

KANT ON THE HISTORY OF HUMANKIND: THE INVISIBLE HAND OF NATURE BEHIND THE PROGRESS OF THE REALIZATION OF FREEDOM

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In his essay, “*Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*” (1784), Kant claims that the history of mankind should reflectively be understood as a process thanks to which the human race ‘as a whole’ gradually approximates its terminus *ad quem*, *i.e.*, the establishment of “a moral whole” (*ein moralisch Ganze*). (*IaG AA 8:21*).² In objection to the empirical standpoint adopted by historiographers’ account of natural history, Kant shows that his intention is far from elaborating a “history...written merely empirically” (*IaG AA 8:30*), *i.e.*, “history which concerns itself with the narration of... appearances” (*IaG AA 8:17*).³ Noticeably, Kant is not rejecting natural history as such. He rather acknowledges the role of (human) nature in the constant approximation of the highest goal of humanity. In his endeavor to “furnish...a philosophical history” (*philosophische Geschichte*) (*IaG AA 8:31*), ‘nature’ is given credit of being a means to the continual progress of the realization of freedom in the stage of empirical history. (*Cf. IaG AA 8:19; ZeF AA 8:360-368*). The problem is how Kant’s criticism of “history...written merely empirically” (*IaG AA 8:30*) and his emphasis on the role of nature in the moral progress of humanity fit together without contradicting each other.

In three steps, this paper aims at showing, based on the mediating function of the idea of moral progress, that there is no contradiction in the foregoing claims. Like a good number of enlightenment philosophers Kant was concerned with the moral progress of mankind often mistakenly reduced by some scholars to the historical “process of civilization.”⁴ Based on the experiences of past and present evils (wars of conquests, international conflicts, colonialism, revolutions, etc.) historians and historiographers – whose task is “to discover, among a large

number of historical facts, universal principles that guide historical development”⁵ – had been pessimistic and radically skeptic about the moral progress of mankind ‘as a whole’. (cf. *Herder and Mendelsohn*). Not only does Kant object to such empiricism, he does object to any merely idealistic approach for which moral progress is but a merely empty thought of the brain, good in theory but of no use in practice. The moral progress of mankind should, in Kant’s view, be reflectively understood from the perspective of the inevitable realization of freedom in the natural history of mankind. Before the peaks and valleys of the human natural history, a critical philosopher *reflectively* strives to identify a thread gradually and inevitably guiding mankind towards its ultimate goal. While the first section elaborates on the problematic (*i.e.*, lack of objectivity) of the idea of moral progress, the second displays its mediating function.⁶ The third section shows how the moral progress of mankind is facilitated by a powerful ‘invisible hand of nature’.

§1. THE PROBLEMATIC IDEA OF THE MORAL PROGRESS OF MANKIND

Kant’s conception of the history of mankind emerges from a wide range of debates, objections and replies to his contemporaries and critics about the ambivalent nature of man, the progress of culture, religion, education and several other domains of social and political life. In objection to his critics, such as Herder, he argues that, history is neither a history of an isolated culture nor a history of individual human beings. It is rather a history of the human race ‘as a whole’. Contrary to any skepticism about the human moral political progress, Kant concedes that, although the history of mankind is, empirically speaking, “in the large... woven together out of folly, childish vanity, often also out of childish malice and the rage to destruction” (*IaG AA 8:18*), there are reasons to be optimistic. Such optimism leads one to admit that, despite social and political hardships such as bloody revolutions and resistances, dictatorships and international political rivalries, “the human race has always been in progress toward the better and will continue to be so henceforth” (*SF AA 7:89; TP AA 8:308-309*). Let us start by a brief outline of the protagonists of these debates before we specifically examine Kant’s argument.

Theories of moral progress and human flourishing were widespread among enlightenment thinkers. On the one hand, the modern Scientific Revolution – Copernicus, Newton, Galileo, etc. – introduced considerable and empirically observable changes in the human society and its political organization. Besides its challenge to the traditional (ancient and medieval) modes of thinking, the modern Scientific Revolution made available tangible methods and tools for the achievement of greater understanding of nature and, based on specific laws, the prediction of phenomena likely to happen in the future. Following these developments, the human eagerness to discover and invent new technical and mechanical tools increased the social concern for economics, politics, etc. The spirit of free innovation was promoted and a great number of enlightenment scientists and thinkers praised the power of reason that enables man to master and control nature.

Besides the scientific progress and its significant repercussions, debates on the moral

progress of man increased. Aware of the evident development of science and technology, thinkers discussed on the advancement of the civilization of human race and the conditions of its possibility, the possible triumph of the ideals of freedom, the improvement of human social conditions, etc. Amplified in France more than anywhere else, these debates spread over Europe (especially in Germany) and across the Channel. Some names are indicatively worth being mentioned hereafter. Bernard de Fontenelle's comparison of the progress achieved by the Ancients (*i.e.*, Socrates) and the Moderns (*i.e.*, Montaigne) (cf. the *Dialogues des Morts* (1683); Abbé de Saint-Pierre's views on the steady progress of civilization by the human effort to abolish wars (cf. *Le Projet pour rendre la Paix perpétuelle en Europe* (1713); Montesquieu's *L'esprit des Lois* (1750); Voltaire's *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751), Anne Robert Jacques Turgot's *Histoire Universelle* (1751), etc. In Germany, these debates were made accessible to the public through the *Philosophen's* eagerness to vulgarize knowledge. The influence of Montesquieu and Rousseau on Herder's *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774) and *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784), or on Kant's theory of philosophical history have been documented.

In focusing on the moral progress of man, Kant's crucial contribution to the then ongoing debates brought him to innovatively assert, from a different point of view, that human race 'as a whole' is inevitably morally progressing. To endorse Dupré, Kant's argument is based on his resistance to "the uncritical optimism of the *philosophes*."⁷ In Dupré's view, "the notion of unqualified rational and moral progress, so evident to them [les philosophes] remained highly problematic to him [Kant]: it had no 'intuitional content' and seemed to conflict with experience."⁸ Kant intends, however, to critically show that the progress of the realization of freedom in the history of mankind is neither a merely empty idea nor something deducible from a compilation of empirical historical facts brought together in accordance with some techniques and methods of historiography. Kant's concern is to elaborate a history philosophically understood as an "idea of a world history, which in a certain way has a guiding thread a priori." (*IaG AA 8:30*). To fully appreciate his argument one needs to briefly outline some views of one of his main critics, namely, his former student Herder.

Herder's nationalism and critique of the *Aufklärung's* notion of world history led him to seriously object to the concept of the moral progress of the human race *as a whole*.⁹ In Herder's view, universal history as well as the moral progress of man as species are, in reality, empty thoughts. Promoting individualism, he accuses the enlightenment proponents of the universal history of trying the impossible in assuming that there is such thing as a universal culture for all peoples of the world. For Herder, such assumption downplays the plurality and diversity of cultures, nations, and people's specific histories and experiences. Any attempt to subsume other cultures under one's own – so to say superior – culture and mode of thinking is an aberration to the progress of man. Though Herder acknowledges that, for the sake of empirical continuity, each culture and nation builds upon the past achievements of its predecessors, he holds that each generation, each nation, each culture has its own specific history. And he insists upon that this specific history should by no means be subsumed under the empty idea of universal culture. Pluralism and diversity are essential to Herder's argument. Any attempt to universalize culture or history is for him nothing but mere fiction. Thus, in his criticisms of Enlightenment,

he claims that, in their attempt to understand the meaning of the progress of peoples and nations throughout centuries, some thinkers have disregarded concrete facts and based their theories on mere ideas. In objection to Kant, Herder remarks that, “in this way, people have made up novels “about the universally progressing improvement of the world” – novels that no one believes, at least not the true pupil of history and the human heart.¹⁰

The same staunch defense of culture pluralism and diversity is explicit a decade later in Herder’s essay on *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784). This essay was reviewed afterwards by Kant on the demand of Beiser.¹¹ In his critique of colonialism and other forms of political imperialism, then promoted by the so called civilized cultures and nations, Herder highlights that each individual culture is and should be considered as unique and incomparable in its particularities. No culture whatsoever should put itself beyond others. Why would, Herder asks, “the universal, philosophical, human-friendly tone of our century be so gladly *granted* to each distant nation, each oldest age?”¹² Why would “each nation and culture be expected to adopt “our own ideal” in virtue and happiness?”¹³ There is, in his view, no such thing as universal history of humanity. Furthermore, given what experience has taught us, it is even absurd to ask whether the human race as a whole is progressing or not. Some cultures, peoples or nations are indeed progressing, others are not. To think of moral progress at large is pointless.

