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S O M E N O T E S O N V I R T U S
I N S A L L U S T A N D C I C E R O

J u h a n i S a r s i l a

In the political terminology of the last decades of the Roman Republican period *virtus*¹ was indubitably one of the most explosive concepts.² With its many levels of meaning *virtus*, as a political slogan, apparently contained impressive power similar to that of *libertas*.³ In fact *virtus* often occurs together with *libertas*. In or. 35 Cicero writes that he is afraid of the *regnum* of Caesar, which, being hostile to *virtus* has suppressed the old republican *libertas*.⁴ The profoundly humane value of *virtus* is emphasized in

1 This article is connected with the dissertation I am preparing on *virtus* from the Twelve Tables to Livy.

2 Cf. J. Hellegouarc'h, *Le vocabulaire latin des relations et des partis politiques sous la République*, 1963, 242f.; *Un aspect de la littérature de propagande politique à la fin du I^{er} siècle avant J.C.*, *Revue des études latines* LII (1974) 207f.; D. Earl, *The Moral and Political Tradition of Rome*, 1967, 20.

3 About the concept of *libertas* see A. Michel, *Histoire des doctrines politiques à Rome*, 1971, 44ff.; O. Gigon, *Der Begriff der Freiheit in der Antike*, *Gymnasium* 80 (1973) 8ff.

4 Cf. Cic. *Balb.* 51; *Flacc.* 25; *Phil.* 5,41; *Sall. Cat.* 58,11; *Tac. Agr.* 1,15; 11,4. As the precondition to *virtus* in these parallelisms (*libertas - virtus*) *libertas* does not imply mental independence of an individual confronted by external pressure, but certain legal rights which are the basis of life worth living. As to *virtus*, it characterizes an action that is appropriate for the purposes of man and society (cf. K. Büchner, *Humanitas Romana*, 1957, 311). In the political vocabulary the terms denoting "historical consciousness" are inevitably ambiguous. So they ought to be considered impressive rather than precise. (About this problem cf. R. Koebner-H.D. Schmidt, *Imperialism, The Story of Significance of a Political Word 1840-1960*, 1965, xiv-xv). Thus Earl (1967) determinedly argues that *virtus* is untranslatable (8).

the Circle of Scipio Aemilianus by Lucilius (frg. 1326-38 Marx = Lact. inst. 6,5,3),⁵ who was well acquainted with Stoic thought, and later on by Cornelius Nepos (Ages. 5,3; 8,1; Lys. 1,1; Eum. 1,1),⁶ who wrote biographical monographs in a moralizing tone. As it presupposes ethical behaviour in any situation *virtus* is the source of knowledge for distinguishing between the good and evil. In the light of their own political careers, Sallust and Cicero readily saw the criterion of the ideal statesman in *virtus*.

In the beginning of his monograph on Catilina, Sallust clearly points out the intellectual aspect of *virtus*. By it, he denotes mental abilities⁷ having an absolute historical and universal value for himself (Cat. 1,4): *divitiarum et formae gloria fluxa atque fragilis est, virtus (mental excellence) clara aeternaque habetur*.⁸ According to Sallust, *divitiae* (wealth) and *forma* (physical beauty), which are external qualities, are not to be included into *virtus*, a mental ability. In Cat. 1,3 he uses *ingenii vires* and in Cat. 2,2 *ingenium* as near synonyms of *virtus*. It is an intellectual quality leading to success in all walks of life: *quae homines arant, navigant, aedificant, virtuti omnia parent* (Cat. 2,7).

Sallust describes (Cat. 2,9) a man who deserves to be mentioned and remembered as follows: *is demum mihi vivere atque frui anima videtur, qui aliquo negotio intentus praeclari facinoris aut artis bonae famam quaerit*. *Virtus* is not the mental quality of those who are quiet and inactive but must be displayed all the time. As he

5 About Lucilius' *virtus* see Büchner, Altrömische u. Horazische *virtus*, Studien zur römischen Literatur III (1962) 10f.; A.N. van Omme, *Virtus*, een semantiese studie, Proefschrift (1946) 83f.

6 About Nepos' *virtus* see W. Eisenhut, *Virtus Romana; Ihre Stellung im römischen Wertsystem*, *Studia et Testimonia Antiqua XIII* (1973) 46f.

