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THEOLOGY AND THE ATMOSPHERICS OF RACE:
SCHLEIERMACHER, AFFECTIVITY, AND THE TENACITY OF RACISM

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For Sarah

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Though this dissertation takes as its subject matter the many ways in which human sociality can go wrong, its very existence testifies to a vast web of social relations gone right. This truth glows with a special luminosity from my present vantage point at the project's conclusion. The experience of reading the work in its entirety called to mind a veritable barrage of encounters with real people situated in diverse institutional settings that collectively funded its guiding intuitions and sharpened its argument. This confirms an important insight about the life of the mind, namely, that it transpires entirely within the complex movements of human life more broadly conceived. To write is to act under the influence of countless others and in response to conditions that far exceed our ability to articulate, let alone control. This means, at the very least, that the fruit of such labor is as common as the ground from which it springs. The acknowledgements that follow attempt to make this explicit. But I offer them also as testimony to a more profound, theological conviction – one that lies very near the heart of this dissertation – that the intricate network of our relations, for all their fragility and susceptibility to distortion, also pulse with divine grace. Indeed, this is precisely what makes it possible to recognize the distortions in the first place.

Both my moral concern about antiblack racism and my theological consternation with its tenacity emerged from my involvement in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Though certainly imperfect in implementation, its institutional commitment to becoming an anti-racist, pro-reconciling church meant that even a fifteen-year-old white kid living in Southern Illinois and attending an entirely white church could find himself caught up in the costly and life-giving work of racial justice. The Rev. Dr. Christal Williams led my first antiracism workshop with such grace and poignancy that I am still, now more than two decades later, wrestling with the

questions she posed in that stuffy, third-floor youth room at First Christian Church in Centralia, Illinois. This dissertation is a long-incubating response to her witness and ministry. In addition to inviting her to speak that night, Rev. Michael Karunas also accompanied my first forays into racial justice ministries at First Christian Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Michael's sensitive moral conscience shaped my own sense of the church's social witness, and his learned approach to the Christian life taught me that ministry is not threatened but enhanced by theological reflection. Both the realistic comportment of this dissertation and the freedom to think with the great minds of the Christian tradition stem from his example and tutelage. I also wish to thank my church planting comrades, Rev. Neil Ellingson and Rev. Timothy Kim, for stretching my theological imagination beyond comfortable limits and for showing me how much fun it can be to "remake believe" in this supposedly disenchanting, secular age. Their friendship, as well as that of the entire community at Root and Branch Church, nourished me in the earliest days of this project, and it buoys me still.

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The other members of my dissertation committee, Kevin Hector and Omar McRoberts, also played outsized roles in my scholarly development. Hector's *Glaubenslehre* seminar marked my first, and, in hindsight, quite decisive encounter with Schleiermacher's work. Besides serving

as a lucid guide through the classics of modern theology and as an exacting reader of seminar papers, he also advised my master's thesis and encouraged my early interest in doctoral studies. He has been among my steadiest and most generous supporters at Chicago. And while I first turned to Professor McRoberts on account of his expertise in social theory, I routinely left our conversations with as many new theological insights as social scientific ones. His capacious, synthesizing intellect helped me identify the deeper veins of social thought rippling pre-consciously through my work as well as the genuinely constructive potential of thinking with Schleiermacher about enduring questions facing contemporary scholarship on racism. Taken together, these readers embodied a distinctively Chicago approach to the theological task, one that simultaneously encourages the scrupulous reading of classic texts and a ludic freedom to pursue a question wherever it leads.

This list of formative interlocutors is hardly exhaustive. Dean Kristine Culp read several chapters of the dissertation and provided crucial feedback throughout the project. Professor Richard Rosengarten hosted an independent study course on theological and religious aesthetics that proved invaluable for my thinking about feeling, theological symbols, and the religious life. Susan Schreiner's inimitable courses on Luther and Calvin introduced me to classic theological formulations of the bondage of the will and the conscience, each of which plays an important role in this work. In addition to these faculty members, I wish to thank the members of Professor Schweiker's Thesis Group, each of whom provided constructive feedback on early drafts. This includes David Barr, John Buchman, Kristel Clayville, Darryl Dale-Ferguson, Blaize Gervais, Michelle Harrington, Eun Hwang, Michael Le Chevallier, Herbert Lin, Devin O'Rourke, Foster Pinckney, Willa Swenson-Lengyel, Sara-Jo Swiatek, Virginia White, and Raúl Zegarra. It is difficult for me to imagine a more brilliant or supportive cohort of colleagues.

Of all the relations that have sustained and blessed me through this process, the intimate bonds of family have been the steadiest and most vital. I wish to thank my parents, Deborah and Stephen Packman, for their decades of faithful love and support. They, as well as my parents-in-law, Paul and Susan Rohde, offered words of encouragement when the finish line seemed so far away, provided some very crucial childcare for our sons when that finish line got closer, and were the first to celebrate when the finish line was finally crossed. My sisters-in-law, Anna Rohde Schwehn and Inga Rohde, rallied our village to support us in that crucial final stretch of editing, and my brother, Matthew Packman, reliably unleashed his distinctive humor to keep me from taking myself or my work too seriously. Our boys, Benjamin and Owen, provided their father with more delight and blessed distraction than their dazzling young minds could ever comprehend, and the love they have shown me, which is entirely disinterested in any assessments of productivity or argumentative coherence, has been nothing short of salvific. Finally, I want to thank my wife, Sarah Rohde, for being my fiercest advocate, my favorite conversation partner, and my closest friend for the duration of this project. Sarah's labor supported our family through these lean graduate school years, and her presence has imparted a fullness to my life that made these years seem anything but lean. Indeed, my cup overflows. It is with immense gratitude and affection that I dedicate this work to her.

ABBREVIATIONS

- CG Friedrich Schleiermacher. *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhang dargestellt Zweite Auflage (1830/31)*. Edited by Rolf Schäfer. De Gruyter Texte. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008.
- CS Friedrich Schleiermacher. *Der christliche Sitte nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhang dargestellt in Friedrich Schleiermacher's Sämtliche Werke I/12*. Second Edition. Edited by L. Jonas. Berlin: G. Reimer, 1884.
- SW III/6 Friedrich Schleiermacher. *Psychologie in Friedrich Schleiermacher's Sämtliche Werke III/6*. Edited by L. George. Berlin: G. Reimer, 1862.

INTRODUCTION

In the seventh chapter of his Letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul portrays an agent who is prone to a vexing and particularly recalcitrant form of self-frustration. “I do not understand my own actions,” he writes, “[f]or I do not do what I want [ὁ θέλω], but I do [ποιῶ] the very thing that I hate [ὁ μισῶ].” (Romans 7:15)¹ What so perplexes him is the unintuitive relationship between his mental life and his conduct, between what this ‘I’² wants and what it finally does. Typically, actions follow more or less directly from our intentions, just as effects follow from their causes. This makes them intelligible. But here, the ‘I’'s actions contradict its own desire. It does precisely what it hates.

The perplexity only increases when Paul introduces moral terms onto the scene. “I can will what is right [τὸ καλὸν], but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good [ἀγαθόν] that I want, but the evil [ὁ ... κακὸν] I do not want is what I do.” (Rom. 7:18b-19) The failure now assumes the form of a distinctly moral self-frustration. The ‘I’'s actions contradict not only what it wants but also its judgments about the right and the good. This brings Paul to a precipice. All of the normal springs of action have been exhausted. The ‘I’ does what is evil, not because of a false belief or a vicious desire, but rather *in spite of* true beliefs and virtuous desires. Both the source of this evil and the ability to resist it elude Paul. The power of the mind to govern our conduct, famously

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all biblical translations are from the NRSV.

² Whether Paul is speaking here of humanity in general, humanity prior to Christian conversion, or for that matter, any actual human being at all remains a matter of great debate. Stanley Stowers argues that the speaker here is not meant to refer to Paul himself, but is rather an instance of the Hellenistic rhetorical trope of “speech-in-character” or *προσωποποιία*. Stanley Stowers, “Apostrophe, Prosōpopoiia, and Paul’s Rhetorical Education,” in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald, Thomas H. Olbricht, and L. Michael White, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 351–69; Stanley Kent Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

portrayed by Plato in his metaphor of the chariot driver,³ fails to exercise its usual control. This experience bewilders the defeated ‘I’, rendering its own actions unintelligible even to itself.

This confusion does not, however, stop Paul from trying to bring the phenomenon to language, and the result is remarkable. A fissure seems to appear at the very center of this ‘I’, as if the first-personal pronoun cracks under a pressure it cannot sustain. Paul writes, “Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.” (Rom. 7:16-17) Within the span of a single sentence, Paul paradoxically asserts that these evil deeds both *are* and *are not* attributable to the ‘I’. No sooner has he identified the ‘I’ who wills with the ‘I’ who acts than he swiftly doubles back to disavow it. “[I]t is no longer I that do it, but sin...” We might think that, having exhausted the usual springs of action within the self, Paul is forced to press beyond the self in search of the cause of these evil deeds. The agent becomes intelligible to itself only once it acknowledges that its actions are not simply its own - that a mysterious, second agent is acting through, or perhaps even in lieu of, the self. Yet, as we see in the monologue’s dramatic conclusion, these evasive maneuvers ultimately fail. The first-personal pronoun emphatically returns when the ‘I’ cries out, “Wretched man *that I am!*” [ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος] (Rom. 7:24) The wretchedness of this evil is finally attributable to no one other than the *ego* who commits them, even if it does so in spite of itself.

The ambiguity of this account has produced lively exegetical debates. Some of these fixate on the apparent fissure just mentioned, interpreting it as evidence of a tragically divided self.⁴ “The mind” [ὁ νοῦς], which Paul identifies as his “innermost self” [ἐσω ἄνθρωπον] (Rom.

³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 253c-255a

⁴ Bultmann famously endorses the view that flesh/spirit mark, not two distinct parts of a self, but rather two existential modes of being that encompass the whole of the self. “Just as his willing and doing are not distributed between two subjects – say, a better self and his lower impulses – but rather are both realized by the same I, so also are the ‘flesh’ and ‘mind’ (or the ‘inner man’) not two constituent elements out of which he is put together.

7:22), turns out to be neither the whole of the self nor the self's most practically effective part. Rather, it stands at odds – even at war – with the “sinful passions” [τὰ παθήματα τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν] (Rom. 7:5) and “desires” [ἐπιθυμίας] (Rom. 6:12) that work in and through the body, apparently with a mind of their own.⁵ Alongside this broadly Platonic account, others detect a more Aristotelian lineage. On their view, the Apostle describes a case of moral weakness, or *akrasia*, in which the agent is torn between competing desires and ultimately acts against its better judgment.⁶ Further others suggest that Paul's thinking is more aligned with the Jewish notion of an “evil impulse.”⁷ In each case, these interpretations construe the recalcitrant moral failure as the product of an internal contradiction where sin is conceived as a part of the self, typically the irrational and affective part.⁸

Those who favor an apocalyptic interpretation, on the other hand, see much more at play than a merely moral psychological problem. Instead of the internal fissure at the heart of the self, they focus on the moment in which the self is apparently overtaken by a mysterious, external power called Sin.⁹ After all, Paul routinely depicts Sin as an agent, the subject of action verbs. It “seizes” opportunities and “produces” desires in the self (Rom. 7:8); it also “enters the world” (Rom. 5:12), “comes to life” (Rom. 7:9), “deceives,” (Rom. 7:11) “enslaves” (Rom. 7:14) and

Man is split.” (Rudolf Bultmann, “Romans 7 and the Anthropology of Paul,” in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, trans. Schubert Ogden (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), 151.)

⁵ For a Platonic account, see Emma Wasserman, *The Death of the Soul in Romans 7: Sin, Death, and the Law in Light of Hellenistic Moral Psychology*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2:256 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

⁶ Stanley Stowers and Troels Engberg-Pedersen advocate this view. See Stanley Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 269–72, and Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “The Reception of Greco-Roman Culture in the New Testament: The Case of Romans 7:7-25,” in *The New Testament as Reception*, ed. Mogens Müller and Henrik Tronier (New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 54–56.

⁷ Joel Marcus, “The Evil Inclination in the Letters of Paul,” *Irish Biblical Studies* 8 (January 1, 1986): 8–21.

⁸ For an important 20th century philosophical interpretation of Romans 7 along these lines, see Hans Jonas, “The Abyss of the Will: Philosophical Meditations on the Seventh Chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans,” in *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁹ Here, I capitalize “Sin” in keeping with many apocalyptic interpreters to emphasize it as a personified agent. It is worth noting that others have noted the positive valence of sin in its biblical usage. See, for example, Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 81–99.

even “kills” (Rom. 7:11) the self, subjecting it to the rule of a foreign law. The emerging picture is not of a divided self,¹⁰ torn apart by conflicting mental states,¹¹ but of a single agent overwhelmed, even possessed, by a second agent that acts in and through it.¹² These accounts certainly admit that the ‘I’ in this condition remains an agent; it is just a relatively incompetent one. The real dramatic action, that which adequately explains what its powers of mental causation fail to explain, occurs between two non-human protagonists: the Spirit of God/Christ and Sin/Flesh. In this “three-actor moral drama,”¹³ supra-personal powers strive to rule not only the ‘I’ but the entire cosmos. The tragic disjunction between knowledge and action is thus not the consequence of an internal contradiction but an exponent of supra-personal powers that hold sway over the ‘I’.

This apocalyptic reading casts the phenomenon of moral self-frustration at the heart of the passage in a very different light. First, it changes the sense in which the ‘I’'s actions are unintelligible to itself. The confusion results, not from an inexplicable internal contradiction, but from the constricted, psychological scope itself. Since the springs of action do not simply or exhaustively lie within the self, even the most scrupulous introspection is bound to end in

¹⁰ In his classic critique, Krister Stendahl argues that the long interpretive trajectory centered on Paul’s “introspective conscience” lacks historical support and, instead, represents a much later obsession with interiority and the individuated ‘I’. See Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *Harvard Theological Review* 56, no. 3 (July 1963): 199–215.

¹¹ Ernst Käsemann summarizes this “apocalyptic” view nicely. “Anthropology is here the projection of cosmology... Because the world is not finally a neutral place but the field of contending powers, making both individually and socially becomes an object in the struggle and an exponent of the power that rules it.” Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 150.

¹² With reference to Romans 7:8 in particular, James D.G. Dunn writes that Paul “denotes sin as a personified power oppressing human experience in the following verses – so experience/know sin as a force operating on and within the decisions of the everyday.” (James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, Word Biblical Commentary 38A-B (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 1:378.

¹³ J. Louis Martyn, “Epilogue: An Essay in Pauline Meta-Ethics,” in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, ed. John M. G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 173–83.177f. Martyn develops an account of apocalyptic powers in his Galatians commentary. See J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 370–73.

antinomies. The ‘I’ does that which it hates. To focus solely on the agent’s internal states is to remain oblivious to the broader cosmological drama in which it is embedded and the more potent, supra-personal forces that ultimately control it.

This broader scope also reveals the agent’s condition to be more severe than the moral psychological interpreters might admit. Whereas an akratic agent can be strengthened by exercising powers that already lie within her, the agent in Romans 7 does what is evil in spite of a well-functioning mind and well-oriented desires. It needs, not to be morally corrected or improved from within, but to be rescued from beyond. The agent suffers, not from moral weakness, but a much more severe condition of extreme immorality, one that proves particularly resistant to improvement. As one recent interpreter puts it, Paul describes a person who has undergone a “death of the soul”¹⁴ – an unrelenting and normative unresponsiveness to morals the rectification of which exceeds the agent’s own power to effect.

These are crucial themes to which this dissertation will return again and again. But before turning to our topic more directly, one further insight bears noting. For all its emphasis on the exteriority of sin, the apocalyptic interpretation of Romans 7 refuses to empty the ‘I’ of agency and interiority. Paul’s text strongly resists this implication. He speaks often of “sinful passions” and “desires,” along with the relatively impotent judgments and intentions of the “innermost self.” Though Sin assaults the self from without, it is equally clear that it “dwells within me” [*οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοί*] (Rom. 7:17) and “works in our members to bear fruit for death.” [*τὰ ... ἐνηργεῖτο ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ἡμῶν, εἰς τὸ καρποφρῆσαι τῷ θανάτῳ*] (Rom. 7:5) These passages make

¹⁴ This term has roots in ancient Hellenistic moral psychology, particularly amongst Platonists. Emma Wasserman defines it as “a moral-psychological drama in which the worst part of the soul defeats the best part.” Wasserman, *The Death of the Soul in Romans 7*, 8. She argues that the agent Paul describes in Romans 7 suffers from such a condition wherein the rational part of the soul is figuratively killed by the passionate, lower parts of the soul that are identified with sin. See Wasserman, 76–116.

it difficult to suggest that the ‘I’ is simply coerced by Sin, as if it were a victim of sheer compulsion. There is a more complex, nuanced relationship between these two agents.¹⁵ But it is significant that, for Paul, the anthropological *locus* for this interaction between exteriority and interiority is found in the affections, that part of ourselves over which we have the least control. In fact, in one particularly suggestive passage, he even claims that Sin “produced in me all kinds of desires.” [κατειργάσατο ἐν ἐμοὶ πᾶσαν ἐπιθυμίαν] (Rom. 7:8) The implication is that the sinful desires that one experiences as one’s own are actually *affective effects* of an encounter with a power that lies beyond oneself. They are *remnants* of that foreign agent’s activity upon the self, and, even more terrifyingly, *traces* of that Other’s enduring presence within oneself. In this light, the affections are not simply the bodily urges or appetitive longings that inhibit self-control. Rather, they indicate a kind of foreign control at the very root of the self.

Rather than enter into the exegetical debates, this project proposes that the very dynamic in Paul’s text that drives these debates also reveals something profound about our nature as agents. Granting that human beings are agents who bear a remarkable capacity for moral motivation and a certain vulnerability to moral weakness, it asks if there are still other cases of moral self-frustration that are not so easily explicable with reference to our powers of mental causation alone. Is it possible that agents might commit evil deeds that fundamentally elude moral psychological analyses, deeds under which the first-personal pronouns seem to crack under the explanatory pressure? I will argue that these cases do, in fact, exist and are unfortunately quite ordinary. Furthermore, the theories that attempt to explain these phenomena follow Paul by positing the existence of supra-personal forces that constrain and enable

¹⁵ The non-competitive nature of divine and human agency for Paul is a central theme in the edited volume by John M. G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole (eds.), *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment* (London: T & T Clark, 2006)

individual agents. But to see this, we must move well beyond the historical scope of biblical studies and the introspective perspective of moral philosophy in order to explore a much more contemporary, concrete, and distinctly political context – namely, tenacious antiblack racism in the United States.

§1 The Tenacity of American Racism

For the entire history of the United States of America, the realities of racial violence and domination have stood in monstrous contrast to the enlightened ideals inscribed in our founding documents. For most of that history, this gap could be explained by the existence of pervasive antiblack prejudices. So long as Black people were judged to be somehow less human than white people, white Americans could enslave Black people even as they affirmed the fundamental equality of persons before God and under the law. All persons were equal, but only white people counted as persons.

This belief in a natural, often divinely ordained, racial hierarchy was frequently coupled with equally racist desires and emotions which collectively animated and preserved the institutions of white supremacy. The extreme efforts to keep schools, churches, neighborhoods, and workplaces racially segregated were the result of a widespread desire amongst white people to inhabit white-only spaces. The white desire for expressions of deference and subservience from Black people orchestrated all manner of interracial social interactions that, if not satisfied, could quickly turn deadly. Antiblack hatred motivated the racial terror of the Ku Klux Klan. A prevailing white fear of Black men's sexuality generated anti-miscegenation laws and lynch mobs. White people expressed disgust toward the sub-human conditions in which Black people were forced to live and anger toward those who dared to improve those conditions. Through the

middle of the twentieth century, most sociological models of racism emphasized these prejudicial attitudes as the defining feature and animating principle of racial inequality.¹⁶

But by the final third of the twentieth century, the United States underwent a precipitous decline in explicitly racist sentiments.¹⁷ Such trends align with shifts in the cultural acceptability of racist language and the massive legislative and judicial reforms brought about by the Civil Rights Movement. One might think that these declines in antiblack prejudice would have led to equally significant declines in racial inequality. Without racist beliefs and desires, there should be nothing standing in the way of a steady, if gradual, decline in racial injustice.

As mounting volumes of social scientific research have shown, this is far from the case. Whether one looks to respective income levels, accumulated household wealth, access to high-paying jobs, political representation, educational achievement, access to quality housing, access to medical care, incarceration rates, and even expected lifespan, Black Americans remain at a significant disadvantage vis-à-vis their white peers in nearly every measure of social well-being.

§1.1 Social Theories of Tenacity

To solve this “puzzle of persistence,”¹⁸ social scientists have increasingly turned away from attitudinal models of racism in favor structuralist ones. These locate the cause of enduring racial inequalities, not in subjective prejudices in individual minds, but in objective conditions

¹⁶ For examples, see Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1958) and Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944).

¹⁷ Maria Krysan and Sarah Patton Moberg, “Trends in Racial Attitudes,” University of Illinois Institute of Government and Public Affairs, August 25, 2016, <https://igpa.uillinois.edu/programs/racial-attitudes>. Howard Schuman, *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997). In the 1930s, for example, a strong majority of white Americans expressed strong opposition to integrated schools and interracial marriage. But by the turn of the twenty-first century, these indications of white racial attitudes suggest that a nearly total inversion had occurred over the intervening seven decades.

¹⁸ Orlando Patterson, “The Mechanisms of Cultural Reproduction Explaining the Puzzle of Persistence,” in *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Sociology: Second Edition* (Taylor and Francis, 2018), 122–32.

rooted in our material and social environment. They convincingly argue that generations of antiblack violence and oppression have shaped the very fabric of our social order, concentrating wealth and power in the hands of white people by siphoning it from persons of color.¹⁹ This gives a kind of order, or structure, to society. Even steep declines in racist attitudes and changes to cultural norms do little to repair the more deeply embedded patterns that materially benefit white people and disadvantage non-white people. Race has attained a social profundity that conditions – or structures – everything else. This means that racial inequality is reproduced so systematically and with such a thoughtless automaticity that it is largely impervious to the changes in our racial attitudes. As one influential sociologist put it, contemporary racism amounts to a “racism without racists.”²⁰

This marks a surprising parallel with our reading of Paul. When the contents of our minds fail to explain human conduct, both Paul and these social theorists appeal to supra-personal powers to fill the explanatory gap. Of course, we should not overstate this similarity. Contemporary theorists would balk at Paul’s theological description of these powers, not to mention his presumption that the powers that ultimately move us lie in the domain of religion. But it is equally true that social theorists are themselves divided about how to understand these forces. Marxists are likely to speak of group-based material interests indexed to economic realities. Foucault’s intellectual inheritors may invoke historically contingent discursive regimes that discipline what it is even possible for agents to see, think, or do. Such diversity suggests that

¹⁹ Laura Sullivan et al., “The Racial Wealth Gap,” *Institute for Assets and Social Policy, Brandeis University & DEMOS*, 2015; Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth, White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006); Meizhu Lui and United for a Fair Economy, *The Color of Wealth: The Story behind the U.S. Racial Wealth Divide* (New York : New Press : Distributed by W.W. Norton, 2006).

²⁰ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 4th ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014)

these supra-personal forces are complex and multidimensional. They, no less than our psychological powers, resist easy conceptualization. But there is overwhelming consensus amongst scholars of contemporary racism that, however one might think of them, powers of social causation are essential for understanding the tenacity America's most persistent moral failure.

This turn away from human interiority has provided a powerful solution to the puzzle of persistence. But it raises serious questions about the place of human agents and their rich inner lives amongst these larger forces. Contemporary racism may be able to persist without racists, but it surely could not exist without agents. The broad social patterns revealed through empirical research and statistical analysis are, after all, the cumulative result of *choices* made by individuals and groups - even if the consequences of those choices are not evident to the ones who make them. Social theorists are likely to admit this. They would simply say that their task is not to explain the nature of agency but rather to account for the fact that supposedly unencumbered agents display such remarkable statistical similarities and coordination in our choices and conduct.

Here again, social theorists provide us with powerful explanatory resources. Marxists speak of ideologies as forms of social consciousness that serve the material, group-based interests of the ruling class. These interrelated sets of beliefs depict existing political relations amongst groups as natural and just, thereby mystifying the group-based material interests that are actually responsible for these conditions.²¹ Those who prefer their social theory in French might

²¹ For accounts of racism as ideology, see Tommie Shelby, "Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory," *Philosophical Forum* 34, no. 2 (June 1, 2003): 153–88; Tommie Shelby, "Racism, Moralism, and Social Criticism," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 11, no. 1 (2014): 57–74; Lukas Egger, "Theories and Critiques of Ideology as a Foundation for a Critical Theory of Racism," *Austrian Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 3 (January 1, 2019): 17–28.

quibble about the relation between basic material realities and the ideal constructions about them. But they agree that social domination entails a fundamentally discursive process that disciplines subjects to see the “order of things”²² as natural and fitting. For both, agents continue to make choices. But our choices are dominated by material, ideological, and discursive conditions that condition and influence them.

These developments in social theory have done much to illumine the way that social and political relations affect the inner lives of agents. For example, it is difficult to imagine how the white supremacist regimes operating in such geographically and culturally diverse locations as Brazil, South Africa, India, and the United States could take hold without a relatively unified set of racist ideas to coordinate their efforts. Furthermore, the isomorphism of such beliefs with the material interests of the racially dominant helps us understand how they could plausibly enjoy such a long shelf life.

But there are also reasons to wonder whether these theories grasp the complexity of human life in general and racial life in particular. Though calculations of material group interests are very clearly part of what moves us to act, these hardly exhaust our motivations. This is most evident in our personal lives, where we pursue not only material security but also things like truth, goodness, and beauty – sometimes even when those pursuits place our well-being at risk. But even our baser, political motivations resist such easy characterization. Voting blocks are frequently moved to act in sharp contrast to their material interests by racial resentment²³ and

²² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

²³ Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, 1st ed. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

righteous anger,²⁴ economic despair²⁵ and varieties of hope. This suggests that, in solving some aspects of the puzzle of persistence, the shift away from prejudicial attitudes and the richness of human interiority may have also occluded others.

There is a further theoretical concern that brings us closer to our central theme. By emphasizing the ideological and discursive formation of agents living in racialized societies, social theorists seem to presume that ideas and language have the power to move us. But, as Paul knew all too well, the relationship between what we know and what we do is hardly self-evident. Even after the racist ideologies that funded generations of white supremacy in the United States have lost currency, our actions – individually and collectively – indicate that we are not entirely outside of racism’s grip. Might it be that the supra-personal forces that preserve the racial order have shaped our nature as agents even more profoundly? Might the fixation on ideology and language that has illumined so much also conceal the more primordial, affective tethers that bind us to one another and to the racialized world in which we live, move, and have our being? I will argue that this is, in fact, the case. But to see this, we need to look beyond these social theoretical insights and consider empirical psychological research on social cognition.

§1.2 Psychological Underpinnings of Tenacity

As social theorists were turning to the supra-personal realm to explain the tenacity of racism, social psychologists pressed even further inward. They sought a similar question to that of the social theorists: how can racial inequalities persist in the absence of racist beliefs and desires? But instead of material conditions and ideologies, these scientists exploited new

²⁴ Antoine J. Banks, *Anger and Racial Politics: The Emotional Foundation of Racial Attitudes in America* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²⁵ Anne Case and Angus Deaton, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

advances in computing and experimental methods to detect and analyze the embodied, psychological processes that undergird all that we feel, see, and do. Over the past four decades, empirical research on the “broad affective system”²⁶ has challenged a long-standing assumption about the role of conscious, deliberative thought in human behavior. This affective system refers to the autonomic and endocrinal processes that are relatively spontaneous, effortless, computationally inexpensive, and phylogenetically older than the semantically structured processes involved in reflective thought and deliberation. It coordinates many of the physiological responses to environmental stimuli that we share with non-human animals, including the fight or flight response and Pavlovian reward-punishment mechanisms.²⁷ Their findings have disclosed a new dimension to the problem of racism’s tenacity that existing social theories struggle to accommodate.

Implicit biases are judgments or behaviors that are relatively unconscious and automatic. This means that they remain undetected without the aid of sophisticated experiments. As relatively unconscious, these biases are believed to be introspectively opaque; individuals do not know that they exhibit these biases in the way that we know of our explicit aversions and preferences or our explicit judgments. This means that individuals might hold an explicit belief that Black people are the intellectual equals of white people even as they evince antiblack bias when grading a paper or conducting a job interview. Furthermore, as automatic, these biases are triggered by environmental stimuli that may or may not even register in person’s conscious awareness. This means that we do not choose to exhibit these biases. Even more alarming is the

²⁶ This is Peter Railton’s term. See Peter Railton, “The Affective Dog and Its Rational Tale: Intuition and Attunement,” *Ethics* 124, no. 4 (July 1, 2014): 827f.

²⁷ For an excellent summary of these findings, see Stephen T. Asma and Rami Gabriel, *The Emotional Mind: The Affective Roots of Culture and Cognition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019).

finding that, once triggered, these biases tend to elude intentional efforts to control them. In fact, some such efforts actually *exacerbate* the bias – making things worse.

The detection of these biases in the late 1980s and 1990s led to a flowering of empirical research, and the theoretical models have only recently begun to catch up with and synthesize these findings. It is particularly important to note the influence this research has had on moral philosophers and philosophy of action.²⁸ This owes to the fact that such research at least seems to suggest that much of what human beings do – including that which seems to be morally significant – results from automatic processes over which we have little direct control and therefore not the deliberative processes over which we have a good deal more control.²⁹

For our purposes, these findings reveal another dimension to the problem of racism’s tenacity. They suggest that the social logic of race has permeated the very depths of our psyches, coordinating our spontaneous evaluative perceptions of as well as our most primordial, affective responses to one another. Some of these biases appear to rely on those psychological mechanisms involved in semantic processing, but there is also evidence that even our autonomic, physiological fear responses show signs of racialization.³⁰

If this is so, then the level of coordination between supra-personal forces and our embodied psychological processes is even closer than theories of ideology or discursive formation suggest. The powers that influence and move embodied creatures like us are not

²⁸ For an overview of this research and its implications for empirical moral psychology, see Jonathan Haidt, “The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology,” *Science* 316, no. 5827 (May 18, 2007): 998–1002.

²⁹ This has implications for theories of moral responsibility, act attribution, aretaic evaluation, personal identity, and a very many other topics in these fields. See Michael Brownstein, *The Implicit Mind: Cognitive Architecture, the Self, and Ethics* (New York, NY, United States of America: Oxford University Press, 2018).

³⁰ David M. Amodio, Eddie Harmon-Jones, and Patricia G. Devine, “Individual Differences in the Activation and Control of Affective Race Bias as Assessed by Startle Eyeblink Response and Self-Report,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 4 (2003): 738–53, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.4.738>. For the notion of “affect heuristic,” see Paul Slovic et al., “Risk as Analysis and Risk as Feelings: Some Thoughts about Affect, Reason, Risk, and Rationality,” *Risk Analysis: An International Journal* 24, no. 2 (April 2004): 311–22.

exhaustively discursive. Rather, it seems that we are bound to our material and social environment at an even more basic level, one that constrains and distorts how and what we feel toward and perceive in one another. Of course, these tethers are not chains; we are not simply condemned to repeat these patterns that reproduce racial inequalities. But this research certainly helps us understand how it is possible for embodied creatures like us to so routinely act in ways that contribute to the very racial evils we abhor. Our actions follow, not only discursive patterns, but more elementary and intransigent affective pathways.

This research on implicit bias reveals much about racism's affective depths, but it conceals others. For one, social psychologists have tended to explain implicit biases observed in laboratory settings by positing a particular kind of *attitude*, namely, implicit attitudes, as their cause. This sits uneasily with the central social theoretical insight that enduring racial inequalities cannot be explained with reference to individual mental states. It has also led to heated debates between social theorists and social psychologists. Some of these debates are about explanatory adequacy. Structuralists claim that the psychologists miss the forest for the trees, since the primary contributors to racial inequality are irreducibly social forces embedded in our material environment.³¹ Social psychologists claim that structuralist explanations leave an explanatory gap of their own, one that the concept of implicit attitudes might plausibly fill.³² Other correlate debates center on the prescriptive implications for repairing racial injustices.

³¹ See, for example, Sally Haslanger, "Distinguished Lecture: Social Structure, Narrative and Explanation," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 45, no. 1 (2015): 1–15.

³² Payne and colleagues offer one recent attempt to bridge the gap between personal/systemic accounts of racism with a revisionary conception of implicit bias. See B. Keith Payne, Heidi A. Vuletich, and Kristjen B. Lundberg, "The Bias of Crowds: How Implicit Bias Bridges Personal and Systemic Prejudice," *Psychological Inquiry* 28, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 233–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2017.1335568>.

Should antiracism advocates focus primarily on legislative and policy goals, or should they spend precious resources on implicit bias workshops and “resistance”³³ trainings?

§1.3 Tenacity as a Descriptive, Ethical, and Theological Problem

The unresolved nature of these debates suggest that the phenomenon of racism’s tenacity eludes the existing conceptual repertoire of both critical race theory and social psychology. Just how, given its social-structural and implicit-psychological dimensions, should we understand the tenacity of racism? Are there other resources that might plausibly integrate these components of this most recalcitrant moral failure in American life? And what, then, does this mean for how we orient our efforts to dismantle racism and repair its lasting effects?

This prescriptive concern undergirds, at least implicitly, much of the scholarly activity in both fields. That is, critical race theorists and social psychologists of race are centrally interested in the function of social oppression and psychological processes, but these descriptive questions likely attained such salience because they promised some insight into how we might rid ourselves of racial injustice. This prescriptive impulse already indicates that ethical questions – broadly understood as concerning how we ought to live – are already at play in these fields. But there is an even more fundamental question implied in these debates, one that critical race theory and social psychology are less prepared to answer. Namely, what does the tenacity of antiblack racism mean for our self-understanding *as agents*?

This is decidedly not the concern of critical race theory or social psychology. In fact, their insights into racism’s tenacity were made possible by relegating the agent to the periphery of explanations that centered respectively on *impersonal* powers, whether supra-personal forces

³³ Alex Madva, “Resistance Training,” *The Philosophers’ Magazine* 91 (2020): 40–45.

or sub-personal mechanisms. But we should not mistake these powerful functional explanations of social evils as replacements for action explanations, nor should we suppose that the explanatory inadequacy of our inner life empties it of ethical significance. After all, the prescriptions about how to dismantle racism are directed toward human beings who are presumably capable of heeding those insights and changing their ways. Whether that change involves attending a Black Lives Matter protest, lobbying elected leaders to commit to reparations for slavery, having an uncomfortable conversation with a family member who forwarded you a racist email, or attending an implicit bias training session, it is always some agent, i.e., a creature capable of authoring one's own actions in response to reasons, that commits the deed. Such creatures think, evaluate and choose amongst options, deliberate how best to achieve their ends, and make judgments about what is right or good to do. These person-level dynamics may not fully explain all that we do, but neither do expansive social forces or intricate psychological mechanisms fully explain such phenomena as consciousness, perception, evaluation, and judgment. Furthermore, it would be very rare indeed to find a person who understands themselves as a mere *functionary* of supra-personal forces or an *amalgamation* of psychological mechanisms. Even within the descriptive domain, the fact that racial oppression and cognition has demonstrably *changed* in various epochs suggests that whatever dynamics are responsible for the reiteration of racial logics do not exhaust racial dynamics.³⁴ For all of these reasons, the question about what it means to be an agent remains a living one.

³⁴ Anthony Giddens well-known notion of “structuration” attempts to name this ambivalence between reproduction of the same and introduction of novelty. See Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, 1st pbk. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Emirbayer and Desmond have developed an even more complex and compelling account of these dynamics within the context of the contemporary racial order. They suggest that this order includes a reiterative, projective, and a practical dimension. See Mustafa Emirbayer and Matthew Desmond, *The Racial Order* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

Such questions about the nature of agency typically fall within the domain of moral philosophy, concerned as it is with moral consciousness and its relation to the intentional conduct of agents. But this field has a deep-seated tendency to approach these questions by extracting human beings from the natural and social environment that contextualizes all of our conduct.³⁵ Even when environment and context is considered, it is frequently treated as a set of formal constraints on conduct. To be clear, such formalism and abstraction have been crucial to understanding central aspects of human life. We are the kind of creatures who are capable of moral motivation and who also fail spectacularly to act in accord with our judgments about the right and the good. While moral philosophers have spilled considerable ink reflecting on these phenomena, their predilection for abstraction from concrete moral contexts and their largely individualistic scope has meant that they have not always considered why our moral failings take the particular shape they do. That is, one might note that human beings exhibit a general propensity for weakness of will; we frequently act in ways that contradict our evaluative judgments because, say, a more tempting option presents itself to us. But the research into racism's tenacity suggests that there is a further, more severe problem affecting moral agents in race-salient situations. Specifically, agents (primarily white agents but, as we will see, not exclusively so) exhibit evidence of a pervasive antiblack bias that colors moral consciousness, deliberation, and even conduct. This means that agents are more likely to commit moral failures in situations where Black people are present. It also means that Black people are more likely to suffer the unjust consequences of these moral failures than are white people. Moreover, the agents who perpetuate these racial slights and injustices need not – and frequently do not – intend them, and it is equally likely that they lack awareness of both the internal bias coloring

³⁵ I emphasize that this is a *tendency*, but there are certainly moral philosophers who resist it.

their moral deliberation and of the external effects that result from their actions. Insofar as these biases are products of relatively automatic and unconscious processes, the agents who exhibit them seem not to be able to detect or control them. They occur, not because of our beliefs or desires, but rather *in spite* of those beliefs and desires. This is perhaps the most insidious finding from the research on implicit racial bias. They appear even in good and strong-willed agents, those who believe in racial equality and earnestly desire racial justice.

In other words, there seems to be a racial structure to the moral life in the United States (as well as in other countries)³⁶ that moral philosophers who neglect the insights of critical race theory and social psychology are likely to overlook. This research complicates existing moral philosophical accounts of moral weakness in two ways. First, it shows that there are moral failures for which conscious mental states like beliefs and desires cannot explain. Second, there are kinds of moral failure which arise not from intentional deliberation but from the spontaneous and affective depths of our nature.

This brings us, finally, to the central question of dissertation. What does it mean for our self-understanding as agents who live in racialized societies like the United States that even good and strong-willed persons routinely find ourselves acting in ways that contribute to the very racist evils we abhor? This is certainly an ethical question about the nature of agency. But, as my phrasing of the question suggests, it bears a remarkable congruence to the problem that Paul confronts in Romans 7 and that, at least on his account, entails a theological dimension. For Paul,

³⁶ Race structures moral life in other countries around the world as well, of course. There is a sense in which, given the vast reach of European colonialism, white racial supremacy has come to be a global structure. In locales as different as South Africa, India, Brazil, and Australia, white people ruled over persons of color, and they established enduring racial hierarchies with white people positioned at the top. But we must note that, while these contexts are each iterations of white supremacy, there are important differences in how the various racial categories are constructed and how their boundaries are adjudicated. Plus, the meaning of racial categories varies greatly across these contexts. So, this project limits its scope to the racial order as it presently exists in the United States even as it acknowledges that it shares much in common with other white supremacist polities.

remember, the power of the mind to govern conduct proved impotent in the face of a mysterious power that was simultaneously external to the ‘I’ even as it permeated its affective depths. This impotence was more unrelenting than the quotidian phenomenon of moral weakness. Neither moral instruction nor training in virtue could ameliorate it, since its mind already knew what was good (i.e., the law of God) and desired to do it – even delighted in it. It suffered, not from a deliberative error like *akrasia*, but a more fundamental disruption in which its power of choice had been severed from its power to act. This more extreme moral condition indicates that the agent is not merely morally weak, but *morally dead*. Though the agent remains an organically living creature, he or she suffers from what the ancients called the death of the soul. This means, more precisely, that the agent’s condition is characterized by an entrenched and enduring unresponsiveness to moral suasion, exhortation, or training in virtue. The ordinary methods by which agents and their communities intervene to prevent or correct recalcitrant wrongdoing prove insufficient for such a person. He or she needs not to be instructed or trained but rescued and delivered from this condition. Their hope lies, not within but beyond the self – in a redemptive and reconciling power that affects and influences agents on the human scene but fundamentally exceeds that scene.

This dissertation argues that these Pauline theological insights about our nature as agents, the forces that incline us to evil, and the religious power by which we are delivered therefrom not only contribute to existing debates in contemporary scholarship on racism’s tenacity in American life, but they also illumine the ethical and religious depths of those questions. All of these insights center on the nature of the affections and their place in human life before God, and I will argue that attending to the affective life of contemporary racism opens new descriptive, ethical, and theological horizons for understanding its tenacity and its meaning for our self-

understanding as agents. But to gain these insights, we must look beyond the Apostle Paul who, for all of his theological insight, produced neither a thorough account of human affections nor a systematic account of the place of those affections in moral and social life. For that, we turn to a much later thinker who not only advocated certain of these Pauline insights but also developed them within an ingenious theory of the affections, human sociality, and redemption.

§2 Friedrich Schleiermacher: Sin, Sociality, and Feeling

Friedrich Schleiermacher, the 19th century German philosopher and theologian known as the father of modern theology, developed an account of sin that integrates the supra-personal and the affective dimensions of human action. In *The Christian Faith*,³⁷ he presents a picture of human beings as thoroughly incapable of doing the good they want to do. Like Paul, he attributes this recalcitrant moral failure to the power of sin, conceived as a force that essentially exceeds the self even as it permeates and distorts the inner most recesses of its moral psychology. But whereas Paul's account remains at the level of first-order theological discourse, a thoroughly symbolic level of description, Schleiermacher's doctrine of sin constitutes a second-order reflection on those symbolic formulations. It seeks not simply to reiterate Paul's account, but to reconstruct it in a way maximizes conceptual clarity and systematic coherence.³⁸ This famously leads him to reject the supernatural, or as he calls it "magical,"³⁹ understandings of supra-personal forces as ethereal demons or spirits that were likely what Paul had in mind and were

³⁷ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, ed. Terrence N. Tice, Catherine L. Kelsey, and Edwina G. Lawler, First edition. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016); Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der Christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhang dargestellt Zweite Auflage (1830/31)*, ed. Rolf Schäfer, De Gruyter Texte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008). Cited as *CG* with English/German pagination.

³⁸ *CG* §§15-16.

³⁹ See, for example, Schleiermacher's discussion of the devil and its supposed influence in these terms in *CG* §45.2.

certainly what late antique and medieval Christians had in mind.⁴⁰ In its place, Schleiermacher articulates sin and grace as distinctly religious powers that operate on a social register. On his view, sin generates recalcitrant moral failures in persons and groups by flowing through the very ordinary, indeed natural, dynamics of human sociality.

This marked a paradigm shift in Christian theologies of sin that has proven to be as contentious as it is fecund.⁴¹ Its fecundity is evident in the immense flowering of theological reflection on “social” or “structural sin” that rose to prominence in the later 19th and 20th centuries.⁴² These accounts press beyond traditional accounts of sin as a general scourge affecting individual agents in the depths of conscience and focused instead on specific, historical, collective evils like poverty, misogyny, colonialism, and to be sure, racism. The tradition of Black Theology has issued powerful theological diagnoses of white supremacy and racism, even race itself, as a form of social or structural sin.⁴³ Indeed, it has become almost a commonplace to speak of chattel slavery, that fateful episode of monstrous disobedience from which sprung an entire history of racialized suffering, as America’s “original sin.”⁴⁴

Even if his account of sin marks a turning point in the history of Christian theology, these later developments far outstrip Schleiermacher’s own thinking about social domination in general and racial domination in particular. But there is a further, less familiar aspect of Schleiermacher’s doctrine of sin that, I contend, promises to contribute a great deal to our

⁴⁰ David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); Inbar Graiver, *Asceticism of the Mind: Forms of Attention and Self-Transformation in Late Antique Monasticism* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2018).

⁴¹ I address several of the major theological criticisms of Schleiermacher’s doctrine of sin in Chapter 6.

⁴² Derek R. Nelson, *What’s Wrong with Sin?: Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation* (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

⁴³ See, for example, Stephen Ray, “Structural Sin,” in *T&T Clark Companion to the Doctrine of Sin*, ed. Keith L. Johnson and David Lauber (New York: T&T Clark, 2016), 417–32.

⁴⁴ Jim Wallis’s recent book is but one iteration of this. Jim Wallis, *America’s Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

understanding of racism's tenacity. While most critical race theorists cast the supra-personal forces that constrain and condition agents in ideological and discursive terms, Schleiermacher argues that sin's grip on us is even more fundamental. It corrupts our cognitive and volitional activities by distorting a psychologically prior domain of consciousness, one that is most closely related to our organic processes and informs our most basic affective and perceptual apprehension of our environment. He calls this receptive dimension of the soul "feeling" [*Gefühl*], and its primacy vis-à-vis thinking and willing is central to his account of how sin generates such recalcitrant moral failures. We do what is evil, even in spite of knowing better and striving to do the opposite, because our springs of action exceed our conscious awareness, deliberative processes, and our power of self-control.

This insight about the affective depths of sin may help us think about implicit racial bias. But does it not amount to precisely the kind of retreat into individualism about which the social theorists have warned? This brings us to Schleiermacher's most provocative proposal, one that has been frequently misunderstood. For Schleiermacher, feeling is not simply a bodily arousal or a private mental attitude. It also entails a profoundly social dimension; feelings can be transmitted between persons, shared among groups, and even circulated across time and space. Although this social aspect of feeling is more explicitly treated in his ethical writings, it undergirds his mature theory of religion as well as, of particular interest for this project, his doctrine of sin. In other words, Schleiermacher's well-known reinterpretation of sin as a social dynamic often overshadows his perhaps even more innovative claim that social dynamics like sin include an affective dimension. I will argue that it is his insight about the social life of human affectivity and the affective life of human sociality that opens new descriptive, ethical, and theological horizons for understanding the ruthless tenacity of American racism.

Though I will argue that Schleiermacher's ethical and theological works provide us with constructive resources for addressing the aforementioned questions that emerge from critical race theory and social psychology, I want to be equally clear that these works are not, by themselves, sufficient for the task. This supple and incisive thinker was, like all thinkers, also a limited one. He was, after all, a white German man of the Enlightenment era. Even if he was relatively pluralistic by existing standards, he was formed by the racial and Eurocentric (even Prusso-centric) prejudices of his time. On account of these biographical details, we will clearly need to turn to other sources for insight into the contemporary political realities of race in the United States. But even more concerning is the possibility, or rather the likelihood, that his thought is itself colored by the presumption of white supremacy.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the fact that he died in 1834 means that he never read Marx or Freud, let alone the critical race theorists who exposed the racial and Eurocentric biases of even these intellectual giants.

These are all fairly obvious points. But I want to emphasize that my claim is decidedly not that Schleiermacher holds the hidden key for understanding contemporary racial dynamics. Nor do I mean to suggest that his insights are somehow immune to the same racialized political and psychological forces that this dissertation attempts to diagnose. Rather, any illumination his works might reveal on these matters will require hermeneutical reconstruction in light of other thinkers and disciplines that are better situated to understand them. For this reason, I will draw from critical race theory and social psychology to not only articulate contemporary racial

⁴⁵ Theodore Vial has argued that, while Schleiermacher was a committed pluralist who viewed the differences amongst various human populations as goods worthy of preservation and internal development, he and other so-called "expressivists" like Johann Gottfried Herder developed philosophies of language and culture that play a key role in modern conceptions of race. See Theodore M. Vial, *Modern Religion, Modern Race* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 125–87.

realities in the United States in their concreteness but also to disclose and amend Schleiermacher's theoretical oversights.

But I hasten to note that, for all their genuine insights into contemporary racism, both critical race theory and social psychology bring their own noetic limitations. Neither critical race theorists nor social psychologists are centrally concerned with providing answers to ethical and theological questions, for example. But as I noted earlier, there are also *descriptive* questions, questions about the nature and function of racism's tenacity that lie near the center of these disciplines' concerns, that they leave unresolved. If Schleiermacher's work helps us gain traction into these matters, then critical race theorists and psychologists alike have reason to consider his suitably reconstructed insights. Moreover, insofar as critical race theorists and social psychologists are also human beings who live in a racialized world and whose thinking has therefore been formed by racial structures and dynamics, we have reason to interrogate their claims from other, historically distant horizons of inquiry. In short, every attempt at understanding is, as a *human* activity, constrained and enabled by certain presuppositions, disciplinary methods, and contingent facts of history. Rather than deny this fact, we do well to make the limits and powers of particular thinkers explicit and to pursue new knowledge by juxtaposing them with other, differently limited thinkers to illumine that which exceeds the perspective of each on their own.

§3 Theological Stance and Method: Christian Realism and Hermeneutical Realism

This brings us to questions of theological method. Two questions appear especially salient in this regard. First, what is it about such an inquiry that makes it theological? It may seem that questions about the tenacity of racism and the moral failures that contribute to it are

clearly matters of concern for critical race theory, social psychology, and ethics, but it is not obvious that these are appropriate matters for theological reflection. The same might be said from the other side as well. Christian theologians might wonder why someone who purports to be engaged in theology is so concerned with social and psychological explanations of human nature. So, I need to explain why this subject matter is theological in two senses. Why is this an appropriate concern for theology, and why is theological reflection appropriate for the subject matter? This opens up to a second question. If it is the case that the tenacity of racism is an appropriate subject matter for theological reflection, how do theological resources relate to the non-theological disciplines of critical race theory and social psychology, and what counts as valid criteria for evaluating such theological claims?

§3.1 Stance and Method

To respond to these questions, I first want to draw a distinction between an inquirer's *stance* and their *method*. A stance refers to a set of basic convictions that orient an intellectual project.⁴⁶ One might speak of a particular “perspective” on the world or, in another idiom, a “horizon” that designates the field within which possible objects of inquiry and explanatory resources appear. A molecular biologist approaches her work on the nature and function of living things with a certain set of assumptions about, say, what makes something alive rather than not. This stance is likely to rule out certain non-physical realities, or certainly non-natural ones, as in any way significant for explaining or understanding how living things carry on living. This

⁴⁶ Charles Curran provides a thorough treatment of the concept of a stance, one that develops a tradition of Christian ethical reflection that includes H. Richard Niebuhr and James Gustafson, in Charles E. Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 30–32. See also, James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 240–47; H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self, an Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy*, Library of Theological Ethics (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

stance will run into its limits, however, if the biologist were asked to give an account of “the life of the mind.” Daniel Dennett famously argues that we shift between various kinds of stances when facing different tasks. The biologist might adopt an “empirical stance” in the lab, but when she engages with colleagues at a conference, she will surely adopt something like an “intentional stance” whereby she attributes things like conscious mental states to those living things (her colleagues) for which her physicalist explanations prove insufficient.⁴⁷

A method, by contrast, describes the manner in which an inquirer draws upon and arranges the evidence that appears within the horizon afforded by his or her stance or the sake of making claims and demonstrating their truth. The biologist deploys all manner of experimental procedures to test her hypotheses about the chemical composition and molecular structure of the kind of things – namely, living things – that appear salient to her on account of her stance. The adequacy of her explanations is judged in light of their replicability by other scientists working in similar conditions. The moral philosopher, operating from a different stance, relies on a different set of methods that are appropriate to the subject matter. He might appeal to our moral intuitions about what is right or wrong, and his methods likely rely not on experimental replicability so much as logical consistency and the elegance with which his theories explain those basic intuitions. While these methods differ a great deal, two points are worth noting. First, both fields rely upon some kind of method to advance and evaluate their respective claims. Second, their methods are informed by the object of inquiry⁴⁸ and by the inquirer’s stance.

⁴⁷ Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1991).

⁴⁸ As Aristotle puts the point, “For a well-schooled man is one who searches for that degree of precision in each kind of study which the nature of the subject at hand admits: it is obviously just as foolish to accept arguments of probability from a mathematician as to demand strict demonstrations from an orator.” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Oswald, The Library of Liberal Arts (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), I.3, 5 [1094b23-27].)

Thus far, I have spoken of stances and methods in general terms. They are basic structures of human inquiry and understanding that obtain for biologists, legal scholars, moral philosophers, and, it must be said, theologians. What, then, makes a stance distinctly theological or Christian? On my view, a Christian theological stance is one characterized by a set of convictions preserved and proclaimed by Christian communities. Such convictions might pertain to the divine source and end of all that is, the fallen character of human life, the possibility that human life can be – in fact has been – redeemed by Jesus Christ, and so on. These particular convictions enjoy rather broad support across different Christian communions, but for my account at least, this need not be the case. A stance is a Christian theological one just insofar as the inquirer self-consciously appropriates traditional Christian convictions – whether they presently have currency in a particular communion or not – for the sake of illuminating phenomena within a field of inquiry. Disagreements about which norms should govern those appropriations are thus internal disagreements with a more encompassing Christian stance.

§3.2 Christian Realism as a Theological Stance

This project adopts Christian realism as its theological stance. Christian realism is often and appropriately associated with the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, although contemporary realists argue that his work merely crystallizes insights that can be traced back through Martin Luther to Augustine and has since generated a lively and diverse community of proponents.⁴⁹ This stance is particularly valuable for a theological inquiry into the tenacity of contemporary racism for a few reasons. First, the Christian realist foregrounds the significance of the doctrine of sin for

⁴⁹ For an account of Reinhold Niebuhr's contribution to contemporary understandings of Christian realism, see Robin W. Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For a short history of Christian realism see Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Realism and the New Realities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 43–83.

understanding the limits of human virtue and political achievements. Second, these realists attend carefully to the concrete political contexts within which agents make moral choices and show a particular concern to account for the morally ambiguous features within those contexts that influence our choices and actions. Third, the Christian realist emphasis on sin and the fallenness of the present world corresponds to an equally strong emphasis on the gracious activity of God which guarantees the possibility that agents might transcend these finite constraints, albeit in a limited way, and which promises to finally redeem and reconcile all that is. The significance of these three features for the present project will become clear below. But first, we need to see clarify which convictions constitute the Christian realist stance. Following Robin Lovin's definition, I maintain that Christian realism consists in the integration of three otherwise distinct realisms: political, moral, and theological.

Political realism is the view that political choices and action should be analyzed primarily in terms of self-interest and power. It is thus a conviction about the kind of creature human beings are, especially when we enter a distinctly political arena. We are frequently and even primarily moved to act in accord with our *interests*, and in particular, with our interest to achieve and maintain the power to reliably satisfy our future interests. The political realist of course acknowledges the empirical fact that we also appeal to lofty moral ideals like freedom, justice, and democracy and that we frequently justify our conduct on the basis of such values. But to be realistic in this sense means to situate those appeals within the concrete political contexts in which they are uttered and to ask whether there might be other, less noble motives at work. This *prima facie* suspicion of moral discourse in political matters is one the Christian realist shares with a wide array of social and political theorists including Marxist ideology critics, post-structuralist genealogists, and prominent twentieth century figures in international relations like

Hans Morgenthau. It is also a basic commitment of critical race theory. In each case, the political realist takes the amoral human drive for self-preservation and its derivatives (i.e., material group interests or the will to power) as explanatory primitives.

The Christian realist integrates this commitment with a second kind of realism, namely, moral realism. Moral realism is the view that moral terms (ideals, laws, goods, virtues, etc.) refer to enduring features of human nature that stand apart from our constructions about them.⁵⁰ This distinguishes the moral realist from other prominent theories of value such as expressivism, communitarianism, and divine command theory. Expressivists construe moral terms as expressions of subjective attitudes which lack any mind-independent reality.⁵¹ Communitarians hold that moral terms are relatively idiosyncratic creations of communities of moral discourse.⁵² The upshot for the moral realist is that he or she can give an account of how moral judgments could be universally true or false, something which neither the expressivist nor the communitarian position affords. It follows from this that moral values are not exhausted by or reducible to our personal or communal interests. Divine command theorists, by contrast, hold that moral values are grounded in a mind-independent reality, namely, the divine will.⁵³ This

⁵⁰ Lovin, *Christian Realism and the New Realities*, 8. For analysis of how Lovin's moral realism relates to other prominent Christian theological ethicists who endorse moral realism, see Kevin Jung, "Models of Moral Realism in Christian Ethics," *Harvard Theological Review* 108, no. 04 (October 2015): 485–507. For a prominent moral philosophical account of moral realism, see Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

⁵¹ A classic articulation of this position can be found in Charles L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944). It is worth noting that there are some who hold the view that moral concepts – indeed, all evaluative concepts – are expressions of affective states, but they argue that these states are themselves responses to evaluative facts that are non-relational. Christine Tappolet, for example, defends a “neo-sentimentalist” account of value that admits of correctness conditions for the emotional responses to realities that stand apart from the subject. On her view, I might feel fear toward an angry dog improperly if the dog is not, in fact, fearsome. This is a version of, as she puts it, “Sentimental Realism.” See Christine Tappolet, *Emotions, Values, and Agency* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2016), 79–121.

⁵² See, for example, Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

⁵³ For a recent example of this, see John E. Hare, *God's Command*, Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

makes them moral realists; moral claims can be true even if no particular community endorses them and even if they do not express any particular person's preferences. But whereas the divine command theorist identifies the basis of determining moral truth in a non-natural reality, namely, God's will, other moral realists look to natural facts about the world to ground such judgments. These ethical naturalists typically point to objective conditions necessary for human well-being, whether bodily, social, cultural, reflective, or religious.⁵⁴ Insofar as the Christian realist endorses a variety of moral realism that indexes moral terms to enduring features of human nature, it is a version of ethical naturalism.

Moral realism thus qualifies political realism. Human beings are the kind of creatures who reliably choose to act in accord with our self- or group-interests, but we do not *exclusively* so choose. Any clear-eyed assessment of human life certainly must admit that we are the kind of creatures who pursue a wider, more diverse set of goods than those constrained to our narrow self-interest and the accumulation of ever greater power. We strive for moral ideals like justice and fairness, moral laws that require us to respect the humanity of all persons, and moral virtues like kindness and compassion. Even if we do not completely understand each of these moral realities, it is hardly unreasonable to count them among the kind of goods that we pursue and that contribute to human flourishing.⁵⁵ But the commitment to political realism also tempers that to moral realism. Not only are the moral realities disclosed within concrete political contexts in the to-and-fro of competing interest groups, but the plausibility of our claims about human moral

⁵⁴ William Schweiker is a moral realist who endorses ethical naturalism. See William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 117–34; William Schweiker, *Power, Value, and Conviction: Theological Ethics in the Postmodern Age* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1998), 116–17.

⁵⁵ This argument follows that of early Christian theological responses to the classical political realism of Thomas Hobbes. These Christian positions admitted Hobbes's methodological empiricism but contested his account of human nature as empirically implausible. See Joseph Butler, *Five Sermons, Preached at the Rolls Chapel and A Dissertation upon the Nature of Virtue*, ed. Stephen L. Darwall (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub. Company, 1983).

possibilities are constrained by evidence regarding how we actually make choices and act in concrete political contexts.

Finally, the Christian realist also endorses theological realism, the view that God is a reality that exceeds all of our constructions about God and lies beyond discourse itself – including the biblical witness. Put differently, this is a conviction that there is more going on in reality than the political dynamics of power and the moral limits and possibilities of human nature. This is an utterly basic conviction for most monotheistic religions, and its implications for thinking about the political and moral domains of life are significant. First, as with the moral realist’s understanding of moral claims, the theological realist maintains that statements about God can be true or false independently of what someone, or even everyone, believes about God. It follows from this that true claims about the divine are true, not simply for a particular individual or community, but universally. While this coheres with the first-order self-understanding of most Christians and other monotheists, the second implication is perhaps more discordant. For the Christian realist, the truth of a theological claim is not dependent, at least not exclusively dependent, on its fidelity to a particular discursive tradition, an authoritative text, or even to the self-consciousness that “has currency” within a particular historical community.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ This final point means that the Christian realist, as a theological realist, departs from Schleiermacher’s own dogmatic method. As Andrew Dole has convincingly argued, Schleiermacher advocates a version of theological anti-realism because he insists that all dogmatic propositions find their sole grounding in the pious states of heart and mind of a given Christian congregation in a given time and place. See *CG* §15 and §31 and Andrew Dole, “Schleiermacher’s Theological Anti-Realism,” in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 136–54. With that said, Schleiermacher’s position is complicated because, for the pious Christian, dogmatic propositions articulate one’s “convictions” or “certainties” about the whence, whither, and basic structure of human existence. (*CG* §3.4) So while he is insistent that his claims should not be understood to be metaphysical propositions, his point is that Christian dogmatic claims cannot be demonstrated through dialectical reasoning, nor are they competitive with natural scientific claims about the nature of the universe. They are propositions of faith, not science or philosophical reasoning. But those claims still have realistic purport, that is, they mean to describe a reality that exceeds the self and all of our constructions about it – indeed, all discourse. See Jacqueline Mariña, “Schleiermacher, Realism, and Epistemic Modesty: A Reply to My Critics,” in *Schleiermacher, the Study of Religion, and the Future of Theology: A Transatlantic Dialogue*, ed. Brent W. Sockness and Wilhelm Gräb, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 148 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 121–35.

Rather, the truth of such statements must be *demonstrated* in the same way that political and moral claims are, namely, by appealing to reality. In this way, the theologian effectively argues back to the fundamental conviction that reality is more complicated and less transparent than other political and moral realists admit. Reality entails a depth dimension, a wholeness that exceeds the contradictions of moral and political life, that is both *necessary* for fully understanding what is going on in concrete political contexts and *resistant* to description in ordinary conceptual and metaphysical terms. It presses us rather to speak in symbolic and mythic terms of a God who creates, redeems, and consummates all that is.

What exactly would it mean to demonstrate the truth of a theological claim, one that invokes symbols and narratives, by appealing to reality? This is an important methodological question to which I turn in the next section. But first, I want to note two ways that Christian realism as a stance justifies this project as a *theological* inquiry into the tenacity of antiblack racism.

First, the Christian realist is committed to the view that the various realities under consideration are analytically distinct but not ultimately separate from one another. This owes to a deeply Christian conviction, in fact, a Christological conviction, that the living God (theological reality) most fully reveals itself in a *human being* who lived, taught, and was killed amidst other human beings driven by some mix of self-interest and power (political realities) and their higher, morally praiseworthy aspirations (moral realities). This means that the Christian realist has a theological reason to look nowhere other than the concrete contexts within the human scene to inquire about God. From this perspective, the theological task is primarily concerned, not with some divine realm that utterly transcends our world, nor with a particular authoritative tradition of textual interpretation that purports to uniquely impart theological

knowledge, but rather with reality itself, understood to be the actual, God-suffused world in which we live, move, and have our being.

The Christian realist couples this commitment with a second one, namely, that human beings are particularly prone to self-delusion and evasion in their confrontation with reality. John Calvin famously described the human mind as a “factory of idols” that requires a certain bridling if it ever hopes to see past its own illusions and apprehend the one true God.⁵⁷ Different theologians have responded to this problem in a variety of ways.⁵⁸ The Christian realist can certainly affirm many of the ways Christians have sought to clarify and vivify the distinctly Christian message and its contents. But since the realist’s approach to the theological task consists, not merely in the faithful articulation of the Christian message, but also in disclosing the basic structure of lived reality, and since, as I just noted, this reality does not ultimately admit of separation between the divine and the human scene, then the means by which the realist bridles our speculative and idealizing proclivities is more complicated. Certainly, the realist must attend to the Scriptures, direct her gaze toward the Cross, and humbly receive God’s self-revelation in Christ. But having done that, she must also ensure that her understanding of the world of human affairs is protected from the same distortions of self-interest and self-righteousness that threatens to corrupt her understanding of the Christian message. This is why the commitment to political and moral realism is, itself, a theological one. They identify a

⁵⁷ John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 108 [I.11.8].

⁵⁸ Calvin himself counseled readers to put on the “spectacles” of Scripture to see reality rightly, while Luther proposed that theological truth is attained only by attending to the Cross which dashes every human attempt to know God on its own terms. These approaches were forcefully reinterpreted in the twentieth century by Karl Barth, who sought to return Christian theology to its only legitimate ground – God’s self-revelation in the eternal event of Jesus Christ. See Calvin, 70 [I.6.1]; Martin Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation 1518,” in *Career of the Reformer 1*, ed. and trans. Harold J. Grimm, Luther’s Works 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 52–53.; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010).

methodological commitment to ensuring that the rigorously articulated Christian message can be correlated to a grasp of the human world that is articulated with equal rigor such that the former might gain traction in and illumine the latter. After all, it is precisely in this world, properly apprehended, that God is revealed.

We can now see why an inquiry into the tenacity of contemporary antiblack racism is a matter of Christian theological concern and why a theologian has reason to consider the insights from non-theological disciplines that contribute to a more realistic apprehension of what's going on in particular, concrete contexts. This raises a second set of questions. Why should non-theological disciplines like critical race theory, social psychology, and moral philosophy concern themselves with Christian theological claims? I have already hinted at an answer. To the degree that Christian theological claims purport to be about reality, they can be true or false. That is, the Christian realist contends that theological claims are not simply about questions of meaning but also questions of truth. Like the social and human sciences, Christian realists want to get things right, to describe reality as it is. But as I noted above, theological claims attempt to articulate the truth of a dimension of reality that these other disciplines often do not acknowledge (namely, God) and by invoking explanatory resources that differ formally and substantively from those deployed by social theorists and moral philosophers. So, how exactly might a Christian realist inquiry into the tenacity of antiblack racism proceed? What counts as evidence in support of its claims? What kind of insight can it provide, and how might those insights be evaluated? For this, we need to say more about hermeneutical realism as a theological method.

§3.3 Hermeneutical Realism as a Correlate Theological Method

Hermeneutical realism is an account of moral meaning that foregrounds the role of religious symbols and the act of interpretation in disclosing ethical and theological insight.⁵⁹ As a form of realism, it shares a good deal with Christian realism. Each holds that ethical and theological discourses do not so much constitute as disclose moral and theological realities. This means that moral and theological claims can be true or false, and that their truth status does not depend on their being reflected in any set of interests or intuitions or on their fidelity to an authoritative tradition. Despite these significant agreements, the two positions are not identical, and I invoke both here because they each serves this inquiry differently. While nothing in hermeneutical realism speaks against it, the Christian realist's insistence that moral and theological reflection must begin with a politically realistic analysis of a concrete political context is vital to this investigation. As we will see, the progression from political realities to moral and finally to theological reality provides a structure to the argument as a whole. The Christian realist, on the other hand, offers a less sophisticated account of how moral and theological language relates to the realities they purportedly disclose than does the hermeneutical realist. In this section, I will argue that Christian and hermeneutical realism should be seen as complementary positions that, together, provide orientation and structure for this inquiry.

The basic tenet of hermeneutical realism is that we arrive at moral and religious insights by a process that involves both construction and discovery. This distinguishes the position from a naïve realism, which holds that moral and theological truths can be simply “read off of” reality

⁵⁹ William Schweiker has developed this method over the course of his career. See William Schweiker, *Mimetic Reflections: A Study in Hermeneutics, Theology and Ethics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990); William. Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 113–17; William. Schweiker, *Power, Value, and Conviction: Theological Ethics in the Postmodern Age* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1998), 66–70; William Schweiker, “On Religious Ethics,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 1-16.

as in the manner of “natural laws” or “divine commands.” The act of understanding is *a human act*, and it thus involves the cognitive capacities and limits of human agents. But this is not to say that human beings simply construct moral and theological truths, since this would be to deny the premise of moral and theological realism. There is an element of discovery to human understanding, but such discovery always already entails some, even if rather primitive, form of interpretation.⁶⁰

Since interpretations are human constructions that stand apart from the reality they interpret, they can be more or less adequate. For example, the events that transpired at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 might be interpreted as a violent act of insurrection or as a patriotic indictment of a stolen election. Both interpretations refer to the same real events, but they construe those realities in vastly different ways. Of course, one of those interpretations fails to accommodate the preponderance of evidence that the 2020 Presidential Election was fairly decided. This lessens its epistemic value; it is less true than the interpretation that these individuals participated in a violent insurrection – even if they *thought* they were being patriotic.⁶¹ The epistemic adequacy of an interpretation, that is, its truthfulness, is therefore at least partly proportionate to its capacity to reduce errors and accommodate relevant evidence.

⁶⁰ This is evident in the “as-structure” of human experience. To experience a tree as a tree, that is, as more than an indistinct barrage of sensory inputs, involves some interpretive act on the part of the subject. The tree is a real object, distinct from the interpreting subject. But the knowledge that this thing here *is a tree* is subject-dependent. The same goes for moral truths. To experience a mob of insurrectionists storming the U.S. Capitol as a desecration involves, even if it is non-inferential, an interpretation of these individuals (*as* rioters or domestic terrorists, not merely protestors), the meaning of their physical and symbolic conduct (*as* violent, anti-democratic insurrectionists intent to disrupt the legitimate lawmaking process), and the precarious value they threaten (the U.S. Capitol *as* a symbol of American democracy worthy of admiration and preservation). This goes, also, for theological truths. The conviction that God is the author of creation correlates to an experience of oneself and all of finite existence *as* utterly dependent upon a good and gracious Giver.

⁶¹ To be sure, this judgment rests on further interpretations. The appeal to evidence (court decisions, voter tallies, electoral procedures, etc.) involves an interpretation of what properly counts as evidence. But this does not condemn us to a vicious relativism because of the insistence that our interpretations pertain to a reality that stands apart from them.

Along with this *procedural* criterion for evaluating the truth of an interpretation, there is a further, *heuristic* criterion.⁶² An interpretation is truer than another to the degree that it not only accommodates the existing evidence more comprehensively than the other position, but also insofar as it *discloses* further, perhaps deeper questions which are implied but not adequately articulated within that other position. This is particularly important for a theological inquiry that, almost by necessity, draws upon first-order, tradition-specific religious symbols to interpret what is going on in a particular situation. Such symbols almost always lack the conceptual clarity and sets of necessary and sufficient conditions that are *de rigueur* in nearly all humanistic and social scientific inquiries. Some have famously argued that this marks a certain imperfection in religious thinking vis-à-vis the supposedly more thoroughly *wissenschaftliche* disciplines like philosophy.⁶³ But others see the potentially intrinsic ambiguity of religious symbols as that which makes them such fruitful provocations to further thinking. In Paul Ricoeur's well-known formulation, it is the symbol that "gives rise to thought,"⁶⁴ which suggests that religious reflection might stand in a constructive and complementary relation to conceptual thinking. The force of their provocation lies, according to the hermeneutical realist, in their capacity to broaden existing horizons of inquiry and thereby disclose the deeper structures of lived reality, i.e., moral and theological realities, that would have otherwise remained relegated to the margins of thought.

We are now in a position to draw some methodological conclusions. As noted in the previous section, this dissertation adopts a Christian realist stance which explains why the

⁶² Schweiker, "On Religious Ethics," 13–14.

⁶³ This is Hegel's view. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter Crafts Hodgson, trans. Robert F. Brown, Peter Crafts Hodgson, and J.M. Stewart, Hegel Lectures Series (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 75–110.

⁶⁴ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 347–57.

tenacity of antiblack racism is an appropriate subject matter for theological inquiry as well as why a theologian should be at all concerned with insights from critical race theory, social psychology, and moral philosophy. But it left unresolved the question of why these non-theological disciplines have any reason to heed the insights of a theologian or how the truth of theological claims could be evaluated. My contention is that hermeneutical realism provides one way to respond to both these questions.

First, it treats all acts of human understanding as inescapably hermeneutical and oriented toward a reality that stands apart from our constructions about it. This means that non-theological disciplines, no less than theological ones, seek to understand their subject matters from particular stances that both reveal and conceal aspects of reality. We saw this in my earlier analysis of the various theories of racism's tenacity. Critical race theorists and social psychologists are all trying to understand a single phenomenon, but they do so from different perspectives and with different conceptual resources. If a theologian can deploy Christian symbolic resources in ways that shed light on that same phenomenon, then those interested to improve their understanding of that phenomenon, regardless of their stance, have a reason to consider those insights.

Second, hermeneutical realism provides two criteria, one procedural and one heuristic, by which I will demonstrate the truthfulness of this theological diagnosis of racism's tenacity. Since the procedural criterion regards descriptive adequacy, this account must show that it i) accommodates the genuine insights into racism's tenacity from critical race theory and social psychology, ii) identifies limits and inconsistencies in these disciplines' accounts, and iii) more comprehensively and coherently answers these remaining questions that the other disciplines do, individually or combined. I argue that my conception of the "dark atmospherics of race," as

developed throughout this work, achieves these criteria. Since the heuristic criterion requires that my account deepen insight into the moral and theological dimensions of racism's tenacity, my account must show i) that this phenomenon raises questions about our nature as agents and our hope for moral transformation that are either implicit or unacknowledged by critical race theory and social psychology and ii) that Schleiermacher's insights about sin, sociality, and feeling both a) disclose these questions and b) provide conceptual and symbolic resources to articulate what's going on in these deeper levels of human existence. I will argue that my reconstructed notions of "apocalyptic soul death" does just this.

In sum, this is a Christian realist theological inquiry into the tenacity of antiblack racism. It hermeneutically reconstructs insights from critical race theory, social psychology, and Friedrich Schleiermacher's philosophical and theological works for the sake of a more comprehensive understanding of racism's peculiar staying power in American life and deeper insight into its meaning for our ethical self-understanding as agents. As such, it demonstrates that Christian theological reflection can contribute genuine insight into matters of great political and moral concern. It also shows that such theological insight only comes to the degree that traditional Christian convictions are hermeneutically reconstructed in light of the genuine insights from other disciplines that, while non-theological, are no less concerned with reality. Even so, it remains a decidedly Christian theological inquiry insofar as its ultimate criterion of adequacy lies not in the constructions of critical race theory, nor in the empirical findings of social psychologists, nor even in the rich tradition of Christian dogmatic reflection. It lies, rather, in its capacity to articulate that reality in which we live, move, and have our being and that Christians believe, in faith, is most vividly disclosed in Jesus Christ.

§3.4 Structure of the Argument

In light of these remarks on the dissertation's stance and methods, we can outline the specific steps of its argument. It proceeds in three major steps which correspond to Christian realism's three realistic convictions. Part I pursues a politically realistic account of the tenacity of contemporary antiblack racism in the United States. This provides realistic constraints on the ethical theorizing that takes place in Part II, which investigates the moral realities, that is, the enduring features of human nature, that are necessary to understand racism's peculiar recalcitrance to moral suasion and political subversion. Part III then builds upon these insights to argue that there is a further, religious dimension to these racialized moral failures that the Christian theological symbols of sin and death help to illumine and articulate. The argument will be successful to the degree that it i) provides a more coherent, integrated response to the descriptive questions raised by critical race theorists and social psychologists but for which they, at least in their current form, lack adequate conceptual resources and ii) deepens the genuine insights of both fields into this phenomenon by disclosing its ethical and theological depths.

To achieve a politically realistic diagnosis of racism's tenacity, I turn to critical race theorists Charles W. Mills (Chapter One) and recent empirical research on implicit racial bias (Chapter Two). Mills offers us a preliminary description of the problem of racism's tenacity. His Marxism-informed "non-ideal theory" of racial domination reveals the limits of individualistic approaches to understanding racialized moral failures and provides a particularly sophisticated, self-reflective example of the structuralist turn in critical race theory. But Mills's most significant contributions to this inquiry concern his claims about the psychological effects of living in racially structured societies. I explore his concepts of "white ignorance" and "white *Herrenvolk* ethics" before testing them against the empirical evidence of unconscious and

unintentional racial bias in the following chapter. Based on this evidence, I argue that the threats racism poses to agents' epistemic and moral capacities are much worse than even Mills suggests. I identify a particularly insidious type of racialized moral failure that eludes both structuralist and attitudinalist analyses of racism's tenacity and raises ethical questions about the very nature of human agency that exceed the purview of critical race theory and social psychology.⁶⁵

Part II offers a response to these descriptive and ethical questions by hermeneutically reconstructing insights from Friedrich Schleiermacher's ethical writings. This reconstruction occurs on two levels. First, since Schleiermacher never composed a systematic account of feeling and sociality in the moral life, I undertake an *internal reconstruction* of Schleiermacher's position by tracking its historical development and divergences over three periods of his authorship. This reveals a complex account of affectivity as entailing 1) an embodied-psychological dimension responsible for apprehending value and representing it in consciousness and 2) an embodied-social dimension that renders our spontaneous evaluative perceptions susceptible to influence from social and cultural forces. The idea that psychological and social forces converge in the affective consciousness of agents offers, I argue, a promising way to respond to the descriptive and ethical questions raised in Part I. But given Schleiermacher's biographical and theoretical limitations discussed above, this claim about the social-affective structure of lived reality must be itself hermeneutically reconstructed if it is to illumine anything about contemporary racism.

Chapter Four conducts an *external reconstruction* that places Schleiermacher's notion of social affectivity in conversation with Mills's critical race theory and recent work in German

⁶⁵ In this way, I construct a politically realistic account of racism's tenacity to 1) present a preliminary description of the phenomenon under consideration 2) outline a set of theoretical constraints for the ethical and theological theorizing to be undertaken in the rest of this inquiry, and 3) highlight some unanswered questions in critical social theory and social psychology that motivate the dissertation's ethical turn.

neo-phenomenology on the concept of affective *atmospheres*. The concept that emerges, what I call the “dark atmospherics of race,” provides theoretical connective tissue to link the social-structural and implicit-psychological aspects of racism’s tenacity. This provides a more coherent way to understand the close coordination between social structures and implicit racial biases than existing structuralist or attitudinal theories can offer. It also provides a more subtle, recognizably Schleiermacherian, way of thinking about the concrete threats to moral agency (both internal and external to the self) that avoids reducing the agent to a mere functionary of broader forces or to an amalgamation of bodily, psychological processes.

If Parts I and II develop a politically and morally realistic account of racism’s tenacity and its meaning for moral agency, Part III argues that the phenomenon of recalcitrant racialized moral failure poses even more profound, religious questions that exceed the purview of those resources upon which we have previously drawn. If we are agents capable of moral motivation who yet, on account of these dark atmospherics of race, find ourselves frequently committing the very racial evils we detest, does it still make sense to think of ourselves as *free* to choose and do what is good? This raises fundamental questions about the nature of morality itself which, by most accounts, presupposes some significant degree of agential freedom. It also raises a question that can only be described as soteriological. Given this recalcitrant incapacity to act in concert with our beliefs and desires in race-salient situations, what kind of hope do we have for personal and social transformation?

Attentive readers will note the distinctly Pauline provenance of these questions. For our purposes, their significance lies in the fact that they concern the *limits* of moral agency. As David

Tracy has argued, limits can be understood as both *limits-of* and *limits-to*;⁶⁶ they mark the full extent of one reality, and even if only in a negative way, they mark the threshold of some other reality that exceeds and encompasses the former one. For the Christian realist, this marks the point at which an inquiry must draw upon religious symbols to probe the deepest structures of reality. So, in the project's final move, I turn to Schleiermacher's theological writings for resources to respond to these questions. Chapter Five attends to the philosophy of religion Schleiermacher develops in the Introduction to *The Christian Faith* to show that, while he consistently distinguishes religion from ethics, he also understands religious feeling or "piety" [*Frömmigkeit*] to play a fundamental role in the moral life, a role that I argue is well-understood in atmospheric terms. Chapter Six draws on Schleiermacher's substantive dogmatics to offer a theological diagnosis of the dark atmospherics of race as a form of sin that both exceeds and permeates agents, thereby generating a kind of "apocalyptic soul death" from which we are not able to free ourselves. Agents in such a condition require more than moral exhortation or training in virtue to have their moral liveliness restored. Rather, they need something on the order of a conversion, a fundamental transformation of one's affective and perceptual responsiveness to the world, everything and everyone within it, and crucially, to the transcendent source and power animating everything that exists. The final chapter outlines this transition from soul death to new life by turning to Schleiermacher's explication of the Christian consciousness of grace, focusing in particular on his Christology and ecclesiology. In this way, I complement the theological diagnosis of the religious depths of racism's grip on American life in Chapter Six with a theological prognosis in Chapter Seven that describes how what I call Christ's "atmospherics of

⁶⁶ David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 91–119.

grace” might awaken us to the face of God in the human face of color and in the face of Black people in particular.

In sum, this work develops a Christian theological account of racism’s tenacity that not only draws from critical race theory and empirical social psychology but also extends and deepens their genuine insights by articulating the moral and theological realities at play in this concrete political situation. It demonstrates that Christian theology can be fruitfully instructed by contemporary scholarship on racism even as it speaks in its own voice to illumine dimensions of these matters of moral and political concern that non-theological disciplines tend to overlook. If successful, that is, if I can show a) that this theological account contributes to a more coherent understanding of the meaning of moral agency amidst contemporary racism than the non-theological disciplines can on their own and b) that it also discloses fundamental questions about the nature of moral agency itself that remain merely implicit in critical race theory and social psychology, then I will have made a case for theology as a *truth-seeking field of inquiry*. The truth it seeks is not constrained to the piety of a particular community nor the tradition-specific “cultural and/or linguistic framework” that constitute Christianity’s “comprehensive interpretive [scheme].”⁶⁷ Rather, it seeks hermeneutical insight into the basic structures of lived reality itself, a reality that is fundamentally shared but that admits only of a kind of fragmentary knowledge for creatures like us.

To plumb such profound depths requires that we first come to terms with those more manifest realities bearing down on human life in our contemporary situation. For this reason, we begin with an inquiry into the realm of power and group-based material interest in order to

⁶⁷ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 17–18.

apprehend those political realities that make contemporary antiblack racism so resistant to moral suasion and social subversion.

PART I
A POLITICALLY REALISTIC ACCOUNT OF RACISM'S TENACITY

CHAPTER 1
SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND THE TENACITY OF RACISM

Despite significant declines in explicitly racist sentiments over the past several decades, racial inequity, discrimination, and violence remain persistent features of American life. How should we understand this phenomenon, and what does it mean for our self-understanding as moral agents? Part I of this dissertation begins to address these questions by developing an account of racism's tenacity that is politically realistic. Such an account situates agents within a concrete political context marked by structural inequalities and attempts to explain their conduct primarily in terms of self-interest and power. This promises to provide a preliminary, clear-eyed description of racism's tenacity, a sense for the challenge it poses for thinking about moral agency, and a set of realistic constraints for the moral and theological theorizing that takes place in Parts II and III.

On all of these fronts, the critical race theory of Charles W. Mills provides considerable insight. Mills endorses a materialist theory of racial domination that explains its persistence in terms of group-based material interests. According to him, white supremacy as a socio-political system remains intact even after declines in explicit racial prejudice because white people as a group make decisions that promote and further entrench their dominance as a group over persons of color. This explanatory emphasis on groups and objective environmental conditions in favor

of individuals and subjective prejudices is characteristic of critical race theory as a field, and for that reason, Mill's work can be read as a particular iteration of a more general insight.

But Mills's work is also exemplary in several key respects that make him an invaluable contributor to the present study. First, Mills's work as a critical race theorist has continually engaged with, albeit in a critical fashion, what he calls "mainline" or "white" anglophone political and moral philosophy.¹ Since debates in contemporary moral philosophy figure prominently in this dissertation, his familiarity with this field make him an ideal interlocutor and critic of its shortcomings for thinking about race. Second, as an erstwhile Marxist who prominently broke with Marxism and wrote a book about his conversion to critical race theory,² Mills is especially explicit about his commitments as a social theorist and reflective about the necessary and sufficient conditions for a politically realistic theory of racial domination. This means that he offers not only a powerful account of racial social structures but also an historical self-awareness of his theory's relation to other prominent theories of domination and oppression. Finally, for a sociological materialist, Mills exhibits remarkable subtlety in theorizing the effects of social forces on the inner lives of agents. Since the relation between sociality and psychology, especially affectivity, is at the heart of our inquiry, Mills makes for an ideal guide.

The present chapter begins this larger project by developing a preliminary, politically realistic account of racism's tenacity and by clarifying how it challenges thinking about moral agency. It proceeds in four steps. First, I chart the contours of the contemporary debates in anglophone philosophy about moral motivation and failure. Second, I turn to Mills's critique of

¹ His scholarly formation and early career focused on Analytical Marxism, a field committed to clearing the proverbial underbrush from Marx's writings in order to reconstruct his positions in the most systematic and coherent way. More recently, his interests have turned to John Rawls and the adequacy of political liberalism for thinking about questions of reparative justice.

² See Charles W. Mills, *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

anglophone moral philosophy's individualistic scope. He describes it as an "ideal theory" that occludes, and in fact, perpetuates, antiblack racism. Third, I consider Mills's own non-ideal theory of racial oppression and isolate the contours of his reconstructed materialism. Fourth, I relate Mills's materialist social theory to his account of racialized subjectivity by exploring two concepts in particular: white ignorance and white *Herrenvolk* ethics. On the basis his insights, I argue that critical race theory discloses and articulates two limitations that hamper many moral philosophical approaches to moral motivation and failure. Insofar as these approaches explain human action exclusively with reference to mental states, they occlude 1) the irreducibly social determinants of action that contribute to racism's recalcitrance and 2) the manner in which those social determinants shape the epistemic and moral consciousness of agents living in racially structured social orders. The chapter concludes by raising some questions about the adequacy of Mills's reconstructed materialism that motivate the turn in Chapter Two to empirical research on implicit racial bias.

§1 Moral Motivation: The Contemporary Debate

Most people, most of the time, seem to act in accord with what they judge to be the best thing to do. If I judge that it is morally right to recycle egg cartons, then it would be reasonable to expect that I typically recycle egg cartons. But if I discover that egg cartons actually damage recycling equipment, I might decide that it is morally better to compost my egg cartons instead. In this case, it would be reasonable for my conduct to change in accord with my judgments. We appear to be creatures capable of such rational guidance; our actions are frequently responsive to reasons, including moral ones. This is a central intuition that moral philosophers seek to explain: how is it possible for moral judgments to be so reliably correlated with the motivation to act?

But another, less rosy intuition about human action looms as well. Human beings also commit moral failures, ranging from minor omissions to monstrous commissions. Even more troubling is the fact that these moral failures occur in persons who seem to be in reasonable command of their conduct and who possess many other forms of human excellence. Taken together, we appear to be the kind of creatures that are capable of both moral motivation approaching the saintly and moral failure bordering on the demonic. Moral philosophers who study moral motivation and failure strive to give accounts of human action that coherently accommodate both phenomena.³

§1.1 Theories of Moral Motivation

The trouble, at least in its modern formulation, regards a distinction between two species of mental states: beliefs and desires. Beliefs are cognitive attitudes. They purport to accurately represent features of the world and are said to have a mind-to-world direction of fit. As such, beliefs are truth assessable; they can be true or false depending on how accurately they represent the way things are. If I believe that it is sunny outside, and I turn to the window to discover a heavy fog and storm clouds, the law of non-contradiction requires that I change my belief. On the other hand, desires are conative attitudes. This means that they purport to represent the world, not as it is, but as one would like it to be. These attitudes have a world-to-mind direction of fit. As such, desires are not truth assessable; they make no claim about matters of fact. No amount of fog outside my window logically contradicts my desire for a sunny afternoon.

³ For a comprehensive overview of moral motivation and its philosophical debates see Connie S. Rosati, "Moral Motivation," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2016 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/moral-motivation/>.

This “Humean psychology”⁴ provides the background for contemporary debates about moral motivation and failure. Michael Smith helpfully frames this in terms of what he calls “the moral problem” facing contemporary anglophone meta-ethics, and it consists of three apparently inconsistent components: moral cognitivism, judgment internalism, and Humean moral psychology.⁵ The moral cognitivist claims that moral judgments are expressions of belief about matters of fact; specifically, they are judgments about what is right or good to do. This position is intuitively appealing because it holds that moral judgments are truth assessable, and this means that moral debates can be about getting things right, not just winning arguments.⁶ Moral non-cognitivists reject this claim entirely, arguing rather that moral judgments are expressions of an agent’s conative state. To judge an action to be good or right is equivalent to saying “hooray” or “boo” toward that action; instead of responding to moral facts about the world, moral judgments merely express an agent’s desire to encourage or discourage that kind of action. Lacking a shared normative source, the only basis for such encouragement is the agent’s own desires.⁷

This might make non-cognitivism intuitively unappealing. But its strength lies in how easily it explains the second proposition of Smith’s moral problem. Judgment internalism is the claim that to judge an action to be good or right is, all things being equal, to be motivated to act. If I judge that recycling egg cartons is the right thing to do, and if that judgment just is an expression of my desire to see people recycle egg cartons, then my moral judgment is

⁴ Michael Smith describes it this way, but just how closely this matches David Hume’s own views is a matter of debate. See Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995), Chapter 4; Jaqueline Taylor, “Hume on Moral Motivation,” in *Moral Motivation: A History*, ed. Iakovos Vasiliou (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 179–201.

⁵ Smith, *The Moral Problem*.

⁶ This can be a semantic or a metaphysical claim, or both.

⁷ According to Bernard Williams’s “reasons internalism” thesis, a normative reason for action counts as a reason to act only if the agent holds some corresponding desire in her subjective “motivational set.” See Bernard Williams, “Internal and External Reasons,” in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 101–13.

intrinsically motivating. My action is explicable with reference to a pre-existing desire, which just is a motivational state. The cognitivist, on the other hand, cannot appeal to any pre-existing desire. Since moral judgments are beliefs about matters of fact, moral desires emerge from moral beliefs if they emerge at all. To reverse the order threatens the possibility that moral judgments can be assessed in terms of their truthfulness. But this means that the cognitivist struggles to explain how moral judgments motivate us.

The cognitivist has two options: judgment externalism or judgment internalism. Externalism is the view that while moral judgments are indeed a species of belief, beliefs alone are insufficient to explain moral motivation. Beliefs about what is right or good require an “external” conative state to provide the motivation to act in accord with that belief. This position affirms that moral judgments are about matters of fact, and thus avoids the threats of moral relativism and anti-realism. But it can only endorse a contingent relation between moral judgments and motivation. That is, two individuals might share the same moral belief that recycling egg cartons is the right thing to do. But whether or not they act on that judgment is a matter of contingent, empirical facts about their psychological constitution.⁸

The moral cognitivist who endorses judgment internalism, on the other hand, tries to have it both ways. She holds that moral beliefs differ from empirical beliefs because they bear intrinsic motivational force as a matter of conceptual necessity. To equate a moral belief (it is right to keep one’s promises) with an empirical belief (this egg carton holds twelve eggs) is to make a category error; moral judgments are simply the kind of judgments that motivate us to act. To make a moral judgment without being motivated to act is therefore not to make a moral

⁸ Michael Smith argues that that a commitment to externalism forces one to say that the good and strong-willed agent is good on account of having a basic desire to “do what is right.” But this turns moral motivation into a “moral fetish” and a “vice” rooted in the agent’s moral self-regard. (Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 72–75)

judgment at all. Rather, it is to make a moral judgment in the “inverted commas” sense, where a “moral judgment” is a belief about what is right or good to do that one merely entertains but does not personally endorse.⁹ *Bona fide* moral judgments conceptually entail personal endorsement and are therefore intrinsically motivating.¹⁰

This position claims to have threaded the needle. It can explain the rational guidance of moral actions, and its conception of moral beliefs as intrinsically motivating purports to explain how reason can be practical. But a critical question remains: are such mental states conceptually possible? According to the third proposition of Smith’s moral problem, they are not.¹¹ This proposition asserts the standard Humean psychology described earlier and extends it to a theory of motivation: “[a]n agent is motivated to act in a certain way just in case she has an appropriate desire and a means-end belief, where belief and desire are, in Hume’s terms, distinct existences.”¹² The final condition is critical. If cognitive and conative attitudes are distinct existences with opposing directions of fit, then no single attitude with the same content can be both truth-assessable and intrinsically motivating. Yet, this is precisely what the cognitive internalist claims to have found.

To summarize, debates about moral motivation in anglophone philosophy are deeply imbricated in neighboring debates about the nature of moral properties and moral judgments.

⁹ This “inverted commas” formulation has become a commonplace in moral philosophy, but it was first used by R.M. Hare. See R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

¹⁰ This is not to say that such motivational force is necessarily overriding. But it does assert that moral judgments *can* motivate action and that, in the absence of countervailing desires, they *do*.

¹¹ Although Smith endorses the Humean psychological claim that there are no “unitary mental states” that combine cognitive and conative elements, others have argued that such entities do exist. See for example, the notion of an *alief* in Tamar Szabó Gendler, “Alief and Belief,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, no. 10 (2008): 634–63. Some have argued that these problems are easily resolved once such complex mental states are considered. See, for example, Uriah Kriegel, “Moral Motivation, Moral Phenomenology, And The Alief/Belief Distinction,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 90, no. 3 (September 2012): 469–86. I consider these states more in Chapter Two when I raise questions about the adequacy of this Humean psychology.

¹² Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 12.

Moral cognitivists explain how moral judgments could be truth-assessable, and thus they show how it would be possible to have substantive debates about morals that aim at getting things right. But their attempts to show how those judgments can actually motivate action run into trouble. Externalists argue that beliefs about what is right or good to do must be accompanied by conative states if they are to motivate action. But this position can only support a contingent connection between moral judgments and motivation because it restricts the scope of normativity to include only those persons who happen to share this desire. Internalists argue that a merely contingent connection fails to give an account of the very phenomenon of moral motivation itself, the reliable tracking of moral motivations with moral judgments. While internalists can explain this reliable connection, their account requires an appeal to mental states that, at least on the standard Humean psychology, do not (in fact, logically cannot) exist.

§1.2 Theories of Moral Failure

With these observations in view, we need to explore the second, more pessimistic intuition about human beings as moral agents: the reality of moral failure. As Lisa Tessman defines it, a moral failure is “the violation of any of the plural kinds of moral requirements,” which, as opposed to the exclusively deontic connotations of “moral wrongdoing,” can include supererogatory requirements of care and love.¹³ This is an intentionally capacious definition. To love one’s neighbor as oneself, to act in such a way that maximizes happiness, and to respect persons as ends each counts as a moral requirement vulnerable to violation. Such failures can be acts of commission or omission. Both the pastor who sexually abuses a congregant and the

¹³ Lisa Tessman, *Moral Failure: On the Impossible Demands of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 14.

bishop who neglects credible allegations of abuse commit moral failures. But for the action to violate a *moral* requirement, that requirement must pertain to what is good or right to do or be. When Michelangelo discarded the half-finished sculptures currently held in Florence's Uffizi Museum, he did so because they failed to meet his aesthetic standards. These count as aesthetic, not moral, failures because no moral standard was transgressed. Furthermore, only certain kinds of action are appropriate for moral assessment. Traditionally,¹⁴ such actions must be voluntary, i.e., chosen freely without coercion, and with sufficient knowledge about what one was doing. If I am pushed over an overpass and fall through the window of a passing truck, my falling through the window might harm the driver. But I did not violate any moral requirement because my falling was involuntary. If I place a spoonful of white powder into my friend's coffee believing it to be sugar, my ignorance about the fact that this powder is indeed anthrax renders my friend's death a tragedy, not a moral failure. Moral failures are thus typically blameworthy, although not necessarily so.¹⁵

§1.2.1 Cognitivist and Non-Cognitive Theories

Moral philosophers typically explain moral failures in terms of beliefs and desires.¹⁶ Vicious desires are perhaps the paradigmatic threat to moral conduct. Although non-cognitivists deny that there are any moral requirements that categorically bear on all rational agents, they

¹⁴ A classic formulation can be found in Aristotle's account of voluntary (*ἐκούσιον*), involuntary (*ἀκούσιον*), and non-voluntary (*ἀγνοούντα*) action. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.1, 52-57 [1109b30-1111b3].

¹⁵ Tessa Tessman argues that there are truly dilemmatic situations whereby moral failure is unavoidable; to avoid one moral failure necessitates the violation of a different moral requirement and *vice versa*. In these cases, moral failure is only blameworthy if the agent voluntarily places himself in the double bind.

¹⁶ Some "augmented Humeans" insist upon a third mental state, *intentions*, as a crucial cause of human action that is irreducible to beliefs and desires. See Michael Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987). For present purposes, this internal debate amongst Humeans is of no consequence to my argument.

might still endorse a set of moral norms whose validity is circumscribed within a community that desires to instantiate them. In such a case, moral failure occurs when an agent violates those communal norms, and the non-cognitivist is committed to explain this action in terms of a motivating desire. Moral conflict, on this view, is strictly a competition amongst desires. Moral motivation occurs when the moral desires outweigh the immoral ones. When the opposite occurs, an agent commits moral failure. If false beliefs play any role in moral failure, they do so as errors of strategic, not epistemic, reasoning.

