

МОРАЛЬ, ПОЛИТИКА, ОБЩЕСТВО

Victor Olusola Olanipekun

DOES COLOUR REALLY MATTER TO A SYMPATHETIC IMPARTIALIST? INTERROGATING WIREDU'S MORAL UNIVERSALISM AND THE CHALLENGE OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Victor Olusola Olanipekun, Department of Philosophy, Obafemi Awolowo University, P.M.B. 13, Ile-Ife Osun, 220282, Nigeria; e-mail: olanipekuno@oauife.edu.ng

Does Colour really matter to a sympathetic impartialist? In this article, I return a negative response. The article examines certain aspect of Kwasi Wiredu's moral philosophy in *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, and how that aspect of his moral philosophy is applicable to an issue of global concern such as racism. One of the major ways by which Wiredu established his version of moral universalism is through the principle of sympathetic impartiality (PSI). This principle is central to his moral theory because for him, the principle is not only common to all human practice of morality, but is also essential to the harmonization of human interests in the society. This article attempts to interrogate how Wiredu's PSI could be employed to tackle the problem of racial discrimination that bedevilled the whole world. The study employs the method of textual interpretation, argumentative discourses of Wiredu's principle of sympathetic impartiality and analysis of the concepts of racism. The paper contends that if the principle of sympathetic impartiality is universally embraced, it stands the chance of reducing the global problem of racism.

Keywords: sympathetic impartiality, racism, universalism, morality, moral sentiment

For citation: Olanipekun, V.O. "Does colour really matter to a sympathetic impartialist? Interrogating Wiredu's moral universalism and the challenge of racial discrimination", *Filosofskii zhurnal / Philosophy Journal*, 2024, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 108–120.

Introduction

One of the global problems that still requires a new and different solution in the recent time is racism. The persistent nature of the problem of racial discrimination makes W.E.B. Du Bois to conclude that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line."¹ As a global phenomenon, racism has several root causes such as colonialism, slavery, discriminatory policies, self-interest, and extreme community ties. For some decades now, countless scholars, including ethicists, social and political philosophers, political scientists, legal scholars, human rights scholars, as well as the sociologists have studied racism in all

¹ Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York, 1989, p. 13.

its forms and have suggested innumerable interventions for its elimination. As a matter of exigency, a concerted effort is being made globally on a daily basis to find a lasting solution to this ugly phenomenon that keeps threatening world peace.

However, despite the fact that the issue of racial discrimination has received considerable political and scholarly attention from different quarters, the problem still persists and keeps resurfacing in different forms globally. Being conscious of the above view, Clevis Headley argues, that, there is the historical persistence and institutional manifestation of racism despite the fact that most people claim allegiance to certain abstract universal principles regarding the equal moral status of all human beings.² Drawing from Headley's view above, it is evident that not all universal principles can address the problem of racism. The universal principle identified by Headley is the notion of equality. However, in his view, the global campaign for equality or equal moral status of all human beings appears not to be yielding effective results in curbing the problem of racism. The possible reasons for the failure of the campaign for equality of all persons are: first, the concept of equality is a complex and highly controversial concept, and second, people do not see themselves as equal in a real sense. For instance, giving the causal role that colonialism played in racism, how will you convince a former colonizer, with the mindset of racial supremacy, that he/she has an equal moral status with the colonized? Also, despite the purported claim that slavery has been eradicated, how will you convince the children of the former masters that they are equal with the children of the former slaves? This is complex because even if he/she accepts the notion of equal status in principle, it will be difficult to accept it in practice arising from the way his/her background has shaped his/her view and perception about others. The above could account for the persistence in racial discrimination to a certain extent.

For Benjamin Bowser, in the late 1980s, conservative talk radio discovered "color-blindness" as a solution to the race problem.³ Colour blindness stresses the idea of racial equality and social equity. This implies that when you do not profile people as a result of their race or skin color, you will treat them the way you will have treated the people of your own race. In other words, with the idea of color blindness, you will treat others as human beings that they are, and not based on their skin color. But one important question is this: what is the basis upon which the notion of color blindness rests? The response is often that it is based on the notion of equality. That is, the notion of color blindness should be universally applied because all men are equal or have equal moral status regardless of race. However, this idea of color blindness has its limitation and could not solve the problem of racism because the notion of equality is difficult to defend in practice as hinted earlier. The notion of equality is so abstract as far as Headley is concerned. I want to agree with Headley on this because the problem is often that, in what sense are we measuring equality among human beings? The point is that, given the essential differences among people of different race, the notion of equality is complex and difficult to establish.

