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Jimmy Yab, *Kant and the Politics of Racism: Towards Kant's Racialised Form of Cosmopolitan Right* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021 Pp. vii + 285 ISBN 978-3030691004 (hbk) €109.99

Jimmy Yab's *Kant and the Politics of Racism: Towards Kant's Racialised Form of Cosmopolitan Right* is the first monograph in English to address Kant's racism and cosmopolitanism. Yab's book appears at a critical moment in Kant studies. In the English-speaking world, philosophers such as Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (1995), Charles W. Mills (1997) and Robert Bernasconi (2001) have brought attention to Kant's comments on race. There is a growing body of research on Kant and race, yet the dominant narrative persists of Kant as a universalist whose racism can be set aside. Scholars who adopt this narrative tend to quarantine Kant's comments on race from his other work that is considered to be more central to his philosophy.

Yab seeks to challenge the dominant narrative by focusing on Kant's concept of race. Yab proclaims that '[t]he dominant narrative does not always reveal truth!' (p. vii). The 'truth' that Yab seeks is inspired by his educational experience. He writes that, when he was a student in Africa, he was taught the dominant narrative regarding Kant's universalism, an experience that did not include exposure to Kant's racism. Yab only learned of Kant's racism when he enrolled as a student in the United Kingdom and read, for the first time, Charles W. Mills' essay on Kant's *Untermenschen*. According to Mills' reading, Kant demonstrates that people of colour are 'subpersons' or *Untermenschen* because 'racism should be seen as a normative system in its own right that makes whiteness a prerequisite for full personhood and generally . . . limits nonwhites to "subperson" status' (Mills 2005: 170). Yab's awakening led him to consider what it would mean to revisit the dominant narrative in a way that, he argues, would lead to a 'more productive and adequate position based on textual shreds of evidence' (pp. vii–ix).

The book begins with an introduction titled 'Towards a Heterodox Reading of Kant's Theory of Race'. The heterodox reading is Yab's approach contrasted with what he argues is the conventional or orthodox reading. Yab argues that the orthodox reading upholds the universal egalitarian description of Kant while also suggesting that Kant's work can be divided into distinct core and peripheral areas. In this approach, core areas such as Kant's metaphysics and epistemology that are found in the three *Critiques* are kept separate from Kant's work in peripheral fields such as anthropology (p. 4). Yab's heterodox reading aims to accomplish two goals. The first is to correct the view that Kant's work can be divided into two different groups and instead take a more holistic view of Kant's philosophy. By doing so, scholars can see more clearly, among other things, how the idea of race functions with respect to

Kant's political thought (pp. 4–5). This view has the advantage of accounting for Kant's work as being systematic as well. The second goal of the heterodox reading is to incorporate Kant's work on race into his larger corpus, which Yab argues can be done best by focusing on Kant's notion of *Charakteristik*. *Charakteristik* is here understood as the 'fundamental concept of the theory' of race insofar as it raises concerns about the superiority of the character of the white race, while also justifying the inferiority of the black race (p. 5).

The rest of the book is divided into three parts with two chapters in each part. The first section, 'Problematising the "Orthodox Reading"', contains chapter 2, 'Kant on Race: The Current Debate', and chapter 3, 'Critique of the Orthodox Reading'. The goal of these chapters is to show that the orthodox reading fails to account for the 'moral problems' of Kant's racial theory that a focus on *Charakteristik* would uncover (p. 20). In these chapters, Yab describes the key scholars in the debate on Kant and race. The classic distinctions among these scholars and their arguments are left in place. That is, Bernasconi, Eze and Mills are characterized as philosophers who focus on Kant's racism. Philosophers such as Allen Wood, Robert Loudon, Thomas Hill Jr. and Bernard Boxill are characterized as defenders of Kant's universalism. In chapter 3, Yab turns to Kant's racial theory, beginning with a book that tends to be understudied when it comes to Kant and race, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764). Yab argues that this text, insofar as it introduces *Charakteristik*, is where Kant begins his comments on race. *Charakteristik* is also explicitly mentioned in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798). These two texts thus serve as book-ends for Yab regarding Kant's treatment of race, serving also as a testament to the fact that the notion *Charakteristik* is embedded in the concept of race. In Yab's estimation, Kant's essays on race, published in 1777, 1785 and 1788, which tend to attract the most scholarly attention, are mere outgrowths of *Observations*.

