DIVERSITY: LOOKING AHEAD
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Introduction

What is the future of diversity in the human community? The short answer is that it is good; we are making progress within the communities to which we belong. The cautionary note, however, is that the path is up and down, forward and back, but with encouraging momentum nonetheless. What gives us hope for the future? What impedes our way? Are there things we can do to facilitate the forward movement, to equip ourselves to successfully respond to the impediments?

One way to think about these questions is to examine the ways we approach diversity work and how they affect the larger society. Diversity work done by professionals with individuals and in the context of organizations has the potential of great contributions to the communities within which we live our lives. Some diversity strategies have a more direct effect than others. However, even though there are distinctions to be found in the various approaches to diversity work, it is also important to recognize the synthesis of these differences.

First, there is a distinction between diversity work undertaken as a means to some further end and that which is done as an end in itself. Means to ends are valued extrinsically, in terms of whether they accomplish the goal, while an end in itself is intrinsically valuable. Both approaches to diversity work are necessary, valuable and successful but they are different in terms of intent, how the outcomes are to be measured and the ways in which society as a whole is affected. Initially, I will consider these contrasts as though they are actually distinct and separate. Then, I will look at the relationship between these two perspectives. They are connected, certainly, but in what way?

A second difference in the way diversity work is done relates to whether the strategy is aimed at specific kinds of problems, such as racism or sexism, or whether the focus involves

the general meaning of diversity, its value and the underlying and shared propensity to devalue our human differences. In an inexact way, this distinction is connected with the previous one in that training about specifics of sexism or racism may involve simply promoting alterations in behaviors. By contrast, educating toward a change of heart can engender inherent respect and appreciation for women, peoples of colors and others who are marginalized in society.

What I offer here relies on my experience as a philosopher and educator. I also "do diversity work" but in an optimal setting, the classroom. Because students choose my course, Ethics of Diversity, and their grade is at stake, I am able to require in depth reading, thinking, discussing and writing over a period of some 10 weeks. I understand that these conditions are not readily available to most diversity professionals. Furthermore, as an ethicist, my diversity work, both in the classroom and in my communities, is based wholly on the moral dimensions of diversity.

Before proceeding, I want to provide a general context for my remarks by sharing my understanding of the meaning and import of diversity. Although there are multiple definitions of diversity, the context within which we work might be further illuminated by a metaphor drawn from our human relationships with nature, varied and complex as they are. Aldo Leopold, in his seminal work *Sand County Almanac,* published more than 50 years ago, created a paradigm shift in human attitudes about nature which is still in process and gaining acceptance.[1]   He noted that then, and still today, human relationships with nature are primarily dominated by economics. In this sense, nature is extrinsically valuable to us, that is it is valuable primarily as a means to our ends. We harvest trees for lumber, dam rivers for hydroelectric power, fish the oceans, mine the depths of the earth for minerals, and so on. In this sense, nature exists as an object for human use. This orientation often leads human beings to fragment nature into the parts that are economically valuable and permits disregard for that which is perceived as not

useful. Leopold's years as a biologist, however, taught him to see nature in a different and, at that time, radically new way. Instead of a fragmentary conception of nature, Leopold's vision was more expansive and inclusive. He saw that all of the different aspects of nature functioned together as a whole, including those parts without economic value, and were necessary to the good health and thriving of the natural world. This holistic view, quite importantly, includes human beings as part of nature; if the natural world is threatened and vulnerable, so too are we.

First, Leopold points out that the economically valuable parts of nature cannot survive without the non-economically valuable parts. We are coming to understand that a fragmentary perspective of nature, one that appreciates only the economically valuable parts, leads to many practices that are less than optimal. For example, from the perspective of economics alone we created practices such as the clear cutting of forests, removing the trees for which there is a market and then bulldozing the remaining kinds of trees and brush into large stacks, called slash piles, and burning them. These former forests are then replanted with a single species of trees, ones that are economically valuable. There is, however, a profound difference between a forest and a tree farm, between a diverse ecosystem and a monoculture. Leopold concluded that the economically valuable parts of nature required, could not thrive without, the aspects of nature which are of no direct use to human beings.   Tree farms are vulnerable in ways that forests are not. A forest is a rich mixture of flora and fauna, all interrelated and functioning together for the greatest well-being of each and the whole. On the other hand, tree farms, although easier to harvest, are vulnerable to disruption by disease because the dynamic arrangement of the whole, within which trees normally grow, is no longer present to provide a support network that might repel or accommodate threats to its health. I am suggesting that we take these ideas and apply them to the human communities within which we work and live.

