The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity

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Published by Princeton University Press

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Ethnic Prejudice, Proto-Racism,
and Imperialism in Antiquity

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF Part 1 attempted to describe and analyze the conceptual framework of Graeco-Roman attitudes towards other peoples, tracing patterns of proto-racism or pronounced forms of ethnic stereotypes, as defined in the Introduction. It will suffice here to note once again that the dominant approach, accepted in some form by almost all the available sources from the second half of the fifth century B.C. on,[1] is the environmental theory: an environmental determinism which made it possible for Greek and Roman texts to describe foreign peoples in terms of fixed physical and mental traits, determined by climate and geography. From the beginning this concept was connected with a bipolar world-view. It posits an essential contrast between a sturdy but mentally inadequate Europe and a soft Asia, the latter enjoying a good climate, with a healthy and wealthy population, suffering, however, from deficient masculinity and an insufficient sense of individual and collective independence. Aristotle developed the theory further, adding two elements which made it a useful conceptual tool for imperialists. He held that the Greeks occupied the ideal environment between Europe and Asia and were therefore supremely capable of ruling others. Aristotle's second addition is the claim that the inhabitants of Asia were servile by nature, or natural slaves, and therefore suited to be subjects of the Greeks. Roman authors took over these ideas, duly substituting themselves as the ideal rulers.

These concepts were combined with an almost generally accepted belief in the heredity of characteristics acquired by human beings during their lives. Assuming the environment to determine human character and quality, combined with a belief in the heredity of acquired characters, leads to an outlook almost as deterministic as modern racist theory. When applied to human groups, these two complementary ideas attribute to them characteristics which, in due course of time, become uniform and constant. Similarly, they are a powerful tool justifying imperial rule: those who have been conquered must, because of their defeat, be inferior by nature to their conquerors and then, once they have become subjects and slaves, they rapidly acquire and transmit to their descendants the qualities of being born slaves as formulated by Aristotle.

An important element for many Greek authors is the form of government. Here opinions vary, but for some authors monarchic rule by definition excludes

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[1] As argued at length, it is not represented in the work of Herodotus who saw connections between climate, environment, and the character of peoples, but nowhere saw these as part of a theory or set of conditions determining collective character.

the presence of any merit in peoples so ruled. For other authors the quality of government is but one of the factors which determine overall merit.

A variant and particularly inflexible form of environmental determinism is astrology which, for instance in the work of Ptolemy of Alexandria, assumes that the character of entire peoples is decisively determined by their geographical location. Another conceptual device in the arrangement of a hierarchy of peoples is the belief in autochthony and pure lineage. Since this attaches particular value to pure blood, it should be defined as proto-racist. It implies the ultimate dream of perfection for those who feel that there is merit in marrying within one's group and that those marrying outside will produce offspring of lesser quality. This concept reflects a belief that the essence of a person is almost exclusively determined by his ancestry and far less or not at all by his own deeds and choices in life. It furthermore reinforces the gap in status between locals and foreigners.

In the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. the element of descent becomes increasingly important for the Athenians, who consider themselves as being of pure lineage and occupants of the same land from the beginning of time. It is clear that the Athenians were particularly fond of their presumed autochthony. This is meaningful for the present study. Athenian literature has had more influence through the ages than all of the rest of Greek literature together. Autochthony, being an Athenian idea and represented in many Athenian texts, is likely to have influenced a broad public of readers, wherever Greek literature was read. Modified forms of the Athenian idea of autochthony are indeed encountered in later periods and other cultures. The idea of pure versus mixed lineage proves to be one of essential importance to many peoples of all periods. Indeed, the idea that there is a permanent connection between race and soil is a concept revived with vigor in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A theme immediately related to the belief in lineage and connection with the land, which occurs in authors of the fourth century, is that of eugenics. This was advocated by both Plato and Aristotle as a means of preventing a feared deterioration of citizens, especially of the best elements. In Plato it was presented as a system to be kept secret, whereby the upper class of "the Guardians" would maintain their racial superiority. Eugenics gained great influence as a racist concept in the later nineteenth and the twentieth centuries and those who spread the idea obviously were familiar with Plato's work. The concept never was as central to the thinking of any ancient author as it has been in racist theory in modern times. In both ancient and recent thinking, however, it should be noted, the idea of preventing degeneration was probably more important than the hope of improving race. The concept of eugenics, like racism, always was an aspect of—and a response to—the fear of decline and degeneration in society. The Romans did not claim pure lineage, let alone autochthony, for themselves, yet regarded the descent of other peoples as important. They shared with many others the assumption that mixed descent is a form of corruption and results in human beings of inferior quality.

