

IDEA FOR A UNIVERSAL HISTORY WITH COSMOPOLITAN INTENT

[1784]

NO MATTER WHAT CONCEPTION ONE MAY FORM OF THE freedom of the will in metaphysics, the phenomenal appearances of the will, i.e., human actions, are determined by general laws of nature like any other event of nature. History is concerned with telling about these events. History allows one to hope that when history considers *in the large* the play of the freedom of human will, it will be possible to discover the regular progressions thereof. Thus (it is to be hoped) that what appears to be complicated and accidental in individuals, may yet be understood as a steady, progressive, though slow, evolution of the original endowments of the entire species. Thus marriages, the consequent births and the deaths, since the free will seems to have such a great influence on them, do not seem to be subject to any law according to which one could calculate their number beforehand. Yet the annual (statistical) tables about them in the major countries show that they occur according to stable natural laws. It is like the erratic weather the occurrence of which cannot be determined in particular in-

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stances, although it never fails in maintaining the growth of plants, the flow of streams, and other of nature's arrangements at a uniform, uninterrupted pace. Individual human beings, each pursuing his own ends according to his inclination and often one against another (and even one entire people against another) rarely unintentionally promote, as if it were their guide, an end of nature which is unknown to them. They thus work to promote that which they would care little for if they knew about it.

Since men in their endeavors do not act like animals merely according to instinct, nor like rational citizens according to an agreed plan, no planned history seems to be possible (as in the case of bees and beavers). It is hard to suppress a certain disgust when contemplating men's action upon the world stage. For one finds, in spite of apparent wisdom in detail that everything, taken as a whole, is interwoven with stupidity, childish vanity, often with childish viciousness and destructiveness. In the end, one does not know what kind of conception one should have of our species which is so conceited about its superior qualities. Since the philosopher must assume that men have a flexible *purpose of their own*, it is left to him to attempt to discover an end of nature in this senseless march of human events. A history of creatures who proceed without a plan would be possible in keeping with such an end; the history would proceed according to such an end of nature.

We shall see whether we can succeed in discovering a guide to such a history. We shall leave it to nature to produce a man who would be capable of writing history in accordance with such an end. Thus nature produced a *Kepler* who figured out an unexpected way of subsuming the eccentric orbits of the planets to definite laws, and a *Newton* who explained these laws by a general cause of nature.

First Principle

All natural faculties of a creature are destined to unfold completely and according to their end. External observation and analysis confirms this proposition concerning all authority. An organ which is not to be used, a regulation which does not accomplish its purpose, these are self-contradictions in the teleological theory of nature. If we abandon this principle, we no longer have a nature working according to laws, but an aimlessly playing nature. Then the hapless accident takes the place of reason as guide.

Second Principle

In man (as the only rational creature on earth) those natural faculties which aim at the use of reason shall be fully developed in the species, not in the individual. Reason in a creature is the capacity to enlarge the rules and purposes of the use of his resources far beyond natural instinct. It does not recognize any boundary to its projects. It does not develop instinctively but requires trials, experience and information in order to progress gradually from one level of understanding to the next. Therefore every man would have to live excessively long in order to learn how to make full use of all his faculties. Or, if nature has set man a short term of life (as is, in fact, the case), then (perhaps) nature requires an endless procession of begettings of which one transmits its enlightenment to another, in order finally to push the genus of human kind to that level of development which is appropriate to the purpose of nature. This time must, at least theoretically, be the target of the endeavors of man, because otherwise the natural faculties would have to be considered largely pointless and in vain. This would vitiate all practical principles, as it would suggest that nature, the wisdom of which serves as a principle in judging all other natural arrangements, would have to be suspected of childish play when it comes to man.

Third Principle

Nature has intended that man develop everything which transcends the mechanical ordering of his animal existence, entirely by himself and that he does not partake of any other happiness or perfection except that which he has secured himself by his own reason and free of instinct. Nature does not do things superfluously and is not extravagant in the employment of its means to its end. Since nature gave man reason and the freedom of will which rests upon reason, that serves to show clearly nature's purpose in regard to man's equipment. . . . The discovery of his food, of his clothing, of his external security and defense (for which nature gave man neither the horns of the bull, nor the claws of the lion, nor the teeth of the dog, but only hands), all pleasures that can make life agreeable, even his insight and intelligence, indeed, the kindness of his will should be achieved by man's own work. Nature seems to have delighted in the greatest parsimony; she seems to have barely provided man's animal equipment and limited it to the most urgent needs of a beginning existence, as if nature intended that man should owe all to himself, as though he should eventually struggle up from the greatest backwardness to the greatest skills, to inner perfection of mind, and (as far as it is possible on earth) to blessed happiness. Man alone should have the credit (for having accomplished this), as if nature were more concerned with man's rational *self-esteem* than with his well-being. In the course of human affairs a vast amount of hardship awaits man. It seems as though nature had not cared that man live well, but that by progressing thus far man would prove himself through his conduct worthy of life and well-being. However, it remains perplexing that earlier generations seem to do their laborious work for the sake of later generations, in order to provide a foundation from which the latter can advance the building which nature has intended. Only later generations will have the good fortune to live in the building. But however mysteri-

