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On learning how to live in this strange place

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In “How do I live in this strange place?”, Samantha Vice contends that white South Africans ought to feel shame for their unjustly acquired privilege and their morally compromised selves, and recommends that they engage with humility and political silence in projects of personal transformation though private, critical self-examination. On one view, philosophy is in part concerned with practical inquiry into how one might lead a good life, and for many, at least, this necessitates some form of moral learning. Ideally, the philosophers concerned with this question could give practical, action-guiding advice on how one might undertake this moral learning, advice well-supported by evidence and with reasonably good prospects for success. I argue that philosophically “therapeutic” projects of the kind advocated by Vice necessarily involve forms of moral learning, and that a range of empirical research in cognitive, moral, and educational psychology thus bear on their methods and prospects. These considerations undermine the outlook of therapeutic projects that rely principally on solitary methods of critical reflection and introspection. I challenge philosophers to develop more practical, actionable, evidence-based counsel on how to engage in moral learning of the type that Vice and her critics recommend, and I articulate several candidate proposals inspired by research from the educational, learning sciences and debiasing literatures.

Introduction

In “How do I live in this strange place?” (2010), Samantha Vice contends that white South Africans ought to feel shame for their unjustly acquired privilege and their morally compromised selves, and recommends that they engage with humility and political silence in projects of personal transformation though private, critical self-examination, or “work on the self”. Vice’s call for white South Africans to embark on projects of moral self-transformation though critical reflection prompted a vigorous debate in the press, including some deeply enraged opposition in public comments as well as some more thoughtful responses from her colleagues.¹ I interpret Vice’s challenge as part of the effort by white South Africans to confront the racism within their own communities, with Vice’s starting point being a confrontation with her own conceptions. I argue that philosophically therapeutic projects such as this necessarily involve forms of “moral learning”, and that a range of empirical research in cognitive, moral, and educational psychology bear on their prospects for success and on the methods to best undertake them. On one view, philosophy is in part concerned with practical inquiry into how one might lead a good life, and for many of us, this requires some form of moral learning. Ideally, the philosophers concerned with this question might give practical, action-guiding advice on how one might undertake this work on the self, advice well-supported by evidence and with reasonably good prospects of success. I thus consider some actionable strategies for engaging in moral learning of the type that Vice recommends, in light of research from the educational, learning sciences, and debiasing literatures.

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Vice's challenge

Vice considers the moral challenge raised for white South Africans by the facts of their white privilege – the systematically distorted social, economic, and psychological patterns that are the product of a legacy of colonisation and apartheid. After two decades of democratic rule, these starkly racialised patterns of white supremacy, involving radical inequity, poverty, privilege, and injustice, are still deeply entrenched in daily South African life. Vice focuses her reflections on the characteristics of “whiteness” – the self-serving conceptions and habitual behaviour of the privileged that reflect and reinforce these injustices, and the ways in which these conditions, as Lisa Tessman describes, “...limit and burden their moral goodness” (2005, 3). These patterns assume a normative and evaluative framework that relentlessly favours the life and perspectives of the privileged. They are typically tacit, habitual, and deeply ingrained in behaviour.

On Vice's view, white South Africans should aptly feel shame in the face of the facts of their racially unjust privilege and concomitantly distorted characters, shame for being persons “whose welfare is dependent upon harm to others” and demonstrating “vicious traits that are helping, however passively, to sustain privilege and oppression” (2010, 329). She identifies shame as the appropriate moral emotion in response to finding that one's character has fallen short, particularly in ways that reflect and entrench injustice, and in ways which limit one's perception, judgment, and relationships, as well as the moral virtue one's life might attain. Vice expresses a deep fear that these ethically compromising features of character are largely *unmalleable*, being an ineluctable part of our deepest character. The proper response to this shameful state is, for Vice, a political silence, in which whites “concentrate on recovering and rehabilitating ourselves” (2010, 324).

While Vice recognises the moral responsibility of white South Africans to take effective public action in opposing the ubiquitous and institutionalised racial injustice of South Africa, she also identifies the moral demand of an inwardly directed project focused on the character and conceptions of the beneficiaries of racial injustice. Failing to achieve meaningful progress on the inward-directed project, for Vice, undermines the prospects of effectively combatting racial injustice more generally.

Vice thus positions herself within the ancient tradition of “care of the self”, on which philosophical inquiry involves a therapeutic engagement with one's flawed conceptions, undertaken with the aim of moral improvement through self-knowledge. Achieving this, for Vice, requires that white South Africans first come to “know their selves to be constituted by habits of white privilege” (2010, 326), and to then find effective ways of changing or correcting for these dispositions. To live good and virtuous lives, on this view, white South Africans need to (at least) undertake sincere and effective inwardly directed projects of moral recuperation, during which they should humbly refrain from causing further harm through manifesting whitely ways in public political engagement.

