

Sartre's analysis of anti-Semitism and its relevance for today.

Introduction

In the second half of 1944 Jean-Paul Sartre wrote a essay entitled *Anti-Semite and Jew (Reflexions sur la Question Juive)*. He analyses what might be termed the moral pathology of the anti-Semite. Sartre's essay was written hurriedly and looking back over seventy years, we can see its flaws. These are particularly apparent in the one hundred pages or so in which Sartre analyses what it is to be a Jew. For one thing, Sartre applied no empirical research to his analysis and seems to have little understanding of the very different kinds of Jewishness and Jewish communities. He gives lots of examples but these are always of an anecdotal nature and tend to reflect his rather limited experience of Jewish people. Moreover, his distinction between the authentic Jew and the inauthentic Jew raises immediate problems for anyone acquainted with post-modernist scepticism (i.e. most, if not all of us). However, what Sartre does do is apply an existentialist framework to the situation and mental perspective of anti-Semitism and here, as I hope to show, he is both lucid and insightful. I call the work an essay but at 150 pages or so it could also be seen as a short book. Although at times Sartre seems to be taking a lofty, impersonal view of his subject matter – Jew and anti-Semite – he gradually develops the idea that the problem of anti-Semitism is one that affects us all and for which we all must take responsibility. It is the work of a writer/philosopher at the height of his powers – someone able to write in an accessible way and yet at the same time able to deploy a set of ideas and concepts that by the time of writing (for Sartre had already completed *Being and Nothingness*) were well worked out.¹

Sartre is aware of the atrocities committed against Jews in Poland but is clearly unaware (at the time of writing) of the scale of these atrocities, particularly in Eastern Europe and Ukraine. He therefore has no real conception of the full murderous intent behind anti-Semitism as it developed in the years 1940-44, especially after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1940. Sartre is therefore talking about that rather familiar figure of twentieth century western Europe – the Jew-hater rather than the Jew-killer as such. Although I will say a few words about what changes the casual Jew hater into the dedicated killer of Jews my main interest in Sartre's analysis is whether there is anything in it that helps us to understand the nature of prejudice, especially in the context of an anti-immigrant culture that has emerged in recent years in so many countries in Western Europe, especially Great Britain. But I should be clear: by understanding that culture I do not have in mind a dispassionate sociological analysis. What Sartre provides in his essay is a *moral critique* and I hope to use his analysis in the same spirit.

Anatomy of the Anti-Semite

Sartre begins by distinguishing the familiar emotions of anger and hate from the *passion* of the anti-Semite. Whereas the former are provoked by the behaviour or attitude of another and so have an identifiable cause, the anti-Semite nurtures a set of dispositions which render the Jew an object of hatred and contempt so that 'the anti-Semite has chosen to live on the plane of passion' (Sartre 1976, p. 18: to be referred to as AS). By passion Sartre does not designate a heightened emotional state so much as a steady perspective characterised by dispositions, habits of thought and speech and modes of behaviour. As he says, many people choose a passion as a way of life – a life of honour, power, money or style. However, the passion of the anti-Semite is of a particular kind: what is chosen is a passion of hate – a hate that does not just flair up now and again but is permanent, a hate that is lived out and is reflected in speech, in reflection and in response to others. It is a hate

that accompanies the anti-Semite throughout his or her life; a hate that waxes and wanes but which is endless. One lives and dies an anti-Semite and all of life's experience merely confirm and validate the reality and justness of that hate.

