Justice and History

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Abstract
This article explores intergenerational justice and its connection to historic (in)justice and reparations. It includes both the post-war period, and the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, as case studies.

1. Introduction

My concern here is intergenerational justice, a topic which young climate activists have brought to our attention. We owe our children a world which they can decently inhabit. This is self-evident for those of us who have biological children, at least since the invention of reliable birth control; having made a decision to bring children into the world, we are responsible for making that world as decent as possible. Our possibilities are limited, as those of us who are parents painfully know, yet it is always in our power to make the world somewhat better or worse. Yet even those who never become parents have a responsibility to future generations, and not simply because future generations should be counted in whatever calculations we make when considering the impact of our actions on others. It's even more important to focus on the specific fact of human being: we are animals who are part of a chain on which our existence rests. I'm inclined to think we owe a debt to the world for the gift of living in it; that making some contribution to the world that sustains us is incumbent on us all. Gratitude is a virtue, though it's seldom explored. But even if you don't accept a positive duty to pay something in return for the gift of life itself, I hope you'll agree that making the world worse is an act of base ingratitude. *Apres moi le deluge* is an expression that became infamous for a reason.

2. Historic injustice

My focus here, however, is our attitude to past generations who have made the world worse. Whether you focus on slavery or colonialism, arms races or global inequality, all of us were thrown into a world so problematic that fulfilling our obligations to the next generation by

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contributing to cleaning it up is an overwhelming task. Yet by virtue of the same chain that binds us to future generations, we have some relation to the sins of our fathers. We are not only animals who form part of a biological chain; we are animals who would perish without the care our parents provide in the first two years of life. Our parents' care in turn is embedded and sustained in a web of social structures for which they may have limited responsibility, but without which they could not function: things as simple as water supplies and grocery stores, and as complex as government.

I want to explore these questions by moving from the abstract to the particular, and looking at two cases I have studied closely for the past four years. While I think the claims I make can be extended to others, I believe that moral as well as legal responsibility must be grounded in particular historical details, so I will only gesture, in closing, at wider applications.

Germans like long compound words, and they've invented one that has no equivalent in any other language: *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*. There are variations on the term in German, but I use this one – working off the past – because it implies that the past can, and should, be worked off in the way you work off a debt. It also implies that, for all but the very wealthy, debts must be worked-off slowly and incrementally, like mortgages. Unless you're a billionaire, a one-off payment is rarely enough. Beginning in the '60s, a majority – or at least a very loud minority – of educated young Germans insisted that they, and their nation, needed to work-off the Nazi past.

This was not a popular position, and most people outside Germany are shocked to learn that, for decades after the war, most West Germans did not feel the need to atone, or work-off anything at all. In fact, they saw themselves as the war's worst victims. After all, their cities had been reduced to rubble, their territory dismembered, 7 million of their citizens killed; millions of men who survived were prisoners of war, humiliated by those they'd despised and sought to conquer. The first postwar years were marked by hunger and cold so intense that trees which had lined city streets for a hundred years were felled to keep their residents from freezing to death. And on top of it all, the occupiers of the two nations they most detested – the sub-human Russians and the vulgar Yankees – were insisting the war was their fault? It's easy for even good historians like the former British Museum director Neal MacGregor to miss the undertone of self-pity that permeated postwar Germany. That's partly because most Germans found it so obvious they didn't bother to state it, and partly because the one picture of postwar Germany that captured international attention was the one we wanted to see: Willy Brandt on

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his knees before the Warsaw Ghetto memorial. We did not know that Brandt's gesture was unique. Brandt himself had done nothing for which he needed to repent; the committed Social Democrat fled Germany for Norway a few months after the Nazis took power. We did not know that this act, which made him a Good German in the eyes of the world, made him a Bad German in the eyes of the Christian Democrats. The most powerful party in Germany had no qualms about using Brandt's self-imposed exile as a campaign slogan against him: 'What was Herr Brandt doing abroad for twelve years?' Still, when he became chancellor, Brandt felt he had a responsibility to atone for the crimes of the nation he represented. The spontaneous act of kneeling, admired by other nations, was one reason his tenure as chancellor was cut short, though not the official reason. In 1970, most of West Germany saw no need for repentance, and certainly no submissive gesture before the Slavs, who had never been viewed as a nation of equals.