Unsurprisingly, cognitivists assign a much more prominent role to beliefs in their account of moral failures. They contend that moral judgments, as cognitive states, can be *false*. An agent might commit a moral failure on account of an error in reasoning about what is right or good to do. On the basis of this false moral belief, agents would develop desires and intentions that lead them to violate moral requirements. For example, suppose that in 2004 I believed that the United States has a moral obligation to spread democracy around the world. This belief generated a desire to vote for George W. Bush for President. But by 2008, I came to believe that, not only was the American invasion of Iraq a *strategic* error toward the end of spreading democracy around the world, but the value of spreading democracy around the world was itself deeply flawed. All other things being equal, such a person would be motivated to vote quite differently in 2008. Furthermore, this person could well judge that the decision to vote for Bush had been a moral failure the root of which was a cognitive error, a mistake in epistemic reasoning about what is right or good to do.

Given that beliefs and desires play prominent roles in motivating action, then morally problematic (false or imprudent) beliefs or morally problematic (normatively inappropriate) desires could plausibly explain the violation of a moral requirement. But the cognitivist can

account for a further kind of moral failure. Recall that the non-cognitivist is committed to judgment internalism. If moral judgments are conative states, then the internal relation between judgment and motivation necessarily follows. But cognitivists can be externalists or internalists. The externalist rejects the necessary connection between moral judgment and motivation. They generally endorse the Humean view that moral motivation requires both a desire and a means-end belief. Since these two states are conceptually distinct, it is possible to imagine an agent with a moral belief that it is right or good “to ϕ ” but who lacks the requisite desire to motivate the agent “to ϕ .” One might know what is good or right to do and yet fail to do it.

Weakness of will,¹⁷ or *akrasia*,¹⁸ refers either to an action committed against one’s better judgment or the condition of an agent who commits such an act. The akratic agent is one who can freely choose between two actions, judges it better to do one and then elects to do the other. While internalists agree with non-cognitivists that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating, even they have reached a general consensus that such motivation is not necessarily overriding. Strong internalists argue that weakness of will is possible if and only if the agent’s evaluative judgment is based on a limited set of possible available reasons. This limitation constitutes practical irrationality because rationality requires that an agent act on judgments that consider all

¹⁷ Weakness of will is the paradigmatic form of practical irrationality. But recently, moral philosophers have attended to all manner of phenomena that, arguably, count as forms of practical irrationality. One list includes “indecision, irresoluteness, caprice, weakness of will, obstinacy, procrastination, imprudence, *akrasia*, *accidie*, and compulsion.” (Sarah Stroud and Christine Tappolet, “Introduction,” in *Weakness of Will and Practical Irrationality*, ed. Sarah Stroud and Christine Tappolet (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.)

¹⁸ Some scholars distinguish between weakness of will and *akrasia*. They contend that whereas *akrasia* refers to an action committed that contradicts an *occurrent* better judgment, weakness of will refers to an action that runs afoul of a *previous* intention or resolution. These two concepts are dissociable; *akrasia* is neither necessary nor sufficient for weakness of will. For discussion, see Neil Levy, “Resisting ‘Weakness of the Will,’” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 82, no. 1 (2011): 137–38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2010.00424.x>.

available relevant reasons.¹⁹ Had the agent considered all the available relevant reasons, she would have made an unconditional judgment the force of which is necessarily overriding.

More recently, internalists have endorsed “weaker” positions that acknowledge the possibility of “strict akratic action.”²⁰ Even in the face of these unconditional judgments, agents can experience motivational failures that result in moral failure. While unconditional moral judgments necessarily entail motivational force, this force is defeasible. Under ideal conditions, my judgment that it is right to keep my promises is sufficient to motivate me to do so. But in real-world conditions, the motivational force of that judgment competes with all manner of conative states that threaten to overwhelm it. While the rational agent tempers those desires and acts in accord with unconditional moral judgments, we all fall victim to momentary lapses of rationality. This is especially true when we are tired, distracted, or otherwise distressed. So chastened, internalists can admit the possibility of akratic action and maintain the intrinsically motivating nature of moral judgments by constricting the scope of rational agency. The akratic agent is possible, but he stands outside the bounds of reason.

§1.2.2 Neo-Sentimentalist and Dispositionalist Theories

Questions remain about whether or not our moral judgments are so reliably rational. While it might be true that we could reasonably expect agents to act in accord with their better judgments, this is not to say that their better judgments are, in fact, rational judgments. Consider the case of Adolph Eichmann.²¹ Believing himself to be a thoroughgoing Kantian, Eichmann

¹⁹ Donald Davidson exemplifies this position. See Donald Davidson, “How Is Weakness of Will Possible?,” in *Essays on Actions and Events*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21–42.

²⁰ See, for example, Alfred R. Mele, *Irrationality: An Essay on Akrasia, Self-Deception, and Self-Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 16–30.

²¹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 2006).

reported that his better judgment led him to defer to his authorities and to ensure that the trains to Auschwitz operated with perfect efficiency. Even so, this man's actions made him a genocidaire.

Granting that this is an accurate self-report, imagine that in the midst of his work one day, Eichmann stumbled across a scene at a train station where he saw hundreds of Jews being loaded onto railcars. Suppose that he witnessed a wrenching scene of a mother being separated from her young children that caused him emotional distress. His "better judgment" remains that it is morally right to follow orders and to do his duty. But his emotional response inclines him to disobey his superiors to ensure that these children are not separated from their mother. If he were to act on the latter inclination, this would count as an akratic action since it contradicts his "better judgment." But surely his better judgment is mistaken, and the weight of reason sides with the emotional response.²²

These enduring debates about moral motivation and failure have led to some recent developments worthy of our attention. In the example of our alternative Eichmann whose emotional response to Jewish suffering actually led him to revise his better judgment, we are within hailing distance of a position known as ethical sentimentalism.²³ Historically,²⁴ sentimentalists have argued that evaluative concepts, including moral ones, are grounded in the affective domain of consciousness. More recently, sentimentalists have rallied around the claim that one particular kind of affective state, i.e. emotion, is crucial to moral agency and irreducible to beliefs or desires. These neo-sentimentalists contend that emotions are especially helpful in

²² Sabine Döring argues that while emotions might disclose better normative reasons for action than one's "better judgment," weak-willed actions motivated by an emotion remain practically irrational because it does not result from rational guidance. Sabine A. Döring, "Emotion, Autonomy, and Weakness of Will," in *Autonomy and the Self*, ed. Michael Kühler and Nadja Jelinek (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 173–90.

²³ For an historical overview of ethical sentimentalism, see Remy Debes and Karsten Steuber, "Introduction," in *Ethical Sentimentalism: New Perspectives*, ed. Remy Debes and Karsten R. Steuber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1–14.

²⁴ Sentimentalists trace their roots to British moral sense theorists like Francis Hutcheson, Hume, and Adam Smith.

moving past the internalism/externalism impasse. Like moral beliefs, emotions seem to have a cognitive component. Emotions are usually about something in the world. Arachnophobia is a fear *of spiders*; anger typically takes aim at some target, be it a person or an uncooperative vending machine. But unlike beliefs, emotions have an unproblematic relation to motivation and action. The arachnophobe shrieks when she eyes a spider, and the angry child stomps out of the room to pout. While sentimentalists debate the precise nature of emotions, the precise relation of emotions to desires and beliefs, and the nature of moral judgment, they all agree that moral agency is under-theorized if attention is not paid to these peculiar states.

Whereas the sentimentalist attempts to resolve the debates by introducing a new, potentially “unitary” mental state into the traditional Humean psychology of cognitive and conative states, personalists contend that these issues can be resolved with a more holistic position that incorporates beliefs, desires, and emotions into an overarching concept: character. Personalists, or dispositionalists, tend to be cognitivists who think that moral action begins with a belief about what is right or good to do. But this belief is far from the kind of theoretical belief that purports to show the necessary and sufficient conditions for morally worthy conduct, full stop. Rather, these beliefs are more heuristic in nature and limited in scope.²⁵ Having observed good professors at work, I might form a moral belief that, when a student commits plagiarism, a good professor will be relentless in her enforcement of the fundamental values of the university and, furthermore, will display heartfelt concern to the student by meeting with them individually and gently teaching them how to avoid plagiarism in the future. This moral belief is restricted to

²⁵ Eric Schwitzgebel contends that these beliefs are best conceived as “multi-track” dispositions to reliably respond in ways that are recognizable in folk-psychological terms. To have a belief in racial justice is to act, feel, and speak in ways that are typically attributed to those who believe in racial justice. Eric Schwitzgebel, “Belief,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2019 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/belief/>.

what counts as being a good professor in a particular situation but says nothing about what counts as being a good carpenter or even a good lecturer. Moreover, it is derived from a kind of rationality that draws inferences about what to do from examples of good conduct in previous similar situations. The personalist combines this particularism and a heuristic account of moral beliefs with a further contention that even the right moral belief will prove motivationally inert in persons who lack good character. Good character includes not only these intellectual capacities but also a set of conative states, emotional dispositions, and behavioral habits that make one reliably disposed to act in accord with what she believes to be good to do.

To summarize, anglophone moral philosophers broadly acknowledge that, in addition to our capacity for moral motivation, human beings are also capable of moral failure. As with moral motivation, the field continues to debate how best to explain and categorize these failures. For present purpose, it helps to isolate four kinds of moral failure in particular. First, in cases of *compulsion*, morally inappropriate desires cause an agent to violate a moral requirement. Second, in cases of *strategic error*, agents form a true belief about what is good or right to do but make a mistake in determining how best to achieve that state of affairs. Third, in cases of *epistemic error*, agents go wrong in judging what is good or right to do. Fourth, in cases of weakness of will, an agent who is free to do X or Y judges it best to do X and yet, for whatever reason, chooses to do Y. Finally, neo-sentimentalists and personalists expand the possible explanations of moral failures by including emotions and character traits respectively.

§1.3 Summary

With these positions in view, we can now make some general comments about the contours of contemporary debates about moral motivation and moral failure. First, all the

participants agree that human action in general, and moral action in particular, is questionable; most of us, most of the time, reliably act in accordance with our moral judgments even though we are also capable of moral failure. Save for a few strong internalists, most also agrees that *akrasia* can occur even in agents who seem otherwise normal. Second, a commitment to metaphysical naturalism stands as the unstated premise for each of these positions. While they differ on the existence and nature of moral facts, they all reject theistic explanations of moral motivation and would agree that plausible action explanations must refer to elements subject to the laws of nature. In other words, they categorically reject varieties of non-naturalism, religious or otherwise.²⁶ Third, these moral philosophers further limit the set of possible explanations of action by focusing exclusively on mental states and, in particular, those mental states that figure into conscious moral deliberation.²⁷

One central claim of this chapter is that, despite these genuine insights into moral motivation and failure, there is a strong tendency in anglophone moral philosophy to pose questions about agency strictly in terms of the relation between an action and an agent's conscious mental states. This approach limits our understanding of the particular moral failures associated with American racism, or any social evil for that matter, because it neglects a second crucial agential relation, namely, that of an agent to his or her social environment. The prevailing

²⁶ There are important counterexamples. See, for example, John E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ryan Nichols, "Moral Motivation and Christian Theism," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 21, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 175–94.

²⁷ Michael Smith makes this explicit. "For it would seem to be part of our concept of what it is for an agent's reasons to have the potential to explain her behavior that her having those reasons is a fact about her; that the goals that such reasons embody are *her* goals. By contrast with normative reasons, then, which seems to be *truths* of the form 'It is desirable or required that I ϕ ', motivating reasons would seem to be *psychological states*, states that play a certain explanatory role in producing action." (Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 96) David Velleman contends that those "events and states [that] play the role of the agent" are desires, motives, reasons, and other mental states. (J. David Velleman, "What Happens When Someone Acts?," *Mind* 101, no. 403 (1992): 475–78.)

individualistic scope of moral philosophy not only occludes the social, material forces at play in racism, but it also distorts the very intuitions that moral philosophers seek to make intelligible. For to claim that most people, most of the time, reliably act in accord with our judgments is difficult to square with the reality of racialized agency in the United States. For a nation founded on the moral belief that all people are created equal and entitled to certain inalienable rights, it is the very unreliability that persons of color will be so treated that concerns us.

§2 Anglophone Moral Philosophy as Ideal Theory

Anglophone moral philosophers consider moral motivation and failure to be general features of human action that are best understood with reference to an individual's mental states. But according to theorists of social oppression, such theories ignore, and thereby occlude, the irreducibly social forces that establish and preserve patterns of domination and exploitation. The problem they identify is twofold. First, since agents are always ensconced within and influenced by social forces, these theories fundamentally misunderstand human action. This amounts to a descriptive error; to understand the nature of moral agency requires that we further understand the way that historical patterns of conduct and contemporary social conditions differentially constrain and enable individual agents. Second, by neglecting the causality of social forces, such theories culpably occlude precisely those mechanisms that produce and maintain forms of group-based oppression. More than a descriptive error, critical social theorists argue that such theories are morally and politically suspect because they, wittingly or not, preserve and enhance such oppression by naturalizing it. Following developments in feminist philosophy, critical race theorist Charles W. Mills draws on a distinction between "ideal" and "non-ideal" theory to diagnose this inadequacy and prescribe how best to amend it. In this section, I explore this

distinction and argue that it helps us see why the prevailing individualism in moral philosophy makes it ill-suited to diagnose racism's recalcitrance.

Charles Mills is a contemporary political philosopher and critical race theorist who, over his three decades of scholarship, has sought to make the philosophical significance of race manifest to a field that has long neglected it. He attributes this neglect to two sweeping philosophical prejudices stemming from Descartes's *Meditations*.²⁸ Anxious for indubitable epistemic certainty, Descartes extracted the *ego* from medieval ascriptive social and cosmological hierarchies and narrowed the philosopher's focus to the relation between an isolated individual and his thoughts. First, he privileged the individual *ego* over groups as the locus of epistemic authority and philosophical concern. Liberal political theorists like Hobbes and Locke simply extend this logic when they rethink the nature of political groups as aggregates of voluntary, consenting individuals. Second, by defining the *ego* primarily as a thinking being, and only secondarily as an extended body, Descartes launches a philosophical trajectory that privileges ideation over its material conditions of possibility. The consciousness of an individual subject marked the scope for philosophical inquiry such that social and material realities were relegated to the theoretical periphery.

Though the origins of individualism and idealism are likely more complex than Mills suggests,²⁹ these "Cartesian" legacies are certainly clear in the survey of anglophone moral philosophy in §1. Despite their differences, each explains human action in terms of an individual agent's relation to her own thoughts. They also construe moral agents without any mention of material needs or social relations, which leaves out any recognition of gender, class, or racial

²⁸ Charles W. Mills, "Non-Cartesian Sums: Philosophy and the African American Experience," in *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 1–20.

²⁹ Consider, by contrast, Charles Taylor's more extensive inquiry into these questions in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

identity markers. Presumably, this abstraction allows moral philosophers to achieve what they seek, namely, conceptual clarity about universally shared features of moral agency. But Mills's claim is that, given the pervasiveness of group-based oppression in contemporary societies, these theoretical maneuvers are neither necessary nor sufficient for understanding human action. In fact, they badly misunderstand human action and perhaps even exacerbate the moral failures that contribute to tenacious social evils like racism.

To clarify this claim, Mills distinguishing between "ideal" and "non-ideal" theories.³⁰ It is important to note that this is a distinction amongst normative theories. Both ideal and non-ideal theories, whether in epistemology, ethics, or political philosophy, are concerned with making judgments about how we should go about knowing, acting, or structuring our common life. Furthermore, both ideal and non-ideal theories are prescriptive. On the basis of those judgments, they offer recommendations to guide, and presumably change, existing norms. This means that both are likely to make reference to counter-factual states of affairs. Finally, insofar as all theorizing, if it is to serve as an aid for thinking, must reduce exceedingly complex realities into simpler models or schemas, both ideal and non-ideal theories foreground some aspects of reality and relegate others to the periphery.

³⁰ Mills clearly has John Rawls's self-proclaimed "ideal theory" in mind as his principal target, one he takes to be paradigmatic for a wider tendency. Mills's relationship to Rawls is complex; his recent work attempts to critically rehabilitate Rawls's political liberalism to accommodate the claims of reparative justice for historical wrongs suffered such as American chattel slavery. My concern here is not with Mills's reception of Rawls, however, but rather with the ideal/non-ideal distinction as a critical diagnosis of broad trends in anglophone moral philosophy. For Rawls's theory, see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971); John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). For Mills's critical reconstruction of Rawls positions, see Charles W. Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017). Christopher Lebron draws the distinction in the following way: "Ideal theory is that method of normative theorizing that prioritizes the definition and identification of normative principles that are justified by their internal integrity and mutual coherence... By contrast, nonideal theories [...] think that an ideal theoretical approach leaves all the important questions of justice on the table: Who was wronged? When were they wronged? By whom? How? What is the current world state given the answers to the prior questions? You answer these queries, and then you know what's fair." (Christopher Lebron, review of *Rethinking Racial Justice*, by Andrew Valls, *Ethics* 130, no. 3 (April 2020): 478–82. 480.)

The distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory, then, regards the manner in which they approach these shared normative, prescriptive, and modelling functions. According to Mills, ideal theories approach each of these functions by abstracting away from the concrete, political realities of group-based oppression that characterize actual social orders and the actual agents who live, think, and act within them.³¹ Ideal theorists argue that such abstraction is necessary for all theoretical endeavors but especially for normative ones. Theories provide insight precisely by schematizing reality, bracketing some aspects and highlighting others. Normative theorizing requires a special kind of abstraction, namely, the positing of ideals that are decidedly counterfactual. Such idealizing is necessary to recognize concrete instances of injustice or vice as such; one must have some counterfactual depiction of political justice or moral virtue as a standard for comparison. To refrain from such abstraction would be to remain lost in inexhaustible detail and to resign normative reflection to a suffocating empiricism.

Mills concedes both points. But he insists that normative theories need not necessarily be ideal theories. They are so only if their schematizations attribute capacities or qualities to persons or societies that they demonstrably lack. This is what it means to *idealize* persons or societies. For example, when John Rawls constructs a theory of justice that assumes the “basic structures” of society to be largely just, that moral agents act in “strict compliance”³² with the principles of justice, and that individual moral psychologies are typically unaffected by histories of group-based oppression, no intrinsic requirement of normative theory-building requires him to do any of this. An ethicist might construct theoretical abstractions that explain the manifest realities of

³¹ Charles W. Mills, “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology,” in *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*, Transgressing Boundaries: Studies in Black Politics and Black Communities (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 72–90.

³² “Everyone is presumed to act justly and to do his part in upholding just institutions” even though Rawls admits that “[o]bviously the problems of partial compliance theory are the pressing and urgent matters.” Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 8–9.

social injustice, that chart the characteristic ways in which agents fail to act justly, and that grasp the ways in which political forces distort individual moral consciousness. In both cases, theoretical abstraction and normative ideals are at play. But only the former idealizes persons and social conditions.

Mills's claim is that ethicists can construct non-ideal theories about precisely those realities that characteristically inhibit the practical achievement of moral and political ideals. Such theories deploy "descriptive mapping concepts" to illumine the concrete, non-ideal conditions in which humans actually think and act.³³ Far from collapsing moral and political ideals into the given, this descriptive labor isolates predictable moral pitfalls for the sake of refining a set of normative, action-guiding prescriptions, potentially rendering the prescriptive ideals more effective. The appeal of non-ideal theory for normative ethics is this twofold realism. It aims for a *realistic diagnosis* of the concrete social and political conditions that constrain and enable human action. This descriptive realism makes possible a more *realistic prognosis* for how to actually achieve those ideals that normative ethicists strive to clarify.

Non-ideal theorists must refrain from idealizing both social conditions and the individuals living therein. These two elements are inextricably related, according to Mills. He contends that the nature of the social order has a profound, asymmetrical influence on the nature of individuals. This is precisely the problem with Descartes's socially denuded *ego*. To picture human beings as if sociality were merely accidental to our nature badly misunderstands our nature. For better or worse, we are social creatures whose being, thinking, and acting are conditioned by social relations. For a non-ideal theorist to resist idealization, he or she must

³³ Examples include Marxism's "class society," feminist concepts of "patriarchy," etc. See Mills, "'Ideal Theory' as Ideology," 82–84.

acknowledge this important connection between *social ontology* and *philosophical anthropology*. At the most basic level, a social ontology is an account of the nature and properties of social entities, i.e., those realities that emerge from social interaction.³⁴ But according to Mills, human beings are themselves social entities. We are “socially constituted sel[ves], or at least [...] socially shaped sel[ves].”³⁵ So when he defines social ontology as “a mapping of the deep structures of being [...] that does nonetheless locate [these structures] in changing sociohistorical realities,”³⁶ the structures he intends to map include both social systems of group-based oppression and their effects on the agents whose subjectivities emerge amidst these oppressive conditions.

But not all social ontologies acknowledge this interdependence. An idealized social ontology is one that fails to accurately map social existents and their non-ideal relations. The best example is that of classical Liberalism, which according to Mills, “will typically assume the abstract and undifferentiated equal atomic individuals [so as to] abstract *away* from the relations of structural domination, exploitation, coercion, and oppression.”³⁷ This social ontology counts as idealized for two reasons. First, since it makes individuals ontologically basic, social groups must be conceived as amalgamations of consenting individuals. At the very least, this misconstrues the nature of politically salient groups like races and classes that are not, or not simply, voluntary associations. Second, this misconception of social groups means that instances of group-based oppression will either be occluded from view entirely or their systemic character

³⁴ Such entities can include money, works of art, and institutions. See Brian Epstein, “Social Ontology,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/social-ontology/>.

³⁵ Charles W. Mills, “White Supremacy as Sociopolitical System,” in *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism*, New Critical Theory (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 177–94. 193.

³⁶ Mills, “White Supremacy as Sociopolitical System,” 193.

³⁷ Mills, “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology,” 75–76.

will be misunderstood as individualistic, arbitrary, and unconnected. A non-ideal social ontology avoids these idealizations by accounting for non-voluntary social groups, their historical relations, and their enduring political arrangements.

These idealizations of social and political reality also lead to idealizations of the agents who constitute them. To relegate social groups and their oppressive relations as matters of peripheral significance also occludes how those relations “will profoundly shape the ontology of those same [supposedly undifferentiated, equal, atomic] individuals, locating them in superior and inferior positions in social hierarchies of various kinds.”³⁸ To overlook these hierarchical social arrangements highlights only the formal capacity of agents to act and brackets the significant substantive limitations imposed on agents by virtue of their perceived membership in historically subordinated groups. Philosophical anthropologies that ignore these unequal constraints thereby idealize the agential capacities of persons.

But Mills presses the point even further. These political arrangements also affect our inner lives, shaping our cognitions and perceptions in sociologically generalizable ways. Non-ideal theorists must therefore attend to the ways in which perceived group membership contributes to group-specific experiences of and attitudes towards various social realities. Individuals who belong³⁹ to an historically subordinated group are likely to share, at least to some degree, some generalizable experiences relevant to that group’s subordinated position.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Mills argues that group-based interests to maintain or achieve social privilege can distort the epistemic and moral cognitions of individuals. Even more insidiously, Mills notes that

³⁸ Mills, “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology,” 76.

³⁹ The nature of such belonging is complex. Scientists roundly deny that human races constitute a natural kind, so we do not belong to racial groups the way we belong to the human species. But neither is such belonging simply voluntary. So, when I say that persons “belong” to or are “members” of a certain race, this is shorthand for “socially perceived racial group membership.”

⁴⁰ This is a logical extension of the existence of politically salient social groups. I address this in §4.

dominant social groups can exploit their differential control of various media and epistemic justificatory processes to circulate and legitimate hegemonic ideologies. These distort the cognitions of dominant and subordinated groups alike in ways that entrench the political interests of the dominant group. In each case, an idealized social ontology that occludes social relations will necessarily fail to diagnose their effects on individual agents.

Each of the moral philosophical construals of agency discussed in §1 meets Mills's definition of an ideal theory. By framing human action individualistically, these moral philosophers neglect the role that social forces and conditions play in constraining and enabling human action. Of course, moral philosophers might contest this characterization. Whatever the social forces at play in racial oppression, individual agents are the ones that instantiate it, whether by ignoring racial injustice or by actively perpetuating it. So long as individuals are not being physically coerced into reproducing racial oppression, moral consciousness remains the most significant domain for understanding these moral failures. But here, Mills's claim about the inextricable relationship between social ontology and philosophical anthropology is crucial. Group-based oppression not only differentiates agential capacities in ways that a non-ideal philosophical anthropology must acknowledge. They also impact the relation of an agent to his or her own thoughts. As we saw in §1, this relation is the stock-in-trade of moral philosophy. If epistemic and moral consciousness is itself partially constituted, or at least strongly influenced, by social realities beyond the individual agent, then a non-ideal account of moral agency must attend to those realities as well.

If Mills is right, then human beings are not simply undifferentiated actors on a social and political stage; rather, we are actors who act within and are shaped by that social and political environment. So conceived, neither our moral consciousness nor our conduct is adequately

theorized until we come to terms with this complex agential structure. But to issue this critique of a prevailing trend in anglophone moral philosophy as an ideal theory is not yet to offer a non-ideal alternative. To develop this, I turn next to explore Mills's non-ideal critical race theory. Mills maps the deleterious consequences of racism on epistemic and moral capacities with his conceptions of "white ignorance" and "white *Herrenvolk* ethics." But in order to understand how moral consciousness becomes racialized, we need to see how Mills conceives of the social structures that create and reproduce racial oppression.

§3 Racialized Society: Social Causality, Materiality, and Race

Mills's critique of anglophone moral and political philosophy centers on its individualistic focus. By focusing exclusively on the agent-thought relation, these theorists neglect the relationship between an agent and his or her social environment. In societies marred by group-based oppression, these social structures are essential components for understanding human action. The non-ideal theorist's task is to theorize these structural determinants of agency, rendering visible that which ideal theory occludes.

§3.1 Ideal and Non-Ideal Theories of Racism

It is important to note that scholars of race and racism are not of one mind on how best to theorize these phenomena. Jorge L.A. Garcia, for example, argues for a "volitional account of racism" that centers on the moral quality of an agent's intentions. He defines racism as either antipathy toward or callous disregard for a person on account of his or her race.⁴¹ On his account,

⁴¹ Jorge L. A. Garcia, "The Heart of Racism," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 27, no. 1 (March 1, 1996): 5–46; Jorge L. A. Garcia, "Philosophical Analysis and the Moral Concept of Racism," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 25, no. 5 (September 1, 1999): 1–32.

social realities like institutions are racist only if the individuals who constitute them hold racist intentions; they are made racist by their intentional inputs, not their consequentialist outputs. He argues that to suggest otherwise is to make a category error. Although racial inequalities may well persist in social life without racist intentions, such “racial ills” do not warrant the moralized connotations intrinsic to ascriptions of racism.

Garcia’s volitional account of racism contrasts sharply with the dominant trend in scholarship on race and racism, which favors social-systemic accounts over individualistic or psychological ones. This follows a shift in the role of racism in American life. Following the achievement of formal legal equality and the significant strides toward substantive equality during the Civil Rights Era, scholars sought to understand how such stark racial inequalities persist despite significant declines in explicit racial prejudice. If racial inequalities endure “without racists,” they contend that supra-personal forces must be at play.⁴²

Disagreements remain even amongst those who view racism as a social system. A main fault line runs between structuralists and post-structuralists.⁴³ Structuralists trace their theoretical roots to Karl Marx’s historical materialism, which holds that material conditions, conceived as exploitative economic relations, structure all other elements of the social order. Post-structuralists reject Marxism’s narrowly economic interpretation of social oppression in favor of tracing its manifestly plural forms. Instead of economic relations, these theorists look to

⁴² Several scholars have noted this divide between personal/psychological and social-systemic accounts of racism and sought to bridge it. See, for example, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Emirbayer and Desmond, *The Racial Order*.

⁴³ Some scholars simply equate critical race theory with post-structuralist approaches over against Marxism, as in Abigail B. Bakan and Enakshi Dua, “Introducing the Questions, Reframing the Dialogue,” in *Theorizing Anti-Racism: Linkages in Marxism and Critical Race Theory*, ed. Abigail B. Bakan and Enakshi Dua (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 5–13. With that said, Bakan and Dua contend that both provide important insights for understanding racism.

“discourses” or “discursive regimes”⁴⁴ as the most basic manifestation of social power. Post-structuralists insist that racial oppression is irreducible to economic oppression even if, in reality, it is always inextricably related to it. Both structuralists and post-structuralists i) acknowledge the existence and political significance of non-voluntary social groups, ii) attempt to illumine their political relations, and iii) view those political relations as paramount for understanding the nature of individual agents. By Mills’s lights, they are both non-ideal theories. But by contrast, since Garcia foregrounds individual moral consciousness without attending to the supra-personal forces that constrain and condition it, his volitional account of racism amounts to an ideal theory.

Charles Mills’s critical race theory is a non-ideal theory that incorporates elements from both Marxism and post-structuralism. To clarify his account of racialized social structures, I will situate his view in relation to these two prominent non-ideal theoretical positions. I then turn to examine how Mills extends Marx’s concept of “materiality,” along with his post-structuralist revisions, to theorize the racialized nature of epistemic and moral consciousness.

§3.2 Marxist Materialism and Its Racial Discontents

It is difficult to overestimate the place of Karl Marx in Charles Mills’s scholarly development. As a graduate student, Mills found in Marxism a theory that “made oppression central” to its analysis, a discovery that he describes in quasi-religious terms.⁴⁵ His early writings

⁴⁴ The insufficiency of economic structures to explain social reality is perhaps the central insight in poststructuralist social theory. Whereas Marx thought linguistic and ideational constructions were the social effects of economic, material causes, Foucault argued that the individual subjects and groups were more primordially conditioned and governed by implicit discursive norms that bore only a contingent relationship to economic interests. For an account of “discursive formations,” see Foucault, *The Order of Things*. For the relation of such discourses to political, disciplinary power, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). The task of social theory, then, is not to distinguish the real base from the ontologically derivative superstructure. It is to unmask these power dynamics by inquiring genealogically into their *discursive* conditions of possibility.

⁴⁵ Mills speaks of his encounter with Marxism as a “sense of revelation” that led to his “scales falling,” a clear reference to Paul’s conversion recounted in Acts 9:18. Mills, *From Class to Race*, 121.

were in Analytical Marxism, and despite a prominent break with the field in the 1990s,⁴⁶ key features of Marxist social theory endure across his career. Reflecting on the transition from Marxism to critical race theory, Mills writes, “Now what I have belatedly realized is that in my theorization of race, I basically adapted most of this [Marxist] apparatus and changed the identities of the players.”⁴⁷ He identifies five crucial features of this apparatus:

- (i) the emphasis is on the social and the systematic as a structure of domination, rather than on the individual and the ideational;
- (ii) exploitation and material group interests are taken to be causally central;
- (iii) the basic players are the two main classes, the exploiting and the exploited class;
- (iv) the economic power of the exploiting class, the bourgeoisie, translates into a political and juridical power – they are the ‘ruling class’;
- (v) ideologies are generated by this structure which influence social cognition, factual and moral, so as to justify or obfuscate its existence.⁴⁸

Mills suggests here that his major shift from class to race was essentially an application of Marxism to the realities of racial oppression. This understates a more extensive revision, as I will argue. But given the enduring importance of historical materialism for Mills, this apparatus deserves attention.

The first point (i) simply restates the ideal/non-ideal theory distinction. Marxism emphasizes social groups, not individuals, as the primary actors in society and history. But here, Mills makes a further vital qualification. In addition to the social/individual distinction, he pits the “systematic” and “structure[s] of domination” against “the ideational.” Furthermore, (ii) clarifies the nature and logic of these structures; they are exploitative and rooted in material group interests. For Mills, the appeal of Marxism lies not only in its identification of the most

⁴⁶ Mills narrates his “conversion” in Mills, *From Class to Race*.

⁴⁷ Charles W. Mills, “Introduction: Red Shift: Politically Embodied/Embodied Politics,” in *Radical Theory, Caribbean Reality: Race, Class and Social Domination* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2010), 1–27. 23.

⁴⁸ Mills, “Red Shift,” 23.

politically salient actors in society and history, but also in its materialist diagnosis of what drives their interactions.

This materialism is sociopolitical, not metaphysical; it makes no claim about the basic elements of the universe but rather asserts that sociopolitical causality flows asymmetrically. This claim has three components: 1) socio-political orders can be divided into distinct domains, 2) some domains are “material” whereas others are “ideal”, and 3) the overarching socio-political dynamics are explicable with reference to the material, not the ideal, elements.⁴⁹ The sociopolitical materialist contends that material determinants will generally be more efficacious vis-à-vis social and political dynamics than ideal ones. This causal asymmetry means that the most adequate, i.e., non-ideal, description of a polity’s social function appeals to its material elements as explanatorily basic.

For Marx, material elements are those involved in economic production.⁵⁰ As finite, physical creatures, human beings depend upon our environment to remain in existence. We employ creative, productive forces to appropriate and transform our environment for the sake of satisfying those basic needs. Since we lack the ability to meet those needs on our own, we turn our creative energies toward the social world, producing social arrangements to meet these collective needs. These arrangements are material in that they 1) are necessary to meet the basic needs required to keep human beings alive and 2) constitute an objective, permanent constraint on individual and group agents. While particular arrangements change, the human need for basic goods remains constant.

⁴⁹ Charles W. Mills, “Materializing Race,” in *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race*, ed. Emily S. Lee, SUNY Series, Philosophy and Race (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 20.

⁵⁰ Marx classic formulation of historical materialism can be found in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Part One with Selections from Parts Two and Three, Together with Marx’s “Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy,”* ed. C.J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1995).

Furthermore, Marx thinks that these social forms are never egalitarian. Some groups inevitably achieve control over the means of production on which every group depends. This creates a power differential in which the dominant group literally holds the power of life and death. They use this crucial advantage to exploit other groups and further secure their dominance. Even in modern societies that reject ascriptive hierarchies, dominant groups constitute a ruling class. Motivated by interest to entrench their dominance, they translate their economic leverage into juridical, political, religious, and cultural power (iv), coercing other groups to accept their terms under threat of withholding the necessities of life. Furthermore, the ruling class circulates “ideologies” (v), forms of social consciousness that serve ruling class interests by justifying or obfuscating their coercive practices. The crucial point is that the power relations that characterize the material “base” of a society effectively *structure* its ideal “superstructure.” Thus, the entire polity functions as a coherent system of oppression.

A non-ideal theorist like Mills has good reason to endorse this kind of materialism. It figures non-voluntary social groups, not individuals, as the basic units of social analysis, and it foregrounds those oppressive dynamics that ideal theory overlooks. Moreover, it provides an explanation for how these oppressive structures operate; they advance and secure the economic dominance of the ruling class. Thus, materialism promises the non-ideal theorist precisely the kind of political realism he seeks.⁵¹ Diagnostically, it purports to expose the non-ideal reality and function of structural oppression. This diagnosis makes possible a politically realistic prognosis for how best to transform those structures. Furthermore, this twofold political realism provides

⁵¹ Mills explicitly identifies materialism as a species of realism. See Charles W. Mills, “European Specters,” in *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism*, New Critical Theory (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 147–72. 148. See also Charles W. Mills, “Racial Exploitation,” in *The Changing Terrain of Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Maria Krysan and Amanda E. Lewis (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 235–62. 243.

the non-ideal theorist a set of realistic constraints for those individuals whose lives are conditioned by structural determinants of group agency. Materialism thus avoids the descriptive and prescriptive pitfalls of ideal theory.

But Mills's concern is to theorize *racial*, not *class*, oppression. This eventually led him to the judgment that orthodox Marxism is politically unrealistic for theorizing race. As already noted, he had at the very least to expand its social ontology to admit racial groups as basic units of analysis. But this seemingly minor change exposes a more fundamental theoretical chasm. For Marx, social oppression *just is* class oppression. Economic relations are material, and all other forms of oppression are explicable with reference to them. This led twentieth century Marxists to interpret race as ideology, an epistemically vacuous constellation of beliefs and values created by the bourgeoisie to divide the proletariat and to justify its exploitation of new labor and commercial markets. Race, on this view, is superstructural, an ideological effect of economic causes.

For Mills, this analysis of racism proves triply inadequate. First, not only is there no *a priori* reason why all oppression must be reducible to class oppression, but even a cursory glance at American history (not to mention the history of European colonialism) would reveal ample *a posteriori* evidence that racial dynamics were causally efficacious to distribute and restrict the goods necessary for human life.⁵² Second, racial oppression has a distinctly somatic dimension that economic oppression lacks; its logic is inscribed on human bodies, which renders its alienating effects even more inescapable than class oppression. Third, racial oppression entails an “ontological” dimension missing from economic oppression. It correlates somatic properties with the kind of being one is and arranges these types hierarchically, figuring white people as

⁵² For a list of such historical and sociological evidence, see Mills, “European Specters,” 166–67.

paradigmatic humans and nonwhite people as inferior deviations therefrom. This means that, beyond class struggle, persons of color face an “ontological struggle” for social recognition as *human beings*. Thus, race is not only “material” in the Marxist sense of being socially efficacious to make society systemically oppressive. There is also a “deeper, more foundational” materiality of race that demands theoretical attention of its own.⁵³

§3.3 Mills’s Post-structuralist Turn and the ‘Dark Ontology’ of Race

To articulate this materiality of race, Mills turns to poststructuralist methods and insights. Specifically, he probes the discursive conditions of possibility for the simultaneous rise of explicitly racialized social hierarchies and the Enlightenment’s moral egalitarianism. This leads him to analyze the writings of the main Liberal moral and political theorists, most notably Immanuel Kant. The second formulation of Kant’s categorical imperative appears to claim that all human beings equally deserve moral respect. Rational, self-legislating creatures, i.e., *persons*, are morally obligated to treat other persons as ends and never simply as a means.⁵⁴ This neatly divides the moral universe into two groups: persons who must be treated as ends, and non-persons who may be justifiably treated as means to an end. Such a view ought to hold institutions like chattel slavery as paradigmatic instances of moral wrongdoing.

But Mills argues that this conclusion elides a non-ideal reality. It presumes that Kant’s ascription of intrinsic moral worth to all *persons* is identical to ascribing such worth to all *human beings*. Kant’s lectures on anthropology and physical geography reveal that this presumption is

⁵³ Mills, “European Specters,” 168-169.

⁵⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 38 [4:429].

mistaken. As several scholars have noted,⁵⁵ Kant endorses a set of empirical judgments in these lectures that the baseline requirements of personhood (rationality and self-legislation) are not equally distributed across the human population. In fact, he contends that a racial hierarchy neatly divides human beings into “Whites,” “Indians,” “Negroes”, and “[Native] Americans.”⁵⁶ Whites “contain all the inclinations of nature in affects and passions, all talents, and all the predispositions toward culture and civilization. They can obey as well as rule. They are the only race that always advances to perfection.”⁵⁷ Below whites come “Indians” who, although they are “perpetual students,” can only be educated in the arts, not the sciences and “only know coercion, not right and freedom.” These racial limitations on rationality increase when it comes to Black people who only “adopt the culture of slaves. They are not free but children incapable of leading themselves.”⁵⁸ Native Americans are “insensible. They do not speak, love, or care about anything” and “do not adopt any culture.”⁵⁹ Especially given the importance on self-legislation for Kant’s conception of personhood, his claim that “Native Americans and Negroes cannot

⁵⁵ See Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, “The Color of Reason: The Idea of ‘Race’ in Kant’s Anthropology,” *The Bucknell Review* 38, no. 2 (January 1, 1995): 200–241; Robert Bernasconi, “Who Invented the Concept of Race?: Kant’s Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race,” in *Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi, Readings in Continental Philosophy (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 11–36.

⁵⁶ These lectures were never published in Kant’s lifetime and can be found only in Kant’s handwritten literary remains and collections of his students’ notes. All of the following citations come from the Royal Prussian Academy Edition of his collected works. Immanuel Kant, “Entwürfe zu dem College über Anthropologie aus den 70er und 80er Jahren,” in *Immanuel Kant: Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe) I-XXII* (Electronic Edition), edited by the Königlichen-Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, sec. 3, vol. 15, *Anthropologie*, edited by Erich Adickes (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporations, 1999), 877-878. Cited as *AA*. Translations are mine. Mills cites many of these himself in Charles W. Mills, “Kant’s Untermenschen,” in *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*, Transgressing Boundaries: Studies in Black Politics and Black Communities (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 91–112. 95-97. For selected English translations of this material, see Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Anthropology*, ed. Allen W. Wood and Robert B. Loudon, trans. Robert R. Clewis et al., The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁵⁷ Kant, *AA* XV.878 This capacity to both readily obey and rule matches the picture of moral personhood, described in the third articulation of the categorical imperative, as both obedient member and ruling “sovereign” [*Oberhaupt*] of the kingdom of ends. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 41 [4:433].

⁵⁸ Kant, *AA* XV.878.

⁵⁹ Kant, *AA* XV.878.

govern themselves; therefore, they only serve as slaves” strikes Mills as especially difficult to square with the claim that Kant thinks of moral personhood as a universally human attribute.⁶⁰

Those familiar with Kant’s ethics may contend that his clearly racist *empirical* judgments issued in unpublished lectures on anthropology have no bearing on his published, *normative* ethics. After all, the latter affirms the intrinsic dignity of persons, the very thing that shows precisely why racial hierarchy is morally wrong. If one’s concern were to exculpate Kant from moral censure, or to preserve the viability of his ethics and its morally egalitarian ideals, then such arguments might be convincing.

But these are explicitly not Mills’s concern, and neither are they ours. Recall that Mills is engaged in non-ideal theory and thus seeks to highlight the social and material conditions that routinely inhibit the achievement of ethical ideals. In Kant, he finds a figure whose written work manifests the central contradiction of Liberalism as a philosophical and political project. The same champion of human freedom who espoused moral egalitarianism and the intrinsic dignity of persons also championed a view of racial hierarchy that distributed the components of moral personhood in accordance with an individual’s racial essence.

Rather than disregard Kant’s empirical judgments as conceptually unrelated to his ethics, Mills asks how it is intellectually possible to endorse both racial hierarchy and moral egalitarianism as if there were no contradiction. To explain this, Mills argues that, alongside the morally egalitarian ideal Kantianism, there is textual evidence for a non-ideal *Herrenvolk* (master race) Kantianism. The latter describes a *de facto* moral order that restricts moral personhood to a master race, i.e., white people, and relegates nonwhite humans to the moral

⁶⁰ Kant, *AA* XV.878. Rather, Mills interprets Kant to mean that “[s]ubpersons are not capable of becoming moral agents in the full sense, directing and legislating for themselves, but require the paternalistic supervision of the person population.” Charles W. Mills, “White Right: The Idea of a Herrenvolk Ethics,” in *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 139–66. 153.

status of “sub-persons.”⁶¹ While moral respect is the prescribed norm for conduct amongst and toward white persons, degrees of moral disrespect and instrumentalization are prescribed toward nonwhite sub-persons. The rights to which sub-persons are entitled fall somewhere between those of white persons and those of non-human animals, and their obligations entail deference and submission to the supposed mater race. In other words, the apparent contradiction between Kant’s empirical and normative judgments disappears if we recognize that when he spoke of moral persons, he was really only speaking about white people.

This reveals a crucial feature of the non-ideal social ontology from which Enlightenment moral and political philosophy emerged. It shows that Kant and others⁶² were thinking, writing, and living within a “discursive field”⁶³ that restricted full moral personhood to a racial subset of human beings. To be racially white was the condition of the possibility of being fully human. This means that racialized descriptive claims about human nature and normative claims about moral entitlements and obligations are always already present as the “ontological horizon”⁶⁴ that conditions and inflects Kant’s explicit claims about moral personhood. As Mills puts it, the “normative ground floor”⁶⁵ of Kant’s moral egalitarianism is racialized, restricted to white humans.

⁶¹ Kant does not use the term “subperson.” It is Mills’s claim that non-ideal Kantianism implies it, however.

⁶² Mills also identifies similar racialized distinctions in the works of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.

⁶³ Charles W. Mills, “White Supremacy and Racial Justice,” in *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism*, New Critical Theory (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 195–218. 216.

⁶⁴ Judith Butler uses this term in precisely the sense that I mean it here, “the limits to what will be considered to be an intelligible formation of the subject within a given historical scheme of things.” These limits constitute “regimes of truth” which “[constrain] in advance what will and will not be a recognizable form of being.” Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 17, 22.

⁶⁵ Charles W. Mills, “Revisionist Ontologies: Theorizing White Supremacy,” in *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 107.

Mills calls this racialized stratification of moral personhood the non-ideal “dark ontology”⁶⁶ that undergirds the Enlightenment ideal of moral egalitarianism. This constitutes the central logic of racial oppression, and it structures every aspect of not only American social life but also that of much of our now globalized world. It is “the original injustice [...] of the failure to see people of color as full persons in the first place,” a failure that “shapes everything else.”⁶⁷ In other words, this dark ontology has a social causality all of its own; it is to racial oppression what economic relations are to class oppression.

On first glance, this seems like a perfect inversion of Marxist materialism. A set of *ideas* about racial hierarchy has become causally efficacious, embedded in social and historical conditions. But Mills’s position is more nuanced than this. He grants that racism’s modern genesis is best explained as a function of bourgeois economic interests. But this ideological construction has become “materially embedded”⁶⁸ and even “incarnated”⁶⁹ through concrete historical processes of oppression and institutionalized non-recognition. “That is,” he writes,

it is a matter not merely of the stigmatized representation of blacks but of the literal destruction of black being by slavery and colonial forced labor, regimes under which people were often worked to death and were at times reduced to a condition beneath the human. Thus, it is not only that whites are depicted as the superior race, beings of a higher order, but that this depiction begins to seem true in a world in which they dominate the planet and become exemplars of the human.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Charles W. Mills, “Dark Ontologies: Blacks, Jews, and White Supremacy,” in *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 67–96. As Mills puts it, a dark ontology is “the unacknowledged dark side of the Enlightenment ideal. Simply put: one set of rules for whites, another for nonwhites. All persons are equal, but only white males are persons.” Mills, 70. It is “dark” in the sense of being generally unacknowledged and also in that it ascribes personhood along a color spectrum.

⁶⁷ Mills, “White Supremacy and Racial Justice,” 217.

⁶⁸ Mills acknowledges the seeming inconsistency. Charles W. Mills, “New Left Project Interview with Charles Mills,” in *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*, *Transgressing Boundaries: Studies in Black Politics and Black Communities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 8.

⁶⁹ As Mills puts it, race constitutes “a social materialism, through which political domination *becomes* incarnated...” Mills, “European Specters,” 168.

⁷⁰ Mills, “Racial Exploitation,” 256.

It is only as the governing logic of a global socio-political system, backed by economic and military might, that this dark ontology came to so profoundly shape our social world. But Mills's point is that we fundamentally misunderstand that system if we neglect this dark ontology of racialized personhood that undergirds it.

In other words, a non-ideal theory of race requires a more supple conception of social causality than orthodox Marxism admits. It requires a materialism that maintains the asymmetrical flow of social causality, emphasizing "the social and the systematic as a structure of domination, rather than on the individual and the ideational,"⁷¹ but that further acknowledges that individual agents and their ideas are also conditioned by discursive regimes and their ontological horizons. To grasp the materiality of race requires this theoretical nuance.⁷²

Mills calls the global socio-political system that materializes this dark ontology "white supremacy." Unlike "racism," which bears connotations of individual prejudices, Mills prefers white supremacy as a non-ideal descriptive mapping concept that clearly indicates a coherent system of racial oppression.⁷³ A polity is white supremacist if it divides the human population into hierarchically stratified racial groups ($R_1 > R_2 > R_3 > \dots R_n$) such that R_1 s are white people, $R_2 \dots R_n$ s are varieties of nonwhite people, and R_1 s are systematically privy to special set of benefits, burdens, rights, and duties from which $R_2 \dots R_n$ s are excluded.⁷⁴ This conception is

⁷¹ Mills, "Red Shift," 21.

⁷² As Mills puts it, "[W]hite supremacy is founded on a distinctive metaphysic, which is embedded in sociopolitical realities and which in turn reciprocally shapes those realities." (Mills, "White Supremacy as Sociopolitical System," 193)

⁷³ Mills, "Revisionist Ontologies," 100.

⁷⁴ It thus accommodates historical variations in the conception of "race," the boundaries of racial groups, and how color hierarchies within designated racial groups add complexity racial oppression. In each case, the crucial feature remains: white people (however whiteness is conceived) as a group (however that group is ethnically demarcated) occupy a position of multi-dimensional political dominance vis-à-vis various groups of nonwhite people (however those nonwhite groups relate amongst and within themselves).

necessarily formal because it aspires to isolate the general features of historically and geographically diverse iterations of white racial domination, including *de jure* and *de facto* forms. Furthermore, Mills conceives of this system as semi-autonomous and multi-dimensional. White supremacy is semi-autonomous because its particular logic makes it analytically distinct from other oppressive systems even if it always actually intersects with them. As multi-dimensional, Mills contends that the dark ontology becomes causally efficacious through multiple means that are irreducible to, and yet operate in coordination with, one another. White racial domination materializes itself by structuring (i) the juridico-political, (ii) economic, (iii) cultural, (iv) cognitive-evaluative, (v) somatic, and (vi) ontological/metaphysical aspects of a social order to systematically benefit white people and to systematically disadvantage persons of color.

§3.4 Summary

We are now in a position to clarify how Mills's critical race theory conceives of the supra-personal determinants of human action. Mills consistently endorses three central claims of Marxist materialism: 1) groups, not individuals, are the basic units of social analysis, 2) group material interests provide the most realistic explanation for social function and evolution, and 3) these interests drive groups to antagonistic relations that result in the systematic domination of one (or some) by the other. But to theorize race, Mills augments these positions by 1a) supplementing classes with races as politically salient, non-voluntary social groups, 2a) expanding Marx's narrowly economic conception of materiality to include the somatic and ontological dimensions of distinctly racial oppression and material interests to include psychic and social cognitive ones concerning full personhood, and 3a) reconceptualizing social

causality to acknowledge the reciprocal relation of social realities and social ontologies. This allows him to chart the multidimensional contours of racial material conditions without making them functions of economic relations. This more supple conception of materiality grants him insight into how the dark ontology of racialized personhood conditions not only social and political orders but also how individuals see, interpret, and orient themselves within that order.

Even with these amendments, Mills's materialism remains intact. Social causality is still asymmetrical. Social systems and power relations will always more adequately explain social function than individual attitudes and ideas.⁷⁵ He merely acknowledges that ideas can become materially embedded through social processes of recognition and non-recognition. This is not sociological idealism but rather a poststructuralist insight about the potency of discursive regimes to shape social reality. Furthermore, these materially embedded ontologies remain essentially productive. They produce social forms and political arrangements, but they also produce particular kinds of subjects. As Mills puts it, race is "deep in the sense of shaping one's being, one's cognition, one's experience in the world: it generates a *racial* self."⁷⁶ In other words, white supremacy as a socio-political system inscribes our physical bodies and even our inner lives with the racial logic of persons and sub-persons. This reveals the full scope of his critique of the Cartesian *ego* above. Racialized societies like the United States produce racial selves. To abstract away from this dimension of selfhood is to idealize the way in which racial material conditions structure agency and moral subjectivity.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ This is especially clear when Mills turns to make explicitly normative prescriptions for how to achieve a more racially egalitarian structure. See Mills, "White Supremacy and Racial Justice," 217.

⁷⁶ Charles W. Mills, "The Racial Polity," in *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 119–38. 134.

⁷⁷ Mills writes, "[a] pervasive racialization of the social world means that one's race, in effect, puts one in a certain relationship with social reality, thereby tendentially determining one's being and consciousness." (Mills, "White Supremacy as Sociopolitical System," 186.)

This leads us to a point where the moral philosopher must work hand in hand with the social theorist. The same discursive horizon that determines who counts as a full human being conditions the agent-thought relation itself. For moral philosophers to focus exclusively on the agent-thought relation is thus doubly idealized. First, it neglects the fact that individuals act from particular social locations and so are characteristically encumbered from acting or empowered to act by social determinants. Second, and more insidiously, it neglects the fact that the dark ontology of race conditions what individual agents can think, see, recognize, and say. A non-ideal theory of race must not only be politically realistic; furthermore, it must be psychologically realistic. Insofar as an account of moral agency fails to descriptively map how our agential and cognitive-evaluative capacities have become racialized, it remains an ideal theory.

§4 Racialized Agency: White Ignorance and White *Herrenvolk* Ethics

“We learn to see whiteness and blackness,” Mills writes, “seeing ourselves in our own eyes, and in the eyes of others, as equal, as superior, as inferior, but in all cases ineluctably (given a racialized social order) as a human of a certain racial kind.”⁷⁸ The dark ontology of race has become materially embedded, marking human bodies with a political and moral significance that is easily, and perhaps unavoidably, recognized by agents whose inner lives have been shaped by that same logic. Mills names these psychological effects of white supremacy “white ignorance” and “white *Herrenvolk* ethics,” both of which are inexplicable without reference to social causation. By descriptively mapping these realities, Mills uncovers aspects of the agent-thought relation that an ideal theory would neglect or misdiagnose.

⁷⁸ Mills, “European Specters,” 169.

White ignorance and white “*Herrenvolk* ethics” each depend upon the supple materialism described in §3. They refer to sociologically generalizable patterns of consciousness caused by white supremacy as a sociopolitical system. As such, they belong to what Mills calls the cognitive-evaluative dimension of white supremacy. By exposing these forms of social consciousness to be both false and politically motivated, Mills aims to rouse those seduced by false consciousness into political action, motivating them to improve their beliefs and their conduct. That is, Mills engages in a “naturalized”⁷⁹ approach to epistemology and ethics, albeit from the perspective of what Marxists call “ideology critique.”⁸⁰ It seeks to illumine non-ideal patterns of epistemic and moral cognition for the sake of improving them, thereby retaining the normative and realist aspirations of traditional epistemology and ethics. But unlike many contemporary naturalists, Mills is concerned primarily with those cognitive failures with social, as opposed to personal, causes.

On first blush, it might seem that a socially caused belief would be epistemically suspicious. If social causation simply means that members of a given group have a material interest to believe ‘that *P*’ despite the absence of rational reasons (or despite contradicting rational reasons) for holding that belief, then socially caused beliefs would be manifestly irrational. Mills certainly admits that such bad-faith modes of group-based ignorance exist. But his conception of socially caused beliefs also includes more subtle and insidious forms. Given

⁷⁹ The term “naturalized epistemology” belongs to W.V.O. Quine, who sought to incorporate methods from the natural sciences into philosophical reflection on belief formation and justification. See W. V. Quine, *Ontological Relativity: And Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 69–90. For more recent proponents of this project in ethics, see Alvin I. Goldman, “Ethics and Cognitive Science,” *Ethics* 103, no. 2 (January 1993): 337–60; Owen J. Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); Larry May, Marilyn Friedman, and Andy Clark, eds., *Mind and Morals: Essays on Cognitive Science and Ethics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996); Haidt, “The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology.”

⁸⁰ Charles W. Mills, “Marxism, ‘Ideology,’ and Moral Objectivism,” in *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism*, New Critical Theory (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 59–88.

that white supremacy describes a polity in which races count as politically salient non-voluntary groups, it is reasonable to suppose racial group membership in such a polity would subject individuals to relatively distinct, group-specific experiences of social life.⁸¹ For example, since persons of color are more likely than white people to experience police harassment, it follows that this tends to generate different experiences, beliefs, and evaluations amongst those groups with regard the police. These group-specific experiences provide an evidentiary basis from which individuals draw inferences and make judgments about the nature and function of their social world. This means that socially caused beliefs might also be rationally justified.⁸² There are possible reasons for the unequal social distribution of true and false beliefs about racial oppression that are not simply reducible to material group interests.

§4.1 White Ignorance

White ignorance is socially caused in both these good- and bad-faith ways. As Mills defines it, white ignorance is “an ignorance, a non-knowing, that is not contingent, but in which race – white racism and/or white racial domination and their ramifications – plays a crucial causal role.”⁸³ This non-contingency speaks to the systemic production of such ignorance. It specifically refers to a “structural group-based miscognition,”⁸⁴ those false beliefs and absences

⁸¹ This is the central claim of standpoint epistemology; different locations in a social hierarchy equate to differences in epistemic access, especially with regard to knowledge related to social oppression. But it must be qualified. Such experiences are only *relatively* distinct, i.e., they are in principle communicable across groups even if this only results in derivative, second-hand knowledge. And as sociological *generalizations*, group-specific experiences neither universally obtain for in-group, nor universally exclude out-group, members.

⁸² This is not to say the privileged epistemic access *guarantees* the formation of true beliefs. Mills recognizes this, describing epistemic differences as sociologically generalizable (not determinative) “inclination[s],” “doxastic disposition[s],” or “cognitive tendenc[ies]” within racial groups. Charles W. Mills, “White Ignorance,” in *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 58. Any beliefs achieved through social causation are, like all empirical beliefs, defeasible.

⁸³ Mills, 55.

⁸⁴ Mills, 49.

of true beliefs that are characteristic of white people and causally dependent on racial social structures.⁸⁵ Examples include instances of explicit white racism, wherein a white person rejects overwhelming evidence that Black people are his intellectual and moral equals in order to maintain his belief in racial hierarchy. But even more significant for Mills are the forms of “impersonal social-structural causation”⁸⁶ that produce ignorance even in the absence of conscious racism. These instances of good-faith white ignorance result from broad efforts to suppress knowledge of white racial domination, whether by omission in American history textbooks, skewed media coverage of racially charged events, quotidian practices about what makes for polite conversation, or the vastly greater number of national monuments memorializing Confederate generals than those memorializing enslaved persons. Each of these contribute to an epistemic environment in which access to the historical and sociological record has been unequally distributed and actively inhibited by white people for whom such knowledge is politically threatening. To lack true beliefs about the pervasiveness of lynching in the 1890s and the grotesque wealth gap between white people and persons of color in the United States, or to erroneously believe that the extension of formal equality to the enslaved amounted to substantive equality could each be the result of willful ignorance. But it is more likely that they result from socialization in communities for whom the suppression and distortion of such knowledge is politically expedient. In either case, we fail to understand such ignorance if we overlook the social and political forces at play in distributing true and false beliefs.

⁸⁵ Both conditions are necessary. A form of ignorance that is generalizable to all white people but that is not caused by white supremacy is not white ignorance. For example, white people may generally not know who won the 100-meter dash in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, but this does not make it an instance of white ignorance. (Mills, 56–57.)

⁸⁶ Mills, 57.

Mills extends this conception of ignorance beyond the empirical and into the moral realm. He writes of a decidedly “moral ignorance – not merely ignorance of facts *with* moral implications but also moral non-knowings, incorrect judgments about the rights and wrongs of moral situations themselves.”⁸⁷ Like other forms of white ignorance, white moral ignorance manifests in individuals as a result of social causation. It produces sociologically generalizable cognitive tendencies and inclinations that result in white moral failures that perpetuate white supremacy. And as socially caused, an individualistic framing will always mischaracterize them.

§4.2 White *Herrenvolk* Ethics

White *Herrenvolk* ethics⁸⁸ is, like white ignorance, a “naturalized,” non-ideal descriptive mapping concept. It describes the *de facto* moral code of white supremacist polities like the United States that prescribes moral respect amongst white persons and varying degrees of disrespect toward persons of color. This racially partitioned moral code is also a product of social causation. It occurs in bad-faith forms, wherein white communities explicitly socialize their members to morally distinguish between white persons and nonwhite sub-persons. But again, Mills is more interested in the subtle, more insidious ways that white moral agents can innocently claim to endorse moral egalitarianism even as they perpetuate racially charged moral failures. “In these cases,” Mills writes, “problems of *cognition* are involved, the failure to make the appropriate categorization, to identify what one is doing.”⁸⁹ These cognitive problems center on the processes that allow individuals to perceive a particular situation *as a moral situation* that calls for a moral response.

⁸⁷ Mills, 58.

⁸⁸ Mills, “White Right.”

⁸⁹ Mills, 149.

Following developments in cognitive psychology and philosophy of mind,⁹⁰ Mills contends that the mental processes by which agents subsume particular objects under general concepts rely strongly on prototypes drawn from concrete examples stored in working memory.⁹¹ Mills speculates about how these processes of category subsumption operate in the moral realm with regard to the recognition of persons. If we admit that racially structured polities tend to produce group-specific experiences, and if we further accept that the moral education of individuals in white supremacist polities tends to occur in racially segregated communities, then it follows that, for white people, “the examples that are called upon to illustrate, make vivid, and fix in their minds the appropriate abstract moral concepts are prototypically drawn from white experience.”⁹² Even if the days of *de jure* white supremacy are past, the moral communities that teach their members how to orient themselves morally persist across time and space. Thus, even once explicitly racist beliefs and values have fallen out of fashion, the racially segregated communities produced by white supremacy transmit this subtler form of racism. The conceptual prototype of a full moral person remains white, and persons of color are perceived to be inferior deviations from the white prototypes.

These racialized moral perceptions are of great significance for what Mills calls “white recalcitrance on race.”⁹³ In addition to the ample amoral and immoral motivations to preserve racial hierarchy, Mills contends that white supremacy threatens to corrupt the very moral resources that might, in a good and strong-willed white person, overcome moral failure. “[I]n a

⁹⁰ The key philosophical conception of mind here is Jerry Fodor’s “modular” model. Jerry A. Fodor, *The Modularity of Mind: An Essay on Faculty Psychology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983).

⁹¹ See Paul Churchland, “Neural Representation of the Social World,” in *Mind and Morals: Essays on Cognitive Science and Ethics*, ed. Larry May, Andy Clark, and Marilyn Friedman (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 91–108.

⁹² Mills, “White Right,” 150.

⁹³ Mills, 165.

racial polity, [moral] rationality will itself generally be ‘raced’” precisely because these cognitive patterns involved in moral perception are raced.⁹⁴ If, as Hume suggests, we develop the moral capacity of empathy by observing our moral community’s empathic responses to suffering and reproducing those responses in similar situations, then to receive one’s moral education from a non-ideal community systematically desensitized to nonwhite suffering puts one at a moral epistemic disadvantage; such suffering will seem, not morally problematic, but typical and potentially even morally appropriate.⁹⁵ The same goes for a racialized Kantianism where that which demands moral respect is not abstract, ideal personhood but the moral perception of phenotypical traits associated with whiteness. In both cases, the dark ontology of race has shaped moral cognition and deliberation such that white people routinely fail to recognize moral failures in racial situations as moral failures. The problem is not simply that white people’s conduct happens to deviate from moral norms; it is that “social privilege and material interests manifest themselves [...] in the *reshaping and transformation of the principles themselves*.”⁹⁶ This makes possible a special kind of moral dilemma, one in which impersonal social causality generates an insidious form of moral self-frustration. Even apparently good and strong-willed white people fail to perceive such situations of racial injustice as moral situations calling for redress. Overcoming this condition requires more than mustering the moral motivation to do what is right in the face of immoral self- or group-interests.⁹⁷ It requires a radical shift in moral perception, a transformation of one’s basic moral capacities. In a word, it requires conversion.

⁹⁴ Mills, 150–51.

⁹⁵ “In a racial polity, empathic feelings will travel weakly, if at all, across the color line; white empathy will refuse to enter black skin.” (Mills, 157.)

⁹⁶ Mills, 165.

⁹⁷ In critiquing the “optimistic integrationist” approach to racial justice, Mills contends that that which inhibits racial equality is not merely “the scenario (problematic enough in itself) of an ideal morality set in clear opposition to (and expected to triumph over) interest-based motivation, but the worst-case outcome: perceived group interest and a sensed moral entitlement converge on the preservation of the existing racial system.” See Charles W. Mills,

§5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the predominately individualistic scope of anglophone debates about moral motivation and failure is inadequate for understanding the concrete moral failures that contribute to American racism's recalcitrance. Although each party in these debates highlights different mental states to explain moral motivation and failure, the fact that they all appeal to mental states exclusively means that they neglect the irreducibly social determinants of action. According to most critical race theorists, these forms of social causality are necessary for understanding racism's enduring staying power. Drawing on Charles Mills distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory, I argued that ignoring the sociopolitical determinants of action *idealizes* moral agency in two ways. First, it diminishes the difference that an agent's social location in a racially structured society makes in determining his or her agential capacities. Second, it diminishes the degree to which our epistemic and moral consciousness is itself constrained and shaped by social causality. Therefore, to understand the concrete moral failures that contribute to racism's recalcitrance in the United States, we must expand this individualistic tendency in contemporary moral philosophy to consider the supra-personal determinants of human action and the way in which those forces influence our agential capacities themselves, including epistemic and moral consciousness.

In addition to these critical insights, this chapter also explored one constructive response to these limitations in moral philosophy in Charles Mills's non-ideal theory of racial oppression. Mills identifies the dark ontology of race as that which structures societies and subjectivities alike with the logic of white supremacy. To understand how unjust racial disparities persist into

"Whose Fourth of July?: Frederick Douglass and 'Original Intent,'" in *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 167–200. 197.

the post-Civil Rights Era requires that we acknowledge 1) how racially structured societies present white people with more opportunities than persons of color to preserve and enhance our social status and 2) how living in such societies renders white people (and some persons of color too) vulnerable to socially-circulated patterns of epistemic and moral cognition that are *themselves* marked by the logic that distinguishes white moral persons and nonwhite moral sub-persons. This further naturalizes racial hierarchy and diminishes the very capacities to detect and respond to racial injustice as a moral problem that calls for redress. If moral rationality is raced, as Mills suggests, then even morally good and strong-willed persons routinely commit moral failures that perpetuate racial injustice and harm without even knowing it.

Mills's reconstructed materialism marks a crucial step in an adequate account of moral agency amidst tenacious racism. But like all acts of human understanding, some aspects of reality are disclosed while others are concealed. I want to conclude this chapter by highlighting some of the aspects of racialized life that this otherwise powerful theory occludes and note some of the questions that remain to be answered.

The first concerns his vestigial intellectualism. In keeping with his early Marxism, Mills consistently endorses a doxastic account of racism as an ideology. That is, racism consists in a system of epistemically false *beliefs* about human beings as members of hierarchically arranged racial groups that functionally legitimize and preserve a particular social order, namely, white supremacy.⁹⁸ This allows Mills to critique ideological productions like white ignorance and white *Herrenvolk* ethics as not only politically dangerous but epistemically false. But this emphasis on doxastic states risks neglecting the affective, sub-doxastic components of our minds

⁹⁸ Charles W. Mills, "'Heart' Attack: A Critique of Jorge Garcia's Volitional Conception of Racism," *The Journal of Ethics* 7, no. 1 (2003): 29–62.

that yet play prominent roles in epistemic and moral consciousness and, indeed, in motivating action.⁹⁹ Racialized life is largely unrecognizable without reference to the complex *mélange* of feelings that give it a felt, phenomenal texture. The resentful hatred that fueled the white supremacists in Charlottesville, the guilt that racks the white liberal conscience, the morally ambiguous fascination white suburban middle schoolers feel toward Black cultural products, the righteous anger that undergirds protest movements like Black Lives Matter, the urge white people feel to lock the car doors when driving through a black neighborhood, and the awkwardness of a botched interracial handshake may all include doxastic states, but they are hardly reducible to them. Furthermore, when we turn to the research on implicit racial bias in the next chapter, the significance of sub-doxastic states to recalcitrance anti-black racism will become even clearer.

Mill's intellectualism further constrains his account of social causation. Though his reconstructed materialism augments classical Marxist theory with poststructuralist insights, it largely neglects the quasi-discursive, affective dimensions of human sociality. Advocates of the recent "affective turn" in social theory have argued that affectivity, i.e., the "thick interstices connecting bodies to worlds erupting beneath and between the links of language" is a critical element in understanding "the deeper embodied formations by which power makes bodies move."¹⁰⁰ Critical race theorists have recently followed suit, arguing that "hegemonic emotional

⁹⁹ In fairness, Mills does acknowledge in various essays that agents living in white supremacist polities have "been cognitively *and affectively* molded" by those polities in ways that produce "cognitive *and affective* grooves within [...] one's mind." But these acknowledgements never develop into an account of the nature, function, or relation of these processes, not to mention their role in moral motivation and failure. See Mills, "Whose Fourth of July?," 192; Mills, "White Right," 149. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁰ Donovan O. Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 35.

economies,”¹⁰¹ “racialized emotions,”¹⁰² and “racial *habitus*”¹⁰³ are irreducible to discursive or economic logics and yet play significant roles in constraining and enabling agents in racialized societies. These articulations of racism’s intricate affective life render Mills’s appeal to group-based material interests seem too simplistic. In other words, an even more thoroughgoing materialism is needed to grasp the social circulation of racialized affectivity, including their automatic, unconscious, and embodied dimensions.

These questions of descriptive adequacy motivate our turn to the social psychology of implicit cognition in Chapter Two. But there are other explicitly ethical questions about the adequacy of Mills’s account. As noted above, Mills rightly emphasizes the tremendous inertia of oppressive social systems. But of course, these systems are never truly static. Mills acknowledges this in principle.¹⁰⁴ But like other structuralists, his social theory struggles to explain the manifest *dynamism* of racial oppression, let alone the complexity of racial life.¹⁰⁵ If human beings, whether as individuals or groups, are conceived primarily as *functionaries* of large, structural forces, it is not clear if or how we could be considered *agents* at all, let alone agents with the capacity for moral motivation.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Paula Ioanide, *The Emotional Politics of Racism: How Feelings Trump Facts in an Era of Colorblindness*, Stanford Studies in Comparative Race and Ethnicity (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015).

¹⁰² Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “Feeling Race: Theorizing the Racial Economy of Emotions,” *American Sociological Review* 84, no. 1 (February 1, 2019): 1–25.

¹⁰³ Emirbayer and Desmond, *The Racial Order*, 238–45.

¹⁰⁴ He readily notes that *de jure* white supremacy transformed into the *de facto* white supremacy, for example.

¹⁰⁵ As an example, Mills suggests that the major moments of racial progress in the United States are best explicable as “convergences” between the material group interests of black and white people. So long as material group interests are treated as the sole cause of social effects, then this conclusion would seem to follow. See Mills, “Whose Fourth of July?,” 197–99.

¹⁰⁶ This is a point of emphasis in Emirbayer and Desmond’s recent account of the racial order. On their view, structuralist social theorists have too often focused on “racial structures” to the neglect of “racial dynamics.” They correct for this by developing an account of racial agency that is “tri-chordal;” it entails iterative, projective, and practical evaluative moments or dimensions. The point is to acknowledge that individuals and groups not only reproduce received racialized patterns of thinking, feeling, and doing, but we also transform those patterns in light of our aspirations (moral and otherwise) and navigate each new concrete situation in ways that are not simply explicable by what came before us. See Emirbayer and Desmond, *The Racial Order*, 130–83.

The final question concerns the practicability of Mills's account. Though he is careful not to endorse a strict sociological determinism, he has relatively little to say about if and how the moral failures caused by white ignorance and white *Herrenvolk* ethics could be avoided or disrupted. Here again, his materialist social theory does him no favors. If social relations are essentially zero-sum contests between groups with competing material interests, this seems to exclude the possibility that these relations might prove ethically salutary such that these socially caused cognitive impairments might be corrected. At most, Mills appeals to the Brechtian notion of "alienation effect" whereby the ideology critic's work exposes false consciousness and evokes a political awakening. In this way, he writes, "the white eye can learn to see itself seeing whitely."¹⁰⁷ But what justifies this practical optimism that moral knowledge, specifically knowledge about the practical pitfalls that routinely inhibit the achievement of the good? As the survey of moral philosophy in §1 suggested, there are good reasons to suspect that moral judgments are *insufficient* on their own to motivate moral conduct. To know what is good is not necessarily to *desire* to do it. If we recall the case of Paul's "I" in Romans 7, there might even be cases wherein true moral beliefs and virtuous desires still prove insufficient for moral action. Especially since the knowledge in consideration is knowledge of one's own socially caused moral ignorance and epistemic unreliability, it seems equally likely that it would generate moral paralysis as moral motivation.

Before confronting these ethical questions, we need to explore one further factor that constrains and enables agents living in structurally racist societies. The next chapter turns to social psychological research on implicit racial biases to better understand the sub-doxastic threats to moral agency in race-salient situations.

¹⁰⁷ Mills, "White Right," 151.

CHAPTER 2

IMPLICIT BIAS AND THE TENACITY OF RACISM

The first chapter launched our inquiry into the tenacity of racism by investigating its social causes. It argued that these supra-personal forces are essential for understanding antiblack racism's recalcitrance to moral suasion and political subversion. I then turned to Charles Mills's non-ideal theory of racial domination, which provides an account of these social forces and explains how they interface with the inner lives of agents to coordinate their conduct. This revealed three structural determinants of action in racially structured societies that, I argued, any politically realistic account of racism's tenacity must accommodate: 1) differential opportunities for action on account of social location, 2) group-based material interests, and 3) socially caused cognitive distortions like white ignorance and white *Herrenvolk* ethics.

These insights from critical race theory provide a set of realistic constraints for the theological and ethical diagnoses of racism's tenacity developed in the ensuing chapters. But I also raised questions about the adequacy of Mills's account. Though Mills offers a supple account of the relation between material and discursive aspects of racial oppression, he has less to say about its affective and sub-doxastic dimensions. The prominence of affect and emotion in the phenomenology of racism combined with the insufficiency of discursive realities to explain how systems of oppressive power move embodied creatures each suggest that Mills's reconstructed materialism might occlude essential aspects of what makes racism such a stubborn feature of American life.

This chapter advances the investigation by amending this vestigial intellectualism. It explores recent empirical research on implicit racial bias in order to argue for two central claims: a) such biases are significant determinants of action that contribute to recalcitrant antiblack racism and b) neither the contemporary debates in moral philosophy about motivation and failure nor Mills's critical race theory adequately accounts for their moral significance. In addition to these theses, the present chapter also advances a methodological claim about the necessary conditions of a politically realistic account racism's tenacity. In addition to the three structural determinants of action outline earlier, I propose that political realism should also entail a commitment to psychological realism. Owen Flanagan formulates the "principle of minimal psychological realism" in the following way: "Make sure when constructing a moral theory or projecting a moral ideal that the character, decision processing, and behavior prescribed are possible, or are perceived to be possible, for creatures like us."¹ For our purposes, "creatures like us" just means agents who live in racialized societies marked by the three structural determinants of action. So, in surveying recent empirical research on implicit racial bias, this chapter develops a richer account of the socially caused cognitive distortion mentioned earlier and a more finely-grained set of constraints for the ethical and theological account of our nature as agents that follow in Parts II and III of this work.

The chapter proceeds in four steps. First, I turn to the empirical research itself to outline the basic attributes and kinds of implicit racial bias. Second, I argue that these relatively unconscious and automatic antiblack biases are politically significant insofar as they partly explain how racial injustices persist even as explicitly racist sentiments decline. Third, I argue that implicit racial biases result from peculiar, sub-doxastic mental states that the so-called

¹ Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality*, 32.

Humean psychology discussed in the previous chapter fails to take into account. Next, I isolate a particular kind of implicit racial bias that presents an especially perverse threat to moral agency in racially structured societies, one that enervates the very moral resources to which moral philosophers appeal to explain the possibility of moral motivation. With these insights in hand, I conclude by raising further questions about the conceptual adequacy of implicit bias itself, which is, after all, a property of *individuals*, to grasp the clearly social determinants of action. In light of these enduring descriptive and ethical questions, I turn in the following chapter to look for resources in Friedrich Schleiermacher's account of affectivity and sociality in the moral life.

§1 Implicit Racial Bias: Empirical Methods and Findings

The debates about moral motivation and failure generally focus on an agent's relationship to his or her thoughts, specifically those thoughts that are readily available to introspective awareness. But over the last three decades, new experimental methods in cognitive and social psychology have allowed researchers to detect and measure biases that seem to play a role in moral agency but bear a different, more ambiguous relationship to the agent. Implicit biases are a species of social cognitions,² which are mental states and processes involved in the perception, recognition, and evaluation of social objects like people groups, political parties, or consumer brands. To qualify these social cognitions as implicit means two things. First, they are relatively opaque to conscious introspection. They are stimulated within us, influence our judgments, and shape our behavior all without our awareness that these processes are taking place. Second, implicit social cognitions are relatively automatic. They are triggered by environmental stimuli

² For an overview of these studies, see Bertram Gawronski and B. Keith Payne, eds., *Handbook of Implicit Social Cognition: Measurement, Theory, and Applications* (New York: Guilford Press, 2010).

and influence judgments and behavior in ways that are largely unresponsive to those judgments we form through deliberation. These qualities make implicit biases difficult to intentionally suppress or control.³ Scholars continue to debate the precise nature of these cognitions, their relation to conscious mental states, and the meaning of implicitness and automaticity. But there is scholarly consensus that Americans (and others) exhibit widespread implicit biases that link various social groups (races, genders, sexual minorities, elderly persons, obese persons) with culturally stereotypical traits, evaluative characteristics, and even affective responses in ways that generate discriminatory conduct.⁴ If we are to grasp the nature of moral motivation and failure in the concrete context of recalcitrant racism, the empirical findings about these racialized constraints on moral agency deserve our attention.

§1.1 Definitions and Methods

Before turning to the research, a few methodological and terminological clarifications are in order. First, while the debates about moral motivation and failure in anglophone philosophy are predominately debates about conceptual analysis, social psychologists conduct empirical research that tests hypotheses through experimentation. This means that, although both moral philosophers and psychologists are broadly interested in the nature and function of the human mind and its relation to conduct, they approach these common subject matters with different

³ Michael Brownstein and Jennifer Saul define implicit bias as “evaluations of social groups that are largely outside of conscious awareness or control” in Michael Brownstein and Jennifer Mather Saul, “Introduction,” in *Implicit Bias and Philosophy: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, ed. Michael Brownstein and Jennifer Mather Saul, vol. 1, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–22. 1. A prominent, earlier definition regards implicit attitudes as “introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience that mediate favorable or unfavorable feeling, thought, or action toward social objects.” Anthony G. Greenwald and Mahzarin R. Banaji, “Implicit Social Cognition: Attitudes, Self-Esteem, and Stereotypes,” *Psychological Review* 102, no. 1 (January 1995): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.102.1.4>.

⁴ For a summary of seven years of datasets derived from Harvard University’s online *Project Implicit*, see Brian A. Nosek et al., “Pervasiveness and Correlates of Implicit Attitudes and Stereotypes,” *European Review of Social Psychology* 18 (2007): 36–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10463280701489053>.

methods and success conditions. Moral philosophers typically strive to render the concepts we use to speak and think about our moral intuitions maximally clear, distinct, and systematically coherent. The evidentiary basis by which to evaluate the success of their concepts is often the common pool of folk intuitions about the nature and function of our minds. Empirical psychologists are also interested in the clarity, distinctness, and coherence of concepts. But they employ and refine concepts to best explain experimentally observed behaviors, some of which differ quite radically from our ordinary intuitions. This is especially important for work on implicit bias, since these frequently dissociate from our explicit, consciously endorsed evaluations of social groups.

Second, psychologists and philosophers use the term “attitude” differently. In empirical psychology, an attitude is a mental state that represents an evaluative stance toward some object. These are preferences, likings and dislikings, that a subject has toward some object that include an affective valence (positive/negative) and a magnitude of intensity (from weak to strong). In philosophy, on the other hand, attitudes typically refer to mental states that represent a subject’s relation to a proposition, usually cognitive or conative.⁵ These might include affective valences, but they need not.⁶ I can believe that the moon revolves around the earth without feeling anything at all. Furthermore, the word “cognitive” in philosophy refers to those mental states that have a propositional structure and purport to represent states of affairs. Empirical psychologists, on the contrary, use “cognitive” to refer to much wider set of information processing mechanisms in the mind, including non-semantic, associative, and affective ones.

⁵ Roughly, cognitive attitudes are beliefs or belief-like representations that aim at truth; conative attitudes are desires or wishes that aim at satisfaction, and affective attitudes are feelings that register an appraisal with some valence and intensity.

⁶ Recent work in cognitive phenomenology contests this point, arguing that even the most abstract cognitions bear some phenomenal content, i.e., they feel or appear in some such way. See Tim Bayne and Michelle Montague, eds., *Cognitive Phenomenology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Third, the term “implicit” in the literature on implicit bias has at least four distinct meanings.⁷ (1) **Implicit attitudes** are psychological constructs employed to explain experimentally observed behaviors. (2) **Implicit measures** are experimental instruments and tests that detect and assess those thoughts and feeling that evade conscious introspection or that a subject might be motivated to suppress. (3) **Implicit processes** are psychological mechanisms that unconsciously and automatically affect a subject’s judgments and behavior and require implicit measures for detection. Finally, (4) **implicit biases** are evaluative behaviors stimulated by environmental conditions, often automatically, that escape a subject’s capacity for deliberative control. When I refer to “implicit bias,” I exclusively intend (4). When speaking about the experimental instruments and tests used to disclose implicit bias, or (2), I refer to “indirect” as opposed to “implicit” measures since subjects and researchers alike are typically aware of the instrument itself even if they lack awareness of what it is measuring.⁸ Finally, when speaking of the theoretical constructs and processes that psychologists posit to explain indirect measures, I use the term “implicit attitude” while acknowledging that the nature of such constructs is contested.⁹

We can now consider the phenomenon of implicit bias itself. Essentially, implicit biases are evaluative behaviors like judgments or categorizations that are relatively unconscious and automatic such that they are only indirectly detectable. Frequently, these biases differ from consciously and intentionally endorsed evaluative behaviors. On the one hand, these biases are

⁷ These distinctions come from Bertram Gawronski and Skylar M. Brannon, “Attitudes and the Implicit-Explicit Dualism,” in *The Handbook of Attitudes, Volume 1: Basic Principles*, ed. Dolores Albarracín and Blair T. Johnson, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2018), 158–96. Cited in Michael Brownstein, “Implicit Bias,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2017 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/implicit-bias/>.

⁸ This distinction comes from Jan De Houwer et al., “Implicit Measures: A Normative Analysis and Review,” *Psychological Bulletin* 135, no. 3 (January 2009): 347–68, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014211>.

⁹ I engage these debates about the nature of implicit attitudes in §3 below.

hardly new. It is no great surprise that human beings are often conflicted, that we say one thing and do something else.¹⁰ What distinguishes recent research on implicit bias is the advent of more precise methods for detecting and measuring them in laboratory settings.¹¹

In a significant early study in the automatic processing trajectory, Russell Fazio and colleagues developed a method known as “sequential priming.”¹² Participants were “primed” with a images of Black, white, or Asian faces before being instructed to sort evaluative concepts (“attractive,” “likeable,” “wonderful,” “annoying,” “disgusting,” etc.) into appropriate categories (“good” or “bad”). Researchers then measured how quickly participants completed the lexical sorting task. They found that participants responded more quickly when positive evaluative concepts were preceded by a white face prime than when the prime face was Black. Further, categorization occurred more quickly when negative evaluative concepts were preceded by a Black face than by white faces. These results did not correlate to participants’ scores on direct measures of explicit attitudes. Based on these response latencies, researchers inferred that semantic concepts become closely linked in memory through an associative mechanism such that a target concept like “Black” automatically activates negative evaluative concepts. This activation makes the concept more easily accessible in working memory and explains the increased sorting speed in stereotype-congruent cases.

¹⁰ For a brief history of philosophical reflection on “divided minds,” see Jonathan St. B. T. Evans and Keith Frankish, “The Duality of Mind: An Historical Perspective,” in *In Two Minds: Dual Processes and Beyond*, ed. Jonathan St. B. T. Evans and Keith Frankish (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–32.

¹¹ For a concise history of these research trajectories, see B. Keith Payne and Bertram Gawronski, “A History of Implicit Social Cognition: Where Is It Coming From? Where Is It Now? Where Is It Going?,” in *Handbook of Implicit Social Cognition: Measurement, Theory, and Applications*, ed. Bertram Gawronski and B. Keith Payne (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 2–4.

¹² Russell H. Fazio, “Attitudes as Object-Evaluation Associations: Determinants, Consequences, and Correlates of Attitude Accessibility,” in *Attitude Strength: Antecedents and Consequences*, ed. Richard E. Petty and Jon A. Krosnick, vol. 4, The Ohio State University Series on Attitudes and Persuasion (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995), 247–82.

The most popular method for detecting and measuring implicit attitudes is the Implicit Association Test (IAT). Like Fazio's sequential priming method, the IAT measures a participant's reaction time in word- or picture-categorizing tasks. But instead of priming research participants, the IAT presents a stimulus to be sorted into one of two target categories. In a race-evaluation IAT, participants are shown a racially distinct face on a screen and instructed to sort the face into one of two racial group labels (e.g., "black" and "white") on respective sides of the screen. But the screen also presents an attribute category, e.g., an evaluative concept (e.g., "good" or "bad") underneath the target category. When the attribute category is stereotype-congruent with the racial group label, increases in speed or accuracy vis-à-vis stereotype-incongruent cases are taken to indicate levels of implicit racial bias. As of 2019, more than 26 million IAT tests have been administered.¹³ In a review of some 700,000 race-evaluative IAT participants, more than 70% of white participants demonstrated an implicit association linking black faces with negative concepts and white faces with positive concepts.¹⁴ While the findings about Black participants are more mixed, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that this implicit preference for white faces is not reducible to in-group favoritism but includes culturally-embedded evaluations of the relative value of particular groups.¹⁵

The affect misattribution procedure (AMP) is a third prominent kind of indirect measure.¹⁶ Whereas sequential priming methods and the IAT assess implicit evaluative biases by

¹³ Brownstein, "Implicit Bias."

¹⁴ Brownstein, "Implicit Bias, citing Nosek et al., "Pervasiveness and Correlates."

¹⁵ Robert W. Livingston, "The Role of Perceived Negativity in the Moderation of African Americans' Implicit and Explicit Racial Attitudes," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 38, no. 4 (July 1, 2002): 405–13, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-1031\(02\)00002-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-1031(02)00002-1); Leslie Ashburn-Nardo, Megan L. Knowles, and Margo J. Monteith, "Black Americans' Implicit Racial Associations and Their Implications for Intergroup Judgment," *Social Cognition* 21, no. 1 (February 1, 2003): 61–87, <https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.21.1.61.21192>; Nilanjana Dasgupta, "Implicit Ingroup Favoritism, Outgroup Favoritism, and Their Behavioral Manifestations," *Social Justice Research* 17, no. 2 (June 2004): 143–69.

¹⁶ B. Keith Payne et al., "An Inkblot for Attitudes: Affect Misattribution as Implicit Measurement," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89, no. 3 (01 2005): 277–93, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.89.3.277>.

measuring response latencies, the AMP relies on ordinary self-reports from research participants. It measures implicit attitudes by priming subjects with an attitude object such as a Black or white face and then presenting a second image of an unfamiliar object such as a Chinese pictograph. Participants are then instructed to evaluate the second image as either “pleasant” or “unpleasant.” Since the meaning of the character itself is obscure to the subject, it serves as a kind of inkblot upon which participants project, or “misattribute,” the liking or disliking that was actually caused by the racial face prime. The developers of this method demonstrated across several trials that these unfamiliar target pictures were judged to be more unpleasant after priming by a Black face than by a white one.

These three indirect measures exemplify the methods social psychologists employ to detect and assess implicit attitudes. But this list is hardly exhaustive. A second generation of indirect measures have been developed to improve upon these field-transforming procedures.¹⁷ Since my concern is primarily with that which these methods reveal about human beings as moral agents, I limit further discussion of methods to my treatment of the particular research that serves this larger goal. It is to this research that we now turn.

§1.2 Empirical Findings

Empirical research over the past three decades has shown implicit biases to be pervasive in the United States. While these biases are all relatively unconscious and automatic, they remain

¹⁷ Payne and Gawronski, “A History of Implicit Social Cognition: Where Is It Coming From? Where Is It Now? Where Is It Going?,” 8–9. See Brian A Nosek and Mahzarin R Banaji, “The Go/No-Go Association Task,” *Social Cognition* 19, no. 6 (2001): 625–66; Frederica R. Conrey et al., “Separating Multiple Processes in Implicit Social Cognition: The Quad Model of Implicit Task Performance,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89, no. 4 (October 2005): 469–87, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.89.4.469>.

a diverse lot; they include biases towards different social groups (women, black people, the elderly, the obese) as well as different types of bias.¹⁸ Since our concern is with implicit antiblack bias, I focus on implicit racial bias largely to the exclusion of other kinds. Further, since the body of research on even implicit racial bias is much too vast to give an exhaustive account here, I attend to three general types of well-documented implicit racial bias: implicit stereotyping, implicit evaluative bias, and implicit affective bias.¹⁹

§1.2.1 Types of Implicit Racial Bias

First, the research on implicit stereotyping has demonstrated a relatively consistent pattern in which participants associate racially marked persons with culturally prominent stereotypical traits. These were first discovered through sequential priming methods described earlier, and they revealed that lexical-sorting tasks involving African American stereotype words were facilitated by priming subjects with racial group labels.²⁰ This suggests that the racial group labels (“black,” “African-American”) and stereotypical traits (“lazy,” “hostile,” “criminal”) are closely linked in a semantic network such that the activation of the racial group label renders the stereotypical evaluative concept more readily accessible to working memory. Further studies not

¹⁸ Some have argued that these biases are so varied that speaking of implicit bias as a unified kind at all is unhelpful. See Jules Holroyd and Joseph Sweetman, “The Heterogeneity of Implicit Bias,” in *Implicit Bias and Philosophy: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, ed. Michael Brownstein and Jennifer Mather Saul, vol. 1, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 80–103. Others argue that, since the concept of implicit bias is a normative one linked with social conventions about morally appropriate conduct, it is unsurprising that the psychological processes underlying these biases are not a natural kind. See Eric Mandelbaum, “Attitude, Inference, Association: On the Propositional Structure of Implicit Bias,” *Nous* 50, no. 3 (September 2016): 631, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12089>.

¹⁹ I am borrowing these categorizations from David M. Amodio and Saaid A. Mendoza, “Implicit Intergroup Bias: Cognitive, Affective, and Motivational Underpinnings,” in *Handbook of Implicit Social Cognition: Measurement, Theory, and Applications*, ed. Bertram Gawronski and B. Keith Payne (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 353–74.

²⁰ Samuel L. Gaertner and Brian P. McLaughlin, “Racial Stereotypes: Associations and Ascriptions of Positive and Negative Characteristics,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (March 1983): 23–30, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3033657>.

only confirmed these associations between Black people and negative stereotypes but also revealed an association between white people and positive evaluative characteristics.²¹ Many studies have shown significant differences between implicit and explicit measures. In Patricia Devine and colleague's seminal study, participants with both high and low measures of explicit racial bias rated a racially unmarked person engaged in ambiguously aggressive behavior as more hostile when primed with words related to African Americans or African American stereotypes.²² The researchers surmised that these effects were more likely expressions of participants' knowledge of certain pervasive cultural stereotypes exist and thus not indications of their own considered judgments.

Second, in addition to implicit stereotyping, researchers have also detected negative implicit evaluative biases towards African Americans. The study mentioned earlier by Fazio and colleagues discovered implicit evaluative preferences for in-group faces and correlate aversions toward out-group faces amongst both white and black participants.²³ Both the IAT and the AMP have been used to detect and measure these associations. Importantly, while in-group preference and out-group aversion explains some of the findings, these evolutionary mechanisms do not account for the prominence of in-group negative evaluations by Black participants. This suggests that antiblack evaluative biases are reflections not only of evolutionary, but also cultural, mechanisms.

A third kind of implicit racial bias, implicit affective bias, describes biases that appear not to rely on semantic processes but rather on a phylogenetically older system of affective learning

²¹ Bernd Wittenbrink, Charles M. Judd, and Bernadette Park, "Evidence for Racial Prejudice at the Implicit Level and Its Relationship with Questionnaire Measures," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72, no. 2 (January 1997): 262–74, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.72.2.262>.

²² Patricia G. Devine, "Stereotypes and Prejudice: Their Automatic and Controlled Components," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56, no. 1 (January 1989): 5–18, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.56.1.5>.

²³ Fazio, "Attitudes as Object-Evaluation Associations."

and memory that facilitates physiological responses such as fight or flight and reward-punishment mechanisms. This system almost always interacts in complex ways with the phylogenetically newer system involved in semantic processing, so it is almost certain that affective processes are involved in implicit stereotype and evaluative biases. But neuroscientists believe that each system is undergirded by distinct neural substrates that can operate independently of the other,²⁴ and recent technological advances have allowed researchers to isolate and measure these distinctly affective responses with increased precision. For example, David Amodio and colleagues studied autonomic defensive eye-blinks in white subjects presented with white and Black faces.²⁵ This study turns on the well-documented fact that, when human beings are startled, we undergo a full body reflex that includes an autonomic defensive eye-blink. Neuroscientists believe this response to be mediated by subcortical regions of the brain like the amygdala that operate independently from semantic processes. Furthermore, the magnitude of these eye-blinks changes significantly when the response is aversive or appetitive, behaviors that correlate respectively to greater and lesser amygdala activity. Predictably, these researchers observed more aversive eye-blinks when subjects were presented with Black faces than with white ones, suggesting an automatically-aroused antiblack threat response that bore no relation to the subject's explicit measures of bias.²⁶

²⁴ The affective system is believed to involve the amygdala and others sub-cortical circuits that have strong analogues in non-human animals like mice, while semantic memory and learning relies on the neocortical structures that appear to much larger and more developed in humans vis-à-vis other species. See J. D. Gabrieli, "Cognitive Neuroscience of Human Memory," *Annual Review of Psychology* 49 (1998): 87–115, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.87>; Jesse Rissman, James C. Eliassen, and Sheila E. Blumstein, "An Event-Related fMRI Investigation of Implicit Semantic Priming," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 15, no. 8 (November 15, 2003): 1160–75, <https://doi.org/10.1162/089892903322598120>; Larry R. Squire and Stuart M. Zola, "Structure and Function of Declarative and Nondeclarative Memory Systems," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 93, no. 24 (November 26, 1996): 13515–22, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.93.24.13515>.

²⁵ Amodio, Harmon-Jones, and Devine, "Individual Differences in the Activation and Control of Affective Race Bias as Assessed by Startle Eyeblink Response and Self-Report."

²⁶ Outside of tightly controlled experiments, these processes are dynamically interrelated in ways that exceed our present scientific and philosophical grasp. My point here is not to emphasize implicit affective biases to the

§1.2.2 Evidence of Real-World Effects

Each of these types of implicit racial bias have been linked with racially discriminatory behaviors with real-world consequences. For example, researchers studying “weapons bias” primed non-Black participants with an image of a Black or white face and then instructed them to identify an object on a screen as either a weapon or a hand tool. When participants were given ample time to decide, they showed greater accuracy in the weapon-detection task than they did when forced to make a snap judgment. But they still identified guns more quickly when primed with a Black face. Not only did accuracy rates drop under time constraints, but subjects also more frequently misidentified a hand tool as a gun when then face was Black than when it was white.²⁷ Researchers posit that the activation of an implicit Black-criminality stereotype facilitates the perception of weapons-like objects.²⁸

“Shooter bias” studies produced even more chilling results. One study presented participants with an image of either a white or a Black man holding various objects. They were instructed to press a key marked “shoot” if the person was holding a gun and a key marked “don’t shoot” if he was holding anything else. When the targets were armed, subjects “shot” the Black targets more quickly than white ones and choose not to shoot white targets more quickly than Black ones. When the target was unarmed, subjects mistakenly “shot” Black targets more frequently than white targets. The magnitude of these antiblack shooter biases increased in

exclusion of cognitive ones. Rather, I simply mean to emphasize that implicit racial biases do not seem to be exclusively semantic.

²⁷ B. Keith Payne, “Prejudice and Perception: The Role of Automatic and Controlled Processes in Misperceiving a Weapon,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81, no. 2 (August 2001): 181–92, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.2.181>.

²⁸ This raises the epistemic threat of “cognitive penetration” wherein a mental state generates a non-factive perceptual experience on which a subject then grounds a perceptual belief. But as Susanna Siegel argues, the empirical evidence does not conclusively show whether this is *bona fide* cognitive penetration or other, less insidious “selection effects.” See Susanna Siegel, “Can Selection Effects on Experience Influence Its Rational Role?,” in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, ed. Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hawthorne, vol. 4 (Oxford University Press, 2013), 240–70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199672707.003.0009>.

proportion to participants' reported frequency of contact with Black people as well as their reported knowledge of a strong cultural stereotype linking black people to violence, aggression, and danger.²⁹ Furthermore, both white and Black subjects show similar levels of shooter bias.³⁰ According to these researchers, implicit antiblack stereotypes generate not only biases in our perceptual experiences but also in our practical judgments about what to do.

Implicit antiblack evaluative biases have also been linked with real-world effects in employment discrimination,³¹ healthcare outcomes,³² and judgments about which neighborhoods should bear the brunt of environmental harm.³³ The list could go on.³⁴ Some have argued that these politically significant effects are the cumulative result of much smaller, and less obviously vicious behaviors that are influenced by implicit antiblack evaluative biases. Such instances of “aversive racism” include evidence of unintended racial bias by well-intentioned persons with racially egalitarian commitments in helping situations, legal decisions, college admission selections, group problem solving tasks, and other quotidian interpersonal interactions.³⁵

Implicit biases also appear to be responsible for non-deliberative responses to cross-racial interpersonal interactions like non-verbal behaviors. In one study, researchers found that

²⁹ Joshua Correll et al., “The Police Officer’s Dilemma: Using Ethnicity to Disambiguate Potentially Threatening Individuals,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 83, no. 6 (December 2002): 1314–29, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.83.6.1314>.

