

Title: Kant as Methodology: Race, White Ignorance, and Intellectual Responsibility

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Abstract

In this article I situate Kant's theories and epistemologies of race within a wider architecture of knowledge production and coloniality, and from there consider how his approach can illuminate our understandings about methodology and scholarly praxis.

In doing so, I seek to move the conversation beyond Kant's raciology, which by and large has been 'outed', and to instead draw attention to his methodology and praxis. I argue that by recognising and articulating Kant's philosophical and practical incrementalism, dualism, and erasures in knowledge production and dissemination as a methodology, we can better identify, make sense of, and critique those methodologies when they are employed in contemporary scholarship and political action. Additionally, I attempt to answer the question of what comes next for a racially aware Kantian studies (or at least point towards possibilities) by drawing upon decolonial and postcolonial theories and a necessarily interdisciplinary approach. I propose a three-step approach to address Kant's raciology and white ignorance that includes historicity, citational politics, and contrapuntality, as reflexive methods with which Kantian scholars and students may be able to move forward both ethically and intellectually

Introduction

In this article I situate Kant's theories and epistemologies of race within a wider architecture of knowledge production and coloniality, and from there consider how his approach can

illuminate our understandings about methodology and scholarly praxis. In doing so, I consider how scholars and students of Kant can take the knowledge of his raciology forward in productive and reflexive ways. With this contribution to the continuing debate on race in Kantian studies, I build on two propositions by Huaping Lu-Adler at the start of her book *Kant, Race, and Racism* (2023): the first of these propositions is that “[t]he standard approach to Kant’s racial views is largely individualistic”, and therefore Lu-Adler advocates the importance of moving the discussion away from Kant as an *individual* to a recognition of the role that he plays in “the formation of racist ideology” (Lu-Adler, 2023:6). A focus on the formation of this ideology shifts our concerns beyond whether or not Kant renounced his views before he died (see the debate between Kleingeld: 2007; 2014; and Bernasconi, 2011), whether he was a moral egalitarian (Louden), or whether he was an inconsistent one (Mills, 2014). Thus, any commentary on his *character* and whether he was good or bad is of secondary importance. In this article, I adopt this more expansive concern about the power and implications of Kant’s work as part of a greater architecture of knowledge. But in doing so, I wish to move the conversation on even further, focusing less on the racist ideas and theories of Kant, which by and large have been ‘outed’, and to instead draw attention to his methodology and praxis. Moreover, rather than claiming a direct connection and transmission between Kant’s ideas and the existence of racist ideas today (which I am not refuting and have already argued elsewhere) I argue that by recognising and articulating Kant’s philosophical and practical incrementalism, dualism, and erasures in knowledge production and dissemination as a *methodology*, we can better identify, make sense of, and critique those methodologies when they are employed in contemporary scholarship and political action.

This brings me to my second contribution in this article: the above shift from a concern about Kant and his ideas, to a concern about the legacy of Kantian methods for knowledge production more broadly means the stakes of the debate become greater but, perhaps

paradoxically, they also become more personal for the knowledge producer: using reflections on Kant and race to interrogate knowledge production writ large invites all of us as scholars to be more reflexive about our part and complicity in ideas and methods that perpetuate injustices, and our role in failing to challenge harmful political and social trends. Thus, here I build on another of Lu-Adler's propositions, that is, her incorporation of and advocacy of scholarly positionality in the debate. In subtitling her book "views from somewhere", she alludes to the standpoint from which one theorises, a point she expands on in her introductory chapter (2023: 30). Standpoint theory is the notion that where you are located, what your experiences have been, and how you identify, have some bearing on your scholarship. What you perceive, what you take seriously, what you overlook or deem irrelevant – these are choices that are made on the basis of our standpoint (Harding, 1991; 1993). However, since this point appears early on, and briefly, before the rest of the book turns to the 'meat' of Kant's philosophy, it is very possible that many readers may lose sight of their positionality and return to engaging with Kant's ideas from (an assumed) distance. I seek here to unsettle that assumption of distance from Kant's philosophy, but also the assumption of distance from the world around us.

