

## FROM CROOKED WOOD TO MORAL AGENCY: ON ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHICS IN KANT

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Immanuel Kant has long been famous for his deontological or “duty-based” approach to ethics. Even as critics have complained about Kant’s excessive formalism regarding the formulation of moral maxims—maxims which to many thinkers seem incapable of capturing the rich texture of moral life—Kant’s emphasis on the role played by free will continues to attract moral theorists and it remains a mainstay in contemporary bioethical discussions of patient autonomy and rights. Worries over moral contextualism aside, in recent years there has been an entirely different set of concerns raised against Kant’s ethical program. These stem from the increasing attention being paid by scholars to the connection between Kant’s natural historical works—that is, the materials taken from not only Kant’s annual lecture courses on Physical Geography (1756-1796) and Anthropology (1772-1796), but also his published essays on race (1775, 1777 rev. ed, 1785, 1788)—and his social and political program.

Kant’s contributions to debates regarding the natural history of race have led, in particular, to charges ranging from racism and hypocrisy to, at minimum, inconsistency on Kant’s part. At this point it is safe to say that mainstream Kant scholars remain reluctant to condemn Kant altogether, preferring either to identify him as more or less a “man of his times” or to draw a strong distinction between Kant’s self-described hobbyist’s interest in race (10:230) and the transcendental program itself. Critical race theorists remain unconvinced by either of these responses, for there were many in Kant’s circle of interlocutors who rejected anthropological efforts to provide a biologically grounded account of racial difference, including both Herder and Forster.<sup>2</sup> Regarding the purported distinction between Kant’s anthropological writings and the critical system, as Charles Mills puts it: “[E]ither Kant’s racial views do not affect his philosophy at all (the extreme position), or they do not affect it in its *key/central/essential/basic* claims (the more moderate position). The assumption, obviously, is that we have a

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Bernasconi raises this point in particular in his essay “Kant’s Third Thoughts on Race,” in *Reading Kant’s Geography*, edited by S. Elden and E. Mendieta (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), pp. 291-318. Pauline Kleingeld pays special attention to the work done by Forster to force race theorists to integrate first-hand accounts of both the nature of foreign peoples and the actual conditions of colonial slavery into their theories of racial difference, see *Kant and Cosmopolitanism. The Philosophical Ideal of World Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), chapter 4.

principled, non-question-begging way to demarcate what is central from what is peripheral to his philosophy, and a similarly principled way of showing how the racial views (and, of course, their implications) fail to penetrate to this inner circle.”<sup>3</sup> Mills takes such a demarcation to be impossible, charging race theorists thereby with the task of identifying sites of penetration in order to prove that Kant’s philosophical program is hardly as race-neutral as we have all been led to believe.

In this essay my aim will be threefold. First, I want to provide some historical context for Kant’s interest in natural history and to demonstrate the manner in which he was an early contributor to the development of physical anthropology as a field dedicated to investigating differences between “the varieties of men.” Second, I will identify some points of “penetration,” to use Mills’ term, before rehearsing both the best defense available for Kantians and the strongest critical response to this defense.<sup>4</sup> Finally, I want to shift the framework altogether, and propose that we look at Kant’s work on religion to discover a different strategy for thinking about the relationship he sees between the individual and the historically dark times in which they might live.

## FROM NATURAL HISTORY TO THE HISTORY OF NATURE

First then, some historical context. There is of course no single text or author responsible for the series of enormous transformations that occurred in the field of natural history between 1650 and 1750. Keeping our brushstrokes light, it is enough to identify two major trends, combined with a few key publications. The first trend involves the gradual dismantling of the mechanical approach to living organisms during this time period, particularly with respect to attempts to understand two characteristic processes: generation and inheritance. There had been a great deal of conceptual confusion regarding these processes once the explanatory power of the soul had been eliminated—as much by Galileo as by Calvin—from all natural accounts. In its absence, early mechanists seemed nonetheless successful as they mapped the workings of weights and pulleys, pumps and heat, onto the bones and tendons and other of the body. But though that was all thought to explain well enough the workings of an organism in its main parts, mechanists still struggled to make sense of the key facts of living beings, i.e., their ability to reproduce, to grow, and to heal or regenerate their bodies if need be. Reproduction posed a particular challenge. This was due to the all-too-familiar problem of understanding the

<sup>3</sup> Charles Mills, “Kant’s *Untermenschen*,” in *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*, edited by A. Valls (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 175f.

<sup>4</sup> The best-known defense of Kant has come from Pauline Kleingeld in an important essay outlining both Kant’s deep failures during the 1780s and his increasingly vocal change of heart regarding the evils of colonial slavery during the 1790s, see “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 57 (2007): 573-592; this essay is significantly expanded in Kleingeld’s 2012 book *Kant and Cosmopolitanism*. Robert Bernasconi is equally well-known for essays laying the groundwork for subsequent interrogations of Kant and race, see especially “Will the Real Kant Please Stand Up. The Challenge of Enlightenment Racism to the Study of the History of Philosophy,” *Radical Philosophy* 117 (2003): 13-19, and “Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism,” in *Philosophers on Race*, edited by T. Lott and J. Ward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002): 145-166. For those new to this question there is a helpful and well-balanced overview of the field by Jon Mikkelsen in his translator’s introduction to *Kant and the Concept of Race. Late Eighteenth-Century Writings* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013). Also of note is Mikkelsen’s inclusion of an extensively annotated chronology meant to identify, among other things, the parallel efforts being made by abolitionists, by anthropologists, and by philosophers between 1619 and 1859 to respond, to understand, or just to exploit the concept of racial difference.

connection between form and matter, for without a soul to guide the process, it was simply unclear how an inert matter might be responsible for its own organization into a coherent, discrete set of functional parts. Explanations ranged widely on this question but most relied on God to solve the problem, which was not too far of a stretch, given that most theorists at the time took him to have created the world in the first place. That solution aside, the experimenters and the microscopists still kept up the search for a wholly mechanical account, cracking open chick eggs, watching sperm, and observing the parthenogenesis of aphids, while others adopted Cesalpino's lead, slowly disentangling botany as a field from the practical-minded work of the *materia medica*, and seeking instead to understand the physiological nature of plants and the material processes of hybridity. This turn to the physiology of plants inaugurates the second trend, the move from what was an essentially taxonomical approach to the inventories of the natural world, to one focused instead on the life processes—including the life *histories*, therefore—of individual species. Thus although Linnaeus' classification system eventually became the target of subsequent naturalists, it is important to see that it was in part because of this trend that Linnaeus rehabilitated the Aristotelian focus on reproduction as the primary function of non-human organisms, choosing the morphological characteristics of reproductive organs or “fructification parts” as the basis for distinguishing the species lines.

