

10.7 | Slavery

The meaning of slavery can be summed up by the negation of liberty, equality, property, and rights. Slavery is a deprivation of freedom, the subordination of one man to another as inferior to superior, the condition of being completely propertyless because one's whole being is the property of another, and a status totally devoid of rights. The reader will, therefore, find that the discussion of slavery in this section involves notions treated elsewhere: in Section 11.1 on PROPERTY, in Section 12.3 on RIGHTS—NATURAL AND CIVIL, in Section 13.1 on FREEDOM IN SOCIETY, and in Section 13.3 on EQUALITY. The reader will also find relevant materials in Section 10.6 on DESPOTISM AND TYRANNY.

The passages quoted here define slavery; distinguish different types of slavery; contrast the economic roles of the slave and the artisan, the feudal serf, the peasant, and the proletariat; discuss the policies of masters in the treatment of their slaves; and regard the institution of slavery as one of the consequences of sin. The crucial question, however, concerns the justice of slavery.

One justification of slavery maintains

that, as a matter of fact, some men are by nature slaves and, therefore, should be ruled for the benefit of those who are by nature free. Another justification applies only to those who are taken prisoners in a just war and, having forfeited their lives, can therefore be justly enslaved. Still another turns on regarding slaves as something less than human and, therefore, without human rights.

The condemnation of slavery as intrinsically unjust and a clear violation of man's natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness rests on the affirmation of human equality, the equality of men as men overshadowing their inequalities in all other respects. Rousseau's comment on Aristotle's doctrine of natural slavery calls attention to the central question of fact: Are those who appear to be slavish by nature merely men who have been born into slavery and have had their characters conditioned by their treatment as slaves? If, in fact, no men are by nature slaves, then Aristotle must be counted among those who condemn the enslavement of men as being contrary to nature and, therefore, unjust.

1 Of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land; and they shall be your possession.

Leviticus 25:45

2 *Eumaios.* Zeus who views the wide world takes away half the manhood of a man, that day he goes into captivity and slavery.

Homer, *Odyssey*, XVII, 321

3 *Servant.* He is a poor thing who does not feel as his masters do, grieve in their grief, be happy in their happiness. I, though I wear the name of lackey, yet aspire to be counted in the number of the generous

slaves, for I do not have the name of liberty but have the heart. Better this, than for a single man to have the double evil of an evil spirit and to be named by those about him as a slave.

Euripides, *Helen*, 726

4 *Callides.* The suffering of injustice is not the part of a man, but of a slave, who indeed had better die than live; since when he is wronged and trampled upon, he is unable to help himself, or any other about whom he cares.

Plato, *Gorgias*, 483A

5 *Athenian Stranger.* The right treatment of slaves is to behave properly to them, and to do to them, if possible, even more justice than to those who are

our equals; for he who naturally and genuinely reverences justice, and hates injustice, is discovered in his dealings with any class of men to whom he can easily be unjust. And he who in regard to the natures and actions of his slaves is undefiled by impiety and injustice, will best sow the seeds of virtue in them; and this may be truly said of every master, and tyrant, and to every other having authority in relation to his inferiors.

Plato, *Laws*, VI, 777B

- 6 Now instruments are of various sorts; some are living, others lifeless; in the rudder, the pilot of a ship has a lifeless, in the look-out man, a living instrument; for in the arts the servant is a kind of instrument. Thus, too, a possession is an instrument for maintaining life. And so, in the arrangement of the family, a slave is a living possession, and property a number of such instruments; and the servant is himself an instrument which takes precedence of all other instruments. For if every instrument could accomplish its own work, obeying or anticipating the will of others . . . if . . . the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves.

Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253^b27

- 7 The master is only the master of the slave; he does not belong to him, whereas the slave is not only the slave of his master, but wholly belongs to him. Hence we see what is the nature and office of a slave; he who is by nature not his own but another's man, is by nature a slave; and he may be said to be another's man who, being a human being, is also a possession. And a possession may be defined as an instrument of action, separable from the possessor.

