

Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective*

Ak 8:15

Whatever concept of the *freedom of the will* one may develop in the context of metaphysics, the *appearances* of the will,¹ human actions, are determined, like every other natural event, in accordance with universal natural laws. History, which is concerned with giving a narrative account of these appearances, allows us to hope that, however deeply concealed their causes may be, if we consider the free exercise of the human will *broadly*, we can ultimately discern a regular progression in its appearances. History further lets us hope that, in this way, that which seems confused and irregular when considering particular individuals can nonetheless be recognized as a steadily progressing, albeit slow development of the original capacities of the entire species. Thus, given that the free will of humans has such a great influence on marriages, on the births that result from these, and on dying, it would seem that there is no rule to which these events are subject and according to which one could calculate their number in advance. And yet the relevant statistics compiled annually in large countries demonstrate that these events occur just as much in accordance with constant natural laws as do inconstancies in the weather, which cannot be determined individually in advance, but which, taken together, do not fail to maintain a consistent and uninterrupted process in the growth of the plants, the flow of the rivers, and other natural arrangements. Individual human beings and even entire peoples give little thought to the fact that they, by pursuing their own ends, each in his own way and often in opposition to others, unwittingly, as if guided along, work to promote the intent of nature, which is unknown

*A statement printed in the short notices in the twelfth issue of this year's *Gothaische Gelehrte Zeitung* (1784), based, no doubt, on a conversation of mine with a scholar who was passing through, compels me to provide the present clarification, without which the statement would make no sense.

1. "Appearance" is the standard English translation of *Erscheinung*. The term is best read in light of Kant's distinction between the world as it is in itself (of which knowledge is impossible) and the world as it appears to us (of which knowledge is possible).

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to them, and which, even if it were known to them, they would hardly care about.

8:18 Since human beings do not, in the pursuit of their endeavors, follow merely their instincts as do animals, and yet also do not, as would rational citizens of the world, proceed in accordance with a previously arranged plan, it does not seem possible to present a systematic history of them (as could be given for bees or beavers, for instance). One cannot but feel a certain disinclination when one observes their activity as carried out on the great stage of the world and finds it ultimately, despite the occasional semblance of wisdom to be seen in individual actions, all to be made up, by and large, of foolishness, childish vanity, and, often enough, even of childish wickedness and destructiveness. When confronted with this, one does not know, in the end, how one ought to conceive of our species, one so thoroughly conceited about its own superiority. The only option for the philosopher here, since he cannot presuppose that human beings pursue any rational *end of their own* in their endeavors, is that he attempt to discover an *end of nature* behind this absurd course of human activity, an end on the basis of which a history could be given of beings that proceed without a plan of their own, but nevertheless according to a definite plan of nature. — Let us now see whether we can discover a guiding principle for such a history, and then we want to leave it up to nature to produce the man who is able to compile such a history in accordance with this principle. Thus nature produced *Kepler*, for instance, who described, in an unexpected manner, the eccentric orbits of the planets as subject to definite laws, and *Newton*, who explained these laws in terms of a general natural cause.²

FIRST PROPOSITION

All of a creature's natural predispositions are destined eventually to develop fully and in accordance with their purpose. This proposition is supported both by external observation and by internal observation or dissection. An organ that is not meant to be used, or an arrangement that does not achieve its purpose, is a contradiction in the teleological theory of nature. For if we abandon this principle, then we can no longer understand nature as

2. Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) joined Tycho Brahe's observatory and later succeeded him. A believer in the Copernican theory, Kepler used Brahe's observations to deduce three fundamental laws of planetary motion. This later enabled Isaac Newton (1643–1727) to formulate his theory of gravitational force and explain the motions of the planets and their moons in detail.

governed by laws, but rather only as playing aimlessly; and the dismal reign of chance thus replaces the guiding principle of reason.

