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JOAN CREXELLS

Reversing History

*INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY MARIANO MARTÍN RODRÍGUEZ
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Among the modern thinkers who have presented their ideas in Catalan, Joan Crexells (1896-1930) stands out from a literary point of view for his short speculative work “La història a l’inrevés” (*Reversing History*). It was published in the second volume, issue 7 (January 1925) of the *Revista de Catalunya* (Journal of Catalonia) as a mock scholarly essay, but it was only collected in 1968 in a selection from his oeuvre titled *La història a l’inrevés*.¹ This choice of title suggests how important that essay was considered by the publishers, who might have even considered it his masterpiece. Although Crexells was primarily an influential thinker

across several fields (mostly philosophy, but also economy and even statistics!), none of his works is as original as this “reverse history.” Its form is, at least, certainly unusual for an essay, since it combines reflection and speculative fiction, notably science fiction. Indeed, Crexells explicitly asks his readers to embrace a cognitive distancing similar to that proposed by Darko Suvin as a defining feature of science fiction (*cognitive estrangement*) by inviting them to admit his hypothesis of a future journey of several scholars to a distant star, from where they have been able to follow Earth’s history from the present to AD 3000. They send

¹ The following translation is based in a later edition: Joan Crexells, «La història a l’inrevés», *Obra completa*, 1. De Plató a Carles Riba, pròleg de Joaquim Molas, Barcelona, La Magrana, 1996, pp. 170-189.

then to our present their conclusions, reached following their reversed perspective: whereas we, modern men, tend to see the future as a potential path to continuous progress, they see our future as a continuous path backwards.

Crexells' essay summarizes their findings as a review of their successful specialty books, from philosophy to religious studies, from economy to human biology. All these studies constitute diverse views on the evolution of terrestrial humanity, but all have in common their inverted perspective. They insist on approaching the historical march of humanity as a path of progress... in reverse. On Earth, it is believed that progress advances in the same direction in time, forward, towards an increasingly technological and sophisticated society, whereas the travelling scholars see and contend that the course of progress is towards a higher level of complexity, and that this complexity is always lower as society moves away from its past. The reasons for this unorthodox view on human history are rigorously and convincingly argued using the methods, concepts and discourses of their respective sciences. As a conclusion, the narrative voice asks for a relativistic approach underpinning the equivalence of both positions: the usual one supporting the idea that the line of progress from simple to complex follows the temporal arrow from past to future, and the alternative one posited by the featured imaginary scholars, who reverse

that arrow by showing that past societies were the more complex as the more primitive they seem to us... After all, the key is to recognize the fundamental unity of humankind above contending ideas on history understood as the expression of human mind and agency.

This conclusion does not cancel the paradoxical nature of the essay, since its author extensively uses irony to dispel any dogmatic stance. The scholars and their shocking theories are presented with humor as representatives of different national schools of thought. These schools are subject to satire, as well as to a comic mimicking of their ways of writing, from the obscurity of German philosophical jargon to the light rhetoric of the French essay tradition. These exercises in the pastiche mode show that Crexells wished to offer a literary work likely following a similar approach to that of the ironical and paradoxical prefaces of contemporary playwright-essayist George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), who is mentioned in this reverse history. On the other hand, Crexells' writing in the parts where he speaks for himself as narrator and commentator is rather flat and repetitive, perhaps due to the fact that he knew that his readers in his country were not familiar with scholarly writing, and that they needed additional help to understand his point. Nevertheless, this is an exceptional example of science fiction written as a piece of scholarly fiction non-fiction inviting us to read and to reflect off the beaten path.

Reversing History

History goes forward or backward according to the relative motion of the events and their observer.