However, Sartre does not think that this hate has its source in some particular unfortunate experience as a result of encountering Jewish people; nor does it arise through reading about alleged misdemeanours which Jews are supposed to have committed. For such experiences merely confirm the passion of hate that was already there, looking, as it were, for a worthy object of its passion. What characterises the anti-Semite is that hatred is *chosen* as a way of life. Very possibly this choice does not happen in an instant: it may take time to grow, to solidify in the soul of the perpetrator. Sometimes, indeed, the choice may not come to fruition – possibly other, more important experiences deflect the hate before it has time to establish itself; possibly, even, the incipient perpetrator of the passion may pull back, appalled at what he (or she) is turning into. For Sartre it is not merely the temptation of falling into a state of permanent disapproval of the object of hatred that motivates; it is not simply that the perpetrator of the passion enjoys the thrill of hatred and the satisfaction it affords – although, these, to be sure, are important considerations. But in addition, the anti-Semite is drawn by what Sartre terms 'a longing for impenetrability' (AS, 18). What is shunned is any need for reasoned argument and any need to give an account of oneself. As Sartre puts it: 'What frightens them is not the content of truth, of which they have no conception, but the form itself of truth, that thing of *indefinite approximation*' (AS, 19, my italics). This desire for what Sartre calls 'the durability of a stone' is, therefore, accompanied by the disavowal of reasoned argument – a triumph in deliberate unreasonableness and a pleasure taken in the assertion and re-assertion of what is known to be false.

Sartre expounds this idea with relish:

The anti-Semite has chosen hate because hate is a faith; at the outset he has chosen to devalue words and reasons. How entirely at ease he feels as a result. How futile and frivolous discussions about the rights of the Jew appear to him...if out of courtesy he consents for a moment to defend his point of view, he lends himself but does not give himself....Never believe that anti-Semites are completely unaware of the absurdity of their replies. They even like to play with discourse for, by giving ridiculous reasons, they discredit the seriousness of their interlocutors. (AS, 19-20)

Sartre therefore argues that through the disavowal of the importance of reason-asking and giving the anti-Semite is able to live on the plane of certainty. This 'lightning-like certainty' alone can 'hold reason on a leash' (p. 19). At the same time, the intimation of rage within the perpetrator inspires a certain fear, a certain reluctance to take him on in case his full passion is set off. Such a rage is almost worthy of respect, we might be inclined to think: surely this rage, this hatred is justified in some way. If only we can remove the causes perhaps the rage will disappear! But, for Sartre, this is the final illusion of the innocent interlocutor who does not realise that the perpetrator has chosen hatred as a way of life and who cannot be won over by argument and experience.

Yet it must not be thought that the anti-Semite in any way chooses a way of life characterised by individuality: to the contrary, one cannot be an anti-Semite alone. One recognises oneself as part of a crowd and its strength would disappear if it were merely a foible of my own. Moreover, this embrace of the crowd can be accompanied by an acknowledgement of the cleverness and the industriousness of the Jew: but then these attributes, whilst useful, are ultimately of lesser importance. Indeed, the anti-Semite makes a virtue out of mediocrity, a certain pride in the ordinary. For, as Sartre says:

The true Frenchman, rooted in his province, in his country, borne by a tradition twenty centuries old, benefitting from ancestral wisdom, guided by tried customs, does not *need* intelligence. (AS, 23)

This outlook is accompanied by a disdain of abstract thought and complexity. In particular, the expert is to be distrusted unless he or she is able to express in a coherent way the unarticulated sentiments of the many, in which case he becomes a much-loved spokesman. Sartre calls this embrace of mediocrity a 'poor mans snobbery' (26) – snobbery because of its implicit claims to exclusivity. It might be added (although Sartre does not emphasise this particular point) the embrace of rootedness and a sense of place and territory is also accompanied by a disdain of the cosmopolitan and a studied indifference to a knowledge of other cultures and languages. For whilst such knowledge may be of use it needs to be kept at bay in order to make sure that ones self-certainty is not undermined by perspectives that might serve to question it.

In short, then, the anti-Semite is afraid of his own consciousness and his own capacity for freedom and to this end he constructs for himself the 'impenetrability of a stone'. In embracing hatred as a passion he can absolve himself of the responsibility to think too much, to question. Finally, Sartre points out that the Jew can be substituted for 'Negro or the man of yellow skin' – this passion or way of living, certainly relies on an Other but that other does not need to be a Jew. The anti-Semite lives a life of bad faith, of deliberate *unfreedom* and the denial of responsibility of the self. However, for the anti-Semite to turn into an active murderer of Jewish people then certain objective conditions are needed – a discussion of which lies outside this paper and Sartre's essay. These include the active sponsorship of anti-Semitism by the state and for the functions of the state to be actively engaged in promoting murder. What seems to be the case is that the individual murderers do not need to evince particularly strong anti-Semitism for them to engage in slaughter, so long as the appropriate state mechanisms are present. In such a case even ordinary people may turn into murderers.²

