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Human nature as a factor of Roman imperial history in the work of Cassius Dio

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Abstract. According to modern scholarship, including the studies published in the last decade, the concept of a universal and unchanging human nature, originating with Thucydides, is employed by Cassius Dio mainly to explain the events of republican history, whereas the narrative of imperial Rome has a different conceptual basis. The aim of this study is to determine to what extent Dio's representation of human nature as a factor in history depends on the subject of the narrative, i.e., on the era and the political system. An analysis of a number of passages has shown that, when writing the history of imperial Rome, Dio does not entirely abandon the Thucydidean concept. He interprets certain events and phenomena of the Principate period in light of the regularities of human behavior. It has been pointed out that such regularities include for Dio not only the recurrence of *stasis* and civil discord and the specific behavior of politicians during such periods, but also the characteristic features of the political situation in Rome during relatively peaceful times: conspiracies, intrigues among senators vying for privileges obtained from emperors. At the same time, the conception of human nature as an anthropological constant coexists with the Stoic idea of the possibility of healing affections of souls, which is a sign of the evident eclecticism in the conceptual framework of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*.

Keywords: Roman Emperors, the Roman History, Graeco-Roman historiography, historical causation, Thucydides

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Человеческая природа как фактор истории императорского Рима в труде Кассия Диона

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Аннотация. Согласно современным исследованиям, в т.ч. опубликованным в последнее десятилетие, концепция универсальной и неизменной человеческой природы, восходящая к Фукидиду, применяется Кассием Дионом главным образом для объяснения событий республиканской истории, а повествование об императорском Риме имеет иную концептуальную основу. Цель исследования — выяснить, в какой степени репрезентация Дионом роли человеческой природы как фактора истории зависит от предмета повествования, т.е. эпохи и политической системы. Анализ ряда пассажей показал, что при написании истории императорского Рима Дион полностью не отказывается от фукидидовской концепции. Он интерпретирует отдельные события и явления периода принципата в свете закономерностей человеческого поведения. Установлено, что к таким закономерностям Дион относит не только повторение смут и междоусобиц и специфику поведения политиков в такие периоды, но также характерные черты политической обстановки в Риме в сравнительно мирные времена: заговоры, интриги среди сенаторов, борющихся за привилегии, получаемые от императоров. Вместе с тем, представление о человеческой природе как об антропологической константе соседствует со стоической идеей возможности исцеления душевных недугов, что является признаком очевидной эклектичности концептуального оформления «Римской истории» Кассия Диона.

Ключевые слова: Римские императоры, Римская история, греко-римская историография, историческая причинность, Фукидид

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Introduction

One of the trends in the current studies of Cassius Dio is the increasing attention to the conceptual framework of his *History* and his approach to causation. Did Dio see any regularities lurking behind the motives of politicians? What was his understanding of the driving forces of history? To what extent did he follow the traditional moralistic schemata characteristic of the Roman historians? All these questions have been intensively studied in the past decade.

As has emerged from current scholarship, Cassius Dio believed that human action constantly repeats itself, with men being predictable in their behavior [1. P. 215–217; 2. P. 11–15, 38–39; 3. P. 223]. The author’s grim vision of the core qualities of human nature¹ — vigor, aggression, selfishness and lust for power — is modeled mostly on Thucydides², though, according to Adler, Dio appears to be more pessimistic about human nature than Thucydides himself [12. P. 487]. According to a number of scholars, the author of the *Roman History* fully comprehended and accepted the Thucydidean idea of human nature as an important driving force of history [4. P. 52; 13. S. 133, 381–383; 14. P. 461–467; 15. P. 2497–2523]³. For example, it is Dio’s commitment to the “anthropological constant” which shaped his depiction of the Roman conquests, including Dio’s version of the origins of the First Punic War (11. F43.1–3; cf. Thuc 1.23.5–6) [13. S. 384; 18. P. 84–85].

