

**'WHY PHILOSOPHY MATTERS TO AFRICAN HISTORY
(and why African history matters to the World)**

**By
Dapo Ladimeji
Editor "African Century Journal"**

"I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins."

Langston Hughes ²

'Why and by whose power were you sent?'

Tracy K Smith ³

Though this paper has been some 50 years in the making, it may represent aspects of a 'wild ride' to some. I can only say 'fasten your seat-belts'. These issues, the role of history and the place of Africa in it, have been a central theme in my life and of my earliest philosophy papers ⁴, and was a core theme in the courses I taught in those early days. I would have been a slightly unusual student as a Cambridge undergraduate as I was teaching a university course in African literature in London, supervising a final year Cambridge student and publishing in major journals.

Apart from encountering Cheikh Anta Diop's work⁵ and meeting the man himself in Senegal (he was not my first introduction to ancient Egypt as many other African scholars less celebrated had maintained that tradition), there were many scholars from all over the world from many different nationalities who would each secretly urge me on. I still remember a Cambridge classicist taking me aside and confidentially exploding the conventional origins of Plato's thought and pointing to Africa. Emboldened I spent a pleasant Cambridge afternoon espousing my nascent view of world history in general and intellectual history in particular to Malcolm Bowie⁶, my tutor. Having been publicly praised by a Nobel prize winner I was an

¹ Paper presented at 'International Conference in Memory of Emeritus Prof Ade-Ajayi' at University of Ibadan, 12 August 2019

² Langston Hughes (Hughes, 1926)

³ Tracy K Smith (Smith, 2018)

⁴ (Ladimeji, 1972)

⁵ (Diop, 1974)

⁶ (Bowie, 2018)

undergraduate with some credibility. People listened to me. I later learned that Malcom Bowie, who was quite taken by our discussion, mentioned it all to his close friend Martin Bernal ⁷ (the rest as they say ...)⁸.

At the same time I was aware of the challenge placed by Fanon. He wrote:

“ Let us be clearly understood. I am convinced that it would be of the greatest interest to be able to have contact with a Negro literature or architecture of the third century before Christ. I should be very happy to know that a correspondence had flourished between some Negro philosopher and Plato. But I can absolutely not see how this fact would change anything in the lives of the eight-year-old children who labor in the cane fields of Martinique or Guadeloupe.”⁹

This challenge neatly encapsulates *both* history and philosophy as interesting but useless in the circumstances. But the answering challenge to Fanon is: ‘without the correct philosophy and history what will you do the day after the liberation?’ Given the success of the liberation movements, that is where we are today. Fortunately, Fanon himself quotes Aime Cesaire: “I am talking of millions of men who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement.”¹⁰ Is this not a role for history and philosophy? Is it not history and philosophy that will uncover the lies and rectify the people’s culture and free the mind? ¹¹ If we give a more charitable interpretation to Fanon and say that what he meant was at *that* historical moment active struggle was the priority, it would then follow that after liberation curing the culture would become one of the most urgent priorities.

Daniel Ellsberg ¹² has recently written that the Western system generally works as layers upon layers of lies, so that if one is revealed another can stand in the way of truth. Unraveling a web of deceit and often misunderstanding (particularly concerning Africa) requires some patience and so I seek the forbearance of my readers for what may seem at first extraordinary detours.

But enough of prologue....

⁷ (Wikipedia, 2019)

⁸ (Cohen & Bernal, 1993)

⁹ (Fanon, 2008, p. 180)

¹⁰ (Cesaire, 1955, p. 6)

¹¹ One medical scientist, Dr Thomas Cowan, discussing how culture affects physical health wrote: “We live our lives based on the stories we tell ourselves. Cultures are defined by the stories we tell each other.” (Cowan, 2019a, p. 195)

¹² (Ellsberg, 2017)

What follows is a detailed explication and documentation of a complex argument. It will be easier to follow if the key steps are summarised in advance as specific points with the explanation, documentation and justification to follow in the text.

KEY STEPS:

- a. Prior to 1780's it was widely held by European scholars that philosophy started in Egypt and other nearby countries not in Greece.
- b. Kant developed a theory about races and historical destiny that arrived at the conclusion that not only is all history made by whites but it can only be made by whites
- c. Kant was brought up in the Roman law tradition and lecturing in law, he was steeped in that tradition
- d. It is then shown that his concept of personality draws on the Roman law definition which also shows a source for Kant's negative treatment of women
- e. Kant uses the technical steps of the concept of personality and capacity but applies it not to individuals but to 'species'/races. In this way his views are insulated against empirical refutation as he does not base his views on any particular ability or feature of the individuals of a race. In fact all members of a race could have superior features to white people but they would still be without 'historical personality' i.e. cannot make history. He also accepts that there are few empirical data points to support his views. Accordingly, if only whites have historical personality as a specie then regardless of any empirical discovery it is known that only whites, who are destined to rule the world and give to it the laws, can make history.
- f. Plato advised that there are differences between popular and esoteric knowledge and that in dealing with the ordinary person one has to use subtle hidden means as they will never accept the truth but will turn on those who tell them. It is suggested that Kant is using this model to reveal to some conceal to others what he really means. He drops strong hints that there are 'clues' in the text to what he really means.
- g. Kant held that the original humans were white and that what appear as 'races' are degenerate offshoots of the original humans. In this way he can talk of the human species and mean just 'white' people, the only true humans.
- h. Kant by describing the non-whites as degenerates from a common genus can maintain that he is a monogenesisist.
- i. Kant then develops a theory of world history which involves all races excepting white people being wiped out as part of the fulfilment of nature's divine plan. Kant approved of the wiping out of native Americans which he believed had been successfully achieved. It is argued that once the sacred is taken out of history which begins to happen once history and astrology part company there is a tendency for history to become merely a concealed tool of propaganda and social control. In Kant's hands history or its fabrication becomes a 'very useful' tool for social control.

