Chapter Seven

VIRTUES AND VICES

Suetonius' sympathy goes to the emperor who performs his administrative functions properly; who accepts the hierarchy and traditions of Roman society, strengthens and enhances them; who maintains public order and morals; and who passes on to his successor the *res publica* of his ancestors, purged of its faults and improved by new institutions.

But this is only half the story. There is another, ethical dimension to his portrayal of a Caesar in his public capacity. Was he virtuous or vicious? It is only after minute examination of his record in certain areas of moral behaviour that a Caesar is finally assessed. Was he clement, or cruel? Liberal, or mean and grasping? Civil, or arrogant? Continent, or self-indulgent, luxurious and lustful? These are the polarities in terms of which emperor after emperor is judged. Some – Augustus and Titus – rate highly on all counts. Others – Caligula, Galba and Vitellius – are all black. But the majority lie in between with mixed records, either virtuous in some respects and vicious in others, or less virtuous at the start, only to degenerate to vice.[1]

1. Suetonian virtues and vices are analysed by Mouchova (1968) 42-51, more briefly by Steidle (1951) 112. Since the observation that his categories are limited in number is important for the argument, the breakdown of the individual lives is worth recording. Julius: 54, avarice; 73-5, clemency and moderation; 76-9, arrogance. Augustus: 41-3, liberality; 51-6, clemency and civility. Tiberius: 26-32, civility; 42-5, luxury and lust; 46-9, avarice; 50-62, cruelty. Caligula: 22-35, pride and cruelty; 36-7, luxury, 38-42, rapacity. Nero: 10, initially liberal, clement and genial; 26-31, luxury and lust; 32, avarice: 33-8, cruelty. Galba: 12 and 14.2-15, cruelty and avarice. Vitellius: 10-11, greed, cruelty, insolence. Vespasian: 12-15, civility and clemency; 16-19, liberal or rapacious? Domitian: 9, initial clemency and liberality; 10-11, cruelty; 12.1-2, rapacity; 12.3-13, incivility. The structure of the life of Titus is apparently chiastic: 6-7.1, suspected cruelty, incivility, luxury, rapacity; 7.2-9, in fact proves modest (7.2), liberal (7.3-8.1), genial (8.2), clement (8.3-9). Otho and Claudius are the only absentees (see below).

A biographer can reasonably be expected to interest himself in the character and moral qualities of his subject. Plutarch, as moral philosopher, could regard the examination of the ethical make-up of the great men of the past as a central aim for his biographies. Historians too, because they were often concerned with the role of individuals in history, often assessed (and still do) the moral qualities of the characters involved. Cicero took it for granted that character sketches should be a standard component of a historical work. It was common to include an assessment of major historical figures in the form of an obituary notice; and even apart from the moral judgments which these entailed, the narrative frequently carried judgments, explicit or implicit, of the behaviour of the characters involved.[2]

But Suetonius goes way beyond anything met in ancient historians, or even in ancient biographers. The contrast with the historians is sharp, and, as has been seen, essential to his approach. Like a historian, he may note various moral qualities in passing. Thus Augustus is credited with gravity and constancy in stopping abuse of the dole (42.2) and with severity in punishing the amanuensis who betrayed the contents of a letter (67.2); and in a discussion of his intentions in making Tiberius his successor he is characterised as 'a most circumspect and prudent prince' (*Tib.* 21.3). There is nothing remarkable or abnormal about such off-the-cuff judgments. What is at issue is Suetonius' habit of devoting long chapters to the documentation of given qualities and defects. Actions, which for the historian formed the thread of the narrative, are dispersed under virtue and vice headings, reduced to the status of items of evidence.

Such an approach was normal no more for the biographer than the historian. Ancient, like modern, biographies often tried to hit off a man's character. Just as physical features could be evoked in a pen sketch, so could the special features of character that made a man distinctive and individual. Suetonius himself provides an example in his memorable sketch of the idiosyncrasies of Claudius (30-9). Yet two points set this portrait on its own. The first is that it is concerned with peculiar characteristics. Suetonius' virtue and

2. Cicero *de Oratore* 2.63 in a list of the conventional topics of historiography includes 'not only the record of men's actions, but the life and character of anyone particularly famous and renowned'. On such sketches in the historians, see Leo (1901) 234ff. The link between Plutarchan lives and the biographical element in Greek historians is stressed by A. Wardman, *Plutarch's Lives* (1974) 2ff.

vice chapters are not to be understood primarily as a means of distinguishing character. The restricted range of categories he employs makes that almost impossible. It is very rare to find a quality documented that is not also possessed (or by contrast lacked) by most other Caesars. Petty jealousy (*livor* and *malignitas*) was special in Caligula: he resented the fame of heroes of the past and of great authors, and even tripped down the steps in a fit of pique when a charioteer won louder applause than himself (35.3). Nero was unusual in his 'petulance': he roamed the streets at night with the young bloods and assaulted unsuspecting passers-by (26). Supreme benevolence is the mark of that fairy prince Titus: he fretted to have wasted the day in which he had done nobody a favour (8.1). Such rare cases apart, Suetonius' concern is different. What he does is to measure each Caesar against a set scale of criteria. Each virtue/vice category applies as it were a litmus test. A good emperor will show up positively on the tests of clemency, civility, liberality and continence, a tyrant negatively on the same tests.[3]

The second point is that the moral qualities Suetonius analyses are not of merely private significance. There is generally a perceptible division between the public and private aspects of the lives. Topics like personal appearance, literary interests and religious beliefs are treated apart from the reign. But while Claudius' eccentricities appear among such personal topics, the virtues and vices of other Caesars form a central part of the discussion of their reigns. They are tests of their qualities as emperors, not as private men.

Suetonius' approach, therefore, is not (as Leo believed) the product of any biographical tradition . He uses these categories because he wishes to assess each Caesar's performance in his public role. In fact the closest analogy to his method lies in the tradition of regal and imperial panegyric. The literary parentage of this aspect of the *Caesars* is a tradition going back to Xenophon's encomium of the Spartan king Agesilaus. But it is not so much the literary pedigree that matters. It is more interesting to explain how it was that Suetonius found this a natural way of viewing a Caesar. To the modern reader there is something strange and unsatisfactory about discussing a reign in terms of moral categories. Yet there should be no question that for Suetonius and his contemporaries his method was self-evident.

3. Plutarch's character sketches are discussed with reference to his portrayal of physical appearance by Wardman (1967). Wardman shows the contrast in portrayals of moral character in *Plutarch's Lives* 144ff. Further, above, ch.3.

Virtues in the language of public life

Virtues made a praiseworthy emperor, vices a tyrant. This assumption was daily reinforced in any Roman (including the emperor himself) by the norms of the language of public life. In the first place, it was the language of panegyric. Only one imperial panegyric survives from the early empire - Pliny's of Trajan - and this may lull us into supposing that such speeches were reserved for special emperors and special occasions. But the formal thanks to the emperor by the senior consul before the senate was a regular ritual. Pliny's performance survives because it was a masterpiece of its type, and because the rhetoricians of the fourth century copied it as a model. Consular thanks will only have been one of many occasions in the year when the senate listened to panegyric. Any notable occasion, successes at home and abroad, or even failures, triggered off a torrent of rhetoric. Pliny reports that Trajan put a ban on speeches of thanks, except those formally permitted: the problem was too much, not too little. Fronto, the leading orator of the next generation, was to deliver frequent panegyrics of Hadrian and Pius: a letter to him from Pius admits how predictable such occasions could become.[4]

The court was an even better venue for panegyric than the senate house, and as a courtier Suetonius must often have listened to the catalogue of the virtues of Trajan or Hadrian. Formal congratulations were sent from all over the empire on red-letter days - imperial birthdays, New Year's day, the anniversary of accession. Suetonius served a peripatetic emperor: on tour there was no more escape from panegyric than at Rome. Each arrival at a new city will have been marked by speechifying, and then each departure. Perhaps the most vivid indication of the part played by panegyric in the life of the empire is in the contemporary handbooks of rhetoric. Every young gentleman, whether Latin- or Greek-speaking, learnt the techniques of encomium. It was a necessary accomplishment for public life. He came away from the rhetoricians with a ready recipe for the Basilikos Logos, the imperial panegyric. Every now and

4. The practice of panegyric, especially in the late empire, is discussed by J. Straub, *Vom Herrscherideal in der Spätantike* (1939) 146ff., and by S. MacCormack, 'Latin prose panegyrics', in T.A. Dorey (ed.), *Empire and Aftermath* (1975) 154ff. For the practice of speeches of thanks behind Pliny's *Panegyric*, see the commentary of M. Durry (1938) 3ff. On Fronto's panegyrics, see Champlin, *Fronto and Antonine Rome* 83ff. The emperor Pius refers frankly to panegyric as a hackneyed theme: Fronto, *ad Ant. Pium* 2 (Loeb ed. vol. 1.126).

again we catch sight of these rituals in Suetonius. When an embassy from Troy offered Tiberius tardy condolences on the death of his son Drusus, Tiberius responded with condolences on their loss of Hector (52.2). When the consuls forgot to publish an edict on his birthday, Caligula stripped them of office (26.3). Claudius was exceptional in allowing the engagement of his daughter and birthdays of his family to pass 'in silence' – that is, one takes it, without speeches (12.1).[5]

On one point the rhetorical handbooks, from hellenistic times to the late empire, are agreed: that to praise a man adequately one must praise him for virtues. Good birth, fortune, wealth and the like offer material for congratulations; but only virtue merits true praise, 'and the rest is cheating'. A man should be praised for his achievements; but for laudatory purposes it was strongly recommended that they be arranged under virtues. Thus the recipe for the Basilikos Logos recommends that the emperor's military achievements must be placed first; but 'courage marks an emperor more than do other virtues ... If your encomium is of warlike actions you should speak of them under the head of courage'.[6]

On this point the schools of rhetoric were in close accord with the schools of philosophy. Since Plato, philosophers had repeatedly emphasised that virtue was the vital qualification for kingship. Monarchy could be justified because the ruler was the 'best man', the superior of his subjects, not in birth, wealth or military strength, but in moral excellence. A deluge of philosophical tracts *Peri Basileias*, forerunners of the mediaeval 'Mirrors of Princes', urged rulers to virtue. Kingship was a 'godlike thing', but only in virtue could the king imitate the gods. A brief essay survives by Musonius Rufus, a Roman *eques* under the Flavians who was a practising Stoic: the argument is that the emperor must be a philosopher, since the four virtues recommended by the philosophers were the essence of kingship.[7]

5. The most interesting and specific example of rhetorical instructions to the panegyrist are the two treatises ascribed to Menander; these are now edited and translated by D.A. Russell and N.G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (1981).