But is there any one thus intended by nature to be a slave, and for whom such a condition is expedient and right, or rather is not all slavery a violation of nature? There is no difficulty in answering this question, on grounds both of reason and of fact. For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.

Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254^a12

- 8 We may firstly observe in living creatures both a despotical and a constitutional rule; for the soul rules the body with a despotical rule, whereas the intellect rules the appetites with a constitutional and royal rule. And it is clear that the rule of the soul over the body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate, is natural and expedient; whereas the equality of the two or the rule of the inferior is always hurtful. The same holds good of animals in relation to men; for tame animals have a better nature than wild, and all

tame animals are better off when they are ruled by man; for then they are preserved. Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind. Where then there is such a difference as that between soul and body, or between men and animals (as in the case of those whose business is to use their body, and who can do nothing better), the lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master. For he who can be, and therefore is, another's, and he who participates in rational principle enough to apprehend, but not to have, such a principle, is a slave by nature. Whereas the lower animals cannot even apprehend a principle; they obey their instincts. And indeed the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their bodies minister to the needs of life. Nature would like to distinguish between the bodies of freemen and slaves, making the one strong for servile labour, the other upright, and although useless for such services, useful for political life in the arts both of war and peace. But the opposite often happens—that some have the souls and others have the bodies of freemen. And doubtless if men differed from one another in the mere forms of their bodies as much as the statues of the Gods do from men, all would acknowledge that the inferior class should be slaves of the superior. And if this is true of the body, how much more just that a similar distinction should exist in the soul? but the beauty of the body is seen, whereas the beauty of the soul is not seen. It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right.

Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254^b2

- 9 What difference does it make how many masters a man has? Slavery is only one, and yet the person who refuses to let the thought of it affect him is a free man no matter how great the swarm of masters around him.

Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, 28

- 10 'They're slaves,' people say. No. They're human beings. 'They're slaves.' But they share the same roof as ourselves. 'They're slaves.' No, they're friends, humble friends. 'They're slaves.' Strictly speaking they're our fellow-slaves, if you once reflect that fortune has as much power over us as over them.

Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, 47

- 11 How about reflecting that the person you call your slave traces his origin back to the same stock as yourself, has the same good sky above him, breathes as you do, lives as you do, dies as you do? It is as easy for you to see in him a free-born man

as for him to see a slave in you.

Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, 47

- 12 Effort is free once it is towards a fully recognised good; the involuntary is, precisely, motion away from a good and towards the enforced, towards something not recognised as a good; servitude lies in being powerless to move towards one's good, being debarred from the preferred path in a menial obedience. Hence the shame of slavery is incurred not when one is held from the hurtful but when the personal good must be yielded in favour of another's.
- Plotinus, *Sixth Ennead*, VIII, 4
- 13 He did not intend that His rational creature, who was made in His image, should have dominion over anything but the irrational creation—not man over man, but man over the beasts. And hence the righteous men in primitive times were made shepherds of cattle rather than kings of men, God intending thus to teach us what the relative position of the creatures is, and what the desert of sin; for it is with justice, we believe, that the condition of slavery is the result of sin. And this is why we do not find the word "slave" in any part of Scripture until righteous Noah branded the sin of his son with this name. It is a name, therefore, introduced by sin and not by nature. The origin of the Latin word for slave is supposed to be found in the circumstance that those who by the law of war were liable to be killed were sometimes preserved by their victors, and were hence called servants. And these circumstances could never have arisen save through sin. For even when we wage a just war, our adversaries must be sinning; and every victory, even though gained by wicked men, is a result of the first judgment of God, who humbles the vanquished either for the sake of removing or of punishing their sins. Witness that man of God, Daniel, who, when he was in captivity, confessed to God his own sins and the sins of his people, and declares with pious grief that these were the cause of the captivity. The prime cause, then, of slavery is sin, which brings man under the dominion of his fellow—that which does not happen save by the judgment of God, with Whom is no unrighteousness, and Who knows how to award fit punishments to every variety of offence. But our Master in heaven says, "Every one who doeth sin is the servant of sin." And thus there are many wicked masters who have religious men as their slaves, and who are yet themselves in bondage; "for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage." And beyond question it is a happier thing to be the slave of a man than of a lust; for even this very lust of ruling, to mention no others, lays waste men's hearts with the most ruthless dominion. Moreover, when men are subjected to one another in a peaceful order, the lowly position does as

