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Paul C. Taylor, Linda Martín Alcoff, Luvell Anderson



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Frank M. Kirkland

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# KANT ON RACE AND TRANSITION

*Frank M. Kirkland*

## Introduction

To be judged “not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” These words are part of a speech, delivered majestically by Martin Luther King Jr. to upwards of 400,000 people on August 28, 1963. They are part of his anaphoric use of “I have a dream . . .” to refer, in this case, to the future of his then four young children. Most do not know, however, that the lion’s share of King’s speech, proffered in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, for the famous “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” consisted of three parts. The first was a sharply candid admonition concerning the long-standing vicious harms of politically sanctioned racial segregation and its harmful economic repercussions on black people generally in the United States. The second was a somber warning to black people that white backlash and further agony, subsequent to the “March,” would needs be undergone, stemming from the civic and moral protest against these detriments for the sake of basic civil rights and economic fairness. The third part of the speech was an inspiring peroration to a future redeemed in the aftermath of such extensive suffering. The anaphoric use of “I have a dream . . .” is found in this third and final section of the speech. King’s speech, originally untitled, which could have just as well been called, say, “What Must Our Continued Struggle for Freedom Purchase?,” came to be called “I Have a Dream.”

America’s public naming of King’s speech as “I Have a Dream” has an unintended consequence worth mentioning. The first two parts of the speech vanish in the mind of the American public, as if its third part stands alone. More importantly, the gist of King’s whole speech becomes in the mind of the American public only about “having the dream” that all God’s children, not just King’s, shall be judged “not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” However, despite the public’s commemoration of King’s speech solely in terms of its celebrated adage, the *meaning* of that famous refrain in the public’s mind has been rather a hotly contested matter.

Broadly speaking, there are two competing views. We shall deal only with the first view here.<sup>1</sup> On the first view, King’s phrase means that we must (i) *cease pre-judging* people by their skin color or race and (ii) *begin judging* them solely by the substance of their character. By so judging, we gauge the strength of their character in terms independently of the emotional pull of their racial attachments and commitments and give moral credit

to actions done and beliefs held from their sense of duty and responsibility alone. The strength and “content of their character” would presuppose that attaching racial content to moral commitments is wrong and oppressive, and that human fidelities, neutral to race, blind to color, flourish, a state of affairs, many think, King himself endorsed. The obligations stemming from (ii) would trump all considerations involving race, among other emotional attachments and commitments, and enable a “radically non-racial humanism concerned with forms of human dignity that race-thinking undoes or strips away”<sup>2</sup> Judging people solely by the “content of their character” is the moral thing to do without exception; pre-judging them by their race is immoral without exception.<sup>3</sup>

I seek to examine the philosophical salience of Kant on the race-concept (“race”) and, if any, on the contending views of the meaning of the famous saying of King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. In broad strokes, the first view appears to represent a Kantian stance by affirming that we ought to judge people based solely on the “content of their character” full stop. It would be regarded as Kantian, because our judging ought to necessarily and sufficiently put out of play contingent/arbitrary attachments and factors, in this case racial ones, in assessing the content of a person’s character.

Now in saying these things, I am neither expressing nor implying that King had read or was reliant on Kant’s thought for the whole or any part of his 1963 speech. Over the course of my essay, I shall, in passing, make claims that the philosophy of Kant, construed concisely, can be brought to bear respectively on the first view of the meaning of King’s refrain. But, in the main, my essay, more importantly, makes and seeks to demonstrate two proposals. First, the philosophy of Kant, concisely framed, can show the manners in which *normative* import can extend to the race-concept. Normatively Kant did have “second thoughts” on “race” through his conception of “*transition*.” Second, the philosophy of Kant can serve to justify (i) and (ii) in King’s refrain, as “*transitionally*” (Kant) *related*, not as *self-standing alternatives*. Neither proposal is entertained in the literature. Furthermore my claim does not and will not preclude a discussion of Kant’s controversial racial chauvinism<sup>4</sup>, a discussion which has, in various ways, already been put forward in a variety of philosophical venues. Still although “race” may carry normative weight on the basis of Kant’s philosophy, which can be brought to bear on the first view of King’s speech, it prompts two points.

First, contrary to the attitudes of many scholars of Kant to ignore his racial chauvinism, my claim will *not* involve defending, let alone implying, that Kant’s racial chauvinism is to be discounted in and by his own philosophy. My claim should *not* be taken as an apologetic for dispensing with or disregarding his racial chauvinism. Second, contrary to critics of Kant on racial matters, I will *not* endorse or suggest that charting his racial chauvinism sufficiently thwarts his philosophy from denying (1) that enactments of people racially characterized are representative of inferior or superior intellectual and moral competences derived from the invariant “substance” of physiological attributes. Demonstrating my claim requires a concise perspective on his thought, not an apologetic of his core commitments discounting his racial chauvinism and not a chronicling of that chauvinism as if it amply showed his philosophy to be “inconsistently universal or consistently inegalitarian.”<sup>5</sup>

### Kant on Race and Transition

As I mentioned earlier, it is not unusual, indeed it is rather commonplace, to render the meaning of King’s speech along an orthodox Kantian line on which pre-judging

people on the “core” of their racial attributes (visible and heritable physiological features) is treating them as not having any estimable worth, while judging people on the import of their character is an obligation to respect them as having inestimable worth. The former would be prejudicial, deleterious to the integrity of the moral practice of the latter. In doing so, we subject King’s anaphoric refrain to Kant’s “rigorism,” i.e., with respect to morally pertinent actions, judgments, and character involving race, there is no middle position. Either I treat the disposition of others in a race-specific cum racist fashion and, hence, in a (supposedly) morally inimical way, or I treat the disposition of others in a virtuously race-neutral fashion<sup>6</sup> and, hence, in a morally integral way.

