

Meliorism and Social Hope in Pragmatism: Richard Rorty's Reinterpretations¹

Pragmatizmde Meliorizm ve Sosyal Umut Kavramı: Richard Rorty' nin Yeniden Yorumlaması

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Öz

Geleceğin ortak insan çabalarıyla daha iyi olacağı anlamına gelen Meliorizm kavramı, pragmatist düşünür ve filozofların ilgisini çekmiştir. William James, John Dewey, Ralph Waldo Emerson ve Richard Rorty, pragmatizmde Meliorizm'i vurgulayan önemli filozoflardır. Rorty, pragmatist düşünme biçimini iki boyuta odaklanarak yeniden yorumlamıştır. Geleneksel felsefeyi eleştirirken, pragmatizmin toplumda entelektüel kültür yaratmadaki rolüne dikkat çeker. Rorty'nin pragmatizm anlayışı, temsil karşıtı, özcülük karşıtı, temelcilik karşıtı, deneysel, umutlu ve ileriye dönük olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Richard Rorty'nin meliorizm üzerine inşa ettiği sosyal umut felsefesini keşfetmektir. Rorty sosyal umuda erişmek için beş tür duygunun önplana çıktığı sosyal umut teorisi geliştirmiştir. Bu duygular hayal gücü duygusu, belirsizlik duygusu, iletişim duygusu, öz farkındalık duygusu ve öz saygı duygusudur. Rorty, bu beş duyguya sahip olan insanların umut ve beklenti içinde daha ileri görüşlü olarak geleceğe bakacağını söyler. Rorty bireylere umutla geleceğe odaklanıp ve geçmişini atlamayı önerir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pragmatizm, sosyal umut, felsefe, meliorizm, psikoloji

Abstract

The concept of meliorism which means future would be better with joint human efforts has drawn attention of pragmatist thinkers and philosophers. William James, John Dewey, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Richard Rorty are important philosophers placing an emphasis on Meliorism in pragmatism. Rorty has reinterpreted the pragmatist way of thinking focusing on two dimensions. As he criticises traditional philosophy, he draws attention to the role of pragmatism in creating intellectual culture in society. Rorty's understanding of pragmatism may be described as anti-representalist, anti-essentialist, anti-foundationalist, experimentalist, hopeful, and forward-looking. The purpose of this study is to explore Richard Rorty's philosophy of social hope building on meliorism. He has proposed a social hope theory building in which he underlines the importance of the five types of emotions to access social hope. These include sense of imagination, sense of uncertainty, sense of communication, sense of self-awareness and sense of self-respect. Rorty suggests that people who have the five

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emotions may be forward-looking, which is a combined emotion of hope, anticipation, and something enjoyable in the future. He recommends individual focusing on future with hope and skip the past.

Keywords: Pragmatism, social hope, philosophy, meliorism, psychology

Introduction

We live in a continually evolving society where change is surely coming and nobody predict what will happen in the future and what tomorrow brings. Every new day brings both challenges and unlimited possibilities to human life. At the start of the 21st century, humankind has found itself in a more diverse, global, technologic, competitive and media-saturated environment. The people in this century face with serious emerging issues including pandemic, war, poverty, global warming, famine, population explosion, and other social, natural and political issues. The information and changing world in which we live lead to requirements that we learn the meaning of life, that we make the world more understandable and that we are aware of our abilities to be confident in coping with new challenges and using new opportunities. In order to overcome and meet the challenges of tomorrow and to take advantage of new opportunities, today's people need to have more flexible thinking and attitudes to define and to solve the problem they face. The people who are in lack of confidence, who could not develop flexible approaches towards tomorrows and, who are unable to imagine new possibilities would be discouraged to solve the problems and to meet the demand of their life. This type of people may feel depressed and pessimistic. Today it is common to find depressed people who are abandoning the hope for the future. In particular by the explosion of global viruses like Covid-19, the onset of Ukraine-Russia war and economical crises all around the world triggers anxiety, hopelessness and depression.

