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## Colonialism in Kant's Political Philosophy

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Diametros nr 39, 154-181

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2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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## COLONIALISM IN KANT'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

– Howard Williams –

**Abstract.** This article examines the controversy that has arisen concerning the interpretation of Immanuel Kant's account of European colonialism. On the one hand there are those interpreters such as Robert Bernasconi who see Kant's account as all of a piece with his earlier views on race which demonstrate a certain narrow mindedness in relation to black and coloured people and, on the other hand, there are those such as Pauline Kleingeld and Allen Wood who argue that the earlier writings on race are not wholly typical of Kant's approach and suggest that Kant's later discussions of colonialism in *Perpetual Peace* and the *Metaphysics of Morals* provide a better indication of Kant's progressive views on the treatment of non-European societies. The article draws attention to the very strong evidence of Kant's dislike for the pattern of European expansion to other parts of the globe and indicates that within Kant's writings there are the seeds of a wholly unconventional critical understanding of western colonialism that have yet to be developed fully. The article suggests that this critical understanding surpasses the unsystematic objections made to colonialism in post - modernist thought and also the critique proffered by the determinist Marxist account.

**Keywords:** Kant, race, colonialism, imperialism, progress.

So nöthig ist es den Begriff des Menschenrechts nicht bloß auf das  
der Völker zu einander in einem Völkerrecht sondern zuletzt auch auf  
ein Weltbürgerliches Recht auszudehnen weil sowohl das Staats – als  
das Völkerrecht zum äußern Menschenrechte überhaupt ohne welches  
die Aussicht der Annäherung zum ewigen Frieden gänzlich verschlossen  
seyn würde.

Da es nun mit der unter den Völkern der Erde einmal durchgängig  
überhand genommenen engern oder weitem Gemeinschaft so weit gekommen  
ist daß die Rechtsverletzung an einem Platz der Erde nach und  
nach an allen gefühlt wird so ist die Idee eines Weltbürgerrechts eine  
nothwendige Ergänzung des Codex.

Kant, AA XXIII, *Vorarbeiten zu Zum Ewigen...*, S. 175.

## Introduction (knowledge and power)

The treatment that colonies and colonialism receive is often regarded as one of the weakest points of Enlightenment philosophy. Enlightenment philosophers are in general taken to have an arrogant attitude towards non-Europeans and non-European territories. They are seen as looking down on less advanced civilisations and taking a condescending attitude to the ignorant masses of the other continents. Confident that they represent a higher civilization they look down on the ignorant, poorly-organised, technically backward and indolent original occupants of the other continents. This provides the Achilles heel of an otherwise largely progressive philosophical movement. The knowledge which the Enlightenment affords is therefore (often rightly) taken as suspect, as entwined with a dominating power. The universalist claims of the white European philosophers disguise a hegemonial ambition to make the world like Europe itself. Kant usually gets caught up in this criticism. But does Kant think that knowledge should be subservient to power and the aims of European civilisation in this way? Is his dominant attitude to non-European peoples one of condescension and, worse, contempt? In this paper I want to suggest that Kant, although not blameless in this respect, none the less offers a universalist perspective which is not as a consequence wholly Eurocentric.

Kant is committed to the view by his own critical system that knowledge serves an emancipatory purpose for the whole of humankind. Knowledge and the pursuit of freedom are intimately interlinked. This becomes clear in the seminal article published by him in the *Berlinischer Monatsschrift* entitled 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' The article published a year or so after the *Critique of Pure Reason* when Kant was finding his feet as one of the foremost philosophers of his generation stresses the need for each individual to emerge from their 'self-incurred' immaturity. (8: 35)<sup>1</sup> And for this enlightenment nothing is required but freedom, and indeed the least harmful of anything that could be called freedom, namely, freedom to make public use of one's reason in all matters.' (8: 36–37)<sup>2</sup> Of course this emancipatory purpose has to be mediated by those who produce knowledge but they are not – in virtue of their task – subservient to those in established positions of social and political authority. Philosopher should be free to express their opinion as scholars by their writings. Knowledge should be in service to itself – or more correctly to those that create,

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<sup>1</sup> Kant [1996] p. 17. Citations from Kant are taken from *Gesammelte Schriften*, Berlin 1902ff. and the English translations (unless otherwise stated) are drawn from Kant's *Practical Philosophy* in the Cambridge edition of Kant's *Collected Works*. References to the original appear first.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

disseminate and embrace it – and not to established power. For Kant ‘the possession of power unavoidably corrupts the free judgement of reason.’ (8: 370)<sup>3</sup> Kant envisages a clear division of labour between those who govern and those who research and educate. We create knowledge to inform ourselves and the public. Kant encourages everyone to ‘dare to be wise’. As he puts it to ‘have courage to make use of your *own* understanding is the motto of the enlightenment.’ (8: 35)<sup>4</sup> Philosophers have a special role to play in this process of enlightenment. They make up a class that is ‘by its nature incapable of forming seditious factions or clubs.’ (8: 369)<sup>5</sup> Its role is to shed light on the on the activities of the race and so allow us to assess our progress towards freedom. Knowledge may be of a wider purpose in other contexts but those purposes are not part of its essence.

### **Is Kant's hostile to European colonialism?**

Here I shall focus on two crucial points in Kant's political philosophy, in his short book on *Perpetual Peace* (1795) and in his *Doctrine of Right* (1797), where he touches upon the issue of the overseas expansion of European society and its impact on the non-European world. I shall comment on some further instances where Kant notes the impact of colonialism and gets drawn into some of the debates of his time on its significance. Although none of his writings is wholly devoted to the question Kant, none the less, develops a view on colonialism which is of considerable interest.

The first, most striking, discussion of colonialism is in *Perpetual Peace* when he speaks of the implications of his third definitive article concerning cosmopolitanism for the way in which Asian, African, American and Australasian people should be approached by the European visitor. Here Kant makes it patently clear that this approach should not be one of superiority but that of equal inhabitants of the globe's surface and it should be governed by right or law. The second notable instance where the question of colonialism is raised in Kant's political writings is where he speaks in the *Metaphysics of Morals* of how it might be possible for European visitors to establish settlements and property rights in lands beyond their territories. It is clear from these two instances that Kant does not have a high regard for the European colonialism of his day and has as a model a much higher standard of behaviour that in his mind should in future govern

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<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 338.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 338.

relations between economical and technically more advanced nations and other non-European peoples.

These progressive views on the limitation and regulation of European expansion occur in two of Kant's later writings (1795 and 1797). We have to accept that Kant did not always express the most palatable views on non-European peoples and their relative political standing. He appears in his earlier writings to have shared some of the prejudices of his age about the endowments and abilities of non-white races. These opinions are indeed evident in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*<sup>6</sup> which appeared at around the same time as *Perpetual Peace* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Robert Bernasconi<sup>7</sup> and Pauline Kleingeld<sup>8</sup> have pointed to Kant's apparent racist proclivities at certain stages in his intellectual development. For Bernasconi this conditions his attitude to Kant's philosophy as a whole, whereas for Kleingeld it represents an episode in Kant's intellectual development which he leaves behind him in his final political writings. Kant's less guarded remarks on the character of peoples and races seem to suggest that there was occasionally a hiatus between the opinions Kant held and expressed in his contemporary academic and social circles and the full implications of the doctrinal ideas of his political philosophy.

