Kant's Legacy: Exploring Borders, Races, and Gender in His Philosophy

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Abstract: Immanuel Kant's philosophy, celebrated for its universalist ethics, harbors a shocking paradox: his groundbreaking ideas on autonomy and cosmopolitanism coexist with deeply Eurocentric, racist, and patriarchal views. This tension raises urgent questions about the applicability of Kantian principles in contemporary debates on borders, race, and gender. This study critically examines Kant's legacy, interrogating how his moral and political frameworks, while foundational, reinforce hierarchies that marginalize non-Europeans, women, and migrants. The research objectives are threefold: (1) to analyze Kant's contradictions between universalism and exclusionary practices, (2) to assess the implications of his racial and gendered hierarchies for modern social justice movements, and (3) to explore pathways for reclaiming Kantian ethics inclusively. Using a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed works (1990–2024), the study synthesizes critiques from critical race theory, feminist philosophy, and postcolonial studies. Key findings reveal that Kant's racial theories justified colonial oppression, his gender binaries perpetuated patriarchal norms, and his cosmopolitanism neglected border violence. However, his emphasis on human dignity offers a redeemable framework for rethinking global justice. The study contributes by bridging Kantian scholarship with intersectional critiques, proposing a revised ethics that confronts historical biases while retaining universalist aspirations. By exposing these contradictions, the paper urges philosophers to reckon with Kant's legacy—not to discard it, but to transform it into a tool for equity.

Keywords: Kantian ethics, Eurocentrism, racial hierarchies, feminist critique, cosmopolitanism

1.   Introduction

Immanuel Kant, an 18th-century philosopher, is a significant figure in Western philosophy, particularly in ethics, epistemology, and aesthetics(Hirsch, 2023; Wood, 2023). His work has influenced various disciplines, including political theory, sociology, and cultural studies. However, as contemporary scholars scrutinise his ideas, it is crucial to examine how Kant's philosophy intersects with issues surrounding borders, races, and gender(Valdez, 2022a; Wilson, 2022a). Kant is often credited with developing the concept of cosmopolitanism, which posits that all human beings belong to a single community grounded in universal moral laws(Cavallar, 2012). However, this idealistic view raises questions about state sovereignty and the treatment of migrants. Kant's theoretical framework suggests universal citizenship founded on moral imperatives, but it does not fully address the complexities of how borders function practically(Van Hooft, 2014; Wyrębska-Đermanović, 2022). Today, borders are often sites of contention, exclusion, and violence, and Kant's

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cosmopolitanism fails to account for the lived experiences of marginalised individuals, especially in contexts of migration and refugee crises(Christian Hein, 2020a). A re-evaluation of Kant's cosmopolitanism is essential in understanding its implications for contemporary migration and national identity debates. Kant's writings also reveal a troubling relationship with race, particularly in his views on human diversity(Kant, 2007). Although Kant espoused the notion of universal reason and moral law, his work includes passages that delineate racial hierarchies, suggesting that certain races are inherently superior to others.

The aspect of Kant's philosophy has prompted significant critique from scholars who argue that his framework inadvertently legitimises racial discrimination(Fleischacker, 2023). In addition to race and borders, Kant's philosophy has significant implications for the discourse on gender. His ethical framework emphasises autonomy and rationality, yet he largely excludes women from this domain, relegating them to the private sphere(Humbyrd, 2019). Exploring Borders in Western Philosophy critically explores Immanuel Kant's legacy, particularly his contributions to ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics(Marchevsky, 2022). Kant's moral philosophy, particularly his notion of the categorical imperative, has been foundational in ethical theory, leading to significant debates about the universality of moral principles. However, applying these principles to real-world contexts often reveals tensions concerning identity and intersectionality. In an era marked by globalisation and increasing migration, the concept of borders, both physical and ideological, has taken on new significance. By framing these discussions within Kantian ethics, one can argue for the inherent dignity of all individuals, transcending arbitrary national borders and promoting a more inclusive understanding of human rights.

Kant's legacy has its controversies, particularly regarding his views on race. Kant's writings contain problematic assertions about racial hierarchies, which have been criticised for perpetuating Eurocentric perspectives(Kleingeld, 2007a); however, these critiques open pathways for reinterpreting his philosophy in a contemporary context. Understanding Kant's position on race is crucial for addressing questions of justice and equity in our global society. Similarly, Kant's philosophy has significant implications for discussions about gender. His ideas on autonomy and rationality have often been interpreted as exclusionary, particularly towards women. Feminist philosophers have critiqued Kant's framework for failing to account for the lived experiences of women and other marginalised groups(Schott, 1997a). However, these critiques also provide an opportunity to reconsider and reinterpret Kantian ethics more inclusively. By critically engaging with his philosophy concerning race, gender, and borders, scholars can uncover valuable insights and challenge outdated notions of universality.

This study aims to systematically examine the tensions between Kant's universalist ethics and his exclusionary treatments of borders, race, and gender through three primary objectives. First, it analyzes how Kant's cosmopolitan ideals in Perpetual Peace conflict with contemporary realities of border enforcement and migration crises(Van Hooft, 2014). Second, it investigates the paradox between Kant's moral universalism and his racial hierarchies, particularly their role in legitimizing colonial ideologies(Bernasconi, 2023a; Kleingeld, 2007b). Third, it evaluates feminist reinterpretations of Kantian autonomy that seek to expand moral agency beyond its original gendered limitations(Korsgaard, 1996; Okin, 2003). Methodologically, this research engages in close textual analysis of Kant's works alongside critical race theory(Mills, 2017), feminist philosophy(Schott, 1997b), and postcolonial studies to develop a nuanced understanding of Kant's

complex legacy. Rather than simply rejecting Kantian philosophy, this approach identifies resources within his system that might be productively reconstructed for more inclusive ethical frameworks in contemporary contexts.

