POLYSEMY IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

RACIST MONUMENTS IN DIVERSE SOCIETIES

BY

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Introduction
Removalism and Preservationism

P ublic monuments are complex features of public spaces in contemporary democracies.[1] Consider the statue of Sir John A. Macdonald that was once in front of City

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[1] Wikipedia has an extensive article on contentious Confederate monuments in the United States: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Removal_of_Confederate_monuments_and_memorials. Dan Demetriou and Ajume Wingo discuss the South African post-apartheid experience with racist memorials (2018). For a Canadian case, see news stories about the statue of Sir John A. Macdonald in Victoria, British Columbia. An example: Anthony 2018. On June 7, 2020, at the time of the writing of this paper, protestors, participating in the global anti-racism demonstrations in the wake of the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, toppled the statue of Edward Colston from the city centre of Bristol, UK, and dumped it in the harbour: Farrer 2020, Olusoga 2020. Although he was a benefactor to Bristol, Colston was a slave-trader directly responsible for the

Hall in Victoria, British Columbia. This statue had both retrospective and prospective functions, as do all such monuments. It was a public, official reminder of Macdonald's achievements. Where these are good, the memory is also straight-forwardly good. Macdonald was Canada's first Prime Minister and a central architect of Canada as an independent country; these are historical achievements worth celebrating. But Macdonald's legacy is not without blemish, so memorials to him serve also to remind us of the bad, and this is not necessarily unproblematic. Macdonald actively and cruelly controlled the Indigenous Peoples of Canada, especially in the West.[2] The placement of this statue in front of City Hall was an exacerbating feature of this mixed message. Requiring 21st century First Nations Canadians to walk past his monument to access civic services in Victoria made them face his legacy rather intimately. It is understandable that some would not welcome this.

The prospective function of such monuments is at least as important as their historical function. Statues of historical figures serve, ideally, to convey a shared sense of nationhood, of culture, and perhaps even of citizenship. When they work well, they serve social unity by forging a thick sense of social cohesion.[3] However, monuments can also serve to divide. They can preserve and even exacerbate cultural divisions. The message of Victoria's statue of Macdonald is not simply that all in this vicinity are Canadians, but also that some Canadians see others as, well, other, and as less

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sale of approximately 85-100000 slaves. On June 10, 2020, protesters toppled, and then police removed, a statue of Jefferson Davis in Richmond, Virginia. Davis was president of the Confederacy 1861-1865 (Beaumont 2020).

[2] Hopper 2018.

[3] Dan Demetriou presents the forging and reinforcement of social cohesion as the most important consideration in favour of leaving racist monuments *in situ* (2019). He casts this as a distinctively conservative concern, but progressives have reason to emphasize cohesion as well. See., e.g., Kymlicka 2015.

worthy of respect and protection than their fellow citizens. There is both a good vision of Canada and membership in Canadian culture here and a troubled and divisive one.

Complicating matters is the fact that not all people see all the messages that monuments send. Some people saw the statue of Sir John A. Macdonald as just about the origins of Canadian confederation, others saw it only as an insult to Indigenous Canadians. And when two people are indeed attuned to all various meanings of a statue, they do not necessarily weigh them in the same manner.

In the light of all this, it's no wonder that there is both public and academic debate about the moral and political status of such monuments. The challenge, in part, is how to sort through synchronous yet diverse interpretations of contentious monuments. So-called "preservationists" hold that such monuments belong in public spaces; where they are already found, we should preserve them. "Removalists" call for their removal from public spaces. The statue of Macdonald was placed in front of Victoria's City Hall in 1982. It was removed in 2018 after at least a year of discussion with local First Nations groups about the problematic aspects of Macdonald's legacy (Woo 2018). Removalists won this case, but other monuments remain after similar public debate. There has been vociferous discussion about statues of Robert E. Lee in Richmond and Charlottesville, Virginia. At one point the Charlottesville monument was shrouded, but a judge ordered the veil removed in 2018. The Governor of Virginia announced on June 4, 2020 that the Richmond statue would be

removed, but a judge blocked the removal on June 8.[4] Both remain in place as of the time of writing these words

I

Two Errors

Removalist and preservationist positions take various forms. It should be clear that these monuments are complex. However, simple forms of removalist and preservationist positions are sometimes taken, especially in public debate (rather than academic). Some preservationists insist just on the good – i.e., that some statue is at least a fitting reminder of a worthy historical figure and perhaps also a tool for giving local citizens a sense of community and culture. Some removalists argue that all that matters is the bad – i.e., that some memorialized figure was a racist, if not a slaveholder or even a supporter of genocide, and that hence he (typically) ought not to be celebrated. In addition, the on-going problem (be it harm or risk or insult; more on these below) due to the display of the statue in question is sometimes offered as exacerbating the disvalue of the monument and hence as further justifying its removal.

There's no denying that these simple preservationist and removalist positions give voice to legitimate considerations. However, they make a conceptual error in their very simplicity. Indeed, they make the same conceptual error. We have seen the complexity characteristic of these monuments. This is what makes them objects of public discussion: if they were simple, there would be nothing to discuss. However, the simple preservationist and

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[4]   1)   https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52920610;   2) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_E._Lee_Monument_(Charlottesville,_Virginia)#Proposed_removal; 3) Stracqualursi 2020.

removalist approaches neglect this complexity and over-emphasize just one aspect of the monuments under scrutiny.

In particular, monuments of racist historical figures are complex symbols. It is *as symbols* that they bear (dis)value. Given this, it is worth considering their symbolic nature. Generally, C.S. Peirce's account of the nature of representation applies to symbols.[5] For something to be a symbol, it must stand for something to an interpreter, and there must be some particular ground for the interpretation of the symbol. Convention, stipulation, resemblance and causal connection can all function as the ground of interpretation of a symbol; there may be other possible grounds as well. Simple preservationists interpret statues of racist historical figures in one way, on one ground; simple removalists interpret them in another way. The conceptual error that these positions make is to insist on monosemy where there is in fact polysemy. They do this either directly, by insisting that there's just one way to see these monuments, or indirectly, by insisting that a particular interpretation is all that matters.

