3 A New Apogee of *Humanitas* in the Trajanic Age: Pliny the Younger, Tacitus and Suetonius

As the frequency of these two words as well as the analysis brought forward in the previous chapters reveal,[1] for about half a century *clementia* was more invoked a value concept than *humanitas*, especially in the public, official sphere, for which the literary works we deal with in this book are a good touchstone. Yet, at the beginning of the Trajanic age, *humanitas* recovered the significance it had had in Cicero's political thought thanks to Pliny the Younger. Despite all attempts at denigrating, and distancing themselves from, the figure of Nero, the emperors of the Flavian dynasty saw all their efforts vanish because of Domitian, who was long regarded as a second Nero after his death.[2] Recent scholarship has expressed doubt as to whether 96 CE can be considered a watershed in Latin literature; as far as the concepts of value are concerned, however, a significant transformation certainly took place.[3] In particular, by the end of Domitian's reign, *clementia*, which had played a key role (albeit in vain) in the ideology of the Neronian age, and which had been reinvented by Statius at the time of the last Flavian emperor, appears to have been looked at with suspicion once again.[4] In this sense, the arguments put forward by Benferhat, following Charlesworth and others, are convincing and merit being summarised here.[5] As Benferhat points out, there are very few occurrences of *clementia* in the authors of the Trajanic age such as Suetonius and Pliny the Younger, and in the *Panegyricus* in particular the author seems to be wary of Domitian's false clemency. As a consequence, it is unsurprising that the term is employed only once with reference to Trajan (*Pan.* 35.1). Conversely, it appears quite often in Tacitus: once in the *Dialogus de oratoribus*, seven times in the *Historiae* and 27 in the *Annales*. Yet all these instances mainly seem to high-

1 Cf. above, pp. 40–44.

2 On the denigration of Nero as a fundamental component of Flavian image-making cf. Tuck 2016; on Domitian as a second Nero cf. Zissos 2016b.

3 Cf. König/Whitton 2018, 9: "Whether 96 really did inaugurate a literary revival, then, and how long it lasted, are questions we can hardly answer." In this respect, previous scholarship had been less cautious, and Coleman 1990, 38 for instance claimed that 96 "does not represent a dramatic transformation for Latin literature, although neither was the change negligible." Cf. also Wallace-Hadrill 1984, 200 and Dihle 2013, 213–215. Further bibliography in König/Whitton 2018, 6 n. 24.

4 Cf. above, p. 39.

5 Benferhat 2011, 185 n. 212; Charlesworth 1937, 112–113. Cf. also Syme 1958, 414; Burgess 1972, 340–341; Benferhat 2011, 197. Further supporters of *clementia* as a concept which reveals despotic power are mentioned in Konstan 2005, 337–339.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111510507-003

light the historian's hostility towards what has become the *clementia principis* as opposed to the former *clementia populi Romani*. In other words, what had once been the virtue of a great people which was able to show mercy towards the conquered enemy came to symbolise the cruelty and arbitrariness of a tyrant.[6] The same holds true with regard to Suetonius' usage of *clementia*.[7] As Burgess remarks, "Suetonius laid great emphasis on the *clementia* of the emperors, and by concentrating on pardon not for serious offences but for personal insults and trivialities he presents the emperors, apart from Vespasian, as malevolent tyrants."[8] Moreover, despite an image of *Clementia* appearing on coins of 99–100 CE, *clementia* is not included among Trajan's official virtues. In sum, by Trajan's day *clementia* "had become too much a despotic quality [. . .] and it could return again under Hadrian or under later emperors in an altered form as *Clementia Temporum*."[9]

As I argue in what follows, while *clementia* progressively lost its political significance, *humanitas* took its place and also started to embody part of the meaning *clementia* once had. This is first and foremost shown by Pliny, who seems to have understood *humanitas* as Cicero had done, that is, as an ideal which roughly intermingles superior education (the Greek παιδεία) with a benevolent disposition towards humans *qua* humans (the Greek φιλανθρωπία). As I shall show in the first section of this chapter, in the *Panegyricus* the term *humanitas* plays an analogous central role to that played by *clementia* in Seneca's *De clementia*, which can be regarded as a forerunner of the Latin panegyrics – Pliny's in particular –, and Statius' *Siluae* and *Thebaid*. And while Nero and Domitian are either characterised by or encouraged to pursue *clementia*, *humanitas* epitomises the values which differentiate Trajan from his predecessor(s). However, unlike *clementia*, *humanitas* is not an exclusive prerogative of the ruler: it is a value that can and should be possessed by the entire Roman intellectual and political elite that we get to know from Pliny's *Epistulae*. In a way, we could say that *humanitas* is at the

6 Cf. Benferhat 2011, 201. Cf. also Burgess 1972, 341: "This master of irony and innuendo [*scil.* Tacitus] uses *clementia* to great effect in his charcterization of the Julio-Claudian emperors; furthermore, he represents it as a basically imperial prerogative, and it is a short step from here to its use as a propaganda word in anti-imperial sources, a word symbolizing the despotism of the emperors", and Borgo 1985, 48–51. *Contra* Konstan 2005, 344.

7 It must be borne in mind that scholars such as Wallace-Hadrill 1984 maintain that *clementia* played an important role in Suetonius' *Caesares*. But first, this is not to deny that the number of occurrences of this word is rather low (eight instances of *clementia* and two of *clemens*); secondly and crucially, this concept is always used with reference to emperors of the first century CE (Augustus, Tiberius, Nero, Vitellius, Vespasian and Domitian). I will deal with this issue in more detail in the section on Suetonius: cf. below, pp. 127–132.

8 Burgess 1972, 341. On *clementia* in Suetonius cf. also Borgo 1985, 44; 50–52.

9 Charlesworth 1937, 113.

core of the cultural, social and political renaissance that not only Pliny, but also the Roman *nobilitas* and, presumably, Trajan himself, hope will follow the dark age of Domitian's tyranny.[10]

In the light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that in Tacitus and Suetonius the term is differently nuanced and appears rarely. After all, most of what has survived of their works, that is, Tacitus' *Annales* and *Historiae* and Suetonius' *De uita Caesarum*, deal with the history of the Principate until Domitian, whereas *humanitas* was rather a republican, Ciceronian concept which Pliny (and Trajan?) were trying to reintroduce. Yet because of their rarity the very few occurrences of the word in their oeuvre are worth investigating. Accordingly, the second section of this chapter will be devoted to Tacitus, in whose work the term *humanitas* is found only twice: once in the *Agricola* and once in the *Germania*. As we will see, these two occurrences take on different nuances. Of the two, the instance in the *Agricola* is striking and merits discussion at length, because here *humanitas*, which roughly stands for 'civilization', becomes closely related to Tacitus' attitude towards Roman imperialism.

As for Suetonius, the topic of the third and last section of this chapter, *humanitas* only appears twice in the *Vita Tiberii*. As is the case with *Agricola* 21, the term itself is positively connoted but the contexts in which *humanitas* is mentioned seem to warn against the possible risks provoked either by the misuse of this concept or, on the contrary, by its total absence.

Brief subsections at the end of the analysis of *humanitas* in each author are devoted to *humanus* and its adverbial derivatives. As will soon be clear, the adjective is very often deprived of the ideological values carried by the noun, so much so that the meanings of *humanitas* and *humanus* rarely overlap.

3.1 Pliny the Younger: Refounding Imperial Rome in the Name of *Humanitas*

There can be little doubt that in Pliny the Younger's view the idea of *humanitas* was meant to be at the core of the cultural, social and political renaissance that he hoped would follow Domitian's death. Holding a prominent post at Trajan's court and, consequently, in Trajanic society, Pliny did not want to miss the opportunity to try to influence the world in which he lived. This he certainly did in the

10 As Geisthardt 2015, *passim* persuasively shows, Pliny's and Tacitus' works tend to reflect not only their own views, but those of the senatorial class to which they belong. Cf. also Sonnabend 2002, 174: "Die Perspektive des Tacitus war die des Senats, die Perspektive Suetons war die des kaiserlichen Hauses."

Panegyricus and *Epistulae*, the only works which have come down to us. *Humanitas* is a recurrent word in both these works, and this fact is significant. First, after the tyranny of a man who considered himself a second Jupiter, the *humanitas* of his successor made it clear that times had changed and the emperor was again a man among men. Secondly, to restore such an important Ciceronian, republican concept was to indicate the lines along which the Trajanic 'revolution' could take place, that is, by combining education, knowledge and culture with a benevolent attitude towards one's fellow human beings.[11] To best appreciate how Pliny employed this *humanitas* argument, let us look at his works in greater detail, starting with the *Panegyricus*.

3.1.1 The *Panegyricus*

As Innes and others remark, Pliny calls *gratiarum actio* what we usually call *Panegyricus*, that is, the speech he gave in praise of Trajan before the Senate in September 100 CE when he was appointed consul, of which a revised version has come down to us.[12] Although this is the first imperial panegyric we are aware of, Ciceronian orations such as *Pro Marcello* and *Pro Archia* as well as Seneca's *De clementia* can to some extent be considered its precedents and perhaps models, especially with regard to the custom of listing the virtues which characterise the subject of praise.[13] Roche has listed and counted the occurrences of the main virtues of Trajan that Pliny mentions in the *Panegyricus*.[14] Yet his otherwise useful quantitative analysis ends up underestimating the key role that *humanitas* plays in this speech. Compared to *modestia*, *moderatio*, *fides*, *reuerentia*, *cura*, *labor*, *liberalitas*, *securitas*, *pudor*, *pietas*, *benignitas* and *maiestas*, which all appear ten times or more, the seven occurrences of *humani-*

11 Cf. Boyancé 1970b: "En donnant à Rome son œuvre littéraire et philosophique, Cicéron lui [*scil.* Pline le Jeune] a enseigné l'*humanitas* et il a établi les bases de l'unité des hommes de l'empire."

12 Innes 2011, 67. Cf. also Radice 1968, 166. The date is certain, and Pliny himself informs us of his revision of the speech in *Ep.* 3.18. Cf. also *Ep.* 3.13. Recent studies have suggested that it was published "half a dozen years or more after he [scil. Pliny] gave his consular thanksgiving in the senate" (Whitton 2019, 340). Cf. also Woytek 2006.

13 Cf. Radice 1968, 170; Picone 1978, 133 and n. 68 for further bibliography; Levene 1997, 67–77; Manuwald 2011. Casapulla 2019 highlights possible elements of originality that distinguish Pliny's *Panegyricus* from previous *gratiarum actiones*.

14 Roche 2011, 8–9.

tas might at first sight suggest that this concept plays a secondary role, but nothing is further from the truth.[15] As ever, figures need interpretation.

To begin with, *humanitas* is a key element in perhaps the most important part of this *gratiarum actio*, its opening, when a sort of *captatio beneuolentiae* is needed. Following the old precept *Ab Ioue principium*, the *Panegyricus* opens up by invoking the gods and stating that Trajan is very similar to any one of them (§ 1.3: *dis simillimus princeps*). Yet, unlike his predecessor Domitian, he behaves and rules like a man among men – and this is his most extraordinary quality (2.4: *et hoc magis excellit atque eminet, quod unum <ille se> ex nobis putat nec minus hominem se quam hominibus praeesse meminit*, "and his special virtue lies in his thinking so, as also in his never forgetting that he is a man himself while a ruler of men", trans. Radice 1975).[16] The term *humanitas* has not yet been mentioned, but it is sufficiently clear that the theme of Trajan's humanness, or, more generally, of his human qualities, will be at the core of the speech. This becomes explicit soon, when at 2.7 *humanitas* is strikingly opposed to *diuinitas*: *Quid nos ipsi? Diuinitatem principis nostri an humanitatem, temperantiam, facilitatem, ut amor et gaudium tulit, celebrare uniuersi solemus?* ("What about us? Is it the divine nature of our prince or his *humanitas*, his moderation and his courtesy which joy and affection prompt us to celebrate in a single voice?", trans. Radice 1975). This juxtaposition, albeit rare, is not new in the literature of Pliny's day, for Cicero had regarded *diuinitas* as superior to *humanitas*, identifying the former with the (high) qualities of the gods, the latter with the (lower) qualities of human beings.[17] In contrast, not only does this passage seem to put humanness and divinity on the same level, but it implicitly suggests that *humanitas* could even be more important, at least for an emperor.[18] As Rees puts it, Trajan's "simple *humanitas* sets him apart from the arrogance of former emperors and is clearly presented as being of great credit to him. Trajan is not a god, is not called a god and does not want to be treated as a god."[19]

Pliny also innovatively opposes *temperantia* and *facilitas* to *diuinitas*, probably to stress further this novel way of reading the relationship between *humanitas* and *diuinitas*. Indeed, Pliny's originality only consists in creating this polarity – the

15 On the importance of *humanitas* in Pliny's *Panegyricus* cf. also Rieks 1967, 244–248; S. Braund 2012[2], 93; 98.

16 Cf. Feldherr 2019, 403: "By this point [*scil.* after *dis simillimus* at 1.3] Trajan's title perfectly encapsulates the guiding theme of Pliny's praise, that Trajan is most divine because most deeply embedded in human institutions".

17 Cf. Cic. *De or.* 2.86.

18 Cf. Feldherr 2019, 398. On this passage in general cf. also Cova 1978, 108.

19 Rees 2001, 163. Indeed, Rees 2001, 163–164 also shows that other places in the *Panegyricus* would equate Trajan to a god (cf. Levene 1997, 78–83), and yet Pliny's rhetoric manages to hide this aspect. Cf. also Busti 2019; Wood 2019.

triad *humanitas*, *temperantia* and *facilitas* echoes Cicero's *Pro lege Manilia* 36, where *innocentia*, *fides* and *ingenium* complete the list of the qualities that leaders and generals should possess.[20] Of the two, *facilitas* in particular is paired with *humanitas* quite often in Cicero (*De or.* 2.362; *Off.* 1.90; *Fam.* 3.10.10 and 13.24.2) and once in Quintilian (at 11.1.42 in a list of those values which make an orator appeal to the audience), and Hellegouarc'h even regards it as an aspect of *humanitas*.[21] Yet if we accept his definition, *facilitas* is to be seen as the act of a person of higher rank who strives to understand the situation of a subordinate person and does not show *superbia* towards them. Certainly, as other Plinian passages will show, *humanitas* transcends social distinctions, so that in the passage under investigation *facilitas* may serve the purpose of counterbalancing the situation: if *humanitas* casts Trajan down from Olympus, *facilitas* reminds the audience that the emperor is nonetheless in a higher position. The addition of *temperantia*, which appears rarely in Pliny but is at the heart of Tacitus' political message according to Benferhat, and which refers to the ability to restrain passions and instincts according to Hellegouarc'h, thus standing for moderation in political contexts, somehow reiterates the superiority of an emperor who is no longer a god, but is still the emperor.[22]

No sooner has Pliny started mentioning these virtues of Trajan than, in the improvisation he simulates of the speech, he immediately realises that to talk about virtues is to risk undermining the genuineness of his speech. In fact, previous emperors, not least Domitian, had been praised for their virtues too. They had probably been praised insincerely, but still praised. This leads us to Bartsch's emphasis on the practice of doublespeak in imperial literature, that is, the custom of praising someone to blame them, of listing their virtues to indicate that they lack these virtues.[23] To avoid this ambiguity, Pliny feels the need to stress that he is improvising his speech, for he takes it that improvisation is synonymous with

20 Cf. Benferhat 2011, 293: "Pline choisit trois termes cicéroniens qui désignent des qualités propres aux hommes: la conscience d'appartenir à la communauté humaine, la lutte victorieuse de la raison contre les plaisirs, un contact facile."

21 Hellegouarc'h 1963, 216.

22 Benferhat 2011, 291–308; Hellegouarc'h 1963, 259. Cf. Benferhat 2011, 292: "[La *temperantia*] est un mélange du trop peu et du pas assez qui doit servir de règle dans la vie dans toutes ses dimensions, y compris politique."

