Peirce viewed the individual human organism as a body-minded, social animal who interacts semiotically with the world outside of her. He had little patience for the Cartesian portrayal of the individual as a disembodied, solipsistic knower with immediate epistemic access to truth. I use the term “naive individual” to convey a Cartesian knower who ignores her situatedness as an embodied, socially shaped organism in constant communication with the external environment. I reserve the term “individual” to convey a Peircean knower who is inescapably situated (and who may or may not be aware of this situatedness). For emphasis, I occasionally refer to the Peircean knower as a “synechistic individual.” I call on “synechism”—a term referring to the philosophical importance Peirce grants to continuity—to highlight the continuity of the human individual’s body and mind, self and society, and inner and outer worlds. These continua reflect the affectivity of the human organism, whereby she is in ongoing body-minded interaction with the external world, including the latter’s socio-political dimensions.
My first objective in this chapter is to introduce and situate Peircean affectivity within a post-Darwinian context. I use the work of Antonio Damasio as a tool for elucidating the post-Darwinian themes in Peircean affectivity. I also introduce aspects of Peirce’s thought—self-control, phenomenology, and socialized instinctive beliefs—that facilitate a rich dialogue between Peircean affectivity and social criticism. My second objective is to highlight the specific social criticism thematic of my project: Well-meaning people in hegemonic groups (such as heterosexuals, men, whites, and so on) can nonconsciously perpetuate discrimination toward those in non-hegemonic groups (such as GLBTQs, women, people of color, and so on). My focus is the unintentional perpetuation of racism and (to a lesser extent) sexism. I present a preliminary sketch of this problematic, the details of which will be taken up in subsequent chapters, as I bring Peircean affectivity further into dialogue with social criticism.

Post-Darwinian Evolutionary Context and Self-Control

Peirce’s philosophy occurs within a post-Darwinian evolutionary context, in which human beings are animal organisms who must successfully navigate the external world in order to survive and grow. While his preferred model of evolution is Lamarckian, the post-Darwinian thematic of embodied, survival-mediated habit-taking must be held firmly in place, even when Peirce is not explicitly highlighting it for us. In fact, drawing out the post-Darwinian connections and implications of his ideas is the type of work that Peirce prefers his readers to do on their own, impatient as he is with having to spell out the obvious.

Accordingly, my working definition of Peircean affectivity is the following: the ongoing body-minded communication between the human organism and her or his individual, social, and external environments, for the promotion of survival and growth. This communication is shaped by biological, individual, semiotic, social, and other factors. This definition embraces the nonconscious, social, and semiotic dimensions of human reasoning. It is also influenced by the work of
Antonio Damasio, to which I turn below. I offer it in a fallibilist spirit that welcomes further inquiry and suggestions. I should note that Peirce does not use the term “affectivity.” Nonetheless, the affective dimensions of his work—including feeling, emotion, sentiment, interest, instinct, agape, and sympathy, as well as belief, doubt, and habit—are harmoniously interrelated within my working definition. I employ “affectivity” as a synecistic term that encompasses the continuum of the human organism’s ongoing communication with its environments, from the subtle nonconscious physiological and semiotic processes to the more obvious forms of habit-taking and habit-modification.

Human habit-taking is an affective venture whereby individuals and groups communicate with their various environments in order to successfully cope and grow without undue interruptions from environmental factors outside their control.

For Peirce and the other classical American pragmatists, human habits are not merely mechanical, repetitive behavior like one’s routine of brushing her teeth before bed or like “bad habits”—that is, behaviors one would like to eliminate from conduct, like slamming doors or smoking. Instead habits are body-minded patterns of behavior by which human organisms intelligently interact with their physical, social, and internal environments. Habits span a continuum from uncontrolled activity, like the body’s homeostasis mechanisms, to self-controlled conduct, whereby humans self-consciously take on new habits and critique existing habits. Habits, therefore, inform all human conduct, whether we (humans) realize it or not, and whether we like it or not. Peirce describes habits as patterns of nerve firings and attributes to each one a particular feltness, which can be confirmed experientially. For softball/baseball players, one’s batting stance has a feel, for example. As a piano player, I can attest that my habits of playing scales have a feel to them. So do the habits of signing my name, typing on a keyboard, and driving my manual-transmission (stick-shift) car.

Two additional points about habit need to be introduced. First, habits are tendencies; they are not absolute laws that regulate behavior
without exception. Thus my habits represent patterns and generalities that are not *always* executed in behavior. For example, my habit of walking to my favorite coffee shop every weekend reflects behavior in which I engage often, even *very* often. This habit does not rigidly dictate my behavior, however. Some weekends I have obligations with friends or family that preclude my routine; other weekends I am out of town. Still other weekends I try new coffee shops, for a change of pace. The same notion of habit-as-tendency applies at the level of communal or societal habits. In the United States, for example, there is a mainstream cultural habit of forbidding men to wear skirts. There are exceptions to this tendency, such that kilts are generally considered acceptable for men.

Moreover, because habits are tendencies and not absolute laws of human behavior, they can be changed. This change can be initiated by humans, because they have the self-control to set purposes/goals/ideals for their conduct.

A second point to consider is that, for Peirce, our beliefs are habits—that is, embodied patterns of nerve firings. The significance of this point will unfold in subsequent chapters. For now, I note that in the discussions to follow, I often use the term “belief-habit(s),” in order to keep the embodiment of belief in the foreground as I trace the affective themes in Peirce’s work.

This second point, that beliefs are habits, relates to the first point, just noted, that habits are tendencies versus absolute laws. How is it that belief-habits are tendencies? One answer to this question is that someone’s behavior may go against her belief-habits, which shows that belief-habits do not dictate behavior absolutely. For example, I believe that eating healthfully is best for my health, and my usual behavior is to eat foods that are good for me. Nonetheless, my behavior does not always reflect this belief-habit, especially when buttered movie-theater popcorn is involved. When my behavior diverges from my beliefs, I may or may not be aware of it. In the case of eating, I often *know* when I am eating foods that are unhealthy. With other beliefs, I may not know that my behavior contradicts them. My belief
that racism is wrong, for example, may be contradicted by *unintentional* racism on my part. For example, years ago, the first time I taught an introductory philosophy course, my syllabus had no readings from people of color, which perpetuated the racist view that only white people have made significant contributions to philosophy. I was not *trying* to be racist in this case. Instead my focus was to have the typical historical survey of Western philosophy accounted for, which my department wanted me to cover, and I forgot to make room. Nonetheless, my syllabus was all white. How this unintentional contradiction between belief and practice is possible will be addressed in this and subsequent chapters.

Let us return more specifically to the affectivity of habit-formation in humans. Keeping the working definition of affectivity in mind, note that habit-formation is affective because it is a *process of inquiry* whereby one’s habits are consistently attuned to environmental feedback that may interrupt one’s conduct. My own habit of walking, for example, “communicates with” the ground on which I walk and the traffic patterns I encounter. Failure to attune to either set of “feedback” could result in, say, slipping on a patch of ice or getting hit by an oncoming car. So accustomed are humans to this ongoing communication between their habits and their environments that they often fail to notice that it occurs. This is one of the reasons why Peirce’s phenomenology, to be presented below, is indispensable to a study of Peircean affectivity. Attention to the firstness, secondness, and thirdness of experience highlights how humans learn (thirdness) to avoid unwanted obstacles in their environment (secondness), which often results in habits that become so automatic as to function without their awareness (firstness).

Throughout the following chapters I will address the subtle and often unnoticed influences on human belief-habits that stem from two interrelated sources, the unique embodiment of each person and social-shaping. These influences often occur underneath the radar of human consciousness (cf. Damasio 2003, 228). I will be using the term “nonconscious” to describe such influences. My working definition of “nonconscious” is *occurring without one’s conscious awareness*. My use of “nonconscious” is *inclusive* of both the “just beneath
the surface” meanings often ascribed to “subconscious” and psychoanalytic treatments of the “unconscious.” While I will not be explicitly examining psychoanalytic work in the present project, I want to keep inquiry open on this front. Thus in a synec- 
histic spirit, I take “nonconscious” to embrace shadings and ambiguities that span from the subconscious belief-habits that are just shy of conscious attention, like my habit of pacing while I lecture, to “unconscious” habits that are repressed and thus not readily accessible to conscious attention.

My use of “nonconscious” encompasses the following interrelated dimensions of human experience: (1) the homeostasis-promoting physiological processes that ensure survival as an animal organism; (2) the human organism’s ongoing homeostasis-driven object assessment; (3) each person’s idiosyncratic associations with ideas, events, and objects in her world; and (4) instinctive beliefs, which can also be described as common-sense or background beliefs. This list is compatible with Peirce’s description of “instinctive mind,” which is discussed below. Each of these four experiential facets often occurs outside of consciousness, with varying degrees of conscious accessibility. The possibility for conscious accessibility, especially regarding facets 2, 3, and 4, allows someone to change unwanted nonconscious behaviors. In this context, testimony from others can be a key resource in bringing such behaviors to one’s conscious awareness. Like my working definition of affectivity, my conception of “nonconscious” is offered in a fallibilist spirit that welcomes further discussion and critique.

