THREE MEN AND A DIARY: FREEDOM, IDENTITY AND MORAL JUDGEMENT

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Jean-Paul Sartre

Jean-Paul Sartre is perhaps most famous for his view, in <u>Being and Nothingness</u>, that human beings are condemned to be free. But freedom is a promiscuous word. Its use in discourse is riddled with unexplained assumptions and it is used in multiple senses. Yet it is central to making morality an intelligible concept. Therefore, it must be clarified. Freedom entails conflicting definitions as well as conflicts with other ideals and institutions. It can be viewed as a theory of action or as a political concept. It can also be thought of in positive or negative terms. Positive freedom refers to the area within which the individual is self-determining. One is free to the extent that one has control over one's life, or rules oneself. In this sense the term is very close to that of autonomy.   The forces that can prevent freedom are within the individual: his desires or passions. On the other hand, negative freedom refers to the area within which the individual is left free from interference by others. One is free in this sense if one is not prevented from doing something by others. A person is unfree if another or others make it impossible for him to do something or use coercion to prevent him from doing something. Because of its inherent instability, philosophers in their examination of the concept have tended to use tropes to explain it. Such a tactic suggests that freedom does not exist.

However, although he does at times resort to metaphor, Sartre offers an ontological view of freedom, that is, an idea of freedom grounded in objective reality. He is saying something about what it is to be a human being. First of all, Sartre's is a positive view of freedom. For Sartre, in <u>Being and Nothingness</u>, freedom means freedom of consciousness.

> Human freedom precedes essence in man and makes it possible; the essence
> of the human being is suspended in his freedom. What we call freedom is
> impossible to distinguish from the being of 'human reality.' Man does not
> exist first in order to be free subsequently; there is no difference between the
> being of man and his being-free.   (61)

The essential consequence of being condemned to be free is that each individual is responsible for the world and for himself. The word 'responsibility' is taken to mean the ordinary sense of "consciousness of being the incontestable author of an event or of an object" (707). In this sense, the responsibility of the agent is overwhelming; since he is the only one by whom it happens that there is a world; since he is also the one who makes himself be then, whatever may be the situation in which he finds himself, the for-itself must wholly assume responsibility for this situation even though it may be in-supportable (707–708). Being conscious of being the author of an event or object suggests that we have to remind ourselves we are free; that we have to advise ourselves that we must avoid being in bad faith.

The existentialist holds that a person is capable of radical evaluation of her desires, attitudes and beliefs. This is achieved through reflection. This capacity is an inescapable part of being a person. Failure to exercise this capacity constitutes abdication of something "distinctively human" (Cooper 159). Above all, the way a person is must be due to how he has exercised or failed to exercise this capacity. Someone who cannot identify himself in terms of this capacity is in 'bad faith.'

While Sartre's theory of motivation is not always clear (Robert Olson credits Sartre with three theories of motivation), Sartre says that man's behaviour, in keeping with his theory of freedom, "cannot be motivated in any essential sense by the exterior world or past events" (176). Jonathon Webber explains that an agent's action, according to Sartre, can

be motivated by either an agent's inner state ("the ensemble of the desires, emotions and passions which urge me to accomplish a certain act" [31]) or his environment (the set of facts which influence the "rational considerations which justify it" [30]).   An individual action can therefore be explained in terms of internal or external factors and both explanations will reflect the agent's aims at the time. Webber argues that Sartre's philosophy cannot be construed in behaviourist terms, as some have tried to do: "Our behaviour cannot be understood simply as a response to a chunk of being-in-itself . . . but only to the situation as articulated for us in our thought and experience" (34).

Sartre's theory of the motivation of action, therefore, ascribes to a person's total set of projects "the role of accounting for their patterns in behaviour" (229). These projects are neither fixed facts about people nor are fully deterministic of their actions. Agents can act to revise their set of projects. An agent's projects will in part be determined by their beliefs and desires, his beliefs and desires will serve to help 'sculpt his figure.' According to Sartre, a person is responsible for his stance and actions toward the world and others. Consequently, if the individual will not recognize these obligations, or having recognized them ignores them, he is abdicating his responsibility toward the world and others. This is being inauthentic.