Varieties of shame, strategies of silence

Many in Vice's philosophical community accept her claim that habits of whiteness ought to elicit shame in those that hold them, yet many also reject her counsel of silence in the political domain.² For example, Eusebius McKaiser (2011) argues that while shame of whiteness is an appropriate emotional response, following Vice's counsel of political silence would impede the therapeutic project for both white and black people, and would inhibit the possibility of restoring just relationships between them. McKaiser considers how following Vice's advice might serve to limit the opportunities available to black South Africans to resist, unlearn and overthrow self-limiting notions of black inferiority. He further argues that white privilege taints all parts of our lives, including both non-public and non-political domains, and that Vice's proposal therefore leads absurdly to the recommendation that white South Africans withdraw from all forms of public life. Others (e.g. Blum 2011) have made similar challenges to Vice's distinctions between the political and non-political, and between private and public life, suggesting that her counsel of political silence ultimately collapses to one of quietude or passivity.

As McKaiser and others argue, if by “political silence” Vice simply means to allow space for those drowned out by white privilege and racism, then her recommendation seems entirely sensible.

² Though David Benatar (2012) presents an opposing view.

While the reflective awareness that might lead a white person to hold back from speaking and acting in whitely ways is certainly welcome, white South Africans already have a considerable history of political silence, particularly when it concerns the subject of the marginalisation and dispossession of their black compatriots. This silence, at least in part, explains how apartheid came to dominate South African life so thoroughly. For Andrea Hurst, the silence Vice recommends is a particularly unpromising route to the reconfiguration of an ethically compromised self, given its unilateral and independent pursuit, instead of through “ongoing relationships of forgiveness” (Hurst 2011, 489). Nonetheless, even if following Vice’s call for a “literal silence on political and moral matters in political space” (Vice 2011, 512) did advance its stated goal of limiting the harms that whiteness perpetrates on others, Vice does not make it clear how it advances the therapeutic project of work on the self. This is particularly important given the challenge to practices of white political silence raised by antiracist educators like Robin DiAngelo (2015), who detail myriad ways in which white political silence subverts processes of social learning in dialogues about race. Rather than inhibiting the imposition of whitely ways on others, white political silence might therefore merely constitute another of its varied manifestations, one which can significantly hinder efforts at whitely transformation.

In a critique of a different kind, Maria Milazzo (2017) has argued that Vice’s focus on work on the private self neglects the structural and institutional causes of injustice – the enduring over-concentration of wealth, land, and capital in white hands. Milazzo raises the criticism that, “the moralization of racism that often permeates philosophical scholarship reproduces colour-blind logics, which provide individualistic explanations for structural problems, thereby sustaining white dominance” (2017, 557). This approach echoes Linda Alcoff’s critiques of depictions of racism as a “psychosocial pathology that can be solved through behaviour modification” (1998, 12). It also resonates with Sonia Kruks’ concern that while many feminists begin with an acknowledgement that privilege is systemic or structural, in reflecting on their own privilege they often conceptualise it as “the personal possession of an autonomous self”, and so engage in a “discourse of personal self-discovery, confession and guilt, and thence to the moral imperative to engage in a project of self-transformation” (2005, 181).

I will not attempt to settle these questions of shame, political silence and the value of the inwardly directed project for the promotion of racial justice in society. I regard the case for the appropriateness of shame and the problematic nature of the solution Vice proposes to have been well-defended in the responses to Vice’s work. As a white, privileged, cis-gendered, South African male who is deeply ashamed at being a lifelong beneficiary of the historical and ongoing racial injustice of South Africa, ashamed of my own ongoing investment in a racist social order, as well as of the racism, sexism, heteronormativity, ableism, and other forms of bias that taint my conceptions and relationships, I am, like Vice, motivated to identify and confront these features of my cognition. Having recently become a parent, I am especially horrified at the thought of contributing to the intergenerational perpetuation of privilege and white supremacist ideation, and doubly motivated to interrupt this process. Yet this mere motivation seems insufficient to engender meaningful personal change. While it also seems to me that efforts to redress structural and institutional racial injustice represents the most urgent priority for white South Africans who would attempt to live good lives, this seems fully consistent with efforts to confront and overcome the racist conceptions that one discovers within oneself. Though depictions of racism as a psychosocial pathology, instead of a structural, self-perpetuating feature of society, are distorting and re-inscribe a problematic individualism, psychosocial pathologies of bias and prejudice seem a likely consequence of a racially unjust social order, and are presumably worth overcoming in their own right. As long as the impulse to undertake the inwardly directed project and confront these pathologies does not displace the vital effort to challenge the structural causes of racial injustice, these efforts appear fully consistent with, for example, Stephen Biko’s call for whites “to realize that they are only human, not superior” (quoted in Woods 1978), and his advocacy for white South Africans to “concern themselves with the real evil in our society – white racism” (Biko 2004, 23).

