Beyond Racial Segregation to Solidarity

Crossing the Invisible Line of Social Segregation

President Donald Trump claimed that he is “the least racist person that you have ever met.”¹ I have met other people who make similar claims regarding themselves. I wish I could compete with their claims, but I know that I still struggle with racism. After all, if I am not careful, I can easily become indifferent to the outcry of people who do not belong to my family, tribe, and nation. It is not simply white extremists who have to repent of racism, but the indifferent. As Dr. King wrote, “…it may well be that we will have to repent in this generation. Not merely for the vitriolic words and the violent actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say, ‘Wait on time.’”²

To return to President Trump’s claim, it should be noted that denial is one of the most common defense mechanisms that we use to maintain our sense of superiority according to experts in the psychological profession.³ We also cultivate our sense of superiority in the context of group-think. One reason why we cannot see our ethnocentrism and racism is because of our in-group isolation from one another’s groups. Our defense mechanisms bound up with protecting ourselves from the real or presumed threat posed by other groups lead us to discount other groups’ outcries about injustice. Moreover, these same defense mechanisms also lead us to justify our actions that bear negative consequences for other groups as being morally sound based on our sense of superiority.

There is an invisible line between us. The cure to blindness is to move beyond segregation to solidarity. This chapter seeks to move beyond in-group dynamics where we are prone to dehumanize other groups to maintain our sense of security and self-worth. Our sense of self-worth should not come at the expense of one another, but in community with one another. Our fight is not with one another and our groups, but with hate itself.⁴ Without seeking to undercut


⁴Of course, some people will justify their absolute antagonism toward movements protesting against perceived racial abuses committed by the establishment through an appeal to
distinctive sub-cultures and ethnicities, we need to cherish and realize our group identities in communion with one another as a larger whole. This will require moving beyond tribalism to benevolent regard for all people, which will involve sacrifice of selfish interests on the part of dominant cultural groupings. Deliberations will begin with a discussion of tribal and tribalism at the socio-biological level. Then analysis will shift to consideration of negative examples of racial tribalism. Following the discussion of racial tribalism, the chapter will move to present different ways of confronting racial tribalism involving consideration of Martin Luther King, Jr’s personalist orientation in conversation with such figures as Reinhold Niebuhr, Ayn Rand, and Jonathan Edwards and his followers. Special consideration will be given to Edwards on account of his stature in American religious and cultural thought, including the import of his theological ethical framework for abolitionism. Moreover, there are key points of commonality between him and King in the midst of striking dissimilarities.

Evaluating Tribal Lines: Is Tribalism Good, Bad or Neutral?

E.O Wilson writes in *The Social Conquest of Earth*, “To form groups, drawing visceral comfort and pride from familiar fellowship, and to defend the group enthusiastically against rival groups—these are among the absolute universals of human nature and hence of culture.” A few pages later, Wilson writes, “The elementary drive to form and take deep pleasure from in-group membership easily translates at a higher level into tribalism. People are prone to ethnocentrism. It is an uncomfortable fact that even when given a guilt-free choice, individuals prefer the company of others of the same race, nation, clan, and religion.” Wilson turns from tribalism to war. While tribalism is “a fundamental human trait,” war is viewed “as humanity’s hereditary curse.” Upon discussing the conflict leading to genocide involving the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, Wilson remarks, “once a group has been split off and sufficiently dehumanized, any brutality can be justified, at any level, and at any size of the victimized group up to and including law and order. Those who support the establishment claim that they are simply observing God’s hatred of injustice, which would include disregard for the established rule of law and damage to property, etc. These individuals use this rationale to deflect the charge that they are being racist. Certainly, protests against the established rule in view of a higher law must be civil, as espoused by Dr. King. Even so, it is vitally important that individuals who would question these civil rights movements seek in all sincerity and humility to ascertain the merits of their outcries regarding racism rather than simply dismiss them out of hand.


race and nation.” The lines of demarcation between groups can be physical, ethnic, national, political, religious, etc. Wilson notes that they can even be arbitrarily assigned.

An *Independent* article argues that the conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis was not tribal (in the traditional sense of the term; we are using the term tribal for in-grouping generally) or ethnic. For all practical purposes, they were the same people:

> The antagonism between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda and Burundi is not a tribal conflict. It is not, properly speaking, an ethnic conflict. By all the most common definitions, Hutus and Tutsis are the same people, which makes their violent history even more tragically incomprehensible to outsiders.

According to Wilson, the immediate cause of the genocide was political and social, but ultimately, the source of the conflict was overcrowding.

Moving from Africa to America, consider immigration as well as slavery in relation to color in this country. Originally, the Irish were viewed as “Negroes.” They had much in common with African Americans. They were sometimes called “Negroes turned inside out,” and Negroes “smoked Irish.” But when it came to the abolition of slavery, the Irish did not support African Americans because of their own concerns to make it in America.

It is also worth noting that in the South, prior to the Civil War, black and white was not the determinative line of demarcation, but slave and free. Consider the following claim in an article titled “The Invisible Line Between Black and White”:

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10Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, page 63. In response to Wilson, if overcrowding were the ultimate issue, why doesn’t tribal differentiation and genocide happen more often under crowded conditions? The ultimate cause was likely that the colonial manipulation of the Tutsi elite to rule over the Hutus created a huge animosity that broke free when the Hutus gained power.

Before the Civil War, the most important dividing line in the South was not between black and white, but between slave and free. Those categories track each other, but not perfectly, and what really mattered above all to most people when they had to make a choice was that slavery as an institution had to be preserved. But by the 19th century, there were enough people with some African ancestry who were living as respectable white people—people who owned slaves or supported slavery—that to insist on racial purity would actually disrupt the slaveholding South.¹²

Do these examples of immigration and slavery suggest that further to Wilson’s point above, the lines of demarcation between groups are sometimes arbitrary?

In-group dynamics that evolve toward tribal associations certainly bring cohesion and help secure group survival. Members of tribes often function altruistically toward other members, while passionately safeguarding against defections and intrusions. Far from being simply a throwback to more primitive times, the old Arab Bedouin proverb plays out over and over in our contemporary society: “Me against my brothers. My brothers and me against our cousins. My brothers and cousins and me against the world.”

While Wilson’s group selection model of evolutionary development has been the subject of much criticism, its kin selection antagonists and Wilson’s fellow group selection adherents who are also biological reductionists cannot really fault selfish behavior on the individual or group levels. Actually, the only real pushback that is merited logically is if such behavior on the individual or group level would actually undermine their chances of survival. If, for example, tribalism strengthens the tribe that operates altruistically within the group, then such tribal dynamics would be ethically meritorious on a biological reductionistic account. This being the case, Wilson has no rational grounds for lamenting the horrific impact of tribalism in our world, since he cannot justify his protest on a biological basis. As discussed in an earlier chapter, biological reductionism as reflected in Wilson or Dawkins does not account for David Hume’s important distinction between what is the case and what ought to be the case. If survival of the group is our biological aim, who are we to question it? Again, without a transcendent ethical framework in place, what is the case should be the case. We will need to look elsewhere for contending against tribalism, and will do so in a later section of this chapter. For now, let us turn to some more examples of tribalism in our racialized American cultural context today.

Tracing the Dotted Line: What Are Some Examples of Racial Tribalism?

It is very difficult for many Americans, including Christians, to see how racialized our society is. For one, we tend to look at racism (defined here as prejudice with power) and racialization (how racism’s impact in American society is ubiquitous: from education and employment to residence and healthcare) in fixed, static terms. As the book *Divided By Faith* makes clear, racialization operates by way of variables, not constants.\(^{13}\) So, while the society has long renounced slavery and Jim Crow laws of ‘legal’ segregation, our post-Civil Rights era society still struggles with social segregation. In fact, when we think racialization is a thing of the past, or a matter of space or geography like north vs. south,\(^{14}\) or when we ignore outcries of racialization, the more embedded or entrenched it becomes in society.\(^{15}\) We need to be aware of how the past systems continue to impact us,\(^{16}\) such as the lack of inherited wealth for those whose ancestors were slaves and could not own property, and redlining. Other structures are not yet dismantled. We need to account for them, too.

Here I call to mind a television news interview involving Anderson Cooper of CNN and Spike Lee after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Spike Lee claimed that


\(^{14}\)I believe it was Andrew Young who remarked that King experienced racism differently in the North than in the South. It was not a matter of degree, but kind. King observed that in the South, the white majority does not care how close African Americans get, but how high they get. In the North, the white majority does not care how high African Americans get, but how close they get. It may also have been King’s observation that in the South, the white majority loves the African American individual, but hates blacks as a whole. In the North, the white majority hates the African American individual, but loves blacks as a whole. The point here is not to argue for the accuracy of the claims in every instance, but to highlight that racial prejudice manifests itself in a variety of ways.

\(^{15}\)Here is how Emerson and Smith understand racialization: “[A] racialized society is a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships.” Emerson and Smith also emphasize that “a racialized society can also be said to be ‘a society that allocates different economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines, lines that are socially constructed.’” Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, page 7.

\(^{16}\)Here it is also important to account for the epigenetic inheritance of past trauma. See for example Bailey Kirkpatrick, “A Father’s Stress Felt for Generations,” *What Is Epigenetics*; April 23, 2014; https://www.whatisepigenetics.com/a-fathers-stress-felt-for-generations/.
“there is a war on the black male, and it’s tearing the country apart, in my opinion…It’s not just killing us—it’s [the] educational system, it’s the prison system, it’s these young black men growing up with no hope. It’s systematic.”

When Lee speaks of the systematic dimension of this struggle, it should inform us that it is more than simply prejudice or racial aggression carried out by individuals. It’s structural, and it shapes the way society works at various levels and in different domains. On this view, to say that black lives matter does not entail claiming that white lives or blue lives or all lives don’t matter. Rather, “Black Lives Matter” is ultimately challenging the implicit or subliminal view that black lives don’t matter, or don’t matter nearly as much as the lives of the rest of society. However, King’s personalism signifies that black lives matter just as much as other lives. They are not mere matter or chattel to be employed or used for profiting the dominant culture.

Here I call to mind lawyer and legal scholar Michelle Alexander’s book The New Jim Crow. Contrary to the slavery and Jim Crow eras which valued oppressed black labor for white man’s profit, the new Jim Crow sees the African American man as expendable—to be locked up behind bars—no longer vital to global economic fortunes. However, it should be added that private prison systems are viewed as ‘good for business’ in communities where they are housed.

How does the present situation relate to King and his personalist orientation? Do you and I really see every person as created in the image of a personal God and having inherent worth? Do we see people as inherently entitled to freedom as well as constituted in community, which goes beyond our tribal affiliations to include all humanity in solidarity?

Now if we see ourselves in total solidarity, we can never operate in a spirit of indifference to one another, since we are constituted as free persons in communion. But indifference is the ultimate

17Benjamin Fearnow, “Spike Lee: US ‘War on The Black Male’ Tearing the Country Apart,” CBS St. Louis, August 20, 2014; http://stlouis.cbslocal.com/2014/08/20/spike-lee-us-war-on-the-black-male-tearing-the-country-apart/. My colleague Derrick Peterson astutely responded to Lee’s important claim: “Lee’s statement is important because it illuminates the infuriating counterexample of ‘Black on Black violence’ that many bring up when structural racism is brought up. To my mind, black on black violence is part of the same systemic problem because, for example with Michelle Alexander’s work, it is clear that drug and prison penalties are more severe in relation to the black community, constantly leaving them fatherless. Thus, because of absurd drug laws, new generations are left fatherless and without direction, often feeling that gangs or crime are their only exits from a life of constant poverty. In this sense, black on black violence is a manifestation of the same structures, and not a counterexample.”

challenge and temptation we face today. Again, this brings us to King. As Alexander points out, for Dr. King “racial caste systems do not require racial hostility or overt bigotry to thrive. They need only racial indifference.”

King, Alexander and the authors of *Divided by Faith* understand that racialization is not static, but evolving, mutable. So, while the society has long renounced slavery and Jim Crow laws of ‘legal’ segregation, our post-Civil Rights era society still struggles with social segregation in a variety of ways. Historic legal problems like red-lining from New Haven, Connecticut to gentrified Portland, Oregon (while no longer legal) still devastate and cordon communities. Some will point to the thin blue line and police violence. Then there is the concern over gerrymandering and the manipulation of voting district lines and voting rights. Moreover, the


20 Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, page 8.

21 *Investopedia* provides a very clear and helpful definition of “redlining”: “Redlining is an unethical practice that puts services (financial and otherwise) out of reach for residents of certain areas based on race or ethnicity. It can be seen in the systematic denial of mortgages, insurance, loans and other financial services based on location (and that area’s default history) rather than an individual’s qualifications and creditworthiness. Notably, the policy of redlining is felt the most by residents of minority neighborhoods.” “Redlining,” *Investopedia*; https://www.investopedia.com/terms/r/redlining.asp.

invisible though real line that takes many African Americans in economically segregated communities from school to prison\(^\text{23}\) exhausts hope for many today, as Spike Lee noted. We need to become more attentive and not allow ourselves to become indifferent. Racialization has not passed. Rather, it continues to re-emerge and evolve.

How do we demonstrate indifference and reinforce our thing-oriented society that King noted in his Vietnam War address? One way is by rolling our eyes and sweeping aside Alexander’s arguments, by resorting to the myth of black exceptionalism which is the basis for “the current system of control,”\(^\text{24}\) or by discounting the outcries of the African American community regarding their concerns noted in this chapter. We need to listen. We need to ponder and try to connect the dots, learning to see life through their eyes. That is what it means to treat our African American brothers and sisters as persons in communion rather than commodities in isolation in our increasingly thing-oriented society today. Dr. King and the people he represented are still speaking today—are we listening?

