

**a system of freedom and  
joy—herder on the traces of  
spinoza: the two editions of  
*god, some conversations* and  
their relation to the *ethics***

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In each of the two—clearly different—editions of his work *God, Some Conversations* (On Spinoza’s System), from 1787 and 1800 respectively, Johann Gottfried Herder develops a discussion of Spinozan philosophy which has not only been of considerable influence in the dispute over Jacobi’s letters on Spinoza but also beyond. Hegel himself compared both editions shortly after 1800 in a review (which has unfortunately been lost) in an attempt to summarize them but also to position himself within the debate.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I will try to answer the following questions: What motives characterize Herder’s reception of Spinoza? What points are raised? And, to what degree *must* Herder’s thought be called Spinozan? The investigation is divided into two parts. The first part shows, on the basis of the Herderian interpretation of the Spinozan concepts of existence, love of God and nature, where and how the influence from Spinoza makes itself clear as well as where Herder’s God and Spinoza’s substance are strictly incompatible. The second part is concerned with Herder’s understanding of the *modifications* and the concept of *potentia* (power).

Herder conceives of Spinoza’s philosophy as a “system in which all is directed towards the freedom and joy of the soul.”<sup>2</sup> The shift of accent here is already obvious: referring to the biography, the *Letters* and the *Ethics*, Herder seeks to highlight what in Spinoza’s system can be understood as a practical philosophy of life. According to a conception of being [*Daseyn*] connected to Spinoza’s *existentia*

*sive perfectio* (existence or perfection), Herder understands the conatus for self-preservation (*conatus in suo esse perseverare*) as a “love for existence [*Daseyn*]”<sup>3</sup> and interprets the conception of the intellectual love of God (I will discuss this later) as a “love of the all to all that is in us.”<sup>4</sup> Spinoza’s foundation of serenity and joy as always-to-be-fostered feelings with exclusively positive significance (“all those things that bring pleasure are good,” *E IV, Ap. 30*) is conceived by Herder under the heading of the concept of “enjoyment” (which will later become important for Hegel in the *Encyclopaedia*).<sup>5</sup> Leibniz’s reproach that the God of Spinoza is a blind necessity is clearly rejected by Herder as well as Goethe. However, neither is concerned with an exact reconstruction of the substance metaphysics of the rationalist but instead attempt to find—besides a defence of the supposed “atheist”—a legitimation of their own natural philosophical, as well as religiously and metaphysically critical, thought. More precisely stated, what is important for them is the establishment of a concept of being, a comprehension of God and a conception of Nature, the pivotal impulses toward which they received from Spinoza.

Of course, Herder also proves to be a beneficiary of Spinoza’s in terms of a type of thinking whose lively movement and sometimes just contradictory nature prevent a *definite* attribution to Spinozism. His efforts to understand Spinoza coalesce with his search for new answers to the questions of God and the world; with his alternative conception of the empirical natural sciences; as well as a concern to explain his theory of organic powers. Thereby, Herder’s text *God* can be seen as a conglomerate with many facets. The text, planned as a synthesis of Leibniz, Spinoza and Shaftesbury, equally displays features of his dispute with Kant.<sup>6</sup> Further, besides explicit statements on Lessing’s *On the Reality of Things Outside God* and Jacobi’s *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, there are numerous literary references to Haller, Gleim, Vanini and others as well as a discussion of Lambert’s *Neues Organon*.<sup>7</sup> The diversity of all these subjects gives an idea of Herder’s worldview and background and explains the differences in research interests. B.M. Dreike has provided a convincing argument on the influence of Leibniz.<sup>8</sup> As for Spinoza, the opinions diverge greatly. The contradictoriness of the research results alone makes clear how equivocal the phenomenon of new Spinozism is in the case of Herder. As unanimously as the differences of the two editions have been overlooked since Suphan<sup>9</sup> and Haym, so variously has the book been described as Spinozist (Vollrath),<sup>10</sup> non-Spinozist (Dietterle),<sup>11</sup> theistic (Haym)<sup>12</sup> and as a “purely personal document” (Kühnemann).<sup>13</sup> And more recently, despite the knowledge-rich and comprehensive studies of Hermann Timms<sup>14</sup> and David Bells,<sup>15</sup> which provide large-scale analyses of factors both historical and immanent

to the work, and have elucidated the context, they are no substitute for a finely detailed analysis and comparison of Spinoza's *Ethics* and Herder's *God*.

