Cognition and Sensation: A Reconstruction of Herder’s Quasi-Empiricism

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In this paper, I will attempt a reconstruction of Herder’s central thesis in the philosophy of mind, which we might term ‘quasi-empiricism,’ drawing on his On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul (1778) and On Images, Poetry, and Fable (1787). Because of the ‘roughed up’ style of Herder’s philosophical prose, I take this to be a non-trivial task, requiring both heavy interpretive work and philosophical assessment in order to render it into a clear, coherent doctrine. I will decompose the thesis into its two parts: first, its empiricist aspect, which amounts to the claim that our (physically grounded) sensations determine our cognitions; second, its ‘quasi’ aspect, which amounts to the claim that our sensations depend on, in some sense, our conceptual framework, instantiated by our cognitions. I will show that Herder’s commitment to an empiricist picture is bound up with his commitment to a naturalistic concept of the mind, and that the complication of the ‘quasi’ arm of the thesis, that sensations depend on concepts, must be construed in light of these naturalistic commitments. Along the way, I will resist objections from a ‘pure empiricist’ standpoint that attempt to undermine Herder’s motivation for positing the influence of con-

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cepts on sensations, as well as an interpretation (Beiser’s) that unnecessarily weakens Herder’s thesis by improperly construing its naturalistic commitment.

I. The Empiricist Arm

Herder’s commitment to an empiricist picture is clearly articulated in both *On the Cognitions* and *On Images*: “[the soul] only cognizes what this place shows it…. It must use the irritations, the senses, the forces and opportunities which became its own through a fortunate, unearned inheritance”iii; “Human cognition starts from the senses and from experience, and everything comes back to them.”iv For Herder, all cognition is dependent upon sensation, so that reason would be unable to operate without the experiential materials provided to it by the senses.

We can also see that Herder is committed to a stronger claim, that cognitions are not only dependent on their corresponding sensations, but moreover constitutedv by them, in light of his naturalistic picture of the mind. Structurally, *On the Cognitions* builds the mind from the ground up, so to speak, starting with the physical phenomenon of irritations and eventually proceeding to the cognitions which these irritations constitute. Herder identifies irritations as contractions and expansions of bodily fibers, which he asserts as conditions for mental phenomena: “perhaps without this sowing of obscure stirrings and irritations our most divine forces [i.e.: those of the mind] would not exist.”vi He grounds this claim in the correlation of behaviors with the stimulation of these fibers: “The courage of the lion, like the fearfulness of the hare, lies ensouled in its inner structure…. The heart of Achilles was shaken in its plexus by black anger, it required irritability to become an Achilles.”vii Strictly speaking, the final sentence asserts irritations as only a necessary condition (‘required’) for cognitions, but soon after Herder articulates the stronger claim that irritations are also sufficient conditions: “In my modest opinion, no psychology is possible which is not in each step determinate physiology.”viii Mental phenomena are thus determined by physical phenomena of irritations.ix

The link with Herder’s empiricist position becomes clear
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once we note that sensations are realized by irritations, or, more precisely, that the term ‘sensation’ picks out a subset of irritations, namely those that stand in a causal relation to an external object via the senses: “All coarse senses, fibers, and irritations can only sense in themselves; the object must come in addition, touch them, and in a certain sense itself become one with them. Here a way is already opened for cognition outside us.” Thus, Herder’s empiricist picture emerges (unsurprisingly) as a naturalist one: mental states are determined by physical irritations, either, in the case of subjective states like emotions, by ‘irritations in themselves’ (i.e.: not causally related to a sense), or, in the case of objective cognitions (those whose content is about the external world), by irritations that stand in a causal relation to a sensory organ (sensations), which is in turn causally related to an external object.

It is important to note (as this will serve as a crucial premise later on), that while Herder commits himself to a naturalistic story about our mental states, he does not go so far as to reduce them to sensations, insofar as a reduction would imply elimination. One may find such a move appealing—given that we can show mental phenomena to be realized by physical phenomena (in this context, irritations), it is not a great leap further to claim that mental phenomena are identical to their physical realizers, and nothing ‘over and above’ them. But it is clear that Herder wants to avoid such a notion of cognitions: “the head has the power to bring sensations which flow through the body into a single representation, and to guide the former through the latter, which seems to be of such a different nature.” Here, when Herder refers to a ‘single representation,’ he seems to mean a cognition, which, in virtue of its apparently ‘different nature,’ should be considered distinct from its sensations, even if it is ultimately determined by these sensations. One way to motivate this is to note that if we take the singular nature of a cognition to be a genuine property, it is hard to see how we could explain this property if the cognition were merely a plurality of sensations. Thus, though our cognitions are determined by our physically grounded sensations, the term ‘cognition’ still picks out some-
thing beyond physical sensation—namely, the instantiation of a concept by a particular cognition.

