

Kant's Racism

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Abstract: After a long period of comparative neglect, in the last few decades growing numbers of philosophers have been paying attention to the startling contrast presented between Kant's universal moral theory, with its inspiring enlightenment ideas of human autonomy, equality and dignity and Kant's racism. Against Charles Mills, who argues that the way to make Kant consistent is by attributing to him a threshold notion of moral personhood, according to which some races do not qualify for consideration under the categorical imperative, I argue that Kant cannot be made consistent on race, and that rather than trying to make him so, we should use the example of Kant's racism to tell us something about the nature of racism. I argue that Kant's own moral philosophy and moral psychology in fact give some materials for thinking about his racism, and about racism.

1. Introduction

After a long period of comparative neglect, in the last few decades growing numbers of philosophers have been paying attention to the startling contrast presented between Kant's universal moral theory, with its inspiring enlightenment ideas of human autonomy, equality and dignity and Kant's racism.¹ Kant's racism is particularly noteworthy and troubling because of the topics he works on and the details of his views. Frege, for example, is an anti-semitite but works on theories of math and reference which we may take not to be affected by or to affect his anti-semitism. But Kant is (amongst other things) a theorist of an incredibly influential (arguably, revolutionary) moral philosophy centered essentially around the idea of human freedom and equality which argues inflexibly that it is always wrong to treat a person as a means and to fail to respect their humanity. Yet the strongest evidence is that at least for most of his professional life Kant was at a racist and did not express opposition to

1 For the recent discussion see Bernasconi 2011; Bernasconi 2001; Kleingeld, 2012; 2007; Mikkelsen 2013; Mills 2014; Mills 2005.

race-based slavery and colonialism, only changing his mind (if at all) in the last years of his life. In addition to being a racist, Kant has a *theory* of race,² which is partly a racist (hierarchical) theory of race, and it is arguably a historically important theory in the formation of the modern idea of race.³

Kant's racism and Kant's theory of race raise questions both for the history of philosophy and for philosophy. It highlights a centrally troubling feature of the enlightenment: the period in which European thinkers developed ideas about human equality and autonomy while (some) European states were involved in colonizing and enslaving large parts of the world. This is something to which we should pay attention in trying to understand both the enlightenment and the development of the modern idea of race. As Fredrickson argues in his book *Racism, A Short History*, 'What makes Western racism so autonomous and conspicuous in world history has been that it developed in a context that presumed human equality of some kind' (Fredrickson 2002: 11).⁴ It also raises questions about interpreting Kant. Can we just write the racism off as something not central to his philosophy—an unfortunate reflection of his having had some of the prejudices of his time? Can we see it as, in Pauline Kleingeld's words, regrettable, appalling but peripheral (she considers and rejects this suggestion Kleingeld 2007: 582), or should it affect our interpretation of Kant's theories? In particular, should it affect how we interpret Kant's moral philosophy? As Charles Mills stresses, this is a question in the history of philosophy: what did Kant think? And what

2 This is presented in Kant, I, 'Of the Different Human Races' 1775 (2: 427-443) and 'Determination of the Concept of Human Race' 1785 (8: 89-106), hereafter DHR and DCH, as well as in TTP. All references to Kant's writings use the Akademie edition page numbers.

3 See Bernasconi 2011; Mills 2014; Smith 2015.

4 Fredrickson argues that, paradoxically, the enlightenment ideas of human equality, dignity and autonomy in fact *fueled* the development of the ideas of race and the ideology of racism in this period. He argues that such rationalizations would not have been thought to be required by a social system committed, for example, to a caste system, but was required precisely because there was a developing belief in human equality: 'With belief in human equality excluding people required a belief in biological unfitnes for full citizenship' (Fredrickson 2002: 68).

did he understand the presumptive scope of the categorical imperative to be? (Mills 2005).

Before moving to this question I present some of the evidence of Kant's racism. Kant clearly makes comments indicating that he sees non-white people, and in particular black people, as inferior. In his 1764 essay 'On the feeling of the beautiful and sublime' (hereafter FBS) Kant says that '[t]he **Negroes** of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous. Mr. **Hume** challenges anyone to adduce a single example where a Negro has demonstrated talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who have been transported elsewhere from their countries, although very many of them have been set free, nevertheless not a single one has ever been found who has accomplished something greater in art or science or shown any other praiseworthy quality' (FBS 2: 253). He speaks of 'the fact that this scoundrel was completely black from head to foot' as 'a distinct proof that what he said was stupid' (FBS 2: 255). And while talking about negroes he says '[s]o essential is the difference between these two human kinds, and it seems to be just as great with regard to the capacities of the mind as it is with respect to color' (FBS 2: 253).⁵ In a footnote to the essay 'On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy', (1788, hereafter TPP), he quotes a writer of a pro-slavery text who reports that 'among the many thousand

⁵ This essay precedes Kant's developed critical philosophy, and also precedes the time when he had a salary, so is from a time in which he was dependent for his livelihood on popularity; as Guyer argues, the work can be seen as one of the pamphlets that Kant published to advertise his lectures (2007: 18). The racist comments come towards the end of a section on the national characters of different nations, where Kant makes comments such as that 'the Frenchman' is peaceful, likes to be witty and is too concerned with the ridiculous and trivialities; 'the Englishman' is cold and indifferent to strangers, and easily becomes eccentric; 'the Dutchman' is orderly and industrious and has little feeling for the beautiful or sublime; the Arab is hospitable, generous and truthful but has an inflamed power of imagination; the Persians have fine taste and are inclined to gaiety (2: 250-3). It is unclear from the presentation what the status of these claims is supposed to be, what evidence they are based on, and whether Kant is committed to any essentialist presuppositions in these distinctions. However, in the comment about the 'negroes' he *does* express an essentialist commitment, saying *by nature* ('[t]he **Negroes** of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous' (FBS 2: 253)).

freed Negroes ... he knew no example of someone engaged in a business which one could properly call *labour*; rather that, when they are set free, they soon abandon an easy craft which previously as slaves they had been forced to carry out ... Should one not conclude from this that, in addition to the *faculty* to work, there is also an immediate drive to activity (especially to the sustained activity that one calls industry), which is independent of all enticement and which is especially interwoven with certain natural predispositions; and that Indians as well as Negroes do not bring any more of this impetus into other climates and pass it on to their offspring than was needed for their preservation in their old motherland and had been received from nature The far lesser needs in those countries and the little effort it takes to procure only them demand no greater predispositions to activity' (TTP 8: 174*).^6 In the same text, Kant says about native Americans, 'That their natural disposition did not achieve a *perfect* suitability for any climate can be seen from the circumstance that hardly another reason can be given for why this race, which 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' (TTP 8: 175-6).

In addition to these clearly racist views, the central contradiction philosophers like Mills find between Kant's moral philosophy and his racism is based on the idea that he endorsed black slavery. It might be argued that Kant's attitude to black slavery is less clear than his racism. It is clear that until late in his life he fails to condemn slavery,⁷ and as noted, he seems to quote approvingly from a pro-slavery text (calling the author 'a knowledgeable man' TTP 8: 174*). Whether he in fact

6 This text dates from what is referred to as Kant's critical period, and is published after the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781 and 1787), the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and the same year as the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). We should perhaps note that the claim in the footnote is presented speculatively rather than straightforwardly asserted.

