DEAN'S LECTURE

This Senseless Course of Human Things:

'One of Professor Kant's Most Cherished Ideas'

David Levine, Dean
St. John's College
Santa Fe

8:00 p.m.
Friday, August 26
Great Hall

The Senseless Course of Human Things: On "One of Professor Kant's Most Cherished Ideas"

Dean's Lecture

August 2005

ST JOHN'S College

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Immanuel Kant

Idea for a Universal History From a Cosmopolitan Point of View

[1784]

The Nine Theses

First: *All of a creature's natural capacities are destined to develop completely and in conformity with their end.*

Second: *In man (as the sole rational creature on earth) those natural capacities directed toward the use of his reason are to be completely developed only in the species, not in the individual.*

Third: *Nature has willed that man, entirely by himself, produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical organization of his animal existence and partake in no other happiness or perfection than what he himself, independently of instinct, can secure through his own reason.*

Fourth: *The means that nature uses to bring about the development of all of man's capacities is the antagonism among them in society, as far as in the end this antagonism is the cause of law-governed order in society.*

Fifth: *The greatest problem for the human species, whose solution nature compels it to seek, is to achieve a universal civil society administered in accord with the right.*

Sixth: *This problem is the hardest and the last to be solved by the human species.*

Seventh: *The problem of establishing a perfect civil constitution depends on the problem of law-governed external relations among nations and cannot be solved unless the latter is.*

Eighth: *One can regard the history of the human species, in the large, as the realization of a hidden plan of nature to bring about an internally, and for this purpose, also an externally perfect national constitution, as the sole state in which all of humanity's natural capacities can be developed.*

Ninth: *A philosophical attempt to work out a universal history of the world in accord with a plan of nature that aims at a perfect civic union of the human species must be regarded as possible and even as helpful to this objective of nature.*

This Senseless Course of Human Things: On "One of Professor Kant's Most Cherished Ideas"[1]

"Criticism alone can sever
the root of materialism, fatalism,
atheism, free-thinking, fanaticism,
and superstition, which can be
universally injurious."
Kant[2]

"By space the universe swallows me up;
by thought I comprehend the world."
Pascal[3]

"Without man...the whole of creation
would be a mere wilderness
...have no final end."
Kant[4]

"Desedimentation of a tradition
does not ensure self-understanding."
Velkley[5]

1. Studying with Kant:

To everyone, **Welcome!**

To our new freshmen, a special **Welcome!**

Some years ago, ten I believe, I offered a preceptorial on Kant's ***Critique of Teleological Judgment*** (the second part of his ***Critique of Judgment*** [1790]). Before precepts began, a student came up to me and asked excitedly whether it was true, as she had heard, that I had studied *with* Kant.... Now Kant lived in the eighteenth century (he died in 1804). "I'm not *that* old," I replied, though the white beard might suggest otherwise. Apparently an earlier comment of mine to someone else that I had studied Kant came to be transmogrified over time that I had studied *with* Kant. Ummm.

There is, though, an important lesson in this humorous incident. Our memories are not perfect. Nor is our sense of the past. Time is not a neutral medium. The past can be changed in the course of transmission to the present. Its truth, therefore, is not simply available to us. As a result we need to be very, very careful about what we take to be true. Like the game of telephone that we all played as children, what we receive now as an account of things may be very different from what in deed happened, what was actually said, or what in fact was handed down. History and tradition are thus not unproblematic givens.[6] The story we take to be "history," in short, **should** be a *problem* for us.

2. An Exclusive:

It is probably true that we all hold some notion of history close to our hopes for the future from which we take guidance and some measure of perspective and consolation. To help us reflect on this hope, I will turn this evening to Immanuel Kant.

In 1784 there appeared in a German newspaper a brief notice—an exclusive, if you will—written by a visiting scholar making public, even before he had done so himself, "one of Professor Kant's most cherished ideas." In response, Kant quickly put pen to paper and set forth a fuller account of his own thinking. That essay, ***An Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,*** will be our point of departure this evening.

Now, by 1784 Kant had already published the first edition of his famous ***Critique of Pure Reason*** (1781) and had begun its revision (the second edition of 1787). This was soon followed in '88 by his equally famous ***Critique of Practical Reason***. I mention this that we not mistake his little work as the late musings of a thinker seeking to put his life's work into perspective. Rather it is the contemporaneous and, according to the visiting scholar, one of the most deeply held ideas of the critical philosopher. In the ***First Critique*** Kant had sought to give secure foundations to the sciences yet found himself face to face with this *paradox*: the world set out by modern science is a world that is at once **lawful** *and* **aimless**. It is this paradox that Kant seeks to address by means of his reflections on history.

As this is my last lecture of this term as dean, I have taken some liberties and I must ask your indulgence. Tonight I will be addressing difficult material, material that presumes a good deal. I hope I'm able to present it in a way that it will stimulate thought, even if it will not be simply available in all its details. The questions are important; the way, however, is sometimes turgid and difficult to traverse.

3. "Human Reason has this Peculiar Fate:"

Kant begins his ***Critique of Pure Reason*** with a remarkable observation. Reflecting back over the whole range of our rational capacities, he says: "**Human reason has [this] peculiar fate** (*besondere Schicksal*)...: it is burdened (*belästigt*) by questions it cannot dismiss, for they are posed...by the very nature of reason itself, but also [questions] that it **cannot answer**, for they surpass all the capacities of human reason" (vii) [**2x**]. Our nature as human beings is to question, but our fate is to find no answers to certain of these questions. What are we to do? We **can't** dismiss them.[7] Are we to live, then, forever in doubt and uncertainty? "Burdened by questions we cannot dismiss." "Posed by reason itself." We want to know even if it is beyond our capacity to know.

One might respond to such a predicament by saying simply that we shouldn't be asking such questions. But it is Kant's great insight into our human condition that we **cannot help but** ask such questions. Hence his "answer:" We must find a way to satisfy **both** our inquiring natures while at the same time **not** deluding ourselves that such things are knowable. According to Kant, this requires that we acknowledge, and keep clearly in mind, several *fundamental distinctions*: that between knowing and *thinking*, between understanding and *reason*, and between categories and *ideas*.

What can be "known" according to Kant are the things of our daily experience, things we experience through the senses, those, for example, represented to us as objects by the faculty of

understanding and rendered with a certain precision by modern science. We get into trouble, however, when we apply the terms used for **understanding** daily experience—terms he calls "*categories*"[8]—to things that are *beyond* our experience.

Yet we have questions about such "supersensible" things too. We want to know about God, freedom, and, here, human history. As a result Kant distinguishes between the **proper use** of these categories restricted to sense experience and their **extended use** that, while not bringing us to knowledge, would yet allow us to *think* about these greater questions and not just about what is immediately before us. By "thinking," then, he means "entertaining in thought" without at the same time presuming that such things can be known. We thus can "*think*" what we can't know. Just as we can have images in the imagination that we do not know to be true, so we can have "thoughts" whose truth is indeterminable. These he calls "**ideas.**[9]" Again we *think*, but do **not** know, ideas.

In addition, we want to think them, as we do all things, in an organized way, that we might attain an overview and an order of meaning not otherwise available. Thus to make this possible we invoke "**transcendental**[10] **ideas**" as principles of integration that we may have some idea of a bigger "forest" and not simply remain lost amidst the trees, troubled and in doubt. But these ideas, he emphasizes, are "valid" *only* from the human-all-too-human perspective, or, as Kant says, for "subjective purposes" only. From the title of the essay we will consider tonight—***Idea for a Universal History***—we see that we are to situate ourselves in *this* realm of the human-all-too-human, in the realm of "ideas." History is therefore one of those things that **cannot be known**, only somehow thought.

