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**THE QUEST FOR A GLOBAL AGE OF REASON.
PART I: ASIA, AFRICA, THE GREEKS,
AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT ROOTS**

ABSTRACT

This paper will contend that we, in the first quarter of the 21st century, need an enhanced Age of Reason based on global epistemology. One reason to legitimize such a call for more intellectual enlightenment is the lack of required information on non-European philosophy in today's reading lists at European and North American universities. Hence, the present-day Academy contributes to the scarcity of knowledge about the world's global history of ideas outside one's ethnocentric sphere. The question is whether we genuinely want to rethink parts of the "Colonial Canon" and its main narratives of the past.

This article argues that we, if we truly desire, might create "a better Enlightenment." Firstly, by raising the general knowledge level concerning the philosophies of the Global South. Thus, this text includes examples from the global enlightenments in China, Mughal India, Arabic-writing countries, and Indigenous North America—all preceding and influencing the European Enlightenment. Secondly, we can rebuild by rediscovering the Enlightenment ideals within the historiography of the "hidden enlightenment" of Europe's and North America's past. In Part I, of two parts of this paper, a comparative methodology will be outlined. In addition, examples will be given from the history of ideas in India and China to argue that we need to study how these regions influenced the European history of ideas in the 16th and 17th centuries. Finally, towards the end of this text, a re-reading of the contributions from Egypt and Greece aspires to give a more global and complex context for Western Europe's so-called Age of Reason.

Keywords: Enlightenment, global intellectual history, history of ideas, global knowledge, universalism, nationalism, decolonizing.

I. INTRODUCTION: AIM, METHOD, INDIA, AND CHINA

Man is an absurd animal—yea, I will ever maintain it—in his vices, dreadful—in his few virtues, silly—religious without devotion—philosophy without wisdom—the divine passion (as it is called) love too oft without affection—and anger without cause—friendship without reason—hate without reflection—knowledge (like Ashley’s punch in small quantities) without judgement—and wit without discretion.

Ignatius Sancho (1729–1780), letter to John Meheux, August 7, 1777¹

To discuss whether we “need a new enlightenment for the twenty-first century,” we need to scrutinize the roots of the core values of reason, science, humanism, and progress. Likewise, to consider the aims of the future, we need to grasp the goals of the past. To do all this, we—scholars, scientists, philosophers, and intellectuals—need to know more about from where our philosophical and scientific traditions stem.

One case in point is the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). Not unlike several of the world’s peoples in 2021, who have experienced an unprecedented global pandemic, extreme weather in an era of climate change, and literal attacks on democratic institutions, Hobbes was no stranger to turbulence. After all, he wrote his classic *Leviathan* (1651) towards the end of England’s Civil War, which heralded a new beginning and, consequently, the Age of the Enlightenment as we now generally define it. Tellingly, Hobbes wrote that wars hinder the “Culture of the Earth;” these conflicts impede humans from conquering arts, letters, and having peaceful societies. Hence, such fearful times make “the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”²

Less known today is how Hobbes described the origins of philosophy, a field of thought he defined as “Knowledge acquired by Reasoning.”³ In his understanding, philosophical thinking was no European, nor Greek invention. Instead, Hobbes argues, philosophy first flourished in the cities in Asia and Africa, where the earliest human commonwealths and, hence, “leisure” arose. Not until significantly later did philosophy spread to the ancient Greeks, he contends. In chapter 46, including Hobbes’ arguments against a state of war and for peaceful societies, he writes on the origins of philosophy:

“*Leisure* is the mother of *Philosophy*; and *Common-wealth*, the mother of *Peace*, and *Leisure*: Where first were great and flourishing *Cities*, there was first the study of *Philosophy*. The *Gymnosophists* of *India*, the

¹ Sancho, I. 2015. *Letters of the Late Ignatius, an African*. Carretta, V. (Ed.). Toronto: Broadway Editions, 78. Redated, see p. 80, note 2.

² Hobbes, T. 1968. *Leviathan*. London: Pelican Books, 186.

³ *Ibid.*, 682.

Magi of Persia, and the Priests of Chaldæa and Egypt, are counted the most ancient Philosophers; and those Countreys were the most ancient of Kingdomes."⁴

Thus, Hobbes regarded India, Persia, Chaldea (roughly Mesopotamia, today within the borders of the country known as Iraq), and Kemet (Egypt) as the countries which first developed philosophy, a discipline which, he claimed, is based upon leisure and peace—at least some kind of peace of mind.

Reading this, a typical 21st-century reader might ask: But what about the Greeks? Hobbes answers that question as well, in his following sentence, pointing to the state of wars among the people of what today is known as Europe:

“Philosophy was not risen to the Græcians [Greeks], and other people of the West, whose Common-wealths (no greater perhaps then Lucca, or Geneva) had never Peace, but when their fears of one another were equal; nor the Leasure to observe any thing but one another.”

Just after years of wars, and after the build-up of larger cities, did seven men of Greece get the reputation of being wise: some for their thoughts, “others for the learning of the *Chaldæans* and *Egyptians*, which was *Astronomy*, and *Geometry*. But we hear not yet of any *Schools of Philosophy*.”⁵ The Greek schools of philosophy developed late, had power shortly, but, at last, spread over Europe “and the best part of Afrique,” Hobbes writes.⁶

Such an understanding of the history of philosophy is no longer mainstream, Peter K. J. Park explains in his *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy. Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1830* (2013), a winner of the 2016 Frantz Fanon Prize for the Outstanding Book in Caribbean Thought. As Park demonstrates, contributions to philosophy by non-Europeans and women were eradicated from the new European definition of philosophy that gradually, but relatively quickly, evolved with the merging of the Kantian and Hegelian traditions from the early 19th century onwards.⁷

Hence, in general, the universities in Europe and North America, and most of the universities of the world so far in the 21st century, do not have basic introductions to the ancient, or more recent, philosophy written in Africa (the scripts Hieratic and Demotic in Kemet (Egypt) and Nubia,⁸ Ge’ez in Ethio-

⁴ *Ibid.*, 684.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 685.

⁷ Park, P. K. J. 2013. *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1830*. New York: State University of New York Press.

⁸ Wiredu, K. A. (Ed.). 2004. *A Companion to African Philosophy*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

pia,⁹ Arabic in the Mali region, Nigeria, North African region, etc.¹⁰), in Asia (Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Korean, Persian, Arabic, etc.) or Mesoamerica (Nahua, Maya, etc.).¹¹

Given the current curriculum and reading lists, how can philosophy as a discipline then promote “international dialogue”? Is today’s philosophy field more of an obstacle than a solution to dialogue and universalism in the 21st century? For this issue, *Dialogue and Universalism* has raised this vital question: “Do we need a new enlightenment for the twenty-first century?” The journal then asks whether “similar Enlightenment periods can be regarded as preceding the 17th–18th century one,” for example, in China, India, and Arab-majority countries.

If one should indicate a short answer, only to mention China and India, including some of their influence on the European Enlightenment, one could, for example, delve into the unique *The Great Canon of the Yongle Era* (永樂大典) during the Ming Dynasty. Created in China from 1403 until 1408 by more than 2,100 scholars at the Hanlin Academy in Nanjing, this megalomaniac work was the world’s most voluminous encyclopedia until Wikipedia surpassed it in 2007. The lexicon drew information from more than 8,000 texts, covering everything from art, geology, history, science, and engineering to philosophy. The encyclopedia made up some 11,095 volumes—half of them lost during the Anglo-French invasion of Beijing in 1860; only four hundred are extant today—917,000 pages, and the scholars wrote over 370 million Chinese characters, equivalent of about a quarter of a billion English words.¹² Emperor Yongle (1360–1424) commissioned this massive enterprise after he secured the throne. Following up on this knowledge project, the emperor also sent the admiral Zheng He (1371–1435) and a fleet of 27,000 men and women to India, the Arabian Peninsula (including Mecca, for Zheng He was Muslim), and East Africa. Zheng He’s principal ships under these seven “treasure voyages” were more than three times the size of Columbus’s “Santa Maria.” During the fifth voyage, around 1418, the Chinese explorers reached Mogadishu and Barawa in southern Somalia, and they brought back giraffes from Malindi (Kenya), as reported by Fei Xin (c. 1385–1436).¹³ By chance, the Venetian monk and cartographer Fra Mauro’s *Mappa Mundi* (1459), which outlines the main coastlines of Africa,

⁹ Herbjørnsrud, D. 2017. “The African Enlightenment.” *Aeon*; <https://aeon.co/essays/yacob-and-amo-africas-precursors-to-locke-hume-and-kant>

¹⁰ Ahmed Baba Institute. 1995–98. *Fihris makhtutat markaz Ahmad Baba li’l-tawthiq wa’l buhuth al-tarikhiyya bi Tinbuku / Handlist of manuscripts in the Centre de Documentation et de Rechercher Historiques Ahmed Baba*. 5 Vols. London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation.

¹¹ Sahagún, F. B. 1969 (c. 1540–1585). *General History of the Things of New Spain. Book 6. Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy*. Dibble, C. E., A. J. O. Anderson (Trans.). Santa Fe, NM: The School of American Research.

¹² Foot, S., C. F. Robinson (Eds.). 2012. *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*. Vol. 2: 400–1400. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 42.

¹³ Hsin Fei. 1996. *Hsing-ch’a-sheng-lan: The Overall Survey of the Star Raft*. Ptak, R. (Ed.). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

possibly refers to these voyages. His map text states that a multi masted Chinese “junk” (*Zonchi*) was in the southern region of Africa “around 1420,” and Mauro illustrates the claim with a drawing of a titanic ship close to “Cape Diab.”¹⁴ Also, the Korean “Gangnido” world map from 1402, by Yi Hoe and Kwon Kun, outlines both Africa and the coasts of Western Europe. In this pre-Columbian “Pax Mongolica” era, trade was a more important currency than occupation and colonialism.



Figure 1: *The world map (1459) by the Venetian geographer Fra Mauro. South and Africa are at the top, north at the bottom. The Mercator projection (1569) dramatically altered the world maps’ orientation and the sizes of the continents. Ill.: Wikicommons*

The voyages also brought knowledge back to China. In the aftermath of these encyclopedic and earthly travels, the “school of Heart” (心學) philosopher Wang Yangming (Wang Shouren, 1472–1529) began to advocate individualistic

¹⁴ Falchetta, P. 2006. *Fra Mauro's World Map: With a Commentary and Translations of the Inscriptions*. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers.

approaches to the Classics. He argued in an egalitarian way that all humans have “innate knowledge” (*liangzhi*) of right and wrong. Thus, the leading thinker of the off-shoot Taizhou branch and son of a salt worker, Wang Gen, declared that “the streets are full of sages!”¹⁵

Such was the background for the even more revolutionary philosopher Li Zhi (1527–1602), who also happened to be a Muslim Chinese. He vehemently challenged the authorities, fought for the rights of minorities, championed individual judgment, and criticized the misuse of Ruism (儒, from “scholar,” today often named “Confucian”) thinking within the bureaucracy. Li Zhi became the most read philosopher in China of his day, and he influenced classic dramatists like Tang Xianxu (1550–1616) and his complex play *The Peony Pavillion* (*Mudan ting*, 1598) and possibly the vernacular and massive novel *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (*Jin Ping Mei*, MS 1596, published in 1610), which centers women characters and their experiences.¹⁶ In “A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women are too Shortsighted to Understand the Dao,” the radical Li Zhi declared equality between the sexes morally and intellectually, citing vital Chinese females throughout history, contending that it was male misogyny that held them back.¹⁷ Living up to his ideals, Li Zhi entered lengthy philosophical correspondence with the female thinker Mei Danran, whom he declared to be one of the “exceptional” philosophical women he discussed with: “They are stalwarts [*zhangfu*, a masculine-inflected word] who have transcended this world.”¹⁸ In 1599, he met the Jesuit Matteo Ricci, who in his chronicle reported that Li Zhi gave up his academic position and “wrote books against the leaders of the literati.”¹⁹ Ricci and other Jesuits started to spread the ideas of Chinese philosophy and society to Europe, which made the French economist Francois Quesnay (1694–1774), named by his followers as “Confucius of Europe,” argue for the introduction of Chinese meritocracy instead of the European tradition of aristocracy.²⁰

Regarding India, one could also answer the question from the journal by drawing attention to the intellectual revolution during the Mughal Era in India from the mid-16th century: The Muslim Mughal ruler Akbar the Great (1542–1605) was a patron of arts and libraries, an inquiring skeptic who believed in

¹⁵ Handler-Spitz, R., P. C. Lee, H. Saussy. 2016. “Introduction.” In: Li Zhi. *A Book to Burn and A Book to Keep (Hidden)*. New York: Columbia University Press, xxi.