II. The ‘Quasi’ Arm

Most empiricists would be more or less satisfied by the above picture by itself. But Herder complicates his picture by asserting that the interaction between sensations and cognitions is bidirectional; not only do sensations determine cognitions, but sensations depend on, in some sense, concepts, instantiated by cognitions. Before attempting to reconstruct this arm of Herder’s picture, it is important to clarify what this thesis cannot be asserting. One may initially contemplate the picture as one of simple ‘feedback,’ where sensations constitute a cognition, and that this cognition itself then influences the sensations which have determined it. This clearly cannot be Herder’s position, because it would violate his empiricist thesis; if the very cognition constituted by the sensations influences those same determining sensations, then either we are not dealing with the same cognition, because its determining sensations have been modified, or the cognition is not strictly determined by its sensations, because we are dealing with the same cognition across changes in the corresponding sensations, which are supposed to determine it. Whatever the ‘quasi’ aspect of Herder’s thesis amounts to, the ‘influence’ cognition in general has on sensations must come into play before the particular cognition those sensations determine does—otherwise, we lose the empiricist aspect of the picture.

First, assuming that a pure empiricist position is intuitively appealing in its own right, we must motivate Herder’s decision to complicate the picture. It seems that we can do so by noting two examples of radical conceptual difference that Herder describes which a purely empiricist picture would have trouble explaining. The first describes a Western Christian missionary who “smells of animal blood,” and is hindered in his communication with a Brahmin in virtue of this. While the example in the text is admittedly somewhat obscure, the thrust of it seems to be that the missionary fails to communicate with the Brahmin (i.e.: to yield the desired cognitions in the Brahmin) where, if an individ-
ual of the missionary’s own culture was placed in the position of the Brahmin and supplied with all of the same sensations (the missionary’s spoken utterances and the smell of animal blood) the desired cognitions would be yielded.

The second example notes that individuals of different nationalities tend to “understand something so different” in the context of, for example, viewing a painting, to the point that “If one could pursue this difference in the contributions of different senses through lands, times, and peoples, the matter would inevitably become an infinity.”

This ‘infinity’ of difference seems to imply (at least) the possibility of radically different cognitions yielded by identical external world phenomena that should, on a ‘pure empiricist’ picture, give rise to the same sensations (such as the same perception of a painting), and thus the same cognitions.

This second example, however, points to a second problem as well, which Herder does not explicitly recognize—one of conceptual convergence. That is, while one may be perplexed by the radical differences in cognitions between members of distinction nationalities, one may equally be perplexed by the similarity of cognitions between members of the same nationality. If it is possible at all for cognitions yielded from (nearly) identical sensations (strictly, from the external physical phenomena which give rise to those sensations) to diverge, why is it the case that they converge so clearly for members of the same nationality, so that Herder could divide up his example into the ‘Frenchmen, Italians and Dutchmen’ in the first place?

Herder seems to note two sorts of explanation available to the pure empiricist: 1. Differences (or similarity) in individual constitution; 2. Differences (or similarity) in ‘circles of sensations.’ According to (1), as Herder observes: “The deepest basis of our existence is individual, both in sensations and in thoughts” and that “[s]ons of a single tribal father who share a more identical [physiological] organization... inevitably think more similarly to each other.” A pure empiricist might argue that we can explain the failure of communication in the first instance and the differences in the understanding of the painting in the second in terms of physiology—if the sensory organs of the
missionary and Brahmin are sufficiently different, then surely their cognitions will not be identical, because their sensations are not. But this sort of explanation does not seem to suffice for the systematic nature of Herder’s examples: it is not that Herder is caught up in the case of any one missionary and Brahmin failing to communicate, but rather that almost any missionary and Brahmin would have this conceptual divergence in the supposed scenario. Likewise, it seems implausible to claim that there is sufficient systematic physiological difference between Frenchmen and Italians to explain their different understandings of the painting. A parallel point can be made for the phenomenon of conceptual convergence: it is implausible that we could divide up a group of individuals in a room according to nationality simply by examining the functional nature of their sensory organs!

