

# Race, History, and Affect: Comments on Peter K. J. Park's "Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy"\*

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*This article offers an assessment of Peter Park's book in the context of critical race theory. I note how Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy powerfully synthesizes and expands earlier scholarship regarding the concept of race's distorting impact on how the history of philosophy was told. In addition, I note how Park's scholarship has implications for the concept of "philosophy" itself. I go on to speculate about the ways in which this monograph fits into recent explorations of implicit racial bias. I develop three minor criticisms of Park's book concerning the relation it depicts between Christoph Meiners and Immanuel Kant, the possible influence by David Hume on these figures regarding race and philosophy's alleged origins in Europe, and Park's stance toward academic outcast Martin Bernal. The method used is one weakly committed to analytic philosophy. I conclude by arguing that in order to counteract what is now the entrenched view of the history of philosophy and its allegedly exclusive origins in Ancient Greece, analysis and criticism of affect and its relation to race will be needed, in addition to the sorts of rationalistic criticisms that Park's book so admirably provides.*

Key words: racism; implicit bias; Hume; Kant; Meiners; philosophy; Ancient Greece; Martin Bernal

## 1 Introduction

It is commonplace to find popular as well as academic histories of philosophy flatly declaring that philosophy began exclusively with the Ancient Greeks. Thus we find Bertrand Russell asserting in his 1945 *A History of Western Philosophy* that "[p]hilosophy, as distinct from theology, began in Greece in the sixth century B.C."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Peter Adamson states in his 2014 *Classical Philosophy: A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps* that "[o]ur story begins in the sixth century BC" with Thales, "the first ever philosopher"; and Catherine Osborne affirms in her 2004 very short introduction on the Presocratics that "some bright sparks on the eastern edges of the Greek world invented philosophy."<sup>2</sup> Nor is this presumption exclusive to Anglophone philosophy, for one finds it in Nietzsche, Gadamer, and Jostein Gaarder's well-known *Sophie's World: A Novel About the History of Philosophy*.<sup>3</sup>

However, this presumption, and its popular as well as academic ascendancy, can be traced back to the late Enlightenment, a period admirably covered by Peter K. J. Park's *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1830*. What Park's monograph does quite clearly and

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The exchange between Peter Park, Dan Flory and Leah Kalmanson on Park's book *Africa, Asia and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013) took place during the APA's 2016 Central Division meeting (Chicago, Illinois) on a panel sponsored by the Committee on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies. After having peer-reviewed the exchange, JWP invited Sonia Sikka and Mark Larrimore to engage with these papers. All the five papers are being published together in this issue.

convincingly is show us that a momentous struggle took place during that fifty-year time span over what counted as philosophy's history as well as what counted as "philosophy" itself, and that this struggle was principally motivated by then-developing theories of race. Whereas previously the majority of European thinkers had granted that philosophy's origins lay at least partially in Persia, India, Egypt, or elsewhere outside Europe, beginning in the late eighteenth century a group of powerful academic philosophers began arguing vehemently for philosophy's origins in Ancient Greece because that European beginning was consistent with ideas they embraced concerning the alleged superiority of whites over those who were from elsewhere or who possessed a different skin color.

The stakes of this debate were (and remain) extraordinarily high, for in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the claims of originality and invention of philosophy (including, we should note, what later became the natural as well as the social sciences) constituted major premises in the overall argument for racial white supremacy. As Europe was then developing a sense of itself as the première locus of global power, the assertions that it had invented philosophy and the sciences—and that no other peoples had the capacity to do so—amounted to no small proof that European global ascendancy was deserved. Park's scholarship shows, however, that these claims were initially controversial and heavily contested, partly because they overthrew a nearly two-thousand-year tradition of more broadly attributing philosophy and its origination to a diverse array of peoples, locations, and races. Park carefully traces the contours of how this argument began, who its major players were, and why it seemed so important to them, as well as intimating what it means for philosophy now. Moreover, he accomplishes these goals with clarity, thoughtfulness, and judicious impartiality.

There is much, then, to admire in Park's well-argued monograph. For example, one of its many praiseworthy dimensions is the way it synthesizes as well as extends important, earlier scholarship by Indologist Wilhelm Halbfass, philosopher Robert Bernasconi, and others (for example, Park 2013: 5). Another significant dimension of Park's monograph is its implicit confirmation of the conviction that many of us have long held that the concept of "philosophy" itself is not exclusively defined by abstract, universal considerations formulated through rationalistic argument, but also encompasses elements that Immanuel Kant sought to exclude through his project of Critical Philosophy. For example, rather than being confined exclusively to the a priori, philosophy may also include the more mundane dimensions of lived experience that most of us inhabit for the greater share of our existence. Additionally, Park implicitly presumes that in terms of method philosophy may approach its subject matter in ways that need not conform to the strictures of rationalistic argument, but may instead be aphoristic or story-like, as in Confucius, the Vedas, Buddhist scripture, and other forms of non-Western philosophy (for example, Park 2013: 1–3, 151). These more expansive senses of philosophy's definition and method are further entailed by Park's effort to encourage us to look beyond what Kant and others restrictively proposed for the concept of "philosophy" and its history. Park's efforts thus implicitly open up new avenues for more centrally locating forms of thought that have been largely excluded or exiled to the margins of the discipline during the past two hundred years.

More than anything else, however, I appreciate how *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy* underscores that the very conception of "philosophy" itself is deeply dependent on the story we tell about its history and origins. On reflection, it is indeed odd that as philosophers so many of us would mechanically recite the old saws about philosophy beginning with the Ancient Greeks. There is, of course, no question that we owe Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle a substantial debt. They and their predecessors in Miletus, Sicily, and other parts of Greater Greece unquestionably advanced philosophy in ways that well deserve our attention and praise.

But did they *invent* philosophy? Do they constitute its earliest original thinkers, whose unprecedented ideas departed from those of their forebears in ways that amount to a self-generated creation that had never existed elsewhere? Do these thinkers betray no substantial philosophical debts to their predecessors? European philosophers and historians have not always thought so. As Park notes, "[t]he opinion of most early modern historians of philosophy [...] was that philosophy emerged first in the Orient. [...] That philosophy's origins

are Greek was, in the eighteenth century, the opinion of an extreme minority of historians” (Park 2013: 70, 76). Before the late eighteenth century, European chroniclers of philosophy predominantly assumed (as had the Ancient Greeks themselves) that philosophy’s origins lay in the Hebrews, Chaldeans, Persians, Indians, Phoenicians, Egyptians, or others who preceded the Greeks (see, Park 2013: 70–76).

Park thoroughly covers how most *historians* of philosophy thought in his discussion of their pre-1780s sentiments regarding the origins of philosophy, but it is also worth taking a moment to underscore how fully even mainstream figures of the era embraced these ideas. Consider, for example, Thomas Hobbes, who wrote in his 1651 *Leviathan* that “[w]here first were great and flourishing cities, there was first the study of *philosophy*. The *Gymnosophists* of India, the *Magi* of Persia, and the *Priests* of Chaldea and Egypt, are counted the most ancient philosophers [...]. *Philosophy* was not risen to the Grecians, and other people of the west [...].”<sup>4</sup> Nor was this view an aberration in his thinking, for twenty-three years later in *Decameron physiologicum* Hobbes wrote that “Egypt was then as it were an University to all the world, and thither went the curious Greeks, as Pythagoras, Plato, Thales, and others, to fetch philosophy into Greece.”<sup>5</sup> Writing during the same year leading Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth agreed: “[...] the most famous of the Greeks travelled into Egypt to receive culture and literature, as Lycurgus, Solon, Thales, and many others, amongst whom were Pythagoras and Plato. [...] [Pythagoras] was the first that brought philosophy to Greece.”<sup>6</sup> Leibniz similarly declared, “I willingly admit that the Greeks owe the beginnings of the sciences to the Egyptians and Phoenicians. Abraham, who came from the Chaldeans, is rightly thought to have taught some things to the Egyptians. The very old doctrine of the immortality of souls seems to have had metempsychosis added to it by the Indians, and we may believe that it came from them to the Magi and the Egyptians. Pythagoras then introduced it into the West, and Plato generally followed him.”<sup>7</sup> Even in the mid-eighteenth century we can find George Berkeley concurring with these sentiments: “[i]t is allowed by all that the Greeks derived much of their philosophy from the Eastern nations. And Heraclitus is thought by some to have drawn his principles from Orpheus, as Orpheus did from the Egyptians; or as others write, he had been an auditor of Hippasus, a Pythagorean, who held the same notion of fire, and might have derived it from Egypt by his master Pythagoras, who had travelled to Egypt, and been instructed by the sages of that nation [...].”<sup>8</sup> Such agreement by famous seventeenth and eighteenth century mainstream, European philosophers about the origins of the discipline being non-European and due to non-European peoples is rather remarkable for many of us, trained as we have been in the tradition that eclipsed this view.

As Park correctly notes, this difference in perspective regarding philosophy’s origins was discredited and largely forgotten over the course of the last two hundred years. Instead, with few exceptions philosophers told themselves and their students a story about the heroic Greeks, who overcame superstition, backwardness, and tyranny in order to think philosophically for the first time in human history, without knowing or considering *why* Western philosophy made such a radical turn in telling its origins story in the first place.<sup>9</sup> Park’s work gives us a wonderfully coherent and compelling argument for why we should reconsider what we currently conceive of as the standard story for philosophy’s origins, as well as why we should reconsider how we typically define “philosophy” itself. If Park is correct, these two elements of what is presently considered the “canonical” origins narrative, both in the analytic and Continental traditions, were advanced because its early proponents had a serious ideological agenda behind their advocacy for such a change; namely, the valorization of a rigid racial hierarchy that placed European whites atop an apex in terms of intellectual capacities and accorded reduced capacities to everyone else.<sup>10</sup> Scientific theories of race developing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had an enormous impact on how philosophy’s origins story was told, and Park’s work makes this impact clear. By synthesizing as well as extending recent research concerning how the current canonical history of Ancient Greek philosophy was devised and written, Park offers a readily accessible and persuasive compendium of reasons why an older narrative about philosophy’s origins was rejected and a new one mounted in its place. In the process *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy* also helps us to appreciate the radically

different character of pre-1780s history of philosophy, as well as bringing to our attention some of the effects that teaching the history of Ancient philosophy in the standard way has on ourselves and our students. Park's monograph convincingly lays the foundation for the idea that the way we currently describe and explain that history operates to distort the concept of "philosophy," what we consider to be within its boundaries, and who we think can do it.

One additional question Park's book implicitly raises is, why has this revised version of the history of Ancient philosophy remained largely unquestioned, especially after the fall of overt white supremacy during the second half of the twentieth century? Is it solely due to institutional inertia, or is something more at stake for philosophers in their ongoing failure to reconsider the discipline's standard origins narrative? I would argue that this failure reflects, in part, the depth of unconscious white privilege embedded in the discipline itself—that is to say, its very whiteness and the blindness that most members have toward it.<sup>11</sup> While Eric Schwitzgebel reports modest gains in minorities acquiring Ph.D.s in philosophy over the last forty years, there remains a stunning preponderance of whites in the field—more than 85 percent (worse than the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, at least until 2016!).<sup>12</sup> In addition, Liam Kofi Bright's recent study of where work by black philosophers has appeared, 2003–2012, shows that only 0.28 percent were published in what are considered the very best philosophy journals.<sup>13</sup> If we take seriously even some of the recent evidence that has been advanced regarding implicit racial biases, then based on this data the biases of most members in the discipline would seem to be such that questions about the accuracy of the old Eurocentric, Ancient Greek origins story have extreme difficulty being raised and given a fair hearing.<sup>14</sup> That this story might be wrong, let alone harmful, apparently does not agree with the way in which most members of the discipline generally if also unconsciously see the world. Alternative origins stories have great difficulty obtaining fair consideration because they contradict the way in which most members of the discipline exist in the world—"whitely," to use the term offered years ago by Marilyn Frye, or according to the "white gaze," to reference Fanon's familiar concept.<sup>15</sup> Thus the question of potentially revising the story of philosophy's origins has substantial hurdles to clear before it can even be placed before most members of the discipline for serious consideration.

Moreover, the story of philosophy's origins in Ancient Greece reflects an additional unconscious bias that most philosophers no doubt possess: namely, that of seeing themselves as dealers in abstract, eternal verities expressed in universalistic form and ideas untouched by worldly concerns or the humdrum details of everyday existence like race. This quasi-Platonic idealization of philosophy, especially if it exists at a nonconscious level, exerts a strong affective pull on what most members of the discipline would like to believe is true about philosophy, both conceptually and in terms of what they would like to believe about its tradition. However, such an idealization fits hand-in-glove with implicit white racial biases that impede many philosophers' vision of what might actually be true about philosophy, and why. While admittedly Park does not broach these issues, they seem relevant as well as encouraged by his work, and I would be curious to hear what he thinks about them.