Far more typical of German leaders was the Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl, who famously insisted that he benefited from the 'mercy of a late birth'.[1] No sane person could ascribe personal responsibility to someone, like Kohl, who was three years old when the Nazis took power. For him and his contemporaries, therefore, the slate was wiped clean, and he could represent a new Germany unencumbered by its past.

When he argued this in 1983, Kohl was so sharply criticized for the expression that he took it back seven years later, though his weak-kneed attempt to explain his earlier use of it convinced no one. For a change in consciousness, begun in the '60s, had begun to take hold among Germans who recognized the slate would never be clean unless they scrubbed harder. If you think this is overworking a metaphor, you should know that for decades, those who advocated working-off-the-past were called *Nestbeschmützer,* people who dirty their own nests. The *Nestbeschmützer* replied that the dirt was already there, stinking to high heaven, and could no longer be swept under the carpet.

Those who have been to Berlin have probably seen the Holocaust memorial, a monument the size of four football fields placed next to Brandenburg Gate, which is the symbolic center of reunited Germany. One of the leaders of Germany's new rightwing party, the AfD, complained that no other nation in the world has planted a monument of shame in the heart of its capitol. He is right to say

[1] Hans Peter Schwarz, *Helmut Kohl. Eine politische Biographie* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2012).

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that no other nation has done it, wrong to complain about that. Germany's decision to remember its criminal past should be a matter for precarious pride; the shame lies in the crimes, not the marking of them. This is now a consensus, though it's a consensus the radical right is working to undermine.

What I want to emphasize is how hard that consensus was to achieve, *pace* Willy Brandt. It took decades of struggle, often intergenerational struggle, to force changes in notions of citizenship, governmental policies, educational systems and physical iconography. It's a struggle that was often personally wrenching, because the insistence on facing one's parents' crimes seemed to conflict with the duty to respect your parents simply in virtue of the fact that they are your parents. Of course cultures differ widely in their views of the scope of that duty. Traditional cultures extend it to respecting your parents' wishes for your own life, what profession you should enter or what person you should marry. But all cultures presuppose some respect for your parents simply because parenting – at its most basic, keeping small helpless creatures alive until they can live on their own – is bloody hard work. It would be even harder without the presumption that respect and gratitude are owed to the person or persons who do that work. In extreme cases of abuse – think of incest or hard violence – parents may forfeit their right to be respected. Extreme cases. So what if your parents were Nazis?

This was the dilemma faced by most thoughtful Germans of my generation, give or take a decade. Dates mattered, as did exact biographies. Those whose fathers were drafted, but served as medical orderlies, had the easiest time of it. Some, like the son of Hans Frank, the high Nazi official who governed most of German-occupied Poland, has written about privately celebrating the date of his father's execution. One can hardly imagine the clashes in this man's soul, torn between the duty to respect and mourn the people who sired us, and the knowledge that his father truly was one man who could not claim to be only following orders. He gave them. But even those whose parents were far less culpable felt contaminated by their parents' sins. Only those who truly resisted Nazi crimes were not complicit in them – and most of those who truly resisted were dead.

It's significant that many West Germans of that generation chose not to have children themselves, largely because their notions of family and authority, respect and responsibility had become so conflicted. Some Germans, such as Bernhard Schlink, author of the dreadful albeit bestselling novel *The Reader,* even argued that the only way a German can escape her Nazi parents' guilt is to break

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with them entirely.[2] Many did. In order to restore some sense of health to the chain that binds parents and children, working-off their parents' debts was unavoidable. Most states require that debts be paid before deceased persons' assets are distributed to heirs. It's a legal obligation you can only avoid by refusing to accept an inheritance at all, which isn't even possible in all cases. This aspect of law is based on intuitions about fairness: you have no right to enjoy the benefits of an inheritance and reject its liabilities. Unlike personal property, historical debt can rarely be quantified. Yet the intuition embodied in the law is one we are right to preserve. Our relation to our nations is not, of course, exactly analogous to our relation to our parents, but the analogy is strong enough to be useful.

