HERDER'S CONCEPT OF BEING AND THE INFLUENCE OF KANT'S PRE-CRITICAL CONSIDERATION OF THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

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Herder's earliest philosophical writing, the essay fragment *Versuch über das Sein*, explores the concept of Being (Sein) in dialogue with Kant's pre-critical *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes*. In this often critically omitted work, Herder arrives at a number of insights that would be determinative for the development of his later thought. This examination details Herder's concept of Being as the transcendent ground of predication, his contention that Being can never be experienced directly, and his consequent conclusion that the shape of philosophical inquiry should not be one of abstract speculation, but instead one of non-foundational, historically aware, empirical observation. This consideration then briefly addresses how the concept of Being informs Herder's philosophy of science, history, language and religion.

Keywords: Herder – Kant – Ontological argument – Being – Ontology – Philosophy of religion

    I. A unifying idea for Herder. Increasingly, the case is made for the importance of Herder as a philosopher of first rank.[1] However, the range of his production presents any

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[1] This is particularly the case for the English-speaking world. Some recent publications addressing Herder's legacy have included: Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *Philosophical Legacies: Essays on the Thought of Kant, Hegel, and Their Contemporaries* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2008); Michael Forster, *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Robert Edward Norton, *Herder's Aesthetics and the European Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); 'The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 68 (2008), pp. 635-658; 'Herder as Faust', *Goethe's Faust and Cultural Memory*, ed. Lorna Fitzsimmons (Lanham: Lehigh University Press, 2012), pp. 49-67; Charles Taylor, 'The Importance of Herder' in *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration*, ed. Edna Ullmann-Margalit, Avishai Margalit (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), pp. 40-63; John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). There has been less of a need to make the case in the German language, nevertheless a range of recent publications have sought to demonstrate Herder's importance. A few examples include: *Johann Gottfried Herder: Geschichte und Kultur*, ed. Martin Bollacher (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1994); *Herder im Spiegel der Zeiten: Verwerfungen der Rezeptionsgeschichte und Chancen einer Relektüre*, ed. Tilman Borsche (Munich: Fink, 2006); *Herder und die Künste: Ästhetik, Kunsttheorie, Kunstgeschichte*, eds. Elisabeth Décultot and

reader approaching his work with the difficulty of arriving at a general characterisation of his thought. His authorship is immense, and spans a multiplicity of fields, with the result that we are often presented with many versions of Herder depending on which aspect of his work is being focused upon: Philosophy, anthropology, theology, linguistics, historicism, and so forth. The interpretative task is to locate a unifying idea that will help us to hold Herder's diverse writings together, and come to an understanding of his overall aim as a thinker. This represents a substantive endeavour, to which this examination aspires to make a contribution. It will explore Herder's very first surviving philosophical work *Versuch über das Sein* (1763), in which he offers a response to Kant's pre-critical consideration of the ontological argument as set out in *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (1762).

In this text Kant proffered a revised version of the ontological argument. In his consideration we find an early version of his rejection of Being as a predicate; one which we later see revised and expanded in the context of his Critical philosophy in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781).[2] However, what concerns us here is less Kant's critique of the philosophical *locus classicus*, as his argument for the necessity of Being and the equation of this Being with God. Because Being contains the basis for all possibilities, all things are only possible through its function as their ground. Since the possibility of the existence of all *a posteriori* reality rests upon Being, Kant maintains that he can offer an *a priori* argument for the necessary existence of Being, and therefore God. Herder's *Versuch* accepted the spirit of Kant's exploration of Being, and its claim that Being constitutes the ground of predication, but it rejected the *a priorism* of Kant's elaboration. Instead, we find Herder developing a philosophical concept of Being (Sein) that would guide and shape his subsequent philosophy. Consequently, in explicating this formative idea, we can gain an important interpretative principle for the on going process of elucidating Herder's thought.