Besides the conceptual error, these simple positions make a political error as well. The simple preservationist position concerned only with history and the forging of group cohesion says that *this* is who *we* are (and, sometimes, that *this other thing* is who *you* are, but this is not a necessary feature of these positions). The simple removalist position says that *our* ancestors were oppressed by this person and that *we* are harmed or insulted or put at risk by the display of this image. In other words, both simple sides interpret these complex symbols via an understanding of their own identity. To insist on understanding a complex monument through

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[5] Peirce worked on his theory of signs for his whole career. We need not go into Peircean details for present purposes. A good sense of the nuances of Peirce's work is found in Atkin 2013.

the lens of a particular identity (be it national, regional, racial, ethnic, or whatever) is a *de facto* power move. It amounts to saying *we and not you* get to say what's what here, to set the terms of discourse. This is a betrayal of the liberal commitment to equality and neutrality regarding understandings of what counts as good in life. This is why I cast it as a mistake.[6]

II

Identity: Psychology and Ways of Living

Identity should figure centrally in debate about the moral and political status of racist monuments. However, it should do so only in a politically acceptable and conceptually defensible manner. In particular, claims made about identity in these discussions must be conceptually compatible with and politically receptive to the polysemy of these statues.

Here is my suggestion: such conceptually and politically acceptable territory can be found if we distinguish different sorts of claim that might be made about identity. On one hand, we can speak of "psychological" identity (PI)–i.e., of how people conceive of their character, their personality, their understanding of themselves and the broader world. Let's say that PI is determined by the beliefs, desires, emotions, and attitudes that people have about who they are. On the other hand we can speak of identity in terms of what I will call "ways of living" (WoL) – i.e., of the kinds of lives people want to live, or, even stronger, as the kind of life to pursue. PI claims are individualistically focused – they are about properties of individual people. "Way of living" is here used in a

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[6] I take a liberal political framework for granted in what follows. I will note some places where this assumption particularly matters.

deliberately vague manner, but we should interpret WoL claims as more widely focused. These claims are centrally about behavior, both individual and in patterns, much of which will be conducted in essentially interpersonal contexts. Ways of living are naturally associated with ethnic and national groups, but they come in a wider variety of forms than this. Religious groups, political ones, philosophical commitments, sporting interests, artistic tendencies, culinary preferences, individual quirks: all can take the form of ways of living. Whether they are politically relevant will depend on contextual contingencies. Note well: the issue is the sort of interpretation of identity that we should make in political discourse. It is not the metaphysical issue of how to understand personal identity.

Something like but not exactly the same as the distinction between PI and WoL is found in contemporary political thought about identity. For instance, Akeel Bilgrami distinguishes between "subjective" and "objective" identity (e.g., 2006, 2015). The subjective identity of a person is determined by how she conceives of herself (Bilgrami 2006, 5) or by what she identifies with (Bilgrami 2015, 521). Objective identity is independent of such self-conception or identification. While there may be objective aspects to ways of living–a topic to which we will return in Section IV – these are not necessarily independent of how a subject conceives of herself. So both PI and WoL belong most properly on the subjective side of Bilgrami's ledger. The difference is that identity conceived of in terms of PI is private, a matter of how one thinks, whereas identity conceived of in terms of WoL is public, a matter of how one behaves.

Here is an example to sharpen what is meant by PI and WoL as interpretations of common talk of identity. Imagine someone who has grown up in an observant Catholic family in a broader Catholic community. However, this person has lost her religious faith: she

no longer believes in gods, miracles, the supernatural, *etc.* Nor does she lament her change in belief; she is content to be free of those concerns. Given her connections to her family and community, however, she keeps her disbelief to herself. She still attends church, says the words and makes the movements characteristic of public prayers and rituals, marks the religious holidays that all her neighbours mark, and more. Partly this is a matter of habit, partly of fitting in, but in an important sense this woman still wants to do these things. She sees these kinds of behavior as worth performing, just not in the same way that she once did.

What should we say about who this woman is? I'm inclined to think that the answer is multifaceted. On one hand, it makes sense to say that she is an atheist. She is a closeted atheist, but this is still a way of being an atheist. An important set of her beliefs and preferences concerns her withdrawal of endorsement from religious concerns. This is identity with a narrow focus on PI, the psychological aspects of who people are. At the same time, this woman continues in a Catholic way of living. She does the things that Catholics do, and she does so in a manner publicly indistinguishable from her believing neighbours.

If we lean *really* heavily on the difference between PI and WoL, we would say that there is a complete gap between them for this woman. This might lead us to identify identity with PI: this woman is an atheist, not a Catholic. There is something to this. However, we need not insist on such a rigid division, and hence we need not say that this woman is *really* an atheist, and *not really* a Catholic. For one thing, this woman's WoL is only partly a matter of discretion and social conformity. It has psychological aspects as well: she still sees and feels, e.g., the spring season to be the time to do Easter things. We can expect this woman's Catholic context to shape the beliefs and preferences that she has even as an atheist. It is sometimes said that there are no atheists *per se*, but rather Catholic

atheists, protestant ones, Jewish ones, and so on. What this person rejects is at least her previous Catholic understanding of the nature of god. She might also reject more abstractly construed religious notions, but her disbelief need not be explicitly about these. For another thing, why should we not say that this woman is a kind of Catholic? If to be a Catholic is to do certain sorts of things, then she satisfies this criterion. Indeed, the sincerity of the belief of someone who claimed to be a Catholic while never doing any Catholic-style things – that is, without doing anything characteristic of a Catholic way of living – could well be in question.[7] So, while there is some pressure to equate identity with PI, I think that we should resist this inclination.[8]

In the light of all this, consider someone facing a statue. Imagine that this person says, "I see this in this way," or, "I feel this about this statue." These are statements of belief and feeling. If it made sense to interpret them as rooted in the person's identity, then we would be using psychological aspects of identity to provide the grounds of interpretation of the monument. Such claims tend to be conversationally inert, as even these abstract remarks suggest; it's pointless, even rude, to question them. They are statements of how something is, psychologically, and hence they are not naturally

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[7] Since she does Catholic things, one might well question this woman's sincerity with regard to atheism. But to insist that she is not really an atheist either is to lean too far in the other direction.