- j. Kant's view of the future destiny of the human species, that non whites have had no role to play and have no future role to play required a rewriting of history. As Strickland has put it:
- “Kant's disciples sought to rewrite the history of philosophy as the gradual unfolding of Kant's own critical philosophy, treating that as the goal towards which all previous philosophy had been headed all along ..The upshot of all this is that, from the late 18th century until well into the 20th century, philosophy's past has quite literally been whitewashed”¹³
- k. African historians have misunderstood the attack upon them and their societies as merely about historical documentation but in fact regardless of such all non-whites including Asians cannot make history. According to this view, their events are without historical meaning. It is this root belief that African historians together with philosophers need to address and discredit.

1. Distinction between popular and esoteric.

It is difficult to understand historically the relation of history to philosophy without an introduction to the distinction between esoteric and popular. In ancient Egypt and later in Greece there was a view that true understanding was for a few and that certain forms of knowledge needed to be hidden from the populace. Such views can be found in almost all cultures. Let it be clear that the intention here is not to discuss esoteric knowledge or claim secret information, but to use that distinction to explicate certain historical views.

Plato had the fable of the cave¹⁴. According to this, the majority of people are like persons in a cave looking at the shadows of shapes shone by a flame behind them. However a select few would be allowed to step out of the cave and to turn around to see the light itself.

Plato writes that for those left in the cave:

“To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.”

But most importantly, if those who have been outside the cave returned to the world of normal people they would seem incompetent and strange and the risk of promoting what they have learned is that the unlearned might rise up and kill them. As Plato puts it:

“Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and

¹³ (Strickland, 2019)

¹⁴ (Plato, 1883 s.514)

that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if anyone tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.”¹⁵

According to Christian tradition: “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”¹⁶

In the Taoist tradition it is written:

“Lower people hear of the Tao
They laugh loudly at it
If they do not laugh, it would not be the Tao”¹⁷
Tao Te Ching

In all these cases it is advised that the enlightened behave with circumspection in dealing with the ordinary citizens. The Buddhists call it ‘skillful means’¹⁸.

2. Birth of History in Astrology

It is seldom investigated to what extent history was born out of astrology¹⁹ though some journalists have so commented: “astrologers, with their professional interest in timely events, were the first historians.”²⁰ In Chinese history, the evidence is extremely strong as Sima Qian, the Grand Historian, is known also as the Grand Astrologer, whereas his official appointment was as Grand Astrologer. The fundamental requirement of early astrology was to record with considerable exactitude the place, date and time of important events. These were then mapped to celestial events. Astrologers would be the natural custodians and creators of such records as they needed them and were the model for later archivists. Sima Qian’s father gave him the duty to complete the history he had left unfinished.

“Sima Tan, his father, who was the official astrologer, gave as his dying wish I am dying. You must become the Grand Astrologer, and as the Grand Astrologer do not forget that which I have desired to set in order and write [...] The feudal lords have joined together, but

¹⁵ (Plato, 1883, s.514)

¹⁶ (*New International Version (NIV) - Version Information - BibleGateway.Com*, n.d. Matthew 7:6)

¹⁷ (Tzu, 2006 ch.41)

¹⁸ (P. Nelson, n.d.)

¹⁹ Any serious student of the history and philosophy of science has to come to terms with the incredible melange of alchemy, sorcery, mysticism that is involved in the development of modern science. Applying today’s prejudices to understanding the past simply leads to bad scholarship about the past and an inability to see the present where many contemporary scientists have mystical beliefs about the nature of reality which they tend to keep to themselves.

²⁰ (Walters, 2012, p. 26)

their scribal records have been scattered and discontinued. Now the Han has risen and all the world is united under one rule, yet as Grand Astrologer I have not set in order and recorded the glorious sovereigns, worthy rulers, loyal ministers, and gentlemen who died for righteousness. I am fearful that the historical writings of the world will be discarded. You must bear this in mind.’²¹

In ancient China the matter of what can be called ‘point prediction’ was not exclusively focussed on astrology as the primary source for point predictions were I Ching oracles. Astrology was more interpretative than predictive for Sima Qian. For the Chinese astrologers there was no idea that the planets caused any specific action or event but that there were ‘correspondences’ between terrestrial and astral/ astronomical events.

One scholar has written:

“The ancient Chinese were acute observers of celestial phenomena. Such observation was not the result of disinterested stargazing. Original records of regular astronomical observation ranging from the mundane (sunrise and sunset, solstices, individual stars and planets) to the exceptional (lunar and solar eclipses, sunspots, supernovae, etc.) appear as early as writing itself in the Shang oracle bone inscriptions beginning in the late thirteenth century BCE.”²²

He then adds:

‘In the Former Han dynasty (206 BCE–8 CE) it was the duty of the Prefect Grand Scribe-Astrologer Taishi gong to know the historical precedents, to follow the movements of the heavenly bodies and to advise the emperor on the implications of developments, especially unanticipated changes or anomalies. Sima Qian’s Treatise on the Celestial Offices provides a comprehensive survey of the cosmological and astronomical knowledge in the keeping of his office, as well as its practical application. This included plotting the locations, movements and changes affecting the stars and planets and interpreting their significance based on the, by then, well-established system of astral-terrestrial correspondences.

...

