

ANCIENT SLAVERY
AND MODERN
IDEOLOGY



M. I. FINLEY



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PREFACE

Although slaves have been exploited in most societies as far back as any records exist, there have been only five genuine slave societies, two of them in antiquity: classical Greece and classical Italy. This book is about those two societies, examined not in isolation but, in so far as that is meaningful, in comparison with the other three (all in the New World). I consider how the ancient slave societies came into being and how they were transformed in the long process that brought about medieval feudalism; how slavery functioned within the ancient economy and in ancient political systems, and how it was judged socially and morally; what modern historians have made of ancient slavery, and why. These topics are interwoven throughout: the book is not arranged along conventional chronological lines but pursues four major themes one at a time. In other words, although the inquiry is both historical and historiographical, these chapters do not constitute a history of ancient slavery.

Over the past twenty-five years, the study of slavery in the United States, the Caribbean and Brazil has reached an intensity without precedent. The debate has often been bitter, and it has become a public debate, not merely an academic one. It is clear why that should be so: modern slavery was black slavery, and therefore cannot be discussed seriously without impinging on present-day social and racial tensions. Obviously, ancient Greek and Roman slavery has no such immediate significance. Nevertheless, other contemporary ideological considerations are active in that seemingly remote field of historical study – active in the sense that they underlie, and even direct, what often appears to be a purely ‘factual’, ‘objective’ presentation. For that reason, the disagreements in this field are also profound, the controversies conducted polemically. I believe that a full, open account of how modern interest in ancient slavery

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has manifested itself is a necessary prerequisite to the substantive analysis of the institution itself, and I have therefore begun with that theme. It then recurs in the subsequent chapters, primarily as a foil for my own views on the particular subject under examination.

The core of the book consists of four lectures that I had the honour to give at the Collège de France in November and December 1978. The invitation gave me the welcome opportunity to discourse on a subject on which I have been reflecting for a long time. My interest in ancient slavery began in the early 1930s, when I was a graduate student at Columbia University under W. L. Westermann, and I have been writing and lecturing directly on the subject for the past twenty years. I have accumulated many debts during those years, but here I shall restrict myself to thanking John Dunn, Peter Garnsey, Keith Hopkins, Orlando Patterson, Elisabeth Sifton and C. R. Whittaker, who kindly read the whole work in draft; Yvon Garlan, Elio LoCascio, Dieter Metzler, Pierre Vidal-Naquet and my wife, who either read individual chapters or offered help in other ways. I am also most grateful to Douglas Matthews for preparing the index.

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M.I.F.

Chapter 1

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The volume and the polemical ferocity of work on the history of slavery are striking features of contemporary historiography. That is easily understandable for American slavery: it was black slavery, and even a 'purely historical' study of an institution now dead for more than a century cannot escape being caught up in the urgency of contemporary black-white tensions. One commentator has recently remarked rather bitinglly that because of the 'coercion of the times', every 'new interpretation' of slavery has professed to be more antiracist than the one it replaces.¹ Similar concerns are evident in the study of slavery in the Caribbean or Brazil and of the impact of the slave trade on Africa. But they obviously cannot explain why ancient slavery is being subjected to a similarly massive and not much less heated inquiry. No one today need feel ashamed of his Greek or Roman slave ancestors, nor are there any current social or political ills that can be blamed on ancient slavery, no matter how distantly.

Some other explanations must be sought, and I shall argue that they are deeply rooted in major ideological conflicts. For the analysis a crude and partly artificial distinction can be drawn between a moral or spiritual view and a sociological view of the historical process. Such a distinction cannot be neatly maintained, of course, either by the historian or by the activist: in the debate over the abolition of the modern slave trade, 'it is no more unusual to find humanitarians using economic arguments than to find their opponents using humanitarian ones'.² Nevertheless, my distinction is serviceable for my purposes, as the different stresses in the following superficially similar quotations illustrate (both of them easily paralleled in other writers).

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The first is from Arnold Heeren, the extremely influential Göttingen philosopher and historian, writing at the very beginning of the nineteenth century: '. . . everything that moderns have said about and against slavery may also be applied to the Greeks. . . . But one should not try to deny the truth that, without the instrument of slavery, the culture of the ruling class in Greece could in no way have become what it did.'

If the fruits which the latter bore have a value for the whole of civilized mankind, then it may at least be allowed to express doubt whether it was bought at too high a price in the introduction of slavery' (my italics).³

The contrasting quotation is from Engels' *Anti-Dühring*: 'It was slavery that first made possible the division of labour between agriculture and industry on a considerable scale. . . .

Without slavery, no Greek state, no Greek art and science; without slavery, no Roman empire. Without Hellenism and the Roman empire as the base, also no modern Europe. . . . It costs little to inveigh against slavery and the like in general terms, and to pour high moral wrath on such infamies. . . . But that tells us not one word as to how those institutions arose, why they existed, and what role they have played in history.'⁴

The moral-spiritual approach has dominated the discussion of ancient slavery since the early nineteenth century and almost monopolized academic study (apart from 'neutral' antiquarianism), so much so that it is now the common view that modern interest in ancient slavery 'awakened out of the idea of freedom in the eighteenth century with the beginning of modern social constructive criticism',⁵ and that the climax of that initial impulse came in 1847 with the appearance of Henri Wallon's *Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquité*. When Wallon published his three volumes, he introduced them with a 164-page chapter on 'Slavery in the Colonies'. The reason was explicitly given in the short preface: 'Slavery among the ancients! It may seem strange that one should seek so far away, when slavery still exists among us. In taking this path, I do not at all divert minds from the colonial question; on the contrary, I wish to bring them back to it and concentrate them on a solution.'