Karl Pearson, *Grammar of Science*, 3rd ed., note v of the Appendix

I

There is obviously nothing sensational about it. Already at the beginning of the twentieth century, the relativity of the course of phenomena was clearly discovered. It is well known that on Earth we are often surprised by the existence of stars that have been destroyed long ago. The speed of light, although huge, is not infinite. According to science, sunlight takes eight minutes to reach the Earth. Light from a star ten times farther away will take eighty minutes. Now it's all a matter of adding zeros. The light of a star at a distance a hundred times greater than that of the Sun from the Earth, will take eight hundred minutes, etc. One can easily see that by the same simple process of adding zeros we will find ourselves in a hundred years' time and even in a thousand years. Let us now suppose a star whose distance from the Earth is such that it takes a thousand

years for its light to reach us. This is perfectly possible. The magnitude of the Universe allows it. That is why, as Kant said, every day fills us with greater admiration. Now, when you reach these heights, I propose that you take charge of something that I do not think will entail any difficulty. It is this: if we have a sufficiently powerful telescope, we will see all the events that happen in that star, though not, of course, those that occur now, but those that occurred a thousand years ago. And once here, a very easy change of intellectual situation—much easier, alas!, than the real change of position—will convince you that if that star had inhabitants and a telescope it could observe life on Earth as it happened a thousand years ago.

The last effort that I ask of the twentieth century reader who happens to read me, is to imagine an airplane whose speed is so much higher than that of the light which covers the journey from the Earth to the star in question

in a year. In a year's time, the plane will reach the star; we will see, therefore, what was happening on Earth 999 years before the time of departure. But from the moment of departure to the moment of arrival, all the events of the Earth during these 999 years will have unfolded for travellers, in a direction contrary to the current.

The reader of the twentieth century ought to realize that the problem, once posed, was already theoretically solved. It all consisted of finding the telescope and building the airplane of the power and speed respectively required. This was difficult, but not impossible.

The man of the twentieth century was convinced that the tempo of inventions was *prestissimo*. Inventions, in fact, were constant, so much so that the citizen who had not yet finished gaping at one invention, had to keep his mouth even open wider at the next. And although one day the inventions stopped and a couple of centuries passed without anyone inventing anything else—the faith of the man of the twentieth century that what he understood by progress would never stop, of course, was one of the many prejudices and superstitions of the time, which was, as later writers recognized, one of the most obscurantist and gratuitously mistaken epochs through which Humanity has ever passed—and an era without inventions did pass, the activity of the wise men was resumed after some time and, at last, the airplane and the telescope together with all the apparatus necessary to undertake the long journey were invented.

To recount the incidents and the course of the journey that took place around the year 3000, in which Mr. G. Brown, Sc.D., F.S.S. and F.R.S.; the illustrious economist, Herr Geheimrat Dr. Braun, professor of Philosophy at the University of Donaueschingen—at that time, all German villages with more than 1,000 inhabitants had at least one university—; Herr

Oberregierungsrat Professor Mendelsohn, professor of Biology; and M. P. Mendel, the illustrious specialist in Sociology at the Institut de France, took part would be, I say, the work of a writer with a novelist's temperament.

Here we are not interested in anything but the results.

The four illustrious professors had an experience that no one had ever had before. They recreated history the other way around. This led them to some curious ideas that they presented in various reports to their respective scientific associations. Until then, history had been experienced in only one direction. From that moment on, four eminent men followed it in the opposite direction. And what was bound to happen happened.

The humanity that lived in the twentieth century was convinced that the twentieth century was a progress with respect to the nineteenth, for the simple reason that it came after it. But what would have happened if it had been the other way around, if the twentieth century had been perceived by someone before the nineteenth century? Would there not have been an invincible tendency to consider that between the twentieth and nineteenth centuries there was undoubted progress?

