Personal Power in the Roman Empire

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PERSONAL POWER IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Within the bounds of the Roman empire, principally its central and eastern parts, I mean to discuss the ordinary inducements to obedience controlled by people who enjoyed 'clout.' It is not easy to explain that American slang term by any single synonym. "Influence" by itself is too tame. I need to add the specification of physical force that may be perceived by a person's community to lie behind his claims—or *perhaps* to lie behind them. Who could be sure? Force was not something one advertised very widely. Its use, however, especially in out-of-the-way towns and rural areas, was known and had to be reckoned with. What sufficed was to be thought capable of resorting to it if gentler suasions failed. The two forms of inducement, negative and positive, worked as a pair.

My understanding of their use grows out of individual instances. There is almost no generalizing about them by contemporaries. Considering the negative ones to begin with, we have of course a lot of information from the uniquely well-reported province of Egypt, in which weak persons—weak by sex, age, or other handicap—went to the imperial authorities for help against their oppressors.[1] They describe their weakness and others' strength: they have been beaten up, robbed, or frighteningly threatened by persons with a reputation for violence. They fear both for their physical safety and their property. Something similar can be seen in the often-quoted complaint of the farmers on the emperor's own lands in north Africa, at Souk-el-Khmis;[2] yet the types and quantity of sources for such accounts of plain terrorizing, at least as it can be seen through the eyes of the victims, are very unsatisfactory. We know that violence was offered by the strong to the weak. So much we could assume of any period of history, anywhere. Was it, however, a fact of life that a sensible person would consider in his daily doings, or was it rare, more on the order of being struck by lightning?

The search for an answer that can reach beyond scattered anecdotes to something historically significant must turn to slightly higher, or quite exalted, social strata. They will show not the victims but the perpetrators. Suppose the perpetrators were rich enough to own a good

[1] I assemble reff. in *Roman Social Relations* (New Haven 1974) 8–12 and notes.

[2] *CIL* 8.10570 and 14464: tortures, beatings, confinement in fetters by land administrators, even for Roman citizens.

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handful of slaves: then those latter could be used like an army in assaults on your house, your family, or yourself.[3] We have reports from all over—Italy, Greece, and so on—very much as we would expect, in which the only interesting feature, perhaps, is the great difficulty to be sensed in efforts to bring the criminals to book. The reason for that is the absence of a police force. Law there was, but the state agents to enforce it were not easily called on. They amounted, really, to the honor guard of the provincial governors and posts of regular soldiers sometimes found in rural areas.[4] The owner of a runaway slave could request their help in his search. That gave him a kind of vicarious muscle. But a special decree was needed before he could extend his search onto lands owned by a senator.

From a much earlier time we hear of Roman grandees away from Rome insisting on special privileges, using their servants to beat one if one did not comply.[5] One of these reports concerns special access to a town's public baths. Eventually that was secured by law. Anecdote becomes history. Similarly with the deference due to a grandee on the public roads: lowly folk, if mounted, should get off their donkey or mule; pedestrians should get out of the way, otherwise they could be manhandled with impunity by the great man or his retinue.[6] That explains the wrath of an ex-consul of 79 B.C., Servilius, appearing as a witness at a trial and recognizing the accused: it was the very fellow who, while Servilius was once walking along some road, had passed him with-

[3]Cic., II *Verr.* 1.66f., Sicily in the 70s B.C.; *Pro Flacco* 73, an incident at Pergamon in the 60s B.C.(?); M. Dubois, "Lettre de l'empereur Auguste aux Cnidiens," *Bull. corr. hellénique* 7 (1883) 64, at Cnidus under Augustus; Tac., *Ann.* 15.69, slaves used in defense of the house in the 60s A.D.; similarly in *Dig.* 8.5.18, mid-2nd cent.(?); Philostr., *Vit. soph.* 588, a decade or two later in Greece; and so up to the 4th cent. in Egypt, P. Oxy. 1903.

[4]On the grudging use of soldiers in police work, notice Plin., *Ep.* 10.78—though soldiers do a lot of the dirty work against Christians, esp. in the Great Persecution. For use at the call of slave owners, see *Dig.* 11.4.1.2 (Ulpian) and 11.4.2 (Marcus Aurelius, use of *stationarii*).

