

## **The concept of race in Kant's Lectures on Anthropology**

**ALEXEY ZHAVORONKOV\***

Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

**ALEXEY SALIKOV\***

Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia

### **Abstract**

In the course of the last 20 years, the problem of Kant's view of races has evolved from a marginal topic to a question which affects his critical philosophy in general, including the anthropology and its influence on contemporary social studies. The goal of our paper is to examine the anthropological role of Kant's concept of race from the largely overlooked or underestimated perspective of his *Lectures on Anthropology*. Taking into account the differences between Kant's approach in the early lectures of the 1770s and early 1780s and the lectures of the late 1780s in the light of the development of the idea of race in Kant's works, we will demonstrate that several key elements of Kant's 1780s theory of race presented in his published works can be found in his early lectures. On the other hand, we will prove that Kant gradually abandons racial hierarchies and moral characteristics of races in his anthropological lectures of the late 1780s and in the *Anthropology from the Pragmatic Point of View*, shifting his focus to more nuanced descriptions of morals of different nations.

### **Keywords**

Kant, lectures, anthropology, racism, nations, hierarchy, ethics, universalism, cosmopolitanism

The last two decades of Kant studies are characterized by an exponential growth of monographs and papers on Kant's anthropology after the publication of his anthropological lectures in the XXV volume of the German Academy edition (AA) in 1997 and after the appearance of Reinhard Brandt's commentary to Kant's *Anthropology from the Pragmatic Point of View* in 1999. A significant part of these studies focuses on a specific problem

with Kant's concept of race<sup>1</sup> which is often used as a pretext for labelling Kant as a 'racist' thinker whose use of prejudices of its time does not only influence his anthropology but also, quite possibly, his critical philosophy as a whole.

While these are several subtle nuances in the ongoing debates which have meanwhile transgressed the limits of an internal philosophical controversy, affecting the reception of Kant's ideas in contemporary social studies, the arguments of those who take an active part in these debates can be roughly divided into two groups or interpretative strategies.<sup>2</sup> The first one is based on the assumption of the overall consistency of Kant's view of races (despite some minor changes), starting with his works of the 1760s and till his *Anthropology from the Pragmatic Point of View*. This strategy is represented not only by those who, like Robert Bernasconi (Bernasconi 2001, Bernasconi 2002), directly accuse Kant of racism while arguing that it has a major influence on the key elements of Kant's philosophy (e.g. on its universalism) but also by many scholars who undertake the role of Kant's advocates, for instance by stating that Kant simply adopts some Eurocentric prejudices of his time without actually integrating them into his anthropology.<sup>3</sup> The view concerning the role that Kant's *Lectures on Anthropology* should have played in this context is critically summed up by John Zammito: "What Kant provided his young men, then, were widely circulating ethnocentric and imperialist stereotypes of non-European peoples, pronounced from the authority of his lectern. How 'cosmopolitan' this will all have been, the reader can judge." (Zammito 2014, 244).

Another point of view, defended by Susan Shell (Shell 2006), Peter Fenves (Fenves 2003), Sankar Muthu (Muthu 2003, Muthu 2008, Muthu 2011) and Pauline Kleingeld (Kleingeld 2007), relies on the argument that Kant's initial concept of race, presented in his works of the late 1770s and the 1780s (*Of the Different Human Races, Determination of the Concept of Human Race, On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy*), has

---

<sup>1</sup> Among the most significant contributions to the new wave of debates on Kant's idea of race are (in chronological order): Eze 1995, Larrimore 1999, Bernasconi 2001 and 2002, Hill/Boxill 2001, Mills 2005, Kleingeld 2007 and Mills 2014.

\* Dr. Dr. Alexey Zhavoronkov is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. Email: [outdoors@yandex.ru](mailto:outdoors@yandex.ru).

\* Dr. Alexey Salikov works at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. E-mail: [dr.alexey.salikov@gmail.com](mailto:dr.alexey.salikov@gmail.com).

<sup>2</sup> These are, of course, studies which try to find a neutral point of view on the problem. For instance, Raphael Lagier, (2004) tries to "disconnect Kant's anthropological hypotheses from their 'moral implications' in order to undertake their dispassionate examination" (p. 4; see also Zammito 2006).

<sup>3</sup> For this view, see for instance Terra 2013.

---

undergone a major change during the 1790s. From the modern standpoint, this change, presumably influenced by Kant's idea of cosmopolitanism (and possibly by the events of the French Revolution), e.g. in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, raises another question: If we accept the argument on Kant's 'second thoughts'<sup>4</sup>, is it still possible to view his anthropology as a whole – or shall we rather speak of several, perhaps two or three anthropologies, developed by Kant during different stages of his life?<sup>5</sup>

While the latter question can hardly be answered without a long-time research, we can at least make a smaller initial step in order to shed some additional light on the arguments of both parties in the debate on Kant's concept of race. In order to do that, we will take a different look at the problem from the – still rather unpopular – perspective of Kant's *Lectures on Anthropology*.<sup>6</sup> In the first part of our paper, we will describe the influence of Kant's early lectures (from *VA-Collins* to *Menschenkunde*) on some key elements of Kant's 1780s theory of race presented in his published works. In the latter part, we will demonstrate that the supposed 'second thoughts' on race can rather be presented as a gradual and prolonged shift of perspective, starting from the lectures of the mid-1780s and ending with the *Anthropology* of 1798.

