The Politics of Survival

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For Peirce, agapic love is the ideal that communities should embrace in relationship to their individual members, especially when these members are at odds with the community itself.¹ Peirce’s views on agape occur in the rich context of his 1890s Monist “Cosmology Series” and writings on association,² where the synechistic individual emerges as a potential source of novelty, as a result of her unique experience and creativity. This novelty is an important source of communal growth. In what follows, I give an affectivity- and social criticism–focused interpretation and application of these key insights, drawing on work done in previous chapters. I first take up the synechistic individual and then the community.

I demonstrate that, on the one hand, agape provides an insightful affective communal ideal, especially for those in hegemonic groups who need to practice loving concern and openness toward community members in non-hegemonic groups. On the other hand, however, analogous to the application problem faced by the scientific
method, applying the agapic ideal in actual communities can also be undermined by the nonconscious functioning of exclusionary background beliefs. Thus the work in this chapter, like the work done in Chapter 3, points beyond itself to Peirce’s mature doctrine of Critical Common-sensism.

**Part 1: The Law of Mind and the Synechistic Individual: Association**

Once again we take up the ongoing flow of human cognition and belief. In this 1890s context, Peirce’s preferred vocabulary is “feelings”/“ideas,” and the flow of human thought is described by the law of mind. He says, “The law of mind is that feelings and ideas attach themselves in thought so as to form systems” (CP 7.467). The systems formed are habits, habit-formation being one with the process of cognition, which Peirce describes as an ongoing “rhythm” (CP 7.412): “[T]he whole action of the soul [or mind], so far as it is subject to law consist[s] of nothing but taking up and letting drop in ceaseless alternation” (CP 7.410); “the whole activity of the mind consists of a drawing in and dropping out” (CP 7.414).

When the mind allows feelings and ideas to “drop,” they do not simply disappear. Rather they fade from conscious awareness to become part of new or existing habit systems, which exert a subtle but powerful influence on subsequent connections among ideas. This influence often goes unnoticed. It is the sway of sympathy among one’s own habit systems, whose influence can shape our beliefs without our even knowing it (CP 7.434–35, CP 7.447–48).

Feelings/ideas originate in the firstness, secondness, and thirdness of the human organism’s experience, in her ongoing interaction with external and internal environments. The organism’s firstness, in this respect, includes both the feltness of her habits and the automatic, harmonious functioning of undisturbed habits. Secondness involves the ongoing confrontation between the human organism and the external world, including socio-political secondness. And thirdness includes the learning and mediation (between firstness and secondness) involved in one’s habits, as well as a sense of self over time. Firstness
and thirdness continue to be closely related here. Thirdness is reflected in habits, old and new, insofar as they continually mediate one’s navigation of the external world. To the extent that this mediation is or becomes automatic, pre-reflective, these same habits reflect firstness.

The unique relationships among an individual’s habit systems—which are both idiosyncratically and socially shaped—are sources of novel ideas/feelings. Cooking is an everyday example, where one’s habits regarding how and what one normally cooks can be the source for novel combinations and new dishes. Cooking habits are idiosyncratically shaped by one’s likes and dislikes, food allergies, nutritional needs, and so forth. They are likewise socially shaped by factors such as conventions regarding meat and dairy products, availability of types of food, and religious and cultural traditions.

a. Feeling and Idea in the 1890s

In his 1890s writings, Peirce promotes feeling to a higher cognitive status than it had in the Cognition Series of the 1860s. In the earlier essay series, feeling is the felt dimension of cognition, which accompanies but is different from the representational dimension of cognition (W 2:227). In his 1890s work, by contrast, Peirce often uses “feeling” and “idea” in the same breath, as he describes the law of mind:

The one primary and fundamental law of mental action consists in a tendency to generalisation. Feeling tends to spread; connections between feelings awaken feelings; neighboring feelings become assimilated; ideas are apt to reproduce themselves. These are so many formulations of the one law of the growth of mind. (EP 1:291, my emphasis)

And

[T]here is but one law of mind, namely, that ideas tend to spread continuously and to affect certain others which stand to them in a peculiar relation of affectibility. In this spreading they lose intensity, and especially the power of affecting others, but gain
generality and become welded with other ideas. (EP 1:313, my emphasis)

Peirce does not explain this apparently puzzling conflation of terms, although he does distinguish between feeling/idea, on the one hand, and a general idea on the other: “A finite interval of time generally contains an innumerable series of feelings; and when these become welded together in association, the result is a general idea. For . . . by continuous spreading an idea becomes generalised” (EP 1:325). When ideas/feelings become generalized, and this generalization is useful to the organism, a habit is formed (CP 7.498). From the standpoint of survival, this makes sense. Ideas/feelings result from the human organism’s ongoing inquiry with the external environment. General ideas—or proto-habits—are formed to adapt to the secondness of experience. Successful generalizations become full-fledged habits, which promote survival and growth.

In the context of Peirce’s synonymous usage of “feeling” and “idea” in the 1890s, feeling is a part of and makes possible the representative nature of cognition. That is to say, feeling plays a role in ideation or the representative abstraction that occurs in cognition. The firstness and thirdness attributed to human cognition in the Cognition Series have been intertwined in the 1890s writings. “Feeling” and “idea” both convey, within the mind, the semiotic-nervous representations of the external world. Feeling is itself representative and thus is an idea. This makes sense from the perspective of everyday semiotics. Recall Chapter 1’s explanation of how feelings are the portal through which human organisms interact with external objects. The greenness of my car, for example, is at once both a feeling/sensation based on my eyes processing information and a sign of the object to my mind.

b. The Subject-ness of Feelings and Personality

Peirce’s categorial depiction of an “idea” in the Monist series essay “The Law of Mind” (1892) portrays what I call the “subject-ness” of ideas/feelings.
Three elements go to make up an idea. The first is its intrinsic quality as a feeling. The second is the energy with which it affects other ideas, an energy which is infinite in the here-and-nowness of immediate sensation, finite and relative in the recency of the past. The third element is the tendency of an idea to bring along other ideas with it. (EP 1:325)

Note that Peirce is personifying ideas/feelings. They have a felt quality, energy to affect other ideas/feelings, and a “tendency . . . to bring other ideas [or feelings] along with [them]” (EP 1:325). This personification is no accident for Peirce, who specifically compares ideas to persons, “[E]very general idea has the unified living feeling of a person” (EP 1:350, cf. 354).

To convey this anthropomorphic nature, Peirce uses the term “subjective” and its derivatives, attributing to feelings/ideas subjective extension and intensity (EP 1:324; CP 7:396–98, 496–97). There are at least two senses of “subjective” at play here. First, feelings/ideas are subjective because they belong to a particular person in whose mind the nerves are firing, and thus reflect her or his particular biases. Second, feelings/ideas have what I call “subject-ness.” They have subjective extension and intensity, because they are subjects. In being constitutive of the person, feelings/ideas are also microcosms within the human organism, that is, little subjects within the human subject her- or himself. The microcosmic subject-ness of the feeling/idea unfolds under the influence of existing habits in the organism.

Peirce notes the subject-ness of feelings/ideas in several places. In “The Law of Mind,” he notes that a feeling has “a subjective, or substantial, spatial extension” that is “a subjective, not an objective, extension” (EP 1:324, my emphasis). By this he means that feelings are themselves subjects within the mind, “subject[s] of inhesion” (EP 1:324). They take up physical space in the nervous tissue of the brain. Elsewhere in the essay, Peirce describes “subjective” as “considered as a subject or substance having the attribute of duration” (EP 1:315). This means that the spreading of feelings/ideas, described by the law of mind, manifests in nervous tissue belonging to a unique body. Peirce does not elaborate on this insight, although he does note that
feelings involve “externality,” by which he seems to mean an outside trigger of some sort (EP 1:324–25). This relates to the secondness of experience and the intentionality of feelings/ideas. They are triggered by and related to objects.

The uniqueness of the human organism’s body/mind is a significant factor here. The way a particular feeling/idea takes up space in my nervous tissue will differ from the way a similar feeling/idea takes space in your nervous tissue. Peirce uses the term “subjective intensity” to describe the internal vividness of a feeling, such as the liveliness that the sound of thunder has for me personally. In fact, I find the sound of thunder to be thrilling, whereas someone else may find it terrifying in liveliness or, perhaps, neutral. Subjective intensity is thus distinct from the objective intensity, which in this case would be the loudness of the thunderclap itself (CP 7.396–98, 496–97). The subjective intensity of a feeling/idea reflects its subject-ness. As a subject inhering in nervous tissue, a feeling/idea has a personalized vivacity. This vivacity is related to existing habit systems and how the present feeling/idea relates to them. This is another way of saying that the subject-ness of present feelings/ideas is related to past feelings/ideas that have become welded together in habit systems. Peirce specifically notes this influence of past experience on the human organism’s ongoing flow of feelings/ideas, noting that “every state of feeling is affectible by every earlier state” (EP 1:323). Since the influence of past feelings will be different for each person, Peirce’s comment underscores the fact that the influence of our past feelings/ideas is unique to each one of us. My own habit systems reflect past experience with many, many intense thunderstorms, none of which ever threatened my safety, and many of which were accompanied by fascinating (to me) wind and rain patterns. All this past experience informs the subjective intensity that the sound of thunder has for me. For someone whose life, or the lives of loved ones, was threatened by a thunderstorm, the sound of thunder may have a more intense subjective intensity than it does for me. And for someone whose experience of thunderstorms was uninteresting to them from the standpoint of aesthetics or safety, the subjective intensity of thunder may be considerably less subjectively intense, even neutral.
The influence of past feelings on present ones is sophisticated, reflecting what Peirce would call personality or personal character. Personality involves a holistic picture that incorporates one’s past habit systems, one’s ongoing activity in the world, and one’s aspirations for the future. The welding together of personal habit-systems is unique to each organism. Peirce does not elaborate on this uniqueness when he discusses personality in “The Law of Mind.” Nonetheless I would argue that one’s habit-systems-gestalt includes one’s unique embodiment and spatio-temporal orientation toward the world, as well as the ways these irreducibly individual factors blend with social and, more specifically, socio-political environmental interaction.

Peirce’s description of personality encompases the dynamic interplay among one’s personal history, current environmental interactions, and expectations and aims for the future. He says that “[p]ersonality is some kind of coördination or connection of ideas” (EP 1:331). It is the general idea and “living feeling” that results from the ideas/feelings that make up the human organism (EP 1:331). It includes the feltness of being oneself, which involves a grand and ongoing gestalt of the feltness of one’s habits. Moreover,

This personality, like any general idea, is not a thing to be apprehended in an instant. It has to be lived in time; nor can any finite time embrace it in all its fulness [sic]. Yet in each infinitesimal interval it is present and living, though specifically colored by the immediate feelings of that moment. (EP 1:331)

Personality involves the ongoing growth of the human organism, which reflects a special kind of coordination of ideas/feelings. Peirce calls this coordination a developmental teleology, in order to capture both the goal-oriented directedness (teleology) and the dynamic growth of the goals themselves (developmental) (EP 1:331). Our goals grow as we do. An example of this phenomenon is the frequency with which college students change their majors as their interests change and grow. Personality, or character, is dynamic and lived.

