White Psychodrama

Liam Kofi Bright

Abstract: I analyse the political, economic, and cultural circumstances that have given rise to persistent political disputes about race (known colloquially as "the culture war") among a subset of Americans. I argue that they point to a deep tension between widely held normative aspirations and pervasive and readily observable material facts about our society. The characterological pathologies this gives rise to are discussed, and a normatively preferable path forward for an individual attempting to reconcile themselves to the current social order is suggested.

Introduction

One might hope that philosophy could reconcile ourselves to our social world and each other. To entertain this as plausible is to think there is some perspective one could reach via philosophical inquiry that shows our life and society to be as they are for good reason, allowed us to see it all as in some sense rational. Hegel is no doubt the great exponent of this ideal, his system promising to trace history's patterns and conceptual development, with Hegel being so optimistic as to believe that at its end we would achieve the perspective whereby every agent's own actions and situation can be made intelligible to themselves and each other. This was meant to be true for us the readers, so we would be able to see for ourselves how what we do makes sense given our circumstances and is plausibly tending towards a good end (Rawls 2000, 331-336).

Of course the problem is there may not be such a perspective. Perhaps to see the world aright is to recognise it as a jumbled mess, with no progressive tendency towards greater coherence, and no satisfaction to be had in achieving superior insight. Perhaps there is no good end we are collaboratively working towards, no possible reconciliation with each other; maybe we are perpetually on the brink of descending once more into a Hobbesian nightmare. Of course Hegel hoped to reassure us that the existence of such a perspective is guaranteed; as free agents once we achieve self-awareness we necessarily mutually-recognise one another as engaged in a fundamentally cooperative project tending towards justified ends (Pippin 2008). But, alas, not all of us have been convinced, and a kind of existential anomie can befall a thoughtful person who surveys our present socio-cultural situation (Rosa 2020). What if there really is just no excuse for how things are, and no good reason for me to carry on?

We ought then make the social world worthy of reconciliation. The guiding idea here is that the ideal of re-
conciliation underlying Hegelian social thought is desirable, and if it is not yet possible given present social
arrangements we are called upon to change those arrangements until the ideal can be attained. To be clear
this is not a disagreement with Hegel's system at its deepest level; he may have jumped the gun on what a
rationally reconcilable social order looked like, but in some sense that is a mere detail compared to his deep-
er point that we proactively seek a coherence that we can be reconciled to. Social and political philosophy
can then play a dual role of identifying points at which our social order will throw up obstacles to attaining a
coherent and reconcilable view of one's life, and suggesting means by which these obstacles can be removed
(e.g. Vredenburgh 2022).

I shall illustrate these rather abstract ideas by constructing and analysing a narrative of the historical situation
leading up to the current culture war; especially as it plays out concerning race, and black-white relations
even more especially, among the middle class of the USA. As a culturally dominant global hegemon the
terms and structure of the USA's culture war tend to get exported, so it is worth understanding even for those
of us who are not citizens. The pass-time of the chattering classes, the culture war can be understood as a set
of symbolic and political conflicts over emotionally highly charged issues *du jour*. Even if the peculiar topic
of discussion is fleeting, the ultimate resolution to these debates can have drastic effects on the lives of citi-
zens. How we decide to understand and enforce norms around gender and sexuality, for instance, touch upon
some of the most intimate and important aspects of our lives.

Here I am interested in how our peculiar socio-economic conditions shape the contours and possible points
of resolution in the cultural debate around issues of race. It shall be seen that characteristic responses to our
social order, which I shall describe through stylised character archetypes, make it impossible for any lasting
reconciliation to be had for participants in the culture war. Instead our responses both generate and constitute
a kind of racialised psychopathology, that I describe as white psychodrama. Given this analysis of the social
order and its sources of psychic incoherence, I will suggest a way forward. My hope is that this will at least
help people of colour caught in the midst of this work towards a world we can live in, and by seeing our-
selves as so working reconcile ourselves to our actual present social activities. We cannot and ought not rec-
oncile ourselves to a society wrapped up in its own contradictions, no more than we should seek to integrate
into a burning house. But we can come to see ourselves as knowingly and self-consciously working to re-

solve those contradictions, quenching that fire, and laying the foundations for a better structure that we may all live comfortably therein.

A Narrative Of How We Got Here

Once upon a time the United States of America was a *de jure* racist society. As was much of the world beyond its borders, controlled as it was by racist European empires. There was a broadly understood and explicitly codified and enforced racial organisation of who could live where, of how individuals could interact, of what sort of jobs were appropriate for whom, of how law and order would operate — or wouldn't (Wells-Barnett 1895). The science (Morris 2015), sport (Rogosin 2007), and artistic culture of the day (Cooper 1892), were largely carried out in conformity with, if not support of, racist norms. Gross or subtle as it may have been in any given instance, the colour line ran through everything and one crossed it only at great personal peril (Du Bois 1904, 530).

But mountains crumble and rivers disappear, new roads replace the old, stones are buried and vanish in the earth. Time passes and the world changes. So it was that eventually this *de jure* racist system went the way of all things. The civil war overthrew the slave regime. Racial immigration laws were repealed. The civil rights act made various sorts of explicitly racist laws and practices impermissible. By the latter half of the 20th century it was clear an officially endorsed *de jure* racial caste system was no longer to hold sway in American life. Likewise abroad the great European empires fell, and in their place sprang up a plethora of nations governed by formerly colonised peoples. All things considered, the 20th century saw *de jure* racism suffer a world-historic defeat.

