

In the present day, race is a very touchy subject. No matter if one is speaking of it in a positive or negative sense, people become uncomfortable at its mere mention. This manner of discomfort has caused many people to want completely do away with the concept and then attempt to adopt an idea of “color blindness”. With this mentality they hope to be able to solve the issue of racial indifference, by not acknowledging them. I believe that this actually exacerbates the situation, and without completely recognizing the inequalities that exist in this country due to our race, we cannot hope solve the problem. Thus I propose that way that we resolve the error is by embracing our ethnicity. If we are to do this then we will be able to recognize our own individual racial identity, which in turn will help us to understand the connections of disparities and race. To help me properly formulate my argument I will use excerpts of work from various authors. In doing so I am only hoping to help fortify my claim of racial identity being a necessity and do not wish to promote any other idea that may be present in their text.

My first example comes through the work of Charles Mills’ *Blackness Visible*. In his work, Mills makes an argument for the relevance of African-American philosophy in the college classrooms. Although his claims are made for the purposes of enlarging the scope academia, many of his points of persuasion are appropriate in the discussion in continuing the ideas of race.

In his first chapter titled “Non-Cartesian Sums”, Mills discuss how narrow white perspective is and the link that can be seen through the classic philosophy of Rene Descartes. To do this he reminds us of the time period in which he articulated his ideas. During this era, it

was rare for people of African descent to be considered human. While they were not entirely lowered to level of animals, they most certainly never thought of be on par with their white counterparts. Mills refers to the classification as *subpersonhood*.

Charles Mills explains that the result of the *subpersonhood* mentality has caused the black stake and perspective of the world to be completely left out of the popular teachings of philosophy. In other words, mainstream philosophy has been written from white European perspective, which has no idea of how the subperson’s lifestyle. Because of this, present day African-American students see the study of philosophy as a waste of time. Mills writes;

“The peculiar features of the African-American experience –racial slavery, which is chronologically located in the modern epoch, ironically coincident with emergence of liberalism’s proclamation of universal human equality – are not part of the experience represented in the abstractions of European or Euro-American philosophers. And those who have grown up in such a universe, asked to pretend that they are living in the other, will be cynically knowing, and exchanging glances that signify ‘There the white folks go again.’ They know that what is in the books is largely mythical as a general statement of principles, that it was never intended to applicable to them in the first place, but that within the structure of power relations, as part of the routine, one has to pretend that it does.’ (Mills, pg 4)

In other words, because the narrow minded viewpoint of philosophers has been adopted as being the default for teaching the subject, the matter has all together become an unintended form of alienation. This then requires many African –American students to pretend that the issues presented in these writings of these various authors to be relevant to their situation as a minority. Because they’re connection to the material is not genuine, its meaning becomes irrelevant. It

To better illustrate this point; Mills interjects a concept from Rene Descartes’ *Meditation*. Stemming from the questioning of his own existence Descartes comes up with the

solution, "I Think Therefore I Am". This eventually becomes such a huge focal point for both the teaching and studying of philosophy, that it now presently seen as the norm. Because it is thought of a normative idea, it has thus been spread across classrooms as though it can apply to each individual.

Mills rejects this whole idea, but instead suggest that there should be another stance taken on the entire idea. Quoting an African proverb by John Mbiti he introduces the idea of: "I am because we are and since we are therefore I am." What Mills wants us to take from this citation, is the idea of a communal identity, which capture the existential experience of the black individual. This presence is one that has been denied to stand on the basis of individualism, but instead found its way through unification. Mills writes,

"It is not that blacks as a group do not exist but rather that individual blacks do not exist because blacks as a group do not exist: the nonexistence is racial. Hence the defiant, reactive 'non-Carertian sum' has a collective dimension even when expressed by individuals, because it is as a result of this imputed collective property, this propensity to disappear in white eyes, that the sum is denied in the first place." (Mills pg11)

In other words, because the idea of an individual black person is an inconceivable notion, proposing the Cartesian-sum to someone of this ethnicity becomes ridiculous. The basic structure of Rene Descartes answer is built on the fundamental principle of self-identity. However, what Mills is trying to prove is that self-identify is an entitlement of those who are not the *subperson* (ie white people). These individuals have instead been classified as a piece of a unit and therefore cannot fully be identified without referring back to their group.