¹⁶ *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin Ping Mei*. 1993. Roy, D. T. (Trans.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁷ Li Zhi. 2016. *A Book to Burn and A Book to Keep (Hidden)*. New York: Columbia University Press, especially “A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women are too Shortsighted to Understand the Dao,” 30–33.

¹⁸ Li Zhi. 2016, op. cit. (“To Zhou Youshan”), 251–252.

¹⁹ Ricci, M. 1953. *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci, 1583–1610*. New York, Random House, 401.

²⁰ Jacobsen, SG. 2013. “Chinese Influences or Images? Fluctuating Histories of How Enlightenment Europe Read China.” *Journal of World History*, 24 (3).

“the pursuit of reason” over “reliance on tradition,” telling his liberal Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian scholar Abul Fazl (1551–1602): “The pursuit of reason (*aql*) and rejection of traditionalism (*taqlid*) are so brilliantly patent as to be above the need of argument.”²¹ Hence, every Thursday from 1578 onwards, Akbar invited philosophers and representatives of different religions—and the 2,000-year-old non-religious, rational, and atheist Carvaka/Lokayata schools—to his new “House of Worship” (*Ibadat Khana*) in Fatehpur Sikri. In this setting, where religious and non-theistic intellectuals met to discuss their views of the world and the afterlife, Akbar initiated a new, tolerant, syncretic religion, known as “God’s religion,” *Din-i Ilahī*, in 1582. Among the attendants at Akbar’s court discussions were, like in China, Catholic Jesuits: Ridolfo Aquaviva and Antonio Monserrate eagerly reported home to Europe about this “atheist” emperor.²²

In *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450–1700* (2011), Jonardon Ganeri demonstrates how the “new reason” (Navya Nyāya) philosophers—like the reason-based metaphysician Jayarama Nyayapancanana and the cosmopolitan Yasovijaya Gani (1624–1688)—started to flourish in Varanasi and the Bengal town of Navadvipa (Nadia) from the early 17th century. They were building upon the work by the Mithila philosophers, like Gangesa, of the 14–15th centuries and a rebirth of the Vaisesika atomism of the ancient thinker Kanada (“atom-eater,” possibly 4th–2nd BCE); all creating an “Indian Renaissance.” In addition, the rational and inquiring Indian philosophers, belonging to numerous traditions, had the support of the enlightened Dara Shukoh (1615–1659), the eldest son of Shah Jahan. The Muslim Shukoh assembled a team of pandits to render from Sanskrit into Persian texts like the *Upanishads*, the world’s first translation of these classics, to which he wrote a Preface based on “religious cosmopolitanism.” He followed the Sufi doctrine *wahdat al-wujud* (“Unity of Being”) and argued that the Indian *Upanishads* are “in conformity with the holy Qur’ān and even a commentary thereon.”²³ When the French Abraham Anquetil-Duperron made the first European translation of the *Upanishads* in the late 18th century, he translated it from Shukoh’s Persian version since no scholars in Europe mastered Sanskrit at that time.²⁴

In the heydays of the Indian Enlightenment of the 17th century, *le libertin érudit* Francois Bernier (1620–1688), a protégé of Pierre Gassendi, left France in 1656 to become the court physician of Shukoh and then of Aurangzeb. He

²¹ Quoted in: Ali, A. M. 1996. “The Evolution of the Perception of India: Akbar and Abu’l Fazl.” *Social Scientist*, 24 (1–3), 84. Refers to Abu’l Fazl, A’in-i Akbari, Naval Kishore, Lucknow, 1892, III, 179.

²² Herbjørnsrud, D. June 24, 2020. “India’s Atheist Influence on Europe, China, and Science.” *Blog of the American Philosophical Association (APA)*; <http://blog.apaonline.org/2020/06/24/indias-atheist-influence-on-europe-china-and-science/>

²³ Quoted in Ganeri, J. 2011. *The Lost Age of Reason. Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450–1700*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 24–25.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

introduced Descartes to the Indian intellectuals in the 1660s, while he reported and exported Indian ideas back to a Europe ripe for Enlightenment. As Ganeri summarizes this vital Indian Age of Reason and its dialogue with “the West:”

“With Gassendi’s work rendered in Persian even before it was properly available in French, and the monistic pantheism of the Upanisads and Dara Shukoh already in France and England years before Spinoza’s *Ethics* were published, what more dramatic evidence could there be of intellectual globalization in the 1660s.”²⁵

In addition to Emperor Yongle’s attempts at globalization and the Indian Age of Reason, there were other “Enlightenments” and enlightened thinkers in the 16th–17th centuries. For example, in Damascus/Cairo (the female Sufi philosopher Aisha Al-Ba’uniyya, d. 1517),²⁶ Timbuktu (philosopher Ahmed Baba, b. 1556),²⁷ Isfahan (Safavid dynasty: philosopher Sadr al-Din Muhammad Shiraz/Mulla Sadra, b. 1571),²⁸ Axum (the rational Ethiopian philosophers Zera Yacob, b. c. 1600, and his student Walda Heywat),²⁹ Constantinople (the polymath encyclopedist Ḥājjī Khalīfa/Katip Celebi, b. 1609), and Tenochtitlan/Mexico City (female philosopher Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz, b. 1648).³⁰

As indicated in the above paragraphs, the history of ideas seldom turns out to be what we are taught to believe; or what we, in general, are teaching new generations of students now in the early 21st century. Hence, academics do not only struggle to understand “others;” we are hardly trained to know “ourselves.” Certain natural causes for this situation have gradually developed during the 19th and 20th centuries, such as methodological nationalism,³¹ methodological Eurocentrism,³² and intellectual colonialism. The systematic, but often unconsciously, implementation of such ideologies erases the noteworthiness of the epistemologies of the Global South and the non-Canonical contributions in the Global North. The result is what the sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos has

²⁵ Ibid., 16.

²⁶ Al-Ba’uniyyah, A. 2016. *The Principles of Sufism*. Homerin, Th. E. (Trans.). New York: New York University Press.

²⁷ Kane, O. O. 2016. *Beyond Timbuktu. An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 99–105.

²⁸ Mulla Sadra. 2003. *The Elixir of the Gnostics: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press.

²⁹ Sumner, C. 1976. *Ethiopian Philosophy. The Treatise of Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat: Text and Authorship* (Vol. II). Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.

³⁰ Sor Juana. 2014. *Sor Juana Inés De La Cruz. Selected Works*. Grossman, E. (Trans.). New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

³¹ Martins. H. 1974. “Time and Theory in Sociology.” In: *Approaches to Sociology*. Rex, J. (Ed.). London: Routledge, 276.

³² Kerner, I. 2018. “Beyond Eurocentrism: Trajectories towards a Renewed Political and Social Theory.” *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 44 (5), 550–570.

termed “epistemicide,” which again spurs “cognitive injustice.”³³ As leading US historian William H. McNeill admitted when he, in 1991, published a new and highly self-critical Introduction to his modern classic and best-selling *The Rise of the West. A History of the Human Community* (1963): “It follows that my vision of the world’s past can be dismissed as being no more than a rationalization of American hegemony ...”³⁴

McNeill underscored that he and all reviewers in the 1960s were “entirely unaware of the way in which my method of making sense of world history conformed to the temporary world experience of the United States;” the symbiosis operated “at a sub-conscious level for all concerned.” It is a similar “sub-conscious” challenge this paper will try to demonstrate when it comes to the standard narratives of the European Enlightenment, as exemplified with Steven Pinker’s *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (2018).

After all, as Samuel P. Huntington pointed out five years after McNeill’s self-scrutiny, it was not Enlightenment philosophers, nor their ideals, who secured the wealth, power, and relative stability in Western Europe and North America, but war, looting, and brutal imperialism: “The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion [...] but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do.”³⁵

This paper will prioritize those global developments that seem most relevant to the traditional understanding of the European “Enlightenment” and applicable to those who seek ideals for a more global Age of Reason in the 2020s and beyond. First, the text will describe some of the complexity (*internal context*)³⁶ of the European Enlightenment and the untold narratives of, and perspectives on, its contributors. Secondly, it will attempt to depict some hidden *connections* (*external context*) across oceans and boundaries, from “the global enlightenments” to “the European Enlightenment.” Hence, this article’s methodology is based principally on primary sources and the *comparative method of complexity, connection, and comparison* outlined in the paper “Beyond Decolonization: Global Intellectual History and the Reconstruction of a Comparative Method.”³⁷

³³ Santos, B. S. 2014. *Epistemologies of the South. Justice Against Epistemicide*. London: Routledge.

³⁴ Neill, W. H. 1991. *The Rise of the West. A History of the Human Community. With a Retrospective essay*. London: The University of Chicago Press, xvi.

³⁵ Huntington, S. P. 1997. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. London: Simon & Schuster, 51.

³⁶ Herbjørnsrud, D. 2021. “Beyond Decolonization: Global Intellectual History and the Reconstruction of a Comparative Method.” *Global Intellectual History*, 6 (5), 614–640; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2019.1616310>

³⁷ Ibid.

2. BACKGROUND: THE EGYPTIANS AND THE GREEKS

In contrast to the rather Eurocentric version given by Pinker in his *Enlightenment Now* (2018), we have, for example, Seb Falk's *The Light Ages: The Surprising Story of Medieval Science* (2020), which tells a different story. Rather than repeating the argument that "Europe" invented the scientific and humanistic ideals in the 18th century, Falk, a historian at the University of Cambridge, covers Muslim, Christian, Arab, Persian, and Jewish scholars in the preceding millennium, and concludes: "The medieval reality, however, is a Light Age of scientific interest and inquiry."³⁸

Thus, a new generation of scholars challenges the traditional definitions of "medieval," "the Dark Ages," and "the Enlightenment." In this current context, here are some questions for us in the early 2020s: If there ever was an actual Age of Enlightenment (French: *Siècle des Lumières*) based on reason, science, and humanism, why did it end? Moreover, granting that the Enlightenment, or the "Age of Reason," ended in 1793 with the Reign of Terror, or with the despot Napoleon coronating himself in 1804 after reinstating slavery in Haiti and effectively murdering the enlightened leader of the Haitian Revolution, Toussaint L'Ouverture (1743–1803), let us consider this question: What should we name the era afterward, which saw the unfolding of imperialism, colonialism, two world wars, the Holocaust, Hiroshima-Nagasaki, hot and cold wars, ethnic cleansings, terror, and excessive unequal treatment of "the wretched of the earth" and the subalterns? The Dark Ages? The Un-Enlightenment?

