

Immanuel Kant,
Essays

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was born in Königsberg in what was then the Kingdom of Prussia (where he would also die), the fourth of nine children of a poor harness-maker. His parents were sincere pietists, pietism being a reform movement within the Lutheran Church emphasizing biblical doctrine, personal piety, and earnest Christian living. It also emphasized the sovereignty of conscience, and that would have a lasting effect on Kant's moral thinking. At 45, he was finally appointed a full professor (of logic and metaphysics) at the University of Königsberg, which shifted him from his earlier focus on mathematics and physics. His major works are the three great critiques: *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, revised 1787) on metaphysics and epistemology (presenting transcendental idealism as the reconciliation of rationalism and empiricism), *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) on ethics, and *The Critique of Judgment* (1790) on aesthetics and teleology.

Prussia was an enlightened state under Frederick the Great, but when Frederick William II became king in 1786, his minister Wöllner attempted to end religious toleration with regard to the enlighteners.

Kant responded with *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), an essential text in the development of liberal Protestantism.

Profoundly influenced by Rousseau, Kant was a committed Enlightenment thinker who nevertheless moved European thought towards Romanticism. He summed up the impulse of his thinking, "Two things fill the heart with ever-increasing wonder and awe, the more often and more steadily we meditate upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."

What is Enlightenment?

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. Sapere Aude! "Have courage to use your own understanding!"—that is the motto of enlightenment.

Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a proportion of men, long after nature has released them from alien guidance (*naturaliter maiorennnes*), nonetheless gladly remain in lifelong immaturity, and why it is so easy for others to establish themselves as their guardians. It is so easy to be immature. If I have a book to serve as my understanding, a pastor to serve as my conscience, a physician to determine my diet for me, and so on, I need not exert myself at all. I need not think, if only I can pay: others will readily undertake the irksome work for me. The guardians who have so benevolently taken over the supervision of men have carefully seen to it that the far greatest part of them (including the entire fair sex) regard taking the step to maturity as very dangerous, not to mention difficult. Having first made their domestic livestock dumb, and having carefully made sure that these docile creatures will not take a single step without the go-cart to which they are harnessed, these guardians then show them the danger that threatens them, should they attempt to walk alone. Now this danger is not actually so great, for after falling a few times they would in the end certainly learn to walk; but an example of this kind makes men timid and usually frightens them out of all further attempts.

Thus, it is difficult for any individual man to work himself out of the immaturity that has all but become his nature. He has even become fond of this state and for the time being is actually incapable of using his own understanding, for no one has ever allowed him to attempt it. Rules and formulas, those mechanical aids to the rational use, or rather misuse, of his natural gifts, are the shackles of a permanent immaturity. Whoever threw them off would still make only an uncertain leap over the smallest ditch, since he is unaccustomed to this kind of free movement. Consequently, only a few have succeeded, by cultivating their own minds, in freeing themselves from immaturity and pursuing a secure course.

But that the public should enlighten itself is more likely; indeed, if it is only allowed freedom, enlightenment is almost inevitable. For even among the entrenched guardians of the great masses a few will always

think for themselves, a few who, after having themselves thrown off the yoke of immaturity, will spread the spirit of a rational appreciation for both their own worth and for each person's calling to think for himself. But it should be particularly noted that if a public that was first placed in this yoke by the guardians is suitably aroused by some of those who are altogether incapable of enlightenment, it may force the guardians themselves to remain under the yoke—so pernicious is it to instill prejudices, for they finally take revenge upon their originators, or on their descendants. Thus a public can only attain enlightenment slowly. Perhaps a revolution can overthrow autocratic despotism and profiteering or power-grabbing oppression, but it can never truly reform a manner of thinking; instead, new prejudices, just like the old ones they replace, will serve as a leash for the great unthinking mass.