My focus is therefore on the kinds of philosophically therapeutic counsel that Vice and her community offer, the feasibility of undergoing transformative change of the kind they recommend,

and the prospects of their counsel for stimulating the transformation of the whitely self. I ask: if a large, suitably representative, randomly selected sample of appropriately motivated individuals followed this counsel, what would be their typical prospects of success compared to a matched sample that did not? I consider the question of how therapeutic projects of this kind might be best undertaken, with a focus on what resources philosophers might draw on in giving practical, well-evidenced, and action-guiding advice with good prospects of success.

Prospects for self-transformation

Dylan Futter (2011) raises the question of the *feasibility* of undertaking the work on the self that Vice counsels, quoting Harry Frankfurt's claim that "[s]urely the very faintest human passion – both the least salient and the least robust – is our love of the truth about ourselves" (1998, 95). Vice also frequently describes the work on the self she advocates as difficult, stating that "given the entrenched nature of habits, eradicating or changing them will be very difficult" (2010, 325). She suggests that "combating the workings of whiteness requires reflective and critical attention to the habits and presumptions of the self", and "uncomfortable and emotionally vulnerable engagement with others beyond the familiar" (Vice 2011, 509–511). She also recommends that "[w]e should certainly engage with other voices – read the literature of the oppressed, for example, and actively listen to non-white voices" (2010, 335–336). The fact that, as Vice suggests, "our thoughts are heavy with whitely assumptions" compounds the difficulty of Vice's project of self-transformation (2010, 334). The very cognitive tools we depend upon in undertaking the requisite conceptual change seem untrustworthy and tainted with whiteness. As both Vice and most of her respondents point out, a necessary precondition for engaging in work on the self is some prior recognition of the facts of white privilege and the conceptual distortions they bring – itself a considerable challenge for many. As Blum (2011, 441) suggests, it also involves "a commitment and a sincere attempt to jettison or at least mitigate these whitely distortions, recognizing the difficulty of doing so and the near impossibility of doing so completely".

The issue of the difficulty of Vice's self-transformative project is an important one, given that several commentators describe her view as overly pessimistic. Lawrence Blum (2011) suggests that Vice pessimistically underestimates the capabilities that people have for recognising and minimising their own whitely ways, including the conscious adoption of anti-racist identities. Along with McKaiser, he concludes that following Vice's advice would largely disable whites from the morally required civic action necessary to redress the harms of social injustice. Charles Mills (2011) describes Vice's approach as assuming an overly demanding and unrealistic schedule of virtues that makes the supererogatory obligatory. Crucially, whether this assessment is accurate, depends in part on the actual prospects of our efforts to overcome our whitely ways. If this is largely impossible due to our "unmalleable characters", then Vice's pessimism might seem warranted, as a virtuous life would be unattainable for white South Africans, regardless of their efforts at overcoming whiteness. Vice's use of an image of a self "stained by white privilege" reflects this concern – stains can be difficult, sometimes impossible, to get out (2010, 328).

The concern with the difficulty of the project of self-transformation invites two responses. First, it certainly seems right that an all-or-nothing approach to self-transformation and moral virtue is unrealistic, and Mills plausibly claims that Vice presents us with a somewhat distorted moral cartography. Engaging in sincere, effortful work to confront and minimise one's own racist whiteness, if it does not displace meaningful efforts to redress the structural causes of racial injustice itself, seems eminently worthwhile. Mills cites Lengbeyer's (2004) suggestion that the goal of moral "purification", involving the "cleansing" of whitely thoughts from one's conception is naïve and unproductive, and that a better approach involves habituation in the recognition, management, and control of racist ideas to minimise their role in cognition. Nonetheless, it does not follow that shame is an inappropriate response to learning of one's whitely ways. Second, the question of the prospects for effective work on the whitely self is surely an empirical one, and if successful work is at least possible, some approaches are likely better than others.

Methodologies of the philosophical therapeutic

Other responses to Vice have considered ways in which work on the whitely self might be best pursued. Blum suggests that “one better accomplishes the goal of correcting whitely distortions through open-minded and respectful interactions with one’s colleagues and clients in the context of shared moral projects” (2011, 442). Fütter (2011) proffers the ironic literary form of Plato’s dialogues as a superior method for eliciting the kinds of self-transformative changes that Vice prescribes, though the tale of the Corinthian enlightened through dialogue with Socrates represents a relatively weak source of evidence for the morally recuperative effects of this technique. In contrast to Vice’s counsel of white political silence, McKaiser recommends that white South Africans rather live “carefully in reflective self-awareness of the unearned privileges they enjoy unconsciously and habitually”, and, “take practical care to mitigate against the continued, systemic benefits of whiteness”, and that, “tonal and attitudinal changes should reflect their newfound awareness of the nature, scope and continued unjust presence of whiteness” (2011, 460).

