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Situating the Enlightenment in Herder's Philosophy of History

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Abstract

Although Herder is critical of the Enlightenment, I show that his philosophy of history commits him to the claim that the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment in some way makes a distinctive contribution to the development of humanity. Yet this contribution cannot make this age and culture superior to earlier ones, for this would violate Herder's commitment to the principle that each age and culture ought to be accorded an equal status because of the equal value of its contribution to the full development of humanity. I argue that an abstract way of thinking and a hostility to prejudice are integral elements of Herder's attempt to situate the Enlightenment in his philosophy of history, despite how he otherwise criticizes the Enlightenment for its abstract thinking and its hostility to prejudice.

Keywords

Enlightenment, Herder, humanity, philosophy of history, prejudice

Herder has been portrayed as a critic of key ideas associated with the Enlightenment that include the existence of universal laws and objective, timeless standards. The value accorded to such laws and standards reflects a tendency to generalize, to think in abstract terms and to seek to assimilate what is essentially dissimilar. Although it is conceded that this characterization of Herder's philosophy is an oversimplification, it is described as 'broadly

true'.¹ Equally, however, Herder has been portrayed as a philosopher who is committed to Enlightenment ideas and values, such as naturalism, the sovereignty of reason and autonomy.² Another Enlightenment idea that Herder endorses is the universalist one of humanity, by means of which he seeks to reconcile the claim that each age and culture must be understood in its own terms with the idea of progress.³ Moreover, there is the middle way that seeks to reconcile what may look like conflicting interpretations of the relationship between Herder's philosophy and the Enlightenment by showing that Herder 'charts a complex course navigating between the poles of cultural particularism and universalism'.⁴

In what follows, I show that a version of the last type of interpretation is required to situate the Enlightenment in Herder's philosophy of history in a way that is compatible with a demand that follows from one of his main criticisms of the Enlightenment. This is the demand that each age and culture be valued equally as much as any other age and culture, and in this respect be accorded an equal status, because of the equal value of its distinctive contribution to the formative process of which humanity is both the subject and the object. Given this demand, the Enlightenment cannot be accorded more value because it occupies a later stage in the historical series of ages and cultures by means of which humanity develops. At the same time, however, the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment cannot be

¹ Isaiah Berlin, 'Herder and the Enlightenment', in *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Herder, and Kant*, ed. Henry Hardy, 2nd edn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 208f.

² See Frederick Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 191ff.

³ See Allen W. Wood, 'Herder and Kant on History: Their Enlightenment Faith', in Allen W. Wood, *The Free Development of Each: Studies on Freedom, Right, and Ethics in Classical German Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 131f.

⁴ Sonia Sikka, *Herder on Humanity and Cultural Difference: Enlightened Relativism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

accorded less value, or not deserve to be included in this series of ages and cultures at all, despite Herder's criticisms of it. For this would violate the principle that each age and culture ought to be accorded an equal status because of the equal value of its distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity. Thus the necessity of situating the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment in Herder's philosophy of history follows from this principle. If Herder cannot situate this age and culture, which he identifies with his own age and culture,⁵ in the process of humanity's full development, then his philosophy of history must be thought to fail when it is judged according to its own internal standards.

In what follows, I focus on this specific challenge faced by Herder's philosophy of history. It concerns the logic of this philosophy of history and its internal consistency, as well as one of its fundamental aims. This challenge and Herder's attempt to meet it are most evident and find their most condensed expression in his early philosophy of history, as presented in *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity* (*Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*) from 1774. For in this essay Herder not only criticizes the Enlightenment but also implies that it must nevertheless be thought to make a distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity. This text therefore provides the natural starting point for an attempt to reconstruct and critically assess Herder's

⁵ '[I]n our century there is, unfortunately!, so much light!' (HW 4: 51; HPW 308). I use the following abbreviations: G = Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), cited according to the volume and page number of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königl. Preussische (later Deutsche) Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Reimer/de Gruyter, 1900–); HW = *Johann Gottfried Herder Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed. Martin Bollacher et al. (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–2000), cited by volume and page number; HPW = Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); HSPC = *J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture*, ed. and trans. F. M. Barnard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

attempt to situate the Enlightenment in his philosophy of history in such a way as to satisfy the demand that each age and culture, including the one shaped by the Enlightenment, be valued as much as any other age and culture, and in this sense be accorded an equal status, because of the equal importance of its distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity.

I shall argue that Herder is able to situate the Enlightenment in his philosophy of history by identifying the distinctive contribution that it makes to the full development of humanity. This contribution entitles the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment to equal standing in relation to other ages and cultures. It will be shown to relate to a tendency and a demand that Herder otherwise includes among the defects of Enlightenment thinking: the tendency to think in an abstract way and the demand to free oneself of prejudice. When counterbalanced by other tendencies and values, however, these defects of Enlightenment thinking are conditions of the emergence of a way of viewing and relating to ages and cultures other than one's own that avoids the Enlightenment's tendency to value itself more highly than other ages and cultures and even to denigrate them. In this way, Herder explains how a later age and culture may adopt a more generous attitude towards earlier ages and cultures that reconciles a pluralist perspective with the universalist one implied by the concept of humanity. At the same time, however, the attempt to combine a pluralist perspective with a universalist one in the realm of history presents specific challenges. It is important, therefore, to consider how Herder's attempt to reconcile particularism and universalism here assumes a specific form. In relation to Herder's attempt to reconcile particularism and universalism as integral aspects of the same historical process, I shall identify a tension that emerges between the equal status of each age and culture and the accompanying reduction of each of them to a means once they are viewed as stages in the full development of humanity.

1. History and the idea of humanity

For Herder, history exhibits the natural purposiveness characteristic of living organisms rather than the conscious purposiveness characteristic of intentional actions. Humanity is both the subject (that is, the agent) and the object (that is, the goal) of a quasi-natural developmental process that consists in the progressive manifestation and actualization of human attributes and powers under specific cultural, environmental and social conditions. Because the manifestation and actualization of these attributes and powers depends on these specific conditions, '[p]eople form to greater fullness only what *time, clime, need, world, fate* gives occasion for' (HW 4: 35; HPW 294), with the different conditions resulting in variations with respect to what specific attributes and powers are manifested and actualized, or variations with respect to how the same attributes and powers are manifested and actualized.