³⁰ Correll et al., 1324.

³¹ Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan, “Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination,” *The American Economic Review* 94, no. 4 (2004): 991–1013.

³² Alexander R. Green et al., “Implicit Bias among Physicians and Its Prediction of Thrombolysis Decisions for Black and White Patients,” *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 22, no. 9 (August 10, 2007): 1231–38, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-007-0258-5>.

³³ Courtney M. Bonam, Hilary B. Bergsieker, and Jennifer L. Eberhardt, “Polluting Black Space,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 145, no. 11 (2016): 1561–82, <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000226>.

³⁴ For an overview of the political implications of implicit bias, see B. Keith Payne and C. Daryl Cameron, “Divided Minds, Divided Morals: How Implicit Social Cognition Underpins and Undermines Our Sense of Social Justice,” in *Handbook of Implicit Social Cognition: Measurement, Theory, and Applications*, ed. Bertram Gawronski and B. Keith Payne (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 445–62.

³⁵ For a summary of findings on aversive racism, see Adam R. Pearson, John F. Dovidio, and Samuel L. Gaertner, “The Nature of Contemporary Prejudice: Insights from Aversive Racism,” *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 3, no. 3 (2009): 314–38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2009.00183.x>.

measures of implicit antiblack evaluative bias in white participants who reported having positive explicit attitudes toward Black people predicted greater blinking rates and lower eye-contact toward Black people, indicating discomfort.³⁶ Other studies of white-Black interpersonal interactions showed that Black participants frequently picked up on these non-verbal indications of antiblack bias. These observations figure into their assessment of a white conversation partner's friendliness,³⁷ which in turn can exacerbate feelings of negative affect in racial minorities when they expect to be on the wrong end of a white person's prejudice.³⁸ Such interpersonal evaluative feedback loops have been shown to be, unsurprisingly, quite stressful on those involved, and this makes interracial interactions particularly fragile by diminishing both Black and white participants' motivation to continue in them.³⁹ Considered at a sufficient scale and in combination with structurally unequal access to social goods, it is easy to see how such spontaneous inclinations and interpersonal dynamics could generate profound political effects.

§1.2.3 Questions about Replicability in Experimental Psychology

Before drawing any general conclusions about implicit racial biases and their ethical significance, we must note that some serious questions have been raised about the validity of implicit measurements. Like any empirical science, the epistemic value of any study in cognitive or social psychology is generally indicated by its ability to be replicated on separate occasions

³⁶ John F. Dovidio et al., "On the Nature of Prejudice: Automatic and Controlled Processes," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 33, no. 5 (September 1, 1997): 510–40, <https://doi.org/10.1006/jesp.1997.1331>.

³⁷ John F. Dovidio, Kerry Kawakami, and Samuel L. Gaertner, "Implicit and Explicit Prejudice and Interracial Interaction," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82, no. 1 (January 2002): 62–68, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.1.62>.

³⁸ J. Nicole Shelton and Jennifer A. Richeson, "Intergroup Contact and Pluralistic Ignorance," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 88, no. 1 (January 2005): 91–107, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.1.91>.

³⁹ Adam R. Pearson et al., "The Fragility of Intergroup Relations: Divergent Effects of Delayed Audiovisual Feedback in Intergroup and Intragroup Interaction," *Psychological Science* 19, no. 12 (2008): 1272–79.

under the same conditions. But in recent years, the field of psychology has undergone a so-called “replication crisis”⁴⁰ that has sent shockwaves through the discipline and led some to lose confidence in its existing body of research. This crisis was sparked by allegations of fraud in prominent labs, closer scrutiny of the field’s questionable research and publication practices, and the repeated failure to replicate several field-defining discoveries.⁴¹ Some of these discoveries include work in the subdomains that concern this project, including those of implicit social cognition and automaticity.⁴² Though I cannot offer a thorough treatment of these matters without taking us rather far afield, a few comments defending my use of this research are in order.

The first is a general point about the problems of replicating scientific findings. Unfortunately, this is not utterly unique to the psychological sciences. For example, two recent reports indicate that attempts to replicate significant experiments in cellular biology succeeded at rates of 11% and less than 25%.⁴³ This does not mean that we should simply disregard questions about replicability or that we should treat irreproducible and reproducible findings as equally sound.

⁴⁰ Michael Brownstein offers a succinct account of the replication crisis and offers some principles to guide future experimental research in the appendix of *The Implicit Mind*. See Brownstein, *The Implicit Mind*, 225–30. My analysis draws heavily from this work.

⁴¹ In summarizing the findings of the Open Science Collaboration’s major report on reproducibility, Brownstein writes, “[t]he OSC attempted to replicate one hundred studies from three top journals but found that the magnitude of their mean effect of size replication was half that of the original effects. Moreover, while 97% of the original studies had significant results, only 36% of the replications did.” (Brownstein, 226.) For the report, see Open Science Collaboration, “Estimating the Reproducibility of Psychological Science,” *Science* 349, no. 6251 (2015): 943–943.

⁴² One example is John A. Bargh, Mark Chen, and Laura Burrows, “Automaticity of Social Behavior: Direct Effects of Trait Construct and Stereotype Activation on Action,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71, no. 2 (1996): 230–44, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.71.2.230>.

⁴³ C. Glenn Begley and Lee M. Ellis, “Drug Development: Raise Standards for Preclinical Cancer Research,” *Nature* 483, no. 7391 (March 28, 2012): 531–33, <https://doi.org/10.1038/483531a>; Florian Prinz, Thomas Schlange, and Khusru Asadullah, “Believe It or Not: How Much Can We Rely on Published Data on Potential Drug Targets?,” *Nature Reviews Drug Discovery* 10, no. 9 (September 2011): 712–712, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrd3439-c1>. Cited in Brownstein, *The Implicit Mind*, 226.

But it does suggest that the questions facing experimental psychology are a part of much larger questions facing many empirical sciences.

Second, I invoke this research on implicit racial bias as an experimental verification, indeed, an intensification, of a much more intuitive and widely recognized phenomenon. We do not need sophisticated laboratory work to tell us that human beings frequently express racial biases, or that we are prone to expressing such biases even when we do not mean to do so, or that even our well-intentioned conduct can produce tragic outcomes. These insights are all available to students of history, readers of novels, or for that matter, anyone living a reflective life. If the empirical findings about implicit racial bias are indeed sound, then we have even more reason to inquire about the meaning of our susceptibility to moral self-frustration in race-salient situations. But even if at some point it becomes clear that this research is fundamentally flawed such that its findings lack epistemic value, this lack of evidence does not yet give us a positive reason to doubt these intuitions.

Third, and finally, I maintain that we have reason to think that at least some of these findings about implicit bias are sound and informative. To be sure, researchers have struggled to demonstrate the temporal stability of implicit intergroup biases in individual subjects. It seems to be that an individual who shows high levels of implicit antiblack bias one month can show significantly lower levels the following month.⁴⁴ But this inability to replicate findings in individuals must be held in tension with the remarkable replicability of findings of average biases amongst large groups.⁴⁵ The fact that these kinds of biases reliably appear in aggregate

⁴⁴ For an example of one such longitudinal study that considers, among other things, racial biases, see Bertram Gawronski et al., “Temporal Stability of Implicit and Explicit Measures: A Longitudinal Analysis,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 43, no. 3 (March 1, 2017): 300–312, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167216684131>.

⁴⁵ As Keith Payne puts it, “[a]lthough the reproducibility of many findings in psychology has been called into question, the finding that people, on average, display intergroup biases on implicit tests is not among them.” (Payne, Vuletich, and Lundberg, “The Bias of Crowds,” 233.) Payne cites several studies with particularly large

form suggests that implicit measures are, in fact, detecting something meaningful about human beings living in racialized societies. But as one recent proposal suggests, that which such tests meaningfully reveal might be a feature of the racialized situations themselves and not, by contrast, an enduring personal attitude. Keith Payne and colleagues have argued that this apparent contradiction between individual instability and collective replicability can be resolved if we begin thinking of implicit biases as emergent “aggregate effect[s] of individual fluctuations in concept accessibility that are ephemeral and context dependent.”⁴⁶ Just as the attendees at a baseball game participate in “a wave” circulating around the stadium, an implicit bias could be understood as “a social phenomenon that passes through the minds of individuals but exists with greater stability in the situations they inhabit.”⁴⁷ On this view, the temporal instability of individual implicit biases is easily explained by differences in the environmental stimuli to which subjects are exposed between tests. Perhaps a subject who showed positive evaluative bias toward Black men in February and the opposite bias in March watched an incredible Denzel Washington movie before the first test and a film saturated with antiblack stereotypes before the second test. When viewed at scale, such contingencies are relegated to the periphery such that the more enduring, systemic features of the social and cultural environment appear with greater salience.

This situation-based theory is, admittedly, much less popular amongst social psychologists than those that explain implicit biases in terms of various kinds of attitudes. I turn to survey some of these latter theories in §3. But to foreshadow one of my central conclusions in

sample sizes that each show significant levels of bias on average. See Nosek et al., “Pervasiveness and Correlates of Implicit Attitudes and Stereotypes”; B. Keith Payne et al., “Implicit and Explicit Prejudice in the 2008 American Presidential Election,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 46, no. 2 (March 1, 2010): 367–74, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2009.11.001>.

⁴⁶ Payne, Vuletich, and Lundberg, “The Bias of Crowds,” 233.

⁴⁷ Payne, Vuletich, and Lundberg, 236.

Part II, I ultimately judge such attitudinalist theories as inadequate precisely because attitudes are individual properties. The conception of implicit bias that I eventually endorse in Chapter Four also emphasizes their situational character. At this juncture, however, my claim is simply that there are compelling reasons to take the empirical research on implicit racial bias seriously and that at least some of the problems with replicability can be attributed to theoretical – and not evidentiary – weaknesses.

§2 Implicit Racial Biases are Pervasive, Evasive, and Cause Moral Failures

This survey of the types of implicit racial bias and their effects on perceptual experience and practical judgment is hardly exhaustive. I offer it merely to outline the general features of implicit racial biases and to indicate their ethical significance. To that end, I will draw some conclusions in this section by outlining three features of these biases that are especially salient for an inquiry into the concrete moral failures associated with the tenacity of antiblack American racism. Specifically, I will argue that implicit racial biases are 1) pervasive, 2) evasive, and 3) causally implicated in racialized moral failures.

First, these biases are pervasive. They appear not only in a substantial portion of the United States population, but also in several other countries around the world.⁴⁸ Their pervasiveness extends across racial lines, albeit in different magnitudes, which suggests that they are not merely the result of the well-attested evolutionary mechanisms that incline us to in-group

⁴⁸ Although a great deal of the research has focused on American participants, similar results have been found in Canada, England, and the Netherlands. See Leanne S. Son Hing et al., “A Two-Dimensional Model That Employs Explicit and Implicit Attitudes to Characterize Prejudice,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94, no. 6 (June 2008): 971–87, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.94.6.971>; Gordon Hodson et al., “Aversive Racism in Britain: The Use of Inadmissible Evidence in Legal Decisions,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 35, no. 4 (2005): 437–48, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.261>; Gerard Kleinpenning and Louk Hagendoorn, “Forms of Racism and the Cumulative Dimension of Ethnic Attitudes,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (1993): 21–36, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2786643>.

preference. Rather, they reflect widely held cultural evaluations of racial groups which routinely situate Black people at the lowest rung on the social ladder. Furthermore, these biases pervade nearly every aspect of social and political life, and they affect a broad range of human psychological processes, including rational deliberation, interpersonal interactions, perceptual experience, and our most basic, affective intercourse with the world.

Implicit racial biases are also evasive. First, they evade conscious awareness. They lack the phenomenal content that more clearly announces other, better-known forms of racial prejudice such as contempt, hatred, disgust, anger, and fear. Like our cholesterol levels, we depend not on introspection but computers and statistical analysis to disclose them to us. With that said, the fact that these biases can be disclosed at all suggests that these are not necessarily or permanently unconscious states. But even once the *content* of an implicit bias is disclosed, its *source*, i.e., the stimulus that triggered the bias-producing process, and its *impact*, i.e., the effect of the bias-producing process on a categorization or judgment, evades our conscious awareness.⁴⁹

This lack of source- and impact-awareness will be particularly important in later chapters, so it is worth attending more carefully to these features. Consider an example. Suppose that a team of researchers informs me that I have an implicit bias linking Black people to unintelligence. This self-knowledge might even remain with me after I leave the laboratory and go about the rest of my week. It might lead me to begin grading all of my students' papers anonymously so as to limit my bias from unjustly affecting their grades. But this self-knowledge, while useful in many ways, does not ensure that I can prevent the sight of my Black colleague's

⁴⁹ Bertram Gawronski, Wilhelm Hofmann, and Christopher J. Wilbur, "Are 'Implicit' Attitudes Unconscious?," *Consciousness and Cognition* 15, no. 3 (September 2006): 485–99, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2005.11.007>.

face in a faculty meeting from stimulating the bias-producing psychological process. In fact, since the process itself is introspectively opaque, I am very likely not to know that it has been triggered. This also means that I am likely to be unaware of exactly how this bias is distorting my evaluation of that same colleague's arguments. In short, implicit biases are evasive because they are stimulated by environmental factors without our knowing it, governed by processes that lack phenomenal content, and generative of conduct and consequences that elude conscious awareness.

Second, implicit racial biases evade intentional efforts to control them. They can be triggered automatically by environmental stimuli even when we do not (and even try not to) attend to them, and they can influence behavior outside of, even in opposition to, deliberative processes. One classic study of automaticity showed that priming participants with stereotypes of elderly persons led them to exit the laboratory more slowly following the experiment than control groups. They also found that subliminal primes of Black faces caused more hostile reactions in participants engaged in a tedious computer task when compared to those primed with white faces.⁵⁰ In both cases, automatic processes, not deliberate ones, generated these behaviors.

Other studies have revealed an even more pernicious phenomenon called the "rebound" effect.⁵¹ After being instructed to suppress stereotypical associations between athletes and poor math skills, participants performed more poorly on a calculus exam than control groups. In a second experiment, researchers compared the walking speed of participants instructed to suppress their stereotypical association between the elderly and slowness against a control group.

⁵⁰ Bargh, Chen, and Burrows, "Automaticity of Social Behavior."

⁵¹ See Alice Follenfant and François Ric, "Behavioral Rebound Following Stereotype Suppression," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40, no. 5 (August 2010): 774–82, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.649>; Lisa Legault, Jennifer N. Gutsell, and Michael Inzlicht, "Ironic Effects of Antiprejudice Messages: How Motivational Interventions Can Reduce (but Also Increase) Prejudice," *Psychological Science* 22, no. 12 (December 2011): 1472–77, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611427918>.

Again, those attempting to suppress the stereotype demonstrated greater stereotype activation than controls. These studies of rebound effect show that well-intentioned efforts to control our biases can, in some cases, have the opposite effect of *increasing* bias.⁵²

The evasive aspects of implicit racial biases raise important epistemological and ethical questions. Let us suppose again that the sight of my Black colleague stimulates an implicit antiblack intelligence bias in me and that this causes me to underestimate the strength of his arguments. My lack of impact-awareness of this bias likely leads to further epistemic distortions. Having not noticed the fact that my colleague's Blackness diminished my evaluation of his arguments, I carry on (falsely) believing myself to be acting in accordance with my racially egalitarian commitments.

Given that these biases are so pervasive amongst the United States population, it is easy to see how the lack of impact awareness could generate a kind of global distortion in self-understanding. We take ourselves to be acting in accord with our explicitly endorsed commitments even as we 1) objectively fall short of those commitments and 2) are informationally insulated from the evidence that might lead us to reform our self-understanding on account of the evasive quality of implicit biases.⁵³

Furthermore, consider the fact that my negative evaluation of my colleague's work is just one of many evaluations I make of Black people that are likely influenced by this implicit racial bias. My supposedly objective assessment contributes yet another piece of experiential evidence that Black people are less intelligent than they actually are. Such evidence serves to buttress my

⁵² This is not to say that implicit biases are *completely* uncontrollable. On the contrary, there is evidence that such biases are, at least to some degree, malleable and controllable. See discussion in Markus E. Schlosser, "Conscious Will, Reason-Responsiveness, and Moral Responsibility," *The Journal of Ethics* 17, no. 3 (2013): 227, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10892-013-9143-0>.

⁵³ Michael Brownstein notes this problem in Brownstein, "Implicit Bias."

bias⁵⁴ and may in fact lead to either cognitive dissonance with my explicit belief that persons of every race are equally capable of intelligence or to my updating my explicit beliefs in accord with this epistemically dubious evidence. As we will see in §4, some studies have shown that implicit racial biases can even distort perceptual experience in ways that threaten precisely this kind of vicious epistemic cycle.

These evasive qualities of implicit racial bias also raise ethical questions. Traditionally, only voluntary actions are deemed appropriate for moral assessment. For an action to be voluntary, it must be chosen freely and performed with sufficient knowledge of what one is doing. At least on first glance, it seems that the unconscious and automatic aspects of implicit biases render the actions they cause involuntary. Consider again the example of my biased evaluation of my Black colleague's arguments. My lack of source- and impact-awareness suggests that I was not knowingly acting in a biased manner. On the contrary, I believed that I was issuing an objective evaluation based on the evaluative properties of my colleague's arguments. Furthermore, since the process that produced the biased evaluation was automatic and not deliberate, it is not quite right to say that I chose to treat my colleague unfairly, or that I was free to do otherwise.⁵⁵ In other words, if we lack both conscious awareness of and direct, person-level control over those actions that result from our implicit biases, it is unclear a) if or how ascriptions of praise, blame, and moral responsibility for such actions could be warranted and b) if or how such actions can be properly attributed to the agents that "commit" them.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ It would buttress my bias if and only if the attitude underlying that bias was propositionally structured. If it were merely associative, it would lack the content-directedness required for evidence update. In the case of this particular bias, this is an open, empirical question. For discussion, see §3 below.

⁵⁵ This is not to say that I was *not at all* acting intentionally. Certainly, I intentionally attended my colleague's presentation, and I intentionally evaluated him. But my intention was to evaluate him on the merits of his argument while I was, in fact, unintentionally evaluating him on the basis of his racial group membership.

⁵⁶ There is great disagreement about how to determine which behaviors are properly attributed to agents as their own acts and which are to be counted as involuntary behaviors. Harry Frankfurt famously held that only "second-

It also seems counter-intuitive *not* to morally assess and attribute these actions to their agents. Consider again the example of my biased evaluation of a Black colleague. Even if my bias reflects a widely held cultural evaluation as opposed to my considered judgment, it was no one other than *me* who falsely judged his arguments to be lacking. If that biased judgment had occurred during a job interview such that it led me to recommend an inferior white candidate for hire over the more qualified Black candidate, then surely it makes sense to say that I not only *wronged* the Black candidate but also become complicit in the *injustice* of a larger pattern of racial bias in higher education.

This brings us to a final quality of implicit biases. Insofar as they seem to contribute to enduring racial inequalities and discriminatory political consequences, they are *politically significant*. As I have indicated, implicit biases have been shown to negatively impact principles of distributive justice and legal fairness. As researchers studying aversive racism have put it, these biases help to fill in the explanatory gap for how racially discriminatory effects can persist amongst a population with increasingly egalitarian commitments. This suggests that, if we are to understand the enduring character of racial injustice in the United States, we must attend to these peculiar social cognitions.

order desires”, i.e., those motives for action which an agent reflectively chooses, are appropriately attributable to the agent. This means that first-order desires such as spontaneous sexual attraction or racial aversion would not be properly attributable to an agent insofar as he or she chooses not to act on them. Harry G. Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 1 (1971): 5–20. Hierarchical self-disclosure positions like this posit a choosing faculty that constitutes the real self. Other non-hierarchical self-disclosure accounts locate the “deep” or “real self” in an agent’s enduring dispositions and concerns. Among these, some argue that attitudes might plausibly be one’s own even if he or she disavows them. For example, see Chandra Sripada, “Self-Expression: A Deep Self Theory of Moral Responsibility,” *Philosophical Studies* 173, no. 5 (May 1, 2016): 1203–32, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-015-0527-9>. Michael Brownstein’s attributionist theory of aretaic appraisals identifies the real self with an agent’s “cares” which, on his view, could plausibly include implicit attitudes. See Michael Brownstein, “Attributionism and Moral Responsibility for Implicit Bias,” *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 2016): 765–86, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-015-0287-7>; Brownstein, *The Implicit Mind*, 101–50.

But this presents us with an impasse. On the one hand, implicit racial biases appear to be causally efficacious in perpetuating racial inequalities by influencing the way agents feel, perceive, deliberate, and act in racially structured societies. But the particular way they influence individual agents seems to fall short of the conditions required for voluntary action, and thus, short of the conditions required for ascriptions of moral responsibility and act attribution. I contend that there are ways to resolve this impasse, but it will require rethinking the approach that moral philosophers traditionally employ when thinking about moral agency.

Before turning to those additional resources, we need to see more clearly how and why moral philosophical accounts of moral failure fall short. In the next section, I argue that the implicit attitudes that undergird implicit biases are, in fact, *sui generis* states that differ sharply from the more conventional psychological elements of the dominant “Humean” psychology. In the following section, I argue that implicit racial attitudes generate an especially insidious kind of moral failure that enervates precisely those moral resources that philosophers call upon to explain moral motivation.

§3 A Distinct Cause of Moral Failure: Implicit Attitudes as *sui generis* Mental States

On first blush, it might seem that the contemporary philosophical approaches to moral failure do, in fact, have resources for understanding the kind of moral problems caused by implicit biases. In Chapter One, I showed that moral philosophers widely acknowledge that we are the kind of creatures who are not only capable of moral motivation, but who all too frequently fall short of such motivation whether by commission or omission. Further, I argued that moral philosophers have a variety of resources for explaining these moral failures, and I outlined four general explanations: 1) compulsion, 2) strategic error, 3) epistemic error, and 4)

weakness of will. To defend my claim that the kinds of moral failures caused by implicit racial biases are poorly explained by the dominant positions in the debates about moral motivation and failure, I must show that none of these four explanations prove adequate.

To do this, we need to know more about what kind of mental states are causally responsible for implicit racial biases. If those mental states are forms of desire or beliefs, then it seems that options 1-3 might prove to be adequate. But if these states are distinct from beliefs and desires, then these options will be insufficient. In §3, I argue that implicit attitudes are *sui generis* states distinct from not only beliefs and desires but the entire Humean psychology that undergirds most accounts of moral motivation and failure. In §4, I argue that the kinds of moral failures caused by implicit attitudes are distinct in important ways from paradigmatic cases of weakness of will. Combined, these sections demonstrate that additional resources are needed to understand the particular threat implicit racial biases pose to moral agency.

§3.1 Two Kinds of Attitudes: Propositional and Associative Structure

Contemporary anglophone debates about moral motivation and failure typically assume a Humean psychology that explains action as caused by an agent's beliefs and desires.⁵⁷ Beliefs are cognitive attitudes that purport to represent states of affairs; they are thus truth-assessable and have a mind-to-world direction of fit. Desires are conative attitudes that represent, not the world as it is, but rather the world as an agent would like it to be. For that reason, they are not truth-assessable and bear a world-to-mind direction of fit.

Despite these differences, beliefs and desires are both propositionally structured attitudes. This means that, unlike associatively structured or unstructured states, beliefs and desires specify

⁵⁷ See Chapter 1.1.

the relation between their component relata. To believe “that I am good” and to desire “that I become good” both link the concepts “I” and “good” in precise ways. The belief entails a claim that I am *in fact* good whereas the desire makes no such assertion. Nevertheless, the desire does have success conditions. It succeeds if I form suitable strategic beliefs about how to become good and, in fact, do so.

In contrast to propositionally structured attitudes, associations do not specify the relation between their relata and therefore lack success conditions. To have an association only indicates that the activation of one relata stimulates the other, rendering it more readily accessible in working memory. A common example is the association between “salt” and “pepper.” When I perceive a saltshaker, pepper automatically comes to mind. This does not amount to the belief that “salt *is* pepper” or to a desire that “salt *should become* pepper.” Rather, it simply indicates an experiential history in which the two concepts have been frequently and consistently paired. Associations lack success conditions because they persist even when the co-activated concept is not instantiated. After thirty-six years of associating salt and pepper, the sight of a saltshaker would continue to activate the concept “pepper” in my mind even if a global shortage of the spice made it unavailable to me for months on end.

These differences mean that propositionally structured attitudes and unstructured associations interact in different ways. Propositionally structured states can figure into inferential processes governed by syllogistic logic. If I hold a belief that John is a Black man, I can infer from this belief that John is a man. This transition in thought is inferential; the first belief rationally justifies the inference to the second. This feature makes beliefs *systematic*; they respond to interactions with other propositionally structured states in ways that seek to minimize logical contradiction. If I believe that John is a Black man, but upon meeting John I discover that

he has white skin, blonde hair, blue eyes, and identifies himself as white, I am rationally required to update my belief. John is *not* a Black man because he is a white man.⁵⁸ Finally, propositionally structured states are also *productive*. Beliefs and desires can be combined, dissociated, and recombined infinitely. Suppose I believe it is raining outside, and this belief generates a desire to grab my umbrella. When I look out the window and see a sunny, cloudless sky, I am rationally required to update my belief; it is *not* raining because it is sunny. This belief-update generates a desire-update. My new belief that it is sunny may lead me to form a new desire to go out for run instead.

Associations lack all of these features. First, they do not figure into inferential reasoning. If I have an association between salt and pepper, the activation of “salt” caused by the sight of an actual saltshaker does not justify the inference that there is a peppershaker on the table as well. In a more germane example, the association of Black men with criminality does not rationally justify the belief that *this Black man* standing in front of me is a criminal. Second, associations are not systematic because they do not update the same way that propositional attitudes do. If I associate Black people with unintelligence, the presentation of strong contradictory evidence and argumentation will not diminish this association. Associative links are paradigmatically unresponsive to logical contradictions because they are not content-driven. Rather, they can only be changed in one of two ways: extinction and counterconditioning.⁵⁹ This means that

⁵⁸ Some philosophers describe the systematicity of propositionally structured states as “inferential promiscuity.” See Stephen P. Stich, “Beliefs and Subdoxastic States,” *Philosophy of Science* 45, no. 4 (1978): 499–518.

⁵⁹ In extinction, an association between two concepts or a concept and an evaluative valence is dissolved by repeated stimulation of one concept without the other. While my association between salt and pepper might persist several months into a global pepper shortage, it will likely reduce in frequency and consistency as that shortage stretched on into decades. In counterconditioning, an association between a concept and a positive or negative valence is diminished or even reversed by repeated activation of the concept with the opposite valence. If I have an association linking Black faces with negative evaluative categories (e.g., bad, ugly, threatening), a counterconditioning procedure that exposed me to black faces and positive evaluative categories (e.g., good, beautiful, safe) could change the association and, in turn, reduce my levels of implicit antiblack evaluative bias. Mandelbaum, “Attitude, Inference, Association,” 635.

associations lack the systematicity of beliefs because they lack responsiveness to justificatory reasons. They are informationally encapsulated states. Third, associations are not productive; their relata cannot be combined, dissociated, and recombined the way that propositionally structured states like beliefs and desires can be.

We can now ask whether the attitudes underlying implicit biases appear to be have a propositional or associative structure. As is often the case in the empirical sciences, experimental findings have outpaced theoretical construction. Broadly speaking,⁶⁰ empirical psychologists tend to treat implicit attitudes as associative states.⁶¹ It is not hard to see why this view is so popular. One of the most salient features of implicit biases is their non-conformity with the explicit attitudes reported by agents. Psychologists infer that the attitude underlying these biases is unresponsive to justificatory reasons and informationally encapsulated from doxastic commitments.

Dual process theories explain this by positing two psychological systems (System 1 and System 2) that each operates along a distinct principle. System 1 is an evolutionarily ancient, computationally efficient, quick, largely unconscious, and relatively imprecise process that operates in accordance with associationist principles like contiguity, formal similarity, etc. System 2 is an evolutionarily recent, computationally expensive, slow, largely conscious, and relatively precise process that operates according to propositional, syllogistic logic. For this

⁶⁰ There are some empirical psychologists who argue that implicit attitudes are propositionally structured, but they remain a minority. See, for example, Chris J. Mitchell, Jan De Houwer, and Peter F. Lovibond, "The Propositional Nature of Human Associative Learning," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 32, no. 2 (April 2009): 183–98, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X09000855>; Jan De Houwer, "A Propositional Model of Implicit Evaluation," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 8, no. 7 (2014): 342–53, <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12111>.

⁶¹ Eric Mandelbaum argues that this view is more frequently assumed than defended in the psychological literature. He surveys several prominent theories to show that they tend to treat three distinct and dissociable claims regarding associative learning, associative structure, and associative transitions in though as if they logically entail each other. See Mandelbaum, "Attitude, Inference, Association."

reason, only System 2 assesses the truth value of mental representations. Whereas System 1 is always operative and allows us to fluently navigate most interactions with our environment, System 2 comes online to adjudicate conflicts in System 1. Dual process theorists posit that implicit attitudes are produced by System 1 while explicit attitudes are produced by System 2. This means that implicit attitudes remain unintegrated into the inferential network governed by System 2, the domain of propositionally structured attitudes like beliefs and desires.

§3.2 Aliefs, Beliefs, Character Traits, or *Sui-Generis* States

If implicit attitudes are indeed associations lacking propositional structure and therefore informationally encapsulated from other propositional states, then explanations of moral motivation and failure that appeal exclusively to propositional states like beliefs and desires would categorically exclude implicit attitudes from their explanations. Several prominent philosophers concur with this view that implicit attitudes are essentially associations. Tamar Gendler, for example, argues that implicit attitudes are best conceived, not as beliefs, but as “aliefs.” These associative states consist of closely related, co-activating “bundles” or “clusters” of components that include cognitive, conative, and affective components. Like beliefs, aliefs bear representational content. Like desires, aliefs include a behavioral tendency. Like non-propositional feelings, aliefs have an affective component with a measurable valence and magnitude. But whereas normal beliefs, desires, and affects are productive, i.e., they can be dissociated and recombined with other propositionally structured attitudes, aliefs lack this quality. Instead, the activation of one element automatically activates the others.

Consider an example. Suppose a white person drives into a predominately Black neighborhood and immediately locks the car doors. The belief that this neighborhood is

predominately Black bears no necessary relation to the feeling of fear or the behavioral tendency to lock doors. Such a belief would simply bear the content that “this is a predominately Black neighborhood.” But the structure of an alief includes representational, affective, and behavioral components, and thus better explains this complex, albeit common, response. In this case, the content of the white man’s alief would be “Black neighborhood! Scary! Lock door!” As Gendler puts it,

to have an alief [is] to a reasonable approximation, to have an innate or habitual propensity to respond to an apparent stimulus in a particular way. It is to be in a mental state that is [...] *associative, automatic and arational*. As a class, aliefs are states that we share with non-human animals; they are developmentally and conceptually *antecedent* to other cognitive attitudes that the creature may go on to develop. Typically, they are also *affect-laden* and *action-generating*.⁶²

The arationality of aliefs is an important feature that distinguishes them from beliefs. It concerns the nature of the mental representation’s structure and responsiveness to evidence. Whereas the representational content of a belief is a proposition that the subject holds as true, the representational content of an alief is merely how something appears. At most, it entails a *prima facie* commitment to its truthfulness. A lead bar partially submerged in water may seem bent to me even though I believe it to be straight. No amount of evidence will change how the bar appears to me.

The arationality of aliefs is both a strength and a weakness for grasping the nature of implicit attitudes. A growing number of philosophers argue that these attitudes might be better understood as belief-like states or even *bona fide* beliefs because they are not *entirely* arational.⁶³

⁶² Tamar Szabó Gendler, “Alief in Action (and Reaction),” *Mind & Language* 23, no. 5 (November 2008): 557, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0017.2008.00352.x>.

⁶³ Michael Brownstein offers a similar account of implicit attitudes as tightly clustered, associatively activated components. But he amends Gendler’s model to show how implicit attitudes can respond to certain kinds of evidence. See Brownstein, *The Implicit Mind*, 29–100.

Although they certainly do not respond perfectly to rational evidence, the same could be said of our normal beliefs! Some advocates of the doxastic model of implicit attitudes argue that they are simply forms of generic belief. Generic beliefs are culturally shared schemas that facilitate social categorization and attributions of stereotypical traits to target objects by subsuming them under abstract, generic types. Common generic beliefs about race in the United States include “Black people are lazy,” “Muslims are terrorists,” and “white men can’t jump.” Proponents of this view suggest that when researchers detect implicit biases, they encounter not evaluative attitudes but rather widely held generic beliefs with which individuals are familiar but may not explicitly endorse.⁶⁴

If implicit attitudes were simply generic beliefs, then they could be changed and reconfigured by logical interventions like instruction and argument. But as we have seen, empirical research suggests that this is not the case. To accommodate this, a more revisionist doxastic model posits that epistemic agents automatically come to believe ideas the instant they merely entertain their content.⁶⁵ This “Spinozan” model of belief fixation rejects the “Cartesian” model, which presumes agents to have the liberty to assess the truth-value of ideas delivered through sensory or imaginative inputs before consenting to belief. Instead, they claim that, even in the case of blatantly false propositions, we reflexively believe them as a possibility condition of judging them to be false. This counter-intuitively means that our minds are filled with numerous contradictory beliefs. But proponents claim that this revisionist picture better explains cases of recalcitrant mental phenomena like implicit biases that are ambiguously responsive to certain kinds of evidence. Indeed, implicit attitudes do seem to be unresponsive to some

⁶⁴ Patricia Devine contends that indirect measures pick up widely-held cultural stereotypes that are shared by persons with explicitly racist and explicit egalitarian attitudes. See Devine, “Stereotypes and Prejudice,” 15–16.

⁶⁵ Eric Mandelbaum, “Thinking Is Believing,” *Inquiry* 57, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 55–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2014.858417>.

associative-based learning interventions (i.e., extinction and counter-conditioning) and, ironically, responsive to some logical interventions⁶⁶ that should only influence propositional states.

Others reject these so-called “representationalist” accounts of implicit bias altogether, arguing that they are better conceived as character traits.⁶⁷ Drawing on the work of the mid-century English philosopher Gilbert Ryle, Eric Schwitzgebel argues for a “dispositionalist” theory of mind which defines beliefs, desires, and intentions not in terms of their internal, representational structure but rather as behavioral tendencies that incline an individual to think, feel, or desire in particular ways.⁶⁸ To determine what I think about Black people, one would have to observe how I speak and act around Black people over time. To ask me about my racial attitudes might be one part of an analysis of my attitude, but since they are multi-track dispositions, explicit self-reports are not sufficiently informative. This view accommodates the divergence between supposedly implicit and explicit attitudes by contending that, like all character traits, ascriptions of racism admit of degrees. Those with explicit commitments to racial equality and biased implicit attitudes are simply “more racist” than they would be with better aligned attitudes.

⁶⁶ Mandelbaum points to studies that present cases wherein implicit biases respond to content-related evidence such as argumentative strength and the attitudinal consensus of a peer group. But his most compelling cases are those that seem to suggest implicit attitudes can respond to logical negation. Mandelbaum, “Attitude, Inference, Association,” 639–46.

⁶⁷ Here again, we should acknowledge a difference between the psychological and philosophical literature. Within psychology, traits denote attitudes that persist stably over time and across contexts. If I have a stable aversion to beef, it constitutes a trait. But if I have an aversion to beef on Thursday as a result of enjoying a much-too-large porterhouse steak on Wednesday, this disliking is more of a state than a trait. In philosophy of mind and action, this conception of a trait as a stable, enduring attitude is more complex. First, as noted above, attitudes in philosophy refer to a broader scope of mental states than mere likings and disliking. Second, traits are the product of a particular theory of attitudes as dispositions.

⁶⁸ This model attributes a “multi-track profile” to attitudes that exceed the representationalist picture of a “belief box” which contains all one’s attitudes to their propositional contents. This has important implications for implicit bias. See, for example, Eric Schwitzgebel, “A Dispositional Approach to Attitudes: Thinking Outside the Belief Box,” in *New Essays on Belief: Constitution, Content and Structure*, ed. Nikolai Nottelmann (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 75–99.

With such a diversity of scholarly views, how are we to decide? Our concern is not to issue a conclusive judgment about the nature of implicit attitudes. Rather, we need merely to show that implicit attitudes are different in kind from those conventional states and traits that philosophers call upon to explain moral motivation. The dispositionalist account can be immediately rejected. As generalizations, traits do not fit into causal explanations of judgment or behavior. In fact, they risk a vicious circle; a characteristic behavior serves both to define a disposition and to indicate what the same disposition will predict.

To decide amongst the remaining options, we need to consider the evidence about their representational structure. Here, the most convincing evidence regards the responsiveness of implicit attitudes to associative and logical interventions. If implicit attitudes were beliefs, they would respond to syllogistic reasoning. In some cases, they seem to do just this. In one study of enemy-of-my-enemy-is-my-friend scenarios, participants were taught to dislike a person who, they were told, disliked a second person. This produced a positive implicit attitude toward the second person, which suggests that inferential and not associative transitions were at play.⁶⁹ But in other studies, researchers showed that the same implicit attitude can be evoked in a subject by exposing them to a proposition and the negation of that same proposition. Participants informed that two bottles contain table sugar showed increased preference for the one marked “sugar” than the one marked “sodium cyanide” with a poison symbol sticker.⁷⁰ This apparent inability to process evidence of negation strongly suggests that these attitudes lack the inferential promiscuity characteristic of *bona fide* beliefs.

⁶⁹ Associative transitions would have followed a pattern of similarity and generated another negative attitude. Mandelbaum, “Attitude, Inference, Association,” 638–40.

⁷⁰ Paul Rozin, Maureen Markwith, and Bonnie Ross, “The Sympathetic Magical Law of Similarity, Nominal Realism and Neglect of Negatives in Response to Negative Labels,” *Psychological Science* 1, no. 6 (November 1990): 383–84, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.1990.tb00246.x>.

In light of this evidence, Neil Levy suggests that implicit attitudes are best understood as “patchy endorsements.”⁷¹ They are endorsements insofar as they have some propositional structure; they have satisfaction conditions and are world-directed. But these endorsements are patchy because they lack the inferential promiscuity that characterizes proper beliefs. Rather, they seem in some cases to be informationally encapsulated.⁷² That is, while *bona fide* beliefs are inferentially responsive to all kinds of representations as evidence, implicit attitudes only figure in some inferential processing and some kinds of representations.

This formulation is consonant with the view that implicit attitudes are *sui generis* states. Not only do they seem to cause actions that dissociate from a subject’s conventional beliefs and desires, but their peculiar structure and informational encapsulation justifies my claim that they are different in kind from these conventional states. As such, implicit attitudes fall outside of the “Humean” psychology that underlies much of the anglophone debates about moral motivation and failure and constitute a distinct cause of racialized moral failure.

§4 A Distinct Kind of Moral Failure: Perceptual Bias that Enervates Moral Resources

If implicit racial biases are causally implicated in moral failures, and if the mental states that undergird these biases are distinct from folk psychological states, then explanations of those moral failures that rely on conventional states will necessarily fall short. This means that we cannot explain these moral failures by appealing to 1) compulsion, 2) strategic error, or 3) epistemic error. In cases of implicit racial bias, the moral failures seem to occur in persons who have true beliefs in racial equality and virtuous desires for racial justice. The root of the problem

⁷¹ Neil Levy, “Neither Fish nor Fowl: Implicit Attitudes as Patchy Endorsements,” *Nous* 49, no. 4 (December 2015): 800–823, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12074>.

⁷² Mandelbaum agrees that implicit attitudes are informationally encapsulated, but he thinks that beliefs are too. See Mandelbaum, “Attitude, Inference, Association,” 650, especially note 26.

must lie elsewhere. But we have yet to consider whether these moral failures are subsumable under the fourth type of moral failure, namely, weakness of will. Weakness of will has long posed problems for theories of moral agency, so perhaps the moral failures caused by implicit biases are a further example of this well-known type of moral failure. In what follows, I show that this is not the case.

§4.1 Implicit Racial Biases are Not Cases of Weakness of Will

Weakness of will occurs when an agent is free to do either X or Y, judges it morally better or right to do X and then elects to do Y. Consider a paradigmatic case of weakness of will. Suppose I am evaluating two candidates for an academic position, one of whom is white and the other is Black. I personally believe that it is morally right to evaluate a candidate on his or her merits.⁷³ While the candidates have relatively similar credentials, I judge the Black candidate to have a slightly stronger research potential, and I decide that the best decision is to vote for her. Yet, I find myself conflicted. I felt greater personal affinity toward the white candidate, who happened to graduate from my *alma mater* and with whom I found it easier to engage socially. As I reflect on this conflict, I acknowledge that the reasons to vote for the white candidate are not good reasons. This is a research university, and the basis for this decision should be research potential. But when it comes time to make a decision, I decide to vote for the white candidate. As I walk home from the meeting, I feel sick with guilt for falling short of my moral standards. I find myself looking for additional justificatory reasons for my decision, but in cooler moments of reflection, I acknowledge that these are *post hoc* rationalizations.

⁷³ I bracket the possibility, one that I find compelling, that a candidate's social location might count as an ethically justifiable reason to hire them because it complicates the point at hand.

Now consider an example of a similar moral failure caused by an implicit attitude. Suppose I have an implicit attitude that links Black people with unintelligence. I am evaluating the same two candidates for the same academic position. I still hold the belief that it is morally right to evaluate candidates on their merits. This time, I am sitting in a lecture hall as each candidate presents a research paper. Suppose further that the Black candidate's paper is objectively better than the white candidate's and that, if I were simply reading the two papers without knowing the authors' racial identities, I would judge the Black candidate's paper to be superior. But on account of this implicit attitude, I judge the Black candidate's argument to be weaker than that of the white candidate. On the basis of this judgment, I vote for the white candidate when our committee meets to make a decision. When I return home that evening, I feel some disappointment about the decision; I would have liked the department to become more racially diverse. But that disappointment is not directed at *myself* because, as far as I could tell, I acted with integrity. Rather, that disappointment is directed at the Black candidate who failed to meet the standards of rigor and clarity that my institution holds in such high regard.

There are important differences between these two moral failures. Both cases count as moral failures because I violated a moral requirement; I treated the Black candidate unjustly in both cases, withholding from her what she was due. In the first case, I acted from weakness of will because I (a) judged that voting for the Black candidate was the right thing to do and (b) chose rather to vote for the white candidate. In the second case, however, neither (a) nor (b) obtains. My implicit bias distorted my judgment so that I wrongly judged the Black candidate's argument to be weaker than it was. While it is certainly true that I chose to vote for the white candidate, I did not do so against my better judgment; on the contrary, I took myself to be acting in accord with my moral commitments.

These examples hint at a crucial feature of those moral failures caused by implicit bias that is lost if we simply treat them as a case of *akrasia*. But what, precisely, is that crucial feature? I suggest that there are at least two. First, the second example of moral failure is characterized by a “deviant causal chain.”⁷⁴ Like voluntary actions, this moral failure is caused by a series of mental states. But unlike voluntary actions, these mental states are not reason-states, i.e., the kind of mental states that might rationally justify an action. As I showed above, implicit attitudes are patchy endorsements that manifest properties of both propositionally and associatively structured states. Their associative properties appear to be in play here, creating unintentional effects caused by associative states.

But what this example further suggests is that this *sui generis* mental state determines a temporally prior aspect of consciousness that is 1) vulnerable to manipulation by social forces and 2) diminishes the very agential and moral resources (i.e., beliefs and desires) to which moral philosophers appeal to explain moral motivation. Before forming any beliefs about the world or any desires to transform it, agents must first perceive that world. Our perceptual experiences form the evidentiary basis from which we form our beliefs about states of affairs, including moral states of affairs. If this domain of consciousness shows empirical signs of racialization, then we must consider the possibility that even our reflective capacities are themselves corrupted by those processes.

According to studies of affective and attentional bias, this is indeed the case. They suggest that cultural patterns of racial categorization and evaluation have permeated the most basic level of our interactions with the world, coloring our sensory perceptions and twisting our

⁷⁴ Markus E. Schlosser, “Agency, Ownership, and the Standard Theory,” in *New Waves in Philosophy of Action*, ed. Jesús H. Aguilar, Andrei A. Buckareff, and Keith. Frankish, New Waves in Philosophy (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 13–31.

felt evaluations of racially marked persons. This threatens to create a vicious cycle whereby agents' implicit associations shape what we see and how we feel, confirming our biases and diminishing our ability to even detect racialized moral failures as moral failures.

§4.2 A Prior Distortion: Anti-Black Perceptual Bias and Moral Exclusion

According to a widely held folk understanding of belief formation, perceptual experiences provide the content and the justification for beliefs. The belief that there is a cup of coffee sitting in front of me is justified, at least provisionally and under normal conditions, by my perceptual experience of the cup of coffee. We assume that our sense organs put us sufficiently in touch with the world and provide access to its contents to provide a backstop against an infinite regression.⁷⁵ If you were to ask me how I know that there is a cup of coffee on my desk, I would appeal to my experience of that cup.

This theory of perception is called dogmatism, and social psychologists researching implicit antiblack perceptual bias tell us that we have reason to suspect it. Jennifer Eberhardt and colleagues⁷⁶ have shown that implicit stereotypes linking Black people to criminality serves as a “visual tuning device.”⁷⁷ Priming participants with an image of a Black person facilitates perception of crime-relevant objects like guns and knives in degraded-image tasks. In contrast, white face primes actually slow the detection of guns and knives compared to controls. As we saw in studies of weapons bias, these implicit racial stereotypes affect what we see. But Eberhardt also showed that these stereotypes affect *who* we see. Priming participants with

⁷⁵ Susanna Siegel describes this folk-psychological perspective as considering perceptual experiences to be the primary “person-level psychological state that determines the contents of perceptual beliefs.” (Siegel, “Can Selection Effects on Experience Influence Its Rational Role?,” 242)

⁷⁶ Jennifer L. Eberhardt et al., “Seeing Black: Race, Crime, and Visual Processing,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 87, no. 6 (2004): 876–93, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.87.6.876>.

⁷⁷ Eberhardt et al., 877.

images of guns and knives increased attentional focus toward Black male faces even as it decreased visual pickup of white male faces. These perceptual and attentional biases did not correlate to measures of explicit racial attitudes. Together, they show that implicit racial stereotypes influence perceptual experience by facilitating a selection effect called “attentional capture.”⁷⁸ When criminality is on one’s mind, attention is automatically drawn toward Black faces and away from white ones.

As in cases described above, these implicit biases have demonstrable real-world consequences. After assessing these kinds of attention bias in a group of police officers, Eberhardt presented them with a lineup of faces before instructing them to identify those they had seen during the experiment.⁷⁹ These faces had been ranked beforehand on the basis of how stereotypically Black or white each face appeared. The officers correctly identified face that were more stereotypically Black than stereotypically white, and they issued false identifications for more stereotypically Black faces when primed with a crime object. Visual processing biases not only track racial differences but also the degrees of stereotypical whiteness and Blackness.⁸⁰ “These results suggest,” according to Eberhard, “that stereotypical associations help people to respond to their environment by rendering certain social groups and objects especially relevant and worthy of attention.”⁸¹ Eberhardt notes the practical and legal significance of these findings. If criminality is already activated in one’s mind, as it certainly must be for on-duty police officers, then it is likely that Black men will appear more perceptually salient to them than white men. It will seem to those officers like Black men deserve more attention. The crime line-up

⁷⁸ Eberhardt et al., 881.

⁷⁹ These faces were all drawn from images of white and Black men convicted of murder.

⁸⁰ A further study asked a police officers to identify “who looks criminal” out of a similar lineup of faces. Not only were black faces perceived to be more criminal than white faces, but looking more stereotypically Black increased the perceptions of criminality.

⁸¹ Eberhardt et al., “Seeing Black,” 890.

scenario suggests that Black men, and more stereotypically Black-looking men at that, are more vulnerable to being misidentified on account of having crime activated in mind.

While these studies focused on the Black-criminality stereotype, a further set of experiments explored an even more concerning association linking Black people with apes. Goff and colleagues⁸² used similar methods with a group of multi-racial male participants to show that priming with a Black face increases detection speed of ape images while priming with a white face has the opposite effect. These same biases were observed when ape-detection-speed was compared with that of other, non-ape animals. Black primes increased ape detection vis-à-vis non-ape animals and white primes decreased it. These imply a strong association with Black people and apes in both white and non-white persons that does not correlate with explicit measures of racial bias. Furthermore, researchers demonstrated that these were irreducible to merely out-group bias⁸³ and are empirically dissociable from implicit antiblack evaluative bias and explicit knowledge of the association as a cultural stereotype.⁸⁴

⁸² Phillip Atiba Goff et al., “Not yet Human: Implicit Knowledge, Historical Dehumanization, and Contemporary Consequences,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94, no. 2 (February 2008): 292–306, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.94.2.292>.

⁸³ When they conducted the same test with Black and Asian faces instead of Black and white ones, the same entirely white group of participants manifested similar attention bias toward Black faces following an ape prime.

⁸⁴ Researchers gave participants both a personalized IAT to detect implicit antiblack evaluative bias and a second, modified IAT that they called the “dehumanizing IAT.” The former test allows researchers to detect the individual’s level of implicit preference for white or Black people apart from background cultural knowledge, or “extra-personal knowledge” i.e., the knowledge that black people are associated with negative evaluations in the larger society. (Michael A. Olson and Russell H. Fazio, “Reducing the Influence of Extrapersonal Associations on the Implicit Association Test: Personalizing the IAT,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 86, no. 5 (2004): 653–67, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.86.5.653>) The dehumanizing IAT instructs participants to sort stereotypically white and Black names by race, but it also instructs them to categorize animals as either great apes or big cats. As expected, the personalized IATs showed categorization facilitation when modules were stereotype-congruent (Black-bad; white-good) in comparison to modules that were stereotype-incongruent (Black-good; white-bad). Further, the dehumanization IAT responses showed greater categorization facilitation for modules that were congruent with the Black-ape stereotype than the Black-big-cat association. But importantly, the effects of the participants’ scores on the personalized IAT were not significant factors in their dehumanization IAT scores. This suggests that the Black-ape association operates orthogonally to the more widely documented implicit antiblack evaluative bias.

Goff and colleagues further demonstrated that these Black-ape stereotypes are linked with real-world consequences. After priming participants with words associated either with big cats or apes, they were then shown video footage of police officers beating a suspect. Although the suspect's race was indecipherable in the video, researchers informed participants that the suspect was either a white or a Black man by displaying a mug shot of one or the other. After watching the video, participants were asked whether they thought the police action was justified. When participants were told the suspect was white, the big cat and ape prime had no significant effect on how justified they thought the beating was. But when the participants were told the suspect was Black, the ape prime resulted in more participants judging the beating to be justified than those given the big-cat prime.⁸⁵

In a final study, researchers found a correlation between the use of ape-related words to describe Black suspects in death penalty-eligible cases in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the actual sentencing of persons to death. Those defendants cast in more ape-like terms were more likely to be Black than white. Among Black defendants, those who received more ape-like representations in the *Inquirer* were more likely to be sentenced to death.⁸⁶

These studies suggest that implicit stereotypes affect not only how we visually process and perceive states of affairs but also how we engage in moral and legal deliberation about those states of affairs.⁸⁷ As in the example of an implicitly biased hiring decision, it is entirely possible

⁸⁵ The big-cat prime produced no significant differences in justification level when participants were told the suspect was white or Black. This clarified that the causally significant stereotype was not simply one linking black people to Africa.

⁸⁶ "Taken together, the results of Study 6 suggest that Black defendants are more likely to be portrayed as apelike in news coverage than White defendants and that this portrayal is associated with a higher probability of state-sponsored executions." (Goff et al., "Not yet Human," 304)

⁸⁷ Jonathan Haidt's "social intuitionist" model attempts to explain this phenomenon. See Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment," *Psychological Review* 108, no. 4 (October 2001): 814–34, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.108.4.814>.

that the participants who made racially biased judgments justifying police violence had neither source- nor impact-awareness of their bias. In that earlier example, the implicit bias linking Black people with unintelligence altered my perceptual experience of that paper; my judgment that the white candidate was more qualified did not conflict with, but rather was based upon, my perceptual experience of the paper. In Goff and colleague's study, the implicit bias linking Black people with apes seems to have altered their perceptual experience of that video. Given the demonstrable selection effect of the Black-ape stereotype on visual processing, it is entirely possible that when the participants were asked to judge the justifiability of the police officers' use of force, their deliberative processes were working with experiential material that was already inflected by racial stereotypes.

Before any moral deliberation takes place, our grasp of the moral situation is mediated by these attentional and perceptual capacities. It is only by virtue of these capacities that agents have anything about which to morally deliberate. These studies suggest that culturally circulated, racist stereotypes are inscribed even at this basic point of contact between agents and their world. Combined with the evidence about implicit antiblack affective bias described above, it appears that race colors our sensory perceptions and twists our felt evaluations of racially marked persons and that these perceptual and affective biases influence downstream cognitive functions like belief and desire formation. All of our knowing and doing, in other words, is circumscribed within a prior domain of consciousness that is vulnerable to distortion by social and cultural forces.

To implicitly associate someone with criminality might, and likely does, influence how we make judgments about and act toward him. Consider this scenario drawn from the evidence we have considered so far. 1) Police officers are likely to be navigating a moral world in which

Black persons appear perceptually salient. 2) The perception of Black persons automatically activates i) crime-relevant concepts and ii) autonomic fear responses. 3) That stereotypical activation alters the perceptual field to i) facilitate the perception of weapons when they are present and ii) generate false perceptual experiences of weapons when they are not present. 4) These perceptual selection effects influence the decision to use lethal force. 5) The belief that the suspect was Black facilitates *post hoc* rationalizations that justify the use of force. In short, it is not difficult to see how implicit attitudes can play a crucial contributing role to the moral failures that issue in Black death by the police.

But the implicit Black-ape association presents a still further threat to moral motivation that strikes at the heart of moral agency itself. To quickly categorize someone as a criminal is also, tacitly, to categorize him as a human being. Gorillas, insects, and rodents cannot commit crimes. Such categorization clearly does not ensure that one will treat a suspected criminal as a human being, of course. But the evidence from Goff and colleagues isolates a particular type of implicit antiblack bias wherein Black people are automatically excluded from the moral community of persons at the level of perception.

“Moral exclusion” refers to the phenomenon in which “individuals and groups are perceived as outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply. Those who are morally excluded are perceived as nonentities, expendable, or undeserving. Consequently, harming or exploiting them appears to be appropriate, acceptable, and just.”⁸⁸ Though originally invoked to describe explicit rhetorical efforts to justify atrocities like ethnic cleansing by characterizing marginalized groups as “vermin,” “insects,” or otherwise sub-human,

⁸⁸ Susan Opatow, “Moral Exclusion and Injustice: An Introduction,” *Journal of Social Issues* 46, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1990.tb00268.x>.

social psychologists have recently explored the mechanisms that undergird this rhetoric. Studies of “infra-humanization” have shown a tendency to attribute secondary, or more distinctly human, emotions like jealousy, sympathy, and hope to in-group members and to deny these human qualities to out-group members.⁸⁹ These humanizing attributions have been shown to facilitate altruism and empathy towards one’s in-group, whereas feelings of antipathy characterize responses to those deemed less human than one’s own group.⁹⁰ Although each of these studies relies on explicit self-reports and explicit judgments, other studies suggest that these might be rooted in social cognitions akin to implicit stereotypes that are automatically stimulated and relatively uncontrolled.⁹¹ Affective neuroscientists have suggested that there may even be automatic, neurological components to moral exclusion. When subjects view images of persons from extreme out-groups (i.e., persons who are homeless or struggling with addiction), researchers detected brain activity associated with disgust responses but not with social

⁸⁹ See Stéphanie Demoulin et al., “Dimensions of Uniquely and Non-Uniquely Human Emotions,” *Cognition and Emotion* 18, no. 1 (2004): 71–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930244000444>; Stéphanie Demoulin et al., “Motivation to Support a Desired Conclusion versus Motivation to Avoid an Undesirable Conclusion: The Case of Infra-humanization,” *International Journal of Psychology* 40, no. 6 (December 2005): 416–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207590500184495>; Ruth Gaunt, Jacques-Philippe Leyens, and Stéphanie Demoulin, “Intergroup Relations and the Attribution of Emotions: Control over Memory for Secondary Emotions Associated with the Ingroup and Outgroup,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 38, no. 5 (September 2002): 508–14, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-1031\(02\)00014-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-1031(02)00014-8); Jacques-Philippe Leyens et al., “Psychological Essentialism and the Differential Attribution of Uniquely Human Emotions to Ingroups and Outgroups,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 31, no. 4 (2001): 395–411, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.50>; Jacques-Philippe Leyens et al., “Emotional Prejudice, Essentialism, and Nationalism: The 2002 Tajfel Lecture,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 33, no. 6 (2003): 703, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.170>; Jeroen Vaes et al., “On the Behavioral Consequences of Infrahumanization: The Implicit Role of Uniquely Human Emotions in Intergroup Relations,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 85, no. 6 (2003): 1016–34, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.6.1016>; Jeroen Vaes, Maria-Paola Paladino, and Jacques-Philippe Leyens, “Priming Uniquely Human Emotions and the In-Group (but Not the out-Group) Activates Humanity Concepts,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 26, no. 2 (2006): 169–81, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.279>.

⁹⁰ Jeroen Vaes, Maria-Paola Paladino, and Jacques-Philippe Leyens, “The Lost E-Mail: Prosocial Reactions Induced by Uniquely Human Emotions,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 41 (2002): 521–34.

⁹¹ See, for example, Nick Haslam et al., “More Human than You: Attributing Humanness to Self and Others,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89, no. 6 (2005): 937–50, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.89.6.937>; Nick Haslam, “Dehumanization : An Integrative Review,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10, no. 3 (2006): 252–64; Stephen Loughlam and Nick Haslam, “Animals and Androids: Implicit Associations between Social Categories and Nonhumans,” *Psychological Science* 18, no. 2 (2007): 116–21.

perception. As one reviewer put it, such extreme outgroups may be so dehumanized that “they may not even be encoded as social beings.”⁹²

While researchers have not definitively mapped all of the mechanisms involved in moral exclusion and infra-humanization, the evidence showing the impact of the Black-ape stereotype on perception and moral deliberation at least suggests that something like this is at play. To be perfectly clear, this is not to say that people who manifest this implicit Black-ape bias *believe* that Black people are descriptively excluded from the group called “*homo sapiens*” or normatively excluded from the group called “moral persons.” It is entirely possible that the persons who exhibited these biases in the lab would be horrified to discover what they have done. But as we saw in §3, implicit attitudes are not beliefs, and the biases that they cause persist in spite of morally true beliefs and virtuous desires.

In other words, the studies of antiblack perceptual bias and infra-humanization imply that moral agents living in racially structured societies are vulnerable to a distinct kind of moral failure. This moral failure is a) not explicable by appealing to beliefs and desires and, in fact, b) enervates those very moral resources. Persons with these biases can believe that Black people are members of the *homo sapiens* species and moral persons with intrinsic dignity, and they can desire to act in ways that are morally and racially egalitarian in nature. Yet, in concrete contexts, these same agents can routinely fail to regard the humanity of Black persons.

⁹² Goff et al., “Not yet Human,” 294.

§4.3 The Role of Perception in Epistemic and Moral Failures

To clarify the nature of this moral failure, consider Aristotle's practical syllogism. These syllogisms consist of two premises, a major and a minor one, from which an agent determines what to do. Consider a simple example:

- A) It is good to provide hospitality to strangers in need.
- B) Asylum seekers arriving at the southern U.S. border are strangers in need.
- ∴ It is good to provide hospitality to asylum seekers arriving at the border.

In this case, the major premise (A) makes a normative judgment about what is good or right to do. Providing hospitality is a good thing to do with regard to a class of persons (strangers in need). The minor premise (B) makes a descriptive claim about matters of fact. Asylum seekers fit the description, "strangers in need." This generates a practical imperative. If you accept A and B, then you are rationally obligated to act in accord with the conclusion.

As Anton Ford has argued, all of the major approaches to action explanations agree that the minor premise of a practical syllogism is a kind of belief.⁹³ Ford argues that this is a mistake, or at least it overlooks a crucial step in the practical syllogism. According to Aristotle, the major premise is related to the minor premise as universal is to particular. But what contemporary theories of action misunderstand is that, at least for Aristotle, particulars are always concrete and context dependent. This means that in addition to *specifying* the major premise, a minor premise must also *particularize* the major premise. To specify the major premise, the minor premise must make a deliberative move from a general end to a specific means to that end. Consider a non-moral case. Suppose that I want to increase my upper body strength. To increase my upper body strength, I could join an expensive gym. Of course, I could find other means to that end as well.

⁹³ Anton Ford, "On What Is in Front of Your Nose," *Philosophical Topics* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 141–61.

But so long as joining a gym is one possible way to increase my upper body strength, it suffices as a specification of the general premise.

Ford notes that this kind of specification does not yet provide an agent with grounds for action, and for that reason, it has not performed the requisite task of a practical syllogism. He considers the case of Oedipus. Oedipus desired not to marry his mother, but he eventually and tragically did just that. His practical syllogism might look like this:

- 1) Do not marry your mother.
 - 2) To not marry your mother, avoid Jocasta.
- ∴ Avoid Jocasta

Oedipus properly formed his major and minor premises. The minor premises specify a means by which to achieve the goal articulated in the major premise. Further, Oedipus succeeded in avoiding the person *whom he thought to be* Jocasta. But Oedipus's goal was not simply to avoid marrying the one *whom he thought to be* his mother. Rather, he wanted to avoid marrying the person *who is actually is* his mother. It is this knowledge that he lacked, that is, knowledge of relevant, concrete particulars. He did not know that *this woman* was Jocasta. More than specification, Oedipus needed a particularization of the major premise to know what to do. A particularization adds precision to the second clause of the minor premise (avoid Jocasta) by indicating which context-specific particulars are to be employed (avoid Jocasta by avoiding *this woman* here and now).⁹⁴

The literature on perceptual bias and infra-humanization suggests that this kind of error is quite likely to play in at least some cases of racialized moral failure. Agents might desire to respect all human beings, and they might reason that to respect all human beings means to

⁹⁴ This means that the minor premise must include a “perceptual demonstrative reference” to concrete particulars in a given context. So if the major premise is “do X”, then the minor premise must read “to do X, do Y *vis-à-vis* this.” (Ford, 151.)

respect Black people. But the error comes in identifying particular Black people as human beings worthy of moral respect in concrete situations. The failure to make this “perceptual demonstrative reference”⁹⁵ is undergirded by psychological processes such as the autonomic threat-response that generates implicit antiblack affective bias and the attentional and perceptual effects of the Black-ape or Black-criminal implicit stereotype.

§4.4 Summary

This section has argued that implicit racial biases cause moral failures that are importantly distinct from those that typically concern anglophone moral philosophers. First, implicit racial biases are caused by implicit attitudes, a *sui-generis* mental state that is neither an association, a belief, nor a character-trait. This means that implicit biases are not only phenomenologically distinct (on account of their evasiveness), but structurally distinct from beliefs and desires. Since moral philosophers typically explain moral failures by appealing to beliefs and desires, they lack explanatory resources for explaining moral failures that are not caused by false beliefs or normatively inappropriate desires. Second, implicit racial biases are not weak-willed actions. Unlike weak-willed moral failures, those caused by implicit attitudes entail a belief-desire concordance, not conflict. This means that implicit racial biases are not simply instances of 1) compulsion, 2) strategic error, 3) epistemic error, or 4) weakness of will. Rather, they threaten moral motivation in two additional ways. First, in the case of deviant causal chains, implicit attitudes generate behavior that does not align with an agent’s explicit judgments or desires and that the agent cannot directly control. Second, as the evidence of perception bias and infra-humanization indicates, implicit biases result from a temporally prior dimension of

⁹⁵ Ford, 152.

consciousness that is vulnerable to distortion from social forces and diminishes the very agential and moral resources (i.e., beliefs and desires) to which moral philosophers appeal to explain moral motivation at the level of perception and affect. These two kinds of moral failure expose significant limitations in the most prominent theories of moral agency for grasping the concrete threats to moral motivation facing agents who live in racially structured societies.

§5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that, in addition to the social causes described in Chapter One, there are important implicit psychological causes that contribute to the recalcitrance of antiblack racism. As evasive, sub-doxastic states, the implicit attitudes that undergird such biases lie outside the conventional Humean psychological ontology that privileges propositionally structured states like beliefs and desires to explain human action. This means that they also bear a more ambiguous relationship to agency than those person-level states that figure in conscious moral deliberation and normally count as reasons for action. Without resolving this ambiguity, I argued that these attitudes contribute to kinds of moral failure that cannot be subsumed as instances of compulsion, strategic error, epistemic error, or weakness of will. They seem rather to generate an especially insidious kind of perceptual and attentional distortion that automatically excludes Black people from the moral community and, in turn, enervates the cognitively downstream person-level moral resources that philosophers call upon to explain moral motivation.

These insights drawn from empirical research in social psychology extend and deepen those drawn from Charles Mills's critical race theory. They reveal that socially caused epistemic and moral impairments affect not only the semantic cognitions that primarily concerned Mills

but also our attentional, visual, and affective processes. These phylogenetically older mechanisms regulate our most basic affective and perceptual intercourse with our environment, and while they do not mechanistically determine our deliberative capacities, their influence on such cognitively downstream activities is clearly asymmetrical. After all, our higher intellectual capacities like reflection and deliberation *reflect on* and *deliberate about* the world that is given to us in consciousness by virtue of these affective and attentional mechanisms. If, as these empirical studies repeatedly suggest, this immediately apprehended world already bears the marks of racialization, then the dark ontology of race has permeated us even more thoroughly than the ideology critic or the genealogical analyst might be able to admit. It also means that the project of achieving a more racially just world will prove even more difficult. For the very capacity to detect racial injustices as such, indeed, even to perceive them as moral situations calling out for a moral response, is enervated by these recalcitrant perceptual and affective biases.

While social psychologists have done much to illumine these insidious dynamics, they have comparably little to say about the nature of these biases as social products. As I noted, they assert that these biases are not reducible to evolutionary mechanisms and, instead, reflect broad cultural evaluations. But the social, cultural, and political processes that inscribe this racial logic so deeply in our psyches are not so much theorized as presumed and intimated by these psychologists. Furthermore, the concept of an implicit attitude is, after all, a *mental state* and is thus a property of individuals. The field's vestigial individualism becomes stunningly clear in its constructive proposals for combatting such biases, most of which center on intensive re-conditioning exercises in laboratory settings.⁹⁶ These suggest that implicit biases can be

⁹⁶ Brownstein surveys several of these methods in §4.2 of Brownstein, "Implicit Bias."

effectively reduced through such trainings, but they neglect the fact that, immediately upon leaving the laboratory, agents are re-subjected to the barrage of racializing social forces that generated the biases in the first place. Jennifer Saul puts this point nicely:

To fully combat the influence of implicit biases, what we really need to do is to re-shape our social world. The stereotypes underlying implicit biases can only fully be broken down by creating more integrated neighborhoods and workplaces; by having women, people of colour and disabled people in positions of power; by having men in nurturing roles; and so on. The only way to be fully freed from the grip of bias-related doubt is to create a social world where the stereotypes that now warp our judgments no longer hold sway over us. And the way to do this is to end the social regularities that feed and support these stereotypes. Can this be done? Who knows? It is a massive task ...⁹⁷

To the degree that we neglect the social, structural realities that “feed and support these stereotypes,” neither our descriptions of the concrete threats to moral motivation nor our prescriptions for overcoming them will prove adequate. For this reason, Mills’s reconstructed materialist theory of racial oppression remains essential.

This concludes Part I of our investigation. Over the past two chapters, I developed an account of racism’s tenacity that is both politically and psychologically realistic and offered a preliminary description of the challenge such tenacity poses to thinking about moral agency. This analysis will provide a set of realistic constraints for the moral and theological theorizing that I undertake in Parts II and III. More specifically, in order to be politically and psychologically realistic, such theorizing must account for a) the differential opportunities for action afforded to agents by virtue of their location within a racial hierarchy, b) the significance of group-based material interests in motivating racialized agents, and c) the effects of social causality on the

⁹⁷ Jennifer Mather Saul, “Skepticism and Implicit Bias,” *Disputatio: International Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 37 (November 2013): 260–61. Sally Haslanger makes a similar point, “Even if [implicit] bias involves over-generalization and distortion, it is learned. If we attempt to change how we perceive and think without changing the social reality that is responsible for the schemas we employ, our efforts are unlikely to be sustainable.” (Haslanger, “Distinguished Lecture,” 14.)

epistemic and moral consciousness of agents living in racially structured societies. In light of the conclusions of the present chapter, particular concern must be shown for both the cognitive and the affective and perceptual dimensions of these psychological distortions.

These insights from critical race theory and empirical psychology have served this inquiry well. But questions still remain. First, the relationship between Mills's theory of racialized social causality and the social psychological construct of implicit attitude remains unclear. How is it that these materially embedded, discursive social patterns become inscribed in our most basic affective intercourse with the world such that they influence our perceptual and attentional apprehension of that world? In other words, further descriptive work is required to synthesize these social-structural and embodied-psychological dynamics that constrain and enable agents living in racially structured societies.

Second, with all of this attention to the impersonal causes of racialized moral failures, these chapters have said relatively little about the person-level springs of action. This was by design. After all, it was the explanatory inadequacy of personal attitudes to account for racism's staying power that led us to explore its supra- and sub-personal causes. But since this is a theological inquiry into the tenacity of racism and its meaning for moral agency, these impersonal forces are perhaps necessary but insufficient. They are necessary for a politically and psychologically realistic account of racism's tenacity, but they are insufficient to account for the experience of being an agent. Indeed, none of us experiences ourselves to be merely functionaries of larger social structures or amalgamations of embodied, psychological mechanisms. If there were no agents in the concrete context of American racism, then neither our actions nor the evaluative judgments they seem to track would be meaningfully our own. Neither would there be anyone who could heed the prescriptions offered by critical race theorists and

social psychologists for how to dismantle systemic racism or reduce our implicit biases. The existence of agents who are, at least to some degree, responsive to reasons and capable of responsibility is therefore implied in both fields even if neither is centrally concerned with theorizing about the nature and structure of agency. To be psychologically realistic, then, requires that we also accommodate the intuition that we are the kind of creatures that are capable of rational action guidance and distinctly moral motivation.

My larger claim is that these intuitions about our nature as moral beings need not be relinquished in the face of the impersonal threats to moral motivation we face in racially structured societies. While this hermeneutical exchange between the fields of critical race theory, social psychology, and moral philosophy have illuminated the moral problem, other lights will be required to offer a coherent response.

The following two chapters respond to these descriptive and fundamental questions about moral agency by hermeneutically reconstructing insights found in Friedrich Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics. Chapter Three interprets Schleiermacher's notion of "social affectivity," arguing that it provides connective tissue to synthesize the supra- and sub-personal dynamics that constrain and enable *bona fide* agents. Chapter Four offers a further reconstruction of social affectivity in light of Mills's critical race theory and recent work in the phenomenology of atmospheres.

PART II

A MORALLY REALISTIC ACCOUNT OF RACISM'S TENACITY

Part I of this work developed a politically realistic description of racism's tenacity and a preliminary account of its meaning for our self-understanding as moral agents. Drawing insight from critical race theory and the social psychology of implicit bias, these chapters emphasized the significance of the impersonal forces bearing down on agents in racialized societies. I argued that we fundamentally misunderstand the particular moral failures that make racism so recalcitrant so long as we neglect these forces and focus instead on the conscious mental states of individual agents favored by most moral philosophers working on moral motivation and failure. In this way, Part I provided both a preliminary diagnosis of the problem of racism's tenacity and outlined a set of politically realistic constraints that will guide the rest of this inquiry.

While these insights are necessary for such an investigation, they remain insufficient for three reasons. First, they are descriptively inadequate. Implicit racial biases are conceived primarily as attitudes, which are properties of individuals, and racial structures are conceived as social realities, which are properties of collectives or material conditions. The question of how these two aspects of racism's tenacity relate and occasion such close coordination, however, remains unanswered. Second, they are ethically inadequate. Though they shed considerable light on the impersonal threats to the psychic and moral integrity of agents living in racialized societies, these social theorists and psychologists neglect questions about the meaning of agency itself in these conditions. Without such an account, they risk construing agents alternatively as *functionaries* of large structural forces or *amalgamations* of psychological mechanisms. In

neither case is it clear a) to whom to ascribe praise, blame, and moral responsibility for the evils these theories are meant to explain nor b) what makes each of us a self with the power to act in accord with our moral judgments. These are ethical questions concerning the enduring features of human nature, or what we might call moral realities. Third, both social psychologists and critical race theorists retain vestigial practical idealisms in their prescriptive proposals for responding to recalcitrant racism. This marks a limitation in the practical dimension of ethics because they fail to provide adequate action guidance.

These descriptive and ethical questions motivate the turn to Part II of the dissertation and to the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher as a constructive resource. Schleiermacher contends that the entirety of an agent's moral capacities (perceptual, deliberative, and agential) are framed and oriented by the affections, which he conceives as the cumulative sedimentation of an individual's reflexive interactions with social and cultural alterity. For Schleiermacher, our affections both render us vulnerable to bodily and environmental forces and ensure our integrity as psychologically unified selves capable of moral motivation. I argue that this illumines an enduring feature of human nature, that is, a moral reality, that is not itself explicable simply with reference to the dynamics of power and interest at the center of my politically realistic account of racism's tenacity in Part I. Furthermore, I show how Schleiermacher's central insight, namely, that that human affectivity bears a social dimension and that human sociality bears an affective life, provides resources for responding to the descriptive and ethical questions remaining from Part I.

This marks an important transition in the argument as a whole, and it is worth recalling a few methodological points. While the focus of our inquiry shifts in Part II from political realities to moral realities, this new focus does not imply any shift in the object of inquiry. For the

Christian realist, moral realities like ideals, virtues, and our collective projects can be just as much a part of our shared, human universe as those nastier realities of dominating power and group-based material interests. The chapters in Part II should not, therefore, be understood as investigating a merely ideal realm of morals that is somehow separate from the non-ideal realm of politics. Rather, I contend that the following two chapters disclose and articulate a reality that is always at play in each and every concrete political context. It is a structure of lived reality.

Two points follow from this. First, the non-appearance of social affective dynamics, or what I will call “atmospheres,” in Part I is a function of political realism’s limited purview - not evidence of their absence. The fact that descriptive and ethical questions remained unanswered by the explanatory resources from critical race theory and social psychology evinces these limits. Second, since I am committed to the view there is but one reality, the conceptual formulations I develop in Part II to describe moral realities must accommodate the political realities I articulated in Part I. In short, the account developed in Part I serves as a realistic constraint on the ethical and theological theorizing that comes in Parts II and III, and the claims in Parts II and III are warranted just insofar as they i) respond more comprehensively to the questions raised in Part I or ii) illumine new questions that are merely implicit in the politically realistic description outlined in Part I.

This dynamic of question and response is the driving force moving the argument forward, and it also indicates the argument’s hermeneutical character. This becomes especially important in Part II, where I conduct a hermeneutical reconstruction of Schleiermacher’s insights about sociality and affectivity in the moral life at two levels. In Chapter Three, I conduct an internal reconstruction of his position by tracing the historical development in his thinking on these

matters across three periods of his writings on philosophical ethics.¹ Such a reconstruction will be, by necessity, selective. It aims at neither an exhaustive treatment of Schleiermacher's ethical authorship nor a systematic depiction of how his diverse ethical writings hang together. Rather, it attends to those works that provide particular insight into the descriptive and ethical questions raised in Part I.

With this internal reconstruction of Schleiermacher's thinking about sociality and affectivity in hand, I turn in Chapter Four to conduct an external reconstruction. This is necessary because, of course, social theory and psychological inquiry have advanced a great deal since Schleiermacher's death in 1834. Moreover, Schleiermacher's biographical details mean that he not only lacked any direct personal experience with contemporary antiblack racism, but it is very likely that he also embodied many of the racial prejudices that so concerns this particular inquiry. While this is probably true of all the thinkers involved in this work, including myself, it is especially so for a white, nineteenth century Prussian scholar who – even if relatively pluralistic by his contemporary standards – would certainly have internalized many prevailing Eurocentric and white supremacist patterns of thought. For these reasons, I make no claim that Schleiermacher somehow holds the hidden key to understanding all of our contemporary racial dynamics. Since this is not my claim, I am free to approach his limitations, not as threats in need of defense, but as provocations for hermeneutical reconstruction. In fact, this reconstruction has

¹ This first reconstruction is necessary because, unfortunately, Schleiermacher never penned a single essay on social affectivity, and many of his most provocative claims remain in works that were not published during his lifetime. To glean these insights, then, I must hermeneutically reconstruct them. My purpose in proceeding historically is threefold. 1) It reveals Schleiermacher's career-long interest in the place of affectivity in the moral life. 2) The early moral psychological writings provide a useful, albeit relatively unexplored, lens through which to interpret his mature philosophical ethics. Since the latter are often interpreted as a departure of his earlier psychological realism, this method makes possible an *internal reconstruction* of Schleiermacher's ethics that reveals important continuities in spite of the stylistic differences. Finally, 3) the developments I trace in Schleiermacher's gradually increasing ethical scope mirror my own claim that moral psychological questions are properly posed by considering the larger interpersonal and social relations in which agents are always already concretely ensconced

already begun by gleaning insights from social psychology and critical race theory in Part I. Chapter Four draws from these rich resources as well as recent work in German phenomenology on the concept of “atmosphere” to think both with and beyond Schleiermacher about the tenacity of racism and its meaning for the moral agents who live and act in its midst.

In each part of this work, the arguments will be successful just insofar as they more comprehensively respond to the questions facing agents who live and act in racialized societies, illumine further questions that are present but merely implicit in other disciplines, and provide heuristic insight into the structures of lived reality. The central claim of the next two chapters is that affective atmospheres constitute one such structure of lived reality and that they are crucial for understanding both the nature of racism’s tenacity and its meaning for our self-understanding as racialized agents.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL AFFECTIVITY IN SCHLEIERMACHER'S PHILOSOPHICAL ETHICS

This chapter begins Part II of our inquiry into the tenacity of antiblack American racism by asking about the moral realities involved therein. A moral reality is an enduring feature of human nature that stands apart from our constructions about it and that is not reducible to the amoral, political realities of interest and power. Such realities include well-established virtues, moral ideals, and the goods we seek individually and collectively. Perhaps foremost among these realities is the capacity for moral agency, that is, the ability to author one's own actions in a way that is responsive to moral judgments. This capacity is, I have argued, implicitly assumed by critical race theorists and social psychologists even if they are not centrally concerned with theorizing about it. But the pervasiveness of the impersonal forces that do concern these theorists suggest a picture of human beings either as functionaries of larger social dynamics or amalgamations of embodied psychological mechanisms. In neither case is it clear how to think of such creatures as moral agents.

This raises the following question: is it possible to integrate our intuition that we are moral agents capable of rational action guidance with the theoretical insights regarding our susceptibility to impersonal social-structural and embodied-psychological forces? Is our capacity for moral agency a moral reality? Or is it perhaps more truthful to say that we are the kind of creatures whose conduct is sufficiently explained by political realities? These questions are of immense practical importance. If it is incoherent to think of ourselves as moral agents, then there

is no one to whom one might ascribe praise, blame, or responsibility for the racial evils that continue to disfigure our world.

I will argue that we are, in fact, moral agents, and that Friedrich Schleiermacher's writings in philosophical ethics provide a way to theorize this moral reality that accommodates the manifest threats to rational action guidance that agents face in racially structured societies like the United States. If this were not reason enough to consider Schleiermacher's insights, he also endorses a particularly suggestive idea that the same aspect of our nature that makes us capable of moral agency also makes us so vulnerable to moral failures and, furthermore, that it also renders us susceptible to distinctly social influences and their morally ambiguous effects. That aspect of human nature is affectivity, which Schleiermacher refers to as "feeling" [*die Gefühl*] but also with other related concepts.¹ Over the course of his authorship, Schleiermacher develops an increasingly sophisticated account of the role of affectivity and sociality in ethical life that, I contend, can help us theorize about our nature as moral agents in a concrete political context that constantly threatens, even if it never eliminates, that reality.

This chapter hermeneutically reconstructs Schleiermacher's account and makes a preliminary case that it articulates an important aspect of our nature as moral agents. Such a reconstruction is necessary because, unfortunately, Schleiermacher never composed a single, unified analysis of feeling. And while I contend that affectivity and sociality serve as touchstones for his ethical thinking throughout his career, his understanding of both concepts undergo significant changes in style and substance. Whatever insight his works might bring on these matters must therefore be retrieved from a variety of published and unpublished texts that

¹ Some examples include "sentiments," [*die Empfindungen*] "sense," [*der Sinn*], "affect" [*Affekt/Affection*], "mood or attunement" [*Stimmung*], "atmospheres" [*Atmosphäre*], and "arousals" [*die Erregungen*].

address a wide array of topics in ethics and were composed over the course of more than three decades. But I will show that there are sufficient continuities across these texts to warrant a reconstruction that is coherent and illuminating.

Throughout his career, Schleiermacher claims that feeling and, more generally, affectivity describe an aspect of human nature with both intrapsychic and social dimensions. Within the human mind, feeling is an embodied, synthetic activity that represents the world to a subject in consciousness in an evaluative manner. It thus plays a crucial role in his theory of moral motivation. Schleiermacher also insists that ethically salient feelings can be elicited by other persons with whom one stands in relationship in such a way that augments one's capacities as a moral agent. This social dimension of affectivity becomes increasingly important in his later works, where he writes of feeling as an aspect of consciousness that can be communicated, shared amongst groups, and even constitutes a person- and world-formative power. But crucially, I contend that even as his attention shifts to the social breadth of affectivity, Schleiermacher refuses to let this collapse the intrapsychic dimension of feeling or obviate its significance for moral agency. It is this supple, complex articulation of the place of affectivity and sociality in ethical life that makes Schleiermacher's work so useful for thinking about the relationship between moral agents and the impersonal forces that diminish our capacity to do the good we want to do in race-salient situations.

The chapter proceeds in six steps. First, I construct a conceptual map of affective phenomena that serves to orient our inquiry into Schleiermacher's complex and occasionally imprecise formulations. I then conduct the reconstruction over the following four sections. The second section explores Schleiermacher's "Notes on Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics" (1789), which presents in condensed form many of his insights about feeling, sociality, and religion in

the moral life. Third, I turn to “On Freedom” (1790-1792), an early, unpublished essay on moral psychology from his Kantian period that presents *Gefühl* as a representing impulse essential to understanding moral motivation and failure. Sections four and five turn to the *Soliloquies* (1800) and *Lectures on Philosophical Ethics* (1812/13) to show that what began as a psychologically realistic critique of Kant’s moral anthropology expands into a mode of discerning affective attunement to social alterity in his Romantic and mature periods. I conclude by outlining a reconstructed concept of “social affectivity” that, by linking the moral psychological and the socio-cultural, helpfully integrates the social-structural and embodied-psychological determinants of action diagnosed in Part I.

§1 Conceptual Clarifications: Feeling, Emotion, Affect

The German word *Gefühl* is routinely translated into English as “feeling,” although Schleiermacher scholars warn that this has led to severe misunderstandings amongst both his contemporary and more recent interpreters. These largely revolve around a view that feelings are essentially subjective, private, and non-cognitive mental states.² Though Schleiermacher’s concept of *Gefühl* develops over time,³ a central argument of this chapter is that he consistently emphasizes its intersubjective, social, and cognitive features.⁴ It emerges from interpersonal

² Andrew Dole’s work has contributed a great deal to anglophone Schleiermacher scholarship by identifying and convincingly rejecting these prominent mischaracterizations. See Andrew Dole, “The Case of the Disappearing Discourse: Schleiermacher’s Fourth Speech and the Field of Religious Studies,” *Journal of Religion* 88, no. 1 (January 2008): 1–28 ;Andrew Dole, “Schleiermacher on Religion,” *Religion Compass* 4, no. 2 (2010): 75–85.

³ For a fine account of the early development of Schleiermacher’s concept of *Gefühl*, see Julia A. Lamm, “The Early Philosophical Roots of Schleiermacher’s Notion of Gefühl, 1788-1794,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 1 (January 1994): 67–105. The later works of his systematic period begin to consolidate his understanding of feeling and its place within his larger theory of subjectivity. For an excellent study of, among other things, the place of feeling in Schleiermacher’s mature thinking about psychology, ethics, religion, and theology, see Dorothee Schlenke, “*Geist und Gemeinschaft*”: *die systematische Bedeutung der Pneumatologie für Friedrich Schleiermachers Theorie der christlichen Frömmigkeit* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999).

⁴ For recent anglophone accounts that highlight *Gefühl* as socially circulated, norm-laden, and bearing some kind of intentional content, see Kevin W. Hector, “Attunement and Explication: A Pragmatist Reading of

interactions, it can be shared between persons and amongst groups, and it represents aspects of the world to the subject or subjects in an evaluative light. For Schleiermacher, then, affectivity is not merely an intrapsychic phenomenon, though it certainly is that. Rather, it pertains both to the innermost depths of the soul and to the grounds of human sociality. These social dimensions of affectivity grasp the way in which evaluative apprehensions of the world and our place within it can be transmitted through real relations to concrete others and even circulate through complex cultural networks. These, in turn, shape the way that individuals and groups perceive themselves, one another, and the world around them.

In what follows, I will develop each of these claims with reference to his texts. But for now, it is important to note how complex Schleiermacher's conception of *Gefühl* is. Its complexity and originality make it so promising as a conceptual link between moral philosophy, social theory, and empirical psychology. It also puts it potentially at odds with our preconceptions about the kind of things that feelings are. Given the importance of *Gefühl* for this argument and the peculiar way in which Schleiermacher deploys it, some conceptual clarity should prove helpful.

Schleiermacher's 'Theology of Feeling,' in *Schleiermacher, the Study of Religion, and the Future of Theology: A Transatlantic Dialogue*, ed. Brent W. Sockness and Wilhelm Gräb, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 148 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 215–42, and also Andrew Dole, *Schleiermacher on Religion and the Natural Order*, Religion, Culture, and History Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 101–35. For an interpretation of Schleiermacher's *Gefühl* in light of contemporary theories of emotion, see Geoff Dumbreck, *Schleiermacher and Religious Feeling*, Studies in Philosophical Theology 49 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012). The German scholarship on Schleiermacher has been attentive to the significance of sociality for his thought in general, and his thinking about feeling in particular, for much longer. See, for example, Wolfgang Hinrichs, *Schleiermachers Theorie der Geselligkeit und ihre Bedeutung für die Pädagogik*. (Weinheim/Bergstr.: Beltz, 1965). For two more recent studies, see Bernd Oberdorfer, *Geselligkeit und Realisierung von Sittlichkeit: die Theorieentwicklung Friedrich Schleiermachers bis 1799* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1995) and Christian Albrecht, *Schleiermachers Theorie der Frömmigkeit: ihr wissenschaftlicher Ort und ihr systematischer Gehalt in den Reden, in der Glaubenslehre und in der Dialektik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994).

In contemporary anglophone⁵ scholarship on affect and emotion, “feeling” typically refers to subjective perceptions of bodily changes. The warmth of the sun on my skin is a kind of feeling, as is the pain I feel in my wrists from typing the words on this page. Such feelings have phenomenal content, meaning that they have a first-personal felt quality. To have a hunger pang or an earache feels a certain way to the one who feels it. As such, feelings are not obviously intentional, world-directed states. As subjective perceptions of bodily changes, feelings are primarily directed toward one’s own body and toward the world only indirectly, if at all.⁶

Emotions, on the other hand, refer to more complex mental states that includes both phenomenal and cognitive components. Like feelings, emotions such as anger or gratitude feel a certain way. But unlike feelings, emotions are typically directed toward objects beyond the body. Our anger typically picks out a target, perhaps a rigged political system or an uncompliant vending machine, and we feel gratitude toward givers of good gifts. As these examples show, the cognitive component of emotions is typically evaluative in nature. Anger toward a rigged political system represents the system as culpably harmful. Gratitude toward a gift giver indicates an appraisal of that gift as good and the giver as generous. Scholars continue to debate

⁵ In German scholarship, *Gefühl* is frequently used a generic term that includes what English speakers mean by “feeling” and “emotion,” although some scholars will differentiate between intentional and non-intentional states by speaking of “emotional” and “non-emotional” *Gefühle* respectively. For discussion, see Roderich Barth, “Frömmigkeit nannten sie all diese Gefühle: Schleiermacher und die Moderne Emotionsdebatte,” in *Der Mensch Und Seine Seele: Bildung–Frömmigkeit–Ästhetik. Akten Des Internationalen Kongresses Der Schleiermacher-Gesellschaft in Münster, September 2015*, ed. Arnulf von Scheliha and Jörg Dierken, Schleiermacher-Archiv 26 (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 164–75 and the collected essays in Sabine A. Döring, ed., *Philosophie der Gefühle*, Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 1907 (Frankfurt am Main: M. Suhrkamp, 2009). The German *Emotion* enjoys frequent usage in the philosophical literature as well. But when Schleiermacher uses the term, it is often meant in a derogatory, ethically and religiously unhealthy sense, as in an emotional outburst.

⁶ For a provocative alternative claim that there is particular kind of feeling that is world-directed (so representational) but whose representational content is distinctly non-conceptual, see Matthew Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being: Phenomenology, Psychiatry and the Sense of Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

the precise relationship between these cognitive-evaluative and feeling components.⁷ But most philosophers of emotion acknowledge that they entail some kind of appraisal.

Anglophone philosophers have also analyzed other affective phenomena like moods, sentiments, and reactive attitudes, but it is safe to say that feelings and emotions have been the focus of contemporary discussions.⁸ As we will see, when Schleiermacher uses the term *Gefühl*, he usually means something much closer to emotion than feeling. With that said, his use of the term is not always consistent within the same text, let alone across his career.⁹ In the following sections, I seek merely to show that, throughout his authorship, Schleiermacher conceives of *Gefühl* and related affective phenomena as i) capable of bearing both intentional and phenomenal content and ii) integrally involved in value perception in the ways that contemporary accounts of emotion suggest they do.

⁷ So-called judgment theories of emotion hold emotions to be primarily or exclusively evaluative judgments. These have fallen under criticism, though, because they struggle to account for the apparent expression of emotions in pre-linguistic children and non-human animals. Peter Goldie has argued that the cognitive-evaluative component transpires precisely in the felt component of emotions. He thus prefers the formulation “feeling-towards.” See Peter Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 16–28, 58–62. Other similar theories speak of “felt evaluations.” See Bennett W. Helm, “Felt Evaluations: A Theory of Pleasure and Pain,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2002): 13–30 and Bennett W. Helm, “Emotions as Evaluative Feelings,” *Emotion Review* 1, no. 3 (July 2009): 248–55. One further cluster of theories, known as “perceptual” theories of emotion, argues that emotions are modes of evaluative perception that are best understood by analogy to sense perception. See, for example, Tappolet, *Emotions, Values, and Agency*. For an overview of this literature, see Andrea Scarantino and Ronald de Sousa, “Emotion,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/emotion/>.

⁸ Typically, emotions are distinguished from moods in that the former are episodic, occurrent, diachronic mental states that intend experiential objects whereas the latter are paradigmatically longer lasting, frequently non-occurrent, and though to lack intentional content. This is strongly disputed by those in the phenomenological tradition who have long held that moods [*die Stimmungen*] disclose the world in a pre-thematic manner. Some anglophone philosophers have also questioned their supposed non-intentionality. See for example, Jonathan Mitchell, “The Intentionality and Intelligibility of Moods,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 27, no. 1 (2019): 118–35, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12385>. Sentiments and reactive attitudes are also typically understood to be complex, diachronic states that figure prominently in sentimentalist moral theories. See for example Peter F. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment, and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1974) and Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

⁹ Julia Lamm deftly enumerates these frequently contrasting meanings in Lamm, “Early Philosophical Roots.”

Despite these affinities between Schleiermacher and the contemporary philosophy of emotion, the latter does not adequately encompass all the ethically interesting aspects of *Gefühl*. This is the case because such mental states are, at least in part, the accretion of concrete connections with other individuals, cultural artifacts, and material conditions. These relations create ethically significant affective environments that both awaken the moral resources of individual persons and influence their capacities for value perception and moral motivation. This contrasts with the dominant view of anglophone philosophers who, despite their differences, largely agree that emotions are mental states and thus properties of individuals.

An alternative theoretical approach to affectivity has emerged over the last three decades that better grasps these pre-personal, social, and environmental aspects of affectivity. Affect theory denotes very broad and diverse community of inquiry that cuts across the humanities, social sciences, and neuroscience.¹⁰ This diversity makes any attempt to speak generally about their definitional or philosophical commitments rather precarious, although some have tried.¹¹ With that said, we might venture to say that one of their central insights is that feelings and emotions are not simply individual mental states. Rather, they are phenomenological renderings in consciousness of more ephemeral, pre-personal vectors of force generated by the reciprocal activity of material bodies in relation. More plainly, when we experience affective phenomena like emotions, feelings, moods, and sentiments, the affect theorist thinks that they are never

¹⁰ For overviews of the affective turn in cultural theory, see Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010) and Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean O'Malley Halley, eds., *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). For a neuroscientific approach to affect, see Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

¹¹ For a rigorous attempt to develop a set of shared conceptual resources for affect theorists, see Jan Slaby and Christian von Scheve, *Affective Societies: Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019). For a succinct history of the theoretical headwaters of contemporary affect theory, see Donovan O. Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 23-34.

simply our own. Instead, such phenomena are constitutively social, the product of a more basic dimension of human and non-human relationality called affect. Individuals are not so much in possession of emotions or feelings as they become possessed and overtaken by these pre-personal vectors of force.¹²

Two points about affect theory are important for our purposes. First, while his writings on philosophical ethics are almost entirely concerned with the dynamics of self-consciousness, Schleiermacher also takes pains to insist that such consciousness always and everywhere appears in organic bodies that are both subject to and active within the natural causal nexus.¹³ Second, while implicit biases were certainly not something that concerned Schleiermacher, some affect theorists have argued that the embodied mechanisms that underly these kinds of unconscious and automatic cognitions are well understood in terms of affect.¹⁴ Their conception of affect also opens new diagnostic horizons for exploring the pre-phenomenal and bodily dimensions of human interaction with each another and their environment, including our neurological, endocrinal, and autonomic dynamics.

To be clear, my claim is certainly not that Schleiermacher grasped all of these insights about the role of affectivity in the moral life. This brief survey of contemporary theories of

¹² Some theorists have attempted to integrate this conception of affect with prevailing conceptions of feeling and emotion in anglophone philosophy. “Roughly, whereas ‘affect’ stands for pre-categorical relational dynamics and ‘feeling’ for the subjective-experiential dimension of these relations, ‘emotion’ signifies consolidated and categorically circumscribed sequences of affective world-relatedness.” Christian von Scheve and Jan Slaby, “Emotion, Emotion Concept,” in *Affective Societies: Key Concepts*, ed. Jan Slaby and Christian von Scheve, 1st Edition, Routledge Studies in Affective Societies (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 43.

¹³ In fact, when Schleiermacher speaks of *Affekt* or *Affection*, he has in mind an individual’s most primitive, organically mediated consciousness of being affected by something that exceeds oneself. As he puts it in the *Lectures on Psychology*, all “receptive” or “up-taking” activities of the soul are “what we call perception, where the result is that we have an *Affection* which is originally a physical influence from something that lies beyond us – something to which we are related and that is set as an object which influences us.” (Schleiermacher, *SW* III/6, 71) This marks the beginning of a complex process of interaction between a self and its world that lies at the root of which every moment of consciousness, ranging from the most elementary bodily reaction to the most sophisticated dialectical reasoning.

¹⁴ von Scheve and Slaby, “Emotion, Emotion Concept,” 45–46.

emotion and affect was necessary precisely because Schleiermacher's ethical writings lack the conceptual clarity and perspicuity of more recent thinkers. But I do claim that Schleiermacher's conception of *Gefühl* and related affective phenomena bear sufficient similarities to these views to warrant constructive comparison. The rest of this chapter attempts to do just this.

§2 Schleiermacher's Earliest Ethical Vision: Affectivity, Sociality, and Religion

In his earliest extant academic writing, Schleiermacher inaugurates a career-long interest in ethics with an unsystematic, albeit suggestive, commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹⁵ Ostensibly, his concern is the significance of friendship to the good life in Books 8 and 9, but the young Schleiermacher remains fixed on a much more contemporary, non-Aristotelian, question about the relation of moral sentiment to duty in moral action. This question was critical to Immanuel Kant's account of moral motivation which appeared three years earlier.¹⁶ We will consider Schleiermacher's direct engagement with Kant's ethics in the following section. But in this section, I want to highlight three distinctive features of his earliest ethical vision: 1) the centrality of *Gefühl* and related affective concepts to his moral anthropology, 2) the socially embedded character of that moral anthropology, and 3) the intimate relation between moral agency, sociality, and religion.