In addition to introducing an inclusive conception of nature through the ecosystems

approach, Leopold goes on to ask whether nature is valuable only extrinsically, that is solely as a means to an end. Is there, also, some value inherent in the natural world beyond the ways in which we use it? Here he is asking about intrinsic value, what he calls "value in the philosophic sense." I think it behooves us to ask this same questions about the complex and diverse human community as well. Although diversity work aimed at some further result or end is necessary, important and valuable, we can also ask whether there is an intrinsic value to embracing the wide range of ways that human beings are and live. Beyond profits, expanded markets, customer intimacy and efficient functioning, is it important to comprehend and appreciate the incredibly rich and complex human community itself? Can we really know who we are as human beings without such an awareness? What might we accomplish if we take Leopold's insights about nature and understand the human community as truly interrelated and interdependent?

For some 25 centuries, at least as long as recorded western Greek-based society has existed, we have held a view of human beings much like we have traditionally viewed the natural world. We have made the assumption, for example, that only certain kinds of people were useful and valuable in certain environments.[2] In business and government in our society, white educated men have been perceived of generally as the only kind of human being who could fulfill roles requiring intelligent decision making and leadership. Others, including women and people of color, have been relegated to physical labor and varying kinds of support work. In other words, there was one type of human being who was considered primarily economically valuable, while others were considered more or less fungible. This way of thinking, which produces a monoculture of sorts in business and government, has left these kinds of organizations, and arguably society as a whole, vulnerable and functioning in a less than optimal manner. For all kinds of reasons, from increased profits to human relationships, self-

conceptions and the well being of society, we have come to realize that the rich mix of human beings in all our varied expressions offers the human community its healthiest existence.   In the same way that foresters are finding that maintaining the ecosystem of forests is more productive in the end, business and government organizations are in the process of embracing the array of human beings in order to continue performing in a vital, effective and efficient manner. Diversity professionals are developing an ecologically sound human community, both locally and globally, one which is healthier and more productive.

        In what follows, I hope to contribute to clarification about the underpinnings of diversity itself and the ways in which diversity professionals approach their work. Understanding how these general approaches are related may point toward a more unified framework within which diversity work may be understood and evaluated. The analysis is applicable to personal and organizational diversity, locally and globally.

Means and Ends

        One way examine diversity work is to draw a distinction between that which aims at some further end and that done as an end in itself. This distinction between means and ends is very basic and familiar. The end is the goal sought while the means are the way to achieve or reach the goal.   Tools are, by definition, means to ends. A gardener uses a shovel to turn the soil.   She or he wants the soil to be cultivated and one way this is achieved is through the use of the shovel. The end is cultivated soil, the means is the shovel and, of course, physical labor. The use of tools is familiar, whether they are as low tech as a shovel or as sophisticated as computers.   Immanuel Kant, an 18th century philosopher drew a further distinction, that between using people as means or tools to our own ends and treating them as ends in themselves. I use people as means to buy my groceries, fill my gas tank,[3] take my order and

deliver the food in a restaurant, etc. Diversity professionals also function as means to achieving the goals of whatever organizations hire them. Teachers, like me, are means to students' educations. In each of these cases, there is a goal or end sought and a means of achieving it. There is, however, a very important difference between persons and things.

Kant's greatest contribution to ethics is the principle that we ought to always treat persons as ends in themselves, that is with respect.[4] People, on this view, although useful as means to someone else's ends, are valuable in and of themselves. The gas station attendant, grocery checker or waiter may be used as means but, at the same time, they are to be respected as ends in themselves, that is to say that what they are doing for me is only part of who they are.   To fail to acknowledge the inherent value of each individual confuses the all-important difference between persons and things, between means and ends, between extrinsic and intrinsic value.

In general terms, most diversity initiatives seek an end beyond the simple respect for each individual and an appreciation of the diverse human community involved there. This is what I mean by diversity work done as a means to a further end. These kinds of diversity initiatives are evaluated according to the end goals sought and are, thus, valued extrinsically. Another approach to diversity work, however, aims directly toward personal and relational transformation in terms of respect and appreciation for human variety in itself.   In this discussion, I am characterizing the latter as diversity work done as an end in itself.[5] Both kinds of approaches have strengths and weaknesses and have the potential to affect the future of diversity in society.