[8] This is not a knockdown argument, of course. Someone who wants to equate identity with individualistically construed psychological states can interpret the argument to come in a more stringent manner than it is offered here. I will argue for interpreting identity, and hence identity politics, in terms of discourse about ways of living. Instead, it could be taken as an argument for replacing the discourse of identity, and hence identity politics, with claims about ways of living.

open to requests for justification. Explanation might be useful for making clear the nature of the feeling or view in question (or other details about an interpretation grounded in a psychologically construed context), but that would be the likely end of conversation about the remark about the statue. When identity is conceived in terms of such psychological items, remarks that invoke identity can function as a conversation stopper.[9]

The claims sketched so far are first-person singular ones. Such claims can be made for both removalist and preservationist positions. Consider "As an African-American, I feel insulted by this monument" and "This statue speaks for my Canadian values" as respective examples. I suspect that PI claims will typically be made in the singular first-person, but they need not be. PI issues can be the grounds of third-person interpretations of monuments as well. "Those people see me as a second-class citizen" and "Opponents of this statue have no respect for history" are examples, again of both removalist and preservationist sides. Moreover, PI claims need not be synchronous, although they often will be. When the monuments in question are old, there is room for PI-based interpretation of the originators of a statue. This can be done by both removalists and preservationists. When one is the target of a third-person PI attribution, there is some room for

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[9] One of the most vivid forms this takes is in claims of offense. To claim that a racist monument offends one is, on its face, to offer one's feelings as legitimate grounds for change and/or redress in an interpersonal sphere. Such a claim is rarely an opening for a complex discussion about the monument in question, although, strictly speaking, it could be. See Sneddon 2021 for an extended examination of the nature and significance of offense. Demetriou & Wingo describe a group of offense-based objections to racist monuments (2018, 344-7). In overlapping territory, Jeremy Waldron (2012) takes pains to reject offense-based interpretations of the problem with hate speech in favour of a diagnosis of the obstacle such speech erects to full and equal living in democratic societies.

conversation, but not much. One can deny the claim, or one can accept it as it is, or one can claim that it is misleading as it stands but worth proper reinterpretation. Once such clarifications are made, they can either be accepted as sincere or rejected as insincere, and that's about it: conversation ends.

Now let's consider invocations of ways of living instead. Rather than individualistically construed psychological items, WoL claims focus on actions, either singly or as patterns, and the shared world in which contentious monuments are found. In principle, and as with PI claims, WoL claims can be made in both the first and third person, and they can be deployed for both removalist and preservationist purposes. However, since WoL claims often focus on an essentially interpersonal domain, many of them are first-person plural, including those in favour of a monument, those against it, and even some apt for use by either side. "This statue makes it hard to be a Jew around here" is likely to be used as a first-person complaint about a monument, but it could be used by an anti-Semite in favour of preservation of a statue. "We shouldn't live in ways that include images like that" is inclusive of all people in the relevant locale, regardless of sympathies for the monument in question. Likewise for its negation: "We should have public monuments to our shared history." The third person statement, "Those people are trying to drive us out of here" is most likely to be used by opponents of a newly erected monument, but it could be used by preservationists objecting to the removal of a long-standing monument. "Those people are trying to return to the way they lived in the past" is purely third person, but "Those people are trying to return to the way we lived in the past" is first person plural in an important sense. The latter statement is most likely to be used by removalists who fear a return to an oppressive social arrangement, but it could be used by someone who laments attempts to setback recent departures from a more egalitarian past.

Crucially, such claims naturally invite scrutiny and requests for justification. A claim that a statue makes a certain sort of life difficult, or that we should collectively live in a way that includes public historical monuments, trains the attention on spaces and activities shared by interlocutors. There is nothing odd or rude about asking about the nature of the obstacle purportedly faced due to a statue, or about why we should choose to live with public monuments rather than without them. Where PI claims tend to stop discussion, WoL claims tend to keep it going.

A couple of nuances are worth noting in passing. First, such claims as, "Those people are trying to drive us out of here" have an explicitly psychological component–the "trying", in this case–as well as a public, action component. Second, consider such claims as "There should be public monuments to our shared history." Strictly speaking this is ambiguous. I think that the best interpretation will typically be one in terms of action – i.e., about at least having monuments but more likely also endorsing, seeking, and erecting them – and hence about a way of living. The status of a claim as about a way of living need not be obvious. However, a PI interpretation may be apt sometimes: "I want there to be public historical monuments." Both of these nuances serve as reminders that the distinction between PI and WoL concerns will not always be crisp.

III

Assessing Claims about Ways of Living

Given all of the above, I suggest that discussion about racist monuments should be either pursued explicitly in terms of ways of living or, what is more likely, interpreted as being about ways of living that are being pursued jointly and overlappingly in a shared space. Although it is in principle possible for an understanding of

a way of living to pertain only to private spaces, this is deeply unlikely. Instead, we perform our ways of living to some significant degree in essentially shared spaces. Since WoL claims tend to be about ways of behaving in public,[10] they are naturally open to requests for justification. To insist on PI claims mattering in discourse about shared spaces is at least to risk a version of the political error already noted: fairness requires openness to request for justification in public discourse, yet PI claims resist justificatory probing. The preservationist, whether simple or complex, advances one understanding of a way of living; the removalist offers another. The discursive and practical issue now is how to adjudicate such disagreements about ways of living.