[5]From Gaius Gracchus' speeches, anecdotes in Aul. Gell. 10.3.5 and 10.3.3—the latter regarding public baths at Teanum Sidicinum; compare the often-quoted Scaptopara inscription, *CIL* 3.12336 (A.D. 238) = *IGR* 1.674 = Syll.[3] 888, later frozen in law: *CT* 7.11.1f. (A.D. 406 and 417).

[6]Dio 45.16.2, Servilius Isauricus, cf. Livy 24.44.10 (213 B.C.), the consul's lictor announces to anyone approaching "that he must get down from his horse"; and Suet., *Nero* 5.1, Domitius Ahenobarbus, consul A.D. 32, who deliberately runs down a boy in a village street.

out dismounting; whereupon the jury "gave the man no further hearing, but unanimously condemned him."

The consul of A.D. 35, "whenever he dined out in Rome, was conveyed by elephant." Fancy transport and a parade of retinue identified the great in their goings-about.[7] They wore items of clothing that indicated their rank, and expressed it also through gait, bearing, expression, and a general air of *noli me tangere*.[8] The Roman as opposed to the Greek or the Carthaginian or any other grandee bore about these various signs commonly and as a part of his way of life. That much we know from foreigners' comments.[9] But the advertising of high status came to prevail in the provinces as well, so far as we can judge from third- and fourth-century customs. Moreover it had its functional side. Beyond feeding the conceit of those with a great appetite for others' fear and deference, it gave fair warning of the power to hurt and thereby deterred trivial or accidental challenge. The coral snake's bright bands conserve its poison. Roman law forbade a blind man to bring suit "because he is unable to see and show reverence toward the magistrate's insignia" (*Digest* 3.1.5).

Without automatic reverence of that sort, people would be forever testing or abusing each other. Society would revert to the jungle. Nobody wanted that. We can hear a tone of disapproval, even of outrage, in many of our accounts already cited (notes 3, 5, 6, and 8), where someone with 'clout' has to use, or at any rate does use, naked physical force. Force stripped everyone else of all their rights. In its place it should rather be law that intervenes to bring disputes to a peaceful end. However, there was nothing to prevent a quite unprincipled man from attempting and sometimes gaining the purchase of a moment's inattention from the law, while he went about his violent business;[10] or he might request the help of the governor's guardsmen to chase his run-

[7]Dio 49.7.6, a man "so extremely proud . . ." On retinues see L. Friedlaender, *Roman Life and Manners*[7], trans. L. A. Magnus, I (London 1908) 207 and 209; MacMullen (note 1 above) 107 and nn. 56f.

[8]Notice the incident Pliny describes (*Ep.* 3.14.7): an equestrian will knock you down for the insult of being touched by your slave. Compare Lucian, *Nigrinus* 21: the rich Roman is seen "addressing others on the street by a spokesman, thinking they will be pleased just by the glance bestowed on them, and the more reverend men expect you to kneel to them"—just as Amm. 28.4.10 indicates later, where the rich "offer their flatterers their knees to kiss or their hands." So Tac., *Hist.* 4.14, speaks of Roman governors' "arrogant retinue," cf. *Ann.* 3.40, "the arrogance of governors."

[9]MacMullen (note 1 above) 195f.

[10]Jos., *B. J.* 2.287f.; Lucian, *Alex.* 57.

away slaves—assuming those really were slaves and not simply alleged to be so.[11] Borrowing official strength in this way, Dio Chrysostom was thought to have conspired with the governor of his province to secure the torture and exile of some of his enemies, others of whom were driven to suicide; and his defense against the charges is not very convincing. At least, there do seem to have been wicked goings-on, however plotted by whatever persons—the proconsul included.[12] Since a governor of Africa, Marius Priscus, the consul of 84, was actually convicted of something similar in a trial before the senate and the emperor, we may trust that he really had done what his prosecutors Pliny and Tacitus alleged. The allegations make the actions, or at least people's suspicions, of Dio sound not incredible. Marius had decreed and carried out eight executions for a payment of 300,000 sesterces, one of the victims being an equestrian. For another 700,000 he had had a second equestrian flogged, then condemned to the mines, and at last strangled. For all this he suffered banishment, poor man, but a banishment comfortable and even luxurious: "the exile begins his drinking around noon and so enjoys the very wrath of the gods."[13]