This consideration will first introduce Herder's *Versuch* essay, and briefly detail its limited reception. It will then take up Kant's consideration of the ontological argument in *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund*, focusing upon his development of the conception of Being as the ground of predication. Following this, it is possible to move on to Herder's response to Kant, which accepts the idea of Being as an absolute ground, but rejects any speculative *a priori* knowledge of it. Instead, we find Herder developing a set of insights based upon the fact that Being can never be experienced directly, in an unconditioned form. From these, he arrives at the conclusion that the shape of philosophical inquiry should not be one of abstract speculation; rather it should proceed in a manner that is non-

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Gerhard Lauer (Heidelberg: Winter, 2013); Hans Dietrich Irmscher, *Johann Gottfried Herder* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001); Martin Kessler, *Johann Gottfried Herder, der Theologe unter den Klassikern. Das Amt des Generalsuperintendenten von Sachsen-Weimar* (Berlin: de Greuter, 2007); Michael Maurer, *Johann Gottfried Herder: Leben und Werk* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2014).

[2] Immanuel Kant, *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Royal Prussian (subsequently German) Academy of Sciences (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1902-), III, A592/B620-A602/B630.

foundational, historically aware, and empirically orientated. Finally, this examination turns to briefly address how the concept of Being informs Herder's philosophy of science, history, language and religion.

II. Kant and the idea of Being. The history of the fragmentary essay *Versuch über das Sein* is one of neglect. This text was excluded from the still–authoritative complete edition of Herder's works *Johann Gottfried Herder Sämtliche Werke* (1877 – 1913), edited by Bernhard Suphan, probably upon the basis of its fragmentary nature.[3] Rudolf Haym, author of the definitive two-volume biography of Herder considered it to be little more than a summary of Kant's essay.[4] The *Versuch* was finally published some one hundred and seventy three years after it was first penned as part of a consideration titled 'Herder als Schüler Kants' by Gottfried Martin, in Kant-*Studien*.[5] The inauspicious year of its publication, 1936, hardly allowed it to be received in an environment conducive to academic reflection. Eventually, Herder's essay finally became widely accessible in 1985, with the Ulrich Gaier edited edition of *Johann Gottfried Herder Werke*.[6] Consequently, the work has played little role in the reception and interpretation of Herder's thought. To understand Herder's aim in the *Versuch* we must turn to the work to which it was responding, Kant's pre-critical *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund*. Kant's work was written in answer to a question set by the Prussian Royal Academy on the topic of 'Evidence in the Metaphysical Sciences.' The paper did not win the prize; that honour went to Moses Mendelssohn, who commented favourably upon Kant's effort.[7]

Kant's essay considers the ontological argument, and in this context takes up the problem of absolute Being. In opposing it, Kant makes the claim that he would later further develop in the first *Kritik*, that 'existence is not a predicate'.[8] In the case of any proposition concerning existence, Kant maintains that the source of one's cognition concerning an object, either in the form of sight or testimony, must be evaluated based upon its actual validity. Predicates, he explains, only suggest possibilities, that is, 'no more is posited in a real thing than is posited in a merely possible thing'.[9] This conclusion is then

[3] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Herders Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. by Bernhard Suphan, 33 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877 – 1913).

[4] Rudolf Haym, *Herder nach seinem Leben und seinen Werken dargestellt* (Berlin: R. Gaertner, 1880 – 85), I, 34.

[5] Gottfried Martin 'Herder als Schüler Kants'*, Kant-Studien*, XLI (1936), 294-306.

[6] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Johann Gottfried Herder Werke*, ed. Ulrich Gaier et al. (Frankfurt am Main: DKV, 1985) I, pp. 9-21.

[7] Immanuel Kant, *The One Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, trans. by Gordon Treash (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), p. 9; Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Fritz Bamberger (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: F. Frommann, 1971), 5.I, pp. 602-606.

[8] Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755 – 1770,* ed. and trans. David Waldorf and Ralf Meerbote, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 117; *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften*, II, 72. All further references to Kant these two editions.

[9] Kant, 121; II, 75.

applied to the ontological argument:

> If I say: 'God is omnipotent' all that is being thought is the logical relation between God and omnipotence, for the latter is a characteristic mark of the former. Nothing further is being posited here. Whether God is, that is to say, whether God is posited absolutely or exists [absolute gesetzt sei oder existiere], is not contained in the original assertion at all.[10]

According to Kant, the existence of the subject must be presupposed since predicates themselves are indeterminate with respect to the existence of their subject.