Means to Ends

Diversity work undertaken as a means to some other end is motivated by prudence, that

is to say, it is a strategically intelligent thing to do. In business, for example, this end might be creation of or access to expanded markets or development of a wider range of products aimed at creating a more varied customer base. Business may also seek increased diversity in order to create a more harmonious workplace, an environment with less tension and more cooperation, conditions which lead to greater efficiency and productivity. The primary impetus for expanded markets, customer intimacy, cooperative workplaces, *et al* is, at the bottom line, business success. Diversity work is also undertaken by business to repair a damaged public image because it negatively impacts the willingness of many kinds of customers to seek whatever this business offers. There have been well-publicized cases of corporate chains which have been held up for general public condemnation because of racism or sexism and this cannot but impede the success of the business.

It is also the case that diversity programs are initiated or expanded to satisfy Federal and State law, for example because of consent decrees or, more positively, to fulfill affirmative action requirements. Also in terms of law, diversity professionals may also make valuable contributions to some of our vexing social problems. For example, law enforcement organizations may benefit greatly from training, education and awareness in order that they are able to more fairly apply existing laws. The phenomenon of racial profiling in traffic stops, the unequal imposition of criminal sentences and, especially, the uneven administration of capital punishment call for changes in ways we behave toward some of our diverse population. Several years ago in Oregon, where I live, Edwin Peterson, a highly respected and retired Chief Justice of the state Supreme Court, initiated and coordinated an effort to gather and analyze statistics from within the justice system itself in order to determine whether racial and ethnic differences made a measurable difference in the application of criminal law.[6] The study found, not surprisingly, that in terms of fairness and equality, the police, courts and judiciary had quite

some ways to go to assure equal justice under the law.   As a result of this study, some policies

and laws have been changed, police training programs have intensified efforts to alter

behaviors impacting certain groups and individuals practitioners within the judicial system have

been encouraged to participate in diversity seminars, all with the aim of rectifying the unequal

treatment and injustice manifested in the legal system of my state.

Like businesses with damaged public images, the primary reason law enforcement and

judicial systems have sought greater acceptance of our human differences is to instill greater

confidence in the public. Order and civility in society depend upon confidence in equal justice

and failure in this regard is a matter of deepest concern. The New Jersey cases of racial

profiling, the reported injustices of the Los Angeles Police Department's Ramparts Division and

the frequent killing of Black men by the Cincinnati police provide examples requiring repair of

seriously damaged public images with the concomitant loss of respect and confidence on the

part of the general public.

In all the foregoing kinds of situations, the end sought is a change in behavior of the

people involved and this is most directly accomplished through training programs. The goal of

the organization might be to alter behaviors to comply with policies, rules and/or laws. To this

end, it may be sufficient to minimize or eliminate offending words and actions on the job. How

the employee behaves elsewhere in her or his life is outside the scope of these kinds of

diversity initiatives. Regardless of a police officer's beliefs about racial and ethnic differences,

does he treat all citizens equally? A man might be forbidden to post a sexually suggestive

calendar or tell titillating jokes in the break room or on company e-mail.   A woman may be

required to delete the racist language that corrodes her conversations with coworkers. A

restaurant corporation may need to be consciously aware of seating and serving people of all

ethnic groups in a like manner to white customers. Police officers may be required to keep

detailed records of why and when and where they stop all drivers, to make sure that they are not practicing "racial profiling."

When specific goals are sought, the results of the diversity professional's work will be evaluated according to extrinsic values, that is, does it produce the desired results? Whether or not the individuals involved experience a personal transformation is of secondary concern and importance, at best. How the employees act outside the context of their work setting is beyond the scope of the training. The man, forbidden to act in a degrading sexist way in the work place, may frequent nude dancing establishments, access on line pornography and may belittle (or worse) women with whom he comes into contact elsewhere. The woman may refused to share a taxi with a person of color, send her children to all white schools and actively work against Affirmative Action laws on her own time. That the employee *behaves* in an appropriate manner at work is the end sought and training undertaken to accomplish this is the means. The degree of success will be measured by behavioral changes required by the organization, that is, the training will be evaluated extrinsically. These measurements can be taken through observation and objective data.   Does the diversity program accomplish the stated goals of the business or institution? The effects these kinds of programs have on the larger society, if any, are unpredictable.

Ends In Themselves

Another kind of diversity work is motivated by ethics, i.e., justice and equality. I am characterizing this kind of work as that which is done as an end in itself. By this, I mean diversity work which is aimed at personal transformation. This is the heart of the matter, both metaphorically and actually. The very core of diversity work seeks changes in perceptions of those identified as different and involves opening people's hearts to their human brothers and

sisters. This kind of diversity work is aimed, then, at the attitudes and beliefs upon which our

behaviors are based and has the greatest potential for creating changes in the larger society.

