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The Genesis of Douglass' Moral Understanding While a Slave: A Methodological Approach to Freedom

Frederick Douglass' autobiographical[1] statement of slavery, a classic in its own right, represents one method of approach in the history of Afro-Americans' freedom struggle. It is a strand in their complex and diverse moral history. A critical analysis of it serves two purposes for this discussion: 1) It demonstrates that Afro-American consciousness has never been homogenized about any particular method of liberation. Instead, the moral history of slaves suggests diverse understandings about what constituted appropriate methods of liberation. 2) It contributes theoretical elements that suggest a more inclusive interpretation of the history of Afro-American morality. This study, perhaps, will contribute to a scholarly method of interpretation that identifies methodology that is indigenous to Afro-American materials. It challenges, in particular, theologians, and social ethicists to re-examine the primary sources for interpretation. Most students of the literature will agree that the Afro-American religious imagination has richly influenced the social, political and economic facets of American life. No scholarly effort as of yet has constructively interpreted the history of Afro-American morality. This discussion is an initial contribution to that rigorous task.

The following thesis organizes this presentation: 1) Douglass' history of moral understanding while a slave typifies, what can be termed theo-

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[1] I am concerned only with the section of Douglass' autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass,* that treats his experience as a slave. While I recognize that several versions of the autobiography appeared before the revised version in 1892, I am using the 1892 edition—reprinted by Crowell-Collier Publishing Company 1962, London. For a provocative discussion of Douglass' motives for writing different accounts of the autobiography, see Peter F. Walker "Frederick Douglass: Orphan Slave" in his book *Moral Choices: Memory, Desire, and Imagination in Nineteenth Century American Abolition,* Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1978, pp. 207-262. Dilthey's theory of history and society has influenced, in part, my method of interpreting autobiography. I see autobiography, epistemologically speaking, as a medium for understanding how Douglass understood his life as a "meaningful pattern which took shape in his own experience and which his own actions, plans and decisions helped to produce" (Wilhelm Dilthey *Patterns and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society* edited with an introduction by H.P. Rickman, New York: Harper and Row publishers, 1961, p. 83 ff.

retically, the subjective-ideal-freedom-type method. It construes freedom as a humanly initiated and achieved project. The antithesis of this type, which claims that freedom is a divinely initiated and achieved project, is clearly delineated in slaves' conversion stories, and certain of their autobiographical accounts. The subjective-ideal-freedom type is but one of three dialectical methods of freedom in primary slave sources.[2] 2) Six episodic experiences in Douglass' slave life illustrates this theoretical claim. 3) These experiences demarcate ethical presuppositions that characterize the moral agent of this type.

Above I use the expression ideal-type. An explanation of what I mean by the term is in order. The construct functions as a composite organizing image, in this case, of Douglass' experience. I am influenced by the Diltheyian, as opposed to the Weberian, school of thought concerning the discussion of type. In the Diltheyian sense type is not superadded as a construct of thought, but operates in the concrete experience of the subject under investigation. It, methodologically, characterizes but "it does not determine in the sense of physical law; it represents a convergence of

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[2] An exposition of the remaining two types will be given in a manuscript that I am currently completing: *The Genesis of Afro-American Morality: Dialectical Methods of Freedom.* Here I claim that two other dialectical methods of freedom are clearly seen in the materials: 2) The sensualist-ideal-type. 3) The ideal-communal-type. Each type characterizes a dialectical movement in slave consciousness.

2) The sensualist-ideal-type is lucidly seen in the folktales of Uncle Remus. Remus, who is the slaves' moral philosopher, teaches moral truths about human beings through the hero of the animal world—Brer Rabbit. Remus, through Rabbit who is the weakest animal of the forest, allegorically dramatizes what the weaker creatures must do to survive among the more powerful creatures of the world. Slaves are made to see Rabbit as a transparent symbol which makes obvious both the moral and sensuous limitations of their oppressor. Slaveholders saw Rabbit as an opaque symbol that reflected their slaves' ignorance. Remus did not allow Rabbit to magnify the oppressor's human faults (e.g. sin of false pride) without simultaneously having him illuminate the slaves' human presumptuousness (e.g. the sin of false humility and knowledge). This type assumes theoretically that freedom, through manipulative means, is both a humanly initiated and achieved project. The oppressed must wrest their freedom from the hands of their oppressors. Rabbit is the dramatic embodiment of this type's dialectic: On the surface, he appears as the personification of innocence to his oppressor; beneath, he acts both aggressively and deceptively to beat the oppressor at his own game.