Objecting to Herder’s argument, Kant builds his argument upon both the rational nature and the practical moral finitude of man. Kant emphasizes upon the fact that, though human beings are animal (finite) beings, they are rational. Human beings are neither perfect animals nor perfect rational beings. They are neither angels nor gods. (Cf. *Rel.AA* 6:21-22). What is at stake in this objection is not a descriptively anthropological account of man. Kant’s main point is rather teleologically oriented to the understanding of the realization of human external freedom in ‘this’ imperfect world of contingencies. On the one hand, based on the empirical observation, Kant remarks that human beings are comparable to a “crooked wood (*klumm Holz*) out of which nothing entirely straight can be fabricated” (*IaG AA* 8:23). On the other hand, this apparently pessimistic view of man turns into an undeniable optimism when he admits that, thanks to nature – of which man is a part – this crookedness is, as far as progress and practical moral teleology are concerned, a driving force towards the highest goal of humankind.

Some scholars have seen in the crooked wood metaphor, as well as in the claim that “man is evil by nature” (*Rel. AA* 6:32) a concrete expression of Kant’s pessimism regarding human nature, *i.e.*, man as ethically and politically depraved. Nevertheless, a close examination of Kant’s argument downplays this interpretation. Kant’s point is that even if this world might not be the best of all possible worlds, as Leibniz had thought, its crookedness and irregularities follow some form of regularity thanks to which nature compels humanity towards its goal.¹⁴ This claim can, however, be defended only from a teleological perspective.

In the *IaG*, *MAM*, *TP*, *ZeF* and *SF*, Kant shows that the empirical experience of human beings and their actions are determined by constant laws of nature as any other natural occurrences such as “the growth of plants”, “the course of streams”, “other natural arrangements”

(*IaG AA 8:17*). Even certain life events such as marriages and births which seem to fall under the scope of human free will follow, “on the whole... (*im Ganzen*) ..., a uniform uninterrupted course” (*IaG AA 8:17*) are governed by constant natural laws. Basically, in stressing upon his teleology, Kant claims that, in the pursuit of their own specific aims and each in its own way, “Individual human beings and even whole nations think little about the fact (that) they are proceeding unnoticed, as by a guiding thread, according to an aim of nature, which is unknown to them, and are laboring at its promotion” (*IaG AA 8:17*).

This claim becomes central to Kant’s appropriation of traditional teleology according to which nature does nothing in vain.¹⁵ In his view, if a little attention had been paid to the course of natural occurrences, not individually but rather ‘in the large’ (*im Ganzen*), individual beings as well as nations would have realized that the sequences of actions happen in accordance with a “natural objective” (*Naturabsicht*), *i.e.*, the aim of nature. (*IaG AA 8:18*). This aim cannot epistemologically be known or determinatively explained because we do not have any intuition of it. It can only be reflectively presupposed by reason as a hypothesis of a thread guiding a priori the natural history of humankind ‘as a whole’. From the view point of experience, there is, in Kant’s view, reason to be pessimistic about the course of natural history which looks as if it has no aim. Before the historical facts of experience, one might think, despite some individual cases that seems to show some order and wisdom, that “everything in the large is woven together out of folly, childish vanity, often also out of childish malice and the rage to destruction.” (*IaG AA 8: 17-18*). Based on empirical facts of experiences “one does not know what concept to make of our species, with its smug imaginings about its excellences. (*IaG AA 8: 17-18*).

From a teleological point of view, one will discover within the rises and falls of the natural history of man “a regular course” (*eine regelmäßige Gang*) of occurrences. (*IaG AA 8:17*). Thus, from a holistic point of view, “what meets the eye in individual subjects as confused and irregular yet in the whole species can be recognized as a steadily progressing though slow development of its original predispositions.” (*IaG AA 8:17*). In Kant’s view, it would be too much to ask a historiographer to give an account of such steady progress. It is rather the task of a philosopher who, in thinking the course of the world from a cosmopolitan point of view, critically asks “whether he can discover an aim of nature in this nonsensical course of things human.” (*IaG AA 8:18*). Elsewhere in his essay on *Theory and Practice*, Kant argues, in objections to the methods of historiographers, that critical philosophy should help us realize that human moral progress will depend “*not so much* upon what we [*as individuals here and there*] do” ... and “by what methods we should proceed in order to bring it about.” (*TP AA 8:310*). Kant is not downplaying the role played by the historical facts of experience and empirical methods of history. His point is rather to show that philosophical history is specifically concerned with checking the conditions of the possibility of a constant and inevitable progress of human rationality despite tough irregularities inherent to human nature.

Humankind is, despite its crookedness, inevitably progressing towards its future end (goal). Moral progress is, in Kant’s view, not to be searched from within the laws of nature. The steadiness of moral progress is rather grounded in human reason itself. That means, in

the *a priori* regulative function of the ideal ‘guiding thread’ (*Leitfaden*) upon which history of mankind can meaningfully be grasped as a ‘world history’ (*Weltgeschichte*). Unlike Herder, Kant admits that all epochs are like stages of that endless all-encompassing and inevitable progress towards the final and universal goal of the history of mankind. This argument is central to Kant’s optimism regarding the progress of humanity towards its highest end.

Given the ambivalent nature of human beings one would unhesitatingly argue that “no history of them in conformity to a plan (as *e.g.* of bees or of beavers) appears to be possible” (*IaG AA 8:17*). In fact, human beings are neither “merely instinctive like animals” (*IaG AA 8:17*) nor pure reasonable thus civilized cosmopolitan citizens who behave “in accordance with an agreed upon plan” (*IaG AA 8:17*). Against any skepticism and charges of pessimism Kant remains optimistic about the steadiness of the moral progress of man. To borrow Howard Williams’ reading,

Kant is, on balance, optimistic about the future of the human race. He believes that at some time in the future men will live in a condition of perpetual peace. This is not because he has faith in the character and motives of individual men, but because he believes circumstances will ultimately force men to live in harmony with each other.¹⁶

What those who charge Kant of being pessimist have missed out, is the claim that even the human natural disposition to be evil constitutes, to use Allen Wood’s terminology, the “subjective conditions for the possibility of the development of moral good in man.”¹⁷ The common objection to this argument is, nonetheless, whether in saying that from evil something good can come about, Kant does not contradict his argument regarding the foundations of morality developed in the *GMS*, *KpV* and *RL*. A careful examination of Kant’s teleological (reflective) approach can help one to realize that there is no contradiction in his argument.

Based on the abovementioned ambivalent nature of man one can understand why and how, in the *IaG*, Kant’s optimistic view about the history of mankind evolves from the distinction between two categories of animal being, namely, between non-rational animal beings from human rational animal beings. The former are merely instinctively motivated [natural determinism], while the latter’ actions should, even if it is not always the case, be motivated by freedom. Both categories are, Kant admits in the first proposition of *IaG*, teleologically speaking, naturally predisposed to develop themselves “completely and purposively” (*vollständig und zweckmäßig*) (*IaG AA 8:18*) in accordance with the laws of nature under which they are necessarily submitted. The main difference between the two categories resides – as underlined earlier in Kant’s essays “*Von den verschiedenen Racen der Menschen*” (1777) and later in the “*Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrace*” (1785) – in the faculty of reason.¹⁸ The human being is, in Kant’s view, the only creature to be endowed with the faculty of reasoning and capable of setting its own ends. Finetuned in *IaG*, this idea is expressed as follows: “Reason in a creature is a faculty of extending the rules and aims of the use of all its powers far beyond natural instinct, and it knows no boundaries to its projects” (*IaG AA 8:18*). Recalling his double character theory (*cf. B 566-596*), Kant admits that though human beings are under the empirical laws of nature (natural determinism), they are endowed with a specific (rational/

intelligible) power to transgress these laws and freely act in accordance with the laws of reason. Human rational beings, contrary to animal non-rational beings, are capable of setting their own goals and the means to reach them. The argument regarding the power of human reason is central in *MAM*, *TP*, *ZeF* and *SF*.

Commenting on the book of *Genesis*, he shows, in his 1786's essay on *Muthmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte*, that thanks to the power of his reason man discovered his superiority over other animals present Garden of Eden. In "becoming conscious of one's reason as a faculty that can extend itself beyond the limits within which all animals are held" (*MAM AA 8:112*) the human being became aware of the fact that the destiny of humanity is in its hands. Put differently, the human being "discovered in himself a faculty of choosing for himself a way of living and not being bound to a single one, as other animals are." (*MAM AA 8:112*). A decade later Kant admits in *Der Streit der Fakultäten* that, "There must be some experience in the human race which, as an event, points to the disposition and capacity of the human race to be the cause of its own advance toward the better" (*SF AA 7:84*). Noticeably, Kant describes this "capacity" as the power of the human race to be "the author of [its] advance" (*SF AA 7:84*). Human race is, thus, by virtue of its rationality, endowed with a natural "capacity to be the cause of its own advance towards the better" (*SF AA 7:84*). The idea of autonomy, central to Kant's entire practical moral thought is hereby dominant.