As should be evident from my comments so far, I am very positively disposed toward *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy* and believe it is an important work that most members of the field would benefit by reading. It not only offers philosophers a powerful argument regarding our racist past, but also evokes troubling concerns about our discipline's present and future. However, I also have three critical, if relatively minor, points I would like to raise. These criticisms are worth raising because I think it is extremely important to get the details of this argument right, and there are a few (albeit secondary) considerations in Park's book that worry me. One concerns the relationship between Immanuel Kant and fellow German philosopher Christoph Meiners (1747–1810). This relation is extremely important to characterize accurately because, if Park is right, these two thinkers constitute the twin epicenters of why philosophy turned away from non-European origins. A second concern involves the possible role that David Hume may have had on Kant and Meiners. Both acknowledged Hume's influence elsewhere, so it is logical to ask whether this Scottish empiricist might have influenced them

regarding race and the history of philosophy as well. The third concern relates to the status of academic pariah Martin Bernal (1937–2013), whose work anticipates Park's, but whose reputation as a scholar has, in my view, been unfairly tarnished. I suggest a more positive stance with regard to Bernal that would make him a legitimate historical precursor to Park rather than someone to be dismissed as having done more harm than good to the scholarly investigation of Ancient Greece and its place in the history of philosophy.

## 2 Meiners and Kant

I would argue that Park's book needs a more nuanced characterization to depict the link between Meiners and Kant. Much of Park's argument depends on the claim that Meiners influenced Kant, and that this influence was later played out in work written by Meiners' childhood friend and professional colleague Dieterich Tiedemann (1748–1803), as well as by fellow German academics Johann Buhle (1763–1821) and Wilhelm Tennemann (1761–1819), all three of whom wrote multi-volume works in the history of philosophy. According to Park, Meiners, who in the late eighteenth century was a powerful figure in German academic circles of philosophy and anthropology, was the first to condemn the idea of widely accepted claims regarding the indebtedness of Ancient Greece to Asian and African cultures: in his view, they contributed “little or nothing” (cited Park 2013: 78). Moreover, he did so for clearly racist reasons (for a summary, see Park 2013: 81–82). Park then plausibly argues that Meiners passed on his views to not only Kant, but also Tiedemann as he wrote his six-volume history of philosophy; and that Buhle, Tennemann, and others followed suit in their accounts of how philosophy allegedly began (Park 2013: 82–95).

While I agree that Tiedemann's, Buhle's, and Tennemann's works in the history of philosophy establish distinct if indirect connections between Meiners and Kant (given, for example, Tiedemann's life-long friendship with Meiners, and Buhle's as well as Tennemann's willingness to take on not only Meiners' ideas but Kant's, too), Park's claim that Kant and Meiners were a “tag-team, working in tandem to shape a modern scientific discourse on race” seems not quite accurate (Park 2013: 95). Because they were in many other ways bitter academic opponents,<sup>16</sup> some different term is needed to show how they worked in tandem to shape the developing scientific discourse on race. I am willing to agree that there was a “feedback-loop” between Kant and Meiners, and that Kant definitely influenced Meiners, as Park argues (Park 2013: 94). Yet Kant and Meiners were more enemies working toward a common goal than a “tag-team” because Kant seems to have been continually correcting Meiners' reasoning for his claims about race, even as Kant agreed with Meiners' overall conclusions. In Kant's view, Meiners was time and again right for the wrong reasons because he used *Popularphilosophie* rather than Kantian Critical Philosophy to ground his arguments, particularly about anthropology and therefore race.<sup>17</sup> Both Kant and Meiners remain comparably “responsible for the exclusion of Asia and Africa from the history of philosophy and for rising Eurocentrism in the discipline” (Park 2013: 95), and Meiners continues to have the “decisive role” in excluding Asia and Africa that Park assigns him (Park 2013: xiii), but the relationship between Kant and Meiners seems better termed a kind of noxiously fruitful antagonism than a “tag-team,” which implies too much co-operation and willingness to work together.

Kant and Meiners were committed academic rivals. In addition, John Zammito suggests that Kant's original impetus for writing about race was Meiners' 1772 *Revision der Philosophie* and articulates that the reason why Kant responded as he did by writing his infamous essay “Of the Different Human Races” (1775/1777) was that Kant believed Meiners' philosophical approach to anthropology and race was deeply wrong-headed.<sup>18</sup> If Zammito is correct, Kant and Meiners were not so much a “tag-team” as bitter opponents who nonetheless worked in concert toward the shared goal of excluding Asia and Africa from the history of philosophy. Rather than getting his “reasons” for this exclusion from Meiners, as Park asserts (2013: xii, 150), Kant agreed with Meiners' racist *conclusions* and devised his own reasoning for why they were true. Thus, in “Of the Different

Human Races” Kant was clarifying scientific concepts (such as “race” and “species”) that Meiners had muddled up with his *Popularphilosophie*;<sup>19</sup> and in the 1782 *Logic* lectures Kant carried out further consequences of that clarification in the racist history of philosophy he proposed, plausibly in response to Meiners’ 1781 *Geschichte des Ursprungs, Fortgangs und Verfalls des Wissenschaften in Griechenland und Rom*, as Park describes (2013, 90–92). However, Kant’s reasoning in these works was completely and self-consciously different, even if he agreed with Meiners’ overall theses.

### 3 Hume’s Possible Influence

I cannot help but wonder about the influence of David Hume on both these German scholars with regard to linking race to the history of philosophy. Hume’s infamous footnote about racial hierarchy added to “Of National Characters” (1753 edition) is familiar, and we know that it influenced Kant because he references it with approval in condemning black talents and mental capacities in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*.<sup>20</sup> However, what is more interesting in the context of discussing the “origins” of philosophy is Hume’s essay from a decade earlier, “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences” (1742).<sup>21</sup> There he argues that certain forms of government and commerce encourage the development of arts and sciences (including, of course, philosophy) and points to Greece’s conditions that “seemed to favor” their rise (Hume 1987: 120). He tells us that “[e]ach city produced its several artists and philosophers” and that “EUROPE is at present a copy at large, of what GREECE was formerly a pattern in miniature” (Hume 1987: 120–1, 121). Although Hume grants that China developed sciences on its own, he argues their progress has been slow and imperfect because China had the wrong sort of government (Hume 1987: 122). In contrast, because of its uniquely beneficial circumstances “the sciences arose in GREECE; and EUROPE has been hitherto the most constant habitation of them” (Hume 1987: 123).

Clearly, Hume’s position in this essay regarding Greece and the origins of philosophy lacks the stridency of Meiners and Kant because he does not explicitly specify race as a factor in the rise and progress of the sciences, although he does note “species of men” and “complexion” while reasoning for science’s general rise among whites and not among nonwhites in the 1753 footnote (Hume 1987: 208). Implicitly racial and prejudicial, the 1742 essay nonetheless lacks the ideological, theoretical ring that Park notes as the hallmark of Meiners’ and Kant’s later work (2013: xii–xiii). In addition, Hume’s position is more ambiguous in the 1742 essay because he grants that some science developed in China, which he implicitly contradicts in the 1753 footnote. However, we know that Hume influenced Kant regarding race and the *general* rise of the sciences in the 1764 *Observations* and that the latter’s affinities for this Scottish thinker were so strong that Hamann called Kant the “Prussian Hume” (cited in Park 2013: 20), so it makes sense to ask whether Hume’s 1742 essay arguing for Greece as the place where the arts and sciences for Europe began could have influenced Kant as well.

Meiners, on the other hand, staked out a philosophical position that shared much in common with Hume. *Popularphilosophie*, with its affinities to British empiricism, would surely have inclined Meiners to know about Hume’s essay as well, and we know that Meiners read some of Hume’s other works.<sup>22</sup> Is it possible that he, too, was influenced by Hume’s remarks about the rise of the sciences in Greece? Could Hume’s 1742 essay have thus influenced either one or both Meiners and Kant regarding Greece as the origin of philosophy? Was this essay translated into German by the time Meiners and Kant were writing about race? I do not know the answers to these questions, and I do not know of any scholars who have written about them. Yet it seems a real historical possibility that Hume could have influenced both Kant and Meiners on this point, one that needs to be carefully investigated, and I wonder what Park thinks about it.

#### 4 Bernal as Precursor

Did Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* really set back eighteenth-century historiography by three decades, as Park asserts (2013: 158 n. 35)?<sup>23</sup> Is it true that, "[a]ny historian who wishes to establish that racist ideas and attitudes were a determining factor in the exclusion of Africa and Asia from modern histories of philosophy must not rely on Bernal's work" (Park 2013: 158 n. 35)? If so, then Park breaks his own rule when on p. 79 he relies on Bernal to argue for the exclusion of Africa and Asia from modern histories of philosophy! In spite of my agreement that many of Bernal's arguments are questionable and his research at times shaky, it also seems appropriate to recognize that he was right in his overall judgment that there had been a radical shift in how we thought about Ancient Greece that began in the late eighteenth century (the very point Park acknowledges on p. 79) and that *some* evidence Bernal marshals for this claim is accurate. However, in the onslaught of criticism that came in the wake of *Black Athena* volumes I and II, the fact that Bernal was right *some* of the time and could construct *some* coherent arguments seem to have slipped by largely underappreciated. For example, like Park Bernal identifies Meiners and Tiedemann as key players in the turn away from the Ancient Model, as Bernal calls it, of arguing for non-Greek origins for philosophy (Bernal 1987: 216–7). Bernal also accurately identifies the use of an Aristotelian "climatic determinism" by various eighteenth-century historians to argue in favor of philosophy's origins in Greece, because, as these historians alleged, philosophy "could not flourish in climates too hot or too cold" (Bernal 1987: 216).<sup>24</sup> Bernal's then-controversial claims that racism substantively influenced our study of the Classics in general and Ancient Greece in particular have been borne out in ways that make him a crucial precursor rather than a pariah. Instead of taking Park's conventional view of Bernal's work, I would like to make the case for a partial rehabilitation by suggesting that *Black Athena* deserves far more appreciation than it is standardly given, particularly in light of the focus and attention it brought to the topic of how we think about Ancient Greece and the role of racism in our conception of who the Ancient Greeks were over the last two centuries.

In support of this view, let me note that my sense of what constitutes intellectual progress includes the idea that sometimes an important step forward may be followed by a ferocious backlash that seems (at least for a time) to throw us two or more steps backward. To draw an analogy: in the wake of Barack Obama's election to the U.S. Presidency in 2008, there was not only great celebration of this clear step forward in America's coming to better terms with its troubled relations with race, but also an immediate, racially saturated backlash that was expressed by Senate leaders declaring that their prime goal was to make Obama a one-term President, a South Carolina Congressman interrupting Obama with the exclamation "You lie!" during one of his first addresses, and, arguably, the election of Donald J. Trump to the U.S. Presidency in 2016. Similar to my sense of Obama's election to the U.S. Presidency and the backlash that plagued it from virtually its beginning, my understanding of Bernal is one of a daring but flawed pioneer who took a crucial step forward but was zealously attacked by his opponents for publicly undermining a treasured implicit presumption that lay beneath a popular, mainstream perception—namely, the very racist presumption that Park has traced back to Meiners, Kant, and Hegel regarding the Ancient Greeks as the self-generated originators of all that is good and valuable about Western civilization because they were Europeans and therefore white, rather than darker-skinned Asians or Africans. The conservative blowback against Bernal was so ferocious that his work is still generally considered academic Kryptonite because any steps that he made forward were seemingly overwhelmed by the vehement and impassioned responses of his opponents.

I want, then, to propose an alternative theory concerning Bernal's role in this debate: namely, that his initial steps forward were crucial for the current reformist movement to take place regarding the role of race in the history of philosophy. Even though it may appear to many that Bernal's work was a setback and no one should rely on it, I would argue that overall *Black Athena* was critical for what progress that has been made to this point because his rather splashy, iconoclastic polemic was necessary to make scholars aware, to themselves

as well as others, of their reliance on a presumption that most of them did not even realize they held, and that had previously been critiqued in predominantly modest, piecemeal ways in marginalized areas of specialized scholarship, such as Presocratic philosophy and Ancient Near Eastern Studies. In a sense, Bernal blew the cover off a controversy that specialist scholars had been brewing in low-circulation journals and monographs for decades, but of which most scholars outside those subfields (as well as many within) were either fundamentally unaware, did not take seriously, or did not take seriously enough.<sup>25</sup> Classical philologist Thomas A. Schmitz rightly notes that *Black Athena* was a “catalyst” for the discussion of questions about race that it raises.<sup>26</sup> It took, in short, Bernal’s dragging this controversy into the light of popular debate to make further progress possible because his work not only forced scholars to face the fact that they relied on racist scholarship to ground their current work and presumptions about Ancient Greece, it forced them to do so before others, both inside and outside their disciplinary fields of expertise.

Like many pioneers, Bernal made mistakes: he was a lumpner rather than a splitter, he could be as perplexing when explaining his etymologies as Heidegger, and some of his archeological interpretations were at best speculative and difficult to countenance. But he was right in outline and about many more details than most of his critics have cared to admit, especially regarding the historiography of Ancient Greece in the first volume of *Black Athena*, which is the one most closely related to Park’s monograph. Moreover, some of Bernal’s critics grudgingly admit that many of his ideas have merit. As reviewer Timothy Taylor wrote of *Black Athena* II for *Antiquity* in 1991, “Bernal has the alarming habit of often being right for the wrong reason.”<sup>27</sup>

However, Bernal lost the publicity battle with Classicists like Mary Lefkowitz and others because the dominant public as well as academic perception of *Black Athena* became that of an incompetent piece of scholarship, done by an unqualified amateur who had overstepped his expertise and bumbled his way into fields of research about which he knew too little.<sup>28</sup> This perception was, I would argue, taken on rather uncritically by most philosophers as well as historians, who not only felt unqualified to judge the massive number of the details marshalled by Bernal, but also felt a strong sense of resistance to the prospect of losing the Ancient Greek origins story for philosophy.