We all benefit from inheritances we did not ask for, and can only partially reject, if we choose. These include, most crucially, being born into a particular culture, with all the history and social structures that implies. The difference between being born in Scotland and being born in Somalia makes all the difference in the world, and a Scot who moves to Somalia will see that more clearly, not less so. Seeing clearly can involve seeing reasons for pride in one's own culture as well as shame for its failures. But there's a reason why the joke about what makes an Austrian is so bitterly funny. 'An Austrian is someone who tries to convince you that Hitler is from Germany and Beethoven from Vienna'.

Unlike Hitler's birthplace Austria, where support for the Nazis was even stronger, Germany went through a decades-long process which involved many elements. One I want to turn to now was the payment of reparations.

3. Reparations

No material payment can compensate for the suffering inflicted by slavery. No one who has read a thorough description of slavery, in Auschwitz or Alabama, would prefer it – no matter the compensation – to never having been enslaved at all. The Austrian Jewish philosopher and writer Jean Améry, who was imprisoned in Auschwitz for two years, wrote that the only thing that could truly make up for those crimes would be turning back time and undoing them.[3] The

[2] Bernhard Schlink, *The Reader*, (Vintage International, 1995).

[3] Jean Améry, *At The Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, Edited by: S. Rosenfeld and S. P. Rosenfeld, (London: Granta Books, 1966).

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only way to solve the problem, he concluded, was 'by permitting resentment to remain alive in the one camp and, aroused by it, self-mistrust in the other'. If this took place, Germans would have integrated Auschwitz into their natural history rather than allowing it to be neutralized by time.

Améry himself, a man of exquisite moral sensibility, did not apply for the reparations he was owed, despite the fact that his material situation after the Liberation was anything but solid. In fact, the roughly 80 billion marks that West Germany paid to Holocaust victims were only accompanied by a half-hearted apology wrested from Adenauer by the Israelis, who virtually wrote it. (The reparations paid by East Germany to Poland and the Soviet Union were forced, though it is telling that with a resolutely anti-fascist government in power, many East Germans thought the reparations were fair.) In his first speech to parliament in 1949, Adenauer had lamented the wartime suffering of a long list of Germans – those who lost their homes to annexation or bombing, those interned in POW camps, those who were widowed or crippled. Before entering into talks about concrete sums, therefore, Israel insisted that Adenauer make a formal statement to parliament admitting German culpability for crimes against the Jewish people. The Jews wanted more acknowledgment of guilt, the Germans wanted less, and what emerged was a compromise. Still, the apology was historic, as were the payment of reparations for it. In making those payments, however, Adenauer's government made an implicit bargain: in paying money to our victims we have finished the process of working-off-our past. We can turn our faces away from the shameful pages of our history, make no attempt to remove former Nazis from our government, our schools, or our cultural institutions, and consider accounts settled. It's important that almost 50 years after Adenauer's agreement, the newly elected Social Democratic/Green government created a foundation, consisting of both government and industry, that not only paid reparations for the slave laborers who had not yet been compensated, mostly because they lived in Eastern Europe. The foundation also set aside funds for projects to remember the past in Eastern Europe, and called itself *Memory, Responsibility and Future*. In 1966, Améry quoted a man who tells him the reparations payments mean that Germans bear the Jews no grudges. Under those circumstances, it's understandable that he refused to take those payments; he was waiting for the genuine remorse that did not come until after he died by his own hand.

Half a century after Améry book was published, it would be hard to find a German today who does not wish to turn time around and

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undo Nazi crimes – even if only to avoid the decades of national shame that followed. The remorse is genuine. But if reparations without apology may be blind, apologies without reparations may be empty.

