

## 8 : RACISM AND IMPURE HEARTS

Racism seems to be, in a fundamental way, a matter of belief. One who possesses what we might call "racist beliefs"—such as that the members of a given racial or ethnic group G are intellectually or morally inferior to members of one's own group, or that G members ought to be prevented from living or intermixing among them—is ipso facto a racist, in common usage, even if these beliefs are never visibly manifested in affect, in construals of events, texts, or situations, or in verbal or other behavior. In particular, not yet acting upon such beliefs does not preclude one from being a "closet" racist (who could, moreover, begin overtly manifesting racism at any time). On the other hand, it is an effective defense to a behavior-based accusation of racism that the person does not hold any racist beliefs and that the suspect behavior is therefore explicable in some other manner. Of course, it can be difficult to adjudicate, in particular cases, whether the offending beliefs in question are in fact nonexistent or whether, instead, there is only self-deception, denial, or other lack of conscious access to them. But the care and effort that go into such adjudications offer significant verification that attributions of racism turn upon the existence or nonexistence of the relevant kind of belief.<sup>1</sup>

Racist beliefs thus strike unreflective common sense as being both necessary and sufficient for an attribution of racism, as that concept is commonly deployed.<sup>2</sup> One's "heart" is either pure on this score, or it is not—in which latter

1. By "belief" here I include all manner of cognitive resources, including assumptions and presuppositions, whether embodied in representations that are sentential or imagistic. In this way, the conception in the text extends even to varieties of racism that show up only in habits of behavior not produced by reasoning with beliefs—such as having "visceral" hostile or aversive reactions (as some dogs have been known to display), unthinkingly shifting into patronizing street slang and slouching whenever meeting black men, and perhaps handing out compliments for articulateness only to blacks. Note also that the term "belief" in this chapter is intended to comprehend, on the sentential side, not only sentences that amount to full-fledged beliefs of the cognizer, but also others that are not so attributable yet are nonetheless parts of his standing cognitive endowment and, once activated from memory, can be accepted by him temporarily but unqualifiedly for purposes of reasoning, just as are his beliefs. (These latter are referred to as "nonbeliefs" in Beyer 1999.)

2. Some accounts of racism do not view racist cognitions as being at its source (e.g., Garcia 1996). But the analysis in this chapter applies to all accounts of racism insofar as racist beliefs are conceived as important causal contributors whose eradication would be desirable.

case one is either very racist, slightly racist, or something in between. The deciding factor is one's system of beliefs.

How, then, to purge oneself, or someone else, of racism? The logical course, it would seem, is education: present information that undermines the racist beliefs, whether by explicit credible teachings that contradict them or by experiences from which the racist can glean their falsehood (such as working or playing alongside members of the disfavored group G). Racism's cure involves removal, in one way or another, of all racist beliefs.<sup>3</sup> Only with such cleansing can a person rightly reckon himself untainted by racism, conscious or unconscious.

Or at least such is the standard view. In this essay, I hope to show that this understanding of the nature of racism and its cure is misleadingly, even counterproductively, oversimplified. A more complicated and nuanced view, though one still concentrating on racism's roots in cognition, offers more astute guidance for moral evaluation, more helpful practical recommendations for those seeking to conquer racism, and a more subtle and accurate picture of the nature of racism. To begin, the next section will show that, due to two kinds of obstacles in the way of racist-belief eradication—(i) the ease with which beliefs of this kind can deflect counterevidence; and (ii) the phenomena of belief perseverance and continuing cognitive usage of already-rejected ideas—the standard view holds out little hope that racists can escape their condition. This will be followed, however, by a discussion of ways by which ineradicable racist beliefs can be rendered ineffectual—which achieves the core of what we seek when we endeavor to eliminate someone's racism. In sum, what I aim to show is that racist beliefs are resistant to subjective rejection; that even those that are so rejected are resistant to lasting expulsion from one's belief system; and that those that remain available for use in cognition can shape thought and behavior even in the event that one has recognized their falsehood. Yet if one is intent upon combating the racism within one's mind, one is not without effective weapons, and we will examine some of the available cognitive countermeasures.

## **I. THE TROUBLE WITH PURIFICATION**

Racist beliefs, it will be argued in this section, possess two features that tend to make their eradication from a person's mind quite a daunting, if not flatly impossible, undertaking. The first is that racist beliefs are among the beliefs whose subjective repudiation is particularly difficult to bring about via an encounter

3. In focusing my analysis of racism upon beliefs, I do not intend to suggest that belief change is a purely intellectual matter. I take no position in this essay on whether belief revision processes typically, or ever, involve emotions, desires, or other mental states or events that are not strictly cognitive.

with evidence. The second feature is one that appears to be characteristic of beliefs generally: even if a racist belief does come to be repudiated by its holder, it might well linger in memory, get activated in certain contexts, and thus manifest in verbal or other behavior.<sup>4</sup>

#### REPUDIATION DOES NOT COME EASILY

Racist beliefs are false—or so I shall assume throughout. (If some of them are actually true, then coming to reject and expunge these from one's mind presents additional challenges over and above those we will be examining.) An important feature they share is that they are often quite deep-seated compared to certain familiar kinds of beliefs, in that in their possessors' eyes they are not logically dependent upon other factual beliefs that are readily susceptible to disconfirmation, and thus they typically are not readily jettisoned in response to the acquisition of additional evidence. To see this, consider the following array of beliefs:

1. The milk on the top shelf of our refrigerator is fresh.
2. The president is being honest about his noninvolvement in the corruption scandal.
3. Increasing U.S. trade with China will increase the likelihood of political democratization there.
4. Asian people are, as a group, generally untrustworthy.
5. Blacks are inferior in intellect and morality to persons of other races.

These beliefs are alike (and like all beliefs) in that, as W. V. O. Quine famously pointed out, they are all in theory potentially immune from convincing refutation: no matter what supposedly contrary evidence is encountered by a believer of any one of them, such evidence can be reinterpreted or explained away in such fashion as to preserve the commitment to the belief. Each of the beliefs can thus be shielded from conclusive disproof: one can never be logically compelled by evidence to grant its falsehood, as long as one is willing to react to the evidence by instead making alterations, however implausible, *elsewhere* in one's belief system.<sup>5</sup>

But for all but those most single-mindedly (or pathologically) committed to

4. Whether this is indeed equally characteristic of all beliefs, or solely or especially affects only certain kinds—such as those having more emotion-laden origins, or those that have been longer in memory or more often used without being consciously rejected by their possessors—is a question meriting further research.

