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On Dealing with Kant's Sexism and Racism

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§1. Introduction

Immanuel Kant is known as an ardent defender of the moral equality and inviolable dignity of all humans. Yet he also contended that men are naturally superior to women and—for much of his life—that "whites" are naturally superior to other "races." On these grounds, he defended the rule of men over women and—again for much of his life—the rule of whites over the rest of the world.

Kant is no exception in having held sexist and racist views, and we should not regard his views as a matter of merely contingent personal prejudice. Sexism and racism were endemic features of the Western philosophical discourse of his era and of the belief systems, social practices, and political institutions that form the historical context of this discourse.

Kant's case is especially poignant, however. He is one of the greatest philosophers of all time, he was able to break with received opinions on many other issues, and he formulated egalitarian moral principles that he claimed to be valid for all human beings—and indeed more broadly still, for all rational beings. Yet he long defended European colonial rule over the rest of the world and the enslavement, by "whites," of those he racialized as being "yellow," "black," "copper-red," and "mixed"-race. Late in life, around his 70th birthday, Kant dropped the thesis of racial hierarchy and began to criticize European colonialism, but he never made parallel revisions to his account of the status of women.

Many moral theorists have been inspired by Kant's conception of human dignity, equality, and the duty of respect. Many also believe that the moral principles Kant articulated can be used precisely to show what is wrong with racism and sexism. But is it possible to do so when we know that Kant himself endorsed racist and sexist views during the very years in which he formulated his egalitarian moral principles?

Can we separate the principles from the objectionable views and use Kant's principles to criticize his own biases? These are the questions at issue in this essay.[1]

I first provide a brief description of Kant's view on sexual and racial hierarchies, and of the way they intersect (§2). I then move to the question whether we should 'remove and set aside' Kant's sexism and racism or 'translate' his egalitarian principles into inegalitarian ones, and I advocate a third position (§3). In §4 I argue that the use of inclusive language and female pronouns, in discussions of Kant's moral and political philosophy, carries significant risks. I conclude by proposing preconditions for fruitfully using Kant's principles to criticize sexism and racism.

§2. Kant on the Sexes and the Races

In the 1780s, the decade of the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), Kant defended the view that there is a sexual and racial hierarchy that justifies the subjection of women to men and of non-whites to whites. In the subsequent decade, he gave up his commitment to the racial hierarchy but not to the sexual hierarchy. I will present his views only briefly here, since my interest in this paper lies in the follow-up questions they raise.[2]

§2.1. Sexual Difference and Sexual Hierarchy

From his early pre-critical writings to his last publications, Kant described women as having very different characteristics than men—characteristics that bear directly on moral agency. In a long chapter on the "contrast" between the sexes, in the early *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764), Kant writes:

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[1] In this essay, I focus only on racism and sexism in Kant's work because these are the focus of this special issue of *SGIR Review*. Many of the arguments developed in this essay can be extended to other aspects of Kant's work and to the work of other figures in the history of philosophy. I thank Gerad Gentry for inviting me to write this paper in which I combine, further elaborate, and extend several arguments originally introduced in separate contexts. I thank him for organizing the panel at the 2019 Eastern APA where this paper was first presented, and I am also grateful to the audience at that session, as well as to Elvira Basevich, Carolyn Benson, Michael Gregory, Suzanne Jacobi, Marijana Vujosevic, and Lieuwe Zijlstra for helpful comments.

[2] I have discussed Kant's views on race and gender in more detail in Kleingeld, 1993, 2007, and 2014, and I draw on these papers in this section.

> The virtue of the woman is a *beautiful virtue*. That of the male sex ought to be a *noble virtue*. Women will avoid evil not because it is unjust but because it is ugly, and for them virtuous actions mean those that are morally beautiful [*sittlich schön*]. Nothing of ought, nothing of must, nothing of obligation. … They do something only because they love to, and the art lies in making sure that they love only what is good. I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles, and I hope not to give offense by this, for these are also extremely rare among the male sex. (OFBS 2:231–232)

Of course, Kant's gallant ending in this passage does not diminish the gravity of his characterization of women as unreceptive to moral obligation and that of men as having to master the art of directing women toward the good. Nor does Kant's claim that these sexual differences have been arranged wisely by "Nature" or "Providence" make this sound any better (OFBS 2:228–243).