In doing so, I ask the question: what comes next? We now have the benefit of nearly thirty years of (necessary) debate on Kant's race theory or racism, specifically in his geography and anthropology. Those who view Kant's thoughts on race as incidental to his wider philosophy would no doubt argue that what comes next is that *we move on* and return to the 'serious' work of his moral philosophy (the implications being that the excavations on race are not serious). But for those who recognise the import of this crucial work undertaken now by multiple scholars both in and outwith the field of philosophy, ongoing questions remain: how does one continue to write and teach on Kant without adopting a simplistic 'add race and stir' approach? Or, if one chooses to focus primarily on Kant's race, how does one avoid

contributing to another academic cottage industry in which racism is reduced to a matter of mere intellectual curiosity, or treated as yet another Kantian puzzle to solve, ultimately recentering Kant's primacy and currency in philosophy and political theory? Or, perhaps, one should eschew Kant's work altogether? Suffice to say, none of these options are satisfactory.

Resisting the above, I attempt to answer the question of what comes next for a racially-aware Kantian studies (or at least point towards possibilities) by drawing upon decolonial and postcolonial theories and a necessarily, inescapably, interdisciplinary approach. The field of critical philosophy has played an indispensable role in excavating and arguing for greater attention to be given to the presence and significance of race in Kantian theory – it deserves plaudits for this. However, I argue that to make sense of the politics of Kant's knowledge production, to understand why it still matters today, and to usher this cognisance towards an emancipatory agenda, we need to draw insights from enquiries and frameworks in history, sociology, linguistics, and political science, all of which grapple more closely with the concept, functions, and application of power in the world we live in. In the final section of the article, then, I discuss historicity and provincialisation, citational politics, and contrapuntality, as reflexive methods with which Kantian scholars and students may be able to move forward both ethically and intellectually.

This practice of reflexivity might be seen by some to be controversial, precisely because they view knowledge as dispassionate, as a pursuit of objectivity, wherein its scientific validity is sullied by the introduction of subjectivity, and in which case one ought not let societal considerations get in the way. If, in that vein, we erroneously see knowledge production in abstraction from the world, historical context, and subsequent impact, one can safely view Kant's work in a bubble, as if his race work was merely a part of his philosophical 'working out' before he reached his actual goal – and thus one need not read deeper into his

‘raciology’. But doing so in fact diminishes Kant’s contribution. Ironically, the typical compartmentalisation of Kant’s work into neat boxes of geography, anthropology, and (apparently far more serious and worthy) moral philosophy, in which no ideas trespass from one box to the other, would and should fundamentally change *precisely* as a result of giving due credit to Kant’s intellect and systemic thinking. In many ways, as Lu-Adler notes, this is about being fair to Kant. To not diminish the importance of Kant’s work on race, means to not distort his own racial theorising due to our own discomfort with it. In the current climate in which we are seeing a serious backlash against this reflexive accountability work, from the closure of ‘Diversity, Equality, Inclusion’ schemes to the detentions and deportations of dissenting scholars in the United States and elsewhere, persistence in this task requires courage, ethical clarity, and intellectual rigour.

‘White Ignorance’ and the Role of Kantian Methodology in Wider Knowledge Production

In this section I explore the role that Kant has played in the wider architecture of colonial knowledge production. This requires one to look beyond merely the ideas of the individual to those influenced by his ideas and especially the methodologies granted permissibility by a Kantian blueprint. To unsettle this individualisation and take a more structural approach to this question, it is helpful to draw from other disciplines and critical approaches that enable one to study across time and into the present, allowing one to trace a mirroring of his methods beyond academia and within broader society and politics. My core argument here is that Kant’s incremental philosophy (race as a geographical inevitability, then of racial hierarchies as morally implicating, and finally of a moral philosophy for the ‘civilised’ that leaves behind the messy raciology that allowed him to get there¹) provides a transferrable

¹ See Gani 2017 for a more thorough explanation of my reasoning.

rubric of moral duality in both contemporary knowledge production and praxis in the ‘real world’, whereby a simultaneous process of racial categorisation, stigmatisation, and discrimination on the one hand, and the erasure of race alongside universalism on the other, can both coexist and in fact are co-dependent.²

To make this argument, I draw briefly on the concept and framework of coloniality, and follow this in more depth with the Millsian concept of ‘white ignorance’. In coining the term ‘coloniality of power’, the Peruvian decolonial scholar Aníbal Quijano sought to demonstrate that colonialism is not only a concept, nor an ideology, but also a *structure* (Quijano, 2000). This, he explained, was maintained through three elements to form a matrix – racial hierarchy, capitalist culture, and finally knowledge. He argued this matrix was purposefully constructed, taught as scientific fact and upheld as a normative belief in Europe and then the Americas. This knowledge system helped to codify and justify racism through ‘scientific fact’ and involved, to give one example, “the separation of mind from the body, the identification of humanness with the mind, and a subsequent hierarchy in which Europe was viewed as the locus of reason and thus humanity, while non-Europeans were viewed as mere bodies deficient of humanity.” (Gani, 2017:) Philosophers of the enlightenment played a central role in this codification of knowledge, among whom Kant, given his scholarly repute (both in his lifetime and posthumously) and his meticulous system-building, was, I would argue, particularly significant. Even before contributing to a methodology of duality, Kant’s racial taxonomy (though his was not the only one to circulate) served to embed within European epistemology the notion of a biological and moral hierarchy of humans, which,

