

Telling Lies, Telling Tales and Telling (and Doing) the Truth: Racism, Moral Repair and the Case for Reparations

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Abstract

First, in the section ‘Telling Lies’, this article attempts to illustrate recent everyday racism. Racism has a history and takes many different forms. I describe a particular practice of racism (found in Britain, circa 1970), which relied, for its doctrine, on supposedly scientific assumptions about biology and breeding—and received a confirming fillip through the celebration of monarchy, empire and rose-tinted history. Second, in ‘Telling Tales’, the story of Zacchaeus is taken as exemplifying a form of moral repair in which telling and doing the truth are intimately related. Third, in ‘Telling and Doing the Truth’, I contend that telling and doing the truth in relation to racism requires not only a clear naming of racism’s lies but also the making of reparations, for the reason that the lies of racism subtended manifold injustices, of which Atlantic slavery and the exploitation of colonies are notable instances. I take the history of the West Indies as providing a clear case where moral repair is (over)due, and I consider the form that reparations might take.

Keywords

racism, reparations, moral repair, truth and lies, slavery, colonialism

Telling Lies: The Culture of Everyday Racism

‘Commonwealth immigration from the late 1940s marked the beginning of the multicultural present that we now inhabit. As second- and third-generation children have grown up in Britain, they have been in search of an inclusive national story, one that makes sense

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of the imperial experience and of contemporary racisms'¹—so say the authors of *Legacies of British Slave-ownership*. What goes for second- and third-generation Britons, might also go, however, for those who do not or cannot count their generations of Britishness—although perhaps with less sense of necessity, they too might want to try to make sense of 'the imperial experience and contemporary racisms' as these have been significant features of the recent British history through which they have lived.

A first-person perspective is generally out of place in an academic paper—autobiography yields what is *prima facie* anecdote and not history. And yet in making sense of a recent stretch of history and its racisms, a first-person perspective has a claim to provide some insight into lived experience, on account of the fact that racisms live from the ground up, not from the top down. Racism, unlike physics for example, or perhaps Roman Catholicism, does not typically have an authoritative version against which local instances can be judged either orthodox or in various ways aberrant. Rather, racisms live and are propagated in the enactment of taken-for-granted practices of judgement, and in the informal teaching of the assemblage of claims and beliefs which are held to support those practices. Personal reflections on how racism seemed on the ground will likely not yield a clear or coherent account of racism, but then there may be no such account to be had. And if, as I shall suggest, the racism I depict was actually an incoherent grasping after half-digested scientific notions, laced with a variety of misunderstandings, fantasies and fables, then reflections from below may best represent the miasma of racist thought and practice.²

Before trying to represent the racism of my first-hand experience, its time, place and social setting must be specified. Before going to university (in 1979) I lived in Worcestershire, in what was a small country town when I was born, mid-way between Worcester and Birmingham. I suppose one could say, especially for somewhere passing from being a small country town to being just a town, that these two local centres represented poles of different social imaginaries (though no one spoke like that). Worcester stood for city in the old-fashioned sense of county cricket, Cathedral, horse racing and moderately sized and slightly quaint department stores; Birmingham stood for city in a more modern sense, with football, serious commerce and industry, dog racing and immigrants. But both cities were a good way distant from one another, socially speaking. Education beyond eighteen was by no means common amongst adults of my parents' age—and no one in my family on either side had been at school beyond sixteen, or travelled any great distance for work (though I recall that a second cousin twice removed—or some such complex genealogical relationship, in the calculation of which all locals seemed adept—was reputed to have been to Cambridge, a place so distant as to possess a certain mythic quality.) Young people reading this might better grasp the relative rarity of university education by noting that it was not uncommon

1. Catherine Hall, Nicholas Draper, Keith McClelland, Katie Donnington and Rachel Lang, *Legacies of British Slave-ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 17.

2. For a systematic presentation and reflection on British racism in this era, see Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 1987).

for personal headed stationary, itself a relic of a long gone age, to bear the legend 'So and So, B.A. (Birmingham)'—or 'Reading' or 'Bristol', or wherever it might be. And just as further education was something of a rarity, so were books; in most of the houses I knew, a *Bible* (Authorized Version), a *Book of Common Prayer*, a small dictionary, a *Pears General and Medical Encyclopaedia*, and the odd prize copy of a Dickens novel, might well comprise the entire holdings, with the addition perhaps of volumes A and B of the *Children's Encyclopaedia Britannica*, since they came free as obviously not wholly compelling trailers for the complete set. Suffice it to say, that this was, culturally speaking, a rather confined world.

In this world, what is sometimes referred to as 'casual racism' was very much the norm, though I think it is better to speak of 'everyday racism'. A casual affair is one in which the parties may go their separate ways at any time; a casual worker is one who works as and when, but is not a permanent employee; a casual remark is one that is not very considered or not to be taken seriously. The racism I describe was not casual in these senses, for it was neither lightly held, occasional, marginal, nor thought to be unimportant.

This everyday racism was ubiquitous, and it was propagated not through some explicit catechism or official teaching, but by the everyday observations, judgments and assumptions through which it was expressed. Anti-Semitic remarks were a commonplace, repeating well-known (and medieval, if not earlier) tropes about money, wealth and business dealings; a racial slur might be used to refer to the colour of a carpet or sofa (as D.H. Lawrence used it in *England, My England* in 1922 to identify the colour of a dress³), or, referring to a person in a wood pile, would indicate a tricky problem; jungles would be identified as the original and rightful home of certain groups of people; Romanies (called gypsies) would be referred to in derogatory terms; Enoch Powell may have been sacked from the front bench of the Conservative party (in 1968) for his infamous 'rivers of blood' speech, and his advocacy of repatriation, but he was the most popular politician of his day and was spoken of not as a pariah, but as a lone voice in the wilderness, raising for debate matters which no one else had the courage to address; and the plight of Rhodesia (as it then was) and South Africa was definitely not the plight of its majority, but the plight of the minority in staving off majority rule. These conversational commonplaces might be heard in homes, classrooms, shops or workplaces—and I don't remember them being challenged, certainly not routinely. Predictably the language of the playground was even more crude and stark—an Iranian contemporary of mine, who attended what the *Telegraph* would doubtless refer to as one of the 'leading public schools', tells me he was routinely referred to by the abbreviation of the name for a soft doll popular in the nineteenth century, with a dark face, gaudy dress and abundant hair (an image of which still adorned jars of marmalade until 2001), and that he generally failed to discombobulate his taunters even by pointing out that his ancestors had been living in spectacular cities at a time when theirs had aspired to mud huts.

