# HERDER'S IMPORTANCE AS A PHILOSOPHER[1]


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*Introduction*


Herder has been sufficiently neglected in recent times, especially among philosophers, to need a few words of introduction. He lived 1744-1803; he was a favorite student of Kant's, and a student and friend of Hamann's; he became a mentor to the young Goethe, on whose development he exercised a profound influence; and he worked, among other things, as a philosopher, literary critic, Bible scholar, and translator.

As I mentioned, Herder has been especially neglected by *philosophers* (with two notable exceptions in the Anglophone world: Isaiah Berlin and Charles Taylor). This

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[1] This title echoes that of an essay by Charles Taylor, "The Importance of Herder" (in *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration*, ed. E. and A. Margalit [Chicago, 1991]), with whose thesis that Herder is an important philosopher I am in strong agreement. However, my arguments for this will for the most part be quite different from Taylor's. In particular, I do not follow, and would indeed strongly disagree with, Taylor's central claim that Herder's seminal contribution lies in his conception of *Besonnenheit* and of a related linguistic "rightness," as introduced in the *Treatise on the Origin of Language* of 1772, and that a whole family of further important and novel ideas somehow follows from that one. My title's addition of the qualification "as a philosopher" is not grudging in spirit but on the contrary flags the fact that Herder has claims to importance not only as a philosopher but also in several other disciplines.

situation strikes me as very unfortunate.[2] Accordingly, I would like here to sketch a positive case for Herder's seminal importance in three closely connected areas of philosophy: philosophy of language; philosophy of interpretation (or "hermeneutics"); and philosophy of translation.[3]

It has been widely recognized that some very important and valuable developments took place in the philosophies of language, interpretation, and translation in late 18th and early 19th century Germany. However, this recognition has largely been distributed among commentators who were interested only in one or the other of these areas, and as a result the likelihood of deep interconnections between the developments has largely been overlooked. Also, the developments in the philosophy of language have usually been credited to Hamann, and those in the philosophies of interpretation and translation to Schleiermacher. What I want to show in this article is that these various developments are indeed deeply interconnected (in particular, that three revolutionary principles which were introduced in the philosophy of language at this period were also fundamental to the revolutions which occurred in the philosophies of interpretation and translation), and that in each area the credit really belongs, not to the other people just mentioned, but to

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[2] The explanation of this neglect is complicated and of some interest. To mention a few of the relevant factors: (i) Herder often uses a passionate, unruly *Sturm und Drang* style, eschews systematicity, and seems to lack arguments and to tolerate inconsistencies. (ii) He has managed (paradoxically enough) to acquire both a bad name with cosmopolitans for "nationalism" and a bad name with nationalists for a sort of cosmopolitan softness. (iii) He fell out, in one way or another, with almost everyone who was anyone in his own day, including his former teacher Kant, his former follower Goethe, Schiller, Fichte, and the Schlegels. As a result, he tended to be widely read and borrowed from by the generation(s) that succeeded him but *rarely credited*. (iv) A further factor which has had a negative effect on Herder's reception by Anglophone philosophers is that his writings are linguistically challenging for non-Germans, and that there are few reliable English translations available. Insofar as some of these factors, in particular (i) and (ii), might seem to reflect badly on Herder, that appearance rests on misconceptions which can easily be defused. For some of the required defusing, see my *Herder: Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge, 2002), introduction.

[3] Similar cases could be made for his importance in several other areas of philosophy as well - including, philosophy of mind, aesthetics, philosophy of history, and political philosophy. I shall not go into these here, but for some relevant discussion see my *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, introduction; "Johann Gottfried von Herder," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online); and "The Liberal Temper in Classical German Philosophy. Freedom of Thought and Expression," *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus*, vol. 2 (2004).

Herder. Moreover, I want to suggest that, at least where the philosophies of language and interpretation are concerned, Herder's versions of the ideas in question are in important respects superior to these other people's versions, and that they are still of importance today. Let me begin with the most fundamental of the three areas: philosophy of language.

*Philosophy of Language*

Already in the mid-1760s, in his *On Diligence in Several Learned Languages* of 1764 and his *Fragments on Recent German Literature* of 1767-8, Herder advanced two revolutionary doctrines which essentially founded modern philosophy of language as we have known it since: (1) Thought is essentially dependent on, and bounded in its scope by, language. That is to say: one can only think if one has a language, and one can only think what one can express linguistically. (2) Meanings, or concepts, are identical - not, as many philosophers before and even since have supposed, with such items, in principle independent of language, as objects referred to, Platonic forms, or Empiricist mental ideas (à la Locke or Hume) - but instead with *word-usages*.[4]

Hamann has commonly been credited with introducing some such doctrines and then passing them on to Herder (e.g. by Isaiah Berlin). However, I believe this to be a mistake; Herder already embraced them in the mid-1760s, Hamann only much later (mainly in his *Metacritique* of 1784, though there are also a few statements going back as far as the early 1770s). The intellectual debt is actually *the other way round*![5]

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[4] For details, including textual evidence, see my "Herder's Philosophy of Language, Interpretation, and Translation: Three Fundamental Principles," *The Review of Metaphysics*, no. 56 (2002).

[5] For details, see ibid.

Why have interpreters made this mistake? One reason is that Hamann's muddle-headed vanity and Herder's affable generosity have conspired to obscure this situation in their correspondence and their other writings. But the main reason lies in the following circumstances: In his best known (but not necessarily best) work in philosophy of language, his *Treatise on the Origin of Language* from 1772, Herder temporarily lapsed from his normal straightforward versions of the two doctrines in question into versions which watered them down into something much closer to a standard Enlightenment position that the mental is prior to the linguistic. For in the *Treatise* he temporarily came to employ such terms as "language" and "word(-usages)" as names for merely *mentalistic* processes (he was looking for a proof of the two doctrines, and temporarily imagined that this was a good way to obtain one, overlooking the fact that it had the unfortunate side-effect of virtually trivializing them, and so depriving them of their original interest). Hamann then published critiques of Herder's *Treatise* in which he rejected such a position and implied a preference for the straightforward versions of the doctrines. Not knowing the full history, interpreters have taken this exchange, and Herder's subsequent turn (or rather *re*turn) to the straightforward versions of the doctrines, as evidence of Hamann's seminal impact on Herder's development, whereas in fact all that Hamann had done was to play back *Herder's own earlier position* against his temporary lapse from it![6]

However, it is not only a matter of chronological precedence. For Herder's normal versions of the two doctrines are also *philosophically superior* to Hamann's. The following are four respects in which this is true: (i) Hamann usually recasts the doctrine of thought's dependence on and boundedness by language in the form of the stronger claim of thought's outright *identity* with language. However, such a strong claim is not going to be philosophically defensible. For, one can think without in the process articulating the thoughts in question linguistically, even "in one's head" (for example, if one is sitting upstairs at home expecting Mary to return home first, and one hears

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[6] For details, see ibid.

someone at the front door who subsequently turns out to have been Peter, one may later say quite truly that one thought the person who came in was Mary, even though one had neither uttered not mentally entertained any such little formula as "Mary is here now," but merely heard the door and felt unsurprised). And conversely, one can articulate a sentence linguistically, indeed even "in one's head," without thereby doing any corresponding thinking (for example, one may watch television in a foreign language which one does not understand and repeat certain sentences, either explicitly or "in one's head," without thereby doing any corresponding thinking). Now, unlike Hamann, Herder is normally careful to avoid any such claim of an outright identity between thought and language. And he thereby holds the more philosophically defensible version of the doctrine.

