GREEK SLAVERY:
FROM DOMINATION TO PROPERTY AND BACK AGAIN

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Abstract: Modern historians of Greek slavery seem to agree, despite other differences, on an understanding of slavery as a relationship of property. This understanding of slavery essentially goes back to Aristotle's theory of natural slavery. An examination of the Greek vocabulary of slavery though shows that the vast majority of Greeks had a very different understanding of slavery as a relationship of domination. This article argues that this alternative Greek understanding of slavery can account for some serious conundrums in Greek attitudes and thought, and explains the reasons behind Aristotle's reformulation of slavery as a relationship of property. Finally, it is argued that seeing slavery as a relationship of domination has enormous potential for the modern study of slavery from a dynamic historical perspective.

Despite the enormous diversity of approaches to Greek slavery, there has been an underlying agreement that has been little explored. Scholars might disagree on whether slaves constituted a class or whether Greek slaves were treated humanely; but there seems to be an uncontested consensus on what they have in mind when they refer to slaves, i.e. on their definition of slavery. A typical definition is that of Moses Finley: 'By slavery, finally, I mean the status in which a man is, in the eyes of the law and of public opinion and with respect to all parties, a possession, a chattel, of another man'.[1]

There seems to be a widespread consensus that slavery is primarily a relationship of property.[2] It is not difficult to trace the origins of this view of slavery; it originates in the philosophical work of Aristotle, who famously defined the slave (*doulos*) as 'a living piece of property (*ktêma ti empsychon*).[3]

Of property, the first and most indispensable kind is that which is also best and most amenable to household management (*oikonomikôtaton*); and this is man (*anthrôpos*). Our first step therefore must be to procure industrious slaves (*doulous*).[4]

These considerations therefore make clear the nature of the slave and his essential quality; one who is a human being (*anthrôpos*) belonging by nature not to himself but to another is by nature a slave, and a human being belongs to another if, although a human being, he is a piece of property (*ktêma*), and a piece of property is an instrument for action separate from its owner.[5]

These passages show the connection in Aristotle's thought between a conception of slavery as a form of property and his conception of slavery as natural. Modern scholarship has accepted Aristotle's view of slavery as a form of property, while abandoning his conception that slaves are natural. But perhaps there lies a dangerous illusion in this selective appropriation. Modern

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[1] Finley (1981) 97; see also Garnsey (1996) 1; Andreau and Descat (2006) 18–21.
[2] For a rare exception of an additional perspective, see Fisher (1993) 5–6.
[3] Arist. *Pol.* 1253b33.
[4] Arist. *Oec.* 1344a23–26.
[5] Arist. *Pol.* 1254a14–18.

scholars have not devoted much thought to the link between slavery as property and the theory of natural slavery. In other words, one could argue that viewing slavery as a form of property already carries with it significant ideological ballast, which is essentially unacknowledged, all the more so because modern scholars consciously reject Aristotle's theory of natural slavery.

I want to argue that the link between the conception of slavery as a form of property and the theory of natural slavery in Aristotle's thought is indeed significant. It is well known that Aristotle's theory of natural slavery, while not without precursors or followers, was a minority position within ancient views on slavery.[6] In the same way, as I will argue, the conception of slavery as a form of property was a minority view within Greek views of slavery. The vast majority of Greek thinkers conceived slavery in a different mode, and this way of thinking about slavery could be still of important analytical value for modern research.

I want to start this exploration by pointing out two conundrums created by the modern orthodox understanding of Greek slavery. The Greeks were a very imaginative people; they could imagine a society with women sharing in power or a society without private property;[7] even a society with all work done by automata.[8] And yet, by and large, the vast majority of them could not conceive a society without slaves. Almost all Greek utopias are about societies where the existence of slavery is taken for granted.[9] While modern societies have not yet created a classless society, put women in power or abolished the need for labour by full automatization, they have indeed found the abolition of slavery as the relatively easiest agenda to realise. The simple fact that Greeks found most impossible what modern societies have realised most successfully has puzzled generations of ancient historians, with various answers being canvassed.[10]

On the other hand, the Greeks were a careful people; they were able to make the most detailed distinctions between similar phenomena. And yet, when it comes down to slavery, they seem to have been particularly lazy. The complaints of modern historians are indicative:

> Philosophers, orators and historians were satisfied with the simplest possible antinomy: free man and slave, *eleutheros* and *doulos*. For their purposes they were not interested in a sociology or jurisprudence of servitude, and they could call helots *douloi* in most contexts, for example, even though they knew perfectly well that helots and Athenian *douloi* were by no means the same. Even so crude a text as the few lines in Pollux enumerating some local words for a status between slavery and freedom is a rare exception in the available literature.[11]

The distinction between chattel slavery and other forms of unfree labour has become mandatory for modern historians, since M.I. Finley emphasized it in a number of pioneering papers in the 1950s and 1960s.[12] And yet the Greeks were indifferent to such a fundamental distinction; as Pierre Vidal-Naquet observed, it was only in the latter part of the fourth century that some Greeks started to differentiate between the different forms covered by *doulos*.[13] A few examples will again suffice to illustrate the dominant attitude of Greek sources. 'There were more servants (*oiketai*) at Chios than in any one other city except Lacedaemon'.[14] Here, Thucydides places the chattel slaves of Chios in the same order as the helots of Sparta, without feeling any need to differentiate between them. Another indicative example comes from the terms of the truce between Athens and Sparta in 423 BC: 'That during the truce, deserters, neither slave nor free (*mête eleutheron mête doulon*) shall be received by you, nor by us'.[15] The term

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[6] Ste. Croix (1981) 416–25; Garnsey (1996) 35–52.

