Horizons, 41, pp. 74–95. © College Theology Society, 2014
doi:10.1017/hor.2014.1

Negative Contrast Experience: An Ignatian Appraisal

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In the face of continual and increased human suffering in every corner of the world, good and principled people often do nothing. Edward Schillebeeckx's understanding of negative experiences of contrast begins with outrage at excessive human suffering and is followed by protest and eventual praxis to ameliorate and end the suffering. The author queries whether unconscious bias prevents human beings from seeing this suffering, and suggests that embracing a rigorous Ignatian consciousness examen may correct this impairment.

Keywords: Schillebeeckx, negative, contrast, suffering, bias, Ignatian, examen, praxis

The woman left the office building in Chicago and was making a beeline to her favorite ice cream shop. As she approached the corner, an outgoing young man wearing a Greenpeace T-shirt greeted her and asked for a moment of her time. While environmental advocacy was not one of her major concerns, and she worried that her parking meter might expire, she decided to listen to the activist anyway. She was a bit frustrated as well; she was already giving to two charitable organizations on a monthly basis. Nevertheless, her guilt kicked in when she thought about her ice cream treat. The young man began his appeal by saying that only 10 percent of people in the United States give to charitable causes. That surprised her. After giving a little background on Greenpeace, he turned his attention to an issue of concern. One of the local chapter's big projects was to advocate the closure of coal plants that were located on the Southside of Chicago.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The organization had been quite successful in that regard in Cincinnati. Her ears perked up. He was speaking about environmental racism. The woman made her small donation, and she assured the young man that she would discuss the work of Greenpeace with her students during the upcoming semester.

This vignette is a concrete and embodied example of negative contrast experience. The Flemish Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx (1914–2009), who made these experiences the centerpiece of his later theology, was concerned with human suffering and ecological abuse. He maintained that when people encounter suffering and abuse, their inchoate response is outrage because of their sense that this should not be! This outrage is the beginning of protest. Injustice is acknowledged and praxis follows—that is, one embarks on some type of action to lessen the suffering and abuse. A person might choose to join a movement, donate to a cause, learn as much as he or she can about the situation, or discuss the suffering and abuse with others in person or through a blog or website.

Sometimes it seems that otherwise good people are not even open to hearing about instances of human suffering and ecological abuse, let alone doing something about them. People believe that they have already given to causes, and their budgets prevent them from giving more. Perhaps they are busy or think they already know about a particular cause. Each of these circumstances can be a missed opportunity to experience compassion and attend to human suffering or the abuse of God's creation.

The Greenpeace activist did indeed get my attention on that particular day. Perhaps on another day I would have said simply that I did not have time. I already feel overwhelmed and helpless in the face of so much suffering, abuse, and injustice. How much outrage can one person sustain? What can I do about my initial lack of interest and openness?

In this article I argue that Schillebeeckx's understanding of negative contrast experience functions as a compelling heuristic of a fundamental human experience, and that its success is therefore linked to the survival and future of threatened *humanum* and creation.[1] I will maintain, however, that his concept of negative contrast experience does not give an account of human inaction in the face of suffering. This lacuna can be offset by attending to a fundamental challenge of human experience, that of unconscious or implicit bias—that is, bias that is invisible and imperceptible, especially by those who internalize it. Without such a critique, the concept of negative contrast experience retains the problematic assumption that women and men will naturally

[1] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 2, 29.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

be outraged and automatically prompted to engage in praxis to end suffering. In reality, people often do not perceive human suffering and may even participate in it. I propose the Ignatian method of "consciousness examen" as a way forward, a potential corrective to this social impairment.

This article proceeds in four stages. I will first offer a brief summary of Schillebeeckx's engagement with the Frankfurt School, his concern for suffering humanity, and his understanding of the phases of negative contrast experience. Second, I will investigate unconscious bias, the impaired vision that prevents otherwise good people from seeing and counteracting suffering and abuse. Third, I will turn to the "consciousness examen," a time-honored daily Ignatian spiritual practice intended to help persons sift through the experiences of their day in a spirit of discernment. Finally, I will briefly consider how the consciousness examen has implications for theological method for all who do theology within a broken world.

I. Schillebeeckx on Negative Contrast Experiences

Influence of the Frankfurt School

Schillebeeckx published the original Dutch version of *The Understanding of Faith* in 1972.[2] In it he acknowledged the limitations of both hermeneutics and critical theory. The former, he said, failed to give a systematic account of nonmeaning in history; the latter emphasized it. Schillebeeckx came to these conclusions by observing the debates between the hermeneute Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas, a second-generation critical theorist of the Institute for Social Research at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt am Main, some of whose members were commonly known as the Frankfurt School. Schillebeeckx was also motivated by a group of young theologians "of the contestation" who were eager to articulate a critical theology.[3] These thinkers held that hermeneutics and subsequently hermeneutical theology were concerned mainly

[2] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Geloofsverstaan: Interpretatie en kritiek*, Theologische Peilinge 5 (Bloemendaal: Nelissen, 1972); English translation: *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1974). About this work, Lieven Boeve states, "It is fair to say that in *Geloofsverstaan* all the preparatory work was completed for Schillebeeckx's theological project from the seventies until the present day" (Boeve, "Experience according to Schillebeeckx: The Driving Force of Faith and Theology," in *Divinising Experience: Essays in the History of Religious Experience from Origen to Ricoeur*, ed. Lieven Boeve and Laurence Paul Hemming, Studies in Philosophical Theology, vol. 23 [Leuven: Peeters, 2004], 205).