6. On the encomiastic tradition see Russell and Wilson xviiiff.; also T. Payr, 'Enkomion', *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 5, 332ff. The insistence on disposition under virtues goes back to Anaximenes *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* 35 (dating from the fourth century BC).

7. Hellenistic kingship literature is a wide but elusive theme. P. Hadot, 'Fürstenspiegel', *Reallexikon für Ant. und Christ.* 8 (1972) 555ff. offers the most convenient survey of the literature. The most thorough discussion of the ancient texts is the unpublished thesis of Oswyn Murray, *Peri Basileias: Studies in the Justification of Monarchic Power in the Hellenistic World* (Oxford D. Phil, 1970). The standard English treatment by E.R. Goodenough, 'The political philosophy of hellenistic kingship', *Yale Class. Studies* 1 (1928) 55ff. takes the fragmentary 'neo-Pythagorean' texts perhaps more seriously than they deserve. See also F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy; Origins and Background* (1966) 1, 241ff. (to be treated with caution). Musonius' essay *On the Need of Kings to Philosophise* is preserved in Stobaeus *Anthology* 4.7.67, 279f. Hense.

Practice reflected the recommendations of rhetoricians and philosophers. A formal panegyric like Pliny's on Trajan is a *tour de force* in demonstrating imperial virtue: twenty separate virtues are here mentioned within three introductory chapters alone, and the rest of the speech repeats them and at least fifteen more as a leitmotif. But there were other contexts where imperial virtues could be exalted on a less massive scale. The erection of honorific inscriptions and dedications to commemorate regal benefits had been a widespread custom since the hellenistic kingdoms. Imperial inscriptions strain to represent the favours which they celebrate in terms of the virtues of the emperor: his liberality, providence, indulgence, munificence. The most memorable of such dedications was offered by the senate to Augustus in return for his 'restoration of the republic': a golden shield awarded in the best hellenistic regal tradition, 'for virtue, clemency, justice, and piety to the gods and his country'. Caligula, Suetonius reports, was awarded another such shield, to be escorted ritually in an annual procession to the accompaniment of hymns of praise of his virtues sung by a choir of noble boys and girls (16.4).

By the second century, the emperor's virtues had become a cliché. Trajan's new title, *Optimus Princeps*, most excellent prince, sums it up. This title was officially conveyed by the senate. But it was perfectly normal in recording the ruler's name to add complimentary epithets *ad lib.* 'Most just prince', 'most provident', 'most pious', 'most indulgent', 'most brave', 'most liberal' and the like are regularly tacked on to the end of the formal titulature of the reigning emperor. From the mid second century such epithets became so clichéd that refuge was sought in blanket superlatives: 'most outstanding in all virtues', 'full of all virtues', 'excelling all previous princes in virtue'.

It is hard here to distinguish what is the product of competitive flattery and what is deliberately engineered by propaganda. Evidently emperors wanted to have virtues attributed to them – the

alternative was to be supposed vicious. How successfully they could manipulate their subjects by use of court poets or official documents and coins is not clear. But at least these official documents, and particularly coins, show that virtue-language was a two-sided game. The subjects claimed that their rulers ought to be virtuous, and demonstrated their loyalty by praise of virtues; while the emperors proclaimed their own possession of virtues, with the double implication that they were doing their duty and deserved loyalty and affection. On the coinage this was accomplished by representing virtues as goddesses on the reverses, so that one side bore the head of Augustus, and the other the image of LIBERALITAS AUGUSTI or whatever. This practice started under Tiberius, though it did not achieve momentum before the civil wars of AD 68-69, when the rival sides used the coinage to press their claims. It reaches its apogee under Suetonius' emperor, Hadrian: he is the first to mint a series of virtues, just as he mints a series of provinces, to illustrate how many virtues he possesses: Justice, Clemency, Indulgence, Patience, Liberality and Tranquillity mark this Augustus.[8]

This then is the background to the Suetonian assumption that virtues make the good emperor and vices the bad. It was a doctrine promulgated by philosophers, instilled by rhetorical education, turned into routine by the lip-service of panegyrists and beneficiaries, and exploited by the emperors themselves. Even had the biographer himself rejected the doctrine (he clearly did not), the fact that people in general did judge their rulers in terms of virtue and vice was itself a justification for analysing which virtues and vices each Caesar possessed, or was believed to possess. It is appropriate enough that the closest analogy to Suetonius' method of documenting individual virtues in turn by adducing a series of instances is the method prescribed by the rhetoricians for encomium. If Suetonius gives as much – or more – space to vices than to virtues, we may recall that the handbooks recommend exactly the same approach for invective,

8. Virtue-language on inscriptions and coins is the subject of the paper by Martin Charlesworth, 'The virtues of a Roman emperor: propaganda and the creation of belief', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 23 (1937) 105ff. I have argued for modification of his views, particularly about the Golden Shield, in 'The Emperor and his virtues', *Historia* 30 (1981) 298ff. on which the present account depends. On complimentary epithets, see R. Frei-Stolba, 'Inoffizielle Kaisertitulaturen im 1. und 2. Jahrhundert n.Chr.', *Museum Helveticum* 26 (1969) 18ff. I have stressed the role of the civil wars in stimulating 'virtue' propaganda on coinage in 'Galba's *Aequitas*', *Numismatic Chronicle* 141 (1981) 20ff. See also Bradley (1976) on virtues on S and on the coinage.

with the substitution of vice for virtue; and that in practice the panegyrist, like Pliny, set off the virtues of the reigning emperor by contrasting them with the vices of his predecessors.[9]

The function of virtues

In that he documents both virtues and vices with characteristic scholarly impartiality, Suetonius differs from both panegyrist and writer of invective. But one point he does hold in common with them is that the function of virtues is to generate popularity, of vices to induce hatred. For all but two of the Caesars, he gives an estimate of the degree of popularity they enjoyed, whether this manifested itself in their lifetime or immediately after their death. There is a close correlation in all cases between the virtues or vices documented and the degree of popularity reported. Augustus was adored by all ranks and conditions of men (57-60); that follows naturally after the record of his liberality to all ranks (41) and of the innumerable proofs of clemency and civility (51-6). Tiberius lived feared and fearing (63-7); that is the result of the vices which broke out after being so long ill-disguised (42-62). Galba made himself unpopular by the report of his vices even before he arrived (12-13) and rapidly earned universal hatred (16). Titus, the darling of mankind (1), only won his popularity after the vices he was supposed to possess turned out false fears, and the greatest virtues emerged (7.1). If the reactions after Domitian's death were mixed (23.1), that is appropriate enough in a ruler whose virtues and vices were for long equally balanced (3.2).

Virtues and vices are not the sole factor behind such reactions. The whole record of the reign counts. But that they are the most sensitive test is confirmed by the two exceptions. Claudius and Otho are the only Caesars for whom Suetonius vouchsafes no estimate of

9. On the formal debt of S to encomium, and particularly Xenophon's *Agesilaus*, see above, ch.3. It is instructive to compare S's statement of purpose in adopting his analytic method of treatment, 'so that the aspects of the life may be demonstrated and assessed more easily' (*Aug.*9) with Aristotle's justification for organising encomium by topic and not chronologically: when the argument is concerned not merely to report an action but to demonstrate something about it, its truth, quality or quantity, chronological narrative is inappropriate because hard to follow; it is simpler and more comprehensible to state which actions demonstrate which qualities (*Rhetoric* 3.16.1416B16ff., paraphrased).

popularity, for good or ill. They are also the only ones for whose reigns he documents neither virtues nor vices. Claudius' vices are treated as part of the characterisation of his personality. The emphasis is on what an odd sort of man he was, not on the unpopularity of his rule. Otho is the one Caesar of whose reign Suetonius says nothing at all. He passes straight from his rise to power to his fall. For once, there are no rubrics. Neither is there assessment of popularity.

To this degree, then, Suetonius' Caesars are what Max Weber termed 'charismatic' rulers. That is to say, they depend for their legitimation on the personal qualities that set them apart from other men, and not simply on 'bureaucratic' criteria, the effectiveness with which they performed their functions.[10] It is an integral part of this outlook that qualities or defects should be regarded as an essential part of the ruler's nature, not mere accidents of the circumstances of the reign. It was not enough for an emperor to be clement because he never had the opportunity to shed blood. Mildness ought to be in his physiological make-up. Seneca stated quite categorically that no emperor could be clement unless he was so by nature. Yet there was an old debate, already raised by Polybius in his account of Philip V of Macedon, and repeatedly aired in Plutarch's *Lives*, occasioned by the variation in the actual performances of rulers. Many who started their reigns mild degenerated later to cruelty. Did power actually warp an autocratic character? Did it reveal hidden weaknesses? Or did circumstances and the advisers he followed at a given moment dictate uncharacteristic behaviour? Greek moral philosophers were loth to concede that human nature might be susceptible to change. *Physis* was determined by birth and remained a constant. At the same time, the charismatic function of royal virtues created a strong disinclination to attribute a ruler's behaviour to anything but nature. If his 'virtues' won him the adoration and the support of his subjects, it would be very unfortunate to have to admit that those virtues were adventitious and not genuine.[11]

10. For Weber's views on bureaucracy and charisma, see *Economy and Society*, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich (1968) 3, 1111ff. For a recent discussion of the principate along Weberian lines see P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque* (1976) 560ff. The term charisma is also invoked by H. Kloft, *Liberalitas Principis* (1970) 181; see also the same author's introduction to the volume *Ideologie und Herrschaft in der Antike* (Wege der Forschung 528, 1979) 14ff.