Bowser eventually identified several solutions that have been offered in order to eradicate this global challenge called racism. As far as Bowser is concerned, racism defies legal solutions, social movements, and changes in economy.⁴

² Headley, C. "Philosophical Approaches to Racism: A Critique of the Individualistic Perspective", *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 2000, Vol. 31, No. 2, p. 223.

³ Bowser, P.B. "Racism: Origin and Theory", *Journal of Black Studies*, 2017, Vol. 6, p. 572.

⁴ Ibid.

In other words, legal solutions such as “criminal justice reform” were offered in the United States of America, but, it could not solve the problem of racism. Similarly, different social and abolitionist movements such as “Black Awareness Movement”, “Black Lives Matter” emerged, but they could not really address the problem of racism. Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was also the core element in the construction of the ‘identity of resistance’ in apartheid South Africa.⁵ This movement has not also provided desired solution to the problem of racism. Similarly, changes in economy were another measure put in place to address the problem of racism, but, it could not address the issue of racial discrimination effectively. The implication of the above view by Bowser, in relation to the objective of this paper, is that racism is not really a legal problem, neither is it a problem of social, nor economic problem. For instance, in the United States of America and contemporary South Africa, racism and segregation have been outlawed. Affirmative Action, Black Economic Empowerment and other progressive policies for change have been legislated and implemented. Sadly, experiences of everyday racism remain a current reality.⁶ The implication of the above view is that there is a dare need for an alternative approach to this recalcitrant problem. This article suggests that racism is essentially a moral problem and I will focus on the moral dimension of racism. In other words, the paper grounds racism on philosophical footing with moral engagement. Thus, from a moral point of view, this paper intends to apply Kwasi Wiredu’s⁷ formulation of the principle of sympathetic impartiality (PSI) to address the problem of racism. Essentially, the fact that racism seems to defy all existing solutions necessitates the need for an alternative. This article does not argue that Wiredu’s principle is the only essential approach in addressing the problem of racism instead, it only argues that, if adopted, it will be an effective complement to the existing approaches.

This article has three main objectives that shall be discussed under three sections. Section one considers the question of racism. Section two discusses sympathetic impartiality. Meanwhile, section three interrogates how Wiredu’s PSI, if universally applied, could alleviate or reduce the problem of racism in the world of ours.

The Question of Racism

Racism is defined by the United Nations as an ‘ideas or theories of superiority of one race or group of persons of one color or ethnic origin’.⁸ At root, racism is “an ideology of racial domination”.⁹ According to Kelvin Boyle,

⁵ Kwesi, Tsri. “Africans are Not Black: Why the Use of the Term ‘Black’ for Africans should be Abandoned”, *African Identities*, 2016, Vol. 14, No. 2, p. 153.

⁶ Mtose, Xoliswa, “Black Peoples’ Lived Experiences of Everyday Racism in Post-Apartheid South Africa”, *The Journal of International Social Research*, 2011, Vol. 4, No. 17, p. 325.

⁷ Kwasi Wiredu is one of the major prominent African philosophers whose intellectual contributions covered several areas of African and western philosophy. One of his contributions that is of interest to us in this article is the principle of sympathetic impartiality. By a sympathetic impartialist in this article, I mean anyone who accept Wiredu’s principle of sympathetic impartiality.

⁸ UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Article 4, 2003 [<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx>].

⁹ Wilson, W.J. *The Bridge over the Racial Divide: Rising Inequality and Coalition Politics*. Berkeley, 1998.

Racism is an ideological construct that assigns a certain race and/or ethnic group to a position of power over others on the basis of physical and cultural attributes, as well as economic wealth, involving hierarchical relations where the 'superior' race exercises domination and control over others. Racial discrimination is any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.¹⁰

Boyle considers racism as an ideological attitude which makes people to be excluded, restricted or preferred based on their race. Thus, if John treats James based on his race and not for the fact that he is a human being, John becomes a racist. Also, following the report in the document of European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs of the European Commission, it is written:

All too often, racial or ethnic origin is used as a ground to discriminate. People of Asian and African descent, Muslims, Jewish and Roma people have all suffered from intolerance. But other, less explicit forms of racism and racial discrimination, such as those based on unconscious bias, can be equally damaging. Racist and discriminatory behaviors can be embedded in social, financial and political institutions, impacting on the levers of power and on policy-making. This structural racism perpetuates the barriers placed in the way of citizens solely due to their racial or ethnic origin.¹¹

The above report mainly categorized racism as a form of discriminatory behavior towards people of certain origin or ethnic background, mostly, people of color. But this is not to say that racism is only found among the white against others, it could also be found among people of color against the white as well.

