

9e - Kant - Conjectural Beginning of Human History

In the *progression* of a history it is indeed allowed to *insert* conjectures in order to fill up gaps in the records, because what precedes as a remote cause and what follows as an effect can provide a quite secure guidance for the discovery of the intermediate causes, so as to make the transition comprehensible. Yet to let a history *arise* simply and solely from conjectures does not seem much better than to make the draft for a novel. Indeed, it would not be able to support the name of a “conjectural history,” but rather that of a mere *fiction*.’ — Nevertheless, what must not be ventured in the progression of the history of human actions, may yet be attempted through conjecture about its *first beginning* insofar as *nature* makes it. For that beginning must not be invented by fiction but can be taken from experience, if one presupposes that the latter in its first beginning was not better or worse than what we encounter now:

a presupposition that conforms to the analogy of nature and does not bring anything venturesome with it. A history of the first development of freedom from its original predisposition in the nature of the human being is therefore something wholly other than the history of freedom in its progression, which can be grounded only on records.

Nevertheless, since conjectures must not make too high claims on assent, but must always announce themselves as at most only a movement of the power of imagination, accompanying reason and indulged in for the recreation and health of the mind, but not for a serious business, they also cannot compare themselves with that kind of history which is proposed and believed, as an actual record about the same occurrence, whose test rests on grounds entirely different from mere philosophy of nature. Just for this reason, and since here I am venturing on a mere pleasure trip, I hope I may ask the favor to be allowed me to make use of a holy document as my map, and at the same time to imagine that my flight, which I make on the wings of the power of imagination, though not without a guiding thread attached by reason onto experience, might follow the same trajectory which that document contains in a historically prescribed manner. The reader will open the pages of that document (*Genesis*, chapter 1 through chapter 6) and will check step by step whether the path that philosophy takes in accordance with concepts will accord with that which the story provides.

Unless one is to enthuse in conjectures, the beginning must be made from that which is capable of no derivation by human reason from previous natural causes: thus with the existence of the human being, and indeed in his fully formed state because he must do without maternal assistance; in a *couple*, so that he can propagate his kind; and as only in *one single* couple, so that war will not arise right away, when human beings would be so near and yet so alien to one another, and also

so that nature should not be blamed for depriving them, by the difference of ancestry, of the most suitable arrangement for sociability as the greatest end of the human vocation; for the unity of that family from which all human beings were to descend was without doubt the best contrivance for this. I set this couple in a place secured against the attack of predators and richly provisioned by nature with all means of nourishment, thus in a *garden*, as it were, in a zone that is always temperate.' And what is still more, I consider this couple only after it has already taken a mighty step in the skill of making use of its powers; thus I do not begin with the completely crude state of its nature;' for if I undertook to fill up that gap, which presumably comprises a long duration, the conjectures would become too many for the reader, but their probabilities too few. The first human being could, therefore, *stand* and *walk*; he could *speak* (*Genesis* 2: 20)," even *discourse*, i.e. speak according to connected words and concepts,' hence *think*. These are all skills which he had to acquire for himself (for if they were innate, then they would also be inherited, which, however, experience contradicts); but I assume him now already provisioned with them, merely in order to consider the development of what is moral in his doing and refraining, which necessarily presupposes that skill.

Instinct, that *voice of God* which all animals obey, must alone have guided the novice. It allowed him a few things for nourishment, but forbade him others (*Genesis* 3: 2-3). — But for this it is not necessary to assume a special, now lost instinct; it could have been merely the sense of smell and its affinity with the organ of taste, but also the latter's familiar sympathy with the instruments of digestion, and also the faculties of pre-sensation, as it were, of the suitability or unsuitability of a food for gratification, such as one still perceives even now. One must not even assume this sense to have been more acute in the first couple than it is now; for it is familiar enough what a great difference is to be encountered between the power of perception in those human beings occupied only with their senses and those occupied at the same time with their thoughts, whereby they are turned away from their sensations.

