

# THE TRUE FREEDOM OF THE SPIRIT: STOICS AND CHRISTIANS

## 235. Dio Chrysostom, 15: *Slavery and Freedom*

Already some of the earliest Greeks to interest themselves in philosophical problems, the Sophists, had speculated about whether social inferiority implied moral inferiority, and about the circumstances under which slavery might be held to be justified. Aristotle developed the theory of 'natural slavery' which implied that, for their own good, inferior barbarians ought to become the slaves of superior Hellenes (see No. 2 above; a racial theory which did not correspond to Greek practice, and was quite inappropriate at Rome, where slavery functioned precisely as a way of making outsiders part of society). In the Hellenistic period, the Stoic solution was that a person's moral status depended upon his soul, and the question of what social status he had was unconnected and unimportant.

This view was frequently advocated by the popular philosophers of the Roman period. The following lecture by Dio of Prusa shows that 'slave' was a standard term of abuse to ordinary Greeks (1); it illustrates the prejudice that while Greeks who fell into slavery retained their natural freedom, barbarians were naturally slaves, so that when they happened to become slaves, they merely got what they deserved (16); it draws an analogy between the dependent status of slaves and that of children (18–20); and it ends with the moralising conclusion that while the application of the word 'slave' to members of a particular status group is vacuous, moral inferiority is indeed a form of slavery.

(1) Just now I heard some people arguing about a case of freedom or slavery — not in the law court or the town square (*agora*), but at home, where there are no time-limits on the length of speeches. Each of the two men had several supporters there. I think that what had happened was that they had already been arguing on opposite sides about some other issues, and that one of them felt that he was losing the argument and couldn't do anything about it, so that as so often happens he became abusive and started to reproach his opponent on the grounds that he was not a free man. But he responded by smiling sweetly and saying:

(2) Slave: What's your evidence? Are you able to say who is a slave and who is free?

Citizen: Of course I am. At least I know that I am a free man myself and so are all these people, whereas you do not share in freedom.

This made some of the people who were there laugh. But it didn't have the effect of shaming the other man into silence: on the contrary, just as fighting-cocks become excited and aggressive when they are struck, the insult made him excited and aggressive, and he asked him what was the basis of his knowledge about his own status and his opponent's.

(3) Citizen: Because I know that my father is as Athenian as anyone, and yours is someone's house-slave (he mentioned the name).

Slave: So what prevents me from rubbing myself down with oil in the Kynosarges, where the bastards go? I might have a free mother — perhaps even an Athenian mother — as well as the father whom you mention. After all, many Athenian women have become pregnant by foreigners or slaves, because of the absence or unavailability of citizens, some without knowing the man's status and others quite aware of it. Of the persons born as a result, none is a slave — they're just non-Athenians.

(4) Citizen: But I know that your mother too was a slave, in the same household as your father.

Slave: Very well; do you know who your mother is?

Citizen: Of course I do. An Athenian, daughter of Athenians, who brought her husband a substantial dowry.

Slave: And you would be able to state on oath that you are the son of the man she claims is your father? Telemakhos didn't dare to insist that Penelope, daughter of Ikarios, was telling the truth when she said Odysseus was his father, and she was an exceptionally modest lady. But it looks as though you wouldn't just take an oath about yourself and your mother if you were asked to, but even about who made some slave woman pregnant — like the woman you say is my mother. (5) Do you think it is impossible for such a woman to become pregnant by some free man or other, or perhaps by her owner? Don't many Athenians have sex with their slave women, some of them secretly and some even openly? They're not all superior to Herakles, who didn't think it beneath him to make love to Iardanos' slave-girl, from whom the kings of Sardis were descended. (6) I suppose you don't believe that Klytairmnestra, the daughter of Tyndareus and wife of Agamemnon, lived with her husband but also made love with Aigistheus while he was away, and that Atreus' wife Aerope had intercourse with Thyestes, and that both in the past and in the present many other women married to famous and wealthy husbands have had sexual relations with other men and sometimes had children by them. But the slave woman you mention was so utterly faithful to her own husband that she never had sex with any other man. (7) And as regards yourself

and me, you insist that both of us are the sons of the person believed to be and referred to as our mother. But one could mention many Athenians, including some very famous ones, who were later shown to have been smuggled in secretly from outside and brought up although they were the sons of neither the father nor the mother to whom they were said to belong. You can see cases like this being acted out and narrated every time you go to a performance of comedy or tragedy — yet, nevertheless, you are absolutely certain that you know how and from whom you and I were born. (8) Don't you know that the law allows a man to be accused of slander if he insults someone without having clear evidence for the things he says?

**Citizen:** Well, I do know that free women often smuggle in children which aren't their own when they don't have any children themselves because they can't become pregnant, since every woman wants to keep her husband and her home, and at the same time there is no shortage of money for bringing up children. But the opposite happens with slaves — some of them kill their children before they are born, and some afterwards if they can avoid detection; sometimes their husbands even connive at it — they don't want the additional problem of having to look after a child when things are difficult enough for slaves as it is.

(9) **Slave:** That's quite true, but there are exceptions — like the slave woman who belonged to Oineos, the bastard son of Pandion. Oineos' herdsman at Eleutherai, and the herdsman's wife, not only didn't abandon their own children, but even took in and brought up as their own other children they found in the road, although they had no idea whose they were; and even afterwards they weren't willing to admit that these were not their own children. But perhaps you would have slandered Zethos and Amphion before it became known who they were, and sworn on oath that the sons of Zeus were slaves?

(10) The other man gave a hollow laugh.

**Citizen:** You're appealing to the tragedians for your evidence?

**Slave:** The Greeks believe them. Whatever heroic characters playwrights depict, they sacrifice to them as heroes, and one can see the shrines which have been built for them. And you should also please remember Priam's Phrygian slave woman, who looked after Alexander on Mount Ida as though he were her own son: she took him from her husband the herdsman, and didn't mind bringing up the child. They say that Telephos, the son of Auge and Herakles, wasn't brought up by a woman but by a hind. Do you think a hind is more likely to pity a child and look after it than a human being who happens to be a slave woman?

(11) Now if I did agree with you that those whom you mentioned really were my parents, how in the name of the gods do you know for certain that they were really of slave status? Or are you absolutely sure

that you know who their parents were, and ready to swear about each of them that they too had two slaves as their parents, and similarly with their parents in turn, and so on for all of them right to the beginning of the line? For clearly, if a single one of these ancestors is free-born, it is no longer properly possible to consider his descendants to be slaves. And it is not conceivable, my friend, that from generation unto generation (as they say) there should be any descent group in which there were not both unlimited numbers of free men and just as many who were slaves — as well as tyrants and kings, slaves who had been chained up and slaves who had been branded and traders and craftsmen and all other types of men there are, sharing all kinds of jobs and lifestyles, successes and failures. (12) Surely you know that poets trace the ancestry of so-called heroes right back to the gods in order to place the figure in question above criticism? Most of them are said to be descended from Zeus, in order to avoid having kings and the founders of cities and the heroes after whom they are named finding themselves in situations which are commonly regarded as bringing disgrace. But what if that is what human affairs are really like — as we and others wiser than ourselves assert? Then your descent can bring you no greater share in real freedom than to anyone supposed to be a plain slave, nor can it bring me any greater share in slavery. Unless you manage to trace your ancestry back to Zeus or Poseidon or Apollo, of course.

(13) **Citizen:** Look, let's forget all about family and ancestors, since you think one can't make any firm statements about it. Perhaps the circumstances of your birth will be found to have been like those of Amphion and Zethos, or Priam's son Alexander. But we all know that you yourself are in a condition of slavery.

