

ARTICLE

Reinventing Kant?

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Abstract

Immanuel Kant is often interpreted as a universal egalitarian who claims that all people, regardless of their differences, are equal. This view has been challenged by several scholars including Charles Mills and Robert Bernasconi, who note the persistent racist underpinning in Kant's work; however, the standard reading is that Kant changed his mind about race and eventually reaffirmed his universalism. By considering Charles Mills' notion of 'Black Radical Kantianism', as a way of reinventing Kant, I argue that continued engagement with Kant's universalism must go hand in hand with recognizing his racism in order to make it truly inclusive.

Keywords: Kant; Charles Mills; Kant and race; Kant and racism

1. Introduction

Every time I give a presentation on Kant and race, I encounter similar questions during the question-and-answer period. Audience members tend to ask whether I think that Kant and his theorizing about equality can be saved, reconstructed or redeemed in ways that would make it helpful in the fight for an anti-racist world. This and similar questions are, at least to my mind, produced by the anxiety regarding what ought to be the response of philosophers to the deplorable views Kant has about minoritized¹ people. For some questioners, learning about Kant's racism incites them to fiercely defend themselves, their work and Kant. I believe that their desire to protect Kant stems from fear and scepticism about engaging with racism in general. I often wonder if there is a way in which philosophers can genuinely engage concerns about racism while also maintaining their interest in Kant. In this essay, I offer one way in which these two goals can be met, in the hope that by doing so there can be further conversations about how to engage Kant and other philosophers regarding their racism.

The essay by Charles Mills, 'Black Radical Kantianism' (Mills 2018) offers a critical hermeneutical approach to Kantianism insofar as he engages in Kant's moral and political ideals and considers their potential for anti-racism. In this essay, I argue that Mills offers a kind of 'radical' treatment of Kantian philosophy regarding the race question that I see as 'reinventing' Kant's universalism. Reinvention accepts the fact that Kant makes racist comments and, in turn, uses this reality as the primary motivation to push the boundaries of Kantian notions of universal egalitarianism. Thus,

retaining the aspirational character of universal egalitarianism, that is, to refer to the way in which it aims to become fully inclusive, requires the use of new resources in order to challenge and expand the notion. Hence, the goal of reinvention is to challenge Kantian universal egalitarianism in the effort to retain the ideal but in a version that is more inclusive. In this article, I will demonstrate how Charles Mills, for example, looks to radical ideologies such as radical feminism, Marxism and the black radical tradition.

In this article, I understand the Kantian ideal of universal egalitarianism to be the belief that all people ought to be regarded and treated equally. Kant never calls himself a 'universal egalitarian' but Lara Denis claims that the notion that Kant is egalitarian is 'perhaps most associated with the second formulation of the categorical imperative' in which Kant argues that human beings should be used as ends in themselves and never solely as a means to an end (Denis 2014: 88). When applied specifically to the race question in Kant, some Kantians argue that insofar as Kant is universally egalitarian, we have a sufficient reason to refuse to regard Kant and his philosophy as being seen as irredeemably racist. For example, Arnold Farr argues that Kant's notion of universalism, as demonstrated in the categorical imperative in the kingdom of ends formulation, 'is the recognition of the common hope for humanity' (Farr 2002: 29). Allen Wood states:

To a more judicious way of looking at things, it might even be expected that the greatest philosophical insights will be those that furthest outrun the philosopher's own ability to absorb and apply them. Kant's assertion of the equal dignity of rational nature in all persons is a striking example of this, when we come to some of his opinions about the family, political, and economic relations, and the concept of race. (Wood 2008: 9)

These writers argue that, regardless of what Kant says in his texts about minoritized peoples, Kant's universalism holds. But the problem with these efforts to uphold Kantian universal egalitarianism is that Kant did indeed make racist claims and did not recant them. The important question for the philosopher is whether one should continue to think that the Kantian idea of universalism is truly inclusive.