## I.

The problem with Kant's concept of race stems from the basic objective of his anthropology which is to describe the man as a whole,<sup>7</sup> thus not limiting the scope solely to physiology (e.g. to physiognomy) or to empirical psychology. Kant does not choose the way of a physiological, or 'horizontal', description which would solely register the basic natural differences without making them undergo a process of judgement. Aiming for the path of vertical classifications instead, he makes use of the dominant, Eurocentric point of

---

<sup>4</sup> The expression "second thoughts" was first used by Pauline Kleingeld (2007) in order to describe the fact that Kant simultaneously defended a universal moral theory and a racial hierarchy during the 1780s.

<sup>5</sup> Hypothetically speaking, we could differentiate between Kant's anthropology of the pre-critical period, his anthropology as part of his critical philosophy and his late anthropology which has a political dimension due to the concept of cosmopolitanism. This differentiation, however, would be oversimplified (1) since the differences between Kant's anthropology of the pre-critical period and his 'critical' anthropology are not always evident and (2) since we can find political elements of Kant's anthropology in his earlier lectures of the 1770s and 1780s.

<sup>6</sup> While there are some brief mentions of Kant's arguments from Lectures on Anthropology (e.g. in Kleingeld 2007, 576–577), there is still no paper which could provide a detailed analysis of the development of Kant's thoughts on race in his lectures. Interestingly, there is no contribution to the topic of Kant's concept of race even in the most informative Cambridge critical guide on Kant's Lectures, aside from a short paragraph in Zammito 2014 (pp. 243–244).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Brandt/Stark 1997, XI.

view shared by an overwhelming majority of authors of travel literature and by a significant number of naturalists of his time. Though, distancing ourselves from the physiological strategy does not necessarily imply that we are obliged to prefer hierarchical classifications to the non-hierarchical (non-vertical) ones. This consideration could be one of the reasons for Kant's change of strategy in his later works, including the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* where Kant refers to Girtanner's study on races which has received little to no attention from scholars participating in the debates on Kant's idea of race.

In Kant's early lectures, we only find fragmentary descriptions of separate races and nations without an explicit classification, although Kant still does occasionally compare races with each other. In *VA-Collins* (1772/73) we find a large paragraph concerning races which was not included in the shortened Cambridge edition of the *Lectures*:

Alle Americaner haben eine große Gleichgültigkeit in ihrem Character; so daß selbst die creolen daran participiren. Sie können am längsten in tiefen gedanken stehen, sie thun entweder gar nichts oder legen sich aufs Glücks und Wagespiel. An den Negern in Afrika hingegen erblickt man, ob es gleich mit America fast unter einem Klima steht, eine große Empfindsamkeit oder läppisches Naturell, es fehlt ihnen an Standhaftigkeit und sie sind zu allem ungeschickt, was ihnen auferlegt wird. Kurz sie haben keinen eigentlichen Character. Sie sind zum Tanzen geneigt und plaudern Nächte hindurch wenn sie gleich am Tage die schwersten Arbeiten verrichtet haben. Die Ostindier sind zurückhaltend und sehen alle wie Philosophen aus. Da hingegen die Europäer gemeinlich ungestüm aufgelegt sind. (AA XXV, 233)

The same four races will later be mentioned in the *Menschenkunde* (1781/82), as opposed to the announcement to Kant's lecture *Of the Different Human Races* (as part of his lecture course on Physical Geography) where Kant mainly differentiates between the 'white', the 'Negro', the 'Hunnish' and the 'Hinduish' race.<sup>8</sup> In *VA-Collins*, we find no trace of a vertical classification of races. The whole paragraph on races looks more like a loose collection of separate observations which are only linked together by the notion of character – the same notion which Kant will use for his description of nations and races in

<sup>8</sup> Still, in the 1777 version of this text, namely at the end of paragraph 3, Kant also uses the nomenclature which coincides with the one in his lectures: "noble blond" European, "copper red" American, "black" Senegambian and "olive-yellow" Indian race (cf. AA, II, 441).

---

other anthropological lectures of the 1770s and 1780s and in his late *Anthropology from Pragmatic Point of View*. Still, Kant does not spare some derogatory words for some races, especially for the 'Negro' race which, according to the text of the Ms, has a "silly natural aptitude", and therefore "no real character".<sup>9</sup>

In *VA-Parow* (1772/73), we find a more detailed passage on races (also not included in the English edition) which is still very similar to the one in *Collins*, starting from the contraposition of the supposed indifference of the American and the sensibility of the 'Negro' race and down to some key epithets:

Der Character aller Americaner ist die Unempfindlichkeit und die hieraus entspringende Gleichgültigkeit, ja selbst die Creolen die daselbst von Europäischen Eltern gebohren werden sind von der Beschaffenheit. Es afficirt sie nichts, sie werden weder durch Versprechungen noch Drohungen gerührt, ja sie sind, selbst in Ansehung der Geschlechter Neigung kaltsinnig. Die Nation welche wohl am meisten in Gedancken sizzen kann, sind die Indianer, die in ihrer Iugend wohl etwas Würffei spielen – welches an sich schon ein melancholisch Spiel ist – bey zunehmenden Jahren aber wohl etliche Stunden nach einander, an einer Angel sizzen können, wenn gleich kein Fisch ist der anbeißt. Die Negers in Africa sind von einem gantz entgegengesetzten Character. Sie haben eine sehr starke Empfindlichkeit, sind aber dabey läppisch; denn obgleich ihre Fasern sehr reizbar sind: so fehlt ihnen doch eine gewisse Festigkeit in denselben, sie sind wie die Affen und sehr geneigt zum Tanzen, so daß sie auch an dem einzigen Tage, den sie von ihren Arbeiten frey haben übermäßig viel tanzen, und wenn sie auch den ganzen Tag gearbeitet haben so plaudern sie doch fast die ganze Nacht hindurch, und schlafen wenig, ob sie gleich den folgenden Tag die schweresten Arbeiten zu verrichten haben; überdem sind sie sehr leichtsinnig und eitel. Der Character der Ost Indianer ist zurückhaltend und behutsam. Sie sehen alle so aus wie Philosophen. (AA XXV, 451)<sup>10</sup>

In spite of highly questionable character of certain remarks, there are no traces of an explicit classification. Still, one needs to take only one step from here to the schematic description in the *Menschenkunde* with its notion of 'incentive' (*Triebfeder*) as the main criterion of distinction between races. The adjective '*läppisch*' (meaning 'silly', 'childish')

---

<sup>9</sup> See a similar description in Ms Hesse (1770) of Kant's *Lectures on Physical Geography*. For the English version of this passage, see Stark 2011b, 94.

<sup>10</sup> While we in no way are trying to play the role of advocates of Kant's manner of characterizing different races, we still have to note that his monkey metaphor which is utterly insulting from the modern standpoint does not hold such meaning for Kant: he uses the same comparison in other contexts, e.g. to describe how the adults play with their children (AA IX, 460).

or ‘trivial’) which can be found both in *VA-Collins* and *VA-Parow* is understood by some scholars as the general inability to have sense for the sublime.<sup>11</sup> Still, in the context of the *Lectures*, it looks to have a more precise meaning. Kant uses the same word in the *Anthropology from Pragmatic Point of View* in the context of the opposition between the strong, active ‘*Empfindsamkeit*’ (‘sensibility’) and the weak, passive ‘*Empfinderei*’ (‘sentimentality’).<sup>12</sup> While the former allows us to make a choice and to control our feelings of pleasure and displeasure, the latter makes possible to be affected by feelings, including the feelings of the others, against our will. Thus, the statement on the absence of a real character in the ‘Negro’ race, present only in *VA-Collins* and not in *VA-Parow*, can be linked to Kant’s anthropological notion of human character as an “unyielding adherence to principles” (*VA-Mrongovius*, XXV, 1388). The ‘sentimentality’ stems from our inability to control our emotions and to make choice according to our principles. Although Kant does not use the notion of incentive and thus makes no statement on the psychological motivation of actions of people belonging to different races, he differentiates between the ability and inability to take or learn certain action, explicitly denying the possibility for the ‘Negro’ race to develop a character and to make independent judgements. Although we could assume that the statement concerning the absence of character is an addition made by his students (based on the differences between Ms Collins and Ms Hamilton and Ms Parow), we still cannot overlook the moral aspects of Kant’s usage of ‘*läppisch*’ which fits with Kant’s later anthropological statements on human character and races.

As we have briefly noted before, in the announcement of his 1775 lecture course on physical geography and in the later edition of this text, published in 1777 under the title *Of the Different Human Races*,<sup>13</sup> Kant offers his readers a different distinction in comparison to his lectures from 1772/73. Since in his *Lectures on Anthropology* Kant does not concern himself with the question on the origin on different races, his argument that human races are developed due to certain predispositions (‘*Anlagen*’) and from certain germs (‘*Keime*’), rooted in human nature (AA II, 434), cannot be found there. On the other hand, there are several instances of usage of the word ‘germ’ in an anthropological sense. (For instance, in

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Smidt 2004, 114 and van Eck 2015, 134.

<sup>12</sup> AA VII, 235–236. Interestingly, Kant does not describe the Negroid race as ‘*empfindlich*’ in his early works, such as *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764). Cf. AA II, 253 and a short remark in Loudon 2000, 99.

<sup>13</sup> For a brief account of the differences between the two editions, see Larrimore 2008, 349.

---

*VA-Friedländer* (1775/76; AA XXV, 651) we find a statement that even a bad human character which has some good seeds in it can still be rectified.) The same applies to the notion of natural predisposition, e.g. in Kant's description of the character of women (AA XXV, 700).

While we can view the *Lectures* – at least at some degree – as the earlier stages of development of Kant's hierarchical view on races, we still have to note that the topic of race is entirely absent in the anthropological lectures of 1775/76, as are Kant's observations on the role of geographical, especially climatic, factors in their development (including the development of their temperament), made in his lectures on physical geography and presented in a more concise form in *Of the Different Human Races*. Although Kant's argument that human temperament can be influenced by physiological factors, e.g. by the separation of the bile, can be traced back to Kant's lectures of the 1770s (cf. *VA-Parow*, 432), it is not used for the explanation of the differences between the skin color of the human races, as is the case in Kant's essay.