much good to the servant as the proud position does harm to the master. But by nature, as God first created us, no one is the slave either of man or of sin. This servitude is, however, penal, and is appointed by that law which enjoins the preservation of the natural order and forbids its disturbance; for if nothing had been done in violation of that law, there would have been nothing to restrain by penal servitude. And therefore the apostle admonishes slaves to be subject to their masters, and to serve them heartily and with good-will, so that, if they cannot be freed by their masters, they may themselves make their slavery in some sort free, by serving not in crafty fear, but in faithful love, until all unrighteousness pass away, and all principality and every human power be brought to nothing, and God be all in all.

Augustine, *City of God*, XIX, 15

- 14 Subjection is twofold. One is servile, by virtue of which a superior makes use of a subject for his own benefit, and this kind of subjection began after sin. There is another kind of subjection, which is called economic or civil, whereby the superior makes use of his subjects for their own benefit and good; and this kind of subjection existed even before sin.
- Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 92, 1
- 15 A slave differs from a free man in that the latter "has the disposal of himself," as is stated in the beginning of [Aristotle's] *Metaphysics*, but a slave is ordered to another. So that one man is master of another as his slave when he refers the one whose master he is, to his own—namely, the master's, use. And since every man's proper good is desirable to himself, and consequently it is a grievous matter to anyone to yield to another what ought to be one's own, therefore such dominion implies of necessity a pain inflicted on the subject. And therefore in the state of innocence such a mastership could not have existed between man and man.
- Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 96, 4
- 16 The master of the servant is master also of all he hath, and may exact the use thereof; that is to say, of his goods, of his labour, of his servants, and of his children, as often as he shall think fit. For he holdeth his life of his master by the covenant of obedience; that is, of owning and authorising whatsoever the master shall do. And in case the master, if he refuse, kill him, or cast him into bonds, or otherwise punish him for his disobedience, he is himself the author of the same, and cannot accuse him of injury.
- Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II, 20
- 17 Freedom from absolute, arbitrary power is so necessary to, and closely joined with, a man's preservation, that he cannot part with it but by what

forfeits his preservation and life together. For a man, not having the power of his own life, cannot by compact or his own consent enslave himself to any one, nor put himself under the absolute, arbitrary power of another to take away his life when he pleases. Nobody can give more power than he has himself, and he that cannot take away his own life cannot give another power over it. . . .

The perfect condition of slavery . . . is nothing else but the state of war continued between a lawful conqueror and a captive, for if once compact enter between them, and make an agreement for a limited power on the one side, and obedience on the other, the state of war and slavery ceases as long as the compact endures; for, as has been said, no man can by agreement pass over to another that which he hath not in himself—a power over his own life.

