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Source: *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Oct., 2004), pp. 609-642

Published by: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3491423>

Accessed: 08-02-2019 07:47 UTC

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Thomas Tryon and the Seventeenth-Century Dimensions of Antislavery

Philippe Rosenberg

HISTORIES of the humanitarian sensibility have an unfortunate tendency to gloss rather quickly over the early modern period. In one narrative after another, humanitarianism springs up in the later eighteenth century as the result of impersonal movements: changing configurations of class interests brought on by capitalism, tamer relations between the genders, epistemic shifts, the Enlightenment, or some combination thereof.¹ With few exceptions, these narratives perpetuate a now very old myth of the eighteenth century as the threshold between a “modern” world governed by discipline and a “feudal” one dominated by its exact opposite—harsh and fickle violence. As specialists of the medieval and early modern periods have shown, however, European subjects living before the magical year 1700 actively wrestled with the brutality that confronted them. Concern for charity, safety, and order led them to curtail what strife and oppression they could, either by condemning abuses, exercising clemency, or intervening in disputes. Their methods relied on invective and informal arrangements rather than systematic theories and legislative campaigns,

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¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1979), pt. 2; Petrus Cornelis Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering: Executions and the Evolution of Repression, from a Preindustrial Metropolis to the European Experience* (Cambridge, 1984); Thomas L. Haskell, “Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility,” *American Historical Review*, XC (1985), 339–361, 547–566; Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London, 1986); John Ashworth, “The Relationship between Capitalism and Humanitarianism,” *AHR*, XCII (1987), 813–828; G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 1992), chaps. 1, 2, 5; Karen Halttunen, “Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture,” *AHR*, C (1995), 303–310; Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media, and Politics*, trans. Graham Burchell (Cambridge, 1999). The exception is Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 2 vols., trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1978), I, 191–205.

William and Mary Quarterly, 3d Series, Volume LXI, Number 4, October 2004

but preindustrial peoples found ways to criticize and contain the abuse of force.²

Why, then, were the noted “strains” accompanying the development of an especially harsh form of slavery in the Caribbean slower to produce any remedies? The received wisdom offers a blunt answer: before the eighteenth century, slavery was invisible, a reality too far distant from the localized references of Europeans to be of direct consequence to them. Long after the sixteenth-century theorists had disputed the enslavement of American natives, the mood in Europe had continued entirely favorable to the enslavement of Africans. Although writers occasionally took offense at some of the evils of slavery, the validity of the institution itself went unquestioned until the tail end of the eighteenth century, when the campaign to end the slave trade began in earnest.³

Though inaccurate, this view remains dominant where the British case is concerned—its prevalence deriving from a somewhat distorted chronology of antislavery that mirrors the histories of humanitarianism mentioned above. The trouble began with Eric Williams’s famous contention that slavery came under fire precisely when it ceased to be profitable. Williams’s claims mobilized a generation of historians trained on (or against) Marxist paradigms, many of whom disagreed with the simplification involved. These historians set out to show that the ferment for abolition lay in the complex ideological contradictions associated with the coming of industrial capitalism. The cult of wage labor, the psychological effects of market capitalism, and the crystallization of rev-

² Joel B. Samaha, “Hanging for Felony: The Rule of Law in Elizabethan Colchester,” *Historical Journal*, XXI (1978), 763–782; Cynthia B. Herrup, “Law and Morality in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Past and Present*, no. 106 (February 1985), 102–123; J. A. Sharpe, “The History of Violence in England: Some Observations,” *ibid.*, no. 108 (August 1985), 206–215; Barbara Donagan, “Codes and Conduct in the English Civil War,” *ibid.*, no. 118 (February 1988), 65–95; Krista Kesselring, “Abjuration and Its Demise: The Changing Face of Royal Justice in the Tudor Period,” *Canadian Journal of History*, XXXIV (1999), 345–358; Jennine Hurl-Eamon, “Domestic Violence Prosecuted: Women Binding over Their Husbands for Assault at Westminster Quarter Sessions, 1685–1720,” *Journal of Family History*, XXVI (2001), 435–454. For a longer-term view, see Richard A. Bauman, *Human Rights in Ancient Rome* (London, 2000), chaps. 6–8; William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago, 1990), chap. 8; Matthew Strickland, *War and Chivalry: The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066–1217* (Cambridge, 1996), chaps. 2, 3, 7, 8; Claude Gauvard, “Violence licite et violence illicite dans le Royaume de France à la fin du Moyen Age,” *Memoria y civilización*, II (1999), 106–112.

³ The language of “strains” and “dissonance” is from David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1966), 223. See, for example, Howard Temperley, “The Ideology of Antislavery,” in David Eltis and James Walvin, eds., *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Origins and Effects in Europe, Africa, and the Americas* (Madison, Wis., 1981), 21.

olutionary aspirations provided them with their dominant themes.⁴ More recent studies tend to center on the mobilization of an abolitionist “culture,” rather than on the clash between slavery and wage labor, but the scholars involved in this newer project have not yet offered any alternative timeline nuanced enough to differentiate between ideas, culture, and mass campaign.⁵ Antislavery, as a set of positions, has been conflated with the particulars of the abolitionist campaign—its “prehistory” relegated, with only a few exceptions, to scattered remarks in dated works.⁶

⁴ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1944), chap. 11; Stanley L. Engerman, “Some Implications of the Abolition of the Slave Trade,” in Eltis and Walvin, eds., *Abolition*, 6–9; Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford, 1986); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975); Howard Temperley, “Capitalism, Slavery, and Ideology,” *Past and Present*, no. 75 (May 1977), 94–118. See also Haskell, “Capitalism,” *AHR*, XC (1985), 339–361, 547–566; and Ashworth, “Capitalism and Humanitarianism,” *ibid.*, XCII (1987), 813–828. The strongest recent case for the importance of revolutionary ideology to the development of antislavery is Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (London, 1988).

⁵ James Walvin, “The Public Campaign in England against Slavery, 1787–1834,” in Eltis and Walvin, *Abolition*, 63–79; David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780–1860* (London, 1991); J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilization of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787–1807* (Manchester, Eng., 1995); Leo d’Anjou, *Social Movements and Cultural Change: The First Abolition Campaign Revisited* (New York, 1996); Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2002).

⁶ The classic study remains Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*. See also the brief notes in Frank J. Klingberg, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England: A Study in English Humanitarianism* (New Haven, Conn., 1926), chap. 2; Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (Gloucester, Mass., 1965); Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1975); Anstey, “The Pattern of British Abolitionism in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher, eds., *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone, Kent, Eng., 1980), 19–42; J. William Frost, ed., *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery* (Norwood, Pa., 1980); Ira V. Brown, “Pennsylvania’s Antislavery Pioneers, 1688–1776,” *Pennsylvania History*, LV (1988), 59–77; Alden T. Vaughan, “Slaveholders’ ‘Hellish Principles’: A Seventeenth-Century Critique,” in Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism* (New York, 1995), 55–81; and the documents assembled in the first section of Roger Bruns, ed., *Am I Not a Man and a Brother: The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America, 1688–1788* (New York, 1977). Historians of the Atlantic economy have now begun to reexamine the chronology but have not yet abandoned the emphasis on the eighteenth century. See Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, 2000), 89, 221–227, 242–247; David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge, 2000), 281–284; Jack P. Greene, “Liberty, Slavery, and the Transformation of British Identity in the Eighteenth-Century West Indies,” *Slavery and Abolition*, XXI, no. 1 (2000), 8–11; and Greene, “‘A Plain and Natural Right to Life and Liberty’: An Early Natural Rights Attack on the Excesses of the Slave System in Colonial British America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., LVII (2000), 793–808.

One ought to wonder at the persistence of this neglect. Many societies contend with ideological contradictions, none more so, perhaps, than those that cope with the dilemmas brought on by colonization while simultaneously undergoing political turmoil at home. The English-speaking world of the 1600s fits this description only too well. The colonial movement gathered momentum at a time when subjects wrestled with harsh domestic and international violence. Civil war, religious persecution, and the new power politics between European nation-states overlapped with the expansion of the English Atlantic economy.⁷ The potential for ideological strain was thus deepened, since the issues arising in colonial contexts dovetailed with a body of domestic opinion already on edge over political crises, religious factionalism, and the relationship between the state and its subjects.⁸ Planters in the West Indies and America might have liked to present chattel slavery and its train of atrocities as *faits accomplis*, but they had to contend with a divided public in the British Isles. A few members of this metropolitan public proceeded to voice strong reservations about slavery and its inherent violence that carried beyond the more frequent criticism of planters. Though these seventeenth-century protests may seem thin on the ground and ought not to be confused with the abolitionism of later years, they point to a set of fracture lines in the responses of English and Scottish subjects to new realities arising in the colonial sphere.

The fate of London merchant Thomas Tryon (1634–1703) illustrates nicely a pattern of cursory interpretation, tinged by forward projection, that has clouded our grasp of these fracture lines.⁹ David Brion Davis's

⁷ For the metropolitan half of the equation, see Jonathan Scott, *England's Troubles: Seventeenth-Century English Political Instability in European Context* (Cambridge, 2000).

⁸ The list of examples is long and familiar to many historians. The histories of plantation policy in Ireland, the Antinomian controversy in New England, maritime disputes, monopolies and commercial interloping, Indian wars, the transportation of convicts, and the colonial ramifications of the two seventeenth-century revolutions (1642–1660 and 1689–1691) all reflect this premise.

