

*Change and continuity*

When travelling on the river Ohio in 1841, Abraham Lincoln was struck by the sight of twelve shackled slaves who were being taken down river to be sold. 'A small iron clevis', he later wrote in a letter describing his experience, 'was around the wrist of each, and this fastened to the main chain by a shorter one at a convenient distance from the others: so that the negroes were strung together precisely like so many fish upon a trot-line.' He thought of the way the slaves had been uprooted from their homes, of the families and friends they had left behind, of the cruelty they would endure from their new owners, finding himself at a loss as he did so to understand how the slaves could continue in such a plight to seem so cheerful. Lincoln was long disturbed by the episode, and as he recalled the sight to a fellow traveller in another letter fourteen years later he remarked what 'a continual torment' the image of the shackled slaves had been to him ever since.<sup>1</sup>

In the Americas slavery was destroyed with astonishing speed. From 1807, when Britain placed a ban on the transatlantic slave trade, to 1888, when the last slaveowning state in the New World, Brazil, abolished slavery, less than a century was required to eradicate an institution that for hundreds, even thousands, of years had gone unchallenged until early in the eighteenth century philosophers and religious thinkers began to raise questions about the moral legitimacy and acceptability of slavery. Against the background of the rise of capitalism there followed from these beginnings a revolution in social consciousness – of which Lincoln's torment is symptomatic – that eventually led to historical change

<sup>1</sup> Quotations: Basler 1953: 1.260; 2.320. The respective dates of the letters are 27 September 1841, and 24 August 1855.

of a very dramatic and, most would surely say, very progressive kind.<sup>2</sup>

At Rome, in contrast, abolition never occurred. But the demise of slavery in the New World raises the question nonetheless of whether significant progressive change ever affected Roman slavery at all over the course of its long history. Scholars commonly maintain that through the central period of Roman history, and particularly under the Principate, a new spirit of humanity gradually came to permeate society, resulting in expressions of sympathy for slaves from philosophers and other intellectuals, and, more practically, a series of positive improvements to slaves' lives made at the public level. Claudius' famous grant of freedom in AD 47 to sick slaves who recovered after being abandoned on the island of Aesculapius in the Tiber is often taken as a case in point. But is the view of a general softening of slavery at Rome historically accurate? To find an answer a twofold approach is necessary. First, representative thought on the subject of slavery needs to be examined to see in what sense it was humane and how it developed; and secondly a practical test is required, to see whether significant signs of change emerge at the institutional level. Accordingly this chapter considers Roman thought, including early Christian thought, on slavery, and the next chapter deals with two features of the Roman slavery system well-suited to a discussion of slavery and humanity, manumission and torture.<sup>3</sup>

Late in life Cicero set out to instruct the educated elite at Rome in the tenets of the major schools of Greek philosophy by composing a series of dialogues modelled on those of Plato. The undertaking at once reflected and reinforced the cultural presence of Greek philosophy that had first begun to manifest itself in Rome a century earlier and that had been growing ever since. (Already in the era of Scipio Aemilianus it had become almost fashionable for the Roman aristocrat to have a Greek philosopher among his intimate friends and counsellors.) Philosophy, as it happened, was never to rouse the greatest enthusiasm at Rome. But educated members of society in the central period could scarcely avoid exposure to the philo-

<sup>2</sup> On the history of modern abolitionism see in general, Davis 1966; Davis 1975; Drescher 1986; Fogel 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Scholars: see the resumé in Manning 1989: 1519; 1533–4. Claudius: Levick 1990: 123–4. Note also MacMullen 1990: 5.

sophical achievements of the Greeks, both classical and Hellenistic. They knew, therefore, the doctrine of natural slavery that Aristotle, building on foundations laid by Plato, had established centuries earlier, according to which the slave was a unique being, an inanimate tool who could not possess or exercise reason but who could perceive it. The slave fulfilled his natural role by performing tasks for an owner who, with his superior intellect, made decisions for the slave which the slave could not make for himself, with the result that a mutually beneficial relationship between master and slave came into being. Aristotle's conclusion consequently (*Politica* 1.2.15) was that 'by nature some are free, others slaves, and ... for these it is both right and expedient that they should serve as slaves'.<sup>4</sup>

Reflective Romans were also aware that the theory of natural slavery had been articulated to counter a rival view that slavery was unnatural, a matter of convention only and unjust. The sophist Alcidas, a pupil of Gorgias, is known for example to have claimed that freedom was common to all and that no one was born to be a slave, though his remarks were made in the context of the Theban liberation of the Messenians from Spartan control early in the fourth century BC and so may have referred to helots (that is, native-born Greeks) rather than to slaves in a strict sense. The sentiment was echoed later in the century, however, in a play by the comic writer Philemon, who said that slave and free had the same flesh, that no one was a slave by nature, and that it was simply chance that enslaved the body. Both men would presumably have applauded the sympathy for slaves evident in Euripides towards the end of the previous century.<sup>5</sup>

At Rome itself the controversy between natural and unnatural found expression in the legal view (*Dig.* 1.5.4.1) that slavery was 'an institution of the law of nations, whereby someone is against nature made subject to the ownership of another'; freedom on the other hand was a condition of natural law, according to which all men were equal and equally free from birth. Such ideas, and the

<sup>4</sup> Cultural presence: see Rawson 1985: 282–97; Rutherford 1989: 66–70. Aristotle and Plato: see Schlaifer 1936; Vlastos 1941; (cf. Calvert 1987); Ste Croix 1981: 416–18; Brunt 1993. Cicero may have believed Theophrastus to be the author of the *Politics*: Rawson 1985: 290.