As long as the inexperienced human being obeyed this call of nature, he did well for himself. Yet *reason* soon began to stir and sought through comparison of that which gratified with that which was represented to him by another sense than the one to which instinct was bound, such as the sense of sight, as similar to what previously was gratifying, to extend his knowledge of the means of nourishment beyond the limits of instinct (*Genesis* 3: 6). This attempt' might have happened to turn out well enough, although instinct did not recommend it, if only it did not contradict it. Yet it is a property of reason that with the assistance of the power of the imagination it can concoct desires not only *without* a natural drive directed to them but even *contrary* to it, which desires in the beginning receive the name of *concupiscence*; but through them are hatched bit by bit, under the term *voluptuousness*, a whole swarm of dispensable inclinations, which are even contrary to nature. The occasion for deserting the natural drive might have been only something trivial; yet the success

of the first attempt, namely of becoming conscious of one's reason as a faculty that can extend itself beyond the limits within which all animals are held, was very important and decisive for his way of living. Thus if it had been only a fruit whose outward look, by its similarity with other pleasant fruits that one had otherwise tasted, invited him to the attempt; if to this perhaps was added the example of an animal whose nature was suited to such a gratification as was, on the contrary, disadvantageous to the human being; hence if there was a natural instinct consequently opposing it, then this could already give reason the first occasion to cavil with the voice of nature (*Genesis 3: 1*)⁷ and, despite its opposition, to make the first attempt at a free choice, which, as the first one, probably did not turn out in conformity to expectation. Now the harm might have been as insignificant as you like, yet about this it opened the human being's eyes (*Genesis 3: 7*).⁸ He 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. Yet upon the momentary delight that this marked superiority might have awakened in him, anxiety and fright must have followed right away, concerning how he, who still did not know the hidden properties _____ and remote effects of any thing, should &eaFT with this newly discovered faculty. He stood, as it were, on the brink of an abyss; for instead of the single objects of his desire to which instinct had up to now directed him, there opened up an infinity of them, and he did not know how to relate to the choice between them; and from this estate of freedom, once he had tasted it, it was nevertheless wholly impossible for him to turn back again to that of servitude (under the dominion of instinct).

Next to the instinct of nourishment, through which nature preserves every individual, the most preeminent is the *sexual instinct*, through which it cares for the preservation of the kind. Once reason had been stirred, it did not omit to demonstrate its influence on the latter too. The human being soon found that the stimulus to sex, which with animals rests merely on a transient, for the most part periodic impulse, was capable for him of being prolonged and even increased through the power of the imagination, whose concern, to be sure, is more with moderation, yet at the same time works more enduringly and uniformly the more its object is *withdrawn from the senses*, and he found that it prevents the boredom that comes along with the satisfaction of a merely animal desire. The figleaf (*Genesis 3: 7*) was thus the product of a far greater manifestation of reason than that which it had demonstrated in the first stage of its development. For to make an inclination more inward and enduring by withdrawing its object from the senses, shows already the consciousness of some dominion of reason over impulse and not merely, as in the first step, a faculty for doing service to those impulses within a lesser or greater extension. *Refusal* was the first artifice for leading from the merely sensed stimulus over to ideal ones, from merely animal desire gradually over to love, and with the latter from the feeling of the merely agreeable over to the taste for beauty, in the beginning only in human beings but then, however, also in nature. Moreover, *propriety*," an inclination by good conduct to influence others to respect for us

(through the concealment of that which could incite low esteem), as the genuine foundation of all true sociability, gave the first hint toward the formation' of the human being as a moral' creature. —A small beginning, which, however, is epoch-making, in that it gives an entirely new direction to the mode of thought —and is more important than the entire immeasurable series of extensions of culture that followed upon it.

The third step of reason, after it had mixed itself into the first immediately sensed needs, was the deliberate *expectation of the future*. This faculty of not enjoying merely the present moment of life but of making present to oneself the coming, often very distant time, is the most decisive_____ marker the_____ human advantage of_____ preparing himself to pursue distant ends in accordance with his vocation, — but also simultaneously it is the most inexhaustible source of cares and worries which the uncertain future incites and from which all animals are exempt (*Genesis 3: 13-19*).¹⁰ The man, who had to nourish himself and his spouse, together with their future children, foresaw the ever-growing troubles of his labor; the woman foresaw the hardships to which nature had subjected her sex, and additionally still those which the more powerful man would lay upon her. Both foresaw with fear that which, after a troubled life, lying in the background of the painting, befalls unavoidably all animals, to be sure, yet without worrying them — namely, death, and they seemed to reproach themselves and make into a crime the use of reason that causes them all these ills. To live on in their posterity, who might perhaps have it better, or also might alleviate their hardships as members of a family, this was perhaps the single consoling prospect that sustained them (*Genesis 3: 16-20*). "

The fourth and last step that reason took in elevating the human being entirely above the society with animals was that he comprehended (however obscurely) that he was the genuine *end of nature*, and that in this nothing that lives on earth can supply a competitor to him. The first time he said to the sheep: *Nature has given you the skin you wear not for you but for me*, then took it off the sheep and put it on himself (*Genesis 3: 21*), he became aware of a prerogative that he had by his nature over all animals, which he now no longer regarded as his fellow creatures, but rather as means and instruments given over to his will for the attainment of his discretionary aims. This representation includes (however obscurely) the thought of the opposite: that he must not say something like this to any *human being*, but has to regard him as an equal participant in the gifts of nature — a preparation from afar for the restrictions that reason was to lay on the will in the future in regard to his fellow human beings, and which far more than inclination and love is necessary to the establishment of society.