Peirce’s portrayal of personality supports the insight that, no matter how socially mediated one’s habits may be, she will always be irreducibly unique in her individualized embodiment, her spatio-temporal perspective, and the interrelationships among all her habits.
The principles of association—contiguity and resemblance—demonstrate this point as well. An examination of these principles shows in detail how, on Peirce’s scheme, individuals are sources of creativity (including creative resistance) in their communities.

c. Inner and Outer Worlds and the Principles of Association

The law of mind manifests in the synechistic individual through association by resemblance and association by contiguity, which Peirce pairs with a person’s inner and outer worlds, respectively:

The ensemble of all habits about ideas of feeling constitutes one great habit which is a World; and the ensemble of all habits about acts of reaction constitutes a second great habit, which is another World. The former is the Inner World, the world of Plato’s forms. The other is the Outer World, or universe of existence. The mind of man is adapted to the reality of being. Accordingly, there are two modes of association of ideas: inner association, based on the habits of the inner world, and outer association, based on the habits of the universe. (CP 4.157, ca. 1897)

The flow of feelings/ideas by which our habits are formed and refined is governed by the interplay between an inner world of individuality, or association by resemblance, and an outer world of “not me,” or association by contiguity.

1. Association by Contiguity

Association by contiguity (“contiguity,” for short) groups feelings/ideas based on experience. My experience of the connection between thunder and rain, for example, leads me to link the two. Contiguity involves the realm of secondness and habits acquired based on our experience with the external world. It involves connections, between feelings/ideas, that are dictated by factors outside one’s mind, either conventionally or naturally: “[I]n association by contiguity an idea calls up the idea of the set in which experience has placed it, and thence one of the other ideas of that set” (CP 7.392, Peirce’s emphasis). This connection between ideas reflects a large-scale habit that
The law of mind, association, and sympathy preexists a particular person’s mental activity and control. Contiguity involves “the suggestion by an idea of another, which has been associated with it, not by the nature of thought, but by experience, or the course of life” (CP 7.391, Peirce’s emphasis). Peirce gives the example of the judicial branch of government making someone think of the executive and legislative branches of government and then, perhaps, of the performance of the legislature (CP 7.391).

The course of life also includes associations driven by socio-political secondness. For example, Jean Shinoda Bolen, a psychiatrist, Jungian analyst, and writer, describes the feelings/ideas she experienced on visiting the Anne Frank Haus in Amsterdam:

I . . . felt a sense of kinship with Anne. During those same wartime years, I had been a child, too. As a Japanese American living in California, whose family had managed to escape being in a concentration camp, I had felt only a fraction of the apprehension of attracting hostile attention that Anne Frank and her family must have felt. We didn’t have to go into hiding, but we did have to move often during the evacuation and the relocation of everyone of Japanese ancestry, initially staying just one step ahead of martial law. During the war years, I went to seven elementary schools in five states. (1994, 204–5)

Anne Frank and her family were in hiding from the Nazis, to avoid being sent to a concentration camp. During the same “wartime years,” Bolen and her family were also making efforts to escape concentration camps. Thus visiting the Anne Frank Haus suggests to Bolen her own family’s experience. This connection reflects an association by contiguity, whereby external factors, in the form of socio-political secondness, led Bolen to connect the threat of concentration camps to her own experience as a Japanese American living in the United States during World War Two.

Humans not only make associations by contiguity, but also by resemblance, which provides a contrast, for Peirce, between human and non-human animals. Non-human animals are clearly seen to demonstrate associations by contiguity, which involves a less sophisticated form of reasoning than does resemblance: “The dog, when he hears
the voice of his master runs expecting to see him, and if he does not find him will manifest surprize, or at any rate perplexity. This is as good an example of inference from connection in experience as could easily be given'' (CP 7.454). The connections involved in resemblance, on the other hand, involve a degree of abstraction that “brutes” seem not to achieve (CP 7.455).

II. ASSOCIATION BY RESEMBLANCE

Peirce calls “association by resemblance” (“resemblance,” for short) the mind’s natural drawing into clusters of feelings/ideas. This type of association “probably implies a higher degree of self-consciousness than any of the brutes possess. It involves a somewhat steady attention to qualities as such; and this must rest on the capacity for language, if not on language itself” (CP 7.455). Resemblance involves abstraction beyond the capacity, shared by many nonhuman animals, to learn from past experiences. It thus allows self-controlled habit-taking to reach greater sophistication in humans than it does in nonhuman animals.

To be more specific: Resemblance allows humans to create habits that differ from those present at birth and from those learned through association by contiguity. Peirce uses the term “general idea” to describe a cluster of feelings/ideas created through resemblance. General ideas become habits or concepts when, on repetition, they are found useful to the organism (CP 7.498, ca. 1898). Note that the habits in question are based on the organism’s own connections, as opposed to connections provided by the external world. For example, in the movie Cast Away (2002) the fictional character Chuck Noland, played by Tom Hanks, is a Federal Express manager who has recently become stranded on a desert island. Before the crash that maroons him, Noland experienced a white, male, middle-class mainstream U.S. lifestyle. After the crash, we witness Noland’s attempts to create new habits of survival, given his starkly new environment. Contiguity is in play, as Noland continually learns from his new experiences. Creativity, or association by resemblance, also plays a primary role,
as he tries new combinations of habits he formerly developed through contiguity. This is especially evident when Noland uses materials from several FedEx packages that have washed ashore from the wrecked plane. He uses the insides of videotapes as makeshift rope. He uses the blade from an ice skate for chopping and cutting and as a small mirror to inspect an aching tooth. Contiguity would have already told him how rope, blades, and reflective surfaces work. In the new environment of the uninhabited island, ropes, blades, and reflective surfaces are not readily available. The miscellaneous FedEx packages are available, however, and resemblance enables Noland to make novel combinations: videotape as rope, ice-skate blades as knife, ax, and mirror. These new combinations promote Noland’s survival in a new environment, by helping him adapt his old habits to this new environment.

Peirce links association by resemblance with instinct, saying, “[I]t may be a natural disposition, which was from birth destined to develop itself whatever the child’s outward experiences might be, so long as he was not maimed nor virtually maimed, say by being imprisoned” (CP 7.498, ca. 1898). As long as a human organism’s sense organs are fully operative and he or she is not socially isolated, his or her associations by resemblance will develop naturally, regardless of environmental particularities. Those who have spent time with small children and witnessed their vast stores of creativity and imagination—expressed in improvised games, costumes, stories, drawings—can attest to the young age at which resemblance is already present in humans. The survival value of this instinct toward resemblance is rooted in the adaptability made possible by unique habit-formation (cf. Damasio 1994, 89–94). Chuck Noland’s creative ingenuity makes it possible for him to adapt to a huge change in environment, despite the ineffectiveness of many of his old habits of securing food, shelter, and water.

Association by resemblance signals the mind’s ability to make self-controlled, creative connections between ideas, connections that go beyond those rendered by experience. It involves “the free play of imagination” (CP 7.437). Resemblance promotes not only survival in
complex environments but also artistic and scientific creativity through which aesthetic and epistemological pursuits can grow and flourish. The creativity made possible by resemblance manifests differently in each individual human, depending on factors including the uniqueness of her personalized embodiment and her corresponding spatio-temporal perspective on the world, as well as the interaction among her unique habits and habit systems. In addition to and alongside these factors, creativity is shaped by experience.

The creative, imaginative energies of resemblance draw on contiguity. If there were no associations/habits/beliefs learned via contiguity/experience, association by resemblance would have nothing from which to work. My creativity in the kitchen, for example, depends on the associations/habits/beliefs I have learned through experience—regarding spices, flavors, textures, cooking techniques, etc. For someone who had never before cooked or set foot in a kitchen, “creativity” would not apply to her or his attempts at cooking. This person would be dependent on trying things from scratch and then learning from the experience. The potential for creativity/resemblance would then grow alongside the accrual of experience. Even someone fairly new to cooking could be creative, as soon as she had a little experience to go on.

III. RECIPROCITY OF INFLUENCE

For Peirce, a person’s inner and outer worlds are continuous, they shade into each other. The human organism’s inner world colors her outer world, making this outer world a world for her. On the other hand, the outer world colors her inner world as well, limiting the personal control she might have over ideas in that domain. Peirce observes, “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” (CP 7.439, Peirce’s emphasis).
Recall that the inner world is the world of resemblance and that the outer world is the world of contiguity. Peirce is saying that association by resemblance and association by contiguity mutually affect each other. One’s personalized resemblances are shaped by one’s experience, and vice versa. For example, my experience of running competitively during my high school years (contiguity) resulted in my applying running metaphors to my life, which reflects association by resemblance. At graduation I even gave a speech whose theme was “the race of life.” In turn, this association by resemblance shaped my experience of running, which became a deeply symbolic act for me, representing strength, discipline, and commitment. Moreover, this reciprocal contiguity-resemblance influence grew along with me. When I became injured in college and could no longer compete (contiguity), I began to see running through a more relaxed metaphor, as reflecting self-attunement and self-care (resemblance). This evolved metaphor shaped my experience (contiguity). It led to my running only for pleasure—versus “making” myself run to complete an exercise regimen—and, eventually, it led to my embracing walking instead of running as my primary form of exercise.

The reciprocity between resemblance and contiguity can grow beyond the sphere of the synchistic individual. For an example that also addresses socio-political issues, take Alice Walker’s novel *The Color Purple* (1982). A Pulitzer Prize–winning work of fiction, it represents Walker’s creative ingenuity and thus involves association by resemblance. At the same time, the novel draws on Walker’s experience and family history and thus involves association by contiguity. Her characters were inspired by her paternal grandfather and grandmother, as well as by the friendship that developed between her grandfather’s second wife and his mistress, Shug Perry (A. Walker 1996, 45; 1983, 355–56; White 2004, 334–36). Regarding Celie, the character based on her grandmother, Walker made a point to give her a “much richer life” than her grandmother was able to experience (2003). Celie leaves her abusive husband and experiences a passionate love relationship with Shug Avery. She also supports herself through designing and sewing specialty pants and eventually inherits a house.
of her own (A. Walker 1982). These plot themes reflect creative associations by resemblance. In addition, as she wrote the novel, Walker’s own experiences (contiguity) were shaped by her creativity (resemblance), as she attended to the demands of her characters. This included a move from New York to a small town in northern California, whereby Walker transformed her living habits in order to serve her creative process (A. Walker 1983, 355–60; 2003; White 2004, 308–12).

On a communal scale, Walker’s novel as a work of art reaches out to its readers’ experiences. As Walker herself puts it, “Art is the mirror, perhaps the only one, in which we can see our true collective face. We must honor its sacred function. We must let art help us” (1996, i). The story of Celie, Nettie, Shug, Mr.—, Sophie, and Harpo reflects the suffering and transformation of African American characters living in the legally segregated Southern United States—and, for some of the characters, in Africa—during the first half of the twentieth century (A. Walker 1982). Discussing The Color Purple, the book and the movie, Walker notes that her work addresses the human condition, not only the African American one (1996, i; 2003). In The Same River Twice (1996), Walker includes letters from her readers about The Color Purple, letters that reflect how their experiences were shaped by the novel. I have excerpted from three of these letters that, based on context, seem to come, respectively, from an African American woman, a Euro-American woman, and a man whose race I could not determine:

Ann Clyde wrote, “Through your writing, you have spoken to me. . . . I just want to say thank you for doing your part, for making me proud to be black, to be a black woman and for your contribution.” (A. Walker 1996, 243)

Donna F. Johnson wrote, “I was, and continue to be, profoundly affected by your novel. . . . In my own circle, the novel was very well received by women of all ages—even Catholic nuns! . . . You have awakened in me a desire to know and understand the experience of Black women.” (232)
Jeffrey P. Rowekamp wrote: “I am writing to you out of thanks. I just finished reading your book . . . , and I feel like my chest is about to burst. I almost cried. It made so much sense to me; made me think about my life and the real meaning of love.” (238)

These reader comments reflect the impact of Walker’s work on her community of readers. The interplay of resemblance and contiguity that informed Walker’s *The Color Purple* influences far more than merely her own belief-habit systems.

d. The Communal Value of the Individual and of Non-hegemonic Perspectives

The synechistic individual is an invaluable source of novelty for the community, as a result of the uniqueness of her or his experiential and creative perspectives. Since each person has her or his own body and her or his own spatio-temporal position in the world, each person’s experience is unique. The habits that make up each person’s past, present, and projected future are a constellation of contiguities and resemblances that, ultimately, revolve around that person alone. For example, Peirce himself plays the role of the creative synechistic individual in his *Monist* “Cosmology Series” essays, which hypothesize a synechistic universe in which consciousness, chance, and mind have a rightful place versus the mechanistic necessitarianism held by many of his scientific contemporaries. Alice Walker is also a creative synechistic individual; no one else could have written *The Color Purple* (1982).

