

Slavery, Marxism, and Liberty

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In this book on the transition from ancient slavery to medieval servitude, Pierre Dockès revels in the modish peculiarities of modern scholarly writing, delightedly citing a passage by the celebrated Marxian structuralist Althusser.¹ Wrestling with the problem of freedom from determination, Althusser was moved to describe a circumstance or a person as "overdetermined" (*surdéterminé*), itself shorthand for "complexly-structurally-unequally-determined"! Dockès himself likes acronyms. An institution appearing in these pages, for example, is the "feudal mode of production," a system contrasted to the "slave mode of production" and the "capitalist" ditto. The first appears as FMP, but the translator does not employ SMP and CMP, forms found in the French original. Since these epitomize the author's thought, all are used in this review. Another contemporary touch is the use of conjectural statistics replete with mathematical symbols. The section asserting that the early medieval generalization of water mills was exploitatively imposed on the farming population by their lords, a point not without merit, is enriched by this "high camp".

Where one is really tempted to cry "Far Out!", however, is when the meaning of the word "lord" is discussed. Our modern translations of the New Testament, we learn, obscured the sense of a revealing passage. The text should not read "no man can serve two masters," but instead "no man can be a slave to two lords." Perhaps Dockès is here imitating Marx's familiar derivation of the Holy Family of the Christian Heaven from the Real Family of the Material World. Too bad, though, that Matthew 6,24 or Luke 16,13 really dealt with man's ability to choose between God and Mammon. Or perchance, since he is seeking to recapture the meaning of the worlds *dominus* and *servire*, our author is like the Italian cardinal who, when confronting the Cathars at Toulouse in 1178, complained bitterly at being obliged to use the vernacular when talking about Sacred Scripture because, as he put it, everybody knows that the Bible was

¹ *Medieval Slavery and Liberation*. Chicago 1982. Pp. vii. 291. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer from the original *La libération médiévale*. Paris 1979.

written in Latin. Anyhow if a reader really wants a passage exemplifying Christian "indifference" to slavery, he should look up 1 Peter 2,418.

Minor infelicities aside, however, the main thing is method.² "To gather data," Dockès says, "and to make sense of the data, one must have a theory, and to have a theory one needs to know what were the most important relations of production, hence to identify the significant discontinuities in space and time." I think he means that the SMP, FMP and CMP are the "important relations of production" one must know in order to have a theory. Is then the theory none other than the data, the SMP, FMP and CMP? We later learn also that an actual uniform FMP may never have existed, but the author opines that "an abstract model need not be useless"! One's head spins.

But who cares? It is the history that counts. This work is a review of a Marxian vision of the progressive stages in the liberation of humanity, the "unidirectional march of history, never reversed in any important respect." Liberation is mankind's "concrete goal:" cannibalism and massacre have been replaced by slavery, slavery by serfdom, and serfdom by wage labour. The hope is for an eventual liberation into a future Elysium not defined by this historian. He can hardly be blamed for this ellipsis, however, partly because his is only a history of the change from the SMP to the FMP, and partly because, from the twelfth century Abbot Joachim of Fiore (who is naturally never cited) to the nineteenth century Marx and Engels (who often appear - hereafter M&E!), prophets have been unable to describe heaven. Still, when a man writes about bliss, man's progress toward it, and about Marx's passing notion borrowed from L.H.Morgan that it was perhaps a return to "primitive communist social relations", would it be harmful briefly to trace the transmission of these ancient ideas? And when one repeats Engel's conjecture that slavery derived from war, how about helping a reader who wonders where a German of a century or so ago got this conception?

Dockès touches lightly on the ancients, referring to Blossius of Cumae and others. Sparked by an anti-Christian bias, he then overleaps the intervening history to land on M&E's familiar turf. Because he is treating both the late or Christian Roman empire and the ideology of progress, however, it would have also been useful to mention traditions expressed in Christianity. In Acts 2, 44-5 and 4, 32-5, for example, a vision of apostolic communism was sketched: from each according to his means; to each according to his needs. Although the

² Note the anachronism of calling a late Roman woman "Saint Melania", a slip compounded in the English version by asserting that she owned property in Brittany, a mistranslation of the French *Bretagne*, Britain. Textbook exaggerations abound: there was "not a single Roman" in the army by the end of the fourth century, medieval lawyers (when?) did not understand the Roman law of property, etc. Note the slip: Irminion for Irminon (Irmino in Latin) of Saint-Germain-des-Près.

origins of this notion predated Christ, the church transmitted it, providing a model of perfection thought possible of being repeated and even bettered by mythographers and utopians throughout the Christian age. Anent Engels' remark about the origin of slavery also, I would be alerted by the fact that sources as familiar as Justinian's Institutes 1, 2, 2 and Digest 1, 5, 4 and 50, 17, 32 repeat the old concept that violence and war had bound man, once naturally equal and free, by the *ius gentium* with its slavery, contract, and private property. Would not a scholar also suspect that other texts asserted that, although admittedly imperfect, the *ius gentium* carried within it a spark of the old fire, thus enabling mankind to light again brotherhood's hearth in a new way?

