

Extrinsic, Intrinsic & Cultural Racisms

Readings:

Anthony Appiah, 1990. "Racisms." In David T. Goldberg, ed., *The Anatomy of Racism*, University of Minnesota Press.

Tariq Modood, 2001. "'Difference,' Cultural Racism and Anti-Racism." In B. Boxill, ed. *Race and Racism*, Oxford U Press.

I. Racist Propositions

Appiah and Modood distinguish several importantly different ideas relevant to race and racism:

Racialism:

...there are heritable characteristics, possessed by members of our species, that 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. These traits and tendencies characteristic of a race constitute, on the racialist view, a sort of racial essence; and it is part of the content of racialism that the essential heritable characteristics...account for more than the visible morphological characteristics—skin color, hair type, facial features—on the basis of which we make our informal classifications. (Appiah 5)

- As we've seen, Appiah argues (elsewhere) that racialism is false; even if there are what we might call *superficial races*, i.e., groups of people who share certain inherited visible features, there are no *racial kinds*, i.e., groups unified by sharing a racial essence.
- A consequence of Appiah's denial of racialism is that if there are any psychological/behavioral similarities ("common traits and tendencies") among members of "superficial races", this is due either to historical/cultural/social causes, or it is due to contingent natural correlations. The correlation of visible and psychological features may be accidental, or due to contextual features, and may break down immediately when the group disperses or when the group's genetic isolation ends.
- Appiah maintains that racialists hold a false or incorrect view, but because racialism makes no moral or evaluative claims (it doesn't say anything about what's good or bad, what we ought to do or not do), there is nothing wrong *morally speaking* in being a racialist. As he puts it, racialism "seems to be a cognitive rather than a moral problem." (5)

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, respects—such as honesty or courage or intelligence—that are uncontroversially held...to be acceptable as a basis for treating people differently. (Appiah 5)

In other words: An extrinsic racist maintains that people of racial group X tend to have the property P, and P is a morally objectionable property (such as dishonesty, laziness, irrationality, etc.) So we are warranted in treating people of racial group X differently (i.e., worse) than others (for at least some apparent racial group X).

Cultural racism:

Modood argues for the importance of a specific form of extrinsic racism (is it a form of extrinsic racism as Appiah defines it?):

I shall call this folk sentiment [that "bodily stigmata" are signs of cultural difference or "spiritual inheritance"], as well as the culturally grounded, differential treatment, practices, policies and ideologies which it has given rise to or is part of, 'cultural racism', to distinguish it from biological racism. (Modood 239)

He continues:

...cultural racism builds on biological racism a further discourse which evokes cultural differences from an alleged British or 'civilised' norm to vilify, marginalise or demand cultural assimilation from groups who also suffer from biological racism which it presupposes. (Modood 239)

Intrinsic racism:

...*intrinsic racists*...are people who differentiate morally between 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....an intrinsic racist holds that the bare fact of being the same race is a reason for preferring one person to another. (Appiah 5-6)

In other words: An intrinsic racists maintains that people of racial group X are inherently morally inferior (for at least some apparent racial group X).

A further phenomenon that is important for understanding racism is

Indirect racism:

A practice or policy may make no reference to race or ethnic groups, hut may nevertheless disproportionately disadvantage some groups more than others. For example, a company policy that gives preference in filling jobs to local people is formally non-racist (and even may date from the time when Britain was not multiracial), but if the local population happens to be predominantly white, the policy disadvantages minority groups. If there are no countervailing justifiable reasons in favour of this policy--related, for example, to the efficiency of the business--then this constitutes indirect discrimination. (Modood 250)

II. Racial Prejudice

- Appiah points out that it would be "odd" to call someone a "racist" if they just happened to be ignorant of all the facts. E.g., someone brought up in a remote location might have only false information about X's and so come to hold what look like racist beliefs; but if in the face of new (and better) evidence she easily corrects her beliefs, then even if she holds some racist beliefs, there is a sense in which *she* is not a racist.

- So, he suggests, *racism (at least "real live racism") is not just a matter of what you believe, but how you believe it*: does your belief rest on the evidence you have available to you (or could easily get), or are you unable or unwilling to take advantage of the available evidence? Those who exhibit a pattern in their inadequate attention to the evidence have a "cognitive incapacity"—on Appiah's view this is a form of irrationality--and this "cognitive incapacity" is the source of their racism. They exhibit "distortions of judgement" (8) possibly due to self-interest, self-deception, internalized racist stereotypes, etc.

Given these observations, Appiah defines "racial prejudice" as follows:

Racial prejudice consists in "the deformation of rationality in judgment [viz., their systematic "incapacity" to collect and assess evidence responsibly] that characterizes those whose racism is more than a theoretical attachment to certain propositions about race." (8)

On this view, racial prejudice is a kind of cognitive flaw. For those who are ignorant and hold racist propositions because they have not been exposed to all the evidence, there is hope that more information will lead them to see the error in their views. But those who suffer from racial prejudice need more than information; they need to learn skills of critical reflection that enable them to see through the distortions of ideology and self-interest. (9-10)

Question: In her essay, "Habits of Hostility: On Seeing Race," Linda Alcoff suggests that racial distinctions have become imbued in our perception of others. She says:

...racializing perceptual practices are used to produce a visual registry of any given social field. This field is organized differentially to distribute the likelihood of intersubjective trust, the extension of

epistemic credence, and empathy. A body that is racialized, then, is over-determined through racial classifications and their associated attributions. (Alcoff 31)

She continues:

Perceptual processes involved in cognition can become organized, like bodily movements used to perform various operations, into integrated units that become attenuated to such a degree that they are experienced as simple, uninterpreted perception. (Alcoff 31)

If racism becomes built into perception in this way, what is the solution? Is it correct to say that someone is *irrational*, or has a cognitive deficit, if they responsibly form beliefs based on their perceptions? How do we change what we “perceive”?