**Drawing the Battle Lines in the Fight with Tribalism: How Should We Contend Against Racial Isolation?**

One way to bring about solidarity is through coercion, even brutality. As much isolation as there is between whites and blacks in our society, the isolation is the result in large part of brutal solidarity historically. For example, King spoke of the “brutal solidarity” that was present during the Vietnam War. Whereas our nation could not seat whites and blacks together in the same classroom, we could coercively throw them into the same trenches and have them burn villages together in Vietnam:

> Perhaps a more tragic recognition of reality took place when it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. So we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor


\(^{24}\)See Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, page 14. This narrative of black exceptionalism surfaces when people claim that President Obama and Oprah are atypical—exceptions to the rule among African Americans (i.e., hard-working, articulate, bright, etc.).
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village, but we realize that they would hardly live on the same block in Chicago. I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor.25

Of course, there were other forms of brutal solidarity through America’s history. In the South, black men, women and children had been brutally ‘imported’ as commodities to work the cotton fields for plantation owners. Their descendants faced the same cruel fate, even after slavery, when they endured sharecropper servitude in close proximity to their former owners.

It would be a gross error to claim that such brutal solidarity was only a Southern phenomenon. One must account for economic solidarity: New England’s wealth depended in many respects on the slave industry. The North often claimed moral superiority, and yet Wall Street was built on the backs of slaves in the South.26 Perhaps President Lincoln had this structural reality involving North and South in mind when he penned his second inaugural address: “In his second inaugural address, Lincoln wondered aloud why God saw fit to send the slaughter of the Civil War to the United States. His conclusion: that slavery was a kind of original sin for the United States, for

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26A TIME article claims: “To be blind to the reason the war happened is to build a sort of border of the mind, walling off an important truth. Slavery was not incidental to America’s origins; it was central. There were slaves at Jamestown. In the 1600s, writes Yale’s David Brion Davis, a towering figure among historians, slave labor was far more central to the making of New York than to the making of Virginia. As late as 1830, there were 2,254 slaves in New Jersey. Connecticut did not abolish slavery until 1848, a scant eight years before the fighting broke out in Kansas. Rhode Island dominated the American slave trade until it was outlawed in 1808. The cotton trade made Wall Street a global financial force. Slaves built the White House.” David Von Drehle, “150 Years After Fort Sumter: Why We’re Still Fighting the Civil War,” TIME, April 7, 2011; http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2063869-4,00.html. No wonder Lincoln blamed both North and South for the war. It was America’s original sin. “As Lincoln suggested in his second inaugural address, the entire nation, North and South, profited from slavery and then paid dearly for it.” Refer here as well: Maurie D. McInnis, “How the Slave Trade Built America,” The New York Times, April 3, 2015; https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/04/03/how-the-slave-trade-built-america/; Dina Gerdeman, “The Clear Connection Between Slavery and American Capitalism,” Forbes, May 3, 2017; https://www.forbes.com/sites/hbsworkingknowledge/2017/05/03/the-clear-connection-between-slavery-and-american-capitalism/#6de032c67bd3; Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman ed., Slavery’s Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development, Early American Studies (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
both North and South, and all Americans had to do penance for it. The Civil War itself involved a “brutal solidarity” between the North and South as men and boys bled and died together on this nation’s bludgeoned battle fields for this country’s original sin of racism.

We are still feeling the weight of that original sin and its curse. “Black Lives Matter.” “Blue Lives Matter.” “All Lives Matter.” Each in their own way reflects the deep cognitive and existential divisions in the U.S. Each in their own way reflects how we are all still engrossed in this racialized nightmare. Even if some of us think the problem exists only in people’s minds, the polarizing dynamics concerning people’s perspectives indicate that we are nowhere close to being of one mind. We have a divided mind and heart as a nation. The dead-end result is a brutal solidarity as we crash into one another on the highways and bi-ways of life, as the movie Crash so vividly portrays.28

Perspectives matter. They influence how we interact and react to one another. While all perspectives matter, they are not equally valid. Moreover, not all of them have the same impact on others. If one belongs to a dominant culture, one’s segregated view will likely have greater influence positively or negatively. In fact, if we think only in terms of our tribe, those whose tribe is dominant will reinforce power dynamics, including negative mindsets and ideological structures. As a result, it is very hard to see the invisible line of segregation, to discern the concerns of those on the other side of that line, or even care.

Now while the dominant culture has been guilty of enforcing and reinforcing brutal forms of coercion to ensure self-serving solidarity over the centuries, others have called for minority populations to exercise coercive strategies to effect equitable change. One of the most noted proponents in American society of this strategy was the social ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr’s view of how individuals and societies function, as well as how to use coercion to bring about equitable resolutions, influenced King.

**King, Niebuhr and Realism:**

King was keenly aware of power dynamics and how the dominant culture would not make space for minorities unless forced to do so. Here he took a page from Niebuhr’s practice and writing. In *Moral Man, Immoral Society*, Niebuhr accounts for the way in which dominant culture power dynamics operate. He sets forth a realist model of diagnosing and addressing societal evil. This

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28*Crash*, directed by Paul Haggis (Santa Monica, Calif.: Lions Gate Films, 2004).
model affirms non-violent coercion or civil disobedience for minority groups since they have no other recourse when confronting dominant culture power dynamics and structures.29

King prized Niebuhr’s realist critique of power dynamics, including those power dynamics bearing on African Americans and segregation. It was almost as if King took a page or two out of *Moral Man, Immoral Society* in his civil rights campaign. Moreover, he refers to Niebuhr in making his case in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail”:

> My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. Lamentably, it is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and

29Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man, Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics*, with a new foreword by Cornel West and an introduction by Landon B. Gilkey (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960; new foreword, 2013), pages 4, 252-254. Now it should be noted that Niebuhr would not employ that same strategy in the context of a nation confronting a tyrannical power. In such situations, use of violence was justified. Niebuhr believed many idealists and pacifists failed to account for diverse social realities. Consider Niebuhr’s realism and how it is in play in his understanding of how the kingdom of God interfaces with social situations: “the ultimate principles of the Kingdom of God are never irrelevant to any problem of justice, and they hover over every social situation as an ideal possibility; but that does not mean that they can be made into simple alternatives for the present schemes of relative justice.” Reinhold Niebuhr, “Why the Christian Church Is Not Pacifist,” in *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, edited and introduced by Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), page 115. King, on the other hand, appeared to universalize non-violent coercion. I can think of no conflict where he would have espoused using violence to bring an end to a conflict. It would seem that his non-violent strategy of coercive love employed in the Civil Rights movement and his pacifist response to the Vietnam War would have been applied universally. It should be noted that Niebuhr, although not a pacifist, opposed the Vietnam War and supported King’s own stance. Regarding the Vietnam War, Niebuhr wrote, “For the first time I fear I am ashamed of our beloved nation.” Richard Niebuhr; quoted in Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), page 285. On supporting King’s stance on the Vietnam War, Niebuhr called King “one of the great religious leaders of our time.” Niebuhr asserted: “Dr. King has the right and a duty, as both a religious and a civil rights leader, to express his concern in these days about such a major human problem as the Vietnam War.” Reinhold Niebuhr; quoted in John J. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr., Non-Violent Strategies and Tactics for Social Change* with a new introduction by the author (New York: Madison Books, 2000), page 261.
voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but, as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups tend to be more immoral than individuals.\(^{30}\)

Niebuhrian realism accounted for the affections’ distorting of reason and the import of dominant culture structural dynamics at the corporate level that undermine moral self-determination. Niebuhr writes of group power dynamics and attempts to bring about justice and equity for all people in a given society or group. Coercion is necessary for cooperation: “All social cooperation on a larger scale than the most intimate social group requires a measure of coercion.”\(^{31}\) Nations and other social groupings do not achieve some form of consensus without coercion.\(^{32}\) When a minority group believes it has some form of advantage, is intent on gaining equity, or desperate enough to do so, it will not succumb to the dominant culture’s dictates, but resist.\(^{33}\) The only way that African Americans would be able to gain equity in America would be through non-violent means. It would not come naturally through the good will of the dominant culture: “It is hopeless for the Negro to expect complete emancipation from the menial social and economic position into which the white man has forced him, merely by trusting in the moral sense of the white race. It is equally hopeless to attempt emancipation through violent rebellion.”\(^{34}\) For Niebuhr, the problem is not primarily an individual matter, but a group structural reality: “However large the number of individual white men who do and who will identify themselves completely with the Negro cause, the white race in America will not admit the Negro to equal rights if it is not forced to do so.”\(^{35}\) Niebuhr recommends boycotts of financial institutions that do not practice equity in loans, businesses that benefit from Negro consumption but that do not employ them, public service institutions that discriminate against African Americans, and refusal to pay taxes to states that spend a fraction of the amount on the education of African American youth that is spent on their white peers.\(^{36}\) It is as if King took good notes and applied these strategies to the Civil Rights movement.

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\(^{34}\) Niebuhr, *Moral Man, Immoral Society*, page 252.


Based on the title of Niebuhr’s book, one might come away thinking that Niebuhr believes individuals are moral, but society is immoral. However, John Howard Yoder cautions against this interpretation: “Niebuhr did not mean to say that individuals are moral and society is immoral; he meant to show that institutions face greater difficulty in being moral. Each person is partly evil, but institutions magnify our sinfulness more than they magnify our virtue…Society’s structures escalate the impact of selfishness and pride. Therefore we have less reason to hope for peace in the world than for peace and progress in one-to-one relationships.”

Niebuhr’s realism may strike some as pessimism. For example, he writes, “…it is safe to hazard the prophecy that the dream of perpetual peace and brotherhood for human society is one which will never be fully realized. It is a vision promoted by the conscience and insight of individual man, but incapable of fulfillment by collective man. It is like all true religious visions, possible of approximation but not of realization in actual history.”

During his student days in Boston, King had come to appreciate the corrective neo-orthodoxy provided in response to a capitulating and shallow, naïve liberalism that was too optimistic and capitulatory toward contemporary culture. On the other hand, King still espoused a form of liberalism that placed him at odds with Niebuhr, who was considered America’s foremost public theologian and ethicist. While King benefited from Niebuhr’s assessment of negative forms of power dynamics in dominant cultural groupings, still King thought that Niebuhr underestimated God’s grace and overestimated human depravity. King writes: “I also came to see that Reinhold Niebuhr had overemphasized the corruption of human nature. His pessimism concerning human nature was not balanced by an optimism concerning divine nature. He was so involved in diagnosing man’s sickness of sin that he overlooked the cure of grace.”


38See Niebuhr, *Moral Man, Immoral Society*, pages 21-22. Social ethicist Niebuhr and socio-biologist Wilson appear to differ on the relative morality of individuals and groups. An interview with Wilson in *The Smithsonian* leads me to wonder if he would title a book *Immoral Man, Moral Society*. For Wilson, our more primal biological impulses result from individual selection and pit individuals against one another. Other traits are not as old and result from group selection. These traits are more altruistic in nature and favor the team or tribe. Such biological characteristics resulting from group selection are more fragile and must be tenaciously fostered if they are to withstand the withering, selfish force of individual selection. Where Niebuhr and Wilson might agree is on how quickly groups form and forcefully compete with other groups. See Natalie Angier, “Edward O. Wilson’s New Take on Human Nature,” *Smithsonian.com*, April 2012; https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/edward-o-wilsons-new-take-on-human-nature-160810520/.

39King, *Autobiography*, page 31. A conversation involving Wolfhart Pannenberg and Niebuhr conveys a similar assessment. Refer to the account of their conversation in Wolfhart
Niebuhr viewed the individual as more moral than society. And yet, rather than focus simply on the individual, he called for engaging society, holding in check the expansion of evil on the collective level in service to dominant culture groupings. He encouraged minority populations to discern coercive means to bring about equitable policies that benefit all. Niebuhr was the darling of mainline Protestant social teaching in the mid-twentieth century, as he sought to reform society. In contrast to this vision and strategy, the late Billy Graham and his Evangelical community focused consideration on reforming individuals through interior spiritual conversion, hoping it would trickle down and effect social change, including on matters of racial injustice.

**King, Graham and Evangelical Pietism:**

King stands somewhere between Niebuhr’s realism, or perhaps qualified pessimism involving coercion, and Evangelical quietism with its emphasis on God’s miraculous, transformative grace. Many Evangelicals tend to think that if you get people saved, racism and racialization will simply disappear. Others think that the aim is not to focus on social ills, but simply focus on the next life.

