

# Nationality from a Philosophical Point of View: Kant's Critique of Hume on the Concept of National Character

## Felsefi Bir Bakış Açısıyla Milliyet: Kant'ın Milli Karakter Kavramına İlişkin Hume Eleştirisi

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### Abstract

The intellectual foundations of the concept of the nation and its relationship with other forms of belonging, such as ethnicity, race, and citizenship, are often overlooked. This study examines Kant's critique of Hume on the concept of national character and its role in the Enlightenment-era conceptual differentiation between "nation" and "race." The study begins by examining the interpretation of ethnic belonging in European intellectual thought before the Enlightenment, with a focus on the paradigm shift of the 18th century. It then explores how 17th- and 18th-century thinkers conceptualized 'nation,' 'race,' and related social categories, providing the intellectual backdrop for Kant's critique of Hume. The analysis identifies the epistemological foundations that separated their positions – Hume's empiricist particularism versus Kant's rationalist-teleological universalism – and argues that this confrontation constitutes one important episode in the intellectual genealogy of the primordialist-constructivist divide that has long structured contemporary nationalism studies.

**Key Words:** National Character, Nation, Race, Immanuel Kant, David Hume.

### Öz

Millet kavramının entelektüel temelleri ya da diğer aidiyet biçimleriyle (etnisite, ırk, vatandaşlık vb.) olan ilişkisi, genellikle görmezden gelinme eğilimindedir. Bu çalışma, Kant'ın "milli karakter" kavramına ilişkin Hume eleştirisi ve bu eleştirinin "millet" ile "ırk" kavramlarının birbirinden ayrışmasındaki rolü üzerine odaklanmaktadır. Çalışmada öncelikle Aydınlanma öncesinde Avrupa fikir hayatında etnik aidiyetin yorumlanışı ele alınmakta, özellikle 18. yüzyılda yaşanan paradigma değişimi incelenmektedir. Ardından 17. ve 18. yüzyıl düşünürlerinin "millet," "ırk" ve ilgili toplumsal kategorileri değerlendirme biçimleri araştırılarak Kant'ın Hume eleştirisinin entelektüel arka planı ortaya koyulmaktadır. Çalışma, iki düşünür arasındaki ayrışmanın epistemolojik temellerini – Hume'un empirist tikelciliği ile Kant'ın akılcı-teleolojik evrenselciliği – çözümlenerek bu yüzleşmenin, çağdaş milliyetçilik çalışmalarında uzun süredir belirleyici olan primordiyalizm-konstruktivizm karşıtlığının entelektüel arka planındaki önemli bir uğrak olduğunu savunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Milli Karakter, Millet, ırk, Immanuel Kant, David Hume.

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## Introduction

“Hume thinks that if each individual in a nation is intent on assuming his own particular character (as with the English), the nation itself has no character. It seems to me that he is mistaken; for affectation of a character is precisely the general character of the people to which he himself belongs”<sup>1</sup>

In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (APP), Kant critiques the stance of David Hume –whose empiricist philosophy profoundly shaped Kant’s own thought– on the concept of “national character.” Hume rejects what he calls “physical causes” as those that “prevail among the generality of mankind.”<sup>2</sup> However, he acknowledges that individuals within a nation may develop shared behavioral patterns and thought tendencies due to the principle of living together. Notably, Hume emphasizes the role of individual character (and thus free will), framing national character in moral rather than physical terms, a perspective Kant appears to place in the background.

The notion that human practices and dispositions stem from hereditary traits reflects a widespread cognitive tendency. Assumptions like the English being “cold,” the French “arrogant,” or the Germans “rude” often seem unremarkable. Yet, as history repeatedly demonstrates, this way of thinking underpins wars, destruction, and genocides. Whether framed as hereditary or as culturally defined, attributing fixed traits to a nation or race amounts to what Bourdieu terms a “substantialist mode of thought,”<sup>3</sup> a tendency that obscures the complex interplay of factors shaping individual behavior.

Acknowledging inequalities among people based on biological differences is no longer considered a reasonable perspective. Yet, the Enlightenment (or modern) scientific and philosophical foundations shaping contemporary thought are strikingly “substantialist” in this regard. It may seem surprising at first to trace the roots of racist thought to Hegel’s characterization of African races as “cannibals” and “people devoid of historical-freedom consciousness,”<sup>4</sup> Locke’s association of slavery with racial hierarchy in the *Second Treatise*,<sup>5</sup> or Marx’s contributions on anti-Semitism.<sup>6</sup> However, this is a natural outcome of

- 1 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, (trans. Robert B. Loudon), Cambridge University Press, New York 2006, p. 213.
- 2 David Hume, “Of National Characters”, Angela Coventry and Andrew Valls, eds., *David Hume on Morals, Politics, and Society*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2018, p. 162.
- 3 Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, (trans. Randal Johnson), Stanford University Press, California 1998, p. 4.
- 4 G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, (trans. H.B. Nisbett), Cambridge University Press, New York 1984, pp. 182–83.
- 5 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Peter Laslett, ed., Cambridge University Press, 14th ed., New York 2003, p. 289.
- 6 Karl Marx, “On The Jewish Question”, Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 1978, pp. 26–46.

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the Eurocentric origins of modern thought and what Horkheimer and Adorno identify as the “hidebound particularism” underpinning this tradition.<sup>7</sup>

Advances in anthropology and philology in the 18th century led European philosophy to frame relations among human groups around the concept of a “scientific” race. During this period, Aryan myths emerged, accompanied by the notion that Semitic or Hamitic races were hereditarily “inferior,” a presupposition that influenced philosophical discourse. Both French humanist thinkers<sup>8</sup> and German romantics like Herder and Fichte<sup>9</sup> were shaped by this substantialist attitude. Freud’s concepts of the “group mind,” or “social instinct,” becoming a subject of scientific inquiry in the modern era directly reflects this tendency within the European philosophical canon.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, the discovery of the Sanskrit-Latin language connection by “adventurous explorers” such as William Jones and Anquetil-Duperron in the late 18th century foreshadowed the rise of Aryan myths. The “superior race” theories stemming from these developments had profound consequences for European political life.