It may be objected that these earlier communist fancies lacked the "materialism" of the nineteenth-century version, and it is assuredly true that they were otherworldly or idealist. I nevertheless believe that our author has lost too much by excluding these visions from his perspective because they would have strengthened his awareness of the manifold constancy of human hope. Indeed, it is possible that he could have argued that his revolutionary late Roman slaves not only had access within the church to an ideology that appealed to them, but also one that had long disturbed the rest of their masters.

Enough cavillations for the moment, however. The picture sketched in this book proposes a familiar historical evolution. The SMP persisted throughout antiquity, finally collapsing in the tenth century when it was replaced by the FMP. This in turn lasted until modern times when it was displaced by the CMP. This argument is based not only on eighteenth and nineteenth-century traditions of human progress but also on a series of subordinate arguments, historical and dialectical.

The first of these is the definition of slavery used in this book. Slavery cannot be a "concentration camp" system. Although, according to this author, the Nazis were not insane because they were just killing off what they thought was a nearly infinite supply of a labourers (!), theirs was not a true SMP. Dock-ès' SMP also excludes the private ownership of men or women for pleasure, for domestic service, the labour of servile artisans, however economically important, and that of one or two labourers in each farm household. True slavery appears only when the SMP becomes "the predominant relation of production," when, that is, it is expressed in big enterprises with large privately owned slave labour gangs. When this is so, the simple term "slavery" (*esclavage*) is insufficient. What is needed is a word accentuating this special system as the essence of the slave institution. Although the English translator does not employ it, the recycled word *esclavagisme* is used in French.

Questions and reservations come to mind. The author excludes servitudes imposed by government, whether legally so describable or not. These weigh heavily in human history, however, ranging all the way from servile elites, Athens' Scythian police, for example, and Islam's Mamluks and Janissaries, to the vast but inefficient recent German and Russian concentration and/or labour camps, or, to stretch legal terminology too far (which the author does not),

South Africa's *Apartheid* workers. To these we should certainly add the hordes of imprisoned "criminals," those expressions of mental dysfunction or malaise mixed with social rebellion so visible in today's relatively wealthy "capitalist" and "democratic" societies. Although aware of them, Dockès erases such categories from consideration because they are not specifically designed for immediate economic gain, and also because the private ownership of slaves is an essential ingredient of his *esclavagisme*. To me, however, the predictable use of coerced men and women on a large scale is really the basic definition of slavery.

In terms of past history, however, Dockès' exclusion of privately owned industrial and domestic slaves is more consequential. These kinds of servitude were characteristic of most African, Near Eastern, and Asian societies until well into the nineteenth century. This excision also allows him to skip another group of notoriously coerced human beings, the many "rightless" domestics or "slavies" seen everywhere well into the twentieth century. Still, since others, including as perceptive an author as Moses Finley, have seen fit to exclude these categories, one may admit this historian's schema for the purpose of definition. The only caveat is that the reader ought remember that, to put these long-lived and economically significant types of servitude aside in order to conform to a stereotypical three-stage evolution of institutions, we are not here treating slavery but instead an *esclavagisme* of limited importance presumably selected for ideological reasons.

Even this choice, moreover, is unsatisfactory. Our historian is faced by the fact that his SMP especially flourished in early modern times, the age of Europe's invasion of the world's other continents. This sudden recrudescence of the SMP seems to upset the three-fold schema favoured by his ideological sources, and he therefore dismisses it by calling it "merely regional," a manifestation that did not affect the "world level" (*niveau mondial*). "Regional" is surely a curious adjective to apply to the parts of Africa actually settled by Europeans and the large reaches of South and North America, including what was, until the end of the eighteenth century, the best exploited part of this half of the world, reaching from Virginia through the Caribbean to Brazil, even to Bolivia, all areas where the SMP flourished. Dockès has already stacked the deck, moreover, because the whole of Islam, of Asia, indeed of the rest of the world outside of Europe has been neatly excluded by the terms of his own definition of *esclavagisme*. What he therefore obviously means is simply that the SMP hardly penetrated Europe at that time, being excluded by the growing CMP characteristic of that region. Perhaps, but, in fact, the "world level" does not even embrace all of Europe. During Europe's great expansion, the CMP had not even been sighted in the Balkans, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Scandinavia, in short, in large reaches of this continent. The definition of "world level" and "merely regional" therefore seem to be expression of a Europe-centered fiction introduced to veil an unverifiable proposition. My suspicion about the function of Dockès inadvertent chauvinism is reinforced by the fact that, in antiquity, the SMP flourished only in some of the western and recently develop-

ing parts of the Roman empire, not in the deeply rooted urban civilization of the Greek dominated eastern half of the Mediterranean.

