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A Critical Reader

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*The Color of Reason: The Idea of "Race" in Kant's Anthropology**

Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze

1 Introduction

In his important book, *This Is Race*, Earl W. Count observes that scholars often forget "that Immanuel Kant produced the most profound raciological thought of the eighteenth century."[1] This scholarly forgetfulness of Kant's racial theories, or his raciology, I suggest, is attributable to the overwhelming desire to see Kant only as a "pure" philosopher, preoccupied only with "pure" culture- and color-blind philosophical themes in the sanctum sanctorum of the traditions of Western philosophy. Otherwise, how does one explain the many surprised expressions I received while researching this work: Kant? Anthropology? Race? The Kant most remembered in North American academic communities is the Kant of the *Critiques*. It is forgotten that the philosopher developed courses in anthropology and/or geography and taught them regularly for forty years from 1756 until the year before his retirement in 1797.[2] Speaking specifically about anthropology, Kant himself wrote in the introduction to his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*:

> In my occupation with *pure philosophy*, which was originally undertaken of my own accord, but which later belonged to my teaching duties, I have for some thirty years delivered lectures twice a year on "knowledge of the world," namely on

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> Anthropology and Physical Geography. They were popular lectures attended by people from the general public. The present manual contains my lectures on anthropology. As to Physical Geography, however, it will not be possible, considering my age, to produce a manual from my manuscript, which is hardly legible to anyone but myself.[3]

It was Kant, in fact, who introduced anthropology as a branch of study to the German universities when he first started his lectures in the winter semester of 1772–3.[4] He was also the first to introduce the study of geography, which he considered inseparable from anthropology, to Königsberg University, beginning from the summer semester of 1756.[5] Throughout his career at the university, Kant offered 72 courses in "Anthropology" and/or "Physical Geography," more than in logic (54 times), metaphysics (49 times), moral philosophy (28), and theoretical physics (20 times).[6] Although the volume *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* was the last book edited by Kant and was published toward the end of his life, the material actually chronologically predates the *Critiques*. Further, it is known that material from Kant's courses in "Anthropology" and "Physical Geography" found their way into his lectures in ethics and metaphysics.

What was Kant's fascination for anthropology? What does Kant mean by "anthropology"? How is this discipline connected to "physical geography," and why did Kant conceive of anthropology and geography as *twin* sciences? More specifically, what are the substantive anthropological theories on race propounded by Kant? In order to establish a framework for an adequate appreciation of Kant's contribution to anthropology and the theory of race in general, we will in this essay rely on copious but neglected works and notes he prepared and used in his lectures in the area: *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*,[7] *Physische Geographie*,[8] "Conjectural beginning of human history" (1785),[9] "Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrace" (1785),[10] "On the varieties of the different races of man" (1775),[11] and the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764).[12] Although there has been critical interest in Kant's anthropology among scholars as diverse as Max Scheler,[13] Martin Heidegger,[14] Ernst Cassirer,[15] Michel Foucault,[16] Frederick van de Pitte,[17] and so forth, there is no evidence that this interest bears upon Kant's racial theories. Two recent articles, Ronald Judy's "Kant and the Negro"[18] and Christian Neugebauer's "The racism of Kant and Hegel,"[19] are relevant explorations of Kant's racial and racist statements, but each of these discussions of the matter is either too theoretically diffuse and unfocused on Kant's substantive themes on race ("Kant and the Negro") or insufficiently rooted in the rich and definite anthropologico-conceptual framework purposely established by Kant himself for his raciology ("The racism of Kant and Hegel"). The following discussion, while relying on Kant's texts and the critical literature, seeks to focus analytical attention on (1) Kant's

understanding of anthropology as a science, (2) his doctrine of "human nature," and (3) the idea and theory of "race" and racial classifications established on the basis of a specific conception of "human nature." In turn, we shall critique Kant on (1) through (3), and conclude with a general appraisal of the philosophical and the cultural-political significance of Kant's philosophy of race.

2 Kant's Understanding of Anthropology

The disciplinary boundaries established for "anthropology" by Kant and the eighteenth-century writers are radically different from whatever one may assume to constitute the contour of the discipline today.[20] One cannot understand the peculiar nature of "anthropology" as Kant understood it except in conjunction with his idea of "physical geography" – although his conception of "geography" is equally historically distant from us. According to Kant, "physical geography" is the study of "the natural condition of the earth and what is contained on it: seas, continents, mountains, rivers, the atmosphere, *man*, animals, plants and minerals."[21] "Man" is included in his study because humans are part and parcel of nature. But within "man," nature is manifest in two ways, or in two aspects: externally (as body) and internally (as soul, spirit). To study "man" in nature, or as part of nature, is therefore to study the two aspects of nature contained, revealed, or manifested in the human entity. While the one human aspect of nature (or natural aspect of the human) is bodily, physical, and external, the other is psychological, moral, and internal. In Kant's conception and vocabulary, "physical geography" and "anthropology" combine to study "man" in these two aspects; "geography" studies the bodily, physical, external aspect of "man," and "anthropology" studies the psychological, moral, internal aspect. This is why Kant called physical geography and anthropology "twin" sciences. Kant believed that, together, both disciplines would pursue and provide a full range of total knowledge on the subject of "man":

> The physical geography, which I herewith announce, belongs to an idea (*Idee*) which I create for myself for purposes of useful academic instruction, and which I would call the preliminary exercise in the knowledge of the world . . . Here before [the student] lies a *twofold field*, namely *nature and man*, of which he has a plan for the time being through which he can put into order, according to rules, all his future experiences. Both parts, however, have to be considered . . . not according to what their objects contain as peculiar to themselves (physics and empirical knowledge of soul), but what their relationship is in the whole in which they stand and in which each has its own position. *This first form of instruction I call physical geography . . . the second anthropology.*[22]

Thus while anthropology studies humans or human reality as they are available to the *internal* sense, geography studies the same phenomena as they are presented or available to the *external* sense. For example, in concrete terms, since human *bodies* belong to the physical world and are perceptible to the external senses (the eyes, for example), Kant's study of race and racial classifications on the basis of *physical* characteristics (skin color, to be precise) was done under the disciplinary domain of "geography."[23] On the other hand, Kant's study of the *internal* structures which condition the human being as a *moral* entity and which are therefore susceptible to development of character (or moral perfectibility) comes under the disciplinary domain of "anthropology." While geography studies the human being as a physically given, anthropology studies the human being as a moral agent (or "a freely acting being").[24]

In his book *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant focused on the study of the human being as a moral agent. The human individual is a moral agent because one is capable of experiencing oneself as an ego, an "I," who thinks (self-reflects) and wills. It is this capacity for consciousness and agency that elevates the human being beyond the causality and determinism of physical nature in which the individual is nevertheless implicated by embodiment:

> The fact that man is aware of an ego-concept raises him infinitely above all other creatures living on earth. Because of this, he is a person; and by virtue of this oneness of consciousness, he remains one and the same person despite all the vicissitudes which may befall him. He is a being who, by reason of his preeminence and dignity, is wholly different from *things*, such as the irrational animals whom he can master and rule at will.[25]

What confers or constitutes the ego, or "personhood," for Kant, is therefore the ability to think and will, and this ability, in turn, is what makes the person a moral agent. As a moral agent, the person is majestically raised not only above mere (bodily) physical nature but indeed "infinitely above all other creatures living on earth." Thus, for Kant, the domain of the body (physical) is radically (qualitatively and otherwise) different from the domain of the soul (spirit, mind) or of moral agency.

