Evolution, Original Sin, and the Fall

with Helen De Cruz and Johan De Smedt, "Introduction to the Symposium on Evolution, Original Sin, and the Fall"; Paul A. Macdonald, Jr., "In Defense of Aquinas's Adam: Original Justice, the Fall, and Evolution"; Julie Loveland Swanstrom, "Aquinas on Sin, Essence, and Change: Applying the Reasoning on Women to Evolution in Aquinas"; Hans Madueme, "The Theological Problem with Evolution"; Austin M. Freeman, "The Author of the Epic: Tolkien, Evolution, and God's Story"; and Jack Mulder, Jr., "Original Sin, Racism, and Epistemologies of Ignorance."

ORIGINAL SIN, RACISM, AND EPISTEMOLOGIES OF IGNORANCE

by Jack Mulder, Jr.

Abstract. The purpose of this article is twofold. First, it explores and shows ways in which one important view of racism parallels the Christian doctrine of original sin. Second, it argues that this comparison helps to close the gap between the two main strands of Christian thinking about original sin. Philosophers and theologians are often asked to decide between Augustinian or Irenaean theories of original sin. An epistemology of ignorance, especially as applied in discussions of racism, helps us to see how this dichotomy may be short-sighted. For virtually no one, in an epistemology of ignorance, matures *into* being a racist. Nevertheless, as Charles W. Mills famously argues, the epistemology of ignorance he terms the Racial Contract has a historical inception, namely, the period around the beginning of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. I close the article by discussing whether a model of original sin similar to an epistemology of racist ignorance might satisfy the dogmatic constraints of the Catholic tradition.

Keywords: epistemologies of ignorance; monogenism; original sin; polygenism; racism; white ignorance

Stories of Sin

In a recent interview, Catholic Auxiliary Bishop Joseph N. Perry of Chicago said: "…no one believes in original sin today. And, consequently, no one can imagine themselves being racist" (Dugan 2020). In my view, a rough parallel between original sin and racism is often asserted but rarely substantiated. It is a virtual commonplace to hear racism referred to as

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the U.S. "original sin," a sentiment enshrined by works like Jim Wallis's (2017) bestseller *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America*. Yet I know of no place where this comparison receives a detailed discussion in a philosophically or theologically sophisticated way. Bishop Perry, in the passage above, suggests a link between our understanding of the depth of racism and the depth of original sin. I think he is right to think there is a kind of epistemic link between our ability to understand the two concepts, and here I want to show how some parallels might help us both to understand our own sinfulness as well as our persistent racism.

In a helpful recent article, Leigh Vicens (2018) argues that implicit bias (and often racist implicit bias) fits the description of a form of sin in the Christian view. Yet Vicens declines to apply this to original sin. She writes, "The idea that human sinfulness is inherited as a consequence of some 'primordial transgression' is controversial, and here I do not assume a particular historical origin of our orientation toward disobedience, but only that we have such an orientation" (2018, 102–103). In this article, I want to carry this discussion forward by showing how original sin and racism are connected precisely in regard to their origin and inheritance. Accordingly, this article has two aims. The first is to help put some philosophical flesh on the comparison of original sin and racism, particularly in these two areas, and the second is to explore ways the comparison to racism might help us close the gap between the two leading stories of original sin, namely, the Augustinian and Irenaean stories.

In his famous "Soul-Making Theodicy," John Hick distinguishes between the "majority report" of Christian theodicy and the "minority report" thereof (2016, 263). The majority report, according to Hick, is the Augustinian approach, which "hinges upon the idea of the fall," whereas the minority report is the so-called Irenaean approach. In the Augustinian approach, human beings originate from a first primeval pair (or perhaps small, jointly culpable group), each member of which begins morally and spiritually perfect. The fall from grace that occurs as a result of their sin is transmitted to their posterity. Naturally, for St. Augustine himself, the first pair is Adam and Eve, but some more recent developments in the Christian tradition are content to use terms like our "first parents." The Catholic tradition in Christianity would seem to have taken up the mantle of the Augustinian approach and developed it considerably, especially at the Council of Trent (1545–1563). It is important to note that the contemporary Catholic Church is clear that "original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam's descendants" (Catholic Church 1997, sec. 405). Original sin does refer to a loss of original justice or holiness, but it does not follow that post-Fall humans are directly culpable for an ancient sin. Nevertheless, through this primordial fall (on the Augustinian story) all humankind finds itself in the predicament of