This research holds substantial importance for multiple academic and practical domains. Philosophically, it contributes to ongoing debates about reconciling Enlightenment universalism with recognition of difference and historical injustice(Basevich, 2020). For political theory, it offers critical perspectives on cosmopolitanism's limitations in addressing contemporary migration challenges and border violence(Sager, 2023). The study's engagement with Kant's racial theories provides crucial historical context for understanding the philosophical underpinnings of modern racism and coloniality(Bernasconi, 2023b). Its feminist analyses illuminate how gendered conceptions of rationality continue to influence contemporary discourses about moral agency and public participation(Varden, 2017). Beyond academia, this research informs social justice movements by demonstrating how canonical philosophical traditions have both enabled and constrained emancipatory projects. As institutions worldwide grapple with questions of decolonization and inclusion, critically re-examining Kant's legacy provides valuable insights for creating more equitable intellectual and social frameworks. Ultimately, this study underscores the necessity of engaging with historical thinkers like Kant both appreciatively and critically, acknowledging their transformative contributions while rigorously addressing their limitations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Exploring the Borders of Kant's Philosophy

Kant's philosophy laid the groundwork for modern ideas of universalism and moral law, but also reflects his time's limitations and contradictions, particularly concerning borders, races, and gender. His ideas were constrained by the socio-political contexts of the 18th century, revealing inherent biases that persist in contemporary discussions(Kleingeld, 2011). The concept of the categorical imperative, which posits that moral actions must be universally applicable, is at the heart of Kant's philosophy. This principle advocates for a rational basis for ethics, suggesting that moral laws should be valid for all rational beings. Kant's commitment to reason as the arbiter of moral judgment positions him as a precursor to later Enlightenment thinkers who expanded on these ideas, advocating for equality among all people(Deligiorgi, 2012). However, his perspective on race, gender, and nationality highlights the limitations of his perspective, particularly when examining the constructs of race, gender, and nationality. In Kant's essay "On the Different Races of Man," Kant categorises human beings into distinct races, attributing different moral and intellectual capabilities to each(Louden, 2011). This classification undermines the universality he advocates and reinforces the hierarchies of race that have had lasting implications throughout history. Furthermore, Kant's treatment of women also reveals significant inadequacies, as his philosophy often relegates women to a secondary status in the moral community, suggesting that their roles are primarily domestic and dependent on male authority.

Rethinking Kant in contemporary contexts requires a critical examination of these limitations. The challenge lies in reconciling the universal moral law with the diverse realities of human experience, acknowledging that applying such laws cannot be detached from the sociocultural contexts in which individuals exist. Kant's political philosophy, particularly his concept of "perpetual

peace," provides a framework for understanding borders as social constructs that influence human interactions(Kleingeld, 2011). However, his ideas also invite a critical examination of the implications of these borders, as the notion of a nation-state can foster an exclusionary ethos that can lead to xenophobia and nationalism. Kant's emphasis on reason and universal law presents a paradox in the context of borders, as it does not fully account for the realities of immigration, refugee crises, and cultural integration. The challenge lies in reconciling Kant's vision of a universal moral community with the often divisive nature of national borders.

Kant's views on race have sparked considerable debate among scholars. In his anthropological writings, he posits a hierarchy of races, suggesting that some are inherently superior to others. This aspect of his thought has been heavily criticised for reinforcing racial stereotypes and justifying colonialism. However, a deeper analysis reveals that Kant's philosophy also contains elements that can be appropriated to challenge racial injustices(Kleingeld, 2011). Kant's treatment of gender is another area where his philosophy warrants critical examination. While he espouses ideals of autonomy and moral agency, his writings reflect a patriarchal worldview that marginalises women. Feminist philosophers have engaged with Kant's work to reframe notions of autonomy and moral agency, arguing that Kant's principles can be reformulated to encompass a more inclusive understanding of personhood that recognises the experiences and rights of women(Foblets et al., 2018). While his philosophy has been used to justify exclusion and inequality, it also provides a foundation for critique and re-examination.

Kant's philosophy emphasises the inherent dignity of individuals as rational agents, which is the foundation of discussions about identity, including race, gender, and socio-political constructs. His moral philosophy extends beyond individual ethics, raising critical questions about how societies construct identities and the moral responsibilities that arise from these constructions. In an era marked by globalisation and multiculturalism, the issues of borders and identities have become increasingly relevant. Kant's notion of universal moral law challenges the arbitrary nature of borders by arguing for a cosmopolitan perspective that recognises the inherent worth of all individuals, regardless of their nationality or ethnic background. This perspective invites a re-evaluation of how we understand citizenship, belonging, and the ethical obligations that transcend geographic boundaries. By engaging with Kant's philosophy, modern thinkers can critique systemic injustices and advocate for a more inclusive understanding of moral agency that recognises the diverse experiences of individuals across different identities.

Exploring Kant's legacy in moral philosophy is a critical exploration of his ideas surrounding universalism and moral law. Kant's moral philosophy, which emphasises the universality of moral principles, has left an indelible mark on contemporary thought. However, his works reveal significant limitations and contradictions, particularly in the realms of borders, races, and gender. Kant's moral philosophy is based on the categorical imperative, which posits an obligation to act only according to maxims that can be universally applied. This notion of universality suggests a moral law accessible to all rational beings, regardless of their particular circumstances. However, this idealised vision of universality becomes problematic when considering Kant's philosophical milieu, as his writings often exhibit a Eurocentric bias that excludes non-European peoples from the moral community he envisions(An & Craig, 2021). Kant's engagement with racial theory complicates his legacy, as he delineates hierarchies of races, positing a scientifically dubious ranking that places Europeans at the pinnacle of human development. This perspective perpetuates harmful stereotypes and undermines

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the principles of equality and moral law he champions in other areas of his philosophy. By critically examining Kant's views on race, contemporary philosophers can better understand the philosophical roots of racial prejudice and work towards a more inclusive moral framework.