This is also the kind of diversity work I do in my classroom.   I suspect that this is also the

orientation of most diversity professionals to their work regardless of the limitations within which

most must work, that is, configuring diversity work to respond to the needs and plans of those

by whom we are employed.

Although I am unfamiliar with the full range and variety of kinds of diversity work done by

professionals, I assume that most organizations seek professionals for the primary purpose of

the economic health and/or efficient functioning of the organization itself. Some corporations,

however, also include personal transformation as a stated goal of diversity initiatives. For

example, Hewlett-Packard, which has a large production site where I live, includes personal

transformation as a stated goal of their diversity initiative. They say that "behaviors and actions

come from conviction" and, for the 21st century, have characterized their diversity goals as

"actualizing cross-cultural understanding and acceptance."   From this, it is clear that Hewlett-

Packard's orientation to diversity extends beyond the observable on-the-job behavior of their

work force to include personal changes which will benefit the larger society.[7]

Barriers to work aimed at "the heart of the matter" are many.   For this reason, I think it

is crucially important to acknowledge that each of us wants very much to believe that we are

honorable human beings and that we do not intend harm to others, especially in the ways

important to diversity initiatives. It is so deeply important to us to keep this perception of

ourselves intact, we call upon a myriad of defense mechanisms, most of which are familiar, I

am sure, to diversity professionals. There is individual resistance that comes from not wanting

to believe that we each have been misinformed in ways that have affected our human decency

in regards to one another. Then there is guilt which arises when we realize that, without our

knowledge or consent, we have participated in the maintenance of beliefs and institutions which

maintain the hierarchical structuring of humanity which is so very harmful to each of us and our

society as a whole. There is also a deep fear that there will be loss in terms of status and

economics if we base our relationships on equality and justice. It does not matter whether

these losses are actual or perceived; the fear itself is real.   However, as difficult as this

approach may be, the rewards are great.

The strength of this approach is that the transformed person is ready, willing and able to

make a variety changes. Education here is highly successful. Increased awareness and

understanding of the human community become part of who the person is and he or she is

therefore able to make important contributions to the organization and to the wider community

in which the organization functions. An important result of personal transformation is that

society as a whole is more likely to be positive affected; if a person has undergone a personal

transformation, their behavior will remain consistent whether they are on the job, in the

community or at home. Thus, there are good reasons to think that education is an efficient and

effective route to attaining an inclusive diverse community, however that community might be

constituted.

A drawback of this approach is that the organization does not appear to gain anything

from transformative diversity work beyond the required behavioral changes. Why invest the

funds required for the intensive, time-consuming kinds of education required for transformation

on a personal level when training in terms of behavior will suffice to accomplish the workplace

dynamics required?   A second difficulty arises here when we consider how one might measure

the success of this kind of diversity work. I have suggested that personal diversity work is done

as an end in itself, that is, the value is intrinsic. If a person undergoes a change at the core of

their being regarding how they perceive other human beings in a way which is accepting and

embracing, success has been achieved but measuring intrinsic value is difficult. Although one

could look to evidence of behavioral changes and attainment of organizational goals, it would

seem that success in terms of inner changes in employees, for example, would at best be

estimated in terms of personal reports and other subjective instruments. Finally, personal

transformation does not necessarily assure that someone will be able to recognize the more

discreet and subtle kinds of unintended offense to others. My experiences have shown me that

there are layers and layers of subtleties which continue to be revealed in regards to being with

others we have been taught to perceive as different. There does not appear to be any "fix"

which works once and for all.

Synthesis of Means and Ends

        I have presented two distinct ways of approaching diversity work in the abstract sense,

that is as though they are actually discreet and separate. Diversity work done as a means to an

end, that is, to accomplish specific goals is based on behavior and training and is evaluated

extrinsically. On the other hand, personal transformative work, to create a change of heart, is

the kind of diversity work I have characterized as being done as an end in itself. The value of

this is intrinsic, that is, it is sufficient unto itself when successful. These two orientations are

distinct, not only theoretically but also in terms of the aims of the organizations that hire

diversity professionals, the strategies they employ and the methods of evaluation. However, it

is clear to me that there is also an interpenetration of these two approaches.[8] In each case,

whether the approach is directed at behavior or whether personal transformation is the aim,

one has the potential to follow from the other. This means, in effect, that they are potentially

overlapping rather than contending approaches. If someone's behavior and beliefs are in

conflict and the person becomes conscious of this discontinuity, internal discord develops. This

can provide substantial motivation to bring the two conflicting aspects of being into harmony. A convergence of the two ways of doing diversity, then, is surely a more accurate representation of what actually occurs.