Along with these legal and institutional changes went cultural changes. Casual use of the most highly charged racial slurs became limited to the worst bigots and nowadays one can hear the sentiment expressed that overt expressions of bigotry ought to disqualify someone from public office (Thau 2021). Over the 20th century Americans steadily reported much less opposition to interracial marriage between blacks and whites (Newport 2013). Career paths opened up to non white people which previously would have had an absolute colour bar (Durant & Louden 1986). Various of black American's artistic contributions came to define not just American but much of the globe's popular culture (e.g. Morgan & Bennett 2011). Mainstream right politicians ceased to explicitly identify as defending white dominance or white interests (Rodgers 2011 ch.4),

a norm change which even Trump made some nominal effort to respect (Saul 2017). American social attitudes thus seemed to adjust in line with the 20th centuries' legal changes.

But change was not total. The 20th century kicked off with an economist lamenting the black middle class' merger access to capital (Harris 1936 ch.9). The 21st century began the same way, as the gap between total wealth and assets owned by black vs white Americans was once again increasing (Oliver & Shapiro 2006, ch.8). Black assets were then hit especially hard by the 2008 crash (Rugh & Massey 2010). Even setting the crash aside, the fact that what black wealth exists is often tied up in housing property is its own source of racial vulnerability. Black property tends to be worth less (Shapiro 2004) amidst continuing residential segregation (Anderson 2010). This segregation can concentrate social difficulties that further hinder black Americans' life chances (Shelby 2017). And the rarity of interracial contact induced is no doubt related to the persistently low rates of racial intermarriage (Fryer 2007). All of which compounds the fact that inheritance law allows for intergenerational wealth transfers that maintain economic segregation (Halliday 2018, ch.6), and intergenerational mobility from being propertyless into wealth is difficult and rare (Wright 1997, §6.5). What's more, finally, the backdrop for all this is a global economy where the ability to inherit wealth increasingly determines one's life chances (Picketty 2014, ch.11). Whatever else changed, the people who have the stuff still tend to be white, and blacks must still sell our labour to them if we are to get by.

In this way American domestic politics mirrored the broader global trends of a post imperial world (Táíwò 2022a, ch.2). The European empires despoiled and depopulated nations (Davis 2002, Marschal 2017). What they left in their wake were often under-developed economies (Rodney 1972) and institutional structures ripe to be taken over by local elites who could simply continue the pattern of authoritarian wealth extraction (Fanon 1961, ch.3; Acemoglu & Robinson 2012). But the end of formal colonisation did not generally lead to reparations. For the most part agents based in the former colonial metropoles retained ownership of key resources and even infrastructure (Nkrumah 1965), and if anything inefficiencies in the credit market have led to a net capital flow from the former colonies to the former colonisers (Picketty 2015, 58). Neither domestically nor internationally did a change in cultural attitudes and legal permissions correlate with a change in racial patterns of ownership. As such, many of the material patterns of inequality from the bad old days of *de jure* racist regimes have survived the demise of their former ideological superstructure.

Returning to the US, these persistent material inequalities have consequences for occupational inequality.

The legacy of *de jure* segregation plausibly goes a long way to explaining wealth and income gaps between black and white Americans (Aliprantis & Carroll 2019). And contemporary *de facto* segregation generates social networks that concentrate access to opportunities for work and education among the already prosperous, further disadvantaging blacks (Royster 2003 ch.7). What's more, fulfilling and legal employment for "less skilled" workers was already drying up by the early 21st century (Atenasio 2021). In so far as there has been a coherent social response to this collapse in opportunity what has stepped in to the place of those jobs has been the prison system (Gilmore 2007 ch.3; Picketty 2015, 24). The rapid rise in the population of incarcerated persons has of course disproportionately affected black people (Alexander 2012), and despite mass incarceration being a persistent public concern the American political establishment has been unable to effectively react (Barkow 2019).

Finally, even if explicit appeal to white interests withered away, race continues to in fact be a powerful predictor of how Americans vote (Picketty 2020, 818-822). The liberalisation of social attitudes has not led to the total disappearance of overtly racist stereotypes (e.g. Davis 1981; Priest *et al* 2018). And the political intelligentsia are still largely white, which has arguably affected the content and focus of their work (Mills 2017).

This then is where history has placed us. The maddening ambiguity of our position is what leads to the titular white psychodrama. One cannot reconcile oneself to this society because it constantly pulls in two directions - it presents one with an ideological narrative that speaks of equality, and a material structure that witnesses rank inequality. At some level this society just does not make sense to itself, its own ideology out of whack with the plain facts of its own existence. There are those who are tempted to focus only on the positives, and see in this a story of triumphant progress towards racial justice or a post-racial future. And there are those who are inclined to see in it a story of eternal recurrence, racism ever reinventing itself. But both of these perspectives are too tidy to capture the phenomenon. For this story is of a world and a nation in contradiction with itself.

After much struggle this world has publicly declared, and in some sense sincerely come to believe, that racial hatred is a social failure and a horrid character defect. We now welcome forms of love, friendship, and cooperation that were once unthinkable. And yet we carefully divide up the pie to ensure former slaves are kept poor and ashamed. The inevitable social discord generated by this immiseration are dealt with by brutality

and caging. And the lingering suspicion remains that all this is the former slaves' fault. How then do people respond to the facts relayed in this historical narrative, and what does it mean for their ability to reconcile themselves to their own social order?

