

THE TAXONOMY OF PATIENCE, OR WHEN IS *PATIENTIA* NOT A VIRTUE?

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WE CAN BEGIN with two vignettes, one familiar and edifying, the other less familiar and sordid.

According to legend, the infant Roman Republic was no sooner born than it faced a challenge from Lars Porsenna of Clusium, who first gave refuge to Tarquinius Superbus and then demanded restoration of the deposed king and his line. After direct attack failed, Porsenna laid siege to the city; as the siege wore on and began to grind the Romans down, a young noble, Gaius Mucius, received the senate's approval for a plan to steal into the enemy camp and assassinate Porsenna. Here is how Saint Augustine finishes the story, as he took it over from Livy and used it to point a moral of his own:¹

[Mucius intended] to bring about peace with King Porsenna, who at that time was pressing the Romans hard in war. Because he failed to kill Porsenna himself and killed another instead by mistake, he thrust his right hand into the fire that was burning on an altar before the king's eyes, saying that there were many such men who had sworn to bring about his end. Struck through by dread at [Mucius'] hardihood, and at the thought of an oath taken by men like that, the king unhesitatingly and at once withdrew from the war and made peace. Then who will reckon up his services to the kingdom of heaven, if for its sake he suffers fiery immolation, not of a hand but of his whole body, and not at his own instance but that of a persecutor?

By mutilating himself Mucius famously earned the nickname "Lefty"—Scaevola—which was thereafter passed down proudly to his descendants. Mucius himself entered the honor roll of Roman historical *exempla*, those paradigms of virtue in which, the Romans thought, their history was uniquely rich. Through his willful and defiant suffering Scaevola became great, and memorable.

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1. August. *De civ. D.* 5.18 "si Mucius, ut cum Porsenna rege pax fieret, qui gravissimo bello Romanos premebat, quia Porsennam ipsum occidere non potuit et pro eo alterum deceptus occidit, in ardentem aram ante eius oculos dexteram extendit, dicens multos se tales, qualem illum videret, in eius exitium coniurasse, cuius ille fortitudinem et coniurationem talium perhorrescens sine ulla dubitatione se ab illo bello facta pace compescuit: quis regno caelorum inputaturus est merita sua, si pro illo non unam manum neque hoc sibi ultro faciens, sed persequente aliquo patiens totum flammis corpus inpenderit?" Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

For the second vignette I turn to the younger Seneca, who also tells a story to point a moral, though of a rather different sort. His tale, a blend of high dudgeon and prurience, gives us the moralist in full battle cry (*Q. Nat.* 1. 16):²

At this point I want to tell you a little story, so that you may understand how lust scorns no instrument for rousing passion and what a talent it has for whipping itself into a frenzy. There was a man named Hostius Quadra, . . . rich, greedy, a slave to his millions. The deified Augustus did not consider him worth being avenged when he was murdered by his slaves, and all but proclaimed that he seemed to have been murdered justly. He was vile in relation not to one sex alone but lusted after men as well as women. He had mirrors made . . . that reflect images far larger [than they really are], in which a finger exceeded the length and thickness of an arm. These, moreover, he so arranged that when he was offering himself to a man he might see in a mirror all the movements of his stallion behind him and then take delight in the false size of his partner's very member. . . . The things that monster said and did . . . are disgusting to talk about. [Oh yes, disgusting—though Seneca is only one-third the way through his tale, and just getting warmed up.] Mirrors faced him on all sides in order that he might be a spectator of his own shame. . . . As though it were not enough to submit himself to unheard-of—even unknown—acts he summoned his eyes to witness them. . . . He used to watch men admitted all alike to his person for all the doings. Sometimes shared between a man and a woman, and with his whole body spread in position for submitting to them [*toto corpore patientiae expositus*], he used to watch the unspeakable acts. . . . “At the same time,” he said, “I submit to both a man and a woman—and nonetheless, even with that part of my body not occupied I perform the role of a male in the violation of another person. All my organs are occupied in the lechery. Let my eyes, too, come into their share of the debauchery and be witnesses and supervisors of it. . . . Nature did poorly in providing such scanty accessories to human lust . . . I will discover a way to deceive my sick wants and satisfy them. To what purpose my depravity if I sin only to the limit of nature? . . . Let my lust see more than it consumes and marvel at what it undergoes [*obscenitas mea . . . patientiam suam ipsa miretur*].” Shameful behavior! . . . He ought to have been immolated in front of his own mirror!

