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Why totally unjustified convictions persist. Twardowski on the nature of prejudice

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The project of the Enlightenment was - and still is - to combat prejudices through philosophical criticism: that is, to make prejudices recognizable as such, to make their harmful influence on our thoughts and actions clear, and thus to undermine their lasting existence. Pessimists would say that this is a battle against windmills that can never be won because people cannot live without prejudice. Must we bow to this fatalistic insight? At the beginning of the twentieth century Kazimierz Twardowski vehemently opposed declaring the project of enlightenment a failure. For him, it is a central project of philosophy that must never be abandoned because of its social relevance. Only if we understand better what prejudices are and how they work can we prevent them from being passed on from generation to generation.

The following considerations are intended to show that Twardowski's attitude is still exemplary even at the beginning of the 21st century. In the first two sections, I explain what the strength of Twardowski's epistemic analysis of prejudice is, and then draw a comparison with a structurally similar approach in the social sciences. In the second part, I discuss the historical dimension that Twardowski adds to his purely epistemic definition of prejudice when he describes social prejudices as "relics of the past". In the last section, I will look at the strategies Twardowski proposed to combat prejudice and will give some reasons why these strategies might fail.

## 1. Superstition as cognitive failure

Twardowski's commitment to the spirit of the Enlightenment is evident in many places in his lectures and writings.<sup>1</sup> In the following I rely primarily on the text of a public lecture "On prejudices" that Twardowski gave at the University of Lvov in March 1906. As required by such a lecture, Twardowski confines himself to brief remarks that do not yet constitute a complete theory of prejudices. In a relaxed lecture style, he draws a sketch of a theory that needs to be completed by an appropriate interpretation.

Let us begin with the following question: Why does Twardowski choose his as examples of prejudice above all popular superstition? Does this have systematic reasons or is it part of the dramaturgy of his lecture? His first example is the superstitious opinion that the number 13 is an unlucky number. Some people would not even call it a prejudice, because it has nothing to do with discrimination of people on the basis of race, sex, or religion. Twardowski also discusses examples of discriminatory attitudes in the further course of his lecture, but for him these are just one among other examples of prejudice.

In fact, the wide range of examples Twardowski uses is not accidental, but part of his concept, which identifies prejudices as epistemic failures. His critique of prejudice is therefore primarily an epistemological critique. The negative social consequences play a secondary role and, in the case of popular superstition, they are harmless compared to racial or religious prejudices. This idea is also reflected in Twardowski's lecture. He does not begin with examples that focus on consequences, but with examples that illustrate the questionable habits of thought without which prejudices would not be preserved.

But why should we criticize popular superstition in the first place? The brief remarks that Twardowski makes about this contain three essential starting points for such criticism:

First, folk superstition shows that even people who realize that it is superstition hold on to it. They hold on to it without asking for reasons that justify this belief.<sup>2</sup> For example, in the case of the superstition that the number 13 is an unlucky number. Those who believe this do not

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of Twardowski's writings on prejudice and education, see (van der Schaar 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Twardowski goes a step further when he claims that it is not possible to give good reasons for a prejudice: "This is precisely the difference between a prejudice and any other judgment: there is nothing we can say to explain or justify it." (Twardowski 2014a, p. 74).

want to live at an address with the number 13. But do such people really believe that an unhappiness threatens if they ignore it? Against it speaks that there are hardly any experiences, which confirm this superstition. Superstitious people avoid exactly such situations in which this belief could prove true. Why then do they hold on to this superstition? If they don't do it simply because others believe it too, they may think that it is at least possible that the number 13 brings bad luck. That would be an attempt to justify superstition, which can easily be exposed as an epistemic blunder. For it is just as possible that the number 11 brings bad luck. So anyone who invokes the possibility that there might be some truth in the superstition succumbs to a fallacy.