Moreover, in regard to history and other processes viewed developmentally (such as Nature), another of these ideas proves helpful, one that allows us to see our thinking as having an inner integration: the idea of **purpose** and **purposiveness**. ("We call that purposive the existence of which seems to presuppose the antecedent representation of it.") By purposiveness, Kant means, then, a way of thinking an *inner* connectedness yet with **no** claims to objectivity or knowledge, again, for "subjective purposes" only.[11]

And now to Kant's little essay.

4. A Newton for the Course of Human Things:

Kant begins his exposition by asking us first to reflect on the *appearance* of human action. Is it possible for us to see our actions as we would those of *other* natural beings and not, as we are wont, from amidst our everyday concerns as individuals?

Nowadays (at least in the western world) we tend to think of ourselves as somehow separate from the great chain of causality that characterizes the world of nature.[12] Indeed it was Kant who, amidst all the doubts that modern science had raised about human freedom, had found a way to conceive of our being **free agents**, governed by principle and not simply by natural necessity. From this "metaphysical" perspective (*Absicht*), he allows, we are free to think of ourselves as causes in the world. (Indeed for many, this is Kant's most distinctive contribution, that of philosopher of freedom.)

Now, however, he asks us to try to see human life "**in the large**" (*im ganzen*), not to look at our individual lives, nor that of our families, nor our nation, but to look at humankind *as a whole*, as a **species** (*die ganze Gattung*). What can be made of our existence on earth? Is it

leading anywhere, or is it all but "sound and fury signifying nothing?" Does it even make sense to ask such a question?

Kant says it does. Indeed he says we **must** seek a larger view, for the reality of our own lives often does not present us with a coherent picture. On the contrary, our lives might appear haphazard, discontinuous, without rhyme or reason, and as a result disorienting. Looking at the whole, by contrast, might "...allow[] us to **hope,"** he says, "that if we examine *the play of the human will's freedom* ***in the large,*** we [might] discover (*entdecken*) its course to conform to *rules* as well as to **hope** that what strikes us as complicated and unpredictable in the...individual... [may] in **the history of the entire species [2x]** be discovered to be progressive (*fortgehend*) and [to reveal] the slow development (*Entwicklung*: evolution) of its original capacities." In the large, things may be "thought" purposeful, whereas in the small this may not be so easy.

Indeed even in the shorter view, our lives are not simply patternless. For all our sense of our own distinctiveness or "individuality," human lives too conform to larger patterns. We are all subject to the latest fads—most of us wear blue jeans. Sociologists and psychologists study "customary" and "normal" behaviors. And insurance agents are forever compiling actuarial tables about all sorts of likelihoods. In short, we have to recognize that there are such (second order) generalities that obtain even about our lives.

But is there a yet bigger, more comprehensive, more cosmopolitan, even "universal" pattern that obtains for the **species**? Can we give an account or narrative (*Erzählung*) of the story of mankind, even the chapters still to be written? Such a project might at first sound unimaginable. Indeed Kant grants that we might think of such a universal history as "strange and absurd," a metaphysical "novel," if you will (see ix 38: "romance novel" [*Roman*]; "without rhyme or reason," *befremdlicher und dem Anschein nach ungereimter Anschlag*).

Kant suggests, however, that we not dismiss such a possibility out of hand, for there are many unruly things we've succeeded in rendering lawful. He offers the example of the **weather**—a curious comparison to be sure—though one that shows both the difficulty and the possibility of such a "strange" project. "The annual charts that countries make of [large scale human phenomena]," he says, "show that they [too] occur in conformity with **natural laws** as invariable as those [governing] the unpredictable weather, whose particular changes we cannot determine in advance [especially in his time], but which **in the large** do not fail to support a uniform and uninterrupted pattern [such as we see also in] the growth of plants, the flow of rivers, and in other natural events" (29). In the large, even the weather proves regular. "In the large."

This brings Kant to an important, indeed momentous assertion. "*Each [individual], according to his own inclination, follows his own purpose, often in opposition to others; yet each individual and people,* ***as if following some guiding thread*** *(Leitfaden), go toward (fortgehen) a natural but to each of them unknown goal...*" [2x] Our freedom notwithstanding, we are not exempt from being natural beings, hence from conforming to natural laws.[13]

It would thus appear that human life takes place on **two different planes** at once, one known to us, the other unknown.[14] As individuals we choose our own purposes; as a species we are brought to other, unsought, yet accomplished goals. Kant elaborates: "Individual men and even entire peoples give little thought to the fact that while each [person] according to his own ways pursues his own end...they [at the same time] unknowingly [*unbekannt*] proceed toward **an unacknowledged [*unbemerkt*] natural end.**" He then adds "...as if [*als*] following a **guiding**

thread...they [unknowingly] work to promote an end they would set little store by, even if they were aware of it (29)." It is Kant's project this evening to show us nature's other ends.

Whereas from the perspective of individual human lives, everything on the world stage, he says, may appear "woven together from folly and childish vanity and often even childish malice and destructiveness,"[15] it is the obligation of the philosopher, by contrast, to see "...whether there is some **natural objective** [to be found] in ***this senseless course of human things*** (*diesem widersinnigen Gange menschlicher Dinge*) **[2x]**, [and] from which it may be possible to produce **a history of creatures who proceed without a plan of their own but in conformity with some definite plan of nature [2x]**" (30; viii 36). Thus he proposes a new sort of history, a species or universal history, thought not as separate from or in opposition to nature, but rather as articulating nature's hidden plan (ix).

Let us note his language, new to his contemporaries, but so familiar to us today. We are to place our **hopes** for meaning in life, not in modern science, but in a "universal" history wherein alone the greater progress of mankind is revealed. Only then will the fuller significance of our own lives be known. Only then can we find consolation, where there is little when considered "in the small." In short, we are to place our hopes in "the progress of history."

While Kant doesn't think that he is himself to be the author of such a history, he expects that nature will provide, just as she provided a **Kepler** to subject "the eccentric planets to definite laws" or a **Newton** "who explained these laws by means of a universal natural cause" (cp. viii 37). By outlining an idea for a universal history, Kant seeks to prepare the way for such a Newton of human affairs.[16]

5. A Brief Exposition:

Kant's work is in ten parts, an introduction and nine "theses." [You have its table of contents before you.] Our summary has to be brief and, I'm afraid, somewhat dense.

i: Reason's View: In the first thesis, he sets out the basic presupposition of this new kind of history: "***All of a creature's natural capacities are destined [bestimmt] to develop completely and in conformity with their end*** (30)." This principle, he says, is confirmed by experience.[17] We see this progressive development in animals, for example. But this in turn reveals something about how we are seeing things. Such a seeing sees the fulfillment in the intermediate state. Such a seeing is end-seeing or "teleological."

Indeed this proves pivotal. Our seeing can be bare and factual **or** it can reveal the fullness of ends. But which way are we to look? The *overriding question* for us, Kant seems to be saying, is what sort of universe, and thereby what sort of world, we want to inhabit (cp. vii 35, ix 39). Kant lays out the alternatives: "If we stray from that fundamental [teleological] principle, we no longer have a lawful [world] but an **aimlessly playing nature**...." If we don't allow ourselves to see such end-directedness, "...unconsolable chance [*das trostlose Ungefähr*] takes the place of **reason's guiding thread**."