This leads Kant to consider the nature of Being. First, he determines that Being is identical to 'positing or setting', and this may be done either relatively (A is relative to B) or absolutely (A is A). In the case of absolute positing 'what is considered is not merely a relation, but the thing posited in and for itself'.[11] In such a case, Kant continues, 'being is the same as existence.'[12] There is no relation between A and another predicate B, but simply A in relation to itself. In the case of absolute positing, 'the thing itself, with all predicates, *is* absolutely [ist schlechthin gesetzt].'[13] Such absolute positing carries with it what Kant calls 'absolute real necessity [die absolute Realnotwendigkeit]', and as such it is the 'ultimate foundation [Hauptgrund]'.[14] This absolute postulation constitutes the ultimate ground upon which all relative postulates can be thought. Accordingly, Kant sets up the situation whereby a single absolute postulation can be isolated through the removal of all predicates. This is Being: 'Since existence is not a predicate, contingency cannot be applied at all to existence'.[15]

Based upon this reasoning, Kant turns to an *a priori* consideration of this absolute Being, to which he assigns the attributes usually ascribed to God: unique, simple, immutable, 'the supreme reality [die höchste Realität]',[16] and a mind. In support of this, Kant offers three arguments: First, that will and understanding are 'true reality [*wahre Realität*]' and as such must exist together with absolute reality in one thing. Second, if absolute Being did not possess these properties, then any other being that had them would take precedence over absolute Being. Finally, that a mind is necessary to be the principle ground of the order, beauty and perfection present in nature.[17] With this list of characteristics one can see how Kant's consideration of existence leads back to a consideration of divinity. Kant summarises:

> There exists something absolute necessarily [schlechterdings notwendig]. It is one in its essence; it is simple in its substance; it is a mind according to its nature; it is eternal in

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[10] Kant, 119; II, 72.
[11] Kant, 121; II, 75.
[12] Kant, 119; II, 73.
[13] Kant, 120; II, 74.
[14] Kant, 126-27; II, 82.
[15] Kant, 128; II, 83.
[16] Kant, 128-131; II, 83-87.
[17] Kant, 132; II, 87.

its duration; it is immutable in its constitution; and it is all-sufficient in respect of all that is possible and real. It is a god. I am not here offering a determinate definition of the concept of God […] But I am certain that the being, whose existence we have just proved, is precisely the Divine Being, whose differing characteristics will be reduced, in one way or another, to the most concise formula.[18]

According to Kant, this position, arrived at through pure *a priori* deliberation, is an improvement upon the considerations of God offered by Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza. He explains that his position does not presuppose the thinker, other minds, or external reality. Rather, it has the uncomplicated quality of being 'an argument derived from the internal characteristic mark of absolute necessity.'[19] Compared to Descartes, he argues that it provides a more sound ground than the *cogito*: 'I who think am not such an absolutely necessary being, for I am not the ground of all reality and I am subject to change'.[20] In comparison to Leibniz, he maintains that it allows for the existence of evil without the necessity of having to argue that it is part of the best of all possible worlds. He writes: 'the world is not an accident of God, for there are to be found within the world conflict, deficiency, changeability, all of which are the opposites of the determinations to be found in the divinity'.[21] Finally, distinguishing his position from Spinoza, he argues that it does not reduce all reality into a single monistic substance: 'God is not the only substance which exists; all other substances only exist in dependence upon God.'[22]

III. Herder's reception of Kant's idea of Being. In reflecting upon Kant's pre-critical consideration of Being, Herder established an understanding of this key philosophical principle, however his conclusions differentiated him from those of Kant. For Herder, divine Being was indeed necessary for existence, as the ground of predication, but as such it was also the foundation of all speculative thought concerning reality. As such, this transcendent principle occupied a negative relationship to abstract philosophical speculation. It was the ground of all reality, and therefore all speculation, but according to Herder it could not be an object of speculation itself. Herder's title and tone throughout in the text reflect this. He begins the *Versuch* by stressing that he does not write for an academic audience, but rather as an exercise in learning.[23] In this sense he aims to stress the real purpose of a 'Versuch', or *essayer*, as an attempt at a problem or to weigh the facts at hand, as opposed to what the professional philosopher does in Herder's opinion, which is to impose an abstract conclusion.

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[18] Kant, 133, II, 89.

[19] Kant, 135; II, 91.

[20] Kant, 134; II, 90.

[21] Kant, 134; II, 90-91.

