The Fin de siècle Culture

Condorcet represented the culmination of the enlightenment, bringing together the rationalism, materialism and sensationism of the philosophers, he transformed the enlightenment world-view into a philosophy of history, showing the enlightenment as the culmination of human evolution and creating a faith for the century.

yet, by the time the Sketch was published the philosophers were not alone in attracting the minds of France. Beginning in the 1770's new movements emerged that completely disregarded the work of the philosophers. Thinksers were being attracted by ideas discarded by the philosophers with contempt. Neo-platonism, the idea of the Great Chain Of Being, Hermetic philosophy, mysticism and Illuminism were vying with the philosophers religion of humanity. Meser was hypnotising France with his theory Of Animal Magnetism; charlatanism was afoot in the form of Cagliostro; theosophical societies were founded based on the occult sciences; and Masonic lodges lured members with secret, arcane practices. Mozarts Magic Flute depicted a mystical religion Of humanity alluding ptlan mystery cults. The first conception of a clock-work universe was rejected as unspiritual and a subtle, Restif de la Bretonne, formulated a comology in which the universe was thought of as a great animal, alive and vital, promiscuous universe in which stars were males and planets were females and there interaction was sexual. All of this was in sharp opposition to the hopes of Condorcet and the mathematical spirit of the Enlightenment.

Germany was affected by these trends too, perhaps more strongly than France. Rousseau and pre-romanticism was embraced by the "sturm und drang" movement in German literature. Goethe wrote the In which a young man is frustrated In his love because of social conventions and classes. His lover is married, and socially his superior. He suffers terribly, experiencing a mixture of warm tender love and powerful despair. In agony he takes his own life and Europe was 80 taken with the story that many suicides were reported dressed In Werther's costume, fulfilling his tragic unrequited modus of love. This outburst of sentimentallsm, the sobbing the crying, the ecstasy, the melancholy, carried over into German philosophy. The rigid, orderly Immanuel Kant was quick to condemn this phenomenon, calling these philosophers Schwinders, world sufferers. One Of Kant's own students, Johann Gottfried von Herder felt the brunt of his master's disgust for this reason.

Herder's Attack on the Enlightenment

One of the most German philosophers, Herder came from a religious family and was a pastor, and like his countrymen his life contrasts sharply with the activism of the French. The philosophers engaged In political contravery and frequented the salons Of Paris, while the Germans lived quiet, contemplative lives, secluded from the turmoil of the world In Academies and Churches. A strong sense of separation from the burning questions of the day Is characteristic of Herder, who, instead cultivated inner freedom and Spiritual growth. A mood of alienation from the world pervades the thought of the major German thinkers of this period.

Herder attacked the enlightenment In the name of the feelings
and the spirit. His writing is unsystematic and extremely emotional, charged with images of organic, mysterious growth. The rationalism of the French, their love of mathematics, which abstracted from concrete reality and eliminated its emotive content received his caustic scorn. His way of seeing the world was organic, glorifying a romantic holism, demanding that experience be perceived as unmathematical, aesthetic, colorful, varied, emotive, less uniform. He attacked the fundamental assumptions of the enlightenment as untrue to lived reality; their simple dichotomies between body and soul, reason and emotion, nature and spirit were condemned as false abstractions. On the basis of this new orientation he wrote philosophies of history that took the wind out of the sails of Condorcet's bright expectations.

The German Idea of History

Throughout Herder's literary career he was absorbed in the problem of history. In 1775, Another Philosophy of History Concerning the Development of Mankind. In 1775, Causes of the Decline of Taste Among Peoples Where It Once Flourished, In 1784 to 1791, History--Mankind, and finally in 1793 to 1797, Letters for the Advancement of Humanity. All of these works are past, an assumption that all ages are ultimately equal in worth and that the historian's task is to recapture the spirit of the time and place no matter how alien and how ridiculous it may appear. This idea of history is a far cry from Voltaire's notion of history as * recouthing of the follies of the past so that the present may avoid them. To Herder, the past is no more bizarre than the present and the purpose of studying and reading history is to see the astounding variety of humanity, the wondrous diversity of human expression and activity,

Herder expanded the idea of history beyond its contemporary limitations in many ways. Europeans were still writing history as if Europe alone constituted the world. Herder included all peoples in his histories, the Chinese, the Indians, the Persians, among the more advanced societies, but also the primitives, the Caribs, the Polynesians, the tribes of Africa ---history became truly the history of humanity. And it was the idea of humanity that dominated Herder's historic works.