Over against the whole thrust of modern philosophy (with the possible exception of Leibniz), Kant here asserts the rational necessity of some form of a teleological conception of Nature (now with a capital '**N**').[18] The earlier rejection of final cause by Bacon and Descartes (and thereafter Newton) yielded a conception of "mere nature"[19] (small '**n**') that is blind—or Kant's term "aimless"—sheer "matter in the void." Rather than being part of an integrated whole

(a cosmos), events, while internally lawful, are but chance events, "happenings." A rigorously mechanistic conception of nature would thus have to forsake insight into any larger meaning of things.[20] By contrast, Kant's new philosophy of history (i 30; ix 39), heroically we might say, seeks to avert or forestall this outcome by proposing "a different way of looking at Nature." **Reason**, he claims, would have us see things differently.

ii: Consolation: In his second thesis he begins to spell out the implications for man: ***"In man...those natural capacities directed toward the use of his reason are to be completely developed only in the species, not in the individual."***

Human reason has an "interest[21]" to develop "beyond natural instinct." Indeed, he adds somewhat ominously, "... [reason] knows no limit[] to its projects" [*kennt keine Grenzen ihrer Entwürfe*] [30]."[22] But this process takes trial and error, and since any individual life is short, we ourselves never see the full development of our natural capacities. Indeed such an advance would take unforeseeable generations, with each generation "...passing its *enlightenment* (*Aufklärung*) on to the next, [in order] to bring...our species to the stage of development that completely fulfills nature's objective."

In this way the ideal of full development, while not realistic for individuals, sorry to say, is retained for the **species**. The promise of such an ideal transcends and thereby eclipses the futility and despair inherent in human finitude. Man's natural capacities are no longer seen as "purposeless" or the result of the "childish play" of nature. On the contrary, whereas in his critical writings he had sought to cut man off from "nature's leading strings"[23] and thereby establish man's unconditional autonomy, Kant here, with the introduction of the *ideas* of Nature and History, seeks to assimilate man back into some greater conception of the whole and reclaim for man the "guiding thread" of reason that the faculty of understanding and modern science could not provide.

Such rational idealism has this advantage in his view. It would not lead to cynicism.[24] A despairing cynicism—consequent upon the realization that we are but the "contemptible plaything of nature"—would, Kant fears, only confuse our motivation and "**destroy all [our] practical [moral] principles.**" Lest the conception of human autonomy and morality be forever undermined, we must look past our disorienting existential situation to the less compromising long view provided by a "universal history" and see therein our consolation. It is Kant's profound hope that such a consoling (ix 39) view of the **wisdom of nature** might provide a more secure foundation for our moral principles.[25]

iii: By Himself: Kant's third thesis seeks to place man within this larger scheme. ***"Nature has willed that man, entirely by himself, ...partake in no other happiness or perfection than what he himself, independently of instinct, can secure through his own reason" (31).*** Here Kant seeks to reconcile human freedom and nature's plan.

It is part of the economy ("parsimony") of Nature, Kant here asserts, that man is so constituted that, if he is to attain anything beyond what is provided by bare instinct, he must do it himself ("produce everything **from himself**"[26]). Nature has given man only his reason and free will to work with; his resourcefulness thus has to be **willed**. Indeed the "host of hardships" that we face in life only serve the greater ends by forcing man to overcome them and thereby to "advance from the lowest barbarity." Here man should thank himself, he says, and take pride in his self-development ("self-esteem").

However, here too we see that Nature is not concerned with our personal well-being as with the ultimate perfection of the **species**. Kant herewith is brought face to face with the "paradox of progress:" namely that preceding stages are but **means** to later ones, and thus, in the case of human affairs, the lives of earlier generations have their ultimate worth **not** in themselves but only as they serve subsequent generations. Like the good parent, all prior labors and efforts have been for others. Thus a more "enlightened" outlook, one that encompasses the destiny of the species, is necessary lest we despair that our own labors bear so little fruit.

iv: Antagonism: Kant now seeks to think through the ground of his conviction that history leads to the betterment of the species. How is this thinkable, since we do not experience "progress" in the small, but if anything, the reverse? ***"The means that nature uses to bring about the development of all of man's capacities [he says in his fourth thesis] is the antagonism among them in society as far as in the end this antagonism is the cause of law-governed order in society" (31).***[27]

Nature works in wondrous ways. Its course is not simple, nor its ways obvious. Though it intends a noble end, a "law-governed order in society," its **means,** surprisingly, are **not** of like kind. One of the many ironies of history is that—in one of Kant's most famous phrases—it is man's very "**unsocial sociability**" (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*) [2x] that both binds us together with our fellows, and, bringing us into conflict, forces us to confront and thereby resolve these differences. Man is therefore both a **social animal** with his end "in society" (where he finds himself "more than man") **and** a **selfish animal** who seeks his private and sometimes exclusive happiness. Man wants "everything to go according to his own desires" (32)—to do his own thing—yet surprisingly this too works to his long term advantage.

Indeed man lives out this alchemy of opposites (dialectic?): Struggle "awakens" in man a sense of his powers, forcing him to overcome his inclination to laziness and inertia, he says, "driven by his desire for honor, power, or property, to secure status among his fellows." Irony of ironies, in so dong a "first step to[ward] *culture*" is [nevertheless] taken.[28] "...*All* man's talents are gradually developed, his taste is cultured," he says, "and through **progressive enlightenment** he begins to establish **a [new] way of thinking** (cp. vii 35) that can in time transform the crude natural capacity for moral discrimination into definite practical principles and thus transform a pathologically enforced agreement ...into **a moral whole**." Paradoxically, our unsociability seems necessary for our moral development. Paradoxically, an intermediate evil may even serve a long term good.

Indeed Kant even goes so far as to say that, were it not for our selfishness, we would have remained simple peasants (Arcadian shepherds). He even offers this ill-conceived prayer of thanksgiving: ***"Thanks be to nature," he says, "for the incompatibility, for the distasteful, competitive vanity, for the insatiable desire to possess and to rule"*** (32). ***"Thanks be to nature...,"*** were it not for antagonism, man's greatest potential would remain underdeveloped, dormant. He then offers this summary observation: ***"Man wills concord; but nature knows better what is good for the species: she [that is Nature] wills discord."*** Nature wills discord. Discord has a role in the larger scheme of things and is thus not simply bad. Indeed Kant would have us see here a higher wisdom: "...the design of **a wise creator**, not [as others might think] the hand of a malicious spirit." ***"Thanks be to nature...."***

v: The Dynamic of Our Unsociableness: Man's condition is thus one of antagonism, though, Kant is hopeful, not a perpetual one. In the fifth thesis he addresses the remarkable progress that is yet possible even from out of discord. ***"The greatest problem for the human***

species, whose solution nature compels it to seek, is to achieve a universal civil society administered in accord with the right" (33).

