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9. The Place of Kant's Philosophy of History in the History of the Philosophy of History.

VITTORIO HÖSLE

1. *Introduction.*

Philosophical disciplines must be reflexive. An epistemological theory which, like the one by Immanuel Kant, concerns only the epistemological status of particular scientific doctrines, but not its own, cannot claim to be complete. An ethical theory that does not explain which normative principles ground the work of the ethicist herself is similarly deficient.[1] The same holds for the philosophy of history as well: it must grasp itself in terms of philosophy of history. But what does that mean? The philosophy of history is the search for the logic of historical processes and thus the philosophy of history of the philosophy of history must ask itself the question concerning the logic of development in the history of the philosophy of history. Precisely in view of the success that historical and philosophical-historical thought has enjoyed since the 18th century within European philosophy (the models put forth by Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger are essentially attempts to spell out the implications of historicism for First Philosophy), it is surprising that this thought seldom reflects on its own historicality – self-relativization is rarely carried out by that movement which played a singular role in bringing about the collapse of traditional metaphysics.

Strictly speaking, there is but a single attempt at a philosophical history of the philosophy of history – Karl Löwith's *Meaning in History*.[2] That work remains a significant achievement because, on the one hand, it analyzes the theological presuppositions of modern philosophy of history, and on the other, recognizes the problematic features in immanentizing the hopes of salvific

[1] Cf. my account of an ethics of ethics in HÖSLE 2004, p. 80ff. My reflections on first philosophy in HÖSLE 1997a, p. 143ff. consider the necessity of reflexive epistemology as the *fundamentum inconcussum* of philosophy.

[2] LÖWITH 1949. The work appeared in German with the title *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen*, Stuttgart, 1953. Despite my fundamental criticism of it, I owe much to this book – as of yet there is no work comparable to it in this area.

history, in integrating it in the course of secular history. Unlike Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Löwith views this not as the perfection, but rather as a perversion, of Christian eschatology:

> The Christian hope is not a worldly desire and expectation that something will probably happen but a cast of mind based on an unconditional faith in God's redemptive purpose. Genuine hope is, therefore, as free and absolute as the act of faith itself.[3]

Löwith finds the teleological, but purely immanent, foundation of modern philosophical history far less convincing than both the immanent, but cyclical, theory of history held by the Greeks and the Christian theology of history that expects a break in historical continuity before arriving at the *telos* of history:

> But how can one imagine history as a continuous process within a *linear* progression, without presupposing a discontinuing *terminus a quo* and *ad quem,* i.e., a beginning and an end? The modern mind is not single-minded: it eliminates from its progressive outlook the Christian implication of creation and consummation, while it assimilates from the ancient world view the idea of an endless and continuous movement, discarding its circular structure. The modern mind has not made up its mind whether it should be Christian or pagan. It sees with one eye of faith and one of reason. Hence its vision is necessarily dim in comparison with either Greek or biblical thinking.[4]

It is only right and proper to begin an account of a work on the history of the philosophy of history with a reflection on its historical origin. It is clear, then, that Löwith's work, as well as Walter Benjamin's *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (*On the Concept of History*) (published posthumously in 1942) and Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*) of 1947, are marked by an existential aversion to naïve ideologies of progress – an aversion that was only too understandable in the decade in which these writings (all by German Jews) were published. Not only do the crimes of the 1940s, unparalleled in world history, render the idea of world history as continual progress peculiarly obsolete even for the later generations; it is also beyond dispute that half of the crimes committed in the 20th century, namely those by the Communists, were even justified in part by a philosophical theory of progress, which in various forms had become one of the most powerful means of legitimation in the era after the collapse of rational theology. After such experiences, difficulties with the philosophy of history are certainly understandable, particularly when the philosophy of history insinuates that the casualties of history were necessary sacrificial pawns on the way to the realization of a great idea.

But in order to grasp Löwith's fundamental skepticism regarding the progress model, we must take into account more than just historical circumstances

[3] LÖWITH 1949, p. 206.
[4] LÖWITH 1949, p. 207.

in evaluating his work. From the point of view of the history of ideas, Löwith's work belongs itself to a late phase of philosophical-historical thought, as is proven, on the one hand, by its reflexive structure, and on the other, by its rejection of the direction of development taught by modern philosophy of history. This rejection finds symbolic expression in the peculiar structure of the book: Löwith's overview begins with Burckhardt's disavowal of the progress model and unravels the history of the philosophy of history backwards, as it were, from Marx and Hegel to Bossuet and Joachim to Augustine, Orosius and the Biblical interpretation of history. This approach departs significantly from a process such as that found in Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*), and it is not difficult to see why: While Hegel sees a positive development in the history of philosophy, gradually approaching a final endpoint – namely, his own system –, Löwith sees in the history of the philosophy of history a process of decline, behind which one should have recourse to a more original model. Evident in his approach is the lasting influence of his teacher, Heidegger, who in the never-written second part of *Being and Time* also wanted to proceed from Kant to Descartes to Aristotle. Here too, the reverse course of analysis is grounded in a fundamental mistrust of tradition, indeed, in a dysteleological conception of the history of ideas.

