

Kitcher on the Ethics of Inquiry

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I

The thesis that scientific inquiry must operate within moral constraints is familiar and unobjectionable in cases involving immoral treatment of experimental subjects, as in the infamous Tuskegee experiments. However, in *Science, Truth, and Democracy*¹ and related work,² Philip Kitcher envisions a more controversial set of constraints. Specifically, he argues that inquiry ought not to be pursued in cases where the *consequences* of its pursuit are likely to affect negatively the lives of individuals who comprise a socially underprivileged group. This constraint is controversial because it imposes moral obligations upon scientific inquirers that they do not have as moral agents generally.³ That is, whereas the familiar prohibitions against the violation of the rights of experimental subjects amount to the enforcement of fundamental moral obligations in the laboratory and the denial that such obligations can be overridden for the sake of scientific discovery, Kitcher argues that scientists incur in virtue of their role as scientists a set of distinctive moral obligations with regard to individuals belonging to underprivileged groups. In this way, Kitcher is proposing an autonomous *ethics of inquiry* rather than arguing for the *extension* of familiar moral obligations to scientific inquiry.

Much of Kitcher's argument is directed squarely at sociobiological and psychometric research concerning the native abilities of the sexes and races. Kitcher's "ambitious" conclusion against such inquiry is that "were we to recognize certain kinds of truths, the impact on some people would be to erode their sense of worth and make it difficult, even impossible, to frame a conception of their lives as valuable."⁴ That is to say, the truth about some things will set no one free, and in such cases "free inquiry may be too dangerous to be tolerated."⁵ His weaker conclusion is that given the political frame of these issues, we have no reason to embrace the Millian optimism that the truth will out. In fact, he claims, there is reason to believe such research, regardless of its conclusions, will most likely further entrench the standing prejudices.

The question of what kinds of moral considerations, if any, should constrain scientific practice is so difficult and complex that it cannot be properly addressed in a single essay. Accordingly, our objective in the present essay is modest: we shall argue that Kitcher's proposal is inadequate. Given that the issue of moral constraints on inquiry is especially pressing under contemporary social and political conditions, we hope that our critique of Kitcher will encourage further work

not only among philosophers of science, but among ethicists and political philosophers as well.⁶

II

Kitcher begins with the observation that scientific investigation occurs within particular societies, and that most contemporary societies, if not all, are home to significant but remediable unjust inequalities with respect to the well-being of individuals. These inequalities range from economic disadvantage and lower-than-average life expectancy to restricted access to valuable opportunities and positions.⁷ Following Kitcher, we shall call members of the group whose lives go considerably less well than justice allows *the underprivileged*, *U* for short. Kitcher asks us to suppose that a partial cause of the diminished quality of life for those in *U* is the belief, *B*, that those in *U* are naturally inferior to the rest of the population, and so are worthy of only a restricted range of educational and professional opportunities. Kitcher reasons that, since *B* generates injustice, a reduction in the number of persons who hold *B*, or in the degree of confidence with which persons hold *B*, is likely to increase justice in society. Kitcher asks us to suppose that until the recent past *B* was widely held, and so once exerted considerable influence on central political institutions and policies. Although *B* is now widely and officially repudiated, residual forms of it are manifest in the private attitudes and practices of various sectors of the population. We present these claims as follows:

1. There is an underprivileged class (*U*).
2. A partial cause for the lack of privilege for those in *U* is that the belief (*B*) that those in *U* are inferior was at a point in the recent past widely held.
3. Insofar as *B* is presently widely and officially repudiated, society has made moral progress; insofar as *B* is still present in residual forms, there is room for further progress.