Schleiermacher's essay begins with a problem. In a world marked by unjust social inequalities, those who most benefit from this arrangement only rarely feel inclined to act benevolently to those who least benefit from it. Since they occupy different social circles, the

¹⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Anmerkungen zu Aristoteles: Nikomachische Ethik 8-9 (1788)" in *KGA I/1*, 1-44. A partial English translation of this text is available in Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Notes on Aristotle Nichomachean Ethics 8-9," trans. John F. Hoffmeyer, *Theology Today* 56, no. 2 (July 1, 1999): 164-68. Cited as "Notes on Aristotle" with English/German pagination.

¹⁶ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

opportunities to form real friendships across class lines are limited, and this means that the rich will tend to care little about the plight of the poor. This is a problem because, according to Schleiermacher, the rich have a moral duty to care for the poor. “[B]eneficence,” he writes, “is far too much our duty for us to dare leave it up to the decision of our sentiments [or] to regard it merely as a pleasant satisfaction of those sentiments.”¹⁷ In addition to their limited scope, sentiments are also notoriously finicky. He posits that, “as a general rule, such efforts at human kindness quickly die out if the feeling of duty does not shoulder the brunt of the work.”¹⁸ If we are to actually improve the condition of the poor in an enduring way, we need “practical reason”¹⁹ to inform us of our duty and, furthermore, to cultivate a “feeling of duty”²⁰ that moves us to reliably act in accord with that duty. But even then, the moral life remains perilous for the rich person. Benevolent deeds might appear to be motivated by duty when, in truth, they are the result of “egoistic feelings,” whether a condescending pity or a morally vicious gratification at being “the author of another’s happiness.”²¹ Put succinctly, the feeling of duty is necessary to sustain the kind of benevolent action required by practical reason in conditions of social injustice, and yet this feeling is itself at risk of egoistic corruption.

Schleiermacher’s solution to this problem is simple and provocative: friendship across social boundaries. The feeling of duty becomes truly beneficent when it is augmented by the “sociable sentiments”²² of love and compassion that arise amongst friends. In this environment, the privileged citizen lovingly renounces his own supposedly beneficent intentions for the other

¹⁷ Schleiermacher, “Notes on Aristotle,” 165/3.

¹⁸ Schleiermacher, “Notes on Aristotle,” 165/3. He writes further that, “[h]uman beings are hard, inflexible things, who only rarely correspond to the purpose one had for them.” (Schleiermacher, “Notes on Aristotle,” 165/3)

¹⁹ Schleiermacher, “Notes on Aristotle,” 165/3.

²⁰ *Gefühl von Pflicht* (Schleiermacher, “Notes on Aristotle,” 166/5)

²¹ Schleiermacher, “Notes on Aristotle,” 166/4.

²² *gesellige Empfindungen* (Schleiermacher, “Notes on Aristotle,” 166/5)

person and, instead, re-orient his conduct to promote the benefit of the other on the other's terms. By stepping "beyond the system of [one's] own ideas and act[ing] in accordance with an alien purpose," the agent not only avoids the pitfalls of egoism but also experiences "the play of all sorts of enchantments that are completely new to him"²³ such that he finds "his own happiness ... [to be] that much more beautiful when others contribute to it according to his wishes."²⁴ To become truly beneficent, and in fact, to become truly happy, these sociable sentiments of love and compassion are necessary.

What exactly is a sociable sentiment? Schleiermacher describes them as a species of "supra-sensible sentiments,"²⁵ distinct from merely sensory sentiments like pleasure and pain. This distinction hangs primarily on the responsiveness of each class of sentiments to reason. According to Schleiermacher, young children conduct themselves by regarding individual actions and the pleasure or pain those actions will provide. The only way to change their conduct is to entice with pleasure and threaten with pain.²⁶ The "finer feelings,"²⁷ by contrast, arise when children become capable of regarding individual actions as subsumable within a class of actions (i.e., actions linked to a particular principle or generative of particular consequences) and acting on the basis of practical maxims linked to those judgments. In the case of the privileged citizen, he decides to befriend an underprivileged citizen largely *in spite of* his hedonic calculus and rather because he judges it to be his moral duty. The supra-sensible sentiments of love and compassion are thus distinct from pleasure and pain because they emerge from and respond to rational judgments. As sentiments, they have a particular felt quality. But as supra-sensible

²³ Schleiermacher, "Notes on Aristotle," 166/5.

²⁴ Schleiermacher, "Notes on Aristotle," 167/5.

²⁵ *übersinnliche Empfindungen* (Schleiermacher, "Notes on Aristotle," 167/5)

²⁶ As he puts it, "They obey not reason, but force." (Schleiermacher, "Notes on Aristotle," 167/5-6)

²⁷ Schleiermacher, "Notes on Aristotle," 167/6

sentiments, they are not simply hedonic sensations. They also bear a cognitive, world-directed component.

The hybrid phenomenal and cognitive content of supra-sensible sentiments marks a similarity to contemporary philosophical accounts of emotion. But in addition to their rationality, Schleiermacher makes important claims about their interpersonal dimension and their ontogenesis. “[M]utual sentiments,” he writes, “are the ground of all sociability and all connections of friendship.”²⁸ We not only *have* love and compassion as individual mental states, but we *share* love and compassion with and for our friends. Elsewhere, he contends that these real connections also “awaken the need for”²⁹ such sentiments. This suggests that sociable sentiments and connections are reciprocally co-constituting; the arousal of such sentiments depends upon real relations with other people. Once they are aroused, they strengthen those relational connections even as they enhance the moral lives of both parties.

Supra-sensible sentiments are so important to the ethical life because, as Schleiermacher puts it, they “have a certain power to tone the activity of the soul and to obliterate the deficiencies of the human condition.”³⁰ He notes three such sentiments, each of which he describes as a species of feeling: the feeling of religion, the feeling of “pure morality,” and the feeling of “sociability.”³¹ He briefly considers three examples of men at different ages and notes that each age requires the reciprocal interaction of these three feelings.³² In this text at least, just how these feelings accomplish their soul-toning and deficiency-obliterating activity remains unclear. The following sections turn to his later writings in order to reconstruct this early insight.

²⁸ Schleiermacher, “Notes on Aristotle,” 167/5

²⁹ Schleiermacher, “Notes on Aristotle,” 166/5

³⁰ Schleiermacher, “Notes on Aristotle,” 167–5

³¹ “*die Gefühle der Religion, der reinen Sittlichkeit und der Geselligkeit*” (Schleiermacher, “Notes on Aristotle,” 167/5)

³² Schleiermacher, “Notes on Aristotle,” 168/6-7

Before turning to these developments, I want to highlight a particularly striking claim about the religious depths of moral agency in this early document that would occupy Schleiermacher for decades to come:

My obligation to perform beneficent actions arises at least in part from the fact that I must structure my free actions, including their impact upon others, in such a way that the *perfection* in the individual parts of the world as a whole becomes increasingly clear both to me and to others, and that the apparent imperfections and disharmonies disappear. This I must do *in order to promote God's glorification*.³³

This passage shows that, for Schleiermacher, the relationship between duty and sentiment that so consumed his late eighteenth century contemporaries requires a significantly broader scope than the internal, psychological dynamics of moral consciousness. Duty requires one to track the *impact* of one's actions on others in ways that both *perfect* the world and make that perfection *manifest* to oneself and to others. Furthermore, he situates this complex interrelation between psychological and social dynamics within a teleological framework, indeed a theological one. Free human actions must be so structured, individually and collectively, to perfect the world, to render that perfection luminous for oneself and for others, and thereby to glorify its Creator.

In sum, Schleiermacher's early reflections on friendship presents a capacious and suggestive ethical vision. His moral anthropology emphasizes the role of *Gefühl* and sentiments, but he employs these affective terms in ways that highlight their a) rationality and b) social embeddedness. Ethically edifying sentiments are supra-sensible, meaning that they are reason-responsive, and they are also reciprocally generative of and dependent on sociable relations with others. Finally, Schleiermacher not only includes the religious feeling among these supra-sensible sentiments but suggests that moral duty has both a theological source and telos. By

³³ Schleiermacher, "Notes on Aristotle," 166/4. Emphasis added.

addressing the relationship between duty and sentiment in social and theological frames, he vastly expands the scope of the late eighteenth century debates about moral motivation.

§3 Schleiermacher's Kantian Period: The Moral *Gefühl*, Motivation, and Value Perception

Schleiermacher's earliest ethical vision presents the moral, sociable, and religious feelings as crucially interdependent elements of ethical life. But in the years immediately following his "Notes on Aristotle," the moral feeling, especially its role in moral motivation, consumed Schleiermacher's interest, largely to the exclusion of the other two feelings. In a series of unpublished writings composed between 1789-1792, Schleiermacher wrestled with several key aspects of Kant's rationalistic ethics of duty. Though he presents himself in these texts as a Kantian, closer inspection reveals deep rifts between the two, especially regarding moral psychology.³⁴ This section explores these issues and tracks the development of Schleiermacher's concept of the moral feeling in his Kantian period. The following two sections explore his renewed interest in the sociable feeling in his middle and mature works, and I will return to the "religious feeling" in Part III.

Kant famously argues that morality's condition of possibility is that reason can be practical. The moral judgment that "I *ought* to ϕ " warrants the inference that "I *can* ϕ ." Stated differently, the phenomenon of moral obligation necessarily implies that human beings are free to choose between acting in accord with that obligation and acting otherwise. But Kant insists

³⁴ Just how far Schleiermacher's position strays from that of Kant is a matter of debate. Jaqueline Mariña argues that Schleiermacher's attempted critique of Kant's conception of transcendental freedom in "On Freedom" finally collapses into an endorsement of that position, whereas Julia Lamm and Ruth Jackson Ravenscroft contend that his compatibilist account of freedom is coherent and metaphysically plausible. See Julia A. Lamm, *The Living God: Schleiermacher's Theological Appropriation of Spinoza* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 41–42; Jacqueline Mariña, *Transformation of the Self in the Thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15–42; Ruth Jackson Ravenscroft, *The Veiled God: Schleiermacher's Theology of Finitude*, Studies in Systematic Theology 19 (Boston: Brill, 2019), 62–91.

that this freedom to choose between maxims is different in kind from the freedom to choose amongst various objects of desire. The former freedom is the capacity to abjure all of one's sensory inclinations out of respect for that which utterly transcends the world of experience, namely, the moral law. Only then does one choose to act on the basis of duty, which is the sole factor in determining an action's moral worth. Even if an action conforms outwardly to the moral law but is motivated by some natural inclination, Kant insists that it is merely legal, not moral.

According to Kant, then, morality itself hangs on the possibility laws of reason can *directly influence* the faculty of desire.³⁵ But critics claim that this leaves an explanatory gap in his theory of moral motivation. How is it that a faculty of desire, which in all other cases grounds its choices in sensory inclinations, happens to renounce those inclinations and chooses rather to act on the basis of a rational principle? The capacity to choose apart from any natural inclination seems at odds with the kind of creatures we are, namely, natural creatures who act on natural desires.

To resolve this, Kant posits a distinction between a *phenomenal* personality and a *noumenal* personality. The phenomenal personality refers to the persons we appear to be, those natural beings who act on their natural inclinations. The noumenal personality, in contrast, refers to the persons practical reason tells us we must be. Even if there is no empirical evidence that we are capable of initiating a causal sequence apart from the laws of nature, such freedom is necessitated by the phenomenon of moral obligation.³⁶ In other words, to fill this explanatory

³⁵ "What is essential in all moral worth of actions is that the moral law must determine the will directly. If the determination of the will, although occurring in conformity with the moral law, does so only by means of a feeling – of whatever kind – that must be presupposed in order for that law to become a sufficient determining basis of the will, and hence does not occur on account of the law, then the action will indeed contain legality, but not morality." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2002), 94 [5:71-72].

³⁶ Kant, 67-69 [5:48-50].

gap, Kant effectively posits two kinds of will – a real will governed by the laws of nature and an ideal will governed by the laws of freedom.³⁷

Schleiermacher registers his suspicions about this solution as early as 1789. In an essay entitled, “On the Highest Good,”³⁸ he argues that our wills simply cannot be determined directly by the moral law of reason. Rather, such determination can only come indirectly by means of the will’s subjective determining grounds.³⁹ Moral conduct follows not from some transcendently free noumenal will but from arduously cultivating the “moral feeling”⁴⁰ through “practice” and “attentiveness.”⁴¹ Although this feeling is analytically distinct from sensory feelings like pleasure and pain, it enjoys no categorical distinction from the natural incentives at play in the faculty of

³⁷ These two wills operate in accordance with two different kinds of causality. Kant writes that, in deducing the moral principle, “[T]he power of freedom, the freedom of which the moral law, which itself needs no justifying grounds, proves not only the possibility but the actuality in beings who cognize this law as obligating for them. The moral law is in fact a law of causality through freedom and hence a law of the possibility of a suprasensible nature, just as the metaphysical law of the events in the world of sense was a law of the causality of sensible nature ... [T]he moral law satisfactorily proves its [own] reality, even for the critique of speculative reason, by supplementing a causality thought merely negatively, the possibility of which was incomprehensible to speculative reason but which is nonetheless needed to assume, by positive determination [of this causality], viz., the concept of a reason directly determining the will (through the condition of a universal lawful form of the will’s maxims. Thus the moral law is able for the first time to give to reason – which always became extravagant when it wanted to proceed speculatively with its ideas – objective although only practical reality, and converts reason’s *transcendent* use into an *immanent* use (wherein reason, through ideas, is itself an efficient cause in the realm of experience.)” Kant, 66-67 [5:47-48]. The difficulty lies in determining how a transcendently free cause can become an efficient cause.

³⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On the Highest Good*, trans. H. Victor Froese (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1992); Friedrich Schleiermacher, “Über das höchste Gut (1789),” in *KGA I/1*, 83–125. Cited as *Highest Good* with English/German pagination.

³⁹ “Ours is not a will that can be determined by the moral law directly; rather, this can only happen indirectly, by means of subjective motivating grounds derived from the moral law.” (Schleiermacher, *Highest Good*, 23/100) Later, he claims that Kant’s “principal error” was “too closely identifying the pure law of reason with the subjective determining grounds of our will derived from the pure law and his having unduly drawn reason near to the faculty of desire.” (Schleiermacher, *Highest Good*, 29/104)

⁴⁰ *moralische Gefühl / Sittengefühl*. In this text, he shifts between these formulations without distinction, even within the same paragraph. See Schleiermacher, *Highest Good*, 53-54/124-125.

⁴¹ *Uebung and Aufmerksamkeit* (Schleiermacher, *Highest Good*, 53/124)

desire.⁴² This is the only way that the moral feeling can exert its soul-toning force in the moral life.⁴³

For Schleiermacher, then, we have but one will – the natural and finite one. But this threatens the possibility that conduct might be truly moral. If all action is mediated by a feeling in the faculty of desire, then reason cannot influence the will directly; one cannot act *because* reason commands it. Schleiermacher acknowledges precisely this point in his later essay, “On Freedom.”⁴⁴ He writes,

If law-giving reason is to become practical and something is to occur according to its law, that reason’s dictums must be able to become objects of an impulse [*eines Trieb*]. This must be true not simply to the extent that what reason commands happens to be in accord with some inclination [*einer Neigung*], that is, insofar as reason’s dictums relate mediately [*mittelbar*] to a sensible object, but rather precisely insofar as the dictums belong to reason and relate immediately [*unmittelbar*] to the law. That is, even if in some particular case the law’s will should become actual through an accidental relation, the law has no influence on the faculty of desire...⁴⁵

Here, Schleiermacher endorses Kant’s claim that, for an action to have moral worth, it must be motivated by the moral law. Since the laws of reason are “the highest product of the faculty of representation,”⁴⁶ this means that the faculty of representation must provide the faculty of desire with rational motives for action.

This concession raises the same problem that Kant faced. If, as Schleiermacher admits, the faculty of representation “exercises no generally physical and necessary dominion over the

⁴² Schleiermacher describes the moral feeling as a “dispassionate gentleness” [*Leidenschaftliche Sanftmuth*] that lies “at a certain distance from our senses.” (Schleiermacher, *Highest Good*, 54/125)

⁴³ He writes that the “dispassionate gentleness” of the moral feeling is a cultivated achievement, the result of “attentiveness and practice” (Schleiermacher, *Highest Good*, 53/124) that distinguishes it from “the impetuous, turbulent emotions of attraction and repulsion that are related to the immediate sensuous interest of the heart.” (Schleiermacher, *Highest Good*, 54/125)

⁴⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, trans. Albert L. Blackwell, Schleiermacher Studies and Translations 9 (Lewiston, NY, USA: E. Mellen Press, 1992). Schleiermacher, “Über die Freiheit (Zwischen 1790 und 1792),” in *KGA I/1*, 217-356. Cited with English/German pagination.

⁴⁵ Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 18/233.

⁴⁶ Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 24/239.

faculty of desire,”⁴⁷ how can its maxims motivate action? But instead of invoking Kant’s *noumenal* will explanation, Schleiermacher invokes the concept of *Gefühl* conceived as an “impulse” of the finite, *phenomenal* faculty of desire.⁴⁸ For a human faculty of desire to be capable of moral motivation, it must include

a feeling [*ein Gefühl*], that is, an impulse [*ein Trieb*], that relates immediately and exclusively [*der sich unmittelbar und allein...bezieht*] to practical reason and at the same time represents [*repräsentiert*] practical reason in the faculty of desire. Moreover, this impulse must have exactly the same relation to the faculty of desire as every other. The entire possibility of the idea of moral obligation rests upon the existence of this impulse, for this impulse alone relates reason to the faculty of desire.⁴⁹

The fundamental link binding the faculties of representation and desire lies in this *Gefühl*, which “belongs to”⁵⁰ the faculty of desire even as its “immediate and exclusive”⁵¹ relation to practical reason ensures the causality determining moral action flows from the faculty of representation to the faculty of desire. The latter feature means that practical reason, by virtue of this “representing impulse”⁵² of *Gefühl*, directly determines the faculty of desire.

What could it mean that *Gefühl*, an element of the faculty of desire, is capable of representation? The answer lies in Schleiermacher’s identification of *Gefühl* as an impulse. He defines impulse as “the representing subject’s activity, grounded in the subject’s nature, of bringing forth representations.”⁵³ It is an elemental activity or “power” of the soul that is

⁴⁷ Schleiermacher, 14/230.

⁴⁸ “[W]hat matters here is not the ground of the inherent existence of this faculty [of desire] in general, but rather the ground determining the individuality of the particular activities in which that faculty is exercised.”

(Schleiermacher, 21/236) So while the capacity to be moved by morals may be a transcendental feature belonging to the essence of the faculty of desire, any satisfying explanation of the phenomenon requires an appeal to the “variabilities and the determinations of the variable in the subject,” not its conditions of possibility.

(Schleiermacher, 22/237) That is, it must appeal to a series of efficient causes.

⁴⁹ Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 18/233.

⁵⁰ *Dazu gehört* (Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 18/233)

⁵¹ Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 18/233.

⁵² *repräsentirenden Trieb* (Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 19/234)

⁵³ Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 8/223.

importantly distinct from the soul's "faculties."⁵⁴ Faculties denote particular capabilities attributable to subjects on account of their real activities. I have a faculty of sight by virtue of the activity of my eyes, optic nerves, neurological activity involved in visual processing, etc. Similarly, I have a faculty of representation by virtue of the fact that I actively represent the world to myself in consciousness. Schleiermacher defines the faculty of desire in terms of this basic representing activity of impulse; it denotes the "faculty of determining impulse in general for an object of a particular impulse in some moment of existence."⁵⁵ Subjects actively represent the world in consciousness *and* actively pick out particular objects represented in consciousness as objects of appetite and aversion. When I represent the field outside my window in my mind, I select the maple tree out from the rest of the field and desire to go sit under its bright red canopy. When this desire reaches a threshold, it generates a behavioral tendency to stand up from my desk and walk outside to the maple tree.⁵⁶ Both faculties are ontologically dependent on the elemental representing activity of the soul, or impulse. Though analytically distinct, these faculties "hang together"⁵⁷ in the actual activity that animates the soul.

This tells us about how Schleiermacher understands the relationship between the two faculties. But what is it that finally determines the faculty of desire to pick *this* object or action

⁵⁴ *Kraft, Vermögen* (Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 7/223) Schleiermacher refers to Karl Leonhard Reinhold's distinction between power and faculty, but he formulates the relation of "impulse" [*Trieb*] to a subject's power and faculties. Günther Meckenstock's editorial note in *KGA I/1*, 222-223 (translated in Schleiermacher, 7-8) cites Reinhold's definitions of each in his Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens* (Prag: C. Widtmann und I. M. Mauke, 1789). Lamm notes that Schleiermacher returns to this distinction in his works on Spinoza. See Lamm, *The Living God*, 42 and Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Spinozismus" in *KGA I/1*, 510-558. 536.

⁵⁵ Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 8/223.

⁵⁶ These faculties and their activity are distinct from "action" [*Handeln*], which occurs only once my desire to sit under the maple tree reaches a sufficient magnitude to enlist the "physical causal faculty" and generate an "action tendency" to make my way through the field to the tree. (Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 8/223-224)

⁵⁷ Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 22/237. "In the faculty of representation everything hangs together [*hängt alles zusammen*], and what we separate therein by way of abstraction will not be found sundered *in concreto*. The faculty of desire coheres with the faculty of representation in like fashion." (Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 22/237)

represented in consciousness and not any of the others? Schleiermacher's answer is simple: the way the subject represents the object or action in consciousness. Consider the earlier example of the maple tree. Suppose that when I look out my window and see the bright red canopy of the maple tree, it appears particularly inviting to me, as if it were beckoning me to come sit under it. But suppose further that this tree is located on my neighbor's property, and that the last time he caught me sitting under his tree, he got angry and made me promise never to come into his yard again. This second thought affects the way I represent the tree to myself. Though its beauty continues to captivate me, and though I still feel inclined to go sit under it, I decide not to. Perhaps it is the fear I feel toward rousing my neighbor's anger. Or perhaps I now represent the tree to myself as morally forbidden because I judge that sitting under it would require that I break a promise. In either case, the new representation injects a *caesura* between the natural transition from craving a delightful object to the behavioral tendency to pursue and enjoy it.⁵⁸

This example illustrates two important points about Schleiermacher's early moral psychology. First, the capacity to resist immediate inclinations and to weigh various courses of action in a given situation is, according to Schleiermacher, what distinguishes human beings from non-human animals. For moles and foxes, the moment a desirable object appears, their faculty of desire instinctively pursues it until the object is consumed or otherwise disappears. For human beings, "the object appears and the faculty of desire craves."⁵⁹ There is an interruption between the craving and the doing, one that gives us a moment to reflect upon and weigh our options. We act, he says, on the basis of choice, not instinct.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ This could, of course, have the opposite effect. See Genesis 3.

⁵⁹ Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 10/226.

⁶⁰ Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 8/223-224.

Second, that which occasions this *caesura* between the appearance of value in consciousness and the decision to act is the subject's representing activity itself, or impulse. We are the kind of creatures who can populate our minds with all manner of representations that influence what the faculty of desire finally chooses. In the example, I represented the tree as inviting and beckoning before representing it as potentially dangerous and morally forbidden. These latter representations can, according to Schleiermacher, include moral representations such as the laws of practical reason. But in order for those moral representations to determine the faculty of desire, they must compete with all the multifarious impulses that represent the situation differently.

We are now in a position to understand the significance of *Gefühl* for Schleiermacher's early account of moral motivation and failure. Like Kant, Schleiermacher wants to argue that agents are capable of acting on the basis of moral obligation in every conceivable situation. Like Kant, he also wants to claim that our human faculty of desire is capable of acting on the basis of choice and that moral action is always of this kind. But whereas Kant invokes a noumenal personality to explain moral motivation, Schleiermacher appeals to the ordinary, finite faculty of desire with its teeming cacophony of impulses to explain it. He writes,

[S]ince impulses are limited by no determined boundary in the essence of the soul, no degree of impulse, however great, can be conceived to which an impulse of even higher degree cannot be juxtaposed. Through this boundlessness of impulses, if I may so express myself, a complete subordination of impulses under moral impulses is easily conceivable.⁶¹

In other words, since it is possible in every concrete situation for an agent to represent that situation as an occasion to act on his or her moral obligation, and since it is always possible that the moral impulse broadcasting this representation in consciousness will trump the other amoral

⁶¹ Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 25/239-240.

and immoral impulses competing with it, human beings are capable of moral motivation in every conceivable empirical context. And for Schleiermacher, it is the boundlessness of our impulses, a feature of embodied human life, that guarantees this.

One possible downside to this claim is that practical reason enjoys no categorical distinction from the other impulses teeming in the faculty of desire. It must make its case, so to speak, in the same tribunal as the bodily desires for sensible goods and the maxims endorsed by merely strategic, prudential reasoning. But this also means that Schleiermacher can provide a compelling account of moral failure.

On this view, moral failures are not simply products of a radically free will that inexplicably chooses sensory motives over moral ones. They also result from failures that precede and condition our willing such as failures of attention,⁶² evaluative perception, and moral deliberation:

It depends upon the state of our faculty of representation what variety of internal objects of impulse will arise through the association of ideas occasioned by an external object and, together with that object, simultaneously affect the faculty of desire; [...] it depends upon the state of our faculty of representation how in any particular case the influence of an appearing object may be modified by knowledge of that object; [...] it depends upon the state of our faculty of representation whether and how we formulate the maxims under which we believe the particular case to be comprehended; [...] it rests upon the state of our faculty of representation whether or not we take cognizance of certain external objects of impulse as such; and [...] it rests solely upon this same state to what

⁶² Though Schleiermacher goes to great lengths to claim that the faculty of desire is “grounded in” the faculty of representation, he concludes this account of moral psychology by insisting that the faculty of desire is also “the first existential ground of all particular actions of understanding, namely the direction of imagination [*Einbildungskraft*]” and that “attention [*Aufmerksamkeit*] itself can be conceived as nothing other than desire for the completion of a train of representations [*Vorstellungen*].” (Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 27/241, translation slightly modified) To be sure, attention can be responsive to our desires and choices. But this is not generally true for every attention event. Objects can grab or consume our attention in spite of our best efforts not to notice them. And as the empirical studies of implicit antiblack attentional bias showed in Chapter Two, attention seems to be at least partially undergirded by automatic psychological mechanisms over which we have little to no direct control. For an account of the social influences on attention, see Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Social Structure of Irrelevance* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015). For a phenomenological analysis of attention that emphasizes its ambivalence vis-à-vis intentionality, see Bernhard Waldenfels, *Phänomenologie der Aufmerksamkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).

extent the syllogism basing the application of law on the appropriate maxim will be formally and materially correct.⁶³

These dynamics are pre-volitional; they do not result from an agent's choosing but rather set the evaluative scene within which the faculty of desire makes its choices. Yet, by populating consciousness with associated ideas (perhaps the maple tree reminds me of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil), salient knowledge (the memory that my neighbor was angry last time I sat under the tree), salient principles of action (is this an occasion for moral action or enjoying the goodness of creation?), and by rendering some objects in the scene more conspicuous than others (the beautiful tree itself or the ominous fence blocking my path), this pre-volitional activity of *Gefühl* clearly influences how and what one chooses by effectively reordering the evaluative scene itself.

Furthermore, the manner in which these evaluative scenes are set is itself not simply a consequence of an individual's choices. Rather, they are the product of an individual's cumulative interactions with and apprehensions of an already value-laden world. This indicates a further, synthetic function of *Gefühl*. We have already seen that it is the unifying ground of the faculties of representation and desire. But in addition to this synchronic synthesis, *Gefühl* also diachronically synthesizes experiential episodes from across an individual's lifetime.⁶⁴ It collates the "totality of present representations" from the experiential well of the total "progression of representations in the soul"⁶⁵ over the course of one's life. This means that the way we

⁶³ Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 22/237.

⁶⁴ My formulation of these two forms of synthesis owes much to Peter Grove's illuminating analysis of Schleiermacher's "*Synthesislehre*" in his mature lectures on philosophical ethics in Berlin. See Peter Grove, "Gefühl und Selbstbewusstsein: Der Begriff der Subjektivität in Schleiermachers philosophischer Ethik," in *Schleiermacher und Kierkegaard: Subjektivität und Wahrheit: Akten des Schleiermacher-Kierkegaard-Kongresses in Kopenhagen, Oktober 2003*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al., Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series 11 / Schleiermacher-Archiv 21 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 107–23.

⁶⁵ Schleiermacher, *On Freedom*, 22/237–238.

apprehend a situation, including whether or not we apprehend it properly as a moral situation at all, is strongly influenced by our life history as embodied, desiderative, rational creatures.

According to Schleiermacher, all of these evaluative scene-setting functions are governed by *Gefühl*, conceived as a soul-grounding, representing impulse.

Schleiermacher certainly does not have implicit attitudes in mind when he describes these pre-volitional dynamics. But according to the social psychological research surveyed in Chapter Two, these *sui generis* mental states produce precisely those kinds of distortions in moral consciousness that Schleiermacher locates in the state of an agent's faculty of representation. I showed there that implicit racial stereotypes function as "visual tuning devices" that influence attentional and perceptual capacities and, in turn, affect downstream cognitive functions like evaluative perception, judgment, and moral deliberation that generate racialized moral failures. Schleiermacher's conception of *Gefühl* as impulse thus highlights the significance of this domain of moral consciousness and its vulnerability to foreign influence. Furthermore, this concept bears many of the properties typically ascribed to emotion. It is a 1) world-directed state with 2) both cognitive and phenomenal content where 3) the cognitive content is distinctly evaluative in nature, and it 4) serves as both a normative and a motivational reason for action.

But it must be said that this early account of affectivity in the moral life remains insufficient for diagnosing the peculiar threats structural racism poses to moral agency. First, by emphasizing the conscious phenomenality of *Gefühl*, Schleiermacher's concept fails to grasp the pre-phenomenal, unconscious qualities of implicit bias. Second, by treating the moral *Gefühl* as an element of moral psychology largely in isolation from the sociable *Gefühl*, this text only hints at the ways in which an individual's affections are shaped by social forces and conditions. On

both points, insights from affect theory might prove helpful. But first, we need to see how his view of affectivity expands in his later works.

§4 Schleiermacher's Romantic Period: Ethical Sense and Social Alterity in the *Soliloquies*

Schleiermacher's preoccupation with moral psychological questions led to developments in his early notion of the moral *Gefühl* as a synthesizing, soul-toning activity. But these came largely at the expense of the other two supra-sensible feelings discussed in his Aristotle commentary. By the end of that decade, both the religious and sociable feeling would receive their due in his *Speeches on Religion*⁶⁶ and *Soliloquies*,⁶⁷ published in 1799 and 1800 respectively. Though *Gefühl* plays a less obvious role in the latter than the former, closer analysis reveals that affectivity is no less important for Schleiermacher's conception of the ethical life than they were in his earlier Kantian period. The central difference consists in this: whereas his Kantian period focused exclusively on the intrapsychic dynamics of *Gefühl*, his *Soliloquies* explores the place of affectivity in social life, specifically in the process of ethical formation, or *Bildung*.

A series of five rhapsodic essays composed in a Romantic idiom, Schleiermacher's *Soliloquies* artfully unfolds his highest ethical intuition: "each human being should represent humanity in his or her own way ..."⁶⁸ Becoming an ethical individual is a process of formation that critically depends on sociable connections with real people. But the first step on this journey

⁶⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Here, he famously identified the "essence" of religion as a distinct formation of *Gefühl*, namely, the "sense or taste for the infinite." (Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 23) I return to this topic in Chapter Five.

⁶⁷ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Monologen. Eine Neujahrsgabe* (1800) in *KGA I/3*, 1-61. The most recent English translation is Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher's Soliloquies, an English Translation of the Monologen, with a Critical Introduction and Appendix*, trans. Horace L. Friess (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1926). Cited with English/German pagination.

⁶⁸ Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 31/18.

is a deeply personal, inward movement of “reflection”⁶⁹ whereby one steps back from the “outward spectacle of life” and attends to “the spiritual activity that secretly stirs one’s inmost being.”⁷⁰ It is here, specifically in the moment of self-critique that one discovers the first glimpse of “humanity.”⁷¹ Even in its rudimentary form as an inner disciplinarian, the conscience attests that the individual has some elementary grasp of a universal standard for human conduct by which one’s own conduct falls short.⁷²

Eventually, self-scolding gives way to a more profound self-transformation. In this second stage of ethical development, the clarity of the universal standard appears in “one bright moment” as a “grand revelation” wherein the subject makes “a single free decision” to be a *Mensch*.⁷³ This decision elevates the individual from the crude, fragmented existence of the beasts to the “height of reason” that marks humanity’s “sacred precincts.”⁷⁴ As in “On Freedom,” Schleiermacher emphasizes the link between the way that agents evaluatively represent moral reality in consciousness and their conduct. There is, he writes, an “inner and necessary connection between doing and seeing”⁷⁵ where such seeing is a moral vision of humanity as a universal code of conduct. While this stage of ethical development differentiates one from the beasts, it provides no guidance for how to further differentiate one’s own conduct from the mass of other humans. If this vision of humanity focuses only on what makes us universally alike, i.e., reason, we have no way of becoming ethical *individuals* whose lives are recognizably our own.

⁶⁹ *Die Reflexion*. This is the title of the first essay, which exhorts the reader to “become conscious of your immediate relations to the Infinite and the Eternal” because the one who neglects to do so “will always remain a slave of Time and Necessity.” (Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 12/7; 15/8-9)

⁷⁰ Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 15/8.

⁷¹ *Menschheit* (Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 28/16)

⁷² this is itself a “consciousness of true humanity [albeit] sadly mutilated.” (Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 27/16)

⁷³ Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 28-29/16. Translation slightly modified.

⁷⁴ Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 28-19/16-17.

⁷⁵ Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 28/16.

In contrast to those who conceive of humanity as “rough unshapen masses, inwardly altogether alike”⁷⁶ and only differentiated on account of external features, Schleiermacher’s announces his “highest intuition” in ethics thusly:

Each human being should represent humanity in his or her own way and in one’s own unique combination of humanity’s elements in order that humanity might reveal itself in every way and such that everything that can at all emanate differentially from its womb might become actual in the fullness of space and time.⁷⁷

In other words, introspection, self-scrutiny, and the free resolve to be a *Mensch* are necessary but insufficient for ethical formation. One must also step out into the world and engage with real people from diverse social circles who expresses humanity in their own way.⁷⁸

This exposure to social alterity reveals true humanity to be a rich tapestry of distinct individuals. It augments the individual’s vision of humanity and enhances ethical formation in two ways. First, by increasing knowledge of the sum total of possible human expressions, one can clarify what makes his or her particular expression unique. Contrast, in other words, is an essential feature of individuality.⁷⁹ Second, the encounter with social alterity provides opportunities to “appropriate”⁸⁰ their unique expressions of humanity. This provides an

⁷⁶ Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 31/18.

⁷⁷ Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 31/18. Translation slightly modified.

⁷⁸ “Even here in the realm of the highest morality, the same direct connection between doing and seeing obtains. Only if one is conscious of his individuality in his present conduct can he be sure that he will not offend it in future conduct. And only if he requires himself to steadily gaze upon the whole of humanity and to oppose his own expression of it to each other possible one can he uphold the consciousness of his individuality: for only through contrast is individuality recognized.” (Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 38/21-22, translation modified)

⁷⁹ “The one who wants to form himself into a determinate individual must have a sense for all that he or she is not.” (Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 38/21, translation modified)

⁸⁰ The German “*Aneignen*” literally means “to make one’s own.” Schleiermacher uses the term throughout the *Soliloquies* to describe how an individual’s encounter with others can be ethically edifying. See Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 37/21 and 72/42. Several recent interpreters of Schleiermacher have highlighted the ethical problems of appropriating the cultural expressions of others. Kwok Pui Lan, for example, has criticized Schleiermacher’s use of this term in his *Speeches*, claiming that it re-inscribes gendered and colonialist stereotypes. See Kwok Pui Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 189f. Others have argued that Schleiermacher’s use of the term actually subverts and reverses its potentially aggressive and violent meanings. See Steven R. Jungkeit, *Spaces of Modern Theology: Geography and Power in Schleiermacher’s World*, *New Approaches to Religion and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

individual with a more expansive set of expressive possibilities to consider inhabiting as one's own. Whether by increasing self-knowledge or providing "communal nourishment"⁸¹ for one's own expression of humanity, these encounters are vital to the formation of ethical individuals.

This marks a return to Schleiermacher's early interest in sociability. As in his Aristotle commentary, Schleiermacher claims that these ethically salutary sociable connections leave their mark primarily in the realm of the affections. The consciousness of true humanity is neither a reified principle of action nor an abstract representation but rather an affective consciousness rooted in one's "heart and mind"⁸² that Schleiermacher calls "sense."⁸³ In the *Soliloquies*, sense denotes a receptive openness to alterity that frames and orients the entire perceptual, deliberative, and agential relations between an individual and her environment.⁸⁴ It makes possible the evaluative perception of the rich variety of human expressions *as* expressions of humanity and thus as suitable for appropriation.

The affective quality of sense becomes clearer when we note that Schleiermacher attributes two essential components to it, namely, love and fantasy.⁸⁵ Love is a "sacred feeling" and "attractational power of the world" that draws individuals beyond the first stage of ethical

Matthew Robinson also offers a useful discussion of this matter in Matthew Ryan Robinson, *Redeeming Relationship, Relationships That Redeem: Free Sociability and the Completion of Humanity in the Thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher*, *Religion in Philosophy and Theology* 99 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 133–35.

⁸¹ "I feel myself to be clearer and richer, stronger and healthier after each action. This is the case because with each act I appropriate something from the communal nourishment of humanity [*gemeinschaftlichen Nahrungsstoffe der Menschheit*] and gradually define my shape more precisely." (Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 91/55, translation from Brent W. Sockness, "Schleiermacher and the Ethics of Authenticity: The 'Monologen' of 1800," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 32, no. 3 (2004): 501.

⁸² *das Gemüth* (Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 36/21 and 42/24)

⁸³ *der Sinn* (Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 35-39/20-22)

⁸⁴ Sockness calls it a "dispositional sensitivity or receptivity to human diversity," and Christiane Ehrhardt notes that this receptivity to alterity entails a critical aspect that requires defense from ethically deleterious "constrictions" [*Beschränkungen*] and becomes important in his later works on hermeneutics. See Sockness, "Schleiermacher and the Ethics of Authenticity," 501; Christiane Ehrhardt, *Religion, Bildung und Erziehung bei Schleiermacher: eine Analyse der Beziehungen und des Widerstreits zwischen den "Reden über die Religion" und den "Monologen"* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2005), 204–10.

⁸⁵ Sockness, "Schleiermacher and the Ethics of Authenticity," 501–5.

formation and toward “perfection” through ethically formative encounter with others.⁸⁶ It also serves as the norm that perfects the reciprocal process of appropriation itself.⁸⁷ Fantasy describes the imaginative activity of combination, association, empathy, and the projection of alternate possible worlds⁸⁸ that assists the cultivation of ethical sense guided by love. It allows us to leap beyond individual limitations in experience by projecting infinite possibilities for action beyond those we actually commit such that we can empathetically inhabit imagined possible selves as “others” and enjoy the ethical fruits therein.

Though predominantly receptive in nature, sense is hardly passive. Schleiermacher presents it as a discerning and vigilant openness. Since his highest ethical intuition is that each is to represent humanity in one’s own way, such vigilance is necessary. Without it, one risks being “constrained” by some “alien yoke” or placed under “the domination of an alien opinion.”⁸⁹ Schleiermacher recommends the appropriate first response to alterity is to “dispute” with it, to actively discern whether it is indeed drawn from “the domain of [true] humanity,” and even to “rise up, weapons in hand” to defend one’s freedom from “alien influences” and “slavery.” Upon ensuring enough critical distance to achieve “one’s own viewpoint,” one can “gladly allow each opinion to line up beside one’s own so that sense can peacefully complete the business of interpreting and penetrating each other standpoint.”⁹⁰ In other words, even one’s openness to

⁸⁶ Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 39/22.

⁸⁷ Insufficient other-regarding love results in the hostile imposition of one’s own expressions of humanity onto others, whereas insufficient self-love puts one at risk of being hostilely appropriated by others and losing one’s distinctness. See, for example, Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 39-43/22-24. As Sockness puts it, in *The Soliloquies*, love “tolerates difference, lets the other be itself, and mitigates the crushing asymmetries that inevitably hold between stronger and weaker parties in their various acts of mutual appropriation.” (Sockness, “Schleiermacher and the Ethics of Authenticity,” 502)

⁸⁸ Sockness notes that while the German literary tradition of the eighteenth century employed a variety of terms to describe the empathetic, creative, and associative powers of the imagination (*Phantasie*, *Einbildungskraft*, *Dichtungskraft*), the Schleiermacher of the *Soliloquies* lumps these altogether and speaks non-technically of the imaginative powers as *Phantasie* or *Fantasie*. (Sockness, 503)

⁸⁹ Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 40-41/22-23.

⁹⁰ Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 40-41/23.

social alterity must itself be one's own. Sense, therefore, is a critical and discerning openness to alterity that, while unmistakably rooted in the affections, entails prominent cognitive functions like recognition and evaluative judgment.

In sum, Schleiermacher's *Soliloquies* marks a crucial development in his thinking about affectivity and sociality in the moral life that began in his Aristotle commentary. Whereas "On Freedom" emphasized the role of the moral feeling as the soul-grounding activity that unifies the faculties of representation and desire, the *Soliloquies* explores the crucial role of sociable feelings and sociable connections in the formation of ethical individuals. This is more than a simple change in focus. He situates the introspective moment in which an agent relates to herself and resolves to be a *Mensch* as a necessary but ultimately insufficient stage of ethical development. To become perfect, that is, to become human in one's own way, requires that one pass through the *ideal* relation of the self to itself and establish *real* relations between the self and concrete others. These real relations are possible on account of a critical and discerning openness to alterity that Schleiermacher calls "sense," which is rooted in the heart and mind and is itself transformed by loving and imaginative encounters with others. As in the Aristotle commentary, these interpersonal encounters generate ethically salutary effects, opening new horizons for how agents perceive, deliberate, and act in the world. Moral psychology is a part, but not all, of moral life.

With that said, it is important to track the continuities with "On Freedom" as well. Schleiermacher's call to pass through and beyond introspection does not negate the importance of moral consciousness. As before, he claims that there is an "intimate and necessary connection between seeing and doing;"⁹¹ the way agents represent a value-laden world to ourselves

⁹¹ Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, 28/16.

profoundly influences the way we act within that world. But whereas “On Freedom” focused on the way in which *Gefühl* apprehends value within the mind, his *Soliloquies* describes a more expansive value-laden vision of social reality forged through loving and imaginative encounters with humanity in all of its ambiguous and glorious variety. This vision is a function of an agent’s ethical sense, which frames and orients all of her perceiving, evaluating, and deliberating. Thus, the pre-volitional domain of consciousness that Schleiermacher describes as *Gefühl* in “On Freedom” opens agents to their social environments and is profoundly susceptible to influence by social forces. While Schleiermacher’s focus in the *Soliloquies* is on interpersonal interactions, his mature ethics of *Bildung* considers this social-affective dimension of agency at an even broader scale.

§5 Schleiermacher’s Mature Ethics of Culture: Reason and Feeling in The Berlin Lectures⁹²

Schleiermacher’s mature ethical vision can be found in the literary remains of his Berlin lectures on philosophical ethics.⁹³ Like the *Soliloquies*, these lectures depict ethical life as a process of cultivation or *Bildung*; individuals become ethical through a lifetime of creative and discerning interactions with alterity. But Schleiermacher’s mature position differs from that of the *Soliloquies* in several ways. First, the subject of these ethics is not the individual *ich* pursuing its own ethical edification but rather *reason* conceived as an intersubjective and socio-historical

⁹² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Lectures on Philosophical Ethics*, ed. Robert B. Loudon, trans. Louise Adey Huish, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Ethik (1812/13): mit späteren Fassungen der Einleitung, Güterlehre und Pflichtenlehre*, ed. Otto Braun and Hans Joachim Birkner, Philosophische Bibliothek 335 (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1981). Cited with English/German pagination.

⁹³ These include lecture notes from 1812/13, 1814/15, 1816/17, 1824, 1827, and 1832 as well as a series of six treatises presented to the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences between 1819 and 1830. I follow Andrew Dole’s division of Schleiermacher’s ethical works into two distinct periods separated by a brief middle period. (Dole, *Schleiermacher on Religion and the Natural Order*, 103)

activity that organizes nature into meaningful worlds. This means, second, that whereas the *Soliloquies* depicted the edifying encounter with social alterity in *interpersonal* terms, the Berlin lectures present the same encounter in *cultural* terms; agents interact with others and the intelligibility impressed into the natural world through generations of human activity and concretized in and through institutions.⁹⁴ We might therefore think of Schleiermacher's mature ethics as not only an ethics of *Bildungsethik* but also one of *Sittlichkeit*. Like Hegel, Schleiermacher is concerned not just with the morality of individual persons and their actions but with the way that reason shapes and becomes embedded in the concrete norms, habits, and institutional patterns of real human communities.⁹⁵ Finally, Schleiermacher's mature ethics departs from the Romantic style in favor of the more conceptually precise, even "fiercely

⁹⁴ Recent commentators agree on the expansive character of these ethics, although they formulate it differently: a "general theory of human culture", "a comprehensive theory of the distinctively human-historical world," and "a philosophy of culture, or as a theory of history or of the social." (Günter Scholz, *Ethik und Hermeneutik: Schleiermachers Grundlegung der Geisteswissenschaften*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 1191 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 35; Brent W. Sockness, "The Forgotten Moralists: Friedrich Schleiermacher and the Science of Spirit," *The Harvard Theological Review* 96, no. 3 (2003): 343; Peter Grove, *Deutungen des Subjekts: Schleiermachers Philosophie der Religion*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 129 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 377.) These are cited in Dole, *Schleiermacher on Religion and the Natural Order*, 104 n.13.

⁹⁵ This comparison with Hegel is instructive, but there are very important differences between these two thinkers. Epistemologically, Schleiermacher departs from Hegel's view that the achievement of absolute knowledge is a human possibility. For Schleiermacher, all of our knowledge – ethical or otherwise – is marked by an intransigent contrast between the real and the ideal. According to John Wallhauser, this informs Schleiermacher's "heuristic" method in his philosophical ethics which "moves between the poles of ideal and real [and] does not seek closure in some third and absolute point beyond the oscillation itself. There is no closed system, because there is no Hegelian third standpoint transcending the earlier polarities [of real and ideal]." (John Wallhauser, "General Introduction," in *Brouillon zur Ethik (1805/1806) / Notes on Ethics (1805/1806) ; Notes on the Theory of Virtue (1804/1805)*, by Friedrich Schleiermacher, trans. John Wallhauser, Terrence N. Tice, and Edwina G. Lawler, *Schleiermacher Studies and Translations* 22 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 15) Ethically, Schleiermacher rescinds from Hegel's famously worrisome identification of the state with "the reality of the ethical idea." By contrast, his ethics of *Sittlichkeit* insists that the activity of reason upon nature generates a plurality of semi-autonomous spheres of human activity which include, but are not reducible to, the state. For Hegel's claim, see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §257. For more discussion on this comparison, as well as a selection of secondary commentators, see Robert B. Loudon, "Introduction," in *Lectures on Philosophical Ethics*, by Friedrich Schleiermacher, ed. Robert B. Loudon, trans. Louise Adey Huish, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xxii–xxiii.

abstract,”⁹⁶ idiom of German idealism that, as one commentator put it, constitutes “a massive, intricate web of unalleviated abstraction.”⁹⁷

While these shifts in the subject and style of Schleiermacher’s ethics may at first suggest a departure from his psychologically realistic concern for affectivity in ethical life, I contend that a closer look reveals that they actually deepen and refine this commitment.⁹⁸ As in his Kantian period, he insists that our wills are bound to the way in which *Gefühl* represents value in consciousness. As in his Romantic period, he insists that ethical life is a process of becoming an individual in and through concrete social relationships. But here, in the Berlin lectures, Schleiermacher claims that the apprehension of value in consciousness that is so important for moral motivation is *itself* importantly bound to the social, cultural, and historical forces that shape our affections. Perhaps even more important is the further suggestion, one that he only begins to develop in these lectures, that affectivity is not simply a psychological phenomenon. Rather, it entails a supra-personal, social life that plays an important role in the ethical process as a whole. To see this, however, we must first come to terms with the basic features of Schleiermacher’s mature conception of ethical life.

⁹⁶ Andrew Dole aptly describes Schleiermacher’s lectures in this way in Dole, *Schleiermacher on Religion and the Natural Order*, 114.

⁹⁷ Wallhausser, “General Introduction,” 9.

⁹⁸ Some have argued that this shift into Schleiermacher’s “systematic period” – roughly beginning with the 1803 publication of his *Outlines of a Critique of Previous Ethical Theories* forward – marks a diminishment of his earlier commitment to psychological realism. By contrast, I follow John Wallhausser and others in showing that several crucial elements from his early works survive the methodological and formal transition. See Wallhausser, 9–10, especially n.32. With that said, we must admit that his impressive theory of culture remains abstracted from the empirical diversity of particular, concrete cultures. Cornelia Richter puts this point nicely: “... Schleiermacher does not develop the basic structures of culture out of the variety and plurality of cultural life, but has them constructed beforehand in his “Dialectics”. They were first deduced and then put to the test in the *Ethics*. Schleiermacher’s cultural philosophy remains in the distinction between transcendental philosophy and empirical studies, where the variety of life is regarded as an object of philosophy.” (Cornelia Richter, “Feeling and Sense, Ethics and Culture: Perspectives on Religion and Culture in Schleiermacher and Cassirer,” in *Schleiermacher und Kierkegaard: Subjektivität und Wahrheit: Akten des Schleiermacher-Kierkegaard-Kongresses in Kopenhagen, Oktober 2003*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al., Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series 11 / Schleiermacher-Archiv 21 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 166–67.)

§5.1 Basic Features of the Mature Ethics

Schleiermacher's Berlin lectures present a descriptive ethics of *Bildung*. Ethical life is construed as a process of cultivation whereby intelligent beings reflexively infuse, or ensoul,⁹⁹ nature with reason to form moral worlds. This occurs anytime human beings meaningfully organize their natural or social environment, as when barren tracks of prairie become productive farms or when unruly children become well-mannered adults. In both cases, some bit of the natural world is transformed by intelligent creatures in such a way that renders it more perfect. Schleiermacher thinks of these more reasonable bits of nature as objective goods, and the point of moral life is to cultivate every bit of nature into a more perfect, i.e., more reasonably organized, form - a good. The highest good, that toward which the entire ethical process aims, is the utter permeation of nature by reason – the reflexive rationalization of all that is.¹⁰⁰

The goods that result from reason's activity upon nature bear two primary characteristics. First, they express the activity of reason upon them in ways that are perceptible to others. If I were to stumble upon neatly ordered rows of corn during a hike, the farm's ordered materiality would announce to me that some intelligent creature had made it this way, presumably for some purpose. In Schleiermacher's terms, the farm has become a symbol of reason. Second, the goods

⁹⁹ The ensouling of nature by reason is the basic intuition that Schleiermacher's mature ethics attempts to explicate. It is first formulated in his lectures on ethics at the University of Halle in 1805/1806, which constitute his *Brouillon zur Ethik* or "Notes on Ethics." "Reason should be soul. The ensouling principle [*Das beseelende Princip*] forms and sustains body and life; we must thus discover reason as appropriating human nature and maintaining itself as soul in reciprocity with the whole." See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brouillon Zur Ethik (1805/1806) / Notes on Ethics (1805/1806) ; Notes on the Theory of Virtue (1804/1805)*, trans. John. Wallhausser, Terrence N. Tice, and Edwina G. Lawler, Schleiermacher Studies and Translations 22 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), sixth instructional hour, 39. The German text can be found in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brouillon zur Ethik (1805/06)*, ed. Hans Joachim Birkner, Philosophische Bibliothek 334 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1981).

¹⁰⁰ William Schweiker, drawing on Max Weber and more recent theorists of the totalizing impulses of modern societies, interprets Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics in these terms. On his view, Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics too closely identifies the human power to organize the natural world with the good, although Schweiker sees Schleiermacher's distinctly Christian theological ethics as placing a helpful a check on these totalizing impulses. See William Schweiker, "Consciousness and the Good: Schleiermacher and Contemporary Theological Ethics," *Theology Today* 56, no. 2 (July 1999): 180–96.

formed by reason also facilitate the continued rationalization of nature. Suppose that I were so impressed by the farm that I decided to introduce myself to the farmer and become her apprentice. By familiarizing myself with the farmer's ways and availing myself of the farm's implements, I would be in a much better position to begin my career in agriculture than I otherwise would. It contributes to my perfection as a farmer. Moreover, by appropriating this accumulated knowledge, I might also be able to expand the farm's reach by a few acres or improve the efficiency of its procedures. This capacity for goods to facilitate the further transformation of nature by reason makes them not only symbols but also organs of reason.

The ethicist's task, according to Schleiermacher, is not to prescribe rational principles of action or to deduce the transcendental conditions of possibility for moral agency. Rather it is to describe or "narrate"¹⁰¹ this historical process of reason's perfection of nature. The ethicist scours nature for evidence of reason's activity in order to discern its formal contours and evaluate its products.¹⁰² The individual human being marks the first stop on this itinerary. It is there, and more precisely, in the twofold activity of cognition and volition, that the ideal realm of consciousness first emerges within the real, organic realm of nature.¹⁰³ The understanding is the activity by which one recognizes objective goods as symbols of reason, and the will is the activity that organizes nature into goods. These describe the "cognitive" and "organizing"¹⁰⁴ functions of reason respectively. Though analytically distinct, Schleiermacher insists that these functions are never entirely separate in any given moment. To desire to overturn a rigged

¹⁰¹ Schleiermacher describes his ethical method as *Darstellung oder Erzählung* (depiction or narration). (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 7/10)

¹⁰² This means that ethics is concerned, not with reason in and for itself, but with the activity of reason as it relates to and appears within nature.

¹⁰³ "The original positing of reason in the form of understanding and will [*Verstand und Wille*] within a nature which is originally organic and symbolic is its positing in the human individual." (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 10/14)

¹⁰⁴ *erkennend* and *organisierend* (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 14/19)

political system is tacitly to recognize that political systems are social goods and that this particular one is a corruption of that ideal type. Similarly, to recognize a given political order as a social good is tacitly to desire to preserve and enhance it. Together, the cognizing and organizing functions of reason constitute “personality,”¹⁰⁵ which according to Schleiermacher is that “elemental force which produces the ethical process in its total perfection.”¹⁰⁶ Reason first appears in and flows through personalities to transform nature into its symbols and organs.

This shows that individual agents, and in particular, the inner lives of agents, are of immense significance to Schleiermacher’s mature ethical vision. Only creatures with understanding and will have what it takes to recognize ethical goods as such and to transform nature in accord with some purpose. For this reason, Schleiermacher contends that the ethicist’s task requires that he or she attend not only to the objective goods that agents produce through their reasonable conduct but also to the dynamics of reason within consciousness.

To accommodate this, Schleiermacher complements his doctrine of goods with doctrines of virtue and duty.¹⁰⁷ As dimensions of ethical inquiry, each concerns the activity of reason in and through nature, and each plays a part in the achievement of the highest good. But whereas the doctrine of goods narrates the results of agents’ activity, the doctrine of virtue attends to the activity of reason on the human powers of action, specifically, on the formation of an ethical “disposition” and correlate “proficiencies” within individuals.¹⁰⁸ The doctrine of duty, by

¹⁰⁵ *Persönlichkeit*. Importantly, Schleiermacher ascribes personality of both individuals and groups. While the understanding or the will predominates at any given moment of existence, each mutually entails the other.

¹⁰⁶ Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 11/15.

¹⁰⁷ “Everything which has become moral is a good, and the totality of that [process] a single entity, hence the highest good. The objective depiction of the ethical is therefore the depiction of the idea of the highest good. Every function of human nature raised to the power of reason is a virtue, and hence the first part of an indirect depiction is the doctrine of virtue. It is because an action can only be understood in the context of a totality of a life, raised up out of momentary limitations, that it corresponds to the concept of duty; thus the other art of indirect depiction is the doctrine of duty.” (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 11/16)

¹⁰⁸ Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 102/138.

contrast, concerns the rational principles of action that relate the “whole idea of *Sittlichkeit*” to particular situations.¹⁰⁹ In other words, the elemental force that fuels the ethical process as a whole and contributes to the perfection of nature is the personality of virtuous, dutiful agents.

The activity of reason is unthinkable for Schleiermacher without reference to the inner lives of individual agents, but he is equally adamant that reason is irreducible to personality.¹¹⁰ To narrate the vivid “life of reason”¹¹¹ in history requires that the ethicist attend to both its moral psychological and its supra-personal life as it becomes objectively concretized in social and cultural conditions. In his doctrine of goods, Schleiermacher articulates five general social goods, i.e., forms of human sociality that result from and facilitate virtuous, dutiful conduct. The most basic social form is the family, which provides an ethical context for human sexuality and for the raising of children. The other four social forms are dependent upon the family, and Schleiermacher describes them in terms of the aspects of reason that each primarily instantiates. The organizing function of reason manifests most prominently in the state and “free sociality,” whereas its cognizing function comes to the fore in the academy and the church. He distinguishes these further by invoking a second intrinsic contrast in reason, namely, its individual or general character. While the state strives to organize a natural assemblage of people with impartial justice and maximal freedom for commercial exchange, small culturally distinct groups that Schleiermacher subsumes under the banner of free sociality seek to form human beings in ways that are both more distinctive and less translatable to a general audience. Similarly, while the academy seeks knowledge of reality that is maximally universal, churches circulate ways of

¹⁰⁹ Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 124/167.

¹¹⁰ “We may not substitute personality for reason as the object of ethics because the action of the individual and the action of a group cannot be considered in isolation; thus, in a theory of human action, the opposition of personality must be superseded, and this leaves nothing but the life of reason in an organization.” (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 4/7)

¹¹¹ Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 4/7.

apprehending reality that bear the idiosyncrasies of particular traditions. Crucially, these forms of sociality are symbols of reason's activity and organs by which the same activity transforms and perfects nature. To neglect this supra-personal life of reason in favor of its intrapsychic life is, on Schleiermacher's view, to offer a disastrously reductive and incomplete picture of ethical life.¹¹²

With this outline of its basic features, the expansiveness and complexity of Schleiermacher's mature ethical vision come into view. Like his early and middle period, the moral psychology of individual agents remains an incredibly important feature of his analysis. As we saw in his *Soliloquies*, Schleiermacher emphasizes the vital role of human sociality in ethical life. But by replacing the subject of his mature ethics from the individual *ich* in the *Soliloquies* to the multi-dimensional activity of reason in and through nature, Schleiermacher simultaneously expands and deepens his earlier ethical insights. To see this, we need to press beyond the basic features of mature ethical vision and explore the social and affective dimensions of reason in more detail.

§5.2 The Social Breadth and Affective Depths of Reason

In the *Soliloquies*, we saw that Schleiermacher critiqued the rationalistic ethics of duty endorsed by figures like Kant and Fichte on the grounds that reason, conceived as a general capacity to discern what kind of conduct befits humanity, does nothing to distinguish individual agents from one another. To become an ethical individual, one must act in such a way that accords with reason, but one must do this while expressing one's humanity in one's own way.

¹¹² It is also noteworthy that, for Schleiermacher, Hegel's ethics of *Sittlichkeit* are guilty of a different and more ethically dangerous kind of reductionism. By positioning the state as the completion of ethical life, Schleiermacher worries that the individual side of reason and the social forms that preserve it (free sociality and the church) would be subsumed within a suffocating totality that seeks to sublimate human individuality and diversity.

Crucially, Schleiermacher depicts the achievement of ethical individuality as a further development of reason, not a departure from it. It is, after all, *ethical* individuality that we must pursue, and for that reason, it must fall within the bounds of what is generally permissible for truly human conduct. This means that, when he claims that loving and imaginative encounters with real people from distinct walks of life are necessary to become who we are, neither the social nor the affective character of this activity in any way contradicts its rational character. That is, Schleiermacher's critique of Kantian and Fichtean ethics focused, not on their rationalism, but rather on 1) their reduction of the ethical life to the concept of duty, which neglects the concepts of virtue and the highest good, and 2) their reductively moral psychological scope, which neglects the vivid life of reason in cultural, social, and historical existence.

As my analysis in the previous section showed, Schleiermacher's mature ethics advance this first line of criticism by integrating a doctrine of duty with doctrines of virtue and goods. But he also advances this second line of critique in such a way that evinces significant continuity across his ethical writings. More importantly, I will show that it also discloses an enduring – if frequently overlooked – feature of ethical life that I call “social affectivity.” This feature, I argue, can be hermeneutically reconstructed to provide descriptive and normative insights into the tenacity of antiblack racism and its meaning for our self-understanding as agents. To understand this, we first need to see how Schleiermacher's mature ethics develops his thinking about sociality and affectivity in ethical life.

Consider first the place of sociality in his account. Schleiermacher presents the vivid life of reason as exceeding individual personality in two ways. First, he says that the activity of both the understanding and the will “supersede”¹¹³ personality. Through the understanding, reason

¹¹³ *aufheben* (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 22-23/30)

“molds”¹¹⁴ sensory impressions into “depictions”¹¹⁵ in consciousness that subjects can then express for others to cognize. Through the will, reason creates objective products that are recognizable to others as symbols and organs of reason.¹¹⁶ Reason therefore mediates the interaction between intelligent creatures, the intelligible world they inhabit, and the intersubjective interactions amongst those creatures as they individually and collectively seek to reflexively rationalize nature.

Second, Schleiermacher contends that reason not only supersedes but precedes personality. Personality itself, Schleiermacher contends, “is the *result* of the ethical process.”¹¹⁷ By this, he means that our individual epistemic and moral psychological capacities are themselves the effects of the prior activity of reason on us. Whether it is the sexual activity of our parents or the vast cloud of witnesses that contributed to our intellectual and moral formation, neither our existence nor the way we understand the world, nor the ways that we desire to change it are simply our own. This means, further, that the same moral psychological elements that fuel the ethical process are always already ensconced within, shaped by, and largely products of our formative social relations.

This adds considerable texture to what might at first seem like a rather arid picture of reason ensouling nature. On Schleiermacher’s view, reason is i) an historical activity of finite human agents that entails ii) two reciprocal functions (cognizing and organizing) and iii) two contrasting poles (individual and general). It also iv) operates reciprocally at two orders of

¹¹⁴ *einbilden* and *hineinbilden* (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 14/19)

¹¹⁵ “The way in which self-consciousness becomes external to further the cognition of others is through depiction [*Darstellung*]. (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 22-23/30)

¹¹⁶ “For the individual engaged in formative activity, this superseding is brought about through the endeavor which accompanies the act of formation to give what has been formed symbolic value, i.e., to make it a recognizable sign of the formative power of reason.” (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 21/29)

¹¹⁷ Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 24/32. Emphasis added.

magnitude (moral psychological and socio-cultural) in such a way that v) contributes to the ethical formation of individuals, collectives, and nature as a whole. Conceived in this way, it is easy to see why accounts emphasizing “pure” reason and its transcendental conditions would strike Schleiermacher as deficient. Schleiermacher certainly saw the value in such inquiries; he engaged in such reflection himself.¹¹⁸ But for ethical reflection, where ethics is conceived as the study of the activity of reason in and through nature, one must situate the operations of a knowing mind within a social context tufted with institutions and objective goods as well as a particular historical context that is but one node in a larger, intergenerational process of perfecting nature. This means that the moral psychological dynamics that consumed his attention in the Kantian period can no longer be adequately theorized in isolation from an agent’s formative relations. Rather, they must be understood as part of a broader social and historical dynamic that both precedes and supersedes individual personalities.

But Schleiermacher posits a still further dimension to reason. Those human minds capable of understanding and willing are not only embedded in concrete social relations. They are also embodied within living organisms that are constantly interacting with the physical environment. In addition to its social and historical breadth, Schleiermacher contends that reason entails an embodied, affective depth.

Schleiermacher describes affectivity in his discussion of reason’s individual pole. The universal pole of reason accounts for our ability to recognize and create expressions of human activity *as human* activities. Though I may not grasp precisely how my in-laws have arranged their kitchen, I can tell that it has *somehow been arranged* by creatures like me. The same could

¹¹⁸ Schleiermacher’s lectures on “dialectics” include his most systematic reflection on logic, epistemology, and the metaphysics of knowledge. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, ed. Manfred Frank, 1st ed., 2 vols., Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 1529 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).

be said about Ancient Greek or Mayan ruins; these are clearly human cultural artifacts, and their indecipherability need not indicate a rational deficiency on the part of their ancient creators or their contemporary admirers. Rather, it indicates that reason entails a depth dimension. It is not simply exhausted by those aspects of consciousness that are maximally universal and most easily transmissible across time, space and culture.

To analyze these depths of human particularity, Schleiermacher turns to decidedly affective concepts like “attunements of the heart and mind and inner movements,”¹¹⁹ and, unsurprisingly, “feeling.”¹²⁰ Unlike the relatively free commerce of consciousness between persons made possible by reason’s universal pole, which is structured by discursive thought, these forms of affective consciousness are relatively untransmissible.¹²¹ They renounce appropriation by others, calling instead to be acknowledged.¹²² Whereas the universal dimension of reason strives for “objective knowledge” through the medium of language,¹²³ the individual dimension of reason strives for a more localized “subjective” validity through artistic media such as images, gestures, and tones. Outside of particular communities, these subjective cognitions and the cultural artifacts created to express them will seem foreign and mostly illegible. Schleiermacher consistently associates these more physical forms of embodied communication with relatively constrained circles of intelligibility that emerge from a shared life.

At the level of personality, the two constitutive features of reason’s individual pole are *Gefühl* and fantasy. These features are closely associated with the body and facilitate the most

¹¹⁹ *Gemüthsstimmungen und Bewegungen* (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 20/27) Translation mine.

¹²⁰ Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 53/70.

¹²¹ Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 38-40/50-52, 195-196/264-266.

¹²² Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 195-196/264-266.

¹²³ “This system of organic movements which are both expression and sign of acts of consciousness, construed as the capacity for cognition with the character of identity found in schematism, is *language*.” (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 50/65)

elementary cognitive functions. *Gefühl* describes the subjective consciousness aroused by the world's impingements on the sensory organs, and fantasy describes the synthetic activity by which an individual combines and associates the manifold of sensory impressions into subjectively meaningful cognitions. Though analytically distinct, Schleiermacher insists that *Gefühl* and fantasy as inseparable *in concreto*; the synthetic activity of fantasy "penetrates" the "indeterminate diversity" of sensory impressions in *Gefühl*, inscribing one's own idiosyncratic "internal principle"¹²⁴ on each moment of consciousness. This principle makes each moment of consciousness uniquely one's own and integrates the entire series of experiences that make up one's life.¹²⁵

When this inner principle knits the deliverances of the senses into subjectively meaningful wholes, it does not do so haphazardly, or in an entirely idiosyncratic way. Rather, it imposes a kind of order on consciousness, although this order is not the object of objective knowledge.¹²⁶ The subjective cognitions of *Gefühl* are, instead, ordered axiologically. This inner synthetic principle operates as a "law," which, "is quite simply the general formula for the relative value of each individual thing for the individual person."¹²⁷ In other words, at the most basic level of affective consciousness, in the very knitting together of a subjectively coherent

¹²⁴ "For every feeling is the result of external influences on the unity of the internal principle, and every association is the result of the internal principle [penetrating] the objective in its indeterminate diversity." (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 54/70) Schleiermacher describes this inner principle as given, in part, biologically and constructed, in part, socially. As biological organism, human beings are relatively identical. But even at this level, we are differentiated by the unique combination of capacities or "talents" that we each possess. This "certain harmony of talents" forms the basis of particularity, distinguishes each individual from all others, and stands as the "inner principle which constantly reproduces the same living relationship regardless of the circumstances or external influences." (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 36/47)

¹²⁵ Grove, "Gefühl und Selbstbewusstsein," 114–18.

¹²⁶ While language serves as the paradigmatic medium for the transmission of objective knowledge for Schleiermacher, he acknowledges that even it appears in relatively more and relatively less identical form. Thus, while language bears a schematism that allows for utmost precision in communication, it also bears an expressive, artful dimension (i.e., the musicality of language) that modifies what and how it serves in social interaction. For a thorough and insightful discussion of this feature of Schleiermacher's thought, see Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 209–20.

¹²⁷ Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 54/72.

world, the individual has already immediately construed the objects within that world in accordance with some scheme of value.¹²⁸

This marks two important points of continuity with the Schleiermacher's account of the moral *Gefühl* as a "representing impulse" from his Kantian period. First, though it is now inextricably coupled with the activity of fantasy, *Gefühl* remains a synthetic, soul-grounding activity that evaluatively apprehends objects and actions within particular situations. It thus denotes a domain of consciousness that lies anterior to objective knowing and willing and constitutes their condition of possibility. Objective knowing and willing are cognitively downstream activities that further develop this immediate apprehension of the world in subjective feeling-consciousness.¹²⁹ Second, as aspects of *reason*, the dynamics of *Gefühl* and fantasy are not reducible to the organic, physiological dimensions of human nature, although they certainly depend upon them. Rather, they bear the imprint of a working mind, the activity of which perfects nature by giving it orderly, meaningful form. In particular, these subjective cognitions shape the world by depicting it in consciousness in a certain, evaluative light. This imposition or apprehension of intelligible forms in nature indicates that, even though subjective

¹²⁸ Like Iris Murdoch, Schleiermacher thinks that action is oriented by an apprehension in consciousness of a value-laden world. See Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2001). Maria Antonaccio vivifies this feature of Murdoch's thought in Maria Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human the Moral Thought of Iris Murdoch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 85–164.

¹²⁹ This is made more explicit in his *Lectures on Psychology*, where he distinguishes between subjective and objective forms of a subject's receptive activity vis-à-vis the world. *Gefühl* is the subjective form of receptivity whereas sensory perception is the objective form. Both designate responses to some organic affection stimulated by the influence of the world beyond the self, and the distinction between them is only relative. But whereas in *Gefühl*, the subject is conscious of the internal effects of the world's influence upon the self, sensory perception is a "reflection of the nature of the thing" in consciousness. See Schleiermacher, *SW* III/6, 418–420 as well as Schlenke's helpful discussion in Schlenke, *Geist und Gemeinschaft*, 29–35. Of course, the sensory perception of an object is only possible insofar as there is a living self that stands in a continuous relation to the various internal changes it undergoes on account of the influence of the world..

cognitions occur prior to and occasionally diverge from one's explicit judgments or intentions, they are no less *cognitions*, that is, world-directed states.¹³⁰

Schleiermacher's mature ethics also press beyond the moral psychological scope of his early Kantian period. His claim that *Gefühl* and fantasy are aspects of reason means that they also share in reason's social character and participate in the ethical process of *Bildung*. When fantasy shapes the "definite arousal[s]" of feeling into "images," Schleiermacher tells us that this constitutes a "presentational act."¹³¹ By this, he means that subjective cognitions "supersede" personality in the way that reason does in general. They naturally drive toward intersubjective recognition. Instead of conceptual contents that can be communicated through discursive speech, subjective cognitions depict an affective, value-laden construal of the world, an evaluative *mise-en-scène*, that is most adequately communicated through bodily gestures, facial expressions, tones, images, and "everything that can be an element of the arts."¹³² This representation cannot be boiled down to an abstract moral formula, the kind of context-independent principle that could be applied to nearly any situation. Rather, it must be shown to others through bodily gestures and revealed through artistic media.¹³³ The crucial point is that, while these

¹³⁰ Schleiermacher's clearest articulation of the relation between *Gefühl* and reason is found in the notes to his 1816/17 lectures: "All in all, what we call feeling is the expression of reason in nature, just as thought is. It is an activity of life that has come to being in nature, but only because of reason, and this is true not only of ethical and religious feeling but also of bodily feeling, provided that it is posited as human, and as an entire moment of feeling. Feeling in itself is even less an organ than thought, however, because it returns purely to itself. It is thus a definite expression of the way in which reason exists in this particular nature. For feeling, even of the very lowest kind, always expresses the effect that reason does or does not have within nature. And every feeling is always directed toward the unity of life, not toward something individual." (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 190/259)

¹³¹ *als einem eigentlich darstellenden Act.* (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 55/73)

¹³² Schleiermacher, 56/74. So whereas language communicates objective knowledge, the relatively non-transferable contents of subjective consciousness are transmitted artfully as intuition.

¹³³ "In fact gesture, taken in the broadest sense of the word, stands in the same direct and original relation to feeling as language does to thought; and just as no thought is mature and complete until it has simultaneously been made word, so no feeling is a complete and perfected act unless it has been made gesture." (Schleiermacher, 197/267) Whereas words allow for the contents of consciousness to be "articulated" and "reproduced" for the sake of "making intelligible," the gestures allow for the communication of feeling through "intimation" and "surmising"

communicative acts are less broadly intelligible than those structured by discursive thought, they are nonetheless communicative and, for that reason, they supersede personality no less than linguistic systems do.

This means that the affective cognitions that we express through bodily gestures and artistic media can be shared amongst social groups. This is particularly important for the social form that Schleiermacher calls the church, wherein “each person experiences religious feeling not merely as something personal but also as something held in common [and where] each endeavors to transmit the way he is affected to other people and to share in depiction of the way they are affected in his turn.”¹³⁴ Unsurprisingly, it is not simply discursive speech or clear and distinct ideas that facilitate this religious communication. Rather, Schleiermacher contends that actual religious communities rely on their own “artistic system” of gestures, images, music, and ritual to preserve and communicate such feelings.¹³⁵ The “highest tendency” in the church, he tells us, is the “formation of a collection of art treasures which enables each person to form his own feeling and in which each can deposit his own finest feelings.”¹³⁶ The more advanced members curate this treasure trove, cultivating their own feelings with those resources provided by their predecessors and contributing their own additions to the collection for the weaker members and for the sake of the tradition’s continued liveliness. This collection includes, presumably, the symbolic and mythic texts found in Scripture, but also the traditions of textual interpretation, religious painting, hymnody, and liturgical ritual. In fact, Schleiermacher places particular

for the sake of “revelation.” (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 197/267, translation by Dole, *Schleiermacher on Religion and the Natural Order*, 120)

¹³⁴ Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 92/122.

¹³⁵ Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 90/120.

¹³⁶ Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 92/122.

emphasis on the value of a religious community's cultic life which, as he puts it, both "expresses and nurtures" their distinctive common life.¹³⁷

We will further attend to Schleiermacher's understanding of distinctly religious feelings in Part III. But for now, I want to highlight two general points about his conception of affectivity and sociality in the moral life. First, it is clear that, for Schleiermacher, feelings can be collective in nature; they can be "something communal."¹³⁸ This does not mean that the individual members of a group hold a numerically identical feeling. In the case of a church, individuals members experience the religious feeling in their own way. But it is a *common feeling* that affects each member in their own way.¹³⁹

He describes this in more detail in his work on art and aesthetics.¹⁴⁰ When an artist creates a work of art, he or she transforms organic, bodily arousals into artful expressions by mediating these two moments of artistic production with a further, formative activity called *Urbildung*.¹⁴¹ This process begins in the primordial openness of a subject's sensory organs to the influences of the outside world. Human beings bear an elementary "willingness to be affected"¹⁴² that makes us vulnerable to all manner of bodily arousals in response to worldly stimuli. Over time, we passively synthesize these manifold arousals into "inner types" that,

¹³⁷ Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 92/122.

¹³⁸ *ein gemeinsames* (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 92/122)

¹³⁹ This becomes even more explicit in his dogmatic works, where the distinctly Christian feeling that binds all Christians in all times and places is a feeling of being swept up in redemption by Jesus of Nazareth. See *CG*² §§6 and 11. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5.

¹⁴⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Ästhetik (1819/25). Über Den Begriff Der Kunst (1831/32)*, ed. Thomas Lehnerer, Philosophische Bibliothek 365 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1984). The most comprehensive study of Schleiermacher's writings on art and aesthetics remains Thomas Lehnerer, *Die Kunsttheorie Friedrich Schleiermachers*, 1st ed. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987). Dorothee Schlenke's study situates Schleiermacher's work on art and aesthetics within his broader theory of subjectivity as developed in his lectures on psychology, dialectics, and ethics. In particular, see Schlenke, *Geist und Gemeinschaft*, 105–35.

¹⁴¹ It is this mediating step between arousal and expression that distinguishes "artistic" from "artless" activity. (Schleiermacher, *Ästhetik*, 10–11)

¹⁴² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermachers ästhetik, im auftrage der Preußischen Akademie und der Literatur-archiv-gesellschaft zu Berlin nach den bisher unveröffentlichten urschriften zum ersten male*, ed. Rudolf Odebrecht (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1931), 52.

according to Schleiermacher, introduce a degree of clarity and distinctness into our otherwise “clouded” apprehension of reality.¹⁴³ The world gradually appears not only as a chaotic barrage of pleasant or unpleasant stimuli but as bearing some meaningful, recognizable order. These inner types are not concepts, nor do they depend on discursive thought. Rather, they are products of an inner-emotional activity that Schleiermacher calls *Stimmung*.¹⁴⁴ The activity of *Urbildung* draws from these accumulated feeling types and imaginatively recombines them in new ways, further clarifying and vivifying the inner type that is only imperfectly apprehended in *Stimmung*. This synthetic, formative activity impresses a distinct feeling type into the work of art itself, effectively producing a “determinate universal,”¹⁴⁵ a pure archetypal presentation of something distilled to its essence. It is this *Urbild* that observers of a work of art recognize at a visceral level and that elicits roughly similar feelings within them. The artist’s feelings remain numerically distinct from those of the observer, but they are identical in terms of their ability to be subsumed under a single general feeling type. We might say, then, that although feeling is the most individual and subjective form of evaluative consciousness, it can also be communicated to and thereby shared with others to form communities of feeling.

Second, as Schleiermacher’s claim about the significance of the *cultus* for the church suggests, the transmission of feeling transpires not only between persons but also through time and space by means of cultural artifacts. Public worship is, after all, a ritual performance. It takes

¹⁴³ “When a person is in a state of passionate arousal, what arises most is that he or she is clouded [*getrübt*] by reality.” (Schleiermacher, *Ästhetik*, 37)

¹⁴⁴ *Stimmung*, frequently translated as “mood” or “attunement,” is for Schleiermacher an inner-emotional activity that synthesizes various bodily feelings into a more general feeling type. It thus imposes some elementary form on or apprehends such a form within reality’s manifold diversity, thereby introducing a degree of unity. This is important for his theory of art because, on his view, artistic activity emerges “not from the immediately aroused feeling, but rather from the combinatory activity of *Stimmung*. It is *Stimmung* that provides a moderation of arousal” by subsuming it under a more general type. (Schleiermacher, *Ästhetik*, 36–37) I will turn to this important concept in Chapter 4.1.

¹⁴⁵ Schleiermacher, *Ästhetik*, 45.

place within a particular built environment adorned in tradition-specific ways that are intended to arouse a distinctive, tradition-specific response. Though Schleiermacher does not develop this point in these lectures, the implication is that when individuals are invited into a particular social and material environment and participate in rituals that have been handed down over generations, they can be united in a common feeling with an entire religious tradition, an enduring community of pious feeling. The preservation and expansion of such a communal feeling is the distinctive vocation of churches, and their artistic system is carefully devised to facilitate this. But insofar as the dynamics involved are intrinsic to reason in general, a similar phenomenon should appear in every domain of ethical life where reason is operative. We might speculate that, not only churches, but the entire set of objective social goods produced by the ethical process are characterized by distinctive forms of common feeling.

This marks an important advance beyond both the Kantian and Romantic periods of Schleiermacher's thought. In the Kantian period, feeling was conceived almost exclusively in moral psychological terms as a synthetic, soul-grounding activity. In the Romantic period, Schleiermacher emphasized the significance of real relations with other people for the cultivation of ethical individuals, but even there, affectivity was understood primarily in terms of an individual person's ethical sense. At most, he writes about the loving interaction between persons and its ethically edifying effects on them. But here, in his mature ethics, we find a conception of feeling that emphasizes its collective, supra-personal form.

This claim follows from Schleiermacher's view that the subjective cognitions of feeling-consciousness are at least partly transmissible. But there is also a further, ethical claim about the significance of social affectivity for the moral life. The transmissibility of these affective cognitions across time and space through human artifice means that social affectivity exerts a

similar kind of soul- and culture-forming influence that Schleiermacher attributes to reason more generally. This happens in a particularly vivid form in the liturgical life of churches. But it also happens in the quotidian life within a household, where families cultivate a particular worldview and guests come to recognize a certain distinctive “feel” in the homes of their hosts. Elsewhere, Schleiermacher claims that the social life of feeling comes to a particularly intense expression in communal festivals, which he describes as “communal act[s] of discharging” in one, meaningful expression the cumulative, pent-up activity of “that which moves human beings inwardly in the business of life.”¹⁴⁶

Schleiermacher does not make this explicit, but we could also imagine similar social affective dynamics in less intimate but equally expressive settings. Consider, for example, the pomp and circumstance of graduation ceremonies, the pageantry of the courtroom, or the ceremonious decorum of a presidential inauguration. In each case, some bit of nature is shaped so as to express an evaluative perspective on the world for others to perceive and internalize. Graduations emphasize the good of education and welcome students into a guild of higher learning; the spectacle of the courtroom expresses the good of the rule of law as well as the severe consequences for transgressing it; presidential inaugurations trumpet the good of peaceful transitions of power. These public rites radiate an expressive content that is clearly evaluative without being exhaustively discursive. The words written on a diploma, the verdict issued by a judge, and the oath of office uttered by a new president are all vital parts of their respective dramas, but they remain only parts of much larger webs of significance. To reduce these embodied performances and the affective environments created thereby to their strictly discursive elements would be to severely diminish their impact on the lives of those involved.

¹⁴⁶ Schleiermacher, *Ästhetik*, 163–64. For discussion, see Schlenke, *Geist und Gemeinschaft*, 120..

These insights are pressing us beyond the letter of Schleiermacher's text, they are implied in his claims about the cultic life of churches and his more general claims about the world- and person-formative power of reason. Human life is suffused with these kinds of social affective dynamics. We live, move, and have our being in a world that has been profoundly shaped by the activity of prior generations, and that cumulative activity has been concretized in the embodied norms of cultural life and has even been inscribed into our built, material environment. Furthermore, this activity is not exhaustively discursive, and its expressive and formative powers are not confined to those aspects of our minds that are governed by logical and semantic processes. Our interaction with the world transpires at a more primordial level, one that forms us in ways that exceed our conscious awareness and that, despite our best efforts, proves exceedingly difficult to transform on our own. This difficulty owes, at least in part, to the fact that our immediate, subjective cognitions that set the evaluative scene within which we know and act are themselves profoundly influenced by the socially embedded, performatively embodied, and materially instantiated norms that we inherit from history. As Bernard Meland famously put this point much later, "we live more deeply than we think."¹⁴⁷

§5.3 Summary

We are now in a position to see how Schleiermacher's mature philosophical ethics not only retains but deepens his early psychological realism. As before, he claims that our wills remain bound within an evaluative apprehension of our moral world facilitated by *Gefühl* and related affective phenomena. But his mature ethics deepens this psychological realism by

¹⁴⁷ Bernard Eugene Meland, *Fallible Forms and Symbols: Discourses on Method in a Theology of Culture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 184.

situating the individual agent within his or her formative social relations and cultural conditions which reciprocally act and are acted upon by individual agents. Although he presents these dynamics in the idiom of transcendental idealism as the activity of reason upon nature, closer inspection reveals this activity to entail a decidedly affective dimension that, as a dimension of *reason*, plays a critical role in the ethical process as a whole. Within the individual soul, it appears as the felt, evaluative grasp of a moral world in consciousness that constrains and enables our cognitions and volitions. As a feature of social collectives and objective conditions, it appears as the shared feelings that circulate through groups and their cultural artifacts, coordinating the affective responses of those involved and orienting the cognitive and volitional activity of a culture.

In other words, human affectivity has a social life, human sociality has an affective life, and both are important for ethical life as a whole. Though Schleiermacher had no concept of racialized social structures nor any sense for how deeply racial bias lurks in our implicit minds, my claim is that this reconstruction of his insights about affectivity and sociality can help us understand the nature of racism's tenacity and its meaning for our self-understanding as agents. Of course, this will require further reconstruction, and I pursue that task in the following chapter. But first, I want to conclude by summarizing some of the key points about affectivity and sociality in Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics and to make a preliminary case for the contribution they make to our larger inquiry.

§6 Conclusion: Social Affectivity in Schleiermacher's Philosophical Ethics

This chapter has argued that, despite clear developments in style and substance across his career, the themes of affectivity and sociality stand as recurring touchstones in Schleiermacher's

understanding of ethical life. What began as a moral psychological inquiry into the nature of moral motivation opened up into a phenomenological inquiry of culture that entails a suggestive account of the social and historical transmission of affectivity and its evaluative logic. Although the scope and complexity of his ethics increased over the course of his career, I have argued that his early commitment to psychological realism has remained intact. In fact, I made the even stronger claim that his later turn to situate agents within their formative social relations and affective environments deepened this realism. This means that the moral *Gefühl* must not only compete against the various amoral and immoral impulses teeming in our embodied souls. It must also compete with the social affectivity that, as part of the activity of reason, both precedes and supersedes each individual. The way in which individuals immediately perceive and evaluate the world around them as well as their place within it is strongly informed by social and cultural patterns that they did not choose, that frequently evade their awareness, and that prove equally evasive of their intentional efforts to control or correct them.

This reconstruction helps us think about the larger questions of this project in at least two preliminary ways. The first concerns the nature of social evils like racism. The second concerns the enduring possibility of moral motivation amidst seemingly overwhelming threats.

First, the person-forming power of social affectivity provides a way for us understand how it is possible for social logics like the dark ontology of race to permeate our most immediate, subjective evaluations of one another and ourselves. This was one of the central questions remaining from Part I. If critical race theorists speak of supra-personal structures of white supremacy and social psychologists speak of embodied, unconscious, and automatic antiblack attitudes, how can we understand the tight coordination between these two dimensions of racial life?

This concept of social affectivity proves helpful because it implies that our immediate, evaluative construals of our environment are not merely our own. Rather, they are at least partly the product of our involvement in the social affective dynamics that both surround us as features of our social and material environment and permeate our inner lives. This suggests, furthermore, that we need not conceive of implicit biases merely in attitudinalist terms. Certainly, the psychological construct of an implicit attitude helps to explain some of what scientists observe about implicit racial bias. But these explanations also occlude other aspects, such as the forms of social causality that are clearly involved in generating these biases as well as the wider web of interpersonal and social effects in which these biased judgments and actions are imbricated. On these points, this nascent concept of social affectivity promises to augment the attitudinalist explanations of racism's tenacity preferred by many social psychologists.

The same can be said for those explanations offered by critical race theorists. Those explanations relied on the construct of social structures to articulate the irreducibility of racism's tenacity to individual attitudes and personal action. These structures describe the materially embedded patterns that preserve and further entrench white racial dominance. While Charles Mills invoked concepts like white ignorance and white *Herrenvolk* ethics to describe the effect of such social causation on the inner lives of agents, I argued that these emphasize the doxastic components of racial cognition to the neglect of those affective and perceptual dimensions revealed in the empirical research on implicit racial bias. By contrast, this concept of social affectivity foregrounds the embodied, evaluative dimension of consciousness and situates it within a wider nexus of affective dynamics at play in interpersonal, cultural, and even material environments.

In these ways, the concept of social affectivity promises to contribute descriptive coherence to our understanding of racism's tenacity precisely by linking the embodied psychological mechanisms of individuals with their formative social, cultural, and material environment. This is a provisional claim, however, because Schleiermacher's writings provide very little conceptually to help us grasp the particular, concrete political and psychological realities of contemporary antiblack racism. For that, we need to hermeneutically reconstruct this general insight about human nature in light of the conceptual repertoire of critical race theory. The following chapter attempts this kind of reconstruction.

But there is one further insight to be drawn from Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics. In addition to the descriptive question about the nature of racism's tenacity, Part I also left us with an ethical question about the meaning of moral agency amidst the seemingly pervasive, impersonal impediments to rational action guidance in race-salient situations. On first glance, the concept of social affectivity might even render these impediments more threatening. If the empirical findings of implicit racial bias are detecting not just individually biased attitudes but sweeping, social-affective dynamics that overwhelm individual agents and manipulate them to immediately exclude Black people from the moral community at the level of perception, then perhaps there are situations in which the possibility of moral motivation is truly eliminated. This raises further worries about the appropriateness of holding persons who exhibit these kinds of biases morally responsible for their actions.

On this point, we do well to return to Schleiermacher's early account of moral motivation in "On Freedom," and, in particular, to his concept of the "boundlessness of impulses." Recall that, in this early critical engagement with Kant, Schleiermacher affirms the transcendental possibility of moral motivation in every possible context, but he does so without recourse to a

noumenal personality. Instead, he turns to the multifarious, frenetic activities of our ordinary faculty of desire, which he presents as teeming with all manner of impulses. Distinctly moral motivation occurs when the moral *Gefühl* represents a given situation as a situation calling for moral action and successfully subordinates the other, amoral and immoral impulses to itself. This makes moral motivation especially precarious; it can always be derailed by some especially strong inclination.

But Schleiermacher argues that this precariousness never reaches the point of completely eliminating the possibility of moral agency. He contends that there is no single impulse, or even any aggregation of impulses, that is so great that we cannot conceive of an even greater impulse overcoming and subduing it. Since the moral *Gefühl* is an impulse, it is always conceivable that it could subordinate the other impulses and serve as the subjective determining ground of an agent's action.

Though the picture of moral agency we find in Schleiermacher's mature ethics vastly expands the complexity and extent of these affective forces, the insight about the boundlessness of impulses remains just as true in 1812 as it did in the early 1790s. Even for creatures who have been so thoroughly socialized by the logic of race that they automatically identify moral personhood with whiteness and perceive Black and other nonwhite people as inferior deviations of that standard, it remains at least conceivable that they could summon another impulse that represents all human beings as persons of intrinsic value who deserve moral respect. We could imagine this moral impulse emerging from an agent's reflection on the apparent inconsistency of treating human beings differently on account of their race. But it is probably more likely that this new evaluative representation comes to one from an external source. Perhaps he is overtaken with grief and horror when he witnesses an episode of antiblack violence. Perhaps the sight of a

Black man holding a sign with the words “I am a man,” or of protesters chanting that “Black Lives Matter,” leads him to reflect on the conditions that make such utterances necessary. To be sure, these same events might have no effect or even an adverse one. But they suggest that it is at least conceivable for agents to conjure a moral representation of race-salient situations. And as these examples imply, these moral representations are likely to have an affective valence of their own.

In sum, I have argued that Schleiermacher’s philosophical ethics provide conceptual resources for integrating insights about the nature of racism’s tenacity from critical race theory and social psychology. They also provide a way to understand moral motivation as at least possible in every concrete situation. This latter point means that Schleiermacher has helped to identify a moral reality, an enduring feature of human nature that is irreducible to the amoral and immoral political and psychological realities described in Part I. Though irreducible to these realities, I have argued that this formulation of moral agency in terms of the boundlessness of impulses in no way idealizes them. On the contrary, I have shown that this reconstruction is psychologically realistic insofar as it gives a compelling account of not only the possibility of moral motivation but also of the multiple, complex, and recalcitrant forces that threaten it.

This means that we have a preliminary account of racism’s tenacity that is morally realistic. It is, however, a preliminary account. First, while I have shown this to be a psychologically realistic account of moral motivation, I have not yet integrated it within an account of those political realities that characterize the concrete context of contemporary antiblack racism. To do this, we need to return to Charles Mills’s account of the dark ontology of race and white supremacy as a socio-political system. Second, while my reconstructed concept of social affectivity holds promise for thinking about racism’s tenacity, it remains conceptually

underdeveloped, and it is not sufficiently clear yet whether it has warrant independent of Schleiermacher's work. What is social affectivity, exactly? And how does it illumine contemporary racism? To answer these questions, we turn next to the phenomenology of "atmospheres" and develop an account of the dark atmospherics of race.

CHAPTER 4

THE DARK ATMOSPHERICS OF RACE

The previous chapter reconstructed a concept of social affectivity from Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics that, I argued, promises to integrate two dimensions of antiblack racism's tenacity in American life. On the one hand, such tenacity seems to require us to speak of supra-personal social structures that reproduce racial inequalities in the absence of explicit racists. On the other hand, social psychologists contend that implicit racial attitudes are at least partly to blame for racism's staying power. The concept of social affectivity provides a way to grasp both of these dimensions and to articulate their relationship. Like social structures, social affectivity is not reducible to the inner life of any particular individual but is rather shared amongst groups and even materially embedded in cultural artifacts. Like implicit attitudes, social affectivity permeates the most primordial domains of evaluative consciousness and modulates how individuals affectively and perceptually apprehend one another and their world. These features make social affectivity a promising candidate for explaining how it is that objective social structures shape our most spontaneous, evaluative responses in race-salient situations and coordinate our conduct in ways that perpetuate antiblack racism.

Though promising and suggestive, this concept also raises questions. What exactly is social affectivity, and why should we think of it as a truly social entity, one that is not simply an aggregate of individual attitudes or psychological projections? On account of the abstract style of Schleiermacher's mature philosophical ethics, we are left with a rather meager sense of what these peculiar phenomena are actually like. Furthermore, while he does gesture toward

affectivity as something that can be communally shared, the concept of *Gefühl* remains for him primarily a domain of self-consciousness and thus an attribute of individuals. His claims about collective consciousness and communal feelings seem to be derived from his psychology of individuals.¹ So, if a concept of social affectivity is to avoid collapsing into a reductive attitudinal view, we must think not only with but also beyond Schleiermacher and his conceptual repertoire.

Alongside these questions about the phenomenal character of social affectivity and its coherence as a concept, there are even more basic questions about whether we have any independent reasons apart from Schleiermacher's work to think that such things exist. If we have understood affectivity in psychological terms for so long, what cause have we to begin thinking of feelings and emotions as somehow irreducible to our inner lives? Finally, even if we grant that social affectivity exists and that it is conceptually coherent, what does it reveal about antiblack racism?

This chapter responds to these questions by engaging in a second hermeneutical reconstruction. Whereas the previous chapter conducted an internal reconstruction of Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics in order to generate the concept of social affectivity, this chapter performs an external reconstruction by thinking both with and beyond Schleiermacher in two ways. First, I turn to recent phenomenological research to demonstrate that social affectivity

¹ Thomas Lehnerer argues convincingly for this point. Lehnerer, *Die Kunsttheorie Friedrich Schleiermachers*, 261–62. Others, specifically Schleiermacher scholars writing in Germany in the 1930s, argue that Schleiermacher has in mind a more collective consciousness of a people, even a kind of “*Volksseele*.” See Rudolf Odebrecht, *Schleiermachers system der Ästhetik: Grundlegung und problemgeschichtliche Sendung* (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1932), 89. For more recent discussion of the primacy of the individual in Schleiermacher's work, see Frank Vogelsang, *Die Rede von Gott in einer offenen Wirklichkeit: phänomenologisch-hermeneutische Untersuchungen nach Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur und Waldenfels*, *Fermenta philosophica* (Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber, 2016), 111–15; Manke Jiang, *Religion und Individualität bei Schleiermacher*, *Schleiermacher-Archiv* 30 (Walter de Gruyter, 2020).

is a rather ordinary feature of human life and, furthermore, that the concept of “atmosphere” helps to clarify its nature and its influence on moral agency. In fact, I will make an even stronger claim that atmospheres constitute a basic structure of lived reality that obtain for every agent and in every concrete situation. Second, I return to Charles Mills’s concept of the dark ontology of race, which identifies the distinctly racial social logic of white moral persons and nonwhite moral sub-persons. I argue that these resources help to reconstruct Schleiermacher’s rather undeveloped notion of social affectivity in a way that makes vivid a frequently overlooked dimension of racial life and clarifies the meaning of racism’s tenacity for agents who are enveloped and permeated by them. I call this dimension of racial life “the dark atmospherics of race;” it refers to the social affective dynamic characteristic of racialized social orders that make the distinction between white moral persons and nonwhite moral sub-persons immediately palpable in race-salient situations and, through these phenomenological effects, coordinate the conduct of agents in ways that materialize that very distinction in social and material existence.

This hermeneutical reconstruction of social affectivity in racialized life helps to explain how agents can be vulnerable to the kind of moral enervation in racial situations indicated by studies of implicit racial bias without constraining moral agency to mental causation or rendering it an epiphenomenon of social structural dynamics. My argument will be successful if it a) demonstrates the plausibility of social affectivity as a structure of lived reality that b) discloses aspects of racialized life overlooked by attitudinal and structural theories and c) integrates the genuine insights from critical race theory and social psychology into the nature of antiblack racism’s tenacity. Insofar as this account provides a more adequate response to the question of tenacious antiblack racism’s moral meaning than either attitudinal or structural positions, it marks an advance in our understanding of antiblack racism as a moral problem.

