

THE PROBLEM OF PRIVILEGE: TEMPERAMENT AND DIVERSITY IN KANT'S  
"BEOBACHTUNGEN ÜBER DAS GEFÜHL DES SCHÖNEN UND ERHABENEN"

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures.

Chapel Hill  
2010

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## ABSTRACT

TAYLER KENT: The Problem of Privilege: Temperament and Diversity in Kant's  
"Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen"

(Under the direction of Dr. Jonathan Hess)

This thesis explores Kant's theory of the temperaments as outlined in his 1764 pre-critical essay on the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime. While this text is often singled out for its prejudicial remarks, the chapter on temperament provides a useful framework for understanding Kant's thinking on diversity at this stage in his philosophy, and is critical for any attempt to reconcile the tensions in this work between its advocacy of cosmopolitan universalism and its troubling observations on gender and race. The first chapter explores Kant's awareness of the problem of privileging the melancholic above all others as the only temperament capable of achieving true moral virtue. The second and third chapters investigate how Kant engages in a struggle to redefine what constitutes the morally feeling subject in order to exclude women and non-Europeans from his ideal community of rational and moral human subjects.

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## Introduction

In a scathing 1799 review of Immanuel Kant's *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, Friedrich Schleiermacher referred to Kant's study of the heterogeneity of the human race as "eine Sammlung von Trivialitäten" and "eine Negation aller Anthropologie" (Schleiermacher 300). Objecting, among other things, to Kant's treatment of women as an abnormality, as well as remarking on the impossibility of creating an anthropology that was both practical and popular, Schleiermacher touched on points of critique that would also continue to be leveled at Kant's anthropological writings, with ever-increasing intensity, straight into the twenty-first century. Had Schleiermacher directed his review at one of Kant's earlier works, his 1764 *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, upon which much of Kant's later anthropological writings are based, his criticism would likely have been just as harsh. This pre-critical treatise on the diversity of humanity and its capacity for moral feeling was Kant's premier attempt at a "popular philosophy" and is widely regarded by Kant scholars as somewhat of an embarrassment for its troubling remarks on gender and race.

In the *Beobachtungen*, Kant outlines his aesthetic and moral philosophy of the relationship between the beautiful and the sublime and how the attributes of both categories can be applied to traits of human nature, gender, and national character. In this text, Kant presents himself not as a critical philosopher, but rather as an eloquent essayist, expressing his observations through an accessible and clear writing style that is not typical of his later

critical works. Kant's aim here is to make a contribution to a new analysis of human feeling in which a focus on the empirical method of observation (*Beobachtungen*) is of central importance. In fact, the term *Beobachten* was the crucial term for anthropology in the mid-eighteenth century in Germany, and is the very foundation upon which much of Kant's notion of a disciplinary anthropology was based (Zammito 108). Through its style and subject matter this work can be seen as both an attempt to morally educate a relatively broad reading public and to contribute to the formal intellectual development of the discipline of anthropology during the Enlightenment. Based on the assertion that feeling is what reveals the true nature of the subject, Kant proposes that the "finer feelings" which are responsible for man's moral virtue are divided into two distinct categories, the beautiful and the sublime. These two categories are then in subsequent chapters mapped out onto the human temperaments, genders, and national characters. In the first of the four sections of the essay, entitled "*Von den unterschiedenen Gegenständen des Gefühls vom Erhabenen und Schönen,*" Kant delineates his conceptions of what types of finer feeling constitute the sublime, and which belong to the beautiful, making clear one of his primary distinctions, that the sublime moves (*rührt*) and the beautiful charms (*reizt*), privileging the sublime as the category most closely associated with true moral virtue based on principles. Using this distinction as the basis of his argument, Kant proceeds in the following three sections of the treatise to explore how the finer feelings of the sublime and beautiful manifest themselves in greater or lesser quantities in human temperaments, genders, and national characters. In the section on temperament, entitled "*Von den Eigenschaften des Erhabenen und Schönen am Menschen überhaupt,*" Kant explores the Hippocratic tradition of the four temperaments, the melancholic, the sanguine, the choleric and the phlegmatic, mapping his theory of the

beautiful and sublime onto these categories. Kant emphasizes in this section that the genuine virtue based on principles that he associated with the sublime in the previous section is most closely linked to the melancholy temperament. It is in the third and fourth sections of this essay, entitled “*Von dem Unterschiede des Erhabenen und Schönen in dem Gegenverhältniß beider Geschlechter*” and “*Von den Nationalcharaktern, in so ferne sie auf dem unterschiedlichen Gefühl des Erhabenen und Schönen beruhen,*” however, where Kant’s remarks get him into the most trouble. In these two sections, Kant makes it quite clear which genders and nationalities are “beautiful” as opposed to the more privileged “sublime,” and consequently these sections have been heavily criticized for their overt racism and misogyny.

Critics have not only rightly pointed out the text’s racially demeaning and overtly sexist elements, but they have also suggested that in comparison to Kant’s critical work, this essay seems deficient and rather humiliating. In his study of the characterization of the sublime, Ian Balfour states, “[by] comparison with the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), a transcendental inquiry into the conditions of the possibility of aesthetic judgment, the text of the *Observations* is in many ways meager and inadequate, at times downright embarrassing” (325). Others have argued that the text makes for “difficult reading,” not because the language is particularly complex, but because the chapters of the work on gender and national character are so saturated with glaring prejudice (Balfour 326; Shell 455).

But while some have been quick to dismiss this work for its blatant stereotypes, several other contemporary scholars have argued that despite the *Beobachtungen*’s myopic reflections on women and non-Europeans, a closer analysis of this text reveals a fascinating picture of Kant’s world view at this stage of his philosophy, a stage marked by an experimentation with new forms and an uncharacteristically graceful and witty writing style,

a genuine attempt to reach a broader audience, and an intense engagement with the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The intricacies of this text are often overlooked due to a tendency to judge this text based on modern conceptions of race, the impracticality of which has been pointed out by post-colonial philosopher Emmanuel Eze. He claims that there was no “empirical context to the concept of ‘race’ in the eighteenth century” (166), and that if there was such a concept, it was Kant who laid much of the groundwork for it (166). Eze further points out that Kant’s mapping of the humors onto racial differences in his lectures on physical geography, although quite legitimately “racist” by today’s standards, should still be taken seriously as a significant early attempt to understand the concept of race. He says:

It would be unwise to dismiss these antecedents because they are still the ‘racial’ territories or their non-existence, upon which, today the genetic sciences seek to shed some light. Archaic as some of the ancient and classical categories may sound, it is indeed the Hippocratic- Galenic and Linnaean taxonomy that residually informs today’s most influential biological thinking in the areas of racial science (166).

Scholars have argued that rather than merely dismissing this essay for its disturbing observations on race and gender, it is perhaps productive to take a closer look at the chapter on human temperament, as it is the most critical for understanding the work as a whole. Susan Shell has pointed out how Kant seems to concede a degree of ambiguity or at least “acknowledge his own limitations as a spectator” in this chapter (Shell 458). Others have extended this argument and contended that this concession of a degree of ambiguity in this section of the treatise is one of the most useful for attempting to reconcile its tensions. Mark Larrimore states in his study of temperament in the *Beobachtungen* that the system that Kant proposes by which people of all temperaments work together to form a moral whole is a “temperament argument writ large, whereby society as a whole is best off with a variety of

types, whose strengths and weaknesses provoke each other and keep each other in check” (Larrimore 273).

While these arguments have built a relatively solid framework for emphasizing the importance of this rather obscure pre-critical text, there is still more work that needs to be done. Some critics flat-out dismiss this essay as an embarrassing racist and misogynist rant. Others do acknowledge the significance of the essay’s unique reflections on temperament. But for the most part these analyses are concerned primarily with mapping the progression of this theory over the entire course of Kant’s thinking on the subject of the humors, particularly by comparing the *Beobachtungen* with his later work *Anthropologie aus pragmatischer Hinsicht*. These types of analyses often completely ignore the text’s less salient moments. Surprisingly, very little critical work has been done that analyzes this essay as a whole. I propose that it is fruitful to examine this entire text, including its problematic elements, and ask the question: Is it possible to use Kant’s theory of the humors in his *Beobachtungen* to better understand its disquieting remarks about women and race?

This paper will expand upon the existing scholarship on Kant’s observations on human temperament in the *Beobachtungen*, but will also attempt to shed new light on the text as a whole. I will argue that while all four sections of this essay are structurally quite similar, it is in the chapter on human temperament where Kant’s “feeling for the beauty and dignity of human nature” is most apparent, a feeling that clearly embraces and necessitates diversity as a key component of his ideal picture of humanity. While the sections on gender and national character use similar structures and methods of categorizations, syntheses, and exclusions, the second chapter of the essay, in which these categories are explicitly mapped out onto the four human temperaments, most clearly reflects an embracing of humanity in all

its differences. I will further argue that it is in his exploration of human temperament where Kant struggles the most with the inherent problems of privileging the “sublime” melancholic temperament over the “beautiful” sanguine and choleric temperaments, revealing himself to be conflicted about the relationship between these two aesthetic and moral categories. I will argue that this consciousness of the problems with his own empirical method in this particular section of the work provides a useful and often overlooked framework for understanding Kant’s ideas on diversity at this particular stage of his philosophy. I will argue that Kant’s acknowledgment of the inherent problems with privileging one human temperament over the other is significant because it represents an embrace of human variety and difference that is not present at other junctures in the essay. Kant’s admittance of the problem of privileging the melancholic temperament reveals him as deeply conflicted about the inherent contradictions of privileging some individuals over others, and is a struggle that is unique to this particular chapter. This recognition of the necessity of difference with regard to character is critical for any attempts to reconcile the tensions in this work between its advocacy of cosmopolitan universalism and its troubling and prejudicial observations on gender and race.