Man's fulfillment is in a free society. Human society continually undergoes revolutions that are progressive, from wild freedom to self-recognized limitation ("consistent with the freedom of others"), from socially precarious passions to socially constructive passions. As with trees competing for light, our *competitiveness* brings us to strive upward. Thus antagonism is not finally destructive, nor "wild freedom" inevitable. "**Necessity** compels men...to enter into this state of coercion." In sum: "**All** the culture and art that adorn mankind, as well as the most beautiful social order, are [the] fruits of **unsociableness** that is *forced* to discipline itself and thus through an *imposed art* to develop nature's seed completely." By means of nature's "imposed art" law will emerge out of wildness, culture out of barbarism. Civilization, in short, is the wondrous product of uncivilized forces.

vi: The Magistracy of Law: This progress toward a universal civil society is especially remarkable considering man's "nature.[29]" Hence his sixth thesis: "***This problem [of establishing a civil society in accord with the right] is both the hardest and the last to be solved by the human species."***

The problem can be clearly stated, though not easily solved: Man, that is, **we**, regularly abuse our freedom, our "selfish animal propensities" inducing us to exempt ourselves from lawful behavior. Man in short does not freely accept the moral law. Even Kant has to admit that "...From warped wood...nothing straight can be fashioned." How then to get such a creature to accept the "magistracy" and authority of law? He puts the political problem thusly: "[Man] requires a **master** (*Herr*) who will **break his self-will** and **force** him to obey a universally valid will [and law], whereby everyone can be free." However, even then, who among us is exempt from such self-will and could serve as the "chief (*Oberhaupt*) of public justice"? The political problem would thus appear to be insoluble, not simply "the hardest of all."

Nevertheless Kant is not deterred. "Nature," he says, "only enjoins us to the *approximation* of this idea." Three conditions are required: 1) the correct **conception** of a constitution, 2) great **experience** "during much of the world's course," and 3) **good will.**[30] As if having Plato's ***Republic*** in mind, Kant admits that what he speaks of is an *unlikely story or ideal*: "...It is hard to find three such factors...together all at once; [and] when it happens, it will only be very **late** [in the history of mankind] and [only] after **many** futile attempts (34)." Kant's solution: the progressive course of history. Though outside the realm of possibility for individual men, we should not cease to hope for a universal civil society for future generations.

vii: Sad Experience: Again unlikely does not mean impossible. Therefore it would do us well, Kant says, to think about the conditions under which the establishment of "a perfect civil constitution" could come about: ***"The problem of establishing a perfect civil constitution," he says in his seventh thesis, "depends on the problem of [securing] law-governed external relations among nations and cannot be solved unless the latter [problem] is" (34).***

Whatever one state may accomplish within its own borders, antagonism remains operative between states, that is, the "state of nature" obtains in international affairs. Kant understands that this **cannot** be ignored.[31] However here too, Kant is convinced, nature is at work securing our betterment; here too the cruelest things of human existence are instrumental to the overall human good: "Nature has once more **used** human quarrelsomeness [he says], man's inevitable *antagonism* ...as a **means** for discovering a state of calm and society." Indeed even **war**

drives us "...to take the step that reason [otherwise] could have suggested, without so much sad experience, namely, to leave the lawless state of savagery and enter a greater *federation of peoples (grossen Völkerbunde).*"[32]

This idea of a "federation of peoples" or league of nations, in Kant's view [1784], is *not* fanciful enthusiasm (*schwärmerisch*) (and should not be laughed at, Rousseau notwithstanding) but rather is "...the **inevitable outcome** [2x] of the distress that men cause one another (35)."[33] Here international affairs is seen as recapitulating nationhood and political psychology. If a commonwealth is possible out of the unsociable wills of individuals, why not a league of nations out of unsocial national interests? Again the dynamic of distress is thought ultimately to be positive. Nature has a plan that understanding knows not of.

At this point Kant steps back to reflect once again on his **fundamental premise:** *Our view of nature, and what it is capable of, is thought to bear on our view of history and what is possible therein.* There are **three ways,** he says, that this natural dynamic might be viewed: 1) that of (Epicurean) **modern science,** 2) that of **rational idealism,** and 3) that of **nihilism**.

1) We can think of nature, as modern science does, as a **chance** "concourse of efficient causes." Here an aimless (if lawful) atomism has an organization to form (if only for a time) out of randomly colliding particles. On this model what results is "an occurrence that is not very likely to happen," that is, all wholes would be *unexplainable* events.[34] [Newton]

Or 2) reason could propose an alternative. We might "...**assume** (*annehmen*) that nature follows a regular course in leading our species by degrees...and through this *seemingly* chaotic arrangement, develop[s] those original natural capacities in a thoroughly law-governed way," that is, Kant's teleological view (see ix 38).[35]

Or lastly 3) we might just conclude that "the whole of men's actions and reactions will result in ...nothing intelligent,"—that is, all would be "but sound and fury signifying nothing." He adds revealingly, with such a view we wouldn't then be able "...to tell in advance whether...the strife ... [that is] so natural to our species is [only] preparing us for a **hell of evils**." A dreadful spectre. [Lucretius]

What alternative have we, then, as moral beings but to listen to this "other way of considering nature"? Kant's proposal that we revise our view of the course of human affairs with the aide of teleological glasses is rooted in his profound **hope** for man's potentiality and, we see now, his profound **fear** for our existential predicament. Modern science (and the faculty of understanding) is not in a position to help. [36]

Kant therefore asks us to consider this ultimate question: "*...Is it truly* ***rational***[37] *to assume that nature is* ***purposive*** *in its parts but* ***purposeless*** *as a whole?*"[38] Cannot human history as a whole be seen as purposeful? Does it not all signify something?[39] (cp. ix 39).

Kant's idealism notwithstanding, he continues to insist at the same time on not being unrealistic. He is under no illusions that the going will be *hard*, the suffering *real* and even moments of tranquility might be *deceptive*. There is a long way to go before we reach "**the final stage**." "Before this last step...," he says, "human nature must endure the harshest of evils, which pass in disguise [sometimes even] as external well-being..." (36).[40] Indeed while we may be "cultured," we are still far from being moral. Hence even our so-called "civilized state" may, on the contrary, be an obstacle to our deepest moral and political development ("...continuously

inhibit[] their citizens' plodding efforts to shape internally their **way of thinking** [*Denkungsart*]..." [cp. ii 32]).[41] All the same, painful progress is still progress.

viii: A Little Of It: Hence his eighth thesis: ***One can regard the history of the human species, in the large, as the realization of a hidden (verborgenen) plan of nature to bring about an internally and for this purpose, also an externally perfect national constitution, as the sole state in which all of humanity's natural capacities can be developed."*** Philosophy too has a view of the final end (an eschatology, "a chiliastic vision" [36]).[42]

The question for Kant is "...whether **experience** [might be able to] uncover something like a course (*Kreislauf*) leading to this objective of nature (*Naturabsicht*)." His answer is honest: experience at best reveals only "a little of it (*etwas Weniges*)." But even an inkling might provide a beginning. Our position as observer of the "course" of human things, while problematic, can be compared, he here suggests, to astronomers seeking to chart the course of the planets.[43] And then he concludes, puzzlingly: we will have "as little certitude" about human things as do those who consider planetary motions.[44]

Despite "little certitude" in these matters, we human beings nevertheless cannot resist going down this thought path, Kant insists: "Human nature is so constituted as to be **incapable of indifference** toward even the most distant epoch through which our species must go."[45] We care about the future. It is characteristic of our modern temporal frame that we are future-oriented. Thus even the faintest indications loom large for us.[46] This is especially so, Kant adds, as we might ourselves be able to contribute to "the happy time of our posterity."[47] He thus concludes: "Although the [future] body politic presently exists only in very *rough outline*, a **feeling** (*Gefühl*) seems nonetheless to be stirring... giv[ing] rise to the **hope** that...a universal cosmopolitan state...will *at last* come to be realized" (38). In light of this hope, our consciousness will be raised (as we say today) and our hearts stirred (cp. *Herzensanteil*).

ix. The Burden of History: This brings us to his ninth and last thesis: ***"A philosophical attempt to work out a universal history of the world in accord with a plan of nature that aims at a perfect civic union of the human species must be regarded as possible and even as helpful to this objective of nature" (38).***

As we have seen, Kant is aware that such an "attempt at a universal history" is unusual. It is not empirical and cannot be a matter of knowledge or science. To write a history in accordance with a **predetermined** (*a priori*) **transcendental idea** might be thought, as a result, a projection of our profound hope for a rational society in the face of "the senseless course of human things." In this respect, he himself likens his proposal to a "romance novel" (*Roman*) "without rhyme or reason." This he openly admits.