SECOND PROPOSITION

In the human being (as the only rational creature on earth), those natural predispositions aimed at the use of its reason are to be developed in full only in the species, but not in the individual. Reason is the ability of a creature to extend the rules and ends of the use of all of its powers far beyond its natural instincts, and reason knows no limits in the scope of its projects. Reason itself does not function according to instinct, but rather requires experimentation, practice, and instruction in order to advance gradually from one stage of insight to the next. For this reason any individual person would have to live an inordinately long period of time in order to learn how to make full use of all of his natural predispositions. Or, if nature has limited the span of his life (as has in fact happened), it requires a perhaps incalculable number of generations, of which each passes its enlightenment on to the next, in order to eventually bring the seeds in our species to the stage of development which fully corresponds to nature's purpose. And this point in time must, at least in the idea of what the human being is, be the goal of his endeavors, since otherwise his natural predispositions would have to be regarded as largely futile and pointless. All practical principles would thereby be abolished, and nature, whose wisdom otherwise serves as the basic principle for judging all other arrangements, would thus be suspected of childish play in the case of human beings alone.

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THIRD PROPOSITION

Nature has willed that human beings produce everything that extends beyond the mechanical organization of their animal existence completely on their own, and that they shall not partake in any happiness or perfection other than that which they attain free of instinct and by means of their own reason. For nature does nothing superfluous and is not wasteful in the use of its means to attain its ends. The mere fact that it gave human beings the faculty of reason and the freedom of will based on this faculty is a clear indication of its intent with regard to their endowments. They were intended neither to be led by instinct, nor to be supplied and instructed with innate knowledge; they were intended to produce everything themselves. The invention of their means of sustenance, their clothing, their outward security and defense (for which it gave them neither the bull's horns, nor the

8:20 lion's claws, nor the dog's teeth, but only hands), all the joys that can make life pleasant, their insights and prudence, and even the goodness of their will were intended to be entirely the products of their own efforts. Nature seems to have taken pleasure in its own extreme economy in this regard, and to have provided for their animal features so sparingly, so tailored as to meet only the most vital needs of a primitive existence, as if it had intended that human beings, after working themselves out of a condition of the greatest brutishness to a condition of the greatest skill, of inner perfection in their manner of thought, and hence (to the extent possible on earth) to a state of happiness, should take the full credit for this themselves and have only themselves to thank for it. It thus seems as if nature has been concerned more with their rational *self-esteem* than with their well-being. For in the course of human affairs, humans are confronted with a whole host of hardships. It seems, however, that nature was not at all concerned that human beings live well, but rather that they work themselves far enough ahead to become, through their behavior, worthy of life and of well-being. What is disconcerting here, however, is that previous generations seem to have pursued their arduous endeavors only for the sake of the later ones, in order to prepare for them a level from which they can raise even higher the structure that nature intended; and that nevertheless only the later generations should have the fortune to dwell in the building which was the work of a long series of earlier generations (albeit without this being their intention), without themselves being able to share in the fortune that they themselves had worked toward. But however perplexing this may be, it is nevertheless necessary if one assumes that an animal species should possess reason and, as a class of rational beings, each of which dies, but whose species is immortal, ought nonetheless attain the full development of its predispositions.

FOURTH PROPOSITION

*The means that nature employs in order to bring about the development of all of the predispositions of humans is their **antagonism** in society, insofar as this antagonism ultimately becomes the cause of a law-governed organization of society.* Here I take antagonism to mean the *unsociable sociability* of human beings, that is, their tendency to enter into society, a tendency connected, however, with a constant resistance that continually threatens to break up this society. This unsociable sociability is obviously part of human nature. Human beings have an inclination to *associate* with one another