Successful transformative kinds of diversity work can alter behaviors. People who accept, embrace and enjoy the many ways that we exist as human beings in the world today are predisposed to accomplish all of the relevant goals of various organizations. In the best case, when this type of diversity initiative is successful, problems and concerns of discrimination, bias, ignorance, bigotry, *et al* either do not arise or, when they do, socially aware, conscious people have personal motives for working through any difficulties, rather than being mandated to do so by threat of economic loss or sanction from those in a supervisory capacity.

It is also the case that changes in behavior have the potential to create a change of heart as well and it is to this I want to turn next. The first ethical theory in the history of western culture was created by Aristotle, some 25 centuries ago. Virtue ethics, as it is called, is aimed toward acquisition of the character traits we desire and which we find admirable in people. According to Aristotle, and born out by centuries of evidence, we acquire virtues by habit.[9] We teach children, for example, to behave in certain ways and repeat the lessons over and over again. Eventually, these children become adults and, barring any pathology, the behaviors taught them from an early age become part of their character, who they are. According to this theory, if we want to acquire a particular virtue, we need only to repeatedly *act as if we have the virtue* and then, given enough time, we will acquire it. For example, if we seek the virtue of tolerance, we need only consistently <u>act</u> in a tolerant manner for a period of time and tolerance will then become part of our character.   We need not <u>feel</u> tolerant while we are "acting as if" in order to acquire the virtue. Thus, acquisition of a virtue, in Aristotle's view, is a matter of

behavior, first and foremost; the sensibilities follow.[10] This shows how diversity initiatives,

aimed at alteration of behaviors for further goals, have the potential to foster personal changes

in people.

Support for this theory may be derived from the following example.   One argument

offered against affirmative action asserts that forcing people to work together despite

"differences" which separate them in society only adds fuel to the fire or, put another way,

increases racial and/or gender tensions. If this were so, requiring people who distrust one

another to work together would be counterproductive to the efficient functioning of any

organization. There is, however, evidence to the contrary. In a 1995 *Chronicle of Higher

Education* article, the author describes research that compares the racial attitudes of whites

whose employers practice affirmative action with those who do not.[11]   The research found that

whites who have first hand experience with affirmative action are more likely to support social

programs that focus on race than those who do not have similar experiences. These people

are less likely to believe stereotypes of minority groups as well.

It seems reasonable to me to interpret this evidence in a way that supports the idea that

behavioral changes, whether coerced or voluntary, lead to differences in perceptions. I am

imagining here a workplace where affirmative action is practiced and, as a result, people of

different races are required to work together in spite of pre-existing wariness or outright

aversion. In order for this to occur, the coworkers must initially behave in ways opposed to their

prior assumptions about racial difference. In other words, we could say they were "acting as if"

they were accepting of the racial variations of their coworkers and this consistent behavior led

to the changes in beliefs.   Thus, diversity work which seeks to alter behavior as a means to

further goals has the potential to also create personal transformation.[12]   Although it may be

enough to lay the groundwork in terms of behavioral expectations and hope for the internal

changes, we will benefit from understanding how alteration in personal beliefs occurs under these kinds of conditions. This information would be quite valuable to diversity professionals in thinking about ways of organizing diversity work.

There are multiple ways to directly facilitate the phenomenon noted in the research discussed in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* article discussed above. One of the most potent and effective lessons I offer my students is derived from Martin Buber's *I and Thou*. In this small but powerful book, Buber explains the distinction between seeing someone as an It and as a Thou. I articulate this as the contrast between "what" someone is as opposed to "who" a person is. "What" someone is deemed to be is generally based on the very same inherent characteristics involved in the creation and maintenance of social hierarchies. For example, a person's race or gender or sexual orientation, although a mere fragment of the person, metaphorically leaps out and stands in front of the whole person such that "what" they are becomes the sum total of their identity for others. On the other hand, "who" someone is cannot be said.[13] According to Buber, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (8). In the wholeness of our beings, each one of us is dynamic and unique and it is a travesty to reduce someone to a characteristic over which they have no control. Not one of us feels good about being perceived of or treated as a thing or a "what" yet we are lead to this sort of perception of particular others by much of our education, the popular media, received family beliefs, in short, almost everything in society.

