Racist Value Judgments as Objectively False Beliefs: A Philosophical and Social-Psychological Analysis

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I. Introduction

We argue that racist value judgments express beliefs that are objectively false. In our view, racist value judgments have cognitive or descriptive content that is empirically inaccurate and this inaccuracy is, in principle, available to objective, rational assessment. Our position responds to a popular view that, while some value judgments, such as racist judgments, might be abhorrent, values generally are not the sorts of things that are related to the evidence of experience, or if they are so related, it is not available to us to say with any objectivity that the evidence claims are true or false.

In more philosophical terms, our position cuts across a number of metaethical debates, contrasting, for example, with what might be called "non-cognitivist" views of racist value judgments, just in case these views deny that such judgments are beliefs that have some relation to empirical content, and with some subjectivist or relativist views, just in case these views deny that any of the content inherent in racist value judgments can be assigned objective truth values. We should note, however, that our position does not straightforwardly chime with any number of metaethical views labeled "cognitivist" or "objectivist." With backgrounds in epistemology and sociology we intend instead to bring together two areas of research not often addressed in philosophical debates about values generally, or racist values in particular, namely, Donald Davidson's naturalized, holistic account of meaning[1] and the prominent social-psychological theory of values pioneered by Milton Rokeach.[2] We use this interdisciplinary approach to defend the view that, insofar as racist value judgments are meaningful, then they are beliefs that have empirical content, or must be inferentially linked to beliefs that do; that the truth or falsity of that content can be objectively assigned; and that this assignment is amenable to rational assessment.

This is not, of course, to claim that such rational assessment is always practiced, just that, insofar as we believe that this sort of assessment is, in principle, available in the case of more straightforwardly descriptive judgments, so too it is, in principle, available in the case of value judgments. Similarly, any rational assessment regarding the objective truth or falsity of a value judgment is as fallible—that is, as amenable to correction in the light of new evidence—as is the assessment of the truth or falsity of any given descriptive judgment.[3]

The notion of "objective" that we defend in the claim that "racist value judgments are objectively false beliefs" is meant simply to point to the idea that the falseness of racist beliefs is not, in general, a product of our willing those beliefs to be false. Just as with descriptive judgments, the truth or falsity of value judgments holds independently of our desires.[4] With respect to our argument that value judgments are capable of rational adjudication, we mean that value judgments, like descriptive judgments, are arrived at and can be adjusted in the face of experiences or other sorts of empirical evidence, broadly construed. Indeed, as the philosopher Elizabeth Anderson has argued, we are all familiar with the process of adjusting our value judgments in light of new evidence—this process, she reminds us, is called "growing up."[5] According to results from the sociological literature, this rational process of value adjustment is especially likely when value judgments, such as racist value judgments, contradict other values held to be true.[6]

One implication of our view is that to say that a racist value judgment is wrong means something like identifying that judgment as empirically false. Some might argue at this point that our analysis fails to account for the moral indignation we attach to the label "racist"—why does moral outrage properly attach to this sort of empirical failure but not to others? We agree that moral indignation properly attaches to accusations of racism, but we believe that the moral indignation is evoked primarily because of the failure of the person making the racist judgment to be responsible to evidence, and because failures of this sort are inconsistent with other meta-value judgments that we have good empirical reasons to associate with human flourishing. These empirical failures at the meta-value level are historically associated with serious consequences.[7] People are similarly, and properly, outraged when they are confronted by various failures to be responsible to evidence, even when those failures do not involve racist value judgments, but where the consequences of such failures still involve serious consequences because they conflict with meta-value judgments about human flourishing—for example, the outrage a parent might feel when confronted by other parents who claim that they do not need to vaccinate their children against childhood diseases.

Our point is strengthened by considering the moral outrage evoked by failures to be responsible to the weight of empirical evidence in cases, like the immunization example, that do have serious consequences but are not related to folk-racial categorizations, and contrasting these with another type of case involving false claims concerning folk-racial categories that do not typically invoke moral outrage because they are not thought to result in serious consequences. For example, in a contemporary American family identified as "White," imagine a three-year old announcing to her mother that "Black people are lazy." The mother would likely correct the child, and might express some anger toward the child, but she would probably not direct the same level of moral outrage at the child as she would if the child was old enough to know that the claim about African Americans was false. Any moral outrage is generally reserved for the older children and/or adults who made the claim that the younger child then picked up. The mistakes of

older children and adults have far more serious consequences, and older children and adults know, or should know, better. In the face of their refusal to be responsible to the rules of evidence—especially when, in the American case, the historical contingencies have made the consequences of these sorts of meta-value failures so serious—we are right to express moral outrage.

The point about historical contingency is also important. Imagine a claim made by an older child, or adult, about the laziness of Lutherans. While equally mistaken, this empirical failure has not, at least in the U.S. context, been historically attached to serious consequences and so it is less likely to evoke moral outrage.

II. What Is a Racist Value Judgment?

What does it mean to say that a value judgment is racist? This question has been the topic of important philosophical and political debate for a number of years. Many of the positions taken in this debate are fruitfully discussed in Andrew Valls' recent edited collection *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*.[8] Most positions in the debate conceive of some sort of split between the descriptive and moral features expressed in racist judgments, though most of the parties acknowledge that there are important overlaps between the two sorts of features. We agree that, with respect to racist judgments, it is especially difficult to split the descriptive from the moral features—the two are too tightly linked (a point we return to below, in section III). But more troubling to us is what this split is usually taken to indicate: namely, that while the descriptive features of racism have empirical content, the truth or falsity of which can be rationally assessed, the moral features do not; moral claims are thought to be unrelated to empirical evidence. Unlike descriptive claims, they can be neither true nor false, and, as a consequence, they are unavailable to rational assessment.

