posit a clear separation between the human species and all others, even the apes that resemble it most closely.³² In *On the Origin of Language*, he suggests that the distinctiveness of human beings, as language-users, resides in their capacity to step back from the sea of drives and sensations that flood all living beings so as to distinguish, order and judge.³³ This capacity is the condition for the possibility of language, which in turn, Herder always insists, is essential to reason (e.g. *Ideen*, 347-52). Herder terms it *Besonnenheit*, a word denoting, in his usage, both self-reflection and self-restraint. On earth, only human beings possess *Besonnenheit*, and only in virtue of possessing it are they properly human. Thus, one would misunderstand the dispute between Herder and Kant on the subject of happiness if one were to conclude that Kant values the specifically human property of reason, while Herder encourages the indulgence of all manner of natural drives. In fact, Herder also thinks that the fulfillment of the human essence requires the exercise of something like reason, but he does not see this faculty as isolated — or isolable — from perception and feeling. He also does not conceive of it as the sole thing in the world that has intrinsic worth, in part because he does not conceive of it as a 'sole' thing at all.

APPV, 20/AA 7:136: 'How much cleverness has been wasted in throwing a delicate veil over man's desires, but revealing still enough of man's close relation to the animal kingdom so that bashfulness results.'

- 31 This is reflected in his life as well as in his philosophical writings, as one can surmise from his letters to Caroline Flachsland, the woman with whom he fell in love and whom he married. Herder wrote a large number of these between 1770 and 1771. See the first volume of *Herders Briefe* (Weimar: Herman Böhlau 1977); for instance, nos. 83-85, 188-94.
- 32 Herder argues, in the *Ideen*, that, while all human varieties are brothers, 'with the ape you can enter into no brotherhood' (*Ideen*, 255). Dagmar Barnouw notes the contrast between this aspect of Herder's position and that of his friend and contemporary, Georg Forster; see 'Eräugnis: Georg Forster on the Difficulties of Diversity,' in *Impure Reason: Dialectic of Enlightenment in Germany*, W. Daniel Wilson and Robert C. Holub, eds. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1993), 336.
- 33 *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772), *Werke*, vol. 1, 722. Henceforth, *Sprache*.

II Happiness and the Good

Kant asserts, in the *Groundwork for a Metaphysic of Morals*, that only a 'good will' is good 'without limitation' and 'good in itself' (7-8/AA 4:393-94), such that this will must be 'the highest good and the condition of every other, even of all demands for happiness' (10/AA 4:397). Remarks like these may leave the impression that Kant attributes no worth to happiness considered as an end. Attempting to counter this impression, Christine Korsgaard argues, in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, that in fact Kant views happiness as 'objectively' good, but he thinks it is good only under certain conditions, being repugnant, for instance, when *not* accompanied by a good will.³⁴ The *Groundwork* specifically alludes to the example of someone who prospers without having any feature of a good will to support its claim that happiness is not unconditionally good (Gr, 7/AA 4:393).

However, Kant's thesis that only a good will has absolute or intrinsic worth and, concomitantly, that happiness is no more than a conditional good, involves more than the claim that happiness accompanied by wickedness is not good. If this were all Kant meant, then he would not suggest, in his question to Herder, that the existence of happy Tahitians is not self-justifying — a point he repeats in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* when he says that the question of 'why it is necessary that human beings exist' might not be so easy to answer 'if one thinks about the New Hollanders or the Fuegians' (CJ, 250/AA 5:378). Kant does not think these people are wicked, in the sense that they do not care for one another, or that their societies are exceptionally violent or cruel. On the contrary, the image of Tahitians at least, formed on the basis of travel reports like those of Georg Forster, was one of a good-natured and peaceful people, kind to one another and to strangers.³⁵ In Kant's mind, though, while such people possess capacities sufficient for inclusion in the category of human beings, their imagined manner of existence (prior to visitation by 'more civilized nations') is not sufficient to qualify as

34 C.M. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), 118

35 See the account in Forster's well known *A Voyage Round the World*, first published in English in 1777, and then in German, in two volumes, between 1778 and 1780. *Georg Forsters Werke*, vol. 1, ed. Robert L. Kahn (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1986), 155-92. Forster concludes of 'O-Taheitee' that 'this island is indeed one of the happiest spots on the globe' (187). Louis de Bougainville provides a similar account in his *A Voyage Around the World*, translated from French into English in 1772 by Georg Forster's father, John Reinhold Forster. Reprinted by Da Capo Press, New York, 1967; 198-249.

an end in itself. That is because they do not exercise 'good will' in the Kantian sense; living merely for enjoyment, their needs amply met by the richness of their natural environment, they do not exercise 'will' at all. Reason can therefore find no ultimate purpose to their existence. As Kant says in the third *Critique*: 'But that the existence of a human being who lives merely for enjoyment (however busy he might be this respect) should have a value in itself, even if as a means to this he was as helpful as possible to others who were likewise concerned only with enjoyment, because he participated in all gratification through sympathy: of this reason could never be persuaded' (CJ, 94/AA 5:208).