² The question of whether this methodology is intended by Kant or not (and therefore the question of whether he was purposefully misleading with his notion of universalism) is, I would argue, not relevant here. The fact remains his work has facilitated a methodology of duality. We do know Kant produced a racial taxonomy in his geography; and we do know he utilised it in his anthropology, offering a rubric of application; and we do know he omitted it from his moral philosophy without retraction of earlier ideas; thus recognising him as a pioneer in the methodology of duality that this produced, without obscuring or undermining his agency, is valid.

whether intended or not, offered justification for colonial practices. Such academic and discursive productions of colonial and racist tropes reflect just one mechanism through which the matrix of coloniality was and is upheld; while this production and assertion of racial hierarchies is neither a complex or sophisticated method of coloniality, it is nevertheless a primary and persistent one.

But far more sophisticated and subtle in operation is a Kantian methodology of duality, which as a form of knowledge production also sits within and upholds a matrix of coloniality. To explain this more fully I turn to Charles Mills' theory of 'white ignorance'. As Mills lays out in his ten classificatory points in the theory, white ignorance is a necessarily socially constructed phenomenon insofar that it is based on the social construction of race and doxastic adherence to racial taxonomies. As such, it may be a product and manifestation of 'whiteness' but is not limited to white people. Moreover, while it stems from a racist theoretical and sociological position, those that participate in white ignorance are not necessarily racist. Mills makes clear this is an ignorance that is attributed to race, i.e. whiteness, and is distinguishable from general ignorance that may be held and shared by white people (such as flawed notions about the planets two hundred years ago, which was an ignorance but not a 'white' one (Mills, 2007: 20)). Rather 'white ignorance' is a "non-knowing...in which race – white racism and/or white racial domination and their ramifications – plays a crucial causal role" (2007: 21).

In a later article, Mills clarifies that this ignorance necessarily goes hand in hand with a concerted erasure (rather than a mere forgetfulness). He states:

“The common element, then, is what could be called racial erasure: the retrospective whiting-out, the whitewashing that of the racial past in order to construct a racial narrative that severs the present from any legacy of racial domination.” (Mills, 2022: 220).

As Mills notes, this severing was less necessary prior to the second world war, a time when western global domination was seen as useful proof of western (white) supremacy: thus open propagation of racial inferiorities in comparison to Europe played a necessary role in European (and settler-colonial) self-identity. But in the post-war liberal order, after the horrors of Nazism and the Holocaust, and with the rise of newly independent states in the Global South, “racism as official Western norm was no longer politic” (Mills, 2022: 220): of course, this did not mean racism disappeared, it merely continued as the unacknowledged underbelly of liberal democratic systems and discourse (Acharya, 2022; Shilliam, 2009; Gani, 2025). In this way, the liberal order facilitated an unmentionable continuity of coloniality beyond a manufactured watershed that was supposed to have consigned it to history. To borrow from, and gently correct, Mills’ statement above, then, the liberal order did not only require a whitewashed narrative that severed the present from the *past*, but one that severed the present from another coeval (racist) *present*.

This duality precisely mirrors the duality in Kantian systematic theorising, and as such Kantian methodology might be seen as especially useful, even an essential guide, for liberal political orders and liberal academia – which in the west is most of academia (notwithstanding, or perhaps evidenced by, fascist interventions). While Mills had a lot to say about Kant and Kant’s racism, it is interesting that he did not explicitly trace his theory of ‘white ignorance’ to Kantian methodology. And yet the parallels are uncanny. Thus, in

response to Mills' invitation to historicise white ignorance (2007: 33), I locate the concept, and importantly the praxis, of white ignorance in Kantian methodology. Mills states this epistemology is necessarily a modern one (Mills, 2022: 221); thus, if Kant is preeminent in modernist knowledge production, his work merits particular scrutiny as one likely and influential progenitor for this epistemology.