We begin with Jorge Garcia's view that racism is "fundamentally, a vicious kind of racially based disregard for the welfare of certain people."[9] He argues that racism "essentially involves not our beliefs and their rationality or irrationality, but our wants, intentions, likes, or dislikes and their distance from the moral virtues."[10] Valls notes that a feature of Garcia's view is that it explains why racism is always wrong: "As 'a form of disregard' or 'ill-will,' it is wrong for the same reason that any kind of disregard or ill-will is wrong."[11] Garcia views the moral disregard as separate from any particular sort of belief, empirically informed or otherwise, although he acknowledges that, for many racist people, empirical beliefs (such as the belief in the inferiority of members of another "race") are used to rationalize the moral disregard, and over time "the belief and the disregard will reinforce each other."[12] As we argue below, we're not convinced that, in cases of racist judgments, the moral disregard can be reliably separated from empirical content.

Kwame Anthony Appiah's analysis of racism involves a similar split between the moral and descriptive claims, by dividing the inherently problematic judg-

ments that fall under the category "racist" from the more contingently problematic judgments that fall under a different and sometimes morally innocuous category "racialist."[13] Racialist judgments are those that involve descriptive or empirical claims about the biological or otherwise essential differences between the "races," such as scientific claims about the heritable characteristics of different people as classified by their folk-racial categories. Appiah believes that such racialist views are generally false, though Valls notes that for Appiah, insofar as these racialist claims are false, this represents a "cognitive rather than a moral problem."[14] Valls argues that the racialist/racist distinction is important in that it allows racialist scientific investigations to proceed without necessarily receiving moral condemnation. Racialist considerations are empirical questions for further scientific study. Just because these questions might be answered incorrectly doesn't necessarily mean that the answers are "racist."[15]

With respect to racism, as distinct from racialism, Appiah makes a further distinction between "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" kinds that once again involves distinguishing between descriptive and moral claims. Extrinsic racism involves moral failures presupposed by descriptive or empirical failures (the extrinsic racist would be the racialist who takes the further step of differentially linking moral features to her descriptive racial categories). Intrinsic racism, in contrast, is marked primarily by moral failures, unrelated to any particular empirical failure.[16]

We argue that throughout this debate, even as it is recognized that the split between moral claims and descriptive or empirical claims is difficult to make, the split continues to be overplayed, and the grounds for introducing the split are problematic. Valls agrees that something is amiss, diagnosing the problem as resulting from the difficulty of identifying the "morally relevant qualities" that are thought to underwrite racist claims, but are thought to be absent in the descriptive features underwriting the racialist's claims.[17] Both the racialist and the (extrinsic) racist make descriptive, empirical claims about the difference between people as divided by race, but the racialist doesn't link those racial categories with morally relevant qualities, while the (extrinsic) racist does. But who's to say, asks Valls, what a morally relevant quality is? He continues: "Another way of putting this point is that if the extrinsic racist is right that the characteristics on which she focuses are morally relevant, and right about the way they are relevant, then her basic moral position might not be objectionable. She could be wrong in associating these characteristics with certain races, but this is the same kind of error that the racialist makes—a cognitive, not a moral one."[18]

By contrast, we think the problem for analyses of racism occurs when any split between descriptive and moral claims is too rigidly maintained such that the descriptive features are viewed as inherently free of moral content, and the moral features are viewed as free of descriptive or empirical content. A further problem results when the split between descriptive and moral features is thought to hinge on the view that, unlike descriptive claims, the lack of empirical content in moral claims makes those claims unavailable to rational adjudication.

III. The Conceptual Overlap between the Descriptive and
Moral Features of Racist Beliefs

Appiah is surely right that racism aimed at African Americans, say, involves not only a descriptive, empirical claim about the biological distinctiveness of African Americans as a group, but also a moral claim that African Americans so marked are, typically, inferior as a group in ways that make individual members of the group less worthy of moral consideration. However, it is important to note that, historically, in discussions of "races" and racism, the descriptive and moral features overlap, and forcing a conceptually robust distinction between them obscures important features of each.

We turn our attention first to the moral elements underlying a number of descriptive, scientific claims about the biological distinctiveness of African Americans. Appiah calls these descriptive attempts to tie our folk-racial categories to genetic or other biological categories "racialism"—a necessary but not sufficient condition for extrinsic racism. For Appiah, racialist descriptive projects, while probably empirically mistaken, can be normatively, or morally, neutral. That is, these projects are at worst a "cognitive rather than a moral problem."[19] We are not convinced that these two spheres can be so easily separated.

The Moral Features of "Racialist" Science Projects

It is becoming increasingly clear that while genetic stories can be told that separate the species *homo sapiens* into what we might call "ecological types," these types arise from very particular ecological pressures in very particular geographic regions, and, as a result, have very low correlations with any of the folk-racial typologies currently informing racism in the American context.[20] For example, the genes associated with sickle-cell anemia are not, in fact, highly correlated with being identified as African American. Rather, they are highly correlated with having ancestors from Mediterranean and Equatorial regions where malaria is prevalent, a feature shared across a number of folk-racial categories.[21]

Indeed, more than a century's worth of biological study has failed to explain folk-racial categories in terms of genetic categories. This failure is due in large part to the well-documented fact that, as with any differences between human populations, the genetic differences *within* folk-racial categories range over a distribution that is larger than the average genetic differences *between* these categories.[22] These problems have been recognized for as long as scientists have been making racialist claims about the biological distinctiveness of various "races." In addition, there is the slightly less historically established (but significantly larger) set of studies that have found and continue to find that social explanations account for far more of the variance than do genetic accounts in explanations for why folk-racial categories seem relatively stable and "easy" to identify.

