

**Herder's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Human History (1784-91)*, or:
the Anthropological De-struction of "Africa"**

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(Translated by Jeffrey S. Librett)

*In his work *Ideas for a Philosophy of Human History (1784-1791)*, the preacher and philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder deals critically with the philosophy of Enlightenment, in which he sees the seed of a racial and cultural classification that considers peoples outside Europe as inferior. This centrally included Africa and its inhabitants as represented by German philosophers. Such a way of imagining Africa, widely shared amongst thinkers of the Enlightenment, echoes still today in various representations in the Western media, and could even serve as an explanation of the current migration drama in the Mediterranean. Herder, who was well informed of these representations in his own day, attempted, in *Ideas*, to deconstruct the then prevalent image of Africa and its peoples, and thereby entered into an intellectual dispute with his philosophical contemporaries, whose position was to reaffirm the supremacy of European culture and so justify slavery and colonialism. This paper first focuses on Herder's context, then explains his positions and his work, and shows how his attempt ended in a deconstruction of the "Africa" of the Enlightenment.*

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Introduction

Johann Gottfried Herder, the preacher and philosopher, born on August 25th, 1744 in Mohrunge, is considered all over the world to be one of the most important, but also one of the most controversial philosophers of his time. The reason is that he uncompromisingly criticized many of his contemporaries' views. He summarized his counter-Enlightenment positions in a historically oriented teaching whose influence touched, for example, the French Enlighteners and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.¹

Herder's questioning attitude announced itself already in individual writings, such as the treatise from 1774, *Also a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*, which he characterized as a "contribution to contributions" in the preamble of his newly published work, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Human History* (1784-1791).² This latter publication contains many of the author's positions on religion, nature- and climate-theory, and language, but especially on history and anthropology, the positions that made him into the leading cultural theoretician of his time. In opposition to the stance of his contemporary, Immanuel Kant, who sees different races amongst the peoples, or Hegel, who disparaged Africa as the place of darkness—to which I will return below—Herder takes a different path.³

We want to concern ourselves in what follows specifically with the section on the "Organization of the African peoples," insofar as, when one views it against the backdrop of images of Africa that were debated in the press, one sees that Herder proposes here a different Africa, quite distinct from the "Africa" of his day.⁴ The work gives expression to Herder's views that not only place in question Eurocentric self-evidences of the Enlightenment, but are even directed in many instances against European historiography and ethnography [*Völkerkunde*]. In expressing such views, Herder places Africa in a positive light, similar to positive travel writing of the day, and takes, in connection with this positive view of Africa, culturally relativistic positions that were daring for his time. The de-centering of Europe appears to him as necessary, in order to initiate an era of new studies in cultural anthropology. Accordingly, this work is conceived as a new philosophy, which of course then attracted massive critique, since, at this time, Herder's predecessors and teachers propagated a different image of Africa. Above all Immanuel Kant, the philosopher and key figure of the Enlightenment, wrote a review of Herder's philosophy of history, in which he criticized Herder strongly:

Daher möchte wohl, was ihm Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit heißt, etwas ganz anderes sein, als was man gewöhnlich unter diesem Namen versteht: nicht etwa eine logische Pünktlichkeit in Bestimmung der Begriffe, oder sorgfältige Unterscheidung und Bewährung der Grundsätze, sondern ein sich nicht lange verweilender, viel umfassender Blick, eine in Auffindung von Analogien fertige Sagazität, im Gebrauche derselben aber

kühne Einbildungskraft, verbunden mit der Geschicklichkeit, für seinen immer in dunkeler Ferne gehaltenen Gegenstand durch Gefühle und Empfindungen einzunehmen, die, als Wirkungen von einem großen Gehalte der Gedanken, oder als vielbedeutende Winke mehr von sich vermuten lassen, als kalte Beurteilung wohl gerade zu in denselben antreffen würde.

