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Kant's Four Examples: On South Sea Islanders, Tahitians, and Other Cautionary Tales for the Case of "Rusting Talents"

IT IS A REMARKABLE THING to find oneself suddenly surprised by an author after having spent years analyzing, interpreting, and teaching their works. And yet, that is precisely the experience of many Kant specialists in recent times, as greater attention than ever has been placed on Kant's discussions of gender and race. Part of the disorientation for Kantians surely comes from the way in which these investigations—oriented as they are by questions of empire as opposed to say, metaphysics—are able to make a body of work that has been long-familiar seem strange and new. It is in this vein that I want to use my discussion here as an opportunity to reconsider one of Kant's most familiar texts, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785; *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*), in order to focus on the case of moral failure presented by the person who has chosen an easy path in life: one who has "sein Talent rosten ließe" (4:423; let their talents rust),¹ to use Kant's phrase. With this in focus, I will identify four subsequent counterexamples offered up by Kant, each meant to offer specific cases of non-Europeans in a manner that can provide further moral instruction on this point. What this approach should reveal is not only Kant's unsurprising consistency regarding the need for self-improvement but also the compatibility he evidently saw between engaging his readers in moral guidance, on the one hand, and identifying non-European others as counterexamples of a morally worthless existence, on the other.

Now anyone teaching Kant's moral theory would be well aware of the attention that has long been paid to Kant's four examples of moral failure in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. From a pedagogical perspective, this makes sense, both for Kant's presentation and for those of us in the classroom. Kant uses the four examples in order to explain the various formulations of the moral law in its function as a categorical imperative for human behavior, testing them against the question of whether they might be coherently conceived as a maxim held by all of us in the first formulation, and if this maxim would amount to treating others as if they were morally valuable in the second one. The examples make it easy to demonstrate, for example, that if everyone

told lies all the time, then the distinction between truth and falsity would break down; an incoherence proving therefore the contradiction contained in the maxim's conception from the start.

Despite this, Kantians have long sought to shift scholarly attention away from an exclusive focus on the *Groundwork* toward Kant's later and much more developed discussions of moral life found in *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793; *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*) and *Die Metaphysik der Sitten* (1797; *The Metaphysics of Morals*), complaining with real evidence that to treat Kant's ethics through the lens of the earlier text and especially these examples alone is to miss some of the best parts of Kant's theory.² For my purposes here, however, I am going to stay with Kant's examples and look at what he has to say about the paradigmatic case of rusting talents. I am choosing this example because I believe it will open the door to a broader investigation of Kant's sources at a time when he was at the height of his career, and in the middle of his busiest decade of writing and indeed influence across the broad areas of investigation being undertaken by him.

In his presentation, Kant gives readers four examples which are then divided into two kinds of maxims: ones yielding narrow or explicitly defined duties—do not commit suicide and do not tell lies—and ones yielding broader, long-running duties like help others and improve yourself. Regarding the moral duty for self-improvement, you might generate a maxim for testing like: When faced with a choice between relaxation or study, I will choose to relax now and study later, and since we can imagine a world where all agents choose to put off their work, we see that it passes the universalizability test. What about the second formulation, the one where we must act in such a manner that we treat everyone always as ends in themselves versus as means to our own ends? Here the maxim runs into trouble. Reflecting on the two formulations of the categorical imperative, Kant expands on his understanding of what is precisely at stake here. In his words, “Nun sind in der Menschheit Anlagen zu größerer Vollkommenheit, die zum Zwecke der Natur in Ansehung der Menschheit in unserem Subject gehören; diese zu vernachlässigen, würde allenfalls wohl mit der *Erhaltung* der Menschheit, als Zwecke an sich selbst, aber nicht der Beförderung dieses Zwecks bestehen können” (4:430; Now there are in humanity predispositions to great perfection, which belong to the end of nature with regard to humanity in our subject; to neglect these would perhaps be consistent with the preservation of humanity as an end in itself, but not with the *advancement* of this end).³ Industrious activity toward self-betterment models moral behavior, according to Kant, and in this way it promotes the flourishing of not just oneself, but others as well, advancing thereby the moral progress of the species as a whole. In this way, Kant positions industry as a specifically *moral* behavior and as a key to mankind's being positioned as the teleological endpoint of nature.⁴

