The Politics of Survival

Lara Trout

Published by Fordham University Press

Trout, Lara.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/14670

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=454579
Critical Common-sensism (CCS) is an epistemological doctrine that calls for a critical examination of the common-sense beliefs that underwrite human cognition. It is thus uniquely suited to address social critical concerns about discriminatory beliefs that can become ingrained within one’s background beliefs without her or his awareness. The self-controlled scrutiny of background/common-sense beliefs called for by Critical Common-sensism provides the missing piece in terms of the application problem faced by both the scientific method and the agapic ideal. I foreground Critical Common-sensism’s social critical potential by examining CCS in conjunction with the work done in previous chapters, as well as in conjunction with additional social critical insights.

The chapter culminates by showing that, when Critical Common-sensism is ideally applied, it does not leave scientific and agapic ideals behind. Rather the strands of science, agape, and Critical Common-sensism weave into a tapestry of loving reasonableness, where the
embrace of diverse perspectives promotes growth in knowledge and self-control. Critical Common-sensism provides those in hegemonic groups with consciousness-raising tools that can help them address their blind spots with respect to discrimination faced by those in non-hegemonic groups. Scientific method and agape provide the epistemological and loving motivations to put this awareness into practice by resisting exclusionary instinctive beliefs despite the strength of their influence.

In what follows I will continue to use “belief” and “belief-habit” interchangeably, depending on context, to highlight the CCSist caution that beliefs are habits that can be difficult to change or eradicate. I also use “background” and “common-sense” synonymously to refer to the instinctive beliefs from which one reasons.

Part 1: Critical Common-sensism

We begin doing philosophy against the background of our common-sense view of things, a set of often inchoate and unformulated assumptions about the nature of mind and the physical world, about the scope of our knowledge and its sources, and about values and rationality, which forms the background to our everyday actions and inquiries. In modern jargon, we begin with a folk physics and a folk psychology, and a common-sense view of morality and rationality which are more often embodied in our habits of belief, action, inference, and evaluation than in a carefully set out body of principles. (Hookway 2000, 198)

Peirce’s Critical Common-sensism holds in place both human self-controlled reasoning and the fact that this reasoning has to start from already-existing, background belief-habits. It is an epistemological doctrine that addresses the common-sense belief-habits underwriting human cognition. Critical Common-sensism acknowledges that, for all their powers of reasoning, humans always already reason from belief-habits that are so deep seated as to function outside their immediate awareness and control. At the same time, CCS maintains that humans must scrutinize these background beliefs.
Our common-sense beliefs are practically indubitable—that is, they are not doubted in the everyday course of life (cf. CP 1.661). One reason from them without questioning them. CCS endeavors to examine these common-sense beliefs, to determine whether any are, in fact, doubtful. Those that are found dubitable—once this dubitability is confirmed through scientific testing—must be changed or abandoned. It should be noted that, in this CCS context, Peirce explicitly links “dubitability” with falseness when discussing problematic common-sense beliefs. In what follows I employ “dubitability” in this same sense.

To clarify this critical sorting of beliefs, I refer to those that are “legitimately” considered indubitable and those that are “illegitimately” so considered. Under the “legitimate” category are two types of common-sense beliefs: those that are so deeply taken for granted they are not even identified as background beliefs in the first place and those that are so identified, but attempts to doubt them are unsuccessful. Peirce describes both types of these “original beliefs” as acritical (EP 2:347). Original beliefs withstand CCS scrutiny, either by not emerging as beliefs in the first place or by emerging as beliefs that are impervious to current efforts to doubt them. Hookway notes, “[A]n acritical belief is one of which we are certain, which does not issue from the kind of process of deliberation or reasoning which can be subjected to critical monitoring. We do not know why we believe these things; we cannot imagine being able to doubt them; and they have a foundational role for our practices of inquiry and justification” (Hookway 2000, 150). Given a particular common-sense belief, if efforts to doubt it fail, then it is acritical for the time being. It is legitimately indubitable. Peirce stresses, however, that acritical beliefs are always subject to doubt at a later time: “[W]hat has been [acritically] indubitable one day has often been proved on the morrow to be false” (CP 5.514). This reflects Peirce’s fallibilism, whereby any belief is conceivably wrong, even if a particular person or community finds it to be acritical for the time being. Acritical beliefs are also characterized by their vagueness, to be explained shortly.
Illegitimately indubitable common-sense beliefs are those that can be identified and that are simply taken for granted. Efforts to doubt them are insufficient or not even undertaken. Peirce warns Critical Common-sensists against carelessly allowing an illegitimately indubitable belief into their set of common-sense beliefs: “[A] philosopher ought not to regard an important proposition as indubitable without a systematic and arduous endeavour to attain to a doubt of it” (CP 5.498). To illegitimately render a common-sense belief indubitable undermines self-controlled reasoning, by giving place to an unsound premise.

a. Vagueness versus Specificity

Legitimate and illegitimate indubitability apply to vagueness and specificity, respectively, in relation to common-sense beliefs. One of the signal characteristics of acritical common-sense (or original) beliefs is that they are vague, not so vague as to convey nothing, but vague enough that the principle of contradiction does not apply to them. Two examples Peirce gives are “fire burns” and there is “order in nature” (CP 5.498, 508, 516). These beliefs convey something about both fire and nature, but remain vague enough that they are each true in some respects and false in others. For example, it is true that fire burns dry paper, but false that fire burns water (EP 2:350 ff.; CP 5.505 ff.; Hookway 2000, 150, 211 ff.). To render a vague belief specific is to make it doubt-able. Peirce notes, “[E]verybody’s actions show that it is impossible to doubt that there is an element of order in the world; but the moment we attempt to define that orderliness we find room for doubt” (EP 2:541 n. 10; cf. CP 5.507–8).

The importance of vagueness for my project is its use as a criterion: If a belief is not vague, then it must not be considered a legitimately indubitable common-sense belief. Peirce asserts that CCS “insist[s] that the acritically indubitable is invariably vague” and “all the veritabibly indubitable beliefs are vague” (EP 2:350; CP 5.505, my emphasis). He also warns against considering specific beliefs to be indubitable:
[1]f we are to admit that some propositions are beyond our powers of doubt, we must not admit any specified proposition to be of this nature without severe criticism; nor must any man assume with no better reason than because he cannot doubt it, that another man cannot do so. (EP 2:433, my emphasis)

Peirce’s fallibilism prevents him from absolutizing this admonition. Hence his qualification that specified beliefs are to be admitted (as acritical) only with “severe criticism.” This fallibilist signature notwithstanding, Peirce’s warning against illegitimate indubitability is clear, and so is his reasoning on the matter. He wants to ensure against specified beliefs, which are amenable to doubt, becoming uncritically accepted and then internalized as such. If this happens, then a scientifically unsound belief—that has not been subjected to the scientific method—can become absorbed into the habitual scientific assumptions that ground reasoning processes.

Racist common-sense beliefs, for example, can be used to exemplify the contrast between a legitimately indubitable, vague common-sense belief and an illegitimately indubitable, specified common-sense belief. The belief that there is order to nature is a vague, legitimately indubitable common-sense belief. In Western history, a specific version of this belief was illegitimately assumed to be indubitable by many European and Euro-American white people. The specified belief went something like this: “Nature is ordered in such a way that nonwhite races are inferior to Caucasians.” Many affluent white people routinely reasoned from this belief as an uncritically accepted premise. They thereby ranked their own Caucasian race as superior and other races as inferior. This racist assumption resulted in circular reasoning about the inferiority of non-Caucasian races. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), for example, wrote the influential work *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*. For evidence of the superiority of the Caucasian race, he includes an aesthetic appeal, noting that whites possess “that kind of appearance which, according to our opinion of symmetry, we consider most handsome and becoming” (Blumenbach 2000, 28, my emphasis). Clearly Blumenbach’s presumed audience was white, and he felt comfortable appealing to a common-sense
racist aesthetic to support his racial hierarchy. Charles Mills provides an informative sampling of white philosophers’ comments on the inferiority of nonwhite races. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) made his own appeal to a common-sense aesthetic when he noted that “a clear proof that what [a Negro] said was stupid” was that “this fellow was quite black from head to foot.” David Hume (1711–76) asserted that “the negroes, and in general all the other species of men,” are “naturally inferior to the whites.” Recall the nineteenth-century pseudoscience of race, which took for granted the very racial hierarchies that it set out to prove. Stephen Jay Gould comments that “the pervasive assent given by scientists to [these] conventional [racial] rankings arose from shared social belief, not from objective data gathered to test an open question” (1981, 35, my emphasis).

White supremacist common-sense beliefs are illegitimately indubitable. They are specific beliefs that are dubitable and false. Had people of color been included in the community of inquiry historically, the dubitability of these racist beliefs could have surfaced more effectively (cf. Harding 1991, 148–49). As it was, communities of powerful whites acted from a hegemonic common-sense that helped enforce their racist agenda.

b. The Instinctive Nature of Common-sense Beliefs

Peirce says that original beliefs are “of the general nature of instincts” (EP 2:349, my emphasis). He does not define what he means by instinct in this context but notes that he uses the term “in a broad sense” (CP 5.498), which seems to refer to the dimensions of common-sense beliefs that make them feel so “original” that we “cannot ‘go behind’ them” (EP 2:347). They are “irresistible,” reflect “innate cognitive habits,” and are “uncontrolled” (CP 5.499, 504, 522). They can also function nonconsciously—that is, without our conscious awareness. Recall that Peirce links the uncontrolled with the “not fully conscious” and that, for him, consciousness is not “a separate tissue, overlying an unconscious region of the occult nature, mind, soul, or physiological basis” (EP 2:227, 347). Rather, “the difference is
only relative and the demarcation not precise” (EP 2:347). Common-sense beliefs can function without one’s awareness of them. This is why some do not even emerge when CCS looks for them. Hookway notes that, “We may not be very good at identifying common-sense certainties” (2000, 207). This is because they can function nonconsciously, such that we simply cannot “see” them. They are blind spots in our reasoning process. This often holds true for racist, sexist, and other discriminatory common-sense beliefs, which is why it can be hard for well-meaning anti-racists, anti-sexists, and others to detect their own discriminatory behavior.