<sup>5</sup> Rival view: see Schlaifer 1936: 199–201; Guthrie 1969: 155–60; and especially Cambiano 1987.

tradition on which they depended, imply that slavery was always regarded at Rome as an ambiguous, perhaps even vulnerable, institution, which means in turn that in theory there must always have been a certain potential for improving change from which the slave population might have benefited. Yet nothing suggests that it was natural for Romans to think in terms of reform simply because an institution could be categorised as contrary to nature. Indeed the legal phraseology might just as well be taken to represent a final Roman ossification of the original Greek debate completely devoid of any practical importance. For those, moreover, who responded to the attractions of Stoicism, the most popular brand of Greek philosophy at Rome, the debate was irrelevant.<sup>6</sup>

The Stoics were prepared to acknowledge the humanity of the slave, believing that the distinction between slave and free, or any other distinction for that matter, was of far less philosophical significance than that between the wise and the foolish. Their ideal was to achieve wisdom by living in accordance with nature, that is by harmonising the reason they saw in every human being with the rational principle that underlay the whole structure of the universe. Each individual was a necessary part of the universal order and to live in harmony with nature was the individual's destiny. But because choices between good and evil constantly had to be confronted and made, to live in harmony with nature was a difficult goal to attain and the pursuit of wisdom a lifelong struggle. The emphasis here clearly fell on the inner life of the human being as wisdom was sought through the cultivation of personal virtue. External realities, such as slavery, could not be controlled in the way that personal decisions could be controlled, and so they were matters of indifference. But the Stoics believed that it was possible for both slave and free to cultivate virtue: social status was no impediment to living in accord with nature because the only freedom that mattered was freedom of the spirit and that was available to all.<sup>7</sup>

The idea that the slave was part of a common humanity had probably made its presence felt at Rome by the first century BC at latest through the work of the Stoic philosopher Posidonius of

<sup>6</sup> Legal view: cf. *Dig.* 1.1.4. (Ulpian); 12.6.64 (Tryphoninus); 50.17.32 (Ulpian); *Inst.* 1.2.2.

<sup>7</sup> See Manning 1989; Brunt 1993.

Apamea, who was an associate of Cicero and Cn. Pompeius, among others. In a universal history Posidonius wrote accounts of the major slave uprisings in Sicily of the late second century B.C. The narratives are no longer extant, but Posidonius' sympathies for the slave rebels have been detected in other writers who subsequently drew on him and it has always seemed logical to associate this concern with Posidonius' Stoic cosmopolitanism.<sup>8</sup>

It is in the writings of Seneca, however, from the middle of the first century A.D., that a real sensitivity to the degradations and humiliations of slavery is particularly visible in a Stoic philosopher, together with a powerful argument for esteeming the slave's moral worth over his social standing. Seneca was emphatic that slaves should be recognised as human beings just like the free: they were born in exactly the same way, breathed the same air, and were subject to the same mortality as the free; simply because they were slaves, a matter of accident that was not their fault, they were not to be treated with cruelty and arrogance (of a sort he could vividly illustrate), but because they were human beings they were to be treated with consideration and courtesy. Their moral development, moreover, was to be given far more attention than the kind of work they did when judgements were made about them. Slaves displayed their humanity in voluntarily and self-effacingly catering to their masters' interests, not as a result of compulsion alone, and because they were human they were able to pursue the path of virtue. Slavery was a condition of the body, not of the mind, Seneca maintained, and slaves could transcend their physical bondage by exercising for good that freedom of the spirit that knew no subjection.<sup>9</sup>

These views continued to find favour in later generations. Following the common Stoic doctrine that only the wise man could be truly free, the Greek orator Dio Chrysostom (14.18) offered the variation in the age of Trajan that freedom consisted of knowing what was permissible and what was forbidden, while slavery was the opposite. Then, if the slave understood the real meaning of freedom it did not matter that he had been sold as a slave countless times or that he lived his life in shackles: he could, in fact, be a freer

<sup>8</sup> See Strasburger 1965; cf. Bradley 1989: 133–6; Sacks 1990: 142–4.

<sup>9</sup> The crucial texts are *Ep.* 47 and *Ben.* 3.18–28, on which see Bradley 1986b. Comprehensively, see Griffin 1976: 256–85.

man than a king as long as he realised that philosophy was the key to being set free – the metaphor of course being far more important than the reality. Similarly in a work lampooning philosophy of all descriptions, Lucian (*Vitarum Auctio* 21) had his Stoic representative contend that he did not mind being sold as a slave because the sale was a circumstance he was powerless to control and what he could not control was of no bearing on his spiritual progress. Lucian's intent was to draw a smile, but the Stoic's argument was expected at the same time to strike a chord of recognition. Towards the turn of the third century the emperor Marcus Aurelius (*Med.* 6.24) took for granted the common humanity of slave and free when meditating on the philosophical commonplace that death brought an equal end to all, Alexander and his stable boy alike.

Throughout the central period of Rome's history Greek and Roman intellectuals took pleasure in debating the meaning of slavery and freedom, and their ideas added to the philosophical inheritance that in every generation informed the lives of those of any education. Slavery was not ignored. But in spite of the stress the Stoics gave to the notion of spiritual equality, neither they nor anyone else ever seriously questioned the place of slavery in society. It might have happened that in their everyday relationships with their slaves some slaveowners were moved to treat their slaves moderately because of their Stoic piety, as a result that is of the injunctions given by Seneca and others like him. It is impossible to tell. But as long as philosophy could regard the slavery of everyday life as an issue of indifference, reformist fervour could never emerge from philosophers' disputations because there was no point to proposing or agitating for change. Thus when Seneca had the opportunity in the principate of Nero to influence legislation, both in the senate and with the emperor, he took no steps at all to effect any public relief of the abuses he knew slaves suffered as a matter of course. The fact is that philosophical disputes were purely abstract, cerebral affairs, utterly divorced from the world of lived reality, and to the extent that they were ever heard by the vast majority of slaves, even those who were educated, they can have meant very little: 'To me', remarks a character in Dio Chrysostom (14.19), 'it appears exceeding strange that one who wears fetters or has been branded or who grinds in a mill will be more free than the great king.' Stoicism was oriented to the practical goal of improving the individual's spiritual well-being. But because it was the individual,

and especially the slaveowning individual, who was the focus, there could be no mental linkage between cosmopolitanism and social action.<sup>10</sup>

