

## Kant on Lazy Savagery, Racialized

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**Abstract:** Kant develops a concept of savagery, partly characterized by laziness, to envision a program for human progress. He also racializes savagery, treating native Americans, in particular, as literal savages. He ascribes to this “race” a peculiar physiological laziness, a supposedly hereditary trait of blunted life power. Accordingly, while he grants them the same “germs” for perfections as he does the civilized Europeans, he allows them no prospect of actually fulfilling any such perfection. For the road to perfection must be paved through industry, a condition that Kant denies to the “savages” by racializing their alleged laziness. This case will shed new light on the debated relation between Kant’s moral universalism and his racism.

**Keywords:** Kant, race, laziness, savagery, native Americans, germs, human progress

### 1. Introduction

Kant calls both blacks and native Americans “lazy.”<sup>1</sup> What he means by this label is not immediately clear. Complicating things, he also holds that *all* humans are lazy, that they are so *by nature*, and that laziness can even be *useful*. My main goal in this paper is to shed light on Kant’s view that native Americans, representing “savages,” are lazy. We can fully assess this view, however, only in connection with his other claims about laziness.

Here is how I will proceed with this assessment. I begin with the notion of laziness as a universal, natural human predisposition. After explaining how Kant relates this notion to human progress, I turn to his concept of savagery as a state of useless laziness and lawless freedom (section 2). I then ask what it would take for him to *racialize* savagery, using a study of Rousseau’s non-racial account of native Americans as lazy “savages” for contrast (section 3).

Kant’s view of Americans fundamentally differs from Rousseau’s partly because he studies them as a natural philosopher, who feels obliged to investigate phenomena that are of significance to humanity and uncover their law-governed natural causes to whatever extent possible (section 4.1). Speculating about race from this standpoint, Kant argues: the original human phylum must contain certain germs and natural predispositions, which developed differently in the early humans as they adapted to four separate climates; four skin colors (white, yellow, black, red), once formed during this early adaptive process, became unfailingly hereditary. Four basic races were established thereby. Native Americans represent the red race (section 4.2).

Theorizing this way, Kant can also racialize characteristics other than skin color, such as laziness. As a natural predisposition, laziness may be circumstantially suppressed in some humans while developed in others (section 2). Blacks and native Americans are assigned to the latter category. Each of these races developed laziness, according to Kant, as an adaptive effect of the

climate in which they formed their skin color. Native Americans are deemed lazy in a peculiar way, however, which makes them utterly useless as far as Kant is concerned (blacks, in his view, can still be trained for hard labor). For he understands their alleged laziness as a blunted life power and a lack of any usable drives or feelings and, according to his system, this physiological laziness is as indelible as their skin color (section 4.2).

The implications of this racialization of lazy savagery become clear in light of Kant's account of human progress. On this account, the human being must be *disciplined* first, before he can be cultivated, civilized, and finally moralized.<sup>2</sup> One is susceptible to discipline, however, only if one has certain drives and feelings. Kant denies native Americans this prerequisite for discipline—and, a fortiori, for any hope of progressing toward moralization—by racializing their supposed laziness. He does so even while granting them the same “germs” for morality as he does all other humans, yet without thereby contradicting himself (section 5). This reading suggests a new way to address the supposed tension between Kant's racism and his moral universalism. There turns out to be no real tension: he can, without contradiction, affirm racism while being genuinely committed to his moral universalism (section 6).

## 2. Laziness and Human Progress: Preliminary Analysis

Kant sometimes presents laziness (*Faulheit*) as a universal and natural human propensity. A propensity is “the subjective ground of the possibility of an inclination (habitual desire, *concupiscentia*), insofar as this possibility is contingent for humanity in general”—contingent in the sense that a propensity is “only the *predisposition* to desire an enjoyment which, when the subject has experienced it, arouses *inclination* to it” (*RGV* 6:29).<sup>3</sup> So, while a propensity may be deemed “innate,” the corresponding inclination is “acquired” empirically. To illustrate, while “all savage peoples have a propensity to drink,” it develops into an inclination only if they have experienced intoxicants. Likewise, while all humans are lazy by nature, this natural predisposition may never become an inclination, because it can be “suppressed by other circumstances” (*Anth-Frie*, 25:580; see 25:690).<sup>4</sup>

Kant is interested in laziness for its role in human progress. The nature of this role depends on what laziness comes down to. If it consists in “the urge to find satisfaction merely in ridding ourselves of work,” then it can, paradoxically, drive one to work: “A lazy man therefore works hard in order to be able afterwards to rest longer” (*Anth-Mron*, 25:1238). This “future repose” can serve as “the frame of reference of all human beings”: “Everyone thinks in terms of first learning something, afterwards holding an office, then taking a wife, and quietly dying, and this laziness to enjoy repose makes him hardworking” (*Anth-Frie*, 25:580). Laziness in this sense is, along with cowardice and falsity, one of the “three natural predispositions in the human being” that are “necessary in order to maintain the species” (*Anth-Mron*, 25:1421).

Laziness itself ultimately becomes an incentive for industry and thus is even useful, .... For all labors are driven by the prospect of laziness, which puts them into motion. Our natural powers would also in the end be overextended and severed if nature had not placed a counterweight in the human being, that is, such a propensity to repose and inactivity. (*Anth-Mron*, 25:1421)

Kant distinguishes this useful laziness from three other states: (1) “leisure, which consists in the inclination to be occupied only with passing the time, or insofar as the occupation is immediate enjoyment without work,” (2) “busyness ... which consists in the diversity of occupations that a man takes on all at once,” and (3) “nonchalance ... which rests on the lack of a sufficient degree of the exertion of powers needed for expedient work” (*Eth-Vigil*, 27:658, translation amended).

Kant also has a physiological characterization of laziness as “a blunting of energies [*Kräfte*]” (*Eth-Vigil*, 27:637). Busyness amounts to laziness in this sense, as the busy one “does not have powers [*Kräfte*] enough to undertake with thoroughness a multitude of differently ordered occupations; he therefore scamps and neglects every one of his tasks” (*Eth-Vigil*, 27:658). So does “indolence [*Trägheit*],” which is opposed to “liveliness [*Lebhaftigkeit*]” (*Anth-Frie*, 25:623). Indolence comes down to “*inertia*, an inner resistance of the soul to being able to set oneself to work.” In this state, one’s “vital forces [*Lebenskräfte*] may not be present in such degree as to permit the needed expenditure of them,” so that one simply cannot “undertake persistent labour, though the motive to work is present.” Worse still is “aggravated laziness,” in which case the soul “does not even have the good will to bestir itself” or the motive to work in the first place (*Eth-Vigil*, 27:637).

Overall, whether Kant finds a state of laziness objectionable depends on its compatibility with human vocation, namely the cultivation and perfection of our natural capacities. We approve “rest after work,” he asserts, “in that after bending our efforts we are content with ourselves, and have earned a state of rest” (*Eth-Vigil*, 27:636–37). By contrast, he decries “the arcadian life of a shepherd, i.e., a life full of laziness with the best attitudes, whereby the human being would never be perfected or cultivated and would not be more esteemed than any other animal species” (*Anth-Mron*, 25:1422; see *IaG* 8:21). This contrast is also reflected in what Kant says about the phlegmatic temperament. As “a great degree of inactivity,” this temperament is “almost always to be found in the human being,” so that “however active he may always be, yet he thus strives for repose.” It is “contemptible,” however, “if the propensity for repose outweighs everything,” whereby “all attributes become useless through the phlegmatic [temperament] and therefore also the whole individual” (*Anth-Frie*, 25:639; see *Anth*. 7:252, 289–90). The mental state thus overrun by phlegm is a state of “insensitivity, laziness, uselessness, or baseness,” wherein “one never earnestly pursues [*triebt*] anything, so that one also does not once grasp anything with zeal either.” Such a human being would at best “act without driving forces [*Triebfedern*]” (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1166, translation amended).