Now, imagine that there is a set of researchers investigating whether *B* is true. Specifically, they are testing the hypothesis that “people with a particular characteristic (call it *C*) are naturally less well-suited for a particular role (call it *R*).”⁸ The research program of an area of science *S* promises to yield evidence with regard to *B*. So:

4. Science *S* can yield evidence for or against *B*.

But, because of *B*'s political implications, *S* operates under what Kitcher calls *political asymmetry*. That is, as a social and psychological fact, people are in general doxastically conservative—they seek to retain their current beliefs. So, with regard to evidence that *supports* their beliefs, they attend carefully to it and it strengthens their belief. Alternatively, they tend to ignore or dismiss

countervailing evidence, hence such evidence has little doxastic impact. Thus, if *S* yields even modest evidence in favor of *B*, *B* will become more openly and widely held, the general attitude toward those with *C* will worsen, and injustice will increase.⁹ However, if *S* yields even strong evidence for the negation of *B*, there will be minimal further eradication of *B* and thus no significant moral progress. So:

5. If *S* yields even modest evidence in favor of *B*, recently achieved moral progress will be partially undone.
6. If *S* yields even strong evidence contrary to *B*, no significant moral progress will follow.

Given the causal connection between *B*'s being widespread and the suffering of those in *U*, it seems clear that if recently achieved moral progress with regard to *U* is undone, those with *C* will suffer. And if no additional progress is made in the form of further eradication of *B* from the population, then those with *C* are not helped, either. So:

7. If acceptance of *B* increases, the quality of life for those in *U* will be further reduced.
8. Without *significant* eradication of the residues of *B*, there will be no notable improvement in quality of life for those in *U*.

Kitcher notes a further psychological fact that complicates the matter, namely, that we often take ourselves to have more support for our beliefs than we in fact have. That is, in general, beliefs are subject to what Kitcher calls *epistemic asymmetry*.¹⁰ With regard to *B*, this asymmetry yields the following result:

9. Those that hold *B* assign to it a higher probability of truth than reliable methods would warrant, and they will correspondingly deflate the probability of the truth of the negation of *B*.

Consequently, unless *S* yields evidence against *B* that is clear, powerful, and easily translated into terms that can be readily understood by the population at large, there will be no significant headway in eradicating *B*'s residua. As the current results of most research in the biological and psychological sciences are cast in a precise and technical vocabulary that presumes a high degree of mathematical and other forms of sophistication, we may conclude that research in *S* cannot make significant progress in furthering justice with regard to *U* by furthering the eradication of *B*. So:

10. Research in *S* cannot make *significant* strides in eradicating *B*.

What follows, then, is:

11. Research in *S* cannot further social justice by effecting notable improvement of the lives of those in *U*.

Importantly, when the political and epistemic asymmetries are coupled with the moral consequences of *B* becoming more widely and strongly held, research in *S* places those in *U* in positive danger. Kitcher captures the conclusion as follows:

If the issues surrounding the impact of having *C* are confusing or complicated, and if the bias towards overestimating the support for an anti-egalitarian answer is sufficiently strong, then the underprivileged are indeed threatened by the pursuit of *S*.¹¹

Thus, if *S* yields *complex* or *indecisive* evidence concerning *B*, the existing bias in favor of *B* will yield a marked increase of public *support* for *B*. There is, then, “no change of any genuine benefit for the underprivileged. . . . [T]he expected utility of pursuing *S* is . . . clearly negative.”¹² Inquiry in *S* regarding *B*, then, should not be pursued. So:

12. Research in *S* will lead to a worsening of the quality of life for those in *U*; thus research in *S* is morally unjustifiable, and should not be pursued.

These conditions obtain, Kitcher argues, in cases where those in *U* are women and those traits in *C* are those uncontroversially biological traits possessed only by women, and the *R*-roles are those of privilege and prominence. They also obtain where those in *U* are those in various minority groups in Western countries—African Americans in the United States, West Indians in the United Kingdom, and immigrants from Northern Africa and the Near East in most European nations.¹³

The consequence of Kitcher’s argument, then, is that research concerning, for example, the Bell Curve thesis is immoral, *even if the proposed research promises to debunk it*. It is important to emphasize that the immorality consists not in the research’s likely conclusions, or how experimental subjects are treated, or even the motives of those who pursue such investigations. Rather, such inquiry is immoral because under the abovementioned political and epistemic conditions, it can be expected only to further existing injustice by placing the underprivileged in harm’s way.