Astrological portents typically had implications for the ruler, high dignitaries and major affairs of state. Because of their extreme rarity, multiple planetary conjunctions – especially dense groupings involving all five naked-eye planets (MERCURY, VENUS, MARS, JUPITER, SATURN) ranked as the most portentous of all celestial phenomena and, as such, had dynastic implications. This pre-eminence was based on the historical association of planetary massings with epochal dynastic transitions, culminating in the most recent such alignment, in 205 BCE.⁷

²¹ (Qian, 1959 s 130.3295)

²² (Pankenier, 2013, p. 166)

This sign in the heavens was officially recognized and later memorialized in the Grand Scribe's Records as the astral omen signalling the imminent rise of the Han dynasty: 'When Han arose, the FIVE PLANETS gathered in DONGJING [EASTERN WELL; lodge #22, roughly Gemini]'.⁸ The later account in the History of the Former Han is even more explicit: 1st year of Emperor Gaozu of Han, 10th month, the five planets gathered in DONGJING [lodge #22]. Extrapolation based on the calendar [indicates] they followed [the lead of] JUPITER. This was the sign that August Emperor Gao received the Mandate.

Therefore, a retainer said to Zhang Er, 'DONGJING is the territory of Qin. When the King of Han [i.e., Liu Bang, soon to be Emperor Gao] entered Qin, the FIVE PLANETS, following JUPITER, gathered together, signifying [he] ought to gain the sub-celestial realm by means of Righteousness.'²³

Here it is clear that the astrological portents were less about point predictions and more about revealing the general approval or disapproval of heaven, and in terms of the legitimacy of a new regime these were matters of highest importance. Recall that actual celestial omens could not be conveniently faked as these planetary bodies were visible to the naked eye.

It is all too easy to overlook the persistent influence of early astrology in historical explanation that lives on in terms such as cycles, periods, waning and rising, eclipsing, etc. While contemporary professional meanings may have become quite technical, we can easily trace the terms to pre-technical periods.

But the important point is not merely that astrology provided the foundational discipline for history in terms of obtaining and recording fundamental data and seeking grand explanations and being alert to repeating patterns. What is crucial to appreciate is that astrology provided a certification that human history was sacred and filled with meaning. Life cannot be a meaningless series of random events if the heavenly bodies respond and interact with events on earth.

These ideas are not exclusively Chinese. According to Leibniz, we could read the history of the universe from the distant past to the future in a grain of sand if we only knew how because all things are interrelated.

"As a result, each body feels the effects of everything that happens in the universe, so that he who sees everything could read off from each body what is happening everywhere; and, indeed,

²³ (Pankenier, 2013, pp. 166–168)

because he could see in its present state what is distant both in space and in time, he could read also what has happened and what will happen.”²⁴

3. Decline in Western Astrology

Many western astrologers were deeply affected by the rise of natural sciences and in seeking to establish the validity and respectability of astrology sought to focus on its predictive ability. In order to do this they then sought to introduce a theory of celestial causation (as opposed to correspondences) and engage in predictive competitions with natural science. This led to astrology being soundly thrashed and largely discredited. A typical comment would be: “Scientific testing has found no evidence to support the premises or purported effects outlined in astrological traditions.”²⁵ An earlier hermetic view of ‘as above so below’ would have survived but would not have joined the natural science bandwagon. However the validity or otherwise of astrology is not the relevant issue here. What is important to recognise is that once the astrological foundation is removed from history the sacred is threatened and in need of alternative support. While there was an astrological basis it would be possible to argue that the truth was out there and one could not simply fabricate versions to suit those in power. In contrast to our world of so-called scientific history where the reduction of history to mere propaganda is without any source of resistance other than individual moral conduct rather than any institutional barrier.

This may sound rather hypothetical but as life would have it we have a case study. On the wedding of Diana and Prince Charles there was considerable interest in the astrological studies community. Penny Thornton²⁶ had given lectures on this marriage to the astrological studies community foretelling a disaster of monumental magnitude. Her public statements were considerably more circumspect²⁷. Word leaked to Buckingham Palace and the spin doctors went into overdrive. Their solution was to change Diana’s time of birth to give a chart that would generate a happy marriage. This bears some consideration²⁸. The PR response was to treat the astrological reports as mere inconvenient press that needed to be countered. In such a view there was no longer anything sacred about life or history. With enough ingenuity the facts could be

²⁴ (Leibniz, 1714, s.61)

²⁵ (*Astrology and Science*, n.d.)

²⁶ (Thornton, 2019)

²⁷ ‘having thoroughly appraised the charts of herself and Charles some four years earlier in my book, *Synastry: the astrology of relationships*, it was clear that there were some potentially great difficulties between them.’ (Thornton, 2018)

²⁸ ‘I still come across discussions of Diana’s chart in periodicals that are based on the wrong time.’ (Thornton, 2018)

rearranged to give the suitable result. Remember, it was open to them to say ‘we all know astrology is bunk’ and ignore it. That is the corruption: to take it seriously enough to act but not seriously enough to listen.

An Oxford historian once took me aside at an MBA alumni social and talking professional to professional told me that all history was made up and mostly by the victors.²⁹ History, once it is known to be openly manipulated cannot be used to learn from or to mine for wisdom. At the time of Machiavelli³⁰ trust in historical writing was crucial as Machiavelli relied on the sincerity of the ancient writers to obtain wisdom, as he admitted, without experience.

Appian wrote concerning ‘The Civil Wars’ that his motive was to pass down to future generations some true knowledge of men and political life:

“To show how these things came about I have written and compiled this narrative, which is well worth the study of those who wish to know the measureless ambition of men, their dreadful lust for power, their unwearied perseverance, and the countless forms of evil.”³¹ He wrote only for the good men, i.e. those not similarly obsessed with lust and wanton ambition, of future generations. Those so obsessed needed no further instruction. Both Appian and Tacitus³² derided those who wrote out of servility or hatred and partisanship, and recognised that personal safety recommended keeping a distance from too recent events.