Locke, *II Civil Government*, IV, 22–23

- 18 There is another sort of servant which by a peculiar name we call slaves, who being captives taken in a just war are, by the right of Nature, subjected to the absolute dominion and arbitrary power of their masters. These men having, as I say, forfeited their lives and, with it, their liberties, and lost their estates, and being in the state of slavery, not capable of any property, cannot in that state be considered as any part of civil society, the chief end whereof is the preservation of property.
- Locke, *II Civil Government*, VII, 85
- 19 Slavery, properly so called, is the establishment of a right which gives to one man such a power over another as renders him absolute master of his life and fortune. The state of slavery is in its own nature bad. It is neither useful to the master nor to the slave; not to the slave, because he can do nothing through a motive of virtue; nor to the master, because by having an unlimited authority over his slaves he insensibly accustoms himself to the want of all moral virtues, and thence becomes fierce, hasty, severe, choleric, voluptuous, and cruel.
- Montesquieu, *Spirit of Laws*, XV, 1
- 20 Were I to vindicate our right to make slaves of the negroes, these should be my arguments:
The Europeans, having extirpated the Americans, were obliged to make slaves of the Africans, for clearing such vast tracts of land.
Sugar would be too dear if the plants which produce it were cultivated by any other than slaves.
These creatures are all over black, and with such a flat nose that they can scarcely be pitied.
It is hardly to be believed that God, who is a wise Being, should place a soul, especially a good soul, in such a black ugly body.
It is so natural to look upon colour as the criterion of human nature, that the Asiatics, among whom eunuchs are employed, always deprive the blacks of their resemblance to us by a more opprobrious distinction.
- The colour of the skin may be determined by that of the hair, which, among the Egyptians, the best philosophers in the world, was of such importance that they put to death all the red-haired men who fell into their hands.
- The negroes prefer a glass necklace to that gold which polite nations so highly value. Can there be a greater proof of their wanting common sense?
- It is impossible for us to suppose these creatures to be men, because, allowing them to be men, a suspicion would follow that we ourselves are not Christians.
- Weak minds exaggerate too much the wrong done to the Africans. For were the case as they state it, would the European powers, who make so many needless conventions among themselves, have failed to enter into a general one, in behalf of humanity and compassion?
- Montesquieu, *Spirit of Laws*, XV, 5
- 21 In moderate governments it is a point of the highest importance that there should not be a great number of slaves. The political liberty of those states adds to the value of civil liberty; and he who is deprived of the latter is also bereft of the former. He sees the happiness of a society, of which he is not so much as a member; he sees the security of others fenced by laws, himself without any protection. He perceives that his master has a soul, capable of enlarging itself: while his own labours under a continual depression. Nothing more assimilates a man to a beast than living among freedmen, himself a slave. Such people as these are natural enemies of society; and their number must be dangerous.
- Montesquieu, *Spirit of Laws*, XV, 12
- 22 Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they.
- Rousseau, *Social Contract*, I, 2
- 23 Aristotle . . . had said that men are by no means equal naturally, but that some are born for slavery, and others for dominion.
Aristotle was right; but he took the effect for the cause. Nothing can be more certain than that every man born in slavery is born for slavery. Slaves lose everything in their chains, even the desire of escaping from them: they love their servitude, as the comrades of Ulysses loved their brutish condition. If then there are slaves by nature, it is because there have been slaves against nature. Force made the first slaves, and their cowardice perpetuated the condition.
- Rousseau, *Social Contract*, I, 2
- 24 The right of conquest has no foundation other

than the right of the strongest. If war does not give the conqueror the right to massacre the conquered peoples, the right to enslave them cannot be based upon a right which does not exist. No one has a right to kill an enemy except when he cannot make him a slave, and the right to enslave him cannot therefore be derived from the right to kill him. It is accordingly an unfair exchange to make him buy at the price of his liberty his life, over which the victor holds no right. Is it not clear that there is a vicious circle in founding the right of life and death on the right of slavery, and the right of slavery on the right of life and death?

Rousseau, *Social Contract*, I, 4

- 25 Is liberty maintained only by the help of slavery? It may be so. Extremes meet. Everything that is not in the course of nature has its disadvantages, civil society most of all. There are some unhappy circumstances in which we can only keep our liberty at others' expense, and where the citizen can be perfectly free only when the slave is most a slave. Such was the case with Sparta. As for you, modern peoples, you have no slaves, but you are slaves yourselves; you pay for their liberty with your own. It is in vain that you boast of this preference; I find in it more cowardice than humanity.

I do not mean by all this that it is necessary to have slaves, or that the right of slavery is legitimate: I am merely giving the reasons why modern peoples, believing themselves to be free, have representatives, while ancient peoples had none. In any case, the moment a people allows itself to be represented, it is no longer free: it no longer exists.