Beyond the above view, W.T. Schmid argues that the racist is not merely a person who "prefers his own," he is someone who wishes to *put down* the other race, who wishes to suppress them and assert his own superiority.¹² In other words, Schmid took his own analysis of a racist into another level. He considers a racist to be someone who is intoxicated with superiority complex. That is, it is someone who keeps basking in the euphoria of racial supremacy by giving preferential treatment to the people of his/her own race at the detriment of others.

According to Stephen Steinberg, in the United States the essence of racial oppression is a racial division of labor, a system of occupational segregation that relegates most blacks to work in the least desirable job sectors or that excludes them from job markets altogether.¹³ Beyond the notion of traditional racial segregation, Matthew Clair and Jeffrey Denis uncovered new forms of racism that are

¹⁰ Boyle, K. "Introduction", *Dimensions of Racism. Proceedings of a Workshop to commemorate the end of the United Nations Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (Paris, 19-20 February 2003)*. New York; Geneva, 2003, p. 11, n. 1.

¹¹ European Commission, Anti-racism Action Plan, pp. 1-2. For details, see Document on European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, by Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs Directorate-General for Internal Policies, PE 730.304 - May 2022.

¹² Schmid, W.T. "The Definition of Racism", *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 1996, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 34.

¹³ Steinberg, S. *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy*. Boston, 1995, pp. 179-180.

expressed not in avowed racist attitudes but rather in contextually specific moral and symbolic principles that stereotype subordinated racial groups as undeserving and thereby justify existing racial inequalities and racial discrimination.¹⁴

For Momodou M. Jallow, a new form of racism has emerged in recent years. It is based on the idea that non-European migrants are culturally incompatible with the values and lifestyle of the continent.¹⁵ This idea, directly or indirectly, supports the notion of racial discrimination against the migrants. That is, when the non-western migrants are treated as people who are not compatible with the values of the western society, they are bound to face all sorts of discrimination when applying for certain things such as jobs, accommodation and so on. Now, having discussed the question of racism, what exactly is Wiredu's principle of sympathetic impartiality? Details shall be provided in the next section.

Wiredu's Principle of Sympathetic Impartiality (PSI)

From historical trace, the principle of sympathetic impartiality (PSI) did not begin with Wiredu. In 1759, Adam Smith, in his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, formulated the idea of sympathetic impartiality. Though, he did not call it sympathetic impartiality, but such principle was implied in his work as far as scholars are concerned. According to Adam Smith,

...there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner. That we often derive sorrow from the sorrow of others, is a matter of fact too obvious to require any instances to prove it; for this sentiment, like all the other original passions of human nature, is by no means confined to the virtuous and humane, though they perhaps may feel it with the most exquisite sensibility. The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it.¹⁶

The above view by Smith is an expression of sympathetic impartiality along the line of moral sentiment. In Maria Carrasco's commentary, Adam Smith's version of spectator's "sympathetic impartial" perspective consists in this particular standpoint that despite being truly impartial, is nonetheless capable of considering, from the very inside of the agent, the specific circumstances of each situation.¹⁷ While Smith's version of the PSI is not irrelevant to our research, our main concern is on the Wiredu's version of the principle of sympathetic impartiality.

In *Cultural Universals and Particulars* Wiredu identified the notion of common biological identity, inter-cultural communication, epistemic and moral universals as indices of cultural universalism. However, our focus is not on Wiredu's cultural universalism at large, but on his moral theory. Now, focusing on his

¹⁴ Clair, M. & Jeffrey, S.D. "Racism, Sociology of", *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 2nd ed., Vol. 19. Amsterdam, 2001, p. 12720.

¹⁵ Jallow, M.M. "Racism, Intolerance, Hate Speech", *Council of Europe*, August 2021 [https://edoc.coe.int, accessed on 21.04.2023].

¹⁶ Smith, A. *The Theory of Moral Sentiment*. Cambridge, 1790, p. 4.