5. See, e.g., Quine 1992: 13–14. The locus classicus for this idea is Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1964: 20–46, esp. 42–44): "Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system" (43). One straightforward overview of the Quine-Duhem Thesis, along with further citations to Quine's work on holism, can be found in Klee 1997: 64–65.

the defense of certain beliefs come what may, this in-theory feature common to all beliefs does not, of course, dictate their in-practice subjective susceptibility to counterevidence—a susceptibility that definitely varies across beliefs. Whatever insulation of them from evidence is *possible*, in actual psychological fact we do experience contrary evidence as imposing varying degrees of rational compulsion upon us to revise or abandon our beliefs. In the case of those listed above, we feel such compulsion more for the beliefs toward the top of the list than for those toward the bottom, with racist beliefs tending to be among the kinds of beliefs less open, from their possessors' standpoints, to rational challenge.<sup>6</sup>

So yes, if I taste that milk in the refrigerator, and it clearly seems sour, no logic can bar me from patching up my belief system to preserve my belief '1', that it is fresh. I could add a bit of new speculative theory about how fresh milk can sometimes taste sour, or a new factual conjecture that my taste buds are out of order or that I have been slipped a mind-altering drug. But let's be realistic. In all but the most extraordinary circumstances, as soon as I detect that sourness, I will revise my belief. I will repudiate '1', intending never again to use it seriously in the role of a belief.

In this respect, '2' ("The president is being honest about his non-involvement in the corruption scandal") differs importantly from '1'. If one believes it, one will be more prone than in the case of '1' to react initially to direct counterevidence by discounting that evidence rather than by simply accepting it as showing the falsehood of one's belief. This might be due to one or more of a number of related yet distinguishable factors, including the availability of alternative accounts of the counterevidence's source, the availability of alternative interpretations of the counterevidence itself, and the conceptual connections between such interpretations and the belief in question.

First, that is, the source of counterevidence to '2' (say, press reports or unearthed tapes indicating that the president himself ordered the scandalous acts) will be, by comparison with that for '1', more open to multiple explanations, some

6. Given my focus upon *rational* challenges to beliefs, some will understandably wonder about motivated *nonrational* or *irrational* pressures for racist-belief maintenance or revision—extraordinary, and maybe even routine, pressures exerted upon beliefs by wishes, dislikes, emotional needs, and so forth. I intend to avoid such concededly interesting matters in this chapter, however, because I think that the explanatory power of the model of rational belief formation and revision (including innocent—i.e., unmotivated—irrationality) has not yet been fully explored and is far from being exhausted, thus rendering somewhat premature the resort to motivated mechanisms in order to explain why people believe what they do. (For example, my notion of "perspect," set out below, points toward an innocent explanation for internal inconsistencies within a person's belief system.) Before we adopt the (comforting) view that racists have lost normal rational cognitive control over their belief systems, let's first see how much of racism might be comprehensible as a product of our ordinarily rational cognitive processes.

of which show the counterevidence to be of dubious reliability—the product of disinformation fed to the press, irresponsible journalistic practice, deviously edited tapes, utterances misleadingly taken out of context, or the like. Second, even if the counterevidence to ‘2’ is deemed to be uncorrupted and from a trustworthy source, it would be less likely to demand a repudiating response from the believer due to its greater openness, compared to counterevidence to ‘1’, to multiple plausible readings of its meaning. Sensations of sour taste, or even printed sell-by dates, are relatively unambiguous informational inputs, whereas an (accurate, undoctored, unedited) tape of a conversation involving the president might well be susceptible to varying reasonable interpretations that impute differing verbal acts and states of mind to him. Third, not only are diverse plausible interpretations of counterevidence to ‘2’ available, but some of these allow for a committed believer to maintain ‘2’ without inconsistency, whereas the incompatibility between belief ‘1’ and the meaning of its counterevidence is relatively inescapable—commitment to ‘1’ cannot help one evade the logical pressure brought by the counterevidence. A belief about the freshness of milk in a given container cannot by itself (at least without extraordinary strain) alter one’s sense-based perception that some of that milk is in fact sour or otherwise not fresh, and neither can it alter one’s understanding of the logical incompatibility between such a perception and one’s belief. By contrast, if the president’s honesty is treated as a given to which the evidence can acceptably be made to conform, then some of the supposed counterevidence might readily, and not implausibly, be construed so as not to constitute *counterevidence*. (Most simply: might the president have been joking, intentionally deceptive, or tipsy when he issued the incriminating utterance?) More generally, some beliefs are such that not only is their counterevidence open to varied construals, but those of the construals that conflict with the beliefs are more easily discountable because fewer in number and lesser in degree of plausibility. The upshot of all this is that counterevidence to ‘2’ is less likely to seem conclusive than counterevidence to ‘1’, and accordingly less likely to instigate a subjective rejection of the belief.

Nevertheless, the evidence that one faces can be such that one feels inescapably compelled to reject ‘2’ and to regard any reasonably intelligent person who insists upon holding onto it as beset by some irrational, cognition-distorting emotional wish, need, or compulsion. With ‘3’, though (‘Increasing U.S. trade with China will increase the likelihood of political democratization there’), we move still further from the clarity of ‘1’ because of the more general, theoretical nature of the cognitive commitment it involves. Thus it is even more likely than ‘2’ to be used in interpreting evidence that bears upon its truth or falsehood and to self-protectively cause such evidence to be construed in belief-upholding ways. But it is still a kind of belief for which evidence might be encountered that, even if open to multiple interpretations, is on all but the most implausible of these so blatantly and unambiguously contrary that a believer cannot, in good

conscience and without self-deception, construe it away. Hence the belief, despite its power to color the evidence regarding it, is ultimately still open to revision or elimination to a significant degree.