In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), one of Kant's last publications, he continues to distinguish between "feminine" and "masculine" virtue, asserting that each has a different "incentive," that women have "their own vocation," and that this is all part of a grand providential scheme (A 7:303-311).

When two people unite, Kant writes with reference to marriage, one must be subordinate to the other. Nature has made men superior to women in strength and courage, whereas women are naturally fearful, and this gives men the right to command. Women, by contrast, are superior to men in being able to conquer the inclination of the other sex toward them. As if this was not already damning with faint praise, Kant adds that men gladly submit to their wives' regimes so as to be able to go about their own business (A 7:303–304).

In his legal and political philosophy, Kant never criticizes the legal tutelage of women; indeed, he justifies it explicitly by reference to male superiority. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant asserts that the only "*human* right" is the "innate right to freedom" that "belongs to every human being by virtue of his humanity." He further explicates this as a right to freedom, equality, and independence (including the right to be *one's own master* [*Herr*], MM 6:237). Yet Kant also argues that the "natural superiority" of men gives a husband the right to command over his wife as her master (*Herr*) (MM 6:279; cp. A 7:209). Further, he classifies "*all* women" as "passive citizens," that is, as lacking civil independence and the right to vote. Dependent men

(such as domestic servants) are also passive citizens, but Kant explicitly states that they should always have the option of working their way up to active citizenship (MM 6:314–315). Nowhere does Kant condemn the subordinate legal and political status of women or call for their emancipation.

Kant shows some awareness of the tensions in his own account. He feels the need to declare that the characteristics of women and their subordinate status do not run counter to the fundamental equality of men and women (MM 6:279), but his comments hardly move beyond a reaffirmation of natural male superiority. Moreover, he admits that the very notion of "passive citizenship" "seems to contradict the concept of a citizen as such" (MM 6:314). But this does not motivate him to apply his own republican principles to the internal organization of the family or the legal status of women. His claim in the *Anthropology* that when two people unite one must be subordinated to the other (see above) contradicts his account of the freedom and equality of the citizens who are united in the republic (MM 6:314).

In his moral theory, the characteristics he assigns to men, such as courage, appear as the virtues of *human beings*. These are qualities that—he there claims—all human beings ought to strive to realize fully and in a morally appropriate way. The female characteristics do not appear to mark potential *human* excellences, however, and what Kant calls "feminine virtue" is not moral virtue in the strict sense of his ethics.

Kant repeatedly acknowledges that there are women whose conduct does not fit his characterization, such as women scientists. Rather than celebrating their exceptional accomplishments and calling for their civil and political emancipation, however, he describes them as aberrations (OFBS 2: 229–230; LA Parow, 25: 355; A 7:307).[3] He says that he "would rather not deal with such women," and that, as a rule, "nature has put something into the man for which one will look in vain in a woman" (LA Parow 25: 355). The women he does praise are "upright women who, in connection with their household, laudably maintained a character suitable to their vocation" (A 7:308).[4] He praises *womanly* women, women who do their *womanly* duties.

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[3] I thank Kate Moran for the reference to the Parow lectures.

[4] Mari Mikkola (2011:102) claims that in this sentence Kant gives an example of women acting on *moral principles*. But given the reference to "their household" and to "a character *suitable to their vocation*" rather than character simpliciter, this does not seem to be the case. Moreover, immediately following

§2.2. *Racial Difference with and without Racial Hierarchy*

Whereas Kant attributes to women characteristics that *contrast* with those of men, while also asserting their equality, until the mid 1790s he explicitly describes the "yellow," "Negro," and "copper-red" races as having increasingly serious *deficits* compared to "whites" and as lacking the capacity to govern themselves. On this basis, Kant defends white colonial rule over the rest of humankind, including the exploitation of non-white slaves. (It is worth noting here that Kant does not restrict the original region of "whites" to Europe but includes Africa north of the Sahara and large parts of Asia, see DCHR 8:92.)

Kant portrays whites as occupying the highest rung of the racial ladder and as entitled to give laws to all other parts of the world. In his 1782 lectures on Physical Geography, Kant claims that the peoples of India would be much happier under European rule (LPG Doenhoff, 178–178'). In drafts of his anthropology lectures, he notes that "Americans and Negroes cannot govern themselves. Thus, [they] serve only as slaves" (R 15:878). In the lectures, he is reported as having said that [Native] Americans are the lowest of the four races because they are weak and incapable of being educated. He places Negroes above them because they can be trained to be slaves (but are incapable of other forms of education), and he remarks that although the inhabitants of India can be educated, this does not extend to the use of abstract concepts (LA Menschenkunde, 25:1187), and hence they are incapable of being magistrates (R 15: 877). Kant also refers to this hierarchy in his published works, such as the 1788 essay "On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy," which appeared just months after the *Critique of Practical Reason* (UTP 8:176).