[7] See, for example, Ar. *Eccl.* 590–709; Dawson (1992); Vidal-Naquet (1986) 205–23.

[8] Arist. *Pol.* 1253b33–39.

[9] Finley (1975).

[10] For example, Finley (1981) 105.

[11] Finley (1981) 140. See also de Ste. Croix (1981)

138–40; Fisher (1993) 6–7; Cartledge (1996).

[12] Finley (1981) 116–66; Lotze (1959); Vidal-Naquet (1986) 205–23.

[13] Vidal-Naquet (1986) 165.

[14] Thuc. 8.40.2.

[15] Thuc. 4.118.7.

slave here covers both the fugitive Athenian slaves and the fugitive helots without any need for further elaboration. This is not because ancient Greeks were not aware of the important differences. The terms of the slightly later peace treaty of Nicias are eloquent testimony in this respect. This treaty contains a number of reciprocal obligations for both Athens and Sparta, which are repeated exactly, with only the names changing according to the case. But there is one exception, an obligation that is not reciprocal: 'Should the slave population (*douleia*) rise, the Athenians shall help the Lacedaemonians with all their might, according to their power'.[16] There is no reciprocal obligation for the Spartans to help the Athenians in case of a slave revolt, and the reason is obvious: while the revolt of the Spartan helots was something deemed a realistic possibility, a revolt of the Athenian slaves was deemed (and proved to be) completely unimaginable.

How are we to explain the two above conundrums? Can it be the case that it is the understanding of slavery as a form of property that creates them?[17] To start with, there is no single Greek word that translates our term slavery: 'Greek language, and in particular the Greek language of the early and the classical times lacks even a near approximation to the modern word "slave"'.[18] What the Greeks had was a variety of terms that looked at slaves from a variety of different perspectives and with different emphases.[19] The same enslaved individual could be called *doulos*, *andrapodon*, *pais*, *hypêretês*, *sôma*, *oiketês*, etc, each time with a different emphasis in mind. The most common term is the word *doulos*; but it is also a crucial term, because out of all the Greek terms for slaves it is the only one that gave rise to an abstract noun (*douleia*) to describe the general concept of slavery.[20] As we shall see, the various Greek terms for slaves owe their existence and survival to different semantic connotations and emphases; if, out of all these terms for slaves, it is only the term *doulos* that is used to create an abstract noun for slavery, then we have to conclude that it was the semantic connotations of the word *doulos* that the Greeks saw as the most important features of the general condition of slavery. Thus, the analysis of this term has particular significance for understanding the Greek conception of slavery.

To start with, *doulos* is used in contradistinction to the term *eleutheros*, free.[21] *Eleutheros* describes a person who is not under the control of somebody else, has sole control over himself and is acting on his own will and not under the compulsion of somebody else;[22] on the contrary, a *doulos* is somebody who is under the control, the power of somebody else and lacks control over himself.[23] Let us examine a number of examples which illustrate the meaning of *doulos*.

A city would not be the best on the basis of such a way of life, but the democracy would be best preserved that way. For the people do not want a good government under which *they themselves are slaves* (*douleuein*); they want to be free and to rule.[24]

The Athenians came to this country first to effect the *enslavement of Sicily* (*katadoulôsei*), and after that, if successful, of Peloponnese and the rest of Hellas, possessing already the greatest empire yet known, of present or former times, among the Hellenes.[25]

What do you think will happen to you through kissing a pretty face? Won't you lose your liberty in a trice *and become a slave* (*doulos*), begin spending large sums on harmful pleasures, have no time to give to anything fit for a gentleman, be forced to concern yourself with things that no madman even would care about?[26]

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[16] Thuc. 5.23.

[17] One of the few exceptions to the tendency among modern scholars to identify slavery as a form of property is Westermann (1960) 25–26.

[18] Gschnitzer (1976) 4.

[19] See also Klees (1975) 29-33.

[20] Gschnitzer (1976).

[21] Mactoux (1980) 59–62.

[22] See, for example, Lys. 2.14. For the reappearance of this concept of freedom as non-dependence in early modern Europe, see Skinner (1997).

[23] See the comments of Raaflaub (2004) 128–34.

[24] Ps-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 1.8.

[25] Thuc. 7.66.

[26] Xen. *Mem.* 1.3.11.

The three examples above refer to relationships between individuals within a community; to relationships between communities; and to the internal, psychological condition of the individual. What is interesting about them is that they have nothing to do with what modern scholars understand as slavery. Property, the chief component of modern definitions of slavery, is completely missing. Instead, what is emphasized is something different: domination, the power of one party over the other. In all three examples slavery is conceived as domination: as domination of the rich over the poor; of one *polis* over others; of an individual by his passions.[27] Modern scholars tend to refer to these uses of the concept of slave as metaphorical.[28] But this is in my view totally misconceived, as we shall see.

Accordingly, the word *doulos* can be used in two different, but related ways.[29] *Doulos*, in describing the domination of one party over another, can be used to describe a *power relationship* between two parties. But it can also be used to describe the social condition of a person who lacks freedom; very common in this respect is the use of the phrase 'everybody, slave or free' as an all-encompassing formula.[30] Thus, *doulos* can be used to express a *contrast* between two different conditions; when used in this manner, *doulos* is also often contrasted with the terms 'citizen' (*politês*) and 'master' (*despotês*, *kyrios*), because these two conditions have freedom as their precondition and are by definition denied to a slave.[31]

Finally, there are cases that might be understood in the sense of *belonging*, in particular when *doulos* is used together with a possessive pronoun: 'And when you were my slave (*doulos emos*), what did you tell me?';[32] 'King, we are being unjustly treated by your slave (*sou doulou*), the son of the shepherd'.[33] These might be taken as examples that show clearly that *doulos* means a piece of property, but it is easy to see that this is a misconception, and that in these examples it is still the case that when somebody is described as a *doulos* of somebody else, he/she is conceived as part of a relationship of domination and not of a relationship of property. One very revealing example comes from tragedy, in a passage where Helen explains to Menelaus that her following Paris was an act that was forced on her by Aphrodite, the goddess of love: 'But punish the goddess and show yourself more mighty even than Zeus, who, though he lords it over (*kratos echei*) the other gods, is her slave (*doulos ekeinês*)'.[34] This example makes it crystal clear in juxtaposing Zeus' power over the other gods to his slavery to Aphrodite that the meaning of *doulos* remains that of somebody who is under the power of somebody else and not his / her property.