What about '4' and '5'? These are typical racist beliefs, directed against Asians and blacks, respectively. And it seems that they are more akin to beliefs like '3' than beliefs like '1'. They color the evidence that a believer in them encounters. A significant portion of the available counterevidence is testimony of others that can be dismissed as not supported by objective data and maybe even as tainted by ideology (by multiculturalist or egalitarian political commitments, say). Other evidence, obtained from direct but limited acquaintance with the group G members in question, does not bring with it an unavoidable contra-belief reading, but is readily susceptible to alternate plausible interpretations that confirm, rather than refute, the racist beliefs.<sup>7</sup> Beliefs like these are not completely resistant to change via evidence; but the kind of evidence most difficult to construe or rationalize away—involved acquaintance with a range of G members in settings that allow them to reveal unambiguously their possession of traits opposite to the negative ones imputed by '4' and '5'—is of a kind rarely encountered by racists. In sum, we see in this section how rational processes tend to work against revision or jettisoning of racist beliefs, given the relatively great (though not uniquely great) "distance" of such beliefs from their evidentiary supports. The road to psychological rejection of racist beliefs is thus one that tends not to be traversed by the believers, for reasons that are partly a matter of the dictates of rational belief revision.

#### A DEEPER OBSTACLE TO PURIFICATION

Not only do holders of racist beliefs tend not to find themselves rationally compelled by the evidence that they encounter to subjectively renounce those beliefs, but they face a still more profound impediment to the purging of them. Even after they are renounced as false, racist beliefs, like other beliefs, often continue to reside within a person's cognitive endowment, where (as with dormant viruses) the right circumstances can cause them to be activated and employed in emotion- and behavior-influencing cognitive processes. Racism thus is akin to a disease that, once contracted, is forever present within the body and capable, when activated, of degrading its health.

Now, this picture does conflict with at least two standard assumptions about the operation of human cognitive systems: (i) that once an idea is rejected as false, it is barred or expelled from a person's belief system; (ii) that an idea

7. Part of the explanation of this phenomenon no doubt resides with the widespread emotional (but rationally warranted) tendency to favor preservation of our existing beliefs over their alteration, a conservatism that provides greater stability of worldview and the accompanying practical and psychic advantages.

thought by someone to be false cannot, in any event, enter into his cognizing—in other words, that when engaging in “serious” or “sincere” (i.e., non-hypothetical, non-suppositional, non-joking, non-acting, etc.) mental operations, people employ only ideas that they hold to be true. But there are weighty reasons to think that it is these assumptions, rather than the picture I am proposing, that is at odds with reality.

### *Repudiation without Elimination*

Even where a cognizer ascertains that a sentence (or other representation) in his endowment is deserving of expulsion, and goes on to will this, it is typically difficult to effectuate such a willing. Call this *belief perseverance*.<sup>8</sup> Judging a sentence false is apparently not as consequential an act as we might be tempted to think: it does not always prevent the sentence’s initial entry into a person’s cognitive endowment, and neither does it, in general, result in the elimination of the sentence from that endowment once there—or, as will be discussed in the next section, prevent its activation and usage in subsequent cognizing.

This is a well-attested fact about the mind. The psychologist Daniel Wegner writes of “thoughts that we cannot erase from our mind” that “continue to influence our further thinking” (1989: 100). With regard to such a thought, “Suggesting [to oneself] that the thought is wrong or false or silly or mistaken will not make it truly disappear” (113). He writes,

When we have an idea that . . . just cries out to be wiped off the face of the earth, the most direct attack we can imagine making on it is to say it is false. The fact that disbelieved ideas do not “go away,” however, leaves us with this potentially tricky, oscillating idea in our mind. Sometimes we will remember it is false, and we will make decisions accordingly. But at other times we may lose track of our disbelief, or our resolution to disregard this idea, and so make judgments that follow from the belief that the thought is true. (116)

The psychological evidence suggests that “it takes much more than a retraction to produce a lasting and effective suppression.” It seems that “the will to disbe-

8. This class of phenomena, referred to as “(non)belief perseverance” in Beyer 1999, is more general than what goes by the name “belief perseverance” in the psychological literature, which involves continuing to maintain a belief that one has derived from one’s experiences in an experiment even after one has been debriefed by the experimenters about the phoniness of the experimental “evidence” upon which one based one’s belief. See, e.g., Harman 1986: 35–38. Wegner participated in an experiment extending this result to cases where *pre-experiment* briefings were used in order to warn subjects, and found that “the majority fell for the false feedback” nonetheless (Wegner 1989: 105). Wegner concludes: “Whether we learn before, during, or after we encounter a piece of information that the information is false, we may subsequently use the information in just the same way” (104).

lieve is not, by itself, sufficient to clear our minds of false thoughts or their unwanted implications" (100, 117).

One reason that belief perseverance gets overlooked at times within philosophy might be that certain kinds of illustrative example tend to influence theoretical reflection in this area. Treating, for example, the old chestnut

It is raining (here and now)

(e.g., Williams 1973: 136) as one's central source of data concerning belief can distort one's view. A just-formed instance of this prototypical belief sentence might indeed disappear immediately upon a glance out the window at the weather; this is one way that ordinary learning of facts occurs. But a belief that, say, one's father was an honest man might well be more tenacious in the face of acknowledgedly powerful disconfirming information. One might accept the new evidence, recognize that it dispositively entails a lack of honesty on one's father's part, and still, on numerous subsequent occasions, sincerely declare one's father to have been honest or engage in reasonings or imaginings that take him to have been so. The cognitive representations containing the information that one's father was honest will not have been expunged, and one will have also lost mental access, temporarily if not permanently, to (i) the counterevidence that one deemed (and would still deem) a conclusive refutation of one's belief, and likely also to (ii) one's earlier experience(s) of having rejected the belief based upon that counterevidence. (The variations in how beliefs resist expulsion despite acknowledged disconfirmation are, of course, not to be confused with the earlier-discussed variations in how beliefs deflect or discourage subjective acknowledgment of their disconfirmation in the face of counterevidence.)

Despite the general neglect of belief perseverance, some philosophers have enriched their portrayals of cognition by taking notice of the phenomenon. Gilbert Harman, for instance, writes, "Of course, there are cases in which one has to struggle in order to abandon a belief one takes to be discredited. One finds oneself coming back to thoughts one realizes one should no longer accept" (1986: 38). We can add that, unfortunately, one does not always "find oneself" doing this when it occurs; one sometimes comes back to supposedly discredited thoughts *unawares*. Alvin Goldman, too, has insightful things to say on the topic. He speaks of the cognitive state that remains even after it has been repudiated (and even after a corrected state has been added to the cognitive endowment) as a "credal residue" and recognizes that these "are important to acknowledge because, like a phoenix, they can be reborn—as beliefs" (1986: 223–24).

