

Anthony Appiah & the racism in his work – part1

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This article's (Part1 of a series) main focus is on a logical analysis of Appiah's main argument that Alexander Crummell was a racist. However to show that the implicit fraudulent scholarship involved in nature of the argument is specifically racist we need to put his claimed logical argument in the context of other claims that Appiah makes in order to show that there is a pattern of fraudulent scholarship with a specifically anti African anti- Afro American animus. A 'prelude ' will cover these points and then 'Appiah's logical analysis of racism' will look closely at the logic of his claims. Here the issue is that a logical review simply asks if the premises can justify the conclusion and if each step of an argument can follow the earlier in a formally sound manner. Such an analysis abstracts from the issue of whether the steps are reasonable or factually correct.

PRELUDE

What Appiah presents in 'In my father's house' (Appiah, 1992) is an image of Africa that is a collection of local groups who live separate from other groups and have little or no knowledge of each other. They are lazy, drunken people with no thought of the future or sense of morals. It is only with the arrival of Europeans that any civilisation arises and even then only in respect of those who travelled to Europe and were educated there. Many of the famous nationalists would have remained happy and contented colonials had they not visited Europe or America and discovered concepts such as liberty and nationality. It is only when they visited the West that they 'discovered' they were 'African' having had no idea of such an entity ever before. However between one country or group in Africa and another there is no cultural similarity or shared values or traditions. It is the concepts which they learnt in the West that led them to return to Africa and seek decolonisation. However these otherwise happy natives encountered ideas from African Americans which were racist to the core and unfortunately Africans have been seriously infected by these ideas that had no place in Africa. Africans had lived happily under colonialism and when they came to Europe made many friends and generally had a happy time had it not been for an infection from African Americans of racist ideas. It is of great importance that that they 'Africans' should recognise that each group in Africa is totally different and there is no common culture or history to bind them. In subsequent articles the historical, factual and interpretive elements of this view will be addressed. This first paper addresses primarily the logical argument about racism.

Appiah's first chapter "The Invention of Africa" is constituted of a long series of ex cathedra statements for which no evidence is supplied.

1. On p.6 he writes

'The lesson the Africans drew from the Nazis We had known that European colonialism could lay waste African lives with a careless ease; now we knew that white people could take the murderous tools of modernity and apply them to each other'

This is stated without reference or documentation. Ex cathedra. Not only is it not true it is abundantly untrue. First of all if the statement is taken literally, one recalls that 620,000 died during the US civil war so any informed Black person would be aware that white people were capable of slaughtering themselves particularly as this event happened before the eyes of African Americans. Then again many Africans took part in World War 1 where the slaughter on the Western battlefield was greater than in the subsequent war. However what Appiah is mistranslating is the idea widely held among European intellectuals at the time that 'genocide' was something Europeans performed only on non-whites so that the application of genocide on the European continent within what had been considered 'white' people was astonishing. But it was astonishing only to certain Europeans.

Black people had watched the Russian Revolution with care and were well aware of what was happening:

'In fact, at the time of the revolution, Black radicals across the U.S. followed events in Russia with rapturous attentiveness, convinced that the victory of Lenin's Bolsheviks in the October Revolution held vital lessons for their own struggle for liberation. Black activists from all backgrounds debated the meaning of the revolution, from nationalists like Marcus Garvey to the NAACP's W.E.B. Du Bois.' ("The Black Bolsheviks," n.d.).

African Americans volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War (The Abraham Lincoln Brigade) fully aware of the future programs of fascists and Nazis. African American pilots had supported Ethiopia and then returned to support freedom in the Spanish Civil War against the Mussolini backed Falange. Frantz Fanon volunteered aged 18 and at the risk of his life to fight against Hitler fully aware as to what was at stake. (wikipedia, n.d.)

Finally anyone witnessing the massacres and racial hatred of European colonisers would be well aware that such hatred was no respecter of persons and could switch targets at a bugle call. Technically, Hitler did not consider Slavs white but rather an inferior race to be slaughtered to make lebensraum (wikipedia, 2019a) for the superior Aryan race. In this regard Hitler looked admiringly at America's treatment of native Americans and seizure of their lands.

The idea that it took World War 2 for black people to discover the murderous nature of Nazism or that white people could kill each other is ridiculous. It is Europeans who were shocked to

discover that they too could become targets for liquidation and Appiah has transposed this onto Africa.

2. Appiah p.7 talks of the ‘the experience of a colonised people forced to accept the swaggering presence of the coloniser’ not of his brutal acts and expropriation. Perhaps Appiah has no knowledge of the Belgian Congo.