After all, and as a side note, the women of France were not allowed to vote until after World War II, while a new law from November 1800 made it illegal for the women of Paris to wear trousers; the ban was in place until the first female Minister of Education, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, born in Morocco and raised as a Muslim, overturned it in February 2013. Moreover, it was not until 2015 that British taxpayers finished paying off the debt which their government incurred because of the abolition of slavery, as the UK government in 1835 borrowed 40 percent of the Treasury's annual income to compensate British slave owners and, thus, tens of thousands of their descendants on both sides of the Atlantic.³⁹

In times like these, luckily, we can seek comfort and enlightenment in the best-specialized scholarship of the 21st century. Interestingly, such research supports Hobbes's global worldview of the history of philosophy and Egypt, which was in line with the norm in his era and area. Not only were the many philosophical texts of Ancient Kemet (Egypt), most written in cursive Hieratic, penned some 2000 to 700 years before Socrates: for example, the lamentation

³⁸ Falk, S. 2020. *The Light Ages: The Surprising Story of Medieval Science*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

³⁹ Scanlan, P. X. 2020. *Slave Empire: How Slavery Built Modern Britain*. London: Robinson.

by Ankhu (Khakheperraseneb, c. 1700–1600 BCE), the teachings of the middle-class scribe Ani (written 1539–1514 BCE), or the skepticism in “Be a Writer” (“The Immortality of Writers,” c. 1200 BCE).⁴⁰

It also appears that the teachings of Ancient Kemet influenced the writings of the foremost Greek thinkers: In a recent paper, the Egyptologist Joachim Quack demonstrates how the Pythagorean concept of “akousmata” (sayings/teachings) borrows from Egyptian teachings.⁴¹ Furthermore, in 2020, the Egyptologist Cristoph Poetsch demonstrated that the Egyptian *Book of Thoth* “forms a source of the Platonic text” *Phaedrus*.⁴² In this dialogue, Socrates states that he heard from “the ancients” that it was Thoth, the God of learning and writing, who “invented numbers and arithmetic and geometry and astronomy, also draughts and dice, and, most important of all, letters,” and introduced this learning to Egypt and its King Thamus.⁴³

Poetsch reveals how Plato uses *Book of Thoth* as a source before responding with an opposed criticism of writing. As Socrates goes on to argue in *Phaedrus*, criticizing Thoth’s Egyptian invention of writing by quoting the king Thamus: “Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them.”⁴⁴

In addition, the latest Oxford University Press anthology (2016) on *Graeco Egyptian Interactions* notes that new research indicates even that the Greek term “philosophos” is based on Egyptian.⁴⁵ After all, the Greek word *philosophos* means—at least according to the Platonic tradition—one who “loves wisdom.” Inadvertently, the 2005 translators of the Demotic version of the *Book of Thoth*, built on older Kemet texts from at least 1200 BCE, points out that the prominent figure in this text is the “*mr-rh*,” “the-one-who-loves-knowledge” or “He-who-wishes-to-learn.”⁴⁶ This “lover-of-wisdom” is the student or scholar who desires to know the wisdom of Thoth. The translators note that the word

⁴⁰ Simpson, W. K. (Ed.). 2003. *The Literature of Ancient Egypt. An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry*. 3rd edition.

⁴¹ Quack, J. 2009. “Fragmente eines ängmatischen Weisheitstextes (Ex pOxy. 79/103). Mit Bemerkungen zu den pythagoräischen Akousmata und der spätägyptischen Weisheitstradition.” In: *Actes du IXe congrès international des études démotiques Paris*. Devauchelle, D., G. Widmer (Eds.). 31 août – 3 septembre 2005, BdÉ 147 (Kairo 2009), 267–292.

⁴² Poetsch, C. June 26, 2021. “Das Thothbuch: eine ägyptische Vorlage der platonischen Schriftkritik im Phaidros?” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 103 (2), Abstract.

⁴³ Plato. 1947. *Plato in Twelve Volumes. Phaedrus*, Vol. 9. Fowler, H. N. (Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 561 (274d).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, (275a).

⁴⁵ Rutherford, I. 2016. “Aegypto-Graeca: Interaction and Translation between Greek Literature and Egypt.” In: *Graeco-Egyptian Interactions. Literature, Translation, and Culture, 500 BC–AD 300*. Rutherford, I. (Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3, footnote 12.

⁴⁶ Herbjørnsrud, D. 2018. “The Radical Philosophy of Egypt: Forget God and Family, Write!” *Blog of the American Philosophical Association* (APA); <https://blog.apaonline.org/2020/06/16/the-untold-history-of-indias-vital-atheist-philosophy/>

for the one who loves wisdom (*mr-rḥ*), a term used in that text, has a “striking Egyptian parallel to Greek Philosophos.”⁴⁷

Furthermore, the translators note: “This usage in the *Book of Thoth* renders more understandable Graeco-Egyptian characterizations of Egyptian priests as “philosophers” by such authors as Porphyry or Chaeremon ...”⁴⁸ By chance, the Greek *philosophos* notion correlates with the Egyptian concept of *mr-rḥ* (possibly pronounced “mer-rekh”), which is also a combination of the words “love” (*mr*) and “wisdom” or “knowledge” (*rh*).⁴⁹ Hence, as one who loves wisdom, philosophy.

In contrast to the narratives after the European Enlightenment, the Egyptologist Joachim Quack, one of the world’s foremost scholars on the topic, now has avowed that he favors the ancient reports rather than the colonial, academic storylines from the 19th and 20th centuries. He concludes: “In the light of the points of view presented here, I would principally advocate trusting the ancient tradition.”⁵⁰

It was such an ancient tradition Hobbes and most of his peers trusted during the early European Enlightenment, as he lived in an era before the advent of scientific racism and Eurocentrism based on white supremacy. The rhetorician and philosopher Isocrates (436–338 BCE), Plato’s senior, exemplifies this ancient tradition when he notes that “the Egyptians are the healthiest and most long of life among men; and then for the soul they introduced philosophy’s training.”⁵¹ Isocrates also declares that Pythagoras of Samos imported the discipline of philosophy from Egypt, as he “was first to bring to the Greeks all philosophy.”⁵²

Likewise, in his *Timaeus*, Plato lets Critias narrate how Solon traveled to Egypt, searching for knowledge under Amasis II (570–526 BCE). There, Solon was lectured on history by the elders at Saïs by the Nile; “he discovered that

⁴⁷ Jasnow, R., K. T. Zauzich (Eds., Trans.). *The Ancient Egyptian Book of Thoth: A Demotic Discourse on Knowledge and Pendant to the Classical Hermetica*. 2005. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 13. The translation of the text starts at p. 139.

⁴⁸ Jasnow, R., K. T. Zauzich 2005, op. cit., 13, footnote 36.

⁴⁹ Quack, J. 2009, op. cit., 291. In German: “Abschließend sei noch auf eine Grundfrage der Terminologie eingegangen. Nach einhelliger antiker Tradition hat sich Pythagoras als erster Grieche überhaupt mit dem Begriff ‘Philosoph’ bezeichnet. Das heißt auf Deutsch natürlich ‘der Wissensliebende.’ Ins Ägyptische übersetzt würde es *mri-rḥ* lauten, und dies ist keineswegs eine abstrakt postulierte Bildung, sondern vielmehr real bezeugt als Gesprächspartner in dem wohl fundamentalsten Buch über die grundsätzliche Initiierung in ägyptische Priesterweisheit überhaupt, nämlich dem Thotbuch.”

⁵⁰ Quack, J., 2009, op. cit., 291. German: “Im Lichte der hier vorgetragenen Gesichtspunkte würde ich dafür plädieren, der antiken Tradition prinzipielles Vertrauen entgegenzubringen.”

⁵¹ Isocrates. 1966. *Isocrates with an English Translation in Three Volumes*. Vol. 3. Norlin, G. (Trans.). London: William Heinemann Ltd., 115, chap. 11.22. Greek: “tais de psukhais philosophias askēs in katedeixan.”

⁵² Ibid., 119. Greek: “hos aphikomenos eis Aigupton kai mathētēs ekeinōn genomenos tēn t’ allēn philosophian prōtos eis tous Hellēnas ekomise, kai ta peri tas thusias kai tas hagisteias tas en tois hierois epiphanesteron tōn allōn espoudasen.”

neither he himself nor any other Greek knew anything at all” about the past.⁵³ Likewise, in the *Athenian Constitution*, Aristotle notes that Solon “went abroad on a journey to Egypt, for the purpose both of trading and of seeing the country.”⁵⁴

Similarly, in Plato’s *Symposium*, the female teacher Diotima tells Socrates that knowledge is not confined to the Greeks and that Solon is not unique: “All over the world, in fact, in Greece and abroad, various men in various places have on a number on a number of occasions engendered virtue in some form or other by creating works of beauty for public display.”⁵⁵ In a similar vein, in *The Histories*, Herodotus states that Otanes and the Persians, not the Greeks, first, and most eloquently, advocated democracy (interchangeably termed *isonomy*, “equality under the law”).⁵⁶ According to Herodotus, this occurred when Darius was about to take power in 522 BCE.

While in *Politics*, Aristotle states that Egypt was first also when it comes to political institutions: “The antiquity of all of them is indicated by the history of Egypt; for the Egyptians are reputed to be the oldest of nations, but they have always had laws and a political system.”⁵⁷

This tradition of recognizing the knowledge and philosophical insights of contributors outside of what we now name “Europe” continued throughout the centuries. This is relevant to contextualize the later European Enlightenment and illuminate its background. For example, four hundred years after Plato, the geographer Strabo (c. 64 BCE–24 CE) traveled to Egypt and Heliopolis (*lwnw*: “The Pillars”), by the Nile, just north of today’s Cairo. He observed; “at Heliopolis the houses of the priests and schools of Plato and Eudoxus were pointed out to us; for Eudoxus went up to that place with Plato, and they both passed thirteen years with the priests, as is stated by some writers...”⁵⁸ The Roman writer Plutarch (46–119) follows up in the same vein, reporting that Solon received instructions from Sonchis of Saïs, Pythagoras from Oenuphis of Heliopolis, and Eudoxus from Chonuphis of Memphis.⁵⁹

A century later, the Christian theologian and philosopher Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215) expanded on such intercultural and global perspectives in

⁵³ Plato. 1929. *Plato in Twelve Volumes, Timaeus*. Vol. 9. Fowler, H. N. (Trans.). London: William Heinemann Ltd., 33 (22a).

⁵⁴ Aristotle. 1952. *Athenian Constitution*. Vol. 20. Rackham, H. (Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 11.

⁵⁵ Plato. 1994. *Symposium*. Waterfield, R. (Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 53 (209d-e).

⁵⁶ Herodotus. 2003. *The Histories*. John Marincola (Trans.). London: Penguin Books, 207–208 (3:80).

⁵⁷ Aristotle. 1972. *Politics*. Book VI. Rackham, H. (Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 581 (Ch. 7, 1329b).

⁵⁸ Strabo. 1932. *The Geography of Strabo*. Sitlington Sterrett, J. R. (Trans.). Loeb Classical Library edition, Vol. VIII, 85 (17:29).