Reason (human rationality) has, in Kant's view, not ceased to constantly progress towards its goal, namely, the full realization of freedom. In both *IaG* and *MAM*, it is, however, expressively argued that the moral progress of man is not something to search for in the mechanisms of nature but rather in the human rationality itself. Constant moral progress of humankind 'as a whole' is thus understood only from the perspective of this goal, namely, the endlessly and inevitable constant development of reason through the natural history of man. This inevitability is explicit in Kant's objection to Mendelsohn's skepticism about the moral progress of human race. (*cf. TP, part III*).

In his objection to Mendelsohn, Kant insists upon the fact that "steadily progressing though slow development" (*TP AA 8:308*) of humankind as a whole is essentially different from what Mendelsohn calls, on the basis of historical facts of experience, "small oscillations of human race" (*TP AA 8:308*). Kant is aware of the fact that in everyday experience some isolated human actions – also referred to as "appearances of the human free will" (*IaG AA 8:17*) – might bring one to agree with Mendelsohn's soft pessimistic view that "the human race as a whole make small oscillations, and it never takes a few steps forward without soon afterward sliding back twice as fast into its former state" (*TP AA 8:308*). Full of optimism, Kant rejects this Sisyphean view. As none can deny the scientific progress, He assumes that, "since the human race is constantly advancing with respect to culture (as its natural end) it is also to be conceived as progressing toward what is better with respect to the moral end of its existence" (*TP AA 8:308-309*). He adds that "this will indeed be interrupted from time to time but will never be broken off" (*TP AA 8:309*). By its rationality and its moral predisposition, constant progress is inevitable.

Beyond historical facts the human race is, thanks to its rational nature, morally progressing. This progress can however never be grasped unless one adopts a reflective point of view through which one can admit unhesitatingly that there are “predispositions from which one can gather that the human race will always progress toward what is better and that the evil of present and past times will disappear in the good of future times.” (*TP AA 8:307*). Noticeably, Kant had made it clear in *IaG* that “those predispositions whose goal is the use of his [human being] reason were to develop completely only in the species, but not in the individual.” (*IaG AA 8:18*). This claim is characteristic of Kant’s conception of the historical progress of reason’s ideals.

For Mendelsohn, as well as Herder, it is mere ‘fantasy’ to think that humanity ‘as a whole’ has such predispositions or that it is progressing and will always do so. While he admits that isolated individuals or nations do make progress, Mendelsohn sees humanity as constantly vacillating between fixed limits. More precisely, “the human race as a whole make small oscillations, and it never takes a few steps forward without soon afterward sliding back twice as fast into its former state.” (*TP AA 8:307-308*).¹⁹ In Kant’s view, Mendelsohn’s empirical departure point prevents him from realizing that the human race ‘as a whole’ is making progress. Empirical experience shows only regression into the worse. Based on man’s existential warful nature and tendency to compete, one can easily find reasons to be skeptic and to hate the human nature. Kant argues that it is only from a reflective point of view that the human race can be loved, if not in its crookedness “at least in its constant approach to the good.” (*TP AA 8: 307*).

The idea of moral progress of the human race as a whole is, for the philosopher of Königsberg, a problematic idea in the sense that it lacks objectivity. Moral progress can, nevertheless, be thought without contradiction as a possibility. Kant argues that the idea of moral progress is a presupposition in no need of explanatory proof. It is a duty for humanity ‘as a whole’. Understanding, “the duty of every member of the series of generations – to which I (as a human being in general) belong and am yet not so good in the moral character required of me as I ought to be and hence could be – so to influence posterity that it becomes always better”. (*TP AA 8:309*).²⁰

Briefly, from a teleological perspective guiding Kant’s argument, history is understood as the progress of mankind ‘as a whole’ gradually making headway towards the full and perfect realization of its external freedom through a perfect civil society. The moral progress of mankind is thus an inevitable progress of rationality towards a rightful-civil constitution, *i.e.*, based on the principle of right stipulating “what relations among human beings and states *ought* to be” (*TP AA 8:313, italic is my emphasis*). It remains, however, questionable: if moral progress of humankind is inevitable, would human beings bother making moral efforts? What if moral progress holds in theory but it is of no use in practice?

§ 2. THE MEDIATING FUNCTION OF THE IDEA OF MORAL PROGRESS

Kant’s philosophical history is optimistically based on the presupposition that the human race is, by virtue of its rationality, pre-disposed to gradually and continually make

moral progress towards the better. In following Kant's twofold concept of morality überhaupt and its applications it can be argued that the a priori concept of moral progress applies to both the moral ethical progress and the moral juridical-political progress. (cf. *MS AA 6:214, Einleitung*). In other words, practical reason compels us to presuppose, on the one hand, a necessary progress towards the ethical *summum bonum*, i.e., happiness added to virtue; on the other hand, progress towards the juridico-political *summum bonum*, i.e., perpetual peace. (*RL AA 6:355*). This distinction has been seen by Yirmiyahu Yovel as a "dual system" of the goal of history, namely, "an internal (moral) and an external (legal) side that complement each other."²¹ The former consists in the personal moral (ethical) improvement; the latter consists in the moral (juridico-political) progress. The argument of this paper deals with the latter, namely, the progress of the entire human race towards a perfect civil cosmopolitan political community. Such progress can, to use José Nicolau Heck's terminology, be understood in terms of "right directed toward a progressive realization of republican ideas and perpetual peace, that is, political practice in harmony with morality."²²

In emphasizing upon the fact that moral progress is a mere presupposition of practical reason, Kant is neither a naïve daydreamer for whom everything on the stage of the history of mankind goes perfectly, nor a self-declared pessimist for whom the entire human race is going bad and heading into the dark hole of perdition and eternal damnation. He rather admits that if one sets aside historical facts – from which humanity as whole displays no sign of progress – and consider human beings as intelligible beings whose awareness of the moral law makes aware of being under the duty to act morally – the progress of humankind can be seen not as a mere fiction of the brain but rather as a fact of reason. It would thus be childish, Kant concedes, to think, as empiricists do, that in some parts of the world, such as Europe, they are making progress towards perpetual peace because they are promoting the "balance of power" principle (*TP AA 8:312*). This practical empirical principle can indeed make temporarily conflicts cease, but such peace remains extremely fragile. Towards the end of *TP*, Kant maintains ironically that, "an enduring universal peace by means of the so-called balance of power in Europe is a mere fantasy, like Swift's house that the builder had constructed in such perfect accord with all the laws of equilibrium that it collapsed as soon as a sparrow alighted upon it" (*TP AA 8:312*). Genuine peace – understood in its perpetuity – should be grounded in the principle of reason, more specifically, the principle of right derived from the highest principle of morality überhaupt, i.e., the categorical imperative. (Cf. *TP AA 8:313*).

Kant has no doubts, reflectively speaking, that the human race is *inevitably* progressing towards its final goal. He nonetheless admits that its full realization is not to be expected in the present age. In order for reason to achieve its full enlightenment, Kant concedes, "nature perhaps needs an immense series of generations, each of which transmits its enlightenment to the next, in order finally to propel its germs in our species to that stage of development which is completely suited to its aim." (*IaG AA 8:19*). For the record, Kant's philosophical history, in se teleological, is not a narrative of past or present events. It is rather, reflectively speaking, oriented to a point in the future which "must be, at least in the idea of the human being, the goal of his endeavors, because otherwise the natural predispositions would have to be regarded for the most part as in vain and purposeless" (*IaG AA 8:19*). In other words, that point can

reflectively be envisaged (fore-seen) as undoubtedly reachable. From the view point of the empirical course of human affairs it, however, appears that the human race will never reach this aim. The representation of that aim remains merely fictitious. Yet, from Kant's reflective view point, far from being a merely empty fiction without any claim to reality moral progress is the reason's representation of the progressive approximation of the ultimate goal of humanity. It can only be understood as a fiction in the sense that, to borrow Martin Moors' reflection on Kant's Fictionalism, it functions well "only as an unique standpoint" (A681/B709) that alone one can adopt, as through a schema (A682/B710), to represent the sum total of all duties converging into one highest good."²³

The point Kant wants to make is that, from a theoretical *determinative* point of view the representation of the progress of right towards perpetual peace carries no cognitive truth. But from a practical moral point of view the representation of such progress effectively creates the hope and the future of humanity. To put it differently, human reason needs to think of the moral progress for its moral practical interest. In thinking of moral progress the human being makes *reflectively* real what seems (*determinatively*) merely fictitious. By way of analogy to what Martin Moors calls "religious fictionalism" and its function in Kant's ethical autonomy, it can be argued that for the sake of the moral practical interest of the human reason, "Affirmations in the modus of rational faith get a fictitious status though they are continuous with truth: the truth of what my entire moral life is unavoidably urging me to accept."²⁴ In the same line of thought, although the representation of the progress of the realization of freedom in the natural history of mankind seems fictitious, it carries with it the truth of our entire juridico-political moral life. The humankind needs this representation in order to move towards its goal. Without this representation, moral progress is impossible.