**Slave:** Come, come: do you think that everyone who is in a condition of slavery is a real slave? Aren't there many men who are of free status who are held in a state of slavery unjustly? Some of them have appealed to a court of law and proved that they were free; others continue to put up with it till the end because they have no incontrovertible proof of their freedom, or because their so-called masters treat them humanely. (14) Think of Eumaios, son of Ktesios and grandson of Hormenos; he was the son of a man who was undeniably free and wealthy, but served Odysseus and Laertes as a slave in Ithaka. He had many opportunities to sail off home if he had wanted to, but he never thought it worthwhile. What about the many Athenians who were taken prisoner in Sicily — they served as slaves in Sicily and in the Peloponnese, although they were of free status. The same is true of those who were made prisoners in many other battles — some just for a short time until they found someone to ransom them, others until their deaths. (15) Then there was the occasion after the battle in which the Athenians were defeated at Akanthos, when Kallias' son was believed to have been in Thrace for

a long time as a slave, so that when he later escaped and returned, he started an argument about Kallias' estate and caused the next-of-kin a lot of trouble. I think myself that he was an imposter — he wasn't Kallias' son, but his groom, who looked very like the young man (he in fact died in the battle). He also spoke correct Greek and knew how to read and write.

But tens of thousands of others have suffered this misfortune. (16) I guess that at this very moment many of the people serving as slaves right here are free men. After all, when an Athenian is taken prisoner in war and shipped off to Persia or Thrace or Sicily and sold there, we don't say that such a free man is now a slave. On the other hand if some Thracian or Persian is brought here (and not simply one whose parents are ordinary free men, but even the son of a noble or king), we don't accept that he is free any longer. (17) Now at Athens and in many other communities there is a law which prevents anyone who really (*physei*) is a slave from ever attaining the status of a citizen. But no one would have denied citizenship to Kallias' son if he had in fact survived the battle, been captured, taken to Thrace, kept there for many years and frequently beaten. So there are occasions on which the law says that those unjustly in a state of servitude have not become slaves. (18) Now what on earth is it that you see me do or suffer that makes you say that you are certain I am a slave?

**Citizen:** You are fed by your master, you accompany him about and you do what he tells you: and if you don't, you are beaten.

**Slave:** Then you have proved that sons too are their fathers' slaves. Many poor men are attended by their sons when they go out to the gymnasium, or at dinners; and they are all fed by their fathers and often beaten by them, and they do whatever their fathers tell them to do. (19) Though as regards obeying and being beaten, you will argue that the pupils of schoolteachers are their slaves, and that teachers of gymnastics are the owners of their pupils, or anyone else who teaches anything. They all give them instructions and beat them if they don't obey.

**Citizen:** No doubt. But teachers of gymnastics and others can't chain their pupils up or sell them or send them to work in the tread-mill. Masters are allowed to do all these things.

(20) **Slave:** Perhaps you don't know that in many well-governed communities, fathers are permitted to do all the things you mention to their sons — chain them up, if they wish, and sell them, and something even more extreme than that: they are allowed to kill them without a trial and without stating their reason. But that doesn't go any further towards making them their fathers' slaves rather than their sons. And if I did indeed serve as a slave, and was truly a slave from the beginning, then why shouldn't I now be as free as anyone else; and conversely,

even if you are the son of people who are undeniably free, why shouldn't you be utterly and completely a slave?

(21) **Citizen:** I just can't see how I am to turn into a slave when I am actually free. But it is quite possible for you to become free, if your master manumits you.

**Slave:** But my dear friend, can no one become free even if his master doesn't manumit him?

**Citizen:** How on earth could he?

**Slave:** The way after the battle of Chaeronea the Athenians voted that the slaves who had fought together with them should be free; if the war had continued and Philip hadn't made peace so soon, many if not all the Athenians' slaves would have received their freedom, though they wouldn't have been manumitted by their own masters [see No. 89 above].

**Citizen:** I accept that, the community can make you free by a public act.

(22) **Slave:** Well now: you don't think I could free myself?

**Citizen:** If you got the money from somewhere and paid your master.

**Slave:** I don't mean that way; I mean the way Cyrus set free not just himself, but the whole of Persia, a huge number of people, without paying any money or being manumitted by his master. As you know, Cyrus was the †lamp-maker† of Astyages, and when he had the power and thought it opportune, he not only became free, but king over the whole of Asia at the same time.

**Citizen:** I take your point. Now how do you think I could become a slave?

(23) **Slave:** The way tens of thousands of people who are free sell themselves to become slaves in accordance with written contracts — and the terms are sometimes not at all moderate, but very exacting indeed.

The people who were present had accepted the drift of the argument so far, because they thought that it wasn't serious but rather a kind of logical exercise. But then they objected that it seemed absurd if every piece of evidence by which one could distinguish a slave from a free man were to be disallowed, and clever arguments could be set up to counter every single point. (24) So they moved away from the question of whether this particular man was really a slave, and considered instead what a slave actually is. They thought that if someone has full rights of ownership over someone so that he is able to do whatever he wants with him, just as with any other piece of property or livestock, then that person is correctly described as the slave of the man who owns him.

The man who had spoken in the argument about slavery again raised an objection: what did 'full rights of ownership' mean? (25) After all, there were many people who seemed to have owned a house or an

estate or a horse or an ox for a long period of time, and some of them had even inherited them from their parents, but they had no legal right to them. In the same way, a man or woman might be owned unjustly. There are several ways in which people come to possess slaves, just like other property: they can get them from someone else either as a gift or as an inheritance or by purchase, or they can have them right from the moment when they are born (these they call 'home-bred' slaves); and the third way of obtaining possession is by taking a prisoner in warfare or in a pirate raid and keeping him in servitude as a result; that, I suppose, is the earliest way of all. For the first people to be slaves can't have been descended from slaves, but will have been overpowered in a war or a raid, and forced to serve their captors as slaves. (26) So the morality of this most ancient method, from which all the others are derived, is extremely dubious and can't really be defended at all. As soon as these people have the opportunity to run away, there is nothing to stop them from being free again, since they were not legitimately enslaved; and therefore they cannot have been real slaves at any time. Sometimes they haven't just escaped from slavery themselves, but enslaved their masters in their turn — so, at the throw of a dice (as the saying goes), the whole situation was reversed.

One of those present suggested that these people themselves could no doubt not be called slaves, but that the name could properly be used of their children and the second and third generations after them.

(27) *Slave*: But how? If it is being captured that makes a man a slave, then shouldn't this be applied to those who are captured themselves much more than to the descendants? If it is not that but birth which is the criterion, then it is clear that since those who were captured were free men, their children could not be slaves either. Look at the example of the Messenians: after an interval of how many years was it that they got back both their freedom and their country? (28) After the Thebans had defeated the Spartans at Leuktra, they marched into the Peloponnese together with their allies and forced the Spartans to give up Messenia; they resettled all the people who were descended from those Messenians who had previously been the Spartans' slaves and were called Helots [369 BC]. No one says that the Thebans did this unjustly, but rather with great honour, and great justice. So if that method of getting possession of a slave from which all the others originated is unjust, then none of the others are likely to be either, and the word 'slave' cannot properly be used at all. (29) But perhaps the term 'slave' wasn't originally used like this — for a man for whose body money has been paid, or who is born from so-called slaves, as most people think; rather, for a servile and illiberal disposition. For we will all agree that many so-called slaves have the character of free men, while many free

men have very servile characters. It's like the terms 'noble' and 'well-born': people first used them to refer to those who were well-born in terms of virtue, without making any detailed examination of who their parents were. But later those with inherited wealth and status were called 'well-born' by some people. (30) There is clear evidence for this — for the old meaning of the word is still used for cocks, or horses, or hounds, just as it used to be for men. If you see a horse which is proud and restless and a keen runner, you don't ask whether its ancestors came from Arcadia or Media or Thessaly: you judge the horse itself and call it 'well-bred'. And if those who know about hounds see one which is swift and keen and good at tracking, they won't ask whether the breed is Carian or Spartan or anything else, they'll call it a 'noble' hound. The same is true of fighting-cocks and other animals.