Now one could reasonably ask what Mucius Scaevola and Hostius Quadra—the hero of Roman legend and Seneca's sexual grotesque—might even remotely have in common. They seem to occupy opposing poles of existence, the one taken to embody the extremes of physical and moral hardihood, the other summoned up as the ultimate in physical and moral degradation. And yet, in Roman terms, they are united by exemplifying precisely the same quality: *patientia*. So, for example, Scaevola stands first among the *exempla* that Valerius Maximus chooses when he devotes a chapter of his collection of memorable deeds and sayings to *patientia*, with the remark that “Hardihood (*fortitudo*) has revealed itself to human-kind through the outstanding works of men and women alike, and [in so doing] has urged *patientia* to take center stage—a quality with equally strong and stable roots and equally rich in noble spirit, so similar in fact that it

2. On the story of Hostius Quadra, approached from different perspectives, see most recently D. C. Leitaõ, “Senecan Catoptrics and the Passion of Hostius Quadra (*Sen. Nat.* 1),” *Materiali e Discussioni* 41 (1998): 127–60; C. A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (Oxford, 1999), 203–4. The much-abbreviated version of Seneca's rant given in the text here is adapted from the Loeb of T. H. Corcoran (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).

could seem to have been born either from or with *fortitudo* itself.”³ At the other pole, Hostius Quadra is said by Seneca to be *toto corpore patientiae expositus*, and his elaborate experiments with optics are said to have this as their goal: *Obscenitas mea . . . patientiam suam ipsa miretur* (“that my very lust might marvel at its own *patientia*”). What, exactly, is this trait called *patientia*, corresponding to dispositions that, in English, might range from “endurance” to “patience” to “forbearance” to “passivity” to “submissiveness,” but that Latin denoted with but a single term? It is a term that, more than any other Latin word I know, can be used to express either high praise or grave condemnation: how can we understand its range, variability, and ambivalence?⁴

Let me begin by offering a few general and, I think, unproblematic observations on the trait: these will lead us to the central problem of *patientia*, which we can then consider in more detail. Most obviously, most literally, and most generally, *patientia* is the quality entailed in being the recipient, not the generator, of action or experience. That is its simple, etymological sense, as the abstract noun derived from the verb *pati*, the opposite of *agere* or *facere*; the opposition, of course, is among the most familiar binary simplifications of life, framing existence as either active or passive, as a matter of doing or being done to. Aligned as it is on one side of this opposition, *patientia* functions as a term for defining a person’s fundamental position in the world, in relation to his or her total environment: that is, in relation to the general human condition—the natural, physical world and its demands—on the one hand, and in relation to other human beings, on the other. As we will soon see, this distinction, between the natural and the social or ethical dimensions of *patientia*, is especially helpful in understanding the dynamics of the trait and its evaluation.

Given the “global” role of *patientia*, then, we might find it instructive at this point to ask the question: what does the Roman world look like viewed only through the lens of *patientia*? By way of an answer I can suggest a set of three propositions that seem to go to the trait’s core:

Proposition 1. The natural world is hard and not made for the convenience of human beings, much less for their pleasure. This fact provides the backdrop against which *patientia* most commonly figures, and with reference to which it most consistently appears as a virtue. This is *patientia* as a response to external nature, the elements, and the conditions of life that nature and the elements impose: *patientia frigoris* or *patientia solis*—the ability to tolerate cold or heat, for example—and *patientia doloris* or

3. Val. Max. 3. 3. pr.: “egregiis virorum pariter ac feminarum operibus fortitudo se oculis hominum subiecit patientiamque in medium procedere hortata est, non sane infirmioribus radicibus stabilitam aut minus generoso spiritu abundantem, sed ita similitudine iunctam, ut cum ea vel ex ea nata videri possit.”

4. The discussion that follows is based on a complete survey of the behavior of nominal and participial forms in (*im*)*patien*- and on extensive sampling of the verbal forms derived from *pati*: both surveys were greatly assisted by the Packard Humanities Institute CD-ROM #5.3 (1991). Note that though the moral ambivalence of *patientia* is especially pronounced, it is not unique: *audacia*—in some respects a diametrically opposed trait—offers another instance; cf. my article “The Shame of the Romans,” *TAPA* 127 (1997): 16–17.

patientia laboris—the ability to tolerate the pain that inevitably results from living in the physical world, or the ability to tolerate the toil that the physical world imposes because the Golden Age is a myth and human beings must scratch a living from the earth in the sweat of their brow.⁵ These traits are unequivocally good: as such, they are understood to have been the traits of the *maiores*, the archetypal yeomen of the Roman self-conception, who made Rome what it was, before foreign elements and luxury made it soft. The people who possessed this sort of *patientia* enjoyed a simple and pristine virtue, a trait so basic and seemingly so “natural” that it assimilated them to the domesticated animals—the horse and the ox—that were valued for *patientia* of the same type.⁶ At the same time, *patientia frigoris*, *patientia solis*, *patientia doloris*, *patientia laboris* are also the virtues of the soldier, exposed to the elements and the pain of dreadful wounds: not for nothing were the ancestral yeomen not only farmers but warriors too, as they appear in Vergil’s evocation of the hardy Italian youths (*Aen.* 9. 607–8): “*patiens operum parvoque adsueta iuventus / aut rastris terram domat aut quatit oppida bello.*” From this point of view, then, *patientia* links agriculture and warfare as the “natural” spheres of the mature man, just as being *patiens viri*—“capable of experiencing a man,” for marriage and procreation—marks the “natural” state of the mature woman.⁷ This is a point to which I will return.