⁵⁹ Plutarch. 1936. *Isis and Osiris*. Published in Vol. V of the Loeb Classical Library edition, 27 (Part I: 10).

his *Stromateis* (*Miscellanies*). Clement uses the reports from the writer Megasthenes (c. 300 BCE) and shared knowledge when he acknowledges both Buddhism and Indian philosophy, in addition to an extensive list of inventions from different peoples of the “known world.” Clement also points out that the earliest Greek philosophers, like Thales and Pythagoras, were of immigrant background or received their teachings outside of Greece. Tellingly, he introduces Chapter 16 (“Non-Greeks Invented Most of the Skills of Civilization”) with this sentence: “Non-Greeks invented not only philosophy but practically every form of technical skill.”⁶⁰

Recent scholarship, exemplified with works like the tome *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies on Greek and Indian Philosophies* (2003) by Thomas McEvelley, has confirmed this older tradition of honoring “ex oriente lux,” “the Light from the East,” both when it comes to theory and practice. The influence on Greece as an “eastern Mediterranean culture” came not only from Egypt, Babylonia, and Persia. McEvelley’s study on early Pre-Socratic philosophy demonstrates clear parallels to the more ancient texts of the *Rig Veda* (c. 1200 BCE) and the *Upanishads* (from c. 700 BCE), and this influence on the Greeks from Indian thinkers “included monistic solutions to the Problem of One and the Many, the doctrine of the transformation of the elements into one another, at least the ethical aspect of the reincarnation doctrine associated with it, and elements or aspects of the doctrine of the cosmic cycle; at the same time Jain influences were entering Greece through the Orphic community.”⁶¹ Hence, McEvelley concludes: “... since the ideas in question remained fundamental elements of Greek thought for a thousand years, it is time to acknowledge that one of the major strains of Greek thought was Indian-influenced—that it might even be called the Indianized or Greco-Indian lineage.”

Thales (c. 600 BCE), partly of *Phoenician* background and from Miletus in Ionia, is said to have argued that the material substrate is water. This is an old Indian philosophy, first referred to by one of the late singers of the *Rig Veda*, Prajapati Paramestin: “In the beginning, an undistinguished ocean was this all” (X.129.3).⁶² In the *Chandogya Upanisad*, one of the oldest Upanishads, Sanatkumara “... expresses much the same doctrine of material monism that Aristotle attributed to Thales.” Thus, he states: “It is just water [...] Water indeed is all these forms.” (VII.10.1–2).⁶³

After the Greek “Orientalizing Period”, which in today’s Canon is defined as lasting from the mid-8th until the mid-7th centuries BCE, the pre-Socratic

⁶⁰ Clement of Alexandria. 1991. *Stromateis. Books One to Three. The Fathers of the Church*. Vol. 85. Ferguson, J. (Trans.). Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 79.

⁶¹ McEvelley, Th. 2002. *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies*. New York: Allworth Press, 642.

⁶² Cited in: McEvelley, Th. 2002, op. cit., 29.

⁶³ Cited in: McEvelley, Th. 2002, op. cit., 30.

philosophers primarily operated in Ionia (present-day Western Turkey) under the rule of Cyrus and the Persian Empire, which from 539 BCE extended from Bosphorus to the Indus River. Thus, “the most advanced parts of Greece and India were in the same political entity.”⁶⁴

Later, the skepticism of ancient India seems imported to Greece with Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360–270 BCE), the founder of the Greek school of skepticism, who traveled to Taxila (present-day Pakistan) with Alexander the Great and met with Buddhists and Indian philosophers (gymnosophists) like Dandemis.⁶⁵

As we have seen earlier in this text, both the Jesuits in the late 16th century and the intellectual Bernier in the mid-17th century received information on the rational, skeptical, and atheist Carvaka–Lokayata schools during their meeting with India’s intellectuals in the Mughal Empire.

Accordingly, the terms “complexity” and “connection” seem fit to give a more global context for the European Enlightenment, both when it comes to a comparison with the Chinese and Indian traditions. Consequently, I will argue, we need to rethink the standard Colonial Canon. But how? This question will be addressed in Part II.

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⁶⁴ McEvelley, Th. 2002, op. cit., 5–7.

⁶⁵ Beckwith, C. I. 2015. *Greek Buddha. Pyrrho’s Encounter with Early Buddhism in Central Asia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

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**THE QUEST FOR A GLOBAL AGE OF REASON.
PART II: CULTURAL APPROPRIATION AND RACISM
IN THE NAME OF ENLIGHTENMENT**

ABSTRACT

The Age of Enlightenment is more global and complex than the standard Eurocentric Colonial Canon narrative presents. For example, before the advent of unscientific racism and the systematic negligence of the contributions of Others outside of “White Europe,” Raphael centered Ibn Rushd (Averroes) in his Vatican fresco “Causarum Cognitio” (1511); the astronomer Edmund Halley taught himself Arabic to be more enlightened; The Royal Society of London acknowledged the scientific method developed by Ibn Al-Haytham (Alhazen). In addition, if we study the Transatlantic texts of the late 18th century, it is not Kant, but instead enlightened thinkers like Anton Wilhelm Amo (born in present-day’s Ghana), Phillis Wheatley (Senegal region), and Toussaint L’Ouverture (Haiti), who mostly live up to the ideals of reason, humanism, universalism, and human rights. One obstacle to developing a more balanced presentation of the Age of the Enlightenment is the influence of colonialism, Eurocentrism, and methodological nationalism. Consequently, this paper, part II of two, will also deal with the European Enlightenment’s unscientific heritage of scholarly racism from the 1750s. It will be demonstrated how Linnaeus, Hume, Kant, and Hegel were among the Founding Fathers of intellectual white supremacy within the Academy.

Hence, the Age of Enlightenment is not what we are taught to believe. This paper will demonstrate how the lights from different “Global Enlightenments” can illuminate paths forward to more dialogue and universalism in the 21st century.

Keywords: Enlightenment, Colonial Canon, colonialism, Eurocentrism, racism, white supremacy, Black Lives Matter.

1. DANTE, RAPHAEL, COPERNICUS, AND THE ARABS

As discussed in Part I, inclusive descriptions of the world's history of philosophy and science, following Plato and Clement of Alexandria, also prevailed north of the Mediterranean Sea for more than two millennia. So, when Dante wrote his *Comedy* (*Commedia*, 1320, two centuries later the adjective "Divine" was added), he included three Muslims among the non-Christian, virtuous, and non-sinful historical figures in "Limbo:" the Kurdish general Salah ad-Din (Saladin, 1137–1193), who for centuries was venerated in Europe for having saved both Christians and Jews when he toppled the Crusader regime in Jerusalem in 1187; the Persian philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980–1037), whose *The Canon of Medicine* was the leading medical book in Europe from the 13th century until the early 18th century; and the European Arab philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126–1198) of Cordoba, Andalusia, who was the first in Europe to couple "pagan" Greek philosophy (especially Aristotle, earning him the nickname of "the great Commentator") with Abrahamic monotheism. Not everything was replicated or developed, though, as Ibn Rushd "considers women essentially identical with men, possessing the same intellectual abilities;" and he "displays an undeniable preference for women's emancipation" as he urged his contemporaries to "allow women a greater role in public affairs for the benefit of the entire state."¹ In several ways, Ibn Rushd paved the way for what is now known as the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, if not a more modern, egalitarian world.

For example, Ibn Rushd's argument for a two-fold truth—that a proposition may be theologically true and philosophically false or vice versa—spurred widespread debate in Europe and created several schools of Averroism at different universities.² Such points were attested during the Afro-Asian Philosophy Association's (AAPA) fifth international conference in Cairo in December 1994 titled "Ibn Rushd and the Enlightenment" and developed further in the anthology *Averroës and the Enlightenment* (1998), with a foreword by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Gali.

Tellingly, Dante included both Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd among the greats of the philosophic family, with such illustrious members as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Dante ended his "Limbo list" with the two Muslim polymaths:

"Euclid the geometer, and Ptolemy,
Hippocrates, Galen, Avicenna,
Averroës, who made the Commentary, /
I cannot tell about them all in full."³

¹ Belo, C. 2009. "Some Considerations on Averroës' Views Regarding Women and Their Role in Society." *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 20 (1).

² Wahba, M., M. Abousenna. 1998. *Averroës and the Enlightenment*. New York: Prometheus Books.

³ Dante Alighieri. 1996. *Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy: Inferno*. Musa, M. (Trans.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 41 (Canto 4). Original: "Euclide geomètra e Tolomeo,/ Ipochràte, Avicenna e Galieno,/Averrois, che'l gran comento feo/lo non posso ritrar di tutti a pieno ..."

In Canto 10 of the last part of the *Comedy*, “Paradise,” Dante, in addition to honoring the role of the Ethiopians, Indians, and Persians,⁴ introduced the prominent and controversial Averroist Siger of Brabant (c. 1240–1284) alongside the Dominican theologian Thomas Aquinas. Consequently, Dante proposed multiple truths, diversity, and intellectual tolerance.⁵

Accordingly, compared to more recent history, the term “the Dark Ages,” or “medieval,” or “Middle Ages” for that matter, is hardly fitting to describe the centuries before the 15th century, which was as much an intellectual Golden Age in Andalusia (Spain) and the regions on the Italian Peninsula influenced by the syncretism of Roger II, the Normans, and the Arabs in Sicily from the 12th century. One can argue that there was no Renaissance in Europe, as there was no rebirth. Greek philosophy had never been a part of the daily lives of Western Europeans before the translation and interpretation process started in Baghdad in the eighth century. The ancient Greek accomplishments belonged more to the regions south and east of the Bosphorus than the regions west and north; both before and after Socrates, the Greeks were more “Middle Eastern” than “Western European.” History, this river of the riveting past, seems more like a continuous flow, ending in the world’s ocean with its ebbs and flows, as the North African polymath Ibn Khaldun describes it in his *Introduction (Al-Muqaddimah, 1377)* to his world history. After all, one cannot step into the same river twice.

The concepts of the Dark Ages, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment make the past into easy ideological tidbits, but they conceal more than they reveal. For example, from the early 13th century and until Europe’s Enlightenment Era, the legendary St. Maurice (Moritz), the most important saint among Christian Europeans for centuries, was depicted as an African. According to the hagiographies, the Christian commander Maurice and his legion from Thebes, in southern Egypt, sacrificed their lives in 287: The African soldiers rejected to kill innocent European civilians in today’s Switzerland, as the Roman and non-Christian emperor Maximian had ordered them to do, Olivette Otele contends.⁶ In the 1400 and 1500s, Maurice was depicted as a handsome African soldier in European paintings, for instance, in Mathis Grünewald’s “Meeting of St. Erasmus and St. Maurice” (c. 1520). The humanizing visualization of Africans is also present in widespread paintings of the black Balthazar as one of the three Magis (wise men) visiting the infant Jesus, as in Albrecht Dürer’s nativity scene *The Adoration of the Kings* (1504).

⁴ Barolini, T. 2014. “Paradiso 19: Injustice on the Banks of the Indus.” *Commento Baroliniano*, Digital Dante. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries; <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/paradiso/paradiso-19/>

⁵ Barolini, T. 2014a. “Paradiso 10: Multiple Truth and Intellectual Tolerance,” op. cit.

⁶ Otele, O. 2021. *African Europeans. An Untold History*. New York: Basic Books, 18–32.



Figure 1. *The painting “Meeting of St. Erasmus and St. Maurice” by Matthias Grünewald, c. 1520. Both Maurice and Erasmus are venerated martyrs and saints in the Roman Catholic Church. Here, Maurice stands in silver armor. Ill.: Wikicommons*

After all, this was the era when Africans had explored Europe for more than a hundred years: Ethiopian emperors had sent embassies to Rome, Naples, and Iberia from 1402. In 1416, three Ethiopians were invited to, and joined, the ecumenical Council of Constance, in today’s southern Germany. The Africans were well received: In May 1428, King Alfonso V of Aragon—one of Western Europe’s most vital powers—sent a memorandum to the Yeshaq I (ruled 1414–1429), asking for “what kind of help” he “could have in money,” in addition to military aid, from the Ethiopians.⁷

⁷ Quoted in Krebs, V. 2021. *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy with Latin Europe*. Sham: Palgrave MacMillan, 85.