[3] Mary Catherine Hilkert, "Edward Schillebeeckx, OP (1914–): Encountering God in a Secular and Suffering World," *Theology Today* 62 (2005): 382.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with the preservation of meaning from one generation to the next. This was evident in their interpretation of tradition, and led to the exclusion of non-meaning, alienation, and domination in history, especially the history of Christianity. On the contrary, Schillebeeckx maintained that a critical hermeneutics ought to really be "tradition *against* tradition"[4] because this was the optimal setting for emancipation through praxis.[5] When the tradition critiques the tradition, errors and their consequences can be dealt with.

Theodor Adorno was one of the leaders of the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists, and his use of the language of "negative dialectics" and critical negativity prompted Schillebeeckx's deepening exploration into negative contrast experiences.[6] The crux of "negative dialectics" was the intersection between evil and suffering *and* critical resistance against anything and everything that threatened the *humanum*. The contradiction was what Adorno hoped would transform thinking, so that fundamental antagonism would diminish while reconciliation increased. He believed this moment of encounter between suffering and resistance need not be an end, but rather a locus of possibility. In fact, it was the absence of critical resistance during the rise of National Socialism during the second decade of the twentieth century that prompted the formation of the Frankfurt School.

Schillebeeckx's negative dialectics contrasted with that of Adorno, since Schillebeeckx applied his negative dialectics within a "positive sphere of meaning."[7] This was important because it was the basis for the development of "political love."[8] As Schillebeekx further explained, "Universal resistance to alienation, inhumanity and the absence of freedom assumes, in [C]hristianity, the form of a redemption by God which can be realised in and through the faith of people in history."[9] That is why he turned a familiar statement on its head: *extra mundum nulla salus* ("Outside the world there is no salvation"). These words point to his belief "that the creative, saving presence of God is mediated in and through human beings."[10] Nevertheless, this resistance posited by negative dialectics is not enough in and of itself. It must

[4] Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith*, 131.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

[7] Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith*, 91.

[8] Elizabeth K. Tillar, "The Influence of Social Critical Theory on Edward Schillebeeckx's Theology of Suffering for Others," *Heythrop Journal* 42 (2001): 168.

[9] Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith,* 93.

[10] Robert J. Schreiter, "Schillebeeckx and Theology in the Twenty-First Century," in *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology*, ed. Lieven Boeve, Frederiek Depoortere, and Stephan Van Erp (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), xiv.

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catalyze protest and action.[11] Schillebeeckx maintained that praxis must be coupled with theory for there to be a positive outcome. Despite the seeming success or failure of these actions, they are "signs or glimpses of an ultimate total meaning of life." He would later call these signs and glimpses "infinite fragments, in a history which *stands open* towards eschatological consummation."[12] Schillebeeckx later developed a Christology of negative dialectics explicitly evident in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus amid fragments of partial salvation and eventual correction by God.[13]

Schillebeeckx learned a considerable amount from Habermas. The latter's critical theory of society was instructive for Schillebeeckx, who learned that "every critical theory runs the risk of becoming dissociated from praxis and thus losing its critical power."[14] Schillebeeckx thus acknowledged the link between theory and praxis so necessary for social transformation, one that coheres well with the life witness of Jesus Christ. Jesus' life as described in the Gospel accounts involved teaching and healing. This dual dimension of his ministry provided a strong witness for women and men who wanted to change the world. Critical social theory gave Schillebeeckx a way to talk about social salvation.

Prioritizing Human Suffering in the Spirit of Jesus

Schillebeeckx sharpened his keen sensitivity to evil and suffering and made it the starting point of his new Christology and subsequent theology. Theologian John Galvin would write that "Schillebeeckx's christology begins with a problem, not a formula or a theory. His quest for a suitable starting point common to all human life and, therefore, accessible to all lead[s] him to concentrate on the universal experience of evil, the bitter awareness that the history of the human race is one of suffering."[15] Auschwitz captured Schillebeeckx's imagination, but he was also drawn to other global situations in which oppressed people were resisting, protesting, and demanding their rights. In the foreword of the third book of his Christological trilogy,

[11] Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith*, 94.

[12] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 819 (emphasis in the original).

[13] Ibid., 784–96.

[14] Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith*, 105.

[15] John Galvin, "The Story of Jesus as the Story of God," in *The Praxis of the Reign of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. Mary Catherine Hilkert and Robert J. Schreiter, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 81. The first part of this quote is reminiscent of Karl Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, *God, Christ, Mary, and Grace*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 149–200.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Church: The Human Story of God, Schillebeeckx explains his intention "to offer what through my own reflection I have made my own as a liberating theology from and thanks to the great Christian tradition."[16] Some, like his contemporary Johann Baptist Metz, would call that "political theology." Schillebeeckx would later include all of created reality when discussing victims of humankind's evil, and he would eventually write about the evil of religious rivalry and conflict and the tragic fallout of globalization.[17] Schillebeeckx articulated that his Christianity was the "praxis of the reign of God." He described this theology as a "critical-hermeneutical interpretation," with critical being "contextualizing and systematizing, it is a praxis."[18]

The seeds of Schillebeeckx's sensitivity to human suffering were sown while he was under the influence of his Dominican confreres Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu.[19] Congar's interest in the priest-worker movement in France, and Chenu's direct involvement in it, helped Schillebeeckx realize the importance of praxis in the life of faith. In fact, during the writing of *Gaudium et Spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*), Congar favored a theology from below that was concrete.[20] The spirit of the church embracing the world as expressed in *Gaudium et Spes* undoubtedly affirmed the theological sensibilities of Congar, Chenu, and Schillebeeckx.

Negative Contrast Experience: The Process

Awareness of Evil and Suffering. Schillebeeckx's "negative contrast experience" begins with individual or communal awareness of evil and suffering. He refers specifically to an excess or accumulation of evil and suffering in our history that is "an unfathomable, theoretically incomprehensible *mystery,*" with the exception of the negativity that is the result of humanity's

[16] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of* God, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1991), xv. See also Edward Schillebeeckx, *God Is New Each Moment*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 71. During these interviews with Huub Oosterhuis and Piet Hoogeveen, Schillebeeckx anticipated that the third volume of his Christological trilogy would be "a western theology of liberation."