III

We trust that the foregoing sketch will suffice to show that Kitcher has developed a sophisticated view of the moral constraints to which scientific inquiry is subject under the political conditions that obtain in most contemporary developed societies. We would like to raise two general lines of criticism. The first targets the broadly consequentialist character of Kitcher’s argument; the second aims more generally at the project of indexing the moral obligations of inquirers to the contingent demographic facts of particular societies.

We begin with the uncontroversial observation that consequentialist arguments must be based upon comparative judgments concerning not only the expected outcome of pursuing some action, but also that of other possible actions, including acts of omission. In light of this, it is odd that Kitcher does not consider the expected result of *not pursuing* inquiry concerning *B*. Leaving these consequences out of the analysis severely skews the considerations that Kitcher proffers. This is especially apparent once it is recognized that the moral requirement of refraining from *B*-related research amounts to the obligation to leave research on race to the racists and research on sex-related differences in ability to the sexists. This is due not only to the fact that the racists and sexists may be indifferent to moral argument concerning their views, but also to the fact that part of what it is to be a racist or sexist is to *deny* that inequities of opportunity and privilege for women or persons of color constitute injustice.¹⁴ That is, according to the racist and sexist, the unequal status of women and persons of color that prevailed until the recent past is *morally proper*, and the extent to which beliefs like *B* are *receding* is the extent to which society is engaged in injustice.

To explain: To claim that persons in some demographic group are *underprivileged* is not simply to note the sociological fact of an unequal distribution of wealth, opportunity, and the like; rather, it is to judge that the inequality is *unjust*, that the persons in that group are *getting less than they deserve* by way of social goods or perhaps *more than they deserve* by way of social burdens. The judgment that some group or individual is *underprivileged* is therefore partly a judgment about *desert*. However, the question of what women and persons of color *deserve* is partly a question of *ability*. But this is *precisely* the question that the racists and sexists aim to investigate: they aim to show that social inequalities are generated by native differences in ability and thus are *not* unjust.¹⁵ Accordingly, racist and sexist scientists can accept Kitcher's argument and yet pursue the kinds of inquiry Kitcher seeks to prohibit because they reject Kitcher's view regarding which groups are underprivileged.¹⁶

Thus, Kitcher's argument can persuade only those who are *not* racist or sexist to forego *B*-related research. Consequently, an outcome of Kitcher's view is that only racists and sexists will pursue race- and sex-related research. Yet surely *this* state of affairs would exacerbate existing epistemic and political asymmetries concerning *B*. That is, if only racists are doing the research, then presumably the majority of the reports on the research in *S* would be in support of *B*.¹⁷ Given that *B* is subject to both political and epistemic asymmetries, we would find that whatever moral progress we have made would be undone with the same kind of reversion that Kitcher argued would come if *S* yielded support for *B* in 5. If that is the case, then those in *U* are most certainly put in harm's way. So:

13. If research in *S* is taken to be morally unjustifiable, then only those who do not care for moral justification at all or those who reject the proposed determination of the membership of *U* will pursue *S*.

To simplify, let us call those who will persist in pursuing the research Kitcher seeks to restrict *the racists*. Hence, we infer:

14. If the racists are the only ones doing work in *S*, then most research in *S* will support *B*.
15. The remaining research in *S* will lead to lowered quality of life for those in *U*.