Instinct also conveys the reliability of original beliefs, yet this “reliability” is limited. On the one hand, “[N]othing is so unerring as instinct within its proper field, while reason goes wrong about as often as right—perhaps oftener” (CP 5.522). This reliability is grounded in “the total everyday experience of many generations of multitudinous populations” (CP 5.522). On the other hand, instinct is not foolproof, as (1) it can be outstripped by the human species’ development of self-control, and (2) instinct can be socialized to reflect narrow cultural or socio-political bias.

Regarding the first point, Peirce believes that original common-sense beliefs can become outmoded, stripped of their legitimate indubitability by the growth of humans in self-control. In other words, Critical Common-sensist doubt is sensitive to the evolutionary nature of the world and of human progress in particular. Peirce notes that original beliefs are limited in their range, applying only to humanity in its primitive settings:

\[\text{[I]ndubitable beliefs refer to a somewhat primitive mode of life, and . . . while they never become dubitable in so far as our mode of life remains that of somewhat primitive man, yet as we develop degrees of self-control unknown to that man, occasions of action arise in relation to which the original beliefs, if stretched to cover them, have no sufficient authority. In other words, we outgrow the applicability of instinct—not altogether, by any manner of means, but in our highest activities. (CP 5.511, Peirce’s emphasis)}\]
Peirce believes that humanity has attained such growth, through scientific achievement: “Modern science, with its microscopes and telescopes, with its chemistry and electricity, and with its entirely new appliances of life, has put us into quite another world; almost as much so as if it had transported our race to another planet” (CP 5:513). This being the case, it is especially necessary to examine common-sense beliefs for doubtfulness, in order to keep up with growth in self-control. Again, “what has been indubitable one day has often been proved on the morrow to be false” (CP 5:514). The legitimate indubitability of original beliefs must be checked against growth in self-control, not simply decided on once and for all.

For the sake of good science, each of us must exercise ongoing self-control over our common-sense beliefs, even those that have been acritical to us in the past. For Peirce self-control involves the capacity to achieve critical distance from one’s beliefs so that one can orchestrate growth through ongoing critique and modification of her beliefs and ideals (CP 5:533–35; EP 2:245–48, 337–38). Critical Common-sensism is itself an exercise in self-control, whereby individuals and communities work to raise to awareness beliefs that might otherwise function uncritically. While not all common-sense beliefs can be raised to consciousness, some can. And of these, some are subject to control through reflection and critique. Peirce does not pretend that one can achieve control over a given belief in the immediacy of the present but asserts that reflection on past behavior can be brought to bear on future behavior (EP 2:245, 337). Thus, even if one cannot help acting on a particular belief today, tomorrow she may be able to reflect on and critique that belief. Critical common-sensism and self-control are processes that work within an organic paradigm where change is ongoing.

The second point about the unreliability of instinctive beliefs—that they can reflect exclusionary socio-political bias—relates to illegitimately indubitable, specified beliefs. While original beliefs “rest on . . . the total everyday experience of many generations of multitudinous populations,” this very experience can reflect social injustices that perpetuate oppression, even over “many generations” (CP 5:522).
Injustice can take root in common-sense through the hegemonic imposition of specified beliefs that are illegitimately indubitable, but can nonetheless become ingrained as part of one’s background beliefs, especially for those belonging to hegemonic groups (such as heterosexuals, men, whites and others). Indeed, the goal of the authority method of fixing beliefs is the internalization of hegemonic beliefs by community members, so that these beliefs become an unquestionable dimension of experience. As noted in Chapter 1, in an 1893 addendum to “Fixation of Belief,” Peirce comments, “It will be wholesome enough for us to make a general review of the causes of our beliefs; and the result will be that most of them have been taken upon trust and have been held since we were too young to discriminate the credible from the incredible” (CP 5.376 n. 3). As argued in earlier chapters, Peircean instinctive beliefs include socialized beliefs, not merely “natural” ones like the belief that “fire burns” or that there is order in nature (CP 5.498, 5.508, 2.170; Hookway 2000, 216; Ayim 1982, 19).

The cultivation of socialized instinctive beliefs, which become rooted in common-sense, often begins in childhood (CP 2.170, 5.376 n. 3). The coercive survival dilemma described in Chapter 2 highlights the seriousness with which a dependent and vulnerable child must take the testimony of her caretakers and community, since doing so can be a matter of life and death. It makes sense to describe as instinctive socialized beliefs that have been formed so early and under the pressure of needing to trust in order to survive (CP 2.170). Chapter 3 highlights the continued reinforcement of hegemonic beliefs via socio-political secondness and/or lack thereof, such that they form the very fabric of one’s reality and the backdrop from which one reasons.

In his paper “What Pragmatism Is” (1905), Peirce notes that “[b]elief is not a momentary mode of consciousness; it is a habit of mind essentially enduring for some time, and mostly (at least) unconscious; and like other habits, it is (until it meets with some surprise that begins its dissolution) perfectly self-satisfied” (EP 2:336–37). Thus it is not only original beliefs that can function nonconsciously; any of our beliefs can. For people belonging to hegemonic groups, such as whites
and men, racist and sexist beliefs learned (implicitly or explicitly) in childhood might not meet with surprise/secondness, as a result of hegemonic norms that endorse discrimination. Unchallenged, such beliefs can easily become woven into common-sense, without the realization of whites and men. The same danger of internalization applies to others in hegemonic groups, such as able-bodied people, those who are economically stable, heterosexuals, and so on.

Framing what Peirce calls “instinctive mind” in terms of common-sense beliefs, we could say that it includes a continuum of background beliefs ranging from those that are so deep they do not surface when CCS looks for them, to those acritical beliefs that can be identified but not doubted, to those that can be identified and doubted (such as racist, sexist, and other discriminatory beliefs). Instinctive mind is the repository for vague, legitimately indubitable beliefs, as well as the specified, illegitimately indubitable ones.

We may be dimly able to see that in part [“instinctive mind”] depends on the accidents of the moment, in part on what is personal or racial, in part [on what] is common to all nicely adjusted organisms whose equilibrium has narrow ranges of stability, in part on whatever is composed of vast collections of independently variable elements. . . . (EP 2:241, my emphasis, editorial brackets)

Peirce’s inclusion of a personal dimension in the instinctive mind, as noted last chapter, signals that specified, illegitimately indubitable beliefs can indeed make their way into one’s common-sense. We cannot understand the personal—or the racial—outside of the social matrices that shape them, a theme also discussed last chapter in conjunction with association by resemblance (inner world) and by contiguity (outer world). One’s personal understanding of herself or himself and of her or his world—including factors like economic stability, race, sex, sexuality, and so on—is socially shaped from birth. 12

c. Doubt

The Critical Common-sensist “has a high esteem for doubt. . . . Only, his hunger is not to be appeased with paper doubts: he must have the
heavy and noble metal, or else belief” (CP 5.514). It is tempting to read an overly Cartesian spirit into CCS’s admiration for doubt. This would be an exaggeration. Despite the fact that both Descartes and Peirce use doubt as a tool against slavery to authority, Cartesian doubt is too strong, as well as too naive (CP 5.517; Hookway 2000, 204–5, 209 n. 11). In a dialogue between an imaginary interlocutor and an imaginary pragmaticist,13 Peirce responds to the challenge that a Critical Common-sensist’s admiration of doubt is best served by a Cartesian approach:

**Doctor X:** I should think that so passionate a lover of doubt would make a clean sweep of his beliefs.

**Pragmaticist:** You naturally would, holding the infant’s mind to be a *tabula rasa* and the adult’s a school state, on which doubts are written with a soapstone pencil to be cleaned off with the dab of a wet sponge; but if they are marked with talc on man’s “glassy essence,” they may disappear for a long time only to be revived by a breath. (CP 5.519)

Peirce’s point here is that Cartesian doubt assumes that doubting a belief is a superficial issue, unattached to the deep-seated habits that shape our worldviews. The Cartesian assumes that, through the mere assertion of doubt, a belief is “doubted.” Beliefs, however, are *habits* that cannot be cast off at will by the human organism. Either experience or imagination has to intervene if the belief-habit is to be modified (CP 5.524).

To fully appreciate Peirce’s insights about paper-doubt, we must not construe it too narrowly, as if paper-doubt involves only beliefs that are not really in question (such as belief in the existence of the external world). There are at least two types of Cartesian paper-doubt, corresponding to sincere and insincere doubt of beliefs. Drawing on Descartes’ First Meditation, there is the paper-doubt of a belief that one does indeed doubt, such as the trustworthiness of sense data (Descartes 1998, 60).14 Second, there is the paper-doubt of a belief that one does not truly doubt, such as the existence of the external world.15 Peirce criticizes Descartes for assuming that Cartesian methodic doubt can successfully clear the ground of reasoning from
both types of beliefs, through merely writing down or asserting the doubtfulness of these beliefs. Our everyday behavior will betray both sincere and insincere paper-doubt, showing that the belief-habits corresponding to the senses and the external world are alive and well. As conscientiously as I may try to implement Cartesian doubt, if I see a rock sailing toward my head I will most likely believe—and therefore act on—both the sense data and the external otherness that tell me so.