3. See *Oxford English Dictionary* for reference.

In some ways this everyday racism seems particularly remarkable given the dominating historical event of the era, which was, of course, the end of the Second World War—about as close in date to when I was born as is the resignation of Tony Blair to us now. I doubt that any Manichean myth has ever painted the forces of good and bad quite as starkly as did the films and comics which recapitulated the triumph of Britain over the Germans (acknowledging the fact, of course, that Britain had some modest assistance in gaining its victory from some not wholly reliable allies). But, at least as far as I can recall, these narratives did not focus specifically, if at all, on Germany's genocidal enactment of Nazi racial logics, but were more inclined to pivot on the threat to Britain and its empire, for the dogged defence of which Churchill was, of course, lionized. In any case, the everyday racism of Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s seemed to sit comfortably alongside regular replays of the defeat of the Nazis. Perhaps what can seem a mystery is solved by Du Bois when, in *The World and Africa* (first published in 1947), he observes that 'There was no Nazi atrocity—concentration camps, wholesale maiming and murder, defilement of women or ghastly blasphemy of childhood—which Christian civilization or Europe had not long been practicing against coloured folk in all parts of the world in the name of and for the defence of a Superior Race born to rule the world'.⁴

I have observed that everyday racism was not explicitly taught but exemplified and instilled by practice. But that is not to say that there was no theory which underlay that practice—in fact there was a purported 'science' which was deemed to provide warrant for everyday racism, even if it was not presented in those terms. Everyday racism was reliant, that is to say, on a set of assumptions and implicit beliefs to do with breeding.

It would perhaps be easy to be put off the scent by the fact that the description of someone as 'ill-bred' meant (as the OED has it), 'badly brought up'—so it would be 'ill-bred' for example, to eat in public. In the same way (again as the OED has it), 'good breeding' was a matter of manners and behaviour. But if such phrases somewhat confusingly render breeding a matter of nurture rather than nature, the importance of breeding exactly as a matter of nature and not nurture was a doctrine that was regularly adumbrated—though not, as I say, in the form of an explicit catechism.

4. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa* (New York: International Publishers, 1947), p. 23, as cited by R.D.G. Kelley, who notes that Du Bois is actually just one of a group of scholars who early on 'understood fascism not as some aberration from the march of progress, an unexpected right wing turn, but a logical development of Western Civilization itself. They viewed fascism as a blood relative of slavery and imperialism, global systems rooted not only in capitalist political economy but racist ideologies that were already in place at the dawn of modernity. As early as 1936, Ralph Bunche, then a radical political science professor at Howard University, suggested that imperialism gave birth to fascism. "The doctrine of fascism" wrote Bunche, "with its extreme jingoism, its exaggerated exaltation of the state and its comic-opera glorification of race, has given a new and greater impetus to the policy of world imperialism which had conquered and subjected to ruthless exploitation virtually all the darker populations of the earth.'" See Robin D.G. Kelley, 'The Poetics of Anticolonialism', an introduction to A. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), pp. 20–21.

In fact the Trojan horse of this doctrine was the widespread practice of the keeping and breeding of animals.⁵ Of course in a small country town, as my home town was when I was growing up, the borders between urban and rural were more porous than they probably are in the same town today, symbolized by the fact that the annual town show was chiefly an agricultural event, in which livestock featured prominently—thus the fact that, for farmers, the breeding of animals (whether it be cows, sheep, pigs or chickens) was becoming through the 1960s and 1970s an ever more sophisticated practice, was far from irrelevant to popular understanding. In such farming, age-old conceptions of the importance of form and bloodlines were being augmented and refined in theory by enhanced genetic knowledge, and more effectively put into practice by, for example, the well-established practice of artificial insemination and the newer practices of embryo transfer (which would be further enhanced by technologies of in vitro fertilization). More to the point, however, the practice of animal breeding was not confined to farmers, but was a matter of first-hand knowledge and serious commitment for those very many who kept and bred dogs, cats, birds, rabbits, ferrets and various other species, and perhaps most importantly of all, racing pigeons. Add to all this the fact that the relatively recent Betting and Gambling Act of 1960 had legalized off-track betting and massively increased the popularity of the betting shop, and one realizes the need to reckon with widespread interest, far beyond the boundaries of the farmyard, in matters of bloodline and pedigree.

In his study of 'Pigeon Racing and Working-Class Culture in Britain, c. 1870–1950', Martin Johnes clearly identifies some key ideas which informed the keeping and breeding of pigeons—themes and ideas which would also likely play a part in relation to other species.⁶ The central idea was just that 'Pedigree mattered in a pigeon'—and, of course, 'determined its price. Thus fanciers traced and recorded a bird's family line.'⁷ 'Breeding was a long and skilled process',⁸ as Johnes observes, and it was typically governed by what he terms 'a degree of ruthlessness'.⁹ Thus one distinguished fancier asserted that he 'subjected his pigeons "rigidly to the doctrine of the 'survival of the fittest'" and that he never tried to cure any ailments his birds might suffer from. Instead, he tried to "stamp out weakness of constitution by killing every ailing bird" that showed a loss of stamina'.¹⁰ If this is expressed rather harshly, the central idea was commonplace:

one miner noted that many of his peers 'became as knowledgeable about Charles Darwin and his principles of selectivity as he was about Humphrey Davy and the principles underlying the

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5. Harriet Ritvo's *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987) is a rich source on the entanglements of thought and practice in relation to non-human animals in the making of human social worlds.
 6. Martin Johnes, 'Pigeon Racing and Working-Class Culture in Britain, c. 1870–1950', *Cultural and Social History* 4.3 (2007), pp. 361–83.
 7. Johnes, 'Pigeon Racing', p. 374.
 8. Johnes, 'Pigeon Racing', p. 368.
 9. Johnes, 'Pigeon Racing', p. 369.
 10. Johnes, 'Pigeon Racing', p. 369.

safety lamp. So in his understanding of the former maxim, it was his accepted theory that only the fittest pigeons should survive'. A bird that got temporarily lost could find itself returning to an angry owner who promptly killed it.¹¹

The keeping of pigeons had declined in popularity from its peak by the time I was growing up; and in any case, it had never been as popular in Worcestershire as further north. And yet the wheeling of flocks of homing racing pigeons on a summer's evening was a striking and familiar sight to a child at the time, even if the child would not have perceived that the keeping and breeding of these and other animals played its part in supporting the racist doctrine that 'pedigree mattered'. For if 'good breeding' amongst humans was a matter of manners and education (like being 'ill-bred, as I have noted), and thus rather confusingly, a matter of nurture not nature, to be well-bred (again as the OED evidences) could refer to both.

The notion of 'good breeding' as a matter of pedigree had its most prominent symbols in the royal family and the aristocracy, with their bloodlines loudly trumpeted and prominently displayed.¹² A child might be forgiven for thinking that all families are as old as each other, but the same genealogical outlook which could adeptly calculate a cousin twice removed, also took for granted that some families were older in a special and more important sense—and that the possession of a certain kind of pedigree, rich in blue blood, was a matter of some import. The so-called hereditary principle seemed to take some of its authority from the social Darwinism which ruled the roost in the pigeon loft (even if the ruthless selectivity for merit in the latter case had no very obvious parallels in the case of the aristocracy.)