[22] Kant, 134; II, 91. For the later development of this argument in Kant's own thought see Ian Logan, 'Whatever Happened to Kant's Ontological Argument?', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2007) 74.2, 346-63.

[23] Herder, *Werke*, 9.

For Herder, philosophical speculation was inadequate to the complex experiential nature of Being. Rather, he explains, Being as an inarticulable aspect of our experience, like 'a coarse clump [gröbere Klumpen]'.[24] Herder argues for a correlation between the sensate (sinnlich) and inseparable (unzergliederlich); the most sensate concept is Being, which is completly inseparability from thought. Whilst all things can be dis-integrated from Being, it remains completely inseparable.[25] Echoing Kant, Herder writes that 'Being is a complete term of experience' that is impossible to explain since it is the ground of predication and the prerequisite of all concepts.[26] He writes: 'who can think of a more sensate concept, discover a more simple word, or conceive of a concept that does not rest upon its [Being's] ground.'[27] Being is the basis of all experience and is utterly invariable, constituting the unity of all experience: 'Thus, Being is: indivisible   inexplicable the centre of all certainty'.[28]

Despite the fact that it remains indescribable, Herder maintains that Being is something, and that its impenetrable nature is not due to a problem with language.[29] In fact, it can manifest itself to us in two ways: the existential and the ideal.[30] The former is experiential, while the latter is a secondary reflection on the first.[31] Neither the existential nor the ideal is explicable without the other, nor can Being be reduced to either. The abstract *a- priorism* of Kant aimed to infer from the ideal to the existential, turning Being into an entirely subjective *a priori* thinking 'I'. To this Herder retorts that '[t]he concept of Being is, subjectively speaking, doubtlessly prior to that of possibility, and real possibility is prior to the logical one since', Herder ironically comments, 'human beings existed before philosophers.'[32] Adopting a different tact than Kant's approach, Herder explains that 'common sense shall be our teacher here: one never attempts to prove a concept of experience *a priori'*.[33] For Herder, 'nature robbed the worldly-wise of the burden of proving it since it has convinced us: – it [Being] is the centre of all certainty'.[34] With comments such as these, we see Herder developing a skepticism toward philosophical speculation, and an intentionally non-philosophical, familiar style, that would remain with him throughout his authorship. According to Herder, Being is 'the foundation of all our thinking and the element with which we are enveloped'.[35]

Based upon these conclusions, Herder develops a critical posture toward the phi-

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[24] Herder, *Werke*, I, 20.
[25] Herder, *Werke*, I, 20.
[26] Herder, *Werke*, I, 15.
[27] Herder, *Werke*, I, 12.
[28] Herder, *Werke*, I, 20.
[29] Herder, *Werke*, I, 114–15.
[30] Herder, *Werke*, I, 12.
[31] Herder, *Werke*, I, 15.
[32] Herder, *Werke*, I, 15.
[33] Herder, *Werke*, I, 17.
[34] Herder, *Werke*, I, 19.
[35] Herder, *Werke*, I, 14.

losophical enterprise, which we find advanced in the opening lines of the *Versuch*. Adopting an irreverent tone, he contrasts the method of the philosophers with his own through the myth of Epimetheus and Prometheus. These Titans were entrusted by the gods to distribute qualities to the animals of the earth. Herder likens the method of the philosopher to Prometheus (*Προμηθεύς*, literally fore-thought), wherein theory precedes actuality; and his own to that of Epimetheus (*Ἐπιμηθεύς*, literally after-thought), in which actuality precedes the theoretical. This allusion is the first record of a conviction that would come to structure Herder's thought in general: that philosophical inquiry must always acknowledge that it begins *in medias res*. This being in the middle of things militates against abstraction, and *a fortiori* any attempt to theorise an a priori foundation, and its use as the ground for an architectonic. This is the basis of one of Herder's guiding philosophical principles: that meaning is always situational, grounded in Being, but determined in situation and time. This makes all philosophical inquiry a process of ceaseless approximation. The Promethean, and its foregrounding nature, can be identified with Kant's attempt to arrive at an *a priori* proof for the necessity of Being and hence the existence of God apart from experience.[36] Yet for Herder, Being manifested itself in one's own participation in Being. Consequently, Being could only ever be encountered as Epimetheus encountered it, as already conditioned.