The late Billy Graham reflected Evangelical piety with its emphasis on moral uplift achieved by God’s miraculous grace. Conversion and revival will right the social wrongs in society. Graham did not agree with King’s strategy of non-violent confrontation, as illustrated in Birmingham.\(^4\) It

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\(^4\)For articles reflecting upon the complicated relationship involving Graham, King and the Civil Rights Movement, see the following: John Blake, “Where Billy Graham Missed the Mark,” CNN, February 22, 2018 (https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/22/us/billy-graham-mlk-civil-rights/index.html). Take note of the following portion of the CNN article: “According to [William] Martin’s biography [A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story], Graham said at the time that only ‘a spiritual and moral awakening’ would solve the nation’s race problems, adding that ‘if the law says that I cannot march or I cannot demonstrate, I ought not to march and I ought not to demonstrate.’ ‘Billy Graham was uncomfortable with confrontation,’ Martin says. ‘He wanted to move along in an orderly fashion. He wasn’t comfortable with some of MLK’s tactics.’” See also Jay Reeves, “Billy Graham Had Pride and Regret on Civil Rights Issues,” Associated Press, February 25, 2018 (http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/billy-graham-played-complicated-role-us-race-relations-53344966); Kate Shellnut, “What Is Billy Graham’s Friendship with Martin Luther King Jr. Worth?” Christianity Today, February 23, 2018 (https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/february/billy-graham-martin-luther-king-jr-friendship-civil-rights.html). The latter article includes a sub-heading that reads, “Contemporary Christians have mixed takes on late evangelist’s civil rights legacy.”
is quite likely that Graham was one of those white moderates King would have had in mind in his Birmingham Jail letter. King was more balanced than Niebuhr and Graham. Like Niebuhr, King saw the need to understand structures and confront unhealthy power dynamics through coercive means. However, like Graham, he also cherished the miracle of God’s gracious, loving intervention as necessary to confront the problem.

Later in this chapter, brief consideration will be given to the theological rationale for employing civil disobedience for addressing structural evil. The employment of civil disobedience for addressing structural evil like racialization in the United States is quite difficult for many contemporary American Evangelicals to appreciate. This is due to multiple factors, including individualism, Christian American nationalism, and lack of significant concern and/or awareness of the contemporary evils of racism.

Before proceeding further, it is important to give greater consideration to individualism, which appears in Evangelicalism’s emphasis on personal conversion’s moral impact on society. As the old saying goes, “Jesus is changing the world one individual at a time.” According to Emerson and Smith, most white American Evangelicals engage racial considerations in view of free-will individualism as well as emphasis on personal relationships and conversion (the “miracle motif”—if you get people converted problems like racialization will disappear). However, the majority reject “structural explanations.” Emerson and Smith claim that without discerning how structures work, and how they can and often buttress racialization, it is not possible to bring an end to the racial sickness that is plaguing society and the church.

In looking back on King’s day, it would appear that Evangelicals would have had a difficult time accounting for King’s and Niebuhr’s cognizance and engagement of structural realities. That is not to say they would have affirmed racism. Many of them like Graham would have found racism abhorrent but would not have sought to overturn structural racialized dynamics. The solution then, as for many today, would be to address the problem individually. The solution to confronting the racial problem would involve seeking to be blind to color and taking each person on their own merits.

**King, Rand and Objectivism:**

It is not only Evangelicals like Graham who would have had trouble with King and Niebuhr on certain Civil Rights movement aims and methods. Ayn Rand took issue with the Civil Rights campaign involving legislation and would have dismissed King’s model of coercive love. Rand

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41 Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, pages 76, 78.

42 See Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, page 78.
was a self-professed atheist philosopher who rejected altruism and interdependence in favor of rational self-interest. This framework is often called objectivism.

Rand was a contemporary of King, Niebuhr, and Graham. As already noted, she was quite critical of the Civil Rights movement. In her 1963 essay titled “Racism,” Rand attacked racism on the one hand and the Civil Rights Bill on the other hand.

In this 1963 essay, Rand claims that the Civil Rights bill puts forth a reverse form of racism. To set the matter in context, Rand wrote this essay at the time the Civil Rights Bill was working its way through Congress toward enactment the following year (1964). Rand opposed such directives that would automatically award employment to a racial minority over a white applicant when the two candidates are equally qualified. Individuals should not be held responsible for other people’s actions past and present, but their actions alone. While Rand was against discrimination in areas of public and governmental programs, she supported granting the freedom to individuals to operate private businesses along racist lines, however abhorrent she found such practices. It is important to note that Rand also affirmed opposition to those individuals’ engaged in racist practices, albeit “only by private means” through such endeavors as “economic boycott or social ostracism.”

So, while Rand would oppose legal coercion or imposition, she would favor coercion in a private capacity.

Now it should be noted that in addition to attacking the Civil Rights Bill based on her supreme regard for individual freedoms, including property rights, Rand also fervently attacked racism based on her philosophy of objectivism or “rational selfism.” Here’s Rand:

To ascribe one’s virtues to one’s racial origin, is to confess that one has no knowledge of the process by which virtues are acquired and, most often, that one has failed to acquire them. The overwhelming majority of racists are men who have earned no sense of personal identity, who can claim no individual achievement or distinction, and who seek the illusion of a “tribal self-esteem” by alleging the inferiority of some other tribe. Observe the hysterical intensity of the Southern racists; observe also that racism is much more prevalent among the poor white trash than among their intellectual betters.

Rand went on to blame collectivism for racism:

Historically, racism has always risen or fallen with the rise or fall of collectivism. Collectivism holds that the individual has no rights, that his life and work belong to the group (to “society,” to the tribe, the state, the nation) and that the group may sacrifice him at its

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44 Rand, “Racism,” page 149.
own whim to its own interests. The only way to implement a doctrine of that kind is by means of brute force — and statism has always been the political corollary of collectivism.\textsuperscript{45}

Rand presented the individual as the focal point of ethical deliberations. Moreover, she espoused a high confidence in the power of reason and exhorted all persons to cultivate this feature of their humanity. Lastly, she championed free market capitalism apart from any governmental restraints as key to human flourishing. In fact, in addition to the philosophy of individualism, Rand proclaimed that laissez-faire capitalism is the cure to racism: “There is only one antidote to racism: the philosophy of individualism and its politico-economic corollary, laissez-faire capitalism.”\textsuperscript{46} Here’s Rand again:

\begin{quote}
It is capitalism that gave mankind its first steps toward freedom and a rational way of life. It is capitalism that broke through national and racial barriers, by means of free trade. It is capitalism that abolished serfdom and slavery in all the civilized countries of the world. It is the capitalist North that destroyed the slavery of the agrarian-feudal South in the United States.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

While I appreciate Rand’s antipathy to racism, she did not show appreciation for the structural power dynamics bound up with racialization. Notions of reverse racism fall flat since there is not equality. While there can be racial prejudice working both ways, racism as defined in this chapter involves prejudice involving power imbalances favoring the dominant culture. In fact, the racialized society that Rand wished to locate in the past is still with us. One must account for present day power imbalances, as well as the historical impact on present day situations. In contrast, her contemporaries Niebuhr and King had a firm grasp of negative structural dynamics and how the dominant culture would not pursue equity for all if it were not forced to do so.

In addition to her blindness to power structures, Rand also had too optimistic a view of human reason. Her own life experience shaped her philosophical orientation in the direction of selfism in opposition to altruism. As a child in Russia at the time of the Bolshevik revolution, Rand’s father’s pharmacy in St. Petersburg, Russia was seized by Bolshevik soldiers in 1917. She and her family were forced from their lives of comfort and privilege in St. Petersburg to poverty in Crimea. No doubt, these experiences shaped her philosophy of rational selfish or objectivism. Experiences and their attendant emotions make an indelible impact on our reasoning. While we

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{45}\textsuperscript{45}\textsuperscript{Rand, “Racism,” page 149.}
\textsuperscript{46}\textsuperscript{Rand, “Racism,” page 150.}
\textsuperscript{47}\textsuperscript{Rand, “Racism,” page 151.}
\end{quote}
all struggle in this way, the failure to admit how fragile our reasoning faculties are and how other forces come into play make it especially difficult to be ‘objective.’

Lastly, Rand’s view of capitalism also missed the mark. No matter the economic system, oppression can play a part whenever one portion of society gains control over others. Society is not made of monadic, self-contained parts, but a web of various relations. The individual certainly matters and should not be coerced unless the same individual and the community it is part of is being coercive, as in the case of those who oppress African Americans and the like. As noted earlier in this chapter, far from removing slavery, staggering capitalistic growth in the North was based on the slave trade and industry throughout the country, including both North and South.

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48 While Rand’s convictions regarding people who were not of white European descent were more favorable than Immanuel Kant’s (perhaps in part due to dominant perceptions in his day), nonetheless, Kant’s overarching system makes more space for other factors being considered than simply rational ones. See Thomas E. Hill, Jr., and Bernard Boxill, “Kant and Race,” in Bernard Boxill, ed., Race and Racism, Oxford Readings in Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Although Kant prized the role deliberative reason plays for social ethical development, he realized in part how non-rational biases come into play during deliberations that make it exceptionally difficult to reason astutely on ethical matters. Moreover, he partially understood the need to foster our feelings as well as our reasoning powers to fulfill our moral aims or ends as humans, even though he gave pride of place to reason over feelings (page 466). One feature he and Rand shared in common was their lack of needed awareness of the influence of social structures on our thinking, and how we need to tend to them. The individual alone cannot get it done (See page 467 on how Kant, in contrast to Rousseau, did not see the need to reform social institutions that cultivate moral sentiments benefiting social structures that are in keeping with moral reason; he left the matter to individuals to reform their moral sentiments without strong support from social institutions). What is needed is cultivation of reason along with keen awareness of the various social and psychological forces that give rise to racism for institutions to be developed that can help address and overcome racism (See for example page 471). The authors argue that Kant had racist tendencies that emerged at points. For example, his view that without proper employment of deliberative reasoning one could not perform one’s moral duties and live in a worthwhile manner was unduly narrow. Still, those tendencies do not depend on the main tenets of his philosophical paradigm, but rather run contrary to it. The authors argue that the basic thrust or overarching framework of Kant’s philosophy can be used in the effort to undermine racism (See for example page 449-450).
King, Edwards and Altruism:

It is interesting to note that many Evangelical Christians in the United States resonate with Rand, not with her antagonism toward altruism or her atheism, but with her affirmation of individualism, confidence in reason, and celebration of free market economics. It is also worth noting that the progenitor of Evangelicalism in North America, Jonathan Edwards, had a more qualified appreciation of the individual and self-love, reason, and market economics. Certain aspects of his thought, including his concept of benevolence, or what certain abolitionist descendants took up and refined as “disinterested benevolence” resonate strongly with King’s framework in the fight with tribalism. Edwards was an iconic and complex figure whose conflicted views and responses on matters pertaining to slavery and race represent America past and present in its own conflicted struggle with racism and structural evil.49

Edwards as Conflicted Defender of Benevolent Virtue

For those who applaud altruism and who maintain that a completely self-serving orientation is not good, no matter how seemingly rational the various individuals are who engage in ‘free’ trade,50 they might find Edwards appealing. He was certainly more guarded on the merits of capitalism than Rand. Edwards writes, “How careful and eagle-eyed is the merchant to observe and improve his opportunities and advantages.” And again, “How greatly have we forsaken the pious examples of our fathers!”51 While not disparaging certain aspects of capitalism such as buying low and selling high, along with acknowledging the merits of supply and demand dynamics, Edwards maintained that deliberations on these capitalistic forces needed to account for interdependence and human agency/free will. In other words, an individual must not only


50 Rand’s ethical system of rational selfism maintains that if all parties operate rationally in keeping with their own best interests, there will be no abuses. The respective parties will be sure to safeguard against any potential harm to their persons caused by external agents. On Rand’s view, altruism caters to larger forces that ultimately harm individual freedom.

account for one’s own profit margins, but also for the well-being of the entire community, as well as for the well-being of the individuals with whom one engages in financial transactions. 52

Perhaps it is fair to say that Edwards’s critical eye toward the emerging capitalistic structure in New England had more to do with his awareness of human depravity shaping economic and social institutions, no matter the system, than it does with free market economics themselves. It would also appear to be the case that while holding out hope for human industry in view of God’s providential oversight, nonetheless, given human depravity, checks and balances on financial systems are always needed to safeguard against selfish ambitions that undermine the well-being of other individuals and the surrounding community.

One other economic item requires consideration at this point, especially as it concerns human depravity. Edwards made note of how New England’s budding economy during colonial times benefited from slavery. As George Marsden claims, Edwards asserted that “the whole economy of New England…depended on products produced by African slavery (a key part in New England’s trade was with the slave economies of the Caribbean).”53 This assessment of slavery does not mesh with Rand’s view noted earlier: “It is the capitalist North that destroyed the slavery of the agrarian-feudal South in the United States.”54 The impetus for slavery was economic throughout the Americas. Dehumanization of others based on skin color was tolerated and promoted to harvest sugar and cotton and acquire molasses for consumer demands in North America and beyond. 55


54 Rand, “Racism,” page 151. It is worth noting that Connecticut, where Edwards was born, raised and educated (Yale) did not stop importing slaves until 1774. Nor did it bring a complete end to slavery until 1848, even though it put in place a law (the Gradual Abolition Act of 1784) that terminated slavery for those born into it, but only after they had reached the age of 25. See Douglas Harper, “Slavery in Connecticut,” in Slavery in the North; http://slavenorth.com/connecticut.htm.

55 Kenneth Minkema points out that by the year 1731, Rhode Island was emerging as a dominant slave trading center in North America. The majority of kidnapped Africans were exchanged for molasses in the Caribbean. Molasses was an essential ingredient in the making of rum on which Rhode Island’s economy depended. Kenneth P. Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards’s Defense of Slavery,” Massachusetts Historical Review, vol. 4 (2002): 26.
It is important to pause here and discuss briefly Edwards’s multifaceted relation to slavery. As already suggested, Edwards was conflicted on the subject of slavery. Edwards owned slaves, defended a Christian minister who was being attacked as a slave owner, and did not think the Bible prohibited slavery. And yet, he eventually spoke out against the African slave trade: it kidnapped Africans and deprived African countries of their people. Here’s Marsden: “At the same time that he defended slavery as not wrong in itself, Edwards made a point of condemning the African slave trade. Do ‘other nations’ Edwards asked, ‘have any power or business to disfranchise all the nations of Africa?’”