7 And the extent to which he does condemn it then has been disputed; See Bernasconi 2011. Against this, see Kleingeld 2007, 2012 and Frierson 2013: 114.

endorses slavery may be argued to be less clear; he does not do so in published work and does condemn it in very late works.⁸ This possible uncertainty might be taken to be significant for the relation between his racism and his moral theory, since thinking that races are different, and even thinking that some races are inferior, need not amount to thinking that they can be enslaved. It might be argued that thinking that some races are, for example, lazy or weak, is compatible with thinking that members of such races are still owed respect as persons—Kant does not think that within races someone's being lazy or weak undermines owing them respect—in which case it might be thought that Kant's racist beliefs could still be compatible with his universal moral theory. However, even if it could be made textually plausible that Kant never endorsed slavery, his failure to condemn slavery is striking and noteworthy. Further, for reasons I return to at the end of this paper, we should question the possibility of a distinction between racist views of racial inferiority and racist lack of respect.⁹ My aim here is to assess Kant's moral theory in the light of the worst possible case for his views on black slavery so I will assume that at least until his late political works, Kant was not opposed to black slavery and will take his racism to include this as well as his views on racial differences.

A large part of the debate around the question of the relation between Kant's universal moral theory and his racism has concerned whether, as Kleingeld puts it, Kant was an inconsistent universalist or a consistent inegalitarian (Kleingeld 2007: 576). Some philosophers, such as Eze and Mills, have argued that Kant's racism undermines reading his moral theories as universalist (Eze 1994; Mills, 2005, 2014), while others, such as Hill and Boxill, have argued that though Kant's racist statements contradict his moral philosophy, this does not undermine the universalism of the moral theories (Hill and Boxill, 2001). Mills argues that Kant can be made consistent only if we think that he never intended

⁸ See Kleingeld 2007; 2012.

⁹ Part of the importance of Kleingeld's (2007, 2012) work is in showing the interplay between racist views and different levels of the practical theory.

the categorical imperative to apply to non-white people and that his philosophy can be made sense of only with the addition of the concept of an *Untermensch*, a category of humans who are part of the human species but do not meet the threshold of rational capacities necessary to qualify for full *moral personhood* (Mills 2005; 2014). As Mills understands Kant, he has a threshold notion of personhood; he regards members of all races as *humans* but not all humans as *persons*, and applies his moral philosophy only to persons. Kleingeld has made an important intervention in this debate by arguing that it treats Kant insufficiently historically: it fails to note the development of, and significant changes within, his views on race. She argues Kant improved his views in the 1790s and that the late Kant clearly takes his political philosophy to condemn slavery and colonialism (Kleingeld 2007; 2012; 2014).¹⁰ If this is right, then we might think that Kant's views become more consistent under the pressures of his own theories, which would count towards seeing the theories as intended by him to be genuinely universalist.¹¹

In different ways, Kleingeld and Mills' arguments can both be seen as making Kant more consistent: Mills by making Kant's racist views compatible with his moral theory and Kleingeld by arguing that he becomes more consistent when he abandons his racist views, so the theories can be read as universalist despite the earlier racism. Against both

10 Against Mills, Kleingeld argues that there are texts in which Kant very clearly talks about morality as being grounded in characteristics linked to *humanity* rather than being grounded in Kant's arguably more technical idea of personhood. While I agree with Kleingeld on what Kant's intended reference is in these passages, this is a tricky point. Against her reading Mills points out how common it is for references to supposedly general terms like 'humanity' not to be intended to apply to other races or to all humans, something Kleingeld herself notes in discussions of gender (Kleingeld 2012: 180-3). More powerfully, in my view, she appeals to the fact that in Kant's political philosophy in the 1790s he clearly and explicitly condemns slavery and colonialism, and establishes a principle of cosmopolitan right that is inconsistent with colonialism. As she argues, Kant explicitly presents colonialism as incompatible with right (2014: 52-53) and clearly assigns full juridical personhood to humans on all continents (Kleingeld 2014: 55-6).

11 Kleingeld's argument is important also in showing that it would be wrong to assume that there is no interplay between Kant's morally problematic views and his philosophical system.

Mills and Kleingeld, Robert Bernasconi argues that Kant cannot be made consistent with regard to race (2011). He says '[p]hilosophers need to think less about saving the reputation of past philosophers and more about the ease with which moral theories are divorced from practice, precisely because so many of us fail in this regard' (Bernasconi 2011: 296). Bernasconi argues, against Kleingeld, that it is unclear exactly what we can conclude from Kant's condemnation of slavery.¹² He argues that Kant was more worried about the slave *trade* than slavery and that his concerns are ultimately about commerce (2011: 302-7). In my view Kant's condemnation of slavery in the *Metaphysics of Morals* and *Towards Perpetual Peace* is clear,¹³ but setting aside the question of which of Kleingeld or Bernasconi are right about the very late Kant, this still leaves us with problems, as Mills points out, with interpreting central critical works such as the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785, hereafter *Groundwork*) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), where it is unclear whether Kant endorsed slavery but he certainly failed to condemn it. Rather than trying

12 Bernasconi also draws on there being no explicit acknowledgement from Kant that he saw the problem as evidence against his having changed his view (2011: 292). However, it is unclear how much can be made of this point. There are central doctrines of Kant's theoretical philosophy on which he radically changes his views, yet seldom explicitly notes this, for example, his view on the analytic/synthetic distinction or the possibility of our having intellectual knowledge of things in themselves. These are absolutely central to his critical philosophy, are positions on which he changed his view substantially, but when he discusses these ideas in the critical texts he does not note these changes. Commentators looking for the part in the *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant says something like, 'I used to think, as evidenced in my inaugural dissertation, that pure concepts alone could give us intellectual (though not sensible) knowledge of things in themselves, but I have changed my mind for the below reasons, and now assert as central to all aspects of my philosophical system that cognition of things in themselves is not possible', will be disappointed.

13 Here I agree with Kleingeld against Bernasconi. In *Towards Perpetual Peace* (hereafter PP) Kant speaks disapprovingly of the cruelty of slavery in the 'sugar islands' (pp 8: 359). As Bernasconi notes, he seems to disapprove of the fact that the violence is not even profitable, however, he also says that this lack of profitability is the best result, 'considered from the standpoint of a moral judge'. (PP 8: 359): it is a bad thing that terrible cruelty and violence are perpetrated without even producing goods for anyone, but morally speaking it is a good thing that no profit is produced. This cannot be regarded as condemning slavery only because of its not being profitable. In the *Metaphysics of Morals* he explicitly condemns colonialism even if it will bring good consequences (MM 6: 266).

to work out whether Kant remained a racist all his life and what his views on slavery were, I argue, against Mills, that Kant's practical philosophy cannot be made compatible with Mills' *Untermensch* postulation. However, I accept Mills' point about the dramatic and important inconsistency this requires ascribing to Kant, and how striking it is to think Kant could have not noticed such an obvious problem. I argue that rather than trying to make Kant consistent, we can use the example of Kant's racism to tell us something about the nature of racism. Further, I argue that Kant's own moral philosophy, political philosophy and moral psychology in fact give some materials for thinking about racism and about his racism. I start by giving some reasons why philosophers should take Kant's racism seriously. In part II I argue for the importance of paying attention to Kant's theory of race, including for understanding the history of the concept of race. In part III I argue that Mills' attempt to make Kant consistent does not work, and that his *Untermensch* reading is inconsistent with Kant's critical practical philosophy. Kant's theory is incompatible with his racism and the fact that Kant failed to see this is striking. In part IV I argue that Kant's racism can tell us something about racism, and further that Kant's practical philosophy has materials that are helpful for understanding racism.