Kant's discussions of chattel slavery until the mid-1790s are strikingly matter-of-fact.[5] He reports on the types of slaves needed for various types of labor (VRM

this passage, Kant gives several examples of men (Milton, Socrates) who displayed "masculine virtue" when faced with unlawful or dishonorable requests from their wives, and who did so "without diminishing the merit of feminine virtue" (A 7:308; where Kant also presents Milton's rather condescending response to his wife).

[5] By "slavery" I mean chattel slavery. Kant distinguishes this from slavery imposed as criminal punishment. In the Doctrine of Right, he argues that this punishment is permissible within (very wide) limits and as long as it is imposed only on the person who committed the crime (MM 6:329–330). Presumably he refers to the use of prisoners for forced labor, but in this paper I leave this issue to the side.

2:438n.), endorses an anti-abolitionist tract (UTP 8:174n.), and remarks that Negroes "seem to be made to serve others" (LA Ko 363) and "were created for" the harsh labor conditions on the so-called [Caribbean] "Sugar Islands" (LPG Dohna, 421). The 1780s lecture transcripts include passages such as the following:

> The Mandinka are the very most desirable among all Negroes up to the Gambia river, because they are the most hardworking ones. These are the ones that one prefers to seek for slaves, because these can tolerate labor in the greatest heat that no human being [*Mensch*] can endure. Each year 20,000 of this Negro nation have to be bought to replace their decline in America, where they are used to work on the spice trees … One gets the Negroes by having them catch each other, and one has to seize them with force. (LPG Doenhoff: 189)

Note in this passage the implicit contrast between "slave" and "human being" and Kant's adoption of the perspective of the slave owner when explaining to his students which kinds of slaves "one prefers" and which "have to be bought."

In the middle of the 1790s, however, not long before the publication of *Toward Perpetual Peace,* Kant *abandoned* the thesis of racial hierarchy and white superiority. In contrast to his earlier characterization of Native Americans as weak, for example, he now calls them courageous, on a par with medieval European knights (TPP 8:365). Whereas he had previously described conditions on the "Sugar Islands" without any hint of criticism, merely educating his students on the use of these territories for European profit, he shifts to being a vocal critic of colonialism and slavery. In *Toward Perpetual Peace* Kant writes:

> The worst of this (or, considered from the standpoint of a moral judge, the best) is that they [viz., the European states] do not even profit from this violence; that all these trading companies are on the verge of collapse; that the Sugar Islands, this place of the cruelest and most calculated slavery, yield no true profit. (TPP 8:359)

Importantly, not only does Kant begin to criticize colonialism and slavery, but he simultaneously adds a new category of public right to his legal and political theory. This is the category of "cosmopolitan right." Cosmopolitan right grants full and equal

juridical status to all humans—to all "citizens of the earth" (*Erdbürger*, MM 6:353). It covers relations between states and foreign individuals or groups, including non-state peoples. Among other things, cosmopolitan right prohibits states from imperialist intrusion. No one has a right to settle land used by others, except when expressly permitted through a treaty (TPP 8:358–359). Kant appeals to this new type of right when he condemns European colonialism and slavery. He calls the "trade in Negroes" a grave violation of their cosmopolitan right (R 23:173–174). He sharply criticizes the fact that the inhabitants of "America, the Negro countries, the Spice Islands, the Cape, etc.," were treated as ownerless things and "displaced or enslaved" by the Europeans (TPP 8:358; R 23:173–174). He now strongly condemns the founding of colonies by annexation, mentioning territories of "American Indians, the Hottentots, and the inhabitants of New Holland" as examples (MM 6:266). Instead, he now expresses the hope that "remote parts of the world can establish relations peacefully with one another, relations which ultimately become regulated by public laws and can thus finally bring the human species ever closer to a cosmopolitan constitution" (TPP 8:358).