Rousseau, *Social Contract*, III, 15

- 26 After supper I accompanied him [Johnson] to his apartment, and at my request he dictated to me an argument in favour of the negro who was then claiming his liberty, in an action in the Court of Session in Scotland. He had always been very zealous against slavery in every form, in which I, with all deference, thought that he discovered "a zeal without knowledge." Upon one occasion, when in company with some very grave men at Oxford, his toast was, "Here's to the next insurrection of the negroes in the West Indies." His violent prejudice against our West Indian and American settlers appeared whenever there was an opportunity. Towards the conclusion of his *Taxation no Tyranny*, he says, "how is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?" . . .

The argument dictated by Dr. Johnson was as follows:—

"It must be agreed that in most ages many countries have had part of their inhabitants in a state of slavery; yet it may be doubted whether slavery can ever be supposed the natural condition of man. It is impossible not to conceive that

men in their original state were equal; and very difficult to imagine how one would be subjected to another but by violent compulsion. An individual may, indeed, forfeit his liberty by a crime; but he cannot by that crime forfeit the liberty of his children. What is true of a criminal seems true likewise of a captive. A man may accept life from a conquering enemy on condition of perpetual servitude; but it is very doubtful whether he can entail that servitude on his descendants; for no man can stipulate without commission for another. The condition which he himself accepts, his son or grandson perhaps would have rejected. If we should admit, what perhaps may with more reason be denied, that there are certain relations between man and man which may make slavery necessary and just, yet it can never be proved that he who is now suing for his freedom ever stood in any of those relations. He is certainly subject by no law, but that of violence, to his present master; who pretends no claim to his obedience, but that he bought him from a merchant of slaves, whose right to sell him never was examined. . . . The sum of the argument is this:—No man is by nature the property of another: The defendant is, therefore, by nature free: The rights of nature must be some way forfeited before they can be justly taken away: That the defendant has by any act forfeited the rights of nature we require to be proved; and if no proof of such forfeiture can be given, we doubt not but the justice of the court will declare him free."

I record Dr. Johnson's argument fairly upon this particular case; where, perhaps, he was in the right. But I beg leave to enter my most solemn protest against his general doctrine with respect to the *Slave Trade*. For I will resolutely say—that his unfavourable notion of it was owing to prejudice, and imperfect or false information. The wild and dangerous attempt which has for some time been persisted in to obtain an act of our Legislature, to abolish so very important and necessary a branch of commercial interest, must have been crushed at once, had not the insignificance of the zealots who vainly took the lead in it, made the vast body of Planters, Merchants, and others, whose immense properties are involved in that trade, reasonably enough suppose that there could be no danger. The encouragement which the attempt has received excites my wonder and indignation: and though some men of superiour abilities have supported it; whether from a love of temporary popularity, when prosperous; or a love of general mischief, when desperate, my opinion is unshaken. To abolish a *status*, which in all ages God has sanctioned, and man has continued, would not only be robbery to an innumerable class of our fellow-subjects; but it would be extreme cruelty to the African Savages, a portion of whom it saves from massacre, or intolerable bondage in their own country, and introduces into a much happier state

of life; especially now when their passage to the West Indies and their treatment there is humanely regulated. To abolish that trade would be to

—*shut the gates of mercy on mankind.*

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Sept. 23, 1777)

- 27 There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal. This quality is the germ of all education in him. From his cradle to his grave he is learning to do what he sees others do. If a parent could find no motive either in his philanthropy or his self-love, for restraining the intemperance of passion towards his slave, it should always be a sufficient one that his child is present. But generally it is not sufficient. The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to the worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances. And with what execration should the statesman be loaded, who, permitting one half the citizens thus to trample on the rights of the other, transforms those into despots, and these into enemies, destroys the morals of the one part, and the *amor patriæ* of the other. For if a slave can have a country in this world, it must be any other in preference to that in which he is born to live and labor for another; in which he must lock up the faculties of his nature, contribute as far as depends on his individual endeavors to the evanishment of the human race, or entail his own miserable condition on the endless generations proceeding from him. With the morals of the people, their industry also is destroyed. For in a warm climate, no man will labor for himself who can make another labor for him. This is so true, that of the proprietors of slaves a very small proportion indeed are ever seen to labor. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever; that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation is among possible events; that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest.

Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, XVIII

- 28 In the free states of antiquity the domestic slaves were exposed to the wanton rigour of despotism. The perfect settlement of the Roman empire was

preceded by ages of violence and rapine. The slaves consisted, for the most part, of barbarian captives, taken in thousands by the chance of war, purchased at a vile price, accustomed to a life of independence, and impatient to break and to revenge their fetters. Against such internal enemies, whose desperate insurrections had more than once reduced the republic to the brink of destruction, the most severe regulations, and the most cruel treatment, seemed almost justified by the great law of self-preservation. But when the principal nations of Europe, Asia, and Africa, were united under the laws of one sovereign, the source of foreign supplies flowed with much less abundance, and the Romans were reduced to the milder but more tedious method of propagation. In their numerous families, and particularly in their country estates, they encouraged the marriage of their slaves. The sentiments of nature, the habits of education, and the possession of a dependent species of property, contributed to alleviate the hardships of servitude. The existence of a slave became an object of greater value, and though his happiness still depended on the temper and circumstances of the master, the humanity of the latter, instead of being restrained by fear, was encouraged by the sense of his own interest. The progress of manners was accelerated by the virtue or policy of the emperors; and by the edicts of Hadrian and the Antonines, the protection of the laws was extended to the most abject part of mankind. The jurisdiction of life and death over the slaves, a power long exercised and often abused, was taken out of private hands, and reserved to the magistrates alone. The subterraneous prisons were abolished; and, upon a just complaint of intolerable treatment, the injured slave obtained either his deliverance, or a less cruel master.

Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, II

- 29 No individual in the state can indeed be entirely without dignity; for he has at least that of being a citizen, except when he has lost his civil status by a crime. As a criminal he is still maintained in life, but he is made the mere instrument of the will of another, whether it be the state or a particular citizen. In the latter position, in which he could only be placed by a juridical judgement, he would practically become a *slave*, and would belong as property to another, who would be not merely his master but his owner. Such an owner would be entitled to exchange or alienate him as a thing, to use him at will except for shameful purposes, and to *dispose of his powers*, but not of his life and members. No one can bind himself to such a condition of dependence, as he would thereby cease to be a person, and it is only as a person that

he can make a contract.

Kant, *Science of Right*, 49

- 30 Even if by committing a crime [a person] has *personally* become subjected to another, this subject-condition does not become *hereditary*; for he has only brought it upon himself by his own wrongdoing. Neither can one who has been begotten by a slave be claimed as property on the ground of the cost of his rearing, because such rearing is an absolute duty naturally incumbent upon parents; and in case the parents be slaves, it devolves upon their masters or owners, who, in undertaking the possession of such subjects, have also made themselves responsible for the performance of their duties.

Kant, *Science of Right*, 49

Let the case of the slaves be considered, as it is in truth, a peculiar one. Let the compromising expedient of the Constitution be mutually adopted, which regards them as inhabitants, but as debased by servitude below the equal level of free inhabitants; which regards the slave as divested of two-fifths of the man.

Hamilton or Madison, *Federalist* 54

- 32 To adhere to man's absolute freedom—one aspect of the matter—is *eo ipso* to condemn slavery. Yet if a man is a slave, his own will is responsible for his slavery, just as it is its will which is responsible if a people is subjugated. Hence the wrong of slavery lies at the door not simply of enslavers or conquerors but of the slaves and the conquered themselves. Slavery occurs in man's transition from the state of nature to genuinely ethical conditions; it occurs in a world where a wrong is still right. At that stage wrong has validity and so is necessarily in place.

Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Additions,
Par. 57

- 33 Mr. [Henry] Clay said to me: "In our Southern states there are a great many districts where white people cannot get acclimatized and where the blacks live and prosper. I imagine that in time the black population of the South, as it becomes free, will concentrate in that portion of the American territory, and the white population, on the other hand, will gradually move out. In that way a population will be formed entirely descended from the Africans, which will be able to have its own nationality and to enjoy its own laws. I can see no other solution to the great question of slavery. I do not think that the blacks will ever mingle sufficiently completely with the white to form a single people with them. The introduction of this foreign race is anyhow the one great plague of America."