Kant recognizes that the moral domain, or that sphere which constitutes the individual as "person" and as beyond mere thing, is also part of nature. But Kant argues that the unique quality of this (human) aspect of the world transcends mere nature. A recognition of the reality and the uniqueness of the moral domain therefore justifies Kant's designation of his anthropology as "pragmatic":

> A systematic doctrine containing our knowledge of man (anthropology) can either be given from a physiological or pragmatic point of view. Physiological knowledge of man aims at the investigation of what Nature makes of man, whereas pragmatic

> knowledge of man aims at what man makes, can, or should make of himself as a freely acting being.[26]

The distinction between "what Nature makes of man" and "what man makes of himself" is central to understanding the relationship between Kant's anthropology and geography. While one generates pure (scientific, causal) knowledge of nature, the other generates pragmatic (moral, self-improvement) knowledge of the human. In the study of the human, however, both disciplines merge, or rather intersect, since "man" is at once physical (bodily) and spiritual (psychological, moral). Thus, for Kant, "geography" can be either *physical* or *moral.* In its physical aspect, geography studies humans in their physical/bodily (for example, "racial," skin-color) varieties, whereas in its moral aspects, geography studies human customs and unreflectively held mores which Kant calls "second nature."[27] "Anthropology," too, can be either *pragmatic* or *physiological*, as it studies humans as moral agents or as part of physical nature. In sum: pragmatic anthropology studies the inner realm of morality, the realm of freedom; physiological anthropology encompasses humans as part of unconscious nature; and geography studies humans both in their empirical (bodily/physical) nature and in their collective, customary aspects. Or stated otherwise, physical geography studies outer nature and provides knowledge of humans as external bodies: race, color, height, facial characteristics, and so forth, while pragmatic anthropology provides knowledge of the inner, morally conditioned structure of humans (practical philosophy provides moral knowledge and orientation as to what the destiny of human existence and action *ought* to be). The interrelatedness of geography and anthropology and moral philosophy is evident throughout Kant's lectures. As late as 1764, Kant himself had not separated anthropology from geography and thus included "moral anthropology" under the broader designation of "moral and political geography." Moral philosophy presupposes physical geography and anthropology, for while the first two observe and provide knowledge of "actual behavior of human beings and formulates the practical and subjective rules which that behavior obeys," moral philosophy seeks to establish "rules of right conduct, that is, what ought to happen."[28]

Kant's study of anthropology is not peripheral to his critical philosophy. We recall that Kant often summarized his philosophy as the attempt to find answers to the "two things that fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, namely: the starry heavens above and the moral law within."[29] While the "starry heavens above" refers to physical nature, under the causal law (and studied by physics), "the moral law within" is the domain of freedom, of the human individual as a moral entity. For Kant, Newtonian physics had achieved spectacular success in terms of understanding the deterministic laws of physical nature, but philosophy had been unable to establish an equivalent necessary and secure grounding for morality and moral action. Faced with the metaphysical "dogmatism" of the rationalists (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz) on the one hand,

and the debilitating skepticism of Hume's empiricism on the other, Kant, against the rationalists, argues that the mathematical model they propose as ideal for metaphysical and moral inquiry is untenable primarily because mathematics studies ideal entities, moving from definitions by purely rational arguments to apodictic conclusions. Metaphysics, Kant argues, must proceed analytically (especially after Hume's attack on metaphysical dogmatism) in order to clarify what is given indistinctly in empirical experience. "[T]he true method of metaphysics," Kant concludes, "is basically the same as that introduced by Newton into natural science and which had such useful consequences in that field."[30]

But there is a problem here: unlike physical nature, the object of Newton's physics, God, freedom, and morality, and the immortality of the soul – the traditional "objects" of metaphysics – are *not* objects of empirical experience. This situation, potentially, would, in metaphysical matters, lead to radical skepticism *à la* Hume. However, while insisting with Hume that speculation must be based on experience, and always checked against experience, Kant rejected Hume's radical skepticism and sought within the structures of human experience fixed, permanent, and enduring structures that would ground moral actions as law. The *Critique of Pure Reason* and the subsequent *Critiques* can be studied not only from a negative standpoint of showing what is impossible to pure reason but, from this anthropological perspective, as a positive attempt to find in the subjectivity of the human structure a specifically human, inner *nature* upon which to found moral existence as necessity.[31] It was from the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau that Kant was inspired to locate this "fixed point of nature [from] which man can never shift."[32]

3 Kant's Doctrine of "Human Nature" Based on His Reading of Rousseau

Kant succinctly defines "nature" as "the existence of things under law."[33] In the announcement of his anthropology lectures for the academic year 1765–6, Kant stated that he would set forth a "new" method for the study of "man," a method based not just on the observation of humans in their varying historical and contingent forms, but on that which is fixed, permanent, and enduring in human nature.[34] In this announcement, Kant does not mention Rousseau by name, but he describes the method he would teach as a "brilliant discovery of our time,"[35] and, in the comments on the lecture notes, he explicitly states that "Rousseau was the very first to discover beneath the varying forms which human nature assumes the deeply concealed nature of man and the hidden law in accordance with which Providence is justified by his observations."[36] It is certain that Rousseau's most influential writings were already published in the 1770s when Kant was grappling with the problems of necessary foundations for

metaphysics and morality. Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and the Sciences* was published in 1750. The second "Discourse," *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men*, was published in 1758. The most famous Rousseau work, the *Social Contract*, appeared in 1762, the same year as *Émile*, the book on education. The *New Héloïse* appeared in 1761. These texts contain Rousseau's extensive speculations on "human nature," and evidence abounds that they impressed Kant greatly and influenced his own philosophical development.[37] *In order to understand Kant's positive articulation of the permanent and enduring "human nature," we must examine his reading of Rousseau.* Kant found in Rousseau's writings the idea of a fixed *essence* of "human nature," which provided the needed shore for grounding metaphysical and moral knowledge. What were Rousseau's views on "human nature"? Rousseau writes in the opening paragraph of *On the Origin of Language* that "speech distinguishes man among animals." In the same text, Rousseau links the origin of speech with the origin of society: language is "the first social institution."[38] Language and society are linked and inseparable because "as soon as one man was recognized by another as a sentient, thinking being similar to himself, the desire or need to communicate his feelings and thoughts made him seek the means to do so."[39] But in Rousseau's view language and society, as human creations, are not natural: they are *artificial*, invented. Language and society come into being when, and are signs of the fact that, a "pure state of nature" has been transgressed and a radically different dispensation, state of *human* nature, has dawned. For Rousseau, a "pure state of nature," the condition of *l'homme naturel*, is radically different from a "state of human nature," which is the condition of the civil, socialized *l'homme de l'homme*. Speech and society are *proper* to civilized humanity. Rousseau admits that it is conceptually impossible to grasp the cause or the origin and the nature of this revolutionary transition from non-articulate speech (gestures, hollering) to articulate speech (languages, symbols) as a means of communication.[40] Given the fact that one cannot obtain factual information or explanation of the transition from *l'homme naturel* to *l'homme de l'homme*, Rousseau proposes to imagine such a state as a hypothesis for explaining the origin and development of civilization. According to him:

> We will *suppose* that this . . . difficulty [of explaining origin] is obviated. Let us for a moment then take ourselves as being in this vast space which must lie between a pure state of nature and that in which languages had become necessary.

When Rousseau can locate himself in the "vast space" between a "pure state of nature" and human nature, he can *imagine* the moment when society was constituted and postulates that from one side of the divide to the other there was "a multitude of centuries" marked by distinct evolutionary steps. One cannot, however, ascertain factually what, when, or where, these stages were.[41] Both in the *Origin of Language* and in the *Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau

postulates that one stage that ought to have existed between the "pure state of nature" and the constitution of society was the "age of huts."[42] The "age of huts" is the age of the "primitives," and Rousseau describes the primitive age as a time when "spare human population had no more social structure than the family, no laws but those of nature, no language but that of gesture and some inarticulate sounds." It is only after this primitive stage that communication grew from gesture to language, and community life from family to civil society, giving rise to morality, law, and history.[43]

Now, in his anti-Enlightenment writings, Rousseau employed his hypothetical views of the evolution of humans for critical purposes. In the *Social Contract*, for example, Rousseau states that "man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains." By this he means that in nature, or in the state of nature, humans are born free, independent, self-sufficient, innocent, and uncorrupted. It is society and culture that have put humans in bondage: ruled by laws not of one's own making, oppressed by others, wretched, and torn between one's natural inclinations, on the one hand, and social and conventional duties on the other. By nature, human existence is raw and rustic, but good and happy. Culture and civilization have imposed constraints and domesticated the individual so that development of the mind in the arts and the sciences has made humans civilized and dependent, oppressed, unhappy, and immoral. In fact, Rousseau's first *Discourse* was written for an Academy of Dijon essay competition on the question: "whether the progress of the arts and sciences has tended to the purification or the corruption of morality."[44] In his essay, which won the first prize, Rousseau argues that culture and civilization are destroying human nature because achievements in the arts and the sciences are blindly rewarded at the expense of and to the detriment of moral cultivation. Society and civilization breed evil and therefore are enemies of "true" (read: natural) humanity and mores. Using this hypothetical and ideal image of *natural*, Rousseau claims to have uncovered the disfigurements that human nature has undergone in the name of civilized society:

> Deep in the heart of the forest [of Saint Germain] I sought and found the vision of those primeval ages whose history I barely sketched. I denied myself all the easy deceits to which men are prone. I dared to unveil human nature and to look upon it in its nakedness, to trace the course of times and of events which have disfigured man (*l'homme de l'homme*) with natural man. I pointed out the true source of our misery in our pretended perfection.[45]

Rousseau's contention is that civilization may have added many dimensions (such as articulate language and the culture of arts and sciences) to the reality of human existence, but, as "artifical" overlays, they do not add anything of worth to the moral vocation of the human; in fact they may detract from it. Because civilization is artificial and superficial, it burdens that which is truly human in the individual.