It is not, after all, the biological species 'human being' that possesses, for Kant, the status of being an end in itself. This status belongs to 'rational natures,' and happy Tahitians, as Kant imagines them, do not realize this nature until they meet other human beings who do — namely, Europeans. Until then, Kant thinks, these people only do what they *want* to do, and doing what one wants makes a person no better than a sheep. Kant's judgments on this point rest in part on his belief that sympathetic actions have no moral worth because they are motivated by natural incentives, and therefore do not express freedom. In the final analysis, such actions are self-interested, for sympathetic souls are actually motivated, according to Kant, by the 'inner satisfaction' they find in 'spreading joy around them' (Gr, 11/AA 4:398).³⁶ They aim, therefore, at the satisfaction of inclinations, which is one of Kant's definitions of happiness. What gives a form of existence absolute or intrinsic worth, however, is the capacity to act independently of inclinations, and that means without aiming at happiness. Thus, the existence of a human being is not an end in itself if he merely enjoys his existence and wants others to do so as well. Rather, 'only through that which he does

36 A number of commentators have disputed the claim that Kant considered all 'inclinations,' including sympathetic ones, to be egoistic, but I find their arguments unconvincing. Korsgaard, for instance, argues that, for Kant, *both* the man of duty and the man of sympathetic temperament genuinely aim at the welfare of others (*Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 107), appealing, in support of her claim, to the same sentence of the *Groundwork* that I have cited here. On my interpretation, however, the sentence actually says that sympathetic persons have no motive *other than* the satisfaction they find in spreading joy around them, where such a motive is still ultimately self-interested. On similar grounds, I would take issue with Andrews Reath's claim, that 'Kant recognizes that we can have inclinations that are *straightforwardly* other-regarding' (my italics) so that 'it seems somewhat misleading to term [the principle of happiness] the "principle of self-love," as Kant does' ('Hedonism, Heteronomy and Kant's Principle of Happiness,' *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 70 [1989] 42-72, at 60). In fact, Kant's description of his own position is accurate, since he believes that the true aim of sympathetic action is the happiness of the agent, not benefit to others.

without regard to enjoyment, in full freedom and independently of that which nature could passively provide for him, does he give his being as the existence of a person absolute value' (CJ. 94/AA 5:208). The claim that 'happiness, in all the fullness of its agreeableness is far from being an unconditional good' (CJ. 94/AA 5:209) actually means, then, that happiness has *no* worth, all by itself. It gains worth only when it is the natural end of a being who also engages in self-legislation *not* motivated by the aim of happiness, where merely kind or loving actions do not fit this criterion.

One must not overlook the significance of Kant's assertion, in the *Groundwork*, that 'the inclinations themselves, as sources of needs, are so far from having an absolute worth, so as to make one wish to have them, that it must instead be the universal wish of every rational being to be altogether free of them' (Gr, 37/AA 4:428). Sympathetic commentators have tended to water down the force of this statement, thereby setting aside its radical implications. Korsgaard glosses the sentence as follows: 'Now even without fully endorsing what Kant says here, we can easily agree that there are some inclinations of which we want to be free.'³⁷ Allen Wood deals with the issue in substantially the same way, saying 'it is surely true of *some* inclinations ... that they are a nuisance,' and that Kant's stronger claim about the complete worthlessness of inclinations is 'besides the point.'³⁸ That depends, though, on which point one is addressing. Given that happiness, according to Kant's own conception of it, involves the satisfaction of inclinations in some manner, the wish to be rid of inclinations altogether would require an indifference to happiness. This sentiment accords well with Kant's assertion, in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, that 'life itself and all the enjoyment of it, so far as it depends upon circumstances, has no value of its own; what alone has value is the use to which life is put and the end to which it is directed' (APPV, 141/239).

On the other hand, Kant also says, in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*:

Natural inclinations, *considered in themselves*, are good, that is, not a matter of reproach, and it is not only futile to want to extirpate them but to do so would also be harmful and blameworthy. Rather, let them be tamed and instead of clashing with one another they can be brought into harmony in a wholeness which is called happiness.³⁹

37 *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 121

38 *Kant's Ethical Thought*, 123

39 *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row 1960), 51. AA 6:58.

Here, considering the difference between these several remarks, Rae Langton's distinction between a 'sane' and a 'severe' Kant — the latter being described as 'very far from the sane'⁴⁰ — seems apposite. The severe Kant is a moral ascetic. Desires enter his consciousness only as a painful hindrance, and he would rather be free of them. He considers happiness to be impossible, and an unworthy goal in any case. The sane Kant, on the other hand, thinks that natural inclinations should be limited and reconciled with one another, for only then can happiness be achieved. He also thinks that such happiness is an 'objective good,' as Korsgaard suggests, as long as it does not require abrogating moral principles. Doubtless, many aspects of the severe Kant's position on happiness and morality could be reconstructed in this saner fashion.

Yet there is also a continuity in the fundamental values Kant espouses in all of his post-critical writings. It is true that, at various points, he is more or less generously disposed towards the natural end of happiness. Unregulated, inclinations can obstruct that end, as well as being a counter-force to the demands of duty, so they tend to emerge into consciousness as a burden, though they are not, in themselves, evil. What remains constant is that Kant never grants to a happy existence the status of being an end in itself, and inclinations, concomitantly, are never granted an intrinsic worth. That status belongs purely to the will, and only its activity properly justifies the existence of a happy being.