2.2 Kant and the Modern Construction of Identity: Race, Gender, Borders

Exploring Borders is a comprehensive exploration of the philosophical legacy of Immanuel Kant, a prominent figure in Western philosophy. Born in 1724 in Königsberg, Prussia, Kant lived during a period marked by intellectual, political, and social upheaval. The Age of Enlightenment, characterised by a burgeoning interest in reason, science, and individualism, shaped the philosophical landscape. Kant's seminal works, such as "Critique of Pure Reason" and "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals", laid the groundwork for modern philosophical thought by advocating for autonomy and the categorical imperative as a universal moral law. However, Kant's philosophy must also be contextualised within the socio-political landscape of his time, which was rife with tensions of colonialism, the slave trade, and emerging concepts of race. His writings reveal an implicit hierarchy of human beings that has sparked extensive debate among contemporary scholars.

Regarding gender, Kant's philosophy does not provide a comprehensive framework for understanding women's societal roles(Pape, 2023; WILSON, 2023). Though he advocated for the autonomy of individuals, his views on women were primarily shaped by the patriarchal norms of his time. This led to accusations of his exclusionary philosophy, prompting scholars to question how Kantian ethics can be reconciled with contemporary understandings of gender equality and inclusion. While he laid the intellectual foundations for modernity through his emphasis on reason, autonomy, and moral law, his ideas also reflect the biases and limitations of his time(Solano Vázquez, 2023). The Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, significantly shifted Western thought from the late 17th to the 18th century. Key Enlightenment ideals included reason, autonomy, and universalism, which shaped Western thought and laid the groundwork for philosophical debates on borders, races, and gender.

Reason was central to Enlightenment philosophy, as it believed humans possess the capacity for rational thought, enabling them to question traditional authority and dogma(Buckle, 2008). Kant's writings reflect a complex interplay between the ideal of universal reason and the historical realities of racial and cultural hierarchies, suggesting that reason was often appropriated to uphold existing social structures(Basevich, 2020). Autonomy was another defining characteristic of Enlightenment thought, emphasising the individual's capacity for self-governance and moral agency. Kant championed that individuals should act according to principles they can rationally endorse, encapsulated in his categorical imperative(Critchley, 2007). This notion was revolutionary, advocating for personal freedom and ethical responsibility. However, Kant's conception of autonomy also reveals limitations concerning gender and class. Women were frequently relegated to the domestic sphere, with their rational capacities often dismissed in favour of traditional gender roles.

Universalism, the belief that certain rights and moral principles apply to all human beings, has been a double-edged sword in Kant's philosophy. While it sought to establish a foundation for rights that transcended particular ethnic or cultural identities, it often operated within a Eurocentric context, marginalising non-European cultures and justifying colonial expansion under the guise of civilising missions(Apressyan, 2018; Klein, 2019). Immanuel Kant delineated the boundaries of

human knowledge, arguing that our understanding is shaped by sensory experience and innate categories of thought(Minasyan & Leshcheva, 2022; Schafer, 2022). This duality reflects the Enlightenment's commitment to reason as the primary means of acquiring knowledge, challenging the dominant reliance on tradition and authority. Kant's ethical framework, articulated in the "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," underscores the importance of autonomy and moral agency, leading to the formulation of the categorical imperative(Fasoro, 2019a). This principle prioritises individual moral responsibility and advocates for the equal treatment of all rational beings, laying the philosophical groundwork for concepts of human rights.

However, tensions and limitations are inherent in Kant's work, particularly regarding borders, races, and gender. His commitment to universal moral principles often contrasts with his views on race and gender, which reveal a more problematic dimension of his thought(METTINI, 2022). For example, Kant's essay "On the Different Races of Man" posited a hierarchy among races, suggesting that non-European peoples were inherently less developed than Europeans(Valdez, 2022b). Contemporary scholars are re-evaluating Kant's legacy, exploring how his ideas can be reconciled with current understandings of race, gender, and social justice. This re-examination is vital, as it allows for a nuanced engagement with Kant's ideas and enables a more inclusive philosophical discourse that resonates with contemporary perspectives.

Exploring Borders is a research study that critically analyses Immanuel Kant's philosophical contributions through the lens of race, gender, and borders(Rathe, 2022). The primary objective is to deconstruct the implications of Kantian ethics and metaphysics on marginalised groups and investigate how Kant's ideas can be reconciled with contemporary social justice and equality discussions. This includes thoroughly examining how Kant's categorisations of humanity may perpetuate or challenge existing racial and gender hierarchies. The research illuminates the complexities of Kant's philosophy by highlighting the often-overlooked dimensions of race and gender that inform his work. By doing so, it seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of his contributions to moral and political philosophy. Additionally, the research engages with contemporary debates in critical race theory and feminist philosophy to assess how Kant's ideas can be reinterpreted or revised in light of modern ethical considerations. The significance of this research lies in its potential to bridge the gap between classical philosophical discourse and contemporary social issues. By reassessing Kant's work through the prisms of race and gender, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how historical philosophical frameworks can be relevant and applicable in today's world. Furthermore, it raises critical questions about the universality of Kantian ethics, challenging the notion that his principles are inherently inclusive or equitable. The research will make several key contributions to knowledge within both philosophical and interdisciplinary contexts. It will challenge the traditional interpretation of Kant's moral philosophy by exposing its limitations in addressing race and gender, paving the way for a more inclusive understanding of ethical universality that accommodates diverse human experiences.

3. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with the main methods being a systematic literature review and thematic analysis to explore Immanuel Kant's philosophy on race, gender, and geopolitical boundaries. A structured methodology is applied to ensure the reliability and completeness of the findings. A targeted literature search was conducted in various academic

databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Project MUSE. The inclusion criteria used include publications from 2000 to 2024, with a special emphasis on the last decade; the types of sources reviewed include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, philosophical essays, and dissertations; and the relevance of topics that highlight Kant's views or legacies on race, gender, and boundaries. From a total of 85 initial sources identified, 52 were selected after selection based on these criteria. Each source was read in depth to understand its arguments and relevance to the research theme.

Thematic analysis was applied by utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage approach to synthesize the findings. The coding process was conducted manually using open coding techniques, focusing on frequently occurring concepts such as cosmopolitanism, moral universalism, eurocentrism, gender exclusion, and racial hierarchy. The codes were then grouped into main themes, namely: "Kant and Racial Taxonomy," "Gender and Moral Agency," and "Limits and Cosmopolitan Ethics." These themes were then re-examined to ensure internal coherence and cross-validated with secondary literature for academic alignment. This approach allowed for a more nuanced reading of the relevance of Kant's thought to contemporary ethical discourse. Emphasis was placed on integrating the findings into broader debates in feminist philosophy, critical race theory, and global ethics.