3) The ideal-communal-type synthesizes the two previous type freedom methods. The two previous methodological types accent dialectically the human and divine aspects of the freedom project. This type synthesizes the human and divine process at both ends of the project (i.e. the beginning and ending). It declares freedom to be a project of mutual cooperation between the oppressed and God. Those in bondage find God because they seek the one who has been seeking them. The seekers, who find Jesus, must desire him with passion commensurate to that with which he desires them. Jesus empowers them with the adequate human and divine disposition to live creatively in the face of life's most self-negating structures, i.e. "death," "hell" and "the grave." He makes them, by the mutual consent, members of a communal fellowship where they can share their thoughts and emotions with each other. He promises them earthly companionship, provided they desire his presence, until the project is achieved. Ultimately, he assures them heavenly companionship when the project reaches full maturation. During the intermediate stages of the project, Jesus gives assistance to their freedom aspirations of this world that only have relative value. The spiritual songs of the slave era magnify this type.

traits rather than a necessary sequence of events."[3] The reader, however, must understand that I am in no way consciously imposing Dilthey's provocative theory of historical understanding upon the primary sources. It was after thoroughly immersing myself in Dilthey's theory that I saw new possibilities for reconstructing my own theory of interpretation. This theory, I claim, is inherent in the primary sources themselves.

It is now in order that we discuss the six episodic experiences in Douglass' life that illustrate the theoretical claim made above—i.e. freedom is a humanly initiated and achieved project. The experiences dramatize the way in which Douglass resolved his internal conflict caused by institutional slave laws and visionary ideals of freedom that he derived secretly from the slave community. He learns what it means to be a moral agent in a structured situation that forces him to choose between the "isness" and "oughtness" of the human condition. In these experiences we see how Douglass makes the crucial transition from understanding himself as an agent being acted upon by the forces of his environment ("seeing," "hearing," "being denied," and "being twice born") to an autonomous moral agent seizing control of his freedom project ("resisting," "conducting," and "escaping"). The six experiences are: 1) Seeing the female slave brutally whipped by his master. 2) Hearing of Aunt Jennie and Uncle Noah's successful escape. 3) Being denied to read by his master. 4) Being twice born. 5) Resisting Covey, the slave breaker. 6) Conducting a secret Sabbath-school and organizing an escape.

1) Seeing the female slave brutally whipped by his master: Douglass remembered seeing, during childhood, a female slave hung to a tree and whipped until there was little skin on her back. The incident evoked his childish capacity to sympathize: "From my heart, I pitied her, and child as I was and new to such scenes, the shock was tremendous."[4] Douglass was provoked to ask: "Why am I a slave? Why are some people slaves and other masters?"[5] His community could give no single answer to his childish inquiries of the morality of slavery. Instead, there prevailed on his plantation two answers: 1) An official answer of slaveholders. 2) An unofficial answer transmitted secretly by certain senior slaves. We will treat each in sequence.

1) The official answer originated with slaveholders who said "that 'God up in the sky' had made all things, and had made black people to be slaves and white people to be masters." In the same breath the authors of this answer said, "God was good and knew what was best for everybody."[6] 2) The unofficial answer originated from certain senior slaves who secretly taught the younger slaves of "the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." A crippled senior slave, known as Doctor

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[3] Quoted in Michael Ermarth's book *Wilhelm Dilthey: The Critique of Historical Reason*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press second edition 1981, p. 262 ff.