Each of these recommendations, along with Vice’s counsel of inner reflection, uncomfortable engagement with the other and exposure to relevant literatures, seem to me to be eminently sensible. It seems undeniable that a sufficiently careful, questioning, reflective, and anti-racist attitude would challenge a great many of one’s whitely ways. These recommendations are, however, typically posed at a very abstract and general level, one very far from the contingencies of daily life, and are often highly dependent on the perceptive and reflective skills of those seeking self-transformation. They also tend to rely heavily on the transformative power of self-reflection, which may overstate the effectiveness of this method for effecting personal change. For example, Shannon Sullivan (2006) argues that self-reflection is a relatively limited tool for this task. She argues that the unconscious character of whitely habits “actively thwart the process of conscious reflection upon them”, setting up “devious resistances”, and suggesting that they “are more likely to be changed by indirect, rather than direct, assaults upon them” through changing the environments that sustain and replicate them (2006, 1–2). Critically, besides Vice’s recommendation to read the literature of the oppressed, the recommendations made by Vice’s critics are not particularly *practical* in nature and they do not say much about how a person might undertake work on the whitely self, nor why these activities are likely to be useful. While Vice’s call for “uncomfortable and emotionally vulnerable engagement with others beyond the familiar” sounds promising, it is not obvious what this involves, how to undertake it, or why it is likely to be a productive stratagem (2011, 511). One can imagine someone who is highly motivated to engage in the project of challenging their whitely ways, who agrees enthusiastically with all the advice presented by Vice and her critics, and yet who still does not have any idea what to actually *do*. Acting “carefully” and “reflectively” would certainly help in moral transformation, as would advice to “make a considerable effort”, but these recommendations provide little concrete guidance, nor is it clear how effective they are likely to be.

I argue that a useful way of understanding the task facing someone sincerely motivated to engage in the recuperative project that Vice counsels is as an undertaking of *moral learning*. It is a kind of learning in that it involves inquiry into new, more accurate conceptualisations, of self and of others, new patterns of behaviour and response, including the formation of new implicit associations and forms of unconscious automaticity. It involves learning because it involves a changing of beliefs, the discovery of new moral facts or new morally relevant facts about ourselves and others, and the adoption and use of more sophisticated intuitive theories of psychology and sociology. It is a distinctively *moral* learning because it involves grappling with one’s moral condition – engaging in efforts at moral understanding and improvement. Adopting a perspective on which overcoming the perceptual and cognitive distortions of whiteness involves moral learning, has implications both for the kinds of resources that one might draw on in developing philosophically therapeutic counsel, and for the prospects of that counsel’s success.

A sketch of moral learning theory

Taking Vice’s challenge as a call for specific forms of moral learning opens the interdisciplinary field of the learning sciences as both a resource and an evidential base for recuperative moral counsel. Work in cognitive, developmental, and educational psychology from the last several decades has

developed detailed accounts of the processes of learning, from neurological through classroom instruction. Moral psychology and other forms of evaluative and value-oriented cognition have been the subject of a less extensive investigation and, in contrast with research in education, has focused less on learning and instruction. However, as Peter Railton (2017) argues, a confluence of recent cross-disciplinary research findings in social learning theory and moral psychology supports a particular story about what moral learning involves. In this section, I briefly outline Railton's story, and consider some implications for the therapeutic project.

Railton contrasts moral learning approaches with nativist accounts of moral judgment like that of Jonathan Haidt (2007), which understand cognition in terms of innate, evolved, intuitive representations of relatively low flexibility and capable of limited development. He also contrasts moral learning with constructivist approaches like that of Jean Piaget ([1932] 1965) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1982) who consider learning in terms of developmental trajectories through successively more sophisticated, maturation-linked stages of understanding. The moral learning approach involves moral understanding as a product

of domain-general learning processes, and thus as an integral part of our modeling of the physical and social world. Such modeling generates expectations continuously that guide perception, thought, and action, and permit learning from discrepancies with expectation throughout life. Moral learning therefore can go beyond the acquisition of known moral concepts or internalization of prevailing social norms, and can extend to the formation of novel moral concepts and evaluations, resulting in dramatic personal and social change even within one lifetime (Railton 2017, 172).

On this view, moral learning involves an experience-based process of revision in the intuitive theories that guide moral reasoning, as found in the case of conceptual learning in other domains, including physics understanding. These intuitive theories involve, as Rhodes and Wellman describe, "coherent, abstract representations involving domain-specific, unobservable causal-explanatory entities" (2017, 191) embedded within mental models that guide behaviour and reasoning. These representations and their relations may not be subject to conscious articulation, but they provide intuitive moral judgments for cases even when the underlying features of the cognitive moral model may not be accessible to the subject. Railton's view is therefore that many of the deep, abstract representations that guide moral judgment are embedded within cognitive models acquired through theory-based evidential learning, and are thus subject to revision through new experiences that then potentiate further learning.