Hopelessness can be defined as a state of desperation. In other words, hopelessness is the level of desperation and pessimism for life including a person's negative expectations for the future. Hopelessness might be considered as an infectious disease that spreads rapidly and affects human life in several ways by eliminating the human desire to act. Losing hope leads to losing or maybe ignoring the capacity to want and desire anything. Sometimes losing hope results in losing the wish to live.

While hopelessness is affecting people in this way, the notion of hope gives people a vital spiritual energy and keeps people from the danger of staying in the state of lethargy, fatigue and inaction. It has a therapeutic function which helps human recovering their sense of well-being. Hope might be identified as a crucial factor that contributes to optimizing the human capability and competencies to control their own destiny and to determine how best to live. It provides the person all essential elements to recover from a state of hopelessness: courage to change, to act and to trust.

Considering its therapeutic function and power on clients, the field of psychology gives a broad space in elaborating the notion of hope. In psychology hope is argued using various conceptualizations including a cognitive state (Synder, 1991), disposition (Peterson, 2006) or personal trait (Lazarus, 1999). Although

psychologists conceptualize it in different ways, there is a common point that hope is a vital catalyst for human to sustain their life in undesired conditions (Lazarus,1999).

Similar to psychologist numerous philosophers in pragmatism draw attention to the importance of the notion of hope for both individual and social progress. Pragmatist philisophers see hope as a construct in terms of providing a ground for people to continue their engagement in the life. However, discussions on hope in philosophy do not take enough academic attention in comparison to psychology. Considering this fact, the purpose of this study is to explore hope (meliorism) in pragmatist philosophy discussing Richard Rorty' s theory of social hope.

Hope in Pragmatism

The term “ pragmatist” was firstly used by S. Peirce but William James made this philosophy known worldwide (Bakır,2016). Pragmatism derived from the Greek word pragma (πράγμα) that means taking an action (Bakır,2016). The term, pragmatism, is translated into English as practice, and action-oriented but when the term translated into Turkish, it losses its real meaning. In Turkish, pragmatism is translated as ‘ utilitarianisms” that means “ faydacılık”. More than ‘faydacılık’ pragmatism aims at making progress via human action, inquiry and collaboration. Pragmatism puts the human at the center of philosophy as ones who can change the world by being in action and putting efforts to access good will. In pragmatism, ones with high degree of hope mostly have inner motivation to act, and ameliorate imperfections.

Hopefulness called as meliorism in pragmatist way of thinking is considered one of the main agents to access social progress. Because of its role on social progress, the concept of meliorism is widely discussed in the pragmatist way of thinking. Meliorism derived from the Latin Word, melior, means that the World and everything would be better with the joint human effort. The concept of meliorism brings together two central themes, namely pluralism and humanism, in the pragmatist vision. In the pragmatist aspect, meliorism refers to the doctrine that the word is not universe, on the contrary it is pluriverse and human should put efforts for making a better pluriverse world. In pragmatism, the notion of meliorism is not a theoretical idea or wishful thinking, rather it encourages taking action with high level of hope. William James, John Dewey, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Richard Rorty are important philosophers placing an emphasis on Meliorism in pragmatism.

Among given philopsophers above, James widely discusses the notion of meliorism as a ‘ iyilestirici’ philosophy saying that “ the World we live in exists diffuse and distributed... The World stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at hour hands... Man engenders truths upon it” (as cited in Koopman,2006,p.107). James suggests that each individual should be a healer (iyileştirici), and when everyone becomes healers , they altogether change and ameliorate the imperfect World into a good place. William James puts the humans at the center of the universe as ones who are curious, enthusiastic, hard working and imaginative. To him, humans with progressive vision have inherent potential, power and skills to redesign the entire universe for creating better living condition (James,1977). James’ thinking of meliorism underlines the importance of the action, imagination and



hope. According to James, if ones acted with hope and sense of imagination, they can change the society bringing new improvements. Similarly, Emerson also calls for hopefulness emphasizing the importance of studying hard with love. Emerson stated,