When applied specifically to concerns about how to reconcile Kant's racism with his universalism, reinvention is an approach that takes on the aspirational character of Kant's philosophy in an effort to present a universal that does not exclude certain groups of people. In this article, I begin by discussing the nature of radicalization. I then provide more context for the discussion by presenting a few of the prominent approaches to Kant and his comments on minoritized people. I deem these approaches as 'rehabilitation' insofar as they seek to present Kant as a universalist without directly challenging his views on race. I then offer my view on the late Charles Mills' 'Black Radical Kantianism'. I argue that this text demonstrates at least one way a 'radical Kant' can be portrayed. This serves as a critical foray into my own reflections about reinvention, which are discussed in the last section. There, I argue for the notion of reinvention, and the potential for its use in the discipline of philosophy. I present it as an interpretive view that allows one to resituate racism as critical to the study of Kant while also pushing the boundaries of Kant's ideals. What makes reinvention different from other approaches is that it recognizes and accepts Kant's racism in its engagement of his universalism.

2. Can Kant be radicalized?

Can Kant be radicalized? The answer to this question depends upon what is meant by radicalization and which aspect of Kant the questioner intends to radicalize. The lay definition of 'radicalization' refers to a fundamental change or alteration in something from what it was before. There are at least two ways of radicalizing Kant that the questioner might be considering. The first way concerns whether Kant the man can be radicalized – or at least whether he could have been, given certain conditions favoured by those asking the question – and the second is whether Kant's philosophical thought can be radicalized. In this article, I am not concerned with providing an answer to the question of whether Kant the man can be radicalized. The answer to this question depends upon whether one thinks that Kant's actual thought process satisfied certain conditions relevant to whatever conditions are favoured by those asking the question. The answer to this question can vary widely insofar as it is based upon the narrative one desires to tell about Kant. I do not think that it is worth the time or effort to pursue this avenue of inquiry. Kant said what he said, believed what he believed and wrote what he wrote. Kant was who he was. As such, if the question is asking whether Kant the man can be radicalized, then the answer is 'no'. What can be radicalized is the way in which philosophers work on Kant. These efforts constitute the kind of radicalization that must be undertaken in philosophy.

The second way in which this question might be asked is with regard to how Kant the man is interpreted. This way is more directly focused on whether Kant's philosophical claims actually intend to or do reflect more 'radical' views than their standard interpretations would suggest. Namely, by radicalizing Kant, when Kant claims that minoritized people might not equally participate in human progress, we might attribute to Kant a different meaning or intention than what he said. Against the backdrop of concerns about Kant's unsavoury comments about women and people of colour, the questioner might be intending to ask whether the shortcomings of Kant's views can be overcome because, in the end, Kant is universally egalitarian. While this question regarding how to interpret Kant's work is more philosophically driven than the first question that is merely about what Kant actually wrote (and what we surmise that his intentions might have been), the problem with these two questions is the same. Both are directly or indirectly concerned with making sure that Kant the man and his scholarship are not seen as racist. They are invested in either making certain that Kant is not seen as personally racist or that his work should not be seen as such, a claim which is thought to have an impact on the extent to which one can take seriously his philosophical, physiological and teleological claims about racialized people.

I am not focused on determining whether Kant was intentionally racist, malicious or merely a man of his time regarding his views about race. Kant does make such comments, and there should be no argument about their presence and their potential value for considerations about equality. Accepting the fact that Kant made comments about race and said things that were racist should be the starting point when it comes to discussions about Kant and race, and we should not be ignoring or marginalizing these remarks. Of course, I am also not saying that these remarks must be the starting point of *all* conversations about Kant. Rather, I would like to suggest that with respect to conversations about Kant's racism and sexism, such concerns ought to start with the acknowledgement of the fact that he made racist, sexist and colonialist remarks.