While there is considerable illumination to be gained simply by bringing this perseverance phenomenon into contact with issues of racism, it is only with an *explanation* of the difficulties of belief eradication that a fully satisfying account will be attained. A good start in this direction can be made by introducing a



richer, more realistic model of cognition. The commonsense view, influenced by the analogy of the mind to a computer, takes a person's cognizing simply to involve manipulations carried out upon a single set of sentential beliefs; but by adding two sorts of complications that render this view more true to life, it becomes possible to discern in greater detail some of the mechanisms that thwart people's attempts to rid their minds permanently of repudiated beliefs.

*Man Does Not Think by Sentences Alone.* The first complication is that memory contributes to cognition more than just sententially embodied information—so that even were one to eradicate a given racist belief sentence 'p' from one's memory, one might retain other kinds of parallel mental representations, due to which one might find oneself at a later point again accepting 'p' or reasoning or acting as if one accepts it. To begin with, humans possess an "episodic memory" system that stores memories of past experiences—memories of the experiences themselves,<sup>9</sup> rather than memories about them: memories of *eating* the apple, or *seeing* that it was green, as opposed to sentential memories that one ate the apple or *that* it was green.<sup>10</sup>

One use that is made of episodic memories is the derivation from them of sentences that can then enter into ordinary reasoning and even be added to a person's permanent store of knowledge. Though this ordinarily facilitates effective cognizing—supplying a wealth of otherwise-unavailable information to ongoing thought processes—it can undermine one's intentions to rid oneself lastingly of a racist belief, even supposing that one is able in the first place to expunge the belief from one's store of cognitive assets. In the simplest kind of case, one retains an episodic memory of having thought or argued the racist position in question, and upon recalling this simply accepts that position once more: This can readily occur, because it is not uncommon for one who maintains confidence in one's own thought processes to come newly to accept a sentence 'p' by trusting that the episodic memory of one having *earlier* accepted it provides two assurances: (i) that one did indeed accept 'p' earlier, and (ii) that it is worthy of acceptance once again. Of course, if one also has grounds for suspecting that 'p' is false—maybe grounds also thrown up by episodic memory, such as the recollection of having later come to doubt 'p'—then the new taking up of 'p' might be inhibited. Thus, if one recalls not just having held or articulated the racist belief in question, but also having later repudiated it, one will not be induced to accept it afresh. But if, as seems common enough, the experience leading to repudiation is isolated in a region of memory unconnected with some experiences

9. The memories might not be veridical. They can be distorted by initial expectations, interpretations, misperceptions, and misunderstandings, and perhaps also by analogous processes that occur subsequent to initial storage.

10. See, e.g., Tulving 2002: 1999. Another example of episodic-memory content was the above-mentioned recollected "earlier experience(s) of having rejected the belief" that one's father was honest.

of unhesitatingly using the racist belief, then recollecting the latter could well reinject that belief into one's immediate reasonings and even potentially back into the pool of permanently stored resources available generally for cognizing.

There are also more complex paths by which recollection of episodic memories can lead to the resuscitation of a previously rejected racist belief. Recollecting having thought that *q*, having thought that *r*, and having thought that *s* might induce one to treat those three sentences as legitimate premises for reasoning, whereupon one might infer to one's old racist belief, '*p*'. Or one might remember having certain experiences that now, in one's current reflections upon them, cause one to conclude afresh that *p*. In such ways, one's racist belief can be discredited, subjectively rejected, and (let us suppose) eliminated from one's pool of ready-to-use cognitive resources—yet still be reconstituted from the echoes of past experience.

There is a second kind of nonsentential memory input into cognition that poses a similar problem to the would-be self-purifying racist. It seems clear that we store in memory, for future mental use, not only sentences, such as the racist beliefs to be eradicated, but also *images* (or image sequences) of various sorts:<sup>11</sup> one's own imagined tennis serve; John McEnroe's tennis serve; dream and fantasy sequences; someone holding onto the edge of a roof (an image obtained from film or television); a precedent instance of the interactions at the end of a first date (perhaps simplified or idealized into generic form); what one's niece looked like at age ten; how she greedily tried to grab her younger brother's candy. Like episodic memories, these, if trusted by their possessor to be reliable sources of truth—which is often eminently reasonable, as there is frequently much to be learned about the world from them—can contain the seeds from which extinguished racist beliefs might be regenerated anew. The stored image of an episode of dealing with a merchant who is Jewish and is relentless about not giving up ground in negotiations, even if obtained from reading or viewing fiction, is one from which one might now extract and accept a racist belief about Jews, or by virtue of which one might presuppose such a view in one's reasonings. Thus, true cleansing of one's racist attitude that Jews are stingy and greedy demands not only the elimination of all sentences to that effect (plus other sentences from which such a view might be derived), as well as all episodic memories of personal mental experiencings from which one might take over or reconstruct such an attitude, but also the modification or expunging of all other standing cognitive resources in image form that one might construe (using one's remaining cognitive resources) as accurately portraying Jews as such.

This sort of self-cleansing would appear to be quite a difficult, if not hopeless, task. But the futility of trying to guarantee the nonoccurrence of racist cogni-

11. I am using "image" in an unanalyzed, everyday, nonscientific sense, as a contrast with verbally encoded information.

tions by purging one's mental cupboard of all ingredients from which they might be fabricated is not cause for despair, as there is another, more efficacious course that we will consider in sections 2 and 3 below.

*The Cognitive System Is Not Fully Integrated.* The second of the two complications neglected by the usual computer-analogized model of mind is that cognition is not a fully integrated process. That is, one's cognitive endowment, the pool of resources stored in memory for utilization in thinking, is *not* a single fund from which any and all assets are available to be activated whenever relevant to the current topic of cognition. Rather than provide in such fashion a single *perspective* upon the world and a single *personality* for engaging with it, one's endowment is compartmentalized in a complex pattern that actually supports many distinct, partial, partly overlapping, situation-triggered (and sometimes mutually inconsistent) *perspects* along with a corresponding set of *personas* (Beyer 1999). The stream of cognizing involves a continual shifting from one *perspect* (and its corresponding *persona*) to another. As a result, how one thinks or behaves in one kind of setting is no sure indicator of how one thinks or behaves in a different one. Indeed, one can even sometimes be found reasoning earnestly in *perspect* P<sub>1</sub> with a premise that is *contradictory* to its counterpart that one earnestly employs in P<sub>2</sub>.