11. Seneca *de Clementia* 1.1.6 for the statement that clemency must be natural. For Polybius on Philip, see esp. *Histories* 7.11ff., but also 9.22.7-26.11 on Hannibal. The prime discussions of character change in Plutarch are *Aratus* 51.3 (on Philip), *Sulla* 30.4., *Sertorius* 10 and 25.

If as a biographer Suetonius was likely to take an interest in human nature, his inclination coincided with the contemporary concerns of men living under rulers who sought support by advertisement of their virtues. He is anxious to demonstrate that virtues or vices were 'natural' inborn characteristics. Tiberius' cruelty was early detected by his teacher of rhetoric, Theodorus of Gadara, who called him 'mud mixed with blood' (57.1).[12] Domitian was sadly lacking in civil disposition from his youth up: when his father's mistress Caenis offered him the usual kiss on return from abroad, he coldly proferred his hand (12.3).

Yet everyone knew that autocrats might be forced to act out of character. Suetonius is aware of the difficulty and airs the question occasionally. The classic dilemma was Vespasian's handling of finances. Some said he was naturally stingy: what better evidence than that of the old retainer who, refused his freedom, muttered, 'the old fox has changed his fur, not his ways'. Yet there was no doubt that civil wars had imposed an intolerable strain on the treasury (16.3). Suetonius gives Vespasian the benefit of the doubt on the grounds of his liberal support of the arts (17-19.1), but he does not deny that the emperor kept his bad reputation on this score (19.2). His verdict on Domitian also gives weight to both nature and circumstances. Initially he gave several signs of natural inclination towards clemency and liberality (9). If he later proved cruel and extortionate, 'as far as one can make out, financial straits made him rapacious, fear made him cruel over and above his natural inclination'.[13]

The choice of virtues

The prominence Suetonius gives to moral categories makes sense not simply in terms of literary conventions but also, and more

12. It may be noted that the anecdote about Tiberius and Theodorus is referred elsewhere to another emperor and another teacher: *Suda* s.v. Alexander Aegeus tells it of Alexander and Nero.

13. For other passages where S attributes behaviour to character (*natura* or *ingenium*), see below n.26. The meaning of *super naturam* at *Dom.* 3.2 is disputed: see Steidle (1951) 95. The normal sense would be 'in addition to his nature', but some have taken it as 'against his nature' in order to reconcile the passage with *Dom.* 9. I render 'over and above' in order to preserve possible ambiguity.

illuminatingly, in terms of the mental attitudes of contemporaries living under an autocracy which relied heavily on the language of virtue for its legitimation. For the same reason it ought to be enlightening to ask which the imperial qualities are to which Suetonius gives prominence. No earlier author known to us applied this method to the Caesars and was thereby compelled to formulate the moral criteria which distinguished a good emperor from a bad one. Nevertheless, Suetonius is not out to write a 'Mirror of Princes' and convince his readers of what the ideal *ought* to be. His method is based upon assumptions. He can tacitly take for granted which the vital virtues are because he expects his readers to be of one mind with himself.

But the matter is not so simple as it might seem. The range of conceivable imperial virtues was enormous. On the most conservative estimate there were at least fifty virtues celebrated by panegyrists or honorific inscriptions. In truth the scope was limitless, for any imaginable human quality might be attributed to the emperor, and it was the natural impulse of the panegyrist to do so.[14] Suetonius, by contrast, is highly selective. As we have seen, his virtue-and-vice chapters are reducible to four recurrent areas: clemency, civility, liberality and the restraint of luxury and lust. It is not just a matter of terminology (in fact the names he gives to virtues and vices differ slightly). More impressive is the consistency with which he documents the same patterns of behaviour in emperor after emperor. Individual records vary, between mildness and bestial cruelty, between open-handedness and unscrupulous extortion. But the spheres of activity within which performances vary themselves remain constant. Was there a widely acknowledged set of essential imperial virtues, or is this a set of his own?

There was indeed one school of thought which held that there was a given set of imperial virtues, and precisely four in number. This was the doctrine the rhetoricians taught their pupils: 'Always divide the actions of those you are going to praise into the virtues. There are four virtues: courage, justice, temperance and wisdom.' The same prescription is found in handbook after handbook. It derives ultimately from Plato who identified these four as the sum of all virtues. The Stoics accepted the Platonic canon, and argued that all other virtues were sub-categories of the four. The rhetoricians

14. Various virtues attributed to various emperors are listed by L. Wickert, 'Princeps' *RE* XXII (1954) 2231ff.

took their cue from the philosophers, and by the imperial period the primacy of the four virtues was taken for granted. It is likely enough that the philosophical tracts on kingship emphasised the need for these virtues; they are certainly the ones Musonius demanded in an emperor. They are in practice acclaimed in emperors by a series of orators: by Aelius Aristides a generation later than Suetonius, and frequently in the numerous panegyrics surviving from the fourth century AD.[15]

But Plato's canon is not Suetonius'. Temperance (*sōphrosynē*) they have in common, but in other respects they part widely. Courage, which the rhetoricians claimed was the appropriate heading for military achievements, hardly enters Suetonius' account: he is more interested in discipline, military institutions and the like. Wisdom could cover the ability 'to legislate well and dispose and arrange the affairs of subjects to advantage', but Suetonius, who thought Augustus very prudent and recorded Claudius' reputation for stupidity, never uses wisdom as a heading. Justice was an obvious heading for an author so interested in imperial jurisdiction; yet the only people to whom he attributes this quality are provincial governors, Augustus' father (3.2), Galba in Spain before his proclamation (7.1), and the governors under Domitian whose strict supervision ensured that they were never more restrained or just (8.2).[16]

It is not wholly surprising that Suetonius parts company with Greek rhetoricians and philosophers. Though the Romans paid lip-service to the Platonic canon, they had strong ideas of their own about *virtus*, and were little inclined to acknowledge that a Roman might learn much from a Greek about morality. Their own ancestors

15. For a sketch of the history of the Platonic canon, H. North, 'Canons and hierarchies of the cardinal virtues in Greek and Latin literature', in L. Wallach (ed.), *The Classical Tradition* (1966) 165ff. The instructions cited are from Menander Rhetor's *Basilikos Logos*, Russell and Wilson 85f. They are fairly closely followed by Aelius Aristides' panegyric. S.A. Stertz, *CQ* 29 (1979) 172ff. argues, I believe rightly, that this is a model panegyric not aimed at a specific emperor; but the view is controversial, see C.J. Jones, *CQ* 31 (1981) 224ff. In fact very few surviving panegyrics, and none of the Latin ones, do follow the scholastic rules.

16. It should be stressed that though S does not use these Platonic qualities as categories, he did not necessarily think them unimportant. He sees courage in Otho's death (12.1), prudence in Augustus (*Tib.* 21.3), folly in Claudius (38.3). Justice was a central category in kingship literature and takes pride of place in Marcus' *Meditations*: P.A. Brunt, *JRS* 64 (1974) 7. Doubtless much of what S records under headings like clemency, liberality could be regarded in Greek terms as illustrating justice.

set a better example. The two panegyrics that survive by outstanding Roman orators, Cicero and Pliny, pay no attention to the Greek canon. Cicero praised Pompey for the qualities that made a great general: understanding of warfare, manliness (*virtus*), authority and good luck. Pliny in his *Panegyric* uses no fixed set of virtues at all. He abandons the method of disposition by virtue headings. Far from confining Trajan to a handful of qualities, he is at pains to give the impression of the boundless profusion of his talents which leaves the orator at a loss where to begin or end.[17]

Pliny is much more representative of Roman opinion than are Musonius or Menander Rhetor. The Romans were not fond of systematic theoretical structures, and there is no sign that they ever attempted to define the cardinal virtues of an emperor. Nothing could be more misleading than to see (as has been fashionable) a Roman canon in the Golden Shield of Augustus. The 'Virtue, Clemency, Justice and Piety to gods and country' for which Augustus was honoured correspond neither to the panegyrists nor to the coins, nor to Suetonius. Of course these virtues are acclaimed in other emperors, but they have no status as a set. Of what use would such a set be? Only the theoretician and the instructor needed rigid rules. For practical purposes flexibility was best.[18]

The most we can hope for, therefore, is partial correspondence between the virtues met in Suetonius and any group elsewhere. Only one of the Augustan shield virtues, clemency, is important in Suetonius. Justice, as we have seen, he does not mention. The only piety in which he is interested is that show of loyalty to their predecessors and family which each of the Julio-Claudians put on at the beginning of his reign in order to win popularity and to establish a dynastic claim. More of the Suetonian virtues can be paralleled on the coinage of Hadrian's reign. CLEMENTIA and LIBERALITAS are there; and the goddess of chastity, PUDICITIA, is depicted for the first time under Hadrian, though it is almost certainly the chastity of the ladies of the imperial household which he is advertising. However, there are far more coin virtues

17. On the native Roman tradition of *virtus*, see D.C. Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust* (1961) 18ff. The use of *virtus* in Latin texts is discussed exhaustively by W. Eisenhut, *Virtus Romana* (1973). Cicero's encomium of Pompey occurs in his speech *pro Lege Manilia* 27-48. This contrasts with passages in the rhetorical treatises where he largely transcribes hellenistic sources: see Russell and Wilson xxii.