The degree to which Kant was aware of the impact of what he said is also not of interest here. Kant's intention regarding what he said does not matter. What is important is the impact of what he said. By 'impact', I am referring to Kant's complicity in the spreading of racist views. His support of these views had an impact on the fact that views like his were widespread then and continue to be so now. Some might argue that *of course* Kant would be so complicit because it is inevitable that he would have such views because they were the status quo. While this may be true, this does not also mean that we cannot and ought not evaluate and engage with these ideas today. I am not making a claim about the praiseworthiness or blameworthiness of Kant's thoughts about race and his racist comments; rather, my goal is to encourage analysing the comments of Kant's that are about race as one would analyse any other aspect of his philosophy – not with judgement, but with curiosity.

I take this perspective because I believe philosophical work cannot and ought not attempt to be the judge or jury of what Kant or other philosophers in the history of philosophy have said. Philosophers are incapable of adjudicating what Kant said with what he (may have) meant, assuming that the two are different. To attempt to square Kant's words with his intentions (if they are in fact different) is not our job. Thus, while the question of whether Kant's philosophy can be radicalized is philosophically oriented, it reeks of concerns that have more to do with salvaging Kant the man from allegations of racism. These concerns are misplaced and are outside of the scope of what philosophical work can appropriately address. It is not the philosopher's place to redeem Kant from the claims that he actually made. Rather, as individuals who tinker with ideas, it is our job to be in conversation with those ideas and, if possible, reconstruct them in such a way that they lead to a more anti-racist world. Such underlying concerns about what motivates a philosopher to make racist statements and whether those statements are intentional are not unimportant questions. However, to address these considerations appropriately would require the corresponding ability to evaluate the racial prejudice of past philosophers, a task that is perhaps more fitting for scholars in the disciplines of psychology and sociology, or those in a special area of philosophy such as moral psychology.

The question that ought to consume our time is what to do about these claims and whether addressing them reflects the goals of the discipline of philosophy as we see it. Thus, any hope for the radicalization of Kant can be done only in the context of philosophy. That is, philosophy as a discipline can be radicalized, which means that it can be fundamentally altered or changed from what it was before. The effort to radicalize Kant may look different from philosopher to philosopher. Radicalization does not mean that we work to save Kant from his racism but rather that we consider how Kant's scholarship is disseminated in research and in teaching. The 'radicalization' of Kant should be aimed at what philosophers can tackle, which is addressing the hermeneutical, and by extension ethical, reasons for addressing Kant's racism. Philosophers have a moral responsibility to at least welcome the engagement of racism in philosophy. This does not mean that *all* philosophers should directly engage with race in their own work, but that all should at least allow room for such work to be done by others. In this article, I present my thoughts about how Kantian conceptions of universal equality and universalism can be 'reinvented'. Before turning to this, however, I present several philosophical approaches that have sought to reconcile Kant's universalism with his racism. I label all these approaches as rehabilitation.

3. The problem with rehabilitation

'Rehabilitating' Kant refers to an attempt to promote, in various ways, the so-called more universal aspects of Kant's theorizing. Some scholars argue that the universalist character of Kant's theorizing is itself enough to redeem him from racist allegations. For example, Pauline Kleingeld concedes that Kant is indeed racist up to a certain point in his life and work, but that he is not irredeemably so – that is, Kant eventually adopts a position on race that is in line with his universalist theory (Kleingeld 2007: 585). Different scholars may call their own approaches by different names, but the goal of rehabilitating Kant is the same: it is an attempt to promote the universal character of Kant's universalism. The problem with wanting to rehabilitate Kant (and his work) is that doing so has the *effect* of whitewashing him and his philosophy. Some of these approaches are intended to do just that, and their proponents do so by dismissing or diminishing the importance and attention to concerns about minoritized people in Kant's work. However, the *intention* of the approach does not matter. I am aware that the philosophers in question do not intend to do anything malicious in their writing and that the goal of their writing is generally the same as mine: to retain and promote Kant's universalism. This cannot be done by merely asserting that Kant's universalism is universally egalitarian. Kant does make comments about the differences amongst people, suggesting that he does not think that all people are in fact the same, a perspective which has repercussions for whether all people are equally deserving of respect. Many of these comments are direct and familiar, such as the remark Kant makes about an enslaved black male servant being 'stupid' (OFBS, 2: 254) while others are of a more implicit and obscure nature, such as the many comments Kant makes about the insufficiencies of women's morality, social and political status and mental capacity (OFBS, 2: 229–30; MM, 6: 314). These comments cannot be easily overlooked because insofar as Kant makes it clear that there are such differences amongst people, be they moral, social or physiological in nature, he opens the door to prejudicing their status with regard to right, moral capacity and ability to contribute to human progress. It is not merely the case that Kant said some bad things about people; it is the case that these comments are precisely of the sort to end up seeping into other concerns about them in other important contexts.