The historical classification of a work implies neither its confutation nor its affirmation: At the very least one can agree with the critics of the philosophy of history in acknowledging that the problem of validity cannot be solved by philosophical-historical considerations and that we should reject any philosophy of history that makes such a claim. But not every philosophy of history does this, as for example, Kant's philosophy of history, which Löwith never includes in his survey. This omission is significant – and thus we approach the substantive critique of Löwith's important model –, because Kant's *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (*Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*) in fact does not, without further qualification, fit into the developmental narrative that Löwith outlines, nor, at least, is it subject to the objections that Löwith directs against modern philosophy of history. For Kant does not simply presuppose, unreflectively, theological principles which get transformed within a context where they don't apply; quite the contrary, Kant grounds his philosophical-historical reflections on a principle that is thematic throughout his philosophy: the moral law.

Kant's philosophy of history is a philosophy of history from a practical point of view, and his arguments for a conception of history as progress therefore remain worthy of consideration even if the empirical evidence speaks against them, since Kant argues above all from a normative level: that one *ought* to concern oneself with progress in history. This normative theory of progress should indeed be distinguished from the descriptive, even if Kant

believes that there is a connection between the normative and descriptive theses – wherein the normative thesis grounds the descriptive and not, as in Marxism, the reverse, wherein the descriptive grounds the normative. That Löwith doesn't really take into consideration the moral arguments supporting a modern history of philosophy, which, of course, no one had articulated as clearly as Kant, but which were more or less implicit among other optimists of history of the 18th and 19th centuries, is one of the great weaknesses of his book (and it is plausible to trace it back to Heidegger as well, in whom – whatever his merits may be – a sense for the moral question can hardly be found). Nor is it the only weakness. Even if Löwith continually refers to the philosophical-historical model of antiquity, it is not particularly thematic in his book; he deals just as little with the return of cyclical representations in 20th century philosophy of history, as in Oswald Spengler and Arnold Joseph Toynbee. (Only Nietzsche's conception of the doctrine of eternal recurrence is discussed in the second appendix to the book.) That might be explained by the fact that it is the modern picture of history which Löwith wants partly to explain and partly to criticize; but by neglecting the most important alternatives to the model of progress, the substantive basis that continually draws philosophy back to the model of progress remains unclear. The one-sidedly cyclical conception is not really more evident than the one-sidedly linear conception if one opts for an immanent philosophy of history – one grasps that, however, only when one studies the cyclical model more carefully than Löwith has done.

The aim of the following essay is to determine the place of Kant's philosophy of history in the history of the philosophy of history. That means, on the one hand, relativizing its claim to truth, while, on the other hand, also grasping its enduring value even in our own time. In what follows, I will proceed, first, by sketching as succinctly as possible a philosophically and historically conceived survey of the philosophy of history in which Kant can find his proper place, and second, by representing and evaluating the fundamental thoughts of Kant's *Idea*. In this way it will be shown that several of these thoughts are quite capable of inspiring a contemporary philosophy of history even today, indeed, even of setting forth a productive challenge.

2. *The Philosophy of History: Patterns and Models.*

Greatly simplified, it can be said that the history of the philosophy of history leads from a cyclical model to a linear model to a critique of the progress model (including the revival of cyclical representations). It is hardly coincidental that the heyday of linear models was the 18th and 19th centuries, as Europe had reached the height of its power and was in a position to impose its political will on nearly the entire world: Linear philosophy of history should in part explain

Europe's success and partly justify it. Significantly, however, the first volume of Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*), appears in 1918, thus at the close of the catastrophic war that put an end to European hegemony, and was for that reason so eagerly embraced: The political decline corresponded to the rejection of the progress model. This re-emerges in the most important philosophical-historical essay of recent years,[5] and indeed, not coincidentally by a US-American of Japanese descent – today the USA and East Asia play an entirely different role at the center of world history than Europe; neither, therefore, can afford to do away with the philosophy of history. At any rate, the connections between the dominant philosophical-historical model and the global political situation are evident. In what follows, I will identify the four main stages in the history of the philosophy of history.