The problem with the aforementioned position, however, is that whereas King could endorse, supposedly on Kantian grounds, *only* the race-neutral evaluation of people’s disposition as morally significant, Kant himself endorses *both* the race-specific and race-neutral appraisals. At face value, Kant’s rigorism would be put out of play not by the standard objections to it, but by his own accounts on race. Kant could likely regard the race-neutral appraisal of people’s character as morally worthwhile, but he would likely not consider the race-specific treatment of people’s character as morally detrimental, since such a treatment would, in his eyes, rely on a scientific certification of “race.” That certification would leave in place an *extra-moral yet rational incentive* (hypothetical imperative) to accept the treatment as morally permissible. There would be nothing prejudicial, on scientific grounds, in such treatment to moral practice. We have thus entered the thicket that is Kant’s own racial theory.

Kant is regarded as providing the original formulations of the modern notion of “race.”<sup>7</sup> Generally speaking, he makes the following points. The modern concept of “race” is an empirical one, framed necessarily to describe and explain “scientifically,” not “manifestly,” the diversity of people in the world.<sup>8</sup> As an empirical concept, “race” would be regarded as warranted in acquiring sense and reference within experience. It would receive such warrant from what Kant calls an “empirical deduction” which addresses the *quid facti* status of “race.” Its objective employment in judgment would be dependent on experience scientifically corroborated. But “race” does not acquire its warrant from a “transcendental or non-empirical deduction,” addressing the *quid juris* status of a concept, since “race” does *not* possess such a status. If it were to have one, its objective employment in judgment would be rightly entitled to serve as an epistemic condition of experience.<sup>9</sup>

As an empirical concept, “race” would consist of “marks,” *intensionally* distinguishing and individuating it from other concepts such as, in this case, “species,” “variety,” and “breed.” Furthermore its specificity would establish *extensionally* the introduction of different populations (“differentia”) such as, in this instance, “white,” “black,” “brown,” “red,” “yellow,” and so forth, which can be arranged hierarchically, invariantly, as a matter of nature through what Kant postulates as imperceptible “germs” (*Keime*). Kant’s postulate of “germs” allows “race” to serve as a phenomenal expression of an empirical character based on an imperceptible predisposition enabling “race’s” empirical reality to track it scientifically. Such a character could be tracked from the appearances in which “race” is postulated and thereby, insinuate at least, a predisposition to act or behave on the grounds of maxims serving racial cum racist ends. Hence, through his postulate of “germs,” Kant’s empirical race-concept would admit to a racist (not exclusively a racialist) conception as well.

This portrayal answers, for example, the question of the late Emmanuel Eze whether “race” is “transcendental.” The answer is categorically “no.” Kant would not be trying to establish that the objective use of the race-concept in experience is entitled by right to operate as an epistemically normative pre-condition of experience. He rather tries to establish that the objective use or empirical reality of the race-concept in experience can be certified scientifically. This point marks his writings on “race.” The race-concept would not be involved in governing Kant’s philosophical examination of the a priori parameters of theoretical reason in and of experience. Instead it would be governed by them. But the validity of “race” as an empirical concept is something Kant would be trying to demonstrate, that is, attempting to corroborate its use in experience by experience scientifically, not attempting to seek its use in experience as something entitled a priori or normatively by right. If the scientific demonstration were *successful*, “race” would have objectively cognitive content certified scientifically of its empirical reality and would fall under the purview of what Kant calls a “judgment of experience.”

This point, however, sets problems for Kant because, if the scientific demonstration is *unsuccessful*, “race” could not be an empirical but, what he would call, a “usurped” (*usurpierte*) or pseudo-concept.<sup>10</sup> The race-concept may be “manifestly” used in experience, but could not be construed as possibly credentialed by experience scientifically. To be clear, Kant never expressly claimed or argued that “race” was a pseudo-concept and, therefore, never referred to the science of race as pseudo-science, as is the case today. Otherwise “race” would not even have *quid facti* status. Indeed if he were to deny it such status, it would then be legitimate to claim that Kant could underwrite in full the *first version* of the anaphoric refrain of King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Yet, for Kant, the possibility that “race” could *not* receive scientific validation as an empirical concept would *not* rule out per se the race-concept. The *quid facti* status of “race” could be regarded as a matter dependent on our *presumption* about nature as purposive, entitled by right under the purview of what Kant calls a “judgment of taste” as well as its impact on the judgment of others.

Briefly this would signify that the race-concept could admit of a transcendental or non-empirical deduction of its *quid facti* status by demonstrating the legitimacy of our presumption of nature’s purposiveness reflected in judgments of taste. “Race” would be *neither* a matter of taste *nor* a matter rightfully entitled to be used, because Kant did not believe that nature itself was purposively ordered to be *necessarily suitable* for our objectively cognitive or scientific needs and demands. Rather it would be a matter for a judgment of taste, wherein “race” (a) would bear aesthetically appealing “common sense” (*Gemeinsinn*, not *gemeinen Menschenverstand*)<sup>11</sup> *not* bound to its conceptual intension and extension, (b) would occasion an estimation of its aesthetic appeal to our *presumption* of a purposive and non-doctrinal conception of nature, and (c) would license only what others ought to find “exemplary” or communicable about “race” without cognitively determining or scientifically credentialing its truth value and empirical reality. Racist ends *may still* appear and proliferate; they also *may not*. But, as matters of judgment of taste, they would be *without* cognitive or scientific guarantee in either instance.