We can see from E. Chukwudi Eze's work that Kant is counted by some contemporary African philosophers as a representative of blinkered Eurocentrism. Eze suggests that 'significant aspects of the philosophies produced by Hume, Kant, Hegel and Marx have been shown to originate in, and to be intelligible only when understood as, an organic development within larger socio-historical contexts of European colonialism and the ethnocentric idea: Europe is *the* model of humanity, culture, and history itself.'<sup>9</sup> For Eze:

... formulations of philosophical prejudices against Africa and Africans (and other non-European peoples generally) were easily circulated and recycled among modern European philosophers - with little originality. In his essay "On the Varieties of the Different Races of Man," Immanuel Kant amplified and completed the remarks he had made about "the Negro" elsewhere (Observations On the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime) with the following hierarchical chart on the different "races".

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<sup>6</sup> In the *Anthropology* he is even harsh with those peoples who have a European connection. He says that the nationals of 'European Turkey never have attained and never will attain what is necessary for the acquisition of a definite national character.' (7: 319) Kant [2007] p. 414.

<sup>7</sup> Bernasconi [2001] pp. 11-36, and [2002] pp. 145-166.

<sup>8</sup> Kleingeld [2007] pp. 573-592.

<sup>9</sup> Eze [1998] p. 214.

STEM GENUS: white brunette.

First race, very blond (northern Europe).

Second race, Copper-Red (America).

Third race, Black (Senegambia).

Fourth race, Olive-Yellow (Indians).

As in Hume, the assumption behind this arrangement and this order is precisely skin color: white, black, red, yellow; and the ideal skin tone is the "white" – the white brunette – to which others are superior or inferior as they approximate the "white."<sup>10</sup>

It seems highly plausible to assume, as does Eze, that at this stage in his intellectual development in 1785 'Kant ascribed to skin colour (white or black) the evidence of rational (and therefore, human) capacity – or the lack of it.'<sup>11</sup> What are we to make of this evidence of Kant's racist attitudes in his critical and pre-critical writings? Does this mean that Kant should not be seen as a reliable source when seeking to assess the moral and political standing of colonialism and the oppression suffered by many non-whites at the hands of European colonialism?

In his book *Kantian Ethics* (2008) Allen Wood suggests one valuable perspective from which to view this discussion on Kant's involvement in the development of theories of race. Whilst Wood acknowledges fully the extent to which Kant embraces racist theories in his essays on the topic in the 1780s so that Kant 'in effect pretty clearly underwrites a kind of racial hierarchy, in which only the white race has developed under conditions suitable for making contributions to the future progress of the human species.'<sup>12</sup> Kant is no doubt an unreliable thinker on the topic and it is probably very much to his advantage that he did not greatly pursue these racist ideas in the decade after. None the less, Wood argues that the attacks on Kant in this respect are often made on 'political grounds' and seem never aimed at achieving philosophical insights of any kind.'<sup>13</sup> As Wood points out, Kant 'is far from being the only philosopher who can be attacked in this way: Locke, Rousseau, Hume, Fichte, Hegel, Marx, Mill ... virtually every significant figure in the history of philosophy is vulnerable to attack in this manner.'<sup>14</sup> Some controversy and debate attaches to most individuals of note in the history of philosophy. In an intriguing passage Wood gives his reaction to

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<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 215.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> Wood [2008] p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem.

those who seek to dismiss Kant's more general political and moral philosophy on the grounds that he expressed some racist views:

I suspect part of the motivation for these attacks is based on a mistaken analogy between the right way to view historical philosophers and the right way to view present-day political figures. When we hear a politician stating grand ethical principles, within which his actions and stands on particular issues stand in blatant contradiction, the natural conclusion to draw is that his moral pronouncements are hypocritical and should not be taken seriously. Thus it may be tempting to look similarly at the analogous phenomenon in the case of important figures in the history of philosophy. We show our own enlightened outlook and critical distance from these dead white men not by being taken in by their high-sounding philosophical pronouncements but by revealing with merciless accuracy the naked historical facts about their dreadful political opinions.<sup>15</sup>

Needless to say by today's political standards in the advanced countries of the world some of the views expressed by Kant in his early and anthropological writings appear highly prejudiced. It seems that someone who writes as he does of Negroes and American Indians cannot possibly have anything to offer in terms of political philosophy now. However this surely represents too sweeping an assessment. For the best political philosophy does not emerge suddenly at one point in time: it is the product of trial and error and complex social and political development over time. Plato, who is often credited with getting political philosophy off the ground, expressed what may appear to be the most deplorable views about less intellectually able people, and found quite acceptable the removal 'from sight into some secret or hidden place' the children 'of inferior parents.'<sup>16</sup> This is often taken as an euphemism for the not uncommon practice of infanticide in Plato's time. Political philosophy emerges as a reliable subject area of study as a result of a long process of trial and error. And Kant can be regarded as contributing substantially to the subject - in the same way as Plato - despite some lapses of judgment (as seen from today's perspectives) in expressing what we might now regard as civilised standards of behaviour.

A major issue arises here of how we should read Kant as a political philosopher (and as a philosopher more generally). Quite clearly in order to get the most out of his philosophy we have to make major efforts to cross the

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> Plato [2000] p. 158.

boundaries between our age and his. Each age has its own preoccupations and concerns, and quite clearly with a subject like political philosophy the main focus will change from age to age. We have to acknowledge that the principal focuses of political philosophy in Kant's time are not immediately known to us. Here we have to undertake some reading and research to understand the historical context of a writer in East Prussia at the end of the eighteenth century. Even if we do our research most thoroughly it is doubtful that we can entirely situate ourselves in the context in which Kant found himself. None the less the effort is worthwhile since even partial knowledge of the context will shed light on the structures and methods of his political thinking. But this investigation and illumination of the (German, eighteenth century) past in order to comprehend Kant's thinking and significance for us now is not a one-way process. To do it well we have also to have an acute understanding of the context into which political philosophy in our times and the problems that nowadays appear to be most acute. This is not a straightforward task since the thoughts that may structure *our* understanding most as political philosophers now are in all likelihood the most self-evident, taken for granted and so most likely to be overlooked. This difficulty seems to me to come into play in the current preoccupation with Kant's occasional prejudiced expressions of view about the different races.<sup>17</sup> We live in a post-colonial age where discrimination on grounds of race, nationality and ethnicity are quite rightly deeply frowned upon. There is even a global legal structure now coming into existence that seeks to mitigate and ultimately undermine such discrimination. All political philosophers of progressive leanings seek to identify with this encouraging and praiseworthy development. But this was not the case in Kant's time. Those of a progressive predilection had in his time only begun to think about such problems. Major concerns for Kant's time were the diminution of war (where the supposed civilized nations of the world regarded it as a legitimate way of resolving their disputes); the development of democracy (through extending voting rights beyond the privileged few); the growth of the separation of powers (of the legislature, executive and judiciary; the founding and safeguarding of property rights; and the removal of corruption. Many of these