While eugenics was never as popular in antiquity as it was in the nineteenth

and twentieth centuries, physiognomics by contrast was highly popular both in antiquity and in more recent history. It seeks to detect through their external features the characters and destiny of individuals. The chapter on this subject illustrates the manner in which these concepts are used to rate the mental, physical, and moral levels, not only of individuals, but also of whole peoples. The approach is essentially an application of three widely accepted theories, combined here: first it is assumed that the environment has a direct, continuous impact on collective physical features, as extensively discussed above. Second, there is the assumption of a direct and stable connection between external, physical features and mental and moral qualities. Third, it is assumed that this connection between external factors and mental characteristics is stronger than individual variations. The result is a system of classifying people according to ethnic stereotypes, both physical and mental. One tool is comparisons with animals. This denial of individuality and variation, both between individuals and generations, is characteristic of racist thinking. In antiquity as in modern racist theory, these assumptions are not based on empirical observation or objective reasoning. They are based on belief or, rather, conviction. The system became particularly popular in the second century A.D. and was immensely influential in later periods.

Chapter 2 deals with the above topics in their connection with ancient imperialism. Three subjects are discussed: slaves and subject peoples, comparisons of human beings with animals, and mass death or genocide as practiced by states in antiquity. Greek and Roman conceptions of individual slavery were closely connected with attitudes towards conquered peoples as a whole: most slaves, not born as such, had lost their freedom through capture in war. Their status was in many respects seen as similar to that of entire peoples who had lost a war. Aristotle's *Politics* propounds the view that masters and slaves were essentially different and naturally fit for their respective functions in life. Masters and slaves are claimed to live in a symbiosis which is beneficial to both. The theory is particularly important for the present study because, in fact, the characteristics of natural slaves are applied to foreigners only, never to Greeks. Specific non-Greek peoples are described as collectively having qualities which designate them as the proper material for slaves of the Greeks. The arguments applied by Aristotle to individual slaves and masters are thus easily transmitted to entire groups and peoples. Both mind and body are claimed to suit the function in life of masters and slaves: According to Aristotle, "it is nature's intention also to erect a physical difference between the body of the freeman and that of the slave, giving the latter strength for the menial duties of life, but making the former upright in carriage and (though useless for physical labour) useful for the various purposes of civic life." Since masters and slaves are said to be born with these characteristics, this theory is proto-racist according to the definition adopted in the Introduction.

The usual method of acquiring slaves is war. War is described as a form of acquisition, just like hunting, and the object is the procurement of slaves from among those peoples who are already slaves by nature. Provided certain norms

are respected, war is therefore a legitimate process aimed at reducing inferior foreigners to the state of slavery for which nature has designed them anyway. Thus this proto-racist ideology serves to justify wars of conquest. This does not mean it causes such wars, but it helps in justifying them. It is also noteworthy that slaves are thought to be closer in nature to animals than the masters. Aristotle's theory of natural slavery influenced later writers: they accept the natural inferiority of some peoples as a given fact and posit that this justifies their subjugation and enslavement.

A related idea about slavery and empire is encountered first in the work of Plato and thereafter in the writings of various Roman historians. It is the idea that a person, once he is enslaved, loses his strength, his will to fight for freedom, and becomes totally servile. In other words: it is an irreversible process. Although it is not the same as the theory of natural slavery, it claims that a person or a people, after a generation or two of slavery or subjugation, acquires a slavish personality unfit for a life in freedom. This claim is regularly applied to peoples living under Roman rule. There is a widespread conviction that recent slaves are still dangerous, but over time slavery causes deterioration, and this is thought to be true for entire peoples as well. It is therefore important to make subject peoples adapt to imperial rule for two or three generations. Thereafter they can no longer rebel successfully. As seen in chapter 11, Tacitus's fear of the Germans lies in the fact that they have not yet been subjected. Their freedom and independence means that they are not exposed to the corrupting influence of serfdom and Roman luxury. To sum up: the theory of natural slavery and related attitudes towards the vanquished are all geared to justify empire both from a moral and a functional perspective. This is not to say that such ideas were instrumental in promoting imperialism, but it is clear that they served to remove moral qualms or even prevent such qualms from becoming a significant factor in the public attitudes of many Greeks and Romans.

