

## Critical Notice

# Anti-Racism and Kant Scholarship: A Critical Notice of *Kant, Race, and Racism: Views from Somewhere*, by Huaping Lu-Adler

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### 1. Kant, race, and racism

Immanuel Kant viewed himself as the first person to have properly defined the concept of a human ‘race’. He distinguished four human ‘races’ and ranked them: placing ‘whites’ at the top, he arranged the others in terms of alleged deficits in their capacity for thought and action. He made equally abhorrent claims about race-based slavery and white colonial rule, accepting both. Over the past few decades, Kant’s position on these matters has been the subject of increasing debate, including the question whether he retracted this racial hierarchy later in life, as I have argued (Kleingeld 2007, 2012, 2014). Huaping Lu-Adler’s *Kant, Race, and Racism: Views from Somewhere* is the first Anglophone book-length discussion of Kant’s views on race and related issues. In this book, she ‘interrogates Kant’s philosophy with a deep focus on his theory of race and his relation to racism’, also addressing the question of ‘what one can do to confront racism today and what, if any, resources Kant’s philosophy can still offer to this end’ (p. 1). In the following, I first provide an overview of her argument, identifying several issues that I will subsequently pursue in more detail.

The book has three parts. In Part I, ‘Reframing the Discourse’, Lu-Adler criticizes critical race theorists, Kant scholars, and Kantians alike for focusing on the question whether there is a *contradiction* between Kant’s core moral theory and his racism (Chapter 1) and for focusing on Kant’s texts in abstraction from his *impact* on the formation of racist ideology (Chapter 2). Part of her aim is to ‘free’ scholarship

from the ‘steadfast hold’ of the thesis that Kant changed his position on race-related issues in the mid-1790s (p. 36).

In Chapter 1, she argues that Kant’s racist views are harmoniously integrated in his overall system. His moral theory, she argues, considers human beings merely *qua* rational beings, and the moral principles of the *Groundwork* ‘are not concerned with concretely embodied humans at all’ (p. 14). Kant’s racial views, by contrast, concern human beings *qua* embodied, and they have their proper systematic place in his physical geography. Since they deal with different subjects, Kant’s moral theory and his racial views are ‘perfectly consistent’ (p. 34). I will challenge this argument below.

In Chapter 2, Lu-Adler argues that the debate over Kant’s racism has focused too narrowly on Kant’s philosophical views and has overlooked his impact on the formation of racial and racist ideology. She criticizes authors who discuss Kant’s racism for employing inadequate definitions of racism. She finds Sally Haslanger’s conception of racism as a matter of a racist-ideological formation, understood in terms of social practices, most helpful. With regard to Kant and racism, Lu-Adler suggests, ‘what matters most’ is that Kant was powerfully positioned as a scholar and educator and ‘injected’ his racial views into the social world, such that they could receive active uptake (pp. 105-106). While reading the first hundred pages, I was expecting that Lu-Adler would eventually offer a historical account of Kant’s influence on racism. But she explains that she is ‘not asking that we determine Kant’s actual *causal* impact in the racist-ideological formation’ (p. 105, emphasis in original), since this is impossible to reconstruct. She restricts herself to the claim that Kant contributed to racist ideology, or that we can ‘at least *expect*’ he did and ‘*imagine*’ how it went (pp. 105, 102, emphasis added).

Lu-Adler concludes that ‘we’—I assume she means to include Kant scholars and Kantians—‘should not dwell’ on issues such as whether Kant’s racism contradicts his core moral theory or whether he radically changed his views. These issues are ‘beside the point’ (p. 40) and ‘can blind us’ to what really matters, which is that Kant contributed to racism (p. 88). She claims that

we should go beyond, if not disregard, the question of whether Kant later retracted his own racist views. For, even if he did, he could never single-handedly undo the racialist and racist worldview that his geography and anthropology teachings and writings might have helped to form in the minds of his broadest audiences. (p. 75)

I return below to this claim and to the issue of Kant’s impact.

Part II, ‘Seeing “Race”’, examines Kant’s theory of race in its historical context. Chapter 3 offers an informative account of how Kant approached race as a natural scientist and how this approach fits with his theory of scientific inquiry. The biological concept of race was supposed to help solve puzzles about the heredity of bodily features that are not part of the essence of a species. More specifically: if all humans descend from common ancestors, how did their offspring develop different heritable colours? Kant hypothesized that the human species originally had a set of general ‘germs and predispositions’ that developed differently, hereditably, and irreversibly in different climates. Examining his account of the role of hypotheses, Lu-Adler argues that his theory of race is an integral part of his theoretical philosophy.