The fact that Kant abandons the racial hierarchy of intellectual and agential capacities does not, however, mean that he also drops the notion of race as a physiological concept. He retains this as a biological notion, but he no longer argues that the *physiological* differences between the races are associated with differences in their capacities for *thought and action*. Accordingly, he emphasizes that racial differences are irrelevant to his project in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) since they have no bearing on action (A 7:120; cp. A 7:320). And indeed, the *Anthropology* no longer offers—as his earlier lectures on the subject had—an account of the different "characters" of the races (A 7:320–321).

§2.3. *Where Hierarchies Intersect*

The two previous sections discussed Kant's sexism and racism separately, and it is important to do so, if only to show the difference between Kant's characterization of women in terms of a *contrast* with men and his characterization of the races in terms of the *deficits* of non-whites ("non-white" being an appropriate expression indeed in this context). With this said, separate discussion of racism and sexism presents only part of the picture. They *intersect*: they exist simultaneously, and this is evident in

Kant's description of each.[6] "*The* woman" described in the *Anthropology* is clearly not a "yellow, black, or red" slave living in a European colony; she has her "own household," and this is not a corner in the slaves' quarters. "*The* family" described in the *Metaphysics of Morals* is a single household with one married heterosexual couple, their offspring, and their male or female dependent servants (MM 6:282–283), not the extended family common in many regions outside of Europe.

Conversely, when Kant defends the racial hierarchy, he describes the deficiencies of the "yellow, black, and red" races in terms of their lack of qualities that he attributes to white *men*. As we saw, he claims that other races cannot govern themselves, that they lack courage, and that some lack physical strength—these are all weaknesses that he also attributes to all *women*. Similarly, after Kant discards the idea of a racial hierarchy, he begins to attribute "courage" to Native Americans (TPP 8:365), a characteristic that he then still claims *women* are lacking. In other words, "the" Native Americans he describes are *men*.

Kant does not thematize the different ways in which the intersection of various hierarchies and forms of subordination impact those involved. As a result, important questions remain unaddressed. Let me mention just one example. Kant writes: "When I make a contract with a servant, he must also be an end … and not merely a means. He must also want it." (FLNL 27:1319). Kant further argues that a servant ought to obey the head of the household but should have the right to cancel the contract (MM 6:283). Although he explicitly includes both "male and female servants" in the household (ibid.), he does not discuss whether a *female* servant has a right to enter or cancel the contract on her own, or whether this must be done by—and hence with the approval of—her male "*Herr,*" guardian, and representative (e.g., her husband, her father). Presumably, Kant's position is the latter since he defends women's civil dependence and writes that the contract is between the (male) head of the household (*Hausherr*) and "free persons" (ibid.). But nowhere does he discuss the normative principles that govern the guardian's conduct in such cases, that is, the conditions under which he *ought* to give approval to a female charge who wishes to terminate her job. Nor does Kant thematize the compounded dependence of female servants in the household—let alone that of female servants of color.

[6] Black feminist theorists have long pressed this point. See Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 1982; Hooks, 1984; Collins, 2000. For more recent discussions, see Alcoff, 2006; Collins and Bilge, 2016.

In sum, by examining Kant's account of the races in light of his sexism, and by examining his account of the sexes in light of his racism, we can expose implicit assumptions in each that might otherwise go unnoticed.

§3. Inconsistency, Inegalitarianism, and Race-Neutral and Gender-Neutral Language

With regard to his racism and sexism, there is debate over the question of whether Kant is best seen as an inconsistent egalitarian or a consistent inegalitarian. The motivation behind this debate is not so much to determine whether it is possible to "save" our dear Kant from inconsistency but rather to determine whether it is possible to use Kant's principles to criticize his biases. After all, if Kant's prejudice contradicts his principles it seems much easier to shed the first and retain the second than if they form one coherent set of beliefs.