The fact that Herder is describing a historical *process* means that he is not thinking of humanity primarily in terms of the coexistence of different cultures, each of which makes its distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity at the same time. Rather, there is a historical series in which each age and culture makes its distinctive contribution and is replaced by another age and culture that makes its distinctive contribution. This historical series is necessary because '[t]he human container is *capable of no full perfection all at once*; it must always *leave behind in moving further on*' (HW 4: 29; HPW 288). Thus, although there may be exceptions, Herder views the full development of humanity as the result of a process that somehow incorporates previous developments. The term 'humanity' is therefore not an abstract notion which ignores the concrete features and differences that enable us to distinguish ages and cultures from one another and focuses instead on their common features, such as how they manifest reason or the capacity for freedom, though this is not to say that

such common features are not crucial elements of the concept of humanity understood in the concrete, cumulative sense intended by Herder. The term ‘humanity’ itself can be taken to signify all human attributes and powers viewed as a whole. The full development of humanity would then consist in the manifestation and actualization of all these attributes and powers in the course of history. Yet how can the historical series of ages and cultures be explained in a way that is compatible with the principle that each age and culture ought to be accorded an equal status because of the equal value of its distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity? By employing the analogy of the winning team in a relay race,⁶ I shall now attempt to show how we might answer this question.

There is here a process through which a desired goal is gradually achieved by means of a collective endeavor to which each member of the team contributes. Moreover, each team member’s contribution can be viewed as a distinctive one that is appropriate to a specific leg of the race. For example, the last runner may have to be the best sprinter because the ability to increase one’s running speed in a short space of time is required in the event of a close finish, whereas in the previous leg of the race the runner may need to maintain a steadier pace because this is more desirable at this stage of the race, where the aim is to ensure that the

⁶ In accordance with the idea of natural purposiveness, Herder himself employs analogies of natural growth, such as the growth of a tree or a human being. If pursued more fully, however, analogies of this kind turn out to be problematic in relation to the development of humanity and the claim that ages and cultures are of equal value. On the one hand, these analogies imply a stage of progress towards the goal of full human development followed by a stage of degeneration and decay. There may be a subsequent stage of rebirth and renewal, but this suggests a cyclical view of history, with humanity each time returning to its starting point. Moreover, the analogy of human growth and development suggests that earlier stages are immature compared to later ones – Herder equates infancy with an Oriental age and culture, childhood with Egyptian culture and the Phoenicians, youth with ancient Greece and early adulthood with the Romans. A model of this kind suggests that certain non-Western cultures are inferior to more developed Western ones. On this point, see Sikka, *Herder on Humanity and Cultural Difference*, 106ff.

team does not risk squandering the progress that it has already made. The final runner only completes a process to which each member of the team makes a distinctive contribution, so that the fact that he or she is the one to cross the finishing line does not entail that his or her contribution is of greater value compared to the other runners' contributions to securing the same outcome. Admittedly, this analogy is only partially successful because Herder's theory of history concerns not only an end that each age and culture helps to realize by means of its distinctive contribution to a specific outcome, but also an end that is fuller and richer by the time the final stage of the process has been completed.⁷ There is, in short, the transition from a simpler to a more complex and, in this respect, more developed condition. Does this imply a view of historical progress that entails that each successive member in the historical series is an improvement on the previous one because of the greater complexity and richness of the stage of humanity's development that it brings about?

When Herder claims that a historical series of distinctive ages and cultures is necessary for human perfection, he can be taken to mean that there is a series of shapes of humanity in which one culture replaces another one as soon as the latter has made its distinctive contribution, rather than a series in which the later culture somehow repeats *all* previous contributions while *in addition* making its own distinctive contribution. It is nevertheless possible to conceive of a state of fuller or greater perfection in which all previous and present contributions to the full development of humanity are combined and

⁷ If the process of development through which humanity realizes itself is a potentially open-ended one, then the analogy of the relay race is also misleading in that it involves a clearly identifiable goal, namely winning the race. Another difference is that, in the case of the relay race, the same goal is consciously pursued by all the members of the same team, whereas, in accordance with the analogy of natural development, Herder does not claim that each age and culture consciously contributes to the full development of humanity. I shall return to this difference and identify a significant implication of it.

unified in a single idea of humanity, though only if we assume the existence of a divine intellect capable of intuiting in a single moment that which human beings must think in the form of a temporal series. Herder himself acknowledges this: ‘[I]t is only the Creator who *thinks* the whole *unity of one, of all*, nations in all their *manifoldness* without having the *unity* thereby fade for him’ (HW 4: 35; HPW 293). It would then not be the case that the most recent age unifies within itself *all* previous achievements. This age can, at most, build on the foundations provided by earlier ones. Instead, the concrete universal that unifies all forms of human development within itself would be an object of God’s intellect alone, as opposed to being identifiable with a specific stage of the historical process through which human attributes and powers manifest themselves and are actualized.⁸ Nevertheless, from the human standpoint, this process must be viewed as a cumulative one that occurs in the form of a temporal series of ages and cultures that involves the transition from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality.

Herder’s idea of a historical process through which humanity develops has been shown to be in principle compatible with the demand that each age and culture be accorded an equal status because of the equal value of its distinctive contribution to this formative process, though only by introducing a theological assumption to which Herder himself is committed. In this way, Herder’s philosophy of history incorporates the Enlightenment ideals of humanity and progress. Herder is nevertheless critical of the Enlightenment. This critical attitude does not, however, entail the exclusion of the Enlightenment from the series of ages

⁸ In the later *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Humanity (Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit)*, Herder identifies the divine understanding as the prototype of the human understanding in so far as it seeks unity in diversity (*Vielartigkeit*) (HW 6: 253; HSPC 283). This suggests that what remains an aspiration for the human mind because of the constraints of space and time to which it is subject is already a reality in the case of the divine mind, which must therefore be assumed not to be subject to the same constraints.

and cultures that contribute to the development of humanity without any one of them being equated with the full development of humanity, for, according to Herder himself, each age and culture exhibits not only distinctive virtues but also the corresponding defects and limitations: ‘*shortcoming* and *virtue* always dwell together in one human hut’ (HW 4: 37; HPW 295). It is therefore possible both to criticize the Enlightenment and to view the age and culture that it defines as making a distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity. Yet it is not easy to identify the Enlightenment’s distinctive contribution to this goal, given Herder’s predominantly negative characterization of the age and culture shaped by the ideas and values of the Enlightenment. I shall now turn to Herder’s criticisms of the Enlightenment before showing how the Enlightenment can nevertheless be seen to make a distinctive contribution of its own to the full development of humanity that entitles the age and culture shaped by it to an equal status.

