

## Kant's a priori Philosophy and his Racism

### I Introduction

Kant's philosophy centrally focusses on trying to give an a priori account of conditions of the possibility of various human phenomena, including metaphysics, empirical knowledge, there being moral reasons and the nature of just political power. His a priori conditions are presented as if they are meant to be humanly universal – to apply equally to all humans. He thinks, for example, that, for humans, perceiving distinct particulars requires a priori representations of space and time; that, for humans, the possibility of empirical knowledge depends on the application of a priori concepts of substance and cause; that our reason unavoidably seeks for further explanations of any contingent phenomena we encounter; that for all humans, what counts as a valid reason for acting is constrained by the condition of respecting the humanity of each other human; and that we are morally required to create a state which has powers to coercively enforce the conditions that enable the equal political freedom of each.

Despite these supposedly universal features of his a priori moral theory, Kant has racist and sexist views that seem incompatible with regarding all human beings as moral equals. Further, while his attitudes seem to have improved over time in his published works, and while his racist and sexist views mostly do not feature centrally in his most a priori works, they do continue to appear throughout his life, and certainly contemporaneously with his supposedly universal a priori theories.

This leaves us with questions about how to make sense of his views and about how Kant himself understood his theories – did he intend the categorical imperative, for example, to apply only to white men? Perhaps independent of how Kant himself understood his claims there is the question of whether the theories themselves can be extricated from his racism and sexism. Further, there are questions about whether there could be any resources in Kant's account for work on topics like racial justice, or whether, in contrast, critique of Kant's views as well as work on racism, sexism and theory of race must come from outside his system, and perhaps from outside of an a priori framework. Even if we conclude that Kant's system is irredeemably compromised, paying attention to and understanding the details of Kant's racism is still important in a number of respects – amongst other things for understanding the history of the modern concept of race and for understanding racism. It also raises broader questions about methodology in philosophy and the history of philosophy: how should we read the work of racist and sexist figures in the tradition? More generally, is there something fundamentally flawed about a priori methodology as a way of approaching topics like racial justice which require attention to context and situation? Inspired by his talk of human equality and autonomy some commentators simply assume that the core theories are separable from his racism, frequently writing as if this is the case without even pausing to notice the racism,<sup>1</sup> but on the

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<sup>1</sup> This seems to have been the majority view of scholars working on Kant's moral theory, since most work on Kant's practical philosophy does not address the question of whether his work is undermined by his racism, and assumes that the ideas are meant to apply to all humans rather than to white men.

other hand others write Kant off as irredeemably compromised and having nothing useful to tell us about practical reason and moral life because of his racism and sexism.<sup>2</sup> My view is that with respect to the latter issue we should treat this as an open question, and take it case by case. We should never assume that any part of his work – even the most seemingly abstract and theoretical – is innocent of infection by his racist and Eurocentric assumptions. But at the same time we should also not assume that because of his racism there could not be resources in his work that could be useful or true, including for understanding and addressing racism and sexism. In previous work have discussed the implications of Kant's racism for the question of whether he intended his theories to apply to all humans, or just to white men.<sup>3</sup> Here, after some brief comments on this issue, I take up the question of whether there could be resources in his system that can be productively used for work on race, racism, and historical injustice, starting with a challenge raised by Charles Mills concerning rethinking this work in the light of the racist exclusions of the tradition.