1) The most natural interpretation of history is that which corresponds to a cyclical model. As long as human beings are seen primarily as a part of nature, they are bound to take the return of natural courses – such as the cycle of seasons – as the paradigm for the interpretation of their own history.[6] For humans too are born and then die, states are established and then decline. In particular, however, people know from their ancestors that certain human behavior patterns are always a given: They belong to the world, which is perceived as ultimately meaningful, just as much as the movement of the stars. Even the founder of scientific historiography assumes that such things, or things similar to those he describes, must be repeated on the basis of human nature;[7] and even if that interpretation which construes him as a value-neutral scientist of a modern disposition is false, it remains true that for Thucydides the repetition of events such as the destruction of Melos is also likely for all eternity, and that it would make little sense for him to reflect on potential ways of abolishing them. Not that Thucydides shares the Athenians' defense of the positivism of power; but just as little does he share the anthropological optimism of the kind that Rousseau held. The same holds for his great countryman and somewhat younger contemporary, who offered conceptual clarity to the basic intuitions of philosophy of history in the pre-Christian world and grounded them in a metaphysical doctrine of principles. Since Konrad Gaiser's research,[8] we know that Plato's scattered remarks on the philosophy of history in the *Republic*, *Statesman*, *Timaeus*, *Critias*, and *Laws* reflect a rigorous systematic conception, which is

[5] FUKUYAMA 1992. The book presents an intelligent popularization and development of Hegel's philosophy of history in the wake of Alexandre Kojève.

[6] Cf. ELIADE 1949.

[7] THUC. 1.22.

[8] GAISER 1961; ID., 1968, p. 203–289. Cf. also my chapter on this topic in HÖSLE 1984, p. 589–614.

grounded in the dialectics of the two principles of the unwritten doctrines. According to that conception, a relatively 'non-historical' period alternates with a 'historical' period on various levels; in the latter period, humans develop individual responsibility and cultural differentiation takes place, and at the end of it, philosophy emerges along with a moral-political decline, because of which philosophy's attempt to have a political effect is necessarily condemned to failure. The collapse of the higher level of culture is followed by the return of a non-historical epoch, and so on in an eternal cycle, within which the oscillation of non-historicality and linear development (which at the same time is progress and decline) must find its place.

2) The particular significance of Christianity's contribution to historical thought is immediately clear when one considers that Christendom is tied to a religion according to which God manifests Himself in a particular way in history, and transcends this religion through the idea of a New Covenant; thus, it thinks from its origins on historically to the second power, as it were. The central event from which it proceeds, the Incarnation, actually stands at the center of history, and not, as in alternative conceptions, at the beginning or the end. While reading Celsus's polemic, preserved through Origen, one still senses the provocation having to do with directing divine interest in the history toward a specific religious community.[9] At any rate, a cyclical conception of history as advocated, for example, by the Stoics and Neo-Platonists, is no longer compatible with faith in the incarnation – crucial chapters of Augustine's *De ciuitate Dei*[10] take aim against such a conception. However, Augustine can only claim to have removed the most important obstacle to a modern philosophy of history – he hardly made a positive contribution. For he classifies history exclusively according to Biblical events;[11] it is not easy to find in his writings a positive reference to the Roman Empire. While Orosius, inspired by Augustine to write his *Historiae aduersus paganos*, reinterprets the doctrine of the four empires, which is found in the *Book of Daniel*, such that the Roman Empire appears as the fourth, Western empire, after the Babylonian, Macedonian, and Carthaginian Empires (in the East, North, South, respectively),[12] and makes reference to a secret connection between the *Pax Romana* and Christ's birth,[13] Augustine, who knows only two empires,[14] rejects any theology of empires and *a fortiori* any political eschatology. Indeed, he himself rejects even purely theological chiliasms – claims of the *Book of Revelation* are rein-

[9] ORIG., *Cels.* 4.23.
[10] AUG., *Civ. Dei* 12.14.18 and 21.
[11] Cf. AUG., *Civ. Dei* 22.30 the doctrine of the six epochs.
[12] OROS. 2.1.
[13] OROS. 3.8.
[14] AUG., *Civ. Dei* 16.17.