The U.S. Congress did not even issue an apology for slavery until 2008. The discussion about reparations for slavery, which had been held on and off since the '60s, was given new life with an essay by the writer Ta-Nehisi Coates. As he rightly wrote, 'the idea of reparations is frightening not simply because we might lack the ability to pay. The idea of reparations threatens something much deeper – America's heritage, history, and standing in the world'.[4]

Those who oppose American reparations for slavery have seldom responded directly to that claim, but they're quick to dismiss the German precedent by pointing out the differences between the two cases. Their arguments turn on the justice as well as the difficulty of assessing claims made on the basis of a crime that occurred generations ago. Any serious discussion of American reparations for slavery must acknowledge two facts:

1. America's wealth is intrinsically bound up with profits from slavery, from the plantations of the South to the factories of the North.

Earlier histories of slavery portrayed it as a premodern, agrarian institution. Recent scholarship has shown, however, that slavery was a major engine of the growth of the modern American and British economies. Cotton was as central to the nineteenth-century economy as oil is to the economy today. It wasn't just the raw material for the nineteenth century's most successful industry, the textile mills that were as profitable in Manchester, New Hampshire, as in Manchester, England. Cotton also drove increasing demand for iron goods, rope, furniture, and shoes. Apart from the products produced by their labor, enslaved people themselves made up 20 percent of America's wealth. As cotton production boomed, the separation of enslaved families became central to the slave system. Slaves were torn from their families because they fetched twice as much in New Orleans as they did in Virginia. Less obvious but more insidious was the way that bonds using those slaves as collateral enriched investors all over the world. The historian Edward Baptist showed that torture of slaves was not the product of accidental sadism nor even

[4] Ta-Nehisi Coates, 'The Case for Reparations', *The Atlantic* (https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/, 2014).

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a matter of punishment for alleged infractions. It was a central factor of production, forcing enslaved men and women to labor at inhuman speeds. 'The whip', he concludes, 'was as important to making cotton grow as sunshine and rain'.[5]

2. Chattel slavery was abolished in 1865, but it was replaced by other forms of subjugation that were not just a function of custom and prejudice but a matter of law.

Long before the Civil War, some Quaker communities made membership contingent on compensating one's former slaves. Yale president Timothy Dwight wrote, 'It is in vain to allege that our ancestors brought them hither, and not we … We inherit our ample patrimony with all its incumbrances, and are bound to pay the debts of our ancestors … To give [slaves] liberty, and stop here, is to entail upon them a curse'. As the war drew to its bloody close, there was initial support for the idea that African Americans were owed some compensation for generations of forced labor, support that led to the initial declaration that each freedman would be offered forty acres of land and a mule, and almost a million acres of Southern land were set aside for this purpose. Had it been realized, it would have been an act of reparation for the thousands of acres those African Americans had worked, under the lash, without pay. Moreover, the vision of small, independent farmers exactly fit Jefferson's conception of the ideal conditions for a democratic republic.

But Jefferson's vision had been replaced by reveries of profit in the world cotton market. Both North and South preferred large plantations producing for export to self-sufficient small farmers. Moreover, President Andrew Johnson was keen on restoring the rights and properties of the Southern planters who'd always had his sympathy. Not half a year after Lincoln's murder, Johnson overturned every order that had granted land to freed people and returned it to the planters who had started the war.

Both neoslavery and terror were instruments white Southerners used to wipe out the gains of Reconstruction. In the absence of federal troops and Northern engagement, Southern states fiercely enforced the laws known as the Black Codes, which were largely successful attempts to evade the Thirteenth Amendment, which had

[5] Edward Baptist, 'Picking Up Cotton Under the Pushing System', *Slate* (https://slate.com/human-interest/2015/08/slavery-under-the-pushing-system-why-systematic-violence-became-a-necessity.html, 2015).

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outlawed slavery 'except as punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted'. In the warped justice system of the postwar South, nothing was easier than inventing crimes and duly convicting African Americans of them. Most were arrested under deliberately obscure vagrancy laws, according to which black persons unable to immediately prove they were currently employed by a white person could be charged, convicted, and sentenced to hard labor. Offenses such as spitting, selling produce after dark, walking next to a railroad, and talking loudly near a white woman could also result in prison terms.