Exploring Peircean affectivity within a post-Darwinian context gives rise to a significant concern that must be addressed before we proceed. It might be objected that this post-Darwinian affective context undermines a view of the human person as capable of self-controlled conduct, whereby she shapes her own ends. Mapping survival concerns onto human projects may seem to reduce, to an unacceptable degree, human activity to mere animalistic concerns for staying alive and propagating the species. In response, I would argue that the opposite is indeed the case. Attention to a post-Darwinian thematic enlarges self-controlled human activity, by drawing explicit attention
to ways self-control can be undermined by factors that might otherwise escape conscious attention. Achieving awareness of these factors is a step toward bringing them under the domain of self-control. Let me explain this point much more fully, by placing it within the multifaceted context of nonconscious belief-habits, self-control, Critical Common-sensism, communal inquiry, fallibilism, agapic sympathy, and reasonableness.

Whether humans acknowledge it or not, their ends are shaped by factors outside of their complete control, including culturally mediated interests in the survival of self and species. A primary focus of my project is the dependency of children on their caretakers and community for survival, which leaves children vulnerable to internalizing unreasonable belief-habits about how reality works. By “internalization” (and its derivatives), I mean the incorporation, by means of reinforcement or trauma, of a belief into one’s personal comportment and worldview, such that the belief is difficult to eradicate rationally. On the whole, adopting the spoken and/or behavioral belief-habits conveyed by her caretakers and community promotes the young child’s survival (cf. A. Rorty 1980, 122; Dewey [1922] 1988, 43–53, 65–68). Yet some of these belief-habits may promote racism, sexism, or other discriminatory thinking, which may be reinforced at the societal level. The young child does not have the resources to determine which caretaker and/or community belief-habits are survival-rich (such as “Hot stoves are dangerous”) and which convey mere socio-political prejudice (such as “Women are inferior to men”). I discuss this tension in Chapter 2. By the time critical thinking develops in the human organism, problematic belief-habits—like those that promote racism, sexism, and so on—may be so internalized as to escape conscious awareness. Failure to embrace humanity’s post-Darwinian legacy implicitly blocks the road of inquiry into human conduct by leaving such influences unexamined. To neglect inquiry into nonconscious, growth-inhibiting individual or communal habits is to promote blindness to the limitations such habits can place on us. This blindness undermines self-control.
For example, neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux, drawing on work in social psychology, explains how we can be affected *without conscious awareness* by stereotypes that affect how we treat people whose race or gender is different from our own:

[E]motions, attitudes, goals, and intentions can be activated *without awareness*, and . . . these can influence the way people think about and act in social situations. For example, physical features (like skin color or hair length) are enough to activate racial or gender stereotypes, regardless of whether the person possessing the feature expresses any of the behavioral characteristics of the stereotype. This kind of *automatic activation of attitudes* occurs in a variety of different situations and appears to constitute our *first reaction to a person*. And once activated, these attitudes can influence the way we then treat the person, and can even have influences over our behavior in other situations. (1996, 61–62, my emphasis; cf. Alcoff 2006, 242–43)

Since these reactions can occur without one’s awareness, they can undermine self-control. That is to say, if my ideals for myself include acting in a nondiscriminatory fashion, yet I am having prejudiced reactions to people of color, for example, *without noticing these reactions*, then my self-control is undermined. My actual actions do not square with my consciously intended ideals for conduct.

Social psychologist John Bargh notes, with a measured optimism, that when people are educated about the nonconscious influence that race and sex stereotypes can have, they can correct for it if they want to, although such correction is by no means a simple task:

When one is aware of the possibility of stereotypic bias and one possesses values against such bias, one can control the influence of the stereotype. . . . But the exercise of this control depends critically upon the awareness of the preconscious influence, and except in such cases as racial and (to a lesser extent) sex stereotypes, about which they have been educated, people are not aware of most varieties of preconscious influence. Even if they were to be, it would not be a straightforward matter to adjust for them. One suspects only that one has been influenced but has no idea how
much weight the preconscious input had on the final judgment.  
(1992, 250)

Bargh notes the importance of education for making people aware of how stereotypes can nonconsciously influence their thinking and behavior. This newfound awareness then can be used, by those who repudiate the stereotypes, to work against their nonconscious influence. While Bargh notes that it is not “a straightforward matter to adjust for” nonconscious stereotyping, I do not find this point overly discouraging (250). In fact, given the overconfidence I have seen in both white people and men in the United States, who assume that they simply are not racist and/or sexist, I find Bargh’s comments refreshing (albeit sobering), as they underscore that addressing racism, sexism, and other social ills in the United States is far from a simple matter. Ongoing humility and hard work are necessary, even for those who have been educated about the nonconscious influence of racism, sexism, and other discriminatory belief-habits.

On Peirce’s scheme, self-control occurs within a communal paradigm where fallibilism and ongoing growth are embraced, and correcting for conflicts between ideals and behavior is an ongoing process that is not supposed to come to an end. Peirce’s thought is thus hopeful in the face of contradictions between ideals and conduct, because of the capacity for self-control itself. Self-control allows humans to reflect on their behavior in order to improve on it. Peirce notes, “Among the things which the reader, as a rational person, does not doubt, is that he not merely has habits, but also can exert a measure of self-control over his future actions” (EP 2:337). Self-control allows humans to set aims or goals or purposes (such as, say, trying to be more patient) that go beyond narrowly survival-oriented purposes, such as daily nutrition, which is a purpose shared by many nonhuman animals. Self-control enables humans to criticize their past actions (as, say, not reflecting the ideal of patient behavior) in order to improve on them (CP 5.533–35; EP 2:245–48, 337–38). Self-control also enables humans to inhibit behaviors (such as impatiently rolling one’s eyes or looking at one’s watch during conversations)
that undermine one’s purpose (of being more patient) (W 2:261 n. 6; EP 2:342, 385).

Self-control’s critical reflection extends into the background beliefs that inform an individual’s or group’s “common-sense” sensibilities. Peirce’s Critical Common-sensism (CCS) is an epistemological doctrine that calls for the examination of beliefs that are usually taken for granted in human conduct and reasoning. Engaging in CCS is thus an operation of self-control, whereby individuals and communities scrutinize belief-habits that may seem too obvious to require critique (CP 5.497–525; EP 2:346–54). My project calls attention to how “the obvious” is often circumscribed within hegemonic-group interests, such that CCS efforts take on socio-political import. My focus is the common-sense beliefs that can take root in childhood.

Regarding beliefs that stem from childhood, Peirce explicitly says that we should critically examine them. In an 1893 addendum to his well-known essay “Fixation of Belief,” Peirce notes:

> It will be wholesome enough for us to make a general review of the causes of our beliefs; and the result will be that most of them have been taken upon trust and have been held since we were too young to discriminate the credible from the incredible. Such reflections may awaken real doubts about some of our positions. (CP 5.376 n. 3)

Here Peirce explicitly acknowledges the vulnerability of children regarding beliefs they adopt during childhood. Small children do not have the critical capacity to question the beliefs of their caretakers and communities. It is therefore important to undertake critical reflection on our beliefs as adults, which “may awaken real doubts about some of our positions.”

In his essay “What Pragmatism Is” (1905), Peirce takes care to situate self-control within a communal context. Following a discussion of self-control, he tells readers it is “all-important to assure oneself of and to remember” that “the man’s circle of society (however widely or narrowly this phrase may be understood) is a sort of loosely compacted person, in some respects of higher rank than the person of an
individual organism” (EP 2:338). Peirce is well aware of the power of society to manifest social belief-habits, which in turn shape the belief-habits of individual members of society. Knowledge itself is shaped by communal inquiry into knowledge and reality, which is why Peirce also says that “to make single individuals absolute judges of truth is most pernicious” (W 2:212). It is folly for an individual to conceive her self-controlled efforts as occurring outside of a social context. Attention to the communal context of self-control is also essential to the critique undertaken by Critical Common-sensism.

Examination of a socio-political example shows the importance of engaging Critical Common-sensism as a communal effort. As a child who was born in 1969, I learned the belief that racism is largely over in the United States, because of the accomplishments of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Any lingering racism of, say, a family member here or there did not really “count” but only reflected an individual’s failure to grasp that large-scale racism in the United States, such as legalized segregation, was over. It did not occur to me to question this idea as a child. As an adult, however, it did occur to me to question it. My experience as a teacher in an alternative high school, in a predominantly African American neighborhood in inner-city Milwaukee, Wisconsin, created real doubts for me that racism was, for the most part, absent in the United States. The consistent testimony from the students of color with whom I worked made it clear to me that my belief needed revising. As a result of my capacity for self-control, I criticized my former belief and changed it radically. In this example, my self-control relied upon a learning experience that exposed me to consistent testimony from people of color about ongoing racism in the United States. Without this experience and testimony, I cannot be sure that my adult self-controlled, critical reflection would have noticed that this particular childhood-derived belief (that racism is not a problem in the United States) was in need of revision.