In the *Lectures* of the 1770s, we find another problematic argument concerning the ability of the races to develop themselves and to avoid extinction:

We find nations that do not appear to have progressed in the perfection of human nature, but have come to a standstill, while others, as in Europe, are always progressing. If the Europeans had not discovered America, the Americans would have remained in their condition. And we believe even now that they will attain to no perfection, for it appears that they will all be exterminated, not through acts of murder, for that would be gruesome! but rather that they will die out. For it is calculated only a twentieth part of all the previous Americans are still there. Since they only retain a small part, while the Europeans take so much away from them, there will arise internal struggles between them, and they will be in friction with one another.<sup>14</sup> (*VA-Pillau*, AA XXV, 840)<sup>15</sup>

This topic, mentioned several times in studies on Kant's ethics and anthropology (e.g. in Wood 2007, 8 and Cohen 2009, 39), plays a marginal role in *Of the Different Human Races* where Kant assumes the white race to be the perfect one among the four because of

---

<sup>14</sup> All English passages of the *Lectures* cited in this paper are from the Cambridge edition (2014) which preserves the original pagination of the German volume of *Akademieausgabe*.

<sup>15</sup> See also Kant's note to his anthropological lectures in XV, 878: "Alle racen werden ausgerottet werden (Amerikaner und Neger können sich nicht selbst regiren. Dienen also nur zu Slaven), nur nicht die der Weissen." For a further discussion, see Larrimore 1999, 113–115 and Bernasconi 2002, 159–160.

the temperate climate it lives in.<sup>16</sup> The idea of the possible extinction of non-white races which are supposedly hindered in their development because of the geographical factors was, however, abandoned in Kant's later works.

Our next important source among Kant's anthropological lectures belongs to the critical period. It is the aforementioned *Menschenkunde* (presumably 1781/82) with its distinction between American, Negro, Hindu and European race which is shaped much more like a classification in comparison to the loose description in the lectures of 1772/73. For the first time, Kant uses the notion of incentive as the main criterion of distinction. Still, we find here some key elements of the previous descriptions of two races:

- 1) The American people acquires no culture. It has no incentives; because affect and passion are absent in it. They are not in love, thus they are also not fertile. They hardly speak at all, do not caress one another, also do not care for anything, and are lazy, *they paint their faces in an ugly manner.*
- 2) The Negro race, one could say, is exactly the opposite of the American; they are full of affect and passion, very lively, talkative and vain. They acquire culture, but only a culture of slaves; that is, they allow themselves to be trained. They have many incentives, are also sensitive, afraid of beatings, and also do many things out of honor.
- 3) It is true that the Hindus have incentives, but they have a strong degree of composure, and they all look like philosophers. Despite this, they are nevertheless very much inclined toward anger and love. As a result they acquire culture in the highest degree, but only in the arts and not in the sciences. They never raise it up to abstract concepts; a great Hindustani man is the one who has gone very far in deceit and who has a lot of money. The Hindus always remain as they are, they never bring culture further, although they began to cultivate themselves much earlier.
- 4) The white race contains all incentives and talents in itself; as a result *it must be considered in a bit more detail. Information concerning it is given above. (Menschenkunde, AA XXV, 1186 f.)*

Kant's classification does look more like a developed version of the ones presented in his lectures of the 1770s rather than a variation of the distinction in *Of the Different Human Races*, even though Kant previously identifies the Americans with the Hunnish race "that

---

<sup>16</sup> In the 1775 edition, Kant writes: "If we were to ask with which of the present races the first *human lineal stem stock* might well have had the greatest similarity, we will presumably – although without any prejudice on behalf of the presumptuously greater perfection of one color <when compared to> another – pronounce <favor> for the <race> of *whites*" (cit. from the English translation in Mikkelsen 2013, 54).

---

is still not fully acclimated" (AA II, 433). Instead of the (at least explicitly) non-hierarchical distinction in accordance to skin colour and temperament we see a qualitative and quantitative ethical distinction according the ability to acquire culture due to presence or absence of incentives in each race. Kant's description of each race includes some blatantly racist remarks, such as the one concerning the inability for the people of Negroid race (to use a later, non-Kantian term) to acquire culture aside from one of slaves. Firstly, this argument approves that Kant – at least at this point of development of his anthropology – sees chattel slavery in a positive light.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, Kant's statement does clearly imply a strong, invariable hierarchical relation between races where the Negroid race not only has the position at the bottom but also cannot change it by the means of cultural development. The American race, as the inert one with no incentives at all, is placed even lower.<sup>18</sup> In this light (and in the light of the previously cited passage from *VA-Pillau*), it would be safe to assume that Kant does not yet see the oppression of native Americans by the Europeans as a problem, as opposed to his position on this matter in *Perpetual Peace*.

Following his distinction, Kant notes that "whenever any revolutions have occurred, they have always been brought about by the whites, and the Hindus, Americans, and Negroes have never participated in them" (*Menschenkunde*, AA XXV, 1187). Although this argument may appear neutral *per se*, it actually reinforces Kant's previous statements on the impossibility of a cultural improvement of other races since he implies that revolutions are social-political key tools of human improvement (cf. *VA-Friedländer*, AA XXV, 690–691).

