# Class, Embeddedness, and the Modernity of Ancient Athens

MOHAMMAD NAFISSI

*Department of Law, Governance and International Relations, London Metropolitan University*

In a famous issue of *Times Literary Supplement* (*TLS*) focusing on the state of historical scholarship, Moses Finley called for "Unfreezing the Classics" through "serious history" and lamented that, "Less than a generation ago the profound disagreement between Hugh Last and (now Sir) Ronald Syme about Augustus was . . . serious. But today? While our colleagues engage in polemics over the Tudor Revolution in government, the rise of gentry, the roots of Industrial Revolution or the causes of the First World War, what excites us to debate?"[1] Less than a generation later, the field of classical scholarship had been so transformed that Keith Hopkins, one of Finley's successors as the chair of ancient history at Cambridge could report without much exaggeration that, "Ancient economy is an academic battle ground where the contestants campaign under various colours—apologists, Marxists, modernizers, primitivists . . . Even within schools, there are sects. Besides, new strategies, new alliances, new compromises are repeatedly devised. Fresh contingents of scholars arrive, new tactics (such as underwater archaeology) are developed . . . But no new weapon is finally decisive. The war continues."[2]

The radical change was largely due to the success of Finley himself in writing the kind of history that was "about important matters of broad human concern" and reflected his "seriousness and his values." Indeed he had already fired the opening shots of the battle of ancient economy in a controversial confer-

Acknowledgments: This paper is dedicated to the memory of Paul Hirst. It was completed shortly after his unexpected death in July 2003, and draws on the research conducted for the Ph.D. thesis supervised by Paul and John North ("The Oikos Controversy and Modern Social Thought: The Contributions of Weber, Polanyi and Finley," University of London, 1994). Paul was a good man and a profound and fertile thinker. Along with all those who knew him or read his work, I find his absence a great loss. Among the many I should thank for helpful comments on the authors and issues examined below, here I only mention John North, Ralph Schroeder, Sam Whimster, C. R. Whittaker, Keith Hopkins, Sally Humphreys, Kari Polanyi-Levitt, Marguerite Mendell, Michael Crawford, the late G. E. M. de Ste Croix, David Akin and the three anonymous readers for *CSSH*. Robin Osborne and Farhad Nourbakhsh read and commented on earlier versions of this paper with meticulous care and remained generous in addressing my follow up questions. I have not followed their suggestions in every case and this probably explains much of the paper's remaining flaws.

[1] Finley 1966:290. [2] Hopkins 1983:ix.

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ence paper in 1962 and by the time of the *TLS* piece his contributions had gone a long way in establishing his position as "the best living social historian of Greece" with the interest and knowledge to address major issues in anthropology, sociology, and politics as well as classics and ancient history.[3] But it was above all the publication of *The Ancient Economy* (Finley 1973a; henceforth *AE*) that kindled interest in ancient history on the dramatic scale depicted by Hopkins. By synthesizing and extending his own earlier work, here for the first time Finley developed an overall conception of the Greco-Roman world or what conventionally is considered the ancient stage in the history of the 'West.'[4]

This account or, as he preferred to call it, "model," came to be seen during Finley's own lifetime as the "new orthodoxy" and subsequently as the "definitive statement on the primitivist position" whose "principle features . . . are now widely accepted."[5] However, at the very moment when Edmund Burke was thus celebrating the triumph of primitivism, Edward Cohen was mounting a powerful defense of modernism whose strength was recognized even by the most persistent champion of Finley's cause.[6] While Cohen's contribution undermined the Finleyean research agenda by showing extensive commercial banking in the last decades of democratic Athens, Robin Osborne's demonstration of commercial trade in "inter-dependent" markets in archaic Greece questioned it even for the centuries before its rise.[7] Marxist scholars, too, have been forceful in challenging the Finleyean orthodoxy and defending different but distinctively Marxian alternatives. In the most comprehensive Marxist contribution of recent years, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, G. E. M. de Ste. Croix's critique of the "Weberian" aspects of *AE* proved so compelling as to be followed wholesale in Michael Mann's influential neo-Weberian historical sociology.[8]

Yet, as recent studies show, Finley's work remains, if not the ultimate destination, then the inevitable "point of departure" for most new scholarly battalions.[9] In short, Finley continues to "excite" ancient historians (and others) to debate, even those who readily agree with Richard Saller that the "Finely/anti-

[3] Finley 1962/1965; Momigliano 1975:36. Keith Hopkins earlier had singled out Finley as the "only ancient historian to have had his works appraised in a professional journal of sociology" (1972:355).

[4] Given Finley's insistence on the embeddedness of the economy and therefore the absence of economics, *Ancient Political Economy* may have been a more apt title.

[5] Hopkins 1983:x; Burke 1992:200.

[6] Cohen 1992; Morris 1994; see also Morris 1999; 2002:27–29.

[7] Osborne 1996; cf. Tandy, who, following Polanyi, finds that "until the late fourth century B.C., there is no evidence for a supply-demand-price mechanism in international exchanges" (1997:125).

[8] See Mann 1986:216–23.

[9] Mattingly and Salmon 2001:3. Cartledge makes a similar point by suggesting that "our understanding of the ancient (Greek, Roman, Graeco-Roman) probably owes most to Moses Finley's work of that title, misunderstood and controversial though it remains" (2002b:158). By selecting *The Ancient Economy* as the title of their recent volume and calling its first part "After Finley," the editors, Sheidel and Von Redden (2002), underline the same point.

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Finley debate has become increasingly sterile." But if so, this has come about at least in part because, as Saller adds, "it is less easy to figure out how to break out of it."[10] This paper attempts to do so not so much by following Saller's sound advice of "dispensing with misleading polarities"[11] between the opposed camps but by finding unresolved (and irresolvable) tensions within each, and above all in the writings of Finley himself. Put differently, I hope to break out of the Finley/Anti-Finley trap through finding the anti-Finley in Finley, and thus showing the Finleyists (or the Marxists and the modernists) that, at least in some respects, they may consolidate their own tradition by accommodating others.

In pursuit of this aim, the paper focuses on *AE*'s rejection of class in favor of status in the analysis of ancient developments and its complex reception in Marxist, modernist, and primitivist accounts.[12] Many aspects of *AE* were or remain controversial, but none has been as unexpected and provocative as the rejection of class. This is because rather than opening a new front against Finley's usual targets—antiquarianism and mainstream "positivist" agendas—it started a civil war that tore apart the camp Finley had long cultivated and identified as "structural history."[13] Informed by social theory, this capacious camp housed those who drew on Weberian sociology, Durkheimian anthropology, and Marxian political economy and posed new questions and questioned conventional wisdom. By provocatively rejecting the central concept of Marxian analysis, Finley shook the foundations of this alliance. The Finleyean round of the battle of ancient economy thus became overlaid with a supposedly Marxian-Weberian confrontation that is yet to be adequately mapped out on what is generally presented as a straightforward primitivist-modernist (or substantivist-formalist) dispute.

## PRIMITIVISM, MODERNISM AND THE MARXIAN CONUNDRUM

In *AE*, Finley pointedly allied himself with a tradition whose chief architects were identified as Weber, Johannes Hasebroek, and "in our own day" Karl Polanyi.[14] The roots of this tradition have been traced by Finley and others to the Carl Bücher or primitivist side of the "*oikos* controversy" in the closing decade of the nineteenth century. Several influential historians led by Eduard Meyer attacked the political economist Bücher and his mentor Karl Rodbertus

[10] Saller 2002:257. If Saller represents what Scott Meickle describes as "moderate modernism" (2002:248), a decade earlier Paul Millett expressed a similar frustration as a perhaps radical anti-modernist by saying that "The so-called 'primitivist-modernist' controversy ought to have died a natural death long ago, but it still refuses to lie down" (1991:9); cf. Meickle 2002:235–36.

[11] From a position much closer to Finley, Paul Cartledge makes a similar call (2002a:14, n. 8); see also H. Parkins and Smith (1998:4ff.).

[12] See *AE,* 50–51.

[13] This is Finley's own label for describing the shared element in the diverse approaches of the historians whose work he edited in the collection published as *Studies in Ancient Society* (1974:ix).

[14] *AE*, 26.

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with particular ferocity over two related methodological and substantive issues. First, for their attempt to fit unique events into general patterns and explain them with reference to general laws; and second for a deterministic evolutionary theory that ring-fenced antiquity as an autarchic or primitive "household" stage of world history (followed by the stages of "town economy" and "national economy" or developed market capitalism) and refused to recognize its quasi modern institutions, ideas, and developments. For Bücher and his followers, mainstream historians were theoretically naïve and unable to distinguish between the essential and inessential in historical research, and thus liable to antiquarianism and arbitrary generalizations reflecting the historians' own world. Thus Meyer's infamous claim that "The seventh and sixth century of Greek history corresponds to the development of modernity in the fourteenth and fifteenth century after Christ; the fifth to the sixteenth."[15]

Whilst Finley increasingly identified with Weber in his later writings and indeed enlisted him posthumously as a partisan of the primitivist cause, it is Polanyi's influence that is particularly significant for understanding Finley's work. It was Polanyi who introduced Finley in the early 1950s to the limitations of modernizing interpretations of Aristotle and other Greek writers.[16] More importantly, both Polanyi and Finley were "excited" to debate about the Athenian economy, as radical thinkers resistant to the idea that the only sustained experience of direct democracy in history was, as with liberal democracy, associated with free commerce and capitalism.[17] This reinforced their commitment to primitivism as a cause which, however, had to be defended more convincingly than before.