It is important to note, however, that the concept of race in Enlightenment thought was initially used in a historical rather than biological context. As traditional religion –or church– centered paradigms gave way to a new framework rooted in the natural sciences, race functioned as a highly “rational” and “universal” concept within this shift. Natural history emerged as a key specialized field for understanding humanity, and the concept of race provided a rational framework for situating human groups within this new historical perspective.<sup>11</sup> Within the Enlightenment’s universalist ideal, categorizing human species into racial groups appeared to align with the principles of reason and nature.

According to Hudson, the scientific rhetoric of Enlightenment thinkers created a new context in which “race” replaced “nation.”<sup>12</sup> In medieval Europe, encyclopedists and chroniclers primarily defined human communities using the Latin terms *gens* and *natio*.<sup>13</sup> Disciplines such as natural history, grounded

7 Max Horkheimer – Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, (trans. Edmund Jephcott), Stanford University Press, California 2002, p. 138.

8 Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism and Exoticism in French Thought*, (trans. Catherine Porter), Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1993, pp. 96–106.

9 Robert Bernasconi, *İrk Kavramını Kim İcat Etti? Felsefi Düşünce İrk ve İrkçilik*, (trans. Zeynep Direk), Metis Yayınları, İstanbul 2011, pp. 98–114.

10 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion*, (trans. James Strachey), Penguin Books, New York 1985, p. 97.

11 Christian Geulen, *İrkçiliğin Tarihi*, (trans. Simin Şahin), Runik Kitap, İstanbul 2021, pp. 49–50.

12 Nicholas Hudson, “From ‘Nation’ to ‘Race’: The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, XXIX/3, 1996, p. 248.

13 This study serves, in a sense, as a continuation of my 2024 article, which examined the use of the Latin concepts *gens* and *natio* in medieval chronicles. I argue that the social categoriza-

in positive science, and anthropology, which emerged as a subfield, provided more “scientific” and empirical foundations for differentiating human groups within Enlightenment rational discourse. “National” boundaries, which lacked concrete or objective criteria, were supplanted by “racial” criteria. Interestingly, this was also the period when the first notions of national characters and identities became conceivable, with Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities” gaining prominence under the influence of print capitalism.<sup>14</sup>

In this context, how should we understand the relationship between the concept of “national character,” carefully analyzed by Enlightenment philosophers such as Kant and Hume, and the concept of race? More specifically, what role did Enlightenment thought play in shaping the distinction between nation and race in the Western canon? Did the concept of race truly replace the nation as a rational framework in the 18th century, supplanting the “irrational” and undefined notions of earlier periods? Or does the “terminological chaos” caused by the inconsistent use of terms like nation, race, and ethnicity in the literature undermine such conclusions?<sup>15</sup> Most importantly, can the origins of the theoretical divide between primordialism and constructivism—central to contemporary nationalism studies—be traced to the Enlightenment debates on national character? A reinterpretation of the dramatic shift in the understanding of ethnic belonging, shaped by the categories of nation and race in the 18th century, through the lens of political philosophy, may offer meaningful answers to these questions.

The primary aim of this study is to link the historical foundations of the distinction between the concepts of nation and race with key debates in Enlightenment thought, providing a philosophical framework for nationalism studies. Kant’s critical engagement with Hume appears to foreshadow the substantialist basis of the primordialist and constructivist perspectives. Therefore, this study argues that the Kant-Hume debate constitutes one important episode in the intellectual genealogy of the primordialist-constructivist divide in nationalism studies. For Kant, the “hereditary rules” he described as an “empirical” scientific object for geographers, and which he argued shaped communal practices,<sup>16</sup> were less significant for Hume than the “political” or “cultural” factors he emphasized.<sup>17</sup>

tion forms employed in medieval European chronicles underpin the political concept of the “nation,” which gained legitimacy beginning in the 18th century. See M. Fahri Daniş, “Stages of Ethnic Belonging in the Western Canon: Etymological Rules of the Medieval *Gens* and *Natio* Concepts”, *Ortaçağ Araştırmaları Dergisi*, VII/1, 2024, pp. 161–183.

14 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London 2006.

15 Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding*, Princeton University Press, New York 1994, p. 90.

16 Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, p. 218.

17 Hume, “Of National Characters”, p. 162.

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Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify how key terms are used in this study. "Race" refers to biological or quasi-biological classifications of human groups, as they emerged in 18th-century natural history. "Nation" denotes a political and/or cultural community defined by shared historical experience and institutions. "National character" is the Enlightenment-era concept describing the perceived moral and behavioral dispositions of a given people. "Ethnicity" is treated as a socially constructed category of belonging. While these categories frequently overlapped in 18th-century usage, this study traces precisely the process by which they began to diverge.<sup>18</sup>

This study first examines the conceptual frameworks of Enlightenment thinkers, their perspectives on the *natio* or *gens*, and their approaches to the substantiality of ethnic affiliation prior to the 18th century. Thinkers such as Machiavelli, Rousseau and Kant used specific terminologies to describe communities, which reflect early attempts to align the emerging notion of a new type of subject –rooted in Cartesian philosophy– with the idea of nationhood. The study also highlights the significant rupture in the 18th century, during which the terminology and paradigms used to explain human origins or ethnic affiliations shifted dramatically. The emergence of race as a scientific concept during this period replaced the theologically driven models of the Middle Ages and became a "legitimate" tool for defining the origins of various peoples. By examining this scientific-philosophical transformation, the study uncovers the intellectual background of the "national character" debate between Kant and Hume, facilitating a comparative analysis of texts that reflect this pivotal distinction. The study concludes by examining the theoretical legacy of Kant's critique, arguing that the primordialist-constructivist divide central to contemporary nationalism studies finds one of its earliest philosophical articulations in the Kant-Hume confrontation.