(ii) Hamann has no *argument* for the doctrine (in a famous letter from the 1780s he says that he is still waiting for an "apocalyptic angel" to illuminate him on this score!). By contrast, Herder, already in the 1760s indeed, has an extremely plausible argument for it: thoughts are essentially articulated through concepts, but according to Herder's second doctrine concepts or meanings are (not referents, Platonic forms, or Empiricist mental ideas, but) *word*-usages.[7]

(iii) Unlike Hamann (who again has none), Herder also has plausible arguments for this second doctrine itself. His arguments against identifying meanings with referents include the following, all of which are plausible and important: (a) Referring-terms (i.e. referring by function even if not by actual performance) can be meaningful despite lacking any referent (e.g. the terms "Zeus" and "phlogiston"). (b) Language was originally *expressive* rather than referring or descriptive, and still includes many terms which, while meaningful, have an expressive rather than a referring or descriptive character (e.g. the term "Ah!"). (c) Singular referring terms do not acquire their meanings directly from or in an object referred to (the supposition that they do is one of the strongest sources of the temptation to equate meanings with referents), but only *via*

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[7] For details, see ibid.

*general concepts*. So much for the identification of meanings with referents. Herder's central argument against identifying them with Platonic forms or Empiricist mental ideas, and for identifying them with word-usages instead, appeals to the *decisiveness of linguistic-behavioral criteria* for ascribing *understanding* to a person: that decisiveness would be incompatible with meaning consisting in a Platonic form or an Empiricist mental idea (and hence understanding in mental contact with such a form or containment of such an idea), but it accords perfectly with meaning consisting in word-usage (and hence understanding in competence in word-usage). In this connection, Herder is fond of quoting some lines from the poet Edward Young: "Speech, Thought's Criterion . . . / Thought in the Mind may come forth Gold or Dross, / When coin'd in Word, we know its *real* Worth."[8] Consequently, meanings are not referents, Platonic forms, or Empiricist ideas, but instead word-usages.[9]

(iv) Unlike Hamann, Herder in addition identifies a series of prima facie problem cases which seem to confront the two doctrines in question (i.e. cases in which thoughts or concepts seem to occur without any corresponding language use being involved): God, young children, animals, and non-linguistic art. And for each of these cases he develops a very plausible way of saving the two doctrines in the face of it.[10] For example, in the case of animals, his considered solution is to say that higher primates such as apes sometimes acquire a rudimentary grasp of language and a commensurate ability to think and conceptualize, but that animals which lack language can achieve only pre-forms of such

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[8] E. Young, *Night Thoughts*. To my knowledge, Herder's earliest allusion to this passage occurs in his *Dithyrambic Rhapsody on the Rhapsody of Cabbalistic Prose* from 1764, *Johann Gottfried Herder Werke*, ed. U. Gaier et al. (Frankfurt am Main, 1985-), 1:39. For an example of his later quotation of it, see his *On the Ability to Speak and to Hear* of 1795.

[9] For a more detailed discussion of these arguments, and in particular for supporting textual evidence, see my "Herder's Philosophy of Language, Interpretation, and Translation: Three Fundamental Principles."

[10] See my "Gods, Animals, and Artists: Some Problem Cases in Herder's Philosophy of Language," *Inquiry*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2003).

mental operations.[11] And in the case of non-linguistic art (so called) - sculpture, painting, music, etc. - his considered solution is to concede that such art often express thoughts and meanings, but to insist that the thoughts and meanings in question are dependent on and bounded by the artist's capacity for linguistic expression.[12]

Herder's two doctrines strikingly anticipate positions held by the most important 20th century philosopher of language: the later Wittgenstein. This is not accidental; Herder (and Hamann) influenced Wittgenstein via Mauthner.[13]

But I think that a case can be made that Herder's philosophy of language is actually superior to Wittgenstein's in at least one important respect. For Herder also embraces a *third* doctrine in the philosophy of language: a quasi-empiricist doctrine which holds that meanings or concepts must of their very nature be anchored in (perceptual or affective) *sensations*, but which - unlike cruder traditional versions of that position, such as Hume's - also incorporates two important qualifications (hence the "quasi-"): (i) that the dependence goes both ways, i.e. that the sensations of a concept-using human being also depend for their specific character on his concepts (it is not, as Hume supposed, simply a matter of a person's first having, say, the sensation of blue and then on that basis developing the concept of blue; rather, acquiring the concept affects the nature of the sensation); and (ii) that the dependence is loose enough to permit *metaphorical* extensions (so that, for example, the sensuous "in" found in a statement like "The dog is

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[11] This is the solution he eventually arrives at in his *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity* (1784-91). It seems to me markedly superior to the solution he had offered earlier in the *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772), that only human beings can really use language, think, or conceptualize - a position which Taylor has in my view mistakenly emphasized and praised at "The Importance of Herder," pp. 44 ff. For further details on this subject, see my "Gods, Animals, and Artists: Some Problem Cases in Herder's Philosophy of Language."

[12] For details, see ibid., and my "Hegel and Some (Near) Contemporaries: Narrow or Broad Expressivism?" in *Das Interesse des Denkens: Hegel aus heutiger Sicht*, ed. W. Welsch and K. Vieweg (Munich, 2003).

[13] Concerning this influence, see my "Herder's Philosophy of Language, Interpretation, and Translation: Three Fundamental Principles," p. 356, n. 116.

in his kennel" becomes the non-sensuous, or at least less-directly-sensuous, "in" found in a statement like "Smith is in legal trouble").

Such a doctrine as this is likely to strike modern philosophical ears as misguided (it used to strike mine that way). This is mainly because of the intervening strong influence of Frege's and Wittgenstein's anti-psychologism, or (precisely) exclusion of mental items such as sensations from any essential involvement in meaning and understanding. However, I want to suggest that Herder is probably right here. The following are four points in defense of his doctrine: (a) One's confidence in Fregean-Wittgenstein's anti-psychologism should be at least a little undermined by recalling another of Wittgenstein's doctrines: his surely very plausible doctrine that such concepts as "meaning" are in their prephilosophical state vague and fluid.[14] It seems unlikely that our commonsense concept of meaning carries any such sharp partitioning of meaning from sensation as Fregean-Wittgensteinian anti-psychologism advocates. Indeed, Wittgenstein himself occasionally concedes that in excluding psychological items from meaning in this way, his conception of meaning as use departs from the ordinary meaning of the term "meaning," selectively accentuating one strand of it to the neglect of other strands.[15]

(b) Herder's quasi-empiricist doctrine might seem incompatible with his and Wittgenstein's shared identification of meaning with *word-usage*. Now, in Wittgenstein's version of such an identification "word-usage" does indeed refer strictly to a pattern of linguistic competence in a sense that excludes any essential role for sensations. But that is not something required of *any* doctrine of meaning as word-usage. After all, a *usage* is of its very nature a usage in relation to some *context* or other, and there is no obvious reason why the context in question might not in this case essentially include *sensations*. So there is after all no real incompatibility here.

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[14] See my *Wittgenstein on the Arbitrariness of Grammar* (Princeton, 2004), pp. 137 ff.

[15] See esp. *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge 1932-1935* (Chicago, 1982), pp. 44, 47-48, 121.