Paper-doubt, whether it is sincere or insincere, ultimately undermines self-control, because it ignores the affectivity of belief and doubt—that is, their embodiment in habit. Peirce says that it is “disastrous to science for those who pursue it to think they doubt what they really believe” (CP 5.498). This is because the belief-habits continue to function, while they are thought to be “cast into doubt.” One cannot, as Peirce notes, simply wipe beliefs away as if they had no physiological and neural roots. Paper-doubt assumes this can be done, however, and thus leaves the belief-habits in place, “only to be revived by a breath” (CP 5.519). Proper doubt involves habit-rupture or modification based on experience and/or efforts in the imagination: “For belief, while it lasts, is a strong habit, and as such, forces the man to believe until some surprise breaks up the habit. The breaking of a belief can only be due to some novel experience, whether external or internal” (CP 5.524). In other words, doubt, like a belief-habit, is an affair of the mind and body, not merely the mind. Habits mold one’s body, so that to change or eliminate them involves special efforts. As I will argue below, Peirce’s insights regarding paper-doubt help explain the difficulty of eradicating discriminatory beliefs, which, because of their habitual nature, can still function without one’s awareness, despite one’s conscious disavowal of them.

1. TOOLS FOR DETERMINING DOUBTFULNESS

The CCSist strategies for determining the doubtfulness of a common-sense belief involve “logical analysis,” experience, “experimenting in the imagination,” and testimony (CP 5.517, 509). Logical analysis is necessary to bring to awareness, to the extent possible, the common-sense beliefs informing our reasoning. Experience is an important
source of information about whether a common-sense belief is doubtful or dubitable. At a time in human history when a particular society or culture believed the earth to be flat, for example, an expedition that succeeded in circumnavigating the globe would have offered experiential proof of the dubitability (falseness) of the belief “The earth is flat.” When we do not have experiential evidence at hand, we may turn to the imagination.

By conducting inner experimentations in imagination, a person can determine whether it is possible for her or him to doubt the belief in question (CP 5.507, 517). This involves abstracting the belief from its present circumstances, in order to determine if it becomes doubtable in comparison with other circumstances. Peirce puts it this way:

[The Critical Common-sensist] hold[s] that everything in the substance of his beliefs can be represented in the schemata of his imagination; that is to say, in what may be compared to composite photographs of continuous series of modifications of images; these composites being accompanied by conditional resolutions as to conduct.

These resolutions should cover all classes of circumstances, in the sense that they would produce . . . determinations of habit corresponding to every possible pragmaticistic application of the propositions believed. (CP 5.517)

Experimentation through imagination involves the realm of association by resemblance (as rooted in association by contiguity), in which the person’s own repertoire of habits is brought to bear on the belief in question. The person uses the resources of her or his own experience (that is, contiguity associations as they are reflected in the inner world of resemblance) in order to conceive whether or not there is a scenario in which the belief in question can be doubted. This is similar to the application of the pragmatic maxim, whereby imagination is used to conceive of all possible habitual effects of a belief or aim. In the CCS context, however, the imagination is used to conceive of any way possible a belief could be called into doubt.

It is important to note here that, while one’s experience helps facilitate this imaginative process, this experience also reflects an unavoidable limitation. The less experience one has, the less her or his
imagination can experiment to test for conceivable doubtfulness. For example, returning to a personal experience I described in Chapter 1: When I was in high school, I lacked the imaginative capacity to doubt the belief “Racism does not occur at my school,” which was a common-sense belief for me at the time. Recall that my graduating class was 480 students, roughly 1 percent of whom were students of color. The school was situated in a middle-class, predominantly white suburb. In my junior or senior year (approximately 1986), I heard that an African American classmate, who I did not know except by name, said he was experiencing racism from his teachers. I could not imagine what he was talking about. My school was not a racist school, I thought to myself. My imagination failed me. My personal experience (associations by contiguity) did not provide me with resources to conceive, via association by resemblance, the plausibility of his claim. I had never experienced racism and had never seen teachers be racist. It did not occur to me that my classes were almost always exclusively white. I did not believe my classmate. With more than twenty years of hindsight, including deeply alienating experiences of sexism and sexual harassment (as well as current work to unlearn my unintentional racism), I can imagine how easily racism might have occurred for my classmate.

Lorraine Code discusses how important it is to be mindful of the limitations of one’s imaginative capacities and of the importance of not presuming one social imaginary that applies to everyone in a community or society. To talk about what “we” all know is true, or about what life is like for “us,” can unwittingly silence non-hegemonic voices that are marginalized from the dominant way of life (Code 2001, 267–72). She highlights how one’s imagination can reflect the hegemonic reinforcement of false universalization: “The complex of interlocking assumptions that presume universal human sameness and discount singular experiences at the limits of what the society defines as thinkable is held in place by a hegemonic imaginary” (272, my emphasis). In the context of my project, I take the “hegemonic imaginary” to refer to what is “officially” conceivable or imaginable,
drawing on the interrelationships among hegemonic societal belief-habits. In mainstream U.S. discourse, oppressive forces such as racism and sexism are viewed as primarily resolved, social ills of the past. The prevalence of ongoing racism and sexism is, for the most part, not “officially” conceivable. This hegemonic imaginary can reinforce the imagination-limitation of individuals in hegemonic groups. In my own high school example, my personal inability to imagine racism was buttressed by public mainstream discourse that claimed (and still claims) that racism is a thing of the past, so that anyone “complaining” about it is held suspect.

When experimenting through imagination does succeed in revealing the doubtfulness of a common-sense belief, the belief has been brought under self-control, at least to an extent. This opens the door to testing and confirming the dubitability of the belief. Imagination is thus a means by which humans achieve critical and creative distance from the world. If I stamp my foot about a particular common-sense belief, insisting that it is “inconceivable” that it could be doubtful, I show my inability to imaginatively separate the belief from its felt concrete urgency. This belief has control over me, not vice versa. Confirming a common-sense belief’s dubitability is just the beginning, however. If the belief is to be changed or eliminated, efforts of self-control must move beyond this discovery stage (which is comparable to sincere paper-doubt) to address the belief’s habitual nature. Below I examine discriminatory hegemonic beliefs in this respect. It is not enough to simply assert their dubitability, since these beliefs are deep-seated habits that can function nonconsciously despite one’s conscious disavowal of them.

In addition to experience and imagination, testimony is a tool for determining the doubtfulness of common-sense beliefs. Peirce’s discussion of this aspect of CCS hints at the fact that scrutinizing common-sense beliefs is supposed to occur in the context of communal inquiry. It also highlights the familiar tension, in the context of my project, regarding an individual’s holding a belief that conflicts with a belief, or beliefs, held by the rest of her community. Peirce notes, on the one hand, “Could I be assured that other men candidly and
with sufficient deliberation doubt any proposition which I regard as indubitable, that fact would inevitably cause me to doubt it, too” (CP 5.509). This recalls the comment in the Cognition Series, discussed in Chapter 2, that communal testimony could convince a person of her or his “madness” (W2: 202). It also recalls the Logic of Science essay “Fixation of Belief,” where Peirce describes the social impulse that leads a person out of tenacity and into a communal method for fixing beliefs (W 3:250). On the other hand, as we might expect, Peirce follows up the current passage with this qualification:

I ought not, however, lightly to admit that they do so doubt a proposition after the most thorough criticism by myself and anxious consideration of any other criticisms which I have been able to find and understand has left it quite indubitable by me, since there are other states of mind that can easily be mistaken for doubt. (CP 5.509, my emphasis)

This passage highlights the importance of the individual as a source of communal growth. One who has done the rigorous footwork of determining a belief’s indubitability should not “lightly . . . admit” or easily surrender to the community’s doubt of said belief. This is because “other states of mind that can be mistaken for doubt” include, I would argue, prejudice and fear of what differs from the norm. Everyone else’s doubting, or believing, something does not necessitate that they are right and the exceptional individual is wrong. We can recall, once again, Peirce’s reference in “Fixation of Belief” to the defiant community member who has “a wider sort of social feeling” (W 3:251). This wider social attunement can involve challenging a belief’s dubitability or indubitability, depending on context. To return to an example examined above, a hegemonic community can promote specified (versus vague) beliefs as indubitable, such as the inferiority of non-Caucasian races. In such cases, it is right for the individual to maintain her own view of, in this case, the dubitability of the racist belief in question.

Peirce does not explain how to navigate the tension between the individual and the community when they are at odds. On the one hand, individuals without a sense of their synecchistic context should
not rule the day. Peirce warns against the hubris of assuming a solitary claim to indubitability: “. . . nor must any man assume with no better reason than because he cannot doubt it, that another man cannot do so” (EP 2:433). On the other hand, an authoritative community, with no respect for the insight of the synechistic individual, should not take precedence either. A healthy dialectic is necessary between the synechistically minded individual and the synechistically minded community, in conjunction with scientific testing, in the determination of a common-sense belief’s dubitability or indubitability. Neither should assume a naive authority at the expense of the other. The synechistic individual must sincerely acknowledge the input of other community members. If she is at odds with her community, she cannot merely assert the authority of her own determination of (in)dubitability without thoroughly checking against experience, experimentation through imagination, and self-criticism (CP 5:509). The community, for its part, must not dismiss the perspective of a synechistic individual, or synechistic group, without careful consideration and application of the scientific method. A simple appeal to the majority is clearly not acceptable to Peirce. If a common-sense belief is found doubtful, then the reason for the doubtfulness can be articulated in the form of a hypothesis that can be tested against experience (cf. Hookway 2000, 43, 150–51, 192). This way, regardless of how many, or few, find a belief problematic, there is a common standard of evaluation of the claim. Moreover, since truth is an ongoing and fallible process for Peirce, the evaluation of the claim can itself undergo further revision in light of future experience and perspective. This is an important point, given the history of racist and sexist pseudoscience in the United States, which shows that evaluating claims, or testing hypotheses, can fall far short of Peirce’s infinitely inclusive ideal.19 There is always room, on Peirce’s scheme, to correct for exclusionary reasoning practices.