If the American artist will study with the hope and love the price thing to be done by him, considering the climate, the soil, the length of the day, the wants of the people, the habit and form of the government, he will create a house in which all these will find themselves fitted (as cited in Koopman, 2006, p. 110)

Although the language of hope seems absent from Dewey's works, he discussed hope as a prerequisite for social progress. He mostly elaborated the value of meliorism emphasizing hope is as an effort and inquiry rather than fantasy belief. Dewey recognized that the circumstances in which people live were full of challenges and obstacles to make progress. He suggested that people should stop worrying about annoying things, instead they should use inquiry to find alternative ways to overcome the obstacles and challenges standing in front of their progress. To hope pragmatically means to recognize the challenges of the current circumstances and to make thoughtful efforts to deal with such challenges. Rorty following pragmatist approach has reinterpreted the value of hope building upon meliorism. Rorty has discussed a social hope theory building up the idea of meliorism. The purpose of this study is to explore Richard Rorty's philosophy of social hope. Prior to presenting Rorty's contribution to our thinking about the notion of meliorism, examining his philosophical thinking and his pragmatist views could be beneficial in order to understand his theory.

Rorty's Philosophy

Richard Rorty is one of the most influential philosophers in twentieth century. As he was one of the followers of pragmatism, he reconceptualized many ideas of pragmatism. His pragmatist way of thinking spread over the US and entire world while he was lecturing at top universities including Harvard, Princeton and Stanford University in the US. He has influenced and revitalized various fields within the humanities, education and social sciences. Rorty tries to attempt clarifying and presenting his own writings attributing to ideas of a wide range of important thinkers including Kant, Foucault, Dewey and Plato. His works make a great level of contribution in order to comprehend and resynthesize the meaning of truth, reality and the role of philosophy.

In general, Rorty's works support the pragmatist approach in modern times. Rorty plays an important role in demonstrating that pragmatism is not only a philosophical way, but it is also a kind of scientific and advanced method. Therefore, he mainly concerns about the rehabilitation and renewal of pragmatism. According to Rorty, pragmatism is a form of thinking focused on practice over theory. His pragmatism gives the main role to human authority justifying claims and beliefs. John Dewey, Charles S. Pierce, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Alain Locke, Sidney Hook, George Herbert Mead, W. E. B Dubois, William James and Josiah Royce are some of the main figures in pragmatism who inspired Rorty (Mendiate, 2007). Rorty's pragmatism may be described as anti-representalist, anti-essentialist, anti-

foundationalist, experimentalist, hopeful, and forward looking. His interpretation of philosophy is different from western philosophers, therefore Rorty criticizes various aspects of traditional philosophy in his works. Rorty argues that the entire philosophical tradition starting from Plato to Kant sees truth as the correspondence of reality, and as an intangible issue waiting to be discovered by human beings. Also, in philosophical tradition, human mind is assumed as the mirror reflecting the reality accurately to human society. In the western tradition, mind is considered as an object belonging to humans and distinguishing them from the rest of the world. Rorty opposes to these views of Western tradition. He argues that language and mind do not represent the reality, on the contrary they are kind of tools helping humans to deal with reality. The value of those tools can be judged according to what extent they helping people to access purposes and deal with environment.

In Rortian view, our theories does not represent the reality, in contrast theories only talk about the aspects of reality. In related to this claim, language can not make our world rather than presenting. We are able to describe the same event in numerous ways, depending on our goals. There are various ways of describing the universe and individuals use any of these ways based on their purposes. For Rorty, language is the tool which enables human beings to meet their purposes. The rhetoric of truth is a concept widely used in a particular language game. (King, 1982) Therefore, knowledge is contingent upon access to particular language game (Gibbs & Costley, 2012) which is shaped through historical and social factors. Therefore, there is no fixed or certain truth. According to Rorty, truth is a kind of inter-subjective agreement of individuals that enables the members in community to speak a public language.

