



THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ENSLAVEMENT AND EXPLOITATION: SETTING THE STAGE FOR MODERN HUMAN TRAFFICKING

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Abstract:

Enslavement and exploitation continue today across the globe and the term human trafficking has become a contemporary catch-all phrase to include a variety of abuses. Exploitation under the umbrella of human trafficking is often framed as a new issue in today's discourse, or as an exception to an otherwise innocuous world system of progress, democracy, and global capitalism. However, if we examine the thinking that has undergirded the various phases of slavery and other types of exploitation, we find a diversity of rationalization for the kinds of abuses common in various historical eras and today. This essay explores the writing of key philosophers often associated with the development of democratic society, particularly in Western Europe and North America. The essay connects the thinking that laid the foundation for the global slave trade of the colonial era to the thinking that supports the current systems of neoliberalism and global capitalism. Threads are traced across key philosophical work to illustrate some of the common assumptions made today in western civilization that set the stage for our current predicament of widespread human trafficking. The essay builds upon the argument that the rationalization of the global slave trade in the colonial era are still present, even if latent, in the rationalization of exploitation for global profit-making today.

Keywords: philosophical foundations, enslavement, exploitation, modern human trafficking

1. Introduction

The situation is grim when we look at the vast numbers of people being exploited across the planet (International Labour Organization 2020). Looking to philosophers (Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Burke, Marx and Weber) may provide us with some insights into how exploitation in the form of slavery, exploitation and human trafficking have been rationalized. Some of the foundational theorists in philosophy speak about

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enslavement and offer their societies moral, economic and social justifications for the abuse and exploitation of other humans. We know that slavery never ended (Pinkster 2015), contrary to a widely accepted assumption in places like the United States (Thomas 2008). Why would we then assume that the thinking that undergirded the slavery of the past not continue today? Perhaps the philosophical frameworks of the past should be further interrogated in ways that we may not have considered prior, and could potentially offer ways of thinking our way out of the exploitation and enslavement we still see today. Are we making some of the assumptions about society and its members that our predecessors made, and do those assumptions perpetuate the exploitations and abuses we know exist world-wide? First a look to ancient thinkers of antiquity is needed, with an eye for the thought that laid the bedrock for slavery and exploitation in western civilization. Next, an interrogation is needed into the ideas modern-era philosophers, particularly those writing in the age of European colonial expansion, and whose work may lend itself to thinking about slavery and exploitation. Inquiring across major these writers' ideas and eras helps us to understand how those in the past thought about enslavement and exploitation. These ideas from the past illuminate the present circumstances, and understanding their blind spots may help to better avoid the traps that these ideas set up.

Finally, by tracing the thinking of the past up to the present, a new line of sight will emerge on the issues with potential directions for informed and productive praxis to more effectively address enslavement, human trafficking, and exploitation occurring on a grand scale across the planet. We should not be surprised that the thinking inspired and informed by early periods of history might face the same social, political, economic and intellectual traps that continue to plague society today. What is needed is to challenge some of the assumptions which are then inadvertently contributing to the continuation of these issues, or at the very least, these assumptions prevent us from truly transcending barriers that can account for the contemporary human condition.

Inherent tensions have emerged within the debates and discourses on human trafficking. The critical debates in the anti-trafficking arena highlight the tensions that are also continue to be interwoven into the philosophical underpinnings of neoliberal capitalism that also drive the exploitation of large swaths of people today. The distinction between present human trafficking and the historical and state-sanctioned slavery of the Antebellum South continues to be debated between historians (Blight 2015; n.d.; Patterson 1982; Patterson & Zhuo 2018), social scientists (Dummermuth 2019; Hepburn & Simon 2013) and organizations (Free The Slaves 2020). Though these debates will not be explored with this paper, a clearer link between the rationalizations and justifications of social practices contributing to slavery and exploitation throughout history may contribute to the dialogues. Distinctions between the macro-scale practices of state sanctioned slavery throughout history, and the micro-scale, often ad-hoc and idiosyncratic realities of human trafficking make comparisons across time difficult, and the expressed purpose of this paper to explore the philosophical underpinnings may offer a way to link the thinking that underlies both phenomena. Further, scholars point to

corruption (Moore January 2015; April 2015) and co-optation (Godrej 2014) of anti-trafficking organizations by powerful political and economic interests, as well as conflation of sex work and sex trafficking in anti-trafficking discourse (Bernstein 2018; Brooks 2020; Flanigan & Watson 2019; Kempadoo, Sanghera, and Pattanaik 2012) making resolving these debates in the near future unlikely. This paper endeavors to delineate potential intellectual tools that may inform and clarify the issues in this debate, but will likely not bring together the entrenched sides.