Although some aspects of Rousseau's writings seem to advocate a rejection of civilization and a return to the "natural state," others (such as found in the main arguments of the *Social Contract*) refuse a wholesale rejection of civil society, attempt to justify the transition from nature to culture and organized society, and inquire into what kinds of social structures would be appropriate to develop, rather than corrupt, the "true" nature of "man," which is human freedom and "natural goodness."[46]

But if *artificial* civilization corrupts the "natural state" and natural goodness in "man," what, precisely, constitutes this "original," good, and uncorrupted "natural state" of humanity? In Kant's reading of Rousseau's *Origin of Inequality*, the "nature" to which "man" ought to return is not some precivilization, happy, primitive state, but a genuine cultivation of those high capacities that are specific to humans. Likewise, in his interpretation of *Émile*, Kant did not think that Rousseau intended to alienate humans from civilization or suggest that humans return to the Olduvai gorge. In his lectures in anthropology, Kant declares that:

> One certainly need not accept the ill-tempered picture which Rousseau paints of the human species. It is not his real opinion when he speaks of the human species as daring to leave its natural condition, and when he propagates a reversal and a return into the woods. Rousseau only wanted to express our species' difficulty in walking the path of continuous progress toward our destiny.[47]

After he had accurately given a summary of three of Rousseau's major works (*Discourse on the Arts and the Sciences*, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, and *Julie*) as lamenting "the damage done to our species by 1) our departure from Nature into culture, which weakened our strength; 2) civilization, which resulted in inequality and mutual oppression; and 3) presumed moralization, which caused unnatural education and distorted thinking," Kant proceeded to deflate any positive, self-sustaining, and autonomous significance one might attribute to the three texts and their claims. In Kant's reading, the three works are merely a prepadeutic to Rousseau's later works, which give more positive humanizing characterization and value to society, culture, and civilization. According to Kant:

> [The] three works which present the state of Nature as a state of innocence . . . should serve only as preludes to his [Rousseau's] *Social Contract*, his *Émile*, and his *Savoyard Vicar* so that we can find our way out of the labyrinth of evil into which our species has wandered through its own fault.[48]

Obviously operating from the premise that the "state of nature" is (at least) *also* a realm of "evil," Kant interprets the thrust of Rousseau's body of work not as suggesting that we return to a "pure," innocent human "state of nature," but rather as inviting us to *make* humanity and goodness out of ourselves. In Kant's

words: "Rousseau did not really want that man should go back to the state of nature, but that he should rather look back at it from the stage he has now attained."[49]

There is, then, in Kant, a clear distinction between a raw "state of nature" and a "state of *human* nature" which "man . . . has now attained." Indeed, for Kant, if the "state of nature" is a state of evil, it is "human nature," as moral nature, which offers the possibility of the overcoming of evil.[50]

For Kant human nature, unlike natural nature, is, in essence, a *moral* nature, so that what constitutes human nature *proper* is not, as the ancients may have believed, simply intelligence or reason, but moral reason – the capacity to posit oneself rationally as a moral agent. Humans, in the state of nature, are simply *animale rationabile*; they have to make of themselves *animale rationale*. The idea and the effort of "making of oneself" is a specifically historical and moral process. Moral capacity means that humans can posit goals and ends in their actions because they make choices in life, and choices are made in the function of goals. Intimately connected with the idea of moral reason, then, is the capacity for action directed toward self-perfectibility, or the faculty of self-improvement. Kant writes that the individual "has a character which he himself creates, because he is capable of perfecting himself according to the purposes which he himself adopts."[51] The "goal" of society and civilization is therefore tied to the destiny of the species: "to affect the perfection of man through cultural progress."[52]

Kant's peculiar appropriation of Rousseau was, and still is, controversial.[53] Kant's Rousseau is not the Rousseau who became known as advocating a return to the life of the "noble savage" – that is, the Rousseau who advocated passion and instinct against reason and became the hero of the Storm and Stress movement. Rather, Kant found in Rousseau a "restorer of the rights of humanity"[54] – but a humanity defined as social, civilized, and moral. In the *Anthropology*, Kant explicitly writes:

> Man, on account of his reason, is destined to live in a society of other people, and in this society he has to cultivate himself, civilize himself, and apply himself to a moral purpose by the arts and the sciences. No matter how great his animalistic inclination may be to abandon himself passively to the enticements of ease and comfort, which he calls happiness, he is still destined to make himself worthy of humanity by actively struggling with the obstacles that cling to him because of the crudity of his nature.[55]

Humanity is clearly demarcated away from and against the natural state and elevated to a level where it has necessarily to construct in freedom its own culture. For Kant, it is this radical autonomy that defines the worth, the dignity, and therefore the essence of humanity. Pragmatic anthropology as a science has as its object the description of this essential structure of humanity and its

subjectivity. Anthropology's task is to understand and describe "the destination of man and the characteristic of his development"[56] as rational, social, and moral subject. Pragmatic anthropology is meant to help "man" understand how to make himself worthy of humanity through combat with the roughness of his state of nature.[57] Kant's anthropological analysis of the "essence of man," accordingly, starts not from a study of the notion of a prehistorical or precivilization "primitive" human nature, but rather from the study of the nature of "man" *qua* civilized. To study animals, one might start with the wild, but when the object of study is the human, one must focus on it in its creative endeavors – that is, in culture and civilization – for "civilization does not constitute man's secondary or accidental characteristic, but marks man's essential nature, his specific character."[58]

In the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, in which he draws a radical distinction between "inner" and "outer" nature, Kant argues that humans are essentially different from brutes because humans possess an inner nature, or character. He defines character in three senses: as natural disposition, as temperament, and as rational/moral. The first two refer to humans in their passive, bodily capacity, as subject to physical/causal laws of external nature (or "what can be done to man"), while the last refers to the human "as rational creature who has acquired freedom" and relates to "what he himself is willing to make of himself" through categorical self-regulation.[59] It is "character" in this moral sense which distinguishes human nature from animal nature:

> Here it does not matter what nature makes of man, but what man himself makes of himself, for the former belongs to the temperament (where the subject is merely passive) and the latter shows that he has a character.[60]

A moral character is conscious of itself as free: free to choose or to posit/orient oneself and one's actions toward specifically human goals and destiny. The ability to posit specifically human goals signifies and reveals a teleologically compelling process that transcends the world of pure causality or causal inclinations. Freedom, as a horizon for destined action, places humans under another kind of "law," over and above the determinism of external nature. The destiny of the individual is to realize fully one's freedom by overcoming the "rawness" of nature, which, in moral terms, means to realize good out of (inherent) evil.[61] Exploiting his running dialogue with Rousseau for the explication of what he assumes to be the fundamental human condition, Kant states:

> The question arises (either with or against Rousseau) . . . whether man is good by nature or bad by nature . . . [A] being endowed with the faculty of practical reason and with consciousness [is] . . . subject to a moral law and to the feeling (which is then called moral feeling) . . . This is the intelligible character of

> humanity as such, and thus far man is good (by nature) according to his inborn gift. But experience also shows that in man there is an inclination to desire actively what is unlawful. This is the inclination to evil which arises as unavoidably and as soon as man begins to make use of his freedom. Consequently the inclination to evil can be regarded as innate. Hence, according to his sensible character, man must be judged as being evil (by nature). This is not contradictory when we are talking about the character of the species because it can be assumed that the species' *natural destiny* consists in continual progress toward the better.[62]