Confucius studied recorded history intently for its lessons. In the Analects he said:

"I was not born knowing anything; I was fond of the ancient and sought it keenly:" (Confucius, 1998, p. 66 ch.7:19)

His students said of him:

“The subjects on which the Master most frequently discoursed were, - The Odes, The History, and the observances of the rites; - on all these he constantly dwelt”. (Confucius, 1995, p. 193)

²⁹ However during a visit to the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, in 2017 I witnessed an entry that described Armageddon - battle of Megiddo - as a draw. Armageddon is known throughout history (H. H. Nelson, 1913) and in the Bible as a by-word for military disaster. This reveals an extra-ordinary depth of anti-African sentiment in contemporary Israeli scholarship. Sometimes even losers get to rewrite history.

³⁰ As Machiavelli noted: “Whence it happens that by far the greater number of those who read History, take pleasure in following the variety of incidents which it presents, without a thought to imitate them; judging such imitation to be not only difficult but impossible; as though the heavens, the sun, the elements, and man himself were no longer the same as they formerly were as regards motion, order, and power.” (Machiavelli, 1883 preface to Book 1) Note the reference to celestial objects/events.

³¹ (Appian, 1899, s.6)

³² ‘the truthfulness of history was impaired in many ways; at first, through men's ignorance of public affairs, which were now wholly strange to them, then, through their passion for flattery, or, on the other hand, their hatred of their masters. And so between the enmity of the one and the servility of the other, neither had any regard for posterity.’ (Tacitus, 1942)

4. Enter Imanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Nature abhors a vacuum. Western history required a new grounding and towards the end of the 18th century where the Newtonian revolution was at its height there were several contenders but the most influential victor was Kant.

It is a standard trope that during the 18th century there was a rise of a new way of thinking and the emergence of modern science based on Newtonian mechanics that was different to all thinking before. But this new age of rationalism that emerges out of science is more polemic than accurate.³³ The so called new materialist ideas were a revival of some ancient Epicurean ideas. Lucretius had written:

‘Nothing exists per se except atoms and the void.’³⁴

David Konstan describes Epicureanism thus:

‘The philosophy of Epicurus (341–270 B.C.E.) was a complete and interdependent system, involving a view of the goal of human life (happiness, resulting from absence of physical pain and mental disturbance), an empiricist theory of knowledge (sensations, together with the perception of pleasure and pain, are infallible criteria), a description of nature based on atomistic materialism, and a naturalistic account of evolution, from the formation of the world to the emergence of human societies. Epicurus believed that, on the basis of a radical materialism which dispensed with transcendent entities such as the Platonic Ideas or Forms, he could disprove the possibility of the soul’s survival after death, and hence the prospect of punishment in the afterlife.’³⁵

If one were to declare there was nothing but atoms, God did not exist nor an after life and all there is to live for is pleasure one might be assumed to be a supporter of the latest biology and possibly a disciple of Richard Dawkins rather than a revivalist of ancient beliefs. Clearly what is often considered a new Enlightenment rationalism was a mere revival of ancient beliefs. But Kant’s polemic is to place his new theories on the side of scientific progress and so render his opponents in the camp of luddites or conservatives. Not all his opponents took the bait, particularly not Herder.³⁶

³³ According to Pew: ‘According to the poll, just over half of scientists (51%) believe in some form of deity or higher power; specifically, 33% of scientists say they believe in God, while 18% believe in a universal spirit or higher power’ (“Scientists and Belief,” 2009) and they mention that Francis Collins, a renowned geneticist, and devout evangelical was appointed by President Obama as director of the National Institutes of Health.

³⁴ (Lucretius, 1997)

³⁵ (Konstan, 2018)

³⁶ (Eigen & Larrimore, 2006)

There is considerable irony here for the so called Copernican revolution was driven in part by heretical sun worshippers and Isaac Newton spent more time experimenting with alchemy than on what would today be called 'natural sciences'³⁷. There is also a sub-text in reconfiguring Epicureanism as an emerging 'modern' worldview as that allows for the claim that these views originated in the Europe of the Enlightenment and that non-Europeans were not capable of discovering these principles. As Habermas described it: "The project of modernity formulated in the 18th century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art, according to their inner logic."³⁸

If many of these views date back to Epicureans who were part of the Greek speaking middle eastern world (Philodemus, a major Epicurean philosopher, came from present day Jordan) such eurocentric claims would be apparently worthless.³⁹

But more complicated is that these polemical uses in Kant's time are different to the subsequent polemics. Kant claimed to be introducing a Copernican revolution in philosophy and the world of intellectual endeavour. However today's contemporary polemic is about Kant as the modern philosopher who introduces universality into the world of thought and morals. His former appeal to modern astronomy and Newtonianism is deprecated for the higher moral ground.

Contemporary understanding of Kant's general approach can be summarised thus: "The fundamental idea of Kant's "critical philosophy" is human autonomy. He argues that the human understanding is the source of the general laws of nature that structure all our experience; and that human reason gives itself the moral law, which is our basis for belief in God, freedom, and immortality. Therefore, scientific knowledge, morality, and religious belief are mutually consistent and secure because they all rest on the same foundation of human autonomy, which is also the final end of nature according to the teleological worldview of reflecting judgment that Kant introduces to unify the theoretical and practical parts of his philosophical system."⁴⁰ When we come to Kant's views on Africa and other races this entire edifice rapidly crumbles.