In order to synthesize and understand the ways that philosophical discourse has informed ideas about slavery, Michel Foucault's genealogical approach to discourse analysis, exemplified in his book *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (1975/1995) offers a useful approach through which to better understand the flow of ideas through time. How the thinkers included below thought about slavery, and influenced the intellectual discourses of their times (and the subsequent centuries), from informing political documents, to the development and perpetuation of economic and social structures is important in order to uncover how they subtly inform our present practices and ideologies. The purpose of this essay is to tease out the threads that, like human trafficking, remain hidden from view but are nonetheless ever-present in our world.

2. A genealogy of the justifications of slavery

If we are to begin with quintessential ancient thinkers, there is no better place to start than Plato. Plato engaged with issues related to slavery from the vantage point of living in an ancient society inundated with enslaved people. The practice of enslaving humans was an integral part of Greek society, so we can assume some discussion and engagement with the topic was occurring among Plato's contemporaries. This excerpt from *Gorgias* of a conversation between Socrates and Callicles illustrates the issues being debated in society during these times.

"Socrates: Then according to you, one wise man may often be superior to ten thousand fools, and he ought to rule them, and they ought to be his subjects, and he ought to have more than they should. This is what I believe that you mean (and you must not suppose that I am word-catching), if you allow that the one is superior to the ten thousand?"

Callicles: Yes; that is what I mean, and that is what I conceive to be natural justice—that the better and wiser should rule and have more than the inferior.

Socrates: Stop there, and let me ask you what you would say in this case: Let us suppose that we are all together as we are now; there are several of us, and we have a large common store of meats and drinks, and there are all sorts of persons in our company having various degrees of strength and weakness, and one of us, being a physician, is wiser in the matter of food than all the rest, and he is probably stronger than some and not so strong as others of us—will he not, being wiser, be also better than we are, and our superior in this matter of food?"

Callicles: Certainly." (Plato 380 BC)

One can see that the debate over the place of slavery in a society extends as far back as Socrates' era and Socrates here is clarifying Callicles' thinking as to whether the difference in wisdom between people could justify the wise ruling the less-wise of society. Calvert (1987) argued that the evidence was clear: "*Plato included slaves in his ideal state*" (p. 367). Calvert claimed that, despite the third class in Plato's Republic being precluded from owning slaves or being sovereign over others, the philosopher class of the wise guardians of society in Plato's utopia would certainly have sovereignty over others. Plato described the naturally slavish soul of those without wisdom, which Calvert argued would mean that they "...should live their lives in accordance with this predominance" (1987, 370). We are left wondering whether or not this element in Plato's thinking is just an artifact of ancient society, or whether this kernel of rationale for enslavement set a trap that continues in our contemporary thinking.

We would be hard pressed to find a more influential thinker on Western thought from the age of antiquity through the Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution and into the Modern age than Aristotle. The godfather of the scientific method, Aristotle's emphasis on empirical thinking has driven many of the most important developments in modern civilization (Humphries n.d.). Aristotle's thought was central to the Enlightenment paradigm, and Aristotle's privileging of logic and reason is at the heart of the Modern era. Aristotle's philosophy is typically associated with realism and positivism and the organization of many of our contemporary divisions of academic subjects can be tied back to Aristotelian thinking. Hierarchy, logic, reason and division are all key aspects of Aristotelian philosophy, not only in the fields of mathematics and the sciences, but also in law, and ethics. Aristotle's rationalization of slavery is a racialized and oppressive thread throughout western civilization, the Enlightenment, and the scientific world. Knowledge, nature, truth and society have all been ominous concepts, empty without the power differentials at play within human interaction, and manipulated for personal use depending. The empty vessel of the concept truth always had in it the potential to be filled with all sorts of biases, inequalities, misuses, abuses and exploitations. The power to determine what is truth and what is not comes with it the power to wield that truth as a weapon over others.