Some authors argue that Kant was a consistent inegalitarian. Charles Mills, for one, suggests that Kant's sexism and racism are clear indications that his moral theory is meant to apply only to white men, despite the seemingly inclusive terminology in which it is articulated. Mills argues that Kant saw only white men as "humans" in the *full* sense and that he meant the Categorical Imperative to apply only to white men. All others were, to Kant, inferior beings, *Untermenschen* or sub-persons: biologically human but below the threshold of full personhood on a par with white men (Mills, 2005). On this view, it is impossible to use Kant's principles against his biases since Kant's principles themselves *carry* the bias. As Mills puts it: "the racist texts are *part* of his theory, not contradictions to it," and "race in a racist sense is central to his thought" (Mills, 2019, 31-32; see also Eze, 1994; Bernasconi, 2001). Mills argues that we should "translate" Kant's principles:

> In my opinion, there is no "tension" here, and putatively universalist Kantian egalitarian proclamations really need to be translated as restricted in their scope to the white male minority. (Mills, 2019, 34)

Others argue that Kant should be considered an inconsistent egalitarian. They maintain that his hierarchical views on the sexes and races *contradict* his moral and political principles. As a consequence, they argue, we can and should focus on the principles and leave Kant's racist and sexist comments to the side. In this vein, David

McCabe has recently argued that Kant's views on race are "not worthy of our serious attention" and that "our eyes should be on Kant's moral theory" (McCabe, 2019, 7; cf. Louden, 2000, 105). He writes:

> [I]t is not clear why we should be interested in someone's views except where they seem likely to be *philosophically* significant and fruitful, and Kant's views on race are certainly not that. (McCabe, 2019, 7)

Similar views have been defended with regard to Kant's sexism. Mari Mikkola has argued that in those cases where Kant's views on women are inconsistent with his main claims about the use of reason, they should "be bracketed off" or "put to one side" (Mikkola, 2011, 105, 107).[7]

McCabe argues that the "logic" of Kant's moral theory is "at odds with other views he had endorsed" and that "Kant's developed moral theory is unambiguous in asserting equal status for all rational beings" (McCabe, 2019, 7). In other words, McCabe justifies his claim that Kant's racism contradicts his egalitarianism by appealing to the fact that his moral principles are articulated race-neutrally.

In light of Mills's challenge, however, the view that Kant is an inconsistent egalitarian requires more argumentation than a mere reference to the race-neutral and gender-neutral terms in which his principles are formulated. Mills asserts that Kant assumes that only white men are "humans" in the *full* sense and hence that Kant restricts the applicability of the Categorical Imperative to white men. It does not suffice to respond that the Categorical Imperative *must* apply to all women and to all men of color too ("yellow, black, and red" and "mixed"-race) because Kant writes that it is valid for all humans. After all, what is required for showing that Kant grants equal status to women and men of all races is proof that he attributes to women and non-white men those qualities that he claims are required for counting as human *in the full sense*.

Now one might believe that establishing this is easier in Kant's case than in the case of philosophers who wrote in English. Kant wrote in German, and unlike English, where "man" means both "human being" and "male individual," German has a

[7] She also argues that Kant's views on women are not as dim as they are usually made out to be, Mikkola, 2011; see also Varden, 2017.

separate word for each. "Mensch" means "human being," and "Mann" means "male human being." Hence it might seem that whenever Kant makes claims about "Menschen," we can safely assume that they apply to both sexes and all races distinguished by Kant. Helga Varden has recently defended this view, adding that it seems "somewhat unfair" to "accuse Kant … of saying one thing while meaning something else entirely" (Varden, 2017, 683–684).

The relevant texts make clear, however, that things are more complicated. As far as race goes, the passage quoted above in which Kant discusses the Mandinka is a case in point. Here Kant asserts that "no human being" (*Mensch*) can allegedly stand the heat, *but that the Mandinka can*. Here, "Mensch" clearly does *not* refer to the Mandinka, although there is no doubt that Kant regarded them as belonging to the human species. Apparently, however, not everything that Kant predicates of "humans" also holds for "Negroes" (just as not everything Kant predicates of the races applies to their female members, see section 2 above).[8] Whether general terms are indeed used in this way can be determined only on the basis of their context.

The same point applies in the case of sex and gender. There are many passages in which Kant moves back and forth between "Mensch" and "Mann." Consider this claim from the *Critique of Practical Reason:* "There are cases in which human beings [*Menschen*] show from childhood … early wickedness and progress in it … continuously into their manhood" [*Mannesjahre*] (CPrR 5:99–100). Similarly, the "children" [*Kinder*] of a household eventually become "their own masters" [*ihre eigene Herren*] (MM 6:282). Thus, we cannot validly infer from Kant's use of the general term "Mensch" that he includes all humans in its scope.