Supporting Railton's view is the output of several decades of research on reinforcement learning, Bayesian updating, hierarchical neural nets and mental models. These explain, for example, patterns of lifelong development in vision (Geisler 2011), motor control (Liu and Todorov 2007), causal inference (Holyoak and Cheng 2011), theory of mind (Gopnik and Wellman 2012) and the expertise gained from lifelong learning (Yarrow, Brown and Krakauer 2009). Research into the neural networks that underlie reinforcement learning in primate foraging, specifically on brain structures with functional homologues in humans, provides considerable support for the hypothesis that dynamically updated, projective, and generative cognitive maps or models guide behaviour and decision-making (Moser, Kropff and Moser 2008). These models are inherently evaluative and value-laden, mapping the expected-value landscape in terms of magnitudes of risk and reward and combining these to generate decision weights during choice which are sensitive to how an agent's own decisions will affect future pathways through the landscape. This learning process involves "projective simulation" – the use of expectation-based feedback to interpret perceptual stimuli, using relatively generic, error-based learning algorithms to train the system in the absence of explicit instruction and a relative poverty of stimulus (Gupta, van der Meer, Touretzky and Redish 2010). Recent neuroimaging studies on navigational learning show that rats even explore and perfect models of the landscape of choice "offline", during sleep, with activation occurring particularly in more unfamiliar areas of the neural map, which occasionally result in the discovery of more optimal "shortcut" pathways (Gupta et al. 2010). Research on infants reveal them as navigating the human environment using non-perspectival expected-value representations of agents and actions

(Shenhav and Greene 2010), and Railton suggests that this “expectation-based action-guidance via imaginative projection and simulation turns out to be just as central to intelligence as Hume imagined, and even more pervasive” (2017, 174).

The moral learning view provides a cautiously optimistic view of the possibility of the kinds of moral learning advocated by Vice. The typical exposure of the experience-based moral learning systems of children to a radically skewed and unrepresentative informational sample explains a great deal of social and moral bias. As Railton points out, it is only at the relatively late age of six, once children have first learned the social structure and power relations of their group, that they manifest implicit bias in favour of those in higher categories of a social hierarchy (Dunham, Baron and Banaji 2008). This social prejudice manifests even in those who are themselves marginalised by the bias, and who thus adopt negative stereotypes of their own group. On Railton’s view, changing the experiential sample (and so the resulting evidential base) such that it provides more extensive and representative feedback is likely to elicit moral learning that changes the cognitive models responsible for these biases.

The picture presented by Railton suggests that the moral learning that Vice counsels, while not easy or straightforward, is feasible. In contrast to the relatively pessimistic view of an unmalleable self that is forever stained by ineluctable racial bias and whiteness, on this view even the relatively unconscious, implicit, and habitual whitely biases that Vice found so pernicious are modifiable through new experiential learning, involving engagement with different social groupings and new information about the nature of the social hierarchy. Broadening and de-skewing the evidential basis underlying one’s models can thus stimulate new moral learning, allowing for the recuperation and transformation of the prejudiced self.

Practical steps for moral learning

Considerations from moral and educational psychology raise challenges to the prospects of moral learning that are overly reliant on methods of solitary, intuition-dependent, critical introspection. As the discussion of shame implies, the truths about self that are the target of moral inquiry are both difficult to locate, painful to behold, and “deviously resistive” to our efforts to confront them. Though conscious, reflective, and careful self-monitoring is probably useful, it does not constitute the broadening of the relevant evidential base that Railton considers as necessary for initiating moral learning. As Sullivan (2006) argues, these recommendations also do not change the context and environments in which learning takes place, and so are unlikely to be effective in challenging habitual whitely ways. While Vice expresses a sensible desire to avoid the mistakes that entrench whitely habits, this is also probably not the right way of thinking about the role and value of error in processes of learning, and fails to recognise the ways in which white political silence can actively hinder whitely transformation. Research on implicit biases is also very pessimistic about the prospects of these kinds of methods:

[T]eaching people about biases does not reliably debias them. Indeed, the literature suggests that (for at least a wide class of biases) practically any debiasing strategy intended to be learned and subsequently self-deployed by individuals, acting alone and at the point of making a judgment, is unlikely to succeed in significantly minimizing biases (Beaulac and Kenyon 2014, 2).

I suggest that insights from the field of educational psychology and moral learning theory provisionally support at least three interconnected ways of encouraging effective work on the moral models that underlie the whitely self, specifically by encouraging a broadening and de-skewing of their evidential basis and allowing natural moral learning to take place. This counsel adds to, rather than replaces, the many excellent (though often vague and abstract) recommendations made by Vice and her critics for engaging in processes of “dewhitelification”, by drawing on evidence from the learning and debiasing research literatures. The three recommendations aim to provide productive, concrete, and actionable strategies for undertaking this moral learning.

Recommendation 1: Learn to converse competently in an indigenous African language spoken by one of the marginalised and disadvantaged social groups that are subject to whitely bias.