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<sup>17</sup> A notable example is Stuart Elden and Eduardo Mendieta's edited collection *Reading Kant's Geography*. Several of the essays express severe disappointment in Kant for showing evidence of racist proclivities in his discussion of non-European peoples. In particular Robert Bernasconi's chapter 'Kant's Third Thoughts on Race'; Walter Mignolo's 'The Darker side of the Enlightenment: A De-Colonial reading of Kant's *Geography*'; and Eduardo Mendieta 'Geography is to History as Woman is to Man: Kant on Sex, Race, and Geography' berate Kant for failing to embrace a wholly egalitarian view of the various races. I find the discussion to be markedly anachronistic: Kant's ethical system as a whole is taken to be flawed on the grounds that Kant should have known and judged in manner which was largely unknown and unconsidered by him.



problems remain with us now, so this provides scope for the relevance of Kant's ideas to us but we quite naturally look to a historical authority like Kant to provide us with illumination on problems that are pressing to us today. And it is of course here that Kant's ideas may give rise to additional concern and disappointment. For all the help Kant can provide us with more generally in discerning what freedom may be we cannot look to him, for example, to resolve the feminist issues of today. But we must temper this disappointment with the realization that he cannot be reasonably be expected to have known what would be central to the agenda of political philosophy in the early twenty first century. We have to read and research Kant with the a view to what we might sensibly expect him to provide guidance upon, and not with a view to his conveniently providing answers to all the pressing questions that we need now to address.

Using hindsight to judge a philosopher from a contemporary political standpoint represents, as Wood notes,

... a fundamentally wrong way to look at the matter. For one thing, great figures in the history of philosophy are often great because their insights into highly abstract matters of principle far outrun the capacity of their own time – and often enough, their own capacity – to understand fully what these insights mean in practice. To see this gap – either in the case of the philosopher or in the case of the entire age – as a case of simple hypocrisy is to misunderstand badly the relation of important philosophical principles to the historical conditions of their genesis. 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.<sup>18</sup>

Allen Wood's reasoning is helpful not only in putting Kant's European supremacism and racism in context but also in placing Kant's political and moral thinking in general. Wood reminds us of what a philosopher can and can't do, and also what we in doing philosophy should seek to avoid. As Wood stresses,

... it is important to draw a distinction between what Kantian doctrines imply, in abstract philosophical terms – and what even Kant himself may have intended them to imply – and what social arrangements Kant himself accepted and

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<sup>18</sup> Wood [2008] p. 9.

approved – or what even Kantians today may accept and approve. As Kant himself realised (and often emphasizes), there are systematic contradictions within modern civilization between the moral ideals and principles people recognizes and the ways they actually live. It is entirely appropriate to inquire about the discrepancy between what Kantian principles say and what Kant thought about the treatment of women and non-whites, just as it is important wonder whether the American Declaration of Independence “all men are created equal” was ever meant to include women and people of color. It is also correct and important to point out the way such conflicts show themselves within Kant’s own doctrines. But all this remains true only as long as we understand the situation in the right way.

It is easier for us, with two hundred years’ hindsight, to see such contradictions in Kant himself (or in other eighteenth or nineteenth-century thinkers) than to see them in ourselves. In that sense it is dangerous for us to focus on Kant’s (now obvious) errors about issues of race or gender, as if we thought that we ourselves might be immune to similar criticisms by future philosophers reflecting on our views. On the contrary, Kant’s errors should make us that much more aware of the likelihood that this will occur, and in that sense they should cause us to identify with him rather than hold him at arms’ length. They should serve as a warning to us, based on the limited historical, cultural, and human perspective that we inevitably have in common with him.<sup>19</sup>

Great care has to be taken to avoid not only regarding Kant as *always* thoroughly consistent in everything he wrote and recommended, but also to ensure imputing that we ourselves are immune from some of the errors Kant may have made. Deploying what is philosophically sound in Kant does not necessarily draw us into taking the same political stand as Kant took. And although what Kant argues politically may connect with his more general philosophical approach, this does not mean that adopting this philosophical approach will inevitably lead us to the same conclusions. In other words, the philosophically cogent aspects of Kant’s political thinking might well be deployed to derive political conclusions which are markedly different from those that Kant drew in his day. Thus what now appear to be defects in Kant’s political philosophy do not of themselves negate attempts to apply some of Kant’s main principles to social and political issues today. For example even in his final political writings Kant does not accord equal status to women as citizens. For him, although they may

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<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 11.

well take an intelligent interest in the politics of the day and be highly intelligent, they cannot be given the vote and so cannot enjoy the full independence that is open to males. (6: 314)<sup>20</sup> From the standpoint of today's feminist this represents an appalling lapse. None the less, this has not prevented many feminist writers from taking advantage of Kant's political philosophy and his writings on women to present a more satisfactory account of social and political relations for the twenty first century. Kant was highly creative in all his endeavours and even where treads wrongly he can still offer help to us know in considering our position. So his ideas deserve to be taken seriously, even where we may not like them. And in rejecting them we also need to be careful that we too are not simply reflecting the prejudices of our age. This is even more the case when we can see within Kant's writings an evolution in his position on political questions. As Pauline Kleingeld has pointed out, Kant's views on race seem to have altered considerably as his philosophical career advanced.<sup>21</sup> Arguably this may have occurred because the fundamental moral and political principles which Kant deduced from his critical philosophy required that many of his taken for granted political ideas would have to change. Certainly his ideas on our fundamental equality as human beings, deriving from our innate freedom would seem to imply that ultimately Kant would have to think again about his racial prejudice. This is of course only speculation. It may well be that Kant's political views on racial equality and the non-European world may simply have changed under the pressure of political events (and the French Revolution of 1789 onwards was an extraordinary change).

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<sup>20</sup> Kant [1996] p. 458.

<sup>21</sup> "More plausible, therefore, is the assumption that Kant gave up the hierarchical view of the races in the context of his elaboration of his political theory and theory of right. The time when he changed his views on race falls within the period during which his political theory and philosophy of right underwent significant transformations, in the wake of the French Revolution. Examples of other important developments in Kant's political theory around this time are his notion of citizenship, his republicanism, and the concept of cosmopolitan right. Kant was never generous in explaining to posterity the genesis or transformation of his views, and thus we may never know the precise circumstances of his change of mind. Yet it would certainly not be surprising if he had started to reconsider his earlier acquiescence in the European practices of colonialism and slavery while he was developing his new theoretical commitments, and if he had decided to give up entirely the hierarchy of the races, even while retaining the notion of race as a purely physiological concept.