The fact that synechistic individuals are inescapably socially shaped points to synechistic *groups* of community members also being sources of novelty for the larger community, because of shared experiences among synechistic group members, experiences that are not encountered by other community members. In other words, these groups have certain type(s) of experiential secondness in common, my focus being socio-political secondness. Peirce does not explicitly address group membership in the 1890s association writings, but it is a relatively straightforward extrapolation, given his general convictions about the influence of society on the individual’s habit-taking.
Moreover, in his 1901 review of Karl Pearson’s *Grammar of Science*, Peirce shows a sensitivity to group membership on the basis of economic class, sharply criticizing the tendency of British society to harness science to its sense of “social stability” (EP 2:58, 61). Peirce also hints at a similar economic-based class elitism in his criticism of the Gospel of Greed in the “Cosmology Series” essay “Evolutionary Love,” to which I turn in Part 2. He thus seems well aware that group membership can result in shared experience.

The socialization informing our individualized habit-taking involves our membership in various groups, including groups identified by race, sex, and a host of other factors. These groups are likely to reflect similar habit-taking in respect to societal forces that base privileged and oppressive treatment of people on group membership. Thus the similar habit-taking is not due to inborn instinctive habits shared by group members. That is to say, the similarity does not involve innate “essences” corresponding to each race, sex, and so on. Rather the commonality occurs because of shared experiences (or lack thereof) of discriminatory secondness. People of color and women, for example, often encounter racist and/or sexist secondness that targets them because of their group membership. Euro-American men do not often experience either of these types of secondness, and Euro-American women do not often experience racist secondness.

*The Color Purple*, beyond reflecting the experience of a unique synechistic individual, Alice Walker, also reflects the experiences of African American men and women living in the rural U.S. south in the early twentieth century (1982). The brutality of both racism during this era in the South and domestic violence are prominent themes, as are spirituality and love in the midst of suffering. Walker’s portrayal of African American experience cannot be said to speak for all African Americans’ experiences of racism and racism/sexism. Nonetheless, her novel is an invaluable contribution to socio-political inquiry in a country like the United States, which continues to suffer from racism and sexism.
Many people of color and women in the United States share experiences of racist and/or sexist secondness that highlight racist and sexist societal habits that are not yet fully eradicated despite the efforts of the civil rights and women’s movements. Racist and/or sexist societal habits are the source of socio-political secondness experienced by these groups. For Euro-Americans, however, racist secondness is not commonly experienced. The same can be said for men and sexist secondness. Moreover, in the United States, human experience is falsely universalized by mainstream culture, according to a white male privileged norm that is supposedly not raced. This promotes falsely universalized associations/habits/beliefs that racism and sexism are no longer significant factors in human experience in the United States. For Euro-Americans and men, these associations/habits/beliefs foster blindness to the ways in which U.S. society continues to operate according to background racist and sexist beliefs. Because of these phenomenological “blind spots,” the testimony of non-hegemonic groups is all the more important for identifying unjust societal habits that are still in play. Of course, phenomenological blindness can happen on other fronts besides race and sex. The reader is invited to extrapolate regarding able-bodied privilege, economic privilege, heterosexual privilege, and so on.

In addition, regarding discussions among the politically powerful that do acknowledge the persistence of injustice in the United States, non-hegemonic synechistic groups can help challenge the false universalizations and conceptual misunderstandings that can characterize even this explicitly justice-promoting communal inquiry. For example, legal scholar Frank Wu writes about the prevalence of racism against Asian Americans in the United States, stressing that race issues are not accurately portrayed by a black-white paradigm (2003). Wu gives the following “modest suggestion”:

Whatever any of us concludes about race, we should start by including all of us. Whether we strive for moral principles or practical compromises, our vision must encompass everyone. Our leaders should speak to all individuals, about every group, and for the country as a whole. A unified theory of race, race relations,
and racial tensions must have whites, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and all the rest, and even within groups must include Arab Americans, Jewish Americans, white ethnicities, and so forth. Our theory is an inadequate account otherwise. (36)

Another example is provided by Linda Alcoff, who describes the problematic complexities for Latinos in the United States:

The question of Latino identity’s relationship to the conventional categories of race that have been historically dominant in the United States is a particularly vexing one. To put it straightforwardly, we simply don’t fit. Racialized identities in the North have long connoted homogeneity and easily visible identifying features, but this doesn’t apply to Latinos in the United States, nor even to any one national subset, such as Cuban Americans or Puerto Ricans. We have no homogeneous culture, we come in every conceivable color, and identities such as “mestizo” signify the very absence of boundaries. (2006, 229)

The non-hegemonic perspectives represented by Wu and Alcoff are sources of reasonableness, by which anti-racist inquiry can embrace diversity and complexity. I continue to invite the reader to extrapolate beyond the deep complexities of anti-racist inquiry to include the analogous complexities involved in anti-sexist, anti-heterosexist, and other forms of inquiry seeking justice for marginalized groups. If the United States is to live up to its ideal of justice for all, its inquiry must embrace the rich diversity of those who have suffered injustice past and present. This embrace is all the more important since these non-hegemonic perspectives are still often poorly represented in societal inquiry in the United States.

I do not mean to imply that non-hegemonic perspectives are useful only to the extent that they articulate blind spots in hegemonic discourse. Since my focus in this book is on revealing how these blind spots are created and sustained, I overrepresent the role of non-hegemonic voices in naming these oversights. Nonetheless, insights and experiences originating outside the hegemonically articulated reality can provide alternative visions of how reality may be articulated in
the first place. This calls into question just how the United States and the “West” in general might look if others had shaped the mainstream discourse. For example, in his essay “Kinship with the World,” Vine Deloria explains:

> In the Indian tradition we find continuous generations of people living in specific lands, or migrating to new lands, and having an extremely intimate relationship with lands, animals, vegetables, and all of life. . . .

> Indians do not simply learn survival skills or different ways to shape human utensils out of other natural things. In shaping those things, people have the responsibility to help complete their life cycles as part of the universe in the same way they are helping people. Human beings are not above nature or above the rest of the world. Human beings are incomplete without the rest of the world. Every species needs to give to every other species in order to make up a universe. (1999, 226)

It is beyond the scope of my project to give this passage the analysis it deserves. Given the current planetary crisis of global warming, however, the insights that humans are connected with, dependent on, and responsible to the rest of the natural world portray a deeply relevant alternative paradigm. Historically, however, this Native American vision was jettisoned by Euro-Americans who sought to appropriate land for themselves.10

The value of an individual’s or synchistic group’s perspective does not guarantee that the perspective will be embraced within hegemonic discourse in general or within a specific community of inquiry that is dominated by individuals belonging to hegemonic groups, such as Euro-Americans, heterosexuals, men, and so on. For example, as a result of internalized falsely universalized associations/habits/beliefs regarding race in the United States, testimony that racism is still present often faces dismissal. Bell hooks notes:

> Simply talking about race, white supremacy, and racism can lead one to be typecast, excluded, placed lower on the food chain in the existing white-supremacist system. . . . While more individuals in contemporary culture talk about race and racism, the power of
that talk has been diminished by racist backlash that trivializes it, more often than not representing it as mere hysteria. (2003b, 27)

Hooks also notes that Euro-American resistance to feedback about racism can occur because of habits that operate outside of consciousness, such that “liberal whites who are concerned with ending racism may simultaneously hold on to beliefs and assumptions that have their roots in white supremacy” (2003b, 30, my emphasis). For Euro-Americans, many of whom have not experienced racist secondness, the falsely universalized associations/habits/beliefs of human experience as not including racism can function nonconsciously. When this happens, testimony about racism can seem irrelevant, hypersensitive, overreactive, or crazy, because it runs against the hegemonic conceptualization of human experience. In “human experience” race is not a factor. To “make” race a factor, by testifying about racism, is thus problematic. The Euro-American making a dismissal, such as “You’re just playing the race card,” may not realize that he or she is acting according to a falsely universalized, Euro-American concept/association/habit/belief. This can make it difficult for Euro-Americans to come to terms with their unintentional racism, since they do not “see” it. This failure to see extends beyond unintentional racism to include many other forms of unintentional discrimination. Once again the reader is invited to extrapolate.

e. Nonconscious Dimensions of Association

Peirce notes that we are not always aware of why one idea is connected with another.11 This can be because an association by contiguity can suggest an idea without being noticed. He examines “a fact of consciousness [that] usually . . . [passes] unnoticed in suggestions by contiguity, namely that when A suggests B, the compound idea AB intervenes” (CP 7.406; cf. CP 7.399). A in this case is an association/habit/belief, which suggests B, another association/habit/belief. For example, I am driving in my car and notice the light up ahead has just turned red. The association/habit/belief “red means stop” (R) suggests the association/habit/belief “braking enables me to stop”
(B). R suggests B, the intermediate RB intervening, something like “red light—need to brake.” I do not usually notice the RB linkage, but it is there. Clearly the nonconscious suggestions fueled by contiguity give an evolutionary advantage. We need many of our habits to function automatically, as they suggest the firing of other survival-promoting habits, which suggest others, and so on. The complications would be prohibitive if humans had to think about every habit execution. Our homeodynamic maintenance directs a vast number of association-based suggestions that occur outside our awareness (cf. Damasio 1999, 228).

The degree of nonconsciousness varies. Nonconscious connections may reside at the margins of consciousness, so that they readily come into view when a conscious gaze is turned on them. Peirce gives the personal example of looking out from his writing table and seeing the family milking-cow. He soon thereafter thinks of bringing his wife a glass of milk. In hindsight he notes that his train of thought was unobtrusively informed by the idea of helping his wife, who was ill at the time and who would have benefited from the milk (CP 7.428–29, 435). The idea is readily available to him in hindsight, so that he can describe it:

In my train of thought about the cow, I have no doubt that idea of doing something to help my wife was what made me notice the creature at all, and caused my thought to be active in that direction. The set wife-milk was in the deeper shaded part of consciousness. The set cow-milk joined itself to this and gave wife-milk-cow, and thence wife-cow. This did not emerge into the glare of attention but was working all the time. (CP 7.435)

Peirce can, with a little effort, readily identify the idea, or association/habit/belief—namely, “helping my wife,” that guided the suggestions leading him from “cow” to “bringing my wife a glass of milk.”