Hence what philosophy of the history of humanity means to him may very well be something quite different from what is normally understood under that name. His is not a logical precision in the definition of concepts or careful adherence to principles, but rather a fleeting, sweeping view, an adroitness in unearthing analogies in the wielding of which he shows a bold imagination. This is combined with cleverness in soliciting sympathy for his subject—kept in increasingly hazy remoteness—by means of sentiment and sensation. Further suspicion is stimulated as to whether these emotions are effects of a prodigious system of thought or only equivocal hints which cool, critical examination would uncover in them.⁵

The goal of the present essay is to place Herder's image of Africa under a magnifying glass, as he develops it in "Organization of the African Peoples," and to discuss the author's culturally relativist positions. To achieve this, I will first retrace the image of Africa in the Enlightenment, then analyze the *Ideas*, and finally discuss the author's deconstructive anthropological positions.

Africa in Herder's Day

In Herder's times, "Africa" is a construct that is represented negatively in the total European consciousness, and especially in thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel.⁶ Precisely during the Enlightenment, the opinion was widely embraced that one had to civilize other peoples by bringing them the values of rationality, or reason, for only in this way could human beings and societies make progress. In accordance with such views, it was decided in Göttingen that other peoples and their customs should be studied

in a new discipline. This only became a solidly established discipline in the second half of the 19th century, dividing itself off from history and geography, with which it had hitherto always been bound up.⁷ Within this Enlightenment program, the development of humanity can be reached only through the force of reason. Reason is thus supposed to be privileged here over and against superstition and other irrational behavior.

A logical corollary of this rationalist conception of history as the inexorable progression of humankind to a cosmopolitan condition of rational perfectibility was the tendency of Enlightenment philosophers to demean or deride those cultures, past and present, which lacked consciousness of the principles of enlightened reason. Such cultures tended to be seen as lesser stages in the development towards this enlightened perfect end. Hence, in the view of Condorcet, it was the good fortune of the barbarous, unenlightened cultures of his day that they could acquire these rational principles of Enlightenment directly from the enlightened culture of European society.⁸

From this passage it emerges that here it is especially the extra-European cultures that were being considered irrational. In this respect, within the European cultural space two mutually opposed positions collided. One of these represented the opinion that there are backward peoples who should be cultivated by means of Enlightenment thought, and the other spoke up on behalf of the recognition of the simple life of the natural peoples [*Naturvölker*].⁹ Especially in many French philosophers one could find the latter view early on. Already in the 16th century, Montaigne propagates the myth of the “noble savage.” He presented the following thesis in a famous essay, in order to go beyond the negative image of extra-European cultures:

Or je trouve, pour revenir à mon propos, qu'il n'y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation, à ce qu'on m'en a rapporté ; sinon que chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage ; comme de vrai, il semble que nous n'avons d'autre mire de la vérité et de la raison que l'exemple et l'idée des opinions et usances du pays où nous sommes. Là est toujours la parfaite religion, la parfaite police, parfait et accompli usage de toutes

choses. Ils sont sauvages, de même que nous appelons sauvages les fruits que nature, de soi et de son progrès ordinaire, a produits : là où, à la vérité, ce sont ceux que nous avons altérés par notre artifice, et détournés de l'ordre commun, que nous devrions appeler plutôt sauvages. En ceux-là sont vives et vigoureuses les vraies et plus utiles et naturelles vertus et propriétés, lesquelles nous avons abâtardies en ceux-cy, et les avons seulement accommodées au plaisir de notre goût corrompu. Et si pourtant, la saveur même et délicatesse se trouve à notre goût excellente, à l'envi des nôtres, en divers fruits de ces contrées-là sans culture. Ce n'est pas raison que l'art gagne le point d'honneur de sur notre grande et puissante mère Nature. Nous avons tant rechargé la beauté et la richesse de ses ouvrages par nos inventions, que nous l'avons tout étouffée. Si est-ce que partout où sa pureté reluit, elle fait merveilleuse honte à nos vaines et frivoles entreprises.