If we take “race” to have a “common sense” and express it as estimation of a shareable taste coinciding with our open-ended yet rightful presumption of nature as “purposive without a purpose,”<sup>12</sup> then the possibility is open that “race” could be involved in empirical inquiry, but whose scientific credential would *not* be an explicitly sought or guaranteed desideratum in or of such inquiry.<sup>13</sup> That is to say, “race” can be assumed

(a) to occasion an endeavor or project to judge or appraise in a manner purposively amenable to our cognitive ends, whatever they may presently or eventually be, without such a project needing or dictating in advance a specific purpose or end, and (b) to be oriented by that endeavor's open-ended and disinterested capacity to share "race's" sense as anyone else would.

Thus even the lack of success to demonstrate that and how the objective employment of "race" *judgmentally or cognitively in experience* acquires its empirical reality scientifically would *not* foreclose a *non-empirical deduction* of a *judgment of taste* regarding "race" wherein the *quid facti* status of "race" could be justified or rightly entitled by our presumption of nature as purposive to allow for both its "common sense" and its appraisals of what ought or ought not to be sentiments toward it.<sup>14</sup>

So Kant's writings in support of the race-concept, for example, in his 1775 and 1785 essays, "Of the Different Races of Human Beings" (DRHB) and "Determination of the Concept of a Human Race" (DCHR), respectively,<sup>15</sup> can be characterized as Kant's attempt to show "race" as an objectively employable empirical concept and thus tacitly, at least, a challenge to the belief that "race" would be a pseudo-concept.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, his 1788 essay, "On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy" (OUTPP),<sup>17</sup> does not exclusively delineate whether the race-concept could be objectively employable in empirical settings (in nature, even human nature), but entertains whether the ends that concept serves, *whatever they may be*, can be rightly assumed in a judgment of taste to exhibit necessarily a licit plausibility in them. In OUTPP, Kant affirms our entitlement to *assume* in such a judgment the empirical reliability of *either* racial cum racist or just solely racial ends that "race" could purposively satisfy, but without prior attestation that it does.<sup>18</sup> But, in that same essay, he *also* avows our entitlement to anticipate and judge freely, rationally, and unconditionally that those ends, purposively assuming their empirical reliability, are under moral projects and the law of freedom, and thus ought be *neither* worthy to pursue morally nor sufficient to promote objectively.<sup>19</sup>

Besides intimating that "race" may *not* be restricted exclusively to its scientifically credentialed determination, given that our varied appraisals of it may be in accord with our rightful assumption to approach nature as if it were purposively open-ended rather than as if it were not, there is another point that OUTPP considers that DRHB and DCHR do not. Kant alludes to the manner that "race" as a matter for a judgment of taste and the purposiveness of nature rightly presumed in such judgment ought to be subject to the demands of morality and that those demands ought to be realized in this world. Although I cannot here elaborate on the details, ramifications, and nuances of this point in a fuller way, it is important, I believe, to acknowledge that this point gives Kant pause, raises "second thoughts"<sup>20</sup> for him, about the race-concept.

Indeed Kant could underwrite King's anaphoric refrain concerning the dream of people judging someone by the color of their skin turning one day toward judging someone by the content of their character. But whereas for King this turn is a matter longed for in a "dream," it would be, for Kant, a matter of what he calls the "transition (*Übergang*) from nature (wherein "race" would be either be cognitively used as scientifically credentialed or would be rightly presumed to have common sense without objectively cognitive contribution or truth value) to freedom (wherein "race" ought *not* be effectuated in our moral demands on this world)." Although this "transition" is not a "dream" for Kant, it is still very problematic for him.



Kant does not provide a uniformly distinct explication of both the notion of “transition” and the manner it is to be comprehended. In the *CPR*, “transition” is that in which the concepts of nature and of freedom are *conceived* as connected within the *single* jurisdiction of reason itself.<sup>21</sup> In the *Critique of Practical Reason (CPrR)*, “transition” leads to the achievement extending the employment of a priori concepts legitimately to noumena or ideals, *not solely to phenomena*, to enable hope in such ideals to incentivize morality.<sup>22</sup> But the explication which appears to prevail ultimately in his thought is “transition,” found in *CPJ*, as the “bridge” or conduit over the “immense gulf” between *two* conceptual jurisdictions, that of nature and that of freedom.<sup>23</sup> There is this “immense gulf,” because neither conceptual jurisdiction is derivable from the other. But both rightfully cover the same terrain or empirical reality, which encompasses *all objects of possible experience, inclusive of all objects that ought or ought not to be effectuated in possible experience.*

There must be some kind of compatibility with each other. Kant, however, would never affirm that nature’s conceptual jurisdiction stems from that of freedom. Yet most contemporary philosophers would argue, *contra* Kant, that freedom’s conceptual jurisdiction is compatible with that of nature, thereby naturalizing freedom and rendering it empirically conditioned. How then do these two conceptual jurisdictions cover the same possible experience or empirical reality without conflicting with or hampering each other? The answer for Kant would be—only if what should be moral ends, circumscribed by the conceptual jurisdiction of freedom, not by that of nature, are obtained and ensured in this world. What does all this have to do with the race-concept?