Other types of nonconscious associative suggestions are not so easily grasped by the individual thinker. My concern is with nonconscious associative suggestions that are driven by hegemonic associations, such as those informing racism, sexism, and other social
ills. The specific type of nonconscious association I will be addressing more fully below is the subtle operation of exclusionary sympathy, by means of instinctive beliefs that are racist, sexist, or otherwise discriminatory. Hegemonic associations/habits/beliefs are often invisible to those who benefit from them, whether they function through individual behavior or institutional structures. Yet these same associations/habits/beliefs are often in plain view for many who are in non-hegemonic groups and experience corresponding socio-political secondness. Dismissal of testimony from these non-hegemonic groups often occurs, however, by means of the very associations/habits/beliefs they are in a position to identify. Voices of people of color and women, regarding racism and sexism, for example, are often characterized as, at best, mere complaining. On the one hand, such a summary dismissal reflects the hegemonic association/belief/habit that only the testimony of Euro-Americans or men counts, regarding racism or sexism, respectively (cf. Mills 1997, 60–61). On the other hand, this hegemonic belief about testimony is not likely to be consciously endorsed by the Euro-American or man who makes the dismissal. On the contrary, those who dismiss in this fashion often repudiate racism and sexism. I argue that these often well-intentioned individuals are acting from nonconscious racist and/or sexist beliefs.

Part 2: The Law of Mind and Society: Agapic versus Exclusionary Sympathy

“Sympathy” is the term Peirce uses to describe the law of mind as it functions in human communities. In its ideal agapic form, sympathy embraces as sources of growth the creative bursts of spontaneity that arise within the existing habit systems of a community. I call this “agapic sympathy.” Sympathy can also play out non-agapically, excluding opportunities for growth by rejecting new elements that arise from existing habits. I call this “exclusionary sympathy.” Similar to the problematic overlap among the authority, a priori, and science methods of fixing belief is the problematic overlap that can exist between exclusionary and agapic sympathy as they manifest in actual
communities. The agapic ideal can be undermined by the instinctive, nonconscious functioning of exclusionary background beliefs.

a. Sympathy among Human Organisms

Peirce argues that, according to his law of mind, “corporate” or communal personalities must exist (EP 1:350–51).

It is true that when the generalisation of feeling has been carried so far as to include all within a person, a stopping-place, in a certain sense, has been attained; and further generalisation will have a less lively character. But we must not think it will cease. *Esprit de corps*, national sentiment, sympathy, are no mere metaphors. (EP 1:350)

In fact, if the right kind of experiments were conducted, Peirce suggests, there would probably be “evidence of the influence of such greater persons upon individuals” (EP 1:350). In addition, he notes that his account of the law of mind makes sense out of “the very extraordinary insight which some persons are able to gain of others from indications so slight that it is difficult to ascertain what they are” (EP 1:332).

The community is a macrocosm of the individual for Peirce. Interpersonal feelings among humans—*sympathy*—parallels the *intra*personal sympathy occurring within the human person’s (body-)mind. At the individual level, a present feeling/idea is inescapably influenced intra-sympathetically by the community of existing feeling-systems (or associations/habits/beliefs) within the organism. Creativity arises from an individual’s drawing insightfully on past associations/habits/beliefs. At the communal level, an individual community member is inescapably influenced sympathetically by other community members and by communal habits. At this level, the individual herself, as well as groups, can be sources of creativity, which arise amidst communal sympathetic influence and from which the community as a whole can benefit. Here, ideally, the community draws on the insights that arise among its members, viewing these insights as sources of growth.
b. God as Sympathetic Ideal: Agape

There are ambiguities in Peirce’s use of the term “sympathy,” which are elucidated by distinguishing between human sympathy and the divine agapic ideal. Peirce uses “sympathy” to convey the law of mind as it functions on the communal human plane—inclusively or exclusively. As noted above, I use the appellations “agapic sympathy” and “exclusionary sympathy” to convey this difference. At the level of the divine, the Christian God is agape. As such, God serves as a divine sympathetic source that makes possible the growth of a universe. Let me note that Peirce does not conceive Christianity as rooted in strict dogmas or doctrines, a point that will be discussed more below. His emphasis on Christianity focuses on a loving community, whose role-models are God and Jesus Christ. The spontaneous bursts of novelty through which the universe is created point back to God as an ultimate creative and loving agency that embraces these bursts as sources of growth (RLT 258–63; EP 1:297; Hausman 1999, 204). At the human level, however, the agapic ideal involves choice. Human communities have the freedom to adopt a non-agapic, exclusionary stance toward perspectives that differ from their own.

I. HOW AGAPE WORKS

Peirce’s discussion of agape occurs in the final “Cosmology Series” essay, “Evolutionary Love.” He suggests that agape characterizes the evolution of the universe, which he calls agapastic evolution or agapasm, noting that “[i]n genuine agapasm . . . advance takes place by virtue of a positive sympathy among the created springing from continuity of mind” (EP 1:362). He gives a detailed description of this type of evolution at the level of the individual human organism, who is herself a cosmos undergoing evolution. In agapastic evolution, generally speaking, new and growth-inducing elements enter into an organism’s experience by means of “energetic projaculation” and habit: “energetic projaculation” describes the spontaneous creation of “new elements of form,” and habit plays the dual role of both stabilizing the new form, so that it is not rejected by the organism outright, and
harmonizing or adapting the new form into the “general morphology” of the organism (EP 1:360).

For example, a few years ago I unexpectedly came across a small community fair while I was out on a walk. Of the various community agencies that had display tables, one was the local chapter of the International Hospitality Council (IHC). The IHC was looking for native English-speaking women to facilitate international women’s book groups for women new to the United States who were not fluent in English. The groups would be a way to meet people and to learn more about English in an informal setting. I signed up on the spot. This was an “energetic projaculation,” a burst of newness into my experience (EP 1:360). Habit then played the role of stabilizing this newness, allowing me to incorporate it into my existing lifestyle, by regularly clearing my calendar and doing the footwork to coordinate and foster the group. A note of clarification is in order here. To the extent that I am directing the show in my microcosmic universe, I am analogous to God, as is every individual, on Peirce’s scheme. Unlike God, I am embodied, my scope of creativity is vastly smaller, and agape need not be a mode of operation I embrace. Humans can reject an agapic response, as I do when I fail to embrace bursts of newness, such as the chance to join other new groups or to attend a lecture or rally, or any number of other opportunities.

Peirce notes that the movement of energetic projaculation and habit found in agapastic evolution is the same as the circular movement of agapastic love, which “at one and the same impulse project[s] creations into independency and draw[s] them into harmony” (EP 1:353, 361). The movement of God’s agapic love creates while allowing for the independence of the created (cf. Hausman, 1999, p. 204). It also embraces the uniqueness of the created, harmonizing it through habit. Regarding the reading group, I tried to be as hands-off as possible, to let our group unfold naturally, independent of my preconceived expectations. The other group members decided what they wanted to read and how they wanted to build group community through social engagements beyond our regular meetings. I did my best to harmonize our group through habit, by serving as a reliable
communication hub and securing copies of the readings for each of
our meetings.

It is important to note that spontaneous bursts or energetic proja-
culations are not purely spontaneous—that is, uninfluenced by the
backdrops against which they occur. At the level of the cosmos itself,
this means that the spontaneous “firsts” that hail the dawning of a
universe themselves arise out of the agapically infused original contin-
uity, which is, arguably, God (RLT 258–63; EP 1:352–53). At the level
of the human organism, spontaneity is informed by the inner-sympa-
thetic influence of existing habit systems. My spontaneous desire to
volunteer to facilitate the book group, for example, was influenced by
my existing habits of doing community service, reading, and interest
in women’s issues.

Another way of expressing this point is to say that agape is conta-
gious. The very love whereby God allows a universe to grow spontane-
ously is so attractive that the created is likely to take on its character,
as my spontaneity took on the character of my habits (Ventimiglia
2001, 28–31). In his description of this phenomenon, Peirce appeals to
the parent-child relationship, noting that agapastic evolution occurs
“first, by the bestowal of spontaneous energy by the parent upon the
offspring, and, second, by the disposition of the latter to catch the
general idea of those about it and thus to subserve the general pur-
pose” (EP 1:362). God is a parent-like presence (in a vague sense),
who confers creative freedom on “children,” be they the originary
feelings out of which the universe is ultimately made or human or-
organisms. In either case, God’s creative love is probably attractive
enough that it is adopted by the beloved. Probably. Agape does not
force its purposes onto the beloved but rather influences the beloved
through the beloved’s own desire to imitate it (Ventimiglia 2001, 28–
31). This is final causality at work, the causality of mind. God is agape,
and agape provides the ideal model for the functioning of the human
mind and community, a model that allows for organic growth
through the “gentle force” of final causality.15

Agapastic evolution, then, allows for the flow of life, in which
bursts of creativity play a significant role. This is a flow in which habit
mediates between spontaneity and the secondness of the external environment. Whether it is the evolution of a universe, of a community, or of an individual human organism, agape provides an organic model for growth, a model in which spontaneity is embraced as an indispensable source of vitality.

II. AGAPIC VERSUS EXCLUSIONARY SYMPATHY

God’s agape is an ideal to which human communities should aspire as they grow in mature self-control. Peirce stresses this theme through contrast in “Evolutionary Love,” where he criticizes his culture’s focus on greed instead of agape. His critique itself reflects the fact that humans are not preordained to embrace the agapic love modeled by God. Humanity has a choice regarding the agapic ideal. Were God to force humans to take an agapic stance toward others and themselves, God’s agape would thereby be performatively contradicted. Agape does not force. Rather, it embraces what is different from itself, even and especially when that difference is contrary to its very nature (EP 1:353; Ventimiglia 2001, 28–31). God as agape, therefore, allows humans to reject agape. In its paradigmatic form, agape involves embracing what is “most bitterly hostile and negative to itself” (EP 1:353).

In applying the agapic ideal to human communities, which I wish to do here, I must address a possible misunderstanding or (depending on context) manipulation of agape that is not explicitly acknowledged by Peirce. In fact, I think Peirce leaves himself open to this misunderstanding by not more explicitly outlining the differences between divine, infinite agape and human, finite agape. I agree with Carl Hausman that “Peirce’s notion of agape must be modified when applied to finite contexts within the cosmos” (1974, 22). I present such a modification here by showing, on Peircean terms, how the agapic ideal should be understood within human communities.

The possible misunderstanding/manipulation is this: Agape is characterized by embracing what is different, even and especially when this difference is threatening to oneself. Thus people in non-hegemonic groups who aspire to this ideal might think, or might be
pressed by those in hegemonic groups to think, that it is appropriate to embrace growth-inhibiting belief-habits about themselves, such as “People of color are inferior,” “Women are inferior,” and so on. I would argue that such an understanding of agape is incorrect on Peircean terms, even though on the face of it, agape seems to require an embrace of the different no matter what. Such an embrace might work at the divine level, but not on the human plane.

It is unreasonable on Peircean terms for a person in a non-hegemonic group to embrace growth-inhibiting beliefs about herself, especially when these beliefs promote her removal from the community of inquiry. It is also unreasonable for those in hegemonic groups to embrace such beliefs about others. Since Peirce requires the community of inquiry to be infinitely inclusive, it is unacceptable—and undermines reasonableness—to countenance beliefs that suggest that some humans do not belong. While Peirce does not speak to this point explicitly in “Evolutionary Love,” he does address it implicitly. In the same context as his discussions of agapic love, Peirce criticizes his culture’s “gospel of greed” for excluding the “weak” from communal inquiry (EP 1:357–58, 362). He counters this ruthless, Darwinian “survival of the fittest” gospel with “[t]he gospel of Christ [that] says that progress comes from every individual merging his individuality in sympathy with his neighbors” (EP 1:357, my emphasis). The dynamics within this loving community manifest sincere care and concern.