I want to suggest that Lefkowitz and company’s victory here was at least as much a matter of emotion as it was substantive argument. Time and again she, and her cohort of like-minded scholars, effectively smeared Bernal with innuendoes of incompetence and association with clearly inferior scholarship, rather than dealing directly and in detail with his arguments. In addition, they were able to rely on the fact that most interested readers (in the U.S. and Europe, anyway) shared their implicit white racial biases regarding Ancient Greece’s place at the foundation of all that was good and of value about Western civilization.<sup>29</sup> These biases moreover run deeper than most of us realize. As the implicit bias literature noted above implies, these biases are not only intellectual but also embodied. Our presumptions become ingrained into not only our minds but also our bodies by means of habit and develop into affective predispositions that most people do not even realize they have—especially regarding race.<sup>30</sup> Just as implicit white racial biases have helped to keep philosophy as a discipline from overcoming its excessive whiteness over the last forty years, Lefkowitz and company were able to dog-whistle their way to many philosophers’ embodied, affective senses that the Ancient Greek origins story was ultimately too valuable to consider reimagining it in the robust way Bernal’s scholarship demanded, let alone think about viable non-European alternatives to it.

Based on these considerations, I would argue that Bernal’s role in advancing the debate about Ancient Greece’s place in sustaining racial white supremacy has been cast far too negatively. This negative perception is due as much to the emotional ferocity of his critics, their implicit invocation of affective presumption, and their tacit reliance on the dominant narrative regarding Ancient Greece being an ingrained habit, as it is on the actual flaws in his scholarship. Again, if the implicit racial bias scholarship is correct, the defense of Ancient Greece as the origin of Western civilization could plausibly have become habitualized to the point of being



affectively embodied in most Western scholars. Thus, triggering it would require meeting a very low threshold. Bernal's critics would not have had to have worked very hard to set it off.

Possibly I am being too harsh about a minor detail in Park's monograph and allowing myself to range far beyond what he aimed to do. After all, Park condemns *Black Athena* in an endnote and only mentions him twice in the main text. The point, however, that I am trying to make is this: combating racism cannot only occur on the rational level, as many scholars (especially those in philosophy) seem to believe. (I, in any case, long believed that.) Rather, combating racism must occur on at least two levels. One is the rational, where we marshal arguments about evidence and belief, etc., and where our rationality has sovereignty. Park has indeed got this part of the debate pretty well covered when it comes to the history of philosophy.

Yet there is another level that I think Bernal's treatment by his critics and Park's agreement with it reveals. If recent theorists of moral psychology are correct, there is an additional level on which the battle against racism must also be fought, and that level is one of embodied, low-level intuitions over which the rational holds very little effective sway. This level is one of ingrained habit and affect, of our emotional responses that operate in many ways independently of our rationality. If Bernal's treatment by his critics shows us anything, it is that we not only have to face the fact that rational arguments need to be mounted against racism—something that we have done fairly well in philosophy and to which Park's work admirably contributes—but we also need to devise forms of legitimate affective persuasion that will influence those committed to white supremacy and privilege at the embodied level as well (especially those who are unknowingly so committed). Often, these two ways of reacting (emotionally and rationally) will not even agree within the same person. One can, for example, be simultaneously committed to anti-racism from a rational perspective and still react in racist ways to individuals.<sup>31</sup> By implication this possibility also means that one might accept criticisms about the racist history of philosophy in the West and still affectively feel the need to defend the “purity” of Ancient Greek philosophy's origins, free of outside influences.<sup>32</sup> As philosophers and academics, we have not been very good at understanding, let alone facing, these possibilities. Rather, we have tended to focus on the evidence and argument, as we have been trained to do. But if we are going to fully confront problems of race—including those involving the history of philosophy—we will also have to acknowledge that our recognition and acceptance of rational argumentation is only part the battle. The other part will be to confront the affective and embodied dimensions of race inculcated into us by years of habit and training in what has long been and continues to be a de facto white supremacist culture. Unlearning the affective dimension of that “confirmation bias” lay before us like terra incognita, awaiting our exploration and comprehension (please excuse the mildly colonialist metaphor!).

## 5 Concluding Remarks

Park's monograph is certainly an important step in the fight against racism in philosophy. It offers us a powerful set of analytic weapons against some deeply pernicious aspects of the discipline. But the lesson of Bernal's status in the overall debate about Ancient Greece must be learned as well. My criticism of a relatively minor point in Park's monograph is aimed at revealing this second lesson. The affective side of race, which operates semi-independently of our rationality, must also be addressed. This is a side of the battle that most of us have not yet faced, but need to, in order to fully overcome the problems posed by race in philosophy. I think Park's stance against Bernal in his endnote reveals a telling weakness in philosophy's overall strategy against racism—an understandable one, but one that nonetheless reveals a crucial flaw in most battle plans against racism. There is more to do besides just marshaling arguments and evidence; we must also face how deeply we are affectively attached to race and what that means for how we consider the arguments and evidence toward which we address most of our attention.<sup>33</sup>

As Aristotle argued long ago, our affects and our reason need to function in concert if we wish to be moral.<sup>34</sup> That goal will not be easy to achieve with respect to race, but ultimately it is the only way out of this horrific hole we have dug for ourselves through centuries of thinking and acting as if human beings were ranked according to an ongoing series of rigid, inherited racial hierarchies favoring whiteness. Park has supplied us with some important tools for digging ourselves part of the way out. But there are others we must develop as well.

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- <sup>1</sup> Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* [1945], (New York: Touchstone, 2007), xiv.
- <sup>2</sup> Peter Adamson, *Classical Philosophy: A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps*, Volume I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3–4; Catherine Osborne, *Presocratic Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), xv.
- <sup>3</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* [1872], trans. and ed. Greg Whitlock (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 4, 7; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Beginning of Knowledge* [1999], trans. Rod Coltman (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 119, 129, 131; and Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World: A Novel About the History of Philosophy* [1991], trans. Paulette Møller (New York: Berkley Books, 1994), 21, 32.
- <sup>4</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [1651], ed. Michael Oakeshott (New York: Collier Books, 1975), 479.
- <sup>5</sup> Thomas Hobbes, “Decameron Physiologicum, or, Ten Dialogues of Natural Philosophy” [1678], Chap. I (“Of the Original of Natural Philosophy”), in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. William Molesworth (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1845), Vol. 7, 74.
- <sup>6</sup> Ralph Cudworth, “The True Intellectual System of the Universe” [1678], in *The Works of Ralph Cudworth, D. D.: Containing The True Intellectual System of the Universe, Sermons, &c.*, ed. Thomas Birch (Oxford: D. A. Talboys, 1829), Vol. II, 108.
- <sup>7</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “Letter to Hansch on the Platonic Philosophy or on Platonic Enthusiasm,” July 25, 1707, in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. and trans. Leroy E. Loemker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), Vol. II, 963.
- <sup>8</sup> George Berkeley, “Siris: A Chain of Philosophical Reflexions and Inquiries Concerning the Virtues of Tar-water, and Divers Other Subjects Connected Together and Arising One from Another” [1744], in *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1967), 91.
- <sup>9</sup> An unexceptional example is S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, and C. D. C. Reeve’s “Introduction” to their *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, fourth edition, ed. S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, and C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2011), viii.
- <sup>10</sup> For a parallel corroborating argument, see Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), esp. 48–68, 134–54.
- <sup>11</sup> As many readers will recognize, this kind of unconscious white privilege might also be termed “white ignorance,” as Charles W. Mills has argued in “White Ignorance,” *Race and the Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 13–38.
- <sup>12</sup> Eric Schwitzgebel, “Percentages of U.S. Doctorates in Philosophy Given to Women and to Minorities, 1973–2014,” *The Splintered Mind*, January 13, 2016, <http://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.com/2016/01/percentages-of-us-doctorates-in.html> (accessed 20 January 2016).
- <sup>13</sup> Liam Kofi Bright, “Publications by U.S. Black Philosophers in Top Philosophy Journals: The Numbers,” *The Daily Nous*, January 18, 2016, <http://dailynous.com/2016/01/18/publications-by-u-s-black-authors-in-top-philosophy-journals-the-numbers/> (accessed 22 January 2016).
- <sup>14</sup> The literature on implicit bias is quite extensive; see the “Recommended Reading” on the *Implicit Bias and Philosophy* website [www.biasproject.org/recommended-reading](http://www.biasproject.org/recommended-reading) (accessed 23 January 2016); Michael Brownstein,

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- “Implicit Bias,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/implicit-bias/> (accessed 23 January 2016); and *Implicit Bias and Philosophy*, two volumes, ed. Michael Brownstein and Jennifer Saul (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- 15 Marilyn Frye, “White Woman Feminist, 1983–1992” in *Willful Virgin: Essays in Feminism* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1992), 147–69, at 155, 157, 160ff.; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* [1952], trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 90, 95.
- 16 See, for example, Kant: *Philosophical Correspondence, 1759–1799*, ed. and trans. Arnulf Zweig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 7, 122 n.
- 17 John H. Zammito, “Policing Polygeneticism in Germany, 1775: (Kames) Kant, and Blumenbach,” *The German Invention of Race*, ed. Sara Eigen and Mark Larrimore (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 35–54, at 38–39.
- 18 Zammito (2006: 36–45).
- 19 See Zammito (2006: 40–1).
- 20 David Hume, “Of National Characters” [1753], reprinted in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, rev. edition, ed. Eugene Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987), 197–215, at 208; Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T Goldthwait (1960; rpt. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 110–1. (Although Hume first published “Of National Characters” in 1748, he added this infamous footnote to the 1753 edition; see Richard Popkin, “Hume’s Racism Reconsidered,” in *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 64–75, at 65.
- 21 David Hume, “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences” [1742], reprinted in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, 111–37.
- 22 See, for example, James Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume’s Writings on Religion*, two volumes (London: Thoemmes Press, 2005), vol. I, 223.
- 23 Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, three volumes (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987, 1991, 2006).
- 24 See also Bernal (1987: 204). This point is easily further substantiated. In addition to the examples of Bodin, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Heumann that Bernal mentions, Hegel discusses climatic determinism in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* [1837], trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 152–96. See also Theodor Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers: A History of Ancient Philosophy* [1893–1909], three volumes, trans. Laurie Magnus (London: John Murray, 1901–1912), Volume I, 4 and 14, where Gomperz argues that “soil” and rugged mountains helped to determine Ancient Greek philosophical capacities, thereby advancing a related form of geographic determinism.
- 25 See, for example, M. L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* [1984], trans. Margaret Pinder and Walter Burkert (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); and G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 26 Thomas A. Schmitz, “Ex Africa lux? Black Athena and the Debate about Afrocentrism in the US,” *Göttinger Forum für Altertumswissenschaft* 2 (1999): 17–76, at 25.
- 27 Timothy Taylor, “Among the New Books,” *Antiquity* 65, no. 249, (1991): 977–86, at 981.
- 28 See, for example, Mary Lefkowitz, “Not Out of Africa,” *The New Republic*, February 10, 1992, 29–36, at 33; and *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History*, Second Paperback Edition (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Mary Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers, “Preface,” *Black Athena Revisited*, ed. Mary Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), ix–xiv, at ix; and Mary Lefkowitz, “Ancient History, Ancient Myths,” in *Black Athena Revisited*, 3–23, at 12.
- 29 See especially Lefkowitz (1992, 1997).
- 30 See Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: the Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), and *The Physiology of Sexist and Racist Oppression* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- 31 See Tamar Szabó Gendler, “On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias,” *Philosophical Studies* 156 (2011): 33–63; Shannon Sullivan, *Good White People: The Problem with Middle-Class White Anti-Racism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014); and Sullivan, *The Physiology of Sexist and Racist Oppression*, 1–2, 158–61.

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- <sup>32</sup> A possible instance of such a conflict might be evident in a comment made by the well-known philosopher and editor of Ancient Greek texts, Jonathan Barnes. Reflecting on his admission that Presocratic philosophy in Ionia might well have been influenced by the Egyptians and the Babylonians, Barnes nonetheless admits to preferring to believe that philosophically “Thales seems to live in a different and a more luminous world” than that inhabited by the Ancient Egyptians or Babylonians, thereby contradicting the admission he had just made; see *Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (London: Penguin, 1987), 60.
- <sup>33</sup> A good place to look in order to begin unpacking this affective dimension of race is the above-mentioned work of Shannon Sullivan.
- <sup>34</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Second Edition, Terence Irwin, trans., (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 17–19.