Let me make this connection explicit by recapitulating and expanding on the argument of Kantian duality. By Kantian duality I am referring to the fact that Kant was not silent on race overall – he helped to construct it as a concept and a system after all (Bernasconi, 2020); but, furthermore, in his final level of theorising he chose to erase both race and his own racial logics that were essential to his moral universalism. In effect, operating exactly as ‘white ignorance’ does, Kant whitewashed his legal theory, removing the traces of raciology that undergirded it.³

To clarify, in Kant’s epistemic framework, contra Larrimore and in agreement with a number of scholars, there was no inconsistency between his moral theory and racial theory (Mills, 2022; Mikkelsen, 2013: 2; Gani, 2017: 439; Abundez-Guerra, 2018; Lu-Adler, 2023: 35-36;). Rather, he already did the necessary work with his racial taxonomy in his earlier geography, followed by his anthropology to exclude non-white races as political and moral agents, which provided the pre-emptive justification for their exclusion in a ‘pure’ moral universalism that only concerned civilised races.⁴ To argue Kant was merely inconsistent thus denies Kant agency in his system-building – a system that though speculative and resting on spurious science (Mosayebi, 2025; Marwah, 2022:) nevertheless does contain an internal logic. It only

³ Again, the question of intention, while a valuable enquiry in itself, is moot here, since the above summary merely lays out what his theorising *did*, which is sufficient to ascribe responsibility. To try to remove responsibility by separating it from intention diminishes Kant’s agency as theorist and knowledge producer, and his capacity to evaluate his own work.

⁴ Why Kant does so is an important question for Kantian scholars – though, as it would return us to an individualisation of his ideas, is beyond the scope of this particular article.

lacks logic if one mistakenly conflates his universality with generality (Lu-Adler, 2023: 43).

As Sylvia Wynter explained and traced through an intellectual history (Wynter, 2003), this universality has in western political thought been predicated on a demarcation of who has reason (white races), who is capable of reason, and who is not. So, to treat his moral philosophy as truly universal without questioning who it was limited to is a distortion of Kant's own theorisation.

While the above extracts a methodology of 'white ignorance' from Kant's *theorising*, it is also possible to identify Kant adopting this methodology in his *praxis* as a knowledge producer. As Dilek Huseyinzadegan has brilliantly argued and traced (Huseyinzadegan, 2024), Kant's normally meticulous and keen observation appears to have been conspicuously neglectful and indifferent to one of the most significant events to occur in the late 18th and early 19th century: the Haitian revolution. For someone who was deeply interested in revolution and its emancipatory possibilities, even long after the worst excesses of terror of the French revolution became apparent and turned away other enthusiasts, Kant's silence on the Haitian revolution cannot be put down to disinterest in the political phenomenon. Moreover, given that the French revolution was so dependent on Haitian slavery, and was fundamentally affected, adversely, by the revolution in St Domingue, events there would presumably have been of direct concern to Kant and his political alignments and hopes. That we find no deeper engagement from Kant with the Haitian revolution, except to dismiss it, is more than accidental and more than amnesia. This point also speaks to the lively debate that followed Pauline Kleingeld's intervention on "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race" (2007). To that debate I would add the following question: if, as Kleingeld has contended, Kant was so personally and morally transformed as to condemn slavery in his later life, would he not have been keen to say something about the first community to call for and succeed in the abolition of slavery? While Huseyinzadegan has argued this silence is not even due to a wilful

ideological motivation to erase but from an indifference which precluded cognisance of the Haitian revolution, I would like to push further clarity on this point. I would argue even if Kant's silence is separated from intentionality (in answer to Marwah's query to Lu-Adler in his review, 2024: 690) it does not diminish Kant's responsibility and role in facilitating a methodology of duality; rather we should see his silence as a *second order consequence*, and therefore connected to, an (initially) very intentional commitment by Kant to his own constructed racial taxonomy. If Kant's praxis of quietude is a result of indifference, his indifference is a result of his carefully systematised theory of racial and human hierarchies. Nor does the taxonomy somehow unwittingly meander into silence; there is a process of theory-building which not only permits but in fact *requires* a silence in order to uphold epistemic consistency with his systematic theory. This neat rubric of white ignorance that is necessarily arrived at incrementally necessitates a methodology and epistemology of simultaneous compartmentalism and duality that allows multiple truths to exist alongside each other. This meant a hyper-visibility of the French Revolution as a vehicle for human progress on the one hand, and an invisibility of the French Revolution's stubborn persistence with slavery and consumption of its profits in sugar-refining and ship-building (Trouillot, 2012, 2015; Gaspar and Geggus, 1997). To acknowledge the concurrent Haitian Revolutionaries, who were revolting against (and being suppressed by) the French, would have disrupted Kant's incremental methodology and would have jeopardised Kant's chosen exemplar for his theories of universalism.⁵