This chapter proceeds in four steps. First, I develop the concept of an atmosphere by exploring Schleiermacher's own usage of the term before turning to more recent phenomenological research on these quotidian yet puzzling entities. The latter research helps to vivify the notion of social affectivity as well as clarify its nature and its relationship to agency. Second, I show that this concept not only discloses a structure of lived reality but also proves particularly illuminating for racial situations. I turn to examples of these phenomena as described in the work of James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon, and Audre Lord that are neither simply structural nor attitudinal but lie somewhere in between. Having demonstrated the plausibility and disclosive power of the concept of atmosphere for racial situations, the third section constructs a new concept to describe what is going on in the social affective dimension of racialized life. I call this concept the dark atmospherics of race, an extension of Mills's notion of the dark ontology of race that emerges from a fusion of horizons with Schleiermacher's account of sociality and affectivity in ethical life. In the final section, I argue that in addition to improving our grasp of the phenomenological richness of racial situations, this concept provides theoretical connective tissue to integrate the individual-psychological and social-structural dimensions of racism as well as a more subtle articulation of the agent-environment relation than those offered in structuralist and mentalist accounts of action. I then motivate the dissertation's theological turn by raising further questions about psychological and moral integrity that this strictly philosophical account fails to answer.

§1 Social Affectivity as Atmosphere

The claim that American racism bears an affective dimension is hardly new. Intense feelings such as hatred, contempt, fear, and rage are paradigmatic elements of, and responses to,

the kind overt racism built on explicit racial prejudices. As we have seen, critical race theorists like Mills insist that these attitudes are neither necessary nor sufficient for understanding contemporary racism, since racial inequality persists even in the absence of widespread antiblack prejudice. This insight motivated the structuralist turn away from the interior life of agents and toward the exterior conditions that constrain and enable agential life. To seek explanations for racism's tenacity "in the heart"² is to neglect the more potent forms of social causality revealed through social scientific and social theoretical analyses.

This seems at odds with my claim that racism's affective dimensions are critical for understanding its recalcitrance to moral suasion and political subversion. But that is only the case if affectivity is understood primarily in terms of individual attitudes. Following developments in affect theory and German neo-phenomenology, I contend that affective attitudes like feelings and emotions are better understood as subjective registering of dynamics that fundamentally exceed and encompass the subject.³ These broader forces emerge from and pertain primarily to a situation that includes a living, feeling self but that is not reducible to that self. Despite their supra-individual status, atmospheres remain properly affective insofar as they a) manifest in a living body as a felt quality of a situation and b) grip the agents involved in that situation in the

² The paradigmatic example of such an account is Jorge L.A. Garcia's volitional account of racism. See Garcia, "The Heart of Racism"; Jorge L. A. Garcia, "Current Conceptions of Racism: A Critical Examination of Some Recent Social Philosophy (English)," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 28, no. 2 (1997): 5–42; Garcia, "Philosophical Analysis and the Moral Concept of Racism."

³ For one particularly illuminating perspective from affect theory, see Jan Slaby, "Relational Affect: Perspectives from Philosophy and Cultural Studies," in *How to Do Things with Affects: Affective Triggers in Aesthetic Forms and Cultural Practices*, ed. Ernst van Alphen and Tomáš Jirsa, *Thamyris/Intersecting: Place, Sex and Race* 34 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 59–81, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004397712_005. For a concise articulation of some of the major trends in the so-called "new phenomenology," see Hermann Schmitz, Rudolf Owen Müllan, and Jan Slaby, "Emotions Outside the Box—the New Phenomenology of Feeling and Corporeality," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 10, no. 2 (June 2011): 241–59, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-011-9195-1>. For two more recent developments in the phenomenology of atmospheres, see Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*, 4th ed., Edition Suhrkamp 2664 (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019); Tonino Griffero, *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*, trans. Sarah De Sanctis (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014).

manner of a passion. In order to support my claim that racism's affective dimensions are central to its tenacity, I first need to show that such supra-individual forms of affectivity are plausible and that they influence agential capacities and conduct in the ways that systemic racism does.

§1.1 *Stimmungen* and Atmospheres in Schleiermacher's *Lectures on Psychology and Aesthetics*

The concept of atmosphere is, of course, originally meteorological. It denotes an ambient weather or climatic condition that surrounds and permeates human existence. When I find myself caught in a rainstorm, the moist atmosphere saturates my clothes and trickles down my face. But I also inhale that moisture into my lungs and absorb it through my skin only to expel some of it back into my environment, which is then inhaled by others or absorbed by plants. The atmosphere is thus primarily a feature of one's environment, but the relation between the living self and its atmospheric environment is ineluctably porous.

This porous quality of atmospheres is one that Schleiermacher himself notes. Though certainly not a central concept in his work, Schleiermacher invokes atmospheres⁴ in his *Lectures on Psychology*⁵ at a crucial and illuminating juncture where he describes the sensory functions of *Gefühl*.⁶ Sensory functions refer to the bodily aspects of a living self that render it receptive to the organic, physical influences from the world beyond it. Before knowing anything about the world or desiring to change it, Schleiermacher contends that the subject must first be organically

⁴ The German term is *die Atmosphäre*, but *die Stimmung* is frequently used to refer to atmospheres in their non-meteorological sense. Schleiermacher himself places these terms in close relation, as I note below. *Die Stimmung* is often translated into English as "mood," but as David Wellbery notes, mood rarely carries the relatively objective quality of *Stimmung* in the German usage. If it does, it is usually qualified as in the "political mood" of Paris in 1968 or the "aesthetic mood" of Picasso's Spain. See David E. Wellbery, "Stimmung," in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe (ÄGB) historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, ed. Karlheinz Barck et al., vol. 5, 7 vols. (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlag, 2003), 703–33.

⁵ *SW* III/6.

⁶ *SW* III/6, 422f; 504f; 76f.

affected by it. Such being-affected is mediated by sensory functions in one of two ways. The particular sensory functions include the five senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell) which depict sensory objects in consciousness. We see a table, taste a fresh slice of bread, or hear the buzz of a hummingbird. The general sensory function, on the other hand, neither depicts objects in consciousness nor is it associated with any one of the five senses. This function, which he calls the “skin sense,”⁷ is affected by one’s environment as a whole and represents environmental qualities to the subject in the form of elementary opposites such as heat and cold, wet and dry. Schleiermacher compares it to respiration which, as “the lowest physical basis” of feeling-consciousness, does not so much take up material from the world as it is “merely dynamically affected” by the environing situation as a whole. Schleiermacher calls this expressive quality of a situation that registers in consciousness through the skin sense an atmosphere.⁸

As the self is dynamically affected by its environment, it immediately grasps the atmospheric quality (wet/dry, warm/cold) and registers its influence on the living self as a whole. If the atmosphere is too cold or too hot, the subject feels pain. If the atmosphere is suitable, it elicits a feeling of pleasure. Two things are important to note here. First, Schleiermacher insists that the living self’s dynamic interaction with an atmosphere results in the immediate, that is, pre-reflective, assessment of the environment’s conduciveness to one’s own life expressed in the basic contrast of pleasure or pain. We do not draw any inferences from a warm sensation to a feeling of pleasure; it happens to us immediately. Second, insofar as this assessment appears immediately in feeling, the interaction between the skin sense and an atmosphere is doubly disclosive, revealing both something about the self and something about the environment within

⁷ *SW* III/6, 428-429.

⁸ “[T]he skin sense just is the immediate and exclusive intercourse with an atmosphere.” (*SW* III/6, 429)

which the self is situated. When I walk outside of my Chicago classroom in January without a coat, the icy quality of the atmosphere, the shivering in my limbs, and the feeling of discomfort each appear to me instantaneously. This complex interaction reveals to me features of my environment (its life-threatening coldness) and features of myself (my vulnerability to the cold).

In the immediate context of his discussion of atmospheres and the skin sense, Schleiermacher invokes another term that has been importantly correlated to recent phenomenological discussions of atmospheres, namely, *Stimmung*. Having just claimed that the living body immediately registers the conduciveness of an atmosphere for the subject's life process as a whole, he must then explain how it is possible for the determinations of the general sensory function (i.e., the skin sense) which, as an aspect of feeling-consciousness, marks a moment of receptivity to the world, is related to the spontaneous life functions, i.e., cognition and volition. Since Schleiermacher claims that the skin sense registers the conduciveness of an atmosphere for the self's life processes *as a whole*, there must be some activity that binds together the functionally distinct life processes undergirding the subject's sense of itself as a self. That is, there must be some further synthetic activity that allows subjects to have a sense, not only for what advances or diminishes this or that life process (i.e., sight, hearing, respiration, cognition, etc.), but what advances or diminishes one's life as a whole. He writes that, "[t]his influence of feeling upon the active function is that which we call *Stimmung*."⁹ For Schleiermacher, the activity of *Stimmung* regulates the attentional and perceptual processes of a subject in dynamic relation to its environment.¹⁰ The quality of *Stimmung* is not entirely within the subject's control; our mood is as much determined by the influence of our environment on us

⁹ *SW* III/6, 429.

¹⁰ For the secondary literature on *Stimmung* in Schleiermacher's thought, see Schlenke, *Geist und Gemeinschaft*; Lehnerer, *Die Kunsttheorie Friedrich Schleiermachers*.

as it is our own conscious attempts to control it, although this can improve with practice. It also determines to a large extent what a subject perceives and what she does not perceive. The person in a cheerful mood perceives cheerful aspects of her environment with ease, whereas the gloomy elements fade into the background and are only noticed with difficulty.¹¹ Finally, the relative ease or difficulty with which a subject perceives particular elements of their environment is the function of both innate temperament and social conditioning.

Though Schleiermacher has relatively little to say about atmospheres and *Stimmungen*,¹² these concepts appear at crucial moments in his theory of subjectivity and identify features of lived reality that later thinkers would come to explore more thoroughly. Specifically, Schleiermacher invokes them to theorize the relationship between a living self and its environment. This relationship is importantly affective; both general and particular sensory functions are elements of *Gefühl*, the receptive side of consciousness. The feeling consciousness that emerges from the living body's affective involvement in its environment entails a primitive, evaluative dimension that registers in the feeling of pleasure or pain. Furthermore, Schleiermacher's discussion of these realities leads him to ascribe a synthetic activity to the soul that is neither volitional nor cognitive but rather affective and perceptual. Finally, *Stimmungen*

¹¹ "That is what we use to refer to with the expression *Stimmung*, where that which affects us is received [*aufgenommen*] only to the extent that it is given to us in receptivity, as we receive only the cheerful in the cheerful mood, the depressive in a depressed mood, which is of the same type. So that is the character of the melancholic, that it persists in a mood for a long time and that every impression easily becomes a mood. This persistence of the tendency to be affirmed in the same way we must think of under the form of the vibration; it will gradually decrease, but the stronger the temperament, the longer it will last." (*SW* III/6, 310)

¹² Besides these cursory remarks in his *Lectures on Psychology*, the most concerned attention to *Stimmung* appears in Schleiermacher's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, where it plays a similarly synthetic role in the domain of feeling. Specifically, it refers primarily to that aspect of human psychology which synthesizes diverse moments of affection into a relatively stable, enduring feeling. Lehnerer calls this an "emotional universal," a felt discernment of one's environment that includes some primitive kind of judgment but that remains importantly distinct from the higher, "cognitive" [*erkennenden*] functions of the mind. (Lehnerer, *Die Kunsttheorie*, 257) It is *Stimmung* which determines whether an expressive response to reality is merely reactive and "artless" or entails some order and measure, rendering it "artful" [*kunstlose, künstlerliche*]. See Schleiermacher, *Ästhetik*, 10f, 37.

are construed as essentially one's own even as they mark an openness of the subject to that which lies beyond it.

§1.2 Atmospheres in German Neo-Phenomenology

These Schleiermacherian insights are provocative, but they remain undeveloped in his works. There is, however, a strong interest in atmospheres and *Stimmungen* amongst the neo-phenomenologists who work primarily in the German-speaking world. These thinkers largely trace their intellectual lineage from Edmund Husserl through Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The movement's founder, Hermann Schmitz, composed a multi-volume study of the role of the "felt or living body" [*der Leib*] in the structure of experience.¹³ He argues that this provides a point from which to resist the natural scientific reduction of the felt body to the "physical body" [*der Körper*] and, correlatively, the misrepresentation of emotions and feelings as essentially psychological states, or attitudes. By centering a phenomenology on the felt body, these thinkers contend that we can begin to appreciate the spatial aspects of feeling and move beyond the fateful misstep of psychologizing them.

My concern is not with the German neo-phenomenologists themselves so much as what they help us see about atmospheric feelings. Their interest in atmospheres and *Stimmungen* centers on the porous and evaluative qualities already noted by Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century. When we walk into a crowded room, we immediately detect the felt quality of the space. The room might have an icy sterility, or it could seem inviting and warm. In either case, this feeling registers immediately within us. We do not reason our way to this general quality of the space through inductive inference. The room as a whole simply presents itself to us

¹³ Hermann Schmitz, *System der Philosophie*, 5 vols. (Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1964-1980).

as hostile or inviting. Of course, we might reflect on why it was that the room felt the way it did. Perhaps it was the jubilant smiles of the people, the lush afternoon light pouring in through the windows, or the smell of freshly baked bread. But this analysis of the room's components is motivated by a prior experience of the room as a whole, one that strongly inflects our experience of its parts.

Consider another example. Suppose that you attend a dinner party hosted by a colleague strictly because you feel obliged to go. As you walk up to the house, the loud bustle of the party suggests a festive air. But since you are not thrilled to be there, you find yourself rather annoyed by the sound of your colleagues merriment. Your mood lifts, however, when you walk inside and notice a long-lost friend standing across the room. The two of you embrace and quickly get lost in reliving old times. Quickly, the rest of the room seems to fade into the background. Not only do you find your friend's quirky mannerisms delightful, but they set you at ease, filling you with a warm, comfortable nostalgia. After only a few joyful minutes, both of you feel the ambience change when the boorish host intrudes upon your conversation and drunkenly mutters an off-color joke. You suddenly remember where you are. The joy of reconnecting with your friend evaporates and is replaced by a keen frustration toward the host. Not only did he "make" you come to his party, but now he has robbed you of that which made it bearable. Though the host remains completely oblivious to his intrusion, others who observed this altercation surmise how you feel from your expression. They too feel a hint of frustration, or at least some polite embarrassment, toward the host.

We colloquially speak of these phenomena as if something were "in the air" even if their perception or recognition typically registers in bodily feelings. The iciness of a room makes my joints stiffen and my movements cautious. The off-color joke sends a flush of redness to my face

or, depending on the company, it might summon a transgressive chuckle. At the funeral of a friend, my throat constricts with emotion as the organ fills the space with the concluding chords of “How Great Thou Art.” As each of these examples show, the felt qualities that we register as individuals emerge from and pertain primarily to the environment. I experience the iciness, not as a projection of my own attitudes, but as a property of *the room*. The solemnity I feel is a property of *the funeral*.

§1.2.1 Atmospheres as Properties of Subject-Involving Situations

This suggests that atmospheres are not adequately understood as individual feelings or attitudes.¹⁴ Rather, I propose that they are properties of a situation, a *milieu* that precedes and envelops multiple felt bodies in which each is affectively involved. By situations, I simply mean scenes of life taken as a whole. They include, first and foremost, the ambient material environment, that is, everything that can become an object of sense perceptions: the green grasses of a field, the smooth stones of a cathedral floor, the warm hearth in a winter cottage. But situations also include the human beings and their relational dynamics that emerge within those settings. There may be children frolicking in the field, congregants gathered in a cathedral to hear a sermon, and a dysfunctional family seated awkwardly around the cottage hearth in a vacation gone awry. The assemblage of material and human elements of a situation combine to

¹⁴ Friedlind Riedel defines atmosphere as “a feeling, mood, or *Stimmung* that fundamentally exceeds an individual body and instead pertains primarily to the overall situation in which bodies are entrenched. The concept of an atmosphere thus challenges a notion of feelings as the private mental states of a cognizant subject and instead construes feelings as collectively embodied, spatially extended, material, and culturally inflected.” Friedlind Riedel, “Atmosphere,” in *Affective Societies: Key Concepts*, ed. Jan Slaby and Christian von Scheve, 1st ed., Routledge Studies in Affective Societies (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 85. Tonino Griffero defines an atmosphere similarly as “a qualitative-sentimental *prius*, spatially poured out, of our sensible encounter with the world.” (Griffero, *Atmospheres*, 5) While various theorists construe the degree to which atmospheres exceed the inner lives of individual agents in different degrees, they generally agree that these phenomena are not simply mental attitudes.

produce a spatially extended feeling that, while it registers in individuals, is not reducible to any particular individual.

More must be said about what it means for a feeling to be spatially extended. But we should first note another feature of situations; namely, that they are telescopic. A monk reading the psalms in his cell is enveloped in an atmosphere, as is the prisoner held in solitary confinement. The examples of atmospheres at a dinner party and a funeral emerge from more explicitly social situations that could simply not exist without a panoply of symbolically laden interactions, rituals, and interpersonal processes. But while the intensity of these intimate gatherings makes them useful examples, they are themselves ensconced within and permeated by more extensive, if perhaps more diffuse, atmospheres. For instance, it makes a difference to the feel of a funeral whether it is held by white Congregationalists in New England or black Baptists in Georgia. The dinner party's atmosphere would change considerably if the entirely working-class male participants were replaced by women with advanced degrees in gender studies. Though analytically distinct, these multiple atmospheric layers are always operative in a given situation. The solitary monk's affective involvement in the atmosphere of his cell is not entirely uninfluenced by the wider cultural and social currents of the world. The atmosphere of the party composed entirely of working-class men is altered if even one of those men happened to be a monk. This telescopic quality makes the concept of atmosphere useful for articulating the complexity of lived situations, where much more is often going on than first meets the eye. But it also highlights a commonality running from the most solitary moments of human life to the most expansive, world-historical ones. In all situations, no matter their size, the individuals ensconced within them are to some degree affected by the plural atmospheres that emerge from them well before they think, deliberate, or act therein.

We can now say more about what it means for an atmosphere to be a spatially extended feeling. They appear to us as located in and bound to particular places that are distinguishable from other places. When we walk into a cathedral from the street, the new situation announces itself to us as an atmospheric shift. There is a threshold where the bustle of city traffic gradually ends and the cool, contemplative air of the cathedral begins. This is a porous threshold. The cathedral's atmosphere pours out into the street, whether in the singing of hymns that emanate from its windows or in its massive, gothic presence in a cityscape otherwise filled with commercial activity. The city's atmosphere also seeps into the cathedral, although progressively less so as one moves from the narthex to the nave and, finally, to the altar. Some theorists have argued that such spatially poured out feelings are "pre-dimensional."¹⁵ This simply means that, while atmospheres are spatially located in ways that entail limits and thresholds, one cannot measure the cathedral's atmosphere in the same way that you can measure the width of its walls or the height of its spires. The towering eminence of St. John the Divine in New York City is not confined to its physical proportions, and the joyous atmosphere of the summer barbeque wafts for several blocks beyond the property line.

As spatially extended feelings that emerge from and pertain primarily to a situation as a whole, atmospheres are irreducible to individual feelings and attitudes. On this view, such attitudes are rather the effects of the atmosphere on the felt bodies already affectively involved in the situation. This mutual involvement does not necessarily mean that each person feels the numerically identical feeling, or that each feels it to the same degree. Consider the example of a funeral. No doubt the family of the deceased is moved more intensely by the funeral's atmosphere than those who barely knew him. The estranged son is certain to have a different

¹⁵ Griffero, *Atmospheres*, 36–47.

experience than the father's favorite daughter, and the passerby who happens to see the trail of mourners in procession may not feel much of anything. But these diverse experiences each arise in response to something that everyone involved shares in common. They are each affected by the same expressive quality of the funeral, its solemnity, albeit in their own way. Even the estranged son who is so filled with bitter resentment toward his father that he resolves to feel nothing, demonstrates precisely with this response that he has already been affected.

Atmospheres are thus not entirely subjective phenomena, but neither are they entirely objective. Different theorists have described them as “half-things”¹⁶ or “quasi-things.”¹⁷ The designation is less important here than this ontological ambiguity. As Gernot Böhme puts it,

atmospheres are neither something objective, that is, qualities possessed by things, and yet they are something thinglike, belonging to the thing in that things articulate their presence through qualities. Nor are atmospheres something subjective, for example, determinations of a psychic state. And yet they are subjectlike, belonging to subjects in that they are sensed in bodily presence by human beings and this sensing is at the same time a bodily state of being of subjects in space.¹⁸

¹⁶ Hermann Schmitz developed this distinction between “full-things” and “half-things.” On his view, things are any material entity that can become an object of experience. Stones are things, as are trees, castles, and chairs. They have two important properties. First, their perdurance in time is only possible in a continuous fashion without interruption. An ice cube remains what it is only so long as it does not melt into a puddle. This interruption in its existence negates its duration. Second, they participate in a kind of causality that is distinct from their mode of influence. If I throw a block of ice at a window and shatter it, the block of ice may be the cause, but it was the mode of influence, namely the fact that it was *thrown*, that made it efficacious. Half-things, on the other hand, can endure in existence with interruption and they participate in the kind of causality in which the cause is indistinct from mode of influence. Schmitz lists examples such as voices, the wind, the sense of gravity, electric shocks, pain, melodies, and shrill sounds. A voice does not cease being a voice in between enunciated words resounding in the air. Neither does the wind cease to be what it is in between gusts, nor electric shocks in between flows of current. Phenomenologically speaking, there is no distinction between the wind and its effect on me. In these half-things, cause and mode of influence are identical. While a physicist could reconstrue the experience of wind or electrical shock as “moving air” or “a current of electrons,” this is to reify them as full things. See Schmitz, Müllan, and Slaby, “Emotions Outside the Box—the New Phenomenology of Feeling and Corporeality,” 256–57.

¹⁷ Tonino Griffero prefers the designation “quasi-things,” which he defines as “any entity that – while not being a full-thing – deeply incorporates the felt-bodily narrowness and therefore exerts on us a more direct and immediate power than that exerted by the full thing, in terms of suggestion and sometimes depending on context.” (Tonino Griffero, *Quasi-Things: The Paradigm of Atmospheres* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2017), xviii.

¹⁸ Gernot Böhme, “Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics,” *Thesis Eleven* 36, no. 1 (August 1, 1993): 122, <https://doi.org/10.1177/072551369303600107>.

This peculiar status is largely what makes atmospheres such rich matters for phenomenological reflection. While ontology is not our central concern, this point is worth mentioning because of its implications for how we think about their causal efficacy vis-à-vis agents. For now, it suffices to say that atmospheres are not easily understood as subjective or objective because they appear “between”¹⁹ subjects and objects. They are spatially extended feelings that emerge from situations that envelop agents who are already affectively involved in those situations.

Finally, atmospheres also have a disclosive quality. They primarily reveal qualities of the situation from which they emerge. We perceive the funeral’s solemnity or the party’s joyousness through the atmospheric effects on us. Here again, the individual components of a situation that can become objects of sensory perception are certainly involved in the generation of these effects. But considered individually, neither the thump of the speakers, nor the excited chatter of the partiers, nor the dimness of the light can explain the party’s ecstatic quality. That joy appears rather in and through the individual objects viewed as a whole. But, secondarily, atmospheres also disclose aspects of the selves affected by them. Perhaps the estranged son experiences a surprising tinge of grief amidst his bitterness – a grief that he might not otherwise have felt had he not attended the funeral. This experience might confuse and alarm him precisely because it reveals an aspect of himself to himself, one that he was intent to ignore and repress.

To summarize, atmospheres are 1) spatially extended feelings that 2) emerge from and pertain primarily to a situation that encompasses and exceeds multiple felt bodies. They are 3) quasi-objective, meaning that they are neither objects of experience nor reducible to subjective experience but rather possess aspects of both. Insofar as these feelings are irreducible to any particular individual, atmospheres have a degree of objectivity that distinguish them from

¹⁹ Böhme, 114.

affective attitudes like feelings or emotions. They exceed the subjective consciousness of individual agents. But atmospheres also have an integral subjective aspect. They are entirely inaccessible and undetectable outside of a living, feeling self. This in-between status means, furthermore, that atmospheres 4) are phenomenologically disclosive of both the situational environment and the self who is ensconced therein.

§1.2.2 Atmospheres and Agency

In addition to these features, atmospheres exercise a particular kind of authority over the individuals enveloped by them. The gloomy person at a party finds herself caught up in the cheerfulness that only moments before had so annoyed her. The scholar consumed with worry about a deadline is surprised by the nearly immediate relief he feels after a few minutes of imaginative play with his four-year old son. A couple *en route* to a romantic dinner is so overcome by the moral fervor of a street protest that they cancel their plans in favor of a more politically engaged evening. In each case, individuals are affected by a power that exceeds them and whose vector sharply contrasts with their expectations and intentions. In fact, this power frequently affects us in ways that transform our expectations, intentions, and desires.

This authority comes in degrees ranging from the merely suggestive to the violent and coercive. The spectacle of a public execution deploys a particularly potent atmosphere, one meant to elicit obedience to a sovereign power through terror. Though its violence is not quite as explicit, the kind of totalitarian propaganda and public rallies characteristic of the Nazi regime sought to constrain and orient the conduct of the German *Volk* by creating an atmosphere of grievance and racist scapegoating. Commercial advertisers seek to influence consumption patterns by creating seductive atmospheres that alter how we evaluatively perceive our situation

and what new product or vacation package might improve it. Whether its power is violent and coercive, or merely seductive and suggestive, atmospheres have a certain grip on agents that influences our conduct primarily by means of selective disclosure. They affect us by altering the way we perceive our situation and our place within it.

It is important to stress that atmospheric authority is never absolute. Though the couple's plans were altered by the atmosphere of the protest, they eventually gave their consent. If the protest had been supporting a cause that was morally abhorrent to the couple, they would have carried on with their evening, perhaps with a lingering hint of disgust. This freedom to resist is certainly diminished as the atmosphere's power veers toward the coercive and violent end of the spectrum. But even in the bleakest moments of history, when people were living under the most grinding political oppression and most grievous threats to bodily harm, the capacity to identify these atmospheric influences, to judge them, and thereby to reject them, is never utterly extinguished. Agents under the sway of an atmosphere remain agents with the capacity to author their own actions. But it is equally true that, insofar as human beings are always involved in concrete situations, agents are always under the influence of some foreign power, one that addresses us from beyond and, by affecting us, intervenes in our exercise of agency.

Further, the influence of atmospheres on the agents within their grip is not simply that of efficient causality. To borrow Schmitz's terminology, half-things like atmospheres differ from full things in that, for the former, their mode of influence is identical to the cause while, for the latter, these are distinct.²⁰ A rock (cause) shatters a window (effect) on account of its being thrown (mode of influence). But phenomenologically speaking, there is no distinction between

²⁰ Schmitz, Müllan, and Slaby, "Emotions Outside the Box—the New Phenomenology of Feeling and Corporeality," 256f.

the feeling of the wind or an electric shock and their effects on me. A physicist could certainly reconstrue these experiences as “moving air” or “a current of electrons,” but this is to reify them as full things. Similarly, when the reluctant partygoer experiences a surprising change of mood, a neuroscientist might explain this in terms of increased serotonin levels. But for the partygoer, the atmosphere of revelry influences her immediately; its influence appears not as a decipherable cause but rather as a dynamic movement that addresses her from beyond and carries her off in its vector. Her attitudinal shift is thus a part of a broader emergent movement of the situation that subsumes her and, by moving her in this way, intervenes in her exercise of agency.

More precisely, this intervening influence affects agents primarily by altering how we evaluatively perceive our situation and our place within it. This occurs at various levels of complexity. Since atmospheres emerge from situations as a whole, they are rarely the objects of perception. Rather, they condition how objects of perception appear. Sometimes they cast a background hue that gives the situation a recognizable, felt valence and thereby “colors” the objects contained therein in a uniform manner. The joy of the party casts a brightness over all its participants, making each appear more vividly alive than they otherwise might. Atmospheres also influence patterns of salient viewing or attention. To be in a gloomy mood means that the sad elements of a situation press to the foreground of our perceptual field, becoming all the more conspicuous. This also means that other, more joyful elements of the scene are selectively relegated to the background.²¹

These influences function phenomenologically. They move agents to evaluatively perceive their situations and their place within them differently than they otherwise would. At

²¹ Mark Wynn offers a compelling account of the phenomenological import of hue and perceptual salience as value-disclosures in Mark Wynn, *Renewing the Senses: A Study of the Philosophy and Theology of the Spiritual Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15–41.

most, such movements might suggest certain actions. The chaotic revelry and pounding bass of the dancefloor might “beckon” one to it, whereas the alley’s darkness might prompt one to find a different route home. In neither case does the agent *choose* to evaluatively perceive the situation as they do; the dancefloor just beckons and the darkened alley just seems dangerous. But these pathic moments never necessitate the actions they suggest. In both cases, it is no one other than the agent who *chooses* to act in response to these environmental affordances.

§1.3 Summary

Let us take stock of the argument so far. I have claimed that atmospheres are 1) spatially extended feelings that 2) emerge from a subject-involving situation and register in the felt bodies of individuals affectively involved therein. They are 3) quasi-objective, meaning that they exist neither as objects of experience nor subjective experiences but rather as something in-between. They effectively 4) disclose to agents both features of the situation itself and the agent’s condition in that situation. I have also claimed that atmosphere 5) exercise a kind of authority over the individuals enveloped by them and that this authority 6) influences agency primarily by modulating how an agent feelingly responds to and perceives that situation. While this authority never fully determines what an agent will do, its effects are particularly recalcitrant because it shapes how one immediately perceives and affectively registers a situation as a whole.

The peculiar phenomenology and potency of atmospheres raises questions for an account of moral agency. As saw in Chapter One, the prevailing theories of moral agency hold that moral action is exclusively caused by the agent’s propositionally structured attitudes, i.e., beliefs and desires. This distinguishes an agent’s *actions* from his or her *behaviors* and from mere *events*. Insofar as atmospheres are not individual mental states, they are categorically excluded as

elements of mental causation. As properties of situations, it might at first seem that atmospheres fall rather within the domain of social causation. But their quasi-objectivity means that they cannot be measured and quantified in the manner of social structures. As essentially qualitative realities, atmospheric efficacy is only indirectly measured by objective effects; their primary influence lies rather in the way that they grip us from without and re-organize the way in which we affectively construe our situation and evaluatively perceive objects within it.

As we saw in Chapter Two, this affective domain of consciousness plays a crucial role in antiblack racism's tenacity. By distorting the way agents construe racial situations, implicit antiblack affective and perceptual biases effectively enervate agents who hold true beliefs in racial equality and virtuous desires for racial justice. But I also argued that, insofar as social psychologists typically explain these biases in terms of implicit *attitudes* and thus as properties of individuals agents, they exhibit the kind of individualistic framework for action explanations that critical race theorists like Charles Mills rightly indict. This inattention to social causation, especially its structural dimensions, has led to a certain naïveté in their practical prescriptions, which usually entail some manner of retraining an individual's psychological associations.

In what follows, I will argue that the ambiguous causality of atmospheres makes them perfectly situated to integrate insights from critical race theory and social psychology with regard to racism's recalcitrance. But before turning to this theoretical point, we must first show that atmospheres not only exist but that they also help us understand racial situations in particular.

§2 Atmospheres in Race-Salient Situations

As I mentioned earlier, it is not especially surprising to claim that racism entails an affective life. The mid-twentieth century sociological studies of racism focused centrally on

racial prejudice and typically affective forms of prejudice at that.²² The racist person had hatred for another person on account of their race. The Ku Klux Klan member was motivated to act on his racist ideology by the contempt he felt toward black people as inferior beings. It was the fear of a racial uprising or the pollution of pure, white blood that spurred white people to such intense racialized brutality. It was the feeling of disgust at interracial sex, coupled with the fearful fascination with black male sexual prowess, that motivated the anti-miscegenation laws. In sum, racism's affective life has long been linked to the phenomenology of racial situations and to the motivational springs of action that keep it firmly entrenched.

But this conception of racism as primarily a matter “of the heart” fell out of favor as measures of explicit racial prejudice in the United States fell and racial inequalities remained. Structuralist social theorists argued that such “racism without racists” required a new theoretical apparatus, one that focused less on the inner lives of agents and more on the objective material conditions and institutions that generate white racial supremacy in the absence of these racist sentiments. One need not have hatred in his heart to perpetuate white racial dominance; he need only follow his rational self-interest within a political economy and institutional arrangement cultivated by previous generations to provide advantages to white people at the expense of persons of color.

§2.1 Racial Atmospheres and the “Wake” of Chattel Slavery: James Baldwin’s Cocktail Party

While this move has advanced our understanding of racial inequality, its equation of affectivity with individual attitudes has also occluded certain aspects of contemporary racism. Consider James Baldwin’s evocative description of interracial cocktail parties.

²² Prominent examples of this approach include Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice.*; Myrdal, *An American Dilemma.*

In our image of the Negro breathes the past we deny, not dead but living yet and powerful, the beast in our jungle of statistics. It is this which defeats us, which continues to defeat us, which lends to interracial cocktail parties their rattling, genteel, nervously smiling air: in any drawing room at such a gathering the beast may spring filling the air with flying things and an unenlightened wailing. Wherever the problem touches there is confusion, there is danger. Where the Negro face appears a tension is created, the tension of a silence filled with things unutterable. It is a sentimental error, therefore, to believe that the past is dead; it means nothing to say that it is all forgotten, that the Negro himself has forgotten it. It is not a question of memory. Oedipus did not remember the thongs that bound his feet; nevertheless, the marks they left testified to the doom toward which his feet were leading him. The man does not remember the hand that struck him, the darkness that frightened him, as a child; nevertheless, the hand and the darkness remain with him, indivisible from himself forever, part of the passion that drives him wherever he thinks to take flight.²³

Baldwin points to an aspect of racial life that is difficult to theorize. These social gatherings have a distinct feel, a “rattling, genteel, nervously smiling air” that elicits tension amongst the revelers. “[T]here is confusion, there is danger.” That he attributes this feel to the party itself, and not to individual partygoers, indicates the situational character to this feeling that exceeds the existence of each person even as it registers within them. As such, the phenomenon is not simply an individual attitude; it defeats “us” and not just “me.”

But Baldwin is equally adamant that this aspect of racial situations is not simply a statistical aggregation drawn from sociological analysis. Within that “jungle of statistics” lies something else, a “beast” that “may spring filling the air with flying things and an unenlightened wailing.” Of course, Baldwin is not a sociologist. He puts his remarkable intellect in the service of disclosing racial realities with a qualitative, not a quantitative, precision. He does not tell us about race in America so much as show it to us.²⁴ This means that his personification of the

²³ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 29–30.

²⁴ “Don’t describe it, show it. That’s what I try to teach all young writers – take it out! Don’t describe a purple sunset, make me see that it is purple.” (James Baldwin, “The Art of Fiction No. 78,” interviewed by Jordan Elgrably, *The Paris Review* 91 (Spring, 1984) <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2994/the-art-of-fiction-no-78-james-baldwin>)

“beast” as an agent, one that is “not dead but living yet and powerful,” is a literary figuration of a social reality, but it is one that escapes quantification and objectification.

The peculiar phenomenology of this feeling is matched by its equally peculiar power. Baldwin tells us that its potency has roots in a collective past that “is not dead but living and powerful,” so much so that it “continues to defeat us.” It is a power known not primarily through causal relations but rather in its felt effects. “The man does not remember the hand that struck him, the darkness that frightened him, as a child; nevertheless, the hand and the darkness remain with him, indivisible from himself forever.” These affective effects no doubt have causes (someone’s hand, a particular instance of darkness), but their enduring efficacy is irreducible to these historically distant events. They have instead become indivisible from the agents themselves, grafted into the warp and woof of their experience and conduct. The feelings take on a novel power of their own. It is “part of the passion that drives [the agent] wherever he thinks to take flight.”

The phenomenon that Baldwin describes here fits many of the qualities of an atmosphere. It is a spatially extended feeling that envelops multiple felt bodies and registers affectively within them. This feeling is disclosive in the dual way that I claimed for atmospheres; it both reveals the fraught, confused quality of the situation and the anxious, “rattling” quality of the selves ensconced within it. Furthermore, that which Baldwin describes symbolically as a “beast in the jungle of statistics” exerts a peculiar, self-defeating power over the agents subsumed by it. It has a kind of authority over them, one that is not properly understood either as the intentional power of mental causation nor as the social power of objective structures. Rather, it appears as a passion that drives us, primarily by altering the way in which we feel in and evaluatively construe our environment.

But Baldwin's account also expands the conception of atmosphere sketched above in important ways. Specifically, he contends that this racial atmosphere of a cocktail party is not merely the product of a discrete situation. It emerges here as the cumulative product of a history of racial situations. Without the history of chattel slavery and its enduring effects in American life, the "image of the Negro" that haunts this scene would neither threaten nor confuse the revelers. The force that drives us like a passion would also dissipate. This suggests that atmospheres are not only disclosive of an evaluative scene; more than that, they are products of historical forces. Just as the "jungle of statistics" does not adequately grasp the social forces at play in this situation, neither does an historical narrative grasp the continuing affective force of the "image of the Negro." For Baldwin, this atmosphere announced a presence, an enduring weight of history, that is impossible to sever from ourselves.²⁵

Drawing on Christina Sharpe's haunting image of "the wake"²⁶ to symbolize the enduring afterlives of chattel slavery in contemporary life, Jan Slaby writes of an "enduring background affectivity" that constitute the "ramifications of historical events" like slavery but that "register[s] and endure[s] in the form of a sustained affective texture [that] remains operative within the sensual fabric that enables and stages, prefigures and disfigures the present."²⁷ Agents living in such a wake discover a "background sense for what is already significant" that weighs upon us. This schema of significance selectively directs our attention and shapes our felt

²⁵ As Friedlind Riedel puts it, "an atmosphere, then, not only simulates a palpable unity where there might otherwise be difference but can even render potential futures or repressed memories abundantly present, or make otherwise absent or ulterior persons or relationships perceptible. Crucially, these effects of atmospheres are not mental projection 'into the world' but have a material presence and pertain to embodied processes of involvement." (Riedel, "Atmosphere," 85)

²⁶ Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

²⁷ Jan Slaby, "The Weight of History: From Heidegger to Afro-Pessimism," in *Phenomenology as Performative Exercise*, ed. Lucilla Guidi and Thomas Rentsch, *Studies in Contemporary Phenomenology* 19 (New York & Leiden: Brill, 2020), 173–95.

engagements with the world, but we do not so much choose it as find ourselves, to borrow Heidegger's formulation, "thrown" into a pre-figured world.²⁸ This background sense is preserved and reproduced through all manner of institutional arrangements and social customs through which agents learn to see and feel one another. Furthermore, as Baldwin's example suggests, this schema of significance frequently hides just out of view and evades our memory even as it intervenes in our conduct in subtle and insidious ways.

It is also worth noting that, for Baldwin, the atmosphere of this racial situation does not affect the individuals ensconced within it in an identical manner. As I noted formally above, a singular atmosphere can elicit a variety of felt responses with varying degrees of intensity. But elsewhere in Baldwin's writing, he limns the distinct meanings of "the image of the Negro" for Black and white people. For instance, in *The Fire Next Time*, he contends that, for white Americans, Black people represent both a seductive freedom from the banal confines of whiteness and an enduring reminder that the national ideals with which whites identify are empty myths and that their material comforts are stolen goods.²⁹

Baldwin's description does much to show how useful the concept of atmospheres can be for theorizing racial situations. But it also augments and refines the concept. In particular, he helps us see the temporal character of atmospheres. Atmospheres are not only productive of an evaluative scene in which agents are ensconced, but they are also themselves produced by the accumulation of previous situations. Furthermore, as temporal products, atmospheres are ways in which agents are gripped by and affectively involved within "effective histories."³⁰ History has not only

²⁸ For Heidegger's account of Dasein's "thrownness", see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 1962), §§29 and 38.

²⁹ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International, 1993), 82–106. He makes a similar point in James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village," in *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 163–79.

³⁰ This concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte* is one of the central themes in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Bloomsbury Revelations (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013). While his notion centers on the explicitly

generated the contours of the social order that constrains and enables our conduct; it has also formed us as passionate agents who are driven by powers that exceed us and yet have become woven into our own agency.

Baldwin's description powerfully illumines an affective dimension of racial life that neither individualist nor structuralist accounts of racism quite grasp. The enduring affective effects of chattel slavery are irreducible to the lifeless, quantitative analyses of racial inequality. There is a felt, phenomenal dimension that exerts a peculiar power over and through agents. But neither is this "passion that drives [agents]" simply a racially prejudicial attitude. It is rather a situational quality that exceeds the individuals ensconced within that situation. It operates not at the deliberative level of consciousness, but rather in our unconscious drives and passions that move us in ways that "defeat us."

§2.2 Racial Atmospheres and the Racializing Gaze: Frantz Fanon and Audre Lorde

Baldwin's cocktail party highlights an important aspect of contemporary racism. Though explicitly racist beliefs and desires have decreased over the past several decades, the specter of slavery continues to haunt and disfigure the present, binding us to a tragic fate that we seem collectively impotent to resist. The fact that the cocktail party is an interracial one suggests that the white people involved are not the manifest racists of the Ku Klux Klan but rather the subtle racists who, despite their intentions, have yet to untether themselves from a history of white supremacy. Of course, there are more intentional forms of antiblack racism whose lingering effects continue to color the atmosphere of racial situations. This section highlights the notion of

linguistic depths of historical consciousness, the notion of atmospherics I am developing here foregrounds its affective dimensions.

the racializing gaze in the work of Franz Fanon and Audre Lorde. I argue that this gaze is both productive of racial atmospheres in discrete situations and also a mechanism by which racial atmospheres exert historical force. In particular, they do this by influencing the way future generations of white people and persons of color evaluatively construe their situations and their place within those situations.

Franz Fanon's vivid account of the racializing gaze has become something of a classic in critical race theory.³¹ In the chapter entitled "The Lived Experience of the Black Man" in *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon describes a young white boy who, upon seeing him, clings to his mother and shouts, "*Maman*, look a Negro; I'm scared!"³² Fanon analyses the effect of this encounter in the following way:

My body was returned to me spread-eagled, disjointed, redone, draped in mourning on this white winter's day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is wicked, the Negro is ugly; look, a Negro; the Negro is trembling, the Negro is trembling because he's cold, the small boy is trembling because he's afraid of the Negro, the Negro is trembling with cold, the cold that chills the bones, the lovely little boy is trembling because he thinks the Negro is trembling with rage, the little white boy runs to his mother's arms: "*Maman*, the Negro's going to eat me."³³

Fanon interprets this episode as an iteration of the "historical-racial schema"³⁴ and later "an epidermal racial schema"³⁵ that figures whiteness as the domain of being and blackness as the domain of non-being, the hell of abjection.³⁶ This schema is a product of colonial oppression, the long history of French imperial domination of Fanon's native Martinique, but it governs the bodily comportment and affective responses between white and Black people in such a way that

³¹ See, for example, George Yancy, *Look, a White!: Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012).

³² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 93.

³³ Fanon, 93.

³⁴ Fanon, 91.

³⁵ Fanon, 92.

³⁶ Fanon, xii.

is not entirely, or even primarily, deliberative. For Black people like Fanon, this “white gaze” appears as “an unusual weight descended on us;”³⁷ it is even “an atmosphere of certain uncertainty” that exists “all around the body” and “reigns” over it.³⁸ This affords him a kind of embodied “implicit knowledge”³⁹ that emerges from quotidian encounters of degradation and humiliation and facilitates a choreographic script in which white people assert their presumed superiority over Black people. Fanon’s insight is that this routine alienates Black people from their own bodies. As he puts it, “I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all, the grinning *Ya bon Banania*.”⁴⁰ The white gaze, which in the historical-racial schema occupies the pole of objectivity, becomes an internalized sense of Black racial inferiority.

This example highlights, perhaps even better than Baldwin’s cocktail party, the bodily and affective dimensions of racial situations. The trembling Fanon reports is ostensibly a response to the cold of this “white winter’s day.” But it is misinterpreted by the white boy who perceives that Fanon is trembling with rage. It is not hard to imagine that Fanon, upon perceiving the boy’s fear of him, might have reason to fear for himself, further escalating the affective dynamic. These interpersonal responses are not indexed to the intentions of either agent. Rather, they are emergent properties that arise from the interaction itself and from the history of situations that produced it. It holds each participant in its grip.

³⁷ Fanon, 90.

³⁸ “*Tout autour du corps règne une atmosphère d’incertitude certaine.*” Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 89. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90.

³⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90.

⁴⁰ Fanon, 92.

This bodily and affective dynamic is even more evident in a similar scene described by Audre Lorde. She recalls a time as a young girl when she was riding the New York City subway from Midtown up to Harlem. There she encounters a white woman in a fur hat whose racist contempt for the young Lorde needed no words.

My mother spots an almost seat, pushes my little snowsuited body down. On one side of me a man reading a paper. On the other, a woman in a fur hat staring at me. Her mouth twitches as she stares and then her gaze drops down, pulling mine with it. Her leather-gloved hand plucks at the line where my new blue snowpants and her sleek fur coat meet. She jerks her coat closer to her. I look. I do not see whatever terrible thing she is seeing on the seat between us – probably a roach. But she has communicated her horror to me. It must be something very bad from the way she’s looking, so I pull my snowsuit closer to me away from it, too. When I look up the woman is still staring at me, her nose holes and eyes huge. And suddenly I realize there is nothing crawling up the seat between us; it is me she doesn’t want her coat to touch. [...] No word has been spoken. I’m afraid to say anything to my mother because I don’t know what I’ve done. I look at the sides of my snowpants, secretly. Is there something on them? Something’s going on here I do not understand, but I will never forget it. Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate.⁴¹

In addition to the fear exhibited in Fanon’s account, Lorde describes a racialized atmosphere of contempt and disgust. The white woman’s bodily expressions indicated that something awful and threatening was in their midst, something that should elicit revulsion. At first, Lorde assumes that the woman has seen an insect “crawling up the seat between us.” The fact that Lorde did not immediately perceive that the woman was disgusted *by her* indicates that she did not enter the scene with this negative self-conception. But once it was communicated to her, she “will never forget it.” Whether this is lodged in her memory or, as Baldwin put it, that passionate drive that moves us without explicitly remembering why, Lorde describes it in decidedly bodily and emotional terms. “Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate.”

⁴¹ Audre Lorde, “Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 147–48.

This bodily and affective dynamic colors the discursive elements of Fanon's scene as well. The boy explicitly says that he is scared as he cries to his mother. But the first words are "Look, a Negro!" Though this expression contains propositional content, its significance lies rather in its perlocutionary effect.⁴² The boy does not merely intend to communicate to his mother that a Black man happens to be walking on the sidewalk. Rather, this utterance is such that it draws the mother's attention toward a particular element of the scene as an object of scorn. The appropriate response is not simply to attain knowledge of a state of affairs but to enhance the perceptual salience for his mother of someone the boy takes to be fearsome. Furthermore, this drawing of attention is not simply an individualistic effect. Rather, it is a social dynamic that emerges from the scene: the boy's fear is a response to the sight of Fanon and contaminates the entire scene, including the boy's mother and Fanon himself. This is a performative utterance, in other words. It not only expresses a pattern of salient viewing in the boy, but it also shapes the attentional patterns of the mother and, sinisterly, Fanon as well.

At first, the white gaze issued from the boy might seem like a psychological projection. But Fanon resists this characterization. He writes that "[i]t is not imposed on me; it is rather a definitive structuring of my self and the world."⁴³ It is not as if the boy *intended* to perceive Fanon as fearsome, or that this evaluative *mise-en-scène* was the result of careful deliberation. Presumably, the boy experienced the fear as one undergoes a passion. This is not to suggest that his affective response was epistemically or morally justified - quite the opposite. We have no reason to believe that Fanon posed any real threat to the boy or his mother. But even if the boy's

⁴² J.L. Austin distinguishes perlocutionary effects from the illocutionary and locutionary aspects of speech acts. Where locutions are literal, meaningful sentences and illocutions are the linguistic function of literal sentences, perlocutionary acts refer to the achievement of an illocution on the listener. Such effects include warning, persuading, convincing, etc. See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), especially 109-147.

⁴³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 91.

fear response is dubious, it is not simply enough to say that it was caused by an attitude of fear. Rather, both Fanon and the boy encounter a pre-figured world in this scene, one in which Black people are construed as fearsome and white people as vulnerable objects of Black aggression.

This example from Fanon thus shares many important atmospheric elements. The emotional valence of the scene emerges from the situation itself and envelops the agents in a responsive pattern that is irreducible to the intentions of either party. Both register this spatially extended feeling affectively in ways that direct unintentional bodily movements. It also discloses both qualities of the situation and of the individuals ensconced within it, even if these qualities are epistemically suspect. For these reasons, it makes sense to speak of a racialized atmosphere at play in Fanon's famous scene.

But like Baldwin, Fanon also presses us to reconfigure our conception of atmospheres. It is crucial that the boy and Fanon occupy two very different racial positions in the historical-racial schema, and this differential is essential for understanding their distinct responses. So, while I acknowledged earlier in a formal way that different agents undergo atmospheric influences differently, this episode suggests that an adequate understanding of racial atmospheres requires that we attend to these different positionings of agents within a racial hierarchy.⁴⁴

Finally, the internalization of Black inferiority described by Fanon and Lorde suggests that these atmospheric dynamics are both person- and world-formative. The quotidian abuse and denigration Fanon experienced under French colonialism did not leave him unaffected. The book in which this passage appears is essentially an analysis of this condition coupled with his speculations about how to overcome it. This presents the task of decolonialization in ethical terms as a process of self-reconstruction. But since the destructive effects of the white gaze are

⁴⁴ As I note in the next section, Mills's concept of the dark ontology of race achieves just this.

not simply imposed on Black people, but rather emerge from “a definitive structuring of my self and the world,”⁴⁵ the liberation of self is intimately tied to the liberation of the world. In neither case is liberation exclusively a matter of re-allocating social goods, although it would certainly entail that. Rather, it would require a thorough re-ordering of our affective responses and perceptual patterns in racialized situations.

In these instances of the racializing gaze, it is important to note that the interpersonal dynamics that Fanon and Lorde put into words are not simply linguistic. What they describe is racialization, not as a text, but as performance and affective response. In Fanon’s example, the racial-historical scheme envelops both him and his oppressors, choreographing their interaction and charging their encounter with an escalating fear. Lorde’s examples rely even more on a non-discursive performance. She detected the white woman’s condescension and disgust in and through the woman’s bodily reactions and expressions. The woman in the fur hat did not need to say anything to make her feelings known or, more importantly, to cause lasting racial harm. Though these feelings could be understood in projectionist terms, I’ve argued that they are more plausibly understood atmospherically.

§2.3 Racial Atmospheres and Police Brutality: The Nonchalant Murder of George Floyd

The examples from Baldwin, Fanon, and Lorde are each embedded in literary contexts. Baldwin the essayist, Fanon the decolonial psychoanalyst, and Lorde the Black feminist critic each represent their lived experiences of racial atmospheres through the written word. Despite the fact that each occurred in the previous century, their literary prowess powerfully evokes realities that I trust are recognizable for those of us living in different racial situations. As a final

⁴⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 91.

example, I want to turn our attention to the atmospheric dynamics in much more recent and more explicitly violent scene, one that was mediated to the world not through words but through a cellphone video.

On the afternoon of May 25, 2020, George Floyd was killed by four Minneapolis police officers.⁴⁶ The officers were called to the scene by a convenience store clerk who claimed that Floyd purchased cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill. Surveillance footage from businesses in the area depict two officers, Thomas Lane and J. Alexander Kueng, initially approaching Floyd who appears to be generally compliant. After struggling to convince Floyd to enter the back of police vehicle, the rookie officers call for backup. Two more officers, Tuo Thau and Derek Chauvin, arrive on the scene. Floyd is eventually placed into the back of a police car, but the video then shows Chauvin forcibly removing him from the vehicle, throwing him onto the street, and pressing his knee onto the back of Floyd's neck. At this point, at least two bystanders began to film the interaction. This footage depicts Floyd in clear duress as he repeatedly tells the officers that he cannot breathe. Those filming the scene and other bystanders gathering on the sidewalk can be heard imploring the officers to respond to Floyd's pleas. They did not. Chauvin remained in place for nearly nine minutes, well after Floyd became unresponsive. The officers can be seen trying in vain to find a pulse, and yet Chauvin's knee remained on Floyd's neck for an additional two minutes. Minutes later, George Floyd was pronounced dead.

The officers' affective response to Floyd's duress is best described as a coordinated indifference. Officer Thau stands facing the crowd that had gathered on the sidewalk, completely expressionless. Officers Lane and Kueng are partly occluded from the camera's view, but they

⁴⁶ For a step-by-step reconstruction of the events leading to George Floyd's death, including video drawn from area surveillance cameras and cellphone cameras, see Evan Hill et al., "How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody," *The New York Times*, May 31, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>.

can still be seen restraining Floyd's legs. Chauvin's performance is the most disturbing. He is visible with one hand in his pocket and one knee on Floyd's neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. Chauvin clearly registers that Floyd is crying for breath, something he does no less than twenty times over the course of the altercation. At one point, Floyd says "They're going to kill me, man," to which Chauvin mockingly replies, "Takes a heck of a lot of oxygen to say that."⁴⁷ Even when Lane asks Chauvin if he should roll Floyd onto his side, Chauvin again replies with chilling disregard. "No, he's staying put where we got him."⁴⁸

This event can be interpreted in a variety of ways. The cavalier sense of impunity Chauvin exhibited is certainly an iteration of the structurally racist patterns in policing where white officers abuse Black citizens without fear of accountability.⁴⁹ What other conclusion could be drawn from the fact that Chauvin killed Floyd in broad daylight, in the presence of other officers, and in front of clearly concerned citizens who were filming the scene. There are also clearly attitudinal dimensions at play. Based on Chauvin's utter disregard for Floyd's humanity, expressed through his behaviors and his comments, it would be reasonable to suppose that he held racially prejudiced attitudes linking Black people to criminality and danger.

But neither of these perspectives quite grasp the affective intensity of this scene. This is perhaps most manifest in Derek Chauvin's face and his demeanor. As Floyd begs for breath, Chauvin remains on Floyd's neck with his hand blithely in his pocket. His affect communicates a

⁴⁷ Kim Barker and Serge F. Kovalski, "Officer Who Pressed His Knee on George Floyd's Neck Drew Scrutiny Long Before," *The New York Times*, July 18, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/18/us/derek-chauvin-george-floyd.html>.

⁴⁸ Richard A. Oppel Jr. and Kim Barker, "New Transcripts Detail Last Moments for George Floyd," *The New York Times*, July 8, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/us/george-floyd-body-camera-transcripts.html>.

⁴⁹ For a powerful historical analysis of such structurally racist patterns in policing, see Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

terrifying nonchalance, as if to suggest that there is nothing to see here, as if to suggest that this is just another day on the job. Officer Chauvin's demeanor confirms that this nonchalance is not simply confined to Chauvin's mind. There is social coordination to this affective display. Such coordination is essential to understanding how it was possible for Chauvin to remain on Floyd's neck for the sheer length of time that he did. By filling the space on that corner in South Minneapolis with an air of business-as-usual normalcy, of a disciplined apathy for George Floyd's Black life, Chauvin could resist the bystanders' demands and even his fellow officer's all-too-polite suggestion that he ought to let Floyd breathe.

It is precisely this affective intensity that caught the eyes of not only the bystanders but also the millions of people who witnessed this scene on their mobile phones and television screens. In addition to the gross injustice of brutalizing a human being, the officers' nonchalance crystalized a broader suspicion about the valuation of Black life in the United States, one that gripped a sufficiently large number of people to motivate what some have suggested are the largest mass protests in history.⁵⁰ To be sure, these protests were only possible because of the grassroots organizing conducted by groups like the Movement for Black Lives and the technological capacity to widely disseminate this video. But that which circulated through these organizational and technological conduits and affected people was a visceral sense of moral outrage. The brutal norm of devaluing Black life was made affectively palpable in the racial atmosphere of nonchalance emanating from this scene and through screens around the world. In

⁵⁰ Larry Buchanan, Quoc Trung Bui, and Jugal K. Patel, "Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History," *The New York Times*, July 3, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html>.

turn, it sparked something of a counter-atmosphere that, according to polls,⁵¹ initiated a sea change in public support for the Movement for Black Lives.

§2.4 Summary

In each these racial situations, the concept of atmosphere illumines morally significant elements that are occluded by strictly attitudinal or structuralist analyses. This reality can appear in a variety of forms. It can range from the relatively diffuse tension or awkwardness of a cocktail party to quotidian gestures of contempt commonly called microaggressions and their internalized effects. But as the final example shows, racial atmospheres are operative in even the most violent racial situations, including the public torture and killing of unarmed Black men by the police. These atmospheric dynamics are not exhaustively discursive. The woman in the fur hat did not need to say anything to Lorde to communicate her racist disgust; it was rather “Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate...” that filled the space between them. Rather, they each include bodily expressions of emotion that emerge in response to a situation, one that has been pre-figured by a long effective history that construes Black people as contemptible, disgusting, or criminally dangerous and white people as vulnerable to contamination or harm at the hands of Black people. These atmospheres, in other words, are doubly disclosive; they reveal to those involved not only an evaluative construal of their situation, i.e., what Fanon calls the “historical-racial schema,” but also their place within that situation. Furthermore, to the degree that individual agents are affectively involved in these situations, the atmospheres influence the free exercise of their agency. The agents who live, move, and have their being in these situations are

⁵¹ Nate Cohn and Kevin Quealy, “How Public Opinion Has Moved on Black Lives Matter,” *The New York Times*, June 10, 2020, sec. The Upshot, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/10/upshot/black-lives-matter-attitudes.html>.

thus neither voluntaristic monads nor mere functionaries of larger social and structural forces. They are agents under the influence of affective dynamics that both exceed and permeate their existence.

§3 The Dark Atmospherics of Race

How should we think about these morally fraught atmospheric dimensions of racialized situations? In the following section, I attempt to answer this by hermeneutically reconstructing Mills's concept of the dark ontology of race and Schleiermacher's notion of social affectivity conceived in atmospheric terms. I call the concept that emerges the dark atmospherics of race.⁵² It describes a set of pervasive, social affective dynamics in racialized societies that make the distinction between white persons and nonwhite sub-persons palpable and salient in the manner of passion. These phenomenological effects on the inner lives of agents do not eliminate moral agency, but they do influence agents' conduct in coordinated ways that perpetuate racial injustice. Like social structures, the dark atmospherics of race are irreducible to the subjective attitudes of individuals. But as properties of a subject-involving situations, they are also irreducible to the objective environment conceived apart from the subjects with complex inner lives who are ensconced within and affected by them. In this section, I begin by considering Mills's notion of the dark ontology of race as a social logic with expressive, atmospheric

⁵² I use the term "dark" here in the same way that Mills uses it to qualify his dark ontology of race, which he defines as the non-ideal social ontology of the Enlightenment. "It could be said to be triply dark. First, it is dark in the sense of being color-coded, consigning nonwhites to a lower rung on the ontological ladder. Second, it is dark in the sense of being sinister, a social ontology of domination and subordination. And finally, it is dark in the sense of being largely unacknowledged in Western political [and I might add, ethical] theory." (Charles W. Mills, "Dark Ontologies: Blacks, Jews, and White Supremacy," in *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 70)

qualities. I then return to Schleiermacher's insight that social affectivity plays a role in the formation of ethical beings and worlds and reconstruct it in light of Mills's critical race theory.

§3.1 The Dark Ontology of Race as Social Structure and Atmosphere

As we saw in Chapter One, Charles Mills's notion of the dark ontology of race refers to the unspoken social ontology that constrains moral personhood to white human beings and relegates nonwhite human beings to a lower rung that lies below the "normative ground floor" of liberal political orders.⁵³ While respect, equality, and self-rule normatively govern interactions amongst white persons, the *de facto* norms of disrespect, inequality, and domination are prescribed toward non-white "sub-persons." This idea was invented out of whole cloth by European political philosophers, but Mills explains that it came to structure all aspects of contemporary global life through the institutions of European colonialism and chattel slavery. In what I called his reconstructed materialism, Mills describes how a discursive construction was so thoroughly materialized in and through coercive political institutions that the dark ontology of race came to structure not only social and political orders but also of how individuals see, interpret, and orient themselves within that order.⁵⁴

This concept is crucial for understanding the racial atmospheres described in the examples above. First, the distinction between white persons and nonwhite sub-persons appears

⁵³ They are ascribed inferior positions on a racial hierarchy such that the fundamental dignity that normatively governs the treatment of white people does not obtain for them. Rather than equality, respect, and freedom, the dark ontology of race prescribes inequality, disrespect, and all manner of domination for and amongst persons of color, who are construed not as moral persons capable of self-rule but as sub-persons who need to be ruled. Such "prescriptions" are, of course, not explicit. For discussion of non-ideal theory, see Chapter One.

⁵⁴ "We learn to see whiteness and blackness, seeing ourselves in our own eyes, and in the eyes of others, as equal, as superior, as inferior, but in all cases ineluctably (given a racialized social order) as a human of a certain racial kind. And this ineluctable racialization, I would further submit, is 'material' in Marx's own sense – indeed, at a deeper, more foundational level of his own sense..." (Charles W. Mills, "European Specters," in *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism*, New Critical Theory (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 169)

to be strongly in play in each of the examples. This is particularly clear in the case of George Floyd's torture and killing. Fanon and Lorde vividly described ways in which their supposed racial inferiority was inscribed into their psyches through bodily expressions and perlocutionary effects. The dark ontology of race clarifies what makes these situations and their atmospheres *racial* situations and atmospheres at all. They disclose the individual elements within the scene as a whole in accord with a hierarchy of value that operates at the level of perception and affect.

Second, Mills's reconstructed materialism helps us grasp the productive, iterative function of racial atmospheres. Baldwin notes the historical continuity between the institution of chattel slavery and the tense, fearful air of interracial parties, one that is embedded deeper than memory. We experience the racial dynamics today because we stand amidst an effective history that was centuries in the making and whose institutions have changed but have certainly not disappeared. This highlights the temporal dimension of racial atmospheres. As products of histories of racial domination, they also mark the mode in which these histories appear in the present and manifest their felt significance. The significance of French colonial history in Martinique is made visceral and palpable in Fanon's encounter with the young white boy, whose fear of Fanon has roots in a history of white fears of slave revolts and the dehumanizing stereotypes white people invoked to justify enslaving Black people. But in Baldwin's cocktail party, it is precisely the non-acknowledgement of the history of slavery that haunts the room and unsettles its guests. Mills's notion of "white ignorance" describes the selective distribution of knowledge and ignorance with regard to racial realities and the histories that produced them. Such selectivity serves white material interests by marginalizing the historical moral horrors that sully the story of the United States as a bastion of liberty and justice for all.

In these ways, Mills's critical race theory articulates the particular social logic that makes these situations distinctly racial situations, and his reconstructed materialist social theory helps to explain how this logic became so profoundly embedded in social life. But Mills's theory does not adequately grasp all of the morally salient features of racial atmospheres. For this reason, I propose a reconstruction of the dark ontology of race with my above discussion of racial atmospheres to form a new, more adequate non-ideal descriptive concept: the dark atmospherics of race.

First, neither objective social structures nor discursive regimes adequately explain how systems of dominating power like white supremacy move embodied creatures to act. Human beings do not simply run action scripts in the manner that machines carry out protocols. Nor do we implement discursive strategies the way that generals conduct wars.⁵⁵ In order for embodied creatures like us to be influenced and moved by systems of domination, we must first be affected by them. As Donovan Schaefer puts it is, "Without affects, power – even and especially discourse – is inert."⁵⁶

Despite his poststructuralist revisions, Mills continues to conceive of the effects of social causation on individual agents in mode of an ideology critic. On his view, white supremacy affects our inner lives primarily at a cognitive and doxastic level. But if we complement Mill's own formulation of the dark ontology of race as a discursive regime with the concept of atmosphere, this explanatory gap begins to diminish. Systems of dominating power like white

⁵⁵ To presume as much is to commit what Donovan Schaefer has called the "linguistic fallacy [...] a flaw at the heart of traditional ideology critique, which takes as given that language is a sort of computer program, an intrinsically compelling system of information/force... [it] presupposes that language is an apparatus of command that effortlessly articulates with bodies." (Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 35.)

⁵⁶ Schaefer, 34.

supremacy move agents by first affecting us, and thereby influencing us, at the level of feeling and perception.

Second, Mills's strict reliance on material group interests to explain the agential and motivational dynamics of racism's tenacity is unnecessarily reductive. The achievement and preservation of dominance is clearly an important aspect of human behavior. But it is certainly not the only way to understand what moves us. Some especially virtuous people resist material group interests on moral grounds. But beyond that, there is a tragic dimension to racialized conduct that is entirely overlooked if we think solely in terms of the will to dominate. In Baldwin's cocktail party, for example, the tension that "defeats us" expresses not a self-interested malice but an anxious awkwardness. His invocation of Oedipus further suggests the situation's tragic character, as its participants are driven toward a fate they would never choose. There is so much more going on in racial situations than the accumulation of social benefits and the rational calculation of material interest.⁵⁷ As one theorist put it, race entails an "erotic life"⁵⁸ that grips and moves us in ways that are more ambiguous than purposive, more responsive than calculating.

The concept of atmosphere fruitfully extends Mills's dark ontology of race on these points as well. As quasi-things, atmospheres bridge the conceptual gap between subjective and objective dimensions of racial oppression that Mills's theory of ideology acknowledges but

⁵⁷ Donovan Schaefer puts it thusly: "Thinking racism affectively suggests that racialization is not simply a conceptual mistake, a set of beliefs about another group of bodies that happens to be wrong and which could be erased through the provision of correct facts. Supplementing existing structural, economic, and linguistic approaches, an analytics of affect suggests that racism can also be produced or accelerated by bodies trafficking in viscerally charged economies of hate. This dimension of racism, which Sharon Patricia Holland calls the "erotic life of racism," flourishes not because of ignorance or lack of information, but because of a set of compulsions that drive bodies to generate and police the boundaries of their social worlds." (Schaefer, 123)

⁵⁸ See Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2012). For similar concerns about reductions of racial dynamics to material interests, see Susannah Heschel, "The Slippery yet Tenacious Nature of Racism: New Developments in Critical Race Theory and Their Implications for the Study of Religion and Ethics," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 35, no. 1 (2015): 3–27.

underexplains. It is only because agents are affected by racial atmospheres that the socially embedded logic of white persons and nonwhite sub-persons can seep into our inner lives and constrain epistemic and moral consciousness as it does. Further, this affective quality of atmospheres better explains how the social causality of white supremacy grips agents, holds us under its sway, and moves us to act than does Mills's revised materialist approach. While the doxastic distortions of racist ideology are important factors, we have also seen how even those of us who explicitly reject racist ideology are vulnerable to an even more insidious distortion at the level of perception and feeling.

Finally, atmospheres allow for a more subtle articulation of the relationship between agents and their social environment than does Mills's reconstructed materialism. Instead of mere functionaries of social structural dynamics, agents enveloped by the dark atmospherics of race remain agents, albeit agents under varying degrees of foreign influence. The authority of this influence functions phenomenologically. It sets the evaluative scene in which objects or persons immediately appear in consciousness. But this authority is never absolute, and the atmospheric dynamics are never unitary. On this view, there are likely to be many competing atmospheres in any given situation, none of which are determinate for the agents that are affectively involved therein.

In short, the concept of the dark atmospherics of race not only retains Mills's genuine insights into the nature and function of racism's tenacity but it also deepens and expands those insights. But there is one further feature of these racial atmospherics that warrant our attention, namely, their person- and world-formative quality. For that, we do well to return to Schleiermacher's mature philosophical ethics.

§3.2 The Dark Atmospherics of Race as Person- and World-Formative Powers

The example of the racializing gaze in the work of Fanon and Lorde showed that what I am calling the dark atmospherics of race do not leave agents unaffected. Rather, they shape their psychology and embodied dispositions in accord with an historical-racial schema. This resonates strongly with Schleiermacher's claim that, as aspects of reason, social affectivity is both person- and world-formative. As I noted in the previous chapter, Schleiermacher describes these dynamics in a general way that is only so helpful for grasping their significance in a particular, concrete political context like contemporary American racism. But now that we have a more richly textured account of racial atmospherics, we can now return to Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics to ask about the moral meaning of these forms of social affectivity.

It must be said that there are many ways in which Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics lacks the conceptual repertoire for this task. Though his account of reason transforming nature is complex and multi-dimensional, it remains formalistic and ethically optimistic. All human activity is subsumed under the general activity of reason and its sole function is to perfect nature. By contrast, we are concerned with a very particular social logic that has organized the natural world in an ethically deleterious way. For this reason, Charles Mills's concept of the dark ontology of race and his invocation of non-ideal descriptive mapping concepts figure prominently in this account.

Furthermore, although one of Schleiermacher's central merits was his attention to the role of sociality in ethical life, he construes social life in exclusively culturalist terms. For him, sociality is a realm of free human expression in and through which individuals find resources for

authentic self-discovery and self-definition.⁵⁹ Moreover, Schleiermacher understands culture in teleological terms. This means that while there are many ways to become a cultivated person, culture is ultimately something that one can have more or less of. Whole peoples can exhibit relatively advanced or relatively primitive cultures. And it is unsurprising that, for someone who lived amongst the most elite academic and ecclesial circles in early nineteenth-century Berlin, these evaluative judgments typically followed racial lines.⁶⁰

We must depart from Schleiermacher on each of these points as well. While antiblack racism certainly has a cultural dimension, Mills has emphasized that racial groups are not so much voluntarily chosen for the sake of their expressive possibilities as they are imposed by dominant groups driven by material interests. Race thus occupies a more primordial dimension of human sociality that provides an organizing principle that structures all cultural activity, not to mention juridical, political, and economic life. Likewise, Mills's notion of the dark ontology of race identifies and critiques precisely the kind of racial hierarchy that makes teleologies of culture so dangerous. Whatever person- and world-formative power we ascribe to the dark atmospherics of race, we must acknowledge the distinction between culture and the social and scrutinize the ethical ends we seek for evidence of racialization. On all of these points, Mills's work serves us very well.

The importance of these qualifications cannot be overstated. But I want to emphasize that they are qualifications of a more basic insight that Mills and Schleiermacher fundamentally share. For both thinkers, human agents are profoundly shaped by powers that exceed us and that operate in our social and historical context. These powers shape not only our material

⁵⁹ For a detailed account of this, see my readings of *Die Monologen* and the Berlin Lectures on philosophical ethics in Chapter 3.4 and 3.5 respectively.

⁶⁰ For a nuanced articulation of this problem in Schleiermacher and Johann Gottfried Herder, see Vial, *Modern Religion, Modern Race*, Chapters 4-5.

environment and institutional landscape but also our inner lives. This, in turn, inclines us to act in ways that further shape our world and that imprint it with the logic of these powers. And while Mills helps us to see the social structural and doxastic dimensions of this phenomenon, Schleiermacher's insight that these powers bear an affective dimension that coordinates our immediate evaluative perceptions and casts a felt valence over discrete situations has led us to reconsider the very nature of racism's tenacity. In other words, since Charles Mills and Friedrich Schleiermacher each reveal and conceal certain aspects of the powers that shape us and our world, we can achieve new descriptive comprehensiveness by hermeneutically reconstructing their respective insights in light of the other.

I will return to these descriptive insights in the following section. But the question before us now is ethical in nature. How do the dark atmospherics of race relate to the process of ethically perfecting persons and their worlds? More precisely, how does this peculiar efficacy of atmospheres vis-à-vis agents, which I have argued pertains primarily to the manner in which agents feel in and evaluatively perceive their situation, enhance or diminish an individual's capacity to act in accord with her considered judgments?

Let us return to the earlier example of Baldwin's cocktail party. The atmosphere of fear and tension that "defeats us" owes, not to any conscious memory, but to an "utterable" past the participants collectively deny. This past, by which he means the history of Black enslavement in the United States and its enduring effects, remains present in spite of our denials. "The man does not remember the hand that struck him, the darkness that frightened him, as a child; nevertheless, the hand and the darkness remain with him, indivisible from himself forever, part of the passion that drives him wherever he thinks to take flight."⁶¹ Though there seems to be a latent theory of

⁶¹ James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone," in *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 30.

repression at play here, Baldwin's concern is not with the psychological mechanism so much as the experience of being affectively gripped and moved by forces beyond one's control. There is another agency in the room that is, as he puts it, "indivisible" from us. And yet this indivisibility does not equate to identity. Its potency remains distinct from that of the "I" who thinks, wills, chooses, and deliberates; in fact, this potency defeats the "I" and its intentions.

Fanon's encounter with the young white boy suggests something similar. The internalized sense of Black inferiority Fanon reports is sharply at odds with his own beliefs and desires. He *knows* that the racial stigmas imposed upon him by the French are not true, and he certainly does not desire to capitulate to them. And yet, he cannot free himself from that "objective gaze" that reveals his Blackness to him with all its associated stereotypes.⁶² The historical-racial schema that purportedly justified his subjugation has become part of him, coloring his self-perception and constraining his capacity for self-determination from within.

These literary accounts align quite closely with the empirical findings of implicit racial bias discussed in Chapter Two. These studies showed that exposing agents to racial stimuli can cause them to issue racially biased judgments and to commit racially discriminatory behaviors that contradict their considered judgments about what is right or good to do. I showed that this poses a particularly insidious threat to the moral integrity of agents whose moral resources are effectively enervated in race-salient situations by these implicit attitudes. The moral resources upon which agents draw to commit moral acts, i.e., moral beliefs and virtuous desires, are inhibited by these temporally prior distortions of moral consciousness, distortions at the level of perception and affect.

⁶² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 92.

Such distortions are precisely that which the dark atmospherics of race produce in agents. They grip the agents who are affectively involved in a situation, often in spite of their intentions or expectations, and influence their agency by altering the way in which they evaluatively perceive that situation and their place within it. The insight to be drawn from Schleiermacher's ethics of *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit* is that we need not understand the kind of moral enervation at play in race-salient situations strictly in terms of the agent's attitudes. Rather, these implicit attitudes can be more comprehensively understood as *effects* of the supra-personal atmospherics of race. The biased judgment or behavior is triggered in a particular situation in which these atmospheric dynamics are already present and, therefore, already affecting the agents involved. One does not choose to perceive a person as Black, let alone as threatening, unintelligent, or prone to criminality, and his or her intentional efforts to not so perceive someone arrive rather late to the scene, after its evaluative contours have already taken a racialized shape. This shaping is itself the effect of being exposed to these atmospheric dynamics in countless concrete situations such that the agent is now reliably disposed to apprehend future situations in a similar way. Furthermore, our conduct in those future situations, whether conscious and intentional or unconscious and unintentional, further contributes to the atmospheric dynamics that emerge therefrom. To focus solely on the implicit attitude and the biased behavior it causes is to overlook the broader matrix of atmospheric dynamics that make racism so tenacious.

§3.3 Summary

In this section, I outlined a conception of the dark atmospherics of race by hermeneutically reconstructing insights from Charles Mills critical race theory and from Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics. This concept identifies a social and historical force that

makes the distinction between white persons and nonwhite sub-persons perceptible at the level of affect and perception. Like social structures, the dark atmospherics of race are irreducible to the subjective attitudes of individuals. But as properties of a subject-involving situations, they are also irreducible to the objective environment conceived apart from the subjects with complex inner lives who are ensconced within it and affected by them. This concept amends some theoretical shortcomings in Mills's critical race theory, and it also augments Schleiermacher's understanding of how social affectivity exerts its person- and world-formative power. Finally, I showed that this concept accommodates the vivid depictions of racialized moral enervation in the works of Baldwin and Fanon as well as the social psychological evidence on implicit racial bias. In fact, I made the even the stronger assertion that it better grasps the tenacity of racism than the attitudinalist accounts favored by social psychologists. In the next section, I provide arguments for this assertion. Specifically, I make the case that this concept of the dark atmospherics of race helpfully integrate the insights from attitudinal and structuralist theories of antiblack racism's tenacity and allows for a more subtle articulation of the agent/environment relation in racial situations.

§4 Descriptive and Ethical Insights

I began this chapter by noting two questions, one descriptive and one ethical, regarding the nature of racism's tenacity. On the one hand, critical race theorists posit the existence of social structures that are objectively embedded aspects of our environment to explain the recalcitrance of racial disparities. But this turn away from human interiority to explain our conduct sits uneasily with our self-understanding as agents who author our own actions. It also seems discordant with a second explanation of racism's tenacity, namely, the theory of pervasive

implicit racial bias. Instead of attending to objective social realities, they posit the existence of implicit racial attitudes in the depths of our embodied minds.

I maintain that both perspectives provide insight into racism's tenacity. But like every instance of human understanding, these theories both reveal and conceal. Rather than attempt to reduce one dimension of racialized life as merely epiphenomenal vis-à-vis the other, my concern has been to develop a more capacious theory of racism's tenacity that accommodates the genuine insights of both disciplines and draws on further conceptual resources to articulate that which each conceals. I argued above that neither structuralist nor attitudinal theories grasp the phenomena described by Baldwin, Fanon, Lorde and that I argued was a morally significant aspect of George Floyd's killing. My claim there was that the concept of the dark atmospherics of race helpfully illumines a lived structure of racial existence that tends to be overlooked by attitudinal or structuralist approaches. The value of this new concept was presented primarily on phenomenological grounds.

By way of conclusion, I will argue that this concept provides us with two additional insights. First, it provides theoretical connective tissue to integrate the explanations of racism's tenacity offered by critical race theory and social psychology. Second, it provides a more subtle way to articulate the porous relationship between agent and environment. But this final point also raises further questions about psychological and moral integrity that, I contend, will require more than philosophical and conceptual resources to muster an adequate response. If my arguments for these claims are successful, I will have shown that the concept of the dark atmospherics of race contributes to a more comprehensive descriptive account of racism's tenacity as well as deeper insight into our nature as moral agents. These advances thereby justify the hermeneutical reconstruction of social affectivity in racialized life.

§4.1 Dark Atmospheric of Race as Theoretical Connective Tissue

I contend that the dark atmospheric of race serve as theoretical connective tissue that relates the social-structural and embodied-psychological dimensions of racism in two ways. First, insofar as atmospheres are quasi-things with both objective and subjective qualities, they provide a way to think about the reciprocal interaction between individual agents and their socio-material environment without reducing one to the other. Second, insofar as atmospheres are telescopic and overlap one another, they allow us to think across the various registers of racialized life (sub-personal, personal, interpersonal, political) in a nimbler and more finely grained manner than do concepts like social structure or implicit attitudes.

Recall first that, as quasi-things, the dark atmospheric of race emerge from and pertain primarily to concrete situations that envelop individual agents. But this object-like quality is never entirely separate from their subject-like quality, since atmospheres simply would not appear in situations without subjects. Atmospheres are thus ways in which individuals are affected by their social and material environment, but they are also ways in which individuals actively inhabit their environment. This in-between status provides a powerful response to the explanatory problem I noted in §3.1 regarding how objective social arrangements or discursive regimes actually move embodied creatures to act. To be sure, objective social arrangements differentially constrain and enable agents by virtue of their social location. It is equally certain that discursive regimes strongly influence what is and is not possible to think, say, and do. But these material and discursive features of our situation only move us to the degree that they first affect us in the manner that atmospheres do. Otherwise, they remain motivationally inert. The dark atmospheric of race thus extends Mills's revised materialism to accommodate the affective, embodied life of racism. It articulates how these situations affect and move agents in

coordinated ways by altering their evaluative perceptions of their situations and their place within them. This helps to close the explanatory gap between objective features of the environment and the conduct of agents who live, move, and have their being therein.

But this theory of antiblack racism's recalcitrance also does not collapse into a merely attitudinal account. As spatially extended feelings, the impulses and compulsions that make racial situations so charged are not confined simply within the minds of individual agents. They emerge from situations, which include not only other persons but also material features of the built environment, symbols, and even the histories – both remembered and repressed – that continue to haunt us. By thinking atmospherically about racism's tenacity, the spontaneous evaluative responses that color our interactions in race-salient situations can be understood as emergent features of an enduring historical process that grips and moves us in ways that range from the violent and coercive to the subtle and suggestive. Furthermore, this perspective allows us to track the series of enduring effects initiated by our own affective responses in these situations, some of which remain outside the bounds of conscious awareness. In each case, an atmospheric account of racism's tenacity avoids the individualistic pitfalls that critical race theorists have rightfully criticized.

Crucially, affective involvement can be marked by both conscious feelings and the unconscious, automatic biases observed by social psychologists. Both the intense fear the young white boy feels toward Fanon and the unconscious, bodily fear-responses detected experimentally in studies of implicit affective bias are modes of agents' affective involvement in racial situations. To be so involved, in other words, does not entail that one is directly aware or conscious of that involvement. In fact, in cases of antiblack perceptual bias, the subjects who exclude Black people from the scope of moral concern are likely not aware of what they are

doing. In both conscious and unconscious cases of affective involvement, agents are influenced in ways that do not align with their beliefs, desires, and intentions. They are held under the sway of an atmosphere that alters the way in which they feel and evaluatively perceive their situation and their place within it.

This shift from an attitudinal to atmospheric theory of affectivity avoids the important structuralist critique of those accounts of racism cast primarily in terms of personal prejudice, whether implicit or explicit. Rather, the implicit racial biases observed in laboratory settings reveal the depth to which agents living in racialized social orders have been formed by their affective involvement in countless racially structured situations. Such affective formation becomes dispositional such that, when presented with racial stimuli in a laboratory environment, the bodily responses and psychological mechanisms forged over the course of a lifetime reappear in a particularly recalcitrant way. For the sake of quantifying these effects, psychologists speak in terms of discrete attitudes in the mind. But this individualistic approach obscures the atmospheric dynamics that cultivated such biases in the world and that elicited them in the lab.

To be perfectly clear, this atmospheric account does not deny the existence of social structures or implicit attitudes. On the contrary, I take it that these each identify crucial aspects of racialized life that we ignore at our peril. My claim is simply that these concepts do not exhaustively describe racism's tenacity and, furthermore, that the concept of the dark atmospherics of race both accommodates these features and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the political and psychological realities that shape how we feel, think, and act.

This comment about the more comprehensive understanding of racism's tenacity brings us to the second important feature of atmospheres, namely, their telescopic and overlapping nature. As we have seen, atmospheres are telescopic insofar as they pertain to situations of vastly

different size and scope. A prisoner in solitary confinement is enveloped in an atmosphere no less than the impassioned protesters at a Black Lives Matter rally or the white suburbanite enjoying an afternoon at the country club. In each situation, the effects that critical race theorists attribute to structural causation are certainly at play. Similarly, the individuals in each of these situations are certainly the bearers of particular attitudes. But since social structures primarily refer to very broad social arrangements and their dynamics, and since attitudes primarily refer to individual mental states, these concepts are bound to certain magnitudes of scope in a way that atmospheres are not.

I hasten to note that there are many occasions where this constraint counts as an epistemic virtue. Both the congressperson working on legislation for racial reparations and the social scientist researching the racial wealth gap rely upon broad, structural analyses. The cognitive psychologist similarly relies on a concept of attitudes to make sense of her experimental observations. But in practical contexts, where agents are trying to understand their concrete situation and to orient their lives responsibly therein, they are likely to need conceptual resources that move more nimbly between these various registers. The dark atmospherics of race constitutes one such conceptual resource.

Not only do atmospheres range in scope, but they also overlap with one another in ways that create tensions of their own. This is helpful for understanding why it is that persons who belong to different racial groups often respond so differently to a single event. The same video footage of a police officer forcefully subduing an unarmed Black man might strike a Black viewer as personally traumatizing and a white retired law-enforcement officer as clearly justified. To many others, the response to the video amounts to a complex mixture of shame and numb ambivalence. These affective and perceptual responses are indexed to the long racial

history of policing in the United States, and one could easily imagine how the expression of these vastly different responses by people in the same room would produce a further set of interpersonal dynamics that produce an atmospheric shift. This single scene could be analyzed in terms of the structural forces that have encouraged white people to align with law enforcement and sown great suspicion and fear amongst Black communities toward the same institution. One could also ask about the personal attitudes of each individual toward racial progress and policing. To be sure, the personal histories of individual Black and white persons will modulate their affective response to such a video in ways that a more general, structural analysis is likely to overlook. But to grasp the situation as a whole, one must track how all of these plural powers coalesce and affect individuals and groups who are always already affectively involved, albeit in different ways, in the situation.

In sum, this account of the dark atmospherics of race provides theoretical connective tissue to integrate insights about racism's tenacity from critical race theory and from the social psychology of implicit bias. It helps to explain how social structures and discursive regimes actually move embodied creatures and how those peculiar sub-doaxastic states that link Black people to all manner of negative stereotypes got inside of us and generate recalcitrant moral failures in racial situations. Finally, the telescopic and mutually overlapping quality of atmospheres provides a way to shift more elegantly across the various registers of racialized life and to offer a more finely grained analysis of what is going on in racialized situations than we could attain through structural or attitudinal analyses alone.

§4.2 The Atmospherics Between Agent and Environment

In addition to these descriptive achievements, the concept of the dark atmospherics of race also provides new insight into the agent-environment relation. By emphasizing objective features of the social environment at the expense of the complex inner lives of agents, structuralist and post-structuralist social theorists risk construing agents as mere *functionaries* of broader social patterns of behavior. On the other hand, by emphasizing the role of sub-doxastic, automatic, and even autonomic features of our embodied minds in tenacious racism, social psychologists risk construing agents as mere *amalgamations* of impersonal psychological mechanisms. Neither approach coheres with our lived experience of ourselves as agents who, at least to some degree, authors our own actions.

The atmospheric approach accommodates both the lived experience of agency and the manifest constraints imposed on us, whether on account of our bodily responses to environmental stimuli or the influence of our social environment on how we feel in and evaluatively construe our situation. While atmospheric influences range from the seductive to the coercive, I have argued that it never extinguishes agency. Their influence on agents is primarily phenomenological, meaning that they do not so much *cause* us to act as *incline* us to act by altering our felt comportment vis-à-vis some situation.

At this juncture, we might recall the early Schleiermacherian notion of the “boundlessness of impulses” as that feature of our souls that guarantees the possibility of moral motivation in every situation.⁶³ On his view, the soul is a teeming bundle of impulses that are constantly responding to various objects, whether internal thoughts or external objects of perception. These impulses are responsible for determining how an agent acts, but

⁶³ I discussed this concept in Chapter 3.3.

Schleiermacher insists that no single impulse is every absolutely, and therefore necessarily, motivating. This means that it is always conceivable that some other impulse, perhaps one that represents the scene in a moral light, might subordinate the other competing impulses to itself.

Now suppose that we think of such impulses in atmospheric terms as felt-bodily resonances of the atmospheres emanating from a particular situation. We could say that, while the individuals ensconced within those situations cannot prevent the atmospheres from affecting them, there is no reason to think that those atmospheres absolutely determine what we do the way that one billiard ball determines the path of a second one by striking it. Atmospherics might unavoidably present us with subjective inclinations or environmental affordances for particular kinds of conduct, but they remain suggestions, not sufficient causes.

With that said, insofar as agents are always embedded in situations, they are also always under the sway of some atmosphere. This means that the free exercise of agency is always unavoidably constrained, oriented, and even permeated by other forces and potencies distinct from the “I” who thinks, judges, wills, and deliberates. Some of these forces are embedded in our bodily and psychological constitution. One famous study showed that a group of Israeli judges issued much more lenient sentences when those judgments were issue after lunch, when their caloric needs were satisfied, as opposed to before lunch, when they were likely getting hungry.⁶⁴ In a more germane example, Baldwin speaks of the power of a repressed past that drives us toward unintended, tragic fates and defeat our good intentions. In neither case does the “I” cease to issue judgements or to author its own actions. It is no one other than the judge who signs her

⁶⁴ Shai Danziger, Jonathan Levav, and Liora Avnaim-Pesso, “Extraneous Factors in Judicial Decisions,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 108, no. 17 (April 26, 2011): 6889–92. Other researchers have called their findings into question. See, for example, Keren Weinsahl-Margel and John Shapard, “Overlooked Factors in the Analysis of Parole Decisions,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 108, no. 42 (October 18, 2011): E833–E833.

name on the sentencing documents; it is no one other than Oedipus who lumbers on to his tragic fate. But it is equally true that, in these cases, the “I” does not act entirely on its own.

In sum, an atmospheric approach to agency acknowledges just how complicated it is for human beings to act in the world. Unlike those moral philosophers who largely reflect on agency in abstraction from bodily and environmental constraints, this account affirms that we are embodied creatures who are constantly pushed and pulled by forces within us and beyond us. It acknowledges, furthermore, that some of these forces lie outside of our conscious awareness and even outside of our capacity to control. But it also affirms the intuition that moral motivation is at least conceivable in every situation. Unlike structuralist theories of tenacious racism, this approach more clearly articulates how agents remain more than mere functionaries of broader social patterns of behavior even as it acknowledges how vulnerable we are to falling under the sway of such forces. On the other hand, unlike social psychological theories of tenacious racism, this approach more clearly articulates how agents are more than mere amalgamations of psychological processes even as it acknowledges the depths to which such socially toned mechanisms distort our felt relation to and evaluative perception of racial situations. Insofar as this account integrates the genuine insights from each of these disciplines more comprehensively than each can do on its own, I have demonstrated its epistemic value as an insight into the meaning of moral agency amidst tenacious racism.

§5 Conclusion

This chapter developed the concept of the dark atmospherics of race and argued that it provides descriptive and ethical insight into racism’s tenacity and the meaning of moral agency therein. It achieved this formulation by hermeneutically reconstructing insights from

Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics, neo-phenomenological research on atmospheres, and Charles Mills's notion of the dark ontology of race. The result was a novel diagnostic concept that allows for three chief insights. It 1) identifies a structure of lived, racialized experience that is overlooked by structuralist and attitudinal theories of racism, 2) integrates insights into the nature of antiblack racism's tenacity from critical race theory and the social psychology of implicit bias, and 3) reveals something of the complexity of our nature as moral agents who are paradoxically bound and yet free, whose own actions and their consequences are permeated by powers beyond our awareness and control even as the possibility of moral motivation remains conceivable in every case. This marks an advance in our inquiry into the nature of tenacious antiblack racism and its meaning for moral agency.

This chapter therefore completes Part II of the dissertation, which sought to articulate the moral realities at play in racism's tenacity. It identified an enduring feature of our nature as agents that complements and deepens the politically realistic account of racism's tenacity developed in Part I. We are the kind of creatures whose affections play a fundamental role, not only in framing and orienting moral deliberation, but also in tethering our evaluative perceptions to social and cultural forces. Feeling ensures psychic integrity and the possibility of moral motivation, but it also makes our moral lives precarious and vulnerable to the distortions of political realities like dominating power and material group interest. This means that Schleiermacher's thinking, suitably reconstructed, helps us think about agents who are strongly influenced by amoral political forces but who cannot be exhaustively understood in those terms. We seek, not only dominance and self-interest, but also the right and the good – even if the latter pursuit is always susceptible to corruption by the former.

In each of these ways, our investigation has achieved new insights into the nature of racism's tenacity and its meaning for moral agency, not by evading or idealizing its nefarious effects, but rather by probing their depths even further. With that said, these advances raise further questions that expose the limits of ethical inquiry itself and, I want to suggest, invite us to engage in distinctly theological reflection. These questions concern a) the fragmentary quality of agency, b) the limits of moral striving, and c) the possibility of personal and social transformation.

First, recall that one of the upshots of thinking atmospherically about agency is that it blurs the lines between agent and environment. By construing agents as affectively involved in situations, as opposed to being essentially separate from them, we can accommodate our phenomenological intuitions about the spatial and intersubjective qualities of feelings and better explain how our material, social, and historical environment can influence our conduct. But it also raises the rather terrifying possibility that our own actions are shot through with alterity. This is precisely what makes the findings about implicit racial bias so unsettling. They reveal that there are foreign powers, ones that we judge to be evil and earnestly disavow, that work not only on us but through us, coursing through our conduct. Our own deeds, it turns out, are not simply or exhaustively our own.

While Schleiermacher's ethical writings pointed to feeling as entailing an inner-emotional, synthetic activity to explain our *psychic integrity* as self-conscious individuals, it is not clear that his philosophical ethics help us to think about this kind of threat to our *moral integrity* as agents. Stated otherwise, by framing his philosophical ethics in terms of the activity of reason upon nature, Schleiermacher can only explain moral failures as instances of practical irrationality. As such, they can be amended by improving what already lies within us, namely,

the power of reason. But as I have shown, the research on implicit racial bias suggests that racialized moral failures can occur even in those of us who reason properly that Black people are human beings and infer therefrom that they are creatures of intrinsic dignity who are entitled to moral respect. This suggests that we suffer from a more fundamental fragmentation, one that affects our most basic affective and perceptual intercourse with the world and influences cognitively downstream activities like those involved in moral deliberation. If reason itself has been corrupted by the dark atmospherics of race, then it is not clear how it could even identify – let alone amend – such moral disintegration.

This leads to a second question about the limits of morality itself. Part II of the dissertation qualified the politically realistic account of racism’s tenacity by arguing that our moral aspirations, along with the possibility of moral motivation in every situation, are enduring features of human nature for which any realistic picture of agency must account. I have already noted that these moral realities are constrained by the political realities described in Part I. But we are now in a position to identify a further, and more fundamental, limit.

At each stage of moral action (from the formation of an intention, to the decision to act, to the achievement of real-world effects) the dark atmospherics of race inhibit the moral aspirations of good and strong-willed agents. By infusing our affective perceptions of situations, these dynamics limit agent’s capacity to perceive racial evils *as evils* in the first place, thereby inhibiting the formation of morally appropriate intentions. In cases where agents do form such intentions, the dark atmospherics of race frustrate not only the successful achievement of the intended act but also the agent’s apprehension of the failure *as a failure* such that it might arouse feelings of regret. Furthermore, even in those cases where agents form good intentions and successfully carry them through to discrete acts, they still face enormous headwinds. Most

obviously, the social structures that reproduce racial inequalities do not simply vanish overnight. Our actions, even the most praiseworthy ones, are thus constrained by the sedimented inertia of centuries-old behavioral patterns and the material conditions they have put in place. But since the dark atmospherics of race have infused the logic of white persons and nonwhite sub-persons into our spontaneous evaluative perceptions, they further inhibit the kind of contagious expansion of morally edifying atmospherics that might animate substantive moral and social transformation. Like small candles lit in the midst of a torrential storm, the light and heat of racially just and loving conduct struggles to take hold. Thus, in each of these ways, human moral aspirations run into significant limits that are not simply a product of the political realities of dominating power and self-interest. Rather, they are even more enduring limits on human power itself, conceived individually or collectively.

Together, these point to a third question about the possibility of self and world transformation. If 1) we are the recalcitrantly fragmented creatures I have claimed we are, and if 2) even our moral aspirations face enduring limits, then 3) we have reason to worry about our own capacity to resolve the psychological, atmospheric, and social distortions that plague us. By virtue of what power could these evils possibly be overcome? Social theorists and psychologists, to the degree that they offer prescriptions for transformation at all, have responses to this question.⁶⁵ But if the limitations on our moral capacities are as severe as they appear, and if our

⁶⁵ Some structuralists argue that this power is to be found in the consciousness and liberating praxis of those most oppressed by these forces. Social psychologists propose a variety of clinical responses that attempt to counteract the psychological effects of racial hierarchy and retrain our minds to form more racially just spontaneous evaluative perceptions. But these positions are both at risk of idealizing our situation. Regarding the structuralist solution, the evidence suggests that the victims of antiblack bias are by no means immune to such biases themselves. This means that, even if they have material group interests that align with the longing for racial justice, and even if they exhibit less bias than white people, they are by no means immune to the tragic limits of human morality or their susceptibility to corruption. It also bears noting that such revolutionary political movements have a history of fracturing along other lines (ideological, racial, national, etc) that make the likelihood of success without building solidarity with white people relatively small. For the social psychologist, the evidence that such training procedures produce enduring effects is still quite ambiguous. Even if these effects

susceptibility to influence by foreign atmospheric forces is so pervasive, then I propose that we would do well to follow the Apostle Paul and ask a different kind of question.

At the end of his monologue in Romans 7, Paul's 'I' reaches a breaking point. The power to do the good that he wants has proven so elusive that he finally laments, "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24) This question, a result of his interrogation of his own moral resources and their apparently intransigent limits, leads him to look elsewhere for an adequate response. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!" (Rom. 7:25)

In this case, the acknowledgment of recalcitrant moral failure does not lead Paul to idealize the situation, stretching the individual's moral capacities beyond recognition for the sake of preserving the possibility of moral responsibility and improvement. Rather, they turn his attention beyond the agent's moral capacities and toward an external power. The *limits of* morality as well as the *limits of* our hope for transformation are also, according to Paul, *limits to* a more encompassing and pervasive reality, complete with its own dynamics and power. The transformation that Paul seeks, one that promises to overcome his impotence and reconcile the externally-possessed and internally-fragmented self, is one that he cannot achieve on his own steam.