### **Categorization of Peoples in the Renaissance**

The Enlightenment heralded the emergence of a fundamentally rational and 'knowing' individual. The concepts of belonging and identity –how this individual related to society and the state– came to define the Enlightenment's social imagination. The ideas of Kant and Hume on this topic cannot be separated from the broader characteristics of the Enlightenment; both thinkers envision a new subjectivity that reached the 18th century through various intellectual

18 The terminological debate surrounding race and ethnicity has long been intertwined with the theoretical conflict between primordialism and functionalism. While a detailed exploration of this debate is beyond the scope of this study, it is sufficient to note the adoption of Jenkins' constructivist model of ethnicity: "No matter how apparently strong or inflexible it may be, ethnicity is always socially constructed, in the first instance and in every other." See: Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*, 2nd ed., Sage, London 2008, p. 49.

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paths. At this point, it is crucial to examine how the intellectual predecessors of the Enlightenment approached ethnic belonging. This issue has a dual nature, tied to both terminological and paradigmatic shifts.

The semantic relationships between terms used to describe various peoples in the pre-eighteenth-century Western literary canon are highly significant. Latin words like *gens*, *natio*, and *populus* share similar meanings but exhibit key differences. *Gens* often refers to ethnically or linguistically homogeneous communities and is closely associated with “race” or the Ancient Greek *ethnos*. In contrast, *natio* is linked to “birth” and originally referred to supra-familial tribal ties. Intellectual history reflects the ascendancy of *natio* over *gens*; today, we belong to “nation-states,” not “gens-states.” However, in the Early Middle Ages and late antiquity, the usage of these terms was more fluid. *Gens* and *natio* were often used interchangeably, with *gens* frequently preferred. For instance, in the works of Bede, Isidore of Seville, or Regino of Prüm, no distinct hierarchical relationship or consistent “etymological rule” can be observed between these terms.<sup>19</sup> The dominance of *natio* in political terminology, leading to its current usage, appears somewhat coincidental, driven largely by the rise of universities in central Europe and the formation of linguistically homogeneous student groups.<sup>20</sup>

In medieval Europe, communities were primarily classified based on the languages they spoke. The Latin phrase *gentem lingua facit* (language makes nations) reflects the close relationship between language and ethnic affiliation. Language was the most evident criterion for belonging to a particular *gens*, and as illustrated in the famous Babylonian myth, the division of humanity was attributed to the existence of different languages.<sup>21</sup> Writing in the 7th century, Isidore of Seville asserted that “nations arose from languages,” not the reverse.<sup>22</sup> During the early Middle Ages, *gentes* and later *nationes* were defined primarily through linguistic criteria. From Bede the Venerable onwards, the term *gentis Anglorum* (“English nation”) referred to those who spoke English, while communities on either side of the Rhine were categorized as German or French speaking.<sup>23</sup>

19 Daniş, “Stages of Ethnic Belonging”, pp. 177–179.

20 Pearl Kibre, *The Nations in the Medieval Universities*, Medieval Academy of America, Massachusetts 1948.; Paul W. Knoll, “Nationes and Other Bonding Groups at Late Medieval Central European Universities”, Nancy van Deusen and Leonard Michael Koff, eds., *Mobs: An Interdisciplinary Inquiry*, Brill Leiden 2012, pp. 95–115.

21 Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, (trans. James Fentress), Blackwell, Oxford 1995, pp. 9–10.

22 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, (trans. S.A. Barney et al.), Cambridge University Press, New York 2006, 9.1.14.

23 Peter Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2004, p. 161.

However, this linguistic classification lacked political significance and did not constitute a basis for legal affiliation in feudal Europe. The legal identity of medieval individuals was dual in nature. On one hand, it was shaped by their "municipal" identity, determined by the feudal relationships and geographical location (*patrie*) to which they were bound. On the other hand, it was defined by the *populus Christianus* identity, promoted by the Church as the divine heir of the universal Roman *imperium*. This latter identity encompassed broader, often political, affiliations and was considered more "legitimate" in most contexts.<sup>24</sup>

In the Middle Ages, the origins and classification of various communities were shaped by both theological and linguistic considerations. The belief in a singular God, lineage, and language at the beginning of creation, and the subsequent division of humanity into distinct peoples after the Flood through the three sons of Noah, was widely accepted. This narrative from the Genesis account in the Old Testament explains the diversity of human communities and languages through Ham, Shem, and Japheth.<sup>25</sup> It reflects the historical paradigm within which ethnic affiliation was understood during this period.

Among 16th-century European thinkers, Machiavelli's work signals a critical shift in the categorization of peoples. While classifying human communities based on language remained rooted in theological paradigms, Machiavelli was one of the first to suggest that linguistic commonality could form the basis of political unity. In *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*, he identifies a shared cultural identity among Italian-speaking regions like Florence, Milan, Lombardy, and Naples. However, this does not support the anachronistic claim that Machiavelli was an "Italian nationalist," as some scholars have argued.<sup>26</sup> Instead, his writings suggest a gradual politicization of language as a stabilizing criterion, distinct from earlier theological frameworks.

In the context of this study, Machiavelli's significance lies in his conceptualization of a new form of political citizenship and the secular meaning he ascribes to the idea of *patria*. The notion of territorial affiliation –a cultural community rooted in the shared customs of a secular *patria*– anticipates, at a very early stage, some ideals that would fully emerge in the 18th century. As

24 Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*, Princeton University Press, New York 2002, pp. 52–53.

25 Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, LIV/1, 1997, pp. 103–142; Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, (trans. Arthur Goldhammer), Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1992.

26 Leif-Eric Easley, 'Nationalist Princes and Patriotic Publics: Machiavelli and Rousseau's Enduring Insights on Nationalism', *The Korean Journal of International Studies* X/1, 2012, pp. 95–121; Felix Gilbert, 'The Concept of Nationalism in Machiavelli's Prince', *Studies in the Renaissance*, I, 1954, pp. 38–48.

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Landon notes, the concept of a “secular *patria*” and the corresponding reinterpretation of “patriotism” in non-religious terms are foundational contributions to modern political philosophy.<sup>27</sup> This does not suggest that nationalism existed in the 16th century, nor does Machiavelli’s work imply any notion of Italian national-cultural unity.<sup>28</sup> Rather, his ideas represent an important precursor to later developments. The treatment of human communities as “historical” collectivities and their conceptualization in a “scientific” framework would only become prominent topics of philosophical discourse in the late 17th century.