Kant offers DRHB as the account of the empirical reality of the race-concept, relying on hypotheses correlating the diversity of racial populations, given the unity of the human species, to geo-climatic areas around the globe. DCHR gives, on the other hand, a treatment of the empirical reality of the race-concept, defending it on grounds of monogenetic causes, subject to laws of nature, to explain the diversity within the unity of the human species. The difference between them is, for Kant, better scientific certification of the empirical reality of “race” in the latter rather than in the former essay. Still the racial cum racist ends would be served by that concept in both essays, would be empirically conditioned, and thus would be subject to nature’s conceptual jurisdiction. Therefore, a “transition” to the concept of freedom, as found in *CPR*, could admit to the *conceivability* of “race” as innocuous/inessential to human practices and morality in the long run for the human species, but *not* to its possible employment as incidental in empirical reality. This sense of “transition,” apropos to “race,” would not be fitting to King’s anaphoric refrain, because the refrain would speak to the *possible employment* of “race” as inessential to the consideration of a person’s character in empirical reality, but never solely to “race’s” *conceivability* as inessential.

Kant’s essay, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim,” would, for example, deny that the empirical reality of “race” is subject to the conceptual jurisdiction of freedom (not to that of nature), but would affirm that the conceivability of cosmopolitanism is supportive of a hopefulness that nature could gradually, albeit unnoticeably, perhaps providentially, over the long haul be amenable to “race” becoming nugatory to human practices and morality.<sup>24</sup> The “cosmopolitan aim” becomes one of a number of conceivable moral ideals worthy of praise and appreciation for which to hope, but without justifying what motivates practical employment of such ideals to future prospects in possible experience, despite nature’s contribution to our “unsociable

sociability.”<sup>25</sup> The “transition” here, pertinent to “race,” could be in sync with King’s refrain, *only if* King were to hold that consideration of a person’s character, in which “race” were inessential, would be a moral state of affairs for which *only* hoping (or dreaming) it would be significant.

As I stated above, the sense of “transition” in OUTPP (and later in CPJ) is different from the two senses above and prevails in Kant’s thought on “race.” Kant distinguishes ends of nature and of freedom, but each set is directly related to reason generally. He further distinguishes them by referring to the former as empirically conditioned whereby “race” together with racial cum racist ends are elements over which the conceptual jurisdiction of nature holds sway. He refers to the latter as belonging to a “doctrine of practically pure ends,” that is, morality and its demands, necessarily presupposing objective reality in this world for what they ultimately, universally, and *unconditionally* prescribe.<sup>26</sup> But, *for the first time*, Kant is arguing for the necessary possibility of the conceptual jurisdiction of freedom, which holds sway over morality and its demands, and which would have *rational and unconditional moral influence* over empirically conditioned items, such as “race” and its racial cum racist ends, and enjoining them to it.

This sense of “transition” is the strongest version Kant proposes which could underwrite King’s anaphoric refrain. Here Kant would be affirming that, say, empirically conditioned racial cum racist ends ought to be unconditionally subject to and influenced by morally motivated demands realized in this world. The move from considering a person on the basis of the “color of her skin” to considering a person’s character not just independently of “race” and its aforementioned ends, but motivationally by morally reasoned demands *not* to do so, would be characteristic of the meaning of King’s refrain under its “first view.” But this sense of “transition” still would pose problems for Kant.

Again, for Kant, under this sense of “transition,” freedom’s conceptual jurisdiction neither stems from nature’s conceptual jurisdiction nor should be subordinate to it. Rather it must be possible that its rational and unconditional moral influence ought never be proscribed or mitigated by the ends under nature’s jurisdiction to render actions or pursuits based on such influence impossible. It is not unusual to think that what Kant calls “culture” conveys the third sense of “transition” from nature to freedom described immediately above. Kant refers to “culture” as the capacity of the human species to produce *freely* chosen ends with *skill*, that is, *aptly* setting and using purposes on the effects of nature which cannot be discovered or found in nature, and with *discipline*, that is, *freely* setting and using purposes without the compulsion of desires and thus without passions dictating choice. “Culture” would allow for freedom *only* to be exercised *not* in virtue of the power of passions, but in virtue of its power to set ends aligned with the purposiveness of nature presumed in judgments of taste. As a consequence, “culture” could allow for racial cum racist ends, freely chosen, that “race” could presume to satisfy purposively, but without objective confirmation that it does. But, on the grounds of this consequence alone, it could *not* set ends worthy to dispute morally or to contest sufficiently, could *not* set ends that should unconditionally challenge in a rationally moral way freely chosen, yet purposively assumed, racist ends. So it could *not* convey or express the third sense of “transition,” through which the moral valence of the conceptual jurisdiction of freedom on possible experience ought to be compelling.

“Culture” could allow one to be progressively civilized, but not progressively moral, having standards of moral evaluation, yet incapable of generating the unconditionally motivational factor needed to undo to the contrary, in this instance, racist ends on



the basis of the standards. This general scenario has led Thomas McCarthy to claim rather smartly that Kant's "culture" could yield a civilization that is itself along the lines of what Walter Benjamin called a politically expedient "monument to barbarism."<sup>27</sup> It would not be today unusual to call it a politically expedient "monument to white supremacy."