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The solution could not have been simpler: abolition of an institution that was un-Christian to its very roots, one that corrupted slaves and masters alike and therefore the whole of society. In 1847 abolitionism was a live issue in Europe. By 1879, however, when Wallon published a second edition, slavery had been banned in virtually all the New World colonies, abolitionism had become an issue of the past, a dead issue. Nevertheless, Wallon, now permanent secretary of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, dean of the Faculté des Lettres in Paris, and 'Father of the Constitution', chose to reprint his out-of-date chapter on the colonies, because, as he wrote in a new preface, 'it may give an idea of the colonial regime and of the state of opinion among us at the precise moment when the debate was resolved, much sooner than one might have believed' – 'thanks to God', he piously added.

Wallon's *Histoire* remains unrivalled in its scale and its deployment of the literary and juristic sources, of the patristic literature, and (far more than is usually allowed) of inscriptional evidence. Yet today it normally receives mere lip service, with a pejorative remark or two about what Westermann has called 'the abolitionist prejudices of the time'. Its 'influence', he continues, 'in establishing the modern religious-moralistic assessment of the ancient institution has probably been the most harmful and the least challenged.'⁶ Joseph Vogt avoids Westermann's denunciatory tone, but the two-page account that he calls paying 'special attention to this outstanding work' is restricted almost entirely to the value judgments (which 'needed revision') about the negative influence of slavery on society and the healing role of Christianity in bringing the institution to an end.⁷ I need not go on calling the roll: from such comments and 'summaries' no one could imagine the contents of Wallon's three volumes or the magnitude of his scholarly contribution. He himself was not wrong when he wrote, in closing the long introductory chapter on the modern situation: 'Besides, this book is not a pleading but a history. Without banishing the modern question from my mind, I have remained face to face with the ancient fact' – tens of thousands of facts, I

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should add, about the size of the slave population, the sources of slavery, the price and employment of slaves, helots, manumission and so on.

Several things need to be said about this mixture of denunciation and neglect of Wallon. The first is that it is a twentieth-century phenomenon.⁸ The second is that, much as one may legitimately criticize, or disagree with, Wallon's interpretations of the data, the case is weak for a charge of deliberate distortion or omission of the evidence in consequence of his Christian piety or his abolitionist fervour. And the third is that anti-Wallonism does not reflect a shift away from the moral-spiritual approach to history, as may appear on the surface, but results from a shift, and also a clash, in the moral values of historians. Crudely stated, the conflict is between Heeren's view that slavery, though an evil, was not too great a price to pay for the supreme cultural achievement (and legacy) of the Greeks, and Wallon's insistence that there can be no defence for an evil which so grossly violates the essence of Christianity. Rarely have the issues been posed quite so bluntly, but it is not difficult to disentangle them from the complex interplay of value-systems. Wallon has suffered posthumously because, good Christian though he commendably was, he allowed no mitigating nuances on behalf of classical traditions and classical values. So have some other twentieth-century historians who, from different premises, attributed the 'decline of antiquity' to the single factor of slavery.

Although I hold that the stress on moral values has led to a distortion of both the study of ancient slavery and the current accounts of the historiography of the subject, I want to pursue the matter of the relationship between Christianity and ancient slavery a bit further, because it has been a central theme in the ideological debates about ancient slavery; indeed, a prime example of what happens when the past is summoned as witness in moral or theological disputation. Westermann, for example, a religious agnostic, or at least not a believer, made his attack on Wallon in a polemical chapter in which he had no difficulty in demolishing the view that Christianity was responsible, even if

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only by delayed action, for the disappearance of ancient slavery. In a world without ideology that polemic would not have been necessary: it had been done nearly a century before at much greater length and with deeper insight, by that radical theologian, friend of Nietzsche and precursor of Karl Barth, Franz Overbeck.⁹ Indeed, it had been done sufficiently in three or four pages in 1771 by John Millar.¹⁰ The position was summed up by Ernst Troeltsch half a century ago: Inwardly 'the nature of the slave relationship was neutralized by the claims of the ideal. Outwardly, however, slavery was merely part of the general law of property and of the order of the State, which Christianity accepted and did not try to alter; indeed, by its moral guarantees it really strengthened it.'¹¹

The heat of Overbeck's arguments and the intemperance of his language may be attributed to the fact that he was making a powerful theological argument about the nature of Christianity, not merely correcting a historical fallacy – and perhaps to the magnitude of the Augean stables he wished to clean. By 1875, when he was writing, it had become dogma that the early church was opposed to slavery: it would require many pages merely to list the books and essays in which this doctrine appeared, not all of them contemptible and some of them of considerable scholarly quality. Wallon was not the creator of the dogma or even its most popular spokesman: the latter was probably Paul Allard, whose *Les esclaves chrétiens* went through five editions in French alone after it first appeared in 1876 and was 'crowned' by the Academy.

The difficulty with the dogma is the apparent incompatibility with the actual record. That had become a serious worry by the early nineteenth century, and there was an outburst of studies of the church and ancient slavery. Wallon, it is worth recalling, won a competition sponsored by the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques in 1837 on the theme, the replacement of slavery by serfdom, and his was one of three works ultimately published as a consequence.¹² In 1845, before Wallon's three volumes had appeared, the Trustees of the Hulsean Prize in the University of Cambridge set as the subject

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of their competition in that year 'The Influence of Christianity in Promoting the Abolition of Slavery in Europe'; the winning dissertation, by Churchill Babington, published the following year, ran to 181 learned pages. In 1862, under the direct stimulus of the American Civil War, the Society for the Defence of the Christian Religion in The Hague invited a more differentiated approach by the two-part formulation of its theme: 1) a 'scientific explanation' of the Biblical passages pertaining to slavery, and 2) an inquiry into how slavery should be considered 'according to the spirit and principles of Christianity'. They were rewarded with at least one lengthy, worthwhile response, the prize-winning essay by a German schoolmaster, Heinrich Wiskemann, published in Leiden in 1866 under the title, *Die Sklaverei*. Wiskemann, a classical scholar, theologian and historian, with a long list of serious publications, undermined the view that the New Testament offers any comfort for abolitionists, and then argued that slavery is nevertheless 'an evil that can be accepted by religion and by reason only under circumstances (*unter Umständen*)'.

