

On Christoph Meiners's Anthropological Treatises in the *Göttingen Historical Magazine* (1791)

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Trans. Michael Olson (draft; do not circulate)

Hannover, by Gebrüder Helwing: *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, by C. Meiners and L.T. Spittler. Fourth volume, parts 3–4 (1789): [237] 376–776. Fifth volume, parts 1–4 (1789), 774 pages. Sixth volume, parts 1–4 (1790), 760 pages. Seventh volume, parts 1–4 (1790), 744 pages in octavo (each part 12 sheets).

Our readers already know (A.L.Z., 1989, no. 136–138)ⁱ the organization of this journal and the different relationship of the contributions provided by the editors. We will separate what belongs to each of them according to the method already chosen and start with the essays and notes of Hr. Hofrath Meiners.ⁱⁱ The elucidations of his anthropological *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* [Outline of the History of Humanity], which was also reviewed by us,ⁱⁱⁱ appear under the following titles: *Über eheliche Verbindungen in den nächsten Graden der Blutsfreundschaft*^{iv} [On Marital Unions in the Closest Degree of Blood Relation] (vol. 4, part 3), *Über die Sinnlichkeit, deren verschiedene Stufen und Zweige*^v [On Sensuality, Its Various Stages and Branches]; *Beyträge zur Geschichte der alphabetischen Schrift*^{vi} [Contributions to the History of Alphabetic Writing] (part 4); *Über das Klima im heissen Erdgürtel*^{vii} [On the Climate in the Torrid Zone] (vol. 5, part 1); *Über die Entstehung des bürgerlichen Regiments*^{viii} [On the Emergence of the Civic Regiment] (part 2); *Geschichte der Sitten der Römer in den beiden ersten Jahrhunderten nach Christi Geburt*^{ix} [History of the Morals of the Romans in the First Two Centuries after the Birth of Christ] (four tracts, vol. 5, parts 3, 4; vol. 6, part 2); *Über die Entstehung des Eigenthums*^x [On the Emergence of Property] (vol. 5, part 3); *Kurze Geschichte*

des gemässigten Klima^{xi} [Short History of the Temperate Climate] (part 4); *Über die sogenannten Wilden oder über Jäger- und Fischervölker*^{xii} [On the So-called Savages or Hunting and Fishing Peoples] (vol. 6, part 2); *Über die Natur der afrikanischen Neger*^{xiii} [On the Nature of the African Negroes] (part 3); *Über die Varietäten und Abarten der Neger*^{xiv} [On the Varieties and Subspecies of the Negroes]; *Über den Sklavenhandel in Westindien*^{xv} [On the Slave Trade in the West Indies] (part 4); *Über die Natur der Amerikaner*^{xvi} [On the Nature of the Americans] (two tracts, vol. 7, parts 1, 2); *Über die Natur der Völker des östlichen und nordöstlichen Asien*^{xvii} [On the Nature of the Peoples of Eastern and Northeastern Asia]; *Der Völker im südlichen Asien, auf den ostindischen und Südseeinseln und auf den Südländern*^{xviii} [The Peoples in Southern Asia, on the East Indian and South Sea Islands, and on the Southern Lands] (part 2); *der morgenländischen Völker*^{xix} [of the Oriental Peoples] (part 3); and finally *der Slawischen Völker in Europa*^{xx} [of the Slavic Peoples in Europe] (part 4). Without the hypothetical thread on which we all arrange our own and all external experiences, order and connection in thought, through which one hopes to attain some certainty in each, and especially in this inexhaustible study, which is so often called humanity's most important, would be impossible. With the confidence, first prompted by the forms of our intellectual powers and nourished by pious prejudice of all kinds, that absolute truth cannot in the end elude the zealous and loyal researcher, some people do not allow themselves to be thwarted in the effort to traverse the unmeasured circle of human knowledge and to tie what they find before them [238] to that thread. But only a few will have the modesty to knowingly reconcile themselves with the unconquerable delusion at the end of this path and hover at the point of equilibrium between a presumptuous dogma and a disgruntled *Omnia vanitas*. This very serious consideration has never been so irresistible to the reviewer in any scientific reading as in the present one. He could not hide, even if he did justice

