

CHAPTER 2 - COMTE, DUNOYER, AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMISTS ON SLAVERY: THE CLASS STRUCTURE OF SLAVE SOCIETIES AND THE DEBATE ABOUT THE PROFITABILITY OF SLAVE LABOUR¹

THE PROBLEM OF SLAVERY AND EXPLOITATION

The study of slavery was important to Comte and Dunoyer because, like the liberal Guizot and the socialist Marx, they traced the development of western European societies back to the fall of the Roman Empire. They believed that a large part of the class structure and the political and legal values of the modern European world were the historical result of the evolution of two systems of coerced labour: the institution of slavery in the ancient world and the institution of serfdom which emerged during the feudal period. They believed that the breakdown of the ancient slave economies had exerted a determining influence over what was to follow in European history, in particular with legal theory, political culture and impediments to the emergence of a liberal industrial economic system.

In so many respects slavery typified the very opposite of what they were struggling to achieve in the Restoration, that is, to create a legal system which protected individual liberty and property and an economic system in which labour was completely free of the restrictions and burdens which had hampered economic development in the ancient and medieval world.² The persistence of slave societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth

¹Parts of this chapter were presented as a paper at a meeting of the History of Economic Thought Society of Australasia, July 1989, in Canberra.

²The formation of Comte's theory of exploitation and historical development can be gauged from his lengthy discussion in Book 5 of his *Traité de législation, ou exposition des lois générales suivant lesquelles les peuples prospèrent, dépérissent ou restent stationnaire*, 4 vols (Paris: A. Sautelet, 1827). Here he provides a sophisticated and detailed sociological and economic analysis of slave societies in both the ancient world and the contemporary empires of England, Holland, Spain, and the Southern States of the United States of America. The nature of the exploitation of slaves by the unproductive aristocratic class, the way in which the form of plantation production determines the degree of slave exploitation, the relationship between slave owners and the protection of their property by the state, the reasons for the decline of the Roman empire, the nature of obedience to authority, the reasons for the oppressed classes to seek a "usurper" like Marius or, as Comte seems to hint at, Napoleon to overcome their distress and exploitation, and the relative efficiency and profitability of slave labour are questions to which Comte devotes considerable attention. It is remarkable how Marxist Comte's analysis at times seems and a comparison with G.E.M. de Ste Croix's work on *The*

centuries indicated to them the barriers which still remained to the universalisation of the liberal industrial ideal. Apart from the historical interest Comte and Dunoyer showed in the slavery problem, it also provided them with a means of defining what they meant by exploitation and productive labour. Slavery in its pure and ancient form was the definitive case of exploited labour, the slave owners that of the parasitic unproductive class. Slaves at the one extreme and independent artisans and entrepreneurs (or the class of "industrials" as they termed it) at the other were the two end-points of the spectrum of exploitation and freedom and these two ideal types were the basic elements in Comte's and Dunoyer's interpretation of history.³ According to their theory of history, in the evolution of society from ancient slavery, to tribal conquest, feudalism, and mercantilism the specifics of exploitation might gradually change, becoming quite complex at times, but they were still essentially the same as that which existed between a chattel slave and its master. Modern taxation, tariffs, guild and professional restrictions were all interpreted as complex and refined examples of exploitation which were nothing but unfortunate variations on an ancient theme. The essence of exploitation in Comte's and Dunoyer's view was the systematic violation of property rights of one class by another, usually achieved by means of the coercive taking of the fruits of one's labour either directly, as was the case in ancient slavery, or indirectly by taxation or tariffs in the modern world.

Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests (London: Duckworth, 1983) confirms this impression. In fact, some of the problems which de Ste Croix identifies in the traditional Marxist interpretation of slavery are avoided by Comte's more "political" theory of exploitation. Dunoyer dealt with the problems of free and unfree labour throughout his magnum opus, *De la liberté du travail, ou simple exposé des conditions dans lesquelles les forces humaines s'exercent avec le plus de puissance* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1845).

³Slavery also formed an important part in Dunoyer's theory of economic evolution. Well before Marx formed his own theory of history, Dunoyer was arguing that societies evolved from one stage to another by changes in the mode of production. Beginning with hunter-gatherer societies his schema included nomadism, settled agriculture, slavery, serfdom, the political privileges of mercantilism, and finally the ultimate stage of "industrialism." The different modes of production in each stage of society's evolution also influenced that society's moral and political attitudes and this was as true for slave societies as any other. The earliest complete formulation of Dunoyer's theory of history appears in Charles Dunoyer, *L'Industrie et la morale considérées dans leurs rapports avec la liberté* (Paris: A. Sautet, 1825). Dunoyer's theory of history and industrialism will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

THE DISCUSSION OF SLAVERY IN *LE CENSEUR*

The earliest statements we have of the views of Comte and Dunoyer on slavery are from their magazine *Le Censeur*, in which Dunoyer in particular discussed slavery in connection with the issue of British foreign policy.⁴ His interest in the issue of slavery and the slave trade came about from the reviews he did of French translations of pamphlets published by the British abolitionists and reports of debates in the House of Commons. At the time the negotiations for the Treaty of Paris in May 1814 were taking place, the House of Commons was debating the suppression of the slave trade and the handing back of French colonies taken in the war against Napoleon. Like the French abolitionists of the 1820s active in the Society for Christian Morality, Dunoyer was puzzled by the lack of interest shown by the French public in the question of slavery.⁵ The answer lay partly in the activity of the British government. Since the suppression of the slave trade was official British policy, French patriots felt obliged to oppose whatever was in the interests of the British Empire. French cynics might argue the British supported or at best tolerated the trade in slaves for centuries while it was in their interests and now that they perceived their interests in a different way the British wanted to impose a similar view on the French. Dunoyer was critical of the oscillations in the French attitude towards the British which made a considered reaction to the slave trade difficult. From an attitude which Dunoyer described as "the ridiculous infatuation which we had for them before the revolution" the French public now went to the opposite extreme of opposing a particular policy merely because their recent enemy supported it. Another reason for the French public to doubt the motives and humanitarianism of the British in wanting to end the slave trade was their memory of the behaviour of the British army in the treatment of French prisoners of war.

⁴The attitude of Dunoyer to slavery has been discussed by Leonard P. Liggio in an unpublished manuscript dealing with Dunoyer's political philosophy and I would like to thank him for making his manuscript available to me. The section dealing with Dunoyer's attitude to slavery comes from chapter 3 "International Relations in 1814-1815: Anglophobia, Counter-Revolution and the Congress of Vienna," pp 114 ff.

⁵See the discussion in Seymour Drescher, "The Abolition of Slavery," in *Dilemmas of Democracy: Tocqueville and Modernization* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968), pp. 151-195.

Dunoyer believed that the poor treatment given to French prisoners in the frightful conditions of the convict ships led many to question the humanitarian credentials of the British with respect to the blacks.⁶

One of the more important British abolitionist pamphlets to be reviewed by Dunoyer in *Le Censeur* was Thomas Clarkson's *Essay on the Impolicy of the Slave Trade*.⁷ According to Leonard Liggio, Clarkson had some contact with French liberals and Dunoyer was influenced by him only indirectly through their friendship with the leading French abolitionist, the Abbé Grégoire. Clarkson had come to Paris in the summer of 1789 to assist the Société des Amis des Noirs in their work on behalf of the abolitionist cause, whose French supporters included Lafayette and Condorcet. Clarkson's major works on the slave trade had been translated into French and he spent time speaking with Deputies. He was so successful that he was able to convert Grégoire to a more radical abolitionist position. He later returned to Paris in August 1814 to attempt to help remedy the lack of interest expressed by the French public in the issue of slavery. Clarkson met with Grégoire again in order to arrange for the translation of more British abolitionist pamphlets and Liggio suggests that this is when Dunoyer may have met Clarkson. Grégoire had other important contacts with radical liberals who had a considerable influence on Comte and Dunoyer. For example, Jean-Baptiste Say (an important mentor of Dunoyer and the father-in-law of Comte) was an active member of the Société des Amis des Noirs, founded by Grégoire in March 1796. Say reviewed and announced the Société's publication in the *Décade philosophique* (the journal of the Ideologues which Say edited) and spoke at society meetings. Thus it can be seen that Comte and Dunoyer had access to several sources of anti-slavery thought, including Clarkson and the radical British abolitionists (via Grégoire); the philosophe tradition of Condorcet and Denis Diderot; the Coppet circle of Benjamin

⁶Dunoyer, *Bulletin du Censeur*, vol. 1, no. 10, 12-22 September, p.71; quoted in Liggio, pp. 115-6.

⁷Dunoyer, review of Thomas Clarkson, *Essai sur les désavantages politiques de la traité des Nègres... Traduit de l'anglais sur la dernière édition qui a paru à Londres en 1789* (Paris, 1814), in *Le Censeur*, vol. 2, pp. 156-75; discussed by Liggio, pp.116-16A.

Constant, Madame de Staël, and Simonde de Sismondi;⁸ and the political economists such as Adam Smith, Destutt de Tracy and Jean-Baptiste Say.

In his long review of Clarkson's book Dunoyer expressed horror that anyone professing to be rational could defend the existence of slavery and then proceeded to attack some of the common arguments put forward by defenders of slavery. In an emotional passage he exclaimed:

What! You see men violently torn away from their country, from their family, from their habits, from their affections; packed like animals, chained together in irons, in horrible prisons; in this state, and nearly deprived of air and of food, they are forced to undertake a voyage of several months; sold to colonists sometimes more barbarous than their ravishers; condemned to work all their lives harder than our galley-slaves, without any wages but whip blows, without consolation except contempt, without hope (other) than of a quick death, and you ask if humanity suffers from this kind of unhappiness! What! the laws divine and human proscribe slavery in metropolitan France, and you doubt if it ought to be allowed in the colonies! Our laws punish the Frenchman who voluntarily alienates his liberty, and you do not know if it ought to support the burden of ending it among Africans.⁹

Following this characteristic outburst, Dunoyer attacked some of the most common arguments put forward by defenders of slavery. It should be remembered that at this time Comte and Dunoyer had not yet fully digested the significance of Say's political economy. Their liberalism was still primarily moral and political rather than economic (or industrial

⁸Any history of the abolitionist movement in France must include Madame de Staël and Simonde de Sismondi. Madame de Staël wrote an influential introduction to a French translation of William Wilberforce, "Préface pour la traduction d'un ouvrage de M. Wilberforce, sur la traite des nègres," (1814) in Madame de Staël, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Auguste de Staël (Paris, 1817), vol. 17. Her son, Auguste, was one of the leading members of the liberal abolitionist movement during the Restoration period. Sismondi while at Coppet under the influence of Madame de Staël developed a life-long interest in all forms of coerced labour, in particular slavery and serfdom. See Simonde de Sismondi, *De l'intérêt de la France à l'égard de la traite des nègres* (Genève: 1814); and the following essays: "Des effets de l'esclavage sur la race humaine," and "De la marche à suivre pour retirer les cultivateurs nègres de l'esclavage," "Des colonies" in volume 1 of *Études sur l'économie politique* (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1837) and "De la condition des cultivateurs dans la campagne de Rome," in vol. 2. See also Alfred Berchtold, "Sismondi et le groupe de Coppet face à l'esclavage et au colonialisme," in *Sismondi européen. Actes du Colloque international tenu à Genève les 14 et 15 septembre 1973*, ed. Sven Stelling-Michaud (Genève: Slatkine, 1976), pp. 169-98.

⁹Dunoyer, review of Clarkson, *Le Censeur*, vol. 2, pp 156-9; quoted and translated by Liggio, p. 117. The expression "wages of whip blows" used by Dunoyer in this passage is one Charles Comte liked to use in his discussion of slavery in the *Traité de législation* some ten years later. Comte cynically called "les coups de fouet" a new form of money which the slave owners used to pay their slaves for labouring in their fields. See below for a discussion of this.

as they liked to term it) as it was to become increasingly after 1817. Thus Dunoyer's arguments against slavery do not yet include any discussion of the relative profitability of slave and free labour which was to dominate their later work, although he is certainly aware of some economic arguments against slavery. To those who argued that the Europeans were doing the blacks a favour by removing them from a worse form of servitude in Africa, Dunoyer dismissively responded with the question "Why does not one see in Europe nor in any colonies anyone who voluntarily left Africa?"¹⁰ To those who argued that slavery was the normal result of internal African wars and that the Europeans merely purchased the tragic results of these conflicts, Dunoyer responded by saying that the reverse was the case: the African princes engaged in wars precisely in order to acquire slaves for the European traders. "Truly do you purchase only the men destined to death or condemned to slavery? How many free men do you not receive from the hands of violence or of avarice?"¹¹ Those who argued that the Europeans exercised a civilising function on barbaric savages, Dunoyer also summarily dismissed as hypocrites. The very process of acquiring slaves brutalised the Europeans and was certainly no example to set "uncivilised" Africans. To those who drew upon the precedent of the ancient Greek and Roman slave societies, what Dunoyer called disparagingly the so-called "civilisation" of the Romans, he reminded his readers that the ancestors of the ancient Greeks had at one time been more barbarous than the blacks of Senegal, yet they had been able to develop a wonderfully developed and civilised culture in spite of being conquered and enslaved by the Romans. What might the blacks in West Africa have achieved, Dunoyer asked, if they had been left in peace in their own homeland by the Europeans, whom he compared with "ravaging wolves" and "Ferocious beasts."¹²

Although Dunoyer was impressed and influenced by the abolitionist pamphlets coming out of Britain, he was aware that not all their arguments were applicable to the French situation. Clarkson's view that England would not benefit from the slave trade as

¹⁰Dunoyer, *Le Censeur*, pp. 160-62; quoted in Liggio, p. 118.

¹¹Dunoyer, *Le Censeur*, pp. 162-3; quoted and translated by Liggio, p. 118.

¹²Dunoyer, *Le Censeur*, pp. 162-3; quoted and translated by Liggio, p. 118.

much as it could from trading in African natural resources was an argument Dunoyer thought the French abolitionists could not use in their campaign. England was in a position to expand trade with West Africa since it had many trading posts in Africa, whereas the French had lost all theirs during the revolutionary war. Furthermore, whilst the British Caribbean colonies had a plentiful supply of slave labour (and could thus afford to forgo the trade in slaves), the French colonies suffered from a shortage of labour which the advocates of slavery argued could only be supplied by blacks from Africa. In terms of the total importance of the respective colonies to the metropole the British Caribbean colonies were less important than India, whereas the French had little other than their slave colonies to call their own. Thus the arguments of the cynics and Anglophobes had some plausibility. Dunoyer, although admiring the belief in liberty of the British people, shared some of the Anglophobia of late Imperial and early Restoration France, even if his version of Anglophobia was limited to attacking the activity of the British state and navy rather than its people.¹³

Dunoyer concluded that the British change of heart on the slave trade was a combination of the influence of abolitionist humanitarianism and imperial self-interest. He thought that England "gives the world without it costing it anything" and that its greater imperial interests would be served by forcing France and the other European nations to abandon the slave trade, irrespective of the morality of doing so. It was a mistake, Dunoyer believed, for the defenders of slavery to advocate the continued transportation of expensive slaves across the Atlantic. With the British able to seize easily the French colonies at any time, it was foolish to continue to "invest" in them in this manner. If France wished to retain the colonies Dunoyer's solution was to free the slaves so as to give them a personal stake in defending the islands from the British Navy.¹⁴

Dunoyer's next opportunity to discuss the problem of slavery enabled him to respond

¹³A good example of Dunoyer's Anglophobia can be found in Dunoyer, *Le Censeur*, pp.168-73; quoted and translated by Liggio, p 119.

¹⁴Dunoyer, *Le Censeur*, pp.174-5; quoted and translated by Liggio, p. 121. I have altered the tense of the verbs in one sentence.

to some of the economic issues of coerced labour, whether of serfs or black slaves. In a review of Grégoire's book *De la traite et de l'esclavage des noirs et des blancs; par un ami des hommes de toutes les couleurs*,¹⁵ Dunoyer noted that one of the key arguments of the defenders of slavery was that Europeans could not physically cope with labouring in the tropics and that therefore blacks from Africa were needed if the colonies were to have a labour force at all. Dunoyer rejected this argument for a variety of reasons which reveal an interesting divergence from the views of his mentor Jean-Baptiste Say who, although he rejected slavery, subscribed to this particular argument.¹⁶ Dunoyer began by reminding his readers that the slaves' physical condition was actually very poor because of the trauma of the "Middle Passage" and the bad food and conditions to which they were subjected on the plantations. They could not compare, he thought, in physical stamina to the healthy and vigorous European farmers. He cited the evidence of a planter who argued that the enthusiasm of the white farmers caused them to exhaust themselves in the heat of the tropics, whereas the blacks only worked as little as possible thus conserving their strength. This a curious defence for a planter to use since it was one of the main arguments of the abolitionists that slave labour was less productive than free labour for this very same reason - the greater capacity for work of free labourers, whether white or black, who spur themselves on in the expectation of reaping the financial rewards of their hard work. However, at this stage of the argument the question has more to do with racial characteristics than with the relative efficiency of free or slave labour. Dunoyer easily was able to find reports, such as Drouin de Bercy's, which dealt with the use of European labour in Santo Domingo and suggested the opposite, that a white farmer with motivation and the correct tools could outperform a black forced to labour for the plantation owner. Bercy discussed the capacity of the whites to work in the tropics where it was claimed that settlers indentured for thirty-six months, who were whites, did, in the origin of the

¹⁵Comte Henri Grégoire, *De la traite et de l'esclavage des noirs et des blancs; par un ami des hommes de toutes les couleurs* (Paris, 1815); reviewed in *Le Censeur*, vol. 4, pp. 210-30.

¹⁶See the discussion of Say's views of slavery below.

establishment of Saint-Domingue, what today the Blacks do; even in our days, nearly all the inhabitants of the dependency of Grand-Anse, who in general are soldiers, workers or poor Basques, cultivate their farms with their own hands. Yes, I sustain it, and I had the experience: the whites are able to labour in the plains from six in the morning until nine, and from four in the afternoon until the sun set(s). A white with his plough will do more work in one day than fifty Blacks with the hoe, and the earth will be better worked.¹⁷

Dunoyer was also keen to point out that it was not just Europeans who had the capacity for industrious labour. Not only did all mankind have this capacity for work if only they were free to exercise it, but socially useful free labour was in fact the basis for social relations per se. Slavery had two serious negative effects in Dunoyer's view: it had the damaging social consequence of inhibiting much useful industrious activity and secondly, on a personal level it prevented the slave from being truly human. Slavery turned autonomous and potentially useful men and women into machines directed by the hand of another. Freedom was vital if men and women were to be completely human.

Forbid a man this premier quality (the right to labour freely), he is forbidden the principle which constitutes man, and which is so necessary to his existence that, when he is deprived of it, he declines, he is effaced; he is no more than a machine moved by an impulsion which is not his own.¹⁸

Even if slavery continued for centuries it could not totally expunge "the sacred fire which sparks all the active faculties of the soul," but it would have the effect of making all those enslaved hate their masters and act in such a way as to minimise the burden placed upon them. Slaves would quite naturally behave in a deceitful, treacherous, spiteful, vindictive, lazy and slothful manner partly out of hatred for their oppressors and partly to try to alleviate some aspect of their dreadful lives. The tragedy of slavery, Dunoyer thought, was that the slaves came to adopt the "vices" which the Europeans used to justify their enslavement, namely by arguing that only a period of enslavement would equip the blacks with the correct morals and work habits for them to become "civilised." The example of the free blacks in Haiti was instructive for Dunoyer. Once freed from the

¹⁷Dunoyer, *Le Censeur*, vol. 4, pp. 210-13; quoted and translated by Liggio, p. 122.