In sum, men of firm belief were compelled to find some sort of explanation of the long survival of slavery after the triumph of Christianity. Wallon's third volume opens by acknowledging the problem and returns to it time and again. His way out of the dilemma – slavery was an evil practice inconsistent with moral requirements – is not a very satisfying one. Neither is Wiskemann's: Christ and the apostles either maintained silence about slavery or they endorsed it for sound tactical reasons (that is what he meant by 'accepted under circumstances'). However, a lame answer is better than the line adopted by Joseph Vogt: he holds to the dogma of a fundamental opposition by Christianity from the outset, without ever attempting to reply to the arguments and the evidence that have been marshalled against it, not even to those of Westermann, for whom he has expressed much, though not altogether uncritical, admiration. Although 'it is true', he is content to write, that Christianity accepted 'slavery as an institution', what matters is that 'the contrast between slave and master within the new Christian

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community could only be a relative one. . . . A new kind of evaluation of property and power had appeared.¹³ That is close to Wallon, though with a slightly less activist overtone. Vogt's quarrel with Wallon is therefore not over Christianity but over the latter's denial of the spiritual excellence of the pagan Greeks and Romans.

That Vogt is wrong in believing, against Troeltsch, that 'a new kind of evaluation of property and power had appeared', seems to me certain. It seems equally undeniable that it is an evasion of the central dilemma to rest on the casually dismissive clause, 'although it is true that Christianity accepted slavery as an institution'. But I do not discuss those aspects; my immediate concern is with the (methodological fallacy) that pervades Vogt's account, a common one in the history of ideas, which we may call the 'teleological fallacy'. It consists in assuming the existence from the beginning of time, so to speak, of the writer's values – in this instance, the moral rejection of slavery as an evil – and in then examining all earlier thought and practice as if they were, or ought to have been, on the road to this realization: as if men in other periods were asking the same questions and facing the same problems as those of the historian and his world.¹⁴ The false proposition that modern interest and research into ancient slavery had its roots in the Enlightenment and abolitionism is another example. 'Interest' and 'study' are assumed to be constants, and are assessed and judged according to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century practice of academic scholarship and the academic monograph. It should not have to be said that there are, and always have been, levels of interest, or that the research monograph is not the only measure of interest.

Throughout antiquity itself the interest in slavery as such was a contemporary, not a historical, one. The few apparent exceptions are only apparent – the various wrong-headed explanations of the origin of Spartan helots; the assertion by the fourth-century B.C. historian Theopompus (quoted in Athenaeus 4.265B-C), that the Chians were the first to have bought slaves from the barbarians, made in the context of

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Spartan decline and of the Graeco-Macedonian invasion of 'barbarian' Persia;¹⁵ Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Roman Antiquities* 4.24) on the good old days as a blatant contrast to the degeneration which provoked the Augustan enactments of his own day curbing manumissions. Such references to the past, historical or mythical, made in order to explain or justify or illuminate a current situation, belief or action, were common — one need only think of Pindar's odes — but they did not constitute an interest in the past as such, or in history, let alone in a history of, or an historical inquiry into, a particular institution. To hold otherwise is a modern illusion, generated by the creation of a discipline called 'history' and its introduction into school and university curricula.

The illusion is heightened, when we come to more recent centuries, by the unique status and authority of classical culture in western civilization. The citation of Greek and Roman authors was a familiar technique in numerous contexts, but neither Aquinas's reliance on Aristotle nor Dante's choice of Virgil as his guide nor the classical quotations of the American Founding Fathers had anything to do with a desire to study and understand Graeco-Roman society or its history. For certain purposes, individual Greek and Roman writers and thinkers were selected as models of excellence, in style or education or morals or logic, to be deployed in suitable contemporaneous ways. For many purposes they were not serviceable, and then other authorities replaced them, for example, in the seventeenth-century debate about English law, for which the historical (and more often the pseudo-historical) paradigms were English, not Greek or Roman.¹⁶ And so with the defenders of slavery: Aristotle offered no more than learned embroidery to the main argument, which rested on Scripture.¹⁷ To justify the enslavement of some of God's creatures, the support of God was needed, not of history or of pagan philosophy, which knew neither sin nor baptism.

The one sphere in which the ancients could, and did, provide major assistance was the practical one of the law. Roman law offered unbroken continuity, first through the Germanic codes,

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then through the revival of Roman law in the later Middle Ages. The basic texts survived in more than sufficient quantity and there were learned commentaries.¹⁸ Hence the Europeans who peopled the New World with imported African slaves had a ready-made legal system at their disposal, which they adopted almost *in toto*, modifying it slowly to meet certain new conditions, for example, in the eventual restriction of manumission to a minimum. Not surprisingly, no serious study of ancient slavery was stimulated by this juristic activity. Not even Jacques Cujas, greatest of the early modern commentators on the *Corpus Iuris*, contributed anything fresh or penetrating, nor did the occasional dissertation *de iure servorum*.