to the spirit of the author's research and completely adopted his point of view, that from the same sources that Hr. M has consulted a different view of the same subjects that opposed his account on many essential points could be created. Whoever considers the vast sum of knowledge that Hr. M has accumulated and its universality; whoever assesses the astonishing effort of the mind required for such a collection, and then notices that the author has really endeavored without ceasing as a thinker to survey and arrange this inventory, will also understand well how he [Meiners]—even with the broadest reading, which only a few people since Haller have pursued further, and with as much acumen as he displayed in his earlier writings, and still now has shown in many places— could still have lapsed into a one-sidedness that arouses reluctance in many readers and even indignation in some. The reviewer is not inclined to argue with Hr. M about his point of view, but, after repeated observations made by both himself and others, the reviewer believes that the harsh judgments that have been passed on this author for some time arose from a dark, indignant feeling generated by his hypotheses, long before there was time for a closer examination of his method or for finding any hasty errors in his conclusions. It is well known that Hr. M divides the human species into the Caucasian and Altaic stems, the former of which includes the Celts and Slavs, the latter all other peoples of the inhabited earth. Of all human beings, the Celts are the only ones, however, on whom a lucky organization, and with it the highest moral perfectibility, has been bestowed. Three-quarters of the whole earth is, however, in the possession of the [239] Mongols and their descendants, a stem organized by nature into physical and moral deformity. The rest [of the land] that is not held by the Celts is inhabited by the more limited Slavs [according to Meiners], and both these and certain Celtic peoples have degenerated (Mongolized) more or less through intermarriage with those ugly and vicious people.

However the words are defined, it at least remains undeniable that one people must certainly be called beautiful or ugly, good-natured or vicious, enlightened or limited, of pure or corrupt morals when compared to the other. We become aware of degrees of greater or lesser abundance of talents and powers in nature from the worm to the human being; it is consequently not inconsistent to also presume similar gradations among the individuals of each species [*Gattung*]. That assessment according to which there are more simpleminded, crude, animalistic, and ugly humans than beautiful, educated and clever, moral [humans] is obviously correct and agrees with the course of nature on the whole, since excellence is nowhere the rule according to which it multiplies beings. The detrimental and the ugly is also often the most numerous and the most fertile and has its claims to existence and preservation despite what is best. Who can thus deny that in the decree of nature or, what is the same here, of the divinity, by far the most important thing seemed to be that humans, as a special kind of animal, should exist and multiply? Despite this important purpose (namely, *physical life*), those divine virtues of moral sense and reason, as delightful and uplifting as the pleasure which some lucky individuals find in them is, remain at a minimum, as it were, a trifle, and only occasionally, according to circumstances, shall they develop here and there in different proportions in a few individuals.

The individual human beings in whom they have developed most completely are, as far as history teaches us, indisputably inhabitants of our part of the world, and the reliability of this claim can be shown by the influence of their culture [*Bildung*] on the mass of peoples who could be impacted by them. The sciences and arts have attained a level of perfection in Europe not achieved elsewhere; we have an advantage over others in a mechanism of morality [240] that can only arise from long habituation to well thought out principles; finally, we also rule over other parts of the world and encompass the whole world with our more complete knowledge. Whether

we owe these advantages, however, to an inherent excellence of our internal and external organization rather than to the climate, the location of our countries, the chain of past events, especially the certain specific stimulations of the passions and intellectual powers of individual human beings and some lucky twists of fate, like, e.g., the invention of the art of printing, the argument about this will not end easily. It is nevertheless true that the internal measure of strength exists in an indissoluble harmony with external appearance, that the noblest humans must also be the most beautiful in bodily formation, and that Europeans actually now combine in themselves both the advantages of the mind and of the body.

How can we be sure that our stem, before intellectual powers developed in it, could already have possessed its attendant sign, physical beauty? Would reason, just to mention one more doubt, have developed so easily among the Nordic peoples, and in the way it did, if progress had not been made earlier in Chaldea, India, and Egypt; if written language had not migrated with the arts and sciences from Asia and Africa to Greece and effected a more beautiful epoch of enlightenment there under favorable conditions in location, climate, constitution, *and* organization; if, finally, Rome had not devoured all of its neighbors and collected the effects of reason from the furthest points of its dominion and set its whole periphery in motion?

We must also not give credit for the lucky consequences of the appearance of individual men of greater skill to the bulk of their people. Thousands of nobles have lived without leaving any trace of their existence and their acts since far more mediocre minds, and even people with dubious hearts, were often able to impart completely new directions and impulses to their age.

Who is so new to the study of humanity that he does not admit that it was the circumstances and a necessity produced by them—and not human beings alone—that everything depended on? The Chinese, [241] Japanese, Tibetans, Indians, Peruvians, and Mexicans have all

achieved a certain not entirely contemptible degree of moral cultivation [*Bildung*]. If we assume that for thousands of years the large-scale circumstances of the earth favored these peoples in their way as we have been favored, is there any reason which would justly make us doubt the possibility that capacities that are now wholly dormant should not one day appear and develop? How far had a Confucius, a Buddha, a Mango Cápac, etc. not already advanced these peoples?

