

**Title:** Ralph Ellison and the Authentic Self: Can an Invisible Being Live Authentically?  
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This paper explores Ralph Ellison's unique contributions to existential philosophy by comparing the ideas expressed by the protagonist from his novel *Invisible Man* with the ideas of prominent existentialists Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir. Whereas most existential concerns are considered from the perspective of Europeans, this paper considers how Ellison's experience as a 20th century African-American provides a distinct perspective on the concepts of identity, authentic existence, and responsibility. I compare the life of Ellison's protagonist *Invisible Man* with Heidegger's ideal vision of *Dasein* to come to a better understanding of how the feeling of invisibility experienced by African-Americans can further complicate Heidegger's conception of an authentic existence. I then argue that society's propensity to invalidate the authentic existence of African-Americans can lead to an ambivalent attitude towards Sartre's belief in individual responsibility, an attitude which I take to be best understood under the auspices of Simone de Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*. I conclude by evaluating the *Invisible Man*'s approach to life, determining whether I think his existence is authentic in consideration of his lived experience as invisible. The resulting account provides an understanding of how one's ethnicity can profoundly shape their lived experience and perception of the world and judges the extent to which I think that altered perception is warranted.