It may be, furthermore, that this historian neglects much that might help define his SMP. He seems indifferent, for example, to the immense cultural and social expansion characteristic of the two great ages of the SMP, the age of the Roman Republic and that of European expansion in modern times. It hardly seems accidental that both the Roman implantation of an urbanized economy in the western Mediterranean and adjacent regions in western continent... Europe and the analogous introduction of a roughly similar economy in North and South America in modern times rested on the multiplication of coercion. Not only was the SMP employed wherever possible, but also varieties of temporary servitude both contractual and penal. Dockès overlooks this or these facts probably because he, apparently leaning on Pierre Bonnassie, the historian of Catalonia, favours what historians of the United States would call the "Turner thesis" (after F.J. Turner, historian of the "American frontier") wherein the "free" land of the frontier was thought to promote liberty among its inhabitants.

Surely, however, many social patterns are evoked by frontiers. One might propose, for example, that, where men had to be cut down, say, on Bonnassie's Catalan frontier or on those of the modern Graniza or the Cossacks, freemen were best; where it was only a matter of felling trees or planting crops in insalubrious conditions, as in large reaches of the Americas, coerced labour was best. But this is questionable. War's history does not show that freedom necessarily makes the best soldiers, coercion often being as effective in making such. One must therefore examine other reasons why periods of great expansion were sometimes accompanied by massive coercion, and why, at others, they were not. One of the "happier" times, indeed, occurred during the middle ages when settled agriculture and a measure of urbanization were planted in much of continental Europe, a time nevertheless accompanied by what may be called the "Turner syndrome," marked, that is, by increasing freedom acquired by the laboring classes.

This history has always entranced our church-goers. At last, at long last, a vindication! Slavery under the pagan ancients and again under modern secular men; freedom under medieval Christians! But slow! Echoing Moses Finley and others, Dockès asserts that the Christian church had nothing to do with this history. In one sense, at least, I believe he is right. It is assuredly true that, from Saul of Tarsus until the middle ages, no major orthodox Christian author either advocated the liberation of slaves (except as one of other "morally" advantageous ways of eschewing material possession) or preached the abolition of slavery. Like some pagan philosophers, Christians said they were directing mankind to goals higher than material ones, and hence the condition of men on earth, other than that of the clergy, did not concern them. But that fact, if fact it is, may not exhaust the role of the church in this matter.

Dockès may have overlooked a significant institutional change here. The first is that the church universalized a national law (Leviticus 25, 36-46) pro-

hibiting Jews from enslaving other Jews. If this argument seems too legalistic, consider how seriously the medieval clergy took the prohibition of usury, another ancient Jewish law (Deuteronomy 25, 15). Save for criminals, moreover, the Romans themselves did not enslave Roman citizens, only "barbarians." Heirs of both Jews and Romans, then, churchmen came to believe that the "barbarian" was the non-Christian. (The Jews were an exception to this rule. Having already attained citizenship and exemption from the state cult before the empire was Christianized, they lived within medieval Europe as both Roman citizens and non-Christians, therefore not as "barbarians.") A second argument is that the church arose as an enemy of the Roman state and religion, the two being hardly separable, and has, in fact, retained a substantial measure of hostility to the state and its « values » throughout history until today. Furthermore the rivalry between these two magnets of loyalty was mightily reinforced during the transition from antiquity to the middle ages in western Europe by the fact that the church became the refuge of the Romans, their shield from the German invaders. A consequence of this was that, German and Latin, these soon institutionalized traditions locked the clergy of the pen and the laity of the sword into a combat that led the Roman church, unlike any other religion born in the Mediterranean area and unlike any other Christian sect, to try with some success to dominate the secular state. It is therefore probable that the rivalry between the two institutions made it profitable for the clergy to convert the barbarians before they were enslaved, and to protect these new Christians against this fate when they were conquered by secular power: In brief, although the church was not opposed to slavery and liberated few or no slaves, it probably helped eradicate this institution in medieval Europe. If so, this was not done for religious reasons, if such there be, but instead for the enhancement of the interests of the members of an institutionalized embodiment of resistance to secular power, one that wished to rule the minds not only of the people, but those also of their magistrates and princes. In fine, by giving in to a secularist bias, Dockès may have missed an institutional reality.