If this is an accurate portrayal—and there is much reason to think so (Beyer 1999)—then it would seem to offer belief perseverance still another advantage in its contest with purification-by-belief-eradication. Suppose that one awakens to the recognition that one's racist belief 'p' is out-and-out false and wrong-headed, and that this realization leads somehow to the internal acts and circumstances that suffice for effecting belief eradication. Given how substantially independent from one another are the thought processes that a person undertakes in differing *perspects*, would we expect one's anti-'p' realization to result in the expulsion of 'p' from one's entire cognitive endowment—or instead from only a certain kind of *perspect*, so that, yes, when one is, say, again discussing public policy issues with colleagues or strangers, one will never again be tempted by that racist idea, while in other contexts one might continue to find 'p' being offered up by one's memory as an untainted tool for thinking? Whether this is so is an empirical, and not logical, question, of course; but the latter conjecture seems strongly supported by ordinary experience with mental dividedness and how lessons learned in one context fail to carry over to others. It seems, then, that the snuffing out of a racist belief in one *perspect* would not be expected to undermine its continuing availability in others. Moreover, such recalcitrance to systemic uprooting might be expected especially for those sentences that are not newly formed but are of long standing and are integrated into numerous *perspects*—which certainly might often characterize racist beliefs.

And matters are even worse still, of course. For we have simply assumed that

one's realization of the racist belief's falsity would bring about its snuffing in the particular perspect activated at that moment. Yet experience also teaches that even a sincere banishment of a belief often turns out to be only a temporary superseding of it limited to the immediate cognitive episode, with no lasting effects even for this very perspect. Especially where the racist belief has long been activated in this kind of perspect, the insight or information that it is false might be quickly forgotten (or confined to episodic memory) once the current thought episode passes, and not only fail to oust 'p' permanently from all of memory, but even fail to bring about its exclusion from the "activation list" for this one perspect. Despite the temporary setback, it lives on within this perspect to fight another day. It is a familiar experience to learn something, but have the lesson not "take," such that in future pragmatic situations of the same type one just reverts to one's old view.

### *Cognizing with Ideas One Deems to Be False*

Even if it were to prove impossible to banish from one's cognitive endowment the subjectively repudiated items from which racist thoughts and acts arise, this would be of little concern as long as those items could be counted on to remain dormant and inert. And such an expectation is not *prima facie* unreasonable, at least insofar as we are dealing with items (let us again focus upon sentential beliefs) that have been repudiated because they are viewed as being false. How, after all, can one be expected to use, say, racist belief 'p' in one's theoretical or practical reasoning when one rejects 'p' as false?

There is a good deal to be said about the remarkably complicated relation between cognition and truth, but our purposes do not require going into great detail here. Suppose that we grant, for the sake of argument, the plausible psychological principle that one cannot make sincere, serious use in cognition of sentences that one at that time regards to be false. This would still provide little comfort to those seeking to become reformed racists via the route of purification. For there are good reasons to think that the principle would not prevent one from using those racist ideas that continue, despite one's intentions, to reside within one's cognitive endowment.

To begin with, there is the fact of what we might call *epistemic reticence*: cognitive contents do not come labeled in ways that immediately and dependably announce the truth values that their possessors take them to have.<sup>12</sup> We some-

12. Indeed, the considerations discussed in this paragraph, combined with the multiple-perspects account of compartmentalized cognition, suggest that "the truth values that their possessors take them to have" are sometimes not even unitary, determinate values at all. One can make varied assessments of a sentence's truth value, with none of these clearly deserving to be regarded as *the view*, or considered view, that one takes of it.

times unwittingly utilize, in our reasonings, sentences that we would deem upon reflection to be false—or, indeed, even those that we have already in the past so deemed. When these are newly obtained sentences that come from outside information sources or internal inferential processes rather than from memory, this is only to be expected, since we sometimes accept new ideas on trust without testing their epistemic credentials. But even the reused sentences that simply get activated from our standing cognitive endowments do not wear their epistemic statuses on their sleeves. We readily lose track of our past assessments of them (see Harman 1986: 41), and there is in general no immediately introspectible feature that allows us to recapture these (or even the facts about whether we have performed such assessments). Of course, we do in many cases recognize sentences' epistemic statuses while we are employing them in reasoning—not because the sentences automatically announce these, but because we actively institute checks on them during the reasoning process. Introspection informs us that we do this checking only sometimes, however, and this is confirmed by the limitations of our mental machinery: as cognizing is occurring in real time, there is inadequate time and processing power for conducting on-the-spot evaluations of every item about to be utilized in reasoning. (Not to mention the difficulties we would face in trying to muster all the information needed for making such determinations.)

There is other evidence that we sometimes unhesitatingly use sentences in reasoning without scrutinizing them—and thus that racist beliefs might go on influencing cognition if, despite having been repudiated, they linger within our cognitive endowments.<sup>13</sup> But we have established adequately that racism elimination by purification faces imposing obstacles.

13. Some of this evidence is phenomenological: much of our cognitive utilization of sentences, especially that which involves no explicit assent or affirmation, seems to be conducted often in a stance of unskeptical, unconcerned trust. Some evidence is provided by the occasions where someone's challenge to our statement "p" causes us immediately to show, and feel, diffident hesitation, apparently suggesting (in some, though not all, cases) that we did not perform a prior truth assessment. Further support is provided by those who have observed that human cognition commonly occurs in a posture of "unquestioning acceptance" that derives from a natural tendency toward "primitive credulity" (Price 1969: 208–16; see also James 1950; Coady 1992: 121, 123, 46–47; Levi 1991: 71–79; Dancy 1985: 171). Note that even a contemporaneous awareness, or readily available awareness, of the falsehood of a sentence does not interfere with using it in reasoning, as shown by activities like contrary-to-fact supposing, playing devil's advocate, talking off the top of one's head, unknowingly putting on an act, and making believe. (See also Dennett 1978: 308: "Habits of thought tied to [merely] well-turned phrases may persist long after one has denied the relevant assertions.")

