Intrinsic and Extrinsic Racism

Class

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Introduction

This paper is aimed at contemplating and exploring Appiah’s beliefs about Racism and making distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic racism. Arguments would be developed and supported using relevant literature and it would be explained either racialism is nature-supported or nurture plays equally significant on its expression. In the end, prospective remedies, if any, would be presented. In a nutshell, this essay will allow the reader gaining thorough insight about the problem subject in the light of preexisting literature.

Main body

Kwame Anthony Appiah is a British- Ghanaian novelist, cultural theorist and philosopher who was born in May 8, 1954. His major interests included the philosophy of mind and language, politics, moral theories and African Intellectual History. He was in view that racism is although a macro- level issue yet we need to contemplate factors incorporated at micro- level for gaining clearer understanding about racism because society as a whole is made up of discrete and distinct individuals having unique perceptions, feelings, thought patterns, emotions, decision-making abilities, orientations, outlooks, beliefs, problem solving abilities, coping skills, personality and intelligence which coupled with the environmental experiences determines the way through which human beings operate in their environment and develop particular attitudes towards other members of the society (Appiah, 1990).

Appiah takes a stricter look at the structure of beliefs held by racists and focuses on gathering counterevidence for dissuading racists from sticking to these beliefs in theory. In order to break the unfavorable beliefs of racists; Appiah attempts to divide them down into three discrete doctrines; intrinsic racism, extrinsic racism and racialism (Appiah, 1990). Racialism is the central notion proposed by Appiah that human beings possess certain inheritable characteristics that allow them to be divided into smaller and discrete sets of races. Hence, those who deny realism indirectly attempt to deny racism because by denying racialism we mean that there are no genetic predispositions in humans and no animal is superior or inferior to other animals in any sense (Appiah, 1990). Hence, realism is the crux of racism because these ‘so called” inheritable characteristics act as “racial essences.” It must be noted that these characteristics are both moral and morphological in nature and are not shared between races. He believes that as long as equitable distribution of moral characteristics is ensured, morphological factors are not necessarily problematic. However, when moral characteristics are distributed unevenly, morphological idea makes a great problem.

We can confirm the above mentioned scenario by putting some real life example concerning American culture. In the United States today, Whites hold basic human rights almost exclusively regarding all positive “moral” qualities whereas individuals of other colors are narrated with negative moral attributes (Gordon, 1995). As we can see White Americans as educated, stable and safe whereas black people are perceived completely differently and it confirms that in American society, moral qualities are distributed unevenly that creates immense problem for the unprivileged races. Although it is quite challenging to determine the benchmark of “equal” distribution of moral characteristics in society yet we can say that if certain positive traits and values become more evident and valued than others, equality can be attained (Appiah, 1990). To Appiah, racialism is a false doctrine.

Extrinsic racism is referred to as a belief that an insight of race allows individuals to treat the members of his race differently than others. Those who are extrinsic racists believe that real or perceived differences among different races warrant “racial” treatment. For example, if an individual is extrinsic racist, he would treat all white and black people differently i.e., considering all white people as honest and black people as disloyal and less credible (Gordon, 1995). Interestingly, it is quite easy to eliminate extrinsic racism because evidence and theory would be enough for him to question his beliefs (Appiah, 1990). For example, a person who believes that white and black people fall differently at honesty continuum would be shown the list of crimes committed by both white and black people equally. In this way, he would come to know that moral make-up of whites and blacks is quite similar and physical features no longer determine the behaviors of individuals and hold no moral relevance in practice. Appiah further stated that if a person does not change his beliefs in the light of evidences; he is certainly not a sincere extrinsic racist.

On the other hand, an insincere extrinsic racist is an insincere intrinsic racist too. Appiah stated that the fact that one person belongs to a certain race affects his behavior towards the individuals of same race; in other words, he might prefer some individuals over others because they belong to similar or different races. In this scenario, a white person who is intrinsic racist would see all white people as integral part of larger family and is least interested in the verified and original behavioral predispositions (Gordon, 1995). Under this influence, white intrinsic racists will always treat their fellow whites preferably and would entertain them with special treatment and would not grant this “privilege” to the individuals of other races. It must be noted that extrinsic and intrinsic racism are somewhat overlapping in nature, for that matter, it is quite hard to estimate which doctrine exists by nature (Appiah, 1990). He also believed that intrinsic racism is cannot be eliminated because person believes that he is not providing any harm to other races and his behavior towards his own race members is predominately involuntary in nature. So, they would undoubtedly not entertain any counterevidence.

A bulk of literature indicates that both intrinsic and extrinsic racists feel unreasonable with respect to their beliefs about races and prefer clinging to their personal perspective rather than encountering and accepting any counter argument. Another definition of racism presented by Appiah is that racism is something much more than just “feeling” overwhelmingly good about one’s own dominance. Under this feeling, apparently they deem more concerned about their own happiness rather than others’ moral, social, economical and political destruction (Appiah, 1990). This feeling of contentment and superiority makes a great difference particularly when we talk about political and economic systems because we might have people with similar racial beliefs in our political lodges.

In my view, racism is mainly resulted from “nurture” experiences because at the time when we are born, we do not find others inferior particularly with reference to their color. Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura best explains the nurture aspect of racism. With the passing time, our social system i.e., family members, teachers, peer groups, friends, relatives and other members of the community enables us acquiring certain beliefs that become too rigid with the passage of time and we cannot help ourselves practicing the same. Notably, we can learn racism through our own experiences and through observing our models (Frantz, 1986). Both ways are highly consequences-based in nature i.e., if one gets positive consequences after committing any racist act, he will continue to do so whereas if he encounters criticism by parents and teachers upon executing such immoral behavior; he would obviously feel discouraged to commit it again. With the passage of time, constant practice would develop his personality accordingly.

**Conclusion**

This paper was aimed at contemplating and exploring Appiah’s beliefs about Racism and making distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic racism. He believed that both intrinsic and extrinsic racism results from irrational beliefs about races however extrinsic racism can be eliminated using counter-evidence. Moreover, environmental, social or cultural factors are more weighty determinants of racism as compared to the genetic predispositions.

References

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