3. Appiah writes on p.6

‘Many of the Africans, on the other hand (my father among them) took back to their homes European wives and warm memories of European friends: few of them, even from the ‘settler’ cultures of East and Southern Africa, seem to have been committed to ideas of racial separation or to doctrines of racial hatred. Since they came from cultures where black people were in the majority and where lives continued to be largely controlled by indigenous moral and cognitive conceptions, they had no reason to believe that they were inferior to white people and they had, correspondingly, less reason to resent them.’

This is promptly contradicted on p.22 Where he writes:

‘Literate people of my generation , both in Africa and, to a lesser extent, in the West, may find it hard to recover the overwhelmingly negative conception of Africans that inhabited the mainstream of European and American intellectual life by the first years of Europe’s African empires.’

Thus for African intellectuals in 1940’s to have ‘no reason to believe that they were inferior..’ is directly contradicted by Appiah himself.

However let us look at the earlier part of the statement about lives ‘*largely controlled by indigenous moral and cognitive conceptions,*’.

This is astonishingly false and there are no sources for this other than a misquotation p.7 from Wole Soyinka. Soyinka’s aunt, Mrs Ransome -Kuti , was a famous early fighter against colonialism. She travelled around the Eastern bloc, visited the USSR and met Mao Zedong himself. (“Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti,” 2019). This is Soyinka’s immediate family. In Abeokuta, and I too grew up there, Ake is a particular section of Abeokuta, the culture was anti colonial simply in the air you breathed, and drawn in with your mother’s milk. The idea that the children of Abeokuta did not see themselves as fighters against Western imperialism is too absurd to consider. It was simply not something worth discussing.

Then the idea that in East Africa where Africans were being dispossessed of their land or South Africa where apartheid was being promulgated these African ‘lives continued to be largely controlled by indigenous moral and cognitive conceptions.’ is disgraceful. Anyone subject to

forced labour, dispossession and eviction from ancestral lands would have every reason 'to resent them', the Europeans.

Appiah writes (p.9) of Kenyatta, Nkrumah, Kaunda and Nyerere that only when they visited Europe did they experience Western culture otherwise 'each lived at home comfortably rooted in the traditions of his *ethnos*'. This is stated without evidence. Another ex cathedra statement. It also is without truth. This simply makes no sense of Fanon's volunteering to fight Hitler or the fact that most African intellectuals followed the Russian Revolution closely, and several emigrated to Russia (Simmons, n.d.)

What we have here is an extraordinary colonial invention, that left to themselves Africans would have lived for ever happily within their archaic traditions and that it was only Western education that awakened them from their perpetual slumber.

Appiah's technical argument about 'natives' living in their own culture is carefully crafted and dishonest. This was the period of indirect rule. The British and French empires were vastly over extended. If rebellion broke out in one area troops from other parts of the empire had to be resourced and the uprising had to be mercilessly suppressed to deter others. An excerpt on the Malagasy Uprising is sufficient:

'By May 1947 the [French](#) began to counter the nationalists. The French tripled the number of troops on the island to 18,000, primarily by transferring soldiers from French colonies elsewhere in Africa. The colonial authorities sought to fight on the physical and psychological fronts and engaged in a variety of terror tactics designed to demoralize the population. The French military force carried out [mass execution](#), [torture](#), [war rape](#), torching of entire villages, [collective punishment](#) and other atrocities such as throwing live Malagasy prisoners out of an airplane ([death flights](#))'

The estimated number of Malagasy casualties varies from a low of 11,000 to a high of over 100,000.

(wikipedia, 2019b)

It needs emphasising that the point of the brutality was that it should be widely known throughout the Empire to have a deterrent effect.

Indirect rule was rule through native institutions. Empire on a budget. Local chiefs would be replaced if necessary by amenable substitutes and the local colonial officers would monitor their conduct and take any necessary steps to preserve colonial rule. Appiah implies that the pattern of indirect rule meant that locals were left alone and colonial rule did not affect them rather than that the local institutions had been captured by colonial authorities. That the local chiefs did exactly what the colonial officer wanted would have been openly apparent to everyone.

Yet Western invasions were also within living memory at that time and the conquest of their homelands and its immediate and direct consequences. The colonial system maintained its rule with constant 'pacifications' or in plain English 'massacres' or rebelling natives. This view of the colonies presented by Appiah fits in with the extreme right wing view that it was only 'foreign' ideas that disturbed the happy lives of the African natives. Without such external interference these natives would remain happy, fully accommodating to their dispossession from their lands, to working in the mines in South Africa and being forced to grow and sell cocoa at an artificial low price to the Colonial government.

