

Race and the Enlightenment

A Reader

Edited by

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"This fellow was quite black . . . a clear proof that what he said was stupid"

Immanuel Kant

(b. Königsberg, East Prussia, 22 April 1724; d. Königsberg, 12 February 1804)

In the essay below, written in 1775, Kant argues that there are four distinct varieties of the human species, each with a specific "natural disposition." Each race, however, derives from an ideal original "stem genus." This stem genus, Kant says, was a race of "white brunette" people who must have existed "between the 31st and 52nd parallels in the Old World," and are currently best approximated by the "white" inhabitants of Europe ("very blond, soft white-skinned, red-haired, pale blue eyes"), particularly in "the northern regions of Germany."

On the Different Races of Man

In the animal kingdom the natural division into genera and species is founded upon the law of reproduction-in-common, and the unitary nature of the generating force which holds good throughout a certain manifold variety of animals. Hence the rule of Buffon, namely, that animals which generate between them fertile young (whatever the difference of bodily form they may

possess) belong to one and the same physical genus, must be looked upon as the general definition for a natural genus of animals, in contradistinction to all academic definitions of genera. Academic taxonomy deals with classes; it merely arranges according to similarities; while a natural taxonomy arranges according to kinships determined by generation. The former supplies a school-system for the sake of memorizing; the latter a natural system for the comprehension; the former has for its purpose only to bring creatures under a system of labelings; but the latter seeks to bring them under a system of laws.

According to the latter conception, all humans in the whole world belong to the same natural genus, because universally they generate fertile children between them, however great the differences of their bodily form may otherwise be. For this unitary character of the natural genus, which is just as thoroughgoing as is the unitary character of the generative force that has for them a validity in common, we can adduce only a single natural cause; namely, that they all belong to a single stem, whence they have sprung regardless of differences; or whence at least, they could have sprung. In the first case, all men would belong not only to one and the same genus, but also to one family; in the second they would resemble each other, but would not be kin, and many local creations would have to be assumed; which is an opinion that would needlessly multiply the number of causes. An animal genus which at the same time has a common stem, does not contain within itself different species (for these mean diversity of derivation; instead, their mutual differences are *variations* if they are hereditary). The hereditary traits, if they agree with their derivation, are called *resemblances*; but if the deviation is such that the original stem-formation cannot be restored, it may be called an *exspeciation*.

Among the deviations – i.e., the hereditary differences of animals belonging to a single stock – those which, when transplanted (displaced to other areas), maintain themselves over protracted generation, and which also generate hybrid young whenever they interbreed with other deviations of the same stock, are called *racess*. Those which at every transplantation maintain the distinctiveness of their deviation and so preserve their resemblance, yet when interbreeding with others do not necessarily generate hybrids, are called *sports*; but those which

maintain resemblance often and persistently are called *varieties*. Conversely, the deviation which generates hybrids with others, yet which after being transplanted gradually disappears, is called a special *strain*.

In this way Negroes and Whites are not different species of humans (for they belong presumably to one stock), but they are different *races*, for each perpetuates itself in every area, and they generate between them children that are necessarily hybrid, or blendings (mulattoes). On the other hand, blonds or brunettes are not different races of whites, for a blond man can also get from a brunette woman altogether blond children, even though each of these deviations maintains itself throughout protracted generations under any and all transplantations. Hence sometimes whites generate sports. Gradually and at last the constitution of the soil (moisture or drought), and food, also, induce a hereditary difference or strain among animals of one and the same stock and race, especially in stature, proportion of limbs (plump or lanky), and also in the temperament; which latter hybridizes when mixed with another kind; but on another soil and in the presence of other food (even without alteration of climate) disappears in but a few generations. It is a pleasant thing to take note of the different strains of humans according to the differences in these causes, wherever it is ascertainable in one and the same land simply according to province (as the Boeotians on a moist soil differed from the Athenians on a dry one); although the difference often is ascertainable only to an attentive eye while the rest ridicule the notion. Whatever pertains only to varieties and, therefore, is in itself hereditary (although not by that token persistent), can nonetheless bring forth in time, by means of matings that remain within the same families, what I call the *family strain*, where something characteristic becomes so deeply rooted in the generative force that it comes near to being a sport and perpetuates itself as does the latter . . .