¹⁸Dunoyer, *Le Censeur*, vol. 4, p. 214; quoted and translated by Liggio, pp. 122-3. The Russian political economist Henri Storch also described enslaved labourers as machines. For a discussion of Storch's important views of the economics of serf and slave labour see below.

burden of coerced labour yet still threatened with internal divisions and invasion,

these former slaves, metamorphosed by liberty, into energetic men, vigorous and disciplined, have presented at the present time the aspect of a flourishing people who had known how to defend its liberty against the efforts of Bonaparte...¹⁹

Many of the characteristics which Europeans attributed to blacks were also exhibited by enslaved whites, thus supporting Dunoyer's view that it was the institution of slavery and not the inherent characteristics of blacks themselves which gave rise to them. One example he used (which was in keeping with his general Anglophobia) was that of the Irish peasants under the yoke of English government. This was another reason to doubt the sincerity of the British government in their crusade to force the other European powers to give up the slave trade. The British were now keen to end black slavery but they maintained a system of white slavery in Ireland at the same time.²⁰ A more general example was the attitude of the government towards the soil and the peasants who worked it. Much like the plantation owners in the Caribbean who claimed exclusive control over the soil and the product of the slave's labour, the European governments claimed similar rights over the supposedly "free" land owners and labourers by means of taxes and other claims on their labour and property. Napoleon especially was compared to the plantation owners in his propensity to judge his wealth in terms of how many soldiers-slaves he controlled. Dunoyer believed that at times Napoleon, "this extravagant colonist" as he dismissively called him, went so far as to consider all citizens of France and even all of Europe as soldiers at his disposal, with their lives, liberty and property also at the complete disposal of the government, thereby behaving much like a typical slave owner in the colonies.

He (Napoleon) wished in France that there be only soldiers, and he sought that all the work of the nation have for its ulterior end, war. He wished them to ravish from man his faculty to act wholly and entirely by his own will in order to make him the instrument of his will. He wished then to reduce the French

¹⁹Dunoyer, *Le Censeur*, vol. 4, pp. 215-22; quoted and trans. by Liggio, p. 123.

²⁰There were other examples Dunoyer cited of the behaviour of "enslaved" or coerced whites behaving much like enslaved blacks, for example whites who were kidnapped to form gangs of soldiers (in other words armies composed of conscripted or press-ganged men).

and Europe to the last degree of servitude. Also he scorned fundamentally the human species; man was in his eyes only a vile cattle destined to be devoured in order to enslave new victims. But this extravagant colonist ended by ruining and losing his plantation in his wish to extend the number of the slaves that worked for him.²¹

What is intriguing about this passage is the way in which Dunoyer used a discussion about slavery in the Caribbean (launched as a review of a book by Grégoire on the slave trade) to make more general points about the nature of freedom and the power of the state in both Europe and the New World. This is just one example of many which could be produced to show how the debate about slavery raised issues which were central to the development of Comte's and Dunoyer's liberalism during the Restoration.

Another general political conclusion which Dunoyer drew from the problem of slavery was that to some extent the people must accept some of the blame for their enslavement.²² By "the people" Dunoyer is referring more to the European "slaves" than to the black slaves in the Caribbean. The Europeans are enslaved because they have not resisted sufficiently the tendency of governments to expand their power and authority. In only a few countries have the people been able to erect some institutional restrictions to government power in the form of representative bodies and constitutions and these successful cases of popular resistance to the power of the states were often a result of violent revolution, as the English and French experience demonstrated. Despotism was made possible, Dunoyer argued, by the existence of slavery and the absence of opposition to government power. Despotism was in fact a system based upon a hierarchy of slaves, with those at the top exercising power over a system of subordinate slaves who in turn exercised power of the next level of slaves, until the bottom level of farm labourer, conscripted soldier, and ordinary tax payer was reached.²³ In the absence of any resistance

²¹Dunoyer, *Le Censeur*, vol. 4, pp.223-6; quoted and trans. by Liggio, p. 124. Liggio makes the interesting point that Diderot also compared the situation of European workers with the black slaves in the New World.

²²This is a theme Dunoyer returns to in *L'industrie et la morale*, namely that to a large extent individuals are to blame for their own continued enslavement by not sufficiently resisting tyrannous governments.

²³Dunoyer is using an analysis of power based on an hierarchical or pyramidal structure which was elaborated by the 16th century writer and friend of Montaigne, Étienne de la Boétie. He too believed that to some extent slavery is voluntary in that many put up with exploitation in the hope that they can pass it on to others further below them in the pyramid. In addition, those at the very bottom who cannot pass it on to anyone else, do not

to government power, as was the case in feudal Europe and in the colonies, the entire society was "in a state of servility, immobility and torpor." Historical experience (especially recent experience) had given reason for optimism, as Dunoyer believed that the natural impulse of those enslaved was to resist those who governed and enslaved them.²⁴

Since Comte and Dunoyer were involved in so many issues of political and economic liberty during the early years of the Restoration their discussion of slavery was not long nor was it fully worked out and incorporated into their social theory. However, the brief reviews of abolitionist literature done by Dunoyer reveal some of the concerns which both authors were to return to later. The years of *Le Censeur* and *Le Censeur européen* were important as a formative period, revealing sources of influence which were to be reworked during the 1820s.²⁵

THE DEBATE ABOUT THE ECONOMICS AND CLASS STRUCTURE OF SLAVERY IN FRENCH POLITICAL ECONOMY IN THE 1820S

Before turning to an analysis of Comte's and Dunoyer's later views on slavery, the broader debate about the economic and "moral" effects of slavery which occupied liberal political economists and abolitionists (who were often one and the same people) during the Restoration period needs to be examined. Any reading of Comte's and Dunoyer's works on

realise that their strength lies in their very numbers. See Étienne de la Boétie, *Discours de la servitude volontaire* (circa 1552), ed. Simone Goyard-Fabre (Paris: Flammarion, 1983) and Étienne de la Boétie, *Le Discours de la servitude volontaire*, ed. P. Léonard (Paris: Payot, 1978). Similarly, Dunoyer's discussion of "despotism" has some similarities to the English radical minister, Vicesimus Knox, in whose *Spirit of Despotism* (1795) it is argued that the privileged aristocratic classes used war to whip up popular enthusiasms and thus distract attention away from domestic problems. Furthermore, these privileged classes used the prospect of spoils from the system to buy off dissent: Vicesimus Knox, *The Spirit of Despotism*, in *The Works*, vol. 5 (London: J. Mawman, 1824), pp. 137-403 reprinted (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1970). Although the parallels with Dunoyer's analysis of Napoleon and despotism in general are striking there is no evidence that Dunoyer was aware of either Boétie or Knox.

²⁴Liggio, pp. 124-5.

²⁵It would be interesting to know why the task of reviewing the material on slavery fell to Dunoyer rather than Comte. As their later work reveals they were both extremely interested in the problem of slavery and slavery formed a vital component in their social theory. One might have expected them to share their reviews. However this was not the case.

slavery presupposes an awareness of a debate which had taken place in the early 1820s, after Comte and Dunoyer had ended their period of active political journalism but before the appearance of their large printed works. Though important in its own right, this debate about the economic profitability of slave labour compared to free wage labour was also very important in the development of Comte's and Dunoyer's view of slavery. This happened both because it served to confirm their beliefs that something immoral could not be also profitable in the long run and that industry would inevitably prevail over other less economically efficient systems of labour, and because their mentor Say was involved in the dispute. The issue of free and productive versus coerced and unproductive labour was vital to the liberals' belief that a "true fit" existed between economics and morality. The liberal abolitionists in London and Liverpool were convinced that something as immoral and unchristian as slavery could not be profitable and they came up with some ingenious theoretical and historical arguments to argue their case. Say and Comte were impressed by these arguments and the wealth of detailed economic and historical information about conditions in the British and American slave colonies which the British abolitionists published as part of their campaign against slavery.

Adam Smith can be credited for initiating the modern debate among political economists about the relative profitability of free and slave labour. In Book I, chapter viii, paragraph 41 of the *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith discusses the problem of the comparative cost of "the wear and tear" of free labourers and slaves. He believed the latter's "wear and tear" was borne directly by the slave master and that this cost was not kept to a minimum because of the bad management practices of "a negligent master or careless overseer." The "wear and tear" of the former was borne partly by the employer who, by paying subsistence or above subsistence wages, covered some of this cost. However, what tipped the balance in favour of free wage labour over slave labour was the capacity of wage labourers to manage better and hence keep to a minimum the cost of maintaining themselves. In Smith's words "the strict frugality and parsimonious attention of the poor" meant, in the last analysis, "that the work done by freemen comes cheaper in the end than

that performed by slaves."²⁶ The debate between the British abolitionists and the French political economists had followed the precedent set by Smith in phrasing the question in the following manner: is the labour performed by slaves less costly than the labour performed by free men? This was the question the early Say, Hodgson and Storch were trying to answer. Comte and the later Say rejected this question as too narrowly defined, or "peu philosophique" as Comte put it.²⁷

The most important figure after Smith was Jean-Baptiste Say whose economic and sociological writings were to influence Comte and Dunoyer so profoundly. In the early editions of the *Traité d'économie politique* Say had argued that slavery, though immoral, was in fact very profitable. Even as late as 1819, when the fourth edition of his *Traité* appeared, Say was arguing that slave labour was considerably cheaper than free labour. In a chapter on the economic consequences of colonies Say discusses the arguments of Steuart, Adam Smith and Turgot (all of whom believed free labour was cheaper and more productive than slave labour), but he ultimately rejects their authority in favour of information he has about the price of slave labour in the Antilles which he believes shows that a slave is F1300 per annum cheaper than a free labourer.²⁸ The exception to this rule is the highly skilled labour of clockmakers or tailors, but for simple hand labour slavery appears to be cheaper than free labour. Say explains this phenomenon by the fact that black slaves can survive with only the clothes on their backs, the simplest of food and meanest lodgings, whereas free labourers need to earn enough to support their wives and children at

²⁶Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of nations*, ed. R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner (The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith reprinted Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1981), vol. I, pp. 98-99.

²⁷Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 415.

²⁸The information he has on the relative rates of free and slave labour is that the annual cost of upkeep of a black slave in the most humanely run plantations is 300 francs. When this figure is added to the interest on the purchase price (The figures Say use are a purchase price of 2,000 francs and an interest rate of 10%, thus giving an interest cost of 200 francs per annum) a total figure of 500 francs per annum is reached. On the other hand the cost of a free labourer in the Antilles is, according to Say (the source of this price information is not given), between 5 and 7 francs per day, although this can even be higher. Say takes the middle figure of 6 to work his calculation and the number of working days in the year to be 300. The total cost for a free labourer is 1,800 francs per annum, some 1,300 francs higher than the cost of a slave. Jean-Baptiste Say, *Traité d'économie politique* (Paris: Deterville, 1819, 4th edition), Livre 1, chapitre 19, pp. 298-302.

a much higher standard of living. Whatever the economic needs and desires of the black slaves may be, it is the master who is able to enforce savings upon them and keep the cost of their labour to a bare minimum. Thus plantations in Santo Domingo are so profitable that they can repay their purchase price in six years, whilst farms in Europe require twenty five or thirty years in which to repay their purchase price. Although, according to Say, slavery is enormously profitable for the plantation owners, it is not because they are industrious or provide a service to the consumers in the metropole. They are profitable because they are exploitative. They exploit the black slaves by forcing them to work for little or no return. They also exploit the consumers in Europe by their monopoly of the home market or high tariffs which artificially raise the price of their goods.²⁹

Unfortunately for Say's liberalism his assessment of the extraordinary profitability of slave labour led him into a contradiction. On the one hand, he was confident that further economic development in the Americas was unlikely "as long as they were infested with slavery."³⁰ The southern states might be able to grow cotton profitably but they lacked the industrial spirit which a free work force would provide to process the raw cotton into high value added products, as was done in New York. Thus he thought the slave states were economically "punished" for their immoral system of labour. The contradiction arose because he failed to realise that a system as profitable as he thought slavery to be could afford to send its products elsewhere to be processed. By a division of labour the Southern States and the West Indies could specialise in the production of certain crops grown by slave labour and the industrial cities of the North or England could specialise in the sweatshops and factories which used poorly paid free labour. Just how the plantation

²⁹"Mais ces profits mêmes que prouvent-ils? Que si le travail de l'esclave n'est pas cher, l'industrie du maître l'est prodigieusement. Le consommateur n'y gagne rien. Les produits n'en sont pas à meilleur marché. L'un des producteurs s'engraisse aux dépens de l'autre, voilà tout; ou plutôt ce n'est pas tout; il en résulte un système vicieux de production qui s'oppose aux plus beaux développemens de l'industrie. Un esclave est un être dépravé, et son maître ne l'est pas moins; ni l'un ni l'autre ne peuvent devenir complètement industriels, et ils dépravent l'homme libre qui n'a point d'esclaves. Le travail ne peut être en honneur dans les mêmes lieux où il est une flétrissure. On ne peut maintenir que par des airs d'indolence et d'oisiveté, cette suprématie forcée et contre nature, qui est le fondement de l'esclavage. L'inactivité de l'esprit est la conséquence de celle du corps; le fouet à la main, on est dispensé d'intelligence." Say, *Traité* 4th edition, pp. 301-2.

³⁰Say, *Traité*, 4th edition, p. 302.

owners were "punished" by not having factories and the other aspects of industrial society in their midst is not made clear by Say. The high profits Say thought they had from slave labour provided them with more than enough resources to preserve their way of life, as Hodgson noted in his critique of Say.

An explanation for the disagreements between Say and his critics Hodgson and Storch is that there really are two different questions being considered. The first question is whether or not the price of slave labour is higher or lower than the price of free wage labour, which is the argument Say preferred to use at least initially. In other words, how much would it cost for a planter to hire a gang of slaves to do a particular job compared to hiring free labourers to do the same job? The second question concerns the overall economic efficiency of slavery as a labour system, how productive is slave labour in the long run, what incentives do slaves have to work well and efficiently, etc, which is the argument the British abolitionists liked to use. There seems to be little understanding that there are two different arguments involved. The confusion seems to go back to Adam Smith who used both arguments at times. The change which Say and Comte brought to the debate was to reject the former argument as irrelevant and to stress the latter as both more morally sound and more insightful into the exploitative nature of slavery.

ADAM HODGSON'S LETTER TO SAY *ON THE COMPARATIVE EXPENSE OF SLAVE AND FREE
LABOUR* (1823)

Four years after the fourth edition of Say's *Traité* appeared, Say's view of the enormous profitability of slavery was subjected to a searching criticism by Adam Hodgson, writing on behalf of the Liverpool branch of the Society for Mitigating and Gradually Abolishing Slavery.³¹ Adam Hodgson readily admitted the important contributions Say had

³¹Adam Hodgson, *A Letter to M. Jean-Baptiste Say on the Comparative Expense of Slave and Free Labour* (Liverpool: James Smith and London: Hatchard and Son, 1823, second edition). The pamphlet was written as a letter addressed to William Roscoe, President, and to other members of the Liverpool branch of the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery.

made to the liberal cause but regretted Say's belief that slave labour was profitable. This belief, Hodgson remarked, made the activities of the Society that much harder, since one of the Society's main strategies was the campaign to show plantation owners that it was in their best economic interests to abandon slave labour and gradually adopt free wage labour. That one of the leading liberal political economists took the opposite view was a handicap to the abolitionist cause.

Hodgson began his letter with the following remarks:

It is with much concern that I observe, in your excellent and popular work on Political Economy, the sentiments you express on the subject of the comparative expense of free and slave labour. Accustomed to respect you highly, as an enlightened advocate of liberal principles, and to admire the philanthropic spirit which pervades your writings, I cannot but regret deeply, that opinions so much calculated to perpetuate slavery should have the sanction of your authority; and that, while you denounce the slave-system as unjustifiable, you admit that in a pecuniary point of view it may be the most profitable.³²

The key calculation in any assessment of the profitability of slave labour, Hodgson maintained, was the relationship between the annual expenditure needed to maintain the slave and the "annual sum which, in the average term of the productive years of a slave's life, will liquidate the cost of purchase or rearing, and support in old age, if he attain it, with interest..."³³ A similar calculation was possible for free labour, "since the wages paid to free labourers of every kind, must be such as to enable them, one with another, to bring up a family, and continue the race."³⁴ Hodgson rejected Say's main arguments about the profitability of slavery. The first argument Say used was that the high price of free labour in the Antilles could be universalised into an economic principle concerning the relationship between free and slave labour. The second was that the reluctance of the slave owners to free their slaves was proof of the profitability of the slave-system. Hodgson rejected the first argument with the claim that, while in some places free labour might be more

³²Hodgson, p.1.

³³Hodgson, p. 2.

³⁴Hodgson, p. 2.

expensive than slave labour (in the case of the Antilles there were few free workers and labour was considered to be degrading), the general principle to be kept in mind was:

not, whether at a given time and place, free or slave labour is the highest, but whether both are not higher than labour would be if all the community were free, and the principle of population were allowed to produce its natural effect on the price of labour, by maintaining the supply and competition of free labourers.³⁵

The second argument was rejected on the grounds that prejudice and passion blinded the planters' conception of their own true interest. Hodgson was convinced that, once the planters began to view their property in a truly commercial light rather than as a way of life, they would gradually recognise that their true interests would be best served by freeing their slaves and re-employing them as wage labourers.

To support his claim of the unprofitability of slave labour Hodgson draws upon Adam Smith, David Hume, Henri Storch, Brougham, and various memoirs written by slave owners and travellers. In his "Letter to Say" Hodgson developed a series of economic, historical and political arguments to support his case that, in fact, slave labour was vastly inferior to free wage labour in terms of its cost to the plantation owners and general levels of productivity. One of the main economic arguments he used depends upon the incentives and disincentives slaves faced to work productively. Citing the experience of a Joshua Steele of Barbados, Hodgson argues that in the cultivation of food crops the slaves have little incentive to be productive. They perform their work negligently and steal whatever they can get away with, which results in an overall rate of productivity which Steele estimates to be about one third the rate of free labourers.³⁶

The argument about the economic incentives faced by slave and free labourers is probably the most important argument used by the abolitionists. For this reason Hodgson

³⁵Hodgson, p. 26.

³⁶Other accounts written by slave owners themselves or observers come to similar conclusions. Another commentator Hodgson uses is Dr Beattie, who notes that in the West Indies the same amount of work can be done by half the number of paid free labourers than slaves. In the French colonies an observer (Coulomb) states that slaves can only do one third to one half of the work done by what he admits are reluctant French soldiers and not freely paid wage labourers. These very rough proportions of half to a third are shared by other commentators Hodgson cites in his letter.

endeavours to base his case on directly reported experience and concrete examples rather than on pure theory. Some commentators liked to compare the price of sugar and other products produced on plantations which use either slave or free labour. Hodgson draws upon two examples to make his point: Dr Beattie claims that the price of products grown in Cochin China by free labour are lower than the price of the same goods grown by slave labour in the West Indies, an argument to be taken up by Comte in *Traité de législation* (see below); Botham claims that in the Dutch East Indies sugar is produced by free labour (what he calls the "East India mode") more cheaply than in the British colonies. The weakness of this way of arguing is that no attempt is made to separate the various factors which may influence the price in very different localities, such as differences in soil fertility, differences in plant types and so. Hodgson attributes the lower price of the goods in Cochin China and the Dutch East Indies solely to the fact that "free" labour is used. This is understandable given the political purposes of his task, which is to present free labour in the best possible light in order to persuade the slave owners in the Caribbean that it is their economic interests to give up slavery and use free wage labour in its place. Hodgson concludes this part of his case by quoting with approval the Russian political economist Henri Storch, who held the view that slaves are virtual unthinking "machines" who require constant supervision to do even the most menial task. The incompetence of the slaves requires overseers and managers, who in their turn can deliberately exploit the owner or raise costs through their indifference. Thus, in the absence of economic incentives for the slaves to work more productively and with some intelligence, the slave owner must resort to expensive forms of supervision which Hodgson believed was absent when free wage labourers were employed. The British abolitionist Lord Brougham concurs in this view and adds that slaves without economic incentives to work need the threat of violence or punishment, or as Brougham put it "the perpetual terror of the lash."