However this may be, Kant texts from the mid-1790s show that he had had second thoughts about his earlier hierarchical account of race. During the 1780s, as he wrote the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and probably until at least 1792, his disturbing views on race contradicted his own moral universalism. He finally resolved this contradiction during themid-1790s, at the latest during the writing of the manuscript for *Toward Perpetual Peace*. This finds expression not only in his explicit strengthening, in his moral and legal theories, of the status of non-Europeans, but also in his description of the mental properties which he attributes to non-whites, and especially in the harsh criticism of the injustice perpetrated by the European colonial powers." Kleingeld [2007] p. 592.

However, that Kant himself derived different political recommendations from the same fundamental principles in the course of his philosophical career, demonstrates to us the validity of deploying what we take to be philosophically sound in his practical philosophy in a manner not immediately envisaged by Kant himself.

### **Kant taken to task; colonialism; and Locke**

Thomas McCarthy presents a stark contrast to Wood and Kleingeld's tolerant understanding of the apparently racist views expressed by Kant in his historical essays and anthropological writings. Whereas Wood and Kleingeld seek to balance these unappetising views with reference to the progressive and egalitarian implications of Kant's practical philosophy as a whole McCarthy is drawn to the conclusion that they are evidence of a fundamental flaw in Kant's philosophy as a whole. Of course McCarthy does not see Kant as unique in this respect. He sees Kant's racism as part of a defect in European philosophy as a whole. That philosophy was not sufficiently attuned to the needs of the other in its approach. For McCarthy Kant is too much focussed on the subject-object relationship and does not take sufficiently into account the third factor of the kind of human community to which we belong. According to McCarthy there's a deficiency of debate with distinct and opposed interlocutors in Kant's critical philosophy.

The tendencies toward monoculturalism that surface in Kant's account of progress, the insignificant role he envisions for *reciprocal* intercultural learning, is prefigured in his fundamentally monological conceptions of reason and rationality. Though the empirical materials that "practical anthropology" deals with are pervaded by contingency and particularity in his view, the normative standpoint from which they are reflectively judged is not. It is fixed once and for all by the pure rational principles, ideas, and ideals disclosed by the critique of reason. There is scant recognition of the inherent contestability of the latter enterprise, of the essentially social nature of reason and rationality, or of the inescapable interdependence of the universal and the particular. Factoring these into the self-understanding of practical anthropology would reveal its ineluctably interpretive and evaluative character.<sup>22</sup>

This expresses very elegantly the possible dangers of Kant's critical enterprise. Kant seeks of course to legislate for all time on certain aspects of human thinking

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<sup>22</sup> McCarthy [2009] p. 68.

and it may seem highly unlikely that the central features of his philosophy might not need amendment and improvement at certain times. Certainly there is sufficient debate by Kantian specialists on the key epistemological features of his critical philosophy to indicate that Kant failed to get everything right. There is undoubtedly going to be fallibility in some of Kant's major precepts. But does this vitiate the whole enterprise? Amidst the undoubted errors are there not some crucial features that do stand the test of time? Again the interest that Kant's critical system draws would indicate that many of Kant's key ideas are accepted. Not all our true ideas are culturally limited. McCarthy though plumps for an alternative standpoint and finds Kant's system to be fundamentally flawed. McCarthy calls 'into question the extramundane standpoint of transcendental philosophy,' and wants to 'undermine the pure/impure structuring of moral and political theory,' and in contrast wants to stress 'the intrinsically dialogical nature of the discourse of modernity'. Indeed what for McCarthy is required is 'a reconstruction of Kant's moral vision to make room for multicultural universalism and multiple modernities.'<sup>23</sup> Thus, whereas Wood and Kleingeld want to bring to the fore what is persuasive in Kant's general practical philosophy to ground a consistent critique of colonialism and racism for today, McCarthy seems to indicate that the entire Kantian standpoint should be sidelined. This is not the view I shall take here. As compared to McCarthy's social relativism – which permits us to dismiss contrary views as inherently biased without at the same time offering a suitable epistemological anchor for our own standpoint – Wood and Kleingeld's attempts to establish what still remains relevant in Kant's critical political philosophy appears a good deal more attractive. Kant could not hope, nor did he attempt, to anticipate the whole of the future history of European society. McCarthy's conclusion that Kant's whole practical philosophy is inadequate in seeking to assess the nature of the colonial enterprise risks casting out, in my view, very many insights which help us in framing an adequate moral and political response to the experience. Implicit within Kant's standpoint are not only the prejudiced Eurocentric views that McCarthy highlights but also the basic features of a universalist, egalitarian and emancipated human species towards which progressive critics of colonialism, and its counterpart modern imperialism, might aim.

Kant regards a colony as in an inferior condition in respect to other independent states but as legally possible/acceptable under international law in his day. He defines a colony in the following way in the *Doctrine of Right*:

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

'A colony or province is a people that indeed has its own constitution, its own legislation, and its own land, on which those who belong to another state are only foreigners even though this other state has supreme executive authority over the colony or province.' What downgrades the colony in relation to other states is the higher authority another state holds over it in the introduction and implementation of laws. 'The state having that executive authority is called the mother state, and the daughter state, though ruled by it, still governs itself (by its own parliament, possibly with a viceroy presiding over it) (*civitas hybrid*).' The colony is then a hybrid state, enjoying many of the functions and powers of a full state, but not its own master in every respect. Kant cites two examples to illustrate his understanding of colonialism. 'This was the relation Athens had with respect to various islands and that Great Britain now has with regard to Ireland.' (6: 348)<sup>24</sup> Colonialism presupposes the existence of complex colonising states and less privileged peoples in other territories who are not wholly in charge of their own affairs – legislating but not fully executing their own laws.

An influential model for European expansion had been presented by John Locke in his political writings, especially his *Two Treatises on Government*. Locke appears to have expressed few qualms about the European peoples imposing their will upon the non-white world. Locke's labour theory of property fully endorses the industrious white settlers who bring into cultivation previously neglected territories and add to nature's endowments by cultivating skilfully the previously untilled land. As I have put it elsewhere 'colonialism and the expansion of European market society need not be added to Locke's theory of property – they are already an integral part of his doctrine.' Locke considers colonialism 'a practice that increases the "common stock of mankind" by developing and exploiting the productive capacity of the earth.'<sup>25</sup>

'Thus in the beginning all the world was America, and more so than it is now; for no such thing as money was any where known.'<sup>26</sup> And what does Locke mean when he speaks of America in this way in deducing the right of property? The America he has in mind has 'in-land, vacant places' where man, or family are in the 'state they were, at first peopling of the world by the children of Adam, or Noah'. In such a condition 'a man may be permitted to plough, sow, and reap, without being disturbed upon land he has no other title to, but only his making use of it.'<sup>27</sup> In this position 'the measure of property, nature has well set, by the

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<sup>24</sup> Kant [1996] p. 486.

<sup>25</sup> Williams [1996] p. 102.

