



Kant's Racial Views and the Categorical Imperative

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Abstract

This paper offers a critical reassessment of Immanuel Kant's anthropological writing and its effects on the Categorical Imperative. There are a number of reasons why this reassessment is crucial. First, it has been observed that Immanuel Kant's anthropological writings which form the basis or foundation of his ethics contain some elements of racial discrimination or racism. That notwithstanding, some scholars argue that the racial views of Kant do not affect his ethical writings especially his Categorical imperative. This paper therefore, examines Kant's racial views with a view to showing how they affect the principles of the categorical imperative. The paper however, is of the opinion that Kant's racial views indeed affect his ethics – the categorical imperative. For this reason, the paper concludes that Kant's categorical imperative which he claims is a universal moral principle is after all, not so.

Keywords: Race; Categorical; Imperative; Anthropology

Introduction

Immanuel Kant is often praised and elevated as one of the most influential and remarkable figures in the history of Western philosophy for his contributions to philosophy in general and particularly moral philosophy. In his moral philosophy, Kant argues that human understanding is the source of the general laws of nature that structures all our experience; and that human reason gives itself the moral law, which is our basis for belief in God, freedom, and immortality.

Kant's view of the universal moral standard, otherwise known as the categorical imperative has largely been overrated and misunderstood by Kant's contemporary readers. Whereas those interested in Kant's moral philosophy have primarily attended to his ethical writings, a neglected or forgotten and not so popular body of literature suggests that Kant's theory of human nature, which is principally the bedrock of his ethical project provides the anthropological, political, and pedagogical underpinnings needed to fully understand the claims Kant makes about human conduct in

his ethical writings.

Interestingly, scholars tend to concentrate or choose to pick certain works of Kant that they seem to be at home with or interested in, forgetting that Kant wrote several works in different fields with connected links. Today, due to the considerable influences Kant's works have garnered, some scholars including the present researcher, have decided to take Kant's other works (forgotten or neglected works) more seriously because they contain beliefs that are pivotal to understanding the rest of Kant's works. Hence, to understand Kantian ethics, it is pertinent to study the background of his thought which exerted considerable influence and which played a dominant role in his efforts to formulate and synthesize his conception of ethics. There were several intellectual and historical factors that were synthesized in his mind which created ideas that became the cornerstone of his ethical philosophy. For instance, Kant's first work – *Observations on the Beautiful and Sublime* (1761) as well as one of his last works, - *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) contain beliefs and teachings

that make many scholars including the present researcher uncomfortable with the rest of Kant's works particularly his moral philosophy. In the *Observations on the Beautiful and Sublime*, Kant made some remarkable statements that are quite antagonistic to Africans and non-whites. He writes: "The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling....." [1]. As if that was not enough insult on a distinctive and most populated continent of the world, Kant in the same book took up a more nasty categorization of the African people when he remarked: "This fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid" [1]. Kant did not stop at belittling the whole of African people, he equally presents them along with other non-white races including women as inferior people lacking rationality and morality. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to critically examine Immanuel Kant's anthropological writings with a view to showing how the categorical imperative which hitherto has been accepted as a universal moral principle is actually not universal at all.

The Categorical Imperative

Immanuel Kant's ethics rests on the argument that morality is the function of reason. For him, to be fully human is to be a rational being capable of exercising both reason and free will in making decisions and choosing actions. The Categorical Imperative, according to Kant, is an unconditional imperative which immediately commands a certain conduct without having as its condition, any other purpose to be attained by it [2]. In other words, the Categorical Imperative commands actions as good in themselves and not as means to other ends. Kant gave three different formulations of the Categorical Imperative. He formulates the first Categorical Imperative as follows: "Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will, a universal law of nature" [2]. Maxim for Kant, is the subjective principle of action. In the other words, maxim means a rule of action a man follows as part of his own policy of life, whatever rules of living other men may have. The first formulation of the Categorical Imperative means that, in formulating a principle of conduct, a rational being is constrained to postulate an ideal, and in postulating such an ideal, and himself as part of it, the agent sees himself in relation to other rational beings as one among many, of equal importance with them, deserving and giving respect on the basis of reason alone, and not on the basis of those empirical conditions which create distinctions between men. The basic formulation of this imperative is the test of universalizability, which states that you must act so that the rule or principle guiding your action can be willed to be a universal law. That is, could I take this action in all similar circumstances without being logically inconsistent? For example, telling a lie violates this maxim because you could not logically will that people be free to lie whenever they wanted without rendering the concept of truth useless.

The second formulation of the Categorical Imperative is thus: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always and at the same time as an end and never simply as a means" [2]. What this means is that, a rational being is constrained by reason, not to use his fellow human beings simply or merely as means to achieve his own purposes; not to enslave, abuse or exploit them, but always to recognize that they contain within themselves the justification of their own existence, and a right to their autonomy. The second formulation of the Categorical Imperative forbids such things as murder, rape, theft, dishonesty, and fraud, etc. Consequently, a universal duty to respect the rights of others is imposed on us by this principle.