Three Character Archetypes

The character archetypes are stylised representations of typical responses to the status quo. Each of the below types is assumed to be driven by some fairly normal psychological motivations - they do not wish to feel guilty, they would prefer to have more stuff rather than less - and within that responds to the evidence, incentives, and institutional structures their society presents them with. To that extent one can think of these as something like publicly available social roles which facilitate intentional action (Pippin 2008), or as agents for whom I am giving a structural explanation of their behaviour (Haslanger 2016). In either case, allowing for the overly neat appearance of any stylised picture, what follows is meant to be a descriptively plausible picture of reactions by many actual politically switched on agents to life in a society shaped by the circumstances of the historical narrative just relayed. They are caricatures for sure, but ones which I expect many readers will see resemblances of within their own lives.

The agents we discuss are highly polarised people fighting a culture war. There is empirical evidence available which lets us situate what sort of person this would be. Partisanship has largely been a phenomenon only among wealthier and more politically engaged voters (Baldassarri & Gelman 2008; Hetherington 2009; Prior 2013; Lelkes 2016). These are mutually reinforcing categories; home ownership, for instance, predicts being more politically involved (Jiang 2018; Shah & Wichowsky 2019). Polarisation encompasses far more than just party or policy preference (Hare & Poole 2014; Shi *et al* 2017). It includes, significantly for us, what news media and commentariat figures people listen to and engage with (Stroud 2010; Hawdon *et al* 2020). This association with media consumption and lifestyle differences makes the polarisation highly affectively charged (Davis 2019; Iyengar *et al* 2019). White people are more likely to be politically engaged (Huyser *et al* 2018; Grumbach & Sahn 2020) - if anything black voter turnout is systematically over reported (Cassel 2019). And as already discussed, whites are also more likely to be wealthy. So all this means that the culture war categories I focus on will primarily be elite agents, and will largely (though not entirely) focus on various white responses to the status quo.

Despite culture war polarisation largely being a fight between whites, issues of race still turn out to be very important to how it plays out. Measures of racist attitudes still do a good job of predicting American's attitudes to candidates and policies (Roemer *et al* 2007). Since the 2008 election of Barack Obama measures of white Americans level of racial antagonism have spiked (McDermott & Belcher 2014). And voters report racial issues as some of those on which they are most divided (Pew Research Centre 2020). Plausibly at least some of the cultural divides now wracking this section of elite white America arose from differing responses to the changing social meaning of whiteness following the end of *de jure* racist regimes (Olson 2008).

So I shall rationally reconstruct character types which allow one to appreciate how the sort of elite white agent engaged in a culture war revolving around race might behave and ideologically understand themselves (c.f. Prescott-Couch 2015). These responses may not always strike you as plausible or fully coherent. But I think that is to be expected in a situation where people are having to make sense of a society shaped by contradictory forces (Cohen 1978 ch.11 §7). That, after all, is why this is a story of psychodrama. The conflict between an ideology of racial egalitarianism and a material reality of strict hierarchy generates such a tension, and it is the desire to keep one's status atop that hierarchy (or make one's way within it) while avoiding guilt thereby drives the culture war archetypes.

- Repenter

One common type among the white majority may be called the Repenter. This character straightforwardly responds to our story with an overwhelming sense of guilt. They see the group they identify with as having committed horrible crimes globally and domestically, and they are ever so aware of the ways in which present material conditions generate continued depravation for black people alongside relative comfort for many white people. They believe in racially egalitarian ideologies which tell them this ought not be, and hence feel unhappy with themselves and the state of things.

The Repenter would deeply, deeply, like to do things to alleviate this guilt. And their form of repentance involves trying to change their interpersonal habits and consumer choices so as to minimise their contribution to the broader social issue, and help the particular black people they interact with. In this way, by doing that sort of self-work, they hope to be able to live in a world that is admittedly unjust while making it that little bit better, and through such efforts be able to honestly maintain a positive self image.

So the Repenter invests in lessons re sophisticated etiquette around inter-racial interactions (e.g. DiAngelo 2018). They are keen for their work place to celebrate diversity, and satisfying their desire for both a tolerable workspace and various consumer goods drives what commentators call "woke capitalism" (Rossi & Táíwò 2020). They seek out and do their best to appreciate the work of non-white thinkers and artists (Liebow & Rieder 2022, pg.277). Sometimes all this can be rather ostentatious and one rather suspects the moral kudos for being seen to do as much is playing a bit too large a role in their motivations. But it need not be so cynical, these may well be the result of a heartfelt sense that such behaviour is required by justice given the genuine guilt which their group membership and historical situation has placed upon them.

- Represser

Another common type among the white majority may be called the Represser. Much like the Repenter they are aware of our broad historical situation, and not immune to pangs of guilt. But the Represser feels this largely unreasonable — too much focus on the negatives rather than the positives, and prone to generating an irrational self-hatred in themselves and among their fellow whites.

The Represser does not deny the central points of the earlier narrative, but they would like to change the focus away from the potentially guilt inducing elements. Progress has been made and there are after all good things that have happened in our history too. They do not wish to return to *de jure* racism, but instead hold out hope for a society that is, in some sense, considerably more relaxed about race, and less prone to fixate on the historic crimes of white people. Such a society could do better at learning from the past, by considering it with an air of cool detachment. So far as we can now draw on the past's lessons, salient to the Represser is that the success cases for progress seem to be ones wherein race was previously central to how we organised things (say, immigration law) but is now de-emphasised or suppressed.