### **Scientificism, Historicism, and the Invention of the Concept of “Race”**

The significant advances in the natural sciences during the late 17th and early 18th centuries revealed a preference for diversity over uniformity in the natural order, challenging long-standing theological assumptions. Increasingly, people began to approach Bible-centered narratives with skepticism, leading to a profound shift in anthropological and historical paradigms.<sup>29</sup> The realization that the Earth was far older than biblical chronology suggested, and that New World peoples had developed complex religious systems independently, made a revision of the ‘theological philology’ model unavoidable.

The Genesis-based theological framework, which positioned human origins within a singular narrative, proved inadequate for understanding the expanding diversity of human societies. The period, often referred to as an “age of doubt,” required new, rational approaches to categorize “primitive” societies –communities that had developed complex religious systems without any knowledge of “Jesus”. As Voltaire aptly noted, this marked the demise of the “universal conception of history which treats the rest of humanity as if it did not exist.”<sup>30</sup>

The concept of race emerged at this juncture as a “magic word,” providing a framework to interpret differences between human societies not through

27 William J. Landon, *Politics, Patriotism and Language: Niccolò Machiavelli’s “Secular Patria” and the Creation of an Italian National Identity*, Peter Lang, New York 2005, p. 21.

28 The question of whether Machiavelli prioritized Italian political unity or a “Florence-centered unity” remains largely enigmatic. While *The Prince* appears to offer a clearer inclination toward the latter, the broader scope of *Discourses on Livy* complicates this interpretation. Early scholars, such as Gilbert, were quick to characterize Machiavelli as an “Italian nationalist.” However, Parent’s analysis provides a more nuanced perspective, framing Machiavelli’s vision as a “plot to unify relatively equal states.” See: Joseph Parent, *Uniting States: Voluntary Union in World Politics*, Oxford University Press, New York 2011, p. 172.

29 Peter Watson, *The German Genius: Europe’s Third Renaissance, the Second Scientific Revolution and the Twentieth Century*, Simon and Schuster, London 2010.

30 ‘Nouveau Plan d’une Histoire de l’esprit Humain’, in *Essai Sur Les Moeurs et l’esprit Des Nations*, ed. Louis Moland, Garnier Freres, Paris 1878, p. 817.

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the divine lens of the Bible, but within an empirically traceable developmental process. The "expansion of Europe" and the challenges of categorizing the "savage" peoples of the New World within traditional biblical paradigms demanded a universal historical approach. As Bernal aptly notes, this shift occurred when "the laws of race" became the laws of history.<sup>31</sup> Race, as a form of social categorization rooted in nature and therefore empirical, offered a rational framework for understanding the distinctions between human societies. This reorganization of individual affiliation was described by Geulen as being "rationally reorganized," reflecting a broader intellectual movement toward the dominance of reason.<sup>32</sup> This "tyranny of reason" became a defining characteristic of the scientific paradigm, culminating in its fullest expression by the last quarter of the 18th century.<sup>33</sup>

The concept of race became a historical category in the early 18th century, primarily due to the work of the German intellectual circles engaged in natural history. In fact, as early as 1684, the French traveler François Bernier was likely the first to use the category of "race" to classify peoples outside Europe. In his brief article, Bernier divided humanity into four races: Europeans (including North Africans, Indians, and Native Americans), sub-Saharan Africans, Asians, and Semitic peoples. According to Bernier, the "parchedness" of the skin of Egyptians and Native Americans was attributed to climate rather than being an inherent trait, unlike the inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>34</sup> The appeal to an explanation of physical differences based on "climate" or "geography" had a long tradition, dating back to Aristotle.<sup>35</sup> Although this perspective influenced numerous Enlightenment intellectuals, ranging from Voltaire to Rousseau, it is most often associated with Montesquieu in the 18th century. Montesquieu, in his renowned *The Spirit of Laws*, uses the term "*esprit de la nation*" to describe the general characteristics of a given people, shaped by

31 Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, The Fabrication of Ancient Greece*, vol. I, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick 2020, p. 309.

32 Geulen, *Irkıılıđın Tarihi*, p. 38.

33 The Enlightenment ideas of the 18th century often served to legitimize the authoritarian yet "liberating" policies enacted by certain monarchs under the guise of imposing the laws of reason. This governance style, known as "Enlightened Absolutism," emerged as a significant framework characterizing the reigns of Peter I and Catherine II in Russia, Frederick II in Prussia, and Joseph II in Austria. Scott's study provides a comprehensive analysis of the intellectual underpinnings of this concept, offering valuable insights and facilitating historical comparisons. See: Hamish Scott, *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Later Eighteenth-Century Europe*, Macmillan, London 1990.

34 François Bernier, "A New Division of Earth", (trans. Janet L. Nelson), *History Workshop Journal*, LI, 2001, pp. 247–48.

35 Julie K. Ward, "Ethnos in the Politics: Aristotle and Race", Julie K. Ward and Tommy L. Lott, eds., *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays*, Blackwell, Oxford 2002, p. 15.

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various factors.<sup>36</sup> These include religion, laws, administrative practices, historical precedents, and traditions, in addition to climate.<sup>37</sup>

Ten years after Bernier, in 1694, the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* defined the word “race” in relation to “lineage” as *lignée, lignage, extraction*.<sup>38</sup> In the first half of the 18th century, the principle of racial categorization gained increasing prominence within the intellectual community, particularly through the works of natural theorists such as Carl Linnaeus and Comte de Buffon. Following Bernier, Linnaeus divided human societies into four races in his *Systema Naturae*: Americanus, Europeanus, Asiaticus, and Africanus.<sup>39</sup> Linnaeus’ classification was based largely on physiological differences, but he also attributed these differences to “climatic” or “geographical” factors. Buffon, similar to Linnaeus, believed that physiological differentiation stemmed from environmental factors rather than biological ones.<sup>40</sup> However, unlike Linnaeus and Bernier, Buffon proposed a six-fold categorization. According to him, six races originated from a “single common stock” (monogeny<sup>41</sup>): Lapp, Tatar, South Asian, European, Ethiopian, and American.