The third formulation is: "Always so to act that the will could at the same time regard itself as giving in its maxims universal laws [2]. This third formulation is quite similar to the first formulation. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, we shall limit our discourse to the first and second formulations of the Categorical Imperative. Meanwhile, the first and second formulations demand from us the duty to help others and the duty to refrain from false promises. The Categorical Imperative requires practical judgment for its application in every situation. The rule of judgment is therefore, that in any action one wants to perform, ask yourself whether, if the act you have in mind were to take place in accordance with a law of nature, of which you yourself were a part; you could regard it as possible through your will.

For Kant, the Categorical Imperative is the fundamental principle that determines which possible principles can be objectively valid for the decision of our will. It is a law, which neither depends on our desires or feelings, nor prescribes any particular action. It rather imposes an abidingness to law for its own sake. Thus, it speaks about the conformity of one's action to the universal law. Therefore, for Kant, a morally good man is he who seeks to obey a law valid for all men and follow an objective standard not determined by his desires.

Kant's Racial Views

Immanuel Kant was not the first to introduce the classification of the human variability; it was rather the Swedish botanist named Carolus Linnaeus who having been inspired by the physician Galen Pergamon's division of human types according to four bodily fluids, introduced the first classifications of the human variability when dividing the genus *Homo Sapiens* into four categories. Pergamon's division of human types was later expounded by the most influential ancient physician called Hippocrates. In his book *Systema Naturae*, Linnaeus determined four basic races as verities thus: *Homo Americanus*, *Homo Asiaticus*, *Homo*

Europaeus and Homo Africanus [3]. This was followed up later by the professor of medicine named Johann F. Blumenbach who became the first to introduce in his work *De Generis Humana* division of races based on skull, jaw and brain size, between 1770 and 1778. He divided humankind into five distinct groups thus: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malaysian. Inspired by Hippocrates, Linnaeus and Blumenbach's works, Kant taking skin colour as evidence of a racial class, classified humans into four races thus: white (Europeans), yellow (Asians), black (Africans), and red (American Indians) from the geographic standpoint [4].

Having classified humans into these four different races, Kant provides a psychological or moral description of the characteristics of each of the races. He argues that different nations have different aesthetics and moral sensibilities, hence the "beautiful" and the "sublime" are various qualities of aesthetic and moral "feeling." As one would expect, Kant himself a German, placed the German at the topmost level in his classification of the human races. According to Kant, the German has a fortunate combination of feeling, both in that of the sublime and in that of the beautiful. The German for Kant is reasonably methodical both in love and in all forms of taste. He combines the beautiful with the noble and is particularly interested in peoples' judgment of him. He has healthy inclinations in love [1].

The Englishman, says Kant, is cool and indifferent toward a stranger. He has little inclination to small complaisance. He is a great performer of services in friendship. He takes little trouble to be witty in society or to display a polite demeanor. He is reasonable and steady, a bad imitator who cares very little about what others judge. He follows his own taste and in relation to women, he is not so polite but accords respect and esteem. He is very steadfast [1].

The Frenchman on the other hand, is gracious, courteous, complaisant and has a predominant feeling for the morally beautiful. He becomes familiar very quick and is witty and full of noble qualities. While the Spaniard is earnest, taciturn, truthful, a proud soul and more feeling for great than for beautiful actions. He has little kindness and gentle benevolence. He is often harsh and cruel. Kant claims that the Italian has a feeling mixed from that of a Spaniard and that of a Frenchman. According to him, the Frenchman has more feeling for the beautiful than the Italian, and more for the sublime than the Spaniard. As for the Dutchman, Kant observes that he has orderly and diligent disposition as well as little feeling for what is in the finer understanding of beautiful or sublime. He contrasts as much with a Frenchman as with an Englishman [1].

Having classified the characteristic dispositions of the European race, Kant in his usual manner of disdaining the

non-European races has this to say:

If we cast a fleeting glance over the other parts of the world, we find the Arab the noblest man in the Orient. The Arab has a feeling that degenerates very much into the adventurous. He is hospitable, generous, and truthful. His inflamed imagination presents things to him in unnatural and distorted images. The Persians on the other hand are good poets, courteous and of fairly fine taste. The Japanese are very resolute which degenerates into utmost stubbornness in their valor and their disdain for death. They display few signs of finer feeling [1].

Speaking of the Hindus, Kant notes that they have motivating forces but they have a strong degree of passivity and they all look like philosophers. But then, Kant did not fail to tag them as he says that they incline greatly towards anger and love. However, Kant accords the Hindus some degree of rationality without realizing it when he notes that the Hindus can be educated to the highest degree but only in the arts and not in the sciences. Kant did not fail to put the Hindus in the waste dump of irrational races when he notes that the Hindus can never achieve the level of abstract concepts. A great Hindustani man according to Kant is one who has gone far in the art of deception and has much money and who has a dominating taste of the grotesque. Not only that the Hindus are irrational, Kant claims that their religion is a religion which consists of grotesqueries. He equally accused them of sacrificing the wives for their dead husbands. The height of Kant's disdain for the Hindus is when he asserts that the Hindus always stay the way they are and can never advance, although they began their education much earlier. This claim is quite serious as it connotes a lot of negativities for the Hindus. In Kant's categorization, "the Hindus, Persians, Chinese, Turks and actually all oriental peoples belong" to this description [1].