Nothing is required for this enlightenment, however, except freedom; and the freedom in question is the least harmful of all, namely, the freedom to use reason *publicly* in all matters. But on all sides I hear: “*Do not argue!*” The officer says, “Do not argue, drill!” The taxman says, “Do not argue, pay!” The pastor says, “Do not argue, believe!” (Only one ruler in the world says, “*Argue* as much as you want and about what you want, *but obey!*”) In this we have [examples of] pervasive restrictions on freedom. But which restriction hinders enlightenment and which does not, but instead actually advances it? I reply: The *public* use of one's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among mankind; the *private* use of reason may, however, often be very narrowly restricted, without otherwise hindering the progress of enlightenment. By the public use of one's own reason I understand the use that anyone as a scholar makes of reason before the entire *literate world*. I call the private use of reason that which a person may make in a civic post or office that has been entrusted to him. Now in many affairs conducted in the interests of a community, a certain mechanism is required by means of which some of its members must conduct themselves in an entirely passive manner so that through an artificial unanimity the government may guide them toward public ends, or at least prevent them from destroying such ends. Here one certainly must not argue, instead one must obey. However, insofar as this part of the machine also regards himself as a member of the community as a whole, or even of the world community, and as a consequence addresses the public in the role of a scholar, in the proper sense of that term, he can most certainly argue, without thereby harming the affairs for which as a passive member he is partly responsible. Thus it would be disastrous if an officer on duty who was given a command by his superior were to question the appropriateness or utility of the order. He must obey. But as a scholar he

cannot be justly constrained from making comments about errors in military service, or from placing them before the public for its judgment. The citizen cannot refuse to pay the taxes imposed on him; indeed, impertinent criticism of such levies, when they should be paid by him, can be punished as a scandal (since it can lead to widespread insubordination). But the same person does not act contrary to civic duty when, as a scholar, he publicly expresses his thoughts regarding the impropriety or even injustice of such taxes. Likewise a pastor is bound to instruct his catecumens and congregation in accordance with the symbol of the church he serves, for he was appointed on that condition. But as a scholar he has complete freedom, indeed even the calling, to impart to the public all of his carefully considered and well-intentioned thoughts concerning mistaken aspects of that symbol, as well as his suggestions for the better arrangement of religious and church matters. Nothing in this can weigh on his conscience. What he teaches in consequence of his office as a servant of the church he sets out as something with regard to which he has no discretion to teach in accord with his own lights; rather, he offers it under the direction and in the name of another. He will say, "Our church teaches this or that and these are the demonstrations it uses." He thereby extracts for his congregation all practical uses from precepts to which he would not himself subscribe with complete conviction, but whose presentation he can nonetheless undertake, since it is not entirely impossible that truth lies hidden in them, and, in any case, nothing contrary to the very nature of religion is to be found in them. If he believed he could find anything of the latter sort in them, he could not in good conscience serve in his position; he would have to resign. Thus an appointed teacher's use of his reason for the sake of his congregation is merely *private*, because, however large the congregation is, this use is always only domestic; in this regard, as a priest, he is not free and cannot be such because he is acting under instructions from someone else. By contrast, the cleric—as a scholar who speaks through his writings to the public as such, i.e., the world—enjoys in this *public use* of reason an unrestricted freedom to use his own rational capacities and to speak his own mind. For that the (spiritual) guardians of a people should themselves be immature is an absurdity that would insure the perpetuation of absurdities.

But would a society of pastors, perhaps a church assembly or venerable presbytery (as those among the Dutch call themselves), not be justified in binding itself by oath to a certain unalterable symbol in order to secure a constant guardianship over each of its members and through them over the people, and this for all time: I say that this is wholly impossible. Such a contract, whose intention is to preclude

forever all further enlightenment of the human race, is absolutely null and void, even if it should be ratified by the supreme power, by parliaments, and by the most solemn peace treaties. One age cannot bind itself, and thus conspire, to place a succeeding one in a condition whereby it would be impossible for the later age to expand its knowledge (particularly where it is so very important), to rid itself of errors, and generally to increase its enlightenment. That would be a crime against human nature, whose essential destiny lies precisely in such progress; subsequent generations are thus completely justified in dismissing such agreements as unauthorized and criminal. The criterion of everything that can be agreed upon as a law by a people lies in this question: Can a people impose such a law on itself? Now it might be possible, in anticipation of a better state of affairs, to introduce a provisional order for a specific, short time, all the while giving all citizens, especially clergy, in their role as scholars, the freedom to comment publicly, i.e., in writing, on the present institution's shortcomings. The provisional order might last until insight into the nature of these matters had become so widespread and obvious that the combined (if not unanimous) voices of the populace could propose to the crown that it take under its protection those congregations that, in accord with their newly gained insight, had organized themselves under altered religious institutions, but without interfering with those wishing to allow matters to remain as before. However, it is absolutely forbidden that they unite into a religious organization that nobody may for the duration of a man's lifetime publicly question, for so doing would deny, render fruitless, and make detrimental to succeeding generations an era in man's progress toward improvement. A man may put off enlightenment with regard to what he ought to know, though only for a short time and for his own person; but to renounce it for himself, or, even more, for subsequent generations, is to violate and trample man's divine rights underfoot. And what a people may not decree for itself may still less be imposed on it by a monarch, for his lawgiving authority rests on his unification of the people's collective will in his own. If he only sees to it that all genuine or purported improvement is consonant with civil order, he can allow his subjects to do what they find necessary to their spiritual well-being, which is not his affair. However, he must prevent anyone from forcibly interfering with another's working as best he can to determine and promote his well-being. It detracts from his own majesty when he interferes in these matters, since the writings in which his subjects attempt to clarify their insights lend value to his conception of governance. This holds whether he acts from his own highest insight—whereby he calls upon himself the reproach, "*Caesar non est supra grammaticos.*"—as