18. Against assertions to the contrary, see *Historia* (1981) 300ff.

which Suetonius does not notice; and there is one of his central imperial virtues, civility, which is depicted neither in this nor in any other reign.[19]

Perhaps the closest we can get to Suetonius is in Pliny's *Panegyric*. In one passage in the introduction (3.4) Pliny reels off a series of contrasting pairs of virtues and vices which cover very much the same ground as do Suetonius' pairs. He is congratulating himself on his fortune in having Trajan to praise: his virtues are so outstanding that there is no danger the emperor will take him to be hinting at his possession of the opposite vice: 'that he will mistake talk of humanity for criticism of his pride; praise of frugality for luxury; of clemency for cruelty; of liberality for avarice; of benignity for jealousy; of continence for lust; of hard work for laziness; of fortitude for timidity.' All the main Suetonian polarities are here: humanity (equivalent to civility) and pride, clemency and cruelty, liberality and avarice, luxury and lust with their opposites, frugality and continence. Hard work and laziness are closely associated with luxury and lust: how emperors slept or played are topics Suetonius often discusses together with their eating and drinking habits, their taste for jewelry and furniture. In addition Pliny has thrown in two pairs which only surface exceptionally in Suetonius: malignity and jealousy were special to Caligula, and though Suetonius says nothing of fortitude, timidity marks the tyrants Tiberius (63-7) and Domitian (14-16), and is among the fatal weaknesses of Claudius (35-7).

The closeness of the links between Suetonius and his old *contubernalis* Pliny makes good sense. They saw eye to eye on questions of ideology. Pliny meant his *Panegyric* as a model against which future princes could measure themselves. It could also be used as the measure for past princes, and it is difficult to imagine that Suetonius did not know this popular masterpiece, and did not owe at least something to it. But even if this is right, it is not good enough to stop here having identified a new Plinian 'canon' of imperial virtues and vices, an instant recipe for a 'perfect prince'. What we need to explain is the significance of this particular selection of virtues and

19. S describes the show of piety towards predecessors with which Caligula (15.1-3), Claudius (11.2-3) and Nero (9) opened their reigns. These items all belong to the accession narrative, not to the analysis of virtues and vices. On the Hadrianic coinage, see *Historia* (1981) 307ff.

vices, and why Suetonius found it convenient to return to them again and again.[20]

To grasp what Suetonius is doing, it is better to focus on the vices than the virtues. In his list of pride, cruelty, avarice, luxury and lust we see not merely a group of imperial vices, but aspects of abuse by the powerful of those in their power which had been long since denounced by writers of the republic. These are the abuses that marked the misgovernment of Sicily by Verres. The Sicilians could have put up with Verres, inveighs Cicero, had he had no more than the occasional failing. What made him intolerable was the simultaneous occurrence of every possible vice – luxury, cruelty, avarice and pride. This catalogue must have been familiar to the jury in the extortion courts. The tax-collectors of Syria complained that they were ruined by the avarice, pride and cruelty of the governor Gabinius. Historians spoke the same language. 'Avarice and luxury,' says the elder Cato in a speech in Livy, 'are the two plagues which have proved the destruction of every great empire.' Lust, cruelty and inhuman pride are unleashed when Hannibal sacks a city; pride, cruelty and avarice are equally the fault of a Roman commander or a Numidian king.[21]

From republican historians the vices passed to imperial historians. Roman emperors abused their subjects in much the same ways as republican governors had abused their provincials. Cruelty, avarice, pride, luxury and lust are constantly met throughout Tacitus' *Annals* and *Histories*. They also colour the account of Alexander written by Curtius Rufus at an unknown point in the early empire. There the hot-blooded young conspirator Hermolaus inveighs against Alexander very much as a Roman conspirator might accuse an emperor. The vices which for Hermolaus prove him a tyrant are cruelty, lack of liberality and pride; Alexander is careful to refute each charge in order (8.7-8).[22]

20. Pliny makes explicit the role of his *Panegyric* as a yardstick in *Ep.* 3.18.1-3. The links between S and the *Panegyric* are discussed by della Corte (1967) 77ff.; see also Lewis (forthcoming).

21. On these vices and their place in the political vocabulary of the late republic see J. Hellegouarc'h, *Le Vocabulaire latin des relations et des partis politiques sous la République* (1963) 439f., though he underestimates the role of vices in political language in general. R. Combès, *Imperator* (1966) 329ff. is valuable on virtues and vices attributed to republican governors. For lists of vices see respectively Cicero *in Verr.* 2.2.9, *de Prov. Cons.* 11, Livy 34.4.2, 21.57.14, 43.7.8, 32.21.21.

22. It is frustrating that there is no agreement about the date of composition of the Alexander History: estimates range from the mid first to the fourth centuries A.D. See now J.E. Atkinson, *A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni Books 3 and 4* (1980) 19-57 making a Julio-Claudian date highly plausible. For the way this work reflects contemporary conditions, see A. Heuss, 'Alexander der Grosse und die politische Ideologie des Altertums', *Antike und Abendland* 4 (1954) 65ff.

Against this background, Suetonius' vice-and-virtue pairs make better sense. Vices were what antagonised the emperor's subjects, and the vices that antagonised them were naturally the forms of abuse that affected them directly. Suetonius is not compiling a list of all the qualities desirable in a ruler, nor attempting to catalogue all the qualities each Caesar brought to his work. He is analysing the way the Caesars treated their people, and the way the people reacted to them. The areas of vice or virtue are thus natural ones of conflict of interest between ruler and ruled, and especially the propertied classes among the ruled. As Aristotle puts it in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1130b1 f.), injustice is motivated by the pursuit of honour, wealth and personal safety, together with the pleasure that derives from them. Wherever the upper classes valued their status, property and personal safety they were likely to resent an autocrat who threatened their possession of these advantages in order to secure his own. The cruel emperor shed blood to secure his own protection; the avaricious one seized property to fill his exchequer; the proud one exalted his own status and diminished that of his subjects; the luxurious one dissipated the tax-payer's money on his own pleasures, and showed that he had his own, not his people's, welfare at heart.

Suetonius writes from the point of view of the subject anxious about his neck, his pocket, his standing, and his comfort. It follows that it is the presence or absence of vice that most concerns him. The virtues are largely negative ones. Clemency is to refrain from punishing subjects, or to punish them less severely than the law and the emperor's absolute powers might allow. Liberality partly involves generosity with money; but Suetonius is as much concerned that spending should not lead to extortion. Civility is a matter of not acting like a god and autocrat, but rather refusing distinctions and prerogatives. The weight of the emphasis is even clearer in his treatment of self-indulgence. Luxury and lust feature as tyrannical vices alongside cruelty and the rest. But chastity, modesty or restraint are never listed among the positive virtues in the way the rhetoricians recommend; Suetonius follows biographical tradition in simply

describing the private life of moderate emperors along with other personal details.[23]

It is intrinsically likely that Suetonius' criteria reflect those generally taken for granted by the propertied classes. Nor is there reason to suppose that an emperor would have been inclined to challenge them. It is a prime advantage of Suetonius' method that it projects in such sharp focus assumptions which elsewhere remain blurred. The approach has other advantages too. The author is able to discuss the emperor's record in certain important areas, the exercise of punishment, the handling of finances, the pitching of status, and the use and abuse of imperial power for gratification of private pleasures. Such topics can be seen as a whole; in the chronological narrative of the annalist they must remain dispersed.

But does the approach in fact come off? The answer should be carefully nuanced. There are both advantages and disadvantages in abandoning chronology. Where the topic is such that numerous small items contribute to establishing a real pattern, and the pattern genuinely varied from Caesar to Caesar and did reflect their personal inclinations, Suetonius can give insights which the historians missed or blurred. But the more the political and historical background to a particular event matters, the more dangerous it is to tear it from its context in order to build up a generalisation.

Punishment[24]

Suetonius is least happy in his treatment of clemency and cruelty. *Clementia* was perhaps the most widely publicised of all imperial virtues: at the same time the one most insistently demanded and the most sinister in its abuse. In the pages of Tacitus there is one context above all where *clementia* is relevant. Trials and executions, mostly of senators and their families, but also of other members of the upper classes and of the imperial family itself, mar the record of reign after reign. Such trials and deaths may reasonably be termed

23. Luxury and lust feature among other tyrannical vices at *Tib.* 42-5, *Cal.* 36-7, *Ner.* 26-31, *Vit.* 10.2. But Augustus' *continentia* (68-78) is part of his private life, and similarly *Cl.* 33; *Vesp.* 21. Domitian's private life is also treated as something private, though the tone is critical (22).

24. The relevant chapters are as follows. On *clementia*, *Jul.* 73-5, *Aug.* 51, *Ner.* 10.1-2, *Vesp.* 14-15, *Tit.* 8.3-9, *Dom.* 9. On *saevitia*, *Tib.* 50-62, *Cal.* 23-33 (pride and cruelty taken together), *Cl.* 34, *Ner.* 33-8, *Galb.* 12.1-2 and 14.3-15, *Vit.* 14, *Dom.* 10-11.