Proposition 2. Faced with the hardness of the physical world, a real man must respond not merely with a composed and quiet endurance (a lower-case “stoical” endurance) but with behavior that comes as close to an active role as circumstances allow. Being on the receiving end of experience here goes beyond self-protection—the endurance of the turtle withdrawing into his shell—and shades over into resistance, and the sense that just by virtue of withstanding you are actually moving forward toward some goal. This aggressive passivity, if I can put it that way, links *patientia* with *fortitudo*, as we have already seen it linked by Valerius Maximus, when he describes *patientia* as being “so similar in fact [to *fortitudo*] that it could seem to have been born either from or with *fortitudo* itself.” With Valerius’ biological model, and its slight indecision—is it more correct to regard *patientia* as the offspring of *fortitudo*, or its twin?—we can compare two of Cicero’s remarks on the subject. First from the youthful *De inventione*: “*fortitudo* is the deliberate undertaking of dangers and endurance of travails. Its parts are *magnificentia*, *fidentia*, *patientia*, *perseverantia*. . . . *patientia* is the willing

5. *patientia frigoris*: e.g., Cic. *Cat.* 1.26; Livy 21.4.6. *patientia solis*: e.g., Hor. *Carm.* 1.8.4 (cf. Tac. *Hist.* 2.99: “*impatiens solis pulveris tempestatum, quantumque hebes ad sustinendum laborem miles*”). *patientia doloris*: e.g., Cic. *Tusc.* 2.65, 5.41; Sen. *Ep.* 23.4; Plin. *Ep.* 1.22.7. *patientia laboris*: Sall. *Jug.* 44.1 (cf. *Cat.* 5.3); Livy 39.40.11; Sen. *Controv.* 1. pr. 14; Curt. 10.5.27; Sen. *Dial.* 6.2.3; Suet. *Iul.* 57.1 (cf. *Ov. Tr.* 3.2.10: “*mollis et impatiens ante laboris eram*”; Sen. *Dial.* 6.11.3: “*frigoris aestus laboris impatiens*”).

6. E.g., *patientia laboris*: Columella *Rust.* 6.2.8, 6.36.2, 7.1.2, 7.6.9 (cf. Sen. *Dial.* 4.16.2).

7. Festus p. 250 L: “*pubes . . . incipit esse a quattuordecim annis: femina a duodecim viri potens, sive patiens, ut quidam putant.*” On *pati* as “the technical term of the passive role in intercourse,” see J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore, 1982), 189–90 (drawing a contrast with the rare sexual use of Gk. πάσχω); cf. H. N. Parker, “The Teratogenic Grid,” in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. J. Hallett and M. Skinner (Princeton, 1997), 48–52; Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (note 2 above), 174–75.

and sustained endurance of difficult and challenging tasks for the sake of an honorable or useful end." Then from the *Partitiones oratoriae*, written for his son a generation later: "That which stands to meet oncoming woes is called *fortitudo*, that which endures and sees to the end what is already at hand is called *patientia*. The quality that embraces them both is called *magnitudo animi*."⁸ Setting aside the differences among these definitions (and there are other such definitions, all with some variations), we can see the noble company that *patientia* keeps, especially its association with "greatness of spirit" and a goal beyond itself. Such resistance does not make the physical world an easier place, or often do much good in the event, but there was no useful or respectable alternative.

In fact, there can be no alternative that equally displays the exertion of the individual will against the world: *patientia* says not only "I am" but also "I choose," against experience that seems to threaten existence and nullify choice. This is the link between *patientia* and *magnitudo animi* (greatness of spirit), if we understand the latter quality to be the controlled and insistent expression of what a person thinks essential in himself. *Patientia* demonstrates that you are self-possessed—in your own *potestas*, not that of circumstance—and that you are acting under the direction of your own will: as Cicero says at one point, "totum in eo est, ut tibi imperes" (the whole point is that you are the one giving yourself orders); and he goes on to suggest that it is this self-direction that keeps the *animus* under control and actually makes the pain itself seem somehow milder.⁹ Even horrendous experience, if it is suffered under commands from oneself and in that sense is self-chosen and self-willed, can be counted a good and be held out as exemplary. So we have Scaevola, with whom we began, plunging his right hand into the fire (Scaevola's example was imitated by Pompey the Great himself, though to less devastating effect, Val. Max. 3.3.2). So we have Atilius Regulus, choosing to return to Carthage and certain death in order to keep his promise, even though the promise was made to a treacherous enemy:¹⁰ his gruesome and prolonged dying—by starvation, or by crucifixion, or by having his eyelids cut away so that he could not sleep—is described by a remarkable number of writers in various genres, always to make the point that though he appeared to suffer and die "in the power of the enemy" (*in potestate hostium*, Cic. *Fin.* 5.82), he was all the time *compos sui*, in command of himself. And so also a truly striking number of Rome's other great historical *exempla*, who achieve their exemplary status not by displays of strength or daring or wisdom or guile, but by choosing self-mutilation or self-destruction (M. Curtius, the Decii, the Fabii . . . : "magnum exemplum

8. Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 2.163: "fortitudo est considerata periculorum susceptio et laborum perpressio. eius partes magnificentia, fidentia, patientia, perseverantia. . . . patientia est honestatis aut utilitatis causa rerum arduarum ac difficilium voluntaria ac diuturna perpressio"; *Part. or.* 77: "nam quae venientibus malis obstat fortitudo, quae quod iam adest tolerat et perfert patientia nominatur. Quae autem haec uno genere complectitur, magnitudo animi dicitur"; cf. *Tusc.* 2.32: "fortitudini comitibusque eius, magnitudini animi, gravitati, patientiae . . ."

9. Cic. *Tusc.* 2.53, cf. 5.41, 74, 77, 80.

10. Testimonia for Regulus are surveyed by E. R. Mix, *Marcus Atilius Regulus, Exemplum Historicum*, Studies in Classical Literature, vol. 10 (The Hague, 1970).

nisi mala fortuna non invenit," Sen. *Dial.* 1.3.4). In this regard *patientia* provides a very Roman model—certainly more Roman than Greek—for the honorable expression of self.¹¹

Proposition 3. Propositions 1 and 2 are unproblematically true only in relation to the physical world: real hell is other people, and relations with them. The exercise of *patientia* in relation to the physical world—heat, cold, hunger, the inevitability of pain, and the necessity of toil—is certainly a trial, but it is a trial that is free of one kind of tension. If you are testing your will against forces that are assumed, from the outset, to be stronger than yourself, passing the test is honorable but failure is not per se disgraceful: failure may well entail physical pain and injury, but not *iniuria* in the sense of "insult." But that kind of *iniuria*, in which social pain is involved, is precisely what makes *patientia* a source of tension in the area of social relations. Here other people's wills are in play as well as one's own; and differentials of power, rather than being assumed from the start, are often what it is the aim of any given transaction to clarify (or obfuscate). In social relations *patientia* almost always is implicated in establishing hierarchy and expressing differentials of power, an anxious matter in a competitive world. This is where *patientia* becomes, at best, an ambiguous quality, and where the question "When is *patientia* not a virtue?" gains real point.

We can consider the question by looking first at those for whom *patientia* in social relations was, at least ideologically, not an ambiguous matter: I mean slaves and women. In the realm of social relations, the *patientia* of slaves was in principle understood to be total: there was no request, no imposition that a slave would not be expected to suffer without resistance.¹² This of course is merely another way of saying that the enslaved person—as a being with no effective will of his own, no capacity for asserting autonomous choices proceeding from a set of self-defined goals—did not function as a "person" at all. In this respect *patientia* could be said to define the essence of slavery, as we in fact see it doing in an anonymous treatise *de differentiis*, drawing distinctions between the near-synonyms *servitus* and *servitium* (Anon. *De differentiis*, *Gramm. Lat.* 7.529 Keil): "servitus est sub domino, servi patientia servitium facit." Whereas it is the hierarchical relation, the subordination to the *dominus*, that defines the one, it is the slave's *patientia* that defines—indeed, *facit*, creates—the other. This is *patientia* at

11. On this characteristically Roman form of desperate endurance, see the recent remarks of C. A. Barton, *Roman Honor* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2001), 47–56, with numerous references. On the "novel virtue" of "endurance" (ὀποῦνσις) that begins to emerge in Jewish and proto-Christian writings in the late first century C.E., see the important discussion of B. D. Shaw, "Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996): 269–312, esp. 278–91.

12. Some masters had a sense that there were things one should not do to a slave (in anger, for example), but this sense proceeded primarily from considerations not of the slave but of the master's character and the deforming effects of passions, or had the prudential aim of maintaining the slave system with a minimum of friction: cf. K. R. Bradley, "Seneca and Slavery," *C&M* 37 (1986): 161–72. That slaves themselves not infrequently did resist, and variously refused the role of *patientia* assigned to them, is also true (e.g., id., *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire* [Oxford, 1987], 31–32); but that is a different matter from the ideological point under discussion.

the opposite pole from the virtue we previously were considering, not a testing and assertion of will as a way of establishing a substantial character ("greatness of spirit"), but a complete absence of will on the part of someone at the rock bottom of the social hierarchy.

