

How successfully do you think Corson makes the link between the ideas of 'postmodernity, social justice and critical realism'? Using your own work situation, show how you might adopt his position to your own situation. If you feel that his position is not justified, explain why. Limit your answer to 1500 words.

Introduction

After close, careful, and multiple readings of Corson's article, I would have to say that his construction of a link between the ideas of postmodernity, social justice and critical realism is lacking. I say this because to me the word 'link' implies something of a causal relationship – as in the link between smoking and cancer. Corson however, builds more of a correlation between postmodernity, social justice and critical realism; it is an important tenet of both science and of academia that correlation does not equal causation. Corson does make, however, a strong case for social justice. This point is then extrapolated, not to critical realism, but to what Corson calls 'emancipatory leadership' and 'critical policy making'. He then goes on to give clear examples of how to implement these two concepts.

The second part of the question asks how I might adopt Corson's position to my current work situation. In my case, there are two complicating factors to consider. First, I have been out of a teaching environment since late 2002. Second, when I was in a teaching environment, my situation was unique in that I was a minority member teaching in what was an extremely homogeneous majority, namely a Korean university in Korea. Nevertheless, I feel confident that I can draw on my experiences to reflect on the ideas presented

by Corson. As the third part of the question states, I intend to explain why I feel that Corson's position is not justified.

Social Justice, Capitalism, Democracy – Peas of the Same Pod?

Much of Corson's argument pertaining to social justice is framed within a discussion of capitalism, especially where it applies to social relations. With one notable exception, Corson overlooks completely the ideal of democracy. The one instance when Corson does mention democracy, albeit indirectly, is when he writes, "...citizens living in societies where this ideology [a capitalist world view] is dominant are *forced* to live their lives within the ideology, whether they want to or not." (Corson 1998: 3; emphasis added). Here Corson overlooks the role of democracy in people's lives, not to mention his later statements concerning non-coercive, voluntary hegemony that would seem to contradict his view that people are *forced* to live their lives within a particular ideology (see *Cultural background and identity*, p.6).

In either case, I feel that in democratic parts of the world (where most if not all education for diversity takes place), the role of democracy in social justice, education, and policy and ideology formation cannot be overlooked. Certainly it must never be so completely ignored as to say that anyone is *forced* to live in any certain way. I have a personal anecdote relevant to this point. I was 21 years old and did not like (politically speaking) any of the candidates running for the office of Mayor in my hometown. Faced

with having to vote for someone that I did not like, I chose to run as a candidate for Mayor myself; this way I could, in perfectly good conscience, exercise my democratic right and vote for a candidate that I liked. I was not *forced* to live my life in any certain way; I could, and did, play an active part in shaping my environment.

Space, the Final Frontier

In light of this account, the question must be asked, "If I was anywhere else in the world but my native land would I have been able to do the same?" Perhaps yes, perhaps no, but one must also ask why would I be somewhere that is not my native land? And if I am, then what level of responsibility do I have to adjust myself to my new surroundings?

Like Corson, I currently live in a place that is not my birthland. And like Corson, I too have lived for many years in other countries and spent long periods in many more places. So like Corson, I believe that my personal background affords me the chance to speak with some level of objectivity. As such, I believe fervently that when in a foreign land it is my duty to observe, learn, and employ the local practice(s), language(s), and custom(s).

There are consequences to people's decisions to move outside their native land. If people expect their new host to bend completely to suit them then they are ignoring these consequences. Unfortunately, the long, and in my view embarrassing, history of human exploration and development has done just that. Historically, human exploration

has chosen to ignore these consequences and instead, moved into new lands, destroyed the indigenous people and culture, and claimed the land as its own; the foreign minority becomes the local majority. The desire for minority groups to be recognised within today's majority is this same principle at work but to a much more innocuous degree. To date, human exploration has only occurred globally; however, to illustrate my point I wish to suggest something much more further-reaching.

Corson alludes to Quebec's ambitions to secede from Canada because Quebec believes it has a distinct society. He provides as support the thoughts of Habermas, which state that, a collectivist approach "gives weight to the justice needs and interests of groups of people who are *distinctive* in some way" (Corson 1998: 12; emphasis added). The problem with this line of thinking is that everyone, as is every group, is distinctive in some way. For example, what is to stop British Columbia for geographic reasons, Newfoundland for linguistic reasons, the Yukon Territory for climactic reasons, or any other region in Canada for any number of reasons from claiming distinctiveness? The answer is 'nothing'. For each of those regions, like every other region in Canada, is distinct in some way. And later, if Quebec (or any other province or territory in Canada) were to secede, how long would it be before certain groups within that newly formed state would claim that they are in some way distinct from the rest of the group? I use Canada as an example here because Corson does the same. However, my views of diversity are applicable to every person, every group, and every nation on Earth.

For me, the problem lies in championing diversity blindly and uncritically. The first thing that must happen is that all humans must realise that they share an undeniable, unchangeable, universal, and uniting trait, namely humanity. Then and only then can humans begin to look at and account for such distinctions as language, religion, education, economic and political philosophy and the like. In short, the one thing that all human beings have in common is that they are human. Before any concessions for difference can be made, humans must first realise and internalise this fact; we must champion our similarity before we can champion our diversity. Sadly, I reckon this will not happen in my lifetime and will probably only happen upon contact and/or communication with intelligent non-human societies.

Conclusion

A very important caveat to my discussion is the role that my identity has played in shaping my beliefs and attitudes. I am Canadian, male, and by all outward appearances, white. Some might say that those three factors, and especially the latter two, allow me the luxury of thinking of myself as an individual, forgetting my skin colour and sex. Other groups, especially women and minorities, who are constantly reminded by the "great cultural hall of mirrors" of their sex and colour have no such luxury (Friedman 1988: 38).

I do not wish to give the impression that I am against what Corson has proposed; naturally I am in favour of social justice. However, what I question is the manner by which Corson has suggested it be

achieved. For me social justice begins with the critical realisation that the things that unite humans are far greater and far more powerful than the things that divide us. Thankfully, as Corson mentions (see *Teachers and critical realism*, p.4), the things that divide us can be 'reconstructed'. The reason that this is so is that those things that divide humans are the very things of human creation; all behaviour is learned behaviour and as such, can be unlearned.

I believe that there needs to be a greater emphasis on knowing exactly what it entails to leave the comfortable confines of one's native land. Just as both speakers *and* listeners must share the communicative burden in successful communication (Lippi-Green 1997), I believe the same concept to be true on a cultural level. There must be some degree of responsibility on peoples' part to adapt to their adopted homeland; not just the expectation, benign or otherwise, of the local majority's responsibility to adapt to the minority. On the surface, ensuring that everyone's voice is heard is ambitious and desirable, however, in reality it proves to be a frustratingly elusive and, in some cases, fragmentary ideal.

References

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