(31) Clearly the same applies to human beings: if a man is well-born in terms of virtue, then he ought to be called 'noble', even if no one knows who his parents or ancestors were.

And it is not possible for anyone to be noble without being well-born, or to be well-born without being free. After all, if it were normal to use the words 'freedom' and 'slavery' for horses, cocks or hounds, we wouldn't make any distinction between those which are 'noble' and those which are 'free', or between those which are 'servile' and those which are 'low-born'. (32) Similarly it isn't right to distinguish between men who are 'noble and well-born' and men who are 'free'; the same people must be both. Nor should some people be called 'common and base' and a different group 'slaves'.

So our argument leads us to the conclusion that it is not the philosophers who have changed the meanings of these words, but the foolish majority of mankind, in their ignorance.

### 236. Horace, *Satires*, 2, 7.75–94

According to traditional Roman morality, it was necessary to prove that you were a good man (your *virtus*) through your own actions; inherited status did not suffice in itself. Hence the Romans found it easy to accept Stoic ideas about the importance of spiritual freedom. Here Horace shows that a good slave can have more 'freedom' than a bad master — but we should note that at the end of the poem he betrays his irritation at his slave's preaching: 'If you don't get out of here quickly, you'll be assigned to my Sabine farm as the ninth labourer' (117f.).

Are you my owner — you, who submit to orders from so many powerful forces and persons? You, who would not be freed from fear and dread if you were touched three or even four times by the

Praetor's rod? Furthermore (and this should have just as much force as what I have just been saying): whether the man subject to a slave is called a substitute (according to your usage) or a fellow-slave — what am I with respect to you? Why, you who order me around are some other person's wretched slave, moved about like a puppet whose strings are pulled by someone else.

Is anyone free then? The Wise Man, who is in full command over himself, who is not afraid of poverty or death or imprisonment, who has the courage to defy his desires and scorn public respect, who is complete in himself and polished and rounded off so that nothing outside him can stick to the smooth surface, against whom Fortune's onslaught always fails. Are you able to identify any one of these characteristics as your own? Some woman asks you for five talents; she annoys you, throws you out, pours cold water over you, summons you back. Tear this shameful halter from your neck: come on, say, 'I am free, I am free.' You can't do it; your mind is oppressed by a master who is not gentle, but goads you with sharp pricks until you are exhausted, and drives you on in spite of your resistance.

### 237. Seneca, *Dialogue 9: The Tranquillity of the Mind*, 10.3

The Stoic belief that all men are subject to a capricious Fortune was one reason for dismissing status distinctions as comparatively less important than moral freedom. It also paved the way for the Christian's subjection of all men to a rather more benevolent Godhead.

We are all fettered to Fortune. For some, the chain is made of gold, and is loose; for others it is tight and filthy — but what difference does that make? All of us are surrounded by the same kind of captivity, and even those who hold others bound are in bonds themselves, unless you happen to think that the handcuff the guard wears on his left wrist hurts less than the prisoner's. Public offices hold one man captive, wealth another; some are disadvantaged by high birth, some by humble birth; some have to put up with other people's commands, some with their own. Some have to stay in one place because they've been exiled, others because they've been appointed to a priesthood — all life is slavery.

[The *Flamen Dialis*, the priest of the state cult of Jupiter, was not allowed to spend more than three nights in succession outside the boundary of the city of Rome.]

### 238. Seneca, *Letters*, 47

The most famous plea that slaves were human beings who should be treated accordingly, with the greatest influence on Renaissance humanists, occurs in the *Moral Letters* of Seneca. But it is primarily a rhetorical exercise, and Seneca is much more interested in writing exciting Latin than in improving the conditions of his readers' slaves.

(1) It gave me great pleasure to learn from those who had been to see you that you live on terms of familiarity with your slaves. This is appropriate to your wisdom and scholarship.

'These people are slaves.' No: they are human beings.

'These people are slaves.' No: they are those with whom you share your roof.

'These people are slaves.' No: when you consider how much power Chance can exert over you both, they are fellow-slaves.

'These people are slaves.' No: when you consider how much Chance can exert over you both, they are fellow-slaves.

(2) That's why I find it ludicrous that there should be people who think it shameful to have dinner with their slave — what reason is there for this attitude, except for the arrogant social convention that when a master dines, he should have a crowd of slaves standing all around him? While he eats more than he can hold down, and burdens his stomach, bloated by his excessive greed and no longer capable of fulfilling the functions of a stomach, so that he vomits it all out with greater labour than that with which he swallowed it — (3) meanwhile his wretched slaves aren't even allowed to move their lips in order to speak. Every sound is suppressed by the threat of a beating; and not even unintentional noises like coughing, sneezing or hiccups are exempted from chastisement. If the silence is disturbed by any sound, it must be atoned for by a dire punishment. Throughout the night they stand there hungry and silent. (4) That's how it comes about that those who aren't allowed to talk in the presence of their master will tell tales about him behind his back. But those slaves who were allowed to talk not just in their master's presence, but actually with their master, were ready to offer their neck on his behalf, and to turn aside onto their own head danger that was threatening him: they talked when they served dinner, but kept quiet when they were being tortured. (5) Then there is that proverb which originates from the same arrogant attitude, that we have as many enemies as we have slaves. They aren't our enemies unless we make them so. I shan't mention some other cruel and inhumane ways in which we would be mistreating them even if they were dumb beasts instead of human beings — when, for instance, we lie down to dine, and someone has to clear up the vomit, while another stands at the

bottom of the couch to remove the leavings of the drunken guests. (6) There is someone whose task it is to carve expensive fowl. He guides his well-trained hand around the bird's breast and rump as he carves it up; he has no personal motive for doing this whatsoever. What a wretch, to live for no other purpose than to carve up fattened birds skilfully – unless the man who teaches someone this skill because it is going to give him pleasure is more to be pitied than the slave who has no choice but to learn it! (7) Another pours the wine; he is dressed like a woman and has great difficulty in not betraying his age. (8) Another, whose job it is to assess the behaviour of the guests, stands there uneasily and checks who is sufficiently unrestrained with regard to his appetite or his tongue to be invited back tomorrow. There are those who prepare the menu and know their master's taste with utter precision, so that they can judge what sorts of things have the right savour to wake him up, the appearance to give him pleasure, the novelty to put him back on his feet when he feels sick; what he finds boring because he has had too much of it, what he craves for on any particular day. He cannot bear to eat with these people, and considers that it detracts from his prestige if he has to touch the same table as his slave. Heavens above – how many owners does he have out of that lot? (9) I saw Callistus' one-time master stand at the door and be left to wait while others were asked inside – the man who had written out the advertisement for him and had put him up for sale amongst a group of particularly worthless slaves. That slave had been put in the first batch of ten at the sale (where all the auctioneer cares about is testing his voice), and he paid his master back what he deserved: he in his turn turned him away, he too did not consider him worthy to be in his house. His master sold Callistus: and how much Callistus cost his master! (10) You must think carefully about the fact that the man whom you call your slave is born from the same seed, enjoys the same sky, breathes like you, dies like you! You are as able to recognise a free man in him as he to recognise a slave in you. After the destruction of Varus' army, Chance pulled down many men of respectable birth who were expecting to attain senatorial rank as the result of a military career; it made one of them a shepherd, another a door-keeper. Will you be contemptuous of a man whose status is one which you may yourself be reduced to – for all that you're contemptuous of it?