With this brief rehearsal in view, I want to put a little pressure on Kant's choice to have the problem posed by rusting talents included

as one of the four best examples of moral failure. Lying, suicide, and selfishness make sense, but why not intemperance, greed, or jealousy? Beyond the Bible's seven deadly sins, Kant was certainly familiar with a long tradition of ethical thought devoted to cataloging virtues and vices. Kant, however, points to his "source" material by way of a counterexample in his own discussion. Illustrating the failure to engage in self-improvement, Kant describes an agent who considers whether their choice to neglect their natural talents agrees with duty: "Da sieht er nun, daß zwar eine Natur nach einem solchen allgemeinen Gesetze immer noch bestehen könne, obgleich der Mensch (so wie die Südsee-Einwohner), sein Talent rosten ließe, und sein Leben bloß auf Müßiggang, Ergötzlichkeit, Fortpflanzung, mit einem Wort, auf Genuß zu verwenden bedacht wäre," but he would not will it, "Denn als ein vernünftiges Wesen will er nothwendig, daß alle Vermögen in ihm entwickelt werden" (4:423; Now he sees that a nature could indeed still subsist according to such a universal law, even if human beings (like the South Sea Islanders) should let their talents rust and be intent on devoting their lives merely to idleness, amusement, procreation, in a word, to enjoyment. [But he would not will it], for as a rational being he necessarily wills that all capacities in him be developed).⁵

Kant's reference to the behavior of "South Sea Islanders" appears to come out of nowhere, but if a modern reader might feel slightly bewildered by Kant's casual reference to Pacific islanders, this would not have been the case at all during his own day. Germany had been awash in Pacific travel literature since the late 1760s, but especially so in the wake of Captain James Cook's three voyages to the Pacific between 1769 and 1779.⁶ Cook's second expedition had included J. R. Forster and his son Georg as the ship's naturalists, and each of them had composed travel narratives of the voyage, first in English and then in lightly revised German translation. Returning to Germany after the voyage, the Forsters would go on to produce a flurry of subsequent books, papers, translations, and reviews in an ongoing effort to disseminate maritime news. Georg Forster, who died relatively young at the age of 39 in 1794 had, for example, just finished as his last piece of work, a translation and commentary on Captain Bligh's success at last in bringing breadfruit from the Pacific to British slave plantations in the Caribbean, a long-standing goal of Joseph Banks, naturalist on Cook's first voyage (1769–1772), and head of Kew Gardens in London.⁷

In fact, Kant would receive a sharp attack on his theory of race from Georg Forster in 1786, one year after the *Groundwork*, to which Kant would mount a vigorous defense.⁸ But leaving aside Forster's role as an influence on Kant, I want to see what other sources exist for us to make sense of Kant's decision to include "rusting talents" as one of the four most significant cases of moral failure. In addition to the *Groundwork*, in 1785 Kant published his second account of racial variation and inheritance, but a more likely driver was the publication of the first part of Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–91; *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*), which Kant reviewed that

year as well.⁹ In his review we find Kant using it as an opportunity to repeat his point regarding the immorality of a life devoted to enjoyment over self-discipline and work for, as he had put it in the *Groundwork*: there is a law “nehmlich seine Glückseligkeit zu befördern, nicht aus Neigung, sondern aus Pflicht, und da hat sein Verhalten allererst den eigentlichen moralischen Wert” (4:399; namely to advance one’s happiness, not from inclination, but from duty; and it is not until then that one’s conduct has its actual moral worth).¹⁰

Herder’s treatise was full of allusions to ethnographic data and general information gleaned from the many travel narratives available, going so far as to call J. R. Forster “the Ulysses of our time” for all his contributions. Kant found much to complain about in Herder’s *Outlines* but we can focus on his approach to happiness. Kant’s own view, as intimated in the *Groundwork* but only fully worked out in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790; *Critique of Judgment*), was that a human being’s worth was directly connected to their performance of duties under the guidance of the moral law, and that while we might in this way strive to be *worthy* of happiness, the meaning of human existence was defined by a life that was internally oriented and indeed disciplined by moral choice-making.¹¹ This, to put it mildly, was the opposite approach taken by Herder, who, paraphrased by Kant, believed that “gütig dachte die Vorsehung, daß sie den Kunstendzwecken großer Gesellschaften die leichtere Glückseligkeit einzelner Menschen vorzog und jene kostbare Staatsmaschine, so viel sie konnte, für die Zeit sparte” (8:64; Providence thought beneficently when it gave preference to the easier happiness of individual human beings over the artificial final ends of large societies).¹² Kant was keen to insist on his own view, and to make this explicit, he offered what I will call his *first* counterexample, asking:

Meint der Herr Verfasser wohl: daß, wenn die glücklichen Einwohner von Otaheite, niemals von gesittetern Nationen besucht, in ihrer ruhigen Indolenz auch tausende von Jahrhunderten durch zu leben bestimmt wären, man eine befriedigende Antwort auf die Frage geben könnte, warum sie gar existiren und ob es nicht eben so gut gewesen wäre, daß diese Insel mit glücklichen Schafen und Rindern, als mit im bloßen Genusse glücklichen Menschen besetzt gewesen wäre? (8:65)

Does the author really mean that if the happy inhabitants of Tahiti, never visited by more cultured nations, had been destined to live for thousands of centuries in their tranquil indolence, one could give a satisfying answer to the question why they exist at all, and whether it would not have been just as good to have this island populated with happy sheep and cattle as with human beings who are happy merely enjoying themselves?¹³

Kant was clearly not done with the point, since within a few months of the Herder review, he had another piece ready for press, one offering a separate rejoinder to Herder’s own speculations, which Kant titled “Muthmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte” (1786; *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*). In 1755 Rousseau had penned a similarly

speculative origin story, one clearly inspired by Buffon's genealogical approach to natural history in the opening volumes of the *Histoire Naturelle*, insofar as Rousseau sought to provide his own genealogical investigation into the natural history of inequality. In Kant's essay, he has Rousseau as much in his sight as Herder, but we can just focus on the latter for now as we track Kant's focus on the moral failure posed by the case of rusting talents. For after reaching the point at which civil society has been formed in his conjectural reconstruction, the point at which "daß menschliche Geschlecht sich vermehren und aus einem Mittelpunkte wie Bienenstöcke durch Aussendung schon gebildeter Colonisten überall verbreiten" (8:119; humankind could multiply and extend itself everywhere from a central point, like a beehive sending out already formed colonists),¹⁴ an epoch from whence "ging auch die Ungleichheit unter Menschen, dies reiche Quelle so vieles Bösen, aber auch alles Guten" (8:119; began also the *inequality* among human beings, this rich source of so much evil, but also of all good),¹⁵ Kant ends the essay with a closing remark on moral corruption.¹⁶

The moral corruption Kant is referring to stems from the sorrow all thinking people feel when considering the many ongoing tragedies—from natural disasters to disease to war—afflicting human life. Kant is worried that such reflection might lead a thinking person to question the wise course of providence, deciding rather that we are all at the mercy of fate, with nothing to be done about it. The only remedy, Kant insists, is to be content with providence, partly as a bolster to one's personal courage but also in order to accept responsibility for one's own small part to play via self-improvement. The course of human development does not entail a falling arc from good to evil, but charts instead a path that is the reverse of that order. "Die Geschichte der *Natur* fängt also vom Guten an, denn sie ist *das Werk Gottes*," Kant declares, "die Geschichte der *Freiheit* vom Bösen, denn sie ist *Menschenwerk*" (8:115; The history of *nature* thus begins from the good, for that is the *work of God*; the history of *freedom* from evil, for it is the *work of human beings*).¹⁷ Our task, as Kant sees it, is to figure out what we can do to contribute to humankind's progress from evil to good. While we might wish for the end of war and a long life of tranquility and peace, Kant urges readers to see instead the opportunities wrought by circumstances wherein, say, political freedom becomes all the more visible and precious by the contrasting case of war or one avoids the inevitable pile-up of sins and vices in a life lived too long.

But it is Kant's final comment that takes us back to his critique of Herder's sense that happiness and even enjoyment might not be such bad things in life after all. Here Kant offers his *second* example of the immorality of this approach to life. For alongside the poet's wish for a golden age when we were satisfied by the simple affordances of nature, a mystical time of equality and peace, we now find everywhere *Robinsonades* and voyages to the South Sea islands with charming accounts of the pure enjoyment of a carefree life, dreamt away in laziness or frittered away in childish play. As he puts it, "mit einem Worte der reine Genuß eines

sorgenfreien, in Faulheit verträumten oder mit kindischem Spiel vertändelten Lebens—eine Sehnsucht, die die Robinsone und die Reisen nach den Südseeinseln so reizend macht” (8:122; in a word, the pure enjoyment of a carefree life, dreamt away in laziness or frittered away in childish play—a longing that makes the Robinsonades and voyages to the south sea islands so charming).¹⁸ How *bored*, Kant asks, must a thinking human be to seek worth solely in *enjoyment* or to bring in laziness as a counterweight to reason’s reminders that he should give his life its worth through *actions*.¹⁹