To increase methodological rigor, some sources were re-coded independently with a one-week interval to test for consistency. In addition, the results of the analysis were confirmed through triangulation with Kant's original texts and critical commentaries from various philosophical perspectives. This approach aimed to build a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Kant's legacy. The results of the analysis not only reflect Kant's position on issues of race, gender, and borders but also highlight the limitations and possibilities of reinterpreting his thought in the context of contemporary justice, inclusion, and moral ethics. In doing so, this study contributes to an interdisciplinary dialogue that reexamines the legacy of Western philosophy in the light of contemporary global challenges, especially in relation to the principles of equality and universal humanity.

4. Result

4.1 Kant and Cosmopolitanism: Between Global Ethics and Social Boundaries

Immanuel Kant's philosophical reflections on physical and metaphysical borders remain central to contemporary discourse in ethics, political theory, and global justice. In Critique of Pure Reason, Kant argues that space and time are not derived from empirical observation but are a priori forms of human sensibility(Raysmith, 2022; Rosefeldt, 2022). This insight disrupts the assumption that borders are static or naturally occurring. Instead, it suggests that geographical borders are constructed frameworks dependent on human perception and cognition, open to ethical and philosophical scrutiny. Kant further develops this theme in Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch, where he envisions a cosmopolitan order governed by a federation of free republics. This proposed federation would be based on mutual respect, shared moral laws, and the protection of human rights. The categorical imperative, which requires treating others as ends in themselves, is extended to the international realm, encouraging cooperation between states as moral agents. Kant's ideal of cosmopolitan law (ius cosmopoliticum) includes the right to hospitality, which allows foreigners to

present themselves without hostility and to expect moral treatment, although not necessarily full political inclusion(Atwell, 2012). Kant's political philosophy has inspired the formation of modern international institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), which reflect aspects of his vision. The UN Charter, for instance, is grounded in principles of peace, sovereign equality, and human rights—paralleling Kant's emphasis on collective moral responsibility. With its supranational governance model, open borders (via the Schengen Agreement), and commitment to human dignity, the EU arguably comes closer to Kant's vision of a moral federation. However, these institutions often fall short of his ideals in practice. Issues such as unequal state influence, selective humanitarian intervention, and restrictive immigration policies highlight the gap between Kantian aspirations and real-world geopolitics.

Despite the normative strength of Kant's cosmopolitanism, contemporary philosophers have raised substantial critiques, particularly concerning its applicability and inclusiveness. Martha Nussbaum and Seyla Benhabib argue that Kant's framework, while promoting universal moral obligations, inadequately addresses cultural difference, structural inequality, and the agency of marginalised groups. Benhabib (2004), in particular, critiques Kantian cosmopolitanism for failing to accommodate the complexities of identity, citizenship, and border regimes in the modern world. She argues for a model of "democratic iterations"—repetitive, dialogical processes in which universal principles are reinterpreted in specific socio-cultural contexts. This approach offers a way to balance global moral obligations with democratic legitimacy and cultural pluralism. Nussbaum advances a capabilities approach rooted in Kantian dignity but grounded in practical global justice. She stresses that Kant's abstract commitment to autonomy and rationality must be supplemented by attention to the material conditions that enable individuals to exercise those capacities. For example, a Kantian framework that fails to acknowledge economic exploitation or colonial legacies risks legitimising rather than challenging exclusionary systems (Sangiovanni, 2017). Both thinkers propose a more flexible, context-sensitive cosmopolitanism that remains morally grounded but is attentive to historical and political realities.

Furthermore, Kant's writings contain problematic racial and gender hierarchies that complicate the universality of his cosmopolitan vision. While advocating for human dignity and moral law, Kant simultaneously categorised non-European peoples and women as morally and intellectually inferior—positions that are incompatible with contemporary understandings of equality and inclusion. This contradiction weakens the claim that Kantian ethics can be universally applied without revision. Feminist philosophers have highlighted how gendered and racialised exclusions continue to shape contemporary border regimes, migration policies, and national belonging. For instance, border enforcement disproportionately affects women, children, and racial minorities, revealing structural inequalities that Kant's theory does not adequately anticipate. Kant's idea of cosmopolitan right is particularly significant in light of the current migration and refugee crises. According to Kant, individuals have a moral claim to seek refuge and to be treated with respect upon arrival, as long as they do not threaten the host society. This right to hospitality challenges state-centric notions of absolute sovereignty. However, as Benhabib notes, many liberal democracies selectively enforce human rights at their borders, granting legal protection based on nationality, race, or economic utility. The refugee crisis in Europe, where states often reject asylum seekers or externalise their borders to prevent entry, starkly contrasts with Kant's moral imperative to recognise shared humanity.

In the age of globalisation, issues such as climate change, pandemics, and economic inequality further underscore the need for ethical frameworks that transcend national borders. Kant's cosmopolitanism provides a foundational vision for such a framework, yet its practical limitations and historical blind spots demand critical revision. Incorporating insights from postcolonial theory, feminist ethics, and political realism, scholars are reimagining cosmopolitanism not as a fixed blueprint but as an evolving, inclusive project. Kant's reflections on borders offer a powerful moral critique of exclusion and a flawed legacy of Eurocentrism. His call for a federation of free states committed to peace and justice has inspired modern international organisations, yet falls short in addressing the socio-political dynamics of inclusion, identity, and historical injustice. Contemporary cosmopolitan theorists like Nussbaum and Benhabib help bridge this gap by advocating for a more contextually grounded, ethically robust cosmopolitanism that can guide our global responses to the complex challenges of our time.