(11) I don't want to let myself go on this vast topic, and give you a homily on how to treat slaves: we behave towards them in a proud, cruel and insulting fashion. The sum of what I wish to preach is this: treat those whose status is inferior to your own in the same manner as you would wish your own superior to treat you. Each time you remember how much you are entitled to do to your slave, you must remember also just how much your own master is entitled to do to you. (12) 'But I don't have any master,' you object. The world is still

young: perhaps there will come a time when you do have one. Don't you know how old Hecuba was when she began to serve as a slave, or Croesus, or the mother of Darius, or Plato or Diogenes? (13) Be forgiving towards your slave, even courteous, let him take part in your conversations, and when you discuss important family issues, and when you have dinner. At this point all those who go in for luxurious living will scream at me: 'There's no more undignified and degrading way to behave than that.' Yet I'll catch these very same people kissing the hand of someone else's slave as a mark of respect. (14) Can't you even see this, that our ancestors took away from slave-owners any grounds for others to suspect them of insulting behaviour, and from slaves any grounds for feeling that they were being treated in an insulting fashion? They gave the owner the title 'Head of the household', and the slaves 'Members of the household' – that's the term which is still used in mimes. They instituted a religious festival [the Saturnalia], not so that masters should eat with their slaves on that day only, but so that they should always do so. They allowed masters to have a position of respect and to administer justice within the household; they thought that the household was a state in miniature.

(15) 'What's your conclusion? Do you want me to invite all my slaves to eat with me?' Not more so than that you should invite all your children. You would be mistaken if you thought that I was going to ignore some just because they do low-status work, which is what you consider that of mule-drovers or cowherds to be. I'm not going to assess them according to their jobs, but according to their moral character. Everyone makes his own moral character: jobs are assigned by Chance. You must invite some people to dine with you because they deserve it, and others so that they may deserve it in future. If there is anything slavish in such people because of their unpleasant jobs, then association with men of free birth will drive it out of them. (16) My dear Lucilius, you mustn't look for friends only in the Forum and in the Council chamber; if you look carefully, you'll find them in your own home too. Good wood often warps if no craftsman uses it: test it, see if you can use it. Just as a man who doesn't look at a horse he's going to buy but at the saddle and bridle instead is a fool, so someone who assesses a person by his clothes or social rank – which is wrapped round us just like our clothes – is an utter idiot. (17) 'The man is a slave.' Perhaps he is free in his heart. 'The man is a slave.' Is that going to harm him? Show me who isn't a slave: some are slaves to sex, others to money, some to social prestige, all are slaves to hope and fear. I'll give you some examples: the man of consular rank who acts as the slave of some old woman [because he wants a legacy from her]; the rich man who's after a young slave girl; I'll show you some young men from the best families who have made themselves the property of popular



actors – and no kind of slavery is more dishonourable than that which is entered into voluntarily. So there can be no reason why you should let these high-principled people stop you from showing yourself to your slaves as a pleasant person and not as their proud superior. Let them respect you rather than fear you. (18) I suppose that someone will say that what I'm now doing is inciting slaves to put on the cap of freedom, dethroning masters from their superior position because I said 'Let them respect their master instead of fearing him'. 'What you must mean is this,' they'll say: 'They should respect us in the same way as clients do, as dependants who call on us to pay their respects as a sign of their humble status.' Anyone who's going to say that, will have forgotten that what is enough for a god isn't too little for slave-owners. Whoever is respected, is loved too: and love cannot be mixed up with fear. (19) So I think that you are absolutely right that you don't want to be feared by your slaves, and that when you punish them, you do so with words: beatings are for punishing dumb animals. Not everything that displeases us also does us harm. Our luxury has made us so mad that we are angry at anything that doesn't correspond exactly to our whim. (20) We are putting on the attitudes of tyrants – for they too have fits of anger, as though someone was doing them harm, and quite forget both their own position of power, and the powerlessness of others: yet the superiority of their rank makes them absolutely proof against any danger of being harmed. It isn't that they don't know this, but rather that by complaining they can find an opportunity to do harm themselves: they find that they are hurt in order to hurt others. (21) I don't want to keep you any longer: I know that I don't have to preach to you. Among the other advantages of good manners is this: that they satisfy their own demands, and thus remain constant. Bad manners are fickle and ever-changing – not improving, just changing into something else.

### 239. Seneca, *On Benefits*, 3, 17

Examples of loyal slaves were important evidence in favour of the Stoic proposition that slaves were moral agents who deserved to be treated humanely. When historians or rhetoricians recounted the story of the Roman civil wars, it was paradoxical that slaves and freedmen should sometimes have remained more faithful to their masters and patrons than sons to their fathers (see Velleius Paterculus, 2, 67; Appian, *Roman Civil Wars*, 4, 43.179–48.208; and Valerius Maximus, 6, 8). Seneca argues that people who have natural or social obligations towards one another – like sons towards their fathers – can nevertheless confer benefits which are beyond the call of duty. To prove that this may be so for sons, Seneca shows that it is even possible

for the lowest form of human being, the slave – for according to Stoic doctrine (see Epictetus, 4.1) it is only the slave's body that is owned by his master, while the soul may remain free, and thus able to behave virtuously – for example, by conferring benefits.

(3) He who is glad that he has been done a good turn will experience that same pleasure all the time, and he will be happy because he considers, not the thing he has received, but the mind of the person from whom he received it. A good turn continually pleases a person who is grateful, but pleases an ungrateful person only once [i.e. at the moment when it is performed]. (4) How can you make a comparison between these two different types – one is worried and uneasy, as men who fraudulently deny their debts tend to be; he does not respect his parents as he ought, nor his tutor or his schoolteachers. But the other is cheerful and happy as he looks out for a chance to repay his gratitude, and he experiences great joy from this very feeling. He isn't wondering how he can possibly escape his obligations, but in what way he can repay more fully and more richly not just his parents and friends, but also persons of lower social status than himself. For even if he has been done a good turn by his slave, he does not consider from whom, but what it was that he received.

(Ch. 18.1) Yet there are some people, like Hecaton, who question whether a slave is able to do his master a good turn. Now some philosophers make the following distinction: some things are benefits, some things are obligations, some things are services rendered; a benefit is the sort of thing that an outsider might bestow (an outsider is defined as someone who without blame might have done nothing); obligations are proper to a son or wife, or to those persons whom ties of kinship encourage and oblige to assist you; while services are rendered by a slave, whose status places him in a position where nothing that he might do would give him a claim upon his superior.

(2) But anyone who denies that a slave may sometimes do his master a good turn is ignorant of human law – for what is crucial is the intention of whoever confers the benefit, not his status. Virtue's door is barred to no man. It is open to everyone, it admits everyone, it invites everyone inside, whether they are free-born or freedmen or slaves or kings or exiles; it does not select on grounds of family or wealth; Virtue is satisfied with man just as he is. What security could we find against sudden disasters, what great prize would there be for our souls to strive for, if a clear-cut example of virtuous behaviour could be made void by the fortuitous rank of the doer? (3) If what a slave does for his owner is not a benefit, then nor is what anyone does for their king, or what a soldier does for his commander – for if one only has *obligations* towards superiors, then it makes no difference what the nature of those bonds of authority may be. If a slave can't

have a benefit ascribed to him because he cannot escape and is afraid of extreme punishments, then the same objection holds for anyone with a king or a military commander over him, since these persons have the same rights over him even if under a different label. But people *can* bestow benefits upon their kings and their commanders; so it follows that they can also do so for their owners. (4) It is within a slave's power to be just, to be courageous, to be great-hearted; it follows that it is also within his power to confer a benefit, since this too is an essential element of a virtuous character. Indeed, slaves can bestow benefits upon their masters so obviously that the benefit they gave was often their masters' very survival.