Such tempered justice reflected the convict's status, needless to say. The higher your rank, the less severity to which you might be subjected. Two broad terms in law, *humiliores* and *honestiores,* eventually divided society formally for appropriate treatment by the judge. Each was in turn subdivided. For the finer distinctions, the judge must size up the persons who came before him: among several accusers of a single man, he should allow the best to proceed with the case, the one possessing the advantage of *dignitas* (*Dig.* 48.2.16). Among many witnesses, he should give most credence to the superior *dignitas* (*Dig.* 22.5.3.1). But he should be careful not to exclude from his court persons who might be represented by an advocate without *dignitas* (*Dig.* 1.16.9.4). Evidently the Latin term in these contexts, bearing the usual meaning of worth or rank, pointed to a world outside the law, the values of which could be excluded only with special effort or not at all—for we have just seen the courts used by the lawless to strike and wound their enemies.

But consider other contexts also. To begin with, Cicero (*Sulla* 46) warns a critic of his administration not to wax too critical in his remarks—otherwise "I may have to take some thought for my *dignitas.*

[11]Note 4 above and *Dig.* 22.3.20; and notice how Lucian can borrow soldiers for his own protection from the governor of Cappadocia, "a friend of mine" (*Alex.* 55).

[12]*Or.* 43.11 and 45.15.

[13]Plin., *Ep.* 2.11.3, 8, and 19; Juv. 1.49f.

For no one ever brought the slightest suspicion on me whom I did not overturn and overwhelm." The sort of *dignitas* he has in mind sounds like rather an active quality, does it not? It is, or can be, demonstrated in annihilating one's enemies. Or again, he is ready to take on the insurrectionaries in the city (*Cat.* 4.20): "If," he declares, "if that gang, roused by someone's rage and wickedness, should some day be able to prevail over your own and the state's *dignitas* so as to bring about my end, I will still not regret my opposition to them," etc. The ultimate power of defense to be ranged even against revolution is that personal and institutional force, *dignitas.* And one more illustration, from Caesar (*B. G.* 8.24): while he despairs of catching his enemy Ambiorix, nevertheless "he considered it vital to his *dignitas* to strip Ambiorix' territory of citizens, buildings, and cattle so completely that" the Gauls themselves would reject him. What Caesar wants to assert through total war is a certain perception of himself, the same perception that Cicero values. He must be seen as capable of ruthless and effective action. So important to him is such an image that he will lead his country into civil war in its defense.[14] And it must of necessity be at least a part of that other meaning in the key word, worth or rank.

While Cicero is shocked by the lengths to which Caesar presses the matter, it remains well within the bounds of ordinary Roman values. Indeed Cicero himself says, later and in another context, that "no war can be rightly undertaken *save for vengeance* or defense."[15] There is the closest of connections between *dignitas* and the power to strike back, just as Cicero had reminded his opponent during his defense of young Sulla; likewise, of young Caelius. In the latter trial (*Cael.* 21) he praises people who "defend their friends and do what men of courage generally do, that is, they feel resentment if they are injured, and let themselves go, if their wrath is roused, and fight when they are challenged." What else were the Gracchi taught by their impeccable parent? "You say," Cornelia tells Gaius, "it is a lovely thing to be avenged upon your ene-

[14]Notice *B. G.* 4.17, 6.8, and 8.6, for similar use of *dignitas;* for Caesar's own *dignitas* as the key to 49 B.C., a subject often discussed, see the recent E. Wistrand, *Caesar and Contemporary Roman Society* (Göteborg 1979), 30f., with a good selection of passages from Caesar, Hirtius, and Cicero, e.g., *Pro Ligario* 6.18, "What other object did your armed forces have except to drive off *contumelia,* insult, from you? And, invincible, what did they accomplish except to defend their rights and your *dignitas?*"

[15]*Rep.* 3.35, on which W. V. Harris says, in his *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome* (Oxford 1979) 165, n. 2, "revenge was morally quite acceptable to most Romans."

mies—and to no one does this seem more important or lovelier than to myself."[16]