Paul Guyer is therefore right to suggest that Kantian morality, in its mature version, is based on the intrinsic, rather than merely instrumental, value of freedom.⁴¹ The satisfaction an agent takes in the awareness of exercising a free will — an awareness emerging only in the face of resistance — is the one thing that, for Kant, does not provoke the question, 'why?' It is the one end requiring no further justification,⁴² a view

40 Rae Langton, 'Duty and Desolation,' *Philosophy* 67 (1992) 481-505; 485, 495

41 Paul Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2000), 11. Andrews Reath, in his review of Guyer's book, says that 'Guyer challenges, or at least revises, Kant's understanding of his own method.' For while 'Kant holds that the moral law cannot be based on any conception of the good because of his belief that conceptions of the good can only be determined empirically in relation to agents interests and thus cannot ground principles with the requisite necessity and universality ... Guyer claims that Kant in fact derives the moral law from an antecedent conception of the value of freedom' ('Value and Law in Kant's Moral Theory,' *Ethics* 114 (2003) 127-55; 134.

42 Pippin draws attention to the peculiarity of this aspect of Kant's conception, where freedom, understood as 'end setting determined by reason,' is identified as a substantive value, 'but then *its* intrinsic value is not defended teleologically or by any appeal to natural purposes or any kind of contentment,' so that 'somehow the value-conferring capacity itself has its value conferred' (Robert B. Pippin, 'Kant's

that gives an ascetic slant to some of Kant's intuitions about morality. As Max Scheler observed, Kant 'makes the moral value of an action dependent on its *cost*, on the *sacrifices* made by the one who acts,' even if he 'does not imply that virtuous conduct as such is conduct *against* an inclination.'⁴³

Herder does not grant moral worth primarily to acts that are costly, nor does he feel that reason remains dissatisfied in the face of a happy life. To some extent, it might be that one hits the bedrock of basic values at this juncture. But Herder's assessment of this issue is also connected to his understanding of the nature of reason. Kant tends to think of this faculty, in both its theoretical and practical functions, as sharply distinct from all others, and particularly from sensation — so distinct, in fact, that it links human beings, the sole possessors of reason on earth, to a realm of existence entirely separate from nature. Herder frequently objects to this view of reason. His essay on language contends that reason is only the 'arrangement' (*Einrichtung*) or 'management' (*Haushaltung*) of the whole of human nature, and that the idea of it as a 'new, wholly separated power' distinguishing humans from animals is 'philosophical nonsense, however great may be the philosophers who utter it' (*Sprache*, 717-18). In the *Ideas*, Herder describes reason, *Vernunft*, as something learned, *vernommenes* (*Ideen*, 144), a point he repeats in his *Metakritik*, designed as a critique of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁴⁴ In the first place, the material of reason is derived entirely from the senses; there are no *a priori* categories. To cite Marion Heinz: 'the fundamental principle of Herder's argument is the idea that limited beings possess the content of their representations not through or from themselves, but mediated by the body,' so that 'the power (*Kraft*) of the soul is bound to the powers of the body,' and can work only on 'what flows to it from the body.'⁴⁵ In addition, Herder considers freedom and self-determination to be themselves natural forces. 'Freedom,' he maintains, 'is a force of nature; when it opposes laws, these take their revenge, and the highest force that we know of in our nature, namely, *self-determination*

Theory of Value: On Allen Wood's *Kant's Ethical Thought*,' *Inquiry* 43 (2000) 239-66; 255).

43 Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-formal Ethics of Values*, trans. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 1973), 227-8.

44 *Eine Metakritik zur Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1799), *Werke*, 8, Hans Dietrich Irmischer, ed., 499. Henceforth, *Metakritik*.

45 Marion Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus: Untersuchung zur Erkenntnistheorie und Metaphysik des jungen Herders* (1763-1778) (Hamburg: Meiner 1994), 139

(*Selbstbestimmung*), is only free when it obeys the highest laws of nature through its own power' (*Metakritik*, 529).

As I noted earlier, however, Herder does not think human beings are much the same as other species. He agrees with Kant that they have a power distinguishing them from animals, but he understands the character of this power, and the resulting distinction, differently from Kant. While Kant rejects the intrinsic value of the life of Tahitians, he also says, in his *Lectures on Anthropology* (and here there is perhaps a tension in his position), that 'any being that can say "I," and therefore make itself into an object of its consideration, has an unmediated worth' (AA 25.1:10). Herder thinks, though, that having this ability alters *every* dimension of our being, with the result that, within human desire, experience and activity, a clear line cannot be drawn separating the sensual and the rational. It is true, in Shell's words, that 'the cycles of nature do not strike Herder with the repellent force that they evoke in Kant.'⁴⁶ But the sharp contrast between Herder's and Kant's reactions to the 'natural' within the human also reflects their opposed conceptions of the constitution of the human psyche. For Herder, 'the whole of nature knows itself in [man] as in a living mirror; she sees through his eye, thinks behind his brow, feels in his breast, and works and makes with his hands' (BBH, p. 363). Thus *Besonnenheit*, 'reflectivity,' the capacity that allows human beings to relate to themselves so as to be able to say 'I,' arises as a self-reflexive moment within nature. Through it, human beings are granted a unique form of awareness, as well as a capacity for self-regulation. Infused with this awareness, and appropriately regulated by the exercise of self-determination — which, it must be remembered, is itself a natural force — sense, thought, feeling, and activity are equally and fully human. When accompanied by an added awareness that the nature working within them is the same as the nature working within all things, they also take on the character of the sacred.