It is, of course, a puzzle why medieval European society established, retained for long, and then eventually abandoned this rarely achieved balance between, and polarization of, the religious institution and the secular one, the church and the state. The answer to this question obviously lies beyond the scope of a brief essay. I have elsewhere expatiated on it, asserting that it had something to do with the balance of powers achieved by about 1100, describing it as an inadvertent alliance of the ecumenical authority of the Roman pontiffs with the intimate and intense power of the local rural seigniories and urban collective seigniories. What the universal and particular powers sometimes damaged and always restrained was the authority of intermediate princes, the heads of the larger states that eventually triumphed in the later middle ages and early modern times.

To return to Dockès, let us rehearse in more detail his account of this history. In the late Roman republic the SMP was general throughout

Italy. Whether specializing in animal husbandry or crops, the SMP was always organized as a large scale export exploitation marked by violent coercion. Although the individual unit of exploitation or *villa* was becoming somewhat smaller, its typical buildings and land layout spread from Italy to the western provinces, implanting the SMP everywhere during the early imperial centuries. The author addresses the familiar problem of the *coloni*, asserting, as have others, that tenant farmers did not replace the slaves so much as supplement them. Later on, in the late empire, the *colonus* fell into a condition not much better than that of the slave, thus serving as a forerunner of the medieval serf, a person settled on an allotment but owing service to a lord. In the meantime, even in the fifth century, there were many great estates, such as Melania's mentioned in Palladius' *Lausiac History* 61, 5. Dockès tells us that this pious woman owned 24,000 slaves, estates in Italy, Spain, Britain, and Sicily, of which ample properties one included no less than sixty-two hamlets. This example of gigantism suits the author's notion that there is no such thing as a stable small slave exploitation. Like M&E's factory in the CMP, once the SMP is introduced, the enterprise always grows in scale.

Before the medieval state of servitude or FMP was attained, however, a series of slave and rural revolts, notably those of the *Bagaudae*, etc., brought Rome down and opened the door to the German barbarians. Let no one think that these products of Tacitus's imagination were conquering heroes. The empire fell, Dockès says, because of its "internal contradictions," and not because of the "downtrodden" and miserable primitives who penetrated its frontiers, there to play the role of counter-revolutionary "scabs." So successful were they at this role, however, that the subsequent Carolingian Frankish empire took off from their reinforcement of the master's authority to restore and spread the SMP and *villa* system. In spite of this, by reducing the numbers of their own offspring and by persistent irrepressible revolt, the rural population fought for, and attained, a measure of liberation. Strangely forgoing the pullulating heresies available, the rustics turned again to paganism in order to combat the Christian state religion. Innovative technologically, they also introduced the heavy wheeled plough and the water mill. This inventive economy was replaced by the FMP imposed by the lords to the detriment of rural freedom. After the invasions were over, the seigniors tyrannously made the villagers build and live in fortified centres, insisted on their use of central water mills, etc. Since the FMP is an advance over the SMP, this change was nevertheless an improvement, one forced on an unwilling ruling class by the revolutionary activity of the rural proletariat. After Georges Duby's *seigneurie banale* had been established, the labourer could commence the struggle to wring from the masters the hereditary rights possessed by the free farmer of modern times.

Is there anything worthwhile here? I think so. The guiding notion is that ordinary farmers, in fact, the *laboratores* of the world, can act just as can their masters, and can "liberate" themselves. Who can doubt that the people play a role in history, one that, in spite of their individual weakness, is great because

their mass gives them weight? So far so good, in fact, very good because historians, Marxian and others, often neglect the power and initiatives of the humble. At the same time, a boxer who outreaches himself, Dockès goes too far, too far by half.

One doubt surfaced during this historian's discussion of the capacity of slaves to multiply. He rejects the usual view that they do not breed successfully in captivity, especially when in work gangs, because R.W. Fogel and S.L. Engerman showed that North American black slaves increased in the nineteenth century. They had to, Dockès says somewhat mechanically (nothing about climate, nourishment, etc.), because the British had stopped the maritime slave traffic. Anent the Roman and early medieval slaves, there, he thinks, they did not multiply because the slaves practised infanticide. Although the poor assuredly do not wish to bear the burden of providing hands for the masters, he adduces no evidence showing that the lords knew their labourers were diminishing the potential labour force. Even the church seemed quiescent here. While opposing the "exposure" of infants, it did little to prevent parents selling them into servitude. It also prohibited parents sleeping together with their small children, a prescription surely having more motives than fear of infanticide. With no more evidence than this, what can be said?