⁹ Seventeenth-century specialists are already familiar with Tryon's writings through various brief comments, even though these tend to pigeonhole him as a sectarian author. See Ruthe T. Sheffey, "Some Evidence for a New Source of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Studies in Philology*, LIX (1962), 52–63; Milton Cantor, "The Image of the Negro in Colonial Literature," *New England Quarterly*, XXXVI (1963), 457; Carl Bridenbaugh and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624–1690* (New York, 1972); Gary A. Puckrein, *Little England: Plantation Society and Anglo-Barbadian Politics, 1627–1700* (New York, 1984), 168; Vaughan, "Slaveholders' 'Hellish Principles,'" in Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 75–76; Nigel Smith, "Enthusiasm and Enlightenment: Of Food, Filth, and Slavery," in Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward, eds., *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550–1850* (Cambridge, 1999), 106–118; Anita Guerrini, "A Diet for a Sensitive Soul:

seminal study of early antislavery has set the tone for much of what is known about this early critic of slavery. In a brief, three-page overview of Tryon's position, Davis applauds what he regards as a due concern for "the Negroes' welfare" in anticipation of certain features of the eighteenth century's culture of sensibility and cult of primitivism. But Davis also complains about a "confusing jumble of inconsistencies" that bars Tryon from any real standing as an abolitionist. In his judgment, Tryon simply failed to detect any "inherent conflict between slaveholding and a good conscience." One explanation for this apparent failure is that Tryon was won over by the profit motive. Another, subordinate, problem was Tryon's predilection for mysticism. Tryon obsessed over a cosmic balance between the spiritual and natural worlds. This unusual perspective led him, ultimately, to confuse the dynamics of slavery with the effects of sin. Africans had violated divine law and, in doing so, had called down divine wrath upon themselves, resulting in their enslavement. Tryon's criticism of the plantations was meant to warn the West Indian planters about the dangers that now attended their own corrupted Christianity.¹⁰

Literary critics have been inclined to think that Tryon's mysticism, far from promoting conceptual clutter, provided him with inspiration and coherence. For Nigel Smith, Tryon's mysticism supplies one of the missing links between the religious radicalism of the Civil War sects and the culture of the Enlightenment. Tryon's effort to clarify the meaning of mystical notions resulted in a sweeping critique of intemperance and pollution that encompassed everything from the eating of animals to slavery. Combined with a belief in perfectibility, the opposition between "wrath" and "benevolence" suggested that moral evils could be overcome, aligning Tryon with the ideals of eighteenth-century reformers. For Timothy Morton, that Tryon embraced vegetarianism carries greater importance than his reflections on benevolence. Disgust with corrupt forms of consumption led Tryon to castigate the planter elite of the West Indies under the trope of carnivorous capitalism. Planters mistreated their own bodies even as they transformed the deprived and mutilated bodies of their slaves into "flesh." In seeking out practical outcomes to his mysticism, Tryon went as far as to anticipate the technique

Vegetarianism in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, XXIII (May 1999), 35; Keith A. Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (Cambridge, 2000), 36–40; Timothy Morton, "Plantation of Wrath," in Morton and Nigel Smith, eds., *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1650–1830: From Revolution to Revolution* (Cambridge, 2002), 70–88. One of Tryon's antislavery tracts has been reproduced in Thomas W. Krise, ed., *Caribbeana: An Anthology of English Literature of the West Indies, 1657–1777* (Chicago, 1999), 51–76.

¹⁰ Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 372, 373–374.

of “ventriloquism” that would subsequently become a mainstay of the eighteenth century’s “culture of sympathy”; he gave a voice to suffering victims, restoring the subjectivity of individuals who were normally treated as fetishized commodities.¹¹

These various readings are compelling and have rescued Tryon’s works from the margins of historical attention. That said, they share an unfortunate tendency to assume that Tryon’s response to slavery was determined by his sectarianism and tend, furthermore, to filter his ideas through a teleological lens. Tryon emerges as a “radical” who either anticipated or failed to properly anticipate a mature form of abolitionism.

Viewing Tryon as a religious eccentric or protoreformer is misleading. His claims were congruent with contemporary thinking and are most constructively understood in this light. For Tryon and other early critics of slavery, many of whom gained firsthand exposure to the institution through travel, categories that we now consider fixed had not yet fully taken form. The practice of domination that was emerging in the British colonies in the Caribbean and North America was something new. The familiarity of well-entrenched institutions such as indentured service complicated the distinction between the servant and the slave. The relative novelty of West Indian slavery meant also that its viability had not yet been established.¹² High mortality rates and the potential for slave uprisings threatened colonial prosperity, shedding doubt on the soundness of slavery on tactical as well as economic grounds. The planters, meanwhile, struck observers as a crassly mercantile and irreligious group, prompting remarks that they might not have the interests of British colonialism especially close to heart.

Early critics of slavery were quick to marry religious commentary centering on the planters’ vices with practical observations concerning violence and the tenor of colonial life itself. Their views, in other words, were not entirely absorbed in what we might classify as either religious or sectarian concerns.¹³ As was frequently the case in early modern cul-

¹¹ Smith, “Enthusiasm and Enlightenment,” in MacLean, Landry, and Ward, eds., *The Country and the City Revisited*, 106–118; Morton, “Plantation of Wrath,” in Morton and Smith, eds., *Radicalism in British Literary Culture*, 70–88.

¹² David Eltis’s *Rise of African Slavery* attempts to delineate the process whereby the coerced labor of Africans became normalized at a time when the same kind of coerced labor became unacceptable to the societies of northwestern Europe. The mid-seventeenth century was the point when coerced and waged modes of labor began to diverge significantly, with the colonies embracing the former in its starkest form, and the metropolis, the latter. Clear notions of “possessive individualism,” involving full rights to one’s body and the contracting of one’s labor, were as yet only emerging (see 3, 5–12, 22–23, 42–46, 54). Although Eltis is interested in outcomes, my interest here is in the conceptual unsettledness that accompanied this gradual process.

¹³ In spite of his enthusiasm for the history of denominational communities, Roger Anstey made a similar point when he noted that the ideas about benevolence,

tural productions, the religious idiom accommodated secular points. Tryon, for instance, was deeply attuned to the connections between the ethical and functional threats that cruelty and oppression posed to the future prospects of West Indian society. To people like him, the emerging colonial elites of the West Indies were increasingly reminiscent of the Spaniards, whose empire had faltered (allegedly) because of greed, brutality, and mismanagement. The contrasts that Tryon would draw between service and brutalization, virtuous and corrupt households, and functional and dysfunctional empires owed as much to pragmatic concerns as they did to spiritual commitments.

Thomas Tryon was born to humble circumstances. A tiler's son from the Cotswolds, Tryon eventually left for London to become the apprentice of a hatmaker.¹⁴ His master was a Baptist, and Tryon briefly followed suit, but, as his posthumous memoir indicates, he was busier acquainting himself with works of astrology and popular medicine.

In 1657, at age twenty-three, Tryon acquired deep religious convictions. These led him to espouse vegetarianism and temperance as expressions of "self-denial" and what he termed "separation." Tryon had by then found his inspiration in the recently translated works of the German mystic Jacob Boehme, whose blend of Paracelsianism, alchemy, and mystical spiritualism caught on in England during the Civil War and Interregnum.¹⁵ "Behmenism," as this body of thought was known, appealed to a loose circle of religious radicals clustered around the clergyman John Pordage and his follower Jane Lead. Tryon's exact relationship to this group is unknown.¹⁶ There were similarities, but also differences, between Tryon and the Behmenists. As a group, the English

utility, and redemption vital to the success of modern abolitionism were shared between different religious perspectives and consistent with mainstream moral philosophy. See Anstey, "Pattern of British Abolitionism," in Bolt and Drescher, eds., *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform*, 20–21.

¹⁴ Thomas Tryon, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Tho. Tryon, Late of London* (London, 1705), 7–14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26–27, 32, 39. The classic introduction to Boehme is Alexandre Koyré, *La philosophie de Jacob Boehme* (Paris, 1929). On the translation of Boehme's works, see Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London, 1914), 213–219. See also Serge Hutin, *Les disciples anglais de Jacob Boehme aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1960). The term Paracelsianism refers to the body of alchemical and medical thought associated with Theophrastus von Hohenheim, known as Paracelsus (1493–1541). This is an expansive subject in its own right. For a useful introduction, see Allen G. Debus, *The English Paracelsians* (London, 1965).

¹⁶ B. J. Gibbons speculates that he might have known Roger Crab, a "Philadelphian" hatter with likely ties to Pordage. See Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and Its Development in England* (New York, 1996), 114–116.

Behmenists believed in the possibility of mystical union with God, in the workings of wisdom (feminized and personalized as *Sophia*), and in some form of Boehme's vitalist theory of the so-called seven qualities.¹⁷ Tryon, for his part, invoked notions of wisdom similar to those of other Behmenists, but he was mainly attracted to Boehme's reflections on "radices" (centers of spiritual energy analogous to seeds or roots and like them capable of outward expression and development) and "signatures" (crudely, the correspondence between different objects in the material world and equivalent principles in the spiritual realm). Tryon applied both of these concepts in a fairly materialistic sense. For him, the outer life of things manifested inner spiritual properties. In plants and foods, these spiritual properties had implications for health. In humans, by contrast, the radices were responsible for a tug-of-war between a regenerating spirit of love and a deadening spirit of wrath.¹⁸

Six years following his religious epiphany, an experience of a different sort awaited Tryon as he left London and set up for himself in Barbados. Tryon stayed in the Caribbean from 1663 until 1669, with only a brief interruption. His memoir provides few details about his time there except to say that he was busy making beaver hats. What he saw of slavery is a matter of inference, but, as an urban tradesman, Tryon would likely have worked in proximity to African slaves. Bridgetown, moreover, was not far removed from the sugar plantations. What is clear is that firsthand experience of the West Indies left its mark on Tryon. He was now one of an expanding club of Britons who moved between the metropolis and its colonies both physically and in terms of intellectual and economic outlooks. When the pressures of a growing family persuaded Tryon to return to London, he donned the mantle of a merchant and became involved in the commissions trade. Like other independent agents, Tryon now helped West Indian planters bypass expensive merchant-creditors by directly transacting the sale of sugar in Britain and supplying the plantations with metropolitan goods on the promise of future proceeds.¹⁹

¹⁷ Boehme talked about seven "fountain-spirits" (*Quellgeister*) that included the forces of contraction, expansion, anguish, spiritual fire, love-desire, understanding, and body. They coincided with the seven planets but carried distinctly cosmological implications. In effect, these fountain-spirits amounted to stages in God's self-manifestation or self-externalization into spirit and nature—with implications that were pantheistic. See Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, 90–91. For the beliefs of the English Behmenists, see Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 172–183; Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, 110–114.

¹⁸ Tryon, *Memoirs*, 36–54 (misnumbered 2–17, 34–37). Tryon's view of the "spirit of love" closely paralleled Boehme's call to "fraternity" through Christ's "spirit of love." See Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 196–199.