2. Herder’s criticisms of the Enlightenment

This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity contains several criticisms of the Enlightenment. Each criticism concerns a specific way in which the Enlightenment fails to recognize the principle that each age and culture ought to be accorded an equal status because of the equal value of its distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity, by viewing itself as superior to all other ages and cultures. The criticisms are as follows:

1. The Enlightenment applies to all ages and cultures general standards taken from its own age and culture, such as its concept of human nature and its notion of happiness, and it judges that these ages and cultures fail to meet these standards, whereas it itself not only adopts the relevant standards but also seeks to reform the world in accordance with them. Thus the age and culture shaped by the ideas and values that

Herder associates with the Enlightenment considers itself to be the end and crowning achievement of human history: ‘The enlightened *human being of later time* – he wants to be not only a *hearer of all* but himself the final *epitomizing note* of all notes!, *mirror of all the past* and *representative of the purpose of the composition in all its scenes!*’ (HW 4: 83–84; HPW 336)

2. Given (1), the Enlightenment must be thought to reject the justifiability of the beliefs, values, practices and traditions of earlier ages and cultures, on the grounds of their incompatibility with its own ideas and values. These beliefs, practices and traditions are instead classed as prejudices, deception, superstition, products of cultural and political backwardness, and so on. In this way, the Enlightenment shows itself to be intolerant, despite its own pleas for toleration.

3. The Enlightenment employs ‘cold’ reason to judge things and thereby lacks the affective and imaginative means required both to understand the meaning and value that the beliefs, practices and traditions of other cultures and societies had for the members of these cultures and societies and to recognize the distinctive contribution of these cultures and societies to the full development of humanity. This limitation of Enlightenment thinking helps to explain the Enlightenment’s hostility to these beliefs, practices and traditions.

4. The Enlightenment ignores how it itself rests upon the achievements of previous ages and cultures, which are therefore not alien to itself, and on which it continues to depend in that their beliefs, values, practices and traditions provide the material for its critical use of reason: ‘In order to yield *that* light, such a *great* shadow was necessary;

the knot needed to be tied *so firmly* in order that afterwards the *unfolding* [*Entwicklung*] might occur' (HW 4: 54; HPW 310). Thus the Enlightenment does not bring about a radical break in history, even if the idea of such a break forms a part of its own self-conception. Rather, history forms a single process of which each age and culture represents a necessary stage. This necessity justifies each stage, despite its shortcomings.

This negative characterization of the Enlightenment allows us to view the Enlightenment, as Herder conceives of it, as a set of distinctive attitudes and beliefs that can to some extent be understood independently of the question of which Enlightenment writers gave expression to these attitudes and beliefs and in what ways.⁹ It also invites the following question: What, then, is the Enlightenment's distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity that entitles *it* to an equal status because of the equal value of this contribution? So far, it seems that the modern enlightened world only enjoys the advantage of having the wealth of all previous human development available to it. Yet this wealth is something whose richness and value it is incapable of appreciating because it judges other ages and cultures according to its own standards, whereas an appreciation of their richness and value requires the ability to feel and to exercise one's imagination in ways that enable one to experience the meaning and value that the beliefs, practices and traditions of other ages and cultures had for those individuals who lived in these ages and participated in these cultures:

⁹ I shall therefore not engage with the question of the precise historical targets of Herder's criticisms of Enlightenment thinking. I shall instead focus on the question of the logic and internal consistency of Herder's philosophy of history.

The whole nature of the soul, which *rules* through everything, which *models* all other inclinations and forces of the soul *in accordance with itself*, and in addition *colors* even the most indifferent actions – in order to share in feeling [*mitzufühlen*] this, do not answer on the basis of the word but go into the age, into the clime, the whole history, feel yourself into everything [*fühle dich in alles hinein*] – only now are you on the way towards understanding the word.
(HW 4: 33; HPW 292)

The task is therefore to understand an age or culture from within, in its own terms, as opposed to applying an external framework of beliefs and values to it, as the Enlightenment does. This type of understanding is to be achieved by means of an affective and imaginative identification with the beliefs, values, practices and traditions that define an age and culture, thereby facilitating genuine appreciation of the essential contribution of this age and culture to humanity's full development:

We will learn to see the value of ages that we now despise – the feeling of *universal humanity* and *happiness* [*Glückseligkeit*] will stir – the result of ruin-filled history will become prospects of a higher than *human this-worldly existence*, will show us *plan* where we formerly found *confusion*. (HW 4: 89–90; HPW 342; translation slightly modified)

Yet this type of affective and imaginative identification with another age and culture is precisely what an age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment is incapable of achieving:

The human spirit received the first forms of wisdom and virtue with a *simplicity, strength, and loftiness* that now – speaking frankly – in our philosophical, cold, European world surely has nothing, nothing at all, like it. And precisely because we are so incapable of *understanding!*, of *feeling!*, it any more, let alone of *enjoying* it, we *mock, deny, and misinterpret!* (HW 4: 17; HPW 278)

If Herder's view of the Enlightenment were reducible to a purely negative one, however, there would be a significant problem when it comes to situating the age and culture shaped by it in his philosophy of history, for this age and culture would then have to be accorded either no value relative to the goal of the full development of humanity or less value than other ages and cultures because of its inferior contribution. I shall now argue that Herder's remarks on the Enlightenment can be understood in such a way that the age and culture shaped by it does make a distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity that entitles this age and culture to equal standing in relation to other ages and cultures. This contribution involves two specific ways in which the Enlightenment makes possible the further development of humanity.