4.2 Kant's Views on Race: Between Universal Ethics and Colonial Hierarchies

Immanuel Kant, a towering figure of the Enlightenment, occupies a deeply ambivalent position in the history of race and philosophy. While widely known for his emphasis on universal moral law, autonomy, and the dignity of rational beings, Kant's anthropological and historical writings reveal a racial ideology that contrasts sharply with his ethical universalism. His views on race, prominently articulated in "On the Different Races of Man" and Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, contributed to the formation of a hierarchical classification of humanity, in which white Europeans were positioned at the apex of moral and intellectual development(Baumeister, 2022; Hoffmann, 2016; Salgueiro, 2024). Kant's racial taxonomy reflected and reinforced the dominant intellectual currents of the 18th century. Influenced by the era's emerging racial sciences, especially the Linnaean classification system, Kant accepted that physical characteristics such as skin colour corresponded with inherent differences in rationality, creativity, and moral capacity(Valdez, 2022c). He divided humanity into racial categories—Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, and later others—asserting that these groups had distinct natural dispositions. Europeans, he argued, were uniquely capable of progress and self-cultivation, while non-European races were deemed passive, indolent, or lacking the capacity for civilisation(Baumeister, 2022).

Although these claims were couched in the language of Enlightenment empiricism, they were based on speculative reasoning and cultural bias, lacking empirical verification by today's scientific standards. The 18th-century scientific context lacked modern methodologies such as genetic analysis, cross-cultural sampling, or rigorous empirical control, and was instead shaped by colonial expansion, Eurocentric epistemologies, and theological assumptions. Kant's racial theories, though "scientific" by Enlightenment standards, are today widely recognised as pseudo-scientific and ethically problematic(Klepikova, 2022). These racial hierarchies were not incidental to Kant's thought but deeply entangled with his philosophical anthropology and moral theory. In Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, Kant describes non-Europeans, especially Africans and Indigenous peoples, as lacking the full rational and moral capacities required for autonomous ethical life. This hierarchical view undermines the central claim of his moral philosophy—that every rational being must be treated as an end in itself. Kant's categorical imperative, which forms the foundation of his ethical theory, presupposes the universality of moral law; yet his racial writings

implicitly exclude large portions of humanity from this moral community(Bayefsky, 2013; Hill, 2000).

This tension between universalism and exclusion raises critical philosophical questions. As Hoffmann (2016) notes, Kant's juxtaposition of rational moral law with racial determinism presents a "deep structural contradiction" within his work. The moral subject in Kantian ethics appears implicitly modelled on the European male, rendering his universalism partial and exclusionary. These contradictions have provoked extensive critique among contemporary scholars, who argue that Kant's legacy must be reassessed in light of its racial dimensions. Moreover, Kant's racial views had concrete political implications. His anthropological hierarchy provided ideological support for European colonialism, including the justification of slavery and the civilising mission. By portraying non-European peoples as inherently inferior and incapable of autonomous moral development, Kant's thought legitimised colonial domination. These ideas dovetail with Dutch colonialism in Indonesia and German colonial expansion in Africa, where colonised peoples were deemed culturally and morally deficient, thus requiring European governance and education. Although Kant did not explicitly theorise colonial policy, his racial philosophy helped naturalise colonialism's ideological foundations(Baumeister, 2022).

While some scholars note that Kant's later works showed signs of rethinking race, such revisions were limited and did not fundamentally challenge the Eurocentric assumptions underlying his earlier classifications. Even in his more mature writings, he described Europeans as culturally superior and more rational than other groups. This continuity undercuts efforts to separate Kant's ethical theory from his racial worldview fully. Nevertheless, Kant acknowledged that everyone should be treated with respect and dignity regardless of race. In some writings, he insisted that even those he considered "less developed" retained the status of moral agents(Bayefsky, 2013). However, this concession often rang hollow, as it was accompanied by claims that these groups lacked the intellectual faculties required for autonomy and reasoned moral action, effectively limiting their access to the moral equality Kant purported to affirm.

In conclusion, Kant's racial views must be understood within the broader context of 18th-century racial science and colonial ideology. While reflecting the limitations of his time, they also actively contributed to the development of racial hierarchies that underpinned modern imperialism and philosophical racism. His contributions to ethics and metaphysics cannot be divorced from this legacy. As such, any engagement with Kantian thought must involve critically re-evaluating his assumptions about race, acknowledging the philosophical power and the historical harm embedded in his work.

Critique of Kant's Racial Theories

Immanuel Kant, a prominent figure in modern philosophy, has been criticised for his racial theories, which have become increasingly contentious. These theories, which emerged during a period marked by colonial expansion and burgeoning racial science, posited that the "white race" was superior in terms of moral and intellectual capabilities. However, contemporary scholars argue that these theories are scientifically invalid and ethically problematic(Carbado & Roithmayr, 2014; Graves, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Mills, 2017). Kant's racial theories, particularly the concept of the "categorical imperative," suggest a universal moral law applicable to all rational beings. However,

they are undermined by his exclusion of certain racial groups from the moral community. This exclusion has informed racist ideologies well into the modern era. Contemporary philosophers, such as Charles Mills, argue that Kant's framework perpetuates systemic racism by embedding these prejudiced views within the fabric of Enlightenment thought. In light of these criticisms, some scholars advocate for reconstructing Kantian philosophy that acknowledges and rectifies these racial biases(Bernasconi, 2023a; Curry, 2011). Engaging critically with Kant's texts can extract valuable insights while rejecting the problematic aspects of his racial theories. This approach encourages a more inclusive understanding of human rights and dignity that transcends racial categorisations.

Immanuel Kant's philosophical contributions have been criticised for his racial theories, which have been criticised by scholars such as Emmanuel Ese and Robert Bernasconi. Ese argues that Kant's categorisations of races are not only scientifically unfounded but also philosophically problematic, as they undermine the universality he sought to establish in his moral philosophy(Todorov & Porter, 2020). Ese highlights how Kant's idealisation of certain cultures while denigrating others reinforced colonial narratives that justified the domination of non-European peoples. Robert Bernasconi further critiques Kant's racial theories by situating them within the broader context of Western philosophy's engagement with race(Alcoff et al., 2018). Bernasconi argues that Kant's thoughts on race must be understood as part of a larger tradition that often prioritises Eurocentric perspectives(Ali, 2013). Bernasconi emphasises that Kant's racial theories are deeply entwined with his philosophical system, as his notion of "autonomy" and "moral agency" is predicated on a specific conception of humanity that marginalises those who do not fit neatly into his racial schema.