Kant admits that humankind should, by virtue of its rationality, not expect the intervention of any miraculous external power, such as divine power for instance, in order to achieve its goal. He remains, however nuanced, as it can be seen in his essay *ZeF* (the Guarantee chapter) or his early claim, as reported in the '*Philosophische Religionslehre nach Pölitz*, that freedom does not exclude an enigmatic "*concursum divinum*", not in the sense of a miracle, but in the sense of divine cooperation. (cf. *V-Phil-Th/Pölitz AA 28: 1106*). Stressing the idea of autonomy, he wants to argue that, humanity should *by itself* achieve its goals: man "should labor and work himself up so far that he might make himself worthy of well-being through his conduct of life" (*IaG AA 8:20*). Each generation is, through struggles and tough hardships, morally tasked to develop skills and make life comfortable (nourishment, clothing, economic and political endeavors, etc.), and gradually – through political institutionalization – contribute to the approximation of its final goal. To the question whether our generation is not a mere profiteer of the old generations' scientific, social, political, economic hard work, Kant thinks that it might seem so from an empirical point of view. But it is not the case if the issue is approached from a teleological point of view.

It might seem unjust that our generation get benefit of the past generations' struggles for peace and freedom. But, in looking at mankind as a whole, it is also the duty for our generation to make paths walkable for the future generation. In other words, this wonder disappears if one

sets off from a teleological perspective and looks at the human race not as a bunch of separate individuals but rather as a whole. From that perspective, it becomes soon evident that the lifespan of individual human beings, societies and cultures is limited in time and space. They pass before reaching the goal, while “the species is immortal, [and] should nevertheless attain to completeness in the development of their predispositions.” (*IaG AA 8:20*). In its own way, each generation contributes to the gradual approximation of the highest goal of the human race ‘as a whole’. Some generations might slow it down, others might speed it up, but none will break it off because they are all, knowing it or not, part of human rationality in constant and inevitable progress towards its full realization.

From what precedes, the mediating function of the idea of moral progress comes to the fore. The idea of moral progress does reflectively bridge up the gulf between what is being done in the crooked course of human affairs and what ought to be done to achieve the goal of mankind. The idea of moral progress guarantees the bridgeability between human experiences – determinatively speaking, incapable of progress – and the ideal goal ‘apparently’ unattainable. By virtue of the idea of moral progress the concept of “continual approximation” (“*in kontinuierlicher Annäherung*”) of the highest (political) good becomes graspable. (*cf. RL AA 6:355*). By way of explanation, the presupposition of moral progress mediates the reality of the experience of man in the world – human behavior as it is in space and time – and the apparently unattainable goal of humanity [*i.e.*, “the moral character required of me as I ought to be.”] (*TP AA 8:309*).

The idea of moral progress is thus presupposed by reason as a mediating force between theory and practice. That is, between the ideal and the real. In Kant’s view, human being is, by virtue of its rationality, endowed with the power if not to completely achieve then gradually approximate the goal of moral progress. Kant’s political optimism is grounded in this mediating function of the idea of moral progress whose realization is, as argued in *TP*, a duty (*Pflicht*) of the entire human race “constantly advancing with respect to culture (as its natural end) ... toward what is better with respect to the moral end of its existence.” (*TP AA 8:308-309*). It thus follows that, the progress of human race towards the better, too ideal and fictitious it might appear, is a functional ‘innate duty’ which ensures the mediation between ‘what is’ (reality) and ‘what ought to be’ (ideal). Not only is the idea of moral progress a representation whose practical interest is necessary to the practical interest of human reason, the full achievement of the highest political good is, prospectively speaking, a matter for “hope for better times”. (*TP AA 8:309*).

Regardless of tough and unpromising experience of various forms of oppression and coercion which the human species is, historically spoken, passing through, the idea of moral progress keeps the philosopher’s faith in the constant advance of rationality. Kant admits that, “Confronted by the sorry sight, not so much of those troubles that oppress human beings from natural causes as rather of those that they themselves inflict upon one another, the mind is nevertheless cheered up by the prospect that matters could become better in the future.” (*TP AA 8:309*). Meaning that, while upon “empirical arguments” (*TP AA 8:310*) nothing guarantees better times in the future, a reflective point of view allows a philosopher to optimistically assert

that “in our age... the human race as a whole has actually made considerable moral progress... and that the outcry about its incessantly increasing depravity comes from the very fact that when it reaches a higher level of morality it sees farther ahead” (*TP AA 8:310*). An empirical point of view fails to identify this progress because its judgment is based on “short-term checks” which, being limited in time and space, “can prove nothing” regarding the future. (*cf. TP AA 8:310*). A reflective judgment is thus given credit of doing the job. To fully grasp Kant’s argument, one needs to understand his prophetic view of history. Kant’s work *Der Streit der Fakultäten* is well elaborate on this point.

In the second part of *SF* – entitled “An old question raised again: Is the human race constantly progressing?” (*SF AA 7:79-94*) – Kant stresses upon what he calls “*prophetic history*” (*wahrsagende Geschichte*) (*SF AA 7:84*), i.e., a ‘prophetic’ representation of history in view of giving an account of political optimism. In indirectly referring to the French Revolution as “a recent occurrence in our time” (*SF AA 7:85*), Kant brings back his argument of *TP* according to which this occurrence had provided a tangible evidence that, even though the way to go is still long, “the human race as a whole has actually made considerable moral progress.” (*TP AA 8:310*). The point he wants to make is that a reflective judgment shows that moral progress of humankind is not a mere fiction of the brain, it is rather continuously underway and it will fully be accomplished in the future.

Having made it clear that the historical facts do not allow us to catch any glimpse on the possibility of moral progress Kant remarks, in the *SF*, that he wants “a fragment of human history... that is drawn not from past but future time, therefore a predictive (*vorhersagende*) history” (*SF AA 7:79*). That is, a history specifically understood as a “possible representation *a priori* of events which are supposed to happen.” (*SF AA 7:79*). The problem becomes whether such a history is possible. If it is, what should its conditions of possibility be?

Basically, Kant’s argument is that human reason is, by virtue of its reflective power of judgment, capable of representing *a priori* the moral political progress of mankind. As it has been argued and explained above, reason needs this representation for its practical interest. To the question how this history is possible *a priori*, he replies that it is possible on the condition that “the diviner (*Wahrsager*) himself makes and contrives the events which he announces in advance” (*SF AA 4:80*). That is, contrary to the historiographer whose empirical history is based on external historical facts, the ‘predictive history’ (*wahrsagende Geschichte*) is rather oriented to the future. Aware of the then ongoing debates, Kant does not hesitate to submit this mode of representation to critique. His argument goes as follows. The human race can be represented as existing,

- (1) “either...in continual *retrogression* toward wickedness [*im kontinuierlichen Rückgange zum Argeren*]: “moral terrorism (*moralisch Terrorismus*)”,
- (2) “or ...in perpetual *progression* toward improvement (*im beständigen Fortgange zum Besseren*) in its moral destination which could also be called chiliasm if we view the goal of progress within a broad prospectus: “eudaemonism” (*Eudämonismus*)
- (3) “or... in eternal *stagnation* (*im ewigen Stillstande*) in its present stage of moral worth among creatures (a stagnation with which eternal rotation in orbit around the same point is one and the same): “abderitism” (*Abderitismus*). (*SF AA 7:81*).

Upon a short and rich critical analysis of these three modes, Kant comes up with a *sui generis* representation of history. Accusing these three modes of relying on historical facts, he shows that they can only ‘predict’ but not ‘foresee’ with assurance and certainty the course of the history of mankind. Only reason’s reflective judgment can *foresee* with certainty the history of mankind as a sphere of the progress of the realization of freedom. These three modes predict the future of mankind on the basis of empirical facts of experience. Kant wants to show, from a philosophical-reflective point of view, that humanity as *a whole* is, despite its ups and downs, its revolutions and rage devastations, morally progressing towards its highest goal. Reason itself reflectively foresees with certainty the inevitable moral progress of mankind as a duty. In other words, “The problem of progress is not to be resolved directly through experience.” (*SF AA 7:83*).