If the human being must overcome the useless kind of laziness, it may not be enough to say that the lazy one would be punished with “self-contempt” or a feeling of “low esteem” out of the recognition that laziness—as an inclination directly opposed to industry—“is contrary to both the right and the end of humanity in our own person” (*Eth-Vigil*, 27:657; see *MS* 6:444–45). After all, it is possible that one sees nothing wrong in not being industrious. Only in the condition of culture or civil state, Kant submits, would one feel ashamed of being lazy.

Through culture the needs [*Bedürfnisse*] of the human being became great, and this was also a tie that linked human beings more firmly to one another. Thus laziness was fought against and

the human being was required to be industrious and hard working. The civil state is therefore the only condition in which all the natural predispositions of the human being can be developed. (*Anth-Mron*, 25:1423)

The key term in this passage is ‘needs.’ Kant is not talking about just any needs, but the kind that bind human beings to one another. In his view, one can have such needs *only* in the state of culture, as opposed to the state of nature. In the latter state, the human being is still lazy even while doing things like fishing and hunting, as “he does nothing other than that to which nature and necessity drives him” (*Anth-Frie*, 25:690). That is, he is “driven to activity ... by pain, ... by hunger” (*Anth-Mron*, 25:1317). If this state of existence is “good in some respects,” such can only be *negative* goodness out of sheer ignorance. Thus, “if poets and philosophers call this age the golden and fortunate one,” Kant dismisses its putative goldenness as the effect of “a propensity toward laziness,” whereby “human beings nourished themselves from trees like apes and did not need to work due to a lack of needs.” By contrast, “one could call the age of the developed culture of humanity the true golden age” (*Anth-Mron*, 25:1418; see *Anth-Frie*, 25:685–88).

The unique advantage of the civil state, Kant argues, is that it can make the human being *positively* good. Even if “the human being in the civil state sacrifices many advantages of nature, yet many means are thus furnished to replace such [advantages].” The greatest of these means are artificial needs that one has *as a member of society*. There is, for instance, “an artificial constraint of the parents, of the circumstances of making a living, of propriety, of honor, and through this arises such diverse activity whereby the human being produces much positive good, which would not at all have existed in the savage state [of nature].” The answer to the question “is the natural state or the civil one more in keeping with the purpose of human beings?” is therefore abundantly clear to Kant: insofar as “the human being develops his talents solely in the civil state,” his perfection requires “the perfection of the civil constitution” (*Anth-Frie*, 25:689-90).

Key to the civil constitution in question is civil freedom, which includes “the law, or the restriction of the freedom of an individual in order not to disturb the freedom of another,” and “an authority that applies the laws.” By contrast, “the freedom of the savages and nomads” is lawless or barbaric freedom, namely “freedom without laws and force” (*Anth-Mron*, 25:1424). Kant ties this lawless freedom to “arrogance and laziness.” The “savages also work little,” he claims, “for they think that freedom consists in laziness since work after all is coercion” (*Anth-Mron*, 25:1355); as a result, “the life of the human being thereby withers away” and reduces itself to “uselessness” (*Anth-Mron*, 25:1359; see *Anth.* 7:331; *ZeF* 8:354). Civil freedom alone is conducive to human perfection, Kant argues, precisely because it is “fettered in a lot of ways, through the force of the authorities, ... through our delusion about social position,” and so on (*Anth-Frie*, 25:686; see *Anth-Mron*, 25:1425–26; *MAM* 8:115–17).

Having thus characterized the state of nature or savagery in terms of useless laziness and lawless freedom, Kant uses it to conceptualize a stage that the human being must grow out of:

as little as it is to be approved that the human being always remain a child, ... just as little is it to be approved, that the human being always remain in [a state of] savagery. Rousseau also did not want to say that the determination of human beings is [the state of] savagery, but that the

human being should not seek his perfection of his state in such a way that he sacrifices all advantages of nature, by chasing after the civil advantages. This [state of savagery] *serves only for the plan of education and government*, through which such a perfect state can be achieved. (*Anth-Frie*, 25:689, italics added; see *Bem.* 20:31; *Anth.* 7:326–27)

Specifically, the relevance of the notion of savagery to Kant’s plan is this: The human being must, first and foremost, be so *disciplined* that he is “accustomed early to subject himself to the precepts of reason,” lest he “retain a certain savagery throughout his life” (*Päd.* 9:442). The reason is that “savagery cannot be taken away, and negligence in discipline can never be made good” (*Päd.* 9:444). We will return to this point in section 5.

### 3. Interlude: How (Not) to Racialize Savagery

Charles Mills, in his *Racial Contract*, distinguishes two ways of understanding the state of nature or savagery: it is a European state “lost in the past—if it ever existed in the first place,” or a non-European state attributed to certain people who exist presently in some faraway spaces and who are “deemed childlike, incapable of self-rule and handling their own affairs.”<sup>5</sup> The former state may well be a merely *hypothetical* one for the purpose of theorizing about civilization. The latter kind of savagery, by contrast, is seen as an *actual* state literally materialized in a “wild and racialized place.”<sup>6</sup> In this case, the savagery in a people is viewed as “so deeply penetrated that the door to civilization ... is barred.”<sup>7</sup>

According to Mills, the notion of a literal state of nature/savagery, as well as that of a hypothetical one, is operative in the social contract theories of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau.<sup>8</sup> If these theories are therefore somewhat inflected by a “tacit racial logic”<sup>9</sup> or “underlying racial dichotomization and hierarchy of civilized and savage,”<sup>10</sup> Mills adds, this racial inflection is even more pronounced in Kant’s work. In this case, “full personhood [presupposed by contractual relations] is actually dependent on race.” Underpinning the Kantian contract is a “racial rational and moral order” or, to be more specific, a “color-coded racial hierarchy of Europeans, Asians, Africans, and Native Americans, differentiated by their degree of innate *talent*.”<sup>11</sup> In this way, Mills submits, Kant’s contract theory is “the best illustration of the grip of the Racial Contract on Europeans.”<sup>12</sup>

Mills may be right in his conclusion about Kant. But a lot more needs to be said to get there. It is not clear that any of the contract theorists mentioned racialized savagery, tacitly or otherwise. In the case of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, just because they portrayed native Americans, for instance, as literal savages, it does not follow that they racialized the dichotomy of civilization and savagery. None of them had a trackable concept of race or racial classification of human beings to make this move. As patronizing as their views of native Americans were, they might see the alleged savagery of these people as a contingent matter of circumstances, not some hereditary characteristic that can be properly called “racial.” In Kant’s case, it is certainly true, as we shall see, that he has a well-developed racial classification, according to which native Americans represent a distinct race on account of their red *skin*. It is also true that he sees them as literal savages, as suggested by his distinction “between the [medieval] European and the American

savages” (*ZeF* 8:354) and numerous other references to the latter. It still does not follow, however, that he regards their alleged *savagery* as a racial characteristic, which would have to be persistently hereditary across different environments. It is one thing to attribute certain characteristics to a people who supposedly belong in a race, but another to treat those characteristics themselves as properly racial ones. After all, even if this people, whose skin color marks a distinct race (according to Kant), currently live in a state of savagery, this may well be a transitory effect of the particular environment in which they happen to reside.

To illustrate this last point, let us consider Rousseau’s account of laziness, especially as it pertains to so-called savages. In the “Essay on the Origin of Languages” (published posthumously in 1781), Rousseau distinguishes three states of man in relation to society: the savage (hunter), the barbarian (herdsman), and the civil (soil tiller). The yet unsettled man in the first two states would not cultivate the soil. Such *formerly were* “the Nomads, ... the Arabs living in their tents, the Scythians in their wagons,” and such *still are* “the wandering Tartars, and the Savages of America” (Rousseau, *Political Writings*, 269).<sup>13</sup> In each of these cases, the state of being is merely “a function of the climate and of the nature of the soil,” which determine “the means by which men provide for their subsistence” (Rousseau, *Political Writings*, 272). Here is one example.