23 Bartsch 1994. Cf. also Bartsch's theory of the praise/blame axis: "that is, the tendency for terms of praise and blame to be liable to slippage and thus to mean their opposites or their negative counterparts on one or another evaluative axis separating good qualities from bad" (1994, 170).

sincerity. (It does not seem to matter to Pliny that in claiming that he was improvising, he was presumably telling one of his biggest lies ever.) Compare 3.1:

> Igitur quod temperamentum omnes in illo subito pietatis calore seruamus, hoc singuli quoque meditatique teneamus, sciamusque nullum esse neque sincerius neque acceptius genus gratiarum, quam quod illas acclamationes aemulemur, quae fingendi non habent tempus.
>
> This moderation, then, which we have all maintained in the sudden surge of our affection, we must individually try to keep in our more studied tributes, remembering that there is no more sincere nor welcome kind of thanks than that which most resembles the spontaneous acclamation which has no time for artifice. (trans. Radice 1975)

There follows (3.4) a long list of virtues that Pliny attributes to Trajan against their opposites:

> Non enim periculum est, ne, cum loquar de humanitate, exprobrari sibi superbiam credat, cum de frugalitate, luxuriam, cum de clementia, crudelitatem, cum de liberalitate, auaritiam, cum de benignitate, liuorem, cum de continentia, libidinem, cum de labore, inertiam, cum de fortitudine, timorem.
>
> There is no danger that in my references to his *humanitas* he will see a reproach for arrogance; that he will suppose I mean extravagance by modest expenditure, and cruelty by forbearance; that I think him covetous and capricious when I call him generous and kind, profligate and idle instead of self-controlled and active, or that I judge him a coward when I speak of him as a brave man. (trans. Radice 1975)

Both in terms of *humanitas* and in the framework of the *Panegyricus* section 3.4 plays a key role. As Bartsch points out, this passage is of crucial importance in that it represents Pliny's official declaration that there is no doublespeak in his panegyric.[24] After a long time, hidden and public transcripts can again coincide,[25] and no doubt this happens because the emperor deserves to be praised (*nam merenti gratias agere facile est*) and would not have any reasons to take offence and see a reproach for the opposites of the praised virtues.[26] Among these virtues, *humanitas*, coming at the very beginning of the list, clearly has a prominent position. Moreover, this word has already been mentioned twice, and we are still at the very beginning of a speech which runs to 95 sections in total. But it is also the case that

24 Bartsch 1994, 156–157.

25 Bartsch 1994, 162.

26 Bradley 1991, 3719 does see in this passage a kind of reproach, but not for Trajan's vices, rather for Domitian's: "Trajan thus benefits in the 'Panegyricus' at Domitian's expense because if the present emperor is the epitome of imperial virtues, the last Flavian embodies all the vices that, by their existence, those virtues presupposed."

this passage helps us infer another characteristic of *humanitas* I have already discussed in the introduction: when it comes to defining it as a virtue, its opposite is not only represented by the obvious *inhumanitas*, but also by *superbia*.[27] In a way, the contrast between *superbia* and *humanitas* at 3.4 echoes and completes that between *diuinitas* and *humanitas* at 2.7: while here at 3.4 it is clearly ethical, at 2.7, in counterposing divine and human nature, it is ontological. Yet in historical terms the comparison is always the same: while Trajan possesses *humanitas*, Domitian is not only characterised by *diuinitas*, but also by *superbia* (*Pan.* 48).[28] After all, as Baraz has remarked, although the poetic panegyric tradition of the Flavian Age admits a positive conception of pride, "the prose panegyrics, beginning with Pliny the Younger's spirited attacks on the recently dispatched Domitian, are committed to linking pride to tyranny, continuing the line that begins with Tarquin the Proud."[29]

In addition to the ontological and ethical points of view, there is a third perspective from which to understand *humanitas*: we might call it the public, 'official' or hierarchical value of *humanitas*, to which we shall return later. This aspect of *humanitas* too can be grasped in the opening sections of the *Panegyricus*. *Pan.* 4.6 reads: *At principi nostro quanta concordia quantusque concentus omnium laudum omnisque gloriae contigit! Vt nihil seueritati eius hilaritate, nihil grauitati simplicitate, nihil maiestati humanitate detrahitur!* ("Contrast our prince, in whose person all the merits which win our admiration are found in complete and happy harmony! His essential seriousness and authority lose nothing through his candour and good humour; he can show *humanitas* but remain a sovereign power", trans. Radice 1975). So the contrast is now between *humanitas* and *maiestas*. Like *diuinitas* and *superbia*, *maiestas* too, at least originally, was linked to gods and religion in general, and essentially referred to the superiority of the gods over mortals.[30] Yet ever since the Republican age *maiestas* also evoked superiority in general, whether it was physical, social or political – in this sense, the root of *maior* is the determinant.[31] It usually characterised the Romans – their magistrates and generals in particular – and the superiority of the Romans over all other peoples.[32] Consequently, the charge of *maiestas* generally referred to vio-

27 Cf. above, pp. 44–45.

28 On the implicit comparison between Trajan's *humanitas* and Domitian's *diuinitas* (and *maiestas*) cf. also Hiltbrunner 1994a, 733, although discussion here is very concise.

29 Baraz 2020, 261–262. More generally on the relationship between *humanitas* and *superbia* cf. above, pp. 44–45.

30 Cf. Hellegouarc'h 1963, 315 n. 6 and 7 for a list of the occurrences; Drexler 1956, 196. More in detail d'Aloja 2011, 16–27.

31 Cf. Hellegouarc'h 1963, 314–315; d'Aloja 2011, 240.

32 Cf. Drexler 1956, 196; Hellegouarc'h 1963, 317–318.

lation of the Roman magistrates' authority.[33] As we have already seen, in Livy 29.9.6, Pleminius, Scipio's hated legatus of Locris, is said to be beaten by the Locrians *sine respectu non maiestatis modo sed etiam humanitatis*, where we notice the contrast between Pleminius' official role of representative of the *maiestas populi Romani* and, despite all his faults, his nature and rights as a human being (*humanitas*).[34] Applied to the case of Trajan, *maiestas*, which we have seen to be one of the most frequently mentioned values in the *Panegyricus*, thus refers to that superior political power which every emperor possesses[35] – and yet Trajan is such a great emperor that he does not need to worry that his *maiestas* might be diminished by his *humanitas*.

The richness of these first paragraphs of the *Panegyricus* requires some summary here. Despite Roche's data, we have only reached paragraph 4 of the *Panegyricus* and Pliny has already mentioned Trajan's *humanitas* three times, one of which at the very beginning of the long list of the emperor's virtues that we read at 3.4, a paragraph whose centrality has already been shown. In addition, Pliny has so far opposed *humanitas* to three concepts which belong to three different spheres: ontological (*diuinitas*), ethical (*superbia*) and political (*maiestas*). Needless to say, this implies that *humanitas* too, thanks to its polysemy, can belong (at the very least) to these three spheres. But it is also worth stressing that, while the first two comparisons are presented by Pliny as antithetical so that the presence of one element excludes the other (so either we have *diuinitas* or *humanitas*, either *superbia* or *humanitas*), *humanitas* and *maiestas* seem instead to be allowed to coexist.[36] If we wanted to look for a rational explanation, we might perhaps conjecture that this difference is due to the fact that in Pliny's view ontology and ethics are not used to accepting compromise, while politics is all about compromise. Accordingly, the best ruler is he who is able to maintain all his social and political prerogatives without showing haughtiness and making the people feel his superiority; or he who has received supreme power from the gods but does not forget the most important value of all, *humanitas*; or else, to borrow Pliny's own words, the best ruler is one who can mix two utterly different things, *securitatem olim imperantis et incipientis pudorem* (24.1: "a beginner's modesty and the

33 Cf. Drexler 1956; Hellegouarc'h 1963, 319.

34 On this Livian occurrence of *humanitas* with reference to Pleminius cf. Della Calce/Mollea 2022, and above, p. 65.

35 As d'Aloja 2011, 151; 246–247 remarks, in the imperial age *maiestas* almost becomes a prerogative of the emperor.

36 On the coexistence of *humanitas* and *maiestas* at *Pan.* 4.6 cf. also d'Aloja 2011, 165. On the importance of anthithesis to highlight Trajan's virtues in the *Panegyricus* cf. S. Braund 2012^2, 96; Feldherr 2019, 392–394 and, above all, Rees 2001.

assurance of one long accustomed to command", trans. Radice 1975). Such a goal can also be achieved through facial expression: *manet imperatori quae prius oris humanitas* (24.2: "your lips keep their old *humanitas* now you are emperor", trans. Radice 1975). Interestingly, this suggests that *humanitas* can be perceived visually: although we shall look at this aspect in more detail when focusing on the *Epistulae*, we shall also find this same idea in the last occurrence of *humanitas* in the *Panegyricus* (71.5).[37] For the moment, it is sufficient to stress that in attributing this good balance of imperial and human characteristics to Trajan, we can assume that Pliny was also urging the emperor to continue to behave in this manner.

There is, however, a fourth aspect of *humanitas*, which underlies and facilitates its ethical and political features: Pliny introduces this educational component at 47.3, that is, in the middle of his panegyric, while lauding Trajan's restoration of the liberal arts: *An quisquam studia humanitatis professus non cum omnia tua tum uel in primis laudibus ferat admissionum tuarum facilitatem?* ("Every lover of culture (*studia humanitatis*) must applaud all your actions, while reserving his highest praise for your readiness to give audiences", trans. Radice 1975). With the phrase *studia humanitatis* Pliny really proves to be Ciceronian.[38] No one else before him resorted to such an expression, except Cicero. As we have seen, particularly significant for the history of the term *humanitas* and its success in Renaissance humanism is the instance in his *Pro Archia* 3, but its first appearance is to be found in *Pro Murena* 61 (63 BCE).[39] *Studia humanitatis* evidently refers to culture, liberal studies, education, and therefore evokes the Greek idea of παιδεία.[40] Granted, as a man of letters Pliny has personal interests in the emperor's fostering of the liberal arts, but, as with Cicero, it would be a mistake to assume that the *studia humanitatis* are to be seen as an end in themselves. Rather, they represent a point of departure on which to build a civilized society which is worthy of this name, that is to say, a society which is governed by sound political and ethical principles – and these principles too, as we have seen, can be expressed through the term *humanitas*. By contrast, the preceding era, that is to say, that of Domitian, was characterised by *immanitas*, which alongside *superbia* and *inhumanitas*, stands in opposition to *humanitas*. In fact, what immediately precedes 47.3 reads:

37 On *Pan.* 71.5 cf. below, pp. 93–95.

38 On Pliny's Ciceronianism see R. Gibson/Morello 2012, 296–297 with further bibliography. According to Méthy 2007, 295: "l'influence de Cicéron sur la pratique littéraire de Pline, reconnue et revendiquée comme telle, n'est plus à démontrer."

39 For the relevant bibliography cf. above, pp. 57; 61.

40 More in detail on the expression *studia humanitatis* above, p. 57.

> Quid uitam? Quid mores iuuentutis? Quam principaliter formas! Quem honorem dicendi magistris, quam dignationem sapientiae doctoribus habes! Vt sub te spiritum et sanguinem et patriam receperunt studia! Quae priorum temporum immanitas exsiliis puniebat, quum sibi uitiorum omnium conscius princeps inimicas uitiis artes non odio magis, quam reuerentia, relegaret. At tu easdem artes in complexu, oculis, auribus habes. Praestas enim, quaecunque praecipiunt, tantumque eas diligis, quantum ab illis probaris. (*Pan.* 47.1–2)

> As for the lives and characters of the young – how you are forming them in true princely fashion! And the teachers of rhetoric and professors of philosophy – how you hold them in honour! Under you the liberal arts are restored, to breathe and live in their own country – the learning which the barbarity of the past punished with exile, when an emperor acquainted with all the vices sought to banish everything hostile to vice, motivated less by hatred for learning as by fear for its authority. But you embrace these very arts, opening arms, eyes and ears to them, a living example of their precepts, as much their lover as the subject of their regard. (trans. Radice 1975)

That in this passage Trajan is (more or less tacitly) compared to Domitian seems obvious and has already been noticed.[41] Other Plinian as well as Tacitean passages support this view.[42] *Immanitas* too plays a role in this respect, as in *Ep.* 4.11.6 *immanitate tyranni* is explicitly referred to Domitian and no doubt the referent does not change in the case of *immanissima belua* of *Pan.* 48.3.[43] Nor is *Pan.* 47 the only time when *humanitas* is opposed to *immanitas*. The most relevant precedent is represented by a passage in Cicero's *De officiis* which deals, needless to say, with tyranny. Speaking of Phalaris, tyrant of Akragas, today's Agrigento, in Sicily, Cicero says:

> Nam quod ad Phalarim attinet, perfacile iudicium est. Nulla est enim societas nobis cum tyrannis et potius summa distractio est, neque est contra naturam spoliare eum, si possis, quem est honestum necare, atque hoc omne genus pestiferum atque impium ex hominum communitate exterminandum est. Etenim, ut membra quaedam amputantur, si et ipsa sanguine et tamquam spiritu carere coeperunt et nocent reliquis partibus corporis, sic ista in figura hominis feritas et immanitas beluae a communi tamquam humanitatis corpore segreganda est. (Cic. *Off.* 3.32)

> Now it is very easy to make a judgement in the case of Phalaris. For there can be no fellowship between us and tyrants – on the contrary there is a complete estrangement – and it is not contrary to nature to rob a man, if you are able, to whom it is honourable to kill. Indeed, the whole pestilential and irreverent class ought to be expelled from the community of mankind. For just as some limbs are amputated, if they begin to lose their blood and their life, as it were, and are harming the other parts of the body, similarly if the wildness and mon-

41 Cf. Whitton 2019, 364.

42 Cf. Whitton 2019, 364 n. 151.

43 On *immanissima belua* and the Ciceronian ring of this image, used with reference to Verres and Mark Antony for instance, cf. Blair 2019, 433–434.

> strousness of a beast appears in human form, it must be removed from the common humanity, so to speak, of the body. (trans. Atkins 1991)

Alongside Cicero's *De republica* 2.48, we find here one of the first passages in Latin literature where beasts' wildness (*feritas et immanitas beluae*) is synonymous with human barbarity (*in figura hominis*) in opposition to civilization (*humanitatis corpore*).[44] And given the importance and success of Cicero's *De officiis*, it will not be too far off to think that Pliny the Younger had this passage in mind when identifying the tyrant Domitian with *immanitas* and Trajan with *humanitas*. But what is the exact meaning of *immanitas*? *Immanitas* derives from the adjective *immanis*, which is in turn the negative form of *manis* / *manus*, meaning *bonus*.[45] This means that there is no etymological relationship whatsoever between *humanitas* and *immanitas*, and their being counterposed is probably due to two reasons: first, they sound similar; second, the former has a positive, the latter a negative meaning. In other words, they give birth to a paronomasia, a figure of speech Cicero seems to like, as we have already seen in the closure of his *Pro Archia*.[46]

Returning to Pliny's *Panegyricus*, it is worth stressing that, despite the different nuances we have already noticed *humanitas* takes on therein, its polisemy has not been fully exploited yet, for in this work this concept also has a 'social' aspect. Just after praising Trajan's care for intellectuals, Pliny turns to the emperor's behaviour during banquets (which have always offered intellectuals occasions to meet and discuss literary issues after all). In this context, Trajan is said always to be very kind to his fellow diners:

> Num autem serias tantum partes dierum in oculis nostris coetuque consumis? Non remissionibus tuis eadem frequentia eademque illa socialitas interest? Non tibi semper in medio cibus semperque mensa communis? Non ex conuictu nostro mutua uoluptas? Non prouocas reddisque sermones? Non ipsum tempus epularum tuarum, cum frugalitas contrahat, extendit humanitas? (*Pan*. 49.4–5)

44 On Cicero's *Rep*. 2.48 cf. Della Calce/Mollea 2023. Following Muretus and some *codices recentiores*, I read *humanitatis corpore* instead of *humanitate corporis*. Despite printing the latter *lectio*, in his OCT edition Winterbottom 1994, 121 glossed Muretus' choice with the words *fort(asse) recte* and also Dyck 1996, 535 endorses it. I take it that *humanitatis corpus* refers to the whole civilized society, from which uncivilized elements should be removed. On the opposition *humanitas* / *immanitas* cf. also *Off*. 1.62.

45 Cf. Macr. *Sat*. 1.3.13: "*Lanuuini mane pro bono dicunt*", with Ernout/Meillet 2001[4], 384; De Vaan 2008, 364.

46 Cf. above, pp. 59–60.

> Nor is it only the working hours of your day which you spend in our midst for all to see; your leisure hours are marked by the same numbers and friendliness. Your meals are always taken in public and your table open to all, the repast and its pleasures are there for us to share, while you encourage our conversation and join in it. As for the length of your banquet, polite manners (*humanitas*) prolong what frugality cut short. (trans. Radice 1975)

Here the emperor's *humanitas* balances out his *frugalitas* (roughly 'sober habits', 'frugality'), thus prolonging the banquet. This implicit comparison further stresses the importance of *humanitas* if we remember that at the beginning of this panegyric Pliny also considered *frugalitas* to be one of the virtues a good ruler should possess.[47] 'Polite manners', 'courtesy', 'kindness' are of course acceptable translations, but – as is often the case when dealing with the term *humanitas* – none of them are very telling about what *humanitas* implies. Also, they may suggest that the emperor was only worried about appearing (rather than being) kind and polite. To some extent this might be true. Yet if we think *humanitas* in terms of φιλανθρωπία, we cannot rule out the hypothesis that Trajan really felt the need to spend time among his friends.[48] In other words, not only do Trajan's fellow diners benefit from his *humanitas*, but the emperor himself benefits from his own *humanitas*. As Susanna Braund has persuasively showed in fact, his sociable attitude towards feasting is another aspect of his being a good ruler, who "advertises his *humanitas* by his communality and especially by his commensality" while "[i]solation and inaccessibility [also during banquets] are classic marks of the 'bad' ruler."[49] The (implicit) contrast with Domitian, who was not accessible, is again significant:[50] fortunately, the times when Statius had the feeling of dining in the presence of Jupiter when at Domitian's table now seem distant.[51]

In the wake of this (implied) contrast with Domitian as well as of the opposition between *humanitas* and *superbia* at 3.4, the final occurrence of *humanitas* in the *Panegyricus* reiterates and strengthens the idea that Trajan must also be praised for not looking down on his people, despite having the opportunity to do so. *Pan*. 71.4–6 could not be a more peremptory confirmation of this:

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47 Cf. *Pan*. 3.4 above. *Frugalitas* is here opposed to *luxuria*. The comparison between *Pan.* 3.4 and 49.6 seems to confirm that Maguinness 2012[2], 269 is right in claiming that *frugalitas* and *humanitas* are not incompatible and thus Pliny is not contradicting himself at 49.6. We will meet the theme of *humanitas* during banquets as a virtue of the good ruler again during this study: cf. below, pp. 188–189.

48 On the importance for an emperor of having good friends cf. *Pan.* 85.

49 S. Braund 1996, 51 and 45.

50 Cf. S. Braund 1996, 44: "One of the most striking things about this passage [*scil. Pan*. 49.4–6] is that Pliny articulates his praise of Trajan through contrast with Domitian, unnamed but unmistakable."