³⁷ (Losure, 2017) and (Newman, 2019)

³⁸ (Habermas & Ben-Habib, 1981, p. 9)

³⁹ One of the drawbacks of Epicurean views is its apparent denial of mystery: everything is what it appears. Contrary to popular misconception the idea that the world is merely atoms and void is not helpful for research as it lacks affinity to the world of mystery, complexity, often breathtaking beauty and awesome novelty that nature presents to the research scientists. As one medical scientist writes: "I often tell people and patients, 'If you see the world from a materialistic point of view and you realize that the matter we're talking about is made of atoms, which are, themselves, 99% space, just empty, so how does that work? It's an illusion.' Once we see that we're essentially crystallized energy, then you start to wake up." (Cowan, 2019b)

⁴⁰ (Rohlf, 2018)

5. Kant and concept of 'persons'.

It is necessary to start by disabusing the reader who has a standard interpretation of Kant's universalism. For Kant universalism is a logical form. For something to be a law it must be capable of being expressed in the correct logical form which is something like 'for all X if Y then Z'. 'Law likeness' was a precondition for acceptability of principle. If we then say 'for all Human beings if Y then Z' we are in no way committed to equality or anti apartheid as all that is required is to redefine 'human' to exclude 2/3 of humanity and we can still make the statement 'for all Human beings if Y then Z' and exclude 2/3 of humanity. The most die-hard apartheid supporter would have no difficulty accommodating to Kant's universalism. To this extent modern scientific racism is a direct outcome of Kant's philosophy.

In order to address Kant's views on Africa we need to evaluate the concept of a person. Charles Mills who attempted to explicate the racist elements in Kant wrote thus:

"What are persons, and why does the concept become particularly important in the modern period? .. Persons" is the nonsexist way of referring to humans, instead of calling them "men." ⁴¹ However this is entirely incorrect and it is not possible to understand Kant's views of Africans without a correct understanding of 'person'. ⁴²

Roman law influenced all European countries and the Corpus Juris Civilis of Justinian was the basis of law in Germany under the Holy Roman Empire until 1806. One scholar described the thoroughness of its influence in Germany under the Holy Roman Empire thus:

"As a result of this long and extensive process the German states were now divided into two regions, one of common (Roman) law and the other of codes.But whatever its form the Reception of the Roman law was now practically complete. For in the first of the regions described above "the force of Roman private law as a subsidiary common law remained unaffected throughout ;" and in the second region the codes largely embodied the principles of the Roman law." ⁴³

Kant lectured on law and was entirely familiar with Roman law. For example, explicitly referring to the Roman law concept of persons he wrote:

'... such beings would be men without juridical personality, as slaves of bondsmen'. ⁴⁴

To begin our exploration of the Roman law concept of a person and to make clear that this is essentially different from 'human being' it may be useful to reflect that under most national jurisdictions *today* a corporate entity is a 'person'. It can own and sell property, it can enter into contracts, sue and be sued, and it can commit criminal acts. Technically, it can be born and die, and in some circumstances it can be resurrected.

Introducing the Roman law concept of a person Professor Long wrote:

"Among the Romans legal capacity was the exception, as among modern nations it is the rule. Even free persons enjoying the status of citizens were usually in some condition

⁴¹ (Mills, 2005, p. 169)

⁴² Further commentary on Kant's concept of 'person' can be found in (Ladimeji, 2019b)

⁴³ (Lobingier, 1916)

⁴⁴ (Kant, 2012, p. 114)

of subordination or dependence in respect to their family relations. The only person fully independent was the head of a family, or paterfamilias, above the age of twenty-five Years”.⁴⁵ There were three kinds of personal status

1. Freeman or slave
2. Citizen or alien
3. Family status (sui juris i.e. independent, or alieni juris i.e. subject to another’s authority)

Women were for the most part legal nonentities:

“the public law of Rome did not recognize woman at all.”⁴⁶

“Upon marriage, the wife, as we have intimated, was entirely freed from her father's control. But she merely exchanged one master for another. She passed into her husband's manus or, if he were in potestate, under the same control as he himself was

She was as incapable of performing a legal act as an inanimate object,...“⁴⁷

In early Roman times a husband could kill his wife for adultery.

Couch quotes an ancient fragment: “The husband is the judge of his wife. If she has committed a fault, he punishes her; if she has drunk wine, he condemns her; if she has been guilty of adultery, he kills her.”⁴⁸

Couch sums up the Roman law view of women:

“In the ancient Roman law, women were always children; this condition being called by the jurist the perpetual tutelage of woman. "A sex created to please and obey," to quote the words of Gibbon, " was never supposed to have attained the age of reason and experience.”⁴⁹

It is in this context that we should understand the status of Roman sons.

While a son could conduct himself independently in the sphere of public law i.e. in conduct of public office etc, that was not the case in the private sphere:

“On the other hand, in the domain of private law (jus privatum) the authority of the father continued undiminished during the whole period of the republic, and for many years of the empire. At the birth of a child, the father was the sole judge of its legitimacy. He could expose the new-born babe or condemn to death the full-grown son.

... the son was as incapable of possessing, and therefore of transmitting, title to any property, as the slave “⁵⁰

Roman law recognised that many of these distinctions were artificial as in man made , particularly laws as related to slavery, and did not reflect any thing in ‘nature’. This status of slavery could arise from capture in war and was in no way a reflection of the ability or non ability of the enslaved. Though artificial in origin these provisions were quite real in so far as they could lead to death.

⁴⁵ (Long, 1912, p. 1)

⁴⁶ (Couch, 1894, p. 42)

⁴⁷ (Couch, 1894, p. 45)

⁴⁸ (Couch, 1894, p. 46)

⁴⁹ (Couch, 1894, p. 48)

⁵⁰ (Couch, 1894, p. 41)

This Roman conception of personality was both complex, powerful and wide ranging. Its focus was on the individual. Kant introduced a major innovation in applying the concept to ‘races’. This allowed Kant to ascribe features and abilities, roles and status to the new category of ‘race’.