original sin, from which, the Christian story tells us, each of us need rescuing through the redemption offered by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the Irenaean approach, humans are the product of "the long evolutionary process." The "gradual production" of our species featured morally and spiritually immature (albeit unique) animals in their "constant struggle against a hostile environment" (Hick 2016, 265). Nevertheless, because of this difficult struggle, humans are able to emerge, in the second stage of God's creative work, with a better set of virtues, namely, those developed in a hard-won struggle against challenge and temptation. These virtues are more valuable, thinks Hick, than whatever sort would be possessed by the initial Augustinian primeval pair, who simply had their virtues from the first. We must be careful to distinguish Irenaean accounts from the account of St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–c. 200). For Irenaeus, Adam and Eve fell and, while perhaps they were not morally perfect, the fall turned them in the wrong direction morally and spiritually speaking and therefore had devastating effects (McCoy 2018, 169). For "Irenaean" thinkers like Hick, there is often enough no historical fall or if there is, it is an understandable and even natural feature of the immature state from which humanity began. James Henry Collin sums it up well:

> According to the Irenaean picture, humans did not begin their time on Earth as perfect and then (mysteriously) behave imperfectly, bringing about the Fall. Instead, humans began as finite, limited, and sinful creatures, who require the right kind of environment to grow into saintly people, ready for deification. This environment requires the risk of suffering, and—if we follow through the consequences of Hick's thought experiment on the necessary environment for morally significant action—death. (Collin 2019, 532)

For the Augustinian, death is understood as a punishment, and consequence, of original sin. For many "Irenaeans," however, death is an important part of the environment needed to grow "saintly people" from their originally imperfect state.

One or another version of this clash between Augustinian and "Irenaean" views tends to be set before philosophers and theologians as the choice to be made when considering theories of original sin. In this article, I will argue that considering developments in the philosophy of race can help us see ways in which this dichotomy may be short-sighted. The specific tool I will employ is known as an epistemology of ignorance. It was first deployed in the philosophy of race by Charles W. Mills in his contemporary classic, *The Racial Contract* (Mills 1997). The device is notable because it explores and explains a socially transmitted malady, namely, racism (or white supremacy) for which there is nevertheless a fairly discrete historical origin, namely, the "series of acts… which collectively can be seen, not just metaphorically but close to literally" as the "contract" that

underwrites modern racism (Mills 1997, 20–21). In the following section, I will bring the options for theorizing about original sin into further relief. In the subsequent section, I will discuss how an epistemology of ignorance works and how it might illuminate our thinking about original sin. In the final main section, I will see where this leaves us, suggesting that the gulf between the two camps on original sin may not be as wide as we might have supposed.

The Origin of Original Sin

In what follows, I shall occasionally consult a contemporary theological tradition for its views on original sin. That tradition is the Catholic tradition, and I choose it for two main reasons: first, it is the one I know best, as it is my own tradition. Second, it holds two views often thought to be in conflict. The first view the contemporary Catholic Church has held, not exactly as a teaching of its own, but as a view it regularly takes for granted even in official documents, is that evolution is true, or at least highly plausible. The late Catholic theologian Edward T. Oakes has defined "evolution" as referring to the "fact that all life currently occupying this planet descended from a single cell roughly three and a half billion years ago whose progeny showed slight modifications, leading to increased complexity in life forms" (2016, 93). Indeed, Pope St. John Paul II regarded this view as confirmed by many different separate discoveries and he regarded this as an important argument in favor of evolution (Oakes 2016, 96). The second view is monogenism, the view that there is a single set of first parents from which all future humans claim descent. The alternative to monogenism is polygenism, the view that "either after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all, or that Adam represents a certain number of first parents," and Pope Pius XII explicitly condemned polygenism in 1950 (sec. 37).

It is worth considering monogenism here at some length for three reasons. First, the theme of this issue is on evolution and original sin and, as we shall see, monogenism is often considered a chief obstacle in the way of an Augustinian account of original sin. But second, and more importantly, moving the discussion of original sin and racism forward requires it. As we said above, this article's focus (which is different from Vicens's focus) is on the origin and inheritance of original sin, and monogenism has a great deal to do with both, at least on the Augustinian model. Finally, our second aim in the article is seeking some rapprochement between the Augustinian and Irenaean theories of original sin. But if monogenism is off the table entirely for reasons stemming from evolutionary biology, then an important component of the Augustinian view is up for dismissal, not rapprochement. In the remainder of this section, I will consider monogenism,

not to argue for its truth or falsity, but to show how it remains, and should remain, part of the conversation.