(c) Frege's anti-psychologism is based on a dubious Platonist ontology (the "third realm"). Wittgenstein's instead appeals, somewhat more plausibly, to arguments, similar to Herder's, concerning the criteria which we actually use for ascribing conceptual understanding to people: Wittgenstein argues that what is decisive here is their linguistic competence, not whatever sensations they may happen to have. However, there are two sides to Wittgenstein's case which seem to me very different in their levels of plausibility, and which should be distinguished: On the one hand, he argues that linguistic competence is *necessary* for understanding - and this seems *entirely* plausible. On the other hand, though, he also argues that it is in a sense *sufficient* for understanding, in particular that there is no need of any psychological process, such as having sensations, in addition - but this seems much less plausible. Suppose, for instance, that someone had never had a sensation of red (say, because he was congenitally blind or color-blind), but that we managed to teach him to make all of the right intralinguistic statements about red - for example, concerning its position on the color spectrum, its being a brighter color than grey, and so on - and that in addition we managed, by implanting a fancy electronic device in his brain, to enable him to apply the word "red" when and only when presented with something red (despite, let it be stipulated, still not having the sensation of redness).[16] Would we in such a case want to say that he fully understood the word "red"? It seems at least very plausible to say that we would *not*.

(d) In the light of such considerations, someone might concede, pace Frege and Wittgenstein, that sensations are *sometimes* internal to concept-possession, but still remain skeptical that they *always* are, as Herder's doctrine claims. Candidate counterexamples which are likely to seem attractive are, for instance, logical connectives,

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[16] The stipulation that he applies the term correctly but still lacks the sensation might be questioned on the ground that applying the term correctly is *sufficient* for having the sensation. However, I think that a little further reflection shows that this is not in fact true.

such as "and" and "not."[17] However, it seems to me that, on further reflection, these do not in fact constitute convincing counterexamples to Herder's doctrine at all. For instance, whenever one observes a certain state of affairs added to another (e.g. a chair being red and (then) having a cat on it as well) one has a sensory illustration of "and"; and whenever one observes a certain state of affairs ceasing to obtain (e.g. the same cat jumping off the chair) one has a sensory illustration of "not."[18]

   In sum, I would suggest that Herder's third doctrine is at least very plausible, and that it may well constitute an important respect in which his philosophy of language is actually superior to Wittgenstein's.[19]

*Philosophy of Interpretation (Hermeneutics)*

Let us turn now to a further, but closely related, area of philosophy. Schleiermacher has commonly been credited with having made major advances in the early 19th century in

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[17] Logic requires no more than these two, note.

[18] Recall that, unlike cruder versions of a doctrine of concept-empiricism, Herder's version is not committed to claiming that such observations could be made *without* the concepts in question.

[19] Two qualifications of these high claims on behalf of Herder's philosophy of language: (i) The three Herderian doctrines on which I have focused here were not entirely without precedents: the Leibniz-Wolff tradition had anticipated the doctrine of thought's dependence on and boundedness by language; Ernesti had anticipated the doctrine that meanings are word-usages (albeit only in an epistemological version); and Herder's quasi-empiricism is indebted to not only to the Empiricists themselves but also to the precritical Kant. Concerning these anticipations, see my "Herder's Philosophy of Language, Interpretation, and Translation: Three Fundamental Principles."
   (ii) Important developments in the philosophy of language have certainly taken place since Herder. To mention a chronologically proximate one: Schleiermacher and F. Schlegel subsequently introduced an important element of linguistic *holism* into the philosophy of language (pace Taylor, "The Importance of Herder," pp. 56-9, who gives the impression that such a move was already implicit in Herder). Concerning this, see my "Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; "Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics: Some Problems and Solutions," *The Harvard Review of Philosophy*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2005); and "Language," forthcoming in the *Cambridge History of Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. A. Wood.

the philosophy of interpretation, or "hermeneutics" (e.g. by Manfred Frank and Peter Szondi). I would agree that a huge advance in hermeneutics occurred at around that period (and moreover, that, as Szondi suggests, 20th century philosophical hermeneutics à la Heidegger and Gadamer has generally been a retrograde step rather than one of progress). However, almost everything that is distinctive and important in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics had in fact already been developed by Herder before him.[20]

The following are some central examples: (i) Schleiermacher famously argues in favor of a *general* hermeneutics, applicable to sacred texts as well as profane, modern as well as ancient, oral as well as written, and so on. But Herder had already moved strongly in this direction. For example, he had argued in works from as early as the 1760s against relying on divine inspiration when interpreting the Bible, and for instead interpreting it in the same historically and philologically scrupulous manner as any other ancient text; and he had included modern as well as ancient texts in his own interpretive endeavors.

(ii) Schleiermacher makes a doctrine that thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by language (like Hamann, he goes as far as to say: identical with language) fundamental to his theory of interpretation. But, as we saw, Herder had already developed such a doctrine; and he too had made it fundamental to his theory of interpretation.

(iii) Schleiermacher equates meanings with word-usages, or rules of word-use, and accordingly makes pinning down such rules the central task of the linguistic side of interpretation. But, as we saw, Herder had already equated meanings with word-usages; and accordingly, he too had made pinning these down the central task of interpretation.

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[20] One of the few people who have recognized Herder's importance for the development of hermeneutics is J. Wach, *Das Verstehen: Grundzüge einer Geschichte der hermeneutischen Theorie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Hildesheim, 1966), 1:19-22, cf. 35-6, 72. However, Wach does not identify Herder's contributions in any detail, and in particular does not identify what I would regard as some of his most important ones, such as complementing linguistic with psychological interpretation, and specifying "divination" as the method especially of the latter.

(iv) Schleiermacher famously emphasizes that interpretation needs to cope with a phenomenon of conceptual idiosyncrasy, not only between languages but also in the individual author vis à vis his background language; and Schleiermacher argues that largely for this reason interpretation needs to complement *linguistic* interpretation, which focuses on an author's background language, with *psychological* interpretation, which focuses on his distinctive psychology. But Herder had already argued along exactly these lines in his *On Thomas Abbt's Writings* (1768) and *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* (1778).[21]

(v) Schleiermacher famously argues for the need, especially on the psychological side of interpretation, to use a method of "divination," by which he means (with French rather than Latin etymology in mind: *deviner* rather than *divus* or *divinus*) a method of fallible, corrigible hypothesis based on but also going well beyond whatever meager empirical evidence is available. But Herder had already argued exactly the same in the two works of his just mentioned.

(vi) Schleiermacher argues for a form of methodological empiricism - i.e. working up from empirical evidence towards (general) conclusions - on both the linguistic and the psychological sides of interpretation. But Herder had already argued strongly for such a method as well.

(vii) Schleiermacher famously argues for a holistic approach to the available evidence - for example, for interpreting the parts of a text in light of the whole text to which they belong; the latter in light of the author's whole corpus; and all of these in light of the whole historical and social context to which they belong. But Herder had already argued for these sorts of holism as well (for instance, for the first in the *Critical Forests* of 1769, and for the third in *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity* from 1774).

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[21] Another theorist who was evidently influenced by Herder to incorporate a focus on authorial psychology into interpretation is F. Ast (concerning this aspect of Ast's position, cf. Wach, *Das Verstehen*, 1:45-6, 49). Schleiermacher's appropriation of this position from Herder may in part have been mediated by Ast.

(viii) Schleiermacher famously addresses the problem of *circularity* which such holism seems to confront, arguing that (to take the first sort of holism as an example) the interpreter should begin by reading through the parts of a text in sequence, interpreting them as well as possible, then, having thereby reached an overview of the whole text, deploy this overview in order to refine his interpretation of the parts, whose refined interpretation can then produce a more exact understanding of the whole, and so on indefinitely (a solution whose key lies in the recognition that understanding is not an all-or-nothing matter, but comes in degrees). But, once again, Herder had already addressed the same problem and offered the same solution, namely in his *Critical Forests*.

