TRUTH AND LIBERATION: DELINEATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRUTH AND PHILOSOPHIES OF LIBERATION

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Abstract
This project seeks to outline a practical framework of race, gender, and class in their liberation movements against a theory of truth while considering their ability to conform to the said framework in praxis. The research examined in this study seeks to articulate and rationalize the very nature, the philosophical core, of liberation movements pertaining to race, gender, and class struggle. The praxis of each will not only be internally compared to their own established frameworks, but also to one overarching framework for liberation movements. The ends of each will be investigated through expanding upon their cores and detailing the rational and logical ends of each and how they align or disregard their frameworks. Finally, upon establishing the core and the goals, there will be an applied ethics analysis on whether pursing these various forms of liberation do more to help or hinder the praxis of marginalized identities.

Introduction

It is reasonably assumed that the ways in which one seeks their or another marginalized group's liberation is highly contextual to the social location within which they find themselves, the political situation which dictates that certain ideas are more efficacious than others, and the economic leverage which operates as an amplimer or a silencer of any given issue. Concerning most major pushes for parity in various aspects of society, there always seems to be a caveat which goes against a current-day understanding and approach to the topic. A major flashpoint for this phenomenon can be found in the slavery abolition movements that sought to end slavery in America. There was a strong biracial approach to dismantling the institution of slavery, but the methods and the articulations of the motivations could almost be broken down by the same race dichotomy. Many from a white religious background argued against slavery because it was immoral and left a stain on the country. The Black people of the era argued the same, but many more argued for a deeper ontological claim: being represented as fully human and receiving all the rights that would follow. The Black people at the time knew this was radical for the current political situation they were in, but they also knew to work with those who saw them as less than a human would help move them toward a deeper goal.

The pursuit of this paper seeks to investigate this deeper goal that marginalized groups appeal toward and measure progress against, whether consciously or not. The material end goal of any given movement is highly contextual to the material conditions under which they achieve liberation. With that said, predicting the concrete reality of the liberated future for the various social movements goes beyond the scope of this paper. This project seeks to map out the unspoken framework upon which liberation movements seemingly depend, that which has operated as an unspoken roadmap to

liberation. While tracing the roadmap, there will be non-material definitions of liberation around which the framework is shaped. There is an emphasis on discovering the frameworks of these movements because these underlining frameworks have been guiding their movements even without them being directly articulated.

Limitations of Paper

There are many different eras and various liberation movements that can be used as examples to help map out the frameworks of liberation. This paper focuses on the 1890s to 1945 in the American context. Further, there will be a focus on Black or racial liberation, gender liberation, and class liberation from the Black perspective writers and advocates, especially those Black advocates that shared a common background of social location and political situation.

A couple of important social and political markers make this time period distinct and should inform our understanding of the liberation movements of the time. Leading into the 1890s, there were reports of a high number of lynchings that terrorized Black bodies from "sundown" towns to urban beacons. White women won the right to vote, but this great step was overshadowed by the deep disenfranchisement of women of color. Major coalitions formed for all their respective liberation movements from the NAACP to the Socialist Party of America. The landmark decision of Plessy V. Ferguson established separate, but equal as the law of America. A crucial economic marker was the burning and destruction of the Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma by their white neighbors (*History.com* Editors 2018). Finally, throughout this period, and beyond, there were mass migrations of Black bodies from the South to the North for better economic opportunities and haven from the infamous lynchings of the South.

Why the Correspondence Theory of Truth

There will not be much room for the deliberation on which appeal to the truth will be used, but there will be an explanation on why the tool at prodding for the truth will be correspondence theory. Correspondence theory is "that what we believe or say is true if it corresponds to the way things actually are, to the facts." (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2018) This theory will be used as a tool in establishing the truth of the framework, but also as the corresponded facts upon which progress is being measured. Correspondence theory is being used, because we want to be able to say if something is positively working toward the goal of liberation, working in opposite directions, or working under an entirely unique set of criteria which recognized as such.

General Liberation

Before initiating a discussion on the nature of the specific notions of liberation in each respective movement, there should be attention paid to the general notions of what liberation should entail. When one seeks liberation, they usually are seeking freedom from a superstructure or situation that in some ways constrains or oppresses them. There is a myriad of ways one can be exposed to oppressive forces, but a common thread among many of them is the idea of Otherness.