The professors found themselves in that situation. Their work promoted great discussions. They, from their star, were citizens of a remote era of Humanity and had lived through the eras that ordinary humans called later. And yet, they could send their messages to present-day humanity, as the journey only lasted one year. It was therefore something unique. The primitive man, through the mouth of the illustrious professors, introduced himself to the current one to say simply: "It is not true that from me to you there is progress. Humanity, on the contrary, by passing from you to me, has progressed." For the four professors,

the people of their time on Earth were a pure memory; for the people of the land, the time in which the professors lived was definitely over. It happened like with that discussion of the book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. When Alice meets the unicorn, he assures her that Alice is a fabulous being, just as Alice considers him fabulous. Unfortunately, there is no superior disinterested being who can decide whether the fabulous being is Alice or the unicorn; likewise, there is no higher being who decides whether we are a memory for the men of the first century or they a mere memory for us.

But let us limit ourselves—simple reviewers of other people's works—to reproducing the works of some of the scholars in question.

II

Here are some excerpts from Prof. Braun's report presented to the Hegelian Society in Berlin.

"Humanity," affirmed Prof. Braun, "humanity progresses. It is evident that there is progress from the man of the thirtieth century to the man of the twentieth century and from the man of the twentieth century to the man of the tenth century. But strictly speaking, it is not the progress of man, but the progress of the Idea that runs beneath him and is the reason for his deepest evolutions. The great personalities as well as the great human communities that have come to turn Humanity around are simple organs of the Idea, which is revealed in them. Each person, each epoch, is a revelation of the Idea, a revelation subject, of course, to restrictions, because it is the conditioning of the unconditioned (*Die Bedinglichkeit des Unbedigten*)."

"Everything that is real," he further added, "is rational. You just must look for its reason. It

is true that reason sometimes takes apparently absurd paths to express itself. It is true that it often seems that evolution is driven and motivated solely by some individual selfishness. But here is the cunning of the Idea, which uses the individual drivers and motives for realizing itself. When slavery was established in the mid-nineteenth century, the institution that later became widespread with such success, the states of the South of North America believed they were defending economic advantages, but they were actually a simple instrument of the Idea. It was necessary, in fact, to extend the usefulness of inorganic nature to the lower part of organic nature, so that the sovereignty of the spirit would hover over them. It was a necessary moment in the evolution of history. Just as Hegel claims when talking about human inventions, when he studies History in the sense considered normal by humans, when an invention was needed for the needs of the evolution of the Idea, the invention appeared, so it can be said that the appearance of slavery came from a need of the Idea. Gunpowder was needed, says Hegel, and here it is! Likewise, we could say: slavery was necessary: here it is!"

"The movement of history follows a course, the elementary scheme of which is that of the three dialectical moments: thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Synthesis is at the same time the thesis of a higher development. The periods of history are ordered according to the aforementioned scheme."

"The first period runs from the year 3000 to the year 2000. It is the time of absolute submission to the formal principle of order. Each individual's life program is perfectly determined. Freedom is annulled. Machines fully perform the functions of man. It is the total mastery of inorganic principles. Spiritual spontaneity is reduced to a minimum. Spiritual simplicity is absolute. The simplest

explanations, that is, scientific explanations, are given of all things.”

“The first period in the history of mankind—the North American period—is that of the sovereignty of form.”

“In opposition to this period, in the year 2000 the great turn of history began. The spirit rebels against form and tries to free itself from it. But this spirit is strictly speaking still a simple product of form. The form, by imprisoning the spirit, has created it. And the spirit, when it externalizes itself, rebels against form. We end up depending on the ghosts that we ourselves have created, it has been said. And that is what happened at that time.”

“The regulation of human activities took place by the fact of the existence of a formal principle of order, by an objective right. When the revolution became, however, subjective law was born.”

“The second period of humanity—the Germanic period—is that of the mastery of the spirit as the consciousness of subjective law.”

“The activity of the spirit is applied in this period to the exercise of what is right. This entire period is characterized by the predominance of the question of law over all other questions. Freedom lies simply in the exercise of what is right.”

“Yet this long period up to Christianity is interesting enough to warrant a more detailed analysis.”