Even with cases in which membership in folk-racial categories is reliably associated with certain phenomena, such as intelligence as measured by standardized tests, it is clear that membership in a folk-racial category cannot be the underlying *cause* of the level of intelligence. The underlying cause of the difference is a series of economic and social processes that, in American society, differentially affect the performance on standardized tests of people identified differentially by folk-racial categories. This has been tested by taking advantage of existing variations in economic and social factors in different parts of the United States, and around the world, and measuring these variations against standardized test scores, and by highlighting or downplaying the salience of folk-racial identification for individuals prior to taking standardized tests.[23] These studies have shown that any measured effects that folk-racial categories have on standardized test scores are quite clearly secondary correlates of powerful, historically contingent and socially variable forces.

Even when biologically-based medical differences have been found between people grouped according to folk-racial categories, such as the increased rates of hypertension and diabetes found in people identified as African Americans, social variables related to poverty, stress and diet explain significant portions of the reported variance.[24] It is a well-documented medical fact that being identified as being African American puts you at higher risk for these diseases, and the most likely reason is that these diseases are affected by exactly the sorts of environments and social stressors we associate with being identified as African American.

In the face of the overwhelming data showing that social factors rather than biological factors better explain the existence and maintenance of folk-racial categories, the continued support of "racialist" science studies focused on explaining folk-racial categories in terms of genetic or other biological categories begins to seem less morally innocuous than Appiah's account of "racialism" would allow. Describing the continuing search for biologically determined differences between folk-racial categories as a "cognitive" failure, *as distinct from* a moral failure, seems to be missing an important point.

We should note that, of course, there are no hard and fast rules available to guide decisions about when a scientific research program has run its course, and when those who continue to pursue particular programs deserve negative moral evaluation. All scientists can ever base these sorts of judgments on are the best data available. It is true that new data might be found and that the scientific consensus might change, but then so too will our notions of folk-racial and genetic categories have changed, and radically so. When we criticize certain racialist research projects as morally problematic, we are, in part, saying that those projects are inadequate (and always have been), relative to the current and best notions of the relationship between biology, sociology, and folk-racial categories.

What is of particular moral interest is when a scientist who is aware of the evidence against biological explanations of "racial" differences continues to do the cognitive work necessary to maintain racialist beliefs. Psychological theories of identity, balance, and cognitive dissonance offer some explanations. While

these psychological theories make no claim regarding the moral quality of such beliefs, it is important from an ethical standpoint to realize that these beliefs are, to one extent or another, chosen. To choose to retain a belief that (1) is demonstrably contrary to well-established facts; and (2) is historically associated with serious consequences, including harm to others directly affected by the belief, seems to be a choice worthy of negative moral evaluation.

The ongoing work of Philippe Rushton and Arthur Jensen is a case in point. Rushton and Jensen are two of the very few social scientists who continue to argue that the social effects of racism against African Americans cannot account for lower scores on intelligence tests. They hold this view, they claim, because " 'racism' has had no adverse impact on the intelligence [scores] of east Asians and Jews, who average higher scores than do Europeans."[25] Rushton and Jensen's failure to attend to the empirically verifiable differences in the sorts of racism experienced by African Americans, "east Asians" and "Jews" is precisely the sort of empirical mistake that should evoke our moral outrage.

The Descriptive Features Inherent in Racist Moral Claims

We now address the opposite problem, that is, when moral claims involving race are thought to be conceptually separate from descriptive, empirical claims. Appiah agrees that the racialist's descriptive judgment regarding the biological distinctiveness of African Americans as a group is logically presupposed by the extrinsic racist's moral claim.[26] He agrees also that the extrinsic racist's moral views can, in principle, be changed in the face of rational persuasion. However, he argues, this change is possible only *insofar as* the extrinsic racist's moral views are presupposed by a particular empirical picture that the racist can be shown is false. For Appiah, moral claims are not available for objective, rational adjudication *qua moral claims*, but only by virtue of their logical relation to the descriptive realm. This point becomes even clearer when Appiah argues that intrinsic racism involves moral failures *unrelated to* any particular empirical failures concerning descriptions of the way the world is. For the intrinsic racist, "scientific evidence is not going to settle the issue."[27] He explains:

> An intrinsic racist holds that the bare fact of being of the same race is a reason for preferring one person to another. For an intrinsic racist, no amount of evidence that a member of another race is capable of great moral, intellectual, or cultural achievements, or has characteristics that, in members of one's own race, would make them admirable or attractive, offers any ground for treating that person as she would treat similarly endowed members of her own race.[28]

With respect to the claim that intrinsic racists are not making empirical mistakes, only moral mistakes, there are a couple of things to note. We begin with a discussion of the intrinsic racist's moral claim, that, for example, they "just don't like African Americans." First, for the intrinsic racist to have morally

significant preferences for certain people, *as grouped by folk-racial categories*, then *some* empirical project is at work according to which the intrinsic racist is able, first, to discriminate between groups, and then to identify the feature she claims is shared by the group members to which she attaches her moral preferences. Recall, however, the well-documented claim, cited above, that among any particular grouping of humans, whether it be groupings according to folk-racial categories, genetic markers, national origin, or even sex, the overall homogeneity of the human population means that whatever categorization scheme you're using to separate the morally worthy from the unworthy, the inevitable result is that some members of your own group will be identified as unworthy, and some members of the outsider group will be identified as worthy. Any moral relevance the intrinsic racist attaches to her particular grouping strategy will be empirically flawed.

