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Racism And Its Presuppositions: Pragmatic Ethics For Social Change

ABSTRACT

The paper provides a brief review on effects of racism on individual and society. Racism serves as a diagnostic test which reveals differences and unjustified actions within the nation. The review upholds the argument that fears and hatred-driven forms of racism are not only dangerous but morally incorrect, and socially harmful. This paper focuses on ways of overcoming racism with moral ideas of social intelligence and self-realization and concludes by stressing Dewey's moral pragmatism as a potent instrument of social change.

KeyWords

racism and pragmatism.

INTRODUCTION

The superior and inferior sections of the society divided on basis of race justify unavailability of economic benefits, emotional disturbances, and social discrimination. Racism is considered to be a disregard for the dignity in person and unjust. The paper draws attention to Dewey's pragmatism in ethics to explain the moral ideals such as self realization and social intelligence or democracy as a potential way of life which promotes the virtues of tolerance and interrelationship. According to Dewey's pragmatism, such way of life ensures respect for persons and serves as a means for every person to participate in the formation of goods and be receptive to each others concern in a serious way. This being the case, Dewey's moral pragmatism implies that racism provides an insight into the social problems of men in society and need for social reform.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Racism is an ideology. The concept of racial difference results in both disadvantage and discrimination for certain racially defined groups (Leech 1996, 710). Racism operating at the economic and political levels from racial prejudice differs from racism which operates at the cultural and psychological levels.

In American and European tradition, Naomi Zack (1998) has identified four main components of racism. These include

- Biological differences among groups.
- Cultural differences among groups.
- The unequal distributions of the political and the economic power whenever different groups have come together and believed differences in the value or fundamental human worth of members of different groups (Zack 1998, 11).

Biological differences among races were considered to be a cause for racial differences until twentieth century, when it was believed that biological differences were inherited with the cultural differences. Later in twentieth century, consensus reached by scientists concluded that cultural differences are not inherited but are the result of different historical circumstances (Zack 1998, 11).

However, the differences in economic and political power and differences in social status contribute major part of cultural differences associated with race. These inequalities lead to debate on race and social justice. A human ranking based on races and biologically-determined hierarchy among different races is considered to be racist by all educated people and claim that allegedly inferior races should be ruled by allegedly superior races is also described as racist Bunnin and Yu (2004).

Fear and hatred-driven racism has led to major genocidal violence and war. Racism has been identified with practice of slavery and other repressive control of Asian, Australian people (ibid) African, and indigenous American. Historically, racism was employed to facilitate colonialism and imperialism and to destroy indigenous people and their culture. Racism is associated with anti-semitism and was the intellectual foundation of Nazism in Germany.

The German Nazis were keen race theorists, believing that distinctions can be drawn between Aryans and others specifically the Jews. The Nazis concern only for welfare of members of "Aryan" race and no concern for Jews, Gypsies and Slavs (Singer 1983, 319) explain the moral wrongness of racism.

In colonial America, prisoners from Africa worked as slaves along with Europeans and Native Americans. By the end of the eighteenth century, African slaves were known as "negroes" who were referred as "Negroes" by historians after 1930s but who probably should have been referred to as American slaves. They were implied to be different race from whites, lower in biological hierarchy and intellectually and morally inferior to whites (Zack 1993, 116-122). They were defined as a "race" of "negroes". According to historians who believed that "Negroes" were enslaved because they were "negroes" but the fact was enslaving of ancestors lead to enslavement of African prisoners and their descendants. A racist attitude characterized the position that the South African citizens of European origin took, particularly the descendants of the original Dutch or Boer colonists, with regard to the local black Africans or Bantu inhabitants despite the fact that in 1965, the Bantu inhabitants numbered about thirteen million as against some three million whites (Goffart 1967, 58). Despite the huge gap, the constitution

prescribed and legalized an extremely complicated system of racial discrimination affecting not only private life but also public life.

Goffart (1967) recognized historical, religious and economic factors responsible for the complicated situation of South Africa as historically, racial elements originated outside the South African territory, religiously, Afrikaaners or Boers considered racial inequality as a matter of divine and biblical institutions, and economically the exploiters of country's wealth in areas such as mining industry, (diamond, coal, platinum, and gold) utilized a far-reaching and complex force of black or Bantu labour who were supplied by immigrants from other part of the African continent and subjected to a complex system of travel and social restrictions. This form of behaviour with racism is discrimination.

The situation is evident in America where applicants are considered for jobs on the basis of the race to which they belong rather than their individuality. The Americans, blacks, and whites constitute principal characters in current problems involving race and other races may include Indians, Asians, people of mixed race and women of color. Varied ethnicity or cultural traditions in a group or family also contribute to racism for example Hispanics which are American ethnic group with great racial variety.

America has a long history of racial categorization. These racial categories of black and white attributed to the history of slavery, segregation and poverty, and lack of interaction between blacks and whites race form a rigid and asymmetrical classification system in the United States.

The drop rule has reflected in the United States census since 1920 (Zack 1998, 74) according to which, an individual is considered to be racially black if he or she has one black ancestor in her line of descent irrespective of fact how many of white, Asians or Native Americans ancestors were also present which concludes that a person is white only if she has no non-white ancestors (Zack 1998, 74). This has become the logic behind American racial designation and the basis of the public policy related with black chattel slavery considered to be unjust by many historians.