The North America for Kant displays so sublime a mental character more than other nations of the Savages. He writes:

They have a strong feeling for honour. They are truthful, honest and extremely proud. They feel the whole worth of freedom and have little feeling for the beautiful in moral understanding. They have no virtue of forgiveness. In fact, the virtue of forgiveness is disdained as a miserable cowardice. The Americans are completely uneducable because they lack "affection and passion." They cannot be educated. It has no motivating force, for it lacks affection and passion. They are not in love, thus they are also not afraid. They hardly speak, do not caress each other, care about nothing and are lazy [1].

Meanwhile, having catalogued, categorized or classified the rest of the races showing their strengths and weaknesses,

Kant did not see or say anything good about the black race. In fact, Kant's descriptions of Africa and African people are the worst and the most humiliating and disdainful of all the races already discussed. Not even a single good comment or positive characteristic was attributed to the black race. In the classifications of the different human races, Kant writes of the black people thus:

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have even been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art and science or any other praise-worthy quality even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between the two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour [1].

Kant noted that the religion of fetishes is so widely spread among the Negroes, a sort of idolatry that sinks as deeply as into the trifling as appears possible to human nature. Kant describes the Negroes as animist – “a bird feather, a cow's horn, a conch shell, or any other common object, can be consecrated to become an object of veneration and of invocation in swearing oaths” [1]. In Kant's table of moral classifications, the Africans unfortunately can only be “trained” as slaves and servants. The race of the Negroes is, according to Kant, completely the opposite of the Americans; “they are full of affection and passion, very lively, very vain in the Negroes way, and so talkative that they must be driven apart from each other with thrashings. They can be educated but only as servants (slaves); that is, they allow themselves to be “trained” as servants. They have many motivating forces, are also sensitive, are afraid of blows and do much out of a sense of honor” [5].

It is to be noted that for Kant, to be “educated” or to educate oneself, and to “train” somebody consists purely of physical coercion and corporeal punishment. This can be seen in Kant's writings about how to flog the African servant or slave into submission. Hence, Kant advises that in order to control and bring the African servants to total obedience or submission “a split bamboo cane be used instead of a whip, so that the ‘negro’ will suffer a great deal of pains (because of the ‘Negro's thick skin, he would not be racked with sufficient agonies through a whip) but without dying [6]. Kant gives reason why it is necessary to beat the African servants with a split bamboo cane instead of a whip. According to him, “to beat the Negro efficiently requires a split cane rather than a whip,

because the blood needs to find a way out of the Negro's thick skin to avoid festering” [1]. To justify his view, Kant argues that the African deserves this kind of “training” (corporeal punishment) because he or she is “exclusively idle,” lazy, and prone to hesitation and jealousy. Kant attributes all these negative qualities of the Negro to the fact that he (the Negro) through some climatic and anthropological reasons lacks “true” (rational and moral) character. Kant further stated that “all inhabitants of the hottest zones (which include Africa) are, without exceptions, idle” [1]. Obviously, Kant's views above about the African was informed by the transatlantic slave trades in which he observes that African slaves are flogged, and in his words “trained” as European labour.

While considering the relation of the sexes, Kant notes that “the European alone has found the secret of decorating with so many flowers the sensual charm of a mighty inclination and of interlacing it with so much morality that he has not only extremely elevated its agreeableness but has also made it very decorous” [1]. In other words, Kant implies that it is only the Europeans who have mastered the art of treating women with respect and esteem. Speaking of ‘treating women with respect’, Kant himself did not have a favourable disposition towards the female sex. In fact, Kant's feelings towards women in spite of all the nice things or qualities he ascribed to them could be regarded as one of aversion. For instance, in the *Observation on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, Kant asserted that women are “inferior” to men in some important way; that, because of this weakness or inferiority, women need (for their own good, or for the good of the marriage, or for the good of society) to be constrained in some way; that marriage automatically makes the wife the servant of her husband; that, also because of this weakness or inferiority, women lack a requisite for active participation in the political life of the society [4]. By this Kant affirms a belief that women lack intellectual ability and political wisdom and as such should be excluded from active citizenship.

As for the Orient, Kant notes that he has very false taste with regards to the relation of the sexes because he has no concept of the morally beautiful. He thrives on all sorts of amorous grotesqueries. Among this race says Kant, a woman is always in a prison. In the lands of the blacks Kant had exclaimed: “what better can one expect than what is found prevailing, namely the feminine sex in the deepest slavery!” [4]. Kant cites Father Labat's report in which a Negro carpenter whom he reproached for haughty treatment toward his wives answered: “You whites are fools, for first you make great concessions to your wives, and afterwards you complain when they drive you mad” [4]. Rather than addressing the issue raised by the Negro carpenter, Kant avoided the issue and instead makes a universal racial declaration thus: “it might be that there were something in

this which perhaps deserved to be considered, but in short, this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid" [4]. Kant accords the Canadians the best of all the Savage nations by whom the feminine sex is held in great actual regard.