<sup>26</sup> Locke [1999] p. 301.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 293.

extent of man's labour, and the conveniency of life.'<sup>28</sup> In this original condition an individual is entitled to own what he can cultivate and use so long as this does not deprive others of a similar opportunity. This was a doctrine that well-suited the pattern of European expansion in the seventeenth century. Where the world is still like 'in-land America' the biblical story still holds: 'at the beginning, Cain might take as much ground as he could till, and make it his own land and yet leave enough for Abel's sheep to feed on.'<sup>29</sup> Thus Locke accepts that 'the property of labour should be able to over-balance the community of land.'<sup>30</sup> It is labour that transforms things out of their natural condition and gives value to them. And although America through its vast unexploited territories represents an enormous bounty to human kind its present occupiers cannot be regarded as being in a fortunate condition as a result of it. Indeed, 'there can be no clearer demonstration of any thing, than several nations of the Americans are of this, who are rich in land and poor in all the comforts of life; whom nature having furnished as liberally as any other people, with the materials of plenty;' 'yet for want of improving it by labour, have not one hundredth part of the conveniences we enjoy.'<sup>31</sup> The lack of industry the native Indians have shown makes their title to their territories extremely weak and where they have not settled in numbers Locke clearly sees no hindrance to Europeans creating for themselves a title to that land and its fruits through their labour.

If we look in the passages in Kant's 1797 *Rechtslehre* what can we in contrast learn? The passages are very difficult to interpret since they draw upon some of the main concepts of Kant's critical philosophy, such as the *a priori*. Their main object is to look at the ways in which property can be acquired in a non-civil condition. For Kant there is, as with Locke, an original right of the common possession of the 'earth's surface', which because it is a globe or a sphere requires that human beings must 'finally put up with being near one another' and cannot 'disperse infinitely.' (8: 358)<sup>32</sup> Originally no one had a greater right than any other 'to be on a place on the earth.' This right of common possession entitles to visit all parts of the earth, but it does not entitle us automatically to settle there or take possession of things. Here Kant does not regard the earth surface then with the European colonialist's eye. He does not accept a right to acquire what we can

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<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 295.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, p. 296.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 296-297.

<sup>32</sup> Kant [1996] p. 329.

usefully exploit or take over territories that may appear empty or under populated simply because we have expended our labour on them.

This right to visit all parts of the earth is a right to seek contact and not necessarily to acquire. The 'authorization that a foreign newcomer' has upon entering a new territory does 'not extend beyond the conditions which make it possible to seek commerce with the old inhabitants (*alten Einwohnern*)'. The object of such contact is to extend peaceable relations among individuals and nations. Kant favours strongly then the heightened interaction and commerce amongst peoples that occurs through exploration and travel: the bringing of 'distant parts of the world' into relation with one another because ultimately these relations can 'become publicly lawful'. (8: 358)<sup>33</sup> His final objective in furthering such interaction is that 'the human race' is brought ever closer to 'a cosmopolitan constitution'. (8: 358)<sup>34</sup>

This is clearly a perspective that is influenced by the fact that Kant is a European. As a lifelong inhabitant of Königsberg, an important port in the Baltic Sea, Kant evidently shared the outward going attitude of a seafaring community. But it can hardly be claimed that overseas travel was an exclusive activity of northern European people even in those days. The Polynesians appear to have travelled enormous distances already to establish new settlements on the islands of the South Pacific. There is evidence of sea travel and commerce in all parts of the world. Indeed, arguably some non-European peoples can be seen as far greater travellers and seafarers than the Europeans. A perspective that Kant adds that arguably has an European tinge is that these journeys and contacts should ultimately be regulated by law, and do not rule out commerce. Unavoidably Kant is Eurocentric in his outlook but not in a way that wholly disregards the merits of other cultures and races. His concept of right commits him, as we shall see, to an egalitarian approach to all members of the human race.

Indeed, Kant's discussion of overseas trade and travel in his time is in many respects decidedly anti-European. His vision is of 'cosmopolitan constitution' that properly regulates contact amongst peoples' (8: 358)<sup>35</sup> and so maintains harmonious relations amongst them. 'If one compares with this the inhospitable behaviour of civilized, especially commercial, states of our part of the world, they injustice they show in visiting foreign lands and peoples (which with them is tantamount to conquering them) goes to horrifying lengths.' (8: 358)<sup>36</sup> Kant

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<sup>33</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem.



maintains that existing inhabitants of distant lands should be treated with respect. If they do not share the same productive practices and commercial activities of the European world this provides no justification for sweeping away their rights. But this is precisely what occurred: 'When America, the Negro countries, the Spice Islands, the Cape, and so forth were discovered, they were, to them, countries belonging to no one, since they counted the inhabitants as nothing.' The members of the European expeditions that arrived in these territories did not behave like visitors but saw themselves as lords of all they surveyed. The territories were taken as a gift of God to them to be used as they pleased. Where the European traders met with resistance they still held by their 'divine right' to do as they saw fit with what they discovered. 'In the East Indies (Hindustan) they brought in foreign soldiers under the pretext of merely proposing to set up trading posts, but with them oppression of the inhabitants, incitement of the various Indian states to widespread wars, famine, rebellions, treachery, and the whole litany of troubles that oppresses the human race.' (8: 359)<sup>37</sup> Kant maintains that the apparent tragic condition of the territories acquired by the European races is not the fault of the native inhabitants themselves. In many respects Kant sees the colonists as bringing with them the worst aspects of European civilization. Kant's view is not that the European invaders have much to teach the native peoples but rather a great deal can be learned by looking at the response of the more astute non-European countries to their western intruders. 'China and Japan' which had experimented with such visitors 'have therefore wisely' allowed 'access but not entry' to them and the Japanese had taken the sterner step of 'allowing access only to a single European people, the Dutch, but excluding them, like prisoners, from community with the natives.' (8: 359)<sup>38</sup> Thus the hospitality that is required by cosmopolitan law cannot be transformed into the tolerance of boorish and aggressive behaviour which turns the visited territories into dependencies and mirrors of the worst conditions of the visiting states themselves. For Kant colonialism helps fuel the flames of European wars and renders Africa, India and the Americas into the sites of endless indigenous wars which have their origins in the greed of the European traders.<sup>39</sup> Contrary to the pretensions of these traders and settlers, Africans, Asians and the original inhabitants of the Americas have the same rights within their territories as Europeans have in their own states. Their independence and difference have to be respected. Here Kant accepts without reservation the plurality of the human race and its constituent peoples.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 330.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Williams [2012] p. 170.

