

## **Introduction - On Human Improvement (draft)**

Initially I thought that this book didn't need an introduction. The first chapter starts right where I want it to start, at the beginning of everything, and I felt that an introduction to such a beginning would only lead to useless repetition and unjustified speculation from the reader. It would be unfortunate if the reader starts with the wrong expectations and therefore misinterprets what I would like to tell him. Also, the title says exactly enough about what this book is about, so I feel no need to elaborate on it. But as the book starts at the very beginning, the reader may not directly see the link between that beginning and the subject of human improvement. Indeed, it would also be unfortunate if the reader starts reading constantly asking himself where this is leading him to. So after all, I thought it might be a good idea to tell the reader why we need to start at the beginning when we want to talk about complex matters such as human improvement.

By 'the beginning of everything' I do not mean the beginning of the physical world such as the universe, but of that which concerns me: the moral improvement of individuals. It is a challenging subject and that is why I have to start at the beginning because, before I can talk about what it consists of and how it is possible to achieve it, I need to define a reference frame that clarifies the terms I will be using to explain it. So the first chapter is about how we can build a universal reference frame starting from our perceptions and consciousness of the real world. Questions such as 'What is moral improvement?' and 'Is it possible?' can only be meaningfully answered in relation to that reference frame.

For example, the question of what moral improvement consists of presupposes that there is a certain universal moral reference frame and that all our actions can be judged relative to it. If we want to be able to judge a certain situation as more or less morally acceptable than another situation, we need an elaborate system of well described principles because such a judgment can only be done in relation to a certain ideal image we have in mind. But how does that ideal look like? What will it define and will it allow behavioral and cultural diversity? Or maybe this ideal can be achieved in different ways because it consists of many independent virtues (being not equal to each other because they cannot be compared) such that they cannot all be realized at the same time? Optimization mostly leads to uniformity but this must not be so. We will see that there is a set of principles that define the relative 'goodness' of a given situation (and of a given person) and that there are different tools we have at our disposal that can help us fulfill them.

One of the difficulties facing a study of such a reference frame is that it can be argued that nobody (or everybody) has the right or knowledge to define it. In our seemingly democratic societies the determination of such a framework is regarded as the right of the people (who in fact define only a small part of it) and surely not the right of a single individual because this would be

labeled as dictatorial. Why would a certain individual have a better understanding of what is wrong and what is right? Paradoxically, so called experts seem to have been given more rights than others in regards of defining society or, at least, they are given the task of educating the masses. Without a neutral measuring tool this debate can go on endlessly so this issue will be given the utmost attention. For those who fear that this must lead to a 'conservative' and 'totalitarian' philosophy and critique I can assure you that what you are about to read will not be easily categorized in a certain existing political, social or economic ideology. This 'new ideology' I talk about consists of different parts of many existing views.

But even if we assume that we can have a fairly good idea of that ideal we seek, many difficulties remain. What is the highest moral culture we can achieve? Perhaps we should ask ourselves if human improvement is possible at all? Do we dare to admit that how we are now is the best we can? It could be that we have achieved the limit of our moral capacity, that we have reached the limits of what nature has given us or allows us to be. For example, the current moral cultures (or the behavioral traits we usually associate with being human) are largely defined by a harsh but well-tested process of natural selection favoring aggressive and dominant humans above peace-loving ones. Or perhaps we are in a long intermediate phase of a linear moral evolution? If we could measure human morality through history we may observe a cyclical trend: after an improvement in moral culture necessarily follows a period of moral decline. Also, it may be possible that we can achieve the highest moral culture only for a short amount of time and that we desperately, because of moral exhaustion or boredom (assisted by the principles of natural selection), fall back to the human condition of least resistance.

The practical aspect of human improvement also has its share of problems. Can the moral culture necessary for achieving a better world be realized in every individual or can it only be taught to a happy few? It may be that the beauty and importance of individual diversity within a single species also has its downsides: the moral improvement of the happy few could be made impossible by the overwhelming plebeian majority. If that is so, we must ask ourselves if it is morally acceptable to organize society with that in mind. For example, we could create two independent societies, one for the happy few and another for those who cannot be morally improved (or perhaps many different ones, each for a different level of moral culture). Assuming that we find it morally acceptable to do such a thing, how will we define which individual belongs to which society? A sort of 'moral quotient' test seems difficult to implement. If it can be done, we will have to commit the worst form of social segregation in order to improve humanity. But must we not remain optimistic and assume that it is possible to teach this higher moral culture to everyone? An alternative and perhaps an acceptable strategy is that we would first allow moral segregation before we can improve the whole of humanity. Such a process would start with a very small minority of

lightened individuals that, bit by bit, absorb the whole of humanity into their benevolence (I elaborate on this strategy in the conclusion). But again, without a universal reference frame to refer to we can debate endlessly about the practical realizability of human improvement.

I do not claim that I can answer all these questions definitively but by exploring the subject matter into more detail in the following chapters it is my intention to give the reader the tools so that he may answer them himself. There are two important things one should learn when he is willing to answer these questions. First, he will have to learn to see the truth when he is looking at our world. The reference frame I speak of in the first chapter should help him with this. When he will do so, he will be conscious of what is going wrong and subsequently he will realize that something must be done about it. Our inquiry in the moral improvability of humanity assumes that our current condition is sub-optimal. But in what respects? Surely there are things that ought to be good in this world (I also mention the good things) and some of us even claim that we already have found the moral optimum and that the means for achieving it are already in place. By checking these claims in relation to our universal reference frame we can see what aspects we tend to forget or refuse to see through the glasses we have been taught to carry since our birth. This critical analysis of the current state of humanity is the subject of the second chapter.

Secondly, he must have a good idea of how that ideal looks like in the real world. He may be able to realize what is wrong but without having a clear picture of how it should be, he cannot undertake the appropriate measures. Also, when he is conscious of what can be achieved he will be more motivated to change himself and his surroundings. That is what the third and final chapter is about: how the principles of the first chapter can be translated into a model for a better world and how such a world could look like. Yes indeed, it will sound very Utopian but that is exactly what it is supposed to be: it should represent that dream that we one day wish to achieve. Whether we will ever achieve it or not isn't the question I will try to answer (neither is it relevant). By knowing what it is, every one of us should try his best to achieve it, because essentially, if you are not a utopian you are a pessimist. How far we can put that dream into practice is only limited by our belief in our own potential to do good. But rest assured, humanity only deserves what it does achieve.

The following is not all that there is to tell about this subject matter nor does it represent my definitive philosophy about it because for that I have insufficient time and wisdom. Also, I have no intentions in creating a moral reference frame that fits my convenience. Of course, I could misinterpret natural logic and the true state of my perceptions - and therefore misapply it - but the following thoughts represent my philosophy and are meant to represent a helping tool for a society that believes in the moral improvement of humanity. Finally, to help the reader I have summarized the most important concepts and, in my opinion, the most likely solution for human improvement in the conclusion. To further help the reader - and myself - I will regularly use graphics to visualize the

theories I want to explain because, as they say, an image can tell more than a thousand words. I hope that these images of my thoughts will compensate for the many words I failed to mention and help you understand what I really mean.