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Kant and Slavery
—Or Why He Never Became a Racial Egalitarian

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[Abstract]
According to an oft-repeated narrative, while Kant maintained racist views through the 1780s, he changed his mind in the 1790s. Pauline Kleingeld introduced this narrative based on passages from Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) and "Toward Perpetual Peace" (1795). On her reading, Kant categorically condemned chattel slavery (and colonialism) in those texts, which meant that he became more racially egalitarian. But the passages involving slavery, once contextualized, either do not concern modern, race-based chattel slavery or at best suggest that Kant mentioned it as a cautionary tale for labor practices in Europe. Overall, Kant never explicitly considered chattel slavery as a moral problem to be addressed on its own. Rather, he treated it primarily in terms of its function in human history. If he ended up expressing some qualms about its practices, it was likely because they threatened to deepen intra-European conflicts and undermine the prospect of perpetual peace. The humanity of the enslaved "Negroes" was never part of the reasoning. This was not a casual oversight on Kant's part. It reflects the complexity of his philosophical system: everything he did or did not say about chattel slavery begins to make sense once we connect his philosophy of history and his depiction of "Negroes" as natural slaves.

[Keywords] Kant; race; chattel slavery; slave trade; human progress

1. Introduction

When it comes to Kant's views on slavery, scholars are confronted with an obvious interpretive problem. He did two things in the 1780s that seem irreconcilable. On the one hand, he articulated the universalist tenets of his core moral philosophy in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). On the other hand, he portrayed "Negroes" as natural slaves on multiple occasions (as we shall see in section 3). Most notably, in his 1788 essay on race,[1] he spoke approvingly of the anti-abolitionist merchant James Tobin's testimony that freed "Negro slaves" all became "tramps" (8:174n.).[2] He did so with the knowledge that Tobin was involved in a public controversy with the abolitionist Reverend James Ramsay.[3] Charles Mills therefore sees an apparent contradiction between two of Kant's propositions:

> Unqualified Universalism: "all biological humans, including all of the races, are normatively equally human/full persons";
>
> Racist Particularism: "the races of blacks and Native Americans are natural slaves" (2014:146).

The contradiction here is so "flagrant," Mills contends, that it "would have been noticed by anyone of the most minimal intelligence, let alone one of the smartest minds." It seems far more plausible,

then, to interpret Kant's universalism as limited in scope: the purportedly universalist moral claims are "really meant to apply fully only to those biological humans who are normatively human, the full persons" (2014:146). Blacks and Native Americans, as Kant describes them, "do not attain the threshold of normative equality, and so merit differential treatment," including enslavement (2014:140).

This represents what Pauline Kleingeld, in her narrative-shaping paper "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race," calls the "consistent inegalitarian" reading of Kant. It is opposed to the "inconsistent universalist" reading, according to which Kant's core moral theory is truly universalist although his racism "fundamentally contradicts" it (2007:575).[4] While Mills finds "absurdity" in ascribing to Kant "the degree of cognitive dissonance requisite for the genuinely universalist reading of his work" (2014:145-46), most scholars are willing to bite the bullet and ascribe the contradiction to Kant anyway. Lucy Allais, for instance, agrees that Kant's "failure to condemn slavery [in the 1780s] is striking and noteworthy" (2016:5) and that this failure puts pressure on interpretations of his central critical works such as the *Groundwork*. She accepts "the dramatic and important inconsistency this requires ascribing to Kant," but argues that we can tap into Kant's own theory of moral psychology to understand and learn from how he "failed to see" the inconsistency (2016:7-8).

No matter how Kant scholars navigate the interpretative space between the "consistent inegalitarian" and "inconsistent universalist" camps, it can be difficult to be constantly reminded that the philosopher at the center of their scholarship taught and published racist views.[5] If so, then Kleingeld's abovementioned paper seems to offer a sense of relief and hopefulness. As the paper's title suggests, Kleingeld's Kant later reversed his racist position. The story goes as follows: Kant was an inconsistent universalist until at least the end of the 1780s, as he "simultaneously defended a universalist moral theory and a racial hierarchy" (Kleingeld 2007:575); he "radically revised his views on race during the 1790s," however, as evidenced by his condemnations of colonialism and slavery in "Toward Perpetual Peace" (1795) and the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797); in this way, he "finally resolved" the earlier contradiction between "his disturbing views on race [and] his own moral universalism" and became "more egalitarian with regard to race" (2007:582-92).

The credibility of this story hinges on Kleingeld's interpretation of Kant's later views on slavery and colonialism. An earlier analysis of the relevant passages from "Toward Perpetual Peace" and the *Metaphysics of Morals* by Robert Bernasconi revealed "no direct statement by Kant calling for the abolition of either African slavery or the slave trade, even if only in principle" (2002:150-52). Kleingeld counters that Kant "categorically and repeatedly condemns chattel slavery [and the slave trade]" in those texts (2007:586-88). Despite Bernasconi's forceful pushback against this counter (2011; also see Valdez 2017),[6] the conclusion that Kant belatedly but unmistakably adopted a more racially egalitarian position seems to be the one that has staying power (Kleingeld 2019:8-9; 2021:356-57). Although Kleingeld's original intention might not be to redeem Kant (she was more critical of his racist views and took them more seriously than most scholars were), her conclusion has been treated as a redemptive one. It has often been used to show that Kant finally renounced racism on philosophical grounds—a clear proof that his philosophy is

stronger than his (former) racist prejudices (see, for instance, Wood 2008:10-11; McCabe 2019:6-7). Even when there is no explicit reference to Kleingeld's 2007 paper, the redemptive narrative it set in motion is sometimes repeated with resounding confidence (Wolff 2020).

The disproportionate uptake that Kleingeld's conclusion has received in the ongoing debate about Kant and racism has raised the *stakes* for the dominant approach if the conclusion turns out to be false. Champions of the dominant approach tend to personalize Kant's racist views and thereby make them hermeneutically irrelevant to the fundamentals of his philosophy. Robert Louden, for instance, characterizes Kant's problematic claims about race (and gender) as regrettable "private prejudices" but insists that his theory is "stronger than his prejudices" (Louden 2000:105). Similarly, Allen Wood emphasizes "the task of separating Kant's errors, or the prejudices of his time or his personality, from the philosophical principles on which we are grounding ethical theory" (Wood 2008:15). In these terms, Wood describes the controversy over Kant's racist (and sexist) prejudices as between "those who take philosophical principles seriously," on the one hand, and "those who are skeptical about the whole project of systematic philosophy," on the other. Wood reduces the latter camp's position to a matter of personal attacks on Kant, insinuating that the "attackers" have no interest in achieving "philosophical insights" with their "sensational exposés" (2008:8-9). The former camp, by contrast, is said to include "the leading writers on Kantian ethics who have addressed this issue," namely Thomas Hill and Bernard Boxill (2001), Marcia Baron (2001), and Wood himself (1999:3–7, 338–39). These writers, Wood suggests, admit that "Kant regarded nonwhite races as inferior to whites," but focus on the fact that "he also held on basic philosophical grounds an egalitarian position about all human beings regardless of gender or race," because "it is this latter position that matters to Kantian ethics" (2008:8, 276n.11). Kleingeld's story of Kant's belated but principled conversion to racial egalitarianism seems to vindicate this point (Wood 2008:10-11).