Some slave owners and plantation managers had realised this fact and had introduced experiments in order to provide the slaves with some economic incentive to be more productive. Joshua Steele had tried paying his slaves for the work they did in an attempt to

mimic the incentive effects of free labour. Steele reported that after four years of trying such an experiment his economic return was increased threefold. Costs of supervision dropped and the care and diligence of the slaves in their work increased. Steele's experiment was very important to the cause of the British abolitionists and they used it repeatedly to drive home the point to slave owners that it was in their economic interests to abandon or at least reform the system of slave labour. In later editions of his *Traité* Say disputed the success of Steel's experiment and its usefulness as a model for other slave owners. Nevertheless, Steele provided an example of what an enlightened slave owner might do to increase the productivity of his slaves. Brougham suggested that it might prove to be a way in which slavery could gradually be done away with. In the transition period before the complete abolition of slavery, slaves might pay a tax or tribute to their master for the right to work on their own account or at market wage rates in his fields. This was also the view of Henri Storch whose work on the Russian serfs provided perhaps the best example of such a halfway house between slavery and free labour. Storch's important analysis will be discussed in more detail below. Hodgson concluded that the transition to free labour might be made via a two stage reform: the first introducing piece work to increase the productivity of slave labour; the second a system of profit sharing with the master via some kind of tax or tribute on their work.³⁷

Hodgson used another tack in making his case, this time in asking what might happen if slavery were more profitable and productive than free labour. The example of the United States of America was instructive in this regard. With two clearly delineated zones in which slavery and free labour operated, the comparative effects of the two systems of labour could be observed. Hodgson compared the price of land in slave and non-slave regions with the assumption that, if slave labour were more productive, the price of land where slaves were used would be higher than land where free labour was used. The state of Maryland provided the best example with one region permitting slavery and another not. He found no

³⁷Hodgson, p. 22.

difference in land prices in Maryland or in a comparison between prices in the states of Virginia (slave) and Pennsylvania (free). America also provided advocates of free labour with the example of a rapidly industrialising North using free wage labour and welcoming innovation and entrepreneurial activity and a South which changed very little and which was forced to seek new land as old land was exhausted by the method of cultivation. Many commentators viewed the difference between the North and the South as conclusive proof that the future lay with industrialism based upon free wage labour and not agriculture based upon slaves. Hodgson believed that the days of the South and slavery were numbered for a number of reasons. The South could not compete economically, its real labour costs were high, the workers had no incentive to be productive, innovation was not encouraged and the slave owners lacked an entrepreneurial attitude to production. There was also a political reason for the ultimate failure of the slave South. Nothing, Hodgson thought, could resist the spread of "republicanism," by which he meant the values of "1776" and "1789," in other words respect for the moral and legal equality of the individual, private property, the free market, and democracy. Even if slavery was not doomed for economic reasons it would soon be swept aside by the political imperative of republicanism which was even at that time spreading to Latin America with its waves of wars of liberation.³⁸

Before concluding his case against slave labour, Hodgson had to explain why slavery had persisted for so long and appeared, at least, to be profitable. The best known example of a slave society which had existed for centuries was the Roman empire. Although it eventually grew "decadent" and declined, the fact that slavery existed for so long needed to be explained. Hodgson does not devote much attention to the case of ancient Roman slavery except to say that it ruined the small private farmer and prospered only as long as fresh sources of cheap slaves were available from the regular wars against non-Roman societies. When the source of cheap slaves dried up it was not long before the pernicious economic effects of slavery were felt. If the success of Roman slavery depended upon

³⁸Hodgson, pp. 35 ff.

constant wars of conquest, the apparent success of slavery in the modern world owed much to the protective system of tariffs and exclusive trading zones. High cost slave labour, Hodgson argued, could only survive because it had a guaranteed market in the metropole where the high costs of production could be passed on to the consumer. Since the consumers of sugar, tobacco, indigo and cotton could not buy from alternative sources, they had to buy from the protected slave plantations. This system could not survive if a policy of free trade put an end to tariffs and exclusive trading zones. Interestingly, it was latter argument which Comte was to use in the *Traité de législation* (1827) and which Say was to adopt in his reformulation of the critique of slave labour in the *Cours complet* of 1828. Overall, Hodgson was convinced that the examples and arguments he had presented refuted Say's argument of the high profitability of slave labour on the Caribbean plantations. Now surely, Say must agree that not only was slavery immoral but also uneconomic. Hodgson concluded by summarising his case against arguments supporting the profitability of slave labour:

If then, it has appeared that we should be naturally led to infer, from the very constitution of human nature, that slave labour is more expensive than the labour of free men; if it has appeared that such has been the opinion of the most eminent philosophers and enlightened travellers in different ages and countries; if it has appeared that in a state where slavery is allowed, land is most valuable in those districts where the slave system prevails the least, notwithstanding great disadvantages of locality; and that in adjoining states, with precisely the same soil and climate, in the one of which slavery is allowed, and in the other prohibited, land is most valuable in that state in which it is proscribed; if it has appeared that slave labour has never been able to maintain its ground in competition with free labour, except where monopoly has secured high profits, or protecting duties afforded artificial support; if it has appeared that, in every quarter of the globe, in proportion as the planter rendered attention to economy more indispensable, the harsher features of the slave-system have disappeared, and the condition of the slave has been gradually assimilated to that of the free labourer; and if it has been found, by experience, to substitute the alacrity of voluntary labour, for the reluctance of compulsory toil; and that emancipation has rendered the estates on which it has taken place, greatly and rapidly more productive - I need not, I think, adduce additional proofs of the truth of the general proposition, that slave labour is more expensive than the labour of free men.³⁹

³⁹Hodgson, pp. 25-6.

SAY'S FIRST RESPONSE TO CRITICISM

Say responded to Hodgson's argument in a letter to the author, dated Paris 25 March 1823, which was published in the second edition of Hodgson's pamphlet which also appeared in 1823.⁴⁰ In the letter Say said he agreed with Hodgson on all the main issues and acknowledged that "You have collected, in a small space, an accumulation of facts and arguments which it appears to me impossible to refute."⁴¹ Say attributed their difference of opinion to the fact that Hodgson most probably had read only the earlier editions of Say's *Traité*. Say claimed that in the later editions he had altered his views concerning the profitability of slave labour "so as to arrive nearly at the same conclusion as you."⁴² He also claimed that he was expanding his remarks on slavery in a book on which he was currently working. As Say put it "I approach still nearer to your sentiments in the works I am preparing." Unfortunately, the precise work Say is referring to is not clear and the exact chronology of Say's change of opinion is very difficult to determine. All that one can say is that sometime between the publication of the fourth edition of Say's *Traité* and his reading of Hodgson's pamphlet Say had come to question the profitability of slavery. Confusion arises because Say could be referring to one of three works with which he was occupied at this time. There are indications of his change of heart in the all three works he published in the early 1820s, most notably his comments in his edition of Henri Storch's *Cours d'économie politique* (1823),⁴³ the lectures he gave at the Athénée which became the *Cours complet d'économie politique pratique* (1828),⁴⁴ and the fifth edition of the *Traité*. The

⁴⁰Say states that Hodgson's letter had been passed on to him by the Baron de Staël, one of the leading figures in the Society for Christian Morality, the major abolitionist group in France.

⁴¹*Letter from J.B. Say to the Author*, Paris, 25th March, 1823 in Hodgson, pp. 59-60.

⁴²Hodgson, p. 60.

⁴³Henri Storch, *Cours d'économie politique, ou exposition des principes qui déterminent la prospérité des nations. Ouvrage qui a servi à l'instruction de LL. AA. II. les grand -ducs Nicolas et Michel*, by Henri Storch with explicatory and critical notes by Jean-Baptiste Say (Paris: J-P. Aillaud, 1823).

⁴⁴Jean-Baptiste Say, *Cours complet d'économie politique pratique; ouvrage destiné à mettre sous les yeux des hommes d'état, des propriétaires fonciers et les capitalistes, des savans, des agriculteurs, des manufacturiers, des négocians, et en général de tous les citoyens, l'économie des sociétés*, (Paris: Rapilly, 1828).

sections of these works dealing with slavery and colonies, in conjunction with Say's reply to Hodgson's letter, provide the main source of information on Say's thinking in the early and mid 1820s. However, as of March 1823 when he responded to Hodgson's criticisms, his view of slavery was that it is

incompatible with productive industry, in a state of society moderately advanced. It is already verging towards its termination among all people of European origin; and as the restlessness and intelligence of Europe will ultimately pervade the globe, we may affirm that slavery will one day be extinguished everywhere.⁴⁵

HENRI FRÉDÉRIC STORCH ON SLAVERY AND SERFDOM IN EASTERN EUROPE - *COURS*
D'ÉCONOMIE POLITIQUE (1823)

In the same year as Say responded to Hodgson's letter challenging his view of the profitability of slave labour he also had to come to terms with a leading Russian economist's analysis of the economics of serfdom and slavery in Eastern Europe. Henri Storch⁴⁶ was a member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences and a pioneer in the

⁴⁵Hodgson, p. 60.

⁴⁶Henri-Frédéric Storch (1766-1835), a Russian economist noted for his work on the economics of unfree labour, particularly that of serfdom, was born on 15 February 1766 in Riga and died on 13 November 1835 in Saint Petersburg. Storch studied at the universities of Jena and Heidelberg before returning to Russia where he taught belles-lettres from 1787 in Saint Petersburg and exercised various positions in education and government administration. In 1790 he worked for the office of Count Berborodko, the minister for foreign affairs. In 1796 he was elected a corresponding member of the Saint Petersburg Academy of sciences after the publication of the first volume of *Tableau historique et statistique de l'empire de Russie*. In 1799 he was appointed tutor to the daughters of Tsar Paul I and shortly afterwards Storch was made a councilor of the court and an hereditary noble. He became a state councillor in 1804 and head of the Academy's statistical section. He was also appointed to teach political economy by Alexander I to the grand dukes Nicholas and Michael. In 1828 he was promoted to the rank of private councillor and appointed vice-president of the Academy of Sciences, offices which he held until his death. His major theoretical work was the *Cours d'économie politique* which was based upon the lectures he gave to the grand dukes. Blanqui described Storch's economic theories as eclectic but considered his empirical work of great value. In terms of school affiliation he followed closely the writings of Say and Smith. The main issues which occupied him include the distinction between free and unfree labour, the contribution which unfree serf labour made to the national wealth of the Russian empire, the importance of moral (or rather "human") capital to national wealth, comparative banking, and the greater wealth producing capacity of industry and commerce compared to agriculture. Perhaps his greatest contributions to economics were his analysis of serf labour in Eastern Europe and his theory of "nonmaterial production", the latter influencing Dunoyer who used it in his *De la liberté du travail*. The debate between Storch and Say on the issue of immaterial production was conducted in Say's footnotes to the second edition of the *Cours* and in Storch's response *Considérations sur la nature du revenu national* (1824). His major writings include: *Gemälde von St. Petersburg* (Riga, 1793); *Statistische Übersicht*

collection of economic statistics. He was a fairly orthodox member of the Smithian school of political economy and had the dubious pleasure of teaching the grand dukes (one was to become the Tsar) the principles of political economy. His lectures to the dukes were published in 1815 as the *Cours d'économie politique* and contain much of interest on the economics of serfdom and slavery in Russia and Eastern Europe. Jean-Baptiste Say was interested enough to edit a second, apparently unauthorised French edition in 1823 with extensive notes and comments by him. Say was not shy to criticise Storch quite severely. Storch was stung into publishing a fifth and supplementary volume to the new French edition in order to respond to some of his editor's critical remarks.⁴⁷

There is much of interest in Storch's work, but what concerns us here are his detailed discussions of the economics of forced labour, about which Say had nothing but praise, describing him as a "publiciste éclairé" and a "véritable philanthrope." Say concluded with the highest accolade an empirical political economist could bestow on another, that "sur tout ce qu'il dit de l'esclavage...(i)l parle de ce qu'il a vu."⁴⁸ As an acute observer of the economic and social conditions in Russia, Henri Storch was well placed to present to the French-speaking world detailed information about the situation of slaves and serfs in Russia. Sometime before he had published a monumental work on economic statistics called the *Tableau historique et statistique de l'empire de Russie à la fin du dix-huitième*

der Statthalterschaften des russischen Reiches (St.Petersburg, 1795); *Tableau historique et statistique de l'empire de Russie à la fin du dix-huitième siècle* (Riga and Leipzig, 1797-1803. French translation 1801, 2 vols); *Cours d'économie politique, ou exposition des principes qui déterminent la prospérité des nations* 6 vols (St. Petersburg: A. Pluchart et comp., 1815) based upon the course he gave to the grand dukes Nicholas and Michael; unauthorized second edition of *Cours d'économie politique* 4 vols. (Paris, 1823) edited by Jean-Baptiste Say with extensive notes and critical commentaries; *Considération sur la nature du revenu national* (Paris, 1824) 5th volume of the *Cours* and a repudiation of Say's unauthorized edition; *Zur Kritik des Begriffs Nationaleinkommens* (St. Petersburg, 1827); *Esquisses, scènes et observations recueillies pendant son voyage en France* (Heidelberg, 1790); *Principes généraux de belles-lettres* (Saint-Petersberg); numerous articles in the *Mémoires* of the Saint Petersburg academy of sciences. Source: article by J.L. in *Nouveau Dictionnaire d'Économie Politique* vol 2, pp. 925-26.

⁴⁷Henri Frédéric Storch, *Cours d'économie politique, ou exposition des principes qui déterminent la prospérité des nations. Ouvrage qui a servi à l'instruction de LL. AA. II. les grands-ducs Nicolas et Michel*, ed. J.-B. Say (Paris: J.-P. Aillaud, 1823), 4 vols. Storch's sometimes angry response to Say's editorial comments was published as a fifth volume, *Considérations sur la nature du revenu national* (1824).

⁴⁸Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, Chapter 9 "Influence de l'esclavage sur la civilisation," Say's footnote on pp. 439-90.

siècle (1797-1803),⁴⁹ the success of which got him appointed head of the statistical section of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences. But it was the French edition of the *Cours* which made the situation of the Russian slaves and serfs known to a broader reading public. In Storch's conclusion to volume three Say found a summary of the nature of slavery which he thought to be the best he had ever seen. In a discussion of the ways in which the state could hinder the development of industry and individual prosperity by favouring one class over another, Storch turned to a special case of class privilege, that of slavery:

Dans l'autres États, les lois tolèrent la servitude, c'est-à-dire excluent la classe la plus nombreuse d'habitans de cette protection dont les autres citoyens jouissent: les membres de cette classe se trouvent exposés, non pas à la vérité, comme les sauvages, à la rapacité de tous ceux avec lesquels ils vivent, mais aux violences de leurs maîtres; et la crainte seule de ces violences suffit pour étouffer en eux l'envie de travailler et le désir d'accumuler, même quand ils ont le loisir et les moyens de se livrer à un travail profitable pour eux.⁵⁰

Storch's understanding of slave labour was a complex one. Like Comte and Dunoyer were to do in their works on slavery, Storch viewed it firstly in historical terms, as an important part of the gradual evolution of societies in which chattel slavery played a vital role, to feudal societies in which slavery was moderated in various ways, to the present, in which societies at different levels of development coexisted with different degrees of forced labour. Since he passionately believed in the idea of progress, the highest stage of human historical development was where individual liberty was fully realised and this meant of course a society in which slave labour in any form played no part. The particular historical moment in which he was writing was a crucial one because Europe had paved the way for the liberation of all mankind with the success of the French Revolution. The ideas of English and French liberty were now impossible to contain geographically and it would not be long before the remnants of slavery disappeared in Eastern Europe and Russia. Part of the intention of his *Cours* was to prepare the grand dukes for this eventuality, which Storch thought would occur sometime during their lifetime. Storch's confident prediction was that

⁴⁹Henri Storch, *Tableau historique et statistique de l'empire de Russie à la fin du dix-huitième siècle*, 8 volumes (1797-1803), 8 vols. (Riga and Leipzig) two volumes of which were translated into French in 1801.

⁵⁰Storch, *Cours*, tome 3, pp. 504-5.

within one hundred years all vestiges of slavery in the European dominated world would have disappeared.

A second way in Storch viewed slavery was in sociological terms, as a form of class exploitation, which the above quotation so admired by Say clearly shows. He believed that slavery had a dire effect on population growth and perpetuated an unequal division of property ownership.⁵¹ Storch argued that, in both the ancient world and the modern slave colonies, population growth was hindered by the existence of slavery, which thus created a need for continual injections of new slaves to maintain the labour supply. In comparison with free societies "jamais une population composée d'esclaves n'augmente dans la même proportion qu'une autre composée d'hommes libres."⁵² This was also true he thought for European societies in which serfdom still existed. Using his favorite examples of the liberation of the serfs in the Danish king's domains in Holstein and the activities of the reform-minded Polish Count Zamoiski, he compared the rate of population growth before and after the liberation of the serfs and found that population growth took off only after liberation.⁵³ In a poetic analogy Storch compared the growth in population of the freed serfs to the spurt in growth of a young tree after pruning away branches which are impeding its development.⁵⁴

Another sociological consequence of slavery was the lack of development of a middle class or "tiers-état." This had the consequence of preventing the formation of a class of prosperous consumers who could create the demand required for industrialisation to occur. Furthermore, the absence of a middle class meant that the spread of "enlightenment" did not occur, the middle class, Storch believed, being the mechanism by which "enlightenment" was transmitted. Storch shared Say's view of the importance of the middle class to the industrial economy and in turn quoted him with approval:

⁵¹Most of his remarks on the sociological effects of slavery can be found in a chapter called "Influence de l'esclavage sur la civilisation" in *Cours*, vol. 3, chapter 9, pp. 439-66. Storch deals with population on pages 439-50 and with the middle class on pages 450-7.

⁵²Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 444.

⁵³Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 448.

⁵⁴Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 448.

C'est dans cette classe mitoyenne, loin des soucis et des plaisirs de la grandeur, loin des angoisses de la misère; c'est dans la classe où se rencontre les fortunes honnêtes, les loisirs mêlés à l'habitude du travail, les libres communications de l'amitié, le goût de la lecture et des voyages: c'est dans cette classe, dis-je, que naissent les lumières, et c'est de là qu'elles se répandent chez les grands et chez le peuple; car les grands et le peuple n'ont pas le temps de méditer; ils n'adoptent les vérités que lorsque elles leur parviennent sous la forme d'axiomes et qu'elles n'ont plus besoin de preuves.⁵⁵

The reason a middle class did not develop in slave societies was because the recruiting mechanism was absent. In free societies the middle class is recruited out of the more ambitious or hardworking lower class. The existing middle class acts as both a teacher and a model to which the lower class can aspire. In a slave society there is no way in which ambitious or hardworking slaves can leave their legally determined class position and "rise" into the class above. Also, if a slave society does have a middle class it is likely to be very rudimentary and weak, thus not strong enough to transform society as Storch and Say would like. In fact in slave societies the social forces act in the opposite way. Instead of influencing both "les grands" and "le peuple" with their industrious habits and their enlightenment, the middle class is attracted upwards to the nobility (or slave owners). Storch described this phenomenon as a "mania" for the trappings of the aristocracy, which existed to the detriment of industry and enlightenment in slave societies and in Europe of the ancien régime.⁵⁶ Instead of growing as it should and influencing society, the middle class tries to steer their children into careers which will ennoble them and divert their wealth (which should be invested in industrial enterprises) into investments in land and buildings in an attempt to ape the behaviour of the aristocracy. Thus the reproduction of the middle class and its "industrious" values does not occur and the society remains in a state of economic underdevelopment.⁵⁷ A further consequence of the lack of a middle class in slave societies was the domination of the "civil functions" of the state by the aristocracy, who

⁵⁵Jean-Baptiste Say quoted by Storch but no reference is given, *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 451.

⁵⁶Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 454 on the "manie nobilitaire" for political privileges rather than for the fruits of "industry." Compare Storch's view with Dunoyer's discussion of the stage of economic development known as "privilege" in chapter three.

