



KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH

Postmodern Multiculturalism

Kwame Anthony Appiah is our postmodern Socrates. He asks what it means to be African and African-American, but his answers immediately raise issues that encompass us all. His principal and abiding concern is how we individually construct ourselves in dialogue with social circumstance, both private and public, past and present.

Today's urgent need, Appiah argues, is for an "ethical universal" that transcends social fragmentation and bridges our differences. Its foundation he locates in "reasonableness" that accommodates competing beliefs and behaviors without polarizing the differences among them. Pluralism liberated from ideology—it is this disposition that will enable an inclusive "*humanism*," which is "provisional, historically contingent, anti-essentialist (in other words postmodern)."

Appiah is, perhaps, uniquely qualified to articulate this aspiration, since he has successfully crossed so many of the borders that divide and alienate us from each other. Appiah is a person of multiple nationalities—his mother from the English landed gentry, his father a Ghanaian barrister and statesman— as well, a gay man.

He has taught philosophy and African and African-American studies at Cambridge, Duke, Cornell, Yale, Harvard, and Princeton Universities. He is currently Rockefeller University Professor of Philosophy at Princeton (with a cross-appointment at the University Center for Human Values).

Appiah's latest book, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers (Issues of Our Time)*, is a work of discourse on "clashing civilizations" that, according to *Publisher's Weekly*, "reclaims a tradition of creative exchange and imaginative engagement across lines of difference." His early philosophical work dealt with probabilistic semantics and theories of meaning, but his more recent books have tackled philosophical problems of race and racism. *The Ethics of Identity*, and *In My Father's House*, are among his titles.

Appiah and his co-editor, Henry Louis Gates, have compiled *Africana*, a one-volume encyclopedia of the Pan-African experience.