We have already seen one way that ways of living contribute to discussion of racist monuments: by providing particular grounds of their interpretation. To over-simplify: The white Anglo-Saxon protestant history buff sees Sir John A. Macdonald's statue as a tribute to a Father of Confederation and hence as fostering a way of living that remembers such achievements and pursues the continuation of the values found there, such as unity across cultural (French vs English) and geographical (Canada is vast!) differences. The Indigenous Canadian sees it as reminder of (all but) attempted genocide and hence as constituting a way of life involving different and unequal classes of citizens, and insensitivity to race-based suffering and loss. These interpretations are over-simplifications if only because there is no reason to think that there's a single white Anglo-Saxon protestant or Indigenous Canadian understanding of this statue. Putting this aside, the starting point for anything like

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[10] Some interpret discourse about "public" spaces as necessarily political. I don't mean this, even though political themes and relations matter for the present topic. By "public" I mean "shared". See Adut 2018 on these issues.

adequate and productive public discussion about such statues will require the collection and public consideration of such interpretations. In some cases, perhaps even many, this will involve the formal articulation of such interpretations from rather more inchoate starting points. Interestingly, this in turn will amount to formulation of a conception of the way of living in question. The more the starting point is unarticulated, the more that this process will require reflection on and even constitutive decision about the very nature of the way of living in question. There is no reason to expect people to be operating will clear-eyed understandings of their own ways of living; I suspect that none of us do completely.

As I say, the formulation and collection of such interpretations (both of monuments and of ways of living) is only the first step. The second is to reflect on the relevant claims about the meaning of the monuments and the ways of living, and to adjudicate their differences as much as possible. Here we find another opportunity for ways of living to frame discourse about racist monuments: by constituting reference points for finding the relevant terms of justification. Such terms of justification can be grouped into two classes of questions. These questions are directed primarily but not necessarily exclusively at the interpretations of the monuments in question collected in step one.

The first set of questions raises issues internal to a particular way of living. For a monument understood in a specific way, we can ask what it, taken in this way, is doing for the way of life of the proponents of this specific interpretation. Is it centrally important to this way of living, or is it relatively peripheral? For instance, suppose that a statue is endorsed for preservation on the basis of the significance of living in places where there are public markers of historical achievements of various kinds. We should ask whether this particular statue is vital to such public marking in this locale. Would another, non-racist monument do the historical job that is

emphasized here? Are there already many such monuments in this region, such that the job of doing public marking of history is well distributed across them? Or are there very few, such that this statue is doing a lot of the emphasized work?

Part of what is being probed by these questions is the feasibility of the monument for executing the function identified for it in the interpretation in question. Dan Demetriou emphasizes the forging of social cohesion as the most significant preservationist consideration (2019). This is at least as much a prospective function as it is a retrospective one of marking history, so questions about the suitability of a particular monument understood in a particular way for carrying out this function are particularly apt. The more contentious a monument is, the less suitable it will be for bringing about social cohesion, at least of a wide-ranging variety. I have focused on the statue of Sir John A. Macdonald in Victoria because I'm Canadian, but the length and extent of the discord over this statue pales in contrast to that found for the Virginia statues of Robert E. Lee. The ability of statues of Lee to bring about social cohesion of a wide sort should be thought to be less impressive than that of the now-removed statue of Macdonald. Indeed, rather than wide-ranging social cohesion, we should inquire as to whether these statues are more apt for creating or exacerbating existing social divisions. Statues of Lee can be expected to unite those who see themselves as proud descendants of the confederacy, but they cannot be reasonably expected to include those who see themselves as living in a way continuous with that of African-American slaves under the same regime. Or, they cannot be reasonably expected to include them in the same way; they might be included but with an uneven, even oppressed status. "Cohesion" is an evaluatively neutral term; some of the ways in which it might be brought about will take the unwelcome form of the extension of the chains of the past, rather than the welcome form of the hand-holding of solidarity.

The same sorts of questions should be raised for removalist claims. Removalists contend that racist statues are problematic in one or more ways because of what they symbolize. So, we should ask whether a particular interpretation conveys a serious problem or a mild one. Travis Timmerman argues that the most significant moral problem found in the public display of racist statues is the emotional suffering that they cause (2019). To assess such a worry some empirical data are needed, to establish that people do indeed suffer due to a given monument, understood in the way advanced in some removalist claim. Then we need to probe a little deeper and inquire as to whether the suffering is serious or superficial. Mild discomfort is one thing, traumatizing distress another (both morally and psychologically speaking). Then, as with preservationist considerations, we should ask whether removal of the statue in question would alleviate the suffering. The empirical details collected can reveal nuances that bear on this issue. If the statue is the whole of the problem, then removal might indeed do the job, as the remaining site now lacks the cause of the way-of-living-based suffering. But if the particular statue is not the whole problem – e.g., if there are others in the area that are equally problematic, or if the area itself is a source of suffering, as a former slave plantation might be – then its removal might not really address the suffering in question.