This example highlights an important limitation of naively individualistic self-controlled efforts to scrutinize background beliefs from childhood—that is, efforts undertaken by an individual isolated
from conversation with others in her community. Self-control cannot effectively criticize belief-habits that do not surface (to the individual) as needing to be examined. How, then, can a person become aware of belief-habits occurring outside of consciousness? One answer to this question is rooted in openness to feedback from other people, as my experience in Milwaukee indicates. Others can reveal belief-habits one enacts without realizing it. My students’ testimony about the prevalence of racism made me conscious of my false belief-habit that racism is largely over in the United States. Becoming aware of this belief was the first step toward changing it. Thus, openness to feedback can enhance self-control. Through feedback one can learn of her blind spots and, ideally, adjust her belief-habits accordingly, ever open to further feedback as she continually works to instill new belief-habits. In Chapter 5, I discuss testimony further in this context, while also highlighting that, for Peirce, efforts at changing belief-habits must address their embodied roots; one cannot change a belief-habit via mere intellectual proclamation.

The importance of openness to the perspectives of others is implied in a description Peirce makes of self-control in his essay “Grounds of Validity of the Laws of Logic” (1869), where he places self-control in a communal context:

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

Peirce is highlighting both the purposeful and inhibitory dimensions of self-control in this passage, placing both within the communal context of “love of what is good for all on the whole.” In the sociopolitical context under consideration here, “the widest possible consideration” is a general purpose that helps inform more-specific purposes, such as the importance of repudiating racism (and other social
ills) in the United States. Self-control enables people to have these loving and social-justice-oriented purposes, in addition to purposes shared with nonhuman animals, such as individual survival and propagation of the species. It should be noted that, for Peirce, Christianity is not grounded in doctrine or dogma but rather in love and communal concern. Thus his religious references can be applied secularly, beyond any doctrinal commitments of Christianity, as I will be applying them in this book by focusing on love and mutual concern among community members.¹⁴

When Peirce says that “[s]elf-control seems to be the capacity for rising to an extended view of a practical subject instead of seeing only temporary urgency,” the inhibitory dimension of self-control is prominent alongside the purposeful dimension (W 2:261 n. 6, my emphasis). To achieve goals (such as getting up earlier in the morning), we often must say no to the “temporary urgency” of existing habits that resist growth (such as hitting the snooze button on the alarm clock). Within the socio-political context, those in hegemonic groups may need to inhibit the “temporary urgency” of dismissing negative feedback about discrimination from someone in a non-hegemonic group. The inhibition of this dismissal can be especially difficult regarding racism and sexism in the United States, since U.S. mainstream societal belief-habits proclaim that racism and sexism have largely ended in this country.¹⁵ These are beliefs that are often considered unassailable knowledge. Moreover, these societal belief-habits often translate into individual belief-habits that involve being so sure that one knows racism or sexism to be over that further input is dismissed as unnecessary. When a white person says of a person of color that he or she is “playing the race card,” it is often a dismissal that reflects a failure of inhibitory self-control.

When self-control succeeds in this socio-political scenario, those in hegemonic groups who sincerely eschew injustice achieve “an extended view of [the] practical subject” that embraces the broader purposes of love and the repudiation of injustice (W 2:261 n. 6). This extended view is also informed by genuine sympathy for the person giving the negative feedback (about one’s own or society’s behavior),
even though this feedback might be hard to hear. Self-control in this case results in resisting the immediate urge to reject this testimony. The feedback is held in place as a source of learning and growth. This holding-in-place is fueled by a loving concern for the individual voicing the feedback. In his essay “Evolutionary Love” (1893), Peirce explains that agape is the ideal for humans in community. Agape, to be discussed more fully in Chapter 4, is love whose signal characteristic is an embrace of the different, even when this difference seems threatening (EP 1:353). Agapic love strengthens the inhibitory dimension of self-control, whereby the urge to reject what is foreign or uncomfortable is resisted.

It should come as no surprise that successful self-control in this context mirrors Peirce’s first rule of reason, “that in order to learn you must desire to learn and in so desiring not be satisfied with what you already incline to think,” and its oft-quoted corollary, “Do not block the way of inquiry” (EP 2:48). If those in hegemonic groups are satisfied in their belief-habits that racism and sexism are over in the United States, this satisfaction undermines the learning process. If they know that racism and sexism are over, then they may be convinced that there is nothing else to learn. This attitude fuels disinterest, or outright unwillingness, in pursuing inquiry into how racism and sexism (and other social ills) might be alive and well. This closed-mindedness blocks the learning process and blocks growth, both individually and at societal levels.

For self-control to optimally promote growth, there must be an ongoing epistemological humility at the individual and societal levels. Peirce is a fallibilist who believes that knowledge is always open for revision at some future point. This revision can be due to the organic nature of the cosmos itself, which has an element of spontaneity that can never be completely captured in scientific laws. It can also be due to testimony from community members who enhance or even overturn conventional knowledge about how reality works, which is my focus here. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, for Peirce reality is articulated by a community of inquiry, not by isolated Cartesian knowers. And he notes that this community is infinite in scope: “[T]he very
origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a community, without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge” (W 2:239). The communal epistemological efforts by which reality is described, then, involve a community “without definite limits,” which implies that any given communal efforts are always subject to revision from future community members whose voices have yet to be heard. This ever-present possibility for communal growth, coupled with the organic growth of the cosmos itself, means that knowledge is also subject to “indefinite increase.” Thus humility toward one’s beliefs is critical.

This humility goes hand in hand with the most admirable ideal for humans, which is to promote the concrete growth of reasonableness in the universe. For Peirce, reason “always must be in a state of incipiency, of growth,” as reason consists in the generality that governs individual events (EP 2:255). This generality is manifest in habits. And since the cosmos itself is living, the habits that form its very fabric grow as well, whether they be the large-scale habits of nature, such as the cycles of the seasons, or the smaller-scale habits that govern an individual’s behavior. Peirce notes, “The creation of the universe, which did not take place during a certain busy week, in the year 4004 b.c., but is going on today and never will be done, is this very development of Reason” (EP 2:255, my emphasis). This being the case, “the ideal of conduct will be to execute our little function in the operation of the creation by giving a hand toward rendering the world more reasonable whenever . . . it is ‘up to us’ to do so” (EP 2:255). One way humans can help the universe become more reasonable is by fostering the growth of the reasonableness of their own belief-habits, as individuals and as communities.

To grow is to increase in diversity, to become more heterogeneous (EP 2:254–55, 343–44; CP 1.174; EP 1:310). In the context of my project, I focus on growth in reasonableness in the context of human belief-habits that inform conduct and knowledge. Growth in reasonableness entails rendering the general patterns, or belief-habits, that govern one’s behavior and/or knowledge more diverse. In the introduction,
I used the example of my belief-habit about racism growing in reasonableness, beginning with the unreasonable belief-habit that racism is no longer a problem in the United States. This unreasonable belief-habit grew in reasonableness to accommodate the prevalence of racism against African Americans, growth facilitated by the testimony from my African American students in the 1990s. Nonetheless my understanding at this point in my life still was unreasonable to the extent that my belief-habit conceived racism against people of color as merely a “black-white” paradigm, as if African Americans were the only people to experience racism from Euro-American white people. My belief-habit that racism is prevalent in the United States has grown, further, into a multifaceted paradigm, including racism against Asian Americans, Latino Americans, Native Americans, and others. In addition, I now understand that within each of these groups there is further diversity to be considered, such as the varying countries and/or tribes that are represented under group designations such as “Asian American,” “Latino American,” and “Native American.” In addition, still other factors need to be considered, such as English as a second (and sometimes imposed) language, immigration issues, mixed-race issues, and more. In fact, I now understand that my belief-habits about racism will never achieve full reasonableness. I will never be “done” understanding racism. That said, my understanding of racism is now far more reasonable than it started out being. There has been concrete growth. To view my understanding of racism as “never done” is to be fallibilist toward my knowledge of the world around me, ever open to further feedback that can help me achieve further growth.

The epistemological humility required by self-control and reasonableness is ideally paired with agapic sympathy, which helps me hold in place feedback that might be hard to hear. My care for others in my community aids me in holding their testimony in place when it challenges my own. Such challenges are often necessary for growth, as they can reveal unreasonableness I may not realize I am acting out. My behavior may unintentionally ignore, disparage, stereotype, or undermine diversity concerns regarding membership in the community...
of inquiry (Lugones 2003, 83). I may thus unwittingly promote a homo
genous or less diverse community of inquiry. As threatening as it
may be to hear that my behavior has been, say, racist, sexist, or other-
wise discriminatory, I ideally care about the community member(s)
sharing this feedback. Epistemological humility and agapic sympathy
thus ideally foster a self-controlled response to feedback—a response
that holds in place the larger purpose of justice and diversity and in-
hibits knee-jerk exclusionary reactions (such as an accusation of
“playing the race card”) that block the road of inquiry.

On the Critical Common-sensism front, fallibilism, epistemologi-
cal humility, and agapic sympathy all should inform the ongoing
efforts by which humans continually expand self-control by scrutiniz-
ing their common-sense belief-habits. Since knowledge involves a
community of inquiry, Critical Common-sensism must be under-
taken not by Cartesian individuals isolated from communal dynamics
but by socially attuned individuals and by societies. This way more
common-sense beliefs have a chance of being critically assessed, be-
cause each individual can be helped by others to see background be-
liefs of which she is not conscious. My focus is on the background
beliefs to which those in hegemonic groups are blind. Those in non-
hegemonic groups are often in a position to identify those beliefs,
such as those promoting heterosexism, racism, sexism, and other so-
cial ills. Ideally the genuine concern those in hegemonic groups have
for those in non-hegemonic groups leads to an embrace of their testi-
mony about ongoing discrimination.