There are many reasons why following this highly actionable advice is likely to help in challenging one's racist conceptions and habits. McKaiser usefully recommends that we recognise and counteract the systemic benefits that whiteness brings – one important and pervasive source of these benefits is linguistic. The language of discourse in South Africa potentially reflects historical and ongoing injustice, and it does so in multiple ways, including through its historical role as a language of the coloniser and oppressor, and as a tool used for imperialistic, racist, and hegemonic purposes. Pervasive social distortions have meant that while millions of black South Africans have had to undertake learning English and Afrikaans, comparatively few whites are multilingual. The ease and fluency of expressing complex ideas in a first language brings a range of advantages to first-language speakers and corresponding costs to second-language speakers. Additionally, various forms of epistemic benefits and costs also accrue because of the choice of language, which lead to unjust credibility deficits and systematic hermeneutical disadvantages, as Miranda Fricker (2007) describes.

These factors have been very well documented in the sociolinguistic research literature (Ng 2007), and research has repeatedly shown that language and accent are potent activators of implicit and explicit stereotypes and prejudice. For example, people consistently judge those exhibiting accents that differ from dominant cultures as less intelligent (Gluszek and Dovidio 2010), less competent (Bradac 1990), less educated (Bresnahan, Ohashi, Nebashi, Liu and Shearman 2002), less linguistically skilled (Cargile and Giles 1997) and less pleasant to listen to (Nesdale and Rooney 1996). Studies have found that these kinds of prejudices result in discrimination in housing (Zhao, Ondrich and Yinger 2006), employment (Rubin 2002), business (Tsalikis, Ortiz-Buonafina and La Tour 1992) and educational opportunities (Marvasti 2005). One study showed that simply telling students that a second-language speaker had delivered the lecture to which they had just listened, significantly reduced their subsequent comprehension and retention of the content of that lecture (Rubin 1992). Studies have also shown that the accents in which a person makes a claim systematically influences others' ratings of the likely truth of that claim, with participants rating claims as less likely to be true as a function of the strength of the accent in which it is made. For strong accents, these effects are completely impervious to debiasing efforts that present evidence of these biases to the research participants who display them (Lev-Ari and Keysar 2010).

In addition to research on biases and first-language use, a growing body of literature also suggests that using a second language directly reduces one's reliance on the heuristics and subconscious implicit associations that contribute to biased judgments (Ogunnaiké, Dunham and Banaji 2010). In a 2012 study, Keysar, Hayakawa and An found that when people use a second language, they are significantly less prone to powerful cognitive biases involving framing effects and loss aversion. Geipel, Hadjichristidis and Surian (2015) also found that reliance on a foreign language promoted less severe moral judgments and lowered participants' levels of confidence in these judgments. This "foreign-language effect" has been replicated in several studies and across different kinds of bias (e.g. Costa, Foucart, Hayakawa, Aparici, Apesteguia, Heafner and Keysar 2014; Cippolletti, McFarlane and Weissglass 2016). Explanations for the foreign language effect include the increased psychological distance attained through use of a second language, the muting of language-linked intuitions and emotional response, and the encouragement of systematic rather than automatic thinking processes. As Hadjichristidis, Geipel and Surian (2017, 645) argue, "certain mental constructs, such as stereotypes, which have been shaped by years of cultural learning in a native language context, may exert less influence when processing a foreign language".

In sum, language-related sources of bias contribute to the invisible skewing of the lifelong learning sample that has shaped our moral models, and at least in part explain their biased state. The research literature suggests that despite efforts to undertake Vice's recommended "uncomfortable engagement" with those "beyond the familiar", using a first language to do so potentially activates stereotypes and prejudice against second-language speakers. The prospects of even highly motivated efforts to undertake personal transformation thus seem bleak if they merely reinforce these linguistic, testimonial, and hermeneutical injustices. From the perspective of moral learning theory, the process of unlearning whiteness requires confronting our moral models with new kinds and sources of information, as well as interpreting this data in new ways. Yet the literature shows that using a

dominant-culture language to communicate brings with it a systematic set of distortions in this data, inhibiting this process of effective learning. In contrast, the research also shows that learning and using the language of the oppressed facilitates interactions that are less subject to these biasing distortions, and that using a second language helps deactivate existing prejudice. It also helps to change the power dynamic between speakers, reversing a critical source of bias, disadvantage, and vulnerability, and serves to bring new, more reliable evidence to play to the process of rebuilding the moral models that guide cognition. Undertaken as a part of moral learning, language learning also potentiates and amplifies other forms of moral learning involving contact experiences with marginalised groups.

Recommendation 2: Engage in “contact immersion” with the people of racially marginalised groups, by pursuing shared, cooperative projects with common goals, which draw upon the contributions of others and involve collective risk and processes of perspective-taking.

The growing debiasing literature shows that the mere presence of others, mere exposure to marginalised groups, and situational and contextual changes significantly reduces implicit bias (Van Bavel and Cunningham 2009). It also shows that engendering deep and lasting debiasing requires extensive “contact immersion” with racially marginalised groups (Pettigrew 1998; Blair 2002; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Dasgupta and Rivera 2008). In accordance with both Railton and Sullivan, initiating new learning requires changing one’s context and environment to gain new sources of evidence. Given that whitely ways involve bias against racially marginalised groups, extensive contact with members of these groups is necessary to provide a new evidential basis for confronting and transforming our whitely moral models. Another source of support for this recommendation comes from the educational literature on transformative or transgressive learning. For example, Baumgartner (2012) found that reflective discourse and critical reflection are relatively ineffective for purposes of transformative learning, as compared to personal experience. Finally, this recommendation also coheres with Hurst’s (2011) call for interdependent, rather than unilateral, efforts at personal transformation.