Although few claim that Pope Pius's condemnation of polygenism, glimpsed above, is irreformable in the technical sense, the Church has continued to teach monogenism since he issued it. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, for instance, originally promulgated in 1992, states "Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1997, sec. 390). Moreover, the Council of Trent's 1546 Decree on Original Sin saved a canon (the usual site for infallible conciliar teaching) to claim that original sin "is one in origin and is transmitted by propagation and not by imitation" (Denzinger 2012, sec. 1513). Thus, while monogenism is not necessarily regarded as an infallible teaching of the Church, it is certainly the natural reading of claims that enjoy greater authority, namely, that original sin has a single origin and that later generations incur it precisely through descent, or "propagation."

Another reason it may be worth consulting this tradition is that the possible convergence of evolutionary science and a monogenetic account of original sin seems to be exactly what "Irenaean" authors like John Schneider seem at pains to deny. Schneider writes, "Perhaps the *first thing* to consider is that genomic science—after mapping of the human genome—strongly supports a polygenetic account of human origins" (2012, 953, italics mine). Schneider further notes that it is probable that "the current human population descends from somewhere between 1,000 and 20,000 original breeding human pairs" (2012, 953). A consideration of what "Darminian Adam" (the first modern human being) might have looked like follows. Schneider notes that "he" was not "at all morally mature, much less spiritually regal" (2012, 954). Rather, natural selection and common ancestry could have *gradually* inscribed certain virtues, such as "solidarity, cooperativeness, tolerance, compassion," and even a kind of altruism. But they would also have resulted in competitive traits and a certain sort of (perhaps group-oriented) selfishness, especially where it concerned territory, food, and mates (2012, 954).

Schneider then offers three main complaints against the so-called Augustinian Adam, by which he seems to mean any view of primeval humans in which they were morally and spiritually pristine. The first is that many such views seem to aver preternaturally gifted humans who were immune from physical ills, a type of human we have no scientific reason to think ever existed (2012, 956, 961). A second problem concerns these paradisiacal humans and their puzzling motivation to do evil. What more could they want than what they already had? Finally, a related problem is that motivation to fall seems to require spiritual fragility in a way that is in tension with Augustinian requirements for Adam (2012, 961–62).

I will make no attempt to defend St. Augustine's own views here, but it is worth noting that heirs to the monogenist tradition in which he stood can reply to some of Schneider's objections. Kenneth Kemp, for instance, in defending the Catholic Church's monogenist stance, suggests that we make a distinction between the biological species *Homo sapiens* and the "philosophical species," which has a rational soul, along with the "theological species" which has an eternal destiny (2011, 230). Kemp's theory, accordingly, is "monogenetic with respect to theologically human beings but polygenetic with respect to the biological species" (2011, 232). This, then, will not require a population bottleneck of a single (merely biologically) human couple, since Kemp argues that "the *theological* doctrine of monogenesis requires only that all human beings have the original couple among their ancestors, not that every ancestral line in each individual's family tree leads back to a single couple" (2011, 232, italics mine). Rather, this view will only require an initial human or couple to be endowed with a rational soul and spiritual destiny. Thereupon, what with the primeval pair's quickly falling into sin (along with promiscuity), their couplings could give rise to an entirely philosophically and theologically human race some hundreds of years later (Kemp 2011, 232).

Some aspects of Schneider's argument will simply be granted by his opposition. If Schneider has to call "fairy dust" (2012, 958) God's creative action to endow an individual with a rational soul and an eternal destiny, then Kemp and others might grant the point. On the other hand, at least in the case of a spiritual destiny, it is not obvious why that is so implausible. If heaven is supposed to be characterized by friendship with God, it is reasonable to think that might require an infinite God to *befriend* us. Paul A. MacDonald, Jr. is another example of someone who develops this monogenist view and grants that, on St. Thomas Aquinas's view, God's endowment of a rational soul to an individual would be miraculous (2010, 130–31). But what of Schneider's other objections to "Augustinian Adam"?