Women, too, stood in a problematic relation to social or ethical *patientia*, though for quite different reasons. It was not that women—free women, that is—were viewed as lacking wills of their own. Rather, they were taken to be deficient in control of their wills, because they could not control their emotions: if complete *patientia* was the defining characteristic of slaves, then utter lack of *patientia*—that is to say, *impatientia*—was a defining characteristic of women. The point can be conveniently illustrated from a series of scholia on the *Aeneid*, in which Servius condenses the conventional wisdom of four centuries for the edification of his pupils.

When Aeneas encounters in the Underworld the shades of those who have died from cruel love (*durus amor*), Servius remarks that Vergil "includes examples only of women—not because male examples are lacking, but he chooses the sex that is *impatiens* in respect of love," and on the next verse remarks Phaedra's *impatientia amoris* that caused her to take her own life.¹³ When in Book 7 Ascanius precipitates the first fighting by wounding the pet deer of Tyrrhus and his sons, it is Tyrrhus' daughter, Silvia, whom Vergil shows us first reacting to the wounded animal and raising the alarm: Servius says that Vergil "well attributes" *impatientia doloris*, the inability to withstand the pain of grief, to the girl—that is, it was a stroke of characterization and plotting more true-to-life than if he had attributed that same inability to the sons.¹⁴ In fact, the very notion of "female" (*femineum*) can adequately be glossed by *impatiens* alone, as we see Servius doing in a series of three short notes to Books 9 and 11—though in the second of these he helpfully expands the gloss by adding *inrationabili* ("irrational").¹⁵

It comes as no surprise, then, when we find the striking finale to this series in the commentary to the *Eclogues* (written after the commentary to the *Aeneid*), when Servius introduces *Eclogue* 10 and its consolation of the love-sick poet Cornelius Gallus. Servius first claims, famously, that when Gallus fell from favor with Augustus, Vergil removed the praise of Gallus that had originally dominated the last half of *Georgics* 4. He then explains why we should not be taken aback to see that while Vergil changed *Georgics* 4, "he left this eclogue as it is: for though he consoles [that is, seems to console] Gallus in it, the reader who looks beneath the surface can see that it is actually a work of invective (*vituperatio*)"—because Gallus' *impatientia turpis amoris* is put on display, and an attack is thereby plainly

13. Serv. ad *Aen.* 6.444: "tantum feminarum ponit exempla, non quo desint viri, sed elegit sexum impatientem ad amandum"; ad *Aen.* 6.445: "quo facto . . . et Hippolyto interempto Phaedra amoris impatientia laqueo vitam finivit."

14. Serv. ad *Aen.* 7.503: "SILVIA PRIMA SOROR bene puellae dat doloris impatientiam."

15. Serv. ad *Aen.* 9.475: "FEMINEO VLVLATV impatienti, ut 'femineo praedae et spoliolum ardebat amore' (11. 782)"; ad *Aen.* 11.782: "FEMINEO impatienti, inrationabili, ut 'femineae ardentem iraeque curaeque coquebant' (7.345)"; ad *Aen.* 11.878: "FEMINEVM CLAMOREM impatientem: nam iam dixerat 'matres', per quod muliebrem clamorem poteramus accipere."

made on Augustus' enemy Antony, whom the actress Cytheris accompanied on campaign *contra Romanum morem*.¹⁶ In a way useful to Servius' somewhat goofy argument, the unmanly *impatientia* of Gallus is yoked to the strain of Augustan propaganda that depicted Antony as "womanish" and un-Roman, here in his relation to the actress Cytheris, but also, and especially, in his subordination to that dreadful eastern female, Cleopatra.

Emotional *impatientia* is not the only respect relevant to our topic in which women were problematic, or in which they embodied what a real man should not be. As we can recall, there is at least one kind of *patientia* that is positively valued in women: their receptivity of the male in sexual intercourse, the role that is regarded as theirs by physical nature—what Petronius, for example, calls the "law of woman's *patientia*" (*muliebris patientiae lex*), which was the measure of a woman's physical maturity.¹⁷ But the very fact that it was the *lex* for a woman made it unacceptable for a man: so, for example, the same phrase, *muliebris patientia*, is incorporated elsewhere by Petronius in a string of foul abuse directed at a male, and is incorporated by a declaimer defending the position of a soldier in Marius' army who killed a superior officer, a relative of Marius himself, when the man attempted first to seduce and then to rape him.¹⁸ It is clear, of course, that this form of *patientia* is also central to Seneca's indignation in recounting the tale of Hostius Quadra. The man and his habits were no doubt contemptible on several counts, from Seneca's point of view, but the detail from which he starts, and to which he obsessively returns again and again, is Hostius' use of the distorting mirror, which both allowed him to watch as another penetrated him and magnified the fact and means of the penetration. This was the way in which, as Seneca puts it, Hostius' lust could "see more than it consume[d] and marvel at" its own *patientia*.