Mild climates, lush and fertile lands were the first to be populated and the last where nations were formed, because there men could more easily do without one another, and the needs that cause society to be born made themselves felt later there. (Rousseau, *Political Writings*, 272)

By this logic, *if* the climate remained mild and nature continued to supply a ready bounty for human sustenance, Rousseau doubts that savages “would ever have renounced their primitive freedom and left the isolated and pastoral existence that so well suits their natural indolence,” to subject themselves unnecessarily to the slavish labor and constraints that are part and parcel of the social or civil state (Rousseau, *Political Writings*, 272–73).

As far as Rousseau is concerned, the “natural indolence” in question is not unique to savages. In the footnote on this concept, he remarks that, as a general matter, “man is naturally lazy [ *paresseux*]” and is so to an astonishing extent (Rousseau, *Political Writings*, 272n).

It would seem that he lives solely in order to sleep, to vegetate, to remain motionless; he can scarcely decide to go through the motions required to keep from dying of hunger. Nothing keeps the savages loving their state as much as this delicious indolence. The passions that cause man to be restless, provident, active, are born in society. To do nothing is man’s primary and strongest passion after that of self-preservation. If one looked at it more closely, one would find that even among us people work only in order to get to rest [*repos*]: it is still laziness that makes us industrious [*laborieux*]. (Rousseau, *Political Writings*, 272–73n)

This passage makes three points about laziness. First, it is a universal, natural human tendency. Second, this tendency can be suppressed, though not eliminated, by external circumstances. Third, even in society, one may be industrious only for the sake of future repose. Accordingly, if the putative savages of America are lazy, this laziness is not an inherent trait unique to them, but a fortuitous result of their environment. Likewise, if the man of society appears to be industrious, he is only making a contrived effort to satisfy his circumstantially engendered needs. The natural

tendency of laziness remains in both cases. It just manifests itself differently: If the savage's laziness comes off as inactivity, the social man's is masked by active labor.

By this analysis, just because Rousseau portrayed native Americans as literal savages enjoying their “primitive freedom” and “delicious indolence,” it does not mean that he racialized savagery (or civilization for that matter). To make this racialization move, he would need

- (1) a racial classification that sorts all human beings into various racial categories, with native Americans and civilized Europeans belonging to distinct races, and
- (2) an account of how marks of savagery are properly racial, not just in that they happen to be manifested in a race, but in that they are and will remain constant among its people across generations and across environments.

Rousseau offered neither of these. What about Kant? We can get an unequivocal version of (1) from his three dedicated essays on race—“Of the Different Races of Human Beings” (1775/7), “Determination of the Concept of a Human Race” (1785), and “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy” (1788).<sup>14</sup> What about (2)? In particular, does he hold that laziness, while it is a universal human predisposition, has somehow developed into a hereditary trait of inactivity in the race of literal savages? My expositions in section 4 will suggest a “yes.” I will discuss the practical implications of this answer in section 5.

#### 4. Kant on Native Americans as Lazy Savages

##### 4.1. Some Clues in Kant's Early Works

In all three of his essays on race, Kant studies this subject by the rules of natural philosophy, so that only “a philosophical *jury* ... composed of mere investigators of nature [*Naturforschern*]” can adjudicate his dispute with critics (*GTP* 8:179).<sup>15</sup> Understanding this natural-philosophical viewpoint will prove key to understanding how Kant might racialize lazy savagery as well as skin color. Some of his early writings contain telling clues in this regard, where reflections on natural philosophy occasionally paralleled or even intersected with his yet un-theorized racial views.

To begin, Kant often takes the position of a *Naturforscher*—variously translated as “naturalist,” “natural philosopher,” and “natural scientist”—in discourses about nature. The naturalist purportedly has a certain obligation to investigate the causes of natural phenomena that are important to humanity (for example, earthquakes).

Great events that affect the fate of all mankind rightly arouse that commendable curiosity, which is stimulated by all that is extraordinary and typically looks into the causes of such events. In such cases, the natural philosopher's obligation to the public is to give an account of the insights yielded by observation and investigation. (*VUE*, 1:419)<sup>16</sup>

Specifically, the naturalist seeks to uncover *natural* causes of phenomena. Kant gives a forceful apology for this practice in the “Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens” (1755), against those defenders of religion who like to invoke naïve teleology. To explain what makes the island of Jamaica inhabitable, for instance, “the naturalist must find the natural causes of this in the most universal properties of the air [and of heat]” and in accordance with “the universal laws of nature,” without presuming any special purposes (*NTH* 1:224–25).

Remarkably, Kant uses this model of natural-causal inquiry to compare the rational beings inhabiting different planets. This comparison is not a mere fiction, he argues, but accords with a natural law akin to the Newtonian law of universal gravitation:

The perfection of the spiritual world as well as of the material world increases and progresses in the planets from Mercury on to Saturn ... in a correct sequence of degrees in proportion to their distances from the Sun. (*NTH* 1:360)

Of the then-known planets in our solar system, Mercury is the closest to the Sun, Jupiter and Saturn are the furthest, and Earth is somewhere in between. So, Kant submits two propositions with “a degree of credibility that is not far removed from an established certainty”: first, from Mercury, through Earth, to Saturn, the matter that constitutes the inhabitants of various planets goes from coarse to finer and lighter; second, the same inhabitants are less or more excellent in their abilities to form clear concepts and thoughts, insofar as these “intellectual abilities have a necessary dependence on the material of the machine they inhabit” (*NTH* 1:358–59). Human beings, as Earth-bound rational beings,<sup>17</sup> can therefore position themselves at the midpoint on the spectrum of intellectual perfection:

If the idea of the most sublime classes of rational creatures that inhabit Jupiter or Saturn arouses their jealousy and humiliates them by the knowledge of their own baseness, then they can be satisfied again and comforted by the sight of the low stages on the planets Venus and Mercury, which are lowered far below the perfection of human nature. ... On the one hand, we saw thinking creatures among whom a Greenlander or Hottentot would be Newton, on the other hand, those who would admire him as an ape. (*NTH* 1:359–60)

The reference to “a Greenlander or Hottentot” in this passage is suggestive.<sup>18</sup> The point is that, to the Venusians and Mercurians, who belong in a “class [of rational beings that] borders more closely on the lack of reason” (*NTH* 1:362), *even* a Greenlander or Hottentot would come across as very intelligent. To Kant the naturalist, a similar material principle underlies the intellectual inferiority of a Venusian or Mercurian (relative to the higher planetarians) and that of a Greenlander or Hottentot (relative to the more intelligent humans). Roughly speaking, a class of rational beings are more or less intelligent depending on how far from the Sun their native habitat is, where their class developed its unique characteristics in adaptation to the local climate (as defined by properties of air and heat).<sup>19</sup> Apropos the human being as such (as a species), “his ability to think rationally” is limited by “the constitution of the matter to which he is bound and which is proportionate to the distance from the Sun.” This limitation is not equally materialized in all individuals: provided it takes several stages for the human being to approximate “the purpose of his being,” *some* humans may advance far less than others and “remain at [an early] stage of development” (*NTH* 1:355–56). While Kant does not yet have a theory of race to draw such differences along racial lines, his insinuation that Greenlanders and Hottentots are among the least developed of all humans in terms of their rational capacity is already an ominous sign.