Rorty claims that human has a continuous relationship with the world, therefore knowledge and self cannot be separated from each other. He argues that there is no way the world is independent of our descriptions. For Rorty, humans are not passive viewers who are sitting back, observing the world from a distance and waiting the discovery. Rather, according to Rorty, each person interprets the reality in accordance with his own subjective condition. In contrast to traditional philosophy, each person is an active participant and has some responsibilities in the creation of truth. Truth is socially constructed by human beings for their own purposes. In other words, truth is a partly experimental issue used by human to understand the world, to cope with environment and to find out what works, and what serves to their purposes. Therefore, truth cannot be outside of human beings.

Rorty, like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault and Dewey, sees the desire for universal truth to be the main cause of human oppression. This tradition should be overcome, says Rorty in his book, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, because that tradition does not work. He emphasizes that philosophy should give up talking about discovering truths, instead, it may help human to reinterpret their beliefs.

Rorty's work announces new roles of philosophy. According to him, philosophy should become a partner in the conversation of humankind. By conversation Rorty does not refer to chat, rather he means cultural discourse allowing humans to listen and learn from each other. He states that philosophy should contribute to the conversation of humankind by insisting on its edifying role, that is by, "finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking" (Rorty, 1979, p. 360). For Rorty, the



purpose of understanding our world is not only to know how to cope, but also to quest the ways for change and improvement. According to him, best philosophers can express our hopes; they can tell us how things look like without claiming on the 'truth'.

In Rortian philosophy, the education aims at whole development of human to prepare them for their whole life. Rather than thinking on how future will be, predicting what future brings to our life, looking at the current condition would be more useful in terms of understanding where we are now. We need to focus on what we can do now.

Rorty emphasizes instead of being the search for this ultimate ground of agreement, instead of focusing on epistemology, philosophy will now become "hermeneutics" a single voice within that conversation, helping to keep it alive (Nehamas, 1982, p.399). Rorty proposed that we need to avoid from dualism – set of distinctions – such as appearance-reality, theory-practice, matter-mind, made-found, man-nature, sensible-intellectual which lie at the heart of western thinking. For Rorty, these traditional distinctions have become obstacles to our social hopes (Reason, 2003, p.105). One of the tasks of schooling might be avoiding these kinds of distinction. We need to aim at progressing whole life of students without any distinctions between school life and life outside of school.

Rorty recommended that we might be forward looking which is a combined sense of feeling of hope, expecting, and regarding something pleasurable in the future. He recommends focusing on future with hope and skipping the past. We should focus more on what we are doing today and what we want to do in the future.

Rorty's pragmatist hope is pluralistic and humanistic. Accordingly, each member of a society should be aware that her/his action might impact other members' actions. Therefore, everybody should be responsive of the actions and ideas of others. Rorty wishes accessing a social hope for everybody including all ethnic groups, genders and entire world. Rorty claims that peoples have more similarities than differences, so rather than focusing on the language 'I', more focus should be emphasized on 'we'. In this way, people have a desire to be in a community and support each other's weaknesses and appreciate strengths.

Rorty's pluralist and humanist ideas ultimately lead to meliorism. Through meliorism, he proposes that we are as humans having capacity to create better selves and a better life and future. It is emphasized that future would be better than past by the real effort and energy of humanbeings. In his pragmatist vision, hope is the essence giving human an energy that they can make a difference both in their individual lives and for the world. Rorty's hopefulness call for actions through which change the destiny of the society. Rorty makes connection between truth and hope saying that hope should replace truth instead of reconstructing it. In Rorty's point of view, the notion of uncertainty should be changed by the sense of imagination and sense of self-reliance that encourage people to have a better life. Rorty pays considerable attention to sense of imagination that many people lost in the twentieth century. Self-reliance is an important terminology here but Rorty refers self-reliance as a starting point not as a goal.