Edwards was not a passionate defender of involuntary servitude. His defense of slavery reflected “deep ambivalence” regarding African slavery as an institution. However, in spite of his conflicted, though evolving personal position, the logic of his ethical theory on “the nature of true virtue” which stands opposed to Rand’s rational selfish would be instrumental in the rise of a distinctive strand of abolitionism in New England. We will discuss this ethical theory shortly. Here it is worth noting that contrary to the usual move in history for a founder’s ideas to lose steam and significance among the succeeding generations, Edwards’s first generation of disciples actually advanced beyond Edwards on the question of slavery, abolition, and integration. It was only after his immediate followers passed from the scene that the decline in a distinctively Edwardsean confrontation of slavery occurred. Kenneth Minkema and Harry Stout put the matter succinctly in their discussion of the “declension model” for describing movements’ devolution:


57Marsden, Jonathan Edwards, page 257.

58Marsden, Jonathan Edwards, page 257.

59Edwards was inconsistent in at least two senses. First, he approved of the institution of slavery for those born into it, even after he condemned the practice of abducting and exporting Africans as slaves to the colonies. Second, Edwards’s evolving stance on slavery never matched his perspective on what is entailed by true virtue. The subject of “true virtue” in Edwards’s thought will be discussed below.

60On the evolution in Edwards’s thought, Minkema writes, “The shift in Edwards’s thinking on slavery and the slave trade came as a residual effect of his consuming interest in furthering the international work of redemption.” Edwards went from supporting the purchase of “newly imported slaves” to opposing importation. “Nonetheless, he remained an unapologetic defender of slavery as an institution and continued owning slaves himself.” Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards’s Defense of Slavery,” page 42.
In American social and intellectual history, it has been common to use a declension model to describe the devolution of movements from primitive originality and genius to dissipation, imitation, and irrelevance… By focusing on the involvement of Edwards’s followers in the debate over slavery, we show that here, at least, the declension model holds true, though the tradition reached its apex, not in the progenitor, but in his first-generation disciples.61

It is also important to point out that Edwards believed slavery would be abolished during the fast-approaching Millennium.62 Furthermore, according to Marsden, Edwards did not view Africans and Indians as racially or spiritually inferior.63 Rather, African and Native American civilizations paled in comparison to Christendom in large part due to Satan’s oppressive rule over them. Nonetheless, these peoples had the same “rights” and “potentialities” as those of European descent and would excel in learning and religion in the millennial period.64

The preceding reflections on Edwards in relation to slavery are not intended in any way to justify his deliberations and actions in owning slaves or in defending a fellow clergyman, the Reverend Benjamin Doolittle, who was a slave owner. Rather, as in the case of King with sexism noted in the chapter on gender, we must situate Edwards in his historical context and view him as a complicated public intellectual who was conflicted and yet evolving. Moreover, as with King’s


62 See Marsden, Jonathan Edwards, page 258. Edwards was a post-millennialist who held that the glorious age was not far off.

63 Marsden, Jonathan Edwards, pages 257-258. How does Marsden’s view of Edwards not viewing Africans as racially inferior mesh with Minkema and Stout’s claim that “To be true to their mentor’s philosophical and theological legacy, Edwards’s heirs had to repudiate his racist indifference to antislavery”? Minkema and Stout, “The Edwardsean Tradition and Antislavery,” page 49 (italics added). Perhaps Edwards did not see them as inferior, but still remained calloused due to mere self-love for his own racial tribe.

64 Marsden, Jonathan Edwards, pages 257-258. Now, according to Minkema, Edwards was paternalistic in his approach to African slaves and Indians given his hierarchical view of this life as well as the life to come. While there could be spiritual liberty, there would not be “a social and political liberty on a par with whites.” Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards’s Defense of Slavery,” pages 34-35. While slavery was permitted, there was no place for abuse. Severe judgment would befall abusive slave owners. In fact, in at least one instance, Edwards reflected upon his own standing before God in how he treated his slaves. See pages 39-40 of Minkema for consideration of Edwards’s exegesis of Job 31:13-14 in the “Blank Bible.”
personalism, while accounting for significant missteps along the way (as with King’s sexism noted in the chapter on gender and Edwards’s views on slavery), one can also find in Edwards’s ethical framework on “the nature of true virtue” (to be discussed shortly) resources not only for abolishing slavery, but also for confronting racism wherever it manifests itself.65

Now to return to the comparison between Edwards and Rand. Another point of contention involving Rand and her disciples is how they favor the individual over community. Edwards certainly cherished the individual. However, unlike Rand, he also esteemed interdependence. Affirmation of interdependence does not entail the rejection of the individual’s importance or make the individual subservient to some collectivist identity. For Edwards, both features were central to his thought, including his economic theory. Leigh-Anne Walker claims:

These ideas of interdependence and free will were evident in Edwards’s economic thinking. Edwards distrusted any system that did not have as its core the good of society. This is somewhat different from utilitarian notions that a free market produced the greatest good for the greatest number. Edwards argued that buying and selling occur with one’s neighbors, whom we were to love as ourselves. Therefore, market transactions must be conducted for the benefit of the entire community, and economic transactions that harmed society were wrong.66

It is also worth accounting for the following statement on the freedom of relational beings made in the image of God:

…Edwards saw the true damage from corrupt market practices as the violence done not to the market system but to the free will of human beings. And modern economic theory would agree, as a free market operates by the unforced decisions of market participants. For

65Refer back to the discussion of Kant in a prior footnote, where a similar point is made. In spite of his own personal, racist leanings at points, Hill and Boxill argued in “Kant and Race” that such personal tendencies do not reflect the fundamental tenets of Kant’s philosophical system, which can be used in ethical deliberations to counter racism. The same could be said of Thomas Jefferson, who was deeply complicit and conflicted on slavery. While he and other founding fathers did not model civic virtue at every turn, King did not disparage the Constitution or Bill of Rights. Rather, King argued that our founding figures and the nation as a whole from its inception to his day did not honor its most cherished values when it came to the equality of all people. King held the country to account and called us back as a nation to honor those ideals. We still have much ground to cover in embracing those ideals today regarding the inherent equality of all people, no matter their ethnic heritage, and seeking to insure their flourishing.

Edwards, by violating the liberty and independence of others, we destroy who we were created to be: free, relational beings made in the image of God.\(^{67}\)

Edwards’s human ontology of interdependence and freedom/human agency followed from his overarching Trinitarian theology. While humanity entails individual persons finding their identity in communion with others, they are not coerced in their interconnection, but interact freely. Ideally, humans would engage lovingly out of concern for one another, and not simply self-concern. On the import of Trinitarian thought forms for human ontology in Edwards, William Danaher writes,

A clear relation seems to exist between Edwards’s Trinitarian reflections and his conception of ‘compounded self-love.’… God’s self-love is not merely a force of unity motivated by a love for what is best, but is generative, comprehensive, and properly social. Thus, self-love in God is as much an act of self-transcendence as it is an act of self-esteem. Likewise, compounded self-love yields a love that desires the union with, and the well-being of, another. Self-love, in short, has not only a positive connotation in Edwards, but his definition of compounded self-love derives from his conception of God’s love as a dynamic and relational state of communion between the persons of the Trinity.\(^{68}\)

Whereas for Rand, self-concern or “self-esteem” is of the utmost importance, self-concern or self-love in Edwards involves “self-transcendence,”\(^{69}\) which flows from his Trinitarian ontology. “Simple mere self-love” and “love to God are entirely distinct, and don’t enter into the nature of the other at all.” However, self-love does not end there for Edwards in terms of his overarching framework: “Compounded self-love” “also arises from a principle uniting him to another being, whereby the good of that other being does in a sort become his own. This second sort of self-love is not entirely distinct from love to God, but enters into its nature.”\(^{70}\) For Edwards, natural love is good, when it is simple self-love. It is essential to our self-preservation and happiness. However, simple self-love without the mediation of God’s Spirit, through which compounded self-love

\(^{67}\)Walker, “Economic Thought,” pages 174-175.


comes to us, leads to ruin. Here’s Edwards: “This natural and necessary inclination to ourselves, without that governor and guide, will certainly without anything else produce, or rather will become, all those sinful inclinations which are in the corrupted nature of man.”

God’s love is truly social for Edwards, as well as for King. Both Edwards and King balanced consideration of the importance of the autonomous or free individual and community. For Edwards, it flows from his Trinitarian theology, which involves such themes as God’s compounded self-love that goes beyond mere self-love, involving both “self-transcendence” as well as “self-esteem.” Excellence involves “consent” toward others. The word consent is taken to convey the idea that one “actively desires their welfare.”

At this point, it is worth drawing attention to the logical connection Edwards makes between consent and the Trinity. Now it would be extremely odd to consider God lacking in excellence. But how could God be excellent, if God exists in eternal isolation, which would make it impossible for God to consent to others’ well-being in eternity, actively desiring their welfare? Edwards resolves the matter by saying, “one alone cannot be excellent, inasmuch as, in such case, there can be no consent. Therefore, if God is excellent, there must be a plurality in God; otherwise, there can be no consent in him.”

For Edwards, “love of benevolence” concerning any person is consent to their well-being or “an inclination to their good.” But there is more: “…evermore equal to the inclination or desire anyone has of another’s good, is the delight he has in that other’s good if it be obtained, and the uneasiness if it be not obtained.” It would seem that this notion of delighting in another obtaining the good they desire involves Edwards’s notion of complacence, which is the feeling of satisfaction, delight and pleasure. Here one finds an aesthetic quality to Edwards’s ethical framework.


75Here is what the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy’s entry for Jonathan Edwards has to say about benevolence and complacence in his thought: “True virtue aims at the good of being
Edwards’s prizing of “interdependence and free will,” as noted above, appears to follow from his Trinitarian ontology, which includes elements of consent and complacence. Whether or not King ever envisioned the individual and community in view of his understanding of the Trinity, he did hold the two elements—individual and community—together, as already acknowledged. Rufus Burrow points out that “King always held in tension the value of the autonomous in general and therefore also prizes the disposition that promotes it. Truly virtuous people thus love two things — being and benevolence. They not only value benevolence because it promotes the general good, however; they also ‘relish’ or delight in it for its own sake. Hence, while virtue ‘most essentially consists in benevolence to being’ (True Virtue, 1765; Edwards 1957–, vol. 8, 540), in a wider sense it includes not only benevolence but also ‘complacence’ in benevolence's intrinsic excellence or beauty.” See the sub-section titled “3.1 Ethics” of William Wainwright, “Jonathan Edwards,” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.); URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/edwards/. Moreover, the entry on Edwards has this to say about benevolence and consent: “One who loves others, for instance, or actively desires their welfare, ‘agrees’ with them or ‘consents’ to them. Love’s scope can be narrower or wider, however. Agreement or consent is ‘comprehensive’ or ‘universal’ only when directed towards being in general. Only true benevolence, therefore, is truly beautiful.” See the sub-section titled “3.2 Aesthetics” of William Wainwright, “Jonathan Edwards,” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.); URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/edwards/.

There may be a tension or difference of view between Walker and Danaher when it comes to their understanding of freedom of will in Edwards’s corpus. Noted in this chapter, Walker claims in her article on Edwards’s economic perspective that Edwards prizes free will, as well as interdependence. What is meant by free will? Edwards certainly does not hold to an Arminian perspective, or a libertarian notion of free will. In fact, he was often quite critical of Arminianism. Here’s Danaher on freedom of will or choice in Edwards: “Though it is undeniable that Edwards does not assign a high place to freedom of choice even from the perspective in his Trinitarian thought, this is because in his Trinitarian theology love, rather than freedom of choice, holds the ontological center.” Danaher, The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards, pages 167-168. How might one explain freedom of will or choice in Edwards against this backdrop in which his Trinitarian theology prizes holy love or benevolence as freedom over freedom of choice? Perhaps it is a matter of seeing true freedom as operating according to nature rather than sheer choice. This seems to match Edwards’s view that virtue is not construed in terms of the will’s actions, but nature. Just as God is free in operating according to his virtuous nature of holy benevolence, so we are free when we operate in like manner. See Jonathan Edwards, Freedom of the Will, ed. Paul Ramsey, vol. 1, The Works of Jonathan Edwards (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), pages 280, 339-340, 364.
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individual and that of the community.” Burrow also notes: “Following the lead of Paul Tillich, King held that freedom constituted the essence of personhood, and that to be a person is to be free, and vice versa.” And finally:

His staunch conviction that a person cannot be all that he can be in isolation was consistent with both the personalistic principle of the unity of humanity and the Afrikan traditional view of the primacy of community. We are not persons in isolation. Human beings are, rather, persons-in-community. King said, “At the heart of all that civilization has meant and developed is ‘community’ - the mutually cooperative and voluntary venture of man to assume a semblance of responsibility for his brother.” A person cannot be a person without interaction with other persons. King always held in tension the value of the autonomous individual and that of the community. Ultimately, he sought the establishment of the beloved community, a thoroughly inclusive community based on the principle of equality and respect for the humanity and dignity of every person.

Human love that reflects or images God’s love will always entail affirmation of the individual and the community for King, as well as for Edwards. As such, it stands in stark contrast to Rand’s vision of love, which involves only self-esteem. There is no role or place for self-transcendence in her system.