II. Failure to Achieve Doubt

If experience, imagination, and testimony fail to find a common-sense belief doubtful, then it is a legitimately indubitable, acritical...
belief. While such a belief might be found doubtful and dubitable in the future, if a community’s sincere efforts have failed to shake its present indubitability, this must be accepted. The reasons for this were stated earlier. Casting a belief into mere paper-doubt leaves the belief-habit in place but makes its presence harder to consciously detect. When a belief is merely declared doubtful or dubitable, which is what paper-doubt entails, it *ostensibly* no longer influences the reasonings of an individual or community. Yet since the belief is rooted in habit, and these roots have not been modified or changed, the belief still functions. I can, for example, say I doubt that there is order in nature, but the belief-habit will not thereby be affected. Whenever I expect the future to conform to the past, and whenever I act on this expectation, I betray my paper-doubt.

If a community is hegemonic, however, its declaration of indubitable common-sense beliefs can be fraudulent, not reflecting a fully communal Critical Common-sensist effort. Thus we arrive once again at the doorstep of inclusion/exclusion issues, which highlight that the scrutiny of common-sense beliefs *must include* all possible perspectives within a specific community. If a community aspires to be truly Critical Common-sensist, it must address socio-political concerns of epistemological exclusion.

*Part 2: Socio-political Application of Critical Common-sensism*

With Critical Common-sensism in place, operating in conjunction with the scientific method and agape, Peirce has the resources to address the application problem outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. The problem, once again, is this. The ideals of both science and agape can be undermined in actual human communities, because of latent prejudices and power differentials that hegemonic community members do not see. More specifically, common-sense beliefs can be infiltrated by internalized, exclusionary beliefs that have been enforced by an authoritative, hegemonic society. Since these common-sense beliefs can function nonconsciously *and* can be shared by members of hegemonic groups, exclusionary beliefs can function
even within communities that repudiate racism, sexism, and other discriminatory practices. Since communities of inquiry in the United States still reflect the overrepresentation of hegemonic groups, shared nonconscious discriminatory beliefs about non-hegemonic groups can be unintentionally perpetuated. A common form of nonconscious discriminatory behavior is the dismissal of feedback from non-hegemonic groups, such as reports of racism, sexism, or other forms of discrimination. In what follows I continue to focus primarily on racism (and sexism to a lesser extent) in order to draw out the nuances of the nonconscious discrimination phenomenon in the United States. Narrowing my focus in this way allows me to go deeper into the complexities of the argumentation without having to pause to make qualifications. It also makes sense to focus on racism, since it is (along with sexism) widely proclaimed to be “over” as a systemic problem in the United States, which makes it a good example for highlighting the nuanced conceptual tools provided by Peirce’s Critical Common-sensism. I invite the reader to extrapolate regarding other types of nonconscious discrimination that can be enacted by those in hegemonic groups who repudiate the very type of discrimination they are unwittingly perpetuating, such as discrimination against the poor, GLBTQs, and so on.

I frame the application problem in the following CCS terms. There can be communal disagreement about whether illegitimate commonsense beliefs, such as racist beliefs, have been fully eliminated. On the one hand, members of a community may all agree that racist beliefs are dubitable and should not inform thought and practice. On the other hand, members may disagree about whether these beliefs have been fully eradicated. Some, often whites, may endorse the sincere (but naive) paper-doubt view that simply asserting the wrongness of the beliefs is enough to effect “doubt” of them. Others, often people of color, profess the ineffectiveness of this shallow doubt, as they experience the continued functioning of racist beliefs that whites do not notice. In this regard I analyze the issue of well-intentioned “color-blindness” in mainstream U.S. discourse. Many white people sincerely repudiate racist beliefs but remain unaware of the prevalence of
racism in contemporary U.S. society. Often these same white people dismiss feedback from people of color that racism still persists. Before showing how CCS addresses this problem, I will discuss, at length, how CCS can diagnose the problem by highlighting important nuances that are at play.

a. Historical Loophole

First, let me place the application problem in historical context, drawing on points made in earlier chapters. What I call the “historical loophole” refers to how explicit, conscious prejudice undermines implementation of the ideal community of inquiry. Recall that “[t]his community . . . must not be limited, but must extend to all races of beings with whom we can come into immediate or mediate intellectual relation. It must reach, however vaguely, beyond this geological epoch, beyond all bounds” (W 3:284). Members of the ideal community are mature in their epistemic outlook, demonstrating self-control that is informed by an agapic embrace of diverse perspectives. Peirce is inclusive in his description of the “intellectual relations” that characterize the ideal community. Nonetheless, historically speaking, both people of color and women have been excluded from actual communities of inquiry because of their supposed intellectual inferiority. Thus the hegemonic biases of Euro-American propertied men promoted a limited community of inquiry, a limited community that has been perpetuated historically.

I call this a historical loophole because it involves conscious prejudice and the explicitly endorsed exclusion of non-hegemonic groups from the community of inquiry. Historically people of color and women were denied entry into scientific, educational, and political circles in the Western world. These exclusions were premised on hegemonic common-sense belief-habits that are not easy to eliminate. This means that the historical loophole can persist in a contemporary form, even in the wake of the civil rights and women’s movements in the United States. I call this persistence the “contemporary loophole.” Racism and sexism exist in the United States even though
mainstream discourse says they should and do not. I argue that the “contemporary loophole” remains, *even if we grant the premise* that racism and sexism are no longer consciously practiced in the United States. I grant this premise for rhetorical purposes, in order to show how persistent *nonconscious* prejudice can be among well-intentioned people who truly believe racism and sexism are wrong. I believe that conscious, *systemic* racism and sexism (as well as other forms of oppression) are alive and well in the United States and internationally. Nonetheless, I think it can be fruitful to separate unintentional discrimination from the mix, in order to make the case that well-meaning people still have work to do to unlearn their unintentional racism and sexism.

Returning to the historical loophole: If the membership of the community of inquiry is limited, as it has been in Western history, to Euro-American privileged men, then these men may fail to identify doubtful common-sense beliefs that need to be subjected to the scientific method. They may so take for granted premises such as “Nonwhite races are intellectually inferior to the white race” or “Women are intellectually inferior to men” that their logical analysis either does not reveal these specified common-sense beliefs in the first place or reveals them as acritical. Western history bears this out, as discussed above and in earlier chapters. Since people of color and women were thus explicitly excluded from communal inquiry, they were not present to identify and challenge the common-sense beliefs that degraded them.

Had such groups of people been given *proportionate* representation and status in communities of inquiry, things might have been different. Instead of a shared oblivion to the functioning of doubtful exclusionary common-sense beliefs, perhaps there may have been a majority of community members, including people of color and women, who could identify and/or challenge the common-sense beliefs in question (cf. Harding 1991, 148–49). These members could have pushed to have the beliefs subjected to fair scientific inquiry. Or perhaps the beliefs would not have taken root in the first place. When the community refuses membership to non-hegemonic groups, it
limits its resources in experience, imagination, and testimony. It thereby also limits its ability to identify common-sense beliefs that undermine the community’s self-controlled functioning. Sandra Harding’s critique of objectivity as reflecting “value-free, impartial, dispassionate [scientific] research” dovetails with my Critical Common-sensist analysis of shared hegemonic background beliefs:

The conception of value-free, impartial, dispassionate research is supposed to direct the identification of all social values and their elimination from the results of research, yet it has been operationalized to identify and eliminate only those social values and interests that differ among the researchers and critics who are regarded by the scientific community as competent to make such judgments. If the community of “qualified” researchers and critics systematically excludes, for example, all African Americans and women of all races, and if the larger culture is stratified by race and gender and lacks powerful critiques of this stratification, it is not plausible to imagine that racist and sexist interests and values would be identified within a community of scientists composed entirely of people who benefit—intentionally or not—from institutional racism and sexism. (1991, 143, Harding’s emphasis)

Harding is not drawing on Peirce’s Critical Common-sensism here. Nonetheless, she sheds light on how CCS can be applied socio-politically, by highlighting how shared discriminatory “values and interests” create what I would call shared blind spots regarding background beliefs that inform scientific communal reasoning.

Historically, when affluent Euro-American white men were assuming that people of color and women were inferior, the nonwhite perspectives were not given a voice in the inquiry. The exclusive community of inquiry ignored that these people had both experience and imaginative capacities (because of their experience) that the community of white men did not have. The experience and imagination of these non-hegemonic perspectives would have enhanced the scrutiny of common-sense beliefs, since it would have made more likely the identification of additional doubtful beliefs. As discussed in earlier chapters, members of non-hegemonic groups, such as people of
color and women, have often experienced socio-political secondness that Euro-American white men have not. To refuse them membership is to surrender to the blind spots that are inevitable when diverse perspectives are rejected in favor of finite group interest.