When one is being oppressed, there are usually superficial grounds on which they are being placed into a space of Otherness. One is not white; they are other. One is not a man; they are other. One is not a capitalist; they are other. This forceful marginalization into the status of 'other' marks one as being less than the dominant group in almost every respect, for if they were perceived as equals, no distinction would exist. The act of being

placed within the other is not inherently oppressive, but there are many such distinctions that powerfully manifest themselves. The liberations discussed in this paper illustrate such historical oppressive otherness.

There are many distinctions placed within society, but liberation from those that operate to reinforce oppressive structures have shown to have a similar structure in their frameworks. Liberation from oppressive otherness consists of the advocating for a diminishment of the otherness distinction or, at the very least, the diminishment of the oppressive otherness distinction and the systems that support and are supported by such a distinction. The fight against otherness is central to Black liberation, gender liberation, and class liberation. The recognition of the commonality of this pivotal concept will better help articulate the definition of liberation in each of these movements

Black Liberation

There are complex intersecting needs usually included in into Black liberation that should be addressed. Black liberation, in the context of this paper, seeks to diminish and eliminate racial categories and the power they hold. It is crucial to understand that Black liberation is the deconstruction of the racial marginalization which seeks to other them from whiteness. This focus only on the racial otherness does not seek to discount the work of black feminist or womanist authors but establishes that there are two different systems of otherness that interact with one another. It is important to see these are two separate structures because it would be limiting to prioritize racial distinction over gender distinction or vice versa.

Now, there needs to be a discussion on the period in question, to investigate the methods for Black liberation with the material conditions of the time against the non-material framework. Numerous issues define the period for Black people, but one of the most infamous examples is the lynching of Black bodies throughout the nation. There are many ways to see the issue of lynching, but one that shines through most examinations of the time is Ida B. Wells' analysis of lynching for a racialized economic purpose (Wells, 1893). Of course, many died unjustly due to reasons outside of economic jealousy, but that does not minimize the seemingly coordinated effort to weaponize mobs to push out competing Black businesses or even whole Black towns, as in the case of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Measuring against the framework, Wells and those like her actively deconstructed an othering distinction in meaningful ways by calling into question the fundamental nature of why Black bodies deserved less economic status and had to die for it.

There were always advocates who sought Black liberation in the socio-economic space. One of the giants of this space was Booker T. Washington who strived to convince Black people to develop in their own marginalized spaces separate from the larger, white society. Washington argued that "no race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized." (Washington, 1895) Even at the time, this argument served as a very contentious notion for the Black community. Although it seemed that Washington was being guided by the framework of seeking to eventually eliminate otherness by contributing heavily to the market of America, the material conditions demonstrated that those who accumulated too much capital within Black spaces resulted in whiteness seeing the otherness of Blackness as a threat rather than a benefit.

The opposite of the spectrum, in many cases, was an idea popularized by W.E.B. Du Bois who sought not only acceptance into the larger lexicon of America but forced the issue by building coalitions based on racial marginalization. Du Bois sought "a new organized group action along economic lines, guided by intelligence and with the express object of making it possible for negroes to earn a better living and, therefore, more effectively to support agencies for social uplift" (Du Bois 1933). The method of this approach is complicated when interacting with the framework put forth. With the material conditions, the need for coalition-building is clear and a needed feature for seeking structural change for the diminishment of racial otherness. When one first examines this notion against the framework, it may seem contradictory to form a coalition around race for the elimination of race, but there will be no tension if there are qualifications to said coalition. If the coalition does not seek to make eternal their classification and understand the purpose of the group is to eliminate the need for the group, then coalitions fall well within the framework of deconstructing otherness.

However, one example of such coalition-building that contradicts the framework in very egregious ways is the rise of Black non-traditional religions which find their roots in the early 1900s. There are a few that are established, but they all share a similar underlying framework that is not liberation. They all seek, at the core, to make Blackness eternal. This is a direct response to ontological claims that Blackness was just a disease that grew malignant from whiteness. Some of these sought to flip this myth narrative on its head for the purposes of creating their own myths on race to gather support. Groups like the Nation of Islam are powerful organizations in the lexicon for perceived Black Liberation work, but their existence weakens any notion of deconstructing racial otherness, but rather flips the otherness on whiteness.