ous this [conclusion] may be, it is nevertheless necessary, if one assumes that an animal species is to have reason, and is to arrive at a complete development of its faculties as a class of reasonable beings who die while their species is immortal.

Fourth Principle

The means which nature employs to accomplish the development of all faculties is the antagonism of men in society, since this antagonism becomes, in the end, the cause of a lawful order of this society. I mean by antagonism the asocial sociability of man, i.e., the propensity of men to enter into a society, which propensity is, however, linked to a constant mutual resistance which threatens to dissolve this society. This propensity apparently is innate in man. Man has an inclination to *associate* himself, because in such a state he feels himself more like a man capable of developing his natural faculties. Man has also a marked propensity to *isolate* himself, because he finds in himself the asocial quality to want to arrange everything according to his own ideas. He therefore expects resistance everywhere, just as he knows of himself that he is inclined to resist others. This resistance awakens all the latent forces in man which drive him to overcome his propensity to be lazy, and so, impelled by vainglory, ambition and avarice, he seeks to achieve a standing among his fellows, whom he does not suffer gladly, but whom he cannot *leave*. Thus the first steps from barbarism to culture are achieved; for culture actually consists in the social value of man. All man's talents are gradually unfolded, taste is developed. Through continuous enlightenment the basis is laid for a frame of mind which, in the course of time, transforms the raw natural faculty of moral discrimination into definite practical principles. Thus a *pathologically* enforced co-ordination of society finally transforms it into a *moral* whole. Without these essentially unlovely qualities of asociality, from which springs the resistance which everyone must encounter in his egoistic pretensions, all talents would have remained hidden germs. If

man lived an Arcadian shepherd's existence of harmony, modesty and mutuality, man, good-natured like the sheep he is herding, would not invest his existence with greater value than that his animals have. Man would not fill the vacuum of creation as regards his end, rational nature. Thanks are due to nature for his quarrelsomeness, his enviously competitive vanity, and for his insatiable desire to possess or to rule, for without them all the excellent natural faculties of mankind would forever remain undeveloped. Man wants concord but nature knows better what is good for his kind; nature wants discord. Man wants to live comfortably and pleasurable but nature intends that he should raise himself out of lethargy and inactive contentment into work and trouble and then he should find means of exalting himself, adroitly from these latter. The natural impulses, the sources of associability and continuous resistance from which so many evils spring, but which at the same time drive man to a new exertion of his powers and thus to a development of his natural faculties, suggest the arrangement of a wise creator and not the hand of an evil spirit who might have ruined this excellent enterprise or spoiled it out of envy.

Fifth Principle

The latest problem for mankind, the solution of which nature forces him to seek, is the achievement of a civil society which administers law (Recht) generally. Nature can achieve its other intentions regarding mankind only through the solution and fulfilment of this task, for a completely *just civic constitution* is the highest task nature has set mankind. This is because only under such a constitution can there be achieved the supreme objective of nature, namely, the development of all the faculties of man by his own effort. It is also nature's intent that man should secure all these ends by himself only in a society which not only possesses the greatest freedom and hence a very general antagonism of its members but also possesses the most precise determination and enforcement of the limit of this freedom so

that it can coexist with the freedom of other societies: this will serve the highest purpose of nature.

In other words, a society in which *freedom under external laws* is found combined in the highest degree with irresistible force, that is to say, a perfectly *just civic constitution*, must be the supreme task nature has set for mankind. Only through the solution and fulfillment of this task can nature hope to achieve its other objectives concerning man. Want forces man, who so greatly inclines toward unrestricted freedom, to enter into this state of constraint. It takes the greatest want of all to bring men to the point where they cannot live alongside each other in wild freedom but within such an enclosure as the civic association provides. These very same inclinations afterwards have a very good effect. It is like the trees in a forest which, since each seeks to take air and sun away from the other, compel each other to seek both and thus they achieve a beautiful straight growth. Whereas those that develop their branches as they please, in freedom and apart from each other, grow crooked and twisted. All culture and art which adorn mankind, the most beautiful social order, are the fruits of associability which is self-compelled to discipline itself and thus through a derived art to fulfill completely the germs of its nature.