¹⁹ Tryon, *Memoirs*, 40–42; Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623–1775* (Baltimore, 1973), 287–288. The source of

This financial association with the West Indies is one of two considerations that make Tryon's relationship to the antislavery sentiments he would eventually espouse a complicated one. The other consideration is the twenty-year gap that separates Tryon's published statements about slavery from his initial stay in Barbados. For Tryon, the 1680s and early 1690s were a period of intense literary activity. Beginning in 1682, Tryon published works on subjects that ranged from the merits of vegetarianism and the interpretation of dreams to the benefits of open trade. In his memoir, he attributed this activity to what he called "an inward instigation to write and publish." He had sought to make a case for "temperance, cleanness, and innocency of living," which to his mind involved the avoidance of violence toward humans and animals alike. Tryon's frequent recourse to the pseudonym "Philotheos Physiologus" during much of this period suggests that, as an author, he identified with a brand of moral advice that combined religious inspiration (*philotheos*, lover of God) with natural philosophy (*physiologus*). Over time, the physiologus in Tryon asserted itself with increasing regularity, his outpourings taking on a practical cast.²⁰ The last of Tryon's publications, a collection of his letters, shows an individual engrossed by the late seventeenth century's ethos of "improvement."

What type of audience could a commentator of this kind hope to attract? The answer, it seems, is that he courted the Quakers. The best clue for this connection lies in the publication history of his works. The printers and booksellers who distributed Tryon's works included George Larkin, the publisher of John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners . . .* (1666) and of several other Nonconformist works, as well as Thomas Salusbury, Langly Curtis, and Elizabeth Harris, all of whom had close ties to anti-Catholic agitation. But Tryon's preferred printers throughout his writing career were the Quakers Andrew Sowle and his daughter Tace, who accounted for much of the Quakers' output

the capital and skills that allowed Tryon to proceed in this endeavor remains unclear, though a failed commercial venture in the Netherlands in 1664–1665 and the success of his hatmaking business (did Tryon import furs?) provide clues (Tryon, *Memoirs*, 41). There is no mention in his memoir that he ever participated in the slave trade in any direct capacity.

²⁰ Tryon, *Memoirs*, 54–55. Tryon's writings during this period include, for example, *Healths Grand Preservative . . .* (London, 1682); *A Treatise of Cleanness in Meats and Drinks . . .* (London, 1682); *The Way to Health, Long Life, and Happiness . . .* (London, 1683); *A Treatise of Dreams and Visions . . .* [London, 1689]; *A New Method of Educating Children . . .* (London, 1695); *England's Grandeur, and Way to Get Wealth . . .* (London, 1699). His ventures into psychology and dream interpretation demonstrated interest in the operation of "radices" in the human soul, but his work on things like the schooling of children exhibited only residual connections with Boehme's mysticism.

throughout the Restoration.²¹ That the Sowles identified Tryon, who makes no mention of Quakerism in his memoir, with a market for books addressed, in part at least, to this constituency is intriguing.²² Tryon might have impressed the Quakers in that he belonged to a group of socially modest individuals who took it upon themselves to “speak out” against disagreeable social arrangements from a position of “sincerity.”²³ For Tryon and potential members of his audience, sinful human arrangements bolstered by hierarchy and custom stood opposed to a universally accessible wisdom that spoke the language of “conscience.” That the brunt of his admonitions fell upon violence, hypocrisy, and persecution might have earned him further standing with this group, inasmuch as these were staples of its own publications.

The relationship, however, was symbiotic. The Sowles encouraged Tryon to embark on concurrent criticism of European cruelty and of colonial affairs by publishing all of his works on these subjects in short succession. Tryon’s two main tracts on slavery, “The Negro’s Complaint of Their Hard Servitude, and the Cruelties Practised upon Them . . .” and “A Discourse in Way of Dialogue, between an Ethiopian or Negro-Slave and a Christian, That Was His Master in America,” were published in 1684 as parts II and III of a work titled *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies . . .* (part I was an account of the merits of tropical herbs and fruits). These tracts were contemporaneous with two other works that picked up on colonial themes. One of these was *A Dialogue between an East-Indian Brackmanny or Heathen-Philosopher, and a French Gentleman concerning the Present Affairs of*

²¹ Henry R. Plomer, *A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers Who Were at Work in England, Scotland, and Ireland from 1641 to 1667* (London, 1907), s.v., “Sowle, Andrew”; Plomer, *A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers Who Were at Work in England, Scotland, and Ireland from 1668 to 1725* (Oxford, 1922), s.v., “Curtis,” “Harris,” and “Salusbury.” For a full list of Tryon’s works and publishers, see the *English Short-Title Catalog*.

²² The relationship between Quakers and Behmenists was a complicated one, marked by initial attraction and subsequent rivalry. See Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 220–333; Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, 126–128. The pattern was repeated when one of the Quakers went out of his way to publicly condemn Tryon’s vegetarianism on the grounds that biblical figures, including Jesus, had eaten meat. See John Field, *The Absurdity and Falsness of Thomas Trion’s Doctrine Manifested in Forbidding to Eat Flesh . . .* (London, 1685).

²³ See Margaret Spufford, “First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Spiritual Autobiographers,” *Social History*, IV (1979), 407–435. On the language of the Dissenters, see N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Athens, Ga., 1987), 218, 246–249; Hugh Ormsby-Lennon, “From Shibboleth to Apocalypse: Quaker Speechways during the Puritan Revolution,” in Peter Burke and Roy Porter, eds., *Language, Self, and Society: A Social History of Language* (Cambridge, 1991), 72–112.

Europe, which appeared in 1683. The other was the fictional speech of a so-called planter titled *The Planter's Speech to His Neighbours and Country-Men of Pennsylvania, East and West Jersey . . .*, which was published in 1684.²⁴ In the first of these tracts, Tryon has an Indian Brahmin (a natural philosopher, wise man, and vegetarian rolled into one) confront a violence-loving Catholic Frenchman who stands for the impiety of conventional Christian practice. *The Planter's Speech*, meanwhile, discussed the means whereby the North American colonies, and in particular the Quakers' then very recent colonies in West Jersey and Pennsylvania, might preserve their religious purity from the tide of violence and vice that threatened from all sides.²⁵

Put together, these considerations provide us with a starting point from which to contextualize Tryon's objections to slavery. He had moved from the radicalism and mystical anticipation of the Interregnum to the more composed form of moral testimony characteristic of the Restoration. His humble origins afforded him direct insight into the nature of labor, and his transnational experiences exposed him to the practice of slavery at a moment when it was emerging as a defining feature of the West Indian economy. As a commercial agent, he kept in regular contact with the colonial world, but he did so from a metropolitan vantage point. By the time that he took up the pen as a purveyor of inspired testimony, he had developed an affinity with the Quakers, and his writings attracted attention from these quarters. In exploring the international scene, Tryon wrote not only on the Caribbean, of which he had direct knowledge, but also on Pennsylvania and the various North American colonies, where the Quakers' hopes for a peaceful, godly society clashed with the current practice of colonialism.

For Tryon, then, mysticism was merely a filter; his preoccupations in the early 1680s centered on, among other things, the international standing of British Christianity. His writings addressed an audience of Dissenters and other readers much broader than the Behmenists. Indeed, Tryon

²⁴ Sowle might have had a direct hand in inspiring this particular tract. In an English translation of the *Discourses* between Alexander the Great and the Brahmin Dindimus, which he published earlier in 1683, Sowle advertised a forthcoming "Dialogue betwixt an *East Indian Brachman*, and a *Christian*, price 1 d." See *The Upright Lives of the Heathen Briefly Noted; or, Epistles and Discourses betwixt Alexander the Conquerer and Dindimus King of the Brachmans . . .* (London, [1683]), 10. Sowle published a variant edition of Thomas Tryon, *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies . . .* (London, [1684]), titled *Friendly Advicie [sic] to the Gentelmen-Planters . . .* The pagination of the two editions is consistent, though the type varies.

²⁵ West Jersey was ceded to Quakers in 1676, and Pennsylvania was chartered in 1681.

must be placed in relation to a still-wider intellectual context. The religious debates informing early antislavery transcended denominational lines. For one thing, they were not the exclusive property of any one religious community.²⁶ For another, religious rhetoric conveyed positions on subjects that we might otherwise tend to classify as secular, including the alarming role of violence in the social practices of the colonies.

Tryon's views harmonized with preoccupations salient among a number of his contemporaries who maintained that slavery clashed with core tenets of Christianity. The first stirrings of antislavery sentiment in England focused to a large extent on the competition between principle and expediency. The tenor of these discussions was casuistic. Individuals endowed with "tender consciences" might find that slavery raised qualms for them. Questioning the morality of slavery therefore required undertaking a methodical exercise of ethical classification to achieve clarity—casuistry in the most technical of its seventeenth-century meanings.²⁷ Some individuals, however, including Tryon, were eager to move from casuistic reasoning proper to public expressions of moral dismay. The point in this activity was to expose not only the limitations but also the hypocrisy of their opponents' moral rationalizations. Their attacks borrowed from casuistic approaches but functioned as a form of invective directed against the casuistry of others.²⁸

The Puritan Richard Baxter took up the pen against slavery early on and from an explicitly casuistic perspective. His entry in the *Christian*

²⁶ This point has been advanced with reference to the eighteenth century in an article complaining that the importance of Dissenters to antislavery has been grossly overstated and that of Tories and Anglicans underappreciated. See Nicholas Hudson, "Britons Never Will Be Slaves: National Myth, Conservatism, and the Beginnings of British Antislavery," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, XXXIV (2001), 559–576.

²⁷ On casuistry, see Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley, Calif., 1988), chaps. 7–8; Keith Thomas, "Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England," in John Morrill et al., eds., *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1993), 29–56; James F. Keenan and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *The Context of Casuistry* (Washington, D.C., 1995), pt. 3; Barbara Donagan, "Casuistry and Allegiance in the English Civil War," in Derek Hirst and Richard Strier, eds., *Writing and Political Engagement in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1999), 89–111.

²⁸ This approach was symptomatic of mid-seventeenth-century discontent with casuistry, the best-known instances of which are the campaign against "mental reservation" and Blaise Pascal's case against the moral laxism of Jesuit casuistry in the *Provincial Letters* (1657). See Johann P. Sommerville, "The 'New Art of Lying': Equivocation, Mental Reservation, and Casuistry," in Edmund Leites, ed., *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1988), 159–184; Jonsen and Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry*, chap. 12.

Directory was aimed at “our Natives in Barbado’s,” the West Indian planters. It blasted the African slave trade as a damnable exercise in man stealing carried out by individuals who counted as “the common enemies of mankind.” Baxter also made a point of condemning Christians who purchased slaves. Slavery was permissible, but *solely* if intended as lawful punishment for a criminal offense or if the slave had placed himself or herself into this condition by indenture. The only consideration that would warrant buying a captured African slave was a charitable intent to ransom the captive. A buyer who purchased a slave had to set this individual free; otherwise, the buyer would share in the guilt of man theft that the slave trade entailed. Baxter’s argument was simple: “By right the man is his own and therefore no man else may have just title to him.”²⁹ The practical implications of his position were also plain. The form of slavery that was emerging in the West Indies was incompatible with Christian ethics. Planters could only legitimately rely on the labor of indentured servants or convicts and were required to treat the former in accordance with the principles of Christian paternalism.