terpreted, for the purposes of stabilizing the church, from the future into the past.[15] It is the insatiable yearning for a better future that, in the work of Joachim of Fiore in the 12th century, builds upon Trinitarian speculation to bring forth the thesis that, after the age of the Father (the Old Testament) and of the Son (the New Testament), a third begins, that of the Holy Spirit. Although Joachim himself was certainly no revolutionary, many centuries later his doctrine, even if in various reflections, inspired both pure theorists of history[16] as well as people who tried to pave the way to establishing the third and final epoch.[17]

3) Modernity has Giambattista Vico to thank for the discovery that historiography is only possible on the basis of a philosophically grounded social science. To the present, no other philosopher has so clearly conceived the greatness and limits of a historical worldview as he did; no one has correctly interpreted so many historical phenomena (in particular, of all other philosophers only Arnold Gehlen has delved equally deep into the mentality of the archaic people); no one has yet shown to a comparably convincing degree that the great intellectual and social-scientific discoveries leading to the collapse of rational theology in the 19th century are in fact compatible with it.[18] Even if Vico constantly emphasized his Catholicism and strictly distinguished between sacred and profane history, and thus did not wish to see his groundbreaking principles applied to the analysis of Jewish history, wherein divine providence works in supernatural ways while its effect on profane history is limited to the fact that it causes something to break forth from the human intentions that transcends them – namely, rational institutions – on one point Vico is absolutely pagan: in his clear option for the cyclical model. As with Plato, for Vico too the ascendance of a culture toward an evolved rationality contains the seeds of its decline within it; and hence the barbarism of reflection, the endpoint of historical development, is followed periodically by the original barbarism of the beginning. It remains utterly unclear how the privileged position of the incarnation, indeed also that of Christendom as a religious-political phenomenon, is supposed to be compatible with this model; in fact, Vico is completely

[15] AUG., *Civ. Dei* 20.7ff. Cf. STERNBERGER 1978, I p. 321ff., II p. 227f.

[16] We can include Auguste Comte among them, but also, more recently, Ernest Gellner, who also bases his philosophy of history on a triadic model (GELLNER 1988). It is odd that a clearly trinitarian thinker such as Hegel draws on the older tetradic model in his philosophy of history.

[17] The doctrine of course has explosive power within the church as well, since it devalues the existing hierarchy. It was for this reason that Thomas Aquinas rejected the doctrine: *Summa Theologiae* I/II q. 106 a.4.

[18] I have analyzed Vico's idea of a rational-theological genealogy of morals in HÖSLE 1990. This introduction appeared also in Italian: HÖSLE 1997b.

silent about the coming of Christ (which Augustine too discusses much less than Old Testament history).

That Vico was almost completely ignored in his day certainly has something to do with the fact that he did not understand, and even opposed, the conceptions of progress so cherished by his century that were about to become the civil religion of the new epoch. The central accomplishment of the 18th century in the field of philosophy of history consists in working out a linear model that ranges over individual cultures. Overcoming the historical-theological orientation toward Judaism and Christendom was decisive—on the basis of a universal conception of God it in fact seems quite implausible that God would be less interested in the history of the Chinese, for example, than in that of the Jews, as Voltaire, introducing the term 'philosophy of history', emphasized in his *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (*Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations*) in contrast to Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet's *Discours sur l'histoire universelle (Discourse on Universal History)*. To be fair, one must of course emphasize that the historical-theological conceptions of Augustine, Orosius, and Salvianus themselves already represent the overcoming of one form of ethnocentrism – namely, the Roman –, but it is certainly right that in their works political ethnocentrism is replaced by the religious. However, even the 'profane' philosophy of history, which is critical of Christendom, irrespective of its universal interest, does not get around a particular form of ethnocentrism: One's own epoch is heralded as the *telos* of history, in comparison to which others are depreciated. (A remarkable exception is Johann Gottfried Herder's *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* [*Another Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*], where already the title challenges Voltaire). Nicolas de Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain (Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind)*, in which the horrible conditions under which it was composed are hardly detectable thanks to its beaming historical optimism, interprets history as a process of progressive social formation from nomadic peoples to agrarian societies to the formation of the French Republic, attributing a special significance to the media revolutions (the invention of the alphabet and the printing press) and the development of a scientific spirit that ultimately dissolved the power of authority. Overcoming inequality among nations, progress in equality within those nations, and finally the actual perfection of the human race count as the goals of development. Concerning the first point, it is admittedly clear which direction he thinks the overcoming of inequality must take – the whole world should become like the French and the Anglo-Americans.[19] It is difficult, however, to view this as actually overcoming ethnocentrism, even if that objective arises from a universalist ethic.

[19] CONDORCET 1988, p. 266.