But is the story true? To answer this question, we need to clarify three things, namely the logical structure of Kleingeld's argument, who bears the *burden of proof* in the debate about Kant's later position, and what it means to call his earlier position "racist." First, Kant never explicitly affirmed that the four principal races in his rigid racial classificatory system (white Europeans, yellow Asians, black "Negroes," and red Amerindians) ought to be treated as equal participants in all important—cultural and political as well as moral—aspects of human life. So, Kleingeld largely relies on indirect evidence for her conclusion, including Kant's putative criticisms of chattel slavery, the slave trade, and colonialism in his later works. Here is the basic structure of this part of her argument.

(1) The later Kant rejected X (X = chattel slavery, the slave trade, or colonialism).

(2) If (1), then the later Kant became a racial egalitarian.

Therefore, the later Kant became a racial egalitarian.

Premise (1) incorporates three distinct factual claims (about chattel slavery, the slave trade, and colonialism respectively), each of which can be checked against the relevant texts. Premise (2) amounts to saying that, if any of those factual claims is true, then the only or best explanation is a newly adopted belief in racial equality on Kant's part. Inés Valdez (2017) has questioned the

soundness of the argument with respect to colonialism: while it is true that Kant became critical of colonialism, what best explains those criticisms is not that he suddenly came to see all races as equals, but that his observations of the political realities in the 1790s made him concerned about the devastating impact of European expansionism and intra-European rivalries on the possibility of peace in Europe. As we shall see, a similar point can be made about Kant's criticism of the slave trade. Meanwhile, it will turn out that Kleingeld has little textual basis for her factual claim about Kant's condemnation of chattel slavery (as an institution).

Second, given Kant's consistent practice of profiling "Negroes" as natural slaves both in published writings and in numerous lectures through the 1780s (as I shall explain in section 3), Kleingeld must prove, with clear textual evidence and cogent reasoning, that he significantly *changed* his conception of this race (among other non-white races). Kleingeld has this burden of proof especially because, as Mark Larrimore (2008:358) has pointed out, Kant's race essays were reprinted from 1793 through 1799 (also see Bernasconi 2011:300). The racist remarks in the original versions were left intact in those reprints. In particular, the 1799 reprint of Kant's 1788 essay on race retained, *verbatim*, all of its denigrating claims about the Amerindians and "Negroes" (8:174-76). One can also find similar claims in Christoph Girtanner's *Über das Kantische Prinzip für die Naturgeschichte* (1796:138-39, 156-57), which Kant recommends in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) to spare himself the need to elaborate on "the Character of Races" (7:320).[7]

Last but not least, we should be clear about what makes some of Kant's earlier remarks about the various non-white races "racist" in the first place. Kleingeld equates racism with "racial hierarchism," according to which "the races [besides certain biological differences] *also* vary greatly in their capacities for agency and their powers of intellect" (2007:574-75). There is no need to treat racial hierarchism as the defining feature of racism, however. As David Theo Goldberg puts it, the primary feature of racism—as it has been practiced during and since Kant's era—is a racially based distribution of "social power," whereby the dominant race is "in a position to exclude [racial] others from (primary) social goods, including rights, to prevent their access, or participation, or expression, or simply to demean or diminish the other's self-respect." So construed, it need not rely on any hierarchical ordering of the races. A presumption of racialized *differences* suffices (1990:319).[8] Indeed, as we shall see in section 3, Kant portrays the four races in terms of unbridgeable differences. He ascribes to each non-white race a distinct set of characteristics, which underwrite a special form of *exclusion*. Amerindians are excluded from the prospect of forming any civil relations on account of their supposedly indelible "savagery," a label that carries profound implications in Kant's philosophy (Lu-Adler 2022b). "Negroes" are said to lack any "immediate drive to activity" and so are excluded from the titles of "farmer" and "laborer" (8: 174), even as they toil in the fields of sugar plantations (2: 438n.). Hindus, who represent the yellow race, are excluded from the entitlement to what Kant views as the most advanced cultural achievements, namely sciences properly so called, including "philosophy" (Park 2013: 69-95). There is no clear evidence that the later Kant renounced any of these forms of racist exclusions.[9]

I will focus on the "Negro" question in this paper: did Kant ever become more egalitarian with respect to this race?[10] Kleingeld's affirmative answer hangs on her factual claim that Kant categorically condemned chattel slavery as well as the slave trade around the mid-1790s, condemnations that on her reading imply a newly adopted belief in racial equality (2007:586-88). There are two problems, though. First, Kleingeld wrongly assumes that, whenever Kant refers to slavery in his later writings, he is talking about modern, race-based chattel slavery ("racial slavery" henceforth) and that all critical remarks about the latter point to a moral condemnation thereof as an institution. As I will explain in section 2, the key texts that Kleingeld cited from the *Metaphysics of Morals* to support her factual claim either do not pertain to racial slavery or at best suggest that, while he was aware of the brutality of this type of slavery, he mentioned it primarily as a cautionary tale for labor practices in Europe.

Second, Kleingeld makes a big deal of Kant's passing reference to the "trade in negroes [*Negerhandel*]" in his drafts for "Toward Perpetual Peace,"[11] where he describes it as "an offense against the hospitality of black peoples" (23:174). Kleingeld sees this as evidence that "Kant repeatedly and explicitly criticizes slavery of non-Europeans in the strongest terms," taking it to mean that he "censures the slave trade … as in itself a 'violation' of the cosmopolitan right of blacks" (2007:587). This reading is dubious for a couple of reasons. For one, violating the "hospitality" of black peoples is not the same as violating their "cosmopolitan right," which Kant characterizes as a *right of foreign visitors* against the native inhabitants of a piece of land. He does not explicitly grant this right to non-Europeans, whose land is being visited.[12] For another, as Bernasconi has noted, "[Kleingeld] provides no reason to believe that the [putative] attribution of cosmopolitan right in this case implies equality of capacities between the races"; the logical "link" she tries to establish between Kant's opposition to the slave trade and racial egalitarianism is therefore tenuous at best (2011:304). My analysis in sections 3 and 4 suggests an alternative explanation of Kant's critical remarks about the slave trade and about certain practices of plantation slavery: given the political realities in the 1790s, he became concerned about their potential to impede human progress by indirectly worsening intra-European power struggles and dimming the prospect of perpetual peace. This way of thinking, I shall argue, is consistent with how Kant approached racial slavery all along: he never treated it, which had been institutionalized and woven into the Eurocentric global order, as an urgent *moral* problem to be addressed on its own; by all appearances, he was morally indifferent to it (as an institution), and so he neither straightforwardly endorsed it as morally permissible nor condemned it as morally wrong; rather, what he chose to say about it at a given time depended on how he saw it from the standpoint of a disinterested philosopher of *history*.

With this interpretation, my ultimate aim is not to judge Kant the individual for failing to lend moral support to the abolition of racial slavery and the slave trade even when he was primed to do so. Rather, my main concern as a Kant scholar is that his views on racial slavery have never been analyzed with sufficient clarity or depth. As a result, we have missed an opportunity to see that his moral philosophy, conception of history, political theory, and racial views are more intricately connected than the dominant, individualistic discourse about his relation to racism has

assumed. If my analysis in this paper ends up dashing the false hope that Kant miraculously became a sort of racial egalitarian later in life, interested scholars will at least be thereby liberated to move beyond the debate over whether or for how long Kant was a racist and invest more in rectifying his racist legacies (section 5).