Baxter’s arguments found echoes in the polemics of the Quaker George Fox and the Anglican Morgan Godwyn, whose attacks on slaveholders centered on the obligation to convert slaves to Christianity. Neither Godwyn nor Fox rejected the validity of slavery itself, and they should therefore not be counted as antislavery authors. Their biting remarks do, however, point to a source of apprehension in the British response to West Indian slave society that was closely connected to the casuistry of slavery, and, in particular, to the jumble of racial and religious categories that entered into justifications for the enslavement of Africans. George Fox visited Barbados in 1671 and raised a stir when he and other Quakers attempted to preach to African slaves. In typical Quaker fashion, they mobilized the resources of letters, public testimony, and print to advise each other, validate their actions, and “admonish” their opponents.³⁰ Fox’s formal statement on the subject appeared in print five years later in the form of a short pamphlet titled

²⁹ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory; or, A Summ of Practical Theologie and Cases of Conscience* (London, 1673), 558, 559. Baxter’s position and language on this score resemble those of Puritan colonists in Massachusetts during the 1640s. The distinction between the different types of slavery also involved differences in treatment. Baxter considered it appropriate that convict slaves should meet with greater severity than indentured servants. See Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800* (London, 1997), 239.

³⁰ Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace beyond the Line*, 357–358; Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, 5–10; Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 307–309; Larry Gragg, “A Heavenly Visitation,” *History Today*, LII, no. 2 (2002), 46–51; and Kenneth L. Carroll, “George Fox and Slavery,” *Quaker History*, LXXXVI, no. 2 (1997), 16–25.

Gospel Family-Order. Fox insisted that Christ had died for all people: “for the Tawnys and for the *Blacks*, as well as for you that are called *Whites*.” The revealing element here was the insertion of the word “called” alongside the newly racialized category “*Whites*.”³¹ The Quakers observed that the planters’ reluctance to Christianize their slaves amounted to deliberate unholiness—enough to shed doubt on their moral, if not in this case on their racial, whiteness.

Morgan Godwyn, an Anglican priest who traveled to Barbados and Virginia in the mid- to late 1670s, was allegedly shocked when he read a Quaker pamphlet (probably Fox’s) that called on the Anglican clergy to answer the infuriating question: “Who made you the Ministers of the Gospel to the White People only, and not to the Tawneys and Blacks also?”³² Unlike most members of the Church of England, who chose to overlook this question, Godwyn took the unusual step of treating it seriously. The obfuscation he encountered among West Indian and Virginian slaveowners outraged him more than it did even the Quakers. Godwyn concluded that plantation society was being won over by lucre to such an extent that it was turning un-Christian. The strategy he would adopt in denouncing this trend in his tracts and sermons was explicitly casuistic. Godwyn defined slavery as a condition separate from the captive’s religious identity and then pointed to the uncompromising nature of the Christian mandate to proselytize. This strategy allowed him to refute the rationalizations planters put forth for neglecting their religious duty, starting with the notion that baptized slaves would somehow have to be set free and moving to the idea that Africans were incapable (or unworthy) of being evangelized. On these grounds, he could then articulate a wider critique of the physical and spiritual abuse of African slaves.³³

³¹ G[eorge] Fox, *Gospel Family-Order, Being a Short Discourse concerning the Ordering of Families, Both of Whites, Blacks, and Indians* ([London], 1676), 13–14. The use of the nominal form in the plural makes it clear that “Whites” is being opposed to “Blacks” (or the equivalent) and that this racial term had made its informal entry in West Indian discourse.

³² Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate, Suing for Their Admission into the Church* . . . (London, 1680), 4. The reference appears to be to Fox, although Godwyn was paraphrasing.

³³ See Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*; Godwyn, *A Supplement to the Negro’s and Indians Advocate* . . . (London, 1681); Godwyn, *The Revival; or, Directions for a Sculpture* . . . (London, 1682); and Godwyn, *Trade Preferr’d before Religion, and Christ Made to Give Place to Mammon* (London, 1685). The preface indicates that the sermon was preached at Westminster Abbey under Charles II, even though publication followed later, under James II. For further discussion of Godwyn and his place in the critique of slavery and the American discourse of race, see Vaughan, “Slaveholders’ ‘Hellish Principles,’” in Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 55–81.

When we place Tryon's ideas in relation to those of Baxter, Fox, and Godwyn, their apparent disjointedness ceases to present any problem. On close examination, Tryon combines several lines of moral commentary already familiar from the casuistic debates that surrounded slavery. The main vehicle of Tryon's second antislavery pamphlet, the slave Sambo, is identified in the text as an indigenous voice of wisdom—the son of a fetish maker (a “Phitisheer”) who had doubled as a “Priest” and “Heathen Philosopher.” Speaking through Sambo, Tryon works his way up to a moral diatribe. At first Sambo simply expresses curiosity about Christianity. The master agrees to satisfy it but does so without the least intention of bringing about the conversion of “such dark *stupid Heathens* as you are.” The dialogue, at this stage, builds on the familiar topic of the planters' refusal to convert their slaves. For Tryon, however, this dialogue is merely the prelude to a fuller examination of the vices of plantation society, one that extends into a systematic attack on slavery itself, which comes close to Baxter's argument but ends up presenting a far more comprehensive treatment of the issue. The master's exposé of Christian doctrines and moral requirements encompasses everything from trinitarianism to purity, temperance, modesty, and nonviolence. On hearing this speech, however, Sambo cannot repress his surprise. As he puts it, Christians lead lives so removed from the “undeniable Truths, and holy Rules” that they profess that they might as well not be Christians at all.³⁴

What ensues is Sambo's point-by-point contrast between basic Christian ethical norms and the behavior of West Indian planters.³⁵ The reader is led through a comprehensive survey of the moral vices of the colonies, which takes the form of a stark moral polemic comparing principles with behavioral outcomes. But the broader point of this exercise is never lost on the reader: since slaveholders invoke Christianity as one of the fundamental differences between themselves and their slaves—the grounds for their so-called right to enslave Africans—un-Christian behavior on their part ought, logically speaking, to invalidate slavery.

This sort of move was not unusual for Tryon. Tryon's Brahmin dialogue, mentioned earlier, bears comparison to the dialogue between Sambo and his master. In this case, it is the Brahmin who plays the part of the “heathen” protagonist. Contrasting Christian principles with Christian conduct, he is dismayed to find how poorly the two match up. One excerpt captures much of the spirit of the exchange:

³⁴ Tryon, *Friendly Advice*, 151, 152, 160.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 161–189.

French-man: 'Tis very true, the Principles of our Religion are such, but the general Practice now-a-days runs quite contrary.

Heathen: And yet Practice is the Life of any Religion: If you do verily believe those Principles of Christianity to be true, why do you not follow them in your conversations? If you do not believe them, why do you call yourselves *Christians*?³⁶

The Brahmin, speaking from a position that is external to Christianity, queries religious labels. Identity as a Christian, he insists, must proceed from a practice that embodies principles. If actions stem from an antagonistic set of principles, the pretense of a Christian identity must be dropped. At this juncture, the argument becomes overtly anticasuistic. Shades of gray and moral compromise are squarely excluded owing to a need for absolute moral transparency, as part of a gesture that could be described as Pascalian in its hostility toward ethical rationalizations.

It might be tempting to claim that the Brahmin dialogue gave Tryon the idea for a second, analogous dialogue between master and slave, with the slave now in the role of the religious outsider. Tryon's comments on slavery would then be little more than a religious exercise. But the similarities in procedure conceal a difference in purpose between the two tracts. In the Brahmin dialogue, the Frenchman is an emblematic figure: he stands not only for Catholicism but also for religious persecutors at large—the “popery” of the Church of England as much as that of Rome. In the slave dialogue, by contrast, the oppressive master is not an allegorical emblem for anyone or anything else. He is simply a corrupt planter who lives a sinful life and oppresses his slaves. The target of Tryon's moral attack, in this particular instance, is quite squarely the planters' world.

Tryon's other antislavery tract, “The Negro's Complaint,” takes up the evils of slavery from the slave's vantage point. Speaking in the first person, the slaves expose the full range of the horrors that weigh upon them: everything from systematic malnutrition and lack of rest to cruel, arbitrary punishments, the breaking up of families, and the rape of female slaves. Lacking any compassionate audience, the slaves offer up this litany of grievances to a vindictive God. The momentum of their lament leads, however, to an important claim: the “nominal Christians” who participate in or abet slavery are guilty of turning might into right. As Tryon puts it: “The stronger and more subtle murder, enslave and oppress the weaker, and more innocent and simple sort at their pleasure,

³⁶ [Thomas Tryon], *A Dialogue between an East-Indian Brackmanny or Heathen-Philosopher, and a French Gentleman concerning the Present Affairs of Europe* (London, 1683), 3.

and pretend they have a Right, because they have got a Power so to do. Nor is this only amongst us, and those People called *Heathens*, but even those who call themselves by thy Name, and boast the Title of *Christians*, are no less active in these Exploits and Practices than any other." This overt attack on a rights-based argument for slavery gets to the very heart of Tryon's position: slavery is nothing but power—and the notion of a specifically "Christian" colonial regime founded upon it, nothing but pretense. Tryon's stance on the origins of the slave trade proper is just as blunt. Although recognizing that Africans are fully complicit in its perpetuation, he credits the "Christian Tyrants" with the "chiefest Crime." Their role as instigators of the slave trade exposes the full extent of Christian hypocrisy in the tropics. Far from defeating any enemies in a just war, they simply run to the "remotest Regions" to buy up the casualties of artificial feuds or plain treachery—victims who remain invisible to Christian Europe *because* they are not Christians.³⁷ As far as Tryon is concerned, then, the casuistry justifying slavery is a sham from start to finish.

In arguing that slavery rests only on thinly disguised violence, Tryon sidestepped an entire battery of arguments rooted in the Old Testament and its acquiescence in bondage. Tryon did not so much as pause to ask whether any circumstances might warrant property rights in human beings. Instead, he moved on to the primary topics of his moral attack: violence and the ethically suspect circumstances that surrounded the seventeenth-century practice of slavery.