Then follows another subject, the response frequently encountered of peoples to foreign peoples or minorities, namely comparisons of human beings with animals. Comparisons and metaphors identifying people with animals are common in the ancient literature. There is a rich and varied literary tradition that uses animals as a literary device. However, not all literary passages that represent people as animals should be interpreted as comparisons or metaphors. Some of them seem to be intended quite literally. Thus Aristotle says that those who yield to unnatural inclinations are not natural, but bestial or diseased. He applies this also to entire peoples. Like the theory of natural slavery and related attitudes towards foreigners, the animal comparison was part of an attitude of mind, a way of thinking about oneself as distinct from a foreigner, which formed the framework in which imperialism could flourish unfettered by moral inhibitions or restraints.

In modern cultures this denial of the humanity of others can serve as an excuse to treat them in a brutish manner or even to exterminate them. This, however, is not a pattern encountered in the ancient world, when people presumably felt less of a need to justify large-scale slaughter in moral terms.

Chapter 3 focuses on a number of specific topics, seen to be relevant to the heart of the present discussion, namely ancient ways of looking at immigrant foreigners and members of minorities within society at large. While chapter 1 primarily considers attitudes in Greek and Roman literature towards other peoples living at a distance, in their own lands, chapter 3 attempts to clarify another important topic, namely the attitudes of Romans towards foreigners who settled in Italy and in the city of Rome. The subjects include fear of being influenced by, or even dominated by the vanquished, a particularly sensitive topic for Romans because of the tremendous influence exerted by Greek culture. The texts available suggest apprehension that the Romans would lose their ancestral physical and moral strength and be affected by Greek luxury and license. Their forceful masculinity would be affected by soft Mediterranean culture. The fear of being conquered by the vanquished is a self-contradictory mentality on the part of an imperial power, but it has the characteristics of many forms of group hatred. It is an attitude that satisfies both fantasies of superiority and fears of inferiority; it will explain equally well whatever happens in reality, and it can be used to justify aggression. It is well represented in Roman sources but also characteristic of modern racism with its constant fear of being contaminated by other inferior races. It suits the general Roman preoccupation with the decline of empire and civilization and, at the same time, makes outsiders responsible for this disastrous development. In tracing these tensions I do not want to imply that there is an easy connection between their presence and specific policies on the part of the Roman Empire. It is my aim to show that the attitudes of the Romans towards their empire and its inhabitants, as attested in the available literature, were complex and often contradictory.

This is not to say, of course, that such ambivalent or hostile feelings about foreigners occur only in imperial societies. As we know from contemporary Europe, societies without the least imperial ambition can still suffer from a good deal of xenophobia, particularly when they include substantial numbers of immigrants or minorities. Xenophobia and ethnic hatred can exist in any complex society, but imperial states by their very nature are confronted continuously with a variety of peoples which form part of the empire, and settle in urban centers. Thus two essentially different forms of ethnic stereotypes and proto-racism can be discerned: the first is aimed at foreign peoples, seen from a distance; the second at minority groups within their own society. The former is seen to be more aggressive in nature when it is combined with imperial or expansionist ambitions. The latter may, but does not have to, occur in imperial societies that see an influx of immigrants from the conquered nations.

In the next section of chapter 3, periodically returning efforts to ban the foreign presence from the city of Rome and Italy are considered. Expulsions from Rome were the result of social stresses or even collective hatred, but they were expulsions, not killings, and they had no long-term effect, as is easily understood, for even modern prosperous states with their bureacracy and technology are unsuccessful in their attempts to keep out immigrants. The periodic Roman decisions to expel foreigners, it has been argued in this work, are indic-

ative of the tensions that existed in Rome from the time it ceased to be a mid-size city-state. The fact that such expulsions took place at all means that we must take seriously the various sources which express hostility towards immigrant people. It is also clear, however, that Roman attitudes, like those of other peoples in comparable circumstances, were not consistent over time. Thus periods of hostility and expulsions were followed by periods of tolerance and inaction.