Some of this mass of common ground between Schleiermacher's theory of interpretation and Herder's is no doubt due to their having shared sources on the subject which they both respected, especially Ernesti's *Institutes* of 1761. But much of it can only be due to Schleiermacher having borrowed from Herder - for example, the central ideas of complementing linguistic with psychological interpretation, especially in order to address the phenomenon of authorial conceptual idiosyncrasy, and of employing "divination," in the sense of fallible, corrigible hypothesis, particularly as the method of psychological interpretation (neither of which ideas had yet been developed by Ernesti).[22]

Moreover, where Schleiermacher's and Herder's theories of interpretation *do* differ, it almost always turns out that Herder's is philosophically superior. Here are some examples: (a) Unlike Herder, Schleiermacher agrees with Hamann in opting for an ambitious "identity" version of the doctrine of thought's dependence on and boundedness by language (more specifically, for a doctrine that thought is identical with *inner* language). But, as we already saw, unlike Herder's more restrained version of the doctrine, such an ambitious version is not philosophically tenable.

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[22] For further details concerning the above points, see my *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, introduction; "Herder's Philosophy of Language, Interpretation, and Translation: Three Fundamental Principles"; and "Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics: Some Problems and Solutions."

(b) Schleiermacher in some of his later work adds to his Herderian doctrine that meanings are word-usages, or rules of word use, a doctrine that they are Kantian empirical schemata, or rules for the production of images. However, Kant had conceived empirical schemata in the spirit of a sharp meaning-language dualism typical of the Enlightenment, and Schleiermacher's addition incorporates this feature. But this lands him, unlike Herder, in inconsistency with their shared fundamental conception of meanings as word-usages.[23]

(c) For Herder the phenomenon of individual conceptual idiosyncrasy in authors - which largely motivates his principle of complementing linguistic with psychological interpretation - is no more than an empirically established rule of thumb. By contrast, Schleiermacher, in his *Dialectics* and *Ethics* lectures, argues for it in an a priori manner as a universal feature of all reason, all meaning and understanding. However, this version of the position is much less plausible than Herder's: in its very a priori status, in the specific details of its a priori argument, and in its highly counterintuitive consequence that strictly speaking nobody *ever* understands another person.[24]

(d) Whereas Herder conceives psychological interpretation as a broad exploration of an author's psychological traits, Schleiermacher usually attempts to specify it more narrowly as a pinning down of an author's "seminal decision [*Keimentschluß*]" which was present at his text's inception and unfolded itself as the text in a necessary fashion. However, this idea (inspired in part by Fichte's dubious metaphysics of the self) seems unhelpful as a general picture of the nature of texts and of how to interpret them. For how many texts

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[23] On the other hand, a further feature of this addition is more or less shared by Herder, namely its inclusion of images or sensations in meaning, and, as we have seen, while this is very controversial (in particular, anathema to a Fregean-Wittgensteinian anti-psychologism), it may well be defensible.

[24] For fuller discussion of points (a)-(c), see my "Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics: Some Problems and Solutions."

are actually composed in this way (rather than, say, through a whole series of more or less distinct authorial decisions, serendipity during the process of composition, and so on)?[25]

(e) Whereas Herder allows the psychological side of interpretation to draw on both linguistic and non-linguistic behavioral evidence, Schleiermacher restricts it to linguistic evidence only. This again seems a retrograde step; *both* sources can in principle provide evidence of authorial psychology relevant to interpretation, and in some cases non-linguistic evidence may indeed be more telling than linguistic evidence. For example, if one is wondering whether the Marquis de Sade's writings emanate from a genuine sadism or merely affect it, say as a sort of literary pose adopted in order to attack a certain value system, then it surely helps to know something about his history of actual assaults on women.[26]

(f) Herder generally sees interpretive inquiries as similar to natural scientific ones, and in particular he regards the role in interpretive inquiries of "divination," in the sense of fallible, corrigible hypothesis based on but also extending well beyond the limited empirical evidence available, as making them like natural scientific ones (see especially his 1768 work *On Thomas Abbt's Writings*). By contrast, Schleiermacher regards the role of "divination" in interpretation as making interpretation deeply *unlike* natural science: not a science but an art. Now, Herder and Schleiermacher both seem to me importantly right in holding that a method of "divination," in the specified sense, is fundamental to interpretation. But I would suggest that Herder is correct in seeing this as a factor which makes interpretation like natural science, and Schleiermacher incorrect in seeing it as one

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[25] It is a small symptom of the waywardness of this idea that presupposing it and applying it to the Platonic corpus as a whole led Schleiermacher into one of his gravest errors concerning that corpus: namely, that the *Phaedrus* (!) must be the earliest of the dialogues and the *Republic* the latest (since these two dialogues seem to share a certain family of fundamental ideas - about separate forms, a tripartite soul, etc. - in, respectively, a *seminal* and then a *fully-developed* manner). For fuller discussion and criticism of Schleiermacher's conception of the *Keimentschluß*, see my "Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics: Some Problems and Solutions."

[26] For further discussion of this question, see ibid.

which makes them unlike each other. For Schleiermacher's position here rests on an assumption that natural science works exclusively with a method of plain induction, à la Hume (this first a is f, this second a is f, this third a is f, . . . therefore all a's are f),[27] so that the method of "divination," or hypothesis, on the psychological side of interpretation makes interpretation deeply unlike natural science. But since Poincaré and Popper we have come to realize that, on the contrary, natural science *very much* works by means of hypothesis rather than merely plain induction. At least to this extent, then, Herder's position concerning the extent to which interpretation and natural science are similar activities seems significantly superior to Schleiermacher's.[28]

(g) Another virtue of Herder's theory of interpretation over Schleiermacher's lies in its much greater emphasis on the vital importance for correct interpretation of identifying a work's *genre*, i.e. a set of purposes and rules (normally common to a number of works and authors) which regulate a work's composition. Herder emphasizes this not only in connection with linguistic texts (this is the focus of his classic essay *Shakespeare* from 1773), but also in connection with works of non-linguistic art, such as sculpture (see, for example, his *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity* from 1774). Two principles which he rightly emphasizes in this area are the following: First, genres, even when they share a single name (e.g. "tragedy" or "portrait sculpture") often vary in important ways from epoch to epoch, culture to culture, individual author to individual author, even individual work of an author to individual work, and it is vitally important for the interpreter to take this into account, and in particular to resist a frequent and strong temptation to falsely assimilate one genre to another simply because they share a single name and certain common features (e.g. Shakespearean tragedy to ancient

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[27] Schleiermacher calls this a "comparative" method and sees it as prominent both in natural science and on the merely linguistic side of interpretation.

[28] For some further discussion of this question, see my "Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics: Some Problems and Solutions."

Greek tragedy, or Egyptian portrait sculpture to Greek portrait sculpture). Second, the identification of a work's genre (like that of word-usages and authorial psychology) must take place by scrupulous *empirical* means, not by means that are - at least relative to the work in question - a priorist (as happened, for example, when 17th and 18th century French critics interpreted and assessed Shakespearean tragedy in terms of a conception of tragedy derived from Aristotle and ancient tragedy). Now, Schleiermacher does not *altogether* neglect the subject of identifying genre in interpretation.[29] But he does fail to give this subject the emphasis and attention that it deserves, and his thoughts about it are no more than a pale reflection of Herder's.[30]

(h) Finally (and perhaps most controversially), I suggest that Herder's theory of interpretation has one further important point of superiority over Schleiermacher's. Herder famously argues that interpretation should employ a method of *Einfühlung* ("feeling one's way into [the standpoint of the person interpreted]"), whereas by contrast Schleiermacher generally avoids this idea (preferring instead to speak merely of *placing* oneself in the position of the person interpreted). Herder's idea that *Einfühlung* plays an important role in interpretation combines several different facets, all of which, I think, turn out to be very sensible on reflection, but one of which turns out to be especially

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[29] Concerning his occasional attention to this subject, see P. Szondi, "Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics Today," in his *On Textual Understanding and Other Essays,* in *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 15 (Manchester, 1986), p. 111.