Although not directly implicated in the *oikos* debate, Marxism may be seen as an unstable variant of primitivism.[18] On the one hand, Marxism is quintessentially primitivist in viewing Greece, Rome, and slavery as the lowest stage of the universal or at any rate western evolutionary history. On the other, it generalizes a particular (production/exploitation-based) concept of class and class conflict derived from the experience of the nineteenth-century northwest Europe to earlier historical periods. It thus insists on the centrality of class conflict between slaves and slave-owners in the ancient world. Having shown that slavery, in the significant "productive" sense meant by Marxism, only arose in specific periods and places in antiquity, Finley noticed the apparently decisive absence (apart form brief periods in Roman history) of any

[15] Meyer (1895/1979:118–19). As the reader will notice, the following could be accused of outdoing Meyer by drawing parallels between certain aspects of Athenian political economy and developments in the twentieth century and beyond. But then, as will also be seen, I am, in this regard, in the good company of many notable Marxists and primitivists, including Finley himself.

[16] Finley 1974b:39, n. 47.

[17] On the ideological orientation of the research programmes of both Polanyi and Finley and various phases of their intellectual developments see Nafissi (forthcoming), especially chapters 6, 7, and 10.

[18] See Figueria 1994:109–10; Nafissi 2000:56ff.

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record of major conflict between slaves and slave-owners. Certain oppressed groups, helots for example, may have been in a state of continuous resistance, but they were not slaves. At the same time, the struggle between "the rich" and "the poor" was certainly intense in many Greek states through much of their recorded history. But, then again, Finley claimed that this did not constitute exploitation-based class conflict in the strict or "technical" sense of the term.[19]

By the time of writing *AE*, already some notable Marxist scholars had begun searching for a more adequate approach. Jean Pierre Vernant, for example, deployed certain Maoist additions to the Marxist arsenal. The relationship between slave-owners and slaves was described as the "fundamental contradiction" in Greece which was said to have "blocked or markedly held back . . . overall technical progress." At the same time, in view of the fact that "the slaves' opposition to their masters were never directly expressed in terms of social and political struggle," and that they never acted as a distinct class "in the succession of conflicts which were a permanent feature of the city-states," Vernant defined the conflict between the "rich" and "poor" over the "redistribution of the surplus" as the "principal contradiction" in ancient Greece.[20] Another close associate of Finley, Pierre Vidal Naquet, went further. He examined the question that directly interested Finley—"Were Greek Slaves a Class"—and came up with an unabashedly negative answer.[21]

Finley's problem with class analysis becomes even more understandable when the position of the main exponent of the Marxian orthodoxy is examined. Contra not only Finley, Vernant, and Vidal Naquet, but also the more *bona fide* Marxists, Ste Croix insisted on a universal, objectivist concept of class. Eric Hobsbawm's and E. P. Thompson's advocacy of "class for itself" as the only historically useful concept of class was rejected since it would significantly limit the universality of Marxist theory and claims. Ste Croix is characteristically open about the nature of his anxiety: to require an articulated identity of interests would, he suggests, "make it seldom possible for us to speak of 'class' in the ancient world at all, except in relation to ruling classes."[22] But we may join Finley in asking, 'So what?' if that is what the evidence dictates? Indeed, notwithstanding his protestations, even Ste Croix cannot avoid making the distinction that brings him almost full circle back to the starting point of the revisionists: "Class in the full sense," he concedes to Hobsbawm, "only comes into existence at the historical moment when classes begin to acquire consciousness of themselves as such."[23]

There is another difficulty with Ste Croix's position. His recognition, with

[19] *AE*, 49ff., 183ff.; see also Finley 1983:10ff. [20] Vernant 1965/1980:13.

[21] Vidal Naquet 1986. Although he, too, retains the spirit of the Marxian stance by describing the master-slave relationship as the fundamental contradiction of the ancient world. See Ste Croix's response (1981:63–64).

[22] 1981:63. [23] 1981:63. Cf. Hobsbawm 1971:6.

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Vernant and Finley, that class struggle in the "full sense" only took place between citizens, or citizens and to be citizens, sits uneasily with his claim that once "exploitation" is brought back "as the hallmark of class . . . at once class struggle is in forefront as it should be."[24] Here the problem is more serious and neither Ste Croix nor Mann face up to it: the citizens engaged in the conflicts of the post-Solonic and classical Athens for the most part did not stand in relations of exploitation to each other and hence did not qualify as class in the sense demanded by Ste. Croix.[25] Mann recognizes that the particularity of Greece has something to do with class: ". . . it might seem that in the middle of a discussion of classical Greece, I have converted to Marxism . . . I have been able to describe this period, but not preceding ones, in Marxian terminology because this became appropriate to this historical setting."

He thus not only concedes that "the dialectic of Greece was in large part—as Marx said it was—a class struggle," he also embraces Ste Croix's "effective" critique of "Weber's and Finley's use of status . . . in place of class."[26] Mann's dismissal of Finley and enthusiasm for Marxism and class is misplaced. The Marx Mann has in mind not only saw Greece in terms of the dialectic of "class struggle," but also all other formations. Moreover, in the case of ancient Greece, the same Marx thought that this dialectic was enacted above all between slaves and slave masters. But as Mann recognizes, "slaves were not an active force in history, indispensable as their labour was to those who were. . . . By contrast, even the lowest citizenry possessed class praxis."[27] Ironically, this conclusion points to square one of Finley's doubts concerning the applicability of Marxian class analysis to ancient Greece and other pre-capitalist formations. Put differently, Mann's own operative concept of class is essentially Weberian, according to which, rather than exploitation as such, "'property' and 'lack of property' are . . . the basic categories of all class situations."[28]

Finley's decision to discard class analysis has an added advantage. It removes the "modernizing" implications of viewing ancient developments in rigorous class terms. Various Marxist and Weberian concepts converge in assuming common economic situation as a defining characteristic of class, which in turn presupposes a disembedded economy. Polanyi saw this as the outcome of a particular process that was only completed in, and by, nineteenth-century capital-

[24] 1981:57. [25] See Mann 1986:216–28.

[26] 1986:226, 222. Ober, too, assumes that Finley's studies are "based in part on Max Weber's studies of status and hierarchy" (1989:12). Ober's own direct contribution to the debate between Finley and Ste Croix over class and status (1991) generally bypasses the issues problematized here.

[27] Mann 1986:219; cf. Garlan's ultimately Examination struggle Of the question (1988:203ff.).

[28] Weber 1948:182. Some Marxists may object to this, but no consistent version of the orthodox position has been forthcoming. In his examination of literary and other classical texts, David Konstan finds clear evidence of class and class conflict in the explicit or "altered register." But his conception, too, rests on the division between the rich and poor (1994:50). Wood and Wood directly question Finley's rejection of class and in the process move between apparently different concepts of class, but they do not resolve the difficulties identified by Finley and his followers 1978:60ff.

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ism.[29] A disembedded economy and the associated rise of classes and class struggle are, in this reading, the hallmarks of capitalist modernity. Conversely, status is seen as the main form of social stratification in economically embedded or "status" societies. Polanyi is especially singled out here, because his approach best explains the anti-modernist context of Finley's turn to status. In retracing the intellectual roots of his own project, Polanyi explicitly remarked on the link between status and embeddedness whose "empirical discovery in terms of history was made by Sir Henry Sumner Maine in the Roman law categories of status and contractus . . . Maine undertook to prove that modern society was built on contractus, while ancient society rested on status. . . . Not before Malinowski's fundamental stand on the nature of primitive society was that antithesis applied to the economy. It is now possible to say that status or [Tonnies'] *Gemeinschaft* dominate where the economy is embedded in non-economic institutions; contractus or *Gesellschaft* is characteristic of the existence of a motivationally distinct economy in society."[30]

Polanyi recognized that Marxism and liberalism's competing classes and individuals arose through the disembedding of the economy and the disappearance of status society. Finley's rejection of class is grounded in this problematic. Status overcomes both the difficulties of reconciling class analysis and ancient historical evidence and removes the modernist associations of considering the Greek city-states as class or capitalist societies. In *AE*, Finley restates Polanyi's position, but through Lukács: "Half a century ago Georg Lukács, a most orthodox Marxist, made the correct observation that in pre-capitalist societies "status-consciousness . . . masks class consciousness." By that he meant, in his own words, that "the structuring of society into castes and estates means that economic elements are *inextricably* joined to political and religious factors"; that "economic and legal categories are objectively and *substantively so interwoven* as to be *inseparable*" (original emphases).[31]

What is at issue is not so much the fact and extent of Lukács' orthodoxy or his concise anticipation of Polanyi's views, as Finley's open display of the amicable nature of his apparently drastic revisionism to his Marxist colleagues. The question of class or status was not, he in effect reminds them, a narrow theoretical or empirical question. It implied a choice between viewing ancient Greece and Rome as a sub-species of either (primitive) "status" or (modern) "contractus" types of society. The discarding of class only meant expelling modernism rather than rejecting Marxism, whose class analysis remained applicable to the contemporary world. Returning directly to Bücher and Meyer in his subsequent work, Finley reminded the Marxists of how much Marx had in common with the former against the latter and his allies and their descendants, the mainstream historians.[32] Evidently, thought Finley, it was the overriding

[29] 1945:50–51. [30] Polanyi 1957b:68–70. [31] *AE*, 50.
[32] 1977/1981e:7ff.; see also 1980:45–46; 1985:88–90.

