POSTREMO SUO TANTUM INGENIO UTEBATUR

TACITUS' portrayal of the emperor Tiberius has called forth a superabundance of comment. This note, therefore, will be brief and directed to a single question, provoked by some of this recent work; namely, how far are we entitled to draw conclusions as to Tacitus' powers of psychological analysis or as to his philosophical outlook on the basis of this portrayal? A generation ago Marsh concluded that Tacitus' psychology was superficial: 'That a man could successfully conceal his real character till he was nearing seventy and then throw off the disguise did not seem to Tacitus in any way improbable.'[1] Arruntius, he concluded, must be regarded 'a better psychologist than Tacitus' in view of his different judgement of Tiberius as recorded by the latter. More recently R. M. Ogilvie has written that the 'Roman—Stoic—preconception that a man's character cannot change and that he is at twenty what he will be at fifty and that what he is at fifty he must have been at twenty . . .' explains the uniformly dark portrayal of Tiberius by Tacitus[2] and that Tacitus 'could not envisage that Tiberius' character might have deteriorated'.[3] Similarly, F. R. D. Goodyear finds Tacitus' memorable theory contrary to psychological probability but adds that 'no evidence shows that Tacitus did not honestly believe in it'.[4]

But is there sufficient evidence to show that Tacitus *did* honestly believe in this theory or that he did so under the compelling influence of Stoic philosophy? We are given immediate pause when we find in Thucydides[5] the following analysis of the character of the Plataeans in a speech of the Thebans in 427 B.C.: ἃ μέν ποτε χρηστοὶ ἐγένεσθε, ὡς φατέ, οὐ προσήκοντα νῦν ἐπεδείξατε, ἃ δὲ ἡ φύσις αἰεὶ ἐβούλετο ἐξηλέγχθη ἐς τὸ ἀληθές. Here we have basically the same formula used as that applied by Tacitus to Tiberius. The *physis* of the Plataeans is represented as always inclined to the bad; or, to convert to Latin terminology,[6] any behaviour (*mores*) on their part which has won approval in the past was due entirely to external factors and did not reflect their essential *ingenium*. Clearly in using such language the Thebans cannot have been under Stoic influence nor should we suppose that we have here a carefully weighed analysis of human psychology on their part (especially in a situation where Thebans are addressing Spartans!) or even upon the part of Thucydides himself. Much less, again, would we be inclined to conclude that the Spartan ephor, Sthenelaidas, of all people, was a better psychologist than these Theban spokesmen in that on another famous occasion he did show himself capable of conceiving that the Athenians' character might have changed from good to bad, with the argument that, if this was so, then they deserved double punishment for their recent behaviour.[7]

The Thebans' analysis of Plataean behaviour was, of course, adapted to the situation in which it was offered, in a kind of international court. The Thebans

[1] F. B. Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius*, 14.
[2] R. M. Ogilvie, *Commentary on Livy*, 463.
[3] *The Romans and their Gods*, 18.
[4] *Tacitus: Greece and Rome, New Surveys*, no. 4 (1970), 33. See now the same author's *Annals of Tacitus* (I–VI), i. 37–40.
[5] Thuc. 3. 64. 4.
[6] This Latin terminology is discussed by H. Hoffmann in *Gymnasium*, lxxv (1968), 240 ff.
[7] Thuc. 1. 86. 2.

knew that, as in any other type of Greek court, judgement was likely to be based, not on a simple assessment as to whether the defendant had in fact committed a particular offence, but on the jurors' views as to his previous behaviour, as it affected themselves or the *polis* which they represented. The orator had to keep in mind what the court was predisposed to believe, not merely what it was reasonable for it to believe in the light of the evidence adduced on the specific matter at issue. He might, indeed, in such a situation naïvely remind the court that 'it would not be reasonable for you to acquit the defendant on the basis that, whilst he did commit the offence, he has proved himself a good man in all else'[1] (that is, he has benefited and therefore won the approval of members of the court by his previous behaviour); but once he had recognized that juries, in spite of such reminders, were inclined to arrive at verdicts which were 'not reasonable' he naturally adopted a rather more subtle technique (though it became stereotyped), that of denying that the previous 'good' behaviour was to be taken at its face value at all.