The issue raised here, however, is that Kant is aware of the difficulty surrounding the practical employment of moral demands against "race" and its aforementioned racist ends, since the success of this employment entails only that effectuating such moral demands in this world ought not be impossible, not that they are guaranteed. This situation, in my mind, provokes Kant's "second thoughts" on "race." But his "second thoughts" on "race" are *not* what Pauline Kleingeld refers to as Kant's "radically revised views"<sup>28</sup> on "race." She cites as evidence for these "revised views" (a) Kant's silence on racial hierarchy; (b) his increasing egalitarianism regarding race; (c) his extension of juridical status to non-whites; (d) his articulated prohibition of colonialism for the sake of cosmopolitan aims; (e) his rejection of consequentialist justifications for colonialism; and (f) his condemnation of chattel slavery, all of which represents a moral constraint on the behavior of European nations and all presented in various places exclusively in his post-1790 writings.<sup>29</sup>

But Kleingeld's thesis and her evidence cited to support it turn on a mistake. She attests that in his post-1790 writing, "Toward Perpetual Peace," (a) Kant regards nature as having "organized the earth in such a way that humans can and will live everywhere . . . [using] the surface of the earth for interacting peacefully."<sup>30</sup> Further she affirms that (b) Kant "envisages a world in which people of different colors and on different continents establish peaceful relations with each other that honor the normative principles laid down in his exposition of cosmopolitan right."<sup>31</sup> Regarding (a), Kant would have to presume that nature organizes purposively in that way, not claim that it does so. Regarding (b), Kant does envisage such a world, but the issue for him is the realization of such a world under the laws of freedom and ends of morality.

In effect, Kleingeld misses two points. She fails to grasp that the purposiveness of nature is attributed to our presumption about nature, not to nature itself, which can aid in reconfiguring "race" in an open-ended way. Indeed it still would leave in one piece the racist ends "race" serves, but it would open that concept to serve non-racist ends with neither cognitive nor objective import. She also fails to grasp that the ultimate issue for Kant would *not* be envisaging (conceiving or presuming) a post-and non-racial cum racist world subject to moral requirements, but would be raising matters of such a world's realizability, that is, the *effectuation* of those requirements on the sensible world. In short, Kleingeld affirms Kant's "second thoughts" on "race" independently of or without grasping the significance of "race's" alteration specifically under Kant's notion of the third or post-1788 sense of "transition."

Kant's "second thoughts" then would *not* be "radically revised" ones. They rather would be *reservations regarding the impact of earlier thoughts on "race" in light of the impact of later or different ones on it, specifically what the thought of effectively realizing the moral purge of "race" and its ends ought to have on them in the sensible world.* As I stated above, Kant never regarded "race" as a pseudo-concept and never regarded its science as pseudo-science, as we do today. This concept and the racist ends it served remained intact and in force under Kant's conceptual jurisdiction of nature and were never recanted or repudiated. Only the concept, not the racist ends, was revised for the sake of a better

scientific account, but within that jurisdiction. The shift to the conceptual jurisdiction of freedom, however, subjects “race” to a different account, in which it is at first conceivable, then hoped, that its meaning is rendered nugatory and its racist ends are expunged in the face of moral requirements. But Kant’s notion of “race” under the conceptual jurisdiction of nature would still be in play, despite conceiving of and hoping for its conceptual insignificance and moral removal, unless there is such removal of it and its ends effectively in the sensible world. The evidence Kleingeld cites does speak to moral ends, conceived of and hoped for, within the conceptual jurisdiction of freedom, *but not to moral ends ultimately having to be effectively realized in this world under that conceptual jurisdiction*. Given that each jurisdiction has its own integrity, “race” and its racist ends would be in play, unless de-certified scientifically in this world *and* effectively removed morally in this world. In that light, Kant could not count, in his day, on the former happening in this world, but could only promote that the latter should.<sup>32</sup>

### Kantian Postscripts

Still everything stated so far still would give pride of place to Kleingeld’s thesis generally. But it would not do so to the views of her critics such as Robert Bernasconi and Charles Mills, who have basically argued that “race” and its racist ends are intact and in force *throughout* Kant’s philosophy. Their thesis would deny not only the validity of Kant having “second thoughts” on “race” but, more importantly, the validity of placing Kant’s “second thoughts” on “race” in the context of his notion of “transition,” for which I have argued.

Bernasconi’s recent critical response to Kleingeld’s essay takes the position that Kant’s cosmopolitanism is not an “antidote” to the racial cum racist ends of “race,” but rather the “natural accompaniment” to them.<sup>33</sup> Kant’s so-called second thoughts and “silence” on “race” in his post-1790 writings supposedly relies on the belief that cosmopolitanism is an antidote to the aforementioned ends of “race.” Yet, for Bernasconi, Kant’s cosmopolitanism accompanies racism, not as a necessary possibility like the “I think” accompanying all one’s representations, but as a belief that they were naturally concomitant with each other. This serves as evidence for Bernasconi to make the rather historically positivist claim that Kant and those of his times had differences from contemporary philosophers, who would regard cosmopolitanism as remedial to, not as coexisting with, racism. Thus, on this point, Bernasconi is critical of Kleingeld for both believing that the ends of Kant’s moral philosophy trump racial cum racist ends and imposing sentiments about cosmopolitanism divergent from those of his times, all aimed solely to rescue Kant’s reputation from the charge of racism rather than to acknowledge his continuous acceptance of it.

But Bernasconi’s response misses the mark. First, cosmopolitanism’s accompaniment with racism would not be a historically positivist affair, but would be a matter pertinent to Kant’s thought. Consistent with what I earlier stated, that accompaniment would be possible for Kant, on the condition that the ends of civilization were a matter of “skill” and “discipline” alone, not a matter of the times. If so, it would rely on freedom solely as the setting of *empirically conditioned ends*, consistent with allowing them to be realized in this world for the sake of political expediency, rather than as the setting of *empirically unconditioned ends*, enabling them to be realized in this world for the sake of morally political obligation.<sup>34</sup> Second, Kant’s cosmopolitanism

would thus legitimately serve as antidote to racism on morally political grounds, not as attendant to it on politically expedient ones. Kleingeld regards cosmopolitanism as (1) a morally conceivable end designed as the antidote to racism or (2) a morally conceivable end whose purpose is that for which the foreclosure of racism is to be hoped. She leaves out cosmopolitanism as (3) a morally remedial end designed toward the elimination of racism, which ought to be effectuated in this world. Her problem then would be simply *neglecting an alternative* Kant could necessarily take. Bernasconi's problem, however, is *regarding all three stances as out of the question* in Kant's thought, favoring a historically positivist and politically expedient stance toward Kant's cosmopolitanism rather than trying to extend the cosmopolitan commitments Kant would have toward morally foreclosing racism, to those commitments he must have toward such moral foreclosure.