When I use the term “embrace” in this context, I am signaling the
epistemological attitude of deep open-mindedness that Peirce re-
quires.19 To embrace something—such as an idea, a person, a group,
or someone’s testimony—includes but goes beyond not rejecting it. To
embrace something is also to allow oneself to learn from it. I contrast
this with merely tolerating something, i.e., merely being open minded
enough to not reject it. Take, for example, the following brief letter
from a heterosexual woman who writes about her attitudes toward
gay and lesbian people. Her comments are addressed to contempo-
rary U.S. psychologist Harriet Lerner’s advice column, Life Preservers:
I have nothing against homosexuals and I deplore prejudice of any kind. But I fail to see the importance of “coming out” for gays and lesbians. My husband and I do not discuss our sex life or sexual orientation in public, so why should homosexuals? What ever happened to privacy and discretion? (Lerner 1996, 311)

On the one hand, this writer tolerates “homosexuals.” One could speculate that she would, for example, support hiring a qualified person regardless of her or his sexual orientation. She also would probably repudiate violence aimed at those who are gay or lesbian. On the other hand, the writer does not embrace their perspectives. This lack of embrace is manifested in her closed-mindedness toward “coming out,” which undermines her learning from the experience of those who are gay or lesbian. For example, while she and her husband “do not discuss [their] sex life” publicly, they most likely do discuss their sexual orientation in countless ways, at least implicitly, such as unproblematically using terms like “husband,” “wife,” “marriage,” and “honeymoon” (311). In 2010 legalized same-sex marriage is still deeply resisted across the United States, such that same-sex couples are often not in a position to marry. Moreover, public displays of affection in the United States are held to a heterosexual norm that can make simply holding hands socially problematic for gay and lesbian couples (312). If the letter writer embraced the idea of “coming out,” she might learn how prevalent heterosexual norms are in the United States, such that being in the closet requires much “silence and secrecy” (311). As Lerner explains, “To be gay and in the closet is to watch oneself constantly” (311). These efforts can be exhausting, an insight the letter writer resists.

As a contrasting example, an embrace of same-sex relationships is demonstrated by social criticism scholar Peggy McIntosh, who self-identifies as heterosexual. She critically reflects on her own experience to see how it reflects heterosexual privilege: “The fact that I live under the same roof with a man triggers all kinds of societal assumptions about my worth, politics, life, and values and triggers a host of unearned advantages and powers” (McIntosh 1988, 297–98). Such as “Most people I meet will see my marital arrangements as an asset to
my life or as a favorable comment on my likability, my competence, or my mental health” (298). And “I can talk about the social events of a weekend without fearing most listeners’ reactions” (298). These comments show that, beyond merely tolerating same-sex relationships, McIntosh allows the experiences of same-sex couples to teach her about the prevalence of heterosexual norms in U.S. culture.20

The embrace of feedback I discuss throughout this book focuses on those in hegemonic groups in relationship to the corresponding non-hegemonic groups, such as whites toward people of color, men toward women, heterosexuals toward GLBTQs, and so on. And within this context, the scenario I examine is the feedback that non-hegemonic groups can provide that discriminatory practices are still in play in the United States, despite mainstream assumptions that—at least regarding racism and sexism—injustices on these fronts are no longer prevalent. It is important to note that, when the relationship is reversed—such that the feedback comes from hegemonic groups and targets those in non-hegemonic groups—embracing feedback does not always foster reasonableness. In scenarios ranging from ignoring diverse perspectives to stereotyping them or dismissing them as unworthy of engagement, feedback from hegemonic groups can be explicitly unreasonable, because it promotes a community of inquiry that is less diverse and less open to inquiry about injustices that persist in the United States (Lugones 2003, 83). This issue will be taken up in Chapter 4.

Let us return to the objection that initiated this lengthy discussion of self-control, nonconscious belief-habits learned in childhood, fallibilism, epistemological humility, and agapic sympathy. The objection, once again, is that a focus on the post-Darwinian aspects of Peircean affectivity undermines a view of humans as self-controlled organisms, reducing them, to an unacceptable extent, to animal organisms that operate merely from a concern for individual survival and propagation of the species. I argue, in response, that not paying attention to the post-Darwinian aspects of human affectivity turns a blind eye on belief-habits learned in childhood that can function nonconsciously in adulthood, undermining self-controlled behavior.
Often exclusionary belief-habits that promote racism, sexism, and other social ills can operate in just this fashion.

To embrace, rather than merely tolerate, the post-Darwinian context for human thought and behavior is to allow ourselves to learn from it, to promote self-control on individual and social levels. This embrace opens inquiry into how humans might reason best, given that some of their ends are unavoidably shaped by culturally mediated concerns for survival and propagation of the species. This open inquiry reveals how survival concerns are linked, through the vulnerability of young children, to the socio-politically derived belief-habits of caretakers and society. My project explores how socio-politically derived, exclusionary habits can become internalized by those in privileged groups—such as Euro-Americans, heterosexuals, men, etc.—such that they function nonconsciously and threaten the reasonableness of inquiry. It embraces the Critical Common-sensist mandate that communal efforts be made to criticize common-sense (or background) beliefs in order to promote growth in human self-control. These efforts must include embracing the testimony of those—including people of color, GLBTQs, women, etc.—who can identify heterosexist, racist, sexist, or other discriminatory background belief-habits that Euro-Americans, heterosexuals, men, and others may not notice.

It should be noted that communal persons (that is, communities or societies) as well as individual persons are subject to the blind spots, and their concomitant dangers, that nonconscious belief-habits create. Communities or societies that allow growth-inhibiting habits to function without critique can easily perpetuate oppression, thereby undermining the flourishing of their members. The individual and her community are closely related. Oppression does not reside only in socio-political structures that are external to community members, such as laws and institutions. It also may reside in the internalized habits of members of historically privileged and oppressed groups. The latter may internalize self-exclusionary habits, which are rooted in lack of confidence in one’s perspective as a community member.
The former may internalize exclusionary habits that disparage the perspectives of non-hegemonic individuals or groups. This second phenomenon is my focus in this project, that is, growth-undermining habits of privilege, which include mistrusting and dismissing feedback from those in non-hegemonic groups (Alcoff 2006, 40).

Now that I have, hopefully, laid to rest a significant objection to studying Peircean affectivity through a post-Darwinian lens, the path is clear to continue that study and to explain more fully how its sociopolitical trajectories take shape.

**Peircean Affectivity and the Work of Antonio Damasio**

As outlined above, the affective dimensions of Peirce’s work—including feeling, emotion, sentiment, interest, instinct, agape, and sympathy, as well as belief, doubt, and habit—are harmoniously interrelated under my working definition of Peircean affectivity: **the ongoing body-minded communication between the human organism and her or his individual, social, and external environments, for the promotion of survival and growth. This communication is shaped by biological, individual, semiotic, social, and other factors.** I use “affectivity” to capture the continuum of the human organism’s ongoing conversations, from subtle to obvious, with its varied environments. This continuum is underwritten by a post-Darwinian survival thematic that informs the human organism’s conduct. As I will continually demonstrate in this project, the Peircean human organism is always “emotionally susceptible” or affective.21 Antonio Damasio’s work helps explain why.

Damasio’s work involves the scientific investigation of emotion and feeling in their relationship to the body and mind of the human organism. He operates from an evolutionary perspective that is sensitive to the embodied, semiotic, and social dimensions of the human experience, which are inseparable from concerns for promoting the survival and flourishing of self and species. In what follows, I draw from his three books: *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the*
While Damasio does not specifically highlight and define the term “affectivity,” he uses the phrase “process of affect” to refer to “the complex chain of events” that are involved in emotion and feeling (2003, 27; cf. 1999, 342 n. 10). He also applauds Spinoza’s use of the Latin affectus as “‘the modifications of the body, whereby the active power of the said body is increased or diminished, aided or constrained, and also the ideas of such modifications’ (Spinoza, The Ethics, Part III)” (Damasio 2003, 301 n. 3). I thus use the term “theory of affectivity” as a working description of Damasio’s work in this context, with the proviso that his work is ongoing and grows from book to book. Damasio himself notes, in fallibilist fashion, “I have a difficult time seeing scientific results, especially in neurobiology, as anything but provisional approximations, to be enjoyed for awhile and discarded as soon as better accounts become available” (1994, xviii). Damasio’s research is, nonetheless, aimed at formulating and testing his hypotheses scientifically, as he documents in each of his books.