Here, MacDonald's account is useful. He points out that Aquinas's view does not hold that our Edenic individuals were preternaturally gifted in some superhuman way. Rather, on MacDonald's Thomistic account, such individuals would be susceptible to pain, though they would lack the *experience* of (certain kinds of) pain. They would also possess the ability to *manage the threat* of natural disasters, though not without effort (2010, 132). This helps to moderate the type of preternatural powers Schneider objects to in Augustinian Adams. To Schneider's second problem of motivation for sin, MacDonald notes that, in contrast to certain other writers who might be vulnerable to this objection, Aquinas does not hold that Adam and Eve enjoy the beatific vision precisely because this would not allow them even the possibility of sinning (2010, 129). Thus, to Schneider's third point, it is simply true that Aquinas's Adam and Eve would have

been fragile in some way, but that way is precisely what would have been needed in order for them to stage the familiar drama of sin and salvation that the Augustinian tradition considers Christianity to be.

The goal of this section is not to defuse all objections to an Augustinian view of original sin, nor is it to defend monogenism as such. Rather, the point of this section has been to stage a bit of the conversation between contemporary exponents of Augustinian and Irenaean views, particularly as their views are developed in response to evolutionary biology. In the next section, I will consider a parallel to original sin, namely, racism. The consideration of racism, I will argue, helps to mitigate the opposition between these theories of original sin somewhat.

Racism, the Racial Contract, and Epistemologies of Ignorance

The geneticist J. B. S. Haldane is reputed to have given a lecture on his view of evolution that occasioned a skeptical remark from an audience member. The woman in question was skeptical that, even over the billions of years available for evolution, a complicated human body could have resulted from a single cell. Haldane is supposed to have responded, "But madam, you did it yourself. And it only took nine months" (quoted in Oakes 2016, 94). In discussing a monogenist theory of original sin and how a single pair could "infect" all of humanity, I sometimes overhear skepticism about the philosophical gymnastics required to make this work. But I am tempted to respond, if only for the sake of argument, that we have done it ourselves and it only took 500 years.

The sad fact, of course, is that it took much less than 500 years to infect the modern world with white supremacy. In fact, the stinging opening sentence from Mills's *The Racial Contract* claims "White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has *made* the modern world what it is today" (1997, 1, italics mine). Mills is also clear that this is a *global* political system (1997, 2). This helps us to understand both the scope of white supremacy in Mills's view but also the way in which it can help to explain many different culturally embedded forms of racism (which Mills thinks of as subordinate and localized versions of the one Racial Contract). For there are many different ways in which white supremacy rears its head, whether through slavery in the United States and other parts of the so-called "New World," or various forms of colonialism in a host of different countries and continents.

Mills thinks of white supremacy as a kind of contract primarily between whites in regard to how they will exploit nonwhites, a contract that Mills calls the Racial Contract (1997, 7, 11–12). This contract is to be understood as analogous to the social contract of the contractarian tradition in political philosophy, but with a key difference: this contract is historical

and not some ahistorical device about what an ideally rational participant would choose in regard to, say, the distribution of goods. But Mills also thinks of the Racial Contract as wider in its application than a merely social contract. For the Racial Contract is descriptive, normative, and epistemological. It tells you what is the case, what should be the case, and how you should think about it (1997, 10–11). Since the Contract concerns how people of color are to be exploited by whites, people of color are not in a position to give genuine consent to the Racial Contract, and in any event they are theorized by it as subpersons (1997, 11–12).

We should acknowledge that there is a real question about the purchase of Mills's contract model. Sally Haslanger, for example, in commenting on Mills's work, cautioned that "we cannot assume that the conceptual repertoire used to understand our own (Western) history even makes sense in other cultural contexts" (2000). She believes that the term "contract" here is best understood as a device to show how racism functions "*as if it were* designed" (2017, 17n15). Nevertheless, Haslanger herself concedes that it is precisely the "recent global history of race" that gives the closest actual fit for a domination/exclusion contract (as opposed to, say, the contract model for feminist theorizing and the perhaps untraceable origin of gender-based oppression) (2000). Moreover, while I do think that Mills's model is nimble enough to respond to key objections on this front (more on this below), the question of its accuracy is a secondary question in this article. The question at issue here is how it bears on the theological issue of original sin. We can hardly adjudicate the notoriously knotty issue of how theoretically to understand racism here, but we can use a well-received model such as Mills's for our purposes.