Yet he would have us acknowledge that there is an important difference between such a history and a simple imaginative fabrication. With this type of historical perspective we might be able to see ourselves as *instrumental* toward the realization of the greater end.[48] "[Even] if one...***assumes*** (*annnehmen*) that nature does proceed **without** a plan and final objective (*Plan und Endabsicht*) ...this idea can [nevertheless] be **useful** (*brauchbar*)."[49] Despite the fact that we may well be too "...shortsighted to [truly] penetrate the secret mechanism of [Nature's] workings," this idea of reason might still serve as a "guiding thread" for our **actions**. It can present as a "system" what otherwise we experience as the "planless aggregate" and thereby provide a new framework within which we can rethink our lives.

Such a philosophical "perspective" (*Gesichtspunkt, Standpunkte*), Kant says, might then serve three functions: 1) it might help us to **clarify** the confused play of human things, 2) it might assist us in **prophesying** future political changes, 3) but above all, as we've seen, it presents us with a "**consoling view of the future**" (*eine tröstende Aussicht in die Zukunft*) in which, though "from afar," we might somehow see "...how the human species finally works its way up to that state where all the seeds [that] nature has planted...can be fully developed and their destiny (*Bestimmung*) here on earth fulfilled."[50]

Kant can now fully admit what had been apparent earlier: such a philosophy of history is a "**justification of Nature**" (*Rechtfertigung der Natur*) and, he adds, "even more" of **Providence** (*Vorsehung*). (It is both a **physiodicy** and a **theodicy**.) He therefore leaves us with one last *overriding question*: "For what *use* is it," he asks, "to laud and recommend ...the wisdom of creation in the non-rational realm of nature, if that part of the great theatre of supreme wisdom that contains the purpose of all the rest [namely man]...should remain..." without a final end? Thus a teleological naturalism must be complemented by teleological humanism, lest there be no consolation to be had in this world.[51]

This is of course no argument[52] but the expression of man's profound hope. Hope (*espoir*) in the progress of human history is seen as saving us from despair (*desespoir*) over the "senseless course of human things." In the end we see that Kant's ***Idea for a Universal History*** is a "venture of the heart"[53] providing man with a magistracy, direction and source of hope that we could not otherwise cull from our difficult and unrevealing existence. Such an **idea** is an example of man "creating from his own resources" (iii 31) a prospect and project that sees past the "senseless course of human things" to a vision at once higher and more engaging than otherwise available. This is idealism in the noble sense.

6. From a Non-Cosmopolitan Point of View:

"As one people with one language for all,
if this is what they have begun to do,
nothing they plot to do will elude them."
Genesis[54]

Many questions follow worth reflecting on. What is noteworthy about the last two theses is the importance Kant places on **human action**. Indeed action (or *praxis*) is seen as the final justification of this universal view of history. **We** might ourselves be able to contribute to "the happy time of our posterity," Kant said tantalizingly. **We** might ourselves even be able to be helpful to Nature ("the objective of nature"). Indeed such a view of a universal history now serves as a "guiding thread," **not** just of our thoughts, as originally laid out, but of our own actions and lives. This new emphasis on action (what Kant will later call "the primacy of pure practical reason[55]") is of great moment.

Kant no longer has just our thoughts in mind. His historical idealism has led him to, indeed seems now to depend on a **felt need** (*Gefühl*) to have our world match our thoughts (practical idealism). Hope will succeed despair, then, only once we **remake** the world after the image of our ideas. Indeed the presumed "inevitability" of this view depends on man's practical engagement. Saving thoughts are thus not enough; man must become a **world maker** (*Weltbaumeister*).[56] Herewith we begin to see the fuller significance of his earlier, ambiguous remark—made in passing, so it seemed—that reason "...knows **no limits** to its projects" (ii 30: *kennt keine Grenzen ihrer Entwürfe*).[57]

But let us step back. Did not Kant make it very clear at the outset that *ideas* were only supposed to be a way of organizing our thoughts (and thus only "regulative," not "constitutive") that is, have their validity for "subjective purposes" only?" Here, it would appear, we are witness to an unexpected **inversion in his orientation.**[58] No longer "mere thoughts," such ideas are now understood to be "determinative for practical purposes"[59] that is, to shape lives. Here our "interests" determine our judgment (rather than the other way around)[60] and epistemological restraint gives way to reason's other interests. Other questions follow.

Kant's hopeful project sought to save us from "this senseless course of human things" by introducing us to a mode of thinking that, founded on a confidence in man's potential for enlightenment and a rational faith in "nature's hidden plan," would allow a new order of meaning otherwise denied us. Yet, given his well-founded suspicion of reason's general tendency to take flight and become "transcendent" (and his own earlier efforts to corral such unbridled employment), how is it that Kant here can be confident that this "new way of thinking" (ii) isn't yet another form of "**the sophistry of reason,**"[61] reason in the service of questionable ends?

And again, given his profound anxiety about theoretical reason, should he not be equally, if not **more** cautious about the infinity of reason in the realm of the practical, i.e. with respect to the **infinity of our wills**? It may seem ennobling to hear of man as "the legislator of his own actions"—the "captain of his ship" etc—yet should it not be a matter of concern to hear that man will be the legislator of a new world order that, even while aspiring to be universal and moral, would be so only by nature pulling civilization out of the hat of **antagonism**? What if nature is not so capable, so wise?[62]

Indeed Kant's praise of antagonism requires further reflection. The higher enlightenment of historical consciousness is now presumed to supersede our lesser human wisdom, that an idealistic hopefulness might supersede a despairing realism. However by seeing value in (not to say, glorifying) what morality would have us shun, Kant only opens a **Pandora's Box.**

i) In its least problematic form, he can be seen as appreciating the positive outcome of "competition," as in liberal capitalism. ii) However, viewed as part of the greater struggle of nature (cp. Darwinism), human life loses its quality of self-determination and we find ourselves once again determined by natural necessity and our "unsociable" natures. In this view, restraint may appear historically regressive. iii) Of more current note, the question arises of the relationship between the human will and the instrumental use of antagonism. Our frustration with the slow pace of progress might lead us to "take history into our own hands" and to cause our motivation to become heteronomous and thereby impure. One step away from "social activism," two steps from "revolutionary consciousness," and three from "terrorism." Terrorism, if not motivated by simple revenge, justifies forced or violent change as giving nature or history (or God) a helping hand, or a bomb. In such a view, one is simply expediting "the inevitable course of history" or progress (or God's will). Kant's ethics of pure intention is thus at risk of being supplanted by a politics of unintended consequences. In trying to rescue man from an aimless existence, indeed to promote our higher cultivation and moral development, does not Kant therewith re-expose man to (if he doesn't inadvertently encourage) the most destructive forces of nature and history?