This view accounts, in large measure, for 'the striking absence in Herder of the complex sexual pessimism so marked in the anthropologies of Rousseau and Kant alike,' remarked upon by Shell.⁴⁷ In *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant describes the 'predisposition to animality in mankind' as threefold: 'first for self-preservation, second, for the propagation of the species, through the sexual impulse, and for the care of offspring so begotten; and third, for community with other men, *i.e.*, the social impulse.' He states that this predisposition is good,

46 *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996), 186

47 *Ibid.*, 186

because it does not *per se* contradict the moral law, but it remains, for him, an animal aspect of our nature, in contrast with 'humanity' and 'personality.'⁴⁸ As Herder sees it, on the other hand, the will to live, sexual love, care for children, sociability — these are indeed natural drives, with analogues in the animal world, but they are expressed in a special way among human beings (*Ideen*, 109). It is not, therefore, a matter of regulating the 'animal' in ourselves through the use of reason, conceived as a distinct and non-natural capacity. Herder's ideal, rather, involves a harmonious ordering of desire, so that, through humanity, natural forces may achieve their clearest and most beautiful form.

The antithesis between Herder's and Kant's attitude towards emotion is a corollary of this difference. Kant sees emotions as merely natural, which means that they belong to the realm of sensibility, are ultimately self-seeking, and are determined by causal laws. Actions motivated by emotions have no moral worth, for they are not the result of free self-legislation according to the autonomous laws of pure practical reason. Herder does not divide the natural and the moral, the sensible and the rational, in this fashion. Accordingly, he does not think of emotions as drives occasioned by the needs of the sensible part of the self, nor does he separate them from understanding. In 'On the Worth of Emotions,' he insists on the unity of the soul, against philosophers who want to divide it into a hierarchy of powers, and claims that the so-called 'lower' powers of the soul, to which emotion is often relegated, are actually the basis of the so-called 'higher' ones.⁴⁹ Theodor Litt suggests that, on this issue, 'what divides Kant and Herder is not merely a divergence in psychological theories of emotion,' but 'different interpretations of the fundamental relationship between human beings and the world.' Whereas Kant sees human beings as standing over against the world, Herder sees them as 'woven into the whole of the world with all the threads of their existence.' Ultimately, that is why emotions are, for Kant, 'blind followers,' whereas, for Herder, they are 'discoverers leading our interpretations of the world.'⁵⁰

Locating this metaphysical difference permits a further clarification to Kant's and Herder's respective understanding of the status of desire, which in turn has implications for the status of happiness, as a condition in which desire is fulfilled. Herder could *never* entertain the thought that a rational being would prefer to be rid of what Kant calls 'inclina-

48 *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 22. AA 6:26.

49 *Werke*, 9/1, Christoph Bultmann and Thomas Zippert, eds., 100

50 Theodor Litt, *Kant und Herder als Deuter der geistigen Welt* (Leipzig: Verlag Quelle und Meyer 1930), 66

tions,' as he considers these to be links between human beings and reality, both in the sense that they are themselves expressions of nature, and in the sense that they connect us with the enviroing world. Now it is true that the sane Kant does not think we should try to eliminate inclinations. Moreover, apart from a few moments of severe Stoicism, Kant generally believes that, while inclinations are often a burden, it is better that they be satisfied than not, given that they exist. That is to say, he mainly holds the (sane) view that happiness is preferable to unhappiness, as long as there is no conflict with morality. But he does not ever think, as Herder does, that emotions and desires — indeed, even physical drives and hungers — connect us with the real in such a way that their fulfillment could constitute an end in itself. Furthermore, in contrast with Herder, he always draws a sharp division between 'natural inclinations' and the faculties proper to morality.

Herder's belief that love and sympathy are essential to morality has to be interpreted against the background of his general understanding of the status of emotions. In this context, Herder does not simply privilege spontaneity of feeling *over* self-regulation. He praises the moral heroism, for instance, through which unsteady, selfish drives are freely bound by law and readiness for sacrifice. However, he describes this self-binding as motivated by care for the good of others, rather than by any pure thought of duty (*Ideen*, 148-9). And because Herder does not divide emotion and sense from reason and freedom in the way Kant does, he can affirm that such motivation, far from involving heteronomy, is the product of the most powerful self-determination (*Ideen*, 149).

The story Herder tells about the development of principles of justice is revealing here. The first community, he claims, is the family. Combining maternal love and paternal guidance, it is held together by bonds of mutual sympathy and trust (*Ideen*, 158). Rules become necessary because this sympathy does not extend widely enough, and so, beyond a limited circle, can be a dim and often ineffective leader (*Ideen*, 159). Thus while Herder agrees with Kant that sympathy is an unsure guide to moral conduct and principles are needed, his view does not implicate its exclusion from the realm of morality. Sympathy is itself a faculty of moral discernment, Herder thinks, motivated by moral concerns. The problem is that, in a limited creature, it tends to be confined to the sphere of those who are familiar. Nature therefore provides human beings with rules of conduct that *mimic* sympathy, the highest of which is that you should behave towards others only as you would wish them to behave towards you (*Ideen*, 159). Attaining mutual sympathy remains the ideal of human interaction, and approaching this ideal is the moral task of humanity. Among nations, therefore, 'a *common feeling* must gradually awaken, so that each can feel itself to be in the place of the other' (BBH, 725).