For all the success of Linnaeus' *Systema naturae* (1735) there were, as just said, severe criticisms as well. Classification schemes had become, in some sense, suspect by the mid-eighteenth century. For one thing, and as any horticulturalist could attest, plants hybridized far too readily for the species lines to be always clear—a problem only exacerbated once it came to far-flung varieties—which meant that many plants have to be listed as “indeterminate” within the confines of the Linnaean program. For another, serious epistemic concerns had been raised regarding the essential arbitrariness of classification schemes. These problems that had been described by Locke in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), but they had also been addressed by the botanist John Ray, whose *Historia Plantarum* (1686) emphasized the need to avoid preconceived categories when observing the life history of any individual member of a species.<sup>5</sup> It was indeed against this background suspicion regarding classification that the *Encyclopédie* would be freshly envisioned, and that Buffon would begin to publish what would eventually become some 36 volumes, with supplements, of a *Natural History, General and Particular* (1749-1788).<sup>6</sup> Criticizing taxonomical science for its false erudition, its arbitrarily imposed criteria, and its misguided search for natural divisions, Buffon argued that naturalists must begin instead with a sense for nature's underlying connections, that instead of looking for stable classificatory features they should embrace nature's great capacity for fluidity among its forms. A true natural history of a species, according to Buffon, would encompass everything known about the habits and traits of its individual members, but importantly also the long view of the species as a whole, the course of its development via migration, domestication, and even its degeneration into other forms.

<sup>5</sup> A helpful discussion of this is provided by Phillip Sloan in “John Locke, John Ray, and the Problem of the Natural System,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 5 (1972): 1-53.

<sup>6</sup> The earliest edition appeared as *Histoire Naturelle, générale et particulière*, 15 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1749-1767), though Buffon continued to produce supplements until his death in 1788.

Buffon's idea of tracing a species to its point of origin and then working forward to determine the path of its development would be widely applied by authors suddenly interested in thinking about history through the lens of genealogy, a lens automatically connecting formerly discrete parts into an organically unified, and historically coherent, whole. By 1755 three such works had already appeared. Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, for example, opened with a long discussion of Buffon's method before going on to apply his investigatory principles to the realm of politics in an effort to provide "a natural history of inequality." In this discussion Rousseau relied also on traveler's reports of indigenous cultures and the solitary "oran-gutan" in order to provide a contrast to the "degenerated" form of the domesticated humans currently residing in France. In his *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, J.J. Winckelmann applied Buffon's new genealogical approach to the history of art. Though most fully articulated in his subsequent *History of Ancient Art* (1764), Winckelmann's work inaugurated what has been described as "the tyranny of Greece over Germany" in the arts for the remainder of the century. And finally, there was Kant's own contribution to this historical moment, his *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*. Rightly famous for staking Kant's title to the Kant-Laplace nebular hypothesis, for our purposes the point to draw from this text is the close manner in which Kant followed Buffon's own work to provide a natural history of the heavens.<sup>7</sup>

It was in the year after the *Universal Natural History* came out that Kant inaugurated a new university course dedicated to "Physical Geography."<sup>8</sup> Here Kant seems to have followed the path taken by Buffon when teaching the new course on Physical Geography, and just as Buffon devoted lengthy rehearsals to what he termed "The Varieties of the Human Species," Kant would as well. According to Buffon, "these varieties may be reduced to three heads: 1. The colour; 2. The figure and stature; and, 3. The Dispositions of different people." As Kant described it in the course announcement for the following year's Physical Geography course, he

<sup>7</sup> The general idea behind such a "nebular" hypothesis for the formation of the cosmos—an account according to which attractive and repulsive forces turned an original chaos of particles into increasingly structured bodies—was not entirely novel in 1755, a fact which Kant would have been well aware of given his familiarity with the cosmological theories advanced by Maupertuis and Buffon. In volume one of the *Natural History* Buffon discussed the formation of planets, the role played by comets, and the effects of wind and water on geological formation. Buffon's intimation, moreover, of a nebular hypothesis would certainly have been noticed by Kant. "The planets," Buffon wrote, "move round the sun in the same direction and nearly in the same plane, the greatest inclination of their planes not exceeding  $7\frac{1}{2}$  degrees. This similarity in the position and motion of the planets indicates that their impulsive or centrifugal forces must have originated from one common cause." In *Buffon's Natural History containing a theory of the earth, a general history of man, of the brute creation, and of vegetables, minerals, &c. &c.*, trans. J.S. Barr, ten vols. (London: Symonds, 1797), vol. 1, p. 75. Kant referred to Maupertuis's work on celestial mechanics a number of times in *Universal Natural History* as well, e.g., 1:232, 1:236, 1:254, 1:255. All citations from Kant are indicated according to the pagination of *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1902-) with volume and page number indicated in that order by the use of Roman numerals separated by full colons. An exception to this will be references to the *Critique of Pure Reason* which will follow standard citation practice in referring to the A-edition of 1781 and the B-edition of 1787 when providing academy edition page numbers.

<sup>8</sup> Kant explained that he was first inspired to give such a course after reading a 1751 review of William Wright of Derham's cosmological treatises in the *Hamburgischen freien Urtheile* (1:231), but anyone reading through Kant's course outline for his course on physical geography in 1757 would have immediately seen just how closely acquainted Kant had become by then with Buffon's early volumes. The German translation of Buffon's *Natural History* was undertaken by Abraham Kästner between 1750 and 1774 as *Allgemeine Historie der Natur: nach ihren besonderen Theilen abgehandelt*, trans. Abraham Gotthelf Kästner (Hamburg and Leipzig: G.C. Grund and A.H. Holle). Although Buffon originally published the first three volumes together in French in 1749, Kästner translated and published only the first two of these into German in 1750; volume three appeared in German translation in 1752. A helpful discussion of Kant's earliest lectures, including his likely sources, is provided by Werner Stark as part of the editorial apparatus put together for the recent Academy edition of Kant's so-called "diktaat text" from 1756-58, see Kant's *Vorlesungen über Physische Geographie*, AA 26.1, esp. the "Einleitung" and the footnotes accompanying parts 2 and 3, pp. 85ff.