And on Mills's view, the Racial Contract is very real. Mills writes, "Far from being lost in the mists of the ages, it is clearly historically locatable in the series of events marking the creation of the modern world by European colonialism and the voyages of 'discovery' now increasingly and more appropriately called expeditions of conquest" (1997, 20). White people, however, especially those (including the present author) who come late to the scene after these founding events, are no longer in a position perhaps to *ratify* the Contract, though they are inevitably *beneficiaries* of it, even if they can choose not to be *signatories* to it (1997, 11). But note that one would need to opt *out*, not opt *in*. Tommie Shelby gives us a case for our consideration that may prove helpful. He asks us to consider a "sincere extrinsic racist," a person who harbors no *ill will* toward black people, even while she uncritically accepts certain beliefs that have been ingrained in her over the years. These beliefs include erroneous racist beliefs that black people are *naturally* "disposed to be violent, irresponsible, and indolent" (Shelby 2002, 418). Our sincere extrinsic racist, however, just believes that such mistaken things are the case, not that black people have any responsibility for it. But *of course*, this person is a racist regardless of the condition

of her will, and what that shows us is that "racist ideology is a virus that people can catch and spread through no fault of their own and without (fully) knowing that they are contaminated by it" (Shelby 2002, 418).

Mills writes that one needs a "frank appreciation for how the Racial Contract creates a *racialized* moral psychology" (1997, 93, italics original). Accordingly, whites "will experience genuine cognitive difficulties in recognizing certain behavior patterns *as* racist, so that quite apart from questions of motivation and bad faith they will be morally handicapped simply from the conceptual point of view" (1997, 93). This is the operation of what Mills terms an epistemology of ignorance. Although there is a certain sort of inertia in the Racial Contract (because you're already absorbed into it without your direct choice), the epistemology of ignorance it involves requires maintenance. This is because this epistemology is "a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made" (Mills 1997, 18). This means, at least in part, that white people in particular get along just fine in a racist world even though they will not often be able to detect its racism. But this comes with a corollary, namely, that the way the world really is tends to seep into the dealings with it white people have, which they must studiously ignore if they are to persist in the privilege that this cognitive dysfunction paradoxically gives them.

This is one area where there may be both some interesting divergence and convergence between an epistemology of ignorance operating in racism and original sin. For Christians, the world really is fallen in the theological sense, but, in the world of the Racial Contract, nonwhite people are of course full people and not the subpeople the Racial Contract makes them out to be. Nevertheless, the Catholic tradition within Christianity (to take but one example) holds that there are certainly ways in which God can be known through human reason even though these ways are hampered somewhat by human sin (Catholic Church 1997, sec. 36–37). Thus, without divine revelation and grace, humans remain at least partially in ignorance (and so original sin, too, has a certain inertia). Nevertheless, some of our ignorance is willful (Catholic Church 1997, sec. 37) and it remains true for Christians that God's grace is an active providential force in the world, so this ignorance must be willfully and sinfully managed if we are permanently to resist God's grace. It is worth noting that managing white ignorance is part of the picture in an epistemology of ignorance as well. Indeed, Elizabeth V. Spelman helpfully illustrates how, in the aftermath of the American Civil War, there was a concerted effort to ignore the fact that "what they [i.e., the North and South] fought over was among other things the condition of the slave" (Spelman 2007, 129). To recognize, this would have posed a nearly insuperable obstacle to

reconciliation among whites. Since reality was different than the prospect of reconciliation among previously warring whites dictated, reality was actively ignored and at times disavowed.

It might seem that this is only a cognitive problem for white people, and while it is a *special* problem for them (and again I include myself here), the Racial Contract's effects are not restricted to whites. In addition to the "privilege-evasive" ignorance of white people under the Racial Contract, there is also what Alison Bailey calls "the ignorance of internalized oppression" (Bailey 2007, 85). The Racial Contract norms nonwhites as subpersons and, to the extent that people of color accept this, they, too, can be signatories to the Contract (Mills 1997, 118). To do this, one need not do anything so overt as accepting an actual metaphysical claim to the effect that nonwhites are subpersons. Instead one need only internalize those practices and standards that spring from the white supremacist assertion that this is the case. This also means that recognizing one's own humanity in the face of deeply inscribed denials of it is a long, difficult work. Bailey writes "Recognizing one's own humanity requires rejecting European beauty standards, challenging the colonizer's version of history, and cultivating cognitive resistance to the 'racially mystificatory' aspects of white theory" (2007, 86).