A related topic is the ambivalent attitude in both Greek and Roman sources regarding the effects, beneficial or harmful, of contact between peoples. I am not aware of any obvious parallel for this tendency in western cultures in recent centuries, unless we want to compare it with the fluctuations between isolationism and international engagement encountered in modern nations. Ancient literature, however, expresses an obvious ambivalence regarding the desirability of communication between peoples. Trade and commerce are seen as the vehicles for the corruption of much that is valuable or even essential. Like mixed marriages, they harm integrity and soberness. Yet peoples who are entirely cut off from the rest of the world have no merit either. It was only in a distant past, in the Golden Age, that people could live happily without traveling and trading. These feelings of reluctance in seeking contact with other nations did not, however, have much practical effect. Both Greeks and Romans did not allow such feelings to restrain their foreign ambitions.

At this point it bears repeating that the entire complex of ideas and attitudes here described derives from the extant Greek and Roman texts. As is well known, these do not represent a random selection, but have come to us through a process of transmission in antiquity and afterward, which itself was guided by fashions and trends in education, science, and the tastes of book collectors. It is therefore impossible to deny that there may have been other views on the subjects here discussed which are no longer accessible to the modern reader because they appeared in texts that have disappeared. This theory cannot be proved or disproved, but we may at least claim that the development, traced on the basis of the available literature, is fairly consistent. Furthermore, it is impossible to deny that even a full collection of ancient texts—had it been accessible—would still represent the views of those segments of society which produced and published literature. To mention just two examples: we have many texts that disapprove of eastern cults in Rome and hardly any that support them. It would be an interesting question how Roman supporters of the Isis cult would have judged Egyptians as a people. Second, there are quite a few passages that express disapproval of converts to Judaism, but we have no pronouncements by the converts themselves. The present study therefore analyzes the opinions we encounter in the sources, while allowing for the possibility that there may have been other views. We are concerned with long-term developments, and these appear to be quite consistent in the available material.

Part 2 considers various specific peoples as characterized in Greek and Roman literature, both those in their midst and distant peoples. This allows us to

gain a more coherent impression of reactions to specific peoples, while keeping in mind the conclusions gained in the first part of this study.

Chapter 4 considers the attitudes of Greek authors towards the Persians and other inhabitants of Asia after the Greek victory over the Persians early in the fifth century B.C. Most important to consider here is Herodotus, but others are also relevant and discussed. In spite of assertions to the opposite in the modern literature, the fifth-century authors who wrote about the wars with Persia did so in a spirit of respect for the Persians and their military might. The Greeks were proud of their victory over a major power which had sought to subject the Greek mainland, but they did not attempt to belittle the enemy, nor is there any trace of thinking along lines of bipolarity: Europe versus Asia represented simple geographical concepts only. Herodotus and others do not view the war with the Persians as a conflict between continents, between political cultures or in any other obviously ideological perspective. They see it as a battle for independence, for freedom from foreign rule, but not as a struggle for the freedom of the individual, as so often claimed in the modern literature. The Persians are not belittled, nor are they described in derogatory stereotypical terms, and there is certainly no trace of proto-racism in the sources of this period.

Outspoken and irrational anti-Oriental attitudes occur among Greek authors of the fourth century who had an imperialistic ideology, such as Isocrates. These attitudes are not yet found among the authors who described the wars with Persians or had fought or traveled themselves in the East, such as Herodotus, Aeschylus, and Xenophon. Expressions of fierce hostility towards Persia are found first, not in the historical literature, but in rhetoric and philosophy. Gorgias, Lysias, Plato as well as Isocrates and, among the tragedians, Euripides, emphasize the essential opposition between Greece and the barbarians more than any previous literature. The concept of a natural enemy, who must be hated, first occurs in these authors and not, as claimed by many scholars, in Herodotus and his contemporaries. By the late fifth century Persia was not merely an enemy power—it was Asia, the opposite of Europe. No compromise was possible, desirable, or necessary, for the Asiatics were inferior and could be defeated. Thus we may discern here a direct correlation between imperialist conceptions and the way in which the enemy is perceived. The desire to defeat and conquer goes hand in hand with the perception of the enemy as weak, immoral, and contemptible.