because in such a condition they feel themselves to be more human, that is to say, more in a position to develop their natural predispositions. But they also have a strong tendency to *isolate* themselves, because they encounter in themselves the unsociable trait that predisposes them to want to direct everything only to their own ends and hence to expect to encounter resistance everywhere, just as they know that they themselves tend to resist others. It is this resistance that awakens all human powers and causes human beings to overcome their tendency to idleness and, driven by lust for honor, power, or property, to establish a position for themselves among their fellows, whom they can neither *endure* nor *do without*. Here the first true steps are taken from brutishness to culture, which consists, actually, in the social worth of human beings. And here all of the talents are gradually developed, taste is formed, and, even, through continual enlightenment, the beginning of a foundation is laid for a manner of thinking which is able, over time, to transform the primitive natural predisposition for moral discernment into definite practical principles and, in this way, to ultimately transform an agreement to society that initially had been *pathologically*³ coerced into a *moral* whole. Without those characteristics of unsociability, which are indeed quite unattractive in themselves, and which give rise to the resistance that each person necessarily encounters in his selfish presumptuousness, human beings would live the arcadian life of shepherds, in full harmony, contentment, and mutual love. But all human talents would thus lie eternally dormant, and human beings, as good-natured as the sheep that they put out to pasture, would thus give their own lives hardly more worth than that of their domesticated animals. They would fail to fill the void with regard to the purpose for which they, as rational nature, were created. For this reason one should thank nature for their quarrelsomeness, for their jealously competitive vanity, and for their insatiable appetite for property and even for power! Without these all of the excellent natural human predispositions would lie in eternal slumber, undeveloped. Humans desire harmony, but nature knows better what is good for their species: it wills discord. Humans wish to live leisurely and enjoy themselves, but nature wills that human beings abandon their sloth and passive contentment and thrust themselves into work and hardship, only to find means, in turn, to cleverly escape the latter. The natural motivating forces for this, the sources of unsociability and continual resistance from which so many ills arise, but

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3. The term “pathological” here means “determined by impulses from the senses” (cf. CPuR A802/B830).

8:22 which also drive one to the renewed exertion of one's energies, and hence to the further development of the natural predispositions, thus reveal the plan of a wise creator, and not, as it may seem, the work of a malicious spirit that has tampered with the creator's marvelous work or ruined it out of envy.

FIFTH PROPOSITION

*The greatest problem for the human species to which nature compels it to seek a solution is the achievement of a **civil society** which administers right universally.* Nature's highest intent for humankind, that is, the development of all of the latter's natural predispositions, can be realized only in society, and more precisely, in a society that possesses the greatest degree of freedom, hence one in which its members continually struggle with each other and yet in which the limits of this freedom are specified and secured in the most exact manner, so that such freedom of each is consistent with that of others. Nature also wills that humankind attain this, like all the ends of its vocation, by its own efforts. Thus a society in which *freedom under external laws* is connected to the highest possible degree with irresistible power, that is, a *perfectly just civil constitution*, must be the highest goal of nature for the human species, since it is only by solving and completing this task that nature can attain its other goals for humankind. It is hardship that compels human beings, who are otherwise so enamored of unrestrained freedom, to enter into this condition of coercion. Indeed, it is the greatest hardship of all, that which human beings inflict on each other, whose natural inclinations make them unable to live together in a state of wild freedom for very long. It is only in a refuge such as a civic union that these same inclinations subsequently produce the best effect, just as trees in a forest, precisely by seeking to take air and light from all the others around them, compel each other to look for air and light above themselves and thus grow up straight and beautiful, while those that live apart from others and sprout their branches freely grow stunted, crooked, and bent. All the culture and art that decorates humankind, as well as its most pleasing social order, are fruits of an unsociability that is forced by its own nature to discipline itself and thereby develop fully the seeds that nature planted within it by means of an imposed art.

SIXTH PROPOSITION

This problem is both the most difficult and also the last to be solved by the human species. Even the mere idea of this task makes the following diffi-