The thought here is that if left unchecked, racist and sexist science and pseudo-science threaten to undermine whatever moral progress that had been made in eliminating *B*. We can sustain and perhaps augment that level of moral achievement only if there are mainstream and level-headed answers to racist arguments and scientific research aimed at debunking supposed evidence for beliefs like *B*.¹⁸

Even granting Kitcher's central premises, once the expected consequences of refraining from the kinds of inquiry he deems immoral are countenanced, a strong case against Kitcher's constraints emerges. But consider a likely rejoinder. It could be argued that there is a further consequence of Kitcher's view that mitigates the above argument, namely, that public knowledge and policy will come to reflect the view that research in *S* is morally repugnant and politically beyond the pale. That is, Kitcher's view would generate a moral onus that hangs over those who persist with such research or use the conclusions of such research in public deliberation. Further, this onus is the reason why most researchers may begin to neglect the program and why its conclusions are disallowed from public deliberation. So, Kitcher's view, if widely adopted, can be expected to generate a public that is committed to the following:

16. Research in *S* is not to be countenanced, not because it fails to be indicative of what is true, but because it is morally reprehensible to pursue *S*'s program or consider data from it.

But thoughts such as 16 lead to a kind of *epistemic backlash* where those who hold *B* or some residuum of it become suspicious that the popular conception of the matter is more an institutional requirement than a moral one, that the egalitarian party line is being taken as more important than the truth. Insofar as such *politically prudential* reasons are given for them to no longer proffer *B* as a public reason for policy, they will grow suspicious that the truth about *B* is being *legislated* instead of *inquired into*. The backlash consists in taking this as a case where ideology steps in to conceal uncomfortable truths.¹⁹ The prejudices concerning *B* can be bolstered and buttressed by such requirements, because those who espouse and pursue research supporting *B* take themselves to be and present themselves as playing Galileo to a politically correct bishop of Padua. So:

17. If research in *S* is shunned in popular opinion, then the moral progress noted in 3 is jeopardized.

What follows, then, is:

18. If results from *S* are banned (or informally publicly debarred), then those in *U* are put at risk of lowered quality of life.

Kitcher concedes that this consequence of backlash looms for programs banned or even ones from whom funding is merely withdrawn. But he maintains that “these gloomy reflections do not touch the argument that the research under scrutiny is unjustified.”²⁰ Yet it is unclear, now, given the expected consequences of *barring* *B*-related research, that *pursuing* it is so objectionable. The dilemma is that if *S* is pursued, then it is likely that either its results will refute *B*, but be too complicated for popular understanding, or else support *B*. If the former, it will not have any effect on changing the public attitude toward *B* (even though it refutes *B*), and if the latter, it will weigh public opinion heavily in *B*’s favor. As a consequence, if *B*-related research is pursued, then those in *U* will either have no improvement or be adversely affected. So pursuing *B*-related inquiry is unlikely to improve the lot of those in *U* and is very likely to worsen their standing. But, as we have argued, *refraining* from pursuing such research *guarantees* the reversion into previous injustice and thus *ensures* a worsening of the well-being of those in *U*. In refusing to do the requisite research or debunk the theories, the scientists forego the social process of public scrutiny and criticism that stands to eliminate biases behind injustice.²¹ Although it is admittedly not without risks of the sort Kitcher has identified, pursuing *S* seems the better option. Thus, these “gloomy reflections” surely *do* touch Kitcher’s argument. In fact, they overturn it.

Consequentialist arguments are notoriously adaptive. We suppose, then, that Kitcher might be able to meet the foregoing objections by adding additional stipulations that can accommodate our intuitions concerning the consequences of not pursuing *B*-related research. But even if we suppose that there could be a successful revision of this sort, there remains a more general difficulty with Kitcher’s approach.

The difficulty we have in mind concerns the very project of indexing an ethics of inquiry to the political and epistemic conditions that prevail in a particular society. The problem is that whereas the epistemic and political asymmetries tend to respect national borders, the results of scientific research programs do not. Kitcher’s argument that it is wrong to pursue *B*-related research in societies where the relevant asymmetries hold leaves open the possibility that research that is morally forbidden in one society could be allowed in another. Further, given the presumption that science policy should follow the moral requirement to further justice, it allows for the outcome that research that is morally forbidden in one society could be morally required in another. To see this, imagine a society whose major political institutions and practices are as yet directed by racist and sexist views, but is nonetheless *not* subject to the political and epistemic asymmetries Kitcher has specified. We might further suppose that the racism and sexism of this society is generated by the wide acceptance of empirical research that supports

such views, and that members of this society hold their racist and sexist views *because* they believe that the best scientific evidence supports them. Under such conditions, it would be the case that scientific refutation of the racist and sexist theories is necessary for even the possibility of social improvement. Surely in such a society such research would be not merely permissible, it may be positively *required* by justice.