According to (2), a pure empiricist might argue that the difference is a consequence different “circles of sensations” for members of different nationalities. That is, the missionary and Brahmin, or Frenchman and Italian, live in geographical regions with radically different sensory experiences, and so will of course have radically different conceptual frameworks, because concepts (instantiated by cognitions) rise up out of sensation. But it is unclear how such an example can come to bear on the present cases, because, in the examples being considered, the sensations (or, more precisely, the external world phenomena which give rise the sensations) are being held constant, so the sort of conceptual difference we are dealing with here is not simply a consequence of inhabiting different geographic or temporal realms. A pure empiricist may contend that, in the Brahmin example, the sensation of animal blood yields a volitional effect that then influences his cognition (say, that he desires not to be near particular sorts of slain animals, and this desire interferes with his cognitive process of understanding the missionary’s speech). Initially, it might seem that such a position is damaging to Herder, as he sees an intimate relation between our volitions and cognitions, “Would the head think if your heart did not beat?”, so that there is room for our volitions to influence our
cognitions. But it is unclear how the pure empiricist could push this line without discarding his own thesis about the determination of cognitions by sensations. For if two (nearly) identical sets of sensations could yield two radically different cognitions, then it does not seem that the cognition is determined by its sensations. To say that the difference is a consequence of the influence of volitions (or other cognitions, Herder takes them to be two sides of the same coin, see *Cognitions*, 215) without allowing this to play out on the level of sensations is to deny the empiricist, and moreover, possibly the naturalistic thesis (since the physical story behind such influence is unclear if one denies that this influence is realized on the level of physically grounded sensations), which is to discard precisely what is presupposed by both Herder and the pure empiricist. That is, if we take a naturalistic and empiricist position as our starting point, it is hard to see how complicating the ‘higher-level’ picture can avoid complicating our talk on the level of sensations and irritations.

Likewise, in the case of conceptual convergence, it seems that individuals classified under a given nationality, who share a great many concepts, do not have the corresponding shared ‘circle of sensations’ that the pure empiricist would posit (think of a factory worker in Paris and a fisherman on the coast of the Mediterranean). To explain conceptual divergence in the case of presumed convergence of sensation, and conceptual convergence in the case of presumed divergence of sensation, our sensations, which, on an empiricist thesis determine our cognitions, must be determined by something beyond the external world (or physiological organization of sensory organs) in which they stand in a relation to, as such explanations fail to suffice for the examples in question. And the obvious entities to do this explanatory work are the differing conceptual frameworks themselves.

If sensations depend on, in some sense, concepts (instantiated by cognitions), we can effectively explain the above examples. The Brahmin’s sensation corresponding to the animal blood depends upon his concept of its type, which is distinct from that of the missionary. In virtue of this, the Brahmin and missionary have distinct sensations and so, in light of the empiricist thesis
that cognitions are determined by their sensations), distinct cognitions. Likewise, Frenchmen and Italians plausibly have different conceptual frameworks, in virtue of their distinct languages (more on this relation below), and so conceptual influence on their perception of the painting can explain their distinct cognitions of it. And in the case of conceptual convergence, the shared conceptual framework (once again, in light of the shared language) of members of a nationality would help to unify their cognitions, if we posit that the particular sensations an individual has depend on the conceptual framework that individual inhabits.

The crucial question, then, is how sensations depend on concepts. It seems that Herder could mean one of two things here: either simply that the irritations which yield cognitions of concepts in some way influence our sensations, or that concepts, by means of cognitions, interact with sensations in a sense over and above their instantiating irritations. I will argue that the first reading is implausible in light of Herder’s non-eliminative naturalism, and so attempt to reconstruct a possible line the latter reading could take. Before we begin, however, it is important to discard a third possibility that seems to present itself initially: that the concept, independent of the cognitions which instantiate it, could influence our sensations in some way. Such a possibility seems to be a non-starter for Herder, as it seems that to talk of concepts independent from cognitions would require us to posit an ‘ideal’ or ‘Platonic’ realm for concepts, for it is unclear how else we could talk about concepts in a physically-grounded sense. But it is precisely such a move that Herder rejects in his philosophy of language.\textsuperscript{xix, xx} Moreover, even if we were to permit such talk of ‘Platonic’ concepts, it is exceptionally obscure how such concepts could stand in any naturalistic relation to physical phenomena, as the two radically differ in type. And, according to Beiser, it is precisely these sorts of concerns which Herder’s naturalism is seeking to avoid: “if we are dualists… then we cannot account for the fact that [physical and mental or conceptual phenomena] interact.”\textsuperscript{xxi}