51 Cf. *Silu.* 4.2.10–12 and B. Gibson 2011, 121–122. Cf. also Juvenal's *Satire* 4.

> Nam, cui nihil ad augendum fastigium superest, hic uno modo crescere potest, si se ipse summittat securus magnitudinis suae. Neque enim ab ullo periculo fortuna principum longius abest quam humilitatis. Mihi quidem non tam humanitas tua quam intentio eius admirabilis uidebatur. Quippe, cum orationi oculos, uocem, manum commodares, ut si alii eadem ista mandasses, omnes comitatis numeros obibas.
>
> For when a man can improve no more on his supreme position, the only way he can rise still higher is by stepping down, confident in his greatness. (There is nothing the fortune of princes has less to fear than the risk of being brought too low.) For me, even your *humanitas* seemed less remarkable than your anxiety to make it felt. In adapting your expression, your voice and gestures to your words, as if this was some commission you had to entrust to another, you ran through the whole gamut of politeness. (trans. Radice 1975)

Trajan's *humanitas* is not considered as admirable (*admirabilis*) as his anxiety to make it felt. This suggests that for an emperor, as well as for other statesmen, the emphasis is not only on possessing *humanitas*, but also on flaunting it – and this is another good thing about Trajan according to Pliny. Evidently, attention to the emperor's body language (*oculos uocem manum*), which we have already noticed at 24.2, reveals Pliny's interest in, and practice of, oratory and poetry, as we will see the *Epistulae* show in greater detail.[52]

In this passage *humanitas* is rendered by 'courtesy' in Radice's original translation, but the sense of the sentence is more probably that Pliny appreciates Trajan's attempt to be seen as a humble man more than his simple lack of haughtiness. The emperor is thus praised not only because he does not show haughtiness, but also because he attempts to reach the common man's level.[53] In this sense, the fact that here the discussion of *humanitas* comes right after a sentence centred on *humilitas* is of particular interest. Unlike *humanitas*, whose derivation from the root of *humus* is indirect, *humilitas* derives directly from *humus*.[54] Yet despite this etymological relationship, their meanings are at opposite poles: while *humanitas* tends always to be positive, *humilitas* is generally negative, mainly standing for 'insignificance', 'unimportance', 'lowness of rank', 'degradation'.[55] This applies not only to Latin authors in general, but also to Pliny in particular. Of the other two instances of *humilitas*, one refers to the degradation of the senate when heaping excessive praise on the ex-slave Pallas (*Ep.* 8.6.15), the other to those bad emperors who are only able to win over their people's love by displaying humility or submissiveness

52 Cf. above, p. 90. The part of the sentence from *Quippe, cum orationi* to *mandasses* has raised some doubts among scholars: See the relevant discussion in B. Gibson 2019, 258–260.

53 Cf. Cova 1978, 108–109; Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 42–43; S. Braund 2012^2, 93.

54 On the etymology of *humanitas* cf. above, pp. 22; 45.

55 Cf. the entry on *humilitas* in the *OLD* and *TLL* 6.3.3115.80–3118.20.

(*Pan.* 4.5).[56] Therefore, in view of this implicit comparison with *humilitas* at *Pan.* 71.5, it looks as though *humanitas* can also be regarded as the right compromise between the high extremes *superbia* and *diuinitas* on the one hand, and the low extreme *humilitas* on the other.

To summarise, the general image we get from Pliny's use of *humanitas* in the *Panegyricus* is that of a balanced value which has its roots in education and culture. However, following Cicero, Pliny does not consider education as an end in itself. The emperor needs to be a learned man, but, whatever the level of learning he can reach, that would be useless if it did not give rise to those ethical and then political sentiments which prevent him from being haughty and considering himself like a god. After all, Domitian was probably more learned than his successor, but he stopped at the first step, without understanding that learning was merely a precondition.[57] When opposing Trajan's *humanitas* to *diuinitas* and *superbia*, Pliny was therefore probably alluding to Domitian, and at the same time he was also telling the new emperor that in following *humanitas* he would avoid the main vices of his predecessor. As S. Braund has suggested, *humanitas* is therefore to be regarded (also) as the common denominator between praise and protreptic.[58]

Yet Pliny was very accurate in choosing *humanitas*. Being well aware that, under a good emperor, the Roman intelligentsia would have the chance to reacquire power and contribute to the rebuilding of society, he must have regarded *humanitas* as a possible *trait d'union* between Trajan and his court. After all, the good thing about *humanitas* is that it is not, by definition as it were, a prerogative of any social class in particular, unlike *clementia* for example, which we have seen was instead possessed only by those people who had a superior power. All this, along with further nuances of *humanitas*, emerges well from Pliny's *Epistulae*, to which we now turn.

3.1.2 The *Letters*

In the ten books of his *Epistulae*, presumably written between 96 CE (or 97/98) and 113 CE, that is to say mainly if not exclusively under the reign of Trajan, we can

56 Also worth noting in the case of *Pan.* 4.5 is the fact that some *codices recentiores* wrongly read *humanitate* instead of *humilitate* (*reuerentiam ille terrore, alius amorem humilitate captauit*).
57 Cf. Coleman 1990, 19: "the tyrant Domitian, an author himself, had actively sponsored literary creativity, whereas Trajan, *optimus princeps*, seems to have been the least literary of emperors."
58 S. Braund 2012[2], 98.

count 14 instances of the term *humanitas*.[59] Along the established lines of understanding *humanitas* as either φιλανθρωπία or παιδεία, Méthy claims that in most cases the idea of φιλανθρωπία seems to be prominent.[60] Even though the same can hold true to some extent with regard to the *Panegyricus*, we have seen that it would be simplistic to reduce Pliny's use of *humanitas* there just to this idea. By the same token, it would be rash to take that for granted in the *Epistulae*, which on the contrary display further nuances, if not meanings, that the word can take on according to Pliny.[61] For the sake of continuity, let us begin with those letters in which *humanitas*, like in the *Panegyricus*, has to do with the role of the emperor.

If one recalls the 'social' aspect of *humanitas* I mentioned with regard to *Pan.* 49.4–5, where this value urges the emperor to prolong the banquets, *Ep*. 6.31.14 seems to lead to the climax of this aspect.[62] Indeed, here Trajan's *humanitas* even takes the shape of generosity in giving gifts to his guests when they leave: *Summo die abeuntibus nobis (tam diligens in Caesare humanitas) xenia sunt missa* ("On the final day as we departed we were sent guest-presents; such is the solicitous *humanitas* shown by the emperor", trans. Walsh 2006). This letter, which Pliny wrote to an otherwise unknown Cornelianus in 107 CE after Trajan's return from Dacia, seems therefore to confirm both that Pliny had been sincere in praising the emperor's kindness at *Pan.* 49.4–5 and that Trajan maintained the same kind attitude during banquets throughout the entire course of his reign.[63]

But it is also towards his soldiers that Trajan seems to be particularly keen on showing his *humanitas*.[64] This is what we learn from *Ep.* 10.106, which is sufficiently short to quote in full:

> Rogatus, domine, a P. Accio Aquila, centurione cohortis sextae equestris, ut mitterem tibi libellum per quem indulgentiam pro statu filiae suae implorat, durum putaui negare, cum scirem quantam soleres militum precibus patientiam humanitatemque praestare.

59 On the chronology of the letters cf. Sherwin-White 1966, 20–41; 62–65; 529–532; Marchesi 2008, 12 and n. 1, and, above all, Bodel 2015, 42–108, who provides a useful overview of the different chronologies proposed by previous scholars.

60 Méthy 2007, 250.

61 In this sense, Malaspina 2019, 137 looks far more careful: "toutefois, il [scil. Pline] suit les positions de Cicéron et, dans son *temperamentum*, il ne propose pas de classifications rigides entre l'*humanitas* comme culture et l'*humanitas* comme humanité."

62 Cf. Bütler 1970, 117, who already links the occurrence of *humanitas* at *Ep.* 6.31.14 to that of *Pan.* 49.4–5; Whitton 2019, 355–356.

63 On the date of this letter as well as on the problem of identifying Cornelianus cf. Sherwin-White 1966, 391.

64 Cf. Méthy 2007, 269.

> When I was asked, my lord, by P. Accius Aquila, a centurion in the sixth mounted cohort, to send to you a petition through which he begs your generosity on behalf of the status of his daughter, I thought it harsh to refuse, since I was aware how much forbearance and *humanitas* you regularly show to the pleas of soldiers. (trans. Walsh 2006)

Publius Accius Aquila – the *tria nomina* immediately reveal that he was a Roman citizen – had probably married a *peregrina* (foreign woman), which explains why his daughter lacked Roman citizenship. Given that this letter is addressed to the emperor, its flattering tone is to be expected and it reminds us of the tone of the *Panegyricus*. In acknowledging the emperor's *humanitas* and *patientia*, which are here juxtaposed for the first time in Latin literature, Pliny actually urges him to put such virtues into practice. Indeed *patientia*, presumably to be understood as tolerance, patience on this occasion, is not necessarily a virtue. However, I postpone this discussion to the section on Apuleius' *Apologia*, for *patientia* plays a more significant role in that context.[65] For the time being, it is enough to say that Trajan's positive response (10.107: *cuius* [scil. *Aquilae*] *precibus motus dedi filiae eius ciuitatem Romanam*, "In response to his pleas, I have granted Roman citizenship to his daughter", trans. Walsh 2006) confirms that he does possess *humanitas* and *patientia*, at least in this situation.

So much for *humanitas* with regard to Trajan. However, as I hinted at before, the success of this value-term in Pliny's view seems to be due, among other aspects, to its transcending certain distinction of social class, and, in particular, to its being shared by the emperor and the upper classes of Rome. Like the emperor, also the members of his entourage could – and often did – hold posts which involved the direct exercise of political power, especially abroad. *Humanitas* was one of the virtues they had to display.[66] According to Pliny, Calestrius Tiro did so at the time of his proconsulship of Baetica:

> Egregie facis (inquiro enim) et perseuera, quod iustitiam tuam prouincialibus multa humanitate commendas; cuius praecipua pars est honestissimum quemque complecti atque ita a minoribus amari, ut simul a principibus diligare. Plerique autem dum uerentur ne gratiae potentium nimium impertire uideantur, sinisteritatis atque etiam malignitatis famam consequuntur. (*Ep.* 9.5.1–2)[67]
>
> You are doing splendid work (for I am taking soundings). Carry on the good work in administering your justice to the provincials in that most civilized way (*multa humanitate*). One principal branch of which virtue is to distinguish merit in every degree: this wins you the

65 Cf. below, pp. 140–141.

66 Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 42: "In the exercise of power, it was provincial government that especially called on qualities like *comitas*, *facilitas* and *humanitas*."

67 This letter probably dates to 107–108 CE: cf. Sherwin-White 1966, 484.

> affection of the lesser citizens, and at the same time the regard of the leading men. Many people, in their fear that they may bestow too many favours on the powerful, gain a reputation for bad manners and even ill-will. (trans. Walsh 2006, adapted)

This passage interestingly establishes a relation between *humanitas*, whose nuances here we have yet to delineate, and *iustitia*. In particular, to claim that justice should be administered with *humanitas* might lead to the conclusion that justice alone is not enough, a strong statement which would call for an explanation. Hellegouarc'h points out that in the *De officiis* Cicero went so far as to regard *iustitia* as the most important virtue, upon which Roman society as a whole was based.[68] So is Pliny somehow contradicting his beloved Cicero? This does not seem to be the case. To begin with, in a very short letter to Trajan (10.86b), Pliny himself recommends Fabius Valens to the emperor for his *iustitia* and *humanitas*, thus implying that there is no contrast between the two. But also Cicero juxtaposes *iustitia* and *humanitas* when listing the values which best fit the head judge (along with *fides* and *grauitas*) at *Pro Milone* 22. And the same holds true for Seneca (*Dial.* 4.28.2 and 9.10.6), although at *Ben.* 3.7.5 he counterposes the role of the judge (*iudex*), who has to judge according to laws, to that of the referee (*arbiter*), who can instead modify his verdict on the base of his *humanitas* or *misericordia* (*non prout lex aut iustitia suadet, sed prout humanitas aut misericordia inpulit*).[69] Yet not even this passage calls *iustitia* into question, for Seneca claims to prefer a judge over a referee in case of judicial inquiries. The figure of the referee appears however to be comparable to that of a provincial governor like Calestrius Tiro: while *iustitia* must set the guidelines, *humanitas* provides common sense, compassion and mental flexibility, all of which are important, if not fundamental, in the passage from legal theory to practice, that is to say, from the theoretical conception of justice to its application in contexts where different human beings belonging to different social classes are involved. This is the reason why Pliny says that this *humanitas* mainly consists in becoming the friend of every honest man, from those of humble extraction (*minores*) to the nobles (*principes*). As we saw in the *Panegyricus*, *humanitas* often implies steering a path between opposites.

But there is a special circumstance in which *humanitas* really becomes a requisite for a provincial governor, namely when this magistrate is appointed as pro-

68 Hellegouarc'h 1963, 266. Cf. Cic. *Off.* 3.28 and 1.20, with Benoist/Gangloff 2019, 21–22. On *Off.* 1.20 and its relationship with the idea of *aequitas*, which we shall see Symmachus for one linking to *humanitas*, cf. Vogt-Spira 2014, 52–54; Mantovani 2017, 51–53 and below, pp. 288–289.

69 Cf. also the relationship between *clementia* and *iustitia* in Seneca: above, p. 70. Much later, at *Diuinae Institutiones* 3.9.19, Lactantius will equate *humanitas*, *iustitia* and *pietas*, almost regarding the three as synonyms.

consul of Achaea. As we saw in the Introduction, Greece was regarded by the Romans as the birthplace of *humanitas*. In this respect, the importance of Pliny's letter to Maximus (*Ep*. 8.24.2) has already been pointed out, but it now merits further examination.[70] Let us recapitulate. A certain Maximus, about whom we do not know so much, is about to become the annual proconsul of Achaea. Pliny gives him some advice on how to best carry out his duties.[71] The exhortation begins as follows:

> Cogita te missum in prouinciam Achaiam, illam ueram et meram Graeciam, in qua primum humanitas litterae, etiam fruges inuentae esse creduntur; missum ad ordinandum statum liberarum ciuitatum, id est ad homines maxime homines, ad liberos maxime liberos, qui ius a natura datum uirtute meritis amicitia, foedere denique et religione tenuerunt.
>
> Bear in mind that you have been dispatched to the province of Achaia, which is the true and genuine Greece in which *humanitas*, literature, and agriculture too are believed to have been first invented. Remember that you have been sent to order the condition of free states, dispatched in other words to men who are men in the highest sense, to free citizens, free in the highest sense, who have maintained the rights which nature bestowed on them by virtue of their excellence, merits, political friendships, treaty, and finally religious devotion. (trans. Walsh 2006)

To begin with, in the list of the Greek 'inventions' *humanitas* comes first – and, as we will see shortly, it probably implies or includes the elements that Pliny mentions later in the paragraph. Given Pliny's philhellenism, which shines through frequently in his work and very much in this letter, the prominent position of a word which we have seen characterising the *optimus princeps* Trajan cannot pass unnoticed. On the contrary, we might argue that this value is seen as central to the emperor and Roman society for the very reason that it had been the founding value of Greek society, admiration for which Pliny discloses several times.[72]

Ciceronian model aside,[73] this letter seems to express a meaning of *humanitas* which is very close to that of Tacitus' *Agricola* 21, to which we will turn in the next section of this chapter. By saying *in qua* [scil. *Graecia*] *primum humanitas litterae, etiam fruges inuentae esse creduntur*, Pliny seems to imply that neither literature (*litterae*) nor agriculture (*fruges*) can be considered synonyms of or, in

70 Cf. above, p. 35.

71 On Maximus cf. Sherwin-White 1966, 477. The date of the letter cannot be established with certainty, but Sherwin-White 1966, 477 seems to exclude that it was written before 104–105 CE.

72 On Pliny's philhellenism in the *Epistulae* cf. Rees 2014, 109–112 (with further bibliography). By contrast, there is almost total lack of Greekness in the *Panegyricus*, presumably because Pliny tries to distance "his speech from the reputation for debased, hackneyed, extorted, insincere praise he could neatly align with the Greek associations of Flavian rhetoric" (Rees 2014, 122).

73 Cf. above, p. 35.

the case of *fruges* at least (*etiam* marks a hiatus between the first two elements and *fruges*), hyponyms of *humanitas*: these three elements appear as distinct.[74] The consequences for our understanding of the term are relevant. Most interpretations of this passage claim that here *humanitas* stands for 'civilization',[75] but who would not consider the birth of agriculture as a milestone in the process of civilization?[76] The myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus in Plato's *Protagoras* (322a) is clear evidence of this:[77]

> Ἐπειδὴ δὲ ὁ ἄνθρωπος θείας μετέσχε μοίρας, πρῶτον μὲν διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ συγγένειαν ζῴων μόνον θεοὺς ἐνόμισεν, καὶ ἐπεχείρει βωμούς τε ἱδρύεσθαι καὶ ἀγάλματα θεῶν· ἔπειτα φωνὴν καὶ ὀνόματα ταχὺ διηρθρώσατο τῇ τέχνῃ, καὶ οἰκήσεις καὶ ἐσθῆτας καὶ ὑποδέσεις καὶ στρωμνὰς καὶ τὰς ἐκ γῆς τροφὰς ηὕρετο.
>
> It is because humans had a share of the divine dispensation that they alone among animals worshipped the gods, with whom they had a kind of kinship, and erected altars and sacred images. It wasn't long before they were articulating speech and words and had invented houses, clothes, shoes, and blankets, and were nourished by food from the earth. (trans. Lombardo/Bell 1997)

Granted, *humanitas* seems at first glance to be conceived as something which is more related to *litterae*, maybe a sort of hypernym, and thus to cultural and educational aspects.[78] Or, to put it another way, it would seem that Pliny's interpretation of civilization exclusively rests on educational bases. Yet, as often with *humanitas*, it would probably be simplistic to reach such a conclusion. True, education (*litterae*) is there and can be the precondition, so to speak, but then Pliny lists other elements that may ultimately fall under the label 'civilization'. Pride of place goes to *libertas* (*liberarum ciuitatum*, *liberos maxime liberos*), which of

74 Following Merrill 1919, 375, Lefèvre 2009, 172 believes that in this passage *litterae* stands for 'letters of the alphabet', thus alluding to the myth of Palamedes. In this way, the allusion to the myth of Triptolemos through the alleged invention of agriculture (*fruges*) would be counterbalanced. Of course this interpretation is possible, but on the one hand the third item, *humanitas*, would still lack any clear reference to another myth; on the other, the letters of the alphabet would simply represent the first stage of literature.

75 Cf. Bolisani 1961–62, 63.

76 On agriculture as a fundamental element in the process of civilization cf. in particular Edelstein 1967, 44; Müller 2003, *passim*.