¹⁷ Carrasco, M.A. "Adam Smith's 'Sympathetic Impartiality' and Universality", *Revista de Instituciones*, 2010, Vol. 52, p. 181.

notion of moral universalism, one of the ways by which Wiredu established his version of moral universalism is through the principle of sympathetic impartiality. What is this principle? According to Wiredu, the principle of sympathetic impartiality states that one is always to act in such a way as to avoid doing things that have effects on others that one would not welcome if one were in the situation of those others in an otherwise identical reenactment of the action.¹⁸ It is obvious that this principle is parasitic on the Golden Rule. The Golden rule says – do unto others, what you want others to do unto you. One way by which Wattles analyze Golden rule is that “in judging what you would desire that another, if your circumstances were transposed, should do to you, you always consider, not what any unreasonable passion or private interest would prompt you, but what impartial reason would dictate to you to desire.”¹⁹

However, even though the principle of sympathetic impartiality and golden rule are similar, it is also important to note that they are different in certain respect. It should be noted that while sympathetic impartiality focuses on the negative actions, golden rule focuses on both positive or negative actions, depending on the one under consideration. It should be noted that impartiality and sympathy are two essential elements of the sympathetic impartiality that are not contained in the golden rule. As Molefe puts it, it is crucial to note that sympathetic impartiality has two aspects. On the one hand, it is a function of some moral psychology expressed through the virtues of sympathy/empathy, and on the other, there is the element of impartiality.²⁰ Molefe helpful comment gives a good clarification between golden rule and sympathetic impartiality.

Now, Wiredu’s conception of the PSI is relevant to the issue under consideration because ordinarily, an issue/action does not become a moral issue/action unless it has the potential or capable of helping or harming other people including oneself. Essentially, the view defended by Wiredu is that, morality arises out of the pursuit for the principle of sympathetic impartiality.²¹ Wiredu considers the principle of sympathetic impartiality as a basis for universalism in ethics. According to him, the need for morality arises from the fact that, human beings have common and conflicting interests. Coexistence in society requires some adjustment of these interests, which rest on the fact that human beings do have a basic natural sympathy for their kinds.²² The above view suggests that Wiredu did not just consider the principle of sympathetic impartiality as the basis of ethical universalism alone, he also considered the principle as the foundation of morality as a whole. The implication is that the question of right and wrong will be useless unless it is founded upon the principle of sympathetic impartiality.

Similarly, Wiredu asserts that the principle of sympathetic impartiality is a human universal transcending cultures viewed as social forms and customary beliefs and practices. In being common to all practice of morality, it is a universal of any non-brutish form of human life.²³ The above view shows that sympathetic

¹⁸ Wiredu, K. “The Moral Foundations of an African Culture”, *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*. Washington DC, 1992, pp. 193–206.

¹⁹ Clair, M. & Jeffrey, S.D. “Racism, Sociology of”, p. 12723.

²⁰ Molefe, M. “An African Perspective on the Partiality and Impartiality Debate: Insights from Kwasi Wiredu’s Moral Philosophy”, *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 2017, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 470–482.

²¹ Wiredu, K. “The Moral Foundations of an African Culture”, p. 41.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

impartiality has a universal appeal. In fact, by extension, a sympathetic impartialist is a universalist. That is, all sympathetic impartialists are universalists, but not all universalists are sympathetic impartialists. It also re-emphasizes the centrality of this principle in every ethical discourse regardless of culture, place or society. In order to explain the principle of sympathetic impartiality further, Wiredu argues that the principle provides a solid foundation for the definition of moral worth in its most edifying sense. The above view implies that the principle of sympathetic impartiality plays a vital role in determining the extent to which an agent deserves moral praise or blame when an action is performed. As far as Wiredu is concerned, a morally right action will be an action performed in line with the principle of sympathetic impartiality and vice versa.

In order to buttress the above view, Azenabor argues that as human, we have moral sympathy for our kind. Because of this, we adopt in our conduct the principle of “Sympathetic impartiality” – empathy.²⁴ Azenabor’s view above is essential because his notion of empathy captures Wiredu’s notion of sympathetic impartiality. According to Wiredu, sympathetic impartiality represents a fusion of impartiality and sympathy: the impartiality is what the moral rules embody, and the sympathy is what the moral motivation represents.²⁵ Let us briefly consider the two essential elements that formed sympathetic impartiality.

Moral Consideration / Moral Rules

The impartiality aspect of sympathetic impartiality is what moral rules embody. How? What the above view imply is that morality involves an impartial consideration. This arises out of the fact that impartiality is considered as part of the true meaning of morality. The argument is that our moral culture is universal in the sense that at least some of our moral norms are understood as applying to all persons without discrimination or impartially irrespective of nationality.²⁶ In other words, morality is universal in nature.