If one understands Herder's text however as a *process* of convergence and divergence, then the fluctuations in misunderstanding, as well as the simultaneity of agreed proximity and critical distance, become plausible. The methodical reproduction<sup>16</sup> of the Herderian process-related development of thought proves to be the appropriate way to follow the traces of the contradictory facets and temporal development of his reception of Spinoza and to specify his protean oscillation between agreement and rejection

## 1. A CONTRADICTION-FULL AGREEMENT

Herder's understanding of Spinoza's philosophy in the book *God* is loose and to a certain extent poetic. It includes, for example, the blunt rejection of the theory of attributes due to the—what can certainly only be understood as fallacious—assumption that the attributes are negligible or at least refinable component aspects of Spinoza's philosophy. Yet it also includes the development of a concept of being, which for Herder provides a direct link to Spinoza's concept of existence: if, according to Spinoza, a) reality is perfection and b) being able to exist is a capability, then, so Herder concludes, being is to be considered godly. With a concept of being animated by forces, he ventures to combine Spinoza's formulas *realitas sive perfectio* (existence or perfection), *natura sive deus* (Nature or God) and *existentia sive potentia* (existence or power) with the thought *existentia sive Deus*: "God or being."<sup>17</sup> Thereby he is able to bind inseparably God, being and power. Reality and existence consequently become reciprocal determinations. Furthermore, *realitas*—completely in the Spinozan sense—is understood as the whole of that, which is what it is, and in its being thus represents a foundational structure that cannot be any other way.<sup>18</sup> "From Spinoza himself," Herder explains, one can, using the concept of being in the sense of "actuality, reality," encompass the reason for everything; it is "the chief conception in Spinoza."<sup>19</sup> Although this may remain undecided, it is certain that such conceptions of Herder's (as well as Goethe's) can be read as traces of Spinoza, whose philosophical ideas have been incorporated integrally.<sup>20</sup>

### *Irreconcilable Differences*

However, the Spinoza resurrected in Weimar is of course a different one. And this also means that essential aspects of his philosophy had their radicality defused through theo-ideological harmonization efforts. The God of philosophical

reason is also for Herder decidedly too little worthy of worship. The differences between him and Spinoza can most clearly be seen in respect to the concept of God. It is, for Herder, a difficult, indeed irresolvable, task, on the one hand, to support a God without personality,<sup>21</sup> to differentiate himself from Jacobi and other contemporaries, and at the same time, on the other hand, to not accept the God of the *Ethics*, the equivalence “substance or God or Nature,” due to “abstractness” and, as a theologian, to save theism. The contradictions contained in his statements are insurmountable at this point. Even in the fifth conversation there is talk of a “Father,”<sup>22</sup> which he seemed to have long ago discarded in his confrontation with Jacobi (“you want God ... as a friend who thinks of you”).<sup>23</sup> With his attempt to integrate theistic and even pietistic aspects into a modified Spinozism, Herder not only had to fail: from today’s perspective he could also be accused of undercutting Spinoza’s radicalism, of failing to capture the logical consequence of his ethical doctrine and of underestimating the scope of the *Ethics* in terms of the diversity of its aspects.

Those differences cannot be assimilated: Herder represents the belief of a God who came into the world; Spinoza’s substance, in contrast, is eternal. Herder’s deep roots in bourgeois Protestantism as well as the historicity of his thinking distinguish him here so irreconcilably from Spinoza that the intended gain of a religious reorientation cannot hide the fact of the painful loss of the liberal achievements of the philosopher. Spinoza’s ethical doctrine involves a pragmatic belief in reason tied in with a deep and fundamental affirmation of life: what is useful for the individual is also good so long as it does not harm others—that is why one needs reason as a personal corrective and a reasonable politics as a general one. Virtue is for Spinoza a reward in itself (e.g. *E IV*, P18S): only an unemancipated person needs gratification from an otherworldly father. Shame and remorse, as the theory of affections teaches us, are in themselves bad feelings, for they are sadness, and sadness is the transition to lesser perfection.<sup>24</sup> Above all pedagogically, as Spinoza concludes in the Scholium to Proposition 54 in the fourth part, these feelings have a certain meaning: to protect barbarians from complete brutalization. One can see how resistant to integration these concepts must have been for the Christian theologian. While Spinoza’s bold innovation consisted in describing feelings and passions as if they were “bodies and lines in space,” in order to penetrate beyond all normative and moralizing set goals to a description of the actual state, Herder negates this de-anthropomorphization via the geometrical method almost violently. He had declared this since the very beginning to be a regrettably misguided attempt and had never seen its human centred and emancipatory potential. If Spinoza ultimately naturalizes the deity,

to the extent that each psychic trait is denied in order to displace it within a law-ordered universal connectivity, with Herder Nature itself is deified, God is humanized after all and man is made the image of God.