The human project, then, is to overcome the state of nature by human nature, to overcome evil by good. In this project of overcoming "raw" nature and the inherent condition of evil, history, Kant implies, is on the side of humanity – for humans are the only animals with history; indeed history or historicality, and arts and culture, are the reality and the outcome of the human moral essence and condition. The possession of moral character therefore "already implies a favorable disposition and inclination to the good," while evil (since it holds conflict with itself and does not permit a permanent principle) is truly without character.[63]

To conclude, it should be obvious from the foregoing exposition of the theoretical groundwork of Kant's philosophical anthropology that the disciplinary and conceptual boundaries Kant established for his practice of physical geography cum anthropology follow closely upon his general procedure of philosophical inquiry. Maintaining the distinction between what in his system is the "phenomenal" and the "ideal," Kant, in his reception of Rousseau, seems to split Rousseau's ideas into the "historical" (the phenomenal) and the "hypothetical" (the ideal). Rousseau's ideas about the "primitive" origin and development of human nature, for example, are interpreted by Kant to be merely hypothetical, not theoretical. For Kant, such a hypothetical ideal (in this case, a model of humanity) is useful only for the regulation of moral life or, as he read it into Rousseau's work, the functional critique of modern society. One cannot fail to notice, however, that Kant himself elevated and reinterpreted Rousseau's supposedly hypothetical, or ideal, assumptions as to the origin and development of *European civilization* into a general statement on *humanity as such*.

Yet for Kant, human nature, or the knowledge of human nature, does not derive from empirical cultural or historical studies. History and culture are inadequate to understanding human nature because they deal only with the phenomenal, accidental, and changing aspects of "man," rather than with the essential and permanent. And "through the work of Rousseau, Kant did grasp the essential element in man: his ethical . . . nature."[64] Thus, according to Kant, while physical and racial characteristics as aspects of the physical nature are studied or established by "scientific reason," moral nature, or rational character, which constitutes humanity proper, is the domain of pragmatic anthropology leading to practical/moral philosophy.

4 Kant's Idea of "Race"

4.1 The taxonomy

We saw in the preceding sections of this chapter that for Kant physical geography, in conjunction with anthropology, is supposed to provide a full range of total knowledge on the subject of "man." Specifically, physical geography, which studies outer nature, provides knowledge of humans as external bodies: color, height, facial characteristics, and so forth, while pragmatic anthropology provides knowledge of the inner, morally conditioned structure of humans. In the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, especially section 4 ("Of national characteristics"), which essentially belongs to geography and anthropology, Kant, following Hippocratic lines, outlines a *geographical* and *psychological* (moral) classification of humans. From the geographic standpoint, just as other biological phenomena such as animals are divided into domestic and wild, land, air, and water species, and so forth, different human races are also conceived of as manifesting biologically original and distinct classes, geographically distributed. Taking skin color as evidence of a "racial" class, Kant classified humans into: white (Europeans), yellow (Asians), black (Africans) and red (American Indians). "Moral" geography (which might as well be called "cultural" geography) studies the customs and the mores held collectively by each of these races, classes, or groups. For example, some elements in the "moral geography" taught by Kant included expositions on culture, such as the "knowledge" that it is customary to permit theft in Africa, or to desert children in China, or to bury them alive in Brazil, or for Eskimos to strangle them.[65] Finally, it is the domain of moral philosophy to show, for example, that such actions, based upon unreflective mores and customs, natural impulses (or "the inclination to evil"),[66] and/or the "commands of authority," lack "ethical principles" and are therefore not *properly* (i.e., essentially) human.[67] Unreflective mores and customs (such as supposedly practiced by the non-European peoples listed by Kant) are devoid of ethical principles because these people lack the capacity for development of "character," and they lack character presumably because they lack adequate self-consciousness and rational will, for it is self-reflectivity (the "ego concept")[68] and the rational principled will which make the upbuilding of (moral) character possible through the (educational) process of development of goodness latent in/as human nature.

From the *psychological* or moral standpoint, then, within Kant's classification the American (i.e., in the context of this discussion, American Indian), the African, and the Hindu appear to be incapable of moral maturity because they lack "talent," which is a "gift" of nature. After stating that "the difference in natural gifts between the various nations cannot be completely explained by means of causal [external, physical, climatic] causes but rather must lie in the

[moral] nature of Man himself,"[69] Kant goes on to provide the psychological-moral account for the differences on the basis of a presumed rational ability or inability to "elevate" (or educate) oneself into humanity from, one might add, the rather humble "gift" or "talent" originally offered or denied by mother nature to various races.[70] In Kant's table of moral classifications, while the Americans are completely uneducable because they lack "affect and passion," the Africans escape such a malheur, but can only be "trained" as slaves and servants:

> The race of the American cannot be educated. It has no motivating force, for it lacks affect and passion. They are not in love, thus they are also not afraid. They hardly speak, do not caress each other, care about nothing and are lazy.[71]

However,

> The race of the Negroes, one could say, is completely the opposite of the Americans; they are full of affect and passion, very lively, talkative and vain. They can be educated but only as servants (slaves), that is they allow themselves to be trained. They have many motivating forces, are also sensitive, are afraid of blows and do much out of a sense of honor.[72]

The meaning of the distinction that Kant makes between ability to be "educated" or to educate oneself on the one hand, and to "train" somebody on the other, can be surmised from the following. "Training," for Kant, seems to consist purely of physical coercion and corporeal punishment, for in his writings about how to flog the African servant or slave into submission, Kant "advises us to use a split bamboo cane instead of a whip, so that the 'negro' will suffer a great deal of pains (because of the 'negro's' thick skin, he would not be racked with sufficient agonies through a whip) but without dying."[73] To beat "the Negro" efficiently requires "a split cane rather than a whip, because the blood needs to find a way out of the Negro's thick skin to avoid festering."[74]

The African, according to Kant, deserves this kind of "training" because he or she is "exclusively idle," lazy, and prone to hesitation and jealousy, and the African is all these because, for climate and anthropological reasons, he or she lacks "true" (rational and moral) character:

> All inhabitants of the hottest zones are, without exceptions, idle. With some, this laziness is offset by government and force . . . The aroused power of imagination has the effect that he [the inhabitant] often attempts to do something; but the heat soon passes and reluctance soon assumes its old position.[75]

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Kant is able to hold the above views about the African because, thanks to transatlantic mercantalist slave trades, Kant *sees*

and *knows* that, in fact, African slaves are flogged, "trained" in his words, as European labor. More generally, and from a philosophical perspective, and perhaps in a more subtle way, Kant's position manifests an inarticulate subscription to a system of thought which assumes that what is different, especially that which is "black," is bad, evil, inferior, or a moral negation of "white," light, and goodness. Kant's theoretical anthropological edifice, then, in addition to its various conscious and unconscious ideological functions and utilities, had uncritically assumed that the particularity of European existence is *the* empirical as well as ideal model of humanity, of *universal* humanity, so that others are more or less less human or civilized ("educable" or "educated") as they approximate this European ideal.

In his "orientalist" inscription of the Asian into his system, Kant writes of "the Hindus" that they

> do have motivating forces but they have a strong degree of passivity (*Gelassenheit*) and all look like philosophers. Nevertheless they incline greatly towards anger and love. They thus can be educated to the highest degree but only in the arts and not in the sciences. They can never achieve the level of abstract concepts. A great hindustani man is one who has gone far in the art of deception and has much money. The Hindus always stay the way they are, they can never advance, although they began their education much earlier.

And just in case anybody missed it, Kant reminds us that "the Hindus, Persians, Chinese, Turks and actually all oriental peoples belong" to this description.[76]

It is, therefore, rather predictable that the only "race" Kant recognizes as not only educable but capable of *progress* in the educational process of the arts and sciences is the "white" Europeans. In an important single sentence, Kant states: "The white race possesses *all* motivating forces and talents *in itself*; therefore we must examine it somewhat more closely."[77] Indeed, in his lectures and in the *Anthropology*, Kant's preoccupation can be summarized as: an exercise in the sympathetic study of European humanity, taken as humanity *in itself*, and a demonstration of how this "ideal" or "true" humanity and its history is *naturally* and qualitatively (spiritually, morally, rationally, etc.) and quantitatively (bodily, physically, climatically, etc.) superior to all others.