would be comparing people from different regions in terms of their colour (*Farbe*), their natural shape (*natürliche Bildung*), and their dispositions (*die Neigungen*) (2:9). Kant followed Buffon's environmentalism too so far as he would similarly argue that food (*Landesprodukte*), climate (*Himmelstriche*), and "manners" (Buffon's dispositions), were the main grounds for explaining obvious physiological differences between people around the world. By 1765-66 Kant had begun to compress the portions of the course devoted to "physical, moral, and political geography"—subjects Kant took to be directly connected to the physical features of the earth—in order to make room for his increasingly expanded discussions of character or "*man*, throughout the world, from the point of view of the variety of his natural properties and the differences in that feature of man which is moral in character" (2:312), these were investigations that, as Kant put it in his course announcement for that year, promised to produce "a comprehensive map of the human species" (2:313). By 1772-73 the Physical Geography course had become so full that Kant began to offer a separate course on "Anthropology" dedicated to the newly expanded discussions of human nature, subsequently alternating the two courses between the university's Summer and Winter semesters every year until he stopped teaching altogether in 1796.

While this represents only a rough outline of an extraordinarily rich timeframe, it should at least give a sense of the historical context within which Kant's interest in natural history arose. Natural history, as should have been made clear by now, was a term meant to cover a wide swath of investigations, of enquiries including everything from the formation of the cosmos to the habits of insects. By the 1770s, however, the broad nature of these investigations began to change as newly dedicated research programs arose and natural history began its gradual dismemberment into discrete fields and specialized university faculties.

## KANT AND THE PHYSIOLOGY OF RACE

The "science of man," as investigations into anthropology were then known, followed a similar trajectory towards anthropology's eventual establishment into a more narrowly defined field. Here Kant's own path toward the development of his anthropology course is instructive. The course itself emerged as a hybrid of discussions that had previously belonged to two of Kant's other courses, the long-running Physical Geography course and Kant's course on Metaphysics.<sup>9</sup> Kant's lectures on the latter followed Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* (1739), which included discussions of "ontology," "cosmology," "empirical psychology," "rational psychology," and "theology."<sup>10</sup> Of these, empirical psychology covered the most ground, with topics that generally followed, at least in outline, the path taken by Descartes in his *Meditations*. Thus after an initial summary of the soul as substantial, simple, immaterial, and intelligent, Baumgarten moved to considerations of the soul's activity in forming representations, of its aesthetic feelings

<sup>9</sup> Holly Wilson describes the manner in which interpreters have historically differed in seeing the Anthropology course as either a direct descendent of the Metaphysics course or as indelibly linked to the course on Physical Geography. See *Kant's Pragmatic Anthropology: Its Origin, Meaning, and Critical Significance* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), esp. pp. 16-24.

<sup>10</sup> A.G. Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, third ed. (Halle: C.H. Hemmerde, 1757). A reprint of Baumgarten's text is included in the Academy volume devoted to the notes Kant made in his own copy of the text, see 17:5-226. Thomas Sturm discusses Baumgarten's account of empirical psychology in relation to Kant in "Kant on Empirical Psychology," in *Kant and the Sciences*, edited by Eric Watkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 163-184.

of pleasure and displeasure, of its will or “faculty of desire,” and finally, of its connection to the body. From the mid-1760s on, empirical psychology did not belong to Kant’s conception of metaphysics since, as Kant defined its scope, “Empirical psychology is the cognition of the objects of inner sense insofar as it is obtained from experience” (28:222). Reflection on this certainly lay behind Kant’s later taxonomy in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* insofar as moral empiricism would be immediately determined to be a species of “practical anthropology” for its consideration of the will only so far as it could be sensuously affected (4:388), and it grounded Kant’s insistence that ‘we should not dream for a moment of trying to derive the reality of the basic moral principle from the special characteristics of human nature’ (4:425). That said, Kant still seems to have thought that if empirical psychology could be developed into an area of study independent of metaphysics, then its investigations would contain great potential since its contents could be investigated in the same manner as was being done in the natural histories of plants and animals (28:224). As he put it, “Though it [empirical psychology] is but a stranger [to metaphysics] it has long been accepted as a member of the household, and we allow it to stay for some time longer, until it is in a position to set up an establishment of its own in a complete anthropology, the pendant to the empirical doctrine of nature” (A849/B877).

If empirical psychology could be disentangled from metaphysics, Kant believed that it could function as an empirical complement to ethics, and indeed once the Kant began to teach his course on Anthropology he did so always in tandem with a course on Ethics that he would teach in the same semester.<sup>11</sup> What Kant’s earliest publication on themes taken from the empirical psychology portion of the Metaphysics course demonstrates, however, is the connection he drew between moral agency and the kind of work being done by physical geographers to distinguish population groups by custom, nationality, and race. Thus although the title of 1764’s *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime* might have led its readers to expect a work on aesthetics, it was in fact a text that brought together the various strands that Kant was then pulling together as he began to think about the proper scope of anthropology: a field that could include an account of character, taste, and morality alongside consideration of native differences between sexes, nations, and the races.<sup>12</sup>

As Kant began to teach Anthropology he was concerned to distinguish his approach from not only the physiologically based psychological approach then associated with Bonnet, but also from the sort of medical anthropology that had been produced by Platner. Kant wanted something different, his Anthropology courses were meant to attract a wide audience and introduce topics that would not only enlarge the world for his listeners but improve their moral capacities along the way. As he summarized it at the end of his career: “The sum total

<sup>11</sup> Werner Stark discusses the significance of this in “Historical Notes and Interpretive Questions about Kant’s Lectures on Anthropology,” in *Essays on Kant’s Anthropology*, edited by B. Jacobs and P. Kain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 15-37, see esp. p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> The *Observations* was self-consciously styled as a piece of popular philosophy by Kant and it was in fact both popular and successful in making Kant known beyond university circles; subsequent editions appeared without emendation by Kant in 1766, 1771, 1797, 1797-98, and 1799. John Zammito emphasizes the importance of this style form for Kant when describing his relationship to Herder between 1762 and 1773, and rightfully insists that Herder be more regularly included in works tracing the history of anthropology as a field, see *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Sonia Sikka’s work is also helpful for situating Herder’s contribution within the context of anthropology, see *Herder on Humanity and Cultural Difference. Enlightened Relativism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), sesp. chapters 3 and 4.

of anthropology in respect to the vocation of the human being and the characteristic of his formation, is the following. The human being is destined by his reason to live in a society with human beings and in it to *cultivate* himself, to *civilize* himself, and to *moralize* himself by means of the arts and sciences” (7:324). Throughout the 1770s and well into the 1780s Kant continued, however, to include hierarchical comments on national and racial characteristics reminiscent of his early remarks in the *Observations* in the Anthropology course, and it wasn’t until the end of his teaching career that Kant would come to decide that an account of racial difference had no place in a pragmatic anthropology, referring his readers instead to a piece written by Christoph Girtanner, a supporter of Kant’s racial theories (7:320).