The multitude of ways, in which whiteness is normed in culture, entertainment, beauty products, and so on, can help us to see that refusing to be a signatory to the Racial Contract can be a difficult work for people of color as well as for white people. Nevertheless, the fact that white people have a tendency to form segregated communities composed only of their own often reinforces the Racial Contract both socially and psychologically. On the other hand, the tendencies people of color have to form more inclusive multicultural communities in which solidarity among and with the oppressed can play a role may allow people of color to chart a clearer social path to rejecting the evils of the Racial Contract (notwithstanding the strategic importance of "safe havens" for oppressed groups as such on which see José Medina 2013, 7–9). Indeed, if Medina is right, often these communities' solidarity is enhanced precisely by "an irreducible diversity of experiential and agential perspectives, and with an eye to fostering and strengthening this diversity" (2013, 308).

One might think that this divergence between the experience of white and nonwhite people in regard to the Racial Contract suggests another disanalogy to the case of original sin, but actually I think the reverse is true. As Mills has it, "Whiteness is not really a color at all, but a set of power relations" (1997, 127). The boundaries of "whiteness" can be somewhat fluid, and "other subordinate Racial Contracts exist which do not involve white/nonwhite relations" (Mills 1997, 127). Indeed, Mills goes on to argue that some more localized instantiations of the Racial Contract may even take place between factions of black people (e.g., one imagines the

Rwandan genocide) (see Mills 1997, 128–29). But if these instantiations bear the oppressive ideological mark of colonialism, which is often historically quite plausible, then it is quite possible that the global project of white supremacy (the Racial Contract) is at work, even if white people are, in some cases, neither the (discrete) dominators nor the oppressed.[1] Accordingly, it is primarily the oppressed and marginalized who have the best chance of seeing the Racial Contract for what it is, and both white people and people of color can get caught up in the trap of domination. Indeed, in one of Peter van Inwagen's treatments of theodicy, he notes the well-documented fact that members of the rather less prosperous Global South tend to be more religious than members of the Global North. One might explain this by saying that less prosperous and educated people often turn to superstition. But the explanation van Inwagen offers, and, that I submit, Christians ought to prefer, is that the poor are in a better position accurately to assess their need for divine assistance (van Inwagen 1988, 175). Christians should find the latter explanation unsurprising, since Jesus himself proclaimed the poor and oppressed blessed and issued a warning to the rich and privileged (Luke 6:20 and 24).

Thus far, we have seen some of the ways that the Racial Contract bears certain parallels to original sin in terms of its effects, but what about its nature and transmission, some of the key issues for any discussion with evolutionary science? To talk more fruitfully about that, we need to hear a bit more from Mills about what white ignorance is. We have already seen that it is not confined to white people (Mills 2007, 22). Further, Mills writes that "White ignorance is not indefeasible… and some people who are white will, because of their particular histories… overcome it and have true beliefs on what their fellow whites get wrong. So, *white ignorance is best thought of as a cognitive tendency—an inclination, a doxastic disposition—which is not insuperable*" (2007, 23, italics mine). This definition of Mills's suggests that his view of white ignorance, one of the "key themes" (Mills 2007, 15) of his book *The Racial Contract* is closer to what the Catholic tradition would understand as one of the key *effects* of original sin, namely, concupiscence, though whether the latter is "insuperable" for the regenerate Christian is a vexed theological question we cannot pursue here.

The Catholic Church defines concupiscence as "the movement of the sensitive appetite contrary to the operation of the human reason," claims that it resulted from the first sin, and notes that concupiscence "inclines" us to sin (Catholic Church 1997, sec. 2515). Although Mills says that white ignorance is a *cognitive* tendency, it certainly has moral implications, since we have seen that maintaining white ignorance requires maintenance. Moreover, it often requires social maintenance so that complicity is wide and plentiful, but culpability much more difficult to assign (see Medina 2013, 145–50, 294). Finally, Mills clearly wants the combatting of white ignorance to result in "*heightened sensitivity* to social oppression

and the attempt to reduce and ultimately eliminate that oppression" (2007, 22). So, while Mills seems to think of white ignorance as primarily a cognitive tendency that we have passed down through the centuries in some sense by imitation (and not by propagation), it clearly has an (im)moral upshot.