A second point of departure for a critique of superstition arises from the observation that a superstition often survives because its original source has fallen into oblivion. The number 13 also serves as an illustrative example of this. The origin of this prejudice could have to do with the fact that, as Twardowski supposes, 13 people were sitting around the table at the Last Supper. However, this is a mere supposition and is not known to most of those who subscribe to this superstition. Would it encourage them to avoid a hotel room with the number 13 if they knew the source of the superstition? Probably not, because then the question is obvious to everyone what the Last Supper has to do with the numbering of hotel rooms. The same applies to the superstitious advice not to get up with your left foot. In this case, too, it can be assumed that the superstition stems from the fact that most people are more adept with their right hand than with their left. But why should a right-handed person not get out of bed with the left foot just as well? Also, in this case the conclusion is therefore obvious: It is better for superstitious people if they do not know where this belief comes from. The fact that such ignorance benefits superstition naturally makes it epistemically suspicious.

This leads us to a third point at which a critique of popular superstition can begin: the enemy of superstition is science, for it provides the methods to test and refute epistemically suspicious views. Twardowski does not forget to point out that even within science, rational means are not always used. On the contrary: for Twardowski, the true power of prejudices is shown precisely in the fact that they can also have an effect in science: "But it is only when we realize that prejudices are present in science and not only in daily life that we begin to realize the true power of prejudices" (Twardowski 2014a, p. 80). How could scientific thinking nevertheless succeed in pushing back superstitious thinking? Like many before him, Twardowski relies on the self-cleaning power of science. Superstition lacks this power, which is another reason to criticize it.

However, the trust in the self-cleaning power of science must first be justified. The fact that science is a proven remedy for superstition does not yet show that it also has a suitable remedy for prejudices within its own ranks. This is precisely where a pessimist can therefore raise his voice and claim that scientific thinking is ultimately nothing more than blind faith in science. The pathetic appeal with which Twardowski ends his lecture is directed against such pessimism:<sup>3</sup>

“The aim is to teach people to think independently, reasonably, critically, and accustom them to be aware whether their convictions are justified or not. The only way leads to promoting science and education, since education and science endow us with the treasure of knowledge and enrich our lives, and at the same time free us from obstacles which prevent individuals and societies from sound development.” (Twardowski 2014a, p. 80)

Such appeals have it in themselves that they quickly fade away. What remains is the question of how science and superstition differ fundamentally. This is where a theory of prejudices should make its contribution, and it is also precisely at this point that Twardowski’s systematic considerations come into play. His first thesis is that all prejudices - including those from which science itself is not immune - are knitted according to a certain pattern. Finding these patterns is the first task of a philosophical analysis.

## 2. A question of definition

If one looks for some feature that is common to all prejudices, the following thought seems obvious: Prejudices are an expression of uncritical behavior towards authorities. It seems *prima facie* plausible that both popular superstition and social prejudices are similar in this respect: Superstitious people behave uncritically towards customs or a religion, racist or sexist people uncritically follow the authority of a social environment that has raised them to be racists or sexists.

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<sup>3</sup> Twardowski becomes similarly pathetic at the end of his lecture on “Independence of Thinking”: “Thence the meaning of science for society is apparent. It does not only bring society a number of new laws, thus providing numerous benefits, but it also cultivates the ideal aspect of independent thought, which is being objective, free from prejudice and secondary considerations, dispassionate, intrepid and adamant.” (Twardowski 2014, p. 89).

However, Twardowskis takes a different approach. The ability to think independently is also of central importance to him, but it is above all a means of protecting himself from prejudice. This is especially true in dealing with prejudices, which Twardowski calls “relics of the past” (Twardowski 2014a, p. 79). However, one must not conclude from this that every uncritical trust in an authority automatically leads to prejudice. Nor does the reversal of this thought seem to be compelling: Not every prejudice is a relic of an authority-believing thought in the past. Prejudices can always arise anew. This speaks for Twardowski’s decision to seek the pattern common to all prejudices in an epistemic deficiency.