II. Kant's Racism and Kant on Race

There are a number of general reasons to think we should not ignore Kant's racism by bracketing it as a regrettable aberration which merely represents common views at the time. One is that Kant was undeniably an exceptionally brilliant thinker, many of whose thoughts across his critical corpus are self-consciously groundbreaking, revolutionary and do not correspond to what 'everyone thought at the time,' significantly, including the account of autonomy, dignity and human equality at the centre of his moral theory. Another reason, based on methodological consistency, is that the trend in the history of philosophy has increasingly been to pay more attention to context and also to those less-studied writings considered more 'minor'. Philosophers are paying

detailed attention to works like Kant's *Anthropology*¹⁴ to understand, for example, his account of hallucination and to use this to help us understand his views on perception and intuition in the first *Critique*.¹⁵ We should not do this while just ignoring the bits of the 'minor' writings that we don't like.¹⁶ If we really want to work out what Kant thought, we should pay attention to the fact that for most of his life he did not seem to think black people were moral or intellectual equals of white people. Rather than looking away where he went obviously wrong, we should try to work out how he went wrong: whether, for example, it is in his teleological account of biology, his empirical facts, or his personal prejudices, and how these relate to each other. There are numerous parts of Kant's philosophy to which working this out may be relevant. For example, his ideas about species are important for philosophy of biology and the history of philosophy of biology, and it is clear that Kant's ideas about race are relevant to understanding his ideas about species and varieties, as well as to his thinking about the role of teleology in biology.¹⁷ Bernasconi argues that some of the ideas about teleology Kant expresses in his essays on race are important for understanding the third Critique.¹⁸ And examining Kant's theory of race in terms of his attempt to understand the nature of hereditary principles using both a priori reason and (obviously inadequate) empirical knowledge, may tell us something about the combination of empirical and a priori concerns in his understanding of special sciences.¹⁹

14 Kant, I. *Anthropology from a Practical Point of View*, 2007.

15 See, for example, Stephenson 2015.

16 On the other hand, there are important distinctions to be made between the critical works in which Kant presents his philosophical systems and more minor works; in my view, where Kant makes claims that are inconsistent with his central theoretical account, it is the theory that should have primacy, and it is noteworthy that his racism does not feature in the central critical practical philosophy.

17 Kant himself presents it as relevant to understanding his account of teleology in biology (TTP). For discussion of this issue see Mikkelsen 2013: 4, 17, 23, Frierson 2013: 113.

18 Bernasconi 2011; 2001: 15. See also Mikkelsen 2013: 169.

19 Why, for example, does he think that neither mechanical laws nor chance can explain the changes responsible for race?

An important part of the significance of Kant's writings on race is for the history of the concept of race, where they are arguably central in the history of what can be called the modern classical idea of race. As Kleingeld notes, Kant, ever the theorist, does not just mention races, he presents a *theory* of race. In his recent book, *Nature, Human Nature and Human Difference* (2015), Justin Smith describes Kant's theory as 'one of the most formidable attempts in the modern period to treat the concept of race within the framework of a broader philosophical project' (Smith 2015: 241). The very idea of a theory of race is a relatively (and importantly) new thing in Kant's time—indeed, the very idea of 'race' is, arguably, new at this time, with Kant being one of the first people to theorize it.²⁰ Further, as Kleingeld (2007; 2012) documents, far from being simply what everyone thought, it is clear that Kant takes his theory to be new and important and at odds with how others thought of race, on both empirical and theoretical grounds, and that he went out of his way to argue with thinkers arguing for equality between races, for the insignificance of race, and for other conceptions of race. Kant's essay 'On the use of Teleological Principles in History,' was a response to his contemporary Georg Forster, who had traveled widely and written about race. Forster criticized Kant's account of non-Europeans and argued for cultural diversity and moral equality between races (Forster 1786; Kleingeld 2012: 93-5). In his response to Forster's criticisms of his theory of race, Kant reasserts stereotypes which Forster had denied on the basis of actual experience in his travels (Kleingeld 2012: 108). Forster became active in fighting against racism and slavery; Kant entirely failed to do this, somehow missing the obvious potential of his own theories.

There is dispute in the history of philosophy and history about whether the notion of race and the phenomenon of racism are modern

20 This would not mean that *racism* started in this period, but it may be that racism as it developed in the modern period is significantly affected by (and affects) the development of the early modern concept of race, and that this resulted in changes to racism and new forms of racism emerging in this period.

and about whether they existed in the ancient world.²¹ Very many scholars argue that what has been called the classical modern concept of race, as well as racism as an ideology (certainly white supremacy as an ideology), dates to the period of the enlightenment.²² This specific conception of race sees humanity as divided into specific groups associated with continental origin, associates race with certain observable physical characteristics, giving particular significance to skin colour, but also associates race with mental and moral characteristics, regards racial characteristics as hereditary in some especially significant sense, and was most commonly a racist conception, with a hierarchical ranking of races. Significantly, almost all of the central components of the modern idea of classical racial groups are in Kant's new theory of race.²³ He holds (and

21 See Snowdon (1983) who argues against there being colour prejudice in the ancient world and Isaacs (2004) who argues for a notion of proto-racism, involving essentialist views of other peoples. These positions are of course compatible: there could have been notions of race or proto-race, as well as racism, without the existence of the specific anti-black racism that has dominated the modern world.

22 Fredrickson, for example, argues that 'The modern concept of race as basic human types classified by physical characteristics (primarily skin color) was not invented until the eighteenth century' (Fredrickson 2002 53).

23 Consider the account of the classical race groups given by Larry Blum 2015. On Blum's account, classical racial groups were supposed to be kinds the human species naturally divides into which have the following attributes: 'Each group possessed mental and other psychological qualities specific to that group. The qualities were rooted in the group's nature, generally understood in a biological fashion. The qualities were passed from one generation to the next through some sort of mechanism, generally understood to be biological in character. (Only later, around 1900, was this mechanism assumed to be genetic). The differences between the different groups were fixed and unchangeable, and this was thought to follow from their biological character. The groups generally, but not necessarily, differed in certain phenotypic characteristics (especially skin color, eye shape, hair texture, other facial features). So these features could be regarded as markers of the internal, race-defining characteristics. The groups were understood as originating in specific, generally continentally-defined, regions of the world (blacks in sub-Saharan Africa, whites in Europe, and so forth)' (Blum 2015: 1). All these ideas feature in Kant's account. Another contemporary theorist of race, Atkin says that 'underlying our ordinary talk and thought about race are the following ideas: that the key markers of race are bodily or somatic traits; that race involves genealogy or inheritance; that race is crucially tied to geographical origins; that race indicates, generates or constrains certain physical or mental abilities and capacities; that race indicates, generates or constrains certain cultural and attitudinal behaviours; that race involves notions of purity' (Atkin 2012: 12). He argues that

attempts to provide a theory to explain) that humanity divides into natural groups that are separated by distinct, visible, heritable physical differences and that the groups having these distinct heritable physical characteristics share some kind of geographical origin.²⁴ As Kleingeld says, for Kant, '[a] "race", then, denotes a subset of the species that is characterized by a set of necessarily heritable characteristics which are not characteristic of the species as a whole (8: 99, 100), and which hence indicate common ancestry' (Kleingeld 2007: 578-9). Although he appeals to geography in giving an account of how and why races would originally have developed their different characteristics, it is important to Kant's account of what races are that these characteristics are now thoroughly entrenched and heritable (not in ongoing interaction with the environment).²⁵ His postulation is that the original humans had all the latent potentials (which he calls *Keime*—germs or seeds) to develop adaptations to different environments (such as different skin colours or more or less hair), and that the *racially* significant adaptations are ones

the only three that are non-negotiable are that race is marked by somatic differences or physical markers, is inherited and is linked to geographical origin. These are the central ideas of Kant's race concept.

24 Kant thinks there are four races. In 1775 he describes them as: 1) the race of whites, 2) the Negro race, 3) the Hunnish (Mongolian or Kalmuckian) race, 4) the Hindu race. He includes in the whites the Moors (Mauretanian from Africa), the Arabs, the Turkish-Tartaric ethnic tribe and the Persians, 'as well as all other peoples from Asia who are not explicitly excluded from it by the remaining divisions' (2: 432). In 1785 he describes the four races as whites, yellow Indians, Negroes and copper-red Americans. In both essays by far the most significant difference between the races is skin colour, and he in fact argues in 1785 that skin colour is the only significant racial attribute.