[17] Edward Schillebeeckx, "Prologue," Robert J. Schreiter, trans. in *The Praxis of the Reign of God*, ix–xi, at x.

[18] Ibid., xvii.

[19] Robert Schreiter, "An Orientation to His Thought," in *The Schillebeeckx Reader*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 2–3.

[20] Norman P. Tanner, *The Church and the World: Gadium et Spes, Inter Mirifica* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), 9. See also George Kilcourse, *Catholic Theology in North American Context* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 57.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

faulty engagement with science and technology.[21] This evil and suffering cannot be explained, but an appropriate response is the action of resistance. This, together with specifically remembering those who have suffered, can be a stimulus for future practical and critical reason.[22]

God is not the ground of this evil and suffering. Schillebeeckx unequivocally repeated that God does not want human beings to suffer,[23] thus contradicting the erroneous language that some use to talk about Christian salvation. God did not send Jesus to die on the cross. It was "the history of human injustice" that led to Jesus' fateful death. A sustained critical negativity sometimes articulated as ideology critique can enable human beings to discern history's nonmeaning and nonsense. These examples are also formative. Schillebeeckx explains: "Ideas and expectations of salvation and of personal and social happiness have always been formulated in the light of [one's] experience of and reflection about the absence of salvation, suffering, misery and alienation. They have, in other words, arisen from an accumulation of negative experiences throughout a history of suffering that has lasted for centuries."[24]

Schillebeeckx insists that Jesus identifies with those who suffer because he is likewise a victim in suffering's long history.[25] In a number of places in his writings, Schillebeeckx provides a litany of places and circumstances that are synonymous with evil and suffering, such as Buchenwald, Auschwitz, and Vietnam.[26] Subsequent theologians have added the Middle Passage, Rwanda, Sudan, and all those who have been oppressed because of race, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, and caste.[27] Schillebeeckx affirms that "through the death of Jesus, seen in light of his resurrection, the Christian has the assurance that suffering and death

[21] Edward Schillebeeckx, "Human Experience and Suffering," in Schreiter, *The Schillebeeckx Reader*, 52–53.

[22] Ibid., 53.

[23] Ibid., 54.

[24] Edward Schillebeeckx, "The 'God of Jesus' and 'Jesus of God,'" in *Concilium* 93 (1974, no. 3), 110–28, at 110.

[25] Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 729.

[26] Ibid., 725.

[27] E.g, see M. Shawn Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows: Toward a Theology of Suffering in Womanist Perspective," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil & Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 109–10; Kathleen McManus, *Unbroken Communion: The Place and Meaning of Suffering in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 2, 135–40; and Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011).

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cannot separate [him or her] from God."[28] God is, rather, especially present in such suffering.

Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection together form the paradigmatic negative contrast experience whereby Jesus' passion and death are the "ultimate negativity."[29] Jesus' execution was "utter negativity," but Jesus transformed it by his constant resistance to evil and suffering, his solidarity with all those who were vulnerable, and his unbroken communion with his Father.[30] And after Jesus' death, God completely exonerated him and raised him from the dead as the ultimate correction of evil.

Indignation. During an August 26, 2012 interview with *The Atlantic*, civil rights icon Rep. John Lewis commented on partisan efforts to disenfranchise minority voters during the 2012 election: "As a people and as a nation, we are too quiet. All of us should be up on our feet. There should be public outcry. *There should be a sense of righteous indignation over what is happening during this election season*."[31] The righteous indignation to which Rep. Lewis refers is based on a fierce understanding of truth and law. This potentially productive anger can provoke a "prophetic protest" rooted in hope for the future.[32]

For Schillebeeckx, when individuals and communities face evil and suffering—their own and that of others—the universal prereligious response is, "This cannot be allowed to continue!" For Schillebeeckx, "this is a basic experience"[33] of our life in this world, the veto to life as it is.

But indignation does not stop there. It is the "specific starting point for ethics" provoked by "the actual threat and attack on the *humanum* … [that is an] ethical challenge and an ethical imperative, embedded in very specific negative experiences of contrast, of human misfortune and unhappiness, here and now."[34] Indignation opens one's eyes anew to the extent of human suffering that exists, in part as a result of humanity's choices. Human suffering prevents full human flourishing, and all who observe this are compelled to act. Failure to do so makes one become part of the problem, and may be regarded as a sin of omission.

[28] Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 800.

[29] Course notes on Mary Catherine Hilkert, "The Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx," University of Notre Dame, Fall 2002.

[30] Hilkert, "Edward Schillebeeckx, OP (1914–)," 385.

[31] Andrew Cohen, "Rep. John Lewis: 'Make Some Noise' on New Voting Restrictions," *The Atlantic*, August 26, 2012, http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/08/rep-john-lewis-make-some-noise-on-new-voting-restrictions/261549/.

[32] Sison, *Screening Schillebeeckx*, 133.

[33] Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 5.

[34] Ibid., 29.