Since learning promotes caution, a second doubt is prompted by exaggeration. Adverted to above, Dockès' devout Melania may have freed troops of slaves and given away provincewide properties. If so, it may likewise be true that another lady of good family mentioned by Palladius (*Lausiac History* 55, 3) named Silvana, memorized 5,500,000 lines of the Christian Fathers, wherefore, we learn, "she was freed from knowledge falsely so called, and, flying on wings thanks to the grace of these books...transformed herself into a spiritual bird and so journeyed to Christ." Surely the greatest take-off until Howard Hughes flew his outsized Spruce Goose a foot or two in the air over the waters off California, but was Melania as rich as Silvana was learned?

This brings us to a more general problem, one no more than touched on by the author. The poor were not the only rebels. Late Roman times saw many fugitives and many revolts, all undermining imperial defence. Reflecting this history, Vegetius Renatus (*Epitoma rei militaris* 3, 10) exaggeratedly asserted that "however small, no nation can be utterly destroyed by its enemies unless it consumes itself by its own hatreds." Similarly, in spite of his obvious motive, Salvian was surely truthful when he claimed that citizens sometimes fled to the barbarians to escape the crushing burden of exactions. What such ancients were adverting to, as our author himself avows in an aside, was a general withdrawal from society not only by slaves, but also by *coloni*, *curiales* (a group ranging from substantial yeoman farmers to wealthy burghers - to use anachronistic terms), and by members of all but the richest classes. And, indeed, the bizarre abnegation of Dockès' saintly Melania herself does not smack of Rome's ancient ideal citizenship. In short, revolts there were, but it is more significant that man in the late empire sought to withdraw into autarchic independence in

the economic sphere, into provincial or regional independence in the political arena, and from family and city into the solitary life of the hermitage and monastery. Similar tendencies were also observable during the collapse of the Carolingian empire, but this later withdrawal was not as intense as that of post-Constantinian Rome. Although momentarily retarded by renewed invasions, the new medieval growth was everywhere visible. Could it therefore be that the "upper classes" were conspiring with their "chattels" to abolish the latter's slavery?

Although it seems evident that, without markets, there is no *esclavagisme*, the author does not much investigate this side of his SMP. Indeed, after Rome reached its peak in the early empire, he scarcely mentions markets at all in spite of the continuation of a similar if slightly weakened *villa* economy into the early middle ages. Two points may be made here. The times when *esclavagisme* was most successful were, as noted above, during the expansion of Latin civilization in the Roman republic and that of western Europe in modern times, and it is noteworthy that both SMPs were designed for agricultural exportation. This fact, and here I agree with Dockès, does not seem to mean that slaves could not continue to be the basic labour force even if the *villa* no longer had the large gangs of the "true blue" SMP and was more interested in self-sufficiency than in exportation. Slavery is simply a legal term describing the dependency of the *laboratores*, and there were several times in Roman imperial history and the early middle ages when slaves must have been relatively abundant. During the third century German wars, the fifth century invasions, and the spread of the Carolingian empire into Europe's eastern pagan frontier ample supplies of slaves must have been obtained for the Latin market. It is therefore likely that slaves were available for labour even though the economy was autarchic.

Still, what about the *colonus* and the obviously related problem of the slave gang? Putting aside household workshops similar to those in Russia's eighteenth century manors, the Merovingian *gynceae*, and other small "factories," what need was there for great gang-worked agricultural enterprise in the later empire with its shrinking cities and vanishing markets? To cite the wealth of Symmachus or Melania is pointless because these exceptional persons, as described here and by Moses Finley, have little to do with an export economy. In brief, it is probable that, in spite of significant revivals owing to the availability of captives, simple slavery was in slow decline throughout late antiquity and the early middle ages, and, more significantly, that our historian's *esclavagisme* had all but vanished by the third century. In fact, Dockès himself agrees with this assessment, but does not come to the necessary conclusion that, if *esclavage* remained and *esclavagisme* did not, there was a break lasting upwards of six centuries in the progress from the SMP to the FMP!

Another point of some significance is this historian's lack of clarity concerning the power of the masses. On one hand, they were able to pull down the Roman empire and free themselves, and, on the other, the masters ruled with unimaginable brutality for around four or five centuries. Why was this tyranny

not destroyed earlier? In short, although this is a possible reconstruction of the history, I suspect the author of trying to have it both ways: the workers are omnipotent, but let us anyway wash our cheeks with tears as big as crocodile eggs to lament their stripes. To claim that the generalization of the water mill and of the fortified village were examples of the landlords' exploitative use of labour, however, is something different. Indeed, following the unpublished work of Stephen Marglin (to be quoted below), Dockès seems convinced that almost every technological "advance" was created simply to exploit the working classes.