Sympathy Consideration

Meanwhile, the sympathy aspect of sympathetic impartiality is what moral motivation evinces. In general, moral motivation could be defined as a force that moves a moral agent to perform or not to perform certain actions that are considered morally right or wrong in a particular moral universe. According to Thomas Scanlon, the question of reason is primary to moral motivation, and once relevant reasons are understood there is no separate problem for moral motivation.²⁷ Arising from the fact that the reason that one gives for a moral action is always the motivating force for a moral action, what the above view imply, in this context, is that sympathy is the motivating force for a moral action.

Essentially, the principle of sympathetic impartiality transcends the common notion of impartiality in ethics. This is because such notion involves sympathy,

²⁴ Azenabor, G. “An African Theory of Moral Conflict Resolution: A Kwesi Wiredu’s Paradigmatic Model”, *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 2018, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 151–171.

²⁵ Wiredu, K. *Cultural Universals and Particulars*. Indianapolis, 1996, p. 31.

²⁶ Wong, D. “Relativism”, *A Companion to Ethics*. Oxford, 2000, p. 442.

²⁷ Scanlon, T.M. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, Mass., 1998, p. 147.

that moral motivation projects. Now, how do we apply Wiredu's principle of sympathetic impartiality to the problem of racism? Answer to this question shall be the focus of the next section.

Wiredu's Principle of Sympathetic Impartiality and the Question of Racial Discrimination

Is it possible to eradicate the problem of racism when people are not willing to put themselves in the shoes of others when contemplating an action of racial discrimination? This paper supplies a negative response. Actually, the fact that people have not been paying adequate attention to the above question could be described as one of the factors that led to the lingering problem of racism. Arising from the above, it becomes imperative to understand that a global problem such as racism requires a solution that is universal in nature, such as the principle of sympathetic impartiality. As Wiredu rightly puts it, "in all inter-personal situations, put yourself in the skin of the other and see if you can contemplate the consequences of your proposal with equanimity"²⁸ The above view is Wiredu's expression of the principle of sympathetic impartiality as it directly addresses the issue of racism and racial discrimination. The above recommendation by Wiredu is essential because it has to do with the original passion of human nature. The implication of such view is that when Mr. X (White skin) sees himself in the skin of Mr. Y (Coloured skin), the tendency of treating Y unjustly because of his skin colour will be minimal. The reason is because the consciousness of the fact that "if I were to be in his/her shoes" or "if I were to be in his/her skin colour" has a way of checkmating unjust and unfair treatment of other people based on their culture, race or skin colour. The reason is because PSI makes you look beyond racial wall in your treatment of other people. A question may be asked that: Does sympathetic impartiality not have limits? What if self-interest simply weighs more? Does putting yourself in another's shoes mean you forget other factors? In this paper, I do not argue that PSI is absolute, I only suggest that giving PSI a consideration could help in addressing the problem of racism than other available alternatives.

Instances of Modern Racism

Housing:

According to Joe R. Feagin, racism still exists today because for him,

Whites maintain effective segregation spatially by keeping their residential areas mostly or entirely White. Housing discrimination cuts across a variety of institutions and involves White landlords, homeowners, bankers, Realtors, and government officials. The data suggest that the majority in each group discriminates if the circumstances are right. Segregated housing patterns result from continuing discrimination by owners and managers of rental housing and by real estate salespeople.²⁹

²⁸ Wiredu, K. "The Moral Foundations of an African Culture", p. 199.

²⁹ Feagin, J.R. "Excluding Blacks and Others from Housing: The Foundation of White Racism", *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research*, 1999, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 81.

School:

Decades after the U.S. Supreme Court declared that racially segregated public schools are inherently unequal, there is ample evidence that the decision in *Brown v. The Board of Education* has not provided equal educational opportunity for most children of color. Today, two-thirds of Black students still attend schools where the majority of students are not White.³⁰

In view of the above instances, the essence of recommending Wiredu's principle of sympathetic impartiality is to de-emphasize and discourage the idea of racism and racial discrimination in order to encourage impartial treatment of all human beings regardless of race or culture. Specifically, Wiredu argues that the principle of sympathetic impartiality requires us to "be willing to put oneself, as the saying goes, in the shoes of others when contemplating an action"³¹ Obviously, the moral recommendation of this nature is clearly an antidote to the problem of racism, and all forms of racial discrimination encountered in the housing and education sectors identified above. By extension, had it been that the white police officer who killed George Floyd through suffocation in the United States of America put himself in his shoes when he was crying 'I can't breathe'³², he wouldn't have done what he did when contemplating such action.

