

## Aper's Cosmic Digression in Tacitus's *Dialogus de Oratoribus* 16

Despite recent attempts to 'rehabilitate' the character of Marcus Aper in Tacitus's *Dialogus de oratoribus*, the prevailing interpretation has remained Williams's (1978) man of 'brash pragmatism and a vulgar set of values.' Even sympathetic treatments, such as Champion's (1994), Goldberg's (1999), and Kraus's (2014), persist in seeing Aper as a relativist for whom the categories of past and present are unstable and open to interpretation. This paper intends to refine these interpretations by considering the largely overlooked passage at 16.7, where Aper refers to the *magnus annus* in Cicero's *Hortensius*. It finds that this reference is likely meant to allude also to the *Somnium Scipionis* of Cicero's *De re publica* VI. Comparison of the similarities and differences of *Dialogus* 16 and the *Somnium* demonstrates that Aper's seeming relativism is more likely an indictment of the antiquarian relativism of his interlocutor Messalla, and that Aper is attempting to demarcate the boundaries of past and present on a rational basis. Tacitus is thus adapting the idea of the *magnus et verus annus* from its philosophical, protreptic use to a use of greater relevance to the historian, for whom the definition of *antiquus* and *praesens* is fundamental to the ordering of narrative and theme.

### Bibliography

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