It is important to see that there were, almost from the beginning, two research programs at work within anthropology. The first program took its lead from Rousseau, and from Rousseau’s appropriation of Buffon in particular, for reconstructing the history of the state. This reconstruction, as with all social contract theories, set up the state of nature as a contrast case, but Rousseau’s attention to the ruinous effect of society and especially the false morality espoused by good manners and breeding, shifted the focus for many to the role of culture in history. This was the starting point for Herder as he concentrated on the cultural climate—the education, religion, and above all, the language of a people—as the dominant factor for determining the character of any social group. While Herder certainly brought metaphysical and religious concepts to bear on his own “history of man,” it is still possible to see a line running from Herder through Humboldt to the cultural anthropologists and linguists working with indigenous groups in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The second program took its lead from a separate branch of research coming out of Buffon, but also from Maupertuis and any number of other theorists interested in the problem of generation. By the mid-eighteenth century preexistence theorists were on the defensive, thanks in large part to a constant stream of discoveries seeming to undermine claims regarding nature’s passivity with respect to form. One way of testing the position advanced by those who relied on the preexistence of forms was to search for patterns of heredity. Maupertuis, for example, carefully tracked the history of a family in Berlin known for producing children with six fingers. Once he had definitively shown that polydactyls were being born regardless of whether their six-fingered parent was a male or female, Maupertuis claimed victory against Ovists and Spermists alike.<sup>13</sup> Without any clear idea of the actual process by which embryogenesis occurred, Maupertuis was confident at least that progeny were the result of some kind of mixture of materials taken from both the mother and the father. As he tried to discover the mechanisms driving inheritance Maupertuis began his own breeding program, gradually creating a menagerie full of cats, dogs, birds, and other, more exotic animals. In the case of humans, mixed race or so-called “blended” children provided the best opportunity for investigation, even if these early enquiries were equally tied to questions regarding the original colour of mankind. Thus Maupertuis’ first piece on generation theory had been occasioned by an African albino (a boy born to African slaves in colonial South America) who had been paraded around Paris by the aristocracy as a curiosity and sensation in Parisian salon culture in

<sup>13</sup> See *Essai sur la formation des corps organizes* (Berlin, 1754), pp. 159-161. The *Essai* was reissued two years later under the title *Système de la nature* for a new edition of Maupertuis’s collected works, *Oeuvres*, 4 vols. (Lyon, 1756).

1744. In 1745 Maupertuis republished his piece with a new essay on “Varieties in the Species of Man” under the title *Venus Physique*.<sup>14</sup>

It was through publications like these that questions regarding generation became linked to questions regarding the physiological bases for racial difference. This research program was carried forward after Maupertuis by Camper, Blumenbach, Sömmering, and others, as the field shifted increasingly toward the gathering of biometric data on the morphological characteristics of the races, a trend that continued under the heading of physical anthropology well into the 1960s. While Maupertuis was busy investigating inheritance as a key to understanding generation, taxonomists searched for an account of physiological differences that would permit the delineation of subspecies into true varieties or races as opposed to mere strains and sorts. The two endeavors—investigations into the mechanisms of generation and heredity on the one hand, and the search for a taxonomical definition of race, on the other—came together in 1775 when Kant presented a new taxonomical division of the races and their strains that crucially rested on a theory of the unfailing inheritance of racial bloodlines.<sup>15</sup>

The occasion for Kant’s piece was the announcement he put together for his Physical Geography course—a course he had taught eighteen times by then—for just as in the case of his earlier announcements, he attached a representative essay. Promising a discussion “Of the Different Races of Human Beings to Announce the Lectures on Physical Geography of Immanuel Kant,” the piece amounted to Kant’s first work exclusively devoted to a topic in natural history.<sup>16</sup> The essay opened with Kant’s taxonomy, for Kant took races (*Racen*) and varieties (*Varietäten*) to each represent “subspecies” (*Abartungen*), with the point of distinction being the persistency with which characteristics were inherited: varieties were inconsistent, races were not. Kant accepted Buffon’s definition of degeneration (*Ausartung*) as a case when “subspecies could no longer provide the original formation of the phylum (*Stammbildung*)” (2:429), before moving on to further distinguish “strains” (*Spielarten*) from a “sort” (*Schlag*). What made the category of race stand out in the taxonomy was the special capacity of racial character to withstand complete amelioration through either racial blending (*Mischung*) or transplanting. Because Kant followed Buffon in assigning stature and disposition to contingent geographical forces like climate and nutrition, however, he took colour—which Buffon

<sup>14</sup> Maupertuis’s early piece appeared in a series of three anonymously published pamphlet editions, “Dissertation physique à l’occasion du nègre blanc” (Leiden, 1744). *Venus Physique* was published anonymously but also without a listed location, only a date. A comprehensive listing of Maupertuis’s unusually complicated publication history—a history comprising multiple editions under different titles, often published anonymously or even pseudonymously—is in Giorgio Tonnelli’s “Introduction. Bibliographie et histoire du texte” included in Maupertuis’s works, see P.L. Moreau de Maupertuis, *Oeuvres* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974), vol. 1, pp. XI-LXXXIII.

<sup>15</sup> In his *Natural History* Buffon had emphasized the genius of mankind for surviving all manner of climactic conditions, “the blood is different,” as Buffon put it, “but the germ is the same.” In the entry “On Degeneration,” [1766] in *Natural History, General and Particular*, translated by W. Smellie, third edition (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1791), vol. 7, p. 396. Kästner’s translation of this entry into German, “*Von der Abartung der Thiere*,” appeared in 1772. Attention to bloodlines was an established method for tracing genealogy and inheritance, but the focus on blood as a link to both character and geographical origin went back to Hippocrates. Kant’s first discussion of character in the Anthropology, “On the way of cognizing the interior of the human being from the exterior,” followed the Greek medical model when discussing “temperament” (7:286f), just as his account of race described the chemical-environmental effects that could be had on blood in determining a person’s physiology (2:438ff).