This phenomenon is of course by no means peculiar to Kant. In the years after the 1789 declaration of the "rights of man and citizen," Olympe de Gouges in vain claimed "human" rights for women, and she died under the guillotine. Some particularly interesting examples are found in high-profile legal cases. Nineteenth-century Dutch laws concerning citizenship and voting rights were formulated in gender-neutral language, in terms of "Netherlanders" having to fulfill certain requirements (such as paying a certain amount of taxes). In 1883, Aletta Jacobs, the

[8] Whether Kant expressed this sentence exactly in these words when he gave his lecture does not matter for the purpose of my argument. My point here is general and applies both to the person who transcribed the lecture and to Kant.

first Dutch woman to satisfy the requirements, was nevertheless denied the right to vote, even by the Dutch High Council (the supreme court of the Netherlands). The court's reasoning was that the terms "Netherlander" and "subject" here had to be understood as referring to men only, "because were this not the case … it would undoubtedly have been stated clearly and unequivocally."[9] In other words, the gender-neutral terms s*hould not be assumed* to apply to women, for if they did apply to women, this would have been explicitly mentioned. In a similar case, the Canadian Supreme Court came to the same conclusion.[10]

These supreme courts used as their principle the exact *opposite* of the idea that gender-neutral terms such as "Mensch" and "Netherlander" *should be assumed to include* both men and women. This is important to keep in mind when we twenty-first century readers approach historical texts. In many contexts, the general term *should be assumed to exclude* women unless indicated otherwise. This does not mean, of course, that women are always excluded—Aletta Jacobs did have to pay her taxes. But *whether* women are included or excluded can be determined only by reference to the background assumptions and wider context in which the general terms are used.

Nevertheless, the gender-neutral and race-neutral terminology creates a *gap* or *tension* between the "neutral" wording of principles and their application as restricted by unstated assumptions. Precisely this tension made it possible for Olympe de Gouges and Aletta Jacobs to appeal to the general terminology in claiming women's rights. Kant produces a similar tension between the general wording of his highest principles and the tacitly assumed restrictions that become visible only in their application. At the same time, given the general terminology in which he articulates these principles, their scope as stated extends well beyond his own restrictive construal of their application.

Because of this built-in tension in Kant's principles (and in the theory he develops on their basis), we can use these principles to criticize Kant himself and say that Kant "violates his own principles." We could not do this were we to follow Mills's suggestion and "translate" Kant's formulations into the language of white male superiority. Nor, I should add, could Mills develop his own version of black radical

[9] *Weekblad van het regt* 4917, 7 August, 1883, p.1.

[10] As mentioned by Richard Rorty, 1990, 5, n.6

Kantianism on the basis of the resulting white male supremacist theory. Mills, too, makes use of the critical potential implicit in Kant's general formulations (Mills 2018).

The built-in tension in Kant's race and gender-neutral-worded theory also makes it possible to argue that Kant is *inconsistent* at least in important respects. If we take the principles as stated, abstracting from the unstated assumptions that restrict their application, then we can show, for example, that Kant's Formula of Humanity contradicts his condoning non-white slavery. The argument can go as follows. Per definition, all human races share the essential characteristics common to all humans as such, and Kant explicitly says as much in the context of his 1785 essay on race:

> Properties that belong to the species itself in its essence, and which are hence common to all human beings as such, are inevitably hereditary; but because human beings do not differ with regard to these properties, these will be kept out of the discussion of the subdivision of the races. (DCHR 8:99)

Furthermore, Kant argues that the essential characteristics common to all humans as such include their rational nature. He also justifies the prohibition against using others merely as means in terms of humans' rational nature, or even simply in terms of their being human (G 4: 429–430). People who use other human beings as slaves use them as mere means. Hence Kant's condoning of non-white slavery *contradicts* his own prohibition against using other humans merely as means.

The fact that such contradictions can be pointed out, however, by no means implies that we can "remove and set aside" Kant's racism and sexism. The contradiction is generated by *abstracting* from the racist and sexist assumptions guiding their application. Kant does not apply the principles in an egalitarian way, and we should not lose sight of that fact when we focus on his race-neutral and gender-neutral formulations. It would be very odd to assume, say, that Kant would seriously defend *genuine racism* during his 1787 Physical Geography and Anthropology classes but would seriously defend *genuine egalitarianism* before and after class while working on his *Critique of Practical Reason*. We would have to imagine him switching back and forth between opposing positions on the same day, each day. Furthermore, simply setting aside his sexism and racism ignores how they influence his ethics and political theory more broadly, as I will argue in the next section.