Twardowskis answers the question of what is common to all prejudices with the following definition:

“We may very generally define a prejudice as a preconceived, unjustified and erroneous conviction, or in other words, a preconceived and totally unjustifiable conviction.” (Twardowski 2014a, p. 75)

A very similar definition can already be found in the great Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment published by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert:

“Prejudice: A false judgement which the mind forms about the nature of things after an inadequate use of the intellectual faculties; this unhappy fruit of ignorance gives bias to the mind, and blinds and enthralls it.” (Chevalier de Jaucourt, 1765)<sup>4</sup>

It is striking that in both definitions the content of the beliefs at stake does not play any role at all. Twardowski therefore only says succinctly about the scope of the term prejudice: “They can assume many forms and concern various matters” (Twardowski 2014a, p. 75). This makes it clear that his view is that a prejudice can be criticized simply because it is a prejudice, irrespective of its content. Both definitions also agree that it is not an unfortunate coincidence or a question of fate whether someone has a “totally unjustifiable conviction”. Such convictions only arise when someone does not know how to use his cognitive abilities adequately. But can this really be said so generally? Does this not presuppose an excessive degree of rationality? Perhaps we are not in a position to examine each of our opinions to see whether it is justifiable or not?

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<sup>4</sup> Translation quoted from (Acton 1952), p. 325.

But this fear is not appropriate at this point. These definitions are not expressing a demand that might exceed our cognitive abilities, but rather a simple epistemic norm that may or may not be respected:

One should not accept completely unjustifiable opinions.

Prejudices are epistemic misconduct because they violate this norm. This is the claim. This does not mean that it is a misconduct that we can always recognize as such and also correct. One can respect such a norm even if one can only partially fulfill it due to limited cognitive abilities. This does not mean that a prejudice does not contain more than just a violation of this general epistemic norm. In the case of racist or other social prejudices, social and moral norms are obviously also involved. The thesis is, and this is not implausible, that the violation of social or moral norms is always accompanied by the violation of the norm, not to accept completely unjustified opinions.

Let us therefore take a look at the way the term prejudice is used in the social sciences. There, the focus is naturally on socially discriminating prejudices. But not all social scientists see in it the defining characteristic of social prejudice. Gordon Allport uses a definition structurally similar to that of Twardowski:

“[A prejudice is] an aversive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he [sic!] belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to this group.” (Allport 1954/1979, p. 7)

Therefore, the principle applies here as well: prejudices can be criticized simply because they are prejudices. Because Allport’s definition leaves it open against which group a prejudice is directed, and what the negative characteristics are that are attributed to that group. In the background, there is a social norm here that has again general validity:

One should not judge other people solely by the group to which they belong.

What speaks for the validity of this norm? It seems inevitable that in answering this question, the general epistemic norm of not accepting completely unjustified opinions will be invoked.

Anyone who judges a person solely on the basis of his or her membership of a group overlooks the fact that each person is an individual with his or her own history. To deny or ignore this is epistemic misconduct that cannot be justified by anything.

But aren't these general norms far too abstract to base a theory of prejudice on? This is an objection that can be raised against both Twardowski and Allport. Because both of them pay homage to the principle, as we have seen, that you can criticize prejudices just because they are prejudices. But shouldn't the criticism of a prejudice also depend on its content? Following Wittgenstein, one could say that the meaning of the term 'prejudice' can only be explained by examples. However, if we maintain that a definition is possible, then I think that one will not be able to do without reference to the above-mentioned norms. This can be shown by the definition of Allport as well as that of Twardowski.

In the case of the Allport definition, in order to be unrelated to the general social norm, the terms 'hostile', 'aversive' and 'objectionable' could be deleted. This leaves the definition of a social stereotype:

A social stereotype is an attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because she belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the qualities ascribed to this group.