A number of studies have also shown the important place that Dio’s conception of human nature occupies within the author’s interpretative framework for the rise and fall of Rome’s *dēmokratia*. As Rees has pointed out, Dio, unlike Thucydides or Aristotle, does not view equality as a source of stability. Instead, Dio points to human nature itself as the reason why equality inevitably leads to civil discord: the innate quality of humans is to dominate, rather than to share power (frg. 5.12; 7.3) [2. P. 14]. This observation by Rees has become seminal for further studies devoted to Dio’s treatment of “envy” (φθόνος) as destructive for Roman public institutions and leading to the decay of the Republic [20; 21].

Developing Rees’ observations, Burden-Strevens focuses on Dio’s commitment to the idea of the intensification of human vices under particular circumstances and comes to conclusion that Dio viewed competition, envy and internecine conflicts as a natural consequence of republican government, given that equality in Dio’s view was incompatible with one’s drive to surpass and dominate others [22. P. 194]. Provocatively, Burden-Strevens claims that envy (φθόνος), ambition (φιλοτιμία), cupidity (ἐπιθυμία) and desire for gain or advancement (πλεονεξία) “disappear almost entirely from the *Roman History* with the advent of Augustus’ monarchy,” while in the speeches from the Augustan era Dio “reflects a final time upon those vices, and their replacement by a more virtuous political culture shorn of the worst excesses of competition” [22. P. 195]. Consequently, Burden-Strevens, if compared with Adler [12. P. 513–514], allows Dio to be more

¹ The concept of “human nature” is mentioned in Dio’s work more than 20 times. The historian uses diverse terminology to refer to it: τὸ ἔμφυτον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις (2.7.3), ἡ ἀνθρωπεΐα/ἀνθρωπίνη φύσις (4.17.7; 8.36.1), τὸ ἀνθρώπινον (5.20.4), τὸ ἀνθρώπειον (6.24.1). See [1. P. 215–216; 4. P. 52].

² Dio’s linguistic borrowings from Thucydides were studied in detail by Litsch [5]. See also [1. P. 215–217; 6; 7; 8. S. 282–284; 9. P. 88; 10. P. 18–19; 11. P. 2525].

³ For the peculiarities of Dio’s treatment of human nature as a factor in history, see [2. P. 6; 16. P. 11; 17. P. 166; 18. P. 66–85]. Alternatively, Millar viewed Dio’s reflections on human nature as no more than rhetorical platitudes [19. P. 16].

optimistic about the political life of imperial Rome or, at least, emphasizes some nuances within Dio's generally gloomy political universe.

Burden-Strevens is, on terminological grounds, correct. "Ambition" (φιλοτιμία), for instance, can be detected only a few times in the imperial narrative, as a personal quality of Domitian and Hadrian (65.3.4; 69.3.2–3). More importantly, the vast majority of references to human nature are found in the books on the regal and republican periods [1. P. 215–216]. In the the imperial section, Dio employs the terminology of human nature (ἄνθρωπινή φύσις / τὸ ἀνθρώπειον) not only to define the psychological and ethical properties of historical personalities (as in 56.45.1; 77 [76].5.1; 79 [78].15.3), but also to refer to natural human capabilities (e.g., "human physical dimensions" in 66.22.2 or "the human mind" in 68.13.5). In this, his technique resembles that of Herodotus. Consequently, as has been noted by Pelling, Dio's conceptual point and techniques depend on history itself: abstract generalizations on the modes of human behavior did not work well for narrating the Principate; instead, Dio recognizes and highlights the impact of the emperor's personality on historical processes [23. P. 122]. Yet all these observations prompt a crucial question: to what extent does Dio's application of human nature as an explanatory model depend on the era he depicts?

Of course, it can be a narrative strategy deliberately chosen by the author in order to explain the collapse of Rome's *dēmokratia* and the inevitability of monarchy. However, it should be noted that, first, Dio's exploration of human nature begins with the feuds among *basileis* represented in early books, i.e. events that happened long before the inception of the Republic, and, second, the principate of Augustus, as Lange has shown, could hardly be regarded by Dio as the end of history, because "Augustus and monarchy did not end *stasis* and civil war" [24. P. 466]. Lange further demonstrates that Dio, emulating Thucydides' idea of the cyclical recurrence of *stasis*, highlights similarities in the dynamics and trends of civil wars at different stages of Roman history [24. P. 470–471; 25. P. 4; 26. P. 346]⁴.