Appiah's worry is that any attempts to use empirical information about the morally relevant qualities of members from other "races" will fail to persuade the intrinsic racist, but his worry is beside the point we want to establish here. What we can show the intrinsic racist is that because there are no empirical criteria by which she can reliably sort people into "races," she might be unwittingly discriminating against people she would identify as being members of her own "race." We will later discuss a variety of empirically-based rational strategies that have been effective in changing racist views, but for now it is important simply to acknowledge that the intrinsic racist's moral claims presuppose the ability to empirically sort "her kind" from "the rest." Given the homogeneity of the human family, membership in any given folk-racial category is going to tell you little or nothing about what particular traits (moral or otherwise) an individual has—a point that shows that the moral culpability of extrinsic *and* intrinsic forms of racism is presupposed by at least some empirical errors.

One might argue that the intrinsic racists' claim that they "just don't like African Americans" is not specific enough to reveal any empirical errors. To some extent this is true, but then understanding the racism of the claim is similarly limited. The claim immediately demands the question "*Why* don't they like African Americans?" Explanations in the form of negative moral qualities usually follow, for example, "Because African Americans are lazy," or "Because African Americans aren't as smart as 'whites.' " In American culture (as elsewhere) being lazy or unintelligent are often given as reasons for justifying moral condemnation. At this point, the racism of the moral claims becomes clearer. Note that, *pace* Garcia, we would all agree that these claims are racist not just because they involve a negative moral quality (the claim "African Americans are excellent athletes" is also racist, even though it involves a [putatively] positive moral quality). The reason these claims about African Americans are racist is that compelling reasons can be given to show that they are beliefs that are objectively false. The claims that African Americans are lazy, unintelligent, or excellent athletes involve empirical generalizations about the qualities of a group of people that does not bear up consistently under critical scrutiny.

We have argued that the descriptive and moral features expressed in racist beliefs are tightly intertwined, such that separating them, as Appiah does when he distinguishes between racialism and racism, both downplays the moral culpability that often informs "racialist" science projects, and ignores the empirical inadequacies that necessarily inform any moral judgments that group people by folk-racial categories. However, even if a case could be made that the descriptive and moral features of racism can sometimes be meaningfully teased apart, we are concerned when the difference between the two sorts of features hinges on the view that only the descriptive claims, and not the moral claims, have empirical content that is capable of being objectively true or false and therefore available for rational adjudication.

Within philosophy, a number of arguments have recently been marshaled to show that the split between descriptive and moral claims cannot be based in any general way on the distinction between those claims that have empirical content, the truth value of which is available for objective adjudication and those claims that have no such content and/or are otherwise unavailable for such adjudication.[29] These arguments are not without controversy, of course, and Appiah, in fact, explicitly rejects at least one version of them. As Appiah characterizes the descriptive/moral distinction that underwrites his distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic racism, he argues that we need to keep the moral dimension free of descriptive content.[30] To do otherwise, he writes, would be akin to taking the "controversial" route of talking about "moral knowledge" which, in turn, comes dangerously close to talk of "moral truths."[31] We think that Appiah is right about the direction that talk of the descriptive content of moral beliefs can take; unlike Appiah, we think that there is a way to follow in that general direction and arrive at entirely reasonable conclusions.

IV. Value Judgments as Empirical Beliefs with Objective Truth Values

We have already argued that racist value judgments involve both descriptive and moral features that are appropriately difficult to disentangle. However, we want to go further and show that whatever reasons one might have for trying to disentangle these features, both the descriptive *and* moral features of our value judgments should be thought of as involving empirical beliefs, the truth values of which can be objectively and rationally adjudicated. Inspired by Davidson's holistic and naturalistic approach to the philosophy of language, we argue that, insofar as racist value judgments have any meaning at all; and insofar as the acquisition of meaningful beliefs is an holistic process that does not differentiate between beliefs that express moral claims and beliefs that express descriptive claims, then just as the truth or falsity of descriptive claims can be established objectively (though of course fallibilistically), so too can people establish the truth or falsity of moral claims. And just as with descriptive claims, people can and do rationally assess the truth or falsity of moral claims by comparing the content

of the latter with their experiences and with other empirical evidence, broadly construed.

Our view of value judgments as an overlapping set of descriptive and moral claims capable of being objectively true or false contrasts with a more popular view of value judgments that focuses on their private or subjective nature—an inner nature that keeps value judgments from being available for objective evaluation. On some interpretations of Hume, for example, it seems that because we cannot find value judgments out in the world, in the way that we can find, say, rocks out in the world, then no objective claims can be made about values. However, with Davidson, we do not think that questions of the "location" of values (out there, in here) get to the question of the *objectivity* of values.[32] Or another way of putting it: unless we are operating with some lingering "Cartesian" dualism, we should not make much metaphysical noise about the difference between beliefs formed "out there" and "in here." It is not that there's *no* difference between those sorts of beliefs, just not a difference that affects our ability to objectively examine their truth. Notice also that our argument about the objectivity of moral beliefs does not require any metaphysically realist notion that values, like rocks, are out there in the world. We argue that the question of the location of the values makes no difference to the issue of their objectivity.[33]

Compare the case of making objective claims regarding other sorts of properties, such as weights or colors. There is a fact of the matter about whether something weighs five kilograms rather than ten; or is green rather than red. Insofar as we can make objective judgments about properties such as color or weight, this does not commit us to the view that greenness is out there in the world, in the same way that rocks are out there in the world.

Note also that just because there is an objective fact about whether these predicates can be applied in any given case does not mean that we would all agree on the application criteria, or that the identification process is going to be straightforward.

Compare:

1. Grass is green.
2. "Racial" categories are irrelevant when judging laziness.
3. Individual organisms belong to the same species just in case they can interbreed.
4. Water is the molecule H_2O.

Cases 3 and 4 might stand out as straightforwardly and objectively true descriptive judgments. However, identifying water as the molecule "H_2O" is controversial. A sample of pure H_2O does not have the properties many of us would want to associate with water and in large amounts is harmful to drink. Indeed, the process of identifying macroproperties of the world around us by reference to their molecular properties is still debated within chemistry. Defining

species categories is similarly controversial within evolutionary biology, and systematics more generally. In fact, there is probably as much if not more agreement about the application criteria and empirical evidence for the judgments involved in cases 1 and 2, than there is for cases 3 and 4. But, again, even with doubts about application criteria, there is little doubt that there is an objective fact of the matter in each of the above four cases.