Assumptions regarding social hierarchy have been woven into Western thought since Aristotle, including the natural right of some having more power and privilege over others, and the natural order of things in the social world. Western thought traced back to Aristotle makes positivist links between the order of the social world, and the order in the empirical world of physics, chemistry and biology. To reinforce these social hierarchies as natural, Aristotle gave some attention in his philosophical and political work to the master/servant relationship. Aristotle suggested that due to natural differences in intelligence and talent (all empirically determinable), some individuals might be better off in a servile position and others may deserve better social standing due to their intellectual or physical prowess much like we might see among animals in nature. Aristotle saw the organization of the ancient city-state as right and good, with specific city state organizational structures like Athens, Sparta and Carthage as being particularly

superior in the world. He saw the Greek men as superior to others and the empirical evidence of this was the Greek superiority in the world at the time. If the world was our scientific laboratory, then imperial conquest, domination of other groups and geographic expansion were the experimental proof needed to establish the way nature was to be ordered. These developments were right and good, with the only support for such beliefs being that they were the reality and empirically observable. Aristotle's ancient thought may seem internally contradictory to our contemporary sensibilities, but we can trace some of our contemporarily embedded social DNA back to these ideas of the natural and right order of things within capitalism, western domination in global economics, paternalism in the workplace and maybe even how some rationalize exploitation like human trafficking. We continue to ignore aspects of our contemporary societies that reinforce exploitation based on gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, immigration status, economic and social class.

Aristotle's ideas about politics also reinforce these ideas of social hierarchy. According to Aristotle's thinking, humans gather together naturally in the polis and the purpose of the government is to promote the well-being of all citizens and the good of the whole community. Each of the various forms of human organizing and power structures had the potential to be perverted. Monarchy was not inherently bad but could be perverted to tyranny. Aristocracy had the potential to organize the most talented and intelligent members of society into positions of power where they would design the society so that all would benefit, but it could also be perverted into oligarchy. Finally, a constitutional government had the potential to be organized just so where the benefits were maximized and the drawbacks minimized; however, it could also be perverted to democracy where the majority group rules in their interest to the detriment of the minority.

Nyquist (2013) explored Aristotle's distinction of household slavery, where individuals possessed enslaved persons in their household to serve labor functions in ways similar to marital relationships and parental relationships serving private needs of the male citizen (which he considered natural and good) and political slavery in which despotism gave rise to enslavement of those who were not natural slaves (in other words Greek males) (Brace 2018). Clearly, a paternalistic attitude was inherent in Classical Greek thought. This delineation of who could be properly enslaved and who could not have been prevalent through the epoch African slave trade, the antebellum south, and we still see traces of it today in the discourse related to human trafficking.

Aristotle's ideas were inherently sexist and classist as he only saw Greek men as citizens, but saw outsiders and women as naturally inferior. Rather than the analytical logic of Aristotle's philosophy opening up avenues for emancipation and expanded liberty for women and slaves, he justified their oppression and exploitation. Since slavery was so widespread in Greek society, Aristotle needed to explain slavery empirically. Therefore, in Aristotle's work found in *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, he expanded his rationale for what he called *natural slavery* (Heath 2008). Slavery, according to Aristotle, is not only permissible but the right thing to do for the social good (Brace 2018), as these

husbands, fathers and slave owners could direct the labor of slaves and women in ways that are better and more beneficial for Greek society as a whole. Aristotle explained the master-slave relationship as symbiotic, arguing that in Aristotle's view, the existence of masters and slaves in society was a "...pairing of those who cannot exist without one another" (Brace 2018, 22), and that "*being enslaved was good for natural slaves*" (p. 22). Clearly, some of Aristotle's rationale lingered and was co-opted into the rationale of the ante-bellum southerners (Harper 1838), as well as the contemporary trafficker.

Aristotle's thinking is also an early philosophical and historical linkage between patriarchal attitudes and oppression toward out-groups. Aristotle viewed most of Asian culture as conducive to producing people who are natural slaves as well as "*unable to engage in global deliberation*" (Heath 2008, 251) to develop long-term goals toward a better life. In light of the elements mentioned above, the Aristotelian version of scientific method falls short when applied to human beings. Aristotle's thought even leaned a bit toward eugenics as he considered one's character to be largely affected by one's natural environment, which he conveniently extrapolated in a Greek-centric manner. Greece's mild, temperate climate, according to Aristotle, makes for naturally good rulers and barbarians, or those from more harsher climates, are conversely not good rulers. Aristotle further clarified that barbarians' cities are communities of slaves. Linguistically, we can see the link between slavery and xenophobia in ancient Greek culture, as even the term *slave* in the English language comes from the Latin root for *slav* or slavic person. According to Aristotle, since a happy life is a life lived in accordance with reason, and women and slaves are not endowed with reason, then Aristotle argued that women and slaves would be better off when someone who is endowed with reason takes charge of them. Tracing back Aristotle's thinking on slavery illustrates the inherently racist, sexist and xenophobic connection between the rationalizations of slavery and millennia of subsequent intellectual development in the Western world. Despite the positive contributions that Aristotle's thinking has had on the development of humankind, we cannot disentangle the intertwined elements of gender, race and social class bias inherent in these Aristotelian notions of reason, logic and truth, and their implications from antiquity to today. Further, Monoson (2011) found explicit use of Aristotle in many active pro-slavery voices in the Antebellum South. In particular, these actors used positivistic scientism of Aristotle's natural rights theory to explicitly justify enslaving Africans and to bring a level of sophistication to their position in propaganda and in the discourse.