Herder's critique of some contemporary trends in the sphere of morality is based on this ideal. He complains that, in his age, the principles of freedom, honour and virtue are on everyone's lips, while warm feeling for those who are closest is infinitely weakened (AGP, 64). In reality, he says, the savage (*Wilde*) who loves his family and is passionate about his tribe is a 'truer being' than the 'cultivated shadow' enraptured by a mere word (*Ideen*, 333). Even the beautiful term 'love of man' (*Menschenliebe*), he writes in the *Letters*, has become so trivial that mostly one loves 'men' but no one among them (BBH, 148). These remarks raise two related points. First, they maintain the intrinsic value of love. For Herder, to whom happiness is an end in itself, the feeling that *wants* others to be happy has the highest moral worth, since it is motivated by a wish for the general good. Thus, while Herder would certainly agree with Kant that happiness combined with wickedness (supposing such a condition to be possible)⁵¹ is not good, he would strongly disagree that actions motivated 'only' by a desire for the happiness of others cannot be described as moral. Second, Herder is criticizing the hypocrisy of his allegedly enlightened times, in which Europeans enthuse about their superior principles of justice, while impoverishing and enslaving other nations. Both assertions are grounded in a belief that, without sympathy, moral principles are empty abstractions. They are needed to manage feeling, and may substitute for it when feeling is too limited, but they will not, on their own, ensure that people either see or respect the happiness of others. Consequently, Herder thinks, people ought to enlarge their sympathies, which they can do through attempts to imagine being in the place of others.

Kant does also claim that people have a duty to cultivate sympathetic feeling (MM, 205/AA 6:457). In line with his way of distinguishing the spheres of sensibility and freedom, however, only the '*will to share in others' feelings*,' is moral, not the receptivity to these feelings, and it is so because sympathy helps us 'to do what the representation of duty alone might not accomplish' (MM, 205/AA 6:457). Affection for others cannot be described as morally motivated, as it can for Herder, nor does it possess any cognitive value.⁵² The difference is subtle, but important.

51 In fact, while Herder unequivocally condemns viciousness, he does not explicitly analyze the case of a happy but vicious person. Perhaps he agreed with Plato 'that the inescapable penalty of wickedness is simply to be the sort of person one is,' as Iris Murdoch puts it in her reading of the *Theaetetus* (*The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* [Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977], 39). I am speculating, but such a view would accord with Herder's understanding of virtue.

52 Korsgaard claims that, for Kant, 'being sympathetic helps us to be aware of those cases when our assistance or support will be called for,' but I can see no basis for

For Kant, what has moral value is the *activity* of cultivating compassionate feelings, in the belief that they can be useful aids to achieving that which reason discerns to be right, and this activity is itself motivated by a respect for duty. For Herder, people should be sympathetic because love for others, being motivated by a desire for their happiness, incarnates the very goal of morality. Herder does not think this desire is at bottom self-interested, and he rejects the metaphysical and psychological distinctions upon which Kant bases his view that all desires are determined, while moral action must be free.

As a result, Kant and Herder come to very different conclusions about what defines the character of the morally good person. Kant states that the person of cold temperament who acts from duty thereby gives himself a 'higher worth' than the person who acts from sympathetic inclination (Gr, 11-12/AA 4:398-99). Herder claims that 'merely following rules, without possessing virtue, means wanting to follow cold reason alone, and not enjoying the whole feeling part of humanity.'⁵³ It is not that Kant thinks the best kind of person is cold-hearted, but, for him, virtue resides in choosing to do one's duty, and this choice is never more visible than when it is made in opposition to inclinations. Herder's idea of the virtuous person, by contrast, closely resembles Schiller's model of the 'beautiful soul,' in whom sense and reason, duty and inclination, harmonize.⁵⁴ The truly virtuous person, Schiller thinks, should have 'an inclination to duty'; 'he should obey his reason with joy,' rather than being perpetually divided against himself.⁵⁵ Schiller therefore ridiculed what he saw as an implication of Kant's position, *viz.* that actions done with pleasure cannot be virtuous.⁵⁶ It has been pointed out, in Kant's defense, that he is not proposing that actions must be performed with aversion in order to be considered moral. As Allison observes: 'Kant never claims that an otherwise morally praiseworthy act loses its moral significance if an agent has an inclination to perform it. His claim is rather that such an act lacks moral significance if the agent performs it

this claim in the section of *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue* to which she is appealing. 'From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble: Kant and Aristotle on Morally Good Action,' in *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics*, 203-36, at 221.

53 'Gedanken bei Lesung Montesquieus,' (1769), *Werke*, 9/2, Rainer Wisbert, ed., 207

54 Friedrich Schiller, 'Über Anmut und Würde' ('On Grace and Dignity'), *Werke in drei Bänden*, Herbert G. Göpfert, ed. (München: Carl Hanser Verlag 1966), 408-9

55 *Ibid.*, 405-6

56 See H.J. Paton, *The Categorical Imperative, A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (London: Hutchinson & Co. 1958), 48.

only because of the inclination.⁵⁷ This defense, though, requires accepting a Kantian view of the nature of 'inclinations' as inherently selfish, which Schiller — and Herder — do not. On Herder's moral psychology, we *can* gladly do our duty, because we can act out of a desire for the happiness of others. In so doing, we do not aim to gratify the desire; we aim to further the ends of others, and that is virtuous. Within the constitution of the human soul, moreover, the divisions Kant wants to draw in isolating inclination, as an affair entirely of sense, from self-determination, as a function of pure practical reason, are untenable.