In addition to engaging with Kant’s theory of temperaments in the *Beobachtungen*, I shall further my analysis by examining the subsequent chapters on both gender and national character, exploring how the “feeling for the beauty and dignity of human nature” which Kant advocates in his discussion of the temperaments is almost entirely absent from these subsequent sections. In these chapters I will show how Kant is engaged in a critical reworking of his own definition of what constitutes true moral virtue in order to justify the contradictions that arise from his observations about women and non-Europeans. While the

blatant racial and misogynistic statements in these sections of the work can by no means be defended or disregarded, it is my contention that this text should be regarded not primarily as a racist doctrine that excludes more than it embraces, but as both reflective of and a critical attempt to resolve a central and impossible problem of the Enlightenment: how to elevate a diverse and multifaceted humanity into a complete, beautiful, dignified, and all-encompassing moral whole. In his chapter on gender, which largely restricts its comments to the necessary role of women, Kant engages in an analysis that is similar to his discussion of temperament in its description of the two sexes as distinct yet complementary, and in its insistence that nature seldom unites all noble and beautiful qualities in one human being. In his discussion of national character, Kant employs a similar strategy of highlighting the distinctive qualities between separate races and nations, privileging some and flat-out dismissing others, and yet ends his discussion with a call for all young citizens of the world to collectively act upon the moral feeling that lies “*in dem Busen eines jeden jungen Weltbürgers.*” Although these two sections on gender and national character reflect an often contradictory and narrow-minded view of humanity from an eighteenth-century Western European white male perspective, there are moments within the entire text that reveal Kant as a thinker who remains deeply conflicted about his own troubling observations. I will argue that Kant’s primary objective in the final two chapters of the *Beobachtungen* is to redefine what constitutes the morally feeling subject in order to exclude women and non-Europeans from his proposed ideal enlightened community. I contend that this repeated need to re-justify his own categorizations in these final sections of the essay reveals Kant as a philosopher who is engaged in a deep struggle with the inherent tensions between the privileging of certain sexes and races over others and his earlier insistence that moral feeling

is universal. This text makes it clear that when Kant thinks of universality, he has in mind a system of categorizations that necessitate the privileging of the white male European over all other races and genders.

My analysis will begin with a reading of the section of the essay on human temperament. I will reflect here on how Kant's mapping of the four humors (the melancholic, sanguine, choleric, and phlegmatic) comes from a Hippocratic tradition whose popularity ebbed and flowed since the middle ages, but which during the Enlightenment was reincarnated as a useful schema for aesthetic and anthropological reflections on human variety and difference. I will further argue that it is precisely this section of the treatise that most clearly reveals Kant as an observer attempting to come to terms with human difference, pointing to moments within the text that make this struggle remarkably clear. As I move forward with my analysis of Kant's reflections on gender, I will use my argument from the chapter on temperament as a framework for understanding Kant's conception of men and women as "distinct yet complementary," reflecting on Kant's observations on the union between man and woman as the ideal expression of the beautiful and sublime. Through my reading I will show how this section of the treatise also reveals Kant as deeply conflicted about the role of women and their potential inclusion (or exclusion) from an ideal universal community composed of morally virtuous individuals. I will similarly frame my argument as I proceed to a reading of the section of the treatise on national character. In this chapter I will focus briefly on the significance of this discussion to the developing fields of anthropology and physical geography in the eighteenth century. I will then illustrate how this chapter is predominantly concerned with redefining what constitutes moral personhood in order to justify the exclusion of certain nationalities from Kant's portrait of the ideal humanity. While

Kant's chapter on human temperament reveals him to be conflicted about the privileging of some natural dispositions over others, his observations on gender and national character exhibit a different kind of struggle. These sections are far less apologetic in their attempt to create a clear hierarchy which firmly establishes the white male as the superior prototype of Enlightenment ideals.

**Privileging the Melancholic: Kant's Theory of the Temperaments in "Von den Eigenschaften des Erhabenen und Schönen am Menschen überhaupt"**

When we consider the work of Kant, we often think of his critical philosophy, most notably his three famous critiques, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and the *Critique of Judgment*. These are works were not aimed at a broad reading public and were primarily designed for an academic and highly intellectual audience. It is difficult to conceive of the most famous critical philosopher of the Enlightenment as having ever written something designed to be "popular." But the *Beobachtungen* was intended to be just that. Scholars have noted that this essay constitutes "the epitome of popular Kant" (Stuckenberg, 220). Willi Goetschel notes in his *Constituting Critique* that, "[t]he title of this text signals its specific function. Although it must be considered as one of the essays, the subjective spin of the term *Observations* [Beobachtungen] denotes an especially free, open form of essay" (Goetschel 59). Instructive and not overly serious in tone, the essay claims in the opening paragraph to approach questions of moral feeling with more of "das Auge eines Beobachters als des Philosophen" (229). The essay has the feel of a text that is intended to be widely read, and indeed, according to one critic, it was one of Kant's "best-read and most successful piece[s] of writing. It thrust Kant into the forefront of 'popular philosophy' at the time, [and] made him an exemplary *reflektierende Schrifsteller*" (Zammito 106). But it is clear from a reading of the *Beobachtungen* that Kant not only desired his message to reach a broad audience, but he also firmly believed in the informative and instructional purposes of his observations. Kant states, "Das Feld der Beobachtung, dieser Besonderheiten der

menschlichen Natur erstreckt sich sehr weit und verbirgt annoch einen reichen Vorrat zu Entdeckungen, die eben so anmutig als lehrreich sein“ (229). It is clear from the tone of the essay that Kant’s writing was intended for a much broader audience than his later critical critiques, and was an attempt to reach an expanding reading public that was itself becoming increasingly diverse. Serving the dual function of entertaining and educating, Kant’s essay addresses an audience for which the concept of difference was an ever-growing concern, a difference that for Kant was most ideally conceptualized in the mapping of the universal traits of humanity and their various capacities for moral feeling onto an analysis of the human temperaments.

Through much of Western history, the theory of the four temperaments (the melancholic, the sanguine, the choleric, and the phlegmatic) have played an important role in not only medicine, but also anthropology, philosophy and ethics. Originally developed by Hippocrates and then improved upon by Aristotle and Galen (Kagan 13), by the eighteenth century the concept of temperament had come to mean the balance of the four humors: phlegm, yellow bile, black bile and blood (Kagan 2). A perfect balance of humors, however, was said to be unachievable. It was rather the natural imbalance of humors that was said to be capable of explaining tendencies in human behavior and character, particularly with regard to the melancholic, sanguine, and choleric temperaments. In their comprehensive study of human temperament *Saturn and Melancholy*, Raymond Kilbansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl explain how Galen’s theory of temperament closely aligned character traits and temperament with the four humors:

Acuteness and intelligence of the mind came from the bilious humours [choleric], steadiness and solidity from the atrabilious [melancholy], but from the blood [sanguine] simplicity bordering on foolishness. But phlegm by its nature does not contribute to the formation of character (58).

In the eighteenth century, the idea that these imbalances of humor could help people to better understand each other developed into a genre of enlightenment psychology known as *Die Kunst, der Menschen Gemüther zu Lesen*, or “the art of reading people” (Böhme 269). The notion that an understanding of the natural imbalances that exist in all humans could have the practical aim of improving relationships and promoting human progress was an important component of the *Popularphilosophie* of ethical and sociopolitical agency that emerged during this time period (Zammito 9). Questions about how to solve the mind-body problem and create a more moral and complete society could be practically and conveniently explored through an understanding of the interactions among the melancholic, sanguine and choleric temperaments that existed in the general population. The passive and cold-blooded phlegmatic temperament, however, was commonly and often disdainfully sequestered in its own temperament sub-category in eighteenth century temperament discourse (Larrimore 267); lacking in agency and motivation, the phlegmatic’s character traits did not fit in with favored notions of human progress and moral action. But nevertheless, attempts to understand the makeup of humanity through the melancholic, sanguine and choleric temperaments were a common intellectual undertaking by the time Kant put forth his ideas on the subject in the *Beobachtungen*.

It is clear that Kant intended this text to serve a practical moral purpose. Located at the end of the chapter entitled “Von den Eigenschaften des Erhabenen und Schönen am Menschen überhaupt” (829), Kant’s description of the four temperaments serves as a bridge between the general outline of his moral and aesthetic philosophy that comes at the beginning of the essay, and his exploration of gender and national character differences that comes at

the end. Kant's conception of the three different types of virtue corresponds closely to his description of three of the four temperaments. *Wahre Tugend*, which Kant associates with the melancholic temperament, can only exist in an individual who follows principles, and who has a "Gefühl von der Schönheit und Würde der Menschlichen Natur" (241). The melancholic temperament "fühlt die Würde seiner eigenen Natur" (234) and is therefore aligned with the sublime. Kant emphasizes that the notion of *wahre Tugend* is most closely tied to the melancholic, saying "die echte Tugend also aus Grundsätzen hat etwas an sich, was am meisten mit der melancholischen Gemütsverfassung in gemilderten Verstande zusammenzustimmen scheint" (241). He privileges the melancholic temperament over the sanguine and choleric, suggesting that it is the only character category that allows one to achieve true moral virtue.