'political' – not indeed in the sense that any dispute over policies or forms of government lay behind them, but because they were the product of the emperor's determination to secure his own power. The emperor's power was always threatened by the potential disaffection of his subjects. A sense of insecurity might lead him to condemn (or allow to be condemned in the senate) anyone whose loyalty could be called into question however trivial the grounds. Insecurity also lent itself to rich exploitation whether by interested parties in the palace or by rival factions in the senate.[25]

The ideal response was to grant the opponent free pardon in return for future loyalty. Such *clementia* was pioneered by Julius (75) and imitated by Augustus (51) in order to disarm their opponents in times of civil war. It could also be an effective technique of disarming supposed opponents in times of peace. Vespasian is said to have reacted to suspicions against Mettius Pompusianus, whose astrological forecast was only too promising, by appointing him consul (14). Titus, more romantically, is shown forgiving two alleged patrician conspirators, seating them next to himself at the games, and offering them the gladiators' swords to try (9). The publicity value of such gestures lent itself to exploitation. A milder penalty than deserved might be represented as clemency, and certain emperors tried to have their cake and eat it. Domitian had no hesitation in executing dissidents, but prefaced their condemnation by loud advertisement of his clemency (11.2).

The Romans sometimes asserted, or wrote on the assumption that, only a man naturally predisposed to mildness could genuinely exercise *clementia* and that emperors who resorted to repressive tactics, executions and tortures did so because innately cruel and bloodthirsty. Possibly there is truth in this view: but it cannot be the whole truth.[26] Inevitably there was an element of political

25. The literature on *clementia* is extensive. See M. Griffin, *Seneca: a Philosopher in Politics* (1976) 133ff. for an introduction to the subject and discussion of Seneca's vital essay; T. Adam, *Clementia Principis* (1970) for further discussion and bibliography. The sinister overtones of *clementia* are stressed by Charlesworth, *Proc. Brit. Acad.* 23 (1937) 113. On Tacitean *clementia*, cf. B. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician* (1976) 87ff. The evidence on the theme of *maiestas* trials under the principate is collected by R.A. Bauman, *Impietas in Principem* (1974).

26. Suetonius seeks the root of clemency or cruelty in the subject's nature at *Jul.* 74.1, *Tib.* 57.1 and 59.1, *Cal.* 11 and 29.1, *Cl.* 34, *Ner.* 7.1 and 26.1, *Vit.* 10.1, *Dom.* 3.2. For the statement that true clemency could only be natural, Seneca *de Clem.* 1.1.6 (cited above). The same assumption lies behind the

calculation in any exercise of clemency. Moreover the situation might not be in the emperor's control. His fears and suspicions could be exploited by rival factions or by interested subordinates. Suetonius makes out a good case for the natural bloodthirstiness of Claudius by invoking his conduct in two of his characteristic activities, watching the games and giving judgment (34). A man who waited all day to watch an execution by cudgelling, and who had two commemorative paper-knives made from the swords of a pair of gladiators who hacked each other to death, was evidently not over-squeamish. But Suetonius himself indicates that this had little to do with Claudius' numerous political executions which resulted from the uncontrolled intrigues of his family and palace staff (29) who skilfully exploited his timidity (37). Here the handling of the relationship between character and politics is laudable. As a courtier, perhaps, Suetonius had a feeling for the nature of palace intrigue.

But elsewhere his account is marred by the desire to attribute everything to character. Tacitus too believed Tiberius a cruel and bloody tyrant. But his narrative shows fairly that most of the political trials and executions of the reign were associated with the rivalry between Sejanus' faction and its opponents, and the bloody aftermath of Sejanus' overthrow. Suetonius, because he is only concerned to demonstrate Tiberius' character, suppresses this narrative context and gives a gravely distorted picture. It may well be that Tiberius executed a guardsman for filching a peacock from his aviary (60). The anecdote chimes with what is said elsewhere of his disciplinarian severity and his taste for delicatessen. But it cannot help explain his execution of members of his family and shift some of the responsibility from Sejanus' shoulders (61).[27]

Suetonius' aim is not to explain the political crisis of Tiberius' reign but to compile a dossier of his inhumanity. His cruel deeds are too many to enumerate and Suetonius therefore proposes to exemplify the various forms his savagery took (61.2). On this excuse he reduces the vast question of the political and treason trials of the reign, which occupies most of the first six books of Tacitus' *Annals*, to a paragraph of unreliable generalisations (61.2-5). 'Some defendants stabbed themselves ... others took poison actually in the senate;

debate over Caesar's clemency, on which see S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (1971) 237ff.

27. Tacitus states his view that Tiberius was naturally cruel at *Ann.* 6.51. But so bald a statement does not do justice to the complexity of his portrayal.

even so their wounds were bound up and they were dragged off, still quivering, to execution.' He refers to two episodes involving the *eques* Vibullius Agrippa in AD 36 and Albucilla in 37. 'Because tradition forbade the strangulation of virgins, immature girls were raped by the executioner before strangulation.' He refers to the luckless daughter of Sejanus. 'There was none of the condemned who was not thrown on the Wailing Steps and dragged off with a hook.' At most this form of extreme punishment can only have been common in the first flush of the backlash against Sejanus and his supporters.[28]

In a word, if we had to rely on Suetonius for an understanding of the catastrophe of the end of Tiberius' reign, we would remain largely in the dark. Our ignorance about the similar crisis at the end of Domitian's reign is not dispelled by his list of senators executed on the most trivial of grounds (10.2-4). Often, elsewhere, all cases of cruelty are lumped together as flowing from the same cause and arranged conveniently in hierarchic order. Thus with Nero: first murders within his own family (33-4); then of his wives (35.1-3); then of more distant relatives, friends and members of the household (35.4-5); so to outsiders, and above all the great conspiracies (36-7); and finally the Roman people itself, which he deliberately attacked by starting the Great Fire (38). Suetonius is out to prove Nero a monster, not to understand the problems involved, and so conjures up this image of universal destruction. He suppresses the severe doubts as to Nero's responsibility for the fire. He deliberately trivialises Nero's motives to underline his monstrosity. He thereby plays down the political element: Britannicus was murdered because he had a better voice as well as constituting a threat (33.2); his mother because she nagged (34.1); and the prefect of Egypt, Caecina Tuscus, because he took a dip in the baths especially built for Nero's projected visit (35.5).[29]

It is in such cases that the loss of narrative is most dismaying. But that said, we should not belabour Suetonius too far. First, he

28. The inadequacies of S's picture of Tiberius are stressed by Bringmann (1971), who joins the chorus of abuse of the rubric system. For Vibulenus (or Vibullius) Agrippa, Tacitus *Ann.* 6.40; Albucilla, 6.48; Sejanus' daughter, 5.9. Note however that the detail of twenty executed at *Tib.* 61.4 is more precise than the 'immense carnage' of *Ann.* 6.19.

29. The triviality of the grounds on which tyrants executed their victims is repeatedly underlined by S: see *Tib.* 58 and 61.3, *Cal.* 27.3, *Ner.* 37.1, *Galb.* 14.3, *Vit.* 14.1, *Dom.* 10.2-4. He tends therefore to exaggerate the trivial in order to blacken their characters.

was probably giving his readership what they wanted and expected. They felt that natural disposition played a crucial role in affecting the way a ruler behaved. They were not necessarily wrong. Secondly, his chapters on cruelty and clemency have the great advantage of broadening the focus from too narrow attention to the senatorial aristocracy. The biographer's special calling was to discern character in small things as well as great. Suetonius' anecdotal material has the effect of conjuring up a vivid picture of the wide social range affected by the emperor's powers. He prefers to illustrate Augustus' clemency not by the famous senatorial cases (easily accessible in any history book) but by two plebeians: Augustus merely fined Junius Novatus for a highly scurrilous letter of abuse, and exiled Cassius of Padua for declaring at a dinner that he would happily run the emperor through (51.1). Others were less mild. Tiberius, when a fisherman offered him a mullet and a lobster, had him scarified in the face with his own catch (60). Caligula callously fed up beasts for the amphitheatre on condemned criminals when the price of meat rose too high (27.1). One is constantly reminded that the autocrat wielded unlimited power *de facto* if not *de iure* over all who happened to incur his displeasure. The games offered the best chance for the populace to see and applaud its ruler; but he could be no less vicious then. Caligula burnt alive the poet of a farce who made a *double entendre* at his expense (27.4). Vitellius supposedly had some plebeians killed for insulting his favourite team, the Greens (14.3). Domitian, no better, had a man thrown to the dogs for criticising the emperor's bias against 'Thracian' gladiators (10.1).

Suetonius' chapters are not, then, primarily concerned with the emperor's treatment of political opponents, actual, potential or alleged. They do not offer an analysis of the exercise of formal judicial powers. They look at Caesars as men possessed of power, arbitrary and absolute, and show the terrifying consequences when power is not kept in check by moral restraint.