well as, indeed even more, when he despoils his highest authority by supporting the spiritual despotism of some tyrants in his state over his other subjects.

If it is now asked, “Do we presently live in an *enlightened* age?” the answer is, “No, but we do live in an age of *enlightenment*.” As matters now stand, a great deal is still lacking in order for men as a whole to be, or even to put themselves into a position to be able without external guidance to apply understanding confidently to religious issues. But we do have clear indications that the way is now being opened for men to proceed freely in this direction and that the obstacles to general enlightenment—to their release from their self-imposed immaturity—are gradually diminishing. In this regard, this age is the age of enlightenment, the century of Frederick.

A prince who does not find it beneath him to say that he takes it to be his *duty* to prescribe nothing, but rather to allow men complete freedom in religious matters—who thereby renounces the arrogant title of *tolerance*—is himself enlightened and deserves to be praised by a grateful present and by posterity as the first, at least where the government is concerned, to release the human race from immaturity and to leave everyone free to use his own reason in all matters of conscience. Under his rule, venerable pastors, in their role as scholars and without prejudice to their official duties, may freely and openly set out for the world’s scrutiny their judgments and views, even where these occasionally differ from the accepted symbol. Still greater freedom is afforded to those who are not restricted by an official post. This spirit of freedom is expanding even where it must struggle against the external obstacles of governments that misunderstand their own function. Such governments are illuminated by the example that the existence of freedom need not give cause for the least concern regarding public order and harmony in the commonwealth. If only they refrain from inventing artifices to keep themselves in it, men will gradually raise themselves from barbarism.

I have focused on religious matters in setting out my main point concerning enlightenment, i.e., man’s emergence from self-imposed immaturity, first because our rulers have no interest in assuming the role of their subjects’ guardians with respect to the arts and sciences, and secondly because that form of immaturity is both the most pernicious and disgraceful of all. But the manner of thinking of a head of state who favors religious enlightenment goes even further, for he realizes that there is no danger to his legislation in allowing his subjects to use reason *publicly* and to set before the world their thoughts concerning better formulations of his laws, even if this involves frank criticism of

legislation currently in effect. We have before us a shining example, with respect to which no monarch surpasses the one whom we honor.

But only a ruler who is himself enlightened and has no dread of shadows, yet who likewise has a well-disciplined, numerous army to guarantee public peace, can say what no republic may dare, namely: “*Argue as much as you want and about what you want, but obey!*” Here as elsewhere, when things are considered in broad perspective, a strange, unexpected pattern in human affairs reveals itself, one in which almost everything is paradoxical. A greater degree of civil freedom seems advantageous to a people’s *spiritual* freedom; yet the former established impassable boundaries for the latter; conversely, a lesser degree of civil freedom provides enough room for all fully to expand their abilities. Thus, once nature has removed the hard shell from this kernel for which she has most fondly cared, namely, the inclination to and vocation for free *thinking*, the kernel gradually reacts on a people’s mentality (whereby they become increasingly able to *act freely*), and it finally even influences the principles of government, [42] which finds that it can profit by treating men, *who are now more than machines*, in accord with their dignity.

Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent

Whatever concept one may form of *freedom of the will* in a metaphysical context, its appearances, human actions, like all other natural events, are certainly determined [*bestimmt*] in conformity with universal natural laws. History—which concerns itself with providing a narrative of these appearances, regardless of how deeply hidden their causes may be—allows us to hope that if we examine *the play of the human will's freedom in the large*, we can discover its course to conform to rules [*regelmässig*] as well as to hope that what strikes us as complicated and unpredictable in the single individual may in the history of the entire species be discovered to be the steady progress and slow development of its original capacities. Since the free wills of men seem to have so great an influence on marriage, the births consequent to it, and death, it appears that they are not subject to any rule by which one can in advance determine their number; and yet the annual charts that large countries make of them show that they occur in conformity with natural laws as invariable as those [governing] the unpredictable weather, whose particular changes we cannot determine in advance, but which in the large do not fail to support a uniform and uninterrupted pattern in the growth of plants, in the flow of rivers, and in other natural events. Individual men and even entire peoples give little thought to the fact that while each according to his own ways pursues his own end—often at cross purposes with each other—they unconsciously proceed toward an unknown natural end, as if following a guiding thread; and they work to promote an end they would set little store by, even if they were aware of it.