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Protest. Protest signals the presence of an injustice so profound that the only response is some kind of intervention that others will witness and join. For Schillebeeckx, this moment is also a locus of divine presence: "God is the source and heart of all truly human movements of liberation and salvation."[35] Some may argue that this was evident in the protests of the Arab Spring in 2011. On December 21, 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a twenty-six-year-old Tunisan fruit seller doused himself with paint thinner and set himself on fire; his act of protest ignited a revolution.[36] Bouazizi's frustration was rooted in his inability to sell fruits and vegetables to support his family, since such actions were illegal. Nevertheless, he acquired produce by going into debt, but local officials regularly confiscated his goods. On that fateful December day Bouazizi went to the regional government headquarters to make his case. He was turned away without a hearing. Thus he chose his final act.[37] Within a month, the ensuing movement had forced Tunisian president and dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali to flee the country.[38] A Lebanese commentator quoted a famous Tunisian poet to mark this historic day: "And the people wanted life, and the chains were broken."[39] The people of Tunisia had been agitating for change for some time in response to the restrictions on free speech and political parties. The power of the labor movement, evident in their widespread strikes, encouraged protestors, while the youth were concerned with their financial and employment futures.[40] As Schillebeeckx had written, God, "who does not want [human beings] to suffer…wills to *overcome* suffering where it occurs in our history."[41] In line with Schillebeeckx's view, we can claim that this is a case of God being present with God's people when they cry out for liberation and for avenues to human flourishing.

Today the initial vetoes against oppression and in favor of the so-called Arab Spring need the support of a new chorus to agitate for change in Syria as the struggle continues and the death toll rises, as well as in Egypt, where

[35] Ibid., 10.

[36] Sarra Grira and Slimane Rouissi, "Public Suicide Attempt Sparks Angry Riots in Central Tunisia," *France 24 International News*, December 21, 2010, http://observers.france24.com/content/20101221-youth-public-suicide-attempt-sparks-angry-riots-sidi-bouzid-tunisia-poverty-bouazizi-immolation.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Anthony Shadid, "Joy as Tunisian President Flees Offers Lesson to Arab Leaders," *New York Times,* January 14, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/15/world/africa/15region.html.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Lisa Anderson, "Demystifying the Arab Spring," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (May/June 2011), http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67693/lisa-anderson/demystifying-the-arab-spring.

[41] Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 730.

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a new leader has overreached his responsibilities. Both can be labeled sites of negative contrast experiences.

Praxis. Already in 1972 Schillebeeckx saw that critical social theory had lost its force when theory and praxis became disconnected. In the conclusion of the introduction to *The Understanding of Faith*, he suggested that theologians forgo the inclination to add pious embellishments to theological treatises, and focus critical reflection on praxis. In this way he suggested a path to a more meaningful future:

> Theological reflection about the contribution that can be made by these new movements [the study of hermeneutics and critical social theory] may lead theologians to conclude that the [C]hristian message can be handed down in a contemporary interpretation if theology can act as the reflective and critical self-consciousness of [C]hristian praxis. In this, theology can not only interpret the reality of faith, but also formulate operational models to renew faith, and thus lay the foundation in praxis for the validity of an interpretation here and now of that reality. In this way, a new relationship between theory and practice will be brought to light in theology.[42]

It is significant to note that, for Schillebeeckx, praxis is clearly linked with a meaningful and timely faith, and he argues that Christians must transmit the faith in language that present and future generations can hear.[43] Additionally, one can detect the beginnings of Schillebeeckx's hope for critical communities moving toward political holiness. Inspired by these communities' role in Latin American liberation theology, he wrote about how they could be the site where activists and others could find strength for the praxis of the kingdom of God.[44]

Like Adorno's negative dialectics, Schillebeeckx's negative contrast experiences do not offer a blueprint for the future. Rather, they signal fragmentary experiences of salvation and well-being: such "fleeting promise[s] of a happier lot" function as real and imminent "coming attractions" that enable people to continue to hope for salvation from God, despite contemporary events that suggest the contrary. Schillebeeckx's views are rooted in his conviction that God is benevolent and caring, a God who is "bent toward humanity."[45]

[42] Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith*, xiii.

[43] See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report on the Books "Jesus" and "Christ"* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 30.

[44] See Edward Schillebeeckx, "Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment," trans. David Smith, *Concilium* 84 (1973, no. 4), 48–61.

[45] Mary Catherine Hilkert, "Experience and Revelation," in Hilkert and Schreiter, *The Praxis of the Reign of God*, 61.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This is evident in the gospel narrative, in which Jesus' life and ministry results in people's healing and wholeness. Throughout the progression of Schillebeeckx's negative contrast experiences, the fundamental human no expressed through indignation and protest, and its correlative open yes, are linked to experiences of salvation and well-being, however intermittent they may be.[46] These occasional experiences "are fragmentary but real experiences of meaning and happiness, on both a smaller or larger scale, which constantly keep nurturing, establishing, and sustaining this open yes."[47]

Believers and nonbelievers alike can collaborate and give voice to the necessary fundamental no and the open yes. In the expanding space of this open yes, Christian believers "hear the name of God," and their praxis is recognized as the praxis of the kingdom.[48]

II. Examining Unconscious Bias

Negative contrast experiences, then, are cyclical. The dynamic begins when people notice evil and injustice in the world. Indignation and protest follow as people say no through praxis to barriers to human and ecological flourishing. The cycle continues with the recognition of still other instances of suffering and evil. In an ideal world, negative contrast experiences would ameliorate and eventually end human suffering, and a common solidarity would engender hope for a better future. However, sin and human finitude do not allow things to unfold in this way.

One pervasive aspect of human finitude is implicit or unconscious bias. Implicit bias consists of "attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, decision making and behavior, without our even realizing it."[49] It can have many causes: race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and so on. To act out of these implicit biases would be an example of negative contrast experience. Unfortunately, the reality is that implicit bias clouds the human ability to say, "This should not be." Implicit bias is difficult to analyze and still more difficult to predict. We turn to implicit racism as a primary example of implicit bias, and then to some explicitly theological solutions that have been proposed to deal with this issue.

[46] Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 6.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Jerry Kang et al., "Implicit Bias in the Courtroom," *UCLA Law Review* 59 (June 2012): 1124–86, at 1126. Sociologist Lincoln Quillian explains, "*Implicit* is a term from memory research referring to memories from past socialization or experiences that affect current thought and behavior without conscious awareness" (Quillian, "Does Unconscious Racism Exist?," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 71, no. 1 [2008]: 6–11, at 7).