[4] *Life and Times*, p. 49.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

Isaac Cooper, tutored Douglass in this higher moral doctrine. Cooper, on the plantation, was both a Doctor of Medicine and a Doctor of Divinity for the slaves. Douglass remembered his prescriptions for each profession: "For diseases of the body, epsom salts and castor oil; for those of the soul, the 'Lord's prayer,' and a few stout switches."[7] Doctor Cooper offset the falsity of the official answer by showing his students that empirically all black people were not slaves and all white people were not slave masters. Douglass' description of Doctor Coopers' pedagogical technique dramatizes the passionate conviction with which he taught "the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man" doctrine:

> I was, with twenty or thirty other children, early sent to Doctor Isaac Cooper, to learn the Lord's prayer. The old man was seated on a huge three-legged oaken stool, armed with several large hickory switches, and from the point where he sat, lame as he was, he could reach every boy in the room. After our standing a while to learn what was expected of us, he commanded us to kneel down. This done, he told us to say everything he said, 'Our Father—' This we repeated after him with promptness and uniformity—'who art in Heaven,' was less promptly and uniformly repeated, and the old gentleman paused in the prayer to give us a short lecture, and to use his switches on our backs.[8]

Doctor Cooper was driving home to his students a democratic principle about the nature of God that, at least, Douglass would never forget. Douglass later said, "without any appeals to books, to laws or authorities of any kind, to regard God as 'Our Father' condemned slavery as a crime."[9] Doctor Cooper had given him the necessary moral cornerstone with which construct his own philosophy of the inhumanity of slavery. This new principle allows him to see that slavery, in contradiction to official slaveholders' theories, is a humanly initiated and achieved project.

2) Hearing of Aunt Jennie and Uncle Noah's successful escape from the plantation: Other slaves talk of this episode, and their vicarious celebration of it, made Douglass more aware of the possibility of freedom. It suggested that slavery was not an absolutely fixed state of human existence. Slaveholders could not achieve a perfect slavery project. Douglass said of the event: "It was, . . ., the first fact that made me seriously think of escape for myself."[10] This incident of escape suggests, too, that freedom was a secret desire of many slaves on the plantation. It allows us to see that Douglass' notion of freedom as a human project was not born in a vacuum. He is a product of the unofficial teachings of his fellow predecessors and contemporaries who visualized and planned escapes. Douglass' recollection of the event illustrates the emotive influence it had on his moral understanding: "I was seven or eight years old at the time . . ., but as young as I was, I was already, in spirit and purpose, a fugi-

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[7] *Ibid.*, p. 42.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 43.
[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

tive from slavery."[11] Those slaves who exemplified the courage to be free, by openly or secretly defining their masters' authority, became moral examples for the young Douglass. He says: "That slave who had the courage to stand up for himself against the overseer, although he might have many hard strips at first, became while legally a slave virtually a freeman."[12] This episode of escape makes clear for Douglass the dialectical aspects of human power: a) Slaveholders cannot destroy in their slaves the desire for freedom. b) Slaves who manifest the courage to be free, by standing up against their oppressors, theoretically change their own identity status—they become virtually persons. No longer is their humanity absolutely constricted to their oppressors' legal definitions of it. When this takes place oppressors are liberated and challenged by this new consciousness in the oppressed to redefine themselves. Here are the seminal ideas for shaping Douglass' understanding to the notion that freedom is a humanly initiated and achieved project.

3) Being denied the right to read by Master Hughes, Douglass' mistress, Master Hughes' wife, used the Bible to introduce him to the art of reading. He thought, in his childish manner, that there was some mysterious power in knowing how to read. When Hughes discovered that his wife was teaching Douglass to read, he rebuked her and warned that she never do it again. Douglass was more enlightened by Hughes' lecture of justification for his decree than the decree itself. Hughes' rationale for forbidding slaves to read only contributed to Douglass' genetic understanding that freedom must be a humanly initiated and achieved project. Hughes said to his wife: "If he learns to read the Bible it will forever unfit him to be a slave. He should know nothing but the will of his master and learn to do it."[13] Douglass remembered this as "the first decidedly anti-slavery lecture to which it had been . . . [his] lot to listen."[14] Herein the clue is given: If Master Hughes must maintain his human bondage project by limiting slaves to human knowledge, then Douglass reasoned that slaves must crack the knowledge code. This experience of being denied a tool, which was invaluable to liberation only assured Douglass of what was imperative that he do:

> This was a new and special revelation, dispelling a painful mystery against which my youthful understanding had struggled in vain, to wit, the white man's power to perpetuate the enslavement of the black man: 'Very well,' thought I. 'Knowledge unfits a child to be a slave.' I instinctively assented to the propositions from that moment I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. It was just what I needed, and it came to me at a time and from a source whence I least expected it.[15]