One of Rand’s principle concerns and points of wariness regarding the community at large was the danger of coercion. No doubt, this is key to her solitary consideration of self-love. It is worth noting that Edwards was also concerned about coercion, though love in community is never coercive in his estimation. It flows from his view of God’s love as non-coercive, as the triune God loves spontaneously and joyfully in inseparable union. Here’s Edwards:

> The Godhead being thus begotten by God’s having an idea of himself and standing forth in a distinct subsistence or person in that idea, there proceeds a most pure act, and an infinitely holy and sweet energy arises between the Father and Son: for their love and joy is mutual, in mutually loving and delighting in each other...The Deity becomes all act; the divine essence itself flows out and is as it were breathed forth in love and joy. So that the Godhead therein stands forth in yet another manner of subsistence, and there proceeds the

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third person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, viz. the Deity in act: for there is no other act but the act of the will.  

In “Treatise on Grace,” Edwards writes of a Trinitarian overflow or breathing out in and through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God’s love breathed out between the Father and Son first and foremost, and then outward toward the human creature:

…the Holy Spirit is the divine love itself, the love of the Father and the Son. …the Holy Ghost is that love of God and Christ that is breathed forth primarily towards each other, and flows out secondarily towards the creature…He is the Deity wholly breathed forth in infinite, substantial, intelligent love: from the Father and Son first towards each other, and secondarily freely flowing out to the creature, and so standing forth a distinct personal subsistence.

A few paragraphs earlier Edwards writes,

…the Scripture seems in many places to speak of love in Christians as if it were the same with the Spirit of God in them, or at least as the prime and most natural breathing and acting of the Spirit in the soul. So Romans 5:5, “Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

The divine love extends to the world, which God loves. Though the outpouring or breathing forth of the Spirit by whom the union of our spirits with the Father and Son are made effective, we participate in that triune love.

For Edwards, participation in the life of the triune Godhead, whose love is inherently communal, is the fount of true virtue. Participation in the triune God’s gracious love is the essence of morality. Danaher puts the matter this way: “the moral life is one of gracious participation in the triune love of God.” Thus, there can be no such thing as virtuous self-love existing in isolation of God and neighbor, as in Rand’s system which champions “the virtue of selfishness” (the title

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of her book). Edwards addresses this theme of virtue in more philosophical dress in his volume *The Nature of True Virtue*. The intra-Trinitarian mutual love “between the several persons of the Godhead” extends outward toward the creation.⁸⁴

Love for being in general is the fount of virtue. Being in general is the triune God’s once love for being in general or the triune God is the fount of virtue, then God’s love must first be for God’s triune self, and then extend outward, “flowing out to particular beings…”⁸⁵ Private or particular affection does not convey true virtue, which, as just noted, involves a general benevolence toward all, and which flows from being in general, which is the triune God. Edwards writes,

…no affection limited to any private system, not dependent on, nor subordinate to Being in general can be of the nature of true virtue; and this, whatever the private system be, let it be more or less extensive, consisting of a greater or smaller number of individuals, so long as it contains an infinitely little part of universal existence, and so bears no proportion to the great all-comprehending system. And consequently, that no affection whatsoever to any creature, or any system of created beings, which is not dependent on, nor subordinate to a propensity or union of the heart to God, the supreme and infinite Being, can be of the nature of true virtue.⁸⁶

This ethical model stands opposed to any form of tribalism—or radical individualism (involving a tribe of one) as with Rand, which is inherently private and in no way reflective of “universal existence.”

Private affection or a propensity of love limited to groups of individuals, or solitary love of self, does not reflect or participate in God’s captivating love. Such captivating love flows from the Godhead’s “infinitely strong propensity” of the “divine persons one to another,”⁸⁷ which is being in general, and which arouses a general benevolence, or love for all people. Such love is compelling and enslaving (as the Apostle Paul—Jesus’ bondservant—wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21), yet free.⁸⁸

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Edwards’s Inconsistencies and Edwardsean Corrections

Now what might the preceding discussion entail for human love concerning those enslaved, not to God’s love, but inhumane brutality? Here it behooves us to return to consider Edwards on slavery. All that Edwards maintains concerning human agency and interconnectedness is very good in principle. However, his emphasis on non-coercion pertaining to individuals certainly did not extend to slaves. The slave industry greatly benefited the budding capitalistic system while violating “the liberty and independence of” those enslaved. In this sense, Edwards unintentionally comes across as a utilitarian who permits policies that weigh against a minority population’s benefit for the pleasure of the majority in society. Perhaps Edwards’s greatest fault in addressing slavery was his hierarchal orientation that favored established structures, which fought against certain egalitarian impulses or trajectories in his theology and ethics.

On the one hand, Edwards envisioned the future equality of all peoples no matter their ethnic heritage. No doubt, a foretaste of that eschatological reality surfaced in his personal ministry as Edwards welcomed Indians and those of African descent into church membership, neither reducing nor adding to the requirements for membership. Edwards’s conversionist orientation certainly manifested populist trajectories. However, on the other hand, Edwards modeled paternalism in his ardent defense of pastoral privilege and authority. Regarding this tension, Marsden writes, “True to his hierarchical instincts, Edwards pulled back from any politically disruptive implications of this evangelical Christian egalitarianism.”

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89Regarding Edwards’s repulsion of coercion, see Walker, “Economic Thought,” page 173.

90As quoted earlier in this chapter, according to Walker, Edwards warned against abuses in market economic practices. Such abuses harmed people’s “liberty and independence.” See Walker, “Economic Thought,” pages 174-175.

91See Marsden, Jonathan Edwards, page 258. See also page 259 regarding paternalism and populism. The egalitarian and hierarchical impulses appear to have competed with one another in Edwards’s thought at various points in his ministry. Consider the following examples of his egalitarian trajectory: According to Gerald McDermott, Edwards spoke against church leaders who gave the best seats in the church sanctuary to the wealthy and mighty. Gerald R. McDermott, One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), pages 170, 181. Edwards’s regard for the common Christian may have played a role in his determination to limit admittance to the communion table to the regenerate. This controversial decision that ultimately led to his ouster from his church in Northampton, MA, may have been an attempt to reconfigure ecclesial authority in terms of spiritual poverty, not worldly affluence. McDermott writes: Edwards’s
Fortunately, or better, providentially, Edwards’s followers such as Samuel Hopkins and Edwards’s son, Jonathan Edwards, Jr., did not follow Edwards, Sr. in his personal stance on slavery. Rather, they worked out the logic of Edwards, Sr’s position set forth in his posthumously published volume *The Nature of True Virtue*, where Edwards defines true virtue in the following manner: “True virtue most essentially consists in benevolence to Being in general. Or perhaps to speak more accurately, it is that consent, propensity and union of heart to Being in general, that is immediately exercised in a general good will.”

Minkema and Stout remark about this volume’s import for anti-slavery in the hands of Edwardseans like Hopkins:

> In that work Edwards defined “true virtue” as “that consent, propensity and union of heart to Being in general, that is immediately exercised in a general good will.” Edwards used another key term, “Being in general,” to identify God. Sometimes Edwards defined true virtue as “benevolence to Being in general,” with “benevolence” meaning that “general good will” or love extended to God and fellow humans. These terms are crucial, for Edwards’s disciples would refine his concept of benevolence even more into “disinterested benevolence,” or “disinterestedness,” with distinct implications for antislavery.

Minkema and Stout go on to claim that “It was in the logic of Edwards’s ethics and epistemology, rather than in his personal views, that seeds of a unique antislavery ideology would be planted. To be true to their mentor’s philosophical and theological legacy, Edwards’s ennoblement of the common Christian may have given confidence” to the general populace “who tried to challenge society’s elites” (pages 166-171, 182).

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93 Minkema and Stout, “The Edwardsean Tradition and Antislavery,” page 48. Charles Hodge was keenly aware and deeply disturbed over the import of Edwardsean tenets of virtue and benevolence for abolitionism. Minkema and Stout, “The Edwardsean Tradition and Antislavery,” page 65. We can learn a great deal from the Edwardsean tradition, including its various and competing strands, as well as from opponents to Edwards and his theology as a whole. The proponents of immediatism (like Hopkins) in the years after Edwards’s death championed “antislavery radicalism.” They ran up against competing forces that prioritized the preservation of “ecclesiological and political union,” as well as promoted “revival and church growth” as paramount, not abolition. See Minkema and Stout, “The Edwardsean Tradition and Antislavery,” page 74. In our day, various religious forces are in conflict with one another on matters pertaining to equal rights for minority populations. In my estimation, there can be no unity, revival or church growth worthy of the triune God and church that does not promote equity as essential to reconciliation and multiplication.
heirs had to repudiate his racist indifference to antislavery. For Edwards, Jr. and Hopkins, repentance necessarily involves moving beyond regard for private interests and private parties and focuses concentrated energies on the deliverance of slaves. Concern for their well-being was part and parcel of conversion and required immediate emancipation and integration. There was no place for gradualism.

How does one explain Edwards’s conflicted stance given the powerful implications arising from his treatise on virtue for abolition and full integration? Is his hierarchical orientation alone sufficient to explain the dramatic inconsistency? How could Edwards function like a gradualist on slavery? Given what Edwards witnessed of the horrors of the slave trade in New England, how could he not call holding another person captive sin, which would have required immediate repentance on the basis of his theology? Edwards was certainly no privatized pietist, like the gradualist Nathaniel William Taylor. Minkema and Stout provide the following assessment of Taylor: “Taylor was…frustratingly gradualist and cautious on slavery, exemplifying the revised and reactionary Edwardsean conviction that the end of slavery could best be effected through the conversion of one soul at a time.” Taylor and his students represent the views of many Evangelicals today: “Although he and his disciples opposed the evils of slavery, ‘When push came to shove, . . . their concern to uphold law and order, to ensure the South’s peaceful transition away from a slave-based economy, and to promote Christian charity among all concerned, undermined their efforts to put an end to the practice.’”

Could it be that Edwards’s conflicted stance was bound up with a failure to account sufficiently for the influence of the fall on our noetic faculties and power dynamics in society? We would find here a similarity with Rand, who was criticized above for being too confident in the power of reason to operate objectively, immune to the influence of prejudice and non-rational factors. It is quite possible that too high a regard for reason combined with too high a regard for

established orders like the clergy undermined or fought against various dimensions of Edwards’s thought: his egalitarian impulse bound up with conversion as the great equalizer,\footnote{Here is Edwards on that form of benevolence that is limited in scope falling short of true virtue: “…therefore let it be supposed that some beings, by natural instinct or by some other means, have a determination of mind to union and benevolence to a particular person or private system, which is but a small part of the universal system of being: and that this disposition or determination of mind is independent on, or not subordinate to, benevolence to Being in general. Such a determination, disposition, or affection of mind is not of the nature of true virtue.” Edwards, The Nature of True Virtue, page 554. See also Edwards’s own footnote defining and comparing “private system,” “private affection,” “great system,” and “general affection” (page 554, note 3).}
eschatological vision regarding the equality of all people, and his teaching on true virtue involving immediate action concerning benevolence or general good will (which for Edwards could never be limited to a private party or a person\footnote{Edwards, The Nature of True Virtue, page 540.} flowing from a heart united with being in general.\footnote{Danaher, The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards, page 178.}

If we were to ask Niebuhr if Edwards prized reason too highly, the answer would likely be yes. Danaher argues that “from Niebuhr’s perspective, Edwards’s relatively high estimation of the intellect runs the risk of generating a theology unconscious of its own ‘ideological taint’ and ‘corruption of self-interest.’”\footnote{Danaher, The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards, page 178.} To be fair, Danaher wisely points out that Edwards was alert to people pretending to be spiritually alive. Moreover, “in Original Sin, he demonstrates keen awareness of the performative failures of social institutions and religious communities, particularly in his own New England.”\footnote{Danaher, The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards, page 178.} And yet, as Minkema notes, when it came to Edwards’s defense of the slave owning clergyman Doolittle, who was under attack by congregants, Edwards may very well have faltered to reason out his views to their logical and spiritual conclusion. Surrounded by his own distinguished and powerful supporters, who were also slave owners, including his uncle, Col. John Stoddard, and noteworthy supporters of Doolittle, Edwards may have determined not to challenge the system.\footnote{Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards’s Defense of Slavery,” page 36.} In the case of his slave-owning uncle and principle counselor John Stoddard, Minkema writes, “Blood, in this case, was thicker than the Spirit.”\footnote{Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards’s Defense of Slavery,” page 36.} Consideration of such pressures illustrate that even Edwards struggled to wean himself from ignoble, self-serving interests. Though we tend to enshrine him in marble or stone, Edwards’s
feet, like ours, were made of clay. This situation also calls to mind Niebuhr’s assertion: “Even the most rational men are never quite rational when their own interests are at stake.”  

**The Original Contribution of Edwards’s Doctrine of Original Sin**

Apart from the risk that Edwards’s high view of the intellect poses for his social ethics, a feature of Edwards’s doctrine of sin that bears constructive import for our discussion on slavery and racism is Edwards’s treatment of human solidarity in Adam’s sin. In a culture that prizes autonomy, not unlike Rand’s atomistic perspective, it is quite difficult for us to see how we are responsible for one another and for society in its entirety. Without wishing to undermine individual responsibility, we need to account for our inseparability as humans. Otherwise, moral and social cohesiveness evaporates.