At the same time, as Geraldine Heng has argued, there was a gradual build-up of religious prejudice in Europe during the centuries before the Catholic “reconquest” of Muslim Granada/Alhambra, in January 1492, and the Inquisition, settler colonialism, and the internal Christian religious wars in Europe that were to follow.⁸ Thus, for instance, the Jews were expelled from England already in 1290; Edward I and the Commons of Parliament negotiated an expulsion order 75 years after the Magna Carta was signed.

Nevertheless, the general worldview among Europeans of letters before the 1700s was to honor and credit the teachings of one’s teachers and forebears, as the general acknowledgment was that we are all “dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants” (*nanos gigantium humeris insidentes*, John of Salisbury, 12th century). After all, the European world maps were, in those days, relatively more “correct” when it comes to the sizes of the continents than now: Since the 7th century, the Isodoran maps (T and O maps) presented Asia on top: it covered half of the earth’s surface, while Africa and Europe made up approximately a quarter each. In 1459, Fra Mauro’s world map had a similar ratio, but he put Africa and South on top, like Al-Idrisi, Roger II and the Arabs.

The priority on Asia and Africa, which is more than ten times the size of what is now known as Europe, shifted with the gradual implementation of the projection by the Flemish cartographer Mercator, who put Europe and North on the top. More importantly, his Mercator projection of 1569 exaggerates the areas far from the equator. Greenland, for example, is shown as large as the African continent, even though Africa is more than fourteen times the size of this Danish colony. Mercator himself stated explicitly, in the title of his map, that his new representation of the globe was only “adapted for use in navigation” (*ad Usum Navigantium Emendate Accommodata*). The distorted projection was meant for sailors, not for textbooks in schools or Google Maps, which adopted the Web Mercator projection in 2005. Maps and illustrations influence people’s minds and mindsets.

Long before the effects of imperialism, colonialism, and new world maps, the painter Raphael finished his famous fresco *Causarum Cognitio* (“Knowledge of the Causes,” today misleadingly known as “The School of Athens”) in the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican City in 1511. So, in accordance with Dante’s worldview, he situated Ibn Rushd (Averroes), with a turban and his hand to his heart, at a central position in the painting. The Muslim Arab philosopher stands just behind what seems to be a writing Pythagoras, while a young disciple holds up a small chalkboard with inscriptions on the Pythagorean idea of perfect harmony through intervals in musical notes. Ibn Rushd looks over the shoulder of Pythagoras, but his eyes seem focused on neither the ancient’s writing nor on the Pythagorean chalkboard. Instead, Ibn Rushd appears to study

⁸ Heng, G. 2018. *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

a book held up before him by a male figure, often believed to be the pre-Socratic Parmenides (b. c. 515 BCE), who argued that existence is eternal. In such a way, Raphael summarized the history of philosophy as a continuum from the ancients via the Muslim Arabs, by the general understanding of his era, as we also can witness in Giorgione's *The Three Philosophers* (c. 1509) (on the right-hand side of Raphael's fresco, not printed here, is seemingly the Persian Zarathustra (Zoroaster), holding a celestial sphere in one hand, alongside Ptolemy).



Figure 3. A section of the fresco “Causarum Cognitio” (later known as “The School of Athens”) by Raphael, 1509–1511. The artist depicts Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Pythagoras, and, possibly, Parmenides. Ill.: Wikicommons.

Moreover, shortly after Raphael finished his fresco in the Vatican, Copernicus completed his *Little Commentary* (*Commentariolus*, registered in 1514), postulating a heliocentric theory. Copernicus refers to the “Chaldean,” or Arab, scientist Al-Battani (858–929) and his calculations of the length of a year but writes that he instead trusts the ancient Egyptian calculations (*qualis etiam in Aegyptica antiquitate reperitur*).⁹ In his main work, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* (1543), Copernicus quoted five Arab scientists, such as Al-Battani, Abu Al-Zarkali, and Thabit Ibn Qurra.¹⁰ He noted in his introduction

⁹ Copernicus, N. 2004. *Three Copernican Treatises*. Rosen, E. E. (Trans.). Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 7.

¹⁰ Copernici, N. (Torinsensis). 1543. *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*. Nürenberg: Libri VI. See also Saliba, G. 2007, 193–232. *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

that the idea that the Earth circles around the Sun is not his invention but rather an old idea and that he had read all he could find about former theories.¹¹ The modest Copernicus even credited the Indians for using “their numbers” since he applied the Indian numerical system (*indicae numerorum figurae*), which recently had been taken in use in northern Europe.¹²

After all, during Copernicus’ studies in Krakow (Poland) in the early 1490s, he had access to several Arab works, and in the bookshop of Jan Haller, he bought himself the well-known astrological star treatise by the North African astrologer Albhazen (Haly, 11th century), a work that was translated from Arabic into Latin in 1485.¹³ Then, in the late 20th century, the scholars Swerdlow and Neugebauer established that Copernicus used theories developed by Muayyad al-Din al-Urdi (d. 1266), Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201–1274), Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi (1236–1311), and Ibn al-Shatir (1304–1375): all leading astronomers and scientists at the observatory in Maragha (today’s eastern Iran), established in 1259 under the directorship of Al-Tusi. Rather than being a disconnected figure, they regard Copernicus “as the last Marāgha astronomer.”¹⁴

The intellectual curiosity of Copernicus will come as no surprise for Hobbes and his contemporaries a century later. When another Pole, Johannes Hevelius (Jan Heweliusz, born in Gdansk), published his *Selenographia* (1647), the first known treatise in Northern Europe dedicated to the Moon, his title-page featured two scientists: Galileo Galilei, holding a telescope, and Ibn Al-Haytham (Alhazen), the polymath born in Basra (today’s Iraq) in 965 and deceased in Cairo in 1040, holding a geometrical diagram. Fittingly, written beneath Galilei’s pedestal is the word “sense” (*sensu*, in the sense of), while under Al-Haytham, the following essential notion is inscribed at the book’s cover: reason (*ratione*). While Galilei symbolized knowledge through the senses, Al-Haytham symbolized knowledge through reason. In intellectual circles of Western Europe during the 17th century, Al-Haytham became a materialization of reason and rationality.

When Hevelius got elected as the first foreign Fellow of The Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge (est. 1663) in 1664, he continued his work on Arab scientists. In fact, a significant part of the work of this Royal Society in the 17th century was dedicated to Arab texts written by Muslim scholars. For example, the leading astronomer Edmond Halley of the Royal Society taught himself Arabic to translate Apollonius of Perga’s work on conics, which was only extant in an Arabic translation by Thabit bin Qurra (826–

¹¹ Copernicus, N. 1978. *Copernicus on the Revolutions*. Rosen, E. E. (Trans.). Pennsylvania: Macmillian, 4.

¹² Copernicus, N., 1978, *ibid.*, 27.

¹³ Tadeusz Nadzieja. 2012. “Nicolaus Copernicus’ Studies in Kraków.” *Polskie Towarzystwo Matematyczne, Wiad. Mat.*, 48 (2), 325–329.

¹⁴ Swerdlow, N., O. Neugebauer. 1984. *Mathematical Astronomy in Copernicus’s De Revolutionibus*. New York: Springer-Verlag, 295. Quote from Saliba. 2007, *op. cit.*, 209.

901) and commissioned during the House of Wisdom in Baghdad under Caliph Harun Al-Rashid.¹⁵ After all, the first Muslim and Arab Fellow, Muhammad ibn Haddu of Morocco, was elected to the Royal Society in 1682.



Figure 4. Frontispiece of Johannes Hevelius, *Selenographia* (Gdansk, 1647). Ibn Al-Haytham (Alhazen/“Alhasen”) to the left, Galileo Galilei to the right. Artwork by Adolph Boyß, engraved by Jeremy Falck. Ill.: Wikicommons

2. AL-HAYTHAM'S METHOD, ETHIOPIA STUDIES, LEIBNIZ

The scholars of the Royal Society in England were named “the new philosophers” since they stressed experiment and observation over abstract argument. Such empiricism also explains why Hevelius placed Al-Haytham on his front page; Al-Haytham was not only the scientist who wrote on the Moon and his magnum opus *The Optics* (1021), a book explicitly referenced by for example

¹⁵ Russell, G. A. (Ed.). 1993. *The “Arabick” Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England*. Leiden: Brill.

Descartes, Fermat, and Kepler.¹⁶ He was also the one who first defined the scientific, experimental, and critical method. Al-Haytham introduces *Doubts Concerning Ptolemy* (c. 1028, *Al-Shukūk” alā Batlamyūs/Dubitaciones in Ptolemaeum*), the first substantial criticism of the models proposed by Ptolemy, with these words, stressing the need for criticism in scientific investigations:

“Truth is sought for itself; and in seeking that which is sought for itself one is only concerned to find it. To find the truth is hard and the way to it rough. For the truths are immersed in uncertainties, and all men are naturally inclined to have faith in the scientists. Thus when a man looks into the writings of scientists and, following his natural inclination, confines himself to grasping their pronouncements and intentions, the truth [for him] will consist of their intended notions and their indicated goals.”¹⁷

Scientists tend to make errors, Al-Haytham underscored, which is why they disagree so often. Hence, the Arab scholar emphasized that one should be both critical towards the ancients and toward oneself. Therefore, it is one’s duty to attack all texts, including one’s own, from every side:

“The seeker after the truth is, therefore, not he who studies the writings of the ancients and, following his natural disposition, puts his trust in them, but rather the one who suspects his faith in them and questions what he gathers from them, the one who submits to argument and demonstration, and not to the sayings of a human being whose nature is fraught with all kinds of imperfection and deficiency. It is thus the duty of the man who studies the writings of scientists, if learning the truth is his goal, to make himself an enemy of all that he reads, and, applying his mind to the core and margins of its content, attack it from every side. He should also suspect himself as he performs his critical examination of it, so that he may avoid falling into either prejudice or leniency.”¹⁸

Al-Haytham’s rigorous research procedure starts by stating the problem, explicitly supported by observations; one should then critically review previous work, conduct verifiable experiments to evaluate hypotheses, interpret the data and then formulate conclusions. After such a process, one could publish the findings. Although written nearly a millennium ago, this can still be considered a relatively modern scientific approach.

¹⁶ Smith, J. D. 1992. ‘The Remarkable Ibn al-Haytham.’ *The Mathematical Gazette*, 76 (475), 189–198.

¹⁷ Ibn Al-Haytham 1989. *The Optics of Ibn Al-Haytham, Books I–III*. Sabra, A. I. (Trans.). London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 3. (In this “Commentary” by Sabra, he quotes the “Introduction” of *Dubitaciones in Ptolemaeum*.)

¹⁸ Ibid.