At this point, let me pause to stress that Peirce’s Christian community is not united by means of dogmatic or doctrinal beliefs. In fact, Peirce had many harsh words for the evolution of Christianity as an institution, even within the same essay as he praises the Christian ideal of agape (EP 1:352–53, 365–66; cf. Orange 1984, 48–49). I think this gives Peirce’s ideas about agape a secular appeal that they would not have otherwise. The ideal community is Christian, not because its members are united via shared doctrines. Rather they are united in “life and feeling” and in the “positive sympathy” modeled by Christ and by God (EP 1:354, 362). As Hausman notes regarding Peirce’s invocation of Christianity in “Evolutionary Love,”
What Peirce stressed was a kind of altruism and concern for communities in contrast to a view that advocated self-interest for the individual. . . . One can treat the ideas Peirce proposed through the religious setting in ways that are, at least explicitly, nonreligious, unless religion is taken in a broad sense that excludes commitment to some institutional group or dogma and refers to any metaphysical commitment. (1999, 203)

In other words, Peirce’s grounding of agape in Christian ideals does not assume a religious, in the sense of dogmatic or doctrinal, commitment on the part of his readers.

With that qualification in place, let us examine the general dynamics within Peirce’s ideal Christian community. In this context, growth occurs through the contributions of all community members, not merely those considered strong, whatever “strong” might mean. Contrasting his Lamarckian evolution, which is fueled by agapic love, with the ruthlessness of Darwinian evolution that “rejects” the weak, Peirce notes, “In genuine agapism, on the other hand, advance takes place by virtue of a positive sympathy among the created springing from continuity of mind” (EP 1:362). Human communities, created by God, grow by means of mutual care and concern among their members. As Doug Anderson notes, “We imitate God by expanding our realm of neighbors, thus . . . generalizing our concern” (1995a, 107, cf. 105). By means of mutual care and concern, reasonableness is promoted, as the uniqueness of individual community members is embraced by her community mates, which increases the diversity within the community.

This ideal caring community, then, does not expect its members to be united through sameness. Rather it expects them to be united in the midst of their differences. To understand what Peirce has in mind here, take an explanation he gives about colors along a spectrum, “There is in the nature of things no sharp line of demarcation between the three fundamental colors, red, green, and violet. But for all that they are really different” (EP 1:363). Ideally community members do not erect “sharp lines of demarcation” between themselves but rather embrace their differences, even when these differences are
threatening (EP 1:363, 353). This brings us back to a proper reading of agape, a reading that places the agapic ideal within a human community whose members respect reasonableness and thus (ideally) do not embrace belief-habits suggesting that they themselves or others should be excluded from the community.

Moreover, Peirce’s discussion shows that the reasonableness that informs the agapic ideal involves genuine care. Community members ideally have sincere concern for each other. Thus the exclusion of some groups from communal membership or from communal respect and trustworthiness is viewed as unacceptable from the perspective of caring about those who would be affected by such exclusion. The agapic ideal manifests in a compassionate embrace of communal perspectives differing from one’s own, even and especially when feedback from these differing perspectives is negative and might reflect negatively on oneself. In the context of my project, I see the agapic ideal as applying especially to those in hegemonic groups (such as Euro-Americans, heterosexuals, men, and so on) who have trouble honoring testimony about discrimination from those in non-hegemonic groups. In particular, testimony concerning nonconscious discrimination can be especially hard to hear, because the behavior was unintended and can challenge the hegemonic-group person’s view of herself as not discriminatory—that is, not heterosexist, racist, sexist, and so on. Agape calls for an embrace of this testimony, even and especially when it is threatening in this way.

To demonstrate in detail how human sympathy can either reflect or stray from the agapic ideal, an extended example is useful. Recall that the motion of agape is circular, involving two movements: First, a creative projection of newness, and second, an embracing and stabilizing of this spontaneous novelty. When human sympathy is agapic, it completes the circle by allowing for both movements. An agapic analysis can be made of psychologist Harriet Lerner’s efforts to organize “the first women’s feminist conference at Menninger’s Clinic” (Lerner 1993, 210). The directors were herself and another “white, middle-class, heterosexual” female colleague (211). Their objective
was “to create a safe space in which to critique theory and share personal experience. We knew that the freedom to speak honestly and openly required a conference setting that offered a radical departure from patriarchal structures” (210). Lerner and her colleague followed this initial conference, which they named “Women in Context,” with others “focused on such themes as ‘Women and Self-Esteem’ and ‘Mothers and Daughters’” (210). In the midst of their satisfaction with the success of these conference meetings, a spontaneous burst came in the form of significant criticism about false universalization: “Minority women began to challenge the white, middle-class, heterosexual ‘culture’ of the conference” (210). This criticism was a creative projection of newness—it was the first movement of agapic sympathy.

The second movement involved Lerner and her colleague’s embracing and stabilizing this spontaneity, by working to make subsequent conferences far more inclusive of diverse perspectives (Lerner 1993, 212–13). This second movement was all the more agapic since Lerner found it quite difficult to embrace the criticisms about lack of diversity. She felt defensive and overwhelmed, engaging in exclusionary self-dialogue: “I . . . said things to myself like ‘But we are a white institution,’ and ‘I don’t really know women of color who could lecture on this subject,’ and ‘Won’t the quality of the conference suffer if we try to invite speakers of every race, class, and creed?’” (210, Lerner’s emphasis). Despite her discomfort with embracing both the criticism itself and the diversity of future conferences, Lerner completed the second movement of the agapic circle by “co-direct[ing] an inclusive conference, giving real [versus merely token] space to those women’s voices long silenced and oppressed” (213).

In addition, Lerner sustained her agapic attitude by accepting criticisms of this new inclusive conference:

We did not all sit in a circle, hold hands, and sing “We Are the World.” Significant differences emerged, including criticisms of our leadership. Some questioned whether a conference held in a white institution under the leadership of two white women was fully inclusive. Others questioned the politics of white women “giving space” in their conference to black women and others. In
keeping with the research on tokenism, these important challenges did not emerge (and probably wouldn’t have been heard) until there were significant numbers of minority women among us. (1993, 213, Lerner’s emphasis)

Lerner embraced this criticism. She notes:

I learned more about myself in that conference, albeit through my errors, than I had in any other. And I gained a deeper appreciation of the fact that truth-telling...is, first and foremost, a matter of context. For context determines not only what truths we will feel safe to voice, but also what truths we can discover and know about ourselves. (213)

These comments reflect Lerner’s growth based on feedback from women in non-hegemonic groups. Moreover, Lerner has written about these experiences to help explain to others in hegemonic groups how easily unintentional socio-political exclusion can happen (210).

Thus, Lerner’s practice of agape promoted her individual growth, as well as the growth the community of feminists with which she was working. Testimony from women of color and other non-hegemonic perspectives helped her enlarge her understanding of unintentional socio-political exclusion and unintentional false universalization. Her corresponding associations/beliefs/habits expanded and became more complex. So did the community of feminists with which she worked. This growth was not easy. It involved significant habit change in order to address the problems of false universalization. The second round of criticism also showed Lerner that even her best efforts still reflected white hegemony. Her openness to continued criticism reflects her openness to continued growth and to the fallible nature of her best efforts.

Lerner’s agapic stance needs to be put into perspective, lest it seem that I am unduly glorifying those in hegemonic groups who “condescend” to acknowledge non-hegemonic perspectives. My intent is not to glorify Lerner but to use as a model her candid admission both of her unintentionally exclusionary practices and of her difficulty in
hearing criticisms from non-hegemonic perspectives. Lerner’s experiences show how Peirce’s agapic ideal is liberatory in its call for open-heartedness. On the human plane, the agapic embrace of what is “most bitterly hostile and negative to” oneself includes being open to criticism that challenges one to the core (EP 1:353). Shannon Sullivan notes that white people often have difficulty coming to consciousness about white privilege, because it “disrupt[s] their sense of themselves as morally good” (2006, 128).21 Racism and other “-isms” are viewed so negatively in contemporary mainstream U.S. society that it can be difficult for someone to hear that her behavior reflects “-isms” to any extent. This fear of being discriminatory is often problematically coupled with the common-sense mainstream assumption that one cannot behave in a heterosexist, racist, sexist, etc., fashion unless one intends too (Alcoff 2006, 188). Fear of a challenge to one’s self-concept as “not heterosexist, racist, sexist, etc.,” receives illegitimate reassurance from the assumption that unintentional “-isms” are not possible. In contrast, agape calls for the embrace of feedback that one’s behavior is, however unintentionally, discriminatory. It calls for listening and for openness to change.

Agape can be applied as an affective tool that those in privileged groups, such as Euro-Americans, heterosexuals, men, and so on, can use to hold in place negative feedback from those in non-hegemonic groups. It is a tool, to borrow from Patricia Williams, for “listening across that great divide,” for “allow[ing] oneself to be held in a state of suspended knowing” (1997, 74). Agape is a strategy that those in privileged positions can use to push past an initial, and often strong, urge to dismiss negative feedback from non-hegemonic groups. The resistance of this urge makes the completion of the second movement of the agapic circle possible, whereby associations/habits/beliefs expand, grow, to embrace diversity.

In contrast to agapic sympathy, exclusionary sympathy includes the first movement but rejects the second movement of agape’s sympathetic circle. It acknowledges the creative newness but refuses to embrace and stabilize it. In terms of habit-taking, exclusionary sympathy involves clinging to present habit systems as they are. It rejects
growth. Lerner would have been exclusionary in her sympathy if she had rejected the feedback about diversity by portraying it as mere complaining, overreaction, “playing the race card,” etc.

The first movement—the spontaneous, creative burst of newness—is a part of human sympathy regardless of type, agapic or exclusionary. In addition, this spontaneity is not freestanding but, as noted above, emerges amidst the backdrop of existing habit systems. It results from the intricate sympathetic coalescence that exists among the various components of existing habits. The spontaneity of the feedback at Lerner’s conference, for example, arose from habits of feminist discourse and the goal of the conference itself: “to create a safe space in which to critique theory and share personal experience. We knew that the freedom to speak honestly and openly required a conference setting that offered a radical departure from patriarchal structures” (1993, 210). The critical feedback—that the conference was too white, middle class, and heterosexual—arose from these same habits, reflecting honesty and openness, as well as critique of theory and of patriarchal structures.