## *Decolonizing the Department: Peter K. J. Park and the Profession of Philosophy*

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*Peter K. J. Park's book Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon is a call to action for academic philosophers. As Park shows, philosophical historiography, as we have come to know it, is a relatively recent invention indebted in large part to Immanuel Kant's adherence to a contentious theory of racial essentialism. Park argues that this racism undergirds Kant's work on the history of philosophy—it informs his arguments for the exclusion of African and Asian sources from the canon and his insistence that philosophy flowered spontaneously among the Greeks with no influence from the non-Greek-speaking world. Indeed, other philosophical historiographies available in Kant's lifetime traced the origins of philosophy to a variety of regions, such as India or Egypt, and contextualized the work of the Athenians accordingly. Today, presumably, few philosophers would agree with the notion that the history of philosophy is a record of European cultural ascendancy reflecting the natural superiority of the white race; yet, as the following essay argues, the degree requirements for our programs of study, along with other curricular and departmental structures, together serve to transmit this outdated teleology and the racist narrative regarding white supremacy associated with it.*

Key words: philosophy and race; racism; history of philosophy; African philosophy; Asian philosophy

I begin with a short story of the troubling classroom experience that prompted my commentary on Peter K. J. Park's book *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon*. In a class on philosophy and postcolonialism, my students and I were discussing the conclusion of the fourth chapter, which is one of the key points in Park's argument, where he makes the case that Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) views on race are indeed *racist*. As Park asks, "Was Kant a racial thinker? According to Bernasconi, he was one of the founding theorists of race. Was Kant a racist? A first-time reader of 'Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime' may well be shocked and disturbed by Kant's racial stereotypes and racist remarks" (93). Park elaborates that these statements include Kant's conviction that no African person has ever made any artistic or scientific achievements, and that black skin color is proof of stupidity.

We moved on to the next paragraph in Park's book, which is the culmination of his major claim about Kant, in which he discusses the racial essentialism that informs Kant's anthropology and history of philosophy. In Park's words, "Kant taught that the Hindu race did not develop philosophy because they did not have that capacity. In his anthropology lectures, Kant explicitly attributes this lack *not* to the form of government or customs of the Asians, but to their descent (*Abstammung*). Montesquieu had famously argued that the form of government or customs of a people determined its character. Kant taught his students that it was the other way around. It is race that determines the form of government and the customs." In other words, for Kant, it is no accident of history that philosophy only exists in Europe. Rather, white Europeans are the *only* people to have developed philosophy, while *all* non-white people lack philosophy, because of their inherent characteristics as members of different races. Park's final remark in the fourth chapter holds that Kant was a central figure responsible for shaping the "modern scientific discourse of race" and for "the exclusion of Africa and Asia from the history of philosophy and for rising Eurocentrism in the discipline" (95).

After making it through the upsetting comments about black skin color and concluding the chapter on this strong claim about racial essentialism, there was a moment of silence, as the students and I digested

everything. After a pause, I looked at the class and said, “I guess you wonder why we still teach a guy like Kant, don’t you?” And then, the single African American student in the room looked at me and said, “Yeah.”

I had this student on my mind while preparing my commentary on Park’s book. How do we as philosophers explain our disciplinary and professional practices to students? How do we defend teaching a philosophical canon that contains so many known racists and patriarchs? As I have come to see, the great majority of philosophy departments are structured around the same canon and the same historical narrative that Park shows is a recent invention, constructed only a few hundred years ago through the purposeful and racially-motivated interventions of figures such as Kant, Christoph Meiners (1747–1810), Wilhelm Tennemann (1761–1819), Dieterich Tiedemann (1748–1803), and, later, G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831). In this brief commentary, I want to focus on the material in Park’s book that directly impacts—or should impact—the discipline and profession of academic philosophy as we practice it today.

## 1 A Very Special Kind of History

Following from the point above about racial essentialism, one of the most important arguments that Park makes is that philosophers can no longer claim that Kant was simply a victim of his time, that is, that he absorbed a racist worldview from prevailing currents. To the contrary, theories of race were hotly debated, being divided among a range of positions, some quite egalitarian. As Park shows, Kant chose to advance a contentious theory of racial essentialism that in no way reflected a consensus among his contemporaries. A core thesis of Park’s book is that Kant’s racism undergirds his work on the history of philosophy—it informs Kant’s arguments for the exclusion of African and Asian sources from the canon and his insistence that philosophy flowered spontaneously among the Greeks with no influence from the non-Greek-speaking world. Again, as Park makes clear, Kant was here advancing what we might call a fringe view, which was not representative of the diversity of opinions on philosophy’s history available to Kant at that time. But this fringe view went on to influence the Kantian School, and then Hegel, and from there to assume a dominant position within academia. Today’s philosophy departments are the inheritors of a historical narrative, a canon, and a general program of study shaped by the dubious racial theories of Kant and Hegel.

The historical narrative in particular is problematic on several levels. On the one hand, the narrative is informed by the racial essentialism discussed above. That is, a certain picture of philosophy’s historical trajectory (from its Greek origins, through its advances associated with modernity and the enlightenment, and on to the contemporary period) was promoted by figures such as Kant and Hegel and reflected their commitment to various racial stereotypes. On the other hand, as Robert Bernasconi says, in this so-called history of philosophy, “the basic rules of good history are disregarded” (15).<sup>1</sup> Park takes us through Kant’s philosophical arguments for why the history of philosophy is, indeed, an atypical sort of “history.” As Kant says, the history of philosophy is “so special a kind that nothing of what is recounted therein could happen without knowing beforehand what should have happened and therefore also what can happen” (Qtd. in Park, 23). In other words, philosophy is premised on a collection of a priori truths, and so the actual unfolding of the development of the academic profession over time is of no consequence. For Kant, philosophical truths are akin to theorems of mathematics—they exist independently of their discovery and articulation by human beings. Moreover, in a move that underscores his racial essentialism, Kant promotes the idea that only the people of a certain race, thanks to what he claimed were inherent racial characteristics, are capable of understanding and developing these truths.

The philosophical question of mathematic truth aside, I doubt that many people today would seriously hold this view of the history of philosophy. And yet, to return to Bernasconi for a moment, as he says: “For fifty years or so historians of philosophy have believed that they can write a work in the history of philosophy

and brazenly rewrite the arguments of the canonical philosophers, if they think they can improve on what those philosophers had managed for themselves” (15). Bernasconi cites Bernard Williams’ claim that Descartes’ work was “ambiguous, incomplete, [and] imperfectly determined by the author’s and his contemporaries’ understanding”; and so, Williams himself sets out write a “rational reconstruction of Descartes’ thought” (15). Williams explains that the history of philosophy faces “a cut-off point, where authenticity is replaced as the objective by the aim of articulating philosophical ideas” (15). Bernasconi comments: “Clearly the casualty of such efforts is an understanding of the historical dimension of a philosopher’s work and I believe that this leaves anyone who takes this route ill-equipped to address the question of the coexistence in the same thinker of both racism and moral universalism, which is why they tend to ignore one or the other, usually the racism” (15).

Williams’ characterization of the cut-off point between the practice of history and the practice of the history of philosophy only echoes Kant’s claim, nearly two hundred years earlier, about the very special type of history that is the history of philosophy. Again, I doubt that many philosophers today believe this. For example, when teaching Greek philosophy, many of us take pains to stress that the ancient Greek worldview is quite foreign to us now, and we try to help students understand the claims of Greek philosophers in a culturally and historically appropriate context.

Although few people today would present philosophy to our students as the transmission of a priori truths that need no historical contextualization, we nonetheless still pass on this naïve understanding of philosophy’s history, not necessarily in our individual classrooms, but in our departments as a whole. That is, departmental structures themselves can communicate the centrality of white European thought—as when, for example, a department’s courses in “ancient” and “modern” philosophy trace a predictable path from the Greeks to Kant, or when programs for majors and minors include non-Western courses only as electives. Apart from the issues of historical accuracy, we must question whether this intellectual climate contributes to the well-known lack of demographic diversity in academic philosophy. Compared to other disciplines in the humanities, philosophy awards fewer degrees to students from underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities;<sup>2</sup> and professionals in academic philosophy also remain overwhelmingly white and male.<sup>3</sup> Philosophy is impoverished by the exclusion of diverse perspectives, both in terms of the individuals who populate the profession and the authors who comprise the canon; ultimately, it risks losing its vitality and relevance by becoming increasingly insular in an increasingly globalized world. If we are to help build more diverse and inclusive philosophy programs, then what are the structural changes to academic departments that need to be made?

## 2 What We Teach and How We Teach It

My go-to strategy in cases like this is to change the names of things, and I have been rightly criticized by like-minded colleagues who would say that this amounts to a cosmetic adjustment, not a structural change. That said, the first point that concerns me is the series of courses that usually fall under a department’s required classes in the history of philosophy. In many U.S. philosophy departments, requirements for the major and/or the minor include a history component that covers, at least, courses such as Ancient Philosophy and Modern Philosophy, and at times additional courses on Medieval Philosophy, Twentieth-Century Philosophy, among others. Courses that follow this particular historical periodization tend to comprise mostly, if not exclusively, Western content. Turn to a department’s non-Western offerings, if there are any, and you will likely find courses such as Chinese Philosophy, Indian Philosophy, Buddhist Philosophy, and so forth. In other words, the curriculum reinforces for students the idea that Europe is marked by important historical developments while Asian traditions are monolithic and ahistorical. This problem cannot be solved by including more non-Western content in existing Ancient Philosophy courses or by offering separate courses titled, for example, Ancient

Chinese Philosophy. The deeper problem, as Park's work reminds us, is that "ancient" and "modern" are not neutral historical markers; rather, they pertain to European history and, moreover to a certain teleological view of European progress from ancient and "primitive" to modern and "enlightened" forms of culture and governance, a point already familiar to historians in postcolonial studies.<sup>4</sup>

In the service of establishing more inclusive terminology, my first inclination is to rename courses to avoid the remnants of this teleological accounting of history. That is, if we want to teach Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, then we should perhaps call the class "Athenian Philosophy circa 400 BCE." My next inclination is to consider ways to incorporate culturally appropriate historical markers. So, in light of my own areas of specialization, I might teach classes called "Han-Dynasty Philosophy" or "Warring States Ruism."<sup>5</sup> But these name changes imply a structure-level intervention, because the question arises: What do we *require* that students take for the major and minor, and what do we categorize as "elective"? That is, if we want students to be familiar with past philosophers, then what are the compelling reasons to make Athenian philosophy a requirement and Han-dynasty philosophy optional?

Consider Park's discussion of competing portrayals of the role of Greek philosophy in the history of philosophy. Many histories, both before and after Kant, did not posit the Greeks as the originators of philosophy, but instead contextualized the influence of the Athenians in a variety of other ways. By my count, Park reviews over twenty histories of philosophy written between the 1500s and 1800s, which either attribute the origins of philosophy to a non-Greek source (such as Egypt or India), or which survey multiple philosophical traditions originating in different areas, including (to name just a few) Persia, Ethiopia, China, and, in one case, Canada (by which the author meant the indigenous peoples of the Americas) (see especially 70–7). In other words, "world philosophy" was once the mainstream. As Park says: "That philosophy was exclusively of Greek origin was an opinion held by only three published historians of philosophy in the eighteenth century" (8)—namely the same Meiners, Tiedemann, and Tenneman whose theories influenced Kant and Hegel. So, Park's research allows us to make the claim, fairly confidently, that the Greeks enjoy the status they do today largely because they were appropriated in the late 1700s into the racist narrative of world-historical development promoted by a small subset of scholars at the time. And, we in philosophy departments today have to decide how we will resist perpetuating this narrative. So, again, I think that attention to the names of the courses in the history of philosophy series leads very quickly to discussions about restructuring whole departments, as we find ways to articulate our justifications for requiring or not requiring the study of the Athenians for students seeking the degree.

In addition to this concern about the historical narrative that we pass on to students via avenues such as degree requirements, Park's book also raises concerns about the canon that we are transmitting. This brings me back around to my experience in my postcolonialism class, and the question of how I articulate to students the benefit of teaching Kant. As a woman in philosophy, I have to question why my own lesson plans for modern European philosophy contain only male philosophers. The active scholarly lives of women in Europe's modern period are well documented; their writings are freely available.<sup>6</sup> And yet, I am utterly guilty of not teaching these women in my classes. I tend to consider some people, like Kant, to be so important that their presence is non-negotiable on the syllabus, and I consider their work so difficult that it requires weeks of semester time to teach; and so, I end up prioritizing space for these male voices.

One of the many benefits of Park's book is that it has cleared up what remained of my sentimental allegiance to the so-called canon as I have received it. Women from the modern period sit in obscurity only because I am actively helping to obscure them. When it comes both to rethinking degree requirements, and to rethinking the canon, I have come to see that philosophy departments as a group need to embrace a certain amount of messiness. In other words, a neat and tidy historical narrative is almost always misleading; a neat and tidy canon is almost always exclusionary. Embracing this messiness may mean fundamentally restructuring our



departments and our degree requirements, rethinking what we mean by an education in philosophy, indeed, redefining philosophy itself.