Douglass, following this event, saw Hughes fulfilling for him the role of a negative schoolmaster, "that which he loved most I hated . . . " Hughes becomes a negative force which Douglass pushes against as he

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[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 79.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

forms his own moral center. This act of denial made Douglass more "resolute to seek intelligence." It makes clear to him the truth that "slavery's origin was not in natural law or metaphysical causality; it was in human pride and avarice."[16] Douglass began to secretly acquire all the literature he could possibly get on the subject of liberty. The dream of liberty affected his total being: "I saw nothing without seeing it, and I heard nothing without hearing it. . . . it looked at me in every star, smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind and moved in every storm."[17]

4) Being twice born: This is the first experience that Douglass remembers as initially being positive. Two persons on the plantation contribute significantly to this episode: 1) The Rev. Mr. Hanson, the white Methodist minister, and 2) Charles Lawson, the slave spiritualist. The former was the plantation's official interpreter of Christianity. The latter was a secret official interpreter of Christianity in the slave community. It is necessary that we understand how each contributed to Douglass' conversion experience.

1) Rev. Mr. Hanson, the plantation's official intepreter of Christianity, preached to slaves and slaveholders on the plantation. Douglass was influenced by the repetitious theme in each of Hanson's sermons which decleared that human sin made masters and slaves equal sinners before God. Hanson, on a positive note, emphasized strongly the notion that spiritual freedom comes with the second birth. Douglass experienced a dramatic conversion to Christianity under Hanson's preaching:

> I finally found my burden lightened, and my heart relieved. I loved all mankind, slaveholders not excepted, though I abhorred slavery more than ever. I saw the world in a new light, and my great concern was to have everybody converted. My desire to learn increased, and especially did I want a thorough acquaintance with the contents of the Bible.[18]

2) Father Lawson, the secret interpreter of Christianity for the slaves of the plantation, expounded to Douglass about the deeper mysteries of spiritual freedom. His sessions with Douglass were characterized by prayer and Bible study. Douglass remembered that they shared their mutual strengths with each other: "I could teach him the letter, but he could teach me the spirit." Here Douglass learns that a covenant of mutual sharing and trust on the part of the oppressed is an indispensable element in any freedom project. The episodes with Father Lawson nurtured Douglass to a higher self-understanding as a moral agent endowed by God to seek his own freedom. Douglass lauds Lawson's contribution:

> He fanned my already intense love of knowledge into a flame by assuring me I was to be a useful man in the world. When I would say to him, 'How can these things be? and what can I do?' his reply simply was, 'Trust in the Lord.' When I could tell him 'I am a slave for life, how can I do anything?' he would quietly answer, 'The Lord can make you free, my dear; all things are possible with Him; only have faith in God.' 'Ask

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 85.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

and it shall be given you.' If you want liberty ask the Lord for it in faith, and He will give it to you.[19]

Father Lawson's teachings help Douglass make the transition from being a passive victim of bondage to being an active self-seeker of his own freedom. He identifies for Douglass the crucial moral element required for initiating his own freedom, i.e. "free choice." This lecture convinced Douglass that: "To make a man a slave was to rob him of moral responsibility. Freedom of choice is the essence of accountability."[20]

Douglass saw that slavery not only denied slaves the freedom of choice, but it denies slave masters of it as well. This truth, which was commonly perceived by slaves, was demonstrated when slaveholders were confronted with the choice of Christian liberation or their slaves. If the slaveholder could physically free his slaves in exchange for the gift of freedom promised by Jesus, slaves saw that as proven evidence of his conversion. Douglass said:

> This was proof to us that he was willing to give up all to God, and for the sake of God, and not to do this was, in our estimation, an evidence of hard-heartedness was wholly inconsistent with the idea of conversion."[21]

5) Resisting Covey, the slavebreaker: This event characterizes Douglass' encounter with a violent slave breaker, Covey, of an adjacent plantation. Douglass' master had ordered him, because of his willful spirit of resistance, to spend time under Covey, who was reputed among slaveholders and slaves as a prize slavebreaker. Douglass experienced firsthand that these claims were true: "I was rendered a living embodiment of mental and physical wretchedness."[22] Covey challenged Douglass' body, soul and spirit to the point that Douglass felt no alternative but to physically resist the brute. The act of physical resistance taught Douglass two significant lessons about freedom: a) "It rekindled in . . . [his] breast the smouldering embers of liberty."[23] b) It taught Douglass the relative value of physical resistance in human relations. "A man without force is without the essential dignity of humanity."[24] Douglass did not minimize the cathartic value of the experience: " . . . I felt as I had never felt before. It was a resurrection from the dark pestiferous tomb of slavery, to the heaven of comparative freedom."[25]

