

First Essay

Due Date: Monday, February 27

Length: 2000-2500 words

Suggested Topics

1. M. I. Finley argues that “freedom is not a useful category” in discussing societies in which one form of servitude shades into another (“Between Slavery and Freedom,” p. 248). Analyze this argument, discussing why he makes this claim. Do you agree with Finley’s conclusion that freedom is not a useful concept in such circumstances? Feel free to bring Patterson’s text into the discussion.
2. Both Finley and Patterson point to the abolition of debt-bondage as central to the rise of both slavery and freedom in ancient Greece and Rome. Why was this such a decisive moment? How do you assess its consequences?
3. Aristotle’s defence of slavery seems to involve multiple arguments which could be said to operate on different theoretical axes. Assess the consistency of his arguments in this area. Do you find there to be significant tensions or contradictions in his defence of slavery?
4. Aristotle frequently seems to compare women with slaves while also claiming that they are different. Explore his use of this comparison and its implications for his views of the family and society.
5. Christianity has sometimes been referred to as a “slave religion.” Drawing on Patterson’s analysis, discuss the early Christian conceptions of freedom in relation to attitudes towards slavery.
6. Edmund Morgan titles his fourth chapter, “Idle Indian and Lazy Englishman.” Summarize his key arguments here and to what degree these sentiments might be said to anticipate anti-black racism.
7. Locke’s defense of slavery and colonialism has troubled many readers of this liberal philosopher. Drawing on Locke’s texts and the analysis in Losurdo analyze how Locke tries to reconcile liberal principles with the existence of slavery and colonialism. How successful do you find his argument to be?