[30] Schleiermacher's friend and colleague F. Schlegel paid more attention to the subject of genre, and has sometimes been seen as the person who really raised it to prominence in hermeneutics. For example, A. Boeckh, who himself identified generic interpretation as one of the four fundamental types of interpretation, seems to credit F. Schlegel as his main forerunner in this area in his *Encyklopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften* (Leipzig, 1886), p. 253; and Szondi seems to take a similar view of F. Schlegel's importance in this area in his essay "Friedrich Schlegel's Theory of Poetical Genres: A Reconstruction from the Posthumous Fragments," in *On Textual Understanding and Other Essays*. However, Herder certainly raised the subject of the role of identifying genre in interpretation to high prominence first, and I would also suggest that he did so in a more intellectually responsible and defensible way than F. Schlegel.

significant. Among these facets, for example,[31] are a principle that interpretation commonly confronts a mental distance between the interpreted author and the interpreter which the latter needs to overcome by means of laborious historical and philological work (that there is, as it were, an "in" there into which he needs to feel his way by such means); and a principle that sound interpretation requires a measure of sympathy, or at least open-mindedness, towards the interpreted author.[32] (These two facets of Herder's ideal of *Einfühlung* are both prominent in his *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*, for instance.) But another central facet of his ideal of *Einfühlung*, and the one which I think deserves special emphasis, derives from his quasi-empiricism about meanings or concepts: because all meaning involves an aspect of sensation, in order to understand another's meanings it is essential that one grasp the relevant sensations (that one "feel one's way into" them).[33] Now this idea can easily sound misguided. One reason for this is the widespread acceptance of anti-psychologism, but, as I have already argued, anti-psychologism itself seems quite dubious on reflection. Another reason is that it can easily sound as though Herder is here making it a condition of understanding that the interpreter *share* the feelings of the person interpreted, which would have absurd and even dangerous consequences, for example that in order to understand Hitler's antisemitic effusions one needs to have antisemitic feelings oneself. However, Herder is not in fact committed to any such foolish position. Indeed, in his theological works he explicitly emphasizes that the sort of feeling-one's-way-into the standpoint of (say) David's psalms which is necessary in order to understand them does

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[31] For a fuller list of facets, see my *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, introduction.

[32] "Open-mindedness" is perhaps the more accurate word for Herder's ideal, for just as he rejects negative prejudice as detrimental to sound interpretation so he rejects excessive sympathy as equally detrimental to it (see e.g. *Johann Gottfried Herder Werke*, 5:1194).

[33] A.W. Schlegel, taking over Herder's ideal of *Einfühlung*, pointed out in this connection that it would be possible to master the Greeks' use of a certain word "grammatically" but still not understand the word due to a failure to grasp the "intuitions" which underlay its use (see A. Huyssen, *Die frühromantische Konzeption von Übersetzung und Aneignung* [Zürich and Freiburg, 1969], pp. 69 ff., 89).

not require that the interpreter actually share David's hatreds and joys, that this should not be the interpreter's goal, and that the interpreter's recapturing of David's feelings should instead take another form: "David had his affects and worries as a refugee and as a king. We are neither, and hence may neither curse enemies that we do not have nor exult over them as victors. But we must learn to understand and appreciate these feelings."[34] Herder's idea is therefore that a sort of imaginative recapturing of relevant sensations is possible which does not involve actually having them, and that this is enough for interpretation. I think that this is correct. For it is surely true that one can achieve a kind of imaginative grasp of a sensation which, while more than a mere knowledge of it by description, is also less than a full-blooded possession of it, and that this is a routine feature of such processes as reading and understanding literature for example. Herder also seems correct in holding that some such process is necessary for interpretation. This is implied by the arguments which support his quasi-empiricism, or his inclusion of sensations in meaning. But in addition, one can reassure oneself of its correctness at a less theoretical level by, for example, comparing the sort of purely external account of ancient Greek religion which one finds in a book such as Walter Burkert's *Greek Religion* with the sort of, by contrast, sensation-rich account of it which one finds in Walter Otto's books.[35] Despite the extraordinary sophistication and detail of Burkert's account, it seems true that one only really comes to understand the ancient Greeks' religious conceptions once one has complemented it with an account more like Otto's. In short, the Herderian position in question seems both defensible and correct.

Furthermore, I would suggest that it affords a key for solving certain important problems concerning interpretation which have been raised by more recent philosophers. Let me give two examples. First, Gadamer (appropriating and historicizing a position of Heidegger's) has argued that understanding essentially rests on "pre-understanding," a

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[34] *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, in *Johann Gottfried Herder Werke*, 5:1194.

[35] See especially his four books *Die Götter Griechenlands*, *Dionysos*, *Die Manen*, and *Die Musen*.

system of pre-cognitive perspectives on and attitudes towards the world, but that pre-understanding varies historically, so that, because one is restricted to one's own age's form of pre-understanding (or at least to a residue of it which remains even after one has modified it in various ways), one could never exactly reproduce another age's understanding of its discourse.[36] Now a Fregean-Wittgensteinian anti-psychologist would probably reject (Heidegger's and) Gadamer's very assumption here that understanding essentially rests on pre-understanding, on the ground that this amounts to a form of psychologism. But for reasons sketched earlier in the course of defending Herder's quasi-empiricism against anti-psychologism, I think that one should be quite skeptical about such a reaction, and that such a dismissal of Gadamer's problem would therefore be too quick; in some version or other the idea that understanding essentially rests on pre-understanding is probably correct.[37] Nor does it seem plausible to try to forestall Gadamer's problem by questioning the historical variability of forms of pre-understanding (and hence of forms of understanding). Instead, I suggest that a better way of forestalling Gadamer's skeptical conclusion that an exact understanding of historical others is impossible lies in Herder's insight that a type of imaginative access to another person's (perceptual and affective) sensations is possible which falls short of the sort of *committed possession* of them that normally underlies our understanding of our own concepts, but which is nonetheless sufficient to support understanding. If all pre-understanding capable of supporting understanding had to have the character of committed possession, then a version of Gadamer's skepticism would indeed be inevitable, since one cannot simultaneously be in committed possession of one's own form of pre-understanding and of different, incompatible forms. But since a merely

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[36] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, 2002).

[37] Heidegger and Gadamer would of course be loath to equate pre-understanding with a subject's affective and perceptual sensations. They instead envisage it as something more "primordial" than either the subject-object distinction or the distinction between the practical and the theoretical. However, what is plausible in their position seems to me not badly (re)cast in such terms.

imaginative, non-committed sort of pre-understanding is in fact sufficient to support

understanding, Gadamer's skepticism can be avoided.[38]

Second, Anne Eaton has drawn attention to the following interesting problem in

connection with the interpretation of works of art: Understanding them often seems to

require having affective sensations of a certain sort, but the affective sensations in

question may in certain cases be morally reprehensible ones, so that the requirements of

understanding and those of morality come into conflict. For example, it seems arguable

that Titian's *Rape of Europa* essentially expresses and aims to communicate certain (by

our lights) morally reprehensible feelings about rape which were typical of the period and

culture to which Titian belonged, in particular a certain sort of male erotic titillation at

and disdain for the victim of rape, so that in order fully to understand the work one would

need to participate in such feelings.[39] How, if at all, is this problem to be solved? Here

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[38] Note that in qualifiedly endorsing Gadamer's notion of "pre-understanding" here, I mean to endorse his idea that it is a *necessary condition* of understanding, not the implication which the "pre- [*Vor-*]" sometimes seems to carry for him (though not for Heidegger) that it is something which takes place, or at least can take place, temporally *prior* to understanding. Herder's picture, which seems right to me, is that the sensations which support conceptual understanding are *inter*dependent with it - that not only are the concepts in question essentially infused with the sensations in question but *also vice versa*.