But how did these doctrines bear on race and the practice of everyday racism which I have tried to characterize? I think one further link in the chain which comprised the racist ideological landscape of north Worcestershire circa 1970 had to do with the celebration of empire. In 1970, the map of the world was still very nearly red all over—even if that colouring represented former sometimes recent, rather than present, claims to ownership. No matter—just as the war against Germany was rewon on a regular basis, so too the triumph of the British empire was still a matter of popular acclaim (in the *Ladybird Children's Histories* for example), even as Britain's power in reality turned from hard, to distinctly soft. But for the witches' brew of notions which supported the everyday racism of everyday life, all of this hardly mattered—just as a horse did not win the Derby three times in a row by accident, neither did the map get red all over by chance. And so, like some decayed aristocrat in a decaying castle, the average Brit could find a way of looking down on other nations and races as a member of the nation and race which had, at least until quite recently, belonged to the aristocracy, or even the royalty, of sovereign powers.

Dorothea Lange's stark picture of the 'Plantation Overseer and his Field Hands'¹³ from 1936, is a visual representation of a starker social landscape than the one I grew up in. Spatially, and racially, overseer and workers are effectively and manifestly segregated,

11. Johnes, 'Pigeon Racing', pp. 369–70.

12. As Ritvo observes, the 'astonishing resemblance' between Debrett's catalogue of the peerage and baronetage of Great Britain and the stud books which were compiled for race horses from the 1790s and for cattle some 30 years later, seems not to have been commented on when these latter volumes were first produced; *The Animal Estate*, p. 61.

13. <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/304/3924>.

and the overseer, engaged in conversation with a person on the edge of the frame, stands confidently in front of his rather diffident workers. His stance is open and assertive; his hand is firmly planted on his knee and his leg is raised on the car bumper, while behind and to his left, and in contrast, his workers seem altogether more uncertain, and the one closest to him seems especially diminished, his leg and arm wound in towards his body as if to make less of himself. Overseer and workers inhabit the world differently, and indeed inhabit different worlds. The car, with its power and mobility, and the oversized overseer, are symbols of one world; the rather mean store, perched precariously on its makeshift brick support, and the lean workers, symbolize the immobile insecurity of another.

The overseer gives the impression of taking his authority for granted, as if it belongs to the natural order of things. And this is, of course, the great accomplishment of racist ideologies; they insinuate that a racial hierarchy is just the way it is. The patchwork of notions which lay behind the practice of everyday racism I have sought to characterize was probably less blatant than some of the ideas governing the racism of the American south in the 1930s, and the social differentiation these ideas supported was perhaps less stark. But we surely damn with faint praise when we say that some British racisms managed to seem more benign than other versions, even while (as we shall presently see), its lies had subserved the exploitation of peoples and nations in a way that the celebration of history and empire seemed handily to overlook.

Telling Tales

The story of Zacchaeus can be regarded as the climax of a long section of Luke's Gospel immediately preceding the passion. The ringing statement that the 'Son of man came to seek and save the lost' (Lk. 19:10, RSV) rounds off not only this incident, but the saying and incident together round off a significant portion of the Gospel beginning in chapter 15. In that chapter Jesus tells the parables of the shepherd going after the lost sheep, the woman hunting for the lost coin, and the father who looks out for the lost, prodigal son. And amongst the lost, the rich are, it seems, especially lost—in chapter 16, for example, Jesus tells another parable, that of Dives and Lazarus, and encounters the ruler who goes away sorrowful when he is told to sell all he has and give to the poor. Thus the reclamation of the rich Zacchaeus which is announced by Christ with the words 'Today salvation has come to this house', immediately before the Son of man saying, is a mark of the efficacy of Christ's ministry, and a token of the wider salvation which his work in Jerusalem will accomplish.

The salvation which Christ welcomes is manifested by Zacchaeus's undertaking in Lk. 19:8: 'And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold."¹⁴

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14. It is possible to read Zacchaeus's declaration—'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold'—not as a promise of future behaviour but as a description of his current and customary practice, and thus as an answer to the grumbling crowd which complains that Jesus has 'gone in to be a guest of a man who is a sinner'. The narrative context, however, provides a strong argument against this reading, even if it is nonetheless favoured by some critics. As well as leaving it something of a mystery as to why the crowd would have so misread their man (that is, as a

What I shall suggest is that this verse is to be read as providing an exemplar of a form of moral endeavour which certain moral philosophers have labelled ‘moral repair’, and thus a pattern for a response to the history which racism has fostered.

There are three elements to Zacchaeus’s action, the first and third of which are essential to moral repair and so to Zacchaeus’s status as a moral exemplar.

(i) In the first place, ‘Zacchaeus *stood and said* to the Lord ...’ Contemporary commentaries offer competing interpretations of the significance of Zacchaeus’s standing (in the Greek the more formal word for the posture, and as used of the Pharisee in Lk. 18:11, but otherwise uncommon in the New Testament). But the nineteenth-century Methodist scholar Joseph Benson just about covers all the bases: ‘He makes his declaration standing, not only that he might be seen and heard by those who murmured at Christ for coming to his house; but that he might show by his posture his deliberate purpose and ready mind, and express himself with solemnity, as making a vow to God.’¹⁵ The purely practical function of standing up—so that one can be seen and heard, especially if one is ‘short of stature’—does not of course preclude any further symbolic meaning in the act, and in our context one may stand up for what one believes in, to be counted, or in the sight of all, just as one may take a stand; in the context of Zacchaeus, his standing up at once renders what he is about to declare very clearly open and public, but also makes his declaration the more weighty and solemn.

Zacchaeus could be imagined merely expressing his intention to Jesus privately, and so undertaking the giving to the poor and the return of the money to those he has defrauded without any prior public declaration of intent. But, as I will explore below, for the work of moral repair, his standing and saying, which amounts to solemn and public truth telling, is important.

(ii) ‘Half of my goods I give to the poor’. According to Peter Brown, Christianity, in effect, ‘invented the poor’, meaning that under Christianity the poor became a distinct and worthy object of charity—to wealthy Greeks or Romans, the poor made neither an obvious nor compelling claim.¹⁶ Of course, Christian practice emerged from Jewish roots: the injunction ‘open thy hand ... to the poor’ (Deut. 15:11) recurs in the law and the prophets, and Zacchaeus, in giving half of his goods to the poor, proves himself ‘a son of Abraham’ (even if his generosity exceeds the 20 per cent which later rabbinic commentators judged a prudent maximum for such giving).¹⁷ But however interesting the history of the invention of the poor may be (and however woeful may be the history of their repeated demonization), my interest lies not in Zacchaeus’s acknowledgement of the claims of poverty and compassion, but of those for restitution.

(iii) ‘If I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.’ With this commitment to right the wrongs by which he has enriched himself, Zacchaeus responds not to the

notorious sinner), this reading rather detracts from the drama and impetus of the story in its telling and in its place in the narrative.

15. At the relevant place in his five-volume commentary on the Scripture, 1811–18.

16. Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002), p. 8.

17. For discussion and references, see Darrell Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), p. 1520.

claims of need, but of a particular type of justice. It therefore opens a wider vista of social action than that which is commanded by compassion and falls within the history of Christianity and poverty. Zacchaeus's intended action is concerned with restitution or reparation (the latter not a term commonly used in contemporary commentaries, but immediately linked with restitution in Tillotson's sermon on this text, on which see below), and aims at what a contemporary moral philosopher terms 'moral repair'.