Within Kant's classification therefore, the American (American Indian), the African, and the Hindu appear to be incapable of moral maturity because they lack "talent," which is a "gift" of nature. Kant notes that "the difference in natural gifts between the various nations cannot be completely explained by means of causal [external, physical, climatic] causes but rather must lie in the (moral) nature of Man himself [1]. Kant goes on to provide the psychological moral account for the differences on the basis of a presumed rational ability or inability to "elevate" (or educate) oneself into humanity from the rather humble "gift" or "talent" originally offered or denied by mother nature to various races [1].

From the ongoing, it is therefore, clear that the only race Kant recognizes as not only educable but capable of *progress* in the educational process of the arts and sciences is the white race or the European males. This can be seen in his statement: "the white race possesses *all* motivating forces and talents *in itself*" [1]. Kant, in his article "On the varieties of the different races of man," gives a variation on the classification of races he had done in the *Observations* by making the colour of skin the dominant variable based on the geographic and elemental climates. This fact is clearly captured in Kant's hierarchical chart from the superior to the inferior hues of the skin thus:

STEM GENUS: *white brunette*

First race: very blond (northern Europe), of damp cold.

Second race: Copper-Red (America), of dry cold.

Third race: Black (Senegambia), of dry heat.

Fourth race: Olive-Yellow (Indians), of dry heat [4].

According to Eze, the assumption behind this arrangement and this order is precisely the belief that the ideal skin color is the "white" (the *white brunette*) and the others are superior or inferior as they approximate whiteness. Eze notes that in Kant's anthropological system, "all other skin colours are merely *degenerative* developments from the white original" [6]. Kant's exaltation and proclamation of the white supremacy is quite parallel with his declaration that all other skin colours are merely degenerative development from the original – white skin colour. In the *Physical Geography*, Kant narrates how at birth the skin color of every baby of every race is white, but gradually, over a few weeks, the white baby's body turns black. "The Negroes" he says, "are born white, apart from their genitals and a ring around the navel, which are black during the first month; blackness spread across the whole body from these parts" [1].

Meanwhile, still maintaining the usual four categories of the species (Europeans, Asians, Africans, and Americans), Kant writes:

In the hot countries the human being matures earlier in all ways but does not reach the perfection of the temperate zones. Humanity exists in its greatest perfection in the white race. The yellow Indians have a smaller amount of Talent. The Negroes are lower and the lowest are a part of the American peoples [1].

Kant based his hierarchical colour/racial arrangement upon presumed differing grades of "talent. And "talent" for Kant is that which, by "nature," guarantees for the "white," the highest position above all creatures, namely rational and moral order, followed by the "yellow," the "black," and then the "red." Kant's point therefore, is that skin colour is an evidence of superior, inferior, or no gift of talent, or the capacity to realize reason. Hence Kant writes: "skin colour is the marker of "race" as specie-class, as well as evidence of this difference in natural character [1]. For that reason, Kant sees skin colour as that which codifies the natural human capacity for reason and rational thoughts. This is quite clear in his assessment on the reasoning ability or capacity of an African whom Kant, having evaluated the statement he (the African) made regarding the treatment of wives, not only dismissed the statement but regarded what the African said as irrational just because he is black – "this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid [1]. For Kant therefore, "skin colour is not merely a physical characteristic of humans, but also an evidence of an unchanging and unchangeable moral quality [1]. That is precisely why Kant maintains that the Negroes and the Hindus are incapable of moral maturity because they lack talent.

It is necessary at this juncture, to note that Kant did not say that the whites and non-whites are different species of human beings since they all belong to one stock; what he says is that they are different races as presented in his hierarchical chart above. Kant writes: "the 'races' of humanity are clearly not distinct species, as they are capable of producing fertile offspring through interbreeding. They are rather 'deviate' forms, even though they are still so distinct and persistent that they are justifiably distinguishable as classes" [1]. By this Kant departed from the views of Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire and few others who held the view of polygenism and rather remained committed to the competing views of monogenism possibly because of his Christian (Pietist) background. According to Kant, "races are marked by hereditary characteristics that must be passed on to offspring, whereas the characteristics of 'varieties' are not necessarily transmitted across generations: "race...is an

inevitable hereditary peculiarity which certainly justifies division into classes" [4]. Going by Naomi Zack's point of view, race is "a biological taxonomy or set of physical categories that can be used consistently and informatively to describe, explain, and make predictions about groups of human beings and individual members of those groups" [7]. Kant did not just use race consistently to inform, describe, explain and make predictions about blacks and other non-whites, he equally gave race a scientific interpretation of backing. In this way Kant became the first to establish the difference between 'races'. And as such, the biological concept of race can be seen as European invention. This claim is clearly supported by Bernard Boxill, when he writes that the Europeans "invented the idea of biological race after they had enslaved Africans as part of a strategy to rationalize crime that was already well under way" [8]. Boxill suggests that "Europeans had the idea of race before they enslaved Africans and that the idea helped to identify Africans as candidates for enslavement," which was why Kant could not oppose European slavery and colonialism [8].