On this issue, I would suggest that the difference between Herder and Kant is not only based on divergent observations and inferences, but reflects opposed psychological predilections. Herder always favours the perception of continuities and gradations, within the human psyche as well as in nature, whereas there is something in Kant that loves a wall, it seems — between mind and body, reason and sense, human and animal, freedom and inclination. In accordance with judgments expressing these predilections, Kant attributes the highest achievable moral excellence to the following of duty against desire, while Herder's ideal requires the attainment of unity. Litt insightfully draws attention here to the contrast between the two authors' conceptions of virtue. For Kant, he notes, 'virtuous' names a value-tendency directed towards the supersensuous, and obligated only to law. For Herder, it names a 'harmonious integration of all the aspects and propensities of human nature.'⁵⁸ Because happiness, as Herder understands it, would require such an integration, virtue is a actually necessary condition for it, although not a sufficient one. The state of the world, as it presently stands, is such that behaving virtuously often demands sacrifice, but Herder does not see virtue and happiness as *in principle* alien to one another. Virtue is, after all, motivated by a wish for the happiness of all, and one can be happy to do what one ought to do. Therefore, a condition on earth that is both happy and virtuous is certainly conceivable.

To be sure, the highest good, for Kant, is one in which happiness is commensurate with virtue, rather than in conflict with it (CPrR, 93/AA 5:110-11), but within this ideal, the connection between the two remains an extrinsic one. Given Kant's understanding of these phenomena, moreover, it is hard to imagine what either virtue or happiness would be like in such a state. Since Kant conceives of desire and emotion as forms of inclination, and defines inclination negatively, as the allevia-

57 Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), 111

58 *Kant und Herder als Deuter der geistigen Welt*, 133

tion of pain, it seems reasonable to conclude that, in an ideal state, we would have no inclinations. What would virtue be, though, if it never overcame inclinations? And what would happiness be in their absence, when it has been defined as their fulfillment? Langton's presentation of the correspondence between Kant and Maria von Herbert raises precisely these questions. Von Herbert's second letter to Kant suggests that becoming a perfect Kantian moral agent leads to an elimination of the very desires and joys that make life worthwhile. Far from feeling that *these* require further justification, von Herbert finds that a purely moral life has no meaning.⁵⁹

Suppose, however, that Kant's ideal is reconstructed in line with his less severe views. Then the perfect moral condition does not require *eliminating* inclinations, but following moral imperatives *regardless* of them. The problem is, in the case of any individual, either there is a conflict between duty and desire, such that a moral action has some cost, as Scheler puts it, or there is not. In the first situation, the person cannot be described as happy. In the second, it is hard to see how moral and natural motivations could be distinguished. It still seems as if actually attaining the highest good would abolish the tension that is the very basis of virtue on earth, and this is a peculiar goal to set up as the *telos* of history.

Within Herder's ideal condition, by contrast, desire and duty coincide not incidentally but essentially, because in this condition a person behaves out of a sympathetic concern for the happiness of others. It is a mistake to think, as some commentators have done, that the opposition between Kant and Herder on this point hinges on the question of whether or not the 'beautiful soul,' is perfectly achievable. The issue is not about the realizability of these different models, both of which are only meant to be ideal forms, but about their nature. For Herder, the ideal form of humanity is a person who is happy and who wants all others to be so. Neither is there any conflict in this condition, nor does it raise any worries about motivation. Given that human beings are not God, they will never fully achieve such a state, since it would require both perfect inner harmony and an equal love for all human beings. Still, we can strive for it, and the moral agent need never worry that she is acting merely out of love rather than duty, though she may indeed have to worry that her partiality for those who are close to her is leading her to ignore, or even act against, the welfare of more distant people. This is the point at which she will have to consider principles of justice. It remains the case, though, that the production of happy forms

59 'Duty and Desolation,' 493-4

of life, in which people act for benefit of others out of love rather than obligation, is, for Herder, the most sublime goal of human endeavour, and, consequently, of history.

III Happiness and Human Destiny

Happiness is decidedly not the goal of history for Kant, who claims that 'the end of the existence of nature itself must be sought beyond nature' (CJ, 250/AA 5:379). No being within nature can be the final end of creation, Kant believes, because its existence cannot, by itself, answer the question, what is it good for? (CJ, 294/AA 5:426). The existence of plants and animals can be seen as good for the existence of human beings, but the existence of the latter still poses a question (294/AA 5:426). What lifts human beings beyond an ultimately pointless existence is the capacity to set voluntary ends for themselves (CJ, 298/AA 5:431). The final purpose for the existence of nature, therefore, lies in the human capacity to transcend it, to bring both the nature outside and the nature within under the domination of reason and will. Only the realization of this capacity can answer the question 'why are there human beings?' thereby, in fact, providing a full answer to the question 'why is there something rather than nothing?' where the question wants an answer in terms of a final rather than an efficient cause.