Sartre's essay was translated into English within two years and was widely read as early as 1946. And it is still debated today in some Jewish discussion forums.³ As mentioned above, his distinction between the authentic and inauthentic Jew provoked considerable hostility (but also agreement from Jews as well). Sartre argued that the Jew could only be authentic if he fully accepted his Jewishness and did not attempt to live in bad faith through dissembling his identity – e.g. by pretending that his Jewishness didn't matter. I find this part of Sartre's analysis much less convincing partly because there are many ways of enacting a Jewish identity but mainly because I am somewhat loathe to condemn the actions of any Jewish person in response to wide-spread state-sponsored anti-Semitism. However, I do suggest that the kernel of his analysis of the anti-Semite is compelling and it is this which is the focus of this paper. The moral pathology that Sartre discerned is alive today – in the UK, in the USA and indeed, regrettably, in Europe itself - even if the object of the passion is no longer Jewish. But before I move on to discuss the passion of hatred in its twenty-first century guise I wish to consider in a little more detail Sartre's apparent dismissal of sentiment and tradition.

Prejudice and Tradition

Sartre clearly has a suspicion of any set of dispositions and sentiments which are claimed to be natural or inherited and which do not require much reflection or interrogation. But suppose that such prejudices are not ones of hate but ones of liberality and generosity? The logic of the argument seems to suggest that all untutored sentiments are to be held in disfavour as long as they are seen to be in some way an essential part of ones acquired identity. The charge that the anti-Semite is living in bad faith seems to follow from an argument that has cast its net far wider than the prejudice

of hate to include benign, kindly sentiments as well. The anti-Semite is being accused of having a range of sentiments that he has no need to reflect on or criticise. But it is possible to give the anti-Semite some credence to the extent that prejudices may be no bad thing at all. Here, for example, is Edmund Burke, the English eighteenth century critic of the French Revolution, writing in 1790:

YOU see, Sir, that in this enlightened age I am bold enough to confess that we are generally men of untaught feelings, that, instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and, to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them. We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason, because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages. Many of our men of speculation, instead of exploding general prejudices, employ their sagacity to discover the latent wisdom which prevails in them. If they find what they seek, and they seldom fail, they think it more wise to continue the prejudice, with the reason involved, than to cast away the coat of prejudice and to leave nothing but the naked reason; because prejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence. (Burke, 1969, p. 182-3)

We could employ Burke as a foil against Sartre to this extent: our prejudices may be explicit and fully owned. If Sartre is implying that all prejudices are suspect there seems to be something wrong here: there is everything to be applauded if (for example) ones liberal instincts automatically, without any need for reflection at all, find the proclamations of the anti-Semite repugnant. Indeed, one might go further and say that if one has to reflect on the words of the anti-Semite before condemning him then maybe one has already had one reflection too many. If the Sartrean position is one of radical choice in which *all* of my sentiments are subject to choice then this seems to have the same problems as the unencumbered self that Michael Sandel proposed in his critique of Rawls (see Sandel, 1982). Rather than denigrating and mocking prejudice as such, rather we should be quietly satisfied if we and others around us seem to evince the right kind of moral instincts so that we recoil and feel disturbed – even if we cannot always articulate what it is that is disturbing us – whenever we hear the crass words of the racist or the misogynist. Part of what involves education is precisely the cultivation of the right kind of sentiments, the right kind of prejudices.

It seems that in Burke the term prejudice involves two different kinds. There is first of all what might be called hermeneutical prejudice which indicates those ranges of interpretive responses which seem fundamental to a person by dint of their habituation to a climate, food and culture and which is often reflected at the level of meaning but also in the senses – smells, tastes and sounds. As the English eighteenth century essayist, William Hazlitt put it: ‘Prejudice is so far then an involuntary and stubborn association of ideas, of which we cannot assign the distinct grounds and origin’. He goes on to suggest that ‘After all, most of our opinions are a mixture of reason and prejudice, experience and authority’ (Hazlitt, 1903) and it is interesting that these reflections are expressed in an essay which starts off by attacking prejudice in more traditional ways: ‘Prejudice is the child of ignorance..... mere ignorance is a blank canvas, on which we lay what colours we please.’ This kind of prejudice is, of course, of the kind that no-one will ever own up to and to that extent there is not a single prejudiced person on the whole planet. But Hazlitt is sagacious enough to recognise that at the basic interpretive level of experience prejudices are a facet of our humanity.