<sup>16</sup> In this discussion I follow remarks made in my book, *Kant’s Organicism. Epigenesis and the Development of Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), chapter 5.



dismissed as only a superficial mark of distinction—to be the unique and permanent identifier of race. This meant that while “sorts” of races could be distinguished by their figure as a result of their geographical location, their belonging to a particular race would remain stable, even were the sort to eventually change shape again due to transplanting. As Kant explained it,

[T]he condition of the soil (humidity or aridity), likewise that of nutrition, gradually introduce a hereditary difference or *sort* among animals of the same phylum and race, chiefly with respect to size, proportion of the limbs (heavy or thin), as well as natural disposition (*Naturells*), which, while resulting in half-breeds in mixing with foreign ones, disappears over the course of few generations on other soil and with different nutrition (even without a change of climate) (2:431).

Kant understood that it was important to retain this aspect of Buffon’s account regarding geographic distribution, since it explained the different appearances or “sorts” of people across regions which seemed to offer similar conditions. Because soil and nutrition were responsible for the changeable aspects of racial sort, climate became the special “occasioning cause” (*gelegentliche Ursache*) of non-changeable differences in colour (2:436). But while Kant understood all of these causes to work their effects only so far as they took root in a “generative power” (*Zeugungskraft*) during embryogenesis—a necessary requirement for the subsequent inheritance of traits (2:436)—he based his account on something other than a theory of animal generation.

The inner provisions for adaptation in the species were assigned instead to an organism’s “natural disposition” to produce changes in size and proportion, and its “germs” (*Keime*) for the production of entirely new parts. Thus birds transplanted to colder climates would have germs ready to be unfolded (*ausgewickelt*) for the development (*Entwicklung*) of new parts, that is, more feathers. And wheat faced with cold could rely on the unfolding of a natural disposition regarding the proportional thickness of its protective chaff (2:434). The vagaries of environment thus served as contingent occasioning causes for changes in the creature, but the grounds for an individual’s adaptive response were prepared in advance due to Nature’s concern for the species lines under her protection. Such advance concern introduced the language of purpose (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) and ends (*Zwecke*) into Kant’s discussion, vocabulary that could only be employed in so far as what was being advanced was a speculative lens meant to aid in our investigation of the world. “Chance or the universal mechanical laws could not produce such agreements,” Kant argued, “Therefore we must consider such occasional unfoldings as *performed* (*vorgebildet*)” (2:435). Performed germs and dispositions were thus purposed from the start for their later formation into traits meant to allow a species’ adaptation to its environment. The great adaptability of mankind meant that the species’ widespread geographic distribution was a matter of destiny: “The human being was destined for all climates and for every soil” Kant wrote,

consequently various germs and natural predispositions had to lie ready in him to be on occasion either unfolded or restrained, so that he would become suited to his place in the world and over the course of the generations would appear to be as it were native to and made for that place. With these concepts, let us go through the whole human species on the wide earth and adduce purposive causes of its subspecies therein in cases where the natural causes are not easily recognizable and again adduce natural causes where we do not perceive ends (2:435).

Armed thereby with an approach to natural history that combined purposive and natural causes, Kant was free to assert on teleological grounds not only the *historical* unity of the species in the case of mankind—a unity happily supported by the empirical experience of interfertility between the races—but a non-contingent basis for the subsequent appearances of traits serving to differentiate individuals from the other members of the species.

With Kant's first essay on race now in view, there are two points worth noting. Although the discussion of race as a specific physiological result of adaptation to environmental conditions belonged to the Physical Geography course, there were passing comments on the mental and moral characteristics of the races in these lectures as well. This is not a surprise, given that the course originally included moral disposition as a shaping force for distinguishing peoples. Thus in the 1775 course announcement Kant remarked, for example, that "humid warmth is beneficial to the robust growth of animals in general and, in short, this results in the Negro, who is well suited to his climate, namely strong, fleshy, supple, but who, given the abundant provision of his mother land, is lazy, soft and trifling" (2:438). Such a comment raises obvious concerns regarding Kant's insistence on the unfailing inheritance of race, since it implies that racially identified characteristics like laziness, weakness of character, and so on might be indelible features of a population. In the 1775 essay Kant had explained the unique permanence of colour against subsequent climatic variation by way of the functioning of the germs designated for this specific trait: "[O]nly the phyletic formation can degenerate into a race; however, once a race has taken root and has suffocated (*erstickt*) the other germs, it resists all transformation just because the character of the race has then become prevailing in the generative power" (2:442). In the Anthropology lectures given by Kant that same year, he did not in fact seem committed to the idea that moral dispositions were unchangeable. Given the universal perfectibility of the species, for example, Kant explained that the "savage Indian or Greenlander" had "the same germs as a civilized human being, only they are not yet developed" (25:651). By 1781-82, however, Kant suggested that in cases where no advancement had occurred in a people over time, one must assume that there is a certain natural disposition (*Naturanlage*) within them that could not be overcome, "The Hindus, the Persians, the Chinese, the Turks, and in general all Oriental peoples belong to this group" (25:1181). And by 1790-91, Kant was ready to say that although the point of the human species' natural dispositions is to lead it to the formation of a civil society (and ultimately, thereby, a moral kingdom of ends), neither the African nor the American Indian would ever be capable of creating (*stiften*) such a society themselves.<sup>17</sup> This shift in Kant's thinking represented the increasing emphasis in his Anthropology lectures during the 1780s on the role of disposition as an occasioning cause alongside climate and nutrition in the formation of races and varieties, a claim that, if true, would indeed inflexibly link race and disposition in his account.