By the foregoing claim, Kant does not mean that moral progress has nothing to do with experience. He is rather saying that experience does not guarantee moral progress. He optimistically concedes that whatever the human race is passing through, it is and has always been progressing towards its goal. Humanity is inevitably progressing even when people might, based on historical facts, think either that humanity is continually retrogressing toward wickedness (moral terrorism), or that human race is endlessly longing for the proportionality between the good and evil (eudemonism), or that the human race is eternally vacillating between the good and the evil (abderitism). Realistically, Kant does not ignore the fact that the human race can, through its baseness, show the signs of regression and deep decline up to a highest degree. He, nevertheless, asserts that “a person may not despair even then of encountering a juncture (*punctum flexus contrarii*) where the moral predisposition in our race would be able to turn anew toward the better” (*SF AA 7:83*). Kant’s point is that, even if, empirically speaking, the human race appears falling into perpetual regress, or eternally vacillating between the good and the evil and thus incapable of overcoming the evil, one should not forget that the intelligible character of human rational beings. In other words, “we are dealing with beings that act freely.” (*SF AA 7:83*). Those are rational beings who “from the feeling of self-inflicted evil, when things disintegrate altogether, know how to adopt a strengthened motive for making them even better than they were before that state” (*SF AA 7:83*). Thus, by its rational nature human race *ought* to always make progress. It is a duty. This is a claim of a philosopher, for whom rationality is, regardless of historical ups and downs, unstopably set on the track of its progress. Reason is operative anyhow. Elsewhere in *ZeF*, Kant maintains that “The problem of establishing a state, no matter how hard it may sound, is soluble even for a nation of devils (if only they have understanding)” (*ZeF AA 8:366*). Meaning, if only they are rational.

The idea of the inevitable gradual progress of humanity towards the better is undoubtedly absurd (*widersinnisch*) to a historiographer, as any “miserable mortals” (“*arme Sterbliche*”) who wants to make sense of the history of man on the basis of historical facts and determinative laws of nature. They lean their judgments about the past and present actions on the historical, political, social, scientific empirical facts. They can do without basing their argument and judgment on what is happening here and now. They compare historical facts and search for connecting empirical principles. Briefly, they are anchored to the facts of history. Kant notes, however, that “If the course of human affairs seems so senseless (*widersinnisch*) to us, perhaps it lies in a poor choice of position from which we regard it.” (*SF AA 7:83*). Had we learned to

critically distinguish between the stages of historical facts (effects) from the stage of its causes, we could have been able to foresee and foretell that experience reflects only the effects. But such a “divine (perfect) eye” (*SFAA 7:84*) to accurately make judgment regarding the future is not human. Human beings can only predict it on the basis of facts of past and present experiences. Meaning, the future is determinatively predicted through the lens of the past and present political, economic and social facts. If human being had a ‘divine eye’ he would have been able to transcend the laws of nature and foretell with certainty the future. But a human being is not capable of that prediction. On the contrary, “in connection with the mixture of good and evil in his predisposition.... he himself does not know what effect he might expect from it.” (*SFAA 7:84*). Any determinative judgement of the history of humankind bumps into an undeterminable future.

In prophetic manner, Kant envisages that the human race as a whole should, by virtue of the reflective power of human reason, foresee (*vorhersehen*) its future and determine its own ends. He concedes that, the genuine meaning of the history of mankind lies in this right and power to determine its own ends, i.e., the power of freedom as autonomy. History is thus, to endorse Bourgeois’ reading of Kant, synthetically connected with freedom. History consists of the inevitable progress of the realization of freedom on the stage of the empirical world.²⁵ Moral progress is a duty for the entire mankind. To borrow Yovel’s terms, “Kant does in effect, introduce an explicit concept of a “history of reason,” a history that is itself rational or “transcendental” and not empirical. This concept is usually overlooked or explained away by Kantian critics, who find it embarrassing.”²⁶ The same remark has been made by scholars such as A. Philonenko and B. Bourgeois whose defense of Kant against mere fictionalism is fully endorsed here.²⁷ The next section will deal with the issue regarding the means of moral progress.

§3. THE ‘INVISIBLE HAND’ OF NATURE BEHIND THE PROGRESS OF THE REALIZATION OF FREEDOM

To the question by what means the human race as a whole does gradually and continuously approximate its highest end, Kant points to ‘nature’ and ‘education’ (instruction). Keeping in mind that man is both rational (intelligible) and part of nature (empirical), the following opening claims will allow us to engage with Kant’s argument.

In *IaG AA 8:19*, Kant claims that,

- (1) Nature has willed that the human being should produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical arrangement of his animal existence entirely out of himself (...)
- (2) [Nature has willed that the human being should] participate in no other happiness or perfection than that which he has procured for himself free from instinct through his own reason (...)
- (3) Nature gave the human being reason, and the freedom of the will grounded on it, that was already a clear indication of its aim in regard to that endowment. For he should now not be guided by instinct or cared for and instructed by innate knowledge; rather he should produce everything out of himself.

A decade later, in the *Guarantee Supplement* (*ZeF AA 8:360-368*) he says that, Nature has arranged things in the way that,

- (1) people not only “could” but also “should” be able to live in all regions of the earth...
- (2) By war, language and *religions*, nature has driven people everywhere” on the planet (even against their own will) and in its acting towards the final end....
- (3) By war, need of trades, etc. nature has compelled (categorically) people to enter into more or less lawful relations. (*ZeF AA 8:363*)

From the foregoing statements, nature is seen as an *invisible* compelling force. The ‘invisible hand of nature’ guarantees – through the natural history of man – the constant progress of rationality and freedom as autonomy.²⁸ Nature has, through its polemics taken care of that the human race should be able to direct itself. Its main aim is to prepare the human race ‘as a whole’ to the full public use of its own reason (public enlightenment). A decade after the *IaG*, Kant readmits, in the Supplement to *ZeF*, that nature provides a guarantee (*Gewähr*) for a gradual progress towards the highest political good, perpetual peace.

Kant’s insistence on the rational character of man is of paramount importance to his account of the nature of the moral progress of mankind and the means to achieve this progress. Far from being concerned with a descriptive anthropological account of human nature, as it has been thought by some scholars of Kant’s anthropology (R. Louden, P. Frierson, among others), Kant wanted to underscore that the ambivalent nature of man – whose actions are neither purely animal nor purely rational – plays an enormous role in the constitutive process of republicanization.²⁹ The history of mankind, too crooked it might seem, is purposively oriented. As humans, we are shortsighted to see that purpose. But a teleological fact is that “nature does not proceed without a plan or final aim.” (*IaG AA 8:29*). Following traditional teleology Kant concedes that, “Nature does nothing superfluous.” (*IaG AA 8:19*).

It goes without saying that the concept of ‘nature’ is equivocal. The concept ‘nature’ used in *IaG* is, for instance, different from the one in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. A close reading reveals that the concept of nature used in the *KrV* consists in nature envisaged either as “*natura materialiter spectata*”, *i.e.*, “nature as the sum total of all appearances”, or “*natura formaliter spectata*”, *i.e.*, “nature in general” (*i.e.*, “lawfulness of appearances in space and time.” (*B 163-165*)). This is the same concept of nature in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Sciences* (*Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft*) (*Cf. MAN AA 4 :467 (preface)*). What becomes evident in the *IaG* as well as in the *Guarantee Supplement* (*ZeF AA 8:360-368*) is the crucial distinction between, to borrow Brigitte Geonget’s terms, nature as a “volitional agency guiding the course of natural history”, and nature as an “objective element, a lieu of the effective realization of the end of nature.”³⁰ The latter is nature understood from the view point of the understanding’s determinative principles, as it is the case in the *Transcendental Analytic* of the *First Critique*. The former is, *teleologically* speaking, the creative and powerful ‘invisible hand’ (of nature) guaranteeing the realization of the progress of freedom in the history of mankind. What is at stake in the former is not the concept of ‘nature in general’ regulating by means of necessary and universal laws the entire and infinite series of causes and effects. The former

is rather concerned with the teleological character of nature accessible through the reflective power of judgment.³¹ Nature is, thus, seen as an agent acting in accordance with an aim, namely, to prepare the human race ‘as a whole’ to constantly achieve its full enlightenment. In *IaG*, the concept of nature refers to a reflectively autonomous agent. Thus, the following expressions: “Nature has willed that...” (*IaG AA 8:19*) ...” Nature gave...” (*idem*); “the means nature employs...” (*idem*). Noticeably, this is closely connected with Kant’s representation of nature as an artist (*Künsterin*) in *ZeF*.

In the *Guarantee Supplement of Perpetual Peace* (*ZeF AA 8:360-368*) whose importance in Kant’s argument has often been disregarded, Kant engages a discussion on “the great artist nature” whose character is actively creative. Unlike the ‘passive nature’ of the *KrV*, the concept of nature in *IaG* and the *Guarantee Supplement* is “compelling” (*IaG AA 8:22*), intelligibly active and free. Nature is, Kant uses Lucretius’s terminology, ‘the contriver of things’ (“*natura daedala rerum*”). (Cf. *ZeF AA 8:360*). Kant’s use of the concept of nature in the *Guarantee Supplement* reminds one of his recourse – in the solution to the antinomy of practical reason (*KpV AA 5:113-119*) – to God as “an intelligible author of nature” (*ein intelligibelen Urhebers der Natur*) (*KpV AA 5:115*) who guarantees the possibility of the *summum bonum*. In the *Second Critique*, Kant argues explicitly that, the intelligible author of nature is God whose existence must be postulated. Nature (as originated/effect) owes its being to an intelligible author (originator/cause). In the guarantee supplement this picture of Nature owing its activity from an original being (God) vanishes. Nature becomes rather elevated to the level of divine intelligibility. It no longer originates from, but it is viewed as originator (author) itself. Kant calls it, “the great artist nature” (*die große Künstlerin Natur*) (*ZeF AA 8:360*) which guarantees a smooth approximation of the highest political good of mankind.