The point is exemplified further by Musonius Rufus, another Stoic of the first century AD, who in many ways entertained notions that by contemporary Roman standards were very liberal. Musonius for example favoured equal opportunity in education for both boys and girls; he saw no barrier to women studying philosophy as well as men; and rather unconventionally he regarded marriage as a truly companionate relationship. However, when he counselled against the sexual exploitation of slave women by their masters, it did not occur to Musonius to impugn the institution that gave rise to such behaviour in the first place or to wonder about the effects of sexual abuse on those abused. To the master who felt no shame in taking sexual advantage of a slave woman ('particularly if she happens to be unmarried'), Musonius' only retort was to ask how the master would feel himself if he discovered his wife had had an affair with a male slave, meaning that the master ought to feel the same sense of shame he would consider the due of his wife in such a circumstance. To that question, as seen in an earlier chapter, there was a standard response, or rather a double standard response, that has considerable significance for the attitudes it embodies: it was by no means as serious a matter for a master to have sex with a slave woman as it was for a mistress to have sex with a slave man. But in both question and response it was the slaveowner, not the slave, who was the object of concern.<sup>11</sup>

When philosophers, therefore, had any qualms at all about the manner in which slaves were ill-used, they were not in the first instance interested in the victims of immoderation, so much as in the immoderation itself and those slaveowners who exhibited it. The philosophers' purpose was to eliminate excessive behaviour by slaveowners for the sake of the owners' moral health, as one step on the long path of Stoic virtue. Accordingly Musonius declaimed against sexual abuse because it was philosophically desirable that the owners of slave women should learn how to control their baser instincts if they were to become wise. Protection for the victimised,

however, was given no thought. Similarly with Seneca: in his view of society, luxury and excess reduced men to slavery of all sorts – some were enslaved by wealth, others by social rank, others by sex and so on. But philosophy demanded that these forms of self-indulgence be abandoned if the enslaved were to be set free and to find spiritual redemption. To avoid cruelty in the way the owner dealt with his slaves was thus again a step in the right direction towards the Stoic goal, but the cruelty itself was not at issue – any more than wealth, rank and sex. Whatever benefits accrued to slaves as a result of what the philosophers taught, consequently, were incidental and secondary benefits. Slavery itself was beyond dispute.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the theory that virtue was available to all, it must be understood, Roman philosophers and moralists did not address themselves to audiences of slaves but to their social peers, men of status, wealth and education. Epictetus, the former slave and once pupil of Musonius who achieved fame as a Stoic teacher in the late first century AD, is proof enough that knowledge could not be confined by boundaries of status. But the majority of slaves, whether domestics or rural workers, can seldom have had the chance to listen to philosophers trumpeting lofty ideals of spiritual equality, let alone to devote themselves wholly to them. What for example would Seneca's slave Felicio, a man grown old in service, have thought of the Stoic virtue his master preached? When Seneca once visited the estate where the decrepit, toothless old man had been reduced to working as a doorkeeper, he failed to recognise the person who in childhood had been his playmate. Presumably therefore he had not recently given Felicio any assuaging words on the meaninglessness of servitude. Epictetus or Felicio: who was more representative of the typical slave? Seneca perceived, like the writers on agriculture, that if slaves were treated compassionately they would become more compliant to their owners' wishes. In improving his moral character the slaveowner could easily acquire a practical dividend. But compliance was not sought directly from slaves, in the manner of Varro and Columella (and even they never spoke of slaves more than they had to). The well-being of slaveowners consumed the interests of the moralists to such an extent

<sup>10</sup> No steps: Griffin 1976: 275–85.

<sup>11</sup> Musonius on sexual exploitation: 12 (Lutz 87–9). Standard response: Quint. *Inst.* 5.11.34–5 (quoted in chapter 2).

<sup>12</sup> Bradley 1986b; cf. Manning 1989: 1523.

that slaves themselves were utterly ignored, and this was a reality that showed no change over time at all.<sup>13</sup>

From time to time the philosophers acknowledged the humanity of the slaves in their midst, but they did not encourage slaves to develop their human character in any independent, self-fulfilling fashion. From time to time they found it instructive to catalogue the atrocities to which slaves were routinely subjected, but they were not constrained to eliminate those atrocities or to confront their underlying cause. The philosophers established no intellectual foundation on which reform could be built, and so slavery remained from this vantage point an unchanged and unchangeable institution, regardless of arguments about its 'naturalness' or otherwise. Where Lincoln saw misery that led to inner torment and abolition, the Roman philosophers, proceeding from a much narrower vision of humanity, saw only the opportunity for personal self-betterment.

