

Translator's Introduction

Recent Work on Kant's Race Theory / The Texts / The Translations

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The present volume includes four texts by the prominent eighteenth-century German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and an equal number of texts by four of his less well-known contemporaries—the German geographer and zoologist E. A. W. Zimmermann (1743–1815); the German naturalist, travel writer, and essayist Georg Forster (1754–1794); the German popular philosopher and publicist Christoph Meiners (1747–1810); and the Göttingen-based, Swiss-born physician, early popularizer of anti-phlogistic chemistry, and chronicler of the French Revolution Christoph Girtanner (1760–1800).

The volume was originally conceived primarily as a contribution to the discussion of two disparate strands of research in Kant studies that came into prominence in the 1990s. Framed in contemporary terms, the first of these might be referred to as Kant's race theory, the second as his philosophy of biology. Kant, however, is best understood not as a "system builder," but as a "systematic" philosopher—that is, as a thinker who was ever reexamining the conclusions he had come to within each component part of the critical project both with respect to the conclusions he had previously established for the other component parts of the project as well as to his most favored "core" beliefs.¹ He was, in other words, not the sort of philosopher who never revised his views on the many topics that interested him, and he clearly endeavored to keep himself informed of developments in every imaginable field of investigation of his time.² Consequently, to consider any narrowly

defined topic within the scope of the critical philosophy, such as Kant's race theory or his philosophy of biology, could lead to a reconsideration of every other part of the critical project. We should then hardly find it surprising that significant interest in the texts by Kant included in this volume has, in the years since the volume was originally conceived, also increased among scholars concerned primarily with Kant's political philosophy—or, more specifically, with his role in the formative development of a view that is difficult to define but commonly referred to as liberal internationalism.³ Thus it would be no exaggeration to suggest that what is at stake in these discussions is not simply Kant's views on specific topics but a complete reassessment of his contribution to the “the project of modernity,” inasmuch as Kant's contribution to the construction of liberal internationalism is viewed as a core element of that project as famously sketched by Jürgen Habermas in his 1980 Adorno Prize lecture, “Modernity versus Postmodernity.”⁴

An introduction such as this is nevertheless not the place for any attempt to address systematically all of the implications that the study of the texts included in this volume could have for our contemporary understanding and assessment of the critical philosophy. Nor is the present volume intended primarily for a readership comprised mainly of Kant scholars, but rather for scholars in many fields, as well as an educated general readership. I have, therefore, in preparing this introduction, not made any attempt to address systematically all of the many issues to which familiarity with the texts included in this volume could make a contribution, but instead more simply divided my remarks into three sections, each of which approaches the study of these texts from a different perspective.

The first section introduces the reader to the texts through a brief, critical examination of the secondary literature of the past couple of decades, which brought into the open the fact that Kant did indeed write numerous texts concerned with issues of race which had otherwise been almost universally ignored by English-language Kant scholarship in the past two centuries.

The second section focuses more directly on the texts themselves, the philosophical and historical context in which they appeared, and the central issues that emerge from the study of them.

Finally, in the third section, I identify and briefly discuss some of the most pressing issues of translation that had to be addressed in order to produce English texts both faithful to the German originals and readable.

If read sequentially, these three sections might best be viewed as successively revealing different layered interests involved in the serious study of any such texts as these. I hope nevertheless that the sections might also be read nonsequentially and even independently of each other. The reader who cares not at all for introductions of this sort or who prefers only the briefest of introductory commentary might even find it preferable to postpone study

of these introductory remarks until after she or he has familiarized her- or himself with the texts and the briefer introductions included with them.

The primary goal of a volume such as this is naturally to provide readers who are not able to read easily the texts included in the language in which they were originally written access to them. To the extent, however, that I have, in preparing these translations for publication, not foregone entirely the larger task of evaluating them with respect to the contribution that knowledge of them might make to contemporary reevaluations of the critical philosophy, comments to this end appear sometimes in the body of this and the other, briefer introductions, and sometimes only in the endnotes, which might themselves be viewed as yet another, deeper, fourth layer for study.⁵

The evaluative comments that are included might, however, be better read more as a stimulus for further research and discussion than as conclusive.

Recent Work on Kant's Race Theory

Why then an anthology comprised of translations of eight late eighteenth-century German texts, including four by Kant? More specifically, why might anyone think that the study of texts such as these, especially those by Kant, could make a contribution to contemporary discussions concerning race theory and the philosophy of biology? For who—half a century, or even a couple of decades ago—would ever have thought of Kant as a major contributor to the formative development of either race theory or the philosophy of biology? For the Kant we knew then was typically presented as a figure who had contributed so much to the development of modern liberal internationalism that it was inconceivable that he could have ever written or uttered comments that could be construed as racist or have even concerned himself with any of the problems of race theory—except, perhaps, in ways that directly contributed to the construction of modern concepts of human rights.⁶ Now, however, with new knowledge of the texts by Kant included in this volume and a reexamination of related texts and other source materials, there can be no doubt about the fact that Kant was not only deeply concerned with the analysis of the concept of race but that he gave expression to views both in print and in his private notebooks that are clearly racist not only in tone but also in spirit, if not, necessarily, in ideological intent.⁷

Similarly, the Kant we knew then was usually presented as a figure so devoted to the promotion and defense of Newtonian physics as the only genuine science that he seriously doubted if even chemistry could ever lay claim to being called a “science”—and if, by Kant's criteria, chemistry was not considered worthy of this title, why, we might then have wondered, would he have ever even concerned himself seriously with any subject matter per-

taining to biology?⁸ But to frame the issue in these terms obviously assumes that Kant could have used the term *biology* in its fully developed, modern sense. I believe, however, that it can very easily be shown that Kant could never have conceived what he was doing in precisely the same way that we might—namely, as the investigation of a specific problem within a fully developed field of natural scientific investigation comparable to either physics or chemistry.