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task of Marxists to stay united with other "structural historians" and reverse the victory which the ancient historians had assumed, "to their own satisfaction," to have won in the dispute "now commonly referred to as the Bücher-Meyer controversy."[33]

## SUBSTANTIVIST PRIMITIVISM: A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE?

So what about Finley's alternative? First, it, too, was not as stable as has been widely assumed. Shaw and Saller, for example, are mistaken in maintaining that "Finley throughout all his work clearly rejected the Marxist conception of "class" as the only or even the most profitable way of analyzing social relations in ancient society."[34] Six years before the publication of *AE,* a commentator who had objected to Finley's reference to the "ferocious class bias" of Josephus as "ill applied Marxism," received the following response: "To a historian of antiquity this is a most remarkable posture, since ancient authors analysed society in terms of classes having divergent and conflicting interests. The whole of Aristotle's *Politics,* for example, the most systematic and most profound political analysis to have been produced in antiquity, rests on the existence of classes, as does Plato's very different kind of discourse in the republic. . . . Examples can be multiplied but, to do so is unnecessary: it is all very familiar and commonplace. Marx was neither so ignorant nor so arrogant as to claim that he had discovered the existence of classes and class struggle."[35]

It is also true, however, that as early as his first major article on slavery in 1959, Finley was already thinking of "ancient society as made up of *spectrum of statuses,*" and soon after he was expressing his dissatisfaction with the fact that "we are in thrall to a very primitive sociology which assumes that there are only three kinds of labour-status: the free, contractual wage-earner, the serf, and the slave."[36] So, is it the case that after a long period of scholarly doubt and scrutiny, Finley had made up his mind in *AE* in favor of status over class? The matter cannot be settled so easily, for class, class conflict, and consciousness make a comeback in Finley's last major study, *Politics in the Ancient World,* but with a proviso: "My return in the present work to "class" (in the sense intended in ordinary discourse, not in a technical sense, Marxist or other) does not imply a change of view. I merely find the conventional terminology more convenient, and harmless, in an account of ancient politics."[37]

Why is it any more convenient and harmless to use class in an account of ancient politics rather than an account of ancient economics? Whatever the pre-

[33] 1962/1965:11. Knowing the unlikely eventuality of convincing all his Marxist critics, Finley persisted by distinguishing between the subtle Marxists and the "Engelsian" or "linear" and other crude Marxists. He placed himself in or alongside the ranks of the former in what, in an enthusiastic review of Perry Anderson's work, he termed the "Great Schism." (1975:14). Finley's claim was, at least in this case, untenable, for Anderson's account, too, remained wedded to a class-divided Athens shaped decisively by the slave mode of production. See Anderson 1975:36–37.

[34] Shaw and Saller 1981:xvii. [35] 1967:201.

[36] Finley 1959/1981a:98; 1960/1981b:142. [37] Finley 1983:10, n. 29.

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cise answer to this and other similar questions, Finley's return to class analysis expresses genuine bewilderment on his part. For in *Politics*, Finley not only finds convincing Aristotle's description of *poleis* as above all divided between rich and poor, but acknowledges that it "exemplifies class, class consciousness and class conflict sufficiently for my purposes."[38] And Aristotle could hardly have been expected to be clearer about the wide reach and efficacy of class division in classical Greece:

> What really differentiates oligarchy and democracy is wealth or the lack of it. It inevitably follows that where men rule because of the possession of wealth, whether their number be large or small, that is oligarchy and when the poor rule, that is democracy. . . . But the same people cannot be both rich and poor, and this is why the prime division of a state into parts seems to be into poor and the well-to-do. Further owing to the fact that the one group is for the most part numerically small, the other large, these two parts appear as opposites among the parts of the state. So the constitutions are accordingly constructed to reflect the predominance of one or the other of these and there seem to be two constitutions—democracy and oligarchy.[39]

Whether Aristotle's consciously opposed rich and poor constituted classes may be questioned, but that his account demands a retreat from considering Athens a "status society" in any historically significant sense of the term should not be in dispute. If correct, this conclusion should prevent Austin and Vidal Naquet, as well as Finley, from having the Polanyian and the Aristotelian cakes while chewing both loudly too. In their highly informative *Economic & Social History of Ancient Greece*, they, even more boldly than Finley, declare that "THE ECONOMY IN GREECE IS EMBEDDED IN SOCIETY" (original emphasis). For them, "the distinction drawn by Polanyi between economies which are more or less embedded in society is a fundamental one."[40] To prove the point, they round up, especially *pace* Finley, the usual suspects—the distinction between *oikonomia* and its modern derivatives; Greeks' failure to produce genuine economic analyses; the denigration of productive occupations and the high esteem of politics and warfare, and so on.[41] But these and other features of ancient Athens, rather than proving the embeddedness of its economy, may show only the distinctiveness of its own variant of disembeddedness.

This raises questions also about Ian Morris' influential review, "The Athenian Economy Twenty Years after *The Ancient Economy*." Morris concedes that subsequent work such as Cohen's study of Athenian banking have undermined the primitivism of *AE* by showing that the Athenian economy was more com-

[38] 1983:11.

[39] Aristotle 1981:1279b26 seq.; 1291a40seq; see also Plato 1987:557a. Ober 1991 emphasizes Aristotle's reference to "non-economic" factors such as education, but then, as he points out in an earlier work, "only the rich could afford higher education" (1989:113, n. 24; see also 191ff.). The same point is underlined by Loraux 1986:177–78.

[40] Austin and Vidal Naquet (1977:8). However, unlike Finley in *AE*, they stop short of taking the next step of replacing class with status, and therefore appear to leave open the nature of the overall social stratification in classical Athens.

[41] 1977:8ff.

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mercialized than Finley perceived in his seminal book. But, he insists on decoupling the debate between the substantivists (inspired by Polanyi and his concept of embeddedness) and the formalists (the universalizers of modern economics and instrumental rationality), which he considers central to explaining Athenian developments and the primitivist-modernist dispute which he thinks has become rather "stale and unproductive."[42] According to Morris, Finley may have underestimated the scale of the commercial financial sector, but he was right in insisting that economy in Antiquity remained tied within political and ideological institutions, norms, and processes in the manner suggested by the "substantivist" concept of embeddedness.

Yet, substantivism, if not reducible to primitivism, is intimately related to it, at least in the context of the debates over the ancient economy. Cohen, for his part, indeed indicates this when he martials extensive evidence to refute the claim made by Finley and other primitivists that "the undeniable ubiquity of credit at Athens arose from social values embedded in Athenian culture that mandated the profuse extension of loans on a 'friendly' basis, free of interest and other monetary considerations."[43] Osborne does the same when he shows the existence of "interdependent markets" in archaic Greece, as does Loomis when he finds market wages in Athens.[44] The developments represented by these findings frame the broader question raised by Ste Croix in his review of *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* four decades ago: "Professor Polanyi will not . . . allow the economy of ancient Greece, at any rate before the Hellenistic period, to count as a system of "exchange." Unfortunately he has failed to ask himself whether it can be said to fall under any of his other [reciprocity and redistribution] heads." By so posing the question, Ste Croix was able to re-affirm his own preferred answer that the Athens's was indeed a "free market" economy.[45]

In Finley's attempt to overcome the limitations of class analysis, status is assigned the same role that class occupied in the much criticized Marxist discourse, namely that of a master-concept for understanding and analyzing all the significant historical developments in Antiquity. To perform this monumental task, status must be emptied of all positive determination, therefore granting it limited, negative, operational utility. This is entailed by the inclusion of pre-Solonic and classical Athens, archaic Sparta, and imperial Rome as different manifestations of "status society," along with the feudal formations of the Mid-

[42] Morris 1994:351, see also 354. Cartledge, too, emphasizes the substantivism of Finley's primitivism (2002b:158). For Polanyi's contribution to the substantivist-primitivist paradigm see Polanyi 1968; 1971; Dalton 1968; 1990; Neal and Tandy 1994; cf. Cook 1966; 1968; Humphreys 1978; Pearson 2000:972ff.). Mark Granovetter's notable development of the concept of embeddedness (1985) does not address the issues raised here, although his classification of the responses to Polanyi's formulation is usefully employed by Morris (1999:xxvii, ff.).

[43] Cohen 1992:190ff.; see also ch. 1. [44] Loomis 1998:253

[45] Ste Croix 1960:510. This position of course can be put in terms of articulated modes of integration, in which case "market exchange" would appear as the dominant mode. See C. Chase-Dunn and T. D. Hall (1997:24), who employ Polanyi's mode of integration but acknowledge his underestimation of the extent of "market exchange" in antiquity.

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dle Ages and other "pre-capitalist" formations. Could this not explain the reliance on class to distinguish between such formations and account for their interesting differences and developments? Perhaps not. But Finley's own return to class analysis indicates a different answer, a fact not missed by Ste Croix who noticed that *Politics in the Ancient World* "contains many references to class, but none to status."[46] The contentious point here is of course not about the use of status in the analysis of prestige-based social stratification or motives for social action in "class societies" (characterized, for example, by the differentiation and rise in the "status" of wealth-seeking activities). Rather, it is about the comparative characterization of societies. In other words, in the choice between "status," traditional, or embedded, and "class" or modern or disembedded types, it would be difficult to dispute Ste Croix's claim that Athens sits in the latter. But this, contra the view of reductionist modernists, should be treated as the first rather than the ultimate step in outlining the distinctiveness of Athenian developments.