“It begins with the simple awareness of the form of the law. The end of the exercise of freedom is freedom itself. That is, the content of freedom is its own form. In order to fill up this form, further evolution was necessary.”

“The so-called Middle Ages provides it. The end of the exercise of freedom was in the Middle Ages, certainly not an earthly end, but an ultra-earthly end. The triumph of the Church over the State signifies the progress of the evolution

of the idea on its way to complication and completion. The organ of exercise of the law, instead of being the individual in the abstract—the individual as a subject of the law—becomes the natural collectivity, the nationality.”

“And a final evolution brings to the Germanic tribes the exercise of the law to the natural individual instead of the natural collective organ.”

“The synthesis of form and matter is carried out here in the field of the law. The support of the law, the actor of the law, said the first period, is the individual in the abstract—that is, insofar as he fulfils his duty—. The support of the law, said the second period, is the particular natural collectivity. The support of the law, added the third period, is the particular individual.

“As can be seen, we have gone, in these two stages, from the pure objectivity of the law to pure subjectivity. The synthesis was given by Rome. Rome said: there is a subjective right of the natural State (Rome) which is the objective right of individuals, and a subjective right of individuals which is the objective right of the State. In the first period of the subjective law, it was purely that which implied the objective law; in the second period the objective right was that which implied the subjective right; in the third period, subjective law and objective law are constituted in a harmonious totality.”

“The time of the law was definitively completed in this synthesis; a new moment could only appear with the denial of the law. To achieve this, a new bearer of the new idea had to appear.”

Here came a long description of Greece and a beautiful analysis of its natural conditions; it was explained, for example, how the limitation of horizons implied progress from the conception of the law, which is an infinite ideal, to the conception of beauty, which is a finite ideal, and other ideas that were much applauded

on the day Professor Braun read them. He then continued, following the ideological scheme:

“The principle of law could only be denied in one way: by asking oneself about the right of the law. What is the right with which we use or suffer the law?, the Greeks asked. The right cannot be maintained if it is not based on an idea. I have the right to do something as long as the thing is right. It makes no sense to say that I have or do not have a right simply to something. You need to know if this thing is fine or not. If it’s right, I have the right to do it; if it is not, I do not. Here is an aesthetic principle introduced into the law. Thus, the right remains subordinate to beauty.”

“We now have the two principles in opposition, the principle of law and the principle of beauty. What formula will unite them? The formula that unites them is a religious formula, as it appeared in the Eastern empires. In the high religious purpose of the Eastern empires, aesthetics and the law were combined. The organization of these empires was perfect; as an immediate product of the divinity, it had all the characteristics of beauty and in this organization (organization by castes) all rights resided.”

“But this synthesis of law and beauty in religion was first and foremost the new thesis that humanity put forward. Strictly speaking, we cannot speak of religion, but of religions; every family, every tribe, has its gods, such was the principle that appeared then. And these gods are pure natural beings; the divinity is nature. Not one nature, but multiple natures. The divinity is this tree that I see, this animal, this stone. The full realization of human nature is limitless. The spirit is created as nature, the gods are seen in their natural characters...”

“This is the stage in which we find ourselves,” Prof. Braun concluded, “free from all ancient prejudices, with a soul richer than ever,

language forgotten, the unilateral conception of the law forgotten, beauty as a norm forgotten, free of all artifice, free, in short, in the fullness of our individual nature...”

Prof. Braun’s report sparked great discussions. Naturally, the people who were so accustomed to following these ideas when they went in one direction, were very surprised to hear them being applied in reverse. The comments, in general, were unfavourable, although everyone praised the philosopher’s ideological vigour.

On top of this report, Prof. Braun wrote some *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* (in a volume of more than a thousand pages) that were very popular. For more than three months they were the most fashionable book. The *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* were quickly translated into Spanish. “To complete the ideological landscape of Spain with an august Northern pine,” said the professor of Philosophy from Madrid, who wrote the prologue to the translation.

