

Lecture 21: Divining Racial Realism

I. Crux of Racial Realism as Presented in the Narrative

What is racial realism? Put simply, racial realism as expressed in this narrative is the view that racism is a permanent feature of the American legal system, and society. Consequently, racism cannot be removed or eliminated from the legal system and society, because the economic, political, and social interests of the dominant racial group outweigh the interests of other racial groups, especially African-Americans.

What are the four themes of racial realism?

The four themes of racial realism as stated by Bell's character Erika Wechsler, leader of the White Citizens for Black Survival (WCBS), are:

1. The historical: "there has been no linear progress in civil rights. American racial history has demonstrated both steady subordination of blacks in one way or another and, if examined closely, a pattern of cyclical progress and cyclical regression"(pg.122).
2. The economic: economics dictate which racial groups are the most well off, and therefore dictates which groups can live more freely and comfortably (pg.122).
3. Fulfillment: rather than measuring the success of racial justice based on *goals achieved*, racial realism is focused on achieving salvation through sustained struggle (pg.123).
4. Justice and truth: racial realism is committed to helping blacks and whites alike realize the economic, and legal reality of racism, and therefore insists on shedding myths or assumptions which may serve to block full recognition of such a reality. Blockage of full recognition of the reality of racial permanence in the U.S. maintains false mindsets and beliefs about racism at large (pg.123).

But does racial realism as stated provide grounds for hope that we can consistently achieve racial justice? How does racial realism as stated fare in the face of contemporary positive psychology on hope?

II. Contemporary Positive Psychology on Hope

How does contemporary psychology think about hope?

Basic classification of positive psychology conceptions of hope, and major contemporary (analytic/Anglophone) philosophical accounts of hope: individualistic models, and interpersonal models.

Individualistic models are primarily focused on agential capacities for goal attainment and positive projection while interpersonal models are primarily concerned with how hope could be preserved and propagated on a personal level e.g., father who hopes for his daughter to break generational curse of not graduating from high school.

Contemporary models of hope, both psychological and philosophical, **stress the inherently positive significance of hope.**

Hope is championed as being an **emotion, feeling, or state of being** in which an agent is **motivated to action**.

For instance, the Snyderian mode of hope (agent-pathway) claims that hope is a state of being or state of mind in which one is propelled to action by reflecting on possible pathways to achieving a goal, and reflection on such possible pathways inspires or motivates the agent to action.

--Snyder models the agentic process of hoping in the following three-step manner:

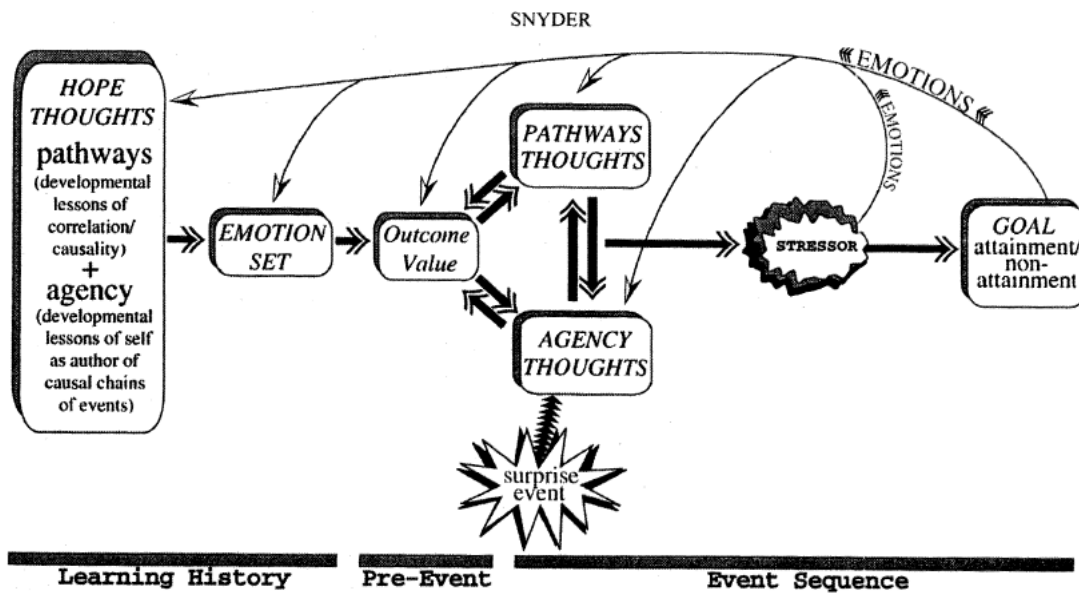


Figure 1. Schematic of feed-forward and feedback functions involving agency and pathway goal-directed thoughts in hope theory.

Other more philosophical models of hope like Victoria McGee's stress that hope is a kind of basic or fundamental condition underlying an individual's entire existence—human beings in particular are the kind of creatures that hope, and without hope they're no longer recognizably human.

Another line of argument about moral progress worth considering can be found in an article by Michele Moody-Adams in which one thing she argues for is the value of perceptual space for creatively imaging moral alternatives, in which she argues "moral progress often depends on expanding perceptual space—dislodging prejudices and habits of belief that limit our ability to take a novel view of the world, our place in it, and our relationships to others, as might be required by new moral interpretations"(Adams, pg. 163). She further argues that "discursive reason-giving and argument are often ineffective in these contexts, and that sometimes we must rely instead on the arresting, disarming, and perceptually disruptive power of creative expression to produce morally necessary transformations in how human beings perceive the world, and their place in it"(Adams, pg. 163).

III. Questions

How does 'Divining Racial Realism' fit into the broader narrative of *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*?

How possible do you think allyship is under a racial realist perspective? That is, do you think trust, consistency, and accountability (all considered general aspects of allyship from a social justice perspective) can be fostered and maintained despite interest convergence?

Do popular models of hope seem inconsistent with Bell's racial realism? If so, why?

Addition. Regarding Snyder's Hope Model, what about situations or conditions under which possible pathways simply cannot be conceived and actualized e.g., systematic, legal and social racism?

Works Cited

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Snyder, C. R. "Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind." *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2002, pp. 249–75. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1448867>.



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