A difficulty here is that, insofar as the argument about "exploitation" is true, it is self-evident. Anyone introducing a technological innovation naturally hopes to get a greater return on his investment or work at less cost or effort. If this innovation is sponsored by a hirer of labor, the lesser cost or effort is often to be measured by the greater gain he derives from his laborers. Still, even if, as stated earlier, the author's statistical proofs seem fanciful, he may well be right about the hardships wreaked on the rustics by the introduction of the water mill and other innovations fostered by the lords. "Well be right," that is, as long as we confess that the water and windmills, wheeled ploughs, harnesses, and other useful things could not have so damaged the mass of the population that they rose against the masters. Had they done so, the exploiters would have soon been overthrown, and there would have been no middle ages at all, not to speak of an FMP, whatever that may be.

A somewhat similar case may be made concerning "encastlement", or erecting fortified villages or castles with attached settlements in western Europe during the tenth century. Here, partly because Dockès follows his scholarly guides too obediently, our author walks a slippery tightrope. The building of fortifications, we learn, had nothing to do with the invasions of the eighth through the tenth century because these were all but over when we begin to hear of such settlements. Why then did once-free farmers voluntarily enter these fortified prisons and submit to the yoke of the lords? They "slit their own throats" because the endemic revolts of those seeking freedom precipitated such anarchy that, in the midst of general mayhem, many exchanged freedom for security.

This possible reconstruction of events is at best partial. That men did not get around to recording the building of hilltop or fortified villages until the invasions were nearly over tells us only that they did not record it. Who argues from silence about ages notoriously wanting documentation? Suppose, however, that the fortifications were actually built only after the invasions. A possible explanation is that, if invasion still haunted them, men merely reacted after the event and not in time for it. The enlarged *enceintes* built by the towns between the Rhine and the Loire in the fourteenth century are an example of that normal human experience. The enclosed areas were soon to be filled with a normally multiplying population, but, the growth failing, the walls remained half empty until long after the middle ages. Another motive may also be

wedded to the ones given above. Being a necessary definition of urban or seigniorial independence in a politically highly decentralized world, a capacity of self-defence was much prized even in times that were not especially warlike. This, I think, has much to do with the balance of powers described as characteristic of the high middle ages earlier in this essay.

Some may also object that the author has not recognized the superiority of free to slave labour, and the fact that slavery clearly impedes invention and the introduction of technological change. The literature on this question is quickly rehearsed in this book, and, in my view, the author leans toward the saner position, although not far enough. He argues that a large agricultural exploitation with a SMP slave gang system enjoyed the same advantage over a commensurate area divided into many individual farms owing rent or a measure of labour that the factory system of the CMP had over a series of domestic workshops. "Inefficiency" did not destroy the SMP, but instead the revolutionary drive of the slaves to free themselves. Proved by the Nazi foreign labour system, Spain's Bolivian mines, and Roman *latifundia*, also, his second point is that slavery offers no impediment to innovation.

Much of this argument seems sound. Centralized large-scale enterprise such as factory-CMP and Roman/American-SMP has obvious advantages over small and disunited production systems. But is it enough to say that this excellent system failed only because of the inefficiency induced by, so to speak, the revolt of the masses? Should not the author also have put into his equation the obvious fact that, although centralization has many advantages, so also does its opposite? Under aerial bombardment during the last war, for example, German industry profitted from decentralization. During the introduction of medieval waterpowered fulling, lone rural mills were more efficient than the many guild shops of the towns. And think of the recent electronic revolutions! Many examples, in fact, indicate that the wide variety of possible circumstances dictates no one royal road to profit or social advancement, but instead many.

That innovation took place several times when slavery was important, furthermore, proves only that this kind of labour is not a total impediment. Does it, however, slow innovation down? Thinking of slavery, for a moment, as just one way of mobilizing labour, let us place masters, whether private owners or public officers, and their workers in various economic contexts. If the economy is growing, for example, the masters want to profit from their labour and anything that will make it go further to bring greater profits is to the good. Excluding those, both masters and labourers, who are overtaxed by the new techniques, innovative machinery is then welcomed by everybody. If, on the other hand, the economy is shrinking, the masters' desires for machines may be impeded by the labourers' reluctance to hasten off to the auction block or the shape-up. To this equation another should be added. When the costs of its acquisition and exploitation are cheap, hand labour of any kind, slave or free, can slow the installation of new machinery; when dear, however, it encourages it, preventing it only by sabotage or violence. Slavery, in fine, is merely an

especially coercive way of using men or women, having, in and of itself, nothing to do with forwarding or retarding innovation. It follows, furthermore, that freedom does not either. It is, as Jacopone da Todi would have said, like loving god: there will be no *do ut des*. If you love freedom, you must love it for itself, and not for any good it will do you or mankind.