The *Versuch* offers the first articulation of Herder's empirically orientated, experiential philosophy. Yet despite his objection to *a priori* speculation, he does not merely adopt an opposing empirical perspective. Rather, he explains that whilst he identifies with the positions of both Aristotle and John Locke in holding that our concepts come from experience, he also asks 'whether our concepts cannot be other than sensual, whether there is no other way to our inner sense, than through the loopholes of the external concepts'.[37] The fact that human beings, unlike other animals, are conscious of their thinking, returns one to the premise of Cartesian idealism: that there is an *a priori* something that allows the self to say to itself 'I'.[38] At the same time, Herder recognises that this 'I' cannot be experienced without conditioned experience. Only in the case of God is it possible to say 'I think through myself, and everything else through me', whereas human beings, Herder explains, are like children who are born into the task of getting to know themselves.[39] In other words, God is able to think the 'I' *a priori* since God is Being, the ground of reality. Human beings, on the other hand, may only know the 'I' through a reflective relationship that experiences Being. In this light, Kant's position, and that of abstract thought in general, pretends at a godlike position that attempts to escape the necessarily experiential aspect of Being.

Consequently, there is a fundamental distinction in the understanding of the divine offered in the positions of Kant and Herder. Kant's *a priori* argument, based on Being as

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[36] Herder, *Werke*, I, 9.
[37] Herder, *Werke*, I, 10.
[38] Herder, *Werke*, I, 11.
[39] Herder, *Werke*, I, 11.

the ground of predication, led him to an extra-mundane conceptualisation of the divinity. Accordingly, God was defined by the same collection of superlative attributes that made up the ontological argument. The result is that under Kant's position God stands at an infinite ontological distance from human finitude. The opposite was the case with Herder's articulation of God as Being. Consequently, God is not a distant abstraction, but immediately present. As he argued, all reality participates in the Being that is both its foundation, and in which all reality is 'enveloped'. Kant and Herder in effect, arrive at opposing positions as a result of their diverging *a priori* and a *posteriori* approaches to the question of Being. Kant's critique of the ontological argument led in part to his general critique of metaphysics, and the development of a transcendental philosophy, wherein the ordering principles of cognition were rational and *a priori*.[40] For Kant, the Absolute at the centre of religion was the moral law that had its source in a transcendent realm, secured by the postulates of pure practical reason: God, freedom, and immortality. Alternately, for Herder, the fact that Being was a matter of experience led to a critique of abstract philosophical speculation, a historicist outlook, and the development of an empiricist naturalism. As a result, we find that in Herder's thoguht the Absolute of religion, whilst transcendent in itself, is known through its immanent manifestations, in the phenomena of science, the course history, the development of language and in the evolution of religion**.**

IV. The subsequent role of Being in Herder's thought. From his early reading of Kant, Herder adopted the principle that Being was the transcendent ground of predication, and the insight that it could only be experienced as such. Furthermore, he concluded that Being was best understood not through speculative thought upon its transcendent nature, but through a process of the ceaseless interpretation of all immanent reality through which Being discloses itself. Abstract philosophical speculation, the attempt to arrive at an Archimedean point in relation to reality, was a fruitless effort, and only obscured our encounter with Being through philosophical fictions that pretended at a God-like position. This is why we see Herder in his subsequent work developing a form of empiricist naturalism and historicism, which focuses upon immanent reality as that which discloses transcendent Being. Herder, like Kant, has no difficulty granting Being divinity, and his thought is thoroughly theistic. However, his God is not the traditional God of philosophy, a collection of superlative attributes at an infinite distance from creation. Rather all reality takes on the quality of disclosing the divine. Herder develops this position throughout his work, particularly in his understanding of science, language, history and religion.

We find Herder developing his idea of divine disclosure in relation to natural science in his dialogue *Gott. Einige Gespräche* (1787). In this work, Herder writes: 'The whole world is an expression, an appearance of his [God's] eternally-living, eternal-active forces'.[41] He elaborates this position, explaining that the deity is revealed as the underlying

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[40] Kant, 72–76; IV, 275-280.