Kwame Appiah

Sartre's is only one version of identity and individuality. Kwame Appiah takes issue with Sartre's notion of what is involved in shaping one's individuality. He thinks that under-pinning Sartre's view of bad faith is the Romantic idea of the self as something that is given to us. He agrees with Charles Taylor whom he quotes: "I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter. But to bracket out history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity, everything but what I find in myself, would be to eliminate all candidates for what matters" (qtd. in Appiah, 19). Appiah is of the opinion that views like Sartre's are susceptible to accusations of being arbitrary. He argues that to create a life is to create a life out of the materials that history has supplied. He follows John Stuart Mill in juxtaposing the "value of self-authorship with the value of achieving our capacities" (19). He thinks that once the self is "tied to something out of our control, once our self-construction is seen as a creative response to our capacities and our circumstances, then the accusation of arbitrariness loses its power" (19).

This view is flawed, however, because Appiah conflates self-construction and identity-construction. For him one's identity and one's self are one and the same thing. He contends that the language of identity reminds us that we are 'dialogically' constituted. "Beginning in infancy" (20), he says "it is in dialogue with other people's understanding of who I am that I develop a conception of my own identity" (20). An identity is always expressed through concepts and practices made available to the individual through his society – his religion, school, his state, and mediated by family, friends, peers. Appiah, unlike Sartre, gives language in "a broad sense" (20) a significant role in shaping the sense of self. He is not only referring to the words we speak, but also to other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the 'language' of art, of gesture, of love, and the like as forming part of the material from which an identity is constructed. The self, therefore, that is created is not a pre-social thing – "not some authentic inner essence independent of the human world into which we have grown" (20) but, rather, the product of our interaction from our earliest years with others (20).

As a result, Appiah argues that individuality presupposes sociability. A 'free self' is a human self, and that in turn is a social being. We are social because we desire and need

the company of others for companionship and survival and "because so much that we care about is collectively created" (20). This sociability forms the basis for a social ethic. Without the bonds we have to others we cannot be free selves, because we would not have been able to be selves at all.

There is, though, a personal dimension to our being: "most people shape their identities as partners of lovers who become spouses and fellow parents" (21); these aspects of our identities, though in a social sense, are peculiar to who we are as individuals. Collective identities – the collective dimension to our individual identities – are the products of histories, and consequently an individual's engagement with them draws on capacities that are not under her control. At the same time they are social not only because they involve others but "because they are constituted in part by socially transmitted conceptions of how a person of that identity properly behaves" (21).

In constructing an identity the individual draws on the categories of person available in her society, among other things. There are ideas about how blacks, gays, women, men, planters, slaves ought to conduct themselves. These notions provide "loose norms or models" which play a role in shaping the projects of an individual. "Collective identities provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can follow in shaping their projects and in telling their life stories" (22). Part of the function of collective identity is to inform this construction of the individual self. Appiah, in short, contends that personal and collective identities are distinct, but that both play a role in the stories of the self. However, only the collective identities have scripts, and only they count as "kinds of person" (23). He explains: there is a

> logical but no social category for of the witty, or clever or the charming, or the
> greedy. People who share these properties do not constitute a social group.
> In the relevant sense, they are not a kind of person. In our society being
> witty does not, for example, suggest the life-script of the 'wit.' And the main
> reason why the personal dimensions are different is that they are not
> dependent on labelling: while intelligence . . . is of the first importance,
> people could be intelligent even if no one had the concept. To say that race is
> socially constructed, to say that an African American is . . . a kind of person,
> is, in part to say that there are no African Americans independent of social
> practice associated with the racial label; by contrast there could certainly be
> clever people even if we did not have the concept of cleverness. (23)

Once labels are applied to people, ideas about people who fit the label come to have social and psychological effects. It shapes the way people conceive of themselves and their life plans or projects. They come to identify with the label, that is, they internalize that social conception of themselves. Additionally, others come to treat those who bear that label in ways that conform to the label thus reinforcing the identity and the concomitant behaviour (66).

The individual. therefore, "makes up" (107) himself from "the tool kit of options" (107) made available by his culture and society. He does make choices, but he also does not. He does not, as an individual, determine the options among which he chooses. To ignore this fact, says Appiah, is to fail to recognize the "dialogic construction of the self" (107). Appiah also makes the point that there "is no bright line between recognition and imposition" because "identities are constituted in part by social conceptions and by treatment-as" (110).

Identities, therefore, can function as limits, especially identities that have political significance – black, woman, gay, aboriginal – for instance. These kinds of identities are the results of "the attitudes and acts of hostile or contemptuous others" (112). Categories such

as these have served as "instruments of subordination, as constant constraints upon autonomy, as indeed, a proxy for misfortune"(112). Appiah does remind us however that although the contours of identity are profoundly real, there are no more immutable or transcendent than other things that "men and women make" (113).