Meanwhile, in addition to establishing the differences between races, Kant equally shows his disdain for women. Like Aristotle, Kant argues that women are to their husbands what slaves are to their masters. Thus for Kant "marriage can make the husband the master of his wife, he the party to direct, she to obey" [4]. Besides, Kant does not see women as complete or active citizens of the state. According to Kant, "no woman, no matter how astute, financially and politically independent, rational or capable she is, can do what (at least in principle) the poorest and most dull-witted of male serfs and apprentices can do" [4]. The implication is that women are naturally inferior to men and that no matter how gifted or outstanding a woman may be, she can never attain the heights that men generally found themselves in.

Finally, Kant brings his mockery of women to its fullest when he writes: "As for scholarly women, they use their books somewhat like a watch, that is, they wear the watch so it can be noticed that they have one, although it is usually broken or does not show the correct time" [4]. These passages show clearly Kant's perception of women. As a child of the Enlightenment, Kant did not resist the temptation of advancing arguments that disdain women and other races that are not European; and this very attitude portrays Kant as a racist. We must not forget that right from the ancient period to the modern era, 'race', 'racism' and 'racist' are words used by individuals and peoples to describe the ideological frame of mind and actions of other people who espouse the doctrine of inequality [9]. As Nwosimiri rightly noted, "racism mostly comes down to prejudice against one or more racial groups that displays some certain kind of hostile behaviour towards the members of the other groups" [10]. Hence racism exists "when one ethnic group or historical collectivity dominates,

excludes, or seeks to eliminate another on the basis of differences that it believes are hereditary and unalterable" [10]. From our study of Kant's anthropology and physical geography, and backed by the definitions of racism above, it is quite evident and undeniable that Kant was a racist. We see this manifest clearly in Kant's classifications of the different races of human kind, where the Africans and other non-whites are said to be "naturally inferior" to the white race (Europeans) based on the possession of rationality by the whites and its absence among the non-whites. This was why Kant did not hesitate in asserting that: "the Negroes of Africa have not received any intelligence from nature that rises above foolishness (trifling)...." [1]. This racial discrimination and humiliation on the Africans is not just on the lack of rationality but also on the differences that Kant believes are hereditary and unalterable such as skin colour. Other remarks such as: "This fellow was quite black from head to toe, a clear proof that what he said was stupid," is another ugly insight on Kant's racial beliefs.

Meanwhile, a brief look into the different types of racism would enable us to situate Kant's racism. There are basically two types of racism namely, intrinsic or moderate racism and extrinsic or strong racism. The intrinsic racism refers to a condition or situation in which a person prefers his family members simply because they are his family members or relations.⁶¹ While extrinsic racism on the other hand, is a situation where the racial essence entails certain morally relevant qualities. That is, "the extrinsic racist believes that people in different racial categories exhibit different characteristics and this justifies different treatment". In this sense Kant is an extrinsic racist because not only did he devalue Africa as a group, he equally characterized them as 'very vain' and 'talkative' who can be 'educated' or 'trained' as slaves, and 'whipped with a split bamboo cane.' Kant would have appeared as an intrinsic racist had he merely preferred the white race (Europeans) or simply assert the superiority of the white race over and above other races. Unfortunately Kant did not. He rather tried (quite unsuccessfully) to give a scientific justification of his racial attitudes and beliefs.

The idea of racism is further made clear by Peter Sedwick when he notes that: "racism draws hierarchical distinction between races, opening a gulf between them and setting one racially designated group over and above another on a scale of worth, intelligence, or importance" [9]. Kant is quite guilty of this 'sin' as he made it more explicit that "humanity exists in its greatest perfection in the white race." In other words, the Europeans embody the ideal humanity whereas other groups are regarded as subhuman or a people who have no status whatsoever.

It is quite true that most Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume, Hegel and

several others exhibited and harbored some racial views and prejudices common to their time, yet none of them was as damning and questionable as Kant's racial views. At least none of them would have said: "The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling (foolishness)." Thus Kant cannot simply be excused as a product of his time about racial superiority because as Stuart Elden notes, "Kant went out of his way to explicitly theorize race, as a crucial category of human life."⁶⁴ Besides, Kant is seen as a thinker who actually invented the scientific concept of race or as Bernasconi puts it, "Kant was the thinker who 'gave the first clear definition of racism.'" (Bernasconi, 2002). In fact, Bernasconi strongly contends that "Kant did not simply define race, but 'played a crucial role in establishing the term 'race' as the currency within which discussions of human variety would be conducted in the nineteenth century'" (Bernasconi, 2002).