So the Represser seeks out intellectual support for the idea that our narrative is altogether too cynical (e.g. Pluckrose & Lindsay 2020). They seek to implement colour-blind policies and norms that avoid drawing attention to race. And through their consumer choices they try to encourage media that embodies race neutral virtues. In a sort of mirror image to the Repenter, one can sometimes get the impression that the wish to avoid discussing race is a second-best alternative for a person who simply dislikes guilt and wishes to remain

ignorant of anything that may induce it (Mills 2007), or, worse, harbours anti-black animus but lacks the courage to explicitly challenge anti-racist social mores. But, again, it need not be, and the Represser strategy can be the result of a heartfelt conviction that the path to just unity goes via deemphasising differences and stressing the encouraging progress made in learning to get along.

Before moving on to our third type let's be clear about a few things. First, the Repressers and Repenters are diametrically opposed. The Repenter's response to our situation crucially depends on playing up exactly the things the Represser wants to play down. They are exactly opposed strategies in responding to a Du Boisian social problem. These are cases wherein one finds "the failure of an organised social group to realise its group ideals, through the inability to adapt certain desired lines of action to conditions of life" (Du Bois 1898, 3). Repenters and Repressers alike are responding to their failure to realise racially egalitarian group ideals, but one wants to adopt lines of behaviour that acknowledge this failure and alleviate guilt and the other wishes to suppress discussion of the failure. It is near enough psychologically impossible for the same person simultaneously do both, and it its thus difficult for Repressors and Repenters to share spaces and resources. Second, the above two types by no means exhaust even elite majority group responses to the situation outlined in the narrative. For one thing most people are simply checked out of politics. For another (e.g.) explicit white supremacists would fit into neither group. But among the chattering classes of the whites I believe the Represser and Repenter character archetypes capture many of the most important personas. Third, and finally, neither's strategy for responding to the narrative involves large scale changes in the distribution of ownership of stuff, including housing and living arrangements. Repenters and Repressers are engaged in a fundamental conflict, but it is a conflict over how to psychologically manage the results of living in a materially deeply unequal society, not a conflict about how or whether to reduce that material inequality.

- PoC Intelligentsia

Of course the rest of us do not simply sit by and watch the whites duke it out amongst themselves. If nothing else they still have ownership of the stuff and a democratic majority, so most of us are dependent on them for making a living. How then have the PoC intelligentsia — people of colour sufficiently engaged in politics to be tapped into the white culture war and the historical narrative underpinning it — responded to the opportunities and challenges presented thereby?

With a dexterous entrepreneurial spirit! Which is to say, by cashing in. In institutions like academia more dominated by the Repenter type there has been the opportunity for mediocre if sharp eyed young PoC intelligentsia to present themselves as bearers of black thinkers' insight (e.g. Bright 2018). It is considerably harder to pull this off from within academia as an advocate for Represser views. But where there is demand there will be supply. And there is a large audience keen for a black thinker to give voice to an intelligent version of the Represser narrative. Sufficiently talented black thinkers have been happy to oblige (e.g. Loury 2009). Various media organisations and political groups likewise provide opportunity for similar pseudo-spokespeople PoC intelligentsia catering to both Repressers and Repenters.

The white majority's superior wealth easily translates into control over cultural institutions. They are the bulk of the consumers for newspapers and intelligentsia magazines, their children the largest racial demographic in elite colleges; they write the cheques that form the basis of the endowments, and tend in fact to be the ones sitting in positions of upper authority in news rooms and university administration. And among this white majority there is demand for a PoC intelligentsia. It is a vital part of Repenter strategy for alleviating guilt that they listen to such voices. Repressers are not as tied to this strategy but if one is troubled by accusations of racism (and these may come from within) the fact that black thinkers agree with your perspective will be salient and interesting. Those PoC intelligentsia who are able to catch and retain the attention of one of the white bourgeois' factions thus gain access to their resources and the institutions they control for promoting their own view. They thereby attain a kind of leadership status which is not related to having skills required for such a job (c.f. Quest 2005) nor popular legitimacy with the people they purportedly speak for (c.f. Salkin 2021). A PoC Intelligentsia thus emerges, without ownership of its cultural situation (Táíwò 2017 §2.2), and catering to white tastes while giving the impression of representing PoC perspectives.

The Repenter, in particular, is especially liable to generate opportunities for PoC intelligentsia to profitably position themselves as having valuable insight into how guilt can be appropriately relieved. Anyone who makes a living off this is, of course, thereby materially invested in the perpetuation of the conditions which give rise to Repenter guilt. Sometimes, as in this quote from a number of people running a racial etiquette workshop aimed at white women, it can be made quite explicit that material change is not sought:

> "The actual work is for you to deconstruct the things within you: whiteness," Rao said. "Whiteness
>
> harms people of color, but worry about yourself. Stop worrying about us — that's paternalistic, too."

Bond echoed this sentiment. "This idea that we, as white people, need to go out and make these big external actions — that's just white supremacy," she said. "This internal work is the hard work; it's the work that never ends."

They see the deconstruction of whiteness as a prerequisite for true anti-racist work. Jackson explained, "Until you deal with your inner stuff — until you can say, 'I'm coming from a place where I recognize that I have these thoughts, and I'm working on it' — everything else is performing." (Fischer 2021)

And more generally there has grown up a small but profitable industry of racial self-help gurus, who extract money from Repenters in exchange for helping them alleviate guilt without challenging the fundamental material inequalities underlying the situation (Lasch-Quinn 2001).