Finley's widely accepted presentation of status as the hallmark of the Weberian approach to classical Antiquity does not represent fully Weber's own multi-level analysis. It is true that in his famous discussion of "Class, Status and Party," Weber says that "where stratification by status permeates a community as strongly as was the case in all political communities of Antiquity and of the Middle Ages, one can never speak of a genuinely free market competition as we understand it today."[47] But once these and other similar general and usually passing statements about Antiquity (or the Middle Ages) are placed in their relevant contexts, they will be seen for what they are: static comparative ideal typifications meant to underline certain features of the ideal type of modernity, rather than exhaustive conclusions about the nature of ancient states as historical entities in their own right. Weber's treatment of classical Athens as a highly evolved polity with a "capitalist" economy is found in *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilisations.*[48] But even in the theoretical, highly condensed and wide ranging discussion of "Class," Weber makes it clear that class and status are not mutually exclusive alternatives for describing and analyzing ancient developments: "The "class struggles" of antiquity—to the extent that they were genuine class struggles and not struggles between status groups—were initially carried out by indebted peasants, and perhaps also by artisans threatened by debt bondage and struggling against debt creditors. For debt bondage is the normal result of differentiation of wealth in commercial cities, especially in seaport cities."[49]

This is a crucial passage, not only because it indicates Weber's continued deployment of class in the self-same text that refers to the status-ridden nature of

[46] Ste Croix 1985:185, n. 39. [47] Weber 1948, 193.
[48] For an extensive discussion of this work see Nafissi (forthcoming) ch. 4; cf. Love 1991.
[49] Weber 1948:185.

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ancient states, but also because it emphasizes a different form of class opposition than that between slave and slave-owner that lies at the center of the dispute over class and status. What is equally interesting is that this approach is fully anticipated in a rather neglected passage in *Capital:* "The class-struggles of the ancient world took the form chiefly of a contest between debtors and creditors, which in Rome ended in the ruin of the plebeian debtors. They were displaced by slaves."[50]

Ste Croix does not ignore this comment, but considers it "not one of Marx's best statements" on the subject. Carried to its logical conclusion, this approach, as Ste Croix realizes, would threaten his own favored interpretation. This is also why he finds Marx's elaboration of the question in the "Preface" to the second edition of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* "even more peculiar": ". . . in ancient Rome the class struggle took place only within a privileged minority, between the free rich and the free poor . . ."[51] This conclusion is of course similar to Finley's, except that Marx, supported by Weber, considers the conflicts between the rich and poor in class terms and offers a felicitous starting point for a reconsideration of the dispute between their followers.

## THE DISTINCTIVE MODERNITY OF ANCIENT ATHENS

Among other factors that may have engendered the seventh-century crisis of Athens (population pressure, soil exhaustion, growth of trade, crop specialization, manufacturing and markets, and so on) and as an expression of them, social stratification in Athens approximated to the "for themselves" variant of class formations; what Ste Croix calls "classes in the full sense"; Finley, "classes in the technical sense"; and Michael Mann, "extensive, symmetrical, political classes."[52] Productive exploitation, polarized consciousness, and mobilization all appear as ingredients of the prolonged struggles that finally give rise to democratic *polis* in the closing years of the sixth century. Finley himself recognized the importance of this fact or something very close to it in no uncertain terms in an earlier study:

> Unless the sources have misled us completely, in Greece and Rome there came a time when, as the ancient writers themselves phrased it, *one whole class* was "enslaved" to another. In the Near East, debt-bondage, for all its importance, never reached such proportions and often it seems to have been narrowed down to the employment of dependent members of the family as pawns. . . . Then came the *break* in Greece and Rome, and it too was complete and drastic. . . . Something new had entered the situation in seventh-century Attica and fifth-century Rome. . . . The effect . . . was that debt-bondage was abolished *tout court,* by political action, and its return was prevented by the growing political power of the *emancipated class* as they became part of a self-governing community, in which they could use their position for both political and economic ends (my emphases).[53]

[50] Marx 1974:135. [51] Cited in Ste Croix 1985:177–78. [52] Mann 1986:216ff.
[53] Finley 1965/1981d:165, 166; see also "Between Slavery and Freedom" (1964/1981c:128).

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This description clearly points to the formation of classes and eruption of significant class conflict which set the immediate context within which Solon and his successors appeared. The Finley who wrote the above could not have dissented from Wood's following summary of the Solonic period which draws on the common thrust of the otherwise distinct accounts of, among others, Andrewes, Murray, Osborne, and perhaps himself:

> Lords and peasants . . . increasingly confronted one another not as two opposed communities, but as individuals and as classes. The resulting balance of forces was inevitably unstable: on the one hand, a propertied class with economic and juridical superiority sufficient to squeeze the peasantry but lacking the unifying force, the check on intra-class competition and conflict, and the coercive support provided by a strongly centralized state; on the other hand, an increasingly restive peasantry chafing at the bonds of personal dependence, the economic vulnerability of the smallholder aggravated by juridical restrictions.[54]

Thus, at least in respect of the "snap shot" of the Solonic period (which is basically all that evidence allows), the concept of class remains useful, and in that rare way that satisfies Finley's and Ste Croix's strict criteria and overcomes the divide among Marxist writers themselves. This refers to the "class in itself—class for itself" debate which invariably looks back to the celebrated passage in Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* where the mass of small holding peasants, isolated from each other and with "no community, national bond and political organization," were found "incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name."[55]

In Athens, notwithstanding the paucity of evidence, the peasantry achieved this capacity. In the reduced ideal typical terms employed below to clarify what is of interest here, the Athenian peasants (or sections thereof and their urban or indeed aristocratic allies) were represented as a class "objectively" bound together as an exploited strata (class in itself) and as a collective actor with the capacity to construct and pursue its "interests" (class for itself), and set a process in train that culminated in an advanced form of democracy. In so doing, they secured and expanded a zone of economic interaction free from political coercion and dependence, and turned wealth into the key standard of social stratification. Contra Finley, the Athens that emerged was not a status society in any usual sense of the term. But neither was it, contra Ste Croix, a class society, at least in the sense that it had become by the time of the Solonic crisis at the turn of sixth century B.C. This is another way of raising a possibility precluded as a consequence of the static context of the debate: the character of class formation underwent significant change as a result of the struggles which engendered it in the first place.

Let us imagine three scenarios. First, had the aristocrats succeeded in uniting and crushing the peasant opposition to debt bondage and other forms of de-

[54] Wood 1988:98–99. [55] 1979:187–88.

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pendent, "embedded," labor, the outcome would have been *serfdom* of sorts and an embedded quasi-feudal regime. Second, the struggle of Athenian peasants results in the expropriation of the aristocracy and the elimination of large holdings, and a *polis of petty producers* that presides over common affairs and safeguards its egalitarian foundations.[56] Although the first case is characterized by exploitation and the second by its absence, neither would have been marked by class conflict. Third, we have a bourgeois trajectory set in motion by the dispossession of the peasantry and its transformation into a class of "doubly free" wage laborers where exploitation and conflict are aligned and inequality is systemic.

The complexity of the Athenian case lies in the way it combines elements of all these situations and thus fits into none. Starting with the first, aristocracy's loss of much of its political and economic power between Solon and Perikles or Demosthenes is evidenced by the many scions of aristocratic families who became leaders of democratic Athens and of the democratic factions. Despite or because of this, aristocratic holdings remained largely intact, particularly during the classical period when, in contrast to many other *poleis*, in Athens land redistribution ceased to be the subject of political debate and conflict.[57] Notwithstanding the conservative fears, the democratic state persistently refrained from eliminating the old or new sources of economic inequality, even as it pursued the project of political equality in ever finer detail.[58] The formal and discursive ease with which inequality was accommodated may be gauged by the fact that during the period of radical democracy, and even in the period following the oligarchic coup, "the citizens of fourth-century Athens were still divided into the four Solonian property classes," although by then these had lost their practical import and "the alternative division into rich and poor on purely economic criteria [had come] to have greater importance."[59]

Most importantly, by replacing, externalizing, and radicalizing various forms of dependent labor, slavery helped sustain an aristocratic life style for the rich, old and new, and a quasi-aristocratic ethos for the citizens as a whole. More broadly, politics and martial qualities as the core values of "good life" in a society permanently at war or in fear of or in preparation for war remained dominant, whether or not these values are taken as signs of the persistence of an aristocratic worldview or the consolidation of a new democratic hegemony.[60] It is this (non-bourgeois) hegemony, alongside the obvious differences with modern capitalism, that is often mistaken for status society.

[56] Both of these options were, according to author of *The Athenian Constitution* (ch. 11), in fact pursued by the period leading to Solon's reforms, which took the "middle way" of abolishing debt bondage as well as safeguarding the property of the oligarchs.

[57] Hansen 1991:81. For democracy's surprising stability see Ober 1989:17ff., 198ff.

[58] Davies 1981; Osborne 1991; 1992; Foxhall 1992. [59] Hansen 1991:116.

[60] For the view that in ancient Greece "as a whole the aristocratic values were not challenged" see Austin and Vidal Naquet 1997:16; and Loraux 1986; cf. Ober 1989; 1996).