7 There are no occurrences of *virtus* in plural in the whole Corpus Sallustianum.

8 Cf. Cic. Sest. 143.

demands that *virtus* should be active⁹ Sallust exhibits a feature typical of Roman thought. There is one occurrence of *virtus* in the extant fragments of Naevius, in "Tarentilla", a comedy: Two young men return home having lavishly spent all their money on entertainments. With the absolute authority of *pater familias*, the fathers reproach them: *primum ad virtutem ut redeatis, abeatis ab ignavia / domi patres patriam ut colatis potius quam peregri probra* (com. 92f. Ribbeck). "In order to return to decency (*virtus*), you must first give up your (moral) indifference (*ignavia*) so that you should honour your fathers and your native country at home rather than disgrace abroad."¹⁰ In this case, in contrast to *virtus*, *ignavia* has the meaning of moral indifference, quality condemned in practical ethics.¹¹ D.C. Earl has pointed out that Greek philosophy has not had a particular influence on Sallust's thought.¹² Moreover, V. Pöschl has argued that, in Sallust, *virtus* is inseparably combined with the concepts of *industria* (persistence) and *labor* (effort).¹³ As the term of Sallust's greatest approval, *virtus* is the result of discipline and experience.¹⁴ This is peculiar to Roman thought, as can be seen in the following examples. According to Virgil *virtus* can be learned: Aeneas advises Ascanius for the future (Aen. 12, 435f.): *disce puer, virtutem (manly conduct) ex me verumque laborem (effort), / fortunam ex aliis*.¹⁵ The author of the treatise "Ad He-

9 Cf. A. Ernout, *Les noms latins en -tūs*, *Philologica I, Études et Commentaires* 1 (1946) 225: "Il (= *virtus*) marque l'activité et la qualité." ἀρετή is active, too; cf. Arist. eth. Nic. 1099a 3f.; Thuc. 2,43,1f.; see J.L. Kukulides, *Staatsphilosophische Ideen zur Zeit des Perikles u. der Sophisten u. ihre pädagogische Bedeutsamkeit*, 1968, 22f.; 58ff.

10 Translated by the author; for further evidence cf. Plaut. Trin. 650; Pseud. 581f.; Cic. Sest. 138; Cat. 4,15; Tac. Germ. 31,1.

11 Cf. Eisenhut 24: "Da sie (= *virtus*) in Gegensatz wird zu *ignavia*, muss sie "Tüchtigkeit, Tatkraft" oder ähnliches bedeuten."

12 *The Political Thought of Sallust*, 1961, 37ff.

13 *Grundwerte römischer Staatsgesinnung in der Geschichtswerken des Sallust*, 1967, 20.

14 Cf. Eisenhut 51.

15 Cf. Acc. trag. 156; 619f. Ribbeck.

rennium" further illustrates the restrictions in acquiring *virtus*: *non posse virtutem sine doctrina comparari; quoniam ne equus quidem indomitus idoneus possit esse* (4,59).¹⁶

Sallust expresses that, principally, *virtus* can be attributed to anyone who has displayed intellectual vigour (*ingenium*) and persistent energy (*industria, labor*) in any walk of life (Cat. 2,9). Nevertheless, in practice he only gives his final approbation on condition that the person in question has historical significance. After a lengthy deliberation on the historical rise of the Roman Republic, Sallust comes to the conclusion that the success was due to *egregia virtus paucorum civium* (Cat. 53,4).¹⁷ Before the destruction of Carthage *virtus omnia domuerat* (Cat. 7,5) in the Roman life, but soon afterwards it was degenerated (Cat. 12,1; 53,5) by *desidia* (inactivity) and *luxus* (extravagance) so that, for a long time, there was no one worthy of *virtus* in Rome. Only in his own age does he believe to see *virtus* emerge in the political careers of Caesar and Marcus Cato (Cat. 53,6). *virtus* (energy and persistence) is the connecting feature between the two vastly different characters (*divorsis moribus*).

According to Sallust, historical knowledge is useful because it enables the understanding of *virtus* in others and its development in oneself. In Iug. 4,5 he tells that the eminent men of the Roman political life had been in the habit of declaring that, while watching the waxen masks of their glorious ancestors, a desire was kindled in their hearts for the acquisition of merit.¹⁸ The pursuit of excellence is psychologically motivated, not by some supernatural power hiding in the waxen effigies (Iug. 4,6): *scilicet non ceram illam neque figuram tantam vim in sese habere, sed memoria rerum gestarum eam flammam egregiis viris in pectore crescere neque prius sedari, quam virtus eorum famam atque gloriam adaequaverit*.¹⁹

16 Cf. Cic. Flacc. 63.

17 Cf. Liv. 1,25,2.

18 "ad virtutem"; cf. Cic. Tusc. 1,3; fin. 5,21f.