As Sankar Muthu notes 'Kant's hatred of paternalism plays an important role in his political understanding of civil societies .. in particular the latitude that Kant prescribes to individuals in determining their cultural activities ... these are tied to 'anti-paternalistic arguments he makes about human self-development.' Muthu sees Kant and Herder as influenced by a similar theory of education. 'Kant's understanding of humanity as cultural agency helps to produce a moral philosophy that is both universalistic and pluralistic' this can be seen 'as part of his defence of non-European peoples' resistance against European imperial power.' Kant 'ultimately draws upon an understanding of peoples that emphasized their collective freedoms in light of their subsistence and land-use practices.'<sup>40</sup>

Kant thus reverses the rosy picture which the colonialists often mistakenly give themselves of their role. Kant is aware that the settlers do themselves and the natives no favours by their unilateral acquisitions. In his final political writings Kant depicts the European colonial system as one of brutal domination. The colonialist self-image is portrayed movingly by Franz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

On the unconscious plane, colonialism therefore did not seek to be considered by the native as a gentle, loving mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather as a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts. The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its physiology, its biology and its own unhappiness, which is its very essence.<sup>41</sup>

Instead of the colonizers appearing as the bringers of civilization Kant also reads them as bringing all the evils of civilization. Far from thinking that 'colonialism came to lighten their darkness,'<sup>42</sup> as with Fanon he portrays the colonizers as motivated by the basest of aims: greed and the desire for domination. Far from thinking that if the 'settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality'<sup>43</sup> Kant sees resistance by the native population to European incursion as the path towards maintaining civilisation.

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<sup>40</sup> Muthu [2003] p. 173.

<sup>41</sup> Fanon [1969] p. 168-169.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, p. 169.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

### Against Lockean Acquisitiveness

We get a much clearer indication why Kant takes this strongly anti-colonialist stand in *The Metaphysics of Morals* where he discusses the acquisition of property by individuals. A good part of the first sections of the doctrine of right in the work are taken up with the question. The discussion of colonialism arises in section 15 where he concludes that 'something can be acquired conclusively only in a civil constitution; in a state of nature it can be acquired but only provisionally.' (6: 264)<sup>44</sup> Kant's deduction of property rights is opposed to Locke's since Kant does not believe it is possible to own an object by simply wresting it from nature or transforming nature to produce it. Kant, in other words, rejects Locke's labour theory of property. This has very important implications for Kant's approach to the gaining of territory or property in other continents and countries. Locke's labour theory of property suited the expansion the influence of European countries that occurred in modern times very well. The license to acquire property in the state of nature provided a justification for seizing unproductive land and producing commodities in foreign lands. Kant's assertion that property cannot be obtained in such a way and that it needs the development of a settled civil society first of all – with a united general will that can make laws – complicates the situation greatly.

He tackles the matter in a very interesting way. He looks at the question of the original acquisition of property from the standpoint of the European traveller set on a voyage of discovery and fruitful gain. 'When nature nor chance but just our own will brings us into the neighbourhood of a people that holds out no prospect of a civil union with it, we should not be authorized to found colonies, by force if need be, in order to establish a civil union and bring these human beings (savages) into a rightful condition (as with the American Indians, the Hottentots and the inhabitants of New Holland); or (which is not much better) to found colonies by fraudulent purchase of their land, and so become owners of their land, making use of our superiority without regard for their first possession.' (6: 266)<sup>45</sup> Kant finds the assumptions of the representatives of the European powers who established colonies all over the world entirely unacceptable. Imperialism holds no charms for him and he finds no justification in law and morality for the practices of the major powers of his day.

Kant concedes to Locke that from a historical and empirical standpoint at one time all the world was 'America' not settled and open to use by the original

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<sup>44</sup> Kant [1996] p. 416.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, pp. 417–418.

human inhabitants. However, Kant is not satisfied with this standpoint from an ethical and metaphysical point of view. We cannot treat the world as though it is a resource open to exploitation by whichever European visitor first hits upon its riches. In this he follows Rousseau, who wittily mocks the pretensions of the Spanish conquistadors in seeking to take possession by fiat of the lands of Latin America.

When Nunez Balboa, standing on the shore, took possession of the southern seas and all of South America in the name of the crown of Castile, was that enough to dispossess all of its inhabitants and to exclude all the Princes of the world. If it had been, then such ceremonies were repeated quite unnecessarily, and all the catholic King had to do was from his council chamber all at once to take possession of the entire universe; except for afterwards subtracting from his empire what the Princes already possessed before.<sup>46</sup>

However much we feel that we are entitled to access and acquire it at will 'since nature (which abhors a vacuum) seems to demand it'<sup>47</sup> we would be taking a wrong step. Property is a social relationship which requires the authority of a civil society and is not a simple relationship between the one individual and nature. Indeed even if 'greater expanses of land in other parts of the world, which are now splendidly populated, would remain forever uninhabited, so that the end of creation would be frustrated,' (6: 267/418) had not some human individuals taken the lead and seized the land to capture its product. We cannot regard these original acts of appropriation as embodying justice. For Kant adopting the Lockean justification for the original acquisition of property and the theory of colonialism that arises from it presents a 'veil of injustice which would sanction any means to good ends.' He is in no doubt that 'such a way of acquiring land is therefore to be repudiated'. (6: 267)<sup>48</sup>

### **The Alternative to Locke *and* Marx**

What then takes the place of this unilateral act of possession in Kant's political philosophy? Kant acknowledges that the civil condition where property ownership safeguarded by the state is the one to be achieved, but he does not sanction the historically (Lockean) deployed means for achieving this end. Facts for him cannot ground rights. That I can show that a strip of earth is under my

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<sup>46</sup> Rousseau [1997] p. 55.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>48</sup> Kant [1996] p. 418.

control through planting and harvesting upon it does not of itself for Kant establish a property right. Possession and use are not in themselves enough to establish a lasting right. So how then does he see the right of property and so original rights of acquisition as grounded? Kant's answer is that a united general will is required in advance of a rightful act of property acquisition and this united general will has to have as its aim the generation and maintenance of a civil commonwealth. A vital aspect of this generation and maintenance of a civil commonwealth is the enactment and enforcement of property laws. This has not to be envisaged as an action that occurs at any one point in time but is rather the intellectual and moral presupposition of any property right. As the term 'united general will' indicates the assertion and observance of property rights must rely on the consent of others. Even in the absence of civil government we have therefore to presuppose that all others can consent to our holding an object taken from nature as our property. Where that consent is in fact not forthcoming there is an ethical presumption in favour of our holding the desired property right - as though it had been given. Thus to establish effective property rights in new territories where there is no civil society requires that significant social developments have to take place. There can be no immediate assertion of property rights by visitors and indeed those visitors should accept that they may not be granted property rights in the territory at all. The original inhabitants of a territory have to be regarded as the potential owners even if they have not asserted that ownership in civil terms. It is they that have to take the necessary steps to a civil condition. At best visitors have the right to make contact with those inhabitants and seek commercial ties. There is no right to impose such ties upon the original inhabitants. Their seeming negligence is their choice and so has to be recognised and not exploited.

Locke's scenario for the potential acquisition of colonial territories is entirely ruled out. Kant unequivocally rejects the labour theory of property.

The first working, or, in general, transforming of a piece of land can furnish no title of acquisition to it; that is, possession of an accident can provide no basis for rightful possession of the substance. What is mine or yours must instead be derived from ownership of the substance in accordance with the rule. (6: 269)<sup>49</sup>

This rule of rightful ownership has to be established through the united general will that is presupposed as the basis of the civil society. The rule determines the rightful physical possession of an object and not the physical possession the rule.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, p. 420.