⁵⁷Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, pp. 452-3.

were hostile to industry and who very much favoured the military. It was dangerous, Storch believed, to allow the military-minded aristocracy to monopolise the positions in law, politics, internal administration of the state, science, and the arts. Only a strong middle class, which believed in the usefulness of what Storch called "la division du travail immatériel" and devoted themselves to it as a lifetime career, could fulfil these tasks adequately.⁵⁸

The third dimension to slavery was a moral one, dealing with the corruption of morals of both the slave owner and the slave. This is an aspect which Say did not pick up to the same extent as Charles Comte and Charles Dunoyer, who made it a central concern of their analyses of slavery in their respective *Traité de législation* and *L'Industrie et la Morale*. Thus it is more likely that Comte and Dunoyer were influenced by Storch than by Say in the matter of the moral corruption of slavery on both the slave and the slave-owner. This moral problem of slavery was the topic of the third part of Storch's chapter on the influence of slavery on "civilisation."⁵⁹ Storch begins by making the point that, without any security with which to enjoy their liberty or any property they might acquire, slaves naturally become "paresseux, insouciant, voleur, dissipateur, ivrogne."⁶⁰ Behind this shiftless exterior lies a deeply felt hatred towards the master, "un coeur ulcéré de l'injustice de sa situation," which leads the slave when circumstances permit to rebellion, revenge and violence, as was the case with the slave uprising in Santo Domingo. The social consequences of slavery also impinge upon the family and public security. Like individual slaves, slave families cannot enjoy the security necessary to bring up children and to plan for the future. It is in the family that the slave's hatred for the master is strengthened and it is this underlying hatred which places the public security in jeopardy.⁶¹ The feelings of hostility between master and slave mean that the master, being so outnumbered by his slaves, lives in a state of constant

⁵⁸Once again Storch quotes Robertson's *History of Charles V* on the danger of the feudalisation of the state, *Cours*, vol. 3, pp. 454-5.

⁵⁹"Influence de l'esclavage sur la civilisation" in *Cours*, vol. 3, chapter 9, pp. 457-66.

⁶⁰Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 457.

⁶¹Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, pp. 458-9.

fear of an uprising.⁶² Historically there had been many examples of isolated outbreaks of disgruntled slaves and serfs, ranging from Spartacus to Pugachev to Santo Domingo. Storch implies that unless the situation of the slaves is improved through amelioration schemes or abolition itself, the state will always face the prospect of recurring rebellion on the part of the slave population.

The fourth level of his analysis is economic and it is the aspect of slavery in which Say was most interested, as it was most directly relevant to his debates with Hodgson on the profitability of slave labour. Storch's contribution was unusual and perhaps quite original in that he stressed the modifications and ameliorations which slave labour had undergone in different parts of the world. Not all slaves were treated like the chattel slaves of antiquity or the Caribbean. He thought it was a mistake to base any economic analysis of slave labour on only these two extreme forms, without taking into account the more moderate slave systems of the Middle Ages and the eastern parts of Europe. Even within the Caribbean system of slavery there were important distinctions to be made between the relatively "unproductive" domestic slaves, who waited at table for the master's personal benefit, and the "productive" slaves, who toiled in the fields growing sugar for the export market.⁶³

As an expert on economic conditions in Russia, Storch was in a position of authority to discuss the variation in slavery which existed there. In particular, he focused upon two special types of forced labour - the modification of slavery which allowed the individual serf to work for himself, free of direct supervision by the master in return for a payment known as the "obroc," and the special class of serfs known as the "peasants of the royal domain" or "crown peasants." In both these cases Storch believed the Russian experience

⁶²Ancient authors such as Aristotle recommended that slave owners try to forestall disturbances by breaking down communication between their slaves. This could be achieved by purchasing slaves from a variety of sources in order to make sure that the slaves had as little as possible in common between themselves. Nevertheless slave owners often talked of being murdered by their slaves and Storch quotes Catherine II from her *Instruction pour le code des lois* on the need to understand the underlying social and economic causes of serf revolts since it was impossible to prevent them through legislation alone. Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, pp. 462-3, footnote a).

⁶³Storch, *Cours*, tome 3, chapter 8 "Continuation: De l'esclave à corvées," p. 141.

showed both the complexity of the nature of slave labour and a means of gradually abolishing its stricter forms in the Caribbean by following the Russian example of obroc or the institution of crown peasants. It will become clear that his scheme for improving the condition of the black slaves is similar to the experiments of "humane" slave owners which were much admired by Clarkson, Hodgson and other abolitionists and rejected by Say as not suited to the tropics.

In a "Note" in the fourth volume of his *Cours*,⁶⁴ Storch gave a detailed description of the class system in Russia, in which he described the different types of servitude. Of the three kinds of productive labouring classes two were coerced, the serfs and the slaves, and a third group was free. The "free class, (which) engaged in industrial work," included those nobles who worked their land for the purposes of agriculture, mining, forestry, fishing or manufacturing; "merchants of the three guilds," who engaged in commerce; the bourgeois or free artisans, who lived in towns (numbering 3,000,000 according to the census of 1782); and free agricultural workers. Included in the latter category were military colonists and the new class of "free cultivators" created by Tsar Alexander in 1803, who numbered only about 13,000 in 1810 and who had been liberated by being bought from their masters.

Under the class of serfs Storch included all "crown peasants," who numbered some 4,675,000 males in 1782. The crown peasants could be divided into two groups, a small group of peasants used in the crown's mines and factories and a much larger group of peasants tied to the glebe. The crown peasants tied to the glebe provided Storch with the example of a "halfway house" between slavery and free labour. They were allowed to pay a tax ("cens" or obroc) to the crown, which was determined by the fertility of the soil and to which Storch likened to a form of land rent. Like the other peasants, the crown peasants were also obliged to pay the capitation tax and to serve in the military, but what interested Storch most was that these serfs were allowed to keep whatever surplus they produced after having paid their taxes. Furthermore, they enjoyed the protection of the law and the

⁶⁴Storch, Note XIX, "Sur la condition des serfs et des esclaves en Russie," *Cours*, vol. 4, pp. 248-58

property they were able to acquire could not be repossessed by their lord. Crown peasants had the right to leave their village upon receiving a passport which was valid for one, two or three years and, with the permission of the commune in which they lived, could move to a free town and engage in free labour there. Although they enjoyed some freedoms and perhaps could be classified as a free labourer, Storch preferred to classify the crown peasants as a kind of serf, since the crown could still force them to work in the mines or the government factories, to rent them out to others, or even to sell them. Storch quite correctly says these powers over their future meant they continued to behave economically more like slaves than free labourers.

The third class were the slaves proper who were the peasants owned by individual members of the nobility and they numbered some 6,678,000 in the 1782 census. In law their situation appeared to be worse than it actually was in practice, according to Storch, since a combination of a softening in attitudes and the economic self-interest of the masters meant they were better treated than previously. Slaves owned by nobles could be rented out to others, forced to labour in the master's own fields, workshops or house, or they could be charged the obroc with the right to work elsewhere. In the latter case, the economics of their situation was similar to the more fortunate crown peasants.

According to Storch, any assessment of the economic efficiency of slave labour had to include all aspects of the slave system not just those slaves working in the fields. The use of domestic slaves by the plantation owner was just as much a part of the slave system as those of prime working age whose labour was usually compared to that of free wage labourers. Storch considered slaves as just another part of the master's total wealth which could be used for consumption or for productive purposes. Those slaves used for domestic purposes, as cooks and valets and housekeepers, Storch believed, were part of the master's expenditure on consumption.⁶⁵ As one might expect, Storch takes a dim view of the usefulness of the "unproductive" domestic slave as he calls them. Whereas a wealthy

⁶⁵He termed it "fonds de consommation." Storch, *Cours*, tome 3, p. 141.

merchant or capitalist might have two or three domestic servants in Europe, in the colonies the slave owner indulged in half a dozen, the upkeep of which sorely taxed the overall productivity of the plantation. But whereas the industrial capitalist or merchant had acquired his wealth through hard work, economising and the careful supervision of his assets and could thus keep his indulgence in servants to a rational limit, the plantation owner did not have these industrious habits and was thus in a very weak position when tempted by the luxury or the "vice très grave" of plentiful slave servants. The unproductive use of potentially productive domestic servants, Storch concluded, had a deleterious effect on the overall productivity and efficiency of slave labour.⁶⁶ The other slaves who worked to produce saleable crops were part of the master's capital stock. Both types of slaves had to be assessed for their economic productivity in order to assess the overall efficiency of the slave system.

Storch, however, was more interested in the use of slaves as a capital asset which could be used to bring in revenue to the owner. He distinguished between three ways in which slave labour could be used: firstly, he could employ them himself on his plantation; secondly, he could rent them out to other plantation owners; and thirdly, he could "les louer à eux-mêmes" by charging them a "cens" or tax for the privilege of working for themselves. The first two methods of disposing of slaves as a capital asset involved supervised and forced labour or "corvées," whereas the latter method had more in common with free labour that was taxed. The third form of slave labour was common in Russia and Storch considered this to be the least oppressive system for the slaves and the most productive and economically efficient form of slavery.⁶⁷ When considered as a form of fixed capital, a kind of "human machine" which could earn a rent, it became possible to compare the returns of slave labour with more traditional income earning capital assets. For example, the annual rent from slave labour (irrespective of which of the three different ways a slave could be used) had to cover the interest on the purchase price or the amount spent to raise and train a

⁶⁶Storch, *Cours*, tome 3, pp. 141-2.

⁶⁷Storch, *Cours*, tome 3, p. 142.

slave to work; the cost of daily maintenance; the cost of capital depreciation over the slave's working life; the cost of life insurance premiums; and the costs of supervising the slave while he worked.⁶⁸ The rent earned by the slave's labour must be sufficient to cover these capital costs, otherwise the slave owner is faced with a capital loss rather than a profit. Each slave owner must be able to calculate these amounts and compare them with the market price for free labour, which is determined purely by the forces of supply and demand for labour in each locality. In Storch's view, the answer to the question, which form of labour was the most profitable, free or slave labour? could only be found by comparing the rent earned by a slave with the wages of a free worker.⁶⁹

Storch's comparison of the costs of free and slave labour revealed that, in some areas of Russia slave labour was cheaper than free labour, in some cases the costs were the same (for example the cost of paying for food or raising a family), but that in most areas the reverse held true. On the demand side the forces acting to set the level of rent for slaves or wages for free labourers should have been the same, but Storch believes that this was not so. The free worker has to sell his labour, whereas the slave owner is not forced to rent out his slaves for hire. They could instead work on the owner's plantation. In addition, whereas anyone with sufficient funds could hire a free labourer, not just anyone could hire a slave gang. In many slave societies there were restrictions on who was entitled to use slave labour. It was usually reserved for a particular and rather small class of privileged individuals. Thus Storch concluded that slave owners exercised a kind of monopoly over the supply of labour which inevitably raised its price in comparison to free labour. The only exception to this rule were societies in which a sufficiently large number of free labourers existed side-by-side with slaves to compete with them and thus drive the price of labour down to a common level. This latter situation certainly did not exist in the Caribbean colonies (from which most of the English abolitionists and Say also got their historical examples) where the dominant form of labour was slave labour, but it did exist in the

⁶⁸Storch, *Cours*, tome 3, pp. 143-4.

⁶⁹Storch, *Cours*, tome 3, p.144.

interior of Russia. In the provincial capitals of the Russian Empire the competition between slave and free labour was intense, unlike in the hinterland where slave labour had a virtual monopoly and where the cost of labour was much higher than in the towns. Storch cites the example, perhaps from personal experience, of the reluctance of rural slaves who came to work as labourers or domestics in St. Petersburg to accept the lower rates of pay brought about by the competition of crown serfs and free labourers. The cheaper cost of labour in the cities meant that it was here that industrialists preferred to set up new factories rather than in the countryside (as in England).⁷⁰ What made the difference between the two forms of labour were the economic incentives which existed to encourage efficient, productive and intelligent work. Basically, the costs of maintaining a slave in good health were higher than the equivalent costs of maintaining a free labourer. This was because the free labourer looked after himself and his family directly and had an obvious incentive to do this as economically and efficiently as possible. Slaves, on the other hand, were more likely to be poorly supervised and looked after, either because the master was distracted by his sumptuous existence or because he had delegated this responsibility to a negligent overseer. A second incentive which made slave labour less useful than free labour was the attitude of the slaves to their work. Slaves were more likely than free labourers to steal, to waste or damage materials and to be generally less than economical in their activity. Since the slave had no direct incentive to work well (other than to avoid punishment), he naturally did not.⁷¹

This unproductive attitude raised the level of rent which was required for the slave owner to break even on his investment. Slave labour was less productive because slaves both produced less in terms of quantity and what they did produce was of lower quality than free labourers. Storch described slave workers as "une mauvaise machine" which was

⁷⁰Storch, *Cours*, tome 3, pp. 147-8, footnote.

⁷¹Storch cites an example from antiquity in order to demonstrate that complaints about the negligence and untrustworthiness of slaves is as ancient as slavery itself. Columella's complaints apparently sounded much like the grumblings of modern slave owners whom Storch personally had heard: "J'ai entendu mille fois les mêmes plaintes de la bouche des propriétaires Livoniens, comme on les entend répéter aux Antilles, en Hongrie et dans l'intérieur de la Russie." Storch, *Cours*, tome 3, p. 146, footnote.

stubborn and very difficult to operate.⁷² Greater skill or dexterity was not rewarded, slaves felt no shame in doing a job poorly, they had no feeling of security that what extra they might be able to produce they would be allowed to keep, and the threat of physical punishment made them even less likely to cooperate. Perhaps the most damning criticism of the productivity of slavery Storch was able to come up with was the Smithian argument about the absence of incentives to innovate. Under the threat of force and with the insecurity of property they felt, slaves had no reason to think about how they might improve their work practices or to think up new methods of doing things. It is for this reason, the lack of incentives in slave labour, that Storch believed the economy of the ancient world had stagnated and was unable to begin the process of industrialisation.⁷³ Say, in one of his many critical notes to Storch's work, agreed with his assessment about the lack of industrial progress in the ancient world, but attributed it to reasons other than purely the existence of slave labour. Say believed the single most important handicap for industrial development in the ancient world was the prevalence of warfare. Like Benjamin Constant, Say argued that the political and economic structure of the ancient world was militaristic in nature. Military service was the most highly respected occupation and the accumulation of capital was made almost impossible with the constant "wars of extermination." What capital the Romans had been able to accumulate was the booty taken from those they had conquered.⁷⁴

Not only is industry hit hard by the existence of slave labour, but also capital accumulation is hindered. This was a topic close to Storch's heart and a source of conflict with Say. One of Storch's main concerns was to discuss the problem of "national income," what was it composed of and how could it be maximised.⁷⁵ The difficulty with slave labour was that it did not encourage the slaves to contribute to the accumulation of "national

⁷²Storch, *Cours*, tome 3, pp. 150, 156.

⁷³Storch, *Cours*, tome 3, pp. 153-4.

⁷⁴Say's note in Storch, *Cours*, tome 3, pp. 154-5.

⁷⁵His dispute with Say led him to publish a supplementary volume to the second French edition of the *Cours*, entitled *Considérations sur la nature du revenu national* (1824), which dealt with this thorny issue.

income."⁷⁶ They had no interest or incentive to accumulate anything and what little they did have was held very insecurely since their master or his overseers could take it with impunity. This was another "cost" of the slave system when compared with the free labour system. Storch asks how slaves could contribute to the important task of adding to the national wealth when their security of possession was subject to the whim of their master, who could at any time deprive them of the fruits of their labour. He concludes, of course, that they cannot.⁷⁷ Thus Storch thought it was a mistake to view the ancient Romans as a wealthy nation, since only a very small group of land and slave owners controlled most of society's wealth, whilst the vast bulk of the population, the "nation," was in dire poverty. Storch considered this to be another severe criticism of the slave system, that it perpetuated such an unequal share of wealth.⁷⁸

The innovation Storch brought to the debate on the economics of slavery was the discussion of what he called the "esclaves censitaires" or slaves who engage in freely paid work with the permission of their masters, on payment of a fee or "cens."⁷⁹ In addition to establishing a fixed fee or tax for the right of the slave to work independently of the master, the slave owner could also allow the slave to use part of his land, or he might provide the slave with some capital to begin a small business in manufacturing or commerce. In the latter cases there would also be a charge for rent or interest in addition to the fee or tax paid by the slave to his master. Storch was interested in this more moderate form of slavery, partly because of its widespread use in Russia, partly because he considered it to be an efficient way of ameliorating the worst economic consequences of forced labour, and partly because he thought it could be the best method of gradually abolishing slavery throughout the Western world.

⁷⁶By "national income" Storch did not mean the wealth of a few enormously wealthy individuals or the well-being of a particular class within the national economy. He was concerned with the problem of trying to assign a value to every component of the economy from landowners and slave owners down to serfs, slaves and hand workers.

⁷⁷Storch, *Cours*, tome 3, pp. 155-6.

⁷⁸Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 185.

⁷⁹Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, book 8, chapter 10, "Des esclaves censitaires et des serfs," pp. 163-69.

Storch had four reasons why the "esclave censitaire" was a better and more efficient worker than the chattel slave. Firstly, the slave's labour is not as closely supervised and thus the slave's attitudes and behaviour more closely approach that of a free labourer or "du moins lui en laisse l'illusion" of being a free labourer.⁸⁰ Secondly, the esclave censitaire is able to engage in free labour, that is, he is able to choose his work and to carry it out according to his own interests. With the incentive of self interest now operating the slave can work hard and be inventive. Thirdly, now that the slave is in control of his work he has the incentive and the means to economise or cut costs and thus improve the efficiency of labour. Fourthly, in societies where there are few free labourers, such as Russia or the Caribbean colonies, the censitaire system provides an important source of labour for manufacturing or commercial enterprises which could not be done by chattel slaves. One of the assumptions behind Storch's advocacy of the censitaire slave system is that the rights and obligations of both parties must be recognised in law in order to protect the property produced by the slave from arbitrary seizure by the master. With some guarantee of security for the slave's property enough incentives are in place for the slave to begin the slow economic process of self-improvement.⁸¹

The situation of these kind of slaves in Russia was often better than that of many crown serfs, which lead some commentators to argue that perhaps it was better to be a slave than to be a serf. Storch explained this anomalous situation in terms of the economic incentives created by the various types of coerced labour which existed in Russia. Although nominally slaves of large landed proprietors, many "esclaves censitaires" lived a reasonably prosperous life in towns and villages pursuing their own trades. This arrangement was very good for the slave owner who benefitted considerably from the "taxes" being paid by the slaves as a result of their relative economic freedom. By managing his slave's payments carefully he could maximise his return. On the other hand, the crown owned millions of serfs who were theoretically better off than many other serfs in Russia. However, Storch

⁸⁰Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 164.

⁸¹Storch, *Cours*, Vol. 3, p. 166.

argued, they were exploited in a quite arbitrary way by petty government officials. Since the Tsar could not personally manage his slaves as many landowners could and did, the crown serfs were illegally at the mercy of the government officials put in charge of their welfare but who tricked and robbed the serfs of their rightful earnings.⁸² But in those parts of Russia where the law protected the property rights of the censitaire slaves and where the depredations of government officials could be kept to a minimum, Storch believed the economic benefits of liberty, even within the institution of slavery, were to be seen.⁸³

Turning to the situation in other parts of Europe, Storch was convinced of the superiority of free labour over slave labour. Russia was not a special case even though its variety of forms of slavery and coerced labour was greater than in any other country. Storch assembled a large number of examples of reforms which moderated the institution of slavery or serfdom and thus led to improvements in agricultural output as a result.⁸⁴ After having established to his satisfaction the inefficiency of slave labour in agriculture, Storch then turned to show how much more inefficient slave labour was in the area of manufacturing. Basically, Storch accused slavery of preventing the proper development of the division of labour which was so necessary, as Smith and Say argued, for the emergence of manufacturing. Some slave owners may introduce a rudimentary division of labour on the plantation and the result, Storch believed, might be a "feeble" increase in productivity. However this was impossible to achieve in industry because, unlike agriculture which to

⁸²Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, pp. 166-7.

⁸³Apart from his own research and experience Storch relied upon the work of a M. Jacob who won a prize from the Economic Society of Saint Petersburg (no date given) on the following question: "Déterminer d'après un calcul exact du temps, de la qualité et du prix du travail, laquelle des deux manières de cultiver les terres est plus profitable pour le propriétaire, celle qui se fait par des esclaves, ou celle qui emploie des ouvriers libres?" Storch believed this work proved definitively that forced labour of various kinds was less productive than free labour. Another source was the work of Young who was invited in 1807 by the Moscow government (at the request of the Tsar) to write a report on Russian agriculture for the minister of the interior. See the footnote on pp. 174-5 of *Cours*, vol. 3.