Division of the human genus into its different races

I believe it necessary to assume only four races of man in order to derive from them all the differences which are ascertainable

on first sight and which perpetuate themselves. They are (1) the race of Whites, (2) the Negro race, (3) the Hunnic (Mongolian or Kalmuck) race, (4) the Hindu or Hindustanic race. In the first, which has its chief seat in Europe, I count the Moors (Mauritanians of Africa), the Arabians (following Niebuhr), the Turko-Tataric ethnic stock and the Persians, and all the other peoples of Asia who are not specifically excepted by inclusion in the other divisions. The Negro race of the northern hemisphere is native (*Autochthones*) only to Africa; the race in the southern hemisphere (except Africa) is perhaps native only to New Guinea and in a few of the neighboring islands is but a transplantation. The Kalmuck race seems to be purest among the Khoshots; among the Torguts it apparently is somewhat mixed with Tataric blood; among the Dzingari more so; it is the same which in antiquity went under the name of Huns, later that of Mongols (in the wider sense) and now of Oliuts.

The Hindustanic race is very pure and ancient in the land of this name; but it is distinct from the people on the farther peninsula of India. I believe it possible to derive from these four races all other hereditary ethnic characters; either as mixed or as incipient races, of which the former is the offspring of different mixings, while the latter has not yet lived in the climate long enough to have assumed fully the character of the race belonging in it. Thus, the mixture of the Tataric with the Hunnic blood has produced the Kara-Kalpaks, the Nagai and the other half-races. The Hindustanic blood mixed with that of the ancient Scyths (in and around Tibet), plus more or less of the Hunnic, has perhaps generated the inhabitants of the farther peninsula of India as mixed races – the Tonkinese and the Chinese. The inhabitants of the northern arctic coast of Asia are an example of an incipient Hunnic race, showing already the universal black hair, the beardless chin, the flat face and eyes that are long slits and but slightly open – the influence of the arctic zone upon a people which in recent times has been driven out from under a mild latitude into these abodes; as for instance the maritime Lapps, an offshoot of the Hungarian people, have become adapted to the peculiarities of the latitude in but a few centuries, although they have budded off from a well-grown people of the temperate zone. Finally, the Americans seem to be a Hunnic race not yet completely adapted. For in the extreme north-west of America (where, according to all supposition, the peopling of this conti-

ment must have taken place out of north-eastern Asia, on account of the agreement in the animal species in both), on the northern shores of Hudson's Bay, the inhabitants are very similar to the Kalmucks. Farther southward the face to be sure becomes more open, has more relief; but the beardless chin, the universal black hair, the red-brown face color coincident with the coldness and the unimpressionableness of the temperament are all left-overs of the influences of a long sojourn in cold regions as we soon shall see; these stretch from the extreme north of this continent to Staten Island. The lengthier sojourn of the ancestors of the Americans in north-eastern Asia and the adjacent north-west of America has brought the Kalmuck formation to perfection; while the more rapid spread of their descendants southward in this continent has done the same for the American formation. From America there have emanated no colonizations. For on the islands of the Pacific Ocean all the inhabitants, except for some Negroes, are bearded; much rather, they indicate somewhat a derivation from the Malays, and likewise on the Sunda islands; and the kind of feudalism which was encountered on the island of Tahiti, and which is the customary Malayan form of state, confirms this supposition.

The reason for assuming the Negroes and Whites to be fundamental races is self-evident. As for the Hindustanic and Kalmuck races, the olive-yellow which underlies the more or less brown of the hot countries in the former race is just as impossible to derive from any other known national make-up as it is to derive the unique face of the latter; and both types are expressed unfailingly in the hybrids.