In 1780, Johann Blumenbach, a member of the same intellectual tradition, introduced the concept of *Bildungstrieb* within a comprehensive theory of nature, which laid much of the groundwork for the modern concept of race. Like Buffon, Blumenbach was a monogenist who attributed racial differences to “degeneration” from a common origin. His key contribution was the concept of *Bildungstrieb*, a “Newtonian force” immanent in the human organism that accounted for physiological variation while maintaining the unity of the species.<sup>42</sup> As Watson noted, this concept was ultimately “teleological,” sanctifying the diversification of races by referencing a final or inexplicable “superior cause.”<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, Blumenbach’s influence, particularly on figures like Kant, was profound.

36 Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone, eds., Cambridge University Press, London 1989, p. 320.

37 Josep R. Llobera, *The God of Modernity: The Development of Nationalism in Western Europe*, Routledge, New York 1994.

38 Hudson, “From ‘Nation’ to ‘Race’”, p. 247.

39 Bernasconi, *Irk Kavramını Kim İcat Etti?*, p. 41.

40 Hudson, “From ‘Nation’ to ‘Race’”, p. 253.

41 While monogenism is the interpretation accepted in religious sources that people come from a single lineage or origin, polygenesis refers to the plural formation of the human species in various parts of the world. Although polygenism theories, which emerged in 17th century Europe, scientifically supported racial categorization, many thinkers who developed race theory were actually monogenists. See: David Livingstone, *Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins*, JHU Press, New York 2011, pp. 121–125; Ricardo Brown, *Until Darwin: Science, Human Variety and the Origins of Race*, Routledge, London 2011, pp. 59–99.

42 Robert Bernasconi, “Kant and Blumenbach’s Polyyps: A Neglected Chapter in the History of the Concept of Race”, Sara Eigen and Mark Larrimore, eds., *The German Invention of Race*, State University of New York Press, New York 2006, p. 90.

43 Watson, *The German Genius*, p. 88.

The concept of race emerged from studies in natural theory, driven by the need for historical categorization that would include non-European peoples. By the late 18th century, philological discoveries reinforced racial categorization by introducing the concept of "origin." William Jones' identification of Sanskrit-Greek-Latin affinities established the Indo-European language family and with it, the Aryan-Semitic dichotomy that would later underpin 19th-century scientific racism.<sup>44</sup> However, this is a distinct development. The invention of the concept of race and the emergence of racism are undoubtedly separate phenomena. As argued in this study, the "national character" debate between Kant and Hume represents one of the most philosophically explicit articulations of this distinction.

### **Nation, Race, National Character**

The distinction between race and nation remains unclear even today. For the purposes of this analysis, race is distinguished from nation primarily on the axis of biological determinism versus cultural/political construction. The relationship between race and nation, and the ways these vague categories overlap have been extensively discussed in the literature. However, addressing the relationship between these two concepts from an intellectual or philosophical perspective –within the Enlightenment era and its context– has not received sufficient attention from researchers. While the widespread use of racial categorization from the mid-18th century onwards contributed to communities gaining an ethnic character based on physiological traits, there were also numerous discussions about new political affiliations during this period.

In the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* of 1694, "nation" is defined as follows: "All the inhabitants of the same state, of the same country, who live under the same laws and use the same language, etc."<sup>45</sup> Ergo, the tendency to define the nation through more subjective, social, and cultural components rather than race was already widespread by the late 17th century. The concept of shared commonality through "language" and "birth," originating from Latin, laid the groundwork for similar interpretations during the Enlightenment. However, the Enlightenment transformed this understanding, imbuing the concept of "nation" with empathy and, in a sense, vitality. While national affiliation was an objective category –defined by residence in a given *patrie*– before the 18th century, the political theorists of the Enlightenment gradually redefined it as the "universal" identity of modern political units.

Rousseau was arguably the most influential thinker in shaping the modern concept of "nation" in the 18th century. While some scholars who re-

44 Olender, *The Languages of Paradise*, pp. 1–21.

45 Hudson, "From 'Nation' to 'Race'", pp. 255–256.

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gard him as the founder of nationalist thought should be approached with skepticism,<sup>46</sup> as Baştürk notes, it is inaccurate to “reduce him to the advocacy of a single view.”<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, Rousseau was certainly one of the first to establish a connection between “nation” and “patrie,” thereby linking the concept of “nation” with legal “citizenship.” His *Essay on the Origins of Language* underscores that collective existence is shaped not by physiological criteria but by cultural factors. This is significant because Rousseau rejected the “universalist” perspective espoused by Enlightenment figures like Voltaire, which sought to standardize and erase the distinctiveness of different peoples. Rousseau’s particularism, in turn, introduces an important principle of “equivalence” at the heart of the modern idea of the nation: Different languages give rise to different nations, which in turn form distinct nation-states. In his *Second Discourse*, Rousseau places the nation at the core of political affiliation and collective organization, affirming the central role of language and other cultural factors in this process:

“Men, who until now had roamed in the woods, having become more settled, gradually come together, unite in various troops, and finally in every region form a particular nation united in morals and character, not by rules or laws, but by the same kind of life and of foods, and the influence of a shared climate.”<sup>48</sup>

Rousseau’s most direct formulation of this idea appears in his draft constitution for Corsica: “*The first rule to be followed is the principle of national character; for each people has, or ought to have, a national character; if it did not, we should have to start by giving it one.*”<sup>49</sup> The crucial point here is that Rousseau frames national character in terms of cultural and geographical components. Moreover, in the absence of a national character, Rousseau views it as the legislator’s duty to instill one in the people.<sup>50</sup> This indicates that the characteristics defining a community are not inherent or biological but are “constructible.”