And thus the human being had entered into an *equality with all rational beings*, of whatever rank they might be (*Genesis 3: 22*); namely, in regard to the claim of *being himself an end*, of also being esteemed as such by everyone else, and of being used by no one merely as a means to other ends. In this, and not in reason considered merely

as an instrument for the satisfaction of various inclinations, there lies the ground of that so unlimited equality of the human being even with higher beings, however superior beyond all comparison they might be to him in natural gifts, none of whom has therefore a right to and dispose with him merely at their discretion. This step is combined, therefore, at the same time with the *release* of the human being from the mother's womb of nature, an alteration that does him honor, to be sure, but at the same time is very perilous, since it drives him out of the harmless and safe condition of infant care, out of a garden, as it were, which cared for him without any effort on his part (*Genesis* 3: 23), ⁴ and thrust him into the wide world, where so much worry, toil, and unknown ills are waiting for him. In the future the troubles of his life will often elicit from him the wish for a paradise, the creature of his power of imagination, where he could dream or fritter away his existence in tranquil inactivity and constant peace. But between him and that imagined seat of bliss is interposed restless reason, which drives him irresistibly toward the development of the capacities placed in him and does not allow him to return to the condition of crudity and simplicity out of which it had pulled him (*Genesis* 3: 24).⁵ It drives him on nevertheless to take upon himself patiently the toil that he hates, and run after the bauble that he despises, and even to forget death itself which he dreads, on account of all those trivialities he is even more afraid to lose.

REMARK

The result of this presentation of the first history of human beings is that the departure of the human being from the paradise which reason represents to him as the first abode of his species was nothing other than the transition from the crudity of a merely animal creature into humanity, from the go-care of instinct to the guidance of reason — in a word, from the guardianship of nature into the condition of freedom. Whether the human being has gained or lost through this alteration can *no* longer be the question, if one looks to the vocation of his species, which consists in nothing but a *progressing* toward perfection, however faulty the first attempts to penetrate toward this goal — the earliest in a long series of members following one after another — might turn out to be. — Nevertheless, this course, which for the species is a *progress* from worse toward better, is not the same for the individual. Before reason awoke, there was neither command nor prohibition and hence no transgression; but when reason began its business and, weak as it is, got into a scuffle with animality in its whole strength, then there had to arise ills and, what is worse, with more cultivated reason, vices, which were entirely alien to the condition of ignorance and hence of innocence. The first step out of this condition, therefore was on the moral side a *fall*; on the physical side, a multitude of ills of life hitherto unknown were the consequence of this fall, hence punishment. The history of *nature* thus begins from good, for that is the *work of God*; the history of *freedom* from evil, for it is the *work of the human being*.⁶ For the individual, who in the use of his freedom looks merely at

himself, there was a loss in such an alteration; for nature, which directs its ends with the human being to the species, it was a gain. The individual therefore has cause to ascribe all ills he suffers, and all the evil he perpetrates, to his own guilt, yet at the same time as a member of the whole (of a species), also to admire and to praise the wisdom and purposiveness of the arrangement. — In this manner one can also bring into agreement with themselves and with reason the assertions of the famous *Rousseau*, which are often misinterpreted and to all appearance conflict with one another. In his writing *on the influence of the sciences* and *on the inequality of human beings*, he shows quite correctly the unavoidable conflict of culture with the nature of the human species as a *physical* species in which each individual was entirely to reach his vocation; but in his *Emile*, his *Social Contract's* and other writings, he seeks again to solve the harder problem of how culture must proceed in order properly to develop the predispositions of humanity as a *moral* species to their vocation, so that the latter no longer conflict with humanity as a natural species. From this conflict (since culture, according to true principles of *educations* of human being and citizen, has perhaps not yet rightly begun, much less having been completed) arise all true ills that oppress human life, and all vices that dishonor it;* nevertheless, the incitements to the latter, which one blames for them, are in themselves good and purposive as natural predispositions, but these predispositions, since they were aimed at the merely natural condition, suffer injury from progressing culture and injure culture in turn, until perfect art again becomes nature, which is the ultimate goal of the moral vocation of the human species.

