

Peter K. J. Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1830*, SUNY Press, Albany, NY, 2013.

Peter Park hones in on a conspicuously brief period during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when European historiographers recast the history of philosophy. In this new title for SUNY Press's Philosophy and Race book series, he recounts a time of rapid transition that changed the way the history of philosophy was studied. Until the end of the eighteenth century, the history of philosophy began with what was then known in Europe as 'the Orient'. Within a mere fifty years, however, this history was rewritten to exclude non-European parts of the world. How, Park asks, did the history of philosophy become the exclusive story of Europe, the Greeks and the West?

Despite developments in classical scholarship and postcolonial studies, the notion of a purely Greek origin still persists. When it comes to other disciplines, the picture of pure Greek origins has waned ever since Martin Bernal's tendentious three-volume *Black Athena* appeared, shining its light on a generalized neglect of ancient Egypt and Asia in academia. Recent work on the flows of communication between Greece and the Near East to be found in books by the likes of Walter Burkert (*Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis*) and Martin West (*The East Face of Helicon*) have done much to enhance understanding of Greco-Egyptian and Greco-Indian contact and intercultural transmission in the first millennium BCE. Philosophers, however, are inclined to avoid addressing philosophy's own eurocentrism. This often means dismissing any mention of non-Greek origins and opting for a monogenealogical, purely Greek history. The chief exception is the work of Robert Bernasconi, and Park locates

Bernasconi's writings as the launching pad for his own investigation. Co-editor of the Philosophy and Race series, Bernasconi has long recognised the problem of racism in contemporary philosophy, and, most importantly, encouraged philosophers to do something about it, asking them to explore the racism to be found within their own traditions, whether continental or analytic.

This is the central concern of *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy* too. Consequently, Park does not merely pose the question of racism in philosophy. That Kant advanced a theory of monogenesis, in which he attempted to explain human differences by defining races based on an understanding of skin colour as a permanent marker of race, is well covered in the previous literature. Bernasconi has written widely on it, as have Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze and Mark Larrimore. Park's is not, then, a book that simply denounces Kant and Hegel. Instead, it seeks a fuller picture of the context and reasons for their discussions of race. (In this, Park's book is proximate to an earlier edited volume in the same SUNY series entitled, *The German Invention of Race*, which gives special attention to Kant's concept of race in particular.) What makes Park's volume distinctive is the author's proactive approach. With a narrow emphasis on changes in the writing of the history of philosophy beginning in the 1790s, he investigates how and why these changes came about at the specific time they did. Park takes sedulous care in exposing cracks in the history of philosophy's foundation, and digs deeper to examine how each crack is connected. His research is based on texts from the early modern period to the early nineteenth century, recounting how prevailing attitudes among early modern historians of philosophy held 'the Orient' as the source of philosophy.

In looking into Hegel's motives for excluding the Orient from the history of philosophy, Park shows then, for example, that Hegel's statements were, first and foremost, a defence against historical claims made by his more 'theologically motivated critics', particularly Friedrich Schlegel. In an earlier publication on Schlegel as a Sanskritist, Park argues for a re-examination of Schlegel's comparative historical work on ancient Indian philosophy, noting that Schlegel pioneered a comparative, cross-cultural history of philosophy which explored Asian philosophy along with European philosophy in one historical context. Here, Park discusses Schlegel's opposition to the opinion held by some historians of philosophy that the ancient Orient had no knowledge of philosophy. Although Schlegel acknowledged a lack of adequate documentation of Oriental philosophy, it did not follow that the Orient had no philosophy at all. Indeed, he believed Plato's doctrine of transmigration was taken from Egypt and was characteristic of Indian thought: 'In arguing that the Indians had real philosophy in respect to both form and method, Schlegel opposed himself to the nascent opinion among some historians of philosophy that the Orientals did not know philosophy'.

In fact, only a tiny minority of eighteenth-century historians of philosophy claimed a Greek origin of philosophy. It was Kantians like Dietrich Tiedemann and Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann who argued for an exclusively Greek beginning. The Kantian School thus changed the rules for writing the history of philosophy so as to exclude Africa and Asia. A combination of *a priori* construction and racial Eurocentrism would come, in this way, to define modern histories of philosophy, initially justified with racial-anthropological arguments taken from Christoph Meiners. Park draws a connection between Meiners and Kant, suggesting that the two influenced each other

in their concepts of race. More than Kant or Hegel, it is Meiners who Park credits with exclusion of Asia and Africa from the history of philosophy.

Although he never published on the history of philosophy per se, Kant's own lectures on logic promoted a history of philosophy that excluded any Asian or African legacy. Before the Greeks, Kant opines, people thought through images and not through concepts. Therefore, no one philosophized before the Greeks: 'It is said that the Greeks learned their wisdom from the Egyptians. But the Egyptians are children compared to the Greeks. They have various cognitions, but not sciences. The Greeks first enlightened the human understanding.' As Park notes, this position seems incongruous within its own eighteenth-century context, and hence Park finds it peculiar that Hegel should take up the Kantian position and incorporate it into his history of philosophy. Certainly, the exclusion of Egypt and Asia was not characteristic of the school of Absolute Idealism. As Park puts it: 'It was a wayward step from Absolute Idealism, with which Hegel was united in many other ways'. Yet, in fact, Hegel's abhorrence for Egypt and Asia went beyond even Kant's disdain for the Orient. Park's final chapter explores the reasons for this antipathy, focusing on the controversy between Hegel and the theologian August Tholuck, in which Hegel defended himself against charges of pantheism or theosophy (and potentially atheism). It is this defense which is offered by Park as an explanation for Hegel's insistence on the exclusion of Africa and Asia from his history of philosophy.

In *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, Park looks ahead to a day when the history of philosophy might no longer be taught with such exclusions, yet does not lose his focus. Nor does he directly appeal to his readers to confront philosophy's racist history or to challenge Europe's self-identity and its relation to the history of

philosophy. But in his reconsideration of the history of philosophy, Park seriously engages the racism still to be found at work in philosophy today.

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