Before getting into my questions, a brief comment on a response people sometimes bring up in relation to this topic: 'oh but didn't everyone have that view then? Is it really fair to criticism him for views which were just so standard at the time? Wouldn't this be using anachronistic standards?'. In my view thinking about Kant's racism would be important even if these concerns were accurate (including the question of why someone supposedly brilliant couldn't have thought something different to 'what everyone thought'), but in fact they are highly questionable. Not only was it *not* everyone's view at the time, Kant went out of his way to debate with someone, Georg Forster, who had far more experience of black people than he did, who questioned his theory of race and argued for abolitionism and defended the equality of the races.<sup>4</sup> His racist views were *not* simply what everyone thought. And *he* didn't think of his views on race as such – he thought of his theory of race as new and important (just as he thought of many of the central ideas of his critical corpus as self-consciously revolutionary). Rather than simply being 'what everyone thought then', it is argued that European anti-black racism as well as the modern conception of what race is really develop in this period – and that Kant is an important player in this development.<sup>5</sup> So we cannot bracket Kant's racism by saying it is simply what everyone thought then. And we need to understand how it relates to the accounts of autonomy, dignity and human equality that are supposedly at the heart of his moral and political philosophy.

A central question of interpretation raised by Kant's racism is whether, as he understood his theory, the categorical imperative is meant to apply to all humans or only white men. Kant presents his theory as giving an a priori, universal account of how we ought to treat persons, and most interpreters discuss his arguments assuming that the theory is meant to apply to all humans. However, Mills (2005; 2014) has argued that the only way to make Kant's moral theory compatible with his racism is to attribute to him the concept of an *Untermensch* – a human who

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<sup>2</sup> This is a view I encounter in discussion with people working on issues to do with race and people working on feminism.

<sup>3</sup> Allais (2016).

<sup>4</sup> See Kleingeld (2007; 2012) for detailed discussion of this.

<sup>5</sup> See Bernasconi 2011, Frederickson 2002; Mills 2014; Smith 2015.

is not a moral person.<sup>6</sup> This makes Kant's racism compatible with his a priori moral theory because it posits that the moral theory applies to all those taken to be *persons*, rather than to all *humans*, which means there is no inconsistency in leaving out humans who supposedly do not meet the threshold for personhood, such as (Kant may be taken to think) black people and women. In other work I have argued that while Mills' *Untermensch* proposal does succeed in introducing consistency to some of the things Kant says, it does not ultimately resolve the problem by making Kant consistent because it introduces inconsistency in other places.<sup>7</sup> Kant may have had an *Untermensch* view of black people and women, but his moral and political theories are not compatible with such a view. In particular, Kant does not have a threshold notion of personhood; he does not take supposed lesser intelligence or lesser moral character to undermine personhood or the requirements for respect. Further, in cases where there is reason to think that humans' rational capacities are so compromised (temporarily or permanently) as to render them unable to actually act autonomously, he takes us to be morally and politically required to respect and protect them, rather than entitled to abuse and exploit them. There being humans who are *Untermenschen* liable to exploitation is not compatible with his position. I have concluded therefore that Kant cannot be made consistent on this issue.

Much of the debate about the question of whether Kant thought of black people and women as moral persons treats the content of the central ideas in Kant's moral and political philosophy (such as the categorical imperative and justice) as roughly agreed on, and makes the question whether or not we are right to assume that the author of the concept intended them to apply to all humans. It seems to follow that once we have noticed the racism, we could then bracket it off and take the theory unchanged, to apply to all humans. However, a further level of questioning involves investigating whether we should rethink what we have understood to be the content of Kant's practical theories in the light of both his racism and that of more than two centuries of interpretation. Mills argues that we should not simply bracket the racism and proceed with the system as it was, but rather should rethink our understanding of the system and its application, in the light not just of overt racism like Kant's, but also the exclusions in the so-called liberal enlightenment tradition, where these could include misunderstanding and obfuscation of what should follow from the tradition's own premises. He has argued that racism among Kant's (largely white) interpreters has led to us failing to pay attention to Kant's racism and interpreting him too charitably.<sup>8</sup> In my view (and also that of Mills<sup>9</sup>) it could *also* be true that racism in the tradition following Kant has led us to not interpret the resources in some of his views radically enough. Where the hypocrisy of enlightenment liberalism<sup>10</sup> may have resulted in the assumption by its proponents of their being in something like conditions of liberal justice, the tradition may have failed to interrogate what is really required by equal

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<sup>6</sup> See also Bernasconi 2011; Eze 1994. See Boxill 2001 and Kleingeld 2001, 2012, 2014, for contrary arguments.