Another example from Euripides is equally revealing: 'There is no mortal who is free; for he is either slave (*doulos*) of money or of fortune, or else the people in their thousands or the fear of public prosecution prevents him from following the dictates of his heart'.[35] Again in this case, being the slave of money or fortune implies being under their power and lacking control over one's actions, as the rest of the passage emphasizes. Consequently, even when the term *doulos* is used to describe a person who belongs to somebody else, the sense of belonging that the speaker has in mind is that of having power over, not of property. The more ambiguous examples cited above, which could be understood in either way, should thus be interpreted in the light of the other attested uses of the word. Seen in this way, there is nothing metaphorical about the use of *doulos* to describe a member of the Athenian Empire or a lover; in both cases we are dealing with communities or persons who do not have control over themselves, but are under the power of somebody else; property has nothing to do with it.

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[27] Why the Greeks thought of these relationships as relationships of domination, rather than exploitation, is explained by Kyrtatas (2002).

[28] See, for example, Hornblower (1991) 150; Fisher (1993) 6–7.

[29] See also the comments of Mactoux (1980) 66–75.

[30] See, for example, Dem. 21.48; Antiph. 6.19.

[31] The opposition between *doulos*/*eleutheros* is

though different in form from the opposition between *doulos*/citizen and *doulos*/master; see Mactoux (1980) 70–73.

[32] Eur. *Hec.* 247.

[33] Herod. 1.114.

[34] Eur. *Tro.* 948–50.

[35] Eur. *Hec.* 864–67. See Gschnitzer (1976) 9–10.

The second main Greek term relating to slavery is *andrapodon*; this has been constructed on the basis of *tetrapodon*, quadruped, and is used to define a person as a piece of property.[36] One example will suffice:

> After this, there is a second law, covering agreements between individuals, which states that whenever anyone sells a chattel slave (*andrapodon*), he must declare in advance any physical disability from which he [i.e. the chattel slave] suffers.[37]

The related noun *andrapodismos* denotes the process of making a person a piece of property, usually by means of capture in war, which was the most common way of turning a person into a slave.[38] Because of this connection with capture, the term *andrapodon* can sometimes take on the more restricted sense of captive; in this case it is possible that the term *doulos* is used to distinguish those captives who had been of servile condition before capture, from those captives who had been free:

> Iasus was sacked by the army, who found a very great booty there, the place being wealthy from ancient date. The Peloponnesians... handed over the town to Tissaphernes with all the captives (*andrapoda*), slave or free (*doula kai eleuthera*), at the stipulated price of one Doric stater a head.[39]

Other passages make clear the conceptual distinction between subjection, expressed by *doulos*, and the capture or turning of a person into a chattel, expressed by *andrapodon*:

> On this day it is possible for you either to be good men, to gain freedom and to be called the allies of the Spartans, or to be subjects (*doulois*) of the Athenians, if you are most fortunate and avoid capture (*andrapodismou*) or death, and to have a harsher subjection (*douleian*) than you had before, and to be those who prevent Greece from being free (*eleutherôseôs*).[40]

In all the above passages we see the different semantic fields of the words *doulos* and *andrapodon*. *Andrapodon* refers to a person as a piece of property or to the physical act of capturing a person and selling him/her into slavery; *doulos* refers to the opposition between slave and free or conveys the sense of subjection of one party to another. The different semantic fields of *doulos* and *andrapodon* can best be seen in the use of the related verbs *douloô* and *andrapodizô*. Whenever a Greek wants to describe the fact that an individual, or even a whole community as a group of individuals, has become the property of somebody else, they always use the verb *andrapodizô* and never the verb *douloô*. The verb *douloô* describes a relationship of power; *andrapodizô* a relationship of property. Two examples will suffice:

> First the Athenians besieged and captured Eion on the Strymon from the Medes, and sold the inhabitants into slavery (*êndrapodisan*)... Next they sold into slavery (*êndrapodisan*) [the inhabitants of] Scyros, the island in the Aegean… After this Naxos left the confederacy, and a war ensued, and she had to return after a siege; this was the first instance that an allied city was subjugated (*edoulôthê*) contrary to Greek custom, though later other [allied cities] too [were subjugated contrary to Greek custom] as various circumstances arose in each case.[41]

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[36] See Lazzeroni (1970); Klees (1975) 31–33; Mactoux (1980) 57–59.

[37] Hyp. 3.15.

[38] For example, Xen. *An.* 6.6.38. See the comments of Ducrey (1968) 23–25.

[39] Thuc. 8.28.3–4; similar uses in Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.14–15; Herod. 3.125. See, on the other hand, 8.62, with the commentary of Gomme et al. (1981) 69, 152.

[40] Thuc. 5.9.9; see also Herod. 3.140.5, 4.142.

[41] Thuc. 1.98.

Thus, the verb *andrapodizô* is used in regard to the inhabitants of Eion and Scyros, who were actually sold into slavery, while the verb *douloô* is used for the people of Naxos, who were only subjected to Athenian rule.