Happiness, on the other hand, 'is ... not even an *end of nature* with regard to human beings in preference to other creatures, let alone a *final end of creation*' (CJ, 303/AA 5:436). It is not a final end of creation because 'the fact that if the human being exists he makes this itself his final aim does not yield any concept of why he should exist at all, and what value he himself has in order to make his existence agreeable' (CPJ, 309/AA 5:442). It is not even an end of nature because nature does not seem designed to make people happy. In the essay on universal history, Kant suggests that nature certainly does not aim at the happiness of individuals, which it is prepared to sacrifice in pursuit of a higher end:

But it appears that nature is utterly unconcerned that man live well, only that he bring himself to the point where his conduct makes him worthy of life and well-being. What will always seem strange about this is that earlier generations appear to carry out their laborious tasks only for the sake of later ones, to prepare for later generations a step from which they in turn can raise still higher the building that nature had in view ... (PP, 31/AA 8:20)

Nature wills that man 'partake in no other happiness or perfection than what he himself, independently of instinct, can secure through his own reason' (PP, 31/AA 8:20). The development of reason, then, through

which human beings gain greater and greater autonomy from nature, is the true goal of history. The struggle for happiness, on the part of individuals, is the *means* through which this goal is achieved; reason is not merely a means for achieving happiness. Thus, Fichte was only a good student of Kant when he wrote, in *The Vocation of Man*, that 'reason is not there for the sake of existence; but existence for the sake of reason.'⁶⁰ Kant maintains that, while people develop their rational capacities with the intention of securing their own well-being, nature uses this effort to secure the development of those capacities, an objective achieved only in the species, not in the individual (PP, 30/AA 8:19). Nature thereby uses the vicious inclinations it has given to human beings — their self-centredness, unsociability, propensity for war — to bring about, at the end of history, the just and moral constitution which is its final aim (CJ, 299-300/AA 5:432; PP, 32-35/AA 8:21-25). In *The Metaphysic of Morals*, Kant makes it clear that the ultimate purpose of such a constitution, embodied in the state, is not the 'the *welfare* of its citizens and their *happiness*,' which might be more easily achieved in a state of nature, as Rousseau asserts. The condition of the ideal state, rather, is one whose 'constitution conforms most fully to principles of right; it is that condition which reason, *by a categorical imperative*, makes it obligatory for us to strive after' (MM, 94-95/AA 6:318). Such a healthy condition defines the well-being of the state, as distinct from the welfare of its citizens.

This is precisely the position that Herder found so repellent. After reading Kant's essay, he wrote, in a letter to his friend Hamann: 'Good that I now know what I have from the Herr Magister of the 7th order; and fortunate, that I have no use for his childish plan according to which the human being is created for the species and the most perfect state-machine at the end of time.' 'I would be sincerely pleased,' he adds, 'if I made [Kant's] idol of reason shrink back or destroyed it.'⁶¹ In opposition to all such ideas of the state, Herder will insist, in the *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity*, that 'all state constitutions are nothing but means for human happiness' and that 'the sum of the individual happiness of all members is the happiness of the state' (BBH, 132-3). To be fair, Herder's criticism of Kant in the letter to Hamann is wrong if it is directed towards Kant's understanding of the nature of the state, and the means that human beings should employ to bring it about. Kant is not saying we exist for the sake of the state, for whose well-being individuals should be sacrificed, claims that would contra-

60 Johann Gottlob Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett 1987). First published in 1800 as *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*.

61 *Herders Briefe*, vol. 5, 106. The letter is dated February 14, 1785.

dict the very essence of his moral and political philosophy. His point is that the just state respects people's rights rather than promoting their happiness, and that such a state is the goal of history. But Herder is not alone among Kant's critics in noticing a contradiction between the categorical imperative and Kant's teleological view of history,⁶² according to which individuals *are* sacrificed for others. Both authors' conceptions of history are, after all, providential ones, positing (or at least hoping for) a moral author of the world. Herder's conception of how such an author would order history is consistent with his own moral principles, whereas Kant's is not. Clearly, Herder finds it disturbing that Kant *could* affirm the view of history he proposes while retaining a belief in its fundamental goodness, and he worries about the political implications of this view, in spite of Kant's injunction against treating rational natures merely as means. This worry seems justified in light of Wood's suggestion that the issue here 'is really about whether we can understand history in terms of an end seen first as implicitly and unconsciously animating the progressive efforts of the entire human species and later as something grasped by reason and pursued consciously and collectively as a common purpose.'⁶³ If unconscious reason within history treats individuals as mere means to a higher end, might there not be a temptation for conscious reason to do so as well, once it recognizes this fact?

As to the nature of the state, Herder fully accepts Kant's principles of natural rights and of the rights of nations, which he wishes would be generally recognized and implemented (BBH, 800). Indeed, he even accepts the idea that human history manifests progress in this regard, and that evil contributes to good. 'Individual generations pass away,' he writes, in lines that strongly foreshadow Hegel, 'but the immortal whole survives the wounds of the vanished members, and learns good from evil itself' (*Ideen*, 645). On Herder's position, however, the goodness of principles of right depends upon their contribution to human happiness, not the other way around, and freedom, whose value Herder always affirms, is a condition and component of happiness rather than an ultimate moral basis. Furthermore, while past individuals and generations have contributed to forms of scientific, social, and political

62 Whether Kant is entitled to such a view is another question; see Wilson, 324: 'Kant's optimism about the cunning of nature appears to be in painful contradiction with his intricately elaborated claim that we are ignorant of the properties of totalities, knowledge of which transcends the bounds of experience.'