Gender Liberation

Gender liberation efforts in Black spaces are not new endeavors to the 1890s to 1945, but there are few formal articulations in the likes of Booker T, Wells, or Du Bois. The Golden Age for these voices to break through to the common lexicon would not take place until years later which lies outside the scope of this research. However, there are still events which can be measured against the framework for Gender Liberation. The framework is as followed: Gender Liberation should seek to diminish and eliminate gendered categories and the power they hold.

One of the pivotal markers for gender liberation was the granting of the right to vote for women, but examined from the framework established by gender liberation we can see why it is measured as lackluster. The push for women to vote falls well within the lines of the framework, but the problem arises when white women pushed aside the need for other women to have the right to vote. This was a deeply racialized issue, but this also negatively impacts the pursuit of gender liberation because there was still a superficial division of Black women and their right for parity under the law. The failure of meeting the standards of the framework cannot even be justified by the material conditions at the time, because Black men already could access the political system. Little to no justification exists as to why Black women were not allowed to take a step toward liberation as well.

While Black women were being pushed out of the larger gender liberation narrative,

there were still Black women who fought to broaden the conversation and stay true to the framework. For example, Anna Julia Cooper saw the importance of more than a vote and envisioned many spaces were women should have a claim. She firmly argued that a "woman's claim [should] be as broad in the concrete as in the abstract" (Cooper 1893). Cooper would lay the groundwork for many future gender liberation writers to think about the concrete and position women within it. When examined under the framework, Cooper's assertion allows for the populating of women in all spaces and creating visibility. This represented an important step toward gender liberation established during this period.

Class Liberation

Finally, there is the importance of the rise of class liberation in Black spaces during the early 1900s. Although entering formally into the United States as an established political group at the beginning of the 1900s, class liberation has a long history outside of the United States which has helped craft almost a direct connection from practical work to an underlying framework. The framework of class liberation is as follows: Class liberation should seek to diminish and eliminate class categories and the power they hold.

Class liberation's extensive history has a glaring hole in the way it interacts with race and class liberation. Many Black class liberators sought to address chasm of understanding that seemed to exist between white and Black advocates within the movement. White people in the movement believed that racism was simply a subsidiary of class struggle and would deconstruct on its own once the populace gained class consciousness. Black socialists agreed that racism was engineered by the owning class, but they also recognized that the once subsidiary was now its own superstructure which needed to be confronted. These critiques would bolster the larger class liberation movement to fully account for all those whom they would hope to liberate.

Black class consciousness theorist A. Phillip Randolph examines the reality of class and the intersection of Black liberation. There were strong rebukes that the "monetary contributions from white capitalists to Black churches, schools, and charities were the reason that the Black community remained ignorant" of their social situation (Cynthia 2006). Randolph and others sought to dissect the ways in which the owning class attempted to hamper class liberation by controlling all meeting places and centers of influence with capital. These were crucial steps into facing the ways that class liberation was inhibited by oppressive forces and created room for more in the class liberation space to flourish.

Objections

There could still be some rejection of these frameworks on the grounds that they do more to hinder the methods in which the oppressed pursue their freedom. How could a marginalized group conform to this framework when they are already restricted on all sides for their own survival already? One could say that these liberation movements should focus more on the material, and the non-material should be left on the side for slight reference and not an overarching tool.

This objection to these philosophical frameworks for liberation have adequate concern for the overall effectiveness of a movement over vague guidelines, but this is a dilemma that is not present in this work. This project sought to pull out what was already there. There was no creation of vague but confining guidelines from the

abstract. Every notion of liberation was developed from the praxis of these movements. Instead, these frameworks seek to bolster the practical work of these movements by making sure they are creating future conditions that will better assist in the final goal of liberation. There is no tension, but rather a partnership of the material and the non-material in the hopes of creating constructive praxis.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this project seeks to outline the practical framework of race, gender, and class in their liberation movements against a theory of truth, while considering their ability to conform to the said framework in praxis. While there was an overarching idea of liberation, there are different approaches when it comes to the implementations of liberation in specific marginalized groups. This work seeks to stress that the non-material framework of all Liberation movements should be laid out in the hopes of always working toward better material conditions. While also using this framework to better understand the past of these movements, it is the hope of this project to establish the roadmap for future actions toward future progress.

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