The second category, *adoptierte Tugend*, is associated with the sanguine temperament, and corresponds with his description of the beautiful. Kant describes this virtue as having "mit den wahren Tugenden große Ähnlichkeiten, indem sie das Gefühl einer unmittelbaren Lust an gütigen und wohlwollenden Handlungen enthalten" (240). The *adoptierte Tugend* is most closely associated with the sanguine temperament. Kant says that the sanguine has "eine gewisse Weichmütigkeit, die leichtlich in ein warmes Gefühl des Mitleidens gesetzt wird" (238). Kant differentiates this sympathy and appreciation for fellow human beings from the more virtuous understanding for the beauty and dignity of humanity that the melancholic temperament exhibits. The sympathetic behaviors associated with *adoptierte Tugend* are not virtuous like *wahre Tugend*, but they are beautiful in the way that they harmonize with it.

The third type of virtue is "das Gefühl vor Ehre und dessen Folge die Scham" (240).

Honor and shame, which are connected with the choleric temperament, are necessary and good according to Kant because they motivate people to do good deeds which they might otherwise be unlikely to perform. However, the choleric's behavior has absolutely nothing to do with true moral virtue; his motivation to act morally stems not from true virtue or an inner feeling of the worth and dignity of all human beings, but rather a superficial notion of the way he is perceived by others. Kant states:

Der welchen man unter der cholericischen Gemütsbeschaffenheit meint, hat ein herrschendes Gefühl vor diejenige Art des Erhabenen, welche man das Prachtige nennen kann. Sie ist eigentlich nur der Schimmer der Erhabenheit und eine starke abstechende Farbe, welche den inneren Gehalt der Sache oder Person, der vielleicht nur schlecht und gemein ist, verbirgt und durch den Schein täuscht und rühret (245).

The choleric, although he has a feel for the sublime and is motivated to act morally through honor and shame, is not truly virtuous. His good deeds are not "Grundsätze der Tugend, sondern der Ehre, und er hat kein Gefühl vor die Schönheit oder den Wert der Handlungen" (246). Furthermore, his superficiality and mere "appearance" of sublimity might go so far as to hide his bad inner qualities.

The fourth temperament in Kant's essay, the phlegmatic, lacks both an appropriate corresponding virtue category and a thorough analysis. Kant's tone when referring to this type is nothing short of dismissive; it is as if people who are not motivated by feeling and therefore disinclined to take action are also not worthy of any discussion. He states, "Da in der phlegmatischen Mischung keine Ingredienzen vom Erhabenen oder Schönen in sonderlich merklichem Grade hineinzukommen pflegen, so gehöret diese Gemüts Eigenschaft nicht in dem Zusammenhang unserer Erwägungen" (246).

With that, Kant gradually eliminates the discussion of the phlegmatic from the treatise, giving it only one more brief mention in his chapter on national character, where he

attributes the phlegmatic's main characteristics to the Dutch. He says, "Der Holländer ist von einer ordentlichen und emsigen Gemütsart, und, indem er lediglich auf das Nützliche sieht, so hat er wenig Gefühl vor dasjenige, was im feineren Verstande schön oder erhaben ist"(272). The Dutchman is merely "ein sehr phlegmatisierter Deutsche[r]" (272). Kant's outright dismissal of the phlegmatic temperament is significant because the main characteristics of the phlegmatic are a lack of moral feeling and a lack of motivation to moral action, both of which are constitute a threat to his proposed ideal moral community. Kant states:

Niemand ist ein Mensch ohne alle Spuren der feineren Empfindung, allein ein größerer Mangel derselben, der Vergleichungsweise auch Fühllosigkeit heißt, kommt in der Charakter des phlegmatischen, den man sonst auch so gar der gröbern Triebfedern, als der Geldbegierde etc.etc. beraubt, die wir aber, zusamt andern verschwisterten Neigungen, ihm allenfalls lassen können, weil sie gar nicht in diesen Plan gehören (242).

The phlegmatic temperament is not part of Kant's *Plan* because a person who possesses no moral feeling and therefore no motivation to take action has no role in his practical vision for the improvement of humanity. The phlegmatic is very much on the opposite end of the spectrum as the melancholic, whose behavior and characteristics take a privileged position and therefore play the most important role in Kant's ideal conception of a morally virtuous humanity comprised of a variety of temperaments.

However, Kant's dismissal of the phlegmatic and his privileging of the melancholic is problematic when one considers the fact that these temperaments are part of human nature; an individual can never change his natural disposition. If *wahre Tugend* can only be achieved by those who have the melancholic temperament, as Kant seems to suggest, then how can those individuals who naturally possess choleric or sanguine temperaments ever

hope to become truly moral? For a text that is often singled out for its prejudicial claims, the following statement is remarkable. In a concession that is radically at odds with the narrow-minded observations made in the chapters on gender and national character, Kant makes a concession of how deeply problematic it is to favor one type of human being over another. In this statement he acknowledges his own inadequacies, and reveals how he struggles to adequately clarify the relationship between the true moral virtue of the melancholic disposition, and the good-intentioned yet non-virtuous sanguine and choleric temperaments:

Wenn ich die edele und schwache Seite der Menschen wechselsweise bemerke, so verweise ich es mir selbst, daß ich nicht denjenigen Standpunkt zu nehmen vermag, von wo diese Abstechungen das große Gemälde der ganzen menschlichen Natur gleichwohl in einer ruhenden Gestalt darstellen. Denn ich bescheide mich gerne: daß, so ferne es zu dem Entwurfe der großen Natur gehöret, diese groteske Stellungen nicht anders als einen edelen Ausdruck geben können, ob man schon viel zu kurzsichtig ist, sie in diesen Verhältnisse zu übersehen (249).

Aware of the contradictions inherent in his preference for the “edele Seite der Menschen” over the “schwache Seite der Menschen” (249), Kant admits that the privileging of one over the other is problematic. He is conflicted about the superiority of the melancholic temperament, because the choleric and sanguine temperaments are also necessary and good. The sanguine temperament is good and beautiful in the way it synthesizes with *wahre Tugend*, and the choleric temperament and the honor and shame it is associated with provide a necessary impulse to do good in those individuals who wouldn’t normally be inclined to do so. In an attempt to solve this problem about the superiority of the melancholic, Kant creates a scheme in which all three of these temperaments, which occur at different frequencies in the population, work together as a cohesive unit for the good of humanity. He states, “Endlich ist die Ehrliebe in aller Menschen Herzen obzwar in ungleichen Maße, verbreitet

worden, welches dem Ganzen einen bis zur Bewunderung reizende Schönheit geben muß“ (249). Embracing the differences in temperament that exist in the population as serving a crucial purpose in the collective whole, we see Kant here attempting to resolve the problem that truly virtuous people are few and far between. He goes on to explain how the melancholic individuals are few in number compared to the sanguine and choleric, but this is actually a good thing because “es so leicht geschehen kann, dass man in diesen Grundsätzen irre” (249). The melancholic can easily go astray with his strong principles, and he is kept in balance by the more numerous good-natured sanguine and self-interested choleric temperaments. These temperaments give the whole community:

Haltung und Festigkeit, in dem sie auch ohne ihre Absicht gemeinnützig werden, die notwendigen Bedürfnisse herbeischalten, und die Grundlage hefern, über welche feinere Seelen Schönheit und Wohlgereimtheit verbreiten können (249).

This synthesized moral community Kant proposes as a defense against the inherent problems with the differentiation of the human temperaments is not unlike the synthesis he proposes at various other junctures throughout the essay; The German is described as the perfect mixture of these very temperaments: “[Der Deutsche] hat eine glückliche Mischung in dem Gefühle so wohl des Erhabenen und des Schönen” (272). The difference here is that this particular synthesis appears to be created by Kant in response to an acknowledged problem with the privileging of one category over another; the moral synthesis he proposes is a response to his own awareness that it is problematic to place the sublime (melancholic) above the beautiful (sanguine, choleric) in this categorization. It would not be productive or fit in with Kant’s practical project to suggest that individuals who possess the choleric or sanguine dispositions are somehow inferior to the melancholic and can never achieve virtue. In order to address this problem (or merely sidestep it) he relies on a familiar synthesis to

stress that these temperaments supplement each other to benefit a larger whole. The sublime melancholic temperament needs the beautiful sanguine and choleric to keep it from being misled by its strong principles. The balancing of these temperaments on a collective level, which leads to the formation of a “Gemälde von prächtigem Ausdruck” (849) is a way for Kant to avoid suggesting that the melancholic temperament is somehow superior to the other natural dispositions. Unlike his explorations of gender and national character, the discussion of temperament and his attempt to synthesize the diverse human dispositions into a collective whole illustrates how the favoring of the sublime over the beautiful can be problematic.