Another relevant development in Kant’s early thinking about natural philosophy concerns the production of organisms, a topic that he touches on in “The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God” (1763). In this essay, he continues to defend the

naturalist's practice of "explaining any of the major arrangements in the world by appealing to the universal laws of nature" without invoking "forces which have been especially invented for the purpose" (*BDG* 2:148). The naturalist thereby presupposes "a great unity in nature, in respect of the adequacy of a single cause to account for many different kinds of consequences" (*BDG* 2:113). Organisms pose a challenge, however, whose "initial generation" cannot be explained as "a mechanical effect incidentally arising from the universal laws of nature." The origin must instead be supernatural. This can be viewed in two ways: one may either attribute each organic formation "immediately to a divine action, which is performed at every mating," or grant that the first divine arrangement of organisms gave them a suitability (*Tauglichkeit*) "not merely to develop [*entwickeln*] their kind [*Gleichen*] thereafter in accordance with a natural law, but truly to generate [*erzeugen*] their kind." Kant supports the latter view: "one must concede to the things of nature a possibility ... of producing their effects in accordance with universal laws" (*BDG* 2:114–15).<sup>20</sup>

Notably, this reflection about organic generation coincided with Kant's turn, purportedly inspired by Rousseau's work, "to honor human beings" and to value theoretical knowledge only in view of its contribution to humanity (*Bem.* 20:44). The "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime" (1764) inaugurated that turn. Here we encounter some of Kant's most notorious claims about non-whites and non-Europeans. For instance, he asserts that the difference between "the Negroes of Africa" and "the whites," as two human lineages (*Menschengeschlechter*), is "just as great with regard to the capacities of mind as it is with respect to color" (*GSE* 2:253). Thus, the fact that a "Negro carpenter" mentioned in a travelogue is "completely black from head to foot" strikes Kant as "a distinct proof that what he said was stupid" (*GSE* 2:254–55). As for the "savages ... of North America," an "exceptional lack of feeling"—particularly "feeling for the beautiful in the moral sense"—is said to be "the mark of these kinds of human beings [*Menschengattungen*]" (*GSE* 2:253–54). By contrast, the European is not only endowed with all sorts of feelings and inclinations but also able to interweave them "with so much that is moral" that he—and he "alone"—has found a way to make them "proper" (*GSE* 2:254).

Kant's remark that American savages lack morally conducive feelings is significant, given his view of phlegmatic temperament at this point. Phlegm is associated with "a greater lack of moral feeling" and even a lack of "the cruder incentives, such as lust for money, etc."; yet these are needed to "drive indolent human nature to actions for the common weal" (*GSE* 2:218–19). For that reason, "this [phlegmatic] quality of mind" is not even worth further consideration (*GSE* 2:224). For sure, the later Kant would speak favorably of "*phlegm* in the good sense," which he associates with a "lack of affect that does not reduce the strength of incentives to action" (*Anth.* 7:252). That is, the "fortunate phlegm (in the moral sense)" is a "natural gift of apathy" (*Anth.* 7:254).<sup>21</sup> It is therefore not to be conflated with "indolence (lifelessness)" (*Anth.* 7:289).<sup>22</sup> At the same time, however, Kant would continue to disparage "phlegm as weakness"—as marked by insensitivity and inactive laziness—and single out "the South Americans" as an example thereof, with whom "even the sexual drive is weak" (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1166).<sup>23</sup> More important, he would submit that "lifelessness" or lack of any drive to activity is "inborn" (*angeboren*) in these—as opposed to "cultivated"—human beings (*Anth.* 7:233).

Granted, in the mid-1760s Kant did not yet have a theory of race to treat native Americans as belonging to a distinct race, let alone racialize their alleged lack of useful feelings/drives by treating it as a hereditary characteristic unique to them. Still, his abovementioned remarks about natural philosophy laid an important foundation for such racialization. Even if his disparaging claims about the “Negroes” of Africa and “savages” of America were mere hearsays gleaned from travelers’ reports, the natural philosopher in him would feel obliged to seek a causal account of the reported phenomena, much as he did in the case of earthquakes. In that spirit, he will start one of his race essays by stating that recent travelers’ reports about different human beings did not so much satisfy the understanding as stimulate it toward investigation (*Nachforschung*) (*BBM* 8:91). Pursuing this investigation as a natural philosopher, he will explain the reported human differences in accordance with certain laws of nature, while holding that the human being, as an organism, must be originally endowed with a suitability for all sorts of climate on Earth. This original endowment, as Kant will make of it, also contains the possibility for the generation of races.

#### 4.2. Racializing Native Americans and Their Alleged Physiological Laziness

In his three race essays, Kant argues for these basic propositions:

- (1) there are four principal races by skin color—white, yellow, black, and red;
- (2) skin color serves as the basis for this racial classification in virtue of being an unfailingly hereditary characteristic;
- (3) different races nevertheless belong to the same human species, with a common origin.

For the purpose of this paper, I will highlight two strands of thought that run through Kant’s arguments. One is his natural-philosophical investigation of observed differences between various groups of humans. The other is his suggestion that certain dispositions attributed to some non-whites, such as laziness and lacking the drive for industry, are indelible effects of particular climates.

First off, Kant promotes his racial classificatory system as “a natural system for the understanding,” which “aims at brining [creatures] under laws.” In this system, “all human beings on the wide earth belong to one and the same natural species” by the so-called Buffon’s rule, namely that members of the same species consistently beget fertile offspring with one another. This unity of species points to “a single natural cause,” or “the unity of the generative power that [all human beings] have in common” (*VRM* 2:429–30). This unifying cause must showcase the “care of Nature to equip her creature through hidden inner provisions for all kinds of future circumstances, so that it preserve itself and be suited to the difference of the climate or the soil.” All human beings must have originated from a *single first phylum*, then, in which “various germs [*Keime*] and natural predispositions [*Anlagen*] ... lie ready ... to be on occasion either unfolded or restrained” (*VRM* 2:434–35; see *BBM* 8:98–99; *GTP* 8:168–69).

As regards the occasioning conditions for such unfolding or restraining, Kant surmises that *air* and *sun* “most deeply influence the generative power and produce an enduring development of the germs and predispositions” (*VRM* 2:436). The combined influence of air and sun results in four radically different types of climate, which is dry or humid and hot or cold. Four basic races, as

marked by distinct skin colors, would be established in those climates (*VRM* 2:441; see *BBM* 8:93–94). Here again, the natural philosopher, who “may not leave the chain of natural causes except where he sees it manifestly attached to immediate ordinance,” seeks a unified natural-causal explanation. Although the four races were established in isolation from one another, Kant the naturalist abhors the conjecture of “many local creations.” Rather, assuming that skin attests to the “self-help of Nature by means of a certain organization,” he seeks to trace different colors of the four races “to the same [natural] cause.” In particular, there must be a common “procedure for continuously removing what irritates the circulation of the blood,” especially in view of the fact that “all animal blood contains iron” (*VRM* 2:439–40). Kant specifies this causal mechanism in terms of the chemical theory that assumes phlogiston and (acidic and alkaline) salts as the basic agents. So, for example,

the saline acidic or the phosphoric acidic or the volatile alkaline in the evacuating vessels of the skin would precipitate the iron particles in the reticulum as red or black or yellow. In the white, however, this iron that is dissolved in the fluids would not be precipitated at all and thereby would indicate at once the perfect mixture of the fluids and the strength [*Stärke*] of this human sort ahead of the others. (*VRM* 2:440; see *BBM* 8:103–4)

Kant admits that this account is “only a sketchy enticement to investigation” (*VRM* 2:440) and is good only for showing that his theory can at least “render the phenomena [of racial differences] comprehensible” (*BBM* 8:104). This concession does not seem to affect his claim that the white race is “ahead of the others,” however. Given what he already said about the whites in the 1760s, this claim of superiority seems to be a given for him. Only that he can now shore it up with a natural-philosophical theory of race.

To appreciate this point, consider what Kant now says about blacks and native Americans. Having speculated that black skin emerged in a hot and humid climate due to the precipitation of iron particles “through the evaporation of the phosphorous acid (of which all Negroes stink),” Kant adds that, by the way (*übrigens*),

humid warmth is beneficial to the robust growth of animals in general and, in short, this results in the Negro, who is well suited to his climate, namely strong, fleshy, supple, but who, given the abundant provision of his mother land, is lazy, soft and trifling. (*VRM* 2:438)

The Americans fare even worse in Kant’s eyes. He claims that this race is an “incompletely adapted” one, as “confirmed [*bestätigt*]” by at least two things. First, though generally considered a race of red skins, people of this race actually have skin colors that are not pure red, but suggest an incomplete adaptation across two different climates—“the reddish rust iron color in the colder” region “as an effect of aerial acid,” and “the darker copper color in the hotter” region “as an effect of the alkaline-bilious nature of the fluids.” Second, their “natural disposition ... betrays a half extinguished life power [*Lebenskraft*],” which Kant again attributes to poor acclimation. So, he claims, while the otherwise lazy Negroes can, when enslaved, still be made to do hard labor, “the red slaves (Americans) in Surinam,” then a Dutch plantation colony in South America, can be used “only for labors in the house because they are too weak for field labor.” This is not due to any shortage of coercive means (*Zwangsmitteln*), Kant explains, but because the Americans generally

lack power (*Vermögen*) and endurance (*VRM* 2:437–38; see *GTP* 8:175–76). This explanation echoes his physiological notion of laziness, which we encountered in section 2, as a “blunting of energies [*Kräfte*].”