Kant's racist remarks from his lectures are reflected in his later works *Determination of the Concept of a Human Race* (1785) and *On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy* (1788) which, together with *Of the Different Human Races*, are widely considered as most important sources on Kant's concept of race.<sup>19</sup> The essay from 1785 simply reflects the same division into four races as in *Menschenkunde* (cf. AA VIII, 93) without any moral implications or hierarchies since Kant only speaks of physical

---

<sup>17</sup> As Pauline Kleingeld demonstrates in her answer to Robert Bernasconi, Kant amends his position at a later point cf. Kleingeld 2007, 597).

<sup>18</sup> We find the same hierarchy in Kant's Lectures on Physical Geography (AA IX, 316).

<sup>19</sup> On disagreements between Kant and Herder (concerning Kant's racial hierarchy and the insufficient character of the differentiation criteria of common ancestry and skin color) and on Kant's answer to Georg Forster's criticism in UTP, see esp. Zammito 2002, Kleingeld 2007 and Larrimore 2008. We have not included these important details from our analysis since they have no direct connection with the remarks on races in the anthropological lectures and have been exhaustingly studied by Kant scholars.

differences. However, in his essay of 1788, Kant once again adds the moral dimension to his description of races, referring to Matthias Christian Sprengel's *Contributions to the Study of Peoples and Countries* in support of the argument that Indians and people of the Negroid race can only acquire slave culture, being unable to have enough impetus for free labor (AA VIII, 174). Kant also stresses that Indians and 'Negroes' do not have the ability to adapt themselves to the cold climate (ibid.) and quietly assumes that the white race has no such difficulties in regard to the migration to countries with hot climate. Although he abandons the use of the notion of incentive as the distinguishing moral factor and does not use the same derogatory manner of description as in his lectures, his main argument proves to be only a minor revision of the one in *Menschenkunde*.

## II.

We clearly see that Kant's racist remarks can be found not only in his lectures on physical geography (more often cited by scholars in this context) but also in his anthropological lectures. We also find indications of a gradual development of a racial hierarchy which takes a clear shape in *Menschenkunde* and coincides with Kant's view on races in his published works of the 1770s and the 1780s. In this light, we face several complex and unpleasant questions. Kant's idea of race is usually analyzed in the context of his ethics and political philosophy or, more generally, from the perspective of his critical philosophy. But what role does it play in his anthropology, especially in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* since Kant's formerly described remarks on races are certainly in conflict with his arguments concerning the anthropological role of cosmopolitanism? Do we need to treat Kant's racial hierarchy as an evidence that his pragmatic anthropology – which investigates, what a human being “can and should make of himself” – is specified only for those who belong to the white race since the others do not have the necessary aptitude to freely develop themselves? Or should we state, together with Robert Loudon, that Kant's thoughts on primarily physiological differences between races do not belong to his pragmatic anthropology at all since they only represent theoretical knowledge of the world?<sup>20</sup> In order to address these problems, we have to explain the role of the idea of race from the perspective of the development of Kant's anthropology in its later stages. Although there are no mentions of the general differences

---

<sup>20</sup> See Loudon 2000, 94.

---

between races in the lectures after the *Menschenkunde*, there are some other interesting tendencies in regard to Kant's description of races which – at least partially – explain the final structure of Kant's anthropological project, as presented in the *Anthropology* of 1798.

As mentioned above, we cannot find any traces of racial hierarchies, even in their more primitive forms, in the 'canonical' anthropological lectures after 1782 (*VA-Mrongovius* and *VA-Busolt*), in contrast to Kant's lectures on physical geography (including the *Dohna* lectures of 1792).<sup>21</sup> In *VA-Mrongovius*, we find instead a strong statement (not present in the previous lectures) that "the human being is free by nature, and all human beings are by nature equal" (AA XXV, 1419). This, along with the gradual development of Kant's notion of cosmopolitanism which goes a long way from an elitist concept in *Menschenkunde*<sup>22</sup> to an egalitarian idea in the late 1790s, creates an obvious discrepancy between the racist tendencies in Kant's previous descriptions of races and his universalist claims – even from the more limited perspective of development of the pragmatic anthropology.

Still, there is also another factor of significant importance. One has to note that Kant, even in his early lectures, does not solely differentiate between races but also between groups of nations which, according to his classification, belong to the same race, for instance, between Oriental and Occidental Europeans. Already in *VA-Friedländer* (XXV, 552), he makes a major statement concerning the differences between Occidental Europeans and "Oriental peoples", assuming that the latter do not have any ability to use pure reason:

Reason is further a faculty of cognition from concepts. Different people have a use of reason on the occasion of intuition, but not from pure concepts, which is the pure use of reason. Those having insight into something according to analogy by means of images, have a use of reason, but not from concepts. It seems that for a large part of the human race, nature has failed them with regard to the faculty of judging from concepts. All Oriental peoples belong to this part. From this it follows that with them the whole of morality cannot be pure, because it must be cognized from concepts. The pure moral

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Kleingeld 2007, 591. On the problematic editorial situation with the Ms Dohna which is essentially a compilation of texts from several sources, see Brandt/Stark 1997, esp. CXLVI. On the role of Ms Dohna in the corpus of Kant's lectures on physical geography, see Stark 2011a.