However, defenders of Kant's racial views like SankarMuthu and Pauline Kleingeld concede that Kant's racial philosophy was indeed horrible and unforgivable, yet they argue that Kant had a second thought in which he disavowed his earlier racial philosophy in his later years. Kleingeld in particular acknowledges that Kant indeed defended his racial hierarchy until around the 1780s, but that he (Kant) later changed his mind around the year 1792 after the publication of 'On the use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy', and before he completed 'Toward Perpetual Peace' which was in 1792 [11]. Kleingeld then concludes that as Kant changed his mind on racial hierarchy, he became more egalitarian. She was particularly interested in and focused on Kant's later work *Toward perpetual Peace* in which Kant discusses his idea of cosmopolitan right and thereafter had a re-think about colonialism. Contrary to Muthu⁶⁸ and Kleingeld, we argue that it is not clear that Kant indeed changed his mind or that he had a second thought on race in which he disavowed his earlier racial hierarchism, neither did he disavow colonialism unconditionally. This is because even in the year 1802 Kant's published writings – *Physical Geography* still carried and echoed his earlier racial hierarchism. Whereas Kleingeld argues that he condoned colonialism in 1790s. So if he actually changed his racial views and condoned colonialism in 1790s, how come his later work - *Physical Geography* written in 1802 is still racial pernicious? It is possible that Kant might have condoned some aspects of colonialism and slave trade, but he did not condemn in entirety the whole institution of colonialism and trans-Atlantic slave trade in so far as he still considers some races inferior and subhuman. Besides, even if Kant condemned European colonialism, this does not affect his moral philosophy as Kleingeld claims in her article 'Kant's Second Thoughts on Race.' Just because Kant disagrees with European colonialism in some respect does not mean he reversed his previous stance about black inferiority. In fact,

Kleingeld's essay totally ignores the central point raised by Bernasconi. Bernasconi notes that "the argument is not that Kant did not consider the effects of colonialism and slavery, the issue is that while condemning many forms of colonialism and slavery, Kant deliberately remains silent and conciliatory concerning chattel slavery". Kleingeld even makes it more doubtful as to whether Kant really had a second thought on race when she acknowledges that Kant radically revised his views on race during the 1790s but gives no indication of when or why he changes his views and makes no mention of a racial hierarchy anywhere in his published writings in the 1790s. If Kant gives no indication of when or why he changed his views how then does Kleingeld infer from that, that he actually changed his racial views just because he becomes silent? Kant's silence on the issue does not imply that he no longer support his racial views or that he out-rightly disavows them. It is quite obvious that Kleingeld did not read Kant's *Physical Geography* published in 1802 which still carries Kant's initial racial views. If Kant had wanted to disavow or disassociate himself with his earlier racial views, he would have clearly stated that in his last works, instead what we see in his *Physical Geography* which was one of Kant's last published works is a man whose racial classifications and hierarchism remains intact throughout his life.

Julie K. Ward equally supports the view that Kant did not change his racial views. She notes that "although such a thinker with as wide a philosophical scope and as long a career as Kant may change his position, in my view, the evidence for Kant reversing his thinking on race is not supported" [12]. Kant makes no comments in his later writings to the effect that he has changed his views on race. So for Ward, the first problem for the reversal of view is that it depends on negative evidence – on what Kant does not say about race in his later political writings. Ward argues that considering that Kant has a long writing career to repudiate his earlier explicit statements about the heritability of racial differences, the absence of comments about race in later writing is hardly evidence of a conversion. In fact, a more natural inference to draw for a lack of comment says Ward, is that he remains unchanged in his earlier views on race. So the argument that Kant recanted or revised his racial views and condemned colonialism is tantamount to reading into Kant's work something that is not explicit.

All over the world, racism is frequently associated with prejudices and hostilities. And more often than not, racist attitudes are generally supported by mistaken and inaccurate beliefs about others as a group. Although Kant's racism may as well be viewed as mistaken and inaccurate beliefs about non-whites particularly the Africans, he, by all means transcended beyond mere mistaken and inaccurate beliefs as he tried to scientifically justify his racial attitudes and beliefs against non-whites. Hence Kant's type of racism

is both extrinsic and scientific racism, and scientific racism is based on specie logic. Kant had clearly stated that the Europeans and non-whites are not two different species but rather different races since they both belong to the same stock.

Other things that support racial attitudes according to Tim Soutphonmmasane – the Australia’s Race Discrimination Commissioner, are “fear and anxiety; envy and resentment; ignorance and arrogance,” [13] and we add, hate. But none of these is good reason enough to espouse racial thoughts or to discriminate against one’s fellow human beings on the basis of mental inability and or skin colour. This is because, racism harms the social standing that another person or group of people enjoyed and can impair the ability of its target to exercise their freedom of speech. This can be vividly observed from the sad and ugly experiences of Africans and people of African descent scattered all over Europe and America.