In Park's very final sentence, he states: "When one day the history of philosophy ceases to do what it does in the service of philosophy, philosophers will cease to teach it" (151). Undoubtedly the history of philosophy has served philosophers well, but mainly white American and European philosophers. As Park says, "In the nineteenth century, the history of philosophy was one of the subjects most regularly covered in philosophy lectures at German universities. [...] The history of philosophy ingrained in [students] the canons of philosophy, which in turn reinforced a particular vision of German and European identity" (151). The history of philosophy was undoubtedly such a popular topic because it presented a fairly self-congratulatory picture of European identity. This only underscores the disconnect that urgently needs to be addressed: On the one hand, as I have said, I doubt that many philosophers in the classroom explain the history of philosophy as the record of European ascendancy on the world-historical stage, or as reflecting the natural superiority of the white race, or as transmitting a priori truths that only this one race can access; yet on the other hand, the degree requirements for our programs of study, as well as our current canon, together serve to transmit this outdated teleology and the racist narrative regarding white supremacy associated with it. Given all this, it is indeed time to cease teaching the history of philosophy as we normally teach it; not only because it no longer serves us, but because we can do better in the service of philosophy. With Park's book on the table, if we do not act, then we are no longer unwitting but knowing accomplices in a racist program of philosophical study.

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- <sup>1</sup> Robert Bernasconi, "Will the Real Kant Please Stand up: The Challenge of Enlightenment Racism to the Study of the History of Philosophy," *Radical Philosophy* 117 (January/February 2003): 13–22.
- <sup>2</sup> "Racial/Ethnic Distribution of Degrees in Philosophy," *Humanities Indicators: A Project of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, updated April 2016 <http://www.humanitiesindicators.org/content/indicatordoc.aspx?i=266> (accessed 11 January 2017).
- <sup>3</sup> "Member Demographics," The American Philosophical Association <https://apaonline.site-ym.com/?demographics> (accessed 11 January 2017).
- <sup>4</sup> See, for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History," *Representations* 37 (1992): 1–26. Park's own book makes clear that the periodization of philosophical history was a contested issue, and that different scholars offered widely divergent accounts. Chakrabarty, other historians, and theorists associated with postcolonial studies have addressed the problematic teleology of historical periodization that denies non-Western peoples any meaningful role in the world-historical narrative.
- <sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the use of the term "philosophy" itself in such contexts, see Kalmanson, "If You Show Me Yours: Reading all 'Difference' as 'Colonial Difference' in Comparative Philosophy," *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 7, no. 2, (Fall 2015): 201–13; and also my introductory comments to a special issue of *ASIANetwork Exchange* on teaching comparative philosophy in Kalmanson and Sarah Mattice, "Introduction: The Rewards and Challenges of Comparative Philosophy in the Undergraduate Classroom," *ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts* 23, no. 2, (Spring 2016): 83–90.

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Project Vox, a database of women in philosophy during the early modern period ([projectvox.library.duke.edu](http://projectvox.library.duke.edu)).

## *Why It Makes Sense to Talk of Decolonizing the Philosophy Department*

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*This article is adapted from my talk in response to Dan Flory's and Leah Kalmanson's commentaries on my book, Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy. I agree with Flory that my characterization of the relationship between Christoph Meiners and Immanuel Kant needs more nuancing, but I do not agree with the prevalent, Kantian interpretation of their relationship. According to that interpretation, Kant's philosophical anthropology was an improvement over Meiners's not-so-philosophical (not Kantian) anthropology even as the former agreed with the latter's racist conclusions. This is the established interpretation (found in the preexisting body of Kant scholarship), and Flory (and others) invokes it instead of actually demonstrating that Kant did not get from Meiners his reasons for excluding Africa and Asia from the history of philosophy because he derived them from his own Critical Philosophy. Thanks to Flory's research, we now see that David Hume lines up with Meiners and Kant on the question of the origins of philosophy and on racial difference. I extend this research to show that Hume, Meiners, and Kant were traffickers of racist ideas from colonial America. I am persuaded by Flory that Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* was an important precursor to my own book even as I tried not to rely on his book. I suggest that Kalmanson's "Decolonizing the Department" is a nod to postcolonial and decolonial thinkers, including Aníbal Quijano, who has made very visible the connections between racial classification, European colonial domination, and Eurocentrism.*

Key words: racism; Kant; Meiners; Hume; Aníbal Quijano; Edward Long; coloniality, decolonization

I would like to thank the American Philosophical Association's Committee on the Status of Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies and especially Leah Kalmanson (Drake University, USA) for organizing the *Author Meets Critics* panel on my book, held during the Association's Central Division meeting in 2016. This essay is adapted from the text of my response to the commentaries by Kalmanson and Dan Flory (Montana State University, USA). Their observations and criticisms have put me back to work to better state or support the arguments of my book. They may notice from the present essay that in some ways I am merely catching up to them and their way of thinking about the problems that my book raises concerning racism and how it has affected academic philosophy's self-conception and pedagogy.

Flory states that he is willing to agree that there was a feedback-loop between Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Christoph Meiners (1747–1810) and that Kant definitely influenced Meiners (who adopted Kant's definition of race). However, he thinks that my calling them a tag-team is inaccurate because tag-team implies too much cooperation and willingness to work together. That Kant and Meiners were bitter academic opponents who had serious philosophical differences with each other is well known among specialists. I am open to Flory's proposed revision, which is that "Kant seems to have been continually correcting Meiners' reasoning for his claims about race, even as Kant agreed with Meiners' overall conclusions. [. . .] Kant and Meiners were not so much a 'tag-team' as bitter opponents who nonetheless worked in concert toward a shared goal of excluding Asia and Africa from the history of philosophy" (Flory 2017). Kant would have liked this

interpretation as it is his own view of what he was doing through his intervention in racial anthropology. Flory's proposed revision evokes for me the oft-heard slogan that Kant's system was a Copernican revolution in philosophy. In any case, I think that Flory may have arrived at the perfect formulation of the Kant-Meiners relationship. It was "a kind of noxiously fruitful antagonism" (Flory 2017). This formulation is more nuanced than *tag-team*, I admit, and it may be one that gets at their relationship more closely.

However, when Flory cites the Kant historian John Zammito, who cites the historian of science Phillip Sloan, who cites the Kantian philosopher Erich Adickes (1866–1928), I stop following him. Because this would be to invoke the established interpretation (found in the preexisting body of Kant scholarship) instead of actually *demonstrating* that Kant *did not* get his reasons for excluding Africa and Asia from Meiners because he derived them from his own Critical Philosophy.

Again, this is Flory's proposed revision: that Kant got from Meiners the idea to exclude Africa and Asia from philosophy, but Kant *did not* get from Meiners the reasons for excluding them. There have been many interpreters of Kant on the subject of natural science, who submit to this same interpretive frame, according to which Kant's thought is a step forward in the linear and progressive development of philosophy. According to this interpretive *and narrative* frame, Kant succeeds where Meiners fails. Kant succeeds also in the sense that he supersedes Meiners. Kant could not have adopted wholesale any ideas from Meiners. As Flory (2017) states, "In Kant's view, Meiners was time and again right for the wrong reasons because he used *Popularphilosophie* rather than Kantian Critical Philosophy to ground his arguments, particularly about anthropology and therefore race" (with a footnote to Zammito's "Policing Polygeneticism in Germany, 1775"). This is the Kantian School's own narrative, which underwrites not only Zammito's, but also Sloan's interpretation of Kant's race essays.

As I am the one who discovered the promiscuous traffic of ideas between Meiners and Kant, I am justified in diverging from the usual interpretation, which would have been to rehearse the Kantians' preferred scenario. What was required in this case, and what I did, was basic textual comparisons of Meiners's writings and Kant's writings (and lectures) on races and peoples. What I found was that they both made scientific contributions to the field of racial classification. They both described a natural/moral hierarchy of races in the way that European thinkers, since the time of the Spanish conquest of America, have done to justify the enslavement of Amerindians and Africans for use in the colonies. They both described Amerindians as uneducable, emotionally, and sexually unexcitable, barely fertile, weak, and lazy.<sup>1</sup> They both described Negroes (*Neger*) as being trainable for servitude, but not capable of self-government and moral independence.<sup>2</sup> Meiners's claim of a Greek origin of scientific civilization and his characterizations of Oriental knowledge are, as I noted in my book, consonant with Kant's statements that the Greeks founded mathematics and philosophy and that "the Hindu or Hindustani race," or the race "of the yellow Indians," never achieved an abstract concept or a moral precept based on principles.<sup>3</sup> Meiners incorporated Kant's definition of race into the second edition of his textbook on ethnology, the *Grundriss der Geschichte der Menschheit*, and even added an explicit reference to Kant's 1785 race essay.<sup>4</sup> As I showed in my book, Kant borrowed more than a few racist descriptions from Meiners (Park 2013: 94–95).

Thanks to Flory's research, it has come to my attention that, decades before Meiners and Kant, David Hume argued that "the sciences arose in GREECE" as "every circumstance among that people seemed to favour the rise of the arts and sciences" (Flory 2017).<sup>5</sup> In Hume's thought are united the claim of the Greek origin of "arts and sciences" and a frank racism. All editions of his publications, with the exception of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, were translated into French and German (and other European languages) and available on the European continent soon after they appeared in Britain.<sup>6</sup> His reputation among anti-racists today is pretty rotten because of the categorical, racist statement he added as a footnote to his essay "Of National Characters," claiming that "negroes" are naturally inferior to "whites" because, as he alleges, there scarcely was a nation or individual "of that complexion" eminent in either arts or sciences.<sup>7</sup> The other major eighteenth-

century philosopher who has a sullied reputation due to his racism is Kant. As Flory reminds us, Kant relates to his readers what Hume had to say about “negroes” in making his own racist *Observations* about them.<sup>8</sup> That Hume lines up with Meiners and Kant on the question of the origins of philosophy and on racial difference is nothing short of a revelation.

In an essay appearing in 2014, Pauline Kleingeld, an expert on Kant’s political philosophy, argues that, before 1795, Kant was a defender of European colonialism. She cites the passage bearing the character-descriptions of the four races, in Kant’s anthropology lectures, and gives her reading of it: “Kant invokes this racial hierarchy—along with the thesis that non-whites are incapable of governing themselves, incapable of being magistrates, and incapable of genuine freedom, and that whites, by contrast, do have the requisite capabilities—to justify whites’ subjecting and governing non-whites through colonial rule. Kant’s account contains a mix of paternalism (as with India, which would be ‘happier’ as a European colony) and instrumentalization (as with Native Americans and blacks, whose alleged ‘purpose’ is to serve as slaves)” (Kleingeld 2014: 47).<sup>9</sup> She also quotes from Kant’s lectures on physical geography (Doenhoff transcription, probably 1782): “These peoples deserve a better fate than their current one, because it is a very manageable and easily governed people! [The current fate of India depends as little on the French as on the English, but this much is certain, that] if they were to be ruled by a European sovereign, the nation would become happier” (Kleingeld 2014: 46). To those who have been confused by Kant’s parenthetical comment, in “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective” (1784), that “our part of the world will probably someday give laws to all the others,” Kleingeld recommends that it be read “in the most literal sense”: that Europe will probably legislate for all other parts of the world through colonial rule.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, compare the foregoing passages with the following passage in Meiners’s 1790 article “Of the Varieties and Deviate Forms of Negroes”:<sup>11</sup> “The progressive improvement [*Verbesserung*] of African blood through constant, new mixing with European blood, which is evident as well in all similar cases in the rest of the world, affords the pleasant prospect that the Europeans can and will contribute to the perfection and happiness of other, less noble peoples, not only through their rule and enlightenment, but even especially by means of interbreeding with them” (Mikkelsen 2013: 206). This is good evidence of Meiners’s belief that European colonialism was a positive good for “other, less noble peoples.” He seems to be working from the same insight as Kant, already quoted as saying in lecture that the Indian people would become happier if they were to be ruled by a European sovereign. Meiners is more frank, more empirical-historical than Kant, as to what this progress through colonization entails. It entails being ruled by Europeans, adopting European civilization (“enlightenment”), and being inseminated by Europeans.

In the same article on the varieties and deviate forms of Negroes, Meiners invokes “all credible writers” in stating his claim that “the Negroes are improved by their removal to the Sugar Islands, or to the American mainland, and that the Creole Negroes, or the Negroes born outside Africa, are less stupid <and> less unruly, and, for that very reason, much more useful than the original Africans” (Mikkelsen 2013: 203). The “all credible writers” whom he is invoking here are scientific observers and writers who knew Africans and Creole Africans through their direct interactions with them on slavers’ ships and on American plantations. One of these writers was Edward Long (1734–1813), a planter, slave owner, judge, and briefly Speaker of the House of Assembly of the British colony of Jamaica.<sup>12</sup> Long is the author of a three-volume work, *The History of Jamaica*, published in 1774.<sup>13</sup> This work is many things. It is a natural and civil history, covering the geography, climate, natural products, settlement, inhabitants, commerce, laws, and government of Jamaica. It is a work promoting Jamaica as a field for British settlement and investment. It is a defense of planters’ rights and liberties against infringements from the metropole. And finally, it is a sophisticated defense of slavery written in a time of growing anti-slavery sentiment in Britain and the North American colonies.<sup>14</sup>

Two years earlier, James Somerset, a slave traveling with his master in England, was freed by the Court of King’s Bench on the basis that slavery was not recognized by the common law of England and Wales. In

the same year, Long authored an anonymous pamphlet, disagreeing with the ruling and defending slavery and the slave trade with legal and economic arguments.<sup>15</sup> For his *History of Jamaica*, he set aside the legal and economic arguments and instead justified slavery on the basis of the racial characteristics of Negroes.<sup>16</sup> This justification is concentrated in Chapters I through IV of Book III: on the natural history of Negroes. The most radical claim that *The History of Jamaica* advances is that Negroes are separate “from the rest of men, not in *kind*, but in *species*” (Long 1774: Vol. 2, 375). Long was not the first to claim human polygenesis. His wording of the claim shows that he adopted it from Samuel Estwick, another West-Indian (Barbadian) planter responding with a pamphlet to the ruling of the Court of King’s Bench.<sup>17</sup>

Long opens Book III with a supposed description of Negro bodies (“particulars wherein they differ most essentially from the Whites”) (1774: Vol. 2, 351–53). He reports that they are black in color due to a dark “reticular membrane” between the epidermis and the skin, which “communicates that black colour” to the latter (Long 1774: 351). But some anatomists believe that their epidermis is itself black; that this coloration is caused by the black bile which Negro bodies secrete. Whatever the physical cause may be, the black color of their skin does not change after transportation into colder climates, nor does it change over generations in the cold climate (Long 1774: 351–52). This sort of experiment was used by Kant and others as evidence for the claim of the permanence of race. They have “[a] covering of wool, like the bestial fleece, instead of hair.” They differ from the Whites in the “roundness of their eyes, the figure of their ears, tumid nostrils, flat noses, invariable thick lips, and general large size of the female nipples, as if adapted by nature to the peculiar conformation of their children’s mouths.” They differ also in the black color of the lice that infests their bodies and in their “bestial or fetid smell” (Long 1774: 352).