> Lacedaemonians, the Athenians ask you to come to their aid and not allow the most ancient city among the Hellenes to fall into subjection (*doulosunê*) at the hands of the barbarians. Even now Eretria has been sold into slavery (*êndrapodistai*), and Hellas has become weaker by an important city.[42]

Again, the distinction is between the possibility of Athenian subjection to Persian rule and the already accomplished sale of the inhabitants of Eretria into slavery.[43]

There is thus nothing metaphorical about the use of the noun *doulos* and the verb *douloô*. What brings 'literal' and 'metaphorical' uses together is the common meaning of domination.[44] Once we realise this, we can start answering the conundrums we looked at above. The reason the Greeks failed to distinguish between chattel slaves and communal slaves or serfs is that the issue of property and the precise legal position has nothing to do with the semantic field of *doulos*. Both chattel slaves and communal slaves are *douloi*, because they are both under the power, the domination, of other people. Whether a Spartan helot, as opposed to an Athenian chattel slave, has the right to have a family or cannot be sold abroad, is secondary in the Greek understanding of the common fact that they are both under the domination of a master.[45]

At the same time, we can now understand why the Greeks found it impossible to conceive a society without *douloi*. *Douleia* for them was not a relationship of property which could be abolished by legislative *fiat*; rather it defined a situation in which an individual or a community was under the power of another individual or community. *Douleia* is the pragmatic result of the fact that there exists inequality of power and wealth among individuals and communities. Some people are *douloi*, because there are others who have the wealth and power to force people to execute their orders or to afford not to do things on their own but to have other people do them on their behalf. The Greeks understood clearly that as long as there were people who, because they had more wealth and power, were able to make others to obey their orders, *douleia* could not be extinguished. This explains why slavery is absent only in a few cases of Greek utopias.[46] One such case is utopian societies which are so primitive that there are not enough resources to allow some people to have more wealth or power and thus to force others to obey them; or sometimes the emphasis is on the fact that such a primitive society has such limited needs that people are able to satisfy all their requirements on their own and without the need to have other people serve their requirements.

> In those days nobody had a slave, a Manês or a Sêkis, but the women had to toil by themselves over all the housework. And what is more, they would grind the corn at early dawn, so that the village rang with the touch of the handmills.[47]

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[42] Herod. 6.106.2.

[43] I will not go here into a detailed examination of the other slave terms, because it does not affect the point under discussion. It would be enough to mention that the Greeks also commonly used the term *oiketês* and other cognate terms from the root *oik-*, which denotes the household; thus *oiketês* describes a slave member of one's household. They also made use of the terms *therapôn* and *hypêretês*, which both denote the sense of servant, and can be applied to both free and non-free persons. See Gschnitzer (1976); Kästner (1981).

[44] See also the comments of Mactoux (1980) 86.

[45] See also Luraghi (2009). For the use of *doulos* to describe the unfree, helot-like, population of Crete, see Lévy (1997); Link (2001).

[46] See the comprehensive discussion of Garlan (1988) 126–38.

[47] Pherecrates in *PCG fr.* 10. See also Herod. 6.137, 8.137.2.

The other form of Greek utopia without *douleia* is a Golden Age: a society where labour and service are unnecessary, either because the earth gives a bountiful production without work or because inanimate objects move and produce, and fish get cooked on their own and come straight to one's mouth.

> A. So then, no man shall own any slave, male or female, but, old though he may be, must serve himself with his own hands?
> B. Not at all, for I shall make all his utensils capable of walking.[48]

In all other forms of societies, *douleia*, according to the Greeks, is a natural result of the existing inequalities in power and wealth.[49]

We can now return to Aristotle and his views on slavery. The obvious question would then be to what extent Aristotle's understanding of *doulos* diverges from those of other contemporary authors. Fortunately, such an exercise has been already undertaken: M.-M. Mactoux has observed that Aristotle has appropriated the term *doulos* to describe conceptual aspects that are rendered by the term *andrapodon* in other sources, such as, for instance, the corpus of the Attic orators.[50] The subject deserves further study, but an initial conclusion seems obvious: Aristotle's minority position on slavery necessitated a minority reconceptualization of the term *doulos* in his work.[51]

But why did Aristotle resort to this reconceptualization of Greek vocabulary of slavery? It seems to me that the answer lies in his polemical aims.[52] In the first book of *Politics* Aristotle is waging a battle on two fronts. On the one hand, he is reacting to those ancient thinkers who believed that slavery was merely a human convention and not by nature.[53] On the other hand, he was reacting to the Platonic view that all forms of rulership had the same nature and aims, whether one was thinking of a herdsman, a slave master, a household head, a king or a citizen magistrate.[54] To combat both opponents, he had to redefine both slavery and power. To answer Plato, he needed to show that rulership/power did not have a single nature and aim, but was indeed highly variable, according to the persons and aims involved. While Greek thinkers usually conceived of slavery as a relationship of power, Aristotle's reaction to Plato necessitated a redefinition of the nature of slavery. Thus, the rulership of a master over his slaves was different from that of a magistrate over his fellow citizens, because they were different relationships.[55] The relationship between master and slave is instrumental; a slave is part of his master's property, he is an 'instrument for action',[56] necessary for fulfilling his master's aims and needs. On the contrary, the relationship between a citizen ruler and the citizens is not instrumental; this form of power exists for the benefit of the citizens and not for the benefit of the ruler. Indeed, to the extent that a political regime aims at the benefit of the rulers rather than the ruled, Aristotle classifies it as a corrupted form of constitution. The contrary does not apply to the relationship between master and slave though; since the slave, as a piece of property, is part of his master, ruling a slave badly is to the detriment of both master and slave.[57] Thus, seeing the slave instrumentally, as part of the master's property, was necessary to make the distinction between different forms of power.[58]

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[48] Crates in *PCG fr.* 16.