2. Kant on slavery in the *Metaphysics of Morals*

Kleingeld (2007) claims that Kant, starting in the mid-1790s, categorically rejected chattel slavey as well as the slave trade. She bases her claim on passages from the *Metaphysics of Morals* (6:241, 270, 283), "Toward Perpetual Peace" (particularly 8:359), and Kant's drafts for the latter (23:173-74). In this section, I focus on the relevant passages from the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Kleingeld treats them as knockdown evidence for Kant's absolute condemnation of chattel slavery (2007:587-88). A contextualized analysis will show, however, that they do not suggest any clear condemnation of the sort of chattel slavery practiced in Kant's time.

Kleingeld assumes that Kant had the modern, race-based chattel slavery (racial slavery) in mind whenever he referred to "slavery." This assumption is unwarranted. To be clear, racial slavery was a system in which slaves (mostly "Negroes" from West Africa),[13] *against their own will*, were legally owned by someone else *as properties*, an ownership that could be transferred through inheritance, gifting, and transaction.[14] Kant casually refers to this practice at one point in the Doctrine of Right (6:229-372), where he includes the "black slaves" on the Coast of Guinea as an example of "goods" traded in the marketplace (6:288). He has the opportunity to add right there: one ought not treat any human being this way. But he says nothing to that effect. A few pages earlier, he has argued that no party can "completely renounce its freedom for the other's advantage" *by contract*. Such a contract would be "self-contradictory" (6:283). As Kant subsequently puts it, "No one can bind himself to this kind of dependence, by which he ceases to be a person, by a contract, since it is only as a person that he can make a contract" (6:330). This logical argument against binding oneself to another by contract, namely through a *voluntary* act, is a far cry from condemning racial slavery, as defined above.

The context in which Kant explains the logical impossibility of voluntarily turning oneself into someone else's slave also matters. It begins with an already qualified claim about human dignity: "no human being *in a state* can be without any dignity, since he at least has the dignity of a *citizen*." Kant then explains how one can nevertheless lose this dignity by committing a crime, whereby "he is made a mere tool of another's choice (either of the state or of another citizen)" (6:329-30, italics added). If enslavement can therefore be a form of state-sanctioned punishment that a citizen of the state must suffer for his own crime (see 6:333), it is still not about racial slavey. In the latter system, slaves did not begin as citizens of the state in which they were enslaved. They did not become slaves by committing crimes. If a citizen's "subjection [by his crime] cannot be *inherited*, because he has incurred it only by his own guilt" (6:330), the opposite was the case for chattel slaves, whose status of enslavement was heritable by law.

Nor can I find any definitive evidence for thinking that Kant was arguing against racial slavery at 6:270, where he is talking about "the right of humanity, not that of human beings" (the

significance of this distinction between *humanity* and *human beings* will become clear in section 3 below). No such evidence is forthcoming at 6:241, either, where Kant talks about the division of duties of right "in Accordance with the Relation of the Subject Imposing Obligation to the Subject Put under Obligation." The third category of this division concerns "The relation in terms of rights of human beings toward beings that have only duties but no rights." Kant remarks that this category is empty in that "these would be human beings without personality (serfs, slaves)." I agree with Kleingeld that Kant's point here is that "there is no place in a theory of right" for such beings (2007:588n.31). It does not follow, however, that he is condemning either slavery or serfdom.[15]

To appreciate this point, we may turn to similar claims Kant made about slavery over a decade earlier, in the "Natural Right Course Lecture Notes by Feyerabend" (1784).[16] These notes, besides suggesting that Kant is not making new claims about slavery in the Doctrine of Right, also help to clarify that such claims have little to do with racial slavery. First off, he distinguishes two kinds of slave, *servus utroneus* (voluntary slave) and *servus obnoxious* (slave through liability). The former is "impossible in *jus naturae*," because one "can never relinquish his natural rights, otherwise he ceases being a person." By contrast, the latter is possible, as one is "made into a slave, especially in war," or by committing crimes as a citizen of a state (27:1381; see 19:547-48, 551-53, 558). As it should be evident by now, racial slavery does not fall in either category.

In fact, Kant uses the ancient Roman practice, not the modern one, as an example of slavery with respect to the issue of right.[17] The Romans, he writes, "considered slaves as things and so a slave could never do wrong." Slaves lack legal personality, which is a precondition of being bound by duties and culpable for violating them. Accordingly, there is no place for them in a theory of right. "Right is nothing other than the law of the equality of action and reaction" between "beings who themselves do have freedom," in relation to which "the freedom of everyone else is limited." Things (or beings treated as things), by contrast, "could … not be limited in their freedom." Since they "have no freedom," there is nothing to limit in the first place (27:1335; see 27:1345, 1506). This suggests a possible explanation of why the third category in Kant's division of duties of right in the *Metaphysics of Morals* must be empty. The would-be slaves and serfs lack legal personality or freedom to begin with, for which reason they lie outside the system of rights and duties. This conceptual point implies no moral stance about slavery or serfdom.

It is also no trivial matter that, for the purpose of illustration, Kant turned to Roman slavery from a distant past, as though the chattel slavery that was practiced in his own day did not even deserve a passing comment in the doctrine of right. Not that Kant was ignorant of its existence. After all, in his first essay on race (1775/77), he mentioned that in the Dutch colony of Surinam, the planters used "the red slaves (Americans)" for domestic labor and "Negroes" for field labor (2:438n.). One can only infer, then, that in theorizing about rights and duties Kant simply ignored what he was well aware of. In his own words, unlike ignorance (*Unwissenheit*), ignoring (*ignoriren*) presupposes intentionality: one *chooses* "not [to] take notice of" but to "abstract from some things that are known, but are put aside because they do not pertain to the end" (24:837).

Kant does make a passing reference to the "Negro" slaves in West-Indian plantations while discussing whether one can lease oneself to someone else, again by contract, for an indeterminate extent of service.

> Now it might seem that someone could put himself under obligation to another person, by a contract to let and hire (*locatio conductio*), to perform services (in return for wages, board or protection) that are permissible in terms of their quality but *indeterminate* in terms of their quantity, and that he thereby becomes just a subject (*subiectus*), not a bondsman (*servus*). But this is only a deceptive appearance. For if the master is authorized to use the powers of his subject as he pleases, he can also exhaust them until his subject dies or is driven to despair (as with the Negroes on the Sugar Islands); his subject will in fact have given himself away, as property, to his master, which is impossible. (6:330)

This matter-of-fact reference to "the Negroes on the Sugar Islands" suggests that Kant was somewhat informed about their desperate situation. It helps to give some context here: the extreme brutality of the West-Indian plantation slavery was reflected in the astonishing rate at which its slave labor had to be replenished every year. Olaudah Equiano (c.1745–97), an abducted African and former slave in West Indies, related the following numbers in his widely circulated autobiography.[18]

> Even in Barbadoes, … where slaves meet with the best treatment, and need fewest recruits of any in the West Indies, … requires 1000 [*sic.*; 5000 to be more exact] negroes annually to keep up the original stock, which is only 80,000. So that the whole term of a negro's life may be said to be there but sixteen years! (Equiano 2003:106)

Equiano traced these numbers to volume 2 of *An Account of the European Settlements in America* by William Burke (1729-98) and Edmund Burke (1729-97).[19] Chapter XI of this volume concerns the "misery of the negroes" in the British colonies vis-à-vis the Dutch, French, and Spanish ones, where there were legal codes regulating treatments of slaves. The chapter revolves around the following claim.