The first way concerns how the abstract mode of thinking that Herder associates with the Enlightenment facilitates general recognition of the principle that each age and culture ought to be accorded an equal status because of the equal value of its distinctive contribution to the formative process through which human attributes and powers manifest themselves and are actualized. The formal thinking that Herder associates with the Enlightenment is, in fact, a condition of this principle itself. It is not, then, a matter of the complete rejection of abstract thinking. Rather, it is a matter of overcoming the one-sidedness of such thinking by complementing it with more concrete modes of experience. This is compatible with the idea

that each age and culture will exhibit not only distinctive virtues but also the corresponding defects and limitations. The second way concerns how the Enlightenment's attack on prejudice paves the way for an attitude that can explain recognition of the value of the distinctive contributions made by other ages and cultures to the same historical process.

3. Situating the Enlightenment

As we have seen, Herder identifies the Enlightenment with attitudes and ways of thinking that invite the application of general standards to other ages and cultures. The standards themselves and their application require ignoring the differences between ages and cultures, even though the standards are drawn from a specific age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment. These standards are expressive of the idea of universality, to which an overriding value is accorded. Thus, although this type of abstract thinking and the attempt to ignore differences are defects of Enlightenment thinking, the Enlightenment is implicitly committed to treating all ages and cultures equally, albeit on its own terms, that is, in accordance with *its* values.

The abstract universality of Enlightenment thinking finds expression in the ideals, values and practices that define the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment, such as pleas for religious toleration that imply the unimportance of religious differences, the favouring of legal norms that apply to all citizens, each of whom enjoys the same legal status and corresponding rights, and the demand for a constitution comprised of political norms that limit the power of monarchs. Although this abstract universality is unresponsive to particulars, whereas feeling and imagination are more suited to an appreciation of them, it makes a distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity by acknowledging a presupposition of the principle that each age and culture ought to be accorded an equal status because of the equal value of its distinctive contribution to the same formative historical

process. For this principle itself is a general one that ought to be applied to all ages and cultures. A consciousness of such general principles is possible, however, only when human beings are acknowledged to be capable of reasoning in a sufficiently abstract way and are encouraged to think in this way.

An appreciation of the distinctive contribution made by each age and culture to the full development of humanity also demands sufficient disinterestedness, for otherwise people's attitudes and viewpoints will be too partial. This disinterestedness itself requires the ability to abstract from features of one's own age and culture that include the interests and values which define it. Thus, once again, the kind of abstract thinking that Herder associates with the Enlightenment is required. This is not to say that abstract modes of thinking did not exist before the Enlightenment. The point is that abstract thinking has become an integral and defining feature of an age and culture, as opposed to an incidental, restricted feature of humanity in its historical development. The challenge is then to explain how the one-sidedness of the Enlightenment's standpoint can be overcome by reconciling an abstract universality with recognition of the distinctiveness of each age and culture.

The reconciliation of universality and pluralism requires conceiving of humanity as a concrete universal in which all previous developments are combined in accordance with the principle that each age and culture ought to be accorded an equal status because of the equal value of its distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity. This conception of humanity cannot be explained in terms of a return to the narrowness and parochialism of earlier ages and cultures that failed to acknowledge this general principle. Nor can it be explained in terms of an enlightened cosmopolitanism founded on an abstract notion of humanity, for this form of cosmopolitanism requires eradicating all differences that are deemed to be incompatible with this notion, thereby resulting in a levelling process and a situation in which one culture, namely the one shaped by the Enlightenment, becomes

dominant. Herder's rejection of this type of universalism and how he associates it with forms of cultural domination are evident from the following passage:

How miserable when there were still nations and national character, what reciprocal *hate, aversion* to foreigners, *fixedness* on one's center of gravity, ancestral *prejudices*, clinging to the *lump of earth* on which we are born and on which we are destined to rot! *Native* manner of thought!, *narrow circle* of ideas – eternal *barbarism*! With us, God be praised!, all *national characters* have been extinguished! We love *all* of us, or rather no one *needs* to love the other. We *socialize with each other*; are completely each other's *like* – *ethically proper, polite, happy*!; indeed have no *fatherland*, no *our-people* for whom we live, but are *friends of humanity* and *citizens of the world*. Already now all of Europe's regents do so, and soon we will *all* speak the French language! And then – happiness! – the Golden Age begins again '*when everyone in the world had one tongue and language*!', *there will arise a single flock and a single shepherd*!' National characters, what has happened to you?
(HW 4: 74–75; HPW 328–29; translation slightly modified)

Although the theological assumption identified earlier represents the ultimate explanation of the concrete universality that replaces the abstract universality of the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment, an age and culture that values this concrete universality and was able to accommodate it, however imperfectly, would be an improvement on any previous age and culture because it would represent a fuller development of humanity, in the sense of a more complete manifestation and actualization of human attributes and powers. Yet how would the value of this age and culture then be equal to that of other ages and cultures that make their

distinctive contributions to the multi-faceted, ongoing formative process through which humanity develops? Would this age and culture not instead be superior to any earlier age and culture, including the preceding one shaped by the Enlightenment that establishes the conditions of its emergence? I shall now explore these questions by focusing on how this age and culture relates to the Enlightenment one that threatens to dominate the present age.

There may be individuals who belong to the present age without having become so permeated by Enlightenment attitudes, values and ways of thinking that they are unable to appreciate the distinctive contributions made by other ages and cultures to the full development of humanity. Herder himself must be thought to belong among them. Yet this ability to transcend one's own age and culture depends on the capacity for abstraction and reflection that the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment presupposes and promotes. The Enlightenment's second distinctive contribution concerns another condition of transcending one's own age and culture. This condition has to do with the possibility of appreciating the distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity made by other ages and cultures, rather than, as with the previous case, the possibility of applying the same basic principle to them and, in this sense, treating them equally.