77 On this myth, its variations and its relationship to the notion of civilization cf. at least Edelstein 1967, 21–24, 86. More generally on ancient myths of civilization cf. Zago 2012, with rich bibliography.

78 Cf. Cova 1972, 33; 1978, 111.

course took on different nuances in the idealised Athens and in Trajanic Rome,[79] but also law (*ius*), virtue (*uirtus*), friendship (*amicitia*), treaties (*foedera*) and religion (*religio*) are mentioned. In other words, we might perhaps say that here *humanitas* is not only the presupposition, but also the theoretical and abstract ideal, whose explanation, but also materialisation, is illustrated by the aforementioned elements, which in the end involve relationships either among men or between men and gods. Since Greece was the first to understand the importance of this multifaceted concept, it follows that it deserves admiration and has the right to be treated accordingly by any man who exercises power there. This is the message that Pliny seems to convey to Maximus, the same message that Cicero had conveyed to his brother Quintus.[80]

After all, governors, politicians, public officials and the like must not let power go to their heads, irrespective of the post they hold and where they exercise it. The case of Claudius Pollio makes this clear. *Ep.* 7.31.3 is a letter of recommendation (*commendaticia*) in which Pliny asks his friend Cornutus Tertullus, *curator Aemiliae* when the letter was written, to accept Pollio's friendship.[81] To this end, Pliny praises Pollio for preserving intact his reputation for *humanitas* despite holding various posts: *numquam officiorum uarietate continuam laudem humanitatis infregit* ("never in the wide range of his offices he breached his unbroken reputation for *humanitas*", trans. Walsh 2006).[82]

It will not have passed unnoticed that the cases of Calestrius Tiro, Pollio and partly Maximus all remind us of what I have defined earlier as the 'official' aspect of *humanitas*. Like the emperor, his magistrates too need to be humane in exercising their power; and like the emperor, they too can rely on the 'educational' aspect of *humanitas* to enhance their humaneness. At times, this aspect can even emerge in an extraordinary manner, as is the case with Arrius Antoninus, one of the most influential men under Nerva's reign.[83] Pliny seems to appreciate his literary talent even more than his public career and, in particular, he exalts Antoninus' Greek epigrams and iambic mimes:

> Quantum ibi humanitatis uenustatis, quam dulcia illa quam amantia quam arguta quam recta! Callimachum me uel Heroden, uel si quid his melius, tenere credebam; quorum

79 Cf. R. Gibson 2019, 461: "The freedom enjoyed by the Greeks of Achaea is a mere residue, the 'name and shadow' of *libertas*, and one that can easily be swapped for slavery."

80 On Cicero's letter to Quintus cf. above, pp. 34; 60.

81 Cf. Sherwin-White 1966, 440. The letter was presumably written after 100 CE.

82 Cf. Cova 1978, 113.

83 On Arrius Antoninus see Sherwin-White 1966, 267 with further bibliographical references; Méthy 2007, 169–171.

> tamen neuter utrumque aut absoluit aut attigit. Hominemne Romanum tam Graece loqui? Non medius fidius ipsas Athenas tam Atticas dixerim. (*Ep.* 4.3.4–5)
>
> What *humanitas*, what charm they embody, how agreeable and affecting they are! What clarity, what propriety lie in them! I thought that I was handling Callimachus or Herodas, or such as is better than these – yet neither of these poets wrote, or sought to write, poetry in both genres. To think that a Roman can be so at home in Greek! I could swear that Athens herself could not be so Attic! (trans. Walsh 2006)

For the first time in the Latin texts which have come down to us, *humanitas* is paired with *uenustas* (charm), and in this context they seem to be two sides of the same coin. Bearing in mind that these two concepts are employed with regard to 'Callimachean' poems, it looks as though the latter points to the outward appearance of these poems, that is, to their beauty, their rhythm or grace, while the former alludes to what facilitates it, that is, the author's education and culture which emerge there.[84] Therefore, what are two – perhaps *the* two – cornerstones of Hellenistic and Callimachean poetics, namely erudition and stylistic sophistication, seem to be mirrored in *humanitas* and *uenustas* respectively.[85]

Moreover (and importantly), like *Ep.* 8.24.2, this letter draws a link between *humanitas* and Greek culture. If, as I have argued, Pliny's broadest idea of *humanitas* as civilization in the letter to Maximus rests mainly, though by no means exclusively, on literature and culture (*litterae*), it is thanks to this 'Greek' *humanitas* that Antoninus is so learned that he is able to write in Greek better than the most erudite Greek poets (at least according to Pliny). After all, if the Greek idea of civilization is to be taken as the model *par excellence*, so are its components, first and foremost literature. Compare Hoffer, with reference to Pliny's thought: "It is no shame for Romans to be imitators of the great cultural tradition of their conquered Greek subjects if they know and use Greek as well as, or better than, the Greeks."[86]

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84 Cf. also Rieks 1967, 238; Bütler 1970, 109; Méthy 2007, 251. *Venustas* is also attributed to the poems of Sentius Augurinus at *Ep*. 4.27.1 and of Vergilius Romanus at 6.21.4. Roller 1998, 286 rightly considers it to be typical of Catullan (and thus Callimachean) poetry.

85 In *Ep*. 7.9 Pliny himself explains why writing these short, low poems (*lusus*) can be beneficial. Because of the strict norms writing poems requires, this exercise will also improve prose style, which is fundamental to any publicly engaged man. And since short poems do not take up too much time, they can be written during the very few moments of idleness (*otium*) a busy man can have. Cf. Hershkowitz 1995, 169–171; Gamberini 1983, 89 and 99; Roller 1998, *passim* – 282–283 on *Ep.* 4.3. For a wider discussion of Pliny's attitude towards poetry cf. Gamberini 1983, 82–121; Roller 1998; Marchesi 2008, 53–96; Janka 2015. Needless to say, Pliny was not the only one to link poetry to oratory, so to speak: further discussion in Fantham 1982, 259–261; Hershkowitz 1995, 171–173; Cavarzere 2011, *passim*, with rich bibliography.

86 Hoffer 1999, 38. Cf. also Swain 2004, 9.

This same poetic atmosphere permeates *Ep.* 5.3. Here Pliny writes to the lawyer Titius Aristo about his own poems. In what might be considered as a sort of apology for his poetic activity, Pliny lists several great Roman men of the past who combined public life with literary endeavour. At some point (5.3.9–10), Pliny stresses the importance of public readings, which give the author a chance to benefit from the audience's judgement: *Multa etiam a multis admonetur, et si non admoneatur, quid quisque sentiat perspicit ex uultu oculis nutu manu murmure silentio; quae satis apertis notis iudicium ab humanitate discernunt* ("Further, he receives numerous suggestions from numerous people, and even if he does not, he observes the reactions of individuals from their facial expressions, eyes, nods, applause, murmurs, and silences, for these offer sufficiently clear indications of the difference between their judgements and their *humanitas*", trans. Walsh 2006). When applied to arts, *iudicium* is that taste which becomes the faculty of judging the quality of a work or performance, and then the judgement itself.[87] The assumption here is that the audience's *humanitas* mitigates a judgement that would probably be negative – or at least this is what Pliny's modesty seems to suggest.[88] The verb *discerno*, which 'divides into two parts' (*in duas partes diuidit*) according to Isidore of Seville's authoritative formulation, leaves little room for doubts in creating this conceptual opposition.[89] *Humanitas* is therefore to be seen as a positive attitude toward a fellow poet whose (low-level?) works deserve sympathy rather than criticism.[90] The Greek idea of φιλανθρωπία comes to mind, but it is tempting to say that this is also a consequence of being well-educated, as Pliny's audience for sure was.

The most interesting thing about this passage is, however, represented by that which permits us to distinguish frank judgement from friendly benevolence: in a nutshell, body language. We have already noticed in the *Panegyricus* that *humanitas* can be physically perceived, but never in Latin literature before *Ep.* 5.3.9–10 are all these physical elements and gestures asyndetically listed together: *uultu oculis nutu manu murmure silentio.*

As in the *Panegyricus*, Pliny's attention towards bodily attitudes probably reveals the experience of an orator and statesman who is used to observing reactions of judges and audience during trials or public speeches, as well as to modifying his behaviour accordingly.[91] Analysing this issue in depth is beyond

87 Cf. *TLL* 7.2.615.76–616.27.

88 Cf. Rieks 1967, 229–230.

89 Cf. Isid. *Diff.* 1.151 and *TLL* 5.1.1296.12–1304.47. Cf. also Roller 1998, 294–295; Méthy 2007, 193–196; 254.

90 Cf. also Bolisani 1961–62, 62.

91 Cf. Gamberini 1983, 98.

the scope of this project, but a passage of the *Institutio oratoria* where Quintilian stresses the importance of gesture for an orator should be sufficient to make the argument clearer:

> Quid autem quisque in dicendo postulet locus paulum differam, ut de gestu prius dicam, qui et ipse uoci consentit et animo cum ea simul paret. Is quantum habeat in oratore momenti satis uel ex eo patet, quod pleraque etiam citra uerba significat. Quippe non manus solum sed nutus etiam declarant nostram uoluntatem, et in mutis pro sermone sunt, et saltatio frequenter sine uoce intellegitur atque adficit, et ex uultu ingressuque perspicitur habitus animorum, et animalium quoque sermone carentium ira, laetitia, adulatio et oculis et quibusdam aliis corporis signis deprenditur. Nec mirum si ista, quae tamen in aliquo posita sunt motu, tantum in animis ualent, cum pictura, tacens opus et habitus semper eiusdem, sic in intimos penetret adfectus ut ipsam uim dicendi nonnumquam superare uideatur. (11.3.65–67)
>
> I postpone for the moment, however, the question of what is required for particular oratorical contexts, in order to speak first of Gesture, which itself conforms to the voice and joins it in obeying the mind. The importance of Gesture for an orator is evident from the simple fact that it can often convey meaning even without the help of words. Not only hands but nods show our intentions; for the dumb, indeed, these take the place of language. A dance too is often understood and emotionally effective without the voice; mental attitudes can be inferred from the face of the walk; and even dumb animals reveal their anger, joy, or wish to please by their eyes or some other bodily signal. Nor is it surprising that these things, which do after all involve some movement, should have such power over the mind, when a picture, a silent work of art in an unvarying attitude, can penetrate our innermost feelings to such an extent that it seems sometimes to be more powerful than speech itself. (trans. Russell 2001)

Speaking of non-spoken language, here Quintilian explicitly connects oratorical gesture to painting (*pictura*) rather than to poetry, whereas at *Institutio oratoria* 1.11.3 he draws an explicit comparison between orator and comedian (*comoedus*).[92] And, as we have seen, in *Ep.* 7.9 Pliny himself admits that there is a relation between poetry and oratory.[93] Going back to the letter to Titius Aristo, the

92 Cf. also the Horatian maxim *ut pictura poesis* (*Ars P.* 361). On the importance of gesture in Quintilian and in Roman oratory cf. Fantham 1982; Dutsch 2002; Hall 2004; Nocchi 2013, 117–148. However, an important caveat is added by Cavarzere 2011, 222: "Il gesto, per Quintiliano e per la retorica antica, coopera sì alla strutturazione logica e ritmica del discorso, ma ne è quasi parassitario; perché altro non fa che tradurre visivamente la segmentazione presente nella catena parlata e che è piuttosto il frutto della *pronuntiatio* vocale, quale era già stata pianificata al momento dell'*inuentio*." Quintilian also believes that a comedian can be an excellent teacher for the future orator, especially at the beginning of his training: cf. Nocchi 2013, 135–137.

93 Cf. above, p. 102 n. 85.

importance that Pliny grants to body language in this case is that, unlike vocal language, it cannot deceive.[94]

To sum up, *Ep.* 4.3 and *Ep.* 5.3 show two different ways in which *humanitas* can be connected to poetry: in the first case it stands to characterise the erudition of the author which emerges from the poems, while in the second case it represents the benevolent attitude of the audience towards authors who do not live up to expectations. But both these circumstances refer to social contexts such as literary circles which must have played a key role in the everyday life of high society, offering either a form of entertainment or occasions to talk about politics or any other topic. Moreover, these letters suggest the pervasiveness of *humanitas* in Roman society, especially within its upper echelons.

Although he did not belong to the Roman political elite and although poetry was probably not among his main interests, no doubt also the Stoic philosopher Euphrates played a role in enlivening the cultural life of Rome, so much so that Pliny considered him as the living proof of the flourishing of the liberal arts in the empire: *Si quando urbs nostra liberalibus studiis floruit, nunc maxime floret. Multa claraque exempla sunt; sufficeret unum, Euphrates philosophus* (*Ep.* 1.10.1–2: "Liberal studies in this city of ours are flourishing as splendidly as ever before. There are many outstanding examples of this, but it would be enough to cite one, the philosopher Euphrates", trans. Walsh 2006).[95] In this letter, addressed to the otherwise unknown Attius Clemens, Pliny also describes his first meeting with Euphrates as follows: *Hunc ego in Syria, cum adulescentulus militarem, penitus et domi inspexi, amarique ab eo laboraui, etsi non erat laborandum. Est enim obuius et expositus plenusque humanitate, quam praecipit* (*Ep.* 1.10.2: "When I was serving in the army in Syria as a mere youth, I became closely acquainted with him – indeed, in his home. I worked hard to win his affection, though the effort was superfluous, for he is accessible and straightforward, and entirely practises the *humanitas* which he preaches", trans. Walsh 2006).[96] To win Euphrates' affection was thus anything but difficult, because he was easy (*obuius*) and frank (*expositus*), but also full of *humanitas*. But how to translate the term – kindness, courtesy, sympathy? *Humanitas* here can easily imply all of these ideas, but, as Rieks suggests, it is difficult to refrain from connecting it to the *liberalia studia* men-

94 Cf. also Roller 1998, 295. But this cannot be taken as a rule. On the contrary, Quintilian divides gestures into two types: natural ones and imitative ones (*Inst*. 11.3.88–89). He then remarks that gesture should be measured and in tune with the speech, otherwise its artificiality would be perceived (*Inst*. 11.3.89). On this issue cf. Nocchi 2013, 129–133.

95 More on the figure of Euphrates in Sherwin-White 1966, 108–109; Pausch 2004, 133–141.

96 Cf. Pausch 2004, 134: "ein zentraler Akzent in seiner [i.e. Pliny's] Charakterisierung des Euphrates darauf liegt, daß dieser sein Leben in Übereinstimmung mit seiner Lehre fuhrt."

tioned in the opening of the letter and the more general context, in which Euphrates' most praised talents derive from his superior education:[97]

> Quantum tamen mihi cernere datur, multa in Euphrate sic eminent et elucent, ut mediocriter quoque doctos aduertant et adficiant. Disputat subtiliter grauiter ornate, frequenter etiam Platonicam illam sublimitatem et latitudinem effingit. Sermo est copiosus et uarius, dulcis in primis, et qui repugnantes quoque ducat impellat. (*Ep.* 1.10.5)[98]

> However, to such insights as are granted to me the many qualities in Euphrates are so outstanding and crystal-clear that even moderately learned men are attracted and struck by them. In argument, he is precise, earnest, and elegant, and often he even achieves the grandeur and sweep of a Plato. In discussion he is fluent, wide-ranging, and particularly charming, the sort of person who can lead on and impress even those who confront him. (trans. Walsh 2006)

Rieks also claims that Euphrates emerges from Pliny's portrait of him as embodying that ideal Panaetian and thus Stoic humanity which shines through Cicero's *De officiis*, while on the contrary Bütler denies the influence of any particular philosophical strand of thought on Pliny's *humanitas*, not least in the case of Euphrates.[99] Irrespective of what position one takes on Pliny's attitude towards philosophy, it would seem quite counterproductive to attribute all the importance Pliny gives to *humanitas* to a sectarian ideal which would hardly meet with wide approval.[100] Accordingly, it is unsurprising that none of his occurrences of *humanitas* have a direct link with Stoicism or other philosophies, let alone in *Ep*. 1.10.2. At any rate, what is particularly relevant in this letter is that it makes it explicit that *humanitas* can be taught (*quam praecipit*). On the one hand, this seems to confirm the interpretation that *humanitas* can have educational implications even when it does not seem to at first sight. On the other hand, the potential to acquire this ideal (rather than being given it at birth) will have been one of the reasons why Pliny, in Cicero's footsteps, relied on it to promote the social and political 'renaissance' after Domitian's death.[101]

In the case of the senator Voconius Romanus, a well-educated friend of Pliny's, the connection between the notions of φιλανθρωπία and education is perhaps tighter.[102] In *Ep*. 8.8 Pliny describes the source of the Clitumnus, which em-

97 Rieks 1967, 240.

98 Cf. also Bolisani 1961–62, 63–64.

99 Rieks 1967, 240; Bütler 1970, 115–116.

100 On Pliny's relationship to philosophy cf. above all Malaspina 2019.

101 On Euphrates' *humanitas* cf. also Cova 1978, 112; Malaspina 2019, 137.

102 Pliny himself calls Romanus *doctissimus uir* in *Ep.* 3.13.5. On Romanus cf. Sherwin-White 1966, 93.

bodies the idea of the *locus amoenus*. At the very end of this letter (8.8.7), Pliny remarks that this wonderful place is not only a source of pleasure, but also offers the possibility of learning something:

> In summa nihil erit, ex quo non capias uoluptatem. Nam studebis quoque: leges multa multorum omnibus columnis omnibus parietibus inscripta, quibus fons ille deusque celebratur. Plura laudabis, non nulla ridebis; quamquam tu uero, quae tua humanitas, nulla ridebis.
>
> In short, there is no aspect which will not afford you pleasure. For you will also have things to study; you will read many inscriptions written by many hands on all the pillars and on all the walls, which hymn the waters and the god. Several of them you will praise, and a few will make you laugh. But such is your *humanitas* that you will not laugh at them. (trans. Walsh 2006)