The position on the psychological-moral status of the non-Europeans assumed by Kant in his lectures and in the *Anthropology* is consistent with his more explicitly *color*-racial descriptions in other writings. We recall that for Kant the ultimate *scientific* evidence for racial groups as specie-classes is manifest and obtained primarily externally by the outer sense, from the color of the skin (thus the suitability of the discipline of physical geography for this branch of study).[78] Physical geography, according to Kant, deals with "classifying things, with grouping their external attributes, and with describing what they are in their present state."[79] In the essay "On the varieties of the different races of man," Kant gives a variation on the classification of races he

had done in the *Observations* by making explicit the geographic element of climate, but the dominant variable here is the color of skin. Kant's hierarchical chart of the superior to the inferior hues of the skin is as follows:

> STEM GENUS: *white brunette*
> First race, very blond (northern Europe), of damp cold.
> Second race, Copper-Red (America), of dry cold.
> Third race, Black (Senegambia), of dry heat.
> Fourth race, Olive-Yellow (Indians), of dry heat.[80]

The assumption behind this arrangement and this order is precisely the belief that the ideal skin color is the "white" (the *white brunette*) and the others are superior or inferior as they approximate whiteness. Indeed, all other skin colors are merely *degenerative* developments from the white original.[81] That Kant seriously believed this can be seen in a story he tells about the process by which the "white" skin turns "black." In the *Physische Geographie*, Kant states that at birth the skin color of every baby of every race is white, but gradually, over a few weeks, the white baby's body turns black (or, one presumes, red or yellow): "The Negroes are born white, apart from their genitals and a ring around the navel, which are black. During the first month blackness spreads across the whole body from these parts."[82]

When Kant waxed more "scientific," and over a period of more than ten years, he switched from this to other kinds of "theory" to explain why the non-European skin colors are "red," "black," and "yellow" instead of "white." In 1775 he attributed the causes of "red," "black," and "yellow" skin colors to the presence of mineral *iron* deposits at the subcutaneous level of the body.[83] Then by 1785 he argues that the presence of an inflammable "substance," *phlogiston*,[84] in the African's blood makes the skin color "black" and, by analogy and extrapolation, is assumed to be responsible for the skin color of other "races" as well.[85] To whatever cause Kant attributed the differences in skin color and therefore of "race" or "racial" distinctions, he nevertheless maintained throughout a hierarchical extrapolation of these color differences.[86] Kant attributes the presumed grades of superiority or inferiority of the race to the presence or absence of "true talent," an endowment of "nature" which marks as well as reveals itself as marker of race in/as skin color. While maintaining the usual four categories of the species (Europeans, Asians, Africans, and Americans), Kant explains:

> In the hot countries the human being matures earlier in all ways but does not reach the perfection of the temperate zones. Humanity exists in its greatest perfection in the white race. The yellow Indians have a smaller amount of Talent. The Negroes are lower and the lowest are a part of the American peoples.[87]

This hierarchical color/racial arrangement is clearly based upon presumed differing grades of "talent." "Talent" is that which, by "nature," guarantees for the "white," in Kant's racial rational and moral order, the highest position above all creatures, followed by the "yellow," the "black," and then the "red." Skin color for Kant is evidence of superior, inferior, or no "gift" of "talent," or the capacity to realize reason and rational-moral perfectibility through education. Skin color, writes Kant, is the marker of "race" as specie-class (*Klassenunterschied*),[88] as well as evidence of "this difference in natural character."[89] For Kant, then, skin color encodes and codifies the "natural" human capacity for reason and rational talents.

Kant's position on the importance of skin color not only as encoding but as *proof* of this codification of rational superiority or inferiority is evident in a comment he made on the subject of the reasoning capacity of a "black" person. When he evaluated a statement made by an African, Kant dismissed the statement with the comment: "this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid."[90] It cannot, therefore, be argued that skin color for Kant was merely a physical characteristic. It is, rather, evidence of an unchanging and unchangeable moral quality. "Race," then, in Kant's view, is based upon an ahistorical principle of reason (*Idee*) and moral law.

4.2 "Race": a transcendental?

Kant's classificatory work on race, however, ought to be situated within the context of prior works in the area, such as the descriptions of the "system of nature" that the natural historians Buffon, Linnaeus, and the French doctor François Bernier had done in the preceding years. Buffon, for example, had classified races *geographically*, using principally physical characteristics such as skin color, height, and other bodily features as indices.[91] According to Buffon, there was a common, homogeneous human origin so that the differences in skin and other bodily features were attributable to climatic and environmental factors that caused a single human "specie" to develop different skin and bodily features. In Buffon's view, the concepts of "species" and "genra" applied in racial classifications are merely artificial, for such *classes* do not exist in nature: "in reality only *individuals* exist in nature."[92] Kant accepted the geographical classification of races, but he rejected Buffon's idea that "races" were not specie-classes – in which case the distinctions would be historical, contingent and ungrounded as logical or metaphysical necessity. According to Kant, the geographical distribution of races is a fact, but the differences among races are permanent and fixed, and transcend climatic or any other environmental factors. Race and racial differences are due to original specie- or class-specific variations in "natural endowments" so that there is a natural "germ" (*Keim*) and "talent" (*Anlage*) for each (separate) race.[93]

Kant's racial theories, then, follow more closely those of Linnaeus than of Buffon. Linnaeus had classified races on the basis of a variety of characteristics: physical, cultural, geographical, and "temperamental" (melancholic, sanguine, choleric, and phlegmatic).[94] Kant essentially reproduces this schema in his *Anthropology*.[95] In many favorable references to Linnaeus's *Systema naturae*, Kant shares with Linnaeus a passion for architectonics in taxonomy: nature is classified into the universe, humans, plants, rocks and minerals, diseases, etc. Yet, Kant regarded Linnaeus's classificatory "system" as "artificial." Kant criticized the "system" for being a mere synthetic "aggregate" rather than an analytically, logically grounded system of nature. After mentioning Linnaeus by name, Kant critiques the taxonomist's work:

> [O]ne should call the system of nature created up to now more correctly an aggregate of nature, because a system presupposes the idea (*Idee*) of a whole out of which the manifold character of things is being derived. We do not have as yet a system of nature. In the existing so-called system of this type, the objects are merely put beside each other and ordered in sequence one after another . . . True philosophy, however, has to follow the diversity and the manifoldness of matter *through all time*.[96]

For Kant, in short, Linnaeus's system was transcendentally ungrounded. In Kant's view, scientific knowledge has to have a transcendental grounding, for it is such a foundation that confers upon scientific knowledge the status of universality, permanence, and fixity. Linnaeus's system also needs to be provided with such universal, necessary reason, which would give it the required transcendental foundation. Indeed, Cassirer is of the opinion that in his *Critique of Judgment* Kant was supplying precisely that which he found lacking in Linnaeus: logical grounding for natural and racial classification.[97]

Over and beyond Buffon or Linnaeus, Kant, in his transcendental philosophy (e.g., *Critique of Pure Reason*), describes ways of orienting oneself geographically in space, mathematically in space and time, and, logically, in the construction of both categories into other sorts of consistent whole. In the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, a work which ought to be considered as primarily anthropological, Kant shows the theoretic transcendental philosophical position at work when he attempts to work out and establish how a particular (moral) feeling relates to humans *generally*, and how it differs between men and women, and among different races.[98] For example, "feeling" as it appears in the title of the work refers to a specific refinement of character which is *universally* properly human: that is, belonging to human nature as such. And we recall that for Kant "human nature" resides in the developmental expression of rational-moral "character." Since it is character that constitutes the specificity of human nature, "human nature *proper*," then whatever dignity or moral worth the individual may have is derived from the fact that one has

struggled to develop one's character, or one's humanity, as universal. Kant states:

> In order to assign man into a system of living nature, and thus to characterize him, no other alternative is left than this: that he has a character which he himself creates by being capable of perfecting himself after the purposes chosen by himself. Through this, he, as an animal endowed with reason (*animale rationabile*) can make out of himself a rational animal (*animale rationale*).[99]

"Character," as the moral formation of personality, seems to be that on which basis humans have worth and dignity, and one consequence of this is that those peoples and "races" to whom Kant assigns minimal or pseudo rational-moral capacity – either because of their non-"white" skin color (evidence of lack of "true talent") or because of the presence of phlogiston in their blood or both – are seriously naturally or inherently inferior to those who have the "gift" of higher rational attainments, evidence of which is seen in their superior "white" skin color, the absence of phlogiston in their blood, and the superior European civilization.[100] While the non-European may have "value," it is not certain that he or she has true "worth." According to Kant:

> everything has either a value or a worth. What has value has a substitute which can replace it as its equivalent; but whatever is, on the other hand, exalted above all values, and thus lacks an equivalent . . . has no merely relative value, that is, a price, but rather an inner worth, that is dignity . . . Hence morality, and humanity, in so far as it is capable of morality, can alone possess dignity.[101]

If non-white peoples lack "true" *rational* character (Kant believes, for example, that the character of the *Mohr* is made up of *imagination* rather than reason)[102] and therefore lack "true" *feeling* and moral sense,[103] then they do not have "true" worth, or dignity. The black person, for example, can accordingly be denied full humanity, since full and "true" humanity accrues only to the white European. For Kant European humanity is *the* humanity *par excellence*.

