

BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION:
SHIFTS IN CAESAR'S POLITICAL PROPAGANDA
AND SELF-PRESENTATION

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Political vision is not usually counted among Caesar's outstanding qualities. Hermann Strasburger and Matthias Gelzer even debated whether Caesar should be called a "statesman"¹. In this chapter, I will address the question posed by the title of this volume by analyzing in Caesar's long political career major shifts in political self-presentation and propaganda. I will distinguish three phases that differed greatly in focus and appeal, and draw attention to some aspects that perhaps have not been taken seriously enough in previous discussions. These aspects are visible especially in the long middle part of Caesar's career on which my study will focus.

1. First, though, a few words on Caesar's political beginnings. In a recent discussion, Erich Gruen begins with his sensational victory in 63 in the election to the office of Pontifex Maximus. Many have seen here "a sign that Caesar cared little for Republican convention and set his path firmly on a precedent-shattering career". Typically, Gruen complicates things by asking how unorthodox Caesar's political path had really been so far, questioning frequently used labels such as *popularis*, "anti-Sullan," or "outsider," and emphasizing, apart from charisma and flash, conventional politics, shrewdly and adroitly played, connections "of an unusual variety, quality, and effectiveness, sedulously cultivated, and positions taken that appealed across a broad spectrum"².

The ancients, though, like many of their modern successors, saw a simpler picture. Plutarch, extreme in this respect, emphasizes Caesar's hatred of Sulla, caused by his close relationship to Marius, which brought the proscriptions of *Mariani* and *Cinnani* close to home, and by the harsh consequences of his refusal to divorce his wife Cornelia, the daughter of Cinna. Plutarch also stresses Caesar's sky-high ambition, aiming to be "the first in power and with armed might" and building a power base by using to fullest effect his easy ways in communicating with the people, his generosity in en-

¹ STRASBURGER 1968 (1953); GELZER 1963, II, 286-306.

² GRUEN 2009.

tainment, his splendor in self-presentation, and provocative acts such as his rousing orations at the funerals of Cornelia and his aunt Julia where he even displayed images of Marius himself, the restoration of Marius's victory monuments, and his challenges to eminent senate leaders. His opponents realized the danger he posed too late, when he was already aiming with full force at total revolution³.

Suetonius travels less blatantly on this single track and focuses more on Caesar's political machinations, but he too places a highly independent, ambitious, and unscrupulous Caesar firmly among determined opponents of the *optimates* and the Sullan heritage⁴. It is Velleius Paternus who shows how parts of the same story could be told without such coloring, even by an ardent admirer of Caesar⁵.

In his "classic" Caesar book, Matthias Gelzer suggests that the Cinna connection significantly strengthened Caesar's *popularis* impulses, not least because Cinna had shown signs of understanding that decisive measures, for example on behalf of the newly enfranchised citizens, were needed to mend the problems of the times. In other words, Caesar became a convinced *popularis* not only because of family relations and injustice he had suffered early on, but because he believed in some of the political programs that had been embraced by leading *populares* and that the *optimates* consistently ignored or resisted⁶.

Hermann Strasburger demonstrates in detailed examination how thin the authentic material about Caesar's early career must have been on which the extant authors could draw, and how much was retrojected from later experiences, struggles, and partisan sentiments⁷. No less importantly, Strasburger shows that in Cicero's view well into the 50s Caesar was an irritation, displaying annoying initiative, but was no power factor; those who really mattered at the time were Pompey and, a distant second, Crassus⁸. Still, Cicero's *Fourth Catilinarian* leaves no doubt that Caesar's characterization as a staunch *popularis* was firmly established already in 63 when he made no compromises in defending the principle of the citizen's right to fair trial – a right he saw violated by actions taken after a *senatus consultum ultimum*⁹.

³ Plut. *Caes.* 1,2; 1,4; 3,3; 4,7; 5-7. On Plutarch's and Suetonius's portrait of Caesar, see STRASBURGER 1982a, 242ff. (1938, 61ff.); PELLING 2009.

⁴ Suet. *Div. Jul.* 1,2-3; 3; 5; 6; 9; 11; 12; 13.