<sup>7</sup> Allais 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Mills 2005; 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Mills 2018a.

<sup>10</sup> This hypocrisy is documented by Domenico Losurdo (2014), who looks at central liberal theorists' endorsement of or failure to condemn slavery and racial oppression, as well as oppression of poor people, and their defences of enclosure and the use of the criminal justice system to exclude poor people. While a number of his choices of supposedly liberal theorists are problematic (Burke, for example), the points are well made with respect to liberals such as John Locke and Alexis de Tocqueville

freedom. I will briefly outline the first part of Mills' critique, and then present some suggestions for developing the second part, in different ways than he has done.

## II

### Mills on the exclusion of race

In a number of works, Mills has argued that mainstream European and Anglo-American political philosophy has failed to theorize racial domination and racial justice to an extent that centrally undermines this tradition as an attempt to theorize justice. He argues that the tradition that is supposedly concerned with justice has really been anything but, and is rather a whitewashed view of equality and co-operation among dominators defending their property interests (amongst other things, he takes this to be reflected in the tradition's focus on theorizing *property*). He says that 'Western philosophy's historic inadequacies on the theorization of social justice are ... most enlighteningly to be understood in relation to Western philosophy's demographic domination by political elites of one kind or another'.<sup>11</sup> In addition to his critique of European and Anglo-American political philosophy's failure to theorize racial domination and racial justice, a central part of Mills' argument is a critique of so-called ideal theory. Ideal theory is political theory that starts with the aim of describing an ideally just society; a central example (and target of Mills) is Rawls and Rawlsian political theory. Critics of ideal theory argue that it fails to give us an account of how we get to a just state from where we actually are, and that we should rather start with attention to actual injustice. Mills argues further, that focus on ideal theory functions to perpetuate racial domination, because idealizing at the level of theory leads its proponents to idealizing their actual societies and over-estimating how just they are. Assuming that the societies they live in are roughly just leads to treating racial injustice as an aberration from the main narrative, rather than the centre of it.

Building on his work in *The Racial Contract* (1999<sup>12</sup>) and 'White Ignorance' (2007<sup>13</sup>), in 'Through a Glass Whitely: Ideal Theory as Epistemic Injustice' (2018b), Mills argues that the failure to theorize racial domination in 200 years of European and Anglo-American political philosophy exhibits the cognitive deficiencies of the dominating group by whom much of this philosophy has been written, obscures the realities of racial domination in the societies this theory is produced by, and that because ideal theory has the effect of idealizing present society, this theory in fact provides an opaque narrative that serves to rationalize what is oppressive in the present social order. He says: '[w]hen a liberal society pretending to be a *Rechtstaat* [state of justice] is actually a *Rassenstaat* [race state], maintaining this political fiction will obviously require a "principled" commitment to a "transparency" that is really an "opacity". ... Racial liberalism in the first stage of whiteopia will justify white racial domination and then later, in

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<sup>11</sup> Unpublished manuscript, presented at the Central APA, Denver 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Mills takes the idea of the social contract (which plays a central roll in European enlightenment political theory, supposedly helping to explain the origins of government and our obligations to it, as well as moral codes for co-operation in society), and argues that if we theorize actual societies using this notion we obfuscate actual group power and domination, and that the *racial* contract (white supremacy theorized as a contract between whites) more accurately describes actual societies.

<sup>13</sup> Mills discusses forms of ignorance and cognitive deficiencies that result from being in a position of domination.

the second stage, deny and obfuscate it' (Mills 2018b: 58). He argues that given the role it has played, ideal theory can be seen as a form of epistemic injustice.