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On the other hand, if we turn to the second and third scenarios, we find that in many respects classical Athens came as close as any other historical formation to several distinctly non-aristocratic utopias, including and beyond the peasant utopia of "the free village, untrammeled by tax collectors, labour recruiters, large landowners, officials."[61] Overcoming the divisions between the state and civil society, town and country, and producers and owners, and doing so without impinging on individual liberty or solidarity, or converting the citizen-actors into citizen-electors appeals to all three rival modern utopias: liberal, Marxist, and communitarian.[62] But, for the purposes of the present discussion, the intrinsically pluralistic social democratic agenda may offer a more telling parallel.

The last centuries of archaic Greece gave rise to movements that extended citizenship rights to all native male Athenians, and in the process consolidated a regime of small producers (urban as well as rural) not generally coercively exploited either by a class of overlords or by a bureaucratic tribute state. Although unequal, "landholding," as Morris suggests, "was unusually egalitarian in fourth-century Athens."[63] And it stood in sharp economic as well as political contrast with the pre-Solonic situation, at least as that was seen in the classical period itself, where "all the land was in the hands of a few and if the poor failed to pay their rents both they and their children were liable to seizure."[64] But, as in the ideal and idealized competitive market model of classical and neo-classical economics, equality is approached with relatively little state intervention and a bureaucratically minimized state. Bureaucratic minimization, however, did not mean either the absence of public intervention in the form of redistributive taxation, direct or indirect supply of essential goods,

[61] Wolf 1971:272, cited in Wood 1988:126.

[62] Relevant literature, of course, goes back to Marx and Mill and earlier writers. Finley himself approached the critical utopian appeal of Athenian democracy in *Democracy Ancient and Modern* (1973b). Among the more recent contributions from the above-mentioned perspectives, see the contributions in Ober and Hedrick, eds. (1996). See, among others, Jenkyns 1980; Hansen 1992; and Williams 1993.

[63] Morris 2000:141; Aristotle 1984:2.2. Morris makes this point contra Osborne (1991) and Foxhall (1992), whose conclusions, he finds, exaggerate the extent of inequalities in Athens. In response to Morris and others, Lin Foxhall has forcefully and perhaps somewhat forcedly questioned the reality, causes, and consequences of egalitarianism in ancient Greece. However, she does not seem to go as far as denying the comparatively greater equality in Athenian landholdings. Indeed, she concedes that the "richest were richer in Rome than in Athens or Corinth," but then suggests that "one could argue that it was the exclusivity of the *polis*, not its egalitarianism, that limited the acquisitiveness of the wealthy." Similarly, she recognizes the prevalence of the ideal of equality, but again undermines it by saying that "one could argue that the principle of equality in partible inheritance is more negative than positive. That is it was (and is) less a matter of delight in the principle of equality and justice than fear of getting less than another or being done of one's due" (2002:215, 212). One could of course argue that the question of achieving equality is different from delighting (psychologically, ideologically, genuinely?) in it. Robin Osborne, in correspondence with the author, has remarked that his findings "are more striking for egalitarianism than inequality."

[64] Aristotle 1984:2.2.

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provision of social security, or state ownership of strategic assets such the Laureion mines.[65]

The quasi-social democratic character of the Athenian state underlies Cohen's reminder that "because fiscal obligations were exclusively placed on the wealthy, the term 'taxpayers' . . . became in popular usage interchangeable with 'the rich' or 'the well off.'"[66] Conversely, Burke highlights as a unique feature of classical Athens and the key to what may be called its ethical disembedding, "the widespread and long-term cash subsidies provided by the state to its citizens, notably those of the thetic class."[67] All this helps explain the otherwise surprisingly limited forms of class struggle in the classical period with even the most dramatic episode, the coup d'Etat instigated by the oligarchs, eliciting a moderate response rather than confiscation and elimination of the rich as a class. As if having approximated to the Rawlsian condition of minimum inequality compatible with maximum welfare for the poorest citizens, the "poor" and their allies and leaders were content with restoring (social) democracy.[68]

The power of *polis* to "legitimately intervene" went beyond modern social democracy and was, according to Finley, theoretically limitless, but, as Hansen notices, this "correct observation ought not to be invoked to establish a difference between ancient and modern democratic ideology, because precisely the same observation applies, for example, to modern Britain."[69] Indeed, private property and sphere were respected to a degree rare among Greek and other states, either in antiquity or later. The distinct autonomy of this sphere is evidenced by mobility, variety, and, on the whole, growing commercialization this side of "the wall normally dividing [the disembedded?] economics from politics."[70] The *metics* are of course there in the first place precisely to do business and, despite the special tax directed at them, clearly favored Athens as a cosmopolis of sorts. But the inclusiveness of Athenian social economy variously extended to women, prostitutes, and slaves. Athenian women, in Foxhall's account, with their "veto power" over disposal of the assets they brought to the *oikos* or the right to exit with their dowry, achieved greater social and economic autonomy than their counterparts in, say, Victorian England.[71] And slaves increasingly appeared along an economically differentiated spectrum that in-

[65] Hansen 1991:97–101.

[66] Cohen 1992:195; see also Osborne (1991:129ff.) on the fiscal obligations of the rich and their modernizing significance.

[67] Burke 1992:201, 216, 218–25.

[68] The outcome was a quasi or perhaps hyper form of social democracy inasmuch as, in Athens, political ideals and institutions achieved primacy in the way that modern social democracy never has.

[69] See Hansen (1991:80) where reference is also made to Finley (1973b:78). There were of course other major differences and Hansen has been accused of ignoring them. See Wood 1996; and Hansen 1996.

[70] Cartledge 2002b:164. [71] Foxhall 1989.

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cluded some of the richest and most of the poorest, with many of the well off setting up their own *oikoi*.[72] At the same time, at least toward the end of fifth century, the labor market appears to determine wages regardless of political status. Accordingly, there is clear evidence of *metics*, slaves, and citizens being paid in line with fluctuations in supply and demand,[73] and, more generally, *metics* and slaves enjoying "exceptional degrees of freedom and equality in the economic and social life of Athens."[74] Athens thus displays two levels of economic disembedding: first, from the polity which in turn allowed the formation and representation of citizen and class interests over redistribution of wealth, and second, within the economy where there is growing "rationality" in the form of differentiation and commercialization of economic activities.

However, a third level of disembeddedness or re-embeddedness of the market sphere—characteristic of medieval European towns and modern capitalism through a "civil society" of differentiated economic enterprises, guilds, and other associations—is marginalized in Athens under the changing but continuously dominant presence of both the *polis* and the *oikos*. Athenian modernization was shaped by a particular process of atomization that ensured the primacy and independence of the male citizens rather than allowing the formation of collective actors among the politically disenfranchised. Mobility and the widest possible differentiation of slaves reinforced their socio-political non-being rather than generating for them a new social identity. And although Foxhall must be right that women have been far more powerful than allowed for in the bulk of surviving evidence produced in and for the public sphere inhabited only by male citizens,[75] the legal and political documents in question reflect reality insofar as whatever power women had was bounded by the *oikos*, only the male heads of which had space for collective, non-traditionalizing action. The same applies even with greater force to slaves and *metics*. The disembedding of the Athenian economy thus did not threaten the democratic *polis* or the primacy of politics. On the contrary, it altogether consolidated it precisely by reserving the possibility of collective "class" action for its citizens. That the Athenians could generally happily witness, at one and the same time, the rise of a slave to become the richest resident of Athens, and the wretched conditions under which thousands labored in silver mines attests both their appreciation of wealth and its subordinate status.

In sum, in the classical Athens that emerges from the conflicts of the seventh and sixth centuries, the economically exploited and politically oppressed are liberated, but exploitation does not disappear.[76] With the consolidation of slav-

[72] Cohen 2000: ch. 5. [73] Loomis 1996:253–54.
[74] Raaflaub 1996:154. [75] Foxhall 1989:42–43.
[76] In Finley's words, "little as we are able to grasp the situation concretely, we can be confident that in the archaic periods in both Greek and Roman history, slavery was unimportant, clientage, debt-bondage and the like the prevalent forms of dependent labour" (*AE*, 69).

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ery, the stratification map of Athens was redrawn radically: exploitation and conflict (potential or actual) persisted, but along two diverging axes: slave-slave master, and rich-poor. The former, the main locus of exploitation (augmented by limited tenancy, generally irregular free wage labor and, for a period, by imperial transfers), no longer sustained the causal relationship between direct exploitation and significant resistance. As emphasized by Finley and others, there is not a single reported case of slave revolt or collective action in classical Greece (apart from the desertion of a group of slaves from the Laureion mines). Instead, conflict over the distribution of economic and political resources and privileges variously persisted until the end of the democratic *polis* and beyond. The "predictions" of the class theory, generalized from the experience of a particular period in modern history, were thus falsified by the very outcome of the struggles in the "archaic" phase of Greek history, which had initially confirmed it.[77]

## SLAVERY AND THE PERTINENCE OF PRIMITIVISM

Following Aristotle, the primitivists' original source of inspiration, Athenian slavery is best understood as an element of the *oikos.* The slave was a fixture of many actual households and a universal fixture of the ideal household,[78] even though, of course, there were slaves that were not traceable to particular *oikoi*, most notably those in silver mines and the "public slaves."[79] By extending the dependence of the dependent laborer to its logical extreme, the turn to slavery, in retrospect, blocked the course of economic differentiation (*oikos*-workshop-firm) and socialization (guilds and trade associations). The reliance on foreign slaves was a key factor in the "external" environment that favored the survival of peasant-holdings which largely relied on the labor of family members.[80] As such, slavery served the consolidation of the peasant-aristocrat settlement which had brought it into historically significant being and which sustained most of the "primitive" aspects of the classical period: the persistence of non-commercial, aristocratic/peasant values; limitations on sale and commoditization of land and labor power; stagnating or (relative to modern capitalism) static technology, as well as ethical retardation.[81]

It was these and similar considerations that compelled Weber, in an early work, to join the primitivist camp and insist that the onset of medieval "slavery" and serfdom, amidst poverty and urban decline, represented an evolution-

[77] On the developments in archaic Greece, see Wood 1988:81–98; Ober 1989:53–75; Snodgrass 1980; Morris 1998.