III. Racism and Morality

Appiah suggests that *racism is symptomatic of a kind of irrationality*. In the case of extrinsic racists, it consists in a failure to be responsive to evidence concerning the (supposedly inferior) racial group in question, e.g., to evidence whether they really have the questionable property P, and to reasoning concerning the link between generalizations about the group and moral judgements.

In the case of intrinsic racists, however, the racism does not lie in the incorrect attribution of certain observable properties to members of a group (it is not like miscalculating whether Whites can jump, or whether Blacks "have rhythm"); the attribution in question concerns moral worth. The intrinsic racist asserts that some groups have greater moral worth than others (or that some individuals, because of their race alone, are more worthy of my regard or loyalty, etc.). Is the intrinsic racist irrational? Is intrinsic racism a cognitive error? Or is it, as Appiah sometimes suggests, (also? instead?) a kind of moral failure?

Appiah suggests that the intrinsic racist exhibits a kind of distorted rationality insofar as he is under the influence of an ideology that serves the dominant group (8) and uses the racist beliefs "as a basis for inflicting harm" (10). Sometimes intrinsic racism is not used as a basis for harm and is not connected to the power of the dominant group, in which case it is not clearly racism, and not clearly irrational. For example, racially subordinate groups sometimes build solidarity with each other—Appiah mentions Zionists and Black Nationalists—by maintaining that race, in and of itself, is morally significant. Although one might argue that at least some members of these groups use race as a basis for inflicting harm, the relevant question is whether it is ever permissible to hold views that are intrinsically racist. Appiah suggests that it is. Do you agree? Are intrinsic racist beliefs less problematic for some groups than others?

But the "distorted rationality" Appiah is trying to point out in the case of intrinsic racists is nothing like a failure to appreciate evidence. Ultimately Appiah's argument is that intrinsic racists misunderstand the nature of public morality. It may be that we are allowed to form special attachments to others, attachments that are based on arbitrary likes and dislikes, in the private domain, e.g., of family. But these special attachments are not allowed to influence us in contexts where morality is at stake. It may be OK to give a birthday gift to your mother and not your professor; but it is not OK to keep your promise to your mother and not to your professor. You must keep all your promises. *What the intrinsic racist fails to understand is that from the moral point of view, race is not a legitimate basis for making distinctions between individuals*. So the intrinsic racist, on Appiah's view, doesn't simply exhibit a cognitive failure, but also a moral failure.

Questions:

- On what basis does Appiah claim that race is not morally relevant? He suggests that to deny this is to go "against the mainstream of the history of Western moral philosophy" (14). But does he have an argument for it? Does he have evidence for it? How could one go about arguing that race is not morally relevant?
- Could an intrinsic racist charge that Appiah's reliance on the idea that race is morally irrelevant is itself a bit of ideology, i.e., that it is the articulation of a particular "practical consciousness" found in the West? Does saying this show that the idea is false or distorted or problematic?

IV. Anti-racism

Modood argues that there have been two forms of anti-racism, viz., the humanist strategy insists that all humans are equal and deserving of equal rights, and the “difference” strategy recommends a revaluing of racial difference (“Black is beautiful”). Both, he argues, are problematic.

- Humanist anti-racism denied Asians
...a language in which to debate cultural difference and the extent to which Asian cultural differences were increasingly being racialised; a language in which to give expression to ethnicity while seeking, at the same time, to oppose racist stereotyping and public expressions of contempt, as well ~is right-wing 'culturalist' constructions of identity; a form of words to express loyalty to one's own minority community within a public discourse of equality and civic integration. (Modood 242)
- A “Difference” approach
...excluded Asians and other victims of racism who did not see their primary identity and incorporation into British society in terms of colour; or at least, it was an anti-racism that was insensitive to the concerns and vulnerabilities of such groups. (Modood 243)
- A “Difference” approach also imposed a black-white binary:
There was tension between these two versions of blackness-political solidarity of all non-whites, and a black diasporic African ethnicity---but no real anti-racist criticism of what was perceived as a natural and benign conflation. Yet my experience in racial equality work was that the assertion of any other non-white minority identity--Asian, Indian or Muslim--was condemned as culturalism, as racism(!) or as divisive of the anti-racist effort and minority unity. (Modood 243)

Modood argues that ignoring the cultural dimension of racism occludes various features of racism. For example,

My argument is that racialised groups which have distinctive cultural identities, or a community life defined as 'alien', will suffer an additional dimension of discrimination and prejudice. The hostility against the non-white minority is likely to be particularly sharp if that minority is sufficiently numerous to reproduce itself as a community, and has a distinctive and cohesive value system which can be perceived as an alternative, and possible challenge, to the norm. It is particularly important to recognise that racism constitutes opposition to, discrimination against, not just individuals but, above all, communities or groups. (Modood 248)

Questions:

- What is Modood’s anti-racist strategy? How does it differ from the humanist and difference approaches? He says:
There is in racial discrimination and colour racism quite clearly a commonality of circumstance among people who are not white. It is partly what gives sense to the term 'ethnic minorities' and to suggestions for a 'rainbow coalition' (Modood 1988: 402). The question is not whether coalitional antiracism is desirable, but of what kind. My personal preference and commitment is for a plural politics that does not privilege colour identities. We must accept what is important to people, and we must be even-handed between the different identity formations. Political blackness is an important constituent of this pluralism, but it cannot be the overarching basis of unity. The end of its hegemony is not without its problems and dangers, but is not to be regretted. A precondition for creating/re-creating a coalitional pluralism is the giving up of the corrupting ideal of a solidaristic monism. (Modood 254)

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