Appiah presents a view of identity and self that is similar to, but also different in significant ways from Sartre's. Appiah's description of social identity construction and its subsequent affects are insightful. Like, Sartre's, it exposes the communal character of human existence. There is indeed a dialogic interaction between the formation of a conception of self and the materials provided by an individual's culture and social world. An identity is constructed in response to facts outside oneself, or as Sartre calls it one's 'facticity.' Categories or kinds of people are labelled as such and then treated in ways that conform to the social construction of them. These constructs are in turn internalized bringing about behaviour that conforms to the conceptualization imposed on them. Identity, therefore, can provide the parameters of self-authorship.

However, Appiah's claim that identity-construction or self-authorship is limited by things that are beyond one's control differs fundamentally from the notion of freedom presented by the French philosopher. Appiah sees an individual's choices as limited to what his society offers; since Sartre equates freedom with choice, this calls into question Sartre's insistence that we cannot but be free. It is not that Appiah does not think freedom matters. It does a great deal because "only free people can take full command of their lives" (6). And he values choice: for "individuality means, among other things, choosing for myself instead of merely being shaped by the constraint of political and social sanction" (5). Autonomy (he alternates between using the terms 'freedom' and 'autonomy'), only really exists, Appiah suggests, if it is cultivated and enabled by the social and political arrangements of the collectivity: "to take autonomy seriously . . . is not without consequences. It proposes a politics that regards persons as ends, as possessing dignity and inherent worth. It proposes a social order that is conducive to some version of individuality" (61). Appiah considers individuality, and hence freedom, as a way of life that is sanctioned and supported by the social order, one of the things beyond one's control.

While Sartre does think that social and historical and personal circumstances constrain the individual, he advocates that the individual has the choice of refusing those constraints, in short, rejecting that identity. Sartre does not equate identity and self. Appiah claims that from infancy, an identity is dialogically developed. The question is, beginning in infancy, who or what can be in dialogue with other people's conceptions? If one is a blank slate, then one is only a palimpsest; there is nothing to engage others dialogically.

For Sartre, by contrast, when a person construes himself as he is for others, when he so internalizes his social identity or role that he is to himself what he is to others, then he is in 'bad faith,' he is 'inauthentic.' As Appiah acknowledges, Sartre does not think a person begins from nowhere, nor can he disengage in one easy stroke, but he is not to be equated with a particular identity because he can always transcend that image. He can refuse the label. Such a radical disengagement from a form of social life would either "destroy or transmute that person's identity" (Cooper 160). The choice is available to the individual regardless of any identity he assumes.

Appiah's use of the term 'freedom' seems to refer to the realm of political freedom. Sartre's use of the word expresses the ontological condition of being human. Consequently, Appiah is sceptical that such choices are possible simply because radical disengagement is unlikely to be an option that one's circumstances offer. It is not possible for an agent to transcend her situation, to disengage from it so as to constitute herself outside of the social

scripts available to her; relative to a particular historical position, certain forms of life are not "real options" (16). Since self-creation is inextricably bound to sociability, some choices are closed to an individual because his social world does not offer them to him. Appiah offers the example of Stevens, the butler and main character in the novel Remains of the Day. Steven's identity emerges out of a role that has developed as part of a tradition, a role that makes sense within a certain social world: a social world that no longer exists. No one now aspires to be a butler as Stevens did because the social world of 'great houses' has disappeared. Without the appropriate social world one cannot be a butler in that way, Appiah argues (16). Appiah's point is that we are not *free* to choose. An individual can only choose from among options socially available to him. Thus, the ontological freedom Sartre's conceptualizes is non-existent.

Another major difference between Appiah's and Sartre's understanding of individuality has to do with the concept of 'authenticity.' This is an important issue for it is fundamental to moral conceptualizations of agency and responsibility. As already noted, Appiah objects to this idea because he thinks that Sartre's conception in this regard is founded on the idea that we have to be ourselves, to be truly our true self. This implies a pre-social self buried within that social self, a self that we have to dig out, not create in response to our social conditions. But 'self', like 'freedom,' is a notoriously troubling term. How do we create a self? What or who is doing the creating? What is being created is an identity, but an identity is not a conscious, thinking thing that creates itself. If society is the creator, then the individual is a *tabula rasa*, and would it then make sense to talk of self-authorship? I suggest Appiah has not fully thought through the notion of identity and has misunderstood Sartre. Sartre says that the self is reflexive:

> The self therefore represents an ideal distance within the immanence of the subject in relation to himself, a way of not being his own coincidence . . . in short, of being in a perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as an absolute cohesion without trace of diversity and unity as a synthesis of multiplicity. (123-124)

Sartre recognizes that labels or social roles confer identities to which the subject must conform. However, he warns against over-identification with the role. The distance between the subject and the acting 'thing' – the grocer, for instance – must be maintained so that reflection is possible.