4. Appiah states that Africans did not leave Europe with ideas of racial separation or racial hatred. On p.6 he writes:

'few of them, even from the 'settler' cultures of East and Southern Africa, seem to have been committed to ideas of racial separation or to doctrines of racial hatred'

This is a quite extraordinary statement. Would anyone suggest that Jews would respond to Nazism by developing racial separation of their own, seeking segregation, and filling their lives with racial hatred? Racial separation was the policy of apartheid not of pan Africanism, just as Jewish segregation was an anti-semitic programme. Why would Africans default to racial hatred as a tactical response to apartheid? The entire history of the anti-slavery movement was a fight against racial hatred. The idea that Africans would be filled with racial hatred is an extremist white idea no doubt based on the premise that if they had been treated the way Africans had they would be filled with hatred. First of all hatred is a poor weapon against evil and further, hatred of an entire population would deny yourself very important allies for your struggle for freedom. Toussaint L'Ouverture used white allies extensively. However to suggest that because his father married a white women there was no racial hatred in England is staggering. Even during the height of Nazi anti semitism non Jews married Jews such that extreme legal measures had to be undertaken to discourage the practice. Appiah's position is equivalent to someone arguing that because their parents married in Germany in 1930's and one was Jewish and the other non-Jewish so there could not have been any problems at the time! Everyone was clearly getting on with each other!

5. Appiah p.22 by careful choice of language argues that the Western view of Africa of the Enlightenment period 'did not derive from ill feeling towards African' but was merely a statement of the facts as, Appiah claims, was confirmed by Crummell. Let us quote the views of Africa that Appiah is endorsing:

'The natives are idolators, superstitious..... Lazy, drunken rascals, without thought for the future, insensitive to any happening, happy or sad...each sex plunging on the other like a brute from the earliest age.'

Appiah makes no effort to detail that the report was specifically about Guinea, a part of West Africa totally devastated by the slave trade and the ensuing wars. Appiah interprets this to be an accurate description of Africa in general.

Appiah's logical analysis of racism

Appiah writes on p.13 'we must first seek out the distinctive content of nineteenth century racism.' However he does this without any consultation with the standard texts of the period i.e. the works of Count Gobineau, Stewart Chamberlain et al. He merely proceeds 'ex cathedra'.

As he states p.13 'I shall be using the words *racism* and *racialism* with the meanings I stipulate'. This is a highly dubious procedure. First of all, he has started by saying his intention is to locate the 'distinctive content of nineteenth century racism', but then directly slips away from that by declaring he will simply define terms ex cathedra. To 'seek out the distinctive content of nineteenth century racism' would require direct engagement with the texts. But this he avoids. By announcing he will unilaterally define terms there is in the mind of a casual reader that these terms will have something to do with 'the distinctive content of nineteenth century racism' but they do not!! To establish that would require some reading of texts. This paragraph is clearly deliberately misleading as the first sentence logically has no connection with the remainder of the paragraph.

A fundamental error in his analysis of text is that he interprets text from a backward looking point of view as if they were focussed on the present day of their time. Pan Africanist focus has always been the future and their recommendations and deprecations were entirely focussed on that.

Racialism: he declares p.13 views

' that there are heritable characteristics, possessed by members of our species, which allow us to divide them into a small set of races, in such a way that all the members of these races share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race'

The immediate problem here is that this definition is far too strong and there is NO nineteenth century racists who can be said to adhere to this view. This requires unique characteristics at the individual level and this has never been part of nineteenth century racial theory. It is of course too easily disproved. Given they were interested in the rise and fall of civilisations i.e. how one society can be grow, flourish and decline, the idea of specific physical differences would militate against explanations of rise and fall unless one could show that there were enormous physical changes which frankly would, then as now, be considered beyond credible.

An extensive sample of Gobineau's (Gobineau, 1854) views is presented below. These are given at length to show just how far away the nineteenth century views are from the description and definitions provided by Appiah. What is crucial to recognise is that the nineteenth Century racists were 'non-genetic' pre-Mendelians as Mendel's work ("Gregor Mendel," 2019) was not widely known till the turn of the 20th Century and for those of the nineteenth century the distinction between biology and culture in the conception of race was necessarily weak.

“The word degenerate, when applied to a people, means (as it ought to mean) that the people has no longer the same intrinsic value as it had before, because it has no longer the same blood in its veins, continual adulterations having gradually affected the quality of that blood. In other words, though the nation bears the name given by its founders, the name no longer connotes the same race ; in fact, the man of a decadent time, the degenerate man properly so called, is a different being, from the racial point of view, from the heroes of the great ages. I agree that he still keeps something of their essence ; but the more he degenerates the more attenuated does this "something" become.’