Chapter 5 discusses the impact of stereotypical attitudes on Roman imperial thinking with particular reference to the East. The East was anything east of Italy and shifted eastward as the empire expanded: at first it was Greece, then, after the full incorporation of Greece as a province it shifted to Asia Minor— which had been East in Greek eyes. Only afterward the East in Roman eyes came to include what is "the Near East" in modern times. Wherever it was, it represented a source of conflicting emotions. The Romans, being conquerors, naturally considered themselves superior and entitled to rule eastern peoples regarded as militarily inferior. Yet, paradoxically, Roman views of these peo-

ples could evoke a vision of their own vulnerability and threaten faith in the stability of empire because there was a strong belief that the inferiority of the other sapped Rome's moral fiber and native strength. Thus imperial expansion was believed to carry with it the seeds of disintegration.

The first clear expression of this ambivalence has been described in chapter 3, which traced the attitudes of Romans towards large numbers of foreigners from various parts of the empire who settled in Italy and in the city of Rome. We encountered hostility towards Greek literature, influential as it was, and towards Greek medicine, both described as threatening in various ways. A related phenomenon is the fear that the Roman army was corruptible and, conquering Asia, could become a corrupting agent. Exposed, as it was believed to be, to vast luxury, lack of morals, and sexual excess, it would spread these vices in Rome and Italy.

At the root of these fears was, first, the idea, familiar throughout antiquity, that traveling and contact with foreigners are bad because they impair the traditional integrity of a people. Second, it was thought that a change of environment can only lead to deterioration and never to improvement. Third, there is the elementary absence of a belief in progress. Change can only be for the worse. Fourth, and connected with the third concept, we have seen that, ever since the second century B.C., Rome was preoccupied with the decline of her Empire, a process considered inevitable by many Romans. Loss of masculinity, integrity, and patriotism, factors just listed, was frequently thought to be the main cause. Thus the expansion of empire carries with it the cause of its destruction. An interesting connection between Roman stereotypes of other peoples and the self-perception of the Romans as conquerors can be discerned.

These attitudes often go far in their imperialist hostility. There are elements for which there is no parallel in modern or early modern thinking, such as the almost total absence of any belief in long-term progress. Furthermore, the deep-seated mistrust of communication and contact between peoples is not common in modern western culture, nor do we encounter in the history of European colonialism anything like the Roman fear of corruption of the colonial armies by natives. In modern times, disapproval of individuals "who went native" was censure of an individual form of presumed degeneration, which could be avoided and was not regarded as a serious large-scale threat. On the whole the European colonial powers were confident of the superiority of their own Christian faith and they felt comfortable ruling masses of Moslem, Hindu, or Buddhist subjects without Old Cato's fear that these religions, or the native cultures in their colonies, would prove stronger than their own cultures. Such fears have increased in recent times. As I write these lines, parties in western Europe are in the ascendance which warn of the dangers supposedly posed to western cultural, moral, and social identity, by immigrants who do not identify with and accept the existing values.

A pattern of proto-racism in Greek and Roman views of subject peoples can be observed. We have seen the application of generalizations (negative or positive) to minorities and foreigners and the role these play in the rhetoric of

imperialism. Stereotypes are rationalized by the assumption that the characteristics described are the result of environmental influences. It is also assumed that acquired characters may become hereditary, just as social factors (notably forms of government) may have an impact. The idea of collective, natural slavery served as a popular element in an ideology which justified conquest and subjugation of foreign peoples. It was in fact a circular argument: once a people was vanquished, this showed that they were inferior and, being inferior, they were fit only to be subject to the imperial power. Particularly in Rome this was reinforced by the belief that conquest and subjection by another power will rob a people over time of the qualities needed for independence. The constitution and form of government play a role, and change is in principle possible.

It might have been interesting to trace such ideas through the age of Alexander and his successors, but this is not really profitable for present purposes. The important sources on this subject all belong to the Roman period and may therefore represent Roman views rather than those of the fourth century B.C. Another topic of great interest is the way in which the Greeks (Demosthenes) saw Philip of Macedon and the Macedonians as non-Greeks. However, this again involves the very question of who and what was Greek, which this book does not address. The Hellenistic period has been omitted. Admittedly, this leaves out of account a whole range of attitudes and outlooks that might be different in approach from those encountered in the present study, but such a study would not clarify classical Greek and Roman attitudes.