> The negroes in our colonies endure a slavery more compleat, and attended with far worse circumstances, than what any people in their condition suffer in any other part of the world, or have suffered in any other period of time. … The island of Barbadoes, (the negroes upon which do not amount to eighty thousand) notwithstanding all the means which they use to increase them by propagation, … lies under a necessity of an annual recruit of five thousand slaves to keep up the stock at the number I have mentioned. This prodigious failure … shews demonstratively that some uncommon and insupportable hardship lies upon the negroes, … in effect this people is under a necessity of being entirely renewed every sixteen years. (Burke and Burke 1760:124-25).

To be clear, this is not an argument against either racial slavery or the slave trade. It is rather a call for the British government to regulate the use of "Negro" slaves in its colonies to make the plantation business *more economical* and the colonies themselves *politically safer* (from rebellions by desperate slaves). So, the authors add:

> I am far from contending in favour of an effeminate indulgence to these people. I know that they are stubborn and intractable for the most part, and that they must be ruled with a rod of iron. I would have them *ruled, but not crushed* with it. … I think it clear from the whole course of history, that those nations which have behaved with the greatest humanity to their slaves, were always best served, and ran the least hazard from their rebellions. (1760:128, italics added)

Although a more humane treatment of the slaves might seem to hurt the slave trade, since there would be no need to constantly restock the slave labor, the traders were reassured that they had nothing to fear: the "same demand" for African slaves could be maintained by "extending our colonies" (1760:129).

Against this backdrop, let us return to Kant's reference to "the Negroes on the Sugar Islands." Note what he is not saying: he is not protesting the treatment of those "Negroes" as inhumane, let alone objecting to racial slavery itself or the slave trade fueling (and fueled by) it. Rather, he seems to be using the treatment of those plantation slaves as a realistic *cautionary tale* of what would happen if no legal limits were placed on the extent to which one person can lease out his labor to another by contract: such an unlimited contract would have virtually licensed the employer to use up the laborer, much as a planter can use up his "Negro" slaves. Far from expressing any humanitarian concern about the plight of actual slaves who are used as chattels, Kant has turned their case into the material for constructing a counterfactual to demonstrate the need to regulate voluntary contractual labor relations between free citizens of a state. Kant suggests this much with the ensuing statement.

> Someone can therefore hire himself out only for work that is determined as to its kind and its amount, either as a day laborer or as a subject living on his master's property. In the latter case he can make a contract, for a time or indefinitely, to perform services … without thereby making himself a serf (*glebae adscriptus*), by which he would forfeit his personality. (6:330)

Thus, as Kant deliberates on the rights of contract laborers in a European state, he shows no concern for all those ill-treated "Negroes" on the remote sugar plantations.[20] Even something like the Burkes' conservative economic argument for a more humane treatment of them, if not for their liberation, would have been better than an utter lack of concern.

3. Kant on the "Negro" race and slavery

What are we to make of the fact that Kant failed to reject, in unequivocal terms, racial slavery even when he had opportunities to do so in the *Metaphysics of Morals*? This failure cannot be a casual oversight.[21] Rather, he could see racial slavery as an inevitable albeit transitory chapter in human history, although he might also concede that, if considered by itself, it was morally wrong.[22] By examining how Kant views the "Negro" race, on the one hand, and human history, on the other, we can get a sense of how he could adopt this nuanced approach to racial slavery.

To begin, Kant always suspected a correlation between skin colors and certain other characteristics. In the "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime" (1764), we find the well-known case of him treating someone's being "completely black from head to foot [as] a distinct proof that what he said was stupid" (2:255). The flip side of low intelligence is animalistic

excellence. Accordingly, Kant tends to describe tropical peoples as physically robust, athletic, and exhibiting acute senses (9:316; 26.1:93-4; 26.2:514-15). He reiterates such claims in his first essay on race (1775/77): tropical climate not only occasions the development of black skin, but also favors "the robust growth of animals in general"; the latter "results in the Negro, who is well suited to his climate, namely strong, fleshy, supple"; furthermore, the minimal needs coupled with nature's "abundant provision" in his native climate make him "lazy, soft and trifling" (2:438). Kant doubles down on this claim in his last essay on race (1788), where he speculates: "Negroes" lack the "immediate drive [*Trieb*] to activity"; this lack is due to the "far lesser needs" and the ease with which such needs can be satisfied in the equatorial tropics; the disinclination to activity having been established in that native climate, it is now "interwoven" with other natural predispositions of this race and "extinguishes just as little as the externally visible [black skin]" in the colder climate of the New World (8:174n.).[23]

For sure, in his essays on race, Kant claims that skin color is the only unfailingly hereditary characteristic, wherefore it alone can be used to establish the division of four principal races—red (Amerindians), black ("Negroes"), yellow (Hindus), and white.[24] The resulting racial classification also gives Kant a hook, however, on which to hang the preconceived correlation between skin colors and certain other characteristics. He can now flesh out a system of racial profiles. Here is a sketch.

(1) Amerindians have no driving force (*Triebfeder*), no affects or passions, and no worry about anything; they love freedom, which however comes down to mere lazy independence. As a result, they acquire no culture.

(2) "Negroes" are full of affects and passions. Being sensitive and "afraid of beatings," they can be trained (*abrichten*, a term used for animal training). This allows them to acquire a "culture of slaves" but no more.

(3) Eastern Indians have driving forces and strong "composure," but no ability for "abstract concepts." Accordingly, they acquire a culture of art, but not that of science or moral enlightenment. They have come to a standstill.

(4) Whites possess all the driving forces, predispositions, and talents that are needed for advanced culture and civilization. They alone can continue to progress in perfecting themselves. (25:1187; 15:877-78; see 25:450-51; 26.2:119-23; 26.2:900-1, 907-8; Kant 1924:362-64)

The alignment of each race to a particular kind of culture or a total lack thereof suggests that the specific characteristics Kant ascribes to each race in turn determine how he locates it in the history of humanity. If, as I shall explain below, he believes that humanity *as a species* is destined to move from the state of nature (savagery), through states of culture and civilization, toward the final destiny of moralization (perfection), it does not follow that he sees all four races as naturally equipped to complete this journey. To the contrary, the order in which I presented Kant's system of racial profiles also reflects how he locates each race on the arc of history. While racial slavery does not constitute a stage of history, he may well see it as a functional element of modern European civilization—at least up to a point.

To see how Kant's philosophical system is capacious enough to accommodate this view, the first thing to note is that, although he grants the same germs (*Keime*) for perfection to all races (25:694), he also holds that those germs can fully develop only under appropriate conditions. These include internal conditions like drives (*Triebfedern*), certain affects and passions, and such talents as the ability to form abstract concepts and principles. According to the racial profiles sketched above, the white race alone is blessed with all these conditions, whereas each of the other races lacks one or more of them; as a result, only white peoples will, as agents of history, continue to propel humanity toward its final destiny.