This is a significant point for my project, because hegemonic or oppressive communities often entrench themselves against changes requested or demanded by non-hegemonic groups within the community. Yet these very changes, from a Peircean point of view, are by-products of existing social aims or other associations/habits/beliefs. Recall Chapter 3’s discussion of “All men are created equal.” The challenges that arose from people of color and women, who were excluded from the implementation of this ideal belief-habit in practice, were grounded in the very belief-habit in question, namely, that “All men are created equal.” Their challenges were creative bursts (first movement) that were rooted in the very ideal in question, yet were rejected by a majority of the founding fathers, who thereby rejected the second movement, that is, the agapic embrace of the new element. Mills notes, for example, “A lot of black thought has simply revolved around the insistent demand that whites live up to their own (ostensibly universalist) principles, so that African-Americans such as David Walker could challenge American Slavery and white supremacy in the

The deciding factor for what type of human sympathy is at play is whether or not the second movement of the sympathetic circle occurs. Agapic sympathy completes both movements, as Lerner did with the conference feedback. Exclusionary sympathy involves only the first movement. That is to say, the spontaneous bursts occur, but without subsequent embrace. Peirce’s depiction of the authority state in “Fixation of Belief” is a paradigmatic example of a community that routinely rejects this second movement. In fact, it takes precautionary measures to ensure the first movement never occurs in the first place. Through education and social threat, the authoritative state attempts to forestall or silence the emergence of perspectives differing from its hegemonic decree (W 3:250–51, 255–56). It attempts to foster the internalization of disempowering habits in individual community members, so that they will refrain from voicing unique perspectives that challenge hegemonic norms. It attempts to manipulate communal sympathy to its own ends, rallying community members around an exclusionary cause—namely, the hegemonic associations/habits/beliefs dictated by those in power.

c. Communal Potential: Agapic Sympathy

Agapic sympathy promotes the internalization by community members of empowering habits, which fuel a vision of diverse others as valued participants in communal inquiry. In “Evolutionary Love,” describing the ideal Christian community, Peirce writes, “The gospel of Christ says that progress comes from every individual merging his individuality in sympathy with his neighbors” (EP 1:357). As noted above, the term “merge” need not require the surrender of the unique characteristics of the individuals merged. Colors on a spectrum are distinct while blending with the colors on either side of them (EP 1:363). The merging of individuals, then, can mean that they become continuous, with no clear markings between them and in mutual concern for one another. If Peirce were striving for a stronger
sense of merging, whereby all individuality was sacrificed, he would jeopardize the spontaneity that is required for the growth of human persons and human communities. Christ did, after all, tell the Christian not to hide her light and not to bury her talents. Peirce stresses that “the ideal of conduct will be to execute our little function in the operation of the creation [of the universe]” (EP 2:255). This small part may involve serving as a source of communal spontaneity, where one’s voice challenges the existing social structures.

As noted earlier, Peirce saw himself this way within the community of science. The Monist “Cosmology Series” itself involved the presentation and defense of novel cosmological hypotheses that he offered as creative contributions to scientific inquiry. He saw his ideas as sympathetically influenced by scientists and other thinkers present and past, as well as involving innovative connections. Peirce’s work in this series constituted a direct challenge to the necessitarian determinism that was in vogue among his scientific contemporaries. For Peirce, the ideal community of science embraces the agapic ideal, since this community must be infinite and indefinite in scope. This way any present community remains open to new perspectives that promote growth in knowledge.

Let me close this account of agape with an additional, and tragic, connection with Peirce’s life. In his later years, Peirce experienced a distinctly non-agapic rejection by his academic and scientific communities of inquiry. In fact, at the time he was writing about agape, Peirce was coping with the loss of an academic post at John Hopkins University, in 1884, as well as the loss of his position (a scientific post) at the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey, in 1891 (Brent 1998, 202). In both cases, the brilliance of Peirce’s work could not withstand the critical gaze of those who disapproved of his social character and unconventional religious views, as well as (in the case of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey) his erratic and undependable work habits. This loss of social and professional standing affected Peirce profoundly, sending him, eventually, into poverty.
really known much, has been disclosed to me, the world of misery” (quoted in Brent 1998, 259–60; cf. 261–62). This sensitivity to the poor (if not to people of color and women) is reflected in his critique of the Gospel of Greed characterizing his society and in his efforts to defend those whom society deemed “weak” (EP 1:357, 362; Brent 1998, 259–62).

d. Communal Critique: The Gospel of Greed

Peirce’s critique of his nineteenth-century culture’s penchant for greed, in “Evolutionary Love,” is a critique of exclusionary sympathy. He notes that the most prominent characteristic of nineteenth-century culture is profit-seeking economics: “Intelligence in the service of greed ensures the justest prices, the fairest contracts, the most enlightened conduct of all the dealings between men, and leads to the *summum bonum*, food in plenty and perfect comfort. Food for whom? Why, for the greedy master of intelligence” (EP 1:354). Greed, then, characterizes the evolutionary engine of nineteenth-century culture’s progress.

[T]he great attention paid to economical questions during our century has induced an exaggeration of the beneficial effects of greed and of the unfortunate results of sentiment, until there has resulted a philosophy which comes unwittingly to this, that greed is the great agent in the elevation of the human race and in the evolution of the universe. (EP 1:354)

Greed is a philosophy that endorses the doctrine of “survival of the fittest,” such that the strong become stronger, and the weak become weaker or die off.27

The Gospel of Greed focuses on the prosperity of the individual while neglecting his or her social situatedness: “[T]he conviction of the nineteenth century is that progress takes place by virtue of every individual’s striving for himself with all his might and trampling his neighbor under foot whenever he gets a chance to do so” (EP 1:357). This conviction is at odds with Peirce’s portrayal of synechism, in
which the individual and her community are continuous and interdependent. The Peircean human community is a macroscopic person, such that every individual member has a contribution to make, not unlike the cells in the human body, to the overall growth of the organism.28 Thus, not only is it nonsensical for a human person to conceive of herself or himself as completely independent of other community members, it also undermines the growth of the community as a whole. In contrast to this naive individualism, Peirce’s vision of the Gospel of Christ involves teamwork and compassion, whereby “progress comes from every individual merging his individuality in sympathy with his neighbors” (EP 1:357).

The Gospel of Greed is not as individualistic as it portrays itself to be. Peirce highlights the situatedness of the greed-individuals in a passage quoted above: “Intelligence in the service of greed ensures the justest prices, the fairest contracts, the most enlightened conduct of all the dealings between men, and leads to the *summum bonum*, food in plenty and perfect comfort. *Food for whom? Why, for the greedy master of intelligence*” (EP 1:354, my emphasis). In this context, Peirce falls shy of specifying the socio-economic and political elitism that underlies the Gospel of Greed. He does, however, seem to realize that underwriting the individualist selfishness of his culture was a hegeemonic group. Charting the course of the Gospel of Greed in nineteenth century United States and Europe, was a *class* of wealthy, privileged people, most of whom were propertyed men of European descent. The *individuals* who were ruthlessly exploiting or destroying the “weak” were, for the most part, members of this *group*. Peirce’s criticism of their blindness to their social situatedness could have been rendered more specific, by naming their social group as powerful, affluent Euro-American men. It should be noted that Peirce’s 1901 criticisms of Karl Pearson’s *The Grammar of Science* (1900, second ed.), noted above, provide a more explicit naming of social situatedness, as Peirce criticizes Pearson for making the stability and happiness of “British society” the goal of science (EP 2:58, 61). This goal included, for Pearson, an endorsement of eugenics as a way to limit procreation among the “weak” of society (1892, 10, 33).29
In the context of his present critique, Peirce’s group-oriented criticism of greed is also implied in a group-oriented articulation of the survival of the fittest—an articulation that he makes in the context of describing Darwinian, or tychastic, evolution (evolution driven by chance):

[1]n the tychastic evolution progress is solely owing to the distribution of the napkin-hidden talent of the rejected servant among those not rejected, just as ruined gamesters leave their money on the table to make those not yet ruined so much the richer. It makes the felicity of the lambs just the damnation of the goats, transposed to the other side of the equation. (EP 1:362)

This particular articulation of greed-based evolution highlights the social consequences that can arise from the denial of both social situatedness and agapic sympathy. Exclusionary sympathy rejects creative, different perspectives, refusing the agapic embrace. In this passage, these rejected perspectives are those of the “goats,” or “ruined gamesters.” This rejection, if we apply more context from U.S. history, is possible because the “lambs” (or the unruined card players) are in a position of power that enables them not only to exclude the “goats”, but to exploit them. The “goats” are not only denied a voice in the evolution of humanity; their resources are “transposed to the other side of the equation.” It is striking that Peirce could have written this in the post–Civil War United States in 1893, yet without an acknowledgment of the parallel between his lamb/goats metaphor and the slavery of African Americans or the genocide, land theft, and treaty violation perpetrated against Native Americans.

I. EPISTEMOLOGY, “WEAKNESS,” AND SCIENCE

By identifying the greed-promoters as a group, we can better trace their activity as a finite community of inquiry that practices exclusionary sympathy, shutting out perspectives that differ from their own. The greed-promoters ignore or demolish the perspective of those they deem “weak,” on the assumption that weakness renders one’s interest irrelevant, or even detrimental, to social inquiry. Yet
this social exclusivity undermines the epistemological soundness of communal inquiry. While a hegemonic group may have the power to ignore non-hegemonic perspectives, this ignorance does not nullify the growth-promoting value of those perspectives. Examples supporting this point abound. To give but two: A Native American view of humanity’s kinship with the land, noted above, is poignantly relevant today, in 2010, in the midst of the global warming crisis (Deloria 1999, 226). W. E. B. Du Bois’s essay “The Conservation of Races” (1897) provides another example. Du Bois argues that each human race has a unique contribution to make to human development on the world stage. This being the case, those of African descent in America need to throw off an identity that strives for absorption within Euro-American culture. They need to embrace their heritage, voice, and potential for contribution to humanity’s growth:

A hegemonic culture practicing exclusionary sympathy cannot invalidate non-hegemonic contributions to cultural growth. Hegemony may refuse to listen to alternative voices, but the value of these voices is unaffected by this refusal. This is especially true when hegemonic culture is the source of claims of inferiority regarding non-hegemonic groups.

Because a hegemonic cultural group is often in the position to “tell the story” of how reality works, often to the detriment of non-hegemonic groups, the notion of “weakness” must be problematized in order to promote the agapic ideal. The label “weak,” in the context of the Gospel of Greed, seems to serve as a one-word argument for the legitimacy of exploitation and oppression. Yet “weak” is a very relative term. Martha Nussbaum makes this point regarding disability, showing it be a matter of perspective and power:
A handicap does not exist simply “by nature,” if that means independently of human action. We might say that an impairment in some area or areas of human functioning may exist without human intervention, but it only becomes a handicap when society treats it in certain ways. Human beings are in general disabled: mortal, weak-eyed, weak-kneed, with terrible backs and neck, short memories, and so forth. But when a majority (or the most powerful group) has such disabilities, society will adjust itself to cater for them. \(2004, 306\)\(^{32}\)

Labeling a group “weak” can serve the hegemonic purpose of dismissal, by placing a non-hegemonic group (along with its individual members) outside the realm of legitimate participation in communal inquiry. When this dismissal occurs, however, left unchallenged are important dimensions of the supposed weakness. In what capacity is the group in question considered weak? Have they been rendered weak? If so, by what or whom? Was coercion involved? Was injustice involved? All but the first of these questions can be appropriately answered only by those deemed “weak” themselves. They have, however, been hegemonically dismissed from communal inquiry. Their testimony does not “count,” even though they provide an important epistemic perspective on the weakness in question. What is left is a hegemonic story in which only socio-politically sanctioned voices have a say.