Living in Königsberg, Kant relied on testimony for information about human beings elsewhere on the globe. Chapter 4 describes the emergence of standardized global data collection. Starting in the seventeenth century, European agents and merchants were given long lists of questions to answer during their voyages. With an engaging discussion of Bacon, Boyle, Linnaeus, Buffon, and others, Lu-Adler shows that these responses were systematized in terms of an increasingly narrow set of criteria, eventually leading to racialization based primarily on skin colour. At this point Kant enters her narrative, defining ‘race’ as a biological category and embedding racial differentiation in an overarching historical narrative of human progress achieved by ‘whites’ (or, as I should like to qualify, white *males*).

These discussions in Part II are informative and interesting. Readers not already familiar with Kant’s writings on race might have liked to hear a bit more about the substance and development of Kant’s account of the four ‘races’, the status of so-called ‘mixed races’, and the geography of race (such as the fact that Kant does not equate ‘whites’ with ‘Europeans’ but includes Africans north of the Sahara, Arabs, Turks, Persians, and ‘all other peoples of Asia who are not explicitly excluded’, VvRM 2:432; cp. BBMR 8:93). But of course, there is always more that can be said.

More controversial, however, is Lu-Adler’s description of Kant’s views of the mid to late 1790s. She contends that Kant never shows clear concern about the treatment of the enslaved individuals in the European colonies (pp. 235-236) and that he displays ‘cold indifference to the atrocities suffered by human beings *in concreto*’ throughout (p. 28). If he expresses misgivings about race-based slavery and colonialism in the mid to late 1790s, she claims, his main concern is that these have negative consequences *for Europe* (pp. 231-236). I return to this thesis below.

Part III, 'A Worldview Transformed by "Race"', addresses how the modern invention of race pervasively transformed both social relations and individual self-perceptions. Chapter 5 analyses two remarkable German novellas from the first two decades after Kant's death, both set in revolutionary Haiti. They are striking for their extraordinary perceptiveness regarding the different ways in which racialization impacts those who are differently situated in a racialized world. One novella includes apt portrayals of double consciousness *avant la lettre*. Lu-Adler uses this well-chosen background to warn against 'colourblind' accounts that abstract from race in a world that is thoroughly shaped by race concepts.

Chapter 6 addresses the formation of 'the' philosophical canon, in particular the idea that 'real philosophy' started with the Greeks. Building on Peter Park (2013) and work by others, Lu-Adler draws attention to eighteenth-century German pluralist histories of philosophy that included Chinese, Indian, and Persian traditions. She argues that Kant's claim that the history of philosophy started with the Greeks derives from his view that only 'whites' have the required capacity for abstract thought and language. She concludes that professional philosophers of all stripes, and Kant scholars and Kantians in particular, ought to be aware of this Eurocentric legacy and do their share to counteract it.

In a 'Forward-Looking Conclusion,' Lu-Adler draws more general practical conclusions. In teaching one should aim to offer a more inclusive syllabus, for example, and increase awareness of racial power dynamics in the classroom. In philosophical research, the issue of corrective justice should be made a central concern.

Towards the end of the book, I began to wonder how Lu-Adler would answer the question with which she started the book: the question of what resources, if any, Kant's philosophy offers for confronting racism today. As she portrays him, Kant developed a 'perfectly consistent' Eurocentric white supremacist system that he never gave up, and the moral philosophy included in that system is irrelevant to embodied human beings.

Despite his contributions to racism, Lu-Adler asserts, '[w]e may still read Kant..., but only if [he has] truly relevant and valuable contributions to make' (p. 328). But does he? According to Lu-Adler, this is not obvious:

We should not assume that Kant's philosophy will have something particularly useful to offer. It is just that we must look everywhere for it, with methodological care and a critical attention to lived realities as well as intellectual curiosity and honesty. (p. 336)

She finally mentions three modest examples of positive resources: Kant's understanding of self-deception, his language of reasonable hope in the face of obstacles, and his conceptions of shame and contempt (p. 347).

In what follows, I argue for a different and more optimistic conclusion. I challenge Lu-Adler's theses that Kant's moral philosophy is irrelevant to embodied human beings, that his racism remained unchanged until the end of his life, and that Kant scholars should stop discussing these issues, and I draw attention to the fact that Kant *also* had an impact on struggles *against* racism.

## 2. A moral theory for 'merely rational beings'?

In Chapter 1 Lu-Adler argues—despite her own recommendation that we put the matter aside—that there is no contradiction between Kant's moral theory and his views on race, including his views on race-based slavery. In support of this claim, she distinguishes 'three levels of [Kant's] discourse': Kant's *physical geography* considers humans as spatio-temporally particularized and embodied beings; his *anthropology* abstracts from this aspect to consider humans as free-acting, yet-to-be-perfected rational animals; and his *pure moral philosophy* abstracts even further to 'consider human beings as mere rational beings' (p. 72; figure 1.1 on pp. 18 and 71). Because Kant employs different conceptions of 'human being' at each level, what he claims about human beings at one level (say, his defence of racial slavery) does not contradict what he claims about human beings at another level (say, his moral philosophy); these claims are simply about entirely different things.