culty apparent: the human being is an *animal* which, when he lives among others of his own species, *needs a master*. This is so because he will certainly abuse his freedom with regard to others of his own kind. And even though he, as a rational creature, desires a law that sets limits on the freedom of all, his selfish animal inclinations will lead him to treat himself as an exception wherever he can. For this reason he needs a *master* who will break his individual will and compel him to obey a will that is universally valid. But where does he find such a master? In no place other than in the human species. But such a master is just as much an animal in need of a master. He may thus begin in whatever way he likes, yet it is not at all evident how he is to find a supreme authority of public justice that is itself just, whether he seeks such a supreme authority in an individual person or in a group of people chosen for this purpose. For any such person will always abuse his freedom if he has no one above him who can enforce his compliance with the laws. The supreme authority must be just *in itself* but also a *human being*. This task is thus the most difficult of all. Indeed, its perfect solution is impossible: nothing entirely straight can be fashioned from the crooked wood of which humankind is made. Nature has charged us only with approximating this idea.* That this task is also the last to be carried out also follows from the fact that such a constitution requires the right conception of its nature, a great store of experience practiced in many affairs of the world, and, above all of this, a good will that is prepared to accept such a constitution. The combination of all these three elements is very difficult, however, and can occur only late, after many futile attempts.

SEVENTH PROPOSITION

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*The problem of establishing a perfect civil constitution is dependent upon the problem of a law-governed **external relation between states** and cannot be solved without having first solved the latter.* What good does it do to work on establishing a law-governed civil constitution among individuals, that is, to organize a *commonwealth*? The same unsociability that had compelled human beings to pursue this commonwealth also is the reason

*Humankind's role is thus very artificial. We do not know how it is with the inhabitants of other planets and their nature, but if we fulfill this task that nature has set us well, then we may well be able to flatter ourselves that we can lay claim to no mean status among our neighbors in the universe. Perhaps in the case of our neighbors an individual is able to fully attain his destiny within his lifetime. In our case it is different: only the species as a whole can hope for this.

that every commonwealth, in its external relations, that is, as a state among states, exists in unrestricted freedom and consequently that states must expect the same ills from other states that threatened individuals and compelled them to enter into a law-governed civil condition. Nature has thus again used the quarrelsomeness of humankind, even that of the large societies and political bodies of this species, in order to invent, through their inevitable *antagonism*, a state of peace and security. That is to say, through wars, through the excessive and ceaseless preparations for war, through the resulting distress that every state, even in times of peace, must ultimately feel internally, nature drives humankind to make initially imperfect attempts, but finally, after the ravages of war, after the downfalls, and after even the complete internal exhaustion of its powers, [nature] impels humankind to take the step that reason could have told it to take without all these lamentable experiences: to abandon the lawless state of savagery and enter into a federation of peoples. In such a federation, every state, even the smallest one, could expect its security and its rights, not by virtue of its own power or as a consequence of its own legal judgment, but rather solely by virtue of this great federation of peoples (*Foedus Amphictyonum*),⁴ from a united power and from the decision based on laws of the united will. However wildly enthusiastic this idea may seem to be, and however ridiculed it may have been in the case of the *Abbé St. Pierre* or *Rousseau*⁵ (perhaps because they believed its realization was all too near): it is nonetheless the inevitable outcome of the distress to which human beings submit one another which compels states to make precisely the same decision (however difficult this may be for them) that the savage individual, just as reluctantly, was forced to make: to give up his brutish freedom and to seek peace and security in a law-governed constitution. — Accordingly, all wars amount

4. Amphictyonic League: an association of neighboring cities in ancient Greece, established for the protection of a religious center. The most important one was the one related to the Temple of Apollo at Delphi.

5. Charles-Irénée Castel, abbé de Saint Pierre (1658–1743), *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe* (1713) [Project for Making Peace Perpetual in Europe]. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Extrait du projet de paix perpétuelle de Monsieur l’Abbé de Saint Pierre” (1761) (*Oeuvres Complètes*, 4 vols., ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond [Paris: Gallimard, 1969–78], 3:561–89). Rousseau’s “Jugement sur la paix perpétuelle” [Judgment on Perpetual Peace], written around the same time as the “Extrait,” was first published posthumously in 1782 (*Oeuvres Complètes*, 3:591–600). Given that Rousseau distances himself clearly and explicitly from the abbé’s proposals in the *Jugement*, it does not seem that Kant had read this second text.

to attempts (certainly not in the intentions of humankind, but indeed in the intentions of nature) to establish new relations between states and to create new political bodies by destroying or at least breaking up old ones. Such states are in turn unable, either internally or in their relation to others, to maintain themselves and hence must endure further, similar revolutions, until the point is finally reached where, on the one hand internally, through an optimal organization of the civil constitution, and on the other hand externally, through a common agreement and legislation, a condition is established that, similar to a civil commonwealth, can maintain itself *automatically*.