Sixth Principle

This problem is the most difficult and at the same time the one which mankind solves last. The difficulty which even the mere idea of this task clearly reveals is the following: Man is an animal who, if he lives among others of his kind, *needs a master*, for man certainly misuses his freedom in regard to others of his kind and, even though as a rational being he desires a law which would provide limits for the freedom of all, his egoistic animal inclination misguides him into excluding himself where he can. Man therefore *needs* a master who can break man's will and compel him to obey a general will under which every man could be free. But where is he to get this master? Nowhere else

but from mankind. But then this master is in turn an animal who needs a master. Therefore one cannot see how man, try as he will, could secure a master [charged with maintaining] public justice who would be himself just. This is true whether one seeks to discover such a master in a single person or in a group of elected persons. For each of these will always abuse his freedom if he has no one over him who wields power according to the laws. Yet the highest master is supposed to be *just in himself* and yet a *man*. The task involved is therefore most difficult; indeed, a complete solution is impossible. One cannot fashion something absolutely straight from wood which is as crooked as that of which man is made. Nature has imposed upon us the task of approximating this idea.¹ That his task should be the latest that man achieves follows from yet another consideration: the *right conceptions* regarding the nature of a possible constitution. Great *experience* in many activities and a *good will* which is prepared to accept such a constitution are all required. Obviously it will be very difficult, and if it happens it will be very late and after many unsuccessful attempts that three such things are found together.

Seventh Principle

The problem of the establishment of a perfect civic constitution depends upon the problem of a lawful external relationship of the states and cannot be solved without the latter. What use is it to work out a lawful civic constitution among individual men, that is, to order a commonwealth? For the very same associability which compelled man to do this is again the cause of the fact that each commonwealth in its external relations, that is to

¹The rule of man is therefore very artificial. We do not know how things are arranged with the inhabitants of other planets and their nature but if we execute this mandate of nature well we may properly flatter ourselves that we occupy a not inconsiderable position among our neighbors in the cosmos. Perhaps with these neighbors an individual can achieve his destiny in his own life. With us mortals it is different: only the species can hope to do so.

say, as a state in relation to other states, is in a condition of unrestricted freedom. Consequently, one commonwealth must expect from the others the very same evils which oppress individual human beings and which compelled them to enter into a lawful civic state. Nature has again used quarrelsomeness, in this case that of the great societies and states, as a means for discovering a condition of quiet and security through the very antagonism inevitable among them. That is to say, wars, the excessive and never-ending preparation for wars, and the want which every state even in the midst of peace must feel—all these are means by which nature instigates attempts, which at first are inadequate, but which, after many devastations, reversals and a very general exhaustion of the states' resources, may accomplish what reason could have suggested to them without so much sad experience, namely, to leave the lawless state of savages and to enter into a union of nations wherein each, even the smallest state, could expect to derive its security and rights—not from its own power or its own legal judgment—but only from this great union of nations (*Fœdus Amphictyonum*) and from united power and decisions according to the united will of them all. However fanciful this idea may seem and as such may have been ridiculed when held by the Abbé St. Pierre and Rousseau (perhaps because they believed the idea to be too near its realization), it is, nevertheless, the inevitable escape from the destitution into which human beings plunge each other. It is this which must compel states to the resolution to seek quiet and security through a lawful constitution (however hard it may be for them) and to do that which the wild man is so very reluctantly forced to do, namely, to give up his brutal freedom.

All wars are therefore so many attempts (not in the intention of men, but in the intention of nature) to bring about new relations among the states and to form new bodies by the break-up of the old states to the point where they cannot again maintain themselves alongside each other and must therefore suffer revolutions until finally, partly through the best possible

arrangement of the civic constitution internally, and partly through the common agreement and legislation externally, there is created a state which, like a civic commonwealth, can maintain itself automatically.