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While the results of implicit bias may seem all-pervasive, recent scholarship points to the difficulties of isolating it. The Implicit Association Test (IAT), one of the primary tools used to detect implicit bias, is used to infer "group-valence and group-trait associations from performances that are influenced by those associations in a manner that is not discerned by respondents."[50] The IAT has been available online since 1998, and has provided considerable data to be used in research.[51]

It can be difficult, however, to determine when a research subject is being influenced by unconscious bias or conscious bias. Some critics conclude that the most popular instrument used to determine bias, the Implicit Attitude Test, is itself ambiguous because of its inability to distinguish between these two types of bias.[52] Such disputes have only contributed to the extensive debates in this field.[53] While implicit bias appears to exist in many forms, anti-black racism, which has been described as "America's original sin,"[54] is one of the most prevalent and destructive of our time.

Race is not primarily a biological set of characteristics. Rather, it is a social construct that nevertheless is real and that matters insofar as it influences the life chances, wealth, and life expectancy of black and darker-skinned people. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, for example, discusses what he calls "racial structure" to explain the social construct of racism. He writes that with the emergence of the concept of race, a social structure developed that was based on awarding "systemic privileges to Europeans (the people who became white) over non-Europeans (the people who became nonwhite)." This social structure is "*the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege.*"[55]

[50] Anthony B. Greenwald and Linda Hamilton Krieger, "Implicit Bias: Scientific Foundations," *California Law Review* 94, no. 4 (July 2006): 952.

[51] Ibid., 955.

[52] Ralph Richard Banks and Richard Thompson Ford, "(How) Does Unconscious Bias Matter? Law, Politics, and Racial Inequality," *Emory Law Journal* 58, no. 5 (2009): 1053–1122, at 1053.

[53] See James S. Uleman, Steven L. Blader, and Alexander Todorov, "Implicit Impressions," in *The New Unconscious*, ed. Ran R. Hassin, James S. Uleman, and John A. Bargh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 362–92; Cayla R Teal et al., "Helping Medical Learners Recognise and Manage Unconscious Bias toward Certain Patient Groups," *Medical Education* 46, no. 1 (Jan. 2012): 80–88; Debra M. Easterly and Cynthia S. Ricard, "Conscious Efforts to End Unconscious Bias: Why Women Leave Academic Research," *Journal of Research Administration* 46, no. 1 (2011): 61–73.

[54] James Cone, interview by Bill Moyers, *Moyers Moments, Bill Moyers Journal,* 2007, http://billmoyers.com/2012/04/13/moyers-moment-2007-james-cone-on-americas-original-sin/.

[55] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 9 (emphasis in the original).

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The implications of these phenomena are global and continue to hold sway, even in a world that some prematurely call "postracial."

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's hate crime statistics for 2010 indicate that 3,725 single-bias hate crimes were motivated by race that year. Of these incidents, 69.8 percent were motivated by antiblack racism.[56] In fact, it has been noted that violence against black Americans "has been and still is the prototypical hate crime."[57] The United States' shared history of slavery with Latin America means that antiblack racism is a problem of the Western Hemisphere.[58] Racial bias has spilled over into the wider world community through colonization, empire, and globalization.

Our reaction to such statistics should be a truly global negative contrast experience. Despite the fact that most people of goodwill would openly deplore this situation, as Bryan Massingale observes, a culture of racism and of colorism continues to be apparent both in the United States and in other countries of the West.[59] Massingale comments on this culture of racism: "'Unconscious racism' connotes how race can operate as a negative —yet not conscious, deliberate, or intentional—decision-making factor, due to the pervasive culture stigma attached to dark skin color in Western culture. Race functions as a largely unconscious or preconscious frame of perception, developed through cultural conditioning and instilled socialization."[60] While no one wishes to be called a racist, not even an unconscious one, there is a body of literature that suggests that all of us are infected with this disease called racism. The implications of unconscious racism for theology demand attention. Unconscious bias is not merely a personal matter that individuals can transcend at will. As legal analysts point out, lives are at stake if judges and members of juries are influenced by unconscious bias.

In a seminal article in the *Stanford Law Review*, Charles R. Lawrence III reminded his readers that psychoanalysis is based on the premise that the human mind is divided into two areas, the conscious and unconscious. As

[56] Federal Bureau of Investigation, "FBI Hate Crime Statistics 2010," http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/hate-crime/2010.

[57] The Leadership Conference, "Confronting the New Faces of Hate: Hate Crimes in America 2009," http://www.civilrights.org/publications/hatecrimes/african-americans.html.

[58] See Henry Louis Gates, *Black in Latin America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 59–90, 119–79.

[59] Colorism is a hierarchal system that assigns the greatest value to those with the lightest skin tone among people who are black and brown.

[60] Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice in the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 26.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Sigmund Freud argued, the conscious part of the brain is governed by the rational and logical beliefs in our mind. It is the conscious part (Ego) that is focused on doing the right thing. The unconscious part of the brain (Id) is in search of pleasure and is beyond our awareness and control. Lawrence explains thus: "On their way to gratification, the Id impulses must pass through the territory of the Ego where they are criticized, rejected, or modified, often by some defensive measure on the part of the secondary process [Ego]. Defensive mechanisms such as repression, denial, introjections, projection, reaction formation, sublimation, and reversal resolve the conflicts between the primary [Id] and secondary processes by disguising forbidden wishes and making them palatable."[61] These disguised defense mechanisms remain in the Id. This affirms the belief that unconscious antagonistic views about out-groups originate in the Id. Additionally, Lawrence notes that changes in overt racist behaviors predate corresponding changes of attitudes.[62] He considers other dimensions of Freud's theory of the conscious and unconscious mind in order to make a case that it is appropriate for the unconscious to be taken into account in the judicial system.