The second thing to note is that, for any event (or action, practice, etc.) that took place in space and time, Kant can judge it either on its own by certain moral principles or in relation to other events (or actions, etc.) from a purely historical standpoint. He may deem something as immoral from the first standpoint, and yet tolerate it from the second. For clues, we turn to the "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim" (1784), which considers "what meets the eye in individual subjects as confused and irregular yet in *the whole species* can be recognized as a steadily progressing though slow development of its original predispositions" (8:17, italics added). This emphasis on humans as a "species," as opposed to individuals, is crucial. To use the terminology of his race essays, Kant is talking about "natural species [*Naturgattung*]" as opposed to "school species [*Schulgattungen*]" (2:429; 8:102; 8:178). In the latter case, the species-concept refers to the sum of all individuals falling under it; accordingly, whatever is true of the concept is necessarily true of each one of those individuals (9:98-9). By contrast, a natural species consists in a temporally extended series of generations, not an aggregate of individuals. What is true of the human species may not be true of individual humans. In particular, if "All natural predispositions of [humanity] are determined sometime to develop themselves completely and purposively," this complete development can be realized "only in the species, but not in the individual" (8:18).[25]

The *means* that nature employs to bring about such a species-bound development, Kant continues, is "the unsociable sociability of human beings, i.e. their propensity to enter into society, which, however, is combined with a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to break up this society" (8:20).

> Now it is this resistance that awakens all the powers of the human being, brings him to overcome his propensity to indolence, and, driven by ambition, tyranny, and greed, to obtain for himself a rank among his fellows, whom he cannot stand, but also cannot leave alone. (8:21)

To show how necessary it is to have the qualities of unsociability that give rise to the requisite resistance, even though they are "not at all amiable in themselves," Kant describes a scenario without them:

> all talents would, in an arcadian pastoral life of perfect concord, contentment and mutual love, remain eternally hidden in their germs; human beings, as good-natured as the sheep they tended, would give their existence hardly any greater worth than that of their domesticated beasts; they would not fill the void in creation in regard to their end as rational nature. (8:21; see 4:423; 8:122-23; 25:1422)

So, thanks be to nature for all those in-themselves spiteful qualities of unsociability, including "the insatiable desire to possess or even to dominate" (8:21)!

Such is Kant's perspective as a disinterested "philosopher—who, regarding human beings and their play in the large, cannot at all presuppose any rational *aim of theirs*": he only wants to see if he can "discover an *aim of nature* in this nonsensical course of things human" (8:18). With this methodological decision, Kant could still admit that humanity was in a morally despicable situation.

> Under the present conditions of human beings one can say that the happiness of states grows simultaneously with the misery of human beings. And there is still the question whether we would not be happier in a raw state, without all this culture, than we are in our present condition. (9:451)

Kant could even use racial slavery and the slave trade as extreme cases of the "misery of human beings" brought about by (European) "culture." At the same time, however, the philosopher of history in him would make a knowing *abstraction* from those cases in order to take a long view of human history, whereby (European) culture must be seen as a necessary *intermediary* stage and preparation for a better (moral) future.[26] We can find a recipe for this perspectival shift in the "Conflict of Faculties" (1798), where Kant treats the old question "Is the human race constantly progressing?" as a question about the "moral history" of humanity qua "the totality of human beings united socially on earth and apportioned into peoples (*universorum*)" (7:79; see 7:320). If the current state of human affairs seems "senseless" to some, Kant recommends a change in "the point of view" after the fashion of the Copernican turn in astronomy (7:83).[27] Specifically, he advises the following: one should see humanity "not as [a sum of] individuals (for that would yield an interminable enumeration and computation)"—of course one would see miseries everywhere if one did that!—"but rather as divided into *nations and states* (as it is encountered on earth)" (7:84, italics added).[28] Thus, even if one sees racial slavery, for instance, as immoral at the micro-level of individuals, one may *choose to look away* from it by switching one's standpoint to the macro-level of nations and states and by considering humanity as a historically developing species.

Assuming this historical perspective, Kant wants to know: provided the human species has certain original germs for perfection, by what driving forces (*Triebfedern*)—among other naturally endowed inner conditions—can those germs be fully developed? This question takes us back to Kant's system of racial profiles. In that system, Amerindians lack the *Triebfedern* and other natural endowments needed to acquire any culture whatsoever. Such a race, as Kant suggested in the "Idea" (8:21, quoted above), therefore seems practically worthless. No wonder he at times expresses bewilderment as to why such purposeless beings exist at all (8:65). What about the "Negro" race? We find this statement in Kant's 1788 essay on race:

> [The Amerindian, who] is too weak for hard labor, too indifferent for industry and incapable of any culture—although there is enough of it as example and encouragement nearby—ranks still far below even the Negro, who stands on the lowest of all the other steps that we have named as differences of the races. (8:176)

Given this comparison of Amerindians and "Negroes," a view of racial slavery as a functional part of European civilization starts to take shape. Everything Kant has said about "Negroes" points to a conception of them as natural slaves for modern plantations: being "strong, fleshy, supple" (2:438), they have the robust animalistic physique to endure a life of hard labor; if the ample provision of their tropical motherland at the same time made them "lazy" (2:438) and naturally disinclined to work, their sensitive temperament nonetheless makes them susceptible to training (to tame their animality). That is, if they lack an "immediate drive to activity" (8:174n.), they can nevertheless be *driven* to toil in the fields of sugar plantations (2:438n.). What other function could Kant have them serve if they were not to be useless like Amerindians?[29] After all, he has attributed no further talents or abilities to the "Negro" race to think that they can ever become self-motivating, let alone self-governing and self-improving, agents of history.

If this captures Kant's view on racial slavery at least through the 1780s, what would it take for him to reverse it (if he were to live up to his reputation as a moral philosopher)? A mighty lot! The burden would be on him to *firmly renounce*, among other things, his prior suggestion that "Negroes" are natural slaves. He would also have to argue against the *institution* of racial slavery and urge its abolition in no uncertain terms. I see no evidence that Kant ever did any of these. In particular, as I explained in section 2, he neither rejected racial slavery nor even called for a more humane treatment of enslaved "Negroes" as late as 1797, while talking about slavery in the Doctrine of Right in a book with 'morals' in the title. We should keep this in mind when we consider Kant's scant remarks about slavery and the slave trade in "Toward Perpetual Peace" (1795) and the associated drafts.

4. Kant on slavery and the slave trade in "Toward Perpetual Peace"

The later Kant occasionally expresses some qualms about how racial slavery and the slave trade were practiced. But his stated reasons for such qualms must disappoint anyone who remembers him mainly as a moral philosopher and therefore expects from him an unequivocal moral objection to the entire institution of racial slavery. Such an objection would explicitly invoke, for instance, the unconditional worth of the enslaved in view of their humanity. In reality, however, Kant seems much more concerned about the destabilizing ramifications for a Eurocentric global order than he is about the slaves' plight. About slavery, he writes:

> The worst of this (or, considered from the standpoint of a moral judge, the best) is that the commercial states *do not even profit from this violence*; that all these trading companies are on the verge of collapse; that the Sugar Islands, that place of the cruelest and most calculated slavery,[30] *yield no true profit* 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*. (8:359, italics added)

Likewise, Kant finds the "trade in negroes [*Negerhandel*]" problematic because, besides being "in itself already an offense against the hospitality of black peoples,"[31] it "will be even worse *for Europe in its consequences*"—including never-ending struggles among some European states with their increased sea power (23:174, italics added). The violations that the European states

committed overseas now clearly threaten to ricochet onto themselves, with the specter of a perpetual war among them (23:174-75) or, just as bad, a super-imperialist world order where one European state exerts hegemony over all the other.