In reference to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, a commentator has observed that Kant conceptualized reflective judgment as constitutive of and expressing a structure of properly *universal* human "feeling" rather than merely postulating a regulative idea for knowledge. This position that reflective or the properly human expression of judgment is *constitutive of feeling* "is tantamount to introducing an anthropological postulate, for *constitutive of feeling which is universal* implies a *depth-structure of humanity*."[104] Whether this "depth-structure" of humanity is understood as already given or as potential, it is obvious that the notion derives from Kant's appropriation and reinterpretation of Rousseau, for whom there is a "hidden" nature of "man" which lies beyond the causal laws of (physical) nature, not merely as an abstract proposition of science, but as a pragmatically realizable moral universal character.

Kant's aesthetics both in the *Observations* and in the *Critique of Judgment*, therefore, harbor an implicit foundation in philosophical anthropology.[105] The discussions presented in Kant's texts on feeling, taste, genius, art, the agreeable, the beautiful, and so forth, give synthesis to the principles and practices that Kant had defined as immanent to and constitutive of human inner nature *as such*. A transcendentally grounded structure of feeling, for Kant, guarantees the objectivity of the scientific descriptions (distinction, classification, hierarchization, etc.) by conferring upon them the quality of permanence and universality, and it is on this score that Kant believed that his own work overcame the philosophico-logical weakness he detected and criticized in Linnaeus.

Kant's idea of the constitutively anthropological *feeling* thus derives from his conception of the reality of "humanity itself," for "feeling" reveals a specific, universal character of the human essence. Kant stated: "I hope that I express this completely when I say that [the feeling of the sublime] is the feeling of the beauty and worth of human nature."[106] Accordingly, in his racial classifications, when he writes in the *Observations* that the "African has no feeling beyond the trifling," Kant, consistent with his earlier doctrines, is implying that the African barely has character, is barely capable of moral action, and therefore is less human. Kant derived from Hume "proof" for the assignment of this subhuman status to "the Negro":

> Mr Hume challenges anyone to cite a simple example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality; even among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between the two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color.[107]

Although Kant cites Hume as the confirming authority for his view of the black, a careful reading shows that Kant, as with Linnaeus' system, considerably elaborated upon Hume by philosophically elevating Hume's literary and political speculations about "the Negro" and providing these speculations with transcendental justifications. For example, when Hume argues that "the Negro" was "naturally" inferior to "the White," he does not attempt a transcendental grounding of either "nature" or "human nature," while Kant does. "Human nature," for Kant, constitutes the unchanging patterns of specie-classes so that racial differences and racial classifications are based a priori on the reason (*Vernunft*) of the natural scientist.

5 Critique of Kant's Anthropology and Raciology

5.1 The doctrine of "human nature"

Although he did not borrow blindly from Rousseau, Kant's conception of human nature is problematic on many grounds, and the development of some of the problems in Kant can easily be traced to their sources in Rousseau's original conceptions. An example of such a problematic is the distinction between the *primitive* "man in a state of nature" and the *civilized* European "state of human nature" – a typical Rousseauean distinction – upon which Kant capitalized, in his admittedly peculiar reading of Rousseau, to articulate and ascribe a specifically *moral* essence to human nature.

Now, in his own writings, Rousseau was never clear, or at least consistent, as to whether his distinctions between *l'homme naturel* and *l'homme de l'homme* are grounded or not in factuality. In one place, Rousseau writes that his notion of the "natural man" is simply an invention of the imagination that leaps beyond ascertainable facts in order to make possible the construction of an ideal past with which to critique the present "enlightened" European society. According to *this* Rousseau (in *On the Origin of Inequality*, for example), the idea of the primitive, uncivilized "natural state of man" is *imaginary* because we cannot observe humans in "a pure state of nature": there simply is not such a *human* state, for we have always known humans *in* society and can observe them only as such. If this is the case, if follows that the primitive condition eludes empirical investigation and therefore must be imagined, and the interpretation of human nature that flows from the fictional posit of "the primitive" must, of necessity, be merely hypothetical. In Rousseau's own words:

> Let us begin, then, *by laying facts aside*, as they do not affect the question. The investigation into which we may enter, in treating this subject [of the idea of primitive "man" in the state of nature], *must not be considered as historical truths*, but only as mere conditional and hypothetical reasonings, calculated to explain the nature of things rather than to ascertain their actual origin, just like the hypothesis which our physicists daily form about the formation of the world.[108]

Rousseau, then, was aware of the fact (as he expressly declared) that he was supplying an imaginative description and interpretation of a "state of nature" and a state of "primitivity" that perhaps never existed. He was simply positing an idea that might help the European man to interpret his current civilization.

But there is *another* Rousseau, a Rousseau who claims to be a natural historian who has given a scientific and *factual* historical description of the evolution of humanity. In fact, earlier in the same text quoted above, Rousseau states: "O man, whatever country thou belongest to, whatever be thy opinion, hearken: *behold thy history, as I have tried to read it*, not in the books of thy fellows who

are liars, but *in nature*, which never lies."[109] Rousseau in this passage implies that he is doing a scientific description of "nature" – a "history" of nature as natural historians (such as Buffon, Linnaeus, or Bernier) did. Furthermore, at the end of his life, in a general review of his own work, in *Rousseau: Judge of Jean-Jacques*, Rousseau explicitly maintains this position of the natural historian when he describes himself as the first *truthful* "historian of human nature."[110]

Despite Cassirer's argument that Kant "never attributed" such historical "value" to Rousseau's doctrine of the origin of the nature of "man" (Cassirer's argument is based on the claim that Kant "was too acute a critic not to see the contrast between ethical truths based on reason and historical truths based on facts"), the case is not that clear. While it might be granted to Cassirer that "Kant framed no hypotheses concerning the *original* state of mankind," there is no evidence that he did not *use* one in his anthropology and raciology. Kant, I argue, *used* both the first and the second Rousseau. In 1786, when he wrote the "Conjectural beginning of human history," Kant explicitly put a disclaimer in the preface: he was doing a "mere excursion" of the imagination accompanied by reason.[111] But as in Rousseau, Kant's writings are neither clear nor consistent on this position. While his *theoretical* considerations concede that his own and Rousseau's account of the origin and development of history and humanity are "conjectural," Kant's *practical* uses of the same theories thoroughly ignore and blur such distinctions between the conjectured and the factual. In both Rousseau and Kant, theoretical and the methodological prudence are quickly overrun by the pragmatics and the exigencies of either social criticism or anthropological and geographical knowledge production. For example, despite the theoretical disclaimer in the "Conjectural beginning," Kant in his geography and anthropology (see *Physische Geographie*) uses the conjectured, hypothetical speculations ("mere excursions" of reason) as resources for establishing the supposed evidentiality of "race" as a transcendental, ahistorical idea of specie-class. Thus, "race" as an a priori idea is founded on *nature*, where "nature" is defined as "the existence of things under law."[112]

Kant contradicts himself because, on the one hand, he insists (theoretically speaking) that his conjectural narrative about the beginnings and development of "human history" is what it claims to be: conjectural. But, on the other hand, in his raciology Kant hierarchically posits first the American Indian, then "the Negro" and the Asian as "primitive" and inferior stages of humanity, for humanity *proper* is embodied only in the history of European life-formation (or, more accurately, in the existence of the white European male). How could Kant assume that this classification of humans according to race and racial distinctions (skin color assumed as external proof and evidence) is based on an idea "inevitably inherited by Nature" – that is, a priori, transcendentally grounded and immutable? If "race," according to Kant, is a principle of nature, a natural law, then, the so-called subhuman, primitive, and characterological

inferiority of the American Indian, the African, or the Asian is a biologically *and* metaphysically inherited (arche)type.[113]