The intellectual inclusion of the Royal Society was not unique during the 17th century. For example, two years after Hevelius put Al-Haytham at the title page of his scientific work, and two years before Hobbes underscored the non-European and non-Greek origins of philosophy in *Leviathan*, the German orientalist Hiob Ludolf (1624–1704) met the Ethiopian monk and lexicographer Abba Gorgoryos (c. 1595–1668) in Rome in 1649. Gorgoryos lived at the Collegium Aethiopicum in Rome with others from the Horn of Africa, and the student Ludolf asked him to teach him Ge'ez, the traditional language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church. After a later invitation by Ludolf, Gorgoryos traveled alone from Rome and all the way to Gotha, in the middle of today's Germany, and reunited with Ludolf in 1652.¹⁹

Together, they co-authored the first grammar of the Amharic language and an Amharic-Latin dictionary, their work based on an Italian-Amharic glossary composed by Gorgoryos. This cooperation laid the foundation for modern European scholarship on Ethiopia.²⁰ The cooperation between Gorgoryos and Ludolf had a lasting effect in Europe, as Wolbert E. Smidt emphasizes, for it was “much influencing the Enlightenment's image of Ethiopia. When Kant (1802, see also Smidt 2004, 2006) formulated a new ethnological theory and placed all peoples of the world in a hierarchical order in the eighteenth century, he exempted Ethiopia from his radically negative judgment of Africa, which according to him had been rejected by history.”²¹

Such an intellectual curiosity continued well into the 18th century. In 1703, Gottfried W. Leibniz (1646–1716) explained the binary system by referring to the ancient Chinese classical work *The Book of Changes (I Ching)*, a work on sixty-four hexagrams by the legendary Fu Xi, written after 900 BCE and sent to him by a Jesuit in China. In the text “Explanation of the binary arithmetic, which uses only the characters 1 and 0, with some remarks on its usefulness, and on the light it throws on the ancient Chinese figures of Fu Xi” (1703), Leibniz stated:

“What is amazing in this reckoning is that this arithmetic by 0 and 1 is found to contain the mystery of the lines of an ancient King and philosopher named Fuxi, who is believed to have lived more than 4000 years ago, and whom the Chinese regard as the founder of their empire and their sciences. There are several linear figures attributed to him, all of which come back to this arithmetic ...”²²

¹⁹ Schmidt, W. G. C. 2015. “Gorgoryos and Ludolf: The Ethiopian and German Fore-Fathers of Ethiopian Studies: An Ethiopian scholar's 1652 visit to Thuringia.” *ITYOPIS: Northeast African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Extra Issue 1, 11–25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20, footnote 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

²² Leibniz, W. 1703. *Die mathematische schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*. Vol. VII. *Memoires de l'Academie Royale des Sciences*. Gerhardt, C. I. (Ed.), 223–227, 225. Translated from the French; <http://www.leibniz-translations.com/binary.htm>

Instead of honoring the Greeks and Romans, Leibniz preferred the heritage of the Arabs of Andalusia—something which Friedrich Nietzsche²³ and the author Fernando Pessoa also argued some two centuries later—as he continued:

“But this ordinary arithmetic by tens does not seem very old, and at least the Greeks and the Romans were ignorant of it, and were deprived of its advantages. It seems that Europe owes its introduction to Gerbert, who became Pope under the name of Sylvester II, who got it from the Moors of Spain.”

3. ANTON WILHELM AMO AND WITTENBERG UNIVERSITY ON AFRICA

By chance, in the early 17th century, Leibniz was a frequent visitor at the court of Wolfenbüttel, where one of the most vital philosophers of the early German Enlightenment grew up. Anton Wilhelm Amo (1700–1752) was kidnapped from his mother and father in Axim, in present-day Ghana, before the age of eight and brought to the Prince of Wolfenbüttel in Saxony—before Amo decided to return to his family in West Africa by ship in 1746–1747. In the meantime, Amo the African (*Afer*, as he named himself) had achieved the best education: in 1729, he defended the law thesis *On the Rights of Moors in Europe* (*De jure Maurorum in Europa*) at the University of Halle—probably the first thesis in Europe arguing against the white enslavement of Africans.²⁴

In addition, Amo wrote two dissertations in Latin, in 1734 (*On the Impassivity of the Human Mind*) and 1738 (*Treatise on the Art of Soberly and Accurately Philosophizing*).²⁵ However, it was not until 2020 that the first translation of his texts into English got published outside of East Germany (DDR); by Oxford University Press. Amo has been labeled a “Cartesian thinker;” to be more precise, he criticized Descartes for being too inconsistent. Fittingly, Amo taught philosophy at the universities of Halle, Wittenberg, and Jena in the 1730s.

The Indian Muslim scholar Soltan Gün Achmet from Ahmedabad and the Christian Arab Solomon Negri from Damascus were other non-Europeans also teaching philosophy in Prussen during the first half of the 18th century. Tellingly, Leibniz published his *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese* in 1714, while Christian Wolff held a famous Halle lecture in 1721 on the rea-

²³ Nietzsche, F. W. 1931. *The Antichrist*. H. L. Menchen (Trans.). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 175. Excerpt: ‘Christianity destroyed for us the whole harvest of ancient civilization, and later it also destroyed for us the whole harvest of Mohammedan civilization. The wonderful culture of the Moors in Spain, which was fundamentally nearer to us and appealed more to our senses and tastes than that of Rome and Greece, was trampled down (— I do not say by what sort of feet —).’

²⁴ This section builds upon Herbjørnsrud’s lecture at the international conference on Amo in Halle, Germany, on October 29–31, 2018: “Anton Wilhelm Amo: An African Philosopher in Early Modern Europe.” It was organized by Dwight Lewis (University of South Florida) and Falk Wunderlich (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg).

²⁵ Herbjørnsrud, D., 2017, op. cit.

sonableness of Confucian moral philosophy. This address, it has to be said, created an uproar among the Pietists, who pressured the Prussian king to expel Wolff from the territory for several years. Nevertheless, despite setbacks, the first half of the 18th century was a reasonably enlightened era in crucial parts of Europe; global intellectual curiosity had some of its best days in the region. One of the most significant texts demonstrating the *Zeitgeist* of this Early Enlightenment, before the 1740s, is a greeting from the Rector of the University of Wittenberg, Johann Gottfried Kraus, to Amo, attached to his 1734 dissertation. Kraus begins, in the text dated May 24, 1733, by stating: “Africa in the past had great honor, whether with regard to its [fertility in human] natural aptitude, devotion to letters, or religious teaching. For it brought forth a great many very eminent men, by whose natural aptitude and devotion divine as much as human wisdom has been taught.”²⁶

Kraus then names several African writers who have been vital for European philosophy and intellectual history: Terence of Carthage (who defined himself as “Afer,” African, known for the statement “I am human, and I think nothing human is alien to me”), the theologian Tertullian of Carthage (d. c. 220, described as having dark complexion),²⁷ and the Church Father Augustine of Hippo (born in the Amazigh (Berber) city of Thagaste, in present-day Algeria, to his Amazigh mother, Monnica). Today, reference works generally characterize these as Roman or Latin writers—even though they, like Augustine, defined themselves as Punic (Amazigh, “Berbers”) and African.²⁸

For example, in a letter to his African friend, Maximus of Madura, who had started to use the name in the language of the Roman colonizers, Augustine wrote in 390: “For surely, considering that you are an African, and that we are both settled in Africa, you could not have so forgotten yourself when writing to Africans as to think that Punic names were a fit theme for censure.”²⁹ Moreover, in 418, Augustine participated in the synod Council of Carthage, which he termed “A Council of Africa” as it summoned hundreds of African bishops. They argued against the European import of heretic Pelagianism and, in *The Code of Canons of the African Church*, declared: “But whoever appeals to a court on the other side of the sea [Rome] may not again be received into communion by any one in Africa.”³⁰

²⁶ Amo, A. W. *Anton Wilhelm Amo's Philosophical Dissertations on Mind and Body*. Menn, S., J. E. Smith (Eds., Trans.). New York: Oxford University Press, 191.

²⁷ Wilhite, D. E. 2007. *Tertullian the African. An Anthropological Reading of Tertullian's Context and Identities*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

²⁸ Ellingsen, M. 2005. *The Richness of Augustine: His Contextual and Pastoral Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

²⁹ Augustine. 1887. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. First Series, Vol. 1. Schaff, P. (Ed.). NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co. Letter 17, “*To Maximus of Madaura*,” can also be read at <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102017.htm>

³⁰ Hefele, C. J. 2007. *A History of the Councils of the Church*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 461.

So, for Kraus and others at the University of Halle in 1734, it was natural to describe Terence, Tertullian, Augustine as Africans. However, since the mid-1700s, this *Zeitgeist* has changed dramatically. When it comes to descriptions of African intellectuals compared to the present-day textbooks, the contrast is also evident in a later passage by Kraus. Like Leibniz three decades earlier, he credited the Arabs (Moors) for bringing the light, liberal learning, and cultivation of letters to Europe. This description of intellectual export seems to allude to the Amazigh Tarik ibn Ziyad and his troops who crossed the Strait of Gibraltar in April 711, conquering Andalusia from the Visigoths and symbolizing the cultural pollination of Andalusia. Commenting on the Arabs, Kraus continued:

“For in the teaching of this people, to whom letters to have been transferred, liberal learning was cultivated, and when the Moors crossed from Africa into Spain, the ancient writers whom they brought over with them gave much assistance to the cultivation of letters, which was then beginning to emerge from darkness. Thus from such ancient times letters have owed a debt to Africa.”

Hence, the Arabs from Africa helped Europe “to emerge from the darkness,” while also Europe owes “a debt to Africa.” Rector Kraus was, of course, not the only one at the University of Wittenberg who held such perspectives. The university’s President, Ludwig Rudolph, also extended his greetings to Amo’s dissertation in 1734. Rudolph started his address like this, underscoring Africa’s richness of goods and human intellect:

“We rightly praise Africa, and Guinea, its region furthest from us, which the Europeans have long called the Gold Coast in view of its plentiful yield of gold—this country, in which you first saw the light, [which is called] by us the mother not only of many goods and treasures of nature, but also of most fertile natural aptitudes.”³¹

Noteworthy, Africans have the most fertile natural aptitudes, and Amo manifests such golden treasures. As late as 1738, Carl Günther Ludovici’s included Amo’s work in his book on the philosophy of Christian Wolff, describing him as “one of the most prominent Wolffians.”³² Nevertheless, a new mindset was about to evolve in Europe.

³¹ Amo. 2020, op. cit., 197.

³² Quoted in: *ibid.*, 30.

4. HUME, KANT, HEGEL, AND THE HERITAGE OF LINNEAUS

Only a mere decade later, when the brutal Transatlantic slave trade and its legitimization had taken its toll on the European mind, after a cultural lag, this inclusive and appreciative worldview gradually but radically transformed. Then, in 1753, David Hume penned an infamous footnote addition to his 1748 essay *Of National Character*. In glaring contrast to the achievements of Amo and African European intellectuals like the minister Jacobus Capitein (1717–1747), Hume now professed: “I am apt to suspect the negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites [...] Not to mention our colonies, there are Negroe slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity ...”³³

Additionally, Hume writes that some in Jamaica talk about an African as “a man of parts and learning,” but he rejects such an assessment: “likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.” Comparisons between Africans and animals were a new invention among those who gained the status of foremost European intellectuals. In this, Hume was not alone in this new era.

In 1735, the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus published his first edition of *Systema Naturae* in the Netherlands. In a peculiar but relatively neutral way, Linnaeus divided the human species into four types or varieties in this order: *Europaeus albus* (European white), *Americanus rubescens* (American reddish), *Asiaticus fuscus* (Asian tawny), *Africanus niger* (African black). After 1748, he started to expand on this division, as The Linnean Society of London (est. 1788) brought to light in a recent historical article, “Linnaeus and Race,” by Dr. Isabelle Charmantier, Head of Collections, published in September 2020. As Charmantier concludes: “Linnaeus’ work on the classification of man forms one of the 18th-century roots of modern scientific racism.”³⁴

Linnaeus’ manuscript draft entitled *Antropomorpha*, edited between 1748 and 1758, has numerous reworked pages on the topic of humans and skin color. Finally, in 1758, he published the 10th and expanded edition of *Systema Naturae*, including five pages where Linnaeus described the different forms of humans. As The Linnean Society of London characterizes the development: “The result of this expansion of the classification of man was the 1758 10th edition of *Systema naturae*, which became the basis for scientific racism.”