We have seen that for Herder the Enlightenment has its own prejudices that shape its evaluation of past ages and cultures. Among these prejudices we can include the belief that the Enlightenment represents a radical break with earlier ages and cultures, to which it therefore owes nothing. The Enlightenment is nevertheless hostile to prejudice even if it fails to reflect on its own prejudices. In fact, the Enlightenment's attitude towards prejudice can be viewed as an entirely negative one, so that a purely critical attitude towards prejudice may be described as one of the Enlightenment's own prejudices, as Hans-Georg Gadamer argues: '[T]here is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its essence: the fundamental

prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power'.¹⁰

The entry on prejudice (*préjugé*) written by Louis de Jaucourt in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* is representative of this purely critical attitude towards prejudice.¹¹ In this entry, a prejudice is described as a false judgement whose source is the inadequate exercise of our intellectual faculties. The failure to employ our critical capacities and the ignorance of the nature of things that is the 'unfortunate fruit' of it blind the mind and imprison it. Moreover, prejudice is contagious, allowing it to be compared to an epidemic to which certain types of people – the masses, women, children and old men – are especially vulnerable. It is a sickness of the understanding that encourages superstition and vulgar errors. Prejudice is especially dangerous when it assumes the form of public or conventional prejudices, the sources of which are custom, fashion and even language itself in so far as prejudices of this kind concern the use of abstract terms such as fortune, virtue and truth concerning which it is impossible to form precise ideas. The entry ends with an injunction: human beings should rid themselves of their prejudices so that they can approach nature with pure eyes and with pure sentiments.¹²

Herder certainly does not endorse this unreservedly hostile attitude towards prejudice. As we have seen, he criticizes the Enlightenment precisely because it devalues and denigrates

¹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 283.

¹¹ Herder alludes to the *Encyclopédie*, if not to this specific entry, in *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*. See HW 4: 77; HPW 331.

¹² Chevalier Louis de Jaucourt, 'Préjugé', *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, 28 vols (Paris, Geneva, Neuchâtel: André le Breton, Michel-Antoine David, Laurent Durand, Antoine-Claude Briasson, 1751–72), vol. 13, 284–85.

the beliefs and values of other ages and cultures by classing them as prejudices. At the same time, the command to rid oneself of the prejudices of one's own age and culture is not obeyed by the Enlightenment itself. Even when Herder accepts that beliefs and values can be classed as prejudices, he does not for this reason consider them to be worthless. This relates to his claim that civilization has both benefits and costs. The costs include a diffusion of human powers, as opposed to their concentration, and thus a significant reduction in force and strength, as in the case of Herder's own age and culture: 'we are the *thin, airy twigs* up there, freely shaking and *whispering* with every wind' (HW 4: 78; HPW 332). Prejudice is what made other ages and cultures stronger and more vital: 'Prejudice [*Vorurteil*] is *good* in its time, for it renders *happy*. It forces peoples together into their *center*, makes them firmer on their tribal *stem*, more blooming *in their kind*, more passionate and hence also happier in their *inclinations* and *purposes*' (HW 4: 39–40; HPW 297). For the Enlightenment, in contrast, false beliefs based on prejudice are to be replaced with genuine knowledge achieved by the use of reason. The uncompromising, one-sided pursuit of this goal deprives human beings and society of their living forces, resulting in a partial development of humanity that leaves some fundamental human needs unsatisfied. Yet we should not ignore the qualification that prejudice is good 'in its time' (*zu seiner Zeit*), rather than in *all* times. I shall now show why this qualification should be taken seriously.

There are specific conditions of a genuine affective and imaginative identification with the beliefs, values, practices and traditions of other ages and cultures.¹³ Overcoming the radical differences between the ways of being, understanding and valuing of one's own age and culture and those of another age and culture is necessary if one is to become conscious of humanity as a concrete universal as opposed to a purely abstract one. This requires the

¹³ The following account of these conditions is indebted to Forster, *Herder's Philosophy*, 79–80.

possession of forms of knowledge, such as historical and philological ones, that facilitate the reconstruction of the meaning of concepts and practices within an age and culture and the reproduction of the perceptual and affective sensations experienced by people belonging to this age and culture. Although reconstruction and reproduction of this kind may never fully succeed, genuine interpretation and understanding would not be possible without them. The forms of knowledge in question are not enough, however, for the interpreter must also approach his or her object with the right attitude. This attitude must not be hostile to the age and culture that is the object of interpretation, for a hostile attitude towards it would threaten to distort the interpretation of this age and culture by predisposing the interpreter to view its beliefs, values, practices and traditions in a purely negative light and to think of his or her own age and culture as superior to it. This suggests that Herder's ideal is a type of open-mindedness,¹⁴ and that his hermeneutics implies a commitment to the ideal of an attitude of impartiality that is strong enough to suspend one's own culturally conditioned values.¹⁵

Open-mindedness and impartiality presuppose an unprejudiced way of thinking. The absence of prejudices, or at least an endeavour to rid oneself of them, is therefore a presupposition of the hermeneutics that Herder wants us to practise in relation to ages or cultures other than our own one and of Herder's philosophy of history in so far as it exemplifies this hermeneutical approach.¹⁶ Indeed, in a passage from a later text, *Letters for*

¹⁴ Forster, *Herder's Philosophy*, 103.

¹⁵ Sikka, *Herder on Humanity and Cultural Difference*, 26.

¹⁶ Herder suggests that he himself was naturally disposed to adopt such an approach and that the benefits obtained by adopting it encouraged him to pursue it even further: 'From early years I have tried to put myself into the position of even the most alien hypotheses, and I returned from almost all of them with the gain of a new side of the truth, or of its reinforcement' (HW 7: 746; HPW 420). He then confesses that there is at least one hypothesis with which he cannot affectively and imaginatively identify himself at all, namely, that of a radically evil

the Advancement of Humanity (Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität), Herder asks us to ‘be unbiased [*unparteiisch*] like the genius of humanity itself’ (HW 7: 698; HPW 394).

Satisfying this demand does not require an attempt to rid ourselves of all prejudices, assuming that this is even possible. Rather, it is sufficient to be reflectively aware that one is approaching another age and culture with prejudices whose source is one’s own age and culture and to seek to identify what these prejudices are. This type of reflection may then enable the interpreter to judge how such prejudices are likely to interfere with his or her attempt to understand the age and culture that forms the object of interpretation and to make the necessary adjustments.