63 *Kant's Ethical Thought*, 233

progress, they also lived for themselves, enjoying forms of life whose pleasures and achievements were unique and unrepeatable.

This belief accords with Herder's general view that 'nothing in the entire kingdom of God ... is *only* a means — everything is simultaneously a means and an end' (AGP, 54). For 'all the works of God have this as their own, that although they all belong to one incalculable whole, each nonetheless is also for itself a whole and carries the divine character of its destiny (*Bestimmung*) within itself' (*Ideen*, 341). Herder thinks this is true even of plants and animals, and so certainly of human beings (*Ideen*, 342). Consequently, with regard to the 'destiny' of non-human species, Herder would have to reject Kant's claim, in 'The Speculative Beginning of Human History,' that man assumed his appropriate place within nature 'the first time he said to a sheep: "the pelt that you bear was given to you by nature not for yourself but for me"' (PP, 52/AA 8: 114). The destiny of *human* individuals, nations, and generations definitely does not lie in merely being a means for a state that only appears at the end of history — a state allegedly brought about, to make matters worse, by a single culture. The peoples of all continents and ages did not live just to fertilize the earth with their ashes, Herder proclaims in the *Ideas*, so that their descendants might become happy, at the end of time, through European culture (*Ideen*, 335). Because Herder affirms the intrinsic worth of happy, flourishing, peaceful human lives, of which he thinks there are many varieties, his philosophy of history never reduces any culture, or any individuals within that culture, to the status of being *only* a vehicle for the accomplishment of a purpose lying outside its own, particular existence.

As to the *final* purpose (*Endzweck*) of creation — 'the end of all things' — there is none. 'For what is a final purpose in the world?' Herder asks in the *Letters*, 'Where is there finality?' (BBH, 625) This is a point he makes again and again in his major writings. In the much earlier work, *Yet Another Philosophy of History*, he had written: 'Examine the whole world from heaven to earth — what is a means? What is an end? Isn't everything a means to a million ends? Isn't everything the end of a million means?' (AGP, 82) The world, including nature and history, cannot be organized into a total system in which the functioning of the parts is subordinated to the production of a good that is not their own. The world, that is to say, is not a machine. Herder's repeated assertion to this effect has a cognitive as well as an ethical dimension. He wants to claim, first, that the world cannot be *comprehended* as a functionally organized total system (*Ideen*, 625). He also wants to say that it *ought not* to be forcibly made into one. 'Nature,' he proposes, 'is everywhere a living whole and wants to be gently followed and improved, not violently mastered' (*Ideen*, 284). Grand attempts to order nature in accordance with the idea of a purpose lead to bad results. 'It is a terrible thing,'

for instance, 'to regard mankind as just a *line* which one can bend, cut, extend, and shrink for some purpose quite as one pleases, in order to execute a plan, to accomplish a task' (BBH, 733).

As Wulf Koepke remarks, Herder strongly opposes 'the social engineering of enlightened absolutism.'⁶⁴ At the same time, he does posit an ideal of 'humanity' toward which all nations should strive. On these points, he is not at odds with Kant (though he is concerned that the latter's philosophy of history seems to point in a contrary direction). But Herder's ideal, which he spells out most fully in the *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity*, is both pluralistic and open-ended. The French and the English will paint their 'humanité and humanity' differently, Herder writes (BBH, 736), and we do not know where the human race may end up, since 'every newly achieved ability is the root of an unnumberable series of new ones' (BBH, 749). Thus it lies in the very nature of the case that *Humanität*, the ideal essence of the species, cannot be given a single, determinate formulation. Its realization involves fairness (*Billichkeit*) and kindness (*Güte*) (BBH, 128), but cannot be further defined into a set of universal and transhistorical principles.

Kant's appeal to a *a priori* and purely formal principles of right shows both the proximity and the distance between Herder's ideal and his own. The happiness of citizens, Kant argues, cannot serve as the highest principle of a political constitution, because 'such well-being, which each individual envisions for himself according to his own personal inclination in this way or that, is worthless for any objective principles such as universality requires' (APPV, 249/AA 7:331). Herder believes that the goal of a just state *is* the happiness of its citizens. He accepts that this happiness is indeed varied, although individuals in a given society also share some common aspirations. Therefore, laws and norms can be nothing more than imperfect generalizations, admitting of exceptions. They may also legitimately differ from one society to another, within limits respecting the basic wants that human beings do as a matter of fact have in common.⁶⁵ Human destiny does not lie, therefore, in achieving a 'kingdom of ends' — a metaphor suggesting a political administrative unit, with a single best form, whose fundamental principle is respect for the human will. Herder's preferred metaphor is that of a 'garden of the common good' (BBH, 227). The ideal world, according to Herder, is a place in which nature is cultivated rather than opposed,

64 Wulf Koepke, 'Kulturation and its Autorization through Herder,' in *Johann Gottfried Herder: Academic Disciplines and the Pursuit of Knowledge*, Wulf Koepke, ed. (Columbia, SC: Camden House 1996), 177-98 at 192.

65 On this point, see Sikka, 'Enlightened Relativism,' 331-2.

containing a diversity of national plants, and founded on a concern for human happiness.

Received: November 2005

Revised: May 2006