Lastly, it is probably fair to say that Dockès shares today's ambivalence about the Marxian tradition. His hands are washed before he operates on the body social to uncover the SMP and FMP. A lustral reference to horrible "concentration camps" distances him from Stalin. Generally loyal but not slavish, he notes that M&E failed to predict the advance of the "capitalist" economy after 1860. And so on. What disturbs him most is M&E's teaching on the capacity of material things and technologies to act on man in history and deprive him of a capacity to act freely. The matter comes up early in the book in regard to the role of mechanical invention in history, and we see, as we indeed know, that M&E shared some of the qualities described by Dockès as "the mechanistic position" of "vulgar materialism". The fact that they also proposed the "liberation" of the wage slave by means of his own action is nevertheless taken to mean that M&E's determinist attitudes are describable as casual witticisms or that they only rarely obtrude in their work. The author therefore contrasts "certain" of Marx's writings with the "totality of [his] work," asserting that he himself has "remained faithful to what is essential in Marx's theory of history." What is not faced here, it seems to me, is simply that the great *barbatus* not only wanted to assert man's capacity to act freely, but also to tell his readers that, as a scientist, he knew that men were shaped by their history. The latter side of Marx, indeed, prompted him to assert with pride in the preface to the first edition of his *Capital* (1967) that his method, "from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains," and that consequently he will not blame the "capitalist or the landlord" for their behaviour. The fact that he often wrote polemical history and, figuratively speaking, beheaded those who differed with him, does not erase this side of his mind.

More than anything else, even if he must gloss over some of M&E's express teachings, Dockès wants to show that man is capable of changing or transcending his history. This belief is based on a particular view of what man is doing on earth. To him, as noted at the beginning of this essay, "liberation" is the "concrete goal" of all mankind. I do not know what the author means, and am even nagged by the suspicion that the word "concrete" is added simply because the argument is so diaphanous. Possibly he means that man will really experience the natural freedom and equality the Roman lawyers and their Greek teachers once dreamt about, as well as the brotherhood the Stoics and their Christian successors preached? The problem is, it seems to me, that, in talking about mankind and its warring classes, the author has lost sight of individual men, the entities whose sum make up mankind. Obviously men want to be

free, but what does that mean for their brother men? A definition reflecting human experience is needed.

Is not what each man wants simply the freedom to do what he wants? Does that desire have much to do with the liberation of all mankind? I believe it does, but cannot see that it has much to do with equality's brotherhood. Given our necessary incapacity to know the future, or, when we do, our inability to avoid threatened disasters or to accumulate a surely sufficient store of life's necessities, given, indeed, our justified fear of the death that presses hard on us, what does the freedom to do what we want have to do with our brother's freedom? Often something, but often not, and, in fact, our survival may well require that he does not do what he wants or even that he dies. A similar impediment, moreover, is attached to the transitory causes that bind groups or classes together against their real or fancied enemies. Even while the "oppressors" are being destroyed, the group, paced by the leaders it chose or threw up, constantly dissolves into its component parts, the partially blind and inadvertently self-centred individuals described above. In fine, I am inclined to argue that, whatever improvements in the relationship of man to man may have taken place in the past, it cannot be shown that they have anything to do with man's desire to do what he wants. Nor does it seem likely that, although men can be shown to participate actively in their own liberation or enslavement, such activity shows that they are free from the history that formed them. The fact that a man does what he wants does not prove that he is free to choose what he wants to do.

A related issue is that Dockès seems to have the idea that man's presumed ability to free himself from his history is altogether beneficent. Perhaps so, but, although initially compelling, this idea forfeits much of its appeal when examined. To understand the actions of a "wilful" person unformed by history is impossible because such a being is one among many random, wholly different, and unpredictable entities, beings in, and inhabitants of, a world of nonsense. Still, it is surely miserable to forgo the hope of being able to perform a free, unmotivated, and unprofitable act. More, could it be that, although history is about men, men have nothing to say about it? Yes, quite possibly so, but, since, like its opposite, this proposition cannot be demonstrated, it seems necessary to confess that the limitations of the mind nature implanted in us offer two contradictory ways of viewing man in life. On one hand, we can scarcely consider ourselves "moral" persons unless we are free to make choices, and, on the other, all other men become incomprehensible if they possess the same freedom.

Because nothing can be done to resolve this tormenting mystery, one should search for ways of handling it that enhance knowledge. There are, I think, many fashions of combining freedom and determination in human history, of which two seem particularly apposite here. A man can attribute ineluctable determination to his or his party's conjectures about historical or spiritual progress. If he is excessively righteous, he can then arrest and slay others who try to impede his "progress" or movement, attributing to his enemies freedom

of choice and responsibility for their deeds. Unhappily, not a few Christians favoured this course in the past. A similar intolerance was also and still remains one of M&E's greatest attractions in a world infected by social ills. The dire maladies resulting from such belief, however, make one seek a different way. Concerning our inner selves, our ideologies and religions, one guesses, we may serve by example, trying to become models for others, always judging ourselves as free and responsible. About the role of others in history, whose freedom or determination we cannot know, restraint is the better course. Spinoza tried (*Tractatus politicus* 1, 4) to view man's action and passions with the detachment used in mathematics or in investigating nature's storms. Men ought not be blamed, simply investigated in order to understand their behaviour. He would allow, I think, the restraint or even execution of men for self-defence; what he prohibits is obfuscating our view of the world by censoriousness directed against other men.