The philosophical treatises on freedom, liberty and justice that were used as seminal foundations for the Declaration of Independence and United States Constitution also had elements that justified slavery. Thomas Hobbes is one example of a foundational thinker that influenced much of the development of liberal western society and governmentality. Much of Hobbes' discussion of slavery related to slavery from war. As Hobbs (1998) stated, "*If, on being captured or defeated in war or losing hope in one's own strength, one makes (to avoid death) a promise to the victor or the stronger party, to serve him, i.e. to do all that he shall command. In this contract the good which the defeated or weaker party*

receives is the sparing of his life, which could have been taken from him, in men's natural state, by right of war; and the good which he promises is service and obedience. "

While Hobbes attempts to contrast despotic rule and civil society in his writing never fully reconciled the notions of enslavement within his ideas about liberty. For Hobbes, the servant and slave were synonymous and whether that person became enslaved "*by war or ill fortune or even by his own idleness*" (Nyquist 2009, 11) was a matter for the state or sovereign, not the individual slaveowner. As Nyquist (2009) noted, the enslaved person according to Hobbes "*has nothing to complain about since whatever discipline his master imposes constitutes an alternative to the termination of life, which is the sovereign's prerogative*" (p. 11). Hobbes does a convenient sidestepping of the presence of slavery in his development of the structures of a civil society when he stated "*whenever the Master's power over their slaves [servi] in a common-wealth is absolute, it is thought to derive from a right of nature, not established by the civil law but prior to it*" (Hobbes 1998, 105).

As Nyquist (2009) also explained, Hobbes also removed maternal power from the family, transferring it to the *paterfamilias* and enshrining *Naturall Power* with paternalism in his conceptions of civil society (p. 18). Thus, Hobbes devalues women's role in society, putting women, wives especially, closer to his conception of servants than to men. As Nyquist noted, Hobbes was "*creating sustainable, systematic analogies among children, servants and civil subjects*" (p. 21) while stratifying the male head of household as analogous to the despot in his ability to rule over his wife, his children and his servants. As Graeber (2014) illustrated, patriarchy is not a timeless or primordial practice, but one that was cultivated over time and connected with the expansion of commercial markets and violence. "*It has always been something of a scandal for those who like to see the advance of science and technology, the accumulation of learning, economic growth- 'human progress,' as we like to call it- as necessarily leading to greater human freedom, a that for women, the exact opposite often seems to be the case*" (Graeber 2014, 178). These seeds will continue to sprout the paternalistic structures in Western societies to this day, and even driving the assumptions what is right and good in business, government and community. Strauss (1996) spent much of his book on Hobbes tying Hobbes' legacy back to Aristotle even as Hobbes noted his own anti-Aristotelian sentiments late in his writings (p. 79). Laird (1942) also emphasized the Aristotelian foundation of Hobbes own political theorizing despite Hobbes disagreement with Aristotle's views, in particular, the subject of slavery. As Hobbes stated in *Leviathan*, "*It is not therefore the victory that giveth the right of dominion over the vanquished, but his own covenant*" (ch. 20). Laird (1942) argued that Hobbes justification of slavery lie in the covenant, or agreement to the situation between both master and slave, even if the slave was under duress, much like the covenant between the sovereign and the citizens. Rather than reject enslavement, Laird suggested that Hobbes just shifted the justification from being situated in the law (Aristotle's natural law) to being situated between men themselves.