The compatibilities between Damasio’s work and Peirce’s thought are striking. While we should not force a point-for-point match between the two, Damasio’s theory of affectivity sheds considerable light on affective themes in Peirce’s thought, especially the implicit ones. What follows is a selective treatment of Damasio’s work, as it pertains to Peircean affectivity.

a. Homeodynamics and Survival

Damasio pairs human affectivity with homeostasis. For Damasio the human organism is a “homeostasis machine” in constant body-mind interaction with its environment. “Homeostasis” refers to the ongoing environmental assessment an organism undertakes to promote its own survival and well-being (Damasio 2003, 35). Damasio describes homeostasis in the following way:
All living organisms from the humble amoeba to the human are born with devices designed to solve automatically, no proper reasoning required, the basic problems of life. Those problems are: finding sources of energy; incorporating and transforming energy; maintaining a chemical balance of the interior compatible with the life process; maintaining the organism’s structure by repairing its wear and tear; and fend off external agents of disease and physical injury. The single word homeostasis is convenient shorthand for the ensemble of regulations and the resulting state of regulated life. (2003, 30, Damasio’s emphasis)

Damasio suggests that “homeodynamics” is a more apt term, as it better suggests the constant activity of the body. I agree with this suggestion and will, from this point forward, be using the term “homeodynamics” to convey the processes outlined in the above passage.

An organism depends, then, on the homeodynamic regulation of its internal life processes. Damasio’s theory of affectivity starts with this biological truism. Human affect involves the ongoing appraisal of internal and external environments, whereby changes in environment are detected. Any given change signals either a potential threat or a boon to the organism’s survival/flourishing. The organism then addresses “the problem” of either protecting itself from the situation at hand or capitalizing on it (Damasio 2003, 35–36). The changes and responses involved range from the subtle to the obvious, and from microscopic to macroscopic, all part and parcel of the human organism’s ongoing homeodynamic assessment of the environment (55–56).

Affective behaviors involve an evolutionary continuum that spans from the behavior of single-celled organisms to the self-controlled behaviors of human organisms (Damasio 2003, 40 ff., 51 ff.). They also involve stimuli occurring both outside the organism and within the organism. Internal stimuli, such as cues arising from hunger or hormones, contribute to the highly individualized interest(s) that characterize a human organism’s intentionality toward the world (39). External stimuli—i.e., the wide range of physical things and events that we encounter outside of our physical bodies—are filtered
through personalized interest(s) as well. These dimensions of individuality will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2, in conjunction with human embodiment and Peirce’s discussions of cognition.

The lowest levels of homeodynamic/affective behaviors include the operation of the immune system, metabolism maintenance, and “basic reflexes” (Damasio 2003, 37). The next highest levels include “pleasure and pain behaviors,” as well as drives (32–34). These lower levels shade into the next higher level, which Damasio calls the “emotions-proper” (38 ff.). Emotions-proper include what are conventionally considered emotions, like fear and sadness. Damasio notes that “emotions in the broad sense” is an appropriate classification of all homeodynamic activity up to and including emotions-proper (35, my emphasis). If continued to its furthest human potential, affective behavior is accompanied by feelings, whereby the human is aware of the affect being experienced. This awareness, in turn, allows for the planning of future actions, so that opportunities and obstacles can be anticipated (Damasio 2003, 51 ff., 176 ff.; 1999, 284–85). The complexity of affective appraisal and response increases with the increasing complexity of the organism and environment (Damasio 1994, 89–94; 2003, 30–42). The human brain and mind are, from an evolutionary perspective, adaptations for survival and flourishing (Damasio 1994, 89–90).

The more basic affective/homeodynamic behaviors are nested within the higher forms (Damasio 2003, 37–38). Damasio stresses that evolution does not throw away the old as it brings in the new (1994, xiii–xiv). The complexity of human feelings is not freestanding but has roots in the most basic bodily processes. Homeodynamics does not consist of a “tidy” set of relations, such that a “simple linear hierarchy” could be established (Damasio 2003, 38). Damasio uses the metaphor of “a tall, messy tree with progressively higher and more elaborate branches coming off the main trunks and thus maintaining a two-way communication with their roots. The history of evolution is written all over that tree” (2003, 38). Thus the most sophisticated levels of human affectivity are rooted in a back-and-forth information exchange with the most basic survival-oriented biological regulation.
b. Homeodynamic Character of “Emotions-Proper”

Damasio’s work on human “emotions-proper” is sensitive to their inborn, social, and semiotic dimensions, as well as to their varied and often subtle forms. He divides emotions-proper into three types—background, primary, and secondary.

Background emotions are a composite product of usually “invisible” processes:

I imagine background emotions as the largely unpredictable result of several concurrent regulatory processes engaged within the vast playground that our organisms resemble. These include metabolic adjustments associated with whatever internal need is arising or has just been satisfied; and with whatever external situation is now being appraised and handled by other emotions, appetites, or intellectual calculation. (Damasio 2003, 44)

Background emotions reflect the body’s general “state of being” based on the ongoing dimensions of life regulations on which survival or homeodynamics depend (44). Much of the time the work of background emotions happens nonconsciously, occurring outside a person’s conscious awareness (Damasio 1994, 152; 1999, 228).

Damasio describes primary emotions as “innate, preorganized” (1994, 133). These are the emotions theorists often group together as basic emotions: “The frequent listing includes fear, anger, disgust, surprise, sadness, and happiness” (Damasio 2003, 44). They are cross-culturally identifiable and depend for their functioning on the brain’s limbic system (2003, 44; 1999, 285; 1994, 133). Social emotions (or secondary emotions) are those emotions that have some degree of preorganized programming but depend for their full manifestation on the social milieu of the organism (Damasio 2003, 45–47). Damasio includes in this category embarrassment, jealousy, guilt, and pride (1999, 51). These emotions involve a sensitivity to social context (Damasio 1994, 138). He notes that they go beyond a dependence on the brain’s limbic system. They are evolutionarily more complex, requiring “the agency of prefrontal and of somatosensory cortices” (Damasio 1994, 134).
Damasio stresses that homeodynamic behaviors are present at or soon after birth but that learning plays a more and more active role in their implementation. This is especially true for the more complex mechanisms of the emotions-proper:

The package of reactions that constitutes crying and sobbing is ready and active at birth; what we cry for, across a lifetime, changes with our experience. All of these reactions are automatic and largely stereotyped, and are engaged under specific circumstances. (Learning, however, can modulate the execution of the stereotyped pattern. Our . . . crying plays differently in different circumstances. . . .) (Damasio 2003, 34–35, emphasis in original)

The social-shaping of affectivity is significant for my project. As we will examine in subsequent chapters, social influence plays an important role in the semiotic-affective interaction the Peircean human organism has with his or her world.

Damasio’s account of emotions-proper is Peircean in its inclusion of nonconscious, innate, and socially shaped dimensions of bodily activity. Of particular interest, for my purposes, is Damasio’s account of background emotions, which helps elucidate the continuum of bodily activity that holds between Peirce’s conceptions of feeling and emotion, as discussed in his Cognition Series, which I examine in Chapter 2. Generally speaking, background emotions also help us to understand the continual bodily motion of the human organism. Peirce’s conviction that cognition and semiotics are processes resonates with the ongoing homeodynamic/affective behavior the human must maintain in order to survive. And his conviction that the individual cannot be separated from her synechistic social context is validated by Damasio’s point that learning plays a role in shaping our inborn affective orientation toward our environments (2003, 34–35).

c. Feelings and Semiotics

Damasio argues that feelings depend on having a brain with the capacity to represent to itself what is going on in the body (2003, 109). Human feelings involve a sophistication of representation whereby
the brain is able to represent to itself both the body and the self (Damasio 1999, 279 ff.). In what follows, I use “feeling” to convey “human feeling.” Feelings are signs, then, and they require a brain with semiotic capacity and self-awareness. They allow us to feel our emotions (in the broad sense)—like thirst or sadness—and to be aware of these feelings. This account resonates strongly with Peircean ideas about feelings, firstness, and semiotics.

Damasio explains that, given any affect, feelings occur based on the mapping (or representation) of the resultant bodily response in the somatosensory regions of the brain. He offers the following “hypothesis . . . in the form of a provisional definition”: “[A] feeling is the perception of a certain state of the body along with the perception of a certain mode of thinking and of thoughts with certain themes” (Damasio 2003, 86, my emphasis). The primary source of feelings is “the brain’s body maps” (85). The nature of feelings as perceptions is similar to Peirce’s equation of feeling and sensation in his early writings, which will be discussed below. Note that Damasio highlights the reliance of feelings on information about the body.

Feelings allow humans to register, for future reference, the survival value of objects in their environment. In fact, Damasio considers virtually all objects to be affectively salient for the human organism. This should come as no surprise, given that our homeodynamic balance requires our constant appraisal of objects in our environment for signs of benefit or danger. Thanks to human memory, the affective salience of encountered objects is remembered, becoming part of the information we “take in” from the world regarding the objects we perceive, whether we are conscious of it or not (Damasio 1999, 47, 57–58):

As far as I can fathom, few if any perceptions of any object or event, actually present or recalled from memory, are ever neutral in emotional terms. Through either innate design or by learning, we react to most, perhaps all, objects with emotions, however weak, and subsequent feelings, however feeble. (Damasio 2003, 93; cf. 309 n. 3)
The compatibility of this feltness of objects with Peirce’s work will be elaborated in Chapter 2, in conjunction with the felt dimension of cognition and association. The nonconscious dimension of association will be discussed in Chapter 4. For now, I will note that Damasio helps to articulate the interweaving dimensions involved in the feltness of a sign, highlighting as he does that innate, individual, and social influences play crucial roles in the affective coloring of objects (cf. Damasio 2003, 48–49). In what follows, for the sake of simplicity, I construe “object” broadly to refer to events, as well as “entities as diverse as a person, a place, a melody, a toothache, a state of bliss” (Damasio 1999, 9).