⁵ Vell. Pat. 2,41,2; 43,3-4.

⁶ GELZER 1968, 20.

⁷ STRASBURGER 1982a, 206-226 (1938, 24-44).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 227-236 (45-54).

⁹ Cic. *Cat.* 4,7-10, esp. 9; STRASBURGER *ibid.*, 229, 232, 311 (47, 50, 129).

Caesar, that is, was a *popularis* not because he hated the *optimates* or aimed at supreme power but because he strongly disagreed with essential policies adopted by leading *optimates*. His statement years later, that he was fighting for his own and the Roman people's liberty against an oppressive faction, Strasburger suggests, has its root in this early period: he was fighting for the restoration of popular sovereignty that had been destroyed by Sulla, not against the nobility or the senate-lead constitution, but against the cotery of Sulla's minions who clung to power even decades after Sulla's death and prevented the realization of social and administrative reforms that insightful statesmen had long been demanding. Strasburger is highly critical of the later Caesar; hence his assessment of the early Caesar's motives matters, even if he also sees in Caesar's constant efforts to humiliate those who "had sat at Sulla's golden tables, while he was hunted by the agents of cruelty," an irrational element, irreconcilable with sober political planning¹⁰.

I take this programmatic element among Caesar's motives seriously. Gruen's efforts to correct a one-sided picture are certainly justified. Even so, I think that Caesar's political goals clashed with those of the "establishment" long before 63. Though exaggerated by later sources, his methods were unusual and aggressive. He insisted on his Marian connections and endorsed the *popularis* method and agenda. He attacked policies of senate and *optimates*. His actions and statements reflected high ambition – and a remarkable willingness to incur risks. If Sallust gives at least a roughly correct picture, in the senate debate in December 63 that decided on the fate of the apprehended Catilinarian conspirators Cato and Caesar represented diametrically opposed views and principles. Subsequently, they were several times involved in intense, principled, and occasionally ugly confrontations. A strong sense of antipathy seems to have played a role at least on Cato's side; it was perhaps mutual. All this helps explain why by the late 60s Caesar was perceived, if not by Cicero, so by others, as a serious threat to the established order¹¹.

2. Early in his consulship in 59, Caesar proposed in the senate an agrarian law that was extraordinary in several respects¹². Already in 70, upon Pompey's return from Spain, the senate had approved a *lex Plotia* that proposed distribution of land to Pompey's veterans; it was not realized because no funds were available. Even so, the senate had in principle recognized the

¹⁰ STRASBURGER *ibid.*, 311-313 (129-131).

¹¹ GELZER 1968, 27-64; FEHRLE 1983, ch. 5; MEIER 1995, ch. 8.

¹² I have presented the argument of sections 2. and 3. and elaborated more fully on some aspects of it in RAAFLAUB 2010a, 2010b.

need of such a measure. It was taken up again in 63 in Rullus's well-known but ultimately unsuccessful bill. One of the main causes of opposition was a ten-men committee with extraordinary powers and resources that would have been placed in charge for five years to realize the program. Three years later, with the booty of Pompey's wars and the tribute of the new provinces in the East now providing the necessary funding, another tribune, Flavius, renewed the effort. His bill did not contain the special provisions that had proved detrimental in Rullus's case. According to Cicero, it was "a pretty harmless affair, much the same as the *Plotia*"¹³. Still, because Pompey supported the proposal the senate opposed it adamantly!

Hence by January 59 an agrarian settlement for Pompey's veterans was still not in sight. In his proposal, Caesar incorporated elements of earlier bills (the principle of purchase, the means of funding, and the range of recipients) but changed the composition of the commission in charge. He had obviously learned the lessons provided by the failures of the Gracchi and Rullus, whose small committees were easily interpreted as serving narrow partisan interests. Caesar's committee was to comprise no fewer than twenty members, characterized as the most suitable for the job (which presumably indicated persons chosen for status and authority). Caesar must have hoped that broad distribution of the gains (especially in patronage and status) that could be expected from such an appointment would make the proposal more palatable to the senate. Moreover, he explicitly excluded himself, and he invited the senate to discuss the bill and suggest improvement and change¹⁴. Even so, following the lead of Cato and his allies, the senate refused to take up discussion, let alone accept the bill. Among possible other reasons for concern, they may have considered the proposal too dangerous, even if Caesar was not directly involved, because as author of the bill he would still gain much popularity, because one had to expect that Pompey and Crassus would be on the committee, and because, apparently, within the twenty there was to be a five-men committee with judicial powers¹⁵.