<sup>22</sup> AA XXV, 1202: "Citizens of a state cannot and may not have cosmopolitan purposes, with the exception of scholars, who can be of use to the world with books; rather, it is the concern of the prince, who has neglected it so much that up to now there has not yet been a monarch who has done something in which he has taken what is best for the entire world in view: [...]."

concept is lacking in their morality, hence in their case nothing can arise from the principle of morality.

The same point, based on the opposition between European rationality (whose roots lie in Greek philosophy) and Occidental sensuality,<sup>23</sup> is made in Kant's *Reflections on Anthropology* which contain drafts for his lectures.<sup>24</sup> It is also intrinsically linked to the later description of the Hindu race in the *Menschenkunde* and thus to the racial hierarchy presented in these and in the previous lectures. According to Kant, some races or certain nations belonging to them have no access to 'pure concepts' due to their sensuality which results in their dependence of symbols or images (cf. XXV, 536) and thus can easily degenerate into foolish irrationality. This point reminds us of Kant's statement that people of the 'Negro' race are incapable of understanding concepts due to their "silly natural aptitude" which can be described, in Kant's language, as 'sentimentality'.

These observations on the character of certain parts of races are, at this point, explicitly connected to Kant's racial hierarchy. It looks as if Kant means to develop this hierarchy even further, adding a sub-hierarchy of different nations belonging to the 'white race' according to the difference in their use of reason. In the later lectures of the 1780s, however, he develops a more nuanced description of nations which, on the one hand, still needs moral characteristics but, on the other hand, loses its connection to the main criteria of his racial classification. While the small paragraphs dedicated to the character of nations in the lectures of the early 1770s (*VA-Parow*, *VA-Collins*) are in fact filled with observations on the character of the 'American' and the 'Negro' race, in the later lectures the descriptions races are gradually replaced by the observations on nations, focusing on the European ones. In *Menschenkunde*, the paragraph on races is separated from the paragraph on the character of nations. It then disappears in the later lectures of the 1780s, while the part on nations plays an even major role in *VA-Mrongovius* (1784/85) in comparison to *Menschenkunde*. This, of course, does not mean that Kant abruptly abandons all attempts at hierarchic classifications based on moral criteria. While working on more detailed descriptions of different nations, he still sticks to his opposition of the

---

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ibid.*: "The Orient is the land of sensation, but the Occident of sound and pure reason. The merit of the Occident is to judge determinately through concepts; therefore this advantage of Occidental talent must not be ruined by analogies and images, for it would otherwise be the degeneration of Occidental taste."

<sup>24</sup> See Reflection 789 (AA XV, 345).

---

culturally strong Occidental rationality and the weak Oriental sensuality.<sup>25</sup> Still, this simple differentiation is not as definitive as the characteristics of races: Kant does imply that Occidental nations can develop rationality, just as a young man can develop it in the course of his life. This dynamic image contrasts with the lapidary description of the racial 'incentives' in the lectures of the early 1780s. Although Kant says no word on the development of non-white races in his lectures of the 1780s, we can interpret the change in his opinion concerning the possibility for Occidental nations to change themselves, as a prelude to his cosmopolitan idea of cultural development of all human beings in his late works.

The presented arguments can be countered from two different sides. On the one hand, we know that Kant's racist remarks can be found in his in his previously mentioned published works of the late 1780s and in the lectures on physical geography (e.g. as late as in *Dohna* lectures from 1792). Therefore, we can only assume that Kant had his doubts concerning the role and form of his anthropological analysis of races but did not yet abandon his racial hierarchy. On the other hand, one can reasonably remind us that Kant sees Occidental and Oriental nations as part of the 'white' race which, according to *Menschenkunde*, has all necessary incentives in order to develop themselves. Thus, the dynamic picture of the development of rationality may still, according to Kant' logic, not be applied to other races – although we find no definitive arguments for either possibility in the anthropological lectures of the late 1780s. While these objections are fully valid, we should keep in mind the result of the development of Kant's position, presented in his *Anthropology* which contains no traces of a racial hierarchy, a detailed, also non-hierarchic description of different European nations and (at least implicitly) a cosmopolitan view of races.

From the developments in Kant's lectures and in his published works, we can conclude that the interest of the late Kant<sup>26</sup> shifts from the morals of races to the morals of nations, primarily in the light of his political philosophy and of the idea of

---

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *VA-Mrongovius*, 1232–1233: "The sensibility of cognition is very common among all the oriental peoples, for there they all speak with pictures and do not have spiritual and abstract words such as we have; but this indicates a weak cultivation of their spirit, for in this respect they are like the first human beings who also used pictography." See also *VA-Busolt*, 1445: "Je grösser die Sinlichkeit ist, desto kleiner ist der Verstand. Orientalische Völker haben mehr Sinnlichkeit als Verstand. Denn sie Reduciren ihre Begriffe größtentheils auf Bilder. Die Orientaler scheinen weniger Natur gaben als die Occidentaler zu besitzen."

