

Raptim atque Turbate: 'Antagonistic' and 'Consensualist' Republicanism in Caesar's Civil War

In its opening chapters, Caesar's *Bellum Civile* engages the same theories of Republicanism identified by Kapust (2011: 22) in Sallust ('antagonistic') and Cicero/Livy ('consensualist'). Rather than adopt one or the other, however, Caesar illustrates the shortcomings of both as they exist within the Pompeian faction.

Caesar begins his *Bellum Civile* with a chaotic and confusing narrative, wherein a single man—Pompey—exercises his corrupt will by manipulating the traditional institutions of the Republic (especially the Senate; see Batstone and Damon 2006: 33-88). This chaos represents a failure of Republicanism on two levels. In Sallustian terms (following Kapust 2011), rather than two 'antagonistic' personalities complementing each other to eventually produce a greater good for the Republic, one of the two antagonists (Pompey) has effectively silenced all interests other than his own. 'Antagonistic' Republicanism has thus given way to a discussion in which only one interest is truly represented; it remains 'antagonistic' only on the surface. Likewise, in Ciceronian/Livian terms, 'consensualist' Republicanism, which relies on cooperative goodwill and deference to dominant Republican *virtus* (Kapust 2011: 81-110; cf. Vasaly 2015), is also now impossible: the senators have not joined Pompey's cause because they are drawn to his *virtus* but because they fear his retaliation—or lust after power themselves. In the face of such dysfunction, Caesar rejects the system outright, choosing to confront it as bankrupt rather than reform it from within.

Caesar justifies this choice on one well-established Republican principle: that Pompey's actions amount to an attack on his *libertas* and the *libertas* of the tribunes—and by extension the *libertas* of Rome itself (*BC* 1.22.5; cf. Fantham 2003). Just as Livy discusses *libertas* in terms of

“freedom from abuse” and a healthy respect for individual *dignitas* (Vasaly 2015: 119-20), Caesar in these opening chapters repeatedly decries the abuse of his own *libertas* and *dignitas* (Peer 2015: 49-51). As Caesar presents it in *BC* 1.7-9, if he submits to Pompey’s will, his *dignitas* and *libertas* will have been effectively violated, and such a precedent would naturally produce a government without individual *libertas*. Ironically, only the decisive, unilateral action of Caesar himself can rid the Republic of this corruption.

In spite of Caesar’s decision to take unilateral action, however, the narrative does not necessarily imply an anti-Republican agenda (*pace* Peer 2015: 41-58). Caesar only rejects the actions of *this* Senate, not the tenets of Republicanism itself. Barely ten chapters after the initial confusion, Caesar demonstrates his enduring belief in Republicanism through his narrative of the siege at Corfinium. When the governor, Domitius Ahenobarus, learns that Pompey does not intend to relieve the siege, he boldly conceals this information from the public (*dissimulans in consilio*, *BC* 1.19) while secretly arranging his own escape from the city. Before he can leave, however, Domitius’ soldiers divine his intention (*BC* 1.20) and—acting as a nameless collective—propose to each other that, given the circumstances, they ought to give the city over to Caesar. One faction dissents, remaining steadfast even to the point of violence—until they discover the truth of the matter, that Domitius is indeed planning to abandon the cause; then they too come around to the general opinion. In essence, the assembly works exactly as it ought, by the principles of both ‘antagonistic’ and ‘consensualist’ Republicanism. Two factions exist, both of them justified in their stances, but in the end the truth wins out because both factions prioritize the good of the community over their own self-interest, eventually coming together on the side with the greatest Republican *virtus*. These unnamed and politically insignificant soldiers thus

provide hope that the Republic itself is not bereft of cooperation and *concordia*; rather, Pompey's *factio paucorum* has only temporarily corrupted it.

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