However, beliefs such as *B* are true or false regardless of which society or scientific community inquires into it, and the news regarding scientific research and the results of current experiments has a habit of crossing geographical, national, and political borders. The border-crossing tendency of science is on the whole a good thing—it makes for an efficient division of scientific labor, and thus produces the great benefits that come with sharing information and combining epistemic resources. It is this aspect of science that frustrates Kitcher's ethics of inquiry. Research regarding sex- and race-related differences that would be on Kitcher's argument immoral to pursue in, say, the United States could be morally permissible elsewhere; and the results of such research will surely reach interested parties in the United States. Accordingly, the negative effects of *B*-related research for *U* are not avoided by the moral constraints implied by Kitcher's argument, since those constraints are generated by relatively *local* considerations.

We can generalize the point in this way. Questions of social justice with regard to historically underprivileged social groups are by necessity indexed to particular societies. It is the business of states to enact what social justice demands. When it comes to science, however, the story is quite different. The moral result sought by Kitcher requires a *global* ethics of inquiry; however, his arguments derive from the historical and sociological facts of a specific society, and so generate constraints in inquiry that are *particular* to that society. In short, the strategy of appealing to local factors in order to achieve a global result cannot succeed.

IV

We have thus far developed two lines of argument against Kitcher's proposal. Both lines of argument have been directed at Kitcher's means rather than his ends; that is, we presumed the soundness of Kitcher's ends and tried to demonstrate the inadequacy of his proposal to achieve them. This presumption is not uncontroversial. Although we cannot in the present essay pursue fully such issues, we should like to close by raising two concerns regarding Kitcher's ends.

The project of developing an ethics of scientific inquiry is similar to the project of developing an ethics of individual action in that both require the identification of some discrete entity to serve as the object of moral evaluation. In the case of standard ethical theories, this entity is the *act*, the *intention* to act, or sometimes the *person*; in the case of an ethics of inquiry, it is the *research program*. To be sure, there is controversy among philosophers over what acts, intentions, and persons are. Yet such controversies do not normally obstruct ethical

theorizing since there seems to be a sufficient degree of agreement at the commonsense level over when a person can be said to have acted or intended and when not. However, the case is not so clear when it comes to parsing scientific research programs. Consider, for example, an epidemiologist pursuing a new treatment for sickle-cell anemia. Is this scientist engaging in a race-related research program of the sort covered by Kitcher's argument? Or again, is a psychologist investigating patterns of cognitive development among boys for the purpose of developing new strategies for dealing with childhood behavioral disorders acting immorally?

This kind of question becomes especially thorny if we accept even a modest version of confirmation holism. Suppose that in the course of pursuing research related to the treatment of Attention Deficit Disorder, our psychologist unwittingly discovers some fact or principle that, when considered in the context of the findings of an otherwise unrelated and seemingly innocent research program in evolutionary biology, implicitly bears upon *B*. Does this render the psychologist's research immoral? Does it render the program in evolutionary biology immoral as well? Does a third scientist who makes explicit the connection between the two findings and their relevance to *B* act immorally?