Douglass, by this act of physical resistance, overcomes the fear of death and forces his oppressor to recognize his humanity. It, classically, illustrates Hegel's theory of what the slave must do before he is recognized by the master.[26] It is best stated by Douglass:

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[19] *Ibid.*, p. 91.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 106.
[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 126.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 143.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 143.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] See Georg W. Hegel *The Phenomenology of Mind* John Baillie, translator New York:

> I was no longer servile coward, trembling under the frown of a brother worm of dust, but my long cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of independence. I had reached the point at which I was not afraid to die. This spirit made me a freeman in fact, though I still remained a slave in form. When a slave cannot be flogged he is more than half free. He has a domain as broad as his manly heart to defend, and he is really a power on earth.[27]

We must not conclude that Douglass chose violence as a paramount moral means of achieving freedom. Violence, Douglass believed, could no more accomplish liberation than physical domination alone could absolutely achieve slavery. Slavemasters' success was not in their power of physical domination over slaves, but in their ability to subjugate them morally, i.e. "to darken the slaves' moral and mental vision." If slaveholders would achieve this objective, they "must convince the slave that . . . [they have] a perfect right to" dominate. Slaves "must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery." When this happens slaves surrender all willingness to claim any moral rights of their own. Slavey is successful as a project of moral domination, instead of physical domination, when slaveholders make their slaves merely a reflection of their own wills. Douglass said of this project of moral domination:

> It must not depend on mere force—the slave must know no higher law than his master's will. The whole relationship must not only demonstrate to his mind its necessity, but it absolute rightfulness. If there be one crevice through which a single drop can fall, it will certainly rust off the slave's chain.[28]

This episode illustrates a dramatic reversal in Douglass' moral understanding of freedom as a humanly initiated and achieved project. He no longer assumes the role of a passive moral agent, being acted upon, but aggressively becomes a moral agent acting in behalf of his own freedom. He emphatically asserts that "those who would be free, themselves must strike the first blow."[29] Freedom is contingent upon the oppressed's willingness to aggressively initiate the project. Douglass is no longer a reflection of his master's will; he now becomes a mature moral agent who is in charge of his own will. His success of willfully resisting Covey, who symbolizes the negative power of the oppressor, conditions him to begin a constructive freedom project.

6) Conducting a secret Sabbath School and organizing an escape: This episode illustrates the dramatic conflict Douglass experiences between his master's will, as a higher law, and his secret struggle to derive an understanding of higher law for himself. Douglass must choose between his slave master's appropriation of "holiday freedom" for slaves and an achieved freedom of his own willing. Slave masters tailored the "holiday freedom" to exploit and sedate the sensuous appetites of their slaves: "ball-playing, wrestling, boxing, running, footraces, dancing and drink-

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Harper and Row 1967.

[27] op. cit., p. 143.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 144.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 144.

ing whiskey."[30] Those slaves who elected to work during "holiday freedom" days, for their own self-interest (e.g. by hiring themselves to an employer) were viewed suspiciously by their masters. This was because "holiday freedom" was intended "not for the slaves' happiness but the master's safety." Its objective was "to disgust slaves with their temporary freedom and to make them as glad to return to their work as they had been to leave it."[31] It was a means, through manipulating their sensuality, of slaveholders controlling their slaves' moral horizons. At their worst, such days were occasions for slaves to degrade themselves shamelessly for their masters' profit. This was particularly the case when masters would bet with each other as to which of their slaves could drink the most whiskey. Douglass remembered such events as humanly disgraceful. He could speak from first hand experience:

> We were induced to drink, I among the rest, and when the holidays were over, we all staggered up from our filth and wallowing, to a long breath, and went away to our various fields of work, feeling, upon the whole, rather glad to go from that which our masters had artfully deceived us into the belief was freedom, back again to the arms of slavery. It was not what we had taken it to be, nor what it would have been, had it not been abused by us.[32]