Neither did the great men of the Enlightenment, despite the current easy assumption to the contrary. Although historical information was for them an essential weapon in their emancipation from the 'domination of metaphysical and theological thinking',¹⁹ their concern with history was purely as a source of paradigms, not as a discipline.²⁰ The culmination came with Montesquieu, the first thinker, in Cassirer's words, 'to grasp and to express clearly the concept of "ideal types" in history.' *The Spirit of the Laws* is a political and sociological doctrine of types', in which the facts are sought 'not for their own sake but for the sake of the laws which they illustrate and express'.²¹ In lesser exponents of the new spirit, especially in the political arena, 'facts' were invented as much as sought; history became neither paradigmatic nor sociological but counterfeit. The French Revolution, Marx noted in the opening of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, 'draped itself alternatively as the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire'. Sparta was preferred over Athens, then to be replaced in the post-revolutionary era by the legend of 'bourgeois Athens'.²²

When men of the Enlightenment wrote about ancient slavery, as they did often, though briefly, the paradigmatic approach was obvious and universal. The eighteenth century in France (and in England) was deeply concerned with both slavery in the New World and serfdom in the Old, which were treated as essentially identical (for example, by John Millar and Adam

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Smith) or were distinguished in purely formal Roman-law terms, as personal and real slavery (in the *Encyclopédie*, for example). The dominant trend was opposed to slavery, though Voltaire and Montesquieu were rather ambiguous in contrast to the unqualified hostility of Diderot or Holbach.²³ Not even the latter, it is worth saying, condemned slavery more bitterly, or with greater knowledge of the Greek and Roman sources, than Jean Bodin in the sixteenth century (*République*, Bk. I, ch. 5).

The key eighteenth-century figure was Montesquieu. There are several well known enigmas about his relatively brief discussion of slavery in Book XV (we should say 'chapter') of the *Esprit des lois*: this is the second of four books within the larger context of climate; it is entitled 'In what Manner the Laws of Civil Slavery Relate to the Nature of the Climate'; and it offers a curious justification of slavery in tropical zones. Nevertheless, these few pages constituted the most influential intellectual attack on slavery written in the eighteenth century. Thus, the chevalier de Jaucourt began his article on 'esclavage' in the fifth volume of the *Encyclopédie* (1755) with an acknowledgement of his reliance on Montesquieu, proceeded to label slavery as a nearly universal institution 'to the shame of mankind', and made no concession at any point in his abolitionism. Behind Montesquieu's analysis there lay wide reading in classical authors, of course, but also in the Roman and Germanic law codes and in the great 'voyages' describing the customs and manners of the New World, the Middle and Far East, more or less in equal measure.²⁴ Nothing could better illustrate Cassirer's conclusion that the facts were sought 'not for their own sake but for the sake of the laws which they illustrate and express'. No historical inquiry, no *historia* in the original Greek sense, was stimulated, let alone a study of ancient slavery.

Exceptions can of course be cited. In one direction, there is the failure of the Abbé Barthélemy, a celebrated *érudit* influenced by Montesquieu, Voltaire and especially Rousseau, to take account of slavery in all the seven volumes of his *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce*, published in 1789, reprinted at least five times in French and translated into several languages by

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the end of the century, though his few references are thoroughly hostile.²⁵ In another direction, there is the stimulus which the Enlightenment gave to historical study in Germany. Between 1800 and 1805 there appeared in Leipzig a massive multi-volume history of Sparta by J. C. F. Manso, a Breslau educator, poet and historian, and an important, controversial Enlightenment figure in his day (though I believe hardly known outside Germany). This remarkable narrative, which carried the story down to the Roman incorporation of Greece into its empire, concentrated on political and military history, but it also devoted dozens of appendices to a wide range of other topics, such as the costs of the Peloponnesian War, and it is punctuated by lengthy reflective digressions in which the man of the Enlightenment reveals himself. The most notable, in our present context, is Manso's assessment of the 'constitution of Lycurgus' (I 178-92), a severe critique of Sparta, primarily because of its base in the exploitation of helots and its concentration on military virtues. Manso's *Sparta* was soon undeservably obliterated by the appearance in 1824 of that perniciously influential 1000-page fantasia, Karl Otfried Müller's *Die Dorer*, in which the helots and the dependent labour in other so-called Dorian states were together squeezed into twenty pages of blatant apologetics. Müller was neither 'enlightened' nor liberal;²⁶ if he nevertheless called the chattel slaves of such 'commercial states' as Athens a permanent danger to 'morality and order' (I 39), that was not because he was an abolitionist but because this incidental remark served to sharpen the glorification of Sparta and the denigration of Athens.

As a historian, Manso clung to the subject-matter that had been traditional ever since the Greeks: helots appeared in the narrative when necessary and were otherwise dealt with in a single appendix. So too with the greatest 'exception' of them all, Edward Gibbon. Although he 'was entirely at home in the new Paris of the encyclopedists and he shared many of their convictions' as well as adopting his 'leading political, moral and religious ideas' from them,²⁷ he wrote *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the first modern history of any period of antiquity

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(and arguably the first modern history *tout court*). Roman history had been a recognized university subject for the previous hundred and fifty years, but the practice everywhere, in England and on the continent, often imposed by statute or charter, was essentially no more than a reading, with commentary, of one or more Latin historians. Gibbon took a revolutionary step by writing his own history, not (or not so much) by transforming the proper subject-matter of history. Slavery was relegated to a few decorous paragraphs in the second chapter, which betrayed the influence of Montesquieu but without the latter's subtle analysis or moral fervour (or even Manso's), and it was then ignored, except fleetingly when it was directly involved in a particular event and therefore was required in the narrative.²⁸

The distinction is further exemplified in the first history of Greece, by the Scottish classicist and royal historiographer, John Gillies, a substantial two-volume work published in 1786, ten years after Gibbon's first volume. The helots received adequate attention in the narrative of the Messenian wars and of the fifth-century revolt, but only a single sentence in twenty-two pages on the Lycurgan reorganization of the Spartan government and social system. Slaves elsewhere in Greece were virtually ignored, though one isolated sentence is so astonishing that I cannot refrain from quoting it: [the system introduced by Solon, Gillies explained, 'would be attended with the inconvenience of withdrawing the citizens too much from their private affairs' were it not for the fact that slaves outnumbered the free by four to one (p. 457)]. Gillies was no Enlightenment figure, as is evident, for instance, from the violence of his diatribes against the Sophists, yet he could refer to slavery with as much moral outrage as any abolitionist of the day.