Some of these inscriptions must have been funny – because of their content? Because of their bad style? We will never know. But again, as in *Ep.* 5.3 discussed above, people who possess *humanitas* do not make fun of other human beings.[103] Nor do they abandon themselves to joy with excess: it is true that they enjoy themselves (*capias uoluptatem*) while learning (*studebis*), but their *humanitas* seems to guarantee composure.[104] In sum, Romanus ought to visit this place because he could increase his *humanitas*-παιδεία by learning something new, but at the same time his *humanitas*-φιλανθρωπία, which is already the result of his education (i.e. of his *humanitas*-παιδεία), will prevent him from resorting to mockery.[105]

Ep. 8.22 probably represents the climax of this nuance of *humanitas*. Here Pliny discusses ethical matters with another senator, Rosianus Geminus; in particular, he provides a definition of what constitutes a truly good and faultless man (8.22.2): *Atque ego optimum et emendatissimum existimo, qui ceteris ita ignoscit, tamquam ipse cotidie peccet, ita peccatis abstinet tamquam nemini ignoscat* ("For my own part, I regard as best and most unblemished the character who is indulgent to the faults of others as if he were guilty of them day after day, yet eschews faults as though he would forgive none of them", trans. Walsh 2006).[106] When it comes to explaining what or who has provoked him to write on such themes, however, Pliny's response reads as follows (8.22.4):

> Nuper quidam — sed melius coram; quamquam ne tunc quidem. Vereor enim ne id quod improbo consectari carpere referre huic quod cum maxime praecipimus repugnet. Quisquis

103 Cf. Bolisani 1961–62, 63.

104 On the relation between pleasure and learning in this letter cf. Lefèvre 2009, 272.

105 On Pliny's *humanitas* in this letter cf. also Rieks 1967, 230–231; Bütler 1970, 115; Lefèvre 2009, 290.

106 Cf. Méthy 2007, 51; Lefèvre 2009, 289. On Geminus cf. Sherwin-White 1966, 402.

> ille qualiscumque sileatur, quem insignire exempli nihil, non insignire humanitatis plurimum refert.
>
> The other day a certain person – but I had better tell you of him face to face, or rather not even then; for I fear that my condemnation of such persecution, sniping, and judgement which I condemn may militate against the precept which I particularly lay down. So I must make no mention of the man's identity and his character, for to reveal him offers no useful lesson, and to refrain from exposing him is the greatest mark of *humanitas*. (trans. Walsh 2006)

The reason why he refrains from telling the name of the man he has in mind is by now evident, at least in terms of Pliny's *humanitas*: like his model Euphrates, he has learnt to attack vices, not individuals.[107] The viewpoint is clearly that of a (self-appointed) teacher of ethics who has a specific idea of his duty to provide good moral examples.[108] Whatever goes beyond this aim (*exempli nihil*), is of little use, or even counterproductive. On the contrary, showing respect, pity or sympathy towards every kind of man is an additional teaching, if not the main one, of Pliny's *humanitas*. We have already seen how this aspect of *humanitas* is central to the *Panegyricus* and to those *Epistulae* where there is a clear distinction of ranks between the person who possesses *humanitas*, that is the emperor, and those who benefit from his *humanitas*, namely the court and the Roman people as a whole. Likewise, other instances of *humanitas* in the *Epistulae* show this ideal at work among peers, thereby confirming the notion that there is no need for a downward relationship between the bestower of *humanitas* and its beneficiary: this is certainly the case in *Ep.* 5.3 and probably in *Ep.* 8.22 as well.

But there are also cases in which the person of higher rank showing *humanitas* is not the emperor. For example, *humanitas* can be shown by a lawyer towards a defendant whose case no one else would take on, as happens in *Ep.* 6.29.2 – and this is one of the reasons why the Stoic philosopher Thrasea suggested such cases should be undertaken: *Cur destitutas* [scil. *causas*]*? Quod in illis maxime et constantia agentis et humanitas cerneretur* ("Why those without an advocate? Because in these above all both the resolve and the *humanitas* of the speaker were demonstrated", trans. Walsh 2006).[109] First, it must be noted that once again Pliny reveals all his Ciceronianism, for an analogous message can be found at *De officiis* 2.51: *Nec*

107 *Ep.* 1.10.7: '*Vitae sanctitas summa; comitas par: insectatur uitia non homines, nec castigat errantes sed emendat*.' Cf. also Rieks 1967, 234–235; Bütler 1970, 110. On Euphrates cf. also above, pp. 105–106.

108 The style and content of this letter reminds the reader of Seneca's *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, where *exempla* are central.

109 Cf. Rieks 1967, 235; Cova 1978, 113.

tamen, ut hoc fugiendum est, item est habendum religioni nocentem aliquando, modo ne nefarium impiumque defendere. Vult hoc multitudo, patitur consuetudo, fert etiam humanitas ("But, on the other hand, though that must be avoided, still scruples should not prevent us from occasionally defending a guilty man, provided he is not wicked and impious. The masses want it; custom permits it; *humanitas* tolerates it", trans. Atkins 1991).[110] Secondly, Pliny's *Ep.* 6.29.2 provides little context, but the juxtaposition of *humanitas* with *constantia* may help us better define this instance of *humanitas*. To begin with, the noun *constantia* appears no fewer than 23 times in Pliny's oeuvre. Sometimes, it refers as in this passage to one of the qualities a good lawyer should possess: *Nam pater ei Erucius Clarus, uir sanctus antiquus disertus atque in agendis causis exercitatus, quas summa fide pari constantia nec uerecundia minore defendit* ("For his father is Erucius Clarus, a man of integrity, old-fashioned manners, eloquence, and long practice in handling cases in the courts, which he defends with the utmost probity and a similar tenacity, yet with equal moderation", trans. Walsh 2006).[111] In this last case, the pairing with *fides* (*summa fide pari constantia*), which is common ever since Republican literature, makes it clear that in such contexts Pliny regards *constantia* as the attitude of remaining faithful to one's principles or decisions.[112] Accordingly, in the wake of Cicero, to show both *constantia* and *humanitas* in a trial is to remain faithful to the principle of the right of defence which should be guaranteed to each and every human being, irrespective of their social condition as well as of their probable guilt. But also of note here is that the lawyer, like the emperor in the *Panegyricus*, not only needs to possess *humanitas*, but also to display it (*quod . . . maxime . . . humanitas cerneretur*).

Similarly, in *Ep.* 5.19.2, Pliny uses the word *humanitas* to characterise his attitude toward his freedman (*libertus*) Zosimus, recently hit by illness: *Quod si essem natura asperior et durior, frangeret me tamen infirmitas liberti mei Zosimi, cui tanto maior humanitas exhibenda est, quanto nunc illa magis eget* ("But even if I were by nature harsher and more unsympathetic, my freedman Zosimus' illness would deeply distress me, and I must show him *humanitas* all the greater now that he is in need of it", trans. Walsh 2006). A hint of educational aspect can be found in this context as well, but, surprisingly, on the side of the beneficiary Zosimus, an honest (*probus*), serviceable (*officiosus*) and liberally educated (*litteratus*) man.[113] From a certain point of view, Zosimus seems to deserve to be treated with *humanitas* because he already shares the ideal of *humanitas*.

110 More on this in Mollea 2022a, 233–234 and *passim*.

111 *Ep.* 2.9.4. Cf. also 5.13.2 and 9.13.19.

112 Cf. Hellegouarc'h 1963, 284 on this meaning of *constantia* in the Republican age.

113 *Ep.* 5.19.3. On *humanitas* in *Ep.* 5.19 cf. also Bolisani 1961–62, 64–65; Lefèvre 2009, 181–182; 190–192.

But sometimes *humanitas* toward slaves and freedmen can be comforting and bothersome at once. This is what Pliny feels as he writes *Ep*. 8.16.1–3:

> Solacia duo nequaquam paria tanto dolori, solacia tamen: unum facilitas manumittendi (uideor enim non omnino immaturos perdidisse, quos iam liberos perdidi), alterum quod permitto seruis quoque quasi testamenta facere, eaque ut legitima custodio. Mandant rogantque quod uisum; pareo ut iussus. Diuidunt donant relinquunt, dumtaxat intra domum; nam seruis res publica quaedam et quasi ciuitas domus est. Sed quamquam his solaciis adquiescam, debilitor et frangor eadem illa humanitate, quae me ut hoc ipsum permitterem induxit.
>
> I have two consolations, which though in no way commensurate with the overwhelming grief, are none the less consolations. The first is my readiness to grant them their freedom (I seem not to have lost them wholly before their time, when they were free as I lost them), and the second is my permitting those who remain slaves to make a sort of will; such documents I guard as if they are legal. The slaves issue their instructions and requests according to their wishes, and I fall in with them as though under orders. They allocate, bestow, and bequeath their possessions, with the proviso that they are confined to the household, for the household is for slaves a sort of republic and citizen-state. But though these consolations ease my mind, I am badly affected and heartbroken, owing to the same *humanitas* which led me to grant that concession. (trans. Walsh 2006)

Thus *humanitas* can also appear as a conflicting force. On the one hand, it looks as if Pliny realises that being too benevolent and generous towards slaves could be risky, probably because it would disrupt the balance of power. Nor would such benevolence guarantee his slaves' devotion. In *Ep*. 3.14.5, in informing Acilius that Larcius Macedo has been killed by some slaves of his, Pliny bitterly ponders: *Vides quot periculis quot contumeliis quot ludibriis simus obnoxii; nec est quod quisquam possit esse securus, quia sit remissus et mitis; non enim iudicio domini sed scelere perimuntur* ("You realize to what dangers and insults and derision we are exposed. No man can remain untroubled because he is relaxed and gentle, for masters are murdered through wickedness rather than considered judgement", trans. Walsh 2006).[114] But on the other hand, the ethical obligations which bind Pliny to all other human beings as humans seem to be overwhelming. Furthermore, as Pliny reveals in the next paragraph of *Ep*. 8.16, there cannot be room for doubt: *Hominis est enim adfici dolore sentire, resistere tamen et solacia admittere, non solaciis non egere* (*Ep.* 8.16.4: "for it is part of being human to be assailed by grief and to have feelings, but to struggle against them and to acknowledge consolations rather than to have no need of them", trans. Walsh

114 Cf. Lefèvre 2009, 183–186.

2006).[115] The overall message of this letter can be a little surprising, especially when compared to a Stoic consideration such as the one we read in Cicero's *De finibus bonorum et malorum* 2.95:

> Potius ergo illa dicantur, turpe esse, uiri non esse debilitari dolore, frangi, succumbere. Nam ista uestra [i.e. Epicurean]: 'Si grauis, breuis; si longus, leuis' dictata sunt. Virtutis, magnitudinis animi, patientiae, fortitudinis fomentis dolor mitigari solet.
>
> Better, then, to say that it is shameful and pathetic to succumb, crushed and broken, to pain. Your maxim "Short if it is severe; light if it is long" makes a nice jingle. But virtue, high-mindedness, courage and endurance are the real remedies for the alleviation of pain. (trans. Woolf 2001)

Rather than stressing Pliny's non-Stoic tendency, however, this comparison has the result of revealing the humane as well as the human character of his *humanitas*.[116] As Trisoglio puts it: "Il suo [i.e. Pliny's] ideale dell'*humanitas* si rivela come permeato di una sensibilità che implica il dolore, ammette il conforto e brama una carezzevole compassione altrui."[117]

In terms of a diachronic evolution of the relationship between masters and slaves, Bolisani is therefore right in stressing the striking contrast between Pliny's *Ep.* 8.16 and a passage by Cato the Elder in which the sickness and death of slaves are regarded as a material loss for their masters – and sick slaves are therefore to be sold:[118]

> Pecus consideret. Auctionem uti faciat: uendat oleum, si pretium habeat; uinum, frumentum quod supersit, uendat; boues uetulos, armenta delicula, oues deliculas, lanam, pelles, plostrum uetus, ferramenta uetera, seruum senem, seruum morbosum, et si quid aliut supersit, uendat. Patrem familias uendacem, non emacem esse oportet. (*Agr.* 2.7)[119]
>
> Look over the live stock and hold a sale. Sell your oil, if the price is satisfactory, and sell the surplus of your wine and grain. Sell worn-out oxen, blemished cattle, blemished sheep, wool, hides, an old wagon, old tools, an old slave, a sickly slave, and whatever else is superfluous. The master should have the selling habit, not the buying habit. (trans. Hooper/Ash 1934)

115 On this passage cf. also Rieks 1967, 250; Cova 1978, 94–95; Méthy 2007, 220 and n. 62; Lefèvre 2009, 187–188.

116 On the anti-Stoic character of this letter cf. Lefèvre 2009, 188. More generally on the relation of Pliny's *humanitas* with philosophy cf. Malaspina 2019, 136–137.

117 Trisoglio 1971, 418.

118 Bolisani 1961–62, 65–66.

119 Cf. also Cic. *Att.* 1.12.4 and Bütler 1970, 112.

It is hard to establish whether this radical change of perspective is due to the increasing diffusion of *humanitas* after Cato's day, or, conversely, if such a theoretical revolution ended up being labelled as *humanitas*.[120] Perhaps this question is futile. What is certain is that in Pliny's view *humanitas* was a multifaceted (political, ethical, ontological, literary) value of Greek inspiration that a good emperor like Trajan and the ruling class of Rome had to possess and show in every aspect of their life, differently nuanced according to circumstances, towards all men without distinction, from nobles to slaves, from Romans to non-Romans (Greeks in particular).[121] To put it another way, if a renaissance could follow the age of Domitian, Pliny believes it had (also) to be in the spirit of *humanitas.*

3.1.3 *Humanus* in Pliny the Younger

In Pliny's *Panegyricus* and ten books of *Epistulae* there are 22 instances of the adjective in total, the neuter form is never used as a noun and *inhumanus* never appears.

Yet Pliny employs both comparatives and superlatives. This is the case, for instance, of *Ep.* 2.3.8. Pliny praises the sophist Isaeus' gift of eloquence and urges his friend Maecilius Nepos to hear him at least once, because ἀφιλόκαλον *inlitteratum iners ac paene etiam turpe est non putare tanti cognitionem qua nulla est iucundior, nulla pulchrior, nulla denique humanior* ("To fail to regard as worthwhile an acquaintance which is as pleasant, charming, and civilized (*humanior*) as can be, is an attitude which is malappris, uneducated, sluggish, and virtually degrading", trans. Walsh 2006).[122] As Rieks and Bütler rightly observe, the context leaves little doubt that *humanior* takes on educational nuances.[123] In other words, such experience would feed Nepos' *humanitas,* probably in the way the sources of the Clitumnus can feed Romanus', as we have already seen.[124]

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120 Some scholars have observed that, when dealing with slaves, *humanitas* can be complemented by self-interest. For example, Hopkins 1978, 118 has claimed that "the prospect of becoming free kept a slave under control and hard at work, while the exaction of a market price as the cost of liberty enabled the master to buy a younger replacement." On this theme cf. also Bonelli 1994, 142 and n. 4 for further bibliography. Although it does not contain the word *humanitas*, Seneca's letter 47 represents perhaps the best previous example of this 'new' attitude towards slaves. And after all, from its very beginning, it stresses the human character of slaves: *'Serui sunt'. Immo homines* ("They are slaves. No, they are men").

121 In this sense, Bury 1989, 59; Méthy 2007, 25; Lefèvre 2009, 171; 176; 294 are right in highlighting the overlap of παιδεία and φιλανθρωπία in Pliny's *humanitas*.

122 On Iseus cf. Sherwin-White 1966, 147–148; Anderson 1993, 19–20; Pausch 2004, 130–132.

123 Rieks 1967, 227–228; Bütler 1970, 108.

124 Cf. above, pp. 106–107.

One of the two superlatives (*Pan.* 59.3) and the comparative of *Ep.* 8.24.9 again remind us of a previously analysed connotation of *humanitas* in Pliny – the one that relates to the relationship between a ruler and his people, as we saw in particular in the *Panegyricus*.[125] So at *Pan.* 59.3 Trajan is said to have been *iustissimus, humanissimus, patientissimus* during his second consulate, in which we also find the juxtaposition of *iustitia* and *patientia*, which are often linked with *humanitas*.[126] As for the comparative at 8.24.9, this is the letter to Maximus that I have analysed above, in which *humanitas* at the outset stands for (Greek) 'civilization'. Towards its close, Pliny urges his friend to behave in his proconsulship of Achaea no worse than he did in his previous proconsulship in Baetica. As one would expect, the reason for this mainly lies in the Greeks' cultural and moral superiority, which emerges throughout the course of the entire letter:

> Quo magis nitendum est ne in longinqua prouincia quam suburbana, ne inter seruientes quam liberos, ne sorte quam iudicio missus, ne rudis et incognitus quam exploratus probatusque humanior melior peritior fuisse uidearis, cum sit alioqui, ut saepe audisti saepe legisti, multo deformius amittere quam non adsequi laudem.
>
> So you are to strive all the more not to appear to have been more civilized (*humanior*), more efficient, and more experienced as an official in that distant province than in this one closer to Rome, nor among that subject people than among free men, nor when chosen by lot than here specially selected, nor when inexperienced and unknown than well tried and approved. For in general, as we have often heard and we often read, it is much more humiliating to lose a reputation than to fail to win it. (trans. Walsh 2006)

Lefèvre comments: "Mit ihnen [d.h. παιδεία und φιλανθρωπία] rahmt Plinius den [8,24] Brief, indem er *humanitas* als παιδεία an den Anfang (2), *humanus* (*humanior*) als φιλάνθρωπος an den Schluß (9) stellt."[127] Although the occurrence of *humanitas* at 8.24.2, as I have shown, is probably more nuanced than it appears in Lefèvre's analysis, the passage suggests that, in Pliny's mind, Maximus ought to be particularly humane for the very reason that he is going to govern the homeland of *humanitas*. Once again the parallelism with Cicero's letter to Quintus is striking.[128]

Also of interest is the case of the other superlative, which is again to be found within a letter dealing with poetry and literature. Writing to his friend Arrianus, Pliny states:

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125 Cf. above, pp. 87–89 and 93–95 in particular.
126 Cf. above, p. 97–98 and below, pp. 140–141; 283; 288–289.
127 Lefèvre 2009, 171.
128 Cf. above, pp. 34 and 60.