## II. VIRTUE WITHOUT PURITY

It seems, then, that the prospects are dim for curing a person's racism through a purging of his cognitive system. For the reasons given above, it is likely that he will not be led to subjectively repudiate the racist beliefs that he holds, and that even if he does, they will not be eliminated from his active fund of cognitive tools or they (or similar sentences) will be readily reconstituted out of other, less obviously troublesome ingredients available in his cognitive warehouse. Either way, they will continue to manifest themselves in reasoning and behavior.

This might seem a counsel of despair. But in fact there is an alternative course that combating an individual's racism might take, an ethical goal both more achievable and more constructive than the simplistic picture of the pure heart. Racism can be effectively defeated in the many individual hearts that harbor it, but only by eschewing a sentimental and overly ambitious ideal for an approach that is more adult, sober, pragmatic, and realistic. The aim should be *management* of one's racist ideas, not their absolute elimination. Rather than make futile efforts to simplify one's cognitive system by uprooting the racist ideas, one ought to seek to *complicate* that system in ways that offer control over the offending ideas' influence and manifestations.<sup>14</sup>

This proposal might appear less unfamiliar if compared to our ways of handling unruly *desires*—desires that tormentingly mock our inabilities to satisfy them, or lead us to make choices we regret or to be people we don't respect. Sometimes, of course, we forsake any attempt even to control such desires, but instead accept and cope with their ramifications, perhaps by restructuring our lives so as to minimize their problematic features. (We continue to indulge a weakness for ice cream, but compensate by exercising more vigorously.) When we cannot or will not adopt this approach, then our ideal is to eliminate the burdensome desires altogether by gaining new information or insight that undermines the attraction of their fulfillments (or the aversiveness of their non-fulfillments). The logical link from input to desire-elimination might be immediate, as when we hear credible reports that a restaurant dish we had been eager to try is actually unpleasantly dry and way oversalted; or it might be indirect, as

14. Thus it might well be that in certain parts of the world the tide of racism has actually receded somewhat in the past generation—notwithstanding the impediments to racist-belief eradication that we have been examining. The explanation for such a shift, if indeed there has been one, could be that (i) racist-belief eradication *efforts* have increased over time, bringing about a parallel, if far smaller, increase in eradication *success* (if we plausibly assume that  $n$  percent of such efforts are successful despite the obstacles, and that  $n$  has not changed in recent decades); and, more important, (ii) the techniques discussed in this section and the next are more commonly practiced nowadays.

when reorienting our lives toward public service, or toward enhanced life opportunities for our newborn, erases our desire to continue living the life of a skid bum. Quite commonly, though, we cannot entirely uproot a troublesome desire, so we make do with taming or limiting it. Think of people's never ending battles against ineradicable desires for alcohol, for certain foods or the activity of consuming them, or for erotic intimacy with those who are off limits; in a different vein, there are lingering desires for activities or other objects that are understood to be worthwhile but that we recognize we must rightly subdue for the sake of, say, our spouses or parents or country.

So how is it that we cope with an ineradicable desire? We might dwell on certain thoughts that cast the desire, or its satisfaction, in a very dim light, and so for now fortify our will to resist its allure. We might prod ourselves to thoughts of unrelated matters, including unrelated desires, and by thus distracting ourselves release the desire's grip for the time being. We might try to commit ourselves to a course of action that makes yielding to the desire impossible—or one that yields to the desire, but in a strictly confined way. In any case, our view of desires is such that we regard them as states that often, maybe typically, must be endured in some manner. Eradication is psychologically out of the question, so the task becomes one of management: managing one's mind, one's life, or the world as it impinges upon one's life, in order to minimize the desires' free rein.

Our standard, textbook view of beliefs is quite different, because the criterion of (apparent) truth exerts so much influence upon whether we retain a belief or not. But as we have seen, this influence is not as great as we might expect (or wish), as it can leave us powerless to the ongoing participation of undesirable ideas in our cognitive processes. We would do well, then, to look for belief-related analogues to the techniques of desire-management.

I cannot purport to provide an exhaustive catalog of the belief-management toolkit, but the overall approach can be glimpsed by considering some of its basic constituents. As is to be expected, these tend to be devices designed not for circumventing the obstacles standing in the way of subjective repudiation of racist beliefs as false,<sup>15</sup> but rather for overcoming our tendencies to retain and continue using belief-like states that we have unambiguously repudiated as epistemically or even merely pragmatically flawed (i.e., as false, or as practically

15. The rationale: if one's thinking tends not to portray certain of one's beliefs as false, one will lack the motivation to devise and employ belief-management strategies regarding them. But there is at least one important exception: the person who sees himself as specially susceptible to certain kinds of false ideas (perhaps of a racist nature, but possibly dealing with, say, religious matters, pseudoscientific ones, hoaxes, UFOs, fortunetellers, etc.). If he views himself as having a weakness for being duped into swallowing false ideas, he might well seek out methods of cognitive self-control that would combat such a weakness by promoting skeptical scrutiny.

troublesome or morally misguided, respectively). The techniques must be routinized if they are to be effective, with some internal triggering mechanisms that are alert to the situations a person faces and that instigate the technique in the appropriate ones. They are not techniques of self-deception—quite the opposite, in fact, in that they are designed to prevent us from welcoming into our reasonings those ideas that we have already determined to be unworthy—but they do bear a kinship to them, for both are used for purposes of avoiding the entry of certain ideas into our thoughts and calculations.