I found this argument hard to follow at times and believe it invites three objections. The first concerns Lu-Adler's presentation of the three levels. If they are *levels* of ('real') abstraction, then the most abstract conception of the 'human being' must be contained in the most concrete, bottom-level (racialized) conception. And if the three conceptions of 'human being' thus have a common core, they do not refer to entirely different things. This would undercut Lu-Adler's strategy for arguing that there is no contradiction.

Second, it is unclear why Lu-Adler refers only to the *Groundwork* when describing 'Kant's moral philosophy' as not concerned with embodied human beings. The *Metaphysics of Morals* seems to pose a particular problem for her thesis. This book is also part of 'Kant's moral philosophy', and it explicitly applies moral principles to *human* beings as such.

Third, and most importantly, I would like to challenge her claim that the *Groundwork* is not concerned with embodied human individuals. By this she seems to mean not that it isn't concerned with *particular* individuals—since neither is her own account—but rather that the *Groundwork* isn't concerned with *human individuals* as such. Lu-Adler spends only one paragraph arguing for this rather non-standard reading, referring to Kant's assertion in the *Groundwork* that moral concepts and moral laws have their origin completely *a priori* in reason. She points out that Kant derives the principle of morality 'from the universal concept of a rational being as such' (GMS 4:411-412), and she concludes that the *Groundwork's* moral philosophy is concerned with human beings 'as mere rational beings', not with 'human beings *in concreto*' (pp. 51-52). She therefore calls it a 'misinterpretation' to read Kant's 'highest moral principles' as relating to actual human beings (pp. 14, 330).

I do not find this brief argument compelling. Kant starts and ends the *Groundwork* with the ordinary moral cognition of human beings who have not only reason but also sensible desires. As Kant puts it, humans consider themselves to be both rational beings and part of the natural world (GMS 4:452). It is precisely because they have sensible desires that moral laws unconditionally *necessitate* human beings (GMS 4:389). *Mere* rational beings, by contrast, necessarily act in accordance with moral laws and are not faced with moral *imperatives*.

Furthermore, part of Kant's project in the *Groundwork* is to determine the *source* of the unconditional necessity with which moral laws command. In the second section, he argues that this source can lie only in reason, not in sensible desires. The fact that this *part* of the argument starts from the concept of a rational being does not mean that Kant's moral philosophy as a whole pertains only to human beings as 'mere rational beings'. Kant's famous examples in the *Groundwork* illustrate that he indeed applies the moral principle to human agents who, due to their sensible desires, consider acting in ways in which 'mere rational beings as such' never would.

Because the moral theory of the *Groundwork* pertains to embodied human beings, contrary to Lu-Adler's assertion, the contradiction between Kant's highest moral principles and his racism does not go away. To mention just one version of it: in the *Groundwork* Kant claims that it is morally impermissible to use other human beings<sup>1</sup> 'merely as

<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking, the Formula of Humanity prohibits using the *humanity* in your own person or that of another merely as a means, but Kant also speaks simply of using another *human being* merely as a means (for example, GMS 4:429). For discussion, see [Kleingeld \(2020\)](#).

means.' By definition, individuals of all human races are human beings (BBMR 8:99). But in lectures from around the same time he endorses race-based slavery, which involves precisely the use of human beings 'merely as means' (for example, V-PG Dönhoff 26:1080).

Elsewhere I have argued that the fact that these claims contradict each other presents a problem for anyone engaging with Kant's moral philosophy of the 1780s (Kleingeld 2019). We cannot ignore the racist side of this contradiction and focus only on Kant's *Groundwork* moral principles. We should recognize that when Kant formulates the principles as applying to all human beings, he is *abstracting* from his background assumptions about racial differences on the basis of which he restricts their application. If we ignore these background assumptions, we risk misrepresenting the Kant of the *Groundwork* as a racial egalitarian. For example, we should not infer from the Formula of Humanity's prohibition against using others 'merely as a means' that Kant condemned racial slavery. Moreover, his racist assumptions influenced which philosophical issues he found important and how he addressed them. When making philosophical use of elements of Kant's moral philosophy from the 1780s, therefore, we should make the necessary adjustments (for an example, see the 'race-sensitive re-articulation' in Mills 2019).