Even though Condorcet sees in the Christian religion an obstacle to progress, a philosophy of history which has lost the central focus on the events documented in the Bible can also ascribe to Christianity a positive world-historical role. Montesquieu and Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot in his *Discours sur les avantages que l'établissement du christianisme a procuré au genre humain* (*Discourse on the Advantages which the Christian Religion Has Conferred on the Human Race*) did this before Condorcet; the most significant philosophy of history of the 19th century to pursue these ideas is Hegel's. Contrary to the models of Voltaire and Condorcet, Hegelian philosophy of history is grounded in a complex metaphysics, indeed in rational theology; for that reason, Hegel's approach to Christianity is peculiarly ambivalent. On the one hand, Hegel is far removed from a naïve faith in the salvific history narrated in the Bible; on the other hand, he claims that God manifests Himself also, and *especially*, in history, even if not exclusively in Judeo-Christian history. Within this evolution of divine reason in human history, however, Christianity plays a markedly central role. But Hegel (in agreement with Joachim on this point) by no means considers the history of Christianity completed with the works of Jesus. Pentecost is the truth of Easter and the pentecostal event continues, on the one hand, in the philosophical understanding of Christian dogma, and on the other, in the development of the modern constitutional state, which has its roots in Christianity. For Hegel, divine providence operates immanently, and differently from Vico, always so – as the cunning of reason that gives rise to the universal from finite passions.[20] In the grasping of its mechanisms, philosophy is engaged in theodicy.[21] World history is progress in the consciousness of freedom that realizes itself within just institutions. In this context, the West-European societies and states that were reshaped in the time from 1789 to 1815 appear as an endpoint to this development, the details of which are subject to amendment but which in its fundamental structure cannot be challenged anymore. At the same time, Hegel's theory of progress is not so entirely one-sided as it might appear when reading exclusively the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. First, in the *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* (*Lectures on Aesthetics*) he recognizes the primacy of the beautiful in classical art, that is, the art form of antiquity; in art history, at least, the Middle Ages and especially the modern era give no indication of progress. Second, mention must be made of Hegel's gloomy insinuations about a potential end to Christianity, which would presumably be consequential for the fate of the constitutional state. Third and finally, the belatedness of philosophy that Hegel, like Plato, teaches, implies that the political order that he defends is doomed to failure.[22]

[20] HEGEL 1970, p. 49.
[21] HEGEL 1970, p. 28 and 540.
[22] Cf. HÖSLE 1987, p. 415ff., esp. 424ff.

Yet, in spite of such reservations: Hegel remains uninterested in future development, and anyhow he does not consider it as the task of philosophers to foster it. The Left Hegelians, by contrast, attempted partly to anticipate intellectually the later development of history, like August Ciezkowski, and partly, like Karl Marx, to shape it practically. The important thing is that Marx, just like Comte, rejects any normative principle that transcends facticity – it is history itself that brings forth morally evaluative principles. With that, however, modern philosophy of history ends up on a path that ultimately leads to its dissolution. A normative comparison of epochs is made very difficult when there are no more supertemporal evaluative standards – for every epoch appears to have its own principles of evaluation. Even if a social formation should prevail worldwide, as Comte and Marx held, the question remains why it should be 'better' – is not such an identification a crude form of the naturalist fallacy? And how can we know what the last stage of history will be? Can we discount something like the self-destruction of the human race, at least by our present knowledge of human vulnerabilities? Indeed, if one takes historicism further, then we cannot in principle claim to understand even our own era in a timelessly valid way – Nietzsche's epistemological-linguistic skepticism is a plausible consequence of radical historicism.

4) Comte's and Marx's models adopt an unsatisfactory middle position between, on the one hand, the social sciences grounded in rational theology and the philosophy of history of Vico, Montesquieu, Hegel, and Tocqueville and the value-neutral social sciences of Durkheim, Weber, and Pareto on the other. But it is not its theoretically unsatisfactory status alone which explains the crisis of the progress model in the late 19th century – no less important was the existential experience of the crisis of classical modernity, of the ambivalence of the social macro-evolution, which even the value-neutral sociologists did not dispute. Jacob Burckhardt eloquently expressed his fundamental skepticism concerning the theory of progress in his (posthumously titled) *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* (*Reflections on World History*). One detects in him, as in his colleague, Nietzsche, the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer, of this peculiar hinge figure between classical rationalism and modern relativism, who on the one hand robs reason of its ontologically privileged position and on the other hand remains committed to ethical and aesthetic objectivism. Nietzsche is likely more consistent than Burckhardt in that he goes beyond Schopenhauer with the idea of a pure positivism of power; but for that reason Burckhardt's critique of the notion of progress is plausible also for those who reject Nietzsche's conclusions. Burckhardt is, first of all, convinced of the intrinsic right of each epoch – thus in his view each epoch is, in the words of his teacher, Ranke, immediate to God, while the teleologization of history leads to a purely egocentric devaluation of the past, or at least those parts of