Powerful arguments have been made to assert the influence of Kant's *theories* in not just political theory and philosophy, but in the academic sciences in general (Beller, 2000;

⁵ Kant's omission of the Haitian revolution was by no means universal amongst modernist philosophers: years later, Hegel engaged thoroughly with the subject (Bowman, 2023); it is all the more notable, therefore, that western scholarship and teaching has tended to follow a Kantian blueprint rather than a Hegelian one in erasing or minimising the importance of the Haitian revolution (Trouillot, 2015; Bhambra, 2016)

Hurrell, 1990), and even in the policy world. But I want to further argue that Kantian methodology has likewise had a powerful influence in scholarly *praxis*. As noted, Kantian duality can be seen in Mills' theory of 'white ignorance' and has given intellectual and moral permission to this epistemology such that it is effectively resistant to charges of hypocrisy: after all, as Kant painstakingly formulated in his system-building, the duality and erasures contain an internal logic. To find other examples of Kantian duality, then, let us begin with knowledge production. One can point to multiple cases of otherwise seemingly conscientious intellectuals who openly championed a normative politics who have similarly performed this methodology of 'white ignorance'; indeed, in each of these instances we can label the phenomenon as 'white ignorance' as opposed to a generic ignorance because the erasures are consistently centred on the question of race. For example, a number of critical studies have highlighted the recurring racial erasure or duality in Hannah Arendt's work, including: Kathryn Gines's groundbreaking exposition of Arendt's sanitisation and 'cordoning off' of slavery when recounting the American revolution (Gines, 2014); Patricia Owen's work on Arendt's dehumanisation of Africans (2017); Ayça Cubukcu's critique of Arendt's downgrading of the legitimacy of the Black civil rights movement while praising white student protestors (Cubukcu, 2020); and Temin's work exploring Arendt's repeated treatment of settler-colonialism as a 'discrete phenomenon' of European history (Temin, 2022). The civil rights movement notably unfolded when Arendt was at the peak of her intellectual fame, which one might assume, as with Kant and the Haitian Revolution, would have elicited more interest and both intellectual and normative support; but she was so indifferent to it that she only expressed her views to dismiss it as a valid subject of political enquiry. In all these instances Arendt, sometimes lauded as one of the most important thinkers on human rights, liberty, and anti-fascism in the 20th century, chose to place some of the most powerful and influential stories of resistance and emancipatory agency, witnessed in her lifetime, beyond

her arbitrary parameters of valid political action. She even performed this duality in her philosophy separating the private from the public realm, which to the objective and detached observer looks jarringly like a sleight of theory to absolve herself from her own personal relationship with her professor-turned-colleague, and public advocate and member of the Nazi party, Martin Heidegger. Feminist and decolonial analysis refute Arendt's arbitrary separation between the private and public realm, aptly asserting that the 'personal *is* political' (Hanisch, 1970; Nicholson, 1981; Lugones, 2010). This was arguably so with Arendt's connections to Heidegger, since she continued to launder his academic reputation in later years such that his philosophy was always prioritised and detached from his brazen anti-semitism and unapologetic Nazism, a separation he himself never deigned to perform (Faye, 2009; Faye et al, 2006).

Similarly, the postcolonial literary scholar Edward Said wrote candidly about his disappointment towards the poststructuralist set that included the likes of Michel Foucault, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Jacques Derrida, a group viewed at the time as the avant-garde of critical intelligentsia in the west (Said, 2000). Initially an admirer of their work as critics of power, Said observed their predominant quietism on the Israeli occupation of Palestine – indeed in some cases they were some of the most vocal and persistent supporters of Zionist nationalism, with a conscious erasure of what that meant for Palestinians. What Said, as a Palestinian, observed decades ago is still very much a prevalent trend in academia today, a trend that has been labelled 'the Palestine exception' (Ratner, 2013; Salaita, 2024; Haaken and Ruth, 2024; Funez-Flores, 2024) – i.e. advocacy of democracy, human rights, freedom, independence, sovereignty, freedom of conscience etc. on all matters, *except Palestine*. Pratt et al, have made a related critique against western feminist scholars and activists on their silences on Gaza (Pratt et al, 2025); similar observations can be

made of experts and theorists of asylum and forced displacement or environmental politics, who usually are more than willing to cross the boundaries of scholarship into ‘politics’ to pronounce on all manner of issues, but whose insights on Palestine have been negligible. Hajir and Qato (2025) explain that these too numerous examples of silences and silencing in the academy are a key tendency of “scholasticide” (Nabulsi, 2009) and moreover, tellingly, they, as did Edward Said, view it as symptomatic of the “systemic, embedded violence which is at the heart of that liberal order’s own heart.” (Levene and Akcam, 2021, cited in Hajar and Qato, 2025: 1).