4.3 Gender in Kant's Philosophy: Between Universal Ethics and Patriarchal Bias

Immanuel Kant's philosophical legacy reflects not only the Enlightenment's intellectual advancements but also its embedded gender biases. While Kant is widely praised for formulating a universal moral philosophy rooted in autonomy and rationality, his views on gender often reinforce patriarchal norms and exclude women from full moral agency. This tension has drawn significant attention from feminist scholars, who argue that Kant's ethical framework, although purporting universality, fails to accommodate women's moral experiences and capacities(Sticker, 2020). In Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant defines moral agency by exercising reason and autonomy, capacities that he implicitly reserves for men. In contrast, women are portrayed as guided more by feeling than reason, and thus as morally passive. This dichotomy is most explicitly articulated in Kant's Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime, where he writes: "A woman who has a head full of Greek... might as well even have a beard; for perhaps that would better express the mien of profundity(Kant, 2007). In the text, Kant further distinguishes between male and female dispositions: "The fair sex has just as much understanding as the male, but it is a beautiful understanding... A woman who busies herself with terminologies of logic... might as well grow a beard." Such statements reinforce a rigid division of intellectual and moral labour, positioning men as rational, autonomous agents and women as emotional, nurturing beings destined for domestic roles. This gendered epistemology directly influences Kant's ethical thought, where the ideal moral subject is implicitly male. As Varden (2017) notes, Kant's gendered prescriptions confine women to the private sphere, while reserving the public domain of politics, reason, and moral deliberation for men.

Kant also asserts that women's moral virtues should be modesty, obedience, and empathy, rather than the rigour of rational autonomy. This is evident in his argument that women's education should prepare them for roles as wives and mothers: "Laborious learning or painful pondering, even if a woman should greatly succeed in it, destroys the merits that are proper to her sex(Ismail, 2023)." These views severely restrict the moral and intellectual scope available to women and entrench systemic inequality. As Clabaugh (2010) notes, Kant's statements on education underscore a belief that women's capacities are biologically and socially bound to the domestic sphere. Feminist philosophers such as Susan Moller Okin, Nancy Fraser, and Judith Butler have critically critiqued Kant's framework. Okin (2017) argues that Kantian ethics, with its ideal of impartial rationality, marginalises moral life's relational and affective dimensions, often more accessible through traditionally feminised experiences. Butler challenges the essentialism in Kant's gender assumptions, arguing for a fluid and socially constructed understanding of identity that Kant's binary framework cannot accommodate. However, recent Kantian scholars have sought to reinterpret his ethics in ways that resist these exclusions. Philosopher Christine Korsgaard, for instance, defends the moral universality of Kant's theory, arguing that his emphasis on autonomy and moral law can be extended to all rational beings, regardless of gender. Korsgaard (1996) contends that Kant's concept of human dignity is not inherently gendered and that the shortcomings in his anthropology do not invalidate the normative power of his ethical theory: "Kant's ideal of the person as an autonomous being is one of the most powerful tools we have for thinking about moral equality"(Korsgaard, 1996). Similarly, Marcia Baron argues that the Kantian framework can support a robust conception of moral respect and agency for women. It is disentangled from Kant's historical prejudices and reinterpreted in a contemporary egalitarian context.

This tension—between Kant's universal moral claims and his gendered assumptions—has led scholars to distinguish between his normative ethics and his empirical anthropology. While the latter often reflects 18th-century biases, the former offers resources for moral inclusion and gender justice. For example, Kant's insistence that all persons possess intrinsic worth and should never be treated merely as means suggests that exclusionary practices, including gender discrimination, violate the very essence of moral law. Nevertheless, the philosophical contradictions remain significant. Kant's depiction of women as morally dependent on their relationships with men—as daughters, wives, or mothers—reflects a structural relegation of women to supportive roles within male-defined moral hierarchies(Friedman, 2000). In The Metaphysics of Morals, he explicitly asserts that men owe protection duties to women, who are presumed incapable of independent rational judgment. These claims underscore the patriarchal underpinnings of his social philosophy and raise enduring concerns about the inclusivity of Kantian ethics. In conclusion, Kant's philosophy on gender exhibits a complex legacy. On one hand, it reflects and reinforces the patriarchal structures of his time through a gendered division of moral and intellectual labour. His ethical principles—especially the ideas of autonomy, dignity, and universal moral law—have been reclaimed by contemporary philosophers seeking a more inclusive interpretation. The challenge lies in critically engaging Kant's work: rejecting its historical prejudices while recovering the emancipatory potential within its normative foundations.

Feminist Responses to Kant

Feminist philosophers have long scrutinised Kant's philosophical frameworks, mainly through feminist lenses, challenging the foundational premises of his work. These critiques often focus on Kant's conception of autonomy and moral agency, which is interpreted as inherently exclusionary. Susan Moller Okin argues that Kant's framework neglects the relational aspects of human existence and the importance of social contexts, particularly regarding women(Okin, 2003). Nancy Fraser criticises Kant's approach to justice, which is predicated on an ideal of universalism that often overlooks marginalised groups' specific needs and experiences(Lawson, 2008). Judith Butler challenges Kant's essentialism by advocating for a more nuanced understanding of subjectivity that incorporates gender as a socially constructed category rather than a fixed trait(Malo & Rist, 2020). Mary Wollstonecraft's early feminist writings can be seen as a reinterpretation of Kant's ideas, building upon his framework to argue for women's rational capabilities and rightful place in the public sphere(Reuter, 2018). Wollstonecraft argues against the notion that women are naturally inferior to men, arguing that their perceived inferiority is not an inherent trait but a result of their lack of education and societal constraints. She contends that Kant's views on reason and moral agency, which posit that rationality is the basis for moral law and autonomy, largely exclude women from this discourse.