> Vt in uita sic in studiis pulcherrimum et humanissimum existimo seueritatem comitatemque miscere, ne illa in tristitiam, haec in petulantiam excedat. Qua ratione ductus grauiora opera lusibus iocisque distinguo. (*Ep*. 8.21.1–2)
>
> As in life, so in literature I regard it as the most handsome and civilized (*humanissimum*) thing to mingle the serious with the genial, so that the first does not lapse into melancholy, nor the second into wantonness. This is the rationale which leads me to intersperse more serious works with playful and sportive ones. (trans. Walsh 2006)

Paired with *pulcherrimum*, *humanissimum* appears to convey a value that is worthy of the highest kind of man – the reader will remember the *homines maxime homines*, that is the Greeks, of *Ep.* 8.24 – to steer a path between opposite activities as well as opposite virtues. In such a context, it is hard to establish to what extent education, culture, philanthropy and the like contribute to defining *humanissimum*. Certainly, as we have already seen, the best men should possess all these values, which can all fall under the (Plinian) label of *humanitas*. Also, as is made clear by the case of *humanitas* in the *Panegyricus*, this value-term has to do with balance and moderation, which Pliny seems to have understood as being a necessity in study as well as in life.[129] In life in particular, *seueritas* and *comitas* are two opposite qualities, and a good balance of both is especially important to the way in which people of higher rank behave towards people of lower rank – an emperor towards his subjects, for instance.[130]

But when *humanus* is paired with *figura, fragilitas, genus, natura, res,* or *sanguis*, that is, when it appears in its pure relational meaning, standing for *hominis*, it loses much of its connection with *humanitas*, as we will note with most other authors.[131]

Two cases that might seem to counter what I have just claimed are yet to be investigated. In *Ep.* 4.14.10, Pliny maintains that the phrase *habes quod agas* ("You have something else to do") is a polite way (*molle et humanum*) to express dislike of his poems: the context and the meaning are almost the same of *humanitas* in *Ep*. 5.3, that is to say that whoever reads or listens to poems by amateurs should be tolerant in case such poems turn out to be of low quality.[132] But *molle et humanum* should also be a *solacium* ('form of consolation') for a friend who has lost his daughter, as is the case of *Ep*. 5.16.10, where φιλανθρωπία probably takes the

129 Cf. Rieks 1967, 230; Bütler 1970, 107.

130 Cf. above, pp. 85–95.

131 On this frequent lack of meaningfulness of *humanus* in Pliny cf. also Cova 1978, 108; Méthy 2007, 26–27; 249.

132 Cf. Rieks 1967, 229; Bütler 1970, 115 and above, pp. 103–104.

shape of sympathy or compassion.[133] In both these instances *humanus* appears in its positive grade, but at the same time it seems to have connections with *humanitas*: does this come into conflict with the thesis that Latin authors usually resort to comparatives and superlatives of *humanus* when they want to render *humanitas*? I do not think so. Quite opposite, it is my contention that these two occurrences contribute to supporting my theory, for in both cases *humanum* does not stand alone but is paired with *molle*, as if Pliny felt a need to clarify what would otherwise be left unclear. In other words, the presence of *mollis* is like an alternative to the use of a comparative. After all, we observe something analogous with *humanitas* itself, whose polysemy induces several authors to pair it with other abstract concepts that clarify its nuances case by case.

3.2 Tacitus: Is the Absence of *Humanitas* a Photographic Negative?

A very good friend of Pliny's, Tacitus also belonged to the social and political elite of Rome, both in the age of the hated Domitian and in that of the *optimus princeps* Trajan. From a certain viewpoint, he may be considered Pliny's *alter ego*, for he too hoped to contribute to Rome's renaissance under Trajan, but with a significant methodological difference: while Pliny resorted to a 'positive' approach, Tacitus resorted to a 'negative' one. This assertion clearly calls for an explanation. As we have seen, through his *Panegyricus* and *Epistulae*, Pliny was trying to reflect if not propose new cultural and social values – among which *humanitas* – in order to restore Rome's past splendour. Conversely, Tacitus' historical work, which reminded people of the nastinesses perpetrated in the first century of the Roman Empire, posits itself as a sort of admonishment to contemporary and future generations, which should not repeat the errors of their predecessors. In this sense, the opening of the *Historiae*, 1.2 in particular, is eloquent, for here Tacitus' tone is dramatic and ominous. For Tacitus' teaching to be effective, however, there must be room for hope, and hope is represented by either the new emperors Nerva and Trajan (1.1) or the very few virtuous figures who lived under bad emperors (1.3). To the latter category, we might add, also belonged Tacitus' father-in-law Agricola,[134] to whom the historian dedicated his monograph *Agricola*, and those who had not been corrupted by Roman imperial society, as is the case with the Germani, whom Tacitus generally praised in the *Germania*.

133 On this passage cf. also Rieks 1967, 239; Bütler 1970, 114; Cova 1978, 94; Lefèvre 2009, 216.
134 On the historical figure of Agricola cf. the recent Sailor 2023.

In these two works, as Syme was among the first to note, we encounter the only two Tacitean occurrences of the term *humanitas*.[135] Such rarity is at least curious, especially in the light of the pervasive use of this concept in the works which have come down to us of Tacitus' contemporary Pliny. Syme puts it down to the ethical and rhetorical connotations of this word, which is not so far from saying that Tacitus disliked this word because of its Ciceronian flavour.[136] Along with or as an alternative to this argument, other scholars, Bauman for one, have pointed out that *humanitas* is not a prominent concept in Roman historiography: there are no occurrences of the term in Sallust and only three in Livy, as we have seen.[137] On a different tack then, Benferhat believes that the sentiment of human solidarity expressed by (Ciceronian) *humanitas* is simply unknown to Tacitus.[138] In my view, all the aforementioned arguments somewhat contribute to explaining Tacitus' discomfort in using the term, but it is my contention that there is more at stake, and that Tacitus deliberately avoided the term because of his 'negative' approach. As has been made clear in Chapter 2, the first century CE saw a decline in the use of *humanitas* and of the exploitation of its polysemy, possibly on account of its Ciceronian, that is republican, inflections. Accordingly, the fact that this 'lack' of *humanitas* in first-century history, especially among the emperors, is mirrored in the lack of *humanitas* in the narration of the first-century history seems to be utterly consistent. As it seems to me, this is but one of "Tacitus' repeated efforts to highlight the discontinuity between Republic and Principate", which are in turn "an attempt to reveal the autocracy of the Principate and to emphasize that he is a historian writing after the fall of *libertas.*"[139] As a countercheck, we could reiterate what has been said in the introduction to this chapter, that *clementia*, which played an important role in the first century, is recurrent in Tacitus' oeuvre as well – even if one endorses Syme's opinion that Tacitus refers to it only ironically – while, on the contrary, it is very rare in Pliny.[140] Also consistent with what I have been suggesting so far is that in Tacitus *humanitas*, as well as never appearing in the 'true' historical works, never refers to individuals, but only to peoples: in the *Agricola*, to the Romans as a whole and consequently to the Britons; and in the *Germania*, to the Germani. Accordingly, it cannot go unnoticed that there is also a significant decentralisation of *humanitas* from the Athenian – Roman axis.

135 Syme 1958, 712 and 714.
136 Syme 1958, 712.
137 Bauman 2000, 30 and 36. On *humanitas* in Livy cf. above, pp. 65–66.
138 Benferhat 2011, 97.
139 Strunk 2017, 3.
140 Syme 1958, 414. *Contra* Konstan 2005, 344.

Yet despite the rarity of the word *humanitas*, or rather *because of* its rarity, the two instances in Tacitus become all the more interesting. Its use in the *Agricola* in particular, which I shall analyse first, brings into play Tacitus' attitude towards Roman imperialism. But before lingering a while over this occurrence, let me devote a few sentences to describing the *Agricola*, a hybrid work in a genre of its own.

3.2.1 The *Agricola*

Presumably written in 98 CE, this *uita*, as the author himself calls it (1.4), is at once a biography and a *laudatio funebris* of Tacitus' father-in-law, a history of Domitian's campaign in Britain and an ethnographic study of the Britons.[141] It therefore comes as no surprise that Tacitus' models vary throughout the course of the *Agricola*: the description of Agricola's youth recalls the upbringing of Catiline, Jugurtha or Marius as had been narrated by Sallust; the important speeches of Calgacus and Agricola have the 'Livian' flavour of those of Scipio and Hannibal; Cicero's consolation for the death of Crassus no doubt influenced Tacitus' for the death of his father-in-law.[142] Most importantly perhaps, the variety of genres is reflected in the ambiguities about its political message, which seems to waver between pro-Trajanic propaganda and a manifesto of anti-imperialism. Whitmarsh suggests that these two ideological aspects are both constitutive of the *Agricola*, and in constant dialogue with one another.[143] While it exceeds the aims of this study to determine what ideo-

141 On the date of the *Agricola* cf. *Ag.* 3.1 and 44.5 with discussion in Forni 1962, 14; Sage 1990, 854–855; Soverini 2004, 6–7. Beck 1998, 72–101 opts for a later publication (late 98 CE–early 99 CE). More recent scholarship tends to deem the problem of the genre of the *Agricola* pointless: cf. Beck 1998, 65; Soverini 2004, 10–11; Birley 2009, 49; Sailor 2012, 37. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries however, most debate over this work actually focused on this issue: for a synthesis of the various opinions cf. Soverini 2004, 10–11 n. 15. On its peculiarities cf. Syme 1958, 25; 125; Forni 1962, 13; Liebeschuetz 1966, 126; Ogilvie 1991, 1715–1716; Petersmann 1991, 1787; Beck 1998, 64; Sonnabend 2002, 143–145; Whitmarsh 2006, 307–310; Elisei 2008, 441; Sailor 2012, 38; Hägg 2012, 212; Audano 2015, 250; Audano 2023. But cf. also Soverini 2004, 13–14: "Nel complesso, più che a una sorta di commistione programmata di generi, mi limiterei a pensare alla consapevole scelta della forma biografica da parte di uno scrittore che però già sin d'ora manifesta i tratti inequivocabili di una vocazione prettamente storica, caratterizzata dalle esigenze artistico-letterarie, nonché dalle motivazioni e dagli interessi socio-politici [. . .] che caratterizzano l'impegno storiografico ad alto livello." Cf. also Fedeli 2013, 93–95.

142 Cf. Ogilvie 1991, 1718–1720 with further bibliography; Birley 2009, 49; Sailor 2012, 37.

143 Whitmarsh 2006.

logical reasons induced Tacitus to write this work,[144] it is worth underscoring that Whitmarsh's reading is very useful for understanding and explaining the ambiguities surrounding *Agr*. 21 and the occurrence of *humanitas* therein:

> Sequens hiems saluberrimis consiliis absumpta. Namque ut homines dispersi ac rudes eoque in bella faciles quieti et otio per uoluptates adsuescerent, hortari priuatim, adiuuare publice ut templa fora domos extruerent, laudando promptos, castigando segnes: ita honor et aemulatio pro necessitate erat. Iam uero principum filios liberalibus artibus erudire, et ingenia Britannorum studiis Gallorum anteferre, ut qui modo linguam Romanam abnuebant, eloquentiam concupiscerent. Inde etiam habitus nostri honor et frequens toga; paulatimque discessum ad delenimenta uitiorum, porticus et balinea et conuiuiorum elegantiam. Idque apud imperitos humanitas uocabatur, cum pars seruitutis esset. (*Agr*. 21)
>
> The following winter was taken up by measures of a most beneficial kind. His intention was, in fact, that people who lived in widely dispersed and primitive settlements and hence were naturally inclined to war should become accustomed to peace and quiet by the provision of amenities. Hence he gave encouragement to individuals and assistance to communities to build temples, market-places, and town houses. He praised those that responded promptly and censured the dilatory. As a result they began to compete with one another for his approval, instead of having to be compelled. Further, he educated the sons of the leading men in the liberal arts and he rated the natural talents of the Britons above the trained skills of the Gauls. The result was that those who just lately had been rejecting the Roman tongue now conceived a desire for eloquence. Thus even our style of dress came into favour and the toga was everywhere to be seen. Gradually, too, they went astray into the allurements of evil ways, colonnades and warm baths and elegant banquets. The Britons, who had had no experience of this, called it 'civilization' (*humanitas*), although it was a part of their enslavement. (trans. Birley 1999)

During the second year of his governorship in Britain, Agricola took pains to 'civilize' the native population in many ways: he helped them build temples, markets and houses, and also trained the sons of the Briton chieftains in the liberal arts. As a consequence, the Britons gradually began to aspire to Roman customs and comforts – the latter particularly dangerous, as they often result in vices. Then comes the interpretative issue which interests us, for Tacitus closes the paragraph with a sentence in which not only the meaning of the term *humanitas* needs determining, but also a pronoun like *id* – for what does this *idque* refer to? Before

144 Cf. Ogilvie 1991, 1715: "The 'Agricola' was Tacitus' first work and in it he was clearly feeling his way, both politically and stylistically. The result is that it is something of an uneven experiment, uneven in style." Cf. also Hanson 1991, 1743. For a diametrically opposite view cf. Turner 1997, 592: "The Agricola [. . .] emerges as the highly sophisticated work of a mature and capable author."

addressing this problem in greater detail, let us consider what is at stake in how we interpret this entire passage and the terms *id* and *humanitas* at its close.

Commenting on this passage, Woodman and Kraus rightly remark that this paragraph is "one of the most famous in T(acitus), perhaps in all Latin."[145] This will come as no surprise if one recalls another most celebrated Latin text, the lines of *Aeneid* 6 (851–853) where Anchises reminds the Romans of their main duty: *tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento / hae tibi erunt artes, pacique imponere morem, / parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* ("You, who are Roman, recall how to govern mankind with your power. / These will be your special "Arts": the enforcement of peace as a habit, / Mercy for those cast down and relentless war upon proud men", trans. Ahl 2007). Yet statements – or even orders, as is the case with Vergil – of this kind sometimes raised the question as to whether this domination as it was put into practice was ethically legitimate and really beneficial for both ruler and ruled. In the case of *Agr.* 21, while scholars such as Birley speak of this piece in terms of the "classic passage in the surviving literature for state-sponsored Romanisation", thereby stressing Tacitus' pro-imperialist orientation, others – Lo Cascio for one – more cautiously limit themselves to claiming that here we meet the fundamental terms of the modern debate over Romanisation.[146] Whitmarsh is sceptical: "[I]t is questionable whether we should be thinking in terms of a single target, and (in contingency) a static, pellucid distinction between praise and blame."[147] As is evident, the answer to the question of Tacitus' attitude towards Romanisation in the *Agricola* is tightly linked to the interpretation of the term *humanitas* at the end of paragraph 21. My reading of this passage will end up corroborating Whitmarsh's general interpretation of the *Agricola*: *humanitas*, which is the term Tacitus employs to sum up all the elements of that paragraph, ultimately plays a neutral role; a positive or negative interpretation depends on the viewpoint from which we look at it, the Romans' or the Britons', because the text allows both.

First, let me try to determine which elements of Tacitus' description are subsumed under the word *humanitas*, or better, under the pronoun *id* (*Idque apud imperitos humanitas uocabatur*).[148] The neuter pronoun *id* with anaphoric reference to nouns of different gender is quite common in Latin.[149] At *Agr.* 21, since there is no neuter noun to which *id* could unmistakably refer, it is also clearly

145 Woodman/Kraus 2014, 199.

146 Birley 2005, 81; 2009, 57; Lo Cascio 2007, 75. On Romanisation in general cf. Scherr 2023, 17–18, with rich and updated bibliography on n. 46.

147 Whitmarsh 2006, 319.

148 Cf. also Della Calce/Mollea 2022, 135–136 on this passage.

149 Cf. *TLL* 7.2.472.12–45.

used in a collective way, but the extent to which it is collective is more difficult to determine. Unless we arbitrarily establish which components are included and which are left out, we must assume that *id* refers to the whole context, thereby including not only *delenimenta uitiorum* such as *porticus*, *balinea* and *conuiuia* – as some scholars have thought – but also *artes liberales*, *eloquentia* and *habitus*.[150] After all, we have already learnt that *artes liberales* and *eloquentia* are usual aspects of *humanitas*, and there can be little doubt that, alongside *habitus*, these aspects play an even more important role in culturally enslaving a people.

To begin with, if *artes liberales* and *eloquentia* are to be taken as a component of *humanitas* at *Agr*. 21, this implies that Tacitus also regarded this term as bearing educational connotations. In doing this, he distances himself from Seneca, but not so much from Cicero, contrary to current opinions.[151] As well as explicitly linking *humanitas* to the liberal studies in the *Pro Archia*, Cicero is in fact the first author whose use of the expression *artes liberales* is attested (*Inu.* 1.35), as I have remarked above.[152] Within the *Agricola*, the *artes liberales* not only recall Tacitus' father-in-law's upbringing and education at 4.2 (*per omnem honestarum artium cultum pueritiam adulescentiamque transegit*, "he passed his boyhood and youth in a complete training in liberal studies", trans. Birley 1999),[153] but are also evoked at. 2.2 (*expulsis insuper sapientiae professoribus atque omni bona arte in exilium acta*, "over and above this, the teachers of philosophy were expelled and all noble accomplishments driven into exile", trans. Birley 1999), and are the same *bonae artes* which had been forced into exile during (presumably) Domitian's reign.[154]

As for *eloquentia*, the 'quality or practice of fluent, apt, and effective speech' according to the *OLD*, it especially characterises the orators, and is in fact a recurrent word in Cicero's and Quntilian's oeuvre.[155] As is well known, in both these authors the good orator, in order to master *eloquentia*, must possess that superior

150 Liebeschuetz's 1966, 137 reading of this passage seems to imply this comprehensive interpretation of *humanitas*, and so does Whitmarsh 2006, 318, who translates *id* as 'Romanization'. *Contra* Haedicke 1975, 76; Høgel 2015, 73: "The sarcasm at work in this grim image of *humanitas* as nothing but a complacent cover for the surrender to the vices of civilisation now even found in the speech of the locals may be one of the reasons why Tacitus avoided the term altogether when writing of Romans." From the readings by Forni 1962, 175 and Soverini 2004, 204–205 it is difficult to find a clear answer to this issue. Cf. also Jens 1956, 337; Baldwin 1990; Scherr 2023, 222–223.