46 Llobera, while arguing that Rousseau equates “nation formation” with the “popular will” in *The Social Contract*, conflates the concepts of “patriotism” and “nationalism.” While the idea of “patriotism” can be traced to the pre-modern era, and some intellectual foundations of the concept of “nation” can indeed be found in Rousseau, it is important to note that the concept of “nationalism” did not emerge until the modern political context in which the “nation-state” was formed. See: Llobera, *The God of Modernity*, p. 157. A similar tendency is evident in Kedourie who identifies Kant as the father of nationalism. See: Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, Hutchinson University Library, London 1961, pp. 27–30..

47 Efe Baştürk, *Sokrates ten Rousseau'ya Politika Felsefesi Tarihi*, Fol Yayınları, İstanbul 2021, p. 332.

48 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, Victor Gourevitch, ed., Cambridge University Press, London 1997, p. 165.

49 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Constitutional Project for Corsica”, 1765, <https://constitution.org/2-Authors/jjr/corsica.htm>, [25.11.24].

50 Anne M. Cohler, *Rousseau and Nationalism*, Basic Books, New York 1970, p. 4.

The idea that certain human societies possess distinct common characteristics has been widespread since the early Middle Ages.<sup>51</sup> As early as the 6th century, Isidore of Seville noted that “the Romans are serious, the Greeks light, the Africans crafty, the Gauls proud and fierce.”<sup>52</sup> From Dante and Petrarch to Jean Bodin, and from Joseph Justus Scaliger to Mesnardière, European discussed common “character” traits that distinguished different societies.<sup>53</sup> The Enlightenment would later contribute to the trend of “inheriting” these characteristics and essentializing them by linking objective premises. In his *Essay on Universal History, the Manners, and Spirit of Nations*, Voltaire continued to interpret the “spirit of nation” as the product of culture, tradition, climate, geography, and historical development.<sup>54</sup> In Germany, from 1765 onwards, Karl von Moser introduced the concept of *volkgeist* (people’s spirit), used to describe the “supra-political” totality embodied by the German nation in its language and culture. Similarly, in his magnum opus, Herder discussed the *geist der nation*, asserting that each specific entity had the right to exist freely.<sup>55</sup>

The idea of a fundamental essence of community, which the English call “character,” the French “*esprit*,” and the Germans “*geist*,” became one of the most widespread concepts in the 18th century. Although these terms essentially mean the same thing, they carry nuances due to their different philosophical backgrounds.<sup>56</sup> Most importantly, “national character” served as the conceptual bridge between race and nation. Kant’s essentialist account laid the groundwork for 19th-century scientific racism and its role as intellectual justification for European colonialism.<sup>57</sup> In contrast, thinkers like Hume, who

51 In fact, the historical foundations of the concept of “character” trace back to ancient Greece. The Greek *charaktér* originates from a verb that refers to the act of stamping. Metaphorically, character is understood as a pattern stamped upon the human soul. See: Ricardo Martirelli, “On the Philosophical Significance of National Characters: Reflections from Hume and Kant”, *Cogito: Studies in Philosophy and Its History*, I, 2016, p. 50; Wilfried Nippel, “Ethnic Images in Classical Antiquity”, Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, eds., *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters*, Brill, Leiden 2007, pp. 33–45..

52 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 9.2.102.

53 Joep Leerssen, “The Poetics and Anthropology of National Character (1500-2000)”, Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, eds., *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters*, Brill, Leiden 2007, pp. 63–75..

54 Voltaire, *An Essay on Universal History, the Manners, and Spirit of Nations*, vol. III, (trans. Mr. Nugent), S. Cotter, Dublin 1759, pp. 221-222.

55 Friedrich Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, (trans. J.E. Anderson), Herder and Herder, London 1972, pp. 342–361.

56 Llobera, *The God of Modernity*, p. 155.

57 Until the groundbreaking work of American anthropologist Franz Boas in the early 20th century, the modern concept of race, with its biological undertones –scientific racism– remained orthodox in both intellectual and political spheres. The Kantian interpretation of national character, based on essential criteria, merged with the “social Darwinist” contributions in 19th-century European anthropology. This fusion solidified the concept of a “moral hierarchy of cultures,” which was developed by foundational figures such as Lewis Henry Morgan and Edward Tylor.

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examined differences between communities based on cultural factors, contributed to the idea of the nation, a new category of belonging that would form the basis of political dominance. This confrontation offers a particularly illuminating philosophical lens through which to examine the broader 18th-century divergence of the modern concepts of nation and race. Thus began the separation of “biology” and “history,” which had originally been intertwined in the rational re-categorization of humanity. While the nation was defined through history, race remained tied to biology.

### **Kant’s Critique of Hume on National Character**

Kant’s critique of Hume on national character takes shape primarily in the APP, published fifty years after Hume’s *Of National Characters* (NC) in 1748. Since Hume had passed away in 1776, this was not a reciprocal exchange but a unilateral philosophical intervention; Kant engaging with Hume’s arguments without the possibility of a response. At the heart of this critique lies a fundamental disagreement about how to account for the varying character traits of human communities. Hume’s stance on this issue is clear: he categorizes the explanations of national character into two groups –“physical” and “moral”– and outright rejects the physical causes. He asserts that “air, food, or climate” do not influence the manifestation of people’s “temper or genius”.<sup>58</sup> This is a direct critique of the traditional approach that explained differences between human groups through geographical or environmental determinism. Instead, Hume emphasizes what he calls “moral” factors as more influential in shaping a nation’s character, such as “poverty and hard labour... political regime... the nature of the government or the revolutions of public affairs.”<sup>59</sup>

Hume’s empiricist method shapes his approach to national character in a distinctive way: since knowledge is derived from experience, observed regularities in a group’s behavior are attributed to shared historical and political conditions rather than innate essences. Hume’s argument in NC is therefore fundamentally inductive; he proceeds from particular political circumstances to tentative generalizations. This contrasts sharply with Kant’s approach in APP, where national character is subsumed under a teleological framework in which nature’s ultimate end is the full realization of human reason. For Kant, the empirical diversity of nations is not an endpoint but a stage in a universal moral progression.