As mentioned already, in 1786 Georg Forster took time to write a lengthy, technical, even sermonising response to Kant—and not just in response to Kant’s second treatise on race published the year before, but indeed to Kant’s review of Herder and the “Conjectural Beginning” essay as well. Kant took some time to reply, busying himself first with lengthy revisions to the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781; *Critique of Pure Reason*) in anticipation of its second edition in 1787, revisions which—at the publisher’s insistence—entailed him detaching a planned addendum and publishing it instead as a free-standing *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788; *Critique of Practical Reason*) in the following year. Still, Kant made time after that to compose a careful response to Forster, one that took up many of Forster’s specific complaints even as Kant was clearly still preoccupied with the concerns of practical reason and his ongoing work on a critique of taste. Without addressing any of the technical issues raised in this essay, “Über den Gebrauch teleologischer Principien in der Philosophie” (1788; “On the use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy”), we can still quickly find a *third* example of Kant’s identification of moral failure and resistance to work through a negative portrait of non-European behavior.²⁰

This example appears by way of reference to a book translated and edited by Georg Forster’s brother-in-law, M. C. Sprengel.²¹ Kant’s comments here—favoring the views taken by the pro-slavery advocate Tobin over those of the abolitionist Ramsay—have been noted with anger and dismay by many at this point, but it is still worth identifying Kant’s consistency on the moral meaning and message offered up by these examples of moral failure.²² In this instance he has interrupted a lengthy discussion of biogeography by phenotype in the main body of the text in order to add a long footnote on the persistence of racial characteristics across time and place. This explains, according to Kant, the characteristic laziness of Africans and Indians, for example, given the original ease of life in their motherlands:

Sollte man hieraus nicht schließen: daß es außer dem Vermögen zu arbeiten noch einen unmittelbaren, von aller Anlockung unabhängigen Trieb zur Thätigkeit (vornehmlich der anhaltenden, die man Emsigkeit nennt) gebe, der mit gewissen Naturanlagen besonders bewebt ist, und daß Indier sowohl als Neger nicht mehr von diesem Antriebe in andere Klimaten mitbringen und vererben, als sie für ihre Erhaltung in ihrem alten Mutterlande

bedurften und von der Natur empfangen hatten, und daß diese innere Anlage eben so wenig erlösche, als die äußerlich sichtbare. (8:174)

Should one not conclude, that in addition to the *faculty* to work, there is also an immediate drive to activity (especially to the sustained activity that one calls industry), which is independent of all enticement and which is especially interwoven with inner predispositions; and that Indians as well as Negroes do not bring any more of this impetus into other climates and pass it onto their offspring than was needed for their preservation in their old motherland and had been received from nature; and that this inner predisposition extinguishes just as little as the externally visible one.²³

Kant took the opportunity to make this point again in the *Critique of Judgment* two years later in 1790. In this text, we find our *fourth* example amid Kant's critique of teleology, specifically the kind of physico-theology that had long proved especially tempting to speculative reason as it tried to make sense of the seeming unity of nature's contents and works. Reflecting on the chain of causes that might be projected onto nature if one's aim is to show the work of an underlying design, Kant distinguishes between internal and external cases of end-directed activity. Can we, for example, conclude that wood has landed on the beach in order to provide material to shelter humans in a place with no trees? Kant's answer is that this kind of reasoning would need to explain how and why human life should fit into the causal chain as an endpoint at all. But we cannot arrive at a categorical purpose in this way, Kant explains, because "man sieht nicht, warum es denn nöthig sei, das Menschen existiren (welches, wenn man etwa die Neuholländer oder Feuerländer in Gedanken hat, so leicht nicht zu beantworten sein möchte)" (5:378; we cannot see why people should have to exist (a question we might not so easily answer if we have in mind, say, the New Hollanders or the Fuegians).²⁴ What we *can* generate from this train of thinking is a subjective principle for reflective judgment, and this can be both entertaining and instructive, according to Kant, when contemplating nature. In this vein, we can purposively view even unpleasant things in light of their salutary effects:

Die Mosquitomücken und andere steckende Insecten, welche die Wüsten von Amerika die Wilden so beschwerlich machen, seien so viel Stacheln der Thätigkeit für diese angehende Menschen, um die Moräste abzuleiten und die dichten den Luftzug abhaltenden Wälder licht zu machen und dadurch, imgleichen den Anbau des Bodens ihren Aufenthalt zugleich gesünder zu machen. (5:379)

We might say that the mosquitoes and other stinging insects that make the wilderness areas of America so troublesome for the savages are so many prods to stir these primitive people to action, such as draining the marshes and clearing the dense forests that inhibit the flow of air, so that in this way, as well as by tilling the soil, they will also make the place where they live healthier.²⁵

It is only later in his discussion that Kant comes back to the earlier point regarding the human being as the endpoint of nature. If the idle lives of carefree enjoyment pursued by the Pacific peoples had been unable to explain the point of their existence, Kant is ready by the end of his account to pick up the argument where he had left it in his “Conjectural Beginning” essay from 1786. Repeating the earlier point regarding the need for inequality if society is to progress—an oppressed majority whose labor supports the rest—Kant is explicit regarding the requirements for those at the top: a culture of skill conditioned by the constant *discipline* of the body’s desire for happiness and pleasure (5:432). This is what it will take for mankind to become the true end of nature, a person whose existence is, if not enjoyable, then certainly of value from the moral point of view (5:434).

What this brief review of Kant’s published remarks between 1785 and 1790 suggests is that Kant’s ethnographic engagements—his reading habits, his love of politics and news of the world, but also his long history of teaching courses each year on physical geography and pragmatic anthropology—led to his regular deployment of racist depictions of non-European others, on the one hand, and colonial fantasies of stewardship and moral uplift through labor on the other. While work has been done by Pauline Kleingeld and others to show the ways in which Kant’s published references to colonialism might indicate a shift in some of his attitudes around 1795, my goal here has been to focus on Kant’s consistent effort to educate his audience about the value of work as a means for moral improvement during his own busiest decade of work. That he did so by way of appeal to negative examples of behavior by non-Europeans is significant insofar as it reveals the way in which Kant’s racism and his urge toward moral guidance were wholly compatible from his own point of view, a conclusion that is not so easily shrugged off in light of any supposed change of mind in the last years of his life and one which certainly calls into question claims regarding a purported deep contradiction between Kant’s moral and anthropological views.²⁶

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NOTES

1. All references to Kant's works in the German original are from *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1902-) and are cited parenthetically by volume and page number. The English translation here is from Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor and Jens Timmerman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011) 75.
2. A good early example of this is Nelson Potter, "What is Wrong with Kant's Four Examples," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 18 (1993): 213–29. Also see Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, trans. George di Giovanni, in *Immanuel Kant: Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 57–215, and *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor in *Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 365–603.
3. Kant, *Groundwork*, 89.
4. See e.g., Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987) §83, 317–321; Kant 5:429–434. A good discussion of this aspect of Kant's text can be found in Dilek Huseyinzadegan's *Kant's Nonideal Theory of Politics* (Chicago: Northwestern UP, 2019).
5. Kant, *Groundwork*, 75.
6. See e.g., the early piece by Christoph Meiners, "Einige Bemerkungen aus der Geschichte der Insel-Bewohner der Südsee," in *Vermischte Philosophische Schriften* (Leipzig, 1775) 252–73, in addition to the Forster texts: Georg Forster, *A Voyage Round the World*, 2 vols., ed. N. Thomas and O. Berghof, eds. (1777; Honolulu: Hawaii Press, 2000), Johann Reinhold Forster, *Observations Made During a Voyage Round the World*, ed. N. Thomas (1778; Honolulu: Hawaii Press, 1996). There is a large literature on the proliferation of travelogues during this time, but see here Huaping Lu-Adler's "Kant's Use of Travel Reports in Theorizing about Race—A Case Study of How Testimony Features in Natural Philosophy," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 91 (2022): 10–19.
7. Forster's translation, "William Blighs Reise in das Südmeer," which included a diagram of the plants onboard *The Bounty*, appeared in the *Magazin von merkwürdigen neuen Reisebeschreibungen* (Berlin: Voss, 1793), with a preface by Forster (iii-xx), and a lightly annotated translation thereafter (1–274). For Banks's role see Jordan Goodman's *Planting the World, Joseph Banks and his Collectors: An Adventurous History of Botany* (London: William Collins, 2020).
8. Georg Forster, "Noch etwas über die Menschenraßen," *Teutscher Merkur*, Oct., Nov. (1786): 57–86, 150–66; translated by J. Mikkelsen as "Something More about the Human Race," in *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013) 143–67. A great deal has been written about this dispute, for a start, see Werner Euler, "Einheit der Abstammung oder Gattungseinteilung? Kants Begriff der (Menschen-)Rasse als Idee einer Naturgeschichte"; Robert Bernasconi, "True Colors: Kant's Distinction between Nature and Artifice in Context"; and John Zammito, "The Forster-Kant Controversy: The Provocations of Interdisciplinarity," all three appear in *Klopffechtereien—Missverständnisse—Widersprüche? Methodische und methodologische Perspektiven auf die Kant-Forster-Kontroverse*, ed. Rainer Godel and Gideon Stiening (Paderhorn: Fink, 2012), 55–96, 191–207, and 225–44.
9. Kant published two reviews of Herder's text in the *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*: Immanuel Kant, "Ideen zur Philosophie die Geschichte der Menschheit von Joh.