Part of Mills' critique is of idealizing assumptions and abstractions that lead to inappropriate universalizing, which, he argues, characterizes the opacity of epistemologies that come out of a position of dominance. One thing that could be taken to follow from this critique is to reject *any* use for ideal theory, reject abstractions and universalizing, and reject political philosophy based on the enlightenment liberal tradition. This position is defended by another important writer on Kant's racism, Robert Bernasconi, who says that '[a]cademic philosophy, especially in the United States, has equipped itself with modes of reasoning that are ill-equipped to examine its own historical complicity with slavery and racism more generally,' and that a 'one-sided focus on the abstract individual removed from the concrete conditions in which he or she finds him - or herself' ... deprives us of the resources needed to identify and stay focused on the problems created by systemic racism. ... In this way, analytic reason and the dogmas associated with it served to mask the real struggle.'<sup>14</sup> Bernasconi argues that both the abstractions of analytic philosophy as a method and the central focus of the liberal tradition on individual autonomy and the defence of private property mean there are unlikely to be any progressive resources in this tradition. Mills, however, responds differently. While he also rejects individualist abstractions from social and political reality and the pretensions to impartiality that may follow from these, his target is less the very idea of universalizing or abstracting than abstracting, idealizing and universalizing badly - in misleading or obfuscating ways. In particular, he rejects idealizing that abstracts away from conceptually registering the reality of structures of social oppression and from theorizing its implications in terms of cognitive effects of social oppression, particularly on the dominating group. He does not conclude that there could not be possible appropriate ways of universalizing or useful idealizing or abstracting. Further, he argues that once we have paid attention to the racism of the proponents of the enlightenment liberal tradition, as well as its failures to address racial domination, further interpretative tasks remain, in particular, that of rethinking the tradition in the light the racial dominance within modernity, in order to see whether both its defenders and its critics have failed to appreciate resources it may have for theorizing racial justice. He argues that if we want to explore the resources of this tradition for theorizing racial justice, we should not simply notice the racism and then bracket it off, taking the supposedly universal theory and its account of society as it was before, but rethink how to interpret the theory and what it says about actual societies. This leads to the project he calls black racial liberalism and black radical Kantianism (Mills 2018a).

In 'Black Radical Kantianism' (2018a) Mills argues for a black radical re-appropriation of ideas in Kant's philosophy, rethinking and drawing on Kantian resources to reframe states such as the United States as a *Rassenstaat* (a racial state) and ask what measures of corrective justice would be needed to bring about a *Rechtsstaat* (state of justice). My aim in the rest of this discussion is to build on this suggestion, though where Mills draws on Kant's moral philosophy, my focus is primarily on his political philosophy, the resources of which, in my view, Mills

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<sup>14</sup> Unpublished manuscript, presented at the Central APA, Denver 2019.

underestimates.<sup>15</sup> Despite this disagreement, I share with him the view that we should re-interrogate this work in the light not just of the racism of the author but also the racist exclusions of two centuries of interpretation. As we have seen, Mills argues that proponents of enlightenment liberal theories tend to wrongly assume that their own societies are dramatically more just than they in fact are. If this is true, it could mean that their theories of justice are irredeemably compromised, but it could also mean that the implications of their theories of justice for changing their own societies are far more radical than they have typically realized. This is the idea I want to explore: if Mills' diagnosis of white ignorance and of the possible distortions in the way that ideal theory leads us to under-attend to dominance and oppressions in our own societies is correct, one result of this could be that these liberal theories themselves might have more radical implications for changing our societies than both their proponents and their (left) critics have taken them to have. Given the assumptions of the interpretive tradition, we should not be too sure that we already know what the system implies. One could reject liberalism as a compromised and conservative bourgeois ideology, but one could also argue that elite interests have distorted beyond recognition what liberalism should be, given its own starting points.

### III

#### Rethinking Kant in the light of racism and the exclusion of race

Mills' challenge is to rethink the scholarly and interpretative tradition of political liberalism in the light of, on the one hand, the actuality of modernity structured by racial domination and on the other, the exclusion of racial domination from political theorizing in the tradition. In this section, I sketch some ideas from Kant's practical philosophy with respect to which I suggest we should take up this challenge. Given the constraints of space, the aim here is primarily to outline areas for further research, rather to actually investigate the ideas in any depth.