**Peirce’s Phenomenology: The Categories of Experience**

Peirce’s phenomenology highlights the dimensions of human affective engagement in the world. Just as Damasio articulates the human’s ongoing environmental assessment and adaptation, so too do the categories of experience, the ever-present dimensions of what Marcia Moen calls the “phenomenological richness” of human experience (1991, 435). There are three categories: firstness, secondness, and thirdness. Peirce’s phenomenological account of these categories gives us tools with which we can elucidate the complexities of the personalized/socialized, affective experience of the human organism. The categories are especially helpful for articulating the socio-political dimensions of human experience and habit-taking. The following account of the categories, with foci tailored to my project, will be drawn on and added to in subsequent chapters.36

a. Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness

“Firstness” refers to the pre-discursive awareness that underlies one’s actions and thoughts. Peirce describes this category as

a consciousness in which there is no comparison, no relation, no recognized multiplicity... no imagination of any modification of
what is positively there, no reflexion. . . . [A]ny simple and positive quality of feeling would be something which our description fits,—that it is such as it is quite regardless of anything else. (EP 2:150, 1903)

Firstness involves a felt attunement to the world within and outside of one’s body. In its purity it cannot be described, because it is too immediate to allow for comparison or contrast to other experiences or thoughts. It is pre-reflective. It includes the harmonious rhythms of breathing, heartbeat, and other inborn habits that maintain the human organism’s biological flourishing. It also encompasses other habits to which one is so accustomed that they function without one’s thinking about them. Ironically, firstness is often most easily “spotted” when something disturbs it. Firstness, for example, is the felt equanimity of a beautiful walk during a steady snowfall, during which there is a harmony between you and your surroundings. You are part of the whiteness coming down around you. As Peirce would do, I invite you—the reader—to imagine yourself on a stroll in the snow. Try to tap into the background feltness that characterizes your attunement to the snow and your surroundings . . . Then, imagine yourself slipping unexpectedly on a patch of ice and falling down, or having your wheelchair become stuck in a patch of unshoveled snow. These are examples of secondness.

Secondness at its most extreme occurs when one meets brute environmental resistance to her projects, like falling down or getting stuck. It involves a non-ego element of one’s experience, a “not me” that resists one’s movement in the world. Peirce describes secondness as “the element that the rough-and-tumble of this world renders most prominent. We talk of hard facts. That hardness, that compulsiveness of experience, is Secondness” (EP 2:268, 1903, emphasis in original; cf. EP 2:150–51, 153–54, 1903). Secondness is also characterized by immediacy, hic et nunc37 (here and now), as Peirce is fond of saying. This dimension of experience, the brute clash that occurs when you fall, get stuck, are startled, stub your toe, etc., has no explanation in the immediacy of the moment. (For explanations, we must
look beyond secondness and into the experiential dimension of thirdness. Secondness can involve less tangible disturbances, like having one’s absorption in a piece of music be disturbed by a ringing phone, doorbell, fire alarm, etc. The disturbances can also shade off into subtle environmental resistances, like the ground that breaks one’s steps or supports one’s wheelchair, and other patterns of physicality to which an individual is familiarized in her everyday experience. At this subtle extreme, secondness shades into firstness.

One can become so habitualized to certain environmental resistances that they become part of one’s attunement to one’s everyday world. When I first was learning how to drive a car with a manual transmission, for example, the experience was filled with paradigmatic secondness. I was forever meeting brute resistance from the car as I struggled to get the clutch, gas, and gear shift to work in harmony with the incline of the road. How I dreaded stopping at a red light on a hill! I have been driving a stick shift for more than twenty years now, and it has long since become a part of the firstness through which I am attuned to my world as I drive. The rhythm of changing gears is a lot like the rhythm of walking for me. I do not think about it unless something goes wrong; then I am back to secondness-proper again.

Two points can be made regarding this shading of secondness into firstness and vice versa. First of all, firstness and secondness are part of every experience, although their proportions will vary. Falling down and getting stuck are experiences in which secondness is prominent, but nonetheless they still involve a pre-discursive, preconceptual attunement to one’s environment (firstness). This is because each of these experiences has the felt awareness of one’s personalized, embodied experience—that is to say, the experience insofar as it is, say, mine or yours. On the other hand, the majestic stroll before falling or getting stuck involved a preponderance of firstness, but also secondness to the extent that the physical environment offered resistance, such as the sidewalk resisting one’s footfalls or wheelchair.

Thirdness, for our purposes, is the felt sense of synthesis involved in learning and reasoning, and the new (or newly adjusted) habits
that result from learning and reasoning (EP 1:260, 291, 296). It is the category in which self-control finds its home. It is thanks to thirdness that I learned how to drive the manual transmission, so that the secondness of awkward gear-shifting evolved into smooth gear-shifting that became part of my firstness. It is thanks to thirdness that I could form the goal of learning to drive the stick shift in the first place. More generally, thirdness allows humans to creatively adapt to their environmental vicissitudes, so that the second-nature habits that have become part of firstness can be changed when survival and/or growth require it.

Thirdness involves the habit-formation that mediates between one’s felt, embodied pre-discursive awareness of the world (firstness) and resistance from one’s environments (secondness). To form habits is to learn the patterns by which we can best harmonize with the various secondnesses of our environments. Thirdness was prominent for my young niece, for example, when she learned that water, after being left awhile in the freezer, turns to ice. (She called me long-distance to tell me her discovery.) Thirdness is only subtly present in the beautiful stroll in the snow, manifested in your implicit reasoning as to which habits to execute (habits of walking, navigation, etc.). It is present in the falling on the ice or getting stuck as you search for the reason why the unexpected scenario happened and then hypothesize how to avoid the problem in the future. Perhaps you thought that your boots had suitable traction to prevent falls or that this stretch of sidewalk was always kept clear of accumulated snow. Now you know better and will adjust your habits of conduct and expectation accordingly.

Thirdness helps humans adapt in order to survive. Francisco Jiménez, for example, writes of how his family immigrated to the United States when he was a child, in order to escape the poverty of their homeland in Tlaquepaque, Mexico (1998, 1–8). He knew no English at first. Learning English (thirdness), for Jiménez, soon became a matter of survival, so he could succeed in the U.S. school system, and so he could more effectively help support his family financially. Had Jiménez and his brother not become fluent English speakers, they
would not have been able to secure the custodial work that supported their family after their father seriously injured his back in the fields as a migrant worker (2001, 83–90). The brothers were in high school at the time (70). The man who hired them specified that their fluency in English was a necessary job requirement, such that their father, who did not speak English, would be ineligible to work for him (85–86). Clearly Jiménez’s ability to learn English enabled him to adapt to living and working in the United States, so that he could—even as a teenager—become a primary breadwinner for his family.

Thirdness also enables humans, apart from the context of immediate survival concerns, to self-consciously take on new habits. Thirdness, for example, enabled me to pursue learning Spanish as an adult, through taking classes, and continual practice in reading, speaking, writing, and listening to what, for me, is a new language. Studying this language has not been a matter of survival for me, as it was for Jiménez. In fact studying Spanish reflects my economic, racial, and “First World” privilege, since I have the resources and the noncoercive socio-political climate in which to learn a new language because I want to.

When habits are first being formed, thirdness is prominent, often alongside disruptive secondness. Firstness often becomes prominent when habits have been mastered. Early in the learning process there is often an awareness of the execution of new patterns of behavior, as one familiarizes oneself with these patterns and works to stabilize them (in order to avoid disruptive secondness). When I was first learning to drive a manual transition, once again, I was very conscious of where the clutch and gas pedals were, as well as of my right hand on the stick shift. I worked to internalize the correct balance of these components to avoid the secondness of stalling (or “kangarooing”) the car. As I became accomplished at driving the stick shift, these now familiar patterns faded from explicit awareness into automatic functioning. In other words, the thirdness of the habit gradually shaded into firstness. This is to say that familiar, functional habits that meet with little obstructive secondness or resistance tend to fade from one’s immediate awareness as specific habits. Firstness
and thirdness are closely related in this respect. The formation of a brand-new habit involves a higher proportion of thirdness/learning/synthesis, and, as the habit becomes routine for us, it shades into firstness. Those with good health and able bodies do not tend to notice their habits of breathing, walking, writing, and managing daily tasks. These habits become part of the gestalt feeling of embodiment that characterizes firstness.