This point should deter one from thinking of the sort of imaginative, non-committed grasp of another person's sensations being described here as simply a kind of tool for effecting understanding of the person's concepts, as though one could get hold of the tool first and then employ it to produce that result afterwards; the two things are too intimately connected to stand in such a relation, though the former remains a necessary condition of the latter.

But if that consequence sounds disappointing, then the same point also has a happier consequence. The above account naturally invites the question (or challenge) how an imaginative grasp of a historical (or cultural) other's different sensations can be achieved, and how it can be judged to have taken place correctly rather than incorrectly. The point recently made suggests at least part of an answer to that question: One can be guided towards a correct grasp of the other's sensations by determining the extra-sensational aspects of his usage of words, and to that extent his concepts - which, since they are internal to the character of his sensations, at least constrain viable intuitions concerning the character of his sensations. And one can judge such intuitions in oneself or another interpreter for correctness or incorrectness by seeing whether the extra-sensational aspects of one's/his associated usage of words match up with those of the historical (or cultural) other whose sensations one/he is attempting to access, since their failure to do so will be enough to show that one/he has failed in the attempt (even if their success in doing so may not be enough to show that one/he has succeeded in the attempt).

[39] Anne Wescott Eaton, *Titian's "Rape of Europa": The Intersection of Ethics and Aesthetics* (University of Chicago doctoral dissertation, August 2003).

again, an anti-psychologist will no doubt see the solution as lying in his sharp distinction of understanding from feeling. But, for reasons already indicated, such a solution seems dubious. However, Herder's position once again makes a more plausible solution possible: What is required for understanding does indeed include recapturing feelings, but not necessarily in the form of actually *having* them, since an imaginative, non-committed recapturing of them is also possible and is equally adequate to support understanding. And, unlike actually *having* an affective feeling, the imaginative, non-committed reproduction of it is motivationally inert, and hence morally unproblematic.

*Philosophy of Translation*

A third, and also closely related, area in which important developments occurred at this period is the philosophy of translation. Schleiermacher has again received most of the credit for this - in particular, for developing what has recently been aptly called a "foreignizing" (as opposed to "domesticating") approach to translation.[40] However, it seems to me that once again it is Herder who really deserves most of the credit.[41]

The following are some key Herderian theses concerning translation which can already be found in his *Fragments on Recent German Literature* of 1767-8, all of which Schleiermacher subsequently took over to form the core of his own theory of translation, especially in his classic essay *On the Different Methods of Translation* from 1813: (i) Translation faces a deep challenge from the fact that there exist radical mental differences - including in particular, conceptual differences - between different historical periods and

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[40] See especially A. Berman, *L'épreuve de l'étranger* (Paris, 1984) and L. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London, 1995).

[41] For a fuller discussion of this whole subject, including the textual evidence which I shall omit here, see my *Herder, Schleiermacher, and the Birth of Foreignizing Translation* (forthcoming).

cultures, and indeed to some extent even between individuals within a single period and culture.

(ii) Consequently, translation is in many cases an extremely difficult undertaking.

(iii) Consequently again, translation commonly confronts a choice between two possible approaches: what Herder calls a "lax" approach (i.e. one in which the language and thought of the target text are allowed to diverge rather freely from those of the source text) and an "accommodating" approach (i.e. one in which the language and thought of the target text are made to accommodate to those of the source text).

(iv) Herder firmly rejects the former approach, largely because it entails sacrificing semantic faithfulness (which is arguably the most commonly accepted and fundamental goal of translation).

(v) He in particular rejects a certain rationale for it which Dryden and others had advocated, namely that a translation should provide *the work that the author would have written had his native language not been the one he actually had but instead the target language*. Herder objects to this that in such a case as that of translating Homer, for example, the author *could not* have written his work in the modern target language.

(vi) So Herder urges that the translator should err in the other direction, towards "accommodating." But how is this to be done?

(vii) One necessary means to achieving it which Herder identifies is *interpretive* expertise in the translator, so Herder requires this.

(viii) Another, much less obvious, means is a certain vitally important technique which Herder develops for overcoming conceptual discrepancies between the source language and the target language. That might seem simply impossible (indeed, some more recent philosophers, such as Donald Davidson, have mistakenly assumed that it would be). But Herder, drawing on his novel philosophy of language, finds a solution: Since meanings or concepts are word-usages, in order to reproduce (or at least approximate) in the target language a concept from the source language which the target language currently lacks,

the translator should take the most closely corresponding word in the target language and "bend" its usage in such a way as to make it mimic the usage of the source word. This technique essentially requires that the source word be translated uniformly throughout its multiple occurrences in a work (and also that the single target word chosen not be used to translate any other source words). Such an approach is far from a commonplace, so far indeed that it is rarely actually used in translations. But Herder scrupulously uses it in his own translations, as does an important tradition which has subsequently followed him in espousing it (including Schleiermacher, Rosenzweig, and Buber).

(ix) Herder is aware that using this "bending" approach will inevitably make for translations that are more difficult to read than those which can be produced by a more "lax" method (e.g. by using multiple words in the target language to translate a single word in the source language), but he considers this price worth paying in order to achieve maximal semantic accuracy.

(x) Another key means which Herder espouses is complementing the goal of semantic faithfulness with that of faithfulness to the *musical form* of a literary work (e.g. meter and rhyme). His motives for doing this are partly extra-semantic: in particular, aesthetic fidelity, and fidelity to the exact expression of feelings which is effected by means of a literary work's musical features. But they are also in part semantic: in his view, musical form and semantic content are strictly inseparable, so that fully realizing even the goal of semantic faithfulness in fact requires that a translation also be faithful to the work's musical form. Why, though, does Herder believe that form and content are inseparable in this way? He has two main reasons: First, musical forms often carry their own meanings (think, for example, of the humorous and bawdy connotations of the meter/rhyme-scheme of a limerick). Second, as was just mentioned, Herder believes that musical form is essential to an exact expression of feelings, but, as we saw earlier, he also thinks that feelings are internal to meanings (this was the force of his quasi-empiricism in the philosophy of language), so that reproducing a work's musical form in translation turns

out to be essential even for accurately conveying the meanings of its words and statements in translation.

(xi) The sort of "accommodating" translation that has just been explained, in addition to being necessary in order to achieve as fully as possible translation's traditional fundamental goal of exactly reproducing meaning (as well as aesthetic fidelity and fidelity in the expression of feelings), is in Herder's view also necessary in order to realize certain further important goals. One of these lies in a potential which translation has for enriching the target language (both conceptually and in musical forms). Herder argues that, in contrast to "accommodating" translation, "lax" translation forgoes this opportunity.

(xii) Another of these goals is expressing, and cultivating in the translation's readership, a cosmopolitan respect for the Other - something which requires that the translation reproduce the Other's meanings (and musical forms) as accurately as possible.