What of attitudes at a less elevated level? One rare, though still oblique, point of entry to non-elite thinking is offered by the *Dream Book* of Artemidorus, the compendium of dreams and interpretations of dreams written late in the second century AD as a guide to the future for those who consulted it, a sober, almost scientific manual based on wide empirical research by an author of considerable learning who had travelled extensively in the Mediterranean world. But for present purposes the book's most interesting feature is that it does not restrict itself to interpreting the dreams of the socially prominent but embraces representatives of all social levels. When travelling in Asia Minor, Greece and Italy, Artemidorus had collected dreams from all kinds of dreamers – men and women, rich and poor, ambassadors and tax-gatherers, athletes and farmers, priests and shipowners. He also collected the dreams of slaves.<sup>14</sup>

In the world of the *Dream Book* slaveowning is ubiquitous and the patterns of slave life evoked are entirely conventional. Slaves are variously bought and sold, hired out and given away as gifts,

<sup>13</sup> Social peers: on Seneca's friend Lucilius Junior, the addressee of the *Moral Epistles*, see Griffin 1976: 91, 94; and on Aebutius Liberalis, the addressee of *de Beneficiis*, see Griffin 1976: 455–6. Majority of slaves: note the popular, and meaningless, Stoic platitudes at Petr. *Sat.* 39.4; 57.5; 71.1. Felicio: Sen. *Ep.* 12. Varro and Columella: Spurr 1990: 80.

<sup>14</sup> On Artemidorus see in general, Price 1986; Lane Fox 1987: 155–8. On dreams, cf. Rutherford 1989: 195–200.

flogged and put to the torture, promoted from one occupation to another and set free. Fugitives are everywhere, slavedealers common. The relationship between slave and master is one in which the slave is expected to obey and to please, standing in fear of the punishment an omnipotent owner can administer at any time. But the master has a responsibility to maintain the slave, he can hold the trustworthy slave in high esteem, and mutual affection between the two is possible. In terms that are virtually Aristotelian, Artemidorus speaks of the slave having the same relationship to the master as the body to the soul.<sup>15</sup>

In Artemidorus' method of dream interpretation the social status of the dreamer is a crucial variable: the same dream can mean different things to different people. For example (*Onir.* 2.3):

Wearing a soft, costly garment is auspicious for both the rich and the poor. For the rich, it is a sign that their present prosperity will continue. For the poor, it signifies that their affairs will be brighter. But for slaves and those who are financially embarrassed, it means sickness.

Among slaves themselves the significance of a dream may vary because of the position held in the household (*Onir.* 2.49):

To dream that one is dead, that one is being carried out for burial, or that one is buried foretells freedom for a slave who is not entrusted with the care of the house. For a dead man has no master and is free from toil and service. But for a slave who has been entrusted with the care of the house, it signifies that death will rob him of his trusteeship.

Yet Artemidorus assumes throughout that the interpretations he gives will be credible to all dreamers, no matter where they stand in the social hierarchy, which means that he takes for granted a set of normative attitudes that to one degree or another all ranks in society shared. The validity of his interpretations rests indeed on his understanding that his view of society was essentially held by everyone else, and from this point of view the connotations of slavery in the *Dream Book* take on special importance.<sup>16</sup>

Images in dreams are often symbolic and have to be properly understood. Thus while the head will indicate a father and knees will indicate freedmen, the feet, or even ankles and toes, will rep-

<sup>15</sup> See *Onir.* 1.35; 1.50; 2.68; 3.54; 3.41; 4.38; 1.76; 2.25; 1.70; 1.77; 2.28; 2.15; 2.30; 1.79; 2.31; 1.26; 2.14; 2.20; 2.19; 2.68; 3.17; 4.13; 1.24; 2.33; 2.19; 1.31; 1.13; 4.30 (cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1.2.13).

<sup>16</sup> Attitudes: Price 1986: 13.

resent slaves. Different parts of a bed will refer to different members of the household, the upper parts indicating the master, his wife and children, the legs his slaves. Functional objects – scrapers and towels, oil flasks and the boxes that contain scrapers, baskets and dishes, millstones – will symbolise slaves because of the tasks associated with them. A range of servile statuses is evident in the equation of small jars to ordinary domestics, amphoras to attendants, and elaborate tables to domestic stewards. The correspondences are very matter-of-fact: ‘covers and sacks for the deposit of bedclothes signify concubines and emancipated female slaves’ (*Onir.* 1.74). Furthermore, Artemidorus is undeviating in categorising slaves with ‘all those in a subordinate position’ (*Onir.* 1.56) or ‘in any bad situation whatsoever’ (*Onir.* 3.13), with those who are poor and sick, those in debt or in jail, those in any way detained against their will. Slavery is a condition characterised by misery, hardship, struggle, outrage and danger, from all of which release is sought, so that the freeborn slave fugitive will naturally try to return to his original home when he makes his bid for freedom.<sup>17</sup>

The associations raised by slavery in Artemidorus are uniformly negative, precisely the same as those seen in elite literary sources. In a late treatise (*de Officiis* 1.41) Cicero stated baldly that slaves constituted the lowest element in society, and ‘lowness’ in the Roman mind meant every kind of inferiority imaginable, physical, intellectual, moral. It was this way of thinking that justified the practices of feeding slaves inferior grades of food and of allotting them inferior types of clothing. It showed no significant variation over time or place.<sup>18</sup>

Recall for example how at the physical level Quintilian (*Inst.* 11.3.83) advised the apprentice orator not to adopt a servile posture when performing. The point is that while utterly illogical the assumption of a physical difference between slave and free was part of the process by which slaves were visualised in the Roman mind: not a difference of race or colour as in New World slave cultures (where the differences were of course very real), but one that simply distinguished between ugliness and beauty, between what was seemly and what was not. Thus the slave ran – he was under

<sup>17</sup> See *Onir.* 1.2; 1.47; 1.48; 1.64; 2.24; 3.30; 2.42; 2.10; 1.14; 1.45; 1.50; 1.80; 2.3; 2.8; 2.12; 4.15; 2.28; 1.20; 1.37; 1.73; 2.23; 4.56.