Now, in Kant’s view, what marks a race is unfailingly hereditary in that, once a race “had established itself through the long residence of its original people [*Stammvolks*]” in one climate, it “could not be transformed into another one through any further influences of the climate” (*VRM* 2:442).

For only the phyletic formation can degenerate into a race; however, once a race has taken root and has suffocated the other germs, it resists all transformation just because the character of the race has then become prevailing in the generative power. (*VRM* 2:442; see *BBM* 8:99–100, 105–6; *GTP* 8:173, 176–77)

An obvious question arises here. Given that Kant has used skin color as the *only* unfailingly hereditary property to establish his fourfold racial classification, what about the other characteristics he has ascribed to some races, such as the Americans’ physiological laziness? After all, even if such characteristics were formed adaptively in a given climate, it does not follow that they would become hereditary and remain constant across climates (recall Rousseau’s account of American “savages” in section 3).

Kant suggests an answer to this question in his third race essay, while responding to Georg Forster’s argument from “second transplanting.” Forster’s argument goes roughly as follows: it takes *indeterminably* long time for a skin color to form under the influence of a climate; thus, one cannot conclude definitively that it will not evolve into a different color in a new climate, through imperceptibly small changes, over another long period of time (Forster, “Something More,” 151–53). More generally, if one assumes, as Kant did, that the first human beings developed a particular characteristic after a prolonged acclimation in one environment, why can one not “also foresee the event of a second transplanting” to engender a “new alteration” of that characteristic in another climate? After all, there is neither a priori proof nor definitive empirical evidence for the impossibility of the latter (Forster, “Something More,” 162).<sup>24</sup>

Kant makes a concerted effort to address this challenge, seeing it as “the most important counterargument” to his theory (*GTP* 8:172). He insists that, once certain germs in the original human phylum were developed in a population to suit a given climate, nature “indeed paid no heed to a transplanting after[wards].” He cites the following as evidence. When some of the already adapted inhabitants of the old region of warm climate were driven to the new region of cold climate, they “have never been able to bring about in their progeny (such as the Creole *Negroes*, or the *Indians* under the name of the gypsies) a sort that would be fit for farmers [*Landanbauern*] or manual laborers [*Handarbeitern*]” (*GTP* 8:173–74).<sup>25</sup> Kant then adds a long footnote to elaborate his point, where he wades into a controversy over whether to liberate Negro slaves and use them as free labors, siding with the pro-slavery plantation owner James Tobin against the abolitionist reverend James Ramsay. One segment of that footnote is worth highlighting for our purpose.

In addition to the *faculty* to work, there is also an immediate drive [*Trieb*] to activity (especially to the sustained activity that one calls industry), which is independent of all enticement and

which is especially interwoven [*verwebt*] with certain natural predispositions; ... Indians as well as Negroes do not bring any more of this impetus into other climates and pass it on to their offspring than was needed for their preservation in their old motherland and had been received from nature; ... this inner predisposition extinguishes just as little as the externally visible one. The far lesser needs in those countries and the little effort it takes to procure only them demand no greater predispositions to activity. (*GTP* 8:174n)

If, as Kant suggested before, Negroes may still be *forced* into hard (field) labor in spite of lacking any inner drive to industry, he once again reserves his worst opinion for native Americans.

This race, which is too weak for hard labor, too indifferent [*gleichgültig*] for industry and incapable of any culture—although there is enough of it as example and encouragement nearby—ranks still far below even the Negro, who stands on the lowest of all the other steps that we have named as differences of the races. (*GTP* 8:176)

Kant explains this point similarly as he did in his first race essay, tracing it to the Americans being a poorly adapted race (*GTP* 8:175). What is different now, however, is that he reaffirms his claim about the basest features of this race in the context of rejecting Forster's suggestion of second transplanting and explicitly treating characteristics other than skin color as beyond further transformation. This is clear enough an indication that, in Kant's view, the weakness attributed to the race of Americans is irreversibly hereditary. That is, he has made it a racial characteristic.

##### 5. Lazy Savagery and Human Progress, from the Racial Lens

Kant sometimes ranks all four races in terms of their ability for *culture*.<sup>26</sup> The red and black races occupy the bottom ranks. Specifically, “the American people acquires no culture. It has no driving force [*Triebfeder*]; because affect and passion are absent in it. ... They ... also do not care for anything, and are lazy.” The blacks, by contrast, are “full of affect and passion.” Still, they acquire “only a culture of slaves; that is, they allow themselves to be trained [*abrichten*],” as they are “sensitive, afraid of beatings,” and so on (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1187, translation amended). The concept “*abrichten*” signifies animal training. When applied to human beings, it means “the taming of our natural animal independence,” without which one would be “wild” (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1170). Training is “merely negative,” then, “by means of which man's tendency to savagery is taken away” (*Päd.* 9:442; see *KU* 5:432). In Kant's view (as we already saw in section 4.2), while blacks have the kind of affects that make them trainable and thereby usable as slaves for hard labor, native Americans seem bound to remain wild. They are simply untrainable, insofar as they are insensitive, indifferent, and without any driving force. It follows that the laziness ascribed to this race cannot even be suppressed by circumstances or transformed into anything beneficial to humanity. That is, their supposed laziness is of the useless sort that defines savagery (as explained in section 2).

To draw out the implications of this racialized version of lazy savagery, consider Kant's view of human progress. On this view, the human being must be *disciplined* (trained), before he can be cultivated (acquire culture), civilized (enter the society), and moralized (act from conceptualized moral incentives). Without the first step, one would remain a “savage”; missing the other steps would make one “crude,” “coarse,” and “evil,” respectively (*Anth-Mensch*,

25:1197).<sup>27</sup> Kant is mainly concerned with how the human being is “formed [cultivated] according to talent, ... made polite (civilized) according to temperament, and ... moralized according to character” (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1157). Moralization is the end goal, albeit one that is still far away as far as Kant can tell.

Up to now there is still no moral constraint among human beings other than the constraint of decency, but we have reason to hope for it. ... [Culture, civilization, and moralization] are three kinds of progress that nature has laid in human beings. We have already come far in culture, in civilization we have not done much, and in moralization we have done almost nothing. (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1197–98; see *IaG* 8:26)

Evidently, character development has the pride of place for its centrality to moralization. Kant’s notion of character, when read together with his racial views, will suggest that only the (European) whites have all the drives and talents needed to approach the hoped-for moral destiny.<sup>28</sup>

Character, Kant states, consists in “the firm attachment to principles once they have been grasped” (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1176). At the very least, then, a “capacity to act *in accordance with concepts and principles* is required for character” (*Anth-Frie*, 25:655, italics added). Kant denies this capacity even to the most advanced non-white race, namely the yellow race (the Hindus in particular): “they acquire culture in the highest degree, but only in the arts and not in the sciences,” due to their inability to rise to “abstract concepts”; thus, they “always remain as they are, they never bring culture further, although they began to cultivate themselves much earlier” (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1187). Moralization as the final end of human progress is therefore beyond their reach, insofar as the ability to form abstract concepts/principles is required for character. Kant in fact generalizes the alleged lack of this ability to all “the Oriental peoples,” who in his view “still have a child’s [pictorial] language of humanity” that reflects a merely sensible mode of cognition. By contrast, “the Westerners abandoned sensibility much sooner and have raised themselves up to the concepts of the understanding” (*Anth-Mron*, 25:1233). Herein lies, Kant claims, an essential and highly consequential difference between the Orientals and the Europeans.