So lack of agreement about how to apply a particular predicate is separate from the question whether that predicate expresses an objective fact of the matter. And just as we would agree that there is a fact of the matter about whether something is green or red, a member of the same species or not, there is also a fact about whether someone is lazy, and whether their membership in any given folk-racial category figures relevantly in this assignment. We can objectively evaluate whether these predicates are being applied correctly even if the level of agreement about application criteria varies from case to case.

Our judgments of properties such as color are similar to our judgments about properties that express values—for example, judging someone as lazy. Indeed, learning the correct application of the color predicate "green" or the value predicate "lazy" requires the same sort of empirical examination that is required when we identify something as being a certain molecule, or the member of a certain species. There is a difference between each of these concepts and our own particular ability to identify and apply them. We can be right or wrong in our applications—wishing will not make it that something that is green or lazy is instead blue or industrious. There is an objective, though of course contingent, fact of the matter about whether something can be identified as "green," or as "lazy," just as there is in the case of defining "species" and "water."

On Davidson's holistic account, to have meaningful beliefs at all, whether they be value judgments or descriptive judgments, is to be practically (e.g., linguistically) enmeshed in a physico–social relationship with the world around us, including other knowers. The meaning, or cognitive content, of our judgments, both descriptive and evaluative, is produced through a triangulation between ourselves, the fellow creatures with whom we communicate and engage, and the shared bits of the world on which that communication or engagement is focused.[34]

Insofar as value judgments *express* anything then—that is, insofar as they are meaningful—they too are beliefs that have been acquired through the usual process of practical engagement with the world through communication with others. Learning to identify someone as "industrious," or as "lazy"—learning the meaning of these value terms—involves learning through experience of the world to successfully classify something as belonging to a particular category, to assign it a property. The same process is used for learning the meaning of the category terms "conducts electricity," "reflects light," "produces heat." Insofar as values or any other kind of judgments are meaningful, they are beliefs that arise from our experience with the world—that is, they have empirical content, broadly construed.[35]

As Anderson argues, value judgments can be shown to be amenable to reflective deliberation—they do not have to determine, inappropriately, any given interpretation of some other set of judgments. Now of course, they might. Anderson argues that "we need to ensure that value judgments do not operate to drive inquiry to a predetermined conclusion."[36] We want to emphasize the holistic point that this same need holds for *any* judgment. So, while assigning some phenomenon to the category "good" might inappropriately bias our interpretations of any new evidence about that phenomenon, so too might our categorizations of it as "hot" or "reflective." Importantly, in neither case is the categorization or its effect on future interpretations immune from appropriate revision in the light of new experiences. As Anderson herself shows, any judgments can be held dogmatically, though, thankfully, they need not be. Anderson concludes that "from an epistemological point of view, value judgments function like empirical hypotheses."[37] We go further, making Davidson's holistic point that value judgments, like any other, just *are* empirical hypotheses, broadly speaking—hypotheses that can be subjected to rational processes of adjudication—they would have no meaning otherwise.[38]

V. Social-Psychological Research on Values

This Davidsonian view of value judgments is supported by and consistent with Rokeach's influential model in the social-psychological research on values. In Rokeach's conception of values, values are those beliefs that provide us with means of recognizing moral and competent behavior in ourselves and others.[39] Unlike the philosophical use of the term "values" to indicate either negative or positive moral judgments, the social-psychological literature reserves the term "value" for positive judgments—in Rokeach's words, values are "conceptions of the desirable." Values serve as cognitive benchmarks for the maintenance and enhancement of self-esteem. As such, values are not much different from colors. Just as we use color categories to identify the differing levels of light refracted off of objects, we use values to identify the extent to which we are behaving in ways that will make us comfortable with, or proud of, ourselves. It is, of course, possible to act or believe in a way that is contrary to one's values, but when such contradictions are made manifest a person experiences a rational motivation to change.

Rokeach defines values as enduring beliefs that one mode of conduct (an instrumental value) or an end state of existence (a terminal value) is preferred to its opposite.[40] The instrumental value *politeness*, for instance, represents a mode of conduct that is preferred to rude conduct; the terminal value *freedom* is an end state preferred to slavery. But values do not exist in a cognitive vacuum; they are organized into value systems that force us to prioritize the universe of values. Thus, politeness collides with another familiar valued mode of conduct, *honesty*. Confronted with a situation in which we can behave either honestly or politely but not both, we are likely to choose behavior that reflects the relative priority of these

values in our value system. Similarly, freedom can conflict with *national security* or *equality*, other end states that are generally part of people's value systems.

Rokeach demonstrated that while value systems are fairly stable cognitive constructs, they can be adjusted through rational processes of engagement with new information. People can be convinced to re-prioritize their values if they are confronted with a contradiction between their beliefs and behaviors. Experiments in "value confrontation" showed, for instance, that college students could be encouraged to raise the priority of a value if they were told that most other students at their university considered that value more important than the experimental subjects did. People can also be encouraged through rational persuasion to behave differently in order to act in accordance with values they already profess to hold. In a quasi-experiment in which one city served as a control group and one an experimental group, Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, and Grube aired a broadcast in the experimental city that contained a value-confrontation message challenging people to increase the priority of the terminal values of *equality* and *a world of beauty*.[41] The researchers were able to show that more generous financial contributions to organizations linked to those terminal values could be obtained from experimental subjects who (1) saw the broadcast; and (2) reported higher-than-average priority for those values.

Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach argue that racism in the United States is linked to the relative decline among Americans in the importance of the value equality, documented in national surveys between 1968 and 1981.[42] Ball-Rokeach and Loges note that this pattern can be seen in local surveys since then.[43] In other words, since the end of the 1960s, Americans have not been as likely to consider themselves morally flawed or incompetent if they fail to behave in ways that further the goal of equality as opposed to other goals, such as national security and freedom. Theories of what has been called "modern racism" focus on explaining attitudes toward people and toward policies that appear to represent a shift from essentialist claims (such as "all Jews are greedy") to more subtle claims (such as "Jews aren't trying hard enough to fit into American culture").[44] This difference shifts the locus of blame from characteristics believed to be fixed and involuntary (e.g., skin pigmentation) to matters of effort and deservedness.

Ball-Rokeach and Loges point out that such modern racist beliefs are consistent with decline in the value *equality*, a value that would imply support for treating people equally without making such treatment contingent on desert. If equality *per se* is an end state worth pursuing, and more important than most other terminal values (as it was to most Americans as late as 1971), most people will support programs (such as affirmative action policies) that promise equality, even if they believe that such programs will compromise other goals they have, such as personal comfort. (Such support may be reluctant, but at least people can reassure themselves that they are sacrificing in the name of a recognizable moral good.) Peterson points out that values influence people's subjective judgments of the fairness of public policy, which suggests that affirmative action may seem more fair to people who consider equality important.[45] As equality diminishes in relative

importance, as it did throughout the 1970s, people will feel less pressure on their conscience to support equality-based programs, and will not chide themselves for supporting, for example, the commitment of resources to prisons (in pursuit of their personal security) and the military (in pursuit of national security), rather than university education for other people's children (in pursuit of equality).

To put all this back in the perspective we introduced at the outset, it is, unfortunately, true that people can simultaneously recognize that a policy or practice will have outcomes that are disproportionately negative for a particular group of people historically identified as belonging to a particular folk-racial category, and even lament that fact, but still console themselves with the belief that the alternative was threatening to another value they cherish more, such as freedom or security. They need not accept the argument that they are racists. They can claim (as many do) that equality is still a good thing, but just not as important as it used to be. However, this does not mean that objective processes of reason are unavailable to those of us who want to criticize this claim. In fact, there are (at least) two rational strategies we could take. One is to attempt to restore the priority of equality in the national value system. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s succeeded in this regard,[46] but the magnitude of the courage and effort needed to accomplish that should not be lost on us. A second strategy is to confront the belief that equality necessitates compromise with specific other values, even if it does necessitate compromise with some values.

As an example of the first strategy, consider that arguments in favor of increasing equality through a tax increase to improve the quality of urban schools can be seen to conflict with the value of a family's personal comfort. Rather than arguing that this conflict does not exist, we can instead reasonably question whether an individual family can claim the priority of their personal comfort over a more equal educational environment. Directly confronting people with this sort of comparison between two values respects their claim regarding their comfort while encouraging them to weigh the relative importance of that comfort against educational equality. Even as the value *equality* fell in the esteem of Americans in the 1970s, it never fell so far as to be beneath *a comfortable life* for most people. There are still some value confrontations that favor equality.

Of course, policies that are meant to pursue equality are often opposed on just these sorts of value grounds—that is, these policies are opposed because they appear to compromise freedom (as in the opposition to affirmative action at universities in which white students argued that their freedom to attend the school of their choice had been unduly diminished) or family security (as in opposition to school busing or equal housing, in which people argue that their home's value is diminished because no one wants to move into an integrated neighborhood). Most people in the United States—even in 1971 and apparently today—are perfectly comfortable prioritizing freedom and their family at the expense of equality. Gandy *et al.* point out that as people draw conclusions about social policies meant to eliminate racial inequity, media accounts of problems of social inequality, and of the success or failure of social policy meant to redress social inequality,

contribute to people's stock of knowledge.[47] "For the general public to support programs designed to eliminate racial disparities, there seem to be two fundamental requirements. First, inequality must be seen as substantial, and, second, it should not be readily explained in terms of individual responsibility."[48] Their analysis of news reports about issues involving inequality (such as differences in infant mortality) between people identified as African Americans and Whites shows that editors and publishers of newspapers appear reluctant to "frame" such issues in terms of structural inequality, thus depriving readers of an opportunity to evaluate such issues in terms of social equality.

In this situation, the second strategy of uncoupling beliefs about the pursuit of equality from the pursuit of other prized values seems a more productive method for confronting the way Americans (and perhaps people in other countries) appraise antiracist policies and practices than the first strategy that aims to elevate the priority of equality *per se*, but the two strategies are not mutually exclusive.

Consider a recent experiment in Los Angeles. Carpusor and Loges contacted more than one thousand landlords advertising apartments for rent in the spring of 2003.[49] The contact was by e-mail, and each message consisted of a brief inquiry about the availability of the apartment signed by one of three names: Patrick MacDougall, Tyrell Jackson, or Said Al-Rahman. Responses from the landlords overwhelmingly encouraged Mr. MacDougall to visit the apartment (eighty-nine percent of the replies to Mr. MacDougall were positive), but Mr. Jackson received a notably cooler reception (only fifty-six percent positive replies) and Mr. Al-Rahman fared between the others (sixty-six percent positive replies). While this sort of discrimination represents a violation of what have been called Equal Housing laws, it can also be understood to demonstrate how people named Tyrell Jackson are not as free as people named Patrick MacDougall to live where they please. The rational persuasive point in much of the twentieth century's civil rights movement was to show that, in many public policy arenas, equality *is* freedom. The two values need not conflict. In some instances, you cannot have one without the other. Finding opportunities to objectively demonstrate the real contradictions between specific modes of conduct and specific outcomes and the values that Americans still claim to hold in high esteem is one rational avenue for deploying the concept of values in opposition to racism.[50]

VI. Concluding Remarks

In his recent book, *The Ethics of Identity*, Appiah writes "Once labels are applied to people, ideas about people who fit the label come to have social and psychological effects. In particular, these ideas shape the ways people conceive of themselves and their projects."[51] Certainly, the hypothetical Tyrell Jackson of Carpusor and Loges's study would agree. It is important to recognize a conception of human values as objective beliefs that provide a basis for rational deliberation. This recognition offers insight into the belief structure that underlies some racist

thinking while keeping room for hope that at least some people can be persuaded that their ability to apply their labels reliably is suspect and that the effects of such labeling is damaging to their own self-esteem.