Guilt and shame are personal and collective, not simply individual, in Edwards’s thought. In *Original Sin*, Edwards argues that God constitutes all humanity as one. It is an “arbitrary” constitution (that is, our constitution depends in no way on anything other than God’s determination and decree), a sovereign constitution, bound up with God “upholding created substance, or causing its existence in each successive moment.” All creaturely reality is the result of “an immediate production out of nothing, at each moment, because its existence at this moment is not merely in part from God, but wholly from him; and not in any part, or degree, from its antecedent existence.” Thus, our human identity remains moment by moment throughout human history completely dependent on God’s sovereign constitution, which involves seeing humanity as one according to kind, and not in name only, contrary to a Nominalist perspective. And so, Edwards rejects the idea that God deals with individuals “one at a time” in favor of God dealing directly with “humankind as a whole.” This approach to original sin, which the editors of *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* claim is “original and brilliant,” is in the face of Edwards’s contemporary John Taylor. Taylor put forth a solitary emphasis on personal sin and rejected the notion that we bear guilt and shame as the result of Adam’s sin. For Taylor, in contrast to Edwards, “Adam and his posteriority are entirely distinct agents.” Against Taylor, Edwards asserts that we do indeed share in Adam’s guilt and shame. Our experience is both personal and social/communal rather than simply individual:

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103Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, page 44.


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…but that men’s hearts should be deeply affected with grief and humiliation before God, for the pollution and guilt which they bring into the world with them, I think, is not in the least unreasonable. Nor is it a thing strange and unheard of, that men should be shamed of things done by others, whom they are nearly concerned in. I am sure, it is not unscriptural; especially when they are justly looked upon in the sight of God, who sees the disposition of their hearts, as fully consenting and concurring.106

According to the Bible, sin, guilt and shame are not simply individual phenomena. As the prayers of righteous Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel signify (Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9 and Daniel 9), even these saints participate in the collective sin of Israel and thus repent as a collective, not simply as individuals. So, too, Saul’s descendants share in Saul’s guilt in massacring the Gibeonites. Thus, David gives Saul’s descendants over to the Gibeonites years later, some of whom are executed (See 2nd Samuel 21).

Much if not all this discussion on collective guilt and shame likely appears quite foreign to those of us who are dominant culture Americans. While quite possibly foreign, it should not be. We participate in America’s original sin of slavery and racism regardless of our individual acts or whether our ancestors were slave owners.107 To the extent we benefit from the evils committed against others in the past and present, to that extent we are culpable. Moreover, we share in Adam’s guilt and shame, which includes the totality of sin and its effects throughout history.

Our estrangement from God involving the imputation of Adam’s guilt and sense of shame signifies that there is a “communal component” to sin.108 God does not simply look at us as individuals, but as a tribe(s). The communal component noted here involves corporate guilt and shame. King may have referred to this dimension when he spoke of seeking to quicken the consciences of the dominant white culture to feel shame upon viewing the hostilities and injustices committed against African Americans during the Civil Rights movement by other white Americans.109 They belong to the same tribe. Something similar may occur when


107See Jim Wallis, America’s Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America, with a foreword by Bryan Stevenson (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016).


109“We made an indifferent and unconcerned nation rise from lethargy and subpoenaed its conscience to appear before the judgment seat of morality on the whole question of civil rights.” Martin Luther King, Jr., “Where Do We Go From Here?” in A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., ed. by Clayborne Carson (New York: IPM/Warner Books, 2001), page 173. James Cone maintains that for King nonviolent suffering would be the means through which “blacks would not only liberate themselves from the necessity of bitterness and the feeling of inferiority toward whites, but would also prick the
townspeople or extended family networks feel shame when one of their own commits heinous acts of injustice against others.

The notion of collective solidarity in sin has significant import for social renewal and transformation. For Edwards, original sin involves a “practical point”: sin is “social as well as personal.” Robert Jenson addresses this practical point in his own treatment of Edwards’s volume *Original Sin*. Jenson writes that the doctrine of the human race’s solidarity and culpability in Adam’s sin upsets our modern notion of self. As a result, we repudiate it. Our age rejects the idea that each of us should “accept responsibility for human history’s total act as my act.” Yet, as Jenson reasons, this modern rejection of the doctrine is “morally corrosive.” He argues: “If I cannot take responsibility for humankind’s act, how can I take it for that of my nation? If not for my nation’s act, how for that of my family?” A few pages later, Jenson addresses the dominant American mindset on what freedom means and entails: “America’s communal entity has been undone by the practiced supposition that we can be free only by treating one another and regarding ourselves as inertial masses, bouncing merely causally against each other in public space.”

The dominant American viewpoint on self and freedom makes it very difficult for us to see how we might participate in racialized structures that dehumanize the other. We may participate daily in racialized systems without ever thinking racist thoughts. Like President Trump, we may think we do not have a ‘racist bone in our bodies.’ Certainly, contrary to Edwards, we don’t own slaves. We have removed laws that make African Americans use separate drinking fountains or bathrooms in public or that force them to separate public schools. And yet, we often live in separate neighborhoods where the contrast in educational opportunities is dramatic. We look at ourselves as those who would be the first to support emancipation, but how have we faired with total integration? And even when it comes to emancipation, we should ponder the painful truth that the percentage of African Americans who will live behind bars far exceeds their white counterparts. You and I may not have committed the dirty deeds back in the Garden of Eden or in Little Rock or Memphis. We may not have put in place redlining laws. But we act out the aftermath of those laws constantly through our failure to integrate. So, we are guilty to a degree, even when we are not conscious of our involuntary, habitual support. The lines of separation between us and those we deem to be racists are blurred by our inaction and paralysis. If we wish conscience of whites and liberate them from a feeling of superiority.” James H. Cone, “Black Theology in American Religion,” *Theology Today* 43 (April 1986): 13.

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to be considered part of the abolitionist tradition of Hopkins and Edwards, Jr. we should set about immediately rather than gradually to reframe the current structures in support of racial integration.113

Conscious acts of racism do not exhaust racist patterns that have been enforced for generations up to the present day. That is why it is important for us to account for Niebuhr’s treatment of immoral society. Society’s structures often escalate and perpetuate individual sins, giving them life long after the sins have been committed or the sinner has died. We must account for power dynamics that enforce and reinforce various iniquities and inequities, including those pertaining to our racialized system, and respond accordingly. Otherwise, we will only reinforce those sinful patterns ourselves.

**Beyond Niebuhrian Realism or Pessimism**

While needing to account for Niebuhr’s realism when dealing with structures, it is also important not to allow realism to become pessimism. As referenced earlier in this chapter, King claimed that Niebuhr “overemphasized the corruption of human nature.” While Niebuhr may have been right on target in diagnosing what ails human nature, he did not situate the problem in relation to divine nature and “the cure” found in God’s grace.114

King was not alone in his assessment of Niebuhr. Edwards would also have taken issue with Niebuhr’s realism on this point. As Danaher writes,

> From Edwards’s perspective, Niebuhr’s account of communal unity is unduly narrow. While Niebuhr believes that communities are essential for human flourishing he acknowledges that communities invariably represent the base drives of individuals, and that coercion is therefore “an inevitable part of the process of social cohesion.”115

The solution for Niebuhr is to put in place a balance of power to achieve some sort of equilibrium. Certainly, checks and balances are important to an extent. But is equilibrium on its own sufficient? For Edwards, equilibrium is not satisfactory as a final solution:

113One noteworthy organization operating in accordance with these values is the Christian Community Development Association, which is founded on the principles of Dr. John M. Perkins’s work of relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution. See the excellent treatment of Perkins and his work in Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).


Edwards would argue that Niebuhr’s “realism” neglects the positive point that all communities reflect the paradigm of community established by the triune God, whose victorious love brings the church into a communion of perfect unity, individuality, and friendship. Where Niebuhr’s doctrine of original sin provides a vision for how pluralistic and fragmented societies can maintain a fragile sense of equilibrium, Edwards’s doctrine of original sin provides a vision for the church’s unique confidence and hope in Christ.\footnote{Danaher, \textit{The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards}, page 179.}

What is needed is a realistic understanding of human frailties and depravity and God’s grace. As with consideration of human agency and community, we find here resonance between Edwards and King. Where they would likely differ concerns King’s and Niebuhr’s use of coercion to challenge dominant cultural structures.

King addressed the issue of balance of power in keeping with Niebuhr’s work through his emphasis on coercive love. However, he went beyond Niebuhrian equilibrium involving a balance of power to an expansion of God’s powerful love breaking in on the racialized human stage. In King, one senses a spirit of optimism, or better hope, in the face of the realistic or rather discouraging situation in which he often found himself.

The white supremacists, black nationalists and white moderates all stood in the way of the beloved community’s actualization. No doubt, King struggled at times with bewilderment and bitterness. And yet, he held firmly to hope—not in human ability, but in God’s miraculous grace that not only transforms individual hearts but also social structures. King did not give up hope in the face of countless obstacles and overwhelming ordeals: “…I have not lost faith. I’m not in despair, because I know that there is a moral order. I haven’t lost faith, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice,” as he declared in a post-Riverside Church address on the Vietnam War at Ebenezer Baptist Church, April 30, 1967.\footnote{Martin Luther King, Jr., “Why I Am Opposed to the War in Vietnam,” Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, April 30, 1967; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b80Bsw0UG-U.} King knew that Good Friday came before Easter and was confident that the ultimate Easter was still ahead. His vision of God’s eschatological kingdom and arrival of the beloved community kept him going.

Further to a point made above, King’s trinitarianism was implicit or suggestive, not explicit and comprehensive. Edwards’s Trinitarianism, on the other hand, was explicit and comprehensive. Perhaps the difference between the two here has to do with King being more of a prophet and activist as a religious and pastoral leader and Edwards being more of a scholar as a religious and pastoral leader. Regardless, both leaders preached on divine love in captivating ways. Moreover,
I don’t see any reason to doubt that King would resonate with Edwards’s assessment of the immediacy of the triune God’s love to human hearts and lives through the divine Spirit.

With this point in mind, it would be worth highlighting Edwards’s view of how God’s love is mediated directly to believers through the Spirit’s indwelling presence. Just as no social ethic is worthy of consideration if it does not account for the human proclivity to put forth selfish agendas under the guise of presumably philanthropic ideals, so no social ethic is worthy of Christian consideration that does not account for the divine drive of general benevolence to move in people’s hearts and lives to effect change for the good of the whole rather than promote selfish ambitions. The latter emphasis will wisely account for evil but will not settle for a presumed equilibrium between the good and the bad. Rather, those who embrace the hope of God’s intervention through Jesus in the Spirit will pray to participate fully in the divine life and embody the coming kingdom for the sake of all.

Edwards’s view of participation in the divine social life of the Father, Son and Spirit through the indwelling presence of the Spirit is noteworthy for human sociality. In reflecting on such passages as Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 2 and 2 Peter 1, Edwards writes,

…that holy, divine principle, which we have observed does radically and essentially consist in divine love, is no other than a communication and participation of that same infinite divine love, which is God, and in which the Godhead is eternally breathed forth and subsists in the third person in the blessed Trinity. So that true saving grace is no other than that very love of God; that is, God, in one of the persons of the Trinity, uniting himself to the soul of a creature as a vital principle, dwelling there and exerting himself by the faculties of the soul of man, in his own proper nature, after the manner of a principle of nature.

…They are not only partakers of a nature that may in some sense be called divine, because ’tis conformed to the nature of God; but the very Deity does in some sense dwell in them. That holy and divine love dwells in their hearts, and is so united to human faculties that ’tis itself become a principle of new nature. That love, which is the very native temper and spirit of God, so dwells in their souls that is exerts itself in its own nature in the exercise of those faculties, after the manner of a natural or vital principle in them.

Danaher writes that “In both the “Treatise on Grace” and the Religious Affections Edwards argues that the saints’ first experience of God’s love is one of complacence in the beauty and excellence of God, which provides the foundation for benevolence toward God and neighbor.”

118 According to Danaher, Niebuhr maintained that a social ethic that is worthy of consideration will give serious attention to human depravity and how it masquerades in noble dress. Danaher, The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards, page 178.


It is the Spirit who mediates this reality in an “immediate,” “in a moment,” “instantaneous” manner\(^\text{121}\) (not dependent on any “human effort,”\(^\text{122}\) nor is it a “gradual work” wrought by God\(^\text{123}\)), just as the Spirit also communicates the beauty and glory of the Father and Son to one another. Their tranquil pleasure in one another is present in their benevolent regard for one another in and through the Spirit, and through the Spirit to the world wherein we are spiritually liberated to respond in kind.\(^\text{124}\) It is this framework that makes possible benevolence or general good will in Edwards’s ethical framework, moving consideration beyond equilibrium to eschatological realization of the beloved community or kingdom of God.

**Beyond Edwardsean Hierarchy and Passivity**

Now given Edwards’s claim noted earlier that “consent, propensity and union of heart to Being in general” is “immediately exercised in a general good will,”\(^\text{125}\) should it not entail an immediate response to seek to abolish slavery and other racialized forms of oppression? Indeed, there is an inconsistency, and Edwards exemplified the irregularity.\(^\text{126}\) However, as previously mentioned, certain first-generation disciples of Edwards did not follow him in his hesitation and failure to make such connections. Rather, they called for the immediate emancipation as well as racial integration of slaves in the American colonies.\(^\text{127}\)


\(^\text{124}\)See also Danaher, *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards*, page 217.