It is a big difference to judge a matter according to shape, appearance, and intuition, and to judge [it] according to concepts. All Oriental nations are not in the position to explain a single property of morality or of justice through concepts; rather all their morals are based on appearance. In the beginning this difference seems to be very small; however it comes to the fore in the application. He who is only capable of representing something for himself according to shape and intuition, is completely incapable of what a concept requires; hence they are capable neither of a philosophy nor of mathematics, nor of being able to have insight into something through concepts. (*Anth-Frie*, 25:655)<sup>29</sup>

To Kant, the Orientals’ incapacity for philosophy or mathematics—in short, for proper “science, as a form of culture that ennobles humanity” (*Anth.* 7:325)—must be more than a transitory phenomenon that may change with external circumstances. He presses for a deeper explanation of their supposedly stagnant relation to culture. The “variety of natural gifts among the many diverse nations cannot be explained entirely by incidental causes” such as climates, he surmises, “but must lie in the nature of the human being himself”; thus, “if a people in no way improves itself over

centuries, then one may assume that there already exists in it a certain natural predisposition which it is not capable of exceeding” (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1181; see *Anth.* 7:313, 315, 319). By contrast, the white race (of the European descent) alone “contains all incentives [*Triebfeder*] and talents in itself” (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1187).<sup>30</sup>

On the whole, while claiming that “many germs lie within humanity” and that it is up to the human being “to develop the natural dispositions proportionally and to unfold humanity from its germs” in pursuit of “his vocation,” Kant thinks that only he who can “have a concept of his vocation” is capable of fulfilling it. Assuming that the European whites alone possess the requisite conceptual capacity, Kant’s hope for the human progress toward moralization is virtually, if not always explicitly, reserved for this race. This reservation aligns with his view that “not individual human beings, but rather the human species, shall get there.” If only the European whites will eventually get there, it will still be the case that “the human being”—a concept that stands for the human *species*—has reached his vocation (*Päd.* 9:445; see *IaG* 8:18–19; *Anth.* 7:323–24).

Against this backdrop, let us return Kant’s view of savagery. We saw in section 2 that, as a conceptual point, savagery is marked by useless laziness and lawless freedom. This notion of savagery served for Kant to outline an educational plan, according to which the human being must be disciplined or trained early on, lest he remain a savage for the rest of his life. This conceptual move is mixed, however, with an overt denigration of literal “savages.”

Now by nature the human being has such a powerful propensity towards [lawless] freedom that when he has grown accustomed to it for a while, he will sacrifice everything for it. ... if [early discipline] does not happen, it is difficult to change the human being later on. He then follows every whim. *It is also observable in savage nations that, though they may be in the service of Europeans for a long time, they can never grow accustomed to the European way of life.* But with them this is not a noble propensity towards freedom, as Rousseau and others believe; rather it is a certain raw state in that the animal in this case has so to speak not yet developed the humanity inside itself. (*Päd.* 9:442, italics added; see *RGV* 6:26–28)

The italicized part of this passage echoes Kant’s dismissal of second transplanting in his third essay on race. Although he is not talking about literal transplanting but the European colonization of indigenous nations, his point is the same, namely that “savages” cannot overcome their savagery in any circumstance whatsoever.

One may see a tension between this point and Kant’s ensuing statement that the savage has “not yet developed” the humanity in himself. This statement makes sense only if the putative savage has the potential to develop the humanity within. Kant sometimes explicitly grants this potential to savages.

Innate [*liegen*] to human nature are germs [*Keime*] which develop and can achieve the perfection for which they are determined. How many germs have not already developed, about which one could before just as little have believed that they would develop, as we now believe about those which are still not developed. Who has seen a savage Indian or Greenlander, should he indeed believe that there is a germ innate to this same [being], to become just such a man

in accordance with Parisian fashion, as another [would become]? He has, however, the same germs as a civilized human being, only they are not yet developed. (*Anth-Frie*, 25:694)

In this way, as Catherine Wilson puts it, it seems that “Kant’s racism is ... curiously at odds with his universal *Keime* theory.”<sup>31</sup> After all, how can he make all those racist claims about the Americans, for instance, while holding that they possess the same germs as other human beings do?

Enter Kant’s racialization of lazy savagery. In section 4.2, we learned that his *Keime* theory has two sides. On the one hand, all human beings, qua humans, share the same original germs and natural predispositions. On the other hand, these germs and predispositions can be unfolded or restrained differently under various material conditions, resulting in more or less hereditary traits that warrant racial and other divisions. In his theory of race, Kant is avowedly more interested in what differentiates human beings than what they have in common (*BBM* 8:99). Accordingly, while he can grant, for instance, that “the natural predisposition of character is innate” in the Americans qua humans, he is more concerned about the *occasioning conditions* under which such a predisposition can develop into “the true character of a human being.” One of those conditions is “a great deal of activity and attention” (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1174). On Kant’s account, the Americans cannot satisfy that condition due to their peculiar laziness, which boils down to a blunted life power and a total lack of usable drives and feelings and which, once it took root in the early people of this race along with their distinctive skin color, became as inextinguishable as the latter. Whatever germs for moral character these “savages” still possess qua humans, they will remain undeveloped.

## 6. Concluding Reflection: Racism in Kant’s Philosophy

I have presented two sides of Kant’s notion of lazy savagery. One is a somewhat abstract notion, in reference to which he conceptualizes a program that can assist the human being to reach his destined perfections (section 2). The other is a racialized one, according to which the “savages” of America have a peculiar kind of physiological laziness, marked by a blunted life power and a lack of drives and feelings that renders them unfit for industry; this laziness, as it was established by the same process of acclimation that formed the red skin, seems to be just as indelible and hereditary as the latter (section 4.2).<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, while Kant can grant these “savages” the same germs for perfections—for developing a moral character, for example—as he does the civilized humans, he can in the same breath deny them the prospect of ever obtaining any such perfection. For the road to perfection must be paved through hard work, a condition that the racialized lazy “savages” simply cannot satisfy on Kant’s account (section 5).

In the limited space remaining, I will briefly consider how this interpretation may add to an ongoing debate about the place of race in Kant’s philosophical system. The debate has largely revolved around the apparent tension between Kant’s pure practical philosophy—with its pronouncements of moral universalism among other things—and his racism. Pauline Kleingeld, in her groundbreaking paper “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race,” describes the tension as follows.

[Kant’s racism] goes against the presumption of human equality which one would expect from someone with a universalist moral theory. After all, the basic moral principle which Kant

formulates during the 1780s, the Categorical Imperative in its several versions, is, *at least in its wording*, addressed to all humans.<sup>33</sup>

The italicized phrase suggests this question: Is Kant *really* committed to universalism? Kleingeld registers two standard answers. Either Kant is an “inconsistent universalist,” who is truly committed to moral universalism but at the same time subscribes to racial views inconsistent with that commitment, or he is a “consistent inegalitarian,” whose racism suggests that the seemingly unrestricted language of his practical philosophy in truth only refers to the European whites. Kleingeld’s own view is that Kant’s position evolved over time. He defended racial hierarchism, which Kleingeld equates with racism, and was therefore an inconsistent universalist until at least the end of 1780s; he “radically revised his views on race during the 1790s,” however, abandoning racial hierarchism. This change of mind, Kleingeld reasons, is partly reflected in Kant’s condemnation of colonialism and slavery in “Toward Perpetual Peace” (1795) and the “Metaphysics of Morals” (1797). In this way, he “finally resolved” the earlier contradiction between “his disturbing views on race [and] his own moral universalism.” That is, he became a consistent universalist in mid-1790s by withdrawing his former racism.<sup>34</sup>