Historian Douglas Blackmon has shown that the system of neoslavery, was more brutal than the chattel slavery which preceded it. Under the old system, a chattel slave was the owner's property. Having made a considerable investment in a black human being, the enslaver had an economic interest in preserving that investment by upholding minimal standards of nutrition and health. Under the new system, convicts were not owned but merely leased by state prisons to private corporations that mined coal, forged steel, or built bricks. In some Alabama prison camps the mortality rate was 40 percent. If a convict died from malnutrition, lashing, overwork, or disease, the corporation could always get another. The timing and scale of arrests were repeatedly correlated with the demand for cheap labor. Just before harvest time, for example, the number of arrests increased dramatically.

Focusing on such policies, and the less brutal but still damaging ones that replaced them in the early 20th century, removes the first objection raised concerning reparations for African Americans: How can anyone determine to whom reparations are owed? Here there's no need to trace lines back to the mid-19th century. If it can be proved that legal measures created to subjugate African Americans persisted a century after slavery was abolished, the debt that was owed to enslaved people should be paid to their heirs. The evidence for those claims was overlooked only because, for too many Americans, the period between the Emancipation Proclamation and the Montgomery bus boycott is simply blank. Recent research allows us to fill in that blank.

Reparations, Coates argued, would be the full acceptance of our collective biography and its consequences. 'More important than any single check cut to any African American, the payment of reparations would represent America's maturation out of the childhood myth of its innocence into a wisdom worthy of its founders'.[6] From

[6] Op. cit. note 4.

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myth to wisdom: it's a matter of growing up. I have argued elsewhere that a healthy adult relationship to your nation is like a healthy relationship to your parents. As children, we tend to accept whatever they tell and give us; what other choice do we have? That lack of choice often leads us, in adolescence, to reject our parents' world(s) entirely. A grownup relationship to your parents involves sifting through all the things they taught you and deciding what you want to keep as your own, and pass on to further generations, and what you'd rather reject. We need to treat our national and cultural histories similarly.

Another argument against reparations is that they support a culture of victimhood that is unhealthy for all. As I've argued elsewhere, a culture of victimhood is indeed problematic. But those objections can become reasons to support reparations, as long as that support is properly grounded. Proper grounding would come with an apology and a full description of the wrong that was done. Unlike welfare or affirmative action, reparations would be seen as a straightforward payment for an overdue debt. If our forebears failed to pay it, the responsibility to do so devolves on those of us who benefit from that failure, whether the benefits come directly from wealth or other privileges gained from belonging to the white majority of a powerful nation. Other means of addressing racial inequality have proved problematic. First, it's not clear that affirmative action programs help those most in need of support. Giving preference in education or employment to members of disempowered groups *so long as it's arguable they are equally qualified* necessarily benefits the best qualified members of those groups, not those who need basic remedial education and other forms of support. Moreover, even when they have been faithfully applied, those programs can harm even those they are designed to benefit. suspicion infects relationships between members of different groups, feeding resentment on one side and self-doubt on the other. Honest payment of a debt that both parties recognize avoids this. Sidestepping concepts like 'trauma' and 'victim', reparations are supported by simpler ideas of justice. And to those who argue that reparations look backward, while politics should look to the future, one simply has to look at contemporary United States and Britain to see how well ignoring the past has worked.

Others have argued that people whose ancestors were slaveholders might be liable for reparations, but those who held no slaves are not. Now most nonblack Americans are descended from people who came to the country in the waves of immigration that began after the Civil War. Nevertheless, in taking on the benefits of citizenship, they took

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on its responsibilities as well. It's usually only first-generation immigrants who consciously take on those responsibilities – if people fleeing poverty, or worse, reflect on such responsibilities at all. Most of us are citizens without active consent. We had no choice about the place where our mothers happened to give birth, and we could not possibly consent to it – any more than we could consent to being born. Some of the most important things that determine our lives are entirely contingent, in ways that can be tragic or wonderful. We may begin by understanding our debts to the past by analogy with familial inheritances, but our responsibility to our nation's past is political. To be a citizen is not merely to take responsibility for your country's history since the moment you, or your ancestors, claimed its citizenship. Political identity cannot merely be a matter of acquiring the benefits that accrue to possessing one passport or another. Though the individuals responsible for slavery and all that followed are long gone, many of the corporate entities, public and private, that legalized and profited from slavery still exist. So do descendants of those who still suffer discrimination because they are part of a group that was brought to America in chains. So long as they live in a society built on injustice, even those who have not incurred guilt are responsible for correcting it.