Discourse about unconscious bias and the law prompts inquiries about equal protection and intent. Criminal intent is an important category, since it determines the type of crime that one is eventually tried for along with its corresponding sentence. Equal protection under the law is the right, ensured by the Fourteenth Amendment, that undue attention will not be given to some values (e.g., diversifying a university population) to the detriment of others.[63] When implicit bias comes into play, legal rights may inadvertently be trampled. Philosopher and race theorist Shannon Sullivan has called unconscious racism "a habit of white privilege." Such a habit is learned unknowingly as members of the dominant culture interact with their children. White privilege is transmitted in many ways, through language, words, gestures, inflection, tone, and timbre, and are all a part of this communication. This is only the beginning of the lifelong process of learning unconscious racism, sexism, and heterosexism, to name just a few "habits of white privilege."[64] These learned behaviors can

[61] Charles R. Lawrence, "The Id, the Ego, and Equal Protection: Reckoning with Unconscious Racism," *Stanford Law Review* 39, no. 2 (January 1987): 317–88, at 331–32.

[62] Ibid., 334.

[63] See Kathleen McNearney, "Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin: The Fifth Circuit Questions Judicial Deference to Race-Conscious Admissions Policies in Higher Education," *Tulane Law Review* 86, no. 6 (June 2012): 1373–84.

[64] See Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 63–93, at 79. See also Peggy McIntosh,

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

result in unconscious choices that do just as much harm as a conscious choice might.

Unconscious racism is a form of implicit bias that can prevent an individual from perceiving the suffering of others and one's own operative privilege. Scholars who write and speak about "whiteness as site of idolatry" seek to understand why it is that whiteness has become such a valuable asset in every corner of the world.[65] The social construction of whiteness has a long history that runs wide and deep. "The ideological hegemony of whiteness is simply too overwhelming to be successfully resisted. The reality of whiteness, however, expresses itself in the form of a conglomerate set of interlocking forces. These forces inhabit every nook and cranny of American life, possessing the power to make themselves representative."[66] This hegemony that overpowers all other counternarratives can become so pervasive that it amounts to an implicit bias that shapes actions ranging from legal judgments to promotions to the choice of whom to sit beside on a bus.

In engaging issues of unconscious racism, as well as other pervasive forces such as sexism, ageism, and homophobia, we learn that we all have been tainted by unconscious bias. No one is exempt. Every person who has ever lived has imbibed some bias that shaped their view of who is important, who is considered beautiful, who is considered smart, or who has the accoutrements of wealth or is a member of the middle class.

Many theologians have engaged the concept of bias as an explanation for humanity's inability to notice others and their suffering. Bernard Lonergan's work has been central to this effort. As M. Shawn Copeland explains, Lonergan argues that bias "is the more or less conscious and deliberate choice, in light of what we perceive as a potential threat to our well-being, to exclude further information or data from consideration in our understanding, judgment, discernment, decision, and action."[67] As Copeland points out, this reaction is rooted in fear. When threatened, individuals can choose consciously the realities around them that protect their own status quo. To acknowledge the realities, or even to acknowledge the reaction, would necessitate change. The roots of such change can be found in the

"Unpacking the Knapsack of White Male Privilege," http://www.nymbp.org/reference/WhitePrivilege.pdf. McIntosh's essay is considered a classic.

[65] George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 192.

[66] Ibid.

[67] M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 13.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

differentiation that Lonergan makes between dramatic, individual, group, and commonsense bias.[68] As Mary Catherine Hilkert has pointed out, Lonergan's understanding of dramatic bias can serve as a valuable tool for self-knowledge, for it can help people take account "of the power of sin to distort."[69] In removing this barrier, the individual is forced to acknowledge the surrounding realities and her own past reactions. The negative contrast experience begins to become clearer.

Besides Lonergan's work on bias, Schillebeeckx himself in his later work began to acknowledge more overtly the need for a "hermeneutics of suspicion" in matters of self-examination.[70] Hilkert observes that "Schillebeeckx accepts their [the 'masters of suspicion'] basic insight that human consciousness can unconsciously repress and distort its perception and expression of reality."[71] This insight has direct implications for the difficulties presented when negative contrast experiences fail to function as they should. While this is helpful, what is needed is an explicit link between ideology critique, a "hermeneutics of suspicion," *and* negative contrast experiences. Bringing forward this particular impulse of Schillebeeckx, while also linking it with negative contrast experiences, would be a meaningful contribution to this discourse.

Without ways of providing an account for humanity's inaction in the face of evil and suffering, the negative contrast experience risks losing its important role, and the ability to recognize the option for the poor might be lessened. Patricia McAuliffe suggests, for example, that the "option for the poor" can serve as the "first concretization of the imperative to resist suffering."[72] This option is an ethical response to a negative contrast experience,

[68] Individual bias is the conscious decision to sidestep or reject opportunities to engage those who are problematically different. Group bias is the intentional decision persons make to self-segregate so as to avoid engaging those who are different. This may be fueled by ethnocentricism and violence. The general bias of common sense is linked with group bias so as to promote the ideas of those with power and repress the ideas of those on the margins. See Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 14. See also Cyril Orji, *Ethnic and Religious Conflict in Africa: An Analysis of Bias, Decline, and Conversion Based on the Works of Bernard Lonergan*, Marquette Studies in Theology (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008).

[69] Mary Catherine Hilkert, "The Threatened *Humanum* as *Imago Dei*: Anthropology and Christian Ethics," in Boeve, Depoortere, and Van Erp, *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology*, 132–33.