The center of the world was no longer the states of Western Europe, but the entire globe. History had to be oriented toward
man as such, not toward any particular civilization. From
Leibniz, Herder seems to have taken the idea of the fullness of
being. Humanity presented a tapestry, infinite and multicolored
in its pattern, that must be viewed as a hole if meaningful
understanding of man was desired. Herder's historical works
read like romantic botanical treatises, capturing and emphasis-
ing the myriad infinity of flora and fauna. The word humanity now
took on a new dimension: no longer was it limited by the
rationalism or the French to those who could read and write.
Each Volk, each people was a legitimate expression of the
infinity potential that was mankind. The pattern
of historical evolution was anything but the straight line of
Condorcet, resembling more a field of flowers, wild on a hillside, each flower
blossoming at a different time and each one clarifying in its
beauty. The true model of history was not mathematics, some
geometrical form, as the French thought, but biological, organic,
showing growth not in an even ten-
staged uniformity, but in unpredictable, disorderly epilons, Change occurs not in a smooth, evolutionary pattern of mathematical design, but in leaps, in Jumps, breaks beyond the scope of rational explanation and certainly beyond a simple, mechanical model of direct cause and effect. Condorcet's idea of history was of eternal conduct and inventions; Herder's was a history of man's inner being. Condorcet's notion of time was of increasing elongation in a geometrically increasing proportion; Herder's was a cyclical, seasonal, more-or-less even-organic rate of movement. Condorcet foresaw the organization of time through reason; for Herder man could make no changes in the tempo of history. Whereas Condorcet saw progress as the increasing domination of man over nature, Herder asked why should man want to master nature? History was at its ape at every moment for every moment with all of being. Although it appears that Condorcet is radical with respect to the status quo, affirming the future as necessarily better, and Herder appears to sanction the status quo, from another point of view Herder might be the revolutionary. For Herder was prepared to sanction the new, however lightening its appearance, while Condorcet's praise for the future was only for the future as a direct development from already existing in the present.

But Herder was far from a systematic thinker and each book, each chapter, each page might contain principles in opposition to previous ones. At times he held the present to be an absolute expression of human possibility a Leibnizian position. But at other times he would agree that there had been a slow evolution in civility, very much like the general position of the philosophes. Yet at other times, in his Vancement of Humanity, he viewed history as a syncopated movement of coming into being and passing away.

he Vol of the Nation

Tho indlvdua h----Volk and the species each receive Herder's blessing as absolute forms of historical reality, e expressed the romantic notion of the negativity of the individual person, in absolute uniqueness. But the-nation wae also absolutely unique, and was also the unit of historical investigation, its spirit determining the being of the individual. Finally, humanity was the subject of history as well. The three levels seem to be interrelated and each relating, his idea of the Volk, the nation was taken over and made primary, but this was in an age of nationalism. Herder seems to have favored a cosmopolitanism in which each nation was unique but all expressed unity. Only in the complete and resonson of its uniqueness, its singular culture, however, was its unity. Tns idea na gr on Goethe. Ds manifestation of humanity, like French civility, could not be judged against another manifestation, like the culture of the Hottentots. In 18 the only historian of the age who was almost totally immune from the moira of his own values, not judging the blfs inferior to the whole peoples Q. In fact, Herder did not see humanity as a juxtaposition of whole and colored races, but rather as a continuum of shades without rgb boundaries separating one group from the next.
The principle of change in history was located by Herder within the Volk on an analogy to organic growth. Each nation was born, grew to a springtime youth, matured, hardened, and died. The motor of history was thus mysterious, hidden deep within the principle of life of the nation, yet moving according to a pattern nonetheless. The nation is simply another biological form like all other aspects of nature. But Herder's concept of nature is not the mechanical materialism of La Mettrie and Condorcet. It is above all creative and vital. The nation is a spiritual form within the garden of nature.