(Ch. 19.1) It cannot be doubted that it is within a slave's power to bestow a benefit on anybody at random — so why shouldn't he be able to do the same for his owner? 'Because,' runs the objection, 'if he gives his master money, he cannot thereby become his creditor. Otherwise he would be putting his master under an obligation towards him every day — he accompanies him on his journeys, looks after him when ill, works hard to cultivate his farm; but all these actions, which would be called benefits if they were to be performed by an outsider, are services when they are performed by a slave. For a benefit is something which someone has done who was entitled to choose *not* to do it. But a slave does not have the power to refuse; thus he does not give, he merely obeys — nor has he any right to claim that he has done something when he was in no position *not* to do it.'

(2) Even if I accept these premisses, I shall win my argument, and raise slaves up to a position where in many respects they shall be free men. First of all, tell me this: if I can show you someone who fights to protect his master without any regard for himself, and when pierced through with wounds nevertheless sheds the last drops of blood in his veins, who tries by means of the delay caused by his own death to allow his owner time to escape — are you going to deny that this man conferred a benefit, just because he happens to be a slave? (3) If I can show you someone whom none of a tyrant's promises could entice to betray his owner's secrets, who was terrified by no threats and vanquished by no tortures, so that he confounded the suspicions of the investigating judge to the full extent that he could, and paid for his loyalty with his life — are you going to deny that this man conferred a benefit upon his owner, just because he happens to be a slave? (4) Consider this: isn't an example of virtuous behaviour in a slave greater to the extent that it is rarer, and something that deserves even more gratitude, for the following reason: that even though authority is disliked, and the constraints of necessity are hard to bear, love for his master has nevertheless overcome the general resentment at serving as a slave in this one particular person. So the act has not ceased to be a benefit because it was performed by a

slave: on the contrary, it has become a greater benefit, because not even his status as a slave was able to deter him from it. (Ch. 20.1) Anyone who thinks that slavery permeates the whole of a man's character, is wrong. The better part of him escapes. Bodies are under an obligation to the owners to whom they are assigned; the mind however is subject to its own authority, which is so free and unrestrained that it cannot even be held within this prison within which it is enclosed, and prevented from using its natural energy to perform great deeds and escape into the heavens as a companion to the gods. (2) So it is just the body which Chance hands over to the owner; that is what he buys and sells — the bit within cannot be given into ownership. Whatever comes from that interior part, is free. And indeed we cannot order our slaves to do everything, and they aren't obliged to obey us in everything — they wouldn't obey orders contrary to the interests of the State, and they wouldn't become accomplices in any criminal undertaking.

(Ch. 21.1) There are certain actions which the law neither requires nor forbids; it is in this area that the slave finds the opportunity to confer a benefit. So long as he does the things which are normally required of a slave, he performs a service; but when he does more than a slave has to do, it becomes a benefit — when it has shifted into the sphere which we associate with friendship, it ceases to be called a service. (2) Now there are certain things which an owner has a responsibility to provide for his slave, like food and clothing allowances; no one has ever called these things benefits. But if a master has been kind to his slave, given him a liberal education, taught him those skills which free-born men are taught — that is a benefit. And conversely the same can happen on the slave's part. Whatever there is that exceeds the prescribed obligations of a slave and is performed freely, and not as the result of a command, is a benefit, so long as it is of such magnitude that it would have been described as such if it had been performed by some other person.

(Ch. 22.1) According to Chrysippus, a slave is a worker whom we have hired for life. In just the same way as a hired worker confers a benefit if he does more than his contract has committed him to do, so also with a slave. When he overcomes the limitations of his status by showing goodwill towards his master, and surpasses what his master has a right to expect by daring to do something noble which would bring honour even to those born into some higher rank, we are confronted with a benefit performed within the household community.

(2) Surely you can't think it fair that those people with whom we are angry when they do less than they should, shouldn't deserve our gratitude when they do more than is required or is normal? Let me tell you the circumstances under which an action is not a benefit: when one could have said, 'It makes no difference whether he wanted to do it



or not.' But if he did something which he was entitled to refuse, then the fact that he wanted to do it ought to be praised.

(3) A benefit and an injury are polar opposites; a man who can receive an injury from his master can also confer a benefit upon him. But there are persons appointed to investigate injuries inflicted upon slaves by their masters, whose duty it is to restrain sadism and sexual passion and meanness in providing slaves with the necessities of life. [This was the responsibility of the City Prefect at Rome, and of the governors in the provinces: see Nos. 32 and 226 above.] So we must conclude that this is not a question of an *owner* obtaining a benefit from a *slave*, but rather of one human being obtaining a benefit from another human being.

(4) To sum up: the slave did everything that lay within his power: he conferred a benefit upon his owner — it lies within *your* power not to accept a benefit coming from a slave. But who is so great that Chance may not force him to turn for help even to those of the lowest social status?

(Ch. 23.1) I shall now relate many different examples of such benefits, some of them quite contradictory. One man gave his owner his life, another helped him to die; one saved him when he was in danger of death, and — as though that instance wasn't impressive enough — another saved him by dying himself; one assisted his master's suicide, another frustrated it.

(2) In the eighteenth book of his *Annals*, Claudius Quadrigarius tells how, when Grumentum was being besieged and had reached a state of utter desperation, two fugitive slaves crossed over and gave assistance to the enemy. Later, when the victorious army was running amock throughout the captured city, these two ran on ahead by a route that was well known to them to the house in which they had served as slaves, and pushed their mistress along in front of them; when anyone asked who she was, they proclaimed that she was their mistress and had treated them most cruelly, and that she was being led off to be punished by them. They brought her outside the city walls and hid her very carefully until the enemy's anger had cooled down; afterwards, when the soldiers had had their fill of slaughter and soon conducted themselves like civilised Romans once again, they too returned to their normal behaviour and gave their mistress back her freedom.

(3) She manumitted them both on the spot and didn't think it degrading to have received her life from people over whom she had had the power of life and death. Indeed, she might rather have congratulated herself on the fact that if she had been saved by someone else, the gift would have been a matter of ordinary and unexceptional mercy, but since she had been saved in this way, the story made her famous, and she became an example to Rome as well as Grumentum. (4) When everyone was

looking after their own interests, in the middle of the enormous confusion of the city's capture, they all deserted her except for these two deserters; and they, in order to show what the reason for that first desertion had been, transferred their loyalty from the victors to their prisoner by pretending to be killers. The greatest thing about the good deed that they did was that they thought that it was worth pretending to kill their mistress, in order to stop her from really being killed. Believe me, to do something noble at the cost of being thought a criminal is not typical of a humble, let alone a servile, spirit.

(5) Vettius, the leader of the Marsians, was being taken to the Roman commander; his slave snatched a sword from the very same soldier by whom he was being dragged along, and first of all killed his master and then said, 'Now it is time for me to look after my own interests — I have already set my master free'; and so he killed himself with a single blow. Give me a more glorious instance of a slave saving his master!

(Ch. 24.1) Caesar was besieging Corfinium, and Domitius was blockaded inside; he ordered a physician who was a slave of his to give him some poison. When he saw how reluctant he was, he said, 'What are you hesitating for, as though this is something entirely within your power. I ask for death, and I am armed.' He promised to do as he had been told and prepared a harmless drink for him to take; when this had put him to sleep, the slave went to Domitius' son and said, 'Order me to be kept under guard until you can tell from the outcome whether or not I have given your father poison.' Domitius lived, and in due course was granted his life by Caesar; but his slave had granted him his life first.