First is a cognition-management strategy for reducing the impact of epistemic reticence: recomputing the truth values of sentences of certain kinds when one is about to use them in any episodes of reasoning that stand to have important consequences for one's actions or feelings. (A corresponding epistemic reevaluation might be instigated for nonsentential, imagistic representations.) The recomputing need not aim for comprehensiveness—that, after all, is quite a tall order—but might confine itself to checking for certain features that warrant epistemic suspicion. So one might, for example, quickly review one's episodic memory for signs that the belief in question has a dubious origin or otherwise checkered past. One might thereby recall having come across weighty counterevidence to 'p' at some earlier time. Or having initially merely *supposed* that p, maybe even contrary to one's conviction at the time, while playing devil's advocate or trying out a new position during an extended discussion on social policy. Or having previously recognized 'p' as tainted by the circumstances in which one acquired it. (One now recalls, for instance, having previously reflected that one originally formed one's particular anti-Asian belief while still only a child, possibly influenced by neighbors or parents, during a period of strained relations with an Asian classmate.) Analogous processes of recomputation can be undertaken to check for signs indicating potential practical or ethical (rather than epistemic) problems with the cognitive assets that one is about to use in possibly consequential reasoning episodes.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, a credential-rechecking arrangement of this kind provides very imperfect protection against the forgetting of a sentence's epistemic or pragmatic status. For one thing, the rechecking is limited by the perspective from which

16. While these procedures are aimed primarily at assisting those persons who have already renounced some of their own racist beliefs as false, immoral, or more trouble than they're worth, they might also be implemented by (and have benign effects upon) some racists who have not yet reached this point. Consider, for instance, the intellectually scrupulous racist who is generally committed to maintaining a rationally defensible belief system and to prudently not acting on ideas that haven't been vetted or that might be corrupted. Or the wavering racist, who finds himself uncertain about the truth (or utility, or morality) of his racist beliefs. For such persons, the credential-checking practices mentioned in the text might serve to bring them toward repudiation of their racist beliefs, rather than to help them deal with already repudiated ones.



it is undertaken, a perspective within which some crucial considerations might be invisible even though they do reside within one's cognitive endowment. Thus, one might give 'p' a go-ahead, but regret this later while cognizing from a different perspective—one that, say, includes evidence that the first one omitted, or affords the recognition that some of the originally considered evidence is unreliable. Second, life occurs in real time: the stream of cognitive tasks thrown one's way does not always permit the luxury of reviewing the credentials of the representations that get mobilized. (Indeed, one often does not even have conscious access to what those representations are.) Even the most rational among us do not maintain clear, ever-updated systems of epistemic and pragmatic classifications for all the representational resources kept on hand.

There is a second process by which one might come to identify the epistemic or pragmatic status of a sentence that one is (considering) employing in reasoning. One might actually possess an explicit belief 'e(p)' specifically about this status, and activate the secondary item whenever using the primary item 'p'. It is not unusual to adopt an activation policy of this nature intentionally, due to regarding 'p' as false or pernicious and worrying that one might nonetheless go ahead and use it unwittingly. To institute such a policy, one inserts into one's perspective-switching system (in whatever mysterious way such things are accomplished) a transition rule that, upon one perceiving that one has accepted 'p' in current cognition (or contemplated accepting it), immediately treats this as a context calling for scrutiny of 'p' and thus brings about a shift to a perspective in which 'e(p)' is accepted. That is, whenever one discovers oneself thinking that p, one immediately activates those cognitive states that indicate that 'p' has no support, or that it is inferior to alternative hypotheses, or that it is imprudent or unethical to accept in one's cognizings. In this way, one "catches oneself" before acceptance of 'p' can do much damage.

This self-monitoring arrangement can apparently come about unintentionally, too, perhaps due to emotional causes. For example, the above-mentioned revelation about the dishonesty of one's father might have such an emotional impact that one cannot think about one's father, or at least about aspects of his character and action that concern truthfulness or rectitude, without immediately recalling that experience of revelation (or perhaps simply the corrective information that it contained).

If such a correction of 'p' happens nearly instantaneously in each instance—and rather than 'e(p)', the activated superseding belief might even be 'not-p', optionally joined by supporting beliefs such as 'e(p)'—then for many practical purposes it is as if one has eliminated 'p' from the set of usable cognitive tools in one's mind, though one actually has not. And perhaps enough of these corrections, or of corrections executed with the right psychological (affective?) accompaniments, actually do succeed in preventing, and not merely correcting,

activations of 'p' in these perspectives.<sup>17</sup> Of course, if one's corrections are not so thoroughgoing, the sentence might continue being utilized within certain perspectives even as it is effectively, functionally eliminated (and perhaps replaced by 'not-p') in others.

The basic process of self-correction is illustrated in the following example:

Suppose you believe for a long time (as all the books used to show) that brontosaurus had very small heads. Later evidence is unearthed to show that they did not have such small heads after all. What happens when you learn this, is that . . . [p]erhaps you also add a note, or correction, to the old small-headedness node, which says: "No, no, this is wrong." Later, if asked the size of brontosaurus' heads, you might initially retrieve "small head." But then you will retrieve the correction as well. (Goldman 1986: 224)

But a more helpful illustration, one with greater relevance to the control of racist beliefs, can be extracted from one of the most renowned episodes of the long-running *Seinfeld* TV comedy show. Jerry and his buddy George repeatedly think that they are mistakenly being taken to be gay, which exasperates them; but every time they complain about being thought gay, they immediately and automatically follow up with a cautionary "Not that there's anything wrong with being gay," or words to that effect. The *Seinfeld* writers may have been aiming to poke fun at the internalized compulsions of "political correctness," but they helpfully portrayed a familiar but underappreciated process of cognitive self-management.

Transposition of such examples to the racism context is straightforward. We can easily imagine someone repeatedly being inclined to invoke a certain group-denigrating belief or assumption, but then correcting himself more or less immediately, perhaps even before the item in question has had a chance to manifest in reasoning, let alone in utterance or other behavior. Indeed, precisely this kind of mental condition would appear to mark the relationship of many people to racist ideas—and to explain some of the difficulty that we have in knowing how to classify people on the "racist" - "nonracist" dichotomy. For do we rightly regard Jeb, who engages in routine auto-correction of his racist inclinations, as racist? He does, after all, possess a racist belief and the repeated initial inclinations, in triggering situations, to use it. Or ought Jeb be characterized as nonracist, given

17. On this model, one might never directly cause 'p' to be finally erased; it would just cease to be activated in any perspective, and either remain in a dormant limbo forever or perhaps eventually fade away from disuse. (Goldman [1986: 223] implies that psychologists maintain that "there is never any real loss of material" from long-term memory, but his only supporting quotation refers only to whether such material can ever be *deliberately* forgotten.)

that it would seem grossly unfair to him, as well as a distortion of the reality, to assimilate under the same "racist" label both him and his brother Jake, who neither is self-critical or repentant about his inclinations, nor has "wired" his mind to limit their impact?