The second section, 'Reconstructing Kant's Theory of Race', contains chapter 4, 'Kant, Race, and Natural History', and chapter 5, 'Kant, Race, and Teleology'. In these chapters, Yab develops his account of Kant's *Charakteristik*. Race, Yab argues, is both a descriptive and normative idea that 'not only classifies human beings according to their physical characters but also puts them into competition according to the completeness of their moral character' (p. 81). In chapter 5, Yab continues discussing Kant's comments about race, arguing that Kant reformulated his race theory, as can be seen in his ideas of human history that exclude the participation of some people. Yab also argues that Kant had two 'missed opportunities' when it came to showing that he was no longer committed to his racist views. Instead of revising the narrative, Kant doubled down on these views, as can be seen in Kant's discussions with J. G. Herder, as well as with Georg Forster, a naturalist and traveller. In his review of Herder's book (AA, 8: 65), for instance, Kant shows a continued commitment to inequality when he states that more cultured nations are superior to those considered to be less cultured, such as Tahiti (p. 106).

The third section, 'Kant's Theory of Race and Cosmopolitanism', contains chapter 6, 'Kant, Race and *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*', and chapter 7, 'Kant's Non-Universal Cosmopolitanism'. In chapter 6, Yab expands on the discussion of *Charakteristik* which began with a discussion of *Observations*, which brings the notion full circle from where it started in *Observations*. Here, *Charakteristik* lies at the intersection of what man can make of himself and what nature can make of man (p. 141).

Chapter 7 is where Yab discusses in greater depth his claim that Kant's cosmopolitanism fails at being universally egalitarian. Yab argues that Kant's cosmopolitanism presents a 'de facto exclusive (i.e. non-universal) form of right' (p. 190). Racialized people are excluded from the cosmopolitan worldview because they are assumed to lack the dispositions (*Anlagen*) to develop characteristics, such as industry, which are needed for the progression of the species.

What makes this book unique is its focus on *Charakteristik*. For Yab, *Charakteristik* is a concept that allows for the 'study of the characteristics of the human species', and in particular, the connection between outer physical attributes such as race and inner moral attributes that capture a person's morality. When Kant talks about the 'inner' and 'outer' attributes of the human being, Yab interprets the relationship between these attributes as the foundation for *Charakteristik*. For example, skin colour ostensibly 'signals the difference in moral character' (p. 6). Therefore, 'race is the manifestation of the inner and outer character of the types that compose the human species' (p. 6). In this regard, Yab argues that *Charakteristik* solidifies the fact that race, in terms of skin colour, is the 'visible expression of the *Charakteristik*' of the human species' (p. 6).

I am not fully convinced that Yab's book provides a discussion of *Charakteristik* that is in fact systematic. It is unclear from Yab's book as to where in Kant's texts *Charakteristik* continues to be developed aside from *Observations* and *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. It is unclear that Kant actually uses the term *Charakteristik* in many of the locations where Yab is arguing that there is a connection between the concept and the particular area of Kant's work. I take the point that Yab is attempting to tell a story regarding *Charakteristik* that I think needs to be told in the context of Kant and race; that is, that there must be a link made between Kant's comments in 1764 and his remarks about national characters in the 1790s. To be sure, Kant was concerned about the development of the species and the conditions that would allow the species to become fully developed. While Yab's intuition to connect these ideas and their relationship to race is correct, a more systematic treatment of *Charakteristik* would show where Kant is conceptualizing the term in the text in addition to showing what implications *Charakteristik* has for the different areas of Kant's work.

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