The use of social stereotypes is not something fundamentally bad. Susan Fiske, for example, points this out when she illustrates the usefulness of social stereotypes with the following example: "When people categorize a person as a gas station attendant, they know how to interact. People cannot possibly treat every person (or object) as unique, but must understand them in terms of prior experiences." (Fiske 2005, p. 37). Fiske therefore thinks that prejudice could be considered as a kind of "unwanted by-product" of a socially useful ability. Before we ask what prejudices are, we should therefore ask: "How exactly do social categories lump people together, and with what impact on understanding, feelings, and action?" (ibid.).<sup>5</sup>

A similar consideration can be made in the case of Twardowski's definition. Again, one could neutralize the reference to the epistemic norm by thinning out the definition. If one deletes the

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<sup>5</sup> Here Fiske follows a current trend in social psychology. See the anthology *On the Nature of Prejudice. Fifty years after Allport* (Dovidio et. al. 2005) and the contributions and introduction by the editors of the *Cambridge Handbook of Prejudice* (Sibley and Barlow 2016).

expressions ‘erroneously’ and ‘completely unjustified’, one gets the following minimal definition of a prejudice:

A prejudice is a preconceived opinion.

In favor of this minimal understanding speaks that it is compatible with the general use of language. This is shown by the historical debate on whether there are legitimate prejudices. Voltaire was a pioneer of this view when he gave the following definition of prejudice in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764)

“Prejudice is an opinion void of judgement: thus everywhere [where] many opinions are instilled into children before they are able to judge.” (Voltaire 1764/1802, p. 289)

One can hardly reproach children for starting their lives with preconceived opinions. It is very reasonable for children to orientate their behavior towards adults. In doing so, they are dependent on adopting their views as long as their own judgment is not yet sufficiently developed. It would be nonsense to incite children not to believe anything their parents say. The same applies here as in the case of social stereotypes: Preconceived opinions need not be bad. However, this also removes the principle that prejudices can be criticized simply because they are prejudices. Whether it is right to use a stereotype or to adopt a preconceived opinion without examination depends on the context and the nature of the stereotype or the content of the opinion.

I am not convinced by this argumentation. Of course, the content and the context play a central role when considering the negative consequences that a prejudice can have. But does that speak against the fact that the term can also be defined independently? And why should one not refer to general, abstract norms?

At this point it becomes clear that the examples of superstition play a central role in Twardowski’s analysis. They provide an argument for the usefulness of the definition chosen by Twardowski. For in the case of superstition, the content does not matter much. It is a trivial thing whether there is a room with the number 13 in a hotel or not, and whether you get up with your left or your right foot. But this does not change the fact that one can and should also



criticize a trivial superstition. For even the most harmless superstition shares with a serious prejudice a structural characteristic that makes it worthy of criticism.

### 3. The ambivalence of social prejudices

If prejudices are worthy of criticism regardless of their content, then the following question arises all the more: How is it that they so easily creep into our thinking and become fixed there? And if the thesis is correct that prejudices violate generally accepted norms, then the question arises: Why do we not notice such norm violations or why are they tolerated in our society? These are fundamental questions that a philosophical theory of prejudice has to deal with if prejudice is to be understood as an epistemic failure, as Twardowski did.<sup>6</sup>

In Twardowski's lecture these questions are not explicitly discussed. Therefore, one has to take a closer look at the different examples to be able to estimate what kind of answer Twardowski might give to these questions. Especially revealing, as we will see in a moment, is a phenomenon that I would like to call the “ambivalence of social prejudices”. We encounter this phenomenon when it remains open whether a norm violation occurs in secret or whether it is recognized as such but simply tolerated.

One of the examples of social prejudice that Twardowski discusses concerns a landowner who has a prejudice against certain professions:

“An average landowner believes it would be improper for his son to become a merchant, a journalist, or God forbid, an actor.” (Twardowski 2014a, p. 78)

To explain the origin of this prejudice, Twardowski adds:

“This kind of prejudice is also clearly influenced by associations - profession, superiority, servility. There were times when indeed there existed a social difference between different classes and professions, which had different rights and thus were separate from each other. This sort of separation is long gone now. (ibid.)

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<sup>6</sup> Not to forget, of course, that the thesis presupposed in these questions also requires further justification, namely the thesis that every prejudice violates an epistemic norm. Begby 2013, for example, argues against this thesis.