Philosophers are well acquainted with this concept of prejudice through the writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argues that reason exists in concrete, historical terms and is dependent on circumstances – thus the idea of radical critique is also a form of prejudice. Thus we

can never escape prejudice – those habits and dispositions that mark us out as a certain kind of individual in certain historical circumstances. Hence we cannot make sense of our lives at the level of meaning unless we see those meanings as an expression of traditions of discourse. So when Gadamer says that there is ‘no unconditional antithesis between reason and tradition’ (Gadamer, 1989, p. 281) this view is a consequence of the exposition of the term prejudice as ‘a judgement that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined’ (p. 270). To this extent we cannot do without prejudice since there are times when we simply have no way of examining all the elements of a situation if we are to come to a judgement or decision. Moreover, even if the task of examination of all elements were to be undertaken the elements themselves would require further examination; at some point we have to trust our prejudices. Thus far, Burke, Hazlitt and Gadamer are agreed.

But there is another kind of prejudice which, to be sure, overlaps with the first kind but is, I suggest, sufficiently distinct from it. These might be called prejudices of value or normative prejudices. No doubt it is true that we all have normative prejudices – the anti-Semite just as much as English liberal, the Gallic republican, the Scottish Presbyterian or the North American feminist. These values are taken as givens and are only questioned at times of crisis or when difficult choices have to be made. They are values that are ingested and lived out day by day. And here, I think, Sartre does have a point. We cannot pretend to ourselves that these prejudices are beyond critique and that we have no need to defend them on the plane of reason. There is a sense in which we are indeed responsible for these prejudices and it is disingenuous to pretend that they operate on the same level as our hermeneutical, interpretive prejudices. It is true, of course, that our normative prejudices may have some of their roots in our hermeneutical prejudices and this is why they are so difficult to give up – but not impossible. After all, who would have thought in past, previous decades that in 2015 Irish citizens would vote by a majority of 62% in favour of gay marriage ? Yet I presume that those 62% are still recognisably Irish in their sensibilities, their affiliations and dispositions. By taking responsibility in Sartre’s sense of the word, we do indeed acknowledge that even some of our most deeply held beliefs at the level of values do stand in need of justification. Sartre’s complaint that the anti-Semite simply does not recognise this seems to me correct. And of course we know the reason why this happens: if he *did* think his views stood in need of justification he would have to give them up for the absurdity that they are.

Moreover, I suggest that we do need to understand that our prejudices are contingent and fragile, in two senses. Firstly, my prejudices are dependent on the situation in which I find myself; I could just as easily have prejudices that seem entirely natural which are different to those that I actually do have. I cannot pretend, without self-delusion, that my prejudices are in any way special or unique. Nor can I pretend that anyone else has any particular reason to defer to them – in exactly the same way that I may feel I have no particular reason to defer to the prejudices of others. The love that I profess for my country may mean a great deal to me but means nothing to those who do not share that love – including those that are from that very same country. The second sense in which my prejudices are fragile is that I am dependent on others, if not validating them, at least acknowledging them. Whilst others may be indifferent to their content they are willing to acknowledge their existence – not only in the form of beliefs but in terms of decisions and actions that may flow from those prejudices. My prejudices can only flourish to the extent that others are prepared to ‘allow’ me to have them even if they do not share those prejudices. However, part of the ‘impenetrability’ that Sartre has referred to is linked to the cultivation of self-certainty and self-entitlement on the part of the part of the prejudice holder; he or she expects (often correctly) that others will defer to their beliefs and behaviours.