Yet something else should not be overlooked. Caesar's bill tackled an issue that was undeniably important and urgent, and he seems to have offered it to the senate in a way that was unobjectionable and conciliatory. Already three years earlier, in the debate about the Catilinarians in December 63, he had presented himself as a responsible statesman who was deeply concerned

¹³ *Att.* 1,18,6; cf. 19,4.

¹⁴ Dio 38,1,6-7; GRUEN 1974, 397-401; FLACH 1990, 71ff.; MEIER 1995, 207-213.

¹⁵ Dio 38,2,3; GRUEN 1974, 398: "Opposition was purely a matter of politics: fear of the consul's growing prestige and popularity." See also MEIER 1995, 207-213; on the committees, BROUGHTON 1952, 191-192.

about issues that were of greatest importance to the whole state. If at least the gist of the remarkable words Sallust attributes to him on that occasion is authentic, Caesar was primarily concerned with the problem of killing citizens upon the authority of a *senatus consultum ultimum*, without the formal trial the law explicitly demanded in capital cases. The same concern drove his support for an effort to have Gaius Rabirius convicted for having done just that forty years earlier¹⁶. The goal was to undo the precedents that supported the Senate's emergency powers, arrogated in the Gracchan crisis of 121, without which the senate's emergency decree became but a dull weapon¹⁷. This line of attack would culminate in Caesar's condemnation of the *senatus consultum ultimum* passed in early 49 against himself because it was not covered by any precedents¹⁸. Hence Caesar's argument in December 63 did not lack a strong personal purpose. Nothing Caesar – or, for that matter, anybody else in Rome – ever said or did lacked such a purpose. Yet Caesar's warning was fully justified; so was his appeal to common sense and respect for the common good. Perhaps more than others, Caesar knew how to combine his own interests with those of the *res publica*.

In early 59 too, having forged the alliance with Pompey and Crassus, Caesar had strong personal stakes in the passage of the agrarian law. Even so, we saw, the issue was urgent and needed to be resolved. Caesar appealed to the senate to collaborate in taking care of a shared responsibility. It is interesting to ask what might have happened if the senate had indeed collaborated and allowed a perhaps modified bill to pass without opposition and violent confrontations. To be sure, there would have been other opportunities for conflicts, but a positive beginning might have facilitated a reasonable resolution of other problems as well. What I consider decisive is that the extreme quarrel among the two consuls with its disastrous consequences and its political and emotional fallout that poisoned politics for years to come might have been avoided altogether or at least have played out on a much less intense level¹⁹.

The three allies had different constituencies: Caesar (like Pompey) enjoyed great popularity among the people, Pompey counted on the support of his veterans, Crassus on that of the *equites*. Their private alliance is usually considered nothing but a self-serving effort by three individuals to control power at the expense of the legitimate authorities. Nobody doubts that it

¹⁶ Sall. *Cat.* 51, esp. 25-42; Cic. *Pro Rabirio*. See bibliog. in n. 19.

¹⁷ On the *senatus consultum ultimum*, see UNGERN-STERNBERG 1970.

¹⁸ Caes. *BC* 1,5,3; 7,5-6.