Leaving aside what is necessarily produced in us by the drive to imitate (which Hr. M grants to the Mongols as something contemptible), by the advantage of education and mechanical habituation, and by local and climatic conditions, and without any presupposition of greater inner excellence, then what remains in us that could make a claim to the impartial philosopher on the designation of moral greatness and perfection? If one proceeds along the path predetermined by our author in the classification of the human species according to its capacities and level of development, it is obvious that even in our part of the world, wherever we may turn, the great bulk of nations, no matter how inclined one might initially be to prefer them to the inhabitants of the rest of the world, partly because of their physical form—partly because of their acknowledged dullness of mind and the low degree of moral feeling that is recognizable in their development—they can retain little or nothing more than others of the respect which is supposedly due to their origin. Without taking into consideration the immorality Hr. M likes to accuse the Altai people of and for which we have the counterpart in [Justus] Lipsius's portrayal of Westphalia, in [Desiderius] Erasmus's portrayal of England, still exhibited today in the huts of German, Scottish, French, Italian cottagers, and of the common man, would one not, if one collected characteristic traits of European peoples from travel writers and historians, be able to draw an off-putting picture of superstition and foolishness, of greed and self-interest, of crudeness and stubbornness, of lust, luxuriance, extravagance, apathy, and malice?^{xxi} As for the

[242] point about physical beauty, how many countries are there in Europe, excluding only England, where it is the lot of the common people? If spirit and wit and artistry are to be the measure of excellence, who ever called the Nordic Europeans ingenious and witty, who dares impute artistry to them? The sense for the beautiful is among us the property of rare individuals, and only in Italy did it manifest itself more perfectly, more accurately, more finely, and without a doubt more generally than elsewhere.

But the Italians, it is said, are not true Celts. Hr. M already attributes the degeneration of the Romans under the Emperors to the ignoble blood of the conquered nations that flowed in the veins of the following generations (volume 5, page 199), just as he also, in the brief comparison of northern and southern Germany, attributes the small advances the Reformation and the Enlightenment have made in the larger half of our fatherland to a poorer organization and a duller moral feeling, the origin of which he believes he has found in the interbreeding of the true Germans (Celts) with the Wends (a Slavic people) (volume 5, page, 200–201). The Moorish and Jewish blood in Spain and Portugal is thus probably also largely responsible [according to Meiners] for the ineptitude and indolence of the inhabitants of those countries; and it is a question whether the moral corruption in France and the consequent dissolution of the state, which is contemptibly enough titled in the *Historical Magazine* an ochlocracy,^{xxii} do not provide sufficient reason to establish an essential difference between the Gauls and the Germans, which has also been well known since Caesar's time and has been preserved to today in physical formation, mental disposition, morals, and language. What kind of foreign blood Roman dominion could have mixed into Gaul and Britain over a period of several centuries also still remains to be investigated.

Taking all of this together, the nobility of the Celtic stem is in general in very bad shape, if either the races [*Racen*] are so interbred that no one can pride themselves on having an untainted lineage, or those peoples in the north, whose [possession of] this privilege is less contested than others, have no reason to be proud of it. Certainly, when the author first thought of his good [243] and evil human stems in order to make it easier for himself to classify his collectanea, he did not realize how much arbitrariness there is in this separation, which was invented so quickly, without any expenditure of energy, and could not be carried out in any way other than the one chosen by him. It seems all too natural, however, that he now had to set out, as it were, to draw very prominent caricature traits of his supposed *half-humans* [*Halbmenschen*] in order to put their difference from the Caucasians in full light, and no less natural that, as soon as he had established his different concepts of Mongols and Celts, he found confirmation of his system in almost every line he read, and like a true systematizer, did not have to bother with the exceptions, which in the end could easily be explained by some kind of hybridization [*Zwitterzeugung*]. Thus, the author's balance shifted without notice; the one-sidedness that is inherent to all systems went askew and untrue because he either did not want to notice the mixture of immorality and inability that must have been obvious to him in the locations he chose, even in Europe and in the midst of his Celts, or by mere assertion glossing over here what he had detested there. He would have avoided this self-contradiction if it had not been his concern to develop the proof of his system from the system itself, an artificial circular motion that is properly no longer permitted in philosophy.