Some scholars have argued that both the “intelligible author of nature” (*KpV 5:115*) and “the great artist nature” (*ZeF AA 8:360*) refer to God who, from beyond, governs the history of humankind. From within this religious interpretation, man is seen as a passive creature whose happiness depends on the existence of a highest being.³² This religious reading has, however, missed out the core-argument of Kant’s political thought. It is remarkable that, in the *Guarantee Supplement*, not only does Kant avoid explicitly using the concept God but also in place of something like ‘the great artist of nature’ (*die große Künstlerin der Natur*) he uses ‘the great artist nature’ (*die große Künstlerin Natur*) (*ZeF AA 8:360*), thus making nature the author itself. Briefly, while in the *Second Critique* nature is seen as an object, the artwork of the great artist (Creator), in the *Guarantee Supplement*, nature itself is rather deified. Nature itself becomes the artist who, by means of his activity and creativity, providentially guarantees a gradual and unbreakable progress of mankind towards a perfect constitution.

Alluding to the unsociable sociability argument developed in *IaG*, Kant views nature in terms of “divine”, “guiding...providence” (*Vorsehung*), whose “mechanical course purposiveness” (*ZeF AA 8:360*) “let (ting) concord (*Eintracht*) arise by means of the discord (*Zwietracht*) between human beings even against their will.” (*ZeF AA 8:361*). Nature guarantees that the ambivalent tendency of man (discord, conflicts vs. concord, contact) which seems to be a barrier to constant progress, becomes rather the incentive of the progress of the realization

of freedom. A short interpretation of Kant's appeal to the artist metaphor can help us gain access to the very meaning of his unsocial sociability argument.

A close examination of Kant's work identifies a close connection between the expression "*die große Künstlerin Natur*" (*ZeF AA 8:360*) and the definition of art and artist elaborated in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* written a half decade earlier before the *Peace essay*. It can be argued that in defining nature as the great artist Kant had in mind his basic definition of art as "causality in accordance with ideas." (*KU AA 5:390*). Meaning, "a special kind of agency distinct from causality in accordance with merely mechanical laws of nature." (*KU AA 5:390*). As an artist, nature is by analogy attributed a reflective power.³³ Nature is consequently more than a play of mechanical laws. Thanks to the principle of purposiveness, nature can display, *in its own way*, and despite its apparently nonsensical polemics, its hidden plan. The question becomes "whether the connection of ends in nature proves a special kind of causality in it; or whether considered in itself and in accordance with objective principles it is not instead identical with the mechanism of nature." (*KU AA 5:390*).

In taking nature as a great artist Kant wants to show, from a reflective point of view, that nature is a special kind of causality which he considers to be, contrary to "*technica naturalis*", "*technica intentionalis*". The former refers to a kind of nature operating in accordance with mere mechanical laws. The latter denotes a *sui generis* "productive capacity of nature in accordance with final causes." (*KU AA 5:390*). In the latter sense, nature is not merely *reproductive*. It is rather *productive*. Meaning that nature is an agency (*Wirkungsart*) whose free *productive* capacity providentially leads the course of history (of mankind) in a different direction from that which was scientifically 'expected' (in accordance with the universal laws of nature). What is being emphasized here is the dynamic character of 'nature' leading the entire human race to a path "deeply hidden for our research" (our modes of understanding). (*KU AA 5:390*). Thus, in the guarantee supplement, Kant shows, for instance, how nature shows itself as the power unexpectedly "letting concord arise by means of the discord between human beings." (*ZeF AA 8:360*). Nature seems unpredictable. It unexpectedly lets the empirical course of political praxis gradually and constantly advance towards (*zum*) the better.

In Kant's optimistic view, a philosopher 'foresees' a plan (regularity) of nature in a series of devastating irregularities observed in the empirical unfolding of human affairs (within as well as beyond the state). Talking about 'nature' Kant upholds that, "If we consider its purposiveness in the course of the world as the profound wisdom of a higher cause directed to the objective final end of the human race and predetermining this course of the world, it is called providence, which we do not, strictly speaking, cognize in these artifices of nature." (*ZeF AA 8:362*). In other words, the stage of the natural history of man (political performances for instances) often seen as nonsensical and aimless does not allow us to identify the goal and providence of nature. We need to look at that stage from a different perspective, namely, a teleological and cosmopolitan point view. Only from this perspective does it become possible to realize that out of the crooked wood of humanity, something straight can be made. If so, nature is purposively leading the "human beings and their play in the large (*im Großen*)" (*IaG AA 8:18*) to its highest good.

Kant avoids arguing that ‘God’ is the guarantor of the progress of the realization of freedom. He rather highlights upon the fact that the rational nature of man guarantees a gradual and secure approximation of the highest good of humanity. The idea is that human rationality and its dialectics is seen as ‘the great artist’ “which we can make comprehensible to ourselves only if we ascribe to it the end of a creator of the world determining it in advance” (*ZeF AA 8:362*). In other words, our (natural) moral predispositions determine the course of our history and make real what might appear to be a dream, namely, freedom in its full external realization. This opens the horizon of hope. Despite the hardship to establish a perfect public right, despite intestines and international wars as well as nations’ raging thirst to dominate global economy, etc., there is still hope that nature, by means of its mechanisms will (and it does) freely and slowly exercise – in its own mode of being artist – its power to guarantee perpetual peace. Based on three definitive articles of perpetual peace, namely, Republicanism, Federalism and cosmopolitanism (*cf ZeF AA 8: 349-360*), it can be argued that nature does so by compelling peoples to fulfill their duty, namely, to establish a republican constitution in the state and beyond the state.³⁴ Understanding, the establishment of a world republic. Noticeably, while nature seems to do so against human beings’ will, it is remarkable that the human being – whose character is ambivalent – is part of that teleological nature.

The ambivalent nature of man as well as the teleological principle remain crucial to Kant’s argument. In his interpretation of Kant’s argument, Ripstein beautifully maintains that,

Natural teleology is not an empirical principle, but rather a rational one through which we are able to find distinctive forms of order, through which the parts of an organism are subordinated to the organism as a whole. A human being is thus both a biological organism, a living thing that we can organize under ideas of teleology, and also, and at the same time, a rational being, which we have a moral obligation to regard as free and purposive.³⁵⁻

In other words, by means of its dialectics, nature constantly prepares human beings to use their reason and thus to act in accordance with the principle of autonomy. This preparation can be long but, if one looks at the human race as whole, it remains constant. Kant concedes that through its cunning, nature knows how to keep the human race on the path of progress. By means of nature, human beings are constantly compelled to enter a civil society through which the gradual approximation towards the better can be hoped for. Kant’s account of the “unsociable sociability of man” (*IaG AA 8:20*) illustrates the foregoing argument.

The fourth proposition of the *IaG* is devoted to the means at the disposal of nature in order for it to gradually bring the human race to its final goal. Namely, a cosmopolitan political order universally administering justice or, to endorse Williams, a society “within which the individual can fight out his battles with others under generally recognized rules.”³⁶ It is also a society in which “irascible characteristics become beneficial.”³⁷ Kant holds that, “The means nature employs in order to bring about the development of all its predispositions is their antagonism in society, insofar as the latter is in the end the cause of their lawful order.” (*IaG AA 8:20*). For clarity sake, by antagonism in society he means “the unsociable sociability of human beings (*die ungesellige Geselligkeit der Menschen*).” (*IaG AA 8:20*). That is, their ambivalent nature. On the one hand, human beings are endowed with the “propensity (*Hang*) to enter into

society” (*IaG AA 8:20*) and thus progressively establish, through mutual coercion, a social and civil community. On the other hand, this propensity goes hand in hand with “a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to break up this society.” (*IaG AA 8:20*).³⁸ Man has both a natural tendency to open up himself, get into contact and socialize (*vergesellschaften*) with others; and a natural tendency to individualize (*vereinseln*) and isolate himself (*isolieren*). The following statement puts it beautifully:

The human being has an inclination to become *socialized*, since in such a condition he feels himself as more a human being, *i.e.*, feels the development of his natural predispositions. But he also has a great propensity to *individualize* (isolate) himself, because he simultaneously encounters in himself the unsociable property of willing to direct everything so as to get his own way, and hence expects resistance everywhere because he knows of himself that he is inclined on his side toward resistance against others. (*IaG AA 8:20-21*).