Self-reliance can be explained as a capacity to rely on one's own capabilities, and to manage one's own choices. The people who are self-reliant never blame circumstances, others, fate, or lack of opportunities since they can create opportunities and make their own tools to use them with all the skill, strength, precision and concentration.

Rorty values interaction and communication. He proposes that social hope is characterized by 'our ability to trust and cooperate with other people 'so as to work together to improve the future (Peters& Ghiraldi, 2001, p.4) Increasing trust, tolerance and participation, might be a prerequisite for promoting democratic values and civic participation. This will be possible by creating environment which invites young people for their participation. Through participation, young people will be able to accumulate trust, as well as learn to tolerate differences.

Rorty's pragmatist hope encompasses the entire human race. He supports the global hope and meliorism for everybody. Rorty's philosophy invites us to respect all kinds of differences including idea, ethnicity, language, culture and gender. He calls us to recognize and accept the diversity that there is no one type of society or education that is ideal and fits for everybody. As a result of the fact that people are diversified so that their preferences, beliefs, ideas, aspirations life styles would be different.

Social Hope Theory

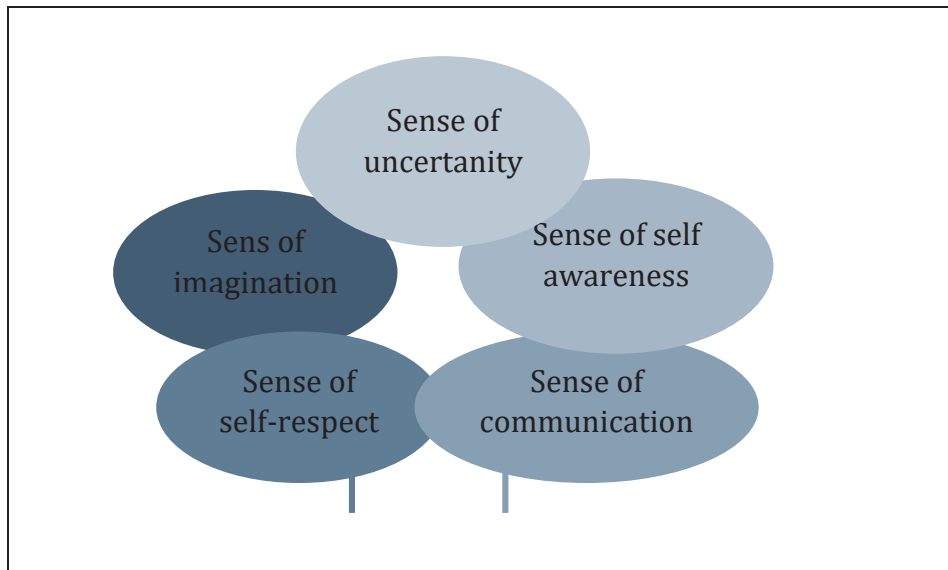


Figure 1. Tenets of social hope

Rorty underlines the importance of the five types of emotions, namely, sense of uncertainty, sense of communication, sense of self-awareness, sense of imagination, and sense of self-respect to access social hope. First one is the sense of uncertainty that refers to the state of unknown situation. The sense of uncertainty takes an important place in Rortian ideas claiming that one does not guarantee what the future brings to their life. Life is uncertain, so preparing our children to an unpredictable life makes them more



powerful for their future life. Accepting the existence of uncertainty not only shows human the ways in which human deal with exploratory words, but also it gives courage and motivation for finding better ways and solutions. Rorty emphasizes that knowledge is fallible and multifaceted. Public people should be taught that knowledge is tentative. Some of what our students have learned at schools may be obsolete or false after a short time passed. For instance, once upon a time, it was believed that the Earth is flat and the planets revolved around the world. At that time, this knowledge was considered as truth. However, when this knowledge was proven false, the new knowledge has been considered truth. Therefore, students might be introduced the current condition, but at the same time, it can be emphasized that their current condition can be changed after new improvements or investigations. Also in Rorty's thinking, knowledge would be introduced students from the familiar concept to unfamiliar (Rorty, 1998). Putting the new knowledge in a familiar concept would help students to activate their previous knowledge and then students would make relationship between new knowledge and their previous knowledge. Consequently, students would able to make sense of the new knowledge and integrate the new information and understanding.