Practice was important in that it invalidated any theoretical justifications one might offer for slavery on the grounds of the Christian tradition. Unlike Richard Baxter, who argued from principles and right, Tryon's method was to list abuses. He knew that his audience had grounds for making comparisons. British audiences in the 1680s were keenly aware of the sufferings of Christian slaves taken captive by North African corsairs through scores of pamphlets, petitions, and fund-raising efforts aimed at ransoming these victims of misfortune. This literature of Christian captivity spoke in highly emotive terms about the fate of slaves, providing the English with opportunity to reflect on the combination of abuse and subjection that slavery entailed.³⁸ But the problem

³⁷ Tryon, *Friendly Advice*, 80, 81, 83–84.

³⁸ Robert C. Davis, "Counting European Slaves on the Barbary Coast," *Past and Present*, no. 172 (August 2001), 87–124; Nabil Matar, introduction to Daniel J. Vitkus, ed., *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England* (New York, 2001), 16–17, 32–40; Vitkus, "The Circulation of Bodies: Slavery, Maritime Commerce, and English Captivity Narratives in the Early Modern Period," in Graeme Harper, ed., *Colonial and Postcolonial Incarceration* (London, 2001), 23–35; Linda Colley, *Captives* (New York, 2002), chaps. 2–3.

was getting readers to view *African* slaves as recognizable victims whose sufferings should matter to British subjects.³⁹

One way to articulate this need for empathy was to invoke the Golden Rule—the injunction to do to others as “ye would have men should do to you.” Richard Baxter had alluded to the Golden Rule in dealing with slavery in 1673 and was followed closely by George Fox in 1676. Appeals to it surfaced again in the protest of the Germantown Quakers in 1688 and in George Keith’s well-known *Exhortation* of 1693. The American John Hepburn thought it so relevant that he enshrined it in the very title of his antislavery pamphlet. In its universal sweep, the Golden Rule facilitated the perception of equality between races by undermining the tendency to dehumanize foreigners. It also seemed to confirm, and even sacralize, the duty of Christians to oppose slavery. Tryon’s reading of Boehme predisposed him to emphasize the spirit of Christian love, and he insisted that Christian principles had to be binding on moral action. We are therefore not at all surprised when the slaves in one of the tracts call upon their Christian masters to answer why it is that they “contemn the great Law of Love, and doing unto all their fellow Creatures as they would be done unto.”⁴⁰

Was it the Golden Rule itself, however, that Tryon had in mind when he argued against slavery on the grounds of transparent Christian

³⁹ The difficulty here owed in part to gradual racialization. The chronology of race and racial prejudice in Europe and America is the subject of continuing debate, for the American dimensions of which see Alden Vaughan, “The Origins Debate: Slavery and Racism in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” in Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 136–174. It seems increasingly clear that mounting insistence on skin color as a mark of difference (and qualification for “natural slavery”) was in evidence throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth century, even though the emergence of a modern racial discourse came later. The classic account is Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968), 3–98. But see also Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1995), 1–9, 211–253; Steven Jablonski, “Ham’s Vicious Race: Slavery and John Milton,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, XXXVII, no. 1 (1997), 173–193. In the French context, see Pierre H. Boulle, “La construction du concept de race dans la France d’Ancien Régime,” *Outre-mers: revue d’histoire*, LXXXIX, no. 2 (2002), 155–175; and Siep Stuurman, “François Bernier and the Invention of Racial Classification,” *History Workshop Journal*, L (2000), 1–21.

⁴⁰ Luke 6:31; Matt. 7:12; Baxter, *Christian Directory*, 557; Fox, *Gospel Family-Order*, 18; “The Germantown Friends’ Protest against Slavery, 1688,” in Frost, ed., *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 69; [George Keith], *An Exhortation and Caution to Friends concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes* [New York, 1693], 3; John Hepburn, *The American Defence of the Christian Golden Rule; or, An Essay to Prove the Unlawfulness of Making Slaves of Men* ([New York?], 1715); Cantor, “Image of the Negro,” *NEQ*, XXXVI (1963), 472–473; Tryon, *Friendly Advice*, 126. Davis cautions that advocates of slavery found ways to accommodate the Golden Rule by aiming for decency in the treatment of slaves. See the example in Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 184.

principles? The traditional view, which interprets the use of the Golden Rule as an inclusive move that makes Africans part of a moral in-group, misses part of the formula's rhetorical force. References to the Golden Rule were fairly unusual in seventeenth-century tracts and carried a special point.⁴¹ To ask one's readers to do unto others as they would have others do unto them was an invitation to reflect on what they would prefer *not* to be subjected to. With regard to slavery, the audience was called upon to personalize the experience of oppression. One was asked to imagine hunger, trauma, bereavement, and all of the other effects of systemic violence relating to slavery as extensions of the victimizers' callous disregard for the suffering they caused. Tryon teased out these implications in a letter penned some time after his *Friendly Advice* in which he proposed setting up parochial schools in the West Indies for teaching children how to weave cotton cloth. In describing his project, Tryon claimed that a simple act of imaginative projection might move planters to alleviate the horrors of slavery:

To excite you [the planters] to the Discharge of your duty herein, its worth your consideration to suppose your selves or Children, for once in the condition of your poor *Negroes*, would you not have thought it punishment enough to have been carried out of your Native Country, without your own Wills and Inclinations, into Foreign Regions, so in the sweat of your Brows to labour for the Maintenance not only of yourselves in a poor despicable State, but of the ease and luxury of others, they being forced to make Brick, as I may say in a Sense they are, without Straw. Think not therefore to thrive by such Oppressive Methods and Severities.⁴²

In this context, the religious language of the Golden Rule pointed to an ethical core concerned with the subjective experience of violence.

⁴¹ The Golden Rule was occasionally invoked in pamphlets complaining about religious persecution and in sermons. See [Edward Bourne], *A Cry against Oppression and Cruelty* . . . (London, 1663), 2; William Penn, "The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience," in *The Select Works of William Penn*, II (1825; rpt. New York, 1971), 139; John Mayo, *The Universall Principle; the Common Justice of the World* . . . (London, 1630); George Boraston, *The Royal Law; or, The Golden Rule of Justice and Charity* (London, 1684); [John Goodman], *The Golden Rule; or, The Royal Law of Equity Explained* (London, 1688); Charles Trimnell, *The Duty of a Christian towards His Neighbour Considered* (London, 1697).

⁴² Thomas Tryon, *Tryon's Letters, upon Several Occasions* (London, 1700), 199–200. A nearly identical letter (186) offers a more telegraphic version of this explanation but makes direct reference to the Golden Rule ("and do not in some degree do by them as we would be done unto").

Conversely, it also drew attention to the objective practice of violence and oppression that underlay this subjective experience. “Oppressive methods” mattered fully as much as the humanity of the people against whom they were carried out.

In the 146 pages of Tryon’s tirade against slavery, the space reserved for the Golden Rule pales in comparison with that devoted to themes falling under the heading of cruelty, vice, and wastefulness. Far from being tangential to the expression of Tryon’s objections to slavery, these issues supplied the point of contact between Tryon’s critique of West Indian society and the overall religious message of his work. Tryon was dismayed above all by the violence of the plantations. He understood slavery to be inseparable from constant intimidation on the one hand (the condition for coerced labor) and the tyranny of the master on the other (the result of unrestrained personal authority). The recurring issue was cruelty—separate from mere violence in that it was simultaneously illegitimate and shameful. Tryon’s fixation on this issue was enshrined in the title of one of the dialogues. “The Negro’s Complaint” addressed not only their servitude but also “the Cruelties Practiced upon Them by Divers of Their Masters Professing Christianity in the *West-Indian Plantations*.” The text itself made fifteen separate references to cruelty and countless more allusions to such closely related subjects as oppression, tyranny, callousness, and unchecked fury.⁴³

In the four decades following the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642, cruelty had become a common subject of political diatribe and moral polemics. Accusations of cruelty surfaced in relation to an impressive range of topics. The literatures of military depredations and anti-Catholic agitation were a mainstay for the rhetoric of cruelty, but other literatures were saturated with it as well: sectarian hagiography, travel accounts, newsletters, murder narratives, even plays and ballads. As envisioned in this diverse body of commentary, cruelty possessed several different valences. One view of cruelty centered on the needless severity of certain forms of violence. “Cruelties,” in this sense, were synonymous with sharp pain, or injury, as experienced by victims. Another view centered on the intentions and emotional dispositions of those who perpetrated aberrant forms of violence.⁴⁴

⁴³ Tryon, *Friendly Advice*, 75, 76, 79, 86, 89, 98, 102, 105, 108, 109, 128 (misnumbered 129), 130, 137, 138, 145.

⁴⁴ Philippe Rosenberg, “The Moral Order of Violence: The Meanings of Cruelty in Early Modern England, 1648–1685” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1999), esp. chaps. 1–2. On the broader sweep of European discussions of cruelty, see also Daniel Baraz, *Medieval Cruelty: Changing Perceptions, Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2003); and James A. Steintrager, *Cruel Delight: Enlightenment Culture and the Inhuman* (Bloomington, Ind., 2004), 3–33.

Tryon moved freely between these different registers. In “The Negro’s Complaint,” for instance, he alternates between moments when cruelty is conflated with the intensity of the slaves’ sufferings (cruel whippings or punishments), moments when it appears as a perverse passion that overtakes the soul (masters and taskmasters “filled with Devilishness, Cruelty and Oppression”), and still other moments when it appears as the product of a deficiency in the other passions, particularly in the faculty of compassion.⁴⁵

At several points, this discussion of the modalities of cruelty slips into an analysis of power relations. Tryon was aware that cruelty could be considered as a systemic practice intended to terrify the slaves into submission and commented on the cyclical dynamic of repression and resistance that resulted.⁴⁶ He was also interested in documenting the stifling effects that this practice of violence had on the masters’ ability to preserve a sense of moral distinctions. At one point, for instance, the slaves exclaim that the “more than savage Cruelty” of their masters “proceeds without any Compassion to Age or Sex.” Masters, in other words, failed to abide by gendered conventions that obligated men in positions of power to extend compassion to women and children. They even forced women to work throughout their pregnancies, in no way lessening their load or holding back the whip. But the height of cruelty, which for Tryon also counts as the clearest expression of colonial “Baseness,” centered on the masters’ complete indifference to the rules of “natural Affection” between fathers and their children. They made perpetual slaves of “their own Seed.”⁴⁷ This practice was an outrage not only because it involved crass mercantilism and the rape of vulnerable women but also because it disrupted the moral boundaries associated with paternity.