Kleingeld does not include, therefore, the aforementioned third point in her "second thoughts" on "race." But Bernasconi does not affirm any of them. This would suggest that while Kleingeld would, in part, embrace, with respect to "race," Kant's attempt to "bridge" or "transition" the "vast gulf" or dualism between what is experienced according to laws of nature circumscribed within theoretical reason and what ought to be experienced according to laws of freedom circumscribed within practical reason, Bernasconi would not. The consequence of his position would not be a denial of this dualism, but it would be a denial of Kant's attempt to find compatibility between the two without reducing one to the other or, as Allen Wood has claimed, a "compatibility of compatibilism and incompatibilism"<sup>35</sup> as well as the *incompatibility between freedom empirically conditioned and empirically unconditioned*. "Race" and the racial cum racist ends it serves originate in experience, and their objective reality is sought there scientifically, circumscribed within nature's conceptual jurisdiction or theoretical reason. They would still be in force circumscribed within an empirically conditioned freedom. Since Bernasconi does *not* abide by Kant's sense of "transition," freedom's conceptual jurisdiction (practical reason) can be distinctly maintained, but plays no role, has no influence, and ought not to have one on "race" other than its empirically conditioned and less than subsidiary impact in and on experience. So Kant's position on "race" would not change, would not be subject to "second thoughts," because it is not and cannot be *unconditionally* changed by practical reason.<sup>36</sup>

This is the line of argument undergirding Mills's faultfinding views of Kant and his sympathizers on "race." He shares with Bernasconi two things—the idea of "transition" has no place in their thought and that Kant's position on "race" is unalterable and holds the field philosophically, scientifically, morally, and politically throughout. But there is a difference between the two of them. Bernasconi would uphold Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical reason, but deny the unconditional effectiveness of the latter on the former's explanatory and justificatory hold on "race." Mills denies *both* Kant's distinction *and* the possibility that practical reason's effectiveness against "race" ought and must be empirically unconditioned.

Unflinchingly Mills gives way and sway to the noted intellectual historian, Jonathan Israel, and his interpretation of Kant's racial views, expressed in his three-volume work on the Enlightenment. Allow me to quote Mills in full.

Kant's racial views . . . are emphatically not to be partitioned off from his ethico-political diagnoses and prescriptions but rather to be seen as an integral

part of his thought—*Kantianism simpliciter* that needs to be situated within the global context of the times of fierce pro- and anti-imperialist debate and recognized as theoretically important. *They are not, for Israel—nor, in my opinion, should they be for us—denizens of separate intellectual worlds, the empirical/sub-theoretical/quirky and the abstract/principled/important, but the same world.*<sup>37</sup>

Uniformity and continuity of Kant's racial cum racist views not just across his writings but, more importantly, across theoretical and practical reason to dispel the difference in their conceptual jurisdictions, constitute "*Kantianism simpliciter*," which can for Mills serve as a theoretically connecting tissue to the capacious manifold of forays engaged in using "race" and its racist ends around the globe historically and presently. For example, this point allows Mills to tether Kant's racial views to the notion of "Untermenschen" and the so-called ethic of Nazism. And since Kant's difference between theoretical and practical reason has been melded into "*Kantianism simpliciter*," Mills thus commits Kant's philosophy significantly to the effectuation of "race" and its racial cum racist ends without "transition" and reason's jurisdictional difference. Indeed no Kantian would accept such a conclusion. But there may be plausibility for such in Kant himself.

Minimally the credibility of "*Kantianism simpliciter*" would rest on four factors. (1) The objective reality of "race" would have to consist in the explanation of skin color (via "germs") as "unfailingly hereditary."<sup>38</sup> (2) Racial heredity would have to enable or be conjoined with both "pathological necessitation" and "pathological affection" of a human will.<sup>39</sup> (3) An empirically conditioned will would have its freedom pathologically *affected* by sensibly empirical motives. On the other hand, an empirically conditioned will, pathologically *necessitated* by them, could *only* sense an impulse to do *x*, but *never* conceive of itself as free to do so. (4) Freedom as empirically unconditioned may be rationally conceivable for a pathologically affected will, *but impoverished, insufficient or neutral to be motivated unconditionally for it*, to derive conclusions of what morally ought to be done and effectuated. Points 1–3 would make possible a racially necessitated will for which freedom would be inconceivable, and "Untermenschen" could be designated. They would also make possible an ethic establishing that which ought to be the case racially is dictated sufficiently by what is necessitated racially. A so-called ethic of Nazism or, more broadly, what Mills has called "Herrenvolk Ethics"<sup>40</sup> has been formulated in this manner. Point 4 indicates a conception of freedom, for which a pathologically necessitated will does not, cannot, and ought not to be motivated morally at all. Although a pathologically affected will does not, it could and ought to be unconditionally motivated morally for the sake of being effective morally. Without a notion of "transition," the landscape, which point 4 indexes, is impossible to enter, let alone entertain, for "*Kantianism simpliciter*."