British Disapproval of Immigration

As we all know, on June 23rd 2016, 52% of British citizens voted to leave the European Union. One of the main motivations was concern over immigration. Although the British people have been used to immigrants arriving from Commonwealth countries ever since the end of World War II, immigration had never figured strongly as an issue in a general election and was broadly accepted (Migration Observatory, 2016, p. 3). However, as is well-known, the accession to the EU in 2004 of eight Central and East European countries triggered, quite quickly, a flow of citizens from these countries (particularly Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania and especially Poland) into the UK. In 2015 alone 269,000 people arrived in the UK to work from EU countries (House of Commons, 2017). By the end of 2015 there were 831, 000 citizens from Poland living and working in the UK (ONS(a), 2017). They were widely dispersed throughout the country – indeed, already by 2011, persons of Polish origin could be found in every city, town and local authority in England from Cornwall up to Northumberland (ONS(b), 2011).

Disapproval of immigration by British nationals has considerably increased since 2004 and, indeed, has increased particularly since 2010^d. The Oxford University Migration Observatory noted that negative perceptions of migrants increased sharply from 2011 to 2013 as did the perceived threat to British culture (see Migration Observatory, 2016, p. 8 & 9). It is therefore unsurprising that at the end of 2015 (just over six months before the EU Referendum) a YouGov poll found that immigration was the main issue facing the British Electorate – 69% (healthcare was selected by 39% of the sample) – see Clarke et al (2017), p. 11. A comprehensive survey of some 90,000 UK nationals taken by the NatCen Social Research organisation back in 2013 found that only 30% were positive about the impact of immigrants; approximately 50% thought they had a negative impact (both economically and undermining British culture) whilst a further 20% were roughly neutral. (NatCen 31st, 2014).

The implications of these attitudes are examined in the work already cited in *Brexit: Why Britain voted to leave the European Union* (Clarke et al, 2017). The book is useful partly because of the datasets it contains but also because the authors do not seem to be particularly sympathetic to the Remain case. Some findings stand out: for example, the way in which immigration is perceived negatively by 68% of pensioners but only 24% of 18-24 year olds (Clarke, p. 22). The pull of anti-immigration attitudes led the Leave camp to emphasise the need to curtail immigration and to prioritise this over other anti-EU arguments (p. 53-4). The authors conclude:

Immigration was a key issue in the 2016 referendum campaign and was also central to explaining why the country eventually voted for Brexit. (p. 190)

I emphasise all these statistics – the generality of which are well-known – to try and show that in the UK there are entrenched and persistent negative attitudes regarding immigration and immigrants. Although Clarke et al do identify a range of motivations for the Leave vote in June 2016, anti-immigrant prejudice is a persistent and dominant theme. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that a major political decision with ramifications both for the UK and Europe was fuelled by the prejudices a significant section of the population in the UK.⁵

What is striking is the way in which anti-immigration prejudice has certain characteristics of the anti-Semite identified by Sartre. For example, there is no expectation that anti-immigration views stand in need of justification. The authors of the book on Brexit (Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley) seem to regard these views as entirely legitimate; nowhere in the book is there the slightest criticism of them. Nor, in the numerous surveys in which they were involved are anti-immigration views

challenged or queried. This lack of criticism and the concomitant lack of a need for justification tends to reinforce the impenetrability that Sartre thought was the decisive attribute of the anti-Semite. As Sartre noted, one is left in the peculiar position of having to recognise and defer to this impenetrability; apparently, it would seem, the problem does not lie with the anti-immigrant prejudice but with the immigrants themselves and with those who have allowed the immigration to happen in the first place. Accompanying these prejudices is a disdain of explanations and argument – most famously pronounced by Michael Gove (a prominent Conservative Party politician) when in early June 2016 he said ‘Britain has had enough of experts’.⁶ Gove was referring to economists here: but the tacit message being put across to voters was one of trust your own instincts and give them free play. Finally there is the unspoken assumption that these prejudices are not isolated, that they are shared by many others and that one can draw comfort from being part of a crowd – all the more comfortable if anti-immigrant views are tacitly shared.

Of course, there can be debates over migrant policy which need not involve expressing anti-immigrant prejudice. Moreover, concerns over management of immigration need not necessarily be motivated by such prejudice. Nor am I suggesting that such sentiments were the only factor in the vote to leave the EU. What I am suggesting is that the extent and intensity of such prejudices cannot be denied.⁷ If Sartre’s analysis was valid in 1944 it is still valid now.