And we cannot suppose that this rule requires the support of one civil society alone. Civil societies grow up alongside each other and their proper functioning requires that they respect the property rights established within each of their territories. The united general will that brings together one functioning state has to be seen as meeting with and coalescing with the united general wills of all civil societies, since it is to be expected that at some point or another the subjects of each civil society will meet one another, and they should do so on a lawful basis.

It appears that Kant's approach to the acquisition of property and so by implication new territories sidesteps the issue that lies at the heart of European colonial expansion. Although Locke's approach may in principle be the wrong one, it was far nearer to the approach adopted than anything we find in Kant's writings. European society expanded overseas through unilateral acquisition. Kant's argument in response appears to be to acknowledge this fact but then to suggest that his own principled approach still needs to be applied if the aggressive colonial past is to be overcome and be made good. Humankind needs to proceed differently from the way it has done. Recognising the wrongs of the past is part of this process but equally a part of the process is adopting moral and rightful methods now for carrying out commercial relations with and trading with distant parts. 'It can be said that establishing universal and lasting peace constitutes not merely a part of the doctrine of right but rather the entire final end of the doctrine of right within the limits of mere reason; for the condition of peace is alone that condition in which mine and what is yours for a multitude of human beings is secured under laws living in proximity to one another, hence those who are united under a constitution; but the rule for this constitution, as a norm for others, cannot be derived from the experience of those who have hitherto found it to be to their advantage; it must, rather be derived a priori by reason from the ideal of a rightful association of human beings under laws as such.' (6: 355)<sup>50</sup>

Colonialism stands thoroughly condemned by Marxist political philosophers however the condemnation takes on a different form from that presented by Kant. Modern colonialism – the expansion of European forms of government and economy – is derided for its inhuman exploitation of native populations and anti-colonialist nationalist movements are offered enthusiastic support but an attitude of tolerance is shown towards the system in its early form and development. This is because the Marxist sees it as a necessary course of economic development that earlier primitive forms of economic relations should be replaced. They condemn the lack of humanity shown to the original inhabitants

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<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, p. 491.

of distant territories, and they are prepared to join with Kant in deploring the violent actions of the conquering Europeans, but they provide an undercurrent of support for the process as it actually occurred by lauding capitalism as the more progressive economic system and stressing the inevitability of the violent breakdown of the previous forms of community and economy. The economic determinism of the theory of history that Marxists deploy undercuts their moral condemnation of colonialism and imperialism. It also helps set the scene for the overthrow of colonialism primarily through violent means which compounds the cycle of violence that brought about imperialism in the first place.<sup>51</sup> Arguably Marx glories too much in his contention that modern capitalism comes into existence dripping with blood: 'If money, according to Augier, "comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek," capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.'<sup>52</sup> The excellent documentation that Marx himself provides of the excesses of colonial expansion and rule is undermined by the apparent lesson that Marx draws from this sad history, namely that 'force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one.'<sup>53</sup> Kant wants to strike out on a different path which avoids the previous pattern of exploitation and the use of violence. Kant cannot embrace the revolutionary path that Marx proposes. He acknowledges but does not condone the arbitrary violence of the past that has founded modern economic and political structures and for Kant there cannot be a *carte blanche* for supposed progressive violence in the future.

Thus a Kantian approach to colonialism and de-colonisation has to take a different direction from that advanced by Marx. For Marx the history and future of colonialism is deeply ambivalent. 'The violent introduction of capitalist modes of production' he thinks 'broke down the archaic "barbarian" systems of "Oriental despotism" which only reinforced a brutalization and degradation of human beings subjugated to external circumstances. It was capitalism that thus prepared

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<sup>51</sup> "Marx's stance raises directly the question of colonial modernity, and the degree to which it can be regarded as beneficial or destructive. Marx forces contemporary readers to face up to the question of how much critiques of colonialism are driven by a form of longing for a pre-industrial way of life altogether. He forces his readers to specify whether they are luxuriating in a nostalgia for a lost indigenous rural way of life, in the manner of Rousseau or Rider Haggard, or arguing for a form of modernity that is beneficial and productive rather than oppressive. Those who do not have access to modernity generally want it when they get the chance. Those who reject it on ideological grounds are often those who already have it. Much of what now draws protests relates to the misery that follows from capitalist reorganization; a stage that Marx himself, while by no means being oblivious to its horrors, saw as the necessary precondition to the benefits of socialism." Young [2001] p. 109.

<sup>52</sup> Marx [1970] p. 759.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 751.

the way for the elevation of man “to be sovereign of circumstances”. Or to put it the other way round, for Marx the argument that the stage of colonization and the introduction of the capitalist mode of production was destined to be transcended by socialism was a way of redeeming the past, of redeeming the oppressions of history itself. Colonialism, therefore, for Marx, was fiercely dialectical: both a ruthless system of economic exploitation and a significant positive move towards a utopian future.<sup>54</sup> The moral and political implications of Marx's position are extraordinary. On the one hand, colonial oppression is to be deeply hated for the manner in which it sweeps away the social structures of the past and subjugates the native population and, on the other hand, it is to be posthumously exonerated as the modernising system that ultimately releases the colonized from their barbarian past. Kant's view is a good deal more generous and humane. He too accepts that the Europeans had imposed colonialism with violence and a profound moral blindness in the past, but he wants those practices abandoned and the rights of the native populations to be respected. Though like Marx he does not appear to doubt that the institutions of modern European capitalism surpass those of the native populations he denies the Europeans the right to impose them on non-Europeans and in *Perpetual Peace* he applauds the stubbornness and independence of the oriental countries that refuse access to European traders. The problematic questions that arise for Marxists: ‘should, for example, colonialism be resisted and overthrown if it risks returning the country to pre-capitalist, archaic economic and social systems? Should the dominant form of resistance from the nationalist bourgeoisie be regarded as enemy or friend?’<sup>55</sup> Such difficulties arise less acutely from the Kantian perspective. Where colonies have not yet been established for the Kantian attempts to do so are legitimately to be resisted, where colonies already exist the task is to work with progressive forces to lighten the burden and move ultimately to independence, and if it is the nationalist bourgeoisie that leads the non-violent campaign to achieve such independence it should of course be supported.