Chapters 6 to 13 offer a survey of ancient views of specific, selected groups of foreigners. The aim here is, as it were, to reverse our point of view. The first part of the study attempted to analyze the ways in which Greeks and Romans saw foreigners and to describe the conceptual mechanisms at play. It was my aim to do so in a systematic way, adducing examples from the texts as appropriate. However, such a treatment, based as it is on thematic analysis, tends to obscure the distinct character of the attitudes towards specific peoples in various parts of the ancient world. Consequently, no coherent image of any one people as seen through Greek and Roman sources, in a given period, emerged there. The last part of this study therefore attempts to elucidate the specific attitudes and opinions regarding various peoples in the light of the concepts traced in the first. Moreover, it then emerges how various generalizations and preconceptions appear continuously through the ages, from the fifth century B.C. till the later Roman empire.

The results of these investigations have been summarized at the end of Part 2 and there is no need to recapitulate them here. It will be instructive, however, to integrate these results with the general conclusions reached in Part 1. In other words, we ought to see how the various conceptual mechanisms traced in Part 1 have been encountered in attitudes towards individual peoples studied in Part 2.

It may be asked whether there is any point or justification in attempting to classify stereotypes and generalizations. After all, we do not know to what extent some of those generalizations may actually have been based on facts, which is one of the difficulties of the present subject. There is, for instance, no

reason to doubt that the average Gaul was taller than the average Syrian in the first century A.D., just as there is no reason to deny that most Nigerians have a darker skin than most Danes today. We can go a step further and agree that the ancient Phoenicians were more active in the Mediterranean trade than the ancient Gauls. Thus it is quite clear that it is possible to list various generalizations, ancient and modern, that are actually true. It is precisely an essential characteristic of stereotypes and generalizations that some of them are indubitably true, while more of them have very little basis in reality or no basis at all. It is the aim of the present study, not to determine what various peoples really were like, but how they are seen in Greek and Roman literature and how the stereotypes and generalizations we encounter are related and develop. Whether or not we accept as fact that eastern troops fought less well than western armies, the point is that this claim carries a value judgment: not whether they reflect reality is meaningful, but the implied value judgment inherent in generalizations.

We have seen that it is always important to consider the origin of generalizations: are we faced with members of a coherent society and their views of other, possibly distant peoples, or are we dealing with a multicultural urban society, where groups of immigrants mix with longer established strata of society? The obvious example is the difference between the fourth-century B.C. Greeks and their views of Persia and Asia Minor and the first-century A.D. Romans who were living in a city with numerous immigrants from Anatolia and Syria. The attitudes of the first group usually are part of an imperialist ideology. Views held about subject peoples or candidates of subjugation are largely characteristic of the mentality of an imperial power. The second group of attitudes are formed by social friction within a given society.

We have seen in Part 2 that in antiquity a good deal of proto-racism was found, as distinct from ethnic, cultural, and religious stereotypes. The two phenomena—proto-racism and stereotypical thinking—are usually combined, but the mix varies in the attitudes towards different peoples. Patterns of opposites can be distinguished. Throughout antiquity we see that the opposition between masculine and effeminate plays a dominant role. These opposite qualities both have strings of associated characteristics. Those who are typically masculine are courageous warriors but not particularly industrious or intelligent. Those who are effeminate tend also to be servile, poor fighters, but they may be diligent and clever. These characteristics are usually assumed to have been imposed by nature, in other words, they definitely belong to the proto-racist set of images.

A second pair of common contrasts betrays mostly sympathy or dislike: peoples are dishonest, cruel, rebellious, and fickle, or they are honest, independently minded, and constant. Although these are all issues of character, they are not qualities imposed by nature; they depend on human will, can be changed, and must therefore be considered as stereotypes. It is important to observe that the second group of opposites need not be milder or kinder than the first. Some proto-racist ideas are not quite so fierce, while some ethnic stereotypes betray

violent hatred. It is a phenomenon of recent history that racism should be associated with bloodshed, while ethnic stereotyping is seen as a more harmless form of discrimination. We have now entered an age when racism is no longer regarded as respectable by consensus, while it has become more accepted to express prejudices in cultural terms.[2]

This study emphasizes the immediate connection that is frequently encountered between prejudice, proto-racist attitudes, and imperial ideology. The interrelationship between these phenomena has not been treated in any separate chapter and it will be useful therefore to summarize once again the conclusions formulated throughout this work.