Since in their endeavors men proceed neither merely instinctually, like animals, nor yet according to a fixed plan, like rational citizens of the world, it appears that no systematic [*planmässig*] *history of man* is possible (as perhaps it might be with bees or beavers).³ One cannot resist a certain [feeling of] indignation when one sees men's actions placed on the great stage of the world and finds that, despite some individuals' seeming wisdom, in the large everything is finally woven together from folly and childish vanity and often even childish malice and destructiveness. In the end, one does not know what concept one should have of a species so taken with its own superiority. Here, since the philosopher cannot assume that in the great human drama mankind has a rational *end of its own*, his only point of departure is to try to discover whether there is some *natural objective* in this senseless course of human affairs, from which it may be possible to produce a history of creatures who proceed without a plan of their own but in conformity with some definite plan of nature's. We want

to see if we can succeed in finding a guiding thread for such a history, and we will leave it to nature to produce the man who is in a position to write it. In this way she produced a Kepler, who in an unexpected way subjected the eccentric paths of the planets to definite laws, and a Newton, who explained these laws by means of a universal natural cause.

First Thesis

All of a creature's natural capacities are destined to develop completely and in conformity with their end. This is confirmed in all animals, both by external and internal, analytical observation. In the teleological theory of nature, an organ that is not intended to be used, an organization that does not achieve its end, is a contradiction. If we stray from that fundamental principle, we no longer have a lawful but an aimlessly playing nature and hopeless chance takes the place of reason's guiding thread.

Second Thesis

In man (as the sole rational creature on earth) those natural capacities directed toward the use of his reason are to be completely developed only in the species, not in the individual. Reason in a creature is a faculty to extend the rules and objectives of the use of all of its powers far beyond natural instinct, and it knows no limits to its projects. However, reason itself does not operate on instinct, but requires trial, practice, and instruction in order gradually to progress from one stage of insight to another. Therefore, each individual man would have to live excessively long if he were to make complete use of all his natural capacities; or if nature has given him only a short lease on life (as is actually the case), she requires a perhaps incalculable sequence of generations, each passing its enlightenment on to the next, to bring its seeds in our species to the stage of development that completely fulfills nature's objective. And the goal of his efforts must be that point in time, at least among the ideas of men, since the natural capacities must otherwise be regarded as in large part purposeless and vain. In that case all practical principles would have to be given up, and nature, whose wisdom serves as a fundamental principle in judging all other arrangements, would in the sole case of man have to be suspected of childish play.

Third Thesis

Nature has willed that man, entirely by himself, produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical organization of his animal existence and partake in no other happiness or perfection than what he himself,

independently of instinct, can secure through his own reason. Nature does nothing unnecessary and is not prodigal in the use of means to her ends [*Zwecken*]. Since she gave man reason and the freedom of will based on it, this is a clear indication of her objective [*Absicht*] as regards his makeup [*Ausstattung*]. Specifically, he should not be led by instinct, nor be provided for and instructed by ready-made knowledge; instead, he should produce everything from himself. Provision for his diet, his clothing, his bodily safety and defense (for which he was given neither the bull's horns, the lion's claws, nor the dog's teeth, but only hands), all amusements that can make life pleasant, even his insight and prudence, indeed, the goodness of his will—all of these should be entirely of his own making. Nature seems here to have taken delight in the greatest frugality and to have calculated her animal endowments so closely—so precisely to the most pressing needs of a primitive existence—that she seems to have willed that if man should ever work himself up from the grossest barbarity to the highest level of sophistication, to inner perfection in his way of thinking and thereby to happiness (as far as it is possible on earth), he alone would have the entire credit for it and would have only himself to thank; it is as if she aimed more at his rational *self-esteem* than at his well-being. For along this course of human affairs a whole host of hardships awaits man. But it appears that nature is utterly unconcerned that man live well, only that he bring himself to the point where his conduct makes him worthy of life and well-being. What will always seem strange about this is that earlier generations appear to carry out their laborious tasks only for the sake of later ones, to prepare for later generations a step from which they in turn can raise still higher the building that nature had in view—that only the most recent generations should have the good fortune to live in the building on which a long sequence of their forefathers (though certainly without any intention of their own) worked, without being able themselves to partake of the prosperity they prepared the way for. But no matter how puzzling this is, it is nonetheless equally as necessary once one assumes that one species of animal should have reason and that as a class of rational beings—each member of which dies, while the species is immortal—it is destined to develop its capacities to perfection.