Given the possibility of such cases, what conclusion are we to draw? The fact that research programs are not easily parsed into discrete categories such as "race-related" and "not race-related" complicates greatly the very project of developing an autonomous ethics of inquiry. More importantly, given even a modest confirmation holism, it seems that any research program, no matter how distant it may appear from issues of race and sex, may produce results that nonetheless bear significantly upon *B*. Furthermore, whether a given research program is likely to produce results that bear significantly on *B* in part depends upon what *other* researchers are working on and what the likely results or *their* research will be. The result, then, seems to be that, on Kitcher's view, *all* scientific research is potentially suspect and *all* researchers have the responsibility to consider the possible consequences of their inquiries vis-à-vis *B*. Such evaluations are extremely difficult to make with confidence under the best circumstances; moreover, if a more robust confirmation holism is true, they may be impossible.

Hence Kitcher's view does not simply amount to a moral prohibition on research that is overtly directed toward race- and sex-related differences in ability. It results rather in a requirement to subject *all* research to moral evaluation. Given the difficulty, if not impossibility, of calculating the likely consequences of some proposed research, this seems an unduly demanding moral burden.

Of course, to demonstrate that a proposed moral obligation is highly demanding is not to demonstrate that no such obligation exists. The demandingness of Kitcher's proposal occasions our second point of concern. Bernard Williams long ago raised a compelling criticism against consequentialism that focused upon the *kind of person* consequentialist theories require us to become. More specifically, Williams argued that consequentialist theories in general and utilitarianism in particular could not assign the proper moral weight to *long-term* moral commitments, what Williams called "projects."²²

Kitcher's view invites the analogue of Williams' critique. Scientific research programs require *ex ante* commitments of personal, institutional, and financial resources. Contemporary research programs often involve the coordination over many years of several researchers working in different subfields and in different locations.²³ Long-term commitment is necessary for effective science. However, Kitcher's view requires scientists to subject their inquiries to perpetual moral evaluation based upon the likely consequences for particular social groups of seeing the research to its conclusion. As we have seen, the relevant consequences are partly determined by a range of contingent facts, including facts about what other researchers are doing and the degree to which the general public is subject to the kind of asymmetries Kitcher has identified.

These factors, including a population's epistemic attitudes, are prone to short-run fluctuation. It seems, then, that Kitcher's moral scientist, like Williams' utilitarian, will have to monitor these factors regularly (daily? monthly?) and adjust his activities accordingly. But this means that Kitcher's scientist cannot commit to a long-term research program, for research that may be permissible today could prove impermissible tomorrow. The consequence is that contemporary science, much of which proceeds by way of long-term research agendas, is hobbled. In this way, Kitcher's ethics of inquiry threatens to render contemporary science impracticable. This is clearly an unacceptable result, but it seems unavoidable if one adopts with Kitcher the aim of morally prohibiting research into particular questions for the sake of furthering specific social ends.

V

We noted early in this essay the importance of the issues Kitcher has addressed. It is reasonable to expect that the question of the nature of the moral constraints appropriate to scientific inquiry will become increasingly pressing in the coming years, as technology in the biosciences grows more powerful. We hope to have shown that further work is needed and to have opened a broader conversation among ethicists, political theorists, and philosophers of science.

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Notes

¹ Philip Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

² Philip Kitcher, "An Argument about Free Inquiry," *Nous* 31, no. 3 (1997): 279–306.

³ One could imagine a view according to which one is morally obligated at all times to act so as to not worsen the lot of underprivileged social groups. As far as we know no one has proposed such a view, and we strongly suspect that any such a view would face insurmountable difficulties.

⁴ Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy*, 96.

⁵ Kitcher, "An Argument about Free Inquiry," 280.