The historical context matters here. Kant was writing in the mid-1790s, when he had every reason to fear either of the two specters just mentioned. 1792 saw the start of a series of wars between Revolutionary (later Napoleonic) France and the rest of Europe, with the First French Empire in the making.[32] 1794 began the so-called *Franzosenzeit* (until 1815), during which period much of Northern Europe would be controlled by France.[33] Meanwhile, the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue (one of the "Sugar Islands" Kant was referring to), or what would be known as the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), had turned into a three-way intra-European power struggle among England, Spain, and France, with England temporarily asserting domination and France abolishing slavery on the island at this juncture (Napoleon would reinstate it in 1802).[34] Whatever Kant's "moral judge" saw, he did not see an opportunity to validate abolitionism. Rather, what he conveyed in the above passage was an almost vindictive recognition that those colonial powers that traded slaves and ran plantations were now reaping the bitter fruits of their insatiable commercial greed.

Granted, unlike what he did in the 1780s, Kant now signals some disapproval of "the cruelest and most calculated" *practice* of slavery in the West Indies and of the slave trade. If this counts as a change of mind about racial slavery, it is an extremely modest one: Kant never showed the slightest approval of the abolitionist causes that had been well under way by the mid-1790s, causes that he must have been aware of.[35] Even his newly expressed qualms were evidently not thanks to any epiphany about racial equality or any recognition of the inviolable humanity of the enslaved and traded "Negroes." Rather, here is a plausible account of what might have transpired between the 1780s and the mid-1790s: in the 1780s, as I suggested in section 3, Kant could tolerate racial slavery as a functionally useful (even if in-itself despicable) part of human history; by the 1790s, however, whatever material advancements it might have helped to bring about (for instance, the establishment of an intricate global trade system),[36] such advancements now seemed to be outweighed by the more destructive and corrosive effects on the intra-European dynamics.

In other words, if Kant refrained from publicly criticizing racial slavery in the 1780s because he believed in its overriding benefits for longer-term (Eurocentric) historical progress, it (or how it was practiced) now seemed intolerable by the same logic: it might actually jeopardize any prospect of a perpetually peaceful union of sovereign states. As Kant put it back in 1784, constant arms race and threats of war (or actual wars) are tolerable only if

> such ills … necessitate our species to devise to the in itself salutary resistance of many states to one another arising from their freedom a law of equilibrium and to introduce a united power giving emphasis to that law, hence to introduce a cosmopolitan condition of public state security, which is not wholly without *dangers* so that the powers of humanity may not fall asleep, but it is at least not without a principle of equality between its reciprocal *effect* and *counter-effect*, so that they may not destroy each other. (8:26)

Kant still believes in this basic principle of equilibrium a decade later (8:367-68).[37] In particular, he emphasizes that each nation's *commercial self-interest* will compel it to promote peace and prevent war by mediation.[38]

> In this way nature guarantees perpetual peace through the mechanism of human inclinations itself, with an assurance that is admittedly not adequate for *predicting* its future (theoretically) but that is still enough for practical purposes and makes it a duty to work toward this (not merely chimerical) end. (8:368)

The political reality in the 1790s (and the ensuing decade or so), however, was that the world had become the stage on which two ambitious empires, France and Britain, fought each other for a super-imperialist domination. Slavery and the slave trade, which in turn affected whose navy could control the global trade routes and leverage that control in international relations, were an integral part of that battle for global hegemony.[39]

If Kant indeed became critical of racial slavery due to its disastrous effects on the intra-European power dynamics in the 1790s, he thereby showed himself to be a keen observer of shifting political realities and a pragmatic political thinker.[40] Here is his nuanced approach in a nutshell: on the one hand, he might have privately regarded racial slavery as morally wrong when considered in isolation (I cannot ascertain that he would go this far, but I am willing to grant it for the sake of argument); on the other hand, whether he would call for its abolition—or, conservatively, for a more humane handling thereof—hinges on how, as a philosopher reflecting on human history, he would assess it in light of the *political reality* at a given time. To make room for this approach, Kant might well borrow from his treatment of women. Seeing women's primary function as "the preservation of the species," Kant uses as his principle something that "does not depend on our choice but on a higher purpose for the human race." So, the question is "not what we *make* our end, but what *nature's end* was"; such an end, "by means of the foolishness of human beings, must still be wisdom according to nature's purpose" (7:305-6). In these terms Kant could regard racial slavery both as morally wrong in itself (a human being ought not use another as mere means to *his* end) and as an arrangement conducive to *nature's* end—until it no longer seemed to serve this end.

So, it was not that Kant simply failed to connect the dots and recognize the immorality of racial slavery. On the contrary, he might be all too systematic and pragmatic a thinker to issue a straightforward moral verdict about something that had become intricately woven into the global order by the end of the eighteenth century. The moral state of human existence is not a *fait accompli* after all, but a remote goal for the human species to strive toward over indefinitely many generations and under contingent historical conditions. When considering humanity from this perspective, Kant locates it somewhere between savagery and moralization, with a view toward the latter as its destiny.

> Up to now there is still no moral constraint among human beings other than the constraint of decency, but we have reason to hope for it. ..... We have already come far in culture, in civilization we have not done much, and in moralization we have done almost nothing. (25:1197–98; see 7:324-25; 8:26; 9:451)

If, in spite of "the malevolence of human nature, which can be seen unconcealed in the free relations of nations," there is "a still greater … moral predisposition to eventually become master of the evil principle within him," the latter predisposition is "at present dormant" (8:355). Just as all naturally endowed germs and predispositions require external conditions to develop, so does the presumptive moral predisposition. One such condition, which is also the hardest to obtain, is a perpetually peaceful global order.

> As long, however, as states apply all their powers to their vain and violent aims of expansion and thus ceaselessly constrain the slow endeavor of the inner formation of their citizens' mode of thought, also withdrawing with this aim all support from it, nothing of [moralization] is to be expected …. In this condition humankind will remain until … it will labor its way out of the chaotic condition of the present relations between states. (8:26)

For Kant, then, the consequential relation between morality and racial slavery might only be an *indirect* one: racial slavery ended up being intolerable not because it violated the humanity of some actual human beings but because it began to undermine the prospect of lasting peace in the world. That is, it now threatened to impede humanity's progress toward its moral destiny, by eroding the political condition of its realizability.

5. Conclusion

Kant never publicly condemned the institution of racial slavery, even when he had the right occasions to do so. He did not do it in the 1780s, nor as late as 1797 (section 2). On my reading, it is not that he regarded racial slavery as *morally* permissible (he never directly endorsed it). Rather, he did not see it as a moral issue to be addressed on its own. He could consistently measure it by its role in the *history* of humanity, where 'humanity' does not mean the sum of all individuals (section 3). If he occasionally expressed some qualms about its practices in the 1790s, it was likely due to his evolving assessment of its role in intra-European politics. While in the 1780s he could tolerate racial slavery for its overall advantageous historical role, the political realities in the 1790s suggested to him that it also had the potential to undermine the prospect of a lasting equilibrium among sovereign European states (section 4). Through and through, Kant exhibited no clear interest in the wellbeing, dignity, or freedom of the enslaved and traded "Negroes," a race that he portrayed as natural slaves (section 3). This, I argued, was not just an unfortunate oversight on Kant's part. Rather, it reflects the extraordinary complexity of his philosophical system: everything he did or did not say about racial slavery begins to make sense once we connect his views on human history, on the relation between morality and political conditions, and on the racial characteristics of "Negroes."