25 He says that groups are called races only if the characteristics by which they are distinguished are unfailingly hereditary (DCH 8: 100): '[i]n this way, Negroes and whites, while not different kinds of human beings (since they belong presumably to one phylum), are still two different races because each of the two perpetuates itself in all regions and both necessarily beget half-breed children or blends (mulattoes) with one another. By contrast, blondes and brunettes are not different races of whites, because a blond man can have entirely blond children with a brunette woman, even though each of these subspecies is preserved throughout extended generations in all transplantings' (DHR 2: 430). He contrasts the unfailingly hereditary nature of racial features with those of varieties, which are heritable peculiarities which are not classifiable because they do not invariably reproduce themselves (TPP 8: 389).

which, once triggered by different environments, are unfailingly heritable. This is supposed to explain why 'racial' features like skin colour mix in offspring, whereas characteristics like eye colour do not.

While Kant makes some statements about races having different moral and intellectual characteristics in presenting his race theory,²⁶ this is not central to his *theory* and the explanation of race he postulates may not be racist in itself.²⁷ However, whether or not Kant understood or intended it in this way, central parts of his theory became part of the (arguably new) modern racist conception of race. One such part is the idea of racial characteristics as those which are *unfailingly hereditary* which is, arguably, an important part of pernicious essentialist notions of race as destiny. Further, it is central to Kant's theory that there is some *inner structure* that explains racial characteristics (rather than temporary effects of interaction with the environment), another feature common to racist views of race. And Kant clearly sees skin colour as the most significant racial characteristic, and his racial groupings correspond to those of the modern conception of race. These features may mark Kant's theory as a crucial transition from earlier proto-racial notions which involve some essentialising about culturally and geographically distinct groups as well as speculation about geography and interaction with the environment, to a full blown theoretical account that divides humanity into the specific modern races, links this crucially with skin colour, and sees racial characteristics as unfailingly hereditary and no longer in ongoing interaction with the environment—the pernicious view of humanity

26 For example, he says that 'Incidentally, 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.' (DHR 2: 438). He mentions causally that all negroes stink (DHR 2: 438), attributing this to the response of minerals and acids in the blood to hot conditions.

27 Unlike his virulently racist and avidly pro-slavery contemporary Christoph Meiners (See Meiners 1790) Kant sees races as well adapted to their environments and does not see some races as degenerate. Meiners' explicit thesis is that negroes are a degenerate race whereas Kant sees negroes and whites as the 'base races' (DHR 2: 433). Meiners also does, while Kant does not, associate race specifically with the blood.

which has shaped the modern world.²⁸

Smith's above-mentioned (2015) book on race in the modern period makes a powerful case for the importance of understanding the history of the modern concept of race and his account raises at least three ways in which Kant's theory of race is significant in this history, which I will briefly mention. The first is that Kant's theory exemplifies the development of the concept of race in the context of central features of early modern philosophy: early modern science, biological classification, and the attempt to place humans into nature. Smith argues that 'Modern racial thinking could not have taken the form it did if it had not been able to piggyback, so to speak, on conceptual innovations in the way science was beginning to approach the diversity of the natural world, and in particular of the living world' (2015: 9) and that 'the emergence of racial categories, of categories of kinds of humans, may in large part be understood as an *overextension* of the project of biological classification that was proving so successful in the same period' (2015: 10).²⁹ Studying the development of the concept of race in this period, and Kant's account in specific, is an important part of early modern biology and of the understanding of humanity in relation to nature.

A second, closely related feature to note is that Smith argues that Kant's theory of race is inconsistent with his own theoretical commitments to monogenesis (humanity having only one origin) and to the claim that all human beings share in the same nature. Smith takes such problems to illustrate common confusions in the early modern idea of race, which he sees as an overextension of supposed biological categories such that an evaluative notion masquerades as a natural kind

28 It may even be the features of Kant's theory that make it less obviously racist than that of someone like Meiners that enabled it to be incorporated into the modern idea of race with less questioning. See Frierson 2013: 108.

29 See Mikkelsen 2013. In the reverse direction from Smith's suggestion of an overextension of the project of biological classification, one could argue that Kant's race theory exemplifies what happens when an apparently neutral, scientific theory is built on the basis of unexamined views about value. Thanks to Frierson (in correspondence) for this point.

(Smith 2015: 54; 235).³⁰ There are numerous other internal problems with Kant's theory, including his insisting that races are not kinds while attempting to give an account that does see them as something like kinds;³¹ his teleological postulation that nature provided the original humans with the 'germs' that would enable them to adapt to all parts of the world, yet failure to provide a reason why nature would have made these adaptations unfailingly hereditary in peoples who subsequently move;³² his changing accounts of which races there are, including inconsistency as to which levels of divisions between humans correspond to races³³. These problems may be significant. For example, with respect to the last mentioned, a central problem with making sense of the idea that races exist (if 'races' correspond to anything like contemporary usage on which white and black would be typical exemplars of races) is giving a principled account of the level of division of humans into groups that share some physical characteristics by ancestry and geographical origin that constitutes races. If humans could in principle be divided into such groups at many different levels, with no basis other than modern history for regarding groups such as 'black', 'white' and 'asian' as picking out a privileged level of division,³⁴ then the idea that

30 He says: 'the mid-eighteenth century seems to have witnessed a steep rise in interest in skin color as a marker of essential difference. This interest seems moreover to have been just as strong among people, such as Kant, whose theoretical commitments concerning the unity of the human species would have required them, on reflection, to acknowledge the relative superficiality of differences of skin color. In other words, skin color was held to be important even when those who held it to be so could offer no coherent explanation of why it was important' (Smith 2015: 241).

31 We can even find Kant referring to races as human kinds (FBS 2: 253) while his official view is that they are not kinds.

32 This objection is raised by Forster (1786: 162). A contemporary reviewer, Johann Metzger, a professor of medicine at Königsberg thought Kant's empirical assumptions so out of date that he wrote 'I would almost like to laugh a bit about these white, black, red, and yellow germs, if the requisite respect for the Professor did not prohibit me from doing so' (quoted in Kleingeld 2012: 102).

33 Kant sometimes says that there are only four races but sometimes labels smaller groups races (DCH 8: 176-7).

34 As opposed to, for example, central African and southern African, Chinese and Japanese, or groups within China or Africa. At each of these levels of division we could

races exist cannot follow merely from the fact that humans who share ancestry and geographical origin tend to share some observable physical characteristics. Understanding the (possibly confused) interplay of biological and evaluative ideas in the formative period of the modern concept of race may be significant for understanding the very idea of race and working out whether it is really coherent.

The third way in which Smith presents Kant's account as significant is as the culmination of a development in which 'the universalism of the early Enlightenment gave way to a fragmented view of humanity, on which "barbarous" peoples lay beyond the pale of rationality and morality not just as a contingent consequence of their place of origins, but as a result of who they ... were in their "natures"' (Smith 2015: 229-30). What is important here is seeing the extent to which the modern concept of race was a new development. Smith notes that it is hard to pinpoint the moment at which thinking about non-European peoples became explicitly racialized, but argues that we can clearly trace a definite change during this period. Discussing the example of Anton Wilhelm Amo, a Ghanian, educated and emancipated former slave, who studied philosophy and law at the university of Halle, produced at least three significant works, moved to Jena as faculty at the university in 1739, and returned to Ghana in 1750, Smith notes: 'within a few decades after Amo's flight from Germany at the end of the 1740s, the racist view of the natural inferiority of blacks would be predominant, whereas it had not been when Amo began his study in the 1720s' (Smith 2015: 228).

While there is some debate about whether a much more minimal concept of race might have some biological reality,³⁵ there is very widespread agreement that the races classical modern race concepts saw humanity as divided into do not exist.³⁶ However, from the 19th century

group humans into clusters with observable physical differences which are linked to ancestry and geographical origins.