Gobineau p.25

‘I think I am right in concluding from these examples, which cover all countries and ages, including our own, that the human race in all its branches has a secret repulsion from the crossing of blood, a repulsion which in many of the branches is invincible, and in others is only conquered to a slight extent.’

Gobineau p.29

‘In every other place where there were really any castes at all, they ceased to exist at the moment when the chance of making a fortune, and of becoming famous by useful discoveries or social talents, became open to the whole world, without distinction of origin. But also, from that same day, the nation that was originally the active, conquering, and civilizing power began to disappear; its blood became merged in that of all the tributaries which it had attracted to its own stream.

Gobineau p.32

‘I think I now have all the data necessary for grappling with the problem of the life and death of nations ; and I can say positively that a people will never die, if it remains eternally composed of the same national elements. If the empire of Darius had, at the battle of Arbela, been able to fill its ranks with Persians, that is to say with real Aryans ; if the Romans of the later Empire had had a Senate and an army of the same stock as that which existed at the time of the Fabii, their dominion would never have come to an end. So long as they kept the same purity of blood, the Persians and Romans would have lived and reigned.’

Gobineau p.33

‘But if, like the Greeks, and the Romans of the later Empire, the people has been absolutely drained of its original blood, and the qualities conferred by the blood, then the day of its defeat will be the day of its death. It has used up the time that heaven granted at its birth, for it has completely changed its race, and with its race its nature. It is therefore degenerate.’

Gobineau p.34

‘With the exception of the Teutonic group and some of the Slavs, all the races in our part of the world have the material instincts only in a slight degree ; they have already played their parts in former ages and cannot begin again.’

Gobineau p.93

‘There is further a general proneness to obesity, which, though not confined to the yellow type, is found there more frequently than in the others. The yellow man has little physical energy, and is inclined to apathy ; he commits none of the strange excesses so common among negroes. His desires are feeble, his will-power rather obstinate than violent ; his longing for material pleasures, though constant, is kept within bounds. A rare glutton by nature, he shows far more discrimination in his choice of food. He tends to mediocrity in everything ; he understands easily enough anything not too deep or sublime.* He has a love of utility and a respect for order, and knows the value of a certain amount of freedom. He is practical, in the narrowest sense of the word. He does not dream or theorize ; he invents little, but can appreciate and take over what is useful to him. His whole desire is to live in the easiest and most comfortable way possible.’

Gobineau p. 206

‘The white races are, further, distinguished by an extraordinary attachment to life. They know better how to use it, and so, as it would seem, set a greater price on it ; both in their own persons and those of others, they are more sparing of life. When they are cruel, they are conscious of their cruelty ; it is very doubtful whether such a consciousness exists in the negro. At the same time, they have discovered reasons why they should surrender this busy life of theirs, that is so precious to them. The principal motive is honour, which under various names has played an enormous part in the ideas of the race from the beginning. I need hardly add that the word honour, together with all the civilizing influences connoted by it, is unknown to both the yellow and the black man.’

Gobineau p. 207

Appiah then defines what he calls *extrinsic racism*.

‘Extrinsic racists make moral distinctions between members of different races because they believe that the racial essence entails certain morally relevant qualities. The basis for the extrinsic racists discrimination between people is their belief that members of different races differ in respects that *warrant* the differential treatment - respect, like honesty or courage or intelligence ..’

Again no sources are given and I cannot conceive of any nineteenth century racist believing this. For the theorists of race the features of the superior civilisation were not shown in individual members but in their working together. They were not hostage to any absurdity that required any and every Aryan to be stronger, more intelligent , and braver than any and every Chinese or African.

Intrinsic racists are according to Appiah p.14 are: ‘people who differentiate morally between different members of different races, because they believe that each race has a different moral status, quite independent of the moral characteristics entailed by its racial essence..... so an intrinsic racist holds that the bare fact of being the same race is a reason for preferring one person to another’.

This sentence is incredibly opaque and I have doubts about its formal coherence. To suggest that the moral status of one individual member of a race is independent of the moral status attributable to the racial characteristics is something no European racist ever believed. He then writes p.14: ‘For an intrinsic racist, no amount of evidence that a member of another race is capable of great moral, intellectual, or cultural achievements, or has characteristics that, in members of one’s own race, would make them admirable or attractive, offers any ground for treating that person as she would treat similarly endowed members of her own race’. This complex sentence needs to be read with care. No African or pan Africanist can be found to suggest that admirable qualities cannot be found in other races. The history of Black volunteering to defend the liberty of others simply disproves such an absurd view. The Abraham Lincoln Brigade fought on behalf of Spanish citizens to protect their democratic rights at a time when they themselves could not vote in their own country. The Black intellectuals who fought for and supported the Russian Revolution did not do so because they thought non-Blacks had different moral status. In fact none of the nineteenth century racists could be convicted of not being willing to see any moral qualities in another race.

