

## The Roots of Enmity: Cato and Caesar in Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*

From his refusal to allow the popular assembly to vote on Caesar's land act for Pompey's veterans in 59 BCE to his fantastical suicide at Utica, to spite Caesar and prevent him from exercising his customary *lenitas*, Cato's intransigent and obstinate opposition to Caesar at every turn of his career attested the deep and abiding antagonism between them. But Cato's opposition to Caesar was not solely a matter of political difference, aristocratic rivalry or personal hostility; it was ultimately rooted in a deep philosophical disagreement, and in two fundamentally irreconcilable worldviews: Caesar's Epicureanism and Cato's Stoicism.

This paper argues that evidence for this can be found in the positions ascribed to each antagonist in Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae* 51 and 52. In these passages, Sallust reports the speeches given by Cato and Caesar to the Senate concerning Cicero's motion to summarily execute Lentulus and the other conspirators of Catiline's *coniuratio*. These speeches distill the underlying principles that have caused the two orators to arrive at their divergent recommendations in the particular case in question. Caesar counsels that no consideration should be given to anger in deciding on how to proceed, and that the overriding concern should be the practical value of showing *lenitas*, and warns of the danger of setting a well-deserved but ultimately extra-legal precedent for summary executing, bolstering his case by alluding to historical misadventures in proscription, notably those of Sulla.

Since this rationale would explain his almost messianic refusal to punish defeated enemies in the *bellum civile* with the Pompeians, it may be seen as a trustworthy representation of Caesar's philosophical outlook. Special attention is due to the particular Caesar's particular argument that:

De poena possum equidem dicere, id quod res habet, in luctu atque miseriis mortem  
aerumnarum requiem, non cruciatum esse; eam cuncta mortalium mala dissolvere; ultra  
neque curae neque gaudio locum esse. (Sallust, *BC* 51.20).

Many scholars have taken this passage to indicate the Epicurean persuasion of Caesar (Bourne, 1977) (Syme, 1964) (Earl, 1961) (Cumont, 1922). Cato, meanwhile, was a well-attested Stoic. His speech in Sallust's *BC* explicitly denies Caesar's Epicurean assertion that the dead are all dead alike, and asserts the Stoic correlation between virtue and happiness; the feud of the Stoics with the Epicureans being as thorough as the feud between Caesar and Cato themselves.

Because the disagreement between Cato and Caesar during this trial is their earliest point of their conflict, and since it arose over these philosophical differences, it is to be argued that their enmity was both born in principled disagreement and subsisted in its intensity and longevity due to its philosophical dimension.

#### Bibliography

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