history which do not lead up to one's own epoch. Second, in a certain contradiction to this view, Burckhardt sees rather obvious weaknesses of the present in contrast to the past – the power of individual self-responsibility necessarily diminishes in the age of the masses; what is held up as moral progress is in truth only a greater diversity of culture and a taming of individuals by the state.[23] Third, what he finds disconcerting about the concept of progress is the idea, often bound up with that concept, that historical crimes are legitimated as a necessary means to a good end. Fourth, the future is never predictable; and in every case Burckhardt directs his interest at the constant and the typical features instead of at what is unique in the process of development.[24] It is this interest in a comparative morphology of cultures that finds its explicit expression in Spengler's and Toynbee's cyclical theories of culture: Here, non-European cultures receive a scholarly treatment that earlier philosophy of history had denied them. An inner distance from the present is common to both; but the difference is strong: While Spengler advances Nietzsche's positivism of power to the point of glorifying violence, Toynbee's universal-historical conception adopts a religious tone – not only does he value the significance of religion in history as positive on the whole, his own work is compatible with a religious-philosophical approach.

3. *Kant.*

Kant was not comparably familiar with the historical sciences of his time as he was with the natural sciences.[25] His text, *Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan purpose* (1784) is thus only a programmatic sketch, if you will: the proposal of a research program that can be measured neither against the concreteness of Hegel's nor of Condorcet's views on the real course of history. We would sooner find substantial insights into the historical process in the essay, *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte* (*Speculative beginning of human history*) of 1786, which certainly cannot be compared to Vico's philosophical theory of human prehistory, since Kant does not deal with the problem of a fundamental otherness of prehistorical humans, but which (among other things) is significant because of his treatment of *Genesis* 2-6. Kant did not interpret the text literally, as the naïve Protestant reader of his time did, but nor did he understand it, like Hegel, as a universal model of the history of human spirit instantiated in every individual, that is, mythological-

[23] BURCKHARDT 1978, p. 11f. and 65f.

[24] BURCKHARDT 1978, p. 6, 14f. and 37.

[25] Regarding Kant's philosophy of history, cf. WEYAND 1964; YOVEL 1980; PHILONENKO 1986.

ly;[26] he uses the text as a historical document in which several structural insights into the course of human prehistory are recorded.

In the '*Idea*' Kant ultimately wants to legitimate only the application of teleological principles to human history. He begins with the claim that the phenomenal world is thoroughly determined; at least, that statistical laws can be discerned. Indeed, in light of human weaknesses one cannot speak of an instinctual or rational plan of individual humans concerning the course of their history, but that does not rule out the possibility that a purpose of nature that transcends humans is at work in this. The following supports this claim: 'All the natural capacities of a creature are destined sooner or later to be developed completely and in conformity with their end'[27] – thus reads the first of nine propositions, which, along with its commentary, forms the shortest section of the text and which in fact contains the basis of the entire argument that follows. At the same time, the natural capacities of humans can develop, not in individuals, but only in the species. Nature desires, however, that humanity bring forth all of its highest capacities solely through their own reason, not through instinct, even if that entails a disadvantage to the earlier generations for the sake of later generations, which can enjoy the fruits of their ancestors' labor. The means of developing culture is thus the unsocial sociability of humans – the discord among humans alone leads out from an arcadian pastoral life in which shepherds would have rendered their existence hardly more valuable than that of their sheep. Since humanity can only develop its natural capacities in society, in which the greatest possible freedom is mutually assured for all, establishing a civil society administering justice universally is the greatest challenge for the human species. This is an exceedingly difficult problem to solve since also the highest authority must be human and nothing straight can be fashioned from such warped wood; proper normative principles, experience, and good will must all cooperate in such a project. Indeed, establishing an isolated constitutional state is of little help if at the same time we cannot overcome wars in a cosmopolitan structure; here, however, the question arises whether such a development will occur by chance, or if it is a purpose of nature, or if the present misery will continue much longer or even increase. Kant answers the question by claiming that the establishment of the constitutional state can be seen, in both internal and external relations, as a purpose of nature – sticking to this claim according to him is a legitimate philosophical chiliasm supported by the observation that, among other things, states strive to adapt to those of greater freedom because of economic competition. A philosophical attempt to interpret history accordingly, thus as a process of the improvement of the state constitution, makes it possible to represent 'an

[26] HEGEL 1970, p. 389.