We can follow the subject further among the moralists of the empire, both Greek and Roman. It is, they say, the right thing to do, to repay people in kind, both with benefits and injury, and you may count yourself lucky if you are able to do both equally.[17] Never a hint that you should turn the other cheek! At the end we have even a bishop commending a candidate for the episcopal throne as being just "such a person as could injure his enemies and help his friends."[18] Along the way to this late Roman view we encounter explicit characterizations of effective, energetic persons who rigorously balance their accounts with others. True, the empire's political rivalries were not quite so rough-and-tumble as those of the later Republic. The times called more for words than deeds, rivalries were more civil, on the surface. Yet the ethic didn't change.[19] For Pliny (*Ep.* 2.9.1), when he senses that "the respect accorded me, my standing, my *dignitas,* are all in the balance," it is over a matter of career-advancement and weight with the emperor, and not even his own career at stake but a young protegé's. Nevertheless all that was terribly important to him.

Occasionally the bland and decent Pliny shows that he understands the need for strong action. Still, he acts for another. His young friend Atilius has come to him with certain difficulties, including concern about insulting behavior that had been shown to him in public by a

[16]Nepos frag. 58 p. 202 Malcovati. It is irrelevant for my argument whether the speech represents common values of Gaius' day or Cicero's. Cornelia, however, does go on to urge Gaius against harming the state. In Gaius' father, notice the same struggle between revenge and care for the state, in Livy 38.53.6 (*res publica* weighed against "private feuds"—again, a view of the second century? of Livy's own?).

[17]Epict., *Diss.* 2.14.18, "you have come to me like a man who stood in need of nothing . . . for when a man has done you either good or harm you know how to pay him back in kind"; Sen., *Ep.* 81.7, "surely it belongs to justice to pay back everyone in kind, with thanks for a *beneficium* and retaliation for injury, or at least ill-will;" and Plut., *Moral.* 563D-E, where someone is held up as a model, "no one more just in business . . . , no one more pious toward god, no one more baneful to enemies or stauncher to friends" (and the same ethic is preached by Plato, *Meno* 71e).

[18]Synes., *Ep.* 67 (*PG* 66.1413C).

[19]Tac., *Ann.* 13.21, Agrippina celebrates a personal victory with revenge and rewards; Plin., *Ep.* 1.5.15 (Regulus described) and 5.13.2, a senator may be expected to litigate most relentlessly where his "influence, *gratia,* reputation, and *dignitas*" are all at stake; and Dio 77.9.3 (A.D. 205) on a grandee "able to hold all the world in contempt" because he can "bestow favors on his friends and vengeance on his enemies" (similarly, the emperor Severus, 77.16.1).

tribune (*Ep.* 6.8.3). Should he suffer this tamely? "I replied, 'Over my dead body.'" And, continues Pliny to his correspondent, turning to Atilius' other concerns, "Why mention this exchange? To let you know that Atilius cannot be wronged so long as I am around . . . Indeed I would count any loss or insult to him as my own, or not merely that, but something more serious still. But why go on with denunciations and, almost, threats?" (6.8.9). The point is made, he resumes his usual blander tone.

If you simply accepted insulting behavior, you lost face. That was serious. You became a Nothing—as even an emperor might. Dio Cassius describes a day at the races which he probably witnessed himself in A.D. 217. Both Macrinus and his son were present. The latter's birthday was the special occasion. The populace began massed shouts that they needed a leader and Jupiter it should be; whereupon the senators and equestrians from their reserved sections in the Circus took up loyal counter-shouts, praising emperor and prince together and inviting the crowds to join in. But the latter resumed the chant, "*He* (Jupiter) is the Romans' Augustus. If we have him, we have it all." Being vastly louder, they prevailed. "Henceforth they regarded both Macrinus and Diadumenianus as absolutely non-existent and already trampled upon them as if they were dead; and this was one important reason why the soldiers despised him and paid no heed to what he did to win their favor."[20]