Inspired by Marxist writings Franz Fanon draws the conclusion in discussing the situation of colonial occupation that ‘at the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect. Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic and the nation is demobilized through a rapid movement of decolonization, the people have the time to see that

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<sup>54</sup> Young [2001] p. 108.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 109.



the liberation has been the business of each and all and that the leader has no special merit.<sup>56</sup> Spectacular and understandable as this declaration may be from the representative of an African nation subject to the cruellest colonial rule in Algeria, it repeats the general problem of the combination of Marxist historicism with moral outrage. Through the acceptance and deployment of violent revolutionary means it negates the moral purpose of the anti-colonial movement. Here it is more likely that a Kantian would support Ghandi's non-violent methods rather than Fanon's military campaigns in determining how best to bring to an end colonial expansion. In writing in the 1790s Kant was clearly more concerned about how to prevent new colonial acquisitions occurring than with restoring colonies wholly to their former inhabitants. Kant's focus is more on creating a future peaceful world wide civil society than ensuring that revenge is taken on all past wrongs. Kant also (at least in the case of China and Japan) credits the native inhabitants with more potential good sense and industry than Marx was apparently prepared to accord them.

In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx depicts an almost mechanistic process where he speaks of

... the bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.<sup>57</sup>

Although he is sympathetic to the plight of the non-European nations he adopts a somewhat derogatory tone in speaking of their apparent abilities and potential. Some of the condescension of the prevailing political and economic system of the nineteenth century is carried over into Marx's description of how things have changed with the rise to power of the middle class. Colonialism is not immediately good for humankind but it is necessary and ultimately beneficial. 'The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy

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<sup>56</sup> Fanon [1969] p. 74.

<sup>57</sup> Marx [1968a] p. 39.

of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.<sup>58</sup> Here Marx shows himself to be much more under Hegel's spell than under Kant's. For Hegel civilization travelled from east to west as time went on, leading to the legitimate dominance of European societies over the rest of the world.<sup>59</sup> Kant's perspective is an entirely contrary one. He finds the supposed advanced civilisations of Europe worse in their savagery than many of the supposed barbarian nations themselves, and in praising Japan and China for their resistance to Western entry and commerce indicates that those countries may ultimately have the resources themselves to advance enlightenment. Above all, Kant does not provide license for European visitors to presume the superiority of their systems of economy and government and to impose them on native populations. Even if the native inhabitants wish to remain in a state of nature Kant accepts that is their choice and their voice should be respected. All that European visitors can ask in such circumstances is that they not be treated with hostility when they try to make contact. They can neither insist on entering nor least of all establishing a colony for themselves. Kant insists on the right of the usual inhabitants of a territory to make the moves they wish to make in their own time and in their own way. He is unlikely to have welcomed 'the cheap prices of commodities' as the 'heavy artillery with which' to batter down the opposition of indigenous people. Kant, unlike the Marxist, is not prepared to 'sanction any means to a good end'. (6: 266)<sup>60</sup> Unlike Marx's forced progressivism<sup>61</sup> Kant takes a tolerant view of those who wish to

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>59</sup> "The bourgeois period of history has to create the material basis of the new world – on the one hand the universal intercourse founded upon the mutual dependency of mankind, and the means of that intercourse; on the other hand the development of the productive powers of man and the transformation of material production into a scientific domination of natural agencies. Bourgeois industry and commerce create these material conditions of a new world in the same way as geological revolutions have created the surface of the earth. When a great social revolution shall have mastered the results of the bourgeois epoch, the marked of the world and the modern powers of production, and subjected them to the common control of the most advanced peoples, then only will human progress cease to resemble the hideous pagan idol, who would not drink the nectar but from the skulls of the slain." Marx [1968] p. 57.

<sup>60</sup> Kant [1996] p. 418.

<sup>61</sup> "Marx, no more than Engels, was not entirely hostile to colonialism as such. He saw the object of colonialism as either the breaking down of the non-capitalist mode of production (for example, the textile industry in India) and transforming it into a capitalist one, or, in the case of Ireland, the prevention of such a process of transformation in order to preserve the supply of industrial labour for British factories – an early instance of underdevelopment. The effect of British rule in Ireland was thus regressive, though potentially revolutionary given the development of Irish bourgeois nationalism; whereas for Marx, its ultimate effect in India was positive, though not as yet even in the 1850s, revolutionary." Young [2001] p. 108. Young's further conclusion is also very

retain their traditional methods of production: 'since as long as they keep within their boundaries the way they want to live on their own land is up to their own discretion.' (6: 266)<sup>62</sup> Kant holds no brief for imposing capitalism on other territories, as this demonstrates: 'can two neighboring peoples (or families) resist each other in adopting a certain use of land, for example can a hunting people resist a pasturing people or a farming people, or the latter resist a people that wants to plant orchards, and so forth? Certainly.' (6: 266)<sup>63</sup>

## **Conclusion**

With some notable exceptions, Kant's views on colonialism have not received the attention they deserve. Just as the case with his views on political improvement in general, his provocative and novel ideas against unrestricted European expansion have remained curiously hidden. They have been hidden on the right by conservative and neo-liberal thinkers who believe in the superiority of European civilization, hidden on the left by radicals who have pursued modernisation too relentlessly, and more recently they have been hidden from a radical anti-Enlightenment postcolonialist perspective by those who focus too intensely on Kant's apparent racism. The Marxist perspective has in particular obscured Kant's vision in its ruthless commitment to centralist modernisation. The conservative and neo-liberal camp have joined forces with the postcolonial school in attempting to indicate the irrelevance of Kant's major ideas to/for the colonial condition. Kant's evolutionary path to progress – wedded to a patient gradualism – and the commitment never to treat people solely as means but always also as ends now merits our closest attention.

The major tension in Kant's theory of colonialism arises from his support for individuals in the state of nature to establish a state, by force if necessary, and his denial of the right to outside powers to inaugurate this process themselves in territories where a state does not exist. Kant acknowledges in his general political theory the duty of individuals to emerge from the state of nature, but stresses in

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interesting: "So while highly critical of British rule in India, Marx nevertheless praised British achievements there, specifically its innovations of consolidating India's political unity, organizing and training the India army, introducing a free press, and introducing railways and steam vessels. Marx thus argued that colonialism was both a bad and a good thing at the same time." Ibidem, p. 108. As Young notes Marx draws a conclusion that 'the moral and humanitarian argument against colonialism is ultimately less important than the benefits of its effects – the world historical movement towards socialism' that we can see is not open to Kant. For Kant the excuse of bringing culture and economic advancement to undeveloped peoples as praiseworthy ends cannot "wash away the stain of injustice in the means used to attain them". (6: 353) Kant [1996] p. 490.

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem, p. 417.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem.

his critique of colonialism that this process cannot be hurried along by outside agents. For Kant to impose a state on other peoples where they themselves have not come to the realisation that such a step is necessary is to act contrary to cosmopolitan right. The principle of hospitality does not allow visitors to create institutions without the agreement of the present inhabitants of territories. The tension that arises from this view is that visitors have to abide by laws that are not recognized by the native inhabitants, and that native inhabitants have to permit access when they may know nothing of such a rule. But for Kant it is better to suffer this tension than for the European states and their subjects to believe they are the inescapable agents of progress. Peoples should enter the civil condition at their own pace and in response to their own recognition of the need to do so. Arguably therefore the major tension in Kant's theory of colonialism is also one of its main strengths. Kant's hostility to paternalism, a hostility shaped by the enlightenment, makes him a champion of native rights.

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