[41] Johann Gottfried Herder, *God, Some Conversations*, trans. by Frederick Burkhardt (New York: Veritas Press, 1940), p. 150; *Sämmtliche Werke*, XVI, 517.

unity of the organic forces in nature.[42] Herder observes this to be the case in the most recent advances within the sciences, where forces such as magnetism and electricity have been proven to be present in bodies and in the atmosphere.[43] According to Herder, scientific examination, as opposed to abstract rational speculation, discloses the divine. The task of philosophy is to make the scientist aware of this:

All these deceptions [of abstract speculation] in which God's name is misused, are avoided by the sober natural scientist who, indeed, does not inform us about particular decisions from the chamber of divine council, but instead, examines the condition of things themselves and notes the essential laws implanted in them. While seeming to forget the divine purposes, he [the scientist] seeks and finds in every object and point of creation, God complete.[44]

This kind of theism, revealed in immanent nature, Herder explains elsewhere in the text, replaces the phantom God of reason, that is everywhere comprehensible as the 'is' that exists between the subject and predicate.[45]

We find the same disclosure of being articulated in relation to the origins of language in Herder's *Über die Ursprung der Sprache* (1772). This was his contribution to the debate on the origins of language for which he was awarded a prize from the Berlin Academy. Rejecting the divine source theory of language, he instead maintained that language was not by divine intervention, but developed through a reflective rational process bound to history and place. Language still had a divine origin of sorts, however, this was as a latent natural capacity placed in the human species by God for humans to develop themselves. Herder further developed the ideas he expressed in his essay on language into the historicised providence that we find in *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774), and elaborated more fully in Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784 – 91). The first volume of this work explains the development of human history according to natural laws. For Herder, 'History is purely a natural history of human forces, actions and instincts in accordance with their place and time'.[46] Consequently, the study of these forces brings us to a greater understanding of Being, allowing individuals to master their passions and imitate the divinely instituted order through their reason.[47]

Finally, when it comes the religious reflection, Herder argues in much the same way as he does with natural science and history. The divine presents itself to each age according to its historical and temporal necessities. In *Über die neuere Deutsche Lieteratur*, in a section entitled 'Vom neuern Gebrauch der Mythologie' (1766 – 1767), Herder makes

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[42] Ibid. 104, 140; XVI, 452, 496.
[43] Ibid. 105; XVI, 453-454.
[44] Ibid. 131; XVI, 491.
[45] Ibid. 150; XVI, 517.
[46] Herder, *Sämmtliche Werke*, XIV, 145.
[47] Herder, *Sämmtliche Werke*, XIII, 171.

the point that it was considered appropriate to make changes and additions to mythology so that it might adapt in order to be 'individual in its character, national in its country, patriotic in its hero, appropriate in its events, realistic in its time, and idiomatic in its language'.[48] This idea operates behind Herder's six collections of *Zerstreute Blätter* (1784 – 1797) which contain an interconnected mixture of poetry and prose, concerning themes central to spirituality from Greek, Roman, Persian, Indian, Scandinavian, and ancient German sources.

Herder's writing has always presented particular difficulties. He aimed to avoid the language of philosophical abstraction, writing in a style he developed in the context of the *Strum und Drang* movement. His publications are earthy, rough, dialogical, irreverent, and contain many allusions that can impede accessibility for the contemporary reader. Despite this, there is much in the writing of Herder for philosophers to take account of. Each of these examples, illustrating his thought on science, history, language, and religion, reflect Herder's wide ranging authorship, and illustrate the important central influence of Kant's critique of the ontological argument, and his assertion that Being is the ground of predication. Recognising the central role of this principle, elaborated in the early *Versuch* text, allows us to gain an understanding of a central organising philosophical principle within Herder's authorship. It also, further to this, makes it possible to appreciate the reasoning behind his style. The fact that Herder believed our encounter with Being was always contextual, meant that he refused to engage in any systematisation of his philosophical position, which gave the illusion of completion. This is reflected in the grammar of his writing as well. He believed this allowed his work to present Being as it was manifested in the particular instances in which it is encountered. This anti-systematic, often fragmentary style established a tradition that we may trace through subsequent philosophy, for example in the work of the Romantics Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, and later in the writing of Nietzsche and even Wittgenstein.

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[48] Herder, '*On the Modern Usage of Mythology*' in *Early Selected Works: 1764-1767*, ed. Ernest A. Menze, Karl Menges, trans. Ernest A. Menze, Michael Palma (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 191-234, 227; *Sämmtliche Werke*, I, 426-449.

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