Prejudice and Agency

In the final sentence of his essay, Sartre pronounces: ‘Not one Frenchman will be free so long as the Jews do not enjoy the fullness of their rights. Not one Frenchman will be secure so long as a single Jew – in France or in the world at large – can fear for his life.’ (AS, p. 153) Perhaps this can be just put down to rhetorical flourish but the suggestion here is that in some sense the existence of pernicious prejudices is the responsibility of all citizens. I now wish to explore this thought.

Can we regard the holding of prejudices as in some way a moral failing for which we are all to be held accountable in some way? Clearly this must be the case if such prejudices directly motivate crimes against persons and property. Yet, leaving on one side criminal acts and other offences, this line of thought does not seem very fruitful. For one thing, it carries the inference that many of those who voted Leave in the 2016 referendum are *morally* tainted: and this just does not seem a productive path to go down. This is especially so if it is the case that many of us (perhaps all of us) carry with us normative prejudices of different kinds to varying degrees (not just hermeneutical prejudices) – as the discussion of Burke and Gadamer suggests. It is not the thesis of this paper that harmony can only be brought about through the expunging of all prejudices. This strikes me as a liberal-rationalist fantasy.

According to Sartre’s analysis, the anti-Semite *chooses* his passion; Sartre is thus according him the dignity of agency. Is there possibly a way in which the *recognition* of agency can help? Could we say that if the anti-Semite is prepared to recognise his *own* freedom then he might be induced to revise his outlook? However, I do not see this line of thinking as very promising. Let us consider two possible approaches.

The first involves using the idea of the ‘strong evaluator’, developed by Charles Taylor. He explains that whereas ‘weak evaluation’ is only concerned with the evaluation of the best means to attain pre-given ends (e.g. ends delivered through desires, or ends provided or prescribed by others), strong evaluation exercises freedom through seeking to shape and modify existing ends and values (Taylor, 1985a: 15-44). Persons need to be strong evaluators if their lives are to have shape and their

purposes interwoven into their values. A strong evaluator is prepared to face up to thinking about what ends in life are worth having; the implication here is that 'weak' evaluators are weak just because, in their preoccupation with means only, they allow themselves to take up ends in an unreflecting way and thus compromising their freedom. To many of those on the outside, this is how the anti-Semite seems – he has taken on views without really thinking them through. But for the latter, holding anti-Semitic views *precisely* distinguishes him as a strong evaluator. It is all the others who are weak, not him. He does deliberate and reflect; and when he dismisses lines of reasoning on the grounds they do not matter, he knows exactly what he is doing as well. So, if we construe agency along the lines of strong evaluation, the anti-Semite can still (if he wishes) claim agency for himself.

Suppose a different approach is adopted – that of the dialectic of freedom. This says that in order to be acknowledged in my freedom I must acknowledge the freedom of others; indeed, a *condition* of my being free is that I recognise the freedom of others for only then will they recognise my freedom. And, because freedom depends on this mutual recognition, then if I wish to be free I must embrace this dialectic. This analysis derives from the account of the master-slave relationship in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Unless others are prepared to recognise me as a person who has the status of 'free person' then my claims to be free are as nothing. And, of course, as Hegel points out in his inimitably abstract manner: "the movement is simply the double movement of two self-consciousnesses" (Hegel, 112).

But the emancipatory dimension in the dialectic of recognition can be disputed. For example, Orlando Patterson in his *Slavery and Social Death* has suggested that the master has no need of recognition from the slave: "...the master could and usually did achieve the recognition he needed from other free persons, including masters" (Patterson, 1982: 99). The culture of slavery enables masters to receive recognition not from slaves – who after all have suffered a 'social death' - but from other masters, and this is all they need. Patterson points out that in this situation, "freedom can mean nothing positive to the master, only control is meaningful" (98). The anti-Semite is therefore deliberately withholding recognition: he does not wish to participate in the culture of liberty, characterised by the dialectic of recognition. His 'impenetrability' signals precisely that he wishes to withhold recognition of others (Jews, immigrants from the EU) in order to deny their status as bearers of liberty. In this way he might exercise a kind of proxy-mastery over his supposed inferiors.

