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Peter K. J. Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780-1830*, SUNY Press, 2013, 253 pp., \$26.95 US (pbk), ISBN 9781438446424.

Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy is a fascinating study of racism and Eurocentrism in eighteenth century works on history of philosophy, with a focus on Immanuel Kant and G.W.F Hegel, two of the most canonical modern philosophers. It is no revelation that modern academic philosophy does not indulge the questions about the racial prejudices of its key figures. The proponents of the status quo complain that such concerns are *ad hominem*, and philosophers' bigoted beliefs and decisions based on them are irrelevant to the logical coherence and soundness of their philosophical views. Scholars at the other end of the spectrum have argued that the insulationist approach to philosophy is based on a false dichotomy and that our beliefs, scientific and mundane, hang together. If a philosopher scales theoretical heights but fails in delivering himself from bigotry and bias in his everyday beliefs, he suffers from a false consciousness. His philosophical work is at best unstable and at worst ideological. Peter Park does not eschew this tension and calls attention to the racist views of two of the most entrenched and influential modern philosophers. He focuses on their views of the history of philosophy and especially on their accounts of the origins of philosophy. He shows that Kant and Hegel both claim that philosophy originates in Greece and whatever was around before was not philosophy, and moreover philosophy can only be carried out by the white Europeans (see Chapters 4 and 6).

The work has a preface, an introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion. In the introduction, Park argues that earlier in the modern tradition, the question of the origin of philosophy was treated more inclusively. Historians of philosophy included Jewish, Persian, and Egyptian figures as early philosophers. However, in the 1780s, they began to exclude Africans and Asians. Park ascribes the responsibility for the exclusionary trend to Kant and Kantians, especially Christoph Meiners (1747-1810). Meiners's detailed and systematic rejection of non-European origins of philosophy is apparently itself grounded in Kant's own rejection of such origins. Park develops an account of the Kantian school of the history of philosophy in Chapter 1 and discusses Kant's own views in Chapter 4. In the latter, he also provides evidence that Kant's anthropological writings were racist and argues effectively that this racism influenced and was influenced by Meiners's views. Some Hegelians, Park shows in Chapter 5, rejected the exclusionary view, but Hegel himself sided with Meiners and adopted the Kantian exclusionary thesis and the corollary theory of race (150). In Chapter 6,

Park demonstrates that Hegel systematically rejected non-European origins of philosophy and articulated a theory of race as the ground of this rejection (114-115).

In Chapter 7, Park traces Hegel's choice of an exclusionary account of the origins of philosophy and the corollary theory of race (which denied Africans and Asians the capacity for freedom and therefore philosophy) to his concern with the charge of pantheism levied against him by Lutheran theologians, especially August Tholuck (1799-1877). The latter engaged in a comparative approach to history of philosophy as against Kant and Hegel (and their disciples) who approached the history of philosophy from within their philosophical systems. In Chapters 2 and 3, Park examines two other important eighteenth century comparativists, Joseph-Marie de Gérando (1772-1842) and Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829). According to Park, "Schlegel experienced philosophy as an education and passage out of philosophy whereas de Gérando experienced it as a confirmation of the experimental philosophy as best for state and society" (57). Park contrasts the critical comparativist approaches of de Gérando and Schlegel with Tholuck's polemic rendition (148). The latter opted for a Pietist comparativism in which he steered between Manicheanism and pantheism by asserting the unity of God and the human source of evil (138-139). All eastern and western philosophies, according to Tholuck, are pantheistic and Hegel's philosophy is no exception. Park thinks that Hegel's racism and exclusionary theory of the origin of philosophy were parts of an effort to resist the charge of pantheism and therefore atheism (of the sort problematized by Lutheran Pietists like Tholuck). "One of the ways in which he resisted was to write Africa and Asia out of the history of philosophy" (148).

The reader cannot help but be impressed by Park's clear exposition and modest scholarship. For example, he situates his significant contributions in the context of relevant research by contemporary scholars including Robert Bernasconi, Wilhelm Halbfass, and Richard King and offers his views as refinements of their theses and arguments. Because of this display of scholarly professionalism, one almost forgives Park's restriction of the importance of the racist commitments of Kant and Hegel to their accounts of the history of philosophy. Hopefully, he will work out the implications of those commitments for other aspects of their systems, especially their moral theories. However, even within the scope of the history of philosophy, Park remains focused on the origins of philosophy and overlooks the paucity of the consideration of non-European philosophers who contributed to the development of European philosophy. I am thinking of the medieval Muslim, Jewish, and Christian philosophers from the Near East and North Africa. Why are they conspicuously absent or played down even in the accounts which celebrate the non-European origins of philosophy? Here and in relation to the adverse reactions to the non-European origins of philosophy, Park could have engaged the thesis of Orientalism advanced by the late Edward Said. The eighteenth century concerns with the view that philosophy is a European phenomenon (or has been passed on to be the exclusive vocation of the Europeans), and the dominance of such views in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, confirms and is in turn explained by Said's verdict that the European academy was enlisted in the European colonial project and actively underrated the cultures of colonized territories to justify their subjugation.¹

Park's view can also benefit from the recent critiques of the understanding of the nature of philosophy by the ancient Greeks. For example, Pierre Hadot's famous challenge to the historians of philosophy who read the Greeks as professing a notion of philosophy on par

¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 3 and 14-15.

with modern academic philosophy is especially instructive.² The idea that for the ancients philosophy was primarily a way of life can be useful in aligning ancient philosophy with Asian and African wisdom traditions.³ Also this approach sheds light on the emergence of academic philosophy in medieval universities, a consideration which Park leaves unexamined.⁴ Finally, through the Hadotian perspective, we can understand some of the reasons for the marginalization of Islamic and Jewish philosophy in the transition away from the paradigm of philosophy as a way of life to that of academic philosophy as “the systematic explanation of the whole of reality.”⁵

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² Hadot writes: “historians of philosophy pay little attention to the fact that ancient philosophy was, first and foremost, a way of life. They consider philosophy as, above all, philosophical discourse” [“Philosophy as a Way of Life” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase and ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 269]. In his later work, Michel Foucault appropriates Hadot’s approach to Greek philosophy. See Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, Vols. 1-3, trans. Robert Hurley (NY: Vintage, 1978-86) and his 1980-82 lectures, translated as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, trans. Graham Burchell (NY: Picador, 2006). Other recent philosophers who adopt the general Hadotian approach include Alexander Nehamas in *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998) and John M. Cooper in *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). See also *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancient and Modern – Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot*, edited by Michael Chase, Stephen Clark and Michael McGhee (Oxford: Wiley and Blackwell, 2013). I develop a Hadotian critique of the scholarship on the Islamic reception of Greek philosophy in the first chapter of my *Reason Unbound: On Spiritual Practice in Islamic Peripatetic Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011).

³ Hadot resists this view and maintains the originality of the Greeks [*What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 180-88]. His arguments, among other flaws, do not take into consideration ancient Persian and Indian texts and traditions.

⁴ See my article, “Prophetic Philosophy as a Way of Life: On Imagination and Religious Law in Abrahamic Peripateticism,” forthcoming in a special issue of *Maghreb Review* (June 2015) dedicated to current research in Islamic philosophy.

⁵ Hadot, “Philosophy as a Way of Life,” 267. It should be kept in mind that Hadot does not give much credence to the syntheses of ancient philosophy and Abrahamic religions and considers them “confused” (270). For a rectification of this flaw in Hadot’s account, refer to my forthcoming article “Prophetic Philosophy as a Way of Life.”

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