19 Cf. Verg. Aen. 6,823.

It is only by *virtus* that real honour can be achieved (Cat. 1,2ff.). Even then this quality, which requires activity, remains the privilege of the happy few (*pauci et egregii*).

Cicero regards *virtus* as a privilege of a statesman similar to him, who has created his career solely by himself, without inherited resources. *Ad gloriam...ego...a me ortus et per me nixus, adscendi*, Cicero proudly declares in *Planc.* 67. Persistence (*industria*) and assiduous effort (*labor*), both qualities included into the Sallustian *virtus*, have paved the way for those without the blessing of noble birth.²⁰ In *Verr.* 5,180ff. Cicero describes the careers of the *homines novi*. He complains that the hereditary *nobilitas* resents the ability (*virtus*) and energy (*industria*) of these "new" men (*Verr.* 5,181): *quanta sit in invidia...novorum hominum virtus et industria*.²¹ Cicero's political self-esteem reached its zenith in the year of his consulate. This is reflected in his speeches against Catilina, in which he attributes *virtus* to himself three times (3,14; 29,4,5). In these cases, *virtus* symbolizes a politician's conviction of his own ability: *denique ita me in re publica tractabo ut meminerim semper quae gesserim curemque ut ea virtute, non casu gesta esse videantur* (3,29).²² In order to preserve his political status also in future, Cicero considers it necessary to emphasize that his success in exposing the conspiracy of Catiline was not due to chance but genuine ability.²³ Sallust and Cicero (*nat. deor.* 1,110) both shared the opinion that *virtus* does not exist at all unless it is *actuosa*.

20 Cf. *rep.* 1,1f.; *Cat.* 3,14; 4,5; 4,16f.

21 In *Iug.* 53,7; 73,7 and 85,13 Sallust relates how the ruling *nobilitas* unjustifiedly made attempts to prevent the access of *homines novi* (like Marius) to the public offices. - For further examples illustrating *virtus* and the idea of *homo novus* see *Cic.* *Balb.* 51; *Sest.* 136f.; *Cluent.* 111; *Liv.* 1,34,6f.; 4,3,17; 54,6; 7,1,1; 39,41,2.

22 Cf. *Quir.* 9.

23 Hence the impressive antithese *casus* - *virtus*.

According to Cicero, the ideal Roman statesman has *amorem ad communem salutem* (rep. 1,1f.). It does not suffice that he possesses *virtus* (*quasi artem aliquam*) but he must also use it actively for the best of society (rep. 1,2). In his letter to Atticus (Att. 8,11) on the 27th of February, 49 BC, Cicero writes that Pompey does not fulfil the above condition, let alone Caesar, for *dominatio quaesita ab utroque est, non id actum, beata et honesta civitas ut esset* (2). The pursuit of absolute power (*dominatio*) is repugnant to Cicero, who is imbued with the Roman-Stoic principle that a statesman's first duty is to serve his state without seeking his own advantage.²⁴ In rep. 3,40 (Lact. inst. 5,18,4) Cicero illustrates this as follows: *vult plane virtus honorem, nec est virtutis ulla alia merces...multi aut inimici potentes suis virtutem praemiis spoliant.*²⁵ Genuine *virtus* can be attributed only to a statesman who does not use his energy for the acquisition of material profit. The only appropriate reward of *virtus* is *honor*. Political or ideological considerations do not make Cicero restrain from attributing *virtus* to his opponents.²⁶

In rep. 5,6 (= Att. 8,11,1) Cicero-Scipio defines the duty of the ideal statesman, who possesses *virtus*: "as a safe voyage is the aim of the pilot (*gubernator*), health of the physician (*medicus*), victory of the general (*imperator*), so the ideal statesman will aim at the happiness of the citizens of the state so that their life should be based on material security (*opes*), copious wealth (*copia*), wide-spread reputation (*gloria*) and honest virtue (*virtus*)."²⁷ I have taken this passage under consideration because it seems to me that

24 Cf. R. Stanka, Die politische Philosophie des Altertums, Geschichte der politischen Philosophie Bd. 1, 1951, 280; Michel 34f.

25 Cf. Sall. Cat. 12,1; Liv. 3,26,7.

26 Ti. Gracchus fin. 4,65; Marius Manil. 47; Balb. 46; Caesar Rab. Post. 42 and even Catiline Cael. 11f. Sallust does not use *virtus* so generously; cf. Pöschl 27.

The quality repeatedly attributed to Pompey in the speech "Pro imperio Cn. Pompei" allegedly refers to his success as a military leader (e.g. 33; 49; 64; cf. prov. cos. 27).