(Ch. 25.1) During the Civil War, there was a slave who hid his master, and put on his rings and his clothes, and went to meet the police and told them that he had no wish to impede them from carrying out their commands, and then offered them his neck. What a man he proved himself to be — ready to die for his owner at a time when it was a sign of unusual loyalty not to want one's master's death: to be seen to be forgiving when everything in the political world was heartless, and to be trustworthy when the political world was utterly without faith. Or to desire death as the prize for being loyal, at a time when enormous rewards were being offered for treachery.

(Ch. 26.1) I cannot pass over some instances from our own era. In the reign of Tiberius, the rage for prosecutions was so widespread, and indeed almost universal, that it did more harm to a city at peace than all the civil wars put together. The mutterings of drunkards were eagerly taken up, everything you did was dangerous, including harmless jokes. Nothing was safe. Anything was an excuse for atrocities. No one asked what was the fate of the accused, since there could be only one

outcome.

(2) A man of praetorian rank called Paulus was at a dinner wearing a ring with a large gem engraved with a portrait of Tiberius Caesar. It would be stupid for me to try to find a euphemism for saying that he made use of a chamber-pot. Immediately this action was noticed by Maro, one of the notorious informers of the period, and immediately also a slave of the man for whom this trap had been set removed the ring from his drunken master's finger. When Maro appealed to the diners as witnesses that the Emperor's image had been polluted, and was already drawing up a formal indictment, the slave showed them the ring on his own hand. Anyone who dismisses this man as a mere slave will also say that Maro was an ideal dinner companion.

(Ch. 27.1) In the times of the Divine Augustus, a man's words were not yet so dangerous, but they could cause trouble. At a dinner, a man of senatorial rank called Rufus had prayed that Caesar would not return safely from the journey that he was planning – for, he added, all the bulls and calves that were going to be sacrificed in thanksgiving for his return were praying for the same thing. There were some who listened carefully to these words. As soon as it was dawn, the slave who had been standing at the bottom of his couch during the dinner told him what he had said during the meal while he was drunk, and urged him to be the first to tell Caesar and be his own accuser. (2) He accepted this advice and went to meet Caesar as he was on his way down to the Forum. He swore that he hadn't known what he was thinking the previous day, and prayed that it would recoil upon himself and upon his own children, and asked the emperor to forgive him and restore him to favour. (3) When the emperor had said that he would do so, he said, 'No one will believe that you have taken me back into your favour unless you give me something as a present,' and he asked for a sum of money which would not have been rejected as mean even by a close friend; and he got it. The emperor commented that, 'For the sake of my own purse I shall have to take care never to be angry with you in future!' (4) The emperor acted honourably in pardoning him, and in being so liberal as well as forgiving. Of course, anyone who hears about this example has to praise the emperor, but only after he has first praised the slave. It goes without saying that the slave who did this was granted his freedom. But it wasn't for free: the money which the emperor had paid out represented the cost of his manumission.

(Ch. 28.1) After all these many examples, can it still be doubted that an owner can sometimes be done a good turn by his slave? Why should a man's status diminish the value of his action, instead of the action raising the man's status? Everyone is made up of the same elements and comes from the same origin; no one is more honourable than another, unless his mind is more upright and better suited to good

habits. (2) Aren't those people who display the masks of their ancestors in their halls and place long lists of the names of their families with all the complicated branchings of family trees in the porches of their houses, merely well-known rather than truly noble? The same universe is everybody's parent; from it everyone can trace their ancestry, whether through high or low estate. Don't be deceived by people who when they find famous names missing when they make up their list of ancestors, fill in the space by inserting the name of a god. (3) You should not look down on any man, even if the names of his ancestors are forgotten and Chance has given him little help. Whether your ancestors include freedmen or slaves or foreigners, you should show some pride and ignore anything dishonourable in your immediate background; for right at the beginning of the line, great nobility awaits you. (4) Why does our pride lead us to such stupidity that we think it beneath us to accept benefits from slaves, so that we are obsessed by their rank and ignore their merits? Are you going to call another man a slave when you are yourself enslaved – to sex or food or a prostitute, if not to prostitutes in general as their common property? (5) You are going to call another man a slave? Where are those bearers taking you in that plush litter? And those attendants in the funny raincoats, dressed up to look like soldiers – where are they going to take you? To some slave door-keeper's door, to the gardens owned by some slave who doesn't even have a prescribed series of duties to perform. And then you deny that you can be done a good turn by your own slave, when you think you've been done a good turn when someone else's slave deigns to give you a formal greeting! (6) What sort of contradiction is this? At one and the same time you look down on slaves, and try to win their favour; when you are inside your own house, you behave arrogantly and despotically, when you are outside, you behave humbly, and allow yourself to be despised to the same extent as you yourself despise others.

#### 240. Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, 2, 18

Another powerful argument to convince intellectuals that some men of slave status were actually as truly noble as any free citizen, was that some philosophers had been slaves.

Phaedon of Elis was one of those who followed Socrates, and he was a very close friend of Socrates and of Plato. Plato used his name for the title of that wonderful book about the immortality of the soul. This Phaedon was a slave of excellent [literally 'a free man's'] physical appearance and character; some writers state that as a boy he had been

forced into prostitution by his owner, who ran a brothel. Cebes, who belonged to Socrates' circle, is said to have bought him at Socrates' suggestion, and have given him a philosophical education. He later became a famous philosopher, and his extremely well-written essays about Socrates can still be read.

There were quite a few other slaves who later became famous philosophers. One of them was Menippus, whose writings Marcus Varro imitated in the *Satires*, which some people entitle *Cynic* but he himself called *Menippean*. And there was also Pompilius, the slave of Theophrastus the Peripatetic, and a slave of Zeno the Stoic who was called Persaeus, and of Epicurus, whose name was Mys; they were all considerable philosophers.

Diogenes the Cynic also served as a slave for a time; but he had been sold into slavery although of free birth. When Xenocrates the Corinthian wanted to buy him, he was asked whether there was any skill that he had learnt, and Diogenes replied, 'I know how to rule free men.' Xenocrates was so impressed by his reply that he bought him, gave him his freedom, and put him in charge of his children, saying, 'Take my children and rule them.'

The memory of the noble philosopher Epictetus, since he was also a slave, is so fresh in our minds that I do not have to write about it as though it were something which has been forgotten.

#### 241. St Theodoret of Cyrrhus' commentary on St Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 7.21–3

The idea that a person's legal status affected only his body, so that quite different criteria had to be applied to see whether his soul – and therefore his *real* character – was slave or free, could be accepted and developed without difficulty by Christians. The abolition of slavery as an institution did not occur to them, and would not have interested them: the liberation of every man's soul did. (The evidence for the hypothesis that early Christian communities contained an above-average proportion of slaves is slight, and statements ascribing abolitionist tendencies to heretical groups like the *circumcelliones* in North Africa merely show that this was one of the most terrible crimes an opponent could be accused of.) St Paul had returned the fugitive slave Onesimos to his owner (No. 213 above), and in his *First Letter to the Corinthians*, he tells slaves to obey their masters and not run away.

At the same time, the terminology of slave-ownership was metaphorically applied to salvation: the word *Redemption* means buying a slave his freedom, as this fifth-century Syrian bishop's commentary on St Paul makes clear.