In terms of the pragmatic maxim and U.S. history, note that “weak” individuals and groups have provided information on the habitual effects of the aims/concepts devised and implemented by the powerful. The aim of wealth shared by the hegemonic elite resulted in, among other things, the barbaric treatment of African Americans and Native Americans. When the voices of these non-hegemonic, “weak” groups were dismissed or ignored, so were the epistemic perspectives they provided. Yet these perspectives revealed stark contradictions. Powerful Euro-American, propertied males proclaimed, “All men our equal,” yet their own freedom was premised on genocide, land theft, treaty violation and slavery.\(^{33}\) In terms of the gambling metaphor cited above, African American slaves and Native
Americans are some of the metaphorical “rejected servants,” the “ruined gamesters” whose resources have made the propertied Euro-American males “so much the richer” (EP 1:362). The “felicity” of these Euro-Americans, in this case, has been “just the damnation of the” African American slaves and the Native Americans (EP 1:362). Included among the “rejected” are other groups that have been, and continue to be, exploited—such as the poor, women, and people living in “Third World” countries—in order to bolster the economic stability of those who profit most from capitalism.\(^{34}\)

## II. The Application Problem Revisited

The Gospel of Greed undermines Peirce’s agapic ideal for communal growth. Its embrace of social Darwinism results in the rejection of those considered “weak.” This rejection, as noted above, undermines the community’s potential for growth because the valuable perspectives of the “weak” are excluded. The promoters of greed are unreasonable in a Peircean sense, because their attitude toward the “weak” reflects a refusal to include diverse perspectives, the embrace of which reason requires. Moreover, taking the United States as our focus, “weakness” itself was projected onto groups like African Americans and Native Americans by those in power, a self-serving rationalization for oppressing and exploiting these groups.

What resulted historically was that scientific efforts made to verify the “weakness”—or “inferiority”—of African Americans and Native Americans involved circular reasoning, whereby the very racial hierarchies supposedly under investigation were assumed true by the investigating scientists. Stephen Jay Gould notes, “In assessing the impact of science upon eighteenth- and nineteenth-century views of race, we must first recognize the cultural milieu of a society whose leaders and intellectuals did not doubt the propriety of racial ranking—with Indians below whites, and blacks below everybody else” (1981, 31). Interestingly enough, Gould conducted extensive research into Samuel Morton’s (1799–1851) infamous skull-measuring projects, which were widely acclaimed in their day and also “proved” the superiority of Caucasians, as a result of their supposedly larger skulls, over
Native Americans and African Americans. Gould found astonishing amounts of data manipulation and unduly biased fudging that favored Caucasians and/or disfavored non-Caucasian races (1981, 50–69). Yet he also notes that there was no evidence of conscious fraud on Morton’s part. Gould concludes that Morton’s biases were so deep seated as to function “unconscious[ly]” (55, Gould’s emphasis; cf. 54–56, 69). The fact that such exclusionary background beliefs can function outside of conscious awareness (for which I use the term “nonconsciously”) was discussed last chapter in the context of how the authority and a priori methods can shape the background beliefs that inform scientific practice. This scenario creates an application problem for the scientific method as this method is articulated in the Logic of Science series, because even sincerely anti-discriminatory scientists can unwittingly act against Peirce’s ideal.

The presence of nonconscious beliefs that unwittingly inform scientific inquiry raises an analogous problem regarding the agapic ideal. Following Gould’s interpretation, Morton is an example of a scientist who did not realize the exclusionary bias informing his reasoning. This points to the possibility that consciously agapic-minded scientists or other inquirers may think they are being inclusive (anti-racist, anti-sexist, etc.) while in fact they are nonconsciously acting out instinctive exclusionary (racist, sexist, etc.) beliefs. In other words, nonconsciously exclusionary sympathy can short-circuit an agapic response without a person’s or community’s even realizing it.

For example, Linda Alcoff describes how a Chicana friend of hers, who was an untenured female faculty member at the time, was demoted at her third-year review by an all-white “department majority,” based on the testimony of one disgruntled graduate student—a white male who was her teaching assistant (2001, 66–67). Alcoff’s friend considered his complaints to be “groundless . . . actually based in his discomfort in the position of teaching assistant to a Chicana” (66). His testimony was honored over hers, however, despite the fact that she received consistently high teaching evaluations that were above the college faculty mean. In addition, she “acted as the beloved advisor of the Latina student group, . . . cooked for her students every
semester, . . . had many great student-teacher relationships, and . . . had already published one book and received a major grant to write her second” (67). In fact, no one else was consulted about this complaint other than the student himself. The contract of Alcoff’s friend was “reduced in length and made contingent on the condition that she prove herself a better teacher” (66).

Alcoff spoke to her friend’s white male department chair, “urging him to consult” with other students and others at the university who “would be in a better position to evaluate the conflicting claims” (2001, 67). Alcoff believed that the chair, to some extent, had her friend’s best interests in mind, wanting to treat her fairly, but he nonetheless “reject[ed] out of hand the possibility that cultural difference played any role” in the white male graduate student’s complaint (67).

In this case we have one woman of color in the midst of—except for her—an all-white cast: the complainant, the department chair, and the remaining department members. And both the complainant and the department chair are also male. The department chair wanted to treat Alcoff’s friend fairly yet refused to consider issues of racism and sexism. Alcoff speculates that this was because he assumed fairness “meant treating her as an individual without social identity and resisting the possibility that such facts [about her social identity] might be relevant unless he himself could see without a doubt that they were so” (2001, 67, Alcoff’s emphasis).

Applying a Peircean interpretation, I would argue that the department chair is, on a conscious level, trying to treat Alcoff’s friend just as he would any other faculty member and thus sees himself as doing right by her. Again, consciously he is not trying to degrade her testimony or undermine her career. Arguably he is trying to act agapically, versus exclusively, by striving for fairness, not allowing her difference in race and sex to be used against her. He is embracing, versus excluding, her right to due process for her contract renewal. At the same time, however, exclusionary sympathy is strongly present. A white male student’s word is taken over hers, despite her glowing teaching and publishing record. The chair assumes that appealing to
his own, white male experience is sufficient to determine that racism and sexism are not at play. He excludes as irrelevant the perspectives of Alcoff’s friend, Alcoff herself, and the others she urged him to consult about this case. In other words, he is rejecting testimony that comes from others whose experience and expertise about racism and sexism are fundamentally different from his own. The department chair is rejecting the different, but is, arguably, not aware that he is doing so. We could say that he sees himself as satisfying agape by treating Alcoff’s friend as a colleague, even though as a woman of color she is different from him. Thus he secures due process for her. Yet he fails to recognize this situation as requiring a much stronger form of agape than he is practicing, one that truly embraces her differences as opposed to asserting that they are not relevant.

Peirce’s association writings can be used to illustrate how nonconscious exclusionary sympathy can occur by means of hegemonic background beliefs. While Peirce does not explicitly mention this nonconscious influence, he does describe what I would call nonconscious agapic sympathy. I extrapolate from this account, knowing that Peirce is open to examining cultural structures that can undermine social growth.

As discussed above, Peirce’s evolutionary engine is agapic love, which exerts a noncoercive influence on the beloved through a gentle and subtle sympathetic influence that shapes spontaneous creativity, but without force. In his 1890s association writings, Peirce discusses an agapic sympathetic influence that occurs without one’s explicit awareness, by means of one’s social matrix.

Our daily life is full of involuntary determinations of belief. It is the egotism of the ego, or field of attention, which imposes on [us] with its . . . conviction that whatever is known is known through it. It is not so. I converse with a man and learn how he is thinking [without his having “‘stated’ the fact in accurate forms of speech”] . . . . [H]ow I have found out his thought is too subtle a process for this psychologist writing to find out. (CP 7.447, ca. 1893, my emphasis)

Peirce gives two more examples: (1) learning a new slang word without ever hearing a formalized definition but rather through “ironical,
twisted, humorous sentences whose meaning is turned inside out and tied in a hard knot,” and (2) our sympathetic attunement to animals in our care (CP 7.447). The nonconscious influence at play here, I would argue, is agapic sympathy, because it involves the embrace of persons, words, and animals that exist outside oneself. While Peirce claims not to know how this influence could occur, it is likely to be fueled, at least in part, by nonconscious agapic background beliefs, which allow for subtle communication and a host of other affective-semiotic associations.

In this context, Peirce does not address the fact that sympathy can be exclusionary. But clearly there could be nonconscious exclusionary background beliefs that foster a failure to connect with other persons, words, and animals. From the standpoint of U.S. mainstream culture past and present, we can easily adjust each of the examples Peirce has given in the above passage. I will focus only on the first.

Peirce and his male interlocutor, who understand each other through subtle references that neither can fully explicate, are experiencing the nonconscious influence of agapic sympathy. They are each embracing the perspective of the other. Implicit in this male bonding, however, are the usual suspects, such as race and sex, and probably education and social pedigree. We could easily adjust this scenario to include a Euro-American affluent man who invariably fails to understand someone outside of his circle of fellows. Here exclusionary sympathy would be at play.

For another example, in The Souls of Black Folk (1903), Du Bois gives a poetic description of the general sympathetic divide between African Americans and Euro-Americans in the U.S. South at the turn of the twentieth century:

Now if one notices carefully one will see that between these two worlds, despite much physical contact, and daily intermingling, there is almost no community of intellectual life or point of transference where the thoughts and feelings of one race can come into direct contact and sympathy with the thoughts and feelings of the other. (Du Bois 1989, 128)
While I am not saying that Du Bois wrote this passage with Peirce in mind, it does arguably portray a nonconscious functioning of an exclusionary sympathy, which can shut down the possibility of the subtle harmony that Peirce finds with his male, presumably Euro-American, interlocutor. Du Bois notes that this estrangement between the races is fueled by beliefs each group has about the other: “‘[O]ne side thinks all whites are narrow and prejudiced, and the other thinks educated Negroes dangerous and insolent’” (129). To the extent that such beliefs function in the automatic everydayness that Du Bois describes, they are arguably functioning nonconsciously, at least for many white people. Whites are not subject to the same racist secondness that targets African Americans, and thus whites have the luxury of not paying attention to large-scale racist dynamics that they themselves can unwittingly perpetuate. Habits of white privilege often function nonconsciously (in the automaticity of firstness). In such cases, the first movements of sympathy are the various points of “physical contact” and “daily intermingling” that are spontaneous occasions for connection and growth (128). But the work done by nonconscious exclusionary beliefs often rejects the second movement.

I am concerned with the exclusionary effects of nonconscious hegemonic privilege in particular, since it reflects a structural power imbalance that can undermine communal inquiry. The failure of people of color to connect sympathetically (either consciously or nonconsciously) with Euro-Americans, in a hegemonically white society, is not likely to result in the dismissal of the Euro-American, hegemonic perspective. In contrast, when Euro-Americans fail to understand people of color, the dismissal of the non-hegemonic perspective(s) can easily follow. Factors exacerbating this imbalance are the ongoing overrepresentation of the Euro-American perspective in various communities of inquiry in the United States, as well as the continued false universalization of the Euro-American, middle-class experience as general to all humans. In this respect, Ralph Ellison’s prologue to Invisible Man provides a telling metaphor:
I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe. . . . I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. . . .

. . . That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality. (1980, 3, emphasis in original)

Ellison’s African American narrator speaks, from a non-hegemonic position, of the racist eyes that “refuse to see” him as a person. I interpret this refusal, in the context of my project, as at least in part a manifestation of the erasure that occurs when Euro-American white reality is falsely universalized and enforced so that the perspectives of people of color are excluded from personhood itself (Mills 1998, 8–9; Nussbaum 1997, 87–88). Yet many white people who perpetuate this false universalization have no idea they are engaging in exclusionary sympathy, because the belief-habits involved are nonconscious.