Linnaeus gave his four simple categories of humans, which matched the continents, five different attributes: Europeans were defined as “white, sanguine, muscular” when it comes to skin color and “medical temperament,” while their

³³ Hume, D. Texts Online. Essay XXI. *Of National Characters* (1748, 1753); <https://davidhume.org/texts/empl1/nc>. See also Eze, C. 1997. *Race and Enlightenment: A Reader*. London: Blackwell, 33.

³⁴ Charmantier, I. 2020. *Linnaeus and Race*; <https://www.linnean.org/learning/who-was-linnaeus/linnaeus-and-race>

“behavior,” in general, is “light, wise, inventor.” Asians, on the other hand, are “sallow, melancholic, stiff,” and their behavior is “stern, haughty, greedy.” The Swede typified Africans as simply “black, phlegmatic, lazy,” and “they” behave “sly, sluggish, neglectful.” As Charmantier notes:

“Africanus consistently remained at the bottom of the list. Moreover, in all editions, Linnaeus’ description of Africanus was the longest, most detailed and physical, and also the most negative. [...] Linnaeus’ classification of man was certainly viewed by contemporaries in a hierarchical manner, and carried on being used in such a way through the following decades. Thus Linnaeus’ hierarchy, with black people at the very bottom, associated with negative moral and physical attributes, stuck.”³⁵

Even though Linnaeus himself did not use the word “race,” the English translation of 1792 included classifications of people by human sub-species. With this new scientific paradigm readily available, it was no surprise that Hume never retracted or changed his footnotes on Africans, Blacks. Furthermore, Kant followed suit, as “most of [Kant’s] academic employment was based on his courses about race,” the authors infer in the Introduction to the first chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race* (2017).³⁶

Like Linnaeus, Kant divided humans into four skin colors (white, red, yellow, and black), each with different mental attributes. In his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), Kant referred explicitly to Hume’s infamous footnote: “The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to adduce a single example where a Negro has demonstrated talents.”³⁷ Kant continued on this note when he published three articles on race in 1775, 1785, and 1788. In his *Physical Geography*, first collected in 1803, the first English edition published in 2013, Kant advocated what we may name white supremacy clearly: “Humanity is at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites.” [Die Menschheit ist in ihrer grössten Vollkommenheit in der Race der Weissen.]³⁸

Such a systematic racial statements from scholars seem to be a new development in global intellectual history. In contrast, Thomas Hobbes did not have any negative words against Africans in his *Leviathan* a century earlier. Instead, he introduced his infamous chapter XIII on the “natural condition of mankind” and wrote: “Nature hath made men so equall, in the faculties of the body, and

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Zack, N. 2017. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race*. New York: Oxford University Press.

³⁷ Kant, I. 1991. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*. Goldthwait, J. T. (Trans.). Berkeley–Los Angeles, CA: California University Press, 110–111.

³⁸ Kant, I. 1877. *Supplement-Band zu Kant’s Werken. Abtheilung I. Die physische Geographie*. Leipzig: L. Heimann’s Verlag, 189; English version: Eze, E. C. 1997. *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 63.

mind.”³⁹ Because Hobbes found greater equality among humans when it comes to the faculties of the mind than that of strength. More than a century earlier, the Spanish friar Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566) regretted his former advocacy for the enslavement of Africans. In his writings from 1527, Las Casas stressed humanism and the equal treatment of Africans: “I came to realize that black slavery was as unjust as Indian slavery [...] and I was not sure that my ignorance and good faith would secure me in the eyes of God.”⁴⁰

Even earlier, the Muslim North African polymath Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), rightly described as a founder of the discipline sociology, criticized (supposedly) claims by Galen that sub-Saharan Africans should have weakness in intellect since they have more levity than Greeks. Khaldun stated that such arguments are absurd and without proof, which leads nowhere.⁴¹ Instead, he argued, the climate and living conditions explain the influences on how humans behave. Consequently, Khaldun concluded: “Human nature is one and the same everywhere.”⁴²

It is noteworthy that several of Kant’s peers did not share his dehumanizing views in the late 18th century. For example, in the (white) English writer George Gregory’s essay collection of 1785, Gregory saluted both the African American female poet Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784) and the British-African intellectual Ignatius Sancho (1729–1780) for their “striking instances of genius.”⁴³

In contrast, in 1788, i.e. in the same year when Kant published his *Critique of Practical Reason*, he also published the essay *On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy* in which he endorsed a pro-slavery text and approved “a critique of a proposal to free black slaves.”⁴⁴ Kant wrote explicitly about differences of the races, and European intellectuals, far and wide, read his works. True, Kant shifted his writing on non-Europeans toward the end of his life, from *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795).⁴⁵ However, it was too little, too late. The Haitian Revolution was already well underway by then, and the “Reign of Terror” had replaced the original French Revolution. In 1795, the racist genie was now out of the bottle by far.

As philosophy Professor Charles W. Mills (1951–2021) concluded about Kant in his modern classic *The Racial Contract* (1997):

³⁹ Hobbes, T. 1968, op. cit., 183.

⁴⁰ Braxton, E. K. 2021. *The Church and the Racial Divide: Reflections of an African American Catholic Bishop*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 75.

⁴¹ Ibn Khaldun. 1967 (1958). *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Rosenthal, F. (Trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 64. (NB! In *Inventing the Berbers* (2019), Ramzi Rouighi has demonstrated several vital mistakes in the Rosenthal translation).

⁴² Ibn Khaldun. 2012. *Al-Muqaddimah*. Vol. II. Magid Al-Iraki (Trans.). Oslo: Pax Forlag. 816. NB! Rosenthal’s translation, 1958 (1967) has skipped this part, see 341–342.

⁴³ Sancho, I. 2015, op. cit., 34.

⁴⁴ Kleingeld, P. 2007. “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race.” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 57 (299), 575.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

“... the embarrassing fact for the white West (which doubtless explains its concealment) is that their most important moral theorist of the past three hundred years is also the foundational theorist in the modern period of the division between *Herrenvolk* and *Untermenschen*, persons and subpersons, upon which Nazi theory would later draw. Modern moral theory and modern racial theory have the same father.”⁴⁶

So, the question is not whether Hume and Kant were children of their time, but to which degree they can be named co-fathers of modern racism and philosophical pseudoscience. This development in the latter half of the 18th century is what we can term “the closing of the European mind.” A veil of ignorance has been drawn over the eyes of generations of academics, so it became harder to see the unequal positions they inhabited. Neutrality and original position are still word games mainly for the privileged. As a result, after a gradual evolution over the 19th and 20th centuries, textbooks in philosophy have for decades excluded thinkers who, by chance, are not defined as white, Protestant, Catholic, or men. As Bryan W. Van Norden recently—and quite bluntly—concluded when it comes to the state of the philosophical discipline in the early 21st century: “Western philosophy is racist.”⁴⁷ Two decades after Kant passed away, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel stated, without backlash from his peers, in his *Lectures of Philosophy of History* (1822–1830):

“In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence as, for example, God, or Law [...] there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character. The copious and circumstantial accounts of Missionaries completely confirm this ...”⁴⁸

Accordingly, Hegel wrote a history that asserted that Europe should get credit for the achievements of North Africa, including ancient Egypt, which he named “European Africa” (following a similar line of thought, it has now become second nature in standard presentations in the 21st century to appropriate Ancient Greece, in the far southeast, as Western European only). Regarding sub-Saharan Africa, Hegel stated: “Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained—for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World—shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself—the land of childhood, which

⁴⁶ Mills, C. 1997. *The Racial Contract*. New York: Cornell University Press, 72.

⁴⁷ Norden, B. W. V. 2017. “Western Philosophy Is Racist.” *Aeon*; <https://aeon.co/essays/why-the-western-philosophical-canon-is-xenophobic-and-racist>

⁴⁸ Hegel, G. W. F. 1901. *Philosophy of History*. Sibree, J. (Trans.). New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 150.

See also Adegbindin, O. 2015. “Critical Notes on Hegel’s Treatment of Africa.” *A New Journal of African Studies*, 11 (20–21).

lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night.”⁴⁹

The respect for Africa’s intellectual heritage and African philosophers like Amo, as Rector Kraus and Wittenberg University propagated in the 1730s, was long gone. Luckily, there are other intellectual representatives than Kant to learn from in the late 18th century, in both Europe and America.

5. THE ENLIGHTENED ENLIGHTENMENT: KONDIARONK, WHEATLEY, L’OUVERTURE

Given the cultural and scientific appropriation of philosophical material and the racially motivated defamation of non-Europeans on the part of European Enlightenment thinkers from the 1500s to the 1800s, can we say that racism is the distinctive trademark of the European Enlightenment of the late 18th century?

If we answer positively, where could this new Enlightenment that we are seeking be? One clue could be to seek the values of reason, science, humanism, and progress (progress for “a global all,” that is) wherever one might find them in this world, across different continents and different eras throughout history, not confining ourselves to Western Europe or North America in the 18th century. That said, we indeed can encounter such values of reason, universalism, and humanism in the 1700s also in “the West,” a term launched after the US joined the “Allied” (Entente Powers) in WWI. Just listen to the words of the poet Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784), who —like Amo—was kidnapped from her family in the Ghana-Senegal region. In a letter printed in the *Connecticut Gazette* and the *Universal Intelligencer* on March 11, 1774, she wrote in the enlightened vein of reason, universalism, and dialogue: “... for in every human Breast, God has implanted a Principle, which we call Love of Freedom; it is impatient of Oppression, and pants for Deliverance.”⁵⁰

As if Wheatley was commenting on the statements by her contemporaries Hume and Kant on Africans and non-whites, she finished her article with a robust and enlightened criticism against hypocritical philosophers: “How well the Cry for Liberty, and the reverse Disposition for the Exercise of oppressive Power over others agree—I humbly think it does not require the Penetration of a Philosopher to determine.” Consequently, it was not Wheatley who turned out the light in the Enlightenment; instead, she lit a torch for the wretched “yearning to breathe free,” to use the words by Emma Lazarus a century later. This cry for liberty from the huddled masses had a long time coming. In 1570, for example, the liberator and abolitionist *Gaspar Yanga* (born in 1545) of the Bran peo-

⁴⁹ Hegel, G. W. F. 1901, op. cit. 148.