By the third page of Book III, Long is already at work establishing the intellectual and moral inferiority of Negroes. He states:

In general, they are void of genius and seem almost incapable of making any progress in civility or science. They have no plan or sense of morality among them. Their barbarity to their children debases their nature even below that of brutes. They have no moral sensations, no taste but for women; gormandizing, and drinking to excess; no wish but to be idle (Long 1774: 353).

They seem unable to combine ideas, or pursue a chain of reasoning; they have no mode of forming calculations, or of recording events to posterity, or of communicating thoughts and observations by marks, characters, or delineations [...] (Long 1774: 377).

Then, uniting scientific description and private economic interests, experiential knowledge and metaphysical speculation, Long rolls out a racist exposition of the Great Chain of Being, of a “gradation” and “natural diversity of human intellect, in general, *ab origine*” with Negroes placing higher than the “oran-outang species,” but far lower than Whites in the order of nature (Long 1774: 371, see Long 1774: 356).

Twice in the course of arguing the intellectual inferiority of Blacks, Long quotes from Hume’s footnote. “Mr. *Hume* presumes, from his observations upon the native Africans, to conclude, that they are inferior to the rest of the species, and utterly incapable of all the higher attainments of the human mind” (Long 1774: 376). In the second instance, which occurs in Chapter IV, Hume’s words are used to diminish the talents and achievements of Francis Williams (1697–1762), an educated, propertied, free Negro.<sup>18</sup> “Mr. Hume, who had heard of Williams, says of him, ‘In Jamaica indeed they talk of one Negroe as a man of parts and learning; but ’tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly’” (Long 1774: 477). Williams, whose Latin poetry was cited by anti-slavery writers as evidence of the equal capacity of Negroes for arts and sciences, became in Long’s hands evidence of Negro incapacity. Readers of *The History of Jamaica* understood Hume as corroborating Long’s scientific racism.

Long also quotes Estwick, whose second edition of “Considerations on the Negroe Cause” (1773) incorporates Hume’s footnote in its entirety. This is how Long quotes Estwick:

And Mr. Estwick, pursuing the same idea [as Hume], observes, ‘Although a Negroe is found in Jamaica, or elsewhere, ever so sensible and acute; yet, if he is incapable of moral sensations, or perceives them only as beasts do simple ideas, without the power of combination, in order to use; it is a mark that distinguishes him from the man who feels, and is capable of these moral sensations, who knows their application, and the purposes of them as sufficiently, as he himself is distinguished from the highest species of brutes’ (Long 1774: 477).

It could be that Estwick was the source through which Long came upon Hume’s footnote. But what is more interesting is that Kant could invoke Hume as well as a West Indian planter could.

Meiners’s article “Of the Varieties and Deviate Forms of Negroes” has thirty-seven footnotes. Eighteen of them are citations to *The History of Jamaica*. Another one of his footnotes bears a citation to Estwick’s pamphlet. Some other footnotes are citations to an abolitionist writer (James Ramsay) and a medical writer (Benjamin Moseley). There are a few travel writers cited who have yet to be identified. My research on Meiners and Kant, Flory’s research on Hume, and the trail of citations leading from Meiners to the West Indian planters, from them to Hume, and from Kant to Hume—reveal that Meiners, Kant, and Hume were traffickers of racist ideas from colonial America and, furthermore, that “travel literature” is, and has been, a euphemism all along. What remains for researchers to uncover are the identities of the colonial writers who may have been Hume’s sources.

Kalmanson has titled her commentary “Decolonizing the Department.” The title is a nod to our peers working in the fields of postcolonial studies and Decolonial Thought, to the light they have shone on modern knowledge production under conditions of European colonial domination. One of these thinkers in particular, the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, has made very visible the connections between racial classification, European colonial domination, and Eurocentrism through his theory of the “coloniality of power.”<sup>19</sup> I quote from his essay “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America” (2000: 535):

From the sixteenth century on, this racial principle [i.e., the idea of race] has proven to be the most effective and long-lasting instrument of universal social domination, since the much older principle—gender or intersexual domination—was encroached on by inferior-superior racial classifications. So the conquered and dominated peoples were situated in a natural position of inferiority, and as a result, their phenotypic traits as well as their cultural features were likewise considered inferior. In this way, race became the fundamental criterion for the distribution of the world population into ranks, places, and roles in the new society’s structure of power.

He adds: “Unlike in any other previous experience of colonialism, the old ideas of superiority of the dominant, and the inferiority of dominated under European colonialism were mutated in a relationship of biologically and structurally superior and inferior” (Quijano 2007: 171).<sup>20</sup> The biologization of the superior and the inferior and the structuring of social and economic relations into a global system of racial and gendered ranks and roles were clinched in the late eighteenth century.

As the center of global capitalism, Europe not only had control of the world market but was also able to impose its colonial dominance over all the regions and populations of the planet, incorporating them into its world-system and its specific model of power. For such regions and populations, this model of

power involved a process of historical reidentification; from Europe, such regions and populations were attributed new geocultural identities (Quijano 2000: 540).

Again, not only did Europe control the world market, they also controlled all regions and populations (viz., their labor, their identities). “In effect, all of the experiences, histories, resources, and cultural products ended up in one global cultural order revolving around European or Western hegemony. Europe’s hegemony over the new model of global power concentrated all forms of the control of subjectivity, culture, and especially knowledge and the production of knowledge under its hegemony” (Quijano 2000: 540). Among the leading agents behind these transformations were the knowledge producers Meiners and Kant, and among the centers of knowledge production for the emerging world-system were the universities of Göttingen and Königsberg.

Quijano concludes his critique of “the European paradigm of rationality/modernity,” originally delivered twenty-five years ago, with a call for the end of “the coloniality of world power,” through epistemological decolonization as the first step, which would be to extricate oneself “from the linkages between rationality/modernity and coloniality” and “from all power which is not constituted by free decisions made by free people” (Quijano 2007: 177). The call for epistemological decolonization is reaffirmed and given a sharper, localized turn by Kalmanson, who is calling for the decolonization of philosophy departments for the reason of their structural racism, their curricular Eurocentrism, and their complicity in the coloniality of power.

Regarding Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena*, I am persuaded by Flory’s comments. I agree with him that a partial rehabilitation is due and that I could call Bernal my precursor. I do refer to Bernal’s work in a comment that I make on Meiners’s stratagem of downplaying the role of Phoenicians and Egyptians in the founding of Greek civilization. Bernal had claimed that late eighteenth-century European scholars revised their image of European civilization, giving it an exclusively Greek pedigree, and that this move was motivated or in coordination with their sense of racial superiority. However, I don’t think it is completely fair to say that I *rely* on Bernal. Still, I realized from reading Flory’s comments that I would have to revise my position on Bernal as it is in fact closer to Timothy Taylor’s position: “Bernal has the alarming habit of often being right for the wrong reason” (Flory 2017). In any case, Flory has made a reasonable case for rehabilitating Bernal’s work.

I appreciate very much how Flory uses the *Black Athena* controversy as an illustration of implicit white racial biases. I agree with him that I could do more, as a teacher and researcher, to fight racism at the affective level. I teach a course on the history of race theory. As I see it now, it will have to be redesigned so as to include something from the implicit racial bias literature.

Kalmanson asks: “How do we as philosophers explain our disciplinary and professional practices to students? How do we defend teaching a philosophical canon that contains so many known racists and patriarchs?” (Kalmanson 2017). It is important to note that the concerns animating both Kalmanson’s and Flory’s commentaries arise from their role as teachers of philosophy.

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- 1 Christoph Meiners, “Ueber die Bevölkerung von Amerika,” in *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, ed. Christoph Meiners and Ludwig Timotheus Spittler, 3 (1788): 193–218; Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königliche Preussische (later Deutsche) Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Georg Reimer [later Walter de Gruyter]), 1900–) 25.2: 1187–8.
- 2 Christoph Meiners, “Ueber die Natur der Afrikanischen Neger,” in *Göttingisches historisches Magazin* 6 (1790): 385–456; Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* 15: 877–79 (*Reflexion* 1520).
- 3 See Chapter 4 in Peter K. J. Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1830* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013). For “the Hindu or Hindustani race,” see Kant’s *Werke*, vol. 6, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1964), 14. For “the yellow Indians,” see Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* 8: 93.
- 4 Christoph Meiners, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Menschheit*, second edition (Lemgo: Meyer, 1785; 1793). See Frank W. P. Dougherty’s “Christoph Meiners und Johann Friedrich Blumenbach im Streit um den Begriff der Menschenrasse,” in *Die Natur des Menschen: Probleme der physischen Anthropologie und Rassenkunde (1750–1850)*, ed. Gunter Mann and Franz Dumont (Stuttgart; New York: Gustav Fischer, 1990, 89–111), 102 n. 52.
- 5 See David Hume, “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” in idem, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, rev. ed., ed. Eugene Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987, 111–37), 120ff.
- 6 See Günter Gawlick and Lothar Kreimendahl, *Hume in der deutschen Aufklärung: Umrisse einer Rezeptionsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1987).
- 7 David Hume, “Of National Characters,” originally published in *Essays, Moral and Political*, fourth edition (London: A. Millar; Edinburgh: A. Kincaid and A. Donaldson, 1753), 277–300; reprinted in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, revised edition, ed. Eugene Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987), 197–215; see Emmanuel C. Eze, “Hume, Race, and Human Nature,” *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 61, no. 4, (Oct. 2000): 691–98.
- 8 Kant, “Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime,” in idem, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, trans. Günter Zöller and Robert I. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 59: “Mr. Hume challenges anyone to adduce a single example where a Negro has demonstrated talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who have been transported elsewhere from their countries, although very many of them have been set free, nevertheless not a single one has ever been found who has accomplished something great in art or science or shown any other praiseworthy quality, while among the whites there are always those who rise up from the lowest rabble and through extraordinary gifts earn respect in the world. So essential is the difference between these two human kinds, and it seems to be just as great with regard to the capacities of mind as it is with respect to color.”
- 9 Pauline Kleingeld, “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Colonialism,” in *Kant and Colonialism: Historical and Critical Perspectives*, ed. Katrin Flikschuh and Lea Ypi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 43–67; Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 25.2: 1187–88.
- 10 Kleingeld (2014: 50): “Against the broader background of his explicit and repeated defenses of colonialism and the racial characterizations that support it, Kant’s remark in the idea for a universal history turns out to be just one passage among many that take European colonialism for granted. Not surprisingly, we find no explicit critique of colonialism and associated practices in Kant’s texts dating from this period. His claim that Europe will probably eventually legislate for the other parts of the world can and should be read in the most literal sense.”
- 11 Christoph Meiners, “Von den Varietäten und Abarten der Neger,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin* 6, (1790): 625–45; translation: “Of the Varieties and Deviate Forms of Negroes (1790),” in *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings*, trans. and ed. Jon M. Mikkelsen (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013), 195–207.
- 12 Long resided most of his life in England and twelve years (1757–69) in Jamaica.
- 13 Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of That Island: with Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government*, 3 vols. (London: T. Lowndes, 1774).
- 14 See Howard Johnson, “Introduction: Edward Long, Historian of Jamaica,” in *The History of Jamaica: Reflections on Its Situation, Settlement, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government*, reprint (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), Vol. 1: i–xxv.
- 15 [Edward Long], “Candid Reflections upon the Judgement Lately Awarded by the Court of King’s Bench, in Westminster-Hall, on What Is Commonly Called the Negroe-Cause” (London: T. Lowndes, 1772).