Another example among early modern philosophers is John Locke, who was intimately connected with the slave trade from Africa and in the colonies of Carolina and Virginia in the 17th century (Brace 2018). Numerous scholars have linked Locke's ideas

to founding thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson (Hellenbrand 1990; Malone 1948; Miller 1988; Peterson 1970; Sheldon 1991) and John Adams (Howe 1966; Morgan 1988). Brace (2018) argued that Locke was a “*glaring contradiction*” (p. 41). John Locke engaged the topic of slavery in two treatises on government (Locke 1689). Locke argued that since no one could give consent to enslave themselves, slavery was the result of “*...the state of war, continued between a lawful conqueror and a captive*” (1689, p. 115). Locke went on to argue that “*...every man has a “property” in his own “person”. The “labour” of his body and the “work: of his hands, we may say, are properly his*” (p.116). However, further into the same passage, Locke stated, “*children or servants could not cut the meat that their father or master had provided for them in common without assigning to everyone his peculiar part*” (p. 117). According to Dienstag (1996), “*...although Locke is capable of imagining a justified slavery, it can only be a kind of delayed death, the interval between the pronouncement of a just death sentence and its execution*” (p. 503). Dienstag further argues that it is useful to understand early American political thought as “*Lockean consensus*” (1996, p. 497) and that Locke’s ideas were particularly appealing to America’s founders because of an underlying protestant ethic in Locke’s work and for Locke’s ability to sidestep the realities of a material enslavement of human labor through a conflation of what Locke called “*political slavery*” or the enslavement of a free and rational mind. These intellectual gymnastics have had profound implications moving forward and we can see results of never fully engaging and rejecting the underlying notions of slavery and racial hierarchy.

Locke’s theories about freedom, liberty and justice were clearly biased (as countless historians have already noted) by the eurocentrism, sexism and paternalism of the day, and at the time, what may appear as glaring contradictions and hypocrisy, were perfectly acceptable from the educated and wealthy colonizing white male’s perspective. Locke owned stock in the Royal African Company which traded in slaves across the Atlantic Ocean. Yet, Locke argued that a man cannot enslave himself to another. Locke contradicted Aristotle’s ideas of natural slavery and made the claim that slaves can only become so by force and violence (Brace, 2018) and therefore as an alternative to killing someone in war, slavery was justified. Locke reaffirmed, through his administrative role in Carolina, the “*legislative power of life or death over their ‘negro slaves’*” (Brace 2018, 40). In Locke’s co-authored *The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina* (1669), he wrote “*Every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his negro slaves, of what opinion or religion soever*” (article 110), and yet he also contradicted this tract many times in his arguments that all people are born free.

Nyquist (2013) explained that, despite Locke’s work on liberty, his attitudes toward slavery further racialized the institution of slavery and exploitation of Africans, and the abuse toward indigenous Americans. Nyquist argued that this racialization occurred because of Locke’s subjectivising of the slave owner as the beneficiary of the spoils of war, which occurs outside civil society and thus not subject to the constraints of civil society. Locke also de-subjectivized the slave, following common attitudes of his time, in which Africans were “*construed as subhuman, monstrous transgressors*” (Nyquist,

337). Nyquist further argued that the collective attitudes of the time informed Locke's view that Native Americans "...inhabit a precivil (*sic*) temporality or primitive age" (p. 336).

Is John Locke's duplicity unique among the thinkers of his time? As Einhorn (2008) argued, "*The history of slavery cannot be separated from the history of business in the United States, especially in the context of the relationship between public power and individual property rights*" (Einhorn 2008, 491). Einhorn posited that the slaveholding contexts in which our political and economic institutions were formulated directly influenced what happened in the U.S. after abolition. According to Einhorn the entire American economic infrastructure on which our major business entities operate is still informed by anti-democratic conceptions of *sacred* property rights that stem from the days of slaveholding elites in the colonial and post-colonial periods. Einhorn also argued that many of our current federal and state tax policies can be traced back to decisions made to protect slave owners' plantation land holdings. As the author noted,

"...the idea that concern for protecting the existing distribution of property rights was ever intended to protect the ordinary "worker" is highly suspect—because the existing distribution of property rights before the Civil War defined many of the "workers" as chattel property" (Einhorn 2008, 501)