Perhaps the first, if not most important, point to consider then, when reading historical texts such as those included in this volume, is that, strictly speaking, even if much of the current interest in the texts included stems from our contemporary concerns with race theory and the philosophy of biology, Kant himself could never have conceptualized the issues with which these texts are concerned in precisely the same way we do, because the word *biology* in its modern sense is generally thought not to have been first used in print until 1802,⁹ only two years before his death and nearly three decades after the publication of the first of the texts included below. Kant clearly did not, therefore, understand what he was doing in terms of the full range of issues that presently comprise the philosophy of biology.¹⁰ For Kant, race theory seems instead to have been little more than a minor, but nevertheless vexing, problem within a model of scientific investigation known since the mid-eighteenth century as natural history, which he champions.¹¹ There are nevertheless definite—if not yet definitively understood—historical connections between Kant's concerns and our own that come into full view when we consider briefly why the four texts by Kant included in this volume have come to have the significance they have in recent years.

To set the stage then for the more systematic and detailed discussions of the four texts by Kant and the four other texts included in this volume and the issues of translation which, as previously noted, are the focus of the next two sections of this introduction, I begin by surveying recent developments in Kant studies that have contributed greatly in bringing these texts into prominence. This, however, is not a difficult task, because the recent emergence of concern about Kant's possible contribution to the formative development of investigations that we call race theory clearly begins with the appearance of seminal articles by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze¹² and Tsenay Serequeberhan¹³ in the early 1990s. Further, the work of Eze and Serequeberhan from that period still merits careful study—although I am inclined to think, for reasons that should become evident in the following few pages, that it was only with the subsequent appearance of articles by Mark Larimore¹⁴ and Robert Bernasconi¹⁵ in the late 1990s and early 2000s that the issues raised in these earlier articles were first framed in ways that remain informative for us.

Eze's first article on Kant, provocatively entitled "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology," remains then as good a beginning

point as any other source for the further study of recent work on Kant and the concept of race precisely because Eze, in this article, did make such a dramatic break with the prevailing English-language Kant scholarship of the time.¹⁶ Indeed, Eze begins the article by boldly citing the claim previously made by Earl W. Count in a 1950 anthology of texts “selected from the international literature on the races of man” in which Count chided scholars for forgetting “that Immanuel Kant produced the most raciological thought of the eighteenth century.”¹⁷ Then, after providing his readers with engaging discussions of Kant’s “understanding of anthropology,” his reading of the works of the Geneva-born French social contract theorist Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) as formative sources for Kant’s view of “human nature,” his “idea of ‘race,’” and a “critique of [his] anthropology and raciology,” Eze concludes by claiming that Kant’s “philosophical anthropology becomes the logocentric articulation of an ahistorical, universal, and unchanging essence of ‘man’ . . . , [a] ‘universalist-humanoid abstraction,’ which colonizes humanity by grounding the particularity of the European self as center even as it denies the humanity of others.”¹⁸ For Eze, consequently, Kant’s interest—clearly evident in the four texts by Kant included in this volume—in the emerging fields of physical geography and anthropology (which, as Eze correctly notes, persisted throughout Kant’s entire career at “the Albertina,” or University of Königsberg, beginning in the mid-1750s through his retirement from lecturing in 1796¹⁹) was sustained primarily by a desire to provide the “logical grounding for natural and racial classification” that was lacking in the binomial classificatory system of the Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus (1707–1778), whose *System of Nature* (*Systema naturae*), first published in 1735, had gained him fame and an international reputation as the leading naturalist of the eighteenth century.²⁰ A central concern of Eze’s examination of Kant’s interest in these emerging fields of study is thus to demonstrate how, as Eze would have it, the concept of race ultimately achieves the status of a “transcendental” category in the complete development of the critical philosophy that allegedly makes it possible for Kant to give philosophical weight to what, by comparison, the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) could—in a racist comment cited by Kant in a 1764 work—only off-handedly propose, namely, “the assignment of . . . subhuman status to ‘the Negro.’”²¹

The significance of Eze’s work for stimulating further research on Kant’s views of race can hardly be underestimated. I would suggest, however, that anyone who takes the time to read Eze’s original contribution to this debate should also take note of the following three lines of criticism that can now be leveled against his research. First, Eze seems, in view of more recent scholarship referenced below and in much more detail in the next two sections of this introduction, to demonstrate little understanding in his assessment of Kant’s race theory of the extent to which Kant’s interest in the problem of natural classification is actually influenced more by his knowledge of the French

naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc Buffon's (1707–1788) competing program for research in this budding area of eighteenth-century scientific research than it was by his knowledge of Linnaeus.²² Second, Eze's knowledge and use of the primary source materials that he draws on to support his claims about Kant's views on race must be regarded as either very limited or overly selective, especially when compared with the subsequent work of Larrimore and Bernasconi examined in more detail below.²³ Third, Eze's claim that the concept of race is elevated to the status of a transcendental category in the completed development of the critical philosophy in the course of the 1780s has been soundly criticized by Thomas E. Hill, Jr. and Bernard Boxill,²⁴ as well as by other prominent scholars,²⁵ yet, to my knowledge, he never seriously addressed these criticisms,²⁶ which suggests that his understanding of the critical philosophy was perhaps less comprehensive than might appear to be the case on an initial reading of his article—especially to readers who have only limited familiarity with Kant's works.²⁷