⁸⁴ He discusses the case of Count Bernstorff who freed his peasants and witnessed an improvement in agricultural output. Storch cites *Landliches Denkmal dem Grafen von Bernstorff von seinen Bauern errichtet* (Kopenhagen, 1734), *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 173. William Coxe discusses Count Zamoiski in Poland who did the same and saw a tripling of output. *Travels through Poland, Russia, etc by William Coxe*, cited by Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 173. The example of the royal domain in Denmark, when in 1765 in Holstein the royal lands were sold off, some to freed peasants. Storch cites Thearup, *Statistik der Dan. Monarch*, in *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 174.

some extent was a result of the work of nature, industry was almost entirely the result of human ingenuity. Any improvements in industrial production had to come from the application of human intelligence and hard work, which Storch thought was entirely lacking in slave systems. He believed that free wage labourers showed their superiority over slaves most clearly in the modern industrial system and thus as industrialisation proceeded this difference would gradually become more obvious to all.⁸⁵

Proof of this claim was provided by comparing the sophistication of the modern economy with that of slave societies, in particular the economies of the ancient world. This, of course, is an unfair comparison since the absence of various consumer goods such as clocks, glasses, paper and books or the high price of woven fabrics is not due to the existence of slavery as Storch argued. Yet it is important to his attack on slavery to maintain that the ancient Roman economy was backward or underdeveloped precisely because the existence of slavery prevented the division of labour from going past a certain primitive level and prevented the formation of a prosperous middle class to buy the goods made in the factories.⁸⁶ Storch dismissed the supposed wealth of the ancient world by claiming that a comfortably well-off inhabitant of a European town in the 1820s was much better off than most in the ancient world, bar the richest of the aristocrats. Whereas the wealth of modern Europe was the result of trade and industry, the narrowly based wealth of the Roman empire was less the result of industry than the product of war, the pillaging that war made possible, and of course slave labour. Not only were the benefits of industry beyond the reach of the Romans, but also commerce, and for much the same reasons. Expressing a critical attitude to the ancient world very similar to that of other liberals such as Comte, Dunoyer, Say and Constant, Storch believed that the ancient world should be condemned for stifling economic development for the benefit of a small minority of aristocratic slave owners. He argued that if war had not been so profitable the ancient Romans would have remained an impoverished nation, since they lacked "les arts

⁸⁵Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 176.

⁸⁶Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, pp. 178-9.

industriels" which were making modern European nations and America so prosperous.⁸⁷

Storch's philosophy of history placed great importance on the relationship between the decline of slavery and the rise of economic activity. In the feudal period the reasons for poor economic activity were similar to the problems faced by the ancient Romans. It was not until the "affranchissement des esclaves," as he termed it, that the economic situation of the average person began to improve.⁸⁸ The great takeoff in European economic development did not occur until the complete abolition of serfdom and slavery. Storch described this as a "grande et bienfaisante révolution," as the "dawn" of all the great inventions and economic developments which have made life easier and more tolerable for all. The destructive effects of slavery were no longer widespread, but limited to only a few places such as the colonies in America and Eastern Europe. Like Say, Storch was optimistic for the future since he believed that the proximity of free societies would gradually undermine the stability of the few remaining slave societies. Already he thought slavery was less harsh and slaves in some societies had some, although certainly inadequate, legal protection from the arbitrary actions of their masters. But the greatest threat to slave societies was the much greater productive power of free labour in free societies. In comparing the relative economic strength of a selection of free and slave societies, Storch came to the not surprising conclusion that, compared to the United States and Ireland (a curious choice if we recall Dunoyer's attack on British policy towards the Irish peasants mentioned above), the economies of Russia, Poland, Hungary and Denmark had made feeble progress in industrial development. In all the economic categories he chose Storch found the slave/serf societies wanting, in population growth, level of exports, and per capita wealth.⁸⁹ He was particularly scathing about the lack of progress in Russia in spite of nearly one hundred and fifty years of state support and assistance. He found the level of the

⁸⁷Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, pp. 178-9.

⁸⁸Storch based his view on the work of Robertson, in particular his *History of Charles the Fifth* and quoted him at some length. Robertson's views on the incentives of free labour and the rise of a middle class were very close to Storch's views on the problem of slave labour in the colonies and serfdom in Russia. See the lengthy quote from Robertson in Storch, *Cours*, vol 3, pp. 179-80.

⁸⁹Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, pp. 182-3.

division of labour, investment in tools and equipment, and the quality of manufactured goods quite inadequate and he laid the blame at the feet of the slave system, concluding in fact that a sophisticated division of labour was incompatible with slave labour.⁹⁰ Storch had a high opinion of the potential of the Russian people and predicted great things for the Russian economy if slavery could be finally abolished.

The solution to the problem of slavery, Storch believed, could be found in the study of European history over the previous two or three centuries. Europe, according to the philosophy of history developed by Robertson and Smith, had evolved from a slave society into one based upon serfdom, and from there into a relatively free society in which labour was freely paid for. As discussed above, Storch believed that the "revolution" which had liberated the "tiers-état" in Europe could be repeated elsewhere, in Russia or in the Caribbean, without bloodshed. Storch called his chapter on the end of slavery "Comment l'esclavage s'abolit insensiblement dans l'Europe occidentale" and the key word in the title is "insensiblement." By this he meant the abolition of slavery and serfdom without too much disruption to life, liberty and property. It was possible, he thought, to persuade the more open-minded slave owners that it was in their interest to introduce free labour for the greater productivity this would create. However, this would be possible only if those slave owners were also convinced that abolition would take place in such a way that their situation and their fortune were left intact and their personal security was not harmed. It was in order to persuade the open-minded slave owner (one must include the two crown princes to whom Storch was teaching economics, with their vast land holdings which included serfs and slaves, in this group) that Storch used his historical example of the peaceful transition to free labour which he observed in western European history since the middle ages.⁹¹

⁹⁰Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, p 184.

⁹¹Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, book 2, chapter 10, "Comment l'esclavage s'abolit insensiblement dans l'Europe occidentale," pp. 466-80.

Although historically "this great revolution"⁹² had been restricted to the western part of Europe, Storch was optimistic that it could and would be extended to the Americas and to eastern Europe. Storch is supremely confident that this will inevitably happen as individual liberty becomes entrenched in European and North American society and exerts its inexorable and irresistible influence on neighbouring and less economically developed societies. He confidently predicted that

... les causes qui ont accéléré l'extension de la liberté individuelle dans l'Europe occidentale ne manqueront pas de produire tôt ou tard le même effet dans les pays où l'esclavage subsiste encore. Ces liens que la barbarie des siècles passés a formés, le progrès naturel de la prospérité les dissout peu à peu; et la marche de la liberté, pour être lente, n'en est moins sûre.⁹³

To support his optimistic perception of the future Storch gives a long list of reforms of labour practices in Europe and America since the end of the eighteenth century. Slavery had been practically abolished in most of the provinces of the Austrian monarchy, the royal domains of Holstein and Denmark, Swedish Pomerania, the Prussian states, and the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. Slavery had been limited and manumission made easier in Hungary, Denmark, and Russia. The slave trade had been prohibited or restricted by the Spanish, Danish, Swedish, American, and British governments. Storch was impressed that so much progress had been made in such a short time and confidently predicted that by the end of the nineteenth century slavery would have disappeared entirely from the continent of Europe and the societies settled by Europeans.⁹⁴ Furthermore, in the societies just

⁹²"... cette grande révolution, la plus importante qui se soit faite dans toute le cours des siècles, celle qui donne un caractère particulier à la civilisation de l'Europe, et d'où datent les progrès étonnants que cette partie du monde a faits dans tous ce qui ennoblit l'existence de l'homme et dans tout ce qui la rend agréable." Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 478. This quote brings to mind François Guizot's concept of "civilisation" by which is meant the belief that Europe has uniquely developed an understanding of individual and economic freedom which has raised it above all other societies, past or present. See Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le moment Guizot* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985) and Guizot's *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe* (Paris: Hachette, 1985), ed. Pierre Rosanvallon for a discussion of this extreme Eurocentric view.

⁹³Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 479.

⁹⁴Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, pp. 479-80. Storch repeated his prediction in the detailed appendix "Sur les progrès de la liberté individuelle en Europe et dans les colonies européennes depuis le milieu du dix-huitième siècle, Note XXIV, *Cours*, vol. 4, pp. 288-96. After discussing the legal reforms in Denmark, Austria, Prussia, Germany, Sweden, the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, Russia, the United States of America, the Danish, English, Spanish and French colonies he concluded the Note with "C'est ainsi que l'empire de l'humanité et de la justice s'étend d'année en année. Quand on réfléchit que les progrès de la liberté personnelle que nous venons

mentioned the process of abolition had not caused serious disruption to the social fabric, but had in fact led to all the salutary results of liberty: increase in population, industry, wealth and individual well-being. Storch concluded his lecture on slavery to the grand dukes by saying:

Ce témoignage rendu par l'expérience de nos jours et dans un si grand nombre de pays, en faveur de la cause de l'humanité et de la justice, devrait suffire pour rassurer les propriétaires, et pour calmer leurs alarmes. Nulle part l'ordre public n'a été troublé, même par l'abolition prompte et générale de la servitude; nulle part les propriétaires n'ont été lésés dans leurs intérêts pécuniaires; au contraire leurs revenus se sont accrus; ils se voient débarrassés de tous les soins et désagrémens qui sont inséparables de la régie des esclaves, et de maîtres craints ils sont devenus des seigneurs respectés.⁹⁵

JEAN-BAPTISTE SAY'S COMMENTS ON SLAVERY IN THE FIFTH EDITION OF THE *TRAITÉ*
D'ÉCONOMIE POLITIQUE (1826)

Say rewrote the section dealing with the profitability of slave labour and doubled it in size from four to eight pages. His rewriting reveals how much of the arguments of Storch and Hodgson he had accepted and how much he had rejected. Interestingly, he continues to concentrate on the narrower argument about the level of payments for free and slave labour (using the example of the Antilles with the total cost of F500 as the annual cost to the owner of keeping a slave) rather than the systemic approach of Storch. But his reading of the literature of the "Society for Mitigating and Gradually Abolishing the State of Slavery" had led to doubts about the overall profitability of slave plantations. Whereas earlier he had confidently asserted that plantations in Santo Domingo were so profitable that they repaid their cost price within six years, he now argued that "(c)'est ainsi probablement que les profits d'une sucrerie étaient tellement exagérés."⁹⁶

d'énumérer ne datent que de cinquante ans tout au plus, n'est-il pas permis d'espérer qu'un espace de temps double de celui-ci suffira pour faire disparaître l'esclavage et la servitude, non-seulement en Europe, mais dans toutes les contrées du monde que peut influencer sa législation et sa civilisation," p. 296.

⁹⁵Storch, *Cours*, vol. 3, p. 480.

⁹⁶Jean-Baptiste Say, *Traité d'économie politique, ou simple exposition de la manière dont se forment, se distribuent et se consomment les richesses; Cinquième Edition, augmenté d'un volume, et à laquelle se*

But the greatest change in Say's thought was to dismiss the Smithian argument about the profitability of slave labour as the most important factor working to protect or weaken the slave system in the colonies. Other external economic and moral factors intruded to undermine the viability of slavery. As he put it "tout est changé"⁹⁷ and to discuss the morality and economic efficiency of slave labour in the colonies was less relevant than he had thought in his earlier editions of the *Traité*. He still condemned the morality of owning slaves, the way in which slavery deprived both the owner and the slave, and corrupted the virtues of "véritable industrie," but he now expanded an economic argument which he had used only sketchily in previous editions of the *Traité*. He now believed the most compelling fact was that the French slave colonies could not compete economically with other sugar producers in a state of free trade. If it were not for the protection offered by the almost exclusive monopoly the French sugar producers enjoyed in the metropolitan market, slavery would collapse regardless of the comparative profitability of slave labour compared to free labour.⁹⁸ Say did not discuss an obvious counter-argument to his change of emphasis in discussing the slave question. Even if the accounts of the profitability of slave labour were exaggerated, the profits might be high enough to enable the plantation owners to mount a formidable political campaign within metropolitan France to maintain the extensive system of tariff protection which alone made slave-produced sugar competitive with other suppliers.

Say also scoffed at the experiments made by "humanitarian" planters, such as Steele and Nottingham and touted by the "Society for Mitigating and Gradually Abolishing the State of Slavery" (as in Hodgson's Letter to Say), to improve the profitability of slavery by introducing some form of wage labour. Say argued that Steele's experiments were short-lived and not universally adopted and that the British slave colonies also faced formidable economic competition. Like their French counterparts, the British plantation owners also

trouvent joints un *Épitome des principes fondamentaux de l'économie politique, et un index raisonné des matières* (Paris: Rapilly, 1826), p. 359.

⁹⁷Say, *Traité* 5th edition, p. 360.

⁹⁸Say, *Traité*, 5th edition, pp. 360-1.

needed tariff protection to survive. Their behaviour in Parliament to maintain this protection was proof to Say of the economic vulnerability of slave-produced colonial products.

The argument used by Hodgson and Storch of the gradual evolution in Europe away from serf labour towards paid free labour was rejected by Say because he thought the European experience was not applicable in the tropics. The climate was too harsh and the cultivation of sugar too back-breaking to enable free European labour to flourish. Black workers, on the other hand, were not ambitious enough and had too few "needs" to be satisfied to make freely paid labour viable. The example of free black labour in Haiti suggested to Say that there were serious problems to be faced by emancipation. Labour continued to be forced in Haiti even after abolition, with blacks required by law to be supervised and severe penalties for poor work were imposed. The result was that the production of sugar in Haiti cost more than in neighbouring islands, the proof of which was the extensive smuggling that went on because of the disparities in prices for these commodities.⁹⁹

Ultimately however, Say reverts to moral and political arguments with which to condemn slavery, thus side-stepping to some extent the debate begun by Hodgson about the economics of slave labour vis-à-vis free wage labour. He thought it was more important to discuss another question concerning the longer-term moral and political consequences of slavery (as he phrased it "pour quel prix on peut le (un homme) faire travailler sans blesser la justice et l'humanité"), than to debate the issue raised by Hodgson.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps recognising the fact that Hodgson had, to all intents and purposes, won the debate, Say was forced into general moral protestations about slavery which no liberal or abolitionist would have contested. Rather feebly himself, he accused his opponents of being "faibles calculateurs" for placing so much emphasis on force rather than on the issue of equity. However, it can be seen that Hodgson and Storch had had some effect on Say's thinking,

⁹⁹Say, *Traité*, 5th edition, p, 362.

¹⁰⁰Say, *Traité*, 5th ed., p. 363.

forcing him to confront the problem of the economics of slave labour, to reject his simplistic approach of using only the case of very high prices for free labour in the French Antilles upon which to base his entire argument, to force him to resort to the quite powerful "external" argument about the necessity of slave societies of relying upon tariff protection to maintain their markets in the metropole, and to develop the sociological distinction between the two quite different methods of acquiring wealth (by force or by trade) which Comte and Dunoyer were to take up as a major plank of their social theory in the mid and late 1820s. On the one hand, there was the wealth produced by industrious activity through the market which Say described as the sole legitimate means of wealth acquisition.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, there was the acquisition of wealth by force, whether by enslavement, feudal obligations, taxation or tariffs. With respect to the acquisition of wealth by means of slave labour, Say concluded his discussion by likening slave owners to a band of Bedouin robbers who seize a caravan of goods with little cost to themselves. This was a comparison which Comte was to adopt as the central issue in his analysis of slavery in the *Traité de législation*, where Comte was to repeat Say almost word for word in his rejection of the traditional Smithian formulation of the problem of slave labour.¹⁰²

COMTE'S VIEWS ON SLAVERY IN THE *TRAITÉ DE LÉGISLATION* (1827) AND THE *TRAITÉ DE LA PROPRIÉTÉ* (1834)

Comte and Dunoyer returned to the issue of slavery in their major published works of the mid and late 1820s. This was a time when they both had academic posts (Comte in exile in Lausanne, Switzerland and Dunoyer at the Athénée Saint-Germain in Paris) and were able to develop the ideas they had first put forward as essays and reviews in *Le Censeur européen*, before they were forced to shut it down in the political repression which

¹⁰¹Say, *Traité*, 5th ed., pp. 363-4.

¹⁰²Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 415. See discussion of this below.

followed the assassination of the Duke de Berry in 1820.¹⁰³

When Comte was forced to flee France in order to avoid incarceration he was fortunate to find a welcoming home in Switzerland, where he was able to work on his *Traité de législation*. In Geneva he was able to work on it undisturbed for about fifteen months, before he accepted a teaching post in 1821 to lecture on natural law in Lausanne. He was forced reluctantly to leave Switzerland in 1823 after the French government put enormous pressure on the Swiss to have him extradited for his support of the Spanish liberal cause. From 1823 to 1826 Comte spent time in England still working on his treatise, which finally was published in late 1826 and 1827 in four volumes.¹⁰⁴ It is apparent that the years Comte spent writing the *Traité de législation* were the years when the debate amongst abolitionists and political economists was at its peak. A quick perusal of Comte's footnotes reveals the names of the main protagonists of this contemporary debate (Say, Sismondi, Storch and the many pamphlets of the Society for Mitigating and Gradually Abolishing Slavery) scattered among the more traditional authorities on ancient and modern slave societies such as the Roman historians, Montesquieu, Volney, Robertson, Alexander von Humboldt and so on. An entire thesis could be dedicated to analysing Comte's theory of slavery, its emergence and the rôle it has played in history, and the sources upon which he based his arguments. However, the discussion that follows will be limited to the sections of Comte's *Traité de législation* which deal with the question of the economics of slavery and

¹⁰³Dunoyer's lectures at the Athénée became *L'Industrie et la morale* (1825) and his views on slavery will be presented in the context of the discussion in chapter three of his theory of the formation of class and the economic evolution of various modes of production culminating in the totally free labour system of pure "industrialism." At this point it perhaps worth noting that at times Dunoyer seems to side with Adam Hodgson and Henri Storch on the matter of improving slave productivity by giving them some economic incentive to work. He also shares their view that the payment of wages to slaves might provide a useful "half-way house" on the road to the complete abolition of slavery. See Charles Dunoyer, *L'industrie et la morale considérées dans leurs rapports avec la liberté* (Paris: Sautet et Cie, 1825). Chapters VI and VII deal with slave labour and serfdom, VI "Du degré de liberté qui est compatible avec la vie des peuples sédentaires qui se font entretenir par des esclaves," pp. 189-237; VII "Du degré de liberté qui est compatible avec la manière de vivre des peuples qui n'ont pas d'esclaves, mais chez qui tout est privilège," pp. 238-77 and the discussion of this in the following chapter.

¹⁰⁴See chapter one for more details about Comte and Dunoyer's career at this time.

Comte's place in the debate.¹⁰⁵

Say had a profound impact on Comte's theory of slavery as the following discussion will show. Comte readily accepted Say's arguments about the inappropriateness of a narrowly based comparison between the costs of slave and free wage labourers. As Say suspected and asserted but did not elaborate upon, Comte developed at some length the idea that the slave system could only survive economically because it had the protection of tariffs in the home market and subsidies from the home government funded by the metropolitan taxpayers. If it had to compete in a fully free market, slavery's economic inefficiencies would be quickly exposed and the system would collapse, thus rendering the argument about the relative cost of slave labour versus free wage labour irrelevant. Comte developed Say's insights on the economics of slavery and combined them with his own ideas on the social, class and legal structure of slavery in the *Traité de législation* which appeared in late 1826 and 1827.