We have met the word *contumelia* before (note 14), where it is opposed to *dignitas*. Caesar, in mention of whom it is referred to by Cicero, speaks of it himself (*B. G.* 7.10). He reasons that he must vigorously confront threats to an ally. Otherwise it might seem "that there was no help to be sought for his friends from him;" and, "where such *contumelia* was suffered, all his adherents would be lost to him." The line of reasoning tells us a great deal about power in his world. Dio Cassius, quoted just above, describes Rome three generations later. Nothing has changed. Power depends in part on the appearance of it, on perceptions, on symbols and gestures; and particularly persons who are ambitious and attempting to broaden the base of their adherents insist on the conventional signs of allegiance from others "as necessary to make their *dignitas* complete; and if they are not accorded them, they resent it as if they had been ill spoken of, and are angry at the *contumelia*. Thus people are more careful toward such men than to the emperors themselves, you might say. To the latter it is a virtue to forgive an offence, while, in the former, that would be taken as an indication of

[20]Dio 79.20.1-3 (Loeb trans.).

weakness; and attacks and vengeance are thought to provide the validation of their great power."[21]

A few generations later still, Pliny agrees: "Regulus is *formidable:* for he has money, faction, and wide backing, and is still more widely feared; and that affords more strength than being liked" (*Ep.* 1.5.15). Recognition of the rules of life in the Roman world, as we see, extends from Republic to empire. For that matter, it extends throughout society, down to the master and his slave or a man of modest standing among his neighbors.[22] You must insist on respect—else you will be trampled on and abused. Others must see you insisting, and be warned. If you want a great deal of respect, your warnings must be dire, perhaps followed up by dire action. Which must be talked about, to yield best results.

But negative inducements to obedience went in pair with the positive. Through various quoted passages, that fact has already emerged quite plainly: in the pairing of being feared and liked, doing "good or harm," "revenge or rewards," and so forth. For ourselves who live neither in Renaissance Italy nor Mafiosa Sicily, it seems more natural to understand Roman patterns of motivation through advantages or privileges sought rather than through deterrents. And indeed the former, *beneficia,* were in constant circulation, the currency by which the person who had much to give gained adherents and their services in turn.

No one, of course, had more to give than the emperor. His *beneficia* are referred to in many, many contexts. They help to define the term itself, which means not simply nice things done for someone or gifts given but grants out of the giver's position of authority.[23] The em-

[21]Dio 58.5.3f. I substitute *dignitas* and *contumelia* for ἀξίωμα and ὑβριξόμενοι to bring out the thought (he is discussing Sejanus and his like).

[22]Liban., *Or.* 47.22, if a slave seeks help from an outside party, "the master is scorned through the other person's rendering aid"; and *Passio S. Perpetuae* 5.2, a father disobeyed by a child is consigned "to scorn among men."

[23]A sampling of texts: *CIL* 12.594; 3.781; and 8.26528b, Antoninus Pius' *beneficia* to Arles, Tyre, and Dougga, in the form of confirming certain monetary advantages to these cities; his gift of procuratorships as *beneficia* at Fronto's request, *Ad Pium* 9 p. 170 Naber; *CIL* 6.2131, promotion to equestrian status; unspecified "great *beneficia* through the emperor's indulgence," 6.1074; 2.4249, "enrolled in the colonia Caesaraugusta by *beneficium* of Hadrian"; special advancement by *beneficia* of the emperor, "earlier through the years than is usually allowed," 12.3164; F. Miltner, *Jahresheft der oesterreichischen Akad. der Wissenschaften* 45 (1960), Beiblatt p. 42, a *beneficium* of the emperor permits reallocation of municipal income; AETERNVM BENEFICIVM LAOD [ICENIS] DATVM on a coin of 213 or 216 commemorating the emperor's gift of

peror's authority, however, was infinite; and in formal terms later, in panegyrical terms earlier, it was acknowledged as such. "Whatever he decides is as good as law." "The emperor is owner of everything."[24] Therefore (it is argued), his actions toward others could not but differ radically from those of even the greatest of his subjects: toward him, the recipient could never feel an obligation, no more than to "The Government" in the abstract—no more than to the weather. Moreover, the favor he showed could not be purely arbitrary. Its special nature can be read in his treatment of promotions within his service. Did they proceed according to rules, principally those of seniority? Or were they rather earned by merit and suitability? In either case he was not free to enjoy his own sweet will. So it is argued.[25]