So, the belief that Kant became "more egalitarian with regard to race" in the 1790s (Kleingeld 2007:586) has turned out to be a mirage. With this conclusion, my goal is not simply to settle the debate about whether or for long Kant was a racist. I have tried my best to avoid the expression 'Kant's racism,' which is ubiquitous in secondary literature. Rather, I talk about Kant's *relation* to racism. This is an intentional move on my part. It is important that Kant both *taught* and published his views on race. Whatever personal revelations he might have had at the end of

his life, he could hardly undo the racist worldviews that he—both as a powerful philosopher and as a popular lecturer with a decades-long teaching career—might have helped to cultivate or affirm in his broadest *audiences*. It is time that we move beyond the individualistic conception of racism that still dominates the ongoing debate about Kant's case.[41] It is time that we work harder to figure out how to undo some of his racist *legacies*, such as the Eurocentric discipline of "history of philosophy" as we now know and practice it.[42] Take this as a scholarly invitation for further discussion.[43]

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[1] Kant published three essays on race: "Of the Different Races of Human Beings" (1775, revised in 1777), "Determination of the Concept of a Human Race" (1785), and "On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy" (1788). On the history of these essays, see Mikkelsen 2013:18–32.

[2] With the exception of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A/B) and the Dohna-Wundlacken notes of his anthropology lecture from 1791/92 (Kant 1924), references to Kant's other works are to the volume and pagination of *Immanuel Kant: Gesammelte Schriften* (29 volumes; Berlin, 1902–). For available translations, I use the Cambridge editions listed in the Bibliography. Other translations are my own.

[3] The Ramsay-Tobin controversy represented a turning point in the debate over slavery (Swaminathan 2016). Kant relied on the abbreviated German translations of their competing tracts (Ramsay 1784 and Tobin 1785) published in volume five of the *Beiträge zur Völker und Länderkunde* (1786: 1-74, 267-92), edited by the geographer and historian Matthias Christian Sprengel. Sprengel himself lectured and published on the history of slavery and was evidently interested in exposing his German readers to abolitionist ideas (Zhang 2018). For a contextualized analysis of Kant's appeal to Tobin's testimony, see Lu-Adler 2022a.

[4] For alternative literature reviews, see Mikkelsen 2013:3-18; Yab 2021:19-29. The latter criticizes the prevailing discourse for fixating on the narrow question of how Kant's racist views affect his moral philosophy.

[5] In the wake of George Floyd's killing by a police officer (May 25, 2020), a German debate over Kant and racism unfolded in public. The exchange between two prominent Kant scholars, Marcus Willaschek (2020a; 2020b) and Michael Wolff (2020), is especially notable.

[6] Other noteworthy responses to Kleingeld that are not exactly captured by my analysis include Basevich 2020 (228-33) and Yab 2021 (51-7, 135-44, 197-207, 214-19), both of which criticize Kleingeld for failing to recognize, among other things, that Kant's theory of race continued to have a pragmatic significance for his later cosmopolitan project.

[7] Although Kant says little about race directly in the *Anthropology*, Jimmy Yab has argued that this text in fact represents the "completion" of Kant's theory of race (2021: 27; see 135-87).

[8] The way Kant excludes women from any agential participation in public affairs of a civil society helps to illustrate this point: of the two human sexes, neither is superior than the other; it is just that nature, for the sake of humanity, intends them to be different—the woman to be "beautiful" and the man, "sublime," in intellectual and aesthetic qualities; this difference in turn determines their places in society—the woman bound for the domestic state and the man, for the civil or political one (2:228-43; 7:303-11).

[9] Even in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant's critique of settler colonialism is premised on the conception of indigenous peoples like Amerindians as "savages," with whom there was "no prospect of a civil union" (6:266). This premise is significant given that Kant equates the state of savagery with the state of nature (Lu-Adler 2022b). He refers to those supposed savages as peoples who have an "empirical title" to the land they inhabit because they happen to be the first to possess

it *physically*. Such a title is "provisional" in a state of nature, whereas "conclusive" and "rational" title can be obtained "only in a civil condition" (6:264-66).

[10] I retain Kant's use of 'Negro' as a technical term. To him, "true Negroes" are not just any African blacks, but only those from the Senegambian region (2:441-42; 9:312; 26.1:87). He excludes some other Africans from this race, such as the derogatively named "Kaffirs" and "Hottentots" (8:93; 8:171). He classifies the latter as savages (6:266).

[11] I call this Kant's "passing reference" to *Negerhandel* because, as Bernasconi (2011:302-3) has pointed out, it disappeared from the published version of "Toward Perpetual Peace." Also see note 35 below.

[12] See note 31 below. It is also worth noting that Kant describes *Negerhandel* as a violation of the black Africans' "hospitality"—a relational concept signifying their reception of uninvited (European) visitors to their native land—but not as a violation of the unconditional *humanity* of the traded human beings. Only an objection in the latter terms would count as a *moral* objection to the slave trade. Furthermore, the blacks are mentioned here only as the original physical possessors of their land, not as a race. What is said of these landed blacks cannot be automatically extended to the ones used as chattel slaves in West-Indian plantations for instance.

[13] Kant traces "true Negroes" to this part of the world. See note 10 above.

[14] The best-known legal document reflecting this situation is the Code Noir, the royal edict that Louis XIV issued in 1685 to regulate the practice of slavery in France's West-Indian colonies. The Code was registered in Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) in 1687, and was last edited in 1788. See Sala-Molins 2018 for the most authoritative and devastating analysis of the Code, which contextualizes each article by drawing on relevant historical, legal, and religious sources. The analysis at the same time invites a meditation on the overall silence of French Enlightenment philosophers about slavery (Sala-Molins 2018:4-6; see Sala-Molins 2006; Cohen 1980:35-59, 60-99).

[15] On serfdom, see O'Rourke 2017.

[16] I thank Jordan Pascoe for drawing my attention to these notes.

[17] See Cugoano 1999 (34-8) for an incisive account of the fundamental differences between ancient forms of slavery and modern chattel slavery, in response to those who defended the latter by claiming that slavery was an ancient practice. Quobna Ottobah Cugoano (c.1757–1791/92) was a formerly enslaved African British author. His *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evils of Slavery*, first published in 1787, was a spirited and philosophically rigorous indictment of racial slavery. Cugoano responded to the Ramsay-Tobin controversy mentioned above. Whereas Kant spoke approvingly of Tobin, Cugoano forcefully invalidated the latter's anti-abolitionist arguments (1999:18-22).

[18] Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* went through nine English editions between 1789 and 1794. Its first German translation appeared in 1792. I am using the 1794 English edition reproduced in Equiano 2003.

[19] Equiano 2003:271n.308. Edmund Burke worked on volume 1 by himself but collaborated with William Burke for volume 2. This volume first appeared in 1757. Equiano used the second edition (1758). I am quoting from the third (1760).

[20] In his 1788 essay on race, Kant suggests that "Negroes" cannot be made "*free* laborers," because they seem incapable of what "one could properly call *labor*" even when they are free (8:174n.).