There is a final question. Is life is better nowadays than in the past? The author several times states that the "surplus labour" extracted by the masters of today's CMP is no smaller in proportion to the total amount of labour than the surplus extracted long ago under the SMP or the FMP. One is even treated to a wonderful and possibly truthful footnote arguing that the "rate of exploitation" is probably higher in the United States than in the average "undeveloped" country. Marx and before him Fourier had nevertheless noted that the factory typical of the CMP is a "palliated prison," whereas the Roman (and American?) SMP was a prison "pure and simple". If then a modern worker or farmer is no more remunerated by his boss or his government than a Roman slave, *colonus*, or medieval serf, what was it that mitigated the prisoner's sentence? Could technological advance have enabled today's "exploited" to surrender a higher percentage of the profits derived from their work, and still live passably well?

Almost surely so. To this assertion, however, Dockès would undoubtedly add that technology is made by men, and is not something external to him and his mind. Who would disagree? This unexceptionable argument is hazar- dously strained, however, when he repeats as an absolute proposition Marglin's saying that "technological progress [is] a by-product of the exploitation of men by other men." One imagines that this "progress" refers to man's creation or introduction of useful objects and mental techniques. If so, the truthful part of this proposition is distressingly obvious. If a man and a woman are together, and an invention derives from their commerce, it seems probable that both were using or exploiting the other. All one has so far said is that the invention took place among men. The issue then is the difference between exploitation and use, the latter being mutually beneficial exploitation and the former mutually harmful use. Is all use exploitation? Is marriage nothing more than the cohabitation of two, a large beast bullying a smaller? Besides, as Dockès has himself rightly insisted, although each slave or worker is weak relative to each master, their collective force, in the long run, is as strong as, or stronger than, the masters'. To resume, in spite of the obvious fact that, in any system of own-

ership or direction, whether that of private or community property, the owners or officers are often vicious, it seems unlikely that most use is exploitation.

To continue with the argument attributed to Marglin, moreover, one cannot help but wonder if it is likely that men look at nature's raw matter and invent the steam engine or that they examine propositions and derive the law of non-contradiction for no other motive than that of using or exploiting their neighbours more successfully. Admittedly, the desire to take a portion of another's life to amplify one's own is tempting, but could that be the principal reason men think and look at the world? The answer is "no". Because nature is not part of man, but rather man of nature, what animates man cannot only be man's relationship to other men; the larger part must be man's relationship to nature or the world. It was useful when the modern secular levites replaced anthropomorphic deities with man, but the game becomes futile if man tries to replace the cosmos with himself. However intense, man's internecine battles cannot have been the only or even the prime motive for the invention of the steam engine, for example, nor could they have inspired the logic of the law of non-contradiction. Primarily, one thinks, man's circumstance in the world obliges him to discover such things in order to use the nature that made him. Once obviously useful things or ideas like the above appear, moreover, only the near obliteration of the species would prevent their spread. I therefore recommend that we accord to nature and the cosmos the same independence Dockès attributes to man alone. Once incorporated in man's material memory and memorials, a machine or logical proposition may well determine far more of his actions than present battles between his classes. In conclusion, I suspect that what Dockès calls "vulgar materialism" is far more "concrete" than his mystical deification of man, just as "vulgar Marxism", with its investigation of who gets what in what system of production and social order, has often proved more revealing than M&E's aggressive and "religious" dogmatism. Mayhap the only sound Marxist is a "vulgar" one!

Still, I dare not summon readers to worship man's technology or thought. A price has been paid for the undoubted advance seen in human history. Innovation, one says, is and has always been advantageous to the health and longevity of mankind. Yes, but, in the short run, every advance wounded or destroyed some part of the world, some beast, or some man or group of men. In the long run, then? Again yes, but today's man is surely a victorious type of the species, all others having been obliterated by nature or by their advancing brethren. Lastly, that the mind nature has implanted in man may destroy the world tomorrow evokes respect, but not enthusiasm.

To return to Dockès, I have rarely read a book that made me question so many propositions I had come to take for granted. True, I have not abandoned my perceptions or preconceptions, but this Frenchman's turbulent rapid columns certainly exercised my thin white or red lines in lively manoeuvres. Perchance, also, I have failed to see that they have been ruptured and are about to be driven from the field.