Similar to Eze, Serequeberhan—whose assessment of Kant's "historico-political writings" is part of a larger project "[t]o critically engage in a destructive reading of the texts of the Occidental tradition as regards their views on non-European cultures"²⁸ (which he no doubt rightly believes to be a central problem for the practice of contemporary African philosophy)—portrays Kant as "one of the most distinguished fabricators—or should I say constructors—of the Idea [that European existence is qualitatively superior to other forms of human life] . . . in the modern European tradition."²⁹ Serequeberhan's criticism of Kant can thus be viewed as an example of ideology critique, which, as described by Douglas Kellner, might—when done as well as it can be done—best be viewed as an effort "to demonstrate the errors, mystifications, and ruling class interest within ideological artifacts which are then smashed and discarded by the heavy hammer of the ideology critic."³⁰ Consequently, even though Serequeberhan properly notes that "Kant was not a person devoid of sympathy or compassion for non-European peoples,"³¹ he ultimately charges him with *uncritically* defending European "conquest and brutish expansion [as] part of the foresight and divine design of nature" and the violence that accompanied it as "the work of Providence and the *de jure* actualization of reason on a global scale."³²

Serequeberhan's assessment of Kant's views can, however, like that of Eze, arguably be shown to oversimplify many crucial elements of the critical philosophy, especially Kant's philosophy of history. For Serequeberhan, in spite of the fact that he does demonstrate familiarity with the poststructuralist French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard's insightful reevaluation of Kant's "historicopolitical writings," seems to view Kant's philosophy of history more through the lens of Hegel's notion of "the slaughterhouse of history" than through the lens of Lyotard's final view that Kant's philosophy of history is

more “pre (high)-” or “post-” modern than that of Hegel and Marx. Kant, however, at least as he is ultimately portrayed by Lyotard, seems not to have had nearly so progressive or so optimistic a view of human history as is presupposed by Serequeberhan's criticism.³³ To suggest, therefore, as Serequeberhan does, that Kant might have believed that the harm done to non-European peoples in the advancement of strong European ideals was in his view ultimately justifiable because of the presumably greater good ultimately resulting from such harm, arguably reflects not only a serious misunderstanding of Kant's moral theory, according to which the morality of actions is always to be judged by intentions and never by consequences, but also his view of history, according to which nature presents human beings with challenges that must be addressed, such as the scourges of mercantilism, colonialism, and, in general, war, but which only we, and not nature, can ultimately take credit or blame for either resolving or not resolving.³⁴

Serequeberhan is, however, probably misled by Kant's use of the term *Providence* (*Vorsehung*) in texts such as the 1784 “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective” (*Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*) to which he gives a strong metaphysical rather than the critical meaning that Kant eventually assigns to this term.³⁵ Further, like Eze, Serequeberhan also seems either not to be aware of or not to have taken seriously enough Kant's explicit condemnation of European colonial expansionism in key texts of the 1790s, such as the *Metaphysics of Morals* (*Metaphysik der Sitten*), which if sympathetically developed, could surely be used to show that the critical philosophy ultimately has just as much to offer in support of the critique of Eurocentrism to which Serequeberhan wishes to contribute as to its defense.³⁶

By contrast, Larrimore's and Bernasconi's assessments of Kant's race theory, as previously indicated, are much more nuanced and far more comprehensive in their treatment of relevant texts, and they both, especially Larrimore, portray Kant as a figure who was far more conflicted in his view of non-European peoples than do either Eze or Serequeberhan. More specifically, Larrimore uses the image of a palimpsest to describe Kant's extended work on the concept of race. “Kant's account of race,” he writes, “is a palimpsest. Its heterogeneous layers are products of different periods of his thinking, while some of its emphases—including its strident rejection of the relevance of historical or anthropological work to the *theory* of race—are crystallized in response to criticism. In combination, the several layers of Kant's argument make possible a variety of potential answers to the practical question of how one ought to make sense of race, and suggest disturbing implications for the fate of non-white races—answers and implication of which Kant was at least aware.”³⁷ To be sure, Larrimore does give due acknowledgment in his assessment of Kant's views to all manner of damning

evidence cited by both Eze and Serequeberhan in their condemnations of the critical philosophy, including: (1) Kant's frequent hierarchical ordering of the races, especially in his writings of the 1760s and 1770s, according to which, in a variation of this earlier theme still included in an important theoretical work dating from the year 1788 ("On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy" [*Über den Gebrauch teleologischer Prinzipien in der Philosophie*]), the Americans are "incapable of all cultivation [*Cultur*]" and stand even "far below the Negro . . . who after all occupies the lowest of the remaining grades we have called racial difference" (AA 8:176)³⁸ (while, in another version, the Negroes, while "not capable of any further civilization [*Civilisirung*]," seem perhaps to rank above the Americans inasmuch as "they have instinct and discipline, which the Americans lack") (AA 25/2:843);³⁹ (2) Kant's oft-stated opposition to the mixing of races, or what in the second half of the nineteenth century becomes known pejoratively as miscegenation;⁴⁰ and (3) the comments recorded in the *Reflexionen*, Kant's unpublished notes, in which he contemplates the possibility that "[a]ll races will be wiped out . . . , except for the white [*Alle racen werden ausgerottet werden . . . , nicht nur die der Weissen*]" and also writes, as a parenthetical insertion between the two parts of the previous citation, that "Americans and Negroes cannot govern themselves. Thus are only good as slaves [*Amerikaner und Neger können sich nicht selbst regieren. Dienen also nur zu Slaven*]" (AA 15/2:878).⁴¹ Larrimore's interest in the comments from the *Reflexionen* can indeed be viewed as the source of inspiration for the title of his article, "Sublime Waste: Kant on the Destiny of the 'Races.'"⁴² But—perhaps because he also recognizes how much the comments in the *Reflexionen* contravene core elements of both Kant's anthropology⁴³ and his ethics⁴⁴—Larrimore ultimately defends only the thesis that "race seems weightless in Kant's larger system."⁴⁵ For, as he notes in presenting this thesis: "The teleology of Kant's race theory is discontinuous with that of his philosophy of history. As also on the subject of women, his anthropology and his ethics seem simply to talk past each other. While Kant's anthropology appears to disqualify non-whites from the work of civilization, Kant's ethics never thematizes the racial oppression European thinkers harnessed to this ideal. . . ."⁴⁶