'Bad faith,' or inauthenticity, is a kind of being that ignores reflection, Sartre argues. "Bad faith is a type of being in the world. . . . But bad faith is conscious of its structure, and it has taken precautions by deciding that the metastable structure is the structure of being" (113). Sartre does not posit a self that is self-aware, vigilant, aware of having an identity imposed on it, and aware of complying or not with that identity. Once that capacity to stand back and reflect on the stance taken toward the social world is lost, then authenticity too is lost.

Self and identity are crucial concepts in any consideration of morality. The individual will act in ways that conform, as both Appiah and Sartre demonstrate, to social categories. In this way, the agent acts in conformity with social expectations. If those expectations are either morally acceptable or opprobrious, is the agent accordingly to be either praised or blamed for his actions? He can only be if he is deemed fully responsible for his actions. Can society be held accountable?

Kwame Appiah's account of identity lacks an adequate conception of moral responsibility. Appiah acknowledges that "identities make ethical claims" and can "involve obligations that go beyond the basic requirements of morality" (xiii–xiv). However, he suggests that these obligations are limited to what a given society dictates to be moral.

This lends itself to the possibility of relativism that contradicts his main point which is that "individuality doesn't merely conduce to, it is constitutive of the social good" (4)

In addition, Appiah is adamant that however social in nature individuality may be, it is "first and last" (6) still a matter of individuality: "the final responsibility for each life is always the responsibility of the person whose life it is" (6). Without an explicit conceptualization of freedom, it is unclear how such a responsibility is to be undertaken in times of conflict between individuals and their social world. This is the strength of Sartre's views. Human beings have to be in a radical sense free. Consequently, freedom of choice or free will has to be explained, it cannot be taken for granted. However, Appiah's discussion of two kinds of obligations – the individual and the collective - does offer a clearer notion of the role of the political and social matrix in which an individual life is shaped.

Thomas Thistlewood

Douglas Hall believes that Thistlewood's diary is a text which we may accept as "trustworthy" (xix). The diary offers insight into a community defined by the experience and practice of slavery. It is the social relations associated with these societies that helped to shape to a large extent the overall character of these societies. Slavery had a determining role in the whole society. The diarist provides us with a window through we can observe these societies so as to be able to use the information gathered in this way as empirical data from which to draw conclusions about the nature of morality.

The diaries indicate how difficult and time-consuming plantation management was. Ongoing concerns in this area include disciplining the slaves, health and medicine, slave resistance in their various guises: running away, suicide, poisoning, verbal resistance and outright rebellion are all recognized and addressed in these diaries. As the diaries amply show, management of a slave plantation, was difficult at the best of times because of slave management, sugar prices and erratic managers who often seemed more concerned with carnal adventures than sugar.

Slave society was stratified according to ownership of property, human and otherwise. Those who owned the land were usually those who enslaved others and perhaps because of this, their perspective is often ignored when the experience of slavery is recounted. They are, however, integral to the experience, because institutionalized slavery did not only denote the underclass of exploited and oppressed people whose lives were forever marked by their economic fate; it also designates the dominant group that controlled that fate of enslaved. The term slavery designates a relationship between these two groups.

The world is already interpreted for the individual by the collective. As Appiah points out, the collective dimension to individual identities, for instance being a white man in a slave society, is a product of history and social expediency. Appiah tells us that collective identities are constituted in part by socially transmitted conceptions of how a person of that identity properly behaves. Therefore, in constructing an identity an individual draws on the categories of person available in his society.

Having arrived in Jamaica at the age of twenty-nine, Thistlewood never returned to England, though he had relatives, friends and business contacts there. He gradually gave up keepsakes, for example, which he had been given by lady friends he had known there. Thistlewood never expressed any yearning for England nor spoke of it in his diaries. His place of birth had nothing to offer him. Entailment had left him landless, and when he came

of age in 1742 his assets amounted to £205.[1] In 1750 when he left for Jamaica he was hardly any better off. Thistlewood was a farmer's second son from one of the least populated regions of England. As the second son, he was not entitled to his father's property. He was not of a disposition to be clerical, having been trained in horticulture. He was never very interested in city life either in England or in Jamaica. After the death of his father, Thistlewood had had to abandon his apprenticeship to a farmer because he lacked the money needed to continue. He then tried a variety of types of employment in Europe and the East, but none worked out. Moreover, he was jobless and nearly penniless, but, as Douglas Hall puts it, "in good stead with those who had connections with the West India plantocracy" (7); therefore, coming to Jamaica seemed a good idea.