The second point to mention will take us to the next stage of the discussion, for it is a reminder of the epistemic status of Kant's natural historical investigations. Kant was explicit in identifying these considerations as "ideas" for the use of the understanding in its investigation of the natural phenomena connected with racial differences. These might be useful, but heuristic

<sup>17</sup> In *Kants Anweisung zur Menschen- und Welterkenntnis*. Nach dessen Vorlesungen im Winterhalbjahre 1790-1791 herausgegeben von Fr. Ch. Starke [Johann Adam Bergk] (Leipzig: Die Expedition des europäischen Aufsehers, 1831), pp. 119, 121.

value aside, they were ultimately conjectural and remained merely regulative, serving simply as guidelines for thought amidst the wealth of empirical data presented to the understanding in any natural historical investigation. This epistemic caution was important for Kant to maintain even as he continued to defend the value of teleological principles when mechanical principles could not be found. How could we explain the amazing capacity of the human species for geographic distribution across the globe? The idea that there must be germs and dispositions with enormous adaptive potential in the species, Kant argued, was a fair application of a teleological principle in the absence of any physical evidence explaining distribution. It was Nature's concern for the species, according to Kant, that led her to provide it with this capacity for adaptation, and we had to conclude on the basis of this capacity, that it was her *intention* from the start that we spread out in the manner we have.

This raises a question regarding the ontological status of these germs and dispositions since it is easy to imagine them as real, physical things, things which in fact are functioning as the mechanical means for Nature's global distribution of the species. Their status, however, is murky. Here it bears noting that Kant used the language of germs and dispositions throughout his works, such that there were germs for good, for evil, for character, for metaphysics, and even for enlightenment. Thus while one can hardly refrain from thinking about DNA or genetic inheritance when reading Kant's physiological account of race, the germs seemed to be functioning rather in the fashion of emergent qualities, as properties which could be realized given the right environmental conditions, but which would otherwise exist only as a set of virtual possibilities. This interpretation fits with the language surrounding Kant's references to germs for reason and goodness as well, since these moral capacities are what make us "susceptible," "receptive," or "vulnerable" to the moral law, according to Kant, in much the same manner that "moral feeling" or an internal "moral vital force" are taken by him to similarly exist as a set of virtual preconditions for moral training.

## KANT'S TELEOLOGICAL VIEW OF HISTORY AND MORALS

In this next part of the discussion I want to focus on the relationship between Kant's anthropology and his emerging view of history and morals during the 1780s, in order to take up, at least in part, Charles Mill's task regarding the search for some kind of penetration of Kant's views on race into the critical system. This can be most efficiently begun by simply laying out the juxtaposition of these topics in terms of their publication history.<sup>18</sup>

**1784:** The first and in some sense the defining history essay by Kant so far as it lays out his "Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent" is published.

**1785:** Three important publications appear starting with the first major statement of Kant's moral philosophy, the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. In his *Ideas for a Philosophy of History of Humanity* (1784), Herder had criticized Kant's teleological approach to both history and race, and Kant returned the favour with a long, critical review of Herder the

<sup>18</sup> Here I want to direct attention again to a point made in an earlier footnote regarding Mikkelsen's inclusion of the history surrounding the slavery debates in Europe and America during these years, see note 3 above.

next year. In 1785 Kant also published his second essay on race, *Determination of the Concept of Human Race*, emphasizing, against Herder, both the monogenesis of the species and the diversity of its racial characters, a diversity guaranteed by the necessary inheritance of these features as demonstrated in the case of interracial offspring.

**1786:** *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* appears, offering an indirect attack on Herder so far as it takes a satirical approach to the biblical account of human origins, an account that Herder had treated with a degree of literalness. Satire aside, this essay is significant for its identifying the need for creating differences in lines of descent from out of the original pairing of Adam and Eve. While this original parentage grounds the reality of mankind's equality in the eyes of nature (8:114), subsequent divergence is at least implicitly the ground for our social inequality, since Kant is referring to colonial efforts when remarking that "*Inequality* among men—that source of so many evils, but also of everything good—began during this period and increased later on" (8:119).

**1788:** The publication of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* which, like the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, was meant to be the definitive account of the transcendental grounds for moral life. Kant also publishes another essay on race, *On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy*, this time defending himself from the abolitionist Georg Forster, who in 1786 published a critique of Kant's reliance on teleological principles in his essays on race.

**1790:** Kant includes a summary of his philosophy of history in §83 of the *Critique of Judgment*, repeating his earlier insistence (8:118, 8:119) on the value nature places on inequality between humans, for such "shining misery has to do with the development of man's natural predispositions and so nature still achieves its own purpose, even if that purpose is not ours" (5:433).

What this survey demonstrates is that Kant was defending his anthropological theory during the same years that he was developing his philosophy of history and his account of moral life. Given that it is during these same years that Kant's support for a racial hierarchy are also most clearly documented in his lectures on Anthropology, we are forced to ask just how universal were the supposedly universal moral principles laid out in the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique* supposed to be? According to Kant, human life is characterized above all by two features: reason and freedom. Because we are all free rational creatures, we are necessarily enjoined to treat others with respect, and to support their rationally chosen ends. Any use of another human being as a mere means, as in the glaring example of slavery, is thus morally forbidden. As Kant puts the point in 1785, "every human being, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in itself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will" (4:428). Pauline Kleingeld suggests at this point that we must ask whether Kant thought that non-whites had no moral status, for if he did think that, then he would be advancing a consistent inegalitarian position. While Kleingeld sees no real textual evidence to support Kant's inegalitarianism, there is plenty of support for Kant's universalism, and she therefore concludes that taken all together, the work during the 1780s provides a portrait of an inconsistent universalism in Kant's texts.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race," op. cit., p. 582f.

What about the history essays during these years? While a comparison of the moral and anthropological writings presents us with an immediate conclusion, the history essays offer us a somewhat more interesting set of problems to consider when deciding on Kant's final position. Here it should be remembered, at least in passing, that in the wake of Rousseau's political writings there had been a real sense of indecision on the part of theorists regarding the relative priority of politics or morals. Rousseau had of course decried the political operations of the state as a case of structural violence, with the near disappearance of moral sympathy in civil life as the necessary result. Kant seems to have taken this lesson to heart, but whereas Rousseau had called for the essential desertion of political society, Kant argued that when taken from the proper teleological perspective, the current state of affairs could be seen as a necessary but ultimately transitional state of affairs in the course of the species' moral development as a whole. Increasingly preoccupied with the possibility of moral development on the grand scale, like many of his contemporaries Kant began to think about the perfectibility of the species in terms of mankind's special vocation, that is, to think of self-improvement for the good of self and whole as the task set by God and nature for mankind. It was no accident, therefore, that alongside murder, suicide, and lying, Kant listed "rusting talents" as one of the four singular cases of moral failure in the *Groundwork*.