But discrepant bits of evidence need to be considered from discrepant points of view, near to the throne or remote, and of different periods. By Fronto's time, in his letter to Marcus Aurelius (5.37), you could recommend someone for promotion "in due form, in due turn, and proper time," with a sense of decades of precedents. The patterns of movement into the heights of governmental power, though perhaps they lacked strict rules, had become familiar. The emperor as well as petitioners knew them, and one could see, if not their lines, at least their shadow in records of many an individual career. Dio Cassius (79.22.2, A.D. 217) indicates their operation in describing a person "due to be made aedile." That is, the position was owed him, but he was irregularly balked. It would have been insulting, however, to tell the emperor (what certainly was not true) that he absolutely had to do or decree anything at all. Instead, if only out of tact, recipients tended to emphasize the arbitrary element and offer their assurances of gratitude.

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grain, in R. Ziegler, *Chiron* 8 (1978) 508; a procuratorship or partial citizenship "by *beneficium* of the emperor," *Dig.* 4.4.11.2 (Ulpian); *FIRA*^{2} 2.266 (Ulpian); *FIRA*^{2} 1.445 (A.D. 205); Plin., *Ep.* 10.11, citizenship by "your *beneficium*" (Trajan's); 10.94f., special exemption granted by the same emperor; Sen., *Benef.* 3.9.2, citizenship or equestrian status as an imperial *beneficium*.

[24]*Dig.* 1.4.1, cf. 1.3.31; Sen., *Benef.* 7.5.3, *Caesar omnia habet,* cf. Ovid, *Fasti* 2.138, "whatever exists beneath Jupiter on high, Caesar possesses," and *Tristia* 4.15, "for the emperor *is* the state."

[25]For access to discussion of these matters, see R. P. Saller, *Jnl. Rom. Studies* 70 (1980) 44, citing H.-G. Pflaum, F. Millar, and P. A. Brunt; idem, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Oxford 1982) 24f., e.g., 33 (adding E. J. Champlin and P. Veyne to the debate); most recently, W. Eck, in *Korruption im Altertum,* ed. W. Schuller (Munich 1982) 142-47. Among these points of view, Eck's and Millar's, though briefly expounded, seem to me closest to the truth, Saller's and Veyne's least persuasive.

Moreover, the emperor always needed more support, however powerful he might seem to be. He must buy it, then. It was proof of a specially lofty benevolence in Nerva, as Pliny recalls (*Paneg.* 39.3), to have expressed this quality through group-legislation rather than through favorable responses to individual requests; for thus "he deprived himself of so many opportunities for *beneficia,* such numerous occasions for laying persons under obligation and getting them into his account books." The latter, in physical form, made up a "Book of Grants," a *liber beneficiorum,* and a small secretariate under a Keeper.[26] Their administration was not, perhaps, very different from that under any great dynast of the Republic, though obviously on a grander scale. Caesar had had a special servant to keep his *beneficia*-books, so Cicero mentions (*Ad fam.* 13.36): the servant, it was discovered, was inventing and selling grants of citizenship. In the empire, governors of a province or legates of a legion kept their books too, like mini-emperors, and counted the promotions at their disposal (apparently there might be a fixed number at the outset of their own terms of appointment).[27] Rights to appointments were treated like bearer-bonds: so many issued to you when you took over your post, the names of the beneficiaries to be filled in ad lib. You first satisfied the most insistent claims of your own dependents and then gratified your peers by admitting some of theirs, without necessarily knowing the merits or even the names of the recipients; and a recipient might make over the *beneficium* to someone else without asking your permission, thereby creating a welcome obligation to himself. For that, he would thank you.[28] It was all very well for a philosopher to protest that "no one enters his *beneficia* in an account book nor, like some greedy bill-collector, calls them in on the day and hour due."[29] High-minded nonsense! Even the same philos-

[26]Hyginus, *De limit. const.* p. 203 ed. Blume-Lachmann-Rudorff, cf. p. 295; *CIL* 6.33770 and reff. there.

[27]A *beneficiorum numerus,* Tac., *Hist.* 4.48.5, cause of wrangling between two authorities in the same province. For the normal context of *beneficia,* in career-advancement, see e.g., *CIL* 6.2131 = *ILS* 4929, a Vestal confers *beneficia* and her *suffragium* on a dependent.