There are a range of available responses to Kleingeld’s argument. One may contend, for instance, that there is no clear-cut evidence that Kant ever changed his positions about the institutions of colonialism and slavery in a way that would amount to a fundamental reversal of his racism.<sup>35</sup> Even if he did come to condemn colonialism/slavery unambiguously, this would *imply nothing* about his stance on race, because his views about race, on the one hand, and about colonialism/slavery, on the other, are mutually independent.<sup>36</sup> At any rate, no matter what the very late Kant thought of race or colonialism or slavery, we still have to confront the fact that he developed his core moral philosophy in the 1780s, during which time he not only failed to condemn colonialism/slavery—not for lack of opportunities—but also made blatantly racist remarks. So, we again have to decide how to interpret the central tenets of his moral philosophy vis-à-vis his racism, settling either on inconsistent universalism<sup>37</sup> or consistent inegalitarianism.<sup>38</sup> Finally, there is the fact that all three of Kant’s race essays would be republished/reprinted numerous times from 1793 through 1799, presumably with his consent.<sup>39</sup>

My study of Kant’s account of lazy savagery suggests yet another response. The first thing to note here is that, contrary to Kleingeld’s interpretation, Kant does not have to believe in racial hierarchy—let alone one in terms of moral qualities—to be a racist. This is so despite the language of ranking or superiority/inferiority that he occasionally uses to talk about the various races.<sup>40</sup> An ideology of racialized *differences* will suffice. Such differences can indeed be non-moral/non-political ones: Kant only need to show that they will somehow determine the practical outcomes. His sexism is a case in point: Of the two human sexes, neither is superior than the other; it is just that nature, for the sake of humanity, intends them to be different—the woman to be “beautiful” and the man, “sublime,” in intellectual and aesthetic qualities; this difference in turn determines, among other things, their places in society—the woman bound for the domestic state and the man, for the civil/political one (*GSE* 2:228–43; *Anth.* 7:303–11; *Anth-Frie*, 25:697–722; *Anth-Mensch*,

25:1188-94; *Anth-Mron*, 25:1392–98). This sexist view is not just consistent with the universalist tenets of Kant’s pure practical philosophy. It supplements the latter.

To specify, let me borrow Mills’ distinction between *ideal* and *non-ideal* theories in his “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology” (without suggesting that he would agree with my analysis). We can see Kant’s universalism as an ideal theory that has as its subject “the human being” in abstraction from the actual conditions of embodied, historically unfolding human existence. Importantly, the universality that requires this abstraction, which is a hallmark of the Kantian a priori, does not entail generality: What is true of the human being *in abstracto* is not immediately applicable to all individual humans *in concreto*. There must in addition be a non-ideal theory that specifies the empirical conditions under which real humans, as earthbound and physiologically limited beings of nature, can nevertheless hope to accomplish the moral ideal that Kant has established a priori. His accounts of sexual and racial differences can be seen as part of this non-ideal theory, insofar as those differences can significantly affect the practical outcomes for members of each sex/race.<sup>41</sup> In this way, Kant could be a *consistent universalist* in the 1780s and beyond, who promoted a pure moral universalism for the human being *in abstracto* while affirming sexist and racist views about actual humans *in concreto*, without thereby contradicting himself.<sup>42</sup>

Kant’s racialization of lazy savagery well illustrates this point. Laziness is something that the human being must overcome to embark on the long journey toward his moral destiny. That is, he “was to *labor himself out* of the crudity of his natural predispositions *by himself*” (*MAM* 8:118, italics added). Thus,

no matter how great his animal tendency may be to give himself over passively to the impulses of ease and good living, ... he is still destined to make himself worthy of humanity by *actively struggling* with the obstacles that cling to him because of the crudity of his nature. (*Anth.* 7:325, italics added)

The italicized words in these passages point to a *most basic condition* of progressing toward a worthy destiny, namely that one must have inner drives for activity and industry. It is precisely this condition that Kant denied to those he literally called “savages,” by racializing their supposed laziness. The racialized laziness is not a moral failure, but something worse in Kant’s system. It is a hereditary physiological state marked by blunted life power and lack of drives; consequently, the putative savages are virtually stuck in the state of nature/savagery, so that whatever germs for perfections they possess qua humans will remain dormant. No wonder, the very late Kant still could not quite figure out what to do with “savages” like American Indians, who represent “a people that *holds out no prospect* of a civil union with it” (*MS* 6:266, italics added). As we learned in section 2, the civil state is “*the only condition* in which all the natural predispositions of the human being can be developed” (*Anth-Mron*, 25:1423, italics added). From the perspective of human progress, then, Kant would see literal savages as a lost cause. If anything, he sees in their very existence and recalcitrant wildness—hence their utter inability for discipline, a prerequisite of civil state—a real-life cautionary tale for the European whites when, for instance, they design a program to educate their young (*Päd.* 9:454).<sup>43</sup>

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- Anth-Mensch* “Menschenkunde.” In *Lectures on Anthropology*, 281–333.
- Anth-Mron* “Anthropology Mrongovius.” In *Lectures on Anthropology*, 335–509.
- BBM* “Determination of the Concept of a Human Race.” In *Anthropology*, 145–59.
- Bem* “Remarks in the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*.” In *Observations*, 63–202.
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- GTP* “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy.” In *Anthropology*, 195–218.
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<sup>1</sup> By ‘native Americans’ with the lower-case ‘n,’ I am referring to indigenous peoples of the American continent.

<sup>2</sup> As a historian explicating Kant’s views, I will retain his practice of using male pronouns to talk about “the human being,” in order not to paper over his sexism. For discussion, see Kleingeld, “Gender-Neutral Language.” Similarly, I will retain Kant’s practice of referring to non-whites and non-Europeans by such terms as ‘Negro,’ ‘Oriental,’ and ‘savage.’ A reader today may find such terms offensive. If so, may that feeling be an impetus for further inquiry.

<sup>3</sup> References to Kant’s works are to the volume and pagination of *Immanuel Kant: Gesammelte Schriften* (29 volumes; Berlin, 1902–). Abbreviations and translations of the specific works used are specified in the bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> I will cite extensively from three texts of Kant’s anthropology lectures from different periods: *Friedländer* (1775–76), *Menschenkunde* (1781–82?), and *Mrongovius* (1784–85). While these are not verbatim transcriptions of Kant’s lectures, there is no reason to doubt that they represent his positions as a lecturer or that what we find in them constitute an important part of his philosophy (see Kant, *Lectures on Anthropology*, 5–10). In any case, whether one should follow the usual

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practice of privileging Kant's published writings over his lectures depends on how one understands racism. If it is only a question of whether *Kant* is racist, then his publications should certainly serve as the more authoritative source of interpretation. If, however, one takes a non-individualist approach and understands racism in terms of what Sally Haslanger ("Ideology") calls "ideological formation," then it suffices to note that Kant's anthropology lectures were popular, that copies thereof were disseminated beyond his classrooms, and that, in instructing his students on anthropology (and physical geography), he intends to equip them with useful knowledge of the world, including the various human populations found therein (*VRM* 2:443; *Anth.* 7:119–20; *Anth-Frie*, 25:469–70; *Anth-Mron*, 25:1210–11). Thus, what matters is not just what Kant himself thought about different races, but what kind of real-life *uptake* his racial views would have among his all white, all European, eighteenth-century audience and readers.

<sup>5</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 46–47.

<sup>7</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 43.

<sup>8</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 64–69.

<sup>9</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 66.

<sup>10</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 69.

<sup>11</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 71.

<sup>12</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 69. Mills builds his argument mainly on Eze, "Color of Reason."

<sup>13</sup> For more references to literal "savages," see Rousseau, *Political Writings*, 135–36, 139–43, 156, 166–68, 186–87.

<sup>14</sup> On the history of these essays and other related texts on race by Kant's contemporaries, see Mikkelsen, *Concept of Race*, 18–32.

<sup>15</sup> Kant is responding to Georg Forster's invocation of a "philosophical jury." It is important to note, however, that Forster was evidently calling for a jury of *moral* philosophers, as the call came after an impassioned reflection on the impact that a theory of race like Kant's may—or may not—have on the cruel practices of slavery (Forster, "Something More," 165–67). Against this backdrop, Kant's insistent appeal to mere *natural* philosophers is particularly worth noting.