The germ of such an analysis can be found in poetry before it is adapted to prose. Thus Pindar,[2] with his γένοιο οἷος ἐσσί (if that reading is accepted), affects to believe, in a very different kind of context, that it cannot be the 'real' Hiero who has preferred Bacchylides to himself. Indeed the possibility of the analysis is inherent in the Greek language itself, where formulations such as αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ βελτίων ἐγένετο can readily be taken to imply two different selves within a single subject, of which one can be represented as more 'real' than the other. The rhetoricians simply developed this into a stock formula which later found Latin expression in treatises such as *ad Herennium* and Cicero's *de inventione*.[3] In such treatises the essential point which emerges is that the Roman orator was perfectly well equipped either to assert or to deny the relevance of a person's previous career (and the *fama* associated with it) to the act of which he was currently being accused in the law-courts. Thus in his defence of a person of good reputation or prosecution of a person of bad reputation he will insist upon the impossibility or inevitability of this act, asserting with regard to that person's *vita et mores*, 'perinde ut opinio est de cuiusque moribus ita quod ab eo factum et non factum sit existimari potest.'[4] If on the other hand he is prosecuting a person of previous good reputation or defending a person of bad reputation, the orator will argue that the court must attend to 'facta, non famam' and that 'non se de moribus eius apud censores sed de criminibus adversariorum apud iudices dicere';[5] or, more particularly relevant to Tacitus' portrayal of Tiberius, in accusing a man of good reputation he will argue 'eum ante celasse, nunc manifesto teneri;[6] quare non oportere hanc rem ex superiore vita spectari sed superiorem vitam ex hac re improbari, et aut potestatem ante peccandi non fuisse aut causam; aut, si haec dici non potuerunt, dicendum erit illud extremum, non esse mirum si nunc primum deliquerit; nam necesse esse *eum qui velit peccare aliquando primum delinquere*.'[7] The closeness of the italicized words to Thucydides' ἃ δὲ ἡ φύσις αἰεὶ ἐβούλετο is obvious. The very

[1] Lysias 14. 23. [2] Pind. *Pyth.* 2. 72.

[3] *Ad Her.* 2. 5; Cic. *inv.* 2. 32–4 (for more on the Greek background see C. J. Classen, *Rh. Mus.* cviii [1965], 122).

[4] Cic. *Cluent.* 70.

[5] *Ad Her.*, loc. cit. Or 'negare oportebit de vita eius et de moribus quaeri, sed de eo crimine, quo de arguatur; quare, ante factis omissis, illud, quod instet, id agi oportere' (*inv.* 2. 27).

[6] Or 'illum ante occultasse sua flagitia; se planum facturum ab eo maleficium non abesse' (*auct. ad Her.*, loc. cit.).

[7] *Inv.* 2. 34. Compare Quint. 7. 2. 33 'dicens neminem non aliquando coepisse peccare'.

versatility of these arguments makes it quite clear that none need indicate anything as to the philosophical outlook or the powers of psychological insight of the orator using them; and that, although Cicero in a specific case may speak of the *impossibility* of a sudden change in a person—'neque enim potest quisquam nostrum subito fingi neque cuiusquam repente vita mutari aut natura converti'[1]—this represents no more than the rhetorical overstatement of an argument which in these treatises is grouped under the heading of *probabile* and *coniectura*.