Biblical commentators typically limit themselves to placing Zacchaeus's act of restitution in its immediate context, where it is not unprecedented (since fourfold restitution was known in Jewish [Exod. 21:31] and Roman law¹⁸), though generous against the prevailing norm for voluntary restitution (which was for the return of the principal plus 20 per cent of its value; see Lev. 6:5 and Num. 5:6-7¹⁹). Such commentators, however, tend not to consider any wider significance in this form of action, in contrast to sermons, which more naturally turn towards the applicability of the story outside its immediate context.

Sermons which recount sentimental tales of individual consciences stung into returning small items of moveable property (a pilfered bottle of wine here, a gold watch there), we may pass over in favour of John Tillotson's two sermons 'On the Nature and Necessity of Restitution', in which, taking Luke 19:8 and 9 as his text, he provides us with what Kant might have termed an analytic of restitution.²⁰

Restitution, Tillotson tells us, 'is nothing else but the making of reparation or satisfaction to another for the injuries we have done him'. As to 'the matter about which it is conversant', it includes all kinds of injuries, whether done with the other's consent or otherwise—the latter being done 'either by fraud and cunning, or by violence and oppression: either by overreaching another man in wit, or overbearing him by power'. As to how restitution is to be made, it can be in kind or in value—or where 'the value ... is not certain, we are to give reasonable satisfaction'. Tillotson's identification of the wider significance of the story chimes with the citation of it in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, where in the context of reflections on the seventh commandment, the fact that 'Jesus blesses Zacchaeus for his pledge' to restore what he has taken from those he has defrauded, is connected with the case for 'reparation for injustice'. For a moment the *Catechism* seems to draw back from the full scope of the case for such reparation by turning to examples to do with theft and the return of stolen goods, only in the next paragraph but one to note that 'the seventh commandment forbids acts or enterprises that lead ... to the enslavement of human beings'.²¹

Tillotson provides in cool outline what Margaret Urban Walker explicates more fully in her important study *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after*

18. For references see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 1225.

19. For references, see Bock, *Luke*, p. 1520.

20. John Tillotson, sermons 116 and 117 in *The Works of the Most Reverend John Tillotson Containing Two Hundred Sermons and Discourses on Several Occasions*, in many editions.

21. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, English translation (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), paragraphs 2412 and 2414.

Wrongdoing.²² The significance of the story of Zacchaeus can be fleshed out, I suggest, by noting in brief her account of the importance of both saying and doing in achieving affective and hence effective moral repair.

Moral repair is the way in which we re-establish relations and relationships in cases where a grave and significant wrong has been perpetrated. If I have taken your coat from the cloakroom by mistake, and notice my error 10 minutes later, simply returning it to you might well be regarded as fulfilling my obligations. But in the case of serious and intentional wrongdoing, something more is necessary. Now in everyday life, Walker observes, 'we have a repertory of common moral gestures that aim at repair, such as owning up, apologizing, making amends, showing repentance, and seeking or offering forgiveness. These are the familiar everyday maneuvers of individuals that are effective in restoring relationships after everyday wrongdoing.'²³ Further, these manoeuvres, Walker suggests, provide a basic toolkit for moral repair in the case of graver wrongs committed not only by individuals against individuals, but by societies against other societies, or by one section of a society against another.

In all these cases, it is the saying and the doing which together are essential to facilitating moral repair. Whereas the simple return of the coat puts the matter right, in case of serious wrongdoing no making amends, without explicit acknowledgement of the wrong through an apology or confession, will be adequate. So if a hospital, through serious medical negligence, causes major injury or even death, an offer of a cash payment by itself, and unaccompanied by any admission of error and apology, would probably, as we say, 'add insult to injury'. And likewise the other way round—however important and essential an apology may be, where it is unaccompanied by additional efforts to make amends, its good faith may be doubted and it may be construed as a cynical attempt to move on a bit too quickly. A hospital issuing a fulsome apology about a series of cases of serious medical negligence, and saying or doing nothing else, may not by this action alone achieve moral repair.

Of course, as Walker acknowledges, there is nothing to say that every situation created by moral wrongdoing can be repaired: it cannot be said, then, that apology and some further action of making amends are together sufficient to accomplish such a repair. But what can be said is that both saying and doing together appear necessary and that in general terms, full and honest apologies, along with imaginative and creative strategies of making amends, provide the best possible chance of repair:

If no wrongs can be fully righted as no bell can be unrung, there is still plenty of room for reparative gestures that work on the moral plane to relieve suffering, disillusionment, isolation and despair. Too little is better than nothing, and small gestures can carry larger meanings or can be a starting point for a broader reconsideration of relationships between individuals and within societies. The refusal of even the small gesture, on the other hand, can feed bitterness, rage and despair.²⁴

22. Margaret U. Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); see also her 'Truth Telling as Reparations' in *Metaphilosophy* 41 (2010), pp. 525–45.

23. Walker, *Moral Repair*, p. 37.

24. Walker, *Moral Repair*, p. 37.

Telling and Doing the Truth

The considerable fortune of the conservative Member of Parliament for South Dorset, Richard Drax, has its origins in the huge wealth amassed by one of the pioneers in the sugar trade, Sir James Drax. The founder of the family fortune acquired substantial estates in Barbados and was in the forefront of switching from the relatively unrewarding production of tobacco to the much more rewarding production of sugar—and relying, in doing so, on replacing indentured European labour with highly organized, disciplined and intensive slave labour. The founder of the family fortune purchased enslaved people early on in 1642, and by the 1650s had established on his Drax Hall estate a way of deploying enslaved peoples which would spread across the Caribbean with the rise of sugar as the most valuable crop in the trade between the colonies and Europe. Sugar plantations would come to net huge profits for their owners, while consuming the lives of enslaved people in perhaps the most brutal and relentless slave regime found anywhere in the world. The demands of sugar production were intense—and the drive for ever greater efficiencies as markets became more competitive made the demands placed on the workers ever more punishing.²⁵ After emancipation in 1833, Sir James's descendant (and Richard Drax's ancestor), John Sawbridge Erle-Drax received £4,293 12s 6d in compensation, more than £3 million in modern terms, for 189 enslaved people on the Barbados estate²⁶—the 12s and 6d indicating the financial exactitude and nicety which was brought to the whole matter of compensating those whose 'property rights' were claimed to have been infringed by emancipation.

There have been other demands for compensation, or reparations, from time to time, from the descendants of those who were emancipated and whose losses had been sustained in the preceding two hundred years—some demands are as modest as asking that the current beneficiary of this inheritance, Richard Drax, should give up the original house and estate from which it all started. But when he is asked about his inheritance, the MP tends to give a standard answer of which the following is an example: 'I am keenly aware of the slave trade in the West Indies, and the role my very distant ancestor played in it is deeply, deeply regrettable, but no one can be held responsible today for what happened many hundreds of years ago. This is a part of the nation's history, from which we must all learn.'