Appiah states p.13 ‘Unlike most Western-educated people, I believethat racialism is false’. As we have shown this entity or set called ‘racialism’ is empty. No one ever believed it and Appiah provides no reference to the contrary.

Appiah states p.13 ‘Racialism is at the heart of nineteenth century attempts to develop a science of racial difference...’ but as we have shown no one ever believed in what Appiah called ‘racialism’ nor does he provide any reference or quotation to support his ex cathedra definitions. In his discussions he never in fact referred to any nineteenth century racists.

In order to distinguish Pan Africanism from Zionism Appiah has to deny that Africans have any shared cultural characteristics or culture. He writes: p.17 ‘people of Africa have a good deal less culturally in common than is usually assumed’. Again no evidence is provided. However unless this statement is taken to the extreme - that Africans have nothing in common culturally, it will be impossible to convict Crummell of racism. Appiah’s argument is equivalent to stating that if I created an artificial set .. all Europeans born on 12 or 18th of the month and sought to create solidarity on that basis I would be a racist. If African countries did not share any common

culture then the fundamental basis of Pan Africanism or equivalently for that matter Judaism or being English would fall apart. However that is not the same as stating that Crummell believed that Africans had no cultural commonalities. If Crummell believed that Africans shared a common culture then Appiah would not be able to distinguish Crummell and Pan Africanism from Zionism. It will be irrelevant whether Crummell's belief was true or not - he could not be called an 'intrinsic racist' under Appiah's idiosyncratic definitions.

Appiah then makes an astonishing statement that it is belief in inferiority that leads to discrimination and that material interest prevents such people from recognising their error. P.13 'The basis for the extrinsic racists' discrimination between people is their belief that members of different races differ in respects that *warrant* the differential treatment. No evidence is presented that the motivating force for discrimination was sincere belief. One reason for this absurdity is that Appiah is defining racism as an idea or attitude of mind. From a Pan African perspective racism as an attitude was irrelevant. What they were concerned about was racial oppression and how to stop that. Colonialism did not start as a result of a logical error or an idea of the inferiority of other races - the bloody wars and the plunder that followed are too well known to require rehearsing now. Even Mussolini was quite adamant about the role of race in his politics. But Appiah's argument requires that this not be true.

Frankly, as has been always obvious to the recipients of colonial oppression: attitudes alone don't kill. Mussolini clearly stated that he did not for a moment believe in racial theories himself but was quite willing to use them to achieve a particular purpose.

"Race? It is a feeling, not a reality. Ninety-five per cent, at least. Nothing will ever make me believe that biologically pure races can be shown to exist today.(wiquotes, 2019)

As Queen Elizabeth 1 of England firmly stated : she did to wish to open a window into men's hearts. As long as your behaviour in word and deed was compliant she could not care what you really believed in your heart.

As a final step in Appiah's argument is to go from convicting someone of being racist under his arbitrary definition to then conclude that he has convicted them of being racist in the generally understood sense of the word and of being in the same league as Hitler et al. In order to connect Crummell to Hitler et al he has to argue that these racists made a logical error and that Crummell makes the same logical error. Throughout all my classes in formal logic as a student it was never suggested that being bad at logic or making serious logical errors was equivalent to committing mass murder!!

CONCLUSIONS:

To summarise: Appiah convicts Crummell of racism by starting from the premise that Africans have no shared culture and that any talk of 'Africans' in general must be related to purely racial signifiers. It is never shown that Crummell or any other pan African did not believe that there was a cultural connection between African peoples and even Appiah never explicitly explains the role

of this assumption that Africans have nothing in common in his argument. It is this lack of anything in common that Appiah uses to differentiate Zionism from Pan Africanism.

But the way his argument has been constructed, using arbitrary definitions that are empty sets, lacking in any reference to actual nineteenth century racists, shows malice aforethought, in much the same way as his deliberate misdescription of the effects of 'indirect rule'. This is so extensive, the arbitrary abuse of sources and the deliberate misleading pattern of sentences to give the impression that his definitions of racialism and racists come from nineteenth century European text, the construction of a theory of racism that makes Africans and African Americans into the world's largest population of racists in the company of Hitler and only some Afrikaaners is deliberate malfeasance. There is no other word to describe this scholarly conduct but as *fraudulent* and the author as racist.

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