How must the man have been astonished, who first saw the wonders of the creation of a living being—globules, with fluids shooting between them, become a living plant; and from this point an animal forms itself. rdr conues until the being is complete, a far cry from ondillac's statu. What would he who saw this wonder for the first time call it? There, he would say, is a living organic power: I know not whence it came, or what it intrinsically is:... The new creature is no ng but the realization of an idea of creative Nature, Who never thinks inactively. Rather strike at the passive sense of the NeWtonlan worl7"

It is in analogy to this vitalistic universe, beyond the faculty of reason, that Herder gives his concept of the nation. The national spirit is effected by the natural climate, but climate is a "chaos of causes" and no direct cause and effect can be found, as Montesquieu tried to show. For the nation is a product not primarily of climate, but of the creative genius of humanity represented in the particular people or Volk. All these capacities of man are developed in each Volk in special ways conforming to their "genius. The senses, the feelings, the imagination, the reason are all different in each people. Herder was one of the first to recognize mythology as a manifestation of a particular culture. Rather than dismissing myth as irrational, Herder lay aware of its importance. "...the mythology of every people is an expression of the particular mode, in which they viewed nature...n Every manifestation of the human capacities is determined not by climate, not by reason, but by culture, by the spirit of the Volk as embodied in their traditions and customs. Against the philosophers' individualism based on the rational capacity of each man, Herder submerges the Individual in the cohesive spirituality of the nation. The way that we experience our feelings is influenced by our culture and Herder proposes to write a history of the feeling of love as it manifested differently all around the globe, an idea the philosophers would hardly deem worthy of historical study.

Thus Herder indicates the interaction of nature and culture as an autonomous sphere within yet natural in its inner being. History is the real of culture but culture is biological spirit. Ierder only distinguished culture or spirit r nature long enough to steep its reality in organic, natural, vitalist analogies.
Aesthetics and Hlæt Herder was influences by Winckelmann's reasearches into Greek art, which showed a parallel development between art and
morality. The art of the Greeks displayed an inner evolution from an austere, early purity, to a late, ornate decay. This transition was paralleled by a similar evolution of the moral strength of the Greeks. Winckelmann's art history demonstrated to Herder the utility of cultural development; the history of art and the history or morally we expressions of a latent history of culture. Cultura was the unifying thread spun through national histories and the nature of change was organic, not causal. Herder described the decline and fall of a mode from youth to degeneracy. The perfect expression of a national culture was in the fullness of its youth. The analogy of you had both a biological and an aesthetic sense to Herder: youth was a time of organic virility and a time of harmonious beauty. The decline of one meant a degeneration, a senescence of culture, in which life became brittle, rigid, permeated by the aroma of death, of lifeless immobility and hardness. In this way, Herder introduced the aesthetic concept of beauty into the philosophy of history.

The Germanic Interlude

Herder struck down the polons of Voltaire and Condorcet on every point. Whereas history was for the philosophers a rise of science, of mathematical reason through the ages, Herder celebrated the relativity of ideas, their equal validity and the primary importance of the feelings in history. If Condorcet foresaw a universal society based on the undeniable superiority of European civilization, a uniform world of enlightenment, science and technology, Herder eulogized the equality of the primitives. He followed Rousseau in revaluing the savage and the emotions at the expense of reason and civilization.

One of the outcomes of Herder's anti-enlightenment philosophy of latency, was a new understanding for the middle ages. For the philosophers, the middle ages were a time of total darkness, almost of non-history, in which humanity was suppressed under the yoke of the Catholic Church and reason gave way to superstition and magic. Like the later Romantic poets, Herder found a genuine expression of life in the Middle Ages. He saw these centuries as a peak of a unified culture in which the human personality experienced a parallel progression of reason and emotion.