Regardless of all this, one would have found his hypothesis forgivable if it had been less dreary and derogatory. That a philosopher returns directly to the point where he left the lowest of his compatriots with their prejudice and national pride, that is, to the partial preference for his

people and fatherland, that might always be the case; and since there are differences in the human species, since the European culture, especially the scientific [culture], surpasses any other, it was to be expected that a scholar would determine the relative value of human beings according to the merits he valued in himself and his peers. Indisputably, however, Hr. M could be just and fair to himself and his compatriots without offending the inhabitants of the rest of the earth with an entirely arbitrary assumption. It is harsh, because it benefits no one [244] to deny peoples that are currently at a different stage of culture [*Bildung*] than us all moral worth, all perfectibility, all human merit. It is harsh to grasp the peculiarities that the author found recorded here and there in such a cutting way that the undeserved criticism of nature arises from it as if it had, a torment for herself and others, equipped by far the largest part of the human species with nothing but devilish dispositions and incorrigible immorality. It is harsh, finally, and without evidence, irresponsible, to divide our species [*Gattung*] into two stems that are with respect to physical formation, intellectual disposition, and moral feeling nearly perfect antipodes and to which nature nonetheless gave the unfortunate possibility of interbreeding their lineages [*Geschlecht*] and of producing dreadful hybrids [*Zwitter*].

It is not the concern of the philosopher whether his doctrine is dreary or not; if he is just convinced of its correctness, his conscience commands him to present it. But Hr. M himself must, according to the principles he expressed elsewhere (Preface to his *Grundriss der Seelenlehre*),^{xviii} be judged far more strictly, since we are not talking about valid conclusions that turn supposed demonstrations of unprovable things back to their nothingness, but of unauthenticated statements that undermine that probability on which a glad and happy *faith* rests. This is the point at which, notwithstanding the rule of equity that no opinion is damnable because of its dangerous conclusions, sentiment nevertheless resists the hostile hypothesis. The reviewer

is a long way from making it a crime for the author to publish his anthropological system, with all its consequences; being of the certain conviction that everything that has ever been said with pure intention can be *relatively* useful, true, and good, and that nothing that human beings imagine or devise will overcome the power of good or quench the light of truth, which are always newly revealed, if always in different measure, in every human breast.

Whoever thinks differently about this, however, and would like to consider the harmfulness of a way of thinking to be sufficient reason to “stifle it by force” (see the Preface cited above) will immediately find himself at ease as soon as he examines the evidence which is supposed [245] to underlie the author’s system. The kind of method Hr. M allows himself in his works on the philosophical history of humanity has already been clearly brought to light and criticized in our journal (unfortunately without the least positive result for the author’s later essays).^{xxiv} Perhaps it is not entirely his fault if he sees everywhere only the bad, ugly, disgusting, [and] detestable. As we analyze the motive for this choice, we would like to almost pity the fate of the scholars who have to content themselves with such meager and undigested resources as most travel reports offer them. We are e.g. convinced, as firmly as Hr. M may cling to his hypothesis and as little as one can exonerate him of a special penchant for dreadful pictures of human customs, that, if he had been so fortunate, with his perspicacity and exact knowledge of what really matters, to visit the peoples he is now degrading in the places where they live, his own observations would have turned out incomparably fairer, more philanthropic, and more conformable to nature than everything he has cobbled together from innumerable authors, as varied in interest as in content, ability, and knowledge.

For although from one position the human species appears more animal than rational and therefore contemptible precisely because of the gift of personal consciousness and language,

there is also a position that can reconcile us with nature and its laws. Rather than, like Hr. M, only pointing out similarities and differences and examining all peoples a hundred and more times over in order to be able to tell us where this or that immoral behavior is primarily observed, it would have been fairer to look at each people in its own right, to describe it according to its circumstances, and to investigate precisely how it fits into the place on the earth that it occupies. It is always an unfortunate thing to determine a rank ordering of different kinds of things with respect to their absolute worth; if, on the other hand, we consider each in its own way—the elephant, the horse, the dog, etc.—as what they are, should be, and can be, then a *sui generis* excellence for each kind [*Art*], which is nowhere lacking in nature, comes to light. Should the [246] human species [*Menschengattung*] be an exception here? It almost appears, if Hr. M. can justify it, that he first characterizes two human stems through essential, inherent differences, and then overwhelms the one with all the expressions of abhorrence because it is not *that* which, by definition, it should not and could not be. Many of the detrimental depictions that the author draws of the inhabitants of other parts of the world would no longer have applied if he had noticed a difference between the extent of cultural and inherent merit in humanity.