On the immediate causes of origin of these different races

The elemental determinants for a certain development which are inherent in the nature of an organic body (plant or animal) may be called (if this development concerns particular parts) *germs* [*Keime*]; but if this development concerns only the size or the relationships between parts, I call these determinants *natural dispositions* [*Anlagen*]. In birds of the same species that nonetheless live in different climates, there are contained germs for

developing a new layer of feathers if they are to live in a cold climate; but these are restrained if they are to sojourn in a temperate climate. Because in a cold land the wheat grain must be more protected against damp cold than in a dry or warm land, it contains a predetermined ability or a natural disposition to produce gradually a thicker skin. This foresight of Nature to equip her creation with hidden inner furnishings against all sorts of future circumstances in order that it be preserved and suited to the variety of climate or soil, is worthy of all wonder; and in the course of wanderings and transplantations of animals and plants it seems to produce new sorts which, however, are nothing more than deviations and races of one and the same genus, whose germs and natural dispositions have merely developed appropriately at long periods in various ways.

Chance or common mechanical laws could not have brought out such harmonious relationships. Hence we must look upon such appropriate developments as preformed. But even there, where nothing answering the purpose is manifest, the mere capacity to reproduce its particular assumed trait is proof enough that a particular germ or natural disposition was to be found in the organic creation. For external things can be causes of an occasion, but not evocative causes, of that which is necessarily inherited and makes for resemblance. Just as chance or physical-mechanical causes cannot produce an organic body, no more can they add something to its generative force, i.e., effect something that can reproduce of itself, if it be a special configuration or relationship between parts. Air, sun, and food can modify an animal body in its growth, but cannot at the same time supply this alteration with a generative force that would be capable of again producing itself without this cause; on the contrary, what is to be reproduced must previously have lain in the generative force, as predisposed towards a development on occasion, according to circumstances which the creature may get into and in which it must maintain itself. For nothing alien to the animal must enter the generative force which would be capable of gradually removing the creature from its original disposition and of producing real exspeciations that perpetuate themselves.

Man was disposed for all climates and every constitution of ground; it follows that there must have lain in him many sorts of germs and natural dispositions, ready on occasion either to be

developed or hold back, in order that he might be fitted to his place in the world, and that he might appear in the course of generations to have been born to that place and made for it. In accordance with these conceptions we shall review the entire human genus throughout the world and, wherever the natural causes are not perhaps discernible, we shall adduce suitable ones for its deviations; but wherever we cannot ascertain the purposes we shall adduce natural causes. Here I shall simply note that air and sun seem to be the causes which can penetrate most deeply into the generative force and can produce a lasting development of the germs and dispositions; i.e. that can found a race; while on the other hand special food is sure to produce a human strain but its distinctiveness soon disappears on transplantation. That which is to depend upon the generative force must affect not the maintenance of life but that of its source, i.e. it must affect the fundamental principles of its animal organization and movement.

Displaced into the arctic zone, man gradually had to exspiciate to smaller stature; because with such, the strength of the heart remaining constant, the blood makes a complete circuit in a shorter time; the pulse therefore is more rapid and the warmth from the blood is greater. As a matter of fact, Cranz found the Greenlanders to be not only far shorter than the Europeans but also possessors of a noticeably greater natural body-heat. Even the disproportion between the total body-stature and the short legs of the northernmost peoples is well suited to their climate, since the latter parts of the body run a greater risk from cold because of their remoteness from the heart. At the same time, most of the now-known inhabitants of the arctic zone seemingly are but late arrivals there; as for instance the Lapps, who with the Huns have sprung from one and the same stock, namely the Hungarian, and have taken up their present seat only since the emigration of the latter from the eastern part of Asia; and yet they have already become adapted to this climate to a considerable degree.

But whenever a northern people is compelled over a long period of time to withstand the influence of the arctic cold it has to undergo yet greater alterations. All development which is extravagant with the body's juices must gradually be curtailed in this desiccating atmosphere. Hence the germs of the hair-growth

must be suppressed in time, so that only those remain which are necessary for covering the head. By means of a natural disposition the prominent parts of the face, which is least suitable for covering, so that those parts suffer continually from the cold, gradually become flattened by virtue of a foresight of Nature in order to preserve them better. The fleshy prominence below the eyes, the half-closed and squinting eyes seem a protective device partly against the desiccating cold of the air, partly against the light from the snow (against which the Eskimo wear snowgoggles), even though they may also be looked upon as natural effects of the climate, which are also to be observed in milder atmospheres though in far less pronounced measure. Thus there gradually originate the beardless chin, the flattened nose, thin lips, squinting eyes, flat face, reddish brown complexion with black hair; in a word, the Kalmuck facial formation, which through a long succession of generations in the same climate has entrenched itself into producing an enduring race, which maintains itself even if immediately afterwards such a people acquires new abodes in milder latitudes.