All the same, even if Larrimore—by stressing the elements of the critical philosophy that forcefully counter an undeniable underlying racism in his personal worldview—is generally far more sympathetic to Kant than either Eze or Serequeberhan, his final assessment of Kant could be viewed as better substantiating Serequeberhan's indictment of him as "one of the most distinguished fabricators—or should I say constructors—of the Idea [that European existence is qualitatively superior to other forms of human life] . . . in the modern European tradition" than Serequeberhan himself can lay claim to. This is because in his view the seeming "weightless[ness]" [of

race] in Kant's larger system" also confers "weightlessness [to] the thought that there [is] no place for the (non-white) races in the history of humanity [that] reveals a fundamental quietism in Kant's view of the history of the human species."⁴⁷

To state the point more sharply, Eze and Serequeberhan both portray Kant as a prominent figure of eighteenth-century European philosophy with a fully-developed racist agenda. They differ, however, in that Eze tends to view that agenda as consciously ideological and intentional while Serequeberhan tends to view it as ideologically motivated but neither fully conscious nor intentional. Larrimore, in contrast, portrays Kant more as conflicted, confused, and cautious—ultimately more guilty of sins of omission than of commission. Nevertheless, after providing an admittedly somewhat "conjectural" reconstruction of the way in which "Kant's various statements concerning race might be brought together with each other and with the rest of his thought," Larrimore does ultimately call Kant to account for his "quietism," which, he suggests, is a consequence of the way in which Kant "absolutizes racial difference by means of a two-stage view of racionation insulated from history and ethics," i.e., that Kant, by distinguishing the formation of the distinct races as a fact of natural history from the original "providential" (hence "supernatural") creation of human beings as such, could seriously contemplate the possibility that because "[a]ll races will be wiped out . . . except for the white" as a consequence of natural processes so powerful and inevitable that there really is—despite what was traditionally taught as a fundamental precept of Kant's ethics, namely, that *ought* implies *can*—no point in attempting to counter them.⁴⁸

Larrimore's criticism of Kant for his "quietism" thus clearly arises from his recognition of the disparity between the view we would expect Kant to have—given our usual understanding of his moral theory—and the view he seems to be expressing in the *Reflexionen*, in which he contemplates the possibility that "[a]ll races . . . except for the white" might be "wiped out" without the thought of this possibility ever evoking in him any sense whatsoever of a moral obligation to prevent it from happening. What makes recognition of this disparity even more disturbing to Larrimore, however, is that he also recognizes that there were contemporaries of Kant with ethical theories far less well-developed than his—such as the German naturalist, travel writer, and essayist, Georg Forster (1754–1794), and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), a professor of medicine at the Georg-August-Universität (Göttingen) usually referred to as the founder of physical anthropology—who "thought that the non-white races might in various ways be saved from their degeneration."⁴⁹

The clear differences between Larrimore's critical evaluation of Kant's race theory and those of Eze and Serequeberhan are therefore significant. More detailed and more nuanced, Larrimore's evaluation is both more

sympathetic and more damning: more sympathetic because of the proper emphasis he gives in his thorough presentation of Kant's views to the elements of the critical philosophy that clearly counter Kant's personal, underlying racist sentiments, but more damning because Larrimore ultimately portrays Kant as a figure who clearly seems not—precisely because of the race theory that he did develop—to have been able himself to take his own countervailing views as seriously as have, fortunately, most Kantians in the past two centuries.⁵⁰

These differences are also apparent in Bernasconi's appraisal of Kant—even if he does not always emphasize the comparatively sympathetic side of his research either in the presentation of his theses or in his defense of them. Bernasconi's articles might, therefore, be characterized as “playfully contentious,” as is perhaps most evident in the titles of the two articles on Kant's view of race that appeared in the early 2000s for which he is most well known: “Who Invented the Concept of Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race,” which appeared in 2001, and “Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism,” which appeared in 2002.⁵¹ The initial statement of the thesis of the second of these two articles is indeed unapologetically provocative. Beginning with a citation from a 1972 lecture by Isaiah Berlin not published until 1997, “Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Nationalism,”⁵² Bernasconi proposes that “[j]ust as Berlin shows a connection between Kant and nationalism,” he will “do the same for Kant and racism.”⁵³ But, while Berlin, according to Bernasconi, was content only to demonstrate how the ideas that motivated Kant's “deeply rational and cosmopolitan” liberal internationalism were “turn[ed] into their opposites” by other prominent figures of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century German philosophy, such as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), Bernasconi wishes to show “that, in spite of Kant's avowed cosmopolitanism . . . evident in such essays as his ‘Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,’ one also finds within his philosophy expressions of a *virulent and theoretically based racism*, at a time when scientific racism was still in its infancy” (emphasis added).⁵⁴

About halfway through the long introductory section of Bernasconi's second article, which, as he later notes, is needed to “[establish] a context for reading Kant's discussions bearing on racial issues”⁵⁵ that follow in the subsequent three sections, it becomes clear, however, that his initial, stated thesis is more grandly programmatic than specific to this single article, which, as he then, more modestly, stresses, will “focus only on Kant's original contribution within the history of racism, ignoring his subsequent use by racists, such as National Socialists in Germany.”⁵⁶ Thus, rather than making good on programmatic promises both to show how Kant's liberal internationalism is stained by an underlying “virulent and theoretically based racism” and, perhaps even more significantly, “that Kant's understanding of race is at stake in