<sup>18</sup> Cicero: cf. Dio Chrys. 14.1: ‘slavery is the most shameful and wretched of states’ (see on Dio in general, Brunt 1973).

compulsion – when the free man, just because he was free, could walk leisurely. Quintilian tells (*Inst.* 6.3.32) how an orator who was rather ugly once argued in a court case concerned with the issue of a man’s freedom that the man in question looked like a slave: he did not have the face of a free man at all. The inevitable riposte was made: ‘Is every ugly man a slave then?’, to which presumably there was no rejoinder. But this is not just a silly story; it illustrates a way of thinking in Roman society that never changed. In *Daphnis & Chloe* (4.17) the parasite Gnathon, when smitten by Daphnis, rhapsodises about the young man’s looks: ‘Don’t you see how his hair is like a hyacinth, his eyes shine under his brows like a jewel in a golden setting, his face is very rosy, while his mouth is full of white teeth like ivory?’ Yet he begins this paean by declaring that he loves someone ‘who has the body of a slave but the beauty of a free man’. Once Daphnis’ true identity is revealed, Dionysophanes makes the comment (4.20) that it was preposterous ever to imagine that Daphnis was the son of the slave couple who had raised him. The absolute stereotype of the ugly slave was Aesop, a veritable monstrosity: ‘potbellied, misshapen of head, snub-nosed, swarthy, dwarfish, bandy-legged, short-armed, squint-eyed, liver-lipped’ (*Vita Aesopi* 1).<sup>19</sup>

In matters of the intellect Quintilian is again instructive. Lumping together all slaves and all barbarians as uneducated, and recognising that representatives of each group might occasionally display a natural flair for rhetoric, Quintilian believed nonetheless (*Inst.* 2.11.7; 2.17.6) that slaves, simply by virtue of being slaves, could not normally be expected to become accomplished orators: because slaves were naturally inferior, certain areas of human endeavour were closed off to them. No great works of art had ever been produced by slaves, the elder Pliny said; painting was the preserve of the free (*Nat.* 35.77). The fact that many slaves had jobs that required knowledge and skills of a highly sophisticated nature did not seem to be an obstacle to articles of faith such as these.

As for morality, enough has been seen already to appreciate that the slave’s moral character was evaluated by the degree of subservience shown to the slaveowner and that this criterion did allow for the emergence of good slaves. At the most fundamental level, however, slaveowners believed that the slave’s natural disposition was

<sup>19</sup> Ran: Plaut. *Poenulus* 522–3, with Graf 1992.

to vice and that slavery itself was, in Cicero's phrase (*Phil.* 2.113), 'the worst of all evils'. By definition slavery was stigmatic, a disgrace if it befell even one's kin, and for a free man the ultimate shaming experience was to fall under the rule of his own slave. (For Claudius in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* (15), it was the height of indignity to be claimed as a slave by Caligula, to be given away as a gift and to become the slave of a freedman.) From the beginning of the central era, slavery was synonymous with insult and humiliation and it is not surprising, consequently, that slavery could become such a resonant political metaphor. Caesar's tyranny brought servitude to Rome in the view of Cicero, while for Tacitus the servility of the Julio-Claudian senate was a painful, and paining, fact of history. In a society where no one was immune from slavery's influence, these were not idle words.<sup>20</sup>

The negative associations of slavery glimpsed in Artemidorus were, then, widespread in Roman society and long-enduring. Slaves were in all senses a naturally inferior species, at least as far as the socially elite were concerned. But because of the assumptions Artemidorus makes about how to interpret dreams and about the way his interpretations will be credible to people from all walks of life, including slave dreamers, it must be presumed that the elite way of thinking about slaves was in fact shared throughout much of society as a whole, by the petty civic officials and peasant farmers, the artisans, traders, athletes and everyone else inhabiting the world of the *Dream Book*, slaves included. (The only possible objection that could be raised is the inherently implausible notion that Artemidorus is a completely unreliable witness to Roman imperial society in the second century.) In turn this implies that there can have been little likelihood of social improvement for slaves arising from the non-elite sectors of society, because slavery's stigmatic connotations were too pervasive to allow any realisable vision of a new or a different social order to manifest itself. A better world in which slaves knew no hardships or from which slavery had been

<sup>20</sup> Stigmatic: *Dig.* 40.12.2; *Plin. Nat.* 28.56. Cf. *Petr. Sat.* 54.5: Trimalchio, apparently injured by a falling acrobat, prefers to set the offending slave free rather than carry the scar of having been physically hurt, and so morally outraged, by one so beneath his station; *Petr. Sat.* 126.11: *superbia* marked the *matrona*, *humilitas* the *ancilla*; *Quint. Inst.* 1.11.2: *vernilitas*, the insolence of the *verna*, was not appropriate for the free youth. Beginning of central era: *Gel.* 10.3.17 (on the elder Cato). Cicero: e.g. *Fam.* 11.8.2; 12.1.1; 12.3.2. Tacitus: e.g. *Ann.* 1.2; 1.7; 14.49.

removed altogether was not what Artemidorus' dreamers dreamed of. In the real world many slaves experienced torments in ways that slaveowners could not and did not. Many slaves wished to be free from slavery, and many resisted it as best as they were able, rejecting established values for the sake of self-survival in the process as they saw fit. But the ideology of servile inferiority was too deeply embedded in the collective consciousness for a radical, large-scale change in moral perspective ever to emerge from below, and without that necessary pre-condition progressive change was impossible. The point is exemplified by the history of a free man who was enslaved by brigands in Britain in the early fifth century AD: carried off to Ireland, the man was forced to work as a slave shepherd until after six years of servitude he one day successfully escaped, first making his way overland to a port in which he could find a ship and then undertaking a sea voyage to the Continent – at great risk to his life from the ship's crew – before eventually returning to his family home in Britain. He later reported that he found slavery a humiliation; but his experience did not launch St Patrick on a career of social reform.<sup>21</sup>