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- <sup>16</sup> Johnson (2002: viii). “It is important that Long’s comments were made, not in some self-evidently polemic tract, but in what became accepted as a standard work on the largest of Britain’s West Indian colonies” (J. P. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: Perceptions of New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982]: 250).
- <sup>17</sup> Samuel Estwick, “Considerations on the Negroe Cause Commonly So Called, Addressed to the Right Honourable Lord Mansfield, Lord Chief Justice of the Court of King’s Bench, & c.” (London: J. Dodsley, 1772; 2nd ed. 1773), 81–82. See Marshall and Williams (1982: 248).
- <sup>18</sup> Vincent Carretta, “Who Was Francis Williams?” *Early American Literature* 38, no. 2, (2003): 213–37.
- <sup>19</sup> Aníbal Quijano, “Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad,” *Perú indígena* 13, no. 29, (1992): 11–20; translation: “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3, (March/May 2007): 168–78; idem, “‘raza,’ ‘etnia,’ ‘nación,’ cuestiones abiertas en América Latina,” in *Encuentro internacional José Carlos Mariátegui y Europa: El otro aspecto del descubrimiento*, ed. Roland Forgues (Lima: Editorial Amauta, 1993), 167–88; idem, “Colonialidad de poder, cultura y conocimiento en América Latina,” *Anuario Mariateguiano* 9, no. 9, (1997): 113–22; idem, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla* 1, no. 3, (2000): 533–80. Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007: 243) nicely explains the concept of coloniality whereas a definition of the concept is not easily gotten from Quijano’s own writings: “Coloniality is different from colonialism. [...] Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breath coloniality all the time and everyday.” (Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3, [March/May 2007]: 240–70.)
- <sup>20</sup> “In the seventeenth century, science combines the views on human groups of different skin colours with notions of cultural and intellectual superiority. In the eighteenth century, this concept is systematised, synchronised with climate theoretical reflections on the relationship between environment and culture as well as historico-philosophical ideas about the progress of humanity and finally incorporated in the race theory formulated by Kant and others” (Wulf D. Hund, “‘It must come from Europe’: The Racisms of Immanuel Kant,” in *Racisms Made in Germany*, ed. Wulf D. Hund, Christian Koller, and Moshe Zimmemann [Berlin: LIT, 2011], 69–98; quotation 77).

## *Whiteness and the Philosophy of History of Philosophy*

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*Dan Flory and Leah Kalmanson's responses to Peter Park's Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1830 confirm the book's profound significance but also raise questions about how this kind of work can gain traction in philosophy departments. Park's recreation of German debates about the origins of philosophy shows the potential of a renewed attention to how we tell the story of philosophy to efforts to decolonize philosophy. But to understand the elimination of Asia and Africa from modern western histories of philosophy we also need to appreciate the connection of the history of philosophy with the philosophy of history—and of modern understandings of “race” and “whiteness” as vital components of these philosophies of history. Immanuel Kant, the inventor of the philosophical category of “race,” for instance, understood “race” as part of a necessary philosophy of history, a paradoxical history of freedom accessible only to “whites,” constructed as the transcendence of “race” in their capacity for autonomy—and for philosophy.*

Key words: race; philosophy; whiteness; history of philosophy; philosophy of history; Kant

Dan Flory and Leah Kalmanson's stimulating engagements with Peter Park's book confirm what an important contribution *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1830* makes to scholarship. Park contextualizes the startlingly recent emergence of the narrative of philosophy beginning in ancient Greece with such precision and passion that contemporary philosophy's self-understanding should never be the same. Reading Kalmanson, Flory and Park's exchanges conveys the excitement of the history of philosophy in action. But they also record the rueful reality that research on the racist and white supremacist commitments of the “great thinkers” of our field generally falls on deaf ears.<sup>1</sup> Historians of philosophy have been drawing attention to the biases of great philosophers for some time now, to little effect. Even the formative role of Immanuel Kant in the invention of “race” has had few repercussions in Kant scholarship. It's hard to imagine that David Hume's contribution to the racist eurocentrism of the history of philosophy, which Flory brings to our attention, will do much to dent his reputation. Park seems to think “philosophy” would rather decouple itself from its problematic history than recognize it.

It does seem that unless and until we genuinely decolonize our departments and degrees, as Kalmanson insists, and find ways to make the study of philosophy aware of implicit racial and other biases, as Flory urges, it'll continue to be business as usual. Myopic canons need to be exploded, and the presumed objectivity of the philosophical stance itself called in question. In historicizing modern western history of philosophy, Park offers resource for both of these projects. All the terms in Park's title were being given fateful new meanings during the period he studied—not just “race” but “philosophy” and “history” too. Arguably we can't effectively tell the story of the rise of the once marginal view localizing supposedly universal philosophical creativity in Europe without also seeing the invention, in tandem with “race,” of “whiteness” as its transcendence and redemption, of “philosophy” as the transcendence and redemption of “religion,” and of “history”—including the history of philosophy—as the stage on which this drama unfolds. Indeed, for many figures Park describes history properly understood *is* the dénouement of this drama. To understand the elimination of Asia and Africa from modern western histories of philosophy we need to learn to see anew the connection of the history of philosophy with

the philosophy of history: What is history? Has it a shape, a meaning? Who are its players? Has it an end? Might it fail? Can it be thought? What part does thought play in it—including our own thinking?

Like all the best work in intellectual history, Park shows us that categories and stories which seem natural or necessary in our time have contingent histories. Complicating our sense of who matters and what they thought they were doing, it inverts background and foreground in our analysis of past thinkers in ways which can subvert and reframe our own thinking. Park shows us that the claim of an exclusive relationship of the European tradition and philosophy is a recent artifact even in Europe, the view only of an “extreme minority” (Park 2013: 76) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century before some of our most revered modern philosophers worked to naturalize it. But you don’t need a concept of “race” to have noxious views of non-Europeans, any more than you need to think the Greeks a rupture in world history to be an orientalist. Why did philosophy’s supposed “whiteness” matter to philosophers still revered today? Park digs deep into textbooks and lecture courses to show what these philosophers thought “philosophy” was. To see why the shape (and possibility) of philosophy’s *history* mattered to them, and should to us, it is helpful to broaden the focus to include their larger projects, of which philosophy was to be the queen. For instance, Park compellingly shows us Hegel’s involvement in the disciplinary reconfiguration of the relation of “philosophy” and “religion” (and “Christianity”). But Hegel’s quarrel with August Tholuck over Christian “philosophy” and eastern “pantheism,” so vividly brought to life in Park’s final chapter, is part of a larger conceptual realignment. Hegel’s University of Berlin contemporaries Friedrich Schleiermacher—whom we in religious studies like to say “invented” religion—and Arthur Schopenhauer also contributed in powerful ways to an unexamined distinction between “religion” and “philosophy” whose legacy endures today. Just look at where “non-western” philosophy is taught in most American universities today: in Religious Studies departments.

If Hegel’s views regarding “race” and the history of philosophy need to be understood in the context of polemics about the relationship of philosophy and religion, Kant’s need to be approached in connection to philosophy’s relationship to the emerging human sciences. Not all philosophers are aware that Kant is considered one of the fathers of the discipline of geography. Geography’s human branch, “anthropology,” too, was a concern and a commitment throughout Kant’s career. But just what he meant by anthropology, and why he thought it indispensable to moral formation, is little appreciated. Kantian philosophers smile when historians point to the pre-critical *Observations on the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764), with its glib reflections on gender, temperament and national character (including an approving citation of Hume’s infamous anti-black footnote). What has that to do with the Kant we care about? they ask, blithely unaware that these matters were not displaced but sublimed with Kant’s critical turn. Kant promoted “Charakteristik”—“the way of cognizing the interior of the human being from the exterior”—all his life; it’s the name of the second half of *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798).<sup>2</sup> For the “critical” Kant even more than the “pre-critical,” “Charakteristik” showed how one must shoulder the burden of “what man can and should make of himself.”<sup>3</sup> The exchange between Flory and Park about how to characterize the fraught relationship between Kant and Christoph Meiners—“tag-team” or “bitter opponents who nevertheless worked in concert” in claiming philosophy for Europe—shows the difficulties and ironies of tracing conceptual change in real time. The particular animosity between Kant and Meiners has roots in the broader hopes each had for “philosophy”—in both cases including things not currently understood as philosophical. The eclectic *Popularphilosophie* of Meiners and others was the main rival to Kant’s anthropological project. It was anathema to Kant because it didn’t realize the possibility, and the moral necessity, of being truly philosophical in the practice of one’s prejudices.

Kant’s lifelong attraction to the idea of “race” makes sense only against the backdrop of his hopes for the human sciences, including history. He wrote several essays in defense of the once marginal concept of “Race” or “Rasse,” at each stage offering its supposed “necessity” as decisive evidence of the indispensability of philosophy to the human sciences, and of the human sciences to practical philosophy. Kant first introduces “race” as opening the way to a true “natural history” (*Naturgeschichte*) as distinguished from anecdotal and

unrigorous “description of nature” (*Naturbeschreibung*) in 1775. Indeed “race” is, for Kant, proof that an understanding of history is required to make meaningful sense of human diversity. Undeterred by empirical disconfirmation of his proffered typology of “races,” Kant argued a decade later that “race” was a concept accessible a priori to anyone trying to understand human destiny. In 1788, he found it to be a pragmatically indispensable part of cosmopolitan agency, an object of moral faith as vital to moral striving as the concept of God! “Race” was a philosophical category, one Kant thought indispensable for making sense of human agency in the world. Kant’s commitment to “race” is harder to ignore when we appreciate its connection to his conception of freedom and the paradox of its history.

As he refined his category of “race” Kant simultaneously constructed “whiteness” as its transcendence and redemption. From the start, “whites” are described both as a race and as not-quite-raced, still in possession of the full array of human potentialities of which the (other) “races” unfortunately each have access only to one. Full human self-determination is available only for “whites,” so the achievement of a fully human history is in their hands alone. The space of “autonomy” Kant sought to demonstrate was structured, in relation to natural law as well as motivational “heteronomy,” in a manner isomorphic to his definitions of whiteness (and within it, Germanness), a space defined by an equilibrium of forces (*Triebe und Anlagen*) from which most people are, de facto, excluded. Kant’s philosophical accounts of “race” were an invitation to claim the stage of history, a call to his “white” readers and students to take up their indispensable place in what his enthusiastic early 19<sup>th</sup> century follower Henrik Steffens would call the “free middle” of otherwise determined human history.<sup>4</sup> Kant may, as Kalmanson finds, be impossible not to teach, even in a decolonized curriculum. Yet we might be able to use our Kant classes to surface and engage implicit biases if we taught his philosophy of freedom as a version of the “white man’s burden.”

As Park shows us, the history of philosophy was more than an academic project. Philosophy unfolded in history, disclosed history’s meaning and direction—and called philosophers to help steer it. The history of the history of philosophy in fact brings us face to face with the philosophy of history. Not seeing why, a Kantian or a Schellingian would argue that philosophy can have no merely historical history—to suppose otherwise “would even excuse the lecturer as well as the students from thinking”<sup>5</sup>!—we don’t see the power of the counterclaim that philosophy can *only* be understood historically. But Park’s study introduces us to other histories of philosophy, which permit us to break free from the stalemate of Kantian and Hegelian histories of philosophy to see why the history of philosophy should have been seen as a philosophical problem in the first place—and to wonder why and how it apparently ceased to be. I was delighted to be reacquainted with Jacob Brucker, and fascinated to learn about other efforts to make sense of the history of philosophy: skeptical “lives and opinions” in the model of Diogenes Laertius, culture-crossing natural history-like taxonomies such as Joseph-Marie de Gérando’s, and creative syntheses like Friedrich Ast’s account of “a gradually opening and closing, eternally emerging, self-revealing circle” (Park 2013: 101). Our own de facto empiricism looks pretty unambitious by comparison, unreflective and unphilosophical.

With his gripping accounts of alternative ways of making sense of philosophizing across time and place, Park gives us the materials and the model for a different way to teach philosophy. An introduction to the forms philosophy’s history (and so philosophy) has been thought to take—from episodic to critical, cyclical to dialectical, great men to “one damn thing after another”—can rekindle questions about what *history* is or must be thought to be, whether for metaphysical or even moral reasons. Why should not a history of philosophy class also be, or at least spend some time with, philosophy of history? And why should not an education in philosophy involve reflection on what it means that philosophizing happens in time, across cultures, in languages, and in concert and tension with other forms of human endeavor, enquiry and theory? This would be the most natural point at which to integrate “comparative philosophy” into our curricula. Imagine if our introduction to philosophizing included accounts of the life and times of thinking framed by Nahuatl philosophy, by Zhuangzian irony or by David Loy’s “studies in lack”!