Immigrating to the West Indies was often a last resort for many in Thistlewood's position. The Scottish poet Robert Burns, had fate not intervened at the last moment, would have made his way to Jamaica to take up a position as manager as well. He had gone so far as to book passage on board the "Nancy." The unwed mother of his child had rejected him on her father's wishes. He had signed the Burns family farm over to his brother; he had been rebuked in church three times in one month for fornication; his girlfriend (not the mother of his twins) had died, and so he was due to set to sail to Jamaica. However, the "Nancy" did not give him enough notice (only two days) in which to wind up his affairs, so he missed the boat, literally. In the mean time, a volume of his poetry was published and his rise to prominence began. He shelved all plans to go to the West Indies.

Thistlewood did not have literary talents, but he had scientific ambitions. He was very much interested in the natural sciences – botany, agriculture, mathematics, chemistry – as well as philosophy and had hoped to develop this interest into a career in the West Indies. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Thistlewood had not intended to become a manager on a slave plantation. His initial intention was to become a surveyor but that prospect fell through, and on the 29th June 1850, after a two month period of unemployment, he made up his mind and "in the morning rode to Sweet River plantation and agreed with Florentius Vassall, Esqr. to be his penkeeper at 50 pounds per annum" (qtd. in Hall, 14). At this point, he had "not one farthing of money left, but what is laid by' (qtd. in Hall, 14). From such impecunity, Thistlewood rose to be "comfortably above the mass of whites toiling for wages on plantations" (Burnard 40); at his death his personal estate was worth over £3000.00. In the end, therefore, his "gamble in coming to Jamaica had succeeded: he achieved more in his new home than he would have accomplished if he had remained in England" (Burnard 40).

The diaries of both 'masters' and 'mistresses' reveal, with varying degrees of self censorship, their inner lives as well as reconstruct the daily routines of living. Thistlewood's is the exception. Although the historian Trevor Burnard finds Thistlewood's "diaries are remarkably honest and accurate" (27), he complains about "Thistlewood's dry re-telling of occurrences" (28), about his "lack of concern for what [his] sexual acts implied about this life and character" (28). This very limited "access to his inner life and the inner life of others" (27) is all the more frustrating for Burnard since it is "extremely uncommon among writers of diaries" (27). Burnard's reading of Thistlewood is superficial. True, his writings are mostly emotionless, unlike other diarists whose writings reveal an internal monologue

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[1]Entailment here refers to the fact that the family's property was inherited by first born and could not be broken up or subdivided. Thistlewood, as the second son, was therefore landless and consequently, penniless

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detailing their observations and reflections and feelings; so richly are their lives depicted that reading them is a voyeuristic experience. By contrast, Thistlewood's journals are clinical records of daily happenings.

It is only on very rare occasions that Thistlewood is moved to make a heart-felt comment about slavery. On one occasion, as manager at Kendal, he learned that Phibbah, his 'wife', was ill at Egypt plantation (her owner lived there and had refused to sell or rent her to him). In distress, Thistlewood comments: "Quashe says she is sick, for which I really am very sorry. Poor girl, I pity her, she is in miserable slavery" (qtd. in Hall, 80). This, Thistlewood's only explicit comment on slavery, shows that even though the agent participates in the institution, he is aware of how much suffering it causes. He is fully aware that it is a 'miserable' business. However, he never seeks to defend his complicity in an institution that makes lives miserable. At one point Thistlewood, a valued overseer, took a position with another plantation, leaving Egypt and the Copes (Phibbah's 'owners'). He writes in one entry: "Sunday 19th June, 1757: Phibbah grieves very much, and last night I could not sleep, but was vastly uneasy" (qtd. in Hall, 78). In another, he writes: " Wednesday 22nd: . . . gave Phibbah two pistols in money, mosquito net, 3 cakes of soap, about 3 ½ yards of cloth ... outdoor lock. And begged hard of Mrs Cope to sell or hire Phibbah to me, but she would not; he was willing" (qtd. in Hall, 78).
Throughout their separation, Thistlewood would often confide his sadness at being away from Phibbah even though they regularly saw each other. She came to spend a night or nights often. And he at times went to Egypt and stayed in her house. He would confide to his diary in a touching manner: "I wish they [the Copes] would sell her to me. Tonight very lonely and melancholy again. No person sleep in the house but myself and Phibbah's being gone fresh in my mind" (qtd. in Hall, 80).