Tocqueville, *Journey to America*
(Sept. 18, 1831)

- 34 Interview with Mr. [John Quincy] Adams (the former President). . . .

Do you look on slavery as a great plague for the United States?

Yes, certainly. That is the root of almost all the troubles of the present and fears for the future.

Do the Southerners realize that state of affairs?

Yes, at the bottom of their hearts. But it is a truth that they will not admit, although they are clearly preoccupied about it. Slavery has altered the whole state of society in the South. There the whites form a class to themselves which has all the ideas, all the passions, all the prejudices of an aristocracy. But do not be mistaken; nowhere is equality between the whites so complete as in the South. Here we have great equality before the law, but it simply does not affect our ways of life. There are upper classes and working classes. Every white man in the South is an equally privileged being whose destiny it is to make the Negroes work without working himself. You cannot conceive how far the idea that work is shameful has entered into the spirit of the Americans of the South. Any undertaking in which the Negroes cannot serve in a subordinate role is sure not to succeed in that part of the Union. All those who trade in a large way in Charleston and the towns have come from New England.

I remember a Southern congressman who was dining with me in Washington, and who could not conceal his surprise at seeing white servants serving us at table. He said to Mrs. Adams: "I feel that it is degrading the human race to have white men for servants. When one of them comes to change my plate, I am always tempted to offer him my place at table." From the idleness in which the whites in the South live spring great differences in their character. They devote themselves to bodily exercises, to hunting and races. They are strongly built, brave, and very honorable; they are more touchy about "points of honor" than people anywhere else; duels are frequent.

Do you think that actually it is impossible to do without Negroes in the South?

I am convinced to the contrary. Europeans cultivate the land in Greece and in Sicily; why should they not do so in Virginia or the Carolinas? It is not hotter there.

Is the number of slaves increasing?

It is diminishing in all the provinces to the east of the Delaware because there wheat and tobacco are grown, and for those crops Negroes are more hindrance than help. So they are sent from there to the provinces where cotton and sugar are grown; in those provinces their numbers increase. In the states of the West where they have been introduced, their numbers remain small.

Tocqueville, *Journey to America* (Oct. 1, 1831)

- 35 I hold that, in the present state of civilization,

where two races of different origin and distinguished by color and other physical differences, as well as intellectual, are brought together, the relation now existing in the slaveholding states between the two is, instead of an evil, a good—a positive good. I feel myself called upon to speak freely upon the subject, where the honor and interests of those I represent are involved. I hold, then, that there never has yet existed a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion of the community did not, in point of fact, live on the labor of the other. Broad and general as is this assertion, it is fully borne out by history.

J. C. Calhoun, *Speech on the Reception of Abolitionist Petitions* (Feb. 1837)

- 36 If you put a chain around the neck of a slave, the other end fastens itself around your own.

Emerson, *Compensation*

- 37 What of it, if some old hunks of a sea-captain orders me to get a broom and sweep down the decks? What does that indignity amount to, weighed, I mean, in the scales of the New Testament? Who is not a slave? Tell me that. Well, then, however the old sea-captains may order me about—however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right: that everybody else is one way or other served in much the same way—either in a physical or metaphysical point of view, that is; and so the universal thump is passed round, and all hands should rub each other's shoulder-blades, and be content.

Melville, *Moby Dick*, I

- 38 Although volume upon volume is written to prove slavery a very good thing, we never hear of the man who wishes to take the good of it, by being a slave himself.

Lincoln, *Fragment on Slavery* (July 1, 1854)

- 39 If A can prove, however conclusively, that he may of right enslave B, why may not B snatch the same argument and prove equally that he may enslave A?

You say A is white, and B is black. It is color, then; the lighter having the right to enslave the darker? Take care. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet with a fairer skin than your own.