Following Molefe's reflection, Wiredu dubs his moral theory, sympathetic impartiality, signalling that we must consider the well-being of all human beings accordingly, hence the insistence on impartiality as a regulative facet of this principle of right action.³³ Also, Molefe argues further that Wiredu's principle prescribes that the virtue of sympathy must be manifested equally to every human being. Thus, we need to care about the welfare of each and every human being. Or, that our sympathy ought not to discriminate among human beings.³⁴

In another place, Molefe argues, Wiredu construes his principle of right action in terms of sympathetic (empathetic) impartiality. This comes with the implication that morality... is best construed as impartial.³⁵ In line with the central position of this paper, what the above view by Molefe suggests is that a racist is partial. It takes one to be impartial for one not to be involved in the act of racial discrimination. According to Appiah, there is a danger in making racial identities too central to our conceptions of ourselves; while there is a place for racial identities in a world shaped by racism, I argue, if we are to move beyond racism we shall have, in the end, to move beyond current racial identities.³⁶ Arising from Appiah's recommendation, I will like to add that one way to move beyond current racial identity is to accept and apply the principle of sympathetic impartiality when dealing with people of other races. This will inform the kind of treatment you give to them.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 84.

³¹ Wiredu, K. *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, p. 237.

³² "I can't breathe" is a slogan that is associated with racial treatment of the Blacks in the United States of America Movement especially in the case of George Floyd who died of Cardiopulmonary arrest in May 25, 2022 due to maltreatment in the hand of an American Police Officer.

³³ Molefe, M. "An African Perspective on the Partiality and Impartiality Debate: Insights from Kwasi Wiredu's Moral Philosophy", p. 478.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Molefe, M. "Critique of Kwasi Wiredu's Humanism and Impartiality", *Acta Academica*, 2016, Vol. 48, No. 1, p. 91.

³⁶ Appiah, K.A. *Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections*. San Diego, 1994, p. 55.

Further Critical Reflection

In the final analysis, is the proposal that a sympathetic impartialist will not be a racist really tenable? I return a positive response. The fact that the PSI is one of the moral principles that all human beings are capable of approving, suggests the workability of that principle in addressing the global problem of racism. It should be noted that I used the word ‘capable’ because it is one thing for people to be capable of doing a thing, and it is another thing for them to be willing to do what they are capable of doing. My contention is that a sympathetic impartialist will not, and need not practice racial discrimination that will include exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin. For instance, when Peter thinks about how to treat Paul who belongs to another race, he is required by the principle of sympathetic impartiality to put himself in Paul’s shoes, imagining if he will approve that others should treat him in a similar manner. Such disposition can motivate Peter to always act in a way that will devoid any act of racial discrimination against Paul or others. Peter is expected to act this way so long as he would not welcome racial discriminatory treatment if he were in the situation of Paul or people of other races.

To reinforce the above view, Chimakonam opines that “a positive way of reading the colour-branding of peoples would be to suggest that colours are used to denote racial variety and not racial hierarchy”.³⁷ Beyond the view that colour branding of people should denote racial variety and not racial hierarchy, I also argue that it should not be the basis for all forms of discriminatory treatments based on colour. It was on this note that we find Appiah’s definition helpful. Appiah defines race as a biological concept, picks out, at best, among humans, classes of people who share certain easily observable physical characteristics, most notably skin color and a few visible features of the face and head.³⁸ In consonance with Chimakonam’s submission, Appiah’s view suggests that race is not really a problem since it is meant to denote racial variety arising from different biological makeup, but racism is a problem because it is meant to show racial supremacy that leads to discrimination.

Now, in agreement with the position of this paper, a sympathetic impartialist would also accept the view that colours are used to denote racial variety and not racial hierarchy. In essence, this paper contends that, if there is a world regulated by the principle of sympathetic impartiality, racism and all forms of racial discrimination will not be a popular phenomenon in such a world.

A critic of the position maintained in this paper may argue that is it impossible to have some individuals who are sympathetic impartialists and also racists? One quick way to respond to the above objection is like the saying, ‘you can’t eat your cake and still have it’. That is, a sympathetic impartialist will avoid doing things that will have effects on others because he will not welcome being in the situation of those others.