⁵⁰ Wheatley, P. 2001. *Complete Writings*. New York: Penguin Group, 153.

ple (in today's Gabon) headed a *maroon rebellion in Veracruz, Mexico*.⁵¹ Yanga founded the independent town-state San Lorenzo de los Negros (now Yanga), close to the country's most extensive mountain range in former Olmec lands. After repelling colonial forces for decades, this community of freed people (*palenque*) signed an independence treaty with the Spanish crown in October 1631, securing it as a free black settlement; after Mexico's independence in the 19th century, Yanga was declared a national hero (*El Primer Libertador de las Americas*).⁵²

Both Wheatley and another vital enlightened thinker, Toussaint L'Ouverture wrote and acted in this transatlantic context. In 1791, L'Ouverture—born into slavery—commenced his long struggle to rid Haiti of slavery and colonizers. The Haitian people succeeded just after his death, on January 1, 1804. Then, the island won its independence from France and became the first nation to permanently ban slavery, creating a monumental new challenge in the colonial and slavery-based Transatlantic world. With symbolic help from five hundred Polish soldiers, who turned against Napoleon and received special status and full citizenship after Haiti's independence, the Haitian Revolution was the first slave uprising that founded a recognized state free from slavery.⁵³

Haiti has survived for more than 215 years now, despite France sending warships to demand an indemnity of 150 million francs (comparable to over US\$30 billion as of today) for the independence of the Black population at the island. A vital background for the first abolitionist state Haiti, is L'Ouverture's enlightened writings and demands. In July 1792, he signed a letter calling for general liberty and mutual respect between blacks and whites. Addressing the white general assembly, L'Ouverture and two confidantes advocated for the general humanism of the human race and equality by natural right:

“Under the blows of your barbarous whip we have accumulated for you the treasures you enjoy in this colony; the human race has suffered to see with what barbarity you have treated men like yourself, yes, men—over whom you have no other right except that you are stronger and more barbaric than we; you have engaged in [slave] traffic, you have sold men for horses, and even that is the least of your shortcomings in the eyes of humanity [...] We are black, it is true, but tell us gentlemen, you who are so judicious, what is the law that says that the black man must belong to and be the property of the white man? Certainly you will not be able to make us see where that ex-

⁵¹ Carroll, P. J. 2001. *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity, and Regional Development*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

⁵² Landers, J. G. 2006. “Cimarrón and Citizen: African Ethnicity, Corporate Identity, and the Evolution of Free Black Towns in the Spanish Circum-Caribbean.” In: *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America*. Lander, J., B. Robinson (Eds.). Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

⁵³ Girard, P. R. 2011. *The Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian War of Independence 1801–1804*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press.

ists, if it is not in your imagination—always ready to form new phantasms so long as they are to your advantage. [...] We are your equals then, by natural right, and if nature pleases itself to diversify colors within the human race, it is not a crime to be born black nor an advantage to be white.”⁵⁴

These words fit all too well also in the first quarter of the 21st century, whether one wants to support Black Lives Matter, fair payments to workers in the Global South, calls to decolonize the reading lists, or advocate for more universalism and dialogue.

With the recent tome, *The Dawn of Everything. A New History of Humanity* (2021) by David Graeber and David Wengrow, such perspectives have come even more into the intellectual forefront. They do not only refute the popular and Eurocentric narratives by Steve Pinker in his *Enlightenment Now* as “he relies on anecdotes, images and individual sensational discoveries ...”⁵⁵ In contrast, based on primary sources, Graeber and Wengrow demonstrate how several Enlightenment ideals were more precisely a *reaction* to the vigorous critiques of European societies propounded by the Indigenous intellectuals from what we now name “America.”

For instance, the First Nation (Wendat) leader Kondiaronk (1649–1701, also known as Gaspar Soiaga) became known for his oratorical and intellectual skills during his discussions with the European settlers. Baron de Lahontan’s report *New Voyages to North America* (1703) recorded his conversations with this sage, in his text named Adario, in the vital section “A Conference or Dialogue Between the Author and Adario, A Noted Man among the Savages.” Here, Kondiaronk advised the Europeans to follow the way of the First Nations so that “a levelling equality would then take place among you as it now do’s among the *Hurons*.”⁵⁶ Such were radical statements for Europeans at the time, as they were all under the yoke of aristocracy, inherited royalty, and absolute monarchs. Nevertheless, Kondiaronk continues in his quest for the qualities of wisdom and reason:

“I have set forth again and again, the qualities that make a man inwardly such as he ought to be; particularly, wisdom, reason, equity, &c. which are courted by the *Hurons*. I have made it appear that the notion of separate interests knocks all these qualities in the head, and that a man swayed by interest can” t be a Man of Reason.”⁵⁷

Intellectuals throughout Europe read such words by Kondiaronk, primarily until the second half of the 18th century. Graeber and Wengrow demonstrate

⁵⁴ L’Ouverture, T. 2008. *The Haitian Revolution*. Nesbitt, N. (Ed.). London: Verso, 6.

⁵⁵ Graeber, D., D. Wengrow. 2021. *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. London: Penguin, 13–17.

⁵⁶ Lahontan, B. de. 1905. *New Voyages to North America*. Vol. II. Gold Thwaites, R. (Ed.). Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co, 572.

⁵⁷ Lahontan, Baron de. 1905, op. cit., 572.

that in the “years between 1703 and 1751, as we have seen, the indigenous American critique of European society had an enormous impact on European thought.”⁵⁸

Kondiaronk was one of several First Nations thinkers and orators who impressed and influenced the European colonizers, including the British. On July 4, 1744, the English settlers met, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, with the leaders of the Iroquois Confederacy (the *Haudenosaunee*, “the people of the Long House,” named after the political arrangement of two “chambers,” where all had a say). The Onondaga speaker Canassatego (1684–1750) held a vital speech on the importance of a union between different peoples, like the Iroquois Confederation of six different First Nations.

An impressed Benjamin Franklin printed Canassatego’s oration; for more than twenty years, Franklin earned his living on printing papers, rediscovered in 1928, on the treaties with the original inhabitants of what was to become the United States of America. In 1750, Franklin wrote that it “would be a very strange Thing, if six Nations of ignorant Savages should be capable of forming a Scheme for such an Union, and be able to execute it in such a Manner, as that it has subsisted Ages, and appears indissoluble; and yet that a like Union should be impracticable for ten or a Dozen English Colonies, to whom it is more necessary, and must be more advantageous.”⁵⁹

Not too long thereafter, Franklin started working on the Albany Plan, which proposed a unified government for the thirteen English colonies. The plan was rejected at the Albany Congress in 1754, but scholars have demonstrated the First Nations’ complex political influence on the European settlers.⁶⁰ Significantly, the European Commissioners of Indian Affairs for the Continental Congress quoted Canassatego’s 1744 speech on August 25, 1775, at a diplomatic meeting—stating that the “advice was good”—less than a year before the Declaration of Independence.⁶¹

However, the European immigrants did not copy the equal treatment of women among the Iroquois, as later honored by Mathilda Joslyn Cage (*Ka-ron-ien-ha-wi*).⁶² Nonetheless, as the US Senate declared in its resolution 331, “To acknowledge the contribution of the Iroquois Confederacy of Nations to the development of the United States Constitution ...” on October 18, 1988: “Whereas, the original framers of the constitution, including most notably, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, are known to have greatly admired

⁵⁸ Graeber, D., D. Wengrow. 2021, op. cit., 48–56.

⁵⁹ Labaree, L. W. (Ed.). 1961. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin. July 1, 1750, through June 30, 1753*. Vol. 4. New Haven: Yale University Press, 117–121.

⁶⁰ Kalter, S. 2006. *Benjamin Franklin, Pennsylvania, and the First Nations: The Treaties of 1736–62*. Urbana–Chicago: Chicago University Press.

⁶¹ Quoted in: Miller, R. J. March 2015. “American Indian Constitutions and Their Influence on the United States Constitution.” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 159 (1), 37.

⁶² Johansen, B. E. 1982. *Forgotten Founders: How the American Indian Helped Shape Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Common Press.

the concepts, principles and government practices of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy.”⁶³

Interestingly, on November 27, 2001, the House of Representatives also acknowledged the First Nations’ revolutionary influence on developing the new US state system in the 18th century. On that day, they unanimously passed resolution 270, which includes this paragraph: “Whereas Native American governments developed the fundamental principles of freedom of speech and separation of powers in government, and these principles form the foundation of the United States Government today.”⁶⁴

More recently, Law Professor Robert J. Miller’s paper on the topic concludes that the US government, created by the Constitution, “more closely reflects the principles of indigenous governments than those of the European monarchies and political regimes of the late-1700s.”⁶⁵ Thus, for example, John Adams, the second US president, did acknowledge the democratic traditions among the First Nations. That said, the European American Founding Fathers of the new US state also became influenced by the old world during these last official decades of the Age of Enlightenment. In *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* (1787), Adams writes that it was not the Greeks of Athens but the Phoenicians of Carthage (North Africa) who most resembled the new US state. Adams commenced with Carthage when it comes to the ancient democratic republics, and he specified this Phoenician state’s check-and-balances and its people’s right to elect their representatives democratically: “The monarchial power was in two suffetes [two annually elected chief magistrates, author comment], the aristocratical in the senate, and the people in a body held the democratical. These are said to have been nicely balanced.”⁶⁶ Seemingly building on *Politics* by Aristotle, who contended that Carthage had an older, more stable, and more balanced democratic system than the Greek states, Adams noted “another remarkable institution” in the Phoenician city-state. If the senate did not agree on a decision, they sent “an appeal to the people.” Hence, Adams concludes regarding Carthage: “This government thus far resembles those of the United States of America more than any other of the ancient republics, perhaps more than any of the modern.”⁶⁷

⁶³ Congress. 1988. *Iroquois Confederacy and Indian Nations—Recognizing Contributions to the United States*; <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/100/hconres331/text>

⁶⁴ Congress. 2001. *Expressing the Sense of Congress that Americans Should Take Time during Native American Heritage Month to Recognize the Many Accomplishments and Contributions Made by Native Peoples*; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-concurrent-resolution/270/text>

⁶⁵ Miller, R. J. 2015, op. cit., 33.

⁶⁶ Adams, J. 1797 (1787). *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America Against Attack of M. Turgot in His Letter to Dr. Price, Dated the Twenty-Second Day of March, 1778*. Vol. 1. 3rd edition. Philadelphia: Printed at Budd and Bartram for William Cobbett, 213.

⁶⁷ Adams, J. 1797, op. cit., 212.

6. CONCLUSION: VISIONS, MILLS, HORACE

So, the Enlightenment in the West was never like anything Pinker envisions in his *Enlightenment Now*. Instead, we can unearth the ideals of equality and liberty, and lasting enlightenment values, found outside the traditional, canonical presentations on the 18th century: among the subalterns, in apocryphal reports, in the “theory from the margins,” in words by Kondiaronk, Wheatley, Sancho, and Adams. Or we can extract universal values from a statement by L’Ouvverture, an intellectual still excluded from the main Enlightenment narratives. In this freedom fighter’s *Proclamation* on August 29, 1793, in his quest to unite all the wretched on the island of Haiti to make a fairer, freer, and more enlightened society, L’Ouvverture wrote: “Equality cannot exist without liberty. And for liberty to exist, we must have unity.”⁶⁸

Unity creates liberty, provides equality. So instead of more pseudoscience and myths about the past, we need a new Age of Reason. Or several new enlightenments, but better this time: enlightenment also for the 99 percent.

First, however, we must know “where we come from.” Without a more rock-solid understanding of the past, we risk building new “Houses of Wisdom” on shaky ground. After all, we carry with us an enlightened load and the wretched of the earth’s burden.

More than two hundred years after the end of the Enlightenment Era, it is as we, to paraphrase Dante, have not yet journeyed half of our intellectual life’s way, finding ourselves within a shadowed and savage forest, as if we have lost the path that does not stray. Alternatively, to use the words by Mills, introducing his *The Racial Contract* (1997): “White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today.”⁶⁹

In his second letter in the *Epistles*, the Roman poet Horace exclaimed: “He who has begun is half done; dare to know; begin!” [*Dimidium facti, qui coepit, habet; sapere aude, incipe.*]

We have also just begun. Probably, we are neither no more than half done, or, like Dante, we are hardly “midway upon the journey.”

If not now, when is the time to dare to know? When will we have the audacity to frankly investigate, study, and teach when it comes to the complexity of the “Global Enlightenments” of the past?

REFERENCES AND BIO-NOTE: see part I of this text.

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⁶⁸ L’Ouvverture, T. 2008, op. cit., 2.

⁶⁹ Mills, C. W. 1997, op. cit., 1.