It is not the case that an unprejudiced way of thinking made its first appearance with the Enlightenment. Herder implies that Socrates already practised this way of thinking when he claims that to act like Socrates would be to ‘*strive with humility against prejudices*’ and to spread ‘*truth and virtue honestly, with love for humankind [*menschenliebend*], self-sacrificingly*’ (HW 4: 90; HPW 343). Nevertheless, by turning prejudice into an object of criticism and making the eradication of prejudice one of *its* fundamental aims, the Enlightenment facilitates the transition to an age and culture in which other ages and cultures are interpreted in such a way that a proper estimation of their value, as derived from their role in the full development of humanity, becomes possible. The age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment cannot itself, however, bring about this transition because of its own unacknowledged prejudices. In this way, the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment is reduced to one stage in the development of humanity, which is contrary to how the Enlightenment views the realization of its own ideals and values as the goal of history. The

fundamental force present in the human mind and will. This invites the question as to the limits of the effectiveness of the hermeneutical method championed by Herder, in that it may be impossible to value certain features of an age and culture because of how repugnant they are to one’s own beliefs and values.

Enlightenment cannot bring about this transition also because its reliance on ‘cold’ and abstract reasoning makes any genuine affective and imaginative identification with other ages and cultures impossible, thereby precluding a genuine appreciation of their value in relation to the goal of the full development of humanity.

This invites the question as to whether both the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment and the age and culture that replaces it would not be closer to the goal of the full development of humanity and, for this reason, superior to earlier ages and cultures. The Enlightenment would contribute to the historical emergence of two necessary conditions of the transition to an age and culture in which the principle that each age and culture ought to be accorded an equal status because of the equal value of its distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity is recognized and adopted. As we have seen, these two conditions are the abstract way of thinking required to recognize and apply the principle in question and the unprejudiced way of thinking which is a presupposition of the hermeneutical method whose effective employment will mark the transition to a new age and culture. Herder himself mentions ‘the *higher age that beckons forth*’ in the same paragraph that he mentions a future time in which ‘all *the light* which we sow into world, with which we now blind many eyes, *make many miserable and gloomy*’ becomes ‘everywhere *moderated life-light and light-warmth*’ (HW 4: 96; HPW 348).

In the case of the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment, one should not forget the extent to which its contributions to the full development of humanity are accompanied by the various defects and limitations that Herder emphasizes in *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*. This is compatible with his claim that each age and culture has both a positive side and a negative side, with the former not being possible without the latter because they stem from the same specific material and social conditions that enable an age and culture to make its distinctive contribution to the goal of the full

development of humanity. For example, the prejudices of earlier ages and cultures are the source of their greater force and vitality, in that a prejudiced way of thinking prevents them from questioning their own beliefs, customs and values. Conversely, the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment possesses significantly less force because of its abstract way of thinking and how the demand to think without prejudices is expressive of a critical form of rationality which threatens to undermine the ideals and values that define this age and culture itself. This weakness, however, is a consequence of the type of abstract thinking that makes it possible to accord other ages and cultures an equal status, while the attack on prejudice paves the way for a genuine appreciation of the value of these ages and cultures as necessary stages of the development of humanity.

With respect to the age and culture that would build upon these contributions to the full development of humanity made by an age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment while overcoming the defects and limitations of this age and culture, we may ask why it would not precisely for this reason be superior to earlier ages and cultures. The age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment might then be considered superior to earlier ones because it is closer to this new age and culture that it makes possible. After all, to return to a passage already quoted, the problem with the modern enlightened human being is that ‘he wants to be not only a *hearer of all* but himself the final *epitomizing note* of all notes’ (HW 4: 83–84; HPW 336). The age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment nevertheless paves the way for an age and culture in which individuals may become the ‘hearers of all’, in the sense of being attuned to earlier ages and cultures in such a way as to appreciate their value and to cease to regard their own age and culture as the only one that deserves respect because of its contribution to the full development of humanity.

On the one hand, this new age and culture need not be identified with the full development of humanity, which may be viewed as an open-ended process. Human

capabilities may, for example, exceed current expectations once they are complemented by unforeseeable social and technological changes. This age and culture can then be thought to make a distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity, which itself is made possible by the contributions of earlier ages and cultures, while having its own defects and limitations. On the other hand, this age and culture would be superior to all earlier ones because it can understand and appreciate the achievements and the uniqueness of ages and cultures other than itself. Its experience and knowledge of human history would therefore be of a richer kind than the type of experience and knowledge available at any previous stage of human development. It may also be better in other ways. For example, it may be a more peaceful and tolerant age and culture because of the relations of mutual respect between nations that it would foster. Would it therefore not be better to live in such an age and to participate in its distinctive culture? Although an affirmative answer to this question appears to be the natural one to give, there are two key points that should be kept in mind.

The first point is that the idea of the development of humanity entails a process that involves an increasingly adequate manifestation and actualization of human attributes and powers, thereby committing Herder's philosophy of history to some notion of progress. We should therefore not be surprised to encounter an attempt to incorporate such a notion. The second point is that the relevant notion of progress is nevertheless not meant to imply that a later age or culture is superior to an earlier one. Although there is a clear sense in which the future age and culture identified above is superior to earlier ages and cultures, the richer type of experience and the other benefits associated with it are possible only because of the contributions to the full development of humanity made by earlier ages and cultures. These ages and cultures provide the material of a richer type of experience and knowledge, and they make possible in other ways this new age and culture, as we have seen in connection with the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment. Thus a sense of superiority in relation to other

ages and cultures would be an inappropriate attitude to adopt. The appropriate attitude would be characterized by a sense of gratitude and respect that does not exclude an awareness of the defects and limitations not only of other ages and cultures but also of one's own age and culture. Even so, the way in which the reconciliation of pluralism, in the form of a series of distinctive ages and cultures, and universalism, in the form of the idea of humanity and its development, is achieved in the course of history gives rise to another potential problem. This problem concerns the relation of the means, that is, the different ages and cultures along with the individuals that belong to them, to the end, that is, the full development of humanity.