### *A Poetic Approach*

Nevertheless, the representation of God is for Herder wavering and complex.<sup>25</sup> In the process of his search, his God even abandons theistic traits in order to become the *summa realitas* (supreme reality) and Nature (which carries all “Being”) in order to recall, at least in regard to his origin, the “God or Nature.” In addition, as the “highest Being” that we as mankind “enjoy” the more “knowledge, and love of the all to all” is within us, he comes closer to the God of the *Ethics* V.<sup>26</sup> The free and rationally-gifted human—whose “mind, insofar as it is eternal” (*E V*, P31Pr.) can be understood as a part of the infinite intellect of God—can here enter into a relationship: qua intuition he approaches, in the love of God, the godly perspective of the cosmos and “intuits” this *sub specie aeternitatis* as universal and eternal identity. It is interesting that Herder speaks of knowledge in this context as in Spinoza we also find the intellectual love for God connected, in a memorable conclusion, to the self-knowledge of man: (“He who clearly and distinctly understands himself and his emotions loves God” (*E V*, P15). The legitimate power of Being of existence is understood by Spinoza as well as Herder as a direct expression of a (differently conceptualized) God.<sup>27</sup> Thereby, however, the knowledge of the whole and one’s self as a part of the whole becomes the knowledge of God: “The more we understand particular things, the more we understand God” (*E V*, P24). And, “So the more each man is advanced in this kind of knowledge, the more clearly conscious he is of himself and of God, that is, the more perfect and blessed he is” (*E V*, P31S). This Scholium however stands in the closest relation to that which Herder sets as the motto of his preface: *Ἀν γυνῶς τί ἐστὶ Θεὸς, ἠδὲ ἰὼν ἔσθῃ*. This proves that Herder’s interpretation (and Goethe’s with him) of the love of God is indeed consistent and quite appropriately Spinozist.

The evident contradictions of such an idea of God and the theistic one can only be explained by the fact that Herder was so entwined in the development of the examination that its historical explosiveness led him to lose track of the overall view, and in addition to this that he found himself conflicted between philosophy and theology.

The strengths of Herder’s thought however do not lie in their conceptual systematicity. He had already, in 1785, dismissed Kant’s advice to give ‘his genius

a few shoves' and make the effort toward creating more precise concepts. Instead there is the constant relation to life in his arguments, the concern to think *κατὰ ἄνθρωπον*, as well as the constructive handling of history for the purpose of future-oriented pioneering, which makes his world of thought fruitful.

As great as the differences in terms of the concept of God are, so great is the proximity to the conception of the love of God, of existence and—as we will now see—Nature. Choosing one or the other aspect for the purpose of clearly classifying Herder as Spinozist or non-Spinozist would always mean absolutizing partial aspects and curtailing the complexity of Herder's reading of Spinoza.

### *Science and Religion*

Proposition 18 of the first part of the *Ethics*—"God is the immanent cause of all things"—is not only fundamentally accepted by Herder but also thoroughly further thought through in terms of the consequences for the empirical sciences that must be present in such a way that the object of their analyses testifies to the presence of God. Herder sees in the results of the Enlightenment the threat of a split between religion and science and thereby two ways of navigating the world: between the objectifying mastery of Nature on the one hand and a religious dogma that has become empty on the other, a split that offers mankind only inadequate alternatives. Hence he tries to provide a mediation between a religion subject to decay and the ever-strengthening natural sciences, whose alienating and destructive potential he recognizes at an early stage, because of which he evokes Spinoza: not only because his position on the immanent causality of God results in the divinity of the world but also because the manner of dealing with Nature described in the appendix to *Ethics* I could serve as a basis for this vocation. Herder perhaps does not quote the particular part directly, however when he states later that "our admiration" of this "cosmic system" is "rational," and preferred against that of "a devout but empty wonder," then one feels indeed close to Spinoza's concern and is reminded of his understanding of Nature as a scholar—*ut doctus*—instead of staring at it idiotically—*ut stultus*.<sup>28</sup>

In Spinoza's plea for a judicious study of Nature as well as his denial of teleological thinking, Herder sees, together with the thought of immanence, a constructive suggestion for a new orientation of the natural sciences of his time. If one takes the entwined congruence of God and Nature seriously, then the scientific treatment of Nature must be a respectful one. One sees thereby how Herder's reception of Spinoza is equally equivocal and fruitful. In fact, in accordance with his

concept of aestheticization, the immanence of God for Herder implies goodness and the beauty of the world, terms that Spinoza would have certainly rejected as anthropomorphic categories that testify more about the nature of our brains (“*pro dispositione cerebri*”) than natural conditions. Nonetheless, this concerns a difference in their temperament between the two.