To believe Kant, the tendency to become socialized and live in contact and harmony with others is intertwined with the “willing to direct everything so as to get his own way” (*IaG AA 8:20-21*). The latter is the will to become autonomous, or as it is put in the essay ‘*Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*’, to set one’s own ends, to “walk alone” (*allein zu gehen*) (*WA 8:36*), to use one’s reason without being interfered by others. Kant is claiming that, in man the tendency to remain in the state of nature and passively follow nature’s harmony and its dictates is knotted with the active tendency to transgress the laws of nature. Basically, besides the human desire to live with others there is an irresistible desire to compete, resist and dominate others. Man lives in such continual tension and competition with others. The will to construct goes hand in hand with the tendency to destroy. Nonetheless, Kant argues, from teleological point of view, that thanks to this ambivalent tendency the human race’s innate potentialities are brought about.

Against recent interpretations according to which the unsociable sociability is acquired, the foregoing argument allows one to highlight upon the fact that this tendency is rather a “predisposition” (*Anlage*) that “obviously lies in the human nature.” (*IaG AA 8:20*). It is thus a natural, pre-given “inclination” (*Neigung*)³⁹ thought to be a springing-board by means of which the entire progress towards a perfect cosmopolitan constitution. It can briefly be said that the social, economic and political life of the entire human race emerges from the gradual and inevitable development of the human beings’ potentiality to agree upon a system of legal public coercion rightfully guaranteeing, against any individual inclinations, distributive justice to each. The point Kant wants to make is not that the progress of the realization of freedom results from a harmonious equilibrium between both tendencies (balance principle). He rather wants to show, from a teleological and reflective view point, and from the idea of duty as well, that the progress of mankind towards the highest political good, is based on both tendencies whatever extreme they may be. Humanity *ought* to make moral progress.

In consideration of the foregoing, the progress of the realization of freedom is an endless improvement of a system of legal public coercion. The strengths of this system emerge from contacts and competitions, struggles for power, honor and dominations, resistances and rebellions, reforms and revolutions, etc. In Kant’s view,

Without these qualities of unsociability from which the resistance arises, which are not at all amiable in themselves, all talents would, in an Arcadian pastoral life of perfect concord, contentment and mutual love, remain eternally hidden in their germs; human beings, as good-natured as the sheep they tended, would give their existence hardly any greater worth than that of their domesticated beasts; they would not fill the void in creation in regard to their end as rational nature. (*IaG AA 8:21*).

To paraphrase, without (human) nature and its crookedness, “the excellent natural predispositions in humanity would eternally slumber undeveloped”. (*IaG AA 8:21*).

Recalling the argument of Kant’s essay ‘*Was ist Aufklärung?*’, the unsociable sociability is an awakening force of the human awareness and desire for freedom, *i.e.*, the desire to walk one’s own way and to set one’s ends. It is the will to be autonomous. On the one hand, man is driven by ambition to resist the domination and tyranny of his fellows and to fight for his freedom (independence). On the other hand, man realizes that he cannot do without others. Man needs to associate with others and form with others a civil state. The problematic of right is hereby at stake and from there politics follows. Kant contends that the unsociable sociability has awakened first human talents and skills which allow the development of culture and then gradually from culture to morality. (*Cf. IaG AA 8: 21-22*). The point he wants to make is that the unsociable sociability is a driving force of the moral progress of mankind towards its full enlightenment.

In his essay *IaG*, his *Pädagogik* as well as *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, Kant insists also upon education (instruction) as a specific means at the service of the constant progress of the realization of freedom. He thus argues that the gradual progress of mankind consists into three stages, namely, cultivation (*Kultivierung*), civilization (*Civilisierung*) and moralization (*Moralisierung*). In Kant’s view, “We are cultivated in a high degree by art and science... civilized, perhaps to the point of being overburdened, by all sorts of social decorum and propriety. But very much is still lacking before we can be held to be already moralized.” (*IaG AA 8:26 see also Anth AA 7:324; Päd AA 9:450*). In one of his reflections on anthropology, he furthermore notes that,

[We] human beings are... in the second grade of progress to perfection, namely cultivated and civilized; but not moralized. We have the highest grade of culture that we can possess without morality; civilization also has [reached] its maximum. The need (*Bedürfnis*) in both will eventually force moralization [*wird endlich die Moralisierung erwingen*], namely through education, a political constitution, and religion. (*Refl AA 15:641, nr. 1460*).⁴⁰

That the transition (Übergang) from civilization to moralization is the hardest is a remark that recurrently comes back in Kant’s *Pädagogik*. In these Lectures, he describes moralization as the highest stage in which “the human being should not merely be skilled for all sorts of ends, but should also acquire the disposition to choose nothing but good ends.” (*Päd AA 9:450*). He means by ‘good ends’ “those which are necessarily approved by everyone and which can be the simultaneous ends of everyone.” (*Päd AA 9:450*).

Education is central to Kant’s political thought. Besides the above-mentioned reason’s need for instruction (*cf. IaG AA 8:19*), he shows in his *Pädagogik* that education arouses early

in the youth, not only the ethical values but also the sense of duties of right. Education thus arouses the “reverence and respect for the rights of human beings.” (*Päd AA 9:489*). Thanks to education, the youth becomes soon aware of duties to himself and to others and this opens soon a further awareness of what it means to live as a civilized citizen. Through the civic education, man learns to act “not only as a good human being, but also as a good citizen.” (*Ped 9:498*). The trainee becomes enlightened and able to hear distinctly the voice of public reason in him and act accordingly. In other words, to borrow P. Frierson’s reading, “Educational progress contributes to bringing about enlightenment, a state in which humans think for themselves.”⁴¹ Highlighting upon the role played by education of citizens (*cf. Päd AA 9: 441-444; see also IaG AA 8:26*), Kant deplors, however, the efforts deployed in warfare instead of enlightening citizens and thus quickening the development of rationality. He nevertheless remains realistic in admitting that although one should be certain that the highest stage of morality will be achieved, such achievement is not to be expected in the near future. Different ups and downs, hesitations and reforms, resistances, revolutions and other forms of human’s crookedness, through education, voyages and other practices by which reason gets enlightened, man will progressively develop his autonomy. In most of his works on history and politics Kant displays no doubt on the fact that the progress of the realization of freedom is underway and that this progress takes place on the state the natural history of humanity.⁴²

CONCLUSION

Kant’s criticisms to the empirically based account of history and its hostility to the possibility of the moral progress of the human race ‘as a whole’ have allowed him to identify the specific task of a critical philosopher. Contrary to a historiographer, a critical philosopher strives “to discover the aim of nature in this nonsensical course of things human.” (*IaG AA 8:18*). The distinction between the determinative and reflective judgment has been shown vital to Kant’s philosophical history. Based on the former form of judgment, the progress of mankind appears to be ‘a mere fantasy’. From the latter, reason is enabled to ‘foresee’ that the human race ‘as a whole’ is, by virtue of its (natural) moral predispositions, inevitably and constantly progressing towards a perfect cosmopolitan civil order. The moral progress of mankind is, thus, not a matter of theoretical knowledge based on the categories of understanding. This lack of strict epistemological explanation does not, however, make it merely fictitious because, the idea (representation) of such progress does, from teleological (reflective) point of view, effectively constitute hope in the future of the human race as a whole. It is from this practical moral perspective that one can be teleologically certain of the fact that, despite necessary as well as unnecessary evils, political institutions, conflicts and competitions, wars and treaties, etc., the human race ought, through its natural history, to constantly approach the full realization of its external freedom. Such progress is a duty. In this paper, the teleological function of nature in this progress has been highlighted. Nature is seen as a force ‘compelling’ the human race to accomplish its duty, namely, the establishment of a republican constitution within and beyond state boundaries.

ABSTRACT: In his objection to the empirical standpoint adopted by historiographers whose concern is solely the empirical facts of history, Kant set off to critically show that such a standpoint cannot give a full account of the history of mankind. In Kant's view, it is but from a reflective point of view that the history of mankind can be grasped as a process thanks to which human race 'as a whole' gradually approximates its *terminus ad quem*, i.e., the establishment of "a moral whole" (*IaG AA 8:21*). Despite his objection to (human) natural history for which the progress of the human race "as whole" is a mere fantasy, Kant admits, in his teleological account of moral progress of the realization of freedom, that (human) nature should be given credit to be a means thanks to which the entire humankind becomes able to constantly approach its highest goal. In other words, the natural history of mankind is the stage of the realization of freedom. This claim seems self-contradictory given the fact that the state of natural empirical history is characterized by coercion, repressions, revolutions, and all other forms of evils. This paper intends to show, based on the mediating function of the idea of moral progress, that Kant's argument is, however, coherent. While the first section elaborates on the problematic idea of moral progress, the second displays its mediating function. The third section shows how the moral progress of mankind on the stage of natural history is facilitated by a powerful 'invisible hand of nature'.