Fourth Thesis

*The means that nature uses to bring about the development of all of man's capacities is the **antagonism** among them in society, as far as in the end this antagonism is the cause of law-governed order in society.* In this context, I understand antagonism to mean men's *unsocial sociability*, i.e., their tendency to enter into society, combined, however,

with a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to sunder this society. This capacity for social existence is clearly embedded in human nature. Man has a propensity for *living in society*, for in that state he feels himself to be more than man, i.e., feels himself to be more than the development of his natural capacities. He also has, however, a great tendency to isolate himself, for he finds in himself the unsociable characteristic of wanting everything to go according to his own desires, and he therefore anticipates resistance everywhere, just as he knows about himself that for his part he tends to resist others. Now this resistance awakens all of man's powers, brings him to overcome his tendency towards laziness, and, driven by his desire for honor, power, or property, to secure status among his fellows, whom he neither *suffers*, nor *withdraws* from. In this way, the first true steps from barbarism to culture, in which the unique social worth of man consists, now occur, all man's talents are gradually developed, his taste is cultured, and through progressive enlightenment he begins to establish a way of thinking that can in time transform the crude natural capacity for moral discrimination into definite practical principles and thus transform a *pathologically* enforced agreement into a society and, finally, into a moral whole. Without those characteristics of unsociability—which are in themselves quite unworthy of being loved and from which arises the resistance that every man must necessarily encounter in pursuing his self-seeking pretensions—man would live as an Arcadian shepherd, in perfect concord, contentment, and mutual love, and all talents would lie eternally dormant in their seed; men docile as the sheep they tend would hardly invest their existence with any worth greater than that of cattle; and as to the purpose behind man's creation, his rational nature, there would remain a void. Thus, thanks be to nature for the incompatibility, for the distasteful, competitive vanity, for the insatiable desire to possess and also to rule. Without them, all of humanity's excellent natural capacities would have lain eternally dormant. Man wills concord; but nature better knows what is good for the species: she wills discord. He wills to live comfortably and pleasantly; but nature wills that he should be plunged from laziness and inactive comfort into work and hardship, so that he will in turn seek by his own cleverness to pull himself up from them. The natural impulse to do this—the sources of unsociability and of thoroughgoing resistance that give rise to so much evil but also drive men anew toward further exertions of their powers, consequently to diverse development of their natural capacities—indicates the design of a wise creator, not the hand of a malicious spirit who fiddled with the creator's masterful arrangement or enviously spoiled it.

Fifth Thesis

*The greatest problem for the human species, whose solution nature compels it to seek, is to achieve a universal **civil society** administered in accord with the right.* Since it is only in society—and, indeed, only in one that combines the greatest freedom, and thus a thoroughgoing antagonism among its members, with a precise determination and protection of the boundaries of this freedom, so that it can coexist with the freedom of others—since it is only in such a society that nature’s highest objective, namely, the highest attainable development of mankind’s capacities, can be achieved, nature also wills that mankind should itself accomplish this, as well as all the other goals that constitute mankind’s vocation. Thus must there be a society in which one will find the highest possible degree of *freedom under external laws* combined with irresistible power, i.e., a perfectly *rightful civil constitution*, whose attainment is the supreme task nature has set for the human species; for only by solving and completing it can nature fulfill her other objectives with our species. Necessity compels men, who are otherwise so deeply enamoured with unrestricted freedom, to enter into this state of coercion; and indeed, they are forced to do so by the greatest need of all, namely, the one that men themselves bring about, for their propensities do not allow them to coexist for very long in wild freedom. But once in a refuge such as civil society furnishes, these same propensities have the most salutary effect. It is just as with trees in a forest, which need each other, for in seeking to take the air and sunlight from the others, each obtains a beautiful, straight shape, while those that grow in freedom and separate from one another branch out randomly, and are stunted, bent, and twisted. All the culture and art that adorn mankind, as well as the most beautiful social order, are fruits of unsociableness that is forced to discipline itself and thus through an imposed art to develop nature’s seed completely.