I understand Twardowski here to mean that he does not want to claim that in his time there were no class differences at all between the members of different professions. That would be too naive. His explanation only makes sense if one understands it to mean that in earlier times there were virtually no social contacts and no changes between certain professions, and that this *strict* separation is fortunately over. The point of the example is then that the greater social mixing has not led to the disappearance of the prejudice based on it. If one now examines the question of why this prejudice has been preserved, one needs to explain the inability or refusal to acknowledge a historical change. The father adheres to rules that are determined by social barriers that no longer exist in this form. He pretends that as a landowner he still has fixed rights that merchants, journalists, and actors are not entitled to. Since he understandably does not want his son to risk a social decline, he does not want him to take up one of these professions. But what is behind this phenomenon that Twardowski calls “association”?

One can roughly describe the epistemic failure that becomes visible in it as inflexible thinking. But that does not say much. What we want to know more precisely is of what kind is the epistemic norm violation that we are to attribute to the well-meaning father. One possibility would be that he does not even notice how inflexible his thinking is, because he overlooks how the social conditions have changed. Then, of course, he does not realize that he is in error and that the opinion he holds is, once, but now no longer justified. The tragedy of the story in this case would be that it would be of no use to remind the father of the normative principle he is violating: One should take note of changes and act accordingly. From his point of view, there is no violation of this norm, because for him certain professions are still associated with clear social disadvantages. His advice is honest and well-meant.

But there is another way of interpreting the father's mistake. It could be that the father stubbornly admits his prejudice. He then knows very well that times have changed and that even merchants and actors now have all the rights and are respected citizens, perhaps even famous for their talent. But he still sticks to his opinion: his son should take up a “proper” profession. This second possible explanation brings the example closer to the case of superstition, as Twardowski also notes:

“Here as well as in the previously analyzed examples, we encounter generalizations and an unjustified broadening of certain events and relationships. [...] We tend to generalize

[...] where it is not justified, just as, for instance, we generalize the inferiority of the left hand and the left side of the body and tend to believe that, since we are less skilled in performing everyday activities with our left hand, getting up with the left foot first will necessarily negatively influence our activities and dispositions etc.” (Twardowski 2014a, p. 78)

One could understand the comparison like this: There are certainly risks in the life of a merchant, a journalist or an actor that a landowner has nothing to fear. From this the father draws the conclusion by generalization that these cannot be ordinary professions. This conclusion is just as flimsy as the conclusion that it is better to stand up with the right foot, because in some activities one is clumsier with the left hand.

But there is something else in the comparison that should not be overlooked. This is the false certainty that distinguishes someone who draws such conclusions and is not able to recognize how threadbare they are. This false certainty belongs to those attitudes which Quassim Cassam calls “postures”. These are attitudes that are affectively charged and that can dominate us like an emotion, without us being able to defend ourselves against it. The postures include contempt, indifference, disdain, suspicion, nonchalance, cynicism, and respect. (Cassam 2019, 81)

He who always takes care to stand up with his right foot could, through this prejudice, acquire a certain posture that he likes. He may feel particularly conscientious in this, or he may bask in a feeling of superiority over those who stand up with the wrong foot. This then contributes to his having become fond of superstition and holding on to it, although he realizes that there is no rational reason for it. A similar thing could be said about the father in Twardowski’s example: he too could have acquired a posture through a social prejudice, which he learned to appreciate. As a landowner, he feels superior to other people. If you point out to him the opportunities offered by other professions, he may respond with a cynical smile. And if you admire the genius of an actor, he may react with contempt or with the remark that this fame will not last long and the fall after a success can be particularly deep.

If the father's behavior is explained in this way, there is nothing tragic about it. For in this interpretation it is in a certain sense perfectly clear to the father that he is in the wrong. He only does not want to admit it, and therefore takes refuge in an attitude which gives him a feeling of

satisfaction. This is comparable to the attitude of a superstitious man who celebrates his superstition with relish, although he secretly knows that it is a humbug.