the discussion of teleology in the *Critique of Judgment*,⁵⁷ Bernasconi really does little more in this second article than to detail Kant's views in "three of the specific areas in which [he] has been or can be associated with racism"—namely, (1) "[his] position *or rather lack of a stated position* on the trade in African slaves and their use in America" (emphasis added), (2) his views on "the issue of colonialism," and (3) his opposition to "race mixing."⁵⁸ For, as the reader might have already surmised by the inclusion of the emphasized wording in Bernasconi's identification of the first of the three "racial issues" examined in this article, the case he makes against Kant at that stage of his programmatic research parallels far more the work of Larrimore—who credits Bernasconi for stimulating his own research⁵⁹—than that of either Eze or Serequeberhan. For it is Kant's "silence" (*pace* Larrimore's focus on Kant's "quietism") on the practice of chattel slavery, which, as Bernasconi, to his credit, correctly notes, "ran entirely counter to the principles of his moral philosophy," that "has to be assessed"⁶⁰—because the evidence at hand suggesting that Kant explicitly endorsed such practices could, according to Bernasconi, be viewed just as easily as nothing more than evidence that Kant was knowledgeable about such practices, which, had he ever been pressed to clarify on the basis of his own theoretical work, he would surely have condemned, even if, according to Bernasconi, he never did.⁶¹

Similarly, after properly stressing that "Kant was vociferous in his condemnation of the colonial practices of the Northern European powers" in the initial explication of the second of the three "racial issues" considered in this article, Bernasconi goes on to note, *pace* Serequeberhan, that "it can [nevertheless] be argued that certain aspects of Kant's philosophy may have lent themselves to a colonialist ideology," a suggestion that allows Bernasconi to reference again "the model proposed by Berlin whereby Kant's philosophy may have been opposed to the more vicious forms of colonialism but perhaps contributed to them nevertheless."⁶² Soon, however, after reintroducing this thesis, Bernasconi concedes that it is not a topic that he is prepared to examine in detail in this article,⁶³ and in the concluding paragraph of this section of the article, in which he presents an informative and reasonably balanced account of Kant's cosmopolitan critique of colonialism, he distinguishes his own project from that of Serequeberhan. "Because Serequeberhan's aim is the broad one of exposing the failure of contemporary philosophers to address the eurocentricism in philosophy . . ." he writes, "he is concerned with the effects of Kant's thought [and] does not develop the specific problem I am raising of how Kant's insistence on the permanence of race can be reconciled in practice with his cosmopolitanism, particularly given that he understood the diversity of races as the work of Providence."⁶⁴

When read carefully, it becomes clear then that Bernasconi's case against Kant in his second article depends primarily on what can be said

about his opposition to “race mixing”—“even though,” as Bernasconi is also quick to admit in his introductory comments, “[Kant’s] comments on this issue are not especially prominent.”⁶⁵ To his credit, Bernasconi is, however, less concerned with Kant’s “comments on this issue” than he is with defending the claim that “Kant provided the *epistemological framework* that would subsequently help to sustain [the political opposition against race mixing that already existed in European societies in the eighteenth century]” (emphasis added).⁶⁶ Thus, even if Bernasconi promises far more in this article than he delivers, it, together with the article he published the previous year, heralds a significant shift in the literature toward understanding Kant’s views on race as an unfortunate episode in the history of science rather than as simply a problem of consistency within Kant’s moral and political philosophy or as a problem that is best understood, *pace* Serequeberhan, as a simple, easily diagnosed, case of ideological “false consciousness.”

Consequently, to understand well Bernasconi’s evaluation of Kant’s views on “race mixing” in the final section of his second article, this evaluation must be considered in connection with the thesis of the article that appeared a year earlier, “Who Invented the Concept of Race?” For, in order to respond credibly to the question posed by this title, Bernasconi finds it necessary to draw on an already well-established body of research in the history of science that does not figure at all prominently in the work of either Eze or Serequeberhan—in spite of the fact that Eze, as previously noted, does make a supposed close connection between Kant and Linnaeus, namely, Kant’s alleged interest in providing the “logical grounding for natural and racial classification” that was lacking in the binomial classificatory system for which Linnaeus had become famous.

The specific way in which Bernasconi’s two articles are related is clear then from a passage early in the second of them in which he boldly asserts: “That Kant was a leading proponent of the concept of race when its scientific status was still far from secure is well established. Indeed, Kant can legitimately be said to have invented the scientific concept of race insofar as he gave the first clear definition of it. . . .”⁶⁷ When, however, we consult the endnotes to the article for evidence of the claim made in the first of these two sentences, we find: (1) only a general claim that the point “seems to have been widely recognized in the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth and seems to have been forgotten only in the last fifty years and then primarily by philosophers”; (2) a brief statement of the central claim of the other article, namely, “that Kant, and neither Buffon, nor Blumenbach, invented the scientific concept of race”; and (3) a very general reference to Eze’s article, “The Color of Reason.”⁶⁸ Consequently, if the claim “[t]hat Kant was a leading proponent of the concept of race when its scientific status was still far from secure is well established” is itself as secure as Bernasconi asserts,

the evidence will have to be sought in the earlier of the two articles, not this one. The second of these two articles does nevertheless make clear why this issue is as significant as Bernasconi thinks it is. For whatever definition of race is ultimately attributed to Kant—whether or not Bernasconi can make good on his claim that Kant was, in some sense or other, the inventor of the concept—it is clear from the references provided in the final section of the second of these articles that Kant was indeed generally “opposed to the mixing of races” and that his views on this matter are recorded in texts dating from the 1760s through the late 1790s.