As V.F. Guerra rightly observes, one of the first things that one notices from Kant’s racial thoughts is that “it sets up a racial hierarchy in which the whites are superior and non-whites are inferior in varying degrees” [14]. It is quite worrisome to hear Kant say that the only race that is capable of full rationality and cultural progress are whites (Europeans). This was probably why Nwosimiri is of the opinion that “the philosophical writings of some modern philosophers like Hume, Kant and Hegel arouse psychological defensiveness by most modern African intellectuals when they come across intellectual racial discrimination and anti-African prejudices in the works of some European thinkers” [10]. Nwosimiri is right, for the scholarly works of Mabogo P. More, Nwosimiri himself and in particular Emmanuel Eze, have recently sparked off debate as to how we should interpret Kant’s racial philosophy and the relationship it has with his moral philosophy. In fact, it is on this note that Mabogo in his Book *African Philosophy Revisited* argues that the “Western conception of Africans and the idealized logocentric self-image of Western philosophy together with its notion of human nature constitute the pillars around which the rejection of African philosophy is based” [15]. Mabogo strongly maintains that “Western valorization of ‘reason’ is directly connected to the interrogation of the legitimacy of African philosophy,” and that “rationality – the notion that undergirds Western philosophy’s self-conception and self-image and its articulation of human nature – is of course, the primarily source of this exclusionary attitude because it legitimizes, encourages and leads to the reinvention of beliefs, attitudes, and articulations of otherness” [15].

Therefore, Kant’s writings contain several pernicious racial views which make Kant himself a racist. And the idea of Kant reversing or disavowing his racial views in his later works is quite unsupported as we have shown. The question

that needs to be addressed now is whether Kant’s racial views affect his moral theory – the categorical imperative or not.

Kant’s Racial Views and the Categorical Imperative

The universalizability criterion forbids individuals from excluding others as rational moral agents who have the right to act as he acts in a given situation. In this sense, anyone who decides to use another person merely as a means for his own end must at the same time realize the other person’s right to do the same to him for he cannot consistently will that he uses another person as a means only and will not be used in the same way by another. In this way the universalizability criterion is a principle of consistency, unfortunately Kant renders it inconsistent and even contradictory the moment he declares that ‘the Negroes of Africa can only be educated or trained as ‘slaves.’ As has been discussed, to train according to Kant involves corporal punishment which is reserved only for slaves. And so to train or educate the Africans for Kant is to treat them simply or merely as means and not as end that they are, and this not only violates the principle of the second formulation of the categorical imperative, but also makes it consistent with Kant’s racial views.

Kant claims that in the moral universe or ‘kingdom of ends’, each rational person is equal and sovereign. People are equal in so far as they will the moral law in accordance with reason, and they are sovereign because by doing so, they each contribute to the building of this kingdom of ends or moral universe. From this idea of a kingdom of ends Kant comes up with a variation on his first formulation of the categorical imperative in which he states “for all rational beings come under the law that each of them must treat itself and all others never merely as means, but in every case at the same time as ends in themselves” [16]. Here Kant postulates the sovereignty and dignity of the rational individual which implies that we should never treat others as tools for achieving our ends or purposes for to do so denies them participation as equal sovereign individuals in the moral universe or kingdom of ends as well as deny them dignity. But all these did not reflect in Kant’s treatment of blacks, for his writings on race indicate that non-Europeans are to be used as slaves (merely as means) contrary to the principles of the categorical imperative. According to Kant, “By ‘kingdom of ends’ I understand a systematic union of different rational beings through common laws” [16]. Obviously, blacks are excluded from the ‘kingdom of ends’ because according to Kant, they ‘lack rationality’ and as can be seen, Kant makes it clear that the ‘kingdom of ends’ is the union of rational beings only. If the ‘kingdoms of ends’ is the union of rational beings only, and blacks are not rational beings, then blacks are not members of the ‘kingdom of ends’, and if they are not

part of the 'kingdom of ends' then they can be used as merely as means to some ends. However, later in this study, we shall attempt to prove that Africans and other non-Europeans are rational and therefore members of Kant's "kingdom of ends".

From the above we admit that Kant's racial views unfortunately affect his moral theory – the categorical imperative. Kant's racial categorization led him into excluding Africans and other non-Europeans from his notion of rationality thereby making his moral theory not universal and inconsistent. In other words, Kant's moral universalism contradicts his particular views on race as we have shown. However, we must note here that although the categorical imperative is affected by Kant's racial views, yet, it does not affect the key central claims of his moral philosophy. Because Kant's moral theory contains enough praise-worthy elements or principles which could guide human actions especially in our contemporary society.

Thus, we acknowledge the fact that Kant was a racist but then Kant's moral theory is essentially anti-racist theory. So instead of abandoning the categorical imperative, we should rather attempt to deepen our understanding of it and its place in Kant's critical philosophy. We hope that this would bring about a reconstruction of Kant's writings. The reconstruction will reveal not necessarily the inconsistency of Kant's moral philosophy or the racist or sexist nature of the categorical imperative, but rather it will disclose the disunity between Kant's theory and his own feeling about blacks, non-Europeans and women. Hence we agree with Arnold Farr that "although Kant's attitude toward people of African descent was deplorable, yet it would be equally deplorable to reject the categorical imperative without first exploring its emancipatory potentials" [17]. This is because, as Loudon rightly pointed out, Kant's theory is fortunately stronger than his prejudices, and it is the theory which philosophers should focus on [18]. Besides, it might be unreasonable to expect a philosopher to be consistent in all his writings and never to slip up and as such we should consider Kant's racial writings as 'mistakes' or 'aberration' that must yield or give way to his philosophy. After all, Kant's racial views are not as damnable and destructive as can be found in many European scholars. For example, the writings of Christoph Meiners (1747-1810) a contemporary of Kant contain several racial and disturbing views about Africa or the black race. David Hume too had bigoted and shocking racial views. Hume had categorically stated that the black race as well as other non-white races is naturally inferior to the white race. He writes:

I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation.