It is here that the connection between Charles Mills' non-Cartesian sum argument and the concept of race as a whole. For those who are able to connect with Descartes teachings,

they see race as a disposable factor in their life. After all, they're existence is something that they can be proven on their own. Those who live under the guise of the *subperson* are associated as a member of the race from birth and therefore are never able to shake this attribute. Thus it becomes a fundamental piece their identity.

While it could be argued that this way of life of the subperson appears to be a detrimental way of life, there are strong points that can be made as it being a necessity. For example if one is able to acknowledge his/her membership within a group, they are also to recognize there are levels to their identity in this country.

One person who is able to articulate the importance concept through philosophical means is, Dr. Dorothy Leland. In her piece, "Conflictual Culture and Authenticity: Deepening Heidegger's Account of the Social", Leland writes a critique of Heidegger's philosophy on authentic and in-authentic Dasein. What is most interesting about her criticism is that she does it based upon another analysis of Heidegger's work, written by Charles Guignon. In Guignon's essay, he attempts to disprove the existential stance that many psychotherapists have taken with regards to Heidegger's philosophy. While they generally believe that the correct way to prove one's authenticity is by pulling away society (the "they"), Guignon believes that this is actually a weakness toward our struggle for authentication. Instead, the writer believes that by becoming more involved with the "they" our Dasein is able to establish its place within the culture and heritage of the world. By this we can discover the true authentication for existence. However, Dorothy Leland has issue with his claim. While she agrees with Guignon's

fundamental argument of being involved in the “they”, she thinks his claim does not go far enough. She states,

“It [Guignon’s argument] provides a useful framework for working out accounts of agency in which the communal nature of human being takes center stage. However, the framework is limited, particularly if applied to the historical/cultural realities in which we actually live...the framework obscures the way in which groups can be differently situated within a given historical/cultural realm.” [Leland pg111-112]

In Leland’s opinion, Guignon’s idea of the social “they” is too general. She believes that he has left out the fact that society operates on a hierarchy of the dominant and the oppressed. The people who belong to this subdued group not only belong to the overall “they” populace, but are also a part of a “they” which is a subset of the general form. “Guignon tends to homogenize the cultural and historical ‘we’”... she states, “and to downplay the existence of conflicting and oppositional narratives concerning fundamental matter such as what ‘goods’ are to be taken as normative or what normative or what moral maps of aspiration and evaluation’ ought to prevail”. [Leland pg 117]. By generalizing the “we” and not acknowledging that there are different aspects of it (ie there are woman and then there are Latina women), Leland asserts that Guignon neglects that there are differences in goals and opinions of certain people within our society. In her reading, she uses the life of Native Americans and immigrants as her example.

For the Native Americans she uses proof gained from the autobiographical work *Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native Daughter* by Janet Campbell Hales, and descendent of the Coeur d’Alene Tribe. The argument that Leland gathers from here is that the differences of their culture and the culture of the dominant do not blend together. Instead the oppressed cultures

and the values of the oppressed get ignored, resulting in an assimilation of the controlled into the controlling people’s culture. This hinders any type of true unity that Guignon believes happens in the form of the “they” self. Leland explains “Stated in the narrative mode, this assimilation involved obliterating the ‘folktales, stories, anecdotes, and histories ‘ that articulated and sustained the practices of the Couer d’Alene and replacing them with the ‘moral map’ of the dominant.” [Leland pg 119] The result of this cultural absorption is an inauthenticity of the Dasein of the oppressed body.

From here, Leland leads us into the consequences of such practices. Acquired from the text of Mexican-American writer Gloria Anzaldua’s book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Leland believes that those who have assimilated into the dominant cultural still feel like outsiders. This assertion is obtained from Anzaldua’s use of the word “borderline”. In her book she uses it as a metaphor to explain the “barrier to being either wholly Anglo or wholly Mexicana.” [Leland pg 119] This results in a feeling of being lost and misplacement within society, which makes it impossible for these people to fully commit to the “they”. This is where Leland finds origin in her term conflictual-culture, which she defines as “a culture in which there are fundamental divisions over what is important, possible, and permissible...” [Leland pg 120]

In the last few pages of her article, Leland attempts to summarize the issue of why the concept of Dasein seems so be so one sized. She explains,

“Heidegger developed the ideal in terms of his own Dasein and historical situation. It stemmed from what Pierre Bourdieu has called the ‘*volkisch* mood’ that affected the vision of the social world held by a generation of conservative German intellectuals during the early decades of *das Man* a less confused distinction between conformity and conformism than Heidegger was able to articulate, it is important not to lose sight of the

understanding of the social world and the engagement with Christianity that the distinction in its very confusions reflects.