From the outset Christianity offered its adherents an equality of religious opportunity that had previously been unknown. It gave access not only to spiritual fulfilment and contentment in the present world but also to salvation in the next. No one was denied, eschatologically speaking: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3.28). From this basis, and particularly because of the emphasis Christianity placed on others as well as on the self, the new religion promised a new social awareness of limitless potential. In late antiquity Augustine (*C.D.* 9.5) pointed out that the outward-looking objectives of reforming the sinner, freeing the afflicted from sorrowful suffering, and saving those in danger from death were quite at odds with the self-oriented

<sup>21</sup> Society as a whole: cf. Ste Croix 1981: 173: slavery was 'omnipresent in the psychology of all classes'. Observe how in Latin curse tablets from Britain, a rather remote area of the Roman world, the division of society into slave and free is as elemental as the division between male and female: see, for example, M. W. C. Hassall and R. S. O. Tomlin, *Britannia* 10 (1979): 343 (no. 3); *Britannia* 12 (1981): 375 (no. 8); *Britannia* 13 (1982): 406 (no. 7). St. Patrick: Thompson 1985: 17–21.

cast of traditional Greco-Roman philosophy. When in the middle of the third century the church at Rome was supporting over fifteen hundred widows and beggars, displaying thereby an altruism glaring in its unconventionality, there could be no doubt of the Christians' ability to combine belief with social action. Despite its myriad forms and troubled beginnings, Christianity unquestionably brought change to the Roman world.<sup>22</sup>

The history of the Christian slave Callistus, however, suggests that by the turn of the third century Christianity had brought little change for good to the Roman slavery system. As a young man Callistus was owned by a certain Carpophorus, himself a Christian, who set Callistus up in business at Rome as a banker. Like one of the slaves the Roman jurists were all too familiar with, Callistus soon set about embezzling sums of money from his bank's depositors, but in the end he panicked and ran away to preempt discovery of what he had done. He made for Portus where he boarded a ship. But realising that Carpophorus had followed him (like a slaveowner in Lucian), he tried in desperation to kill himself by jumping overboard. He was rescued by the ship's crew, however, and taken back to Rome where Carpophorus assigned him to the treadmill (*pistrinum*) in punishment. Believing that Callistus still had some of their money, the depositors later arranged his release. But Callistus had no money, and again he undertook to escape danger in death by concocting a scheme that involved creating a riot in a synagogue. The scheme misfired, and Callistus was instead sentenced to hard labour in the mines of Sardinia by the city prefect. There, no longer so intent on dying, he contrived his release following the powerful interest in setting Christian convicts free shown by the concubine of the emperor Commodus, Marcia. He was then comfortably settled in Antium by the bishop of Rome, Victor, and under Victor's successor Zephyrinus became an ecclesiastical administrator and counsellor of such eminence that on Zephyrinus' death in 217, Callistus, the former slave banker and fugitive, was himself elected pope.<sup>23</sup>

The tale of Callistus is remarkable on many counts. But what is most remarkable is that the relationship between master and slave

<sup>22</sup> Basis: for further and later evidence, see Cadoux 1925: 133, 454, 610. Widows and beggars: Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.43.11.

<sup>23</sup> Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 9.

which it depicts shows no sign of having softened, or altered in any way for the better, under two centuries of Christian influence. Clearly there was no Christian objection to owning slaves, whatever the teachings of the faith on spiritual equality. The Christian slaveowner was concerned to profit from the labour of his slave just like any other slaveowner, and he responded to what he perceived as criminal behaviour in the slave in exactly the same way as his non-Christian counterpart. Following traditional assumptions, he took for granted that the culpable slave, even though a Christian himself, must atone for his misbehaviour with his body. On the other hand, the Christian slave was still making a troublesome property of himself, resorting to time-honoured methods of self-interested sabotage and adopting conventional modes of escape in the face of danger. Ingenuity was still the only guarantee of survival, and opportunities for self-advantage had to be grasped as soon as they appeared. Continuous struggle and tension, therefore, still pervaded the lives of master and slave.

This lack of change is apparent, and dramatically so, in almost every aspect of slave life recorded in Christian sources. Christian slaveowners were well aware that energy had to be devoted to regulating and managing the behaviour of their slaves, and the methods they employed remained the same as they had always been. Cyprian, the third-century bishop of Carthage, for instance, understood (*ad Demetrianum* 8) that the Christian master might enforce obedience to his will in any number of violent ways – beating the slave, depriving him of food and water, giving him nothing to wear, threatening him with the sword, putting him in prison. The bishop might be suspected of rhetorical exaggeration or of referring to unusual capricious violence (there is no way of telling but allowance for the extreme can be made), but shackling and beating obviously raised no serious questions for Christians. A third-century council of bishops meeting at Illiberis (Elvira) in south-eastern Spain ruled that a woman who beat her maidservant (*ancilla*) to death in a fit of anger was to be excommunicated for seven years if the death had been caused deliberately but only for five years if accidentally; excommunication for five years was likewise the penalty for first time adulterers. Nor was any consternation caused by the iron collars used on recaptured runaways: an example from Sardinia, probably of late imperial date, gives the name of the owner of the slave who wore it as 'Felix the arch-



deacon'. Runaways of course were to be returned to their owners, even if they had taken refuge in monasteries. So prescribed the Cappadocian Basil, bishop of Caesarea in the 370s, in his longer collection of monastic rules (11), with the example of Paul two hundred years earlier firmly in his mind: in prison in Ephesus Paul had converted the fugitive slave Onesimus to the new religion, but because Onesimus was a runaway Paul had sent him back to his master Philemon, as the Roman law required. It did not matter that Philemon was also a Christian: the gospel did not promote or sanction slave resistance.<sup>24</sup>