¹⁹ On Caesar's consulship, see, e.g., GELZER 1968, ch. 3; MEIER 1966, 280-288; 1995, ch. 10; CHRIST 1984, 291-300.

was that too, as is well attested by contemporaries²⁰. But this was not the whole picture, and there were many reasons to see it differently. The desperate conditions of large parts of the urban and rural plebs had recently driven them to support Catiline's conspiracy; Cato's over-principled opposition to claims advanced by the *equites* was alienating them from the senate and caused concern; and the veterans had long been waiting for their promised rewards²¹. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the triple alliance also represented large and important groups of Roman citizens whose interests and needs the leading senators had consistently neglected. One might thus interpret Caesar's proposal of an exceptionally large, varied, and distinguished agrarian commission as an effort to avoid or overcome traditional patterns of rivalry among opposing groups in the senate, to encourage collaboration among leading senators from different camps, and thus to facilitate the resolution of an especially important issue. Obviously, the large majority of lowly senators would have followed suit, and the *equites*, veterans, and people would have been satisfied. I have suggested elsewhere that what Caesar aimed at was perhaps nothing less than a "grand coalition," remotely modeled after earlier efforts by Gaius Gracchus and Livius Drusus²². No doubt, the three allies expected to play a leading role in all this, but by refusing himself from the agrarian commission Caesar at least signaled that the exact terms were up for discussion.

The attempt failed. The senate leaders kept thinking in terms of politics as usual and were unable to understand that the problems to be resolved were real, had grown to a level of extraordinary urgency, and thus required serious efforts and new approaches. Their declared principle, that nothing could be changed, nothing new could be tried, was no better than a declaration of bankruptcy²³. The result was a disaster: by that time, Caesar had invested too much in this proposal and could not back out of it, especially considering his allies. Moreover, he succumbed to two of his less admirable character traits: his quick anger and his tendency to do, if necessary alone and against all resistance, what he was convinced needed to be done. I cer-

²⁰ So suggested by Varro's *Trikaranos* and Asinius Pollio's *Historiae* that began in 60. On Cato's view, see Plut. *Pomp.* 47,4; *Caes.* 13,5; on Cicero's, GELZER 1969, 119-134. Caesar's popularity: YAVETZ 1969.

²¹ See YAVETZ 1958; 1963; KÜHNERT 1991 on the misery of the *plebs urbana*; BRUNT 1971, 112-132 on that of the *plebs rustica*. The *lex Iulia agraria* emphasized the settlement of urban and rural proletarians (as the proposals of Rullus and Flavius had done): Dio 38,1,2-3; GRUEN 1974 with sources. On the demands of the equestrians (that is, the *publicani*), see Cic. *Att.* 2,1,8; WARD 1977, 210-219. Cicero's comments on Cato: *Att.* 1,18,7; 2,1,8.

²² RAAFLAUB 2010a.

²³ Dio 38,3,1.

tainly do not want to find excuses for Caesar and play down his responsibility for what followed, but it seems obvious that by choosing total resistance the senate leaders missed a great opportunity and contributed decisively to aggravating the crisis.

3. In January 49 another crisis erupted in civil war. Caesar had long announced his intention to run for a second consulship. Although this was entirely unobjectionable in principle (as Cicero confirms numerous times), his opponents abhorred this prospect. Moreover, Caesar wanted to run *in absentia* (a privilege which a broadly supported bill had granted him in 52). His opponents argued that his command had expired and his privilege was no longer valid, and demanded that he resign his command and seek office in the usual ways. Whether or not Caesar was really afraid of conviction in a Milonian-style trial, he insisted in his right to run *in absentia* and his opponents in his obligation to obey the senate²⁴. After Cicero's return to Rome in the first days of January, a flurry of negotiations, based on major concessions by Caesar, yielded a compromise that was acceptable even to Pompey but failed upon Cato's insistence on principles²⁵. When the senate passed the emergency decree, Caesar crossed the Rubico²⁶.

Addressing his soldiers at the beginning of the war, he criticized the new precedent set by breaking a tribunician veto by threat of armed violence, and insisted that the emergency decree aimed at him (and them) was unprecedented and illegitimate. He recalled the merits of his soldiers for the state (thus hinting at the danger that, because these merits were being denied, their promised rewards would not be realized), and asked for their support. The soldiers shouted that they would fight to overcome the injuries done to their commander and the tribunes of the plebs²⁷. Since the tribunes were supposed to represent the interests of the Roman *plebs*, it is clear that Caesar here appealed to his soldiers in both their functions as soldiers *and citizens*. This explains the extraordinary fact that Caesar in his report uses a *contio* among his soldiers to deal in much detail with a legal issue, the legitimacy of the *senatus consultum ultimum* of Jan. 7²⁸. Like Caesar himself, his soldiers had been declared *hostes publici* and thus de facto excluded from the *res publica*; they now needed to fight for their re-enfranchisement.