Bernasconi, Larrimore, and Mills all deny that which would spur Kant to have "second thoughts" on "race"—the "transition" to the conceptual jurisdiction wherein freedom can be regarded rationally as morally motivating and effectuating unconditionally the repudiation of "race" and its racist ends in this world. Kant, as I stated earlier, never recants, but sustains, his affirmation of the empirical reality of "race" scientifically, and that fuels the belief among them that freedom's conceptual jurisdiction over "race" and its ends is either non-existent to (Mills) or subsidiary to (Bernasconi/Larrimore) or ineffective in relation to (Bernasconi/Larrimore) nature's conceptual jurisdiction

over it and its ends in the sensible world. But that is their mistake. Kant's affirmation by itself forecloses neither the distinction between "nature" and "freedom" nor the crossover from one to the other. Despite my criticism, Kleingeld affirms a sense of "transition" necessary to spur Kant to have "second thoughts" on "race." His "second thoughts" are not as strong as she proposes ("radical revisions"). But they still are reliant on the crossover to and the impact of freedom's conceptual jurisdiction over "race," in which "race" and its racist ends ought to be effectively eliminated morally in this world, even if they are not effectively eliminated scientifically in this world. King would have had an advantage over Kant with the ascendancy of the scientific elimination of "race" during his times. Still, reading King's refrain may have an undercurrent reliant on Kant, when read as calling for the realization of judging the content of character on moral grounds unconditionally rather than pre-judging it on biologically physical grounds.

### Notes

- 1 The second view shall be addressed in the chapter "Hegel on Race and Development" in this volume.
- 2 A proponent of this view would be Paul Gilroy, who claims that "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. . . . was fond of pointing out that race-thinking has the capacity to make its beneficiaries inhuman even as it deprives its victims of their humanity." See his *Against Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 15, 17.
- 3 It should be noted that King's claim has African American religious antecedents first identified by W.E.B. Du Bois. In the final chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, "On the Sorrow Songs," Du Bois remarks that those songs conveyed the hopeful message that "men will judge men by their souls, not by their skins." King's claim under the first view would be in sync with the sorrow songs' message. Du Bois himself does not disavow the message, but raises questions about its possible fulfillment. See *The Souls of Black Folk* in *Du Bois Writings*, edited by Nathan Huggins (New York: Library of America, 1980), 544.
- 4 For representative, albeit not exhaustive, discussions on Kant's racialism, see Robert Bernasconi's "Who Invented the Concept of Race?—Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race" in *Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 11–36, and "Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism" in *Philosophers on Race*, ed. Julie K. Ward and Tommy L. Lott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 145–166; Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "Race: A Transcendental?" in his *Achieving Our Humanity: The Idea of the Postracial Future* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 77–111; Thomas E. Hill and Bernard Boxill, "Kant and Race," in *Race and Racism*, ed. Bernard Boxill (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 448–471; Pauline Kleingeld, "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race," *Philosophical Quarterly* 57, no. 229 (2007): 573–592; Charles Mills, "Kant's Untermenschen" in *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*, ed. Andrew Valls (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 169–193, and "Kant and Race, Redux" in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 35, no. 1–2 (2014): 125–157.
- 5 See Kleingeld, "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race," 582–586.
- 6 Since "race-neutrality" or even "race-eliminativism" is not analytically or by definition "virtuous," I suspect, even for King, it would be significant to establish or discover how it acquires its, say, "virtuousness."
- 7 See Bernasconi, "Who Invented the Concept of Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race"; Mark Larrimore, "Antinomies of Race: Diversity and Destiny in Kant" in *Patterns of Prejudice* 42, no. 4–5 (2008): 341–363, hereinafter cited as Larrimore.
- 8 For the distinction between the "scientific" and the "manifest" image of man and world, see Wilfrid Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" in his *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 1–41. In short, but not in full, the "manifest" image refers to the framework in which human beings come to the awareness of themselves as human beings in context and as reliant on contextually based correlational "procedures" for items perceived and for items introspected. The