(21) 'Are you who have been called by Christ a slave? It shouldn't concern you; even if you are able to gain manumission, you should accept your slave status all the more.' – God's Grace recognises no difference between being a slave and being a master. So you should not try to escape from your status as a slave on the grounds that it is degrading for the Christian Faith. And even if it is possible for you to win manumission, you must stay and be a slave, and await the reward you will obtain for this. This is hyperbole, but it is not pointless: he is telling you not to use religion as a pretext for running away from slavery. And he also offers you quite a different consolation:

(22) 'The slave who has been called by Christ becomes Christ's freedman; and in the same way, the free man who has been called becomes Christ's slave.' – It is our custom to call someone who is an ex-slave a freedman; Paul applies this term to the slave who has been blessed by Faith. He calls the free man Christ's slave, and the slave his freedman, both in order to teach those who are free that they have a master, Christ, and similarly to teach slaves that they have attained true freedom. For no one is so truly free as he who has been set free from sin; and no one endures a slavery as grievous as that of the man subject to the slavery of the passions.

(23) 'You have been bought free for a price: do not become the slaves of human masters.' – This ruling does not contradict what he has just said: he is ordering us not to have the thoughts of a slave, whether we are labelled slaves or addressed as free men. And he has cleverly demonstrated that both slaves and their masters are actually fellow-slaves by saying that both categories 'have been bought free for a price': for the Master has redeemed you both for the price of his own blood.

#### 242. Augustine, *Commentary on Psalm 99*, 7 (PL 37, 1275)

In a commentary on the Psalms, an African Latin bishop made use of the idea that just because a redeemed slave became a freedman, his obligations towards his *patronus* did not cease.

All slavery is filled with bitterness: all who are tied to slave status complain at having to serve. But you must not be afraid of the service of this Master: there will be no groaning, no grumbling, no dissatisfaction here. No one wishes to be sold away from this household, since it is so wonderful that we should all have been bought back ('redeemed'). It is a great joy, my brothers, to be a slave in this great household, even a slave with chains on his feet. You must not be afraid to trust your Master, chained slaves: blame your own deserts for your chains; have

faith in your chains, if you want them to become like adornments. It was not without meaning, nor without listening to people, that the psalmist said: 'May the groaning of those who are in chains reach unto your presence' (78,11).

'Serve the Master in joy.' The master's slavery is free; slavery is free when it is charity, and not necessity, that enforces slavery. 'You, brothers, have been called to be freed,' said the Apostle; 'Only you must not let your freedom give an opportunity to the flesh; you must be slaves to one another, because of the charity given by the Holy Spirit' (*Galatians*, 5.13). Charity makes you a slave, after the truth has made you a free man. 'If you remain faithful to my Word,' said the Evangelist, 'You will really be my pupils; you will recognise the Truth, and the Truth will set you free' (*John*, 8.31f.). You are both a slave and a free man; you are a slave, because that is what you were made; but from that status you have become free, because you love Him who made you. Do not complain at having to serve; your complaints will not bring it about that you cease serving, but that you serve as a bad slave. You are the Master's slave, and the Master's freedman; you shouldn't want to be set free with the result that you leave the household of Him who set you free.

#### 243. Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1, 10

One of the finest arguments in favour of treating slaves humanely was presented by a Roman pagan in the fifth century AD. Like Athenaeus' *Banqueting Sophists* (No. 80), the *Saturnalia* is in the form of a banquet at which a number of well-read members of elite society discuss a whole series of different problems with reference to Latin (and occasionally Greek) literature. The dinner party is so called because it takes place during the religious festival with which slaves were specially associated (see Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 4, 14.4). An unwelcome guest bearing the Christian name Evangelus (corresponding to Athenaeus' Cynic Kynoukos) suggests that the participation of slaves degrades this pagan festival, and a leading representative of pagan culture, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, replies with *exempla* taken from Livy and Aulus Gellius, and arguments from Seneca and other classical moralists.

Slavery did not, of course, disappear in the early Middle Ages, as is clear (for instance) from many of the early lives of Saints; and we may wonder whether the Christian or pagan contemporaries of these philosophers treated their slaves any better than their ancestors had done.

(22) Philochorus says that it was Cecrops who first set up an altar in Attica to Saturnus and Ops, revering these two gods as Jupiter and

the Earth, and instituting the custom that when the crops and fruits had been gathered in, the heads of households should all eat together with the slaves with whom they had endured the hard labour of cultivating the land. For God is pleased at the respect shown to him by slaves, and at contemplating their hard work. That is why, following foreign tradition, we sacrifice to this god with head uncovered.

(23) I think that we have already shown clearly that the *Saturnalia* used to be celebrated on just one day, December the nineteenth, but was later extended to three; first when Caesar added one day to December, and then as a result of Augustus' edict proclaiming that the festival of the *Saturnalia* should last for three days, beginning on the seventeenth and ending on the nineteenth, which was previously the one single day on which they were held. In addition, the celebration of the *Sigillaria* makes the period of public enjoyment and religious activity last for seven whole days.'

(Ch. 11.1) At this point Evangelus interrupted and said, 'I can't bear this parade of knowledge and display of rhetoric by Praetextatus any longer. Just now he asserted that it was in honour of some god that slaves feasted together with their masters, as though the gods care about slaves, or any intelligent man would throw his home open to the accusation of admitting such degrading company; and now he wants to ascribe some religious function to the *Sigillaria*, an opportunity for children who can't yet walk to play with clay masks. Just because he is a recognised authority on ritual, he's smuggling in all sorts of superstitions. I suppose we're not allowed to disbelieve Praetextatus just once in a while.'

(2) Everyone recoiled in horror at this, but Praetextatus himself smiled.

'I'm quite happy that you should think me superstitious, and someone unworthy of belief, so long as I cannot give reasons to demonstrate the truth of both of these statements of mine. Let's talk about slaves first. Were you joking, or do you seriously think that there is a category of human being which the immortal gods do not think worthy of their care and providence? Or perhaps you won't recognise slaves as being human at all? Now listen how angry heaven once was at the way a slave was punished. (3) In 280 BC a man called Autronius Maximus had his slave beaten and driven round the Circus with his head tied to the forked stick (*patibulum*) before the start of the Games. Jupiter was so angry at this that he ordered someone called Annius in a dream to announce to the Senate that this deed of extreme cruelty did not please him. (4) When Annius concealed the dream, an unexpected death carried off his son, and when he was equally negligent regarding a second message from Heaven, he himself was affected by a sudden physical infirmity. In the end he was carried to the Senate in a litter, on the advice of a

meeting of his friends, and he gave them the message, and he had hardly finished speaking when his good health returned to him and he was able to leave the Senate house on his own two feet. (5) As a result of a Senate Recommendation and a law proposed by Maenius, one day was added to these Circus games in order to propitiate Jupiter; it is called *instauraticius*, not, as some think, because of the forked stick – in Greek, *apo tou staurou* ('from the cross'), but from the word "recovery"; according to Varro, *instaurare* means to make good as new. So you see how much the highest of the gods cares for a slave. But what is the origin of your vast and senseless contempt for slaves? As though they weren't created from, and nourished by, the same elements as you, and don't draw breath from the same origin?

[There follows a long passage based directly on material taken from Seneca's 47th letter (Chs. 10ff.) on the idea that slaves are really fellow-slaves to Fortune, and ought to be treated as friends. Seneca's references to slaves who were ready to die for their masters leads Macrobius to cite some examples, probably taken from a first-century handbook of *exempla* like that of Valerius Maximus.]