Further, it is clear that these *formulae* could be easily transferred from the context of a speech for or against the prisoner in the dock to the handling of a character in a historical work, particularly where the historian was faced with an apparent contradiction, not simply between a single act and the rest of the career of a particular person, but between one whole episode and another. Here again we can see Greek orators pointing the way. Thus, Isocrates[2] is found speaking of the Athenians being (inevitably!) corrupted by the radical democracy of his day and so ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις πράγμασι οὐκ ἀνεκτοὺς ὄντας; but, on entering into the atmosphere of the Areopagus, they appear as ὀκνοῦντας τῇ φύσει χρῆσθαι καὶ μᾶλλον τοῖς ἐκεῖ νομίμοις ἢ ταῖς αὐτῶν κακίαις ἐμμένοντας. And since Tacitus, like his great predecessors, had been trained in rhetoric with a view to effective practice in the law-courts and since, again, he conceived his task to be that of giving the verdict of history upon great or infamous men,[3] we should hardly expect him completely to lay aside the techniques appropriate to forensic practice when he turns to the delineation of character in the writing of history.

If then, after all his more dispassionate weighting of the evidence, as compared with much more biased accounts available to him[4]—we need not deny Tacitus' honesty of purpose—it seemed to the historian that the appropriate verdict on Tiberius' reign as a whole was still that of condemnation, he will have been inclined by long training to organize and interpret his evidence along the lines calculated to win such a verdict in the law-courts. Thus, perhaps partly to meet possible versions of Tiberius' reign which would stress its earlier years in order to discount or excuse the later, he argues in effect 'non oportere hanc rem [viz. the latter years] ex superiore vita spectari sed superiorem vitam ex hac re improbari'. L. Arruntius might not choose to use the formula in the same way, on at least one occasion.[5] But we should not assume that his view was more carefully weighed than Tacitus', so as to call for compliments on his superior psychology. It was, after all, a view adapted to a very different context, that of Arruntius' intended suicide which it was intended to justify: 'an, cum Tiberius post tantam rerum experientam vi dominationis convulsus et mutatus sit, G. Caesarem vix finita pueritia, ignarum omnium aut pessimis innutritum, meliora capessiturum, Macrone duce . . .?' Koestermann[6] almost

[1] Cic. *Sulla* 69.

[2] Isoc. 7. 38.

[3] *Ann.* 3. 65.

[4] As to this, we may note that even the would-be orator is bidden to avoid obviously unreliable stories about the accused: 'satius est omni se ante actae vitae abstinere convicio quam levibus aut frivolis aut manifesto falsis reum incessere, quia fides ceteris detrahitur' (Quint. 7. 2. 24)—much more, presumably, the historian who hoped to be believed.

[5] *Ann.* 6. 48, where the mere report of Arruntius' opinion does not, surely, involve Tacitus in any inconsistency (*contra* R. Syme, *Tacitus*, 422).

[6] E. Koestermann, *Cornelius Tacitus* (I–III), i. 38. By contrast F. R. D. Goodyear, *Annals of Tacitus* (I–VI), i. 40, doubts whether Tacitus even saw the contradiction between his own analysis and that of Arruntius. He

implies that Tacitus juxtaposed this judgement with that of *Annals* 6. 41 in order to encourage the reader to choose between two possible verdicts. That may be doubted in view of the brevity of this episode as against the whole structure of Books 1–6 and the emphasis inevitably assumed by the final chapter. But we may agree with another assertion of Koestermann, that *Ann.* 6. 51 fits ill with Tacitus' own review of the earlier period of Tiberius' reign (4. 5 ff.); and we may suppose that in the final summing-up, as well as at strategic points elsewhere in his account, Tacitus inclines towards the rhetorician's technique in its more naked form, lest there should be any doubt left in the reader's mind as to the verdict which is called for; the historian yields to the rhetorician rather than to the philosopher in such passages.