To pursue the trail through Mitford, Niebuhr, Thirlwall and the other major historians of Greece and Rome in the ensuing decades would be a profitless exercise. It is enough to look briefly at George Grote, a philosophical radical far along the political spectrum in his distance from John Gillies. Early in his *History*, in the context of the social structure of Thessaly, Grote

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wrote: 'As a general rule, indeed, the cultivation of the soil by slaves or dependents, for the benefit of proprietors in the cities, prevailed throughout most parts of Greece.'²⁹ Yet in a work many times longer than Gillies', slavery occupied no more space, and that in the same context—Sparta and bits of narrative. That he was more penetrating in his observations and far more 'modern' in his source criticism goes without saying—but is irrelevant to my theme.

The inescapable conclusion is that those who assert that the modern interest in ancient slavery began with the Enlightenment and abolitionism have been looking for the wrong things in the wrong places. They have forgotten that, in Momigliano's terse formulation, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries 'modern people wrote "antiquitates", not Roman (or Greek) histories'.³⁰ And among the antiquarians the study of ancient slavery (more precisely, Roman slavery) attained monographic scale at an early date. I restrict myself to a few out of a considerable number, in particular those which were widely used and cited to the end of the nineteenth century and sometimes in the twentieth, among them two of the earliest.³¹ In 1608 the Frisian Titus Popma published in Leiden his *De operis servis liber*, consisting essentially of a series of 'definitions' of terms, such as *vicarius* or *dispensator*, followed by a relevant quotation or two from ancient authors. Five years later the Paduan cleric and antiquarian Lorenzo Pignoria produced a tome of more than 200 pages, *De servis, et eorum apud veteres ministeriis commentarius*, erudite and systematic with a very modern-looking index of sources that included not only literary and juristic texts but also inscriptions and figured monuments. The bulk of the book consists of a detailed account of the urban occupations of Roman slaves, not to be surpassed until the late nineteenth century.³² Both books went through at least three printings in the course of a century, and that is measure enough of the interest in ancient slavery in the pre-Enlightenment era. So is Joachim Potgiesser's account of Germanic slaves and freedmen from the time of Caesar to the end of the Middle Ages, originally published in 1703, reissued in 1736 in a volume of 985 pages.

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These early antiquarian works were well known to, and often found in the private libraries of, the French *érudits*, a few of whom continued research into ancient slavery, even during and after the Revolution. The *Mémoires* of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres were the main outlet. I do not propose to provide a catalogue: it is enough to mention the long and hostile account of the revolt of Spartacus published in volume 37 (1774), by Charles de Brosses, one of the leading magistrates and parliamentarians of his era; and the two studies by the polymath Jean Levesque de Burigny (author, among other works, of biographies of Erasmus and Grotius) on Roman slaves and freedmen (in volumes 35 and 37).

Some of this basic bibliography, beginning with Popma and Pignoria, opened the appropriate chapter in Friedrich Creuzer's *Abriss der römischen Antiquitäten*, published in 1824, in order, he himself explained, to meet the need for a collection of sources and references to accompany university lectures. Creuzer – friend of Schlegel and other dominating figures of German Romanticism, author of two seminal works, one on Greek historiography,³³ the other on symbolism in ancient religion and mythology, who knew his Grotius, Montesquieu and Hegel as well as the most esoteric Byzantine scholia – made no apology for writing an antiquarian work of such austerity that it avoided continuous prose in favour of mere headings and phrases followed by massive citation and quotation of sources and commentaries. He considered slavery important enough to assign it the third chapter, immediately following the origins and the topography of Rome. His nineteenth-century successors, such as Marquardt in the *Privataltertümer*, shared that assessment, and they had the advantage over Creuzer of possessing a model antiquarian monograph published in 1833, *An Inquiry into the State of Slavery amongst the Romans*, by William Blair, neither an academic nor a classical scholar but a Scottish lawyer.

It is noteworthy that all this antiquarian research into ancient slavery was almost exclusively devoted to the Romans. With the important exception of the demographers and of the

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philologist and jurist J. F. Reitemeier, to whom I shall return, Greek slaves attracted no inquiry on their own. They made their appearance in such monographs as Everhard Feith's book on Homeric antiquities (Leiden 1677) or Samuel Petit's *Leges atticae* (Paris 1635), but not independently. Obviously Greek sources had nothing to offer comparable to the revolts of the second and first centuries B.C. or the Roman agrarian writings or the enormous bulk of the *Corpus Iuris*. Yet I am neither persuaded that this is a sufficient explanation of the difference nor able to offer a better one. Even August Böckh produced only a few pages in his *Staatshaushaltung der Athener* (1817), and they were narrow in scope (restricted to numbers and prices), less complete and less sophisticated than earlier English and French treatments of the same figures, and showed a surprising incomprehension of the arguments of David Hume, for example.³⁴ Two years earlier, in a monograph on the Attic silver mines, Böckh opened the half-dozen pages on slavery with a sharp attack on the institution and then proceeded to a series of fantastic miscalculations and misjudgments of the numbers of slaves employed in the mines and of the profits derived by their owners.³⁵ Even feebler were the few pages, a generation later, in K. F. Hermann's *Lehrbuch der griechischen Antiquitäten* (1852), though he had Wallon available to him. It was not, so far as I know, until Büchschütz brought out his *Besitz und Erwerb im griechischen Alterthume* in 1869 that Greek slavery received a full antiquarian account, 104 pages in a work of 624 pages covering the period from Homer to Alexander (and excluding the western Greeks).

Büchschütz closed with the brief statement (pp. 207–8) that slavery was not only bad economically, though the ancients could not have judged that, but also bad morally and demographically. This may serve to remind us of the fact, often forgotten, that the antiquarians of the past were far from bloodless. Generally they saw ancient slavery as an evil, though they differed in the tone of their condemnation. One must then ask what has led Vogt to single out William Blair's book for special praise: 'how objective this kind of antiquarian research was. . . .