The passage of time only confirmed the traditional outlook. According to the apologist Lactantius at the turn of the fourth century (*de Ira Dei* 5.12) it was perfectly appropriate that the bad slave should be punished physically, and in exactly the same ways Cyprian had earlier detailed. But towards the good slave, Lactantius said (*Institutiones Divinae* 5.18.14–16), the master was best advised to behave magnanimously, giving him words of praise and increasing his responsibilities as a reward for loyal service. Both courses of action would have an effect upon the household at large: the rewards of submission and the penalties for disobedience would be visible to all and the appropriate lessons learned. Servile compliance did not have to depend on physical repression alone in the Christian slaveowner's mind: a broad psychological control was just as desirable and equally attainable. Yet Lactantius' insights were hardly a revelation. The benefits of manipulating rewards and punishments had been known to Roman slaveowners for centuries.<sup>25</sup>

Lactantius' evidence makes clear that good and bad continued to be the principal designations Christians assigned to their slaves, the choice depending as always in the past on the degree of dutifulness displayed. Longstanding notions of servile inferiority also remained unchallenged. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch in the early second century, maintained in his letter to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (4), that slaves' presumptuousness – the sort that followed from treating slaves with some consideration (which Ignatius generally favoured, for male and female slaves alike) – was in no way to

<sup>24</sup> Cyprian: cf. Tert. *de Resurrectione* 57. Council: Canons of Illiberis 5, 68. Sardinia: Sotgiu 1973–4. Paul: Philemon 8–16.

<sup>25</sup> Lactantius: cf. *Ira* 17.8–10.

be tolerated. He meant that slaves, even if kindly treated, were always to know their place, which was at the very bottom of the social scale. Later in the second century Clement of Alexandria made the argument (*Paedagogus* 3.6.34) that as human beings master and slaves hardly differed from one another and that in some respects the slave was superior to his master. Yet Clement nonetheless drew on traditional stereotypes of how the slave was popularly conceived when he urged (*Paed.* 2.1.13) that the Christian was to be sure to avoid the slave's table-manners. To the rancorous Tertullian (*ad Nationes* 1.7) slavery was full of opprobrious associations: slaves were all spies who would betray their owners as a matter of course; they were not to be trusted at all.<sup>26</sup>

Well into the fourth century and beyond slavery remained uncontroversial. To the Gallic poet Ausonius (*Ephemeris*) it seemed perfectly natural to rouse the sleepyhead slave who assisted him in his toilet with the threat of a beating just before he offered up his morning prayers; once the prayers were over the slave could bring the master his outdoor clothes as he prepared to visit friends, or be sent to invite guests for dinner; the owner meantime had instructions to give to his slave cook, while if a flight of literary fancy caught him he could at once summon the slave stenographer to take dictation. To Lactantius again (*Ira Dei* 17.16–19) it was perfectly normal for the head of the household to maintain discipline, correct morals and restrain licence among his dependants, not simply among his slaves but among his wife and children too. There is nothing more traditionally Roman than that. After several centuries the new religion had made no major impact on Rome's social attitudes and structures, and as the vitriolic words of a Christian who disowned his children at Antinoopolis in Egypt (they had tried to kill him) show, even at a very late date slavery was still the social benchmark by which all else was judged: 'I reject and abhor you from now to the utter end of all succeeding time as outcasts and bastards and lower than slaves ...'<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Inferiority: e.g. Tert. *de Patientia* 10.5; Origen, *contra Celsum* 2.47. Clement: cf. *Paed.* 3.12.92.

<sup>27</sup> Ausonius: *Ephemeris* is seemingly a polished version of a school exercise: Dionisotti 1982; cf. Green 1991: 245–6. Impact: Pagels 1988: 52, speaks of Christians taking news of Christian equality 'among the hovels of the poor and into slave quarters, offering help and money and preaching to the poor, the illiterate slaves, women and foreigners'. But she cites no evidence in support. Vitriolic words: *P. Cair. Masp.* 67353.

It would be an error, however, to say that there had been no change at all. Christian teachings on equality clearly had much in common with Stoic theories of cosmopolitanism, Christians, like the Stoic philosophers, taking the view that slavery was a matter of the spiritual or moral domain and that physical, earthly bondage was immaterial to spiritual progress. They agreed that the slave who pursued truth and virtue was not really a slave at all: it was the free person who was enslaved by passion or some other evil who was the true slave. However, whereas the Stoics addressed their message primarily to their social peers and made the self their principal focus of attention, Christian teachers took their good news directly to the slave population. Slaves were addressed in a new way, in their own right, though not with the end of breaking down barriers between slave and free in mind; rather, slaves as in the past were to know their place, but, because eternal life after death was so important, they were now positively instructed by those in authority to stay in it, to be content with it, not to question it:

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ. (Ephesians 6.5)  
Slaves, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. (Colossians 3.22)

Let as many slaves as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and his doctrine may not be blasphemed. (1 Timothy 6.1)

Slaves, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. (1 Peter 2.18)

Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it. (1 Corinthians 7.21)

These injunctions were reiterated time and time again to the slave members of Christian communities all over the Roman world in every generation. The effect was to reinforce the legitimacy of slavery as an institution, not to bring alleviation to those who suffered under it or in any way to promote equality in the church between master and slave.<sup>28</sup>

To the ideology of loyalty and obedience that Roman slave-

<sup>28</sup> True slave: cf. Lane Fox 1986: 296. Addressed: the distinction, crucial in my view, is not recognised by Pagels 1988: 74, among others.