With these precautions, we can make full use of whatever resources we find in Kant's moral philosophy, including the usual candidates: core Kantian notions such as human dignity, the moral requirement of respect, Kant's republican conception of freedom (which he defines in opposition to dependence and domination), and the prohibition against using others merely as means, to mention just a few. These ideas may serve as valuable resources in the fight *against* racism—and they have served as such in the past.

Importantly, therefore, the diagnosis that there is a contradiction between the moral principles of the *Groundwork* as stated and Kant's simultaneous acceptance of exploitative colonialism and race-based slavery gives us no reason at all to downplay or disregard his racism. On the contrary, we can use the *Groundwork's* philosophical resources in support of anti-racist theorizing only if we acknowledge that Kant himself defended racist views at the time.

### 3. Kant's anti-colonialism

Despite claiming that we should disregard the issue, Lu-Adler argues that Kant did not change his race-related views late in life (pp. 230-236). She

agrees that, starting with *Toward Perpetual Peace* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant condemned European colonial practices on other continents, as I have argued (Kleingeld 2007, 2012, 2014), but she denies that this reflects a change in Kant's views on racial differences.<sup>2</sup> Concurring with Inés Valdez (2017), she argues that Kant began to oppose colonialism<sup>3</sup> because he judged that it had bad consequences for Europe. I do not find this argument convincing, as I will explain.

It is beyond dispute that during the 1780s and into the early 1790s Kant characterized and ranked the four alleged races in terms of their intellectual and agential capacities. The resulting racial hierarchy is found in many lectures from this period. Kant also refers to it in his published work, for example in an article from 1788, 'On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy' (ÜGTP 8:174n., 8:176).

It is also widely agreed that in the mid-1790s Kant changed his position on European colonial practices. What is in dispute, however, is whether he criticized these practices for the right reasons and whether he retracted the racial hierarchy. I have argued that Kant came to see European exploitative colonialism and race-based slavery as violations of the *rights* of those who were colonized and enslaved (rather than as primarily bad for Europe) and that he dropped the racial hierarchy (Kleingeld 2007, 2012, 2014). Lu-Adler objects that Kant viewed the colonial practices as bad for Europe and maintained an attitude of 'cold indifference' to the plight of the colonized and enslaved throughout.

### 3.1 Before and after

During the period for which we have clear evidence that Kant defends the racial hierarchy, from the 1770s until the early 1790s, he tightly connects his characterization of the 'races' to his endorsement of European colonial rule and race-based slavery. He characterizes the different 'races' in terms of *politically relevant* capacities, or lack thereof. In light of the various incapacities of the other 'races', Kant sees white colonial rule as appropriate. Consider the following: 'Americans and Negroes cannot govern themselves. Thus, [they] serve only as slaves' (R 15:878, from notes for his anthropology lectures from the 1780s). Native Americans,

<sup>2</sup> Lu-Adler (pp. 38-40) also expresses agreement with several other objections that Robert Bernasconi (2011) has raised against my thesis. I have replied to these in Kleingeld (2014).

<sup>3</sup> By 'colonialism' I mean the practice of a state's subjecting a territory and its population, ruling it as a 'mother state' and, typically, also exploiting it. Kant does not regard all types of colonies as impermissible, however. Permissible colonies are settlements abroad that are either made on land not used by others or made with the fully informed and voluntary consent of the local population (MS 6:338).



Kant suggests, are the 'lowest' of the four 'races'. He calls them impassive and incapable of any culture (ÜGTP 8:176; R 15:877). 'Blacks', he contends, can be trained but are 'incapable of leading themselves'; they 'adopt the culture of bondsmen but not of free men' (R 15:877). He says of 'Hindus' (persons on the Indian subcontinent) that they are superior to both; they can be educated but not in endeavours that require the use of abstract concepts, and hence they are incapable of being magistrates and 'incapable of genuine freedom' (R 15:877). Kant calls the 'white race' the only non-deficient race: '[T]he race of whites contains all incentives and talents' (V-Anth/Mensch 25: 1187; R 15:878). 'Whites' (or, more precisely, white males) are the only human beings capable of political government. Accordingly, Kant comments that India would be 'happier' under a European sovereign (V-PG/Dönhoff 26:1058) and expects Europe eventually also to 'give laws for all the other [parts of the world]' (IaG 8:29). The racial hierarchy is found in numerous anthropology lectures, including V-Anth/Pillau 25:843 (1777/78), V-Anth/Mensch 25:1187-1188 (1781/82), V-Anth/Starke2: 119u (1790/91), V-Anth/Dohna-Wundlacken Ko 362-5 (1791/92), and V-Anth/Reichel 146-147 (1793/94).