Of course it should be clear that the PoC intelligentsia are to a certain extent simply playing the hand life dealt them. As per our narrative they do not tend be independently wealthy or come from family backgrounds that permit self-support. They for the most part occupy institutions in which they are the minority, and the taste-makers and the persons with the ability to direct resources of those institutions will largely be drawn from the white bourgeoisie's chattering class, which is to say will very often be Repenters or Repressers. They have to eat, and who of them we see and hear from is filtered by the tastes of the white majority. If their behaviour seems disappointing then one ought consider the circumstances which birthed them rather than engaging in moralistic personal critique. The sad fact is that once patterns of racial interaction become entrenched they become very hard for individuals to deviate from (Bright *et al* forthcoming). We need a kind of structural change, one that changes the causes of behaviour embedded in the social environment we are all responding to, generating mass rather than individual behavioural changes (Malinsky 2018).

- Illustration

To gain a more concrete sense of how these archetypes present themselves in every day life let us imagine a hypothetical culture war racial flashpoint. Considering how might the character archetypes thus sketched might respond to it will be instructive. So let us suppose that the nation is responding to yet another extra-

judicial killing of a black man by a white police officer. What sort of behaviours should we expect from the character types given what we have said about them?

The Repenter is driven overwhelmingly by guilt, a desire that their personal behaviour and environment not be associated with racism or racial social ills, but no great desire to change the material basis of the society in which they live. A brutal reminder of black vulnerability to death at the hands of the state will thus first and foremost activate that guilt in a visceral way, leading to heartfelt distress. They will wish to signal their extreme disapproval of police behaviour and induce organisations they are associated with to do the same — for instance perhaps their work place could be made to issue a statement affirming that black lives matter, or some such, while committing to uphold anti-racist practices in its own behaviour. They will look to prominent PoC intelligentsia for intellectual leadership on the question of what should be done at a social level, but since these are largely drawn from society's upper echelons they are liable to be uncomfortable at practical actions deemed extreme, i.e. which could actually upset the ability of the police to perform the social function of protecting their lives and property. Hence beyond sloganeering and support for piecemeal reform (supporting candidates who combine radical slogans with piecemeal reform policy will be especially tempting) they are unlikely to engage in any sustained push for large scale change. Guilt is assuaged so far as possible by their personal actions towards the good and the disassociation of their organisations from racist animus. They listened to PoC intelligentsia voices and made some efforts towards acting upon what they were told. When the next police killing causes outrage, the cycle may be repeated.

The Represser is driven by a desire to avoid unnecessary guilt inducing focus on race, to ensure there is recognition of progress made so we do not lose what is valuable, and to avoid any suggestion that they are personally responsible (or responsible qua white person) for the ills of black people they have never interacted with. Any framing of the police killing as racist or which focuses on racial disparities in treatment by the police is hence liable to annoy. If they can be satisfied that there is no proof that specifically racial animus motivated the policeman they will likely bemoan the public rushing to judgement on this point, and offer alternative (race-neutral) explanations for the policeman's behaviour. They will decry any comparison between present events and past explicitly racist atrocities such as lynchings, and highlight the absurdity in suggesting that contemporary police officers still behave in anything like their equivalents in the bad old days of *de jure* racism. Given that their whole stance tends to scepticism about systemic evil being evinced, they will natur-

ally tend to be sceptical of any large scale reforms proposed in the wake of the tragedy. When the next police killing causes outrage, the cycle may be repeated.

The PoC Intelligentsia publicly represents a viewpoint and is taken to have special authority on matters of race relations. Their livelihood depends on being seen as having something useful and interesting to say at moments like this. And, since it is largely the politically engaged who care, the consumers for their opinions are largely drawn from the two white factions whose reactions we just outlined. What is more, the two groups consume different media and seek out different intellectuals, so there is little incentive to hedge and much to provide a specialised reaction. Their incentives are thus to present their viewpoint (which, again and to be clear, may well be sincerely held and on good grounds) as catering to only one of the reactions just outlined. Those who specialise in catering to Represser tastes will thus be ready on hand with statistics that downplay the significance of police killings, or of racial disparities therein, and which suggest that in any case racism is certainly not the explanation for this event. As persons of colour themselves they will have a moral authority to suggest that it is the bad behaviour of the deceased which led to the killing without being written off as violating anti-racist norms. This is a most useful comparative advantage in competing for the attention of Represser consumers looking for commentariat responses to the event. Whereas those who cater to Repenter tastes should provide opportunities for pathos, and offer themselves as experts in policies or programmes that should be adopted in order to atone for and avoid participation in murderous racial evil. Since most PoC Intelligentsia cater to Repenters, their central challenge is to say something sufficiently eye catching (and hence usually radical) to stand out from the crowd without scaring off newspaper editors. This is a skill which can be honed with practice, and in any case by an evolutionary process the market selects for such skill. When the next police killing causes outrage, the cycle may be repeated.

Reconciliation?

We now have our narrative and our cast. America, mirroring global trends, has gone from a *de jure* racist state to one with a far more egalitarian ideology but a racially stratified distribution of wealth. Inhabiting this contradictory land are Repenters, wracked with guilt about the ideology-reality mismatch and seeking to avoid making it worse themselves. Repressers, wanting to stave off rather than alleviate guilt, and worried that in all the concern over inequality we lose track of our progress, seek to instantiate a colour blind meritocracy as the antithesis of *de jure* racism. And PoC intelligentsia, along for the ride, selling their ideological

wares to either side as opportunity or inclination permits. I hope this is a somewhat recognisable picture of elements of our present ideological configuration in those bits of the world dominated by American culture.