To show this Buberian contrast, I invite a woman of color, who is a member of the class, to stand in front of everyone (this has been prearranged with her) and then invite the rest of the students to describe her. Inevitably, what results is a list of the "whats" that she is. Generally her race is not mentioned until third or fourth, after female, tall or short, pretty or other "safe" descriptors. I always make note of this because race is in fact the very first thing noticed. After

there is a sufficiently long list of the "whats" or fragments, I then ask the students to say "who" she is and this proves to be impossible. It is of great significance, in my view, that language simply does not permit us to say who someone is; the best we can do is to use someone's name as a shorthand signifier.[14] The young woman, and each of us, is a complex, constantly changing, dynamic being, unlike any other who has ever lived, is living or will live. Years later, I continue to hear from former students about the power and long term effectiveness of this lesson. I suspect something very similar to this occurs over a period of time when people work together providing they behave toward one another in a manner which permits the complexity of the whole individual to supplant his or her fragmented identity as a member of a "race," for example.

Summary

        Although it is possible to distinguish diversity programs according to the reason(s) they are initiated, it also the case that there is potential for different approaches to augment one another, or overlap.   If we raise the question, however, of what the ultimate aim of diversity work is, it seems to me we are after the change of heart, personal transformation rather than simple changes in behavior. To return to the Leopold-inspired idea of the ecology of the human community, the healthiest, most productive and highest quality life results when all people are valued both intrinsically, in themselves, and extrinsically, as contributors in whatever community and organization they are situated. This calls upon the nature of our beliefs, attitudes and values. This is not to say that behavior is not a crucially important factor; it is. As noted, behavioral changes contain the potential for changes of heart. What I want to suggest is that since personal transformation is more apt to produce accepting behaviors, rather than the reverse, then it is the more direct route to accomplishing what we seek.

Sequencing: General or Specific

A second general way in which diversity strategies differ has to do with sequencing, that is whether it is preferable to go directly to specific problem areas, e.g., race or gender, or whether it is beneficial to first consider diversity and its value generally. For a variety of reasons discussed below, it is my view that the most effective and efficient approach is to begin by providing a context within which the specifics are grounded and make sense. This calls for the general approach first.   Once the groundwork is laid, and specific forms of discrimination become the focus, a further and less obvious question arises.

Our common assumption is that discriminations based on race, gender, sexual orientation and the like are discreet and separate matters.   Most people believe that sexism and racism are utterly different phenomena. I want to question this assumption by asking whether the dynamics of kinds of discrimination really are distinct from one another. It is clear that they certainly do differ in terms of who comprises the target groups. It may also be the case that the intensity of the effects varies on the same basis. However, there are some very good reasons to think that, at a deeper level, they share an underlying structure.   If this is the case, then this becomes a second sequencing question: do we teach about sexism and racism as though they are separate and distinct, or do we first show what all the forms of discrimination have in common? This repeats the sequencing question raised above albeit at another level.

General or Specific

How and where one begins diversity work has a tremendous effect on the outcome. Laying a broad enough foundation in the beginning makes room for everyone to be involved and connected. Beginning with race or gender substantially narrows the footing since many

people will not see these matters are being relevant to them personally. Initially, many people see racism as the problem of people of color and sexism as women's problem. Taking the time to lay the groundwork enables an inclusive experience by providing a common point of reference. This is necessary because initially there is usually no point at which everyone's knowledge, beliefs and experiences converge.

A general introduction can also provide the "why" of "why are we having to do this?" Without such a context, the "why" is left to the learner to create or assume on an individual basis and the variety of possible explanations includes several which are, in fact, impediments to the goals of the instruction. Common challenges which hinder the diversity initiative include accusations of "political correctness," that "this is all just a waste of time" or "I'm not a racist/sexist" and the like.[15]   Coming to a common understanding at the outset seems crucially important to me in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness of the program. Why not remove the maximum number of barriers to success at the outset?

It is also possible, in a general introductory session, to go some ways to creating a personal desire to learn what is being offered. One highly effective way of gaining this kind of involvement is through creation of cognitive dissonance. To the degree that the audience is composed of people from the culture of the United States, we share truisms such as "all men are created equal," that there should be "liberty and justice for all," that people who work hard should be rewarded, that we should not judge others based on the color of their skin, etc. Although most people raised in our society will claim to believe these truisms, there is a huge gap between our words and our deeds. We lack integrity in this regard and this impinges deeply on self-concept. As I mentioned earlier, one of the most important things I have learned from my students over the years of teaching ethics is that it is of critical importance that we each are able to believe we are decent, moral human beings and this intrinsically involves

personal integrity. Cognitive dissonance is created when the gap between what we say we

believe is compared to the actual practices in our society. Presentation of facts, especially

employment and wage statistics, is usually sufficient to accomplish this in a business setting.