<sup>16</sup> Kant published three essays on earthquake in a single year (1756), prompted by the devastating earthquake that struck Lisbon on November 1, 1755, which happened to be the All Saints Day. The event inspired debates among philosophers, natural scientists, and theologians alike. On its impact on Kant's natural philosophy, see Larsen, "Lisbon Earthquake."

<sup>17</sup> Kant refers to the entire human species (*Menschengattung*) as the human "race [*Rasse*]," when contrasted with the "rational beings on other planets, as a multitude of creatures arising from one demiurge" (*Anth.* 7:331).

<sup>18</sup> By "Greenlander" Kant is referring to the Greenlandic Inuit. By "Hottentot," he is either referring to the Khoekhoe people or the Khoekhoe and San peoples collectively, both being southern African nomads and seldom distinguished by early European visitors.

<sup>19</sup> On the surface, this principle would not apply to the Inuit, who lived in the polar zone. To Kant, however, the problem is that this people lived *too far* from the source of heat. As he will show in

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his essays on race, *extreme* cold and extreme heat can impact the human development in similar ways.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed study of Kant's view about the limits of a mechanical explanation of organic generation in "Only Possible Argument," see Ferrini, "Limits of Mechanical Explanation," 303–11.

<sup>21</sup> To make sense of Kant's view of apathy as a gift, which may seem problematic to a reader today, see Formosa, "Duty of Apathy."

<sup>22</sup> Kant connects phlegm in this good sense to "the German's correct understanding and profoundly reflective reason as [one can expect] from any other people capable of the highest culture" (*Anth.* 7:318).

<sup>23</sup> For a dedicated study of the relation between Kant's account of "temperament" and his racial views, see Mensch, "Character and Race."

<sup>24</sup> For an illuminating study of the debate between Forster and Kant, see Goldstein, *Georg Forster*, 92–104.

<sup>25</sup> If Forster were to counter that it would take an indefinitely long time for second transplanting to show noticeable effects, Kant would dismiss this as an unfair delaying tactic: it "would mean to put off the investigator of nature with dilatory answers and to look for excuse" (*GTP* 8:172).

<sup>26</sup> To Kant, "culture in general" is that by which we "make ourselves worthy of humanity" (*MS* 6:392). It mediates between nature and freedom (*KU* 5:431–33; *IaG* 8:21; *MAM* 8:115–18). For discussion, see Marwah, "Nature and Freedom."

<sup>27</sup> Kant is likely talking about the "radical evil" of the human being, who, insofar as he incorporates both the moral law and the incentives of self-love into his maxims, *subordinates* the former to the latter (*RGV* 6:18–53). At any rate, from the Kantian perspective, the imputation of evil already presupposes the ascription of an ability to reflect, abstract, and conceptualize one's incentives so as to form and order maxims. This raises the question as to who Kant is in fact referring to in his theory of (radical) evil. After all, as we shall see, he denies the said ability to all but the European whites.

<sup>28</sup> While "all of Europe, the Turks, and the Kalmucks belong to the white race," Kant divides them into "the Oriental and Occidental [European] kinds" (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1188).

<sup>29</sup> Kant speculates that history of philosophy could only have started with the Greeks, "since no [other] people thought through concepts, but instead all thought through images" (*LoW* 24:800; see *Log.* 9:27). On the development of this Kantian conception of history of philosophy, with its underlying assumptions about European racial superiority, see Park, *History of Philosophy*, 69–95.

<sup>30</sup> This does not mean that Kant has only positive things to say about Europeans. When he discusses the characters of five European nations (France, England, Spain, Italy, German), he deliberately talks about both good and bad sides of each. In fact, he portrays each nation "somewhat more from the side of their faults and deviations from the rule than from the more beautiful side," partly because "flattery *corrupts* while criticism *improves*" (*Anth.* 7:313). The expectation of improvement suggests that Kant cannot racialize a European's faults, which would make the faults

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irreversible and any scheme regarding their improvement unworkable. Consider Kant's portrayal of the Spaniards. For sure, he claims that they are "centuries behind in the sciences" (*Anth.* 7:316) and that they are "like Oriental peoples" in this regard (*Anth-Mron*, 25:1403). He does not attribute this situation to an innate inability to form abstract concepts/principles, however, as he did to the Orientals. Rather, the Spaniards lagged behind other European nations in the sciences "because they do not accept anything from other nations" (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1183). This in turn is likely due to their "noble national pride" (*Anth.* 7:316). Likewise, their alleged "laziness" arises from—as laziness is commonly connected (*gemeinhin ... verbunden*) with—"pride, according to which they regard themselves as the most distinguished and most skillful nation" (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1184). That is, they are "proud of not having to work [*nicht arbeiten zu dürfen*]" (*Anth.* 7:316), as a privilege afforded to them by their nation's purported exceptional advancement. As far as Kant is concerned, while this pride or "[belief that] they are of a noble origin" may turn out to be illusory (*Anth-Mensch*, 25:1184), the laziness engendered thereby can be overcome *in principle* through, say, self-reflection and a more informed comparison with other nations.

<sup>31</sup> Wilson, "Kant on Civilization," 205.

<sup>32</sup> By *physiological* laziness, which Kant the natural philosopher treats as a product of acclimation, I have meant to highlight a fundamental distinction from the sort of laziness that Kant the moral philosopher views as a moral vice. While he would not hesitate to accuse a European of the latter, there is a profound difference between such an accusation, which is a *normative* act that implies some hope or expectation of moral greatness/improvement, and his *descriptive* account of native Americans' laziness as a *non-moral*, merely physiological state.

<sup>33</sup> Kleingeld, "Second Thoughts," 574, italics added.

<sup>34</sup> Kleingeld, "Second Thoughts," 582–92.

<sup>35</sup> Bernasconi, "Third Thoughts."

<sup>36</sup> Boxill, "Kantian Racism"; Valdez, "Not about Race."

<sup>37</sup> Allais, "Kant's Racism."

<sup>38</sup> Mills, "Racism Redux."

<sup>39</sup> Larrimore, "Antinomies of Race," 358.

<sup>40</sup> Interpreters often unquestioningly reduce Kant's racism to racial hierarchism, but do not agree about what the supposed hierarchy comes down to. For a critical overview, see Harfouch, *Mind–Body Problem*, 149–51. For a conceptual distinction between the ranking of races and racial hierarchy, with the latter implying a relation of racial domination, see Boxill, "Kantian Racism," 46.

<sup>41</sup> For Kant, to set forth moral concepts and laws in their universality (*im Allgemeinen*) is to "set [them] forth ... *in abstracto*" (*GMS* 4:409). This means tracing their "origin completely a priori in reason." That is, they "cannot be abstracted from any empirical and therefore merely contingent cognitions." Rather, they must be derived "from the universal concept of a rational being as such [*überhaupt*]," which can only be a concept of pure reason (*GMS* 4:411–12). Accordingly, the universalist proposition that moral concepts/laws hold for all "human beings" comes with a significant caveat: these must be considered as mere rational beings, in total abstraction from "the

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nature of the human being” and from “the circumstances of the world in which he is placed” (*GMS* 4:389). That is also why the a priori system of morals, or the so-called metaphysics of morals, “needs anthropology for its *application* to human beings” (*GMS* 4:412). To this end, one must consider “the particular *nature* of human beings, which is cognized only by experience.” Kant assigns this task to anthropology, which “would deal only with the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in *fulfilling* the laws of a metaphysics of morals” (*MS* 6:217). Notably, much of what Kant has to say about the characters of different races (as well as the two sexes), especially as pertaining to moral development, appears in his anthropology lectures and writings.

<sup>42</sup> For an excellent discussion of how Kant’s “moral-political universalism” and “anthropological-historical particularism,” his racial views being part of the latter, are complementary and even inescapably interdependent of each other, see McCarthy, *Human Development*, 42–68.

<sup>43</sup> I thank the anonymous reviewers for their detailed, constructive, and insightful comments, which led to substantial improvements.