Surrendering aspects of racist value judgments to the realm of the moral as against the descriptive or empirical, as the arguments of Appiah and others suggest, places values beyond the reach of rational discourse—ironically privileging value-based claims by removing them from argument. But as the social-psychological research shows, values are not expressions of faith, shorn of empirical data. Further, a defense of one's actions based on one's values is not immune from rational evaluation—in fact it invites such evaluation because it is a defense based on principles that most people recognize and comprehend. No matter the different degrees of importance that people attribute to equality or freedom, people believe that they know what these terms mean and they use these standards rationally to evaluate themselves and others.

It is true that efforts to dissuade people from racist beliefs may not always succeed on the basis of persistent challenges to the empirical failures that Appiah associates with extrinsic racism. Such beliefs may be too great in number and too elusive a target. But notice that this difficulty in rational persuasion is not related to the question of the objectivity of those moral beliefs. Rational persuasion is often more effective when deployed in those cases of cognitive failure where people's beliefs and behavior are inconsistent with their values, and the motivation to repair that failure may be stronger than the motivation to abandon a common prejudicial belief. If a person simply "has the facts wrong" about the work ethic of African Americans or the trustworthiness of Arabs, it is true that she may shrug and feel no pangs of conscience. But if she realizes that the standards by which she evaluates herself are objectively inconsistent with the folk-racial labels she applies to others, and with the social and psychological effects of those labels, she may be more open to rational persuasion. The social psychological understanding of values as beliefs that provide us with means of recognizing moral and competent behavior in ourselves and others is the empirical feature of the moral realm that we all can and do make use of in our antiracist work.

Notes

[1] Donald Davidson, "Three Varieties of Knowledge," in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 205–20; Donald Davidson, "The Objectivity of Values," in *Problems of Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 39–51.

[2] Milton Rokeach, *The Nature of Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 1973); Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, Milton Rokeach, and Joel Grube, *The Great American Values Test: Influencing Behavior and Belief Through Television* (New York: Free Press, 1984).

[3] We recognize that our claims about the capacity of value judgments to be objectively true or false will only be persuasive to those readers who agree that there is some useful sense to be made of notions of objectivity as applied to the truth or falsity of descriptive judgments. For those readers who are suspicious of even this level of objectivity, a different set of arguments needs to be made and these fall outside the scope of this paper.

[4] Davidson, "Objectivity."

[5] Elizabeth Anderson, "The Uses of Value Judgments in Science," *Hypatia* 19, no. 1 (2004): 1–24.

[6] Daniel Mayton, Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, and William E. Loges, "Human Values and Social Issues: An Introduction," *Journal of Social Issues* 50, no. 4 (1994): 1–8. Some readers might wonder whether and/or how our view of the objectivity of value judgments is compatible with the position put forward by Kant, *viz.* that, the moral law is objective, but not dependent on empirical or natural laws—that objective appeals to rightness or wrongness are justified through the use of reason alone. While we are certainly sympathetic with the Kantian position that value judgments are objective and subject to the processes of reason, one concern we have is that the Kantian position only makes sense in light of a complex and controversial set of metaphysical accounts about the distinction between the natural and moral realms. While no account is free of metaphysical commitments, we believe that ours has the virtue of a wider metaphysical appeal than that provided by Kant.

[7] One reviewer reminds us that in extreme cases, such as the Holocaust, surely there is more to the horror evoked then would be expected in response to "mere" failures of objectivity or responsiveness to evidence. This issue clearly demands more detailed analysis than we can give here. We want to note though that even for those who believe in capital punishment, and/or the appropriateness of torture in specific cases, arguments appealing to evidence are usually demanded with respect to the guilt of the defendant. Part of what makes the Holocaust so horrible is that it was premised on the empirical claim that millions of individuals were guilty and deserving of such punishment, based entirely on their relationship to a putative "racial" category, and further, that this claim was itself made on the basis of evidence against members of the group that was completely fabricated. The failure of anyone in a position of responsibility to apply any reasonable standards of evidence, and the fact that these failures had such unconscionable consequences, informs part of the outrage evoked by the Holocaust.

[8] Andrew Valls, ed., *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[9] Jorge L. A. Garcia, "The Heart of Racism," in *Race and Racism*, ed. Bernard Boxill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 399.

[10] Ibid., 400.

[11] Andrew Valls, "Introduction," in *Race and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Andrew Valls (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005): 8.

[12] Garcia, "Heart," 405.

[13] Kwame A. Appiah, "Racisms," in *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. D. Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 3–17; Kwame A. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[14] Appiah, *Father's House*, 13, as quoted in Valls, "Introduction," 6.

[15] Valls, "Introduction," 5.

[16] See, for instance, Appiah, "Racisms," 3–17, and Appiah, *Father's House*, 13–20.

[17] Valls, "Introduction," 7.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Appiah, *Father's House*, 13.

[20] The literature on this point is extensive. For a recent review, see Massimo Pigliucci and Jonathan Kaplan, "On the Concept of Biological Race and its Applicability to Humans," *Philosophy of Science* 70 (2003): 1161–72.