In the argument's final move, I respond to these questions by turning to Schleiermacher's theological writings. These works, I will argue, press beyond the conceptual and methodological limits of his philosophical ethics by developing his account of affectivity and sociality in human life even further, probing their religious depths and dynamics.

were lasting, the individuals who undergo such trainings would be reintroduced to the very same atmospheric effects that occasioned them in the first place immediately upon leaving the laboratory.

PART III

A THEOLOGICALLY REALISTIC ACCOUNT OF RACISM'S TENACITY

Parts I and II of this work developed accounts of racism's tenacity that were politically and morally realistic respectively. Part I turned to critical race theory and social psychology to identify the impersonal forces bearing down on agents living in racialized societies. Part II turned to Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics to hermeneutically reconstruct an account of moral agency that could accommodate the findings from Part I without idealizing them. I argued that Schleiermacher's early notion of the boundlessness of impulses achieves just that. It identifies a moral reality that ensures the possibility of moral motivation in every possible circumstance, and it also provides a psychologically realistic way to understand the threats to moral agency. I then proceeded to think both with and beyond Schleiermacher in an effort to grasp the social, historical, and political dimensions of these threats. The result was an account of racism's tenacity that i) retains the insights into its social-structural and embodied-psychological dimensions described in Part I, ii) integrates these within a more comprehensive theory of the dark atmospherics of race, and iii) affirms the capacity for moral motivation – and therefore also moral responsibility – as a moral reality that is no less recalcitrant than the forces that threaten it.

Part II thus marked a significant development in our quest to understand the tenacity of racism and its meaning for moral agency. But I concluded Chapter Four by outlining some questions that remain unanswered. First, if agents always act under the sway of some atmosphere such that their own conduct is vulnerable to foreign influences, including some influences that they judge to be evil, how should we think about the moral integrity of agents? Second, if we are

such morally fragmentary creatures, what do the recalcitrant limits of our moral capacities mean for our self-understanding as agents? And finally, do creatures who face intransigent limits on even our noblest moral aspirations have any reason to hope that these might be overcome? Or, to put it more starkly, is the current misery of racial injustice and violence our destiny?

Though it is perhaps most apparent in the final question's soteriological framing, each of these are religious questions that draw us into an even more fundamental inquiry into the structures of lived reality. To identify them as religious simply means that they regard the limits of human being and power, and to contemplate such limits is to have already begun to think about that which lies beyond them, even if only tacitly. To engage in this kind of reflection means to ask whether these limits-of human being and power are also thresholds, i.e., limits-to a more encompassing reality and power.¹

While these questions press beyond the scope of Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics, his theological works locate them at their thematic center. For in these works, he construes the fragmentariness of human life as a religious, and in fact, a soteriological issue. He posits a corruption that runs through the heart of every human life, that infects every social form we inhabit, and that sullies every institution we create. It cannot be resolved through the advance of reason alone, whether as moral exhortation or habitual training, because its roots lie in human affectivity, making it a reality that is deeper than either the understanding or the will. This means that it exceeds the descriptive purview of his philosophical ethics, framed as it is in terms of reason and nature, because the distortion it names regards nature itself.

¹ This account of limits in religious and theological reflection can be found in Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 105–18.

To bring this power to articulation, Schleiermacher must press beyond his philosophical ethics in two ways. First, he turns to investigate the distinctly religious life of feeling, both its intrapsychic and social dimensions. Second, he turns to distinctly Christian symbolic resources to articulate these felt, and I will argue, atmospheric dynamics. This allows Schleiermacher to reckon more directly than he could in his philosophical ethics with the threat that sinister atmospheric influences pose to agential integrity. But by framing these questions about moral integrity within a theology of redemption, Schleiermacher construes both the recognition of our fragmentation as well as the achievement of integrity as effects of a distinctly religious atmosphere stemming from the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, the Redeemer. This presents us with a profound theological insight: it is only in attending to the dismal truth of our recalcitrant limits – even the limits of our very best and noblest parts – that the possibility, or better yet, the hope, of moral and political transformation comes into view.

The transition to Part III marks an important methodological shift. For the first time in this inquiry, I will consider racism's tenacity from a distinctly Christian perspective and by invoking distinctly Christian symbols. As I stated in the Introduction, this is a Christian realist inquiry and, as such, it approaches its subject matter from a Christian stance. Such a stance is characterized by a constellation of tradition-specific Christian convictions about the whence, whither, and fundamental constitution of human existence. But in keeping with my methodological commitments, I bracketed these convictions in Parts I and II so that I could first clarify the political and moral realities that characterize racialized life in the United States. My accounts of these realities can thus serve as constraints on the theological constructions that follow them. This effectively bridles the speculative and idealizing tendencies of moral and

theological reflection, ensuring rather that our thinking remains grounded in the realities that actually characterize human existence.

Since these earlier analyses yielded questions that exceed the explanatory resources of these non-theological disciplines, an explicitly theological analysis is warranted just insofar as it provides more comprehensive responses to those questions and deepens the insights generated in those prior investigations. Part III must be understood, then, not as a departure from the concrete realities of contemporary American racism, but rather as a more thorough interrogation of those realities. It will be successful to the degree that it a) incorporates the insights into racism's tenacity and moral agency developed in Parts I and II, b) provides more adequate responses to the remaining questions about moral integrity, the limits of human power, and the possibility of overcoming those limits than the resources considered heretofore, and c) deepens our insights into the meaning of moral agency amidst tenacious racism. More precisely, this final part concludes our inquiry by developing a Christian theological account of the religious depth of atmospheric feelings in general and the dark atmospherics of race in particular. My claim is that this deepens our understanding of racism's recalcitrance and its meaning for our self-understanding as moral agents.

Part III consists in three chapters. Chapter Five builds a conceptual bridge between Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics and his theological works by exploring his account of religious feeling in the Introduction to his *Glaubenslehre* and analyzing its relation to ethical life more generally. Chapters Six and Seven turn from Schleiermacher's philosophy of religion to his explicitly dogmatic writings where we find his most sustained analysis of the matter that most concerns us: the recalcitrant fragmentariness of human agency, the limits of human moral aspiration, and the possibility that such limits might yet be overcome. Chapter Six looks to his

doctrine of sin and his theological account of the conscience. I argue that thinking with these symbols helps us to articulate both the full extent of racism's multi-dimensional recalcitrance as well as the ultimate inexpugnability of responsibility. Chapter Seven offers an interpretation of Schleiermacher's Christology and ecclesiology in terms of an "atmospherics of grace," a religious power that not only discloses our fragmentary condition but also fuels a life of responsibility and realistic, joyful, and reparative love for the world that God so loves.

Combined, these final chapters provide a way to understand the very real possibility that human beings living in racially structured societies – especially, but not exclusively, those of us with a material group interest to preserve such an arrangement – suffer from an obduracy to the value of Black people that has become so normative and unrelenting that the very moral resources we would normally draw upon to overcome it have themselves been compromised. This condition, what I call the death of the soul, is one from which we cannot rescue ourselves, whether individually or collectively. But my theological claim is that this sin is recognized precisely in its overcoming. Agents become aware of the wages of sin and death as such only insofar as God's redemptive and reconciling love has already taken hold of us. Critical race theory and social psychology thus play important roles in this process – so important, in fact, that we could know neither the breadth of antiblack racism's deterioration of our world nor where to begin in repairing what has been tarnished without their insights. But as Schleiermacher, and for that matter the Apostle Paul, will remind us, knowledge is not identical to virtue. Nor are good intentions sufficient for the renewal of our racialized world. For that, we need more than instruction and virtuous habituation. We need something much closer to a religious conversion. And for that, we need a Redeemer.

CHAPTER 5

RELIGIOUS ATMOSPHERICS AND THE DEPTHS OF ETHICAL LIFE

The previous chapter developed and defended an atmospheric account of racism's tenacity. It argued that the morally enervating forces affecting agents in racial situations are not reducible to individual attitudes or social structures because they also include an enduring pattern of spatially extended feelings. These affective forces render racial markers perceptually salient and racial distinctions of value affectively palpable. I called these dynamics the dark atmospherics of race. My claim was that this concept provides both theoretical connective tissue between the social structural and embodied psychological dimensions of racism and a supple way of theorizing moral agency in racially structured societies.

I also argued that this account leaves further questions unanswered. If, as Baldwin suggests, the enduring legacy of chattel slavery continues to defeat us precisely by having become indivisible from us, how should we think about this spectral power and its relation to the "I" who thinks, chooses, and acts? If, as Fanon and Lorde report, we internalize the dehumanizing gazes of others so deeply that our own self- and world-perceptions rebuff our considered beliefs and reflective desires, are we really the psychologically unified creatures we think we are? Is it not more truthful to speak of tragically divided self, a self at odds with itself? If so, what would it mean for such a self to be capable of, or to assume, responsibility? And wherein lies such creatures' hope for transformation, whether individually or collectively?

Even the impressive resources of Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics provide us with little help in responding to these questions. As we have seen, he understands ethical life entirely

in terms of the human power to transform nature into its symbols and organs. To be sure, his conception of this power is subtle and multi-dimensional. Reason, for him, is an intersubjective, intergenerational power with both discursive and affective aspects. But the horizon for thinking about human life and conduct remains fixed by human activity. It is not therefore surprising that his philosophical ethics lack anything like a thorough treatment of morally enervating powers like the dark atmospherics of race. Within that horizon, such phenomena can only appear as unfortunate consequences of imperfectly rational activity that awaits correction by the power of reason. He sees no need, then, to couple his doctrine of virtue with a doctrine of vice, since vice is simply the enduring prevalence of nature's power over reason. This framework excludes the possibility that reason itself has been corrupted by the generations of vicious human activity, or that nature could become distorted such that it positively resists human efforts to transform it.

The conclusions about racism's tenacity we reached in Chapter Four suggest that something like this has occurred in racialized societies like the United States. To articulate the significance of this fact and to formulate a response to the remaining questions about the limits of human power, it is clear that we need a different framework for thinking and a different set of resources with which to think. More positively, we need a framework that situates human power within an even more encompassing horizon that allows us to contemplate its limits and their meaning for us as agents. And we need a set of diagnostic resources that are appropriate for thinking about that which exceeds the limits of human reason.

Schleiermacher's dogmatic works provide us with both formal and material support for this kind of thinking. His two-part Christian dogmatics, which includes *The Christian Faith* and

his *Christian Ethics*¹, articulate a theology of redemption that construes human life and activity *before God*. By situating agents in relation to the transcendent source and power of all that is, Schleiermacher can assess the limits of human power and of human goodness in a way that his philosophical ethics could not. Since this framework requires him to speak about the whence, whither, and fundamental structure of human existence, and since this reality exceeds the human capacity to know with clarity and distinctness, Schleiermacher avails himself of the entire “artistic treasure trove”² of the Christian theological tradition. Rather than metaphysical or ethical concepts, Schleiermacher turns to the myths, symbols, and rituals that, on his view, most directly express the convictions³ about ultimate reality held in the depths of Christian hearts and minds. As I will show, these convictions and the symbols that express them can help us to reckon with the depths of antiblack racism’s grip on American life and the disastrous fragmentation it has wrought without either eliminating the possibility of moral agency altogether or idealizing the reality of our situation.

Before turning to these explicitly dogmatic resources, we first need to ask how Schleiermacher understands the place of religion in human life, and in particular, its relationship to ethical life. This task, which is the focus of the present chapter, is important for three reasons. First, the shift toward thinking about human life and conduct before God as opposed to a horizon exclusively determined by human power is of great consequence for the project as a whole. It

¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Selections from Friedrich Schleiermacher’s Christian Ethics*, trans. James M. Brandt, 1st ed., Library of Theological Ethics (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011); Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Die Christliche Sitten: Nach Den Grundsätzen Der Evangelischen Kirche Im Zusammenhange Dargestellt*, ed. L. Jonas, 2nd ed., Friedrich Schleiermacher’s Sämtliche Werke, I/12 (Berlin: Reimer, 1884). Cited as *CS* with English/German pagination.

² Schleiermacher describes the expressive resources of churches as *eines Kunstschatzes* in his Berlin lectures on philosophical ethics. See Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 92; Schleiermacher, *Ethik (1812/13)*, 122. Henceforth cited with English/German pagination.

³ Schleiermacher distinguishes “conviction” [*Gewißheit* and also *Ueberzeugung*] from ordinary forms of “knowing” [*Wissen*] in his discussion of the essence of piety. (*CG* §3)

thus warrants careful theoretical attention, and Schleiermacher provides us with one sophisticated way to understand this human-divine relation.

In particular, and this is my second point, Schleiermacher articulates the religious depths of human life and activity by turning to the familiar concept of feeling. This means that the task of clarifying how Schleiermacher thinks about religion in human life simultaneously allows us to continue our inquiry into Schleiermacher's conception of affectivity and sociality. We can read the present chapter as extending the historical trajectory that began in Chapter Three since it shows that feeling entails not only an intrapsychic and social life but also a religious life. It thus marks a site of openness not only to increasingly wide circles of social alterity but also to that which transcends and animates everything that exists.

This means, finally, that we can read Schleiermacher's theory of religion and his dogmatic claims as analyses of that *real relation* between human beings and God. In so doing, we resist prominent misunderstandings of his intellectual projects as subjectivistic, anthropomorphic, or attempts to isolate religion from other dimensions of human life.⁴ But more importantly, we see how each is prominently concerned with power – specifically, a power that

⁴ Andrew Dole very helpfully categorizes the major critiques of Schleiermacher along these lines. See Andrew Dole, "Schleiermacher on Religion," *Religion Compass* 4, no. 2 (2010): 75–85. For the most prominent critique of subjectivism, see Hegel's "Introduction" to his *Religion in its Internal Relationship to Systematic Knowledge* in Eric von der Luft, *Hegel, Hinrichs, and Schleiermacher on Feeling and Reason in Religion: The Texts of Their 1821-22 Debate* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1987), 245–74. Karl Barth led the charge against Schleiermacher's supposed anthropomorphism. See Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen, Winter Semester of 1923-24*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982). Wayne Proudfoot interpreted Schleiermacher as launching a new protectionist strategy that buffers religious experience from public critique. See Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). Although Proudfoot has since qualified this claim, his earlier view of Schleiermacher continues to enjoy broad acceptance. For Proudfoot's more qualified reading, see Wayne Proudfoot, "Immediacy and Intentionality in the Feeling of Absolute Dependence," in *Schleiermacher, the Study of Religion, and the Future of Theology: A Transatlantic Dialogue*, ed. Brent W. Sockness and Wilhelm Gräb, *Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann* 147 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 27–37. For a prominent contemporary proponent of this view, see Russell T. McCutcheon, *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), especially 4–5.

exceeds even as it is profoundly imbricated in human political and moral activity and that Christians understand to be both ultimately real and ultimately significant.

The central aim of this chapter is to reconstruct an understanding of religious power in ethical life by moving dialectically between Schleiermacher's theory of religious feeling and his account of the ethical process of *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit* discussed in Chapter Three. It proceeds in four steps. I begin by outlining the differences between Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics, his works of dogmatic theology, and his philosophy of religion. This clarifies the scope and status of the claims he makes in each field, and it also demonstrates the realistic orientation of each. Next, I turn to the Introduction to the *Glaubenslehre* and reconstruct Schleiermacher's theory of religious feeling. I show that he retains both the intrapsychic and social aspects he attributed to feeling in his philosophical ethics, but he introduces a novel dimension to feeling that plays an important role in the religious transfiguration of ordinary perceptual and affective experience. Third, I integrate this account of religious affectivity with Schleiermacher's account of the ethical process described in his Berlin lectures on philosophical ethics. I argue that such social affectivity is well-understood in atmospheric terms and that these dynamics play a crucial role in ethical life that his philosophical ethics – constrained as it is to the horizon of human power – neglects. I conclude the chapter by making some preliminary remarks about how this understanding of religion and ethical life invites a distinctly religious evaluation and critique of cultural and social phenomena like racism. This motivates the turn to Schleiermacher's substantive dogmatics in the final two chapters, where I construct a Christian theological diagnosis of racism's tenacity.

§1 Philosophical Ethics, Christian Dogmatics, and Philosophy of Religion

Before turning to Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre*, we need first to know how he understands the scope of its claims and their relation to his writings in philosophical ethics. On Schleiermacher's view, *The Christian Faith* and *Christian Ethics* constitute two complementary parts of dogmatic theology.⁵ They share a common object of knowledge, namely, Christian self-consciousness as it presently stands in existing Christian communities. This means that they are both historical sciences; they are concerned not with articulating the speculative essence of Christian self-consciousness but rather with analyzing the empirical appearance of Christian self-consciousness in a discrete historical moment.⁶ They also share a common method that seeks to systematize the contents of existing Christian self-consciousness, reformulating its expressions in such a way that maximizes clarity and minimizes internal contradiction.⁷ This means that the dogmatic theologian submits the traditional symbols, myths, rituals, and discursive forms that Christians actually use to express their self-consciousness to the same kind of dialectical scrutiny that every other university science deploys to weed out conceptual imprecisions and inconsistency. The difference between Christian doctrine and Christian ethics is then merely a matter of emphasis. Where Christian doctrine systematizes Christian self-consciousness when it

⁵ *CG* §26; *CS*, 20-32/2-24. Schleiermacher's conception of theology as a positive, historical science and the relation of its many parts can be found in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study: Revised Translation of the 1811 and 1830 Editions*, trans. Terrence N. Tice, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011); Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums zum Behuf einleitender Vorlesungen (1811/1830)*, ed. Dirk Schmid (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002). Cited as *BO* with English/German pagination. For the relationship of church doctrine to Christian ethics, see *BO* §223-231, 84-86/218-221.

⁶ Schleiermacher locates dogmatic theology under the banner of historical theology. Historical theology studies the various temporal formations of Christianity and tracks their development. It consists of three parts: 1) exegetical theology (*BO* §§103-148), 2) church history (*BO* §§149-194), and 3) historical cognizance of Christianity in its present condition (*BO* §§195-250). Philosophical theology, by contrast, is concerned with identifying the essence of Christian piety that endures across time and space and unites the many diverse temporal forms that Christian communal life has taken. Schleiermacher treats the subject of philosophical theology in *BO* §§32-68.

⁷ *CG* §§15-19.

is determined and expressed as a kind of knowing, Christian ethics systematizes Christian self-consciousness when it is determined and expressed as an incentive for action.⁸ Since knowing and acting are constitutive features of human life, both disciplines are necessary for a complete account of the contents of Christian self-consciousness.

This historical, and more precisely, *empirical* orientation of dogmatic theology marks a point of significant contrast from Schleiermacher's philosophical ethics. As we have seen, the subject matter of Schleiermacher's Berlin lectures is human activity in and through nature in its broadest scope.⁹ Its object is no single, particular, empirical community, but rather the general community of human beings across time and space. This difference in scope has implications for the kind of descriptive resources each discipline draws upon to elucidate its respective subject matter. His philosophical ethics draws solely from philosophical concepts (reason, nature, virtue, law, goods, etc.) that are relatively universal and context independent to describe the formal contours of human action in general. By contrast, his works of dogmatic theology draw from the distinctly Christian tradition, which includes the biblical texts, confessional documents, and rituals that Christian communities use to order their common life.

But these points of difference should not overshadow what the two hold in common. Both dogmatic theology and philosophical ethics take forms of human activity in and through the natural world as their subject matter. This means that they are both forms of what

⁸ This is particularly clear in his *Christian Ethics*, where he describes Christian piety as generating a two-fold motive. The first motive is an "interest" [*Interesse*] that motivates the Christian to seek knowledge of the subject matter of piety, namely "God, the Supreme Being." The second motive is an "incentive" [*Antrieb*] that motivates the agent to act in some way. (CS, 31/22) The difference between Christian doctrine and Christian ethics regards which of these motives comes to the fore. "And then, in terms of content, which propositions are 'dogmatic' in the narrow sense? Those that express the relationship of persons to God but in terms of interest, as that relationship is expressed in accordance with its various modifications. Then which propositions, in terms of content, are the ethical propositions of piety? These are the ones that express exactly the same thing but as inner impetus that finds expression in a cycle of actions." (CS, 31/23)

⁹ Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 6-13/9-18. See discussion in Chapter 3.5.1.

Schleiermacher calls “real knowledge,” and more specifically, they both constitute iterations of the science of ethics.¹⁰ But whereas his philosophical ethics is a form of “speculative ethics,” his dogmatic theology, both Christian doctrine and Christian ethics, fall on the side of “historical ethics.” Moreover, it is crucial to note that both disciplines employ dialectical reasoning to clarify and systematize their subject matter. Schleiermacher insists that dogmatic theology is a second-order discourse the task of which is to reflect upon the first-order discursive expressions of existing Christian communities in order to clarify and systematize their proclamation in the most error-reducing manner.¹¹ This means that the dogmatic theologian adopts a critical stance vis-à-vis the biblical and confessional tradition by subjecting its symbolic expressions of the contents of Christian self-consciousness to dialectical scrutiny and conceptual analysis. This “didactic-presentational”¹² mode of dogmatic theology serves an ecclesial purpose, insofar as it depicts the Christian faith in its most coherent form for church leaders. But at no point does it entirely reduce its symbolic expressions to purely conceptual ones, nor does it replace the first-order discourses of poetry and persuasion.

The following two chapters will draw from the tradition-specific symbolic resources in the substantive dogmatic chapters in his *Glaubenslehre* and *Christian Ethics*. But this chapter is concerned with the more general question of how religion is related to ethical life, and for that, we will turn to the Introduction of the *Glaubenslehre* (§§1-31). While the work as a whole is dogmatic in character, the Introduction shares more in common with the method of his philosophical ethics than with the properly dogmatic sections that follow it. Schleiermacher’s

¹⁰ As real sciences, they take as their subject matter finite being, as opposed to infinite being. Real sciences fall either under “physics” or “ethics,” where the former is the study of finite being from the perspective of nature’s activity upon reason (i.e., the knowing mind) and the latter is the study of finite being from the perspective of reason’s activity upon nature. See Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 5f/7f.

¹¹ *CG* §16.

¹² *CG* §16.1, 119/1:131

concern there is to present a general theory of religion in terms of theory of human subjectivity. As such, the implied scope expands to include all human beings and he restricts himself to relatively context-independent, conceptual resources.

§2 Religion, Feeling, and Transfigured Experience

As early as his *Speeches on Religion* in 1799, Schleiermacher argued that religion, in its essence, is distinct from both theoretical knowledge and practical wisdom. It consists rather in a “sensibility and taste for the infinite,”¹³ and as such, it occupies a distinct domain of consciousness characterized by feeling and intuition. Even at this early stage, Schleiermacher’s eagerness to secure religion’s irreducibility to metaphysics and morals did not stop him from acknowledging their relation. In a suggestive aphorism characteristic of the *Speeches*, he states that “we should do all things with religion, nothing from religion.”¹⁴ His point is to reject those who treat religion as a heteronomous source of moral principles even as he endorses a vital connection between human action and our felt apprehension of the universe in its fullest, infinite manifestation. Schleiermacher clarifies this in his systematic account of religious consciousness or “piety” [*Frömmigkeit*] in the Introduction to *The Christian Faith*.

§2.1 The Intrapsychic Dynamics of Feeling

As the framework for his account of piety as the essence of religious life, Schleiermacher opens *The Christian Faith* by outlining a theory of subjectivity. This theory divides self-consciousness into three parts: knowing, doing, and feeling.¹⁵ Knowing and doing are analogous

¹³ Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 23.

¹⁴ Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 30.

¹⁵ *Wissen, Thun, and Gefühl*. (CG §3, 8/19-20) These are analytically distinct but, in nearly every real moment of self-consciousness, they are co-present. They should not be conceived as independent “faculties,” but rather as

to the cognizing and organizing functions of reason in his philosophical ethics. Subjects come to know things about the world as it is and strive to change the world through conduct. Though these activities have opposing directions of fit, they are both relatively active moments where the subject “step[s]-outside-of-itself”¹⁶ to engage the world. These active moments of theoretical and practical consciousness do not exhaust self-consciousness, however. They presuppose a prior moment of “remaining-within-oneself”¹⁷ in which the subject is simply aware of its own inner states. Schleiermacher calls this receptive domain of self-consciousness “feeling” and, more precisely, “immediate self-consciousness.”¹⁸ The qualifier *immediate* means that it is a pre-reflective, and for that reason, a pre-thematic consciousness. The subject in this state lacks awareness of worldly objects and even of oneself as an object since each of these require reflective thought. The subject simply finds herself feeling joyful, serene, or agitated. As a receptive consciousness, it “is not effected by the subject, but comes to pass only in the subject.”¹⁹

Feeling states are aroused in the subject from beyond it, but they go on to play four crucial roles in intra-psychoic life. First, feeling plays an epistemic or *disclosive* role. Before we know anything about the world or act within it, Schleiermacher insists that we must first be affected by it. Our active cognitions and volitions reflect on this pre-thematic apprehension of the world that is disclosed to the subject in feeling, which means that knowledge is a cognitively

distinct “elements” or “moments” of intrapsychic life. This tripartite division of the soul emerged relatively late in Schleiermacher’s authorship in his 1818 lectures on psychology (*SW* III/6). They constitute a development of the symbolizing and organizing functions of reason prominent in his 1805/06 *Brouillon zur Ethik* and his 1812/13 lectures on philosophical ethics described in Chapter 2. For discussion of this historical development, see Eilert Herms, “Die Bedeutung der ‘Psychologie’ für die Konzeption des Wissenschaftssystems beim späten Schleiermacher,” in *Menschsein im Werden: Studien zu Schleiermacher* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 173–99.

¹⁶ *Aussichheraustreten* (CG §3.3, 12:1:25)

¹⁷ *Insichselbstbleiben* (CG §3.3, 12/1:25)

¹⁸ CG §3, 8/1:19-20.

¹⁹ CG §3.3, 13/1:25.

downstream consequence of the clarifying, analyzing, scrutinizing, and systematizing activity of the mind vis-à-vis the collected manifold of impressions. Of course, we do not engage in such computationally expensive activity for every worldly impression we receive – only those that arouse our interest. Such interest registers in feeling which then filters out irrelevant or uninteresting impressions and flags the important ones.²⁰ This means that, while feeling is the most receptive domain of self-consciousness, it is a selective receptacle. This selectivity is the basis of the subject’s attention.²¹

Second, feeling serves as the *functional link* between cognition and volition. The beliefs we form about our environment tend to impact what we do. If I think a tornado is heading my way, this knowledge is likely to motivate me to stop writing this chapter and seek shelter. Schleiermacher accounts for this link between rational and motivating reasons by noting that cognitive insights only succeed in motivating action to the degree that they “become affect,”²² i.e., produce a bodily stirring.²³ The knowledge about the tornado does not *immediately* generate a motivation. Rather, the urge to act arises only after the cognition first raises my heart rate and registers as the unpleasant feeling of fear. These bodily, affective responses follow immediately from the cognition, and they in turn generate the “impetus”²⁴ to act.²⁵ Schleiermacher asserts that

²⁰ Schleiermacher attends to these intra-psychic dynamics in detail in his lectures on psychology and aesthetics where he outlines the concept of *Stimmung*. See my discussion in Chapter 4.1.

²¹ Attention can be invested by the subject in response to its intentions. In this case, attention would not constitute a feeling consciousness. But attention also entails a pathic dimension; some things grab our attention, make themselves conspicuous to us. These do not depend on our intentions and, in fact, frequently fly in the face of them.

²² *Affect* or *Affekt* (CG §3.4, 16/1:29)

²³ In response to the possible objection that piety lies not in feeling but rather in knowing or doing, Schleiermacher retorts that “they would then also have to point out to us how a certain doing can arise out of some sort of knowing without an intervening determination of self-consciousness.” (CG §3.5, 18/1:31-32)

²⁴ *Antrieb* (CG §3.4, 16/1:29)

²⁵ CG §3.4, 16/1:29.

“a determination of [immediate] self-consciousness underlies every impetus for action”²⁶
precisely by arousing pleasant and unpleasant feelings.²⁷

Third, Schleiermacher contends that determinations of feeling not only mediate, but also *orient* and *accompany* the activities of knowing and doing. Our actions always entail some purpose toward which they aim, and this purpose both precedes the action and accompanies the subject as it sees the action through to completion. Such accompaniment manifests as the feeling of “satisfaction and confidence”²⁸ that we are, in fact, achieving what we set out to do. The same can be said of cognitive activity. The discovery of some new truth is accompanied by “a confident surety,” which quickly passes over into a “striving” to integrate this new insight with one’s existing knowledge of the world.²⁹ In other words, the subject’s cognitive and volitional activities emerge within and are accompanied by a more basic horizon characterized by the subject’s affective involvement in and pre-thematic apprehension of the world.

Finally, feeling serves as the *transcendental possibility condition* for the subjective unity of consciousness. Though knowing and doing are both activities of the subject, they differ in terms of direction. Knowing is a more receptive, cognizing activity that transforms being into thought, while doing is an organizing activity which transforms thought into being.³⁰ Insofar as subjects experience both activities as their own, Schleiermacher deduces that there must be some “intervening determination of self-consciousness”³¹ that synthesizes them, stamping them each

²⁶ CG §3.4, 16/1:29.

²⁷ This substantive mediation also helps to explain how two agents could hold identical beliefs and yet commit to different actions. This results from “a different determination of [immediate] self-consciousness enter[ing] in.” (CG §3.4, 13/1:27)

²⁸ CG §3.5, 17/1:30.

²⁹ CG §3.5, 17/1:30.

³⁰ For Schleiermacher’s more systematic reflections on feeling as the transcendental ground of thinking and willing, see Schleiermacher, *DialO*, 265–97, especially 286–294. Cited as *DialO*.

³¹ CG §3.5, 18/1:32.

as belonging to a single subject.³² Immediate self-consciousness names this ground of subjectivity, even if, for Schleiermacher, this transcendental dimension is always inseparable from the phenomenal dimensions just described.³³

From this brief sketch, we can already see strong connections to his earlier ethical reflections on *Gefühl*. As in his early Kantian period, feeling plays a mediating role between cognition and volition which serves as the possibility condition of moral motivation. As in his *Soliloquies*, feeling denotes a discerning openness to the world that serves both to orient and accompany our conduct. Like his Berlin lectures on philosophical ethics, feeling plays an epistemic or disclosive role in our evaluative apprehension of our environment that sets the scene for cognitive and volitional activity.³⁴

But there is also one central difference with his ethical works, namely, Schleiermacher's inclusion of a transcendental dimension to feeling. We will see that this is central to his account of the religious aspect of self-consciousness. But first, we must note one further similarity with the understanding of affectivity developed in his philosophical ethics, namely, its social dimensions.

§2.2 The Social Dynamics of Feeling

Only a few paragraphs after describing the intrapsychic life of feeling, Schleiermacher hastens to note that feeling bears a prominently social dimension as well. Speaking in particular

³² See Schleiermacher, *DialO*, 286–87.

³³ Cornelia Richter puts it this way: “The notion of feeling [in the *Dialektik*] is, on the one hand, a figure of logical, transcendental reflection presenting the I as the position of awareness of self and otherness. But this figure is, on the other hand, inevitably mediated with the immanent and experiential, individual and embodied dimensions of life.” Richter, “Feeling and Sense, Ethics and Culture: Perspectives on Religion and Culture in Schleiermacher and Cassirer,” 165.

³⁴ See my discussion of each of these texts in Chapter 3.

of religious communities, which he refers to univocally as “churches,” he identifies their basis as a common feeling that circulates through interpersonal communication and unites participants across time and space. He defines a church as a “relatively self-contained community of piety [that] forms an ever-renewing circulation of religious self-consciousness and a propagation of religious stirrings ordered and disposed within”³⁵ its self-contained boundaries. Though more must be said about what he means by “piety” and “religious self-consciousness,” it is enough to know that these terms each refer to the feeling consciousness. How is it possible, then, for the most receptive, personal parts of human subjectivity to participate in “an ever-renewing circulation” that propagates, orders, and disposes subjects in recognizable ways across time and space?

Schleiermacher’s answer centers on what he views as a necessary relation between feeling and expression.³⁶ “Feeling,” he writes, “as the mind and heart’s self-contained state of being determined [...] originally and also without any distinct aim or reference, comes to be something external by means of facial expression, gesture, tone of voice, and indirectly by means of the spoken word.”³⁷ Like a balloon filling with water, subjects can only receive so much stimulation before their contents bursts forth in ways that are “perceptible to the senses of

³⁵ CG §6.4, 43/1:58.

³⁶ Schleiermacher’s claims about the relationship between feeling and expression have aroused suspicion amongst contemporary interpreters. See Konrad Cramer, “Die Eine Frömmigkeit und die vielen Frommen: Zu Schleiermachers Theorie der Vergellschaftung des Religiösen Bewusstseins,” in *Schleiermacher und Kierkegaard: Subjektivität und Wahrheit: Akten des Schleiermacher-Kierkegaard-Kongresses in Kopenhagen, Oktober 2003*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al., Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series 11 / Schleiermacher-Archiv 21 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 313–34; Michael Moxter, “Gefühl und Ausdruck: Nicht nur ein Problem der Schleiermacherinterpretation,” in *Theologie der Gefühle*, ed. Roderich Barth and Christopher Zarnow (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 125–41.

³⁷ CG §6.2, 40/55. In his lectures on philosophical ethics, Schleiermacher makes a similar claim. “The possibility of sociability rests on the possibility of bringing particularity to intuition; this can only be through a mediating term which is at the same time both expression and sign. Every definite excitement of the sensibility is accompanied by tone or gesture as a natural means of expression. [...] Tone is present here not as word, but as song, and gesture is not present here as an indirect sign of the concept, but as a direct one, through both what is purely internal becomes external in a natural and necessary way.” (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 54/72-73)

others.”³⁸ These feeling expressions occur at varying levels of sophistication, ranging from inarticulate bodily gestures to the most skillful artistic productions and, ultimately, to discursive speech. While works of art require much more cognitive investment than “artless” gesticulations, they all require some modicum of rational activity from the subject, even if that activity is not reflective or deliberative.³⁹ In each of these cases, the urge to express one’s feelings in ways that others can perceive and recognize transpires as a matter of *necessity* on account of our nature. As feeling creatures, we are also necessarily expressive, communicative ones.

Schleiermacher describes this dynamic of stimulation and expression as a mimetic, interpersonal process. This begins when an individual is affected or “internally moved”⁴⁰ by some external stimulus that serves as the occasion for expression. In primitive cases, we respond through bodily gestures and vocal tones, although not yet coherent speech. If I were to see a spider crawling up my arm, I might reflexively shriek and jump out of my seat. This “unadorned expression of feeling”⁴¹ renders that internal feeling perceptible to others. When my shriek catches someone’s attention, they immediately form a “representation”⁴² of my affective state as one of fear or shock. Through a process of “lively imitation,”⁴³ Schleiermacher thinks that perceivers of such expressions are themselves moved into a rough estimate of the same state. The accuracy of these imitations increases in proportion to the expression’s vibrancy and resonance with the perceiver’s personal experience, but the urge to express and perceive are, according to Schleiermacher, universally human.⁴⁴ Through this mimetic process of internally mirroring the

³⁸ CG §6.2, 41.

³⁹ See Schleiermacher, *Ästhetik*, 10f. See also my discussion of his lectures on aesthetics in Chapter 3.5.2.

⁴⁰ innerlichen Bewegtheit (CG §6.2, 41/1:55)

⁴¹ bloße Aeußerung des Gefühls (CG §6.2, 41/1:55)

⁴² Vorstellung (CG §6.2, 41/1:55)

⁴³ lebendige Nachbildung (CG §6.2, 41/1:55)

⁴⁴ This “species consciousness” entails the descriptive awareness oneself as a member of the human species and a normative awareness that one is also *for* other human beings. See Cramer, “Die eine Frömmigkeit,” 327.

feeling expressions of others, a “community of feeling”⁴⁵ emerges. To be sure, the expressor and the perceiver each experiences a numerically distinct feeling, and each individual is likely to experience the feeling in slightly different ways on account of their idiosyncratic organic constitution, temperament, and personal memories. But those distinct psychological states share a common feeling type, and I might add, emerge from the same subject-involving situation. In this way, Schleiermacher explains how our most personal feelings can become not only perceptible to but also internalized by others, thus forming the basis of a community.

The sociality of religious feelings plays an enormous role in Schleiermacher’s theological method and his history of religion, not to mention many of the teachings within his material dogmatics.⁴⁶ For now, we should note that the social dimension of feeling that we first saw in his *Soliloquies* and that blossomed in his Berlin lectures on philosophical ethics remains and even grows in prominence in his theory of religion and dogmatic theology. Present also is the person- and world-formative character of feeling and its role in the ethical process of *Bildung*. As in his Berlin lectures, religious communities contribute in their own way to the highest good precisely by awakening, fortifying, and expanding their distinctive feelings, transmitting them through the interpersonal, mimetic process just described. This means that it is the social dimension of feeling that makes religious institutions *historically effective* agents with their own type of person- and world-formative *power*. This power neither coerces with the threat of law or violence (the state), nor demands consent through rational argument (the academy), nor populates the imagination with ever more expressive human possibilities through cultural production (free sociability). Rather, religious power lies in the transmission of their distinct

⁴⁵ Gemeinschaft des Gefühls (CG §6.2, 41/1:56)

⁴⁶ For the paragraphs on the history of religions, see CG §§7-9. The significance of sociality for his explicitly dogmatic claims will be a central topic of Chapters 6 and 7.

feelings across time and space, a process that is aided by the cultivation and interpretation of tradition-specific material (ritual sites, liturgies) and symbolic resources (scriptures, confessions, etc.). These feelings go on to function in intrapsychic life in ways that do not so much cause as orient and accompany human action. As I will argue, this is what Schleiermacher means when he says that we “should do all things with religion, nothing from religion.”⁴⁷

The nature and power of religious feelings align with the account of atmospheric feelings as outlined in the previous chapter. There, I described atmospheres as spatially extended feelings that pertain primarily to subject-involving situations, making them irreducible to the psychological effects they produce within subjects. But therein lies their distinct power; by affecting agents involved in concrete situations, atmospheric feelings influence and move them. These influences are primarily phenomenological, not causal. They change the mood of a space, which affects the perceptual salience of objects within it and casts a hue or color over the entire scene. These in turn dispose agents to certain kinds of action and dissuade them from others. Agents acting under such influence remain agents insofar as their actions are caused by their own beliefs, desires, and intentions. But these beliefs, desires, and intentions all emerge within and under the influence of these phenomenological effects of atmospheres.

In sum, the formal contours that Schleiermacher ascribes to feeling in the *Glaubenslehre* are largely consistent with the account of feeling he gives in his philosophical ethics. Feeling is an intrapsychic phenomenon that includes interpersonal and even socio-historical dynamics. But what makes feeling religious, and what is the relationship between its religious and its ethical dimensions?

⁴⁷ Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 30.

§2.3 The Religious Depth of Feeling

Schleiermacher famously locates the essence of religion in feeling. He claims that “the basis of all ecclesial [i.e., religious] communities” is their piety, which he defines as a “distinct formation of feeling,” and a particular “determination of [immediate] self-consciousness.”⁴⁸ There are certainly pious modes of knowing and acting, too. But he maintains that their piety entirely depends on whether or not they are oriented and accompanied by pious feeling. A feeling is pious, furthermore, precisely insofar as it assumes the “basic form”⁴⁹ of all piety, namely, the feeling of absolute dependence.⁵⁰

Just what it means for a feeling to have the “basic form” of all piety requires some elaboration. Feelings with this form are distinguished from other, non-religious feelings on account of their distinct intentionality and phenomenology. Religious feelings intend not only worldly objects but also that which transcends the world and everything in it. This intentional structure populates self-consciousness, not with an experience of the transcendent as an object, but rather with a transfiguration and augmentation of ordinary human experience. This affective and perceptual reconfiguration of phenomenal experience constitutes the distinctly ethical power of religion.

⁴⁸ *CG* §3, 8/1:19-20.

⁴⁹ *CG* §4.4, 25/1:39.

⁵⁰ On first blush, it might seem that Schleiermacher has badly misunderstood the empirical diversity and lush phenomenality of religion. If all the religions can be boiled down to a single essence, and if each religious experience is merely a variation on the theme of dependency, then surely he has twisted his subject matter beyond recognition. Many of Schleiermacher’s readers have concluded as much. My concern here is neither to defend nor give an exhaustive account of Schleiermacher’s theory of religion. For excellent studies of Schleiermacher’s religious thought, see Dole, *Schleiermacher on Religion and the Natural Order*; Grove, *Deutungen des Subjekts*. Rather, I turn to his account of religious feeling in order to isolate the distinctly religious person- and world-formative power that Schleiermacher attributes to social life in general and to religious communities in particular.

§2.3.1 The Feeling of Absolute Dependence

At its most basic, Schleiermacher depicts human life as an oscillation between moments of “receptivity” and spontaneous, “self-initiated activity.”⁵¹ At the level of immediate self-consciousness, we are always aware of ourselves as agents who receive the activity of our environment upon us and agents who act on and change our environment.⁵² This oscillation produces reciprocal feelings of dependence on our environment and freedom from it. It is significant that, despite having opposite vectors, both kinds of feelings entail a common awareness that *there is something* out there, standing over against the self. Schleiermacher calls this the “world.” It is an ineradicable element of human self-consciousness that relativizes every feeling of freedom and dependence. To feel *absolutely* free vis-à-vis any element of the world is impossible because the world’s activity upon us has always already partially determined us and thereby constrained our freedom. The same goes for any feeling of *absolute* dependence. Even in cases of extreme subjugation, a living self retains some modicum of freedom that relativizes its feelings of dependence.

From these observations, Schleiermacher argues by way of a transcendental deduction that human beings stand in what he describes elsewhere as an “immediate existential relation”⁵³ to the transcendent ground of all finite reality. He notes first that our self-initiated activity *is itself* not generated by the self. Our relative freedom, and for that matter, our entire active and passive existence, is *given to us* from beyond. Schleiermacher infers that this is tantamount to the complete negation of absolute freedom. Neither the self, nor anything in the world as a whole,

⁵¹ Empfänglichkeit / Selbsttätigkeit (CG §4.1, 19/1:34)

⁵² As Schleiermacher puts it, “present in every instance of self-consciousness are two features: a being positioned-as-a-self and a not-having-been-positioned-as-such, so to speak, or a being and a somehow-having-come-to-be.” (CG §4.1, 19/1:33)

⁵³ Friedrich Schleiermacher and Friedrich Lücke, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*, Texts and Translations Series (American Academy of Religion) 3 (Chico, CA: Distributed by Scholars Press, 1981), 40.

can be absolutely free because everything that exists is governed by this reciprocity between relative freedom and relative dependence.⁵⁴

This leads to his second inference. To negate the possibility of absolute freedom entails an affirmation that the self and the entire natural causal nexus of which the self is a part are absolutely dependent on some “whence”⁵⁵ that gives us our existence. We do not stand in any reciprocal relation to this whence, so the source of the feeling of absolute dependence is “not the world in the sense of the totality of temporal being, and still less is it any one part of that totality.”⁵⁶ Rather, it is infinite being, the transcendent ground⁵⁷ of not only our own existence but also of the entirety of finite being.

According to Schleiermacher, this “whence” cannot become an object of consciousness. As finite creatures bound to the reciprocal nexus of relative freedom and dependence, the activity of self-consciousness itself relativizes the activity of our environment upon us. But in the case of absolute dependence, no such relativity obtains. Rather, the subject stands in an absolutely passive relation to the activity of its transcendent ground. Schleiermacher asserts that this transcendent ground is that to which the term “God” traditionally refers,⁵⁸ but this reference is never appropriately made to any individual, finite object. The word “God” picks out no particular being among other beings but rather the source and power of all that is.

⁵⁴ *CG* §4.3, 23-24/1:38.

⁵⁵ *CG* §4.4, 24/1:39.

⁵⁶ *CG* §4.4, 25/1:39.

⁵⁷ *CG* §4.4, 24/1:39. This is a real relation, not merely an ideal one. See Mariña, “Schleiermacher, Realism, and Epistemic Modesty: A Reply to My Critics.”

⁵⁸ “This affirmation is to be understood in such a way that precisely the whence composited in this self-consciousness, the whence of our receptive and self-initiated active existence, is to be designated by the term ‘God’ and for us ‘whence’ holds the truly primary meaning of the term ‘God.’” (*CG* §4.4, 24/1:38-39)

The peculiar intentionality of the feeling of absolute dependence distinguishes it from all other feelings. All bodily, aesthetic, social, and even moral feelings⁵⁹ refer to objects in the natural causal nexus, and for that reason, they figure within the spectrum between relative dependence and relative freedom. But by securing the proper intentional structure of human-divine relations, Schleiermacher seems at first to have rendered that relation a rather unfeeling one. The feeling of absolute dependence is not so much felt as transcendently deduced. Both this feeling and its source emerge from a series of inferences, not the passionate devotion of actual religious persons.

§2.3.2 Actual Religious Feelings

Schleiermacher responds to the apparent non-phenomenality of the feeling of absolute dependence by drawing a distinction. As the basic form of piety, the feeling of absolute dependence is that which is always and everywhere the same in all the diverse religions and their even more diverse practitioners. But Schleiermacher acknowledges that, empirically speaking, the manner in which individuals and groups come to consciousness of their absolute dependence is exceedingly diverse. Real people achieve religious consciousness as the sensory, social, and historical creatures that we are, and this character of our existence strongly informs the phenomenal content of religious life.

⁵⁹ Schleiermacher hedges a bit on this point with regard to moral feelings. He claims, for example, that “we also include social and moral feelings no less than self-oriented feelings within the meaning of ‘sensory,’ in that, taken as a whole, they too are still located within the domain that consists of all that is separated apart and involved in contrast.” (*CG* §5.1, 29/1:42-43) But he qualifies this claim with a marginal note that reads as follows: “Here it is indeed paradoxical that moral feeling would be counted as among sensory feelings. However, this also has to do only with moral feelings in their social relation. What is taken to be absolutely moral is also what is absolutely imperative and thus belongs to the arena of absolute dependence.” (*CG* §5.1, 29/1:42-43) In other words the source of moral obligation and the whence of the feeling of absolute dependence are identical. This will prove particularly important in my discussion of the conscience in Chapter 6.2.

To explain how the basic form of piety relates conceptually to the actual, concrete iterations of piety in religious persons, Schleiermacher outlines three increasingly complex levels of self-consciousness: animal consciousness, sensory self-consciousness, and God-consciousness. First, as embodied, organic creatures, we come to know our environment primarily through our sense organs. When that environment advances our well-being and our drive for self-preservation is satisfied, we immediately feel pleasure. When that well-being is diminished and our drive for self-preservation is threatened, we feel pain. This unites us with all other sentient creatures that navigate the world with the help of sense organs and that seek to satisfy basic organic needs amidst scarce resources. Schleiermacher calls this developmentally primitive stage “animal” consciousness.⁶⁰

Second, in the course of learning a language, he contends that human beings become increasingly aware of themselves as creatures who represent the world to ourselves and to others. Though we never stop feeling pleasure and pain, this development enables the transition beyond the “obscure period” characterized by the “entanglement” of subject and object to one structured by the clear and distinct contrast between them. This distinctly objective consciousness encompasses all of our knowing and doing as well as our more reflective feelings. In fact, Schleiermacher contends that the “whole domain of [adult, human] experience”⁶¹ is marked by this contrast. He calls this second stage “sensory self-consciousness.”⁶²

Schleiermacher then posits a third, higher level of self-consciousness that he identifies with the feeling of absolute dependence. As finite creatures whose experience is exhaustively structured by pleasure-pain and subject-object contrasts, Schleiermacher insists that this highest

⁶⁰ *CG* §5.1, 28/1:41.

⁶¹ *CG* §5.1, 29/1:42.

⁶² The term sensory is to be “understood in the broadest compass of the word [so as to include] the entire fullness of the sensory life of a human being.” (*CG* §5.1, 28/1:42)

form of self-consciousness occurs only for “one who is already determined for a given moment in a certain way within the domain of that contrast.”⁶³ The higher consciousness, which he equates to “God-consciousness,” consists then, not in the replacement of ordinary experience with some special experience that fundamentally exceeds the limits of human consciousness. Rather, higher consciousness consists in the *transfiguration* and *augmentation* of sensory self-consciousness by virtue of its simultaneous occurrence with the consciousness of absolute dependence.⁶⁴ In other words, the distinct formation of feeling that Schleiermacher locates at the heart of religious life amounts to a renewed vision of reality. He describes this transfiguration with regard to perception and affection.

§2.3.2.1 Transfigured Perceptions

First, an increased awareness of absolute dependence leads, as he puts it, to the “consummatory apex” of perceptual experience.⁶⁵ This begins in the transition from animal consciousness to sensory self-consciousness, when the subject perceives her environment with greater clarity and distinctness. The emergence of this “higher tendency” or “potency” in self-consciousness persists even once the subject-object entanglement of animal consciousness has been overcome. It drives toward the consummation of self-consciousness where the contrast between subject and object begins to disappear, albeit never entirely, into a more primordial identity. The more one perceives ordinary, worldly episodes as given by and absolutely

⁶³ *CG* §5.3, 32/1:46.

⁶⁴ Schleiermacher’s subject-theoretical explanations of this co-occurrence are less instructive than his phenomenological insights. To explain how a transcendental feeling can interact with actual, phenomenal feelings, Schleiermacher claims that there must be a “simultaneous being of the two in the same element” [*ein Zugleichsein beider in demselben Moment*] that implies a “mutually being-referenced of each of the two kinds of self-consciousness to the other” [*ein Bezogensein beider aufeinander*] (*CG* §5.3, 32/1:46)

⁶⁵ *Vollendungspunkt* (*CG* §5.3, 32/1:46)

dependent upon the transcendent ground of all that is, the more this higher consciousness comes to predominate over the sensory self-consciousness. Schleiermacher contends that, from the perspective of the higher consciousness, those moments in which sensory self-consciousness predominates appear to be “defective and imperfect.”⁶⁶ The transfiguration of ordinary experience is thus not merely a neutral re-arranging of the parts; rather, it heightens ordinary experience.

Though Schleiermacher describes this in subject-theoretical terms of the gradual transcendence of the subject-object contrast, we might do well to think in more phenomenological terms of perceptual salience and phenomenal hue.⁶⁷ Consider an example. Three white oaks stand outside my window. On any given day, I am likely to ignore them entirely because I am consumed with other projects: getting the kids out the door in the morning, taking my afternoon run, sitting in my office writing this chapter. In each case, I completely neglect these glorious life forms. To perceive the oak trees as given to me and to others from the transcendent source and power of all that is, though, entails that I first attend to them or, perhaps in the opposite direction, that they become conspicuous to me. This change in attentional pattern might reveal something of their value to me; I might experience their beauty, their sturdiness, or the way that they nourish and shelter all manner of other life forms. All of this occurs by virtue of their newfound salience in my perceptual field. Once gripped by them in this way, I become newly interested in these trees, and this changes the phenomenal hue that surrounds and permeates my perceptual field. Instead of the dull tones of a backdrop, the trees’ givenness now

⁶⁶ *CG* §5.3, 32/1:46-47.

⁶⁷ These terms were important to my account of atmospheric influences. See also Mark Wynn, *Renewing the Senses: A Study of the Philosophy and Theology of the Spiritual Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15-41.

appears vivid and electric. The greenness of its canopy envelops my world, and the solace it provides accompanies me throughout the morning.⁶⁸

This example highlights some of Schleiermacher's central insights regarding religious consciousness. The emergence of the higher consciousness does not replace or introduce any new objects into my ordinary perceptual field. Neither, in fact, do those objects completely dissolve into a messy blur lacking clarity or distinction.⁶⁹ But there is a clear phenomenological difference between ordinary and higher consciousness, one that results from my awareness of the trees as gifts. These transfigurations align with the *disclosive* and *orienting/accompanying* functions of feeling described above. Moreover, there is a sense in which these changes in perceptual salience and phenomenal hue allow us to apprehend the trees in a more complete and perfect way than we normally do.

§2.3.2.1 Transfigured Affections

Schleiermacher builds on this evaluative aspect of religious consciousness when he describes it in terms of a “summons”⁷⁰ to a higher life. Like non-human animals, we immediately feel pleasure when our environment suits our bodily well-being and pain in threatening environments. These ineradicable elements of embodied, creaturely life generate “incentives”⁷¹ for action and thereby orient subjects within our environment in ways that preserve and enhance

⁶⁸ This account is strongly influenced by Mark Wynn's account of “world-directed spiritual experience and the revelation of value”, which is itself strongly informed by examples from Erazim Kohák. Wynn, 129–165. See also Erazim V. Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁶⁹ Although the talk of transcending the subject-object distinction could imply as much, Schleiermacher explicitly denies this, noting that it “would still be an imperfect state” precisely to the degree that it lacks the concreteness of sensory self-consciousness. (CG §5.3, 32/1:46-47)

⁷⁰ *Forderung* (CG §5.3, 32/1:46)

⁷¹ *Antrieb[e]* (CG §3.4, 16/29)

bodily well-being. As with ordinary perceptual experience, Schleiermacher contends that increasing awareness of absolute dependence does not replace these hedonic feelings; it introduces a novel depth and complexity to them.

Consider another example. Suppose a man is moved by compassion to give sacrificially in order to benefit a stranger in desperate need. The mercy he shows towards the stranger will lead him to feel some measure of discomfort and material uncertainty. Such unpleasant feelings fail to explain the man's actions. Schleiermacher notes that while such feelings might pervade the sensory self-consciousness of such a man, they can be coupled with a feeling of joy indexed to the higher self-consciousness.⁷² These higher affections not only explain his sacrificial action, but they also disclose a potentially inarticulate conviction that showing mercy to strangers constitutes an "enhancement of life"⁷³ even if it risks bodily well-being. These religious feelings thus refer back to a transfigured evaluative apprehension of one's situation and one's place within it. The man who feels compassion encounters a summons to a higher form of life, one that makes a life ordered merely by self-preservation seem base and constrained.

For Schleiermacher, this summons does not eliminate hedonic feelings. The merciful man is likely to register feelings of discomfort, at least to some degree. These suggest that the orientation toward self-preservation and its correlate motivational impetus remain intact – as well they should! But to experience a summons does reveal a depth to feeling that entails new possibilities for affective and perceptual responses to the world along with correlate possibilities for knowing and acting therein. These new feelings place a check on the life-orienting and conduct-motivating power of bodily pleasure and pain. By feeling compassion toward the man,

⁷² *CG* §5.4, 35/1:49.

⁷³ *Erhöhung des Lebens* (*CG* §5.4, 35/1:48)

the aversion he may have felt on behalf of his drive for self-preservation was overcome by a complex, diachronic response that included both a more intense aversion to the prospect that the stranger would continue to suffer and, perhaps, a positive feeling of joy upon seeing the stranger's well-being improve. Even if the man had not mustered the motivation to help the stranger, his experience of such a summons means that he has already been experientially gripped by a new register of value, a new possibility for his life that appears to him as an enhancement. This affective grip not only orients, but also accompanies each later moment of one's life by announcing deviations from the higher life with feelings of sorrow and confirming successes with feelings of joy.

The decisively *religious* feature of these transfigurations of experience is, I propose, a qualitative contrast between higher and lower orders of lived reality. The perceptual and affective changes attune us concretely to a dimension of reality that exceeds the ordinary and summons us to a life beyond the self. The one who undergoes such transfigured experience does not regard them as value neutral. Rather, this person has effectively received a new evaluative standard in light of which experiences that lack awareness of this transcendent referent seem deficient and undesirable. Though Schleiermacher's description is admittedly formalistic at this point, he signifies this qualitative contrast in his distinction between God-consciousness and "God-forgetfulness."⁷⁴ In both cases, the reality that sustains and animates the world in its vastness is there for one to perceive and feel. But for the God-forgetful person, the self and the world are so conspicuous and all-consuming that they marginalize their transcendent source. This marks ordinary experience with a palpable impoverishment, albeit one that is only perceived in hindsight of a religious summons.

⁷⁴ *CG* §11.2, 82/1:96

§3 Religion and Ethical Life

Now that we have identified the distinctly religious dimension of feeling, we can return to the question of how religious consciousness relates to the ethical life. To reiterate, since we have not yet turned to Schleiermacher's substantive dogmatics, this account remains at some remove from the distinctly Christian community and its tradition-specific symbols. It is an account of human activity in its broadest contours. Since Schleiermacher holds that those contours include feeling consciousness and that religious consciousness is a species of feeling consciousness, we can determine how religious consciousness relates to ethical life in general before turning to his distinctly Christian account of this relation. In what follows, I will highlight four ways in which religious consciousness figures into the ethical process of *Bildung*. Religious feelings a) summon, b) orient, c) accompany, and d) strengthen ethical life.

As we have already seen, Schleiermacher describes the ethical life in his Berlin lectures as a process of *Bildung* whereby reason progressively ensouls nature, making it into its symbols and organs.⁷⁵ He depicts this process by analyzing the activity of reason from three perspectives. The doctrine of virtue describes reason in relation to the human powers of action, the doctrine of duty describes reason as it relates to principles of action, and the doctrine of goods describes the activity and results of rational actions, i.e., virtuous and duty-fulfilling actions, by outlining the social institutions, i.e., goods, they produce, maintain, and enhance. On this view, the highest good toward which the entire ethical process aims is only achieved to the degree that human beings cultivate virtuous dispositions and commit dutiful actions. Only this distinguishes the rational activity that is the subject of ethics from the natural activity that is the subject of physics.

⁷⁵ See Chapter 3.5 for a more thorough treatment of these lectures.

First, religious consciousness is responsible for the initial *summons* to ethical life. The qualitative contrast between a higher and lower forms of life is implicit in Schleiermacher's mature philosophical ethics, where a life of reason is clearly superior to a life governed by merely natural impulses. But while the entire ethical process he describes rests on this assumption, Schleiermacher neither argues for it nor explains the manner in which individual agents come to perceive its superiority. What is it that makes the rigorous business of cultivating virtues, doing what duty requires, and reflexively rationalizing all of nature seem *good* – specifically, *good for oneself*, as an enhancement of one's life? Why not choose to spend one's time pursuing other, less tedious goals?

In a later ethical treatise, Schleiermacher explicitly refuses to give an account of the “coming into being of intelligence,”⁷⁶ that bedrock of ethical life that makes it possible to discern between ethically better and worse. His reason is that such an explanation would pass beyond the study of ethics into cosmology or metaphysics.⁷⁷ This follows directly from his conception of ethics as the real science tasked with describing finite being from the perspective of the dominance of reason's activity over nature. As such, it does not ask about the pre-ethical conditions of possibility for such activity. But we now know that his inquiry into the religious consciousness is not bound by such a horizon. In each human life, the emergence of reason is itself made possible by a power that fundamentally exceeds our own. This means that the

⁷⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, “Über den Begriff des höchsten Gutes. Zweite Abhandlung.,” in *Akademievorträge*, ed. Martin Rössler, *Friedrich Schleiermacher Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (KGA), I/11 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 662.

⁷⁷ “But considered in and for itself, the origination of new organizations [i.e., intelligence from mere materiality] lies beyond our domain. Even if it is the case that the spiritual power appears with the development of the organization in an embryonic condition, the individual being who has become intelligent only enters into our domain when it comes to light. And even then, it does this while we are unconscious of it.” (Schleiermacher, 663) For an illuminating discussion of the pre-ethical ground of the ethical process that exceeds the purview of ethics as Schleiermacher understands it, see Eilert Herms, “Reich Gottes und menschliches Handeln,” in *Menschsein im Werden: Studien zu Schleiermacher* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 101–124.

condition of possibility for ethical life is not itself an achievement of ethical life. Rather, it exceeds the horizon of human power. Phenomenologically speaking, the pursuit of virtue, duty, and the highest good is only possible for us once we have experienced a summons to higher life, a summons that first appears in feeling consciousness and makes the life oriented entirely by the drive toward self-preservation seem deficient. In this way, the possibility condition of ethical life is “not effected by the subject but [come] to pass only in the subject.”⁷⁸ More pointedly, Schleiermacher is arguing that the possibility of ethical life is itself given to us as a gift, indeed, a good gift.

Second, religious consciousness *orients* ethical life. The religious summons announces the emergence of ethical life, but it also provides its vector. Such a vector is again presumed in the philosophical ethics; the ethical process of *Bildung* is indeed one that aims toward an end, namely, the highest good. According to Schleiermacher, this final *telos* of ethical life is not merely ideal, but real.⁷⁹ It is neither a regulative principle nor a postulate of practical reason but rather a substantive future state of affairs toward which rational agents aspire, namely, the sum-total of all well-disposed, duty-fulfilling actions across time and space along with their consequences. This means that the highest good can become an object of desire; it can be perceived as *good for me*. Schleiermacher’s doctrine of virtue describes this basic desiderative orientation as “disposition;”⁸⁰ it designates the “pure ideal content of action” which, when combined with a bodily “proficiency,”⁸¹ generates the motivation to act. Religious consciousness, whether it is marked by predominant God-consciousness or God-forgetfulness,

⁷⁸ *CG* §3.3, 13/1:25

⁷⁹ “The highest good is [...] the organic coherence of all the goods, that is, the whole of moral being expressed under the concept of the good.” (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 163/220)

⁸⁰ *Gesinnung* (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 102/138)

⁸¹ *Fertigkeit* (Schleiermacher, *Philosophical Ethics*, 102/138)

provides the content of disposition by orienting it toward the highest good.⁸² In other words, the fundamental desire to be ethical, the orientation to pursue virtue, duty, and the highest good, is itself an *effect* of the religious summons. This means that a) ethical life cannot appear to be good *for me* without such a summons and b) the possibility of achieving this ethical disposition is not one we can guarantee for ourselves. Rather, we only contingently receive it by virtue of an external influence.⁸³

Third, religious consciousness *accompanies* all aspects of ethical life. Having determined the agent's basic desiderative horizon, the religious consciousness now provides a standard by which each ensuing cognitive or volitional activity is measured. While Schleiermacher clearly thinks that this standard must be rational,⁸⁴ we can see from his analysis of religious consciousness that the higher life to which one is summoned announces itself by transfiguring our perceptions and affections. In the example of the merciful man above, the compassion he felt toward the stranger in need countered the pain of sacrificial giving with a more intense feeling of sorrow at the prospect of the man's continued suffering and a more intense feeling of joy at his recovery. In other words, his religious consciousness plays the role of the conscience. For Schleiermacher, as we will see, the conscience is located primarily in feeling, and it enters the

⁸² Herms, "Reich Gottes" 111–12.

⁸³ As Herms puts it, for Schleiermacher, "No intelligent individual being is capable of determining the content and thus the direction of its own fundamental will (thus, its disposition) by itself." (Herms, "Reich Gottes," 113)

⁸⁴ Schleiermacher describes Christ's appearance in history as a revelation that is "superrational", albeit not absolutely so. "Supposing, however, that we posit the greatest possible difference between this superrational state [that is the indwelling of God in Christ] and whatever reason human beings might have in common, this superrational state can never be set forth as absolutely so without falling into self-contradiction. This is so, for the supreme goal that is posited regarding these workings of redemption is, nevertheless, always a human state that would contain not only the fullest acknowledgement of human reason but would also be a state in which what the divine Spirit effects and what human reason effects cannot be distinguished overall, even in the same individual. Thus, in that after reaching that point reason would be entirely at one with the divine Spirit, the divine Spirit could itself be conceived of as the greatest height to be reached by human reason, and the difference between the two could be conceived of as overcome." (CG §13.2, 98/1:111)

objective or practical consciousness only secondarily. In the dogmatic sections of the *Glaubenslehre*, we will see that the feeling of duty in the conscience bears a religious weight.⁸⁵

Fourth, religious consciousness also *strengthens* ethical life. Even after the agent has been summoned to ethical life, once her disposition has been oriented toward the highest good, and once her conscience accompanies all her ensuing cognitions and volitions, she continues to encounter obstacles to ethical life. Quantitatively, she must cultivate the bodily proficiency required to actually implement the virtuous, duty-fulfilling actions she now desires to commit. But more worrisome is the qualitative threat posed by other desires that lack ethical substance. Her basic desiderative orientation is itself vulnerable to all manner of failures ranging from distractions to temptations. The root of such moral weakness is a diminishing of the qualitative contrast between higher and lower forms of life that registers in our perceptual and affective responses to our environment; it is a function of God-forgetfulness. As this qualitative contrast weakens, the changes in perceptual and affective consciousness make it more difficult for the agent to hold firm against distraction and temptation. Put differently, for Schleiermacher, there is a direct relationship between one's degree of piety and the ease with which morals motivate our conduct.⁸⁶

Alongside this intrapsychic dynamic, religious consciousness also strengthens ethical life in a further way, on account of its social dimension. I have just noted that, for Schleiermacher,

⁸⁵ See Chapter 6.2.1.

⁸⁶ This will become especially clear in Schleiermacher's discussion of the moral psychological manifestation of sin. See my discussion in Chapter 6.1.1. Schleiermacher also makes some suggestive comments about this point in his *Christian Ethics*. In comparison to Christ, in whom "the good was not something that was becoming but something that was original," the rest of us are always in the process of being perfect such that "we are always subject to temptation so that we must exist as being incapable of pure performance of virtue." (CS, 166/605) With that said, however, as spirit achieves further dominance over flesh, Christians become capable of doing good with greater "ease" and thus with less "exertion." To the degree that Christian virtue simply flows forth from one with minimal resistance, Schleiermacher says that that we might call this "'the beautiful' or 'the graceful' in a moral respect." (CS, 165/604) To the degree that one's conduct bears this quality, it more closely resembles that of Christ himself. The image of Christ in one's own life becomes clearer and more vivid.

individuals are summoned to ethical life by something beyond us. We receive the new disposition toward this life as a gift. While these could, in principle, emerge from an individual's interaction with the natural world, Schleiermacher insists that they are more frequently the consequence of an individual's being taken up into a community of piety whose central task is to awaken, renew, and expand God-consciousness. These communities carefully construct cultic environments to invigorate piety amongst their members. They draw on tradition-specific texts and symbols to shape religious feelings in recognizable ways. While these all pertain to the distinctly religious facets of human life, we can now see that they play an utterly essential role in ethical life as a whole. Precisely through the religious tasks of awakening, strengthening, and spreading God-consciousness, religious institutions contribute to the ethical process of *Bildung* and the achievement of the highest good.⁸⁷

We are now in a position to draw some conclusions about Schleiermacher's understanding of religion and ethical life. The first concerns what I'll call his notion of *religious power*. By power, I simply mean the morally ambiguous capacity to respond to, transform, and create reality.⁸⁸ Like the other social forms (the state, the academy, and free sociality), religious communities actively contribute to the ethical process by deploying power in more or less rational ways. But the type of power that religious communities deploy is distinct from the others. Specifically, it is a power that transfigures and augments ordinary experience by

⁸⁷ Herms, "Reich Gottes," 115–20.

⁸⁸ This is William Schweiker's definition of the "the meaning and structure of human freedom or power, that is, the distinctive ability of human beings to shape, respond to, and create reality." William Schweiker, *Dust That Breathes: Christian Faith and the New Humanisms* (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 88–89. Previous formulations can be found in William Schweiker, "Theological Ethics and the Question of Humanism," *The Journal of Religion* 83, no. 4 (2003): 542 and William Schweiker, "The Ethics of Responsibility and the Question of Humanism," *Literature and Theology* 18, no. 3 (2004): 257.

awakening, strengthening, and expanding awareness of the transcendent dimension of reality.⁸⁹

Religious communities exercise this power to contribute to ethical life as a whole, but they do so precisely by pursuing their own, religious vocation. They incorporate persons into their cultic life by arousing and circulating their tradition-specific common feeling thereby transfiguring their experience and augmenting their lives.

This leads to my second conclusion. Religious power takes the form of an atmosphere. It is a type of feeling that grips an agent from beyond it and, in so doing, affects the manner in which the agent apprehends her environment and her place within it. To be gripped by a religious feeling is to undergo a transfiguration of attentional patterns, phenomenal hues, and affective responses to particular objects within the perceptual field. These changes do not properly cause one to act, but they play the crucial intrapsychic role of orienting and accompanying every action. As Schleiermacher puts it, “we should do all things with religion, nothing from religion.”⁹⁰ Further, since these feelings are the common inheritance of a community whose task it is to carefully construct formative, cultic environments that elicit and transmit them, it makes sense to speak of these religious feelings as properties of subject-involving situations. In other words, religious feelings are well conceived as atmospheric feelings both in terms of their nature and their power.

Finally, although this kind of power is distinctly religious, it is not limited to the internal life of religious communities. Schleiermacher describes this in his *Christian Ethics* under the distinction between the internal and external spheres of Christian action. The inner sphere refers to the Christian community itself, and its liturgical life in particular, while the outer sphere refers

⁸⁹ In contrast, the state pursues the good of just relations by exerting legal and coercive power, the academy pursues the good of objective knowledge by exerting logical and argumentative power, and free sociability pursues the good of an enriched set of human expressive possibilities by exerting various kinds of cultural power.

⁹⁰ Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 30.

to the common, social life that Christians share with others.⁹¹ While the church's institutional vocation is to circulate religious atmospheric feelings, the *Christian persons in the church* have much more complex vocations that include service in each of the other spheres of public life.⁹² I explore these more closely in the following chapters, but even in his non-dogmatic account of religious feeling, we can already see that the domain of human life and self-consciousness with which the religions are particularly concerned is, in fact, universally human. Immediate self-consciousness and feeling determines the quality and orientation of the fundamental disposition to be ethical. It is therefore an ineliminable element in the ethical process that is implied in all other spheres.

Furthermore, religious institutions are not the only social forms that create religious effects. The distinct forms of power deployed by the state, academy, and free sociability can shape the way agents affectively perceive their environment including its transcendent dimension, thereby increasing their God-consciousness or God-forgetfulness. This means that any institution, secular or religious, can be an appropriate object of *religious evaluation and critique*.

⁹¹ These two spheres serve as contexts within which Schleiermacher articulates the three different forms of Christian action (restorative, broadening, and presentational action), each of which emerges from Christian piety. I discuss these in more detail in the following chapters. For an overview of the *Christian Ethics* and their structure, see Eilert Herms, "Schleiermacher's *Christian Ethics*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña, trans. Jacqueline Mariña and Christine Helmer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 209–28.

⁹² As Herms puts it, "above all else, it is in this non-ecclesial domain of ethical life that the ecclesial life of the church proves its *truly effective power*. This does not happen in such a way that the ethical life in the realms of science, state, and economy would be incorporated into the life of the church and subordinated to ecclesial regulation. Rather, it occurs when the *Sittlichkeit* of Christian persons who have been formed by the intra-communal communication process of the church determines the quality of their participation in the collective ethical process in science, state, economy, and free sociability." (Herms, "Reich Gottes," 118–19.) He further clarifies that it is "not the church – neither its organizational structure nor its particular communicative praxis – that, by itself, constitutes the reign of God on earth. Rather, it is the specific *Sittlichkeit* of the collective interactions of every individual Christian which was created spiritually within the communication of the Christian community and which now flows in and through the living church and has a ripple effect on the entirety of ethical life – that is, in the church and in the world. (Herms, 120)

§4 Conclusion: The Religious Depths of Racism's Tenacity

The reason for reconstructing Schleiermacher's thinking about religion, feeling, and ethical life has been to ground precisely this kind of religious evaluation and critique. My claim is that the dark atmospherics of race not only enervate our capacities as moral agents, as I argued in Chapter Four, but they also diminish us as religious creatures. Specifically, these powers twist our perceptions of one another in accordance with a racial hierarchy of value, and this renders us less sensitive to the transcendent source and power that animates all of finite reality in a particular racial subset of the human population. In a more symbolic register, we might say that the dark atmospherics of race obfuscate the divine image in the human face of color and its presence in the face of Black people in particular. Furthermore, these same powers shape our affective responses to one another in accordance with the same racial hierarchy of personhood, and this dampens the divine summons to a higher life. Again, to foreshadow a more distinctly Christian formulation, we might say that the dark atmospherics of race disorder our affections such that the loving and joyful atmospherics that God intends for human sociality have been corrupted, replaced instead with antiblack autonomic fear responses, antiblack aversions, and antiblack evaluative and stereotype biases. These perceptual and affective effects of the dark atmospherics of race fragment agents in ways that exceed our capacity to amend. As the research on implicit racial bias suggests, agents frequently exhibit these effects without even knowing it. And even once we come to this self-knowledge, it does not easily translate into moral virtue or spiritual potency.

My analysis of Schleiermacher's theory of religious feeling helps to bring these spiritually deleterious effects to language. The dark atmospherics of race certainly 1) sap the moral resources that we might otherwise employ to resist white supremacy and promote racial

justice. But this only grasps one aspect of feeling's intrapsychic dynamics. They also 2) diminish the clarity with which the conscience perceives racial evils as evils (what I have called the *accompanying* role of religious feeling), 3) distort the desires of agents to align – even unwittingly – with the contours of a white supremacist social order (what I have called the *orienting* role of religious feeling), and 4) obscure the ethically fundamental religious summons to a qualitatively higher life (what I have called the *transcendental* role of religious feeling).

These religious maladies indicate that the condition of agents in the grip of the dark atmospherics of race is not merely one of moral weakness, a condition that could be improved through moral exhortation or virtuous habituation and training. The failures at work here are more severe and unrelenting. It is not simply that agents choose to act in ways that promote white supremacy in spite of knowing better. It is rather that agents who know better, who earnestly desire to act in ways that promote racial justice, find their power of choice tragically severed from their power to act in race salient situations. The evidence of implicit racial bias shows that the morally good and strong-willed agent, the one who recognizes the lie of racial hierarchy and stands committed to dismantling racism, is not only susceptible to such unconscious and unintentional bias but is also inhibited thereby from even detecting their error. Such a person engages in moral deliberation and issues moral judgments about what is right or good to do, and yet he or she continues to act in ways that, if made aware of the biased source and racist impact of their action, they would deeply regret.

The depths of this incapacity go even further. The dark atmospherics of race have formed agents living in racialized societies so profoundly that we are insulated from this kind of morally salutary regret. Even the knowledge *that* one's conduct is prone to such bias, a knowledge that is only attained experimentally, does not mean that one is thereby able to recognize it when it is

operative, let alone able to control and suppress it. Such tenacity in the face of our moral aspirations discloses a more elemental limit on human agency, one that exceeds the register of strength and weakness. In this condition, agents need not only to be strengthened from within but to be set free from a power that outstrips their own.

This brings our inquiry to the very limits of morality itself. Recall that, for Schleiermacher, moral motivation is possible in each and every situation by virtue of what he calls the boundlessness of impulse. We are the kind of creatures that are moved by the teeming impulses in our soul. These impulses are such that they are never absolutely determined by any object, whether a thought or some external good, because it is always possible in principle to conjure a moral representation of sufficient strength to subordinate all the immoral impulses. But the condition I am describing is one in which this very capacity to conjure a moral representation in a race-salient situation meets its limit. The anthropological site that Schleiermacher posits as that which guarantees the possibility of moral agency in every situation is shown to be susceptible to corruption. The freedom to be moral in every case is, it seems, not guaranteed.

This is why the account of religious power in ethical life is so important to this inquiry. For Schleiermacher, that aspect of human nature that guarantees the possibility of moral agency in every situation is itself a *contingent effect* of an encounter with a religious power that *happens to, and not by, the agent*. On this view, agents are effectively powerless to awaken the ethical disposition within us and utterly dependent on religious forces beyond our control to awaken, orient, accompany, and even strengthen us as ethical beings. This helps us grasp a further dimension of racism's tenacity. We can agree with the critical race theorists and social psychologists that political forces, and their psychological correlates, severely constrain the moral aspirations and causal efficacy of agents. But furthermore, our moral capacities confront

even more basic limits when we acknowledge how dependent they are on these contingent, religious dynamics that operate within, even if they are irreducible to, the human scene.

Two important insights about our nature as moral agents follow from these observations. First, if religious dynamics make ethical life possible and, furthermore, if those dynamics are well-understood in atmospheric terms, then the problem that atmospheric dynamics pose to agential integrity might be ethically salutary, even salvific. That is, the ethical insight regarding our vulnerability to foreign influence and inhabitation is now deepened by the religious insight that such influence and inhabitation is the guarantor of moral agency. This means that the possibility that human beings are capable of moral motivation in every situation is not ultimately grounded in the boundlessness of impulse or, for that matter, any anthropological feature of human nature at all. Rather, it is made possible by the stimulating activity of the infinite source and power of all that is on individual agents. This activity remained outside the purview of his philosophical ethics even if, as I have argued, the entire system is premised upon the religious dynamics of summoning, orienting, accompanying, and strengthening ethical life.⁹³ This is good news, so to speak, because it provides a new ground for the possibility of moral motivation in every situation and thus provides a basis for responsibility attributions.

This leads to a second insight. If the possibility of moral action is dependent upon religious atmospheric dynamics, then any hope we have in overcoming the tenacity of racism, whether individually or societally, is itself indexed to the nature and power of a theological reality that exceeds the human scene. If that is so, then a realistic inquiry such as this has reason

⁹³ We should note that, by expanding his scope to include human life in relation to the *Woher* of absolute dependence, Schleiermacher's thinking takes on a dialogical, or perhaps more accurately, a covenantal framework where humanity is construed *before God*. As Paul Ricoeur notes, such a framework distinguishes the religious symbol of *sin*, which entails a real referent and evaluative standard, from that of *guilt*, which marks an internalization and subjectivization of that standard. See Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 47–150.

to turn to an explicitly theological account of that reality and its relation to human agency, one that draws on the distinct, symbolic resources of a particular religious tradition.

The final two chapters attempt just this. They turn to Schleiermacher's substantive dogmatics and offer a constructive theological diagnosis of racism's tenacity and the meaning of moral agency in light of it. This account will build upon the insights about the significance of religious atmospheres for moral life and propose a theological analysis of the dark atmospherics of race under the symbol of sin. This leads us back to where we began in the Introduction, with Paul's depiction of the morally impotent agent in Romans 7. My claim is that its psychologically and morally disintegrating effects are most illuminatingly and coherently understood as a religious, and in fact, a soteriological problem – the effect of an ethically nefarious religious atmosphere. This chapter has cleared the way for such an argument by exposing the religious depths of feeling and identifying the distinctly religious form of power as atmospheric influence. But this account remains merely formal. A more concrete account requires that we press beyond the Introduction of the *Glaubenslehre* and consider his much more richly textured, symbol-laden formulation of distinctly Christian piety found in the dogmatic sections of *The Christian Faith* and his *Christian Ethics*.

CHAPTER 6

THE DEATH OF THE SOUL: A THEOLOGICAL DIAGNOSIS

The previous chapter argued for a preliminary religious critique of the dark atmospherics of race. The claim, in short, was that these social-affective dynamics not only enervate our moral capacities but further diminish us as religious creatures; they dampen our conscience in race salient situations, discipline our desires – even unwittingly – to accord with a white supremacist vision of the world, and obscure the divine summons to a higher life. This account is preliminary, however, because it discloses the religious depths of moral agency in a merely formal way. For a more substantive account of the religious powers at play in the moral life, we need to turn past the *Glaubenslehre*'s Introduction into its properly dogmatic sections. There, as well as in his companion volume on *Christian Ethics*,¹ Schleiermacher gives his most bracing analysis of recalcitrant moral failure as well as his distinctly Christian vision of the hope that such failures, as well as the world they have cumulatively shaped, might be transformed and renewed.

¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, ed. Terrence N. Tice, Catherine L. Kelsey, and Edwina G. Lawler, First edition. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016); Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt Zweite Auflage (1830/31)*, De Gruyter Texte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008). Cited as *CG* with English/German pagination. Only selections from Schleiermacher's *Christian Ethics* have been translated into English. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Selections from Friedrich Schleiermacher's Christian Ethics*, trans. James M. Brandt, 1st ed., Library of Theological Ethics (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011); Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Die christliche Sitte: Nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*, ed. L. Jonas, 2nd ed., Friedrich Schleiermacher's Sämtliche Werke, I/12 (Berlin: Reimer, 1884). Cited as *CS* with English/German pagination.

The final two chapters explore these theological works to offer a Christian theological diagnosis of racism's tenacity and its meaning for our self-understanding as moral agents. Chapter Six argues that the dark atmospherics of race are best understood in light of the Christian symbol of sin, conceived in Schleiermacherian terms as a social-affective source of recalcitrant moral failure. This illumines how, in addition to the well-attested forms of bodily and social death generated by systemic antiblack racism, it also dispenses what I call *apocalyptic soul death*, a normative and unrelenting obduracy to the value of Black persons that renders even apparently good and strong-willed agents affectively unresponsive to the divine presence in the human face of color. The following chapter concludes the work by outlining an account of the Christian atmospherics of grace within which to construct a final theological diagnosis of the meaning of moral agency amidst tenacious antiblack racism.

This chapter marks the nadir of our inquiry because it suggests that the capacity for individual and collective transformation in the direction of racial justice is even more limited than critical race theorists and social psychologists admit. More than counter-ideology instruction, political revolution, or the rigorous re-training of our implicit attitudes, agents in this condition require something on the order of a religious conversion, one that Christians have long depicted in the most radical terms as a transition from death into life. While the prescriptions offered by critical race theorists and social psychologists for achieving racial justice neglect this religious dimension, I argue below that these non-theological disciplines do fulfill a religious vocation. That is, insofar as they contribute to an unblinking, realistic understanding of our condition as agents, we can understand them theologically as promulgating the knowledge of the law.

The chapter proceeds in two general steps. First, I explore Schleiermacher's doctrine of sin, where he depicts human fragmentariness as both a result of and contributor to the religious power of sin and the flesh. I argue that this provides an illuminating description of the religious effects of the dark atmospherics of race as a social-affective source of recalcitrant moral self-frustration that defiles human sociality and contributes even to an apocalyptic rift in the divinely ordered cosmos. Second, I probe Schleiermacher's theological account of the conscience in search of resources for thinking about the meaning of moral agency amidst the tenacity of racism. I invoke the particularly insidious forms of racialized moral failure described in Chapter Two as antiblack perceptual bias and moral exclusion, arguing that it exposes certain limitations in Schleiermacher's doctrine of sin. In response, I turn to the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans for further symbolic resources to augment Schleiermacher's account and develop a more adequate formulation of the meaning of moral agency amidst racism's tenacity as apocalyptic soul death. Only in these terms do we finally grasp the extent and theological significance of the dark atmospherics of race as a soteriological problem, one whose resolution exceeds our political and moral capacities. Agents for whom the soul's responsiveness to the value of Black persons has been effectively killed need more than moral exhortation, education, or training in virtue. Such persons need to be rescued from death and brought into new life.

§1 Schleiermacher's Doctrine of Sin

Schleiermacher's doctrine of sin appears in the properly dogmatic sections of *The Christian Faith*.² These sections purport to elucidate the contents of the distinctly Christian self-

² More precisely, the doctrine of sin appears in the First Aspect of the Second Part of the *Glaubenslehre*. The Second Part explicates the contents of Christian self-consciousness in terms of the contrast between sin and grace. (CG §62-64) The First Aspect develops an account of the consciousness of sin (§§65-85) and the Second Aspect gives an account of the consciousness of grace (§§91-169). Within his treatment of the consciousness of sin,

consciousness, which on his view, is the consciousness of having been caught up in Jesus Christ's redemption of all creation. Intrinsic to this consciousness is an awareness of that old condition from which one has been redeemed and the new one to which one is now free to inhabit.³ This contrast between the old and the new is one that Schleiermacher will sharpen even further when he construes it in biblical terms as the opposition between death and life; the old life, viewed from the perspective of the new life, is not really living at all. But while this contrast is utterly essential for Schleiermacher, he also insists that Christians are always actually conscious of both at the same time, albeit in different proportions.⁴ These two forms of Christian consciousness are the consciousness of sin and grace.

This means that Schleiermacher's definition of sin is framed from within the perspective of Christian self-consciousness.⁵ His methodological commitments prohibit him from making any metaphysical claims about the objectivity of sin, a point his theological critics have long seen as a fatal flaw.⁶ Although I think these charges are overstated, my argument does not

Schleiermacher further divides his account into three sections: 1) sin as a human condition (§§66-74), 2) sin in relation to the constitution of the world (§§75-78), and 3) sin with regard to divine attributes (§§79-85).

³ *CG* §63.2, 386-387/1:395-397.

⁴ "Now, every Christian is indeed conscious of sin and grace as well, but never in separation, rather always in relation to and along with each other." (*CG* §64.1, 389/1:398)

⁵ "Even regarding sin, we cannot set forth an objective elucidation of it without straying from our method. Instead, we have to go back to an individual's own self-consciousness, which declares such a condition to be sin. This approach has all the less against it, moreover, since sin cannot arise in the life of a Christian without such a consciousness." (*CG* §66.1, 401-402/1:405) This passage seems to confirm the suspicions of those who think Schleiermacher reduces sin to the consciousness of sin. But the very next sentence suggests that this conclusion is too hasty. "This is so, for this lack of consciousness [*Bewußtlosigkeit*] would itself be simply a new sin, which would, nevertheless, also have to come into consciousness as such later on." (*CG* §66.1, 402/1:405)

⁶ Karl Barth's critique centers precisely on this relation of sin to self-consciousness. He locates the roots of Schleiermacher's "abysmal error" in his "historico-psychological methodology [wherein] grace and sin [are] no more than two corresponding states in the religious consciousness of the Christian." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/3, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960). Reinhold Niebuhr charges Schleiermacher with a form of Pelagianism because, as he sees it, Schleiermacher locates "the bias toward evil [...] always outside and never inside a particular will." Reinhold Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, Library of Theological Ethics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 246.

require a defense and so I will not offer one here.⁷ Instead, I will simply note that Schleiermacher presents these contents of Christian self-consciousness as “convictions” and “certainties” about realities that stand apart from our constructions about them.⁸ So even though Schleiermacher explicitly states that the justificatory basis for all of his dogmatic claims is a set of inner states,⁹ the Christian regards these states as elicited ultimately by God, the only reality that stands apart from the entirety of finite being taken as a whole. This means that, while the claims about God and human life before God are themselves mind-dependent, that which they purport to be about is mind-independent. Moreover, my primary concern is to show that Schleiermacher’s dogmatic claims about sin and grace reveal aspects of our nature as moral agents in racialized societies that are implied but remain inarticulate in non-theological analyses. For that reason, questions about the coherence of these dogmatic claims within his larger dogmatic system, or their adequacy vis-à-vis the history of Christian doctrine, or the soundness of his conception of the dogmatic task itself, all exceed the bounds of this project. What is important for this project, and what I have already shown in the previous chapter, is that Schleiermacher understands Christian dogmatic claims to be tradition-specific articulations of affective dynamics that 1) pertain to human beings more generally, 2) figure prominently in every aspect of ethical life, 3) can be evaluated in terms

⁷ Although there is still a prevailing suspicion of Schleiermacher’s doctrine of sin, he is not entirely without defenders. Walter Wyman makes a convincing argument that Schleiermacher’s doctrine of sin exposes the internal incoherence of the “Augustinian” views favored by the likes of Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr and critically reconstructs a more plausible “Irenean” account that still retains many traditional elements of the former position. Walter E. Wyman Jr., “Rethinking the Christian Doctrine of Sin: Friedrich Schleiermacher and Hick’s ‘Irenean Type,’” *The Journal of Religion* 74, no. 2 (1994): 199–217. In his lucid and provocative book, Daniel Pedersen has recently argued that Schleiermacher’s doctrine of sin is not only plausible but superior to contemporary alternatives. Daniel James Pedersen, *Schleiermacher’s Theology of Sin and Nature: Agency, Value, and Modern Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

⁸ Schleiermacher refers to *die Ueberzeugungen* and *die Gewißheiten* throughout the *Glaubenslehre*. But the terms are introduced in *CG* §3.4, 13-16/1:26-30.

⁹ “Propositions regarding Christian faith are conceptions of Christian religious states of mind and heart presented in the form of discourse.” (*CG* §15, 116/1:127) “Thus, the structural feature just outlined will be accomplished in full in accordance with these three forms of reflection on religious states of mind and heart. Indeed, this must be done in such a way that, in every instance, basis for this structure lies in the direct description of these states of mind and heart themselves.” (*CG* §31, 185/1:196)

of the degree to which they apprehend the transcendent whence of existence in every moment of consciousness, and therefore 4) are appropriate objects for religious critique.

Schleiermacher defines sin as both a *power* and a *condition*. As a power, sin constitutes a force that transcends individuals and collectives and permeates their inner lives. He speaks of it as both an “agent” and a “potency” that diminishes or vitiates God-consciousness.¹⁰ It is thus a Christian specification of the more general term, “God-forgetfulness,”¹¹ that is distinguished from other, non-Christian construals of this phenomenon by virtue of the fact that Christians apprehend this failure to perceive, attend, and feelingly respond to the divine activity in and through finite reality as originally rooted in the self, not the world.¹² Though human beings and the world as a whole were created with an “original perfection”¹³ such that their interactions could be generative of God-consciousness and receptive to human intentions, Schleiermacher affirms the traditional Augustinian view that the manifest imperfections of the world, i.e., evils, are the result of human activity. This propensity toward God-forgetfulness and the imperfections it elicits constitute not only a power but also a *condition* in which all human beings find themselves and that they perpetually reinforce through their thoughts, words, and deeds.

Although Schleiermacher’s doctrine of sin departs from Protestant orthodoxy in several rather innovative ways,¹⁴ his emphasis of sin as a power over and a condition of human agents for which we are individually and collectively responsible shows that he also retains many central traditional elements. Furthermore, Schleiermacher’s account goes to great lengths to

¹⁰ He describes both the flesh and spirit as *Potenzen* and *Agentien*. (CG §66.2, 403/1:407)

¹¹ CG §11.2, 82/1:96.

¹² “We are conscious that whatever turning away from God might exist in the situations of our lives is a deed originating in ourselves, and we call this sin. (CG §63 385/1:394-395)

¹³ CG §§59-60.

¹⁴ For summaries of these innovations, see Wyman, “Rethinking the Christian Doctrine of Sin” and Kevin Vander Schel, “Friedrich Schleiermacher,” in *T&T Clark Companion to the Doctrine of Sin*, ed. Keith L. Johnson and David Lauber (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 251–66.

insist that, although sin amounts to an almost unavoidable distortion of human nature, the reality it names is ontologically dependent upon and consonant with a more primordial goodness that he calls the original perfection of humanity and the world, a perfection imparted by God in the activity of creation and maintained, to some degree, in the activity of preservation.¹⁵ For present purposes, I want to emphasize how Schleiermacher both draws upon the Pauline symbols of the flesh and the spirit and reconstructs them in light of his theory of religious feeling, which as we saw, entails both intrapsychic and social dimensions.

§1.1 The Intrapsychic Dynamics of the Flesh

To explicate the Christian consciousness of sin, Schleiermacher turns not only to Protestant confessional documents but also to biblical texts. In particular, he draws from Paul's account of sin as a struggle between flesh and spirit, and he frequently cites passages from Paul's Letter to the Romans.¹⁶ These symbols mark a starting point for his formulation of the doctrine of sin, which he explicates with reference to his theory of religious consciousness described in the *Glaubenslehre*'s Introduction.

Schleiermacher defines the flesh as “the totality of the soul's so-called lower forces”¹⁷ that actively resist spirit, which, by contrast, refers to those higher forces of the soul that expand and intensify God-consciousness. These each map respectively onto the lower, sensory self-

¹⁵ “Although sin is based on an uneven development of discernment and force of will, we can conceive the presence of sin in such a way that the concept of the original perfection of human nature is not invalidated through the presence of sin, yet sin is apprehended only as a distortion [*eine Störung*] of nature.” (CG §68, 407/1:412)

¹⁶ Between CG §63 and §74, Schleiermacher explicitly references Paul's Letter to the Romans no less than thirteen times.

¹⁷ CG §66.2, 403/1:407.

consciousness and the higher consciousness described in the Introduction to the *Glaubenslehre*.¹⁸ It is crucial to note that, like Paul, Schleiermacher depicts spirit as *struggling* against the flesh, not *obliterating* it. Its goal is simply to make the flesh its obedient organ.¹⁹ Unfortunately, the flesh has an activity and agenda of its own, and this makes it unreceptive to spirit. As a potencies and agents, Schleiermacher depicts flesh and spirit as “independently self-moving principle[s]”²⁰ in direct conflict with the other.²¹ Instead of forming a harmonious whole, these powers compete for dominance at the level of immediate self-consciousness and threaten the integrity of the self.

Thus, by drawing on these traditional Christian symbols, Schleiermacher identifies the threats to human integrity as a *religious problem*. This problem is religious because it regards the liveliness of an individual’s immediate self-consciousness vis-à-vis the source and power of all that exists, the whence of absolute dependence. As we saw in the previous chapter, Schleiermacher identifies the apex of religious life as the intensively and extensively maximal awareness of absolute dependence in every moment of one’s sensory experience where this awareness manifests phenomenologically in the transfiguration and augmentation of one’s perceptual and affective responses to the environment. The flesh is thus a power that inhibits and degrades this awareness, which is promoted and enhanced by a counter-power called the spirit. Furthermore, this religious problem concerns the integrity of persons because 1) the relationship between flesh and spirit is oppositional, 2) spirit’s activity does not obliterate but augments that

¹⁸ Since this higher consciousness refers specifically to the Christian self-consciousness in these dogmatic paragraphs, the spirit under consideration here is the redemptive activity of Christ. I return to this point in the following chapter.

¹⁹ “That is, it is not that the locus of the lower life potency in persons will be abolished or destroyed, but only that the difference between the two will be overcome. Each moment is to be determined by the higher life potency in that everything that belongs to the lower life potency will become its instrument, and all self-determination will be renounced.” (CS, 42/42)

²⁰ CG §66.2, 403/1:407.

²¹ Here, Schleiermacher’s marginal references to Romans 7 and Galatians 5 are instructive. In Romans 7, the “I” who desires to do what is right confronts a separate agency within his “members” with an entirely different agenda.

of the flesh insofar as it 3) actualizes what one truly is, namely, a creature capable of God-consciousness. To the degree that one fails to achieve God-consciousness in every moment, one remains not only under the sway of the flesh but also fundamentally at odds with oneself.

My claim is that this helpfully thematizes the kind of problem facing agents who act under the influence of the dark atmospherics of race. But to see this, we need to know more about how Schleiermacher understands the recalcitrance of the flesh vis-à-vis the spirit. Whereas theologians like Augustine and Luther construed this in terms of *superbia*, the prideful desire to rebel against God and replace the divine will with one's own as the highest good, Schleiermacher presents a developmental account whereby agents are bound by a twofold "head start"²² that the flesh enjoys over spirit. This head start functions at two levels: the organic and the social.

As organic creatures, we first come to know the world around us through the sensory self-consciousness. Like non-human animals, we perceive our surroundings as sensory objects and desire the satisfaction of basic needs. This sensory self-consciousness is an "autonomous activity,"²³ and yet even here Schleiermacher detects a "self-focused activity of the flesh"²⁴ and a "sin-ridden autonomy"²⁵ that is at odds with the higher consciousness. Although this activity does not properly constitute sin until the contrary activity of spirit has been summoned such that a struggle occurs, it still constitutes a "seed of sin that is constantly at the point of bursting forth"²⁶ and that develops through repetition into a "proficiency."²⁷ This means that the summons to God-consciousness appears within a soul that is already well-practiced in what it will come to recognize as sin.

²² *Vorsprung* (CG §67.2, 406/1:410)

²³ *selbständigkeit der sinnlichen Functionen* (CG §66.2, 404/1:408)

²⁴ *fürsichtigkeit des Fleisches* (CG §67.1, 405/1:409)

²⁵ *sündhafte Selbständigkeit* (CG §69.3, 416/1:419)

²⁶ CG §66.1, 403/1:406.

²⁷ *Fertigkeit* (CG §67.2, 406/1:410)

One implication of this organic head start is that sin, or at least the seed of sin, is anterior to the activity of the will. This accords with Schleiermacher's view that religious powers operate primarily in the realm of immediate self-consciousness and only secondarily influences our more active cognitions and volitions.²⁸ This is also a key characteristic of the kind of influence on agents that I attributed to the dark atmospherics of race. They do not so much *cause* us to act as distort our perceptual and affective apprehension of our environment in ways that *incline* us to exclude Black persons from the scope of moral concern. These inclinations are pre-volitional and sub-doxastic, but their influence on our conduct remains significant.

It is here that Schleiermacher's manner of distinguishing religious and moral consciousness without separating them entirely proves most illuminating. He consistently maintains that these religious powers pertain to feeling or immediate self-consciousness, and for that reason, they happen in us but not by us. And yet, he insists that these religious dynamics profoundly affect our cognitions and volitions.