4. Equal value and instrumental value

Herder's attempt to situate the Enlightenment in his philosophy of history in a way that is consistent with the idea that each age and culture in the historical series contributes to the full development of humanity is to some extent compatible with the model of natural development and the associated analogies that Herder employs. For the existence and growth of the branches of a tree, say, presuppose the prior growth of the trunk of the tree and its continued existence, even though the branches are distinct from the tree trunk and constitute a new moment of the whole, which is the tree itself. Yet this analogy is misleading when applied to Herder's philosophy of history because the type of historical development in question does not require that earlier ages and cultures continue to exist. Rather, there must be some way in which the distinctive contribution that an age and culture makes is preserved while this age and culture itself disappears or is preserved only in a highly modified form at the same time as a later age and culture becomes dominant.¹⁷ Herder has nevertheless been

¹⁷ Herder suggests that in the case of modern European culture this has resulted in the actual oppression of other peoples and cultures. See, for example, the following passage: '*That on our round earth all epochs of humanity*

said to accord each age and culture a value in itself, in that the existence of an age and culture does not need to be justified on instrumental grounds.¹⁸ This type of claim is difficult to reconcile with how in Herder's philosophy of history the value of each age and culture derives from its contribution to a common but unintended goal. Nevertheless, Herder himself appears to endorse such a claim when he states that 'not a thing in the whole of God's realm, am I able to persuade myself though!, is *only* means – everything *means* and *purpose* simultaneously, and hence certainly these centuries [are so] too' (HW 4: 54; HPW 310).

One demand that follows from their status as ends in themselves is that each age and culture is entitled to the form of happiness that is most appropriate to it. This demand is implied by the claim found in another text that happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) is an 'internal state' whose standard cannot be located in an external source, but is, rather, to be found 'within the breast of every single being', from which it is said to follow that no one has the right to seek to impose his or her own conception of happiness on another individual (HW 6: 327; HSPC 308; translation modified). In other words, only the individual concerned can know what makes him or her happy. Moreover, since this happiness is the source of the value of an individual's existence for him- or herself, no individual can be reasonably expected to sacrifice his or her own happiness for the sake of a goal that is incompatible with it. These claims about the happiness of individuals are applied to individual ages and cultures. Yet the coherence of this position is threatened by the idea of historical progress, however ill-defined the goal of the historical process may be, for pluralism with respect to human happiness must

still live and function. There exist there peoples [*Völkerschaften*] in childhood, youth, manhood, and will probably do so for a long time to come before the seafaring old men of Europe succeed in advancing them to old age through brandy, diseases, and slaves' arts' (HW 7: 739; HPW 416–17).

¹⁸ See Sikka, *Herder on Humanity and Cultural Difference*, 84.

then be reconciled with the existence of an objective historical process that determines the value of each age and culture.

A connection between the idea of equal worth and the idea of an intrinsic form of value that generates moral constraints on how human beings ought to treat one another, or, as in this case, that entitles them to a specific human good, is suggested by Immanuel Kant's demand to treat all rational beings '*never merely as means but always at the same time as ends in themselves*' (G 4: 433). According to Kant, this demand follows from a rational being's capacity to give itself universal laws as well as to be subject to such laws. Moreover, Kant distinguishes between the price of a thing and its dignity (G 4: 434–35). In so far as they have a price, things can be treated as equivalents. Presumably, this means that there is some independent measure of value that determines to what extent qualitatively different things have the same quantitative or 'market' value, and in this respect are interchangeable. This type of value is relative in at least two senses: the value of each thing is relative to the value of other equally measurable things, that is to say, one thing has more, less or equal value than another thing, and this relative value itself is determined by each thing's relation to something other than itself, such as a desire that it promises to satisfy. Dignity, in contrast, concerns the non-interchangeability of things, and thus presupposes their uniqueness, and that the value of a thing cannot be determined purely by its relation to something other than itself.

On the one hand, in so far as an age and culture makes a distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity, it cannot be treated as equivalent to any other age and culture, and it may therefore be said to possess dignity in the relevant sense. On the other hand, although Herder wants to accord each age and culture, including the one shaped by the Enlightenment, an equal status because of the equal value of its distinctive contribution to the full development of humanity, this way of explaining the equal status and value of each age and culture introduces an instrumental notion of value because it makes the value of each age

and culture depend on its relation to a goal that determines this value. To this extent, the value of each age and culture would not correspond to the inner worth that Kant associates with the idea of dignity. I shall now explain what I mean by this instrumental notion of value with reference to some of Herder's own claims.

In *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*, Herder claims that human nature 'everywhere attracts *as much happiness as it can*, is a *flexible clay*', and that 'even the image of happiness *changes* with each condition and region' (HW 4: 38; HPW 296). In other words, just as all the attributes and powers of humanity that come to manifest and express themselves in the course of history do not, and cannot, exist at the same time in one age and culture, the form of happiness characteristic of an age and culture will depend on specific conditions that facilitate the development of only some human attributes and powers by producing specific needs that are directed at specific objects. It is the satisfaction of existing needs that produces happiness, and since the needs vary according to material, cultural, social and political conditions, the satisfaction of them will produce a specific form of happiness. Thus each age and culture is happy in its own way at the same time as it makes a distinctive and equally valuable contribution to the goal of the full development of humanity.

Yet Herder does not commit himself to the claim that the people who belong to these ages and cultures consciously pursue this goal, let alone intend it. Indeed, he describes them as tools of a great future good that '*they did not themselves think of*' in connection with some ages and cultures (HW 4: 53; HPW 309). In this respect, each age and culture, together with the individuals who belong to it, is reduced to a means. We may, in fact, think of the goal in question as one that human beings begin to pursue in a conscious way only in the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment, in which the abstract idea of humanity becomes a central value and a rallying cry. Herder suggests that it is not, in fact, possible to become

truly conscious of this goal, whereas becoming conscious of it is a condition of willing it.