But at the outset I promised that one could be reconciled to one's social role through all this. None of the above characters are entirely unsympathetic, yet in so far as one sees oneself in them it is probably with a profound sense of unease. Surely coming to recognise oneself in the characters sketched above as responding to our narrative cannot be a means of reconciling ourselves to the present situation?

Quite so, but it is not the passionate participants of the culture war among the whites that I hope to reconcile you too, nor the hustle and grind of the PoC intelligentsia. For there is another character archetype being depicted in all this — it is the ironic detachment of the narrator who I hope to persuade readers, especially non-white readers, that they may profitably see themselves in. By analogy to the cold-war, let us call this the Non-Aligned character archetype.

The Non-Aligned person represents a kind of ideal, a character type to which one could be reconciled even amidst a society as so described. The basic idea is borrowed and adapted from key ideas in Wiredu's philosophy of conceptual decolonisation (Wiredu 2002), so I will explain the big picture strategy before giving more concrete illustrations. Broadly speaking, we have fulfilled half of the task we set for political philosophy in the introduction. We have outlined a cause which prevents people being able to reconcile themselves to their social order — the fact that the ideology they espouse and the material reality they live within fundamentally come apart, the one always generating problems for the other. And at a high level this immediately suggests a path to reconciliation — make the world better resemble the ideology, or the ideology better resemble the world. I will presume here that in some form or another a racially egalitarian ideology is to be maintained, and thus consider the more specific question: how can one earnestly work towards a more egalitarian social structure given the situation we now find ourselves? As I will outline in a moment, epistemic features of the status quo make this a non-trivially difficult task to even attempt, and so it requires certain characterological virtues that I shall use to construct the Non-Aligned person's archetype.

And this is where the central idea from Wiredu comes in. The situation of the person of colour facing the contemporary culture war, recognising it as doomed to incoherence yet unsure of how to do better, shares certain features with the situation of any formerly colonised person trying to understand their present situa-

tion. Passing familiarity with the history leading up to now makes it clear that key concepts through which one understands the social world, the institutions charged with gathering and marshalling evidence about that world, and the bodies empowered to set the agenda in social discussion, have all been developed by powers indifferent or hostile to one's interests. And yet it would clearly be facile to simply reject whatever one inherits from this nexus (Wiredu 1998). After all, this too lets those same forces set the agenda. It simply adds a negation sign before stating a preferred response to someone else's agenda. One must thus develop the skills and capacities to sift through the discourse space cautiously, weigh and evaluate what one finds, and synthesise what is best therein so that it serves ends one sets oneself. This is what Wiredu calls conceptual decolonisation, and I shall more or less contract the Non-Aligned ideal to be an ideal practitioner of conceptual decolonisation within the present culture war, working towards the end of a genuinely racially egalitarian socio-political order.

Let us then work through that abstract story as applied to our more concrete case. First, why is it that the Non-Aligned person is in a situation wherein they cannot trust their concepts, agenda setting agencies, or evidence gathering institutions? This follows from the way in which the culture war is sustained by a material inequality that no one is seriously trying to fix. Repenters and Repressers are both responding to discontent generated by an ideology-reality mismatch, but neither of them wishes to either ideologically justify the material inequality or give away their property and superior opportunities. But as long as such material inequalities exist they can generate stable patterns of inegalitarian interaction in line with salient identity categories (O'Connor 2019). These can compound one's disadvantage the more minoritised one is (O'Connor et al 2019). And even if, per impossible, we could somehow persuade all the whites to adopt the right sort of inner attitude, the wrong sort of institutional structure can perpetuate racial inequality regardless (Bonilla-Silva 2006). What's more, due attention to colonial history makes it apparent that regimes of stark and brutal racial inequality can go a long time despite a firm majority of the population thinking them entirely illegitimate (Táíwò 2018). Participants in the culture war, organised as it is around responding to this situation, thus find themselves with endless new fodder with which to fuel their battles. The ideology-reality mismatch is forever asserting itself, ever directing their intellectual and practical attention. The Du Boisian social problem can be temporarily forgotten or the guilt from failing to solve it meliorated for a moment — but it will never stop generating new instances of itself, never stop reaffirming its own basic reality.

Hence as long as the material inequalities exist they will keep making racial hierarchy salient whatever the Repressers want, and keep generating reasons for guilt whatever the Repenters want. All of the institutions designed to respond to this culture war — which is essentially all of the epistemic institutions controlled by the white bourgeois, which is to say all of them — are thus fundamentally addressing the wrong questions from the point of view of the Non Aligned person. They are concerned with managing the results of a tension they can never resolve, which the nature of the Repenter and Repressor conflict will not allow them to resolve. They are not arranged to produce information, or set an agenda, that will aid in resolving material inequality, and in fact will forever be supplied with more culture war flashpoints on which to focus and with which to distract.

Since that will no doubt strike many as a bleak situation, it is worth pausing here to address a temptation many have felt, indeed which may be the psychological basis of many becoming PoC intelligentsia. If this is all our society has to offer, why not give in to the overwhelming temptation for an educated person of colour and participate in the culture war, usually from a perspective much more friendly to the Repenters. Could we not win serious material change by persuading them to act as our agents? And even if we cannot, maybe pessimism is simply the proper response to this; and one may as well at least get paid for blunting the worst edges of oppression. It is easy to see why this tempts, not only for reasons of material interest mentioned above, but also in light of the sort of policies and social standing which the Repenters would seem to offer us. But earnestly trying to win the culture war in the sense of achieving victory for either Repenter or Represser is a fool's errand; if those are the teams then the only winning move is not to play.