Let us not forget, moreover, that what might be helpful to **explain** a conditional action can also be used to **excuse** that very action.[63] In this respect a "species view" or "historical view" or "world view" (nowadays an "ideology") might be tempted to **use** its so-called higher standpoint (its "new way of thinking") as justification for otherwise questionable ends. Moreover,

by disengaging "nature's hidden purposes" from individual duties—and therewith reintroducing the rightly maligned "ends justifies the means" rationalization—such "historical consciousness" **confuses**, if it does not actually subvert, man's sense of responsibility (an action otherwise proscribed by the categorical imperative might well serve nature's greater game plan; following one's inclinations might serve history, if not the moral imperative).

The **greatest irony of Kant's critical philosophy,** then—and by extension of nineteenth century continental philosophy more generally—is that, while he sought to make room for and secure the foundations of morality, he at the very same time undermines the **foundations of his own practical principles** (see ii 30, vii 36): in such a context, our moral lives are "historically" insignificant and morality no longer the means to our long term improvement. Thus we are brought to wonder about Kant's grand effort at a politically realistic idealism. (Do we have here a misconstrued or false "sophistication"?[64])

7. When Knowledge Fails:

"Daring triumphs over prudence."
Rosen[65]

In light of such questions, it seems only prudent to wonder whether another approach might not be more appropriate, whether, like Socrates, we shouldn't turn away from such grand expressions of hope, such "worldviews," and look again and afresh at the world of our lives and responsibilities. Indeed with these questions are we not situated back in a non-historical point of view where we can once again look at the things themselves and ask after their non-relational meanings? A reasonable short-sightedness may be preferable to a misleading hope or an unrealizable "interest."

We human beings thus cannot but remain paradoxes to ourselves: Our hearts exceed our grasp. We are limited in our knowledge yet boundless in our aspirations. The questions, confusions, dead ends, paradoxes, in short the messiness of life is not addressed by being transcended, by retreating to reflective judgment, or by leaving the world of our lives behind. Hence a new effort at a Socratic self-understanding seems requisite, a clearer self-understanding than provided by the ambiguous critical philosophy that, while finding ways to offset our limitations, seems only to have lost sight of them.

Thus, we are left with much to wonder about:

"***Human reason has this peculiar fate***:" We human beings have questions about things we will likely never have knowledge of. **So we ask you tonight** to join Kant in finding a way to face these questions, and not to dismiss them, for these are our most distinctive human questions.

As well, our discussion this evening is one way of seeing why "history" may in some sense be a problematic notion, one that can impart to its object an overriding patina of coloration, one that might prevent a "simple and artless[66]" encounter with what is before us. **So we ask you tonight** to wonder anew about this all-too-often unexamined perspective. To what extent does history provide a greater and clearer view that aids judgment and to what extent might it obscure that judgment or even set up unrealistic expectations for our lives?

Further, throughout his little essay, Kant seemed to be asking us to consider "what sort of world we want to live in." Indeed he seemed to say that this was a matter of which assumptions we chose. **So we ask you tonight** to consider whether and to what extent our world *is* a matter of

such choices, or rather a matter of knowledge, or, should that fail, of recognizing our very human limits therewith?

And lastly, concerning the earlier remark that I was thought to have studied *with* Kant, there is a sense, even if not intended, in which the comment might yet be truthful. At St. John's we say "the books are our teachers." In that case, and **if** we've managed to have gotten past our personal limitations and to have heard and conversed *with* the author, we should be proud to have it said that Kant, or any of the authors on the Program, was one of our teachers, that we had studied *with* and learned from them.[67] **So we ask you tonight** to make Kant and **all the authors** on the Program your teachers. *Study **with them**.*

Thank you.

Endnotes

[1] Given on August 26th, 2005 as the annual Friday night "Dean's Lecture" to open the 41st academic year at St. John's College, Santa Fe. The subtitle comes from the ***Gothaische Gelehrte Zeitung*** (1784) where a short notice by a traveling scholar announced Kant's yet undeveloped idea "that the ultimate purpose of the human race is to achieve the most perfect civil constitution." The essay ***Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*** (***Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht***) followed that same year as a first attempt to fill out the tantalizing notice. It is there that Kant speaks of "this senseless course of human affairs" (*diesem widersinnigen Gange menschlicher Dinge*) (30).

The translations of Lewis White Beck, ***Kant On History***, Indianapolis, 1963, and Ted Humphrey, ***Perpetual Peace and Other Essays***, Indianapolis, 1983, were both regularly consulted. For easy reference, we will cite the Humphrey translation in ( ). The text is found in Immanuel Kant, ***Kleinere Schriften zur Geschichtsphilosophie Ethik und Politik***, Hamburg, 1913/1973, pp. 3-20. Returning after some time to the question of the important role of Ideas in Kant's thinking has given me the opportunity to read and benefit from Yirmiyahu Yovel's careful work ***Kant and the Philosophy of History***, Princeton, 1980 [hereafter ***KPH***].

My thanks to Jacqueline Levine, Lore Zeller, John Cornell, ... for their thoughtful suggestions and comments.

[2] ***The Critique of Pure Reason*** [1781/1787], B xxxiv [hereafter ***CPR***].

[3] ***Pensées***, # 348.

[4] ***The Critique of Judgment***, §86 [442] [hereafter ***CJ***].

[5] Richard Velkley, *Introduction* to Dieter Henrich's ***The Unity of Reason, Essays in Kant's Philosophy***, Cambridge, 1994, p. 13 [hereafter ***UR***].

[6] Cp. Levine, *Hand-Me-Downs, Or The Traditionalization of Thought*, 1998.

[7] We cannot just declare such questions "out of bounds," as did Hume and the analytic tradition (and certain one-sided interpretations of the ***1st Critique***), "for they are posed by the very nature of reason itself."

[8] **Categories** are the terms that the faculty of **understanding** uses to "constitute" its world of objects. These allow us to have objects that are fixed in nature and natural laws that describe their "universal and necessary" behavior.

[9] By **ideas** Kant does not mean just any mental entity (as in Descartes). Ideas are a special species of thought that allow us to encompass a general whole or a final end. With respect to the former, the faculty of **reason** uses one of the categories of the understanding, **totality**, but in an extended usage. Ideas are thus general "principles of closure" (***UR***, p. 80) or "principles of totalization" (***KPH***, p.6). "....Reason's pure concepts of totality in the synthesis of conditions are necessary and based on the nature of human reason...to extend, if possible, the unity of understanding up to the unconditioned" (***CPR***, B380). Thus ideas are ultimately problematic ("only an idea," "**a problem without a solution**" [B384]). As a result, while they can provide an overview and a higher order of integration, they provide **no explanation** (cp. B800, ***First Introduction to the Critique of Judgment*** [1789], translated by James Haden, Indianapolis, 1965, p. 18 [214] [hereafter ***FICJ***]; also Stanley Rosen, *Transcendental Ambiguity*, ***Hermeneutics and Politics***, Oxford, 1987, p. 25 [hereafter ***HP***]). Hence Velkley reminds us that there is an important distinction to be made between (subjective) "integration" and (objective) "explanation" (***UR***, p. 6).

All the same, this capacity for ideas and higher orders of integration sets us apart as thinking beings: "...as a pure self activity, [man] is elevated even above the understanding...with respect to ideas, reason shows itself to be a pure spontaneity that far transcends anything sensibility can provide..." (***Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals***, 1785 [hereafter ***GMM***]; cp. ***CPR***, B561, 576; Robert Pippin, ***Modernism as a Philosophical Problem, On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture***, Blackwell, Oxford, 1991, p. 56 [hereafter ***MPP***]).