The another feature of Rortian doctrine would be to increase the communication and interaction in the public. In Rortian philosophy, each individual has a right to express their feelings and ideas freely, since there is no final truth and no final vocabulary. It can be said that Rorty opens all doors to communication. While there are many benefits of communication for the social progress, one benefit in Rortian hopefulness is relevant to creating more possibilities. According to Rorty, communication may enable to more possibilities for individuals. In Rorty's perspective, communication means taking active role in social interaction. Through communication, ones can share their thoughts as well as can listen to others' thoughts. This allows people to enhance their understanding and challenge the ideas of others. In other words, learning from others is an important step since learning opportunities should be arise when various ideas and points of view are expressed. Learning from others does not meant waiting for others to do the work, on the contrary it means taking advantage of others' ideas and experiences. To increase communication in public, it would be necessary to give value the idea of each individual at all levels of achievement and from various backgrounds. Rorty recommends bringing communication into schools. The classroom is a kind of small society and each student should be viewed as an active participant of this community. Diverse group of students including ethnic students, special needs students, bilingual students, low income students, and girls and boys- all of them has a potential to contribute the others' understanding. Giving a chance to every student to voice their ideas and feelings freely is a requirement. It may be possible that communicating one's thinking is not always easy for all students. Students from low-income families, marginalized students or minority groups and sometimes girls lack in confidence or feel excluded, and become reluctant students to express their ideas. At this point, teachers should intervene and encourage students to reflect their feelings. It can be emphasized that every individual can make a contribution to understanding of others.

The third feature is bringing the sense of imagination into the classroom and making it prevalent in the public. In Rorty's point of view, people can not access hope without imagining a better life. Rorty refuses to stand in any awe of anything other than human imagination. In his book of *Truth and Progress*, he asserted that philosophy makes progress not being rigorous but by becoming more imaginative'. Encouraging imagination might be an important step to prevent hopelessness. In his book *Achieving Our Country*, Rorty (1998) recommends to tell imaginative stories of new possibilities rather than build political theories. In Rortian Curriculum, literacy is the powerful tool in terms of bringing imagination as well as other social and cultural issues into the classroom. In order to focus on the imagination in school context, literacy may be used, since literacy is an area that everybody can access and get benefit from it. Also, literacy would enable students to understand that there is not one "right perspective", instead, there are several right perspectives. And each reader would constitute her/ his understanding from the text.

The last feature is helping individuals to develop self-awareness and self-respect. Self-awareness means recognition of personality with a sense of who I am. The people who grow in self-awareness would identify their abilities, skills, emotions, ideals, beliefs, strengths and weaknesses. Through self-awareness, students would learn to exploit their strengths and to cope with their weaknesses. As youth grow in self-awareness, they would increase their understanding of 'who they are' and would determine their aims, plans and their way to go. Knowing about their personality would help students to develop self-respect. The people with self-respect would accept them as an individual who has capabilities and potentials as well as limits and weaknesses. The importance of balanced self-respect is underlined by Rorty. When teachers and families recognize and value students' ideas, strengths and capabilities, students would also develop self-respect. A Rortian curriculum would encourage students that they can make a difference during their life through appreciating them as individuals who are capable of managing everything in their life.

Conclusion

The notion of hope provides the person all essential elements to recover from a state of hopelessness: courage to change, to act and to trust. It gives people a vital energy and keeps people from the danger of lapsing into lethargy and indifference. It has a therapeutic function helping human to recover their sense of well-being. Hope might be identified as crucial factor that contributes to optimizing the capability to control their own destiny and to determine living in better condition.