Doubtless it will be asked, by what right I derive the Kalmuck formation, which now is encountered in its most complete form in the temperate atmospheres, out of the north or the north-east. My reason is this. As far back as Herodotus we learn that the Argippae, dwellers in a land at the foot of mountains in a region which we may take for the Ural mountains, were glabrous and flat-nosed and covered their trees with white coverings (probably he is speaking of felt tents). These physiognomies are now found more or less in north-eastern Asia, but predominantly in the north-western part of America; which part has been explored starting from Hudson's Bay, and in which according to some recent reports the inhabitants look like genuine Kalmucks. If now we reflect that anciently animals and humans must have crossed back and forth between Asia and America, so that we meet with the same kinds of animals in the cold atmosphere of both continents; that this human race, according to Desguines, was known first of all to the Chinese about 1,000 years before our era as being located beyond the Amur, and gradually drove other peoples of Tataric, Hungarian, and other stocks out of their abodes; then this derivation from out of the cold region of the world will not appear to be forced.

However, the most intelligible case of all, namely the derivation of the Americans, as the not completely adapted race of people which has long inhabited the northernmost region of the world, will be well confirmed by the suppressed growth of hair on all parts of the body except the head, by the reddish, rusty color characteristic of the colder territories and the darker copper color of the hotter ones of this continent. For the red-brown appears to be suited (an effect of the atmospheric acids) as well to the cold climate as olive-brown (as an effect of the alkaline-bilious condition of the juices) to the hot; to say nothing of the temperament of the Americans; which temperament betrays a half-extinguished body-force, which can most naturally be looked upon as the effect of a cold world-region.

On the other hand, the extreme damp heat of the warm climate must show, upon a people that has aged in it sufficiently to have become fully adapted to its soil, effects that are quite the opposite of the former. It is precisely the opposite appearance from the Kalmuck formation that is engendered. The growth of the spongy parts of the body must increase in a hot, moist climate; hence a thick snub-nose and tumid lips. The skin must be oily, not only to moderate the influence of evaporation but also to prevent the injurious absorption of the noxious vapors of the air. The superabundance of the iron particles, which are present in all human blood, and which are precipitated in the reticular substance through evaporation of the acids of phosphorus (which make all Negroes stink) cause the blackness that shines through the superficial skin; and the high iron content of the blood seems also necessary in order to forestall a slackening of all parts. The oil of the skin which weakens the nutrient mucus that is requisite for hair growth, has permitted hardly even the production of a woolly covering for the head. Besides all this, damp heat promotes strong growth in animals in general; in short, the Negro is produced, well suited to his climate; that is, strong, fleshy, supple, but in the midst of the bountiful provision of his motherland lazy, soft and dawdling.

The native of Hindustan may be looked upon as having sprung from one of the oldest human races. His country, braced to the north against a high mountain range and from north to south to the tip of the peninsula traversed by a long mountain chain (to which I count also Tibet in the north which perhaps was the

common place of refuge for mankind and his stock of vegetation after the last great revolution of our earth), has in an equable atmosphere the most perfect drainage-divide, such as is possessed by no other part of the Asiatic mainland situated in an equable climate. It therefore has been dry and habitable even in the most ancient times, since both the eastern peninsula of India and China must have been still uninhabited in those times of floods (for in them the rivers, instead of being divided, run parallel). Here then it was possible for a firm human race to take its foundation over a long period of time. The olive-yellow of the Indian skin, the true gypsy color, which is at the base of the more or less dark brown of other eastern peoples, is just as characteristic and maintains itself as constantly as the black color of the Negroes; and it seems, along with the rest of the formation and the different temperament, to be as much the effect of a dry heat as the other of a moist one. According to Ives, the common diseases of the Indians are congested gall-bladders and swollen livers; but their innate color is inclined to yellow anyway and seems to indicate a continuous excretion of the gall that has entered the blood and that in saponified form dissolves perhaps the thickened juices and dissipates them and thereby cools blood at least in the external parts.