[Leland pg 123]

In other words, we should not forget the period of time in which Heidegger developed his concept of the Dasein and das Man. While it may have been truly relevant during the philosopher's time, we should be careful not to assume that we can simply take it and apply to the world that we presently live in. With that in mind, Leland believes that we still have not truly seen a case where the oppressed have been able to successfully establish themselves within the general "they", while not falling into conformity. However, there have been instances in American history where the oppressed have attempted to resist the norms of the dominant "they" in order claim what speaks relevant to their own authenticity.

Using the Black Nationalist Movement as an example, the pride of the young African Americans gain from the culture and stories of their own subset history allows for them to resist the feeling of lost-ness within the larger sphere of society. In turn, these ethnic youths become connected to one another, through recognition of a racial tie.

Unfortunately the continuous domination of the general culture persists in their lives. This prevents this type of lifestyle from truly blossoming due to "practices of reauthorization, suppression, surveillance, and appropriation." [Leland pg 124] There ideas and ways of life are seen as the "other" or non-normative. As a result, the majority remains above the oppressed and the aspects of conflictual culture are un-equal in availability.

In closing, Leland warns that her argument may not be fully accepted by "Heidegger purist", because she does not mention the ideas of being-anxious or fleeing from anxiety. But

she explains that she does feel this is relevant if there is no acknowledgement made for the "not-at-homeness" that felt for the oppressed groups with the "they". Until it is fully comprehended the problems authenticity and in-authenticity shall perpetuate.

While I agree with the complaints that Dorothy Leland made towards Guignon's argument against the traditional psychotherapist's opinion of Heidegger's Dasein. I believe both their viewpoints and that of the existentialist are too extreme. I think that the most beneficial route to take is to equally spend time alone in authenticity as well with the societal "they". By doing so we will be able to recognize that we are an individual but at the same time we are also participants in society. Through this we can see that our identity is not a one-dimensional concept, but is in fact multi-tiered.

Looking back at *Being and Time*, we can see that Heidegger makes it a point to explain that when we immerse ourselves into the "they" our Dasein transforms from authentic to being in-authentic. In the text he states,

"The Self of everyday Dasein is the they-self, which we distinguish from the authentic Self." [BT pg 167] As we interact with others in the "they" we lose sight of the things that are important to our own being in exchange for is important the society we throw ourselves into. As Heidegger states our Dasein becomes "dispersed in the world we encounter closest to us." [BT pg 167].

For this reason I believe that it is important that we have an equal investment in both of individual self as well as our "they" self. By putting more time developing our identity in a way that is distance from society, we cripple the development of our Dasein. However, I can see why existentialists would believe such an extreme is necessary.

When we hear the term in-authentic we automatically tend to think of things in a negative light. For example, if some one tells you that an item that you own is inauthentic, 99% of the time it is not a good thing. Surprisingly however, this fact does not reign true when applied to Heidegger's philosophy on Dasein.

This truth can be seen within his writings he states, "In-authenticity' does not mean anything like Being-no-longer-in-the-world, but amounts rather to a quite distinctive kind of Being-in-the-world –the kind which is completely fascinated by the 'world' and by the Dasein with of Others in the "they" [BT pg 176]. In other words, in-authenticity is just normal alternate form of our Dasein. That means our thrownness into everydayness of the "they" is perfectly normal and should be an expected aspect of our lives.

The term in-authentic generally refers the guidance of our Dasein and the motivation for the actions we take while we are involved in our "they" forms. When we are engaged with others in our everydayness we lose focus on what is important to our own being. We no longer act in a way that is beneficial solely for our own function within the world, but what helps everyone in our immediate social sphere as a whole. For example, when we obey laws like not stealing from others, we do so to ensure that society is decent place to inhabit. Rarely do we do so because our own morals adhere us from doing so, but only because it is a law that we have learned to obey because we are taught to do so.