The approaches I describe here are merely those that are seeking to rehabilitate Kant in some way. For this reason, approaches that are critical of Kant's racism, such as those of Robert Bernasconi (2001) and Charles Mills (1997) are not included. I divide these approaches into two broad categories. Scholars in the first category argue that Kant's ideas on race and his racism can be ignored, that he changed his mind about race or that he eventually allowed minoritized people into his views about the progress of humanity. For instance, Allen Wood concedes that it is 'plausible' that Kant's thoughts on race did contribute to eighteenth-century ideas of race (2008: 8) but that they are irrelevant with regard to reflecting on the insights of Kant's philosophy. This is because Wood argues that Kant's comments on race rest on 'political grounds' which are 'never aimed at achieving philosophical insights of any kind' (p. 9). Relatedly, scholars such as Thomas Hill Jr. and Bernard Boxill contend that Kant's critical and moral philosophies are 'not infected with racism'. While they 'acknowledge that Kant expressed various beliefs and attitudes that are aptly called racist' the claim that Kant's philosophy is infected with racism is 'exaggerated' (2001: 449). Rather, Kant's philosophy has the ability to self-correct: the scholars in this group argue

that principles which are considered to be the cornerstone of Kant's philosophy, such as the notion derived from the categorical imperative that people should be treated as ends in themselves, functions as a strong rebuttal to Kant's own racist beliefs. That is, as Hill, Jr., and Boxill state, 'the charges of racism do not reach Kant's deep theory or undermine its potential for guiding deliberation about the problems of race' (2001: 449). In this regard, one can, at worst, claim that Kant himself is a 'bad Kantian' insofar as reading and believing his own philosophy could have saved him from making the mistake of saying the racist things that he did. At best, one could appropriately concede that Kant's racist views are the result of his own problematic historical and social contexts and that he failed to know any better about what he said.

Some scholars contend that Kant argues for the gradual inclusion of people of colour in the political sphere, whereas others state that he changed his views about race at a particular time. In his earlier writings, Robert Louden contends that Kant's philosophy allows for the gradual inclusion of people of colour. For Louden, it is the 'cosmopolitan conception' of Kant's philosophy whereby people of colour can improve themselves with hard work (2011: 90). Other scholars argue that there is a set point at which Kant's racist views 'changed' dramatically. Sankar Muthu (2003: 182) and Susan Shell (2006: 56–7) identify Kant's shift in thinking as occurring after the publication of the first edition of the first *Critique* in 1781. After 1781, Kant is said to have adopted a stronger position on rationality that contradicted the idea that people of colour are not entitled to be treated as if they have inherent dignity and worth. Pauline Kleingeld argues that Kant 'changed' his mind about race. According to Kleingeld, Kant did defend a racial hierarchy through the 1780s, an idea that had impact on his thoughts about cosmopolitanism and global migration during that period (Kleingeld 2007: 574–5). However, similar to Wood, Boxill and Hill, Jr., Kleingeld contends that Kant's moral philosophy as demonstrated in the categorical imperative, for example, is indeed still 'at least in its wording, addressed to all humans' (2007: 574). Kleingeld argues that Kant changed his views on race after 1792, despite the fact that he did not demonstrate when or why he did so (2007: 586). According to Kleingeld, there are several indications in Kant's late texts, including, for example, the fact that he 'becomes more egalitarian when it comes to race' by granting full juridical status to those he has racialized, a claim which is now also incompatible with his earlier support of slavery (*ibid.*). I take Kleingeld's point that her argument is different from the others in this category because of her concession that race is important to Kant's thinking, at least for a time. However, I place her in the same category as the early work of Louden, Muthu and Shell because she argues that Kant makes a shift in his thinking about race.