(16) Do you want me to list the good qualities that have been proven to be in the heart of a slave? First of all there was the case of Urbinus; he had been ordered to be killed and was hiding on his estate at Reate. When his hiding-place was betrayed, one of his slaves put on his ring and clothes and, pretending to be his master, lay down in the bedroom which the people searching for him broke into; he offered his neck to the soldiers as they came in and received the stroke as though he were himself Urbinus. Later, after recovering his civic rights, Urbinus had a tomb made for him and added an inscription which referred to this great act of virtue.

(17) Demosthenes' freedman Aesopus knew that his patron had committed adultery with Julia. Despite being tortured at length, he steadfastly refused to betray his patron, until finally Demosthenes was confronted with the testimony of others who knew about it and admitted the crime himself.

(18) In case you may think that it is easy for a secret to be kept by just one person, Labienus' freedmen could be forced by no kind of torture to reveal where Labienus was hiding with their help.

No one should imagine that this kind of loyalty on the part of freedmen is due to their gratitude for having been granted their freedom, rather than to natural virtue; take the case of the goodwill a slave showed his master despite having himself been punished by that master. (19) Antius Restio was outlawed and fled, by night, unaccompanied; his other slaves set about plundering his property, but there was one slave who had been chained up and branded on the forehead;

after his master's condemnation, someone else took pity on him and set him free. He followed after his fugitive master and told him not to be afraid of him, since he knew that the degradation he had had to endure was due to Fortune and not to his master, and he hid him and looked after his needs. (20) Then, when he realised that the police agents were approaching, he throttled an old man who happened to be nearby, built a pyre and threw his body onto it. He set it on fire and went up to the people searching for Restio and told them that the proscribed man was paying the penalty he owed the slave, and was now suffering very much more severely than he had ever made the slave suffer. The story was believed and Restio was saved.

(21) After Caepio's criminal plot to kill Augustus had been detected and he had been condemned, a slave carried him down to the Tiber in a chest, took him to Ostia and brought him to his ancestral villa in Laurentine territory, travelling by night. Later he accompanied him on a journey by sea, was shipwrecked together with him, and secretly hid his master at Naples; when he was arrested by a centurion, he could not be induced to betray his master by bribes or threats.

(22) When Asinius Pollio was bringing heavy pressure to bear upon the people of Padua to supply him with money and weapons, and many owners went into hiding as a result, slaves who betrayed their masters were promised a reward in addition to their freedom. But we know that not one single slave was induced by the reward to betray his master.

(23) Now listen to this example not just of loyalty in a slave, but of an imaginative and inventive mind. When Grumentum was being besieged, some slaves left their mistress and went over to the enemy. Then when the city was captured, they attacked the house in accordance with a plan that they had agreed between them, dragged out their mistress with what appeared to be threats to punish her, and shouted to those they passed that at last they had an opportunity to punish their mistress for her cruelty. Pretending to drag her off to her death, they protected her with all due respect and loyalty.

(24) Consider that even nobility of character is to be found in this status group, preferring death to degradation. When Caius Vettius, the Pelignian from Italica, was arrested by his own troops in order to be handed over to Pompeius, his slave killed him and then committed suicide so as not to survive his master.

(25) When Caius Gracchus fled from the Aventine hill, his slave Euporus (or Philocrates, according to some sources), who had been an inseparable companion as long as there was some hope of getting to safety, and had protected him in any way he could, finally killed himself over Gracchus' dead body by ripping open his side with his own hand.

(26) After Africanus' father Publius Scipio had fought a battle

against Hannibal, his slave put the wounded man on a horse and brought him back to camp by himself; all the others had abandoned him.

(27) It may not be much to stand by a master who is alive; how do you reply to the fact that we find among slaves a desire to exact vengeance for their masters' deaths? When a slave of King Seleucus was serving the friend by whom his master had been killed, he stabbed him in the middle of the meal to avenge his master.

(28) In one and the same slave I can find two positive qualities which are highly esteemed even amongst the famous and noble: the ability to exercise power properly, and the great-mindedness to reject the exercise of power. (29) The Messenian Anaxilaus — the man who founded Messana in Sicily — was tyrant of Rhegium. He left two small children, and was satisfied to entrust them to the care of his slave Miccythus. He was a conscientious guardian, and his rule was so mild that the people of Rhegium did not think it a disgrace to be ruled by a slave. When the boys had grown up, he gave them both their property and their kingdom, and he himself took a small travel allowance and went away; he spent his old age most peacefully at Olympia.

(30) There are many examples showing how useful slaves have been to their communities. In the Punic War, when there were no more men who could be enrolled, those slaves who promised that they would fight in place of their masters were given citizenship and called *volones*, because they offered to do this of their own accord.

(31) And when the Romans had been defeated at the battle of Cannae [see No. 58 above], eight thousand slaves were bought free and served as soldiers; although the Romans captured by Hannibal could have been ransomed at less cost, the Republic nevertheless preferred to rely on slaves during this crisis. And after news had been received of the disastrous defeat at Lake Trasimene, freedmen were among those called up to serve.

(32) In the Social War, there is the famous example of the brave assistance given by twelve cohorts conscripted from freedmen. We are told that when Caius Caesar appointed men to take the places of those who had been lost, he even took slaves from his friends and made use of their courageous help.

Augustus Caesar levied several cohorts of freedmen for his German and Illyrian campaigns; he called them volunteers.

(33) You shouldn't imagine that such things only happen in our own Republic. When Zopyrion attacked the people of Borysthene, they freed their slaves, gave resident foreigners citizenship, remitted debts — and were thus able to repulse the enemy.

(34) When only fifteen hundred Spartans survived who were capable of bearing arms, the Spartan Cleomenes levied nine thousand warriors from manumitted slaves; and the Athenians also gave their slaves their

freedom when their state had no further manpower resources to fall back upon.

(35) Nor should you think that these virtues are to be found in slaves of the male sex only. There is an equally memorable action performed by slave women, and you won't easily find an example of a deed more useful to the State performed by any noblewoman.

(36) It is such a well-known fact that July 7th is the festival of slave women that the origin and reason for this celebration should not remain unknown either. On that day free women, together with their slaves, make a sacrifice to Juno Caprotina beneath a wild fig-tree; this commemorates the excellent courage shown by slave women in defence of the honour of the State. (37) After Rome had been captured and the Gallic revolt had subsided, the State was really in extreme straits, and the neighbouring tribes, looking for an opportunity to invade Roman territory, appointed Postumius Livius, the dictator of Fidenae, to command them; he sent orders to the Senate requiring them to hand over all mothers of families and unmarried girls if they wanted to keep what was left of their State. (38) The Senate's deliberations were uncertain and hesitant, but a slave girl called Tutela or Philotis promised that she would go across to the enemy with the other slave women, pretending to be their mistresses; and they dressed up as mothers and girls and marched over to the enemy with a lot of people following them in tears, to make it look as though they were grieving. (39) Livius divided them up around the camp, and they plied the men with lots of wine, pretending that it was a feast day for the Romans. When the men had all fallen asleep, they signalled to the Romans from a wild fig-tree that stood next to the camp. (40) A sudden attack resulted in victory; mindful of the benefit received, the Senate ordered all slave women to be manumitted, gave them a dowry from public funds, permitted them to wear the dress they had used on that occasion, renamed that day the 'Caprotine Nones' after the fig-tree from which the signal for the victory had been given, and decided that an annual sacrifice should be celebrated involving the sap which flows from a wild fig-tree, in memory of the deed which I have mentioned.

Macrobius goes on to show that slaves have risen to the heights of philosophy: his list is taken verbatim from the passage of Aulus Gellius (No. 240 above). The section on slaves concludes:

(46) There, I think, you have an argument for not looking down with contempt on slave status, since Jupiter himself showed interest in a slave, and there is evidence that many of them have been trustworthy, prudent, brave — and even philosophers.