The whole system of our customs hangs on a very fine thread, and like the more tender feelings of the decorous cannot be imagined without a certain degree of rational development, this again presupposes a special way of life and distinct relationships with the place, the climate, the location, and the neighboring human beings. The refinement of moral feeling will follow wherever true concepts come into circulation, but these could not always be developed. Subjective rationality, moreover, accustomed itself to local circumstances, and where these resisted its activity, the organ of thinking, the brain, lay dormant as long as it remained unshaped; it is thus no wonder that it could not take on any new impulsion in old age. But the

senses remained all the more penetrating and sharper. The exertion and exercise of the powers of thought occur, however, at the expense of the body; the senses of the civilized [*gesitteten*] human beings are comparatively weaker. His proficiency at distinguishing more finely between sensible impressions is thus no special disposition that is lacking in barbarous humans, as Hr. M. continuously claims, but an aesthetic feeling turned into a mechanism that is most precisely related to enlightenment and the determination of concepts. We can, as experience teaches, push this mechanism as far in sensing and thinking as in physical exercise and the practice expresses itself as powerfully in good as in evil. To deny our constitutions the advantage that is so clearly manifested in the general habituation to the good by the introduction and sanctification of the laws would, however, be inconsistent; but to either credit or reproach the children of habit [247] for the observance of that order that imposed example and doctrine on them does not seem more reasonable to us. There are individual great human beings in whom a correct measure of the relative value of things, an inner moral sense is more completely developed than in others, and who themselves make these the rule without needing, or even recognizing, external direction. But these, as varied as their extensive enlightenment is, are not bound to any particular soil or any privileged stem, and it requires the all the inflexibility of an addiction to hypotheses to deny them to all other nations to the advantage of one small people.

As much as one may attribute our author's system to the sum of the travel writers, it cannot be denied on the other hand that with due attention one can also find outlines of favorable and even pleasant portrayals of very many, even the wildest, peoples recorded in the most credible authors. If one used the critical attitude so completely neglected by Hr. M, it could be shown very convincingly that though human beings everywhere vacillate between impulse and law, and lean more toward the former side as long as they are wholly uneducated, they already at

the slightest beginnings of social association nevertheless adopt forms of conventional morality, to which they then mechanically conform. Hr. M has obviously been carried away by his hypothesis and thereby has become greatly biased in that he collects everything dreadful, disgusting, [and] degrading from nine-tenths of the human species, recounts their atrocities in whole series of superlatives, and describes all their individuals as one can only describe the dregs of the human species. History, Voltaire said, is nothing but a portrayal of shameful deeds,^{xxv} and this harsh expression has been held against him; what would he have had to say had he read Hr. M! The author still owes us the complement to this depiction, the panegyric to the Celts, which no doubt demands more art if it is not to sound like satire. The task is all the more difficult since here almost every reader can also at the same time be a judge; with that which concerns other parts of the world, however, only a few may speak from their own experience. The reviewer believes in order to justify the weight of the judgment he expresses [248] here he must mention that he had occasion to observe individual human beings from other parts of the world as well as whole peoples in very remote countries, and he does not deny that he did not recognize his acquaintances in the descriptions of the author.

If Hr. M's excerpts were of such a nature that they could be relied upon, his essays might at least be regarded as a preliminary work, or repertory, for the future historiographer of humanity. But we are not able here to go through the labyrinth of contradictions in which Hr. M inextricably entangles himself in the essays that lie before us, as in his previously cited essays. The discussion of all points where he misunderstands his author, applies [him] incorrectly, where he introduces the most contradictory definitions within a few lines, and piles up arbitrary assumptions would require more than one thick volume. So that we do not leave it at this assertion, we will attach just some sketches as examples: "*Human beings are distinguished from*

animals in that they recognize degrees of kinship, etc. and base duties and rights on them."¹

Which definition? Many humans do not in fact recognize them, do not base anything on them. When so much that is individual is brought under a general definition, the humanity of anyone you wanted could be disputed. What the author says about the Negroes' lust, [James] Bruce most convincingly refutes.^{xxvi}

*"The more apathetic and limited peoples are by nature, the smaller the number of their dishes, the more uniform their preparation, and the shorter their mealtimes. Orientals never cease eating their pilau, just like the southern Asians [eat] their rice pudding with stinking fish. Negroes and Americans devour everything, but they choose from among the dishes and often prepare them just as little as the wild animals that they rival in gluttony."*² How can one avoid the reproach of this man, who calls the austere limited and the gluttons animalistic, so as not to have to acknowledge anything other than Celtic merit? *"Gluttony is a native affliction of Americans, Negroes, and all other peoples with the same origin as them, and among us it is just a natural fault of individual human beings born unlucky,"* etc.³ How much is lacking that would make this judgment of the supposed [249] Mongolian peoples fair! Some travelers have admittedly seen gluttonous humans here and there, and even with such a strong appetite not been able to enjoy the food to which they were not accustomed.

*"Of all the [climatic] zones, the torrid is the most hostile to the most noble nations, and the most favorable in turn to the most ignoble."*⁴ *"The only great peoples of Mongolian descent*

¹ "Einige Nachrichten über eheliche Verbindungen in den nächsten Graden der Bluts-Freundschaft," *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 4 (1789): 562–568, 562.

