Kant on Race and Kant’s Racism
Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)
East Prussia

Köningsberg
Kaliningrad
The central ideas in Kant’s **moral philosophy**: the innate equality, dignity and humanity in all human beings, and the idea that this requires treating each individual human being with respect.

The central ideas in Kant’s **political philosophy**: the imperative to establish just states, in which people can live together as citizens in relations of non-domination.

Enlightenment ideas of reason, human equality and autonomy.
Charles Mills
Charles Mills: ‘Modern moral theory and modern racial theory have the same father’ (Mills, “Kant and Race Redux”)
‘What makes Western racism so autonomous and conspicuous in world history has been that it developed in a context that presumed human equality of some kind’ (Fredrickson 2002 11).

‘The modern concept of race as basic human types classified by physical characteristics (primarily skin color) was not invented until the eighteenth century’ (Fredrickson 2002 53).

‘With belief in human equality excluding people required a belief in biological unfitness for full citizenship’ (Frederickson 2002:68).
Kant presents what looks like a universal moral theory: a theory that says that every human being has an innate dignity and value and should be treated with respect. Kant also has a theory of race, a racist theory of race, and says things that indicate that he fails to apply his own revolutionary theory to black people.

Is Kant an inconsistent universalist (Hill, Boxill) or a consistent inegalitarian (Eze, Mills)?
Kant has a universal moral theory that he fails to apply properly – he is an inconsistent universalist. His personal racism does not affect the theory.

Bernard Boxill
Kant does not have a universal moral theory; he did not intend his theory to apply to black people, so he is not really an egalitarian. Consistent inegalitarian.

Kant has a threshold notion of moral personhood, and thinks that blacks are humans who fall below the threshold.
Pauline Kleingeld

*Metaphysics of Morals* (1790s) clearly condemns slavery and colonialism.
Kant clearly takes all races to have reason in the sense that features in his moral philosophy.

Kant takes his moral philosophy to have political implications, including condemnation of colonialism.

To the extent that there is a threshold for the full autonomy of human persons, Kant takes his moral theory to imply that humans who fail to meet the threshold require special protection, rather than that one would be entitled to enslave and exploit them.
J. L. A. Garcia: volitional/attitudinal/affective account of racism as centrally involving hatred and ill-will.

Tommy Shelby: doxastic/cognitive account of racism as centrally involving beliefs about racial superiority.
“the Western archive is singularly complex. … It is neither monolithic, nor the exclusive property of the West. Africa and its diaspora decisively contributed to its making and should legitimately make foundational claims on it.” (Mbembe ‘Decolonising knowledge and the question of the archive’ 24).

whiteness “is the most corrosive and the most lethal when it makes us believe that it is everywhere; that everything originates from it and it has no outside.” (Mbembe ‘Decolonising knowledge and the question of the archive’ 3).
‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal’. (Thomas Jefferson, American Declaration of Independence)

Jefferson was a slave owner.
Domenico Losurdo, Liberalism, a Counter-History
The self-styled champions of liberty branded taxation imposed without their explicit consent as synonymous with despotism and slavery. But they had absolutely no scruples about exercising the most absolute and arbitrary power over their slaves .... “How is it, Samuel Johnson asked, ‘that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty from the drivers of negroes’” (Losurdo, Liberalism: A Counter-History).
“A pluriversity is not merely the extension throughout the world of a Eurocentric model presumed to be universal .... It is a process that does not necessarily abandon the notion of universal knowledge for humanity, but which embraces it via a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions.” (Mbembe “Decolonising knowledge and the question of the archive’ 19).
“Black radical liberalism both (i) recognizes white supremacy as central to the making of the United States and (more sweepingly) the modern world, and (ii) seeks the rethinking of the categories, crucial assumptions, and descriptive and normative frameworks of liberalism in the light of that recognition.” (Mills ‘Black Radical Kantianism’ p 2) and rejects ‘a liberalism originally formulated just by and for bourgeois white males (socially privileged) then nominally extrapolated so as to include the socially subordinated, but with no recognition of the accompanying need to change the official ontology to register their radically different social location.’ (Mills ‘Black Radical Kantianism’ 5)