What we need, therefore, is a middle position: we should acknowledge the tension between the general phrasing of Kant's principles and the unstated restrictions in their application. If we translate the Categorical Imperative into a principle for white males, we lose one side of this tension; if we remove and set aside Kant's racism and sexism, we lose the other.

§4. How to Avoid Distortions and Replications of Kant's Sexism and Racism

McCabe and many others assume that *if* Kant can be shown to be *inconsistent* in the sense that his racist and sexist biases *contradict* his philosophical principles, we can turn our philosophical focus solely to his egalitarian theory as the only thing that is philosophically significant and fruitful. I would now like to show, on the basis of the results of the previous sections, that this assumption can become highly counterproductive.

§4.1. The Dangers of Inclusive Language and Female Pronouns

If we focus on Kant's egalitarian-worded principles while disregarding his sexual and racial hierarchies, there will be a strong temptation to use inclusive language in our discussions. After all, if Kant's *principles* are egalitarian (and contradicted by things he says about gender and race), then why not use inclusive language in our discussion of them?

The use of explicitly gender-inclusive language, and even the exclusive use of female pronouns in discussions of Kant's ethics and political philosophy, has indeed become customary in recent years. The intentions behind this change are laudable, but the practice is nevertheless problematic.

The first problem is that of *misrepresentation*. If we focus on Kant's principles while abstracting from his objectionable views on racial and sexual hierarchy, we risk depicting Kant as defending claims that he did not defend, or even as defending claims he actively argued against. Let me develop one example.

Consider the "innate right of freedom," as formulated in the *Metaphysics of Morals,* in some more detail:

> *"Freedom* (independence from being constrained by another's choice), insofar as it can coexist with the freedom of every other in accordance with a universal

> law, is the only original right belonging to every human being [*jedem Menschen*] by virtue of his humanity [*Menschheit*]." (MM 6:237)

This innate right underlies much of Kant's political philosophy. In order to realize and secure this right to freedom, he argues, citizens ought to unite and collectively give themselves the laws they ought to obey (MM 6: 313–314; 340–341), for if the laws are *their own* laws, then they are independent from being constrained by the choice of *another*. The contrast case is despotism.

As formulated, this innate right is not restricted to males; indeed, Kant states explicitly that "every human being" has this right by virtue of his humanity. Yet Kant relegates women to civil dependence on their husbands or male guardians and to perpetual passive citizenship, meaning that *they* cannot take any part in legislating the laws they ought to obey. Assume, first, that our philosophical interest is in *Kant's principles:* our interest is in the innate right to freedom, and we wish to abstract from Kant's obsolete claims about the subordinate status of women, claims that are arguably in tension with his assertion of this "human" right. Then what? Then, when discussing the innate right, we should most certainly *not* write sentences such as the following: "Kant regards every citizen as entitled to cast *his or her* vote," or "Kant argues that every servant has the right to cancel *his or her* contract." He did not regard all women as entitled to the right to vote and to cancel contracts on their own. For the same reason, we should *not* say of Kant's citizen that *she* has a right to independence, or of the status of a servant that *she* has the right to cancel her contract. Using inclusive language and female pronouns makes these sentences downright false.

Now assume, alternatively, that our interest is in *Kant's sexism:* our interest is in the way Kant justifies the subjection of women and their perpetual dependence, and we are aware of the gender-neutral language Kant uses when formulating the innate right to freedom. Then what? Then, discussing the "innate right to freedom," we should *not* write that this is a right Kant argued to be *innate to* (economically independent) *males alone*. The reason is that describing the right in this way prevents readers from seeing the tension between Kant's sexism on the one hand and the egalitarian wording of the innate right to freedom on the other. For the same reason, we should not follow Mills's recommendation that we "translate" the Categorical Imperative. We should *not* write, for example: "According to the Categorical Imperative, white males ought to act only on maxims they can simultaneously will as

universal laws for white males." There are tensions between Kant's egalitarian principles and his claims about gender and race, and we should portray Kant as neither more nor less of an (in)egalitarian than he was.