And there lies the deep connection between the frequent silences of liberalism with its philosophical roots in Kantianism. Thus, while the issue of Palestine has acted as a stark ‘litmus test’ (Jordan, 1991) of a genuine commitment to liberatory politics in scholarship and has exposed the actual limits of academic freedom and critical thought, similar performances of duality have been manifested in the ‘real world’ across multiple liberal democracies.

Liberal governments have routinely extolled the virtues of freedom, human rights, and progressivism; this was especially evident with their unanimity in (rightly) condemning Russia’s invasion and occupation of Ukraine, and their subsequent political action including support for the resettlement of Ukrainian refugees; funding and supplying a Ukrainian armed resistance; swift enactment of boycotts, divestments and sanctions of Russian commodities and people; and institutional declarations of support for Ukraine. The fact this occurred only a year prior to events in Gaza, when no such support was offered to Palestinian civilians, made the ‘Palestine exception’ even more pronounced and incongruous. Liberal governments also failed to condemn Israel’s ongoing bombardment and forced depopulation of Gaza, or actively aided them through armaments, vetoes in the UN Security Council, and criminalisation of civilian protests. Thus the politics of grievability (Butler, 2009) has been

on stark display in a way that, for many, has confirmed the operation of coloniality and its racial hierarchies, in which some lives are valued more than others, while some lives are deemed dispensable. This record by liberal governments has at times been charged as hypocritical, and yet this accusation overlooks the possibility that such duality and ‘white ignorance’ contains the same internal racial logic of Kantian epistemology, in which an incremental boundary-drawing of humanity grants a ‘moral’ and intellectual permission to erase the oppression, suffering, complaints, agency, and right of resistance, of those racialised as less civilised. Kant’s raciology is still at work, then, but so too is his epistemology.

I have argued that Kant, both in theory and, to a lesser-known extent, in praxis, exhibited (indeed formulated) the foundations of ‘white ignorance’ par excellence. Kantian and Kantian-adjacent scholars, in turn, have also historically reproduced this ‘white ignorance’ in the way they have engaged with Kant’s work, primarily by prioritising and abstracting his legal *concepts* (such as hospitality) from the *conception* (i.e. the historical and epistemic context) of his theorising (Gani, 2017: 429). Book after book, article after article, have preferred to scrutinise and explore Kant’s moral universalism as his ‘serious’ philosophy with virtual silence on Kant’s geography and anthropology as if they are irrelevant, inconsequential, abrogated experiments (see Post, 2008; Cavallar, 2002; Habermas, 2006; Benhabib, 2004) even though these works remained hidden in plain sight for nearly two hundred years. Postcolonial, decolonial, and philosophy or race scholars have long critiqued this erasure or wilful ‘amnesia’ by contemporary academics when adumbrating the value of enlightenment philosophical legacies (Said, 1979; Henderson, 2013; Hesse, 2014; Bhambra, 2021; Shilliam, 2009; 2021; Mills, 1997; Sankaran, 2001). But a connection that has not been made, and that I have sought to make here, is that these knowledge producers were trained in ‘white ignorance’, in this method of duality (upholding *and* erasing racism), by Kant himself.

As such, I propose Kantians should consider shifting the debate beyond Kant's egregious (or not), and persistent (or not) commitment to racist ideology, to detecting and thinking more seriously about what Kant's clever but disturbing epistemology has procured and licensed, all too successfully, in both contemporary scholarship and policy.