That Kant later changed his attitude towards European colonial practices can be illustrated by the contrast between two passages in which he discusses the colonies. In the Dohna Lectures on Physical Geography (1792), Kant reportedly told his students the following about the islands revealingly labelled the 'Sugar Islands':

Much more important [than Cuba] is St. Domingo. On the French part of this island alone there are 350,000 Negroes, on Jamaica 200,000, on Martinique, Guadeloupe, the Grenadines, the number of Negroes varies very much; it is the proper standard of wealth. The old Indian inhabitants ... can tolerate this kind of labour as little as the Europeans, only Negroes were created for it. ... [O]nly the old fertile soil (black earth) produces the greatest profit from these islands. (V-PG/Dohna Transcript:241)

Kant here explains to his students how these islands are used for European profit. As he has done many times before, he describes the Indigenous peoples of the Americas as physically weak, while describing 'Blacks' as having been 'created for' the harsh labour conditions on the plantations. He transitions seamlessly from the use of enslaved human beings to the use of the soil. There is no hint of disapproval of race-based slavery or colonial rule. In other lectures he tells his students which African peoples are 'the most desirable' for use as slaves because

they ‘tolerate labour in the greatest heat’, how many ‘have to be bought’ each year, and how to ‘get’ them, namely ‘with force’ (V-PG/Dönhoff 26:1080). Indeed, Lu-Adler’s description of Kant’s attitude here as ‘cold indifference’ is entirely apt.

By the time we get to *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795), however, Kant’s tone has changed. Claiming that they violate the principles of ‘cosmopolitan right’, he now *condemns* the European colonial powers for their violence and cruelty:

[T]he injustice they show in *visiting* foreign land and peoples (which with them is tantamount to *conquering* them) goes to horrifying lengths. When America, the Negro countries, the Spice Islands, the Cape, and so forth were discovered, they were, to them, countries belonging to no one, since they counted the inhabitants as nothing. In the East Indies (Hindustan), they brought in foreign troops under the pretext of merely proposing to set up trading posts, but with them oppression of the indigenous inhabitants, incitement of the various Indian states to widespread wars, famine, rebellions, treachery, and the whole litany of ills/evils that oppress the human race. (ZeF 8:358-9, emphases in original)

Here Kant denounces what he calls *horrifying injustice* against the local populations in America, Africa, and Asia. He accuses European states of counting the inhabitants as nothing, using deceptive tactics to instigate wars among local rulers, oppressing Indigenous populations, and causing a long list of other terrible consequences. Lu-Adler’s description of Kant’s tone as one of ‘cold indifference’ does not seem apt here.

Kant first introduces ‘cosmopolitan right’ in *Toward Perpetual Peace* and also includes it in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. It grants juridical status to all human beings and covers relations between states and foreign individuals or groups, including non-state peoples. Cosmopolitan right explicitly prohibits settling on land used by others, except through a treaty concluded in good faith (MS 6:352-353). It grants the right to present oneself to foreign individuals, groups, or states, but not a right to enter their territory. They in turn have the right to deny entry, but not with hostility, and not if their refusal would lead to the prospective visitor’s demise (ZeF 8:358; MS 6:352). Kant calls cosmopolitan right a right to the conditions of *hospitality*.

Kant explicitly extends the scope of cosmopolitan right to human beings on other continents. He mentions as examples the Khoekhoe (‘Hottentots’), the Tungusi, Indigenous American peoples (MS 6:353), and others, in addition to those mentioned in the block quotation above.

He criticizes European states and trading companies for *violating* this right and specifically rejects several common justifications of European colonialism (MS 6:353).

Moreover, instead of his earlier claim that all ‘races’ except ‘whites’ are unable to govern themselves, Kant now sketches an ideal future in which ‘distant parts of the world can enter peaceably into relations with one another, which can ultimately become regulated by public laws and so finally bring humankind ever closer to a cosmopolitan constitution’ (ZeF 8:358). He expresses the hope that they will form a union ‘for a lawful settlement of their disputes’ (ZeF 8:379)—a union that is to encompass ‘all peoples on earth’ (ZeF 8:357)—and form a ‘peaceful community of all peoples on earth’ (MS 6:352). Compared to his earlier claim that only ‘whites’ have the capacities required to run political institutions and are hence entitled to govern the rest of the world, this is a pervasive change of view.

Starting with *Toward Perpetual Peace*, Kant makes other changes as well. He omits racial differentiation from his account of historical progress (ZeF 8:360-368). He also changes some of his descriptions of the ‘races’, for example by attributing courage to Native Americans (ZeF 8:365; already in RGV 6:33). Moreover, he omits any characterization of the ‘races’ from the published version of the lectures on anthropology (1798).