He tells us that the power of the flesh generates an "unevenness" between the understanding and the will.²⁹ Schleiermacher has in mind the very ordinary experience of knowing what to do and yet failing to actually do it. As he puts it, "insight" tends to run ahead of "willpower."³⁰ This occurs in cases of weakness of will, when I judge that it is right to do X even as I choose to Y.³¹ Schleiermacher's own examples suggest that there are even more benign iterations of this same problem. He invokes distance as a metaphor to describe what happens

²⁸ CG §3. See discussion in Chapter 5.2.1.

²⁹ CG §68.1, 407/1:412 This corresponds to what I called the *functional role* of religious feeling as that psychological activity that mediates between the activities of knowing and doing. See Chapter 5.2.1.

³⁰ *Einsicht, Willenskraft* (CG §68, 407/1:412)

³¹ Daniel Pedersen has recently argued that this imbalance between insight and willpower is best viewed as a classic case of *akrasia*, where the agent chooses a lower principle (the flesh) instead of a higher principle (the spirit) as the basis for knowing and doing. See Pedersen, *Schleiermacher's Theology of Sin and Nature*, 120–28.

when an agent knows what he or she should do while “far off” from a particular situation but, when they get close enough for a more fine-grained apprehension of its complexity, the power to act suddenly proves to be lacking.³² Since, in both cases, the insight and the discordant willpower emerge from the same person, there must be some moral psychological explanation to account for this disparity, and Schleiermacher invokes the mediating role of feeling for that very purpose. The failure to properly translate moral insight into moral conduct is a consequence of the flesh’s dominance over spirit in the depths of feeling. Or considered phenomenologically, the immediate perceptual and affective apprehension of a situation enervates even good judgments about what is right or good to do from sufficiently motivating one to actually perform good deeds.

I will argue below that this account needs one important amendment if it is to grasp the extent and severity of the kind of racialized moral failures observed in implicit racial bias. But for the moment, we need to grasp the significance of this insight about moral agency and the human condition. Schleiermacher argues that, as organic creatures, we bear an inner tendency and orientation toward obliviousness regarding the divine source and power of all that is, and that this obliviousness inclines us toward moral failure. In his terms, human beings manifest a “susceptibility to sin”³³ that constitutes “the sufficient reason for all actual sins in any individual [and] the preserving inner ground of sinful actions.”³⁴ Before committing any actual sins in thought, word, or deed,³⁵ we find “so many presentiments of human evil and ... seeds of all that

³² *CG* §68.1, 408/1:412.

³³ *Sündhaftigkeit* (*CG* §70, 417/1:421)

³⁴ *CG* §71.1, 427/1:430.

³⁵ Schleiermacher insists that “actual sin remains entirely what it is even where what is only internally susceptible to sin makes an appearance and takes part in a given element of consciousness as thought or desire. That is to say, just as love, also surely viewed as inner movement, is said to be fulfillment of the law, because in every available opportunity it unfailingly breaks forth into external deed, so too a corresponding desire, although it is stirring in its function only internally, is already actual sin on the same basis.” (*CG* §73.2, 456-457/1:459)

is wicked” within us that the complete avoidance of sin is virtually³⁶ unavoidable. Even the spiritually mature Christian remains conscious of this susceptibility as “something present and operative”³⁷ that stains “the entire domain of sinful humanity [such that] there is no single entirely and perfectly good action.”³⁸ It is “truly infinite” and renders us “thoroughly incapable” of freely developing God consciousness or even of aspiring to those states on our own.³⁹ Although there are important qualifications,⁴⁰ and although Schleiermacher will insist that human beings remain responsible agents,⁴¹ he affirms Calvin’s claim that human beings in this condition are totally depraved, demonstrating a “complete incapacity for good.”⁴²

We can now see that Schleiermacher’s doctrine of sin integrates several of the most bewildering aspects of the recalcitrant atmospherics of race. First, it grasps the psychological anteriority of implicitly biased racial perceptions and affections vis-à-vis our explicit beliefs and desires. The power of the flesh precedes conscious awareness and operates with significant autonomy from those deliberate, intentional processes that have traditionally been the focus of moral philosophy. This means, second, that the agent arrives at moral consciousness with a strong disposition toward what he or she will later come to recognize as actual sin. Third, this susceptibility to sin generates moral failures that are particularly recalcitrant. So long as the activity of the flesh holds sway in immediate self-consciousness, even moral insight about what

³⁶ It is important for Schleiermacher that the “susceptibility to sin” [*Sündhaftigkeit*] is not yet “sinfulness” [*Sündigkeit*] because, on his account, Jesus’s sinless perfection admits the former but not the latter. Although he felt temptation, his perfectly potent God consciousness meant that he resisted all temptation without error.

³⁷ *CG* §70.1, 420/1:422.

³⁸ *CG* §73.1, 454-455/1:457-458.

³⁹ *CG* §70.1, 420/1:422-423.

⁴⁰ Schleiermacher qualifies this account of total depravity in two ways. First, human depravity does not eradicate the possibility of receiving Christ’s redemptive activity. Second, he acknowledges that sinful human beings remain capable of “praiseworthy” [*löblichen*] conduct and “civic righteousness,” even if this ultimately falls short of perfection and Christian righteousness. (*CG* §70.3, 422-423/1:425-427)

⁴¹ I emphasize this point below in my discussion of the conscience. See Chapter 6.2.

⁴² *CG* §70, 418/1:421.

is good or right to do fails to translate into moral conduct. This aligns with the ample empirical evidence that implicit racial bias persists even in persons with explicit beliefs in racial equality and desires for racial justice. Finally, in what is perhaps its most provocative consequence for our purposes, Schleiermacher's doctrine of sin provides a way to articulate the condition of agents who are so susceptible to these pre-volitional moral failings. On his view, agents who remain riven by the power of the flesh *bear fault even before they act*.

More remains to be said about this final point. For now, it is sufficient to note that this consciousness of pre-volitional fault aligns with a strong moral intuition that individuals are in some way responsible for the actions they commit on account of their implicit racial attitudes. This complements the various other ways that Schleiermacher's conception of sin and the flesh powerfully integrates the psychologically and morally disintegrating features of the dark atmospherics of race.

In short, I have shown that we have a preliminary reason to think that the dark atmospherics of race could be well conceived not only as a religious problem but as that particular religious problem which Christians call sin. But as I noted earlier, the head start of the flesh is twofold, and so far, this soul-disintegrating power looks to be individual in nature, rooted in the innermost recesses of consciousness. Besides our organic nature, Schleiermacher also locates an unevenness that lies beyond the individual, rooted in a collective, social reality.⁴³ This becomes clear, Schleiermacher thinks, when we acknowledge that we did not choose, but inherit, much of what makes us who we are.

⁴³ “[T]he sin of each individual has its source in an earlier existence above and beyond one’s own existence.” (CG §69.1, 414/1:418)

§1.2 The Social-Historical Dynamics of the Flesh

Schleiermacher consistently affirms that each human being is a distinct individual with an idiosyncratic arrangement of congenital characteristics. But he also acknowledges that these individual traits are not absolutely idiosyncratic. They coalesce in communal settings such that individuals develop recognizably shared traits. Family members usually share common features, whether inherited biologically or cultivated through social processes.⁴⁴ The same is true for increasingly larger groups as well, although the characteristics that unite Chicagoans, Midwesterners, and Americans become increasingly less stable.

Schleiermacher's insight here is twofold. On the one hand, individuals intentionally and unintentionally adopt patterns of feeling, thinking, and acting that have currency in their social *milieu*. On the other hand, these common traits never entirely expunge individuality. Even in the family, that most intimate of social forms, members of the group retain their own idiosyncratic characteristics, and they each express the shared characteristics of their family in their own distinct way. This means that every moment of a person's self-consciousness bears a complex relationship between a person's individuality and "some large type held in common."⁴⁵

These insights about human sociality are the basis for his claim that the power of the flesh operates not only on a moral psychological but also a social register. As we have seen, the susceptibility to sin is a general structure of human experience. But Schleiermacher maintains that each iteration of this phenomenon assumes a distinct shape within particular individuals who are each formed by a distinct biological and social inheritance. This means that those moments of God-forgetfulness, no less than moments of God-consciousness, bear the marks of our personal

⁴⁴ Schleiermacher discusses this in several places, but for one important iteration of it within his doctrine of sin, see *CG* §69.1, 414/1:417-418.

⁴⁵ *CG* §69.1, 414/1: 418.

and communal particularities.⁴⁶ The same can be said for the succession of generations. “What appears from birth as the susceptibility to sin of a generation is conditioned by the susceptibility to sin of earlier generations and itself conditions the susceptibility to sin of generations yet to come.”⁴⁷ Both the fact of our susceptibility to sin and the particular shape of that susceptibility is, in at least in part, the product of our social and historical formation.

The notion that human agents are profoundly shaped by our social and historical environment is hardly new for Schleiermacher. Both in his Berlin Lectures on philosophical ethics and in his philosophy of religion, Schleiermacher emphasized the formative role of social relations in the ethical and religious development of agents. The difference here is that, in his doctrine of sin, Schleiermacher claims that the necessarily social and inter-generational processes of ethical perfection and religious development is threatened at every level by a contrary power. This counter-power flows through our formative social relations, but instead of edifying us, it diminishes and degrades us as moral and religious beings. Instead of strengthening our powers of action as he claims that reason does in his philosophical ethics, the flesh deludes our capacity for evaluative insight and constrains our willpower. Instead of cultivating us to be virtuous, duty-fulfilling seekers of the highest good, it shapes us to be vicious, duty-evading creatures consumed with our misshapen interests. In short, our capacity for ethical and religious improvement entails a shadow side, a susceptibility to a counter-*Bildung* that retards and reverses such improvement.

Schleiermacher calls this the “collective force of the flesh.”⁴⁸ It constitutes the second, distinctly social head start of the flesh over the spirit and adds an additional layer of recalcitrance

⁴⁶ “As a result [of having these shared traits], sin will take a different shape in each of these persons.” (CG §69.1, 415/1:419)

⁴⁷ CG §71, 429/1:432.

⁴⁸ Gesamtkraft des Fleisches (CG §71.2, 429/1:432)

to the human quest for a spiritually integrated life. Even if one makes progress toward moral psychological integrity, susceptibility to the collective force of the flesh makes one subject to a barrage of stimuli and occasions for backsliding. The opposite holds true as well. Even social progress confronts a limit in the individual susceptibility to sin, which, according to Schleiermacher, remains operative in even the most spiritually mature person.

This deepens the precariousness of ethical life even further. As we saw in the previous chapter, agents must be summoned to ethical life by being affected by a religious power. But now, we see that the collective force of the flesh constitutes a positive counter-power that actively inhibits such a summons from ever registering in the depths of the soul. Ethical life, in other words, is not merely *contingent upon* a soul-integrating religious power but also *positively threatened* by a soul-disintegrating religious power.⁴⁹

This marks an important development in our attempt to grasp the multi-dimensional tenacity of racism. For the first time in this inquiry, we have arrived at a formulation of racism's recalcitrance that i) integrates its psychological and social aspects and ii) grasps its character as an active, religiously and morally deleterious power that haunts agents living in the wake of chattel slavery. But this is not all that Schleiermacher's doctrine of sin can illumine about our current predicament, for we have yet to ask what this means for our self-understanding as agents who are susceptible to, indeed riven by, the collective force of the flesh. This brings us to Schleiermacher's account of original sin.

⁴⁹ Eilert Herms calls this frequently overlooked character of his philosophical ethics "moral ambivalence." The entire process of *Bildung* that constitutes ethical life is threatened at every stage by the possibility that immorality will prevail over morality and occasion a "derailment." That which determines whether morality or immorality prevails is religious consciousness. See Eilert Herms, "Reich Gottes und Menschliches Handeln," in *Menschsein im Werden: Studien zu Schleiermacher* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 110–11.

§1.3 Original Sin and the Deterioration of the World

Schleiermacher offers a sophisticated account of the meaning of the flesh for moral agency by invoking the Augustinian concept of “original sin.”⁵⁰ This notion holds that human beings inherit both the guilt of and the proclivity toward sin depicted in the narrative of the Fall in Genesis 1-3. Though he retains many of its traditional elements, he also argues for certain revisions and conceptual clarifications. Foremost among these is a distinction between *originated* and *originating* original sin.⁵¹

§1.3.1 Originated and Originating Original Sin

Originated original sin refers to the human susceptibility to sin insofar as it is given to us as a biological and social effect from previous generations. This emphasizes that we are the relatively passive recipients of this disposition. A white man born in antebellum Mississippi would almost certainly have been conditioned to feel, think, and act in ways that reflect the overt racism passed onto him by his social environment. Though he did not choose to be raised this way and may deeply regret it later in his life, this racist tendency nevertheless lies within him.

But Schleiermacher claims that this passive quality of original sin is only part of the picture. Since in his view, human life consists in a perpetual oscillation between receptivity and self-initiated activity,⁵² all of our more active moments of knowing and doing emerge from that same organic, socially conditioned life that is stained by this sinful inheritance. Before we recognize it, every cognition and volition has already taken up that inheritance and propagated it

⁵⁰ “Moreover, in the whole series of these [patterns that condition the susceptibility to sin of future generations], as that series interconnects with the advancing development of humanity, is the entire relationship expressed in the concept ‘original sin’ given.” (CG §71.2, 429/1:432)

⁵¹ *verursachte / verursachende Ursünde* (CG §71.1, 427/1:429-430)

⁵² CG §4.1, 19-20/1:33-34. For discussion, see Chapter 5.2.1.

as our own, self-initiated activity. At this moment, original sin ceases to be merely originated within us and instead becomes originating original sin.

Originating original sin is a “self-effected original sin” that, Schleiermacher tells us, “pushes up and increases actual sin in each individual self and in others as well.”⁵³ The man who inherited the racism of his community does not only hold these prejudices within him, but he also manifests them in the way he makes evaluative judgments about, orients himself toward, and acts within the world. Each of these activities, even down to merely unintentional reactions vis-à-vis his environment, are attributable to no one other than him. Such reactions emerge from “the innermost center of [one’s] life [such that] sin, viewed as proceeding from this center, is the sinner’s own deed and not another’s deed.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, through repeatedly enacting these racially tainted cognitions and volitions, these social patterns increasingly become indistinct from one’s own character. They come to constitute a second nature.⁵⁵ This process of appropriating social norms is accomplished through one’s own self-initiated activity, which means that the man’s increased susceptibility to precisely these kinds of racialized sins is effectively the consequence of his own, even if unintentional, doing.

This helps us see how the human condition could be understood to bear the kind of pre-volitional fault described in §1.1. On the one hand, the man who inherits a racist disposition from his family and friends did not choose his lot. It was originated within him without his consent and without regard for his intentions. But since the self who forms cognitions and volitions inhabits the same embodied, socially embedded life as the self who inherited these racist habits

⁵³ *CG* §71.1, 427/1:430.

⁵⁴ *CG* §81.2, 503/1:500.

⁵⁵ “[J]ust as every aptitude in a human being gains proficiency through exercise and grows in this way, so too an individual’s susceptibility to sin from birth grows through exercise proceeding from one’s self-initiated activity.” (*CG* §71.1 427/1:429-430)

of mind, those cognitions and volitions that are unquestionably attributable to the agent are already stained by those norms he ineluctably appropriated. The fault he inherits, though not a product of his choices, defiles all of his choices.

This is not to say that the guilt one bears for pre-volitional faults is identical in degree or in kind to the guilt one bears for deliberate moral failures. Certainly, the man who earnestly seeks to identify his unintentional racism and to avoid perpetuating racist evil is more praiseworthy than the committed white supremacist. Between these two extremes, it is surely appropriate to make further distinctions that consider classic exculpating conditions like ignorance and compulsion. But if, as Schleiermacher claims, our self-initiated activity emerges from and is conditioned by our embodied, socially embedded existence, and if that existence is as permeated by the dark atmospherics of race as I have claimed it is, then it follows that even apparently good and strong-willed agents would bear the kind of pre-volitional fault that they, even unwittingly, cultivate within themselves and spread to others in their social environment.

This last point suggests that agents influenced by the dark atmospherics of race are also imbricated in a wider and more complex web of fault. After all, the agent whose choices have been defiled by the racist logic of white persons and nonwhite sub-persons also acts in ways that exhibit this same corruption. These actions go on to generate real-world effects that bear the marks of racialization, and over time, these effects accumulate to construct a world that is itself ordered by white racial supremacy.

This link between a sense of primordial fault and the existence of evil in the world lies at the center of traditional conceptions of original sin, and it is made especially vivid in Schleiermacher's description of its originating aspect. We have already seen how original sin becomes originating on a personal level insofar as individual agents ineluctably appropriate the

norms that have shaped their embodied, socially embedded existence in each of their cognitions and volitions. But it is originating on a social and even a cosmological level as well.

§1.3.2 The Social Dimension of Originating Original Sin

First, consider the social effects of originating original sin. Since we live and act in social environments populated by individuals who are also susceptible to sin, Schleiermacher argues that each sinful thought, word or deed sparks a kind of chain reaction of which the sum is greater than the parts. The sin of one person serves as an occasion for the susceptibility to sin to be aroused in others. These individuals then go on to commit sins that stimulate the same susceptibility in further others. Left unchecked, this dynamic grows exponentially, spreading like a virus to increasingly larger circles of sociality such that it becomes a social and historical power that largely operates with autonomy from the individual agents caught in its movement. According to Schleiermacher, this phenomenon indicates the “thoroughly collective nature”⁵⁶ of the flesh, a feature which makes “a distinctive individual formulation of original sin not intelligible of itself alone.”⁵⁷ Human life is so porous, interconnected, and susceptible to influence from other humans that a more sophisticated account of the source and extent of human fault is required. This leads Schleiermacher to the following, chilling formulation: “in each individual, susceptibility to sin is the work of all, and in all individuals, it is the work of each.”⁵⁸ For that reason, he claims that it is equally appropriate to say that original sin is “the personal fault of every individual” as well as the “collective act and collective fault of the human race.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *CG* §71.2, 428/1:431.

⁵⁷ *CG* §71.2, 429/1:431.

⁵⁸ *CG* §71.2, 428/1:431.

⁵⁹ *CG* §71, 424-425/1:427.

We must proceed carefully at this point. In correlating American racism with original sin, we cannot allow the theological formulations to obscure the historical and moral record. The institution of chattel slavery had very clear perpetrators and victims. The same must be said about those who have benefited and suffered losses from the afterlives of slavery in American racism. If an interpretation of American racism that invokes original sin in any way mystifies or equivocates on these points, then we must firmly reject it. Whatever insight such an account might contribute pales in comparison to that which it culpably conceals.

With this qualification fixed as a bright line, I propose that Schleiermacher's conception of originating original sin illumines an important feature of racism's tenacity. Throughout this work, I have emphasized several ways in which this historically contingent phenomenon has affected agents living in its enduring wake in ethically deleterious ways *without regard for their conscious intentions*. In the studies of implicit racial bias, we saw that even those supposedly good and strong-willed agents who express commitments to racial equality and racial justice show evidence of antiblack bias, the most worrisome of which excludes Black persons from moral concern at the level of perception. I also noted that these biases have been detected, albeit to different degrees, in those persons who suffer most from those biases. This suggests that our susceptibility to antiblack bias is a function of simply living in a racially structured social order and being exposed to situations in which the dark atmospherics of race hold sway. These atmospheric influences unavoidably affect us without regard for and often in direct contradiction to our considered judgments.

Furthermore, these atmospheric influences affect us and incline us to act without regard for our *social location* in a racial hierarchy and *in ways that even contradict our material group interests*. This was apparent in the studies that showed antiblack bias in Black persons, albeit in

different degrees and extents than their white counterparts. We saw something similar in a phenomenologically richer way in the examples of racial atmospherics in James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon, and Audre Lorde. The tension hovering over the interracial cocktail party registered in all the embodied souls present in that room such that Baldwin could speak of an “us” who is defeated by it and driven like Oedipus towards a tragic fate. Fanon and Lorde described the insidious internalization of the dehumanizing gazes of white people, arguing that this affects their own self-conception and their relations with other Black people in ways that explicitly contradict their interests and most resolute intentions.

My point is that we can be crystal clear about the historical, geographical, and institutional origins of white supremacy as well as the different degrees and types of responsibility individuals bear for enduring racial inequalities even as we acknowledge that all agents living in racially structured societies, simply by virtue of that fact, confront a common problem. This problem is one that neither the quality of our intentions, nor our social location in a racial hierarchy, nor our participation in communities committed to achieving racial justice fully resolves for us. There is a moral remainder that stubbornly persists in spite of our most ardent personal, educational, and political efforts, one that marks a basic limit to our moral aspirations and capabilities and that we cannot overcome on our own steam. It is, we might say, an aspect of *our condition* as agents living in racialized societies. Furthermore, we inherit this problem simply by virtue of existing in the afterlife of slavery and we spread to others without intending to do so. This means that, more than a condition, the dark atmospherics of race constitute a *power* that holds us in its grip and flows through our conduct in spite of our best efforts. In each of these ways, Schleiermacher’s formulation of originated and originating original sin powerfully articulates the moral meaning of racism’s tenacity.

§1.3.3 The Cosmological Dimension of Originating Original Sin

But there is an even further way in which original sin, conceived as an originating power, illumines our contemporary situation. Recall that, for Charles Mills, white supremacy as a socio-political system is essentially productive, and its products includes not only racialized agents but also racialized material conditions. The history of white supremacy has, as he rightly notes, operated through military force and political domination to reshape the world, including the very material conditions of human existence, in accord with the dark ontology of white persons and nonwhite sub-persons. Around the world, European colonial powers established societies with white rulers and non-white subjects. In the United States, the entire material context for social life has been molded by white supremacy. Whether in the distribution of wealth, employment disparities in high-income vocations, representation in prominent political and cultural institutions, physical health, incarceration rates, or the physical arrangement of cityscapes, Black people face obstacles as agents that white people do not.⁶⁰ As Mills argued, these conditions effectively constrain Black agents and enable white ones. They also reflexively shape the inner lives of agents who become accustomed to these racial disparities and orient their own lives in relation to them.

These material effects of white supremacy constitute a concrete and recalcitrant impediment to racial justice. This is often overlooked by social psychologists who prescribe intensive laboratory exercises to retrain our implicit social cognitions to eliminate or reduce implicit biases. Immediately upon leaving the laboratory, agents return to precisely that material context and its recalcitrant atmospherics that infuses the biases in the first place.

⁶⁰ For my discussion of these contemporary racial disparities, see Chapters 1 and 2.

In addition to the social dimension of sin, then, we must also think with Schleiermacher about what I call its cosmological effects. By cosmological effects, I just mean that sin, conceived as both the individual and the collective act of human beings, disorders the world in such a way that corrupts the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and our material environment.⁶¹ As we have seen, Schleiermacher holds the view that both the world and human nature were created by God with an original perfection.⁶² The entirety of finite reality is such that each part of it is sufficient to stimulate God-consciousness in individuals and receptive to their designs. The divine summons to the higher life ought to resound clearly in every moment of conscious awareness and the world around us ought to conform without resistance to our intentions. Of course, this is not how we find ourselves or the world. We struggle to transcend our merely sensory grasp of the world, and we meet all kinds of obstacles in our attempts to change the world through our activity. Schleiermacher describes these as evils; they are constraints on life that we experience as painful.⁶³ Such evils are a function of the collective power of the flesh which actively contributes to what Schleiermacher calls “the deterioration of

⁶¹ This refers to what others have called “structural sin.” Steven Ray defines this concept as “the workings of sin in magnitudes beyond the scope of individual actions” and more specifically, “the systems created to visit ill-being on God’s creation [that] become so embedded that they no longer need their creator to proceed [and, in fact] so inundate the fabric of things that every thought, every action, and the material conditions under which those thoughts provoke actions *all* proceed along lines that are in place because of the workings of sin.” Ray, “Structural Sin,” 417. I prefer to speak of the cosmological effects of sin to emphasize 1) the role of agents in intentionally or unintentionally promulgating the systems that visit ill-being on God’s creation and 2) the status of the material world as a *locus* but not the *origin* of sin. Furthermore, I use the term “cosmological” to distinguish my claims about the orderly or disorderly arrangement of the world from my metaphysical claims about the fundamental structure of reality, i.e., the Christian realist claims regarding political, moral, and theological reality.

⁶² *CG* §59-60.

⁶³ “Given that sin is present in human beings, one also finds in the world, as the locus of one’s existence, causes that hinder one’s life to be persistently at work – that is, one finds evil.” (*CG* §75, 473/1:471) These life-hindrances manifest in two ways: “either by their diminishing the fullness of stimuli through which the development of a human being would be advanced or in that they would limit the world’s adaptiveness by means of human activity.” (*CG* §75.2, 476/1:474)

the world.”⁶⁴ Human sin, in other words, leaves its mark. It sows disorder – in this case, racial hierarchy - into God’s well-ordered cosmos.

In his *Glaubenslehre*, Schleiermacher’s account of this cosmological deterioration is admittedly brief. Rather than theorizing precisely how sin deteriorates the world, he focuses instead on describing how evil and suffering register in Christian self-consciousness as consequences of sin.⁶⁵ Some have seen this as “a subjectivistic reduction of the reality of evil to a phenomenon of consciousness” that thereby neglects “objective social conditions” in favor of personal piety.⁶⁶ This, in turn, proves problematic for orienting Christian conduct, since Schleiermacher argues that the appropriately pious response to evil is not to seek the complete “cessation of suffering, as such” but rather to awaken “the tendency to move against sin” itself.⁶⁷ It can seem, in other words, that Schleiermacher is more worried about how individuals and groups apprehend the various evils that impinge upon human life than about whether we take responsibility for repairing what has been broken and caring for those who suffer unjustly.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ [*die*] *Verschlimmerung der Welt* (CG §76.3, 482/1:479)

⁶⁵ Indeed, Schleiermacher argues that the “aim” of the consciousness of sin is not to get rid of evil in the world. He maintains that Christians should not desire the preservation of evil because they deem it to be fitting, divinely ordained punishment for sin. “Such delusion,” he writes, “stemming from misunderstanding as it does, has always been repudiated by the Christian church, setting itself against any superstition and fanaticism that might appear at this point. It has done so, for a continuation of evil cannot be desired when it is viewed as a hindrance to life, in that, in every instance any activity that proceeds from God-consciousness is also restricted by every such hindrance to life in whatever aspect that activity may be pursued.” (CG §78.2, 487/1:484) But on the other hand, he also maintains that “it is just as certain, however, that no activity especially devoted to supplying an element of piety that is directed to cessation of suffering, as such, can proceed from Christian religious consciousness.” (CG §78.2, 487-488/1:484)

⁶⁶ Walter E. Wyman Jr., “Sin and Redemption,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña, Cambridge Companions to the Study of Religion (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 138. Wyman discusses this concern at greater length in Walter E. Wyman Jr., “Testing Liberalism’s Conceptuality: The Relation of Sin and Evil in Schleiermacher’s Theology,” in *Ethical Monotheism, Past and Present: Essays in Honor of Wendell S. Dietrich*, ed. Theodore M. Vial and Mark A. Hadley, Brown Judaic Studies 329 (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2001), 138–54. Derek Nelson is also critical of what he sees as an overly individualistic framework, arguing that, for Schleiermacher, “[s]in is so thoroughly housed in the various consciousnesses of the individual that the concept cannot expand much outside that sphere.” Nelson, *What’s Wrong with Sin?*, 29.

⁶⁷ CG §78.2, 488/1:484.

⁶⁸ This is a particular concern for Nelson, who reads Schleiermacher as committed to the “truly abhorrent claim” that the measure of suffering endured by every nation and even each social class therein is in direct proportion to its

Since I am not committed to endorsing all of Schleiermacher's dogmatic positions, I will not attempt to defend him from all of these charges. It is sufficient to say that if Schleiermacher were suggesting that Christians have no internal reason to be concerned with relieving human suffering, then that is a position we should reject.⁶⁹ But his claim that sin contributes to the deterioration of God's good world should give pause to those who charge Schleiermacher's teaching on sin as reductively subjectivistic. This is confirmed in his *Christian Ethics*, where Schleiermacher describes the three kinds of Christian action that emerge from the consciousness of redemption in Christ. Two of these three kinds of action ("restorative" or "purifying action"

measure of sin. This is, on his view, the "logical conclusion of Schleiermacher's statements on evil and sin in *The Christian Faith*," and it means that Schleiermacher could only say to "the abjectly poor in South America who suffer so greatly from the economic tyranny of the first world [that] 'You deserve it.'" (Nelson, *What's Wrong with Sin?*, 26–27.) Nelson is certainly right that this would be a truly abhorrent claim, but I do not believe it is one to which Schleiermacher is committed. The passage to which Nelson refers reads as follows: "Now, since community within the human race is still rather restricted even today, however, and since many groups existing, as it were, outside the range of other groups' sin do form an enclosed whole for themselves, the same analysis [namely, that the amount of social evil suffered stands in proportion to sin committed] then applies to them as well. Following this track, we will be able to say the same thing of every folk, indeed of every class within such, insofar as each respectively appears as a self-enclosed entity, that the amount of evil in them will be commensurate with the amount of sin." (CG §77.1, 483/1:480) Schleiermacher's claim about the parity of sin and evil is clearly premised on the assumption that human beings exist in self-enclosed [*abgeschlossene*] groups. This assumption is historically dubious, given that Schleiermacher's fellow Europeans had been colonizing parts of Africa, Asia, and the Americas for some time by the early nineteenth century. But the logic of parity seems to rest on the condition that such groups are, in fact, self-enclosed. If anything, Nelson's example of South American communities' suffering at the hands of global capitalism demonstrates the implausibility of any claim about self-enclosure in our manifestly interconnected, globalized world. Once we admit this, though, then we seem to be back in agreement with Schleiermacher that "the effect of sin naturally sets in only gradually" such that, as in the cases when "children and grandchildren first suffer and make amends for the sins of the fathers," those who stand at some distance (temporally, spatially, socially) from the advent of a particular sin find that their suffering is grotesquely disproportionate to their own, actual sins. (CG §77.1, 483/1:479-480)

⁶⁹ I do not think that this is Schleiermacher's view. He gives two reasons to justify his claim that Christians are not directly concerned with the complete cessation of suffering. First, the desire to put an end to suffering might be merely a determination of sensory self-consciousness which, since it would thus be solely concerned with the preservation of one's organic well-being, seeks to avoid the unpleasantness of moral and religious life by numbing us from the summons to the higher life. To eliminate all painful perceptions of hindrances to life would be to consign us all to a life of comfort that lacks any possibility for ethical or religious growth. His second, and more concerning claim, is that "suffering necessarily stirs up consciousness of sin. Even more, the tendency to move against sin must then be awakened." (CG §78.2, 488/1:484-485) On this point, Schleiermacher would have done well to distinguish between various degrees of suffering. While moral and spiritual growth certainly requires some painful experiences, there are forms of suffering (grinding poverty, physical violence, racial oppression) that lack any edifying or pedagogical potential. There is nothing to learn from intense bodily suffering except how to alleviate and heal it, and there is nothing genocide calls for except that we never allow it to happen again.

and “broadening action”) are forms of efficacious action, which means that they bring about changes in oneself and the world. Restorative action⁷⁰ emerges from the painful consciousness of sin whereas broadening action⁷¹ emerges from the pleasurable consciousness of grace. This means, then, that the consciousness of sin entails a motivating impulse to repair that which has been deformed and to strive to restore – even if in a necessarily piecemeal way – the original perfection of the world. “Presentational action,”⁷² by contrast, does not seek to effect any changes in the world. It merely makes manifest the achievement of the spirit’s reign over the flesh that has taken hold within one on account of Christ’s redemptive activity upon him or her, and it is predominant in liturgical settings like Christian worship and festivals.

In this very brief summary of Schleiermacher’s theological ethics, we can already see that Christian self-consciousness of sin and grace can, and in most cases does, produce action that results in material changes to the world. This is precisely what distinguishes efficacious action from presentational action. This also coheres with Schleiermacher account of Christianity as a teleological, as opposed to an aesthetic, piety.⁷³ Moreover, it aligns with what Schleiermacher claims about human action in general, which of course includes Christian action, in his

⁷⁰ “Along with the sense of a lack of pleasure, there thus exists an impulse to action through which the very idea of the relationship between the higher and lower life potencies that has been infringed upon, the normal situation that has been negated, is to be produced, and since it should not stretch out beyond the subject’s actual self-consciousness, the size and scope of which is not at all to be determined here, we can appropriately call it restoring action. [*wiederherstellende Handeln*] What is to be restored is what is always established with the beginning of Christian moral life: that spirit has dominion over flesh as its organism even though the obstinacy of flesh in an individual is as yet never completely overcome.” (CS, 43/44-45) Elsewhere, he refers to the same mode of Christian action as “purifying” [*reinigend*].

⁷¹ “Rather, pleasure is posited when a lower power of life comes under the claim of a higher power and when that same pleasure is posited without resistance (for if there were resistance, a sense of something lacking in pleasure would arise), as willing and insistently inclined in such a way that its subordination under the higher power is immediately possible. Moreover, the impulse toward a widening, broadening action [*zu einem verbreitenden, erweiternden Handeln*] is identical with this pleasure.” (CS, 44/45)

⁷² “[Presentational action] has no purpose other than to make its own existence such that it can likewise be appropriated by others, wherewith all actual efficaciousness is excluded that can only proceed from what is pleasurable or what is lacking in pleasure.” (CS, 47/50) Elsewhere, Schleiermacher describes

⁷³ Schleiermacher outlines this distinction in the Introduction to the *Glaubenslehre*. (CG §9)

philosophical ethics. Through intelligent human activity, reason is infused into nature in ways that transform and perfect nature, rendering it into the symbols and organs of reason.⁷⁴ What these examples all show is that we misunderstand Schleiermacher if we interpret him as saying that sin does not have any reality that exceeds the consciousness of individuals. Rather, precisely because individuals who in the grip of the collective force of the flesh act in ways that change the world around them and impress that reign of the flesh over spirit into nature itself, sin contributes to the deterioration of the world in a material, substantive way.⁷⁵

Schleiermacher's insight is that these material effects of sin on the world reflexively shape human consciousness.⁷⁶ Sinful conduct shapes the world in ways that obscure the divine source and power active therein. That which, by virtue of its original perfection, is eminently capable of stimulating God-consciousness, has lost its efficacy. Similarly, the material reshaping of the world renders it less receptive to intelligent human activity, particularly so when that activity expresses the dominance of spirit over the flesh. The world appears to us, not as a hospitable context for life but rather as cold, malevolent, and God-forsaken – a space of death.

My claim is that the cosmological effects of sin help to articulate the ethical and religious significance of racism's tenacity in the broadest, most encompassing terms. Over the centuries, white supremacy as a socio-political system has ordered the material conditions of existence to accord with white racial dominance. This has made the world into a death-dealing place, a place where Black people are consigned to what Fanon called the "zone of non-being."⁷⁷ This was

⁷⁴ See my discussion in Chapter 3.5.1.

⁷⁵ With that said, the fundamental conviction in the original perfection of the world is never abrogated because, on account of the activity of divine preservation, the world is never so utterly defiled by human sin that its capacity to stimulate God-consciousness has been completely eliminated.

⁷⁶ This marks a profound alignment with the recent phenomenological research on atmospheres discussed in Chapter 4.1.2.

⁷⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xii.

clearest in the institution of chattel slavery, which as Mills put it, enacted “the literal destruction of black being by ... regimes under which people were often worked to death and were at times reduced to a condition beneath the human.”⁷⁸ Such death-dealing continues to this day in less explicit forms, and the cumulative effect of these centuries-long patterns is a world the very contours of which diminish and even extinguish Black life.

These death-dealing contours of our racialized world have not only sullied the original perfection of the world as a hospitable context for life, but it also has rendered the world resistant to our noblest attempts to repair and restore its perfection. This is certainly true on a social level, where the work of moral persuasion and political subversion toward a more racially just world frequently meet entrenched resistance. But it is also true with regard to the material conditions themselves. The sedimentation of centuries of antiblack sins has resulted in city landscapes, institutional arrangements, economic relations, educational inequities, and physical health disparities that simply cannot be changed overnight. Conceived as cosmological effects of sin, the death-dealing character of the world and its calcified resistance to racial justice efforts appear as deteriorations of an originally perfect, hospitable abode for all of life.

On account of the reflexive relationship between self-consciousness and the world, the cosmological effects of sin can also be traced into the inner recesses of our minds. This is precisely what we find in the phenomenon of antiblack perceptual bias and moral exclusion at the level of perception. Considered theologically, this recalcitrant difficulty with perceiving Black people as human beings with intrinsic dignity is a consequence of the deterioration of the world by sin. On account of the original perfection of the world, human beings are all, as features of that world, creatures in and through which God’s creative activity stimulates God-

⁷⁸ Mills, “Racial Exploitation,” 256.

consciousness. This is especially true of human beings, who are created in God's image and likeness. (Genesis 1:27) Of course, we do not always prove receptive to this divine activity. But the social psychological research shows that Americans show a particular numbness to the divine activity in and through Black faces. Conceived as cosmological effects of sin, this non-responsiveness to the face of God in the human face of color indicates the depths of our religious deformation. Though created with an original perfection that makes us capable of perceiving the divine in and through all of finite reality, we who remain in the grip of the dark atmospherics of race have suffered a spiritual deadening to a particular subset of the human population that prevents us from apprehending, let alone responding to, the summons to ethical life.

In short, Schleiermacher's formulation of the doctrine of original sin integrates the psychological and social aspects of the dark atmospherics of race and deepens our sense for the meaning of moral agency amidst tenacious racism in three ways. First, it provides a way to articulate how agents might be vulnerable to a pre-volitional fault, as the literature on implicit racial bias suggests. Second, it illumines how that pre-volitional fault defiles not only our own character but also our social environment by stimulating the susceptibility to sin in others. Third, it discloses the cosmological scope of racial evil in a way that not only acknowledges the material deterioration of a well-ordered world but also the spiritual deterioration of agents who have become unresponsive to the divine activity in the human face of color. Together, these insights are especially troubling because they suggest that agents in this condition bear a particularly strong proclivity toward racial evil. Indeed, I argued that neither good intentions, nor a particular set of material group interests, nor one's social location, nor one's participation in an antiracist community of accountability suffices to resolve these problems. This final point raises

a profound question about the human possibility for transformation given that all of our resources (psychological, social, moral) are threatened by the dark atmospherics of race.

To respond to this soteriological question, we must turn to Schleiermacher's account of grace. But first, we need to visit one more crucial feature in the consciousness of sin, namely, the conscience.

§2 The Conscience, the Law, and the Death of the Soul

The cosmological effects of sin contribute to the deterioration of the world. Though God created the world and everything within it for the sake of stimulating God-consciousness and responding readily to human activity, the dark atmospherics of race have wrought a racialized world that deals in Black death and resists racial justice. These atmospheric forces have also formed human beings who bear a particular insensitivity to the divine activity and presence in the face of Black persons. This raises the question: if we are so severely diminished as religious and ethical creatures by these cosmological effects of sin, how is it possible for us to acknowledge these effects, let alone overcome them? Has the original perfection of the world and of human nature been utterly and exhaustively defiled by sin?

Schleiermacher answers this final question in the negative. He claims that while sin distorts our nature, it does not eliminate or destroy it.⁷⁹ Similarly with regard to the world, he insists that the divine activity of creation and preservation remains always and everywhere at work,⁸⁰ even in those realms of the created order where human beings have done their best to extinguish and obscure it. From these convictions, it follows that the cosmological effects of sin

⁷⁹ "... we can conceive the presence of sin in such a way that the concept of original perfection of human nature is not invalidated through the presence of sin, yet sin is apprehended only as a distortion of nature." (CG, §68, 407/1:412)

⁸⁰ CG §§40-41, §§46-49.

never completely silence the divine summons to a higher life. Rather, it resounds persistently, even if in a muffled and diminished way, in the depths of the conscience.

The fact that Schleiermacher can make such a claim even after arguing that the human condition in sin is one marked by a “complete incapacity for good”⁸¹ is promising. Indeed, I will show that Schleiermacher’s theological account of the conscience provides a way for us to think about moral agency and responsibility in light of the threats facing moral agents in racialized societies like the United States. But in what follows, I will also argue that the research on implicit racial bias suggests that agents in race-salient situations face an even greater impediment to moral conduct than Schleiermacher can admit, one in light of which his claims about the inexpugnability of the conscience appear idealistic. In response, I turn to biblical and ancient moral psychological sources to hermeneutically reconstruct Schleiermacher’s position and render it more psychologically realistic. The emerging picture presents moral agents living in racialized societies as suffering from a kind of *apocalyptic soul death*, a normative and unrelenting obduracy to the value of Black persons that results from the dark atmospherics of race and makes agents affectively unresponsive to the image of God in the human face of color. Only in such bleak terms can we grasp the extent of antiblack racism’s grip on American life and its significance for moral agency. It is also precisely in coming to terms with the radical limits of moral agency that, I argue, we begin to apprehend a more basic ground for moral responsibility and a more promising, realistic hope for moral transformation. But first, we need to see how Schleiermacher understands the conscience and its distinctly theological horizon.

⁸¹ CG §70, 418/1:421.

§2.1 The Conscience

With echoes of Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*,⁸² Schleiermacher identifies the conscience as that aspect of our nature that remains minimally if obstinately receptive to the divine activity in the wake of the Fall. He treats the conscience in reference to the divine attribute of holiness, which on his account, is that aspect of divine causality that unites the conscience with a simultaneous consciousness of one's need for redemption.⁸³ "By the term 'conscience,'" he writes,

we understand precisely this: that all modes of action issuing from and stimulated by God-consciousness are also established as *summonses*, not theoretically, as it were, but claiming currency in self-consciousness in such a way that all deviations of life's expressions from them are perceived as hindrances to life, consequently, as sins.⁸⁴

The conscience, in other words, is that element of self-consciousness in which a person feels addressed by another, i.e., God, with whom he or she is already and ineluctably in relationship and called forth as a self who is capable of responding to that address. The summons takes the shape of a "command,"⁸⁵ but more precisely, a command that has is actively "claiming currency in self-consciousness" by stimulating new perceptions and affections within the self. In this experience, the self apprehends his or her capacity to respond to these commands as itself

⁸² "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity [*divinitatis sensum*]. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his majesty. Ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops. Since, therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honor him and to consecrate their lives to his will [...] Therefore, since from the beginning of the world there has been no region, no city, in short, no household that could do without religion, there lies in this a tacit confession of a sense of deity inscribed in the hearts of all." Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.3.1, 43-44.

⁸³ *CG* §83, 515/1:511. "We understand the holiness of God to refer to that divine causality by which conscience is found to be conjoined, simultaneously, with the state of needing redemption in every instance of human collective life." Translation modified slightly.

⁸⁴ *CG* §83.1, 516:1/511. Translation modified slightly to render *Forderungen* as "summonses" in continuity with *CG* §5. See discussion in Chapter 5.2.1.

⁸⁵ *Gebot* (*CG* §83.1, 516/1:512)

conferred by God. But the externality of this conferral is confirmed internally in a distinctive feeling that is “preeminently traced back to a divine causality, and, viewed as the voice of God in one’s mind and heart.”⁸⁶

Put differently, the conscience is an effect of God’s unrelenting activity toward and upon the self. The phenomenological consequences of its reception are simultaneously affective effects of the divine causality, i.e., a hearing of the voice of God, and the subjective ground of moral agency, i.e., a perception of the psychological, social, and cosmological effects of sin as hindrances to one’s own life. Selves become capable of moral action precisely to the degree that these divine summonses “are delivered to them by virtue of the law planted within them or their moral feeling,”⁸⁷ that is, in a feeling of moral pain or regret.

This experience of conscience takes on a special significance in light of the account of original sin described above. The collective force of the flesh actively suppresses the consciousness that we stand in relation to a transcendent reality that summons us to a higher life. In this condition, our perceptual and affective responses to our environment are governed by the sinful atmospheric influences that move in and through us. Prior to the experience of conscience, these atmospheric influences are not perceived to be sinful.⁸⁸ They elicit no feeling of pain, nor do we feel ourselves as captive to some external power. But upon registering this divine summons in feeling, we become conscious of both. We see that there is more going on within us and our natural and social environment than we had previously known. There is also a divine

⁸⁶ *CG* §83.1, 516/1:512.

⁸⁷ *CG* §83.3, 521/1:516.

⁸⁸ It is important here to note that an agent’s perceived racial-group membership will likely play a strong role in determining the extent and intensity of these feelings of moral regret. That is, a Black person who has endured an entire lifetime of antiblack abuse and callous disregard will surely be more attuned to racialized evils as evils than a white person who has never suffered in these ways and who has been conditioned by white material group interests to not experience such evils as evils.

activity on the scene, one that attunes us to a higher order of value and that is already, in fact, active within oneself, gradually drawing us into a higher, more integrated life.

The pangs of conscience amount to forms of primitive recognition of the fragmentary character of one's present life. This painful sense that something is lacking or disordered extends beyond the first summons to ethical life by orienting and accompanying the self in all of its ensuing cognitive and volitional activity. Through it, one becomes ever more keenly aware of the qualitative contrast between higher and lower life, and this simultaneously increases one's consciousness of sin—in oneself, one's social environment, and in the cosmos itself. To become conscious of the moral and social evils that contribute to the deterioration of the world as sins, that is, as products of the collective force of the flesh, is to experience them as painful hindrances to the higher life to which one is summoned. This orienting and accompanying function of the conscience is that traditionally ascribed to the law.⁸⁹

This claim that our capacity to recognize sin as sin such that we at feel some modicum of the pain of regret follows from Schleiermacher's theological premises. God is sovereign over history, so there is no counter-power that could finally overcome the divine activity. God is also good, the *fons bonorum*, so there is a transcendent standard by which to judge evil and that, by virtue of our inalienable relation to God in the depths of immediate self-consciousness, we are always at least minimally aware of that standard.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Schleiermacher asserts this as well, when he identifies the divine attribute of holiness to which the conscience owes its existence as the "law-giving divine causality." (CG §83.2, 519/1:514)

⁹⁰ There is, as he puts it later in the *Glaubenslehre*, an "ineradicable residual presence" within human nature that confers a "longing for communion with God, which, even if it may press back so close to the boundary of unconsciousness, is nevertheless never entirely snuffed out, a longing that also belongs to the original perfection of human nature." (CG §108.6, 709/2:190)

§2.2 The Racialized Conscience

But does this conviction about the conscience bear itself out in reality? After all, as a Christian realist inquiry, theological claims about our nature as agents are to be constrained by the politically realistic diagnosis of racism's tenacity developed in Part I. And recall that in Chapter Two, we saw that implicit racial biases not only generate unintended racial evils but that they do this in such a way that inhibits the agent's awareness of both the stimulating source and the discriminatory impact of that bias.⁹¹ This suggests that the dark atmospheric of race can hold sway over us to such an extent that even this flicker of conscience is extinguished in race-salient situations. To warrant my theological claims about the conscience, I need to show that they do not simply exceed, and thereby idealize, the politically realistic constraints that bear on the kind of creatures we are, namely, those who live, move, and have our being in racially structured social orders.

To illustrate the problem, consider the example I invoked in Chapter Two. Imagine a professor who fervently believes in racial equality and has strong commitments to increasing the diversity of the professoriate. While serving on a faculty hiring committee, he observes two individuals, one Black and one white, give candidacy lectures. Suppose that the Black lecturer's paper is objectively better. If the faculty member had simply read these papers without knowing who wrote them, he would have judged this paper to be the stronger of the two. But on account of an implicit antiblack intelligence bias, he perceives the white candidate's paper to be better, and he votes to hire the white candidate on these grounds.

This pains him. After all, he wants a more diverse faculty, and hiring one additional white person to an already white faculty prevents progress toward this goal. But this pain of

⁹¹ See discussion of source-, content-, and impact-awareness in Chapter 2.2.

disappointment is directed toward a state of affairs. It is not the moral pain of regret directed toward himself as an agent. To feel regret, two conditions would need to obtain. First, he would need to be aware of the fact that the real cause of his evaluation was not the superior quality of the white candidate's paper, but the racial phenotypes of the presenters. Second, he would need to be aware of the fact that this judgment was epistemically dubious, caused not by an appraisal of the presentations themselves but rather his own implicit attitude. Absent these conditions, his judgment seems to him to be about the presentations (not the presenters) and epistemically sound. But because his implicit bias itself suppresses such source- and the impact-awareness, the hiring committee member feels no regret. As far as he could tell, his judgment was not only sound but even morally praiseworthy insofar as he resisted his desire for a more racially diverse faculty in favor of his institutional commitment to intellectual rigor.

This presents us with an ethical problem because the agent seems to be buffered from precisely the kind of knowledge that is required for aretaic appraisals of his conduct, that is, appraisals of an agent's moral character that justify ascriptions of praise and blame. Moreover, it presents us with a theological problem because it seems to contradict Schleiermacher's two theological convictions about the ineffaceability of the conscience and the ultimate sufficiency of every aspect of the world to serve as a stimulus to God-consciousness. If the dark atmospherics of race not only incline us to commit unintentional racial evils but also obstruct our ability to register ethically salutary regret for our role in perpetuating those evils, how should we then understand our condition as moral and religious creatures?

This brings us to the nadir of our investigation. While I have heretofore described the dark atmospherics of race as *enervating* our moral capacities in race-salient situations, enervation implies that such capacities can be strengthened. For all of their differences, the possibility that

the cause of racial justice might be advanced by variously empowering or strengthening agents undergirds the prescriptions of both critical race theorists and social psychologists. For a sociological materialist like Charles Mills, social transformation comes through a contest of political interests. So the way toward racial justice requires the cultivation of political power by racial minorities, consciousness-raising through counter-ideological instruction, and contingent occasion of “convergences” between the material group interests of white and non-white persons.⁹² Social psychologists recommend intense re-training exercises in laboratory settings that seek to eliminate implicit racial biases and reorient our implicit cognitions to better align with our explicit, considered judgments.

But in order for these political or psychological models of empowerment to move us toward a more racially just world, agents must be able to perceive the racial injustices of the world *as injustices* in the first place. In theological terms, we must be able to recognize the psychological, social, and cosmological effects of sin *as sin*, and therefore to register them in consciousness as painful feelings of regret. We must feelingly apprehend them as constraints on our higher life, individually and collectively. But this possibility condition of moral and religious consciousness in race-salient situations is precisely that which, it seems, the dark atmospherics of race so insidiously corrupts. Unless these conditions are first met, no amount of empowerment, whether through moral training, exhortation, or counter-ideological instruction, will suffice.

This also brings us to an important limit in Schleiermacher’s theology of sin. As we saw earlier, Schleiermacher describes the intrapsychic dynamics of the flesh in terms of a developmental unevenness between the moral psychological capacities of understanding and

⁹² Derrick A. Bell, “Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma,” *Harvard Law Review* 93, no. 3 (1980): 518–33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1340546>. For discussion, see Mills, “Whose Fourth of July?,” 198f.

willpower. Agents tend to understand what it is good or right to do before they are able to muster the willpower to effectively achieve it. This means that sin, at least in its psychological aspect, is a kind of moral weakness or *akrasia*. Agents effectively choose to act on the basis of a principle of action that they recognize to be inferior (the flesh) instead of that principle that they recognize to be superior (spirit).

Schleiermacher resists the alternate possibility that such unevenness could result from willpower outstripping the understanding. If this were so, agents could commit sin without any consciousness of sin.⁹³ He considers two cases in particular. In one case, agents would develop evaluative insight at precisely the same rate as they develop willpower. In the other, agents would possess insight and willpower in perfectly identical degrees across the course of their life. But he rejects these on the basis that persons could “in no way...arrive at any consciousness of sin, viewed as one’s own state.” Indeed, “we find neither of these cases in our experience.”⁹⁴

This position seems to follow from Schleiermacher’s methodological constraints. He sets out to elucidate Christian self-consciousness, nothing more. But in the case of implicit racial bias, “our experience” is of course the problem. Since we typically lack source- and impact-awareness of these biases, our introspective experience reports no consciousness of sin where the experimental observations and statistical calculation suggest that we have, in fact, sinned.

My claim is this. In order to grasp our condition as agents in a politically and psychologically realistic way, we have to step beyond Schleiermacher’s own dogmatic formulations, bound as they are by methodological constraints that this inquiry does not share. But with that said, Schleiermacher does point us in the right direction. After rejecting the

⁹³ *CG* §68.1, 408/1:412-413.

⁹⁴ *CG* §68.1, 408/1:413.

possibility that the willpower might outstrip understanding for the reasons I have just enumerated, he circles back to reconsider what that might entail. “To be sure,” he writes, “one could also think of understanding’s lagging behind will as a counterpart to this unevenness, even though this lag would only seem to be so.”⁹⁵ If such a case were possible, it would be especially grave. He calls it “the indisputably worst situation,” and it would be characterized by a “reactive effect” on understanding of the flesh’s resistance to spirit. “The result,” he writes,

would be that, in part, understanding would try to gloss over states of sin that had been brought about in this way, as if they had, nevertheless, been compatible with God-consciousness. In part, already in its first seeds God-consciousness itself would have been so altered and split, being held in the sway of the flesh, that each state of God-consciousness would be compatible with some aspect or another of flesh, and in this way *the moral contrast between sin and God-consciousness would have got lost*.⁹⁶

Note that, even here, the will remains bound within the confines of the agent’s evaluative grasp of a situation. But the understanding has itself been corrupted by the power of the flesh such that the capacity to recognize sin as sin, and thus as an inhibition on the higher life that elicits feelings of pain and regret, would be lost.

This “indisputably worst situation” seems to appropriately describe the condition of an implicitly biased agent who lacks impact- or source-awareness of those racial biases. It must be said that this brief treatment of the reactive effect of the flesh on the understanding appears almost as an afterthought for Schleiermacher, and his overarching view of the intrapsychic life of sin does seem to be cast in terms of *akrasia*. This means that we will have to think beyond him to grasp the meaning of moral agency in such a condition as we seem to inhabit.

⁹⁵ CG §68.1, 409/1:414.

⁹⁶ CG §68.1, 409-410/1:414. Emphasis added.

But while his analysis here is brief, Schleiermacher does offer some indications of where we might yet look in three important citations from Paul's Letter to the Romans. One is Romans 2:15, where Paul writes that though "what the law requires is written on [the Gentiles'] hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness [...] [T]heir conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them." The next two come from Romans 1, where Paul describes God's punishment of toward those "who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (1:18) and "exchanged the truth about God for a lie" (1:25). These passages seem to be pressing Schleiermacher further than he wants to go. After formulating and defending a picture of the psychology of sin in terms of the well-trod philosophical terrain of *akrasia*, he finds himself grappling with an even more sinister possibility that, while attested in Romans, proves difficult to present in the conceptually precise, systematic style of dogmatic theology. My claim is that such symbolic resources are necessary to speak coherently and realistically about the threat to moral agency posed by racism's tenacity.⁹⁷

§2.3 Soul Death and the Darkening of Senseless Minds

The dark atmospherics of race not only incline agents to unintentionally perpetuate racist evil, but they also make agents incapable of perceiving those evils *as evils* and thus experiencing the ethically and religiously salutary feelings of regret and sorrow. This means that agents ensconced in and enveloped by these atmospheric influences are not simply morally weak such that they need to be strengthened, although this is certainly true. More troubling is this apparent insensitivity to Black death and one's own contribution to its perpetuation. In this section, I press

⁹⁷ That is, I turn to these biblical resources not on account of their revealed authority but rather on hermeneutical grounds.

beyond Schleiermacher's doctrine of sin to consider what light the primary theological symbols in Paul's Letter to the Romans might shed on this phenomenon of racism's tenacity and our condition as agents. In particular, I turn to two symbols: the death of the soul and the darkening of senseless minds.

In the introduction to this work, I began by reflecting on Paul's bewildering depiction of moral self-frustration in Romans 7. There, we find an anonymous 'I' who desires to do what is right, seems capable of making evaluative judgments, and even delights in God's law in the "innermost self." Even yet, this individual utters the following lament: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." (Rom. 7:15) The depth of this problem is evident in the fact that the evil deeds this 'I' commits are not explicable with reference to its intentions. "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." (Rom. 7:17-19) This incapacity to control what the agent does leads Paul to a curious and vexing formulation: "Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me." (Rom. 7:20) Within a single sentence, Paul paradoxically asserts that these evil deeds both are and are not attributable to the agent. After identifying the 'I' who acts with the 'I' who wills, he circles back to disavow this attribution, seeming instead to place the blame on a distinct second agent called Sin.

The ambiguities of this passage have produced a flurry of competing interpretations. Some argue that these rival forces are all components of the 'I' that threaten its integrity. Others argue that 'I' suffers not so much from an internal division but rather is overwhelmed and possessed by a foreign power called "Sin" and elsewhere, "the Flesh."⁹⁸ These latter, apocalyptic

⁹⁸ In keeping with many of the apocalyptic interpreters, I capitalized "Sin" and "Flesh" in these contexts to emphasize their quasi-personal status.

interpreters suggest that the passage dissolves into incoherence so long as we remain constrained to a moral psychological analysis. They propose instead a view in which the human agent participates in a “three actor moral drama”⁹⁹ wherein the primary protagonists are two supra-personal powers: Sin/Flesh and God/Spirit. In this drama, the agent remains an agent who thinks, chooses, judges, and acts. But he is an incompetent agent whose conduct is ultimately determined by these supra-personal forces that move in and through him.

In my reading of Schleiermacher’s doctrine of sin, I sought to show that he powerfully integrates both of these perspectives. Sin and the flesh are conceived as agents and potencies that entail both intrapsychic and supra-personal dimensions. While individuals remain agents, they are also stymied by the two-fold head start of the flesh. Whatever Paul may have envisioned for the metaphysical status of these supra-personal forces, Schleiermacher clearly interprets these religious dynamics with reference to social and historical processes, a move which has proven especially important for thinking about the religious weight of a distinctly social evil like racism. But the real genius of Schleiermacher’s doctrine of sin is that it apprehends the supra-personal dynamics of the flesh without marginalizing the psychological and especially affective dynamics that figure so prominently in Paul’s account. The conceptual link that makes this all possible lies in his theory of affectivity as both an individual and a shared, common reality. In other words, we do well to think of Schleiermacher’s account as recognizably Pauline insofar as it takes up these ambiguities about sin and agency and develops them in ways that extend beyond Paul’s own thinking.

⁹⁹ J. Louis Martyn, “Epilogue: An Essay in Pauline Meta-Ethics,” in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and his Cultural Environment*, ed. John M. G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 177f.

But I want to suggest that the constructive possibilities flow the other way as well. In particular, Paul's symbolic construal of the 'I's condition illumines an aspect of our nature as agents that Schleiermacher only grasps in part. To see this, though, we need to enter briefly into the exegetical debates about the moral psychology of this 'I'.

§2.3.1 Moral Weakness, Moral Failure, and the Death of the Soul

Several prominent interpreters have argued that Paul's 'I' suffers from a classic case of *akrasia*.¹⁰⁰ To reiterate, *akrasia* is a condition in which an agent judges that it is better to do X than Y and yet chooses to do Y anyway. Aristotle famously described this as a form of practical irrationality.¹⁰¹ Akratic action is caused by an error in reasoning wherein an agent chooses to act on a principle that he or she knows to be inferior to another principle. Suppose I am in a situation where I could either keep a promise that would prove costly to me or renege on it to make my life a bit easier. If I judge that it is better to keep one's promises than to seek the path of least resistance, but I choose to renege on the promise anyway, I act akratically. It is important that the akratic action is intentional; I choose to act on the inferior principle and have knowledge of the relevant particulars of the situation. This makes the akratic action appropriate for aretaic evaluation. Furthermore, insofar as the action is committed from choice, I was free to have chosen otherwise.

As I have shown, this is primarily how Schleiermacher construes the psychology of sin. But I contend that this misdiagnoses the condition of Paul's 'I,' who in fact suffers from a

¹⁰⁰ Stanley Stowers and Troels Engberg-Pedersen advocate this view. See Stanley Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 269–72, and Engberg-Pedersen, "Greco-Roman Culture in the New Testament."

¹⁰¹ "It is not possible for the same person to have practical wisdom and be morally weak at the same time..." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.10, 201 [1152a7-14].

significantly worse condition than *akrasia*. Whereas the akratic actor is morally *weak* such that he or she needs to be strengthened, the actor in Romans 7 is morally *dead*. This agent needs more than mere encouragement or instruction to overcome its ailment. He or she must be *revived*, brought from a condition of normative insensitivity to morals and into another condition of responsiveness to them. This is the transition that Christians, including Paul, have long described in the most radical terms as a passage from death into life.

To vivify and clarify this distinction between moral weakness and moral death, a brief detour through Hellenistic moral psychology will be helpful. While *akrasia* has garnered the most philosophical attention, Aristotle's classic formulation of this condition appears as one of several different conditions. Together, they form a kind of "therapeutic spectrum,"¹⁰² a common feature in the thought of many ancient Greek and Roman moralists that served their interest to issue moral diagnoses and prescriptive therapeutics for persons seeking to live a good life.¹⁰³ With regard to Aristotle's spectrum in particular, *akrasia* stands as a middle point between two relatively better moral conditions and two relatively worse ones. Emma Wasserman describes the basic Aristotelian spectrum as follows:

σωφροσύνη, total self-control: ascribed to persons of virtue who always do the good; associated with being closer to gods

εγκράτεια, moral strength: ascribed to persons who do the good almost all of the time but are not fully consistent

ἀκρασία, moral weakness: ascribed to persons who are very inconsistent in doing the good; such persons waver but are still curable

¹⁰² Emma Wasserman, *The Death of the Soul in Romans 7: Sin, Death, and the Law in Light of Hellenistic Moral Psychology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 31–36.

¹⁰³ On the significance of therapy and therapeutics in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). On the practical, life-orienting concern of ancient philosophy, see Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

ακολασία, moral failure: ascribed to entrenched characters who consistently do evil and are often said to be incurable

θηριότης, beastliness: ascribed to characters worse than those suffering from *ακολασία*; associated with those closer to brute animals.¹⁰⁴

As this shows, these conditions are distinguished by how deeply rooted one's disposition toward goodness or evil is and, as a corollary, how responsive one is to moral therapy. The sage who exhibits total self-control has been habituated to be reliably good and thus needs very little by way of assistance. The beastly person is so habituated to be reliably evil that he or she is effectively beyond help. Therapeutic interventions have no place in the soul in which to take hold. The three middle types fall somewhere in between. The morally strong person lacks the consistency of the sage's goodness, but he or she quickly recognizes and amends these mistakes. The morally weak person is less consistent in doing good than the morally strong one, but their evil inclination is not so pervasive to make them unresponsive to moral exhortation and training. Finally, the morally failed person, sometimes translated as the "self-indulgent" person, displays a strong disposition to evil and a thoroughgoing insensitivity to the means of moral improvement.

I want to focus on the distinction between the *akratic* and the *akolatic* agent in particular. For Aristotle, the difference between these agent's relative responsiveness to therapeutic intervention lies in the degree to which each i) remains capable of choice and ii) experiences regret. Consider the following passage.

The morally failed person, as we stated, is one who feels no regret, since he abides by the choice he has made. A morally weak person, on the other hand, always feels regret. Therefore, the formulation of the problem, as we posed it above, does not correspond to the facts: it is a morally failed man who cannot be cured, but a morally weak man is curable. For wickedness is like a disease such as dropsy or consumption, while moral weakness resembles epilepsy: the former is chronic, the latter intermittent. All in all, moral weakness and vice are generically

¹⁰⁴ Wasserman, *The Death of the Soul in Romans* 7, 33–34.

different from each other. A vicious man is not aware of his vice, but a morally weak man knows his weakness.¹⁰⁵

The feeling of moral regret plays a pivotal role in distinguishing these two characters. The morally failed person is not aware of his evil deeds as evils. For that reason, he “abides by the choice he has made” making no effort to choose differently in the future. Elsewhere, Aristotle contends that this *akolatic* agent does not really choose to act badly. He or she does so automatically, not from deliberation but from habit.¹⁰⁶ By contrast, the morally weak person feels regret, acknowledges the error, and makes a different choice the next time. The morally failed person’s insensitivity to regret thus makes them unresponsive to that which might potentially cure them and make better choices possible in the future. Without regret, the agent is effectively stuck in chronic vice with little hope for improvement.

This more severe condition integrates many of the features of Paul’s ‘I’ in Romans 7. That agent commits evils despite actively seeking and choosing what is good. His or her power of choice has been tragically severed from the power to act, the latter of which has been effectively overtaken by Sin. This incapacity renders the agent unresponsive to the usual means of moral improvement. The agent’s moral psychological resources are already well-functioning. He or she has moral knowledge and desires to instantiate it but is simply unable to do so. In this condition, no amount of moral instruction or training will help because these do not address the more profound fissure between the power to act and the power of choice. Finally, Paul depicts this condition as an entrenched and unrelenting one.

¹⁰⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.8, 197 [1150b29-37]. Translation with slight modifications from Wasserman, *The Death of the Soul in Romans 7*, 34.

¹⁰⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.8, 198 [1151a11-14].

These all suggest that Paul's 'I' is suffering from something worse than moral weakness. But we must also note a difference between this 'I' and Aristotle's morally failed person. The tortured cries of despair in Romans 7 suggest that this agent feels considerable regret for his actions. "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24) The person who utters these words can hardly be described as morally insensitive. This suggests that we need to look beyond even Aristotle's formulation.

Following Emma Wasserman, I propose that we find an even more appropriate designation among the Middle Platonists and especially in the works of Philo of Alexandria.¹⁰⁷ There, we find a depiction of moral agents suffering from a similar condition of extreme, entrenched, and potentially incurable immorality. But whereas Aristotle speaks of a morally failed or self-indulgent person, Philo and other Middle Platonists speak of agents suffering from "soul death."

These thinkers adopt a broadly Platonic understanding of the soul as composed of three parts: the passionate, the appetitive, and the rational. Soul death occurs when the lower parts of the soul, those affiliated most closely with the body and vice (passions, appetites, desires), metaphorically invade, wage war on, imprison, and finally "kill" the higher, rational parts associated with the mind and reason. In this condition, reason remains somewhat capable of making good judgments. But having been defeated and imprisoned by the lower parts, the mind loses its ability to put those good judgments into effect. To invoke Plato's famous charioteer metaphor, the person who has suffered soul death is one in which the charioteer of reason continues to issue commands and instructions to the horses representing the spirited part of the soul. But the horses simply do not heed the charioteer's voice.

¹⁰⁷ Wasserman, *The Death of the Soul in Romans 7*, 60–76.

Though Paul never invokes the word “soul” in Romans 7, his account very clearly includes martial imagery in which the “sinful passions and desires” imprison and even kill the ‘I.’ The body’s members operate outside of the control of the “inner self” who, conceived as the rational mind, delights in the law of God and desires to do what is good. But by virtue of having been killed and imprisoned by Sin, reason fails to actually put them into practice.¹⁰⁸

This image of the death of the soul, I contend, illumines not only the condition of Paul’s ‘I’ in Romans 7 but also the condition of agents enveloped and permeated by the dark atmospherics of race. Unlike the fleeting and curable nature of *akrasia*, the racialized moral failures associated with the dark atmospherics of race exhibit a much more entrenched, insidious character. They are not at all accurately depicted as resulting from an agent’s choice. Quite the contrary, they produce antiblack racial biases in persons who intentionally strive to avoid such bias. Furthermore, as socially circulated affective dynamics that pertain primarily to subject-involving situations, the dark atmospherics of race “invade” the inner lives of agents from without in the manner of apocalyptic powers. Once within us, these powers “wage war” with our more conscious and deliberative psychological processes, generating the internal conflict between explicit and implicit attitudes. In far too many cases, this results in the death of the soul – a normative and unrelenting obduracy to the value of Black persons that renders even apparently good and strong-willed agents affectively unresponsive to the presence of God in the human face of color. Persons suffering from this kind of soul death might still show a capacity to issue good moral judgments and express a desire to be morally better. But these moral capacities have been effectively overrun and dominated by foreign, invasive, and sinful atmospherics such that persons continue to commit the racialized moral failures that they desire not to do.

¹⁰⁸ Wasserman, *The Death of the Soul in Romans 7*, 83–96.

So far, this interpretation of our condition as agents as a kind of apocalyptic soul death locates us somewhere between the morally failed *akolates* and the morally weak *akrates* in Aristotle's therapeutic spectrum. Like the *akolates*, the agent suffering from soul death demonstrates an embedded inclination toward antiblack racism. But like the *akrates*, he or she retains some capacity for moral regret. This latter feature is of particular importance for this inquiry. Schleiermacher highlights this feeling as central to the phenomenon of the conscience, which he conceives as a consciousness of the divine activity of holiness. If an agent were entirely unresponsive to this activity, he or she would have no way to heed the summons to the higher life or recognize the qualitative distinction between that higher life and their present one. This is the indisputably worst situation, one in which the moral contrast between sin and God-consciousness is utterly lost, that Schleiermacher only just considers in his doctrine of sin.

Second, this condition is precisely the one in which we find ourselves in cases of implicit racial bias. Agents are informationally encapsulated *by the bias itself* from becoming aware of either the source or the impact of that bias. This evasive quality of implicit racial bias means that there are countless cases in which agents commit racial evils and thereby further deteriorate the world but are obstructed from experiencing ethically salutary regret by the dark atmospherics of race. If that is so, then it is not clear how either moral responsibility or the possibility of moral and religious transformation could obtain for agents caught in the grip of racial atmospherics.

We can see why Schleiermacher was slow to entertain such a possibility. But especially given the phenomenological and experimental evidence that such a complete insensitivity to moral regret for racialized evils is at least possible, we must ensure that our theological formulations acknowledge these politically and psychologically realistic constraints. In the next

section, I attempt to show this by turning to one further symbol in Paul's Letter to the Romans, the darkening of senseless minds.

§2.3.2 Darkening of Senseless Minds and the Law's Knowledge

In Romans 1:18-24, Paul presents a strongly theocentric vision of a morally ordered cosmos. This is particularly important for Paul who, throughout Romans, is concerned with affirming a Jewish commitment to ethical monotheism and demonstrating that the righteousness of God has been fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. But it also presents him with problems, since most Jews – let alone non-Jewish Gentiles – did not acknowledge Paul's interpretation. Paul's solution is to depict those who reject his claims as culpably ignorant.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse. (Rom. 1:18-20)

Crucially, Paul relates the ignorance of God's intentions to the religious ("ungodliness") and moral ("wickedness") obstinacy of human beings who "suppress the truth." He insists that theological and moral knowledge has been given to them in and through the created order, but they did not properly acknowledge it. "For though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened." (Rom. 1:21) This condition of pervasive ignorance notably has idolatry at its root. In consequence of their "exchanging the truth about God for a lie," Paul writes that "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves," "to degrading passions," "a debased mind," and "things that should not be done." An original turning away from God thus generates a series of effects in which human beings

become progressively unresponsive to the eternal power coursing through the moral and religious order. For that reason, they defile that world with all manner of evil.¹⁰⁹

Thus, we have a theological account of how the sinful powers that cause the death of the soul come onto the scene. Three points are especially salient. First, within a theocentric vision like this, evils are evil whether or not anyone recognize them to be such. The normative standard is God, which as theological reality, stands apart from all of our constructions about God. Second, this account emphasizes the way that one idolatrous event sparks a cascade of ensuing events which deaden the consciences of countless others. As Paul puts it later, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned – sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law.” (Rom. 5:12) Third, the downstream effects on our consciences do not eliminate ethical or religious responsibility since the normative standard remains in place as does the moral order of the universe. Though obscured from view, God’s “eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things God has made. So they are without excuse.” (Rom. 1:20)

How does this help us think about the threat that the dark atmospherics of race pose to the conscience? First, it reveals the importance of Schleiermacher’s claim that the divine activity of holiness is the source of the conscience. This means that even in a world thoroughly deteriorated by centuries of white supremacy, the standard by which racial evil is determined to be evil remains in place. Human beings bear the image and likeness of God, whether or not it is recognized. Second, it shows that even if Schleiermacher’s doctrine of sin privileged a less

¹⁰⁹ “They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God’s decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die – yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.” (Rom. 1:29-32)

severe condition of *akrasia* over this “indisputably worst situation” wherein the conscience itself is darkened into senselessness and human minds are pervasively debased, Christian theology has symbolic resources to accommodate such a possibility without impugning the divine normative standard. Indeed, as I have shown, Schleiermacher’s own account explicitly indicates these resources. Third, by affirming the moral order of the world as sustained by the creative and preserving activity of God, which is inseparable from God’s activity of holiness, Schleiermacher endorses the Pauline view that a thoroughly distorted conscience remains, in principle, susceptible to that “eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are” in creation. As Schleiermacher puts it later, human nature entails a “living receptivity” to the divine activity, a “longing for communion with God, which, even if it may press back so close to the boundary of unconsciousness, is nevertheless never entirely snuffed out, a longing that also belongs to the original perfection of the human race.”¹¹⁰

In short, this means that no amount of empirical evidence to the contrary could eliminate the possibility that this transcendent and sovereign divine agent might yet elicit edifying feelings of moral regret in even the most spiritually depleted agent. For that reason, this formulation of the darkened and debased mind accommodates the constraints of political and psychological realism. But by construing that agential condition as one *before God*, where God is understood as the eternal power that sustains the moral order and relentlessly broadcasts it within the conscience of even the most unwilling agent, both the epistemic possibility of detecting racial evils as evils that occasion moral regret and the further possibility that such knowledge might occasion a radical moral transformation are guaranteed by a reality that is not reducible to the political and moral realities discussed in Part I and II. For that reason, these possibilities continue

¹¹⁰ *CG* §108.6, 709/2:190.

to obtain in spite of the manifold forces that threaten agents with disintegration and the world with deterioration.

§2.4 The Knowledge and Limits of the Law

This indisputably worst situation of a darkened and debased mind is certainly a limit case. We must consider it, however, since the research on implicit racial bias suggests that such a thoroughgoing unresponsiveness to the value of Black persons and incapacity to perceive racial evils as evils is not only a possibility but rather seems to be quite common. Yet I argue that reflecting on such extreme cases also indicates the theological value of social psychology and critical race theory. Without their critical insights, the manifold ways in which our world and our inner lives have been degraded by the dark atmospherics of race would have remained, if not entirely imperceptible, certainly less vivid and clear. One must not make too much of the conscience-rousing capacity of what are, after all, academic disciplines. The growing moral consensus about the enduring evils of slavery and racism on American life surely owes much more to the collective witness of Black people over the past four centuries and the gritty practical wisdom of those engaged in the Black Freedom Struggle. We do well, I think, to understand these social theorists and cognitive scientists as clarifying and making explicit precisely those insights that were made possible by generations of political, moral, and religious struggle. And in so doing, they illumine painful truths about our condition as moral agents that we voluntarily and involuntarily avoid.

More succinctly, I am proposing that the insights about the tenacity of racism generated by critical race theory and social psychology serve the theological function of the law. Protestant Reformers like Luther and Calvin understood the law's theological use as its capacity to disclose

the truth of our condition before God as one of utter helplessness. According to them, this knowledge of the depths of human sin and our impotence to extricate ourselves from it occasioned such despair that the sinner realized his or her only hope for overcoming it was to cling to Christ in faith.¹¹¹ In a similar way, by disclosing the depths of racism's tenacity, its embeddedness in our material environment, and its influence on how we apprehend one another, these disciplines reveal how profoundly incapable we are of living a life untainted by the stain of antiblack racism and how stubbornly the world that white supremacy helped to build resists even our noblest efforts to transform it. This knowledge sharpens the conscience, revealing its own racialization to itself, and it thereby discloses our true condition before God to be one that afflicts not only the bad-faith racists but also those of us who, in good faith and perhaps even in accord with our material group interest, seek to eliminate and repair racial evil. Even those good and strong-willed agents find that we promulgate the very racial injustices that we abhor.

In this way, critical race theory and social psychology have a theological vocation. They function as the law which reveals the texture and extent of sin. This is an ethically and religiously edifying task because, to return to Paul's terms, it illumines darkened and debased minds, allowing them to grasp their true condition. But this religious vocation also means that these disciplines have theological limits. The agent Paul depicts in Romans 7 as suffering from the death of the soul has, and this point is crucial, *already received the knowledge of the law*. Such knowledge only reveals the depths of the problem, but this is not at all the same of

¹¹¹ For Luther's understanding of the law, see Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535: Chapters 1-4*, vol. 26, Luther's Works (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), especially 307-313. For Calvin, see Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 348-423 [II.7-8]. Both Luther and Calvin had complex understandings of the nature and use of law. They each acknowledged the difference between civil laws that govern a particular community and religious laws, paradigmatically those given in the Decalogue, that disclose the sinner's true condition before God and bring them to despair. Calvin pressed one step further with his claim that the law can also serve a pedagogical function.

resolving that problem. This means that, theologically considered, the person whose conscience has been stimulated by the findings of critical race theory or social psychology has transitioned from the utterly desperate condition of a darkened, debased mind to the resolutely better but still miserable condition of soul death. This condition is better because one is no longer deceived and might even feel moral regret with some intensity. But it remains miserable because this power to detect what is evil and choose what is good has not yet translated into the power to actually do what is good. The material deterioration of the world and the disintegration of our souls make such goodness appear distant and unattainable.

We are now in a position to understand the full theological significance of Schleiermacher's account of the conscience. Consider again his definition in §83: "We understand the holiness of God to refer to that divine causality by which conscience is found to be conjoined, simultaneously, with the state of needing redemption in every instance of human collective life."¹¹² Schleiermacher insists that, along with the moral feeling of regret, the conscience entails a distinctly religious feeling of the need for redemption. The moral feeling confirms one's status as a moral agent who is capable, by virtue of being summoned by God, of responsibility, and the religious depths of this feeling indicate a primitive acknowledgement that a truly adequate response exceeds one's own capabilities. In other words, it entails both a consciousness of one's moral capacities and a consciousness of the limits of those same capacities.

Herein lies the difference between viewing an evil simply as a moral failure and viewing it as a sin. A moral failure should occasion a feeling of regret that might, in time, motivate a morally appropriate response. To be conscious of the same moral failure as sin occasions all of

¹¹² *CG* §83, 515/1:511.

this, but it also entails a more pervasive sorrow in response to the disintegration of one's own originally perfect human nature and the deterioration of the originally perfect world. While the particular moral failure might be reparable with recourse to one's own moral capacities, these religious distortions are not so easily restored. More than strenuous effort, moral education, or training in virtue, restoration requires something more. In a word, it requires a Redeemer.

§3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I constructed a theological diagnosis of antiblack racism and its meaning for our self-understanding as moral agents. I argued that we finally apprehend the full extent of the racism's tenacity when we understand the dark atmospherics of race theologically as a sin, conceived in Schleiermacherian terms as a social-affective source of recalcitrant moral failure. As such, it contributes to the deterioration of the world and dispenses a kind of racialized apocalyptic soul death as the condition of agency for those of us caught under its influence. The latter formulation required that I press beyond Schleiermacher's hamartiology, since his account of the psychology of sin inadequately grasped the severity of our condition as disclosed by empirical studies of implicit racial bias. This follows from the project's Christian realist commitments; ethical and theological theorizing must accommodate the constraints imposed by the political and psychological realities that actually bear upon human life in concrete contexts. In response, I developed a theological account of the conscience that is both politically and psychologically realistic about the immense threats to moral agency amidst systematic antiblack racism. It also preserves the moral intuition that agents who perpetuate such racism, whether intentionally or unintentionally, remain meaningfully responsible. For no matter how deeply entrenched an agent's empirical insensitivity to the value of Black life might be, neither the

intrinsic value of persons created in the divine image nor the possibility that such value might be recognized can be utterly extinguished.

The theological significance of the conscience, then, lies in its ineradicable receptivity to the law-giving divine causality of holiness which stimulates the moral feeling of regret and the religious feeling of the need for redemption. I have argued that, in the concrete context of American racism, critical race theory and social psychology should be understood theologically as participating in this form of the divine causality. They generate the knowledge of the law insofar as they disclose our true condition before God to be one not merely of recalcitrant moral failure but of sin and death. I further clarified this condition by specifying the limits of the law. While its knowledge can illumine the mind that has been darkened and debased by the dark atmospherics of race, this leaves agents in a better but still miserable condition of soul death, a normative and unrelenting obduracy to the value of Black persons occasioned by a deeper unresponsiveness to the image of God therein. As such, this is a condition that exceeds our capacities to amend. Left to our own devices, neither our own moral disintegration nor the cosmic deterioration wrought by the dark atmospherics of race can be fully restored to their original perfection.

But there is one further point of theological significance regarding the limits of the law. As Schleiermacher puts it, while the “consciousness of sin does come from the law,”¹¹³ the law is “only an incomplete presentation of what is good” precisely because “an accompanying possibility of the law’s being adhered to is not exhibited [in it], not even in the unity of an all-encompassing formulation of it.”¹¹⁴ In other words, the divine activity that discloses the harsh

¹¹³ *CG* §68.3, 413/1:417.

¹¹⁴ *CG* §68.3, 413/1:417.

reality of sin is not exhaustively described under the symbols of holiness and the law. There is a more complete presentation of the good, one that includes the possibility of adherence to the law and the possibility that the goodness and wholeness that we have lost can indeed be truly restored. According to Schleiermacher, the symbols that most adequately articulate the full scope and character of the divine activity is grace and love as revealed and made historically efficacious in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

It is therefore in his account of the Christian consciousness of grace that Schleiermacher articulates both the most fundamental truth about our nature as moral agents and the Christian hope that the tenacious effects of sin can be, and in fact have already been, overcome. And he depicts the activity of divine grace and love on agents in the most radical terms possible, namely, as the transition from death into life.

CHAPTER 7

THE ATMOSPHERICS OF GRACE: A THEOLOGICAL PROGNOSIS

In the previous chapter, I argued that we finally grasp the extent and significance of the dark atmospherics of race when we diagnose them theologically as sin and their effect on agents as apocalyptic soul death. To be caught up in these atmospherics means that the difference between white persons and non-white sub-persons is made immediately palpable to agents in race-salient situations, thereby deadening them to the divine image in the human face of color. The task of overcoming this condition is made so difficult because the racial atmospherics corrupt our moral psychological resources, pollute our social environments, and even contribute to the material deterioration of a well-ordered cosmos. For many, especially amongst the racially privileged, the atmospherics of race have so thoroughly enveloped and permeated them that it has become difficult to even detect racial evils and injustices as evil and unjust. Even once agents have come to recognize the depth and extent of these evils, the multi-dimensional recalcitrance of racism makes the achievement of racial justice seem utopian and the possibility of a life untainted by racial evil seem impossible.

One of Christianity's central convictions is that, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, God inaugurates a reality in history that has the power to transform death into life. This is powerfully articulated in the resurrection, where God raises Jesus up from literal, bodily death. But it is also evident in countless biblical passages that describe the effect of God's activity on human beings in similar terms. In the Gospel of John, for example, Jesus proclaims himself to be the good

shepherd who “came that [his flock] may have life, and have it abundantly.”¹ This notion appears even more sharply in Paul’s writings. In Romans, he depicts the apocalyptic forces of sin and death as engaged in a cosmic struggle with the “spirit of life in Christ [which] has set you free from the law of sin and death.”² Just as the power of sin “dwells within” one’s body and courses through one’s conduct, Paul also presents the spirit of God as an indwelling, foreign power. “If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.”³

This conviction that God’s redemptive activity in and through Christ transforms agents in a manner so radical to warrant calling it a passage from death into life is utterly essential to Schleiermacher’s entire theological project. The Christian self-consciousness that his dogmatics attempt to explicate is, after all, a consciousness of being caught up in Christ’s redemptive power. We have already seen that this consciousness entails an awareness of that from which one has been redeemed, namely, the power of sin and death. But it also entails a consciousness of that to and for which one has been redeemed, namely, abundant life with Christ in the new reality that he has brought into history. Schleiermacher calls this the consciousness of grace, and in explicating it, he describes a second religious power at work in the world that struggles to resist and ultimately overcome the intrapsychic, social, and cosmological effects of sin. It is this power, which Schleiermacher designates as divine love and identifies with the very being of God, that goes one step beyond the theological work of the law. Whereas the law provides an increasingly complete mapping of the ways we fall short of the higher life, divine love represents the further possibility of adherence to the law. In fact, it creates the conditions of this possibility.

¹ John 10:10. All biblical references are to the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

² Romans 8:2.

³ Romans 8:11.

Grace actively revives deadened souls, restores the goodness of human sociality, and rebuilds the world so deteriorated by sin. And just as the effects of sin were wrought in and through the apocalyptic religious atmosphere the flesh, the effects of grace emerge in and through the apocalyptic religious atmosphere of the spirit of Christ.

This chapter concludes the theological diagnosis of moral agency amidst the tenacity of antiblack racism begun in the previous chapter. In so doing, it also concludes the inquiry as a whole. My central claim is that the impersonal threats to moral agency that I characterized in terms of sin and death in Chapter Six do not finally eliminate the possibility that agents could meaningfully orient our lives in such a bleak condition. That is, we can take a thoroughly clear-eyed view of just how bound we are to the social logic of race without thereby falling into despair. The grounds for this hope, I argue, is a theological conviction about the nature of ultimate reality, God, that is made possible just insofar as an agent is caught up in Christ's atmospherics of grace and that is confirmed by the new reality (psychic, social, material) brought about by these atmospherics. Christians call this reality the reign of God on earth.

The argument proceeds in four parts. First, I argue that Schleiermacher's Christology and ecclesiology depict the Redeemer's activity in terms of what I have been calling a religious atmosphere, one that we can understand as the atmospherics of grace.⁴ Second, I explore Schleiermacher's account of the religious conversion that the atmospherics of grace brings forth in a person, arguing that it amounts to a mystical union with Christ through which Christ infuses

⁴ Schleiermacher's Christology is found in §§91-105 of his *Glaubenslehre*, and his ecclesiology in §§113-163. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, ed. Terrence N. Tice, Catherine L. Kelsey, and Edwina G. Lawler, First edition. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016); Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhang dargestellt Zweite Auflage (1830/31)*, De Gruyter Texte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008). Cited as CG with English/German pagination.

a new religious personality into the soul. This “change of heart and mind,”⁵ a translation of the Greek *metanoia*,⁶ illumines the religious and affective depths of the transformation required to heal the psychic disintegration wrought by the dark atmospherics of race. Third, I consider more closely the emotions involved in conversion. Not only do these emotions figure prominently in the struggle for racial justice, but I argue that the emotional transformation that occurs in conversion promises to amend some common moral pitfalls in ways that both edify the participants and advance the goals of racial justice projects. Finally, I respond to the challenge that this apparently individualistic focus on personal transformation neglects the very material, social, and psychic embeddedness that we have taken such pains to foreground in this inquiry. I claim, on the contrary, that this individual conversion is made possible by one’s being taken up into a thoroughly communal and religious atmosphere that both discloses the nature of ultimate reality and constitutes an historically efficacious power that is actively transforming the world with love. This reality, the reign of God on earth, serves as the ground of faith and the object of hope that sustains the meaningfulness of moral agency in a world disfigured by sin.

§1 Jesus Christ and the Atmospherics of Grace

Schleiermacher locates the origin of the Christian self-consciousness in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and, specifically, in his absolutely powerful God-consciousness.⁷ According to him, Jesus was maximally conscious of absolute dependence in every single moment of his life. This distinguishes him from all other humans for whom the religious life consists in a series of

⁵ Schleiermacher’s term is *Sinnesänderung*. (CG §108)

⁶ Schleiermacher explicitly identifies *Sinnesänderung* with *metanoia* in the first published edition of the *Glaubenslehre* from 1821/22. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt (1821/22)*, ed. Hermann Peiter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher Kritische Gesamtausgabe (KGA)*, I/7.2 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), §130, 119.

⁷ CG §94.

unsteady fluctuations between God-consciousness and God-forgetfulness. The rest of us merely approximate the “sinless perfection”⁸ and “unclouded blessedness”⁹ that appears uniquely in him and that constitute his “exclusive dignity.”¹⁰ According to Schleiermacher, the appearance of Christ marks an historical *novum*. Such perfection and blessedness could not have emerged from the existing religious, social, and cultural environment because, as we have seen, the entire world remains utterly in the grip of the collective force of the flesh. Instead, Jesus’s God-consciousness marks an instance, the only instance, in fact, of “the supernatural becoming natural.”¹¹ In this person, the divine activity irrupted into human history to initiate a new, distinctive, qualitatively higher life that is fundamentally inexplicable with reference to preceding human history. Schleiermacher claims that this divine communication in Christ constitutes nothing less than “the being of God in him”¹² which he later specifies as “divine love.”¹³

While these qualities set Jesus apart from the rest of humanity, Schleiermacher upholds the traditional Chalcedonian view that he was also fully human.¹⁴ This means that the natural human drive to express our feelings to others and to form communities of feeling thereby

⁸ CG §88, §98. Sinless perfection just means that every moment of Jesus’s self-initiated activity, that is, every exercise of his will vis-à-vis the world, was entirely consonant with the feeling of absolute dependence.

⁹ CG §101. Unclouded blessedness describes the same thing with regard to his receptivity vis-à-vis the world. The blessed person is one whose perceptual and affective responses to her environment are determined by the religious consciousness of absolute dependence. That is, it is not entirely determined by bodily feeling of pleasure/pain, nor even of sociable or moral feelings. Schleiermacher describes blessedness [*Seligkeit*] in a handwritten, marginal note from his 1821-1822 edition of the *Glaubenslehre* as “not a maximum of pleasure but as simply pleasure concerning what has happened” (CG §5.4, 35/1:49)

¹⁰ CG §92.

¹¹ CG §88.4, 552/2:26.

¹² CG §94, 574/2:52. He also speaks of the “indwelling” of God’s being in Christ. (CG §97.4, 605/2:87) This means, as Schleiermacher puts it, that “we posit God-consciousness in his self-consciousness as determining every element of his life steadily and exclusively. In consequence, he has this status inasmuch as we also posit this complete indwelling of Supreme Being as his distinctive nature and his innermost self.” (CG §94.2, 578/2:56)

¹³ CG §97.3, 601-604/2:8-85. The only predicate Schleiermacher unreservedly attributes to God is love. “Therefore, our proposition must be established and justified in this exclusive form, meaning that only love and no other divine attribute can be equated with God in this fashion.” (CG, §167.1, 1008/2:504)

¹⁴ “[T]he Redeemer is the same as all human beings by virtue of the selfsame character of human nature, but he is distinguished from all other human beings by the steady strength of his God-consciousness, a strength that was an actual being of God in him.” (CG §94, 574/2:52)

pertained to Jesus no less than us.¹⁵ Jesus communicated¹⁶ himself to his immediate followers through his efficacious action, which Schleiermacher describes as the redemptive and reconciling activity of Christ.¹⁷ The efficacy of Christ's self-communication lies in the way it awakens and strengthens the distinctly Christian religious feeling in individual people who, in turn, become conscious of themselves as being swept up in redemption through Christ. The recognition of Jesus's sinless perfection is itself, according to Schleiermacher, a function of his sinless perfection.¹⁸ For this reason, the community of feeling that develops in response is the generative product of Jesus's own activity.

This community is, of course, a real assemblage of people. But Schleiermacher insists that, while it is "externally constituted" in this way, the basis that unites and animates the community "exists as something internal, though capable of being experienced."¹⁹ This internal reality is the distinctly Christian self-consciousness, and Schleiermacher describes it in two ways. First, it is a common "impression of Christ's sinless perfection" that, in turn, provides a new binding orientation and vector to the community.²⁰ Specifically, the person taken up into this community begins to orient her life in relation to the "the reign of God"²¹ which Christ

¹⁵ See *CG* §6 and my discussion in Chapter 5.2.2.

¹⁶ "In this collective life, a life extending back to the efficacious action of Jesus, redemption is wrought by him by virtue of the communication [*vermöge der Mittheilung*] of his sinless perfection." (*CG* §88, 547/2:21)

¹⁷ As redemptive activity, Christ communicates his sinless perfection to others in such a way that it inaugurates and strengthens God-consciousness. It thus redeems them from the life of God-forgetfulness from which they were powerless to free themselves. As reconciling activity, Christ incorporates his followers into his unclouded blessedness, thereby transforming the way they perceive and affectively respond to the effects of sin in themselves and the world. (*CG* §100-101)

¹⁸ "[O]ur proposition refers back to the presupposition that even the recognition of Jesus' perfection was the very work of his perfection itself." (*CG* §88.2, 550/2:24)

¹⁹ *CG* §88.3, 551/2:25.

²⁰ *CG* §88.3, 551/2:25.

²¹ For Schleiermacher, Christ's work is unintelligible without both these personal and social dimensions. As he puts it, "to have faith that Jesus is the Christ and to have faith that the reign of God has come – that is, the new collective life that is to be wrought by God has come" are the same thing." (*CG* §87.3, 546/2:20) Christ redeems human beings by communicating the "being of God," i.e., the divine love, to them, thus awakening God-consciousness and empowering the spirit to dominate the flesh. This inaugurates the reign of God, the corporate life that circulates Christ's love for humanity and creates the conditions whereby God-consciousness can be

inaugurated and promises to consummate in the fullness of time. The reign of God just is the new collective life that has been so affected by an impression of Christ's sinless perfection that they are moved to affect others in the same, life-enhancing way. Second, the Christian community shares "a blessed collective feeling"²² that utterly transforms their perceptual and affective responses to the activity and consequence of sin. Instead of threats to one's standing before God, the feeling of blessedness reveals these imperfections to be "indicators,"²³ summoning one to repair and restore their original perfection. This is an essentially peaceful consciousness, because it means that, whatever impediments to the higher life have come about in their psychic, social, and cosmological existence, these moments of disintegration and deterioration cannot and will not ultimately obstruct God's love from restoring them.

This is a complicated part of Schleiermacher's Christology and soteriology laced with potential pitfalls. One particular concern is his claim that the act of being united with Christ that occasions our sharing in his unclouded blessedness effectively dissociates evil from sin. The effects of sin in oneself and the world are thus no longer seen as evils that inhibit one's life because the redeemed gradually come to orient and evaluate their lives in terms of piety. On his view, Christ demonstrates that even the most morally horrific historical moments like the crucifixion are not utterly irreconcilable with God-consciousness. As discussed in the previous chapter, some worry that this severs religious life from the realities of embodied and socially embedded human life.²⁴ For this reason, I have chosen to emphasize the general point that, by

intensified and expanded. Eventually, this forms individuals and a community that desires the reign of God which "at the same time ... is love for human beings and love for Christ and love for God." That which animates this is "the love of Christ that is in us and enduringly spreading through us." (CG §112.3, 746/2:224)

²² *ein seliges Gesamtgefühl* (CG §101.2, 631/2:114)

²³ *Anzeigen* (CG §101.2, 630/2:113)

²⁴ See my discussion in Chapter 6.1.3.3. We must admit that there have been important developments in our understanding of how profoundly pain disintegrates human life since Schleiermacher's death. See, for example, Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press,

virtue of the original perfection of the world, there is nothing in the world that can utterly obstruct the transcendent source and power of all that is from breaking through the ruins of history and rousing our consciousness of this truth. As Paul puts it, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.” (Rom. 8:38-39)

Having been internally affected in these ways, the community finds itself moved by an impulse to communicate their feeling to others, thereby stimulating them to experience something of this perfection and blessedness. Schleiermacher describes this new impulse as a “desire for the reign of God.”²⁵ This desire is “at the same time ... love for human beings and love for Christ and love for God” since that which animates the new community is “the love of Christ that is in us and enduringly spreading through us.”²⁶ In his *Christian Ethics*,²⁷ Schleiermacher expands this further, arguing that these atmospherics of love circulating in the Christian community also spill out into the “outer sphere” of the world.²⁸ Where Christians experience the ruinous effects of sin, they perceive indicators illumined by divine grace that summon “restorative action.”²⁹ Where Christians experience elements of the world that are not yet ensconced within and permeated by the atmospherics of love, they perceive indicators for “broadening action” and are moved by them to expand the reign of God on earth.³⁰ In both the

1985). Even more significant has been the recognition of the truly abysmal quality of certain episodes of human history where any attempt to integrate them into a consciousness of God’s providential care is obscene.

²⁵ CG §112.4, 747/2:225.

²⁶ CG §112.3, 746/2:224.

²⁷ Schleiermacher, *Selections from Friedrich Schleiermacher’s Christian Ethics*; Schleiermacher, *Die Christliche Sitte: Nach Den Grundsätzen Der Evangelischen Kirche Im Zusammenhange Dargestellt*. Cited as CS with English/German pagination.

²⁸ CS, 167-183/620-705.

²⁹ CS, 43/44-45.

³⁰ CS, 44/45.

internal impression and the external impulse that arises from it, Schleiermacher insists that the Christian is conscious of this activity as Christ's own. Christians are, and seek to further become, organs of Christ's redeeming and reconciling spirit.