Now, to return to my subject, I think there is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation, from what I have been told, except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice; for indeed it seems we have no other test of truth and reason than the example and pattern of the opinions and customs of the country we live in. There is always the perfect religion, the perfect government, the perfect and accomplished manners in all things. Those people are wild, just as we call wild the fruits that Nature has produced by herself and in her normal course; whereas really it is those that we have changed artificially and led astray from the common order, that we should rather call wild. The former retain alive and vigorous their genuine, their most useful and natural, virtues and properties, which we have debased in the latter in adapting them to gratify our corrupted taste. And yet for all that, the savor and delicacy of some uncultivated fruits of those countries is quite as excellent, even to our taste, as that of our own. It is not reasonable that art should win the place of honor over our great and powerful mother Nature. We have so overloaded the beauty and richness

of her works by our inventions that we have quite smothered her. Yet wherever her purity shines forth, she wonderfully puts to shame our vain and frivolous attempts.¹⁰

This myth of the *noble savage* spread throughout Europe up into the 19th century with such thinkers as Bougainville in France¹¹, and reached into Germany with scholars such as Wieland, but with different emphases.¹² These regions outside of Europe were upgraded or downgraded not just in purely cultural terms, but also in terms of various shades of skin-coloring, which made the question of skin-color into an important criterion for differentiating between various peoples and various cultures. Some of the educated men of the Enlightenment, according to Hund, defended the point of view that one should go beyond skin-color to the bone-structure, in order to gain incontrovertible proofs of the differences between the peoples. Above all, the anatomist, Samuel Thomas von Sömmering defended this position, which he summarized in an essay.¹³ However, this association between skin-color and culture (or civilization) developed in phases, according to Hund.

Die *erste Phase* ist gekennzeichnet durch eine mit dem Erfolg des europäischen Kolonialismus und der Entfaltung der transatlantischen Sklaverei einhergehende Verschiebung der Wahrnehmung. Sie machte aus den überkommenen Gegensätzen von Zivilisierten und Barbaren sowie Gläubigen und Heiden die Dichotomie von Weißen und Schwarzen. Die *zweite Phase* wird von der Entwicklung und Durchsetzung des an der Rassenkategorie orientierten Farbrassismus bestimmt. Dieser Prozeß wurde wesentlich von den Wissenschaften der Aufklärung betrieben und mündete in ein Konzept, das die Indikatoren für die weiße Norm unter die Haut verlegte. Die *dritte Phase* ist durch die soziale Verallgemeinerung und kulturelle Codierung des Weißseins geprägt. Es wurde auch den unteren Klassen zugesprochen, die häufig bereit waren, es nach außen wie innen zu verteidigen. Und es wurde zu einem Wertesystem verarbeitet, das selbst die Diskreditierung des Rassenbegriffs überdauerte.

The *first phase* is characterized by a displacement of perception that goes hand in hand with the success of European colonialism and the unfolding of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It constructed the dichotomy of white and black on the basis of the received oppositions between civilized and barbaric, as between believers and heathens. The *second phase* is determined by the development and realization of the color-racism that was oriented in terms of the race-category. This process was advanced essentially by the sciences of the Enlightenment, and issued in the concept that placed the indicators for the white norm beneath the skin. The *third phase* is marked by the social generalization and cultural encoding of being-white. It was also passed on to the lower classes, who were often ready to defend it against the outside and against the inside. And it was developed into a value-system that persisted even beyond the discrediting of the race-concept.¹⁴

Africa precisely belonged to the regions of the world in which the Enlighteners saw neither civilization nor culture. Even before this, it counted as a dark and backward continent. During the Enlightenment, however, nothing in this image was changed, for in Immanuel Kant it receives further confirmation. This strengthens our sense of the degree of racism at this time, against which in various writings Herder will later rebel. The connection Kant establishes between parts of the world and national characteristics, where perfection is reserved for the peoples of Europe--that is, the whites--is not only questionable, but serves a particular purpose. It enables him to classify the people in accordance with parts of the globe, in order to close, concerning Africa, with the infamous sentence: "the negroes of Africa have, of their very nature, no feelings that go beyond the ridiculous."¹⁵

II. "Ideas" for a New Philosophy

In his many publications, Herder positions himself amongst the philosophers at the end of the Enlightenment as a controversial personality by either categorically controverting or at least raising critical questions about all hitherto established self-evidences. His critique of the Enlightenment included many of the works of French and German