The sin of "rusting talents" or the failure to strive for perfection can be our transition from the moral to the social and political work being done by Kant during these years. The endpoint for human history, according to Kant, was the formation of a moral whole, of a society that no longer functioned as a loose aggregate of discrete and selfishly motivated ends, but as one that could instead be positively compared to the coherence and orchestrated harmony present in an organism. Such a moral whole could emerge, according to Kant, only after a prior political stage had been completed. This penultimate stage was similarly utopian insofar as it was said to mark the point in history when civil society would be operating under a just constitution and administered by moral (as opposed to prudential) politicians. The question for Kant's history essays was the means by which humanity might arrive at that penultimate stage.

Within the essays one discovered that a parallel course had been set out for mankind to traverse. One path concerned the use of individual freedom, and the injunctions regarding moral behavior in the ethical works were here mirrored by calls to develop oneself, to refrain from letting one's talents rust, and to support education and freedom of speech. The other path was essentially out of our hands. In the same manner that Nature had a plan for mankind's geographical distribution across the globe, a plan which required the provision of germs and predispositions for our adaptive capacity to find a home in any location, in the history essays Nature appears again, this time providing humanity with a native "unsocial sociability," an irascibility that would force men to be competitive, greedy, and mean but which would also push us to develop and perfect our talents for commerce, industry, and technological advance. This pathologically enforced progress would eventually lead to a happy ending, according to Kant, but it was still the case that much in the way of the morally bad—chronic expansionist wars, for example—would have to occur before the morally good could appear.

The implicit connection between this aspect of the history essays and the anthropology is easy to see at this point. Geographic distribution had created real physical differences between the peoples of the earth, differences which included differing moral and mental capacities for work, for self-governance, for indeed all the activities required in the pursuit of self-perfection. Kant appears to have followed Locke in his attitude toward colonialism during these years, moreover, by taking industrious development of the land to be in line with God's will for the species. For if a people were demonstrated to be indolent or otherwise uninterested in cultivating their land, they had in a real sense forfeited their right to it in God's eyes, and others could in all justice take it from them with an aim to its proper development. The "empirical fact" of the laziness of the Tahitians, to choose one of Kant's examples, was thus indexed to not only their geographical location and therefore race, but their relative place within the overall plan for the species' moral development. Thus although all people were in fact equal in the eyes of Nature, according to Kant, inequality between men was a necessary part of the historical unfolding of the species. As Kant put the point already in his 1775 essay on race: "the great incentives which set into play the sleeping powers of humanity and compel it to develop all its talents and to come nearer to the perfection of their destiny, lie in the intermingling of the evil with the good" (2:431).

Given all this, one might well wonder how our species was supposed to get out of this predicament so long as nature had created physiological differences between populations, differences that would then be exploited by our natural antagonism, even hatred for each other. Kant's best-known response to this question was presented in his essay on *Perpetual Peace* (1795), wherein he explained that only once wars had bankrupted nation states to the point of collapse, would people be willing to come to the table and compromise, and that only then and under those terms, would we see the beginning of the political stage of history. With a just political structure in place, Kant argued, the species could shed its given nature—a nature that was morally blighted and made only of crooked wood—and give birth to what he described as a perfected second nature, that of the morally good agent whose appearance was indeed "the ultimate goal of the entire moral vocation of the human species" (8:118).

## KANT AND THE REVOLUTION OF THE HEART

So far I have focused on the 1780s and I have taken my evidence from Anthropology lectures that were held no later than the 1791-92 winter semester's course. After this time frame, however, and as Pauline Kleingeld has laid out so clearly, there is an identifiable turn in Kant's thoughts. He would not give up his physiological theory of race, on the contrary, he would continue to support his position and to include it in his Physical Geography course. He would endorse Girtanner's use of his theory in Girtanner's own anthropological works, and he would authorize multiple republications of all three of his essays on race. But Kant would also, from this time forward, entirely drop the racial characterizations that had previously found a place in his Anthropology courses, even going so far as to say in the published introduction to the 1796 course that a discussion of race had no place in Anthropology so far as there was no pragmatic value that could attach to racial differences as such (7:120). Kant would also make

a complete turn around from his former support of colonialism and its role in promoting the advance of the human race, since from 1793 on he was a critic of colonialism, particularly of the manner in which native inhabitants were treated as result of colonial expansion. In the late *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant would be explicitly critical of not only the horrors of the slave trade, but of the especially offensive and illegal treatment of the children of slaves since, as Kant argued, one simply could not under any circumstances be born a slave (6:266, 6:283, 6:314, and 6:331).

One reading of this apparent turn around on Kant's part has been to see it as something of a deathbed conversion scene: one more comforting to Kant's readers than it is true as an actual portrait of Kant's change of heart. Robert Bernasconi has thus highlighted Kant's support for the multiple republication of his race essays, and rightfully pointed out that there was no moral risk being taken by Kant in his condemnation of the slave trade, for he was in fact far too late on the scene in comparison to his intellectual contemporaries in reaching this judgment. More damning than this, is Bernasconi's charge that even when Kant decried the slave trade (which, it might be emphasized, is different than condemning the institution of slavery itself), he did not do so by way of appeal to his own universal moral principles, but instead in light of his developing theory of *hospitality* and its role in promoting international commerce.<sup>20</sup>

I am, however, of the mind that there was a real change here on Kant's part, and thus despite the foregoing criticisms, I take the absence of language associated with racial hierarchy to be decisive in supporting the notion that Kant's critique of colonialism was genuinely motivated by a change of attitude, even if he remained committed to his scientific account of the physiological grounds for racial difference. Whether there are any grounds for this new direction in Kant's thinking remains an open question. Suggestions for such grounds have included the influence of Kant's contemporaries, Kant's developing cosmopolitanism, and Kant's interest in the French Revolution with the attention placed there on the "rights of man," as Payne had it. I am going to suggest a different tack, one that returns us to the struggles faced by the individual, the individual who certainly does not have the life span to wait until the end of history to arrive, and who is tasked, nonetheless, with moral agency despite their being surrounded by injustice and inhumanity.