Christian Neugebauer seems to have in mind the impossibility of consistently justifying Kant's elevation of the concept of "race" to a transcendental, even from within the infrastructures of Kant's *Critiques*, when he argues that Kant's raciology is at best "ambiguous" on the question of whether or not Kant's idea of race is transcendentally hypostatic. According to Neugebauer:

> It is *a priori* impossible that the term *race* is an idea much less a principle or law. If it is an idea then Kant has produced the fallacy of hypostatizing an idea. In conclusion, race cannot be a well-established term in reason without ambiguity in regard to Kant's [theoretical] edifice.[114]

Just as Rousseau recognized the hypothetical nature of his "man in a natural state," but proceeded to build historical and social-political sciences upon them, Kant, building upon this tradition of contradiction or confusion, undermines his enunciated principles through an overtly prejudicial and tendentious interpretation of non-European "races," peoples, and cultures. Neugebauer clearly points out that, because of such inconsistencies and contradictions, "the Kantian can no longer hold firm to Kant's statements on the Negro [or other "races"] and further cannot expect further support from the master" on the issue.[115]

5.2 Essentialism

The issue raised above by Neugebauer as to whether or not Kant "hypostatizes" the idea of race should lead us to ask two related but more controversial questions: namely, (1) is Kant's theory of "human nature" essentialist? and (2) is Kant's conception of "race" essentialist? The answers to these two different questions need not be the same. Regarding the first, if we mean by "essentialism" the postulation of a *substance* or a *thing* as the inherent, permanent, inalienable reality that makes an object what it is, then Kant may not be an essentialist. But insofar as one can speak of ideals and ideas, particularly transcendental ideas, as *essentialized*, then Kant is an essentialist. Kant is not an essentialist in the first sense because, although he characterizes human nature as permanent, fixed, and unchanging or enduring, the interpretation of "human nature" derived by Kant from Rousseau (unlike other interpretations, perhaps) does not advocate any substantic or substantified condition *in which* humans existed, from which they have fallen, or to which they are supposed to return or recover. Rather (the essence of) "human nature" for Kant is a teleology, a goal, a destiny – or that which humans *ought to become*.[116]

Thus, Kant may be an "essentialist," but what he essentializes is not a specific

what of "man," but – albeit, a specific – *what for*. Although Kant believed that Rousseau had discovered "the 'real man' beneath all the distortions and concealment, beneath all the masks that man has created for himself and worn in the course of his history," this "real man," the "true" nature of "man," for Kant does not consist in what one *is* but in what one *ought to become*. What is essential here is the *end* of "man."[117] Humans do not have an already given, or ready-made, static essence; they have an ethical one: transcendental, universal, transcultural, and ahistorical. Kant, if anything, is a *normative essentialist*. He appropriated from Rousseau the idea that *l'homme naturel* has an essence, but interpreted this "essence" in a teleological and ethical sense.

But, if Kant's doctrine of "human nature" is only normatively or prescriptively (rather than descriptively) essentialist, what about his *racial* theories? What for Kant is the "essence" of race? When Kant argues on the subject of race that the seed of "talent," or higher rational achievement, is what distinguishes the "white" from the "black" race,[118] what does he mean by "talent?" Is it something acquired, subject to historical contingency and transformation, or is it a substance fixed, permanent, and inherently present or absent in the races? Kant's long citation from Hume's "Essay on national character" in the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* is supposed to "prove" that the Negro lacks "talent" – "talent" here understood as an "essential," natural ingredient for aptitude in higher rational and moral achievement. According to Kant: "among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior [natural] gifts [of "talent"] earn respect in the world," while no Negro has "presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality."[119] Kant is hereby suggesting that there is an essential and natural "gift" that those who are "white" inherently have and those who are "black" inherently lack – and the evidence for this "natural endowment" or the lack thereof is the skin color, "white" or "black."[120] This natural "gift," a racial essence the presence and absence of which distinguishes the white from the black, according to Kant is "fundamental" and "appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color."[121] Since skin color seems to be the empirically determining factor of the presence or absence of the natural "gift" of talent, and talent constitutes the racial essence, it is fair to conclude that the essentialism of Kant's raciology is *biologically* rooted. Thus, Kant's idea of "race" is not only transcendentally hypostatized but also biologically essentialized. Because "race" is an idea as well as a substan(ce)tified *natural* (color) reality, Kant is able to claim that the mixing of races is a contravention of the laws of nature. According to Kant: "Instead of assimilation, which was intended by the melting together of the various races, Nature has here made a law of just the opposite."[122] If we recall that for Kant "Nature" is ahistorically conceived as a quasi-Platonic archetype and, like the Platonic Ideas, it constitutes unchanging patterns of specie-classes, then Kant's essentialism becomes patent.[123] Racial differences and racial classifications, Kant claimed,

are based a priori on the reason (*Vernunft*) of the natural scientist so that what the natural scientist does (a biologist, for example) is simply categorize species into their "Natural" (read: a priori, prefixed, rational) classes (such as race).[124]

5.3 Critique of sources

One must ask: what were Kant's sources of information on non-European peoples and cultures? As a philosopher notorious for his provincialism, how did Kant manage to accumulate so much "knowledge" of Africa, Asia, and the Americas? One obvious source is books – and there were in Kant's time numerous published accounts of "other lands" in travel literatures, both serious and light, as well as fictions and novels that exploited emerging interests in the exotic stories of explorers, missionaries, and fortune seekers.[125] As van de Pitte reminds us, Kant was a voracious reader who was just as comfortable with the scientific speculations of his time as with "the light novels."[126] From Kant's own writings, we have evidence at least that he read travel novels, such as Captain James Cook's *Voyages* (1773), and Kant's readings of such material found their way, and of course as confirming "evidence" and "proofs," into his lectures in anthropology and geography.

For example, in one of his lectures, Kant found in Cook's travel writings on Tahiti evidence to prove the veracity of a "Russian" wisdom that (1) wives enjoy being beaten by their husbands because it proves to the women that their husbands are jealous, and (2) jealousy is proof of marital fidelity on the part of the husband. Conversely, if the man does not show sufficient jealousy and sufficient attention, the woman, so Kant's story goes, becomes a public property for all men who inevitably want to "gnaw" at the now free "bone."

> The old Russian story that wives suspect their husbands of keeping company with other women unless they are beaten now and then, is usually considered to be a fable. However, in Cook's travel book one finds that when an English sailor on Tahiti saw an Indian chastising his wife, the sailor, wanting to be gallant, began to threaten the husband. The woman immediately turned against the Englishman and asked him how it concerned him that her husband had to do this! Accordingly, one will also find that when the married woman practices obvious gallantry and her husband pays no attention to it, but rather compensates himself with drinking parties, card games, or with gallantry of his own, then, not merely contempt but also hate overcomes the feminine partner, because the wife recognizes by this that he does not value her any longer, and that he leaves her indifferently to others, who also want to gnaw at the same bone.[127]

It seems to be that overall, insouciant of the exaggerations and the sensationalisms of European mercantilist, civilizationalist, and missionary-evangelist heroics fiction that pervade much of eighteenth-century accounts of European encounters with the rest of the world, Kant believed that travel stories provided

accurate or factual information for academic science.[128] While acknowledging that "travel" by the scholar him or herself (or what one might call "fieldwork" today) is an ideal way to gather knowledge of other cultures, Kant argued that reading travel books (regardless of their Eurocentric audience-appeal and their intended purpose: namely, propagandistic justification of foreign expansionism and exploitation) can legitimately substitute for fieldwork. It did not seem to matter for Kant's anthropology or physical geography courses whether the research-scholar simply *read* in a travel novel, or actually *saw in situ*, that it is customary to desert children in China, to bury them alive in Brazil, for the Eskimos to strangle them, or that "the Peruvians are simple people since they put everything that is handed to them into their mouths."[129] Kant writes: "Travel is among the means of enlarging the scope of anthropology *even if such knowledge is only acquired by reading books of travel.*"[130] It is common knowledge that one of the reasons why Kant never left Königsberg throughout his professional life was because he wanted to stay in the seaport town to meet and gather information from seafarers. For even before the publication of any of the *Critiques*, Kant was already nationally known in Germany and he turned down attractive job offers from several universities, such as Halle and Berlin. Königsberg, as a bustling international seaport, was ideal for acquiring all sorts of information about the world and other cultures from travelers: merchants, explorers, sailors, etc. May writes that during Kant's time Königsberg "was well-situated for overseas trade, and for intercourse with different countries and with peoples of diverse languages and customs."[131] In the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, in what appears to be an attempt to justify why he is qualified to teach cultural anthropology, Kant states:

> A large city like Königsberg on the river Pregel, the capital of a state, where the representative National assembly of the government resides, a city with a university (for the cultivation of science), a city also favored by its location for maritime commerce, and which, by way of rivers, has the advantages of commerce both with the interior of the country as well as with neighboring countries of different languages and customs, can well be taken as an appropriate place for enlarging one's knowledge of peoples as well as of the world at large, where such knowledge can be acquired *even without travel.*[132]

Thus, with travel books and a city like Königsberg (through both of which Kant could look at the rest of the world from a pristinely neutral Eurocentric perspective) at his disposal, Kant must have felt that he had all the preparation he needed for academic understanding of and teaching about all the peoples and cultures of the world.