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His analysis . . . avoided value-judgments in its reconstruction of ancient institutions'.³⁶ I should not myself select avoidance of value judgments as the best way to characterize an author who referred to 'the odious traffic in human beings' (p. 24); who introduced a seven-page section on punishment and torture (supported by more than five pages of end-notes) with the words, 'The industry of slaves was excited, and their obedience enforced, by severe discipline', and noted that 'punishments were not thought too revolting spectacles to be exhibited before visitors' (p. 112); and who ended his book with a summary of the evil effects of the institution on Rome, 'one of the main causes of the decay of her empire'.

However, one may, if one has the right predilection, find 'objectivity' here in another sense. Blair and the other nineteenth-century antiquarians held fast to that tradition of the genre which had already evoked the hostility of the eighteenth-century 'philosophical historians'. They 'aimed at factual truth, not at interpretation of causes or examination of consequences' or at 'a reinterpretation of the past which leads to conclusions about the present'.³⁷ An enthusiastic anonymous review of Blair closed with these words of praise: 'He has no splendid theory to illustrate; no object but that of diffusing the valuable knowledge which his industry has enabled him to collect'.³⁸ The sweeping final generalizations of Blair and Büchschütz were mere assertions, neither properly developed at the end nor integrated into the account in the body of the work. There was also a silence about contemporary slavery too pervasive to have been accidental. Blair, indeed, declared in his introduction: 'I do not attempt to institute any comparison between modern colonial, and ancient slavery.' He gave two reasons: first, 'the two systems differ so widely, that they could serve but little to illustrate each other'; second, he himself is 'not sufficiently informed' on the modern side.

Creuzer provides even more decisive evidence. In 1827, three years after the publication of his *Abriss*, he was invited to give a lecture in Paris under the auspices of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, of which he was a member, and he chose

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as his topic 'Glimpses of Slavery in Ancient Rome'. In the version published nine years later (in German),³⁹ he gave three reasons for his choice: the current French and English interest in abolitionism, the recent discovery of such important texts as Cicero's *De republica* and the *Institutes* of Gaius, and the opportunity to inform a French audience about German ideas and research. These considerations apart, he continued, *the subject in itself* (*der Gegenstand an sich*: his italics) must occupy the antiquarian, the historian, the philosopher, and every thinking man. He proceeded to a bitter attack on ancient society and morality: 'among the Greeks and Romans slavery is the chief limitation on the so renowned, so exaggeratedly praised nobility (*Herrlichkeit*) of ancient life. . . . Slavery is the great world-historical dividing-line that forever separated paganism and Christianity'.⁴⁰ Every branch of public or private life, he concluded, was linked directly or indirectly to the existence of slavery. And then, in the lecture proper, in the annotation which was as long as the text itself, and in addenda (written in 1835) as long as the text and notes together, he devoted his vast erudition solely to the most dogged antiquarianism, on the etymology of the words *servus* and *Sklave*, on slave garments, and the like.⁴¹ The conclusion seems to me inescapable that the contemporary discussions of slavery had little interest for Creuzer despite his strong moral stance, and that they were certainly not the stimulus to his own study of ancient slavery, that he made a bow to them in his Paris lecture only in order to please his hosts. If that is right, it would help explain why in the citations of his wide reading there is no reference to Hume or the early 'economists', to whom I now turn.⁴² They were the fountainheads of the second of the two approaches, the sociological one, I singled out at the beginning.

I employ the label 'economists' loosely for the writers who, chiefly from the middle of the eighteenth century, examined wealth, labour, production, trade, in what we should now call 'economic' terms, and often with a historical dimension or perspective.⁴³ They did not abandon moral categories: virtually every man I shall discuss in this section condemned slavery

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wholeheartedly, though few were in any sense abolitionists and not all can legitimately be identified with the Enlightenment. But they moved the discussion of slavery — my main concern — into a radically new institutional nexus.

The first, and prime, point that emerges from an examination of this literature is the unanimity with which it was agreed that slave labour was less efficient, because more expensive, than free labour. So obvious did this seem both to Benjamin Franklin, living in the midst of the slaveowners of the New World, and to John Millar or Adam Smith in faraway Scotland, that they found detailed argument unnecessary. A few general considerations sufficed.⁴⁴ Their explanations of the persistence of slavery in the face of its relative costliness were equally brief and simple: cheap land for Franklin, habit and lack of economic insight for Millar, man's 'love to domineer' for Smith. The latter two are not very 'economic', admittedly, but they at least lack the apologetic quality of the traditional explanations, which were designed to save the morality of slavery, such as original sin or the preservation of captive barbarians from death.

None of this required, or stimulated, any serious historical inquiry. However, slavery became entangled in the increasingly sophisticated demographic debates of the eighteenth century, with a perhaps unexpected but certainly decisive consequence. I oversimplify, but, with that caveat, it is fair to say that it was generally agreed, first (in David Hume's words), that 'there is in all men, both male and female, a desire and power of generation', so that, in the absence of restraints of one sort or another, 'the human species . . . would more than double every generation';⁴⁵ second, that a growing population contributed to the prosperity and well-being of a nation. A considerable body of pamphleteering arose on different aspects of these propositions that can be traced back to the sixteenth century, some of first-rate quality and significance, laying the foundation for modern demography, much, on the other hand, that can safely be labelled fantastic or ridiculous. Two of the debated questions concern us and they will have to be examined jointly: 1) was the

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world more heavily populated in ancient times than now? 2) what effects, if any, does large-scale employment of slaves have on population growth?

The affirmative answer to the first question had much support, thanks in particular to the early books of the Old Testament and the generations of Methuselah. Explanation was then required not only for the supposedly sharp drop in population at some point in the past, but also for the failure of contemporary society to achieve a return to the lost numbers. Much of the explanation was heavily moralistic, as well as intellectually weak, but the quality changed once the problem was taken over by those I have been calling 'economists'. And they, predictably, brought slavery into account. The first two for us to consider were Benjamin Franklin, writing in a purely contemporary context of trade and protectionism, and David Hume, who set out openly to disprove the alleged demographic superiority of the ancients.