Demands for reparations may, of course, be addressed to nations not to individuals and many have adopted a line similar to that taken by Mr Drax. Ahead of the UN conference

25. See, for a general treatment, Philip D. Morgan, 'Slavery in the British Caribbean', in David Eltis and Stanley Engerman (eds.), *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 3, *AD 1420–AD 1804* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 378–406. To cite just one telling statistic from another source, in the period 1725–50, the death rate in London was approximately 30 to every 1000 people; in Jamaica it was nearly seven times higher, at approximately 200; see Padraic X. Scanlon, *Slave Empire: How Slavery Built Modern Britain* (London: Robinson, 2020), p. 75, referencing Trevor Burnard's *Planters, Merchants and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650–1820* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

26. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2246>.

against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (WCAR) in 2001, at which a number of nations had hoped to advance the case for reparations, the US government released the following statement:

Countries (and some individuals) that believe that the primary issue for the Conference is some form of International Compensatory scheme for the 17th to 19th century slave trade will find no support from us ... We agree that slavery and the slave trade of the distant past must be acknowledged, discussed, learned from and condemned ... however, we simply do not believe that it is appropriate to address this history, and its many vast aspects, through such measures as international compensatory measures ... We are not willing to agree to anything that suggests present day liability on the part of one state to another for that historical situation.²⁷

At the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in 2007, there was much dancing around the point as to whether Tony Blair would make a full apology for slavery, a simple apology, or merely express regret—as it was, he expressed his ‘deep sorrow’ for Britain’s role, describing it as ‘profoundly shameful’. Those who sought to construe his words closely deemed the phrase ‘It is hard to believe that what would now be a crime against humanity was legal at the time’ as signalling Britain’s following the line taken more bluntly by the United States at the UN conference I have just mentioned. The bicentenary—in the manner of what Ta-Nehisi Coates terms ‘à la carte patriotism’²⁸—plainly intended only to celebrate the achievement of Wilberforce, Clarkson, et al., but not to make any proper reckoning with the more than 250 years in which Britain had been at the forefront of the Atlantic trade in enslaved people. And although many other European nations had a part in the long and profitable slave trade, no European government has yet seriously entertained, let alone conceded, the case for reparations. (Germany’s recent payments to Namibia for its colonial crimes may seem a chink in the armour, but Germany has been insistent on framing the payments as ‘a gesture of reconciliation’ and not as reparations.)

The simple blank refusal to countenance reparations is curious, given that reparations have, for more than 200 years, been a standard way in which nations have dealt with losses incurred or inflicted in war, and more widely still in the last fifty years. There seems no reason in principle why reparations could not be an appropriate part of reckoning with the UK’s leading role in the enslavement of vast numbers of Africans and the particular exploitation of enslaved people in the West Indies.

I have suggested that a proper reckoning includes both saying and doing—the two aspects of moral repair found in Zacchaeus’s actions and in Walker’s analysis. So what precisely is required here?

In the first place, we need to tell the truth—in place of the lies of racism and the tantamount-to-lies versions of British history which pass over the exploitation and oppression which racism founded, sponsored and enabled. And I think that crucially this telling of the truth requires the public formality of the ‘standing and saying’ of

27. Cited in Hilary Beckles, *Britain’s Black Debt* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2013), p. 185.

28. See Ta-Nehisi Coates, ‘The Case for Reparations’, *The Atlantic*, June 2014.

Zacchaeus—the making and marking of a proper occasion to acknowledge and confess the facts about racism and the slavery and other oppressions which racisms have subserved. In the second place, we, as the current beneficiaries of these historic and continuing oppressions, must make amends to those who suffer continuing harms resulting from these original sins.

Telling the Truth about Race and Racism

To tell the truth about racisms as such is too daunting an undertaking, so let me constrain the task by returning to my memoir and asking what truth was missing in the social world of everyday racism which I inhabited. I suggested that the racism I knew had a theory or doctrine, which served to license the practice, albeit that the doctrine was shady and ill developed. My sense is that the everyday racism of those days which I have described, with its explicit racial slurs and openly expressed derogatory comments aimed at those suspected of non-British origin, has been generally forced into hiding—yet perhaps without ever being officially and thoroughly challenged. It is as if we have been taught not to speak this racism, yet without ever learning that it was a lie. Neither in school, college or church, did I ever hear it stated and set out that the doctrine of racism is, quite simply, fallacious—and it is my experience in teaching students in religious studies over the last fifteen years or so, that they are rarely confident in explaining the fallacy in racist thought. Racism's doctrine has sometimes gone unchallenged as to its truth, even if it has become unspeakable—with the result that we are in danger of treating racism as wrong morally (or almost as if it is impolite, as it might be to tell someone they are overweight), without acknowledging that it is wrong epistemologically.

If it is left thus, racism is bracketed in the same category as eugenics, for example, which can be perfectly good science (as our professional and amateur breeders of animals know very well), even if generally judged morally suspect when applied to human animals. With this oversight regarding its epistemological status, the doctrine of racism has a shadowy existence to be sure, but it is never quite confronted. What we need to say out loud, explicitly and articulately, is that racism is bad science and a simple tissue of errors.

The fallacy in typical racist thought is, in fact, simply stated, as in, for example, Adam Rutherford's *How to Argue with a Racist: History, Science, Race and Reality*.²⁹ The central point is that while the normal marker considered important in racial thinking, namely skin colour, does indeed mark a phenotypic difference (though one that is remarkably more difficult to categorize than one might suppose, just because skin colour or tone is a good deal more various than racist classificatory schemes acknowledge, making even the identification of supposed races deeply problematic), it is a difference that is indicative of no significant correlative genetic distinctions. Or to put it as Colin Kidd does, in *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000*,³⁰ the genetic

29. Adam Rutherford, *How to Argue with a Racist: History, Science, Race and Reality* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2020).

30. Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

variation between the members of one racially identified group is generally greater than the variation between that group and another supposedly distinct racial group; that is to say, the members of a purported 'race' are generally more genetically different from each other than they are different from members of another 'race'. Furthermore, any genetic differences between racially identified groups do not account for any differences of the kind which are usually the basis for hierarchical racist thought. To quote Kidd's summary:

All theories of race—from the simplest and most obvious to the most sophisticated and contorted—are examples of cultural construction superimposed on arbitrarily selected features of human variation. All racial taxonomies—whether popular or scientific—are the product not of nature but of the imagination combined with inherited cultural stereotyping as well—to be fair—as the empirical observation of genuine (though superficial, trivial and inconsequential) biological differences.³¹

To go back to the miasma of the racism of the English Midlands circa 1970, the problem with the doctrine of racism was not in the thought that breeding or genetics matter—breeding and genetics may indeed matter, and may in part explain the performance of a race horse or a homing pigeon. It is just that there are no significant differences between 'races' to be explained by reference to genetic variation. Race, as the racist believes in it, is a fiction, and racism is a fantasy built on this fiction.

The lies of racism need to be exposed as such—not left as if they are truths which it is simply impolite to declare. And they need to be so identified officially and formally, perhaps by the equivalent of a national Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to signal the national acceptance of the dishonest past.