For this I am going to focus on *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone* (1793). This text appeared the same year that Kant published a piece in which he rejected political revolution as a means for effective change in a country's political fortunes (8:303). Kant discussed revolution in the *Religion* text as well, however this time in terms of what he described as the "revolution of the heart" (6:47). Kant's account of this is lengthy but I want to include it in full:

[S]o long as the foundation of the maxims of the human being remains impure, it cannot be effected through gradual *reform* but must rather be effected through a *revolution* in the disposition of the human being (a transition to the maxim of holiness of disposition). And so a 'new man' can come about only through a kind of rebirth, as it were a new creation (John 3:3, compare with Genesis, 1:2) and a change of heart. But if a human being is corrupt in the very ground of his

<sup>20</sup> These points are all raised by Bernasconi in his response to Kleingeld, see "Kant's Third Thoughts on Race," op. cit.

maxims, how can he possibly bring about this revolution by his own forces and become a good human being on his own? ... The only way to reconcile this is by saying that a *revolution* is necessary in the mode of thought but a *gradual reformation* in the mode of sense (which places obstacles in the way of the former) ... If by a single and unalterable decision a human being reverses the supreme ground of his maxims by which he was an evil human being (and thereby put on a 'new man'), his is to this extent, by principle and aptitude of mind, a subject *receptive* to the good; but he is a good human being only in incessant laboring and becoming ... For Him who penetrates to the intelligible ground of the heart (the ground of all the maxims of the power of choice), for Him to whom this endless progress is a unity, i.e. for God, this is the same as actually being a good human being (pleasing to him), and to this extent the change can be considered a *revolution*. For human beings however, who can assess themselves and the strength of their maxims only by the upper hand they gain over the senses in time, the change is to be regarded only as an ever-continuing striving for the better, hence as a *gradual reformation* of the propensity to evil of the perverted mind (6:47-48).

In this passage Kant took the revolution of the heart (as witnessed by God alone) to mark the transition from the kingdom of nature to the kingdom of grace, and referred his readers to passages from the bible when describing it. His first reference was to the description of God's spirit hovering above the waters in the opening lines of Genesis; the second was to the Gospel according to John (3:3), where John explains that man, who is born of flesh, must be reborn in spirit and water if he is to enter the kingdom of God. Within the context of the Gospel, this was significant in terms of what it has to say about genealogy: it was not the case that one must be born a son of Abraham to be one of the chosen people, the physical lineage was unnecessary when compared to one's spiritual rebirth as a child of God. This position was consonant, moreover, with the new description of character that would appear in the lectures on Anthropology after 1792, namely as a moral disposition that was not inherited but rather acquired, as something that "man can make of himself" (7:285), and which appealed once more to the language of revolution and birth. As he put it, "The human being who is conscious of having character in his way of thinking does not have it by nature; he must always have *acquired* it. One may also assume that the grounding of character is like a kind of rebirth, a certain solemnity of making a vow to oneself; which makes the resolution and the moment when this transformation took place unforgettable to him, like the beginning of a new epoch. ... Perhaps there are only a few who have attempted this revolution before the age of thirty, and fewer still who have firmly established it before they are forty" (7:294). Regarding the moral and religious revolution of character and heart Kant was clear regarding our basic epistemic constraints here: as a transition out of the kingdom of nature, it placed one in a non-spatio-temporal realm (a noumenal dimension of the self) and was thus de facto non-accessible. This meant that the subject could never be sure that the revolution had in fact taken place—an uncertainty that was felt practically in terms of their remaining unconfident that their motivations were in fact always guided by respect for the moral law. The transition to the kingdom of grace was not supposed to be a transition to another time or space—Kant took the kingdom of grace to be the "divine seed" (6:50) within the human subject, it grounded freedom's native receptivity to the moral law—the kingdom of grace was thus both internal and atemporal.



This opens up some interesting ways of thinking about history and the question of sequential transitions in Kant. For if history can become diachronic, that is, if the kingdom of grace can be reached by individuals at any point that the revolution of their heart takes place, then two things follow. First, there is no opportunity for appeals to historical location when explaining individual moral failure. Second, there is a continued universality—one that would cover all times and peoples, whatever their race or genealogy—regarding the possibility of undergoing this revolution, for acquiring a moral character or “second nature,” and for consequently entering the kingdom of grace. This would seem to relocate (albeit by way of a temporal dislocation) all peoples—particularly nature’s unwilling pawns—back into the history of freedom in terms of mankind’s teleological course toward moral perfection. For while grace, according to Kant, was certainly capable of rehabilitating even the evil slave trader, as the noumenal realm within all humans it could more importantly also serve as the universal entry-point for a return to the history of moral progress, rescuing non-whites, therefore, from their forced exit from the moral development of the species as a whole. Such a proposal would require Kant to fracture the developmental model he had appropriated from natural history in the service of his teleological philosophy of history, but in doing so he would join a number of theorists at work during the 1790s—Schlegel and Goethe, for example—for whom teleological development had come to seem more like a straightjacket than a metaphorical opportunity.

Now whether or not this last bit seems a little too close to a *deus ex machina* style solution for Kant, there are two larger “take-away” points to be drawn from this discussion. What the narrative as a whole reveals is first, the manner by which questions of racial difference helped to define anthropology from its outset, a focus that would continue to orient both its research programs and its school of thought well into the 1960s, and second, the easy and uncomplicated manner by which whole member groups of the population could be excluded from lofty pronouncements regarding the “rights of man”; something that was certainly true of Kant throughout the 1780s. This second point is both easy to recognize and to condemn, but it should also perhaps call us to reflection on our own capacity—as “first-worlders” calling for abstract principles of human rights, say—for hypocrisy as we enjoy the fruits of global economic forces still bearing the traces of colonialism and domination in their wake.

**ABSTRACT:** In this essay I lay out the textual materials surrounding the birth of physical anthropology as a racial science in the eighteenth century with a special focus on the development of Kant’s own contributions to the new field. Kant’s contributions to natural history demonstrated his commitment to a physical, mental, and moral hierarchy among the races and I will spend some time describing both the advantages he drew from this hierarchy for making sense of the social and political history of inequality between peoples, and the obviously problematic relationship that such views would entail for Kant’s universalism as he began to formulate his ethical program in the 1780s. While there is continued scholarly debate regarding the purported moral “turn” made by Kant once he dropped his commitment to a racial hierarchy in the 1790s, what the narrative as a whole reveals is not only the manner by which questions of racial difference defined physical anthropology from its outset, but the easy and uncomplicated manner by which whole member groups of the population could be excluded from lofty pronouncements regarding the “rights of man”—a fact that was as true for Kant in Königsberg, as it was for Jefferson and Hamilton in Philadelphia.

**KEYWORDS:** Kant, Ethics, Race, History, Physical Geography, Anthropology.

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