A critic may furthermore ask that the fact that golden rule that looks like the principle of sympathetic impartiality is not respected in different societies as evidence in the way racial discriminations still persist in all those societies, how do

³⁷ Chimakonam, O.J. “Why the Racial Politic of Colour-branding should be Discontinued”, *Phronimon*, 2019, Vol. 20, p. 1.

³⁸ Appiah, K.A. & Gutmann, A. *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*. Princeton, 1996, p. 68.

we will know whether principle of sympathetic impartiality will be respected? That is, though, golden rule exists in all world cultures in one form or the other, i.e. it is also universal, it does not prevent people socialized in these cultures from being racist. As a way of response, I argue that to think that way is to run into the problem of induction. It will be repugnant to reason that because golden rule is not working, anything with resemblance of golden rule will not also work. That is, the fact that the principle of golden rule does not prevent some people from performing wrong actions does not necessarily imply that the principle of sympathetic impartiality, if universally embraced, will not prevent people from performing wrong actions.

Moreover, the antidote to the prevalent racial discrimination in the school environments in the United States of America and some western countries is this. If parents train their children to embrace the principle of sympathetic impartiality, the level of bullying on the ground of race or skin colour will be minimal if not totally eradicated among school age population. The reason is simply because a sympathetic impartialist will be inspired by human dignity and respect for all, irrespective of culture, racial identity affiliation or background. By extension, the same principle of sympathetic impartiality can be applied to address racial discrimination that led to segregated housing pattern in the west, as well as discrimination faced by the job seekers. A critic may argue to the contrary that the fact that racism is still such a big problem casts doubt on the tenability of the principle of sympathetic impartialism. That is, if this was so easy, why is racism still such a big problem? The best way to respond to the above possible objection is to argue that PSI has not been fully adopted. A principle that has not been tested and adopted could not be said to have failed.

In the final analysis, a critic may also ask that is it productive to take racism only as a moral problem ignoring other structural factors, such as economic inequality, social exclusion, etc., which are a favorable environment for the development of various kinds of xenophobic sentiments? One can easily respond to the above objection that my discussion in this paper does not really exclude economic inequality, and social exclusion. In fact, the duo issues were briefly discussed on racial discrimination. But an elaborate discussion of these will be beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusion

Can a sympathetic impartialist be a racist? The answer is negative. The paper discovered that the principle of sympathetic impartiality is inconsistent with racism. The reason is because a sympathetic impartialist looks beyond cultural and racial walls when considering performing an action. The article submitted that it will be difficult if not practically impossible for the problem of racism to be eradicated when people are not willing to put themselves in the shoes of others when contemplating an action. This article examined certain aspect of Kwasi Wiredu's moral theory in *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, and the positive possible implication of that aspect of his moral theory. One of the major ways by which Wiredu established his own version of moral universalism is through the principle of sympathetic impartiality. As far as Wiredu is concerned, sympathetic impartiality is the basis for moral universalism. This article attempted to interrogate how Wiredu's principle of sympathetic

impartiality could be employed to address the problem of racism that bedevilled the whole world.

This article did not argue that Wiredu's principle of sympathetic impartiality is the only essential approach in curbing the global problem of racism, rather, the paper argued that Wiredu's principle is indeed a meaningful contribution towards the eradication of the problem of racism. By extension, it is our view in this article that when this approach is combined with the existing approaches, it will form an effective synergy in addressing the problem of racism. This paper submitted that racial discrimination will be unpopular in a society regulated by the principle of sympathetic impartiality.