But this “Gemälde von prächtigem Ausdruck” that Kant advocates is significant for another reason. This collective synthesis that requires the embrace of the variety of temperaments that exist in human beings should be formed in such a way that “mitten unter großer Mannigfaltigkeit Einheit hervorleuchtet und das eine glückliche Mischung Schönheit und Würde an sich zeigt” (250). The emphasis here on embracing difference and the acknowledgment of the importance of the beauty and dignity of human nature illustrates an important acceptance of human diversity that serves a practical purpose. The embrace of difference is evident from the opening lines of the *Beobachtungen*, where Kant acknowledges that each individual has its own unique moral feeling:

Die verschiedene Empfindungen des Vergnügens, oder des Verdrusses, beruhen nicht so sehr auf der Beschaffenheit der äußeren Dinge, die sie erregen, als auf das jedem Menschen eigene Gefühl, dadurch mit Lust oder Unlust gerührt zu werden“ (229).

It is through an understanding of these differences where the individual can overcome his own inclinations in order to be a part of a community that virtuously embraces him. At the conclusion of his chapter on temperament in the *Beobachtungen*, Kant explains how his

system embraces different individuals as each playing a distinct role within the collective moral whole:

Denn indem ein jeder auf der großen Bühne, seinen herrschenden Neigungen gemäß, die Handlungen verfolgt, so wird er zugleich durch einem geheimen Antrieb bewogen, in Gedanken außer sich selbst einen Standpunkt zu nehmen, um den Anstand zu beurteilen, den sein Betragen hat, wie es aussehe und dem Zuschauer in die Augen falle (250).

Kant argues that we can only form a community based on the dignity and worth of all human beings by embracing and understanding our differences, most especially differences in temperament, because they affect our ability to act morally virtuous, and by appreciating the beauty and dignity of all human beings. In the footnotes to this section of the essay the *Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen*, which were added to the text in the year after its original publication, Kant insists that underneath our differences, there is a beauty and dignity of all humanity that unites human beings despite their differences. Kant points out his indebtedness to Rousseau for teaching him to appreciate this dignity in this famous passage from the *Bemerkungen*:

Ich bin selbst aus Neigung ein Forscher. Ich fühle den ganzen Durst nach Erkenntnis und die begierige Unruhe darin weiter zu kommen oder auch die Zufriedenheit bey jedem Erwerb. Es war eine Zeit da ich glaubte dieses allein könnte die Ehre der Menschheit machen und ich verachtete den Pöbel der von nichts weis. Rousseau hat mich zurecht gebracht. Dieser verblendende Vorzug verschwindet, ich lerne die Menschen ehren und ich würde mich unnützer finden wie den gemeinen Arbeiter wenn ich nicht glaubete, daß die Betrachtung allen übrigen einen Werth ertheilen könne, die Rechte der Menschheit herzustellen (Kant 44).

Kant's change of heart about the dignity and worth of every human being that he references and attributes to Rousseau in the *Bemerkungen* encouraged Kant to see virtue not as something that only exists for a privileged group, but as something that springs from the inherent dignity and worth that belongs to all human beings. Given this essay's

preoccupation, particularly in the final two chapters on gender and race, with pointing out differences between men and women and Europeans and non-Europeans that clearly privilege certain groups over others, this statement may be surprising. These footnotes are clearly an indication that Kant acknowledged some of the problems with his own categorizations. According to these remarks, moral feeling appears to be universal; it is a quality that unites human beings rather than dividing them or accentuating their differences:

Demnach kann wahre Tugend nur auf Grundsätze gepropft werden, welche, je allgemeiner sie sind, desto erhabener und edler wird sie. Diese Grundsätze sind nicht spekulativische Regeln, sondern das Bewußtsein eines Gefühls, das in jedem menschlichen Busen lebt und sich viel weiter als auf die besondere Gründe des Mitleidens und der Gefälligkeit erstreckt. Ich glaube, ich fasse alles zusammen, wenn ich sage: es sei das Gefühl von der Schönheit und der Würde der menschlichen Natur (239).

Although this text is often singled out for its undoubtedly troubling remarks on gender and race, Kant's observations on human temperament in the *Beobachtungen* can provide key insight about his developing theories of the universality of humanity and his attempts to deal with difference and diversity in the human population. Kant's recognition of the problems of privileging the melancholic temperament as the only character type capable of achieving true virtue reflects how human nature, something that moves beyond the boundaries of gender and nationality, plays a critical role in Kant's moral philosophy. This essay represents one of Kant's early attempts to account for the role of difference in the human population and to embrace diversity as a crucial part of a practical and achievable morally virtuous community. The significance of the variety of characteristics and behaviors that exist within all humans is of utmost importance to Kant's practical moral philosophy. Temperament is a category of human difference which is singled out in this essay in a different manner than gender and national character. In this chapter Kant clearly

acknowledges the critical problem of placing the sublime category in the superior position above the beautiful. The link between human temperament and the ability to achieve moral virtue is thus of critical importance to Kant's philosophy. Temperament is the category that speaks the most directly to the ability of humanity as a collective whole to embrace the universality of human dignity and become a virtuous whole composed of a variety of temperaments. But as we shall see in the remaining chapters of the *Beobachtungen*, the belief in the inherent dignity and worth of all humanity that is the driving force behind this section of the work is a sentiment that does not strongly resurface in Kant's observations on gender and national character. As we have seen in this chapter, singling out and privileging the melancholic temperament as the disposition most suited for achieving true sublime virtue is problematic for Kant. But as we will see in the following chapter, he is significantly less conflicted in his privileging of certain genders and nationalities above others.

**Privileging the Male: Kant's Gender Politics in "Von dem Unterschiede des Erhabenen und Schönen in dem Gegenverhältniß beider Geschlechter"**

At the end of his discussion on temperament, Kant leaves us on an upbeat note. Praising all of humanity for its weaknesses as well as its strengths, Kant insists that "mitten unter großer Mannigfaltigkeit Einheit hervorleuchtet, und das Ganze der moralischen Natur Schönheit und Würde an sich zeigt" (250). It would seem as if Kant's picture of an ideal moral community is all-embracing, encompassing a humanity which is comprised of a diverse set of temperaments. The flaws of one temperament are compensated for by the assets of another, and the diverse human dispositions ideally come together to achieve a collective moral whole which is both beautiful and sublime. But as a close reading of this section has demonstrated, this picture of a universal humanity composed of diverse personalities is not without its problems and contradictions. Kant clearly privileges the melancholic as the individual who is the most capable of achieving true moral virtue. His admittance of the inherent problems with this categorization reveals how in this particular section of the treatise, Kant is troubled by the complications this privileging creates. But this uneasiness about privileging the sublime over the beautiful that we have seen in this critical chapter of the essay appears to be entirely absent from the remaining two sections on gender and national character. These final two chapters of the work have been the most heavily denounced for their sexism and racism. In his third chapter, entitled *Von dem Unterschiede des Erhabenen und Schönen in dem Gegenverhältniß beider Geschlechter*, Kant has been criticized for his ruthless portrayal of women as completely incapable of finer moral feeling.

Paul de Man claims, “Considerations on the feminine languor and passivity, unfavorably contrasted with male energy,” make for “difficult reading” (DeMan 138, qtd. in Shapiro & Sica). But although this chapter certainly contains statements which make for “difficult reading,” there is more to this chapter than first meets the eye.

Kant begins in the first few pages of this chapter with a statement similar to the one in which he ended the previous one. He calls the difference between men and women the “reizenden Unterschied...den die Natur zwischen zwei Menschengattungen hat treffen wollen“ (252) and stresses, “es ist hier nicht genug sich vorzustellen dass man Menschen vor sich habe, man muss zugleich nicht aus der Acht lassen, dass diese Menschen nicht von einerlei Art sind” (252). These distinctions should be esteemed as well as respected as rigid categories. All attempts at moral perfection of either sex must take these differences in character into account. Kant also emphasizes that people are all different, and that these differences should be valued and understood in order for humanity to progress towards a morally perfect whole. In language that echoes the closing remarks of the previous chapter, Kant remarks that this distinction is critical for any attempts to morally improve either sex, and that the natural distinction between man and woman is something that should be not only well understood, but also embraced as natural, beautiful and positive. The all-encompassing nature of this last statement seems to at first suggest that a similar strategy will be employed in this chapter as in the previous chapter on temperament. The gender differences will be highlighted and categorized as either beautiful or sublime, the sublime will be privileged above the beautiful, and it will be suggested that the varying degrees of beauty and sublimity in man and woman should ideally unite to form a morally perfect whole. But the note of acceptance and all-inclusiveness that we see in the closing statements of the previous chapter,

in which the dignity of *all* human beings is the driving current, by the end of the chapter on gender becomes increasingly less apparent and indeed is almost entirely absent from this section of the treatise. In this chapter of my work I will show how Kant is here engaging in a reworking of his “Gemälde von prächtigem Ausdruck” in order to clearly define the acceptable role of women within this ideal picture of humanity. While in his chapter on temperament Kant distinctly exhibits a degree of reluctance to claim that only the melancholic can achieve true moral virtue, he shows virtually no restraint in completely excluding women from the realm of the truly virtuous sublime. It is my contention that although Kant is certainly less troubled by the privileging of the sublime in this section, his repeated need to rewrite and rejustify his own rules throughout the chapter in order to create this “Gemälde von prächtigem Ausdruck” is a technique that deserves closer attention. I argue that this chapter is less about what de Man calls “feminine languor and passivity, unfavorably contrasted with male energy” and more about the calculated reworking of his own theory to create a gender hierarchy which reinforces the status quo by granting women limited moral agency. While Kant certainly appears not to be troubled by the privileging of the sublime male over the beautiful female, his need to rework his own system to justify the exclusion of women from the community of truly morally virtuous human beings reflects an awareness of the contradictions inherent in his own categorizations.