Tyson and Oldroyd (2019) provided further evidence that despite the generally proclaimed embracing of Enlightenment principles of liberty and reason in early American politics, the realities of even our foremost thinkers and leaders was far more pragmatic, as they selectively chose those aspects of Enlightenment philosophy that most conveniently represented their present situations. Tyson and Oldroyd argued that despite the *post haste* rationalization of the treatment of slaves by plantation owners as fair and kind, explained as an Enlightenment ethos that a slaveholder would never mistreat these expensive human investments, in reality, the empirical evidence of the management and accounting records provides a counter narrative. "*The accounts are noteworthy for their lack of focus on maximizing productivity and minimizing costs and thereby facilitating the efficient management of plantations*" (Tyson and Oldroyd 2019, 222). Tyson and Oldroyd attribute this to the unabashed capitalistic drive for a life of leisure and luxury that is apparent in the attitudes and records of the plantation-owning slaveholders. Tyson and Oldroyd illustrated the selective, conflicted and even hypocritical use of the Enlightenment era ideals to rationalize cruelty and exploitation. As Jaffa (2001) further clarified, "*...the metamorphosis of Lockean "rights" into Aristotelian "ends" (or vice versa) occurs in many of the documents of the founding*" [of America] (para 4).

Similarities to Locke's justifications of slavery also came from the Scottish Enlightenment and Edmund Burke. Burke saw historical progress of societies in the four stages of: savagery, barbarism, civilization, and commercial society (Miller 2017). This hierarchy of social development was the basis for his excusing of slavery, "*Nothing could excuse the slave trade at all, but the necessity we are under of peopling our colonies, and the consideration that the slaves we buy were in the same condition in Africa, either hereditary or*

taken in war" (Burke & Burke 1757, 2:128-29). Burke stated, "*Africa, time out of mind, had been in a state of slavery, therefore the inhabitants only changed one species of slavery for another*" (Kohn and O'Neill 2006, p. 203). This justification boils down to the idea that slaves during the African Slave Trade era were better off than in Africa because they were being slowly enlightened toward the civilizing project of commercial society.

Utilitarianism also had connections to the rationalization of slavery and exploitation in one of the movement's key figures, John Stuart Mill. Mill highlighted the importance of liberty and individual free will in the advancement of civilization. He argued for the limitation of the power of a government over its people. However, embedded in his thinking, which was informed by his time at the end of the age of imperialism and expansion, Mill also had biased perceptions about societies at different levels of development, particularly non-European societies. As Mill (1859) stated, "*Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting (sic) the end*" (p. 14). This attitude about hierarchies of societies, some of whom deserved brutality, and others who did not, is sprinkled throughout Mill's philosophy and was used to rationalize his own work in India House as a colonial administrator for the British Crown.

Jahn (2005) explained that two fields that employ the philosophy of John Stuart Mill to different ends are Political Theory and International Relations. Jahn argued that because these two fields do not cross-pollinate and collaborate in meaningful ways, their disciplinary entrenchment (an issue we still see all too often in the academy) causes these two fields to miss important aspects of Mill's thought. For instance, Political Theory as a discipline emphasizes Mill's liberalism with its notions of liberty and free speech. However, the field overlooks the active role Mill took in empire building in India on behalf of the British Empire, and the inextricable imperialistic elements woven into his philosophy. On the other hand, International Relations engaged with imperialism in Mills work, but does so in a way that "*is rooted in a need to justify the political inequality of humanity on cultural grounds*" (Jahn 2005, 600). Jahn's argument is that without the two fields critically examining the use of Mill in both fields to rationalize imperialism in its new and more obfuscated forms, we will continue to see the perpetuation of inequality across the globe.

Engaging with the topic of slavery was not only the purview of the philosophers of the early Modern era of European expansion and colonialism. In the Nineteenth Century, Karl Marx wrote extensively on the American Civil War and on slavery itself, with a particular interest in the connection between slavery and wage labor. Marx saw an important link between ending slavery in America and liberating the working class (Anderson 2019). One issue Marx noted was that truly free labor was undermined in the American South because even though cruel treatment of enslaved laborers often led to their death, there were growing sources of new and inexpensive slaves close by. As Marx stated,

"...the rice-grounds of Georgia, or the swamps of the Mississippi may be fatally injurious to the human constitution; but the waste of human life which the cultivation of these districts necessitates, is not so great that it cannot be repaired from the teeming preserves of Virginia and Kentucky." (1867, Volume 1)