[70] Hilkert, "Experience and Revelation," 65. See Edward Shillebeeckx, "Ideology and Ideology Critique as Hermeneutics," in Schreiter, *The Schillebeeckx Reader,* 113–15.

[71] Hilkert, "Experience and Revelation," 65.

[72] Patricia McAuliffe, *Fundamental Ethics: A Liberationist Approach* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1993), 40.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a lens through which individuals and communities look at the threatened *humanum* and determine who is most in need.[73] These poor, "who have nothing to hope for from human history," find that their human flourishing and very lives are at stake.[74]

The problem of implicit bias is a complex one. In the opening vignette the woman's bias might be a conscious or unconscious belief that charitable causes for humans always supersede those for the rest of creation. In her well-intentioned effort to protect her own kind, she failed to recognize the interconnectedness of all of creation. The woman had "already given at the office." Perhaps she was overwhelmed by the vastness of the suffering of the world and tried to take refuge in work that she had already done. Perhaps her encounter with the Greenpeace activist prodded her to a more responsible use of her resources. She cannot take credit for her relative economic good fortune. The fact that she was born in the global North instead of the global South is no personal achievement. The encounter with the activist prompted her to reflect on what it means to be in solidarity with all of creation.

As Lonergan points out, bias runs deep within the consciousness and unconsciousness of individuals and societies. He asks this question: "How, indeed, is a mind to become conscious of its own bias when that bias springs from a communal flight from understanding and is supported by the whole texture of a civilization? How can new strength and vigor be imparted to the detached and disinterested desire to understand without the reinforcement acting as added bias?"[75] While it is to be hoped that understanding bias may prompt changes in thinking and acting, these changes will be contrary to our past experiences and perhaps to "the whole texture of a civilization."[76] It is no small task to change systems of implicit bias that grow from unacknowledged, yet very real fears.[77] Because these systems threaten the lives and flourishing of the poor, and indeed the humanity of all of us, they must nonetheless be faced.

[73] Ibid.

[74] McManus, *Unbroken Communion*, 135.

[75] Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study in Human Understanding,* ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, vol. 3 of *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 8–9.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Perhaps this fear is a type of "fear of the dark." See Robin Hawley Gorsline, "James Baldwin and Audre Lorde as Theological Resources for the Celebration of Darkness," *Theology and Sexuality* 10, no. 1 (2003): 58–72.

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III. Consciousness Examen as a Way Forward

Unconscious bias is a barrier to discerning God's will.[78] This means that good people can be unaware of the extent of poverty, violence, and other social ills that exist in our world today. Jesuit scholar and activist Dean Brackley (1946–2011) has written that "our cultural formation (by family, school, church, and the media), our location, experience and past choices circumscribe our imagination and intelligence. Along with many benefits, we also inherit the biases and blind spots of our social class, race, age group, sex, religion, and nation."[79] While we choose neither our life circumstances nor the inheritance of "biases and blind spots," we can work to become aware of them. Brackley wrote about bias in the context of the Ignatian consciousness examen, a daily prayer experience that encourages people to remember God's movement in their lives so as to discern God's will.

Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, wrote *The Spiritual Exercises* to be used by the members of the Society and others. The *Exercises* are a guide to those who function as spiritual directors during the thirty-day retreat. The examen is one such prayer exercise among others included in the four-week program outlined in the text. It was the intention of Saint Ignatius that the examen be prayed twice daily. The overarching goal of each exercise is for the individual to discern God's actions in daily life. The director assists the individual over a thirty-day retreat, while some perform the Exercises over a certain number of months. The examen is an important prayer that can help the individual grow closer to God and better understand where God is leading.

In his classic article, "Consciousness Examen," Jesuit spiritual director and author George Aschenbrenner explores the Ignatian consciousness examen and its inherent link with discernment. This type of examination is not focused on good or bad actions one has done. On the contrary, the consciousness examen is focused on the manner in which God is leading or prompting women and men. Aschenbrenner explains that "examen is ultimately aimed at developing a heart with a discerning vision."[80] In contradistinction to the examination of conscience that is focused on one's deeds, be they positive or negative, the consciousness examen shines light on God's action and presence in one's life and how they motivated or precipitated one's deeds.

[78] Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 158–59.

[79] Ibid.

[80] George Aschenbrenner, "Consciousness Examen," *Review for Religious* 31 (1972): 16.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Sacramentality and Mediation

Two theological principles provide the foundation for the consciousness examen: sacramentality and mediation.[81] The two principles are closely related. Sacramentality affirms that all of creation is revelatory of God. This includes objects, people, events, the earth, and the entire cosmos. Because of this principle, it is fruitful for those seeking God to reflect daily on how God was revealed to them in ordinary occurrences. Such a practice can develop within the seeker a growing sensitivity to God's presence in life.

Mediation affirms that "created realities not only contain, reflect, or embody the presence of God, they make that presence spiritually effective for those who avail themselves of these sacred realities."[82] Jesus Christ is *the* mediator, par excellence. This principle of mediation is evident in Catholic devotion to Mary and the saints. Richard McBrien rightly explains that the faithful are drawn to these intercessors because of God's presence within each one. An encounter with the divine is transformative, and thus "spiritually effective." The principles of sacramentality and mediation imbue the consciousness examen.

Steps to a Consciousness Examen

Five steps comprise the Ignatian consciousness examen, sometimes referred to as an awareness examen. In step 1 the individual focuses on gratitude to God for the many gifts afforded. Step 2 consists of asking the Holy Spirit for guidance so that one might see as God sees. Step 3 is characterized by prayerfully reviewing the events of one's day to determine the times one was open to God and those times when one was not. This might be evident during particular moments or it may be captured by one's inclinations throughout the day. In step 4 the individual expresses sorrow for those times or attitudes when she or he was not choosing God. This is also a time to ask for healing and strength. Lastly, the individual prays for a genuine spirit of availability to God in the future so that she or he might walk more closely with God.[83]

The Ignatian consciousness examen is an invitation to a deeper relationship with God and one's self. This action toward a genuine self-knowledge is the crux of what is needed to help reflective individuals come to terms with

[81] Rivero C. Gementiza, "Putting God First: An Introduction to Consciousness Examen," *Philippiniana Sacra* 43, no. 129 (2008): 500.