Consequently, for Bernasconi, the case against Kant—if we might call it that—would seem ultimately to rest on the claim that he was, if not “the inventor” of the concept of race, most certainly a major contributor to the discussion of this concept during the formative period of its modern historical development and that these views were not merely a matter of unreflective personal prejudice but instead the product of a well-developed theoretical framework. Further, if—with this argument in hand—the details of this theoretical framework can be presented in sufficient detail, the claim might also be made that Kant’s views on race stand much closer to the core of his systematic project than scholars generally sympathetic to the critical philosophy are typically inclined to believe, which is indeed what Bernasconi has at times suggested.⁶⁹

All the same, in the final section of the second of these two articles, when Bernasconi comes closest to making good on his programmatic project to uncover a significant racist undercurrent in the liberal internationalism of Kant’s cosmopolitanism,⁷⁰ he instead shifts the focus to the more general problem of how Kant could have come to the conclusions about “race mixing” that he did rather than filling in the details of his case against Kant by identifying the specific connection between his race theory and the “core” beliefs of the critical philosophy. For example, after defending well the claim that Kant “[opposed] race mixing on the grounds that it would diminish the White race” and suggesting that in doing this “Kant seemed to have excluded the best means left open to him for explaining how non-Whites, especially Native Americans and Blacks, might come to play an equal part in the cosmopolitan ideal,” Bernasconi poses questions for further investigation rather than simply writing Kant off as yet another eighteenth-century white male racist in the way that Eze and Serequeberhan tend to do.⁷¹ Further, even if the final sentence of the final paragraph of the article, in which Bernasconi points to Kant’s “role in the development of the scientific concept of race with its power to legitimize prejudices against race mixing and against non-Whites generally,”⁷² is harsh, the first several sentences of the paragraph are more simply programmatic and rather modest. “In this paper,” he writes, “I have focused on trying to establish that Kant’s racism presents a philosophical

issue that should not be dismissed or side-stepped. I do not claim to have resolved how his racism and his cosmopolitanism can be combined, but I have also not sought to make the problem disappear by ignoring those passages that do not fit with our image of him, as so many Kant scholars have chosen to do. *There are tensions within Kant that need to be recognized . . .* (emphasis added).⁷³

Bernasconi's second major contribution to this discussion, "Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism," can thus perhaps best be described as one of those especially important contributions to scholarly debate on a controversial subject that raises more problems than it solves. Certainly, it has stimulated significant, further discussion of how, if at all, Kant's by now well-documented interest in and contribution to the widespread discourse of his time on topics of race dating from the 1760s through the 1790s can be reconciled with the development of his philosophy of history and his moral and political philosophy in the 1780s and 1790s—including, therefore, his liberal internationalism; and we can be certain that the discussion of this problem has not yet ended. For even if we were satisfied with the account of Kant's development during this latter period that one prominent, recent critic of Bernasconi, Pauline Kleingeld, sketches, according to which "Kant texts from the mid-1790s show that he had had second thoughts about his earlier hierarchical account of race" primarily because "his disturbing views on race contradicted his own moral universalism,"⁷⁴ there would still be a need—at least among Kant scholars and others interested in coming to terms with the historical development of the modern concept of race—to account for how such changes in viewpoint were either prompted by or reflected in published work of the late 1780s and 1790s in which Kant still found a need to say something on the topic of race.⁷⁵

Bernasconi's earlier article, "Who Invented the Concept of Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race," is, however, also significant for such a discussion, because it can easily be argued that it was this article in particular—even more than the second—that truly marked a certain shift in the scholarly discussion toward serious studies in the history of science that not even Kleingeld, whose previous work in this area has focused on Kant's philosophy of history and his moral and political philosophy and not at all on his philosophy of science,⁷⁶ can ignore. What then, precisely stated, is the central thesis of "Who Invented the Concept of Race?" The title of the article is of course provocative, but anyone who actually reads the article carefully will surely come to recognize that the thesis that Bernasconi ultimately defends is, as previously suggested, far more modest and qualified than the title would suggest. For, as Bernasconi emphasizes only a few sentences into the article, "by 'the inventor of the concept of race,' I mean the one who gave the concept sufficient definition for subsequent users to believe that they were

addressing something whose scientific status could at least be debated,⁷⁷ and, when explicitly stating his thesis a few pages later, to wit, “that, if any person should be recognized as the author of the first theory of race worthy of the name, it should be the German philosopher Immanuel Kant,” he has already qualified his claim significantly by noting that “[t]he idea of a single author of the concept of race is at best only a useful fiction.”⁷⁸

Bernasconi's statement of the thesis of this article is thus nuanced; but the development of the argument offered in support of the thesis is not. Bernasconi straightforwardly reviews the arguments and evidence that have been or might be offered on behalf of the claim that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century figures other than Kant, including the French Gassendist philosopher, physician, and travel writer François Bernier (1625–1688), Linnaeus, Buffon, or Blumenbach, should be given the dubious honor of being credited with being the inventor, in his qualified use of the term, of the *concept of race*; and he arguably demonstrates that none of these figures used the term or, more specifically, was as concerned with the problem of offering a precise, technical definition of it—and *defending* that use—as was Kant.

Bernasconi's argument for the claim that Kant was the “inventor” of the modern concept of race in the sense that Bernasconi gives to this term does then merit more serious consideration than can be given to it here. Several comments can nevertheless be offered in the interest of ensuring that his claim and its implications are not misunderstood.

First, as will be discussed further in the next section, Bernasconi correctly emphasizes that “the concept of race [that Kant ultimately defends] was [first] introduced to buttress the case against polygenesis”⁷⁹—that is, it was introduced in defense of a viewpoint that is typically regarded as “Biblical” and opposed to any enslavement of non-Whites on the grounds that they are not fully human. As Bernasconi also clearly demonstrates, however, there was not, during this period, “any necessary connection between one's position on the monogenesis-polygenesis dispute and one's position on slavery.”⁸⁰