151 Cf. Benferhat 2011, 93–94. On Ciceronian *humanitas* cf. above, pp. 52–62.

152 Cf. above, p. 61.

153 D'Agostino 1962, 46.

154 Cf. Forni 1962, 88; D'Agostino 1962, 15. Soverini 2004, 115 speaks of a usually moral value of *bona ars* in Tacitus, but the context does not necessarily support his view.

155 Cf. *TLL* 5.2.408.42–43 (s.v. *eloquentia*): *frequentant imprimis Cic(ero), Quint(ilianus).*

knowledge which only the *artes liberales* can provide. In the *Agricola*, Agricola's father was said to be *studio eloquentiae sapientiaeque notus* (4.1: "was noted for his devotion to eloquence and philosophy", trans. Birley 1999). But it is in the *Dialogus de oratoribus* that the term *eloquentia* becomes crucial for Tacitus. Like the *artes liberales*, *eloquentia* too was living through hard times, as is evident from the opening of the *Dialogus*: *Saepe ex me requiris, Iuste Fabi, cur, cum priora saecula tot eminentium oratorum ingeniis gloriaque floruerint, nostra potissimum aetas deserta et laude eloquentiae orbata uix nomen ipsum oratoris retineat* ("Dear Justus Fabius, – There is a question that you often put to me. How is it that, whereas former ages were so prolific of great orators, men of genius and renown, on our generation a signal blight has fallen: it lacks distinction in eloquence, and scarce retains so much as the name of 'orator'", trans. Peterson 1914). Yet despite being at times disregarded at home, the *artes liberales* and *eloquentia* evidently became a key factor in the process of Romanisation abroad. The spread of Latin language must have been central to this process. At *Agr*. 21 Tacitus considers *eloquentia* synonymous with mastery of the Latin language – *lingua Romana*, which "was the language which had spread with Roman power, and not a particular variety of that language restricted to Rome."[156] Cornelius Nepos' *Vita Attici* 4.1, discussed above, provides a close parallel for the association of *humanitas* with mastery of language.[157] As modern commentators point out with regard to Britain, the fact that both Latin language and literature were spreading in Tacitus' days is corroborated by Martial 11.13.5 (*dicitur et nostros cantare Britannia uersus*, "Britain too is said to sing our verses") and Juvenal 15.111 (*Gallia causidicos docuit facunda Britannos*, "eloquent Gaul taught British lawyers").[158] Granted, in ancient Rome education was not for everybody: *a fortiori*, it could not be for everybody in the provinces or among recently conquered peoples. Tacitus' clarification that Agricola's "civilizing efforts were aimed at the British chieftains and their sons" (*principum filios*) comes therefore as unsurprising.[159]

If the *artes liberales* and *eloquentia* undoubtedly played a crucial role, the acme of this process of civilization, that is Romanisation, is however represented by the Roman dress (*nostri habitus*) and especially by the *toga*, which more and more Britons began to wear (the *toga* is characterised as *frequens*). Virg. *Aen.* 1.282 and the success of this line in later authors make it clear that being *toga*-clad was synonymous with being Roman: *Romanos, rerum dominos gentemque togatam* ("Romans, that people in togas, the masters of all in existence", trans. Ahl

156 Adams 2003, 195. Cf. also Flobert 1988, 208.
157 Cf. above, pp. 62–63.
158 Cf. Ogilvie/Richmond 1967, 227; Soverini 2004, 203; Woodman/Kraus 2014, 202.
159 Garnsey 1978, 253. Further discussion in Lo Cascio 2007, 83–96.

2007).[160] In Vout's words, "to be *togatus* was to be actively involved in the workings of the state, whether a priest, an orator, a magistrate, a client or the emperor himself."[161] Yet once the acme has been reached, the onset of decline draws near. In a way, the fact that the *toga* spread all over the empire and was no longer prerogative of the Italian citizens of Rome may have contributed to its loss of social and ideological importance.[162] Of course this remains implicit in Tacitus' *frequens toga*, but right from the following sentence the possible negative aspects of *humanitas* are manifest.

It is true that porticoes (*porticus*), baths (*balinea*) and sumptuous banquets (*conuiuiorum elegantiam*) are not to be seen as vices in themselves (*uitia*). At *Ep.* 90.25 Seneca does not probably look kindly upon porticoes, but it must be borne in mind that such places gave birth to the philosophical school to which he belongs – *porticus* is the Latin for στοά. Likewise, banqueting can have beneficial effects: it is probably sufficient to mention the titles of works such as Plato's *Symposium* or Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* (or *Banquet of the learned*) to give an idea of the philosophical and literary themes that can be touched upon while drinking and / or dining, although of course Trimalchio's dinner party in the *Satyrica* represents the other, that is negative, side to the same coin.[163]

Baths can be seen as a means of integration (and also of Romanisation) as well as "a prelude and preparation for [. . .] the banquet"; however, by the time of Tacitus they were also regarded as immoral venues.[164] Just to give a few examples, Seneca and Demetrius the Cynic disapproved of the luxurious lifestyle they came to symbolise, while Martial and Juvenal imply that mixed baths in particular were often frequented by loose women.[165] In a nutshell, even if they are not intrinsically vices, porticoes, baths and banquets certainly represent potential occasions for being immoral.[166] In this sense, Woodman and Kraus are right in pointing out that the genitive *uitiorum* "is not definitive or appositional ('enticing vices', viz. porticoes etc.) but objective or possessive ('enticements to vice')",

160 Cf. Imp. Aug. *Fr.* 35 Malcovati; Mart. 14.124.1; Suet. *Aug.* 40.5. Cf. Vout 1996, 213–216.

161 Vout 1996, 214. Cf. also Scherr 2023, 221: "Tacitus impliziert demnach mit *habitus* ganz bewusst nicht nur die Art der Kleidung, sondern es ist zugleich an römisches Wesen, römische Verhaltensweisen zu denken, was den zivilisatorischen Aspekt der Passage weiter unterstreicht."

162 On the social decline of the *toga* cf. Vout 1996, 216–218 with further bibliography.

163 For further bibliography as well as examples of pros and cons of banquets cf. Woodman/Kraus 2014, 205. The clarification 'drinking and / or dining' is necessary because the ancient Greek symposium came right after a banquet, but no longer involved eating.

164 Yegül 1992, 5. On the social importance of baths cf. Yegül 1992, 4; 30; Rimell 2015, 159–162.

165 Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 86.6–13; Philost. *VA* 4.42; Mart. 3.51, 11.47; Juv. 6.419–433 with Yegül 1992, 40–43 and Rimell 2015, 160–161.

166 Forni 1962, 175; Grimal 1991, 116; Soverini 2004, 204; Woodman/Kraus 2014, 206.

though their explanation "perhaps with the implication that *uitia* are not an inevitable consequence of the *delenimenta*" raises some doubts, especially in the light of their premises: "T(acitus) is distinguishing the buildings and banquets (*delenimenta*) from their immoral associations and demoralising effects (*uitiorum*)."[167] In other words, they do not seem to give *delenimenta* a pejorative meaning. Yet Benferhat has shown persuasively that right from its first occurrences in Republican Latin *delenimentum* always takes on some negative nuances, in that it always implies some deceit or intention to deceive.[168] Granted, compared to *uitia*, *delenimenta* are 'less' negative; they represent a previous step, so to speak. With regard to *Agr*. 21, therefore, the circle seems to square once we take it that *porticus*, *balinea* and *conuiuiorum elegantiam* are appositions of *delenimenta*, not of *uitiorum*. Thus, if on the one hand porticoes, baths and banquets are only potential occasions for being immoral, on the other hand Tacitus seems to imply that this potentiality is likely to materialise in Britain (in the same way as it had already done at Rome?). After all, these are the risks of 'civilization', as *humanitas* is usually translated at *Agr*. 21, and as Julius Caesar had already denounced at the opening of his *De bello Gallico*.[169] In Tacitus' view, to become Roman is not only to be able to speak perfect Latin or wear the *toga*, but also to be exposed to the blandishments of porticoes, baths and banquets. In other words, civilization is also a step towards possible corruption of the customs and thus towards decadence – and development is not always positive![170] The same myth of the noble savage that Tacitus fully exploits in the *Germania* also seems to shine through here. In a way, this is a variation upon the common theme of the *laudatio temporis acti*, according to which the (often idealised) past is far better than the present. Among other ancient authors, this topic was central to Tacitus' model Sallust, and returns in Ammianus.[171] Yet all this is not to say that *humanitas* has a negative connotation in the *Agricola*. As we have seen, none of the elements which constitute Tacitus' idea of *humanitas* are negative by themselves. Rather, we should speak of a broad meaning of the term *humanitas*, which includes neutral, that is neither positive nor negative, aspects of being Roman.[172] An exclusively negative sense should be – but is not necessarily – taken on by the term, and consequently, by the whole passage, from the non-Roman perspective of the Britons alone, for they do not realise that *humanitas* implies cultural slavery and is not necessarily syn-

167 Woodman/Kraus 2014, 204.
168 Benferhat 2011, 174–176.
169 On *humanitas* in Caesar cf. above, pp. 63–64.
170 Cf. Rutledge 2000, 85.
171 Cf. below, pp. 227–260.
172 Cf. Woolf 1998, 69–70.

onymous with progress.[173] On this occasion, the *Agricola*'s constant tension between pro- and anti-imperialist attitude, as argued by Whitmarsh, materialises in the different perspective from which to look at *humanitas*, the Romans' or the Britons'.[174]

According to Tacitus' narration, just one Briton would seem to realise the negative implications of Roman so-called *humanitas*, the chieftain Calgacus. The speech he delivers before his people prior to the Battle of Mons Graupius (*Agr*. 30–32) includes quite a few allusions to and criticisms of Roman imperialism.[175] Accordingly, and in addition to the references I mentioned at the outset of this section, scholars such as Liebeschuetz and Sailor have highlighted parallels between Calgacus' oration and *Agr*. 21 in pointing out the drawbacks of the Roman empire in Tacitus' view.[176] Rutledge has in turn maintained that both these texts are consistent in revealing the necessity of Roman imperialism, as they both show weaknesses of the Britons: *Agr*. 21 makes it clear that their 'civilization' actually leads to decadence, while Calgacus embodies too many anachronistic republican values, such as *libertas*.[177] This would mean that the Britons do not have the qualities to rule over their own land, and thus need an external ruler, that is, the Roman emperor. Nevertheless, I would again echo Whitmarsh, who argues that one of the main analogies between Calgacus' speech and *Agr*. 21 is that they both concern "identification and exposure of catachrestic signification, of *falsa nomina*":[178] *auferre trucidare rapere falsis nominibus imperium, atque ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant* ("They plunder, they butcher, they ravish, and call it by the lying name of 'empire'. They make a desert and call it 'peace'", trans. Birley 1999) of 30.6 is in dialectic relation with *Idque apud imperitos humanitas uocabatur, cum pars seruitutis esset* of 21.3.[179] Both passages therefore include two perspectives at the same time, the Romans' and the Britons', and it would be arbitrary to exclude either.

173 On *uocabatur* in this passage, cf. Soverini 2004, 205, with further examples: "il motivo della 'falsa definizione', per cui ad indicare una certa realtà viene impiegato un termine inadeguato e disviante, sembra particolarmente avvertito dalla sensibilità tacitiana." Cf. also D. Braund 1996, 161–165.

174 Whitmarsh 2006.

175 Cf. especially 30.1 and 30.7.

176 Liebeschuetz 1966, 136–137; Sailor 2012, 34. Cf. also Whitmarsh 2006, 318–319.

177 Rutledge 2000, 85–90.

178 Whitmarsh 2006, 318.

179 Cf. also Baroud 2023, 537.

3.2.2 The *Germania*

As said before, the second occurrence of *humanitas* in Tacitus is to be found in the *Germania*. Like the *Agricola*, it is a unique work which dates to 98 CE.[180] Its title in the manuscripts, *De origine et situ Germanorum*, evokes an ethnographic monograph, but this only applies to the first half of the work (chapters 1–27.1).[181] After describing the region and the physical and social features of its inhabitants, in the second half (27.2–46) Tacitus turns in fact to a survey of the peoples of Germania.[182]

Towards the end of the first half of the work, also through praising their hospitality, "Tacitus builds up his portrait of the Germani as the Roman other."[183] In this context, he says:

> Conuictibus et hospitiis non alia gens effusius indulget. Quemcumque mortalium arcere tecto nefas habetur; pro fortuna quisque apparatis epulis excipit. Cum defecere, qui modo hospes fuerat monstrator hospitii et comes; proximam domum non inuitati adeunt. Nec interest: pari humanitate accipiuntur. (21.2–3)

> No other people indulges more lavishly in feasting and entertainment. It is regarded as a sin to turn away any person from their house. Each according to his means receives guests with an elaborate meal. When his supplies have run out, the man who has been the host accompanies the guest to show him another lodging. They enter the next house even without an invitation. It makes no difference: they are received with equal warmth (*humanitate*). (trans. Birley 1999)

Although it is far from having the richness of meaning, but also of ambiguities, of the occurrence of *humanitas* in the *Agricola*, this one ultimately shares with the former the idea of civilization. In a way, it could also be said to be complementary to the *Agricola* instance, as it shows that the barbarians, whether they are Britons or Germani, do already possess an idea of civilization. Their idea is probably less sophisticated than the Romans', but for this same reason it is further from vice and more easily manageable. The barbarians possess genuine civilization which does not derive from the liberal arts or their dress, but is more natural, authentically human, at least within the boundaries and by the standards of their own

180 At 37.2 Tacitus refers to Trajan's second consulship (first half of 98 CE) and the context suggests that the historian is talking about a contemporary event. Cf. Rives 2012, 46 with further bibliography; Posadas 2023, 475.

181 Cf. Thomas 2009, 61.

182 On the issues concerning the genre and the style of this work cf. Thomas 2009, 61; *passim*; Rives 2012, 48–53; Posadas 2023, 475–477.

183 Rives 2012, 52.

society. Because of such genuineness and purity, here banquets are not seen as enticements to vice – or at least not to the same degree as in the *Agricola* – but as occasions in which *humanitas* towards fellow countrymen can be displayed. In view of all this, it is probably simplistic to reduce *humanitas* to an equivalent of *hospitalitas*, as the *TLL* entry suggests.[184] Here *humanitas* does take the shape of hospitality, but insofar as it is an offshoot of a more wide-ranging value, namely civilization. In the section on Gellius (and in Ammianus), we will see that and how this connection between *humanitas* and hospitality becomes clearer.

Tacitus' two earliest works thus show a much fuller use of the term *humanitas* in the *Agricola*, and a more restricted one in the *Germania*. In the case of *Agricola*, we could even state that *humanitas* has reached its highest level of meaningfulness in characterising the essence of the Romans: on the one hand, it contains the educational and rhetorical aspects embedded in the most pregnant Ciceronian occurrences of the term; on the other, it goes even beyond Cicero, including some possible less noble features and habits of the Roman people.[185] In contrast, the case of *Germania* proves that there can be a 'lower', 'more barbarian' level of *humanitas*, which is far from the Greek ideal of παιδεία, but at the same time is further from its potentially dangerous consequences. Tacitus must have seen how these dangerous consequences had materialised in first-century Roman society, and this may contribute to explaining why in the *Annales* and *Historiae* he avoided using the term *humanitas* in narrating the events from the end of Augustus' reign to Domitian's.

3.2.3 *Humanus* in Tacitus

But if Tacitus hardly uses *humanitas* in his works, he does use *humanus*. I agree with Benferhat that he did so because he perceived a significant difference in meaning between the noun and the adjective, a difference which emerges from the comparison between the occurrences of *humanitas* and those of *humanus*.[186] A closer look at the 45 instances of *humanus* – including a couple of cases of *inhumanus* – will make this clearer.

In most cases, *humanus* agrees with *adfectus, animus, corpus, cupido, effigies, genus, hostia, ingenium, infirmitas, ius, malignitas, memoria, modus, natura, ops,*

184 Cf. *TLL* 6.3.3082.24–25. Once more a precedent of this nuance of *humanitas* can be found in Cicero: cf. *TLL* 6.3.3082.19–24. For later uses cf. *TLL* 6.3.3082.26–55; Høgel 2015, 96.
185 On Ciceronian *humanitas* cf. above, pp. 52–62.
186 Benferhat 2011, 90.

os, res, sors, species, uox and thus simply conveys the idea of 'human' / 'of man', without any ethical, cultural or philanthropic implications.

In a couple of situations the adjective is used as a noun, in the common comparison / opposition between *humana* and *diuina.* The same (implicit) polarity can be found at *Ann.* 15.44, although here *humana consilia* might also imply that Nero, in paying attention to his people's needs while rebuilding Rome after the fire of July 64 CE, was inspired by philanthropic ideals: *Et haec quidem humanis consiliis prouidebantur. Mox petita dis piacula aditique Sybillae libri* ("Such were the provisions of human design. Later, atonements were sought, with consultation of the Sibyl's books", trans. Damon 2012). Nevertheless, the distance from the *Agricola* occurrence of *humanitas* remains immense.

As predictable, things change when it comes to *inhumanus*. At *Hist.* 2.70 Vitellius wants to tread the plains of Bedriacum to see the traces of his recent victory. The battlefield is ghastly to behold according to Tacitus' description, but *nec minus inhumana pars uiae quam Cremonenses lauru rosaque constrauerant, extructis altaribus caesisque uictimis regium in morem* ("no less callous (*inhumana*) was the part of the road which the people of Cremona had strewn with laurel and roses, after building altars and sacrificing victims in the manner appropriate for a king", trans. Wellesley/Ash 2009). At 3.83, Vitellians and Flavian forces, while fighting against each other on the streets of Rome, showed *inhumana securitas* ('inhuman indifference'). *Inhumanus* thus has a richer, that is ethical, meaning than *humanus*, because it really evokes the idea of what is unbecoming to a human being. But this is inevitable, since the negative prefix *in-* implies a form of judgement which makes of *inhumanus* no longer a simple relational adjective.