Throughout this chapter the beautiful and the sublime serve to differentiate the sexes and to reinforce gender norms. The qualities of the beautiful and the sublime as they are present in the individual should unite in such a way as to ideally express the qualities appropriate to the person’s sex. Although Kant mentions that the qualities of the beautiful

and the sublime can be found in both men and women, the sublime is the defining characteristic of the male and the beautiful is the ideal quality of the female:

...vielmehr erwartet man, das ein jedes Geschlecht beide vereinbare, doch so, dass von einem Frauenzimmer alle andere Vorzüge sich nur dazu vereinigen sollen, um den Charakter des Schönen zu erhöhen, welcher der eigentliche Beziehungspunkt ist, und dagegen unter den männlichen Eigenschaften das Erhabene als das Kennzeichen seiner Art deutlich hervorstehe (251).

Throughout this section, Kant repeatedly emphasizes that moral perfection can only be attained when the qualities of the male sublime and the female beautiful are perfectly united. Kant is clear that these categorizations of what feelings are appropriate for males and females are quite rigid and must be adhered to if this perfect moral union is ever to become a possibility. Kant is very explicit about what can happen if these strict gender roles are not observed. A woman who exhibits character traits which are typical of the male sex might as well have a beard (“mag nur immerhin noch einen Bart dazu haben” (51). Laborious learning is also not for them, and although they might succeed in it, doing so is a threat to their femininity and can “vertilgen die Vorzüge, die ihrem Geschlechte eigenthümlich sind” and can “die Reize schwächen, wodurch sie ihre große Gewalt über das andere Geschlecht ausüben” (51). Women who attempt to achieve success in academic learning will only succeed in losing their feminine charm and their power over the male sex, undermining Kant’s whole system and destroying the natural order of things. According to Kant, women are fundamentally different from men in their understanding of how the world works; they are unable to form principles and are incapable of a sense of moral duty. Women are motivated to action, not by moral principles or duty, but rather by feelings alone. Kant writes:

Die Tugend des Frauenzimmers ist eine schöne Tugend. Die des männlichen Geschlechts soll eine edle Tugend sein. Sie werden das Böse vermeiden, nicht weil es unrecht sondern weil es häßlich ist...Nichts von Sollen, nichts von Müssen, nichts von Schuldigkeit. Das Frauenzimmer ist aller Befehle und alles mürrischen Zwanges unleidlich (255).

The true virtue of woman is a beautiful one (*ist eine schöne Tugend*), and will never be anything more than that. The virtue of man, however, is a noble one (or at least it ideally *should be* : “*soll eine edle Tugend sein*”). Inherent in Kant’s language is the assertion that only men are capable of realizing their moral duty, while women are necessarily excluded from this process of enlightened self-mastery and discovery. Unable to follow moral law, women will always do only that which pleases them.

Throughout the text the qualities that are associated with the sanguine temperament are those that are reserved for women. Like the sanguine, they possess “gütige und wohlwollende Empfindungen, ein feines Gefühl für Anständigkeit und eine gefällige Seele” (255). But unlike the sanguine, women do not possess the same *adoptierte Tugend* , or “adoptive virtues” that men of the sanguine temperament can exhibit. In the chapter on temperament, Kant described the *adoptierte Tugend* in these terms:

In Ansehung der Schwäche der menschlichen Natur und der geringen Macht, welche das allgemeine moralische Gefühl über die mehreste Herzen ausüben würde, hat die Vorsehung dergleichen hülfleistende Triebe als Supplemente der Tugend in uns gelegt, die, indem sie einige auch ohne Grundsätze zu schönen Handlungen bewegen, zugleich andern, die durch diese letztere regiert werden einen größeren Stoß und einen stärkern Antrieb dazu geben können...Ich kann sie daher adoptierte Tugenden nennen, diejenige aber die auf Grundsätzen beruhet die echte Tugend...Diese adoptierte Tugenden haben gleichwohl mit den wahren Tugenden große Ähnlichkeit, indem sie das Gefühl einer unmittelbaren Lust an gütigen und wohlwollenden Handlungen enthalten. (240)

Those individuals who are of the sanguine temperament are those who readily possess these adoptive virtues, which closely resemble true virtues and motivate those who otherwise

have no principles to do good deeds. Traits like sympathy and complaisance, qualities that Kant later insists are fundamentally female characteristics, can be given this adoptive virtue status because they motivate those of the sanguine temperament to benevolent actions.

Kant revisits these adoptive virtues in his chapter on gender, but he makes a noteworthy exception to his prior judgment about what qualifies as an *adoptierte Tugend*. Using strikingly similar language to describe the female virtues as he does to describe the *adoptierte Tugend* in the previous chapter on temperament, Kant describes how “die Vorsehung [hat] in ihren Busen gütige und wohlwollende Empfindungen, ein feines Gefühl für Anständigkeit und eine gefällige Seele gegeben” (255). Whereas for the sanguine male these qualities would no doubt be associated with *adoptierte Tugend*, not quite virtuous but still capable of motivating him to beautiful actions, for the female Kant makes a critical exception to the rule. In the *Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen* he describes the female *schöne Tugend* as, “in einem strengen Urtheil adoptierte Tugend genannt; hier, da sie um des Geschlechtscharakters willen eine günstige Rechtfertigung verdienet, heißt sie überhaupt eine schöne Tugend“ (255).

The language used to describe the virtues attributed to women echoes almost exactly the description from the previous chapter on adoptive virtues. Given the general „Schwäche der menschlichen Natur“ (239) and the fact that most individuals do not yet possess true sublime feelings of moral virtue, divine Providence has placed within the sanguine individual a certain motivation to benevolent actions to make up for this weakness. These virtues bear such a close resemblance to true virtues that they can almost be mistaken for them. But for women it is a different story. Women are also inherently weak and possess no true feelings of moral virtue, and Providence has also placed certain beautiful qualities within

them to make up for this lack of finer feeling. But when these virtues are attributed to women they are not *adoptierte Tugend*, they are merely *schöne Tugend*, as even the appearance of true moral virtue is not appropriate for the female sex. Here we see Kant rewriting his own rules in order to keep women firmly within the realm of the beautiful and the sanguine, and any disruption to the delicate balance in the relationship between men and women would cause his entire system to crumble. Men need women to complement their sublimity, and women who go beyond the boundaries of what is appropriate to their sex are a threat to men's ability to achieve true sublime moral virtue.

Here we can see that the charges of misogyny that have been railed against this chapter of the treatise are no doubt justified if we look at them from a contemporary perspective. It is clear that the "Gefühl von der Schönheit und Würde der menschlichen Natur" (239) that is a defining current of the previous section on human temperament does not seem to apply to women. Women must be excluded from the realm of the sublime and should be subordinate to male reason. The contradictions inherent in the unequivocal male and female roles that Kant and other Enlightenment thinkers allow cannot be fully reconciled or defended from a modern perspective. But if we look at the lengths that Kant goes to throughout this chapter to keep women firmly within the realm of the beautiful/ sanguine we can clearly see Kant struggling to keep women rooted in the domestic sphere, and a repeatedly searching for ways to defend and justify women's exclusion from the ability to achieve true moral virtue. The very fact that Kant felt the need to reiterate in the *Bemerkungen* (written after the essay's original publication) that *schöne Tugend* as opposed to *adoptierte Tugend* should be used when it refers to women shows an attempt to legitimize an argument that is at odds with sentiments from the previous chapter. The belief in the

dignity and worth of all human beings and the universality of moral feeling that becomes the dominant theme of the chapter on human temperament is here seemingly absent, or at least reworked to place women in clearly-defined social roles. It becomes apparent that the “universality of moral feeling” only truly applies to men. In order for Kant’s system to work, women exist to help men become morally (and sublimely) perfect, and in so doing they too can achieve their own distinctly female (and beautiful) perfection. In this way a delicate balance is achieved in which the union between male and female is a sublime and beautiful expression of moral virtue.