(The question) whether one should expect that, from an epicurean influence of effective causes, the states, like small fragments of matter, by their accidental collision, make all kinds of formations which are destroyed again by a new impact until eventually and *accidentally* there occurs a formation which can maintain itself in its form (by a lucky accident which will hardly ever occur!); or whether one should rather assume that nature follows a regular sequence to lead our species from the lowest level of animality gradually to the highest level of humanity by man's own, though involuntary, effort and that thus nature is unfolding in this seemingly wild disorder man's original faculties quite according to rule; or whether one prefers to assume that all these effects and counter-effects will in the long run result in nothing, or at least nothing sensible, and that things will remain as they always have been and therefore one cannot predict that the discord which is natural to the species is in the end preparing for us a hell of evils, evil in an ever so civilized state because perhaps nature will destroy, by barbaric devastation, this state and all advances of culture (a fate which one may well suffer with the government of blind accident which is indeed identical with lawless freedom if no wisely conceived direction of nature is imputed thereto)—these three alternatives, in the last analysis, amount to the question: Whether it be reasonable to assume that nature is appropriate in its parts but (as a whole) inappropriate to its end?²

Therefore, the feckless condition of the savages did . . . what is also being effected by the barbarian freedom of the

²The German antithesis here is *Zweckmäßigkeit* and *Zwecklosigkeit*. These terms are very inadequately rendered by appropriate and inappropriate but no other handy pair is available to render the idea that something is appropriate to its end or not. The full German phrase is *ob es wohl vernünftig sei*.

states which have been instituted; by the employment of all the resources of the commonwealth for armaments against one another, by the devastation which war is causing, but even more by the necessity of being constantly prepared for war. The full development of man's natural faculties is being inhibited by the evils which spring from these conditions which compel our species to discover a counter-balance to the intrinsically healthy resistance of many states against each other resulting from their freedom and to introduce a united power which will give support to this balance. In other words these conditions compel our species to introduce a cosmo-political state of public security which is not without all *danger*, [for we must see to it] that neither the vitality of mankind goes to sleep nor these states destroy each other as they might without a principle of balance of *equality* in their mutual effects and counter-effects. Before this last step, namely, the joining of the states, is taken, in other words, the half-way mark of mankind's development is reached; human nature is enduring the worst hardships under the guise of external welfare and *Rousseau* was not so very wrong when he preferred the condition of savages; [for it is to be preferred], provided one omits this last stage which our species will have to reach. We are highly civilized by art and science, we are civilized in all kinds of social graces and decency to the point where it becomes exasperating, but much (must be discarded) before we can consider ourselves truly ethicized. For the idea of morality is part of culture by the use that has been made of this idea which amounts only to something similar to ethics in the form of a love of honor and external decency (which) constitutes civilization. As long as states will use all their resources for their vain and violent designs for expansion and thus will continually hinder the slow efforts toward the inner shaping of the minds of their citizens, and even withdraw from their citizens all encouragement in this respect, we cannot hope for much because a great exertion by each commonwealth on behalf of the education of their citizens is required for this goal.

Every pretended good that is not grafted upon a morally good frame of mind is nothing more than a pretense and glittering misery. Mankind will probably remain in this condition until, as I have said, it has struggled out of the chaotic condition of the relations among its states.

Eighth Principle

The history of mankind could be viewed on the whole as the realization of a hidden plan of nature in order to bring about an internally—and for this purpose also externally—perfect condition; since this is the only state in which nature can develop all faculties of mankind. This principle is a conclusion drawn from the previous principle. We can see that philosophy may also have its expectation of a millennium, but this millennium would be one for the realization of which philosophical ideas themselves may be helpful although only from afar. Therefore this expectation is hardly utopian. What matters is whether experience can discover some such progress of nature's intention. I would say *some small part*; for this revolution seems to require so much time that from the small distance which man has so far traversed one can judge only uncertainly the shape of the revolution's course and the relation of the parts to the whole. The situation is similar to that in astronomy where it is likewise difficult to determine from all the observations of the heavens up till now the course which our sun, with all its swarm of satellites, occupies in the system of fixed stars. But when one takes into account the general premise that the world is constituted as a system and considers what little has been observed one can say that the indications are sufficiently reliable to enable us to conclude that such a revolution is real. Our human nature has this aspect that it cannot be indifferent to even the most remote epoch at which our species may arrive if only that epoch may be expected with certainty. Furthermore, it is less feasible in our particular case since it seems that we could hasten by our own rational efforts the time when this state