III

The illustrious economist Mr. Brown presented a report before the Society for Economic Studies in London on the evolution of the forms and instruments of production in history.

“The organization of production goes from simplicity to complication. The simplest way to produce something is to produce it with a machine; the most complicated way is to produce it with the arms and hands of man, which are obviously the most complicated machines that exist. The same goes for the means of transport; the simplest transport instruments are airplanes, trains and automobiles; the most complicated are the legs. Man, in evolving,

has gone in production, as in all other things, from the simplest to the most complicated. In the production by the most complicated means, the depersonalization of the work is otherwise avoided. In the serial production that characterized the totality of production at the beginning of history, the personality of the worker was eliminated. Today, on the other hand, the work directly produced with the hands or with instruments that do little more than establish a brief separation between the hand and the product bears the imprint of one's own personality."

"But the evolution of the instruments of production brought with it the evolution of their organization. The system of the division of labour characterized the primitive age of humanity. This system meant that an individual who regularly pressed a lever every minute got for this work, house, food, a kind of ragged ornaments called dresses, etc. Nothing was made by him alone; everything was made with very simple movements of the others as well. Of course, for those people who possessed an ideology of naïve simplicity, that was enough. But as soon as humanity began to feel the need to find in products that delicate perfume of personality that is their best perfection, the organization changed. The trust replaced the guild. The personalization of the work progressed. The guild gave a personality to its products. It is true that the individualization of work was not absolute, but progress was already very respectable. It was felt, however, that in one's own instruments it was necessary to see not the personality of others, but one's own, so as to reach the highest perfection."

"This development was considerably favoured by the abolition of the currency. Currency was, in fact, the fundamental misunderstanding."

"Currency was used to set parallels and equivalences between things, which was truly fantastic. Everything was reduced to the money 'standard', and so it turned out that a jug was the same as two hours of work, thanks to the primary idea that both things were worth the same amount of money. Today we have come to the consideration that two different things are always absolutely different. The man of the ancient centuries in his simplicity carried out an operation called barter. Barter among us today is impossible, because we have a fine perception of the delicate differences between things. Barter, in modern times, has been replaced by the double present. A has a pair of earrings and B a bracelet, and A desires the bracelet and B the earrings. The ancients made the reduction to money, and if the pair of earrings was worth—to give a simple example—the same amount of money as the bracelet, they bartered. But we moderns, who have a fine perception of differences, say: barter is impossible because between a pair of earrings and a bracelet there is no common denominator: That A makes B the present of his earrings and B makes A the present of his bracelet. Here you are in a conception perhaps a little complicated by the prehistoric men of the twentieth century AD, but perfectly clear and natural for the modern man of the twentieth century BC, having fulfilled all the needs of barter without the violence of conception that requires considering earrings and bracelets equivalent."

"Otherwise, however, among modern men little use is made of this substitute for barter; a need is considered not to be sufficiently fulfilled if it has to be fulfilled with something that is not done or discovered by oneself."

"This progress that exists in economic life is revealed even by the simple external observation of the life of modern man. Today's life is much more hectic than the life of man in the centuries

that the people of the Earth call modern and that for us are the oldest. The life of man in the twenty-first century AD, for example, was usually spent sitting. The machines did their job. The man of the twenty-first century, when he woke up, sat in an elevator, then sat in a car that took him to a factory, then sat in front of a machine that worked for him, etc. This does not mean that the man of the twenty-first century did not believe that he led a very hectic life, but, in fact, it was the agitation of machines and not that of man; strictly speaking, man has never lived a simpler life than in this century and the following ones."

When the report reached this point, all the honourable members of the Economics Society took it as an insult. They tolerated everything. They even tolerated a report by another illustrious member stating that "the present economic system was based on the plundering of the poor rich." But what they could not tolerate is that it was said that modern man on earth did not live a much more hectic life than the old one. That was an intolerable insult. Because in those days men granted to past ages all kinds of superiorities, unless life was more hectic than theirs. It was the time of the professionals of agitation.