- Gottfr. Herder, Erster Theil. 1784," *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* 1, no. 4 (1785): 17–20, 21–22; and "Ideen zur Philosophie die Geschichte der Menschheit von Johann Gottfried Herder, Zweiter Theil. 1785," *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* 4 no. 271 (1785): 153–56. The long history of Kant's relationship with his former student is best told by John Zammito in *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002). For Herder's role in relation to the Kant-Forster debate see Jennifer Mensch, "Kant and the Skull Collectors: German Anthropology from Blumenbach to Kant" in *Kant and his German Contemporaries*, ed. Corey Dyck and Falk Wunderlich (Cambridge: Cambridge UP) 192–210.
10. Kant, *Groundwork*, 27.
 11. For more on the difference between the two see Sonia Sikka, "On the Value of Happiness: Herder contra Kant," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 37, no. 4 (2007): 515–46.
 12. English translations of Kant's two reviews of Herder's work are translated by Allen W. Wood in Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöllner and Robert Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 124–42, here 141.
 13. Kant, *Anthropology*, 142. For some pointed discussion of this comment see Robert Bernasconi, "Why do the Happy Inhabitants of Tahiti Bother to Exist at all?," in *Genocide and Human Rights: A Philosophical Guide*, ed. J. Roth (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 139–48.
 14. Immanuel Kant, "Conjectural Beginning of Human History," trans. Allen W. Wood, in Kant, *Anthropology*, 163–75, here 172.
 15. Kant, *Anthropology*, 172.
 16. Kant's remarks on colonialism changed over the years from apparent endorsement to later reconsideration in light of the problems wrought in *Europe* as a result of offshore fighting over colonial possessions. For a recent discussion, see especially Pauline Kleingeld, "Kant's Second Thoughts on Colonialism," in *Kant and Colonialism*, ed. Katrin Flikshuh and Lea Ypi (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014) 43–67; Ines Valdez, "It's not about race: good wars, bad wars, and the origins of Kant's anti-colonialism," *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 4 (2017): 819–34; and Dilek Huseyinzadegan, "Rereading Kantian Hospitality for the Present," in *Kant's Cosmopolitics: Contemporary Issues and Global Debates*, ed. Garrett Wallace Brown and Áron Telegdi-Csetri (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2019) 151–76.
 17. Kant, *Anthropology*, 169. Further discussion of Kant's position here can be found in Jennifer Mensch, "From Crooked Wood to Moral Agent: Connecting Anthropology and Ethics in Kant," *Estudos Kantianos* 2, no. 1 (2014): 185–204.
 18. Kant, *Anthropology*, 174.
 19. Kant's distinction between industrious Europeans and lazy others is taken up well in both Huaping Lu-Adler's "Kant on Lazy Savagery, Racialized," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 60, no. 2 (2022): 253–75, and Jordan Pascoe's *Kant's Theory of Labour* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2022).
 20. Immanuel Kant, "On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy," trans. Günter Zöllner, in Kant, *Anthropology*, 195–218.
 21. Matthias Christian Sprengel, editor of *Beiträge zur Völker und Länderkunde*, vol. 5 (Leipzig: Weygand, 1786), included Reverend James Ramsay's anti-slavery tract, "Behandlung der Negersklaven in den Westindischen Zuckerinseln vorzüglich der englischen Insel St. Kitts, von James Ramsay" (3–74) and a critical