[28]Details quite naked in Plin., *Ep.* 2.13.2 ("You command a very large force, giving you an ample store of *beneficia,*" etc.); 7.22.1, Pliny requests a military tribunate; another he has in his gift and (3.8.4) the recipient treats it as transferable to a kinsman (Pliny had gotten it in the first place from his friend, who knows nothing of what is happening); further, 2.9.3 and 4.4.1–3.

[29]Sen., *Benef.* 1.2.3, adding "it is a disgusting sort of usury to count a *beneficium* as money out at interest" (suggesting that people usually did); cf. 1.1.9, "we give not lend

opher also says, "When I have received a *beneficium* and not returned it, I must keep it safe; for so long as it is in my hand it should be secure. Then it must be returned to the man who asks it back."[30] In actual practice, anyone in a position to help others to get what they wanted could do so by a *beneficium* in the expectation of being able to ask for some service, some *officium,* in return. He banked his claim, his *gratia,* wherever he could. That *gratia* among persons indebted to him constituted their potential obedience, and their obedience was his power.

For the system to work required that claims be recognized without the need of physical force. Society conspired to that end in the usual manner, by elevating such recognition to the level of morals. "You have," declares Publilius Syrus (*Sent.* 149 Duff), "said everything possible against a man when you call him an ingrate." Contrariwise, you have praised him most highly when you speak of his loyalty, his *fides:* in illustration, Cicero, again and again in his letters of referral speaking of the recommended person's capacity of gratitude. Or of the person's love toward himself—meaning, demonstrated gratitude. Again in Fronto's letters, or in Pliny's, these same points are stressed.[31] In Latin inscriptions we have a great many advertisements of the debt owed by whatever person commissioned the text, to his benefactors. He acknowledges the condescension, honor, bountiful affection, benevolence, and esteem they have shown him.[32] More simply, he calls them his incomparable, his ever-present, patrons. He sings their praises for their active concern

beneficia" and (*Ep.* 81.9) "we do not talk about 'paying' a *beneficium;* no word suits us that belongs to indebtedness."

[30]*Benef.* 7.19.3. The unreality in Seneca's other statements is seen by Wistrand (note 14 above) 11f., who adduces contrary Latin usages and citations from Cicero and Publilius Syrus, *Sent.* 61 Duff, "You sell your freedom when you accept a *beneficium*" (date in the 40s/30s B.C.). Notice also Marcus Aurelius, *Medit.* 5.6.1, that some people in bestowing a χάρις create a debtor, as they see it.

[31]Cic., *Ad fam.* 9.24.1, "my well-being is awfully important to him," so I will readily help him; 3.1.3, 5.11.1, 13.4.1, 13.21.2, and Book XIII passim, stressing a person's capacity for gratitude; 13.15.1, 13.21.1, 13.25.1, and 13.38.1, the recommended person is very fond of Cicero; Fronto, *Ep. ad Ant. Pium* 8 (Loeb ed. 1) 236, the choice of friends to help in governing a province is dictated first by *fides,* then by *diligentia* and *integritas;* and the remark in Sen., *Benef.* 7.19.2, "to return a *beneficium* is a matter of *fides.*" Like Cicero, Pliny emphasizes to his friends that a recommended person loves him, *Ep.* 2.9.5, 3.2.4, 6.6.5, 6.23.3, 10.26.1, and esp. 2.13.9, "he recognizes those *beneficia* of mine so gratefully that, in accepting the earlier ones, he earns subsequent ones." Compare 7.22.2, "the loyalest of friends" is recommended.

[32]E.g., *Année épigraphique* 1917-1918; 73; *ILS* 8977; *CIL* 6.1531 and 1624, 3829, 31776; 8.2393 and 12442; 10.4861; and 11.2106.

on his behalf ("What an edifice of good fame did he not erect about me, among his friends and before the public, even in the view of the emperor!" exclaims Pliny about one of his patrons, *Ep.* 4.17.7). His show of thanks not only makes known their ability to gain the good things in life for their loyal dependents but demonstrates that loyalty itself, on which depend further grants. And the ethical norms that tie the two parties together and secure the working relation between *gratia* and *fides,* leverage and gratitude, and between *beneficia* and *officia*—those norms may be sensed very clearly in, for example, some of the more sententious passages of Pliny's letters.[33]