To justify the assumption of Stoic influence upon Tacitus' delineation of Tiberius it would be necessary to show that this author consistently reflects the dogmas of that school (which is not easy) and to suppose that their alleged view of the unchangeability of a man's character has no parallel outside Stoic circles. But, as to the latter, we may notice the judgement of Sir Ronald Syme that 'it was the way of thought of the ancients' (in general) 'to conceive a man's inner nature as something definable and immutable'[1] and, again, that Tacitus' treatment of Tiberius is to be related to a factor common to 'the manner of historians *in every age*' (my italics), namely, the presentation and arrangement of events in 'undue coherence'.[2] This factor in turn is surely to be related to a general principle of human thought, not confined to historians, of which Quintilian reminds his pupils: 'ex praeteritis . . . aestimari solent praesentia.'[3] It is by an extension of this same principle that we try also to make sense of and forecasts about the behaviour of men and of the physical universe. We live in a world where some weight is still given to character testimonials and even to weather forecasts. If on one or two occasions a person falls short of the testimonial we have given to him, we may then speak of his 'acting out of character'. But this is a means of clinging on to, not rejecting, the working principle that pronouncements can reasonably be made as to a person's 'real' character, which are not to be overturned by isolated actions which do not seem to fit in with them. The basic line of thought does not differ significantly from that which we have noticed as implicit in the Greek αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ βελτίων ἐγένετο or in the distinctions (not invariable)[4] between *ingenium* and *mores* in Roman writers. The peculiar element appears when, owing to the exigencies of his case or to suit the predilections of his audience, the classical advocate (or writer influenced by him) chose to take the more isolated actions or actions confined to a comparatively short period of a person's life as indicative of his

recognizes, however, from passages such as *Ann.* 6. 48 and *Hist.* 1. 50. 4 that Tacitus was 'not entirely unacquainted with the idea of change in character' but is among a few classical writers who have 'an occasional inkling of change and development of character' (ibid. 38). But if our author, with his admitted 'skill in indirect characterization', makes little attempt to present the process of change, this should be taken as an indication of *his choice not to do so* rather than to his limited powers of perception—because the exploitation of this skill was more appropriate to biography rather than to history? See A. Momigliano, *The development of Greek biography*, 1971, 40, 99–100: we may compare Plutarch's readiness to allow a change in the character of Pericles which most of his predecessors had seen as 'steadily and sometimes rather unpleasantly democratic' (W. R. Connor, *Theopompus and Fifth Century Athens*, 114, adding, however, that even in this biography the change is really a reversion to Pericles' naturally aristocratic disposition).

[1] R. Syme, op. cit. 421.

[2] Op. cit. 419. [3] 5. 10. 28.

[4] As Hoffmann, loc. cit. 231 n. 54 and 246, allows.

character rather than those which continued over a longer period. A moment's objective reflection would, of course, reveal the implausibility of the line of argument when turned in this direction; but the flow of the speaker's eloquence was designed to discourage any such reflection about this, just as it was about the allegations as to the private life of an Aeschines or a Catiline or an Antonius, which were none the less part of the stock-in-trade of the orator.

There were *quite distinct* reasons which led Greek philosophers to argue the impossibility of character change, especially in an individual who had attained perfect 'goodness', reasons which the orator need not share or appeal to in his audience. Since the 'good' was identified with that which was supremely desirable for the person who had attained it, it was not easy to find any reason why he should abandon it.[1] Moreover it suited the natural prejudices of many Greek philosophers to identify the permanent (and so valuable) element in a man's psyche with that element which was so prominent in their own make-up; whilst the doctrine of *homoiosis* readily suggested to some that the element which apprehends unchangeable reality must itself be unchangeable.[2] We are not entitled to assume that such dogmas automatically operated in the mind of the historian. But with regard to the Stoics, A. A. Long has pointed out[3] that what they reject is 'the possibility of acting inconsistently with *present* character'; if, then, it is not open to a man, with his present character, to 'perform both types of action (good and bad)', this does not mean that 'he neither was nor ever will be in a position to acquire a different character'. So a change in character, from 'badness' to 'goodness' in particular, was for Stoic philosophers by no means inconceivable, as long as that change was *instantaneous*, thus precluding a 'good' act being performed by a person at a point in time when he was even minimally short of perfect wisdom.