Group interest, which often accompanies naive individualism, helps explain the exclusionary thought and practice so commonly exhibited historically by Euro-American propertied men. Recall that Peirce’s critique of greed involves a group critique, not merely a critique of greedy individuals. The profit-seeking Euro-American white men who benefited from the nineteenth century’s economic Darwinism were not a mere collection of unrelated individuals. They were a group sharing common interests. The same point can be made here regarding communities of inquiry in the West. Such exclusive communities were severely limited in their scope, representing the experience and imaginative capacity of only those privileged in terms of economic class, race, and sex. Peirce’s earlier warning can be reread in the spirit of group membership: “[N]or must any man [or group] assume with no better reason than because he [or they] cannot doubt [a particular proposition], that another man [or group] cannot do so” (EP 2:433). To make such an assumption is to block the road of inquiry into the common-sense beliefs that may be impeding a community’s development in self-control.

b. Contemporary Loophole

Let us return to the “contemporary loophole.” I use the designation “contemporary” to convey the fact that the perspectives of people of color and women are now included in many communities of inquiry in the West. Issues of historical racist and sexist exclusion are still in play, however, as a result of the deeply systemic nature of racism and sexism, the corresponding overrepresentation of Euro-American whites and men in actual communities of inquiry, and the fact that racism and sexism involve deep-seated habits that are hard to break.

Critical Common-sensist issues of membership and (dis)agreement about common-sense beliefs take on a contemporary form, because of the nonconscious influence of racist and sexist common-sense
beliefs. The historical loophole manifested in diverse voices being left out of the communal discussion altogether. The identification of certain common-sense beliefs, which were shared and unnoticed by the community members, could not occur. In contemporary communities in the West, issues of exclusion can still occur within a community, even when it both consciously repudiates racist and sexist common-sense beliefs and includes members belonging to non-hegemonic groups. The specific scenario I will examine is this: Community members may disagree about whether or not racist and sexist common-sense beliefs are still in play, even though the beliefs have been stamped “dubitable” by the community as a whole. Members of non-hegemonic groups may think they are still in play, and members of hegemonic groups may think they are not.

Peirce does not specifically indicate how such a disagreement is to be navigated, although he strongly implies that the individual or group with unique experiential and imaginative resources must not be overridden by an uncritical majority. We cannot simply appeal to the scientific method regarding such a disagreement, unfortunately. We are dealing with concrete communities and their decisions regarding which hypotheses are to be tested in the first place.\(^{21}\) If one community member, who is a member of a non-dominant group or groups, voices the hypothesis that discrimination or prejudice is at play, her input could be dismissed as unworthy of being tested (hooks 2003b, 27). Recall the experience of Linda Alcoff’s friend, who was a woman of color in a primarily white philosophy department with a white, male department chair. Her hypothesis that racism and sexism were at play—in the white, male graduate student’s complaint about her—was dismissed with no efforts to test it by talking with other students or with those at the institution who had expertise on issues of racism and sexism in the classroom (Alcoff 2001, 66–67).

In concrete historical communities, when disagreements arise regarding the presence of dubitable common-sense beliefs, such as racist and/or sexist ones, there is often a temptation among those in hegemonic groups to dismiss the testimony of those in non-hegemonic groups. This dismissal is all the more likely when the majority
of community members belong to overrepresented hegemonic groups and do not have the experience or capacity of imagination to detect the presence of discriminatory common-sense beliefs in their reasoning process and behavior. Such discriminatory common-sense beliefs include skepticism toward the testimony of people of color and women, which results in a multifaceted skepticism toward a woman of color (Code 1995; Mills 1997, 60–61). Alcoff comments on how the white, male department chair should have handled the situation with the Chicana faculty member:

The chair should have second-guessed his ability to judge the case, given the fact that he has never himself experienced teaching as a woman of color, nor seen a woman of color alone in a classroom full of White students. Based on this, the chair should have done more consultation, with other students certainly, but also with those at the institution that would be in a better position to evaluate the conflicting claims. (2001, 67)

In other words, the chair should have held in place the racism/sexism hypothesis and subjected it to the testing appropriate to the context, in this case consulting other students and institutional resources. Since he did not do this, the “contemporary loophole” was allowed to manifest in the form of an uncritical white majority voting to demote a woman of color—based on one white, male graduate student’s complaint about her—despite her own testimony that racism and sexism were at play in his complaint (66–67).

1. UNDERNEATH THE RADAR OF PRIVILEGED PERSPECTIVES: “COLORBLINDNESS”

Bell hooks describes an exercise she does with college students in the United States to help them raise to conscious awareness their beliefs about race and sex:

In classroom settings I have often listened to groups of students tell me that racism really no longer shapes the contours of our lives, that there is just no such thing as racial difference, that “we
are all just people.” Then a few minutes later I give them an exercise. I ask if they were about to die and could choose to come back as a white male, a white female, a black female, or black male, which identity would they choose. Each time I do this exercise, most individuals, irrespective of gender or race invariably choose whiteness, and most often white maleness. Black females are the least chosen. When I ask students to explain their choice they proceed to do a sophisticated analysis of privilege based on race (with perspectives that take gender and class into consideration). *This disconnect between their conscious repudiation of race as a marker of privilege and their unconscious understanding is a gap we have to bridge.* (2003b, 25–26, my emphasis)

Looking at this awareness/unawareness issue in terms of sincere paper-doubt and legitimate doubt helps to clarify where the “disconnect” can occur between conscious and nonconscious belief-habit patterns. To apply the discussion from Part 1, recall that, for Peirce, beliefs are deeply rooted habits that cannot be changed or eradicated at will; rather their modification requires work in experience or in imagination (CP 5,524). Without sufficient practice, a belief can come back into play rather easily (CP 5,519). In terms of racist, sexist, and other discriminatory common-sense beliefs, it is not enough to assert that those beliefs are dubitable and therefore no longer part of a person’s or a community’s worldview. Such a stance enacts mere paper-doubt that does not address the embodied depth of the exclusionary background beliefs. This is why Cartesian doubt is insufficient. It treats beliefs as if they can be easily erased and thus leaves their roots intact, so that they may be “revived by a breath” (CP 5,519). Cartesian doubt also assumes that doubt is merely a solitary venture.

In *Seeing a Color-Blind Future*, Patricia Williams addresses the frustration for many people of color, herself included, regarding the credo of “colorblindness” that informs contemporary mainstream white discourse on race in the United States and the United Kingdom (1997). In the post–civil rights era of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, racist beliefs are officially considered to be false and, therefore, illegitimate bases for reasoning regarding public policy and
individual conduct. In this spirit, white people often claim to be “colorblind,” to reflect their sincere repudiation of racism against people of color. In the past, seeing skin color resulted in discrimination against people of color by many whites in the United States. Therefore, in the present, not seeing a person’s skin color—that is, being “colorblind”—can reflect a conscientious condemnation, by white people, of discrimination against people of color. Yet while the assertion of “colorblindness” can be a well-intentioned way for Euro-American whites to express the unacceptability of racism, “colorblindness” can also, ironically, promote a racist status quo. This occurs when well-intentioned “colorblindness” is used not only to express the wrongness of racism but also to insist that racism is no longer a serious problem. The insistence goes something like this: “Racism cannot still be prevalent in the United States, we are colorblind now” (cf. Bonilla-Silva 2003, 177 ff.).

From a Critical Common-sensist perspective, the well-intentioned assertion of “colorblindness” identifies racist beliefs as dubitable. Yet unaddressed are the manifold ways that racism still persistently functions in the United States, despite the progress made during the civil rights era. People of color still deal with everyday and systemic discrimination that is more covert than the blatant racism of the “Jim Crow,” legalized segregation that was once prevalent in the Southern United States (Williams 1997, 41; Bonilla-Silva 2003, 2–4; Sullivan 2006, 4–5). Shannon Sullivan notes, “Race supposedly is not at issue in a society that obsesses over urban ghettos, crime, the resale value of one’s house, welfare queens, the drug war, the death penalty, and a massively growing prison industry” (2006, 5).

People of color are regularly confronted with racist cultural habits that have not been fully addressed. Williams writes,

While I do want to underscore that I embrace color-blindness as a legitimate hope for the future, I worry that we tend to enshrine the notion with a kind of utopianism whose naïveté will ensure its elusiveness. In the material world ranging from playgrounds to politics, our ideals perhaps need more thoughtful, albeit more complicated, guardianship. By this I mean something more than
the “I think therefore it is” school of idealism. “I don’t think about color, therefore your problems don’t exist.” If only it were so easy. (1997, 4)

Williams is calling for deeper work to be done on racism. Merely asserting that “color doesn’t matter” or “racism is wrong” is not enough. Moreover, it can give the false impression that racism is being addressed, when it has merely disappeared from the conscious view of white people.26

“Colorblindness” in this context reflects sincere paper-doubt, the primary insight being this: When a belief is only paper-doubted, the belief-habit both is “cast into doubt” and probably continues to function without one’s awareness. Comparing and contrasting “colorblindness” to power-outage behavior helps highlight the issues at play. A person used to living with electricity has probably experienced the sincere paper-doubt that often occurs during power outages. On the one hand, the belief “The power is on” is sincerely in doubt—electronic devices have suddenly stopped working. On the other hand, even while knowing the power is out, one may inadvertently try to turn on the television (or other electronic device). The belief-habit about the electricity is both being sincerely doubted and still functioning. This is because our belief-habits, especially common-sense ones, function so automatically—so instinctively—as to overrule a simple conscious assertion of doubt. In this scenario the impotent television provides a straightforward cue that one has just acted on a belief-habit that is supposedly in doubt.