Twardowski also points out another aspect that fits into this picture. Both superstition and social prejudice often go hand in hand with a refusal to deal with them critically:

“Since despite the lack of justification, prejudices still persist and are commonly cultivated, there has to be another reason apart from the mere mental association, and it is that people who adhere to prejudices get attached and used to them, and do not even want to get exposed to any evidence against the veracity of prejudices.” (Twardowski 2014a, p. 79)

What Twardowski describes here is a particularly ingenious mechanism of how a prejudice can be preserved: You get used to it and don't want to put it down because it is so easy to live with. In this way, an attitude can spread that can be described as a false tolerance of epistemic norm violations. Everybody knows that it is a mistaken belief or an unjustified prejudice, but one comes to terms with it. Either one suppresses this unpleasant truth, or one even imagines something about not caring about the norm.

So, what is the ambivalence of social prejudices? It consists in the fact that they can be both: a tragic case of ignorance or an unbearable case of complacency. It may be that someone actually has blind spots in his perception of reality that lead to the fact that he is unable to recognize the contradictions in his thinking. This would be the landowner who has not managed to adapt his world view to the changed social circumstances. But it could also be that someone is proud to arrange the world as it suits him, accepting the violation of basic epistemic norms. This description fits well with a politician who cynically uses his power.

Of course, explaining the existence of a prejudice does not in any way mean legitimizing its existence. Even Twardowski's statement that prejudices are relics of the past does not change the fact that they remain what they are: preconceived and completely unjustified beliefs. But knowing that there are various explanations for how prejudices are preserved has not only a theoretical benefit. It is the basis for doing something about it. The measures taken in the fight against a prejudice must be based on whether or not it is a tragic mistake.

#### 4. The practical relevance of philosophical criticism

The theoretical analysis of prejudices can be limited to determining what makes prejudices epistemic failures, and making visible the norm violation that is associated with them. It is clear, however, that following such an analysis the question of its practical relevance arises: What can be done against such norm violations? This brings me back to the already mentioned view that it is useless to fight against prejudices. In any case, it is naive to believe that a critique of prejudices based on philosophical analysis can change anything about their persistence.

Pessimists are in a similarly comfortable position here as the skeptics in epistemology. They can use anything that analysis brings to light to justify their pessimism. For example, a pessimist might take Twardowski's analysis as confirmation that the project of enlightenment was bound to fail. Since people often behave irrationally, are prone to self-deception, and have a tendency to be complacent, they are inherently prone to epistemic failures. No philosophical insight will be able to change this. It only shows how rich our repertoire of pseudo-rationalizations is, with which we succeed in giving our prejudices the appearance of legitimacy.

Just like the skepticism in epistemology, there is no compelling argument against such a pessimistic attitude towards the project of the Enlightenment with which one could refute this view. However, one can show that there is another option. It consists in expanding the project: a critique of prejudice will only be successful if it is at the same time a critique of the pessimistic thesis that theoretical analysis is practically irrelevant.

That Twardowski advocates this option is shown by the already quoted plea with which he ends his lecture. It is clear from this that Twardowski does not want to leave the fight against prejudice to politicians, journalists, or other opinion leaders. Political or journalistic interventions can be important and effective in the short term. But we also need a long-term strategy to build a protective wall against prejudice. According to Twardowski, philosophy must assume this task together with all other sciences.<sup>7</sup>

But what does this more comprehensive program to combat prejudice look like? Twardowski makes three demands, which one might initially understand as demands on politicians. However, they are at the same time an appeal to philosophy to expand the criticism of prejudice

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<sup>7</sup> The role of philosophy as a long-term strategy against prejudices is also emphasized in (Madva 2020).

into a criticism of pessimism: First, Twardowski demands that the value of independent thought should be emphasized and promoted. Secondly, one should emphasize the value of scientific thinking and promote science. And third, one should emphasize the value of education and promote general education. There is more in these three demands than one might at first glance suspect. There is an inner connection between them, which gives these demands additional weight.<sup>8</sup>