¹⁰⁵Charles Comte, *Traité de législation, ou exposition des lois générales suivant lesquelles les peuples prospèrent, dépérissent ou restent stationnaire*, 4 vols. (Paris: A. Sautélet et Cie, 1827). A second revised edition was published in 1835 by Chamerot, Ducollet of Paris in 4 vols. to coincide with the publication of its sequel, the *Traité de la propriété*. A revised and corrected third edition was published in 1837 by Hauman, Cattoir et Cie of Brussels. All references are to this third edition of 1837. Comte's book of some 500 very dense pages with two closely printed columns per page is divided up into five "livres" the first of which deals with theoretical questions of law, sociological analysis, and previous all-encompassing social theories which have been used to explain social structure and evolution, pp. 1-69. Book two deals with the nature of law, in particular natural law, and the various schools of legal thinking, pp. 70-127. Book three concerns the different races of mankind, anthropology, and the influence of these factors on the evolution of culture and civilisation, pp. 128-297. Book four deals with theories of climate and its influence on civilisation, pp. 298-358. Book five deals almost exclusively with slavery, its origin, influence on political culture, the economy and the prospects for its abolition, pp. 359-496. The chapters dealing with the economics of slavery are the following: V "De l'influence de l'esclavage sur les facultés industrielle des maîtres et des esclaves," pp. 370-76; VI "De l'influence de l'esclavage sur la partie de la population qui tient le milieu entre les maîtres et les esclaves," pp. 376-79; XV "De l'influence de l'esclavage domestique sur la production et l'accroissement des richesses," pp. 415-18; XVI "De l'influence de l'esclavage sur les arts industriels et sur le prix de la manoeuvre - suite du précédent," pp. 418-25; XVII "De l'influence de l'esclavage sur la distribution des richesses entre les diverse classes de la population," pp. 425-28; XXVI "De l'influence qu'exercent, sur l'industrie et le commerce des nations libres, les privilèges commerciaux qu'elles accordent à des possesseurs d'esclaves - Du système colonial," pp. 462-68; XXVII "Des privilèges commerciaux accordés aux possesseurs d'esclaves des colonies - Suite du précédent," pp. 468-72. Comte's section on slavery in the *Traité de législation* was highly regarded by many French liberals. For example, Simonde de Sismondi described it as this "excellent livre" and "Nous le regardons, en effet, comme le traité le plus complet, le plus savant, le plus philosophique qui ait jamais été écrit sur l'esclavage et sur ses désastreux effets." In Simonde de Sismondi "Des effets de l'esclavage sur la race humaine," *Études sur l'économie politique*, vol. 2 (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1837) p. 382. Likewise Molinari held Comte's work on slavery as a key text: Molinari, Gustave de, "Esclavage," *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique*..., eds. Charles Coquery and Guillaumin (Paris: Guillaumin, 1852), vol. 1, pp. 712-731.

In Book Five of the *Traité de législation* Comte distinguished between two historical forms of slavery which have existed since the earliest stages of human development. "Political slavery" was the first form and arose when an organised band of warriors invaded a land peopled by an "industrious population," then settled among them after subduing them by force and exploited them in common as a subject race, much like the "conquest theory" of class which Augustin Thierry developed in his histories of France at this time.¹⁰⁶ Comte's analysis of political slavery appears to owe a great deal to Thierry's conquest theory of history, in which the origin of class itself was thought to come from the conquest of one "nation" or racial group by another. The prime example of this, and one which Thierry wrote on at some length in *Le Censeur européen* before expanding his analysis into a book-length history, was the Norman conquest of England. Another example which was a favourite of Thierry was the relationship between the Gauls and the Franks in French history. According to Thierry's view of class, post-conquest society was one divided into "two castes," with the conquering class having a monopoly of political power and ownership of land and the other more populous "working class" being forced to labour for the former in carefully controlled occupations which would not allow them any chance of enriching themselves or liberating themselves from their oppressors. The similarity of Comte's theory can be seen from the following passage:

Nous avons ainsi été conduits à observer la nature, les causes et les effets de l'esclavage politique; nous avons vu des armées de barbares s'organiser pour envahir des pays occupés par des populations industrieuses, se partager, après la victoire, les terres et les hommes conquis, les exploiter en commun, vivre dans l'abondance et le luxe, s'abandonner à l'oisiveté, ou ne se livrer qu'aux exercices propres à perpétuer leur domination, ne laisser aux vaincus que ce qui leur est rigoureusement nécessaire pour travailler, et leur interdire toute occupation qui pourrait favoriser leur affranchissement.

Partout où deux peuples se sont ainsi trouvés sur le même sol, ils sont restés divisés en deux castes, même lorsqu'ils ont fini par n'avoir qu'un langage. Les conquérants se sont emparés du monopole des pouvoirs, en même temps que la

¹⁰⁶See Augustin Thierry, "Vues des révolutions d'Angleterre," *Le Censeur européen*, in three parts, vol. 5, 1817, pp. 1-80; vol. 8, 1818, pp. 1-106; vol. 11, 1819, pp. 1-74; Augustin Thierry, *Histoire de la conquête de l'Angleterre par les Normands* (Paris: Didot, 1825); Augustin Thierry, *Lettres sur l'histoire de France* (Paris: Sautet, 1827).

possession du sol; les vaincus, condamnés à travailler au profit des premiers, sont devenus la classe ouvrière et ont formé la masse de la population.¹⁰⁷

What distinguishes political slavery from the second form of "domestic slavery," in Comte's view, is the manner in which the slave labour is exploited. In the former, it is as a conquered people who are exploited "en masse" as a group and who are forced to provide food, taxes and other goods to the ruling class. In the latter form of slavery, the slaves are divided up and owned and exploited individually and are forced to work for their individual master (in his household, so to speak) by means of "active and continuous" control and supervision.¹⁰⁸ If the method of exploitation has changed for "domestic slaves" then so too has the nature of the ruling class. In a society based upon the forced labour of domestic slaves, Comte argues, the owners of the slaves form an "aristocracy" or an "aristocratic class" as he chose to call it. Aristocracy was a term which Comte chose deliberately and defined carefully. By it he meant a class of people, usually family based, who possessed a monopoly of political power which had been seized by force and who treated their position as a form of personal property, even to the extent of being able to pass it on to their heirs. Comte contrasted this form of aristocracy, which he believed was a central aspect of all slave societies, with "les classes supérieures" with which it was often confused. The latter, Comte believed, was the "natural" result of any peaceable human endeavour and arose because of the inherent differences in skills, knowledge, and application between individuals.¹⁰⁹ But whatever the particular form of slavery, whether "political" or "domestic," according to Comte there were three features all forms of slavery shared: it was a way of exploiting the labour of some for the material benefit of a few, it gave rise to a definite class structure of the few exploiters and the many exploited, and resulted in a legal system which classified men as either property owners or the property of someone else. The former enjoyed the full protection of the law, whilst Comte likened the latter, the slaves, to

¹⁰⁷Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 359.

¹⁰⁸Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 359-60.

¹⁰⁹Comte, *Traité de législation*, pp. 359-60, footnote.

"a piece of furniture" with all the legal rights of such an object.¹¹⁰

Comte did allow for the existence of a third or "middle" class in his scheme. The middle class varied in size from country to country and, where it was substantial, there was an inevitable and bitter conflict or struggle ("lutte") with the aristocratic class. However, the middle class was not of uniform composition and did not have a single class interest (as Marx might phrase it) since it was made up of at least three groups: those who lived in the privileged medieval towns; those who enriched themselves in service to the aristocracy; and those who were the true "industrials," who rose up from the working class by dint of hard work. According to Comte, since the second and third factions of the middle class acquired their wealth in quite different ways, they would by necessity have very different and opposed class interests.¹¹¹

A considerable proportion of Book Five of the *Traité de législation* is devoted to an exhaustive historical and sociological analysis of the three great periods of slavery: ancient Rome up to the fall of the Empire; the feudal period; and the establishment of European colonies in the New World. Comte's interest extends to the effect of slavery on a variety of aspects of the various classes which make up slave societies, including physical characteristics, intellectual achievements, "morals,"¹¹² personal security, interclass relationships, the nature of government, nationalism, religion, as well as the economic issues mentioned above. Naturally, it is impossible to do justice to all this here, but a brief discussion of Comte's attitudes towards the economics of slavery is both appropriate and necessary for the purposes of this chapter. The first purely economic problem Comte turns to is the effect slavery has on what he calls "les facultés industrielles" of the three classes which make up slave societies, namely the slave owners, the slaves, and the middle class, in the three great periods of slavery (ancient Greece and Rome, the feudal period, and modern

¹¹⁰Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 361.

¹¹¹Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 360.

¹¹²By the term "morals" both Comte and Dunoyer mean a combination of moral attitudes as well as political culture.

European colonies).¹¹³ Since the slave owners are able to avoid all productive labour whatsoever, an inevitable consequence is that the slave owning class comes to disdain such work and this attitude is expressed in works of political philosophy (such as Aristotle and Plato) and history (such as Plutarch and Dionysius of Halicarnassus). The underlying purpose of the disdain for useful labour, according to Comte, is an economic one. The aristocratic class had amassed vast tracts of land and used slave labour to cultivate it and to engage in commerce and industry on their behalf. By encouraging the view that productive labour was somehow beneath the dignity of a truly free man and only the province of a slave, Comte believed the aristocratic class was merely trying to establish a monopoly of these economic activities, especially that of the sale of grain.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, there are three exceptions to this general rule of aristocratic disdain for labour. The aristocratic class considers only two occupations to be worthy of nobles, that of the warrior and that of the statesman, with a possible third occupation which Comte sarcastically discusses, that of buying and selling slaves. The first two occupations were acceptable to slave owners because they did not involve the voluntary exchange of one value for another, which was the hallmark of any productive activity as defined by Jean-Baptiste Say and as adopted by Comte and Dunoyer in their social theory. Citing Plutarch's "Life of Cato," Comte makes the following biting remarks which also reveal his strong anti-classical posture:

Il est cependant une industrie que l'esclavage n'avalissait point aux yeux des membres de l'aristocratie, c'est l'industrie qui consistait à dresser, à louer, à acheter et à vendre des hommes. Le même personnage qui craignait de s'avilir en appliquant ses nobles mains à la culture d'un champ ou à l'exercice d'une profession, ne croyait pas déroger en dressant lui-même ses esclaves à faire des métiers qu'il jugeait les plus vils, mêmes celui de gladiateurs. Un citoyen eût été d'infamie s'il se fût fait louer de chevaux; mais un sénateur ou un consul pouvait être loueur d'hommes sans déroger à sa dignité. Un des ancêtres d'Octave avait, disait-on, déshonoré sa postérité en faisant la banque; mais Caton achetait et

¹¹³See V "De l'influence de l'esclavage sur les facultés industrielle des maîtres et des esclaves," pp. 370-76; VI "De l'influence de l'esclavage sur la partie de la population qui tient le milieu entre les maîtres et les esclaves," pp. 376-79 in Comte, *Traité de législation*.

¹¹⁴Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 371. See also footnote p. 378.

vendait des êtres humains; il vendait particulièrement les vieux, qui ne lui rapportaient que peu de profit et qui pouvaient devenir inutiles, et Caton était le gardien des moeurs.¹¹⁵

Referring to the period of European feudalism Comte asserted that the warrior made a living by means of violent pillage, whilst the public official or statesman lived off forced contributions such as taxes, tithes and requisitions. What was significant to Comte was that these occupations were attractive to the aristocratic class precisely because they were not industrial occupations, but in fact their very opposite.¹¹⁶

The ultimate economic consequences of slavery was economic collapse and "decadence." This came about because whatever talents the aristocratic class had they were not used in improving the methods of production and the occupations they did follow, such as war, public service, and slave owning, were a net drain on productive activity. In fact, Comte considered the class of slave owners to be a parasitic class whose miraculous disappearance would leave the total industrial capacity of the world untouched, much like Saint-Simon's famous political parable of 1819 which might well have been known to Comte. In the "political parable" Saint-Simon poses the question, what would happen if France suddenly lost three thousand of its best scientists, artists, artisans, bankers and so on? His answer is economic chaos and collapse, "the nation would become a lifeless corpse." On the other hand, if France lost thirty thousand from the royal family, cabinet officials, ministers, marshalls, clergy, noble landowners and so on, "it would not result in any political harm to the state."¹¹⁷ Concerning slavery, Comte posed a very similar question:

Si, par quelque grande catastrophe, la race des maîtres disparaissait tout à coup d'un pays où l'esclavage est admis, il n'est aucun genre de travail qui demeurât

¹¹⁵Comte, *Traité de législation*, pp. 371-2.

¹¹⁶Comte, *Traité de législation*, pp. 372.

¹¹⁷Saint-Simon, "A Political Parable: Premier extrait de *L'Organisateur*," in *Henri Saint-Simon: Selected Writings in Science, Industry and Social Organisation*, ed. Keith Taylor (London: Croom Helm, 1975), pp. 194-5. Saint-Simon's political parable might have been known to Comte as it was written in 1819 and appeared in Saint-Simon's journal *L'Organisateur*. The relationship between Saint-Simon and Comte and Dunoyer was strained, in spite of the similarities in their ideas, partly because of Saint-Simon's rather odd personality and partly because Saint-Simon's interest in political activism and popularisation clashed with Comte and Dunoyer's more scholarly approach.

suspendu, aucune richesse dont on eût à déplorer la perte. Les travaux prendraient une direction plus utile au genre humain; les intervalles de repos seraient mieux ménagés: mais le travail gagnerait en énergie et en intelligence beaucoup plus qu'il perdrait en durée.¹¹⁸

The slave class had no economic incentive to work hard, preferring to do the barest minimum of labour required to avoid physical punishment from their masters. The slave owners had a vested interest in keeping their slaves as ignorant as possible (with the unfortunate economic side-effect of keeping their labour unskilled) in order to prevent rebellion. The middle class in slave societies finds itself in a similar situation to that of the slaves. Middle class artisans and farmers have to compete with the slaves doing the same kind of work, but they lack the capital resources of the slave owners. If they can get regular work, it is poorly paid and lacks the dignity which free labour should have because of the stigma attached to productive work by the aristocratic class. In ancient Rome, Comte argues, free industrial workers were reduced to a state of indigence and free farmers virtually driven off the land. In the slave states of the United States Comte observed a polarisation of class structure as the free workers "deserted" the south to find employment in the North. In both cases, the existence of slavery made it almost impossible for free labour to exist side-by-side. Comte concluded that, unless all members of a society are active in productive industrial occupations, the necessary skills for economic improvement are gradually lost and the burdens on what productive activity there is become so great that economic decline is an inevitable consequence of slavery.¹¹⁹

The economic decline brought about by slavery also has an effect on cultural activities. Comte expresses surprise that traditional explanations of the decadence of ancient Roman technology, taste, morals and language by writers as diverse as Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Rousseau did not attribute it to the pernicious influence of slavery. These political philosophers preferred to develop elaborate theories about the life-cycle of all states, which went through a progression from childhood, manhood, old age and then death.

¹¹⁸Comte, *Traité de législation*, pp. 372.

¹¹⁹Comte, *Traité de législation*, pp. 374.

They thus missed the most important cause, namely the anti-industrial economic effects of using slave labour on a wide scale.¹²⁰

Comte then turns to the central question of the profitability of slave labour in three important chapters.¹²¹ Perhaps the most startling conclusion Comte comes to, after having read Smith, Say, Hodgson, Storch and Sismondi on the profitability of slave labour, is that the very question first asked by Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* is mistaken. When the question is phrased in the way Smith chose to, namely to place oneself in the shoes of the slave owner and ask whether the costs of labour ("wear and tear" as Smith called them) were more or less for free or slave labour, Comte believed the unspoken assumption behind the question was that individual labourers, whether slave or free, were nothing more than machines whose movement could be arbitrarily directed, accelerated or slowed down. Comte rejected this approach as not one which a true philosophe, a true moralist, or a true legislator should take since it was partisan. It took the perspective of the slave owner at the literal expense of the slave labourer. By not asking about the morality and justice of slave labour in the first place, economists who argued purely about the relative costs of the two different forms of labour were like the pirates or highway robbers who weighed up the costs and benefits of a new raid against travellers. With evident approval Comte cites a passage from Say's fifth edition of the *Traité d'économie politique* (1826) in which Say describes as "feeble calculators" those economists who consider that force counts for everything and justice for nothing when adding up the costs and benefits of a given distribution of property.

Ce sont de faibles calculateurs que ceux qui comptent la force pour tout et l'équité pour rien. Cela conduit au système d'exploitation des Arabes bédouins qui arrêtent une caravane, et s'emparent des marchandises qu'elle transporte, sans qu'il leur en coûte autre chose, disent-ils, que quelques jours d'ambuscade, et quelques livres de poudre à tirer. Il n'y a de manière durable et sûre de

¹²⁰Comte, *Traité de législation*, pp. 374, footnote.

¹²¹XV "De l'influence de l'esclavage domestique sur la production et l'accroissement des richesses," pp. 415-18; XVI "De l'influence de l'esclavage sur les arts industriels et sur le prix de la manoeuvre - suite du précédent," pp. 418-25; XVII "De l'influence de l'esclavage sur la distribution des richesses entre les diverses classes de la population, pp. 425-28 in Comte, *Traité de législation*.

produire que celle qui est légitime, et il n'y a de manière légitime que celle où les avantages de l'une ne sont point acquis aux dépens de l'autre.¹²²

Comte expressed the same idea and laid the blame for the prevalence of naked economic calculation over moral questions of property and justice at the feet of Adam Smith.

Que des pirates ou des voleurs de grand chemin discutent entre eux, si les biens qu'ils acquièrent en rançonnant les voyageurs, leur coûtent plus cher que ceux qu'ils acquerraient en exerçant quelque branche d'industrie, je le conçois; pour eux, la question peut ne pas être éclaircie, et ils n'ont pas la prétention de la discuter, ni comme moralistes, ni comme législateurs. Mais élever une question analogue chez des peuples policés, et en traitant une science, c'est, à ce qu'il me semble, renoncer à l'impartialité qui doit présider à toute recherche scientifique, et rétrograder vers la barbarie. Adam Smith, dont l'esprit était d'ailleurs si juste, a mal posé la question, et il a entraîné dans l'erreur presque tous ceux qui l'ont traitée après lui.¹²³

Amore honest way of expressing the same question, Comte thought, was:

...de savoir si le travail qu'un homme obtient d'un grand nombre d'autres en leur déchirant la peau à coups de fouet, lui coûte plus que le travail qu'il obtiendrait d'eux en leur payant un juste salaire.¹²⁴

Not surprisingly few if any of the political economists contributing to the debate expressed the question in this way, even though most of them would have agreed with Comte's sentiments. To Comte the phrasing of the question in the way made popular by Smith was "unscientific" because it was so value-laden and was therefore not likely to lead to a "good solution" to the problem. It seemed to view the problem exclusively from the perspective of the slave owner, who asked himself how he could minimise his labour costs. In fact, Comte surmised that the way the question was phrased suggested that the first writers on the subject must have been slave owners and that it was to further their own interests that they investigated the problem of the economics of slave labour. A fairer and more general question would be to ask all parties to the transaction for an assessment of their perception of the costs and benefits involved. And this, of course, would involve the

¹²²Comte quotes Say's *Traité*, fifth edition, book 1, chapter 19 in Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 416, footnote.

¹²³Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 415.

¹²⁴Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 415.

slaves as participants rather than as objects or "machines." Comte asks rhetorically why the slaves' costs have never been included in any economic calculation:

Jamais des hommes asservis ne se fussent avisés de mettre en question, si la chétive subsistance qu'ils obtiennent pour prix de leurs travaux leur coûte moins de souffrances et de fatigues que n'en coûte à des ouvriers libres le salaire qu'ils obtiennent de leur travail. Cette question est cependant la même que la précédente; il n'y a de différence entre l'une et l'autre, qu'en ce que, dans la première, ce sont les maîtres qui examinent s'il leur convient de payer leurs ouvriers en coups de fouets ou en bonne monnaie, tandis que dans la seconde ce sont les esclaves qui se demandent quel est entre ces deux modes de paiement, celui qui leur convient le mieux.¹²⁵

A valid scientific inquiry into the problem had to be impartial and could not assume the position of one of the parties at the expense of the other. Thus Comte refused to take the perspective of either master or slave, king or subject, citizen or foreigner in what he wanted and expected to be a scientific analysis of the problem of slavery.¹²⁶

Of course Comte knew very well that, by rejecting the traditional Smithian approach to the problem and introducing the issue of the perception of costs and benefits of the slave, he was going to the heart of the contradiction and injustice of slavery, namely that a human being could be a form of property and thus be the mute object of a transaction. Comte granted that many slave owners behaved exactly like this, treating their slaves like so many English post-horses whose owners drove to death, since it was cheaper to replace them with fresh horses than to care for them in the long term. In a discussion of the Dutch colony in Guyana Comte concluded pessimistically that

Des maîtres de poste anglais trouvent qu'il est plus économique d'épuiser en peu d'années un bon cheval et de le remplacer, que de n'en exiger qu'un travail modéré et de le bien nourrir pour le faire durer plus long-temps: c'est le calcul que font les possesseurs d'hommes dans les colonies.¹²⁷

Interestingly, Dunoyer had a different explanation for the brutal treatment of slaves by their masters. He argued that the owner of a horse will treat it "humanely" because he

¹²⁵Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 415-16.