Original Sin and Racism

In this last section, I want to consider some ways in which the predicament of original sin might bear a similarity to the predicament of racism, even while the two will not map perfectly onto one another. To do this, it may be helpful to consider Gijsbert van den Brink's seven statements that form what he regards as the "network" of original sin (2018, 119), which I will excerpt or paraphrase below:

1. "All human beings are sinful."
2. "All humans have a tendency or inclination toward sinning from the beginning of their lives."
3. The tendency toward sinning "affects every human faculty."
4. The tendency toward sinning is the "well from which all sorts of actual sins spring."
5. The tendency toward sinning is "not part of our original makeup," but is a corruption that resulted from the first sin.
6. This corruption has been passed to "all later generations through sexual reproduction."
7. The guilt of the first sin is imputed to later generations so that they "deserve God's judgment and condemnation."

From this, van den Brink summarizes original sin as "humans' universal, radical, total, effective, acquired, hereditary, and inculpating inclination toward sinning" (119). Given our discussion of racism in the modern world through Mills's Racial Contract, how might these concepts enhance our understanding one of the other?

Regarding (1), it is a stipulation of Christian theology that all human beings are sinful (with special provisos for Jesus and Mary as the case may be). But are we all racist? That will depend on our discussion of (3). If racism affects every human faculty, then presumably some people's faculties will bear less of a trace of racism than others (and some—no doubt people of color have a better chance here—may possess none).[2] Although Mills thinks of white ignorance as primarily cognitive, he does not mean only those cognitive processes of which we are *aware*. Indeed, Shannon Sullivan has argued that Mills *should* think of white ignorance as primarily physiological and not cognitive (2014). In addition, Haslanger has argued that racist ideology should be understood as cultural as well as psychological (2017, 7). However, nothing prevents us from acknowledging, to our shame, that racism is cognitive, physiological, *and* cultural. Regardless, the effects of racism extend very far; both inward and outward. Here,

we might consider the following from Malcolm X: "[the white man] will commit against non-whites the most incredible spontaneous emotional acts, so psyche-deep is his 'white-superiority' complex" (Malcolm X and Haley 2015, 273). Suffice it to say that if there is a faculty that (in any large-sized subset of post-fifteenth-century humans) is or has been entirely untouched by racism, to show it will take a mighty argument.

Once white supremacy was well underway, it seems plausible to think that the inculcation of racist habits would take place developmentally quite early, as Shelby's case of the sincere extrinsic racist helps us to see. Whether it was from the beginning of our lives in (2) will have to be assessed when we discuss the transmission of original sin. Surely, we will have little difficulty in comparing original sin and racism in (4), since both include the sort of inclination from which all sorts of sins spring. Whether this tendency is part of our "original makeup" as humans in (5) is harder to address. Certainly, an Augustinian would say it is not. Whether an Irenaean would say so would depend on how "Irenaean" she was (for Irenaeus himself would say it is not original to our nature, but perhaps not Hick). As far as racism is concerned, it is generally conceded among scholars of race that modern racism itself (as opposed to ethnocentrism and maybe colorism) has a historical point of departure from which, at least in the social sense, its later instances originate. (7) is simply a part of Christian theology, though it is worth noting that understanding the scope of racism can help us to see how it might hamper our relationship with God (Mulder 2020).

The remaining question has to do with the transmission of original sin. It is of course false that racism or white ignorance is transmitted in any straightforward way by sexual reproduction as such. But, turning to original sin, "sexual reproduction" might be too loaded a way to put the term "propagation" in which the Council of Trent was interested. We have seen that nothing prevents a primordial sin taking place in an initial group of philosophical and theological humans even if they are not the first biological humans, and then it is not difficult to imagine how their descendants might constitute the whole biological species before long. But one of the theological problems with locating the transmission of original sin in our biology is that doing so places original sin more and more within the reach of our advancing scientific knowledge. At its limit this would mean, inadmissibly for a Christian, that original sin could be, theoretically, eradicated by human effort and not by the redemption offered by Christ. But what if a sinful ideology that reaches into our very physiology, culture, and minds held some promise for thinking about original sin? That is, could original sin, in a way similar to the way deeply entrenched ideologies such as racism are transmitted, be transmitted *by* sexual reproduction rather than (biologically) *in* sexual reproduction?