[21] Kant was prompted to take a stance on racial slavery in his 1788 essay on race. This essay was a response to an article by Georg Forster (1754-94), "Noch etwas über die Menschenrassen" (1786, reprinted as Forster 1991 and translated as Forster 2013). The latter was mainly a theoretical critique of Kant's monogenetic theory of race, according to which different races and varieties of humans have developed from the same original phylum. But Forster ended his critique with an impassioned reflection on the cruelty of racial slavery. He wanted to know whether Kant's monogenism is any better than polygenism in preventing or lessening the atrocities of slavery. Has "the thought that blacks are our brothers" (according to monogenism), Forster asked, "ever, anywhere, even once, caused the raised whip of the slave driver to be lowered" (2013:165)? Kant sidestepped this challenge in his response.

[22] To my knowledge, Kant never explicitly made such a concession about racial *slavery*. The furthest he went was an ambiguous statement about the slave *trade* from a physical geography lecture in 1792: "Negro trade is certainly morally apprehensible, but it would have taken place even without the Europeans" (26.2:1142).

[23] Kant offers this speculation to *explain* the anti-abolitionist James Tobin's allegation, which Kant presents as a factual statement, that freed "Negro" slaves all became "tramps" (8:174n.).

[24] Especially 8:91-5. On the theoretical considerations underlying Kant's racial classification, see Sandford 2018.

[25] According to Robert Louden, in spite of Kant's racist "prejudices," he was *logically committed* to the egalitarian view that every member of the human species, regardless of their race, will partake in moral perfection as agents. That is, "because [Kant] believes that the entire species progresses in perfection, he must also accept that the entire species is destined to eventually work its way through the preparatory steps of culture and civilization to moralization. It therefore cannot be the case … that women or people of color will always remain mere passive citizens in the realm of ethics" (2000:105). Given Kant's distinction between (natural) species and individuals, however, it is a *non sequitur*—a fallacy of division—to infer propositions about individuals (or groups of individuals) from what is true of the species.

[26] On Kant's account of culture as an intermediary stage of human history, see Marwah 2012.

[27] On the Copernican turn in Kant's philosophy of history, see Booth 1983.

[28] Kant focuses on five Western-European states—France, England, Spain, Italy, and Germany—in his final (1798) account of the character of nations (7:311-20).

[29] On Kant's view of Amerindians as useless savages, see Lu-Adler 2022b. The genocidal suggestion of this view is so palpable that Kant once felt compelled to give a disclaimer: "[Amerindians] will attain to no perfection, for it appears that they will all be exterminated [*ausgerottet*], not through acts of murder, for that would be gruesome! but rather that they will die out [*aussterben*]" (25:840). Kant believes that this race will simply die out, partly because "even the[ir] sexual drive is weak" (25:1166), so that "another life" (biological continuation) cannot be "inferred with much certainty" from this race (25:840).

[30] Calling some practices of racial slavery "the cruelest" is not the same as rejecting racial slavery itself. As I explained in section 2, Kant can describe the slavery practiced in West-Indian plantations as devasting to the lives of the enslaved without denouncing the very institution of slavery. Moreover, as I suggested in section 3, even if Kant found racial slavery immoral in itself, the disinterested philosopher of history in him might still choose to look away from this evil.

[31] Kleingeld interprets this as evidence that "Kant repeatedly and explicitly criticizes slavery of non-Europeans in the strongest terms, as a grave violation of cosmopolitan right" *of blacks* (2007:587). If one reads Kant's statement in its context, however, one can see that he is talking about the *Europeans*' "cosmopolitan right to limited hospitality" (23:174), as "the right of a foreigner against the owner of land" (23:172). Who is the visiting foreigner here? The answer should be obvious. See Gani 2017 and Huseyinzadegan 2019b.

[32] These wars—French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802) and Napoleonic Wars (1803-15)—would come down to France and Britain fighting each other for global hegemony (Esdaile 2018; Mikaberidze 2020).

[33] See Rowe 1999; Van der Burg 2021: 23-44.

[34] For a classical account of the Haitian Revolution, see James 1989 (especially 132-37 and 199-223, on Britain's fateful and short-lived involvement). On the commercial significance of Saint-Domingue, which explained Britain's desire to control the island, see Trouillot 1982. For a more thorough analysis of the historical backdrop and development of the Haitian Revolution, see Geggus 2002.

[35] In the "Conflict of Faculties" (1798), Kant mentions the British debates over the slave trade without passing any value judgment about it (7:90). It is worth adding that the abolitionist movements in Britain went through two protracted phases, targeting the slave trade first and then slavery itself. This phased approach is reflected in the name of the first abolitionist organization, Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (founded in 1787). The Parliament passed the Slave Trade Abolition Act in 1807 and the Slavery Abolition Act much later, in 1833. Worse still, Britain would continue to be invested in or, at best, indifferent toward practices of slavery and the slave trade long after passing those acts (see Afigbo 2006; Sherwood 2007).

[36] On the relation between slavery and the slave trade, on the one hand, and the making of the capitalist global economy, on the other, see De Zwart and Van Zanden 2018: 92-120; Inikori 2020.

[37] Valdez 2017 helps to illuminate this point, especially with its distinction between conflicts that are purposeful (purposive) with respect to human progress and those that are purposeless, including colonial violence.

[38] On the role that Kant's (Eurocentric) view of commerce plays in his political theory, see Ypi 2014; Huseyinzadegan 2019a:117-57.

[39] This is partly because the economic fortune of each empire, which in turn determined its military might, was tied to its involvement in slavery and the slave trade. On the British situation, see Richardson 1998; Morgan 2000. On the French case, see Geggus 2001; Marzagalli 2011.

[40] On this point, we may compare Kant to Edmund Burke. In a letter from 1792, which was attached to his "Sketch of the Negro Code" (written in 1780), Burke explains his conservative

approach to slavery and "the African trade." When "considered with regard to itself only," he states, slavery as well as the slave trade is undoubtedly a moral evil that calls for "utter abolition." But it is an "incurable evil" for that, being "a system made up of a great variety of parts." To deal with such an evil, one cannot count on "the mere operation of any abstract principle[s] … if they are not embodied in specifick regulations." After all, the way down (to slavery) is easy, but *the way back is hard*. In the latter regard, Burke advises, we "take our *point of departure* from a state of Slavery"—so as to regulate it (hence the "Negro Code") and "make it as small an evil as possible" (Burke 1999:255-59; see Marshall 2019:177-201).

[41] I am not saying that one should stop studying Kant as a racist individual altogether, because this study may still have its value. What I find problematic is that the individualistic approach completely *rules* the current discourse about Kant's racial views and is often used to downplay the need for deeper philosophical investigations of those views and their ramifications.

[42] According to Park 2013, Kant made a distinctive contribution to the myth that philosophy proper could only have started with the Greeks, as opposed to the ancient "Orientals" such as Egyptians and Indians (as it was more commonly thought before Kant). The racist rationale underlying this myth is already implicit in Kant's claim, which I mentioned in section 3, that the yellow race is incapable of abstract concepts or principles, which are essential to philosophizing in the Kantian sense. Kant extended this claim to all "Orientals" (for instance, 25:536, 655; 25:1232-33). On how academic philosophy is still in the grip of the myth about the origin of philosophy, see Van Norden 2017.

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