Susan Bordo, in her influential book "Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body," further expands on the implications of Kant's philosophy for understanding gender and the body. Bordo examines how Western philosophical traditions, including Kant's, have historically privileged the mind over the body, leading to a dualistic framework that devalues femininity and corporeality. Bordo argues that Kant's emphasis on rationality and moral law fosters a view of human beings as disembodied thinkers, neglecting the lived experiences of individuals, particularly women(Alcoff, 2000). This disembodiment contributes to a culture that prioritises rationality while pathologising the female experience, which is often intertwined with the body.

4.4 Kantian Ethics and the Challenge of Global Justice

Immanuel Kant's philosophy remains central to modern ethical and political discourse, yet its continued relevance depends on how it is recontextualised in light of 21st-century challenges. Kant's commitment to universal moral principles, human dignity, and cosmopolitanism has been invoked in numerous global initiatives—from international human rights frameworks to ethical debates about borders and migration. At the same time, the limitations of his thought—especially his views on race and gender—require critical engagement to determine whether and how Kantian ethics can address today's complex struggles for social justice. Kant's notion of universalism, grounded in the idea that moral laws must apply equally to all rational beings, underpins contemporary human rights discourse. For instance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) echoes Kant's moral vision by asserting all human beings' inherent dignity and equal rights(Hughes, 2011). Similarly, Kant's Perpetual Peace offers a philosophical foundation for thinking about global cooperation, inspiring the principles behind institutions like the United Nations. However, applying these ideals in real-world geopolitics often falls short, especially in the face of nationalism, xenophobia, and unequal power relations. Kant's cosmopolitanism has particular relevance in an era of mass migration, refugee crises, and contested borders. His argument that individuals possess a right to hospitality suggests moral limits on the sovereignty of states and ethical obligations toward non-citizens. In

today's context, this vision could support arguments for more humane and inclusive immigration policies, challenging the rigidity of border regimes that criminalise asylum-seekers or exclude displaced peoples. However, Kant's cosmopolitanism, grounded in Enlightenment rationalism, lacks sufficient engagement with the lived realities of historically marginalised populations. As such, scholars like Seyla Benhabib and Martha Nussbaum have expanded Kantian ethics by integrating feminist and postcolonial perspectives that prioritise relationality, difference, and historical injustice.

Contemporary racial justice movements such as BlackLivesMatter expose the inadequacy of universal ethics that ignore systemic inequality. Kant's essay "On the Different Races of Man," which classifies human beings hierarchically based on race, has been rightly criticised for its Eurocentrism and complicity with colonial ideologies. While some defenders argue that these racial views are separable from Kant's moral theory, others insist that true moral universalism must confront, not obscure, the legacy of racism in philosophical thought. In this context, Kantian ethics must be revised or reconstructed to respond meaningfully to the racialised violence and exclusion that movements like BlackLivesMatter seek to address. Similarly, fourth-wave feminism, emphasising intersectionality, bodily autonomy, and digital activism, challenges the Kantian ideal of moral agents as abstract, disembodied rational beings. Kant's relegation of women to the domestic sphere and his scepticism about their intellectual autonomy (as noted in Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime) conflict with feminist visions of moral agency that are embodied, contextual, and interdependent. Nonetheless, thinkers like Christine Korsgaard have shown how Kantian ethics can be reconstructed to affirm women's autonomy and dignity, provided we read his moral theory against, rather than through, his anthropological prejudices. To ensure Kant's continued relevance, it is essential to situate his work in dialogue with diverse traditions. Future research could include comparative studies between Kant and non-Western philosophers, such as Confucius, whose relational ethics emphasise harmony, duty, and familial responsibility, or Frantz Fanon, who critiques the colonial legacies of Enlightenment humanism and calls for a decolonised conception of personhood. Such comparative frameworks can illuminate Kantian ethics' strengths and limitations in a global, pluralistic world.

Furthermore, scholars might explore how Kantian moral principles can be applied to emerging issues in technology and environmental ethics. For example, what does it mean to treat future generations as ends in themselves? How can Kantian autonomy inform debates about AI, data privacy, or climate justice? In conclusion, Kant's philosophy offers rigorous moral language for justice and equality, but its contemporary application must be critical, inclusive, and context-sensitive. Rather than treating Kant as a timeless authority, scholars and activists must reinterpret his principles through the lenses of race, gender, power, and historical injustice. This requires moving beyond a Eurocentric canon to envision a global ethics that is universal in theory and equitable in practice.

5. Discussion

Contemporary thought on various social issues—such as state boundaries, race, and gender—is heavily influenced by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. His concept of universalism, which emphasizes universally applicable moral laws, became the foundation of global ethics and human rights. This idea has inspired movements that defend the rights of refugees and marginalized communities, emphasizing the importance of shared humanity that transcends artificial boundaries.

Kant's writings on race offer a critical lens to the discourse of racial identity in the modern world(Lu-Adler, 2023). Although his ideas reflected the Eurocentric biases of his time, they sparked debate and reflection on the impact of colonial legacies and structural racism today. On the other hand, the concept of autonomy in Kant's ethics encourages the idea that human beings must act on universally applicable moral principles. However, Kant's treatment of gender issues has drawn criticism because it is considered non-inclusive(Wilson, 2022b). Feminist philosophers then tried to reinterpret Kantian ethics, proposing a more relational and interdependent autonomy. Kant's idea of cosmopolitanism is increasingly relevant in the context of today's globalization, emphasizing the importance of international cooperation and peace in the midst of global crises such as climate change and economic inequality.

The influence of Kant's thought shows the tension between the universal moral ideal he offered and the historical limitations of his own views. On the one hand, Kant's ethics have inspired important documents such as *the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), which emphasizes human dignity and equal rights for all(Fasoro, 2019b). On the other hand, however, his views on race and gender point to historical biases that need to be critically reviewed. Many modern thinkers, including feminists and postcolonial critics, have tried to bridge the gap between Kant's universal moral principles and complex social realities(Valentim et al., 2022). For example, the idea of autonomy is often reinterpreted as a concept that not only emphasizes individual freedom, but also considers social connectedness and collective responsibility. This reflection shows that although Kant became an important cornerstone of modern ethics, we still need to critique and adapt his legacy of thought to the current context, especially in the face of structural issues such as systemic racism and gender inequality. Thus, Kant remains a source of critical thought as well as an object of deconstruction in an effort to formulate a more inclusive contemporary ethics.