¹²⁶Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 415.

¹²⁷Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 389, footnote.

has no fear of it rising up in revolt against him. He will treat a slave harshly precisely because he is a fellow human being who might do what a horse will not. Thus the slave needs to be kept in a constant state of submission.

La cruauté des traitements qu'on a toujours fait subir aux hommes asservis tient à la nature particulière de cette espèce de serfs, beaucoup plus généreux et plus difficile à soumettre que les autres animaux voués à la servitude domestique. A la rigueur, un maître peut traiter humainement son cheval, son chien, son âne: il n'a pas à craindre que ses esclaves-là se concertent et se révoltent; mais il ne saurait être aussi tranquille sur la soumission des êtres semblables à lui qu'il tient dans l'asservissement; comme leur nature est plus noble, il sent qu'il a plus à faire pour les subjuger, et il les traite avec inhumanité précisément parce qu'ils sont des hommes. Il est tel propriétaire d'esclaves qui passerait avec raison pour un fou furieux, digne d'être à jamais interdit, s'il s'avisait de traiter ses bêtes comme il lui arrive traiter ses gens.¹²⁸

A slave owner or a pirate might be able and willing to make a calculation such as Smith had in mind, but the independent thinking social theorist was not in such a position. As Comte put it with considerable passion:

... mais nous, qui n'avons aucun tarif pour fixer la valeur de nos semblables; nous, qui ne savons pas quel est le prix légitime auquel on achète le pouvoir de faire violence à des hommes, à des enfants, à des femmes; nous, qui n'admettons pas que la partie la plus considérables du genre humain ait été créée pour les plaisirs des membres d'une aristocratie; nous, qui ne pouvons voir dans les relations qui ont lieu entre un maître et ses esclaves, que l'action de la force et de la brutalité sur la faiblesse et sur l'ignorance; nous, aux yeux de qui les esclaves sont des hommes aussi bien que les maîtres, et qui devons calculer ce que coûte un produit, non pas à tels ou tels hommes, mais au genre humain tout entier; nous enfin, qui ne pouvons pas ne compter pour rien les violences et les misères auxquelles des populations sont assujetties pour les plaisirs d'une aristocratie plus ou moins nombreuses, nous devons raisonner autrement que des possesseurs d'esclaves.¹²⁹

But this outburst did not mean that Comte was not interested in the economic consequences of slavery. His concern, like Henri Storch's, was the overall economic, moral, religious, social and political consequences of slavery - a systemic interest, as it were, rather than an interest in the peculiar problems of the slave owner in balancing his plantation account books by weighing the pros and cons of using slaves or free wage

¹²⁸Dunoyer, *L'industrie et la morale*, pp. 232-3, footnote.

¹²⁹Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 416.

labourers. However unlike Storch, Comte was unwilling to countenance the possibility of paying slaves for their labour as a kind of half-way house between slavery and free labour. The moral imperatives of abolition were too strong for him to accept any form of coerced labour as coolly as Storch, perhaps more realistically, was able to do. Nevertheless, Comte's interest in slavery as a system of organising labour led to the asking of a set of economic questions similar to those put forward by Hodgson and Storch, about how slavery affected the total amount of wealth created in society, how it affected the way in which that wealth was distributed and consumed, and how it affected the costs of producing that wealth.¹³⁰

We have already mentioned Comte's answer to the first question: he believed that societies dependent on slave labour stagnated economically and, like the fall of the Roman Empire, became both economically and politically "decadent." Furthermore, slave societies lacked the incentives for innovation and technical improvements. Comte argued that

Deux des principales causes des progrès qu'ont faits les arts et les sciences chez les modernes, sont la division des occupations, et l'usage des machines: or, l'esclavage domestique met un obstacle invincible à l'usage des machines et à la division des occupations.¹³¹

Yet, although Comte rejected the traditional Smithian formulation of the question about the profitability of slave labour as one designed to take the side of the slave owners, much of his analysis, as was Say's and Storch's, was still taken from Smith. One need only compare the above mentioned passage with the following from Smith's *Wealth of Nations* concerning the use of slaves in ancient Athens and Rome to see this fact.

Slaves, however, are very seldom inventive; and all the most important improvements, either in machinery, or in the arrangement and distribution of work which facilitate and abridge labour, have been the discoveries of freemen. Should a slave propose any improvement of this kind, his master would be very apt to consider the proposal as the suggestion of laziness, and a desire to save his own labour at the master's expense. The poor slave, instead of a reward, would probably meet with much abuse, perhaps with some punishment.¹³²

¹³⁰Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 417.

¹³¹Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 424.

¹³²Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of nations*, ed. R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner (The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith reprinted Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1981), vol. II, pp. 684.

The slave owners disdained all industrial activity, whilst the slaves were not encouraged to improve their skills or develop new methods of production as they were not rewarded for their effort and had no security of person or property. As far as the contribution of the slave owners to national wealth, Comte dismisses their activity as "complètement perdue pour la production des richesses."¹³³ Lacking technical innovators and an ever increasing division of labour, slave economies remained locked into agriculture as their sole means of wealth production. One of Comte's observations which most attracted Say's attention in editions of his *Traité d'économie politique* after 1827 was that a considerable number of plantation owners were highly indebted. In spite of their exploitation of slave labour and the tariffs which guaranteed a market for their produce in their home countries, many plantation owners in the British and French colonies were close to bankruptcy, thus prompting a considerable pamphlet literature on their predicament.¹³⁴ In other sectors of the economy slave societies were extremely backward and impoverished. Comte cites the examples given by French travellers' accounts in the United States of supposedly wealthy slave societies being unable to exploit local resources, such as forests, because of the lack of skilled labour. Without local masons, carpenters, market gardeners and ship-builders, plantation owners had to spend vast sums purchasing material from the northern cities or even from as far away as England.¹³⁵ Comte blamed the slave system for preventing the natural development of job skills and the division of labour and thus hampering growth in an important part of the southern economy. If the economy was lacking on the supply side, it was also lacking on the demand side. Without a prosperous and free working and middle class there was no market for the services of masons, carpenters and market gardeners, even if they had existed.¹³⁶

As for the second question, Comte seemed to borrow Storch's concept of "national

¹³³Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 417.

¹³⁴Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 420.

¹³⁵Michaux, *Voyage à l'ouest des monts Alleghany* and Laroche foucauld, *Voyage aux États-Unis* cited in Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 421.

¹³⁶Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 422.

wealth" and concluded that slave economies made little contribution to any increase in overall national wealth. However, Comte's innovation was to go beyond Storch and to inquire into the redistribution of wealth from one class to another within slave societies. He observed that slave owners were very successful at redistributing existing wealth away from the slaves and the consumers and taxpayers of the metropole. In fact, the slave owners were consummate exploiters, directly exploiting their slave workers by forcing them to work in their plantations and homes, and indirectly exploiting the consumers and taxpayers of the metropole by their exclusive access to the home market by means of tariffs and other protective measures.

Extorquer les capitaux du riche par des violences, ce n'est pas accroître la somme des richesses, c'est déplacer des richesses déjà produites; de mêmes, extorquer le travail du pauvre par des coups de fouet ou par les moyens analogues, ce n'est pas diminuer les frais de production, c'est ravir à la masse de la population ses moyens d'existence, pour engraisser les membres d'une aristocratie. Ce qui est vrai pour des individus comparés à des individus, est vrai pour des nations comparées à d'autres nations; il n'y a de différence entre le premier cas et le second, qu'en ce que, dans celui-ci, le brigandage est établi sur une base plus large, et produit des conséquences plus désastreuses.¹³⁷

Therefore, an important social consequence of slavery was the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few wealthy slave owners. Comte describes the development of a highly unequal class structure in ancient Rome, Attica and contemporary British and French colonies in some detail. He concluded that the vast bulk of property and wealth was concentrated in a small number of British plantation owners, perhaps as few as seventeen or eighteen hundred by Comte's estimate, who controlled the lives and fate of more than 800,000 slaves.¹³⁸ A similar calculation put the number of French sugar plantation owners at about thirteen hundred and the number of slaves at approximately 284,400.¹³⁹

¹³⁷Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 416.

¹³⁸"Dans les colonies anglaises, le nombre des esclaves s'élève à plus de huit cent mille; les personnes de cette classe sont plus misérables que ne le sont chez nous les ouvriers les plus pauvres; ils n'ont ni terres, ni maisons, ni vêtements. La partie la plus considérable des richesses est concentrée dans les mains des familles aristocratiques, dont le nombre ne s'élève qu'à dix-sept ou dix-huit cents." Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 427.

¹³⁹Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 427.

The other important source of exploitation for the slave owning "aristocracy" were the consumers and taxpayers of the metropole. This is an argument which Say had made in the third and fourth editions of his *Traité* before his contact with Hodgson and Storch, but which he had not developed at any length. What had been an off-the-cuff remark by Say was now turned into the lynch-pin of Comte's analysis of the entire modern slave system. Whereas in the ancient world slavery was made possible by the supply of cheap slaves made possible by war, in the modern world Comte believed that without the financial "support" provided by the metropole the slave system would sink into bankruptcy and economic collapse. In both cases the economic inefficiencies of slave labour were kept hidden by actions of the state. A clear example of this was provided by the British planters in the Caribbean who, each year it seemed, appealed to Parliament to relieve their economic "distress" by maintaining the lucrative monopoly for their goods in the British market. The monopoly profits which they derived from this exclusive access to the British market made up a considerable proportion of their income over and above the profits they were able to extort from their slaves' labour in the fields.¹⁴⁰ A similar situation existed in the French slave colonies. When Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Bourbon were returned after 1814, the slave owning class was near bankruptcy and thus sought and got exclusive trading rights in France to enable them to repay their considerable debts. Comte estimated this privilege cost French consumers some F20-30 million per annum in extra costs for sugar alone in the mid 1820s.¹⁴¹

The monopoly profits from the exclusive trading rights with the metropole were not the only economic benefits to be had. Another source of subsidy to the slave system were the costs of administration and defence which were borne by the metropolitan taxpayers.

¹⁴⁰Referring to the British planters Comte argued that "La plupart des propriétaires peuvent à peine payer leurs dettes, et fournir aux frais d'exploitation; presque toutes les années, ils sont obligés de faire au parlement anglais l'*exposition de leurs détresse*, et de solliciter des monopoles, c'est-à-dire des impôts en leur faveur, sur la population libre d'Angleterre. Les contributions qu'ils perçoivent sur les Anglais, au moyens de monopoles qui leur ont accordés, sont la partie la plus claire de leurs revenus." Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 427.

¹⁴¹Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 428.

Comte estimated that up to one half of the cost of administering the colonies was a direct subsidy from the taxpayers. In addition to this administrative cost there were the costs of stationing troops on the islands to prevent slave revolts and maintaining naval protection for the traders bringing their produce to France.¹⁴² When all the subsidies to the slave colonies were added up, Comte believed the annual amount reached F50 million in the late 1820s. Thus the slave owners have a lucrative source of income in addition to the use of slaves directly on their plantations. For example, the sugar growers who numbered some 318 directly benefited from the F20-30 million per annum extorted from the French consumers and this was proof enough to Comte that the slave system was an efficient system of class exploitation by a small number of "aristocratic" beneficiaries.¹⁴³ Comte concluded his analysis of the exploitation which the colonial system made possible with the observation that the exploitation of the slaves was like employers who paid a portion of their wage in kind and the rest in a new form of money, the strokes of the whip. On the other hand, the exploitation of the metropolitan consumers by means of the exclusive trading rights and tariffs on cheaper non-French sources was like a man who refuses to buy his supplies from the manufacturer, but prefers to sell stolen goods. To add insult to injury, these stolen goods are not sold more cheaply but at a much higher price - surely a clever form of extortion if it could be maintained.

J'ai fait observer précédemment que, pour obtenir le travail d'un esclave, un maître lui en paie une petite partie en denrées ou en vêtements, et l'autre partie en coups de fouet. Nous ne pouvons considérer ce qui est acquis avec ce dernier genre de monnaie, autrement que nous considérons les bénéfices faits par les individus qui vont rançonner les voyageurs sur les grands chemins. Ainsi, quand nous accordons un monopole aux denrées vendues par des propriétaires qui n'obtiennent le travail de leurs ouvriers qu'à coups de fouet, au préjudice de ceux qui obtiennent le travail en payant un just salaire, nous sommes dans le cas d'un homme qui refuserait d'acheter les produits d'un manufacturier et qui

¹⁴²Comte uses budget papers written by Charles Dupin for all these figures. One example from the ministre de la marine was for the administration of the Antilles in 1820 which cost some F11.8 million but only raised from local sources only F5.7 million. Thus the French taxpayers were subsidising the slave owners to the tune of F6 million. In all, Comte believed that the cost of administering France's three remaining colonies was the same as when it had ten. Comte, *Traité de législation*, pp. 465-6.

¹⁴³Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 467.

voudrait n'acheter que les marchandises volées. Un tel commerce, fait par un malhonnête homme, serait naturel, si les objets volés étaient livrés au-dessous du prix courant; mais, si les voleurs, considérant les dangers de leur profession, en demandaient un prix plus haut que le prix du commerce, que penserions-nous de celui qui leur donnerait la préférence?¹⁴⁴

Since it is the slave owner who has stolen from the slave by not paying him or her "a just wage," it follows that it is not theft if the slave takes property from the slave owner, but merely an effort to redress the balance.¹⁴⁵

The third economic question Comte posed is how slavery affected the costs of producing wealth. He argued that most of the surplus the slave owners were able to "extort" from the slave was dissipated by the high cost of living in a distorted and inefficient economy. Thus their much vaunted wealth, attributed to the cheapness of coerced slave labour, was in fact an illusion.¹⁴⁶ Unlike Storch, Comte did not limit his analysis to the drain on net productivity caused by the unproductive use of large numbers of domestic slaves in the slave owner's household, but extended it to include the effect on the entire economy. Comte uses examples of the great disparities in wages between low priced rented slave labour and high priced free wage labour in South Africa, the American slave states, and the French Caribbean, to make the point that, if the cost of plantation labour by slaves was cheap, the rest of the economy was plagued by labour shortages, especially of skilled artisans, which kept the slave economy in an overall backward and undeveloped state. The northern American states could cope with high wage levels for two reasons. The output of these highly paid and highly skilled workers was considerable and the value of the resources being transformed into saleable products by them provided an excellent return on one's investment, in spite of the high level of wages paid. In the slave owning South the opposite was the case. The low wages for slaves reflected low productivity and under utilised resources. As Comte put it, "les frais d'exploitation égalent ou surpassent la valeur des produits," which explained the high level of indebtedness of many slave owners.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 470.

¹⁴⁵Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 418.

¹⁴⁶Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 422.

¹⁴⁷Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 423.

Once again the source of Comte's argument appears to come from Smith. In an interesting comparison between slave labour in Turkish mines and free wage labour in Hungarian mines, Smith comes to the conclusion that although slave labour is cheap, it is inefficient, and conversely, that whilst free labour is expensive, it is highly productive and profitable to the mine owner.

In the manufactures carried on by slaves, therefore, more labour must generally have been employed to execute the same quantity of work, than in those carried on by freemen. The work of the former must, upon that account, generally have been dearer than that of the latter. The Hungarian mines, it is remarked by Mr. Montesquieu, though not richer, have always been wrought with less expense, and therefore with more profit, than the Turkish mines in their neighbourhood. The Turkish mines are wrought by slaves; and the arms of those slaves are the only machines which the Turks have ever thought of employing. The Hungarian mines are wrought by freemen, who employ a great deal of machinery, by which they facilitate and abridge their own labour.¹⁴⁸

Comte next turned to an analysis of the costs of production in the colonies for the so-called "colonial wares" of sugar, indigo, coffee and such like. Here he found more proof for his claim that the total costs of production of slave labour were far higher than for free wage labour, thus leading to the lower prices for goods produced by free labour. The examples Comte uses to make his case come from two sources. The first are those colonies such as Cuba, where the ratio of slave to free labour is much less than in the French colonies, and the second are those sugar producers where no slaves at all are used in production, namely India and Cochin China. In the former example, the assumption Comte makes is that, since the high cost of producing sugar is almost exclusively due to the presence of slave labour (with other local factors such as soil fertility and climate discounted for his polemical purposes), the greater the proportion of slaves used in production, the greater will be the costs of production. Hence, the final sale price to consumers will be high. Using Jean-Baptiste as his authority, Comte claims that the slave

¹⁴⁸Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of nations*, ed. R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner (The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith reprinted Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1981), vol. II, pp. 684. See the all too brief discussion of this issue in Samuel Hollander, *The Economics of Adam Smith* (University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 211, footnote 11.

colonies with the least number of slaves can produce sugar up to one third more cheaply than the other slave colonies.¹⁴⁹

The second source of examples provide a much sounder basis for argument than the rather weak one of Cuba. In spite of using very primitive methods, lacking any labour-saving machines or modern processes, and facing the higher costs of shipping to Britain, the (East) Indian sugar producers were much more competitive than their West Indian counterparts. Comte ascribed this to the fact that they only used free wage labour and not slaves. Likewise with the sugar producers of Cochin China. Both producers were, for all intents and purposes, kept out of the British and French markets by hefty taxes which raised the internal domestic sale price of foreign imported sugar to the much higher level of slave produced sugar. Comte calculated the extra cost to French consumers of these taxes and trade restrictions in 1826 to be more than F30 million per annum. He regarded this cost as both an unnecessary burden on consumers as well as a direct subsidy to the French slave owners.¹⁵⁰ Comte reminded his readers that the benefits of free trade in sugar and other colonial products would not only be felt by existing consumers of sugar. The lower price would enable large numbers of other people, who were prevented from consuming it at all because of the high price, to purchase sugar, with benefits to themselves and to the producers which an expanded market would create.¹⁵¹ Comte summed up his analysis of the economic consequences of slavery as an "invincible obstacle" to the formation and accumulation of wealth and a serious handicap to any increase in the productivity of labour. The result was a social system with a highly inequitable distribution of wealth, which was

¹⁴⁹Comte makes this rather weak argument in a lengthy footnote and dismisses other more likely factors for this difference preferring to lay all the blame upon slavery itself. "La différence était donc de près d'un tiers en faveur du pays qui, comparativement à la population libre, possède le moins d'esclaves. Il est vrai que quelques autres circonstances locales ont influé sur cette différence; mais l'esclavage est cependant la cause la plus influente." Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 464.

¹⁵⁰In 1826 France consumed 64.6 million kilogrammes of sugar at a cost of F7.30 per kilogramme for a total cost of F69.3 million. If France had been able to buy all its sugar from slave colonies with only half the proportion of slave labour the cost would have been F49.96 million, a saving of about F20 million. If the source had been Indian or Vietnamese sugar the savings would have been F30 million. Comte uses French budget papers for his figures. Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 465.