³⁵ See Hardimon 2003.

³⁶ See Atkin 2012: 33-4. Arguably, what exist, rather, are racialized groups, where, as Blum puts it, racialization is 'the treating of groups as if there were inherent and immutable differences between them; as if certain somatic characteristics marked the

the classic modern conception of race was so widespread in the west that most people in the west have thought that classic races exist, and the idea is the centre of, as Mills puts it, a world-historical ideology of oppression that has shaped the modern world.³⁷ The possibility that, as Mills puts it, '[m]odern moral theory and modern racial theory have the same father'³⁸ is something both noteworthy and troubling for philosophy and historians of philosophy.³⁹

III. Kant's Racism and Kant's Moral Theory

It is in this context that philosophers have argued that we have been wrong to suppose that Kant's apparently universal moral theory in the middle critical period is really supposed to apply to all human beings, and that a historically accurate reading would not see Kant as having a universalist moral theory that gives unique and special value to all human beings, which grounds certain rights all humans have, and which grounds certain positive and negative duties to all human beings, but rather as a theory thought of by its author as applying to white men.⁴⁰ Mills argues that seeing Kant as an inconsistent universalist requires attributing to him views so obviously and explicitly inconsistent that it is simply not plausible that he could have held them, such as that all biological humans, including all of the races, are normatively equally human/full persons who must be treated as ends never as mere means, yet the races of blacks and Native Americans are natural slaves who may

presence of significant characteristics of mind, emotion and character; and as if some were of greater worth than others' (Blum 2002: 247).

³⁷ Mills 1997.

³⁸ Mills 2014.

³⁹ Along with Mills, Bernasconi also argues that if one person deserves to be called the father of the specific modern concept, it is Kant. Bernasconi 2011: 14; Mills 2014. Another way in which Kant's racism has been argued to be significant is in having affected our view of the history of philosophy: Parks (2013) argues that Kant played an important role in a change in coming to view the history of western philosophy as originating in ancient Greece, rather than Egypt and India, as (Park argues) had been overwhelmingly common up to the seventeenth century.

⁴⁰ Eze 1994, Mills, 2005, 2014,

be colonized and enslaved. He argues therefore that the *Untermensch* reading gives us the most consistent reading of Kant.

Supposing that (up to the time of his central critical ethical writings) Kant endorsed or was not opposed to slavery, Mills' *Untermensch* proposal might seem to resolve some inconsistency in Kant, but it does not seem to me that the proposal works and it merely raises other inconsistencies. I argue that this is so regardless of which account of Kant's racism in both the middle and late critical periods has more evidence. The *Untermensch* reading requires seeing *personhood*, on Kant's account, as a threshold concept requiring a level of intelligence that members of some groups of humans could lack. This does not seem to me to be consistent with the way reason and personhood feature in Kant's moral philosophy. As I read it, the central idea in Kant's practical philosophy is practical reason as involving the capacity to set and pursue ends: to act for reasons. This is something different from intelligence and in fact something Kant thinks adult humans have, and he insists that they have it irrespective of vast differences in intelligence and education. It is the capacity to act for reasons which Kant holds (in the *Groundwork*) rationally commits you to seeing reasons for actions as governed by the universalizing constraint expressed in the categorical imperative, and argues (in the *Metaphysics of Morals*) is the basis of an innate right to freedom that requires a civil condition for its realization and defense.⁴¹ This may be a threshold notion in the sense in which it is one which humans gradually acquire from birth, but there is simply no evidence that the inferior moral and intellectual capacities Kant attributes to non-whites involve their not having the capacity to set and pursue ends, or act for reasons. Having the capacity to act for reasons is not the same as being a good, effective or prudent self-governor; it does not require

⁴¹ Strictly speaking, it is having *pure* practical reason (and therefore freedom) that gives us the special value that persons have. However, Kant holds that our having this is not something that can be empirically demonstrated, and takes our empirical basis for seeing people as having it to be the fact that they act for reasons in general. See Frierson (2014) chapter 5 for an account of Kant's views of the empirical markers of moral responsibility.

levels of culture, and it is compatible with the laziness and lack of drive Kant attributes to some non-whites at certain times (TPP 8: 174*; 8 175-6).

Further problems with Mills' threshold reading are given by Kant's own working out of the political implications he takes to follow from his account of morality. In Kant's condemnation of colonialism in the *Metaphysis of Morals* he says that even if a 'superior' society encounters 'savages', it is not justified in settling on their land, even with the motive of spreading civilization (MM 6: 266).⁴² Here it seems that even if he does not abandon his hierarchical account of the races (as Bernasconi (2011) argues) Kant recognizes the moral and juridical implications of even supposedly 'inferior' groups being persons, and thinks that these place constraints which cannot be overridden by supposedly good consequences. Thus, he seems to think that all humans meet the threshold for moral personhood even if some groups are superior to others, by culture or biology. Further, Kant does in fact explicitly discuss humans who, he thinks, do not meet the threshold for being fully autonomous and responsible, most obviously: children.⁴³ In these cases, it is clear that he thinks there are moral and political ways in which their dignity and personhood must be respected and protected. In fact he thinks that this requires a distinct category of law, status rights, which authorize those in the more powerful position to act only on behalf of

42 And in the *Perpetual Peace*, he criticizes the inhospitable behaviour and injustice shown to foreign lands and people by 'civilized, especially commercial, states in our part of the world', in not respecting existing occupants of the lands they encounter: 'When America, the negro countries, the Spice Islands, the Cape, and so forth were discovered, they were, to them, countries belonging to no one, since they counted the inhabitants as nothing. In the East Indies (Hindustan), they brought in foreign soldiers under the pretext of merely proposing to set up trading posts, but with them oppression of the inhabitants, incitement of the various Indian states to widespread wars, famine, rebellions, treachery and the whole litany of troubles that oppress the human race' (PP 8: 358-9). In the same passage he speaks critically of 'the Sugar Islands, that place of the cruelest and most calculated slavery' (PP 8 359).

43 And, more controversially, woman and servants as passive citizens. This example is more complicated because he seems to think they can become active citizens. For discussion, see Varden (2015).

the interests of the dependent person, and which explicitly forbid treating them as property or degrading them. To the extent that there is a threshold for the full autonomy of human persons, Kant takes his moral theory to imply that humans who fail to meet the threshold require special protection, rather than that one would be entitled to enslave and exploit them. Thus, the contradictions may be even worse than Mills takes them to be, since a consistent application of Kant's theory to *Untermenschen* would require benevolent paternalism, which would of course be racism but a different racism to one which could justify slavery, since holding humans who are below the threshold as property is explicitly forbidden by Kant's account. These arguments are presented in a late work, but are not presented as a new theory, but rather what follows from his account of morality, autonomy and freedom.

Rather than attempting to make Kant's racism consistent with his universal moral theory, my suggestion is that we can take the dramatic contradictions Mills so compellingly highlights in Kant's thinking to tell us something about the nature of racism: how pervasive it can be in a person's belief system and resistant to evidence—as shown by the possibility of a person's not noticing obvious contradictions in their thinking. This possibility is spectacularly dramatized (in a way that should give us all pause with respect to ourselves) when it is not just any person, but in fact a groundbreaking and brilliant philosopher, who is explicitly presenting a moral theory about all individual humans' dignity, who has such a dehumanized view of some persons that he fails to notice such obvious problem in his thinking. And the example of racism illustrates a phenomenon which has broader application—how easy humans find it to dehumanize others who are negatively affected by things we want to do.⁴⁴ Further, I want to suggest that Kant's philosophy

44 Consider what are arguably very common failures to notice inconsistencies between the asserted moral views and national narratives of countries and the way those same countries treats such groups as poor people, non-citizens, prisoners, citizens of other countries, refugees, enemies, etc.

itself has the resources for explaining this kind of moral failure, in terms of his understanding of morality, of politics, and of moral psychology.