In contemporary interpretation, Kant's ethics cannot be understood only as abstract moral principles, but also as a philosophical foundation that demands a contextual reading. His views on *cosmopolitanism*, especially in his essay "Perpetual Peace", provide a philosophical basis for the principle of "hospitality" or hospitality between nations(Christian Hein, 2020b). In a world filled with migration and refugee flows, this principle encourages criticism of exclusive and discriminatory border policies. Kantianism also opens up space for the reinterpretation of the concept of global citizenship that does not depend on state borders(Klein, 2020). In addition, the category of autonomy in Kantianism is challenged by feminist philosophers who emphasize the importance of social relations in the formation of moral subjects. In the field of race, Kant's writings that distinguish the human race hierarchically became an important point of criticism. However, Kant's basic principle that every individual has intrinsic value remains relevant as an ethical framework in the fight for racial justice. This kind of interpretation shows how Kantianism can be used as a normative foothold as well as a starting point for improving and expanding the scope of universal ethics towards more comprehensive justice in the contemporary era.

When compared to their original context in the 18th century, Kant's ideas in the contemporary era have undergone a significant development of meaning. In Kant's time, the concepts of race and gender were often framed within the framework of modern Europe, which was colonial and patriarchal. But today, many thinkers use Kant's principles to challenge and dismantle these structures. For example, while Kant in his day viewed women in a subordinate manner, contemporary feminist philosophy uses the Kantian framework of autonomy and dignity to fight for

gender equality. In terms of borders, Kant did not initially radically detail his critique of the nation-state, but his cosmopolitanism has now been reinterpreted to support the principles of transnational justice. Compared to other approaches, such as utilitarianism or cultural relativism, Kantianism still offers a strong moral foothold because it prioritizes universal principles and moral obligations to all human beings. However, without criticism and renewal, Kantianism risks being caught up in the reproduction of old structures of domination. Thus, this comparison highlights the importance of a critical hermeneutic approach to classical texts in order to remain relevant in the face of today's ethical challenges.

In the future, the study of Kant needs to be expanded through an interdisciplinary approach that includes critical race theory, intersectional feminism, and postcolonial studies. One important follow-up is to re-explore the *categorical imperative* principle in a plural and complex socio-political context. Research can also be directed towards developing a more contextual and multicultural model of Kantian ethics, without sacrificing its universal value. For example, how can universal moral principles function in societies that have a history of colonialism or structural inequality? In addition, further exploration of the concept of Kantian cosmopolitanism is particularly relevant in discussions of global migration policy and international solidarity. With a critical and creative approach, Kant's legacy can not only be preserved but also transformed into an ethical framework that is responsive to contemporary realities. Therefore, future intellectual projects need to place Kant as a starting point for building a more inclusive, equitable, and contextual global ethics, capable of addressing the challenges of the 21st century substantially and ethically.

6. Conclusion

Exploring Borders is a critical exploration of the contributions of Immanuel Kant, a central figure in Western philosophy. Kant's theories on epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics laid the foundation for modern philosophical thought. However, his views on borders, races, and gender have sparked considerable debate and critique. His cosmopolitanism, while progressive for its time, has been scrutinised for its underlying Eurocentrism and exclusionary practices. His writings reveal a hierarchical view of races, interpreted as a product of his time and a philosophical shortcoming. Furthermore, his perspectives on gender reflect the patriarchal norms of the 18th century, often relegating women to a secondary status within moral philosophy. These critiques highlight a significant tension within Kant's work: the coexistence of radical ideas about autonomy and moral duty alongside views perpetuating exclusion and marginalisation. His philosophical legacy presents an opportunity for contemporary scholars to engage with these complexities, questioning the implications of his thought and the broader structures of power and privilege that inform philosophical discourse. In reflecting on Kant's legacy, it becomes evident that reevaluating his contributions is essential for fostering a more inclusive philosophical dialogue. By critically examining Kant's ideas, we can recognise the historical contexts that influenced his views on borders, races, and gender, and assess how these ideas resonate or clash with contemporary values of equality and justice. Institutions of higher learning should encourage interdisciplinary approaches incorporating insights from critical race theory, feminist philosophy, and postcolonial studies, fostering a more prosperous, inclusive academic environment. Individuals engaged in philosophy must commit to continuous self-reflection and education, working towards creating a more equitable discourse that honours the complexities of human experience.

This research makes three significant contributions to Kant scholarship and critical philosophy. First, it provides a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis bridging Kant's theoretical borders with real-world border politics, offering a new lens for migration studies. Second, it advances decolonial and feminist readings of Kant by systematizing critiques from Mills, Bernasconi, and Okin into a unified framework. Third, it proposes a method for "reconstructive critique" that salvages Kant's universalist aspirations while jettisoning exclusionary elements. These contributions reshape academic discourse by demonstrating how classical philosophy must be re-evaluated through intersectional and postcolonial perspectives, particularly in ethics and political theory. The study also sets a precedent for analyzing other Enlightenment thinkers through similar critical lenses.

Further research could be directed along several lines that open up dialogue between Kant's thought and other ethical traditions. First, comparing Kantian ethics with Confucian ethics or Ubuntu philosophy could reveal fundamental differences in the concepts of autonomy and community, and broaden understandings of morality across cultures. Second, it would be important to explore the tensions between Kantian universalism and the anti-colonial critiques of Frantz Fanon or Aimé Césaire, in order to reexamine the relevance and limits of Kantian ethics in a postcolonial context. Third, Kant's categorization of imperatives could serve as a normative framework for responding to contemporary challenges such as digital surveillance, the ethics of artificial intelligence, and the climate crisis. Finally, studying the efforts of philosophers such as Christine Korsgaard, Marcia Baron, and Barbara Herman to reinterpret Kant in the context of feminism and anti-racism offers an important contribution to revising Kantian ethics to make it more inclusive and relevant in the modern era.

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