

You are more than you think you are.

When I worked for the County our recording of client demographics grew and grew. There was a time when race was limited to White, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native American . . . but by the time I retired the breakdown was magnified. For instance, Hispanic broke into Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban . . . The lists per type grew longer, to be translated into percentages . . . math!

From a philosopher's point of view such designations fail really and radically to identify those types *in depth*. Take your own characteristics. You might be described as a woman, of German descent, age 45, a spouse, mother, daughter, professional teacher, weighing x number of pounds, a Republican or Democrat, college MA, licensed driver number xxxx . . . But all such data does is position your functional value within our everyday world. You know, as we used to say as kids: *Rich man, poor man, / Beggar man, thief, / Doctor, Lawyer, / Indian Chief.*

But do such descriptions tell us what we *really* are? Take every one of them away, erase them from the board and where do we arrive? Instead of "You are this or that . . ." all you have left is "You *are* . . ." And now you have arrived at the most astonishing thing about you – not your functional value, but that you ARE – you exist!!! You exist along with all things that ARE – mountain ranges, trees, the ocean, the fish in the sea, the lovely deer, the stars, an ant, a building . . . you share existence as within a cosmic family of beings. Forget tracking down your family tree; the tree across the street is already your family – because it IS along with the marvelous fact that You ARE!

When we forget this fundamental fact, that's when the trouble begins. We begin to see everything, people, animals, stars, grass, birds as *things* with which we have no relationship – even things of which to be suspicious. We sense we are somehow alone in an alien universe. When radically speaking we share this fundamental thing called existence with even a blade of grass. We are not alone and we may rightfully show whatever exists awe, respect, even kinship. Theology traces this solidarity, this wonder that we ARE to a Creator, a divine Artist – out of whom each of us has been spoken like a poem. Ponder this and deepen your reverence for yourself and your neighbor and the vineyards and the wine and a humming bird . . . and so on. Great poets like Wordsworth are aware of this and how we lose touch with our depth dimension and become demographics:

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream, / The earth, and every common sight / To me did seem / Apparell'd in celestial light / The glory and the freshness of a dream. / It is not now as it hath been of yore; - / Turn whereso'er I may, . . . / The things which I have seen I now can see no more. // The rainbow comes and goes, / and lovely is the rose; / . . . The sunshine is a glorious birth; / But yet I know, where'er I go, / That there hath past away a glory from the earth. [But ultimately the poet revives his trust:]. . o, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves, / Forbode not any severing of our loves! / . . . Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might; / . . . Thanks to the human heart by which we live, / Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears, / To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Geoff Wood