Thus, I am suggesting that there is nothing inherently self-contradictory as far as the stance of the anti-Semite is concerned. Yet it is perfectly true that in a culture of liberty the very thought of being able to control others is something base and ignoble. Those assuming mastery – whether real or a proxy version of it - are unfree to the extent that they cannot enjoy relations with others on the basis of liberty. But liberty is not what they want: what they want is control. How does one counter this ?

Implications for Civic Education

The argument so far has suggested that a) prejudice is something that everyone has to a lesser or greater degree and so prejudices *per se* are not morally degenerate and that b) there is nothing particularly *self-contradictory* in embracing prejudice including those prejudices that involve the fantasy of a mastery and control. Perhaps what is needed is a narrative that presents a better way of life than that of mastery. Such a narrative lies ready to hand – we are all of us familiar with it – a narrative of *liberty*. This could present a way of life that is more attractive, more compelling and

more enjoyable than a life mired in prejudices characterised by impenetrability. The thought, then, is that rather than countering pernicious prejudices through a moralising narrative we construct a narrative in which impenetrability seems demeaning, unimportant and unproductive.

What kind of features might such a narrative contain? Certainly there should be some knowledge of the history of struggles of liberty and how what counts as *subjects* of liberty was progressively expanded. For example, attention needs to be paid to the suffragettes and the role of the anti-slavery movement in the United States and elsewhere. This would include a narrative of specific figures such as Frederick Douglass and W. Du Bois. But also, I think, attention should be paid to those hitherto neglected episodes of history. As far as Britain is concerned, this would include the English Civil War and the loss of the US colonies a century later. I suggest that a historical narrative that has a focus on the rise of citizenship would spend slightly less time on the Tudors, eminent Victorians and the causes of World War 1. But it *would* include some account of the important stand taken by Churchill in May 1940. Such a narrative – a narrative of liberty – is not easy to present in the UK because it inevitably involves taking a critical stance regarding the role of Empire, not to mention that of England's first colony – Ireland. British history is complex precisely because the same country can be described *both* in terms that emphasise the growth of empire and subjection *and* the promulgation of ideas of liberty both at home and abroad. This inheritance is still very much alive today: 'British values' are a contested domain. But it seems to me that the role of liberty should be emphasised less as a triumph of British supremacy and more as a struggle against domination: and here, I invoke the interpretation of liberty as non-domination – republican liberty – illustrated in the writings of Quentin Skinner (1984, 1998, 2002), JGA Pocock (1975) and Philip Pettit (1997, 2012). Here, we are presented with a narrative of liberty which weaves a trajectory through Renaissance Florence and Northern Italy, through to the Putney Debates of 1647 and the struggle for American independence in 1776, up to the present time.⁸ And one of the features of such a narrative is that it presents an *inclusive* picture of citizens united in struggles against domination.⁹ Perhaps, through such a narrative, persons will be induced to cultivate a *love* for liberty – a love that is an indelible part of one's identity such that without one's freedom, life is cheapened and sullied.

Such a narrative needs also to cultivate a democratic sensibility. For example, it can sometimes be difficult to understand that a democratic process does not exist simply so that one side can win the argument and vanquish the losers. For a commitment to a *democratic* process is essentially a non-perfectionist commitment: that is, the outcome is almost bound to be less than perfect. If one craves political certainty then engaging in a democratic process is most emphatically not the way to achieve it. The commitment to non-perfectionism enshrined in democratic process is fundamental. For the process in question asks participants not to demand certainty; indeed, it asks of them to embrace uncertainty in so far as any outcome achieved is not only not perfect but is also very often provisional. This is because the outcome itself is subject to scrutiny and revision. This applies not only, of course, to policies which are adopted but also to government itself, through regular elections.

