

KANT ON RACE COURSE MODULES:

“Once Kant’s role in constructing a rigorous concept of race is established, it is relatively easy to give Kant a place in the history of racism” (Bernasconi 2002:146)

Background reading: For all of these modules, I strongly recommend reading Robert Bernasconi, “Who Invented the Concept of Race?” in *The German Invention of Race* (2001) and “Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism” in *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays* (2002); Pauline Kleingeld’s “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race” (*Phil Quarterly* 2007); and Bernasconi’s response “Kant’s Third Thoughts on Race” in *Reading Kant’s Geography* (2011).

Jon Mikkelson, *Kant and the Concept of Race* (SUNY 2013) includes Kant’s most important essays on race, important essays on race by Kant’s contemporaries, and an excellent (even if slightly dated) introduction.

1. *CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON* AND KANT’S RACE ESSAYS.

Guiding question: Does the regulative use of the ideas of pure reason cause/promote/ foster/facilitate racism? Or put in a less Kant-jargon-y way: Does humans’ tendency to categorize cause racism? Cf. Appiah’s *Lies that Bind* (pp. 27-28).

Key texts: *Critique of Pure Reason* A641/B670-A668/B696 (esp. B681-686); “Of the different races of human beings” (1775/1777, AHE 82-97); “Determination of the concept of a human race” (1785, AHE 143-159).

2. RACE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Guiding question: How can we (and/or how does Kant) reconcile his race theory with his moral philosophy? How do texts in which Kant is explicitly anti-colonialist or anti-slavery inform our interpretation of his race theory? How do texts in which Kant espouses explicitly and extremely derogatory views of other races inform our interpretation of his race theory?

Key texts: [If students have not already read it, they should read the *Groundwork* (at least PP 43-93)] “Of the different races of human beings” (AHE 82-97), “Determination of the concept of a human race” (AHE 143-159), “On the use of teleological principles in philosophy” (AHE 192-218); *Perpetual Peace* (PP 311-53, especially 8:358-9) and *Metaphysics of Morals* (selection, 6:352-3; PP 489-90); *Observations on the Feeling of Beautiful and Sublime* (selections, AHP 58-61, 2:252-5) and *Physical Geography* 9:316 (“Humanity is at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites. The yellow Indians do have a meager talent. The Negroes are far below them and at the lowest point are a part of the American peoples.”)

3. KANT’S (CHANGING?) ATTITUDES TOWARDS RACE?

Guiding question: Do Kant’s views on race change? If so, why and how? What difference does this historical question make for understanding racism today?

Key texts: As in b, but in chronological order (*Observations*, then race essays, then *Perpetual Peace* and *Metaphysics of Morals*), and also the debate between Bernasconi and Kleingeld in Background Reading above.

ADDITIONAL PLUG: Robert Loudon (louden@maine.edu) has created an excellent stand-alone course called “The Enlightenment and the Other” that includes most of Kant’s writings on race.

TEACHING RACE IN THE *GROUNDWORK OF THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS*

1. **Rewriting Kant's examples of moral worth.** Update Kant's examples of mere morally-correct behavior vs. genuine moral worth: the honest-shopkeeper, the non-suicide, the philanthropist, and the promotor of (his own) happiness. For example, in place of the honest shopkeeper, consider a company adopting anti-racist policies or a student engaged in anti-racist activism. In place of the non-suicide or promoting of his own happiness, consider the person who advocates for benefits for people of color and who is herself a person of color who hopes to benefit from those changes. In lieu of the philanthropist, consider the anti-racist activist who just loves protest, and especially loves protesting alongside people of color, and who engages in activism for the sheer love of it. Better than any of these examples, consider modelling engaged and inclusive pedagogy by asking students to generate their own updated vignettes that illustrate Kant's points with each example; some of these will (hopefully) engage directly with race, ideally in unforeseen ways, and the general practice of inviting students to make examples their own in terms of their lived experience contributes to a more inclusive classroom.
2. **Maxim-testing and the categorical imperative.** Illustrate the maxim-testing interpretation of the formula of universal law with race-relevant examples, including explicitly race-aware maxims and those that have race-disparate impacts without explicitly mentioning race. For example, you might talk about whether Kant's moral theory can distinguish between "In order to increase my profits, I will hire only white candidates" and "In order to increase my profits, I will hire only well-qualified candidates" or what to with maxims like "I (a police officer) will use lethal force when and only when I feel like my life is threatened" (given what we know about implicit bias leads to racial disparities in perceived threat). Or consider how best to frame maxims of affirmative action: "In order to ____, I will give preferential admissions/hiring to ____ [BIPOC individuals; members of underrepresented racial minority groups; members of racial groups that have historically been victims of racist injustice; or individuals who have been subject to injustice]." Use these specific maxims to discuss what maxims are and how to use Kant's formula of universal law (and other formulae) to assess them, but also how Kant's moral theory can be used to identify what's wrong with various forms of racism as well as limits of his moral theory (in *Groundwork*) for diagnosing moral problems with racism.
3. **Self-perfection and "the South Sea Islanders" (4:423).** Discuss in what way(s) Kant's invocation of the South Sea Islanders to illustrate the possibility of an immoral way of life are racist.

Key further reading: Catherine Wilson, "Savagery and the Supersensible: Kant's Universalism in Historical Context," *History of European Ideas* 24 (1998):315-330; Huaping Lu-Adler, "Kant on Lazy Savagery, Racialized" *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, forthcoming.
4. **Kant's Racism and the Groundwork.** After reading Kant's articulations of the formulae of universal law and humanity, read his racist statements from the *Observations* (AHP 58-61, 2:252-5) and discuss how someone with such a universal moral theory could make such claims about other people, then read selections from *Perpetual Peace* and the *Metaphysics of Morals* (8:358-9; 6:352-3).
5. **"Universal" law.** While Kant's *Groundwork* requires "universality" for maxims, **it doesn't specify the domain of that universality.** Discussing racist and sexist remarks in which Kant seems to say that women and certain races are incapable of character or of varying degrees of self-governance can raise the question who gets to be part of the set of rational beings over which the categorical imperative requires that we universalize maxims, who gets to be members of the realm of ends.
6. **There are—and will be—lots of other ideas out there...**