The problem with these approaches is that they seek to make Kant sound better than what he actually said – if one were to take his words literally. It is worth reiterating that the goal of these thinkers is well intentioned insofar as they argue for the promotion of universal egalitarianism in order to promote universalism. That is, they are seeking a truly inclusive universalism. While the desire to promote equality is not in itself problematic, the way in which this promotion is done is the problem. That is, universalism cannot be fabricated or forced upon Kant's work in an effort to obscure what he actually said. The primary problem with these approaches is that they force a claim upon Kant's work that does not actually exist. That is to say, an equitable world does not exist in his work or in the world that his ideals of universalism influenced. By

'influence' I am not suggesting that Kant single-handedly created these ideas, but rather that as an influential philosopher in his time and in ours his complicity in promoting racist ideas in his work is worth our engagement. Insofar as Kant is considered to be a very important philosopher whose work is also alive in the ideals we still hold dear today, such as equality and universalism, for example, Kant's ideas can be said to have had influence on our views. Thus, to the extent that these approaches attempt to promote Kant's universalism categorically, these approaches are complicit in the furthering of racist ideology and the oppression of minoritized peoples. To promote a theory that is, in this respect, not based in reality has the effect of whitewashing Kant, in that, as Charles Mills notes (2018: 18), philosophizing is an abstraction from historical and current reality serving only to 'presuppose an *already-achieved* social ontology of socially recognized equals'. According to Mills, philosophers' attempts to label Kant's philosophy as race-neutral, without acknowledging the ways in which racism appears in philosophy, cannot lead to the actual breaking down of racial barriers. Regarding race, Mills writes: 'Rather, the history and its legacy need to be admitted and confronted for the Kantian ideal of a community of reciprocally respecting persons to be realized' (ibid.). Thus, we cannot assert that Kant's philosophy is universally egalitarian unless Kant explicitly recants his own racism. This recantation would also require that he realizes that his former views were racist. For us to assume otherwise merely based on conjectures about what he may have meant is not enough.

It may not be easy for some to admit, but Kant is guilty of holding sexist, racist and colonialist views. These facts raise concerns that constitute a primary stumbling block for scholars working on Kant today. Some may argue that my saying this, and in particular my emphasis on the importance of Kant's thinking about race and its relation to his corpus, means that I am suggesting that all philosophers who work on Kant should also focus on race. I am not arguing for this. But I am suggesting that philosophers who work on areas that touch on these questions and concerns about equality and related issues should not ignore his remarks on race. And of course, I want to encourage philosophers to welcome these questions and concerns. But the moral aspect of reinvention requires that we not only accept that Kant made racist statements but also have the moral courage to challenge those statements. Challenging means identifying the statements as problematic and in need of addressing. It is critical that these concerns are not marginalized in philosophy. Nor should the philosophers who are focused on race be marginalized, as I argue in 'Legitimizing Blacks in Philosophy' (Shorter-Bourhanou 2017). The reason why these concerns are so relevant to considerations of equality is that Kant's moral, social and political theory is often interpreted as suggesting that Kant's influential idea of 'equality' is universal in scope: that all individuals are, in his view, deserving of equal respect. It would indeed help to promote such an idea in the world if Kant's own views on this matter were 'more progressive' than they in fact were (Baron 1997: 147). That is exactly why I am suggesting that there might be some value in a certain sort of 'reinventing' of Kant. Not for Kant's sake, but only because of the value of the vision of Kant scholars who do the work to reinvent the theory.

4. Black radical Kantianism

Mills' essay 'Black Radical Kantianism' (2018; hereafter BRK) presents an approach that is in contrast to the other approaches that I have identified as 'rehabilitation'.