6. Kant’s racist providence and history

Consider the following quotes from Kant:

‘All races will be wiped out, except for the whites ...’⁵¹

‘... (native) Americans and negroes cannot govern themselves. Thus are good only as slaves.’⁵²

Larrimore summarises Kant’s views as: ‘Human history is the work only of members of the white race... The other races have made no contributions, evidently because they did not have it in them to do so.’Only whites have a ‘drive to activity’ ...only the white race should be making progress in perfection ...’⁵³

It is crucial to keep the above in mind as we explicate Kant vision in detail. It is also important to understand that for Kant whites are not really a separate ‘race’ as they are the original humans and the other races are degenerate off shoots. So when he speaks of the destiny of the species it does not include the degenerate races such as native Americans, Blacks or Asians. This manoeuvre allows Kant to technically claim to be a monogenesist which in terms of acceptability of his new doctrines was important.

In his ‘Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan purpose’ Kant sets out a series of propositions⁵⁴. In ‘Proposition the second’ he writes:

“In Man, as the sole rational creature upon earth, those tendencies which have the use of his reason for their object are destined to obtain their perfect development in the species only, and not in the individual.” This is an important statement because he is stating that the direction of history is towards ‘the specie’ not the individual. It is the specie not the individual who has destiny. So later when Kant says that only whites have a future destiny he is not hostage to any empirical statements about the nature and abilities of individuals of different races. It simply does not matter what your talents are. If you belong to the wrong ‘race’, you are destined for extinction.⁵⁵

In ‘Proposition the Third’ Kant says that nature puts challenges before man to force him to struggle and to achieve. Reports had come of inhabitants of South Seas whose environment was so fruitful they did not have to struggle to survive and in Kant’s view that was the cause of their backwardness.

⁵¹ (Larrimore, 1999, p. 114)

⁵² (Larrimore, 1999, p. 114)

⁵³ (Larrimore, 1999, p. 115)

⁵⁴ (Kant, 2017)

⁵⁵ Further discussion of Kant’s justification and promotion of genocide can be found in (Ladimeji, 2019a)

In 'Proposition the Fourth' Kant writes: 'The means which Nature employs to bring about the development of all tendencies she has laid in Man is the antagonism of these tendencies in the social state'. Here he means that social progress arises from negative aspects of human nature. It is conflict greed and power seeking that leads to firstly widespread conflict but then to a realisation that it would be better to establish rules and laws and live under a government. Equally between nations there is war of each against each which will continue until people realise that nations must themselves live under law and seek to bring about a regime of perpetual peace. In the absence of this conflict there would be no progress. Kant writes: "Men, as gentle as the sheep they fed, would communicate to their existence no higher value than belongs to mere animal life, and would leave the vacuum of creation, which exists in reference to the final purpose of man's nature as a rational nature, unfilled.but Nature knows better what is good for Man as a species; and she ordains discord.'

This inevitably leads to 'Proposition the Fifth':

'The highest problem for the Human Species, to the solution of which it is irresistibly urged by natural impulses, is the establishment of a universal Civil Society founded on the empire of political justice.' For Kant all the gifts of civilisation are the fruits of human conflict.

'Proposition the Sixth' describes the problem of good government. There is a need for a master but any humans will abuse the power. The solution is the adoption of a perfect constitution that becomes everyone's master.

For this constitution to prevent wars between nations it must also constitute a commonwealth of nations (Proposition the Seventh). In fact we can see all human history as the revelation of a secret plan to bring about this perfect state, as Kant puts it in 'Proposition the Eighth': "The History of the Human Species as a whole may be regarded as the unravelling of a hidden Plan of Nature for accomplishing a perfect State of Civil Constitution for society in its internal relations (and, as the condition of that, by the last proposition, in its external relations also) as the sole state of society in which the tendencies of human nature can be all and fully developed."

Finally, Kant argues that even telling this story in the correct manner will help bring about the right result. We are back in 'the cave' and those who can see the light should understand that these stories will help others do what is necessary to bring about the fulfilment of human destiny (of white people).

'Proposition the Ninth: A philosophical attempt to compose a Universal History, in the sense of a Cosmopolitical History, upon a plan tending to unfold the purpose of Nature in a perfect Civil Union of the Human Species (instead of the present imperfect union), is to be regarded as possible, and as capable even of helping forward this very purpose of Nature.'

As Kant indicates 'this idea may possibly turn out very useful' and despite that 'we are too short-sighted to look through the secret mechanism of her (nature's) arrangements, this idea may serve as a clue ... I believe that a clue will be discovered not only for the unravelling of the intricate web of human affairs, and for the guidance of future statesmen in the art of political prophecy'. We are now fully in the world of Plato's 'cave' and in a world of hidden communication. Kant is asking: 'are you one of those enlightened ones who can read between the lines?' All these references to clues, suggestions and 'useful stories' that could help future statesmen should be taken seriously. This is coded speech which hopefully we have successfully decoded.

But this view of human history has implications for the writing or rewriting of history. Versions of world history of Kant's time were not compatible with the story in 'Cosmopolitan ..' so they would need to be rewritten. Kant has been teaching that only whites can be fully rational, only whites have contributed to history but the current history text books did not align with that and they would need to be changed to fit in with his 'very useful' story. This takes us to the next step.