For one thing it is impossible that we shall ever be so persuasive. The matters disputed are sufficiently complex, and the historical narrative sufficiently contradictory, that there will always be the possibility of reasonable disagreement. For another many people benefit from the status quo. First, in the obvious sense in which both Represser and Repenter strategies do not involve surrendering white wealth and are thus relatively advantageous to white elites when compared to seriously redistributive policies that might actually advance the material welfare of black people. But even beyond that there are many, including both whites (Lipsitz 2006) and the PoC intelligentsia outlined above, who materially benefit from the perpetuation of the culture war as it now exists. They will not be keen to let go of it without a fight. And in a highly interconnected and ideologically diverse society everyone will always be able to find sympathetic intellectual spokespeople to bolster their faith in their preferred narrative. Under these conditions we should not expect any coherent grand nar-

rative to achieve consensus (Lyotard 1984). Strategic participation on one side might seem like the pragmatic hard-nosed response of a realist, but it is doomed and in fact simply a waste of time.

Instead we should bear in mind that some situations are simply beyond our control and can only do us harm by involving ourselves (c.f. Ziporyn ch.4). As long as the material circumstances underlying the culture war remain the same neither the Represser nor the Repenter archetype will reliably act to our good. That is not to counsel inaction, but rather to stress that our actions should be aimed at other ends. With that, let us return and ask ourselves — if the Non-Aligned person cannot trust the politico-epistemic institutions of the participants in the culture war, nor can they reasonably hope to turn one of their sides into an engine for change, what ought they do instead?

Well at a high level they ought to act in such a way that they can earnestly see themselves as sensibly working towards the eradication of the material inequalities between racial groups. While it is not the only way of advancing this goal, as a placeholder let us assume the Non-Aligned person seeks to remove the ideology-reality mismatch by securing the physical and cultural conditions necessary for non white people to enjoy republican freedom (c.f. Pettit 2012). There is good reason to think that this cannot be achieved by mere change in people's attitudes or shifting interpersonal etiquette norms (Dotson & Sertler 2021). For republican freedom to be attained far reaching modifications in the basic economic structure may well be required (Roberts 2016; Wills 2018; Cicerchia 2019). As such the Non-Aligned character is moved to seek out avenues for effective collective action that might realise the necessary changes. The question is then — what sort of attitudes and dispositions do they need to have to be effective at this?

The psychological virtues necessary to work towards this under the present situation are difficult to attain. As noted, most of the venues wherein intellectual work and cultural media are produced are controlled by either Repenters or Repressers, with whom Non-Aligned people are, well, not aligned. In so far as people of colour have found a voice there they have been highly liable to elite capture (Táíwò 2022b). Yet, at least until counter-institutions have been built which have sufficient reach, these are the spaces many of us must exist in and persons whose work we must draw from if we are to plan and coordinate in working out how to collectively build a better world. What is more, all the while those institutions will be humming to the rhythm of the perpetual Repenter vs Represser conflict, as the world we inhabit continues inevitably to defy their preferred ideologies. We will thus be bombarded with messaging which claims that their culture war flashpoints

are supremely important and worthy of our immediate attention. The Non-Aligned person must learn to tune out the culture war noise while being attentive to what is of value given their distinctive projects. What sort of projects would these be, and what sort of psychological dispositions would aid their completion?

It is unfortunately rather difficult to say what those distinctive projects will be at this point, precisely because the present author is one subject to all the epistemic disadvantages outlined. But we can say a bit. Before we engage in the project of trying to refine and disseminate racial etiquette codes as in (DiAngelo 2018), Non-Aligned persons will want some evidence that improved civility norms would actually generate material redistribution. Where there is some reason to think they will not we will simply set aside such research projects and re-allocate our attention elsewhere. That is simply an example of a broader point: an immediate project for a non-aligned intellectual would be the reevaluation of projects which are ostensibly for the good of black people and presently taking up much time, attention, and resources - as is the case for racial etiquette trainings (see Diversity and Inclusion World Market Report 2022) - and see which of these projects are premised on in fact serving Repenter or Represser goals. Where examples of misallocated resources are identified, as is the case for etiquette trainings (c.f. Devine & Ash 2022; Kinney & Bright forthcoming §6), we will siphon of resources and prevent people sympathetic to our cause from casting their pearls here.

For a more positive example of a project we could engage in that has both intellectual and more directly material elements, there is the project of climate reparations recently advocated by Táíwò (2022a). He advocates for a forward looking vision of reparations, concerned with what sort of world we can make together, in a fashion that very much mirrors the concerns of the Non-Aligned person. What is more, he argues that due to many of the factors discussed in our narrative earlier, any hope for a decent world for the vast majority of the world's non-white population requires (among other things) the provision of resources and technology to counter-act the ecological and political effects of climate change. This is a form of climate reparations. To this we would perhaps wish to add research on ways in which such people could become independent of the generosity and good behaviour of the world's wealthy, in light of our adopted republican ideals. But in any case, redirecting the conversation, practices, and ultimately resources, involved in how we deal with reparations towards specific climate ends requires powers we do not presently have, and a mixture of skills and dispositions that are rare. Indeed even thinking about things this way is often very contentious (see e.g. Táíwò & Talati 2022). However it is exactly the sort of shift in mindset and practice we will need if we are to carry out the Non-Aligned project of striving to actually resolve our material inequalities.