KEY WORDS: Key words: History, Progress, Nature, Freedom, Mankind, teleology, optimism.

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NOTES

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2 Citations and references to Kant are given in parentheses. Initials from texts published in "Akademie-Ausgabe" (AA) are used. Except the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, they are followed by volume and page number of the AA, Kant's *Gesammelte Schriften von der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902–). For the Critique of Pure Reason, citations follow the 'A' (1781) or 'B' (1787) editions. Where necessary, both are given.

The following abbreviations prepared by Kant-Forschungsstelle der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz have been used: *BGSE*: Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen (*); *GMS*: Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten; *laG*: Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht; *KpV* Kritik der praktischen Vernunft; *KrV* : Kritik der reinen Vernunft; *KU*: Kritik der Urteilskraft; *MAM*: Muthmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte; *MAN*: Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaften; *MS*: Die Metaphysik der Sitten; *Päd* Pädagogik; *REL* : Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft (*); *RezHerder*: Rezensionen von J. G. Herders Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit; *RL*: Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Rechtslehre; *SF*: Der Streit der Fakultäten; *TP*: Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis; *V-Th/Pölitz*: Religionslehre Pölitz; *WA*: Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?; *ZeF*: Zum ewigen Frieden. (* = these abbreviations are not part of those prepared by Kant-Forschungsstelle der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz).

3 What is at stake here is not physical but human nature.

4 Helmut Holzhey and Vilem Mudroch, *Historical Dictionary of Kant and Kantianism*, Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements, no. 60 (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 140. Noticeably, civilization is but one of the three momenta of moral progress, namely, cultivation (*Kultivierung*), (2) civilization (*Civilisierung*) and (3) moralization (*Moralisierung*). cf. Päd AA 9.449-451;441-443

5 Ibid.

- 6 For the meaning of ‘problematic’ in Kant’s terminology see B 100-101.
- 7 Louis Dupré, “Kant’s Theory of History and Progress,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 51, no. 4 (1998): 813.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 For Herder’s discussion on nationalism see Ioannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin’s introduction in Johann Gottfried Herder, *Johann Gottfried Herder: Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, trans. Ioannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub, 2004), Especially on pages xxxv-xxxix (Herder’s Patriotism).
- 10 Johann Gottfried Herder, “This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity,” in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Michael N. Forster, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 298.
- 11 For a well elaborated critical study of Herder’s work and context, see Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy, Second Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). (First published 2000). Read especially the section on ‘Herder and the Enlightenment, pp. 208sq.
- 12 Herder, “This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity,” 297. (order of words slightly changed).
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 For Kant’s reflections on Leibniz’s optimism, see “An Attempt at Some Reflections on Optimism by Immanuel Kant, also containing an announcement of his lectures for the coming semester (1759).” Cf. Bibliography. Debates among the proponents and exponents of Kant’s optimism have increased in recent literature. To name just a few, Jens Timmermann’s reflection on Pessimism and Optimism in Kant’s Moral theory, in Jens Timmermann, *Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary*, Paperback re-issue, 1. paperback ed (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), xiv–xx; Patrick Frierson, “Kantian Moral Pessimism,” in *Kant’s Anatomy of Evil*, ed. Sharon Anderson-Gold and Pablo Muchnik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 33–56; Sidney Axinn, *The Logic of Hope: Extensions of Kant’s View of Religion*, Value Inquiry Book Series 15 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), especially Axinn’s Afterthought: On Kant’s Optimism, 290-292.
- 15 Cf. KU AA 5:367-368, §§66-67.
- 16 Howard Williams, *Kant’s Political Philosophy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 2.
- 17 Allen W. Wood, *Kant’s Moral Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970), 218.
- 18 There have been controversies among scholars regarding Kant’s concept of race and the difference among human races. These controversies have increased in the context of debates over Kant’s views on colonialism and human rights. Recent literature in Kant’s moral political thought, his view of human rights etc., have strongly questioned his account of the European colonialism and the treatment of non-Europeans. On the one hand, some scholars who, on the basis of Kant’s earlier writings on race (1765, 1775, 1777, and 1785), have argued that Kant was in favor of colonialism and slavery as a means to boost the progress of reason in those undeveloped or underdeveloped races/peoples commonly called indigenous. In some cases, Kant has been accused of holding racist views especially when he – in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) – praises the superiority of the “whites” over “the negroes of Africa” or the Amerindians. (cf. *OFBS* 2:253). On the other hand, however, scholars such as Kleingeld and Allen Wood, have endeavored to show that Kant’s views on colonialism changed substantially after the 1780s when he insists upon the principles of equality of all human beings regardless of one’s color, origin or background. For the contributions of Kleingeld, Flikschuh and Williams, I recommend Katrin Flikschuh and Lea Ypi, eds., *Kant and Colonialism: Historical and Critical Perspectives*, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- 19 Kant quotes Section II of Moses Mendelssohn’s book ‘*Jerusalem, oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum*’ (first published 1783). This argument is fine-tuned in the *Conflicts of the Faculties* when Kant, in reference to the stone of Sisyphus, calls this a “eudemonistic manner of representing history” (*CF* 7:82).
- 20 For an elaborated study of the presupposition – not necessarily a postulate – of moral progress see David Lindstedt, “Kant: Progress in Universal History as a Postulate of Practical Reason,” *Kant-Studien* 90, no. 2 (1999).
- 21 Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 139. Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.139. The theme of the ethical endless progress has recently been examined by Kate A. Moran, *Community and Progress in Kant’s Moral Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012); Thomas Höwing, ed., *The Highest Good in Kant’s Philosophy* (Berlin Boston: De Gruyter, 2016).
- 22 José Nicolau Heck, “Right and the Duty to Resist, or Progress Toward the Better,” in *Kant in Brazil*, ed. Frederick Rauscher and Daniel Omar Perez, North American Kant Society Studies in Philosophy, volume 10 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 193.

- 23 Martin Moors, "Religious Fictionalism in Kant's Ethics of Autonomy," in *Cultivating Personhood: Kant and Asian Philosophy*, ed. Stephen Palmquist (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 482.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 475.
- 25 "L'histoire est dans le droit et par le droit parce que le vouloir du droit enclot le destin historique." Bernard Bourgeois, "Histoire et Droit chez Kant," *Revue germanique internationale*, no. 6 (July 10, 1996) : 100.
- 26 Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, 4–5.
- 27 Alexis Philonenko, "Histoire et Guerre Chez Kant," in *Kant's Practical Philosophy Reconsidered*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Dordrecht : Springer Netherlands, 1989), 168–82 ; Bourgeois, "Histoire et Droit chez Kant."
- 28 The concept of "Invisible hand" is not Kant's. It is rather borrowed from Adam Smith (1723-1790). cf. Adam Smith, "The Principles Which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries, Illustrated by the History of Astronomy," in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W. P. D. Wightman et al., The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith 3 (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1982), 49 (section III, §2).
- 29 See for instance Robert B. Loudon, *Kant's Human Being: Essays on His Theory of Human Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Patrick R. Frierson, *What Is the Human Being?*, Kant's Questions (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2013).
- 30 Nature comme "agent volitif orientant le mouvement historique ", et nature comme "élément objectif, lieu de la réalisation effective de la finalité visée." Brigitte Geonget, "Le Concept Kantien d'insociable Sociabilité. Éléments pour une Étude Généalogique : Kant entre Hobbes et Rousseau," *Revue germanique internationale*, no. 6 (July 10, 1996) : 35. (translation is mine).
- 31 Cf. KU AA 5:386-389, §§ 70-71.
- 32 Robert Taylor is one of those who defend the identity between "ein intelligibelen Urhebers der Natur" and "die große Künstlerin Natur". Cf. Robert S. Taylor, "Kant's Political Religion: The Transparency of Perpetual Peace and the Highest Good," *The Review of Politics* 72, no. 01 (December 2010): 10.
- 33 For the definition of reflective judgment, cf. KU, first introduction AA 20:243).
- 34 cf. Kant on Public Right RL AA 6: 311-355, §§43-62).
- 35 Ripstein, *Force and Freedom*, 74, footnote 22.
- 36 Williams, *Kant's Political Philosophy*, 8.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 See also Refl. AA 15:644, nr.1465;
- 39 Definition of "propensity" and the distinction between propensity and inclination see Rel AA 6:29
- 40 Quoted by Robert B. Loudon, *Kant's Impure Ethics: From Rational Beings to Human Beings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 42.
- 41 Frierson, *What Is the Human Being?* 86.
- 42 See for instance WA AA 8:40-42, IaG AA 8:27-28.

Recebido / Received: 11.3.2017.

Aprovado / Approved: 13.9.2017.