[10] Properly employed ideas are "transcendental." Otherwise they exceed our capacity, lose validity and become, in his language, "transcendent."

[11] Kant's notion of purposiveness is "reflective" rather than "objective." See ***FICJ***, pp. 20-1 [215-6]*:* "From this there arises the concept of ***a purposiveness*** of nature, as a characteristic concept of the *reflective judgment*, rather than of reason, since **the end is posited not in the object but always in the subject**, and in fact in the latter's mere capacity for reflection. We call that "purposive" the existence of which seems to presuppose the antecedent representation of it; but natural laws which are constituted and interrelated as if the judgment had designed them to satisfy its own need.... In this way the judgment...thinks a purposiveness in nature in the specification of its form through empirical laws.

It is **not** these forms themselves, however, that are thought as purposive, but only their relation one to another and their adaptability...to a logical system of empirical concepts. Even if nature revealed to us no more than this **logical finality**, we would have cause to marvel at it, not knowing how to base it on the universal laws of the understanding..." Also, as "...a **logical purposiveness**, i.e. of its agreement with the subjective conditions of the faculty of judgment....this **implies nothing about the adaptation of nature to a real finality**...for these could always be mere aggregates...." It is thus a "purposeless purposiveness" (*zwecklose Zweckmässigkeit*) [***CJ*** § ;Yovel, ***KHP***, p. 165]. Again we only *think* purposiveness, then. More things are in the "eye of the beholder," it would appear, than just a beautiful day. Such thinking will lead, by the end of the nineteenth century, to Nietzsche's view of language as the realm of metaphor (see Levine, *A World of Worldless Truths, An Invitation to Philosophy*, 1999).

[12] "...Free wills...seem to be so great an influence on marriage, the births consequent to it, and death, it appears that they are *not subject to any rule*. (29) "

[13] Cp. "...certainly determined in conformity with [*bestimmt nach*] universal laws" (29); also ***CJ*** [430].

[14] This assertion of an unknown (and for Kant unknowable) order of existence prepares the way for **the great inversions of the nineteenth century.** Following modern science's radical distinction between the real depth and the appearing surface, what is humanly primary (first order, original, "intuited" experience) is supplanted by another stratum of existence (second order, historical or global, psychological or metaphysical experience). In the nineteenth century, this takes different forms: Kant introduces the **ideas** of History and Nature; Hegel seeks to make it known as Spirit; Schopenhauer and Nietzsche seek to subordinate our conscious experience to that of Will, the Dionysian, or the Will to Power; Marx to subordinate all primary experience to the underlying economic substructure; Kierkegaard to make this unknowable stratum God; Freud rethinks human experience as itself the expression of subconscious sublimations and Jung of our collective histories.

[15] Cp. ***CJ*** [430].

[16] Cp. ***CJ***, § 75 [400] where he speaks of the absurdity of ever having "**a Newton for a blade of grass.**" However even for Nature and History, non-knowledges strictly speaking, it is clear that Kant's model remains paradoxically Newtonian science, despite the fact that he's in the transcendental realm of ideas, and not phenomena determined by the categories of the understanding and the parameters of intuition (cp. also the vocabulary of force, "action and reaction,"' and the charting of the planets). The analogy with Kepler and Newton is thus unexpected. Kepler had the regularity of planetary orbits to formulate, Newton the universality of mass action. Here, by contrast, we seek not a recurrent pattern of history (contrast viii) but its final end. Kant would thus seem to be venturing a non-determinative, "regulative science." This would be a very different kind of "science," if one at all. A Newton for human affairs? Questions abound. Hegel will seek to take up this charge.

[17] That Kant claims that the outward and inward teleological structure of nature is confirmed in empirical observation is clearly excessive (see viii 36). For Kant, that we might *think* them in this way does not mean that we *see* them as such. Is he forgetting that the "idea" of teleology is regulative, not determinative? Contrast Goethe's natural philosophy where no such radical distinction between thinking and seeing exists. (Levine, "*At the Very Center of the Plenitude, Goethe's Grand Attempt to Overcome the 18th Century*," 2003, § 5-6)

[18] See note 11.

[19] ***CPR***, B561.

[20] Existentialism thus follows of necessity from modern science.

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[21] "To every faculty of the mind an **interest** can be ascribed, i.e. a principle which contains the condition under which alone its exercise is advanced. Reason, as the faculty of [such] principles determines the interest of all the powers of the mind and its own." "....Every interest is ultimately **practical**, even that of speculative reason being only conditional and reaching perfection **only in practical use**" (***Critique of Practical Reason***, Beck translation, 1956, p. 124 [119], 126 [121] [hereafter ***CPrR***]). See also ***GMM*** (Patton translation, p. 128n [122]).

[22] Cp. Descartes, ***Meditations on First Philosophy***, IV....

[23] Preface to the second edition, ***CPR***, ...

[24] See epigraph, p. 1, ***CPR***, B xxxiv.

[25] However, once history fails to show itself to be such a path of consolation, historical idealism loses its foundation and leads to the even greater disappointment, that of lost hopes in "a consummation devoutly to be wished."

[26] Nature and History are examples of precisely those sorts of resourceful ideas of human reason that issue from "a plan of its own" or "from his own resources." Pippin cites Hegel's *Differenz Schrift* [1801]: "...that the world is the product of the freedom of intelligence is the determinate and express principle of **idealism**" (***MPP***, p. 66).

[27] Would Kant have changed his mind had he known that the French Revolution of 1789 would be followed by the Reign of Terror?

[28] See ***KHP*** p. 278.

[29] Human "nature," it would thus appear, is not fixed but subject to historical evolution.

[30] Plato, ***The Republic***, IX 582a, where ***empereia, phronêsis*** and ***logos*** are seen as the prerequisite of judgment.

[31] Contrast Plato who wanted to suppress the question of survival and the primacy of external affairs for fear that it would compromise domestic affairs (the education of the guardians would have to be more warlike and the attention of legislation more outward and therewith possibly compromised—thus ***The Republic*** is by design wholly unrealistic). See Levine, *An Ennobling Innocence, The Founding of Socrates' Republic*, ***St. John's Review***, *XLIII, 2, 1996, pp. 21-38.*

[32] Humphreys point out that Phillip II of Macedon used the Amphyctyonic League to sanction his wars (40).

[33] Twentieth century wars would not appear to have had the salutary effect Kant foresees.

[34] See ***CJ*** §77 [293]. The irony here is that it was Kant after all who in his contemporaneous critical works secured the foundations of this mechanical, Newtonian view of nature.

[35] Thus "only human reason and praxis endow [the universe] with ends" (***KHP***, p. 135).

[36] Yovel, ***KHP***, p. 156.

[37] In what sense is he using the word "rational" (*vernünftig*) here? How are we to think of such second order questions? There are larger questions that understanding knows not of. Here we see why Kant thinks we need to make a distinction between reason and understanding.

[38] Cp. Aristotle, ***Nicomachean Ethics***, I, vii, 1097b.

[39] There are other questions: Have we, as Kant claims, been forced to find "the law of [political] equilibrium"? Are we indeed so driven by necessity that a cosmopolitan culture is inevitable? And just as the principle of balance proves short-lived in physics and biology, might not there be a law of **political entropy** at work in history too? The anterior question about the parts remains as well.