Intellectual Responsibility and Rigour in Kantian Studies: Historicity, Citational Politics, and Contrapuntality

I will now briefly reflect on the question of 'what next?', taking up Lu-Adler's call for standpoint reflexivity. Hamati-Ataya argues reflexivity can take various courses, including the process of unmasking, a revolutionary approach, or a reformist approach (2013). But, to focus on the last outcome, what would reform look like and how can Kant be *reformed* when his work is not only undermined by his raciology but indeed *constituted* by a racist logic? Empty or contradictory slogans such as "Decolonizing Kant", though well-intentioned, should be resisted – one can decolonise something that in its original form was not colonised, but one cannot decolonise something that was a source of coloniality; that would require abolition, not decolonisation. Additionally, efforts to *reform* Kant's work in order to use it to study and translate the experiences of the very people (such as refugees and asylum seekers) that he barely deigned to acknowledge and whom he himself excluded from his moral philosophy seems to me to be offensive and disingenuous both to the marginalised and to Kant. And yet, to throw Kant out altogether (arguably the revolutionary or abolitionist approach) would be another form of erasure, and we would potentially lose the capacity to learn from his methods, as explored above. Calling for a complete boycott, so to speak, would also gain little traction given the embeddedness of Kantian traditions in western epistemology. Therefore, I propose a three-step method in between reform and abolitionism,

that allows us to still engage with Kant's work, but critically and reflexively. In this way, Kantian scholars have the capacity and opportunity to chart a new and ethical approach to Kantian scholarship in a way that may set the standard for all enlightenment philosophy and traditions complicit with colonialism, racism, and slavery.

The first step is to historicise Kant's work, in line with the core method of historicity in postcolonial and decolonial approaches. As elucidated above in Mills' theory, amnesia is a foremost tool in colonial methods and knowledge production. A limited view, or erasure, of historical context fails facilitates an exaggeration of Eurocentric achievements or ideas, erases colonial crimes and beliefs, and their bearing on knowledge production. By contrast, an expansive view of history incorporates the bloody history that the colonisers sought to hide or sanitise. Via a postcolonial historical approach we would also follow the eye-witness accounts, memories, and resistance of the indigenous people who were colonised. Historicity, given that it leans towards *sui generic* readings of texts and ideas, also tends to support geographical contextualisation. Both these approaches then contest universalist claims and expose the contextually-rooted intentions and applications of theories. Now, what is interesting is that a number of Kantian scholars have rightly advocated for historicity precisely to bring forth the progressive and emancipatory potential in Kant's critique of European colonialism (Niesen, 2007); or to map a timeline of the evolution of Kant's ideas, including a possible later revision of his earlier raciology (Kleingeld, 2007). These are valid applications of historicity, but from a postcolonial and decolonial perspective, historicity would also require putting the historical contextualisation in relation to other, concurrent, histories. This would mean greater attention to how Kant's so-called later emancipatory positions of colonialism and slavery (which are debatable anyway) compare with or are in dialogue with the existing abolitionist, anti-imperialist discourse both in Europe and beyond;

it would also mean redressing the strange lack of curiosity regarding Kant's failure to respond to his contemporaries who condemned his raciology, such as the ethnologist Georg Forster and the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (Abundez-Guerra, 2012: 124); instead, thus far, those who argue Kant was anti-slavery have largely abstracted it from the much bigger, far more developed, debate on the subject among multiple interlocutors. Furthermore, a lack of historicity has meant analysts have at times conflated anti-colonialism with anti-racism, or anti-slavery and anti-racism (for example see Kleingeld, 2024) – but the these are not necessarily the same positions: there have been prominent ideologues and movements that have upheld racist beliefs while disavowing imperialism, including Herbert Spencer, the 19th century English philosopher and sociologist (see Hobson, 2012: 84 – 105) and US president and liberal internationalist, Woodrow Wilson (Ambrosius, 2007); similarly, an earlier US president, Benjamin Franklin, was opposed to the slave trade in part *because* of his racism towards Africans (Abundez-Guerra, 2018: 122).

The second step I propose is to be conscious of our citational politics. A primary goal of postcolonial and decolonial theories is epistemic justice, and one simple way in which to pursue this form of justice is through correcting our citational neglect. Academics have been complicit in the marginalisation of Global South, indigenous, and racialised knowledges due to a failure to incorporate, learn from, or cite scholars from (formerly) colonised communities. This marginalisation often occurs via a dismissal of their knowledges and beliefs as lacking in scientific validity or objectivity. Such erasure works alongside the physical elimination (genocide) of colonised communities, and has been given its own label: *epistemicide*. This prompted Gayatri Spivak to famously ask 'can the subaltern speak?' (2023) referring to the challenges subjugated people face in conveying their perspectives. However, instead of asking if they can speak the language of the colonisers in order to be