For the Christian hierarchy, Herder did not agree that it was a universal disaster. He judged the Church in the context of its times, a period of uncertainty and barbarism. Which the survival of Europe was threatened by alien invasions. Rome held Europe together during this time of troubles and she must be given credit for it. The Ecclesial organization spread all over Europe and united Europe for the first time, an invaluable accomplishment. Rome also was a countervailing force against the brutality of the nobility, protecting the lower classes from its arbitrary power. Herder found merit in the Church because it brought together, it unified Europe, it helped give birth to a Volk. He condemned it also Wb it went
against his historical ideal of harmonious cultural unity. The crusades were a catastrophe because they did not further the inner cohesion of the nation, but imperialistically spread it out, expanded it to areas where it did not belong, brought it in confrontation with genuine cultures in the middle.
East. erderls attack on cultural imperlalism was n dlrect k - J oppositlon to Condorcet's hope that the hole world would become llke Europe, enlightened and rational. For Herder the greatest evll ln history is the destruction of a genuine culture by foreigners and European colonization and imperlalism threatened the Integrity of Humanity. Whereas Condorcet sa the indirect benefit of colonlzation as the spread of enlightenment and the progress of umanlty, erder saw only the corruption of umanlty. The cross-fertlllzaton of cultures was for Condorcet a benefit, while for Herder lt was lmposslble since each culture had to develop Independently and the splrlt of the Volk was talnted and even de-stroyed by Intermingling. This Idea, In the hands of later German Ideologlsts of nationalism, Would become a Justlficatlon for racism,

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Herder s phllosoFhrCI--hle----ywwas the seminal work for later historicism. Mitlted as It was by the idea of Humanity, Herder's glorlficatlon of the Volk led Inevltabby to relativsm. Although the Volk at one level was an expression of the fullness of Humanity, the absolute of Herder's philosophy of history Nas ln the end the nation and not Humanity. For the splrlt was embodied fnally ln the creatlvity of the natlon and humanity became empty of meangng. At times, Herder's attitude toward the parade of humanity through the aes was optlmistic, a deep oy at the variety and beauty of anknd. But the dominant tone of hls wok ls melancholla, an inescapable senæe of tragedy stemming fkom the relatlvlty and fmlitude of man's creations. For all nations must dle, given the biologi¢al analgy and the future could not be antlcpated wLth pure hope, as It was for Condorcet. Faih ln the beneflcent destiny of humanity was lmpossible for Herder with h eye fled on the suffering and paln, the mlserly and happlness that domlnated the nation ln its death throes. Although he felt that the destructive forces ln nature were outwelghd by the preservlng and creatlve forces, the process of human evolution Itslf was strewn with the tangled corpses of man's misery. Historlcal evolution was no carefree, easy-oing advance toward perfection äs n seemed ln many ways to the reaer ch. ather history was filled with labo.r palns and the screamfL f bXth, with the horror of decay and the holloN yells of the dyling. A profound sadness overcome the hlstorlan when he contemplates the cyclical rise and fall of natlons. The permanence of mankind is an empLy word wth a holow rlng,
compared to the suffering accompanying changes. In the flux and reflux, in the rise and fall of nations little seems eternal and all is subject to the perishability of nature. The law of birth and death is a tragic fate for man and while the seeds of regeneration are germinating, the rotting smell of decay is the condition of others. History is a continual struggle toward a goal that is not clear. The goal is humility itself but it hardly seems to give solace to those taking its leave. Erder writes:

"Melancholy fate of the human race' in all their exertions chained to an Iton's wheel, to Sisyphus's stone, and condemned to the prospect of a Tantalus. We must will; and we must die, without having seen the fruit of our labors ripen, or leaned a single result of human endeavors from the whole course of history. If a people stand alone, its characters wear away under the hand of time; if it come into collision with others, it is thrown into the crucible, where its impression is equally erased. Thus we hew out blocks of ice; thus we write on the waves or the sea: the wave glides by, the ice melts; our palaces, and our thoughts, are both no more."

This was the final word of the Pletist Pastor.