IV. Kant's Racism and Racism

In terms of his understanding of morality, I think the central Kantian notions of disrespect and respect might be helpful in understanding racism. There is debate among philosophers between what have been called volitional/attitudinal accounts of racism, such as that of Garcia, who sees racism as essentially a matter of race-based hatred or ill-will (Garcia 1996), and more cognitive accounts of racism, such as that Mills (2003) and Tommie Shelby (2002), who argue against Garcia that racism essentially involves beliefs. Kant's notion of respect (and disrespect), has volitional, cognitive and emotional components, and essentially involves failing to respond appropriately to the humanity in others. For Kant, *willing* can't be understood as belonging to a non-cognitive volitional category that is contrasted with a cognitive faculty of belief, since he has an account of practical cognition and holds that the will is practical reason.⁴⁵ While it is not 'non-cognitive' it is also important that Kant does not think of the recognition of others as persons who have a certain value and dignity can be understood as an empirical belief. And Kant also holds that our recognition of the moral law necessarily gives rise to a feeling (respect),⁴⁶ which means that seeing the volitional/feeling side of the contrast as lacking intentional content is also problematic.⁴⁷ There is room here for an account of attitudinal cognitive states that are not mere empirical beliefs, but are closely related to and informed by empirical

⁴⁵ And ultimately that even theoretical reason is subject to practical reason.

⁴⁶ CPR Ch. 3.

⁴⁷ One way of thinking about this is in terms of moral emotions such as reactive attitudes, in Strawson's sense. Strawson clearly sees resentment and gratitude both as feelings and as having content that involves seeing another as a *person*, as *responsible* (free), and as subject to something like a moral demand: a response to a legitimate demand for a minimal degree of reciprocal good will (Strawson 2004: 75-7) and therefore as expressing something very close to Kant's notion of respect for persons. Significantly, it is also a central part of Strawson's account that these attitudes cannot be captured by empirical beliefs of the sort that feature in what he calls objective view.

beliefs, that are bound up with willing, and that have content that expresses how we see and value other persons. If deeply rooted, such attitudes will affect how we interpret the world in ways which will explain, for example, being resistant to evidence.⁴⁸ And if some such normative-emotional attitudes of practical reason express our respect/disrespect for persons, this will also make sense of the way in which attitudes like racism, sexism and homophobia seem to involve dehumanizing of a sort that might not be captured by an empirical belief.

An account of racism as disrespect is presented by Glasgow (2009); how similar this is to a Kantian account would require a detailed account of how respect is understood in both. While developing an account of respect is not the aim of Glasgow's paper, he presents the relevant kind of disrespect as 'something like a failure to adequately recognize autonomous, independent, sensitive, morally significant creatures' (Glasgow 2009: 85). Developing a Kantian account would require giving an account of the nature of the recognition failure in question. It might seem that there are two very different ways in which this could go. One the one hand, someone could fail to recognize of persons that they are persons (one could mistake a person for an object or an animal), while on the other hand, one could recognise that that some group are persons but fail to recognise (or act against or disregard) the valid claims they have on our will in virtue of being persons. This might seem to allow different forms of racism. One would be what we could call an 'empirical' racism which involves an empirical mistake about the capacities of certain groups of persons. Empirical racism could divide into more or less extreme versions: from holding (on the basis of empirical errors) that different races have different physical or psychological characteristics (such as that some are more musical or athletic), to holding (on the basis of empirical errors) that races can be ranked with some being physically and psychologically inferior, to

48 See Frierson 2014, Chapter 6 for an account of Kant's views of prejudice.

holding (on the basis of empirical errors) that some races lack the psychological capacities required for personhood.⁴⁹ It might be thought that empirical racism is reprehensible because (usually) epistemically badly grounded but not be in itself a morally repugnant attitude. Holding that some races are, for example, more likely to be musical need not have any implications for what they are morally due. Even holding that some races are, for example, more likely to be lazy, would not, on Kant's account of morality, justify not treating them with respect. And benevolent paternalism might seem to be less morally blameworthy if based on a genuine empirical error about people's capabilities. However, empirical racism could not exemplify Kantian disrespect. Disrespect involves *both* recognising someone as a person *and* not recognising the valid moral claims grounded in their personhood. This is never simply a failure to recognise of something that it is a person, but a failure to treat a person (something that is in some sense seen as a person) as a person. Unlike empirical racism, racism as disrespect involves disregarding valid claims, so is intrinsically immoral.⁵⁰

In my view, there are problems with seeing the possibility of a genuinely morally innocent, merely empirically mistaken racism, particularly within the context of Kant's practical philosophy. One problem involves one of my responses to Mills' *Untermensch* proposal. I argued that Kant's conception of moral personhood is based on a minimal account of persons as acting for reasons. While this may allow the logical possibility of a failure to recognise that some humans are persons, this is not possible with respect to humans you talk to, trade with, make disingenuous treaties with, expect to obey laws, give orders to, threaten, or attempt to humiliate. These all involve seeing the

49 It might be that Mills' reading allows the possibility of locating Kant's failure to include black people in his universal moral theory in what could be merely empirical errors or empirical ignorance about whether it is empirically plausible that a specified group of people have significantly different (lower) intelligence.

50 This is similar to Appiah's distinction between what he calls 'extrinsic' and 'intrinsic' racism (Appiah 1992: 13-15).

targeted group as persons—as recognising reasons.⁵¹ Racism that involves Kantian disrespect (like all immoral action, on Kant’s account) involves rational incoherence at some level—the racist will hold views in tension with other views to which they are rationally committed. This attribution of rational incoherence does not seem to me to be a disadvantage of the account. A mere false empirical belief, such as the claim that there is a group members of which are likely to be less intelligent, not only fails to justify but also seems to me inadequate to explain actual race-based oppression, and the characteristics racist empirical beliefs supposedly attribute to races to rationalise oppression and discrimination (allegations, say, of lower average intelligence) are seldom seen by their perpetrators as justifying similar treatment of members of their own group with these characteristics. Further, rational incoherence seems to me to fit with the viciousness of some race-based hatred and race-based fear. Such viciousness seems to flow from persons in some inner turmoil rather than persons who are merely mistaking the capacities of some humans. Further, vicious race hatred involves desire to *humiliate* persons which also requires recognising that they are *persons*, rather than just failure to recognise that they are not objects or animals due to some empirical mistake. In the latter case, you might disregard them but you couldn’t aim to humiliate them. Those who fail to respect the personhood of others while, for example, trading with them, speaking to them, or expecting them to obey laws, and claim that they are doing this on the basis of empirical views about difference capabilities are more internally incoherent than empirical racism would allow.

51 A point made by Frederick Douglass in 1852: ‘Must I undertake to prove that the slave is a man? That point is conceded already. Nobody doubts it. The slaveholders themselves acknowledge it in the enactment of laws for their government. They acknowledge it when they punish disobedience on the part of the slave. There are seventy-two crimes in the State of Virginia, which, if committed by a black man, (no matter how ignorant he be), subject him to the punishment of death; while only two of the same crimes will subject a white man to the like punishment. What is this but the acknowledgement that the slave is a moral, intellectual and responsible being?’