- ⁶The critical attention Kitcher has received for *Science, Truth, and Democracy* has come mainly from fellow philosophers of science, such as Brad Wray in "Science, Bias, and the Threat of Global Pessimism," *Philosophy of Science* 68, no. 3 (2001): 467–78 and Helen Longino in "Science and the Common Good: Thoughts on Kitcher's *Science, Truth, and Democracy*," *Philosophy of Science* 69, no. 4 (2001): 560–68. Contemporary work in ethics and political philosophy rarely engages directly the issues Kitcher has addressed. We think the lack of crossover work is unfortunate.
- ⁷Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy*, 96; and Kitcher, "An Argument about Free Inquiry," 280–81.
- ⁸Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy*, 97.
- ⁹*Ibid.*; and Kitcher, "An Argument about Free Inquiry," 281.
- ¹⁰Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy*, 97; and Kitcher, "An Argument about Free Inquiry," 282.
- ¹¹Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy*, 97.
- ¹²*Ibid.*, 98.
- ¹³*Ibid.*
- ¹⁴Many forms of racism and sexism are *morally blind* insofar as they are accompanied by a wholesale rejection of moral considerations relevant to race and sex. Such moral blindness is usually accompanied by an *epistemic blindness*, by which we mean a wholesale disregard for epistemic considerations with regard to beliefs about race and sex. Thus, the *blind* racists and sexists may be disregarded, since their blindness to the evidence means that they are not subject to the asymmetries Kitcher identifies. However, many prevalent forms of racism and sexism are *not blind* in this way; *sophisticated* racists and sexists are sensitive to moral and epistemic considerations, but hold that both support their views. Sophisticated racists hold that persons of color are decidedly *not* underprivileged, believing instead that they are *over-privileged* and that it is primarily white males that suffer in the form of unjust policies such as affirmative action. See the interviews in Carol Swain and Russ Nieli, eds., *Contemporary Voices of White Nationalism in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- ¹⁵Michael Levin, *Why Race Matters* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997).
- ¹⁶Many who pursue race- and sex-related research do so precisely because they see the social *status quo* as offering to underserving groups special advantages, thereby underprivileging white males; see Levin's *Why Race Matters*. Christina Hoff Sommers argues in *The War Against Boys* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001) that existing inequalities in public education in America constitute injustice to boys and young men.
- ¹⁷We take it that this is a plausible assumption for two reasons. First, on Kitcher's own notions of epistemic and political asymmetries with regard to *B*, those who hold it will be more likely to take *B* to be well-supported and take evidence running contrary to be misleading. Researchers holding *B*, then, will have such asymmetries at work when regarding their own data. Second, research in social psychology has shown that groups operating without serious intellectual confrontation with those who disagree tend to become more extreme and more confident in their commitments. This research is canvassed in Cass Sunstein, *Why Societies Need Dissent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).
- ¹⁸The claim 3 seems to be the central point of conflict for Kitcher's argument. The moral progress with regard to racism and sexism is in part posited on a set of results that have set the society on the right moral track. Presumably, the moral progress is partly the result of successful efforts to debunk racist and sexist theories. As a consequence, Kitcher's argument relies on the established progress of research in *S* for the conclusion that further research in *S* is morally retrograde. It seems odd that, at a certain point, the research that loosened the bonds for the underprivileged in society would suddenly be taken to tighten them. If the work in *S* has gotten the society to the point where *B* is widely repudiated, it would seem that the society needs more of the same. However, it may be noted that the racists, as a consequence of *S*'s progress, may not have the requisite funding or institutional status to pursue their research, and this may mitigate the consequences. (Thanks to Kristen Intemann and one of our anonymous reviewers for this point.) However, it seems unreasonable, given the stipulated asymmetries, to expect that those funding research or conferring

status are literate with regard to or convinced by the previous debunking research in S. In fact, given the asymmetries, it seems likely that there will be sources of funding and positions of status given *for the sake of rebutting* the debunking literature. If this is the case, things look considerably bleaker.

¹⁹ Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy*, 105.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

²¹ Brad Wray, in "Science, Bias, and the Threat of Global Pessimism," has argued on the basis of the requirement of challenging and utilizing bias in social scientific reasoning that the Millian ideal of free inquiry is attainable even when epistemic asymmetries are pervasive with respect to central issues. When members of a community forego the Millian ideal, then, they not only forego the chance to challenge bias, but they themselves appear biased in a way that undermines their claims to legitimacy.

²² Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," in *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, ed. J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 100f.

²³ Peter Galison and Bruce Hevly, eds., *Big Science: The Growth of Large-Scale Research* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).