On this point, some thinkers have suggested that "imitation and inheritance are more entangled and less rigidly separated than the Council of

Trent seemed to suggest" (Steinmair-Pösel 2017, 187). For instance, James Alison writes that "it is not as though we are first a biological or natural reality and then, later, become a cultural reality. All human beings are, from conception, always a completely cultural reality" (1998, 279). Some may feel that Alison overplays his hand here, but when we *begin* to take on cultural influence from others is not an easy question to answer and Raymund Schwager offers proposals for its occurrence *in utero* (Schwager 2006). If, due to the beings we are, we are ineluctably influenced by the culture in which we live before we ever have a "neutral moral moment" (Alison 1998, 279), it is worth asking whether this predicament of sin is something to which we are consigned by propagation rather than *mere* imitation (see Schwager 2006, 39). Moreover, in the Girardian framework within which these thinkers are working, there is a primordial (and, for some, historical) fall.

I hasten to add that these suggestions are merely exploratory and only serve to suggest that the gulf between Irenaean and Augustinian views of the transmission of original sin may not be as wide as is commonly supposed. I am a Catholic, and to satisfy the dogmatic constraints of my tradition, I think the inheritance of original sin must be both (1) certain to occur through propagation and (2) mysterious. It must be certain lest Mary not have an entirely unique exemption from it (Catholic Church 1997, sec. 491) and it must be mysterious lest we be able to pinpoint its source and eradicate it, even in principle, on our own. But these things are worth exploring, and the exploration would bridge the gap somewhat between Irenaean and Augustine views of original sin.

Where does this leave us with Bishop Perry's linkage of racism and original sin with which we opened this article? Perry seemed worried that, since people no longer believed in original sin, they were less likely to believe in their own racism. But as high-profile cases of police murder of black citizens cause us to evaluate how racist bias affects us even when we're unaware of it (on which see Vicens 2018), we are, I think, in a better position to appreciate the doctrine of original sin. Moreover, the link plausibly works the other way around: insofar as original sin manifests itself culturally, cognitively, and even physiologically, we are better equipped to acknowledge the mark racism has made on all of us, since whether we start from the acknowledgement of racism or of original sin, we, as a human race, have *done it before*. Our cultures are deeply imbued with racism and there is much work to be done in addressing it. If racism is cognitive as well as physiological and cultural, then when this influence upon us *begins* is no easy question to answer. But it did begin within human history as at least the Augustinians claim about original sin, and whether racism can end will have plenty to do with how we learn to confront our sinfulness, particularly as it exists at the limit of, and even beyond, our awareness.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that developments in philosophy of race help us to see how the concept of racism might lead us to a better understanding of original sin and how the doctrine of original sin bears important parallels to contemporary thinking on racism. What I have not said much about is the solution to either of these. For Christians, original sin is the "reverse side" of the good news that Jesus Christ has entered our predicament from outside and given us a solution to sin that we could not have accessed on our own (Catholic Church 1997, sec. 389). Although Christians will no doubt harbor hope that Christ has resources for us to combat the sin of racism as well, it is not obvious just how Christ's redemption results, without further ado, in the eradication of racism. But let me venture this in closing: insofar as racism is a grievous sin (which it is), Christians can hardly hope for a solution any less radical than the one in whom they put their trust for other sins. Insofar, as racism is a grievous social injustice (which it is), we had better get to work.

Notes

1. Haslanger (2000) notes that there may be overdetermination in the causal history of domination/exclusion "contracts." Surely, it is the case that multiple causal factors are usually work, and, to take some act of genocide, for example, it may be the case that more than one factor would have been sufficient (in a given context) to prompt some genocide or other. But whether (1) that counterfactual genocide could have been imagined without a context nurtured by the history of global white supremacy or (2) such a counterfactual genocide would have been, whatever this means, the *same* genocide (and thus the same local "contract"), are relevant questions.
2. Ibram X. Kendi's (2019) now famous argument that there is only racist and antiracist, not nonracist, is worth assessing here, but I take it that the accomplished antiracist will have met with some success in eliminating or diminishing the racism from at least some of her faculties, and that is what concerns us here.

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