[40] This doctrine of the "last stage" has been uttered before (Plato's "until philosophers become kings...," religion's "kingdom of god" etc). There are other responses than belief. One might become further **dissatisfied** with society because we realize how very remote the last stage is? Become **antisocial** and withdraw from human company seeking some Rousseauean simple life of nature? Or become engaged with **revolutionary** zeal or even anarchistic violence seeking thereby to force the future and put an end to mankind's misery?

[41] Kant here seeks to anticipate the uncertainty that follows upon the historical limbo of the last paragraph. He tries to redirect us to what in his critical writings constitutes man's true dignity, not history, but morality. There is a sense in which we are "too cultured for our own good," in which civilization is but "illusion and glistening misery" (36) (*schimmerndes Elend*; cp. ***CJ***, § 83 [432]: *glänzendes Elend*). With all the substitutes for morality available on the domestic front and with expansionism at work on the international front, it will be a long time until the human species works itself out of its present condition. Does not such a thought only **enervate** our hopes, rather than invigorate them as Kant would have us think?

[42] Contrast Yovel, ***KPH*** p. 127, 154: "The ***Idea*** seems to commit a major dogmatic error. It ascribes to nature as such a 'hidden teleological plan'...and [therewith] lapses into transcendent speculation."

[43] See note 16.

[44] This is especially puzzling since astronomy has been amazingly precise from the outset (see Ptolemy).

[45] He adds, still more paradoxically, "...if only it can be expected with certainty [some measure of?]" (37).

[46] And thus we are at risk of making a mountain out of a mole hill.

[47] This is a **step by step** process: States neglect their internal cultural development, Kant says, only at the risk of losing their "power and influence;" thus cultural preservation is "assured" by the ambitions of states to be competitive; civic freedom is impinged upon only at the risk of domestic evils; individual freedom, including freedom of religion, will spread; thus does enlightenment follow "...as a great good that must **save** the human race from even the self-seeking expansionary schemes of their rulers..." (37); enlightenment, along with "a certain **inclination of the heart,**" cannot but "gradually ascend to the thrones and even influence principles of government." History, in short, "...prepares the way for the great body politic of the future...." He adds, interestingly, that it would be a body politic "for which antiquity provides no example" (38), that is, will be unprecedented. Enlightenment self-interest thus proves not incompatible with the interest of others. Indeed it secures it, if only in the long run. This logic of the double negative is worth thinking about.

One may want to wonder: 1) about the **risk of steps**: by reducing the process of revolutionary change to plausible small steps, one loses sight of the great implausibility of the whole project; 2) the **risk of system**: by building a seemingly "systematic" account, especially on the basis of the faintest or "little" indications, and fascinated by the architectonic of the whole, one is brought to eclipse what otherwise might be apparent and in front of one. Hope will thereby be ballooned and blinding; 3) the **risk of process thinking**: everything is to be thought of as a means such that even evils are instrumental to the final good (and hence only partial evils). (Does this risk violating the categorical imperative that things never be considered simply as means?) Were this astronomy, wouldn't this be a grand extrapolation? How then can it be good humanism?

[48] Idealism is thus justified by social activism etc. See note 40.

[49] At the very least, then, this view of history is a salutary myth.

[50] See Rosen, ***HP***, pp.20-1.

[51] This "other point of view" is adopted by a philosophical mind (*Kopf*) out of our anxiety for posterity: "The notorious complexity of the history of our time must naturally lead to serious doubt as to how our descendents will come to grips with the **burden of this history** that we shall leave them (39)." Inheriting a philosophical history might allow future generations to make sense out of this "conglomeration." There is another, "minor motive" as well. Such a history can also serve the time honored function of advisor to princes and "direct the ambitions of sovereigns."

[52] Man needs a plan; we aren't able to fathom nature's plan; therefore we propose one in her name; reason's guiding thread is presented as nature's guiding thread. History might then be presented under false guises. The evidence for our blindness still remains greater than that for the truthfulness of this idea. The weakness of the argument being what it is, with a little skepticism or major natural or historical catastrophe, and with the subsequent suspicion of the wisdom of nature, we end with an unadorned and undisguised "planless conglomeration." Thus Kant's grand effort to forestall an existential despair may have only prepared it.

[53] Cp. ***CJ***, § , "venture of reason" ( ).

[54] ***Genesis*** 11:6; also Nietzsche, ***Beyond Good and Evil***, # 224 and Rosen, ***HP***, p. 19: "Daring casts its shadow: terror."

[55] Kant will formulate a few years later what is already apparent here, hence the importance of the short (two page) section of the ***Critique of Practical Reason*** [1788] entitled "*On the Primacy of the Pure Practical Reason in its Association with Speculative Reason*" [119-121]. "By primacy...I understand the prerogative of one [faculty] by virtue of which it is the prime ground of determination of the combination of the others." "....If pure reason of itself can be and really is **practical**, it is only one and the same reason which judges *a priori* by principles...." "[Reason] must remember that they are **not its own insights** but **extensions** of its use in some other respect, namely practical." "...[Practical reason has the primacy provided that his combination is **not contingent and arbitrary** but *a priori* and based on reason itself and thus necessary" (Beck translation, pp. 124-6). See Yovel, ***KHP***, p. 232n12: "...The introduction of the primacy of pure practical reason into the definition of philosophy as wisdom...[means that] wisdom in not a mode of knowledge but a certain moral attitude, **a mode of the will**."

[56] Yovel, ***KHP***, p. 78; also Pippin, ***MPP***, p. 56: "Reason...legislates, it even frames 'for itself with perfect spontaneity **an order of its own** according to ideas, to which it adapts the empirical conditions'" (***CPR***, B576; also 561). The purity and universality of our principles is originally the sole justification of such human intersession. Without it, it devolves into simple self-assertion.

[57] See Pippin, ***MPP***, p. 30: "...The early modern hopes [for examples, Descartes'] for a genuinely new, progressive, fundamentally better epoch had proven false." Hence Kant can be seen as responding to the Cartesian project of becoming "master and possessor of nature." We are to change the world, not by means of science and technology, but by means of social action and the pursuit of the greater ends of history (if as the instrument of nature). Kant's hopes for history won't, however, be shared by his successors and will be followed by a period of disillusionment that many nowadays still share (cp. Nietzsche's "centuries of empty hopes").

[58] Brom Anderson and Robert Pippin have directed us to the contemporaneous essay, *What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking* [1786], where Kant addresses the problem of "enthusiasm" and seeks to set out the important differences between "a healthy human reason" which does not lose sight of the difference between unfounded inspiration and reason's legitimate subjective requirements (***Religion and Rational Theology***, Cambridge, 1996).

[59] Cp. ***CJ*** [457]: "We can assume this distinction only as **subjectively necessary** for the character of our cognitive power, and as valid for reflective but **not** for determinative judgment. And yet, when we are concerned with the practical sphere, such a *regulative* principle...is also *constitutive*, i.e. **determinative practically**."

[60] ***CPrR*** [149].

[61] ***CPR*** B....

[62] Yovel cites ***Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*** [VI 100]: "...Man [must] proceed as though everything depended on him; only on this condition **dare** we hope that a higher wisdom will grant the completion of his well-intentioned endeavors" (***KHP***, p. 98).

[63] See Levine, *Introduction*, ***Profound Ignorance***, §§ 3-5.

[64] Cp. Nietzsche's "the pseudo education of the age."

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65 Rosen, ***HP***, p. 46; also, "Kant replaces prudence with the historical dialectic of the passions" (47).

66 Plato, ***Phaedo,*** 100d.

67 That would make us *all* even older than we look.