Also unlike other diarists, Thomas Thistlewood never falls into paternalistic talk about or treatment of his slaves. He is conspicuously reticent in his use of morally substantive talk. Life for the planters was not all roses. As Thistlewood shrewdly observes, the life of a planter while outwardly comfortable involved much "inner grief" (qtd. in Hall, 114). The slaves did their utmost to make the owner's lives hellish. However, it was not for the improvement of the slave that he had to be flogged and humiliated. Such measures were necessary because the slave had to be terrorized into remaining chattel. Thistlewood never pretends otherwise.

Thistlewood at one period enforced most degrading punishments. In July 1756, Port Royal, who had run away, was taken and brought home. Thistlewood gave him "a moderate whipping, pickled him well, made Hector shit in his mouth, immediately put in a gag whilst his mouth was full & made him wear it four or five hours" (qtd. in Hall, 72). Perhaps because this was a particularly tough year – the colony was plagued by a drought and food was in short supply for all – Thistlewood found it necessary to apply this punishment with or without the gag on four separate occasions.

Thistlewood also deprecated sexual violence. His diaries contain frequent references to slaves being forced to have sex with white men. In March 1755, John Cope brought a party of six men to the great house for a session of revellery. Thistlewood reports that

> late in the evening, all except Cope and one other, after being heartily drunk,
> haw'led Eve separately into the Water Room and were Concerned with her. . .
> . Weech 2ce [twice]. First and last. (qtd. in Burnard, 161)

Thistlewood's subsequent failure to punish Eve when she ran away after this incident likely indicates some compassion for her.

On August 13, 1755, Thistlewood writes: "At night Mr. Cope came home in liquor; wanted Silvia very much and was like a mad man almost. Had my supper sent into my house to me" (qtd. in Hall, 70). On

> Sunday, 2nd May 1756: Sometime in the middle of last night Mr. Cope come
> home and Mr. McDonald with him. They sat drinking for sometime then went
> to bed. Mr McDonald had Eve to whom he gave six bitts [sum of money] and
> Mr. Cope made Tom fetch Beck from the Negro house for himself, with whom
> she was till morning. (qtd. in Burnard, 161)

As Burnard comments, Thistlewood's tone in these and similar entries suggests disapproval (161). Thistlewood had also intervened on behalf of an elderly black woman in 1754. He wrote: "at night, Mr Paul Stevens and Thomas Adams going to tear old Sarah to pieces in her hutt [sic], had a quarrel with both of them. They burnt her and would fire the hutt. Note they both drunk" (qtd. in Burnard, 161).

Thistlewood also objected to the impunity with which whites killed blacks. In 1764, he was unable to have white and coloured men punished for the shooting death of Humphrey – a "Stout hopefull young Fellow" (qtd. in Burnard, 167) – because a white man took responsibility for the killing when the matter came to court. In 1761 he complained that John Cunningham "Shott a Free Negro, Free Dick of Corowina" (qtd. in Burnard, 99) with impunity. When he first arrived in Jamaica he had even been aggrieved by the way slaves were treated in death, noting "12th May, 1751: in the afternoon Mimber, a Fine Negro Woman, buried today ... like a Dog! She died yesterday" (qtd. in Burnard, 129).

It is not surprising, then, that Thistlewood took the time to copy a little poem into his commonplace book in 1778:

> Some Afric chief will rise, who, scorning chains,
> Racks, tortures, flames - excruciating pains,
> Will send his injur'd friends to bloody fight,
> And in the flooded carnage take delight;
> Then dear repay us in some vengeful war,
> And give us blood for blood, and scar for scar. (qtd. in Burnard, 262)[2]

The poem shows the awareness that tyranny and violence are used as the primary means of controlling slaves. It also reveals the fear that such measures are not enough to prevent a brave slave goaded beyond endurance by the brutality of his existence into leading others in vengeful rebellion, delighting in the 'flooded carnage' they wreak on the whites. The poem also recognizes the just desert of the slaves giving "us blood for blood, and scar for scar".