[27] KANT, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, A 388 (English transl. by REISS / NISBET 1970, p. 41–53, p. 42).

otherwise planless *aggregate* of human actions as conforming, at least when considered as a whole, to a *system*';[28] indeed, it has therefore to do with a '*justification* of nature – or rather perhaps of *providence* –',[29] the effects of which could otherwise only be hoped for in another world.

What are the remaining insights of Kant's model? Even if it is stated more implicitly than explicitly in the *Idea*, Kant proceeds from an imperative: There is a moral duty to develop those natural capacities of humanity aimed at the use of reason, and this is only possible within a constitutional state and an international order that overcomes war. Providing a more precise foundation for the latter is the task of the philosophy of law and can therefore not be pursued further here in the context of a philosophy of history. A duty of that sort holds categorically, and is thus not grounded in actual interests; nor would humanity's rejection of it affect its validity. Further, it holds ahistorically; it is not possible to integrate it as either an immanent or even a merely historical fact into the empirical world. Indeed, one must concede to Kant the claim that the effort to abide by the moral law entails a concern for the future, even a concern for the future of coming generations. Even a critic of historical optimism such as Theodor W. Adorno stresses:

> Hitler has forced upon the human race, in its state of unfreedom, a new categorical imperative: to organize its thinking and its actions in such a way that Auschwitz does not repeat itself, that nothing comparable can occur again.[30]

One grasps the provocative feature in Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence only when one understands that what Nietzsche wants to say with that is that all the barbarities of history will also return and that one should say "Yes" to them as well: It is in the conscious turn against the moral conception of modern universalism that the novelty in Nietzsche's resurrection of the ancient conception lies.[31] Even Kant's strict separation of the moral law from the world of nature (and thus also of history, which falls under Kant's concept of nature) is compelling if we want to talk about moral progress that spans epochs. Otherwise we could not discount the possibility that the values of a totalitarian universal state that may prevail in the future would rightly appear to it as progress over those of the constitutional state.

[28] KANT, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte* A 408 (English transl.: p. 52)

[29] KANT, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte* A 410 (English transl.: p. 53).

[30] ADORNO 1980, p. 358.

[31] Zarathustra too needs time to adapt to the new doctrine that first occurs to him in his conversation with the dwarf (*Also sprach Zarathustra* III: 'Vom Gesicht und Rätsel' / *Thus Spake Zarathustra* III: 'The Vision and the Enigma') and which initially frightens him. Only his animals induce him to accept his fate, namely, becoming the preacher of eternal recurrence (of everything, including all the barbarities) ('Der Genesende' / 'The Convalescent'). In the critical edition by COLLI / MONTINARI, the passages are found in: IV, p. 199ff. and 275ff.

Yet, the mere validity of that duty is not in fact Kant's focus in the *Idea*. In this text, he instead assumes that this ought is also a purpose of nature, thus that its realization is implied in the being of nature. This assumption is first developed in a plausible way in the *Methodology of Teleological Judgment* in the third *Critique* of 1790, particularly in §83. As much as Kant makes the independence of Ought from Is the central insight of the second *Critique*, he is equally unsatisfied with the absolute dualism of both spheres; given such a distinction, the existence of beings capable of morality would be hardly more than coincidence. The more precise conception of teleology in Kant cannot be elaborated here;[32] anyhow, Kant's position is crucial that only something can be conceived as a final purpose in an order of purposes that 'depends on no further condition than just its idea.'[33] That, however, is just the human being, and indeed only insofar as he is the subject of morality. In the '*Idea*', the argument is much more succinct: In agreement with the natural-teleological mentality of his time (which he must also continually fall back on in his ethical theory), Kant assumes that nature always follows purposes. Without explicit reference to his later developed doctrine of final purpose, this presupposition is not at all convincing to the post-Darwinian conception of nature; thus, to make the essay as philosophically defensible as possible, one must refer to Kant's more developed critiques of practical reason and judgment, which of course were not yet available in 1784. However, any actualization of Kantian teleology must also explicitly address the question of whether nature's final purpose could be pursued as well by possible non-human moral subjects, such that the extinction of the human race would be fully compatible with the continuation of that final purpose.[34]

By Kant's reasoning, one can also appreciate why an instinctual development of natural capacities would not be quite worthy of a moral being. Such a being must work toward its vocation; thus it cannot already find itself at the outset of its history in a condition that constitutes the *telos* of its development. Kant's conception is reminiscent of Plato's, according to which the stage of independent and responsible historical development is ultimately preferred to the divinely guided because it alone allows for more meaningful intellectual achievements.[35] Similarly to Hegel, Kant pursues in the '*Idea*' a more ambitious purpose, namely, the justification of providence in history;[36] and much

[32] Cf. DÜSING 1968.