27 This is the translation of the Loeb-edition (Rolfe) slightly modified.

Eisenhut's interpretation *ad locum* calls for further discussion. Eisenhut argues that "die Aufgabe des guten Staatsmannes ist es, die *virtus* des Volkes herbeizuführen".²⁸ As a matter of fact, this might be plausible, for Cicero, as a statesman-orator could quite well consider himself to be *magister virtutis*.²⁹ Eisenhut's statement is not, however, appropriate for the context discussed; in this case, *virtus* is by no means the ruling concept or even the synonym of *beata vita*.³⁰ Immediately after this, Eisenhut quite appropriately points out that the *beata vita* of the citizens depends on four fairly equal aspects (*opes, copia, gloria, virtus*). Therefore, the above quotation could be regarded as an irrelevant addition in this context. It would be more consistent to use *beata vita* instead of *virtus*.

Eisenhut justifiably remarks that the characteristic (Charaktereigenschaft) *virtus* is here presented on equal terms with three totally external qualities.³¹ Surely it is very illustrative to make a comparison between Cicero and Aristotle in this connection; only it should be done on a more extensive basis than Eisenhut's commentary *ad locum*. In Pol. 7,1-3; 1323a 14 - 1325b 32 Aristotle discusses how the citizens of a πόλις could achieve εὐδαιμονία, and comes to the conclusion that they can succeed in this solely by means of ἀρετή. Further, in Polit. 1,2, 1253a 29ff. he states that the possession of ἀρετή is enough to make a man a socially acceptable being.³² Why does Aristotle imply that εὐδαιμονία of the citizens presupposes only ἀρετή (and nothing else in addition) while, according to Cicero, *beata vita civium* requires securing external prerequisites

28 Eisenhut 58.

29 De orat. 2,35: *quis cohortari ad virtutem (virtuous life) ardentius, quis a vitiis acrius revocari?*

30 The matter is entirely different in Tusculanae disputationes, where Cicero deliberates on the conditions of human happiness after his active political career has come to an end; H. Steinmeyer, Der *virtus*-Begriff bei Cicero u. Seneca, Der altsprachliche Unterricht 17,2 (1974) 53f.

31 Eisenhut 58₁₅₂.

32 These two *loci* are also referred to in Eisenhut.

in addition to *virtus*? Eisenhut concludes his interpretation with the statement that "Cicero wollte den Gedanken nicht fallen lassen, dass der Mensch nur auf Grund der ἀρετή ein sozial brauchbares Wesen sei."³³ This does not, however, complete the discussion. The *virtus* of Cicero cannot simply be defined in terms of Aristotle's ἀρετή.

It should be defined what Aristotle means by εὐδαιμονία on one hand and by ἀρετή on the other when he discusses their interrelation when applied to the citizens of a πόλις. As far as ἀρετή is restricted to mean solely the perfection of soul as such, it is probable that an εὐδαιμονία that, in addition to the perfection of soul, includes that of body and external conditions as well, remains inaccessible. Thus Aristotle thinks (eth. Nic. 1153b 17-21) that ἀρετή, in the restricted meaning of the perfection of soul, is not a sufficient condition for individual independence, the main aspect of εὐδαιμονία.³⁴ But when ἀρετή is extended to mean the perfection of body and external conditions besides that of soul, it actually becomes identical with εὐδαιμονία. Accordingly, Aristotle's and Cicero's points of view differ to a certain degree. A.W.H. Adkins has argued that Aristotle's ἀρετή and εὐδαιμονία both refer to the active life of the free citizens of a πόλις.³⁵ According to Adkins Aristotle considered external ἀγαθά indispensable to the happy life of the citizens of a πόλις, and thus inseparable from their ἀρετή.³⁶ In fact, there were activities which, connected with ἀρετή (in the meaning of the Sallustian *virtus*) required considerable wealth.

As to Cicero, he consciously excluded *virtus* from external qualities. This can mainly be explained in terms of his own character rather than as a response to the ἀρετή of the Aristotelian tradition. As has been stated above, Cicero was a *homo novus* who created a successful political career without any support than his own *virtus* and *industria*. He had the conviction that material prerequisites (= *opes*,

33 Eisenhut 58¹⁵².

34 Cf. eth. Nic. 1097b 6-8 and 1176b 5-6; see Gigon 13f.

35 From the many to the one, 1970, 207.

36 Adkins 206.

copia) were not to be included into *virtus*. So there is an evident connection between Cicero's *virtus* in rep. 5,6 (= Att. 8,11,1) and the idea of *virtus* as a purely mental quality in Sallust's monograph on Catilina.