IV

The report of the Oberregierungsrat Dr. Mendelsohn dealt with "Selection and its progress." Professor Mendelsohn's thesis was that the means of selection had improved since the earliest times (which we must not forget are the last) of Humanity. Like all the people of his country, Professor Mendelsohn had the faculty of generalizing and reasoning with extraordinary acuity. He had been very passionate about Eugenics. This probably

explains some of his concerns. The illustrious professor said:

"Nature not only makes the fittest triumph, but day by day makes the measure of aptitude finer and more rigorous. In primitive times, the play of a series of impure elements that were mixed with it made the selection weak. There was the law that protected the weak; there was medicine that protected the weak; there was hygiene that protected the weak; there was the disgusting humanitarian feeling that protected the weak. All this made selection almost impossible. If a being was inferior, hygiene and medicine prevented him from gradually consuming himself, the Law prevented him from succumbing in struggle with other stronger natures; the humanitarian feeling sustained him in life, and even put at his service those stronger natures, which in advanced times would have been precisely one of the most effective elements of selection. If this state of affairs had lasted for a long time, it is certain that Humanity would have disappeared. This kind of perpetuation of the inept was not possible, this reverse selection."

"Fortunately for the moderns, none of these forces act. The weak are killed by diseases or by their fellows and only strong natures are preserved for as long as they are strong."

"Today's man is the super-man that Nietzsche envisioned at the end of the twentieth century: a magnificent natural instrument carrying within himself all the force that nature empowered to an insurmountable degree gives and more perfected day by day."

V

Finally, the sociologist M. P. Mendel wrote a book on *The Ideological Mechanism in Modern Societies*, which was awarded a prize

by the Institut de France. M. Mendel, who was influenced by Auguste Comte, divided humanity into three periods: scientific period, metaphysical period, religious period. Each of these stages, he claimed, supposes and surpasses the previous one. Reproducing long fragments of the book would be inappropriate. We will reproduce some significant points.

“The scientific period,” said M. Mendel, “is characterized by a truly crude materialism. The world is purely material, the relationships that exist between its elements are fixed and very simple relationships. The existence of the human soul and the spiritual element in nature is unknown.”

“The metaphysical stage begins a transformation; the soul is discovered, and it is a question of interpreting nature in terms of it. The last elements of the universe, it is claimed, have something of a spiritual foundation. But this spiritualism still keeps traces of the first purely scientific stage. One wants to explain reality metaphysically by the same procedures, although not with the same elements. Finally, the religious stage completes the course of History. A fruitful spiritualism guides our knowledge of nature. The world is absolutely spiritualized. The effects of the spiritual powers on him are discovered. No materialist prejudice falsifies any immediate data of consciousness. Full reality in all its complication and all its spirituality.”

On the category of causality, Professor Mendel wrote very apt words such as these:

“At first, the principle of function was applied to the relations between phenomena. It means that between two phenomena there was no other relationship but a completely external relationship. The man of science, that is, primitive man, said that A was the cause of B, but his only representation at this point was that A regularly followed B.”

“Then, when the metaphysical stage came, the concept of cause was finely developed. When one saw that a stone thrown at a windowpane broke this glass, it was said that the blow was the cause of the brittleness, and one imagined the stone forcing the glass to break. In the first period it had been said: the blow of the stone is followed by the breaking of the glass. In the second it was said: stone breaks glass. In the metaphysical period, when the stone breaks the glass, one sees in the stone a force analogous to the human muscular effort in throwing the stone. The hand throws the stone, the stone breaks the glass, they are two absolutely analogous moments. The cause is linked to the representation of effort in both cases.”