Sixth Thesis

This problem is both the hardest and the last to be solved by the human species. The difficulty that the mere idea of this task places before us is this: Man is an *animal that*, if he lives among other members of his species, *has need of a master*. For he certainly abuses his freedom in relation to his equals, and although as a rational creature he desires a law that establishes boundaries for everyone’s freedom, his selfish animal propensities induce him to except himself from them wherever he can. He thus requires a *master* who will break his self-will and force him to obey a universally valid will, whereby everyone can be free. Where is he to find this master? Nowhere but from among the human species. But even he is an animal who requires a master. Thus, begin

wherever he will, it is not to be seen how he can obtain a guarantor [*Oberhaupt*] of public justice who will himself be just, whether he seek it in a single person or in a group of several selected for the role. For each of them will abuse his freedom if he has no one above him to apply force in accord with laws. The supreme guarantor [*Oberhaupt*] should be just *in himself* and still be a *man*. This is therefore the hardest task of all; indeed, its perfect solution is impossible; from such warped wood as is man made, nothing straight can be fashioned. Nature only enjoins us to the approximation of this idea. That it is also the last task to be solved also follows from this: it requires the correct concept of the nature of a possible constitution, great experience during much of the world's course, and above all else a good will prepared to accept that constitution; but it is hard to find three factors such as these together all at once; when it happens, it will only be very late, and after many futile attempts.

Seventh Thesis

*The problem of establishing a perfect civil constitution depends on the problem of law-governed **external relations among nations** and cannot be solved unless the latter is.* What use is it to work for a law-governed civil constitution among individual men, i.e., for the organization of a commonwealth? The same unsociability that forces men to do so in turn causes every commonwealth to adopt for itself, i.e., as a nation in relation to nations, an unrestricted freedom in its external relations; consequently, one commonwealth must anticipate from others the same evil that oppressed individual men, forcing them to enter into a law-governed civil state. Nature has thus once more used human quarrelsomeness, men's inevitable *antagonism*, even in the large societies and political bodies that are created through it, as a means for discovering a state of calm and security. That is, through wars, through excessive and never remitting preparation for war, through the resultant distress that every nation must, even during times of peace, feel within itself, they are driven to make some initial, imperfect attempts; finally, after much devastation, upheaval, and even complete exhaustion of their inner powers, they are driven to take the step that reason could have suggested, even without so much sad experience, namely, to leave the lawless state of savagery and enter into a federation of peoples. In such a league, every nation, even the smallest, can expect to have security and rights, not by virtue of its own might or its own declarations regarding what is right, but from this great federation of peoples (*Foedus Amphictyonium*) alone, from a united might, and from decisions made by the united will in accord with laws. However fanciful this idea may seem

to be—and it was laughed at as such when advanced by an Abbé St. Pierre or a Rousseau (perhaps because they believed its realization was too near)—it is nonetheless the inevitable outcome of the distress that men cause one another, distress that must force nations to just the same decision (however hard it may be for them) to which savage men were so unhappily forced, namely, to give up their brutal freedom and to seek calm and security in a law-governed constitution. All wars are accordingly so many attempts (though not as man's intention, but as nature's objective) to bring about new relations among nations; by the destruction, or at least the dismemberment of old relations, wars cause new bodies to be formed, bodies, however, that themselves will in turn not be able to maintain themselves, either internally or in relation to one another, and must undergo similar revolutions, until finally—partially through the best possible internal organization of the civil constitution, partially through common external agreement and legislation—a state similar to a civil commonwealth is established and can maintain itself *automatically*.

[Here three questions arise for our consideration:] Should one expect that by virtue of some *Epicurean* confluence of efficient causes nations, like minute particles of matter randomly colliding with one another, should experiment with all sorts of organizations that will be destroyed by new collisions, until they finally chance upon an organization that works, one that can maintain its form (an occurrence that is not very likely to happen)? Or should one instead assume that here nature follows a regular course in leading our species by degrees from the lower stages of animality to the highest stages of humanity, imposing on man an art that is nonetheless his own, and, through this seemingly chaotic arrangement, developing those original natural capacities in a thoroughly law-governed way? Or may one sooner conclude that on the whole all of men's actions and reactions will result in nothing, at least nothing intelligent, that matters will remain as they have always been, and that one cannot say in advance whether or not the strife that is so natural to our species is preparing us for a hell of evils, however civilized our state may be, since this state itself and all previous cultural progress will, perhaps, once more be ravaged by barbarism (a fate that under the rule of blind chance, which is, in fact, one with lawless freedom, man cannot resist, unless one assumes that he secretly follows the guiding thread of nature's wisdom)? These three questions come roughly to this: is it truly rational to assume that nature is purposive in its parts but purposeless as a whole? What the lawless state did to savages—namely, hold back all of our species' natural capacities until the evil that this placed them under compelled them to leave this state and enter into a civil constitution, in which all those