owners had always sought to inculcate in their slaves, Christianity brought indeed a novel refinement. It was no longer a question of the master eliciting from the slave by material rewards and incentives a pattern of behaviour the master laid down, but of the slave having to behave as the Master told him to – and coincidentally what master and Master desired was exactly the same. With the argument that obedience was to be given to them 'as unto Christ', Christian slaveowners gave themselves a stronger grip on their slaves than they had ever had before. To pious slaves the teachings on obedience and submission automatically foreclosed all possibility of agitating for freedom, of seeking material improvements, of resisting servitude. Freedom of the spirit and hopes of eternal life, they were repeatedly told, were all that mattered. It was better to be the slave of an earthly master than to be the slave of sin. Slavery was the will of God.<sup>29</sup>

Christianity brought change, therefore, but from the servile perspective it was change not for the better but for the worse. In the past Romans had thought of slavery as a moral evil, full of contagion and horror. Now Christians added a dangerous theological dimension by equating slavery with sin. Slavery was God's punishment for sin, Augustine declared (*C.D.* 19.15), and there was no possibility of error: sin was slavery's first cause. It was a sinister, even pernicious, development. With the promise of spiritual salvation and the threat of eternal damnation at their disposal, Christian slaveowners' psychological domination of their human property was complete. In this sense Christianity did not humanise or otherwise improve the life of the slave; it destroyed it.<sup>30</sup>

The unwillingness of the Christians to tamper with slavery, to call into question its elemental place in the structure of society, is apparent most starkly of all in their adoption of slave imagery to describe and symbolise their relationship with their God. Paul and

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ste Croix 1981: 420: 'Whatever the theologian may think of Christianity's claim to set free the soul of the slave ... the historian cannot deny that it helped to rivet the shackles rather more firmly on his feet.' See also Ste Croix 1975; Brunt 1993: 384–6. The wishes of Christian slaveowners, however, may not always have been secured; see Lane Fox 1986: 297.

<sup>30</sup> Theological dimension: Davis 1966: 90, concluding a chapter on the ancient world, writes: 'For some two thousand years men thought of sin as a kind of slavery. One day they would come to think of slavery as a sin.' To my mind this attributes a mode of thought to classical antiquity that has no basis in evidence and fails to distinguish between Greco-Roman and Christian ways of thinking. For an attempt, however, to draw a moralistic correspondence between Latin *scelus* and Christian sin, see Wallace-Hadrill 1982.

other early Christian leaders quickly styled themselves and their followers 'slaves of Christ' or 'slaves of the Master' or 'slaves of God'. Thus the Epistle to the Philippians opens (1.1) with the words, 'Paul and Timothy, slaves of Jesus Christ ...', while the admonition in the Second Epistle to Timothy (2.24), 'And a slave of the Master must not quarrel but be gentle to all ...', gives an example of the all-encompassing application. English translations tend to prefer 'servants' and 'Lord' for 'slaves' and 'Master' in texts such as these, diluting as a result the forcefulness of the original language (or languages). But to contemporaries there could have been no doubt about the significance of the metaphor. The absolute authority commanded by the object of worship over the worshipper was precisely the same as that commanded by the earthly slave-owner over the slave, while the powerless subjection of the worshipper before God was exactly the same as that characterising the earthly slave's relationship to his owner. To Tertullian (*Apol.* 34.1), the word *dominus* (master) when used of the Christian god meant a god who was omnipotent and omnipotent eternally. It is easy to understand why Augustus in an earlier age should have been so careful to avoid it as a form of personal address.<sup>31</sup>

Because some slaves, in view of the responsible positions they held, had some influence with and ranking before their owners (financial agents, overseers, and so on), the assertion has been made that Paul in particular used the phrase 'slave of Christ' as a title connoting the high authority he held in the early Christian community. But even high ranking slaves were never exempt from physical punishment and other degrading types of maltreatment (as the example of Callistus makes clear), and Paul evidently thought of all Christians as Christ's slaves, not simply Christian leaders like himself. He exhorted slaves to endure their servitude, taking as a norm that slaves were the most downtrodden and unworthy members of society. He knew all the pejorative associations of slavery, taking them over and adapting them to his own purpose. Accordingly there is no room for manoeuvre in understanding the Christian metaphor of slavery. The devotees of the new religion expressed their relationship to their God in the most self-debasing and self-degrading terms that society offered them.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Texts: see Gal. 1.10; Romans 1.1; 6.22; Titus 1.1; Col. 4.12; 1 Pet. 2.16. Augustus: Suet. *Aug.* 53.1.

<sup>32</sup> Assertion: Martin 1990.

It was a remarkable choice, deriving in the first instance from Jewish antecedents. Once taken up, however, the metaphor was never abandoned but became common currency among Christians at all times and in all places regardless of sectarianism, as natural to Eusebius of Caesarea in one generation and to Augustine of Hippo in another as it had been hundreds of years earlier to Paul of Tarsus and others of his age. The logic of Tertullian (*ad Uxorem* 1.1.1; 2.1.1) in addressing his wife as his beloved fellow-slave in the Master (*conserva*) was impeccable. Christians made, therefore, a new addition to the traditional set of asymmetrical relationships between superiors and inferiors that society had always known in the past. Yet as they did so they relied on a spiritual image that bolstered the acceptability of slavery in the real world and increased the ammunition of those who wished to regard it as a natural human institution. In turn the possibility of significant amelioration that Christianity's egalitarian principles theoretically created was closed off by its failure to develop any new intellectual perspective from which slavery might be viewed in a critical light. Roman moralists observed the condition of the slaves around them and retreated from what they saw into abstract intellectualism. Christians made their observations and took refuge in the comfort of their faith. To them change was unnecessary because it was slavery that opened the way to salvation, no matter what misery it entailed along the way. There was no Christian torment, only compromise.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Jewish antecedents: see Nock 1928: 83-7; Vogt 1975: 148-9. Eusebius: *H.E.* 4.15.20; 5.1.3. Augustine: *C.D.* 1.2; 5.26.