\(^\text{126}\)See the treatment of the Spirit’s immediate work in the believer, not simply at conversion, but throughout life in Edwards, *Writings on the Trinity, Grace and Faith* (vol. 21), pages 53 and 196. For an editorial reflection on an apparent difficulty in Edwards’s theology in discerning distinctions involving the immediate work of the Spirit in conversion, the ongoing life of the believer, the common life of all people—Christian and non-Christian alike, and all creaturely reality, see page 53 of volume 21.

\(^\text{127}\)Minkema and Stout note how later Edwardseans generally though not entirely abandoned these emphases: see “The Edwardsean Tradition and Antislavery,” page 48.
There was no place for gradualism according to Hopkins. Nor was there any place for self-love. True love was always disinterested. While seeking to be true to Edwards’s thought, Hopkins attempted to make clear elements of Edwards’s apparently abstract language found in *The Nature of True Virtue* and to provide a more robust and concrete application of its tenets.

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128 Minkema and Stout, “The Edwardsean Tradition and Antislavery,” pages 47, 54, 55. In my estimation, it is not accurate to consider Edwards a gradualist on the issue of slavery, as many later Edwardseans were (they desired a gradual end to slavery, not an immediate end). While Edwards came to argue for the immediate cessation of the African slave trade due to his conviction that it harmed the work of redemption, he did not see the institution of slavery in the colonies as sinful (only abuses committed by slave owners against their slaves). After all, slavery was not outlawed in the Bible. Edwards did not hold back on calling for the abolition of slavery in the colonies because of fear that the loss of the institution would harm the economy (as some gradualists maintained), but rather because of inconsistencies in his own position. If he had viewed the very institution of slavery in the colonies as sinful, he would have likely called for its immediate termination. It is also likely that Edwards would have landed on that position, just as he changed his stance on the African slave trade, which he came to view as harmful to the Great Commission. In contrast to Edwards’ position, church father Gregory of Nyssa viewed slavery in every form as rebellion against God and a denial of human identity as created in God’s image. Here’s Gregory: “[Quoting Ecclesiastes 2.7:] ‘I got me slaves and slave girls.’ For what price, tell me? What did you find in existence worth as much as this human nature? What price did you put on rationality? How many obols did you reckon the equivalent of the likeness of God? How many staters did you get for selling and being shaped by God? God said, let us make man in our own image and likeness (Gen. 1.26). If he is in the likeness of God, and rules the whole earth, and has been granted authority over everything on earth from God, who is his buyer, tell me? Who is his seller? To God alone belongs this power; or rather, not even to God himself. For his gracious gifts, [scripture] says, are irrevocable [Rom. 11.29]. God would not therefore reduce the human race to slavery, since he himself, when we had been enslaved to sin, spontaneously recalled us to freedom. But if God does not enslave what is free, who is he that sets his own power above God’s?” Gregory of Nyssa, *Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes*, ed. Stuart George Hall (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1990), page 74.


130 Hopkins found Edwards’s *Nature of True Virtue* abstract and sentimental, where aesthetics replaced ethics. Moreover, Hopkins maintained that Edwards gave too much autonomy to nature in relation to divine grace, and wrongly promoted self-love in place of selfless love. While Hopkins is right about the abstract philosophical nature of Edwards’s *Nature*
In reframing Edwards’s concept of “benevolence to Being in general” as “disinterested benevolence,” Hopkins was able to challenge the slave trade in no uncertain terms, as he argued that the enslavement of others was selfish and sinful. In fact, in Hopkins’s critique of selfishness, a true believer would go so far in submitting themselves to God’s will that they would be willing to be condemned to hell for God’s glory.131

It is quite possible that Hopkins would have approved of King’s non-violent coercive love (modeled after Gandhi and Niebuhr) in view of Hopkins’ awareness of the evils of slavery and his sense of urgency to take immediate action to confront the slave industry. After all, the vast majority of African Americans at the time of King endured the evils of racial segregation, which also entailed economic exploitation and oppression.

But Hopkins was not Edwards. Although Edwards was in process, and if consistent, would have come to the point of calling for slavery’s abolition in his day, nonetheless, given his hierarchical orientation and apparent distrust of coercion in any form, Edwards would have struggled with King’s model and tactics of civil disobedience in confronting the evils of racism. Such reluctance battled with his own notion of human agency. In discussing the importance of human agency in Edwards’s thought, Walker writes that Edwards “defined will as an act of the mind that enabled...
it to choose, and freedom of the will as freedom from impediment. Activities that coerced or otherwise deprived another of free will violated the injunction to love one’s neighbor as oneself by violating an essential part of what constituted humanity.” Now given his view that economic transactions must benefit the whole of society rather than harm it, Edwards should have realized that the financial transactions involving slavery harmed the general populace, both those enslaved and those buying and selling slaves. Was he simply blind to their suffering, or worse, indifferent?

For whatever reason, Edwards tolerated the use of coercion that kept people in bondage to slavery, but not the use of coercion to free people from bondage in the case of enslaved Africans. For his part, King would not have been able to tolerate the Edwardsian hierarchy and passivity that appeared in Edwards and many of his followers (though not those first generation Edwardseans like Edwards’s son and Hopkins). While King would share Edwards’s emphasis on the vital importance of God’s love, he would have challenged Edwards’s version of love as applied to the slavery issue as abstract, “sentimental and anemic.” For King, the only way forward involved coercive love. Even if such coercion entailed civil disobedience, it was warranted. As King says in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” to the white clergy who were troubled by his civil disobedience,

One may well ask: “How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?” The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that “an unjust law is no law at all.”

In King’s framework, such coercion could never be applied for private interests, only for the sake of the beloved community’s realization among all people.

King’s whole ministry was framed by way of the powerful love of God revealed in Jesus. Remember the discussion earlier in this volume of how King confidently presented this love as invincible in his Vietnam War address. Nietzsche’s mockery is not able to suppress this force. Love is not weak and passive. It is quite strong. In the face of human resistance to emancipation, civil rights and full integration, such love might even express itself in non-violent coercion and civil disobedience. David Cortright presents King’s position in the following terms:


134 King, “Where Do We Go From Here?” page 186.

King integrated the thinking of Niebuhr and Gandhi into a perspective that he called “realistic pacifism.” He retained a strong commitment to nonviolence, but this was tempered by a realization of the limitations of human nature. It is utopian to believe that ethical appeals alone can bring justice. Social power must be applied in addition to moral reasoning if real political change is to occur. Ethical appeals remain important, King wrote, but these “must be undergirded by some form of constructive coercive power.” Power and love are usually considered polar opposites, King wrote. Love is identified with a resignation of power and power with a denial of love.136

The key is to integrate them, which King did so beautifully: “What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anemic… power at its best is love…implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.”137

Such attention to the need for power complementing love because of keen awareness over the limits of human nature did not mean that King lost sight of hope, as already asserted. Again, as previously mentioned, King would most certainly have been critical of Edwards’s stance on slavery and Edwards’s reticence to effect change by challenging the established authority structure. King understood all too well the corrupting nature of power apart from love, but he also displayed greater confidence than Edwards did in the possibility of change in the present. God’s powerful love was at work in society and everyone had some potential for good—even the most racist person—to advance the beloved community (the kingdom of God).138 As David Cortright claims, pessimism does not overshadow hope in King:

Although King was a Niebuhrian realist, he was not completely pessimistic about human nature. King shared Gandhi’s view that “no human being is so bad as to be beyond redemption.” He believed that even the most ardent segregationist had some potential for goodness and could be reached through the power of love. Like the force of magnetism, love has a unique power to attract. In some instances, it can draw the adversary to our side. Even when it does not affect the adversary, it attracts the support of bystanders and third parties


137King, “Where Do We Go from Here?” page 186.

138 Whereas Hopkins was quite critical of natural ethics and Edwards’s affirmation of natural love, King would have appreciated Edwards’s affirmation of natural love when it is simple self-love, not detached or divorced from compounded self-love.
and helps win support for the nonviolent cause. Love is the strongest form of human energy and has transformative power both personally and socially.\textsuperscript{139}

For King, love and power must come together for the sake of justice. Otherwise such love and power are suspect. They meet in justice, or they are deeply problematic, leaving power as abusive and love as “anemic.” Such powerful love is not indifferent to people’s plight. Whether one is operating in view of Edwards’s notion of compounded self-love or Hopkins’ concept of disinterested benevolence (which discounts love of self) and King’s notion of love as \textit{agape}, one will seek to extinguish tribalism’s indifference and operate from benevolent interest on behalf of the marginalized and thereby cultivate beloved community.

\textbf{Eradicating the Racial Caste Line: Beyond Tribal Indifference to Interested Benevolence}

As noted earlier in this chapter, Michelle Alexander points out that for King “racial caste systems do not require racial hostility or overt bigotry to thrive. They need only racial indifference.”\textsuperscript{140} If whites really wish to ensure that our society dismantle and eradicate for good racialized systems that manifest themselves in different ways, we should be attentive to Alexander’s claims. The last thing we should do is fall back on our tribal inclinations and write off her claims as politically correct. If we wish to be biblically and theologically correct, we will take to heart Edwards’s claim noted earlier in this chapter that “…no affection limited to any private system, not dependent on, nor subordinate to Being in general can be of the nature of true virtue.”\textsuperscript{141}

Some might debate whether Edwards’s notion of compounded self-love or Hopkins’s doctrine of disinterested benevolence will help us wipe out racialization once and for all in our society. But one thing is certain: any affection that does not involve active love of others, including removing their distress, does not reflect authentic conversion. As Edwards writes in \textit{Religious Affections}, “But a true Christian love to our brethren, extends both to their souls and bodies.”\textsuperscript{142} Hopkins goes even further than Edwards to include emancipation of slaves and their full integration in society as well as action against British imperialism. Joseph Conforti claims, “As a result of his emphasis on disinterested action as the distinguishing sign of conversion, antislavery and anti-imperial activism emerged as visible indications of spiritual regeneration and true virtue in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{139}Cortright, \textit{Peace}, page 220.
\item \textsuperscript{140}Alexander, \textit{The New Jim Crow}, page 14.
\item \textsuperscript{141}Edwards, \textit{The Nature of True Virtue}, pages 556.
\end{itemize}
Hopkins’s thought during the Revolution.”143 Hopkins did not share the hierarchical reservations that kept Edwards from taking further his critique of slavery. Nor did he have the reservations many New Englanders had to hold back on abolishing slavery due to their fears over economic losses resulting from the slave industry’s demise.

Like Hopkins, King espoused a doctrine of disinterested benevolence or love, which was manifested in his coercive, non-violent love for the white oppressor. King’s emphasis was on agape love, which entails love of one’s enemy. As David Cortright claims, “King emphasized the Christian concept of agape as that ‘overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative.’ It is ‘disinterested love,’ he wrote, love for the sake of love, the unrestrained giving of self.”144

It is important to note that while Hopkins’s view of disinterested benevolence is a departure from Edwards, Edwards would have found repugnant and perverse any notion of self-love that did not include love of the other, including a desire to alleviate their distress. Moreover, given Edwards’s view of compounded self-love, one cannot ultimately separate love of God from love of self, or love of others and love of self. They are all intimately connected. To love the one entails love of the other.145 The problem with Edwards was not his doctrine of benevolence involving complacence or self-satisfaction for being in general. Union of heart with Being in general, including complacence, promotes general good will, not private interests and affection for tribal ties, which compete with general good will.146 Edwards’s main problem was his inconsistency in applying his ethical model to the question of emancipation and full integration of African Americans due to such factors as affirming established hierarchies in society.

143 Joseph A. Conforti, Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement: Calvinism, the Congregational Ministry, and Reform in New England Between the Great Awakenings (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), page 128. Conforti also claims that Hopkins’ stance on slavery was part and parcel of his entire system of thought, including his New Divinity theology (See page 128). For Hopkins, emancipation was not sufficient either. Full integration was required.

144 Cortright, Peace, page 220.

145 One could make a case based on Edwards’s and Hopkins’s respective models for contending against utilitarian notions that allow a minority population to suffer for the sake of the whole. On Edwards’s view, to permit such suffering sears one’s soul and impacts negatively one’s own spiritual estate. Hopkins’s view would go even further and prize regard for the minority population over the well-being of the majority. Thus, while the economy would no doubt be impacted negatively based on the abolition of the slave trade and slavery, both corporately and individually for slave owners, nonetheless, disinterested benevolence requires it.

One theme that connects King with Edwards and Hopkins is their mutual concern for gospel witness. All three would have agreed that the church’s tolerance of racism in such forms as the African slave trade and segregation impeded gospel witness. Contrary to those who maintain that the best way to build the church and expand missions is to bypass racial concerns involving justice themes, Edwards, Hopkins and King offer another, more compelling vantage point. Edwards came to the conclusion that, “Contrary to the argument that the African slave trade introduced so-called heathens to the gospel,” he joined others in claiming that “it thwarted foreign missions.”^147 In fact, Edwards’s “shift … on slavery and the slave trade came as a residual effect of his consuming interest in furthering the international work of redemption.”^148

Edwards’s reasons were grounded in his apocalyptic conviction that before Christ returned to earth, the heathen must be converted to the truths of Christianity. As he surveyed world events, he concluded that slavery could never be a converting ordinance that would bring captured Africans into the Christian faith voluntarily. In fact, an ongoing trade in African slaves would promote just the opposite: wars of African against African, African against European, and European against European. For the conversion of Africa to take place, the slave trade would have to die.~149

Just as Edwards resolved that the Lord’s Supper could not be used as a converting sacrament, slavery could not be viewed as a converting ordinance. Moreover, Edwards’s account of spiritual slavery intimated that abusive slave owners, like the Devil and the Egyptians, greatly impeded the spiritual well-being of their slaves.~150

Hopkins shared the view that slavery was by no means a converting ordinance. Rather, it was a stumbling block to the gospel’s spread among Africans. Going further than Edwards, Hopkins attacked not only the African slave trade, but also slavery in America, as immeasurably harming gospel witness. Here’s Hopkins:

But now, instead of this, what has been done on the coast, by those who pass among the Negroes for Christians, has only served to produce and spread the greatest and most deep-rooted prejudices against the Christian religion, and bar the way to that which is above all things desirable, their coming to the knowledge of the truth that they might be saved. So that while, by the murdering or enslaving millions of millions, they have brought a curse on themselves, and on all that partake with them, they have injured in the highest degree innumerable nations, and done what they could to prevent their salvation, and to fasten them

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down in ignorance and barbarity to the latest posterity!—Who can realize all this, and not feel a mixture of grief, pity, indignation and horror, truly ineffable! And must he not be filled with zeal to do his utmost to put a speedy stop to this seven-headed monster of iniquity, with all the horrid train of evils with which it is attended.