As mentioned above, Bernasconi argues that the liberal tradition is hopeless for thinking about racial justice because of its focus on individual autonomy and the defence of private property. Both these ideas are central to Kant's practical philosophy. However, I suggest that if we take Mills' challenge seriously, we should not be too sure we already know how to understand these ideas and what follows from them, and we should not take the main uses of concepts like autonomy in liberal political rhetoric as authoritative for understanding Kant's notion. For example, whatever the case may be for mainstream liberal political philosophy, Kant's notion of autonomy is not individualist, but rather thoroughly relational. Autonomy, for Kant, is the central characteristic of reason, and the principle of autonomy involves recognising constraints

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<sup>15</sup> With respect to Kant's moral philosophy, I have suggested elsewhere (Allais 2016) that the central Kantian notions of respect (and disrespect) may be useful for thinking about racism. Crucially, disrespect involves *both* recognizing someone as a person *and* not recognizing the valid moral claims grounded in their personhood. This is never simply a failure to recognize of something that it is a person, but a failure to treat a person (something that is in some sense seen as a person) as a person. This is famously noted by Frederick Douglass, when he says: 'Must I undertake to argue that the slave is a man?' 'The slave holders themselves acknowledge it in the enactment of laws for their government. They acknowledge it when they punish disobedience on the part of the slave ... what is this but the acknowledgement that the slave is a moral, intellectual and responsible being' (Douglass 1852).

on reasoning that come from the possibility of reasoning with others. Autonomy is not individualist choosing; it is a matter of recognising universal reasons for action which are grounded in the existence of each individual human being. It's about a mutual recognition of a certain kind of value between agents: seeing yourself as being constrained by the value of other who is simultaneously constrained by your value. It does not seem obvious that this notion is as unfruitful for thinking about racial justice as Bernasconi takes the excessively individualist account of autonomy to be.<sup>16</sup> And a further question is whether and how one can theorize justice without any role for individual autonomy. Kant argues that the autonomy of each individual is what grounds their rights and dignity, and as Mills argues, we should not be too quick to do away with the idea of human rights.

While autonomy is the central idea of Kant's moral philosophy, his political philosophy is based on the idea of freedom, and the right to freedom we each have, as autonomous beings. He sees the justification of the state as grounded on securing the conditions of equal freedom for each. A crucial part of his account is the distinction between justice, on the one hand, and ethics or personal morality, on the other: his account of justice is not about individual virtue but rather structural relations between humans. While the libertarian and to some extent the liberal tradition may have developed the idea of a political philosophy based on freedom in terms of the idea of securing negative freedom (freedom from interference), it is not at all obvious that this is Kant's conception, or the best way to develop what follows from his starting point. Kant takes securing the conditions of equal freedom to have substantial material and institutional implications. If I have read Black Radical Kantianism correctly, Mills seems to think that because Kant's account of justice is not about distributive justice it will not be useful for thinking about addressing inequality or the rectification of historical injustice. While I think it is right that Kant's account is not primarily about distributive justice, this leaves open the question of what follows materially from Kant's starting point of freedom with respect to inequality and historical injustice. While Kant's account will not take distributive material *equality* to be the business of the state, it may well give grounds for thinking that there are forms of inequality that undermine equal freedom, as well as showing that the state is entitled and obliged to act against these. What follows materially from the requirement for equal freedom seems to me an important point for further work.

Mills argues that idealizing theory is prone to make us mistakenly think our societies are more just than they are, and that we are in, roughly, the conditions of liberal justice. Not only does Kant not think that we are roughly in conditions of justice, he thinks we will never be in conditions of justice (though we can make our circumstances more just). It may be that much of the interpretive tradition has mistaken or not fully thought through what follows from Kant's account incorrectly by assuming that he would take us to be roughly in conditions of justice.<sup>17</sup> This seems to me particularly pertinent with respect to property. Kant's central text on political philosophy, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, starts with private property. But what follows from this? Bernasconi takes the starting point of property to be unavoidably a defence of status quo

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<sup>16</sup> Losurdo (2014) points out that it is quite problematic to see supporters of oppression such as slavery and racial domination as in any serious way committed to individualism.