Hope as a language attached to very powerful and inspirational connotations so that it is widely utilized in almost every aspects of the human life including birth, health, religion, and in social life to give positive notions and feelings. However, its usage remains as inner feelings and far away in applying real-life problems. It is thought as a fancy belief, imagination or wishing that tomorrow will be more desirable than today. In contradiction to the former theories, pragmatist theorist Rorty discusses the notion of hope as a practical way of thinking based upon the meliorist thinking in pragmatism that provides both inspiration and direction for people in addressing the real problems.



In pragmatist theory, meliorism is an umbrella term including sense of hope, imagination and action. It is emphasized that life is uncertain and full of both favorable and negative situations that continuously cycle. Nobody can know the future with confidence. At this point, hope is a necessary ground, serving as a coping mechanism in terms of providing a reason to continue their engagement in the life. In pragmatist theory, hope is grounded on concrete structures and agencies such as intelligence, hardworking, community involvement, and interactions. Following pragmatist thinking, Rorty's theory of social hope includes five types of assets, namely, sense of uncertainty, sense of communication, sense of self-awareness, sense of imagination, sense of self-respect to access social hope. Rorty argues that if ones work hard and use inquiry with these five emotional assets, they can able to access social hope. To Rorty, all these are interrelated aspects might influence each other. Rorty recommends that people should be forward looking which is a combined sense of feeling of hope, expecting, and regarding something pleasurable in the future with the joint community efforts. He recommends focusing on future with hope and skipping the past. We should focus more on what we are doing today and what we want to do in the future.

It might be possible that hopefulness can be brought and even taught to public via education. It is not expected that schooling can make all the differences for hope, but, at least, students would be encouraged to work hard, put efforts for finding alternative ways to access happiness even though there are obstacles and challenges. Even in the worst condition, public should be encouraged to find reasons to continue their life engagement. It's time for the youth and for the adults have to realize their power, their role, their duties and their responsibilities and stand up for their rights. They should start finding ways to change, instead of criticizing. It is really important that at least some individuals can see that they could play roles in the transformation of their society. They can see that they can make a difference not only in their individual future but also in the future of their country, even in the future of the world, through participation, trusting other people and being tolerant towards differences.

Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı

"Pragmatizmde Meliorizm ve Sosyal Umut Kavramı: Richard Rorty' nin Yeniden Yorumlaması" başlıklı makalemiz ile ilgili herhangi bir kurum, kuruluş, kişi ile mali çıkar çatışması yoktur ve yazarlar arasında da herhangi bir çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Yaşadığımız yüzyılda insanların yaşam koşulları hiç olmadığı kadar hızlı bir şekilde değişim göstermektedir. Bu değişimin yapısını önceden görebilmek hayli zordur. Her yeni gün insanların hayatına beklenmedik hem bir takım zorluklar hem de sınırsız olanaklar getirmektedir. Bir tarafta gelişen teknoloji ile birlikte bilgiye ulaşma ve kullanma hızı artarken diğer tarafta insanlar bu yüzyılda ekonomik sıkıntılar, iklim değişimi, küresel virüs salgını, savaş ve doğal afetler gibi olumsuzluklarla mücadele etmek zorunda kalmaktadırlar. Bireylerin yaşamlarını sürdürebilmeleri, yaşadıkları çağa uyum sağlayabilmeleri için esnek olmaları, yeniliklere ve değişimlere açık olmaları, risk-yönetimi konusunda becerikli olmaları gerekmektedir. Gelişen yeni durumlara uyum sağlamak zorlanan bireylerin son dönemlerde artan olumsuzluklarla birlikte yaşama sevinci azalmış ve ümitsizliğe sürüklenmeye başlamışlardır. Bu noktada pragmatist felsefesinin 'meliorism' kavramı, tüm olumsuzluklara rağmen insanın gayretiyle dünyanın iyiye gidebileceği inancı önemli hale gelmektedir.