Enlighteners, with whose works he had become familiar already as a young man. Herder's settlement of his accounts with this period can be traced in many writings. He does not just contest the views of his predecessors and contemporaries concerning the goal of philosophy; rather, according to Herder, all of historiography and the philosophy of language needs to be reconceptualized. Indeed, the philosophy of language is a crucial aspect of his critique of the ubiquity of autonomous reason in the discourse of the Enlighteners:

Auch wenn Herder nicht alle Teile seines Werkes sprachphilosophisch begründet, so lassen sich doch alle im Medium der Sprachreflexion thematisieren. Allerdings meint Sprache hier nicht nur die Lautsprache, sondern ebenso die Sprache der Empfindung oder allgemeiner auch solche Symbolische Formen, die weniger systematisch geordnet sind als die verbale Sprache. Im Medium der Sprachphilosophie auslegbar sind deswegen alle Dimensionen, an die Herder Vernunft rückbinden will: die ganze historisch-kulturelle Welt.

Even if Herder did not ground all parts of his work in a philosophy of language, nonetheless all of them can be thematized in the medium of linguistic reflections. However, language means here not just the spoken language, but also the language of feeling or even more generally such symbolic forms as are less systematically ordered than verbal language. All of the dimensions to which Herder wishes to link reason—i.e. all the dimensions of the historical-cultural world—are interpretable in the medium of the philosophy of language.¹⁶

The attitude of the representatives of autonomous reason toward foreign peoples in Asia, North America, and above all Africa supported the oppression and exploitation that was then being perpetrated upon the land and people of parts of the world outside of Europe. Various scholars show how this classification of peoples and cultures on the basis of the Eurocentric categorization of people according to colors and races, which was supported by the idea of Enlightenment, propagates its effects up to our own times. *Being white*, as

an encoded belonging to a higher culture and civilization, has its origin especially in the period of the Enlightenment, which attempted to ground this notion in a scientific manner. This normative interpretation pursued various goals and served as an instrument of oppression, but also as a means of classification of human beings:

Die durch die Erzeugung weißer Normativität bewirkte rassistische Entfremdung wäre als sozialökonomisches Unterdrückungsverhältnis oder ideologischer Verblendungs-zusammenhang nur unzureichend beschrieben. Der durch sie erzeugte, Rassenmakel war von Anfang an nicht allein Zeichen für angebliche kulturelle Zurückgebliebenheit, sondern diente einer körperlichen Stigmatisierung, die tendenziell die Menschlichkeit derer in Frage stellte, die mit ihm behaftet wurden.

The racist alienation that was effected by the production of white normativity could be only insufficiently described as a socio-economic relation of exploitation or an ideological form of obscurantism. The racial failing it produces was from the very beginning not only a sign of ostensible cultural backwardness, but subserved rather the purposes of a bodily stigmatization that tendentially placed in question the humanity of those who were marked by it.¹⁷

In his philosophical reflexions, Herder rebelled against precisely this norm, which had already established itself during the Enlightenment.¹⁸ He divides his book in different parts, each of which critically responds to the Enlightenment. Herder's programmatic text orients itself around the thoroughgoing deconstruction of the ideas of his predecessors, in part also his teachers, including Immanuel Kant and J.G. Hamann. He established himself in various treatises and writings as an opponent of Kant, whose views he placed in question in numerous contributions. As an example of these we can mention his critique of transcendental philosophy, which he saw as a pure utopia, especially since it wanted to free itself as autonomous reason from elements such as language, experience, and history.¹⁹ The composition of the *Ideas* stretched over several years, more precisely

from 1784 to 1791, and the book was published in the Johann Friedrich Hartknoch Verlag. The publication, divided into four parts, treated various themes that Herder considered to be fundamental for the new philosophy of his time. Aside from the critiques of the ubiquity of reason, the *Ideas* begin with the planet on which the entire human race lives, planet earth, which Herder sees as a star amongst other stars. In connection with these reflections on the earth, Herder treated the theme of nature, specifically so as to reject the Enlightenment model, namely the materialist-mechanistic view of nature.²⁰

This monumental fragment treated also language-philosophical themes that put reason in touch with language. In this sense, it became a new philosophy, which placed history, language, and earth under a microscope, and revised previous conceptualizations. Precisely concerning the theme of history Herder took new paths, which led to a new anthropology. In this sense he responded to the understanding of culture that was current during the Enlightenment, which denied to other peoples both culture and reason. This response, insofar as it concerns Africa, can be found in a chapter in the second Part of the *Ideas*. It is rightly considered to be a rejection of his predecessors' traditional conceptions concerning foreign peoples and cultures. I would like now to discuss more closely the push-back against general prejudices with regard to Africa that is contained in this substantial work.