seeds can be developed—barbarous freedom will also do to already established nations. To wit: by expending all of the commonwealth's powers on arming itself against others, by the devastation caused by war, and, still more, by maintaining themselves in constant readiness for war, they hamper progress toward full development of man's natural capacities; however, the evil that arises from this also forces our species to introduce into the intrinsically healthy mutual opposition among states—an opposition that arises from their freedom—a law of equilibrium and an associated power to enforce it and, consequently, a cosmopolitan state in which the security of nations is publicly acknowledged; this state is not totally lacking in *dangers*, so mankind's powers may not slumber, but it is also not lacking in a principle of equality in their mutual action and reaction, so they do not destroy one another. Before this last step (the federation of nations) can be taken—and it is no more than halfway in mankind's formation—human nature must endure the harshest of evils, which pass in disguise as external well-being; and as long as we have not reached this last stage to which our species has still to climb Rousseau was not so far from right in preferring the state of savages. We are, to a high degree, *cultivated* beyond bearing by all manner of social convention and propriety. But we are a long way from being able to regard ourselves as *moral*. For the idea of morality belongs to culture; and yet using this idea only in reference to semblances of morality, e.g., love of honor and outward propriety, constitutes mere civilization. So long, however, as nations expend all their energies on their vain and violent designs, thus continuously inhibiting their citizens' plodding efforts to shape internally their way of thinking [*Denkungsart*], even withholding all support for it, no progress of this sort is to be expected, because the formation of citizens requires a long process of preparation in every commonwealth. All good that is not grafted onto a morally-good character is nothing but illusion and glistering misery. The human race will likely remain in this state until, in the way I have described, it has worked itself out of this chaotic state of national relations.

Eighth Thesis

*One can regard the history of the human species, in the large, as the realization of a hidden plan of nature to bring about an internally, and **for this purpose**, also an externally perfect national constitution, as the sole state in which all of humanity's natural capacities can be developed.* This thesis is a consequence of the foregoing one. One sees that philosophy also has its chiliastic vision, but one whose occurrence can be promoted by its idea [*Idee*], though only from afar, and it is thus anything but fanciful. The issue, then, is whether experience can

uncover something like a course leading to this objective of nature's [*Naturabsicht*]. I say, it reveals a *little of it*; for its cycle appears to require so long a time to complete that the small part of it through which mankind has until now passed allows one to determine the shape of its course and the relations of its parts to the whole with just as little certainty as we can determine, from all previous astronomical observation, the path of the sun and its entire host of satellites through the vast system of fixed stars; nonetheless, based on the premise that the universe has a systematic structure, and from the little that man has observed, we can justifiably conclude that such a cycle actually exists. Furthermore, human nature is so constituted as to be incapable of indifference toward even the most distant epoch through which our species must go, if only it can be expected with certainty. This is especially so in the present case, where it appears that we can by our own rational organization hasten this happy time for posterity. For this reason its faintest signs of approach will be very important to us. Nations now stand in such contrived [*künstlich*] relations to one another that none can stand any weakening of its internal culture without losing power and influence in relation to the others; thus, at least the preservation, if not the progress of this end of nature's [culture] is fairly well assured by these nations' ambitious designs. Furthermore, civil freedom can no longer be so easily infringed without suffering after effects in all areas of endeavor, especially trade, in which event a nation's power in its foreign relations will diminish. But this freedom is gradually expanding. If one hinders the citizen from pursuing his well-being in whatever ways consistent with the freedom of others he chooses, one hampers the liveliness of enterprise generally and, along with it, the power of the whole. Therefore, restrictions on personal activities will be increasingly abolished and general freedom of religion will be granted; enlightenment will thus gradually arise, though folly and caprice will sometimes slip in; it arises as a great good that must save the human race from even the self-seeking expansionary schemes of their rulers, if the latter just understand what is to their own advantage. This enlightenment, however, and with it a certain inclination of the heart that the enlightened man cannot fail to have toward a good that he fully understands, must gradually ascend to the thrones and even influence principles of government. Although, for example, our world rulers presently have no money left over for public educational institutions, or for anything that pertains to what is best in the world—since everything is already allocated in advance for future war—they will yet find it to their own advantage at least not to hinder their people's albeit weak and slow, personal efforts in this work. In the end, even war gradually becomes not only a very