response by the pro-slavery James Tobin, “Anmerkungen über Ramsay’s Schrift von der Behandlung der Negersklaven in den Westindischen Zuckerinseln” (269–92). Ramsay’s remarks came from his *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London: Phillips, 1784), and Tobin’s from his response, *Cursory Remarks upon the Reverend Mr. Ramsay’s etc.* (London: G. & T. Wilkie, 1785).

22. A thorough evaluation of Kant’s position on slavery is provided by Huaping Lu-Adler in “Kant and Slavery—Or Why He Never Became a Racial Egalitarian,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 10, no. 2 (2022): 263–94.

23. Kant, *Anthropology*, 209. Kant took the environment to be determinative in the initial formation of the races insofar as it served as the occasioning cause or trigger for a set of in-born adaptive provisions granted by nature to the species. For a discussion of this aspect of Kant’s position, see Jennifer Mensch, “Caught between Character and Race: ‘Temperament’ in Kant’s Lectures on Anthropology,” *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 43, no. 1 (2017): 125–44.

24. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 258.

25. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 259.

26. Given everything said above regarding Kant’s choice of examples aimed at moral instruction, I disagree, therefore, with Samuel Fleischacker’s recent conclusion that while it is clear that Kant “regarded Black people and Native Americans as inferior to white people in both mental qualities and moral deserts, Kant’s main concern about race, throughout his writings on the subject, has no moral valence: he is simply trying to explain the differences among people in various physical traits.” See “Once More Unto the Breach: Kant and Race,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 1 (2023): 3–28, here 6. The broader sense that there is a “contradiction” between Kant’s attitudes towards racialized peoples, on the one hand, and his moral universalism, on the other, is easily dispelled once one recognizes that Kant is, in fact, entirely consistent when it comes to identifying the characteristics—rationality, a capacity for self-governance, industry, etc.—necessary for achieving a genuine moral “personality” and thus moral life. Because these characteristics were ones that Kant reserved for White (male) Europeans, it was only to this group that the moral theory spoke. It is in this vein that Charles Mills took Kant’s “universalism” to apply only to a very small group—like the group of young men sitting in his lecture theatres year after year perhaps—with everyone else left out and thus indeed in the category of “Untermenschen.” See Mills’s “Kant’s Untermenschen,” in *Black Rights/White Wrongs* (Oxford UP, 2017) 169–93. For Americans, the obvious parallel is presented by Thomas Jefferson, whose own slaveholding would seem to be deeply at odds with the opening lines of the *Declaration of Independence*. But consider how Stephen Douglas interpreted the issue in his fifth presidential debate with Abraham Lincoln: “The signers of the Declaration of Independence never dreamed of the negro when they were writing that document . . . They referred to white men, to men of European birth and European descent, when they declared the equality of all men. . . . When Thomas Jefferson wrote that document, he was the owner, and so continued until his death, of a large number of slaves. Did he intend to say in that Declaration, that his negro slaves, which he held and treated as property, were created his equals by Divine law, and that he was violating the law of God every day of his life by holding them as slaves? It must be borne in mind that when that Declaration was put forth, every one of the thirteen Colonies were slaveholding Colonies, and every man who signed that instrument represented a slave-holding constituency. Recollect, also, that no

one of them emancipated his slaves, much less put them on an equality with himself, after he signed the Declaration. On the contrary, they all continued to hold their negroes as slaves during the revolutionary war. Now, do you believe—are you willing to have it said—that every man who signed the Declaration of Independence declared the negro his equal, and then was hypocrite enough to continue to hold him as a slave, in violation of what he believed to be the Divine law? And yet when you say that the Declaration of Independence includes the negro, you charge the signers of it with hypocrisy.” On Douglas’s reading, in other words, Jefferson too seems to have had only a small segment of the population in mind when espousing his universal declaration. (“Fifth Presidential Debate,” October 7, 1858, 254–56. Available at <https://digital.lib.niu.edu/islandora/object/niu-lincoln%3A37663>.)

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