His considerations are 'radical' for at least two reasons. The first is that Mills is starting on a quest to make Kant's philosophy '*race sensitive*' while performing a 're-articulation of the apparatus to take account of, and redress, a racial subordination not merely national but (historically) global' (p. 7). This 're-articulation' entails coming to terms with the racialised history and experience of blacks and people of colour in the political, social and ethical global system of white domination. BRK is an approach to 're-articulating' Kantian ideals that necessitates acknowledging the experience of racism.

The second reason why Mills' approach is radical is because of the traditions from which it is drawn. Mills pulls from what could be identified as radical traditions: Marxism and radical feminism. Marxist philosophy is helpful in considering the material limitations that black people face due to their exclusion from and experience with racism in society. Radical feminists such as Carol Hay inspire Mills to consider the possibility of recasting Kant's philosophy in ways that would allow for more inclusivity (Mills 2018: 6–7). I would add that the radical nature of both approaches is that they consider the experiences with oppression that groups have, whether this oppression be based on class or gender. By asserting the subjectivity of people, Mills is able to reinsert them into the theory, thereby forcing the theory itself to become more inclusive. He does this by drawing on the Afro-modern political tradition, parts of which also have a radical tradition which seeks to overthrow the white supremacist regime and assert the equality of black and other people of colour, and by recognizing that 'the socially constructed inequalities and their historic legacy cannot be metaphysically ignored considering how *fundamentally and asymmetrically* they have shaped the modern world order and the raced individuals within that order' (p. 14). Recognizing the particular experience with racial oppression of black and other people of colour, Mills argues, is the only way in which universalization can occur. Mills also draws from the critical philosophy of race theoretical framework, which similarly helps to add back into the theory the history and the experience of oppression. Critical philosophy of race takes seriously the fact that the world is structured in ways that are racist while accounting for racism in history and intellectual history. Relying on this approach helps Mills turn away from biological claims about race and its corresponding baggage and instead consider how race, operating now in a 'corrective, *anti-racist way*', can offer a view in which racialized people are now seen as equals (p. 11). The critical philosophy of race approach allows Mills to be more holistic in his treatment of the concerns regarding racism and Kant. The approach lends credence to Mills' argument that, once we are able to account for the racist structured ways of the world, we will be able to assess how moral psychology, education of the virtues and notions of cognition at both the individual and social levels are impacted by race (p. 12). The aim in this regard is to come to understand how group moral psychologies and group vices to which humans are prone shape the human psyche, group behaviour and group motivations (p. 12). Thus, critical philosophy of race serves as an important theoretical framework that allows Mills to address more holistically the history and social reality of people of colour when it comes to racism.

The goal of BRK is to pay attention to the particularities of the experience of minoritized people due to global white supremacy. In this way, Kantian ideals can be held to their promise. BRK is an approach that requires being cognizant of the ways in which history and social positioning has assigned black people to subjugated

positions in society; these facts must be addressed if black people are to be included in the universal. That is, it is not the case that black people are not persons or that they are not due the rights that ought to be accorded to them. Rather, it is the way in which the world is structured (as a world that is governed by global white supremacy) that subjugates black people. Mills takes from the Afro-modern tradition this assertion. The Afro-modern political tradition is 'insistent that modernity is established on and structured by a social ontology of race' (Mills 2018: 14). It is a key part of how Mills seeks to recast Kant's claims, because Mills argues that this tradition asserts the equality of black people despite the narratives that have tried to take them out of that equation. The Afro-modern political tradition also asserts that, due to the inequality that blacks and other people of colour have had to suffer in the world, and in light of the many ways in which blacks have shaped it, their experience with racism in the world cannot be ignored (Mills 2018: 14). BRK is an approach that calls to the forefront these constructions of racism and by doing so is able to bring into focus the ontological and now social, political and ethical equality that must be accorded to people of colour.