artificial undertaking, so uncertain for both sides in its outcome, but also a very dubious one, given the aftermath that the nation suffers by way of an evergrowing burden of debt (a new invention) whose repayment becomes inconceivable. At the same time, the effect that any national upheaval has on all the other nations of our continent, where they are all so closely linked by trade, is so noticeable that these other nations feel compelled, though without legal authority to do so, to offer themselves as arbiters, and thus they indirectly prepare the way for the great body politic [*Staatskörper*] of the future, a body politic for which antiquity provides no example. Although this body politic presently exists only in very rough outline, a feeling seems nonetheless to be already stirring among all its members who have an interest in the preservation of the whole, and this gives rise to the hope that, finally, after many revolutions of reform, nature's supreme objective—a universal *cosmopolitan state*, the womb in which all of the human species' original capacities will be developed—will at last come to be realized.

Ninth Thesis

A philosophical attempt to work out a universal history of the world in accord with a plan of nature that aims at a perfect civic union of the human species must be regarded as possible and even as helpful to this objective of nature's. It is, indeed, a strange and for all appearances absurd scheme to want to write a history based on an idea of how the course of the world must go if it is to approach a certain rational goal; it seems that such an attitude can only result in a *romance*. If one may nonetheless assume that nature does not proceed without a plan and a final objective, even in the play of human freedom, this idea can still be useful; and while we are too shortsighted to penetrate to the hidden mechanism of her workings, this idea may still serve as a guiding thread for presenting an otherwise planless *aggregate* of human actions as a system, at least in the large. For if one begins with Greek history—the one through which all other more ancient or contemporaneous histories have been preserved or at least authenticated; if one follows the influence of the Greeks on the formation and malformation of the body politic of the *Roman* people, who engulfed the Greek nation, and the influence of the Romans on the *barbarians*, who in their turn destroyed the Romans, up to our own time; and if, as episodes, one adds to this the national histories of other peoples, inasmuch as knowledge of them has bit by bit come to us from these enlightened nations; one will discover a course of improvement conforming to rules in the constitutions of the nations on our continent (which will in all likelihood eventually give laws to all others). By (focusing everywhere

only on civil constitutions and their laws and on the relations among nations—since by virtue of the good they contained they served over long periods of time to elevate and glorify peoples (and along with them the arts and sciences) who were yet in turn overthrown by their inherent deficiencies, always leaving behind a seed of enlightenment that developed more with each revolution, preparing for a succeeding and still higher stage of improvement—one will, I believe, discover a guiding thread that can serve not only to clarify the thoroughly confused play of human affairs, or to aid in the political art of prophesying future changes in and among nations (a use that has already been made of human history, even when it has been regarded as the incoherent product of ungoverned freedom). It will also clear the way for (what, without presupposing a plan of nature, one cannot reasonably hope for) a comforting view of the future, one in which we represent from afar how the human species finally works its way up to that state where all the seeds nature has planted in it can be developed fully and in which the species' vocation here on earth can be fulfilled. Such a *justification* of nature—or, better, of *providence*—is no unimportant motive for adopting a particular perspective in observing the world. For what use is it to laud and recommend observing the majesty and wisdom of creation in the nonrational realm of nature, if that part of the great theatre of supreme wisdom that contains the purpose of all the rest—the history of the human race—should remain an endless reproach to it, the sight of which compels us against our wills to turn our eyes away from it and, since we despair of ever finding a perfectly rational objective in it, brings us to the point of hoping for that end only in another world?

It would be a misunderstanding of my point of view to [believe] that I want this idea of a world history that is to a certain extent led by an *a priori* guiding thread to take the place of *history* as such, whose composition is wholly *empirical*. This idea is only a reflection of what a philosophical mind (which must above all be well versed in history) could attempt to do from another perspective. Besides, the otherwise laudable detail with which men now record the history of their times naturally causes everyone concern as to how after several centuries our distant descendants will come to grips with the burden of history that we shall leave to them. Without doubt they will treasure the history of the most ancient times, whose documents will have long since vanished, but they will treasure them only from the standpoint of what interests them, namely, what peoples and governments have done to contribute to or to impair the objective of cosmopolitanism. To make note of this in order to direct the ambitions of national leaders and their servants to the only means by which they can be honorably

remembered even in the most distant future: that can provide some *small* motivation for attempting such a philosophical history.