More central, however, for the question of Herder’s Spinozism is the constructive use of Spinozan philosophical ideas for the purpose of the solution of contemporary problems. “If men had forever stood still in admiration [of the cosmos],” then “many purposes ... could have been thought out.” However that “natural philosopher who first looked away from these purposes and sought the ‘hidden law’ ... assuredly did more than the greatest inventor of purposes among men could do.”<sup>29</sup> The path of the “sober natural scientist who ... examines the conditions of things themselves” is seen as “the road which Spinoza opened up.”<sup>30</sup> While a frequently presented reproach to this day holds that the Cartesian form of rationalism leads to the exploitative objectification of Nature, Herder points out that Spinoza’s enlightened concern with the exploration of Nature, and his equalization of God and Nature, present a new opportunity for understanding it. In order to establish an ethical relationship with Nature, which neither analytically removes God nor mystically enchants nature, Herder draws on aspects of Spinozism that testify to his intensive reading.

All this will have shown that a quasi-archaeological reading of “traces” is full of consequences in a field where a more limited conceptualization may leave one perplexed or duped by the numerous incompatibilities and a conglomeration of facets of varying durability. Two further particularities of Herder’s reading of Spinoza nonetheless should not be overlooked in this regard.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF *POTENTIA* AND ORGANIC FORCES

The influence of Leibniz on the thought of Herder is generally judged to be very strong, specifically in respect to his conception of forces as well as in regard to the strong focus on the aspect of individuality. This cannot be denied. In the second edition of *God*, however, both aspects—forces and individuality—are related, by Herder, to Spinoza. In extensive expansions, the older Herder explains a deepened understanding of Spinoza which highlights two central features in an original reading. On the basis of his conception of the attributes as supposedly unreconciled Cartesian oppositions, Herder called in the first edition for a “mediating concept” that would bring thought and extension into an organic unity. In the second

edition, however, and independent of the critique of the theory of attributes, the following is emphasized: for Spinoza “power is an essential reality ... I can think of no other substantive, which could include both [‘thought’ and ‘motion’] with so little constraint as the conception of force, power” and this is described as going to “the very heart of the Spinozistic system.”<sup>31</sup> Later it would be said that “power ... necessarily, and as a consequence of his own system” leads to “the conception of forces.”<sup>32</sup> Hence, Herder found in Spinoza’s concept of *potentia* a basis for his own concept of power which he proposes by adding the idea of the organism from the natural philosophy of his time. On the other hand, he complains about Leibniz that “with ... little sacrifice”<sup>33</sup> he could have made the move to the theory of power in Herder’s sense. As undeniable as Leibniz’s influence on Herder’s intellectual development may be, Herder himself only refers to the *Ethics* and not the *Theodicy* in his book *God*. With that justification he refers to Spinoza, and how close he reads exactly to come to results that to this day can still be called fresh and original, is shown in the text of the *Ethics* itself, as *potentia* is one of the most dazzling and central concepts of Spinozan philosophy.

The centrality of the concept of *potentia* (power) in the *Ethics* is initially guaranteed through its connection to the entity of God: “God’s power is his very essence” (*E* I, P34). In this context nonetheless, *potentia* is not clearly and consistently differentiated from *potestas*. Further on, *potestas* is largely reserved for the active power of God, while *potentia* reappears at the most diverse levels of the *Ethics*. For example, in connection with the *conatus* in the Proof to *E* III, P7: “Therefore, the power of anything, or the *conatus* with which it acts or endeavors to act ... that is, the power or *conatus* by which it endeavors to persist in its own being, is nothing but the ... essence of the thing.” Here, *potentia* no longer has anything to do with its metaphysical meaning of the power of God but instead is identified with the pursuit of self-preservation as the active drive and essence of man.

Additionally, Spinoza needs the *potentia* of external causes to explain movement and change. The concept obtains an ontic meaning—which, as we saw, was interesting for the interpretation of Herder’s “being”—through *E* I, P11: “To be able to not exist is weakness; on the other hand, to be able to exist is power.” Furthermore, the terms *potentia cogitandi* and *potentia agendi* are present in life and in the world in connection with the theory of affections to the extent that the “*vir fortis*” needs one of the capacities in order to steer the other reasonably.

The equivocity in the signification of the concept is also reflected in the various, sometimes self-contradictory, translations. Lorenz Schmidt, whose translation

Herder would have certainly known, translated *potentia* as “power” [*Macht*] as well as “force” [*Kraft*].<sup>34</sup> Gebhardt, however, from *E II*, P3S, provides the word power for both “*Dei potentiam*” and “*potestatem*.”<sup>35</sup> Baensch differentiates, here, between “power” and “violence.”<sup>36</sup> In the other aforementioned contexts however, he also translates *potentia*—much in the manner of Herder—as “power.” That fact that Gebhardt’s translation, “capacity” [*Vermögen*], cannot be described as wrong can be seen as further proof of how enigmatically Spinoza’s *potentia* is caught up in the meanings of empowerment, strength, power and capacity as well as with what right Herder saw it as a key concept.