Emotional suffering is not the only relevant sort of moral problem that can be the grounds of a removalist argument; turning to other considerations is illuminating regarding ways of living and the interpretation of public monuments. Besides suffering, one might claim that a statue ought to be removed because it insults some people who live near it. The moral significance of insult does not derive solely from the suffering that it causes. One can be insulted, and this can be problematic, without one even knowing about it. Let's say, roughly and for practical purposes, that an insult is an expressive failure with regard to the moral status of a person

directly or indirectly characterized by the expression in question. That statues are expressive should not really be in doubt, given that all agree, at least implicitly, that they are symbols that send messages either via the intentions of their creators or via their public display by their originators or through other channels, including but not limited to public stipulative and/or conventional appropriation. That such symbols can be insulting should also not be in doubt. For instance, remarking not about racist monuments but about cartoons of Muhammed, Hamid Karzai, then-President of Afghanistan, claimed that "Any insult to the holy prophet (peace be upon him) is an insult to more than one billion Muslims." (*New York Times* 2006; quoted in Neu 2008, 207). Put in terms of ways of living, the claim would be that such symbols are insults to those who live a Muslim way of living. Presumably, statues of Muhammed would be seen by Karzai as a similar sort of insult. Accordingly, that statues of Robert E. Lee, John A. Macdonald, Edward Colston, or Cecil Rhodes (see Demetriou & Wingo 2018) might be perceived as insulting to African Americans, First Nations Canadians, Black people in Britain, or Black Africans (respectively) is quite plausible.

When such a claim is advanced as a reason to consider removing a statue, we should ask versions of the questions that we have already seen. Is the insult delivered via disrespect of something central to one's way of living, or via something relatively peripheral? A statue that can be taken as an insult due to the way it characterizes, explicitly or implicitly, an arcane and little known Christian symbol would perform its insulting function through something peripheral to the ways of living of most Christians, but a statue that delivered an insult through the symbol of the cross would address something centrally important to, arguably, all possible Christian ways of living. Likewise, we should ask whether the insult is mild or grave. Historical and even aesthetic contingencies will matter here. Finally (for now), we should ask

whether removal of the statue would provide redress for the insult. It often will, it seems to me, but we ought not take it for granted that this is the case.

Insults are tricky, morally speaking. We tend to think that they matter morally, and yet, when we come to think about why, it can be difficult to articulate a plausible serious moral problem with them. However, in practice insults, especially the kind presented by racist monuments, are not merely expressive failures concerning the moral status of those characterized, even indirectly, by the statue. They can also have material consequences or, more subtly, threaten to have them. That is, something that is plausibly taken as insulting can also often be plausibly taken as posing a risk. Risk can be problematic independently of the direct consequences of the insult, or other action, in question. For instance, if you put me at risk by your manner of driving, such that I regularly worry about my safety and have to spend extra time and resources to protect myself from you, then my life is made worse by your putting me at risk even if you never hit me with your car. Even worse, clearly, is the combination of me taking these costly measures and you still managing to hurt me. An insulting monument can be a source of risk, and typically the risk will be due in large part to the insulting nature of the monument. This is the sort of thing that Jeremy Waldron emphasizes (without particular attention to racist statues) in *The Harm in Hate Speech* (2012). Roughly, his concern is that public speech that erodes the assurances of some people that they are respected as equal members of society can erode their ability to function publicly as equal members of society. Likewise, a statue that commemorates attempts to oppress, to enslave, even to exterminate groups of people identified in a particular way hardly sends a benign message regarding people seen as having a way of living continuous with the historical targets. To both these people themselves and to those who do or might hate them, the message is that not all are equal here, nor will they be treated as such, and

even that efforts might be taken to decrease their social status, including at the most extreme their physical safety.

Accordingly, when the risk that a statue putatively poses is offered as a reason to remove it, a suite of questions arises. How serious is the risk? The relative centrality of the symbolic characterization of the target of the risk might well not matter much to this. Rather, social contingencies will matter more. A statue that overtly denigrates First Nations Canadians might not pose much of a risk in a locale where there is widespread and institutionalized respect for them. A statue with a very obscure insult to African Americans might be a source of a significant risk if the local surroundings contain other sources of risk–unreliable laws and policing, animosity among the citizenry, and so on. These considerations affect the feasibility of addressing the risk by removing the statue in question. Ironically, where there is the greatest risk, it seems to me that the effect of removal is likely to be unimpressive. Still, this method of mitigating risk might well still be worth it, all things considered (more on the extent of "all" below).

I have focused on removalist arguments that deploy ideas about harm, insult and risk. In principle, however, such concerns are available to preservationists as well. Timmerman's concern is that the public display of a racist monument can cause emotional suffering. However, so might the removal of the monument. A potential and likely difference between these arguments is that the display of a monument is an on-going affair, whereas the removal of a monument is a temporally brief event. Still, those who remember a beloved monument now gone might find exposure to its absence a cause of distress. The public display of a racist monument is a standing insult to certain ways of living. The removal of such a statue can be an insult to other ways of living. Finally, just as a racist statue can pose a risk to the social standing

of some people, its removal can pose a risk to the standing of others. I shall return to these points once more considerations about the conversation about monuments and ways of living are in place.[11]

So far I have been identifying questions that might be asked about monuments on the basis of their interpretation in the light of particular ways of living. Ways of living provide another set of questions germane to assessment of these monuments, however: these are questions external to particular ways of living. There are three subsets of external questions. One thing that should be done is to assess the collection of interpretations as a whole: are some of these more or less apt than others? Are some interpretations more or less central to the nature of monument than others? We should not expect clear answers in all cases; interpretation of complex symbols is not something that is done once and for all, so periodic reinterpretation should be expected, even welcomed. Nevertheless, this does not imply that all interpretations are necessarily equal. It's implausible to argue that an image of a swastika is not about Nazis, that an image of a cross is not distinctively Christian, and that a statue of someone who sold slaves should not be taken as a reminder of this. These images, especially in complex forms, might also signify other things, but polysemy is compatible with the relative centrality of some meanings and unimportance of others. Robert E. Lee is much more a symbol of the confederacy and the institution of slavery than John A. Macdonald is of oppression of aboriginal Canadians, although they are both these sorts of symbols. It's not unrealistic to think that, for some cases, the removalist or preservationist position will be found superior to the alternative simply because of the symbolic nature of the monuments in question.

[11] See Sneddon 2016 on symbols, risks, and insults.