The limited cogency of any explanation of *dissimulatio* in Tacitus' Tiberius by reference to his conscious adherence to philosophic theory is indicated not least by *Ann.* 6. 50. In the very next chapter Tacitus is to state that, with Sejanus finally removed, Tiberius had been able to lay aside fear,[4] so that henceforth 'postremo suo tantum ingenio utebatur'. Yet here in 6. 50 we are told that even at death's door 'iam Tiberium corpus, iam vires, nondum dissimulatio deserebat'. Thus, even at death's door, the emperor is not allowed to act in a straightforward fashion! The main factor, surely, lying behind this passage is the historian's striving for that *color orationis* (for its own sake) which 'venustatis modo gratia adhibetur et ipsa novitate ac varietate magis quam si relatio sit recta, delectat'.[5] It is certainly difficult to believe that it represents Tacitus' objective analysis of this particular situation and invites the suspicion that

[1] As in Plato, *Symp.* 205 E.

[2] See Plato, *Rep.* 476 ff.; R. Robinson, *Plato's earlier Dialectic*, 194; R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley, *Plato's Republic*, 166.

[3] A. A. Long, *Problems in Stoicism*, 185 and 184; note also, 175 'freedom to act out of character is a concept *generally* denied or ignored in Greek philosophy' (my italics).

[4] Hoffmann favours F. Klingner's theory that Tacitus transfers to his analysis of Tiberius the idea of the harmful effect of the removal of *metus hostilis*, an idea applied by earlier writers to the analysis of the decline of the state or to a whole class within the state. If Tacitus *is* consciously doing this, then he is adapting a theory which goes back long before the Stoics, though it is sometimes ascribed to Posidonius (D. C. Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust*, 51). It may be added that other historians, by whom Tacitus is likely to have been influenced not less than by philosophers, used the idea to *explain* change, rather than to explain it away, and indeed to suggest that it is inevitable (see F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, i. 697, 744–5).

[5] Quint. 9. 2. 66; see J. Cousin, *R.E.A.* xxix (1951), 244.

allegations of *dissimulatio* at other points do not reflect such an analysis either.

Apart from the stylistic and dramatic motive largely illustrated by this episode there are, of course, other aspects of Tacitus' emphasis on this characteristic in Tiberius.[1] We need not discuss them again here. There is no doubt that it represented in part a genuine trait of the emperor's make-up, already established in the tradition which Tacitus inherited, and that it was a quality in some measure called for to sustain the picture of *res publica restituta*. But the (as it were) unconscious dissimulation which Tacitus attributes to Tiberius is something quite distinct.[2] There seems to be no good reason to deny or minimize an artificial element in it, connected with Tacitus' background of training for the law-courts; and it is both unnecessary and uncomplimentary to Tacitus' powers of thought to imagine that he was unable to conceive of any other analysis or that he was bound by the strait-jacket of any philosophic dogma.[3]

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[1] See R. Syme, op. cit. 420.

[2] It also seems distinct from most of the cases of inconsistency of behaviour discussed by E. Dutoit, *Mus. Helv.* ii (1945), 39, which involve *deliberate* pretence or *constant* vacillation, the latter quite out of place in any Roman *nobilis*, trained or not in Greek philosophy. Syme's verdict allows for a greater element of artificiality, though it is not specifically related to the rhetorical exigencies of the law-courts, to the indirect influence of which I would now attribute more than I did (*J.R.S.* xlix [1959], 56) in the case of Sallust's allegations of *dissimulatio*.

[3] I wish to thank Professor A. Momigliano for stimulating discussion in advance of the writing of this article, which he also made time to read on the eve of departure for Italy; but, since detailed comment was then impossible, all heresy is my own.