Much of self-control is effected in this general way, building self-monitoring into one's perspect-switching system, precisely because cognitive resources are epistemically (and pragmatically) reticent, difficult to eradicate, and so liable sometimes to influence one's thought, feeling, or behavior despite one's contrary wishes or hopes (wishes and hopes that, unfortunately, reside only in other of one's perspects). Efforts at such self-control are not always successful, of course. And inebriation, or other physiological impairment, can interfere with the proper activation of self-corrective mechanisms too. But such failures provide no reason to shy away from techniques that have repeatedly proven their worth.

### III. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Because it is the actual deployment of racist ideas in cognitive activity that is essential to, and sufficient for, a person being *effectively* racist, and not merely nominally or technically so, we might be wise to redirect some of society's efforts that are aimed at eliminating racism in individuals. Rather than ask people to focus upon the largely fruitless task of recapturing their moral purity by eradicating racist beliefs from their cognitive endowments, we might attend more than we now do to inculcating habitual psychological methods of minimizing the *usage* of such beliefs. What is more important, after all—whether racist beliefs are present somewhere within a person's psyche, or whether such beliefs actually manifest in the person's feelings, construals, reasonings, and behavior? Rather than invest resources exclusively in converting racists into pure-hearted, racist-belief-free nonracists, that is, we might work at turning them into merely "potential racists"—people whose racism is dormant, inert, only potentially causally active. They do remain racist according to our original conception, and not just potentially so, yet the term "potential racist" is warranted both by analogy with "potential energy," which is itself a kind of energy, and by the desire to suggest terminologically that having present yet inactive racist attitudes is more akin to not being a racist than to being one.

The general type of approach being proposed is one of countering racism by addition rather than subtraction: corrective or prophylactic resources are to be added to the cognitive endowment and actively employed whenever old racist representations get activated or new racism-instigating information is encountered. The strategy of cognitive cleansing, by contrast, not only faces the difficulties described earlier but also provides no ongoing protection against racism; even total success can be later undone. Simply eliminating existing racist beliefs,

by itself, provides no protection against a reinfection with new ones. For this protection, affirmative cognitive antibodies must be added to the psychic circulatory system. Some of these are not racism-specific, but rather the constituents of good general epistemological hygiene. For instance, there are general concerns that one can "keep in mind" about the influence upon one's cognition of the following: bias, wishful thinking, and self-deception; limited and incorrect evidence; faulty memory, both for facts and for one's own earlier views and experiences; fatigue, illness, and transitory moods; past dreams, previously encountered fictions, early indoctrination, and lingering childhood ideas; and so on. But these varieties of mindfulness, important rational assets though they are, offer less than fully adequate protection against the (re)generation of racism. One might know all these things, and mobilize them when appropriate, yet still adopt racist beliefs—and be reasonable in doing so.

For even if we assume that ideal exposure to all pertinent evidence would lead a person who possesses general rational habits of mind to bar racist ideas from his belief system—in other words, that anyone who adopts a racist belief is someone about whom we can say, "If only he were better informed"—we unfortunately cannot count on people being fully informed about matters bearing upon their attitudes regarding race and ethnicity. There are many folks who are not well educated about these matters; many who have had, at least to their knowledge, little contact in their lives with blacks, or Jews, or Asians, etc.; many who live in communities in which racist views are neither rare nor disdained. Growing up and living under such conditions, people might find themselves reasonably accepting racist beliefs, even if they abide by the set of general rational norms of belief formation and maintenance mentioned above.

To inoculate against racist beliefs, intellectual habits that are more specifically antiracist are needed. One might maintain at the ready a belief about the psychological tendencies of people to see themselves or their own in-groups as superior, one about the falsehood of at least most past racial claims, one about the epistemologically corrupt, politicized roots of racist depictions and doctrines (such as in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*), and the like. The central practical solution to racism is thus affirmatively educating people, and helping them train themselves to continually activate such lessons as needed. It is not to seek to bring about in their minds *tabulae rasae* regarding race and ethnicity.

The current dominant understanding, which takes purification as the standard for whether people have transcended their racism, is not only misguided in theory but harmful in practice. Because the standard is so high, it can dishearten, and discourage from further efforts, those whose attempts at full eradication of their racist attitudes do not meet with success, even if their efforts are paying off in increasing control of those attitudes and undermining of their influence upon reasoning and behavior. Treating self-purification as the only happy outcome, in all-or-nothing fashion, also is likely to produce unproductive excesses of self-

doubt about possessing an unerasable racist taint, even in those who come to manage their racist attitudes effectively in ways like those described above. (Such self-doubt might be especially insidious for those who worry, despite little supporting evidence, that they possess *unconscious* racist beliefs.) Where such self-doubt crosses over into self-loathing, the direct costs are greater still—and so would appear to be the risks that the feelings will be redirected outward against others, maybe even against the targets of the previously well-reined-in racism.

Do the foregoing recommendations apply only to a minuscule proportion of racists, leaving us no closer to understanding the vast majority or to lifting them out of their racism? No; such a sense of futility is unwarranted. First, it seems likely that quite a substantial proportion of all racists, at least in "Western" societies, doubt the wisdom of maintaining their racist beliefs and might be amenable to utilizing cognitive tools for corralling them. The message that such beliefs are false and harmful, even evil, and that people ought to feel ashamed of possessing them, seems to have been disseminated with quite impressive success in schools and in the mass media, even if racism does still thrive in some subcultures. Second, if, as some commentators maintain, racist beliefs are in fact pervasive albeit predominantly hidden from view, then the processes of cognitive management that we have discussed are relevant to vast numbers of people. In sum, the cognitive mechanisms discussed in this chapter are of central, rather than marginal, relevance to the problem of racism.

In fact, the ideas we have considered extend naturally beyond racism to other ethically undesirable cognition-centered traits. The ideal of a pure heart, unsullied by thoughts that are malicious, selfish, or otherwise unsavory, may be largely unattainable in practice for ordinary human beings who care about being good, its pursuit quite possibly counterproductive. If the mind is a trap from which certain cognitive items cannot be entirely removed, then the appropriate ethical ideal for adults who have already been permanently stained by earlier influences and reasoning cannot be self-purification of their belief systems through the purging of the evil elements. Instead, it must be complicating those belief systems in ways that effectively counterbalance the undesired elements, never allowing them to direct serious thought or action uncontested.