What made the new manifestation of slavery in the American South distinct from other forms of slavery was its *"quintessentially modern social form of value production"* (Anderson, 2019, para. 2). To Marx, there was no division between the practice of enslaving laborers and the modern capitalist mode of production. *"It is slavery that has given value to the colonies, it is the colonies that have created world trade, and world trade is the necessary condition for large-scale machine industry"* (Marx 1847, 49-50). Contrary to common assumptions even upheld today, Marx (1867) analyzed the use of slaves in the plantation economies of the American South, the Caribbean islands and Latin America in the most brutal terms as slaveholders focused on extracting the most labor in the shortest period of time. For Marx, in the mind of the slave master, *"the duration of his life becomes a matter of less moment than its productiveness while it lasts"* (Marx 1867). Marx goes on to say that the goal of plantation slave management is to extract from the *"human chattel in the shortest space of time the utmost amount of exertion it is capable of putting forth."* (Marx 1867). In Volume 4 of *Capital*, Marx (1883) goes on to further connect the form of chattel slavery in the plantation economies of the Antebellum South firmly into the capitalism developing in the Modern era.

In the second type of colonies-plantations, where commercial speculations figure from the start and production is intended for the world market, the capitalist mode of production exists, although only in a formal sense, since the slavery of Negroes precludes free wage-labour, which is the basis of capitalist production. But the business in which slaves are used is conducted by capitalists. The method of production which they introduce has not arisen out of slavery but is grafted on to it. In this case the same person is capitalist and landowner. (Marx 1883, *Capital* Volume 4)

Thus, if we take Marx's concern for the use of slave labor in the Antebellum South seriously, we see that enslavement and exploitation (in their present and diverse forms) still has lingering effects today on wage labor, anti-union attitudes, wealth inequality, and extreme poverty, all of which still prevail throughout the South. In our state of Virginia, we see that Marx gave particular attention to the sale and distribution of slaves from the region and its importance to the Virginia economy here in the authors' own backyards.

In the north-west highlands of Virginia, the number of slaves is 15,000, whilst the twenty times as large free population consists mostly of free farmers. The eastern lowlands of Virginia, on the other hand, count well-nigh half a million slaves. Raising Negroes and the sale of the Negroes to the Southern states form the principal source of income of these lowlands. (Marx 1861)

Burkett (1999) used Marx (1967) to explain the how the development of industrial capitalism also *"...grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation..."*

(Marx 1967, 763). Burkett (1999) also employed Marx's conceptions of *wage slavery* and *free appropriation* to illustrate how the logic of capital distinguishes its own ability and rationale to exploit both natural resources and labor of the working class to its own profit in a manner that society deems acceptable and right, despite the resulting ecological devastation and brutal toll capitalism has on the lives of the working class. The Marxist lens on the commodification of labor helps us to understand the inevitability of the conditions we see across the globe in the context of global capitalism. These conditions were predicted by Marx over a century and a half ago, and yet unlike Marx's predictions, we have not seen a revolution of the working class to counter their exploitation by capitalist regimes. Rather, we see an inter-exploitation and an intra-exploitation within and across societies that has become ingrained in our social and economic DNA in the Twenty First Century. Anderson (2017) even argued that the issues that the left faces today in attempting to unify the working classes to address wealth inequality are comparable to the issues Marx was attempting to engage during and after the American Civil War. Anderson claimed that the Anti-slavery movement would be a watershed moment for a working-class revolution in the nineteenth century. Perhaps, Marx would have said the same for the anti-trafficking movement today.

Finally, in the early Twentieth Century, Max Weber's work on religiosity and capitalism is useful to link contemporary ideas about capitalism, society, hierarchy and labor to those earlier justifications of slavery and social stratification. Max Weber was a German sociologist whose *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) traced the linkage between Protestantism and the development of what he calls the "*peculiar modern Western form of capitalism*" (p. xxxvii). Weber suggested that this form of capitalism which he attributes to Western Europe and the United States is unique in its ethos or *spirit*. Weber defined spirit as "*a complex of elements associated in historical reality which we unite into a conceptual whole from the standpoint of their cultural significance*" (p. 13). Weber argued, "[u]nlimited greed for gain is not in the least identical with capitalism, and is still less its spirit" (p. Xxxi). Instead, Weber claimed "[w]e will define a capitalistic economic action as one which rests on the expectation of profit by the utilization of opportunities for exchange, that is on (formally) peaceful chances of profit" (p. xxxii). Weber further claimed that this economic system differed from eastern societies like China and India because of the "*the rational capitalistic organization of (formally) free labour*" (p. xxxiv). Weber argued that two factors distinguished modern Western capitalism: "*the separation of business from the household, which completely dominates modern economic life, and closely connected with it, rational book-keeping*" (p. xxxv).