And can any one consider all these things, and yet pretend to justify the slave-trade, or the slavery of the Africans in America? Is it not impossible, that a real Christian, who has attended to all this, should have any hand in this trade? And it requires the utmost stretch of charity to suppose that any one ever did, or can buy or sell an African slave, with a sincere view to make a true Christian of him.”

As already noted, what separated Hopkins and Edwards was Hopkins’s call for the abolition of slavery, as he and Edwards, Jr. radicalized Edwards, Sr’s thought on true virtue and its bearing on the slave industry. Edwards’s conflicted position would in no way serve well the Great Commission. In contrast, the consistency of his followers Hopkins and Edwards, Jr. advanced the work of redemption. Moreover, Hopkins’s context made his position and practice of disinterested benevolence even more noteworthy and inspiring: Newport, Rhode Island was a slave trading capital.

Of course, King did not face the issue of slavery, but he and his people did face segregation. They still do. Hopkins’s call for full integration has never been heeded in American society. And while the ‘legal’ basis for segregation have been removed in many instances (apart from the new caste system bound up with imprisonment, as addressed by Alexander), today we are living increasingly in a segregated society—and church. Take for example The New York Times article “A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches.” The article quotes Michael Emerson, co-author of Divided By Faith, which was discussed earlier in this chapter:

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152 “The moderate evangelical Edwards came to oppose the overseas slave trade because of his support for revivalism but defended slavery as an institution and did not free his remaining slaves.” Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards’s Defense of Slavery,” page 44.

“Everything we tried is not working,” said Michael Emerson, the author of “Divided by Faith,” a seminal work on race relations within the evangelical church. “The election itself was the single most harmful event to the whole movement of reconciliation in at least the past 30 years,” he said. “It’s about to completely break apart.”154

Given that scenario, King’s sermon “Paul’s Letter to American Christians” bears renewed relevance today:

And so Americans, I am impelled to urge you to get rid of every aspect of segregation. The broad universalism standing at the center of the gospel makes both the theory and practice of segregation morally unjustifiable. Segregation is a blatant denial of the unity which we all have in Christ. It substitutes an I-It relationship. The segregator relegates the segregated to the status of a thing rather than elevate him to the status of a person. The underlying philosophy of Christianity is diametrically opposed to the underlying philosophy of segregation, and all the dialectics of the logicians cannot make them lie down together.155

There was no place for gradualism or moderation with King on overcoming injustice involving segregation unless that meant “wise restraint and calm reasonableness.” Here’s King again in the same sermon:

Now, I know there are those among you who are talking about gradualism and moderation. They are saying to you that you must slow up in the move for freedom and justice. I would say to you, America, if moderation means moving on towards the goal of justice and freedom, with wise restraint and calm reasonableness, then moderation is a great virtue that all men of goodwill must seek to achieve in this tense period of transition. But if moderation means slowing up in the move for justice and capitulating to the whims and caprices of the guardians of a deadening status quo, then moderation is a tragic vice which all men of goodwill must condemn.156


King’s greatest opponents were not the KKK, but white moderates, as he reasoned in his Birmingham Jail letter:

…I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action”; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a “more convenient season.” Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.157

The white moderates stood in the way of the Civil Rights movement being actualized in ways that these other extreme opponents did not resist. Often it is the more subtle form of resistance that impedes progress most.

Whereas the white moderates stood in the way of progress, a case could be made that Malcolm X aided King and the Civil Rights movement. Many whites feared violent revolution, and so chose King given his non-violent confrontation, which appeared “so ‘moderate’” given such traits as King’s talk of forgiveness and love of one’s enemies.158 While that may be so, more benevolent consideration should have led many white Christians to choose King because of their own concern for *agape* love. Rather than focusing on their own privileged status and resisting change, they should have been asking how they could resist ongoing segregation and oppression against African Americans for the furtherance of the gospel among all peoples.

Many African Americans resisted or abandoned the Christian faith because it was often associated with white oppression.159 Certainly, this is how Malcolm X viewed Christianity,

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159 Here it is worth noting the following statistic: “By the end of the 20th century, approximately 30 percent of all the mosques in the United States were serving a predominantly African-American constituency. The number of mosques indicated the inroads made into the black community, long dominated by Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal Christian churches.” J. Gordon Melton, “Islam Among African Americans,” Juan E. Campo, ed., *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2009), page 18.
including the Black Christian tradition. For those interested in promoting the power of *agape* love as key to the Christian faith and the international work of redemption, the only way forward

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Malcolm X was a principle architect in championing a form of Islam that privileged African Americans. He was also antagonistic toward Christianity (See Perry, *Malcolm*, pages 195-196). When he was still a member of the Nation of Islam, he pushed back as orthodox Islam challenged the movement for inspiring racial hostility. Malcolm X argued that Muslims in the Arab world had been guilty of enslaving black Africans, just as was true of European Christians. (Perry, *Malcolm*, page 268). Here it is worth drawing attention to exegetical innovations involving Jewish, Christian and Muslim views of black Africans and slavery beginning in the seventh century A.D. According to David Goldenberg, “The link of blackness and slavery in the various versions of this work is clear, though implicit, while an explicit link, in the form of a dual curse of both blackness and slavery, begins to appear in seventh-century Islamic texts. This exegetical innovation coincides with the seventh-century Muslim conquests in Africa, which brought an increasing influx of black African slaves to the Near East. From this time onward, the Curse of Ham, that is, the exegetical tie between blackness and servitude, is commonly found in works composed in the Near East, whether in Arabic by Muslims or in Syriac by Christians. The increasing reliance on the Curse coincides with the increasing numbers of Blacks taken as slaves...” Another consequence of the Arab conquests is worth reporting. “Where skin color in Arabic literature previously described personal complexion, it is now used to designate ethnic groups, with ‘black’ referring to the dark-skinned peoples. The same phenomenon occurred in sixteenth-century England. After England’s encounter with black Africans, white and black became the terminology for ‘self’ and ‘other.’ Both Arabs and English begin to use color terms as ethnic markers to distinguish others of darker or lighter skin when they discovered such people. This new way of categorizing humanity by skin color was also mapped onto the biblical grid. Beginning in the seventh century, it is found in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim biblical interpretations that see Noah’s sons as representing the three human skin colors of the world’s population.” David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* David M. Goldenberg (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), page 197. According to one study, “The Qur’an states that humankind has been separated into nations and tribes to ‘know one another’ (49:13) and to ‘compete in goodness’ (5:48). Muslims insist that commitment to Islam supplants ties of ethnicity, that is, the ways in which individuals and groups characterize themselves on the basis of shared language, culture, descent, place of origin, history—and today many would add gender. Yet from the first Muslim conquests in seventh-century Arabia, as Muslim armies spread out from the Arabian Peninsula to encounter peoples who neither spoke Arabic nor could claim Arab descent, ethnic concerns frequently surfaced.” See Dale F. Eickelman, “Ethnicity,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Women*, vol. 1, ed., Abish Khatun bint Sad II -Mut’ah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), page 272. To return to Malcolm X, he was a forceful proponent of black separatism, bringing him into conflict with King on integration (Perry, *Malcolm*, page 187). Later, his views on separatism became more ambiguous (Perry, *Malcolm*, page 273). His gradual softening of his views included his claim that religion was a private matter and should not divide the black
during King’s day and our own is through immediate confrontation of structures that oppress ethnic minority communities. We must be diligent to overcome indifference that reinforce racial tribalism. We must move beyond segregation to total integration and solidarity.

If Edwards had lived longer, he likely would have ‘shifted’ further than he did toward total abolition of slavery given “his consuming interest in furthering the international work of redemption.”161 And for those of us who claim a similar interest, let us take to heart Hopkins’s disinterested benevolence. It speaks volumes for his level of commitment to the gospel and to the liberation of all people, not the pleasures of the majority, or an esteemed privileged minority.

May we also be challenged by the example of Gandhi, who influenced King. Gandhi sought to live according to Jesus’ example and teaching set forth in the Sermon on the Mount, along with the Bhagavad Gita (ultimately, he saw no difference between them).162 Gandhi himself evolved on the question of race and, contrary to some assessments, may have done more to undermine the caste system in India than anyone else.163 Like King and the Edwardsean Hopkins, he may have


163 Much debate surrounds Gandhi’s views on black Africans, as a portion of his writings suggest an attachment to the ideas that Indians are actually “Aryans” and therefore in the same category as Europeans. But many of these kinds of writings come from earlier in his career.” Paul Harvey, “Civil Rights Movements and Religion in America,” Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion, Aug 2016; http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-492. Consider also the discussion on racial and caste tensions in Gandhi’s
much to offer us in cultivating a global ethic as this volume envisions and in contending against what Alexander calls the new caste system in the United States. The racial caste system has not been terminated, only “redesigned.” Young African American men “are part of a growing undercaste, permanently locked up and locked out of mainstream society” based on legalized discrimination bound up with the drug war.

This is a subject that concerns all Americans, and requires all Americans to get involved, including those who are enamored with Malcolm X and Gandhi. But will we seek to work with others to solve this ongoing problem of social segregation? We need others’ help if we are to experience the beloved community, Christians and non-Christians alike. The call for solidarity in the fight against racial oppression extends to all people of all faith traditions and walks of life.

With this point in mind, it is important to note that there is a place for natural affections like love of family members, one’s town and nation, which entail self-preservation and happiness, and which for Edwards is never divorced from self-transcendence. They possess something of “the general nature of virtue.” King himself made clear to his fellow Americans on various occasions that his prophetic challenges and civil disobedience work were manifestations of his love for his country.

Further to an earlier allusion, we have much to learn from Gandhi. Consideration of Gandhi would include his affirmation of the Hindu concept of detachment from worldly pleasures and the Buddhist and Jain concept of nonharm. Gandhi’s notion of ahisma entails an active love that

thought and practice in Joseph Lelyveld, Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), pages 57, 60. Note, too, the following defense of Gandhi as it pertains to the caste system in India: “One of the charges levelled against Gandhi is that he acted as an apologist for the caste system, and in 1932, resorted to a fast ‘to block an affirmative action’ planned by the British government in favour of the outcastes, the so-called ‘untouchables’. The fact is that no one did more than Gandhi to undermine the centuries-old caste system and to remove the blot of untouchability from Hinduism.” B. R. Nanda, Gandhi and his Critics (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), page 18. For further reading on the subject of race and caste in Indian thought, consider the following discussion on caste and color: Constance A. Jones and James D. Ryan, “Caste,” in Encyclopedia of Hinduism (New York: Facts on File, 2007), page 100; see also the entry for “Varna” (color), pages 478-479. Refer as well to the entry “Caste” in Society Religious Specialists Religious Traditions Philosophy, vol. 3, in Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism, Knut A. Jacobsen, editor-in-Chief (Boston: Brill, 2011), pages 25-37.


166 Edwards, The Nature of True Virtue, page 609. See also page 617.
does no harm to others and acts to shield them from injury. For Gandhi, such active love entails a forceful grasping or coercion (agraha, part of satyagraha, meaning “firmness” or “forcefully grasping”) to keep others from doing harm.\textsuperscript{167} For all their differences, these themes resonate with Hopkins’s view of benevolent disinterest\textsuperscript{168} and King’s view of agape. But do we resonate with disinterested benevolence and agape, or will we be updated versions of the white moderates who resisted King with their privatized responses and calls for gradualism and moderation, choosing church growth to the detriment of the gospel work of reconciliation and redemption?

Where does all this lead us in the end? God’s self-transcending love and the immediacy of God’s Spirit signify that the dominant culture must transcend itself and move beyond private interests and tribalism to overcome segregation in its various forms. Such overcoming will sometimes take the form of coercion, though always out of love, knowing that injustice impacts all tribes and people groups negatively. As King declared in his Birmingham Jail Letter, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”\textsuperscript{169} But may we not simply be drawn to overcoming injustices. May we also be drawn to the beauty of authentic integration and diversity. With King, “Let us be dissatisfied until integration is not seen as a problem but as an opportunity to participate in the beauty of diversity.”\textsuperscript{170} And with Edwards, let us be captured by the glorious vision of heaven’s manifold unity, most noticeably the triune God, who is “the supreme harmony of all.”\textsuperscript{171}

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\textsuperscript{168}A chief difference for Hopkins would be that disinterested benevolence could only be practiced by those converted and in relationship with Jesus Christ.

\textsuperscript{169}King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” page 189.

\textsuperscript{170}King, “Where Do We Go from Here?” page 196.