The dilemma of this type of mentality is what causes our Dasein to behave in a manner, in which Heidegger refers to as "averageness". In our average form, we merely go along with what are told to do, which is ok because in order for Dasein to prosper in its "they" form.

However, consistent immersion in this system of living is not good, because we can never discover our motivations and moral, aka our authentic self.

As it can be seen, in order for our Dasein to reach its full potential we must commit to being authentic in our aloneness as well as with the "they". However as Dorothy Leland has pointed out through he article, we must also acknowledge the fact that there are subsets of within the "they" and their goals and ideals should be given equal attention. With out doing so we run the risk of endangering the existence of our Dasein.

There are two things that are important to take away from Leland's work. The first is the understanding the importance that both the individual and "they" self has on our existence. By doing so, we are able to realize that we have two form of our identity, and cannot neglect one for the other. The second thing is the notion of our existence being broken into sub categories. This premise calls on us to dive deeper in the examination of who we are as a person within our world and consequently we are able to excavate an entire history of who we are culturally. . For example, instead of simply being an American, we brake that down to being an Asian-American, and then that can be broken down even further to being a Korean-Asian-American or a Japanese-Asian-American.

Unfortunately, those who oppose the use of race, unintentionally call for our perspective to stop simply at the top line of being an "American". They are unaware of how they are damaging their existence. Author Naomi Zack is one person who showcases this type of danger through her written piece entitled, *Their Sameness*,

Difference, and Interplay. Through her research on race and concept of The New Reference Theory, which promotes the idea that race is something that is only mental through two philosophical categories of Essentialism and Nominalism.

In her paper She describes Essentialism as being “doctrines of essence and substance, things are what they are because they contain the essences of the kinds to which they belong.(Zack pg 20) In the other words everything that is defined in this world is done so naturally , because the essence of what something is made of, is what defines it. For example a dog is defined by what makes a dog a dog. These features of a dog cannot be changed otherwise it would no longer be a dog. Furthermore, these sets of characteristics cannot be mixed with the essences, such as that of a cat in order for it to remain as a dog. Zack comments that scientists of the nineteenth-century took this idea and applied it to race in order to justify the belief of the hierarchy within the racial sphere. She then quickly destroys this claim by stating;

“We expect folk world views to lag behind scientific ones, but these nineteenth-century racial theories are a case study of science turning away from empiricist philosophy and it’s methodological implications. For example, nineteenth-century scientists of race did not attempt to isolate “racial essences” for study but merely spoke vaguely of those essences as “in the blood”. Insofar as a universal negation can be affirmed, it is now accepted by scientists that there are no racial essences, which inhere in individuals and determine their racial membership. Nevertheless varied combinations of ancient philosophical essentialism and nineteenth-century scientific racialism linger to this day in American folk concepts of race.” (Zack pg30)

The ability for procreation between different races is the key to her dismantling of race. If race was actually relevant in the real world then there would never be a possibility for them to mix, and like cats and dogs, they would have remain totally separated.

With this method of reasoning disproven, Naomi Zack moves to the second principle known as, nominalism, originally created by seventeenth century English philosopher, John Locke. Locke’s nominalism basically concluded that all objects are defined by a set of basic characteristics. The definition of an entity, or what Locke calls the “intention”, is based upon the extension.. In order for an intention to be accurate it must be composed of both the necessary and sufficient conditions. The necessary is the dependent characteristics that must be included in the makeup of an object in order for it to be what it is. For example, in order to be a student it is necessary to be taught by a teacher. In order for a sufficient component to be met there must be a criterion that allows it to be obtained. It is sufficient to feel hungry if you have had nothing to eat.