With our examples of Non-Aligned scholar-activist projects before us we can think about what psychological virtues they require. And since both require shifting focus quite dramatically within already established areas of inquiry, we have our first characterological requirement of the Non-Aligned person. By whatever psychological means necessary we must stop granting the white bourgeoisie agenda-setting power over our own concerns. That is to say, the Non-Aligned person must cultivate mental self determination in order to ensure we are pursuing lines of thought and action pertinent to our projects and responsive to our concerns (c.f. Bright 2022 §5). For guidance in this we can look to outsider political traditions that have also had to develop within the confines of social forms they could not control (e.g. Robinson 1983, ch.7). This requires of us a kind of self-conscious autonomy in formulating and setting sub goals towards our ultimate end, and a stance of reflective irony towards what is being proffered as important by institutions we cannot trust, is essential to remaining Non-Aligned.

Relatedly, we must cultivate dispassion towards culture war flashpoints (Carey 2018). Repenters, Repressers, and many of the PoC intelligentsia, will insist we ought care deeply about these issues. And there are genuinely good arguments for affective engagement with political injustices (c.f. Cherry 2022). But, where our own agenda of securing republican freedom by changes to the material base does not independently confirm their concerns to be of interest, these affectively charged flashpoints are nothing more than a distraction. Yet, non-aligned people are psychologically formed in the environment of our narrative. Our ill-considered passions are hence likely to align with the spurious concerns of the Repressers and Repenters, and this can be very hard to break free from (James 2020, ch.9). Hopefully the very act of coming to appreciate one's place in the narrative will help denaturalise its concerns and allow one to better liberate oneself from being swept along by the affective salience regime it brings with it (c.f. Bennett 1984 §77). This allows one to focus on what matters to one's own project and better cooperate with others to those ends (Táíwò 2020). Of course, this will not mean that we are always unconcerned with whatever Repressers or Repenters care about — the ability of the police to engage in extra judicial killing certainly affects poor black people's republican freedom! And even where our indifference is maintained this should not be understood as being simply unfeeling (Graver 2008 ch.4). But we must none the less strive to maintain our own inner seat of judgement apart from the concerns the dominant culture attempts to foist upon us (c.f. Hadot 1998). With our own assessments given primacy, the superior wealth and access to media of the Repenters and Repressers will be unable to cajole or bribe us away from our task (c.f. Dobbin 2008 §19; Carlisle 2020 §4.70). In this way they can carry

out Wireduite conceptual decolonisation, having put themselves in a position to sift through what their epistemic environment offers them and select only what they need.

Cultivating this inner space is hence no mere personal retreat from the world. It is vital to achieving the Non-Aligned person's goal. By ensuring one is able to effectively work towards real change, one may help create a political community and material circumstance where all, now properly inclusive of non white people, may freely exercise and live according to their own considered judgements (Skeaff 2018). This then is the ideal of the Non-Aligned character archetype. Someone who can see themselves as genuinely pursuing a reasoned approach to creating a better society, dispassionate enough and at enough ironic distance not to get torn away from their tasks by the raging of the Repenters and the Repressors, reconciled to a project of genuinely resolving social incoherences rather than just eternally responding to each new dramatic demonstration of this incoherence anew.

Conclusion

Confusion is characteristic of a transitional society. This is a society that has undergone sufficiently rapid changes in its mode of life and ideological superstructure that the two have not yet had time to properly adjust each other (c.f. Du Bois 1940). The case of race relationships is especially fraught because one effect of all these changes has been to call the concept itself into question. Since the close of the 20th century we have not even really agreed whether or not there is a "there" there to race at all (Appiah 1985, Zack 1993, Glasgow et al 2019) - and this is no consequence-free metaphysical disagreement, our technological practices embody (often confused) notions of race (Hu forthcoming). It is hence no surprise, and no reason for shame, that we as a culture have had a hard time thinking through this. The USA and the broader postcolonial world has not yet found a way of making sense of itself after *de jure* racist regimes. It is natural enough that the narratives we have available are unsatisfying, and the character archetypes available are not appealing roles.

I have offered as a more attractive character archetype the Non-Aligned person. They seek to eliminate the mis-match between ideological aspiration and material reality. This they do by rendering material circumstances more akin to what one might expect given a racially egalitarian ideology. That is to say, rather than solve the Du Boisian social problem by trying to better manage its fall out, they wish to simply eliminate the circumstances that gave rise to it. Since they have to operate amidst the present society with all its confu-

sions and distractions, I argued that the Non-Aligned person needs to develop a habit of considering issues with Stoical dispassion, while maintaining ironic detachment from the concerns of the other character archetypes. In this way they can focus on achieving their goals, rather than get distracted by the pervasive and highly affectively charged white psychodramas that constitute the mainstay of Repenters and Repressers battling it out in the culture war. I hope this also illustrates how the ideal of reconciliation can still guide political philosophers even in non-ideal societies; we can think about what sort of person and project would constitute a rationally satisfying mode of working towards the better world, and work out how to create conditions that facilitate occupying such a role.

But whether my vision of the Non-Aligned as character archetype with which one could be reconciled is appealing or not, it is imperative that we cease investing our psychic energy in the white bourgeoisie's culture war. It will never get better, and only makes us worse.

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