3.3 Suetonius: *Humanitas* as a Paradox in the *Vita Tiberii*

Our investigation into the use of *humanitas* in the Trajanic age ends with Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus. This is due to a chronological reason, for Suetonius flourished at the turn of the Trajanic and Hadrianic age. His *De uita duodecim Caesarum*, the largest and most famous extant part of his immense production as well as his only work to contain instances of *humanitas*, was in fact probably written between 119–122 CE, that is, at the beginning of the reign of Hadrian.[187] Yet the

187 John the Lydian (*Mag.* 2.6) informs us that Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars* were dedicated to Septicius Clarus as Praetorian prefect, so between 119–122 CE. Most scholars give credit to John the Lydian, but cf. also Townend 1959; Cizek 1977, 13 n. 39; Baldwin 1983, 2; 14; 47–51; Pausch 2004, 252–258; Power 2014b, 76–77. For an overview of Suetonius' lost works cf. Sonnabend 2002, 171; Vacher 2003^2, xxi–xxiv.

reason for including Suetonius in the Trajanic age is also that he belonged to the same cultural milieu as Tacitus and Pliny, and was certainly in close contact with the latter.[188] Moreover, as far as *humanitas* and concepts of value in general are concerned, it is worth recalling that Wallace-Hadrill draws a sharp parallel between Suetonius and Pliny the Younger, identifying in Pliny's already discussed *Panegyricus* 3.4 the "series of contrasting pairs of virtues and vices which cover very much the same ground as do Suetonius' pairs."[189] To recall it briefly, the first pair that Pliny mentions at *Pan.* 3.4 opposes *humanitas* to *superbia*, which Wallace-Hadrill translates and glosses thus: "humanity (equivalent to civility) and pride."[190] As fascinating as they may be, both the main statement and the parenthesis raise some doubts. To begin with, *humanitas* is extremely rare in Suetonius' extant oeuvre, as the term itself is only used twice in the *Vita Tiberii*;[191] nor is *ciuilitas* more frequent, appearing only at *Aug.* 51.1 and *Claud.* 35.1. Moreover, it is very hazardous to consider *ciuilitas* as an equivalent of *humanitas*. Not only are these two words never twinned in Latin, despite it being a language which makes ample use of synonymous doublets, but the very opposition of *humanitas* to *superbia* at *Pan.* 3.4 rules out that possibility: for how could pride (*superbia*) be seen as something opposite to civility?

On the contrary, along the lines I have been drawing in this chapter, especially in the introduction and the section on Tacitus, it is my contention that two arguments at least can be put forward to explain the rarity of *humanitas* in Suetonius' oeuvre. On the one hand, with Tacitus' case in mind, it does not seem rash to conjecture that this is at least partly due to the historical character of Suetonius' work, and to republican and early imperial historians' general avoidance of this term.[192] On the other hand – and this seems to me to be a perhaps stronger

188 Cf. Della Corte 1958, 77–113; Cizek 1977, 7–9; Baldwin 1983, 9–27; Gascou 1984, 735–736; Sonnabend 2002, 169–171; Duchêne 2020, 12–13. Furthermore, Baldwin 1983, 51 for one even proposes that "some, perhaps all, of the imperial biographies were composed and published by 117": cf. the previous footnote.

189 Wallace-Hadrill 1984, 155. On Pliny, *Pan.* 3.4 cf. above, pp. 87–88.

190 Wallace-Hadrill 1984, 155.

191 A third one in *Gram.* 14.2 is in fact within a Ciceronian letter to Atticus.

192 For the lack of *humanitas* in Roman historians cf. above, p. 116. One can object that Suetonius was a biographer rather than a historian. However, despite Plutarch's statement at *Alex.* 1.2 (οὔτε γὰρ ἱστορίας γράφομεν, ἀλλὰ βίους – "Nor do I write about history, but about lives"), the line between biography and history was generally blurred in antiquity. And, after all, Jerome himself called Suetonius a historian (*Chron. praef.* p. 6 Helm = p. 288 Roth). Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1984, 8–10, who defines Suetonius a 'scholar'; Giua 1991, 3735 and n. 8; 3744–3745; Power 2014a, 1–2. Other scholars, such as Della Corte 1958, 203–230; Baldwin 1983, 66–100; Gascou 1984, 343–456, tend on the contrary to distinguish more clearly between history and biography, al-

point – we should not forget that, like Tacitus' major historical works, Suetonius' *Caesares* also deal with first-century emperors, and I have already reiterated more than once that *humanitas* does not seem to have been central to first-century Roman thought; nor was it among the emperors' most praised values. In the light of this, it might seem surprising that the only two instances of *humanitas* in Suetonius are to be found in the *Vita Tiberii*, the biography of an emperor who was by no means a positive model in Suetonius' view.[193] However, a closer analysis of these two occurrences will reveal that there is little room for surprise, for in Tiberius' reign there was only a lack, or at best, an appearance, of *humanitas*. Let us turn to the text in question.

Having praised the emperor's patience in the face of abuse and slander as well as his benevolent and 'democratic' behaviour towards the senate in the previous paragraph, at *Tib.* 29 Suetonius adds: *Atque haec eo notabiliora erant, quod ipse in appellandis uenerandisque et singulis et uniuersis prope excesserat humanitatis modum* ("And this was more remarkable because he himself almost exceeded politeness (*humanitas*) in addressing and paying his respects to individual senators and the senate as a whole", trans. Edwards 2000). As is often the case with *humanitas*, it is difficult to provide a translation which is utterly satisfying. 'Politeness' or 'courtesy' clearly make sense, but of course something is missing. The impression is that once more both the ideas of παιδεία and φιλανθρωπία are simultaneously expressed. The former is the precondition, as it were; the latter, which is far more evident, represents the practical manifestation, the kind and benevolent behaviour of a person of higher rank towards people of lower status.[194] What can be a little surprising, especially in the light of some negative readings of the *Vita Tiberii*, is that this emperor even exceeded the 'standard level' of *humanitas*.[195] But this simply means that a positive concept like *humani-*

though the latter recognises the historical value of the *Vitae Caesarum* (xii–xvi, 345, 457–674, 801–803), which is made clear right from the title, *Suétone Historien*.

193 Cf. Cizek 1977, 102–109; 148; Baldwin 1983, 252–253; Newbold 1984, 121–122; Gascou 1984, 696; Gunderson 2014, 141–145; Duchêne 2020, 101–115; 174–183. Nevertheless, according to Somville's 2002 arguments, Suetonius' description of Tiberius' life is not entirely negative. So when Cizek 1977, 155 claims that *humanitas* is a, perhaps the, criterion for distinguishing the good from the bad emperors, he is evidently speaking of his own idea of *humanitas*, not Suetonius'. Cf. also Cizek 1977, 195–197. Regarding the difficulties for understanding why some words are rare or are used in some *Vitae* alone, cf. the persuasive Baldwin 1983, 484–485, according to which, in the last analysis, there can be no reason for that, especially with words of little or no consequence.

194 On *humanitas* in this passage cf. also Vogt 1975, 150.

195 Cf. *e.g.* the reading by Gunderson 2014. However, according to other readings, *Tib.* 29 is entirely positive: cf. *e.g.* Cizek 1977, 96.

tas, if carried to excess, may seem to hide traces of its opposites, *inhumanitas* or *superbia*.

Other passages of this *Vita* may corroborate this interpretation. At *Tib*. 30, for instance, Suetonius ingeniously observes: *Quin etiam speciem libertatis quandam induxit conseruatis senatui ac magistratibus et maiestate pristina et potestate* ("Maintaining the traditional dignity and power of both senate and magistrates, he even introduced some appearance of a free state", trans. Edwards 2000). The overall message could appear to be positive, but the word *species* (semblance) insinuates serious doubts about Tiberius' true intention.[196] From paragraph 41 onwards then, there is no longer need of dissimulation, and at 42 Suetonius makes Tiberius' degeneration extremely clear:[197] *Ceterum secreti licentiam nanctus et quasi ciuitatis oculis remotis, cuncta simul uitia male diu dissimulata tandem profudit* ("Nevertheless, having obtained the licence afforded by seclusion, far from the eyes of the city, he finally gave in simultaneously to all the vices he had so long struggled to conceal", trans. Edwards 2000). In *Tib*. 50, in fact, the word *humanitas* itself bears its usually positive meaning, but the negative atmosphere is given by the fact that Suetonius is denouncing its lack: *Iuliae uxori tantum afuit ut relegatae, quod minimum est, offici aut humanitatis aliquid impertiret, ut ex constitutione patris uno oppido clausam domo quoque egredi et commercio hominum frui uetuerit* ("So far was he from showing his wife Julia, when she was in exile, a measure of respect and kindness – the least one might expect – that, when her father's orders confined her to a single town, he further forbade her to leave the house or to have any contact with other people", trans. Edwards 2000). The twin-

196 Cf. Gascou 1984, 720–721. On the contrary, Baldwin 1983, 263 believes that this is "a genuine compliment"; while Wallace-Hadrill 1984, 110 takes a sort of median position: "He [i.e. Suetonius] seems to approve vaguely of the 'sort of show of *libertas*' which Tiberius allowed the senate." On *libertas* in Suetonius cf. Baldwin 1983, 327–333; Wallace-Hadrill 1984, 110–112; 118. For the juxtaposition of *libertas* and *maiestas* cf. D'Aloja 2011, 67.

197 On paragraph 41 as a turning point in Suetonius' description of Tiberius cf. Bringmann 1971, 277; Döpp 1972, 451; Vogt 1975, 190; Cizek 1977, 136; Gascou 1984, 681; 691; Giua 1991, 3736; Duchêne 2020, 175. However, Giua 1991, 3736–3737 herself acknowledges that some negative aspects of Tiberius' nature can already be perceived in the first half of his biography. Cf. also Gascou 1984, 700–701. The cases of *humanitas* at 29 and of *speciem libertatis* at 30 seem to me to point in this same direction. Cf. also Bradley 1991, 3703 and n. 11, who then remarks: "towards Tiberius, Caligula, Nero and Domitian he [i.e. Suetonius] is unambiguously hostile" (3729). A different position in Bringmann 1971, 285: "Alle negativen Züge des Tiberius sind im letzten Abschnitt gesammelt, im ersten und im zweiten blieb dafür kein Raum." Cf. also Döpp 1972.

ning of *officium* and *humanitas* has a Ciceronian feel.[198] The phrasing at *Pro Flacco* 57 seems to be the closest to Suetonius:[199]

> Quid uos fieri censetis Trallibus? An id, quod Pergami? Nisi forte hae ciuitates existimari uolunt facilius una se epistula Mithridatis moueri impellique potuisse ut amicitiam populi Romani, fidem suam, iura omnia officii humanitatisque uiolarent, quam ut filium testimonio laederent cuius patrem armis pellendum a suis moenibus censuissent.
>
> What do you think happens at Tralles? Isn't it what happened at Pergamum? Unless perhaps these states wish it to be thought that they are more easily moved and could me more easily persuaded by a single letter of Mithridates to violate the friendship of the Roman people, their own loyalty, all the laws of duty and humanity (*offici humanitatisque*), than to injure by their testimony a son whose father they had voted to repel from their walls by force of arms. (trans. Lord 1953).

In his oratorical, emphatic tone, Cicero's accusation of violating all the laws of obligation and humanity (*iura omnia offici humanitatisque*) summarises and represents the climax of all violations, especially, as this is the case, when it comes to international relationships.[200] By contrast, the Suetonian occurrence pertains to the private sphere, which perhaps contributes to explaining why Suetonius' style is far less dignified and cutting; yet what he means by referring to this dittology is pretty much the same as in Cicero's *Pro Flacco*: all the laws of obligation and humanity would push Tiberius to have mercy upon his wife, but there is no room for humanity in this emperor's nature. In sum, it may sound a little paradoxical, but despite being the only *Vita* where the word *humanitas* appears, we must agree with Wallace-Hadrill 1984, 160 that "Suetonius' aim is not to explain the political crisis of Tiberius' reign but to compile a dossier of his *in*humanity"[201] (my emphasis).

198 On *officium* in this passage and in Suetonius in general cf. Vogt 1975, 242.

199 For other simultaneous instances of *officium* and *humanitas* cf. Cic. *Ver*. 2.2.118; *Phil*. 2.9; *Fam*. 3.1.1; 3.9.1; 11.27.8; 11.28.4; 16.4.2; *Att.* 6.1.1.

200 Cf. Mayer 1951, 147: "Die Begriffe [scil. *officium humanitasque*] sind zu einer einzigen Vorstellung unzertennlich eng verschmolzen; h., an und für sich das generelle Wort, Menschlichkeit in weitesten Sinn, ist durch officium näher bestimmt im Sinne einer Gebundenheit an verpflichtende Gesetze und Normen, die die Beziehungen von einem Volk zum andern regeln, dadurch daß sie Vertrags- und Treubruch verbieten." J. Schneider 1964, 68–69 agrees with Mayer.

201 Wallace-Hadrill 1984, 160.

3.3.1 *Humanus* in Suetonius

Also Suetonius' use of *humanus* seems to have little connection with *humanitas*. To begin with, the *Vita Tiberii*, the only one to include instances of *humanitas*, has no instances of the adjective *humanus*. Indeed, the adjective is always used in its relational meaning, appearing alongside *fastigium, genus, habitus, ius, manus, ops, pes, ratio, res* and *species*. On one occasion it is substantivised and opposed to *diuinus* (*diuina atque humana*).

3.4 Conclusion

Like the end of the Neronian, that of the Domitianic era too imposed a revision of the rhetoric of power. *Clementia*, which Seneca had regarded as the virtue *par excellence* the good ruler should possess, was reinvented once after Nero's behaviour had invalidated its function, but Domitian gave it the final blow. As we saw in the introduction, figures do not allow us to go so far as to speak of a taboo word, but it is telling that its use in Tacitus seems to reveal the historian's hostility towards the concept of *clementia principis* and, what is more, aside from matters of interpretation, it is undeniable that this word is only used with reference to the age between Augustus' death and the early years of the Trajanic age, where what has come down to us of Tacitus' *Historiae* ends.

The rhetoric of works like Pliny the Younger's, which deal with present or future times rather than the historical past, reveal that there is no longer room for *clementia*, whereas there is a strong need to portray Trajan's as the beginning of an age that aspired to recall the idealised republican past. To this end, a Ciceronian-connoted value concept like *humanitas*, that was likely to remind people of the last fight for liberty during the republican age, must have worked very well, and it is for this very reason that in the Trajanic age *humanitas* became a core concept of value. In the case of Pliny, the fact that Cicero was also one of his most important stylistic models seems to explain why for example in his *Panegyricus* the term *humanitas* offers a striking, almost unrivaled, spectrum of nuances. Throughout the speech *humanitas* is first conceived of as an ontological value to be compared with *diuinitas*, then as an ethical one in opposition to *superbia*, and as a political one in association with *maiestas*. Furthermore, the instance of *studia humanitatis* explicitly sets Pliny's *humanitas* in the footsteps of Cicero's, and also makes explicit its educational dimension. Finally, a reference to Trajan's *humanitas* during banquets brings into play the social aspect of this value concept. But if the *Panegyricus* represented an official way of promoting *humanitas*, the *Epistulae* allowed Pliny to spread it among his friends and the upper echelons of Roman society, albeit in a

more silent tone. The *Epistulae* thus provide not only further examples of the multifacetedness of *humanitas*, but, most importantly, also reveal both that Pliny praised this virtue of Trajan in private contexts as well (cf. *Ep.* 6.31.14), and that, thanks to its peculiarity of transcending social class distinctions, *humanitas* could work at and across all levels of Roman society. It is for these very reasons that *humanitas* represented a possible and highly positive value to oppose to Rome's decadence under and immediately after Domitian's tyranny, a decadence which was also moral and that might result in the decadence of the arts and literature, as Pliny himself acknowledges.[202] From a backward perspective, we can ascertain that Pliny's strategy worked, for *humanitas* still played an important role in the Antonine age, and was again crucial three centuries later, when Theodosius I presented himself as a new Trajan. Yet the immediate success of this value concept also depended on Pliny's authoritative voice. In a period that was characterised by the presence of cultural circles which influenced Rome's life at all levels, Pliny's was certainly the most important one.[203] *Humanitas* and the other values (*temperamentum* or *moderatio*, *libertas*, and *amor* for instance)[204] he proclaimed in both his letters and the *Panegyricus* were therefore not only his own, but those embraced – or that Pliny hoped would be embraced – by a large part of the society, presumably by Trajan himself.[205]

That in the works by Tacitus and Suetonius that have come down to us there is little or no room for *humanitas* is consistent with the rhetoric of the times they portray, as we have seen. Accordingly, it is unsurprising that Suetonius associated the word *humanitas* just with Tiberius and just to remark that this emperor lacked, and only feigned, this value concept. Likewise, it cannot be surprising that in the *Annales* and *Historiae*, which were both composed late in Trajan's reign and deal with first-century history, Tacitus never employed *humanitas*. By contrast, he had employed the term *humanitas* in the works of the 98, the *Germania* and the *Agricola*, but it is tempting to regard both those occurrences as another way of criticising Domitian and his policy, even in the foreign field, where – from the Roman viewpoint – barbarians' traditional uncivilization turns out to be better than Roman civilization, or *humanitas*, if you prefer.

202 Cf. *e.g. Epp*. 2.14; 6.2.5–9; 3.18.9–10 and Trisoglio 1971, 421–422.

203 As Cizek 1989, 26 significantly remarks, Pliny is the only exponent of the age of Trajan whom Jerome cited (*Chron.* CCXXII Olymp., an XII = 109 CE). On Pliny's club cf. Cizek 1989, *passim*.

204 On the importance of all these values in addition to *humanitas* cf. Méthy 2007, *passim*. On *temperamentum* in particular, cf. Galimberti Biffino 2003. Broadly speaking, these values (or some of them) can also apply to Suetonius' thought: cf. Cizek 1977, 196; Gascou 1984, 722–735.

205 Cf. Soverini 1989, 545–548.