<sup>26</sup> Under "late" Kant we understand a certain period of the development of his philosophy, starting after the publication of his third *Critique* (1790), marked by his interest in the topics concerning right and politics.

cosmopolitanism. Certain historical events should also have played a major role. While many scholars rightly stress the importance of the French revolution for the change of Kant's position on slavery and on colonialism in general, we should not underestimate other possible sources influencing of Kant's opinion on the slavery issue, such as the critics of European colonialism – Montesquieu, Bayle, Hume, Rousseau, Davenant, Rutherford, Blackstone, Raynal, Diderot, Marmontel and Justi.<sup>27</sup> Although we cannot assess with high confidence that Kant had read all of them, we cannot deny that many of their books enjoyed a widespread popularity in the XVIII century. There is a high probability that Kant was acquainted, for instance, with the monumental and highly popular work of Abbé de Raynal “A History of the Two Indies” (1770) which attacked colonialism and denounced slavery as immoral.<sup>28</sup>

Another possible source of influence on Kant's opinion on slavery and on colonialism in the 1790s might have been the Haitian revolution which began in 1791 and ended in 1804 with the former colony's independence and with the foundation of a state free from slavery, ruled by non-whites and former captives. While we do not find anywhere in Kant's works, lectures and notes even a single mention of Haitian revolution, it is difficult to imagine that he has not heard or read about this remarkable event, especially in the light of its close connection to the French Revolution. The Haitian revolution should have presented a clear evidence for Kant that his former opinion on the impossibility for non-white races to participate in revolutions, let alone to initiate them, proved to be wrong. But it also could have been the following abolition of slavery by the French Jacobins, that may have affected him to rethink his earlier conception of the races.<sup>29</sup> In *Perpetual Peace*, Kant speaks of “injustice” of the European nations towards native Americans and the ‘Negro’ race (AA VIII, 358) – a far cry from his explicit statement on the eventual extinction of non-white races in *VA-Pillau* and from the silent acceptance of their oppression in *Menschenkunde*.

Since Kant has composed his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* based on the material of his lectures, it can be viewed as the final stage of development of the

<sup>27</sup> More on this in Adam 2006, 61-70, Cavallar 2002, 254–259 and Muthu 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Georg Cavallar (2015, 70–71) who also points out that de Raynal's books was “an international blockbuster with more than thirty editions” (p. 70).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Kleingeld 2014, 64–65.

---

Kantian idea of race even in the narrow focus of our analysis<sup>30</sup>. As mentioned before, in the *Anthropology* Kant does not present his concept of race in detail, instead referring to Christoph Girtanner's study *Concerning the Kantian Principle of Natural History* (1796) as a sole necessary source which provides the reader with a thorough explanation on the topic (AA VII, 320). Since Girtanner does provide his readers with a neutral description of physical differences between races without touching the subject of morals, we can conclude that the late Kant has abandoned his previous anthropological attempts to establish a connection between the description of natural features of each race and a racial hierarchy based on moral criteria<sup>31</sup>. This argument can be reinforced through the analysis of the paragraph on varieties of races in *Anthropology* since Kant does see the "fusion of different races" as of Nature's 'aim' (AA VII, 320) which radically contradicts his statements in the lectures on physical geography.<sup>32</sup> Instead of a detailed discussion of the character of races, Kant makes relatively short remarks on the character of major European nations. These remarks majorly coincide with more extensive descriptions in *VA-Mrongovius*, giving us a further proof of a gradual shift of Kant's focus from races to nations in the context of his rejection of previous hierarchies. In this light, it would be more appropriate to speak of a slow development and changing of Kant's concept of race in his pragmatic anthropology, instead of an overall consistency through all periods of his philosophy or, on the contrary, of 'second thoughts' which emerge as late as in the mid-1790s.

But why does Kant include races in his *Anthropology* at all? As absurd as it may seem at the first glance, a characteristic of morals of each race would fit into the Kantian pragmatic anthropology much better in comparison to the description of physical features. In fact, Kant faces a dilemma: to return to the racial (and racist) classifications,

---

<sup>30</sup> The idea that Kant has changed his mind about race characteristics in 1790s was first expressed by Kleingeld (2007).

<sup>31</sup> In his article *Antinomies of Race: Diversity and Destiny in Kant* (2008), Mark Larrimore claims that Kant stopped writing on race in the 1790s and has barely touched the topic in the 'Anthropological Characteristic' of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* not because he has lost his interest or changed his mind about it, but because he did not have to write more on it. During the 1790s, Kant's essays on race were repeatedly cited and republished in different collections, thus standing in the middle of the debates on this topic. In other words, Kant's opinion on race was well known among contemporaries so he could just give a reference to detailed presentation of his ideas (Larrimore 2008, 358). Still, Larrimore's line of argument does not explain why Kant refers to Girtanner instead of other sources which do not exclude the moral aspect from the description of different races.

<sup>32</sup> More on this see in Kleingeld 2007, 590, with a reference to the lectures of 1792 (Dohna) which contain traces of a racial hierarchy.

reestablishing their ties with the notion of character and with the description of different temperaments, just as in his lectures of the 1770s, or to reject this strategy, leaving solely the physiological part of the characteristics. Of course, in the light of the development of Kant's thought the first option is no longer possible. Still, Kant does not (or maybe has no time to) proceed to the last step. Even in its reduced state, the paragraph on races remains, further complicating the problem of consistency and limits of Kant's project of pragmatic anthropology.