In 1751 Franklin wrote a short pamphlet, 'Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind', only eight pages in the standard modern collection of his papers, which circulated by hand until it was published in Boston in 1755 and immediately reprinted several times in London. Section 13 listed six things which 'must diminish a nation', among them 'the introduction of slaves'. His explanation deserves to be quoted in full: 'The Negroes brought into the English Sugar Islands have greatly diminish'd the Whites there; the Poor are by this means depriv'd of Employment, while a few Families acquire vast Estates; which they spend on Foreign Luxuries, and educating their Children in the Habit of those Luxuries; the same Income is needed for the Support of one that might have maintain'd 100. The Whites who have Slaves, not labouring, are enfeebled, and therefore not so generally prolific; the Slaves being work'd too hard, and ill fed, their Constitutions are broken, and the Deaths among them are more than the Births; so that a continual Supply is needed from Africa. The Northern Colonies having few Slaves increase in Whites. Slaves also peJORATE the Families that use them; the white Children become proud,

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disgusted with Labour, and being educated in Idleness, are rendered unfit to get a Living by Industry.'

Simultaneously, and presumably without knowledge of Franklin's seminal pamphlet, Hume was writing his 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', a lengthy essay (published in 1752), which, despite its title, ranged so widely as to earn McCulloch's accolade a century later, 'the most perfect specimen ever published of an inquiry into any matter connected with the public economy of the ancients'.⁴⁶ Hume had been stimulated, as I have already noted, by the argument over the relative populousness of the ancients and the moderns, and the starting-point of his own analysis was the following: The 'chief difference between the *domestic* economy of the ancients and that of the moderns consists in the practice of slavery' (pp. 385-6). Not only is slavery 'more cruel and oppressive than any civil subjection whatsoever', he concluded, but it is also 'in general disadvantageous both to the happiness and the populousness of mankind' (p. 396). The bulk of the essay was occupied with a systematic, critical examination of the population figures in Greek and Roman literary sources, which are 'often ridiculous' (p. 419), including the numbers of slaves. On any account, this study must rank as one of the first original *historical* inquiries into ancient social and economic history. Beloch praised it as 'the basis for every inquiry into the population statistics of antiquity',⁴⁷ but that is too narrow a view of its range and quality.

Now a third name has to be introduced, that of the Scottish divine Robert Wallace, who had read a paper on the same subject to the Edinburgh Philosophical Society 'several years earlier', and who was now provoked to publish his effort with an appendix, a reply to Hume twice as long as the latter's essay.⁴⁸ Wallace was learned enough to catch Hume out in some factual errors, but his method with the evidence, set out in minute detail from Homer's Catalogue of Ships to the fantastic slave numbers quoted by Athenaeus, was one of uncritical acceptance: the larger the figure in any ancient text, the better for his argument. McCulloch's verdict was that he had 'wholly failed to

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shake its [Hume's] foundations', but by no means everyone agreed, then or now.⁴⁹

The Hume-Wallace controversy stirred up extensive interest and discussion both in Britain and on the continent,⁵⁰ which continued to the mid-nineteenth century, as McCulloch reveals. Among the most active discussants were the *philosophes* and the demographers, but their interest, which was never directed to either the Graeco-Roman data or the special problem of the slave population, soon evaporated: thus Malthus, though acknowledging the contribution to demographic theory of Hume and Wallace (and Adam Smith) in his opening, totally ignored these sections of their work. The *érudits*, in contrast, seized on precisely what Malthus passed over, and they produced a series of learned studies of ancient population in general and of slave numbers in particular: Guilhem de Sainte Croix and Letronne on Athens, then Dureau de la Malle on the Romans and particularly on Italy under the Republic.⁵¹ These studies were among the essential building-blocks underpinning the nineteenth-century antiquarian works on ancient slavery.⁵²

However, just as Malthus and his successors abandoned one side of the Hume-Wallace debate, the interest in the size of ancient slave populations, the latter-day antiquarians abandoned the other, more important side, that which led McCulloch to praise Hume's essay as an inquiry into the *public economy* of the ancients. I have already mentioned August Böckh's failure to comprehend what Hume was getting at, and I could repeat that dismissive judgment about virtually every antiquarian and historian who went over the slave-population ground thereafter.⁵³ I shall restrict myself to Wallon. Two of his longest chapters are on slave numbers, revealing his customary knowledge of the ancient evidence and the modern discussions, but total indifference to the fundamental demographic issues, and in essence these chapters are pointless. Nor is there a serious consideration of labour efficiency anywhere in the three volumes. [There are only the conventional, meaningless generalities about growing trade and industry.] Slavery is intrinsically wrong on ethical grounds, and its destructive effect on the free

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people is also a moral one: by its example and by its unfair competitive position, slavery destroys the work ethic, driving the free, and especially the free poor, into sloth and vice.

In other words, Wallon's work on ancient slavery was the climax of (antiquarianism) in this field. His moral fervour also helped divert the subject from the already available, though still embryonic, institutional approach. That is hardly surprising. It seems regularly to be overlooked that the book was written for a prize competition set by the Académie des Sciences *Morales* et Politiques, whose themes for their competitions were regularly moral and philosophical. On this occasion they had selected the following: '1. Through what causes was ancient slavery abolished? 2. In which epoch was there only serfdom (*servitude de la glèbe*) in western Europe, ancient slavery having come to an end?' I have been unable to discover who or what was behind that choice of topic, but it is not to be seriously doubted that they expected moral disquisitions within an historical frame. One unsuccessful entrant had had the presumption, in Michelet's words, to attribute the abolition to a single cause, interest: 'The masters found it to their advantage to free the slaves in return for rents, in other words, to become rentiers instead of masters; it was a question of industry, not a moral question.' This competitor never even asked himself whether Christianity or 'barbarian customs' or the feudal system had any influence. So, though he submitted 'a clever, brilliant, paradoxical work, full of talent and of rash views', it did not receive even honourable mention.⁵⁴

The successful competitors did not make that mistake. All three, Wallon, Biot and Yanoski, produced the same answer to the question set: [Christianity was the key.] All three were also honest and intelligent enough to perceive, and to try to cope with, the obvious difficulty, the delay of many centuries before Christianity took effect. All three also found substantially the same way out, in Biot's formulation: 'Christianity does what it should; it accepts the political disposition of society as a given condition to which it must submit; it accepts temporal slavery as a fact. It directs its efforts only to the morality of men . . .