¹⁵¹Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 465.

against all principles of equality, morality, and justice.¹⁵²

Although Comte had certainly read Hodgson and Storch and quoted from them several times, he virtually ignores their arguments about how to make slave labour more productive. The reason Comte does this is twofold. Firstly, it must be remembered that he is an "immediatist" in his demand for the termination of slavery. In his eyes slavery is so immoral, such an evil, that anything which might prolong it by giving the slave owners an economic incentive to keep it, even in an altered and perhaps ameliorated form, should be avoided. Secondly, Comte had deliberately changed the focus of the debate away from the "peu philosophique" concern with labour profitability to what he considered to be the deeper, institutional and legal underpinnings of slavery, namely protective tariffs, exclusive access to the metropolitan market, tax subsidies for administration and defence, and a legal system which made ownership of others possible. When compared to these matters the experiments of a few planters seemed to pale into insignificance. Steele might have been able to get better productivity from his slaves by paying them a small wage but, in one of the few passages where this issue of paying slaves a wage is addressed, Comte concludes that, without a legal system which could guarantee the slaves that their earnings could be kept in security from their master, they were still slaves at the mercy of their master's whim. What guarantee was there, after their progressive master had died, that any property they had accumulated would not be confiscated by the new slave owner? Comte comes to the interesting conclusion that, if it could somehow come to pass that slaves could enjoy with some security the wages they earned, they would in fact be better off than most so-called free taxpayers, who see their taxes increase every year. Furthermore, if this security of enjoyment of their property continued long enough the slaves would eventually accumulate enough capital to purchase their freedom from their master, thus bringing to an end the entire system of slave exploitation - something the cynical Comte doubted would be in the slave owners' long-term interest and therefore something they, as a class, or the legal

¹⁵²Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 428.

system itself, would not allow to happen (even though the occasional individual slave owner might do so).

Il est, dans quelques pays, et particulièrement au cap de Bonne-Espérance, des esclaves qui doivent être un peu moins mal habiles que les autres; ce sont ceux qui paient par semaine, à leurs maîtres, une somme déterminée, et qui jouissent, sous cette condition, de la faculté d'employer leur temps comme il leur plaît. Ceux-là doivent être moins misérables que les autres; on peut dire même que si un tel état leur était garanti, et si la somme qu'on exige d'eux était invariable pour ceux et pour leur postérité, en peu de temps la position de la plupart d'entre eux serait de beaucoup préférable à celle des peuples qui se croient libres et qui se voient arracher annuellement, sous le nom d'impôts, la moitié de leurs revenus. Si Guillaume-le-Conquérant, par exemple, s'était déclaré propriétaire légitime de tous les hommes qui habitaient le sol d'Angleterre; s'il les avait soumis à la même obligation à laquelle plusieurs colons soumettent leurs noirs, et si lui ni ses successeurs n'avaient jamais augmenté cette obligation, n'est-il pas évident que les plus pauvres seraient aujourd'hui moins imposés qu'ils ne le sont; que la plus grande partie de la population serait depuis long-temps devenue assez riche pour se racheter, et qu'elle n'appartiendrait plus qu'à elle-même? mais les domaines de la couronne sont inaliénables.¹⁵³

As long as protective tariffs, metropolitan subsidies and a cheap source of slaves made exploitation even slightly profitable, Comte thought the slave system would continue.

Storch's aim of abolishing slavery "insensiblement," by persuading the slave owners that it was in their economic interest to pay slaves wages in order to increase their productivity, was rejected by Comte as insufficiently sensitive to the injustices being committed against both the slaves and the metropolitan consumers and taxpayers. Comte had another solution to the problem of slavery which he thought would be just as non-violent and "insensiblement" felt as Storch's. The abolition of "cet horrible système," as Comte called it, follows quite logically from his views on the economic viability of the slave system and the nature of what the legal system should be.¹⁵⁴ He believed slavery could be ended by a combination of "negative" and "positive" steps which would be in keeping with liberal principles. The negative step involved immediately withdrawing economic privileges granted by the state to the slave owners and thus forcing them to

¹⁵³Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 376, footnote.

¹⁵⁴Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 468.

confront market forces. Without the monopoly profits from their exclusive access to the home market and the subsidies paid by the metropolitan taxpayers for administration and defence, the slave owners would not be able to maintain their system of labour. Cheaper goods grown by producers who did not use slave labour, the prospect of higher local taxes to pay for local administration, and the threat of slave uprisings without the comforting presence of French soldiers and sailors, the slave owners would be forced to free their slaves and introduce wages in order to compete. If they could not compete because of their lack of management skills and "industrial" values necessary to be an efficient producer, then Comte was happy to see them go bankrupt and be replaced perhaps by free and independent black producers using land that once belonged to their masters for more productive purposes. To overcome the resistance of the slave owners and to avoid bloodshed Comte recommended two steps to force them to end slavery:

Il en est deux bien simples: le premier (moyen) et le plus efficace serait l'abolition du privilège accordé aux possesseurs d'esclaves pour la vente de leurs denrées; le second serait le rappel des troupes envoyées chez eux pour seconder l'action qu'ils exercent sur les esclaves. ... Si les premiers (les possesseurs d'esclaves) n'avaient la jouissance d'aucun privilège, ils seraient donc obligés, pour vendre leurs denrées, d'employer les mêmes moyens de culture que les seconds (ceux qui font exécuter leurs travaux par des hommes libres); c'est-à-dire qu'ils seraient obligés, sous peine de périr de misère, d'affranchir leurs esclaves.¹⁵⁵

Comte found that future quite an enticing one, if it could be achieved immediately before the slaves lost their patience. Not only would the slaves be freed, but the burden on the metropolitan consumers and taxpayers would be lifted if colonial tariffs and other subsidies could be eliminated.

The positive step to end slavery involved the extension of the protection offered by the legal system to include blacks as well as whites. Slavery to Comte was much more than an economic system for the exploitation of the numerous "working class" by the minority "aristocratic class." One of its essential features was a legal system and the property rights

¹⁵⁵Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 468.

which derived from this legal system, which favoured the class of slave owners at the expense of those who were owned. At the core of this legalistic view of slavery was the idea that slavery was a legal privilege accorded to those who were considered to have full rights acknowledged by the law. A slave on the other hand, either had no rights as a person at all or had very limited rights (such as some restrictions as to the kind of punishment which a slave owner could inflict on him or her) which were very difficult to enforce in a society where most of the public officials, including the judges, were either slave owners themselves or relatives of slave owners. Ultimately, the legal difference between a slave and a slave owner was that the latter had the right in law to own another human being, whereas the former was in fact that type of property. Comte's third way to end slavery was to end this discrimination in law between slave owners and slaves by making all human beings equal under the law. Only in this way could blacks enjoy the benefits of property ownership themselves and the tranquility and repose the rule of law should make possible to all. Comte's legalistic view of slavery and how the liberation of the slaves could be achieved comes across clearly in the following passage:

Qu'est-ce qu'affranchir un homme asservi? c'est tout simplement le soustraire aux violences et aux caprices d'un ou de plusieurs individus, pour le soumettre à l'action régulière de l'autorité publique; c'est, en d'autres termes, empêcher un homme qu'on appelle un maître, de se livrer impunément envers d'autres qu'on appelle des esclaves, à des extortions, à des violences, à des cruautés. Affranchir des hommes, ce n'est pas ouvrir la port au trouble, au désordre, c'est les réprimer; car le désordre existe partout où la violence, la cruauté, la débauche n'ont point de frein. Le plus effroyable des désordres règne partout où la partie la plus nombreuse de la population est livrée sans défense à quelques hommes, qui peuvent s'abandonner sans réserve à tous les vices et à tous les crimes, c'est-à-dire partout où l'esclavage existe. L'ordre règne, au contraire, partout où nul ne peut se livrer impunément à des extorsions, à des injures, à des violences, partout où nul ne peut manquer à ses obligations sans s'exposer à des châtimens, partout où chacun peut remplir ses devoirs sans encourir aucune peine; l'ordre, c'est la liberté.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 479. Comte gives another definition of enslavement along similar lines: "L'asservissement d'un homme à un autre n'étant autre chose qu'un privilège d'impunité accordé au premier pour les crimes dont il peut se rendre coupable à l'égard du second, l'affranchissement n'est pas autre chose que la révocation de ce privilège. Déclarer que, dans tel pays, l'esclavage est aboli, c'est déclarer tout simplement que les délits seront punis sans acception de personnes; établir ou maintenir l'esclavage, c'est accorder ou garantir des privilèges de malfaiteur. Cela est si évident, que, pour abolir complètement la servitude dans tous

Comte's analysis of slavery in the *Traité de législation* had considerable impact on Jean-Baptiste Say's *Cours complet d'économie politique* which appeared in 1828. Say strengthened his argument that the issue of tariff protection for the slave economies was more important than the problem of the comparative costs of free and slave labour. Furthermore, the discussion of the nature of class exploitation in the colonies and the problem of the growing indebtedness of many plantations owed much to Comte's pioneering work, whilst Say's confidence in the spread of "republicanism" weakening the political power of the slave states obviously drew upon Storch for its support. For reasons of space it is impossible to go into any details about Say's final word on the question of slavery, except to say that the debate among the abolitionists and the political economists had raised many problems which Say had not discussed in his earlier works. He had been forced to confront these problems with the result that he had drifted much closer into the position of his son-in-law, Charles Comte, with his class analysis of slavery.

In the sequel to the *Traité de législation*, the *Traité de la propriété*, which was probably written at the same time but which for various reasons did not appear until 1834, Comte again took up the problem of slavery and law. Here he developed the argument that French property law had a fatal weakness at its very heart because it owed so much to Roman law concepts of property and ownership. It was inconceivable to him that a modern, industrial, free market economy could use a legal system designed by and for slave owners. Thus the purpose of the *Traité de la propriété* was to provide a theory of property and legislation which would be free of such burdens and thus more suitable for a free market, industrial society.¹⁵⁷ Comte believed that any theory of property suitable for industrial society needed to be based upon the universal principles of man's nature, thus avoiding what he thought were the "barbarisms" remaining in the French legal tradition inherited from the Romans. These legal "barbarisms" needed to be purged from the Civil Code and

les lieux où elle existe, il souffrirait de juger tous les faits de même nature, d'après les dispositions des mêmes lois." Comte, *Traité de législation*, p. 480.

¹⁵⁷Charles Comte, *Traité de la propriété* (Paris: Chamerot and Ducollet, 1834), 2 vols. Vol. 1, p. 3.

only once this had been achieved could the law of property appropriate to a market society be developed.

From the very beginning of the *Traité de la propriété* Comte's fascination with slavery and its deleterious consequences for social progress, which had been such an important theme in the previous volumes of the *Traité de législation*, was revealed again. The dead hand of the past, in the form of continued respect for legislative theory and practice based upon Roman law, gave Comte an explanation for the sorry state of property theory in post-revolutionary France. Comte believed the methodology of the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had not yet penetrated as far as the study of law and moral philosophy or "morals." Whereas the authority of Aristotle in the fields of biology and astronomy had been long ago challenged, the "authority of books" from the Greek and Roman period still held sway in nineteenth century French legal theory and practice.¹⁵⁸ In his opinion, the theories of property developed by men who were themselves slave owners and only barely out of the stage of economic barbarism¹⁵⁹ contained within them a prejudice in favour of servitude in general and chattel slavery in particular. This pro-slavery bias completely contaminated the tradition of Roman property law and rendered it unsuitable for use in modern market societies. Comte believed that the Greek and Roman assumption of the legitimacy of slavery made it impossible for them to admit the existence of universal principles of human rights based upon human nature. Not only did this prejudice mean that the ancient jurists tolerated the existence of force in labour relations but also within the family between husband and wife and father and child. Comte believed that, as long as Roman concepts continued to influence French law, violence in the market and in the family would continue.

What made modern, i.e. post-revolutionary, society different from the ancient world was the attitude towards the satisfaction of needs. This is a variation of the liberal theme of

¹⁵⁸*Traité de propriété*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹Charles Comte mentions by name Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Papinian, Paul and Ulpian, *Traité de la propriété*, p. 5.

the fundamental difference between the ancient and modern worlds and their concept of liberty, which had been developed by Benjamin Constant. According to Constant, the liberty of the ancient world was the right to participate in the political life of the city-state with little concern for the "content" of that political activity.¹⁶⁰ Modern liberty, on the other hand, was explicitly concerned with the protection of individual rights and the circumscribing of state power as the most dangerous violator of individual rights. The outward form of political power (whether monarchical, aristocratic or democratic) was far less important than the protection of the individual's legal rights. Both Comte and Dunoyer absorbed Benjamin Constant's hostility towards the ancient world and extended it into the economic sphere, in particular the vital importance of slavery to the economy and the legal system.¹⁶¹ Unlike many, Comte and Dunoyer did not seem to favour commercial "Athens" over militaristic "Rome." They appeared to condemn ancient Greek and Roman society about equally because both were slave societies.¹⁶²

With the emergence of market society the "natural" tendency was to use and appropriate material things to satisfy our needs and to free ourselves from the violent acts of our fellows or, in other words, to pursue the liberal agenda of the Enlightenment and early nineteenth century liberalism. The ancient Greek and Roman attitude towards the satisfaction of needs was so different that it made it impossible to use their legal concepts in post-revolutionary society. According to Comte, the classical view was to satisfy needs

¹⁶⁰Although Benjamin Constant developed his well-known distinction in relation to political rather than economic liberty Comte believed it was just as applicable here as elsewhere. Benjamin Constant, *De la liberté des anciens comparée à celles des modernes. Discours prononcé à l'Athénée royal de Paris en 1819*, in *De la liberté chez les modernes. Écrits politiques*, ed. Marcel Gauchet (Paris: Livre de poche, 1980), pp. 491-515. A modern translation with useful introduction is now available by by Biancamaria Fontana, Benjamin Constant, *Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁶¹Dunoyer singles Constant out as one the three most important influences on his thought which contributed to the evolution of his liberalism away from constitutional and towards social and economic liberalism. See Dunoyer, Charles, "Esquisse historique des doctrines auxquelles on a donné le nom industrialisme, c'est-à-dire, des doctrines qui fondent la société sur l'Industrie," *Revue encyclopédique*, février 1827, vol. 33, pp. 368-94. Reprinted in *Notices d'économie politique*, vol. 2 of *Oeuvres*, pp. 173-199. The other influences were the economics of Jean-Baptiste Say and the history of François Montlosier. See the discussion of this in chapter four.

¹⁶²N. Loraux et P. Vidal-Naquet, "La formation de l'Athènes bourgeoise: Essai d'historiographie 1750-1870," in *Classical Influences on Western Thought A.D. 1650-1870. Proceedings of an International Conference held at King's College, Cambridge March 1977*, ed. R.R. Bolgar (Cambridge University Press) pp. 169-222.

through what he called "the intermediary of other men"¹⁶³ who were the property and the "tools" of their masters. Whereas the struggle in the modern world was against the physical world to get the resources to satisfy our needs, in the ancient world the struggle to get resources had been between men - primarily between slave owners and their slaves, but also between Roman and barbarian and conqueror and conquered.

However there exists almost no comparison between the social state in which we live and the social state of those whose ideas we borrow to form our sciences. Our natural inclination leads us to act directly on things in order to appropriate them for our needs and to free ourselves from the violent actions that our fellows would like to subject us in order to force us to become the instruments of their pleasures or their caprices. On the other hand, the men from whom we borrow our ideas only acted on things through the intermediary of other men whom they had appropriated and whom they made the instruments of their labour. Amongst civilised people of our time man struggles constantly against the physical world to control its forces for their own purposes. This struggle also existed in the ancient world but it was more a continual struggle of man against man.¹⁶⁴

Of course, Proudhon and other socialist critics of liberalism would argue that there was little difference between being an "intermediary" or "tool" of a factory owner and being an "intermediary" or "tool" of a Roman slave owner. But this missed the point of Comte's observation of the profound differences between the ancient and the modern world, which accorded equal legal and civil rights to all individuals, whether labourers or capitalists. No one in law was to be treated as a thing. Marx may have railed against the reification of labour as a mere commodity to the disadvantage of the labourer as an autonomous and free individual, but Comte's and Dunoyer's ideal of free labour was quite different from Karl Marx's caricature. The reason why Comte despised the heritage of the ancient world as much as he did was precisely because it treated the labourer as a thing and not as an autonomous individual with legal rights. By contrast, in a market economy labourers were the legal "owners" of their labour, which was contracted for by capitalists and could not be legally coerced.

¹⁶³*Traité de la propriété*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁴Comte,*Traité de la propriété*, p. 4.

In his brief survey of the history of Roman property theory Comte argues that the legal prejudice in favour of slavery was used by numerous Roman and Byzantine Emperors in their codifications of the law to maintain the subjection of individuals as well as entire nations. Similarly, the legal code of the feudal regime borrowed heavily from Roman precedent in order to maintain serfs in a state of subjection. In the modern era a consequence of the "Roman" concept of owning other individuals is revealed in the widespread practice of the ruling families of Europe, who exchange territory and entire peoples among themselves by means of international treaties (perhaps a reference to the Concert of Europe after the fall of Napoleon). Comte couldn't think of a better modern example of the disastrous consequences of basing modern law on the ancient Roman precedent of treating some individuals as mere "things," than this diplomatic convention.

Comte believed that the market system required that all the vestiges of legal servitude be finally removed by a combination of political and legal revolution or reform, which would lead to the rewriting of the legal codes through which servitude was defined and protected. The French Revolution partly achieved the former with the abolition of feudalism at home and slavery in the colonies, but the liberal impulse of the revolution had suffered partial reversals under Napoleon and the Restoration. Comte and Dunoyer were confident the break with history had been made and that it was only a matter of time before the economic absurdities and injustices of servitude were completely eliminated. The belief that slave systems based on compulsory coerced labour would inevitably collapse, as a result of both economic and "moral" pressures, is crucial to understanding the liberal political economists and the abolitionist movement. America and to some extent Great Britain had gone further than France in this process of individual liberation, although the process was far from complete. Slavery continued to be a problem in the Southern States and political privileges which protected the powerful aristocracy in Britain continued to exist. Nevertheless, one area in which France was well behind Britain and America was in the field of law. Because of the strength of Roman law on the Continent with its pro-slavery bias, France could not create a legal system which fully protected individual rights and

property.

Now that the physical domination of the patrician slave owners and the feudal lords had ended, Comte considered it was also time to end the intellectual domination of their legal codes which persisted in the French law schools. Rather than beginning their studies with an analysis of the ancient texts and codifications, Comte thought that modern law students should instead study human nature and the social conditions present in modern market societies, a fundamental assumption of which was the concept of self-ownership and the right to own the fruits of one's labour. A modernised course in legal studies would also include the study of history and what we would call sociology, in order to understand the development of modern market society and its institutions. Economics would also form an important part of legal study since the role of property is vital to both economic and legal theory. Without a suitable legal system which protected property national prosperity would not be possible. The study of a combination of law and economics would enable jurists, bureaucrats and politicians to understand the "natural laws" which made national prosperity possible, something which was impossible to the slave owners of the ancient world.¹⁶⁵

What Comte was in fact proposing was that all law students should undergo the same transformation he and Dunoyer had experienced in the hiatus between the suspension of *Le Censeur* and the founding of *Le Censeur européen*, when they discovered the political economy of Jean-Baptiste Say and the sociological history of Benjamin Constant and François Montlosier. The problem of slavery shows clearly the inadequacy of a purely political and constitutional approach to liberalism. Without the insights provided by political economy and a theory of class, the true strengths and weaknesses of slavery could

¹⁶⁵Comte's hopes for reform of French legal study were partly realised in the course of the nineteenth century. With strong state opposition to liberal political economy being taught in special economics faculties the study of economics was done primarily in the law faculties or privately with the assistance of the economic press such as the *Journal des économistes*. This situation existed well into the late nineteenth century. Lucette le Van-Lemesle, "La promotion de l'économie politique en France au XIXe siècle jusqu'à son introduction dans les facultés (1815-1881)," *Revue d' Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, April 1980, pp. 270-94 and Alain Alcouffe, "The Institutionalization of Political Economy in French Universities: 1819-1896," *History of Political Economy*, Summer 1989, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 313-44.

not be understood. Economic analysis showed how dependent the slave system was on tariff protection and subsidies from the metropole for its survival. Economics and class analysis showed how a small group of slave owners could manipulate the metropolitan legislatures and exploit the slave class on the plantations and the consumers in the metropolitan market. The new social dimension to Comte's liberalism showed how the power of the slave owners might be broken. Free trade would remove one pillar of support for the slave system, while a revolution in legal thinking would destroy another.