What interested Weber was the "*connection of the spirit of modern economic life with the rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism*" (p. xxxix). Weber privileged the modern Western form of capitalism as he stated here, "[c]apitalism existed in China, India, Babylon, in the classic world, and in the Middle Ages. But in all these cases... this particular ethos was lacking" (p. 17). Weber's connected this spirit or ethos which framed work as a calling "*as if it were an absolute end in itself*" (p. 25). Weber argued that this spirit was actively socialized into people in Protestantism through "*...a long and arduous process of education*" (p. 25). Weber

further detailed the calling as follows: “[t]he only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world” (p. 40). Framing work as an “ascetic technique” (p. 105) was how Protestantism linked religiosity and economics, and conversely “[u]nwillingness to work is symptomatic of the lack of grace” (p. 105) and a rejection of Christian duty.

On the other end of the social spectrum from the working class, this Protestant ethic encouraged the accumulation of wealth in the upper classes, “as long as his moral conduct was spotless and the use to which he put his wealth was not objectionable, could follow his pecuniary interests as he would and feel that he was fulfilling a duty in doing so” (p. 120). Finally, we can see that this Protestant ethic supported the division of labor and wealth in a manner that could be deemed righteous and good. As Weber explained, “[t]he power of religious asceticism provided him in addition with sober, conscientious, and unusually industrious workmen, who clung to their work as to a life purpose willed by God” (p. 120). Weber’s outlining of the way in which this Protestant (work) ethic functioned to build a spirit of capitalism unique to Western Europe and the United States can still be useful in understanding the rationalization of neoliberalism on a global scale today. If the Protestant ethic still remains ingrained in contemporary Western capitalism as a spirit or ethos, we ought not be surprised that exploitation of the working class remains as well.

As we see from the lineage from the ancient thinkers to the modern ones in how rationalization and justification of slavery has taken many forms. Graeber argued,

“There is a direct line from the new Roman conception of liberty- not as the ability to form mutual relationships with others, but as the kind of absolute power of ‘use and abuse’ over the conquered chattel who make up the bulk of a wealthy Roman man’s household- to the strange fantasies of liberal philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, and Smith, about the origins of human society in some collection of thirty- or forty-year-old males who seem to have sprung from the earth fully formed...” (2014, p. 210)

3. Conclusion- What does this tell us about now?

From our journey through some of the key philosophical foundations of our thinking in western society, we now have some potential backwards facing lenses through which we can view the various rationalizations of enslavement and exploitation to antiquity. We can trace the rationale back to ways of thinking about social hierarchies that justified the exploitation or enslavement of others based on: their nature, their origin, their bad luck in war, the economic benefits they bring, their perceived betterment through the progress of historical development, and even the will of God. In Plato, we see the justification through wisdom. In Aristotle, we see justification of enslavement due to the inherent superiority of Greek males over the naturally slavish character of women and barbarians. In Hobbes we see the naturalizing of servitude in civil society and sidestepping the inherent contradictions between his notions of liberty and his paternalistic In Locke, we

see a bracketing of enslavement as outside civilized society and justified through acts of war and violence, which civil society does not govern, and in his own example as profiting personally from the slave trade. In Burke, we see the justification of African slaves due the assumption that all Africans were already in a state of slavery, and thus, sidestepping the ethics of enslavement in the New World. In Mill, we see the justification of exploitation based on cultural factors, with his work in India for the British Empire exemplifying the rationale for mistreatment of colonial subjects based on their inferior and barbaric cultures. In Marx, we see a growing acknowledgement of the connections between slave-based plantation economies and capitalism in the industrialized regions, and the linkages between the working class and enslaved persons. Finally, in Weber, we see justification of wealth inequality based on God's will, and the connection between Western Protestantism and contemporary neoliberal capitalist logic. We are brought back to a question posed by Graeber (2014) "*If our political and legal ideas really are founded on the logic of slavery, then how did we ever eliminate slavery?*" (p. 211). For the purposes of this paper, I would revise this to ask if we ever eliminated slavery-like exploitation in a variety of forms.

We also see clearer connections between Platonic idealism, scientific positivism, classical liberal economics, traditional conservatism, Marxism, religious ideology and exploitation. In this essay, the slippery slope between justifications for wealth inequality, justification for exploitation of others, and the widespread exploitation, trafficking and enslavement of humans contributes to better understand the two-way mirror of righteous indignation toward exploitation in our policies, and the simultaneously continuing practices and assumptions that set up exploitation and enslavement in the first place.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

About the Author

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