Imperial style[30]

When it is a matter of describing the conduct and bearing of the Caesars towards their subjects, Suetonius' analytical system comes

30. The relevant chapters are as follows. On *civilitas*: *Aug.* 52-6, *Tib.* 26-32, *Cl.* 12.1-2 (contrasting 35.1), *Ner.* 10.1, *Vesp.* 12-13, *Tit.* 8.2 (contrasting 6.1); note also *Tib.* 11.1-3 on Tiberius in Rhodes before his accession, *Cal.* 3.2 on Caligula's father Germanicus, *Cl.* 1.4 on Claudius' father Drusus. On pride: *Jul.* 76-9, *Cal.* 22-6 (pride and cruelty), *Dom.* 12.3-13.

into its own, for he is able to pull together disparate items that do indeed reveal coherent patterns. Roman emperors found themselves in a deeply ambivalent position. It is characteristic for monarchs to use devices of pomp and ceremonial in order to set an unbridgeable gap between themselves and their subjects, to enhance their majesty and thus to secure their power. But Roman society was deeply penetrated by the ethos of the republic which demanded that no single citizen should excel all others. This sentiment proved the downfall of Julius; so that while he was the model for later Caesars in both clemency and liberality, the model of 'citizenly' behaviour was set by Augustus, in deliberate reaction to his adoptive father. Even so, the conduct of individual Caesars fluctuated greatly in this respect. The further they allowed their standing and prerogatives to deviate from the citizenly norm, the more they were held to suffer from Julius' moral failing of pride.[31]

Suetonius documents with some care these fluctuations from the ideal which he terms *civilitas*. From historical accounts he could derive information on the two most important features of the style, the pose of refusal of any mark of abnormal status, and the elaborate show of respect towards the senate. The familiar narrative of Julius' last months, largely revolving round his supposed desire to become king, is readily compressed into documentation of his pride (76-9). The no less familiar accounts of Augustus' long string of 'refusals' (52-3) and Tiberius' initial encouragement of senatorial freedom (30-1) could likewise be pressed into service. The attitudes of Caesars to their own worship also attracted much attention, ranging from approval of Augustus' refusals (52) to horror at Caligula's enforcement of cult, including exotic sacrifices of flamingoes, peacocks, pheasants and the like (22), paralleled in the narratives of the Jewish writers Philo and Josephus.[32]

Suetonius' method allows him swiftly to evoke a coherent pattern by drawing such items together. He can also supplement this

31. The discussion draws on 'Civilis Princeps: between citizen and king', *JRS* 72 (1982) 32ff. For the monarchical ceremonial elements of the principate, see A. Alföldi, *Die monarchische Repräsentation im römischen Kaiserreiche* (1970). The ambiguity of the monarch's standing in mediaeval and early modern Europe is the subject of the study of E. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (1957).

32. On the ideology of refusal, see J. Béranger, *Recherches sur l'aspect idéologique du principat* (1953) esp. 137ff. On the refusal of divine honours, M.P. Charlesworth, 'The refusal of divine honours: an Augustan formula', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 15 (1939) 1ff.

information by anecdotal material, not all of it necessarily drawn from the histories, depicting the social etiquette of the behaviour of emperors in contact with the upper classes. Augustus and Tiberius are nicely described exchanging courtesies with the aristocracy. Augustus walked round the senate house greeting individual senators by name, accepted invitations to people's celebrations until he grew old and found the press of guests at an engagement party tiresome, and sat at the bedside of a junior senator he hardly knew to dissuade him from suicide (53.3). Tiberius would step aside to make way for the consuls, and followed the funerals of distinguished men as far as the pyre (31.2-32.1). Claudius made a great issue of his own civility, yet spoilt the show by attending dinner parties with a bodyguard and searching the beds of the sick men he visited for concealed weapons (35.1). On the other hand there is the ceremonial that grew up round the person of the ruler. Caligula caused shock by allowing ex-magistrates to run in attendance on his chariot (26.2) whereas Augustus quietly entered the city at night to avoid troubling people, and travelled round the city in a closed litter (53.2). Tiberius would allow no senator the trouble of attending his sedan (27). To pay respects to the emperor at his morning salutation was a privilege, and Augustus won credit by his ease of admission (53.2). But Claudius had callers frisked (35.2), a habit which Vespasian creditably abandoned (12).[33]

Mostly it is the upper classes who are involved in such social rituals. But a civil emperor was also affable to the *plebs*. Augustus admitted the humble to his salutations and exchanged relaxed banter with petitioners (53.2). Similarly Nero admitted the general public to watch his physical and rhetorical exercises (10.2), while Titus admitted them to public bathing sessions (8.2). Augustus delighted the public by canvassing the electorate for his candidates and placing his own ballot in the box (56.1). The emperor's conduct at the games belongs to the same pattern. It was part of Titus' affability that he humoured the crowd by cheering for his favourite teams (8.2). Domitian's arrogance led him to turn down a request from the crowd with a peremptory command for silence (13.1).[34]

33. Imperial etiquette and ceremonial are described fully in Friedländer, *Sittengeschichte* 1, 90ff. (*Life and Manners* 1, 86ff.). The evidence is used by Alföldi, *Monarchische Repräsentation* 27ff. to emphasise the ceremonial elements.

34. The significance of imperial civility at the games is discussed by A. Cameron, *Circus Factions* 175ff., tracing a line of continuity from the early principate to Byzantium. That the games were a prime venue for exalting the imperial image is argued by P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque* 682ff. See also Bradley (1981).

Such items do much to bring alive a picture of the emperor in his everyday surroundings. We owe them to the biographer's eye for small detail, and perhaps also to the courtier's appreciation of the texture of court life. The author's enthusiasm for the ideal of civility fits in with the enthusiasm for traditional social values manifest elsewhere in the *Caesars*. It is valuable evidence that there was nothing exclusively senatorial about this ideal. Even if there were courtiers in some reigns who pressed on the emperor the desirability of maintaining his distance, Suetonius was not one of them. He wholeheartedly embraces the ideal set out at length in Pliny's *Panegyric*, welcoming Trajan as a ruler who conducted himself as 'one of us', a fellow-citizen, modest and sociable.[35]

It is his rubric method which allows him to isolate patterns of conduct which in historians and even in the *Panegyric* are interwoven with numerous other themes. But the novel method of presentation also brings with it a subtle shift of emphasis. What he documents is a moral quality, *civilitas*. He appears indeed to have coined the term; previous authors speak of emperors acting 'civilly', in various respects, but this is the first time that 'civility' emerges as a moral quality. The underlying assumption is that there was a fixed social etiquette to which the good emperor would conform, and which the bad one would reject.

What disappears from sight in the process is the awareness that any particular act of 'civility' might be a carefully thought-out move in a game. Asinius Gallus proposed in the senate that Tiberius should have the power of nominating a number of magistrates five years in advance. On Tacitus' showing it was a shrewd move that thrust at the secrets of power. Tiberius felt challenged, and made an elaborate refusal on the grounds that his power ought not to be amplified; and so, by a speciously laudable speech, he held on to the realities of power (*Ann.* 2.36). The episode is characteristic of Tacitus' treatment of Tiberius' 'moderation'. He sees his civil words and gestures as smoke thrown in the eyes of the senate while he reinforced his actual domination. Tacitus thus subtly penetrates the nature of civility. No emperor by his gestures actually diminished

35. On the ideal in the *Panegyric*, see F. Trisoglio, *La personalità di Plinio il Giovane* (1972) 85ff. The most important passages are *Pan.* 2.3-8; 20-4; 71. For the idea that courtiers might resist civility, cf. *SHA Hadrian* 20.1, *Pius* 6.4, *Sev. Alex.* 20.3.

the reality of his power; on the contrary, by posing as refusing autocratic distinctions, emperors actually consolidated their position and won the approval of the upper orders. The behaviour of Caligula and Domitian was merely counterproductive.[36]

Suetonius too thinks that Tiberius' behaviour was, in general terms, hypocritical (42.1), and states that Claudius' civility was a show (35.1). But his method (unlike Tacitus') does not allow him to expose the element of sham. The more civil gestures he assembles, the more apparent it is that the emperor is civil not arrogant, good not bad. His method thus presupposes the genuineness of the act: to conform to the etiquette is enough.

But herein Suetonius probably reflects the sentiments of his contemporaries more nearly than Tacitus. The principate had long since been indispensable and therefore acceptable. They did not need to see through the hypocrisy of autocratic devices. The vital thing was that the emperor should behave with restraint and with respect for the established order. If the civility which that involved was in a sense fraudulent, they preferred to be deceived.

Finances[37]

Financial dealings lend themselves a great deal more readily to treatment by rubric than to chronological narrative. Every emperor, no matter whether 'good' or 'bad', must be involved in the dual process of expenditure and raising sufficient revenue. It is a positive help here to have the evidence 'gathered into titles and bundles'. So

36. On Tacitus' treatment of the 'moderation' of Tiberius, see R.S. Rogers, *Studies in the Reign of Tiberius* (1943) 60ff., with B. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician* (1976) 89. It has been noted that Tacitus only uses the word *civilitas* in the *Annals* with reference to Tiberius' reign, by I. Lana, 'Civilis, civiliter, civilitas in Tacito e Svetonio', *Atti Ac. Sc. Torino* 106 (1972) 469ff. He explains this by the state of preservation of the text, underestimating Tacitus' motive in unmasking hypocrisy. At almost every occurrence of the term Tacitus seeks by one means or another to deprive Tiberius of real credit: see *Ann.* 1.33, 1.54, 1.72, 2.34 with 4.21, 2.82, 3.22, 6.13. Only once does Tiberius appear to get away with it: 3.76.