might occur which would be so enjoyable for our descendants. For that reason even feeble traces of an approach to this state become very important. The states are (now) on such artificial terms toward each other that not one of them can relax its efforts at internal development without losing, in comparison to the others, in power and influence. Thus if not progress then at least the maintenance of this end of nature (namely, culture) is safeguarded by the ambitions of those states to some extent. Furthermore, civic freedom cannot now be interfered with without the state feeling the disadvantage of such interference in all trades, primarily foreign commerce, and as a result (there is) a decline of the power of the state in its foreign relations. Therefore this freedom is gradually being extended. If one obstructs the citizen in seeking his welfare in any way he chooses, as long as (his way) can coexist with the freedom of others, one also hampers the vitality of all business and the strength of the whole (state). For this reason restrictions of personal activities are being increasingly lifted and general freedom granted and thus enlightenment is gradually developing with occasional nonsense and freakishness. Enlightenment is a great good which must ever draw mankind away from the egoistic expansive tendencies of its rulers once they understand their own advantage. This enlightenment and along with it a certain participation of the heart (are things) which the enlightened man cannot fail to feel for the good which he fully understands must by and by reach the thrones and have influence upon the principles of government. For example, although our governors have no money to spare for public education nor for anything else that concerns the best interests of the world because all the money has in advance been budgeted for the coming war, they will nevertheless find it to their own advantage at least not to hinder the weak and slow independent efforts of their people in this regard. Eventually, even war will become a very dubious enterprise, not only because its result on both sides is so uncertain and artificial, but because in its aftermath the state conse-

quently finds itself saddled with a growing debt the repayment of which becomes undeterminable. At the same time the effect of each impact of a government upon other governments in our continent, where the states have become so very much linked through commerce, will become so noticeable that the other states, compelled by their own danger, even when lacking a legal basis, will offer themselves as arbiters and thus start a future great government of which there is no previous example in history. Even though this body-politic at present is discernible only in its broadest outline, a feeling (for it) is rising in all member states since each is interested in the maintenance of the whole. . . .

Ninth Principle

A philosophical attempt to write a general world history according to a plan of nature which aims at a perfect civic association of mankind must be considered possible and even helpful to this intention of nature. It is a strange and apparently paradoxical project to write a history according to an idea as to how the world should develop if its development is to have an appropriate rational end. It would seem that such a purpose could only produce a novel, but this idea might yet be usable if one could assume that nature and even the play of human freedom does not proceed without plan and intended end. Even though we are too shortsighted to perceive the secret mechanism of nature's plan an otherwise planless conglomeration of human activities could be used as a guide when presented as a system. If one starts with Greek history as the (one) through which all older and contemporary history has been preserved or at least certified,³ one may trace the influence (of Greek

³ Only a *learned public* which has continued from the beginning uninterrupted to our time can certify to ancient history. Beyond that all is *terra incognita* and the history of nations which lived beyond that frame can only be started with the time when they entered it. For the *Jewish* people that happened in the time of the Ptolemies through the Greek translation of the Bible without which one would give little credence

history) upon the formation and malformation of the body politic of the Roman people who devoured the Greek state. Again, (if one traces) down to our time the influence of *Rome* upon the *Barbarian* who destroyed the empire; if one then periodically adds the history of the state of other peoples as knowledge of them has come to us through these enlightened nations; then one will discover a regular procession of improvements in constitutional government in our part of the world which will probably give laws to all other (states) eventually. By concentrating primarily on the civic constitution and its laws and on the relations among states, because both served to raise nations, their arts and sciences, one may discover a guide to explain the chaotic play of human affairs. . . . Such a *justification* of nature, or perhaps one should say of providence, is a not unimportant reason for selecting a particular outlook for observing the world. For what good is it to praise the majesty and wisdom of creation in the realm of nature, which is without reason, and to recommend contemplating them if that part of the great arena of supreme wisdom which above all contains that purpose, namely, the history of mankind, remains as a constant objection because its spectacle compels us to turn away our eyes in disgust and as we despair of ever encountering therein a completed rational end causes us to expect such perfection only in another world? It would be a misinterpretation of my intention to maintain that I wished to displace the work on true empirical history by this idea of a universal history which contains a principle *a priori*. This idea is only a notion of what a philosophical mind, who would have to be very knowledgeable in history, could attempt from another standpoint. Furthermore, the complexity, in many ways praiseworthy, with which the history of an age is now composed, naturally causes everyone to worry as to how our later descendants are going to

to their *isolated* reports. But one can trace backward from this event once it is adequately ascertained and thus with all peoples. The first page of *Thucydides*, says Hume, is the real beginning of history.

cope with the burden of history which, after some centuries, we are going to leave them. Without doubt they will care for the history of the most ancient period, for which the documents would have long perished, only from the standpoint (which) interests them, namely, what nations and governments have contributed toward world government or how they have damaged it. We may be concerned with this and may also consider (that) the ambition of rulers and their servants (should) be directed toward the only means which could secure a glorious reputation for them in later ages. These considerations may also offer a small reason for attempting such a philosophical history.