## References

- Adam, U. (2006), *The Political Economy of J.H.G. Justi*, Peter Lang, Oxford.
- Bernasconi, R. (2001), "Who Invented the Concept of Race? – Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race", in: R. Bernasconi (ed.), *Race*, Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 11–36.
- Bernasconi, R. (2002), "Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism", in: T. Lott, J. Ward (eds.), *Philosophers on Race*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 145–166.
- Brandt, R.; Stark, W. (1997), „Einleitung“, in: *Immanuel Kant, Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 25: Vorlesungen über Anthropologie*, De Gruyter, Berlin, VII–CLII.
- Cavallar, G. (2002), *The Rights of Strangers: Theories of international hospitality, the global community, and political justice since Vitoria*, Ashgate, Aldershot.
- Cavallar, G. (2015), *Kant's Embedded Cosmopolitanism: History, Philosophy, and Education for World Citizens*, de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston.
- Eze, E. Ch. (1995), "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology", in: Katherine Faulkner (ed.), *Anthropology and the German Enlightenment*, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, pp. 196–237.
- Fenves, P. D. (2003), *Late Kant: Towards another law of the Earth*, Routledge, New York, 2003.
- Girtanner, Ch. (1796), "Concerning the Kantian Principle in Natural History", in: Jon M. Mikkelsen (ed.), *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings*, SUNY Press, Albany, 2013.
- Hill, Th. E.; Boxill, B. (2001), "Kant and Race", in: B. Boxill (ed.), *Race and Racism*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 448–471.

- 
- Kleingeld, P. (2007), "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race", in: *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 229, pp. 573–592.
- Kleingeld, P. (2014), "Kant's second thoughts on colonialism", in: K. Flikschuh, L. Ypi (eds.), *Kant and Colonialism: Historical and Critical Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Lagier, R. (2004), *Les races humaines selon Kant*, PUF, Paris.
- Larrimore, M. (1999), "Sublime Waste: Kant on the Destiny of Races", in: Catherine Wilson (ed.), *Civilization and Oppression*, University of Calgary Press, Calgary, pp. 93–137.
- Larrimore, M. (2008), "Antinomies of Race: Diversity and Destiny in Kant", in: *Patterns of Prejudice*, no. 42/4–5, pp. 341–363.
- Louden, R. B. (2000), *Kant's Impure Ethics: From Rational Beings to Human Beings*, Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford, pp. 2000.
- Mikkelsen, J. M. (ed.) (2013), [\*Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings\*](#), State University of New York Press, Albany.
- Mills, Ch. W. (2005), "Kant's Untermenschen", in: A. Valls (ed.), *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, pp. 169–193.
- Mills, Ch. W. (2014), "Kant and Race, Redux", in: *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, vol. 35, no. 1–2, pp. 125–157.
- Muthu, S. (2003), *Enlightenment against empire*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Muthu, S. (2008), "Adam Smith's critique of international trading companies: Theorizing "globalization" in the age of enlightenment", in: *Political Theory*, vol. 36, issue 2, pp. 185–212.
- Muthu, S. (2011), "Conquest, commerce, and cosmopolitanism in Enlightenment political thought", in: S. Muthu (ed.), *Empire and modern political thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 199–231.
- Raynal, G. Abbé de (1780), *A History of the Two Indies. A Translated Selection of Writings from Raynal's Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements des Européens dans les Deux Indes*, P. Jimack (ed.), Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006.
- Shell, S. M. (2006), Kant's Concept of a Human Race, in: S. Eigen, M. Larrimore (eds.), *The German Invention of Race*, SUNY Press, Albany, pp. 55–72.

- Smidt, W. (2004), “Fetishists and Magicians – The Description of African Religions by Immanuel Kant”, in: F. Ludwig, A. Adogame (eds.), *European Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa*, Harassowitz, Wiesbaden, pp. 109–116.
- Stark, W. (2011a), “Kant’s Lectures on Physical Geography: A Brief Outline of Its Origins, Transmission and Development: 1754–1805”, in: Stuart Elden, Eduardo Mendieta (eds.), *Reading Kant’s Geography*, State University of New York Press, Albany, pp. 69–85.
- Stark, W. (2011b), “Historical and Philological References on the Question of a Possible Hierarchy of Human “Races,” “Peoples,” or “Populations” in Immanuel Kant – A Supplement”, in: Stuart Elden, Eduardo Mendieta (eds.), *Reading Kant’s Geography*, State University of New York Press, Albany, pp. 87–102.
- Terra, R. (2013), „Hat die kantische Vernunft eine Hautfrage?“, In: Stefano Bacin et al. (ed.), *Kant und die Philosophie in weltbürgerlicher Absicht: Akten des XI. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, Bd. 1, De Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 431–447.
- Van Eck, C. (2015), *Art, Agency and Living Presence: From the Animated Image to the Excessive Object*, Leiden University Press, Leiden.
- Wood, A. W.; Loudon, R. (eds.) (2014), *Immanuel Kant, Lectures on Anthropology*, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Zammito, J. H. (2002), *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London.
- Zammito, J. H. (2006), “Rez.: Raphael Lagier, Les Races selon Kant”, in: *Isis*, no. 97/1, pp. 154–155.
- Zammito, J. H. (2014), “What a young man needs for his venture into the world: The function and evolution of the Characteristics”, in: Alix Cohen (ed.), *Kant’s Lectures on Anthropology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 230–248.