CLOSE OF THE STORY

The beginning___ of the following_____ period was that the human being_ passed over from the period of comfort and peace into that of *labor* and *discord*, as the prelude to the unification in society. Here we must once again make a great leap and transfer him at once into the possession of domesticated animals and crops, which he himself was able to multiply for his nourishment through sowing or planting (*Genesis* 4: 2), although the transition from the savage life of hunters to the first, and from the unsettled digging of Toots or gathering of fruit to the second, might have taken place slowly enough. Here there had to begin already the strife between human beings who up to then had been living peaceably near one another, whose consequence was the separation of those of different ways of living and their dispersion across the earth. The *pastoral life* is not only comfortable but also, since there can be no lack of fodder in land that is uninhabited far and wide, it provides the most secure support. *Agriculture*, or planting, on the contrary; is very troublesome, dependent on the inconstancy of the weather, and hence insecure, requires also abiding dwelling, property in land and sufficient force to defend it; the shepherd, however, hates this property, since it limits the freedom of his pastures. As to the former, the farmer could seem to envy the herdsman as more favored by heaven (*Genesis* 4: 4); in fact, however, the latter became very burdensome to him as

long as he remained in the neighborhood; for the grazing stock did not spare his plantings. Now since after he has done harm to them it is an easy matter to get far away with his herd and evade all compensation for that harm, leaving nothing behind that he could not find just as well anywhere else, it was probably the farmer who used violence against such incursions which the other did not take to be impermissible, and (since the occasion for it could never entirely cease), if he did not want to forfeit the fruits of his long industry, he finally had to *distance* himself as far as it was possible for him from those who carry on the pastoral life (Genesis 4: 16). This, separation makes the third epoch.

When sustenance depends on the cultivation and planting of a soil (chiefly with trees), it requires abiding dwellings; and their defense against all violations requires a number of human beings assisting one another. Hence with this way of living human beings could no longer live as scattered families, but had to hold together and erect villages (improperly called *towns*), in order to protect their property against savage hunters or hordes of roaming herdsmen. The first needs of life, whose acquisition required a *different way of living* (Genesis 4: 20), could now be *exchanged* for one another. From this culture had to arise and the beginning of art, both as a pastime and as industry (Genesis 4: 2 I-2): but most importantly there had to arise also some arrangement for a civil constitution and public justice, first surely only in regard to great violent acts, the avenging of which was now left no longer to individuals, as in the savage condition, but to a lawful might that held the whole together, i.e. to a kind of government, which was not itself subject to the exercise of power (Genesis 4: 2 3-4). - Bit by bit, from this first and crude inception, all human art, among which that of *sociability and civil security* is the most beneficial, could gradually develop, humankind multiply, and extend itself everywhere from a central point, like a beehive sending out already formed colonists. With this epoch began also the *inequality* among human beings, this rich source of so much evil, but also of all good, and it increased ever further.

Now as long as the nomadic pastoral peoples, who recognize God alone as their lord, continued to swarm around the town dwellers and farmers who have a human being (supreme ruler) as their lord (Genesis 6: 4) and as long as these sworn enemies of all landed property showed hostility toward the latter and were in turn hated by them, there was to be sure continual war between the two, at least unceasing danger of war, and on both sides peoples could therefore at least rejoice internally in the priceless good of freedom — (for the danger of war is also still today the sole thing that moderates despotism, because wealth is required for a state to be a might, but without *freedom*, no enterprise that could produce wealth will take place. In place of this, in a poor people there must be great participation in the preservation of the commonwealth,

which in turn is possible only when it feels itself to be free in the latter). —But with time the increasing luxury' of the town dwellers, but chiefly the art of pleasing, in

which the town women eclipsed the dingy maids of the deserts, must have been a mighty lure for those shepherds (*Genesis* 6: 2), so that they entered into combination with them and let themselves be drawn into the glittering misery of the towns. Then, through the melting together of two otherwise hostile populations, with the end of all danger of war, came at the same time the end of all freedom, hence the despotism of mighty tyrants, on the one side, yet with culture hardly begun, soulless luxury in most abject slavery mixed with all the vices of the crude condition, on the other side, which irresistibly deflected humankind from the progress of the formations of its predisposition to good predelineated by nature; and it thereby made itself unworthy__ of its own existence as a species destined to dominate the earth, not to enjoy like cattle and to serve like slaves (*Genesis* 6: 17).

