

Kant's Ethics and Kant's Racism

QUARTER YEAR

Instructor information

Instructor: Laurenz Ramsauer
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Course description

Immanuel Kant was possibly both the most influential racist as well as the most influential moral philosophy of modern, western thought. Not only contain Kant's handwritten remains outrageously racist remarks, Kant was arguably the first European scholar to produce an entire theory of race with an explicit racial hierarchy. Moreover, Kant was not a child of his time in this regard but confronted severe criticism. At the same time, Kant's conception of all human beings as ends in themselves and his ideas for cosmopolitan rights remain standard examples of Enlightenment egalitarianism. Even more, it is frequently claimed that whatever Kant-the-person might have believed, Kant's ethics provides a powerful antidote to all forms of bigotry. While Kant's racism has long been treated as marginal to his critical philosophy, the topic has attracted a significant amount of scholarly attention since the turn of the last century. In this course, we will grapple with the following questions: Is Kant's philosophy implicated in his racism – and if so, how exactly? What is the relationship between enlightenment philosophy and the European invention of 'race'? And can Kant's moral philosophy really provide the antidote to racism it is frequently said to be?

Prerequisites

Basic familiarity with both Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy are prerequisites for this course. Familiarity with critical philosophy of race as well as German reading skills will be helpful, but are not required.

Texts

All texts will be made available online.

Course requirements

- Thoughtful participation in discussion.
- A 10-15-minute presentation of your essay topic.
- A final 15-20-page paper.

Assessment

Assessment will be based on a brief one-on-one conversation. After handing in your final paper, we will meet and I will ask you to give me a brief elevator-pitch about how your understanding of law has become more nuanced over the course of the quarter, and what you have contributed to the course. You will then grade yourself based on your own estimation of both your learning and your contribution to our discussions. In optional, upper-level courses, self-evaluations tend to be honest and accurate. But in order to prevent students from undervaluing their effort and contribution along e.g., gendered lines, I keep a veto-power over suggested grades, and may raise suggested grades if I believe suggestions to be overly modest. Because assessment will be conversation rather than a top-down judgment, I encourage you to keep reflecting about both your contribution to our discussion and your own learning-process – as well as to your peers' learning – throughout the course.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

If you need accommodation, please inform me as soon as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

Schedule

Week 1: Racism in philosophy

David McCabe, 'Kant Was a Racist: Now What?'

Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Achieving Our Humanity* (preface and chapter 1)

Katrin Flikschuh, 'Philosophical Racism'

Week 2: Kant: a secret inegalitarian?

GMS 4:387-392, 4:406-445

Charles Mills, 'Kant's Untermenschen'

Optional: Charles Mills, 'Kant and Race, Redux'

Week 3: Kant: an explicit inegalitarian?

Anth 7:283-333

Emmanuel Eze, 'The Color of Reason'

Optional: Emmanuel Eze, *Achieving Our Humanity* (chapter 3)

Optional: Tsenay Serequeberhan, 'Eurocentrism in Philosophy'

Week 4: Kant: a confused egalitarian?

GSE

DR 6:314-15

Lucy Allais, 'Kant's Racism'

Optional: J.L.A. Garcia, 'The Heart of Racism'

Optional: Tommie Shelby, 'Is Racism in the "Heart"?'

Week 5: Kant: a slow learner?

ZeF

PG [excerpts]

Pauline Kleingeld, 'Kant's Second Thoughts on Race'

Optional: Robert Bernasconi, 'Kant's Third Thoughts on Race'

Week 6: What's the 18th century concern with 'species,' anyways?

VvRM

BBM

MAM

Anth 7:172, 7:177-78

Optional: John Zammito, 'Policing Polygeneticism in Germany, 1775 (Kames,) Kant, and Blumenbach'

Week 7: Kant on history

IaG

KrV A642/B670-A658/B686, A686/B714-A701/B729

Mark Larrimore, 'Sublime Waste: Kant on the Destiny of the "Races"'

Optional: Pauline Kleingeld, 'Nature or Providence?'

Week 8: Teleology and natural history

IaG [first proposition]

KU 5:359-61, 5:366-77, 5:386-397

Alix Cohen, 'Kant's Biological Conception of History'

Optional: Angela Breitenbach, 'Teleology in Biology: A Kantian Perspective'

Week 9: Teleology and natural history II

KU 5:398-436

ÜGTP

Stella Sandford, 'Kant, Race, and Natural History'

Optional: Christoph Girtanner, 'Concerning the Kantian Principle for Natural History'

Week 10: History and moral progress

Rez Herder

ZeF

IaG

KU 5:260-64

Bernard Boxill, 'Kantian Racism and Kantian Teleology'