Critical to the theoretical background of BRK is Mills' claim that people of colour are seen as *Untermenschen* in Kant's work. They are *Untermenschen* because of the racial contract that exists amongst white men and which minoritized people, including all women, neither benefit from nor partake in as full citizens (Mills 1997: 2–4, 64; 2005: 170–1). As such, BRK is an attempt to rethink the 'black experience in modernity'. One aspect of BRK that Mills identifies as the ethical part insofar as it relates to personhood is that to be race-sensitive means to pay attention to how the concept of race has led to disparities amongst human beings and to recognize that in order to remedy these divisions, one would have to move toward 'universalizing' differently. Mills states that 'universalization for the goal of respective objective personhood in a Kantian "impure ethics" of this kind will require advertence to these differentiated histories, this differentiated positioning, and the need for addressing and redressing them' (2018: 17). There are two aspects of Kant's philosophy that Mills argues can be 'radicalized' in this way. The first is the ethical aspect that specifically addresses the notion of personhood. The second is the political aspect, which is concerned with the notion of right. The idea behind Mills' approach is to not assume or presume that the idea of such equality already exists in Kant's thinking, as the rehabilitation approaches have tried to do. Rather, it is by coming to terms with the historical and phenomenological realities of racism in Kant's own thinking that there can be an eventual 'Kantian' approach that tries to 'bring that equality about'. With respect to the political aspect, it is critical to make non-ideal theory and corrective justice central to the important change (p. 26).

What makes Mills' BRK approach an important addition to the discussion about Kant and race is that he refuses to whitewash Kant, and instead emphasizes the importance of coming to terms with Kant's racism as complicit with the global system of white supremacy. With this reckoning, the reconstruction of the theory into a truly universal Kantian theory can begin to take place. This approach is different from the rehabilitation approaches that seek to, in various ways, diminish the importance of what Kant said about race in the effort to sanitize and whitewash Kant's theory. Mills' strategy is to call attention to Kant's racism and by doing so, aims to

transform the *significance* of 'race'. We would still be working with a 'Kantianism' in which race is central, but now rethought from a critical philosophy of race perspective. So 'race' would no longer signify location in a biological hierarchy of superiors and inferiors within the human species as in Kant, but the location of equals in a social hierarchy of the privileged and the oppressed in a system of racial domination. The 'structuring' role of race (Larrimore) would continue, but now in a corrective, *anti-racist* way. (2018: 10–11)

A black radical Kantian position would discover a way for universalism to account for these disparities between white and minoritized people. This accounting would be neither an abstraction from the reality of these disparities nor an attempt to approach people of colour in a colour-blind way. And as already suggested, another differentiating aspect of Mills' approach to reconciling Kant's words with his theory is that, in contrast to merely asserting that there is racial equality in Kant's work, Mills tries 'to bring that equality about'. It is crucial that this approach not be understood in any way as erasing considerations of race. It is only by recognising disparities, by noting the particularity of the experience of non-dominant groups, that a form of true universalisation can occur (Mills 2018: 17).

Moreover, Mills' approach to 'radicalizing' Kant is critical because it encourages philosophers, and by extension the discipline of philosophy, to account for the discipline's history of racism and racism's impact on the lived experience of minoritized people. His approach also identifies a crucial sticking point emphasized above, namely, that it is not enough to merely state that Kant's philosophy is universally egalitarian when there is evidence that Kant said things that demonstrate that he did not see all people as inherently equal. By somewhat extending these concerns, I would like to conclude by adding my own perspective regarding how to appraise what Kant said about race and what ought to be philosophers' approach to what Kant said. I do not claim to have figured out the answer, but as I close, I would like to consider the hermeneutical and moral challenges for philosophers and the discipline of philosophy posed by Kant's and other philosophers' racism, an approach that I see as reinventing Kant.