² "Ueber die Sinnlichkeit, und deren verschiedene Stufen und Zweige," *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 4 (1789): 586–606, 598.

³ *Ibid.*, 605.

⁴ "Ueber das Klima im heißen Erd-Gürtel," *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 5 (1789): 8–41, 8.

that reached some degree of culture were and still are found only within the tropics.”⁵ China is mostly, Japan entirely, outside the tropics, between 30° and 40° north latitude. That the wet season is the healthiest for Negroes⁶ is denied by credible authors and should not be asserted directly from [Reynaud] Des Marchais’s testimony, although Hr. M trustingly copies from him “that even the clouds (in Africa) are pregnant with all sorts of vermin, and when they pour down rain they leave disgusting worms on the decks of the ships.”⁷ The air in the Gulf of Mexico, too, is similar to a poisonous potion in some places,⁸ and it is said in the conclusion: “one must have read them [i.e., previous reports about the climate in the torrid zone] without thinking, if one did not conclude by thanking God that one was born in that part of the world in which the climate as a whole is most conducive to health, and especially to the generation and development of the noblest qualities of human beings.”⁹ What are the poor inhabitants of the torrid zone supposed to do?

“The ancient constitution of the Kalmycks [...] is still found in all the countries of southern Asia and the South Sea.”¹⁰ “All savages without exception are faithful to the most solemnly sworn covenants for no longer than the first occasion [to break them],” etc.¹¹ You would think we were talking about European cabinets.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁷ Ibid., 33. [Translator’s note: See Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Voyage due Chevalier des Marchais en Guinée, Isles voisines, et à Cayenne*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam, 1731), vol. 2, 121. This passage in Meiners is not, despite Forster’s suggestion to the contrary, a quotation of Labat.]

⁸ Ibid., 38.

⁹ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰ Historische Betrachtungen über die Entstehung des bürgerlichen Regiments,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 5 (1789): 197–244, 237.

¹¹ “Ueber die Entstehung des Eigenthums,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 5 (1789): 461–474, 465.

“It can be claimed almost without exception — that the most worthless human children are born in America and in the Southern Lands.”¹² But not in Otahiti [i.e., Tahiti], the Society, Marquesas, Friendly [i.e., Tonga], Sandwich, Mariana, and Palau Islands? Or should we measure worthlessness by distance?

The author talks about the vast deserts and steppes in Spain, and of the awful marshes with which Italy is covered.¹³ The Pontine Marshes are thirty Italian miles long from Cisterna to Terracina and their width is never more than twelve or thirteen miles.¹⁴ Could Holland and the whole coasts of the North and [250] Baltic Seas, in contrast, not be called a vast marsh? But no; the blessed center where the purest Celts live is the cold half of the temperate latitude of Europe!

Roman women will hardly thank the author for ascribing their aversion to all pleasant smells to the commonality of syphilis.¹⁵ Strange that the same illness should have such different effects in different countries; in Peru, where, according to [Amédée François] *Frezier*’s report, it really is common, the Spanish women cannot get enough pleasant smells and perfume their flower bouquets with musk and ambergris.^{xxvii}

Hr. M claims that the most different dogs are nonetheless more alike than the most different human beings,¹⁶ which neither investigator of nature nor anatomist will concede to him. He believes he has found a proof for the unity of the human species, despite the greatest diversity

¹² “Kurze Geschichte des gemässigten Klima,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 5 (1789): 703–741, 707.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 709.

¹⁴ “Über den wirklichen Zustand der Pomtinischen Sümpfe,” *Italien und Deutschland in Rücksicht auf Sitten, Gebräuche, Litteratur und Kunst*, vol. 1, part 3 (1790): 27–46, 29

¹⁵ “Kurze Geschichte des gemässigten Klima,” 711.

¹⁶ “Ueber die Natur der Afrikanischen Neger, und die davon abhängende Befreyung, oder Einschränkung der Schwarzen,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 6 (1790): 385–456, 394n.

of races [*Racen*], in the analogy of certain animal species [*Thiergattungen*];¹⁷ if only it were settled that, e.g., all dogs come from one pair.

To excuse the slave trade, it supposedly suffices to state that the transport of troops to the West Indies lost as many human beings as the slave ships.¹⁸ They both certainly seem to us abhorrent. Hr. M says, as he is talking about the cruelty of planters toward their slaves: “*With the exception of the cases mentioned, which certainly make up a small minority.*”¹⁹ — It would be desirable if he had passed this mild presumptive judgment whenever he referred to the abominations of the Negroes, Americans, etc.