[78] Finley 1980:90; Cartledge 2002b:163. [79] Hansen 1991:120ff.

[80] See Wood 1988, ch. 2; Garlan 1988: ch. 1, and 201ff.; Cartledge 2002b; and M. Jameson's (2002) response to Cartledge. The outcome of the debate over the number of slaves does not substantially effect the present discussion.

[81] Cartledge 2002b:158; cf. Wood 1988.

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ary advance inasmuch as it rested on the separation of the slave/serf's *oikos* from that of his master's; now the laborers could again begin to be considered a status-group proper.[82]

However, as with much else in Athenian developments, this account is mediated by its apparent opposite. The radical embeddedness of the labor process in slave households must be distinguished from the embeddedness associated with the ideal type of "traditional" or "status" societies. In Athens, wealth and its production had become separated from religion, (extended) kinship, and political institutions; slaves themselves were marketable goods and slave establishments were generally rated among the more dynamic, or "capitalist" sectors of the economy, as Weber emphasized in his final contribution to the *oikos* debate.[83] The Athenian slave society, in other words, arose at the culmination of a cultural and politico-economic evolutionary transformation. From the vantage point of post-Christian modernity, an evolutionary trajectory moving with the unfree slave, the semi-free serf, the formally free wage laborer, substantively free (or Bücher's household, town, national economy; or paganism, monotheism, science), may make some sense. But for the Athenians themselves (and their modernist advocates) the mythohistorical distance between "ancient" and classical Athens was considerable.[84] Thus we have Meyer's insistence that the course of history has been cyclical rather than linear, with classical Greece and Rome being peaks of the ancient cycle.[85] Ironically, Finley shared this overview of "ancient society": "It moved from a society in which status ran along a continuum towards one in which statuses were bunched at two ends, the slave and the free—a movement which most nearly completed in the societies which most attract our attention for obvious reasons. And then, under the Roman Empire, the movement was reversed; ancient society gradually returned to a continuum of statuses and was transformed into what we call the medieval world."[86]

In his last and longest work on slavery, Finley further elaborated the context and factors contributing to the "rise of slave society," including the expansion of commercial production and demand for extra familial labor, and found himself so close to the modernist accounts that he felt compelled to warn the reader that "none of this requires a revival of the Beloch-Meyer 'modernism' . . . My model, I need hardly add, diverges radically from Eduard Meyer's [summarized and dismissed as "nonsense" earlier] despite certain similarities . . ."[87]

[82] Weber 1976b. The same point is underlined in *General Economic History* (1961:106–7). See, however, Cohen's (1992), modernist account of Athenian banking, which centers on the *oikos* and accords a prominent role to slaves. See also Cartledge (2002b) for the association and dissociation between primitivism, modernism, and Greek slavery.

[83] Weber 1976a:50. [84] Thucydides 1954:1.21. [85] Meyer 1895/1979:159–60.

[86] Finley 1964/1981c:132. See also Finley (1959/1981a:92) on the further breakdown of ancient society and the fact that "true slavery" was a characteristic of the more "advanced" city-states rather than "'hybrid' types like helotage."

[87] Finley 1980:88, 90. Clearly, Meyer's account could not be maintained wholesale. As Mo-

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The point here is of course that the divergence was not as radical as Finley preferred to believe.

Notwithstanding the disputes about the number and impact of slaves, Finley's claim that by classical times Greece had been transformed from a society with slaves into a slave society is generally accepted.[88] But the categorization of the slaves themselves is more problematic. Radically atomized and denied the possibility of participating in public life, their unity can only be negatively determined as indicated by their legal status as animated property. Sociologically, this was reinforced by their diverse origins, languages, occupations, and presumably aspirations, as well as through their commodification. Slaves were brought to the market from areas with no tradition of political action and free association, and they often belonged to an amorphous continuum of servile statuses.[89] Moreover, in contrast with the conditions of black slaves in the United States, the external environment did not provide any contradictory reference point (such as the U.S. Constitution and Christianity with their promise of universal equality, or the thriving capitalism of the North and Europe) in relation to which to begin forging a collective identity, language of protest, or external support. The Greek slaves even lacked the common distinguishing racial characteristics that may have served as the basis of a collective endeavor, notwithstanding Aristotle's feeble attempt to provide slavery with a "natural" basis.[90] As a social process, their mobility reinforced their atomization rather than generating group identity or aspiration. How are the slaves to be classified then? Weber has a ready, "Finleyean," answer: "Those men whose fate is not determined by the chance of using goods or services for themselves on the market, e.g. slaves, are not . . . a 'class' in the technical sense of the term. They are, rather, a 'status group.'"[91]

This is fine as long as status is used in the negative, low explanatory sense of standing for non-class social divisions. The difficulty arises, when it is defined positively, as in Weber's central claim that as hierarchies of social esteem and valuation, status group are "in contrast to classes . . . normally communities."[92] Clearly, slaves do not constitute a social class insofar as ownership of property (including their own labor power), and hence the legally sanctioned capacity to own is considered "basic" to all "class situations." But did they constitute a community? For all the reasons given above and more, community is precisely what the Athenian slaves were not. In this crucial respect, the contrast with, for example, the generally more savagely treated helots, or indeed the

migliano noted, Meyer "obviously had ideas about ancient industry and proletariat which nobody would repeat eighty years later . . ." (1987:4). Bücher's views were, in some respects, even more outdated, yet his contributions were invariably positively singled out by Finley at the same time as he dismissed Meyer's as absurd nonsense. See, for example, Finley 1980:42ff.; 1977/1981e:12ff.

[88] Cartledge 2002b; cf. Wood 1988: ch. 2.

[89] Finley 1959/1981a:109–10; 1980: ch. 2; Ste Croix 1981:133ff.

[90] Aristotle 1981:I.v. [91] Weber 1948:183. [92] Weber 1948:186.

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many examples of status groups given by Weber himself, is telling. The lowest Indian caste, however rigorously segregated and devalued, may be considered a status group along with "American gentlemen" or residents of a certain "street" on the basis that all are allocated a socially sanctioned sphere of communal interaction.[93] This was what was denied to slaves qua slaves, even in societies divided along caste lines.[94] In short, our question has no consistent or universal answer, except the one Patterson finds in "almost all slaveholding societies": slavery as the condition of social non-being and slaves as the class of "social dead."[95] Any positive determination of the group is thus strictly absent in the general category itself, but will have to be found in particular slaves and their particular functions as bankers, domestics, miners, and so on.[96]

Although Patterson finds common understanding of slavery as social death across societies and the ages, each names and describes it differently. This points to a possible next step. Ste Croix, who is of course convinced that slaves constituted a class, and Joseph Vogt, who although critical of Marxism and an admirer of Meyer is not concerned with the question of class, both remark in passing on the machine-like character of ancient slavery, with an evident nod toward Aristotle's speaking tools. In attempting to explain and extenuate what Finley called the embarrassment of slavery, Vogt asks the reader "not to lose sight of the fact that in industrialized countries today every productive person is in charge of a machine, which means that he is in charge of two or three dozen invisible technological slaves."[97] This functional conception avoids the inconsistencies of Aristotle's other, naturalized, conception of slavery. It also accords with the comparative absence of racism and universalism in Greece, resulting from the shared racial features of slaves and masters and the particularistic primacy of *polis* and *oikos* in the public and private spheres. Where Vogt is misguided is not over the modernization of Aristotle, but in his understanding of the modern world: he does not recognize that, in contrast to antiquity, the masters in the modern world are the machines (and their owners), not the productive persons that work with them.[98]

Ste Croix approaches the same question, but with reference to the following passage in *Politics* which he considers Aristotle's "one alternative to slavery":[99]

[93] See Patterson on the near universality of the exclusion of slaves from "outcastes" (1981:50–51).

[94] In this context both status and order stand not as alternatives to class but as embodiments of different principles of social classification. See, for example, Runciman's attempt to rigorously distinguish and use them, along with class, in his comparative sociology (1989:23ff.).

[95] Patterson 1981:38ff; 1991:10.

[96] Thus Foxhall's observation that "slaves or freedmen may be household members in an economic but not in a religious or political sense" (1989:24).

[97] Vogt 1974:25.

[98] Herein lies a key to the many contrasts between the two eras, from the dominance of the political or the economic to the different nature and use of science and technology as well as the utopian appeal of classical Athens.

[99] Ste Croix 1981:113.