Lange's articles on Dio as a historian of wars and civil wars provide an interpretative framework for comprehending the Roman History in its entirety. Nevertheless, if we recognize that Dio does not completely abandon his use of φύσις as an explanatory model for historical events in the imperial section of his work, the question remains of whether the application of this model is confined to periods of *stasis* — that is, to times when imperial power was dysfunctional — or whether it is also detectable in Dio's depiction of the events that happened between civil wars, i.e., the bulk of the imperial narrative. If, on the other hand, Dio regarded manifestations of human nature as dependent on the political system, can one therefore conclude that he shared Plato's theory

⁴For Lange's considerations on Dio's conception of human nature, see also [26; 27. P. 165–166; 28. P. 236–237].

that different forms of government shape various types of human character, such as the “oligarchical type” (Plat. Rep. 8.553a) or the “democratic man” (Plat. Rep. 8.558a)? To answer these questions, this article aims to observe Dio’s mentions of “human nature” in different parts of his work, as well as the author’s generalizations on the regularities of human behavior and to examine Dio’s commitment to representing the same basic set of universal human qualities as a factor of history.

“Always Striving for More”

One of the running themes in Dio is the demonstration of the unpredictability and capriciousness of good fortune [22. P. 137–138]⁵. In a similar way, he comments on the ends of several figures: Sejanus (58.11.1), Otho (64 [65].1.1–2), Vitellius (64 [65].20.2), Plautianus (77 [76].4.5), and Julia Domna (79 [78].24.1). These authorial interventions highlight Dio’s focus on this topic, as is also evident from a number of his extended explanations of how great success may lead to great disaster. A case in point is M. Manlius Capitolinus, the famous savior of the Capitol, who was accused of pursuing sole rulership, sentenced to death, and thrown from the Tarpeian Rock. Dio employs this case to make a moralizing statement: “So true it is that nothing in human affairs, as a rule, remains fixed; and success, in particular, leads many people on into catastrophes equally great. It raises their hopes for continued good fortune, *makes them always strive for more* (τοῦ τε πλείονος ἀεὶ ποιοῦσιν ἐπορέγεσθαι), and, when they fail, hurls them into the very opposite extreme”⁶ (7.F26.3).

The passage obviously echoes Thucydides’ Mytilenean Debate (Thuc. 3.39.4, 45.4) [22. P. 464], though an analogy can be found in Stoics as well (Sen. Clem. 1.1.7). Indeed, the more power officials have, the more they desire. For example, Dio explains that the extension of the office of dictator was limited to no more than six months because of the threat that the office holders, “lingering on in the midst of so great power and unhampered authority should become haughty and be carried away by a passion for sole leadership” and he presents Julius Caesar as an example (Zonar. 7.13)⁷. This logic is the same as in the case of Capitolinus: good fortune makes people “always strive for more”⁸. Dio’s Septimius Severus is represented as someone who knows this rule. After the fall of his favourite Plautianus, whose power is characterized by Dio as “equalling

⁵ For Dio presenting good fortune as capricious and amoral, see [12. P. 500–501].

⁶ Here and below, transl. by Cary, emphasis mine.

⁷ Similarly, Catulus refers to Marius and Sulla in order to prove that “it is not proper to entrust to any one man so many positions of command one after another,” with the answer being human nature again (36.31.3).