Hr. M. talks about the “unparalleled similarity” found among all Americans, which, as indefinite as it stands, is nothing less than established,²⁰ since an unusually short, flat forehead is also ascribed to all Americans,²¹ although [Christian Georg Andreas] Oldendorp and [Jean-Baptiste] Labat’s reports about the Caribs alone contradict each other and [Lionel] Wafer, as Hr. M himself recalls, ascribes a high forehead to the inhabitants of the Darién Gap.^{xxviii} He is even unsatisfied with [Filippo Salvatore] Gilij for relating examples of the ingratitude of Americans, without drawing a general conclusion from this.²²

*“Because according to a charitable law of nature, everywhere where human beings of different races [*Racen*] live together, the better ones always win out, even if slowly, over the less good and the nobler blood [251] gets the upper hand over the less noble, it may be hoped that*

¹⁷ Ibid., 399.

¹⁸ “Historische Nachrichten über die wahre Beschaffenheit des Slaven-Handels, und der Knechtschaft der Neger in West-Indien,” *Göttingisches Historisches Magazin*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1790): 645-679, 652. [Translator’s note: See Chapter Twenty-Eight in this volume.]

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Ueber die Natur der Amerikaner,” vol. 7, p. 102.

²¹ Ibid.

²² “Zweyte Abhandlung über die Natur der Amerikaner, besonders über ihre Lebensart,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 7 (1790):209–230, 220.

Commented [OM1]: I think Forster means that Meiners provided these examples. Gilij argues the Americans ARE grateful. See Filippo Salvatore Gilij, *Nachrichten vom Lande Guiana, dem Oronocofluss, und den dortigen Wilden* (Hamburg, 1785), 286–287.

It’s plausible that he meant ‘so’ rather than ‘sogar’.

Commented [OM2R1]: “He is so unsatisfied with Gilij that he relates examples of the of the ingratitude of the Americans, but draws no general conclusions from this.”

Commented [AK3R1]: Gilij cites examples by other authors which he regards as wrong, Meiners then states –pg. 220, footnote e): “Gily states and confirms most examples of the insensibility of the Americans against their benefactors, and the resulting shameless importunate behaviour; nevertheless, he will not generally admit (vol 2, pg. 117) what all credible observers stay beyond doubt about the decisive facts and behaviour, [I.ee.] that the Americans are as ungrateful as they are hard-hearted.” Meiners cites the original publication, which according to the German translator is much longer than the German translation in excerpts. Would be interesting to know if Gilij gave more examples of supposed ungratefulness than given in the German translation.....

*with the progress of time all traces of Slavic dress and architecture, Slavic morals, and customs will disappear from Germany.*²³ Only from Germany? And Slavic dress and architecture, morals, and customs should disappear? And an important claim like this, that the noble Celts ennoble everyone, presented without any evidence? What has become of the author's claim that the degeneration of the Romans under the Caesars was a consequence of the addition of the blood of conquered nations?²⁴ Surely this blood could not possibly enter the Roman masses in any significant proportion, so was just a little bad blood sufficient to spoil them? Should the benevolent natural law point us towards ennobling the Negro, American, and Asiatic races?

We cannot really scoff here: We wish our readers luck in understanding the following passage better than we do. "*Philanthropy makes it a duty for us to suspect of individual members of Slavic nations that they belong to the chosen of their people until contradictory behavior compels a less favorable judgment.*"²⁵. [...]xxix

²³ "Ueber die Natur der Slawischen Völker in Europa," *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 7 (1790): 600–651, 649.

²⁴ "Historische Betrachtungen über die Entstehung des bürgerlichen Regiments," 199.

²⁵ "Ueber die Natur der Slawischen Völker in Europa," 651.

ⁱ Volumes 1–4 of the *Göttingisches historisches Magazin* was very critically reviewed in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, vol. 2, no. 136 (1789): 273–274; vol. 2, no. 137 (1789): 281–288; vol. 2, no. 138 (1789): 289–292.

ⁱⁱ No subsequent review of Spittler’s contributions ever appeared.

ⁱⁱⁱ Christoph Meiners. *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Lemgo, 1785) was reviewed in *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, vol. 2, no. 136 (1789): 274–280.

^{iv} Christoph Meiners, “Einige Nachrichten über eheliche Verbindungen in den nächsten Graden der Bluts-Freundschaft,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 4 (1789): 562–568.

^v Christoph Meiners, “Ueber die Sinnlichkeit, und deren verschiedene Stufen und Zweige,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 4 (1789): 586–606.

^{vi} Christoph Meiners, “Beyträge zur Geschichte der alphabetischen Schrift,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 4 (1789): 720–736.