Taking this concept Naomi Zack discredits race based on the following reasoning;

“...the failure of ‘race’ against nominalist meaning criteria is that there are no necessary, sufficient, or necessary and sufficient conditions of individual human biological traits, which need be present for black or white racial designation. Consider black designation, first. The group of American blacks has been estimated to have 30 percent of the genes for characteristics considered racial that the group of American whites has...In the language of nominalism, the terms “black and white purport to have mutually exclusive intensions and should therefore have mutually exclusive extensions, which they do not.... Therefore unlike the previous case of race and essentialism, where the philosophic theory was itself defective on scientific ground, the problem here with the term ‘race’ and not with nominalism.” (Zack page 35)

With the argument established that the word race is a faulty device on its own. This leaves room for her New Theory of Reference claim to move into play. Without something tangible to define race, then the definition thus becomes pointless and can be dismissed from our lives. By eliminating race Zack is attempting help us to see the flaws of racial superiority and bigotry, thus ushering in a mentality that no matter what race we are, we are all equal.

While I totally agree with Zack's motives for her theories, I believe that simply getting rid of race does more harm than good. Societies such as America have been built on upon race and other human classifications. As a result generations upon generation of people have been either privileged or under-privileged because of the ramifications of this system. By simply eradicating race, we lose sight of this fact, and thus cannot do anything to fix the issue. Ironically the key reason that an idea such as this is even plausible to people like Zack is due to the unfair given to her white race.

As member of the majority, white people hold most the power of how our society functions. As result, their attributes are thought of to be the social norm and thus they are not forced to feel the constant burden of their race. In all fairness, they actually are able to choose when and when they are not associated with their racial group. Thus many have lost the possibility to even see themselves as being a member of the white race.

To better gain an understanding, believe it is best to turn to writer Frances Kendall and her book, *Understanding White Privilege*. In chapter three of her book, she writes; "Many of us who are white have little sense of what that means...We see ourselves as individuals rather than as member of groups...Generally we choose to be viewed as individuals, and take offense at those who point out our group membership." (Kendall pg41) Because white people tend to take themselves out of the equation, and instead speak on race through a third person perspective, the dialogue then becomes full of hypotheticals. This allows issue to become disposal, urged to be thrown away.

Kendell's most relevant stamen comes a few pages later in the chapter when she too discusses the fault in "color-blindness". She states;

"...the objective of being 'color-blind is much the same. I put it in quotation marks because I don't believe being color-blind is possible in terms of race. I think it is used to obscure what is really going on. If we aren't forced to deal with color –ours or others'- we can pretend that we don't live in a society totally stratified by race. We can act as though there are no racial disparities in health care, ability to purchase a home or rent an apartment (given the same financial history), or get a job, have police protection, and on and on. If we don't see color, then we don't have to question why Black and Latina/o children aren't doing as well as white and Asian children on standardized tests..."(Kendell pg 51).

The mere fact that our society is based around race, promotes our inability to ever annul it. As Kendell stated above many of the core disparities that are most prevalent within this country are rooted in race and without actually acknowledging it, we run into the problem of simply running in circles around the issue. This is the reason why I believe that race is a necessary aspect of our society.

Right now I think it is most appropriate to recap all the points I have presented in order help finalize my point on race. As I have shown through the works of Charles Mills, there is a western urge to cling to individuality. While this is all well and good, it not true possibility for everyone. People such as, African-American and Latino/a Americans for example have an identity that is rooted with who they are racial. Thus they therefore are unable to simply think of themselves without thinking of the group that they belong to.

Keeping this in mind, Dorothy Leland shows us that acknowledgment of our racial "they" self actually promotes a better understanding of who we are within the context of our world. When then must consider that while on one side we are own individual self, we are also a piece

of puzzle that has a connection to many different “they” selves. Unfortunately the further we investigate the depth of our multi-“they” identity; we begin to see that they do not all have an equal balance of power.

Thus people such a Naomi Zack hope to solve this problem by suggesting that we halt our view simple at the point where all connected, despite the color of skin. Sadly this does not solve any issue of equality, but simple causes us to ignore the reason for why they are there.

What I believe we must do is to fully acknowledge that because of our differences attributed to our races in the past we do not all have an equal footing on the playing field at the present day. As Francis Kendell has shown, this will require white people to come to the realization that they all possess some sort of unfair privileges based on their own race. By doing so we will be able to truly see the faults in our current society and then move on to change them. If we work hard enough to abolish the differences, race will soon fizzle itself out of our world. But until we reach that point in time we cannot eradicate the ethical concepts that our society has been built up. For this reason I strongly believe that race is a necessity.

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