III. The De-struction of “Africa”

Herder's image of Africa, as I said above, can be found in the second part of the *Ideas* and contains the thinker's various de-constructive positions with respect to then current view of Africa and its inhabitants. Like the other chapters in the same Part, this chapter is supposed to deconstruct—in Derrida's sense²¹—or, better—with reference to Heidegger²²—destroy all of the opinions that had been considered valid during the Enlightenment and before. If one regards Herder's image of Africa in the *Ideas* from this point of view, one can say that Herder irrevocably refused the entire image of Africa of his time. Herder begins his deconstruction of the racism of his period as follows:

Billig müssen wir, wenn wir zum Lande der Schwarzen übergehn, unsre stolzen Vorurteile verleugnen und die Organisation ihres Erdstrichs so unparteiisch betrachten, als ob sie die einzige in der Welt wäre. Mit eben

dem Recht, mit dem wir den Neger für einen verfluchten Sohn Chams und für ein Ebenbild des Unholds halten, kann er seine grausame Räuber für Albinos und weiße Satane erklären, die nur aus Schwachheit der Natur so entartet sind, wie, dem Nordpol nahe, mehrere Tiere in Weiß ausarten.

It is only fair, when we proceed to the country of the blacks, that we lay aside our proud prejudices and consider the nature of this region with as much impartiality as if there were no other in the world. The Negro, whom we consider a cursed son of Ham and the image of the fiend, has equal right to call his cruel despoilers albinos and white satans who so degenerated only because of a flaw of nature, just as several animal species living near the North Pole degenerated into whiteness.²³

What Herder is alluding to in this passage is the color-racism demonstrably present in his day amongst many Enlighteners, above all in Kant and Sömmering, who insofar as they dealt with peoples beyond the limits of Europe set up color as a criterion for distinguishing one race from another.²⁴ It is relevant to remark that Herder polemically turned the tables, and applied this same color-racism to the Europeans, introducing the same arguments against them as they used against the extra-European peoples. Thus, he put into the mouth of the Black person, who was so generally disrespected, exactly the right arguments, supported by the notion that the sun had soaked him most strongly with its color. Thus, he became the original human being [*Urmensch*]. His richness, i.e. gold, was also a sign of pride, and his strong nature (tall trees, powerful animals) was an object of immeasurable magnitude. In this way, Herder destroyed the arguments of his predecessors, by simply turning them around and counseling people to be modest in their encounters with Africa.

Herder's second point of intervention was relativistic, for he now posed the questions, which were important to him, concerning the causes of the different skin-shadings of the various peoples.

Die schwarze Farbe der Neger ist nicht wunderbarer in ihrer Art als die weiße, braune, gelbe, rötliche anderer Nationen. Weder das Blut noch das

Gehirn noch der Same der Neger ist schwarz, sondern das Netz unter der Oberhaut, das wir alle haben und das auch bei uns, wenigstens an einigen Teilen und unter manchen Umständen, mehr oder minder gefärbt ist. Camper hat dies erwiesen, und nach ihm haben wir alle die Anlage, Neger zu werden. Selbst bei den kalten Samojeden ist der Streif um die Brüste der Weiber bemerkt worden; der Keim der Negerschwärze konnte in ihrem Klima bloß nicht weiter entwickelt werden.