So now we have surmises which at least are substantial enough to be counterpoise for those other surmises which find the differences in the human genus so impossible to reconcile that they prefer to assume discrete local creations. To say with Voltaire, God who created the reindeer in Lapland to devour the moss of these cold regions, created also the Laplander to eat the reindeer, is no poor flash for a poet; but it is a bad expedient for the philosopher who may not depart from the chain of natural causes except where the direction it is immediately bound to take is obvious to him.

We have counted four human races under which all the manifold variations of this genus are supposed to be conceived. But all deviations need nevertheless a stem genus; and either we must declare it now extinct, or else we must seek among those extant the one which we can best compare to the stem-genus. To be sure we cannot hope any more to come upon the unaltered original human form anywhere in the world. Precisely because of Nature's propensity to adapt to the soil everywhere over long

generations, the human form must now everywhere be supplied with local modifications. But that portion of the earth between the 31st and 52nd parallels in the Old World (which seems to earn the name of Old World even from the standpoint of peopling) is rightly held to be that in which the most happy mixture of influences of the colder and hotter regions and also the greatest wealth of earthly creatures is encountered; where man too must have departed the least from his original formation because from here he is equally well prepared for all transplants. Here, to be sure, we find white inhabitants, but they are brunette; so we shall assume their form to be closest to the stem-genus. The very blond, soft-white-skinned, red-haired, pale-blue-eyes variation seems to be its nearest in the north; in the time of the Romans it inhabited the northern regions of Germany and, according to other evidence, farther eastward to the Altai mountains, but everywhere in unmeasurable forests of a rather cold region. So the influence of a cold and damp air, which gives the juices a tendency towards scurvy, finally produced a certain strain of humans which would have attained the self-sufficiency of a race; if only in this region of the earth frequent alien mixture had not interrupted the progress of the variation. We can therefore reckon this as at least an approach to the genuine races; and thereupon they may be brought into the following sketch in connection with the natural causes of their origin:

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.

In the following excerpt from his philosophico-anthropological work, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) Kant argues that different nations have different aesthetic and moral sensibilities. The "beautiful" and the "sublime" are, for Kant, various qualities of aesthetic and moral feeling. At the top of Kant's classification, the German has a fortunate combination of feeling, both in that of the sublime and in that of the

beautiful" (thereby surpassing the Englishman and the Frenchman who each seem to have predominately only one half of the feeling); the African, on the other hand, is at the bottom. Quoting from Hume's footnote (see Chapter 3), Kant arrived at the conclusion that the African "has no feeling beyond the milking." (We need to bear in mind that for Kant, the "feeling of the beautiful and the sublime" refers to the higher realms of aesthetic experience. While almost every human being is capable of experiencing the "coarse" pleasures which do not require intellectual and moral cultivation, according to Kant, only the refined intellect or character is capable of ascending to the experience of the qualitatively higher moral delights of the beautiful (which arouses joy) and the sublime (which arouses awe).)

On National Characteristics, so far as They Depend upon the Distinct Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime

The first sort of beautiful feeling seems to be excellently suited to the Italians, and the second, to the French. In the national character that bears the expression of the sublime, this is either that of the terrifying sort, which is a little inclined to the adventurous, or it is a feeling for the noble, or for the splendid. I believe I have reason to be able to ascribe the feeling of the first sort to the Spaniard, the second to the Englishman, and the third to the

[Note on the title] My intention is not at all to portray the characters of peoples in detail, but I sketch only a few features that express the feeling of the sublime and the beautiful which they show. One can readily imagine that in such a picture only a passing justice could be demanded, that its prototypes stand out only in the great multitude of those who lay claim to a finer feeling, and that no nation lacks dispositions that combine the most excellent qualities of this sort. On that account the blame that might occasionally fall upon a people can offend no one, for it is of such a nature that each one can hit it like a ball to his neighbor. Whether these national differences are contingent and depend upon the times and the type of government, or are bound by a certain necessity to the climate, I do not here inquire. [Editor's note: All following footnotes are also Kant's.]