Kant’s perspective on national character integrates an “empirical” approach, differing fundamentally from Hume’s in that it is part of a broader ethical philosophy. Like Hume, Kant rejects the laws of climate, geography, or

58 Hume, “Of National Characters”, p. 164.

59 Hume, “Of National Characters”, p. 163.

environmental determinism in explaining national character.<sup>60</sup> He also criticizes “hereditary maxims” as merely a “risky attempt” to classify varieties of human character. However, where Kant diverges from Hume is in his explicit rejection of the idea that a specific form of government plays a significant role in shaping national character. According to Hume, recent political developments determine national character, which can therefore be seen as “inconstant and irregular”; this view is inconsequential to Kant. He asks, “For where does the government itself get its particular character?”<sup>61</sup> Instead of specifying what shapes national character, Kant focuses on the process through which an inherent natural disposition evolves into a well-defined national character. Drawing on Blumenbach’s concept of *Bildungstrieb*, Kant argues that nature’s goal is the full development of human reason. Consequently, he ranks national characters according to their proximity to the realization of human potential.<sup>62</sup>

The divergence between Hume and Kant on national character cannot be fully understood without situating it within their broader epistemological commitments. Hume’s empiricist starting point –that all knowledge derives from sensory experience and habit– leads naturally to a particularist account of social phenomena: national character is the product of historically specific, contingent circumstances, not innate essences. Kant, by contrast, approaches national character through a rationalist-teleological lens. For him, the empirical variety of national characters serves as raw material to be evaluated against a universal moral standard, namely the progressive realization of human rational capacity. This epistemological difference is not incidental; it is the philosophical root of their disagreement.

In summary, the key difference between Hume and Kant, which makes the discussion of national character meaningful, lies in their approaches: Hume adopts a “relative-particular” perspective, while Kant follows an “ethical-universal” stance. Hume argues that national character is directly linked to the political structure formed by society.<sup>63</sup> He emphasizes the unique role of political conventions in each nation, shaped by the interactions between people, irrespective of genetics, biology, or even climate and geography. In this view, the nation is structured according to the cultural conditions of the society from which it emerges. In contrast, Kant’s view of national character is based on an ethical spectrum, where nations are categorized as “good” or “bad.” This suggests that national character can be normatively improved or made “more moral,” which also allows for the possibility of a hereditary aspect

60 Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, p. 215.

61 Ibid.

62 Robert J. Richards, “Kant and Blumenbach on the *Bildungstrieb*: A Historical Misunderstanding”, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, XXXI/1, 2000, pp. 11–32.

63 Hume, “Of National Characters”, p. 166.

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within Blumenbach's teleological biological framework. A concrete illustration of this divide can be found in how each thinker accounts for the character of the English. For Hume, the English nation's marked individualism is explained by the long history of its relatively free political institutions. For Kant, the same trait would be evaluated against the universal scale of moral development, asking not "how did this character come about?" but "how close does it bring this people to the realization of their rational potential?" These are, in essence, two entirely different philosophical questions masquerading as the same inquiry.

By defining nations as "good" or "bad" according to their conformity to "universal moral laws," Kant refers to the "predispositions of their nature," which arise from the mixture of different tribes.<sup>64</sup> For instance, he claims that the "Spaniard" emerged from the blending of European and Arabian (Moorish) blood. Later in his text, Kant reveals that his conception of national character aligns with an essentialist perspective, which can also be interpreted as a "racial character." When discussing Russia, Poland, and Turkey, Kant argues that these nations lack a distinct national character, asserting that "*European Turkey... will never attain what is necessary for the acquisition of a definite national character,*" aiming to portray a more "hereditary" view of national identity:

"Anyway, since the question here is about innate, natural character which, so to speak, lies in the blood mixture of the human being, not characteristics of nations that are acquired and artificial (or spoiled by too much artifice), one must therefore be very cautious in sketching them."<sup>65</sup>

This passage is philosophically revealing in at least two respects. First, Kant's assertion that Turkey 'will never attain' a definite national character is not a merely empirical observation but a normative verdict rooted in his hierarchical teleology: some peoples are, in Kant's framework, constitutively incapable of ascending to full moral-national self-realization. Second, and more tellingly, the explicit reference to 'blood mixture' as the substrate of national character exposes the extent to which Kant's concept of nationhood is inseparable from a racial ontology. National character, here, is not a cultural achievement but a biological endowment; one that certain peoples, by virtue of their heritage, can never fully possess. This is the moment in the APP where the distinction between 'nation' and 'race' that Kant ostensibly maintains collapses: for Kant, to lack racial depth is to lack national character.

At this point, it is important to highlight that Hume, despite his differences with Kant regarding the conditions for the formation of national char-

64 Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, p. 218.

65 Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, p. 222.

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acteristics, also believed in the existence of such generalizations. Early in NC, he states that it is quite natural to expect a Frenchman to display “greater wit and gaiety” than a Spaniard, or for “an Englishman [to] naturally be supposed to have more knowledge than a Dane”<sup>66</sup>. A more “fateful” statement reflecting Hume’s belief in a hierarchy between “developed” and “undeveloped” races appears in a famous footnote in the same text:

“I am apt to suspect the negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences... Not to mention our colonies, there are Negroe slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity.”<sup>67</sup>

As Asher<sup>68</sup> and Garrett and Sebastiani<sup>69</sup> demonstrate, when comparing Hume to Kant, it is important not to overlook the fact that Hume was not opposed to racial categorization or to a hierarchy based on this classification. Undoubtedly, Kant stands out as the most fitting candidate to be considered the “creator of racial theory” in the modern period, as noted by Bernasconi<sup>70</sup> and many others.<sup>71</sup> Long before writing the APP, the differentiation of social categories and the derivation of a universal, ethical system based on them was a core element of Kant’s philosophy. His remark that “*the fact that... someone is completely black is... a distinct proof that what he said was stupid,*” made in a humorous tone in *Observations on the Sense of the Beautiful and the Sublime*,<sup>72</sup> illustrates the close link between this attempt at categorization, biological heredity, and the development of the “racism” he would further articulate in later works.

Taken together, these two positions –Kant’s essentialist teleology and Hume’s contingent particularism– anticipate, in compressed philosophical form, the theoretical opposition that would later structure the field of nationalism studies as the debate between primordialism and constructivism.