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legislation favourable to the social position of the slave was indeed rare, and one should not be too surprised by that . . . it is evident that laws too favourable to the slaves would have strongly tended to upset the whole social edifice, already crumbling under the repeated blows of foreign invasions. It was preferable, in order to maintain public tranquility, that improvement in the lot of the slave be brought about progressively through improvements of the master'.⁵⁵

What other answers to the Academy's demand for causes were in fact available? One possibility, under the influence of the new German historical school of law, was to look to the Germanic invaders of the Roman empire, and two competitors took that line, one a German who specifically dismissed Christianity as impotent in the matter. He shared honourable mention (presumably for his excellent analysis of documents of the tenth and eleventh centuries) with a long contribution of extreme piety which concluded that the abolition of slavery was brought about not by 'the influence of Christianity in general but by the Catholic and pontifical influence in particular'.⁵⁶ Biot and Yanoski, in contrast, went to some lengths to deny any Germanic contribution.

Another possibility was to build on the foundations laid by the earlier 'economists', but in 1837 men who had that kind of interest had none in the question posed by the Académie (or they were discouraged from competing by knowledge of the interests and bias of the Académie). No fourth possibility comes to mind, and so the moral answer had the field virtually to itself.

In sum, far from marking the beginning of modern research into ancient slavery, [Wallon's *Histoire* was a dead end.] I am not referring to the contingent fact that he, like the other prize-winners, young products of the *Grandes Ecoles*, was not a classical historian. Biot was a Sinologist who had already written a memoir on slavery in Chinese history. Yanoski was a protégé of Michelet's and for a period his assistant: he and Wallon went on to further historical study and publication, but always in fields far removed from either antiquity or slavery.

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The essential point is that, along Wallon's lines, subsequent consideration of ancient slavery was restricted to still more antiquarian examination or, on the moral side, to either propagation of the faith—it is enough to cite the article on slavery by J. Dutilleul in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique* (1924)—or to theological debate, as with Overbeck. No basis was laid for continuing *historical* inquiry. There could be no better demonstration than his own words in the concluding section of his work: 'But the reintroduction of slavery in modern times was an act of violence against the spirit of the Gospels, . . . an abruptly retrograde step. If it pleased some greedy merchants, some inhuman politicians, to return to slavery, it is not for Christianity to retreat with them.'

The strength of Wallon's abolitionist feelings is beyond question, but so is the fact that it had little connection, if any, with either the Enlightenment or the rise of 'modern social constructive criticism'. A puzzle remains. Why did Wallon devote a decade of hard, sustained labour on a 1500-page *introduction* to the 'abolition' of ancient slavery, leaving the account of the abolition itself to others; 1500 pages, furthermore, that were largely irrelevant to his central concern? What difference did it make, for example, morally or otherwise, whether classical Athens had 100,000, 200,000 or 400,000 slaves? Perhaps there is an answer to that question, but none is to be found in Wallon's many pages on those particular figures. I have no explanation and I suggest that it is lost in irrecoverable individual psychology.

At the same time another work appeared, beginning in 1854, which, on the subject of ancient slavery, was equally exceptional and equally a dead end—Mommsen's multi-volume *Roman History*. Slavery is treated from the outset in an unprecedented way, as fundamental to Roman society and history. There is no need in the present context to examine Mommsen's views concretely, beyond registering this central location of slavery (he uses such terms as *Sklavenhaltersystem* and *Sklavenwirtschaft*) and the bitterness of his moral condemnation.⁵⁷ Why Mommsen broke from the tradition of historical writing about

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antiquity in this as in other respects—in so far as he had a model, it was Macaulay—is another enigma I am unable to resolve. Neither his liberalism nor his early experience in political journalism offers a sufficient explanation, and his biographers appear to be oblivious to this interesting aspect of his work. Whereas the *Roman History*, enormously popular with the reading public, has always had an ambivalent reception among professional historians of antiquity, his stress on slavery has met with no response at all: subsequent general histories of Rome (as of Greece) have simply abandoned it.⁵⁸

This is not to deny that, after Wallon and Mommsen, articles and monographs on ancient slavery proliferated, as part of the increasing flow of academic publication. Informative as some of them are, they are of no interest collectively: they are merely a nineteenth- (and often twentieth-) century manifestation of the older 'works of curious erudition', though they are now called 'scholarship' rather than 'antiquarianism'.⁵⁹ Were they the sum total of research into the subject, the sharp, important, and often (as today) heated debates about the place of slavery in Greek and Roman history would never have come into being. The stimulus was provided elsewhere, by men who were not by vocation students of classical antiquity and who transformed the eighteenth-century doctrine of stages in social evolution based on modes of subsistence into a new model (or, rather, into several competing models).

The first work on the new lines, published in 1789, was in fact without influence, but it deserves to be rescued from oblivion. Johann Friedrich Reitemeier has been described in the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* as 'a man of great gifts and the best education, whose widely ranging activity and originality of mind proved virtually fruitless because of the flaws in his character and way of life'. A devoted pupil of Heyne's in Göttingen, he edited the text of the early Byzantine historian Zosimus and wrote monographs on mining in antiquity, on luxury in Athens, and on torture in Greek and Roman law-courts, before turning to legal history, the field in which he could fairly claim to have been the founder of the German