[21] Miriam Bloom, *Understanding Sickle Cell Disease* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1995).

[22] Richard Lewontin, "The Apportionment of Human Diversity," *Evolutionary Biology* 6 (1972): 391–98; Luigi L. Cavalli-Sforza, Paolo Menozzi, and Alberto Piazza, *The History and Geography of Human Genes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[23] For a review of this literature, see Lisa Suzuki and Joshua Aronson, "The Cultural Malleability of Intelligence and Its Impact on the Racial/Ethnic Hierarchy," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 11 (2005): 320–27.

[24] Alan H. Goodman, "Why Genes Don't Count (for Racial Differences in Health)," *American Journal of Public Health* (2000): 1699–1702; Rodrick Wallace and Deborah Wallace, "Socio-economic Determinants of Health: Community Marginalisation and the Diffusion of Disease and Disorder in the United States," *British Medical Journal* 314 (May 3, 1997): 1341–45.

[25] J. Phillipe Rushton and Arthur Jensen, "Wanted: More Race Realism, Less Moralistic Fallacy," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 11, no. 2 (2005): 328–36, at 332–33.

[26] Appiah, *Father's House*, 13.

[27] Ibid., 15.

[28] Ibid., 14–15.

[29] For example, Davidson, "Objectivity."

[30] Appiah, *Father's House*, 15.

[31] Ibid., 194, footnote 12.

[32] Davidson, "Objectivity," 43.

[33] Portions of this argument appear in a *Metascience* review symposium and on-line as part of the *MIT Symposium on Gender, Race and Philosophy* in an exchange between Elizabeth Anderson, Linda Alcoff, Sharyn Clough, Marianne Janack, and Charles Mills. Sharyn Clough, "On the Very Idea of a Feminist Epistemology of Science: Response to Commentators on *Beyond Epistemology: A Pragmatist Approach to Feminist Science Studies*," *Metascience* 15 (2006): 27–37; Sharyn Clough, "Commentary on Elizabeth Anderson's 'Uses of Value Judgments in Science,'" *MIT Symposium on Gender, Race and Philosophy*, Jan. 2006 Symposium I (2006): 1–6, available at http://wikis.mit.edu/confluence/display/SGRP/Archive.

[34] Davidson, "Three Varieties."

[35] Davidson, "Objectivity."

[36] Anderson, "Uses," 11.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Sometimes, of course, meaningful empirical claims can also function more like rules or norms, where the assignment of truth values is beside the point. See, for example, Michael Hymers' illuminating discussion of Wittgenstein's claim regarding the dual nature of putatively descriptive propositions, like "This is my hand." This proposition can, in some contexts, function as an empirical truth, and sometimes, it can function logically as a rule around which other descriptive claims are organized and evaluated. Michael Hymers, "The Dignity of a Rule: Wittgenstein, Mathematical Norms, and Truth," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 42, no. 3 (2003): 419–46. The capacity for a value judgment or a descriptive judgment to be true or false comes with the meaningfulness of the judgment, but the issue of whether truth values should be assigned in any given case is relative to the context in which the judgment is being used. We argue that, typically, the context of racist value judgments is such that the objective truth or falsity of the judgments is a real question and one that can be adjudicated rationally.

[39] Ball-Rokeach et al., *The Great American*; Rokeach, *The Nature*.

[40] Rokeach, *The Nature*.

[41] In the Rokeach *Value Survey*, "Equality" is defined as "brotherhood, equal opportunity for all." This definition eschews equality of outcomes in favor of the equal opportunity enshrined in law and policy. "A World of Beauty" was defined in this context as environmentalism.

[42] Milton Rokeach and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, "Stability and Change in American Value Priorities, 1968–1981," *American Psychologist*, 44 (1988): 775–84.

[43] Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach and William E. Loges, "Choosing Equality: The Correspondence Between Attitudes About Race and the Value of Equality," *Journal of Social Issues* 50, no. 4 (1994): 9–18.

[44] Gerard Kleinpenning and Louk Hagendoorn, "Forms of Racism and the Cumulative Dimension of Ethnic Attitudes," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 56 (1993): 21–36; James R. Kluegel and Eliot Smith, *Beliefs About Inequality: Americans' Views of What Is and What Ought to Be* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1986); Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, and Lawrence Bobo, *Racial Attitudes in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Paul M. Sniderman and Thomas Piazza, *The Scar of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1993).

[45] Randall S. Peterson, "The Role of Values in Predicting Fairness Judgments and Support of Affirmative Action," *Journal of Social Issues* 50, no. 4 (1994): 95–116.

[46] Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach and Irving Tallman, "Social Movements as Moral Confrontations: With Special Reference to Civil Rights," in *Understanding Human Values: Individual and Societal*, ed. Milton Rokeach (New York: Free Press, 1979): 82–94.

[47] Oscar H. Gandy, Katharina Kopp, Tanya Hands, Karen Frazer, and David Phillips, "Race and Risk: Factors Affecting the Framing of Stories about Inequality, Discrimination, and Just Plain Bad Luck," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 61 (1997): 158–82.

[48] Ibid., 159.

[49] Adrian Carpusor and William E. Loges, "Rental Discrimination and Ethnicity in Names," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 36, no. 4 (2006): 934–52.

[50] This argument is offered by Ball-Rokeach and Tallman, "Social Movements," in their analysis of the Southern Christian Leadership Council's actions during the Civil Rights era. They describe the trajectory of the SCLC as a morality tale in which the martyrdom and heroism of civil rights workers—not least Martin Luther King, Jr.—challenge Americans to recognize the values explicitly championed by the movement. Once the values promoted by the SCLC were admitted, it became difficult for most Americans to oppose the movement.

[51] Kwame A. Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005): 66.