To be taken up into this new collective life and to begin to desire the reign of God thereby is much more than a process of re-socialization, although it certainly operates through the same mechanisms. For the Christian, Schleiermacher contends that this process is the means by which human beings receive a "more complete human life, or the completion of the creation of humanity."³¹ In the act of creation and the continuing acts of preservation, God's activity brings forth human beings. Schleiermacher presents Christ as the "second Adam" who completes this activity, bringing forth "new creatures."³² This is the subject of Schleiermacher's doctrine of sanctification,³³ wherein Christ's redeeming and reconciling activity is mediated by the new collective life of fellowship with Christ to make this more perfect human life possible.

With this brief sketch, we can already see how Schleiermacher's account of Christ's redemptive activity instantiates several elements of what I've called a religious power. The distinctly Christian feeling of being swept up in redemption through Christ entails both *intrapsychic* and *social dimensions*. The *summons* to a distinctly Christian life *reorients* the individual to desire the reign of God, and the Christian identifies this summons as issuing from *the transcendent source* of all that exists. These intrapsychic effects are only possible by virtue of one's being taken-up into the new collective life of fellowship with Christ, an activity which the Christian perceives as Christ's own efficacious activity. One must first be affected by

³¹ CG §89.1, 554/2:29.

³² CG §89.3, 556/2:31 It is crucial that, for Schleiermacher, the divine activity of creation and preservation are ultimately identical to the divine activity of love revealed most vividly in Christ. This means that the Redeemer's appearance in history discloses what has been true all along, namely, that the transcendent source and power that animates the entirety of finite reality is a wise and loving God. (CG §§164-169)

³³ CG §§110-112.

Christ's redemptive activity before he or she undergoes the perceptual and affective transformation that makes the higher, Christian life possible. In this way, the Christian is conscious of becoming a new creation as an event that happens in them and not by them. But upon being caught up in this supra-personal power, the Christian finds that his or her ensuing conduct is not only *accompanied* by this transformed vision of the whither, whence, and fundamental constitution of the world along with her place in it. He or she is also *empowered* by Christ's spirit, albeit in a piecemeal way, to repair the ruins of God's good creation and to expand God's coming reign of love on earth.

In short, Christ's activity of redemption constitutes an atmospherics of grace. As a religiously edifying power, these atmospherics struggle against the morally and religiously deleterious dark atmospherics of race, conceived as sin. Whereas the dark atmospherics of race deaden the soul's inherent responsivity to the image of God in the human face of color, the atmospherics of grace revive this responsivity by enveloping and permeating the sin-sick soul with new perceptual, affective, and motivational impulses. Furthermore, the one who experiences this transformation is conscious of it as an effect brought about by a foreign power, one that is traceable to the historical person of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer.

§1.2 Grace, Sin, and Agency

Before exploring how this transformation occurs in more detail, two points deserve special emphasis. One concerns the nature of moral agency itself. The other concerns the relationship of the activity of the law and the activity of love.

In Chapter Three, I showed that Schleiermacher guarantees the possibility of moral agency in every conceivable context by appealing to the “boundlessness of impulses.”³⁴ Since all human conduct – moral and otherwise – is the product of some impulse in the soul, and since no single impulse is so strong that we could not imagine an even stronger impulse overtaking it, Schleiermacher claims that it is perfectly possible to think that a moral impulse could subordinate the non-moral ones in any given situation. By grounding the transcendental possibility of moral agency in an analysis of the finite, phenomenal faculty of desire, Schleiermacher evinced a commitment to psychological realism that funded his critique of Kant’s moral psychology and remained intact even in his mature ethics of culture.

I also argued that this anthropological grounding of moral agency makes the capacity for moral motivation susceptible to the morally deleterious impulses at work in the soul and coursing through our social environment like the dark atmospherics of race. This threat came fully into view when I construed the dark atmospherics of race as sinful, religious power that darkens and debases the mind to such an extent that the divine image in the human face of color becomes almost entirely obscured. The multi-dimensional recalcitrance of the dark atmospherics of race made this threat even worse, raising the possibility that, even with the boundlessness of impulses as a conceptual backstop, agents might be so overwhelmed by these racial atmospherics that any hope of moral motivation is practically extinguished.

In light of this threat, I argued that Schleiermacher’s theological account of the conscience becomes especially important. In it, Schleiermacher grounds the possibility of moral action in a feeling of regret that is, crucially, *stimulated by God*. This in no way negates the value of his philosophical anthropology. But it secures the possibility of moral motivation in every

³⁴ See Chapter 3.3 and 3.6.

situation, and thus the legitimacy of responsibility ascriptions to agents in those situations, by identifying a source and power of moral action that is active in the created order but that is not reducible to the political and moral realities so susceptible to racialization and corruption. The dialogical relation between human beings and God obtains without regard to context, and this relation – not simply some anthropological feature – confers our nature as moral agents. This relation ensures that we are never not in a position to receive the divine summons in the conscience.

The atmospherics of grace extends and deepens this insight. It specifies one particular way in which the divine activity summons agents into existence, orients them to desire a good that both transcends and appears within this world, accompanies every moment of their lives in the form of the conscience, and finally empowers them to do the good they now desire to do. This means that the human susceptibility to influence by foreign powers like the dark atmospherics of race is also precisely what renders us susceptible to the atmospherics of grace that make the moral life not only possible but actual. Our permeability to that which lies beyond us makes us vulnerable to disintegration, but it is also the possibility condition for our transformation and redemption.³⁵ As Schleiermacher puts it, the “ineradicable residual presence” of human nature is a longing for communion with God and a “lively receptivity” to grace.³⁶

This brings us to the second point about the relation of the divine activity as law and love. In the previous section, I showed that Schleiermacher describes the law as an “incomplete presentation of what is good.”³⁷ Specifically, he tells us that it reveals precisely how far we have fallen short of the higher life to which we are called, but it does not reveal the possibility of our

³⁵ Kristine Culp develops this theological dimension of vulnerability in Kristine A. Culp, *Vulnerability and Glory: A Theological Account* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

³⁶ *CG* §108.6, 709/2:190.

³⁷ *CG* §68.3, 413/1:417.

actually adhering to the dictates of the law. The agent who suffers from the death of the soul is capable of experiencing moral regret but is still incapable of actually doing what is good and repairing the sin-corrupted world.

But in the consciousness of grace, this more perfect presentation of the good comes finally into view. For to be conscious of grace is to be conscious that the power of the flesh has been overcome. If this were not so, one could not have become conscious of sin *as sin*, that is, as an impediment to the higher life to which one has been called. The awareness of a qualitative difference between the higher and lower life is a necessary condition for the consciousness of sin, and this awareness is itself the result of the divine summons. This means, crucially, that the consciousness of sin *is itself evidence* that one has been affected by the atmospherics of grace. Though this consciousness alone does not guarantee that one will be able to fundamentally change one's ways and repair the world, it does entail that one has already been enveloped and permeated by a power that can achieve such a thorough conversion in human beings and, ultimately, can restore the original perfection of the world. In fact, the Christian self-consciousness entails a conviction that this triumph of spirit over flesh has already been achieved in Christ and is gradually – if only eschatologically – being realized in and through the world.

In other words, whereas the law only discloses the human incapacity for goodness and the death-dealing character of the world, grace reveals itself as a power sufficient to redeem and reconcile the world to God. And though that power transcends the human scene, the Christian self-consciousness includes the conviction that this power has become natural³⁸ in Christ such that its soul-integrating and world-restoring efficacy is active and available in the community of life that he inaugurated. This means that the more perfect presentation of the good, the one that

³⁸ CG §88.4, 552/2:26.

reveals not only how far short of the law we have fallen but also the possibility of the law being upheld, is grace, understood as the animating force of Christian life in history.

It remains to be seen just how this helps us think about the soul death occasioned by the dark atmospherics of race. For this, we need to know more about how these atmospherics of grace transform individual souls, our social environment, and even the cosmos. Schleiermacher describes the religious transformation that occasions all of this in terms of the mystical union with Christ and the religious transformation it generates.

§2 The Mystical Union with Christ and the “Change of Heart and Mind”

Schleiermacher endorses what he calls a *mystical* account of Christ’s efficacious power and contrasts it to *magical* and *empirical* alternatives.³⁹ The magical view affirms that Christ’s efficacious activity has the potency to establish a qualitatively different life, but it denies that this activity is mediated by a concrete, historical community. The empirical view affirms the necessary mediation of Christ’s activity through Christian communities, but it characterizes this the process in strictly exemplarist terms. That is, communities cultivate distinctly Christ-like personalities among their members, who then serve as moral exemplars for the weaker members to emulate.

³⁹ *CG* §100.3, 625-629/2:108-112; *CG* §101.3, 632-634/2:115-117. In the context of his account of Christ’s redemptive power, Schleiermacher does not give any concrete examples of these magical and empirical alternatives. He seems to employ them here more as useful foils that serve to clarify his own mystical position than as direct criticisms of particular theologians. With that said, he almost certainly has Kant’s “modern” Christology in mind when he describes the empirical view in exemplarist terms. The magical view could be attributed to proponents of the so-called “supernaturalist” theologies that Kant meant to critique as standing outside the limits of reason alone. Though Schleiermacher names no particular figure in this context, he makes reference to several 17th and 18th century Protestant scholastic theologians in his doctrine of preservation, where he is perhaps most explicit about the entailments of his religious naturalism. He argues there, for example, that “all that bestirs us and influences us within our absolute dependence on God [is] conditioned and determined by the interconnected process of nature.” (*CG* §46, 247-248/1:264) Some of the Protestant scholastics he engages include Johannes Andreas Quenstedt, Johannes Laurentius Mosheim, and Franz Volkmar Reinhard.

Neither approach is adequate for Schleiermacher. The empirical view can only support a quantitative, as opposed to a qualitative, contrast between higher and lower realities because the motivational force to emulate an exemplar already belongs to the agent. According to Schleiermacher, biblical expressions like the “new human being” and “new creation”⁴⁰ suggest that redemption causes nothing less than a radical, thoroughgoing transformation. The magical view fails because it can only support an ideal, as opposed to a real, relation between the individual and Christ. If the idea of a Christ was sufficient for redemption, then Christ’s incarnation and his historical ministry would be superfluous. In other words, the redemptive activity of Christ must 1) consist of real, motivationally potent impulses that 2) circulate amongst real, flesh-and-blood persons in concrete situations and 3) effect a qualitative transformation of the self that lies beyond the self’s ability to effect on its own.

The atmospheric nature of Christ’s redemptive activity is made especially vivid when we consider its effects on the lives of persons. The process of being taken up into the new collective life begins when a person is affected by Jesus’s self-disclosure, whether in its original form or in its proclamation of the new collective life that circulates and promulgates “images of Christ.”⁴¹ To be affected by these images means, at the very least, that the church’s communication of Christ’s self-revelation grabs one’s attention and elicits further interest. This is an initially “permeating activity”⁴² in that it presupposes no active, pre-existing desire within the agent. Rather, the communication itself implants that desire within the soul.⁴³ Schleiermacher is careful

⁴⁰ *CG* §106.1, 683/2:165.

⁴¹ *Bilde Christi* (*CG* §88.3, 551/2:26)

⁴² *eindringende Thätigkeit* (*CG* §100.2, 624/2:107)

⁴³ The recipient of grace cannot be willfully opposed to receiving it, nor should we imagine them as mere block of wood struck by grace in the manner of a flash of lightning, as some Gnesio-Lutherans proposed. Rather, Schleiermacher settles on a characterization of our condition prior to receiving Christ as one of “surrender.” It is not an utterly passive state, nor a state of active resistance and rebellion, nor is it one of willful “cooperation.” In this way, Schleiermacher rejects the major positions of the contemporaneous Protestant and Catholic debates

here. He acknowledges that agents remain capable of resisting and turning away from this influence. For him, Christ's activity is exclusively non-coercive.⁴⁴ But some certainly do find themselves gripped by its "attractational power;"⁴⁵ and they freely respond by investing more attention and gradually developing a more vivid "intuition"⁴⁶ of Christ's sinless perfection and unclouded blessedness. Schleiermacher describes this posture to Christ's activity as a "concurrence of the will"⁴⁷ or a "surrender"⁴⁸ to what is essentially a foreign, external impulse and its ensuing effects.

This acquiescence produces a gradual "deadening" of one's former personality and a correlate "enlivening" of a new personality.⁴⁹ The self becomes a qualitatively different self. This new creation remains numerically identical to the old self. But the depth of the transformation cannot be overstated. Whereas the old life was ordered by the self-focused activity of the flesh, the individual's new life becomes ordered ever more singularly by the desire to participate in and expand the reign of God. Whereas the old self was afflicted by the disintegration wrought by the flesh, the new self becomes ever more capable of integrating stimuli from the world with God-consciousness. Schleiermacher puts it this way: "[A]ll the individual's activities are then determined differently though the effect of Christ in the individual; indeed, all impressions are taken up differently as well. Consequently, personal self-

about nature and grace. (CG §108.6) This point is lucidly made in Julia A. Lamm, "Schleiermacher's Treatise on Grace," *Harvard Theological Review* 101, no. 2 (April 2008): 133–68.

⁴⁴ This informs his views on colonization, where he writes that "Christianity knows nothing of the right to bring civilization to uncivilized peoples by means of force [*mit Gewalt*]." (CS, 96/289) But it is also clear in his account of conversion. There, he claims that the human posture toward grace cannot be one of "resistance" [*Widerstand*], as some Protestants insisted. (CG §108.6, 707-708/2:188-190)

⁴⁵ *eine anziehende Kraft* (CG §100.2, 624/2:107)

⁴⁶ *Anschauung* (CG §100.2, 624/2:107)

⁴⁷ *eine Zustimmung des Willens* (CG §108.6, 708/2:189)

⁴⁸ *sich-hingeben* (CG §108.6, 708/2:189)

⁴⁹ CG §100.2, 625/2:108.

consciousness also becomes something different.”⁵⁰ To receive Christ’s spiritual influence means nothing less than to “attain a religious personality that [one] did not yet have beforehand.”⁵¹ Neither intellectual instruction nor habitual training can achieve this, since they both presuppose a latent desire for such a transformation within the self. But according to Schleiermacher, the desire to participate in and expand the reign of God must be “implanted in the soul”⁵² as a “working of Christ himself.”⁵³

We can now see why Schleiermacher calls his favored view the mystical account of Christ’s redemptive and reconciling activity. The human soul is transformed not simply by emulating good Christians nor on account of some religious power that operates entirely outside the bounds of history. Rather, moral and religious transformation occurs by virtue of being brought into a mystical union with the Redeemer himself. The Christian is conscious of this union as initiated by Christ and mediated by the living community that he established. For this reason, it is understood as happening to, and not simply by, oneself. Furthermore, it generates a thorough, qualitative transformation of the self that it would otherwise be powerless to achieve. The power is Christ’s own, implanting new affective, perceptual, and motivational impulses in the individual’s soul. This transformation is experienced as an enhancement of one’s own life in the strongest of terms. The union with Christ, in other words, realizes the transition from death into life.

This radical transformation occurs within individuals who, despite receiving a new religious personality, remain numerically identical. This means that the change cannot happen all at once. This process of receiving this new life-orientation and claiming it as one’s own occurs in

⁵⁰ CG §100.2, 624/2:107.

⁵¹ *religiöse Persönlichkeit / frommen Persönlichkeit* (CG §106.1, 683/2:165)

⁵² *die Kraft des neuen zugleich der Seele muß eingepflanzt worden sein* (CG §106.2, 685/2:167)

⁵³ CG §106.2, 685/2:167.

three stages, each with their own affective and desiderative character. For Schleiermacher, the experience of conversion constitutes a “rebirth” and a fundamental “change of heart and mind” characterized by the transition from the pain of contrition to the joy of faith.⁵⁴

Schleiermacher contends that, after the initially “uplifting” and “joyful” experience of being summoned to a higher life, this pleasant feeling quickly fades into the painful consciousness of contrition.⁵⁵ The old self and its ways now appear tragic and deficient. The ways of the world that had previously seemed rather ordinary and unremarkable now appear as occasions for sorrow and lament. This first glimpse of the perfection that originally characterized human nature and the world evokes the painful feelings of regret and remorse. Like any form of pain, these affections tend to produce aversive responses. Rather than attend to its source and significance, we are just as likely – or perhaps more likely – to divert our gaze and return to the comfortable obliviousness from whence we came. In light of Schleiermacher’s doctrine of sin, this should come as no surprise. After all, the summons to the higher life takes hold in a soul, in a social environment, and in a material context that are all in the grip of the power of the flesh. The process of becoming this new creation is one of struggle. It proceeds in fits and starts. But as Christ’s influence continues to take hold and the new personality is further realized, the fleeting pangs of conscience develop into a more resolute and enduring commitment to abjure the old life.

Note that this first stage of conversion is identical in character to what Schleiermacher called the conscience in his doctrine of sin. It is the painful feeling of moral regret that is aroused by the law-giving divine causality of holiness and that indicates one’s need for redemption.⁵⁶ We

⁵⁴ *CG* §108.

⁵⁵ *CG* §108.2, 694-698/2:176-180.

⁵⁶ *CG* §83. See my discussion in 6.2.1.

can infer from this that Christ's atmospherics of grace are consonant with this divine activity, and are, in fact, an instantiation of it. But whereas Schleiermacher's treatment of the conscience appeared in his explication of the consciousness of sin, his account of the contrition of conversion appears in his explication of the consciousness of grace. And as I stated above, the consciousness of grace apprehends the good, as well as the divine source of goodness, in a more perfect way than does the consciousness of sin. In the latter, the law discloses the distance between the higher and the lower life that occasions regret. But grace goes one step further, illuminating the possibility that the dictates of the law might be fulfilled and that the pain of regret might become something else entirely – something like joy.

This total rejection of the old life governed by the flesh is not yet, however, a positive embrace of the new life in the spirit. Schleiermacher describes a middle stage between contrition and faith called “the change of heart and mind” in which one's self-initiated activity grounds nearly to a halt, and the subject retreats into a moment of receptivity.⁵⁷ The subject undergoes a “turning away from evil and turning to God and the good”⁵⁸ that is “effected by Christ” and “divinely caused.”⁵⁹ As the German *Sinnesänderung* suggests, Schleiermacher has in mind the transformation of one's basic “sense”⁶⁰ of reality, the way one perceives and affectively responds

⁵⁷ Schleiermacher describes it as a “twofold lack of activity in the form of a no-more-being-active regarding the first direction taken and a not-yet-being-active regarding the new direction taken.” (CG §108.2, 694/2:176) “[N]othing remains to the subject for supplying one's spiritually animated being [*geistig lebendiges Sein*] except a passive echo [*leidentliche Nachklang*] of that former activity which is now carried in feeling and which, with respect to the activity not yet begun, is but a longing [*das Verlangen*] viewed as a passive presentiment [*leidentliche Vorahnung*].” (CG §108.2, 694) As Sabine Schmidtke puts it, the change of heart is “the primary expression for the becoming-effective [*Wirksamwerdung*] on account of participation in the new collective life which mediates the creative activity of the Redeemer.” Sabine Schmidtke, *Schleiermachers Lehre von Wiedergeburt und Heiligung: “Lebendige Empfänglichkeit” als soteriologische Schlüsselfigur der “Glaubenslehre,”* Dogmatik in der Moderne 11 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 236.

⁵⁸ CG §108.1, 691/2:172.

⁵⁹ CG §108.2, 696-697/2:178.

⁶⁰ This marks an important connection with Schleiermacher's *Soliloquies*, where the concept of *Sinn* figures prominently. See my discussion in Chapter 3.4.

to the world and one's place in it.⁶¹ He articulates these changes most directly in his account of justification, wherein the agent's felt relation to God shifts from one of bondage and guilt on account of sin to forgiveness and adoption as a beloved child of God.⁶²

This new self-understanding strikes quite a contrast with that imparted by the law. As we saw, the law reveals to us that we are thoroughly stuck in the multi-dimensional recalcitrance of the flesh, that we bear a complete incapacity for good, and that the world itself has suffered irreparable deterioration. But it is more accurate to say that the law's knowledge is not so much refuted as tempered by the knowledge of grace. The two-fold head start of the flesh remains intact, and the cosmological effects of sin remain materially entrenched. But the change of heart and mind couples this with the knowledge that, in Christ, the reign of the spirit over the flesh has irrupted into history so as to finally redeem and reconcile human history to God. It also reveals that Christ's spirit have already taken hold within one's own soul. These perceptual and affective shifts testify to nothing less than this truth. These changes in one's receptivity to the world also entail a correlate shift in volition. It marks a "change of one's innermost striving"⁶³ and a "changed disposition"⁶⁴ that fundamentally re-orient one's life to desire participation in the reign of God and its expansion.

This brings us to the final stage of conversion: faith. Schleiermacher defines faith as a "permanently enduring state of mind and heart [in which the Christian is conscious] of having possession of Christ"⁶⁵ such that he or she feels "satisfactorily positioned and strong within

⁶¹ It is "originally joyful and ... uplifting in its effect," generates a "constant movement forward [such that it] expands to the point of an act of will," and includes a "fresh impulse of one's will." (CG §108.2, 696/177)

⁶² CG §109.2, 714-715/2:195

⁶³ *Aenderung des innersten Strebens* (CG §108.1, 692/2:173)

⁶⁴ *geänderte Gesinnung* (CG §108.1, 693/2:174)

⁶⁵ CG §108.1, 694/2:174.

Christ's community."⁶⁶ Having rejected the former life ruled by the collective force of the flesh, the originally foreign influence of Christ becomes appropriated in faith as one's own. This marks the most compelling evidence of the mystical union with Christ. What had been a merely "vital receptivity"⁶⁷ to Christ's influence has become an "enlivened self-activity"⁶⁸ that emerges only "in union with Christ."⁶⁹

Although the pain of contrition remains in place even here, the affective character that predominates in faith is joy. Specifically, this is what the biblical witness refers to as the "joy of the Lord."⁷⁰ This is an ecstatic emotion that comes especially to the fore in liturgical settings⁷¹ but that, as Schleiermacher makes particularly clear in his *Christian Ethics*, sets the basic tone of the entire Christian life.⁷² Furthermore, and this is a crucial point, the joy of the Lord that adheres to faith is directed, not primarily toward oneself, but rather toward the present and coming reality of the reign of God on earth. It is thus an eschatological joy that regards God's loving redemption and reconciliation of the world, a final restoration of integrity and wholeness of which one's own perceptual and affective transformation is a part.

§3 Race, Grace, and the Coming Reign of God

My claim is that this account of conversion sheds considerable light on the meaning of moral agency amidst tenacious racism. First and foremost, it is a religious transformation that is

⁶⁶ *CG* §108.1, 694/2:175.

⁶⁷ *lebendige Empfänglichkeit* (*CG* §108.6, 708/2:190)

⁶⁸ *belebte Selbsthätigkeit* (*CG* §108.6, 708/2:190)

⁶⁹ *CG* §108.6, 708/2:190.

⁷⁰ Schleiermacher defines the joy of the Lord as "that constant consciousness of the same higher stage of life that is the basis for our communion with God and from which our consciousness of pleasure and of the lack of pleasure proceeds in each moment." (*CS*, 41/41-42)

⁷¹ "The joy of the Lord, in itself, apart from all differences between pleasure and pain, corresponds to the purely presentational action whose general type is the worship service." (*CS*, Beilage A, Einleitung §53, 17)

⁷² Joy is the felt character of being in a state of "blessedness" [*Seeligkeit*], and this "lies in reality at the basis of the temporal lives of the pious." (*CS*, Beilage A, Einleitung §47, 16)

brought about by religious atmospherics. Conversion is an effect of Christ's mystical union with the soul, which is achieved by means of the atmospherics of grace circulating through the Christian community. It imparts affective, perceptual, and motivational impulses to the soul that it did not already possess and that it could not have cultivated by its own devices. These effects are rather made possible within one by a power that the Christian identifies with the transcendent source and power of all that is, the being of God in Christ or divine love. Furthermore, the Christian is conscious of these effects as an enhancement of his or her life, the realization of a new life vis-à-vis that seems even more truly one's own than the previous life. In other words, it appears to one as a transition from death into life. Given that I have been arguing that the dark atmospherics of race are most adequately understood as sin and thus as a soteriological problem, this account of religious conversion articulates the depth of transformation that is required to heal the soul-disintegrating effects of racism.

This contribution is critical, but it is merely formal. I argue that Schleiermacher's account of conversion also offers substantive, normative insights into the meaning of moral agency amidst tenacious racism. I will elucidate three insights in particular. It reveals 1) the ambiguities of moral regret for racial evils, 2) the responsibility enhancing potential of a distinctly Christian theological apprehension of the effects of racist sins, and 3) the significance of joy in repairing a racially disfigured cosmos.

§3.1 The Ambiguity and Perfection of Moral Regret

In the previous chapter, I argued that a theological account of the conscience provided a way to guarantee the possibility of moral agency and responsibility even for those most thoroughly in the grip of the dark atmospherics of race. Since, on my view, God stands apart

from the political and moral realities susceptible to corruption by the atmospherics of race, and since God promulgates the normative standards for human conduct in and through the created order in general and the face of human beings who bear God's image and likeness in particular, even those suffering from darkened and debased minds remain, in Paul's words, "without excuse." The dialogical relation between human beings and God confers our capacity to respond to God's summons to moral agency, and the law-giving divine causality of holiness is, in principle, sufficient to stir feelings of moral regret in moral agents when they transgress God's law. Such feelings are vital components of the conscience, which alert us to potential wrongdoing and provide an opportunity for us to choose to act otherwise. Furthermore, I argued that these feelings play an important role in distinguishing those of us who have not received the knowledge of the law from those who have received it such that they apprehend the severity of our racialized condition. The former group suffers from darkened and debased minds, whereas the later suffers from a better but still miserable condition of apocalyptic soul death.

The feeling of moral regret thus has a theological significance. It is aroused by the law in ways that can be morally and religiously edifying. Without it, one could not perceive sin *as sin*, as a constraint on the higher life to which one is called. But it is important to remember that, for Schleiermacher, the conscience couples the feeling of moral regret with a further feeling, namely, that of the need for redemption. This suggests that regret itself is not an entirely adequate response to sin. Indeed, moral regret entails ambiguities that are especially salient when the regret pertains to racial evils. In this section, I will argue that Schleiermacher's account of contrition in conversion helps us come to terms with these ambiguities and provides norms for improving our affective responses to racial injustice.

According to Schleiermacher, conversion regret comes in many degrees ranging from the fleeting pang of conscience to a resolute decision to renounce the old life and the power of the flesh. All of these forms of regret share a negative valence; they are all unpleasant feelings and thus they tend to generate aversive responses. But while Schleiermacher does not explore this phenomenon in more detail, we might extrapolate on his formulation to suggest that that which an agent perceives as unpleasant and deems worthy of renunciation changes across the spectrum. The earliest pangs of conscience are so fleeting precisely because we quickly turn our attention elsewhere in an effort to avoid painful truths. That which we find unpleasant in such a stage is the fact of being found out, even if it is only our own conscience that has caught us in the act. This evasive maneuver indicates that we already apprehend, even if only vaguely, that we ought to change our ways. But we resist this change because it strikes us as unpleasant, indeed, *more* unpleasant than continuing on in our present course. Over time, however, the frequency and intensity of these painful feelings increase, and this produces a change in our hedonic calculus. The pain of being found out becomes less salient than the pain of remaining stuck in a life that we deem to be beneath us. Instead of motivating elaborate schemes to avoid detection, this latter pain motivates an ever more searing scrutiny of our lives in the hope of expunging that which continues to hold us back.

In other words, some forms of regret are more likely to avert moral consciousness and paralyze moral action as to arouse and stimulate them. These dynamics are surely recognizable in cases of antiblack American racism. In previous chapters, I pointed to the evidence of automatic and unconscious aversions in so-called “aversive racism”⁷³ as well as research on the

⁷³ Adam R. Pearson, John F. Dovidio, and Samuel L. Gaertner, “Teaching & Learning Guide for: The Nature of Contemporary Prejudice: Insights from Aversive Racism,” *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 3, no. 6 (December 2009): 1120–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2009.00227.x>; John F. Dovidio and Samuel L.

affective fragility of uncomfortable interracial interactions. These interpersonal dynamics have been shown to contribute to enduring racial inequities and to inhibit interracial cooperation.⁷⁴ But in addition to these examples, American life is utterly saturated with efforts to evade the history and continued significance of racial violence and structural injustice. The abundance of monuments commemorating Confederate generals and the relative scarcity of those commemorating the victims of lynching is but one especially vivid example of this national evasion. While perhaps more subtle, the ideologies of rugged individualism and the “American dream” of hard-work-fueled social mobility that many Americans invoke to justify their own racial or economic privilege are no less evasive of the nefarious and politically inexpedient truth of systemic antiblack racism.

This brings the profound ambiguity of regret into view. It can be an ethically salutary feeling that alerts an agent of potential wrongdoing and offers them an opportunity to choose otherwise.⁷⁵ But regret can also occasion moral failure in at least two ways, both of which are illuminating for racialized moral failures. As the examples above showed, regret can spur us to avert our gaze from our historic and enduring wrongdoings in order to preserve a positive, albeit false, moral self-conception.⁷⁶ In his doctrine of sin, Schleiermacher described this as the “reactive effect”⁷⁷ of the flesh on understanding as it leads us to gloss over sin for the sake of pacifying a troubled conscience.

Gaertner, “Aversive Racism and Selection Decisions: 1989 and 1999,” *Psychological Science* 11, no. 4 (2000): 315–19.

⁷⁴ See my discussion in Chapter 2.1.2.2.

⁷⁵ See Chapter 6.2.3.1.

⁷⁶ One of Shannon Sullivan’s theses is that the concern to demonstrate one’s own goodness in racial matters is a recurring impediment to racial justice for white, middle class Americans. See Shannon Sullivan, *Good White People: The Problem with Middle-Class White Anti-Racism*, SUNY Series, Philosophy and Race (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014).

⁷⁷ *CG* §68.3, 409-410/1:414.

But regret can run morally afoul in the other direction as well. Instead of averting our gaze, regret can utterly consume our attention in a way that also enervates moral motivation. This occurs in cases of “white guilt,” wherein white people become so obsessed with their complicity in racism that they simply avoid engaging in antiracism efforts for fear of exposing themselves to moral censure.⁷⁸ In other cases, white people can develop such a negative self-conception on account of their unearned racial privilege and complicity that they misconstrue their moral status as irreparably tarnished and underestimate their ability to contribute to a more racially just world.

As these examples show, moral regret is a crucial, but morally ambiguous, response to racial injustice. They also suggest how the Christian atmospherics of grace might amend these problems. Far from providing the kind of cheap grace that inappropriately diminishes or facilitates the avoidance of feelings of regret, Schleiermacher insists Christ’s activity heightens such feelings to the point of desiring to totally abjure the old self. Of course, this does not guarantee that individuals will fully halt these patterns of evasion. But as Christ’s atmospherics of grace take a stronger hold within the soul, these evasions will themselves become occasions for regret. Conversion contrition is thus a particularly rigorous, scrupulous form of regret that resists the all-too-human proclivity to avoid painful truths.

As the examples of white guilt suggest, however, such scrupulosity might have the deleterious effect of sapping moral motivation. The atmospherics of grace provide a corrective here as well. Whereas white guilt threatens to ontologize guilt,⁷⁹ generating feelings of regret

⁷⁸ There is a narcissistic element to this condition as well. The desire to protect one’s moral status in racial matters overwhelms the desire to repair racial harms.

⁷⁹ Richard Findler defines ontological guilt simply as “guilt for one’s own being.” Richard S. Findler, “Reconciliation Versus Reversal: Hegel and Nietzsche on Overcoming Sin or Ontological Guilt,” in *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit: New Critical Essays* (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 295.

toward the kind of being one ineluctably is, the regret of contrition properly orients those feelings toward that which, theologically considered, is not truly who one is. The summons to the higher life was originally uplifting and joyous because it revealed one to be a moral and religious creature destined for a qualitatively higher life, a life vis-à-vis which the lower life seems like a kind of death. The painful feelings that emerge afterwards are responses to the recognition that one has been, heretofore, dead to this truth about oneself. Insofar as the new life in Christ strikes one as an enhancement of one's own life, the agent now has a motivating reason to be scrupulous about unearthing the remaining effects of sin that continue to inhibit the full emergence of that life. This brings about the opposite practical response. Instead of denigrating one's moral self-conception to the point of self-contempt, it infuses the soul with a love of that self who, by God's grace, has become an agent capable of not only rational action guidance but even an excessive, other-regarding love. Instead of sapping moral motivation, it reveals that the religious power that fuels the moral life has already taken hold within oneself.

In short, by situating the moral significance of regret within a theological account of conversion, both the ambiguities of moral regret in racialized societies and the potential of Christian atmospherics of grace to perfect them come into view. These perfections are achieved insofar as the atmospherics of grace a) provides a motivating reason for scrupulosity, b) re-orientes moral regret toward its proper object, and c) realistically affirms the agent's moral and religious self-conception in a way that encourages, rather than depletes, the desire to participation in God's redemption of the world disfigured by sin.

§3.2 The Change of Heart and Mind and a Renewed Vision of Racial Reality

I have already hinted at the second substantive contribution that Schleiermacher's account of conversion brings to these matters. Conversion contrition involves not only an awakened sensitivity to the effects of sin but also a renewed apprehension of their significance. Instead of irreparable stains that misconstrue one's moral status and enervate moral motivation, they express that Christ's atmospherics of grace have already taken hold within oneself, indicating that the enlivening of the new personality and the deadening of the old has already begun. In other words, they are indications of moral and religious transformation.

This renewed, theological vision is the essence of what Schleiermacher calls the change of heart and mind. It is, above all else, an effect of Christ's activity upon the soul that transforms how one perceives and affectively apprehends the world and one's place in it. With regard to oneself, this change of heart and mind diminishes the salience of one's bondage to the multi-dimensional recalcitrance of the flesh as well as the guilt one bears for the sins committed while under its sway. With regard to the world, this change diminishes the salience of the world's apparent God-forsakenness on account of the effects of sin. Instead, the convert apprehends himself or herself as a beloved child of God whose sins are forgiven and who, for that reason, is set free to respond lovingly to the world that God so loves.

On first glance, this might seem like Schleiermacher is claiming that religious conversion averts one's gaze from the entrenched effects of sin in oneself and in one's world. But as we saw in his account of conversion contrition, this cannot be what he has in mind. The Christian atmospherics of grace resist any and all means of evading these painful truths. If anything, the convert becomes increasingly aware of them now that he or she has a motivating reason to reflect upon them. That which changes in the change of heart and mind is, therefore, not *whether* one

pays attention to sin and evil, but rather *how* one attends to them and the significance they bear for one's life.

In my theological account of the dark atmospherics of race, I presented it as a multi-layered, death-dealing power of sin with an emphasis on its tenacity and recalcitrance to even well-intentioned efforts to dismantle and subvert it. Of course, these realities do not fundamentally change simply because we apprehend them differently in consciousness. This is the significance of asserting that they are *realities*; they are persistent, stubborn, and enduring features of our existence. After the change of heart and mind, it remains true that implicit racial biases are intrapsychic effects of sin that distort our originally perfect natures. It also remains true that antiblack social and cultural dynamics are socio-historical effects of sin that defile the created goodness of human sociality. And it remains true that the material structures of white supremacy are cosmological effects of sin that instantiate the deterioration of God's good world.

But the change of heart and mind that occurs at the heart of conversion illumines a deeper truth about these very same realities. The truth is this: the monstrous scars of white supremacy have not utterly effaced the goodness of the world that God created, and they will not ultimately obstruct the redemption of that world that God so loves. This is so because, in Christ, the nature of the transcendent reality that animates all that exists is itself revealed to be divine love, a love that seeks to redeem and reconcile the world and everything in it to God.

These fundamental theological convictions are ones that Christians hold as matters of faith. In no way do they contradict the manifest reality of racist evil or the incalculable destruction it has wrought. But they do illumine that, despite the persistent effort to degrade Black people as sub-human and to sow Black death on American soil, white supremacy has continually run up against the even more persistent and recalcitrant reality of Black survival,

resistance, and dignity. The very presence of Black life in the United States testifies to this, and the contributions Black people have made to American life more broadly evince a grace that far exceeds the collective merits of this land. Foremost among these contributions are the political, artistic, intellectual, moral, and religious efforts that have disclosed the deep contradictions of American history stubbornly evaded by the white majority. The existential struggle for Black recognition and freedom, one that long preceded and contributed to legal emancipation, can be understood theologically as an iteration of Christ's redemptive activity. As such, it is an expression of God's love for a world that is utterly mired in sin and for Black persons who, despite white supremacy's best efforts, remain not only bearers of the divine image and likeness but also the status of God's beloved children.

As theological convictions, these concern the most fundamental structures of lived reality itself and make claims about its whence, whither, and essential constitution. For those who hold, or, more accurately, for those who are convicted by them, they provide orientation within reality construed as a moral space. To be sure, there is plenty of evidence one might invoke to dismiss these convictions as farcical. One could well claim that the most basic truth about the world is that it is fundamentally death-dealing and that the most basic truth about human nature is that we are governed by material interests and the will-to-power. This inquiry has certainly highlighted plenty of evidence to support these conclusions. But I have also argued that one can affirm these political realities without endorsing the further view that they describe reality exhaustively.

In addition to political realities, there are moral realities embedded in human nature that are irreducible to the dynamics of power and self- or group-interest. Upon confronting the dreadful susceptibility of even those moral realities to racialization, I argued that there is even more going on in reality yet. There are religious dynamics coursing through these political and

moral realities that remain irreducible to those realities. They suggest instead that the entire drama of existence transpires *before God*, and that an adequate account of what is going on requires the kind of symbolic resources that are appropriate for speaking about this ultimate reality. The fact that the symbols of sin and soul death helped us to grasp the full extent of racism's tenacity confirmed the value of such theological interpretation. But as is now becoming clear, to construe antiblack racism as sin presupposes the consciousness of grace, a more comprehensive religious power that makes it possible to perceive sin as sin. This consciousness of grace finally becomes efficacious in the change of heart and mind, and the truth revealed therein just is that, in Christ, the power of sin and death has been overcome. The reign of the flesh over spirit is not the full extent of reality. The world is not ultimately beyond redeeming. Its goodness cannot ultimately be extinguished. In other words, consciousness of antiblack racism as a sin entails the conviction that the world it has deteriorated and the manifold forms of death it has dealt are not the final word.

To sustain such a vision amidst the racist horrors of this world is no simple thing. So much of American history and racism's continued presence in contemporary life seems to directly contradict it. It is perhaps for this reason that Schleiermacher describes the change of heart and mind as something that happens to, and not by, oneself. It is the consequence of being caught up by Christ's atmospheres of grace, and the theological vision it imparts to one is a gift. Moreover, the simple fact of living in a world that remains disfigured by sin means that these perceptual, affective, and motivational effects of grace face stiff headwinds. This glimpse of reality must be continually cultivated, strengthened, and restored through participation in the flesh-and-blood community of life that Christ inaugurated.

But such a theological vision of the world and one's place in it is worth cultivating, strengthening, and restoring. First, for those victims of antiblack racism, the conviction that each human being bears the divine image and is, in fact, a beloved child of God can serve as a spiritual bulwark against the lie of white racial supremacy. This is critically important because, as we saw in the work of Frantz Fanon and Audre Lorde, the white racial gaze can be insidiously internalized by Black people in ways that threaten their own self-conception and self-respect.⁸⁰ But this vision is no less vital to those who find themselves perpetuating racial evil and oppression. For explicit antiblack racists, the claim that all human beings are beloved of God strikes at the very heart of their prejudices. It reveals those prejudices to be offensive to God and signs of their own moral and religious diminishment. Furthermore, for such a racist to view themselves as a beloved child of God should reveal how utterly incongruous antiblack hatred and callous disregard are with this normative self-conception, although it certainly does not guarantee this. Finally, for those who discover, through the disclosive power of the law, that they bear implicit antiblack biases, the proclamation of their essential belovedness resists the turn to moral self-hatred and interminable shame. It also serves as evidence that there is a power sufficient to redeem even these deeply entrenched psychological mechanisms that is already at work within them.

These different effects of grace on persons of different racial identities and dispositions are crucial to acknowledge. The atmospherics of grace, like all atmospheres, affect and influences individuals in vastly different ways on account of their personal history, memories, social location, and many other factors. But there are other consequences of this change of heart and mind that pertain more universally. Foremost among these is the conviction that, in Christ,

⁸⁰ See my discussion of these authors in Chapter 4.2.

our individual and collective bondage to sin is overcome. Of course, this does not mean that this process is completed within us or our world. The multi-dimensional recalcitrance of antiblack racism testifies to this. But it does mean that 1) the human possibility to transcend these constraints on the higher life is decisively achieved in Christ and that 2) this possibility of the spirit's rule over the flesh will be intensively and extensively realized in the fullness of time.

This conviction that the effects of sin are in the process of being redeemed and are, for that reason, ultimately passing away changes the way in which one apprehends the enduring effects of racist sin and responds to them. In the previous chapter, I argued that construing the dark atmospherics of race as sin grasps the way in which human agents are imbricated in a vast network of fault.⁸¹ In addition to the voluntary sins we choose, we also bear pre-volitional fault for the susceptibility to sin that we inherit. We incur further fault for the ways in which we, wittingly or not, stimulate the susceptibility to sin in others. This collective force of the flesh, as Schleiermacher described it, contributes to the collective deterioration of the world. These effects of sin are revealed to us, I argued, through the law-giving activity of God's holiness, which illumines these effects as sin for which we bear some degree of guilt. This consciousness of guilt for sin manifests in the painful feeling of moral regret. Though painful, this is morally and religiously edifying because it reveals one's true condition before God and prompts one to reparative action.

But as we have seen, regret can be morally ambiguous. It is equally capable of enervating as it is of stimulating moral motivation. The consciousness of fault, furthermore, can overwhelm the fragile conscience and consume one with thoughts of self-abasement. So, while such consciousness is never entirely expunged on this side of the eschaton, Schleiermacher insists that

⁸¹ See Chapter 6.1.3.2 and 6.1.3.3.

the affective and perceptual transformation that takes place in conversion also changes how one apprehends sin in oneself and the world. Instead of threats to one's relationship with God as a beloved child, sin appears now as "indicators"⁸² calling for further restorative action.

This motivational transformation is so important because it changes the moral and religious quality of an act. Before the change of heart and mind, the person consumed with regret might pursue reparative action for the sake of clearing one's conscience and re-establishing a positive moral or religious self-conception. But upon receiving this renewed vision of reality, the agent's status as a beloved child of God is no longer the uncertain goal that reparative action seeks to achieve. Rather, it is the certain foundation that fuels a life of loving care for those whom God loves.

Such a transformation is a significant feature in all human action, and action that seeks to repair racial evil and establish racial justice is no different. Consider an example. Imagine a person who pours herself tirelessly into the struggle for racial justice. But imagine further that this morally praiseworthy conduct flows from a person who is wracked with intense white guilt for her complicity in racial oppression. This guilt drives her frenetic efforts to dismantled white supremacy, and she hopes her labors will signal that she stands on the right side of history. Obviously, this is morally preferable to positively racist action or inaction. But it remains vicious and sinful on account of the agent's self-absorption. The object of concern remains the self, even if it is a concern for her own moral standing. Moreover, such motivating concerns usually manifest themselves to others in some way or another. She might exhibit a grating self-righteousness. Or, in more severe cases, it might lead her to positively instrumentalize precisely

⁸² *CG* §101.2, 630/2:113.

those whose liberation from racial oppression she claims to be seeking. Such examples clearly pollute the social environment in ways that diminish the moral and religious quality of the action.

Now consider a counter example. Suppose the same person is engaged in the same racial justice project. But instead of acting from a prevailing sense of guilt, she is fueled by a sense of gratitude to the God who loves her in spite of her faults. In such a condition, we could hardly say that this person has forgotten her racial privilege or her complicity in racial injustice. To be grateful to God for her in spite of her faults requires an acknowledgement of those faults. She is not, therefore, concerned with convincing others of her righteousness or establishing her antiracist *bona fides* for the historical record. Rather, she has been set free from precisely these concerns so that she is then, and only then, in a position to truly love her neighbors and the world that God so loves.

Paradoxically, such a person is likely to be enlivened by this re-orientation. Her life, it now seems clear, is not merely about self-preservation, nor is it about dutifully fulfilling all of her obligations in hope of attaining an ever-receding goal of moral integrity. Instead, this agent now sees that her life is a gift that is gained precisely in losing it, in pouring it out for the sake of one's friends.⁸³ This perceptual and affective change thus serves to re-orient the agent in moral space, a re-orientation that generates entirely new motivational impulses.

⁸³ Several feminist theologians have highlighted the gendered dynamics of self-sacrificial love. In a socio-political context in which women perform most of the domestic and care labor and are encouraged through socialization to give tirelessly of themselves to support others, self-sacrificial love turns vicious, tempting women toward the sin of self-negation. Similar concerns could be noted about the racial dynamics of this Christian virtue, especially when the norm of self-sacrifice is interpreted to mean that Black people should be quick to forgive white people for historic and enduring racial evils without conditions and without regard for questions of justice. I agree that any realistic account of Christian love must be attentive to these political dynamics. Below, I will argue that critical race theory and social psychology play a critical role in disciplining and refining Christian love to avoid these very problems. Furthermore, I would note that Christ's formulation of the love commandment entails a reflexive aspect; the Christian is to love her neighbor *as she loves herself*. As I understand it, this means that neighbor love does not exclude self-love but rather perfects it.

This brings us to one final point about the change of heart and mind. The fundamental conviction that takes hold of one in this event is that ultimate reality, God, is love. As I have noted, however, this claim seems rather implausible in a world filled with sin and all the death and deterioration it has wrought. Whatever reality love has in such a world, it hardly seems to be the ultimate one. But this is exactly what Schleiermacher tells us lies at the heart of the Christian proclamation. It is this truth that Jesus's life, death, and resurrection finally reveals. It is also this truth that God promises, in Christ and through the atmospherics of grace, to make real and powerful in history and to consummate at history's end. This means that the perceptual and affective transformation that takes place in the change of heart and mind serves to 1) re-orient one's life in such a radical way to warrant calling it a transition from death into life and 2) make truly loving, world-repairing conduct possible such that 3) love becomes an increasingly efficacious power in history and 4) the true character of reality becomes increasingly perceptible to oneself and to others as love.

These describe the ultimate orienting telos of Christian life, which as we have already seen, Schleiermacher depicts as the reign of God on earth. It is this reality that has been coming progressively into view in the stages of conversion. It first emerged in consciousness as the sense of contrition, the recognition in feeling that something is amiss and in need of redemption. It became even more clearly grasped in the change of heart and mind, where one apprehends the essential belovedness of human beings and the world before God. Such a renewed vision of oneself and the world is itself an appearance God's reign in human history.

But the reign of God is not simply a mode of apprehending reality; it is a *reality*, in fact, *the consummate reality* that God's creative, preserving, and redemptive activity ushers into human history. It is precisely this reality that draws agents' attention and interest to the effects of

sin which are on the verge of passing away. And it is precisely the triumph of this reality over sin and death that occasions what Christians call “the joy of the Lord,” an affective response to the divine activity that spontaneously bursts forth in loving conduct that repairs the world and expands the reign of God on earth.

§3.3 The Joy of the Lord and the Coming Reign of God on Earth

Schleiermacher tells us that the process of conversion completes itself in the emergence of faith. Faith is the conscious apprehension that Christ’s atmospherics of grace have taken a sufficiently firm hold within the soul to be considered one’s own. This means that one has come to perceive oneself and the world not only as objects of divine love but also as its subjects. The new religious personality received from Christ brings new motivational impulses that would have been unthinkable for the old self. Instead of an overwhelming desire for self-preservation on account of the self-focused activity of the flesh, the convert is filled with the desire to be increasingly formed in the likeness of Christ and to participate actively in the reign of God that Christ inaugurated. The loving conduct that flows forth from these new desires are the convert’s own actions; it is this person, and no one else, who performs them. But he or she is conscious of the source, power, and real-world consequences of this conduct as extensions of Christ’s efficacious activity coursing through them. He or she has become an organ of Christ’s spirit in the world.

This marks the final stage in the dramatic passage from death into life. From this vantage point, one looks back on one’s previous life, ruled as it was by the power of the flesh, and regards it as deficient. It is as if he or she had not really been living at all. While contrition and regret continue to mark the Christian self-consciousness to some degree, the prevailing affection

in this stage is joy. Like the regret of contrition, joy also appears in degrees. The new life is not simply and utterly rapturous. As Christ's own life shows, even an absolutely strong God-consciousness marked admits of unpleasant emotions like grief, anger, and sorrow. Jesus wept at the death of his friend.⁸⁴ He overturned the tables of those he perceived to be desecrating the Temple.⁸⁵ He asked God to relieve him of his earthly mission when it became undeniably clear where it was leading.⁸⁶ Christian joy, the joy of the Lord, is therefore a complex emotion, and I will attend to this complexity below. But at its center, this joy is a response to – or rather, an iteration of – Christ's atmospherics of grace that have permeated one's life to such a degree that the triumph over the power of the flesh is now both infused within oneself and gratefully received as one's own. This gift serves as the basis for all ensuing receptivity and activity vis-à-vis the world, coloring every affective and perceptual apprehension and augmenting every cognitive and volitional impulse for the rest of one's days. Everything one feels, experiences, and does from here forward bears the imprint of this joy of the Lord.

Perhaps it seems grotesque to speak of joy in a world so marred by racial violence and oppression. At the very least, we must admit that this strikes a discordant note in a work that has otherwise been so concerned to plumb the depths of racial evil. More worrisome is the very real danger, one to which Christian theologians have certainly contributed, of endorsing saccharine solutions to complex problems in ways that further mystify and exacerbate them. If my claims about joy are to avoid these pitfalls, I must show that the joy of the Lord in no way idealizes the political and psychological realities that actually characterize life in racialized societies like the

⁸⁴ John 11:35.

⁸⁵ Matthew 21:12-13; Luke 11:15-18.

⁸⁶ Luke 22:42.

United States. More than that, I must show that it is a realistic, world-affirming emotion that promises to edify the struggle for racial justice.

Earlier, I noted that one of the ways that moral regret for racial evil can and often does go wrong is its tendency toward self-obsession. The person concerned more with announcing his moral heroism than dismantling systemic racism performatively contradicts his own professed righteousness. But this condition also imbricates the man in a wider web of fault. His colleagues in the struggle find his pomposity to be offensive, and they feel their bonds of solidarity weakened by the self-aggrandizing atmosphere that swirls around him wherever he goes. In addition to these atmospheric effects, self-righteousness frequently inflects how and what one does. Such persons are frequently filled with a zeal that, on its own, is morally praiseworthy. It is a passion for justice, a love for a world finally set right. But the same disposition frequently threatens to corrupt these otherwise laudable efforts. So certain of the goodness of one's ends, all manner of evil seems justifiable or even necessary.

At one end of the spectrum, righteous zeal for racial justice can produce an inflexible commitment to ideological purity that threatens those who deviate from it with punishment and casts rather hasty judgments about which persons are in fact redeemable. This is evident in contemporary "cancel culture," where persons are publicly shamed and effectively excommunicated by a righteous vanguard, even for minor offenses. Such brittleness of character is neither a moral virtue, nor is it politically expedient for forming the kind of mass movements that require broad-based solidarity. In even more severe cases, such zeal can lead us to overlook, instrumentalize, and trample upon human beings created in the divine image and likeness – in some cases, even those whose liberation these movements hope to achieve.

On each of these levels, joy serves to counteract these moral and political deficiencies. As we saw from Schleiermacher's description, Christian joy is an ecstatic, other-regarding emotion. The joy of the Lord effectively deadens the self-focused activity of the flesh and re-orientes the individual's activity toward Christ and his coming reign. Neither its cause nor its object is internal to the self. It is brought about in the soul by Christ's atmospherics of grace, and that which it apprehends is the eschatological reality of a world governed by divine love, the reign of God on earth. It is thus a world-oriented and world-affirming emotion. Of course, the self who feels the joy of the Lord is part of that world that God so loves and, furthermore, is conscious of himself or herself as a beloved child of God. These aspects of joy thus serve as a buffer against the opposite problem of self-negation or self-hatred.

Second, joy is notoriously contagious. This is no less true for the self-righteousness emanating from the person in the earlier example, albeit to the opposite effect. Rather than frustrating one's colleagues and weakening solidarity, the joyful person exudes an atmosphere that buoys others and strengthens interpersonal bonds. To be sure, there are emotions that pass as joy that lack these qualities. We can easily imagine someone who seems to put on a joyous persona in order to avoid more painful, sorrowful realities. This is particularly threatening for groups committed to the struggle for racial justice, where this kind of false joy would likely communicate that someone either does not grasp the moral seriousness of situation or does so but chooses to avoid it through fantasy.

But this merely distinguishes a false from a true or realistic joy, and the joy of the Lord entails such realism. Its cause is Christ's overcoming of the power flesh and the appearance of the atmospherics of grace that made Christ's triumph one's own. These are certainly appropriate causes for joy! Furthermore, its object is the coming of God's reign on earth. This means that

Christian joy is world-oriented and is therefore responsive to real states of affairs. It therefore tracks the degree to which the reality of Christ's reign of love has come about in a given time and place. To the degree that some aspect of the world, whether an implicitly biased soul or a racist social structure undergirding an entire country, has yet to be transformed by the reign of God, the appropriate Christian response is not the pleasant emotion of joy but the painful feeling of sorrow. These instances express the distortion of a soul and the deterioration of a world that God created with an original perfection and that, as objects of divine love, are truly worthy of sorrow in their present state. To steel oneself against these feelings marks a sharp contrast with the person of Jesus who, no less than three times in the Gospel of Luke, is moved in his very bowels with compassion and grief.⁸⁷ The spirit of this Christ responds to the enduring effects of racism, not by projecting a false and obscene joy, but by joining its victims in mourning and lamentation.⁸⁸

With that said, this kind of sorrow, what Schleiermacher calls a "holy sadness"⁸⁹ still bears the imprint of joy because it emerges from the prior conviction that, in Christ, the power of sin and death have been overcome and that these present distortions and deteriorations will also be overcome in the fullness of time. This distinguishes Christian sorrow from other forms, such as the morose sorrow of cosmic resignation or the narcissistic sorrow of paralyzing guilt. But like all kinds of sorrow, Christian sorrow is unpleasant, and the disvalue it apprehends is a real disvalue.

⁸⁷ The verb *πλαγχίζομαι* signals a compassionate feeling that moves one's "inward parts" or *πλαγχνα*. See Luke 7:13, 10:33, and 15:20.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Emilie Townes's account of "communal lament" in Emilie Maureen Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African American Health Issues and a Womanist Ethic of Care* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 1–25.

⁸⁹ Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 119.

This leads to the third improvement joy makes to the problem of self-righteousness in the struggle for racial justice. As I noted, the self-righteous person has a noble passion for racial justice, but it becomes corrupt in ways that fail to respect the divine image and likeness in those deemed to be impediments to the struggle. Since the joy of the Lord is indexed to the degree to which God's reign of love has been achieved in a given situation, this emotion matches self-righteousness in terms of moral passion. But it marks a moral and religious enhancement because, unlike the self-righteous person, the person filled with the joy of the Lord apprehends that both the feeling of joy and the new reality of racial justice coming into existence are the consequence of God's activity, not one's own. In fact, the person gripped by the joy of the Lord bears a moral self-conception that not only permits, but entails, an awareness of the ways in which he or she has fallen short of righteousness. It is a joy of having been set free from that which one was utterly powerless to amend in oneself. This self-appraisal inhibits the grim and occasionally violent drive for moral purity, because the convert knows that he or she would not meet the mark themselves. Instead of shaming and canceling those deemed as enemies of justice, the joyous person is much slower to draw such lines, seeks opportunities to disclose how such recalcitrance to justice inhibits the higher life in those currently resisting it, and remains open in principle to the possibility that such persons are redeemable.

This is not to say that prudential considerations have no place in Christian responses to racism, nor do I mean to suggest that we should abandon the legislative pursuit of racial justice because some deem it to be coercive. The joyous person must remain attentive to the possibility that abiding with such hard-heartedness will result in further racialized harm. Since we live in a world of limited resources, even joyous persons must not spend all their time trying to coax avid racists into a new and more glorious life. Jesus himself counseled his disciples to shake the dust

of their feet when their missionary efforts ran up against entrenched resistance.⁹⁰ He also warned them not to toss pearls to swine⁹¹ and to be as wise as serpents.⁹² In each of these cases, prudential concerns and realism remain integral to the joy of the Lord. But the bright line that such joy recognizes as absolute is that human beings are God's beloved. As such, none are beyond the bounds of redemption and none should be treated merely as instruments toward establishing one's own vision for the world, no matter how righteous it seems. After all, it is God, and not us, who redeems it.

§3.4 Conclusion

In these ways, I contend that the joy of the Lord that Christians receive in faith can be realistic and that, when it is, it promises to enhance the moral lives of those engaged in the struggle for racial justice. This means that, in addition to the merely formal insights into the nature of moral agency described in §1.2, my reconstruction the Christian consciousness of grace provides substantive, normative insight into the virtues that augment struggle for racial justice. In particular, I have argued that it illumines 1) the moral ambiguities of regret for racial evils, 2) the responsibility enhancing potential of a distinctly Christian theological apprehension of the effects of racist sins, and 3) the significance of joy for repairing a racially disfigured cosmos. This demonstrates that Christian theological convictions can shed light on moral realities, in this case, moral virtues, that help us orient ourselves as agents in a racialized world.

As moral realities, these virtues (well-tempered moral regret, loving responsibility, and joy) are general features of human nature. Indeed, they identify certain excellences of human

⁹⁰ Matthew 10:14

⁹¹ Matthew 7:6

⁹² Matthew 10:16

nature. This means that they are character traits that all human being should strive to cultivate in themselves and in their communities. Stated differently, while the arguments in this section are drawn from distinctly Christian resources, the virtues they recommend are not exclusively Christian virtues. Well-tempered moral regret, loving responsibility, and realistic joy promise to fruitfully orient the lives of antiracist Christians and antiracist non-Christians alike. One need not apprehend these virtues as a sequence marking the passage from death into life for them to be virtuous.

This is not to say, however, that the distinctly Christian convictions are merely superfluous. On the contrary, I have been arguing that Christian theology helps us to articulate not only the moral realities at play in contemporary racism but also that reality which exceeds human capacities, including our most excellent ones. These virtues are ones to which we should aspire, but the stubborn truth to which we have returned again and again is that our moral aspirations face recalcitrant limits. We can enter interracial situations with every intention of acting in accordance with these virtues only to find ourselves reproducing the structural injustices we sought to dismantle. We can spend months and years organizing for racial justice only to watch as our communities and material conditions resist our good cause at every step, preventing these virtuous intentions from bearing fruit. These enduring truths about our nature – the fragmentary character of moral agency, the intractable limits on our moral aspirations, and the bleak uncertainty of moral and political transformation – present us with decidedly religious questions, and an adequate response to them requires that we venture decidedly theological claims. In this final section, I turn to these religious questions more directly and show how Christian theological convictions about the whence, whither, and fundamental constitution of existence help us respond to them.

§4 The Passage from Soul Death to Life with God

According to Schleiermacher, that which Christ's atmospherics of grace occasions in the soul includes a personal transformation with moral implications, but it is not simply this. These elements fail to explain the feeling of joy that henceforth serves as the ground tone of Christian existence. This joy is a response to the good news that soul death is not our destiny and that the death-dealing ways of this world will not have the final word. It is an affective registering of the truth that God is love, that the transcendent source, power, and end of everything that exists is, ultimately, love. All that presently stands in the shadow of death is being redeemed. All those who are presently estranged from that love are being reconciled to it. Our destiny is the reign of God on earth, a condition in which all of God's beloved rejoice in God's love and share it with one another as equals. The feeling of joy elicited by Christ's atmospherics of grace is thus not merely an individual feeling. It is rather the individual's way of participating in this new reality, this ultimately real and ultimately significant reality, that is making all things new. To feel this kind of joy is a sign that, even in some small and incomplete way, God has brought forth new life out of death.

This theological vision apprehends the ultimate scene and context within which the moral life takes place. To be sure, such a vision has moral implications. The person who is awakened to the truth that God is love, that all human beings are beloved of God, and that the world as a whole is being reconciled to God will also find themselves called to cultivate that love within themselves, to share it liberally with others, and to pour it back out into the world for the sake of repairing it. In these ways, we might speak of love in the moral philosophical terms of virtues, duties, and goods. But the distinctly religious character of this vision lies in the affirmation that these moral realities emerge in response to the theological reality of divine love, and this

response consists primarily in a set of transfigured perceptions and affections that Christians call the joy of the Lord. The entire drama of human life, including all of its moral and political aspects, transpires before God. And it is within the horizon characterized by God's creative and redemptive activity, i.e., God's love, that we find resources for responding to the enduring religious questions at play in racism's tenacity.

Consider first the question about the seeming impossibility of moral and political transformation. The theological diagnosis of the dark atmospherics of race in terms of sin emphasized the utterly pervasive and insidious recalcitrance of antiblackness in the contemporary United States. Even those fortunate ones who become aware of just how severe this problem is are not, simply by virtue of that knowledge, able to dismantle it. This realism about our plight raised the specter of cosmic despair, and it seemed that any attempt to abate that despair could only come by means of idealizing our capacities or our situation.

But the theological conviction that God is actively redeeming and reconciling the world provides grounds for hope even as we remain realistic about the limitations and corruptions that plague our racialized world. After all, it is a conviction about our destiny. The truth of our present fragmentation and cosmic deterioration is entirely consonant with the truth that wholeness and restoration lie in our future. The power that brings about such wholeness and restoration belongs to God who, as theological reality, is not subject to the limitations of our present condition. Rather, as Schleiermacher puts it, God summons agents to a higher life, a life that outstrips our existing limits and that constitutes our destiny. Moreover, in Christ, God incarnates a religious power with historical efficacy that transforms persons and the world in ways that transcend and augment their present state. Stated differently, the reality of God ensures that the enduring political and moral realities that characterize human existence do not exhaust

the possibilities for human existence. We are being redeemed, and this means that moral and political transformation are always possible. Indeed, they are our destiny.

This brings us to the second religious question which regards the meaning of the recalcitrant limits on human moral aspirations. While the reality and power of God guarantees the possibility of moral and political transformation, the actualization of this possibility depends finally on God, not just us. Human beings cannot simply will ourselves into morally righteous creatures. We have returned to this tragic truth in countless ways in this inquiry into racism's tenacity. Good faith, well-intentioned agents run into a veritable barrage of obstacles that prevent them from achieving racial justice and establishing God's reign of love on earth. The cosmological effects of sin do not disappear overnight, the racialized patterns of relating to each other remain firmly embedded, and even our own perceptual and affective responses to one another bear persistent marks of racialization. We can enter situations with every intention of resisting white supremacy only to find ourselves unconsciously and unintentionally reinforcing it. Whether through political organizing, moral exhortation, education, or implicit bias trainings, none of our racial justice efforts have fully succeeded. Each has met resistance, and each has confronted intransigent limits.

Theologically understood, these limits are marks of creaturely finitude. God is God, and we are not. Our understanding of problems like racism is unavoidably perspectival, our motives for responding to it are unescapably mixed, our strategies for dismantling it are inevitably myopic, and even our vision of a world finally set to rights is sure to be tainted by personal interest and bias. This spiritual insight about our moral limits has important political implications. It means that we must take care to place our hope for God's reign on earth in the activity of God and not, therefore, in any particular political figure or movement alone. Such

movements always stand under the judgment of God, and any claims they make to establishing perfect peace and justice should be relentlessly scrutinized.

At the same time, this insight suggests that we cannot avoid immersing ourselves in the chaotic fray of political movements. After all, God's redemptive and reconciling love works precisely by summoning finite human beings to transcend their present limits. It is within this political arena, fraught as it is with mixed motives and morally ambiguous methods, that God calls human beings, individually and collectively, to loving responsibility and repair of the world. So conceived, politics is a space defined by certain theological limits. But within these limits, it denotes a moral space within which humans are set free to respond to the divine summons.

This also means, however, that each of our responses to God, whether individually or collectively, is certain to fall short of fulfilling the divine summons. We are finite creatures, and the business of loving our neighbors and repairing the world are essentially infinite demands.⁹³ There will always be more to do; in fact, there will always be more to do than we can do. This confronts us with a second kind of despair, one in which the infinitude of the demand overwhelms the finitude of the possible response.

But at this juncture as well, the theological conviction that God is love offers a way to understand this problem. Viewed from this theological perspective, the infinite task of redeeming and reconciling the world belongs to God alone. This reveals that our finite limits constitute a kind of grace, one that sets us free from a moral burden we cannot bear. It also clarifies the appropriate object of moral and religious concern. Once we are freed *from* responsibility for

⁹³ For a philosophical account of this notion, see Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (New York: Verso, 2008). Paul Ricoeur also describes this tension between the infinitude of a divine demand and the necessarily finite character of particular commandments as a central feature of the phenomenon of biblical prophecy. See Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 54–62.

redeeming ourselves and reconciling all of the injustices of the world, we are freed *for* responsibly loving our neighbors and pouring ourselves into the loving repair of the world where we can. Even our success in achieving these more localized goals will be mixed. But to have faith that God is actively redeeming and reconciling the world means that we are but participants in a much larger, inter-generational process of healing and restoration. Where we fall short, God will summon others to perfect and redeem our morally ambiguous labors.

We can understand this concretely if we consider a second theological vocation for the disciplines of critical race theory and social psychology. I already assigned them one such vocation in the previous chapter, where I argued that we can understand them to disclose the knowledge of the law to us. In this way, they reveal our true condition before God. But we might also think of these bodies of knowledge as contributing to the critical refinement of Christian love. This is an important function because, as countless historical examples demonstrate, Christian love is vulnerable to corruption, and this is especially true in the context of racism.

For one, those institutions primarily responsible for global white supremacy, namely, European colonialism and chattel slavery, were not only created by nominal Christians, but these institutions were also frequently elevated as paradigmatic examples of Christian love. Alternatively, Christian love can collapse easily into sentimentality that evades the harsh realities of racist sin and the demands of justice in favor of feel-good affirmations of racial unity and reconciliation. The Christian tradition certainly has internal resources to criticize these misdirected loves. But critical race theory offers a richly textured map of historic and enduring racial injustices, and this can facilitate finely tuned strategic insights for those political efforts that seek to lovingly repair such injustices. These theorists also have insights into the constitution of society and the dynamics of social change that could increase Christian practical wisdom and

more prudently calibrate the efforts of those seeking to maximize the concrete impact of loving responsibility and repair. Social psychologists possess similar strategic and practical insights. Their findings about the insidious nature of racial bias prompts us to seek out new ways to limit their nefarious effects. This might include anonymized procedures in student evaluations and hiring processes, for example. Furthermore, the early research on implicit bias intervention procedures might illumine ways for us to more easily identify and retrain our implicit cognitions. In both cases, the religious task of loving the world that God so loves is enhanced by heeding the critiques and the practical insights of these two disciplines. They could be understood theologically as spiritual disciplines that enhance the effectiveness of Christian love and preserve its integrity.

Let us pause to note the full significance of this claim. Throughout this inquiry, we have asked whether it remains possible to meaningfully orient ourselves as moral agents in racialized societies given the vast impersonal forces that reproduce racial disparities outside of conscious awareness and in spite of our intentions. At first, we turned to critical race theory and social psychology to illumine and articulate those impersonal forces. Next, we turned to these same disciplines to disclose the true condition of racialized agents before God to be one of soul death. But now, I am proposing that they provide strategic and practical wisdom, in short, action guidance, to moral agents who have been set free to order their actions in response to such guidance. In other words, the very forces that continue to bind agents and incline them to perpetuate antiblack racism become, when viewed from the consciousness of grace, that which they seek to repair. As Schleiermacher put it, the remaining effects of sin lose their character as fetters that continually bind us and become instead signals or indicators calling forth for reparative action.

This marks the second time that the notion of freedom has emerged in this discussion. First, I claimed that within theological limits, politics denotes a moral space of human freedom to creatively transcend and enhance present conditions. Second, I claimed that critical race theory and social psychology can provide action guidance that can orient and improve the conduct of moral agents who have been set free from that which binds them. Perceptive readers might be left wondering how, after all of this talk of racism's tenacity and the insidious recalcitrance of sin, we suddenly find such abundant appeals to moral freedom as we near the work's conclusion. Even if I have taken care to insist that such freedom remains confined to certain limits, the invocation of such a theologically and ethically fraught term deserves some explication.

This leads us to the third religious question regarding the meaning of our manifestly fragmentary nature as moral agents. Earlier,⁹⁴ I argued that agents are always already affected by atmospheric forces that intervene in the exercise of their agency. This is a basic structure of lived reality, and it means that our conduct is never simply our own. We seem to be creatures who are particularly vulnerable to such influence, ranging from the merely seductive to the violent and the coercive. And yet, I argued that the actions we commit under such influence remain meaningful our own because, while these influences certainly constrain and inflect our choices, they do not properly cause us to act. We remain agents who author our own actions. We choose what to do, even if we do not know all that informs what we do or all that will follow from it.

This means that our action is shot through with alterity. This is a pressing moral problem because, as the research on implicit racial bias demonstrates, some of those foreign influences that intervene in our conduct are ones that we judge to be evil and would be horrified to discover

⁹⁴ See my discussion in Chapter 4.1.2.

that they are coursing through our conduct. But this is also a pressing religious problem because it raises questions about the limits of human knowledge and power. We do not choose to be exposed to these influences. To live in racialized societies like the United States means that we cannot avoid being exposed to them. And their grip on us seems to be such that we cannot directly control their effects on us or our actions. Can we say that such agents are moral agents, agents with sufficient freedom to author their own actions? Can we say this of an agent who might join with the Apostle Paul in exclaiming that, “I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members?”⁹⁵

Over the past two chapters, I have argued that Christian theological resources provide a way to be utterly clear-eyed about our predicament amidst tenacious evil and yet retain a meaningful sense of agency, one that allows creatures like us in a predicament like ours to meaningfully orient our life and conduct. But this freedom to orient our lives is decidedly not a freedom to simply choose not to sin. It is not a freedom to choose to be born in some other society, or in some other time and place. It is not a freedom that can be attained through rigorous learning, whether intellectual instruction or habitual training. Sin is a condition we inherit from our biological parents and from our wider socio-historical environment, and its power over us twists our immediate affective and perceptual apprehension of the world and our place within it in ways that generate actual sins. These actual sins go on to contribute to the deterioration of the world, shaping it to fit the mold of our shared, sinful misperceptions. Others are shaped by this misshapen world, who further misshape it, and so on. No one is given the choice to simply avoid this reflexive dynamic. To varying degrees, it holds us all within its grip.

⁹⁵ Romans 7:22

Within this condition, we certainly make choices. But the capacity to critically evaluate these choices is constrained by sin such that we cannot even recognize the error of our ways, let alone change them. This is precisely why my claim that the conscience emerges from a dialogical encounter with God is so significant. The freedom to meaningfully orient our lives only emerges as an effect of this immediate existential relationship to the divine, the transcendent source and power of all that exists. In the conscience, God summons us out from the obliviousness of sin to see, for the first, how we stand before God. This discloses a deadness of the soul, to be sure. It reveals our condition to be one in which we know what is good and yet find ourselves incapable of doing it. But this disclosure is itself a function of a more basic liveliness to God, a responsiveness to the divine activity that is inextinguishable because it belongs to God, ultimate reality.⁹⁶ This liveliness makes us susceptible to reality's influence at a deeper register, and that influence attunes us to an order of value that the atmospherics of sin and death have rendered nearly, but never entirely, imperceptible. This attunement marks the birth of freedom. Even before one is able to respond to the divine summons with *bona fide* acts, the critical space between "is" and "ought" has opened within the depths of feeling.⁹⁷

The freedom to act in accord with this summons, however, requires even more. An agent must not only be summoned, but empowered, to do the good he or she desires to do. One must be swept up in a religious power, one that courses through the embodied *frisson* of communal life, that further stimulates, refines, and cultivates this liveliness to God. In this Christian theological account, that religious power is Christ's atmospherics of grace. It occasions a mystical union

⁹⁶ This part of my argument owes to Sabine Schmidtke's interpretation of Schleiermacher's notion of "lively receptivity" as a form of freedom. See Schmidtke, *Schleiermachers Lehre von Wiedergeburt und Heiligung*, 132–52.

⁹⁷ For a lucid reconstruction of Schleiermacher's understanding of the is/ought distinction set in contrast to the positions of Hume and Kant, see Eilert Herms, "Sein und Sollen bei Hume, Kant, und Schleiermacher," in *Menschsein im Werden: Studien zu Schleiermacher* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 298–319.

between the agent and Christ himself such that one gradually comes to perceive and affectively respond to the deepest vein of reality in the manner of Christ. These transfigured perceptions and affections infuse the soul with life and impart to it fresh motivational impulses that had previously been lacking. These impulses incline the agent to act in ways that accord with the moral order of creation that now appears radiant and palpable. In effect, one begins to feel, know, and act with Christ, or to invoke Paul's favored preposition, *in Christ*.

On this view, in short, moral integrity is not so much achieved as received; it is a gift given by God in creation and perfected within us through the mystical union with Christ in redemption. In both its inception and perfection, moral integrity is an effect of foreign, atmospheric influences on the agent. Whether the divine atmospherics at work in all of creation or the distinctly Christian atmospherics of grace, some intervening power is required to call and empower agents into moral liveliness. This means that moral freedom, the freedom to meaningfully orient ourselves as agents, appears not in the heroic resolution to be a self apart from the crowd, or in the inexplicable decision to abjure all sensory inclinations, or even in the lifelong formation within a community of character. Rather, it appears in the agent's affective turn to embrace life with God, a turn that is itself made possible by the liveliness that God has already stirred within one and promises to complete. Moral freedom just is this life with God.

This has two crucial implications for understanding the meaning of our fragmentary character as agents. First, the human susceptibility to foreign influence that makes us so vulnerable to disintegration on account of the atmospherics of race also makes us vulnerable to the grace that transforms us.⁹⁸ Were we more impermeable creatures, we would be more truly and irredeemably dead to this life with God that is our destiny. This means that the condition of

⁹⁸ See Culp, *Vulnerability and Glory*.

permeability to external powers is thus not necessarily an impediment to moral freedom. Indeed, our freedom depends upon our having been influenced by the alien power of God in Christ.

Second, this insight about the meaning of our fragmentary nature requires that we appeal to convictions regarding that which exceeds and envelops our nature. The very recognition of our fragmentariness is a tacit acknowledgement that there are forces beyond ourselves that act upon and through us. The question, then, is how we should understand the character of these influences. As we have seen, many of them are foreign influences that we judge to be evil and religiously deleterious. But the Christian conviction that God is love allows one to acknowledge the pervasive and insidious powers that threaten to disintegrate us precisely because we have already been gripped by that love in light of which such disintegration is even perceptible at all. As Schleiermacher has taught us, sin is known only in its overcoming. To apprehend the tenacity of racism as sin is also to apprehend that we are being lovingly called into moral freedom to be responsible and to lovingly repair its enduring effects.

We might put the point more sharply. The consciousness that God is lovingly summoning and empowering us to responsibility and to repair of a racialized world is not simply the recognition that God is love, or even that God loves the world. It is the more intimate and spiritually potent acknowledgement that God loves *the morally disintegrated, religiously unresponsive person that one actually is*. This means that there is absolutely nothing at all – no degree of fragmentariness, no degree of cosmic deterioration – that suffices to separate human beings from the love of God. It is a gratuitous love, offered not in response to virtue or piety but rather in spite of their conspicuous absence. This means, furthermore, that participation in God's reign of love requires nothing more than an embrace of the divine liveliness that is already

coursing through oneself and drawing one out into the world to share this love with others. Such participation is the means by which moral integrity is achieved and one's joy is perfected.

This reign of God on earth that Christ inaugurated and promises to consummate is indeed that for which the Christian hopes. It constitutes our destiny, that reality in which all of God's beloved rejoice in God's love and share it with one another as equals. But it is also this reality which the dark atmospherics of race, conceived as an apocalyptic power of sin, actively obstructs. The death-dealing nature of racism is, to be sure, most acute for those victims of antiblack violence, oppression, and discrimination. But I have sought to show that racism's shadow of death hangs over a much wider circle of American society, afflicting even those racially privileged ones who seem to be the beneficiaries of what W.E.B. Du Bois called the "wages of whiteness."⁹⁹ Along with these material, psychic, social, and political benefits comes an anxious, despondent, and recalcitrant joylessness that Christians call the wages of sin and death. This joylessness funds all manner of evasive maneuvers: selective narrations of American history, self-justifying ideologies of hard work and rugged individualism, and retreats into privileged enclaves where the pangs of conscience are muffled by indulgence, consumption, and segregation. On an ethical register, these each constitute vicious evasions of moral responsibility. But from this theological perspective, a further, tragic quality comes into view. This reveals that such maneuvers are also evasions of love, indeed, evasions of God's love.¹⁰⁰ They retard the formation of those bonds of love amongst God's equally beloved children that mark our common destiny. This, in turn, diminishes the abundance of our collective life as well as the joy that such

⁹⁹ For Du Bois's discussion of this topic, see W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thomson, 1976), 700–701.

¹⁰⁰ For a deeply moving reflection on this theme, see Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of King Lear," in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Updated Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 267–353.

abundance elicits. Even more tragic is the fact that these evasions have become so thoroughly embedded in our souls that we frequently turn away from that which has the power to save us from this fate without even knowing it.

The good news is that this tragic fate is not our destiny. The forces of white supremacy have, despite their best efforts, routinely run up against the recalcitrant reality of Black dignity and belovedness. The seduction of whiteness has not utterly numbed the consciences of the racially privileged. The histories of antiblack oppression and the unconscious biases lurking in our psyches have not remained entirely hidden from view. The possibility of a more racially just social order has not proven to be entirely utopian. In short, both the reality and the promise of God's reign of love on earth have proven as enduring as those apocalyptic forces that seek to destroy it. And the conviction that life with this God of love is not only our destiny but also our ever-present possibility in the midst of those forces gives us reason to hope.

§5 Conclusion

In sum, this theological prognosis for racism's tenacity complements the theological diagnosis undertaken in the previous one. Together, they show that it is possible to meaningfully orient our lives as moral agents in racialized societies without resorting to an idealized picture of our capacities as agents or the environmental constraints that incline us to reproduce racial disparities. By contrast, if we construe the moral life as taking place within a theological horizon characterized by God's redemptive and reconciling love, we can be utterly realistic about the fragmentary quality of moral agency, the recalcitrant limits on our moral aspirations, and vast headwinds to moral and political transformation without falling into despair. For the theological conviction that God is love offers grounds to hope that our present fragmentariness is no obstacle

to our participation in God's reign of love, that such participation promises to draw us into moral integrity through responsible and reparative action in the world, and that the manifold obstacles to racial justice and the beloved community are not our destiny.

This concludes the theologically realistic account of racism's tenacity in Part III and, with that, the argument as whole. This final part demonstrated that theological symbols like sin, death, grace, and redemption help to illumine questions about our nature as agents that remain merely implicit in critical race theory, social psychology, and moral philosophy. These questions were distinctly religious because they regard the limits of human knowledge and power, and as such, they invite us to investigate that reality to which these limits open. While I have not argued that Christian symbols, narratives, and convictions provide the only theological resources capable of providing adequate responses to these religious questions, I have shown that they can provide one such adequate response. Furthermore, the account developed here is realistic because the distinctly theological claims about ultimate reality accommodate the political and moral realities described in Parts I and II without idealizing them. This means that the atmospheric dynamics of sin and grace described in Part III can be understood as durable features of human life before God that deepen our understanding of moral agency in the context of contemporary racism in the United States.

CONCLUSION

These seven chapters have fashioned a theological account of the tenacity of antiblack American racism and its meaning for moral agency. Admittedly, it is a bleak diagnosis. The forces that keep white supremacy so firmly in place are embedded not only in personal prejudices and our social and material environments. They appear also in the embodied psychological processes that shape how we evaluatively perceive one another and even how we engage in moral deliberation about race-salient situations. This complicates the moral life because it means that even those who earnestly desire racial justice, in fact, even those with a material interest in subverting white supremacy, have already been affected by these forces. And to be so affected by them also means to have, at least to some degree, internalized and reproduced their insidious effects. This means that even good and strong-willed agents routinely find themselves contributing to the evils of racism that they judge to be morally detestable. Though they know what is good and desire to do it, as Paul reminds us, evil lies close at hand.

These affective patterns, what I have named the dark atmospherics of race, circulate through racialized societies and emerge in concrete social situations – even the most quotidian and apparently benign ones – so as to make the distinction between white moral persons and nonwhite moral sub-persons immediately palpable and salient. Though these forces never exhaustively determine our conduct, neither are we entirely free to choose whether or how we will be affected by them. We cannot help but perceive one another as racialized beings, and, it seems, we often cannot help but link those racialized perceptions to a racial hierarchy of value. Our moral lives are bound and permeated by these racial atmospherics. Their influence upon us as agents is evident in nearly every sphere of American life. And while we do well to understand

this influence in sociological and psychological terms, neither grasps the full extent of the ethical and religious disfigurement wrought on those living in the afterlives of America's founding moral horrors. For that, I have argued, we need theology. For that, we must speak in terms of religious, apocalyptic powers and the soul death they effect.

This diagnosis has shown that Christian theological and ethical reflection can contribute substantively to contemporary scholarship on racism and moral agency. I demonstrated this contribution at two levels. First, this account not only accommodates the genuine insights into racism's tenacity from critical race theory and social psychology but also integrates these within a more comprehensive picture of the dark atmospherics of race. It thus satisfies the procedural criterion of hermeneutical realism, which holds that a position exhibits more truth than others just insofar as it can respond more coherently to a wider array of questions about a given subject matter than those other positions can. Second, this theological diagnosis also provided deeper insight than existing accounts into the nature of moral agency in a racialized world. Without neglecting the political realities of interest and dominating power, it disclosed that there are moral and theological realities at play in American racism that must be considered as well. It thus satisfies the heuristic criterion of hermeneutical realism, which holds that a position is truer than others to the degree that it illumines and convincingly responds to questions that remain merely implicit in those other positions and that exceed those positions' diagnostic and explanatory resources.

Consider first these descriptive insights. The theory of racial atmospherics developed here is, to my knowledge, the first attempt to integrate critical theories of race with research on the phenomenology of atmospheres. This draws attention to a dimension of racialized life that lies in between its social-structural and embodied-psychological dimensions and, for that reason,

is frequently overlooked in the existing scholarship. Along with this phenomenological upshot, the concept of atmosphere provides theoretical connective tissue that helps to explain how these two prominent levels of antiblack racism relate and exhibit such close coordination. The telescopic quality of atmospheres, moreover, facilitates more nimble thinking about racial dynamics at a variety of scales. Whereas existing concepts like “social structures” and “implicit attitudes” are each strongly indexed to a particular domain of racialized life, atmospheres are indexed to situations and are thus inclusive of racism’s sub-personal, personal, interpersonal, cultural, and political aspects. In each case, this theory of racial atmospherics foregrounds affectivity as the site at which systems of dominating power interface with and move embodied agents. This marks an improvement upon existing social theories that appeal to constructions like ideologies or discursive regimes that are, if not motivationally inert, at least motivationally suspect. In short, the account developed here contributes to our understanding of the impersonal forces that bear down on agents in racialized societies and that make white supremacy so difficult to dismantle.

Along with these impersonal dynamics, this theory of racial atmospherics also better accommodates the reality of *bona fide* moral agents in the context of American racism than other accounts do. Of course, both critical race theorists and social psychologists betray a confidence that the individuals who perpetuate racial evils have some capacity to act in response to reasons. Otherwise, their prescriptions for dismantling white supremacy and retraining our implicit associations would have no one to heed them. But their concern to grasp the reiterative patterns involved in systemic racism means that they rarely theorize this capacity, and the theories they

favor frequently leave little room for it.¹ This tendency risks depicting human beings as mere functionaries of larger systems or as amalgamations of psychological mechanisms. Many moral philosophers, by contrast, emphasize our responsiveness to reasons to such an extent that they neglect those social forces responsible for producing such insidious regularities in our conduct.

By thinking atmospherically about agency and social evils like racism, we come to a more realistic understanding of each. Moral agents are always already affected by atmospheric powers that intervene in the free exercise of their agency. This helps to explain how racially discriminatory outcomes can persist even when agents do not intend them. But these interventions never utterly determine our conduct because, in every possible context, it remains at least conceivable that a moral impulse could be summoned to subordinate the atmospheric influences that we judge to be evil or imprudent. This means, further, that it makes sense to speak of agents in such a condition as responsible for perpetuating social evils like racism – and, by extension, as responsible for repairing the harms caused by such evils – even when the harm caused on account of their choices was unintended.

This has important implications for future research in moral philosophy and ethics. It has shown that moral philosophers and social theorists can, and perhaps must, work hand in hand to understand the complexities of human action, whether individually or collectively. Agents are always embedded in social and political environments, and their positions within these settings afford them different opportunities for action. But this embeddedness runs even deeper yet. Social structures and dynamics permeate the inner lives of agents and affect they feel, perceive, and deliberate about concrete situations. This means that the very stuff of moral philosophy,

¹ On this score, Mustafa Emirbayer and Matthew Desmond's theory of the racial order stands out as a compelling exception. See Emirbayer and Desmond, *The Racial Order*, 130–83.

those inner states that ground intentional acts, is itself involved in a wider social *milieu*, which is itself involved in even larger historical and cultural dynamics. The genius of Schleiermacher's mature philosophical ethics lies, in large part, in his determination to embed a psychologically realistic account of moral agency within an expansive theory of culture. For reasons I have already articulated, future research in this area will need to press beyond Schleiermacher. But this project shows the fecundity of such thinking across moral philosophy and social theory.

Within the ethics of race in particular, this project also presses in new directions. In recent decades, ethicists interested in race have largely focused on questions of distributive and reparative justice. This is reasonable and prudent. Racial inequalities in wealth and access to social goods profoundly unfair, and there are widespread misunderstandings in the United States about both the extent and the moral significance of these disparities. But these are not the only ethically significant questions to ask about racism.² The recent surge in empirical research on implicit bias has elicited promising interest among some ethicists working on the nature of moral motivation, aretaic appraisals, and responsibility.³ Others have drawn on this research to expand existing debates about racial justice to include questions about "epistemic injustice."⁴ The present study marks a further contribution in this direction, and the theory of racial atmospherics it develops a novel way of understanding how entangled questions about systemic inequality are with questions about the nature of moral agency.

If one of this dissertation's central moves was to theorize the significance of social dynamics for individual agents, its second move was to show that the questions about moral agency that emerge therefrom bear a distinctly religious valence. They invite us to contemplate

² Susannah Heschel makes this point in Heschel, "The Slippery yet Tenacious Nature of Racism," 3.

³ Kriegel, "Moral Motivation, Moral Phenomenology, And The Alief/Belief Distinction"; Brownstein, "Attributionism and Moral Responsibility for Implicit Bias"; Brownstein, *The Implicit Mind*.

⁴ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

the limits of human being and power and to ask what, if anything, transcends them. I have argued, in fact, that questions about the apparently fragmentary character of moral agency, the limits of our moral aspirations, and the possibility of hope for moral and political transformation require that we make claims about nothing less than the whence, whither, and fundamental constitution of existence. They require, in other words, theological reflection.

This drew us beyond Schleiermacher's writings on philosophical ethics into his explicitly religious and dogmatic works. There, we found a set of Christian symbolic resources with which to engage such questions. To interpret the dark atmospherics of race as an apocalyptic power of sin, for example, reveals the condition of agents caught within its multi-dimensional grip to be, not merely that of moral weakness but of moral death. It occasions an enduring, entrenched obduracy to the value of Black people as moral persons that renders agents largely unresponsive to therapeutic interventions. This formulation grasps the depth of the problem suggested in studies of implicit bias. Even good and strong-willed agents find themselves perpetuating the racist evils they abhor. Even knowing that this is our condition, while it marks an improvement over utter obliviousness, does not ensure that our conduct will meaningfully change.

This diagnosis deepens our understanding of the concrete threats to moral agency. It suggests that the dark atmospherics of race not only enervate us as moral beings but that they also diminish us as religious creatures. The death of the soul they occasion obfuscates the face of God in the human face of color and in the face of Black people in particular. This condition is thus one of profound alienation. Those caught within it are separated not only from one another but also from God, the source of life and goodness.

But to posit powers that separate us from God is also to invoke a theological horizon for human life, one that sets us in relation to the transcendent source and power of all that is. This

has two crucial implications for thinking about moral agency amidst systemic racism. First, it means that the consciousness of racism as sin and our condition as one of soul death is itself a consequence of God's activity in the conscience. The mere awareness that our present condition is deficient implies that we are already at least somewhat aware of a better, more integrated life to which we are being summoned. Once we identify God as the source of this awareness, our status as moral agents who heed and respond to the call of conscience is not finally dependent on any anthropological feature or any empirical condition. It is rather conferred on each of us in every moment of our existence and in every conceivable condition by God who offers it to us as a gift.

The second implication owes to Schleiermacher's insight that sin is only recognized in its overcoming. The disclosure of our condition as one of death is but the first step in the emergence of a new creation, a more integrated agent whose destiny lies not in death but in joyous life with God. This means that there is a second religious power on the scene that not only reveals the deleterious effects of sin but also heals, redeems, and reconciles them to God. From this distinctly Christian consciousness of grace, the fragmentary quality of moral agency does not finally inhibit us from engaging in acts of loving responsibility and repair and our enduring limitations as agents do not prohibit us from participating in God's coming reign of love on earth. Indeed, the consciousness of racist sin as sin is itself evidence that the process of redemption has begun to take hold within us in spite of ourselves. The moral and religious life emerges in response to this appearance of divine love.

In short, the theological account of racism's tenacity and its meaning for moral agency shows that we can be utterly realistic about that which threatens the moral life amidst systemic racial evil without falling into despair. Such an account requires that we venture to think

theologically about human life and the basic structures of lived reality that elude strictly political and moral philosophical analyses. This is undoubtedly a venture, since claims about the nature of ultimate reality have an inherently speculative quality. They are convictions of faith and not sight, science, or empirical verification. But if, as I have argued, close attention to those more concrete realities that bear upon human life in contexts like American racism reveals questions about the limits of human being and power, then such speculation is unavoidable. Or more precisely, it is unavoidable if we hope to render these questions articulate such that our response to them might be intelligent and coherent. Moreover, by proceeding hermeneutically and establishing a set of politically and morally realistic constraints, I have shown that theological reflection can be resolutely tethered to reality. When this happens, theology's power to illumine the texture and orient the conduct of real human lives is unleashed.

This kind of hermeneutical engagement between theology and other disciplines also serves to enhance Christian theology itself. In particular, I noted two ways that critical race theory and social psychology contribute to Christian self-understanding. First, they provide knowledge of the law insofar as they help to disclose our true condition as agents in racialized societies to be one of soul death. Second, they provide strategic and practical wisdom for guiding Christian efforts at responsibility for racial injustice and loving repair of the racialized world. This means that Christians have internal, theological reasons to engage these non-theological disciplines. Moreover, my formulations of apocalyptic soul death and Christ's atmospherics of grace suggest that such engagement can be theologically generative.

This brings us finally to Schleiermacher. Though his work serves this dissertation more as a resource and provocation for thinking than as its object of inquiry, the preceding chapters have made certain contributions to Schleiermacher studies that are worth noting. For one, I have

emphasized Schleiermacher's value as a theorist of affectivity and, in particular, its supra-personal dimensions. This follows a prominent trend in anglophone Schleiermacher scholarship that challenges widespread misperceptions of him as solely interested in the subjective, inarticulate depths of human experience.⁵ Indeed, my reconstruction of his ethical writings in terms of the relation between affectivity and sociality indicates that he held a much more supple and expansive view of the nature of feeling.

Though present in even his earliest ethical treatise, Schleiermacher's provocative view that affectivity entails a social life and that human sociality entails an affective life blossoms in his mature philosophical ethics, where he gestures toward an affective dimension of cultural dynamics. I noted that this bears important similarities with recent developments in affect theory and that these make him useful for thinking about the human vulnerability to socio-political, not to mention religious, influences. But by emphasizing the continuity between these works and his early engagement with Kant over questions about moral psychology, I showed that Schleiermacher exhibits an enduring commitment to psychological realism as well as the metaphysical irreducibility of individual persons.⁶ Historically speaking, this reveals Schleiermacher to be a critical inheritor of both Kantian and Spinozist insights, and his intellectual debts to these thinkers fund a suggestive, if never fully developed, alternative to Hegel's ethics of *Sittlichkeit*. With respect to more contemporary debates about emotion and affect, Schleiermacher's thinking foreshadows recent anglophone philosophical views of

⁵ This reductive view of Schleiermacher owes to well-known studies by Wayne Proudfoot and George Lindbeck. See Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*; Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. It is worth noting that Proudfoot came to qualify some of his positions. See Proudfoot, "Immediacy and Intentionality."

⁶ For historical accounts that emphasize his Kantian and Spinozist tendencies respectively, see Mariña, *Transformation of the Self*; Lamm, *The Living God*.

emotion as evaluative, world-directed states as well as those from affect theorists and phenomenologists that caution against such an individualistic framework.

Whether this eclecticism is a sign of Schleiermacher's conceptual ambiguity or of his genuinely original and capacious vision of ethical life will continue to be a matter of debate. Though his own conceptual repertoire is, in my estimation, insufficient to grasp the social-affective life of contemporary racism, his notion that our affections are actually modes of involvement with that which exceeds and envelops us – and thus not simply mental states or bodily responses – finds a more conceptually precise formulation in the phenomenology of atmospheres. To my knowledge, this is the first attempt to think with and beyond Schleiermacher in this direction, and it holds promise for future work in both religious studies and Christian theology. For religious studies, the concept of atmospheres might encourage and facilitate more studies that integrate phenomenological description and theoretical explanation.⁷ Indeed, such work has already begun,⁸ and recent proposals in anglophone philosophy of religion have urged renewed interest in the phenomenology of religious life.⁹ For Christian theologians, the concept of atmospheres could provide more nimble ways to understand the dynamics of passivity and activity in the encounter between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit¹⁰ as well as the place of human experience in theological epistemology.¹¹ On both fronts, further engagement with the

⁷ The classic formulation of this distinction can be found in Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*.

⁸ Friedlind Riedel, "Music as atmosphere. Lines of becoming in congregational worship," *Lebenswelt. Aesthetics and philosophy of experience.*, no. 6 (June 30, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.13130/2240-9599/4913>.

⁹ Wynn, *Renewing the Senses*.

¹⁰ Though he does not show direct interest in affectivity or atmospheres *per se*, Günter Thomas's work on the phenomenon of attention offers one compelling response to these long-standing concerns in Christian pneumatology. Günter Thomas, "Der Geist Als Macht Der Aufmerksamkeit," in *Gottes Geist Und Menschlicher Geist*, ed. Gregor Etzelmüller and Heike Springhart (Leipzig, Germany: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), 117–30; Günter Thomas, "Umkämpfte Aufmerksamkeit: Medienethische Erwägungen zu einer knappen kulturellen Ressource," *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 47, no. 2 (April 2003): 89–104.

¹¹ Simeon Zahl is among the most prominent Christian theologians to engage substantively with affective neuroscience, philosophy of emotion, and affect theory. To my knowledge, though, he does not draw upon the concept of atmospheres. Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (New York: Oxford University

phenomenology of atmospheres could clarify and vivify Schleiermacherian insights about the nature of religion and the aims of theology.

This brings me to my final point. This work offers one way to think with Schleiermacher about human life before God that presses beyond his own dogmatic formulations as well as his carefully delimited views about the aims of theology itself. My hope is that this encourages more constructive theological engagements with Schleiermacher's work, both his ethical and theological writings.¹² It also shows that new insights into very contemporary moral and political problems can be gleaned by engaging thinkers who lived in vastly different social and historical contexts. This is true even when a thinker's social and historical situatedness places them on the wrong side of these moral and political issues. The ethical questions we face at this moment are too complex, and the problems too profound, to place *a priori* limits on which thinkers might help to advance our thinking. A better approach, the one modeled here, is to acknowledge the finite limits that every thinker is bound to have, to make those limits explicit, and to pursue new knowledge by thinking across the horizons of several, differently situated figures and disciplines. Finally, this project shows that Christian theology can be a genuinely realistic, truth-seeking discipline. This means that, in addition to the important work of clarifying the content of the Christian *kerygma* and interpreting its meaning for the contemporary church, theologians can also engage fruitfully and critically with other, non-theological disciplines, to provide hermeneutical insight into the basic structures of lived reality itself.

Press, 2020); Simeon Zahl, "On the Affective Salience of Doctrines," *Modern Theology* 31, no. 3 (July 2015): 428–44, <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12166>.

¹² While he continues to attract more interest from historians than constructive theologians, there are several excellent exceptions to this rule. See, for example, Robinson, *Redeeming Relationship*; Christine Helmer, *Theology and the End of Doctrine*, First edition. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014); Kevin Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

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