This relationship between firstness and thirdness creates a tension that will be explored below and in subsequent chapters. On the one hand, thirdness enables humans to critique their existing habits. Peirce notes that self-control is used to reflect on one’s ideals, to ensure they are consistent with conduct (EP 2:246). Since, however, one’s habits can function without one’s awareness (in the second-nature gestalt of firstness), it is possible for one’s conduct to undermine one’s ideals without self-controlled critical reflection catching the inconsistency. In “What Pragmatism Is,” Peirce describes how deeply rooted established beliefs are for humans: “Belief is not a momentary mode of consciousness; it is a habit of mind essentially enduring for some time, and mostly (at least) unconscious; and like other habits, it is (until it meets with some surprise that begins its dissolution) perfectly self-satisfied” (EP 2:336–37). In this context, Peirce is describing the belief-habits that have become part of firstness, such that they function automatically—so automatically as to escape one’s awareness. Peirce’s insistence on placing self-control in a communal context suggests that feedback from others can help the individual in her efforts at self-control, by helping her identify nonconscious belief-habits that reside, undetected, in the firstness of her experience.

b. Introducing Socio-Political Secondness

A specific application of Peirce’s phenomenology that I employ for my project is what I call socio-political secondness. I highlight the influence its presence or absence has on habit-taking and the corresponding shaping of firstness.
Peirce does not use the term “social secondness,” but his ideas are compatible with the term, by which I mean socially dictated environmental resistance. Secondness—which involves any type of environmental resistance—occurs not only because of physical constraint and the laws of nature, like tripping on a rock and falling down. It can also occur because of social conventions that are largely outside one’s control. For example, no one living in the contemporary mainstream of the United States who was sincerely hoping to land a conventional job would dream of showing up at a job interview, say, naked—even if the temperature and humidity were so high that wearing clothes was uncomfortable. This dress code is due not to physical but to social constraint.

Socio-political secondness refers to social secondness that is not encountered equally by all members of society, like the convention of wearing clothes in public is. Rather socio-political secondness, in the context of my project, involves constraint that is directed at non-hegemonic groups. It includes prejudice and discrimination based on factors such as economic class, race, sex, sexuality, and so on. One’s daily experience is often characterized by socio-political environmental resistance if one is a member of socio-politically targeted groups, such as GLBTQs, people of color, the poor, women, and so on. People in these groups are often limited in their movement in the world for socio-political reasons.

For example, legal scholar Patricia J. Williams had the following experience in 1986, after buzzer systems had been installed in many New York City stores as a crime prevention measure. The basic idea was to deny entry to suspicious-looking people during business hours without denying access to upstanding customers. Williams writes:

I was shopping in Soho and saw in a store window a sweater that I wanted to buy for my mother. I pressed my round brown face to the window and my finger to the buzzer, seeking admittance. A narrow-eyed, white teenager wearing running shoes and feasting on bubble gum glared out, evaluating me for signs that would pit me against the limits of his social understanding. After about five seconds, he mouthed “We’re closed,” and blew pink rubber
It was two Saturdays before Christmas, at one o’clock in the afternoon; there were several white people in the store who appeared to be shopping for things for their mothers. (1991, 44–45, Williams’s emphasis)

Williams’s movement in the world was limited by a “non-ego” force that barred her entry into a store, Benetton’s, based on the color of her skin. The door was locked and was thus a physical instance of secondness, but it need not have remained locked to Williams once she pressed the buzzer. Socio-political constraint is ultimately the reason she was denied entry. Brute resistance blocked her path and shattered her equanimity: “In the flicker of his judgmental gray eyes, that saleschild had transformed my brightly sentimental, joy-to-the-world, pre-Christmas spree to a shambles. He snuffed my sense of humanitarian catholicity, and there was nothing I could do to snuff his, without making a spectacle of myself” (45, my emphasis).

Larger-scale examples of socio-political secondness targeting people of color in the United States abound. In Asian American Dreams, for example, journalist Helen Zia details the numerous socio-political obstacles, past and present, encountered by Asian Americans in the United States (2000). Despite the “model minority” myth that is used to pit them against African Americans, Asian Americans have experienced blatant racism dating back to the nineteenth century and extending into the present, including the internment of Japanese Americans during World War Two and, more currently, glass ceilings, hate crimes, and racial profiling (23–52, 293–302).

People who are Euro-American, born and raised in the mainstream of the United States, are often not familiar with socio-political secondness based on race. This is because mainstream U.S. society remains socio-politically structured to support and promote whiteness. Thus whites often experience an absence of socio-political secondness. This absence promotes habits of false universalization, whereby a Euro-American experience—where race is not an obstacle—is conceptualized as the norm, both in mainstream U.S. society and in the belief-habits of white people. False universalization occurs
when a person or group assumes their experience is representative for all of humanity. When false universalization of a Euro-American experience occurs, it can be difficult for whites to take seriously the testimony of people of color who report on the socio-political secondness they experience based on their race. Yet to deny the latter’s input regarding racism perpetuates a hegemonic norm that blocks inquiry and obstructs societal growth.

In terms of the phenomenological categories, white privilege shapes the felt equanimity (firstness) of Euro-Americans within the white-promoting habits of mainstream U.S. society. Euro-Americans often receive no socio-political resistance (secondness) based on their race. Thus, their white-privileged habits, which are often introduced in childhood, easily slide into the complacent attunement of firstness, often functioning so automatically as to escape notice. While firstness feels so deeply natural that it is pre-discursive and pre-reflective, this naturalness can be a repository for pernicious, socio-politically shaped habits regarding race. Shannon Sullivan notes:

Human beings could never survive if, for example, they had to consciously guide every muscular movement that it takes to get out of bed in the morning. While the nonconscious aspect of habit enables organic flourishing, it also can limit it by allowing all sorts of destructive habits to operate undetected. White privilege is one such habit. (2006, 4)

Building on Sullivan’s point about the undetected habits of privilege, I would add that humans also could not survive into adulthood if they did not receive adequate care as infants and small children. Child development is a phase where young human organisms form many belief-habits about the world that become part of their firstness. Once again, survival interests and societal norms can coalesce for the infant and child, shaping his or her belief-habits so fully that they function undetected in adulthood. We can describe such belief-habits as “socialized instinctive beliefs,” which I will explain more fully below. Heterosexual, male, white, and other privileged belief-habits often fall into this category.
Peircean Semiotics, Evolution, and Feelings

It is not my intention to fully engage Peirce’s semiotics in my project. Instead, I focus on one fundamental semiotic insight that informs Peirce’s thought and helps make sense of Peircean affectivity: all our cognitions are signs. The starting point for this semiotic cognition is, for Peirce, feelings. This section explores how feelings are at once a sight of firstness, secondness, and thirdness. Beyond the qualitative immediacy discussed above, feelings involve sensation and synthesis. They are the portal through which objects outside the human organism are rendered as cognitions or ideas within the organism. Since we cannot access the world outside our bodies except through signs, our interaction with the world around us is semiotically mediated. While Peirce’s semiotic theory itself can be a daunting and highly technical study, this basic insight about our relations to signs makes good sense. Of course we do not access the external world except through signs, as they are rendered for us by our sense organs and the corresponding nerve firings. When I see the dirty dishes in my sink, for example, this seeing is mediated by a synthesis involving the cone and rod cells in my eyes.

Peirce’s semiotic insight also makes good sense from an evolutionary point of view. Semiotic capacity promotes survival. Damasio notes that “the ability to display images internally and to order those images in a process called thought” reflects a complexity by which certain animals can better “predict the future, plan accordingly, and choose the next action” (1994, 90). Since Damasio uses the term “images” broadly, I take his usage to be equivalent—for our purposes—to “signs” as they occur in the human mind on Peirce’s scheme. Because of the complexity of their environment, humans require intermediary neural circuitry more sophisticated than simple stimulus-response mechanisms. In addition to perceiving the external world via images or signs, humans also possess an array of neural organs and systems that monitor their ongoing interactions with the external world (90–94). This complicated scheme allows for sophistication in manipulating images, conceptualizing, and categorizing, all of which help us reason and make decisions (94).
For Peirce, the basic point of contact between the human organism and the external world is “feeling” or “sensation,” terms he uses synonymously in this context. This synonymous usage signals the inseparability of qualitative immediacy (firstness) and environmental confrontation (secondness). Feelings/sensations are continuously triggered by objects external to the human body, which stimulate nerve firings in the sense organs. Feeling, or sensation, involves the grouping of nervous impulses (by means of hypothetic synthesis) such that a rudimentary sorting of things can occur—e.g., these red objects are different from those blue ones, or these are “painful circumstances” and those are “pleasurable” (W 1:472, 495–96; W 2:197 ff.). To have feelings requires both body and mind. In his 1866 Lowell Lectures, Peirce says: “Feelings, we all know, depend upon the bodily organism. The blind man from birth has no such feelings as red, blue, or any other colour; and without any body at all, it is probable we should have no feelings at all . . .” (W 1:495). Feelings are also fully mind-derived for Peirce. They are the felt dimension of cognition (W 2:227), and they also involve the ideation that makes cognition possible in the first place.

Peirce’s rather abstract descriptions of firstness, of which feeling is paradigmatic, can obscure the secondness and thirdness that always accompany an instance of feeling. Recall the earlier description of firstness as “a consciousness in which there is no comparison, no relation, no recognized multiplicity . . . no imagination of any modification of what is positively there, no reflexion. . . . [A]ny simple and positive quality of feeling would be something which our description fits,—that it is such as it is quite regardless of anything else” (EP 2:150, 1903). Note that Peirce says there is “no recognized multiplicity” in firstness (EP 2:150, my emphasis). In fact, one cannot experience a “positive quality of feeling” without the synthetic processing by which elements of the external world become signs (thoughts, cognitions, ideas) to one’s mind.