<sup>17</sup> And it may be that Kant himself makes this mistake.

property rights, but it seems to me highly questionable whether this is correct in terms of what actually follows from the theory. Kant's justification of property is partly its being necessary for agency and his concern about property is how individuals could be entitled unilaterally to place others under obligations and exclude others from the use of objects. Even if in fact, in the tradition, this has been used to defend status quo property rights and rationalize excluding the poor, the position might, in contrast, actually give grounds for thinking that everyone needs access to property, and that this should be provided through redistributive taxation.<sup>18</sup> This is because the exclusion that is required to create the institution of property is inconsistent with the equal freedom of all, which is the ground of the whole account. The fact that Kant takes having property to be a part of citizenship is a thought that can be developed in a variety of directions. On the one hand it could be taken as intended to exclude many people (those who are not property holders at the time), but on the other it could be taken as giving a basis for showing that everyone should have some property, and that this is a requirement of freedom.

Two further points should be noted about Kant's account of property. One, the problems Kant is concerned with arise also for communal property. It is not only when individuals claim property but also when a community or a people does, that the question arises of whether and why they are entitled to exclude others. Thinking this through may be part of explaining the wrong of colonialism. Two, unlike Locke Kant does not think we can have an entirely pre-political account of property: conclusive property rights exist only in a just state. Prior to this all that is had is provisional right. It is far from obvious that we are in a civil condition or just state, as Kant understands it, as opposed to a minimally legitimate state in which we have political obligations to obey the law but which is not just, so it is not obvious that there are any currently any conclusive property rights. In Kant's account provisional right has normative implications: for one thing, it rules out colonial conquest (he says that this holds even where taking people's land is argued to have good consequences). Since provisional right has normative implications, the wrongful ignoring and overriding of provisional rights must have normative consequences; this is something Kant may not have thought through (after all, his political philosophy is a very late work, in which he sketches the a priori framework for thinking about these questions) but it must be thought through to work out his system. It seems to me that the normative implications of presumptive right for understanding how to respond to wrongful dispossession requires much more work, and what resources the account may have for responding to historical injustice seems to me an open question. Ripstein (2009) emphasizes Kant's arguing that with respect to property acquisition there cannot be an obligation on someone purchasing property to investigate the history of the property all the way down to original acquisition, because this would be unreasonably burdensome in a way that would undermine the possibility of property transfers. This might seem to limit the resources of the theory with respect to dealing with historical dispossession of land. But of course, there is clearly a large difference between thinking that it would be unreasonably burdensome to expect someone to trace the history of acquisition of some object they want to purchase to its unknown origins of acquisition, and thinking that there are no implications for purchasing property where there is *known* to be a history of unjust dispossession.

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<sup>18</sup> Allais (2014), Varden (2008), Ripstein (2009).

Mills makes a powerful case for the damage that can be done to our understanding of politics by focusing only on ideal concerns. But, whether or not this is true of Rawls, Kant's account is not just an ideal theory; it has significant ideal and non-ideal components. Kant's account is not based on assuming compliance and does not assume a hypothetical contract as grounding the legitimacy of the state – it could be that all actual states are started with violence. Kant's account is very strongly concerned with how we get to justice from the unjust conditions we are in – his worries about the rule of law are based on this. His account of the connection between the rule of law and justice also shows the distance between his account and one which starts from the idea of society as a co-operative venture for mutual advantage. It is because the rule of law is an indispensable part of justice that it plays such an important part in non-ideal conditions. In seriously non-ideal conditions such as social chaos, civil war or states of barbarism (such as Nazi Germany or apartheid South Africa), he thinks that we should aim to establish the rule of law, possibly using violence, if necessary. Once we have established the rule of law, we need to work within the state to make it more just. The a priori part of the theory plays an important role, because the formal, abstract account of equal freedom and the relation between this and the rule of law, as well as the formal account of a state with certain structures and of certain public institutions, is action guiding in giving us an account of what to aim at in making societies more just. At the same time, it provides constraints on what we can do and how we can go about making the state more just: we cannot do this, for example, through violence or through laws that don't respect the basic rights of some individuals or some groups.