Tryon was hardly alone in noticing cruelty in the West Indies. The abusive behavior of the West Indian slaveholders was rapidly becoming a source of consternation for critics of slavery, independent of their reli-

⁴⁵ Compare Tryon, *Friendly Advice*, 86, 105.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 108–109. (“For these hard Usages and Cruelties do terribly awaken the central Wrath and sleeping Poysons of the Original Nature, by which means and provocations we become sullen, dogged, malicious, envious, angry and revengeful, all which devilish dispositions are occasioned, or much increased in us by the harsh Tyranny of our Masters; Hence many times we neglect our Labour, run away, spoil our Business, and in the anguish of our souls continually curse our Masters and their Posterity; And thence on the other side, our Masters take occasion to redouble their Cruel Usages towards us, and be-labour themselves to Beat and Whip us, and hang us up by the Hands, Feet, and the like, and so Bastinado us till our Bodies become like a piece of raw Flesh, and we are just ready to give up the Ghost.”)

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 102–103, 129.

gious proclivities. In commenting on a rights-based antislavery tract dated 1709, Jack Greene notes the extent to which a reaction to inhumane punishments, and to cruelty in general, influenced the author's case. The work in question opens with examples of the "Cruelty where-with the poor Wretches the Negroes are used," including the image of a slave "kill'd by his Master for taking a small Loaf of Bread." Further examples follow in quick succession: the attempt of a master to deceive his newly purchased slave with promises that his wife would follow him; the unmerciful flogging of a woman who had come to visit her husband on a neighboring plantation; and the near-fatal beating of a pregnant slave. The author of the tract concluded that narrating all such anecdotes would be as "endless as what Avarice and Iniquity can suggest, or what the Caprice and Cruelty of men *bounded by no Fences of human Law*, can invent and execute."⁴⁸

This perspective came after Tryon's time, but if we move back into his own period we find the same concern with whim and cruelty expressed in a series of revealing formulas. The insubordinate Scottish Quaker George Keith contended that slavery was the occasion for nothing but war, violence, cruelty, and oppression (1693). The Tory writer Aphra Behn drew an implacable portrait of the governor of Surinam and his underlings torturing the royal-born slave Oroonoko (1688). The Anglican Morgan Godwyn fought the planters' religious indifference with the image of "the Negro tyed by both his Wrists up to a Rafter or Beam; deep marks of each Stroak appearing upon his Flesh" (1682). In the same vein, the Puritan Richard Baxter drew an unfavorable comparison between the cruelty of the West Indian planters and that of tigers or the "veriest Cannibals" (1673). Even colonial promoters, men like Richard Ligon and John Oldmixon, found the planters' reputation for cruelty difficult to dispel.⁴⁹

Why would such a disparate group of writers converge on cruelty as one of the most salient problems associated with slavery? To contemporary readers, for whom slavery and cruelty are synonymous, the question may seem surprising. But it is being asked here about a society that apparently trivialized the suffering of enslaved populations in its pursuit of an overseas dominion. Answering it requires that we consider how

⁴⁸ Greene, "'A Plain and Natural Right,'" *WMQ*, 3d Ser., LVII (2000), 795–796, 799, 802.

⁴⁹ [Keith], *Exhortation*, 2, 5; Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave* (1688), in Montague Summers, ed., *Works of Aphra Behn*, V (London, 1915), 197, 207–208; Godwyn, *The Revival*, 1; Baxter, *Christian Directory*, 558; Jack P. Greene, "Changing Identity in the British Caribbean: Barbados as a Case Study," in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, eds., *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Princeton, N.J., 1987), 221–223, 235–237.

contemporaries would have approached the issue. For them, slavery was ensconced within a spectrum of power, bracketed at one end by the household and at the other by the imperial world. Tryon, although he was an astute observer and despite the five years that he spent in Barbados, remained an outsider steeped in metropolitan categories not particularly well suited to the discussion of colonial slavery. This profile holds for most of the other writers identified above. When these figures tried to grapple with the meaning of slavery, they hit on a set of fraught, but overdetermined, parallels between slavery and the much better understood institution of service—parallels that led them to identify the cruelty of slavery with the workings of domestic tyranny.

Seventeenth-century society was heavily dependent on the labor of servants, and the ordering of households occupied a proportionally large place in the field of English cultural references. The patriarchal rights of the head of the household over its various members constituted a leitmotiv for prescriptive discourses. As Susan Dwyer Amussen and other historians have observed, violence constituted an important subtheme in such discussions. Most commentators concurred that violence was essential to the preservation of discipline and, therefore, to the moral purpose of the household. But violence could also easily overstep its bounds and bring about the dissolution of the very things it was meant to preserve: deference, sound moral examples, social order, and, in the worst cases, the household unit itself. Cruelty, we should remember, was accepted on occasion as grounds for legal separation and divorce. It likewise constituted a subject for the disapproval of neighbors and their intrusion into the nominally private realm of the family. Markedly excessive violence—the type one would describe as cruel—compromised the normative field of discipline that seemed to hold together a society premised on the ubiquity of deference. Although beating a miscreant was both legal and unremarkable, the patriarchs or matriarchs who beat their underlings on a whim raised questions about the legitimacy of household violence and the differences between domestic authority and tyranny.⁵⁰ The increasingly contractual nature of seventeenth-century household economies

⁵⁰ Susan Dwyer Amussen, "Punishment, Discipline, and Power: The Social Meanings of Violence in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies*, XXXIV (1995), 13–18; Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500–1800* (New Haven, Conn., 1995), 192–222; Keith Wrightson, "The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England," in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox, and Steve Hindle, eds., *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, Eng., 1996), 31–32; Elizabeth Foyster, "Male Honour, Social Control, and Wife Beating in Late Stuart England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, VI (1996), 215–224; Susan Dwyer Amussen, "'Being Stirred to Much Unquietness': Violence and Domestic Violence in Early Modern England," *Journal of Women's History*, VI, no. 2 (1994), 70–89.

only compounded the discussion by raising the stakes of laboring under “good” or “bad” masters.⁵¹

In terms of these metropolitan categories, the growth of slavery in the West Indies and on the American mainland would have made a harsh impression. The deteriorating conditions for white indentured servants had already prompted alarm before the treatment of African slaves emerged as a separate problem. In 1659, the royalists Marcellus Rivers and Oxenbridge Foyle issued a petition against the transportation of war captives to Barbados. Although the petition and accompanying correspondence took issue with Parliament’s role in sponsoring the “enslavement” of Englishmen (gentlemen at that) on flimsy charges of treason, Barbados itself came in for some tough remarks: it was a “Protestants Purgatory,” peopled by “inhumane and barbarous persons.” Laboring conditions were atrocious and bore no relation to service as usually conceived: “[Servants were] now generally grinding at the Mills attending the Furnaces, or digging in this scorching Island, having nothing to feed on (notwithstanding their hard labour,) but Potatoe Roots, nor to drink but water . . . being brought and sold still from one Planter to another, or attached as horses and beasts for the debts of their masters, being whipt at the whipping-posts, as Rogues, for their masters pleasure, and sleep in styes worse than hogs in England, and many other wayes made miserable, beyond expression or Christian imagination.”⁵² The servants in this case were convicts rather than migrants. But the coercive tone of labor in Barbados affected all white servants whose indentures had not yet expired. Though they were not treated as property, their indentures were sometimes traded, and they faced increasingly severe discipline. Some of them chose to rebel or flee, only to be replaced by new arrivals, among whom a number were victims of kidnapping.⁵³

⁵¹ In the late seventeenth century, high mortality combined with high demand for agricultural servants and declining availability of day laborers led masters to offer yearly contracts in a bid to retain help. Servants tended to move from contract to contract. The general trend was toward increasingly favorable working conditions. See Ann Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1981), 51–56, 100–103.

⁵² Marcellus Rivers and Oxenbridge Foyle, *England’s Slavery; or, Barbados Merchandize* (London, 1659), 5, 8. Greene, “Changing Identity,” in Canny and Pagden, eds., *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World*, 222, picks up on the same damning excerpt. See further Bodleian Library Manuscripts, Clarendon State Papers 60/277 and 60/338, Oxford.

⁵³ Hilary McD. Beckles has commented on the ubiquity of the whip and on the complaints of torture that reached the council; see Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627–1715* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1989), 89–92. See also Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace beyond the Line*, 103–110. There were important differences, however, between convict labor and African slavery; a purchaser’s rights over an indentured or convict laborer were limited by a specified

None of these practices fit well with the ideal of well-ordered households, and they proved a source of cognitive dissonance for those trying to reconcile English models with reports filtering in from the colonies. African slavery further complicated matters. It introduced new players who were not only “heathens” but African captives relocated to the New World as chattels. The question might well arise whether one could talk about households and servants at all. Plantations seemed to represent a different form of social organization.⁵⁴ One at a time, each of the West Indian colonies began drafting and adopting a set of laws that clarified the masters’ rights over slaves. The “slave code” in Barbados went into effect in 1661, with Jamaica following suit by 1664. Antigua and the other Leeward Islands waited longer to enact a formal code but adopted a series of comparable measures and practices starting in the 1660s. The outcome of this legislation (despite local variations) was to reduce African slaves to the explicit level of property and bar them from access to English law as commonly understood. The new codes mandated harsh punishments for runaways or potential rebels and validated the master’s right to impose arbitrary sanctions that would have been intolerable to English servants.⁵⁵

The reference in all of this legislation was to the plantation, not the household, but commentators like Baxter and Tryon insisted on maintaining the perspective of the household and the premise that slaves should be considered as servants.⁵⁶ Baxter’s “Directions to Those Masters in Foreign Plantations” formed a subset of the chapter he devoted to the “Duties of Masters towards Their Servants,” in which he enjoined the masters of English servants to remember that these servants were their brethren in Christ. Masters were responsible for assigning work that was suitable to each individual and supplying wholesome

length of years, could not extend to a lifetime of service, and did not entail any inheritable rights over the servant’s children. See Eltis, *Rise of African Slavery*, 64–67, 70–79.

⁵⁴ On the structure of plantation households, see Puckrein, *Little England*, chap. 5.

⁵⁵ The classic account is Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1972), 238–246. See also Beckles, *White Servitude*, chap. 4; and David Barry Gaspar, “Rigid and Incontinent: Origins of the Jamaica Slave Laws of the Seventeenth Century,” in Christopher L. Tomlins and Bruce H. Mann, eds., *The Many Legalities of Early America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001), 78–96.