This last point relates to a further feature a Kantian disrespect analysis of racism would need to develop, which seems to me to raise additional problems for the idea of a morally innocent empirical racism. A Kantian account of racism as a form of disrespect would need to give an account of a disrespectful way of treating persons that is specifically race-based (this is something Glasgow 2009 develops), as opposed to other ways we can disrespect persons individually. Race-based disrespect would involve disregarding or acting against the humanity of some persons on the basis of seeing them as members of a certain race—a certain sub-division of humanity with unfailingly heritable inner structures that determine some of their characteristics—while also, in line with the previous point, in some sense still recognising them as persons. While there is clearly work to be done in giving a Kantian account of the content of such attitudes, it seems to me that it is somehow doubly dehumanising, since the targets of the racism are not being given the regard due to them as persons, and also are being disregarded on the basis of alleged general features of a group they fall in to. This should make us suspicious of the possibility of thinking that holding some races to be liable to certain moral flaws such as laziness is compatible with respecting them. (Here we may see the interplay between biological and evaluative notions that Smith argues to be part of the early modern concept of race.)

So far I have suggested that Kant's central moral notion of respect/disrespect for humanity could be helpful in thinking about racism. Two other parts of Kant's philosophy that are important here are his political philosophy and his moral psychology. In Kant's political philosophy he argues that we cannot understand our moral relations with others merely in terms of individual virtue but also need to think about the structural relations in society that are required for justice. Kant holds that justice is necessary for humans to live together in relations of non-domination: to live together in such a way that individuals' purposive agency is not systematically subject to the arbitrary choices, including virtuous choices, of other individuals. The picture of Kantian

autonomy in the *Groundwork* might be taken to present an individualist account of moral agency according to which individuals' moral standing is not dependent on the situations and relations they are in,⁵² but the 'Doctrine of Right' in the *Metaphysics of Morals* shows how we can be wrongfully related to others in ways that can taint all our dealings with them, no matter how virtuous our individual maxims. Without justice, we can be wrongfully related to others no matter how well-intentioned we may be as individuals.⁵³ And he holds that we are morally obliged to create just states. Far from only giving us a picture of an ideal world,⁵⁴

52 This individualist reading of Kantian autonomy in the *Groundwork* would, in my view, be a mistake. See O'Neill 1989.

53 For example, a number of scholars argue that Kant thinks that a rightful state must provide unconditional provision against absolute poverty (See Ripstein 2009; Varden 2008; Wood 2014). Since securing the basic means of survival is a necessity for being a purposive agent, on this reading, Kant thinks that provision against absolute poverty must be provided by public means in order to make the protection of private property consistent with everyone's freedom. Failing to do this means not creating the conditions of freedom and results in us being wrongfully related to each other. Where people are homeless, destitute or dependent on begging to survive, they are dependent on other individuals' discretionary choices in a way that is inconsistent with their freedom, and this is a situation of domination, not freedom. Since their needs cannot rightfully be met by individuals who have more giving to them (a claim under justice cannot be met by individual discretionary giving, since this fails to secure non-domination), people are related to each other wrongfully, and those individuals who have more and give are compromised by a structurally wrong relation to others that cannot be righted by individual virtue, and in which all their moral options (giving and not giving) are tainted. (Allais, L., 2014; Ripstein 2009.)

54 Kant's practical philosophy may be thought to be associated with what is now called 'ideal theory' but this question is complicated. On the one hand, Kant's account of justice is not that it is a remedial virtue that we need because of deficiencies in the state of nature or human nature, but rather an account of ways in which public law (which involves certain kinds of public institutions) is necessary for individuals who have an innate right to freedom to live together in ways which are consistent with respecting each of their freedom (see Varden 2008). This might make it sound like an ideal theory. However, on the other hand, the theory doesn't just sketch an ideal world without any idea of how we get to it from where we are (one of Mills' worries about ideal theories), but rather gives us basic theoretical principles for thinking about what makes societies just that enable us to see what it is we are aiming at, to analyse what is wrong with societies that have not achieved this, and also to see making our societies progressively more just as a necessary, ongoing project. Kant's concern with the rule of law even in states which are not just is arguably founded in non-ideal considerations. His account of how rightful relations between people

Kant's framework for thinking about what rightful relations require enables us to give a theoretical account of ways in which states can fail to meet this to various degrees, as well as showing how we can all be implicated in structural and historical injustice in such a way that even our best efforts may be morally compromised or tainted: this is a pervasive feature of human society so long as we do not live in conditions of justice and is why we are obliged to form just states.⁵⁵

The importance of this part of Kant's overall account can be seen by the extent to which it helps explain how his extremely dark view of human moral psychology fits together with his morality of autonomy and reason. The fact that these parts fit together in a coherent picture gives support to thinking that the political philosophy is, as Kant presents it, a working out of what is implied by his account of morality, rather than a revision of it. As I read him, Kant thinks that in virtue of having the capacity to act for reasons (having practical reason) we are committed to seeing the value of other humans as placing constraints on what counts as a reason, and that it is only by initiating actions in a way that sees reasons for action as governed by the categorical imperative that we realize our free natures. Since we always recognize moral obligations, always can see them to be overriding, always can act on them, and realize our natures by acting on them, it may seem somewhat mysterious how we ever act badly. However, he also thinks that we have a propensity to evil, understood as the propensity to make morality conditional on self-interest, that is universal, woven into human nature but imputable, inextirpable but possible to overcome.⁵⁶ Kant thinks that bound up with

must be realized through public law that protects everyone's freedom has resources for explaining what is going wrong in states that meet some but not all the conditions for doing this

⁵⁵ This is not to say that all of the wrongness of these situations is imputed to the individuals who act in them, but simply that structural conditions can place individuals in situations in which all their moral options are tainted or problematic, because they do not involve relating to others rightfully.

⁵⁶ Kant, I, *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, 6: 29-30. Hereafter abbreviated as *Religion*.

the propensity to evil is our being massively inclined to self-deception, including moralized self-deception. He thinks that we are dishonest with ourselves about our own motives,⁵⁷ and this dishonesty ‘puts out of tune the moral ability to judge what to think of a human being, and renders any imputability entirely uncertain’.⁵⁸

How exactly to understand a propensity that is universal, woven into human nature yet imputable is unclear, as well as how to understand Kant’s idea that this propensity is grounded in human freedom (the autonomous will that is also the basis of our being moral). Kant is clear that it is not simply a function of our having inclinations, being vulnerable, and having desires that conflict with what morality requires, nor is it a matter of lacking the capacity to recognize moral reasons. So it cannot be explained just by thinking about what it is to be a rational finite embodied agent. And in fact he does not say that the propensity to evil is an inevitable result of being a finite rational agent, but that it is specifically a part of human nature, and suggests that we need to think of it in terms of a story in which we are born into a fallen condition—none of us starts from a condition of innocence. In addition, he says that to say the human is evil by nature does not mean that evil is part of the concept of a human, but rather that ‘according to the cognition we have of the human being through experience, he cannot be judged otherwise’ (*Religion* 6: 32). The idea that evil is not a part of the mere *concept* of a

⁵⁷ He says that we give ourselves credit for not acting against the moral law without thinking about whether the credit rather goes to good luck: ‘so many human beings (conscientious in their own estimation) derive their peace of mind when, in the course of actions in which the law was not consulted or at least did not count the most, they just luckily slipped by the evil consequences; and even fancy that they deserve not to feel guilty of such transgressions as they see others burdened with, without however inquiring whether the credit goes perhaps to good luck, or whether, on the attitude of mind they could well discover within themselves if they just wanted, they would not have practiced similar vices themselves, had they not been kept away from them by impotence, temperament, upbringing, and tempting circumstances of time and place (things which, one and all, cannot be imputed to us). He thinks that ‘this dishonesty, by which we throw a dust in our eyes and which hinders the establishment in us of a genuine moral disposition, then extends itself also externally, to falsity or deception of others’ *Religion*, 6: 38.

⁵⁸ *Religion* 6: 38.

human but yet can be judged as universal to the species seems to require some feature of the human condition that we learn about from experience but yet know will affect everyone. I suggest that there is a possible way of explaining (at least part of) this, drawing on ideas from the *Metaphysics of Morals* mentioned above, in a way that is relevant to understanding racism. I suggest that we can give at least a partial (and secular) explanation of this fallen condition in terms of the idea that our capacity for moral agency is formed and exists in circumstances in which we are all implicated in current and historical injustice (so we don't start from innocence).⁵⁹ The way Kant thinks about rational agency has a way, I want to suggest, of explaining why self-deception is particularly likely in these conditions.