References

- Appiah, K.A. *Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections*. San Diego: University of California, 1994.
- Appiah, K.A. & Gutmann, A. *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Azenabor, G. "An African Theory of Moral Conflict Resolution: A Kwesi Wiredu's Paradigmatic Model", *LWATT: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 2018, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 151-171.
- Bowser, P.B. "Racism: Origin and Theory", *Journal of Black Studies*, 2017, Vol. 6, pp. 572-590.
- Boyle, K. "Introduction", *Dimensions of Racism. Proceedings of a Workshop to commemorate the end of the United Nations Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (Paris, 19-20 February 2003)*, organized by OHCHR in cooperation with UNESCO. New York; Geneva: OHCHR, 2005, pp. 1-12.
- Carrasco, M.A. "Adam Smith's 'Sympathetic Impartiality' and Universality", *Revista de Instituciones*, 2010, Vol. 52, pp. 181-188.
- Chimakonam, O.J. "Why the Racial Politic of Colour-branding should be Discontinued", *Phronimon*, 2019, Vol. 20, pp. 1-14.
- Clair, M. & Jeffrey, S.D. "Racism, Sociology of", *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences*, ed. by P.L. van den Berghe, 2nd ed., Vol. 19. Amsterdam: Elsevier Ltd., 2001, pp. 12720-12723.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. by D. Gibson. New York: Penguin Books, 1989.
- Feagin, J.R. "Excluding Blacks and Others from Housing: The Foundation of White Racism", *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research*, 1999, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 81-88.
- Headley, C. "Philosophical Approaches to Racism: A Critique of the Individualistic Perspective", *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 2000, Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 223-257.
- Jallow, M.M. "Racism, Intolerance, Hate Speech", *Council of Europe*, August 2021 [<https://edoc.coe.int>, accessed on 21.04.2023].
- Kant, I. *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Th.K. Abbott. Indianapolis: Library Liberal, 1949.
- Kwesi, Tsri. "Africans are Not Black: Why the Use of the Term 'Black' for Africans should be Abandoned", *African Identities*, 2016, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 147-160.
- Molefe, M. "An African Perspective on the Partiality and Impartiality Debate: Insights from Kwasi Wiredu's moral philosophy", *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 2017, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 478-479.
- Molefe, M. "Critique of Kwasi Wiredu's Humanism and Impartiality", *Acta Academica*, 2016, Vol. 48, No. 1, pp. 91-110.
- Mtose, Xoliswa. "Black Peoples' Lived Experiences of Everyday Racism in Post-Apartheid South Africa", *The Journal of International Social Research*, 2011, Vol. 4, No. 17, pp. 325-338.
- Scanlon, T.M. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.

- Schmid, W.T. "The Definition of Racism", *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 1996, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 31–40.
- Smith, A. *The Theory of Moral Sentiment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1790.
- Steinberg, S. *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
- Wattles, J. *The Golden Rule*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Wilson, W.J. *The Bridge over the Racial Divide: Rising Inequality and Coalition Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Wiredu, K. "The Moral Foundations of an African Culture", *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, ed. by K. Wiredu and K. Gyekye. Washington DC: The councils for Research in Value and Society, 1992, pp. 193–206.
- Wiredu, K. *Cultural Universals and Particulars*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Wong, D. "Relativism", *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. by P. Singer. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, pp. 442–450.

Действительно ли цвет кожи имеет значение для доброжелательного беспристрастного наблюдателя? К вопросу о моральном универсализме Виреду и проблеме расовой дискриминации

Виктор Олузола Оланипекун

Университет Обафемии Аволая, Иле-Ифе, Нигерия. Department of Philosophy, Obafemi Awolowo University, P.M.B. 13, Ile-Ife Osun, 220282, Nigeria; e-mail: olanipekuno@oauife.edu.ng

Действительно ли цвет кожи имеет значение для доброжелательного беспристрастного наблюдателя? В этой статье я отвечаю отрицательно. В статье исследуются некоторые аспекты моральной философии Куази Виреду, рассмотренные в его книге «Культурные универсалии и партикулярии», а также вопрос о том, как они могут быть применимы к такой глобальной проблеме, как расизм. Один из основных способов, с помощью которых Виреду обосновывает свою версию морального универсализма, – принцип доброжелательной беспристрастности. Этот принцип занимает центральное место в его теории морали, поскольку, по его мнению, он не только является общим для всей человеческой практики соблюдения морали, но и необходим для гармонизации интересов людей в обществе. В настоящей статье предпринята попытка выяснить, как принцип доброжелательной беспристрастности Виреду мог бы быть задействован для решения терзающей весь мир проблемы расовой дискриминации. В работе используется метод интерпретации текста, исследуется аргументация принципа доброжелательной беспристрастности Виреду, анализируются концепции расизма. В статье утверждается, что если принцип доброжелательной беспристрастности будет работать повсеместно, то у него появится шанс повлиять на решение глобальной проблемы расизма.

Ключевые слова: доброжелательной беспристрастность, расизм, универсализм, мораль, нравственные чувства

Для цитирования: *Olanipekun V.O. Does colour really matter to a sympathetic impartialist? Interrogating Wiredu's moral universalism and the challenge of racial discrimination // Философский журнал / Philosophy Journal. 2024. Т. 17. № 3. С. 108–120.*