

## Preface

This book investigates one of the most polysemic Latin words I know of, *humanitas*, and, subordinately, the adjective from which it derives, *humanus*. While after the introduction the second chapter briefly retraces the history of *humanitas* from its origins, the book as a whole focuses on the uses of these two words in the pagan literary texts from the Trajanic (late first century CE) to the Theodosian age (late fourth century CE). My aim is to explore the extent to which the different meanings usually attributed to *humanitas* by dictionaries (roughly ‘human nature’, ‘education and culture’, ‘philanthropy’) are much more nuanced and in continuous relation with one another, and how the use of *humanitas* by some authors often performs clear rhetorical and/or ideological strategies. This book is therefore not only a lexicographical study, but pays careful attention to the wider historical and cultural contexts in which *humanitas* was used. In this respect, the study of the evolution of the word provides a new and interesting insight into wider issues of authorship, political and social changes, as well as ideological appropriations. More specifically, the use of *humanitas* reveals the ways in which Roman authors considered themes that were at the core of their conception of culture and civilization, such as the relationship between being learned and behaving morally, the ideas of moral nobility and clemency, the notion that a value concept can distinguish one category of men from another, or even one historical period from another. These themes, which remain central to later periods – from the Middle Ages to the present day – are crucial to understanding how a civilization constructed itself and changed over time.

In the light of the above, this book might be of interest to a wide range of people. Historians of ideas and philosophers will find a philologically solid basis for determining the historical and cultural premises of concepts such as Humanism, Posthumanism, Humanismus, Humanisation, Dehumanisation etc. Scholars and students of Latin literature will find interpretations of several authors and works (or parts of them), as well as discussions of issues for which *humanitas* itself or passages in which it crops up can be relevant. Classical philologists might be interested too, for all *humanitas*-connected passages that are affected by textual uncertainties are discussed in the light not only of each and every author’s *usus scribendi*, but also of the history of the uses of the term *humanitas* according to genre, period, and overall context. Last but not least, the rhetorical dialectic between *humanitas*, *clementia* and other value concepts can help historians better define the imperial ideology – both on public and private levels – at different stages of its long history.

This book was virtually finished by the end of 2022, but then the delay in the peer review and editorial processes have postponed its publication. Because of the considerable amount of authors and works dealt with, I was able to add only scant references to scholarly works published after 2022.