### 3.2 Kant’s alleged Eurocentrism

Concurring with Valdez (2017), Lu-Adler argues that Kant’s anti-colonialism amounts to no more than a merely Eurocentric concern with the negative effects of colonialism on progress and peace in Europe. Furthermore, Valdez and Lu-Adler both claim that his new opposition to colonialism goes together with his commitment to a racial hierarchy (p. 40; Valdez 2017, pp. 819, 821). In support of these claims, Lu-Adler refers to only a single sentence from *Toward Perpetual Peace* and a sentence from Kant’s notes. The first sentence is part of Kant’s discussion of Cosmopolitan Right in *Toward Perpetual Peace*. It is taken from the paragraph immediately following the previous block quotation, in which Kant condemns the injustice perpetrated by the European states:

The worst of this (or, considered from the standpoint of a moral judge, the best) is that they [viz., European states] do not even benefit from this violence; that all these trading companies are on the verge of collapse; that the Sugar Islands, that place of the most gruesome and most calculated slavery, yield no real earnings but serve

only a mediate and indeed not very laudable purpose, namely, training sailors for warships, and so, in turn, carrying on wars in Europe; and this for powers that make much ado of their piety ... while they drink injustice like water ... (ZeF 8:359)

Lu-Adler claims that this sentence reveals that Kant is ‘worried about racial slavery’s eventual negative consequences for the European states’ (p. 231); this is his ‘only’ concern, ‘not moral concerns about the oppressed “races”’ (pp. 28-29).

It seems to me, however, that this inference is not warranted. Kant condemns European colonial practices as violations of the *rights* of those affected (see §3.1). Moreover, Kant’s claim that the colonial system leads to financial ruin and perpetual war for Europe does not entail that his main concern is Eurocentric. His stated concern in *Toward Perpetual Peace* is *global* perpetual peace (ZeF 8:349n, 8:357), and the fact that European colonialism fuels destructive wars in Europe and around the world makes it a formidable obstacle to global peace.

Furthermore, the idea that colonialism was bad for colonial powers themselves served as a trope in anti-colonial and anti-slavery literature. Authors often included pragmatic arguments in the hope that these would convince those who remained unmoved by the moral considerations (see, for example, [Dobie 2010](#), pp. 228, 232, 244, 250); Kant may have done the same. Again, the fact that the sentence mentions negative consequences for Europe does not mean that these are Kant’s main concern.

Finally, the sentence provides no evidence at all that Kant still displays cold indifference to the plight of the oppressed. Kant now condemns slavery as ‘most gruesome’, and his comment about colonialism’s effects is sandwiched between blistering condemnations of the (‘horri-fying’) injustice and hypocrisy of European states.

What, though, are we to make of Kant’s odd-sounding statement that financial trouble and war are ‘*the worst* of this’? Lu-Adler seems to read this phrase as meaning *the worst for Europe*. Kant’s statement is not entirely clear, but the fact that he writes that a *moral judge* would view it as a good thing that Europe does not benefit from its violence suggests that he may well have meant the opposite. European colonial powers get what they deserve, in the eyes of the moral judge, since what they are doing is unequivocally evil; it is wanton cruelty; they continue to commit atrocities when they do not even benefit. Furthermore, when read in light of the overall aim of *Toward Perpetual Peace* (that is, global perpetual peace), Kant can be taken to say the following: not only do European colonial practices involve horrifying injustice, they also cause wars in

Europe and all over the world, and this is ‘*the worst*’ for the prospect of *perpetual peace*. This reading is strongly suggested by Kant’s draft for this section, in which he writes, after an extensive critique of European violence, that ‘instead of peace, the wars ... [are made to] perpetuate’ (VAZeF 23:174).

The second sentence Lu-Adler uses to support her thesis that Kant is Eurocentric is taken from this draft. Kant writes that the ‘Negro trade’ is ‘as such already a violation of the hospitality of the people of Blacks’ and ‘becomes it even more for Europe by its consequences’ (VAZeF 23:174, quoted on p. 231). On her view, Kant here worries that ‘the violations that the European states committed overseas now clearly threaten to ricochet onto themselves’ (p. 231).

Kant’s statement does not really say, however, that the consequences are bad for Europe (‘it’ refers to ‘violation’). On the contrary, Kant writes that the slave trade leads to even more of a *violation* because—and here follows his biting explanation—now Europe is using its large naval power to ‘bury masses of people on the bottom of the sea,’ to ‘ravage all coastal areas,’ and to ‘let entire peoples...die slowly from hunger’ (VAZeF 23:174). *These* are the further consequences of the slave trade that Kant highlights, and they are perpetrated by Europe. They are a violation ‘for’ Europe in the sense that they are attributable to Europe. Kant then continues by condemning Europeans for having ‘displaced’ and ‘enslaved’ the Indigenous populations of America and for oppressing the populations of the East Indies and causing wars there (VAZeF 23:174). He mentions all of this as an elaboration of his claim, in the sentence immediately prior to that quoted by Lu-Adler, that Europe, through its violations of cosmopolitan right, has brought evils ‘*on humankind*’, including Europe itself, and that it has made war, rather than peace, perpetual (VAZeF 23:174).