[49] See the discussion of Williams (1993) 116–17.

[50] Mactoux (1980) 182–83; note also that the conception of slavery as a relationship of domination is not totally absent from Aristotle's corpus; see Mactoux (1980) 185–87. Aristotle also diverges from the Athenian usage of the term *oikos*: MacDowell (1989).

[51] See Saxonhouse (1992) 189–95 for Aristotle's use of hierarchy to defend an essentialist understanding of

the world while accepting the diversity of the real world.

[52] See Schofield (1990); Garnsey (1996) 107–27.

[53] *Pol.* 1253b20–23; see Cambiano (1987).

[54] *Pol.* 1252a7–18. For Plato's views, see *Plt.* 258e, 294a, 300e.

[55] See Klees (1975) 190–91.

[56] *Pol.* 1254a8–9.

[57] *Pol.* 1255b5–16. See Brunt (1993) 371–77.

[58] See *Pol.* 1278b31–79a22.

On the other hand, while the opponents of slavery attacked the conventional character of the domination of one man by another, Aristotle avoided justifying slavery on the terms of his opponents, by arguing, for example, that slavery was a just human convention, based on the right of conquest or the humanitarian treatment of captives, who would otherwise be put to death.[59] Instead, he chose to deflect the attack by reorienting the discussion. His argument had two sides.[60] First, by arguing that slaves were a piece of property and part of a household's necessary possessions, he was able to justify the instrumental usefulness of slavery as a means of procuring the necessary conditions for attaining the good life.[61] He was thus able to exploit the prevalent Greek appreciation of leisure as part of his justification of slavery; his opponents would have now to show that this form of leisure based on slavery was immoral or that there was another alternative to the good life. Second, showing that slavery in its instrumental form was necessary was not enough; Aristotle still needed to show that there were people who were best served by having to play this role.[62] His instrumental definition of slavery, in which the slave existed only to fulfil the needs and wishes of the master, allowed him to exploit another widespread Greek prejudice. For a long time many Greeks had thought of barbarians as soft, corrupted and spineless;[63] Aristotle presented them as ideally suited for the natural post of slavery within the household.[64] Thus, while in previous Greek usage the term *doulos* was used to convey the concept of domination and the condition of being dominated, Aristotle's polemics necessitated a redefinition of *doulos* as a form of property.

Accepting Aristotle's conception of slavery as a form of property has a number of pernicious effects on the study of Greek slavery. I would like to identify three of them. The first problem is that seeing the slave from the perspective of property enforces an instrumentalist approach. In other worlds, the slave exists only in so far as he satisfies the needs of his master:

> And the term piece of property is used in the same way as the term part (*morion*): a thing that is a part is not only a part of another thing, but absolutely belongs to another thing, and so also does a piece of property. Hence, whereas the master (*despotês*) is merely the slave's master and does not belong to [the slave], the slave (*doulos*) is not merely the slave of the master but wholly belongs to the master.[65]

Thus, the conception of slavery as a form of property implies seeing the identity of the slave as wholly determined by his function as a slave to his master. While the master does not belong to the slave, i.e. he has other identities and functions distinct from his role as a master (father, athlete, architect, citizen, magistrate), the slave's identity is solely defined by his role as somebody's slave.[66] The second problem is that the perception of slavery as a form of property enforces a binary perspective to the exclusion of all others: that between slave-owner and slave. But there are many other relationships in which a slave will have to enter which affect, directly or indirectly, the condition of slavery and the relationship between slaves and their masters. Finally, the Aristotelian perspective encourages us to think of slavery in a static way, since the legal relationship between master and slave remained largely the same during the course of antiquity. I would thus like to argue that shifting our understanding of slavery from property to domination can provide us with something even more valuable: an alternative history of Greek slavery. Let us look carefully at each of the problems created by the Aristotelian perspective and the merits of the alternative Greek approach.

(a) Slavery as a relationship of property focuses our attention on the legal relationship between two individuals. This legal relationship was deeply asymmetrical, as many scholars have

[59] *Pol.* 1255a3–b3.
[60] See also the points of Millett (2007).
[61] *Pol.* 1253b24–54a13.
[62] *Pol.* 1254a15–55a3.
[63] See Cartledge (2002) 51–77, 133–66.
[64] *Pol.* 1254b15–55a2.
[65] *Pol.* 1254a9–13.
[66] See Klees (1975) 188–90.

rightly commented. The slave did not exist as a legal persona, had almost no protected rights and his master had almost complete control over him. The result of this perspective is that historians look at slavery from a top-down perspective. They ask whether masters exercised their power on slaves to its theoretical unlimited extent, to what extent their exercise of power was mitigated by 'humanitarian' or selfish concerns and whether there was an improvement in the way masters treated slaves over the course of time. On the other hand, scholars have examined to what extent slaves or even freemen questioned or even tried to abolish this legal relationship. M.I. Finley examined the issue a long time ago, and, from the perspective from which he approached it, there is little more to be said.[67] But perhaps the problem is with the perspective itself.