Now it seems clear that Seneca's reaction has much to do with the sort of anxiety and indignation provoked by what can be called "category confusion," the confusion of basic conceptual categories used to organize one's experience of the world, in this case the sexual roles of women and men as "naturally" passive and active, penetrated and penetrating. It is not my purpose, however, to enter here into the controversy over more general Roman attitudes toward homoerotic experience. Instead, I want to note the readiness with which the sort of anxiety that Seneca demonstrates spills over into

16. Serv. ad *Ecl.* 10.1: "nec nos debet movere quod, cum mutaverit partem quarti Georgicorum, hanc eclogam sic reliquit: nam licet consoletur in ea Gallum, tamen altius intuenti vituperatio est; nam et in Gallo impatientia turpis amoris ostenditur et aperte hic Antonius carpitur, inimicus Augusti, quem contra Romanum morem Cytheris est in castra comitata."

17. Petron. *Sat.* 25.3: "... nec puellam eius aetatis esse, ut muliebris patientiae legem posset accipere"; for being *virii patiens* as the sign of physical maturity in women, see Festus quoted at n. 7 above.

18. Petron. *Sat.* 9.6: "quibus ego auditis intentavi in oculos Ascyli manus et 'quid dicis' inquam 'muliebris patientiae scortum, cuius ne spiritus <quidem> purus est?'" [Quint.] *Decl. mai.* 3.11: "non sit mihi forsitan querendum . . . in tantum vitia regnare, ut obscenis cupiditibus natura cesserit, ut pollutis in femineam usque patientiam maribus incurrat iam libido in sexum suum. . . . hoc vero cuius dementiae est? in concubinatum iuniores leguntur, et in muliebre patientiam vocatur fortasse iam maritus!" Cf. T. A. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* (New York, 1998), 192.

other areas of life: the point can be made by comparing with Seneca's tirade another, much more familiar text, Catullus' poem 28.

Cast as an epistle to friends serving on the provincial staff of L. Calpurnius Piso Caesonius, the poem asks how they are doing: they have endured cold and hunger (like proper soldiers), but have they made the sort of profit that was the expected return?

Pisonis comites, cohors inanis,
 aptis sarcinulis et expeditis,
 Verani optime tuque mi Fabulle,
 quid rerum geritis? satisne cum isto
 vappa frigoraque et famem tulistis? 5
 ecquidnam in tabulis patet lucelli
 expensum, ut mihi, qui meum secutus
 praetorem refero datum lucello?
 o Memmi, bene me ac diu supinum
 tota ista trabe lentus irrumasti. 10
 sed, quantum video, pari fuistis
 casu: nam nihilo minore verpa
 farti estis. pete nobiles amicos!

Pals of Piso, empty-handed entourage,
 with your knap-sacks squared away and ready for the road,
 my excellent Veranius and you, my dear Fabullus,
 what've you been up to? Endured enough cold
 and hunger with that dirt-bag? Can we see
 in your ledgers any tidy bit of profit gone
 down the drain? That's my story since I followed my praetor:
 "in one hand and out the other" is the account I can give.
 O Memmius, you made me suck a good long while on that
 whacking great staff of yours, flat on my back,
 no rush about it. But, so far as I can see, you two've been
 no luckier, stuffed full by no less a prick. Here's a nice piece
 of advice: "Hunt out well-placed friends"!

Catullus anticipates their answer by recalling his own experience with Memmius in Bithynia. Memmius treated his *cohors* with contempt, deprived them of what they took to be their due—not to put too fine a point on it, he screwed them over good. That is just the metaphor Catullus uses (though specifying oral assault); and his poetic imagination has precisely the same effect as Hostius' distorting mirror, presenting us with Memmius' huge member—*tota ista trabe*—as it does its slow and meticulous work. The difference, of course, is that Catullus represents himself not as reveling in the experience but as outraged by it. "pete nobiles amicos!," he says, and with that sour formula puts his finger on a question central to our topic: in the realm of social relations, who must take what sort of treatment from whom?