No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient GERMANS, the present TARTARS, have still something eminent about them, in their valour, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are NEGROE slaves dispersed all over EUROPE, of which none ever discovered any symptom of ingenuity; tho' low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In JAMAICA, indeed, they talk of one negro 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 [19].

Hume's views above were later adopted and used by Kant. Hume's racial views have not attracted hostilities and attacks the way Kant's racial views did. The truth is that Kant is quite unfortunate since his racial views are not different from that of Hume or Hegel. Hegel on his own part sees non-European peoples to be variously weak, unfit for freedom and irrational because of their biology. He rather sees the Europeans or whites as the very paradigm of freedom and rationality. Thus, it cannot be denied that many erudite and distinguished scholars had some racial views yet propounded great philosophical theories that have continued to influence the society positively till date.

Therefore, for the above reasons, in regards to Kant's character, it is rather his moral philosophy not his racial thought that one should take into account. After all, moral philosophers have some good ideas and some bad ones, and we should not let the bad ideas ruin the good ideas. We should not let a few apples ruin the whole bunch; instead, we should isolate them and acknowledge them as bad apples and probably seek a way to make such bad apples better.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have critically examined Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy and found out that he presents what looks like a universal theory that says that every human being has an innate dignity and value and should be treated with respect. But then, as we have clearly argued and shown in the work, Kant's ethical theory is far from being a universal moral theory. In fact, Kant's ethical theory is an exclusive ethical principle structured for the white-Europeans only. Thus we have been able to show that Kant's ethical theory or the categorical imperative is not at all universal because scholars like Charles Mills maintain that Kant really has a universal moral theory but did not intend his theory to apply to black people. And our position is that Kant's moral theory

is not and cannot be universal because it is a contradiction to say that Kant has a universal moral theory that he did not intend to apply to black people. Except if by the term 'universal' Kant restricts the sense only to White Europeans. But by the very sense of the term 'universal' it is all inclusive and not exclusive. Therefore, as Kant did not intend to apply his moral theory to blacks, his ethics at best would make meaning only to his fellow white Europeans.

Therefore, our study reveals that Kant's ethical theory or the categorical imperative does not apply to Africa and to other non-white races because Kant denies Africans, women and other non-whites the ability to reason or rationality, which according to Kant is the criterion for being moral. In other words, the work reveals that Kant does not consider Africans as moral agents and since they are not moral agents, they are simply brutes. Thus, we have been able to show beyond doubt from Kant's various writings that the categorical imperative does not apply to non-white races particularly the African race.

We equally discover in the course of our study that Kant has a theory of race, a racist theory of race, and says things that clearly indicate that he fails to apply his own revolutionary universal theory to black people as we have shown in the work. We expressed our disbelief and utmost surprise at scholars who argue that Kant's personal racism does not affect his theory. Our question is, if Kant's personal racism directed against one of the largest continents in the world does not affect his theory, what else affects it? Is racism not bad or evil enough to soil one's theory no matter how noble? We noted that late Emmanuel ChukwudiEze, a Nigerian erudite scholar was the first to stir the hornet's nest by showing that Kant's racist beliefs are inseparable from his basic critical philosophy, and that Kant's ethical theory is not what it ordinarily appears to be. Thus, backed by Eze's findings and our discovery, we were able to show and strongly maintain that Kant's racist beliefs affect his moral theory in no small measure. Our stand therefore, is that anyone whether black, white or coloured who defends or maintains that Kant's personal racism does not affect his moral theory misses the point and is equally a racist. Kant as we have shown is not an inconsistent universalist, but a consistent inegalitarian as supported by Eze and other scholars. It is quite clear that Kant's writings do exhibit many private prejudices and contradictory tendencies. Hence, we reject any view suggesting that Kant's theory is fortunately stronger than his prejudices. We equally repudiate any proposal requesting for philosophers to focus only on Kant's theory rather than on his prejudices and contradictions, a proposal that makes anyone who accepts it to be inconsistent with and contrary to the whole idea of philosophy.

Therefore, we have been able to show in this work that

Immanuel Kant is a racist because he not only divided the world into two races namely the pure/superior race (the whites) and the impure/inferior race (non-whites /blacks), but also in his earlier works denied Africans the ability to reason based on their skin colour and race. We equally argued strongly that the categorical imperative does not apply to Africans or non-whites and as such should not be a universal principle of morality. Finally we drew attention to the fact that Africans are equally pure race/human beings and like other humans beings are rational beings and therefore moral agents.

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