Second, on Bernasconi's account, Kant's interest in the concept of race derives primarily from his interest in defending Buffon's idea of natural history—that is, from genuinely scientific rather than ethical or political motives⁸¹—and his continuing interest in defending the concept derives more from a need to defend himself from the criticisms of figures such as his former student, the philosopher and essayist Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), and as previously noted, Georg Forster, whose views he attacked primarily on scientific grounds rather than from any ethical or political interests.⁸² Similarly, what brought Kant and Blumenbach together, according to Bernasconi, was not ethical or political issues, but broader philosophical interests in defending the theory of epigenesis—that is, the view, as will be discussed in more detail below, that every individual begins from material

that is unformed, with the form emerging only gradually, over time, as providing a better scientific account of the mechanical forces involved in the generative processes of nature than the previously dominant theory of “preformed seeds,” or preformationism, which had been advanced by prominent eighteenth-century scientists such as the George-August-Universität (Göttingen) anatomist, physiologist, and poet, Albrecht Haller (1707–1777).⁸³

Third, if the concept of race plays a significant role in the further development of the critical philosophy in the years immediately following Kant's broadside attack on Herder's *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Humankind* (*Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*)—including a central role in motivating research leading to the compositions of a third and final critique, the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*), first published in 1790⁸⁴—it is not, according to Bernasconi, simply because Kant was seriously interested in defending the concept of race itself nor, as Eze claims, because he wanted to give philosophical weight to what, by comparison, Hume could only off-handedly propose, namely, the “subhuman status” of the Negro, by elevating the concept of race to the position of a “transcendental” category, but rather because, as Bernasconi clearly states near the end of the article, “As Kant understood it, racial differences called for a purposive account,”⁸⁵ and, as he had previously shown, “The blackness of Blacks provided Kant with one of his most powerful illustrations of purposiveness within the biological sphere.”⁸⁶ To his credit then, Bernasconi does not reference the work of Eze at all in developing this point; he refers instead to the work of scholars whose interests focus more generally on the early history of the human and life sciences and only, if at all, derivatively on the construction of the concept of race. But, regrettably, he also does not provide his readers with any detailed discussion of the epistemological and systematic significance of “the principle of the formal purposiveness of nature,” which Kant did indeed present in his introduction to the third critique as a “transcendental principle of judgment” (AA 5:181), without which the significance of the fact that the “blackness of Blacks” did “[provide] Kant with one of his most powerful illustrations of purposiveness within the biological sphere” can easily be misunderstood. Bernasconi instead shifts the discussion to an account of Kant's possible influence on Blumenbach, concluding that “[t]he transformation of Blumenbach's philosophy of science in the ten years after 1788 was largely toward a form of Kantianism.”⁸⁷

Finally, even if Bernasconi by the conclusion of his article is clearly convinced that he has successfully defended his central thesis concerning Kant's role as “the author of the first theory of race worthy of the name,” he is ultimately quite circumspect about drawing any further conclusions from this point. He is indeed careful to suggest that much research still needs to be done to determine, more precisely than he is capable of doing in this brief

article, both the significance of the concept of race in the development of the critical philosophy⁸⁸ and the historical importance of Kant's contribution to the construction of a concept of race that could finally be taken seriously by scientists.⁸⁹

As should be obvious then from the foregoing discussion of the work of Eze, Serequeberhan, Larrimore, and Bernasconi, there already exists a clearly well-defined and well-developed, but still relatively small, core literature concerned with assessing Kant's contribution to race theory.⁹⁰ There is, on the other hand, no single article or set of articles, within the context of more narrowly defined research in the philosophy and/or history of biology, that similarly marks the emergence of significant concern with the second issue in recent Kant studies to which this volume will hopefully contribute—namely, Kant's importance for the development of modern biology.⁹¹ The appearance, however, within the past decade of collections of essays both on Kant's philosophy of biology⁹² and on “the problem of animal generation in early modern philosophy”⁹³ clearly indicates that a certain undercurrent of scholarship in this area that has been around for at least the past four or five decades in the English-speaking world has finally fully surfaced and that it can no longer be ignored or considered an area of only minor interest in Kant scholarship.⁹⁴

For anyone with even the slightest familiarity with the controversy that has emerged in recent years over Kant's role in what has, with respect to the first of these issues, been termed, more specifically—but perhaps somewhat misleadingly—“the German invention of race,” the need for translations of the texts included in this volume is thus obvious.⁹⁵ For while most of those who have recently written on this topic are clearly capable of reading and analyzing these texts in the German original, many others with interests in this area no doubt do not have such command of the German language and must, therefore, either feel that they have been left out of the discussion entirely or that they are severely limited in what they can contribute to it because they do not have access to the relevant texts.⁹⁶ The existence of complete translations of all of what are now being termed Kant's *Rassenschriften* (race writings) even by scholars whose primary interests lie more with evaluating his philosophy of biology than his race theory,⁹⁷ will thus hopefully contribute greatly to the resolution of some of the debates surrounding Kant's role in the development of the modern concept of race. Further, as the discussion in the English-speaking world surrounding Kant's philosophy of biology progresses, these translations will surely come to play a similar role in the debates emerging in this exciting area of Kant research and eighteenth-century studies.⁹⁸ For those with special interests in this discussion, I only regret that it has not been possible to include in this volume the translation of three other texts by contemporaries of Kant of considerable importance for both of these

debates—and for coming to terms with the many ways in which Kant's race theory was clearly shaped by his philosophy of biology—that I had originally planned to include in this volume.⁹⁹ I do, however, hope to complete my work on these translations and to make them available in the very near future.

I leave it, on the other hand, to the further development of current discussions concerning the crisis of liberal internationalism to determine more conclusively the significance of Kant's serious interest in the concept of race both for the evaluation of his own liberal internationalism and for liberal internationalism as it has actually developed in the more than two centuries since its modern inception.¹⁰⁰

The Texts

The four texts by Kant included in English translation in this volume first appeared in the years 1775, 1777, 1785, and 1788. They well reflect, therefore, Kant's thinking on subjects such as race (*Race* or *Rasse*), purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*), and what he typically refers to in these works as "organic being" (*organisches Wesen*) from what has traditionally been referred to as the "precritical" period, specifically, the "silent" decade of the 1770s, during which he is usually portrayed as having been preoccupied only with formulating the critical project first presented with the publication of the work for which he is most well known, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*), which first appeared in 1781,¹⁰¹ to the year in which he first published his second critique, the *Critique of Practical Reason* (*Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*), seven years later, in 1788, and began formulating the third, the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*).