Though the term itself does not appear, Catullus 28 is plainly enough a bitter meditation on one form of *patientia*. Subordination and service to "noble friends" is translated into injustice, insult, and injury, expressed in the metaphor of unmanly sexual degradation. The concern, and the potential

for insult and injury, were constantly present in this world of touchy, prickly hierarchy. Consider, for example, a passage from Cicero's defense before Caesar of the Pompeian Quintus Ligarius, who was being prosecuted by another staunch Pompeian, Quintus Aelius Tubero. Ligarius had been placed in charge of north African coastal defenses when one of Pompey's henchman seized control of the province at the outbreak of civil war, and he had refused to allow Quintus Tubero's father to land or take on provisions when he arrived as the governor ratified by the Senate: the elder and younger Tubero had then sailed off to Pompey and the battle of Pharsalus. Cicero casts the matter as a spat within the Pompeian faction, using the shiv-like irony reserved for highly esteemed opponents:¹⁹

But pray, Caesar, consider the *constantia*—the loyal firmness—of the splendid gentleman Lucius Tubero, which—though I approve it as I do—I would not mention did I not know that you regularly praise it among the chief virtues. Has anyone, then, ever shown this degree of *constantia*? I say "*constantia*," though I probably could better say "*patientia*." For really, how few would have done what this man did: to return to the very faction by which he had not been received in the midst of civil war—indeed, to the very faction by which he had been cruelly repulsed? That is the mark of a certain kind of greatness of spirit, belonging to the sort of man whom no insult, no violence, no danger could dislodge from the cause he had undertaken and the purpose on which he had resolved.

By redefining *constantia*—unambiguously a virtue—as the much more ambiguous *patientia* Cicero poses the question: why *did* the elder Tubero "take it"? Why did he not leave the Pompeian side, which had heaped such *contumelia* upon him, and declare for Caesar—a useful spin to give the matter when arguing before Caesar as sole judge. The tactic brands Tubero as at once excessively Pompeian, excessively forbearing—and too little a man: in effect placing him in the same posture relative to the Pompeian faction that Catullus had imagined for himself in relation to Memmius, it asks "How could he swallow *that*?" The answer, which Cicero's venomous courtesy leaves implied, is spelled out in another, similar redefinition: the *patientis animus*, if candidly called by its right name, is the *servilis animus*.²⁰

It may be that virtue is seldom more than a rhetorical question or two removed from vice; but among men of the Roman elite *patientia* was especially vulnerable to such redefinition because of its inherent ambiguity—with perhaps one exception. There was one category of free man in whom *patientia* was regularly praised and upon whom it was unhesitatingly urged, directly or by implication, as a virtue: that was the man whose superior power was beyond question—in a foreign context, a king or great general,

19. Cic. *Lig.* 26: "sed vide quaeso, Caesar, constantiam ornatissimi viri L. Tiberonis, quam ego—quamvis ipse probarem ut probō—tamen non commemorarem nisi a te cognovissem in primis eam virtutem solere laudari. quae fuit igitur umquam in ullo homine tanta constantia? constantiam dico, nescio an melius patientiam possim dicere. quotus enim istud quisque fecisset, ut a quibus partibus in dissensione civili non esset receptus essetque etiam cum crudelitate reiectus, ad eas ipsas partis rediret? magni cuiusdam animi atque eius viri quem de suscepta causa propositaque sententia nulla contumelia, nulla vis, nullum periculum possit depellere."

20. Apul. *Met.* 5.10: "et tu quidem soror videris quam patienti vel potius servili—dicam enim libere quod sentio—haec perferas animo!"

in the Roman context, especially, the *princeps*—in whom *patientia* was above all the forbearance that stayed his hand and kept him from reaching out to crush his inferiors. So, for example, Cornelius Nepos remarks, among the excellences of Epaminondas, that he was “restrained, clement, and forbearing to a remarkable degree, putting up with the *iniuriae* not only of the *populus* but even of his friends”;²¹ so Seneca—referring to Philip of Macedon but doubtless thinking closer to home—says that whatever Philip’s other virtues were, his forbearance in the face of insult surely was among them, adding that that quality is “a great tool for making royal power secure”;²² so Tacitus’ Germanicus, going among his soldiers in disguise, is delighted to hear them praise his *patientia* along with his affability and equanimity;²³ so Pliny, both writing to Trajan from his province and praising him in panegyric, reminds him that *patientia* is one of his hallmarks, along with *humanitas* and *iustitia*;²⁴ and so the *SC de Cn. Pisone patre* heaps praise upon the *patientia* of Tiberius and Germanicus.²⁵ In this respect as in others, this last document makes for enlightening comparison with Tacitus, in whose discourse *patientia*, when it does not refer to physical endurance, denotes only servility, above all the servility of the political elite in the face of the *princeps*’ power.²⁶

Here we see clearly the polarizing force of *patientia* in the expression of asymmetrical status and social hierarchy. For those who stood highest on the pyramid, *patientia* might be considered prudential, as Seneca suggests: the more *patientia* one displayed when already superior, the more superior one would become because more admired and more secure. In this respect *patientia* was very much like *clementia*, another disposition with a distinctly

21. Nep. *Epam.* 3.2: “peritus belli, fortis manu, animo maximo, adeo veritatis diligens, ut ne ioco quidem mentiretur, idem continens clemens patiensque admirandum in modum, non solum populi, sed etiam amicorum ferens iniurias.”