“Colorblindness” is a more complex instance of sincere paper-doubt. Here we have, on the one hand, racist belief-habits that have been placed in doubt in mainstream U.S. discourse. On the other hand, there is consistent testimony that racist belief-habits are still functioning in U.S. society. In contrast to an individual confronting her belief-habits, however, “colorblindness” involves a community’s confrontation of its belief-habits. It is much easier for one person to determine whether she is acting according to belief-habits about something as clear cut as the power being out. There is only one person to convince, the person herself. And the ineffectual television set
is an indisputable cue that the belief-habit has been acted on. In the case of “colorblindness,” a community is involved.

Moreover, environmental feedback about the belief-habits in question is not linked to an inanimate object that fails to “turn on.” Instead, the feedback involves people giving testimony, and the testimony is mixed. Some community members—often white people—insist that they themselves and/or U.S. society are “colorblind” and that therefore racist belief-habits have been eliminated. Others—often people of color—insist that racist belief-habits are still in play. What results is communal disagreement about whether or not racist belief-habits have been eradicated. In terms of paper-doubt, we could say the first group believes that sincere paper-doubt of racist beliefs, through conscientiously pronouncing their wrongness, is sufficient for eradicating racist behavior on individual and societal levels.

The second group grasps the ineffectiveness of sincere paper-doubt and testifies to ongoing racism in U.S. society despite supposed “colorblindness.” The testimony of people of color about racism, however, is often dismissed within the white-dominated discourse in the United States, such that the paper-doubt of the first group (often white people) holds sway. This dismissal often occurs without serious or sincere consideration of the testimony about racism. It is also often coupled with the accusation, literal or figurative, of “playing the race card” (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 29, 179; hooks 2003b, 30 ff., 25–40). To borrow a phrase from Lorraine Code, people of color often do not have “rhetorical space” in which to voice and to receive uptake regarding their experience of racism (Code 1995, ix–x; cf. Tuana 2006, 13). This paper-doubt-fueled dismissal is underwritten by the assumption that a person cannot behave in a racist fashion unless she consciously intends to (Alcoff 2006, 188).

This brings us to another point, which is implied in Patricia Williams’s criticism, described just above, of “colorblindness.” Those who have been targeted by exclusionary common-sense beliefs, including racist ones, are in a unique position to report on whether or not the beliefs are still functioning. This is not to say that those in non-hegemonic groups have a “god’s eye” view on things. It is to
say, however, that someone who is oppressed because of race has a perspective on experience that someone who is a Euro-American white probably does not have. The same point applies to other axes of oppression. In 2010, it is part of the public discourse in the U.S. mainstream that both racism and sexism are wrong. To this extent they have been cast into paper-doubt. Whether or not the deep-rooted habits associated with each are still in play cannot be determined without consulting people of color and women. These are the groups who encounter the most socio-political secondness resulting from societal racist and sexist beliefs. For whites to assume that they alone can determine that racism is a thing of the past is to block the road of inquiry and to silence those often in the best position to speak to these matters. The same reasoning applies regarding men and sexism.

This shows that the eradication of racist and sexist common-sense beliefs is especially hard work. Self-controlled habit-change takes more effort than a simple declaration of success before the work has even begun. That is to say, eradication of racist and sexist belief-habits cannot be a matter of simply declaring doubt—that is, sincere paper-doubt. Speaking about racism, Shannon Sullivan comments on how to address habits of white privilege appropriately:

A white person who wishes to try to change her raced and racist habits would do better to change the environments she inhabits than (to attempt) to use “will power” to change the way she thinks about and reacts to non-white people. . . . A person cannot merely intellectualize a change of habit by telling herself that she will no longer think or behave in particular ways. The key to transformation is to find a way of disrupting a habit through environmental change and then hope that the changed environment will help produced [sic] an improved habit in its place. (2006, 9)

In other words, “intellectualiz[ing] a change of habit”—or sincere paper-doubt—is not sufficient to eradicate racist belief-habits. More is needed, such as the new experience that a change in environment would provide, so that the embodied roots of the belief-habits can be confronted: “For belief, while it lasts, is a strong habit, and as such,
forces the man to believe until some surprise breaks up the habit. The breaking of a belief can only be due to some novel experience, whether external or internal” (CP 5.524). To change or eradicate exclusionary common-sense beliefs, practice in the external world and/or in the internal world of imagination needs to occur. This is what legitimate doubt involves, efforts to change habits.

Moreover, eliminating racist and sexist common-sense beliefs cannot be accomplished by the solitary efforts of privileged individuals or specific privileged groups, such as Euro-American whites and men. A diverse communal effort is needed that pays close attention to the voices of those who have been oppressed by the beliefs in question. The perspectives of people of color and women, for example, are needed to report on the progress that is and is not being made on changing racist and/or sexist habits. This progress is reflected in the extent to which socio-political secondness is still at play, because, once again, this secondness is evidence that racist/sexist cultural habits are still intact. It reflects Cartesian naïveté for a white person or a man, or for whites or men as groups, to assume that they can eliminate racist and/or sexist belief-habits without the input of those who are negatively targeted by these habits, namely, people of color and women. This assumption involves a refusal of inclusive communal inquiry.

If an actual community of inquiry is to grow past its dubitable common-sense beliefs, it must make efforts to prevent these beliefs from cropping up nonconsciously in the future. It must take seriously the agapic ideal of embracing a diversity of perspectives on the common-sense beliefs in question (cf. Sharp 1994, 203–10). Members of hegemonic groups, such as whites and men, may consciously repudiate discrimination in all its forms and yet still fall prey to old habits they do not realize are informing their decisions. This scenario is further complicated by how often these hegemonic groups are overrepresented, because of the continued systemic injustice toward people of color and women in the United States. This creates situations where a single community member or small group of members may identify racist or sexist beliefs to which the majority of members are
blind. Ideally those in the majority will respect a non-hegemonic perspective as representing experience, of socio-political secondness, that the majority of community members have never had. They will realize that their own imagination-experiments are insufficient to the extent that they are not informed by this non-hegemonic experience. This way, even though the non-hegemonic perspective may be poorly represented numerically, it can still hold legitimate sway regarding the common-sense belief(s) in question.²⁹

Let me offer a hypothetical example to highlight this point, an example drawn from twelve years of volunteer work with children with muscular dystrophy at special summer camps designed to be power-wheelchair and power-scooter friendly. Say a group of fully able-bodied people had, with great care, designed blueprints for a summer camp for children in wheelchairs or power-scooters. Would it be reasonable for this able-bodied planning committee to dismiss feedback from someone who uses a power-wheelchair and who noted that the blueprints, while making due consideration for ramps instead of stairs, had doorways throughout the camp that were too narrow to accommodate power chairs? Would it be reasonable for them to say, “You are just playing the wheelchair card”? When I use this example with my classes, my students tend to guffaw or laugh when I give the “wheelchair card” line, because it is straightforwardly clear that the feedback in question reflects experience and perspective that the able-bodied people probably lack and that they need in order to successfully bring about their end of a “barrier-free” summer camp. This hypothetical example shows the value of feedback from a single person who represents a non-hegemonic perspective that others in the community do not share. At the University of Portland, where I currently teach, my colleague Fay Beeler, who is the assistant director of the Physical Plant, tells me that input from wheelchair-using students has been essential in making the campus accessible. The able-bodied Physical Plant staff simply cannot anticipate all the modifications necessary on this front, even though they are deeply committed to fully serving the wheelchair-using student population.³⁰
Unfortunately, it is all too easy for a majority of community members, who represent hegemonic perspectives, to dismiss non-hegemonic perspectives. Moreover, this hegemonic dismissal is facilitated by the very blind spots the diverse members can help to detect. Returning to my focus on racism and sexism, nonconscious prejudice against people of color and/or women can emerge in the form of dismissing these perspectives as illegitimate. In this way the historical loophole overlaps with the contemporary one, as prejudices that have supposedly been overcome continue to operate nonconsciously.

In what follows, I outline two related mechanisms of hegemonic dismissal—first, an appeal to the craziness or irrelevance of the non-hegemonic perspective, and, second, an appeal to the lack of conscious discriminatory intent of those belonging to hegemonic groups. Before continuing, let me remind the reader that, as discouraging as the phenomenon of hegemonic dismissal is, describing and understanding its mechanisms reflect the self-control that can, in turn, criticize these mechanisms and work to change them.

II. TWO MECHANISMS OF HEGEMONIC DISMISSAL

(a) Craziness or Irrelevance  Given the danger, discussed in Chapter 2, that someone’s community could convince her that she is mad/abnormal/inferior, it is not entirely surprising that a mechanism of hegemonic dismissal involves an accusation of craziness or irrelevance. Marilyn Frye argues that a common mechanism for the exclusion of non-hegemonic perspectives is their dismissal as “crazy” (1983, 84–85, 112). Frye discusses this dismissal in the context of the anger of women and, implicitly, others in non-hegemonic groups. This anger, as Frye conceives it, is a social act that makes a claim for respect regarding a domain in which one is experiencing unwarranted obstruction (85 ff.). She gives the example of a woman who “had gone to some trouble to adjust the carburetor on her car and shortly thereafter an attendant at a gas station started monkeying with it. She was dismayed and sharply told him to stop. He became very agitated and yelled at her, calling her a crazy bitch” (89). In patriarchal societies, it is common for women’s anger to be dismissed as crazy if it is
expressed regarding domains that are outside of “the place and functions of Mother/Caretaker/Conserver/Helpmate,” which are realms considered “appropriate” to women (90 ff.). Outside of these realms (such as the domain of cars), it is common for a woman not to receive “uptake” regarding the domain of her complaint; instead the subject can shift to her sanity (84, 88–89). She is “crazy,” and her claim for respect and legitimate inclusion in the domain is dismissed.