In short, the two sentences on which Lu-Adler relies do not prove that in *Toward Perpetual Peace* Kant is worried only about colonialism’s negative impact on Europe, and their immediate contexts clearly undercut her claim. Moreover, she does not address the sizeable amount of textual evidence that runs *counter* to her thesis, such as Kant’s wider discussion of cosmopolitan right, his extension of this right to peoples on other continents, and his critique of the horrifying injustice perpetrated by European colonial powers.

### 3.3 Evidence that Kant abandoned the racial hierarchy

Did Kant retract his racial hierarchy? Lu-Adler rightly points out that the rejection of colonialism and racial slavery is logically compatible

with the endorsement of a racial hierarchy. On her own interpretation, Kant combined precisely these positions. As evidence that Kant's position on racial characteristics remained stable over time, she points out that he did not explicitly renounce the racial hierarchy (p. 39).<sup>4</sup> But, I would like to add, in his later work we find no explicit endorsement of it either.

The fact that Kant did not explicitly renounce the hierarchy does not show that he still endorsed it. Kant hardly ever provides such meta-statements, even though he clearly changed many of his views over time. More importantly, we do not ordinarily require such meta-statements in other cases. Consider the debate about whether Kant's theory in the *Critique of Practical Reason* constitutes a 'great reversal' compared to his theory in the *Groundwork*. Authors on both sides make their case by reference to Kant's *arguments* in these works; the answer is not seen as depending on the existence of an explicit meta-statement. There is no reason to proceed any differently in the case of Kant's views on racial hierarchy, although it would certainly have been much better if he had forcefully renounced his earlier views.

Positive evidence that Kant did retract his racial hierarchy, moreover, can be found in the direct connection, in his earlier work, between his views on racial differences and his defence of European colonialism and race-based slavery. As mentioned above, he characterized the 'races' in terms of their (in)ability to govern themselves and used this to justify

<sup>4</sup> In addition, Lu-Adler mentions several isolated passages from 1795 or later to support her thesis that he continues to endorse his racial hierarchy, but in each case I doubt they do support it. (1) She quotes a passage in which Kant claims that the Chinese and some Indians *do not* use abstract concepts and still use concrete images to make ideas of reason understandable (Jäsche Logik 9:27, pp. 8, 314-315) as proof that he holds that they *cannot*. (2) She claims that in the *Anthropology* Kant regards 'Orientals' as incapable of philosophy, based on his use of a metaphor involving camels. He here describes polyhistorians 'who carry around in their heads... a load of books for one hundred camels' but who lack the 'eye of philosophy'. Lu-Adler fails to note that Kant's own examples of such people are European humanists such as Scaliger, Pico della Mirandola, and others (pp. 297, 304; cp. Anth 7:184, 7:226-227). (3) She mentions that Kant ascribes to 'Caribs' an 'inborn lifelessness' as evidence that he sees them as *unable* to become active (p. 69); however, according to Kant something can be 'inborn' and yet be the product of a *free decision* on the part of the agent (RGV 6:25, 6:38). The stereotype is objectionable but does not show *inability*, as is the case with most of Kant's stereotypical descriptions of alleged 'national characters' (cp. Anth 7:311-320). (4) She cites MS 6:345 as likely evidence that Kant entertained the possible extinction of 'nonwhite races' (p. 227), but the relevant passage (which mentions the low population density in North America) occurs in his description of a position he *rejects*. (5) She writes that in SF 7:90 Kant mentions the slave trade but fails to criticize it (p. 230, n.115). Kant here introduces the slave trade as an example when criticizing the underhanded tactics used by the British monarch and his minister to influence parliament. The example most likely refers to Henry Dundas's successful efforts, in the mid-1790s, to delay the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, in which case it indicates Kant's *objection* to the slave trade.

European colonial rule and race-based slavery. (Recall such statements as that Native Americans and Blacks are incapable of self-government and hence serve only as slaves.) In *Toward Perpetual Peace* and later works, he *condemns* colonial rule and exploitation as a violation of the rights of the colonized, now advocating a world in which distant parts of the earth enter into peaceful relations under public laws. This indicates that he now considers (male) humans of all skin colours to be capable of political self-government and its prerequisites (education, abstract thinking, and so on). In other words, it indicates that he gave up his earlier idea that the ‘white race’ is superior and may rule and use the others however it sees fit.