This delicate balance relies heavily on what Kant repeatedly calls the female “natürliche Reize” (53) and more importantly, the male ability to resist and control it. Women do not only exist to complement the male and his sublime moral virtue, but also to allow him use his principles to control his susceptibility to the tempting charms of the beautiful. Just as individuals of the melancholic temperament have the ability to resist the “gaukelnde Reize des Schönen” (242), so must the sublime male strive not to fall prey to the female’s deceptive charm. Kant’s point about the appropriate way to master the feminine charm is perhaps best illustrated in a passage from the previous chapter, in which Kant uses the example of Alceste and Adraste to illustrate the difference between sublime and beautiful sentiments. The character of Alceste from Moliere’s comedic opera *Le Misanthrope ou l'Atrabilaire amoureux* is used to exemplify how those individuals of the sanguine temperament react to their wives’ *natürliche Reize*. Kant says:

Der muntere und freundliche Alcest sagt: „Ich liebe und schätze meine Frau, denn sie ist schön, schmeichelhaft und klug.“ Wie aber, wenn sie nun durch Krankheit einstellt, durch Alter mürrisch, und, nach dem die erste Bezauberung verschwunden, euch nicht klüger scheinen würde wie jede andere? (243)

The man who does not possess the true feeling for the sublime that is unique to the melancholic temperament is unable to look past his wife's beauty, appearance and "Bezauberung." He is not capable of resisting her feminine charm, which does nothing more than hide the fact that she is no different than any other woman. To contrast this example, Kant uses Moliere's character Adraste from another comedy *Le Sicilien ou L'Amour Peintre*, whose relationship with his wife is described by Kant as the following:

Nehmet dagegen den wohlwollenden und gefetzten Adrast, welcher bei sich denkt: Ich werde dieser Person liebevoll und mit Achtung begegnen, denn sie ist meine Frau. Diese Gesinnung ist edel und großmütig" (243).

According to Kant, an important quality of the melancholic is the ability to control one's impulses with regards to the opposite sex. Those who treat their wives with respect out of principle, not because of their feminine beauty or charm are the most noble and virtuous. Here we see the sanguine and beautiful woman as both charming and powerful. Attraction to that charm and power inherently weakens men and must be controlled and mastered if one hopes to achieve true sublime moral virtue. For Kant, it is the melancholic who is the best equipped to master and control the female.

If we take these remarks at face value, it is apparent that they are brimming with contradictions. How can the same author who lauded the universality of feeling in every human being in the previous section of the essay on temperament in the next breath exclude women from it for their inability to develop rational faculties? While Kant's argument is no doubt inconsistent, a closer look at this section reveals its author as fully aware of the potentially problematic nature of his comments. He says, "Ich glaube schwerlich, dass das schöne Geschlecht der Grundsätze fähig sei, und ich hoffe dadurch nicht zu beleidigen, denn

diese sind auch äußerst selten beim männlichen“ (255). Although this statement could be described as a rather feeble attempt to avoid offending his audience, its inclusion in the passage reveals an anticipation of potential criticism. In fact, Kant inserts many of these conciliatory remarks throughout the chapter. When comparing the qualities of the “fair sex” with the “noble sex,” he defends these categorizations by saying, “Hiedurch wird nun nicht verstanden: Dass das Frauenzimmer edler Eigenschaften ermangelte, oder das männliche Geschlecht der Schönheiten gänzlich entbehren müsste“ (251). On the contrary, he argues that women do indeed have qualities of both the beautiful and sublime, but that these qualities should be united so that they properly and primarily enhance the character of the beautiful. In another such interjection, Kant asks his readers not to interpret the female association with the beautiful as a complete lack of understanding. He writes:

Man wird mir hoffentlich die Herzhähen der männlichen Eigenschaften, in so ferne sie jenen parallel sind, schenken, und sich befriedigen beide nur in der Gegeneinanderhalten zu betrachten. Das schöne Geschlecht hat eben so wohl Verstand als das männliche, nur es ist ein *schöner Verstand*. Der unsrige soll ein *tiefer Verstand* sein, welches ein Ausdruck ist, der einerlei mit dem Erhabenen bedeutet“ (252).

To a present-day reader, this excuse is insufficient, if not downright patronizing. Again, there is an implicit suggestion within the very language itself that women are naturally excluded from the ability to achieve true understanding. Women’s understanding *is* and always will be only a beautiful one (*ist ein schöner Verstand*). Men’s understanding, however, has the ability to become something deeper, or at least it ideally *should* be striving for greater depth (*soll ein tiefer Verstand sein*). There is nothing about the character of woman, however, that can be socially conditioned; she is by her very nature incapable of achieving true moral virtue or breaking out of her natural role as wife and mother. Women

can achieve virtue only insofar as they help men improve their noble character or if they can appreciate the noble qualities to be found within them:

Das Frauenzimmer hat ein vorzügliches Gefühl vor das Schöne so ferne es ihnen selbst zukommt, aber vor das Edle in so weit es am männlichen Geschlechte angetroffen wird...Dagegen fordert sie alle diese Eigenschaften am Manne und die Erhabenheit ihrer Seele zeigt sich nur darin, dass sie diese edle Eigenschaften zu schätzen weiss so ferne sie bei ihm anzutreffen sein. (264)

It is clear that the closest women can approach to achieving virtue is through appreciating those sublime qualities that men possess. Women can only be noble in so far as they “edelen und verfeinern selbst das männliche Geschlecht” (252) with their *Schönheit*. But these repeated interjections throughout this chapter which defend and justify the allotted role of women within his system should not be ignored. While it would seem that in the previous chapter on human temperament Kant is advocating a picture of a diverse but all-encompassing humanity that embraces flaws and achieves a perfect moral balance, this chapter tells a different story. The chapter on gender reveals how Kant’s picture of a universal humanity (which in his chapter on temperament appears to be all-inclusive) must be adjusted to exclude women from achieving sublime moral virtue.

## **Privileging the European: Kant's Observations on *Nationalcharakter***

The section of the essay titled „*Von den Nationalcharakteren, in so ferne sie auf dem Unterschiedlichen Gefühl des Erhabenen und Schönen beruhen*“ begins with a footnote that reads like a disclaimer for the entire chapter. Written after the original publication of the text as part of the *Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen*, Kant begins this section with a statement reminding his readers that indeed all nations can possess individuals with the capacity for moral feeling:

Meine Absicht ist gar nicht, die Charaktere der Völkerschaften ausführlich zu schildern, sondern ich entwerfe nur einige Züge, die das Gefühl des Erhabenen und Schönen an ihnen ausdrücken. Man kann leicht erachten, dass an dergleichen Zeichnung nur eine leidliche Richtigkeit könne verlangt werden, dass die Urbilder davon nur in dem großen Haufen derjenigen, die auf ein feineres Gefühl Anspruch machen, hervorstechen, und dass es keiner Nation an Gemütsarten fehle, welche die vortrefflichste Eigenschaften von dieser Art vereinbaren.(267)

As with many of the conciliatory remarks in the *Bemerkungen*, this footnote reflects Kant's perpetual need within the text to justify his categorizations or further explain its contradictions. Acknowledging his own weakness as an observer of the world's people, Kant emphasizes that a truly detailed portrayal is not his goal here (such an analysis would no doubt prove quite difficult for Kant, who never strayed far from Königsberg and had little to no contact with non-Europeans throughout his lifetime (Goetschel 31). As we have seen in his chapter on gender, Kant feels the need throughout the text to repeatedly re-justify his claims, revealing himself as rather conflicted about the contradictions in his observations. While this section of the essay begins with appeasing remarks that anticipate a critique of his

broad generalizations, this footnote by no means sets the tone for the remainder of the chapter. It is this section of the treatise which is most at odds with his chapter on temperament, and the chapter that is the most troubling to contemporary readers. While it is easy to dismiss these unfounded racial claims as mere prejudice, I propose that it is worthwhile to examine these troubling statements more thoroughly as long as we keep in mind the intellectual and historical context from which they arose. They are symptomatic of a broader Enlightenment discourse that repeatedly sought to use reason itself to justify the exclusion of non-Europeans from the realm of rational and moral human subjectivity. In this chapter I will argue that this section of the essay is most clearly at odds with Kant's belief in the "beauty and dignity of human nature." By going to great lengths to define the non-white, non-European as comparably incapable of moral-self improvement, Kant establishes that the physical characteristics of race are indicators of a person's ability to become morally educated, an ability that he earlier stated to be a basic defining characteristic of the human being. I will begin by briefly sketching out how this chapter fits in with Kant's work in the fields of anthropology and physical geography. By looking at this chapter of the work as symptomatic of a broader Enlightenment discourse which was deeply troubled by the idea of race, the prejudicial claims this essay puts forth can be better understood and more fruitfully analyzed. I will then proceed to a close reading of the text, in which I will show how although the chapter begins with an apparent concession that there are individuals in *all* nations who possess moral feeling, the bulk of this chapter is dedicated to creating a system which defines the white male European as the ideal moral subject. The belief in the "Schönheit und Würde" that was the dominant theme of the chapter on temperament is here almost entirely absent. Central to Kant's thinking on anthropology and physical geography,

Kant's categorizations on national character in the *Beobachtungen* are concerned primarily with rewriting his own concept of "universal humanity" from his chapter on temperament so that it effectively excludes non-Europeans from the realm of morally thinking and feeling subjects.

Like many members of the eighteenth-century reading public, Kant was an avid reader of travel narratives. His interest in distant peoples and cultures formed the basis of his lectures on physical geography, which he gave over a period of twenty-five years and which were his most widely-attended university lectures (Wood 2). Kant's establishment of the academic discipline of physical geography coincided with a general Enlightenment era fascination with "foreign" peoples. Writings which paired empirical observations (or claimed empirical observations) of alien cultures and philosophical enquiries into human society gained an intense popularity during this age, and many of these writings encouraged the emergence of the modern discipline of anthropology. P.J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams note that during this time, "reports about the peoples of the world were acquiring a new value as the raw material for the attempts to analyze man and nature that came to be known as the European Enlightenment" (7). During this time, writers like Montesquieu, Swift, Voltaire and Rousseau, employed techniques of ethnographic description and observation in their widely-read fictional accounts of non-Europeans. The fascination with travel during the Enlightenment and the literary and philosophical explorations of foreign cultures it provoked were in fact, as Wolff and Cipolloni and many others reiterate, attempts to use the "alien, exotic, primitive, savage, and barbarous" (xii) to critically examine modern Western "civilized" culture.