Apart from one exception, *vis* is differentiated continuously from *potentia* in the preface to *E V*, as *vis* is mostly used in connection with the affects.<sup>37</sup> The whole fourth part indeed concerns *de affectuum viribus*, which Gebhardt falsely renders in the singular as “power of the affects” [*Macht der Affekte*]. In the plural, *vires*, denotes the manifold wealth of passions that are put into opposition with both *potentia rationis* and *potentia intellectus*.

The equivocal multi-layering and occasionally wavering use of the term may be traced back to the various editorial stages of the text, however what remains clear is that *potentia* is the only form of a modality of possibility, in Spinoza’s theory, capable of virtually overcoming necessary, caused being.

The *potentia* receives a final signification in the fourth part. There it is identified with *virtus*, virtue: “By virtue and power [*Per virtutem, et potentiam*] I mean the same thing” (*E IV*, D8). This equivalence functions as both have a common reference point in the essence or nature of the human being: “Virtue is human power, which is defined solely by man’s essence [*Virtus est ipsa humana potentia, quae sola hominis essentia definitur*]” (*E IV*, P20Pr).

*Potentia* is therefore something different each time insofar as it has its *cosmological* connection to God, its *ontic* link with existence and an *ethical* relation to the human being: in the latter case it can be distinguished depending on its relationship to the body, the mind, the *conatus* or essence. Common to all of these meanings, however, is its essential place in Spinoza’s system: in every case, *potentia* is a virulent driving force that has to be taken into account at any moment without being calculable itself, and that renders being dynamic. Certainly one must admit that this dynamic is thought of mechanically, and that the organic viewpoint was originally added by Herder. However, the appeal to “power as essence” can only be understood as a deep-seated agreement of the older Herder with Spinoza that

emphasizes a key concept that even to this day has not always been seen as such.

## MODIFICATION AND INDIVIDUALITY

The second aspect Herder introduces against all tradition in the historical reception of Spinoza, is found at the end of the book *God*, in a final original extension in the second edition. There, Herder highlights the modifications of Spinoza explicitly as *individualities*. He clearly denies the accusation that Spinoza's philosophy negates the idea of individuality insofar as he explains, quite categorically, that talk of certain, finite, ways of existence of the substance must be read as speaking of particular individualities and that anything else must be "self-contradictory nonsense."<sup>38</sup> Herder clarifies this reading as follows: identity and selfhood are understood as those things applying to a person who, within the midst of all change, is still possible to regard as a self-enduring "I." Despite a "change of circumstances," the stages of one's life, mental and emotional states and the like, there is nevertheless something that allows the "I" and others to speak of a self-identical person.<sup>39</sup> This "center of selfhood" lies in "myself" that, neither as concept nor as sensation, allows "of further dissection."<sup>40</sup> This is true to the extent that "in spite of all changes, my body and spirit do not remain the same, but I remain the same," namely because "a self does not depend on my reasoning."<sup>41</sup> The principle of individuation "lies in the word 'self' itself."<sup>42</sup> In this manner one determines the distinctiveness of the "I" against others; the self is a specific mode of existence with "different kinds and grades of self-consciousness."<sup>43</sup> Herder understands modification in Spinoza's sense as exactly these "modes of existence." That's why he sees "the one and eternal principle of individuation developed in the system of our philosopher, along a line that leads into our innermost self."<sup>44</sup> In the literature this point is commonly overlooked, whether it has to do with the fact that the extensions of the second edition remain virtually unnoticed, or because such an idiosyncratic and daring reading is incomprehensible for many Herder researchers who do not know the *Ethics* well. And, to be sure, the reading is also in need of explanation. Opening the *Ethics* to find the points to which Herder may have been referring, one could make discoveries in various areas.

For example, the *intelligo* always brought up by Spinoza, if not regarded in the sense of the Cartesian *cogito*, can be assessed as an indication of an apprehending "I"—that of Spinoza in contrast to that of Descartes and others, but also that of a free human whose cognitive capacity is emancipating.<sup>45</sup> This is not to be overrated in a subjective-theoretical sense, yet nonetheless the "I" emerges as the reflexive

reference point of a statement.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, as *E III, P17S* makes clear—“For the human body is composed of very many individual bodies of different nature, and so it can be affected by one and the same body in many different ways”—a body is composed of manifold “individuals” that can each be differently affected. In addition, the diversity is thereby multiplied to the extent that the degree of affectedness is dependent on the nature of the affecting body:

All the ways in which a body is affected by another body follow from the nature of the affected body together with the nature of the body affecting it, so that one and the same body may move in various ways in accordance with the various natures of the bodies causing its motion. (*E II, L3A1*)

The particular and respective form of composition can explain individual and distinct reactions. Only in this manner can it be possible that one loves what another hates and that the same person can now love that which he will later hate:

Different men can be affected in different ways by one and the same object, and one and the same man can be affected by one and the same object in different ways at different times. (*E III, P51*)

The Scholium to this Proposition states:

We therefore see that it is possible that what one man loves, another hates, what one man fears, another fears not, and that one and the same man may now love what he previously hated. ... Again, since everyone according to his emotions judges what is good, what is bad ... it follows that men vary as much in judgment as in emotion.

Both in terms of their affects and in their *judgements*—herein lies one of the reasons for the tolerant and liberal character of Spinoza’s ethical doctrine—people can differ from one another in multifarious manners. This explicit emphasis on the individual diversity of people as well as the subjective and affective affinity of their judgements is remarkable to begin with. Later, this is followed by an explanation, namely that everyone, according to what their personal ideas of courage, timidity and other affects are, makes assignments toward others (or fails to do so) with corresponding provisions. Hence I would consider someone courageous, who does not fear “what I usually fear” (*E III, P51S*).

There is even a certain consideration of social and pedagogic influences on the development of the individual, insofar as it is pointed out that the praise and

blame, negative and positive sanctions, and agreement or rejection of others have a decisive effect on the actions of the individual as they are motivations of extreme importance for the affects (cf. *E III*, P55S).

The pluralistic multiplicity of the world of feelings is not yet a principle of individuation. The mere recognition of this diversity should also not be confused with an obvious theoretical concept of the subject. The point is rather that Spinoza's monochrome identity-thinking includes a clearly articulated awareness of individual differences with regard to essence. "Any emotion of one individual differs from the emotion of another to the extent that the essence of the one individual differs from the essence of the other" (*E III*, P57).

We can find more examples, however, this may be enough to show that Herder is completely right in comprehending the modifications as wholly specific expressions of individual particularity. He proves thereby once again his understanding of Spinoza and shows that he has deeply incorporated the impetus of the *Ethics* and by no means—as often claimed—only read into it what he wanted to get out of it.

### *Identity and Difference*

Monistic, infinite identity proves to be the horizon of the given, finite, differences—this does not however mean that the latter have disappeared within the former. Spinoza's method of observing things uniquely from various viewpoints—quasi perspectively, e.g. "insofar [*quatenus*] as the mind understands all things as governed by necessity, to that extent [*eatenus*] it has a greater power over emotions" (*E V*, P6), that is to say "*in se consideratus*" or with their relation to something else in sight—is proven here too. He always points out that "things can be conceived as real in two different ways" namely in respect to their particularities or in regard to their participation in the whole.<sup>47</sup> In order to restore unity to the split Cartesian world, Spinoza chose the one substance to be the ground of identity for all being. This means only that things are *identical* in terms of their sufficient cause and in their general relation to the substance. If they are regarded alternatively as particular modifications of the two attributes of thought and extension, then they are clearly separated from one another. If body and mind then appear as one and the same individual or as distinct things depends on the angle of perception: "Mind and body—are one and the same individual thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought and now under the attribute of Extension" (*E II*, P21S). And: "Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another ... by the difference of the attributes of the substances" (*E I*, P4).

Certainly, God is considered in the sense of Nicholas of Cusa as *coincidentia oppositorum*, which means that he is a veritable unity of identity and difference, which cannot be stated better than in the expression “God or Nature.”<sup>48</sup> This peculiar figure of thought is the result of that methodical process by means of which Spinoza views things firstly differentially and then in terms of identification. He shows them to be unique and distinct in some respects but identical in their universal relation. Thereby, not only do God and Nature coincide but also nature or essence and—due to the parallelism of the world of ideas and the world of things— reality or perfection. The “or” (*sive*) guarantees the difference while at the same time founding the unity. It is a formula for the identity of parts that, as parts, still differ from one another. Proceeding from the basic assumption of the parallelisms of body and mind, the world of ideas and the world of things, the general and the particular, part and whole, Spinoza always shows that it is dependent on the angle of reception of the perceiving “I” whether one appreciates something in respect to its differences to others or to its universal identity of the whole.<sup>49</sup>

### *The Capacity for Freedom and Truth*

Added to this, the following aspect must be considered: through knowledge—rational as well as, above all, intuitive—man has the possibility to convert their passions into actions, and therefore to become an appropriate cause of their affects. This means mastery over suffering and thus freedom. This capacity for freedom, however, makes the individual modification a subject.