37. The relevant sections are as follows. *Liberalitas*: *Aug.* 41-3, *Ner.* 10.1, *Tit.* 7.3-8.1, *Dom.* 9. *Avaritia*: *Jul.* 54, *Tib.* 46-9, *Cal.* 38-42, *Ner.* 32, *Galb.* 12, *Dom.* 12.1-2. Undecided: *Vesp.* 16-19. Also relevant are chapters where expenditure is *not* rated as liberality. Buildings, doles and games: *Jul.* 38-9, *Aug.* 29, *Cal.* 17.2-21, *Cl.* 20-1, *Ner.* 11-13, *Vesp.* 8.5-9.1, *Dom.* 4-5. Wasteful extravagance (*nepotatus*): *Cal.* 37, *Ner.* 30-1, *Vit.* 13. S's views on the financial conduct of the Caesars are examined at length by Reekmans (1977), who pays, however, too little attention to S's own system of categorisation.

presented, the material can demonstrate a pattern of behaviour. Thus the author of a recent study of imperial liberality appreciated Suetonius' neat categorisation of different aspects of liberality and used it as the basis for his own presentation. The same types of liberality recur from reign to reign: building, games-giving, donatives and other bounties; grants to impoverished senators; aid to cities in time of disaster; and support of poets. One could similarly use Suetonius as a guide to the standard methods of revenue-raising: taxation; the levying of 'voluntary' contributions (*collationes*) on special occasions; inheritance; confiscation of the property of the condemned; in dire straits the auctioning of imperial property; and for the unscrupulous the execution of the rich, the sale of office and judgment and other forms of corruption.[38]

The breakdown of imperial spending and revenue-raising is so conveniently set out that it is tempting to look here for a balanced analysis of the imperial budget. But a budget is not what Suetonius offers. He gives figures quite frequently, whether for the 800,000 sesterces which Nero daily granted Tiridates during his visit (30.2) or the five denarii which Galba tipped a musician (12.3). But there are no overall figures. The information on taxation is frustratingly vague. We are told that Vespasian revived some old taxes, introduced others and raised provincial tribute in some cases to double the old level (16.1). But there are no details or figures for these significant changes, apart from the colourful detail that he introduced a tax on urinals and silenced the protesting Titus by demonstrating that the money smelt good enough (23.3). Again, it would have been possible for Suetonius to give precise figures for the totals spent by Augustus on largess to the troops and the city *plebs*, land-settlements for veterans, hand-outs of corn, subventions to the public treasury, games and building. But though he almost certainly knew the *Res Gestae* which preserved these figures, he is vague, if not positively inadequate, on the subject, and only used figures to show that the level of Augustus' largesses varied (41).[39]

The biographer is simply not interested in analysing the budget. His concern is primarily moral. The question for him is not 'how much?' but 'how good or bad?'. Even behind the apparent neutrality

38. The value of S's breakdown of liberality is appreciated by H. Kloft, *Liberalitas Principis* esp. 77ff. For the main types of both benefaction and revenue-raising, see Millar, *Emperor* 133ff.

39. The *Res Gestae* is (almost certainly) cited directly at *Aug.* 43.1. There was once a prolonged debate on the extent of S's use of the *RG*, but this has long since died away: see Funaioli (1932) 614f.

of his rubrics, strong moral presuppositions are implicit. His handling of building and games-giving is significant. Tiberius is criticised as mean partly on the grounds of failure to build or put on shows (47). The implication is that these activities were normally evidence of liberality. Yet though he provides ample enough details of these activities for most emperors, he takes most of this evidence of liberality out of its moral category and treats it with other routine affairs as part of 'the job'. Moreover, expenditure on palace and entourage is classified as luxurious and again discounted. Thus Nero merits only criticism for his expenditure on the Golden Palace (31); and although Galba is criticised for meanness to his entourage (12.3), Nero's granting of estates to his favourites rates as extravagance (30.2).

At the root of Suetonius' treatment is a dilemma. It is difficult to confess that a man is simultaneously good and bad. Yet it was difficult to be liberal without extortionate revenue-raising, or to spare the pocket of the tax-payer without also appearing mean. Vice and virtue, as the ancients knew, were easily confused: extravagance could be represented as liberality, economy as avarice. Suetonius' categorisation of financial measures into good or bad depends on conventional criteria of the acceptable and unacceptable. The preoccupations of the propertied classes are apparent behind them.[40]

Cicero argued that generosity was only truly virtuous when the recipient merited the benefaction. Suetonius moves from the same assumption. He cares more that money should be spent on right and proper objects than that it should simply be spent. Augustus' massive liberalities to troops and *plebs* are dealt with, as we have seen, rather vaguely. Suetonius is at pains to stress that all orders benefited from his generosity: he specifies interest-free loans (to the wealthy, presumably) and grants to senators (41.1). He goes on to stress that Augustus was by no means out to buy popularity (*salubrem magis quam ambitiosum principem*): he rebuked the people for an excessive demand for subsidised wine, was strict in his distribution of bounties, and was only deterred from abolishing

40. On the conventional moral categories, see Kloft, *Liberalitas Principis* 136ff. See also for an interesting attempt to relate imperial monetary policy to ancient moral categories, D.R. Walker, *The Metrology of the Roman Silver Coinage* Part III (British Archaeological Reports, Supp.40, 1978) 106ff. On the confusion of virtue and vice, cf. Tac. *Hist.* 1.30, *luxuria specie liberalitatis* ('luxury in the guise of liberality') and 1.37, *parsimonia pro avaritia* ('avarice posing as thrift').

the corn-dole by the political dangers implicit in the move (42). The Augustus of the *Res Gestae* is hardly recognisable in this transformation.[41]

The manifest suspicion of the purchase of popular support helps explain Suetonius' treatment of buildings and games. He knew that they could impoverish an emperor and drive him to extortion, as happened with Domitian (12). Nevertheless, he never actually criticises an emperor for either of these activities and Vespasian gets credit for his desire to provide employment by his building programme. 'Let me feed my little people', he rebukes the man with a labour-saving invention (18). Private building, however, was quite another matter from public building (*opera*). Nero was ruinous in nothing so much as his house-building (*aedificando*), that is his erection of palaces (31). The same contrast holds for Pliny's Trajan. He is sparing in house-building; the streets no longer thunder with passing wagonloads of masonry (as they had under Domitian, who rebuilt the Palatine). But in public work he is magnificent (*Pan.* 51.1-3).[42]

Wasteful spending leads directly to extortion, as is demonstrated in the cases of Caligula (38.1) and Nero (32.1). Suetonius is at least as anxious that the emperor should make no unjust exactions as that he should be liberal. Titus, fantastically, is praised for taking not a penny from a single citizen (7.3). This means, of course, not that he remitted taxation, but that he resorted to none of the exactions that typified the tyrant, such as executions of the rich on trumped-up charges. Whereas Caligula extorted contributions on the most spurious grounds, such as for a dowry for his daughter (42), Titus refused even the customary collations. Through procurators emperors controlled much of the tax-gathering. But Nero is said to have appointed them with the encouragement 'Let's make sure no one has a penny left' (32.4) and Vespasian supposedly appointed corrupt ones in order to squeeze them dry later 'like sponges' (16.2). Now taxes might be justified by the circumstances: Vespasian's were perhaps a marginal case but Caligula's 'new and unheard of' taxes on the sale of cooked foods, litigation, porterage and prostitution were unacceptable, as was his failure to publish these innovations

41. Cicero *de Officiis* 1.42-6 lays down the criteria for true liberality. Sallust reflects on the contrast between largess and liberality in his contrast between Cato and Caesar: *Catiline* 54. Tacitus too is realistic about Augustus: 'he seduced the troops with gifts and the people with corn' (*Ann.* 1.2).

42. On attitudes to imperial luxury see below.

except in the minutest script (40-1). An unwritten code of practice also lies behind reactions to the practices of emperors in receiving inheritances. Augustus set the ideal standard in turning down bequests from strangers (66.4). Even so his will revealed that he took fourteen hundred million in twenty years (101.3). Other Caesars exploited this rich source of income by forcing men to make them their heirs.[43]

Suetonius' criteria bear close relation to the ideal depicted by Pliny in Trajan. It was a wonder, remarked Pliny, that the open-handed Trajan could make his books balance. Yet he achieved it by frugality, personal economy in contrast to public liberality (*Pan.* 41). The feat was not such an easy one that the right moral disposition would guarantee success, and Suetonius is not always quite honest in laying out both sides of the ledger. He attacks Tiberius bitterly for meanness (46-8); but suppresses here the evidence of his scrupulous avoidance of extortion. Elsewhere he lets slip that Tiberius told his governors to shear their sheep, not fleece them (32.2), and was himself a model of economical living (34.1). His handling of Augustus also tells less than the whole truth. Not only does he obscure the extent of his liberalities; he says nothing in this context of his introduction of the new 5 per cent inheritance tax that financed bounties to veterans. The first direct tax Romans had been asked to pay in time of peace for nearly two centuries, it aroused, as Dio's narrative shows, bitter opposition and resentment. Suetonius only alludes to it as one of his laudable provisions for the army (49.2).[44]

It is not simply the moral categories that are to blame here, strange though they seem to the modern mind. All ancient authors

43. Executions of the rich are perhaps the commonest and most objectionable of tyrannical abuses S documents: *Tib.* 49, *Cal.* 38.3, *Ner.* 32, *Dom.* 12.1. Note that Vespasian, whom S is disinclined to condemn, was proof against this sort of temptation (13). For the code of practice over inheritances, see R.S. Rogers, *Trans. Am. Phil. Ass.* 78 (1947) 140ff. For bad practice, *Cal.* 38.2, *Ner.* 32.2, *Dom.* 12.2 (abandoning earlier high principles, 9.2). For the ideal, Pliny *Pan.* 43.

44. S's critical treatment of Tiberius is the more notable in contrast with Tacitus' grudging allowance of his high standards, e.g. *Ann.* 3.23. See further Townend (1962). S's favourable treatment of Augustus contrasts with Tacitus' cynical assessment (above n.41). On the new *vicesima hereditatum* tax, Dio 55.25 and 56.28, 4-6; C. Nicolet, *The World of the Citizen in Republican Rome* (1980) 184f. emphasises the importance of the fact that the citizen had no direct tax to pay between 167 and 43 BC when civil wars changed the situation.

use moral categories in discussing imperial finances. Behind the language of vice and virtue lie the anxieties of the interested parties: the men of property who ultimately had to foot the bill for imperial liberality and extravagance. Once sold on the proposition that Augustus was a model ruler, Suetonius could never tell the whole truth.