[82] Richard McBrien, *Catholicism: New Edition* (New York: HarperOne, 1994), 11.

[83] David L. Fleming SJ, *Draw Me into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises* (St. Louis: Institute for Jesuit Sources, 1996), 33.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

their own bias. The consciousness examen is a graced time when one may gain insight into one's self as unconscious thoughts, inclinations for or against people, communities, ideologies, and so forth, bubble to the surface. While one may find these inclinations disconcerting, paying attention to them may be a pathway toward deepening one's sensitivity to God's movement in one's heart.

This call is also a call to justice—the same call evoked by Schillebeeckx's experiences of negative contrasts. Members of underrepresented groups are at the mercy of those with more power who have not reflected on their biases in the depth demanded by the consciousness examen. These groups particularly are those who are marginalized because of race, gender, sexual orientation, and other seemingly undesirable characteristics. The honest individual who pays attention to God's action in his or her life may come to the point of acknowledging a particular implicit bias, not a mistake of his or her own, but a product of his or her socialization.

Brackley views the consciousness examen, with a focus on bias, as "the path to clear perception." Such clear perception demands "cognitive hygiene," and he explains that cognitive hygiene does not simply involve "pure reason and conscious awareness." "It also requires untangling the habits of our hearts and ordering our commitments. And since our deepest assumptions and commitments are rooted in our identity, cognitive liberation depends on personal transformation (conversion)."[84]

While the consciousness examen for individuals can yield self-knowledge, there may be times when a communal approach could be more effective. Not much has been written about the communal consciousness examen. This approach may be particularly efficacious because bias runs deep and needs to be rooted out so that old patterns of thinking do not reappear, and a communal approach could be potentially effective in showing individuals and communities certain patterns and behaviors that may reflect a particular bias. Philip Shano, SJ, has written about communal examen of consciousness and suggests that it "can help the community as a group to attend to its daily life in a prayerful way."[85] He discusses the method used and his experience with weekly communal examen in the context of a Jesuit novitiate. His two-part approach consists of what he calls "guided examen" and "conversational examen." Part 1 is "a loving and contemplative look at our life together." Part 2

[84] Brackley, *The Call to Discernment*, 159. Schillebeeckx has written something similar: "The deepest experiences which direct and support our life are, therefore, experiences of conversion, crucifying experiences which lead us to *metanoia*, lead us to change our mind, our action, our being" (Schillebeeckx, *Church,* 28–9).

[85] Philip Shano, "Communal Examen," *Review for Religious* 68 (2009): 250–60, at 251.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"invites dialogue or conversation so that we share with the others our reflections on our community's life."[86] Sometimes listening to another's reflections on lived community can shed light on patterns or behaviors that were previously unnoticed, and the context of community among friends may increase the willingness of members to acknowledge their biases.

IV. Methodological Implications for Theologians

Brackley's insight that the path to "clear perception" is by detecting and owning one's biases is, among other things, an invitation to theologians to be attentive to their "cognitive hygiene" as they do their "faith seeking understanding." Additionally, theologians would do well to live reflective lives and engage in practices like the consciousness examen because, as Brackley reminds us, "cognitive liberation depends on personal transformation (conversion)."[87]

The detection of unconscious bias should matter to all theologians because "clear perception" is needed to accurately read the signs of the time. Only in this way can that subsequent mutual critical correlation be done with the greatest integrity. Liberationists of every kind would likewise be helped by determining their biases. This can certainly happen in tandem with a theologian's "critical reflection on Christian praxis."[88]

Awareness of one's unconscious bias also matters because it suggests an interior disharmony or disassociation between the conscious and unconscious parts of the human mind. Concretely this means that a theologian's working definition of *imago Dei* is likely to be skewed, since the theologian is influenced by bias. This knowledge need not discourage or silence theologians, but it remains a challenge to self-knowledge and growth in humility that allows one to accept and speak from one's finitude.

Lastly, attention to unconscious bias may be an important impulse for theologians of all races and ethnicities to investigate the construction of race in our society.[89] This topic could eventually prompt discourse and theological reflection. Examples of the construction of race abound in our culture,

[86] Ibid., 251.

[87] Brackley, *The Call to Discernment*, 159.

[88] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), xxix. See also James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 16–17.

[89] See Ruth Frankenburg, *The Social Construction of Whiteness* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1993); Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2014.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

since understandings of race are "an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle."[90]

Negative contrast experience was for Schillebeeckx a bridge to praxis,[91] beginning with noticing evil and injustice, then indignation, outrage, some kind of protest, and finally the praxis of the kingdom of God. In order for this process to be set in motion, women and men must come to terms with their unconscious and willed biases so that they may perceive reality rightly. Engaging daily in a rigorous consciousness examen that is attentive to our biases individually or communally can shed light on biases and enable the subjects to work on addressing the constellation of issues that surround them. This is ultimately done on behalf of those who suffer in plain sight. In this way one can deepen the efficacy of Schillebeeckx's concept of negative contrast experiences as an important pathway to the amelioration of suffering and evil.

[90] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "Racial Formation," in *Race Critical Theories*, ed. Philomena Essed and David Theo Goldberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 123–45. For instance, since the 2008 election of President Barack Obama some believe that race is no longer a barrier to success in the United States.

[91] Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 818.

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