A final objection is that the payment of reparations is decisive; a majority of white Americans and Britons are against it. (Though support for reparations have increased, in the US, in the past few years, as consciousness of the history of neoslavery has increased.) More importantly: So were the vast majority of Germans in the 1950s. Adenauer could muster the votes in favor of reparations only by going outside his own conservative Christian Democratic Union and appealing to the Social Democrats. Outside pressure from the United States played a central role in persuading Adenauer that significant reparations were necessary to gain readmission to what was called the family of civilized nations.

Some have suggested solving problems of racial inequality by insisting on social programs that would benefit all, as a way of widening general support. And as a Social Democrat, or democratic socialist, I am certainly in favor of systems that guarantee the right to health care, education, parental leave, fair working conditions, and yes, even paid vacation as a matter of right, not benefit. Still I want to propose a thought experiment: what if all those were guaranteed, as human rights, to every citizen. Would descendants of slaves be owed something more?

Contrast this question with another. A Holocaust survivor who chose to remain in Germany after the war – and some did – would

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receive the same palette of social services as her ex-Nazi neighbors. Before Germany's Economic Miracle, those services were limited, but as the 1960s brought prosperity, their range expanded. Would we think justice served if the survivor were guaranteed the same economic and social rights as the rest of the nation, or would we think she deserved something more for the pain and terror most of the nation inflicted on her? No compensation could redeem the loss of her parents or children. Still, something more than regular social services – regarded as a right for everyone – seems owed to her for the wrong she suffered. Something more than words of apology.

Nor does it matter whether the wrong was intentional. The historian Isaac Deutscher illustrated this with a parable: suppose a man jumped from a burning house in which many of his family had died, and hit a passing stranger, breaking her arms and legs in falling. If both people were reasonable, they would not become enemies. The jumper would try to console and compensate the innocent stranger, who would understand that she was a victim of accidental circumstance. If they were irrational, they will be caught in an endless cycle of resentment, fear, and revenge. Deutscher used this parable to describe the justified claims of Israeli Jews and Palestinians in 1967, but it can be applied to many cases. To this day, Israel has refused to recognize the justice of Palestinian claims that began when Jews fled a burning Europe, and those claims have only become more valid under the long occupation. All the more urgent are the claims of the victims of American racism, whose perpetrators can hardly be compared with someone escaping a burning home.

How far back do our obligations extend? Noting British prime minister Tony Blair's apology for injustices committed against the Irish a century earlier, the author Robert Penn Warren asked if an apology should extend to Oliver Cromwell, who devastated Ireland in the seventeenth century. Penn Warren thought he was showing the absurdity of demands for historical justice, but the question is worth taking seriously. At the close of the twentieth century, the punk group The Pogues sang

> A curse upon you Oliver Cromwell
> You who raped our Motherland

and hoped he was burning in hell as they sang it. As long as public memory is seething over unacknowledged injustice, the heirs of those who wreaked it should, at the least, acknowledge it.

The philosopher Janna Thompson has argued that obligations to right historical wrongs persist indefinitely, if not eternally. She

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believes that keeping transgenerational commitments, implicit or not, is the central moral and political good that gives nations the basis for trust. Philosophical theories of reparations depend on two different arguments: one emphasizing historical obligations, the other present needs. The case for American reparations for slavery can be made on both grounds – the historical obligation arising from the evil of slavery, as well as the present economic condition of most of its descendants. To those claims Thompson adds a third: 'Maintaining a political society capable of acting justly in a world of nations depends essentially on a moral practice that requires each generation of citizens to take responsibility for keeping the commitments of its predecessors and repairing their injustice'.[7] This way of grounding an obligation for reparations requires no appeal to guilt for the sins of long-dead ancestors, nor does it appeal to obligations automatically conferred by citizenship. It can be applied very widely, though determining the exact obligations must be decided case by case. Particular circumstances always matter.