On the ‘irritations only’ reading, our story would seem to go
as such: my concept of green, for example, is instantiated in a cognition which is yielded by a set of irritations. These irritations exert causal influence on my perception of an object, such that my sensations of that object are formulated in such a way as to yield a particular cognition of the object as green. Such a picture seems implausible for two reasons. First, by itself, it does not seem terribly ‘quasi-empiricist:’ at the core, we simply have a one physical phenomenon exerting causal influence on another physical phenomenon. The concept of green itself seems to be doing no explanatory work—the sensation being influenced only depends on the concept insofar as the irritations doing the causal influence happen to correspond to a cognition of that concept. But the story, by itself, in no way guarantees that the irritations doing the causal work do in fact correspond to such a cognition. Second, to extend this concern, it seems that we are pushed towards an eliminivist notion of cognitions—if all that is doing work in the story are the irritations, it seems that we have no room for talk of cognitions beyond their use as shorthand for a certain set of irritations. But it is clear that Herder rejects such a notion of cognitions (see final paragraph of section I). Thus, it seems that Herder’s sensations depend on concepts (and their instantiating cognitions) cannot be satisfactory fleshed out solely in terms of irritations.

Thus, it seems that we must understand something more robust by the idea that our sensations depend on our cognitions. This is not to say that we reject the above picture of irritations outright, for to do so would imply an interaction between cognitions and physical sensations that is not ultimately grounded physically, and so force us into a dualistic distinction which Herder rejects. Rather, the point is that such a story by itself is, though necessary, insufficient to explain the influence of concepts on sensations, and so we must introduce more on the level of cognitions and the mind itself into the picture.

I take there to be two aspects essential to Herder’s explanation: the characterization of mental faculties as ‘forces’ and the ‘translation’ of sensations to ‘images’ by the mind. Herder’s use of ‘force’ refers to the active aspect of the mind, in contrast to its
receptive, passive aspect: “Every higher degree of power, of attention and abstraction, of voluntary choice and freedom, lies in this obscure foundation of the most intimate irritation and consciousness [that the soul has] of itself, of its force, of its inner life.” In order to maintain the ‘sui generis’ (to use Beiser’s term) character of the mind, Herder uses ‘force’ to pick out the way in which a mind (by means of its ‘ensouled’ body) can actively influence its world, in a way that a non-ensouled body could not. The purely empiricist aspect of Herder’s story fails to do justice to this aspect of the mind, as the story is purely receptive: the mind receives sensations that determine its cognitions. Moreover, while Herder observes that many are tempted to decompose the mind into a variety of forces, each corresponding to a particular mental faculty (e.g. imagination, memory), he emphasizes that the mind is a unified entity: “all these forces are at bottom only a single force, if they are to be human, good, and useful…. the same energy of the soul.” That is, Herder sees an intimate link between the active and unified characteristics of the mind.

Admittedly, beyond the active and unified nature of the mind, Herder has little to say in On the Cognitions or On Images, about what ‘force’ actually amounts to. Beiser seems to infer from Herder’s concept of force a ‘vitalist’ picture, describing them as “organic powers,” claiming that Herder “maintains that we know the effects of a power from experience, and that we are therefore justified in assuming some organic powers as the causes of those effects.” But because Herder is obscure on the nature of these ‘organic powers,’ the question is left open as to whether ‘force’ actually refers to any empirical phenomena, and, moreover, the obscurity of the concept hinders its explanatory value for a theory of the mind.

It seems, however, that we can take Herder’s concept of force, instead of picking out material aspect of the mind, rather formal conditions for any satisfactory material explanation of the mind. That is, to posit that the mind is essentially a unified force is to specify criteria for whatever empirical answer we are meant to supply—the concept itself need not be taken to do any material explanatory work here. In fact, we see a similar move being
made even in the case of irritations, which seem to have clear empirical grounding for Herder: “I could give ten formulas for a solution in empty and uncertain expressions.... But what would all that mean? Basically, still just that it irritates when it irritates, and that everyone believes.”\textsuperscript{xvii} Even in the case of irritations, Herder seems unconcerned with the particular empirical explanation (‘expression’) that is put forth (at least for his purposes in sketching out a theory of the mind), and so it would seem reasonable to take this to be his general position, including on the concept of force. Herder’s obscurity about the particular mechanics of irritations and forces is not the consequence of a thin material explanation, but rather the necessary consequence of an attempt to set out the formal conditions of what it is to be a mind. In the case of irritations, the mind must be determined by some physical phenomena (for which the term ‘irritations’ stands in), and must nevertheless be considered an active, unified entity (which the term ‘force’ specifies). And as Beiser himself notes, we posit these criteria in the first place because they describe our experience of minds. Whatever material explanation is to be given, Herder is setting out the formal criteria it must satisfy.\textsuperscript{xviii}