§4.2. *Ignorance and the Danger of Inadvertent Replication*

A second danger, closely connected with the first, is that of self-incurred *philosophical naiveté* and the unintentional replication of elements of Kant's theories that were developed under the influence of his racism and sexism. The use of inclusive language or exclusively female pronouns not only risks misrepresenting Kant's position but also mutes signals that might otherwise encourage further critical philosophical scrutiny. By making Kant sound like a decent egalitarian, it makes it less likely that readers will recognize that his racist and sexist prejudices had a profound impact on the shape of his moral and political theory as a whole.

Consider the issue of domestic labor. Kant assumed that within marriage, wives or servants would take care of such tasks. He did not problematize the gendered division of labor as a live philosophical issue that deserves discussion. If we now wish to use Kant's political theory for our own philosophical purposes, we should do more than merely remove Kant's essentialist descriptions of women's character. We also need to dig up and problematize associated assumptions and consider the traces they have left. We need to *rethink*, for instance, Kant's way of distinguishing between the private and the public spheres, his gendered conceptualization of what counts as labor and how various tasks should be divided among members of society, the status of servants as dependents in the household, Kant's identification of human virtues and "masculine virtues" (and the omission of "feminine virtues"), and so on. If we do not do this, we risk reproducing elements that Kant originally introduced on the basis of sexist and racist assumptions, many of which remain implicit much of the time.

Theorists who want to *use* Kant's theory for present purposes must engage with Kant's own racism and sexism, if only to avoid replicating their effects in their own work. These elements of Kant's thought should not be regarded as mere items in the history of philosophy museum of bigotry. Dale Spencer and Susan Moller Okin have warned against the tendency in recent political theory to just "add women and stir." It is equally important to guard against the related tendency to just "remove sexism and racism and set aside."

For an example of the type of theoretical remodeling that may be required, we can point to Kant's own writings. Kant reworked his international political theory when he dropped the idea of white superiority. In *Toward Perpetual Peace* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he introduced a novel principle of public right, namely the "cosmopolitan right" mentioned above. This right specifically rules out colonial conquest and explicitly attributes full juridical status to humans on all continents (although, again, he still simultaneously defended the subordination of women). In other words, Kant not only removed any talk of a racial hierarchy but also added something new to his theory of public right as a necessary adjustment.

This is not to say that Kant went far enough in making adjustments to overcome his earlier racism. As Peter Niesen (2014) has argued, Kant fails to consider the issue of restorative justice. Charles Mills (2018) has developed Kantianism further by incorporating key elements Afro-modern thought and experience. Elvira Basevich (MS) has expanded Kant's model of public reason to develop a model of interracial civic fellowship. These are a few examples of transformations of Kant's approach that go further than Kant did himself.[11]

Furthermore, we should make visible, in Kant's work as well as our own use of it, the compounded effects of multiple forms of subordination. Kant discusses the "character" of the races and the sexes separately, but on closer inspection it turns out that his discussion of the races is in fact a discussion of the allegedly different characteristics of their *male* members alone. In order to recognize this pattern, we need to go beyond Kant's discussions of race and examine his discussion of the sexes in *relation* to his discussion of race. Conversely, his characterization of women in the early anthropology lectures does not mention the deficits of "yellow, black, red" or "mixed"-race women, but this does not mean that it is race-neutral.

Thus, we should not take the structure of Kant's theory as a given when using it for our current philosophical purposes, believing that we can simply set aside Kant's objectionable views. We need to ask ourselves what further adjustments must be made. To be able to answer that question, we need to know exactly how and where his racism and sexism influenced his moral and political theory.

[11] Of course, one can also use Kant to move beyond Kant without focusing on the structure of his own theory, but rather by using it to tell us something about the nature of racism (Allais, 2016), or by using Kant's notion of self-respect for purposes of feminist theory (Hay, 2013).

In sum, if we want to use Kant's work for current philosophical purposes without unwittingly reproducing some of his biases, we need to *research* his views on sexual and racial difference, *reveal* the unstated assumptions that guide his application of egalitarian principles, *reconstruct* the influence of these assumptions on the shape of his philosophical theories, and *remodel* these theories where necessary.

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Abbreviations:

A = Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View

CPrR = Critique of Practical Reason

DCHR = Determination of the Concept of a Human Race

FLNL = Feyerabend Lectures on Natural Law

G = Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals

LA = Lectures on Anthropology

LPG = Lectures on Physical Geography

MM = Metaphysics of Morals

OFBS = Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime

R = Reflection

TPP = Toward Perpetual Peace

UTP = On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy

VRM = Of the Different Races of Human Beings

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