Broadening Frye’s observations about dismissals of non-hegemonic claims, I do not think that the dismissal—as “crazy” or irrelevant—of testimony from women or others in non-hegemonic groups is dependent on their being perceived as angry. That is to say, someone in a non-hegemonic group can be perceived as calm and unfazed even while her input is seen as off the mark. In such cases, I would argue, following Frye, that a claim for respect is still being made regarding the subject matter under discussion. In the context of my project, the subject matter has been the presence of racism, sexism, and other social ills. The corresponding claim for respect involves, for example, the expertise of a woman of color on issues of racism/sexism—expertise based on a wealth of experience of patterns recognized as racist and sexist secondness. Bell hooks recounts giving a talk where many white students expressed their disdain for the ideas I expressed, and for my presence, by booing. I challenged the group to consider that what I was saying was not as disturbing to the group as was my embodied young-looking presence, a black female with natural hair in braids. I had barely finished this comment before a liberal white male in the group attacked claiming “you are playing the race card here.” His immediate defensive response is often the feedback that comes when black people/people of color make an observation about the everyday dynamics of race and racism, sex and sexism that does not conform to privileged white perceptions. (2003b, 30, my emphasis)

Bell hooks’s hypothesis was that her presence as a black woman triggered the booing from her Euro-American white audience. She was accused of playing the race card, an accusation that summarily dismissed her hypothesis (hooks 2003b, 30–31). While it is clear that this
scenario was probably not the most ideal setting for inquiry, we can also recall the story of Marilyn Frye’s reaction, discussed in Chapter 3, to the woman of color who accused her of racism (1983, 111–12).

Frye’s scenario was a communal-inquiry setting, in which Frye and other Euro-American white women “formed a white women’s consciousness-raising group to identify and explore the racism in [their] lives with a view to dismantling the barriers that blocked [our] understanding and action in this matter” (Frye 1983, 111). The larger objective was to address problems of racism within feminist circles. As Frye recalls, “[O]ne Black woman criticized us very angrily for ever thinking we could achieve our goals by working only with white women” (111). Frye explained to the woman that she and the rest of the white group had not meant to be exclusive and had planned to “organize a group open to all women shortly after [our] series of white women’s meetings came to a close” (111–12). The woman of color was not satisfied by Frye’s explanation, as it still revolved around white people calling the shots about how to handle racism issues. Frye thought the woman of color sounded crazy, at least at first. Then it occurred to Frye that thinking someone seems crazy can be a by-product of hegemonic privilege—in this case, Frye’s white privilege. She therefore “backed off” to regain her “balance” about the dynamics that were really at play (112).

Calling someone crazy need not be a conscious rhetorical ruse that intentionally exploits a power differential. It also need not take the form either of a literal accusation of craziness or of a bold assertion such as “You are playing the race card!” This is because, once again, common-sense beliefs can shape one’s worldview nonconsciously, including the concepts used to organize one’s experience (Frye 1983, 112). This means that, for example, a certain hypothetical white, male scientist may sincerely believe that a woman of color’s feedback about racism/sexism is crazy or irrelevant. He may be a committed Critical Common-sensist who is dedicated to ending discrimination on all fronts. Nonetheless, her voice may have no place in his conceptual scheme, wherein neither race nor sex presents obstacles to
human experience. He may not have experienced socio-political secondness in either of these forms. The woman’s point of view may be “non-sensical,” because it names perspectives and obstacles that do not exist for him. His hegemonic privilege enables him to falsely universalize his perspective—that is, to assume that his obstacle-free experience regarding race and sex applies to everyone else (Frye 1983, 117). The woman of color’s non-hegemonic perspective, from his point of view, may thus be akin to a logical impossibility (158; cf. 152–74). This is not to say that this scientist cannot embrace her perspective. Rather, the “craziness”/“irrelevance” of her perspective is rooted in nonconsciously operative common-sense beliefs that enable him to dismiss her perspective instead of respecting it as a legitimate challenge to his own. Moreover, because of the scientist’s hegemonic privilege, he is not forced to respect her marginalized perspective. He has the power to choose whether or not to grant her respect (111). If she were big and strong in some way, she could use her power to make him listen. But often she is not.

The example of Alcoff’s Chicana friend and her white, male department chair exemplifies these points. Her non-hegemonic perspective, deeply informed by experiences of racism/sexism in the classroom, was considered irrelevant by him in negotiating the white, male graduate student’s complaint about her. Her hypothesis, that the graduate student’s grievance was based on “his discomfort in the position of teaching assistant to a Chicana,” was dismissed (Alcoff 2001 66). The chair falsely universalized his experience as a white, male faculty member, where race and sex do not enter the classroom as obstacles. Recall that Alcoff spoke to this man and believed that he was trying to treat this woman fairly (67). Yet he tried to do so by an appeal to his own white, male experience, instead of “second-guess[ing] his ability to judge the case, given the fact that he has never himself experienced teaching as a woman of color, nor seen a woman of color alone in a classroom full of White students” (67). The chair was nonconsciously racist and sexist, I would argue, because he dismissed as irrelevant the woman of color’s hypothesis without subjecting it to fair testing (by talking with other students and with
institutional officials who had expertise on racism/sexism in the classroom) (67). He fell prey to the fallacy of “I don’t see racism and sexism at play, thus they are not present.”

As noted earlier, I do not mean to point the finger only at Euro-American white men. In her list of Euro-American white privileges that she enjoys, Peggy McIntosh lists the following:

I can be casual about whether or not to listen to another woman’s voice in a group in which she is the only member of her race. . . .

If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn’t a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have.

I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them. (1988, 293–94)

These privileges are often hard for Euro-American whites to recognize within a culture that falsely universalizes Euro-American white experience as the norm. McIntosh also highlights her heterosexual privileges, as noted in Chapter 1 (1988, 297–98). And she notes how privileges relating to “class, religion, ethnic status, or geographical location” are “intricately intertwined” (293). There are many ways that hegemonic privilege can take shape nonconsciously.

Also noted above, since the tendency to falsely universalize one’s own experience—thereby perpetuating racism, sexism, etc.—is often nonconscious, it can be hard, if not impossible, to detect among members of a community who all share the same nonconscious exclusionary beliefs. In the case of Alcoff’s friend, “the department majority” was white, and this group failed to challenge the chair’s dismissal of the racism/sexism hypothesis (Alcoff 2001, 67). The hegemonic majority can be tempted to override the non-hegemonic voice, because it seems, to them, not to measure up conceptually; it seems, to them, crazy or irrelevant to the inquiry at hand. This mechanism of dismissal is strengthened when paired with another, the appeal to lack of racist, sexist, etc., intent on the part of those in hegemonic groups.
(b) Lack of Conscious Intent  We return to the folk-assumption that, if one is not consciously racist, sexist, etc., then one cannot act in a racist, sexist, etc., manner (Alcoff 2006, 188). Take, once again, the liberal white male who accused bell hooks of “playing the race card” when she suggested that her audience gave her a poor reception because of her race and sex. Presumably this man was both anti-racist and anti-sexist, and yet he dismissed her claim with vigor (hooks 2003b, 30–31). The white, male department chair described by Alcoff is presumably consciously anti-racist and anti-sexist too (Alcoff 2001, 67). These examples reflect the “disconnect” described above—between, on the one hand, one’s conscious motivation, and, on the other hand, nonconsciously habitual behavior. The folk assumption looks only for conscious motivation. Finding none, it thereby dismisses the hypothesis that behavior can nonetheless be racist, sexist, and so on.

My Peircean critique of this folk assumption resonates with Jeffrey Gauthier’s critique of Kant’s ethical theory (2004). While I do not think that either the liberal white male of hooks’s story or the department chair of Alcoff’s story are necessarily card-carrying Kantian ethicists, I do think the folk assumption about racism and sexism reflects a Kantian legacy. Gauthier argues that Kant’s ethical theory relies so heavily on the motive of duty that it cannot address societal prejudices that may inform (and historically have informed) the application of the Categorical Imperative. Moreover, making the motive of duty the fulcrum of moral concern actually undermines the detection of such prejudices. This is because Kantian ethical agents, in assessing the moral dimensions of a situation, look no further than their conscious motives. Gauthier writes,

One of the features of systems of oppression such as racism and sexism that makes them so difficult to change is the fact that even thoughtful and perceptive moral agents can perpetuate these systems without consciously willing any racist or sexist principles at all. By making the good will the sole criterion of the right, Kantianism directs the agent’s moral attention to the conscious intentions of [an] act rather than to its objective function as part of a
broader system. Perhaps just as importantly, because the conscientious moral agent who has tested his principles to the best of his abilities with Kant’s formal test will believe that he has done all that is morally required, he may be unlikely to perceive concerns that escaped the net of that procedure as having great moral significance at all. (2004, 11, my emphasis)

Gauthier is highlighting how focusing on only conscious intention fosters a false confidence that one has done a sufficient check against discriminatory behaviors, since, on a conscious level, one finds no discriminatory intent. This false confidence often fuels the dismissal of feedback that one’s behavior is/was, in fact, discriminatory.