There can be as little doubt that Thistlewood had mastery over moral terms. He knows right from wrong, what is both socially and personally acceptable. Rather than berate Thistlewood, I think the challenge is to explain why such mastery of moral concepts did not elicit a concomitant desire for social amelioration in Thistlewood. Thistlewood is pragmatic about the need for "chains" (qtd. in Hall, 73) and "torture" (qtd. in Burnard, 173), but he does not disparage the enslaved as being wicked or infernal as other diarists, such as Pierre Dessalles, do. Even as he chronicles his use of these instruments of oppression, at emotionally fraught moments he reveals his awareness of the injustice of slavery as well as

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[2]This poem is unlikely to be Thistlewood's poem. He was in the habit of copying passages from books that he was reading into his commonplace book. He also made lists of books he owned. Thistlewood was a voracious reader, so books were important to him, deriving delight and meaning from them. It is Burnard who records this entry in Thistlewood's book, and even he seems unaware of the poem's provenance.

a desire for recompense. In his will, for example, he left enough money to buy Phibbah's freedom but "so long as no more is required for such freedom than the sum of eighty pounds" (qtd. in Hall, 313). He also left an additional hundred pounds for the "purchase of a piece of a Lot and or land for the said Phibbah wherever she shall chuse" (qtd. in Hall, 313). The executors were enjoined to build a "dwelling house" (qtd. in Hall, 313) which was suitable to her station. The Copes of course demanded the maximum sum for her sale. Although Thistlewood died in 1786, Phibbah was not freed until 1792. The sum of eighty pounds for a slave who by then must have been aged (in her 60's) was quite generous.

Moral Judgement

Though he seldom employs it in his diaries, Thistlewood's seems fully conscious that slavery is a bad thing. Unlike Burnard, I do not view this as a short-coming, rather as evidence of his self-reflexivity and honesty. Thistlewood's reticence is perhaps more an indication of a refusal to rationalize or justify the brutality of the system, and ownership of his responsibility for perpetuation of the injustice of the system.

Kwame Appiah has given a compelling and detailed explanation of how powerful labels are, and showed how notions about social roles, identities, provide loose norms or models that play a part in determining the projects and shaping the behaviours of individuals. Thistlewood's refusal to blame or harangue the slaves, or condemn the circumstances of living in a slave society indicate that even as he accepts his role, he acknowledges this as a choice which he freely makes and for whose outcomes he is responsible. The social script about the kind of person an individual ought to be provides the contours of his personal identity. Both Appiah and Sartre agree that identities can function as limits, that they serve as "instruments of subordination as constraints upon autonomy" (Appiah 112). The category of being white in a slave society provided a clear script outlining required behaviours toward both slaves and other whites: the natural order of things for blacks was to be enslaved for their own good, while second class whites in England were encouraged to accept their lot and do the best they can. Both also agree that although the contours of identity are profoundly real, they are no more immutable or transcendent than any other artefact. However, it is Sartre's insistence that human freedom is real and inevitable that renders the responsibility for self absolute and non-paradoxical. It is only if a person is genuinely free that he can be responsible for what is made of him and in turn for his beliefs and desires. While, as Sartre points out, an individual does not begin from nowhere, nor can he disengage from his social identity in one easy stroke, neither is he to be equated with a label or how, as Sartre might put it, 'he is for others,' that is, his existence as an object of the attention of others which helps to constitute his individuality, his identity, his social role, because he can always transcend the image. He can change the script. He can refuse the label. The choice is the individual's. Reflection, deliberation and rationality play a crucial role in the individual's conceptualization of his choices and acceptance of his freedom.

Prescriptive notions of what skin colour and gender signify involve, as Appiah says, the imposition of rigid strictures of how one is to be. Someone who takes autonomy seriously will understand that the "politics of recognition can seem to require that one's skin colour, one's sexual body, should be politically acknowledged in ways that make it hard for those who want to treat their skin and their sexual body as personal dimensions of the self" (164), that is, as something that permits of personal vagaries. Therefore, the collective and personal can intersect and shape the individual in a way that may threaten individual autonomy. Yet it is the individual as an autonomous being that must be held to account for

her actions, not society. It is the individual's choice to be in bad faith or to be authentic.

As the copying of the poem demonstrates, Thistlewood understands his freedom. He accepts that slavery is unjust and unjustifiable, but he does accept it and his role in it because he has neither the moral nor monetary resources to struggle against the limits into which the collective identity which he shares has boxed him. The necessities of surviving in a slave society demands compliance with the social script of master. Slaves had at times to be managed by brutally if the system was to be maintained and indeed physical survival ensured. However, necessity and right, are not the same thing. Furthermore, refusing the system would have provided the perfect antidote to the radical insecurity and fear the pervaded these societies. Thistlewood's diary illustrates his recognition of this.