Seen in the perspective outlined above, the relationship between master and slave is non-negotiable. Nothing can change about the fact that a slave is the property of his master and under his total control. There is no reason to deny that slavery is a deeply asymmetrical relationship. But it is inherently wrong to assume that slavery as a relationship and as an institution is solely created by the masters, while the slaves are passive objects of exploitation.[68] A relationship of property is a legal relationship and is always formulated by those who have the power to do so. There is no reason either to dispute the fact that Greek slavery laws were formulated by Greek masters or to claim that slaves contributed to their formulation. Consequently, many historians tend to assume that slavery was given and that the slaves could only respond to what was already standard and unchanging. The following quotation is characteristic:

> The reaction of slaves to their condition and to their owners were similarly variable and for broadly speaking the same reasons. The spectrum of responses ranged all the way from 'working the system' – in the sense of cooperating to the full with the matter in the interests of self-advancement – through passive acquiescence and mildly non-cooperative behaviour (laziness, pilfering, sabotage) to active resistance (suicide, running away, assault on masters).[69]

Thus, the slave can deal with slavery in a variety of ways; but he only deals with something that is given beforehand and on which he has and can have no effect; even more, his life is seen as either conforming with the institution of slavery or as intentionally resisting it. Such an approach does not consider a number of other possibilities. It fails to understand that slavery is an imposed identity and a person who is a slave cannot be reduced to being solely a slave. A slave inherited and/or constructed a number of other identities, which were significant in a variety of ways. A slave's life, though dominated by his master to an unprecedented and theoretically unlimited extent, could never be reduced to just serving his master. The very institution of slavery was created and changed in a reciprocal way involving many participants, though, of course, in a largely asymmetrical way.[70] This very thing changed the experiences, realities and functions of slavery in a number of ways during the course of Greek history.

We can start with a very elementary, but rarely raised question: how easy was it to tell a slave?[71] His life, experience and treatment in many moments would depend on whether the person who was dealing with him could easily establish whether he was a slave or not; if a slave could pass as a non-slave, he could presumably get away with a lot of things with less discrimination, contempt or maltreatment. It would be unnecessary to ponder here in detail the implications of this for slave systems based on race or for the daily treatment of black people or Arab immigrants by the police in many modern Western countries. Indeed, more than one source tells us that identifying slaves was particularly difficult in Classical Athens:

[67] Finley (1980) 93–122.
[68] See also Zelnick-Abramovitz (2005) 52–60.
[69] Garnsey (1996) 9.

[70] For a similar approach to Roman slavery, see Hopkins (1993).
[71] Vlassopoulos 2009.

> Now among the slaves and metics at Athens there is the greatest uncontrolled wantonness; you can't hit them there, and a slave will not stand aside for you. I shall point out why this is their native practice: if it were customary for a slave (or metic or freedman) to be struck by one who is free, you would often hit an Athenian citizen by mistake on the assumption that he was a slave. For the people there are no better dressed than the slaves and metics, nor are they any more handsome.[72]

Many a slave would have been grateful to the fact that their identity was not readily distinguishable in the context of Athenian society. We must look not only to the methods masters employed to make the position of their slaves visible and distinguishable,[73] but also to the various methods slaves employed to avoid detection and discrimination. The case of Pancleon, the Protean fuller in a speech of Lysias, who has managed to appear to some of his acquaintances as a citizen and to others as a metic, while still other individuals have claimed him as their own slave, illustrates the importance of this element.[74]

Let us move to a different aspect. Thucydides presents an interesting piece of evidence in his description of the civil war between democrats and oligarchs in Corcyra in 427 BC:

> The next day passed in skirmishes of little importance, each party sending into the country to offer freedom to the slaves and to invite them to join them. The mass of the slaves answered the appeal of the people (*dêmos*); their antagonists being reinforced by eight hundred mercenaries from the continent.[75]

How precisely did this take place? Did each party send a group to each farm and the slaves heard first the one group and then the other? Did the democrats send a delegation to the farms that belonged to democrats or democratic sympathizers and the oligarchs accordingly? But then how did most slaves manage to join the democrats? How did the slaves reach a decision? Individually or collectively and on what criteria? Did the slaves have their own form of leadership, as we know other slaves in other slave societies have had?[76] Modern scholars have not asked these questions, and the result is a uni-dimensional view of slavery.[77] But maybe there is something very important in seeking an answer to these questions.

In many slave societies, slaves created their own world, below but also next to the world of the slaveholders. In Jamaica, slaveholders decided to allow slaves a plot of land on which they could cultivate their own products. In certain cases this led to the slaves being granted enough land to provide their own subsistence and the masters being absolved from the need to procure foodstuff for their slaves. The slaves came to consider the plots of land and the produce from them as their own; we even have documents in which their right to these lands was guaranteed. Many Jamaicans came in the course of time to buy their provisions from weekly markets organized by slaves to sell their produce.[78] The legal framework had not changed a bit, and was as restrictive as those employed in ancient Greece. And yet, by a process of negotiation and conflict, which involved master selfishness, mutual benefit and slave assertion, the slaves managed to create a little world of their own. Did the slaves in Corcyra move in a similar direction? They are described as living in the countryside; they could not have been under the constant direct supervision and control of their masters, otherwise one would expect that the masters would simply mobilize the slaves for their own party instead of having to appeal to them.

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[72] Ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 1.10. See Cataldi (2000).

[73] See, for example, the case of tattooing: Jones (1987).

[74] See Lys. 23.

[75] Thuc. 3.73.

[76] See Genovese (1974); Walker (2004).

[77] See the summary of modern discussions in Hornblower (1991) 471–72. For Greek slave revolts in comparative perspective, see Cartledge (2001).

[78] See Mintz (1974) 180–213; Craton (1982).