This is because the consciousness of this goal would require a view of the whole that is to be achieved. Yet a standpoint of this kind is unavailable to human beings, who always belong to a specific age and culture that limits their horizons, and whose importance *for them* generates the illusion that this age and culture forms the goal of all previous historical development: ‘each member in the chain is in its place a *member* – hangs on the chain and does not see *where in the end the chain hangs*. Each in its delusion feels itself to be the *central point*’ (HW 4: 82; HPW 335).

The state of being the instrument of an end that one does not oneself consciously will appears to reduce an agent to a mere means, even if the end is here not completely alien to the instrument of its realization because the concept of ‘humanity’ can be applied both to the end and to the means.¹⁹ This reduction of human beings to means to an end that they do not consciously will is acknowledged by Herder himself in the following passage:

¹⁹ The way in which human beings further an end that they do not consciously will fits the idea that history exhibits the natural purposiveness characteristic of living organisms rather than the conscious purposiveness characteristic of intentional actions. This model of natural development is identified as an integral feature of Herder’s anti-imperialism when it is claimed that for Herder European imperialism represents a violation of the law of natural development. See John K. Noyes, *Herder: Aesthetics against Imperialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 8ff. Yet it is questionable that the idea of natural development is suited to perform this critical function, not only because, as I argue here, it is compatible with the reduction of the value of ages and cultures to an instrumental one that does not entail any moral constraints on how human beings ought to treat one another, but also because the idea of natural development could equally be used to justify forms of territorial expansion or cultural domination that involve the oppression of other peoples and cultures. To rule out this type of justification of territorial expansion and cultural domination, one would have to assume that the process of natural development and growth is a self-limiting one, or one that is limited by external obstacles such as geographical features in a way that produces a natural harmony which enables different cultures and peoples to

What a *work* to which belong so many shade-groups of *nations* and *ages*,
colossus-statues almost without *viewpoint* or *view!*, so many *blind tools*,
 which all act in *the illusion of freedom* and yet do not know *what* they do or
why, which have no *overview* and yet *act along* as zealously as if their *antheap*
 were the *universe* – what a *work this whole is!* (HW 4: 106; HPW 357)

One response to this view of the matter would be to argue that each age and culture is both a means and an end because it not only unconsciously contributes to the fulfilment of the goal of the full development of humanity, but also enjoys its own unique form of happiness as a result of fulfilling its unique role in this historical process. Yet is this happiness genuinely achieved in the face of the instrumental role performed by this age and culture, given how the happiness of each age and culture then entails the suffering of some of its members? For we should not lose sight of how the negative aspects of an age and culture are bound up with the positive ones in Herder's philosophy of history because the same specific conditions necessarily produce both of them.

On the one hand, Herder himself highlights how violence and oppression are necessary concomitants of the formative process that he describes in *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*, leading him to speak of how '[t]he song certainly rose through discords and screeching tunings to a *higher note*' (HW 4: 56; HPW 312).²⁰ On

coexist peacefully without detriment to the identity, values and territorial integrity of each of them. I would say that this is a big assumption.

²⁰ An example of how the contribution made by an age and culture to the full development of humanity justifies otherwise undesirable aspects of this age and culture is provided by the following description of how Roman imperialism was a condition of the emergence and spread of tolerance and international law: 'Even just considered as a *tool* it would seem that the Roman *spirit of conquest* had to *precede* in order to open paths

the other hand, he rejects the idea that the achievement of a goal can justify the suffering required to achieve it, at least if any single age and culture considers itself to be this goal, as the one shaped by the Enlightenment does: ‘Human beings of all parts of the world, who have perished over the ages, you have not lived solely to manure the earth with your ashes, so that at the end of time your posterity should be made happy by European culture’ (HW 6: 335; HSPC, 311; translation modified). Yet the same does not appear to hold true of the goal of the full development of humanity, which is a goal that cannot be reduced to the triumph of any single age and culture. Indeed, we have seen how the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment is itself reduced to a means in relation to this goal.²¹ Moreover, Herder’s negative portrayal of this age and culture suggests that it is not even happy in its own way while serving as the means to an end. The following plea is a case in point: ‘give us *in many respects* your *worship* and *superstition*, *darkness* and *ignorance*, *disorder* and *primitiveness* in *ethics* [*Sitten*], and take our *light* and *unbelief*, our *enervated coldness* and *refinement*, our *philosophical exhaustedness* and *human misery!*’ (HW 4: 53–54; HPW 310).

The age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment serves to illustrate another, related problem that follows from the claim that each age and culture not only has both a positive and a negative side, but also that the one is not possible without the other. If this claim is applied to the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment, then the instrumental value that

everywhere, to establish a *political connection* between peoples which was previously unheard of, to set in motion on precisely this path *tolerance*, *ideas of international law among peoples* previously unheard of on that scale! In this way the *horizon got extended, enlightened*’ (HW 4: 47; HPW 304).

²¹ Even before Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the Enlightenment had been associated with a purely instrumental form of reason by German philosophers such as Fichte and Hegel. See David James, ‘Enlightenment and the Unconditional Good: From Fichte to the Frankfurt School’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 24(1) (2016). We might therefore say that the Enlightenment here becomes a victim of its own specific form of rationality.

this age and culture possesses in relation to the goal of the full development of humanity may justify any practical consequences of it, including the devaluing and oppression of other cultures in the name of universal ideas and values. For if the distinctive contribution to the development of humanity made by this age and culture is a necessary one and this contribution is necessarily bound up with an attempt to dominate other cultures and to eradicate what is distinctive about them, then these practical consequences can be indirectly justified by explaining them in terms of certain presuppositions of the full development of humanity. As we have seen, an age and culture that is closer to achieving this goal would not be possible without the contribution made by the age and culture shaped by the Enlightenment, even though the later historical stage transcends the limitations of the preceding one, including its devaluing and oppression of other cultures. Human beings will then, at most, be able to acknowledge that they have benefited from specific injustices and seek to make amends once the later historical stage has been reached. Yet it is doubtful that Herder himself would want to accept such a conclusion, given the strong terms in which he condemns the way in which Europeans have oppressed other nations, even if the Enlightenment's claim to be the goal of history, in relation to which all previous developments are reduced to mere means in so far as they are accorded any value at all, would be undermined by showing how the age and culture shaped by it is merely a means in relation to an end that lies beyond it.