The black color of the negroes is no more to be wondered at than the white, brown, yellow, or reddish colors of other nations. Neither the blood nor the brain nor the semen of the Negroes is black, but the reticular membrane beneath the cuticle, which is also in us, at least in some parts and under certain circumstances, more or less colored. Camper has demonstrated this, and according to him we all have the potential of becoming Negroes. Even in the cold of the Samoyed country, the ring around the nipples of the female breast has been noted; the germ of Negro blackness could not be further developed in that climate.²⁵

Even more importantly, one can pose the question as to what causes the color difference on the African continent, and what consequences are to be drawn for the new philosophy he promoted. Herder summarized the answers to these questions in a theoretical essay on climate. In order to illustrate concretely his climate theory, he adduced parallels with Portuguese tribes that had lived in Africa for hundreds of years and who were similar to the Blacks in their coloring. Herder attributed this to the climate, for air and sun must have played, according to him, a large role in this. These produce effects in the behavior and nourishment of human beings in the places where they live, and in part also in these inhabitants' cultures. Correspondingly, Herder held the opinion that in milder regions, where sea winds cool the heat, the skin becomes brown.²⁶ His descriptions of peoples who live in Africa might well today evoke critical questions, for Herder divided Africa up into many parts, depending on whether one was in the North or beyond the Senegal River, where he supposed various physiognomies could be found. He thus remained a child of

his age. Above all insofar as, in the *Ideas*, he still describes cultures and human beings in terms of their external appearance, we can see that he remained caught up in the discursive matrix of his colleagues. The fact that Herder's work retains traces of these traditional elements is indeed, no doubt, largely responsible for the negative reception of Herder outside Germany.²⁷

It is above all in the realm of culture that Herder's *Ideas* can be read as a counter-Enlightenment program. Herder did not share the sense of a triumphant reason with the Enlightenment thinkers of his day. Above all, he placed in question their denial that there could be any knowledge outside the domain of reason. He thereby opened the way to a new anthropology which promises a number of different things. In this new anthropology the color-based racism was to be not merely relativized but deconstructed. Herder rejected every division of humanity into races. In the *Ideas* he proposed that for the grounding and existence of a race, difference in origin [*Abstammung*] would be the minimal necessary presupposition, which in this case is not given anywhere on earth. In addition, one would have to consider every region [*Erdstrich*] and every least shading of color-difference as constituting a race of its own, which was untenable. Building upon this idea, he saw neither four nor five races, but only one.²⁸ Nor was this all. He called for caution in the description of other peoples. He was well aware, in this regard, of the limitation of his times:

Aber wie arm sind wir überhaupt an geltenden Nachrichten aus diesem Strich der Erde! Kaum die Küsten des Landes kennen wir, und auch diese oft nicht weiter, als die europäischen Kanonen reichen. Das Innere von Afrika hat von neuern Europäern niemand durchreiset, wie es doch die arabischen Karawanen so oft tun; was wir von ihm wissen, sind Sagen aus dem Munde der Schwarzen oder ziemlich alte Nachrichten einiger glücklichen oder unglücklichen Abenteurer. - Zudem scheint auch bei den Nationen, die wir schon kennen könnten, das Auge der Europäer viel zu tyrannisch-sorglos zu sein, um bei schwarzen elenden Sklaven Unterschiede der Nationalbildung ausforschen zu wollen.

But how deficient we are in authentic information about this region of the earth! We barely know the coastal areas of the country, and even these often no further than the reach of European cannon. No contemporary Europeans have traversed the interior of Africa, which is being done so frequently by Arab caravans; what we know of it is either from the tales of the blacks or from rather ancient reports by a few fortunate or unfortunate adventurers. Even the nations that, as things are, we might know, the eye of the European seems to behold with too tyrannical indifference to try to investigate the variations of national development in wretched black slaves.²⁹

Conclusion:

At once preacher and philosopher, Herder still counts today as one of the “four stars” of Weimar Classicism, alongside Goethe, Schiller, and Wieland. His critique of the Enlightenment and of the most important ideas of this time reveal him to be one of the most controversial thinkers of the Enlightenment period. Above all, the problematic between language and reason constituted one of the main points of contention of his philosophical positions.

The manifold themes he discussed in a number of treatises appear in the eyes of his contemporaries, and still today, as somewhat scattered. His main work, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Human History*, is not a stringent and narrowly structured work, but rather a collection of different essays and fragments, on which he labored for four years.³⁰ They are thus unsystematic reflections, which nonetheless pursue the goal of placing in question various views prevalent in Herder’s time. And the Herder-reception also takes note of it:

Von den Schriften Herders liegt eine historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe immer noch nicht vor. Auch das gehört zu den Umständen einer Wirkungsgeschichte, in der Herder merkwürdig anonym geblieben ist: Sein Werk gilt als ungewöhnlich, zugleich wird es als unübersichtlich und als zusammenhangslos wahrgenommen.