This dismissal by means of good intentions assumes that sincerely paper-doubting common-sense beliefs is sufficient to ensure their eradication: “I find racism and sexism to involve dubitable beliefs, therefore they no longer inform my thought and actions.” Ironically, this stance is itself an enactment of exclusionary privilege. It assumes that non-hegemonic voices, such as those of people of color and women, are not relevant to the question of whether racist or sexist acts are being committed. Built in to the habits of both Euro-American white privilege and male privilege is the prerogative to ignore the perspectives outside the circle of privilege (McIntosh 1988, 293–94). Therefore, the very efforts of those in hegemonic groups to be anti-discriminatory can involve a nonconscious exercise of discriminatory exclusion. Bell hooks comments on racism in this respect:

Once we can face all the myriad ways white-supremacist thinking shapes our daily perceptions, we can understand the reasons liberal whites who are concerned with ending racism may simultaneously hold on to beliefs and assumptions that have their roots in white supremacy. (2003b, 30)

We are led once again to Peirce’s inclusive communal ideal, in which efforts to eliminate racist, sexist, and other discriminatory common-sense beliefs should embrace the perspectives of those most affected by these beliefs. Good intentions cannot be allowed to block the road of inquiry if a community is to successfully implement Critical Common-sensism.
Part 3: Loving Reasonableness: Critical Common-sensism, Science, and Agape

We are now in a position to see how the proactive interpretation of Critical Common-sensism I have offered in this chapter addresses the application problem that can undermine the practice of science and agapic love. The success of Critical Common-sensism on this front depends on its active interplay with both scientific and agapic ideals. It is likely, in the United States, for nonconscious racist, sexist, and other discriminatory beliefs to be shared by the majority of a community of inquiry, who are often members of hegemonic groups such as whites, men, and so on. This can occur even among well-meaning hegemonic-group members who repudiate racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. Critical common-sensism gives us the tools to identify this problem as the continued functioning of dubitable common-sense beliefs, which have only been sincerely paper-doubted, leaving their habitual, embodied roots in tact. Moreover, synthesizing CCSist analysis with the ideals of science and agape provides a way out of the impasse presented by these shared nonconscious hegemonic beliefs.

Critical Common-sensism carries with it both the spirit of science and the spirit of agape, which the pragmaticist embraces as part and parcel of his or her commitment to knowledge and truth. In a discussion of Critical Common-sensism, Peirce puts it this way:

[W]hat he adores, if he is a good pragmaticist, is power; not the sham power of brute force, which, even in its own specialty of spoiling things, secures such slight results; but the creative power of reasonableness, which subdues all other powers, and rules over them with its scepter, knowledge, and its globe, love. It is as one of the chief lieutenants of reasonableness that he highly esteems doubt, although it is not amiable. (CP 5.520, Peirce's emphasis)

This passage synthesizes the interrelationship of Critical Common-sensism, science, and agape, highlighting the importance of embracing doubt, “although it is not amiable.” In the context of the application problem, doubt occurs as a challenge to the hegemonic
assumption that racist, sexist, or other discriminatory common-sense beliefs have been eradicated and thus cannot be present in a given community of inquiry. Doubt involves a non-hegemonic hypothesis that discrimination of some form is present, even though discriminatory common-sense beliefs have supposedly been eliminated. It is common for those in hegemonic groups to dismiss hypotheses about discrimination when voiced by those in non-hegemonic groups, a dismissal that is often fueled by false confidence in the effectiveness of sincere paper-doubt.

Both science and agape supplement this Critical Common-sensist diagnosis, echoing the demand that the non-hegemonic hypothesis be given a fair hearing. Science, for its part, pursues knowledge about reality. Its efforts are undermined by exclusionary instinctive beliefs that prevent the identification of large-scale racist, sexist, and other discriminatory habits. These habits play out through racist, sexist or other discriminatory secondness not usually experienced by those in corresponding hegemonic groups. It is of scientific interest to honor hypotheses from community members representing non-hegemonic groups, as the unique experiences of these members (compared to those in hegemonic groups) make them epistemological assets to the community as a whole. These non-hegemonic community members are necessary to the growth of knowledge. The scientific embrace of a hypothesis about discrimination goes hand in hand with both the ideal of an infinitely inclusive community of inquiry and the agapic imperative to embrace difference, even and especially when this difference feels threatening (EP 1:353; cf. Anderson 1995a, 108–9).

The agapic ideal works from the perspective of a loving concern that bolsters self-control. On the one hand, it can be very tempting for those in hegemonic groups to respond to a non-hegemonic hypothesis with the “brute force” of rejecting the doubt such a hypothesis creates, by labeling the hypothesis crazy or irrelevant (CP 5.520). The felt certainty of nonconsciously functioning common-sense beliefs can be so strong as to preclude self-control. Recall Peirce’s rather phenomenological description of self-control in “Grounds of the Validity
of the Laws of Logic”: “Self-control seems to be the capacity for rising to an extended view of a practical subject instead of seeing only temporary urgency” (W 2:261 n. 6). This “temporary urgency” can involve protecting one’s view of herself as morally good and therefore incapable of behaving in a racist, sexist, or otherwise discriminatory fashion (W 2:261 n. 6; Sullivan 2006, 128). It can feel so uncomfortable to grant the possibility that one has unwittingly perpetuated racism, sexism, etc., that an appeal to good intentions can be, ironically enough, used as a tool of exclusionary sympathy. “Temporary urgency” can also manifest in the “need” to restore a comfort level for the majority of community members (W 2:261 n. 6). If the hypothesis of the presence of racism, sexism, etc., “goes away,” then most of “us” will feel much more comfortable.

On the other hand, in the same description of self-control, Peirce links self-control with the expanded perspective of the loving community:

Self-control seems to be the capacity for rising to an extended view of a practical subject instead of seeing only temporary urgency. This is the only freedom of which man has any reason to be proud; and it is because love of what is good for all on the whole, which is the widest possible consideration, is the essence of Christianity, that it is said that the service of Christ is perfect freedom. (W 2:261 n. 6, my emphasis)

Agape, as the Christian ideal, informs self-control by giving the human organism affective footing beyond the immediate urgency of restoring one’s own comfort level, or the comfort level of the majority. This affective footing is a love that embraces what is different, even and especially when that difference feels threatening to it. In this case, one’s concern for the community member reporting discrimination, and thus creating doubt, overrides the dismissal-temptation. If, for example, someone is experiencing racism, which I may not grasp as a result of my being white, then I want to hold that feedback in place, even if it means that I (or others) have acted in a racist manner. While this may not be a comfortable admission for me to make, my
concern for my community-mate will, ideally, lead me to hold her testimony in place, so that it can be acted on.

One who loves reasonableness, then, “highly esteems doubt, although it is not amiable” (CP 5.520). Indeed, doubt is not “amiable” when it manifests as a jarring interruption of one’s projects and/or as a shock to one’s sense of oneself as a flawless promoter of justice. Nonetheless, embracing doubt promotes growth in reasonableness, and rejecting it undermines self-control. More specifically, embracing doubt—via embracing the hypothesis that racist, sexist, etc., common-sense beliefs are still in play—allows those in hegemonic groups to diversify their understanding of racism, sexism, or other discrimination as functioning in more settings than they imagined possible. Their understanding of these types of discrimination is rendered more complex and nuanced. To reject doubt, through rejecting the hypothesis, is to surrender to the nonconscious operation of dubitable common-sense beliefs. This surrender undermines self-control, because it turns a blind eye on belief-habits that are undermining one’s thought and behavior. It blocks the road of inquiry, breaking Peirce’s First Rule of Reason: “[I]n order to learn you must desire to learn and in so desiring not be satisfied with what you already incline to think” (EP 2:48).

Someone may object that this embrace of non-hegemonic perspectives allows for an “anything goes” attitude in science or everyday life—such that any feedback whatsoever can take center stage—which would erode the possibility of productive rational discourse. Several points can be made in response to this concern. First of all, the non-hegemonic perspectives under discussion involve oppression. Groups are being targeted by racism, sexism, and so on, not merely an individual here or there. The patterns of feedback are compelling in their revelation of large-scale hegemonic habits. Second, even if an individual were giving a completely unique hypothesis, this alone would not count against it. Peirce’s philosophy is committed to embracing creative novelty, as long as the corresponding hypotheses are subjected to the scientific method, which is my next point. Finally, the Peircean
community of inquiry adheres to the scientific method. Hypotheses generated by this community will be subjected to the rigors of that method: They must have explanatory power, for example, and pass through the stages of deduction and induction. Granting special status to historically underrepresented, non-hegemonic perspectives does not change this.

Moreover, their special epistemological status does not confer on non-hegemonic groups a “god’s eye” view on things. It is to say, however, that someone who is oppressed because of race, for example, has a perspective on experience that a white person probably does not have. The same point applies to other axes of oppression. In 2010, it is part of the public discourse in the U.S. mainstream that both racism and sexism are wrong. To this extent they have been cast into sincere paper-doubt. Whether or not the deep-rooted habits associated with each are still in play cannot be determined without consulting people of color and women. These are the groups who encounter the most racist and sexist secondness stemming from societal racist and sexist beliefs.

Community members in hegemonic groups are called to follow Marilyn Frye’s example. They can acknowledge that seeing a non-hegemonic perspective as “crazy” is often a knee-jerk, exclusionary reaction that signals the false universalization—and corresponding close-mindedness—that can accompany hegemonic privilege (Frye 1983, 112). Instead, they can aspire after what Patricia Williams describes as “the insight that comes with the lack of prejudice, the abandon of prejudgment, the willingness to see another viewpoint and be converted if only for a moment, to allow oneself to be held in a state of suspended knowing” (1997, 74). This profound humility described by Williams echoes the rigors of Peirce’s self-control ideally practiced—as self-critical, scientific, fallible, reasonable, and loving toward others. Thus the application problem finds a Peircean response in the interwoven demands of Critical Common-sensism, scientific method, and agapic love, which all fuel the “creative power of reasonableness” (CP 5.520).