Recommendation 3: Undertake debiasing courses that involve collaborative inquiry into the bases of social prejudice, in structured, well-scaffolded, expertly facilitated moral learning environments, featuring members of diverse groups in collaborative argumentation, and characterised by imaginative play, empathetic response, and openness to vulnerability and the possibility of error.

While contact immersion conducted in an indigenous language provides extensive opportunities for engagement with marginalised groups, promising to bring new evidence to bear on whitely cognitive models, much of this information is nonetheless likely to be interpreted in the standard biased manner. Those who would undertake efforts at personal transformation therefore need to develop new conceptual frameworks for interpreting this data – a task that they are unlikely to achieve through solitary work on the self. Structured, expertly facilitated engagements aimed at initiating new understandings of the sources of social hierarchies and causes of racial injustice are therefore essential for those who would undertake personal change of this kind. From the perspective of moral learning theory, these experiences provide new conceptions from which to reinterpret information previously understood in biased ways.

The debiasing literature also provides evidence that formal learning interventions can provide dramatic, long-term racial debiasing, even for implicit biases that are not subject to conscious recognition or articulation (Devine, Forscher, Austin and Cox 2012). In addition, the extensive research in educational psychology on how to stimulate learning also motivates this recommendation, much of this research is likely to be very useful for understanding how moral learning can be engendered. The wider field of educational research and conceptual change literature has shown that while sources and strength of motivation and the adoption of mastery rather than performance goals are key determinants of successful learning (Ryan and Deci 2000), features of formal learning environments can make a considerable difference to learning outcomes. These include recommendations that learning environments include authentic kinds of evidence and interactions among participants, including social, collaborative inquiry (Kuhn, Black, Keselman and Kaplan 2000), effective scaffolding (Reiser 2004), expert facilitators, and openness to the value of error in learning (Brown 1987). Although there has been little direct research on learning and instruction in

the moral domain, there has been some related research in service learning which has found that it can engender changes in students' self-concepts, help to internalise moral standards, and promote greater sensitivity and commitment towards their communities (Billig, Root and Jesse 2005).

The three actionable and practical recommendations outlined above thus jointly aim at the generation of relevant and authentic data for stimulating change in the intuitive moral models that underlie the biased whitely self. The recommendations intersect the private and public worlds, eliding Vice's effort to distinguish between wholly private, self-directed work on the self and public engagement. One cannot sensibly be politically silent in sincerely undertaking these recommendations, and they invite all the risks of exposing one's whitely assumptions to others, and all the opportunities of recognising, confronting, and overcoming these moral misconceptions.

Some objections

The counsel presented above is subject to several likely objections. First, many consider recommendations of this kind as "silencing" structural and institutional injustice by furthering depictions of racism as a psychological and moral problem, and focusing on the cleansing of white guilt rather than an engagement with the real problems of racial injustice. Second, some of those who are proudly and explicitly racist are fully competent in indigenous languages, and deeply immersed in the lives of marginalised groups. Third, it seems possible that immersive engagement might instead serve to reinforce and deepen bias, as the evidential basis available for new learning might still be subject to distortion, or members of disadvantaged groups might manifest dominant-culture negative stereotypes (or even simply vices that are the result of poverty and privation). Fourth, one might understandably be dismissive of self-indulgent, self-directed efforts on the part of white South Africans to fix themselves, while they continue to ignore the pervasive racially unjust and structurally perpetuated inequalities of their daily lives. Work on the self may also seem likely to primarily benefit the beneficiaries of systematic racial injustice. Fifth, one might be particularly wary of recommendations that foist people, who by their own account exhibit racist, privileged views, onto communities that have historically suffered the most from prejudice. The potential negative consequences of these interactions will, most likely, most heavily fall upon those with the most to lose, whereas privilege tends to insulate the privileged from these costs. This recommendation is thus in danger of fulfilling Sullivan's description of privileged whites as tending to assume that all spaces are available and welcoming to them, as "barging in" without adequately considering whether their presence is welcome (Sullivan 2006).³

The first objection raises a critical concern, and it is one I have sought to address by arguing that redressing the structural causes of racial injustice is a necessary part of any effort to live well in South Africa. Nonetheless, I have also argued that an additional concern with the psychological impact of structural racism is warranted, insofar as it does not displace meaningful efforts to fix our unjust society.