Park is less optimistic. He ends his book with a grim and gnomic pronouncement: “When one day the history of philosophy ceases to do what it does in the service of philosophy, philosophers will cease to teach it” (2013: 151). Yet the history Park introduces us to allows us to take a more generous view of what philosophy might be. As the histories he unpacks for us show, the question of the history of philosophy is not just academic but existential. Park’s late eighteenth and early nineteenth century historians of philosophy give voice to an experience of feeling the pulse of history in their own thinking. Our students, too, seek an understanding of their place in the unfolding story of history, especially in our time, when moral progress no longer seems assured. They seek to understand the possibility of freedom, including freedom from prejudice. We may not have the confidence of the historians of a white supremacist philosophy (thank goodness!), but we can offer the study of philosophy as owning the toughest questions about the pain, promise and plurality of existence. After Park’s *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy* it should no longer be an option to turn our backs on this tumult and, with Hume, “happily make our escape into the calm though obscure, regions of philosophy.”<sup>6</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> Along with their responses to Park’s book I have profited especially from Dan Flory, “Race, Indian Philosophy, and the Historiography of Philosophy,” *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies* 14, no. 2, (Spring 2015): 22–7; Leah Kalmanson, “If You Show Me Yours: Reading All ‘Difference’ as ‘Colonial Difference’ in Comparative Philosophy,” *Comparative & Continental Philosophy* 7, no. 2, (November 2015): 201–13.
  - <sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königl. Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and predecessors, 1902–), 7: 283. For the centrality of “Characteristic” to Kant’s practical and pragmatic philosophy, along with other themes mentioned below, see my “Antinomies of Race: Diversity and Destiny in Kant,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 42, nos. 4–5, (2008): 341–63.
  - <sup>3</sup> (Kant 7: 119).
  - <sup>4</sup> Henrik Steffens. See my “Race, Freedom and the Fall in Steffens and Kant,” *The German Invention of Race*, ed. Sara Eigen Figal, and Mark Larrimore (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 91–120.
  - <sup>5</sup> Karl Leonhard Reinhold, paraphrased by Park (2013: 12).
  - <sup>6</sup> David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion in Principal Writings on Religion*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: OUP, 1993), 185.

## *Racism(s) and Philosophy Curricula: A Response to Park, Kalmanson and Flory*

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*Peter Park's book is highly valuable in tracing the racist ideas that have led to the construction and self-conception of the present discipline of philosophy. However, if debates about racism in the thought of canonical figures like Hegel revolve exclusively around the question of biological race theory, they may fail to diagnose the cultural racism that is at least equally salient, if not more so, in the current context. In this respect, the Eurosupremacism of contemporary philosophy is continuous with cultural racism generally, which is often ineffectively countered by anti-racist discourses because it does not recognize itself as a form of racism. Philosophical pluralism, as part of a multicultural program of education, is a useful tool of anti-racism in this context, serving to correct racist caricatures with more balanced portraits of humanity.*

Key words: cultural racism; neoracism; Eurosupremacism; multicultural education; philosophical pluralism

For philosophers engaged with issues of race and Eurocentrism, the whiteness of the standard philosophy curriculum at the vast majority of Western universities is a striking fact. For philosophers not engaged with these issues, by contrast, it is largely invisible. In their minds, the very conception of “philosophy” as an intellectual discipline is such that “Western philosophy” seems a redundant term, a pleonasm like “sociology of society” or “psychology of the mind.” The default assumption is that philosophy just *is* Western, and that if one is going to include non-Western texts or ideas, it will be as an exotic add-on, under the aegis of a separate course called “African philosophy” or “Asian philosophy,” which will naturally be an elective. It is certainly not expected that ideas drawn from African or Asian or native American civilizations will be included in courses with titles like “Epistemology,” “Metaphysics,” “Ethics,” or “Political Philosophy.” It is telling that if a college or university instructor does want to include non-Western sources and ideas in courses that name established areas of philosophy, whether historical periods or subjects, that inevitably requires her to put together a package of readings or to supplement heavily an existing textbook. Genuinely multicultural anthologies and textbooks are rare, in *any* philosophical area. At the same time, the predominant view among academic philosophers is still that little of philosophical worth exists outside Western traditions. They may not be explicitly stated, but attitudes of dismissal and contempt for the very idea of African or Chinese or Indian philosophy remain common within the discipline, shaping decisions about programs, courses and positions.

Those who hold such attitudes are unlikely to think of them as racist, and works like Peter Park's perform a valuable role in tracing the racial ideas that have led to the construction and self-conception of the discipline of philosophy as it currently stands. As Leah Kalmanson says in her commentary:

I doubt that many philosophers in the classroom explain the history of philosophy as the record of European ascendancy on the world-historical stage, or as reflecting the natural superiority of the white race, or as transmitting a priori truths that only this one race can access; yet on the other hand, the degree requirements for our programs of study, as well as our current canon, together serve to transmit this

outdated teleology and the racist narrative regarding white supremacy associated with it (Kalmanson 2017).<sup>1</sup>

Dan Flory highlights the connection Park draws between this racist narrative and philosophy's understanding of its history as an exclusively Greek invention, observing that "Park's monograph convincingly lays the foundation for the idea that the way we currently describe and explain that history operates to distort the concept of 'philosophy,' what we consider to be within its boundaries, and who we think can do it" (Flory 2017).<sup>2</sup>

In his response to Flory's and Kalmanson's commentaries, Park notes that their concerns arise from their role as teachers of philosophy (Park 2017).<sup>3</sup> This is also true of me, and I fully agree that knowledge of the racist history of the history of philosophy is essential to critical analysis of the non-inclusive design of philosophy curricula and the attitudes that support it. In working through Park's argument, however, and considering the focal points of Flory's and Kalmanson's commentaries as well as of Park's response to them, I found myself uneasy at times with an implicit supposition that exposing *biological* racism is the crucial task here. Park is at pains to establish that, within the history he traces, the claims regarding European superiority which serve as a basis for the exclusion of non-European intellectual traditions from the idea of philosophy are not *only* cultural. At one point, for example, discussing Kant, Meiners, and Tenneman, he argues that "the claim that despotism prevented philosophy's development in the Orient is not a 'cultural' analysis [...]. Already in Tennemann, it is a claim about the yellow race" (Park 2013: 95). Flory and Kalmanson think that Park has managed to demonstrate these claims about biological racism, and so do I. We need to understand philosophy's complicity with the biological theses that served as a pretext for the most horrendous mistreatment by Europeans of peoples whom it was convenient for them to enslave, dispossess, and eliminate, in ways that their own (supposedly universal) moral principles seemed to disallow.

But I also worry that arguments insisting that Eurosupremacist claims within the history of philosophy were founded on "race," as an emerging scientific category, rather than "culture," might have the unintended consequence of deflecting attention from considerations that are at least as relevant to understanding "racism," within philosophy and elsewhere. Consider, for instance, Hegel's philosophy of history. Park cites some of Robert Bernasconi's work arguing that Hegel's philosophy of history "was organized along the lines of a racial taxonomy" and that Hegel systematically distorted his sources to portray Africans in a manner that would fit with negative racial stereotypes about their uncivilized nature and lack of any consciousness of freedom (Park 2013: 115). A similarly partial spirit informs Hegel's placement of China and India on the scale of human progress, and his often-convoluted attempts to refute European scholarship pointing to the presence of metaphysics, as well as ethics and sophisticated forms of religion, within these ancient civilizations. Park is right that "Hegel's history of philosophy, like Meiners's and Tennemann's, is actually the history of the philosophical deeds of white Man" (Park 2013: 129). It is important to identify the link between such histories and biological theories about race, as Park seeks to do.

It is equally important, however, to see that, whether they rely on a biological theory of race or not, these kinds of discourses are propelled by a desire for supremacy that takes pleasure in the pathos of distance, to use a Nietzschean idea in an un-Nietzschean way. That desire, which may well be sharpened by anxiety in the face of challenge, is inclined to disregard or distort evidence in manufacturing the knowledge that fits with its wants. Given the configurations of power in which Hegel was writing, this will to supremacy should already be described as "racism," I think, whether it expresses itself as a biological theory or as a theory about the relative rank of human cultures. Does Hegel's philosophy of history become unproblematic if we suppose he did *not* posit an unchangeable biological basis for the alleged intellectual, moral and political inferiority of non-Western peoples? Is it obviously not racist if he was "only" asserting a cultural basis for the evident



shortcomings of these various others, which could be ameliorated through learning from the more advanced, mature and enlightened civilizations of Europe?

My concern is that if debates about racism in the thought of canonical figures like Hegel revolve around this point alone, they may fail to diagnose the cultural racism that is at least equally salient, if not more so, in the current context. The “neo-racism” first identified by Étienne Balibar—which Tariq Modood rightly points out is actually not so new<sup>4</sup>—substitutes talk of nation, culture, and values for the discredited language of race, but expresses the same Eurosupremacist assumptions about backwards and inferior others (who just happen to be non-white), and the same proposals for exclusion and domination.

Similarly, academic philosophers are extremely unlikely to give credence to biological theories about race, and yet often accept portraits of non-Western civilizations as childish, superstitious, less rational, morally backwards, and so on, inherited from Eurosupremacist evolutionary philosophies of history like those of Kant and Hegel. Negative judgements about some feature of another culture are of course not per se racist, but the construction of inferiorizing portraits of others without or even against available evidence is.<sup>5</sup> Better information and more sympathetic voices were present, we know, throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These were deliberately ignored and distorted in the construction of the philosophical canon, as they were in the more directly lethal political arenas where policies of slavery and colonialism were designed, justified and maintained. These moves need to be carefully thematized and identified as racist, whether or not they involve an appeal to “race” as a theory about biologically-based capacities and differences. Note that Bernasconi, although he has contributed much to the study of scientific racism himself, problematizes the “radical distinction between nature and culture,” arguing that it “was and remains inadequate to the task both of mounting a defense against racism in its myriad forms and of illuminating the history of racism,” for “so long as some cultures are seen as uniquely equipped to embody the characteristics that represent social development then it opens the door to a certain form of cultural racism” (Bernasconi 2012: 52).<sup>6</sup>

The standard Eurocentric philosophical curriculum at most Western universities is the result of a past history of racism whose character cannot be adequately analyzed through the deployment of a distinction between nature and culture that sees “racism” only in theories about biological natures. Furthermore, that curriculum is sustained by attitudes that judge as inferior the intellectual traditions of non-Western peoples prior to any serious study, and these attitudes should be judged as racist, even when the individuals responsible for the reproduction of this state of affairs do not hold views about the biological inferiority of “colored” peoples. We face a strategic dilemma here, since the knowledge that would challenge this form of racism is precisely what its racist biases resist. The restructuring of philosophy departments called for by Kalmanson (2017) will not be easy to achieve, to put it mildly, given prevailing views about “the concept of ‘philosophy,’ what we consider to be within its boundaries, and who we think can do it” (Flory 2017).

Still, there are sites of possible resistance. While waiting for—and promoting—the sea change required to reconfigure faculty profiles and curricula, we can, as individuals, provide the needed education in our courses, by whatever means possible, within the constraints we face. This is the admittedly modest site of resistance I have been trying to occupy in recent years, by including multicultural content, in one shape or another, in all the courses I teach. That has required, and continues to require, educating myself in traditions of thought to which I was barely exposed in my own formal education. Unsurprisingly, the more I do so, the less my reasons for including non-Western traditions are specifically political. The more I study Indian, Chinese, and Native American ideas, for example, the more they naturally occur to me as relevant and insightful when engaging with one or another philosophical topic. At that point, the only reason for *not* including them would have to be that they are not of European ancestry, a decision that betrays its racist pedigree. This sort of inclusion of non-Western traditions within our philosophical conversations certainly has to be accompanied by critical analyses of Eurosupremacist discourses, their histories, their premises, and their motivations. Only, the history and present reality of what we call “racism” is not something separate or radically distinct in kind, I believe, from

those perspectively-biased representations and rankings of human societies that defend themselves these days under the cover of concepts such as culture (and often, I might add, religion). We need to recognize this, and to proceed accordingly in developing the strategies through which we counter racism in our discipline.

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- <sup>1</sup> Leah Kalmanson, "Decolonizing the Department: Peter K.J. Park and the Profession of Philosophy," *Journal of World Philosophies* 2, no. 2, (2017): 60–4
  - <sup>2</sup> Dan Flory, "Race, History, and Affect: Comments on Peter K. J. Park's 'Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy,'" *Journal of World Philosophies* 2, no. 2, (2017): 48–59
  - <sup>3</sup> Peter Park "Why It Makes Sense to Talk of Decolonizing the Philosophy Department," *Journal of World Philosophies* 2, no. 2, (2017): 65–72
  - <sup>4</sup> "It could be said that in the long history of racism it is nineteenth-century biologism that is the exception, and certainly Europe's oldest racisms, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, are culturalist" (Modood 2005: 28). Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity, and Muslims in Britain* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005)
  - <sup>5</sup> See Bernasconi's analysis of Hegel's distortion of his sources in Bernasconi (1998). I make a similar case about Herder's use of available material on China (Sikka 2011: 106–16; cf. Sikka 2016), though Herder is more often among the voices calling for fairer judgments about non-Western peoples, and explicitly rejects the concept of race. Robert Bernasconi, "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti," in *Hegel after Derrida*, ed. Stuart Barnett (New York: Routledge, 1998), 41–63; Sonia Sikka, *Herder on Humanity and Cultural Difference: Enlightened Relativism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011); Sonia Sikka, "Journeys that Go Nowhere: Eurocentric Prejudice and the Refusal to Hear," in *Constructions of Self and Other in Yoga, Travel and Tourism: A Journey to Elsewhere*, ed. Lori G. Beaman and Sonia Sikka (Switzerland: Palgrave Pivot [Springer International]), 9–18.
  - <sup>6</sup> Robert Bernasconi, "Race, Culture, History," in *The Philosophy of Race*, ed. Paul C. Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2012), 41–56.