To move to another aspect, Orlando Patterson has emphasized the extent to which slavery is a form of social death: the slave is a natally alienated individual, whose defining characteristic is a lack of kin relations and honour.[79] This is certainly a very important aspect of slavery. But we should not merely stop at the decisive break that the *doulion êmar* (day of enslavement) brought in a slave's life: we must also examine the ways that slaves attempted to create a novel identity and to forge new links of kin, help and support. The slaves were not passive objects, whose identity and existence was completely dominated by their masters. The following inscription, which comes from the mining region of Laureion, shows us how natally alienated slaves forged new links of feeling, help and support: 'The following *eranistai* devoted (this) to Lord Mên [*Turannôi Mêni*] for prosperity: Kadous, Manês, Kallias, Attas, Artemidôros, Maês, Sôsias, Saggarios, Hermaios, Tibeios, Hermos.[80]

All members of this group have names traditionally connected with slaves. Some have foreign names that were commonly borne by slaves (Midas, Attas, Manês), others have Greek names usually given to slaves (Artemidôros, Sôsias, Hermaios).[81] There is no reason therefore to dispute that this is a dedication by a group of slaves working in the silver mines. This was one of the worst occupations a slave could find himself in; it is natural to assume backbreaking work and high rates of mortality. And yet, this group of slaves had created their own collectivity; they described it as an *eranos*, i.e. a group of subscribers for a common purpose.[82] They managed to do this despite the fact that they had different ethnic origins, as indicated by their names; and yet they were able to communicate enough in order to participate in a common cult group. Even more, this dedication shows an interesting mixing of Greek and non-Greek elements. The slaves have adopted the form and terminology of a Greek dedicatory inscription; but the dedication is for Mên, an Anatolian deity, who is described with the Greek adjective *tyrannos*, something not very common in the Greek religious ritual of the Classical period.[83] These slaves created a world of their own, mixing various Greek and non-Greek elements.

The example of this *eranos* also points to another important issue. There were, of course, many slaves who were household servants and their activities were restricted within the boundaries of their master's *oikos*: preparing food, serving their masters, fetching water, cleaning the house, etc.[84] But a considerable proportion of the slave population was engaged in professional activities that took them out of the household, whether they were working with their masters or on their own.[85] We know of slaves who worked together with their masters as potters[86] or builders[87] and others who worked on their own as bankers,[88] perfume makers[89] or shoemakers.[90] These slaves participated in joint activities together with other free and slave persons. This is a classic example of what Aristotle described as *koinônia*:

> But all *koinôniai* are parts as it were of the *koinônia* of the *polis*. Travellers for instance associate together for some advantage, namely to procure some of their necessary supplies. But the *politikê koinônia* too, it is believed, was originally formed, and continues to be maintained, for the advantage of its members... All these *koinôniai* then appear to be parts of the *koinônia* of the *polis*.[91]

Thus, the concept of *koinônia* allows us to see slaves as active agents participating in common activities.[92] It does not take much imagination to realise how the slaves could benefit from such

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[79] Patterson (1982) 13.
[80] *IG* II² 2940. See Lauffer (1955/1956) 179–85.
[81] See Fragiadakis (1988) 22–25, 27–31.
[82] See Arnaoutoglou (2003).
[83] See Bömer (1990) 195–214.
[84] Xen. *Oec.* 9.9.
[85] For the full range of slave employment in antiquity, see Schumacher (2001).

[86] Canciani (1978).
[87] Randall (1953).
[88] Cohen (1992) 61–109.
[89] Hyp. 3.1–9.
[90] Aeschin. 1.97.
[91] Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1160a4–6.
[92] For the importance of *koinônia* as an analytical tool, see Vlassopoulos (2007b).

an association. These slaves already had links with their colleagues at work; they were further enhanced through the joint cult activities in which they participated. It is conceivable that they would use their association with free Greeks to get information, advice and help.

Thus, if we move from property to domination, we can start reinstating the slaves as active subjects of history and restoring to them their subjectivity in creating their own worlds, constructing new identities, sharing activities and forming new links of association, help and support.

(b) Seeing slavery as a relationship of property places the focus on the binary relationship between master and slave. This is, in my view, a very restrictive approach. If we conceive slavery as a relationship of domination we are then able to realise that the relationship between a master and his slave was only one part of the phenomenon and that there were other parts of it, which were equally important.[93] We have already seen how slaves participated in *koinôniai*, even apart from their masters. But the issue has much wider ramifications. The ways and the extent to which a master was able to dominate his slaves depended also on other relationships: those among master citizens; those among slaves; those between slaves and other non-citizens; those between a slave and other citizens apart from his master. The slaves made use of these various relationships in a variety of ways, in order to enhance their position, to improve their living standards, to avoid detection or even to escape slavery completely.

Even when the legal definition of the relationship between master and slave is identical between two societies, the actual realities might differ enormously, based on the various outcomes of all other parameters. To give just one example, scholars have often commented on the fact that most slaves in the Greek world were non-Greeks.[94] This is no Greek exception, since in most slave societies the slaves are outsiders.[95] But scholars have failed to grasp the importance of one peculiarity of Greek slavery: the fact that alongside foreign slaves, there existed communities of free, foreign immigrants in many Greek societies. How did the existence of free Thracians in Athens influence the perception, treatment and domination of slave Thracians? Did the existence of free Thracians make it easier for slave Thracians to avoid detection and contemptuous treatment? Did slave Thracians use their connections and links to their free compatriots to enhance their position?

Or, to give another example, in Athenian democracy a poor artisan or wage labourer was a citizen with full rights. There could be no overt discrimination against artisans as such, because many of them were full citizens (in contrast, for example, to Thebes, where abstaining from the marketplace for ten years was a precondition for being elected an archon).[96] What was the effect of this relationship among citizens on slave artisans and wage labourers?[97] Did the existence of citizen artisans make the life of slave artisans better or easier? What limits did the peasant-citizen put to the exploitation of slaves?[98] To take a third example, a character of Aristophanes complains that he is not able to punish his slaves properly because of the Peloponnesian War, since he is afraid that they might run away, aided by the wartime circumstances.[99] Given the fact that warfare and siege operations were a constant aspect of the Classical period, how did they affect the function of Greek slavery? How did Greek slavery of the Classical period differ from Roman slavery of the Imperial period in this respect?[100]

I will not provide an answer to any of my questions in this context. But the implication of all these questions is the same: what was the effect of free foreigners, citizen artisans or warfare on the extent or form of domination of slaves in Athens? Did slaves make use of these facts to

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[93] Mactoux (1980) 23–56 has stressed the fact that the Athenian social imaginary could conceive of slavery in ways apart from the private binary relationship between slave and master.