We still don't have a complete historical-critical edition of Herder's writings. That, too, belongs to the circumstances of a reception-history in which Herder has remained strangely anonymous: his work counts as unusual, but at the same time it is seen as incoherent and as not allowing of any overview.³¹

In spite of these aspects, which give the impression that Herder is not particularly important for the period of the Enlightenment, his work has had a great influence on later generations of thinkers. To the anthropology of the later centuries, Herder made a great contribution through his organological conception of culture,³² and influenced thinkers such as Oswald Spengler,³³ and later, Leo Frobenius.³⁴ The latter became, at the beginning of the 20th century, of great importance for the thinkers of negritude who were then studying in France, such as Senghor and Césaire, who promoted *feeling* as an important form of intelligence. The influence goes directly back to Herder, who contested during the Enlightenment the omnipotence of reason and its independence from language, history, and experience. Above all, his conception of cultures as singular individuals, whose legitimacy [*Gültigkeit*] resides solely within them, was for the thinkers of negritude a welcome argument. He announced: "For every human can and must think alone in his or her own language" and "every nation has the middle-point of its happiness within itself, as every cone has its geometric centroid!"³⁵

With this sentence, Herder clearly refuses both the program of the Enlightenment and the program of colonialism, both of which want to force their values, their language, and indeed themselves as cultures onto the cultures of others.

¹ Cf. Hans M. Wolff, "Der junge Herder."

² Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 9.

³ Kant, *Werke*, XI, 12ff, and also Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, 120.

⁴ Herder, *Ideen*, 97-105.

⁵ Kant, "Rezension," 781. English in Immanuel Kant, *On History*, 27-8.

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- ⁶ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, 120.
- ⁷ Yousoof Diallo, "L'africanisme en Allemagne," 13-43.
- ⁸ Brian J. Whitton, "Herder's Critique of the Enlightenment."
- ⁹ See Aïssatou Bouba, "Das Bild von Afrika."
- ¹⁰ Michel de Montaigne, "Des cannibals." In English: *The Complete Works*, trans. Donald M. Frame, 185.
- ¹¹ Cf. Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, *Voyage autour du monde*.
- ¹² Cf. Wieland, *Wielands Werke*, vol VII, 417-438.
- ¹³ Samuel Thomas Sömmering, *Über die körperliche Verschiedenheit des Mohren vom Europäer*.
- ¹⁴ Wulf D. Hund, "Die Weisse Norm," 175.
- ¹⁵ Kant, *Werke* II, 880.
- ¹⁶ Jens Heise, *Herder zur Einführung*, 9.
- ¹⁷ Hund, 175ff.
- ¹⁸ I would point here to Kant's programmatic text on what Enlightenment is, in *Werke* XI, 51.
- ¹⁹ Heise, 9.
- ²⁰ Heise, 71.
- ²¹ Cf. Wieland Schwanebeck, "Deonstruktion."
- ²² Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*.
- ²³ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen*, 97-8; and in English, *On World History: an Anthology*, 178.
- ²⁴ Kant, *Werke* XI, 16.
- ²⁵ Herder, *Ideen*, 101ff. *On World History*, 181.
- ²⁶ Herder, *Ideen*, 102.
- ²⁷ Marc Crépon, "Mémoires d'Europe."
- ²⁸ Herder, *Ideen*, 111.
- ²⁹ Herder, *Ideen*, 111; *On History*, 180.
- ³⁰ Carlton J. H. Hayes, "Contributions of Herder to Nationalism," 722.
- ³¹ Jens Heise, "Herder zur Einführung."
- ³² On Herder's organological concept, see Alioune Sow, "Représentations d'une nation et constructions identitaires chez Herder."
- ³³ Cf. Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*.
- ³⁴ Cf. Leo Frobenius, *Kulturgeschichte Afrikas*.
- ³⁵ Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 475-586.

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