Incidentally, the use of reason in Spinoza is not an end in itself. The goal of his philosophy is the *homo liber* (free man) or rather *vir sapiens* (honourable sage), in its moderate hedonistic way as he knows how to enjoy his life and be happy (*E* IV, P45S), with a sanguine peace of mind (*aquiescentia mentis*) that loves being. He can’t reach this goal however when he is the mere object of his passions but only then when he can make use of his reason and therefore his freedom. The *homo liber* is the one “who lives solely according to the dictates of reason” (*E* IV, P67Pr). What is denied the will is granted to the capacity for knowledge. The cognizing mind thus has a very strong position in Spinoza’s system. Therefore, the question of what is true falls to the subject who can see clearly and distinctly what is true and false. That which is true is that of which the cognizing “I” has a clear and distinct representation. This means, therefore, that the specific position of referentiality, from which one speaks and cognizes, is never denied but is always taken into consideration. This does not mean at all that Spinoza

understands this point of view as relativity. Rather, in the manner so typical of him, there results a coincidence of the process of knowing and of that which is known: a true idea agrees with its content completely, i.e. the truth ascertained by the I has a positive-objective equivalence (*E I, D6*). Herder mentions this toward the end of the conversation.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, although it will not be possible to assert that the idea of subjectivity exists in Spinoza in a theoretically formulated sense, one can certainly say that there is an emphasis on individuality, personal development and pluralistic diversity in a distinct proportion:

Indeed, from what has been said I think everyone is quite convinced that emotions can be combined with one another in so many ways and give rise to so many variations that they cannot be numbered. (*E III, P59S*)

Herder's reception of Spinoza thus proves to be an idiosyncratic amalgamation of philosophical agreement as well as systematic and historical differences. A critical evaluation of Herder's relation to Spinoza's thought can therefore not come to a definitive outcome without also voicing the conditions within which his agreement or disagreement with Spinoza is stated. With this complexity, however, it becomes apparent how essentially Herder is influenced by Spinoza, the master of the thought of the identity of unity and plurality, or, using Herder's terms, of the particular and the general.

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## NOTES

1. See Karl Rosenkranz, *G. W. F. Hegels Leben*. Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1844. Reprinted Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963.
2. Johann Gottfried Herder, *God, Some Conversations*. Trans. Frederick H. Burkhardt. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1940, 70. Original: J. G. Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*. Volume XVI. Ed. Bernhard Suphan. Berlin: Weidmann, 1877. Reprinted Hildesheim: Olms-Weimann, 1967, 404-580. Burkhardt's English translation from 1940 is based on the first edition of Herder's text. It adds parts of the second edition in notes or in the appendix but it is not a full translation of both editions. Whenever necessary, I translated directly from the original German second edition. TN
3. Herder, *God*, 177.
4. Herder, *God*, 213.
5. All references to Spinoza's *Ethics* are to the translation by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002). TN
6. See Heinrich Clairmont, „Die Leute wollen keinen Gott, als in ihrer Uniform, ein menschliches Fabeltier“—Herders anthropologisch fundierte Gnoseologie und seine Spinozadeutung in Gott.“ *Spinoza im Deutschland des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Eds Eva Schürmann, Norbert Waszek and Frank Weinreich. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: rommann-holzboog, 2002, 329-355.
7. The pantheism controversy was a major intellectual and religious event in the 1780s that involved Jacobi, Lessing and Mendelssohn among others. It was sparked off by the question of whether Spinoza's philosophical system was to be understood as materialist and atheist, or theist or rather pantheist. Although the controversy was ignited in Germany, it had an effect throughout Europe. See Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism. The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002. TN
8. Beate Monika Dreike, *Herders Naturauffassung in ihrer Beeinflussung durch Leibniz' Philosophie*. Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1973.
9. Ever since Suphan had merely highlighted the “literary meaning” of the second edition in his concluding editorial statement to the collected works (to the detriment, astonishingly, of the philosophical import) one cannot find any argument to the contrary in the related research. See Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*, volume XVI, 625.
10. Wilhelm Vollrath, *Die Auseinandersetzung Herders mit Spinoza*. Gießen: PhD diss., 1911.
11. Joh. A. Dieterle, „Die Grundgedanken in Herders Schrift ‚Gott‘ und ihr Verhältnis zu Spinozas Philosophie.“ *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 87 (1914, 505-555). The title promises considerably more than the author maintains.
12. Rudolf Haym, *Herder. Nach seinem Leben und seinem Werk. 2 Bde.* Reprinted Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1958.
13. Eugen Kühnemann, *Herder*. Leipzig: Verlag der Dürschens Buchhandlung, 1904.
14. Hermann Timm, *Gott und die Freiheit. Studien zur Spinozarenaissance im Deutschland der Goethezeit*. Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1974.
15. David Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe*. University of London: PhD diss., 1984.
16. Of course, this cannot be done here in the necessary length and detail. However, such an analysis is available in the present author's MA thesis from Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 1993.
17. Herder, *Sämtliche Werke* XVI, 541: „Gott oder das Daseyn.“ Although in Burkhardt's translation

of Herder's text, 'Being' is always written in upper case, I have resolved to render it consistently throughout the text with a lower case. TN