There is, however, another and quite different truth about race which must be told as part of the work of moral repair. And this involves an acknowledgement of the alchemical transformation of the racial libel, as applied especially to African Americans, into a proud self-identification.

Although race is a science fiction, it is manifestly a cultural reality. Racist thought has imposed itself on our thinking such that it has provided categories we routinely deploy to identify ourselves and others. And yet the appropriation of racist thought has not been uncritical. The racist devaluation of certain racial types, intended to create, instill and propagate shame and self-loathing, has been resisted and overcome to such an extent that the disvalued characteristic has become a symbol of pride and resilience—the *négritude* movement stands out as an early, self-conscious and explicit rejection of the racist judgement on blackness and the transformation of that negative judgement into a positive celebration. Thus an identity which was inflicted as a form of othering has been taken up and transformed into a powerful and proud self-identity, which has been central to vast cultural achievement, of which the modelling of moral resistance within the black churches has been just one vital element.³² A wound has become glorious, dare we say—so that

31. Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, pp. 8–9.

32. This is a theme which is important to the work of, e.g., James Baldwin, James Cone, Delores Williams (and other womanist theologians), and recently in Henry Louis Gates, *The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song* (New York: Penguin Press, 2021).

what the racist intended for evil, has brought forth forms of life which ought properly to be the subject of Christian hagiography.³³

Telling the Truth about our Racist History

In touching briefly on the transformation of racist libels into proud self-identification, we have already begun to broach something of the history which racist thought fashioned. And a second part of the 'standing and saying' of moral repair involves the clear and explicit acknowledgement of the history which British 'à la carte patriotism' has tended to overlook.

Racism was not merely a slur or a libel, though it was indeed both—in addition it was a lie which subserved the exploitation of those it libelled, through slavery in particular, but in myriad other forms of subjection, maintained long after emancipation. It is this story, again to make reference to the world I grew up in, which was missing.

What is this story? In brief, the story is that if Britain wasn't there at the very beginning of the Atlantic slave trade (Portugal and Spain were the first movers in the mid-fifteenth century), Britain was nonetheless quick to catch up and to claim first place in this most brutal business by the early seventeenth century and for the nearly two hundred years before the abolition of the trade within the British empire. Upwards of 12 million Africans were transported across the Atlantic; many captives died before they reached the coast to be shipped; many died on the voyage; perhaps one-third died in their first year or eighteen months in the colonies during what was termed their 'seasoning'—and British merchants, travelling chiefly out of London, Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow, transported perhaps 25 per cent of this 'merchandise' as they would have put it. And, as already noted, Britain not only carried the enslaved people across the Atlantic, but with the founding of a colony in Barbados in 1625 and in the acquisition of Jamaica in 1655, was at the forefront of developing systems of plantation management which perfected the exploitation of enslaved labour.

If the celebration of the end of the slave trade in British territories (1807) and emancipation (1834) tends to overlook the preceding two hundred years, it is inclined likewise to be accompanied by amnesia regarding the subsequent period, since Britain did not acquit itself of its moral debts with emancipation but rather compounded them. Reparations were paid to slave owners for the loss of the labour and lives of others, but not to the slaves who had been deprived of their own labour and lives (Elizabeth Herrick's and Clarkson's voices being raised nobly but ineffectively on this point)—and to make matters worse, the slaves were to be treated as unpaid 'apprentices' for six years while their erstwhile masters were given time to accustom themselves to the need to pay their new workers. The manifest injustice of the proposed period of unpaid labour by 'apprentices' produced opposition, and the system fell by the wayside before its intended expiry date, but plantation owners in the West Indies managed to institute labour relations which lasted for more than a hundred years and

33. There is, however, a need for a serious discussion with, e.g., Gilroy's suspicion of such identities: see Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000).

maintained a form of servitude little better than slavery for both those who had once been slaves, as well as for newly imported indentured labour from south east Asia.³⁴ And even with the eventual concession of greater political and economic liberty in the early twentieth century, British colonial power was exercised blatantly in the interests of the metropole, and to the distinct disadvantage of the colonies and their peoples.³⁵

I will find it necessary to flesh out aspects of later colonialism below, but this, in outline, is the history which must be acknowledged in the ‘standing and saying’ of moral repair. For too long, Britain’s à la carte approach to its history has overlooked many aspects of this story. Even the most recent children’s Ladybird British History³⁶ treats slavery as something of an aberration (rather overlooking the fact that, for example, at the time of emancipation the British Army was the single largest slaveholder), and an aberration which Parliament simply put right with emancipation—as if with emancipation we were done and dusted with such unpleasantness. And until quite recently even the rather grander *Dictionary of National Biography* occluded the significance of

34. For details, see, e.g., Howard Johnson, *The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude, 1783–1933* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996). It is important to note, of course, what cannot be fully examined here, that, to quote Scanlon, ‘ideas about the incapacity of people of African descent to govern themselves, invented by slaveholders to defend slavery, survived emancipation’: see Scanlon, *Slave Empire*, p. 5. Thus, and as Scanlon argues, British antislavery does not represent so much a radical break with the past, but more of an interruption in a mode of overseas engagement which was expressed as much in the subsequent highly moralistic shouldering of ‘the white man’s burden’ (and the acquisition of a vast empire), as it was in the creation of the slave plantations of the late seventeenth century. ‘Britain came full circle as it carved up and despoiled Africa, conquering territories in the name of anti-slavery where Britons had once called in slave ships. The antislavery movement in the British empire had dismantled chattel slavery in Britain’s colonies. But antislavery policy and rhetoric declared that by virtue of having abolished slavery, Britain had earned the right to take new colonies in the name of a civilisation that itself had been made in the crucible of the slave empire’ (Scanlon, *Slave Empire*, p. 371).

35. See, for example, Howard Johnson, ‘The British Caribbean from Demobilization to Constitutional Decolonization’, in Judith Brown and W.R. Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 4, *The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 598–625. Johnson tells the story of London’s resistance to granting responsible government to its Caribbean colonies, combined with a failure to support appropriate development. ‘Despite evidence of social and economic distress’, colonial governments maintained a commitment to laissez faire policy in the 1930s and did nothing to alleviate the region’s plight: ‘the failure to ameliorate conditions in the British Caribbean reflects the limited responsibility which the British government accepted for colonial development.’ A civil servant, arguing for setting up a commission in 1938 to report on these matters, observed that ‘The West Indies, are to some extent, the British show-window for the USA—I am afraid that it is not a very striking exhibit’ (p. 609). It was, in fact, the need to impress the USA, more than any manifest concern for the islands’ populations, which brought about some change—yet, as another civil servant noted in 1945 of the work of a new board, ‘after four years, the use of a microscope would hardly reveal any progress on the development side in the West Indies’ (p. 611).

36. Tim Wood, *British History* (London: Ladybird, 1996).

slavery within British society by generally preferring the term ‘plantation owner’ to slave owner.³⁷

There is a discussion to be had as to the relationship between slavery and racism—specifically, as to whether slavery bred racism (which seems most likely) or whether racism bred slavery. Either way, racism was the enabling doctrine for the crimes Britain needs to confess. And the confession is twofold—that racism was a lie, and that the exploitation which it facilitated was just that, whether that exploitation was in slavery, servitude, or the subordination of colonies and their inhabitants through to modern times.