⁸ For more cases of this kind as exemplifying Dio’s view of human nature, see [2. P. 18–21; 18; 22. P. 127–130; 24. P. 464].

even that of the emperors themselves” (76 [75].14.6), Septimius Severus called a meeting of the senate, where he “uttered no accusation against Plautianus, but merely deplored *the weakness of human nature, which cannot endure excessive honors* (τὴν τε φύσιν τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ὥς μὴ δυναμένην τιμὰς ὑπερόγκους στέγειν)...” (77 [76].5.1). As Plautianus’ case clearly shows, Dio could depict his contemporaries coveting power no less than the Romans of the past, even though they had fewer opportunities for political competition than their ancestors under the Republic. Now, it was a position within the inner circle of imperial confidants and assistants that had become the object of envy and slander and was found by Dio even more advantageous than the supreme power, because, as the author explains in his usual cynical manner, it gave its beholders authority and the opportunity to misuse it without bearing any responsibility for their actions (66.18.1–2).

“A Warlike Nature Usually Ends up by Being Harsh”

“A warlike nature usually ends up by being harsh and a peaceful one cowardly (τὸ μὲν εὐπόλεμον ἄγροικον τὸ δὲ εἰρηναῖον δειλὸν ὥς τὸ πολὺ ἐκβαῖνον)” (75 [74].5.6). Dio’s usage of the neuter gender leaves room for interpretation and translation of this phrase. On the one hand, one can associate εὐπόλεμον and εἰρηναῖον with someone’s experience rather than with features of character: people become harsh because of war, whereas peace makes them fearful. Dio refers to this norm to emphasize the excellence of Pertinax, who showed himself equally adapted to various circumstances (75 [74].5.6). On the other hand, Dio’s formulation implies that it is normal for people to have different modes of behavior in times of war and peace.

Indeed, according to Dio, wars and especially civil wars change people and their morals. As Lange has convincingly shown, one of the trends is that civil war participants change sides, flocking to their former adversaries in order to secure a place on the winning side. In this respect, Dio provides similar explanations for the events of the triumvirs’ war against Sextus Pompeius (48.29.3) and the civil war between Otho and Vitellius (65 [64].1.1) [24. P. 470–471; 25. P. 4; 26. P. 346]. Thus, in the account of the reconciliation of Octavian and Antony at Brundisium in late 40 BCE (48.29), Dio explains Antony’s participation in the war against Sextus — despite his earlier oaths to side with Sextus and fight against Octavian — as well as Octavian’s efforts to attract Antony’s supporters to his side, in the following way: “So great, indeed, is the perversity that reigns *in factional strife and war* (τῶν στάσεων καὶ τῶν πολέμων); for men in power take no account of justice, but determine on friend and foe according as their own interests and advantage at the time dictate...”. This observation is evidently modeled on Thucydides’ considerations on the war as the “violent teacher”, with conventional morals becoming no longer valid when violence prevails (Thuc. 3.82.2–7; especially 3.82.7) [26. P. 339–341].

In Fragment 36, related to the Second Samnite war, Dio provides some further generalizations on “the justice of the battle-field”. It does not necessarily fit “the ordinary definition of the word”; “war as a sovereign” frequently causes “something that is the reverse of justice to go under that name” (8.F36.21)⁹. Such a consideration goes well with the following idea from the same fragment: “it is requisite and blameless for all men to plan for their own safety, and if they get into any danger, to do anything whatsoever in order to be saved” (8.F36.17). This pronouncement, reminiscent of the Stoic idea that the desire for self-preservation is intrinsic to human nature and fundamental to all values [29. P. 183], may serve as another manifestation of Dio’s stance: conventional morals are inadequate for judging those at war. Thus, the idea of a specific “justice” peculiar to war or civil war appears to be an important premise for Dio’s subsequent justification of Octavian’s civil war activities (52.18.1; 55.21.4). Similar logic is detectable in Dio’s remark on Macrinus’ putting to death Maternianus and Valerius Datus, the prefect of Egypt under Caracalla: that action “was not justifiable, to be sure, — for what wrong had they done in being attentive to their emperor? — yet it was not inconsistent with human nature (οὐ μέντοι καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου τρόπου), since he had been in great peril” (79 [78].15.3). In general, Dio demonstrates quite a reserved attitude to Macrinus (79 [78].11–15); obviously it was not the author’s plan to embellish the actions of an emperor whose low birth he considered a disgrace (79 [78].14.1–15.4). This makes his comment all the more valuable. It reveals the historian’s genuine interest in showing how harsh political decisions are made in times of unrest. Once again, he points to human nature.