Asking what could explain the contrast between what we believe we are like and the fact of the

matter is a way of getting into the subject matter in a general way and is a very effective

instructional method.

A second and also highly effective way of laying the foundation for diversity work is

through explanation of what is called the *null curriculum* which is all the relevant information that

has *not* been included in our educations. It is striking to call attention to the fact that <u>what we</u>

<u>do not know</u> has as much, and probably more, influence on how we see society, ourselves and

others than that which we have been taught. Very few people in our society are educated

about our history. And, what has been omitted is exactly the reason we find ourselves in the

position of needing diversity work to begin with. The very first day of my class, I ask my

students a series of history questions about, for example, the number of victims of the genocide

of the indigenous peoples of this country, when Northern Mexico became part of the United

States and under what circumstances, how many African captives died in the middle passage,

when the 13th Amendment to the Constitution banning slavery was finally ratified by all the

states,[16] why Japanese descendants but not German ones were rounded up in World War II

and put in concentration camps on the West Coast, when women became full citizens of this

country, and the like. If even ten percent of the students are aware of any of these historical

facts, it is surprising. Unfortunately, there has been negligible improvement over the past ten

years.[17] It is unlikely that other adult members of our society are any more well-informed.

Since all these historical facts can be checked for accuracy, this brief exercise raises the

distinct possibility for the student that other perspectives we take for granted may also be the

result of incomplete information.

Understanding our common ground importantly answers many questions of why we are doing the diversity work to begin with because it sheds light on how the human community has found itself in a position of needing to learn how to accept and get along with our human brothers and sisters. Thus, the relevant aspects of our shared past are crucially important for diversity work of all kinds. Without this common ground, awareness of race, gender and other forms of social discrimination has no soil within which to take root in terms of relevance and import. The foundation, in my view, is the key that opens the door to effective learning about the kinds of things that separate us from one another.

<u>Many or One?</u>

Our society suffers from inequalities based on a wide range of socially perceived differences, most commonly, race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disabilities, and age. We generally assume these ways of disadvantaging others are clearly distinct from one another, primarily because they differentially affect what we think of as distinct groups of peoples. This perception of difference leads us to treat sexism as something completely different from racism or ableism, for example. I want to challenge this assumption.

As a philosopher, I am trained to explore and examine the underlying common features of phenomena we take to be separate and distinct. This way of looking at the world has informed my thinking in terms of diversity and I have come to the conclusion that there is a common and underlying shared structure of racism, sexism and other such harmful social practices. Put succinctly, it is my view that there is a single social phenomenon which results in the variety of social inequalities diversity work addresses. On this view, sexism and racism are different only in the manner in which they affect different groups of peoples. These effects also

vary in intensity and duration. However, there is good reason, in my view, to take note of the common features of the different kinds of discrimination.

If we look at the underlying dynamics of discrimination, we can see that it isolates a single attribute about a human person and make this isolate stand for the whole person. In other words, the person becomes a kind of thing, rather than a person like us. We also make some common assumptions across socially perceived differences which have to do with intelligence, morality and ambition. Our assumptions are primarily maintained by stereotypes which seem to explain and justify the differential treatment of people in our society even though they are faulty generalizations based on the fallacy of confirming instances. People with one or more of these identified differences are frequently blamed for the negative effects of discrimination. For most of our shared history, education has omitted all but the most piecemeal counter-evidence to mistaken assumptions and beliefs. There is much more to say about the shared features of all forms of discrimination, too much for this space, so I have attached a published article which provides a much more extensive discussion of this idea.[18]

If my thinking is correct and there is a common structure underlying all forms of discrimination, this would provide another common context, akin to the one discussed above. If we can show that the specific ways we disadvantage one another are actually variations on a common theme, and we can articulate this theme, then learning about one would reveal knowledge about and understanding of the others. This could point to additional ways of approaching diversity work.