66 Hume, “Of National Characters”, p. 162.

67 Hume, “Of National Characters”, p. 170.

68 Kendra Asher, “Was David Hume a Racist? Interpreting Hume’s Infamous Footnote (Part I)”, *Economic Affairs*, XLII/2, 2022, pp. 225–239.

69 Aaron Garrett – Silvia Sebastiani, “David Hume on Race”, Naomi Zack, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race*, Oxford University Press, New York 2017, pp. 31–44.

70 Bernasconi, *Irki Kavramını Kim İcat Etti?*, p. 45.

71 Lucy Allais, “Kant’s Racism”, *Philosophical Papers*, XLV/1–2, 2016, pp. 1–36; Léon Poliakov, “Racism from the Enlightenment to the Age of Imperialism”, Robert Ross, ed., *Racism and Colonialism*, Springer, Dordrecht 1982, pp. 58–59; Walter Scheidt, “The Concept of Race in Anthropology and the Divisions of Human Races from Linnaeus to Deniker”, Earl W. Count, ed., *This Is Race*, Henry Schuman, New York 1950, p. 372.

72 Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, (trans.) John Goldthwait, University of California Press, New York 2011, p. 61.

## Primordialism, Constructivism, and the Legacy of the Critique

In contemporary nationalism studies, the theoretical divide between primordialism and constructivism<sup>73</sup> has long structured how scholars approach questions of national identity and ethnic belonging. Primordialists hold that nations are rooted in deep, pre-political attachments: shared ancestry, language, and cultural memory that precede and transcend political organization. Constructivists –above all Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Anderson– treat nations as modern inventions, products of specific historical, economic, and political processes rather than expressions of primordial givens.<sup>74</sup>

Viewed through this lens, the Kant-Hume critique acquires fresh theoretical significance. Kant’s account of national character –grounded in “blood mixture,” *Bildungstrieb*, and a universal moral hierarchy– maps onto the primordialist logic with striking precision: national character is innate, discoverable, and hierarchically ordered. Hume’s account, by contrast –grounding character in political regimes, historical contingencies, and the “inconstant and irregular” dynamics of public affairs – anticipates the constructivist insistence that collective identity is made, not found. The Enlightenment debate on national character is thus not merely a precursor to later theoretical developments; it is, in a meaningful sense, the philosophical moment at which the conceptual grammar of that debate was first articulated. This makes Kant and Hume not only figures of 18th-century intellectual history but interlocutors in a conversation that nationalism studies is still, in its own way, conducting.

The intellectual legacy of this critique extends well beyond the 18th century. Kant’s essentialist account of national character became a foundational resource for 19th-century social anthropology and scientific racism: his teleological hierarchy of peoples, anchored in Blumenbach’s *Bildungstrieb*, provided a quasi-scientific vocabulary through which racial categories could be ranked and justified. Hume’s account, by contrast, entered the intellectual tradition through a different channel. His insistence that national character is shaped by contingent political and historical conditions –that it is, in effect, built rather than inherited– resonates with what would later become the constructivist critique of essentialist theories of collective identity. In this sense, the Kant-Hume confrontation is not merely a curiosity of Enlightenment intellectual history; it is a moment at which the conceptual tools for both the biologization and the politicization of collective identity were simultaneously sharpened.

73 It is worth emphasizing that “constructivism” as used here refers to this tradition in nationalism studies, not to the epistemological position.

74 For more on the theoretical opposition between primordialists and constructivists, see. Umut Özkırımlı, *Milliyetçilik Kuramları: Eleştirel Bir Bakış*, Doğubatı Yayınları, Ankara 2013; Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, Routledge, London 1998.

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It is important to note, however, that neither thinker maps cleanly onto his theoretical heir. Hume was not a constructivist: his infamous footnote on the natural inferiority of "negroes" reveals that his rejection of biological essentialism was selective and deeply compromised by the racial assumptions of his era. Similarly, Kant was not a straightforward primordialist: he retained a universalist ethical framework in tension with his anthropological hierarchies, a tension that continues to generate scholarly debate. What the Kant-Hume confrontation offers is not a clean origin story but a philosophically dense early chapter in a much longer intellectual history; one in which the boundaries between nation and race, between constructed identity and inherited essence, were first drawn with some philosophical precision.

## Conclusion

This study has traced the intellectual genealogy of the distinction between nation and race through a philosophical examination of Kant's critique of Hume on national character. By situating this intervention within the broader context of Enlightenment thought –from the medieval fluidity of *gens* and *natio* to the emergence of race as a scientific category in the 18th century– the study has argued that the Kant-Hume confrontation represents one of the most philosophically explicit articulations of the conceptual boundary between these two categories. Where Hume's empiricist, politically grounded account of national character resisted biological essentialism, Kant's teleological framework –anchored in Blumenbach's *Bildungstrieb* and a universal moral hierarchy– recast national character in terms that were, ultimately, inseparable from racial ontology. As the analysis of the APP illustrates, for Kant to lack racial depth is, in the end, to lack national character.

The broader significance of this finding lies in its implications for nationalism studies. The deep structural logic of the primordialist-constructivist divide was already present in compressed form in the Kant-Hume confrontation. This does not collapse the distance between 18th-century philosophical anthropology and 20th-century social science; the conceptual vocabularies are different and the historical contexts incommensurable. What it does suggest is that the theoretical fault lines of contemporary nationalism studies have intellectual roots that extend further back than is typically acknowledged, and that philosophical analysis of Enlightenment texts can yield substantive insights for contemporary theoretical debates.

Several questions remain open for further inquiry. The relationship between Kant's moral philosophy and his anthropological writings –and the extent to which his racial hierarchies are consistent or in tension with his universalist ethics– continues to generate scholarly debate. Similarly, a more sustained comparative analysis of other Enlightenment figures, such as Herder or

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Montesquieu, within the same framework could yield a richer picture of how the nation-race distinction crystallized across the 18th century. This study has sought to establish the philosophical coordinates of that distinction; mapping its full historical contours remains a productive task for future research.

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