If the examination of exotic and faraway cultures that appeared in travel narratives

and other writings during this time can be viewed as the beginnings of modern anthropology, it is easy to see how Kant's *Beobachtungen* is indeed reflective of this type of observational and empirical discourse. But it should also be noted that Kant's conception of "anthropology" as outlined in his lectures and writings on the subject differs dramatically from what defines the field today, and even from what modern anthropologists traditionally view as the historical beginnings of the discipline during Kant's lifetime. When Kant first introduced the discipline and began his lectures on anthropology and physical geography at the university at Königsberg in the 1750s, he viewed these two fields of study as complementary. Kant viewed physical geography as the study of the "natural condition of the earth and what is contained on it: seas, continents, mountains, rivers, the atmosphere, man, animals, plants and minerals" (qtd. in Eze 202). As a part of nature, human beings are necessarily included for study as part of the discipline of physical geography. But within this framework, Kant argued that nature could be manifested within the human being both externally and internally, in the body and in the soul. While the external body is physical, the internal soul is psychological and moral. Kant believed that when the discipline of physical geography, which concerns itself with the physical and external realm of the body, combined with anthropology, or the study of the moral and internal realm of the soul, the result was the pursuit of a full range of knowledge on the subject of human nature (Eze 202). While physical geography is primarily concerned with the human being as it exists in its physical external reality, anthropology as Kant understood it was devoted to the study of the inner nature of the human as a free moral agent. Thus, Kant's recognition of the unique internal and moral side of human nature that goes beyond mere physical existence in the external world is what defines his "pragmatic" anthropology. Pragmatic anthropology is concerned

with the study of the inner moral structure of the human being, and is “pragmatic” in the sense that it seeks to understand how this structure can and should shape the future of human existence. Kant’s conception of the twin disciplines of physical geography and anthropology as reflective of both the physical external body and the internal moral soul. But if we view Kant’s discussion on national character in the final section of the *Beobachtungen* as forming the foundation of his thinking on anthropology and physical geography, we can immediately see how Kant’s outline of different nationalities and their relative capacity for moral feeling is deeply problematic. Although Kant viewed anthropology and physical geography as separate disciplines, in this section of the work we can see how the two overlap in a troubling way. Throughout this chapter Kant uses physical, observable characteristics in the external world to make judgments about the inner moral structure of the human being. As we will see in a close examination of the text, Kant’s chapter on national character in the *Beobachtungen*, is concerned with defining the potential for moral progress and growth as one of the fundamental characteristics of the human subject. This definition allows him to completely exclude certain groups from this realm and project the white male European as the ideal human being who is most capable of achieving his true moral potential.

In the beginning of this fourth chapter, before he begins to outline the national characters and their varying degrees of feeling for the beautiful and sublime, Kant makes a critical claim. He states that he is guided in his observations by the assumption that the mental character of a people can be determined by what moral capacities they have. He claims:

Die Gemütscharaktere der Völkerschaften sind am kenntlichsten bei demjenigen, was an ihnen moralisch ist; um deswillen wollen wir noch das verschiedene

Gefühl derselben in Ansehung des Erhabenen und Schönen aus diesem Gesichtspunkte in Erwägung ziehen”(269)

But if we turn again here to the *Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen*, we are once more presented with a kind of disclaimer, in which Kant reiterates his previous statement about sketching only the general features that make a people prone to feelings of either the beautiful or sublime. This time, however, he is even more forceful:

Es ist kaum nötig, dass ich hier meine vorige Entschuldigung wiederhole. In jedem Volke enthält der feinste Teil rühmliche Charaktere von aller Art, und wen ein oder anderer Tadel treffen sollte, der wird, wenn er fein genug ist, seinen Vorteil verstehen, der darauf ankommt, dass er jeden andern seinem Schicksale überläßt, sich selbst aber ausnimmt. (269).

As we have seen in the chapter on gender, Kant again finds it necessary (albeit “*kaum nötig*,” but still nevertheless necessary) to defend himself. Aware of the potential contradictions that could arise out of suggesting that not all nationalities possess moral feeling, Kant later added this disclaimer into the *Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen* as an afterthought to defend against possible criticism. Kant insists that in every nation there are in fact individuals who possess the ability to have finer feeling, and these people should consider themselves an exception to the rule. Here we can see vestiges of the language used in the chapter on temperament, in which the universality of moral feeling and the belief in the dignity and worth of all human beings was the dominant message. But this disclaimer also makes clear that these individuals that belong to the “*feinster Teil*” of a given nation should essentially do what they can to enhance their own superior moral feelings while dismissing the rest of their countrymen as naturally incapable of achieving such a privileged position. By reemphasizing that his analysis relies heavily on generalities rather than individual

characters, Kant admits that there can be instances where exceptional individuals do not fit within these broad categorizations. But ultimately, as we shall see in the remainder of the essay, Kant believes that the ability to cultivate one's "moral feeling" appears to be the very foundation upon which the belief in the dignity and worth of the human being is based. It becomes clear that Kant does not believe that this ability to improve oneself morally is found in large quantities outside of Europe. Those "races" which Kant believes are generally unable to develop rational or moral faculties are shown to be excluded from his "Gemälde von prächtigem Ausdruck." As we have seen in the previous chapter on gender, it unfortunately becomes clear in these final two chapters that the "universality" of moral feeling that was so central to Kant's system in the chapter on temperament really only applies to white male Europeans.

Kant moves forward with his analysis and begins with his descriptions of the various European nations, focusing at first primarily on the English, Spanish, Italian and French and comments on the varying degrees of beauty and sublimity within each. Particularly interesting is his description of the French, which is remarkably similar to his treatment of women in the previous chapter. The French have an extraordinary sense for the feeling of the beautiful, and while they do possess sublime qualities, these are subordinated by the beautiful and are best expressed when they harmonize with it:

Der Franzose hat ein herrliches Gefühl vor das moralisch Schöne. Er ist artig, höflich und gefällig...Selbst seine erhabene Empfindungen, deren er nicht wenige hat, sind dem Gefühle des Schönen untergeordnet und bekommen nur ihre Stärke durch die Zusammenstimmung mit dem letzteren (270).

He goes on to describe the Frenchman's mannerisms as effeminate and their society as unusually infatuated with and oriented towards women. "Das Frauenzimmer gibt in

Frankreich allen Gesellschaften und allem Umgange den Ton” (270). He then suggests that because men in France are flirtatious like women, they do not properly honor them. He notes that Rousseau once observed while staying in France that “ein Frauenzimmer neimals etwas mehr als ein großes Kind werde“(271). Kant claims to disagree with this statement and asserts that the reason Rousseau wrote it was most likely because he had observed the way women are treated in France and was upset that they were not given more honor and respect. He remarks that:

Allein er scharfsichtige Schweizer schrieb dieses in Frankreich und vermutlich empfand er es als ein so großer Vertheidiger des schönen Geschlechts, mit Entrüstung, dass man demselben nicht mit mehr wirklicher Achtung da selbst begegnet (271).

Kant then moves to a description of the Germans, who are described perhaps not so surprisingly as the perfect mixture of the qualities of the beautiful and the sublime. “Er hat eine glückliche Mischung in dem Gefühle so wohl des Erhabenen und des Schönen“ (272). The Germans have the unique ability to sense both the beautiful and the sublime and seem to possess the most ideal combination of these qualities. He then moves on to the Dutch, who he again dismisses for their phlegmatic nature: “Er macht den Contrast so wohl gegen den Franzosen als den Engländer, und ist gewisser maßen ein sehr phlegmatisierter Deutsche[r]” (272). The Dutchman, who has little feeling for either the beautiful or the sublime and who possesses an inherent lack of motivation serves as the example for what can happen to a German if he does not cultivate his finer feelings. Again we see Kant privileging the capacity and motivation for moral growth as an ideal human quality. Apathy and lack of motivation are viewed as a very real threat to progress and the achievement of an ideal humanity based on moral principles.

The remainder of the analysis is devoted to the people outside of Europe, and it is in this section of the treatise where Kant makes his boldest statements about the general lack of moral and rational capabilities in non-Europeans. He compares these other cultures with the European nations he just described, stating, “Wenn die Araber gleichsam die Spanier des Orients seien, so sind die Perser die Franzosen von Asien” (276). The Persians are viewed favorably because they are not such strict followers of Islam, and “erlauben ihrer zur Lustigkeit aufgelegten Gemütsart eine ziemlich milde Auslegung des Koran” (276). When making these broad comparisons with European nations, Kant always tends to highlight the degenerate qualities of these nations. Although the Japanese could technically be regarded as the “Engländer dieses Weltteils” (276), they show “wenig Merkmale eines feineren Gefühls an sich” (276).