Doing the Truth

But does what I am terming moral repair demand in this instance not only saying the truth but also its doing? The Drax line, which western governments seem to favour, is that present generations can have no responsibility for even the admitted wrongs of their forebears—and it is, of course, the case, that if we took the Zacchaeus story in its strictest form, it offers an example of the perpetrator of a wrong making reparation directly to those he wronged, not his descendants making amends to his victims’ descendants.

The unnuanced use of the word ‘responsible’ without some further reflection risks confusion, however, since while a ready moral judgement may insist that a later Drax cannot be held responsible for the sins of his ancestors in the sense of being punished for them, there is another sort of responsibility which may obtain. In law the distinction is marked by criminal and civil actions—for whilst I would not expect to be punished for a theft committed by another, I might well expect to take responsibility for returning an article which was acquired unjustly by that other, even if I acquired it in good faith, perhaps through inheritance. My acquiring it in good faith would excuse me, but not the thief, from the claims of retributive justice, but would not foreclose on claims of reparative or restitutory justice. The simple denial of responsibility effaces this perfectly well-understood distinction.

So the key question is perhaps better put by asking, to borrow Janna Thompson’s words in her useful treatment of reparations, when and ‘why people have reparative obligations for injustices they didn’t commit’ and correlatively—since this is a difference from the simple case of restitution we have just imagined—when ‘and why others have reparative entitlements for injustices they didn’t suffer’.³⁸

I think the answers to those questions ought not to be contentious in principle, whatever difficulty (or more likely resistance) there may be to agreeing in practice that reparations are due. Two conditions would seem important in establishing the responsibilities and entitlements in question. We surely have reparative obligations and others have a claim, in any case where we are manifestly the beneficiaries of an original injustice *and* where others identifiably still suffer on account of that first wrong. A further question arises, of course, not as to who owes to whom, but of *what* is owed: what might satisfy an obligation and entitlement which is judged to obtain?

37. See Hall et al., *Legacies of British Slave-ownership*, p. 1.

38. Janna Thompson, *Should Current Generations Make Reparation for Slavery?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), p. 21.

I propose to answer these questions through a briefly worked example. My suggestion is that the United Kingdom has a reparative obligation to the West Indies on account of the injustices of slavery and subsequent colonial history, and that the present nations of the West Indies have a reparative entitlement on account of disadvantages they continue to suffer which can be traced to that history. I will further suggest that some thoughtful and creative proposals for how this obligation might be satisfied are already extant and deserve careful consideration.

Britain's obligation to the West Indies as a beneficiary of injustice. I have already outlined the story of Britain's engagement with the West Indies: first, the brutal and efficient exploitation of plantations by enslaved labour; second, the conversion of slavery after emancipation into involuntary servitude; and third, a period of colonial neglect and underdevelopment. The question remains, however, in what sense the UK can currently be held to be a beneficiary of this history of injustice.

Sometimes when institutions such as colleges or universities consider their connections with slavery, they look for evidence that the institution or its benefactors directly held enslaved people, or had wealth manifestly derived from owning plantations, and consider themselves in the clear if no such connection is found—it seems to be taken for granted in other words, and rightly so I would suggest, that any accruals of wealth from slavery in the past have materially benefitted the institution in the present. If we apply the same standard to nations, it is a plain fact that the profits from slavery, for example, flowed not only into private fortunes, but through taxation and subsequent investments, into governmental and wider national wealth. Even leaving to one side the stronger claims associated with the work of Eric Williams and others (that slavery was the key to the financing of the industrial revolution, providing its springboard),³⁹ it can straightforwardly be affirmed that it funded much of the economic development of the subsequent period, thus creating the wealth and social capital from which we continue to benefit.

Even if, contrary to the facts, the British government could establish that it never took a penny directly from slavery (just as a modern-day institution might claim), I would contend, as for the institutions, that this is in fact much too narrow a conception of what it is to be a beneficiary of slavery. The fact of the matter is that the triangular trade stimulated nearly every sector of the British economy, so that even those who did not directly hold slaves (such as Trinity College, Cambridge, which by statute could only hold investments in land), nonetheless benefitted from the buoyancy of markets which the wealth from sugar itself encouraged. Similarly for the nation: we are beneficiaries directly and indirectly of the vast wealth which slavery generated. (And this is not even to touch upon the dependence of the industrial revolution of the early nineteenth century, after the decline in the significance of sugar, on the import of slave-grown cotton from the US. To cite Scanlon again: in the 1850s, the US provided 77 per cent of Britain's imports of cotton, at a time when 'one out of five Britons depended on the cotton supply for their livelihood'.⁴⁰)

39. For Eric Williams's argument, see *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).

40. Scanlon, *Slave Empire*, p. 352.

Are the West Indies still disadvantaged by historic injustices? In Marx's terms, slavery appropriates the total value of labour, not just the surplus value appropriated by capitalism. And the capital which may have appreciated within the families and households of workers within the West Indies, throughout the period of slavery, went elsewhere—and the subsequent period of servitude effectively achieved the same end. In the third phase of the history, the neglect of investment and development (including in education) left the West Indies ill-equipped to compete economically at independence. A history of injustice is an important element in the relative poverty of many of these nations.⁴¹

What reparations should be made? So if we conclude, as I believe we should, that we are the beneficiaries of injustices which continue to impoverish the lives of the descendants of those who were first wronged, what amends can we make?

There is often felt to be a particular difficulty here—if restitution is well understood in relatively simple cases (such as in the return of a picture looted by Nazis to the present generation of the family of the owner), the case before us admits of no such obvious solution.

We are in the fortunate position, however, that we do not start with a blank sheet of paper, since there is a proposal on the table, put forward by the Caricom Reparations Commission and addressed to the European colonial powers. The *Ten Point Action Plan for Reparatory Justice*, endorsed by heads of government in March 2014,⁴² is comprehensive, creative and constructive, and it is enough, I think, to let the ten points essentially speak for themselves:

The Plan asks for:

1. A full formal apology for the wrongs of slavery and the subsequent treatment of emancipated peoples.
2. The right to repatriation for descendants of enslaved Africans who may wish to seek to return to Africa.
3. An indigenous peoples development programme, to advance the well-being of the descendants of the original inhabitants of the West Indies, who were decimated by western diseases at first encounter, and have suffered discrimination and poverty ever since.
4. The establishment of cultural institutions in the West Indies to tell the stories of the enslaved from their side.
5. Support in addressing the public health crisis in the Caribbean, arising from the extraordinarily high incidences of chronic diseases (such as hypertension and type II diabetes), related to deprivation and ill-treatment over many generations.