We have seen that both Mills and Bernasconi object to distortions that can follow from abstracting from particular conditions. But the fact that Kant's account of equal freedom is not based on thinking about the particular situated capacities of humans in particular societies does not mean it has no implications for particular conditions; for example, it seems plausible that securing equal freedom will require enabling mobility and access for differently abled citizens, and interventions to address social conditions that undermine agency. Further, while central parts of Kant's account do not depend on the particular contingent features of social relations, there is an important respect in which his account does address a crucial feature of human existence that some ideal accounts ignore, that of existing in dependency relations. Kant's notion of status right is meant to protect the dependent parties in dependency relations (those, such as children, who do not have full autonomous agency), by making the way they can be treated constrained by the rule of law (family law), rather than simply subject to their parents' choices.<sup>19</sup> On Kant's account, even if parents' were perfectly virtuous, the equal freedom and rights of children would not be protected if children were systematically dependent on and in the power of this virtue, as opposed to having some protection from public law against what seems right to the parent. Appealing only to private virtue leaves the weaker partner in an unequal power relation in the stronger's power: a dependent person is not less in the power of the more powerful partner when the partner is virtuous and caring, just as a slave is not less subject to the slave-owner's power when the slave-owner is benevolent, and cares about the

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<sup>19</sup> See Varden 2012.

slave's welfare. Kant's solution is that we need public law to govern private dependency relations, to protect the dependent person from being entirely subject to the virtue of the powerful person. In other words, on Kant's account, defending the equal value of each human being (and defending their autonomy) requires a framework of law that the powerful in asymmetrical dependency relations, such as parents, are subject to, so that children, for example, are not simply in their parents' power. Among Mills' objections to ideal theory are that representing the family as ideal can perpetuate gender oppression; here we see that Kant's account does not depend on representing the family as ideal, and further, argues that even if family members were ideally virtuous family law would still be needed to protect those on the vulnerable side of dependency relations.

I have suggested that Kant's account of family law both pays attention to dependency relations and also may have progressive resources for theorizing these, but of course two of the categories of dependents he discusses are far more problematic than the case of children: women and servants. However, it seems to me that in these cases too, in addition to noticing his sexism, we should examine carefully what the account applies for the relationship between dependency and citizenship, whether political citizenship requires some level of independence, and what the obligations of the state to support and enable this are.

I have noted that both Mills and Bernasconi diagnose inappropriate universalizing and abstracting as part of what has gone wrong in the dominant Anglophone philosophical tradition (with Mills possibly being more optimistic about the possibility of appropriate universalizing and abstracting). This point, in my view, also applies to how we read the history of philosophy, and very much to reading Kant. Getting it wrong as to where the universalizing, or the abstracting, or the a priori moves are happening leads to worse readings of Kant. Readings of Kant have become immeasurably richer as more people have paid attention to the fact that his a priori account of the conditions of the possibility of various phenomena are not meant to be complete accounts of the phenomena in question, and that he has concerns with empirical, situated subjects. Far from seeing humans as rational atoms, Kant sees us as radically evil, disordered, self-deceived, often opaque to ourselves, and, in my view, he sees this as being a function precisely of features of our situatedness. Against Mills I don't think Kant's account of radical evil is only individualist; on the contrary, the corruption evil involves seems to centrally involve features of our social and political situatedness. It may be that our view of Kant as presenting isolated individualist atomic liberal agents transparent to themselves is a function of the very epistemic deficiencies of the interpretive tradition that Mills has talked about. Further, I have argued that Kant's account of human radical evil has materials to explain the kinds of cognitive deficiencies Mills is concerned with: delusional ideology.<sup>20</sup>