4. Conclusion

If there's no algorithm that can calculate how far obligations may go back in time, there is also none that can determine how wide they may reach across space. The claim that the United States owes reparations for slavery has been followed by the argument that European nations owe reparations to the Caribbean community, where slavery was often even more brutal and devastating than it was in the American South. Given the importance of the slave trade, and the products of slavery, for building nineteenth-century Europe's wealth, no further argument might be needed. But the Caribbean community is right to focus on one fact that's particularly galling: after abolishing slavery in its colonies in 1833, Britain paid 20 million pounds to compensate former enslavers for the loss of what they considered their property. The amount, at the time, was 40 percent of annual government income and had to be financed by private loan. British taxpayers paid the interest on that debt until 2015.

Opponents of reparations will blanch: the case I've sketched does imply that there is no honest way to resist claims for reparations on a global scale. The difficulty of figuring out how to allot what to whom is no excuse for refusing to try. It's probably impossible to

[7] Janna Thompson, *Taking Responsibility for the Past: Reparation and Historical Justice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

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calculate the amounts the United States owes to Native Americans, or European countries to their former colonies. Still, the U.S. could begin by restoring mineral rights on the reservations of the former, and Europeans by forgiving the debt of the latter. This could initiate the sort of cleansing Karl Jaspers thought necessary and inescapable for Germany in 1946. After reparations to Israel began, other Germans spoke of retrieving lost honor. Some have suggested that an apology for colonialism is more important than material compensation. The Indian politician and author Shashi Tharoor said that a symbolic payment of one pound a year would suffice as reparations for two hundred years of British rule in India. Reparations, he argued in a 2015 speech at the Oxford Union, are 'not a tool to empower anybody, they are a tool for you to atone…The ability to acknowledge your wrong, to simply say sorry, will go a far, far longer way than some percentage of the GDP in the form of aid'.[8] This is a remarkable statement, given Tharoor's argument that Britain's industrial revolution was premised on the destruction of India's precolonial economy; as in many other colonies, what had been a self-sufficient system was turned into a source of raw material, often through barbaric means. An apology for those abuses would, at the least, acknowledge that foreign aid to developing countries – of which European countries contribute twice as much, relative to GDP, as the United States – is a matter of obligation, not generosity. It might even restrain the development of the new forms of neo-colonialism that many corporations practice today. But for the reasons just sketched, I don't believe that acknowledgment is enough. Opponents of reparations counter that the cost of all that debt would be impossible to raise, which makes them reluctant to even acknowledge it.

Proposals to repair massive injustice are inevitably met with the claim that there isn't enough money in the world to do so. Several taxation policies that might finance reparations have been proposed, but if we are serious about seeking the means to restore justice, the real elephant in the room is the arms industry. Too many of us continue to ignore it. If no one ever produced or profited from another weapon again, we'd still have enough to defend (or kill) ourselves many times over. As in the fable of the emperor's new clothes, it takes a child to point out the obvious. When Malala Yousefzai's life was threatened for demanding girls' rights to education, the world took notice, and

[8] See: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/dr-shashi-tharoor-tells-the-oxford-union-why-britain-owes-reparations-for-colonising-india-in-viral-10407997.html.

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she became the youngest person ever to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Very little attention was paid a few years later, when she used her education to argue that all children have a right to twelve years of free education – and that this could be paid for by cutting military spending for *just eight days every year*. That fact, confirmed for me by a Nobel laureate in economics, received little attention because we have no idea what to do with it. If there were an international vote about priorities, a motion to replace military spending with education – at least for eight days – would surely win hands down. We do not even know what structures would frame such a decision process.[9]

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