1. Chronologically the first ethnocentric justification of imperialist expansion is encountered in Greek literature, in the late fifth and early fourth centuries when it is argued that Asiatics are feeble because they are ruled by monarchs, while the Europeans are good fighters because of their institutions, for they are not ruled by kings. This idea was further developed by Aristotle: In his view the Greeks combine European spirit and freedom with Asiatic intelligence and competence. They are therefore capable of ruling all mankind—an early-text, if not the first one to suggest that Greeks could achieve universal rule.

2a. and 2b. The environmental theory and the belief in the heredity of acquired characters are concepts broadly accepted in Greece and Rome. First formulated some time in the fifth century, they hold that collective characteristics of groups of people are permanently determined by climate and geography. The implication is that the essential features of body and mind come from the outside and do not occur through genetic evolution or conscious choice. Individuality and individual change are thereby ignored. When applied to human groups, these ideas lead to a belief that their characteristics are uniform and constant, once acquired. These presumed characteristics are then subject to value judgments, in which the others are usually rejected as being inferior to the observer, or, in rare instances, approved of as being untainted and superior. It is furthermore true, as a general rule, that such descriptions are not based on

[2] See, for instance, Ehud Barak in an interview with Benny Morris in the *New York Review of Books* of June 13, 2002: "They [sc. the Palestinians] are products of a culture in which to tell a lie . . . creates no dissonance. They don't suffer from the problem of telling lies that exists in Judeo-Christian culture. Truth is seen as an irrelevant category. There is only that which serves your purpose and that which doesn't. They see themselves as emissaries of a national movement for whom everything is permissible. There is no such thing as 'the truth.' Speaking of Arab society, Barak recalls: 'The deputy director of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation once told me that there are societies in which lie detector tests don't work, societies in which lies do not create cognitive dissonance [on which the tests are based].'" We have seen in this study that there is a well-established tradition going back to antiquity of accusing other peoples, notably enemies, of being consistent liars: the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, the Romans, Cretans, all southern peoples, but also the German tribes, and Jews. In another period we hear of "Perfidous Albion." Such accusations are often mutual. Thus the representative of the League of Arab States refers to the "Israeli liar machine" in the General Assembly of the UN (August 16, 1982) and Ariel Sharon is "the biggest liar ever witnessed," according to the representative of Syria in the UNHCR debate on April 2, 2002.

direct observation. As a result, when another people is regarded as inferior, it is easy to argue that they have no claim to independence and should be conquered.

3. Aristotle developed the environmental theory further, adding two elements which made it an essential tool for imperialists. He claims that Greece occupies the very best environment between Europe and Asia and therefore produces people ideally capable of ruling others.

4. Aristotle's second addition is the claim that the inhabitants of Asia were servile by nature, or natural slaves, and therefore suited to be subjects of the Greeks. These ideas became popular and are found in the works of many Roman authors, who duly substitute themselves as the ideal rulers. The theory of natural slavery is expounded by Aristotle in his *Politics*. It became an essential concept in ancient imperialist thinking, as it can easily be applied to entire peoples.

5. Other relevant concepts are autochthony and pure lineage. The Athenians, in their period of imperial expansion, developed an emotional attachment to these interrelated ideas. Rome made no claim of being autochthonous or of pure blood, but applied those ideas to other peoples. Also important is the opposite attitude towards the idea of mixed blood. There is a firm conviction, encountered in numerous texts, that mixing leads to degeneration. The idea is not so much that purity of lineage will lead to improvement; the reverse is true: any form of mixture will result in something worse. This, as has been shown, is connected with the absence of a belief in progress in antiquity. As has been emphasised frequently in this book, all these concepts, by themselves and in combination, did not initiate and promote imperialism, but they defintitely were essential in justifying it and as such their importance should not be underestimated. Successful imperialism requires a certain moral and social climate.