In other work, I have argued that a partial explanation of Kant's account of our radical evil can be given on the basis of putting together his account of the nature of practical reason with his account of the requirements of justice, and that this is a place where both his a priori framework and the relation between this and our particular situatedness, are important.<sup>21</sup> It is

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<sup>20</sup> Allais 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Allais 2018.

important that on Kant's account we do not (and he in fact thinks never will) live in conditions of justice. Kant holds that unless we have just political communities that respect the equal freedom of each we can find ourselves situated in relations of systematic domination which we cannot overcome through individual virtue.<sup>22</sup> In my view, Kant takes this to have implications for our agency, including the kinds of cognitive deficiencies that concern Mills. I argue that the a priori parts of Kant's thought about rational agency has a way of explaining why self-deception and delusional ideology is particularly likely in conditions of injustice. As I understand his account, making sense of yourself as an agent (someone who acts for reasons), involves (implicitly) seeing your actions as governed by the constraint of respecting the humanity of others: seeing yourself as having something like an ordered self whose fundamental principles make the pursuit of self-interest conditional on morality. We are rationally committed to seeing the humanity of others as a constraint on what counts as a reason for action, so seeing yourself as having this commitment is part of what it is to make sense of yourself as a rational agent. If you live in a world in which you are seriously implicated in current and historical injustice, it will be hard to take this on while continuing to see yourself as basically good (whole and ordered) in the way that (as I understand Kant's position) is part of seeing yourself as an agent. Kant in fact thinks that it is so hard that it is liable to make us despair and give up the attempt to be moral. An obviously tempting way of avoiding despair and holding onto a view of ourselves as (apparently) basically good and ordered is to fail to pay attention to ways in which we are implicated in the suffering of others. Since this will involve actions which are not compatible with the way the categorical imperative and the principle of right requires us to respect others, we will have a psychological need to form attitudes that dehumanize those who our ways of life fail to respect. Thus, putting Kant's a priori analysis of practical reason together with his account of the conditions required for external freedom and rightful relations explains a psychological pressure towards forming attitudes, patterns of interpretation and moral salience that dehumanize those who our ways of life fail to respect, so that we can reconcile our lives and our actions with seeing ourselves as committed to the moral law, which we need to do, to make sense of ourselves. This suggests that on a Kantian account of the a priori commitments of practical reason, living in conditions of injustice is liable to lead to moralized self-deception and delusional ideology, and in fact it predicts that our efforts at improvement are likely to be endlessly compromised and caught up in legitimizing narratives.

This final point may make it seem unlikely that we could extricate the enlightenment liberal tradition from the preconceptions of its proponents, and from those of the demographic groups who dominate Anglo-American philosophy programs. But in my view, this simply makes the

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<sup>22</sup> Further, Kant thinks that there is a sense in which the state acts in all of our names, so we cannot escape some complicity with the wrongful actions of states to which we belong. Part of the point of the account of justice is to take us out of the territory of individual virtue and might (in which each is entitled to do what seems right to it), and replace this with all of us being equally subject to an omnilateral will which represents all of us. It seems to follow from this that I am implicated in the structure of the omnilateral will of my state. If my country goes to war unjustly, there is a sense in which this is done in my name, even if I disagree with the government's actions. If the state is failing people with respect to access to housing or means, or is disproportionately arresting people of a particular racialized group, there is a sense in which this is done in my name. This would give another way of making the point that under injustice I am systematically implicated in wrong in ways which I cannot escape through individual virtue.

task more urgent, if more difficult, of rethinking whether we know what really follows from the central starting points of the tradition, and in particular, from Kant's a priori method, and his starting points of human autonomy and the requirements of equal freedom.

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