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"A slave is a sort of living property; and like any other servant is a tool in charge of other tools. For suppose that every tool we had could perform its tasks, either at our bidding or itself perceiving the need, and if—like the statues made by Deadalus or the tripods of Hephaestus . . .—shuttles in loom could fly to and fro and a plucker play a lyre and all self-moved, then master-craftsmen would have no need of servants nor masters of slaves."[100]

In this early and rather poetic vision of a robotic world, Aristotle anticipates modern utopias of "Athens without slavery," life without labor or as aesthetics or politics. A comparison of Aristotle's utopia with Marx's reality suggests why the Athenians may seem, from this end of history, justified to have opted for the evolutionary "dead end" of the *polis*[101] rather than pursuing the course of evolution to its modern capitalist culmination: "The science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself."[102]

The Greek other in this world is matched by the otherness of the agents of *chrematistike* and unnatural economic activities in ancient Greece. The final irony is that during Aristotle's own lifetime, Pasion, a one-time speaking tool and a banker, rose to become both a citizen and the richest man in Athens.[103] No combination could have been more dystopian for the conservative onlooker, or indeed many of his twentieth-century communitarian and state socialist followers. Then as now, banking was the most invisible, liquid, mobile, and therefore profitable type of commercial activity. It was also the one most subversive of the *polis* due to its tax-avoiding secretiveness, reliance on slaves, and intangible generation of profit. In this ancient encounter of the two modernities, the hitherto exclusive alternatives of the freedom of the slave and the dethronement of the citizen warriors can be seen in the distance.

## CONCLUSION: COMPLEXITY AND HISTORY

Following a growing tendency in recent scholarship, this paper has attempted to show the complexity of Athenian developments, and the inability of any single camp to adequately address it. This has been done by treating some of the key protagonists as equally complex phenomenon whose "official" positions must be problematized rather than assumed. The Finleys found here do not exhaust Finley, but, if they encourage the reconsideration of claims such as that his model of ancient economy "is the only theoretically coherent vision of ancient economics to have emerged since the great German debates of the 1890s," a reasonable start has been made.[104] Once on this track, however, there really

[100] Aristotle 1981:I.iv 1253–b23 seq. [101] Runciman 1989:336. [102] Marx 1973:693.
[103] Although, as Cartledge notes, Pasion and Phormion, another banker, "are the only slaves at Athens known to have achieved not just personal freedom but eventually citizenship" (2002b:164).
[104] Morris 2002:27.

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may be no stopping: the variously twisted, exhilarating, and enlightening inner dialogues of Finley might prompt the reader to reconsider the contributions of his heroes and anti-heroes, above all Weber and Polanyi. Here the space and the focus has only allowed the merest indication that, for example, Weber was not only or always a primitivist. A historical scrutiny of Polanyi, too, will, among other pertinent things, evince the ideological overdetermination of his research programme which may now be abandoned or revised in view of the changed circumstances but which, in any case, throw some further light on his own and Finley's approach to Athens.

Most concepts employed or examined here—class, status, embeddedness, modernity—too, are multifaceted. This has sometimes led to their being misused and overused, conflated and confused. In the foregoing and in the relevant literature at least four different notions of embeddedness and three different uses of class may be found. These are specified and briefly reviewed below. Again, the suggested distinctions are not exhaustive or themselves immune to the above sins. But they should underline the possibility that the prolongation of the debate may have resulted from conceptual ambiguity as much as from substantive differences among the parties involved.

First, embeddedness at the broadest level is used as a concept in a long-evolving paradigm developed as a sociological or "institutionalist" alternative to classical and neo-classical economics' theorization of the optimizing actions of atomized individuals.[105] Embeddedness here is not just a feature of pre-capitalist societies, but rather is intrinsic to all social orders, including all the varieties of modern capitalism. For, as Oakeshott noticed, "a genuinely laissez-faire society has never existed anywhere on earth at any time."[106] In his "Foreword" to the latest edition of *The Great Transformation,* Joseph Stiglitz reinforces Oakeshott's observation by referring to the "myth of free market" and emphasizing that "self regulating markets never work," as does Block in his "Introduction," when he takes Polanyi to be saying that although the classical economists wanted to, they "*did not* and *could not* achieve" a disembedded economy (emphases in the original).[107] But to further insist, as Block also does, that this is the only conception of embeddedness to be found in Polanyi universalizes his other more determinate and analytically, historically, and politically significant conception out of existence.[108] The very title of his great book referred to the "unnatural" upheaval that was the rise of the disembedded market economy in nineteenth-century England. To be sure, according to Polanyi this led to resistance as well as 'counter-movements' aimed at social re-embedding, from the trade unions to Fascism, which blocked the differentiation of the economy in any absolute sense. But this should not obscure Polanyi's main focus on the historically unique and, in his view, calamitous consequences of the realization

[105] See Hodgson 1994; cf. Coleman 1994.
[106] Quoted in Gilmour 2002:16.
[107] Stiglitz 2001:xiii, vii; Block 2001:xxvi.
[108] Block 2001:xxv–xxvii.

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of the 'market utopia' in the relative sense that any political project is realized in history.

Put differently, the question becomes historically and comparatively significant only at the next level, when different types of embeddedness are distinguished. For Polanyi, one of these is set apart as disembedded precisely because it is instituted along the lines prefigured in the work of Adam Smith. Here the research programme offered is rather straightforward. Is the livelihood of classical Athenians organized mainly by and through a "redistributionist" center (as variously found in Sparta, Crete, certain Mesopotamian states or indeed in Polanyi's own contemporary ideal of the Soviet five-year plans), or through combinations of autarchic and generalized reciprocal arrangements, or some variant of a market order. Posed in this way, Ste Croix's aforementioned (market) answer seems unavoidable. Interestingly, this conclusion is supported by Finley when, in explicit contrast with the Near East, he finds that the "Graeco-Roman world was essentially and precisely one of private ownership." This even though he at the same time denies its modernist import by, for example, claiming that its markets were not "interdependent," or that "to speak of a 'labour market' or a 'money market' is to immediately falsify the situation," and so on.[109] It is at this level that the contributions of Osborne, Cohen, or Loomis about commercial trade, banking, or labor markets and inflation in Archaic and/or classical Athens undermine Polanyi's position and check Finley's maneuvers to defend it. Not only did these and other markets exist at various degrees of maturity, but the evidence is even more extensive and decisive concerning the differentiation of the polity and the economy, and the distribution of wealth as the basis for taxation and collective "class" action.

Even explicit norms and policies such as discouraging or banning the sale of land to those outside the *oikos* or *polis* must be taken as legal and cultural expressions and responses to economic disembeddedness as an historical and discursive actuality, and as a process that could be shaped politically. Put differently, the disembeddedness of the economy should not be automatically associated with the dominance of economic values or the instrumentalization of politics in the interest of the wealthy, as demanded by reductionist holism. Such arguments require one to rely on a master concept—slave mode, embeddedness, market—as the integrating key to understanding complex and unevenly evolving societies. In fact, a disembedded economy may be dominated by politically determined conceptions of public good or non-economistic values and norms. Christian Meier, although he does not employ the same terms, points toward this conclusion in his study of Athens: "Political equality could in fact become effective only when wide sections of the citizenry . . . had so far *detached* themselves from the social order as to be able to build up, in opposition to it, a political sphere in which different power relationships prevailed. . . .

[109] *AE* 28–29, 22, 23, 147–48, 197–98.

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Insofar as the citizens pursued *economic interests* in politics, these arose from their desire, as partners in the city, to assure themselves of the necessities of life, of remuneration for their political activity, and of a share in the city's revenues; they did *not* derive from any economic position or activity that might have been of prime concern to them" (my emphases).[110]

This formulation accommodates the contrasts drawn by Marx and Weber between western antiquity and modernity on the basis of the dominance of politics or economics and the political or economic man, but it sets them in a disembedded context. It is also compatible with Scott Meikle's re-presentation of the debate around the opposition between use value and exchange value as the "primary end" of economic activity, but it does not necessarily associate the former with "non-market" societies and the latter with "market ones."[111] The Greeks' discovery or invention of politics is an outcome of the same complex process that lead to their invention of economics, whatever the outcome of the dispute about the value and meaning of Aristotle's economic thought.[112] The economy cannot be embedded in the polity without the polity being enmeshed in the economy. Conversely, politics cannot dominate the economy without a prior differentiation of the two.

The distinction between embeddedness and dominance still allows a retention of the spirit of Polanyi's insistence on the distinctiveness of nineteenth-century capitalism, and the role of intellectuals and the state in constructing and consolidating it. This may be indicated by reformulating Oakeshott's observation above to state that the liberal laissez-faire economy has existed as a dominant utopia and, therefore, as a guide to public policy, only in this period. Seen from this vantage point, the Athenians, far from embedding the private in the public or the economy in polity, displayed notable rigor in maintaining the boundaries between them.

This leads us to a third conception of embeddedness as referring to the institutions that frame economic activity and the extent of their specialized differentiation. The central question here concerns the predominance of *oikos* as the site of economic activity. From this point of view, the Athenian economy was by definition embedded and, from the medieval and modern perspectives, primitive. But this requires the proviso that the *oikos* of classical (or archaic) Athens was no longer (if indeed it ever was) the autarchic *oikos* of the original *oikos* debate. For the *oikos* remained the main provider, whether its economic activities were aimed at immediate use or the market, and whether it was engaged in the most "natural" agricultural production or in the least natural types of

[110] Meier 1990:168, 166; see also Burke 1992.

[111] Although generally sympathetic to the primitivist cause, Meikle points to the "lamentable" and other exaggerations of Polanyi and other primitivists (2002:238ff). The point here, however, refers to the often neglected "market socialist" insight that markets as such are not and should not be seen as the exclusive preserve of capitalism and bourgeois hegemony.

[112] See Meikle 1995.