For those whom the impenetrability of prejudice gives certainty in their lives, this can be a difficult lesson to learn; but that for which they crave, democracy can never deliver for them. And those who favour 'actions over mere words' as a way of delivering certainty merely exhibit a sensibility which is profoundly undemocratic because in democratic governance, words count for everything. The urge for instant solutions, the derision of democratic assemblies as just 'talking shops' and the craving for a 'man of action' (they are usually men) are all emblematic of a lack of awareness of what a democratic culture actually involves. And it is profoundly unfortunate that even in the world's oldest democracies many citizens are wanting in their understanding of democratic sensibilities.

The cultivation of what might be termed ‘democratic uncertainty’ is also best placed to undermine the self-certainty and self-entitlement that often accompany prejudice. This does not necessarily challenge prejudices head-on in an attempt to expunge prejudices altogether. Rather it introduces the possibility that one’s deeply held beliefs are not as obvious as one might think; that listening to the narratives and personal testimony of others may sow the seeds of doubt; and that there is a virtue in being open to persuasion. Perhaps we need an education which proclaims that, as far as civic affairs are concerned, a degree of uncertainty may be no bad thing.

Thus a civic education needs to encourage a democratic sensibility that cultivates a degree of uncertainty in its citizens; an awareness that there are rarely easy answers and that one’s own principles – and even dearly held prejudices – are subject to revision and examination. In addition, such a sensibility involves acceptance that the implementation of policies will be gradual and experimental so that there is time and space to reflect on the effects and consequences of fresh policy. And above all, it would be a civic education that introduces the notion that an acknowledgement of imperfections and uncertainties is not a sign of weakness but rather signifies the flourishing of a healthy democratic culture – a culture in which ‘strong evaluators’ are unafraid of uncertainty.

There are many pernicious prejudices that, when they take the form of behaviours, can result in the committing of offences – e.g. fermenting racial hatred or discrimination against women in the workplace. For these behaviours there is a legal process that operates more or less fairly and efficiently. My suggestion is that this kind of legal framework needs to be supplemented by an education of prejudice through introducing a counter-narrative to the narrative of impenetrability, mastery and control. It is the sensibilities of people that we must appeal to and which we must attempt to educate, so that their prejudices emerge as benign, slightly hesitant and better disposed towards all of one’s fellow humans. What seems to me absolutely clear is that if prejudices of impenetrability are allowed to flourish unchecked the democratic process itself will be threatened. We cannot simply do nothing. Hence my suggestion of a counter-narrative of liberty that becomes a central feature of any civic education.

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¹ Sartre also uses the male gender pronoun constantly and consistently throughout the whole essay. It is no use pretending that for Sartre he stands proxy for humankind: it doesn't. He really is talking just about men (not women). Therefore his analysis is of the *male* anti-Semite. Nevertheless, despite Sartre's gendered use of language (and its concomitant meaning) it is my hope that many of his considerations can be seen to apply to male and female equally.

² See the account by Christopher Browning of the members of Reserve Police Battalion 101 in the years 1942-3 in Poland (Browning, 2001).

³ See for example the podcast by Ruth Weiss (2017). Sartre's essay was published in the American journal *Commentary* in 1948 and provoked much discussion – see, e.g. Rosenberg (1949).

⁴ Anti-immigration prejudice is not uniform across the country even though it is clearly widespread.

⁵ On the 26th of June 2016, the *Sun* newspaper ran a lengthy article examining the views (and elation) of people in towns where there was a strong Leave vote. The chief reason overwhelmingly cited for voting Leave was immigration. Even the *Sun* reporter felt obliged to mention that in Bolton (one of the towns visited) EU migrants formed only 2% of the population. See: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/1342831/streets-full-of-polish-shops-kids-not-speaking-english-but-union-jacks-now-flying-high-again/>

⁶ See Financial Times, 03/06/16

⁷ This is emphasised in a more recent book – see Stocker (2017). Anti-Immigrant sentiments appear to be more concentrated in England but generalisation on their distribution needs to be guarded.

⁸ There is some, though limited recognition of this alternative tradition. See David Marquand, *The Guardian* 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/dec/19/britain-problem-not-europe-england-brexite-englishness>

⁹ The attitude of American colonists regarding slavery and Cromwell's treatment of Ireland need not be ducked; a critical attitude to a narrative of liberty is no bad thing.