These four texts by Kant include, first, a brief introductory discussion of the issues to be taken up again in later texts that was prepared as a course announcement for the lectures on physical geography that Kant offered in the summer term of 1775. This text, under the same title, "Of the Different Human Races" (*Von der verschiedenen Racen der Menschen*), was then published—in a significantly expanded version—in a collection of essays apparently intended to showcase the work of authors writing in the style of the "popular philosophy" of the day entitled *The Philosopher for the World* (*Der Philosoph für die Welt*) two years later, in 1777.¹⁰² Translations of both the 1775 and the 1777 versions of this text are, therefore, included below, because knowledge of the differences between the two texts is of some significance in understanding the development of Kant's thinking about the concept of race. The third text by Kant included in this volume did not, however, appear until eight years later, in 1785, four years after the publication of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, two years before the publication of

the second, significantly revised edition of this same critique, and three years prior to the publication of the second critique. This third text bears the—to us surely ominous—title, “Determination of the Concept of a Human Race” (*Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrace*).¹⁰³ More perplexing than this title, however, for many commentators, as will be considered in more detail below, is why Kant would even have been concerned with the subject matter of this article. The title of the last of the texts by Kant, on the other hand, from the year 1788, “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy” (*Über den Gebrauch teleologischer Prinzipien in der Philosophie*),¹⁰⁴ clearly suggests its connection to the third and final critique, first published in 1790, the second part of which is titled “Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment” (*Kritik der teleologischen Urteilskraft*).¹⁰⁵

The best commentators have then generally not found it difficult to account for Kant's 1775 and 1777 contributions to the topic of race in the context of the many discussions of this subject that played out in the intellectual discourse of the “enlightened” societies of Europe in the middle decades of the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁶ Kant's interests were at least threefold. First, the topic of race was generally included as part of eighteenth-century discourse in the emerging field of physical geography, a field for which Kant's importance during this period has actually long been recognized, especially by geographers.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, Kant would naturally believe it appropriate to include some discussion of race in his plans for this course, and a promise of examining this topic in his lectures—which provided him an opportunity to talk of exotic peoples from far-off lands—might have even been beneficial in attracting students. Second, Kant clearly wants in this text to counter the thesis of polygenesis—that is, the theory that differing subgroups of human beings might be descended from different original ancestors from different parts of the world, a view seriously defended during this period by, among others, Voltaire.¹⁰⁸ Third, Kant seems during the 1770s still to be under the influence of the “popular philosophy” of the time, as represented best by his most well-received work prior to the publication of the first critique, the 1764 *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (*Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*), which had also included materials concerned with the division of humankind into various races.¹⁰⁹ Kant's decision to revise and publish an expanded version of the 1775 course announcement as a full-length article a couple of years later in a significant collection of articles showcasing the “popular philosophy” of the time might, therefore, be viewed as an indication that he wished to maintain the reputation that he had established in the previous decade as one of the leading “popular philosophers” of his day, but, as John H. Zammito notes, “This text represents Kant's only significant *publication* as a ‘popular philosopher’ in the 1770s,”¹¹⁰ and the image of the “popular philosopher” provided by other

sources hardly matches the image we have of Kant in the decade preceding the publication of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781.¹¹¹

The publication of the 1785 article is, however, as previously suggested, not so easily accounted for—especially not if the development of the critical philosophy during the decade of the 1780s is understood simply in terms of an interpretive framework common in English-language Kant studies of the past century. For, according to this view, which was no doubt influenced by the predominance of the Neo-Kantian interpretive framework that greatly influenced twentieth-century Anglo-American Kant scholarship, Kant, having first written a major *epistemological* critique of *metaphysics*, namely, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, simply decided (as if, perhaps, he had nothing better to do) to try his hand at *ethics*, which resulted in the publication of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and still later, after this effort had met with sufficient approval, at *aesthetics*, which resulted in the publication of the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*.¹¹² A major problem for this way of accounting for the development of the critical philosophy in the decade after the appearance of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is, however, that it does not take into consideration what might be designated the internal, or systematic, motivation that led Kant to believe that to complete the *critical*, in contrast to the *metaphysical*, part of his philosophy, the first critique would need to be supplemented, first, by a second, and, thereafter, by a third and final critique, which is indeed comprised not only of a “Critique of the Aesthetical Power of Judgment” (*Kritik der ästhetischen Urteilskraft*), but also, as previously noted, a “Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment.”¹¹³

A clue to explaining Kant's interest in composing the 1785 article in which he proposed a rigorous definition—i.e., a “determination” (*Bestimmung*) of the concept of race—can, however, be found in the wording of a couple of sentences that appear near the beginning of another, far more well-known, work of his published in the same year, the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*), which have no doubt perplexed many a reader. The passage, which begins the first sentence of the fifth paragraph of the first section of the work (“Transition from Common Sense Knowledge of Morals to the Philosophical”), reads as follows: “In the natural constitution of an organized being (i.e., one suitably adapted to life [*eines organisierten, d. i. zweckmäßig zum Leben eingerichteten Wesen*]), we assume as an axiom that no organ [*Werkzeug*] will be found for any purpose [*Zweck*] which is not the fittest and best adapted [*das schicklichste und . . . am meisten angemessen*] to that purpose. Now if its preservation [*Erhaltung*], its welfare, in a word, its happiness, were the real end [*der eigentliche Zweck*] of nature in a being having reason and will, then nature would have hit upon a very poor arrangement in appointing the reason of the creature to be the executor of this purpose [*Absicht*]. . . .”¹¹⁴