As Sartre contends, freedom is ontological. Freedom is a freedom of consciousness. Consciousness of reality is only a small part of the picture. The agent is also aware of what is not taking place, has an understanding of things that are absent. Those absences are always a part of my consciousness of the world not imposed on me by my own society; they are part of my construction of the world. The way the agent perceives the world is as much partly what he brings to the world as partly what the world provides him with. This is why we are inescapably free – we can always understand the world in a different way.

The danger to our freedom lies in imagining, thinking that the way we are accustomed to looking at things is the only possible way. It is the act of writing his diaries that perhaps gives Thistlewood the space to reflect, unemotionally, on his existence. For Sartre, in What is Literature?, writing is itself a form of resistance because writing offers the possibility of refusing to allow inherited ideas to take over the writer's thinking. Writing is always a form of trying to think things through for oneself. Thus writing is political – it challenges the habits that a society has. Even though, they do not re-imagine the world, the possibility, indeed the start of the process is there as the diarist examines slavery and see its ills.

It is, therefore, the psychological inconsistencies created by the contradictions of a clash between acceptance of collective identities and the refusal of personal freedom that contributed to the persistence of slave societies. The self-reflexivity of Thistlewood's diary supports Sartre's view that individuals can disengage themselves from their situations, on reflection refuse and, as abolitionists did, then form a project to change that situation. Thistlewood was not a prisoner of his situation. He was responsible for the directive of inaction he gave himself. For, as Sartre argues in Being and Nothingness, "to make myself passive in the world, to refuse to act upon things and upon Others is still to choose myself, and suicide is one mode among others of being-in-the-world" (710). The individual is always free to choose to refuse the identity being imposed by his/her society.

It does seem a little moralistic to blame people for what was considered proper in their era and or culture. It is a condition of blame that we have to see people as being in a position to have known better. If people were not in a position to have known better, then we cannot blame them. However, blame does not exhaust moral judgement. There is lots of room in our ordinary moral reflection for judgements that fall short of blame yet which are still judgements directed at individual agents for what he or she did. Miranda Fricker uses the term "moral disappointment" (2) in respect of people who fail to achieve moral insights which contemporaries of theirs did. Moral disappointment is basically an attitude we have toward other agents and it is a kind of disapproval directed at individual agents for failure to bring their practice under concepts that they could have, even in their time, brought them under because other people had achieved that moral insight. We look back and blame or feel moral disappointment because we can see the incoherence, among other things, of the individual's own thinking.

Fricker's argument is a powerful one. She situates moral thinking in history and so contends that assigning blame is out of order if the agent's moral mistakes are a result of structural features of his cultural-historical circumstances. Such structures lead to a moral incapacity (2). Therefore, if Thistlewood's treatment of 'Negroes' was simply a matter of following the customs and laws of the time, then his actions are born of moral ignorance. Consequently, he is non-culpable. Even though we may regard his behaviour as morally lacking, his thinking was in line with the routine moral thinking of his day.

Appiah offers a view of identity, responsibility and freedom that is situated in history: "Your individual identity . . . defines your ambitions, determines what achievements have significance in your particular life. . . . To create a life is to interpret the materials that history has given you" (162-163). In other words, constructing an identity occurs "in response to facts outside oneself, things that are beyond one's choices" (18). We are all members of collectivities, and therefore our individuality, our personal identities, are structured in response to 'social scripts,' socially transmitted conceptions of how a person of that identity behaves. Therefore, Appiah proposes an ethics of identity that would render Thistlewood non-culpable. We can be morally disappointed in him, but we cannot blame him, hold him to moral account for his actions.

If we want to hold Thistlewood morally accountable for his actions, then it is necessary to align our conceptions of freedom and identity and responsibility with Sartre's for, as the Existentialist insists, the "peculiar character of human-reality is that it is without excuse" (709). For Sartre, there are "no accidents in a life; a community event which suddenly bursts forth and involves me in it does not come from the outside" (708). The individual could have gotten out of it by suicide or desertion. For lack of getting out of it, for not refusing it, the individual has chosen it.

But if we are willing to be so unforgiving of Thistlewood's moral mistakes, then we must be equally willing to accept as culpable individuals whose mistakes we are lenient toward: women who stay in abusive relationships, soldiers who commit atrocities when ordered because they are trying to protect loved ones from reprisals, slaves who killed the planter, even ourselves when we allow an injustice to occur because we were afraid to speak up. Complete responsibility for our actions and omissions is the result of being condemned to be free.

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