⁵⁶ The Lords of Trade and Plantations took the same view in 1676 when they objected to the Jamaican legislature’s use of the term “servitude.” See Hilary McD. Beckles, “The ‘Hub of Empire’: The Caribbean and Britain in the Seventeenth Century,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, I, ed. Nicholas Canny (Oxford, 1998), 229.

food, lodging, and moral trusteeship. "Foreign plantations" ought not to stand as exceptions to these rules. The slave was really a specific kind of servant, the equivalent of an indentured servant whose contract was for general labor. Baxter therefore instructed the master not to require "more of an innocent slave, than you would or might do of an ordinary servant."⁵⁷ Coercing slaves to labor beyond this norm was bad enough, but treating them with overt cruelty carried an even graver consequence: it would teach the slaves to hate Christianity and destroy any possibility for moral stewardship. George Fox, whose reflections on the Christianization and manumission of African servants bore the significant title *Gospel Family-Order*, agreed with the tenets of Baxter's argument. African slaves amounted to a subcategory of servants and should expect to meet with treatment appropriate to a Christian household.⁵⁸

This discussion leads us back to Tryon's critique of the plantations. Although he wrote in the 1680s, Tryon had, in fact, experienced the West Indies in the 1660s. The transition from indentured white service to African slavery was almost complete by this date, but the substitution remained recent enough that it was still plausible to understand slavery by analogy to service.⁵⁹ And that is exactly what Tryon did: he spoke about slaves as mistreated servants and about planters as domestic tyrants. His planters are described as a group of lazy, luxurious, dissolute, punch-guzzling imbeciles. Their culture of vice, violence, and impunity seems to shield them from dictates of decency that would prevail in the metropolis.⁶⁰ They blaspheme continuously. Male planters even tend to mistreat their own wives. One of the inferences that Tryon's reader could draw from this pointed commentary was that West Indian planters returning home to England would be regarded as questionable

⁵⁷ See Baxter, *Christian Directory*, 556–557, 560 (with reference to the discussion on 559). These rules governed relations with transported convicts, not Africans. Note again that Baxter condemned the African slave trade.

⁵⁸ Fox, *Gospel Family-Order*, 6, 16, 18–19.

⁵⁹ The period was the high point of what Richard Sheridan has called "the drift toward monoculture" (Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, 134–140). For a detailed analysis of the shift from white servants to African slaves in the 1640s, 1650s, and thereafter, see Hilary McD. Beckles and Andrew Downes, "The Economics of Transition to the Black Labor System in Barbados, 1630–1680," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XVIII (1987–1988), 225–247; Puckrein, *Little England*, chap. 4; Blackburn, *Making of Colonial Slavery*, 315–325.

⁶⁰ For the possible foundations of this judgment of planters, see Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace beyond the Line*, 139–142. Note that attacks on the mores of both the aristocratic and the commercial classes were beginning to emerge as an important theme in cultural life in England. See Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680–1780* (Berkeley, Calif., 1996), 211–214. Impunity is an especially important theme; see Tryon, *Friendly Advice*, 110–112, 182.

neighbors. Slavery and geographical distance were the only things shielding them from the effects that the patent dysfunctions of their estates should have entailed. They survived simply because they could foist enormous demands on a class of oppressed servants of a type unknown in England since the dissolution of serfdom.

For Tryon it seemed quite clear that the perverse dynamics underwriting the planters' world would prove unsustainable. On the strictly spiritual plane, the planters' souls were as disorderly as their households. As Sambo puts it: "*Sence* gets above *Reason*, the *Man* is ridden by the *Beast*, and when in this hurry, *Conscience* gets leave to be heard, then presently there is nothing but *Furies* and *Dispair*." But the "furies" that haunted the masters pursued them into an economic domain, which Tryon and many of his contemporaries regarded as contiguous with moral arrangements. By institutionalizing physical violence and deprivation, the planters came face-to-face with an untenable demographic pattern: exhausted and severely mistreated, the slaves died in droves before they were able to reproduce their numbers. High infant mortality among the few slave children born in these circumstances compounded the problem. With replacement costs at a premium, the masters' cruelty slowly but inevitably ate away at their estates.⁶¹

Tryon entertained a hope that this process might prove reversible. The solution meant moving away from slavery and back toward service as framed by the virtuous household. Sambo assures the reader that, if masters curbed their greed and intemperate violence, radically improved the diet of African workers, offered alternatives to sugar production, allowed for the establishment of stable African families, and significantly curtailed the length of the workday, the colonies might count on the "willing" service of an African population that would no longer consider itself enslaved. "If," in Sambo's words, "these things you do, we and our Posterity shall *willingly serve you*, and not count it any *Slavery*, but our unspeakable Happiness." This arrangement would spell the end of the slave trade proper. The master would henceforth "encrease by his *own Bread*" and cease to buy new slaves.⁶² Such claims may evoke uncomfortable overtones of West Indian dependence, but, in early modern terms, one could be dependent, and therefore unfree, while still not being a slave. People were well versed in the contractual arrangements

⁶¹ Tryon, *Friendly Advice*, 102–108, 139–145, 178, 218. The argument is repeated in Tryon's *Letters*, 186. On the high incidence of mortality among slaves (which almost certainly informed Tryon's view of the matter), see Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace beyond the Line*, 350–354; Puckrein, *Little England*, 16; as well as Richard B. Sheridan, "Slave Demography in the British West Indies and the Abolition of the Slave Trade," in Eltis and Walvin, *Abolition*, 259–285.

⁶² Tryon, *Friendly Advice*, 219, 220.

whereby individuals placed themselves under the “mastership” of others, and this would remain the case into the eighteenth century.

The rejoinder to Tryon’s claims about willing service exposes a further dimension of his thoughts on West Indian violence. Sambo predicted that the transformation of slaves into dependent laborers would have geopolitical outcomes. “Peace” and “safety,” he claims, would finally come to the planters’ island, “for Innocency is a better defence than Forts and Citadels, than Armies and Fleets, than *Walls of Brass* flankt with *Towers of Adamant*.” Tryon worried about the possibility that the slaves, if they continued to be mistreated, might have recourse to legitimate retribution. He and his readers could easily place the slave in the conventional position of the domestic traitor rebelling against an abusive patriarch.⁶³ But Tryon also recognized the strategic problem posed by a “black majority” that had already manifested a capacity for armed resistance by the time he was writing.⁶⁴ The planters’ cruelty and bloodshed opened them up to a material form of divine retribution even more direct in its effects than the economic failure of sugar plantations. Slave uprisings were one possibility, but alliances with foreign powers were also likely and no less dangerous, since they threatened the very future of English possession.⁶⁵

The contrast between the stark citadel and the virtuous household at the heart of Tryon’s imagery expressed a distinction between two very different regimes of colonial violence. When the master turned into a cruel tyrant, his island turned into a fortress—with walls turned inward as much as outward. If, on the other hand, planters kept themselves within the bounds of legitimate hierarchical relations, they would be able to muster the household as a unit of defense.

This subject was of interest not only to Tryon himself but also to any individuals who might harbor moral concerns about the colonies, including the nominally pacifist Quakers. The strategic question would supply the Germantown Quakers with one of their main rationales for

⁶³ Ibid., 220. See Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550–1700* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994), chap. 1, esp. 28–38.

⁶⁴ Slave conspiracies threatened violence in Barbados in 1675 and 1683. The problem was endemic in Jamaica, where several risings broke out between 1673 and 1694 and where the Maroons provided a base for raids and runaways. See Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), esp. 108–111; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 256–272.

⁶⁵ Tryon, *Friendly Advice*, 215. Tense relations with, for instance, the French over Saint Christopher and the Leeward Islands meant that Tryon’s anxieties on this score had some merit even before the Anglo-French wars of 1689–1713. See C. S. S. Higham, *The Development of the Leeward Islands under the Restoration, 1660–1688* (Cambridge, 1921), chaps. 2–4.

questioning the legitimacy of slavery in 1688. “Masters and mastrisses” might have to resort to war to keep down a population that had every right to fight for its freedom. Following this view, slavery meant more or less the same thing as the institutionalization of aggression. Slaveowning Quakers therefore stood at odds with principles dictating that they should refrain from violence. There was a problem of reputation involved in this, too. The authors of the Germantown petition, who were of Dutch or Low German extraction, worried about bad press in northern and central Europe. If the settlers began to mistreat slaves, their new, purportedly “holy,” colony would come away looking no better than Europe’s persecuting states.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the slaves’ capacity for retaliation threatened a fragile colonial society with the specter of something that bordered on civil war.

This game of international comparisons, on a moral canvas shot through with anxieties about colonial violence, was not the preserve of Quakers. It informed reflections on geopolitics and empire far more broadly. Richard Baxter and Morgan Godwyn, for instance, both asked how an English overseas empire might set itself apart from other empires, which they regarded as both despotic and ultimately weak. They raised the question in connection with the two standard imperial references of the time: Spain and the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁷ In the rhetorical context of the seventeenth century, such allusions were highly charged. The Black Legend of Spain was alive and well in England, thanks in part to a recent retranslation of Bartolomé de Las Casas’s *Brevisima Relación* (printed in 1656) and the cultural production it sustained and thanks, moreover, to a long-standing tradition of anti-Catholic prejudice.⁶⁸ Painted in this light, Spain provided the model of a depraved “Christian” empire that had systematized the mistreatment of non-Christians. The image of the conquistadors butchering innocent natives purely for gain stood as the direct antithesis of the self-image British colonists sought to conjure up in defending their own proceedings.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ “Germantown Protest,” in Frost, ed., *Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 69.

⁶⁷ Baxter, *Christian Directory*, 558; Godwyn, *Trade Preferr’d*, 3; Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*, 82, 131–132, 162. George Keith, who eventually broke with the Quakers, also mentioned the Turks ([Keith], *Exhortation*, 5).

⁶⁸ Bartholome de Las Casas, *The Tears of the Indians . . .*, trans. J[ohn] Phillips (London, 1656). The most notable product was William D’Avenant’s opera, *The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru* (1658), in which the English defend enslaved “Peruvian” natives from their Spanish oppressors. See Susan J. Wiseman, “‘History Digested’: Opera and Colonialism in the 1650s,” in Thomas Healy and Jonathan Sawday, eds., *Literature and the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 1990), 193–197. For earlier applications of Las Casas to the context of English colonial efforts, see Tom Cain, “John Donne and the Ideology of Colonization,” *English Literary Renaissance*, XXXI, no. 3 (2001), 455–469.