Historically speaking, nonconscious exclusionary sympathy has been prevalent with respect to the non-hegemonic perspectives of people of color, women, and others, because of racist, sexist, and other discriminatory background beliefs that are shared by Euro-Americans, men, and/or other hegemonic groups. This pattern is of special concern for scientific or everyday communal inquiry, since Euro-American men (and others in hegemonic groups) often continue to be overrepresented and to hold more power than do people of color, women, and others in non-hegemonic groups. These concerns are reflected in Linda Alcoff’s description of her friend, a Chicana, being demoted, because of the unquestioned testimony of a white male, by an all-white committee headed by a white male department chair. I would argue that the shared hegemonic bias within the all-white—except for Alcoff’s friend—cast fueled oblivion about the racism and sexism at play, such that the department chair could refuse to even consider these factors (Alcoff 2001, 67). Let me note
once more that hegemonic imbalances do not occur only in the case of Euro-American men. Anyone who is privileged in some respect can render invisible the corresponding non-hegemonic perspective.

Since exclusionary beliefs can nonconsciously close down a sympathetic harmony between those in hegemonic groups and those in non-hegemonic groups, the latter’s perspectives can be excluded even by people who—on a conscious level—are anti-racist, anti-sexist, etc. Hence the application problem that undermines the scientific method (of the Logic of Science essays) also manifests in the context of the agapic ideal. In other words, people who are consciously committed to the infinitely inclusive community of inquiry and to the agapic ideal can nonetheless perpetuate the exclusion of non-hegemonic groups.

e. Moving toward Critical Common-sensism

By way of transition into Chapter 5’s discussion of Critical Common-sensism, let me highlight points from two of Peirce’s essays: “Philosophy and the Conduct of Life” (1898) and “Pragmatism as the Logic of Abduction” (1903). Peirce’s use of the terms “instinct” and “instinctive mind,” respectively, in these essays highlights that background beliefs can be the repository of prejudice and can also function nonconsciously.

In “Philosophy and the Conduct of Life,” Peirce stresses how often humans act from instinct even when they think otherwise:

Men many times fancy that they act from reason when, in point of fact, the reasons they attribute to themselves are nothing but excuses which unconscious instinct invents to satisfy the teasing “whys” of the ego. The extent of this self delusion is such as to render philosophical rationalism a farce. (RLT 111, Peirce’s emphasis)

In fact, it is completely appropriate to trust instincts in the immediacy of vitally important life issues. Yet it is just as imperative not to simply trust instinct in the context of scientific inquiry.
Peirce is calling for a scientific philosophical spirit in which thinkers subject their instincts to doubt and empirical testing. Granting that scientists often act from the abductive instinct when forming hypotheses about natural laws, he affirms that instinct alone does not rule in such cases but must be subject to careful testing: “True, we are driven oftentimes in science to try the suggestions of instinct; but we only try them, we compare them with experience, we hold ourselves ready to throw them overboard at a moment’s notice from experience” (RLT 112).

Peirce uses the terms “sentiment” and “instinct” synonymously in this essay, which points to the social-shaping of instinct. He boldly asserts, “It 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). Recall Chapter 1’s discussion of how sentiments can be socially shaped for Peirce, and thus instincts can be socially shaped too.38 There I cited from a 1902 discussion of logic, where Peirce 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)

In the present essay, this social-shaping of instinct is implied in Peirce’s use of “sentiment” and “instinct” interchangeably when referring to “vital interest[s],” such as one’s “religious life” and “code of morals” (RLT 111).

Central to my project is Peirce’s insistence, in “Philosophy and the Conduct of Life,” that our instincts, outside of vitally important topics, must be subject to criticism. Since instincts are paired, at least to an extent, with social-shaping, this criticism includes socially shaped
instinctive beliefs that may interfere with the reasoning process. Failure to scrutinize our instincts, among other things, leaves us open to the felt certainty of social prejudice, for example, such as the prejudice that drove racist and sexist pseudoscience in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as discussed above (Tuana 1993, 34–50; Gould 1981, chapters 2–4).

In “Pragmatism as the Logic of Abduction,” Peirce problematizes our perceptual judgments by noting that they lie on a continuum with abductions. Perceptual judgments, for our purposes, are simply our perceptions. But these perceptions are, Peirce argues, interpretative—they have a “for me” character built into them. Adopting the Peirce’s terminology of perception, we can say that we have no direct access to the percept. The percept is the brute secondness by which a sensation/feeling comes to us hic et nunc (here and now). There is no perspective from which to contemplate it or even talk about it: “Given a percept, this percept does not describe itself; for description involves analysis, while the percept is whole and undivided” (CP 7.626). The only way we can think about or describe a percept is through the perceptual judgment, by means of which I can say something like “That appears to be a yellow chair” (CP 7.626). Peirce also notes, “There is no objection to saying that ‘The chair appears yellow’ means ‘The chair appears to me yellow’” (CP 7.630 n. 11). Our perceptions have an interpretive character, which reflects the perspective of the person perceiving, even though this “for me” character is often so subtle as to escape notice.

Abduction is the mode of reasoning by which we render explanations for surprising or unexpected facts in our experience. We are confronted with a puzzling or surprising effect, and reason back to the cause. For example, years ago I went to California for the first time, having lived in the Midwestern United States for all my life. At the beginning of my stay, I was awakened in the middle of the night by a loud rumbling sound and a shaking bed. This was a surprising set of facts. I proceeded to conduct a sleepy, and sincere, abduction process: Thunderstorm? No. A look out the window discounted this hypothesis. Huge semitruck driving by? Unlikely. Earthquake?! Maybe.
I learned the next morning that there had indeed been an earthquake (4.5 on the Richter scale) the previous night. Abduction, then, involves making explanatory guesses. I have just given a paradigmatic example. At its least pronounced, abduction involves one’s ongoing guesses that the future will conform to the past. These are much less likely to be wrong but still involve residual guessing. If I go out to my car and find that the driver-side door is locked, I “guess” that the same key that has always unlocked this door will unlock it again. And this will hold true the vast majority of the time, although we could imagine exceptions involving switched or broken keys.

When paradigmatic examples are involved, perceptual judgments and abductions are distinguished by the criterion of conceivability of doubt (EP 2:229–30). For example, a sincere perceptual judgment that “my shirt is blue” cannot be doubted in its immediacy. On the other hand, paradigmatic examples of abductions allow for the conceivability of doubt, as evidenced by my California example: Storm? Truck? Earthquake? It was possible for me to doubt each of my guesses.

That abduction and perceptual judgments shade into each other is evidenced by the kind of dual pictures offered in many basic psychology books, where the picture drawn looks like, say, a flight of stairs going up. But, on second glance, it looks like a flight of stairs going down (EP 2:228). The perspective shifts and one’s perception changes. I recall a picture from a psychology class, where the line of an older woman’s nose (her face depicted close up) could also be construed as the jawline of a younger woman standing at a distance. The drawing had been designed to depict both. These examples show that perception involves interpretation, even though this often shades off into the recesses of “some unconscious part of the mind,” or one’s “instinctive mind” (EP 1:228, 241). This dimension of the mind is not conscious, and thus not controllable, in the immediacy of the present (EP 2:227, 240). Once again, Peirce describes instinctive mind this way:

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,
part [on what] is common to all nicely adjusted organisms whose equilibrium has narrow ranges of stability, in part on whatever is composed of vast collections of independently variable elements. . . . (EP 2:241, my emphasis, editorial brackets)

To say that the instinctive mind depends “in part on what is personal” is to point at the same time to the inescapable social and socio-political factors that shape each person’s associations/habits/beliefs. This is because, for Peirce, a person’s inner world and outer world intertwine. Instinctive mind thus includes socio-political shaping that occurs because of hegemonic large-scale associations/habits/beliefs about economic class, race, sex, sexuality, and so on.

Moreover, Peirce emphasizes that “our logically controlled thoughts compose a small part of the mind, the mere blossom of a vast complexus which we may call the instinctive mind” (EP 2:241). This highlights the fact that our instinctive socio-political associations/habits/beliefs can dwell outside of our immediate control. In a 1905 discussion of Critical Common-sensism, Peirce notes that consciousness is not “a separate tissue, overlying an unconscious region of the occult nature, mind, soul, or physiological basis”; rather “the difference is only relative and the demarcation not precise” (EP 2:347). This continuum between consciousness and “an unconscious region” complements Peirce’s account of instinctive mind, showing the likelihood that this “uncontrolled” dimension of mind often functions without our awareness, especially in the present moment (EP 2:347, 241). On the socio-political plane, this means that racist, sexist, and other discriminatory instinctive associations/habits/beliefs can function nonconsciously.

Recall the discussion in Chapters 1 and 2 of the social psychological research that shows how we can be affected nonconsciously by stereotypes that affect how we treat people whose race or gender is different from our own (LeDoux 1996, 61–62, my emphasis; Bargh 1992, 1990; cf. Alcoff 2006, 242–43). Social psychologist John Bargh notes that control can be gained over the nonconscious influence of stereotypes when one has been educated about the danger of specific stereotypes. But he also notes that gaining this control is not a “straightforward”
task, because of the complexities of nonconscious influence (1992, 250). His comments mesh with the problematic in consideration here regarding nonconscious discrimination by those in hegemonic groups who repudiate the very discrimination that they unwittingly perpetuate, but who may not be educated about the possible influence of nonconscious stereotypes. His comments also resonate with the hope found in Peirce’s conception of self-control as an ongoing, fallible process that esteems growth and communal input.

In the present essay, “Pragmatism as the Logic of Abduction,” Peirce notes that what is outside our control today may become controllable at a later time and that what seems inconceivable today may become conceivable tomorrow (EP 2:240, 230). Implicit in these points is that humans can and do grow in self-control, expanding their control over beliefs that were functionally indubitable at an earlier time. There is a tension here, however. When issues of racism, sexism, and other exclusionary instinctive beliefs are at play, those who are in hegemonic positions (such as Euro-Americans, heterosexuals, men, etc.) may not be aware of it, while those in non-hegemonic positions are aware of it. Again, consider Alcoff’s story of her friend, a woman of color in a department full of white people. She saw the racism and sexism at play and the majority of her colleagues did not.

The general problematic is this: How best to navigate the relationship between the community and the individual, when the latter is either a person or a group representing a non-hegemonic perspective in relation to hegemonic communal norms? Those occupying non-hegemonic perspectives are uniquely suited to identify the functioning of exclusionary instinctive/background beliefs that undermine self-controlled scientific inquiry. This uniqueness should be an occasion for an agapic embrace of the different—namely, a unique, non-hegemonic perspective on exclusionary beliefs, which identifies that they are (still) in play. The arising of this uniqueness within a community of inquiry presents the first movement of the agapic circle. Yet the very exclusionary beliefs in question, functioning nonconsciously in hegemonic-group members, can result in the dismissal of
these valuable non-hegemonic epistemological perspectives. Thus there can be a rejection of the second movement of agape, by means of nonconscious exclusionary sympathy. Moreover, since nonconscious influence is involved, racist, sexist, and other discriminatory exclusion can be perpetuated even by people who on a conscious level are anti-racist, anti-sexist, and so on. We have reached the doorstep of Peirce’s mature doctrine of Critical Common-sensism, which calls on self-control to turn its critical gaze toward the background beliefs that inform reasoning at individual and communal levels. Critical Common-sensism offers tools for eliminating even nonconsciously functioning exclusionary instinctive beliefs that undermine the ideals of agape and science.