“The insincerity of the majority of people”

In 26 BCE, the case of Cornelius Gallus was heard in the Roman senate (53.23.5–24.1). The senator was accused of gossiping about Augustus, setting up images of himself in Egypt, and inscribing a list of his achievements on the pyramids. Having been sentenced to exile and deprived of his estate, he could not accept his fate and committed suicide. His accuser turned out to be Valerius Largus, “his comrade and intimate” (53.23.6). Dio regards this case as a manifestation of the following regular pattern in human behavior (53.24.1): “*the insincerity of the majority of people* (τὸ δὲ δὴ τῶν πολλῶν κίβδηλον) was again proved by his case, in that they now treated the man whom formerly they had been wont to flatter...”.

For Dio, this is another instance of traditional senatorial opportunism and, in a broader sense, of people’s eagerness to abandon one politician for another who appears more influential and therefore able to promise greater gains. The entire situation — especially Dio’s remark that Cornelius Gallus “was encouraged

⁹ For parallels between Dio’s and Thucydides’ considerations on words changing their meaning in times of civil strife, see [22. P. 16].

to insolence by the honor shown him” (53.23.5) — resembles Dio’s depiction of senatorial duplicity toward Julius Caesar (44.3.1–2). It was the senators themselves who encouraged the dictator and “puffed him up” (ἐξάραντές τε αὐτόν), leaving Caesar no choice but to accept the honors that he believed were bestowed with sincerity (44.3.3). Another similar example is Dio’s detailed account of the fall of Sejanus (58.4–10). Tiberius himself magnified his praetorian prefect and led the senators to regard Sejanus as even more important than the emperor. Yet at some point, Tiberius became suspicious of Sejanus and began preparing to destroy him (58.4.1). Dio explores in detail the dynamics of how people’s attitudes toward Sejanus shifted depending on the signs Tiberius gave them, whether deliberately or not (58.8–9). The situation remained uncertain until the very last moment, when Tiberius’ letter was read before the senators on 18 October 31 CE. It was a long message, with the denunciation of Sejanus placed at its close. Thus, Dio shows how the senators’ reactions changed as they listened to the address. At first, they continued lauding and cheering Sejanus, anticipating the honors with which he might be loaded. When, however, they heard something contrary to their expectations, they were greatly confused. Finally, their behavior began to change dramatically (58.10.4). In the end, everyone was ready to blame and threaten him (58.10.7). According to Champlin, such a colorful and detailed description of the senatorial meeting “surely transmits an eyewitness account” [30. P. 364]. Be that as it may, Dio himself, as an eyewitness of Commodus’ tensions with the senators and Septimius Severus’ purges of the Senate, left a number of vivid descriptions of the scenes in the Senate-house, reproducing the grim atmosphere of political repressions¹⁰. Given this fact and Dio’s basic premise that human nature stays the same, it would not have been difficult for Dio to imagine the senatorial reactions to the content of Tiberius’ message.

Depicting the aftermath of Sejanus’ fall, Dio finds one more regularity in senatorial behavior: “...as usually happens (ὥσπερ πού φιλῇ γίνεσθαι), they laid the responsibility for their previous misfortunes upon the man who had perished, and charged the emperor with few or none of them” (58.12.4)¹¹. Notably, as in the cases of Caesar and Cornelius Gallus, Dio blames the senators themselves for overthrowing Sejanus by bestowing upon him “the excessive and novel honors” that made him lose his reason and thereby led to his destruction (58.12.6). In Dio’s depiction of these three successive cases, different generations of senators — in 46–44 BCE, in 26 BCE, and in 31 CE — behaved in a similar manner.