(xiii) Herder holds that the approved "accommodating" sort of translation requires the translator to be in a sense a "creative genius," i.e. skilled and creative enough to satisfy the heavy demands which this sort of translation imposes, in particular creative enough to invent the needed novel conceptual and musical forms in the target language.

(xiv) Despite his commitment to the centrality of this sort of translation (largely due to its necessity for achieving translation's traditional fundamental goal of faithfully reproducing meaning), Herder is also in the end quite liberal about the forms that translation (or interlinguistic transfer more generally, including for example what he distinguishes from translation as "imitation [*Nachbildung*]") can legitimately take, allowing that its possible forms are quite various, and that which is most appropriate in a

particular case will depend largely on the author or genre involved and on the translator's purposes.[42]

Herder's theory of translation (as just summarized), and his demonstration of its viability in practice, for example in his sample translations of Shakespeare in the *Volkslieder* of 1774, had an enormous impact on a whole generation of German translation theorists and practitioners, including Voss (the translator of Homer), A.W. Schlegel (the translation theorist, and translator of Shakespeare), Goethe (an important theorist of translation), W. von Humboldt (an important translator and theorist of translation, especially in his 1816 translation of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* and the theoretical preface to it), and Schleiermacher (an important theorist of translation, and Germany's great translator of the Platonic dialogues). Herder's principle of complementing semantic faithfulness with faithfulness in the reproduction of musical form had an especially powerful impact on these successors. His principle of "bending" word-usages in order to cope with conceptual incommensurabilities was less widely followed, but was adopted by Schleiermacher among others.

Schleiermacher was the most theoretically sophisticated of these intellectual heirs, and the Herderian positions adumbrated above all survived to form the core of Schleiermacher's own powerful and influential theory of translation (as articulated especially in his 1813 essay *On the Different Methods of Translation*). However, the situation in this case is slightly different from the one we encountered in interpretation theory. As we saw, in interpretation theory Schleiermacher's borrowing of Herderian positions also involved a worsening of them. In this case, by contrast, Schleiermacher effected some genuine refinements. On the other hand, "refinements" is the right word,

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[42] As in the philosophies of language and interpretation, Herder's positions here were to some extent anticipated by predecessors. For example, Thomas Abbt, whom he quotes with broad approval (but also some criticism) in connection with translation in the *Fragments*, had anticipated both his central approach of "bending" word-usages and that of complementing semantic faithfulness with faithfulness to musical form.

rather than say "innovations": Schleiermacher's improvements took the form of subtle modifications of Herder's positions rather than of anything fundamentally new. Let me run through Schleiermacher's main refinements in order to illustrate this situation.

(a) Schleiermacher radicalizes Herder's fundamental principles of mental (including in particular, conceptual) difference, and of the consequent extreme difficulty of translation in many cases, and he does so in three important respects. First, he emphasizes that reproducing semantic content and reproducing musical form are not only difficult tasks in themselves but also often stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other.[43] (Somewhat surprisingly, Herder had tended to ignore or downplay this.) Second, Schleiermacher develops a much more holistic conception of meaning than Herder's. For example, he regards the diverse usages of a single word (which are normally distinguished by a dictionary entry) as all implicitly internal to each of them, and hence to the word's meaning on any particular occasion of its use; he takes a similar view of families of cognate words; and he even regards a language's distinctive grammar as internal to its meanings. Consequently, in his view, translation, in order faithfully to reproduce meaning, needs to mimic much more than Herder had recognized. Third, Schleiermacher holds that a translation ought to convey where an author was being conceptually conventional in relation to his background language and where, by contrast, conceptually innovative, a task which can be accomplished to some extent according to Schleiermacher (namely by using relatively older vocabulary in the target language for the former cases and relatively newer vocabulary for the latter), but only to some extent (since, for example, it may turn out that the semantically closest equivalent in the target language for an author's conceptual innovation is a relatively old word).

(b) Schleiermacher thus sees the prospects of full success in translation as even dimmer than Herder had seen them as being. However, he also develops a simple but

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[43] For example, the need to translate a single word by a single word throughout a poetic work in order to reproduce its semantic content by "bending" may conflict with the need to replicate the work's original rhyme scheme in the interests of preserving its musical form.

important way of fending off sheer skepticism and despair here. His solution builds on an idea which Herder had already expressed in the *Fragments*, namely that if one cannot translate Homer with full adequacy then one should at least *approximate* it *as closely as possible*: even if translation will inevitably fall short of full success, it should strive to realize its goals (i.e. semantic faithfulness, faithfulness to musical form, and now also reflection of an author's conceptual conventionalities and innovations) *as adequately as possible*.

(c) Schleiermacher sharpens Herder's "lax" vs. "accommodating" choice for translation (which he slightly recasts as a choice between moving the author towards the reader vs. moving the reader towards the author), arguing that the translator must opt unequivocally for one or the other, and that it must be the latter (whereas Herder had argued only for a *compromise erring towards* the latter). While many insightful authors argue to the contrary,[44] I think that Schleiermacher's position may be slightly preferable to Herder's here, for two reasons: First, the pole of "accommodating," or reader-towards-author, translation seems better suited than some sort of compromise between it and the opposite pole as an *ideal*, since it more effectively reminds the translator of what would be required for full realization of translation's fundamental goal of reproducing meaning, and so more effectively spurs him on to optimal performance (even if the best that he will ever actually be able to *achieve* will indeed be a form of compromise). Second, Schleiermacher's sharp choice is also useful as an analytical tool for classifying translations - or parts of a translation - into two types, according as they tend towards the one extreme or the other.

(d) Schleiermacher develops a fuller argument against the "lax" (or author-towards-reader) alternative than Herder does. Like Herder, he makes the fundamental point that it fails by falling needlessly short of translation's traditional fundamental goal of semantic faithfulness. But he also makes a more elaborate case against Dryden's rationale for it, the

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44 For example, Rosenzweig, Huyssen, and Lefevere.

rationale of providing *the work that the author would have written had his native language not been the one he actually had but instead the target language*. Building on Herder's objection to this, namely that it *could not have been the case* that (say) an ancient author like Homer wrote his work with a modern language as his native language, Schleiermacher more carefully distinguishes *two* good reasons why this is so (between which Herder had himself remained ambiguous): first, due to thought's essential dependence on and boundedness by language, together with the incommensurability of languages, an ancient author like Homer could not have had his original *thoughts* in such a case; and second, even *he* could not have existed, since "he" would then have lacked the language that was necessary for constituting the thoughts, desires, etc. which in essential part made him the man he was.[45]

(e) Turning to the favored "accommodating" (or reader-towards-author) approach, and in particular to its strategy of "bending" word-usages in the target language in order to reproduce word-usages and hence meanings from the source language, Schleiermacher develops a fuller case than Herder had done for rejecting some competing ways which might be proposed for dealing with problematic concepts. First, Schleiermacher considers the possibility of using different target language words in different contexts (as is very commonly done in practice), but he rejects this as needlessly distorting the meaning of the original. This seems right. Take Homer's color-word *chlôros*, for instance, a word that Homer sometimes applies to things which we would classify as green (e.g. healthy foliage) and sometimes to things which we would classify as yellow (e.g. honey). Adopting the approach in question, a translator might translate this word sometimes as "green" and sometimes as "yellow," depending on the context. But note that this involves

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[45] Schleiermacher also considers and rejects (correctly, I think, though with inadequate arguments) two possible revisions of Dryden's rationale, neither of which Herder had considered: first, providing the work that the author would have written if he had *added* to his native language a mastery of the target language and composed his work in the latter; and second, providing the work that the author would have written if he had added to his native language a mastery of the target language and himself *translated* his work from the former into the latter.

a severe distortion of the original meaning: in particular, it gives the false impression that Homer had *two familiar* concepts, whereas he in fact had only *a single unfamiliar* one. Second, Schleiermacher considers the possibility of what he calls "paraphrase" - that is, attempting to capture the meaning of a word from the source language by capturing its extension correctly through piling up expansive or restrictive qualifications in the target language. He again rejects this as needlessly distorting the meaning of the original word, and this again seems right. For instance, a translator dealing with the word *chlôros* might, in the spirit of this approach, try using the phrase "green or yellow" in all contexts. But, besides obvious stylistic infelicity, this distorts the meaning severely, not only (as before) giving the modern reader the false impression that Homer here has *two familiar* concepts whereas he in fact has only *a single unfamiliar* one, but also giving him the false impression that Homer has a *disjunctive* concept whereas he in fact has a *non-disjunctive* one.