7. Revising world history

It should be borne in mind that the battle field as chosen by Kantians is philosophy as this subject is held to be the highest form of rationality and intellectual endeavour. If a race was capable of full rationality it should be expressed in the existence of high levels of philosophical activity.

Park⁵⁶ has written about how the whole history of the role of Africa and Asia in philosophy was rewritten during this period. "The exclusion of Africa and Asia from histories of philosophy is relatively recent. It was no earlier than the 1780s that historians of philosophy began to deny that African and Asian people were philosophical ... historians of philosophy began to exclude people they deemed too primitive and incapable of philosophy"⁵⁷. Previously it was standard to locate the origin of philosophy in Egypt and the ancient orient.

By late nineteenth century it became dogma that philosophy started with the Greeks. "Reflecting the disciplinary opinion, the great majority of nineteenth- and twentieth-century histories of philosophy either completely pass over non-European thought or relegate it to the 'pre-history' of philosophy, in which case it still was not accorded the status of 'philosophy'".⁵⁸

Very few historians in 18th century thought philosophy originated with the Greeks.

8. Remedy - why African history matters to the world

Kant's treatment of non-white races can be seen as denying them 'historical personality' in much the same way that Roman law denied legal personality to sons, women and slaves. It did not matter what talents you may have (and many masters often employed their slaves to run their businesses) you would have no legal personality. Kant's statement that all history has been made by whites is stating that only whites have historical personality, the ability to move history forward, the ability to act with meaning. If we recall the earlier discussion of astrology and the sacred in history, it can be seen that Kant vacuums all meaning out of non-white history which is reduced to a series of largely meaningless random events, as Macbeth states:

'it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ (Park, 2013)

⁵⁷ (Park, 2013, Introduction)

⁵⁸ (Park, 2013, Introduction)

⁵⁹ (Shakespeare, 1951)

This lack of 'historical personality' did not mean that absolutely nothing ever happened in non-whites countries, but that the events had no meaning for 'history' as the unravelling of nature's hidden plan. It would be irrelevant how many tomes of historical documentation existed as these would be records of events that have no meaning. Chinese and Asian history became neutralised and even Marx invented an asiatic mode of production to keep them outside of history - a static form that never developed or changed and so was of no historical importance.

However recovering African history would be an important step in freeing all history from the vice like grip of Kantian presumptions, as African history is entirely incompatible with Kantian exegesis. Three episodes can be singled out here from an endless list.

1. The arrival of Christianity in Europe brought by African priests. The role of Coptic priests in bringing Christianity to Ireland and England and converting the English royal family to Christianity. An African monk, St Maurice, who brought Christianity to Switzerland and after whom St Moritz is named.
2. Haiti- the role that the Haitian revolution played in closing down Napoleon's plans to invade America via the secret purchase of Louisiana from Spain and his bid for world conquest by seizing the Americas. This assured the future freedom and independence of the United States.
3. Portugal - the Revolution in Portugal, the collapse of the 'ancien regime' and the emergence of democracy were all caused by the defeat of Portuguese colonial forces by the armed African liberation movements.

These episodes among many others, going to the heart of Europe's own self told history cannot be denied as world historical events. Once African history is recovered and the Western trope that only whites can make meaningful history is demolished, then other national stories and events will be freed to be integrated into all our histories.

African historians misunderstood the claim that Africa has no history. Hugh Trevor-Roper did not mean that there were simply no documents but that even if there were massive documentation as in the case of China these events had no meaning:

Africa is "no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit". Trevor-Roper said "there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness", its past "the unedifying gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe."⁶⁰ (*Hugh Trevor-Roper - Wikipedia*, n.d.) This statement and similar views can be clearly seen to be following Kant's trope that only whites can make history and would apply equally to China or India.

It is the trope and sub-text that African history has no meaning or relevance to Europeans that must be shown to be palpably false.

Once African history is accorded its proper place then the histories of other cultures can more readily find their place in our collective histories. In much the same way that once African Americans won the right to describe themselves as African Americans without denying their American citizenship, other Americans could celebrate their non-wasp ethnicities. Part of the world's international stratification is held in place by the threat of being treated like Africans.

⁶⁰ (*Hugh Trevor-Roper - Wikipedia*, n.d.)

Other cultures are told by Westerners - we may not treat you well but we treat you better than Africans with a barely concealed threat. Once this cultural stratification is broken other cultures will be freed.

9. Conclusions:

Sometimes when things look hopeless

And there seems to be no way

To turn things around

Out of this bleakness

A light appears

And you can see your way through⁶¹

Much of the work of recent Western scholars on Kant resemble nothing so much as extensive hermeneutic exegesis similar to Jewish rabbis or Christian theologians seeking to bludgeon, by one device or the other, a sacred text into saying what is believed to be required. The deep racism in Kant and its espousal that all history of significance is that made by whites is modified with an airbrush. This deferential treatment of Kant's work as if it were a holy text is quite shocking and intolerable.

⁶¹ Oyewole is an original member of 'Last Poets' (Oyewole, 2014)

Bibliography

Appian, of A. (1899). *The Civil Wars* (H. White, Trans.). Macmillan.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text.jsp?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0232>https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Martin_Bernal&oldid=890659570

Astrology and science. (n.d.). wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrology_and_science

Bowie, M. (2018). Malcolm Bowie. In *Wikipedia*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Malcolm_Bowie&oldid=833680655

Cesaire, A. (1955). *Discourse on colonialism* (Joan Pinkham, Trans.). Monthly Review Press.

Cohen, W., & Bernal, M. (1993). An Interview with Martin Bernal. *Social Text*, 35, 1–24.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/466441>

Confucius. (1998). *The Essential Confucius* (T. Cleary, Trans.). Castle Books.