Pragmatizm kelimesi Türkçeye 'faydacılık' olarak çevrilmiştir ancak pragmatizmin gerçek anlamı 'action' yani harekete geçme demektir. Pragmatizmde insanın aktif olması, problem çözmesi, işbirliği içinde araştırma yapması oldukça önemlidir. Meliorism kavramı pragmatist filozof ve düşünürlerin yoğun ilgisini çekmiştir. William James, John Dewey, Ralph Waldo Emerson ve Richard Rorty çalışmalarında pragmatizmde meliorism kavramına vurgu yapmışlardır. William James meliorizme çalışmalarında geniş yer vermiştir. James insanı felsefenin tam ortasına koyarak 'iyileştiren' olarak tanımlamıştır olarak tanımlamıştır. James'e göre insan ister ve gayret ederse ve diğer insanlarla işbirliği yaparsa dünya çok iyi bir yer haline gelebilir. Emerson da benzer şekilde ümitvar şekilde insanların çaba ve gayretiyle olumsuzlukların giderilebileceğini savunur. Dewey'in çalışmalarında umut kavramı çok belirgin olmasa da Dewey sosyal ilerlemin umut olmadan mümkün olmayacağını savunur. Bu filozofların arasında Richard Rorty pragmatist felsefeyi daha farklı yorumlayarak meliorism altyapısına dayalı bir sosyal umut teorisi geliştirmiştir. Rorty'nin sosyal umut teorisi çoğulcul ve insancıl anlayışı temsil eder. Teoriden ziyade deney ve uygulamaya dayalı, ümitvar ve pozitif yapıya olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Richard Rorty'nin sosyal umut teorisini detaylarıyla sunmaktır.

Richard Rorty, yirminci yüzyılın en etkili filozoflarından biridir. Beşeri bilimler, eğitim ve sosyal bilimlerdeki çeşitli alanları etkilemiş ve canlandırmıştır. Rorty birçok eserinde Dewey, Peirce, Foucault, Derrida, Marx, Heidegger, Habermas, Kuhn gibi geniş bir düşünür yelpazesinden temaları sentezlemeye ve yeniden yorumlamaya çalışmıştır. Rorty'ye göre felsefe teoriden ziyade insanların hayatına yönelik önerilerde bulunmalı ve insanlığın sohbetine ortak olmalıdır. Felsefe, yeni, daha iyi, daha ilginç, daha verimli konuşma yolları bularak insanoğlunun eğitici rolünde ısrar ederek, insanoğlunun hayatına katkıda bulunmalıdır. Rorty, felsefi düşüncelerinde umuda ve hayal gücüne önemli bir yer verir. Tavsiyelerinden biri, geleceğe yönelik umut duygusu, geleceğin daha iyi olacağı inancıyla çalışmaktır. Rorty, etnik köken, cinsiyet ve kültür gözetmeksizin tüm insan ırkı için toplumsal umudu desteklemektedir. Rorty'ye göre sosyal umuda ulaşmada diğer insanlara güvenme ve işbirliği yapma oldukça önemlidir. Dünyanın geleceği insanın gerçek çabası ve enerjisi ile daha iyi olacaktır. Rorty, sosyal umuda ulaşmanın imkânsız olmadığını aksine insanların bir araya gelip birlik içinde çalışmasının toplumu topyekûn feraha ulaştıracağını vurgular. Sosyal umuda ulaşmada beş tür duyguya her bir bireyin sahip olması gerektiğini önemle belirtir. Bu duygular bireysel farkındalık, özsaygı, hayal etme duygusu, iletişim ve belirsizlik duygusudur. Rorty'ye göre bu beş duyguya sahip bireylerden oluşan toplum çaba gösterirlerse sosyal umuda ulaşacaklarını bildirmiştir. Rorty, birey ve toplumların geçmişten ziyade geleceğe odaklanmaları gerektiğinin altını çizmiştir.