5. Reinvention: thoughts on scholarship in the discipline of philosophy

I close by considering the way in which philosophers such as Kant present hermeneutical and moral challenges to the discipline of philosophy. The hermeneutical challenge, as I have suggested, is how one should interpret and write about texts such as Kant's, an approach that I think Charles Mills' BRK also addresses. The moral challenge is what a professional philosopher ought to do when it comes to disseminating Kant's philosophy. Is every philosopher, and especially those philosophers who study Kant, required to discuss Kant and race and have a particular view about it? There can be no easy answer to this question. Nevertheless, it is an important question for the discipline to consider and for every philosopher to think about in relationship to their own work and their own beliefs about how the profession of philosophy should operate.

Of course, it is important to point out that in the discipline of philosophy there is a tradition of excluding certain voices from the canon. Put another way, there is evidence that deliberate decisions have been made about which narratives are worthy of inclusion in what is now known as the canon of the discipline. Peter K. J. Park (2013) outlines some of the machinations involved in the building of the canon that ends up leaving out the non-Western world. What can be taken from an exposition such as Park's is that canons are malleable instruments of institutions. Canons are not fixed entities; they are inventions, and these inventions are the imaginings of those who have the power to work on the canon. This means that today's philosophers can indeed reinvent the narratives of their discipline and in fact may have to – not only because it is possible but also because it is the right thing to do. Doing so does not mean that anything in the existing canon has to be thrown out, but rather that there should be room to discuss, challenge and at times disengage from those ideas in the canon that are problematic.

My own perspective on philosophy is rooted in the notion that it is at base a dialogical discipline, which means that it is formed and retained only by being in dialogue with itself. The dialogical notion of the discipline requires that one be in constant conversation with the discipline and account for its failures, keeping the conversation dynamic and changing course when needed. Here, the Socratic adage about the unexamined life is critical. Philosophical thought must be continually examined or else philosophy is not worth doing. Reinvention is in line with the Socratic concept of re-examination. The effort to reinvent leads to a deeper understanding of the entanglement of the intellectual history of race and racism as they are being developed alongside the modern ideals of liberty, freedom and equality.

In the end, the canon of philosophy reflects philosophers' choices about the thinkers and positions that merit reverence. What should be revered, however, is our effort in doing the difficult work of the discipline. If this were done, it would be discovered that the discipline, or what counts as philosophy, is indeed more nuanced, complex and progressive than we realize. For example, Robert Bernasconi points out that the work of understudied African thinker Ottobah Cugoano, a once-enslaved Ghanaian, should be included in the social and political philosophical discussions of the modern era. Cugoano offered a philosophical argument for the moral, religious, social and political justification of emancipation. His social plan for emancipation laid out how such a process would work for the formerly enslaved. Yet Cugoano is not included in such philosophical discussions, leaving a gap, Bernasconi believes, in conversations about racism, slavery and equality. One of the points that Bernasconi makes is that there were individuals who spoke out against slavery in the modern era. The fact that those voices are not canonized, however, leads to an inaccurate understanding of history and only fuels the still-extant idea that there were bifurcated conversations about race and equality. If there were acknowledgement of the more complicated discussions that have been had in the history of philosophy, such realizations would trickle down to philosophy now. Bernasconi notes: 'We must not only investigate the failures of past philosophers but also question why academic philosophy is pursued today in such a fashion that it is considered acceptable to ignore the failure of academic philosophy, both past and present, in the face of slavery' (2018: 37). The discipline of philosophy historically and in the present makes choices about who is included in the canon, who one ought to read, and how

they ought to be understood. One can say that racist views were the dominant views of the day, but that does not mean that they were the only views that one could consume. As in the past, a choice was made. Today, philosophers also have a choice.

Note

1 I use the term ‘minoritized’ as opposed to ‘minority’ in order to draw attention to the way in which oppressed peoples are viewed and treated in society. The term ‘minority’ makes the ontological claim that oppressed peoples are in a certain sense ‘diminutive’ and are also to be identified in society as such. By using the term ‘minoritized’ instead, I am focusing on the failure of society to see oppressed peoples as powerful. ‘Minoritized peoples’ includes e.g. all women and people of colour. However, in this essay, I am referring to, most specifically, people of colour.

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