CONCLUDING REMARK

The thinking human being feels 'a sorrow, one which can even become a moral corruption, of which the thoughtless knows nothing: namely, discontent with the providence that governs the course of the world on the whole, when he estimates the ills that so much oppress humankind, and (as it appears) leaves it with no hope for anything better. But it is of the greatest importance to be *content with providence* (even though on this earthly world of ours it has marked out such a troublesome road for us), partly in order to grasp courage even among our toils, and partly so that by placing responsibility for it on fate, we might not lose sight of our own responsibility, which perhaps might be the sole cause of all these ills, and avoid the remedy against them, which consists in self-improvement.

One must admit that the greatest ills that oppress civilized peoples stem from war, yet to be sure less from one that actually is or has been than from the never relenting and even ceaselessly increasing *armament* for future war. To this are applied all forces of the state, all fruits of its culture that could be used for a still greater culture; in so many places freedom is mightily injured and the maternal provision of the state for individual members is transformed into an unrelenting hardness of these demands, a hardness justified to be sure also by the worry over external danger. Yet would there be this culture, would there be the close connection of the estates of the commonwealth for the reciprocal promotion of its welfare, would there be the population, or even the degree of freedom that is left over, although under very restrictive laws, if that war itself which is always feared did not extort this *respect for humanity* from the states' chief leaders? One needs only to look at *China*, which on account of its situation has to fear perhaps only an unforeseen attack, but not a mighty enemy, and in which therefore all trace of freedom has been eradicated. — Thus at the stage of culture where humankind still stands, war is an indispensable means of bringing culture still further; and only after a (God knows when) completed culture, would an everlasting peace be salutary, and thereby alone be possible for us. Thus, as regards this point, we are ourselves responsible for the ills against which we raise such bitter complaints; and the holy document is quite

right to represent the melting together of the nation? into one society and its complete liberation from external danger, when its culture had hardly begun, as a restraint on all further culture and as a sinking into incurable corruption.

The *second discontent* of human beings concerns the order of nature with regard to the *shortness of life*. To be sure, one must understand only partly how to assess the worth of this life if one can still wish it to last longer than it actually does; for that would only be to prolong a play which is a constant grappling with nothing but troubles. But one cannot really blame a childish power of judgment for fearing death without loving life, and its being hard for it to suffer through every day with even minimal contentment, yet for never having enough of these days not to want to repeat this calamity again. But if one considers only how much care torments us even as regards the means for spending such a short life, and how much injustice is done in the hope of a future, but short-lasting enjoyment, then one has to believe on rational grounds that if human beings could look forward to a lifespan of 800 years or more, the father would have to fear for his life from his son, one brother from his brother, or one friend from another; the vices of such a long-living humankind would rise to such a height that they would be worthy of no better fate than that of being eradicated from the earth in a universal flood (*Genesis 6: 12-13*).

The *third* wish, or rather the empty longing (for one is conscious that one can never get what one wishes) is the shadowy image of the *golden age* so much praised by the poets, where we are supposed to be relieved of all the imagined needs with which luxury burdens us, we are satisfied with the mere needs of nature, a complete equality of human beings, an everlasting peace among them — in a word, the pure enjoyment of a carefree life, dreamt away in laziness or frittered away in childish play: — a longing that makes the Robinsonades and voyages to the south sea islands so charming, but in general prove how much boredom the thinking human being feels with his civilized life, if he seeks its worth solely in *enjoyment* and brings in laziness as a counterweight to reason's reminder that he should give his life its worth through *actions*. The nullity of this wish to return to that time of simplicity and innocence is shown sufficiently when one is taught by the above representation of an original condition that the human being cannot preserve himself in it, because it is not enough for him, and unless he is inclined ever to return to it; so that he must after all ascribe the present condition of troubles to himself and to his own choice.

Thus such a presentation of his history is beneficial and serviceable to the human being for his instruction and improvement by showing him that he must not blame providence for the ills that oppress him; that he is also not justified in ascribing his own misdeeds to an original crime of his ancestral parents, through which a propensity to similar transgressions has supposedly become hereditary in their posterity (for voluntary actions _____ cannot bring_ with them anything hereditary); but rather that he must recognize with full right what they did as having been done

by himself and attribute the responsibility for all ills arising from the misuse of his reason entirely to himself, since he can very well become conscious of the fact that he would have behaved in precisely the same way under the same circumstances and would have begun the first use of reason that way (even against nature's hint). When this point about moral ills is set right, then the physical ills proper can hardly amount to a surplus in our favor in the balance of merit and guilt.

And thus the result of an oldest history of humanity attempted by philosophy is contentment with providence and with the course of things human on the whole — which does not start from good and progress toward evil, but develops gradually from the worse toward the better; and each of us, for his part, is called upon by nature itself to contribute as much as lies in his power to this progress.