Confucius, K. T. (1995). *The Analects* (W. E. Soothill, Trans.). Dover.

Couch, J. A. (1894). Woman in Early Roman Law. *Harvard Law Review*, 8(1), 39–50.

JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1322384>

Cowan, D. T. (2019a). *Cancer and the New Biology of Water*. Chelsea Green Publishing.

Cowan, D. T. (2019b, October). *New Therapy to Help Prevent Cancer*. Mercola.Com.

<http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2019/10/13/structured-water.aspx>

Diop, C. A. (1974). *The African Origin of Civilization* (M. Cook, Trans.). Lawrence Hill Books.

Eigen, S., & Larrimore, M. (2006). Introduction: The German Invention of Race. In *The German Invention of Race*. SUNY.

Ellsberg, D. (2017). *The Doomsday Machine*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Fanon, F. (2008). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Pluto Press.

Habermas, J., & Ben-Habib, S. (1981). Modernity versus Postmodernity. *New German Critique*, 22, 3. <https://doi.org/10.2307/487859>

Hugh Trevor-Roper—Wikipedia. (n.d.). Retrieved September 29, 2019, from

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugh_Trevor-Roper#Debates_on_African_history

Hughes, L. (1926). The Negro Speaks of Rivers. In *The Weary Blues* (revised ed 2015, p. 128). Knopf.

- Kant, I. (2012). Introduction to the metaphysics of morals. In W. Hastie (Trans.), *On the metaphysics of morals and ethics*. Start publishing.
- Kant, I. (2017). *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose—1784* (Delphi Classics). Delphi Publishing Ltd.
- Konstan, D. (2018). Epicurus. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/epicurus/>
- Ladimeji, O. A. (1972). Philosophy and the Third World. *Radical Philosophy, Winter*.
<https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/philosophy-and-the-third-world>
- Ladimeji, O. A. (2019a). Charles Mills and Kant -part 2. *African Century Journal*.
www.african-century.org
- Ladimeji, O. A. (2019b). Charles Mills on Kant's Untermenschen Part1. *African Century Journal*. www.african-century.org
- Larrimore, M. (1999). Sublime Waste: Kant on the Destiny of the 'Races.' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 29 Supplementary*, 99–125.
- Leibniz, G. (1714). *Monadology* (J. Bernett, Trans.).
- Lobingier, Charles Sumner. (1916). The reception of the Roman Law in Germany. *Michigan Law Review, 14, No.7*, 562–569.
- Long, J. (1912). *Notes on Roman Law*.
- Losure, M. (2017). *Isaac the Alchemist: secrets of Isaac Newton*. Candlewick Press.
- Lucretius, T. (1997). *Of the nature of things* (W. E. Leonard, Trans.). ProjectGutenberg.
<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/785/pg785.txt>
- Machiavelli, Niccolò. (1883). *Discourses* (Ninian Thomson, Trans.). Kegan Paul.
- Mills, C. W. (2005). Kant's Untermenschen. In *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy* (pp. 169-93). Cornell University Press.
- Nelson, H. H. (1913). *The Battle of Megiddo*. Chicago University Library.
- Nelson, P. (n.d.). *BuddhaNet Magazine Article: The Origins of 'Skillful Means' in Early Buddhism*. Buddhnet. Retrieved October 9, 2019, from
<https://www.buddhanet.net/skilful-means.htm>

New International Version (NIV)—Version Information—BibleGateway.com. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2019, from

<https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-International-Version-NIV-Bible/>

Newman, W. R. (2019). *The Chymistry of Isaac Newton* [Web archive].

<https://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/newton/project/personnel.do>

Oyewole, A. (2014). To Struggle. In *Branches of the Tree of Life*. 2Leaf Press.

Pankenier, D. W. (2013). Astrology for an Empire: *Culture and Cosmos*, 16(1 and 2).

Park, P. K. J. (2013). *Africa, Asia and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the formation of the philosophical canon 1780-1830*. SUNY.

Plato, A. (1883). *The Republic* (B. Jowett, Trans.). Clarendon Press.

Qian, S. (1959). *Shiji*. Zonghua.

Rohlf, M. (2018). Immanuel Kant. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/kant/>

Scientists and belief. (2009, November). [Www.pewforum.org]. *Pew Forum*.

<https://www.pewforum.org/2009/11/05/scientists-and-belief/>

Shakespeare, W. (1951). *Macbeth: SCENE V. Dunsinane. Within the castle*. (Arden). A C Black. <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/macbeth/macbeth.5.5.html>

Smith, T. K. (2018). The United States Welcomes You. In *Wade in the Water* (p. 96). Penguin.

Strickland, L. (2019, January 8). *How Western Philosophy Became Racist*. IAI TV - Changing How the World Thinks.

<https://iai.tv/articles/the-racism-of-the-western-philosophy-canon-auid-1200>

Tacitus, C. (1942). The History, Chapter 1. In A. J. Church & W. J. Brodribb (Eds.), *Complete Works of Tacitus*. Random House.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0080>

Thornton, P. (2018, August 22). *Princess Diana*. Astrolutely.

<https://www.astrolutely.com/princess-diana/>

Thornton, P. (2019). *About Penny Thornton*. Astrolutely. <https://www.astrolutely.com/about/>

Tzu, L. (2006). *Tao Te Ching.pdf* (derek Lin, Trans.). Skylight Paths Publishing.

<https://taoism.net/tao/tao-te-ching-online-translation/>

Walters, D. A. (2012). *My China series*.

<https://www.scribd.com/document/98441585/My-China-Series-by-David-Arthur-Walters>

Wikipedia. (2019). Martin Bernal. In *Wikipedia*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Martin_Bernal&oldid=890659570