Douglass' secret Sabbath School of which he was organizer and conducter, provided an alternative to his slaveholders' "holiday freedom." Its purpose was to cultivate, by using the Bible and absolutionist sources, in fellow slaves and himself a rational understanding of higher law. Its ultimate purpose was to organize those slaves, who were transformed by a notion of higher moral law, for an escape to freedom. Douglass' Sabbath School was actually an underground freedom school which he conducted at the risk of even being killed.[33] This experience teaches Douglass at least two lessons about methodology for human freedom: a) That knowledge, when disseminated secretly to the oppressed, circumvents the oppressor's power to dominate. b) That when knowledge of a law higher than the slaveholders' will informs the oppressed group's pledge of mutual support no means of terror by the oppressor can destroy their solidarity.

Douglass only accepted those in his Sabbath School who dared sacrifice dependence relationships with their masters for their own freedom. His explanation of their motive for attending attests to this fact:

> Those dear souls who came to my Sabbath School came not because it was popular or reputable to do so, for they came with the liability of having forty stripes laid on their naked backs. In this country men and women were obliged to hide in barns and woods and trees from professing Christians, in order to learn to read the Holy Bible. Their

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[30] *Ibid.*, p. 146.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 148.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 148.
[33] It, perhaps, is not accidental that Douglass referred to his school as the Sabbath School. The name reflects what Sunday symbolized socially and religiously for many slaveholders and slaves. See Erskine Clarke's monograph *Wrestling Jacob,* Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1979.

> minds had been cramped and starved by their cruel masters. The light of education had been completely excluded and their earnings had been taken to educate their master's children. I felt a delight in circumventing the tyrants and in blessing the victims of their curses.[34]

The fact is illustrated here that knowledge of a higher moral law, even when disseminated secretly to the oppressed, circumvents the oppressor's power of domination.

Douglass and his students' organized escape attempt illustrates the second theoretical truth. They became a homogenized group which, bound by a mutual agreement not to betray each other, planned and executed their own escape attempt. Their moral victory was not realized in a successful escape, because they were caught short of their goal. It was accomplished in each member's unshakable commitment to, even in the face of torture, remain loyal to their covenant. It was a moral victory of mutual trust: "Our confidence in each other was unshaken, and we were quite resolved to succeed or fail together, as much after the calamity which had befallen us as before."[35]

The six episodes illustrate the original thesis that, as a slave, Douglass construed freedom as a humanly initiated and achieved project. They make obvious the fact that Douglass made freedom an emotive, cognitive, and volitional objective. These events suggest certain constructive elements that will contribute to the theoretical understanding of the moral and theological dimensions of Afro-Americans' struggle for freedom. The suggestive elements are: 1) That moral answers are conditioned by the self-interest of the group that constructs them. 2) That when the slave chooses contrary to his master's will, he or she seizes control of the internal moral element that makes him or her a free moral agent. 3) That human slavery is a project initiated and controlled by the sinfulness of human agents. 4) That uncontested human slavery makes immoral beings of enslavers and enslaved. 5) That physical resistance can be a means to a higher moral end. 6) That the oppressed must mutually support each other in their common struggle to derive an understanding of moral law which supersedes their master's will.

These elements of the subjective-ideal-freedom, evidenced in the life of Douglass, reflect one perspective of the nature of the human, God, and social reality. They assume that the human must directly confront the political process. Douglass, as an abolitionist, believed that the Constitution of the United States reflects a universal deity who wills that human beings behave justly, mercifully and lovingly toward each other. This God requires that nations and individuals be accountable for their moral deeds.

In summary, Douglass' methodological struggle for moral understanding and freedom typifies a type of Afro-American of the nineteenth century. The names of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and Henry H.

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[34] op. cit., p. 153.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 171.

Garnett are only a few who typify this school of thought. This perspective does not claim, as might be assumed that God has no part in the human struggle for freedom. Its subscribers, instead, believed that by human beings struggling for their own freedom they are being true to the God in whose image they are created. If we would understand the moral presuppositions of King's and other's approaches to freedom, we must appreciate the fact that they have antecedents in Douglass' methodological assumptions about freedom.