Remarkably, Dio has Caligula comment on Sejanus’ case in a speech delivered before the Senate. In that address, Gaius lays the responsibility on the senators for

¹⁰ One of the most telling and dramatic episodes is the search for a bald-headed senator in the Senate-house (77 [76].8.1–6).

¹¹ This is a running theme in Dio. For example, the author finds it “natural” (ὥσπερ εἰκὸς ἦν) that the Romans immediately and radically changed their attitude to both Otho and Vitellius when they heard of the downfall of the former (64 [65].1.1).

the deaths of most of those executed under Tiberius and blames them for their hypocritical and treacherous attitude toward Tiberius and Sejanus (59.16.2–4). This address can, of course, be regarded as political theater. Yet two features suggest that the emperor had strong reasons for distrusting the senators. First, Dio notes that Gaius made use of some of Tiberius' documents (59.16.3). More importantly, there is a nearly verbatim coincidence between Caligula's words (59.16.4) and Dio's own assessment of senatorial responsibility for Sejanus' downfall (58.12.6). This alignment indicates that the emperor's distrust was not unfounded. As Dio's thorough analysis of the Sejanus case and his depiction of Caligula's reaction make clear, emperors and their subjects mirror each other in their mistrust and hypocrisy¹².

“No Man Living Is Ruled of His Own Free Will”

The establishment of the principate did not, to use Burden-Strevens' words, turn into “a moral revolution.” The Roman people remained the same¹³, even though monarchy had the potential to suppress human nature in positive ways [22. P. 245]. This is evident from Dio's depiction of the turmoil resulting from the Romans' attempt to elect a colleague for the consul Gaius Sentius in the absence of Augustus (54.10.1–2). In the wake of that event, the emperor, as Dio notes, had to recognize that “there was no similarity between the conduct of the people during his absence, when they quarreled, and while he was present, when they *were afraid*” (54.10.5). Consequently, the populace's *fear* of the emperor is represented here as the main factor in quelling factional strife and keeping subjects in line. Considerations of a similar sort appear in Caligula's senatorial address where he mentions Tiberius saying to him (59.16.7): “*no man living is ruled of his own free will* (οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἀνθρώπων ἐκὼν ἄρχεται); on the contrary, only so long as a person is afraid, does he pay court to the man who is stronger, but when he gains courage, he avenges himself on the man who is weaker”. The context is significant here, since the statement is made by one “tyrant” referring to another one. Yet the main idea of the speech is the criticism of the senators' dissimulation — which, as we have seen, corresponds to Dio's own observations (cf. 58.12.6 and 59.16.4). More importantly, Dio's own *Realpolitik* statements about people obeying the stronger and disrespecting the weaker can be found elsewhere in his work¹⁴. For example, the bold action of the Roman people at the

¹² Dio depicts senators as simulating their love for the emperor, even though they had no wish that he should survive (59.24.6). On the other hand, Dio occasionally mentions Caligula's fear of his subjects (59.4.1; 59.10.7) and, ironically enough, points to the emperor's fear and suspicion as leading to his death (59.25.8).

¹³ For example, Dio demonstrates *ambitus* and corruption of the Roman officials under Augustus (54.15.1; 55.5.3).

¹⁴ For Dio's pragmatic vision of politics as power-based, see [31. P. 75].

racess, where they expressed their indignation at both Macrinus and Diadumenianus, is explained by Dio with the following verdict: “So truly, it would seem, is there innate in mankind a great respect for that which is superior and a great contempt for that which is inferior” (79 [78].20.3).

Thus, as is evident from Dio’s imperial narrative, people did not become less ambitious or less covetous of power under the principate. For example, the year of the four emperors, 69 CE, is characterized by Dio as a period when “there was no one who might not hope to lay hands on the sovereignty in a time of so great confusion” (63.29.4). In a similar fashion, Dio depicts the transition from Macrinus to Elagabalus, when a number of mutineers — even those of an obscure origin — aspired to the supreme power (80 [79].7.1–3). Consequently, when the reins are loosened, the power struggle manifests itself with increasing force.