To see something, as noted above, is to experience a synthesis made possible by the cone and rod cells in our eyes. Regarding hearing, Peirce notes:
The pitch of a tone depends upon the rapidity of the succession of the vibrations which reach the ear. Each of those vibrations produces an impulse upon the ear. . . . [T]he pitch of a tone depends upon the rapidity with which certain impressions are successively conveyed to the mind. These impressions must exist previously to any tone; hence, the sensation of pitch is determined by previous cognitions. Nevertheless, this would never have been discovered by the mere contemplation of that feeling. (W 2:197)

To have what Peirce would call the “feeling of a tone” means that an abstraction is occurring, by which an element of my external environment is rendered into a sign—that is, a cognition, idea, or thought in my mind. For the sign-making to occur, by which I experience “tone” in its firstness, secondness must be at play, whereby sound waves converge on my ears. Thirdness must also be at play, whereby the sound waves are synthesized into a unified tone. The synthesis involved in sensation is often so seamless as to escape notice, such that there is “no recognized multiplicity” (EP 2:150).

I employ the above dimensions of Peircean semiotics in order to highlight and scrutinize the intricacy of the more conspicuous dimensions of our thought processes. It is not only the physiological processing of feelings/sensations that is generally unrecognizable to humans. As noted in my socio-political reading of the categories, socio-political factors can influence one’s felt encounters with the world (firstness), and thereby one’s cognition, without one’s awareness of such influence.

Socialized Instinctive Beliefs

This brings us to an important clarification regarding Peirce’s use of the term “instinct.” He believes “instinct” can be broadly construed to reflect inborn habits, as well as socialized ones. In a 1902 discussion of logic, he notes:

If I may be allowed to use the word “habit,” without any implication as to the time or manner in which it took birth, so as to be equivalent to the corrected phrase “habit or disposition,” that is,
as some general principle working in a man’s nature to determine how he will act, then an instinct, in the proper sense of the word, is an inherited habit, or in more accurate language, an inherited disposition. But since it is difficult to make sure whether a habit is inherited or is due to infantile training and tradition, I shall ask leave to employ the word “instinct” to cover both cases. (CP 2.170, my emphasis)

Thus, for Peirce, “instinct” can refer to both natural habits that have been determined from birth, like breathing, and socialized belief-habits, such as religious beliefs. This broad construal of instinct is reflected in his synonymous uses of “instinct” and “sentiment” in contexts where he conveys the social-shaping of sentiment that occurs in society (EP 1:119, 377 n. 22; RLT 110–11).

For example, in discussing the a priori method of fixing belief, Peirce makes two comments in which “instinct” and (socialized) “sentiment” are used synonymously as forces that shape our beliefs and actions. First, “Indeed, as long as no better method can be applied, [the a priori method] ought to be followed, since it is then the expression of instinct which must be the ultimate cause of belief in all cases” (EP 1:377 n. 22, my emphasis). Second, Peirce notes how the a priori method is problematic:

> [W]hen I come to see that the chief obstacle to the spread of Christianity among a people of as high culture as the Hindoos has been a conviction of the immorality of our way of treating women, I cannot help seeing that, though governments do not interfere, sentiments in their development will be very greatly determined by accidental causes. (W 3:253, my emphasis; cf. Hookway 2000, 242)

By implication, Peirce is noting that “instinct” can be socialized through religious or governmental channels. This blurring between sentiment and instinct, which allows for “socialized instinct,” is also found in Peirce’s writings of the 1890s, where he explicitly overlaps sentiment and instinct, again using the terms synonymously. In “Philosophy and the Conduct of Life” (1898), he makes the bold assertion that “[i]t is the instincts, the sentiments, that make the substance of the soul. Cognition is only its surface, its locus of contact with what
is external to it” (RLT 110). He also uses “sentiment” and “instinct” interchangeably when referring to “vital interest[s],” such as one’s “religious life” and “code of morals” (RLT 111).

Instinctive beliefs therefore include socialized beliefs, not merely “natural” ones like the belief that “fire burns” or that there is “order in nature” (CP 5.498, 508, 516; Hookway 2000, 216; Ayim 1982, 19). In Critical Common-sensist vocabulary, socialized instinctive beliefs are often specific (versus vague) and dubitable (versus acritical). Nonetheless, they are shaped and reinforced from childhood onward, such that they take on common-sense certainty or “practical infallibility” (CP 1.661). Religious beliefs are often instinctive in this socialized sense. In this context, Peirce discusses the dubitability of the belief, which is found in Christian societies, that “suicide is murder” (EP 2:349–50).

Extrapolating socio-politically, I include in the category of “socialized instinctive beliefs” ideas about race, sex, and other socio-political classifications. Socialized instinctive beliefs are included in one’s common-sense (or background) beliefs. Addressing sexist common-sense beliefs, Christopher Hookway notes:

If we reject a wholly biological understanding of instinctive belief and recognize that common sense is largely an historical cultural achievement, we may still expect a time-lag: inherited assumptions about the capacities of men and women derive highly fallible authority from their entrenchment in common sense. (2000, 212; cf. Anderson 1995a, 110–11)

My project focuses on these socio-politically shaped common-sense beliefs, whose instinctive qualities derive from socialization. Peirce’s discussion of the authority method of fixing belief, while it does not explicitly invoke socialized instinctive beliefs, highlights his conviction that socialization can take explicitly political forms that are transmitted to the young and perpetually reinforced (W 3:250–51).

Instinctive beliefs not only take on common-sense certainty; they also often function nonconsciously—that is, without one’s conscious awareness. For Peirce, consciousness is not “a separate tissue, overlaying an unconscious region of the occult nature, mind, soul, or physiological basis” (EP 2:347). Rather, “the difference is only relative and
the demarcation not precise” (EP 2:347). This means that instinctive beliefs promoting racism, sexism, and other social ills can function without the conscious awareness of those acting on them. At the same time, instinctive beliefs—at least in some cases—can be raised to conscious attention and scrutiny, which is an exercise of self-control undertaken by Critical Common-sensists. I will argue in Chapter 5 that socialized instinctive beliefs are especially amenable to Critical Common-sensist consciousness-raising, since they do not meet the criterion of vagueness and since they can be called into doubt by community members who experience socio-political secondness corresponding to the beliefs in question.

There is a tension here, however, which was noted above. Nonconsciously functioning racism or sexism (or a combination of the two), for example, can result in the rejection of testimony given by the person experiencing the racist and/or sexist socio-political secondness. Such a rejection often takes a form resembling “She’s playing the race card” (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 29, 179; hooks 2003b, 30–31, 35). On the one hand, blind spots by definition refer to things a person cannot see, such as the nonconscious and unintentional functioning of racism or sexism. On the other hand, habits of white and/or male privilege often involve rejecting the testimony of those who can identify these very blind spots because of their experience of corresponding socio-political secondness.

The following chapters apply insights from Peircean affectivity to explain how habits of privilege can become so entrenched as to promote blind spots and encourage blocking the road of inquiry. The socialization of children within a society’s hegemonic norms is a key factor in this explanation. The personal takes shape within the social and starts the minute a baby comes into the world. Babies are born with natural instincts, and they proceed to acquire socialized instinctive beliefs. Peirce gives the following description of “the instinctive mind”:

We may be dimly able to see that in part it depends on the accidents of the moment, in part on what is personal or racial, in
part [on what] is common to all nicely adjusted organisms whose equilibrium has narrow ranges of stability, in part on whatever is composed of vast collections of independently variable elements. . . . (EP 2:241, my emphasis, editorial brackets58)

To say that the instinctive mind involves “in part . . . what is personal” is to underscore, ultimately, the socialized character of the instinctive mind. Since the personal takes shape within a social matrix, socialization of the personal is, for Peirce, inescapable.

This does not eliminate personal uniqueness by any measure. The Peircean human organism is a distinct source of experience and creativity—that is to say, a distinct physiological cosmos embodying a corresponding perspective on the spatio-temporal world. Such uniqueness informs differences between “all nicely adjusted organisms” (EP 2:241), who vary in the specificity of each one’s flesh, including degrees of able-bodiedness, food sensitivities, metabolism, pain thresholds, and a host of other factors. Individuals also vary in how they exercise their self-controlled belief-habit formation, such as how they adapt to secondness in their environments, how they set goals and/or ideals for conduct, and how they approach learning and/or creative endeavors.

Nonetheless the personal is social for Peirce: “We naturally make all our distinctions too absolute. We are accustomed to speak of an external universe and an inner world of thought. But they are merely vicinities with no real boundary line between them” (CP 7.438). And, “Experience being something forced upon us, belongs to the [outer world]. Yet in so far as it is I or you who experiences the constraint, the experience is mine or yours, and thus belongs to the inner world” (7.439, Peirce’s emphasis). The force of experience includes the force of community, such that socio-political secondness is as much a part of reality as are habits of nature, like gravity. Thus socio-political habits about gender, race, sex, and sexuality (to name a few) become part of one’s personal firstness as surely as do habits relating to one’s able-bodiedness (such as using a wheelchair or walking). That is to say, children are implicitly and explicitly socialized about gender, race, sex, sexuality, etc., and the corresponding instinctive belief-habits
often develop deep yet, from the individual’s point of view, imperceptible roots.

Examining the intricacies of childhood belief-habit formation through the lenses of Peircean affectivity and social criticism promotes the consciousness-raising and (thus) self-control of those in hegemonic groups who wish to scrutinize and change these evasive socialized instinctive beliefs, in order to bring conduct and ideals into better harmony.