Another subset of external questions raises what I shall call "objective" concerns regarding the interpretations generated by the ways of living in question. These concerns are objective as they are not generated by particular ways of living and, indeed, apply to all of them. One sort of question concerns the truth/falsity of interpretation. Imagine a removalist who claims that a commemorated historical figure pursued genocide of Indigenous North Americans, or a preservationist argument that represents someone as an important political figure. Showing that these interpretations are false ought to matter. Some public and academic discord over racist statues seems to turn on differences in ideas about the historical facts, so getting clear about just who did what is directly relevant. This does not mean that historical accuracy can be expected to settle issues. It won't for figures with a complex history. Colston *really was* a slave-trader and *really did* a lot of good for Bristol; knowing this does not imply anything specific about his statue. Nor will a clear view of history settle complex interpretative issues. For one thing, where stipulation and appropriation are involved, a monument can be reinterpreted by the standards of those with a particular way of living such that it has a new meaning. Such new meanings are likely to be relatively peripheral, but they need not be: they could become a central way of seeing the image in question. For another thing, the grounds of interpretation of a monument need not be strictly dictated by the physical or pictorial qualities of the monument itself. Suppose that a racist group puts up a monument to someone who was not a racist. Targets of this group who know of the origins of this monument could well see it as racist, as it signifies, in part, the public clout of this racist group.

Concerns about truth and falsity of interpretations of monuments are, let's say, "theoretical" concerns, as they have to do with the accuracy of various beliefs. There are also objective "political" concerns to be addressed – i.e., concerns having to do

with power arrangements among people who live together. The people in question are to be grouped in terms of the ways of living acknowledged to be relevant to whatever monument is under scrutiny. The central political issue is whether the presence or absence of racist monuments in public spaces gives the people in the relevant locale a fair chance at participating in the public sphere as members of their respective ways of living. The problems posed by statues can be due to their location as much as their meaning. A large part of the problem with Victoria's statue of Sir John A. Macdonald was its spot at the door (!) of City Hall, requiring people to pass very close by in order to get access to civic services. A racist monument stuck in a dark corner of town where it is unlikely to be noticed functions differently than this. Cultural and institutional contingencies matter as well. Where a society is fraught with racial divisions, a statue of a famous racist poses a live practical problem. But in a society where such racist problems are genuinely mild, the display of such a monument poses much less of a problem to the public participation of people who identify with the way of living of the targets of the racist figure. Likewise, if there is an institutional initiative of ameliorating racist problems – e.g., of unifying South Africa post-Apartheid or of carrying out Justin Trudeau's declared interest in improving Canada's relations with First Nations Canadians – then the public display of monuments of historical racists can function as an unwelcome obstacle to these projects. Since such projects aim at vouchsafing the status of racialized citizens as political equals, stumbling blocks for these projects are equally impediments to political equality. Where there are no such initiatives, then such statues cannot be such obstacles either, for better and for worse.

There is one more subset of external questions to address. Besides issues either a) pertinent to relations between particular ways of living, or b) objective with regard to ways of living, there are issues that c) have been (and continue to be) the product of

political discussion among ways of living. Interpersonal discourse about how to live together has generated some results. Such things as the relevance of harm as a justification for interpersonal interference in behavior, the significance of freedom of speech, and the legal importance of formal equality have the status of reasonably well-shared touchstones for on-going political discourse. To be sure, the details of these reference points are vexed, and their very status as achievements is tenuous. Regardless, we find in such a group of (sort of) agreed upon liberal values the materials for assessing the contesting claims about monuments generated by ways of living.[12] To a certain extent, raising these questions can involve asking whether a way of living itself is worth fostering or preserving in a particular form. If a *sine qua non* of a particular way of living is a repudiation of wide freedom of speech, or a suspension of endorsement with regard to a view of citizens as equals in the eyes of the law, then political discourse about racist monuments that addresses these values might deliver the verdict that a particular way of living cannot be allowed to continue to be pursued in particular place. There is no *a priori* reason to expect all removalist and preservationist arguments to be consistent with either the pursuit or the ideals of liberal democracy.

IV

Must We Endorse Our Own Ways of Living?

Identity claims have a natural place in discussion of the moral and political status of racist monuments. My claim has been that,

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[12] Since I am constraining my attention to liberal political contexts, this sort of issue is external to particular ways of living. But if we were considering wider political possibilities, then this sort of issue would be internal to a liberal way of living. My thanks to a referee for pushing me on this issue.

in order to be theoretically and politically acceptable, these claims should be understood in terms of ways of living (WoL) rather than in terms of the beliefs and desires we have about ourselves – i.e., identity psychologically construed (PI). PI claims are focused on individuals, whereas WoL claims concern behavior in the wider, shared world. Still, we ought not to divorce way of living claims from psychology *too* deeply. This gives rise to a theoretically subtle and practically important question: in order to have a way of living, must we recognize and endorse it as such? Since "way of living" is here offered as a framework for understanding identity, this question can be reframed: must we recognize and endorse features of our own identity in order for them to be such features? What makes me me?[13]

There is reason to be pulled in both directions on this question. On one hand, there is much to be said about centrally interpreting identity in terms of what shows up in our self-conceptions. We might well think that nobody has a better epistemic perspective on our identities than ourselves. "You don't know me!" is recognized as a legitimate if juvenile claim in interpersonal, politically relevant discourse. The implication is that the speaker knows herself because her identity is evident to her. The more that identity is understood in terms of beliefs and desires, the more that such a view is plausible.

