

In “The Racial Contract” Charles Mills defines a race traitor as a white person who rejects the inherent privilege of being white, and who attempts to combat the inequalities of the racial contract. Since a white person’s job as a signatory of the racial contract is to propagate white supremacy by working against colored people and for other whites, a person who treats colored people equally or goes so far as to attempt to balance out inequities in society by treating colored people better than whites is a traitor to the racial contract.

Mills argues that white people in the United States ought to be race traitors. Since the view the racism is wrong is widely held, once white people realize that they are upholding the racial contract in their daily lives they should attempt to become race traitors. The problem of dysconsciousness often leads white people to not see the racism that exists, but it is there to be seen never the less.

One way in which whites can be race traitors in the US is by righting the economic inequalities inherent in the racial contract. Reparations or a redistribution of wealth equally instead of along racial lines would be one step towards destroying the racial contract. Mills suggests, “wealth is more important than income in determining the likelihood of future racial equalization, since it has a cumulative effect that is passed down through intergenerational transfer, affecting life chances and opportunities for one’s children.” (Mills, 37) So an evening out of the economic status of whites and non-whites would have a major effect upon overall equality within the United States.

The most difficult to implement aspect of being a race traitor is the demand by Mills that the equality outlined by enlightenment social contract theorists be applied not only to whites, but to all peoples as it actually states. The white people of the US ought to demand that non-whites

be treated in reality as the equals of whites politically, socially, and individually. As to how this might be accomplished Mills does not say, and one can only speculate.

Individuals can take action to be race traitors. By treating others as equal to whites, and not upholding the racial contract an individual can help to end racism. Education is another key aspect to being a race traitor. By educating oneself as to the culture and customs of another people whites can be race traitors. Also, in the business world hiring not based upon race, and treating co-workers as people the barrier of race can be partially torn down. Basically any action that does not propagate white supremacy and in fact works against it can help to end the racial contract.

Locke creates what he calls imperatives of feeling. These are values that are created not from cognitive reasoning, but instead from emotions that arise from our feeling modes. “We as human beings experience values as a primary element of our original perception of situations and objects, rather than as a separate and secondary re-description of an originally value-free experience.” (Green, 112)

Value conflict is a major reason for strife between peoples. Locke argues though that an individual is capable of changing the feeling mode that one is in, and thereby arriving at a new value that no longer conflicts with others values. By changing the underlying imperative of feeling true value change can occur. “We can to some extent consciously, reflectively choose to adopt a different attitude or mode of feeling laden perception toward the object or situation.” (Green, 113)

An important aspect of imperatives of feeling is that they are spread culturally. “Certain value feeling-modes tend to become dominant though never universal among people who share a form of life within a relational economic and geopolitical situation.” (Green, 114) Locke argues that little can be done to combat value differences on a rational level. “Instead, the solution lies in understanding and reeducating the natural dynamic of our feeling-modes.” (Green, 114)

The idea of imperatives of feeling apply to “The Racial Contract” in a few key ways. First it gives an explanation of how cultures develop similar value systems. Secondly, and more importantly, it gives a possible solution. If an event or rational thought can convince people to change their modes of feeling, then they can possibly change their imperatives of feelings and bring about new non-conflicting values systems.

Mills attempts to explain how whites can bring about the destruction of the racial contract through becoming race traitors. Locke’s imperatives of feelings explain how this might be

brought about. If whites could change their modes of feeling and thereby re-evaluate their values systems they might be able to change the conflicting values of white supremacy and equality.

Locke shows that reason alone can not do this:

Little can be done toward the explanation or their reconciliation on the rational plane.

Perhaps this is the truth that Brentano came near laying hands on when he suggested a love-hate dimensionality as fundamental to all valuation. Certainly the fundamental opposition of value modes and the attitudes based upon them has been one of the deepest sources of human division and conflict. The role of feeling can never be understood nor controlled through minimizing it; to admit it is the beginning of practical wisdom in such matters. (Green, 114)

Locke also talks about the reciprocity between races that would be possible with the imperatives of feeling. By changing the preferred feeling-modes he argues that races could see briefly how the other group came to their value system. This would allow for a degree of reciprocity that would convince more whites to become race traitors. "Trying on the other's preferred lens may allow us to see the object or situation approximately as the other sees it, which will bring a certain appreciation of the resultant value perceptions. (Green, 115)

Another aspect of imperatives of feelings is, "As a working principle, it divorces proper value loyalty from unjustifiable value bigotry releases a cult from blind identification with creed and dogma, and invests no value interest with monopoly or permanent interest." (Green, 116)

This is important because it allows whites to separate the values of whiteness from cultural values that are proper and should be continued. Being a race traitor does not mean abandoning white culture, it means abandoning those aspects of white culture that oppress non-whites.

Locke's imperatives of feelings help to justify and support the views of Charles Mills as outlined in "The Racial Contract". The idea provides a framework for the race traitor to be created, and to create new value systems from the old system of whiteness. In this area it is invaluable. It also allows for the reciprocity between cultures that is necessary for the eventual destruction of the racial contract and the creation of true social contracts.