(f) Schleiermacher also defends the "bending" approach against certain further potential objections. First, as I mentioned earlier, Herder had recognized that this approach would make for translations which were harder to read, but he had considered this an acceptable price to pay in return for their greater semantic accuracy. Schleiermacher agrees, but he also adds the further point that their difficulty serves a *positive* function, namely that of alerting the reader to the fact that the "bending" approach is being used, and to where in particular it is being used (both things that he needs to know in order for the approach to work for him). For instance, in our Homeric example, the shock of finding honey described as "green" at certain points in the translation (or healthy foliage as "yellow") can serve to alert the reader to both of these things. Second, in the *Fragments* Herder had himself voiced a concern that the "bending" approach threatened to compromise the authentic nature of the target language (though he had evidently overcome this worry subsequently, since, for example, he had gone on to employ this approach in his own translations in the *Volkslieder*). Schleiermacher

explicitly answers this worry with two plausible points: (i) The high degree of linguistic liberty involved can and moreover should be confined to translators; it need not and should not infiltrate the broader language. (ii) A certain natural inertia in languages in any case ensures that any unnatural innovations that arise will not survive for long.

(g) Schleiermacher also develops a more elaborate account than Herder had given of certain conditions which must be fulfilled in order for the "bending" approach to be successful. First, translation of this sort must be done en masse (and systematically), both in order to accustom readers to its method and in order to provide them with a sufficient number of examples of a particular word's "bending" in a sufficiently wide variety of contexts so that they can identify the unfamiliar rule for its use which is being followed and communicated. Second, the "bending" approach can only work if there is sufficient flexibility in the target language, or, more precisely, in the attitude of target language users towards their own language. Schleiermacher plausibly sees such flexibility as a feature of German in his day, but not of French. Third, this approach requires for its success a fairly high level of interest in and knowledge of foreign cultures and languages among the educated public. In short, this approach requires a rather specific historical-cultural *kairos* in order to achieve success.

These improvements in Schleiermacher's version of the theory are real enough, but, as we have seen, they occur against the background of a huge common core of theory which was Herder's achievement, and they have more the character of refinements than of innovations. Moreover, counterbalancing them, there are also certain respects in which Herder's version of the theory is arguably superior to Schleiermacher's. Here are two good candidates: (i) Schleiermacher sees an exception to the rule of mental (and in particular, conceptual) difference in the area of vocabulary which merely refers to or describes items of sensory experience, and he therefore sees translation as easy and straightforward in such cases, so much so indeed that he does not even dignify it with the honorific name of "translation [*Übersetzen*]" at all, but instead distinguishes it as mere

"interpreting [*Dolmetschen*]." However, the notion that there is such an exception to the rule of mental (and in particular, conceptual) difference is a mistake.[46] Indeed, pace Schleiermacher, vocabulary which refers to or describes items of sensory experience is arguably a paradigm area of conceptual discrepancy. For instance, Homer's word *Helios* and our word *sun* certainly refer to the same object but they clearly do not *mean* the same (e.g. the former carries implications of personhood whereas the latter does not); and Homer's color vocabulary is sharply conceptually discrepant with our own, as the example of Homer's word *chlôros* illustrates.[47] Now, unlike Schleiermacher, Herder makes no such exception to the rule. To this extent at least, his theory of translation is superior.

(ii) As was mentioned earlier, although he accords a special status to "accommodating" translation, Herder's considered position concerning translation (and other forms of interlinguistic transfer) is rather liberal: as he puts it in the late *Terpsichore* (1796), there are "*many* sorts of translation, depending on who the author is on whom one works and the purpose for which one represents him."[48] Schleiermacher is usually much less liberal, especially in his 1813 essay, where he argues that the only type of translation that is really possible is the approved reader-towards-author type, that everything else is mere imitation or paraphrase, and that these are only inadequate and unnecessary substitutes for translation proper.[49] I would suggest that the essay's argument against the very

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[46] This mistake may in part be due to Schleiermacher's failure to draw a clear distinction between *referent* and *meaning* - a distinction which Herder had already pointed towards in his *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity*, which was being more fully articulated in Schleiermacher's day by Herder's disciple W. von Humboldt, and which would later receive its classic statement in Frege's "On Sense and Reference."

[47] In addition to the peculiarities of this word already mentioned, it also incorporates an implication of moistness.

[48] *Johann Gottfried Herder Sämtliche Werke*, ed. B. Suphan et al. (Berlin, 1887-), 27:275.

[49] He adopts a more liberal position in his 1825 *Aesthetics* lectures, in particular there welcoming imitation. This is why, despite the position described above, I implied earlier that he is ultimately sympathetic to Herder's liberalism.

possibility of author-to-reader translation rests on an error (namely, an outright equation of this approach with the illegitimate *what the author would have . . .* rationale, which is in fact only *one* possible rationale for it), and that the essay's characterization of imitation and paraphrase as of their very nature merely failed attempts to achieve the same goal as translation is dubious as well. Moreover, and more positively, I would suggest that Herder's contrary intuition that, depending on the particular literary author/genre involved and the translator's particular purposes, one or other of these approaches might well be more appropriate than "accommodating," or reader-towards-author, translation is clearly right. For example, if one is translating Aristophanic comedy and one's purpose is to produce something that can be successfully performed on the modern stage, then one would be ill-advised to use the "accommodating," reader-towards-author, approach (as, for example, B.B. Rogers' translations of Aristophanes tend to do), and much better advised to use a "lax," author-towards-reader, or even an imitative, approach instead (as W. Arrowsmith does in his translation of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, for example).[50] So this is another significant respect in which Herder's theory is arguably superior to Schleiermacher's.

*Conclusion*

This, then, has been a case for Herder's seminal importance in the philosophy of language, the philosophy of interpretation (or "hermeneutics"), and the philosophy of translation. As I hope to have shown, the revolutionary developments that took place in these three areas in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were deeply interconnected (in particular, those in the philosophies of interpretation and translation largely rested on

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[50] Pace a confused contrary judgment of Schleiermacher's concerning the translation of ancient comedy in his 1813 essay.

those in the philosophy of language); it was Herder, rather than other people who usually receive most of the credit, in particular Hamann and Schleiermacher, who was the real source of these developments; at least in the philosophies of language and interpretation he also effected these developments in ways which were philosophically superior to those other people's versions of them; and in all of these areas he still has important things to teach us today.[51] If this line of argument is broadly correct, then Herder deserves far more attention from philosophers than he usually receives.

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[51] As I mentioned in a note near the beginning of this article, I believe that a similar case could be made for Herder's seminal importance in several other areas of philosophy as well.