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PHIL 33 — Ethics & Race

10 November 2023

Weaving Connections 2: The Source of Racism through Wilderson, Garcia, and Fanon

Much philosophical work has been produced regarding the origins of racism. Where does such a powerful force come from? How and from where does it manifest? These questions have utility in that understanding the source of racism is, in theory, essential to destroying it. As it turns out, there is no definitive or easily agreed-upon answer to these questions.

This essay will examine two primary views on the origins of racism: one from “Is Racism In The Heart,” by J.L.A. Garcia, and the other the theory of Afropessimism developed by Frank B. Wilderson (drawing explanations from his interview with Dario Calmese). To supplement the discussion, concepts from “Black Skin, White Masks” by Frantz Fanon will also be briefly employed. To conclude, I will offer a model that synthesizes these works into a familiar yet broadened definition on the origins of racism and discuss its implications for anti-racist projects.

The concept layed out in Garcia’s work is a simple one on its surface: racism comes from “the heart” of individuals. Specifically, Garcia defines racism “as fundamentally a vicious kind of racially based disregard for the welfare of certain people... a hatred” (Garcia 6). Garcia also claims that racism acts as an “infection model of wrongdoing” and “extends to corrupt the people, individual actions, institutional behavior, and systematic operations it infects” (Garcia 11). Garcia recognizes institutional racism as a reality but not an inherent source of racism in society. Finally, Garcia’s model allows racism to exist independent of races and always be immoral due to “its being opposed to the virtues of benevolence and justice” (Garcia 9).

This concept of racism from the heart can take on additional meaning when compared and integrated with the theory of Afropessimism. The primary claim of Afropessimism, summarized for these purposes, is that the world is anti-Black and its existence rests on the destruction (perpetual enslavement) of Black subjects. In this state, liberation is not possible without destroying the world. This view would suggest that racism is inherent and essential to the world/society itself — in other words, the source of racism is the world.

A few interesting revelations arise when considering these views together. Firstly, Garcia's and Wilderson's views are not directly opposed. Wilderson's view that racism is woven into the fabric of our world appears more like an extension of Garcia's points. However, the distinction is still important. Garcia's view of racism in the heart suggests that if we can change the hearts of people, we could destroy racism at its source (although he does not explicitly state whether the former is possible). In afropessimism, the only way to truly destroy racism is to destroy society, or our world, to its core. That being said, if we take Garcia's racism of the heart to be inherent to all humans, then it takes on a similar fundamentality to that of afropessimism.

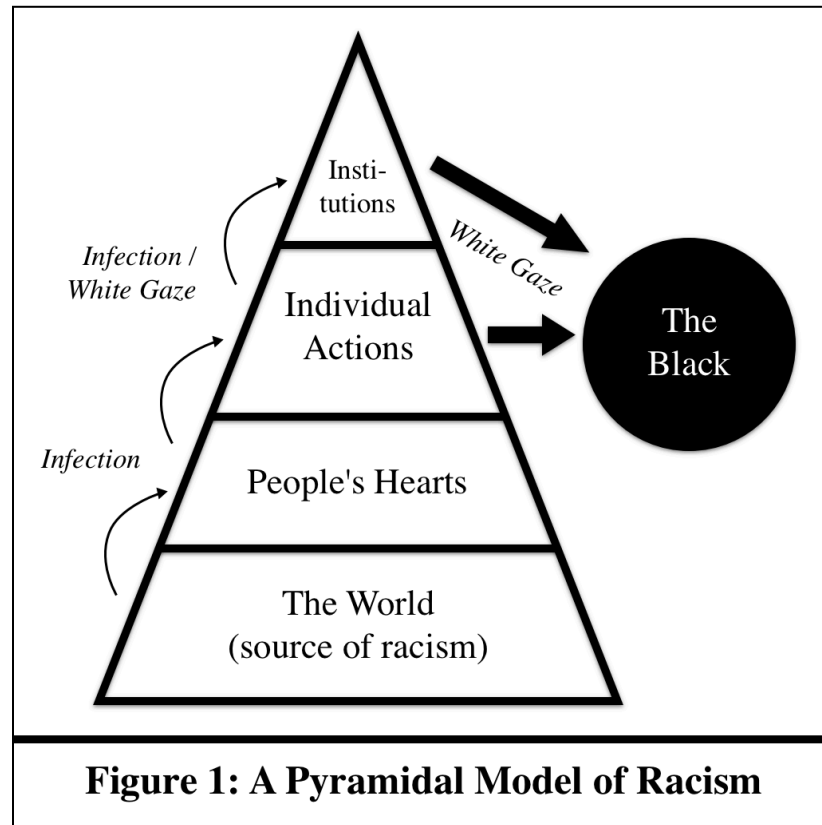
Another interesting point, if the two theories are to be combined, is that of who can be racist. Garcia's model allows any person with a truly emotional hatred based on race to qualify as racist. However, afropessimism builds upon Fanon's work, and as such, questions whether Black subjects even qualify as human. As Fanon states, "The white world, the only decent one... demanded that a man behave like a man. It demanded of me that I behave like a black man—or at least like a Negro" (Fanon 94). This distinction between "man" and The Black, when applied to Garcia's model, provides a novel argument for the idea that Black subjects cannot be racist because they are not fully human. Although intriguing, this specific discussion gets complicated beyond the scope of this paper.

I would like to suggest a partially new model on the origins of racism based on a synthesis of Garcia's and Wilderson's thoughts (Figure 1, below). Afropessimism is used as the base of racism: something inherent in the world itself. However, Garcia's infection model is then applied, and racism spreads to the hearts of individuals (potentially non-Black individuals exclusively). From here, it is exerted along two paths. Firstly, it is exerted onto The Black in and through the White Gaze, as described by Fanon. He says, "The white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am *fixed*... the Whites objectively cut sections of my reality. I have been betrayed" (Fanon 95). Racism is also moved further up the pyramid to institutions through a combination of Garcia's infection and the White Gaze. Fanon recognizes how the Gaze pervades society at large, describing his confrontation with it as, "An unusual weight descended on us. The real world robbed us of our share" (Fanon, 90).

Thus, the White Gaze acts as the vehicle for racism (hatred, subjugation) to be manifested and externalized, both onto The Black directly in interactions between subjects as well as into institutions and back onto society. This almost functions as a cycle, which goes back to Wilderson's claims that Black suffering is a constant without progress. This model maintains the pessimistic position that while dismantling racist institutions or actions may partially or temporarily alleviate Black suffering, it will have no lasting effect as society will be "reinfected" or "gazed upon again" by further racism. Reform merely treats the symptoms, not the causes. Thus, as Wilderson suggests, destroying the world is the only true way to destroy racism.

My only criticism/question on these synthesized thoughts is the preclusion of the temporary benefit of dismantling racism higher on the pyramid. Garcia and Wilderson both suggest that racism is much deeper than actions or institutions — which is a strong point that I'm incorporating — but that any focus less fundamental than our hearts / the world is useless. Is

there any room in this framework to recognize that perhaps a continual and vigilant dismantling of “new racism” in action and institution has some temporary (though lesser compared to destroying the world) value? Or is it simply too rational and white-focused to do any good at all?



References

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