The second objection demonstrates that these three recommendations are not sufficient for engendering transformative moral learning. This should not be surprising – there can be no recipe or algorithm that guarantees learning. As Vice, Blum, Futter and others point out, the initial desire to challenge whitely ways constitutes a necessary precondition for any authentic effort at self-transformation, and educational research confirms that motivation to learn is routinely the most significant predictor of learning outcomes. None of these recommendations could work in the absence of sincere, effortful perseverance of the underlying goal of work on the whitely self, and the recommendations simply aim to potentiate and intensify natural learning that is the product of this motivation. This means that, as Vice and many of her critics emphasise, this counsel only applies to

³ An anonymous reviewer made the insightful suggestion that "to some extent the possibility of white people unlearning whiteness is very much dependent on what black people are likely to do. One feature of whiteness is a sense of control and mastery that extends even into our attempt to undo whiteness – we imagine that it must be in our power to remake ourselves. And so even our insistence that we can and should uproot our own biases to some extent reflects a whitely way of being in the world. It might be that white prejudices are indeed going to be eroded (in South Africa at least), but that this will happen principally as a by-product of black people's increasing intolerance of whiteness and of the resulting dismantling of white privilege, rather than through anything whites (even very well-meaning ones) might do".

those (perhaps few) whites who would genuinely seek to transform themselves, rather than to whites in general, many of whom are oblivious to their whiteness or even proudly invested in a racist (dis) order. While it is thus true that a great many overt racists are conversant in indigenous languages and live among marginalised groups, these factors will tend to be powerless to incite moral learning in those who would not learn.

With regard to the third objection, it is important to recognise that the evidential weight of new experience for purposes of learning is in part a product of the theoretical basis used to interpret this experience – this is the famous “theory-ladenness of observation”. It is thus unsurprising that new experiential data would fail to change one’s underlying moral models when interpreted using false background theories about the workings of society and the causes of social hierarchy. Changing one’s understanding of these facts is likely to bring a greater understanding of why people might manifest morally non-ideal behaviour. More likely though is that the relevant racial and privileged-based judgments are instead simply false, constituting biases, and new learning will tend to diminish their role and importance in moral cognition. The third recommendation of the paper aims to provide opportunities for explicitly challenging these underlying theories and for developing better, more accurate ones. Though it is unavoidable that in attempting to learn one might come to know less rather than more, this risk does not entail that the effort to learn is not worth undertaking.

The fourth objection raises a critical concern that I have not attempted to resolve here – the relevance and importance of work on the whitely self for addressing the far more morally pressing issue of pervasive structural injustice. While Vice proposes a link between these two, suggesting that work on the self is a precondition for effective public action that does not just make the same whitely mistakes, I have argued only that work on the whitely self is worth pursuing insofar as it does not displace or replace meaningful efforts to redress these structural inequalities. However, given that these systematic inequalities in wealth, land, and access to resources are a critical source of the distorted data that has misshaped whitely moral models, and continues to do so for new generations of South Africans, redressing them constitutes a crucial component of generating new and more accurate learning, particularly for future generations of South Africans. The systematic racial injustice of South Africa therefore represents a critical limiting or boundary condition on the moral learning that white South Africans can achieve – it makes this learning both more difficult to attain and more difficult to retain. While theorists in the field of transformative learning have plausibly argued that “personal awareness without social activism reifies existing power structures rather than dismantles it” (Gambrell 2016, 1), the recommendations presented here are fully consistent with a view on which personal change is inextricably linked with social action. It thus seems plausible that, as Blum suggests, “if one’s world is constituted by a very public injustice, it may not be possible for an adequate response to fail to have some public face” (2011, 448). While it is certainly true that the self-directed pursuit of personal transformation that ignored the structural injustice in which we participate would be morally repugnant, the idea that we need to choose between these options represents a false dilemma. In addition, the concern that undertaking efforts at moral learning primarily serves the interests of those that undertake them misunderstands the project – to become less racist is, other things being equal, to become a better person – it should be unsurprising that this counts as a benefit for the individual so transformed, given that the aim of the endeavour is to at least make possible the attainment of greater virtue.

Finally, the fifth objection valuably assesses the potential for unintended harms in following this counsel, and there is no doubt that this is a real possibility. However, this concern needs to be balanced against the harms that are the result of unreconstructed whitely ways, white supremacist ideation and ongoing segregation. While attempting to redress these does open the door to further harms, particularly for the underprivileged, failing to address them brings its own adverse consequences. Crucially, the recommendation to undertake contact immersion with marginalised groups does not assume that whites are welcome in these spaces, merely that the spaces in which they *are* welcome could provide invaluable opportunities for unlearning whitely bias. Given that I am not, from this vantage, in an epistemically advantageous position to judge whether the interactions proposed in extended episodes of contact immersion are likely to constitute a net harm to those with whom we have contact, I can at best reiterate McKaiser’s counsel of care and careful

reflection in the endeavour. Admittedly, undertaking learning is risky, both for those who learn and for those who teach, and there can be no guarantees that we will succeed in learning to live well or that our learning will not come at a cost to another. Nonetheless, it seems to me that at least insofar as it does not harm others, this learning is worth undertaking.

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