[There are three questions to consider here:] Whether one ought to expect that, by an *Epicurean*⁶ concurrence of efficient causes, the states, as do minute particles of matter, through random collisions, will create all sorts of formations which are in turn destroyed upon further impact, until finally a formation is created, *by chance*, which can maintain its form (a fortunate coincidence, which is unlikely ever to occur!); or whether one ought instead to assume that nature pursues a regular course in this regard and gradually leads our species from the low level of animal nature to the highest level of humanity by its own art (an art which nature compels humankind to invent) and develops, in this seemingly disorderly arrangement, those original predispositions in a fully regular manner; or whether one ought rather to assume that nothing, at least nothing sensible, results from all of these actions and reactions of humankind at large, that it shall always be as it always has been, and that one cannot know in advance whether discord, which is such a natural feature of our species, is ultimately setting us up for a hell of ills, however civilized our condition may become, by later perhaps destroying this civilized condition itself and all the advances of culture made thus far by means of barbaric devastation (a fate that one could not resist if one were governed by blind chance, which is indeed one and the same as the state of lawless freedom, unless we assume that such freedom is secretly guided by the wisdom of nature); these three questions all boil down roughly to the question of whether it is reasonable to assume that the order of nature is *purposive* in its parts, and yet *purposeless* as a whole. The purposeless condition of savagery, in which all the natural predispositions in our species lay fallow, subsequently compelled our species, by means of

6. Epicurus (341–270 BCE), ancient Greek philosopher now known primarily for his ethics, but also an important atomist whose physical theory included the claim that the universe is made up of atoms that are in perpetual motion and that form and dissolve compound bodies as they collide and rebound.

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the ills to which this condition subjects it, to leave this state and enter into a civil constitution, in which all those seeds would be able to develop. The same holds true for the barbarous freedom of the already established states: through the use of all of the commonwealth's resources to arm for war against others, through the ravages of war, but more still through the need to remain constantly prepared for war, progress toward the full development of our natural predispositions is hindered, but the ills that arise from this, in turn, compel our species to discover a law of equilibrium with regard to the in itself productive resistance between many states which arises from their freedom, and to introduce a united power which lends force to this law. A cosmopolitan condition of public security is thus introduced, which is not completely free of *danger*, so that humankind's powers do not fall into slumber, but also not without a principle of the *equality* of their mutual *actions and reactions*, so that they do not destroy one another. Before this last step (the federation of states) is taken, hence at a point barely halfway through its development, human nature endures the most severe ills deceptively disguised as external prosperity; and Rousseau's preference of the state of savages⁷ was not all that far off the mark, that is, if one leaves out this last stage, which our species has yet to surmount. We are *cultivated* to a great extent by the arts and the sciences. And we are *civilized* to a troublesome degree in all forms of social courteousness and decency. But to consider ourselves to be already fully *moralized* is quite premature. For the idea of morality is part of culture. But the use of this idea, which leads only to that which resembles morality in the love of honor and outward decency, comprises only mere civilization. As long as states use all their resources to realize their vain and violent goals of expansion and thereby continue to hinder the slow efforts to cultivate their citizens' minds and even to withhold all support from them in this regard, then nothing of the sort can be expected, because such moral cultivation requires a long internal process in every commonwealth in order to educate its citizens. All that is good yet is not based on morally good convictions is nothing but pure outward show and shimmering misery. The human race will likely remain in such a condi-

7. A reference to Rousseau's "Discourse on the Sciences and Arts" (full title: "A Discourse That won First Prize at the Academy of Dijon. In the Year 1750. On the following question proposed by the Academy: Has the revival of the Sciences and Arts contributed to improving morality?") and his "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Mankind" (1755). In Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*, ed. Susan Dunn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).