Pleasures[45]

The antiquarian's analytical approach pays off best in those areas of public life where small items can be used to establish patterns, and are not fraught with political overtones. The fourth main area of tyrannical vice, 'luxury and lust', demands a rather different treatment, and will be reserved for the last chapter. It only half belongs in the context of public life. Indeed some might question whether it belongs to public life at all. The description of Augustus' private life in its massive and minute detail (61-96) is so valuable precisely because it is treated as something private. The facts are offered as simple facts, relished merely for their authenticity: he decorated his house with curiosities, like the bones of prehistoric animals, rather than paintings and statues (72.3), he was fond of figs (76.1) and relaxed by playing 'nuts' with dwarves (83). Even where discussion touches the political arena with the accusations of immorality of triumviral days, Suetonius remains dispassionate, showing up the invective for what it is, but conscientiously documenting from the emperor's own correspondence a weakness for what was regarded as a vice, dicing (68-71).

It is, we may feel, to be regretted that he did not sustain this dispassionate approach for the lives of Tiberius, Caligula and Nero. By including the lurid catalogues of their indulgence or extravagance in the context of their public lives, he abandoned the biographer's schema, and with it his dry informative tone. But what matters here is to see the reason why Suetonius abandons his objective tone in the 'tyrant' lives. He does so because he assumes the extravagance and indulgence of emperors to be a matter of public significance,

45. Luxury, lust and extravagance are treated as of public significance in the following passages: *Tib.* 42-5, *Cal.* 36-7, *Ner.* 27-31, *Vit.* 13, *Tib.* 7.1-2. Other lives sustain a more dispassionate tone: *Aug.* 68-78, *Cl.* 32-3, *Galb.* 22, *Vesp.* 21, *Dom.* 21-2. The account of Julius (45.3-53) is generally critical, and sensitive to the public repercussions of his reputation; but the idea of a 'reign' is of restricted relevance to this life.

and herein he reflects the general assumption of antiquity. Behind this were several, overlapping considerations.[46]

The first was crudely financial. 'Luxury' was a competitive business, a rivalry in displaying wealth and refinement. It could lead to crippling expense. Suetonius states that the extravagance of Caligula, who squandered a reserve of twenty-seven hundred million sesterces accumulated by his predecessor (37), and of Nero, who followed the same pattern (30.1), led directly to fiscal crisis and extortion. We have no notion of the proportion of the imperial budget that might be spent on the palace, entertainment and other 'luxuries' but there is no reason to doubt that it could be substantial. Seneca makes the staggering allegation that Caligula spent the tribute of three provinces on a single dinner. Whether true or not, this shows how Romans felt about imperial luxury. Pliny, as we have seen, proclaimed that it was by personal frugality that the liberal Trajan made the accounts balance; he even auctioned off surplus property and palace furniture. A papyrus has been found in which an anonymous emperor announces a remission of taxes made possible by his own frugality. By the second century economy had become a settled part of imperial style, and men looked back to the prodigality of earlier Caesars with shock.[47]

Combined with the feeling that the emperor had a duty to spare the tax-payer was the expectation that he should set a positive example. The life of the public figure was in the limelight. He could not escape. 'Great fortunes can have no secrets. The imperial house, even its bedroom and secret corners, lie open to view, and everything confidential is exposed to publicity.' Yet the prince's life must be a model to his subjects, a perpetual censorship. Emperors concerned themselves with the moral conduct of their subjects, particularly of

46. That luxury (*tryphē*) was a prime cause of undoing for governments was a commonplace of hellenistic historiography, as can be seen in the book of quotations on the subject collected by Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 12. Discussed by A. Passerini, 'La tryphe nella storiografia ellenistica', *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 11 (1934) 35ff. It also became a commonplace of Roman republican moralising thought, in the elder Cato (Livy 34.4.2), the annalist Piso (frr. 34 and 38), Sallust and Livy himself. Thus D. Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust* (1961) 41ff.

47. Cf. Seneca, *Consolatio ad Helviam* 10.4 for Caligula's banquet; Pliny, *Pan.* 41.1 for frugality; P. Fayum 40, edited by Schubart in *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 14 (1941) 44ff., for the remission of taxes. Trajan's auction is described by Pliny *Pan.* 50; Millar, *Emperor* 148 assembles evidence of parallel cases. It is interesting to note that Caligula gets no credit for his auctions at *Cal.* 38.4-39.

members of the senate, and they lay wide open to the charge of hypocrisy if their own conduct was anything less than exemplary. Even Tiberius knew this much: his supporter Velleius praised him for setting a model, and Suetonius records that he served reheated dishes at a formal dinner as an example of public economy (34.1). Yet he failed to carry conviction. It was in the middle of a 'moral purge' that he awarded key posts to two senators who had kept him company in an all-night drinking party (42.1).[48]

There was a further, practical, objection to *la dolce vita*. 'How may a king avoid turning to idleness and pleasures?' asks Ptolemy Philadelphus in a fictional dialogue with a group of Jewish savants. 'By remembering that he rules a large and populous realm and should put his mind to nothing other than the care of his people.' The conscientious ruler had a tremendous burden of work which put heavy demands on his physical endurance. Trajan, according to Pliny, set the pace for future princes, to shake off their inertia, delights and sweet slumber. Marcus warns himself in his private *Meditations* against the temptations of the pillow; and we find his tutor Fronto vainly writing to urge him to take a break, catch some sleep and relax. Marcus, at first too busy even to read his master's letter, only replies that he is the slave of duty. Not all Suetonius' Caesars set such high standards for themselves. Augustus worked late into the night, and never slept more than seven hours (78); Vespasian (21) and Claudius were early risers, though the latter sometimes nodded off during business (33.2). Yet the wastrels evidently lacked this sense of dedication to the job. If Caligula slept little, it was only because he suffered from insomnia (50.3).[49]

Economy, image and the demands of duty all conspired to make the emperor's private life less than private. Suetonius had every

48. Pliny *Pan.* 83.1 on the exposure of the emperor's private life. It is a traditional topic, met for example in Cicero *de Officiis* 2.44, Sallust *Catiline* 51.12, Seneca *de Clementia* 1.8.3f., Cassius Dio 52.34.2-3 (Maecenas' speech). For the idea that subjects modelled themselves on the ruler, see below, ch.8, n.3. What S means by Tiberius' moral purge (*correctio morum*) is not quite clear since Tacitus states that he refused to take on any such responsibilities: *Ann.*3.52-5. On the idea of regal hypocrisy, cf. Isocrates, *Nicocles* 38: 'Kings are quite wrong to compel others to behave decently without themselves being any more restrained than their subjects.'

49. For Ptolemy's question, Aristeas, *Letter to Philocrates* 245. Pliny Pan. 59.2 and *passim* for Trajan's sleepless energy. Marcus, *Meditations* 5.1 for his warnings to himself, with Fronto *de Feriis Alsiensibus* (Loeb ed. vol.2, 2ff.) for the tutor's warnings.

justification in recording such details, and his treatment of the vices of luxury and lust as public accurately reflects the sense of public outrage provoked by the behaviour of some Caesars. What is to be regretted is that he suspended his critical faculties in the treatment of Tiberius, Caligula and Nero. Had he handled the allegations of vice against them as coolly as those against Augustus, citing original documents, invectives and correspondence, the value of his account would be enormously greater. The failure is not one of the rubric system, but of his sources and his natural sympathies.

Suetonius' moral categories accurately reflect the preoccupations of the class for which he wrote. It was open to emperors to secure their power by executing their critics, by distributing bounties to their supporters at the price of extortions from others and by magnifying their appearance of power through titulature and ceremonial. Citizens with influence, wealth and prestige of their own stood to lose by all these processes. A potential conflict of interest lay at the heart of the problem. Yet they interpreted it as a moral, not a political, problem. A 'good' emperor would naturally exercise restraint in all these areas, so minimising the tension. A 'bad' one would pursue his own advantage alone, and would betray himself in his personal behaviour. Luxury and lust were the signs of a ruler who only used power to his personal advantage and not that of his people. The biographer's interest in character is compounded by the scholar's use of rubrics. The effect, however, is not to distort contemporary perceptions, but to throw them into sharper relief.

Chapter Eight

EMPERORS AND CULTURE

Suetonius' picture of the private lives of the Caesars has attracted by its lively detail the many who have turned to it for entertainment. But to the serious-minded it has long been a stumbling-block. Can we take seriously an author who writes about such subjects, or in such a manner?[1]

It does Suetonius ill justice to cast him as the writer of a *chronique scandaleuse*. Whether as scholar, antiquarian or biographer he was interested in how people live. Private life was no less legitimate a subject for biography than public life. If he reports that Augustus had a taste, pandered to by Livia, for deflowering virgins (71.1), there is no more reason to suppose that he had an eye to a prurient readership than when he reports that the same emperor had a fondness for green figs (76.1), composed epigrams in the bath (85.2), or carried a piece of seal-skin as a protection against lightning (90). Such detail was the traditional stuff of biography in antiquity (nor will it come as a surprise to modern biographers). Habits of eating, drinking and sexual behaviour, cultural interests and religious practices were very much conventional topics.[2]

1. Robert Graves' lively translation of the *Caesars* (first published in the Penguin Classics series in 1957, reissued with an introduction by Michael Grant in 1979) has played a large part in spreading S's popularity in the English-speaking world. His novels *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God* (1934), however, with their numerous dramatisations which draw heavily (but not exclusively) on S have been more influential. The example of professional distaste for gossip in S cited above, ch.1, n.37, is an extreme one, but the point of view remains widespread among scholars: thus Paratore (1959) 341; Syme, *Tacitus* 502; Flach (1972) 288. There have been several opponents of this attitude, but their tone is on the whole apologetic: thus Mooney (1930) 24f. Gugel (1977) 73ff. sets out to analyse the 'Erotica' at length: his search for artistic variations does not seem to me a profitable line of approach. Bradley in his Commentary on the *Nero* 153f. thinks of the market for gossip.

2. See above ch.3. It is interesting to compare the account of Atticus' private life in Nepos' *Life*, 13-18.

SUETONIUS

The Scholar and his Caesars

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