18. Kant's objection to the ontological proof of God, which states that being cannot be perfection, because being is not a real predicate, does not interest Herder in this context. Here he continues to hold to what he wrote at the age of 20 in *Versuch über das Seyn*, highlighted in a confrontation with Kant's *Einzig möglichem Beweisgrund*: "Quidquid est, illud est" is sufficient as the basis for all certainty of being. Decades later even, in a letter to Jacobi dated February 6, 1784, he still held to this view, as Spinozan knowledge.

19. Herder, *God*, 202.

20. Incidentally, it is also this view of existence which substantiates the thesis of the non-demonstrability of God. When he writes, in his *Versuch über das Seyn*, that God's existence is not demonstrable ("kein Dasein Gottes ist erweislich") the point is that it is nevertheless certain ("dennoch Gewiß") (KAA [Kant Akademieausgabe—TN], XXVIII, ii, 959). The self-evidence of all being is related to its perfection.

21. Compare this with the lengthy digression added by Herder to the fourth conversation in the second edition that, amazingly, does not prevent him from clinging to an acting, active 'He' ("thätigen Er").

22. Herder, *God*, 165.

23. "Letter to Jacobi from December 20, 1784." *Herders Briefe*. Ed. Regine Otto. Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1983, 234.

24. On these affirmative basic features of Spinoza's philosophy of life, see also Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Trans. Robert Hurley. San Francisco: City Lights, 1988.

25. On this, see also R. Haym, „Herder bringt das Kunststück [fertig], den Gott des Spinoza und den der Christen einstimmig zu finden.“ Haym, *Herder II*, 309. The multiplicity of ideas of God was also described by Elisabeth Hoffart in *Herders ‚Gott‘*. Halle a. d. S.: Niemeyer, 1918.

26. Herder, *God*, 213.

27. See also Herder, *God*, 169-170 and Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. Trans. Martin Joughin. New York: Zone Books, 1992.

28. Herder, *God*, 132.

29. Herder, *God*, 131.

30. Herder, *God*, 132-33.

31. Herder, *God*, 195.

32. Herder, *God*, 123.

33. Herder, *God*, 109.

34. See Christian Wolff, *B. v. Spinozas Sittenlehre*. Trans. Johann Lorenz Schmidt. #WoGW II.Abt. Bd15#Frankfurt and Leipzig: 1944, e.g. 93, 215.

35. See B. de Spinoza, *Opera. Bd. II. Lateinisch und deutsch*. Ed. Konrad Blumenstock. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967, 165.

36. B. de Spinoza, *Sämtliche Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. 2*. Trans. Otto Baensch. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1989, 52.

37. Exceptions are also possible here when *vis* and *conatus* are equated. See, e.g. *E IV*, P3.

38. Herder, *God*, 210.

39. Herder, *God*, 211.

40. Herder, *God*, 211.

41. Herder, *God*, 211.

42. Herder, *God*, 211.

43. Herder, *God*, 212.
44. Herder, *God*, 212-13.
45. In this connection one must also think of *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* that Spinoza began in a quite individual manner with reference to his experience.
46. For example, in his study on the history of the concept of the “I,” Riedel points out that “the individual [of Spinoza] is granted.” Christoph Riedel, *Subjekt und Individuum*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989, 83.
47. Cf. *E V*, P29S: “We conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them as related to a fixed time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature. Now the things that are conceived as true or real in this second way, we conceive under a form of eternity, and their ideas involve the eternal and infinite essence of God.”
48. Incidentally, Hegel refers to the antinomical character of the first definition in his *Differenzschrift*. See on this Hans-Christian Lucas, *Spinoza in Hegels Logik*. Leiden: Brill, 1982, 10.
49. In the end, Spinoza’s perspectival view is proven on all levels of the *Ethics*. Also in regard to the affects and actions, he states: *Nulla actio, in se solo considerata, bona aut mala est* (*E IV*, P59Pr2; “no action, considered solely in itself, is good or evil”). Essentially, the unity of identity and difference is already thereby set, as God, the *ultima ratio*, is the single substance, beside or beyond which there can be no other, which must nevertheless be considered as both *res cogitans* and *res extensa*.
50. Herder, *God*, 212-18.