In perhaps the most troubling passage of the entire essay, Kant employs a lengthy explanation of the inhabitants of Africa, who in his view have virtually no finer feeling and are incapable of moral improvement, citing the work of Hume as proof that no such capabilities exist within this culture:

Die Negers von Afrika haben von der Natur kein Gefühl welches über das läppische stiege. Herr Hume fordert jedermann auf, ein einziges Beispiel anzuführen, da ein Neger Talente gewiesen habe, und behauptet: Daß unter den hundertausenden von Schwarzen, die aus ihren Ländern anderwärts verführt werden, obgleich deren sehr viele auch in Freiheit gefetzt werden, dennoch nicht ein einziger jemals gefunden worden, der entweder in Kunst oder Wissenschaft, oder irgend einer andern rühmlichen Eigenschaft etwas großes vorgestellt habe...(277)

Although he writes in the *Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen* that there can exist within “inferior” civilizations some individuals who possess moral feeling, the African is clearly exempt from this rule. In order to justify his own contradiction, Kant must make the

African into an entirely different class of human being. He states, “So wesentlich ist der Unterschied zwischen diesen zwei Menschengeschlechtern, und er scheint eben so groß in Ansehung der Gemütsfähigkeiten, als der Farbe nach zu sein“ (277). According to Kant the African is hardly capable of any sort of moral action or achievement, and therefore he must be excluded from the human race. This fundamental and biological difference in skin color is for Kant an indication of a fundamental difference in mental character. This basic distinction is used to justify his exclusion of the African from his ideal community of rational and moral human beings.

As we have seen at various other junctures in this chapter, as well as in the chapter on gender, Kant is essentially redefining what constitutes humanity in order to exclude certain people from it. While in his chapter on human nature, Kant seems to acknowledge the problems with privileging the melancholic as the temperament most capable of achieving true moral virtue, in this final chapter he is decidedly less ambiguous and less indecisive about privileging the white male European as the ideal candidate for moral growth. While the suggestion that some temperaments are better suited for virtuous acts than others seems for Kant to be somewhat difficult to reconcile, his notion of white European superiority seems to trouble him much less. By using physical, observable characteristics in the various nations examined in the text to make judgments about the inner moral capabilities of the people that inhabit them, Kant effectively creates a system in which the idea of “universality” is a concept that can only be truly applied to a select few. Consequently, by the time we reach the concluding remarks of the essay, the modern-day reader has become highly skeptical of Kant’s call to educate every young world citizen in order to elevate humanity’s moral feeling. When Kant calls for “das sittliche Gefühl frühzeitig in dem Busen eines jeden jungen

Weltbürgers zu einer thätigen Empfindung zu erhöhen” (280), it has by this point become quite clear that not every young citizen of the world can properly be included in this moral education he advocates. Unlike Kant’s analysis of human temperament, which seems to embrace difference as an essential aspect of cosmopolitan universalism, Kant’s observations in this final chapter are based primarily on excluding that which is different. In order to justify this exclusion, Kant must completely re-conceptualize his idea of what constitutes the morally feeling human subject.

## Conclusion

Although the *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* is often remembered more for its shortcomings than its strengths, this thesis has shown that taking a closer look at the text's less agreeable moments can reveal greater insight about the true nature of its contradictions. Central to Kant's belief in the possibility of a humanity composed of diverse yet complementary elements is his theory of the temperaments. I have argued that it is in this section of the work where Kant most clearly acknowledges the problems with privileging the sublime over the beautiful. The balancing of these diverse temperaments on a collective level creates a picture of humanity that encompasses people of all dispositions and embraces the various temperaments for their imperfections as well as their assets. I argue that this balancing act is a way for Kant to avoid suggesting that the melancholic temperament is somehow superior to the other natural dispositions; each one needs the others in order for the "Gemälde von prächtigem Ausdruck" to function successfully. But as we move to the more unsettling chapters of the treatise on gender and national character, it becomes rather apparent that Kant's stated belief in the "Gefühl von der Schönheit und der Würde der menschlichen Natur" is not as all-encompassing as it seems. While I have shown Kant to be conflicted at particular junctures in the essay with regards to the privileging of the melancholic temperament, his chapter on the character of the sexes reveals none of the same uncertainty. I have attempted to highlight how in its place we see Kant frequently reworking his own categories so as to exclude women from the privileged realm of sublime masculine understanding. This adjustment of his own theory to shut out

women is not, as has been previously suggested, merely an unfavorable and misogynist portrayal of women that should be dismissed as sexist, but is rather a critical attempt to reinforce and legitimize an emergent bourgeois gender order that gained prominence during this time would gain even more legitimacy in the nineteenth century. By arguing that male and female complement each other and that each sex has definitive societal roles, philosophers such as Kant, Herder, Rousseau and Fichte laid the groundwork for a new perception of gender roles which rationalized the confinement of women within the private sphere. While certainly sexist from a contemporary perspective, I suggest that it is also indicative of a struggle to define the acceptable place of women within the ideal picture of a morally whole community advocated in the chapter on temperament. This struggle to find an acceptable space for women is in many ways characteristic of much of Enlightenment thought, and in the clearly defined gender roles that are repeatedly justified and defended in this essay Kant is revealed, like many of his contemporaries, as a thinker who is deeply concerned with the inherent contradictions of excluding women from the realm of the morally virtuous sublime. I have also illustrated how a similar struggle is at play in perhaps the most troubling chapter of the *Beobachtungen*, the section on national character. This chapter of the text is perhaps the most at odds with Kant's insistence in the third chapter that all humans are endowed with worth and dignity. As I have shown, in this chapter Kant is concerned with defining the potential for moral progress and growth as one of the most basic traits of the human subject. This definition allows him to completely exclude certain groups from this realm and project the white male European as the ideal human being who is most capable of attaining his true moral potential. The universality of feeling that Kant describes at earlier points in the text is here redefined as something that can only truly exist for a

privileged few. Although these statements are undoubtedly highly prejudicial and racist by today's standards, they merit our attention for the problematic way in which they attempt to redefine the basic characteristics of what it means to be human. Kant is here not only redefining humanity, he is essentially creating two separate "Menschengeschlechter," using reason itself to justify the prevention of non-Europeans from receiving full status as rational and moral human beings. If all people are indeed endowed with the capacity to be moral and rational, as Kant seems to suggest in his chapter on human temperament, then it would therefore be theoretically permissible for people from all gender and racial backgrounds to enjoy privileged positions within his proposed ideal community of rational-moral human beings. I claim that while Kant's theory of the temperaments outlined in this essay lies at the heart of his thinking on the necessity of diversity, the final two chapters on gender and national character can be read as attempts to modify his theory so as to promote a clear hierarchy which privileges some and subordinates others. I argue that while Kant is actively reflecting on the problem of privileging the sublime over the beautiful in his chapter on temperament, the subsequent chapters of the essay engage with this problem in a different way. These troublesome remarks on gender and race are not, as others have suggested, completely disjointed from and contradictory to Kant's idea of a universal humanity outlined in the chapter on temperament. I argue that Kant's writings on gender and national character in the *Beobachtungen* are also engaged in an active struggle to resolve the problem of privileging certain groups over others. This problem is central to Kant's conception of universality and is in many ways impossible to solve. The extreme lengths that Kant goes to portray the white male European as the best-suited propagator of Enlightenment ideals appears to stand in stark contrast to his alleged belief in the inherent worth and dignity of all

human beings that he advocates in his discussion of temperament. But the work as a whole reflects an awareness of the difficulty of reconciling the universal moral qualities of humanity with the diverse human elements that comprise it. The problem of privilege and Kant's attempts to resolve it reveal an underlying uneasiness about the role of women and non-Europeans within his own proposed ideal community of rational and moral human beings.

The apparent contradictions in this work are in many ways reflective of a broader Enlightenment discourse which engaged heavily with themes of diversity, tolerance, gender, education, race and national identity. Kant is by no means the only thinker of this era who grappled with questions of diversity and tolerance, or who exhibited a strong belief in the progression of humanity and the ability of the individual and the community to continually strive for greater perfection. The question of how humanity could improve itself, how these emerging social roles should ideally function, and how the goals of freedom, tolerance, education and autonomy could eventually be realized were taken up by many great writers of the Enlightenment, providing a rich field for further inquiry. The development of the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* during this era sought to portray this search for bourgeois subjectivity and its defined gender roles on the stage, and many of the themes put forth in the *Beobachtungen* resurface in this genre. Kant's ideas about gender, class and difference also reappear in the epistolary novels of the period, which served as ideal popularizing vehicles for moral education and were concerned with a similar project of defining key roles for the diverse individuals in society. Other great dramatic works of the period, such as Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*, engage with Kant's conceptions of universal human freedom in their explorations of difference and tolerance in religion and national character. This play proposes

an ideal utopian community that claims to extend its arms to people of all religions and nationalities, even as it also excludes women and expects its non-European and non-Christian members to assimilate and adapt to Western cultural and societal norms. The writers of this period were very much concerned with resolving the problem of privilege that Kant struggles with in the *Beobachtungen*, and by examining their progressive ideas for the improvement of humanity (flawed as many of them might be) we can come closer to an understanding of why diversity and difference presented such a critical problem to these thinkers, both in the eighteenth century and beyond.

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