On the other hand, there are various things to be said in favour of the view that our identities are not necessarily obvious to us, and that hence we need not recognize or endorse something for it to be part of who we are. If our identities are due, whether in small or large part, to biology, or to history, or to cultural surroundings, then we can have an identity (to whatever extent) without recognizing it as either who one is or the product of one or other

[13] Bilgrami gives extended attention to endorsement and identity (2006, 2015).

of these sources. The more that identity is understood in terms of ways of doing things rather than in terms of the contents of a private psychological space, the more that this is plausible. The identities of very young children are illustrative of the issues here. The more that we want to say that such children don't have identities, then the more we will be able to say that who we are depends upon our reflective recognition of our own identities. The more that we want to say that such children have specific identities, then the more we will be able to say that identity does not require reflective recognition: it is given and discovered, not made. The more that we want to say that such children are forming their own identities or figuring out who they are, then the more complex and nuanced is the array of theoretical possibilities open to us, including both individualistically construed psychological aspects and publicly located behavioral ones.

Here is why this issue matters. If we must recognize and endorse an identity-constituting way of living in order for it to be our own, then other people have very little power to impose ways of living on us in ways that affect who we are. The weaker the reflective psychological constraints on such ways of living, the more they can be imposed on us by others.

Symbolic aspects of ways of living are particularly important to think about here, and not just because my topic is the polysemy of racist monuments. There is some reason to think that ways of living tend to be symbolically facilitated. That is, evaluatively loaded symbols matter, at least, to many ways of living; they might even partly constitute them. Can a Christian way of living be completely divorced from the symbol of the cross? I have my doubts. Hamid Karzai's remark about cartoons of Muhammed suggests that certain ways of symbolizing Muslim concerns are deeply insulting to people with a Muslim way of living: the production and display of symbols of this sort are inconsistent with

unproblematic coexistence with Muslims. Where there is this sort of symbolic power, there is also the possibility for some people to shape the way of living of others by deeply influencing their symbolic environment. When a certain symbol matters to *your* way of living and *I* affect how you interpret it, regardless of whether you welcome or even recognize this effect, then I have shaped your way of living. The more deeply and extensively some people do this to others, the more we might want to say that a way of living has been imposed via such semantic power.[14]

This provides the materials for a general removalist argument. Consider racist statues in public spaces. The presence and interpretation of such monuments affects the ways of living of the people in the vicinity via symbolic processes. The statues are interpreted in various ways by all who deal with them. Part of the meaning of these symbols is the messages conveyed both to and about those who are identified as belonging to the targeted way of living. These messages are, in part, "Here is how you will be seen and treated around here." and "Here's how you are expected to act/react around here." The targeted people are forced, with and without recognition, to interpret their own social standing in the terms shaped by these public monuments. This amounts to the imposition, at least in part, of a way of living on these people. Since the monuments in question are in the public sphere, a sphere over which, by liberal standards, no group has a prior right of control, they are politically problematic. Any way of living which endorses or, worse, insists on the public display of these monuments inherits this problematic status.

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[14] Glenn Loury argues that the very idea of race is subject to such symbolic effects (2002, 2003). If he is correct, then anyone with a racialized way of living is open to the shaping of their identity *qua* racialized by those who wield power over how race in general and their race in particular are interpreted.

The case is different for ways of living that call for removal of such statues. When these monuments are removed, the power of some to impose ways of living on others is reduced. One might think that this involves problematic imposition of a way of living upon those who call for the statues to be preserved, but this is not the case. The way of living that is imposed on those who would display the statue is only one that cannot really be avoided in any liberal society: that of acting in ways in the public sphere that respect others as equally deserving participants in that sphere. The others whose equality is vouchsafed by removal of the statue are not thereby given disproportionate control over how to live in this essentially shared space. The removal of a barrier to such equality might well be received as an unwelcome imposition by those who once had extra control over this space, but this implies nothing about whether the imposition is illegitimate.

Are there any materials with which to construct a general preservationist argument? While Demetriou might be correct that social cohesion is the most important consideration in favour of preserving racist monuments, it cannot function as a general reason favouring preservation everywhere. When monuments rigidify intra-community divisions – e.g., between African-Americans and White Southerners – then, while they might foster sub-community (i.e., sub-city, state, country-level) cohesion, they will simultaneously erode unity at a higher level. Instead, I think that the value of freedom of expression is more promising for furbishing the materials for a general preservationist argument. Statues are expressive objects; in societies that explicitly value freedom of expression (as all should), there is a general reason to favour permitting a wide array of forms of expression. Historical monuments clearly fall into this array, for both their retrospective and prospective functions.

Which of these two standing arguments should take priority? Rather than the preservationist position based on freedom of expression, it is the general removalist position based on equality in public spaces that should be prioritized. The general removalist argument rests on the idea that no people have priority over others, *ceteris paribus*, in genuinely shared spaces. Thus, the nature of these spaces constrains ways of living from the outside: ways of behaving must be shaped to respect the interpersonal equality of rights of access to and use of public spaces. By contrast, the value of free expression derives from the ways in which such freedom serves our interests, whether as speakers, as auditors, or as bystanders. Human interests are diverse, so sometimes they must be balanced against each other. Different individuals and groups–i.e., different ways of living–strike different balances among the weights given both to these interests and to the means of serving them, including expression. Where ways of living meet and disagree about these weights, it is legitimate for the people in question to negotiate how to live together. This will require compromising about how to value such things as freedom of expression in shared spaces. This amounts to the devising of a shared way of living, at least in part. In short, the specific value of freedom of expression at particular times and places is internal to ways of living and the shape that these give to the interests from which the significance of expression is derived. Hence it is subject to such external constraints on ways of living as those imposed by the interpersonal nature of shared spaces, rather than being more fundamental than these constraints.[15]

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[15] Shared participation in public spaces is more fundamental since I am taking a liberal political framework for granted. Things are less clear where we imagine such a framework to be itself in question. It is theoretically possible for people to value free speech more than political equality. While this might be practically

This general removalist argument is hostage to two ideas that deserve further examination and defense. The first is the one that I have raised but not settled: whether we can have ways of living imposed upon us. I am inclined to think that we can, but the issues are complex and I will not insist on the final word here. The second under-defended idea is that we cannot legitimately, or even practically, avoid the way of living of, let's say, the democratic citizen in a diverse space in liberal political contexts. I am confident that the issues relevant to this contention are also complex. Without being able to work through these ideas, this general removalist position is offered only as *prima facie* and suggestive.