Kant thinks, as I read him, that acting for reasons (having practical reason) commits you to seeing what counts as a reason for action as constrained by the categorical imperative. This means that making sense of yourself as an agent (someone who acts for reasons), involves (implicitly) seeing your actions as governed by the constraint of respecting the humanity of others: seeing yourself as having something like an ordered self whose fundamental principles make the pursuit of self-interest conditional on morality. This, I suggest, gives us a picture of rational agency which contains a mechanism by which self-deception is likely to arise in certain circumstances. On this account, there is internal pressure to see yourself having an ordered will of a certain sort (to interpret yourself as basically good) since this is part of what it is to make sense of yourself as a rational agent. If you live in a world in which you are seriously implicated in current and historical injustice, it will be hard to take this on⁶⁰ while continuing to see yourself as basically good (whole

59 Other parts of this story include our intrinsic competitiveness and self-interest (see Wood 2010: 16), our development into moral agents from a state prior to reason being guided by people who are imperfect in ways that will affect our agency and our moral perception, and the role of the passions in moral development. Sussman, D, ('Grace and Enthusiasm' MS) gives a detailed account of the necessarily flawed nature of our moral development as agents.

60 Think about the daily atrocity of factory farming, of beggars, wars, the history of

and ordered) in the way that is (as I understand Kant's position) part of seeing yourself as an agent. Kant in fact thinks that it is so hard that it is liable to make us despair and give up the attempt to be moral.⁶¹ An obviously tempting way of avoiding despair and holding onto a view of ourselves as basically good and ordered is to fail to pay attention to ways in which we are implicated in the suffering of others. Since this will involve actions which are not compatible with the way the categorical imperative requires us to respect others, we will have a psychological need to form attitudes, patterns of interpretation and moral salience that dehumanize those who our ways of life fail to respect. One common thread in writing on racism, and in particular, on modern anti-black racism, is to emphasise the idea of racism as an ideology that relates to structures of power and not merely something to be located in 'personal prejudice' (Mills 1999, 2003; Shelby 2002); this fits with my reconstruction of a Kantian explanation of delusional ideologies and dehumanising ways of seeing people, because this is grounded in unjust structural relations. In *The Racial Contract*, Mills argues that the ideology of white supremacy will typically involve white cognitive deficiencies;⁶² I suggest that Kant's thought has an interesting way of explaining this, and it may be that Kant himself illustrates the phenomenon.⁶³

acquisition with respect to any property we may own, the conditions of prisoners.

61 It is because our condition makes seeing ourselves as coherent agents so hard that, Kant thinks, we have a need for grace, which involves the possibility of an optimistic view on our agency from which our defective strivings can be seen as good. See Sussman 2005.

62 Mills argues that 'the Racial Contract creates a racialized moral psychology. Whites will then act in racist ways while thinking of themselves as acting morally. In other words, they will experience genuine cognitive difficulties in recognizing certain behavior patterns as racist, so that quite apart from questions of motivation and bad faith they will be morally handicapped simply from the conceptual point of view in seeing and doing the right thing' (Mills 1999); 'Part of what it means to be constructed as 'white' is a cognitive model that precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities' (Mills 1999); 'One could say then, as a general rule, that white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement' (Mills 1999).

63 Here Mills' *Untermensch* reading may re-enter the picture, not as something which could make Kant's practical philosophy consistent with his racism (since I have argued that it is

I close with a comment about an implication of this discussion for philosophy. A distinction is commonly drawn between Kant's ethics and Kantian ethics, where the latter is thought of as something that needn't be committed to all of Kant's more problematic views. But both 'Kant's ethics' and 'Kantian ethics' can mean different things. Kantian ethics is sometimes taken to mean something broadly inspired by Kant by not strictly concerned with all of his theoretical commitments, but it could also mean a theoretical system proposed by Kant which, when consistently worked out, has results at odds with some of Kant's own actual thoughts. If some of Kant's actual moral beliefs are inconsistent with an accurate working out of the implications of his theory, which is best called 'Kant's ethics'? Mills calls us to focus on the interpretation of Kant's moral philosophy in the light of his racism; I agree with Mills about the importance of this question. I want to add another way of thinking about the interpretation of Kant's moral philosophy in the light of Kant's racism and the whiteness of centuries of interpreters: whether this has led to us failing to pay sufficient attention to what really follows from the theory. Mills paints a damning and compelling picture of what he calls the racial contract as reflected in philosophy, which includes not just demographics (the actual disproportionate whiteness of philosophers in universities), but also the content of philosophy, where, for example, he argues that theories of justice disproportionately ignore historical injustice, and, in particular, the historical injustice of the ideology of white supremacy, and its interplay with the history of so-called liberal enlightenment thought.⁶⁴

not consistent with the way Kant holds that practical reasons grounds moral constraints), but as an analysis of Kant's own personal views: he may have had an *Untermensch* view of black people and native Americans despite this not being compatible with his views about moral agency and personhood.

64 Mills says: 'White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today. You will not find this term in introductory, or even advanced, texts in political theory. A standard undergraduate philosophy course will start off with Plato and Aristotle, perhaps say something about Augustine, Aquinas, and Michiavelli, move on to Hobbes, Locke, Mill, and Marx, and then wind up with Rawls and Nozick. It will introduce you to the notions of aristocracy, democracy, absolutism, liberalism, representative government, socialism, welfare capitalism, and libertarianism. But though it covers more than

In this context it is worth thinking about the possibility of Kantian theories giving a more disruptive and radical analysis of our society than either Kantianism or liberalism is traditionally thought of as having.⁶⁵ It could be that Kant's powerful system has theoretical resources for thinking about, for example, the implications for property ownership of historically unjust dispossession of land, and the implications for criminal law of the ways in which the criminal justice system fails to protect some communities,⁶⁶ that philosophy has failed to think through, perhaps due to the cognitive failings that, I have suggested, Kant himself exemplifies. Mills attributes to mainstream philosophers who want to ignore Kant's racism the thought that 'Ok, Kant was a racist, but that doesn't affect his theories'.⁶⁷ It might be that we have underestimated the extent to which racism may have affected the interpretation of the theories. Where Mills thinks we have interpreted what Kant himself thought too charitably (taking his theories to be meant to apply to everyone), I want to raise the possibility that (amongst other things) racism in philosophy has meant that we haven't interpreted the theories sufficiently radically.⁶⁸

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two thousand years of Western political thought and runs the ostensible gamut of political systems, there will be no mention of the basic political system that has shaped the world for the past several hundred years. And this omission is not accidental. Rather, it reflects the fact that standard textbooks and courses have for the most part been written and designed by whites, who take their racial privilege so much for granted that they do not even see it as political, as a form of domination' (Mills 1999).

65 This possibility is presented by Mills himself, in 'Black Radical Kantianism' (MS).

66 The kinds of problems explored by Shelby 2007.

67 Mills 2014: 2

68 For help in the development of this paper, thanks to Patrick Frierson, Ward Jones, Pauline Kleingeld, JP Messina, Achille Mbembe, Mukasa Mubirumusoke, Jameliah Shorter, Jens Timmerman, members of the audience at a presentation at Wiser, Wits, 2015, members of the audience at a presentation at the Central Division APA in Chicago 2016, members of the San Diego History of Philosophy Round table 2016, members of the audience at a presentation at UC Irvine, 2016, participants in the New England Colloquium in Early Modern Philosophy, Yale, 2016 and members of the audience at a presentation at the Naks biennial meeting in Atlanta, 2016.

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