Another racial category apart from that of the black-white are women of color. Women who resisted slavery and racism began to rethink common beliefs about women's role that took inspiration from the abolitionist (movement to end slavery) and civil rights struggle (Alcoff 1998, 475). Concept-wise, both racism and sexism appeared to be similar form of oppression. Concepts like "White supremacy" and "male supremacy" were developed to describe the social hierarchies corresponding to each form of oppression. Both racism and sexism are attributes of inferiority and both fundamentally identity-based forms of oppression where the term identity is said to determine life aspirations, intellectual abilities and achievable skills. Noting the intersections of racism and sexism, second-wave feminist theory (from the 1960s) has recognized the importance of addressing racism and racial differences among women.

THE MORAL WRONGNESS OF RACISM

Practice of racism is arbitrary and morally wrong since social effects of racism on the individual and the society like poverty, miseducation, demoralization, corruption, hatred, despair, race-based deprivation of benefits, emotional repudiation, moral distaste, and social discrimination are myriad (Garcia 2001, 1437 and 1439). Racism denies the dignity in a person, which not only leads to failure of full development of person as human being but also a feeling of being less unique from others than he is. Racial society does not guarantee the inner unity and self-realization required of the human person. Racism denies individuals of their fundamental human rights. Discrimination in ordinary employment situations threatens basic rights of blacks like education, housing, and other basic human rights.

Employment, education, and housing are basic human rights and cannot be subjected to racism. Considerations to merits as individuals and not as member of racial groups are to be given. According to Peter Singer (1983, 317 racial discrimination is peculiarly invidious. Giving support to this view, Feinberg (1973) and Hart (1961) explain that it is difficult to think of anything for which race is a relevant characteristic, and hence the use of race as a basis for discrimination is arbitrarily to single out an irrelevant factor, no doubt that because of a bias or the prejudice against those of a different race.

Racism which is fear or hatred-driven has led to violence and war destroying structure of the society. It is on this ground that racism has been condemned. Racism destroys the basic structure of humanity as true unity in true diversity and thereby destroys its own inner falsity and worthlessness.

DEWEY'S MORAL PRAGMATISM

Pragmatic ethics is pluralistic, naturalistic, developmental and experimental reflecting on. Motivations influencing ethical systems. Dewey

pragmatic ethics begin by viewing all human beings as living organisms irrespective of race acting within and responding to their environment. Action is a feedback process of learning. People live in a social environment in which the experiences of others regardless of their race shape their conduct. Morals, for Dewey means growth of conduct. Since for Dewey ethics deals with all human action which deals with skills in communication, broad experience, educational and political organization, and creation of new values and ideals (Hare 1995, 692) hence Dewey's ethics is the art of rendering human existence as meaningful and intrinsically fulfilling as possible.

In his moral pragmatism, two major moral considerations are social intelligence or the democratic way of life and self-realization as a moral ideal for overcoming racism. For Dewey, we live in a world of change, there are numerous ways of bettering human lot and hence no institutions or policies should be regarded as beyond modification and since every situation presents more or less novel opportunities, we should be prepared to address them creatively (Gouinlock 1993, 84). Dewey inferred the idea of the ideal social order from his analysis of social intelligence. According to him, the ideal social order is a structure that allows maximum self-development of all individuals, allows free exchange of ideas, and decides on policies in a manner that acknowledges each person's capacity effectively to participate in and contribute to the direction of social life.

Pointedly, one can draw the implication of Dewey's idea of self-realization and the ideal social order for racism by stressing that his attempt is to overcome the problem of inequality created by racism. As a result of such inequality, people are denied equal opportunities as member of a different race and this prevents them from fully developing and achieving their potentials as human beings.

Dewey's moral pragmatism therefore serves as instrument of social change if his ideal of the moral order which allows for self-realization is employed in any racial society. This type of growth is the only moral end for Dewey.

Dewey recognizes the need for interpersonal relationships irrespective of race hence his account gives no room for racial discrimination. His moral pragmatism is essentially communicative. He describes it like democratic life, which implies respect for persons in terms of right to participate in the formation of the goods and that persons communicate with each other freely and honestly to convey their concerns and to propose their tentatively preferred plans of action.

Dewey is critical of the notion of changelessness and sees the need for social change when he explains that the good life is one of intelligent participation in the process of social change. Going by the analysis therefore, task before everybody, particularly in a racial society is to learn to discard their dogmatic and absolute ways. The parties to moral deliberation must be willing to communicate, the willing to be informed, to entertain novel proposals, to learn and to adjust. They must regard each other with respect and be willing to modify their judgments.

Moreover, Dewey condemns the idea of individuals been arrayed against each other in adversary relations as it is the case in racial societies. Moral deliberation should be communicative. Individuals those should consult with one another, share their views about the nature of their problem, exchange their concerns about the values at issue, propose alternatives for conduct and modify the analyses and proposals in an effort to create a consensus. (Gouinlock 2001, 403) this is the process that Dewey called "social intelligence" or democracy as a way of life.

CONCLUSION

This way of life rules out any form of racial discrimination and promotes peaceful and harmonious co-existence. Again, if racism is conceived as a discriminatory conduct, an attitude of contempt or heartlessness which is expressed in individual or collective behaviour as some historians do (Garcia 1999, 769). Dewey's moral pragmatism offers a means of behavioural change in racist practices. According to him, the world in which we live, people are associated together and what a person does has important consequences on other persons.

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