⁶⁹ Dutch writings about the New World offer rich parallels, compounded by the Spaniards’ poor reputation during and after the revolt in the Low Countries. See

The case of the Ottoman Empire and the Barbary Coast—British authors and readers often assimilated the two—spoke no less directly to the problem of slavery. The enslavement of Christian captives by the corsairs of the southern Mediterranean ports had become a hot issue. Captivity narratives and geographical descriptions expounded the cruelty and tyranny of slave masters in the Ottoman and Moroccan orbits.⁷⁰ Yet they also made a point of noting that Muslims drew upon slavery as a means of encouraging conversion and treated slaves who embraced Islam with leniency. American slavery suffered in comparison in that it was permanent and lacked even the religious motivation that seemed to inform the purported cruelty of the “Turks.”⁷¹

It is reasonably easy to understand how such references might resonate with Tryon. His address from a fictional West Indian planter to his “Neighbours and Country-Men of Pennsylvania” demonstrates his commitment to the ideal of America as a promised land. The West Indian colonies, in his judgment, were far from virtuous, indicating that colonial subjects were striking out in a direction that was antithetical to the rationales that their more conscientious counterparts at home might offer for the colonial enterprise. The scope and severity of the problem emerged more clearly, however, when comparing the British Caribbean to the Ottoman and Spanish examples. Christians were hypocrites when they “cr[ie]d out against the Tyranny of the *Turks*.” They treated Africans worse than the Turks did their slaves and “hindered,” rather than encouraged, conversion and manumission.⁷²

England was foolishly following the Spaniards’ lead. Spain had shed the blood of thousands on the empty pretence of “propagating the Christian Religion” and had then seen the empire it coveted crumble away “*ever since those Cruelties*.” Rather than rising up to “*universal*

Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad: The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570–1670* (Cambridge, 2001), esp. chaps. 2, 5. In Morgan Godwyn’s view, the Spaniards recovered, but only after they converted the Indians, which put a stop to rioting. See Godwyn, *The Negro’s and Indians Advocate*, 131–132.

⁷⁰ See *A Brief Relation or Remonstrance of the Injurious Proceedings and Inhumane Cruelties of the Turks* . . . ([London], 1657); Hen[ry] Marsh, *A New Survey of the Turkish Empire and Government* . . . (London, 1663), 48–57; William Okeley, *Eben-ezer; or, A Small Monument of Great Mercy* . . . (London, 1675), reprinted in Vitkus, *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption*, 149–157, 162–163, 165–166; Thomas Phelps, *A True Account of the Captivity of Thomas Phelps, at Machaness in Barbary* . . . (London, 1685), 8–9; See also Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 308.

⁷¹ Marsh, *A New Survey*, 51; Okeley, *Eben-ezer*, in Vitkus, ed., *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption*, 157–158; Matar, introduction, *ibid.*, 39; Colley, *Captives*, 58–59. John Hepburn would turn the contrast into a fictional comment directed from a “Mahometan” slaveholder to a (Christian) “Negro-master” (Hepburn, *American Defence*, 9–10). See also Rivers, *England’s Slavery*, 7.

⁷² Tryon, *Friendly Advice*, 200–201.

Monarchy (which their Ambition promised themselves),” the Spaniards were now “scarce able to defend their own antient Patrimony, or keep off an Enemy from the Frontiers of *Castile*.” Tryon was also quick to note that the Spaniards had taken America with “*mightry Men of War*.” All England had, in comparison, were a few “petty *Pinnaces*, and tottering *Skiffs*.” The lesson here was as much secular as it was providential: “private fortunes” that were grounded solely in violence would simply never stand fast.⁷³ The future prosperity of a weak colonial regime would have to be secured through peace, which is to say through the *voluntary* participation, military as much as economic, of a self-regenerating population of African servants.

Tryon’s reading of Spanish colonial rule was misguided, and his hopes for the British West Indies, naive. But, in spite of these limitations, his reasoning remains interesting. In comparing the cruelty of Britain’s colonies to that of other empires, Tryon was drawing connections between the notion of the virtuous household and the safety and prosperity of the colonies. At one level, this tendency to put separate issues on a single moral footing points to a religious sensibility. Tryon challenged the moral equivocators of his day by calling for uncompromisingly “Christian” outcomes to all situations, domestic or international. But the other conceptual glue that holds the different ends of the earth together within the framework of a single critique is Tryon’s analysis of violence. As the heads of households descend from the legitimate use of violence into oppression, they also abandon the benefits of restraint. Aside from corrupting the planter, the effects of violence ripple well beyond the household. In the imperial context, the planters’ resort to intemperate violence becomes a vector for exhaustion, impoverishment, disloyalty, and strategic vulnerability.

All told, Tryon considered slavery incompatible with the dictates of a good conscience. The moral enormities that defined the West Indian practice of slavery were alien to his particular definition of the Christian identity. But, although he was certainly enamored with Boehme’s terminology, Tryon was neither a strict mystic nor a sectarian dogmatist. He allowed personal experience to mold his perspectives and was capable of articulating clear objections to slavery that were as much material as they were spiritual.

Although religion left few subjects untouched in early modern society, denominational identities make poor guides to the complexity of people’s outlooks. Twenty-year-old memories of Barbados, a Quaker publisher, and a continuing interest in colonial affairs all played their

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 211–212.

part in shaping Tryon's perspectives. So, too, in a sense, did the changing circumstances of Nonconformity. After the fall of the Cromwellian regime, English sectarians underwent what Christopher Hill pessimistically described as an "Experience of Defeat."⁷⁴ For Tryon and many others, the experience more closely resembled one of deferment and reinvention. Following a brief exile to Barbados and a stint in commerce, Tryon found a new voice as a dispenser of testimony. By 1683–1684, he was repackaging ideas from the 1650s in forms more palatable to the politically and religiously mixed audiences of the late seventeenth century. He did so through a combination of pragmatism and conventional morality. Tryon made a point of showing that slavery contradicted not only conscience but also interest. The depths of violence that set West Indian slavery apart from the metropolitan practice of service seemed to him to threaten the future of the English plantations on all scores: moral, economic, military, and geopolitical as well as religious. Not surprisingly, the various concerns that permeated his attack on slavery turn up in the opinions of several of his contemporaries. Cruelty, immorality, and the contrast between orderly households and disorderly plantations were on the minds of many metropolitan writers as they grappled with the societies emerging in the West Indian colonies.

"Emerging" is the operative word in all of this. The writings of Tryon, Baxter, Godwyn, Keith, the Pennsylvania Quakers, and others consistently point to what should be an obvious fact: the development of antislavery opinion in Britain was coextensive with the institutionalization of slavery itself. This fact ought, in turn, to alter the ways in which historians evaluate the sweep of antislavery in Britain and elsewhere. Antislavery was a reactive process that began to take shape during formative phases of transatlantic British colonialism—within fields of ideology and economic reality distinct from those of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At this early stage, plantation slavery was gradually diverging from the modalities of agricultural and domestic service and from the preindustrial "moral economy" with which these were linked. Tryon's response to this growing disjuncture, his tendency to concentrate on cruelty and the ethical conditions under which servants labored, were symptomatic of a preindustrial form of economic reasoning.

Echoes of Tryon's approach would linger on within the body of eighteenth-century antislavery thought. When they discussed the fate of "black servants," some of the recognized instigators of modern aboli-

⁷⁴ Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London, 1984).

tionism, including John Woolman, Anthony Benezet, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, and Olaudah Equiano, tended to fixate on violence, affliction, and turpitude in a manner reminiscent of Tryon's seventeenth-century protest.⁷⁵ When Adam Smith stated that the demographic and human inefficacies of the slave system provided the strongest argument for turning slaves into free hands, he, too, was revisiting issues raised in Tryon's day.⁷⁶ Saying so is not a call to teleological interpretations; it is just the opposite. Historians will need to explain why certain critiques of slavery voiced in the eighteenth century, at a time when abolitionism was about to take off as a mass movement, held on to themes that made as much sense within the ideological context of the previous century, at a time when slavery raised concerns over the triangular entanglement of its economic viability, colonial implications, and moral consequences.

Tryon was not always steadfast in his persuasions. He was willing to compromise with the slaveholders and thought that a "Captivated Freedom" would suffice if immediate freedom could not be won for the slaves. He failed also to get past the hardening racism of his age and embraced something resembling protosegregationist views.⁷⁷ But he nonetheless sought to draw attention to an institution that was rapidly becoming invisible through normalization. Not only did Tryon purposefully deploy known moral idioms against the grain of their conventional use in support of a suffering people, but, with his contrastive approach, he sought to undermine the ethical rationalizations that preserved the perceived legitimacy of slavery. He made clear the distinctions between Christian and un-Christian behavior, chastisement and cruelty, and just and tyrannical regimes, not just for the purposes of satirizing colonial elites or in a vague hope of seeing some improvement in the slaves' working conditions but as part of an attack on two of slavery's core practices: the trade in human beings proper and the regime of violent coercion that brutalized Africans once they became entrapped in the plantation economy. The conceptual and polemical resources of the sev-

⁷⁵ John Woolman, *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* (1754), in Bruns, *Am I Not a Man*, 72–73, 77; Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1771), *ibid.*, 162–170, 173–180; Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (1787), ed. Vincent Carretta (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1999); Olaudah Equiano, *The Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African* (1789), I, ed. Paul Edwards (London, 1969), 78–79, 87–88, 203–226.

⁷⁶ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London, 1776), I, book 1, chap. 8. Smith went further, of course, than Tryon. He explained that the high profitability of crops like sugar and tobacco made the wastefulness of plantation slavery possible. Other crops would not have supported it (book 3, chap. 2). See also Benezet, *Account of Guinea*, in Bruns, *Am I Not a Man*, 166–167, 182–183.

⁷⁷ Tryon, *Letters*, 199. Tryon proposed that trade schools be set up in pairs, one per parish for African- and English-born children, respectively (183).

enteenth century, it seems, were quite adequate to this task and had their place in the articulation of English strains of antislavery.

What this supplies us with, then, is a corrective to narratives of antislavery that have become dependent on conventionally modern currents for too great a part of their explanatory force. Here is a thinker who fits poorly in a chronology centering on bourgeois reform, the culture of nineteenth-century market capitalism, or the age of democratic revolutions and who fits much better within the early modern practice of pamphleteering and activism. A busy public sphere, less bourgeois in this case than baroque, ensured that Tryon's message—his challenge to the moral equivocations of the seventeenth century—found its way into a heterogeneous metropolitan culture already less than uniformly sympathetic to African slavery.