41. There are, of course, considerable differences between different countries: thus in 2019 Jamaica had GDP per capita of approx. \$5,500, Grenada nearly \$11,000, St Lucia approx. \$11,500, Barbados approx. \$18,000, whereas the Bahamas, the wealthiest, had nearly \$35,000. Measuring the wealth of nations is not without its subtleties, of course, but some sense of the significance of these numbers is given by the fact that GDP per capita of approx. \$18,000 represents an average for the world. And it is worth noting too that most of these economies, even the relatively prosperous ones, are fragile, relying very heavily on tourism and with their governments burdened with significant levels of debt.

42. See: <https://caricomreparations.org/caricom/caricom10-point-reparation-plan/>.

6. Assistance in the eradication of illiteracy—‘At the end of the European colonial period in most parts of the Caribbean, the British in particular left the black and indigenous communities in a general state of illiteracy. Some 70% of blacks in British colonies were functionally illiterate in the 1960s when nation states began to appear. Jamaica, the largest such community, was home to the largest number of such citizens.’ Plainly, such high levels of illiteracy represented a significant drag on social and economic development.
7. An African knowledge programme aimed at connecting people of African descent with their roots.
8. Psychological rehabilitation aimed at ‘healing and repair of African descendants’ populations’.
9. Technology transfer to enhance access to science and technology:

For 400 years the trade and production policies of Europe could be summed up in the British slogan: ‘not a nail is to be made in the colonies’. The Caribbean was denied participation in Europe’s industrialization process and was confined to the role of producer and exporter of raw materials. This system was designed to extract maximum value from the region and to enable maximum wealth accumulation in Europe. The effectiveness of this policy meant that the Caribbean entered its nation-building phase as a technologically and scientifically ill-equipped backward space within the postmodern world economy. Generations of Caribbean youth, as a consequence, have been denied membership and access to the science and technology culture that is the world’s youth patrimony.

10. Debt cancellation to address the problems faced by governments seeking to overcome the inheritance of slavery and colonialism:

Caribbean governments that emerged from slavery and colonialism have inherited the massive crisis of community poverty and institutional unpreparedness for development. These governments still daily engage in the business of cleaning up the colonial mess in order to prepare for development.

The pressure of development has driven governments to carry the burden of public employment and social policies designed to confront colonial legacies. This process has resulted in states accumulating unsustainable levels of public debt that now constitute their fiscal entrapment.

This debt cycle properly belongs to the imperial governments who have made no sustained attempt to deal with debilitating colonial legacies. Support for the payment of domestic debt and cancellation of international debt are necessary reparatory actions.

It should be very clear from these points that the Caricom Reparations Commission (CRC) is inviting European nations to take part in what I have been terming ‘moral repair’. That is to say, the proposal is not, as it might be, a simple demand for compensation, but a much more significant invitation to try to repair relations between the West Indies and the former colonial powers. The possibility of such repair, and of such an invitation, can never be taken for granted—as Walker puts it, ‘Those who have suffered serious harm or grave injustice may struggle to summon the trust and renew the hope that repair requires, and they may yet have good reasons to withhold these.’⁴³ This

43. Walker, *Moral Repair*, pp. 204–5.

gracious invitation—gracious exactly in looking for repair—has not, as yet, received the gracious response and engagement it deserves.

In Conclusion: On Precarity

In Dorothea Lange's picture of the overseer and his workers, it is the precarity of the workers which seems to the fore—even the building on the steps of which they sit, teeters on its rickety brick support. And yet, ethically speaking, the overseer occupies the more precarious position, since his rests on the wrongs they suffer. His workers are not just poor—but those whose unfree labour and history of oppression is turned to his advantage.

Palma Giovane's picture⁴⁴ of the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus endeavours to capture the urgency in Luke's story. Jesus, who is only 'passing through' (Lk. 19:1) Jericho in his final approach to Jerusalem where his destiny lies, is represented as an onward moving figure, gesturing towards Zacchaeus. And Zacchaeus seems already to be leaving his perch in the tree, even as he is addressed. In the story Jesus issues a peremptory and immediate summons—'make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today' (Lk. 19:5)—and Zacchaeus responds exactly in kind: 'so he made haste and came down' (Lk. 19:6).

Jesus deals with Zacchaeus in passing, but the urgency in the encounter between them is not to be explained only by Jesus' itinerary. Christ, being Christ, must call Zacchaeus not from his precarity in the tree, but more importantly from the moral precarity of his life. And if he does so for the sake of Zacchaeus himself ('since he also is a son of Abraham' [Lk. 9:9]), does he not also do it for the sake of the poor and the wronged who may be experiencing a different sort of precarity because of how Zacchaeus up to now has lived?

To touch on the subject of racism in Britain is, of course, to find these two sorts of precarity again—the social precarity of those who suffer, and the moral precarity of those who are responsible for the grave injustices which have fostered that suffering.

The current pandemic might be likened to a storm which has brightly illuminated contours of our social landscape that were there all the time, even if we weren't good at noticing them. In the UK to be sure, but elsewhere too and indeed across the world, the virus has not affected all people equally, but has instead followed and highlighted those contours of social differentiation which track economic inequalities and racial injustice and oppression—the two, of course, very often combined in a bitter mix of unmerited hardship. For what is absolutely clear about the UK's avoidable deaths from Covid-19, is that the victims have not been randomly selected—as might be the victims of a lightning strike. Rather, in the UK it is the poor and ethnic minority communities which have suffered disproportionately in the current pandemic (with more infections, worse outcomes, and more deaths), all this compounding the lesser opportunities and advantages in work, housing and education, which have afflicted these particular populations for so much longer than the pandemic. Poverty is one bad card to be dealt. Belonging to certain

44. <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/christ-calling-zacchaeus-5648>.

ethnic groups can, in terms of life chances, be another. And in this pandemic to be dealt one—let alone two—has often proved fatal.

If the location of social precarity is clear enough, where does moral precarity sit? Plainly it lies with the UK, amongst other colonial powers, not only for past deeds and for its continuing failure to reckon with that past, but also for the continuing and morally debilitating hold of racism on present-day life and politics (as witnessed in the crimes against humanity which the British policy of deterrence in relation to refugees and migrants constitutes).

Any nation, however, is made up of individuals and institutions, and it surely behoves us to look down from the heights of high politics and nation-states. If we do, we may find that moral precarity could be attributed to a Christian ethicist (such as myself), who has reached the last stages of his or her career but is only now engaging academically with the lies of racism and the oppressions which they have served. (It may appear to be a plea in mitigation to say that racism has generally not been on the syllabus of Christian ethics, until at least recently, but that only convicts the whole discipline while seeking to excuse individuals.) And the same precarity might be identified as the condition of the church to which that ethicist belongs (the Church of England), since it could have acted (but has not yet) where the state has failed to act—perhaps by establishing an intellectually and financially well-resourced board of enquiry or commission which could authoritatively set out and formally apologize for the church's complicity in slavery and racism's other sins, and invite those who continue to suffer from these wrongs to engage with it in identifying creative, constructive, and quite likely, costly ways of making amends.

Who would have guessed at the beginning of the story that Zacchaeus would come down from his tree? And yet, summoned by the Lord, he did, and heard a benediction pronounced over him—'Today salvation has come to this house'. Will individuals, institutions and nations hear the still urgent call 'come down, make haste'—and receive that benediction?

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