The second aspect of Herder’s explanation of the dependence of sensations on cognitions is that of ‘translation.’ In \textit{On the Cognitions}, Herder describes language as the “medium of our self-feeling and mental consciousness”, which seems to describe the relation of our irritations and (‘self-feeling’) and cognitions (‘mental consciousness’).\textsuperscript{xviii} The point is clearer in \textit{On Images}: “When the soul sees objects as images, or rather when it transforms them into mental images, according to what rules that are imprinted on it, what is it doing but translating.”\textsuperscript{xxix} That is, in order for one to form a cognition of an object in perception (an ‘image’), a process of translation is required, which is carried out through the vehicle of language. Moreover, this process of translation is taken as necessary to satisfy the formal criterion of the unity of the mind:

The object has so little in common with the image, the image with the thought, the thought with the expression, the visual perception with the
name.... Only the *communicability* among our several senses and the *harmony prevailing between them*, whereupon this communication rests—only this constitutes the inner form of the so-called perfectibility of man.xxx

Because of the disparate nature of cognitions, sensations, and objects, we need a medium, language, to unify them. But Herder takes the need to posit this medium to follow from the ‘harmony,’ or unity, of the mind, which we take as one of the formal criteria which any theory of the mind must satisfy. The final step is to note that, in Herder’s philosophy of language, language and concepts are intimately bound up, so that it is in the very translation of our sensations that concepts come to bear on sensations.xxx That is, in order to think of an object of perception (supplied to us by sensations), we must do so linguistically, which requires a translation of the sensations into an ‘image,’ and in this act of translation we find the application of concepts to sensations, and thus the ‘quasi’ aspect of Herder’s quasi-empiricism. The formal criteria of ‘force’ square neatly here, as it is the unified nature of the mind that leads us to posit a medium that can ensure this unity, while the active natures enables the act of translation, and thus the application of concepts to sensations, to be the way in which language, as the medium, establishes this unity.

We may thus return to the question of how this notion of ‘dependence’ of sensations on cognitions/concepts is to be understood. One may initially be tempted to characterize the relation as causal—the act of translation exerts a causal influence on the sensations provided to a subject, yielding a distinct sensation. But it is unclear that we should take Herder’s picture to be describing the distinct temporal moments that a causal relation would imply—for, as observed above, Herder seems to be establishing the formal framework for an empirical theory of the mind, rather than the empirical theory itself. That is, we need not take Herder’s claim to be that we have sensations at one moment, and then at the next, after this process of translation occurs, we find ourselves with a cognition.
Rather, if we instead understand the act of translation as one of presentation of sensations to the mind in a comprehensible mode, so that the ‘different natures’ of sensations and cognitions are able to stand in a relation to each other, the notion of the ‘dependency’ of sensations on cognitions can be seen as a consequence of what Herder takes to be the formal criteria for something to be a mind. That is, the mind is a unified entity, and this unity requires some medium to connect what seem to be disparate aspects of it, such as its cognitions and sensations, and Herder takes the medium that does this work to be language, for thought is essentially linguistic in nature. But in positing language as the medium by which the mind is unified, we see that sensations must depend upon cognitions, which in turn must be presented in a linguistic mode. That is, to employ a language in translation is necessarily to employ a conceptual framework (instantiated by cognitions), and so if the integration of sensations with cognitions requires the former, it must also require the latter. We thus come to see the notion of dependence here not as causal, but as a logical presupposition of Herder’s unified concept of the mind. We can take Herder’s ‘quasi-empiricist’ thesis, then, not as a nebulous attempt at material explanation of the mechanics of the mind, but rather as the specification of the form that any such material explanation must take.
Notes

i. Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) studied under Kant at the University of Konigsberg, producing in his career a variety of texts in disciplines we would now recognize as philosophy of language, mind, and history, as well as political philosophy. Michael Forster observes that “Herder can claim to have established whole disciplines which we now take for granted” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2007), such as modern philosophy of language, which assumes the intimate relation between thought and language Herder posited, as well as modern hermeneutics and linguistics. In his historical context, we can also see his philosophy as something of a reaction to the idealism centered on the thought of his professor at Konigsberg. Some aspects of this reaction can be seen in the reconstruction attempted here, though I will not draw out these connections explicitly.