^{vii} Christoph Meiners, “Ueber das Klima im heissen Erd-Gürtel,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 5 (1789): 8–41.

^{viii} Christoph Meiners, “Historische Betrachtungen über die Entstehung des bürgerlichen Regiments,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 5 (1789): 197–244.

^{ix} Christoph Meiners, “Geschichte der Sitten der Römer in den beyden ersten Jahrhunderten nach Christi Geburt, und zwar zuerst über die nothwendige Entstehung des Despotismus aus der allgemeinen Sitten-Verderbniß,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 5 (1789): 369–417; “Ueber den Fortgang des Despotismus und des Verfalls der Sitten unter den Römern,” vol. 5 (1789): 561–613; “Dritte Abhandlung über den Verfall der Sitten der Römer unter den Kaisern, und besonders über die Ueppigkeit beyder Geschlechter,” vol. 6 (1790): 215–237; “Vierte Abhandlung über den Verfall der Sitten unter den Römern zur Zeit der Kaiser, und namentlich über die Leckerhaftigkeit, Schlemmerey, und Völlerey der Römer,” vol. 6 (1790): 238–271.

^x Christoph Meiners, “Ueber die Entstehung des Eigenthums,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 5 (1789): 461–474.

^{xi} Christoph Meiners, “Kurze Geschichte des gemässigten Klima,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 5 (1789): 703–741.

^{xii} Christoph Meiners, “Historische Bemerkungen über die sogenannten Wilden oder über Jäger- und Fischer-Völker,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 6 (1790): 273–311.

^{xiii} Christoph Meiners, “Ueber die Natur der Afrikanischen Neger, und die davon abhängende Befreyung, oder Einschränkung der Schwarzen,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 6 (1790): 385–456.

^{xiv} Christoph Meiners, “Von den Varietäten und Abarten der Neger,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 6 (1790): 625–645. This essay is available in English in Jon M. Mikkelsen (ed.), *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), 195–207.

^{xv} Christoph Meiners, “Historische Nachrichten über die wahre Beschaffenheit des Sklaven-Handels, und der Knechtschaft der Neger in West-Indien,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 6 (1790): 645–679. [See Chapter Twenty-Seven in this volume.](#)

^{xvi} Christoph Meiners, “Ueber die Natur der Americaner,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 7 (1790): 102–156, “Zweyte Abhandlung über die Natur der Americaner, besonders über ihre Gemüthsart,” 209–230.

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- ^{xvii} Christoph Meiners, “Ueber die Natur der Völker des östlichen und nordöstlichen Asiens,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 7 (1790): 230–258.
- ^{xviii} Christoph Meiners, “Ueber die Natur der Völker im südlichen Asien, auf den Ostindischen und Südsee-Inseln, und in den Südländern,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 7 (1790): 258–306.
- ^{xix} Christoph Meiners, “Ueber die Natur der morgenländischen Völker,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 7 (1790): 385–455.
- ^{xx} Christoph Meiners, “Ueber die Natur der Slawischen Völker in Europa,” *Göttingisches historisches Magazin*, vol. 7 (1790): 600–651.
- ^{xxi} See *Iusti Lipsi Epistolarum Centuriae Duae* (Leiden, 1590), 15; and Desiderius Erasmus, *Familiarum colloquiorum opus* (Paris, 1526).
- ^{xxii} Ochlocracy refers to rule by the mob.
- ^{xxiii} Christoph Meiners, *Grundriss der Seelenlehre* (Lemgo, 1786), Preface: “In my opinion, the young psychologist [*Seelen-Forscher*] must begin with the comprehensible works of men who do not start from supposed axioms and arbitrary definitions but who base all of their reasoning on experience, the correctness or incorrectness of which anyone who will look back on his inner life or on the history of his life can judge.”
- ^{xxiv} See note x above.
- ^{xxv} Voltaire, *L’Ingénu*, in *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, vol. 57 (Paris, 1785): 5–115, 59: “En effet, l’histoire n’est que le tableau des crimes et des malheurs [Indeed, history is nothing more than a tableau of crimes and misfortunes].”
- ^{xxvi} See James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, In the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773*, 5 vols. (London, 1790), vol. 2, 556–558.
- ^{xxvii} Amédée Francois Frezier, *Relation du voyage de la mer du Sud aux côtes du Chily et du Pérou* (Paris, 1716), 11.
- ^{xxviii} See Lionel Wafer, *A new voyage and description of the Isthmus of America*, 3rd ed., in William Dampier, *A Collection of Voyages*, 4 vols. (London, 1729), vol. 3, 344.
- ^{xxix} We omit the final paragraph of Forster’s review, which lists the essays Meiners published in the *Philosophische Bibliothek* that address non-anthropological subjects.