You do not mean color exactly? You mean the whites are intellectually the superiors of the blacks, and therefore have the right to enslave them? Take care again. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet with an intellect superior to your own.

But, say you, it is a question of interest; and if you can make it your interest, you have the right to enslave another. Very well. And if he can make

it his interest, he has the right to enslave you.

Lincoln, *Fragment on Slavery* (July 1, 1854)

- 40 If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—ferently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

Lincoln, *Second Inaugural Address*

- 41 In slave labour, even that part of the working day in which the slave is only replacing the value of his own means of existence, in which, therefore, in fact, he works for himself alone, appears as labour for his master. All the slave's labour appears as unpaid labour.

Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, VI, 19

- 42 In this and most other civilised countries . . . an engagement by which a person should sell himself, or allow himself to be sold, as a slave, would be null and void; neither enforced by law nor by opinion. The ground for thus limiting his power of voluntarily disposing of his own lot in life, is apparent, and is very clearly seen in this extreme case. The reason for not interfering, unless for the sake of others, with a person's voluntary acts, is consideration for his liberty. His voluntary choice is evidence that what he so chooses is desirable, or at least endurable, to him, and his good is on the whole best provided for by allowing him to take his own means of pursuing it. But by selling himself for a slave, he abdicates his liberty; he foregoes any future use of it beyond that single act. He therefore defeats, in his own case, the very purpose which is the justification of allowing him to dispose of himself. He is no longer free; but is thenceforth in a position which has no longer the presumption in its favour, that would be afforded by his voluntarily remaining in it. The principle of freedom cannot require that he should be free not to be free. It is not freedom to be allowed to alienate his freedom.

Mill, *On Liberty*, V

- 43 All mankind is divided, as it was at all times and is still, into slaves and freemen; for whoever has

not two-thirds of his day for himself is a slave, be he otherwise whatever he likes, statesman, merchant, official, or scholar.

Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, 283

44 In the relation of master to slave the master does not make a point of the need that he has for the other; he has in his grasp the power of satisfying

this need through his own action; whereas the slave, in his dependent condition, his hope and fear, is quite conscious of the need he has for his master. Even if the need is at bottom equally urgent for both, it always works in favor of the oppressor and against the oppressed.

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Intro.

10.8 | *Classes and Class Conflict*

The notion of the class struggle or class conflict was not invented by Karl Marx, though it is often attributed to him, as is also the conception of a classless society. The reader will find a passage from the *Republic* in which Plato declares that there are two cities, not one, the city of the rich and the city of the poor; and they are forever in conflict with one another. The reader will also find a statement by Aristotle setting forth his conception of the ideal polity as one that approximates classlessness through the overwhelming preponderance of a middle class, neither rich nor poor.

Toynbee's observation that war and class are the twin evils that have plagued all historic civilizations and brought their downfall is corroborated by much that is said in the quotations gathered below. Among the class divisions mentioned, the two that have exerted the greatest divisiveness upon society are, first, the chasm that separates the haves from the have-nots, the rich from the poor, the propertied class from the unpropertied; and the second, the one that sets a ruling class apart from a subject class, those with political power and privileges and

those excluded from active participation in political life.

The acceptance of class divisions and class conflict is not confined to the ancients. The reader will find it in quotations drawn from Montesquieu, Rousseau, and even from Thomas Jefferson, who, in proposing an educational system for Virginia, thought of the children as divided into those who were destined for labor and those who were destined for leisure and learning. The reader will also find a quotation from the tenth *Federalist* paper, in which Madison argues that since factions and factional conflict cannot be eliminated from society, the best we can hope to do is to find ways of remedying or attenuating their baneful effects.

A class-structured society promotes and preserves inequalities of treatment, status, and opportunity. Hence those who advocate a universal equality of conditions favor the ideal of a classless society. For other relevant discussion, the reader is referred to Section 11.2 on WEALTH AND POVERTY, Section 13.3 on EQUALITY, Section 10.4 on GOVERNMENT OF AND BY THE PEOPLE: REPUBLIC AND DEMOCRACY, and Section 10.9 on REVOLUTION.