This highly unorthodox nature of Kant's sources for anthropological theories was common knowledge both within and outside of the university. In his lecture announcements, Kant frequently acknowledged that he would be lecturing

from his private notes.[133] Furthermore, he was granted state permission to do this. In a letter from the Ministry of Education, and on the strength of the argument that the "worst" source was "better than none," von Zedlitz, the Minister of Education, wrote:

> The worst compendium is certainly better than none, and the professors may, if they are wise enough, improve upon the author as much as they can, but lecturing on dictated passages must be absolutely stopped. From this, Professor Kant and his lectures on physical geography are to be excepted, as it is well known that there is yet no suitable text-book in this subject.[134]

With this kind of backing, Kant had every institutional cover and caché that allowed him to transform, in lively and entertaining lectures meant to delight both the students and the public,[135] hearsay, fables, and travel lore into instant academic science. Kant's reliance on explorers, missionaries, seekers after wealth and fame, colonizers, etc., and their travelogues provided, or served to validate, Kant's worst characterizations of non-European "races" and cultures.

On one reading, then, we might be tempted to believe that Kant's "theory of race" as contained in his anthropological and cultural-geographical writings was simply a provincialist's recycling of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, fueled during Kant's time by the travel narratives of eighteenth-century Europeans who had economic and imperial political and cultural ambitions in other lands. Under this reading, Kant would be merely carrying forward the tradition of racism and ethnocentrism familiar to us from the literary and political writings of a Montesquieu, Locke, or Hume. While this interpretation may not be totally without merit, I want to argue, however, that it would be a mistake to believe that Kant contributed nothing new or of original consequence to the study of "race" or to the problem of European ethnocentrism in general. Strictly speaking, Kant's anthropology and geography offer the strongest, if not the only, sufficiently articulated *theoretical philosophical* justification of the superior/inferior classification of "races of men" of any European writer up to his time. This is evident, for example, in the title of his essay "Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrace," which Kant explicitly states he was moved to write in order to clear the conceptual confusions that had developed in the field since the increase in the number of explorations and empirical observations on the different parts of the world.[136] Walter Scheidt is correct, I believe, when he notes that Kant produced "the first *theory* of race which really merits that name."[137]

The highly theoretical and transcendental nature of Kant's treatment of the idea of "race" makes it impossible to understand those (such as Willibald Klinke)[138] who would argue that Kant's writings on race should not be taken philosophically seriously because Kant's interest in anthropology and cultural geography was supposedly mere "pastime" or "mental relaxation" exercise.

This estimation of Kant the geographer and anthropologist is untenable because it is impossible to prove that Kant's physical geography and anthropology are marginal to the overall humanistic project of his critical philosophy. The geography and the anthropology writings may have been *marginalized* by the critical reception of Kant in our time, but they were neither marginal to Kant's teaching and professional philosophical career nor inconsequential in our day to any attempt at a coherent understanding of Kant as a cultural thinker. The attempt to trivialize Kant's contributions in anthropology and geography may stem either from the fact that the content of his speculations in the area – which were questionable in the first place – might have been superseded by subsequent and current disciplinary, methodological, and other advances in the fields. It may also be explained as a result of the embarrassing difficulty of ignoring the inconsistencies and the contradictions presented by the (supposedly) "non-critical" anthropology and cultural geography writings to the unity of Kant's better-known transcendental theoretical projects. On closer examination, however, Kant's racial theories, which he reached through a concern with geography, belong in an intimate way to Kant's transcendental philosophy, or at least cannot be understood without the acknowledgment of the transcendental grounding that Kant explicitly provides them.[139]

6 Conclusion

It should be obvious that what is at stake in our critique of Kant is, as Lucius Outlaw pointedly states, the "struggle over the meaning of man,"[140] or the project of defining what it means to be(come) human. In 1765 Kant wrote:

> If there is any science man really needs, it is the one I teach, of how to fulfill properly that position in creation which is assigned to man, and from which he is able to learn *what one must be in order to be a man.*[141]

It is clear that what Kant settled upon as the "essence" of humanity, that which one ought to become in order to deserve human dignity, sounds very much like Kant himself: "white," European, and male.[142] More broadly speaking, Kant's philosophical anthropology reveals itself as the guardian of Europe's self-image of itself as superior and the rest of the world as barbaric. Behind Kant's anthropology is what Tsenay Serequeberhan characterizes as "the *singular* and grounding metaphysical belief that European humanity is properly speaking isomorphic with the humanity of the human *as such.*"[143] This universalist conjuction of metaphysics and anthropology is made possible by a philosophy which understands itself as the lieu of logos so that philosophical anthropology becomes the logocentric articulation of an ahistorical, universal, and unchanging essence of "man." The so-called primitives surely ought to be wary of such

Kantian "universalist-humanoid abstraction,"[144] which colonizes humanity by grounding the particularity of the European self as center even as it denies the humanity of others. And lest it be forgotten, nothing that I have said here is particularly new. Friedrich Gentz, who studied with Kant at Königsberg between 1783 and 1786, pointed out that, if the goal of Kant's anthropological theories were realized, it would "compact the whole species into one and the same form," a dangerous situation which would destroy diversity and the "free movement of the spirit" – for anyone who disagreed with Kant's compact would be "treated as a rebel against *fundamental principles of human nature.*"[145]

Notes

1 Earl W. Count, *This Is Race: An Anthology Selected from the International Literature on the Races of Man* (Schuman, New York, 1950), p. 704.

2 See Paul Gedan, notes to Kant's *Physische Geographie*, in Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 24 vols (Reimer, Berlin, 1900–66). Hereafter cited as *GS*. Citations from *Physische Geographie* are based primarily on the English translations contained in J.A. May, *Kant's Concept of Geography and Its Relation to Recent Geographical Thought* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1970); some citations are from other sources (see n. 8, below). Some of the translations are either my own or my adaptation of other translations.

3 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, IL, 1978), p. 6n. Hereafter cited as *Anthropology*.

4 Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau, Kant and Goethe*, trans. James Gutmann et al. (Harper, New York, 1963), p. 25. Hereafter cited as *RKG*.

5 May, *Kant's Concept of Geography*, p. 4. Hereafter cited as *KCG*.

6 Ibid.

7 See n. 3, above.

8 Of which only the introduction is available in English; see the appendix in May, *KCG*. Due to the fact that there is not available in English a complete compilation of Kant's texts of the *Physische Geographie*, I have relied on several sources for my references to the texts. In addition to May (see n. 2, above) these sources are Kant's *Gesammelte Schriften* (see n. 2, above); *Kants philosophische Anthropologie: Nach handschriftlichen Vorlesungen*, ed. Friedrich Christian Starke (Leipzig, 1831); Christian Neugebauer's quotations from Kant's *Physische Geographie*, which are cited from the Kant-Ausgabe der Philosophischen Bibliothek edition, ed. K. Vorlander (Leipzig, 1920). Neugebauer's selections are contained in his essay "The racism of Kant and Hegel," in H. Odera Oruka (ed.), *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy* (Brill, New York, 1990), pp. 259–72. In the following notes, the source and, when applicable, the translator of each citation from the *Physische Geographie* is indicated.

9 In Immanuel Kant, *Kant on History*, trans. Emil L. Fackenheim, ed. Lewis White Beck (Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1963), pp. 63ff.