6. The last significant concept to be mentioned here in connection with imperialist ideas, closely related with the fifth point, is that of decline and degeneration through displacement and contamination. Just as there are believed to be environments which are good or even ideal for the creation of an imperial power, so there are those that are unfavorable. So much was clear already. A related idea, that also is part of the complex of environmental theory, is that of decline as a result of migration. A concomitant idea is deterioration through contamination. Both Strabo and Tacitus hold that what we call "Romanization" is essentially a process of corruption: "And yet our [Roman] mode of life has spread its change for the worse to almost all peoples, introducing amongst them luxury and sensual pleasures and, to satisfy these vices, base artifices that lead to innumerable acts of greed." Important in this connection was the idea that Roman troops stationed amongst effeminate and soft peoples will themselves become soft and transmit their softness to their fellow citizens upon their return home. Roman troops stationed near Germans will not themselves become stronger: their own inherent decadence will corrupt their neighbors. Clearly the an-

cient ideas about decline and degeneration did not give cause for conquest and subjugation. Indeed, they might rather have put brakes on imperial ambition, but this does not appear to have happened. Even so, such feelings show the complexity of Greek and Roman imperialism.

The Roman views—and especially those of Tacitus—on the Germans are probably the best example to be found anywhere in ancient literature of a full integration of proto-racist stereotypes and imperialist ideology. To conquer and rule them was not only the ultimate test of a warrior-empire, it was also a necessity for its long-term survival. As long as the Germans would remain independent and maintain their pure lineage—as emphasized by Tacitus—they would preserve their strength. Their subjugation and Romanization would corrupt them and remove the threat they represented. Romanization represented a successful process of ethnic decomposition and imperial integration, necessary for the establishment and maintenance of full control. Where this failed, the empire was under threat. There is a continuous preoccupation with the decline of Empire in antiquity. When Gibbon chose the title of his great work, this entirely reflected ancient views of history.

If the German fighting power was seen as such a threat, why did the Romans never seriously endeavour to conquer the Germans after the early first century A.D.? The reasons are not hard to find. Whatever the impact of ideas such as Tacitus tried to convey, the German public image in Rome did not make them an attractive target for imperial campaigns. They *were* fierce fighters and moreover inhabited a poor land. A brief raid in Mesopotamia promised more gain than years of fighting in Germany ever could. I would propose the hypothesis that Roman deliberations on such matters were guided as much by the common image of—and stereotypes associated with—the foreigners who were candidates for subjugation as by factual knowledge and accurate information.

I hope this study has succeeded in showing that proto-racism was a significant phenomenon in antiquity. The distinction between a proto-racist attitude and other forms of prejudice is intellectually far more important to us than it was to Greeks and Romans. Other prejudices have therefore been given their due, but particular attention has been paid to proto-racism for two reasons. First, the relevance of the concept had to be proven. There would be no disagreement as to the existence of ethnic prejudice or xenophobia in antiquity, even though there may be marked differences in the evaluation of these phenomena. However, the existence of proto-racism is not obvious. Second, proto-racism and racism in all its manifestations are conceptually and by definition the most extreme forms of prejudice. Ethnic, cultural, and similar prejudices may be quite vehement, but they do not deny in principle the possibility of change at an individual or collective level. Proto-racist or racist prejudice, however, regards the presumed group characteristics as unalterable. It therefore excludes individual variation or collective improvement. Moreover, it is based on an imaginary categorization: races do not exist in fact. Paradoxically, therefore, race tends to mean whatever the racist wants it to mean and this can focus on

physical, moral, intellectual, and religious categories, in other words: it encompasses everything. Thus, as the most extreme form of stereotypical thinking, it has led also to the most extreme forms of hostile and violent discrimination. Consequently, while ethnic prejudice by its very nature represents irrational thinking, racism goes much further in its rigid denial of reality. If we speak in terms of mental health—which is not my field—then obviously racism is a more severe pathology than ethnic prejudice. While these developments reached their pinnacle in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and not during Greek and Roman antiquity, it is the claim of this study that the ideas ultimately go back to these early periods.

This study therefore is an attempt to give the Greeks and Romans their due: if they have given us, through their literature, many of the ideas of freedom, democracy, philosophy, novel artistic concepts and so much else that we regard as essential in our culture, it should be recognized that the same literature also transmitted some of the elementary concepts of discrimination and inequality that are still with us. It is possible also that in considering these phenomena in their early shape, we may gain a better understanding of their contemporary forms.