[33] KANT, *Kritik der Urteilskraft / Critique of Judgment*, §84, B 397f.

[34] Cf. HÖSLE 1998.

[35] Cf. the myth in Plato's *Statesman* (esp. PLAT., *Politik.* 268d ff.)

[36] KANT, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte* A 410. It is an isolated claim, however, and without further qualification it is incompatible with Kant's brand of skepticism toward any resolution of the theodicy problem (cf. *Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Versuche in der Theodizee / On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy*).

more is required for such a project than an indication of the necessity of a slow-moving development, namely, evidence that the actual historical development is also the best possible way to the sought-after objective. Undoubtedly, war has contributed to the development of particular human virtues;[37] but it does not follow from this that these virtues could only have been cultivated through war. Nevertheless, Kant, who saw it as a moral duty to overcome wars of aggression, lacks the triumphalist strain we find in Hegel; he is not oblivious to the victims of history, and unlike Hegel, he regarded the question of an 'end of all things' – the title of the 1794 essay – as entirely legitimate: The absolute (which for Kant is reducible to the moral law) is not fully realized in the world and its historical development.

Of particular importance with respect to concrete historical mechanisms is Kant's view of the interrelation of domestic and foreign politics. On his view, there is cause for optimism in the fact that less developed states must adapt to those more developed. This argument might also be reconstructed in terms of a Darwinian theory of cultural evolution, since it is essentially based on purely causal terms: One could say that the strategy of a liberal constitutional state is, owing to its economic power, evolutionarily stable relative to alternative strategies.[38] Indeed, one cannot deny that the competitive edge of Western industrial societies over pre-modern political structures constantly increased in modernity; at the same time, the example of National Socialist Germany shows that the power of the modern state need not necessarily be accomplished by means of the constitutional state – it is possible to adopt the economic and military rationality of modernity by also denying the principles of the constitutional state. Here we encounter a fundamental problem of Kant's argument. In the '*Idea*', of course, we read that establishing a constitutional state also requires a good will;[39] but Kant is obviously of the view that the well-designed constitutional state, at least once it has come into existence, can be grounded on the rational egoism of everyone.[40] As a purpose of nature, the progress of history can only concern external conduct, or legality, but not morality[41] (which, one might also add, is more likely to thrive under bad external conditions).

For that reason, the hope for institutional progress is thoroughly compatible with skepticism concerning the state of morality. Cultivation and civilization

[37] Cf. KANT, *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte*, A 24: 'At the stage of culture which human race still stands on, war is an indispensible means for bringing it to still a higher stage.'

[38] Thus Kant writes of the French Revolution, in which he, like Hegel, recognized a decisive turning point in human history: 'For such a phenomenon ... can never be forgotten.' (KANT, *Der Streit der Fakultäten / The Contest of Faculties* A 149)

[39] KANT, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte* A 398.

[40] Cf. KANT, *Zum ewigen Frieden / Perpetual Peace* B 61.

[41] KANT, *Der Streit der Fakultäten* A 156.

hardly imply moralization – hence Kant sympathizes with Rousseau,[42] one of the first critics of the progress model. However, Kant always leaves room for the hope that, within a world ordered by the rule of law, all human capacities can be developed, including those of morality – even if a philosophy of history along the lines of Fichte's *Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (*Characteristics of the Present Age*), which aims at a state of complete justification and sanctification as the endpoint of history, remains alien to him. The hope for such a condition is wrecked by Kant's view of human beings as irrevocably comprised of warped wood; and perhaps his synthesis of a realistic anthropology with a demanding ethics is a better foundation for a contemporary philosophy of history than either the naïve optimism of many 19th century thinkers or the dismal despair of most philosophers of history of the 20th century. For humanity has a duty to legal and moral progress—and from this duty follows the duty of philosophers of history to bring forth from a wealth of facts all indications in human history that lend hope to the belief that the pursuit of such a goal is not entirely in vain.*

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[42] KANT, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte* A 402f.

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