heard, anti-colonial scholars have argued more should be done to hear them *on their own terms*. Thus, the pursuit of epistemic justice begins by asking who is speaking, who is seen as a producer of knowledge, and which voices are not being heard? In line with Fanon's call for a revival of native knowledges, and cognisant of what Sarah Ahmed has called 'the politics of citation' (2013), anti-colonialism thus urges us to cite racialised, indigenous and Global South authors to avoid repeating colonial practices of erasure. For Kantian scholarship, this would mean taking seriously the critiques and perspectives that can be unlocked by those with non-hegemonic positionalities who are able to think creatively from the margins. If the critique of Kant's work focuses on his positions on race, slavery, and colonialism, then our pursuit of intellectual rigour would require us to engage more closely with the existing scholarship and expertise on race, slavery, and colonialism to better situate Kant's ideas.

And finally, bringing together both the above approaches, I propose for Kantian scholars the adoption of a contrapuntal methodology. Contrapuntality was defined and advocated by the aforementioned Edward Said, widely viewed as the founder of postcolonial studies. In identifying this methodology, Said turned to his love of western classical music, in which various themes play off one another, so that in the "resulting polyphony there is concert and order" (Said, 59-60). Similarly, when applied to scholarship, the wholeness of a text is revealed by exploring the "overlapping and mutually embedded histories" (Chowdhry, 2007) of the metropolitan and colonised societies. Via a contrapuntal analysis, then, there can be "two, three, four, five, voices; they are all part of the same composition, but they are each distinct." (Said, quoted in Chowdhry, 2007: 105). One may be concerned at this point that this sounds all too similar to a call for pluralism devoid of considerations of power, but this approach in fact is about "worlding" texts, crucially not introducing different stories merely to stand alongside each other, but to expose their interconnectedness and hierarchies, and to

lay bare the nexus between knowledge and power. Said exemplified this approach after his groundbreaking work *Orientalism* (1979) was challenged for focusing on European colonial agency (albeit to critique it) while obscuring the narratives of resistance and subaltern agency. In response, Said explored the idea of contrapuntality, first in *Reflections on Exile* (1984), and more fully in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). There he sought to redress the previous imbalance that he was criticised for, by unearthing subaltern stories of resistance that, through dialectic opposition, composed the other side to European colonialism. Without this perspective, the story would be severely incomplete.

If we seek examples of how Kant's work can be approached contrapuntally, some already exist – excavations which historicise and provincialise Kant's work so that it is shown to be necessarily speaking to or shaped by contemporary events (even by omission), and studies that introduce previously ignored interlocutors. In his contrapuntal analysis of Kant, Foucault, and the Martiniquean poet and literary critic Edouard Glissant, Robbie Shilliam observes “who can legitimately dialogue – that is to say, who can be considered to have a sufficiently developed ethical faculty – is revealed by the degree to which they can contribute to what is, in fact, a *monologue*” (Shilliam, 2011: 651 – italics in original text). His introduction of Glissant, a Caribbean thinker, disrupts this monologue in a way that in fact expands our understanding of Kant's work. Huseyinzadegan's above-noted work similarly could be seen as an example of contrapuntality that both historicises Kant and, by picking up questions asked in the pivotal work of Michel Trouillot, draws on a wider, less provincial expertise that incorporates scholars of colour and the Global South. Robust work that connects Kant's moral philosophy to the predominant moral issues of his time, the slave trade and colonialism, has existed for some time of course, from Bernasconi's critical early interventions (2002; 2003; 2011), to Valdez (2017), to Lu-Adler (2022), and Pascoe (2022);

this important work can be strengthened even further by bringing racialised historians, political economists, and sociologists of slavery, colonialism, and racial capitalism directly into the analysis as interlocutors on and with Kant's work.

This contrapuntal and reflexive approach is not an argument for a relativistic approach to knowledge and so-called alternate realities, which in fact steers us towards continued siloes. But rather, as Charles Mills notes, “mapping an epistemology of ignorance”, and therefore confronting and redressing it, is a “preliminary to reformulating an epistemology that will give us genuine knowledge” (Mills, 15-16). By expanding the horizons of historical, philosophical and geographical enquiry, we are better positioned to see linkages between ideas, necessarily co-constituting and in dialogue with each other even if unacknowledged, while bringing into frame that which was occluded whether intentional or not. No universalism is universal if confined to not just one continent but to one arbitrary delineation of intellectual and political agents. Instead, and at the heart of this approach, is a pursuit of “genuine knowledge” that requires a more expansive approach, as outlined above, and which thankfully does not require the contortions of having to ‘save’ Kant in order to still draw from his work.

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