Let us start with the demand for independent thinking. As plausible as this demand may sound at first, it does not fit in with the observation that people like to make themselves comfortable in their own world view. Twardowski's example of this was a landowner who did not want his son to become a merchant or actor. There is nothing in this example to suggest that the father lacks independent thinking. On the contrary, we can imagine this landowner as a man who is as proud of his intellectual independence as he is of his economic independence. This is precisely why he refuses to acknowledge that times have changed. So the demand for more autonomous thinking is going nowhere. But that does not make the demand any less meaningful. It only shows that one must additionally demand that autonomous thinking is measured against intersubjectively valid standards.

This leads us to Twardowski's second demand, to emphasize and promote the value of science. Scientific thinking is intersubjective by its very nature. Autonomous thinking that is oriented to the standards of science is therefore protected from idiosyncrasy. But here, too, a possible conflict is looming. There are probably criteria with which one can distinguish between science and pseudo-science, but to arm oneself against pseudo-rationalizations, more is needed. The history of science contains enough examples of how scientific methods have been used to prove, for example, that people of different races are differently intelligent. Not all of these studies can be immediately classified as pseudo-scientific, as the debate about the book *The Bell Curve* has shown (see Herrnstein et. al. 1995). So, what do you do if someone establishes a racist or sexist prejudice based on seemingly solid scientific evidence? There is no way around the realization that science is about more than just the truth. Science has practical effects that must be taken into account when evaluating its results. However, the evaluation situation is often not symmetrical: studies that do not find a relevant difference between races or genders often contribute little to reducing discrimination. By contrast, if studies show supposed differences,

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<sup>8</sup> With Twardowski, these three demands flow seamlessly into each other also when he treats them in more detail. See his lectures "On Mistakes of Thinking" and "Independence of Thinking" in (Twardowski 2014).

their publication demonstrably leads to even greater discrimination against the already disadvantaged group.

The conclusion must not, of course, be that studies should be suppressed or even banned because they could have adverse effects. Nevertheless, one must ask what the standards of intersubjective validity are if not all informed persons can agree. This is not to be expected in studies that contribute significantly to the discrimination of a group of people. No one in the disadvantaged group will believe these claims, however scientifically sound they may be. The demand for emphasis on value and for the promotion of scientific thinking can therefore also go nowhere. It only makes sense to take measures that see the value of science in the fact that in many cases, although not always, it produces results that any sufficiently informed person can accept.

This brings us to the third demand, the demand for general education. Everyone can agree that education is a great asset, which is why all modern societies invest large sums of money in the education of young people and in the training of adults. However, not everything can be bought through education. It would be naïve to assume that higher levels of education automatically go hand in hand with a decrease in prejudice.

We must therefore be aware that education can conflict with our moral concepts. Take, for example, the ability to justify one's behavior to others, but also to oneself. This ability promoted by education can also be used to turn untruths into their opposite. In this way, an educated anti-Semite could wonderfully explain why he is not an anti-Semite. Education alone is therefore no guarantee that people can better protect themselves against epistemic or moral errors. In particular, education can also contribute to the development of subtle forms of self-deception that make someone blind to their prejudices. The demand must therefore be a demand for an education that does not prevent people from trusting their simple cognitive instincts. Such instincts are often the best means to expose a downright lie, especially if they can unfold together with autonomous thinking. This closes the circle.

There is, I think, a lot in these considerations that can be held against those pessimists who doubt the practical relevance of philosophical arguments in the fight against prejudices. If one understands the demand for autonomous thinking and the promotion of science and education in such a way that they are dovetailed in the right way, then such an interaction of different

forces seems to be the right approach to push back the influence of prejudices in our society. Admittedly, the program is not new and has not yet given us a world without prejudices. But to conclude from this that prejudices are part of human nature and that our basic cognitive equipment is unchangeable in this respect is also nothing but a prejudice.

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