22. Sen. *Dial.* 3.23.2: “nam si qua alia in Philippo virtus, fuit et contumeliarum patientia, ingens instrumentum ad tutelam regni”—a lesson from *De ira*, in which Seneca necessarily spends much time urging *patientia*, in ways that show how much it goes against the Roman grain (see esp. *Dial.* 4.12.1–6, 16.1–2, 5.23.4–7, 36.1). Cf. also *Clem.* 1.8.6, expressly addressed to the *princeps*: “adice nunc, quod privatos homines ad accipiendas iniurias oportunoiores acceptarum patientia facit, regibus certior est ex mansuetudine securitas.”

23. Tac. *Ann.* 2.13: “contectus umeros ferina pelle, adit castrorum vias, adsistit tabernaculis fruiturque fama sui, cum hic nobilitatem ducis, decorem alius, plurimi patientiam, comitatem, per seria per iocos eundem animum laudibus ferrent.” The other qualities among which *patientia* nestles here guarantee that it is the social trait that is being praised in Germanicus, not his physical endurance.

24. Plin. *Ep.* 10.106.1: “rogatus, domine, a P. Accio Aquila, centurione cohortis sextae equestris, ut mitterem tibi libellum per quem indulgentiam pro statu filiae suae implorat, durum putavi negare, cum scirem quantum soleres militum precibus patientiam humanitatemque praestare”; *Pan.* 59.3: “diceris iustissimus humanissimus patientissimus fuisse.”

25. *SC de Cn. Pisone patre* 15–18: “Ti. Caesari Augusto . . . cuius aequitatem et patientiam . . . admirari senatum,” 26–27 “<senatum> arbi<tr>ari singularem moderationem patientiam<ue> evictam esse feritate morum Cn. Pisonis patris.”

26. E.g., Tac. *Agr.* 2.3: “dedimus profecto grande patientiae documentum, et sicut vetus aetas vidit quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos quid in servitute”; *Hist.* 2.29: “igitur torpere cuncti, circumspicere inter se attoniti et id ipsum quod nemo regeret paventes; silentio, patientia, postremo precibus ac lacrimis veniam quaerebant”; *Ann.* 3.65: “. . . in hunc modum eloqui solitum ‘o homines ad servitutem paratos!’ scilicet etiam illum qui libertatem publicam nolle tam proiectae servientium patientiae taedebat,” 12.50: “atque illi quamvis servitio sueti patientiam abruptum armisque regiam circumveniunt,” 14.64: “neque tamen silebimus si quod senatus consultum adulatione novum aut patientia postremum fuit,” 16.16: “at nunc patientia servilis tantumque sanguinis domi perditum fatigant animum et maestitia restringunt.”

hierarchical coloration and a similarly ambiguous place in Roman thought. But if *patientia* in the great produced admiration, it was admiration born of fear, and the knowledge that forbearance was merely the dormant state of awful power. Hence the impression one receives, from some celebrations of imperial *patientia*, of men whistling as they walk past the graveyard.

In the end we have Cicero's most famous question: "quo usque tandem abutere, Catalina, patientia nostra?" *quo usque* indeed: the question, with *abutere*, implies that there is a proper use, up to a point, of another's *patientia*, and of one's own. But what is it? At what point do you draw the line? From one perspective social *patientia* is obviously essential: it serves as the ligaments in the skeleton of the body politic, to provide a certain "give" and prevent excessive brittleness. A world without *patientia* would be truly intolerable, a world of alpha males in constant conflict. But . . . : *quo usque*?

That was a crucial question for the men who were neither at the top nor at the bottom of the social pyramid, neither possessing the vast forbearance that the most powerful could afford nor able to afford the infinite passivity that was the lot of the utterly powerless. Such men had to find a hard path between the different but equally unacceptable models of the female and the servile. Set against female *impatientia* and lack of self-control, *patientia* was a virtue insofar as it approached *constantia*, *moderatio*, *temperantia*, and the like; insofar as it entailed inactivity in the face of *iniuria* and *contumelia*—insofar as it entailed turning the other cheek—it looked uncomfortably like the *patientia* of the slave. In this way the problem of *patientia* condensed for the Romans the problem of living in a human society defined by hierarchy and differentials of power. It was a problem that could be solved only by appeal to truths thought to lie outside merely human relations: by Stoicism, in the purely personal autonomy of the wise who live according to Nature, or by Christianity's yielding of the self to an all-loving God. But those stories, for the great mass of men, were either unacceptable or unknown.

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