ii. Part of my hope is that this paper will encourage a fresh examination of Herder’s philosophy of mind (and his philosophy generally) in the Anglophone community, as it bears significant relations to modern analytic philosophy in its emphasis on the relation of thought and language and the role of philosophy in the science of the mind. Because of limitations of scope and length, I cannot address the contemporary relevance of Herder at length here. I do, however, hope to initiate such a conversation with this paper.


v. It is important to note, as will be emphasized below, that constitution here does not entail eliminative reduction.
That is, the purported fact that a mental phenomenon is made up of physical phenomena (‘irritations’) does not entail that the mental phenomenon is nothing over and above, or distinct from, those physical phenomena, on Herder’s view. Or another way of putting this, physical phenomena may instantiate tokens of a mental type, but this does not entail that the type itself is merely physical. To avoid the implication of such reduction, I will hereafter use the weaker term ‘determination,’ but this should be taken to refer to a non-eliminative constitutive relation between the mental and physical.

vi. Herder, “Cognitions,” 189
vii. ibid, 195
viii. ibid, 196, emphasis his.
ix. An interesting concern, a detailed discussion of which is unfortunately beyond our scope, questions whether Herder’s commitment to the determination of mental phenomena by the (strictly speaking) biological phenomena of irritations actually commits him to a genuinely naturalist picture. Specifically, if one reads Herder in a vitalist light (see, for example, Beiser’s approach below), one may see room for holding this determinate relation and denying that the biological, and thus the mental, are determined by the physical. Naturalism would thus seem to be an inappropriate characterization. If such a position, however, justifies its vitalist reading by emphasizing Herder’s reference to the ‘forces’ [Krafte] of the soul, it would seem to be in troubled waters, as will be argued below.

x. Herder, “Cognitions,” 203, emphasis his.

To be clear, by a ‘pure empiricist’ position, I mean a position on which our sensations determine our cognitions, full stop—no ‘feedback’ or conceptual dependence for those sensations.

xiii. Herder, “Cognitions,” 220
xiv. Of course, in order to make the example interesting, we
must assume that Brahmin is typically able to understand language used by the missionary.

xv. Herder, “Cognitions,” 204

xvi. ‘Nationality’ here is meant to refer to a group of individuals who share a language, culture, history, etc. This sense of nationality need not correspond directly to the nation-states of Herder’s time or ours (though Herder does refer to such states in the passage referenced).


xviii. ibid, 220

xix. Michael Forester, introduction to Philosophical Writings, xv

xx. This may lead one to ask how I can talk about any concept at all, independent from a particular instantiation of it as a cognition. One way to resolve this concern is to assert that when I talk about my concept of green, I need not refer to any historic instance of my thought about green, but that I do need to refer to a possible cognition of the concept.

xxi. Frederick C. Besier, “Herder’s Philosophy of Mind” in The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 146

xxii. Herder, “Cognitions,” 208

xxiii. ibid, 209, emphasis his

xxiv. ibid, 211

xxv. Beiser, “Herder’s Philosophy of Mind,” 148

xxvi. Herder, “Cognitions,” 200

xxvii. Perhaps this is what philosophy of mind ought to be disposed towards generally—to establish the formal framework in which any empirical science of the mind must operate within. A heavy reliance on a particular fine-grained scientific theory in a philosophical theory of the mind would thus get things backwards: our scientific theory should be held accountable to satisfying certain philosophical requires in order to be a sufficient theory of mind. Though, to be sure, the actual (as well as probably optimal) strategy sees the two approaches in a productive
dynamic. The key is that philosophy of mind ought to formalize its theories in such a way that a non-trivial change in the science of the mind doesn’t bring the whole philosophical edifice crashing to the ground. As we can see with Herder: there is a sense in which his philosophy of mind transcends the scientific moment he engages with. Though the latter may be confined to the dust bins of history, there is still life in Herder.

xxviii. Herder, “Cognitions,” 211
xxix. Herder, “Images,” 359
xxx. ibid 359, emphasis his.
xxxi. See, for example, “Fragments on Recent German Literature,” in Philosophical Writings, 48-49.
Bibliography