Conclusion

Verdicts, Symbols, and the Slippery Slope

If we stand back from the details, here's what all of the above amounts to. Racist monuments are found in public spaces. People of various kinds share these spaces; by liberal standards, they are equally entitled to this. Our historical, cultural, political and expressive lives are complex, so these statues have a less-than-obvious moral and political status. In order to determine which statues, if any, should be removed and which, if any, should be preserved, we need information about how these statues enter people's ways of living: how they are understood, what effects they have, and more. Where there are conflicts between what these symbols do for the various people who share the space in which they are found, we need to do the hard work of thinking about which understandings of these statues seem the best-founded and which effects seem the most important to allow or prevent. Where

unlikely, I imagine that history can offer us examples of actual societies with such an arrangement.

a racist statue isn't terribly important to anyone but poses a large problem, and especially where its historical accuracy is wanting, then it should come down. Where a racist statue is beloved and doesn't pose much of a problem, especially when its historical lesson is otherwise accurate and worth applauding, then it should remain.

Particularly important are statues that don't fall in these neat categories. Where a statue is both *deeply* valued and *deeply* problematic, and when other considerations are also in balance, then its moral and political status should be thought to be unclear, but only for now. The temporal qualification is important, as it reminds us of the complex polysemy of these monuments and hence of the lively and on-going interpretations and reinterpretations of their meaning. So long as people live complex lives in the space in which such monuments are found, they will assess and reassess just what they symbolize. There's no natural end to such symbolic interpretation. There is no ceiling on the number of grounds of interpretation that may be brought to bear on these monuments by the people dealing with them. Grey cases can become clear, and vice versa. We should expect a growing case for the removal of monuments that are currently accepted, I predict. All of this is to say that the nature and significance of the messages sent by racist monuments are essentially contestable. Accepting this requires that we receive the products of the discourse about these monuments in a spirit of intellectual and political humility. No decision either for or against the removal/preservation of a statue should be thought to be once-and-for-all. This requires that removed statues not be destroyed. Destruction is incompatible with humble acceptance of the polysemy of complex monuments.

I see this as a moderate position. It allows for either preservationist or removalist positions to be persuasive at a given

time. However, it is consistent with, at any given moment, *all* actual preservationist or removalist arguments being accepted. This is just to say that it is consistent with a call to remove all currently contentious monuments. Some will not see this as moderate. What is seen by some as a moderate position is one that divides nicely between those statues that ought to be removed and those that ought to be preserved. The failure to provide such a dividing line is thought to put us on an undesirably slippery slope: if we do not have a way of distinguishing once and for all which monuments should be kept and which should be removed, we open the door to losing them all, which (so the concern goes) would be to lose too much.

Timmerman thinks that his considerations of emotional harm can be used to divide between the statues that ought to be removed and those that should remain. The statues that cause significant harm should be removed. Those that do not cause grave enough emotional suffering should remain (2019). However, as Timmerman recognizes, this is a fragile position. For any preserved statue, it might come to cause more significant harm in the future. In that case, Timmerman accepts that it ought to be removed. Thus, Timmerman's own position will not appease those who fear the road towards general and complete removal. But the situation is even graver for such worries than Timmerman allows. The reason that these statues might come to cause even more emotional suffering is some new manner in which they are interpreted. Their power to cause suffering is due to their symbolic nature. But, as we have seen, suffering is not the only possible moral problem with these monuments. At the very least there is also insult and the risk to political equality that they pose, and these problems also arise due to what such monuments are taken to mean. No stable stopping point on the slippery slope is provided by focusing on harm, only a doubly partial one.

Demetriou and Wingo suggest that the slippery slope can be avoided if the post-apartheid approach of South Africa is followed. According to them, only the most offensive and least beloved statues should be removed. Racist monuments that are preserved should be relabeled to make their good and bad aspects clear. New non-racist monuments should be added to the public sphere (Demetriou and Wingo 2018, 11-12; Demetriou 2019). There is much to like about this recommendation, but it too fails to block movement down the slope. Take the idea of the "most" offensive statues: this is practically self-defeating, as once statues are removed, there is a new batch of "most" offensive ones remaining. If we focus instead on "egregiously" offensive statues, then the hard interpretive issues that I have emphasized come to the fore. What counts as offensive, and to what degree, depends on how the monuments in question are understood. What is innocuous now can look much different in the future (and vice versa). As time goes by, even the approach sketched by Demetriou and Wingo is open to resulting in complete removal of racist statues from the public sphere.

The deep reason for this is twofold. First, as I have emphasized, racist monuments are polysemous, and hence their meaning is essentially contestable. Since their good and bad powers are due to particular interpretations of what they mean, the moral status of racist monuments inherits this essential contestability. There is no firm ground to be found in this territory, despite the wishes of those who dislike slippery slopes. Second, although in principle the various considerations that might be canvassed when thinking about these monuments could result in preservation of them all, there is a standing and important consideration supporting general removal of racist statues, and hence the slope is more likely to draw us in this direction. The particular reason is this: the racist monuments in question are found in public spaces. These spaces are ones to which everyone has equal right of access, and over

which no one has any prior right of control. By these standards, racist monuments are necessarily problematic: they send messages of inequality, of unequal right of participation in public spaces, and of the legitimate shaping of the behavior of some people in these spaces by others whether they like it or not. Removal of items that send such messages from these places will always be an improvement by the standards set by the political nature of these spaces. I hope that the discussion above suffices to show that considerations of the nature of our shared spaces is not all that matters in discourse about ways of living and racist monuments. However, that these considerations always matter should not be forgotten either.

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