A Philosophical Exploration of Motivated Ignorance

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Overview

The conventional understanding of ignorance involves an unintentional lack of knowledge. However, there are cases in which a person is aware of some body of information, but chooses to ignore it. This second kind of ignorance is the kind that I choose to focus on with my research project. Specifically, the willful ignorance of racial inequality in the United States discussed by Elizabeth Spelman, James Baldwin, and Ira Katznelson.

Key Findings

In my paper, I address the literature concerned with emotionally driven willful ignorance. Specifically, the group of people who choose to avoid considering the possibility of widespread racial inequality to avoid shame. These people are aware that if widespread racial inequality were to exist, they would be forced to reckon with their own role in perpetuating this inequality. To maintain their own positive self-image and avoid shame, they refuse to consider or attempt to learn if widespread racial inequality exists.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to understand and inform those who are ignorant of racial inequality out of shame. Because those who are willfully ignorant out of shame have been made aware of this pattern of cognition, they can either make an effort to become informed or maintain their ignorance.

References
1. When Affirmative Action Was White, Ira Katznelson
2. The Fire Next Time, James Baldwin
3. Managing Ignorance, Elizabeth Spelman

Acknowledgements
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