- “scientific” image refers to the framework of postulating imperceptible items for explaining correlations among perceptible items and whose sustained presence is derived from the success of theory construction based on such postulations.
- 9 See Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Deduction: An Analytical-Historical Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 181–196. For those unfamiliar with Kant, he does not use “deduction” as an argument whose conclusion follows logically, necessarily, from its premises. Rather, it is being used as an argument seeking to establish rightful entitlement to the ownership of property, demonstrating that such entitlement is neither grounded on physical possession/use of property nor grounded on how said possession was obtained, but grounded on the juridical distinction between “mine” and “thine.” Kant takes “deduction” to argue for the difference between (a) the entitlement of concepts’ use, because their validity is indispensable to and non-circumventible by what counts as a real possibility of experience and (b) the use of concepts by virtue of possession, because their validity is reliant on and acquired from real experience. A priori concepts make up the former, thereby holding *quid juris* status; empirical concepts make up the latter, thereby holding *quid facti* status.
  - 10 Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Deduction*, 182. Allison is referring to passages from A84–87/B117–119 in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), hereinafter cited as *CPR*.
  - 11 See Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 122–124, sec. 20–22 and 174–175, sec. 40, hereinafter cited as *CPJ*. *Gemeinsinn* as “common sense” refers to common meaning about “x”; *gemeinen Menschenverstand* as “common sense” refers to a common yet non-intellectual orientation or state of mind towards “x.”
  - 12 *CPJ*, 105, sec. 10.
  - 13 For example, Alain Locke would strongly deny even the possibility that “race” could be scientifically credentialed, despite the history of attempts to do so. But, I think, he would affirm the actuality that “race” is aesthetically branded in appraisals that value it favorably, a prospect he would take further and seek to confirm, unlike Kant. See his “The Theoretical and Scientific Conceptions of Race” and “The Political and Practical Conceptions of Race” in his *Race Contacts and Interracial Relations: Lectures on the Theory and Practice of Race*, ed. Jeffrey C. Stewart (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1992).
  - 14 Be mindful that *neither* “race’s” use *nor* the assumption of its shareable “common sense” in our sentiments affirming it currently (and previously for a long time) has acquired empirical credentials scientifically or rightful entitlement legally and morally. These points, however, do not prevent further attempts to seek scientific validation in “race’s” use, albeit now very rarely, or to presume, rather frequently, that there is something legitimate in the assumption of its alleged “common sense.” Still it is significant to recognize that, during Kant’s time, its scientific certification and rightful entitlement legally and morally were both often employed and presumed.
  - 15 For these essays, see Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöller and Robert B. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 82–98 and 143–159, respectively, hereinafter cited as *Anthro, Hist, Educ*.
  - 16 In contrast to an empirical one, a pseudo-concept would be a representation formed to *generalize* through *association* of items, *without* bona fide “manifest,” “scientific,” or a priori credentials, about “x.” It would *not* be a representation formed to *universalize* through *comparison* of patterns or schemata, governing both the apprehension of those items and the abstraction from their differences, about “x.”
  - 17 For this essay, see *Anthro, Hist, Educ*, 192–218.
  - 18 To make this point clearer, ask the following question: What is the difference, *as a matter of a judgment of taste*, between ascertaining that a young black girl’s possession of a black doll rather than a white one is *deleterious* to her well-being and, on the other hand, a young black girl’s possession of a fictional book about black girls and their adventures rather than white boys and theirs is *beneficial* to her? To be sure, the science of psychology can step in to investigate each scenario to establish its cognitive or objective truth value. But the communicability of the common sense of each would remain in force for Kant regardless of the scientific results, unless those results were to “feedback” into and “saturate” the common sense of one or the other.



- 19 *Anthro, Hist, Educ*, 217. “Morality is destined to realize its [doctrine of practically pure] ends in the world, not neglecting their possibility in the world, securing the objective reality of [the aforementioned doctrine of] ends such that the doctrine prescribes as to be effectuated in the world.”
- 20 On this issue, I’m in general agreement with Kleingeld. My difference with her resides in what motivates Kant to have “second thoughts” on the race-concept and what those “second thoughts” mean for him. See Kleingeld, “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race.”
- 21 See CPR, A339/B386.
- 22 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 2008) 5–6, 5: 6–7, hereinafter cited as CPR.
- 23 See CPJ, 63. Unlike the conceptual jurisdiction of nature, from which neither transition to nor influence on the conceptual jurisdiction of freedom can be had in Kant’s thought, “the latter [jurisdiction] *should* have an influence on the former, namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real [or effective] (*wirklich*) in the sensible world; and nature must [as a consequence therefrom] be able to be presumed in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom.”
- 24 See *Anthro, Hist, and Educ*, 107–120.
- 25 *Anthro, Hist, and Educ*, 111.
- 26 *Anthro, Hist, and Educ*, 217.
- 27 See Thomas McCarthy, “Kant on Race and Development,” in his *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 61.
- 28 Kleingeld, “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race,” 586.
- 29 Kleingeld, “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race,” 587–588.
- 30 Kleingeld, “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race,” 589.
- 31 Kleingeld, “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race,” 589.
- 32 For over a century, the former has happened, but the latter has remained rather entangled under this Kantian view.
- 33 See Robert Bernasconi’s “Kant’s Third Thoughts on Race” in *Reading Kant’s Geography*, ed. Stuart Elden and Eduardo Mendieta (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), 295–296.
- 34 See Immanuel Kant, “Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Project” in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 344–347, hereinafter cited as TPP.
- 35 See Allen Wood, “Kant’s Compatibilism” in *Self and Nature in Kant’s Philosophy*, ed. Allen Wood (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 74.
- 36 Larrimore’s excellent work on Kant’s racial views also succumbs to this criticism. Larrimore clearly understands that “race” as an essential part of the *physical-anthropological* investigation of what “nature makes of man” becomes, in Kant’s post-1790 writings, an essential part of the *pragmatic-anthropological* investigation of, as Larrimore puts it, “what man can and should make of himself.” This is noteworthy for two reasons. He (1) omits an important part in the latter quote and, in so doing, (2) construes “race” under an empirically conditioned sense of freedom and rationality. Kant’s latter quote actually states, “what man as a *free agent makes*, or can and should make, of himself.” Larrimore’s omission would concede Kant regarding “race” and the racial cum racist ends it serves as having a necessary hand in what man freely makes of himself, which would be empirically conditioned. For Kant, what man makes, or can and should make, of himself as a free agent would involve being motivationally primed rationally *not* to act or believe in ways “race” and its ends are determined and executed in this world. The issue—the effectuation of that point—cannot be entertained by Larrimore, since it is not on the table. See Larrimore, “Antinomies of Race,” 357–363.
- 37 See Mills, “Kant and Race, Redux,” 137–138 (my emphasis).
- 38 See *Anthro, Hist, and Educ*, 151.
- 39 See CPR, A534/B562 and A802/B830.
- 40 See Charles Mills, “White Right: The Idea of a *Herrenvolk* Ethics” in his *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 139–166.

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