[94] See, for example, Cartledge (2002) 51–77.

[95] Patterson (1982) 148–71.

[96] Arist. *Pol.* 1278a25. For restriction of rights in oligarchies, see Ostwald (2000).

[97] See Vlassopoulos (2007a).

[98] Wood (1988) 61.

[99] *Nub.* 5–7.

[100] See the short comment of Fisher (1993) 81–82.

reduce the level of domination? Did these facts place limits on the extent to which a master could dominate his slaves? This is why we need a larger vista and this is why perceiving slavery as domination allows us to extend our vision.

(c) But the most important benefit of approaching slavery as a form of domination can be a dynamic account of Greek slavery. The legal form of slavery remained essentially unchanged from the Archaic period until late antiquity. This has encouraged scholars to write accounts that are essentially static. The realities, experiences and functions of slavery are seen as fundamentally unchanged during the course of the Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic and Roman periods. Almost all accounts of Greek slavery thus adopt a synchronic approach. Finley's lectures on ancient slavery and modern ideology are characteristic in this respect: a chapter on the historiography of the study of slavery is followed by a chapter on the emergence of the classical slave system; then comes a synchronic chapter on slavery and humanity, which unsurprisingly finds little change in the treatment of slaves over the whole course of classical antiquity; and then comes the last chapter on the demise of the classical slave system.[101]

Static accounts based on the continuity of the legal form have been reinforced by another concern. I have tried above to show that the conception of slavery as a relationship of property is closely connected with the abolitionist debate; thus, it usually moves research towards the question of whether there was an abolitionist movement in antiquity, or at least whether slaves were progressively treated in a better, more humane, way. Thus, the only factor of change is sought in establishing whether some masters or slaves tried to abolish slavery or whether slaves were gradually treated better. The so-called humanitarian approach to Greek slavery tried to do precisely this; and it was an easy task for their opponents to show that from this perspective there was hardly any change during the whole course of antiquity.[102] But their conclusions, stressing the absence of abolitionist attempts and the continuity in the masters' total power over the slaves, eventually confirmed a static history of Greek slavery, in which historical change occurs only in the phases of emergence and decline.

This belief in the essentially unchanging form of Greek slavery seems surprising on a number of levels. Given that Greek society changed profoundly in many other aspects during these centuries, it seems *prima facie* strange that what everyone agrees was such a fundamental institution should have been the only one to remain unchanged. Even more, the evidence from other slave societies gives little credence to such a view; to take only the example of the slave societies of North America, historical research in the last few decades has uncovered fundamental changes and shifts within the three centuries of their existence.[103]

Moving from property to domination as the basis of understanding slavery can thus potentially allow us to capture the dynamic history of Greek slavery. While legal forms remained the same, slaves tried, and in many cases managed, to negotiate their position, take advantage of external circumstances, make use of connections, avoid detection and even gain their freedom. The realities, experiences and functions of slaves changed in tandem with, and sometimes were in opposition to, wider changes in Greek society. To quote one of the most influential recent studies of American slavery:

> Because the circumstances of such contestation and cooperation continually changed, slavery itself continually changed. The refusal of either party to concede the realities of master-slave relations meant that slavery was intrinsically unstable. No bargain could last for very long, for as power slipped from master to slave and back to master, the terms of slavery would again be renegotiated. Slavery was never made, but instead was continually remade, for power – no matter how great – was never absolute, but always contingent.[104]

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[101] Finley (1980); same pattern in Andreau and Descat (2006).

[102] Garlan (1988) 119–208.

[103] Kolchin (1993); Berlin (1998).

[104] Berlin (1998) 3.

Let me give a final example from Classical Athens that vividly portrays the negotiation of power inherent in seeing slavery as domination:

> If anyone is also startled by the fact that they let the slaves live luxuriously there and some of them sumptuously, it would be clear that even this they do for a reason. For where there is a naval power, it is necessary from financial considerations to be slaves to the slaves in order to take a portion of their earnings, and it is then necessary to let them go free. And where there are rich slaves, it is no longer profitable in such a place for my slave to fear you. In Sparta my slave would fear you; but if your slave fears me, there will be the chance that he will give over his money so as not to have to worry anymore. For this reason we have set up equality of speech (*isêgoria*) between slaves and free men, and between metics and citizens.[105]

If we are to write a dynamic account of Greek slavery, we need to overcome the essentialist understanding of slavery that has been bequeathed to us by Aristotle. We need to look at the constant negotiation of this relationship of power. In this negotiation, the pole of the slave did not remain constant, nor was it defined unilaterally by the masters. Many different aspects were of importance: the ways that slaves attempted to avoid or overcome their identification as slaves; the new identities that slaves attempted or managed to forge; the networks and associations in which slaves participated and tried to take advantage of; the efforts of slaves to use the various niches that the economic, political and social processes left open to them. I hope that this article has succeeded in showing that our perception of slavery is fundamentally different from the prevalent view among ancient Greeks and that there is immense value in using the non-Aristotelian Greek perspective as a powerful tool of analysis. What results it can produce remain to be seen in the future.

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[105] Ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 1.11–12.

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