These cases are further evidence of Dio’s perception of the struggle for hegemony as innate in every person. This is exactly what Dio’s Livia says to Augustus about the desire for power — a desire characteristic even of those who would never dare to struggle for hegemony: “it is *implanted in their nature* (ἐν τε τῇ φύσει αὐτῶν), just like any other instinct, and it is impossible either by persuasion or by compulsion to destroy such instincts in some of them” (55.14.6–7). In her speech, Livia employs arguments that are quite characteristic of Dio’s *clementia* narrative, which is also found in some other speeches, such as Fabius Rullus the Elder’s appeal for clemency (8.F36.1–5) and Agrippa’s speech (52.1–13). In all the three pieces of oratory one finds the following considerations: human nature leads men to do wrong under particular circumstances; neither the law nor threats can always quell nature and, consequently, severe punishments in certain cases will only destroy perpetrators who could be corrected, while also failing to make others more reasonable; only under the influence of timely forgiveness will the perpetrators change their behavior, while the rest, at the sight of the possibility of salvation, will be kept in line without resistance (F36.1–3; 52.34.6–8; 55.14.4–8, 16.3–5). As has been noted by a number of scholars, such argumentation is modeled on Diodotus’ speech in Thucydides (3.46.4–6) [8. S. 124; 32. P. 143]. However, the theoretical framework of such recommendations apparently goes beyond Thucydides. Adler, following Giua, rightly points to a certain incongruity between Livia’s conception of human nature as incorrigibly tempting men to commit evil acts and her subsequent proposal of remedies for healing “affections of the soul” through clemency and thereby turning wrongdoers into right-minded subjects (55.17.1–3, 20.3) [32. P. 146; 33. P. 320–321]. In this respect — and especially through the physician analogy (53.17.1) — Dio’s Livia is very close to Seneca, who regards mercy as a remedy for *mores* (*Clem.* 1.2.1, 1.5.1, 1.9.6, 1.17.1–2). Furthermore, Dio appears to share the Stoic idea of man being innately good, though affected by some external factors. One of the most telling examples is Commodus, whom Dio refers to as not being “naturally wicked” (73 [72].1.1) [34. P. 30–31].

Conclusion

A conception of fixed human nature, borrowed directly or indirectly from Thucydides, was particularly suitable for a narrative of times of crisis or of a state's progression toward domination over others. Writing about the principate, however, required a different approach, since this period lacked classical precedents. Yet even within the imperial section, some episodes and — importantly — the author's generalizations have a certain Thucydidean flair, as Dio's understanding of politics remains power-based. Dio demonstrates that no one agrees to be ruled of his own free will, and, therefore, political authority is respected only when it is capable of instilling fear. Such was the principate, and such it had already become under Augustus.

According to Dio, Rome's new monarchy was preferable to *dēmokratia* because it provided much less opportunity for corrupt competition among the magistrates. However, the Romans did not become less inclined to rivalry with their peers, especially in periods of *stasis*. Dio continues to explore the regularities of human behavior in times of unrest — a topic that was especially important for the historian, who considered civil discord and domestic disorder more dangerous for the empire than any foreign threat.

Dio finds it quite natural that, in times of anxiety, political leaders — whether Octavian or Macrinus — eliminate their potential competitors. Yet in times of peace and order, the political environment of Imperial Rome was no less aggressive. As Dio's narrative shows, the senators were ready to intrigue, deceive, and betray their fellows when keeping a sharp eye on their own safety or struggling for the benefits they could receive from the emperors or imperial favorites.

The conception of human nature as an anthropological constant is not Dio's only interpretative framework for explaining patterns of human behavior. He appears to be close to the Stoics when admitting that one is not necessarily born a "tyrant", but becomes so under the influence of external factors. Notably, Dio employs both conceptions — the conception of a fixed human nature and the idea of healing the affections of the soul — in order to advocate for a policy of *clementia*. This is another sign of the apparent eclecticism of Dio's approach to history and his methodological framework.

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