#### 4. Kant’s dual impact

One of Lu-Adler’s central claims is that, for the sake of the fight against racism, scholars working on Kant’s views on race should move away from the issues of whether these views changed over time and whether they contradict his moral principles. Instead, what should guide our research agenda is ‘Kant’s relation to racism’, by which she means the contribution we can ‘imagine’ or ‘expect’ Kant to have made to racist ideology.

I do not believe that one should place such restrictions on Kant scholarship for the sake of anti-racism. We should remain more pluralistic, allowing for multiple, complementary, and mutually enriching approaches to the issue of Kant, race, and racism.

The reason is not just that it is in the nature of scholarship that it may open up new avenues in as yet unexpected directions. The logic of Lu-Adler’s own argument implies that we should also focus on the issues she wants us to disregard.

Although Lu-Adler aims to determine Kant’s relation to racism, she does not address or even mention the fact that Kant has also had an *anti-colonial*, *anti-slavery*, and *anti-racist* impact. A full account of Kant’s relation to racism, however, should include the influence of his moral theory from the 1780s on *anti-racism*. Consider two examples, both key elements of the *Groundwork*: Kant’s defence of human dignity and the prohibition, in the Formula of Humanity, against using other human beings ‘merely as means’. Both have been immensely influential in the fight against slavery, colonialism, and white supremacist ideology, despite Kant’s own racist commitments at the time of writing the *Groundwork*. After all, and as Lu-Adler is well aware, Kant’s impact

does not necessarily track the substance of his own beliefs. Many readers of the *Groundwork* were unaware of (the extent of) Kant's racism. Moreover, even if they knew about it, they may have abstracted from his racism and worked with Kant's moral principles *as stated*, that is, as principles that apply to all human beings. This contribution to anti-racism, too, is part of Kant's legacy.

As I explained at the end of §2, using the moral philosophy of the *Groundwork* in abstraction from his views on race carries the risk of misrepresenting Kant's own position and/or overlooking the need for philosophical revisions. Hence, we need to examine the relation between Kant's moral principles and his racist views, including whether they contradict each other.

Consider, second, Kant's legal and political theory of the mid to late 1790s, most influentially *Toward Perpetual Peace* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*. These works have widely been read as condemning colonialism and race-based slavery as violations of the rights of the colonized and the enslaved (see, for example, the collection edited by [Flikschuh and Ypi 2014](#)). If Kant's influence on racist ideology is a reason for focusing on his earlier race-related views, then his influence on anti-colonialism and abolitionism is likewise a reason for focusing on these later works.

I do not mean to suggest, of course, that Kant completely overcame racism in all regards or that his theory from the mid-1790s can simply be 'cut and pasted' to serve as a ready-made ingredient for current philosophical theories. In the second half of the 1790s, Kant envisioned an ideal future in which human beings on all continents would unite in a shared legal order, but he did not discuss the process of abolition and decolonization—let alone the requirements of postcolonial justice (including corrective justice) or the social power and lasting impact of racialization and racist ideology, to mention a few examples. Furthermore, he continued to voice objectionable stereotypes about 'national character', 'savages', and gender, relegating women to a perpetual dependent status. Thus, we will have to do better, and we will have to think for ourselves.

My discussion has focused on the main points on which Lu-Adler and I disagree, especially in relation to Part I of her book. I have argued against both her claim that the *Groundwork* is not concerned with embodied human beings and her assertion that Kant's moral theory is perfectly consistent with his views on race. I also disagree with Lu-Adler's suggestion that the question whether Kant changed his mind on race-related issues should be suppressed for the sake of anti-racism. It seems to me that answering this question is indispensable to a full



account of Kant's relation to racism and that the fight against racism is not best served by focusing only on his likely contribution to racist ideology. We should also attend to (rather than intentionally disregard) Kant's later work, where he develops the notion of cosmopolitan right and explicitly critiques European powers for committing horrific injustice against the colonized. I would like to repeat my positive assessment, however, of the informative and engaging discussions, in Parts II and III, of Kant's work from the 1770s through to the early 1790s. They tell an important part of a longer story.<sup>5</sup>

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## Abbreviations

Anth	Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798)
BBMR	'Determination of the Concept of a Human Race' (1785)
GMS	<i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (1785)
IaG	'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim' (1784)
MS	<i>Metaphysics of Morals</i> (1797)

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- R Notes and Fragments  
 RGV *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793)  
 SF *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798)  
 ÜGTP 'On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy' (1788)  
 VAZeF Drafts for *Toward Perpetual Peace*  
 V-Anth Lectures on Anthropology  
 V-PG Lectures on Physical Geography  
 VvRM 'Of the Different Races of Human Beings' (1775/1777)  
 ZeF *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795)
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