Evidence for the relationship that I describe is most often found among the upper classes in Italy, predictably; for they were Roman and, in its formalities, so was the relationship. Also, of course, they had power and could therefore bestow as well as receive *beneficia.* But the terminology could be applied, perhaps a little peculiarly, to benefactors lower down in the social scale.[34] It became familiar in provinces settled and shaped by the Romans—that is, the west (seen in inscriptions, e.g., note 23); and the Greek east learned of it too. To go no further back than Pompey, we have reference to a special grant regarding citizenship which he had accorded to the natives of Pontus province, whether made known to them first in Greek or Latin we cannot say. It appears as a *beneficium* when it is later referred to; in Greek it would be *charis.*[35] The term *beneficium* appears translated as a loan word into Greek and

[33]*Ep.* 7.31.7 (trans. B. Radice): "For, according to the code of friendship, the one who takes the initiative puts the other in his debt and owes no more until he is repaid." Also 1.19, "The length of our friendship warrants that you will be ever mindful of this gift; I will even withhold the admonition (though I should offer it, if I did not know you would observe it unasked), to treat that position, given by me, with all possible discretion; for a rank is the more carefully to be maintained, in which there is a friend's *beneficium* also to be protected."

[34]B. Cavagnola, *Atti, Centro studi e documentazione sull'Italia romana* 6 (1974-1975) 83: a public slave, now freed, thanked "for his many *beneficia* and easy access granted by the whole household."

[35]*Dig.* 50.1.1.2; for the Greek word chosen as a translation, see Miltner (note 23 above) loc. cit. χάριτες = *beneficia* in the bilingual inscription; Marcus Aurelius (note 30 above); *Acts* 25.3, an irregular request made of a governor by civic leaders, αἰτούμενοι χάριν κατ'αὐτοῦ; *IGR* 4.1402 (A.D. 198/209), tax exemption granted by the emperor is a χάρις; and Ael. Arist., *Or.* 32(12).15, saying that rulers once openly bestowed χάριτες instead of ordinary gifts very much as in imperial affairs nowadays. Notice D. Sperber, *A Dictionary of Greek and Latin Legal Terms in Rabbinic Literature* (Jerusalem 1984) 72, and *Acts of Phileas* (P. Bodmer 20) XI lines 175f., βενεδίκιον τῷ ἀδελρῳ σον χαρίξομαι.

Hebrew around the turn of the third and fourth centuries. The fact suggests that it designated something that had been at some point seen as characteristically Roman, an odd foreign custom. Its oddity can have lain only in the obligation that accompanied the grant; for obviously all peoples have the custom of doing casual, unreciprocated favors. What distinguished the practice as Pompey or Pliny taught it was the particular insistence implied in the word *fides*.

It is ethical norms that we want for the writing of history, not anecdotes. But anecdotes often contain a hint of the sense of right and wrong in surrounding society, from which we can draw general distinctions between our own world and the past. For one thing, the readiness to avenge insult and do some injury to the person responsible would earn approval among the likes of Cicero or Pliny. Submit to a slight? No, only "over my dead body!" *Dignitas* might sound the same threatening note to be heard in the word "respect," on which some modern mobster-chief insists. But, in the second place, Cicero and Pliny would also give approval to the exact recording of one's non-monetary debts to others. That was taken for granted in a respectable person. It could be counted on. Occasionally it is made explicit as the reason for performing some action, although, among the usual mixture of motives, we would not expect to be told very often that a *beneficium* was intended solely or chiefly as a sort of investment in someone else's future compliance or service.[36] Between these two forms of inducement, however, it is plain that the persons of local or empire-wide authority, equally, built up their power and controlled the world around them.

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[36]Plin., *Ep.* 6.18.1, "I would like to place under obligation, *obstringere*, a most distinguished chartered colony, through acting as its lawyer, and yourself, through a favor most acceptable to you"; Publilius Syrus, *Sent.* 59 Duff, "You have no right to ask if you don't know how to bestow a *beneficium*"; and Plut., *Moral.* 814C, "the Romans themselves are extremely zealous for their friends in matters of political partisanship, and it is a noble thing to gain a harvest of friendship among the rulers," i.e., the Roman governors set over Plutarch's countrymen, "on behalf of the general happiness."