“Finally, came the last stage, the religious stage. In it, this simplicity vanishes. When an event occurs in nature, its cause is not unique or merely material, but the material cause is purely occasional. Strictly speaking, spiritual powers produce the fact by making use of material causes.”

“The mentality of the men whom people call primitive,” he added elsewhere, “is infinitely more complicated than that of men they call civilized. How can we compare, for example, the idea of cause to the idea of omen? What poverty in the first! What a wonderful complication in the second! How can a man accustomed to purely scientific reasoning conceive the idea of a totem? A tribe bears the name of an animal, and it is therefore necessary to respect all the animals of that name if you do not want to cause great misfortune. Is it there something more complicated?”

“A man is dead because a stone has fallen on him. The vulgar man of the twentieth century AD will say that the cause of death is the stone. What superficiality! The man who among ordinary humans is called primitive will see the

stone as an instrument of a spiritual power that has wanted to take revenge or punish him. For one, all deaths are natural; on the other hand, all deaths are supernatural. To rise to the latter conception is certainly not the work of any superficial brain."

Professor Mendel followed in this same line of reasoning talking about the complications of the idea of taboo, divination, the signs provided by dreams, etc. And he affirmed emphatically that no man of the thirtieth century, and even less of the twentieth century, was capable of understanding any reasoning like the ones which those the ignorant called savages used to explain any event.

"The fact is that," he concluded, "the man of the thirtieth or twentieth century lacked that admirable intuition of the whole, that wonderful instinct which makes us discover in natural and even material things the presence and efficacy of the supernatural powers which are intimately united with the world of our nature."

VI

It has been noted of Bernard Shaw that his paradoxes would be even more brilliant if he did not want to explain their mechanism to us in the prologues of his dramas. Bernard Shaw shows the trick, it has been said.

It is quite possible that teaching the trick considerably diminishes the aesthetic effect of things. But, on the other hand, it serves to clarify them. One can call the man that shows the trick a bad artist, but one must recognize a certain taste for the truth all clean of rhetorical details.

Hoping that I am considered a friend of the truth rather than of paradox, although I am in love with both, I will allow myself to show

the trick of this article, explaining what my intention is. It is a fact that in the evolution of Humanity some things have been obtained; in a certain order of ideas, some progress has been made. But it is a fact that to obtain this progress we have had to sacrifice and allow many other things to be destroyed. It is logical and natural that we think that the ones we have saved are the most important.

But what would a man say if he lived history the other way around? Do we have the right to suppose that he would agree with us, or would he rather find that the important things are those that we have been losing, that for him would be the ones that he would have gained?

One can see that the line of reasoning of those who defend the existence of profound progress in human history can often be easily turned upside down.

Two beings who live in opposite directions of time will probably believe that they are both progressing. The solution would be given by a third being who lived above the two and who understood all the value of the reasoning of the two. But since this being is not easy to conceive, we find ourselves in great difficulty.

You will tell me, of course, that it is also difficult to conceive of the possibility of the journey that I propose, to which I will reply that what is difficult to conceive is the possibility of realization, but that theoretically the possibility is perfect. And why not give a chance to argue to the being, for now imaginary, to make the singular journey that I propose?

Earlier I have spoken of that extraordinary book of philosophy called *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, where the author, acting in perfect fairness, gives the unicorn the means of arguing his assertion that the imaginary being is Alice and not him. In this discussion, of course, they do not understand each other. But there comes

a time when a possibility of resolution begins. The unicorn proposes to Alice:

“Let’s play and play! I will believe that you are a real being on condition that you believe that I am a real being.”

Likewise, our two men, the one who has followed history in the normal sense and the one who has followed it in the opposite direction to the normal, could perhaps agree by proposing to each other:

“If you accept my progress, I will accept your progress.”

It would be a perfectly admissible arbitration formula for both.

Although the ideal formula would be this:

—There is a certain progress going forward in history as there is a certain progress going back in history. But both lines of progress are secondary to the fundamental unity of human nature.