

Cicero's Argument for Expediency in the *Pro Murena*

Cicero makes a vehement argument for political expediency in his speech *Pro Murena*. While defending Lucius Licinius Murena, a consul-elect and former general accused of political bribery, Cicero spends much of the speech addressing the prosecutors of the case, Servius Sulpicius Rufus and Cato Uticensis. This paper seeks to explore the motivations behind these addresses and the similarities between them. As he addresses the two prosecutors, Cicero critiques the merits of jurisprudence and Stoic philosophy, the disciplines from which Sulpicius and Cato respectively made their prosecutions. Scholars generally agree that Cicero criticized the intellectual pursuits of law and philosophy, claiming that they were ill-suited to Roman politics, because he could not attack the personal character of such distinguished men without losing respect from the jury. Further, Cicero wanted to render Sulpicius and Cato irrelevant to the prosecution of the case by removing their legal and moral authority (see Craig, Stem, Harries, and Classen). While not disagreeing with those sentiments, this paper also proposes an additional reason for Cicero's method of argument: that Cicero uses the *Pro Murena* to show that the case was not merely a question of whether Murena was guilty, but rather that it concerned the general safety of Rome. This relates to the fact that, if Murena were to be convicted, Rome would only have one consul in the next year, which would leave the city vulnerable to the impending threat of the Catilinarian conspiracy. Thus, my paper argues that Cicero saw the prosecutors as a bigger threat to the state than Murena himself, because they were acting for personal gain instead of the safety of the state.

To achieve this end, my paper outlines four main commonalities between the two attacks that reveal the threats Sulpicius and Cato pose to Rome. Cicero identifies both law and philosophy as rigidly averse to compromise, lacking popular consensus, impractical and

idealistic, and inconsistent with Roman identity. My paper works through these points and notes how Cicero uses each one to show the prosecutors as disinterested in the safety of the state. Additionally, it emphasizes that the political circumstances surrounding the trial make Cicero's argument all the more relevant and urgent. Not only are the motives of Sulpicius and Cato dangerous in general, but they are particularly dangerous given the fact that in 63 B.C., the year of the trial, Rome was embroiled in political chaos. As a result, Cicero sees expedient action as absolutely critical, and far more important than maintaining absolute legal and moral precision. Finally, this paper argues that Cicero saw Sulpicius and Cato as not only dangerous, but as potential enemies of the state, as, in effect, they were trying to remove Rome's source of protection by convicting Murena. Cicero's description of Catiline in the *peroratio* of the speech confirms this, as he creates a parallel between Catiline, an enemy of the state, and the prosecutors. This paper seeks to demonstrate that by turning the attention of the case away from the defendant and toward the prosecution, Cicero was not merely distracting the jury in order to win the case, but rather, in an effort to maintain the safety of the republic, he was exposing a much larger threat that affected the entire state.