Conclusion

Looking ahead, there are clear signs of increasing personal, organization and social awareness of the benefits of a diverse society. Although it is tempting to focus on all the many

and difficult remaining problems, it is also important to look back to see how far we have come,

and it is some good distance. Even though highly damaging conditions persist in society and

periodically manifest in painful ways, it is difficult to imagine a return to conditions of even a few

decades ago. Social programs such as Affirmative Action, organizational initiatives and

heartfelt individual commitment born of personal struggles and the Civil Rights movement have

combined to create a determined momentum toward a future in which the human community

fully appreciates and enjoys the rich tapestry woven from all our differences. Advancements on

the part of women, for example, are spreading around the globe with activists in this country

taking up human rights issues for women elsewhere. International women's meetings, held for

the past several decades, provide a means of sharing ideas, practices, visions of a better world,

and hope. Statistics tell of a growing middle class in ethnic communities here in the United

States. As more men of color and women gain positions of leadership and authority in

government and business, our shared conception of what counts as excellence will no longer

be obscured by the meanings assigned to race and gender. In taking such a positive

perspective, I do not relegate the persistent problems to the periphery of our awareness.

However, if we do not acknowledge the successes born of the hard work by and commitment of

many people working in all kinds of venues and in a wide range of ways, it would be more

difficult to go on, which we must do.

        As far as I can tell, diversity work will not be done in our lifetimes. As crude and overt

manifestations of bias, bigotry and hate are remediated, milder expressions of similar

sentiments arise. It also seems to be the case that sensitivity to mistreatment becomes more

finely tuned as well. This is why, in my view, we must work toward the heart of the matter.

Beginning with Aristotle and through the intervening centuries, ethicists have concluded that

ultimately the intellect alone moves no one. What does move us is caring, compassion and

empathy and it is these sentiments that bind human beings to one another. Empathy shows us

our commonality across differences of all kinds and leads to our embrace of each other as

persons.

ENDNOTES

1 Leopold, Aldo. *Sand County Almanac, with Essays from Round River*. New York: Ballantine Books. 1970.

2 Plato (350 BCE) argued in *The Republic* that a just society was one in which people performed work assigned them according to a master plan. A modern criticism asks who was in the position formulate such a plan and make such assignments, primarily on the basis of birth status.

3 Oregon, where I live, prohibits self-service gasoline so I can't get my gas tank filled without "using" the gas station attendant.

4 Kant calls this the *Practical Imperative*. Kant, Immanuel. *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Trans. T.K. Abbott. 1898.

5 Strictly speaking, diversity work which seeks personal transformation is also done as a means to an end but then this would be true of absolutely everything since all we do seeks to serve life, human and otherwise. For the purposes of this discussion, I will maintain that helping human beings live in a healthy interpersonal manner across all socially constructed differences is the end sought by diversity work.

6 Bella, Rich. "Oregon Courts Racially Biased, Study Finds." *The Oregonian* 21 May 94: A1.

7 "As a company we are committed to developing skills and providing tools, resources and and environment for all our employees, so that ... they can make choices to help them navigate through their work and personal life and personal life changes" (accessed 3/7/01).

8 In basic ways, I agree with Hayles and Russell in this regard (60-61). See their work in *The Diversity Directive*. New York: Ballantine Books. 1970.

9 Interestingly, *ethos*, the root of *ethics* in Ancient Greek, is the word for *habit*. See Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* for his theory of virtue.

10 A contemporary theory argues that <u>what</u> we think is significantly affected by <u>how</u> we behave. This is the exact reverse of our generally unexamined sense of causality, that what we think causes or leads to our behavior. See, for example: Damasio, Antonio R. *Descartes' Error*. New York: G.P. Putnam. 1994.

11 Winkler, Karen J. "A Sociologist's Research Finds Little Evidence of White Backlash." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 17 November 95: A15.

12 I stress <u>potential</u> here because time spent at work in racially diverse company is only part of our lives. Failure to exercise tolerance in the rest of our lives would hinder the possibility of personal change.

13 Although Buber uses examples such as "the melody is not made up of notes nor the verse of words," I usually clarify what he means by asking a student about their favorite pie and go on to list the ingredients and ask them if the ingredients are piled in front of them, would they enjoy the pie. This has proven to be an effective means of teaching the idea of the whole being more than the sum of the parts. Buber, Martin. *I and Thou.*. Trans. Ronald Gregor Smith. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1958.

14 Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1958: 181.

15 Hayles and Russell say the failure to lay a common foundation is one of the primary reasons for resistance and backlash (129).

16 Mississippi ratified the 13th Amendment in 1995.

1717. Howard Zinn's *A Peoples History of the United States* is an excellent corrective for the incomplete histories taught in most public schools and universities. New York: Harper & Row. 1980. Also see James W. Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Text Got Wrong*. New York: New Press. 1995.

18 Roberts, Lani. "One or Many?" *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 4: 1 & 2 (1997): 41-47.