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money lending. This conception distinguishes between what Polanyi called "market exchange" as the aim (or one aim) of economic activity (and the mechanism for its allocation) and its institutionalization in households, firms, and so on. It is the lack of necessary correspondence between these that allows Cohen, a most forceful "modernist" critic of Finley, to argue the case for disembeddedness of the Athenian economy whilst still fully concurring with Foxhall, a self-proclaimed "irredentist substantivist," that materially the *oikos* dominated "the economy of the Greek city-states, since economic enterprises largely existed and were managed within the structure of households."[113]

The persistence of *oikos* reinforces and extends the point already made about reductionist holism. The differentiation of economy and polity does not necessarily lead to the dominance of the former as in modern capitalism, but nor does it homogenize the institutional forms of economic activity. As with Athenian polity, the Athenian economy presents a distinctive mix of institutions and values. Thus even *oikos* refuses the comfort demanded by the modern followers of ancient philosophers that it only serve its own needs or those of the *polis*, or, conversely, that it function as the perfect substitute for the modern firm.

The fourth and final conception of embeddedness coincides with our first and broadest use of the concept of class and designates a particular type of "modern" society. It may be re-presented here by way of recent assessments of Polanyi's paradigm which show that even in Mesopotamia market trading and commercial production was much more extensive than he (or Finley) assumed.[114] These findings are somewhat perverse. They reinforce the general modernist position by suggesting a strong convergent tendency in complex societies toward market allocation of resources. But by thus identifying Babylonia, Athens, and modern Europe all as variants of "market economy," they tend to underplay the distinctiveness of both Graeco-Roman and modern Western developmental paths.[115] The opposition to "barbarians" and the barbarian ideal type and the cosmopolitan *metics* was central to the consolidation of the Athenian citizens' collective identity and historical consciousness. And it was the force of a similar opposition in the European enlightenment that eventually compelled Marx to contemplate abandoning the universality of class conflict and to turn to the "Asiatic mode of production" to account for non-western societies whose "stagnating" trajectories were not shaped by class conflict.

The resolution of this dilemma points to a conception of disembeddedness capacious enough to address consistently the differences between Athenian and bourgeois developments, without denying the shared modernity that historical-

[113] Cohen 2000:37; Foxhall 2002:219.

[114] See Polanyi 1957a; Silver 1983; 1985; 1995, xii–xiii, 97–177; Gledhill and Larsen 1982:204–13. For a response to Silver (1983) and a forceful defense of Polanyi's position, see Mayhew, Neal, and Tandy (1985).

[115] The findings happily also undermine the significance of economic factors (often treated as decisive by modernists and primitivists alike) in shaping historical development.

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ly sets them apart from other formations. It rests on the historical claim that the class struggles of archaic Greece presupposed (i.e., were embedded in) a process of disembedding of Athenians as autonomous agents with the capacity—discursive as much as coercive—for the collective construction and pursuit of ideal and material interests. No other peasantry (or representatives thereof) ever achieved this capacity or found itself in conditions to use it to extend legitimate political power and agency to itself, and to do so without denying it to other autonomous actors. This internalization of the other's autonomy within an emergent sphere that legitimizes difference (and therefore conflict, dialogue, demagogy, reflection, compromise) and thus posits public (third person) justice as constructed rather than given, and necessarily "compromised" rather than absolute, is of course personified in the remembered Solon.

According to Castoriadis, "the interest in the other starts with the Greeks. This interest is but another side of the critical examination and interrogation of their own institutions."[116] In terms discussed here, this twin claim can be put differently by saying that the interest in the Persian, Trojan, or Egyptian other was underpinned by the interest in the Greek other and indeed the Athenian other, who became sociologically and politically irremovable through the struggles of the Solonic period. This, in turn, can be translated into the claim that the period marked the disembedding of the Athenian other, or the constitution of a multi-actor society with its intrinsic pluralist, pluralizing, and modernizing dynamics. Ancient Athens thus became modern in this sense long before Cohen's commercial bankers and Loomis' labor markets. Athens' modernity, from this vantage, is not negated or even moderated, even if we accept Meikle's claim that its economy was never dominated by exchange value, or that, in Tandy's words, it never became a "market dominant" economy.[117]

This type of disembedding is broader than and logically and historically prior to the other types. It focuses on what, at the most general level, makes Athens and modern Europe modern, but it also has room to accommodate their differences, including the extent of the profit-making sectors or the dominance of the *oikos* or of aristocratic, democratic, or bourgeois values. It also frees the concept from association with profit-making economic activity, and is more consonant with the spirit of Polanyi's agenda, namely, to counter the claim that pursuit of self-interest and "the tendency to truck and barter" were inextricably embedded in human nature and thus universal.

Modern society in the sense just described is class society inasmuch as it is characterized by the mutually recognized, though variously disputed, capacity and rights of its citizens to engage in collective action. As understood by the

[116] Castoriadis 1997:268.

[117] Tandy 1997:122ff. Tandy and his substantivist associates should also appreciate that since, according to Polanyi, fully disembedded or "market dominant economies" arose only in the nineteenth century, then in this respect at least there is no disagreement with even Eduard Meyer, who never considered classical Athens a mini-replica of Victorian England.

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Athenians, too, class action on behalf of or against the "poor" or the "rich," or for the *polis* and against other Greek states, the Persians, and so on, are subspecies of collective action in the sense that Xerxes' massive expedition against the Athenians was not. This is why the opposition between liberal and Marxist traditions over the nature of Athenian democracy—one emphasizing individual freedom and popular sovereignty in the funeral oration, Euripides's tragedies and orators; the other Aristotle's politics, equality, and class rule of the majority—is unsustainable at this level of analysis.[118] The Solonic episode points to both of these perspectives as conditions of possibility, and as consequences of each other. The autonomous, disembedded individual who is able and willing to join others in the construction and pursuit of collective interests is an emergent condition of possibility, as well as the (extended and institutionalized) legacy of Solon. That Solon did not favor class rule is evinced by his middle way (whether this was a myth of his own or of later generations, or truly historical), but his reforms were demanded and shaped by class conflict and served to institutionalize class conflict, consciousness, and discourse.[119]

These changes and the broader process of modernity that framed them were not, however, immunized against history. On the contrary, the pluralism or freedom of Athens and Athenians internalized change as a permanent feature and possibility. This in turn calls for (a) a concept of class broad enough to accommodate historical change in disembedded contexts; and (b) the recognition that such a change could remove class and class conflict and its modern foundations, or produce other types of modernity.

Seen in this light, no single undifferentiated concept can comprehend the classical fissure between the central processes of exploitation and social conflicts, or their unity during the Solonic crisis. The disembedded and at times conflictual pursuit of collectively constructed aims cannot be represented by status in any reasonable sense of the term. Modern class theory can deal with both cases, but on the condition that we discard direct exploitation as an essential feature of class relations. By insisting on the historically meaningful and contingent nature of class formation, and on a broad conception that does not necessarily depend on direct exploitation, our conclusions tend to favor what Lee and Turner call the "weak" neo-Weberian side of the debate.[120] This in turn undermines the consideration of slaves as a class. To split class into pairs, such as in-itself/objective/minimal and for-itself/political/active sense, will not help precisely because slaves qua slaves were denied in principle even the minimum potential to become the second of the above pairs, and thus they cannot be represented by the first, either.

[118] Hansen 1991:100.
[119] On Solonic reforms and the "middle way" see Morris 2002:33–44.
[120] Lee and Turner 1996:10ff.; cf. Part 1.

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The conflicts of the Athenian citizens in the classical period could be given a new name, saving "class" for exploitative relations only. The preference here for retaining it, however, is not a matter of harmless convenience, but closely approximates Weber's and Polanyi's views of class formation as a *modern process* associated with the combination of individuals in the same "market situation" to improve their life chances. This approach is at once both broader and narrower than that defended by Ste Croix and shared in a key respect by Finley in *AE*. It is broader insofar as it sets aside exploitation as an intrinsic element of class. It is narrower because it limits class formation, following Finley himself, to only certain periods in history, when the conditions of its possibility are available or emergent, conditions such as individualization, differentiation of economically grounded actors, and the means of collective construction and realization of common aims.[121] However, this approach comes with two provisos. First, that "property" is socially differentiated and recognized as the basis of stratification and political action and discourse. This makes the concepts of class and class society historically specific and analytically nontrivial. The second proviso is that a distinction is made between class societies and the classes therein. Both categories are, by definition, dynamic and subject to change. Even when Athens functioned as a class society, there were significant changes in its class map which, in turn, require us to employ the broadest possible conception of class so as to accommodate change. But, however capacious, the concept remains historical and as such subject to redundancy, as in fact eventually happened following the collapse of the *polis* and the removal of conditions that demanded its deployment. This means that contrary to the reception of general concepts such the slave mode of production, or the "embeddedness" assumed by Finley's "model" of the "ancient economy," which encompasses the whole of the Graeco-Roman world during "in very round numbers . . . the period between 1000 B.C. and A.D. 500,"[122] "class society" stands for a dynamic trajectory that is not foreclosed by the concept itself. As a variant of modern society, democratic Athens was characterized by the uneven historicity of its various components, and thus the open-endedness of its overall trajectory. Nevertheless, as with the contemporary bourgeois society, there was a sense in which it had reached its end of history, long before it was overrun by the Macedonians. In Athens's case, however, this was not due to an apparent lack of feasible alternatives, but rather that these were seen as more or less "barbaric" evolutionary reversals, and therefore not worthy of pursuit.

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[121] This conclusion was in effect recognized by Marx himself when he began to grapple with "Asiatic" societies, although he did not publish his reflections or pursue them systematically.
[122] *AE*, 29.

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