²⁴ BC 1,2,6; 9,2-3; 32,2-6; 85,10; for discussion, see RAAFLAUB 1974, 143-147. Suet. *Div. Iul.* 30,4-5 mentions Caesar's fears of a trial. Most recently, MORSTEIN-MARX 2007 (with bibliog.) has contested the seriousness of such fears.

²⁵ RAAFLAUB 1974, 64-68 with references.

²⁶ BC 1,5-1,8,1.

²⁷ BC 1,7.

²⁸ On these issues, see RAAFLAUB 1974, 82-100.

Hence the centurio Crastinus's appeal to his comrades at Pharsalus to fight for Caesar's *dignitas* and their own *libertas*, which must here be understood as *civitas*, citizenship²⁹. Both Sulla and Cinna had equally appealed explicitly to their soldiers in their capacity as citizens³⁰.

Not surprisingly, the beginning of Caesar's *Bellum civile* is full of bitter accusations that the faction of Caesar's enemies had ignored the liberty of senate and people and violated laws and customs in order to destroy him. The civil war would have been avoided if the senate had been allowed to decide freely³¹. This seems to be correct: the vast majority of the senate, though preferring Pompey, clearly favored policies that helped preserve peace³². Caesar's supporters held *contiones*, successfully arousing popular opinion³³. In Cicero's view, Caesar also had important segments of the *equites* on his side³⁴. Caesar thus seems to have pursued a strategy that was similar to that of 59. The support of senate majority, equestrians, people, and veterans or soldiers would have made it possible to place the state on a broader foundation and tackle the solution of urgent problems from this broader base. Even after his invasion of Italy, Caesar demanded free elections and the return of control over public affairs to the senate and Roman people³⁵ – which, of course, required that the stranglehold over senate and politics exerted by the *factio paucorum* be broken.

In central Italy, Caesar reports, the officers in charge of Pompey's recruiting efforts and garrisons fled, fearing the *voluntas* of the *municipia*, that is, the strong sympathies for Caesar widespread in the townships of this region. They readily opened their gates to Caesar's officers. The district of Picenum, Pompey's home country, even Labienus's Cingulum, received Caesar with greatest enthusiasm (*libentissimis animis*)³⁶. Citizens and soldiers eagerly joined Caesar. His narrative creates the impression of a virtual plebiscite of the Roman citizens in Italy, massively favoring him. Still a few months later, he used this impression to urge the leaders of Massilia to join the *auctoritas* of all of Italy rather than follow one man. Communities in Further Spain and Epirus adopted the same position, supporting Caesar at great risk. Thus in early 48 the people of Apollonia supposedly said "they would not close

²⁹ BC 3,91,2. Cic. *Lig.* 6,18; Luc. *Phars.* 1,277-279 confirm the identity of *libertas* and *civitas* in this case.

³⁰ App. BC 1,7,57; 1,8,65-66.

³¹ 1,2,6; 3,5; cf. Hirtius in BG 8,52,4-5.

³² App. BC 2,4,30.

³³ Cic. *Att.* 7,8,5.

³⁴ Cic. *Att.* 7,7,5.

³⁵ BC 1,9,5.

³⁶ BC 1,12; 13,1; 15,1-2.

the gates against a consul, nor would they take it upon themselves to judge differently from the whole of Italy and the Roman people”³⁷.

We might thus conclude that Caesar’s coalition comprised all Roman citizens, whether in the senate, among the equestrians, in Rome, Italy, the provinces, or the army. I feel reminded of Octavian, who forged an even grander coalition against Antony, cemented by the great oath of allegiance sworn to him by all of Italy and the western provinces³⁸.

In the spring of 49, when Caesar had failed to prevent Pompey’s escape from Italy, he returned to Rome and urged the remaining senators “to take responsibility for the state and administer it together with himself”. But, he added, “if they were frightened and refused, he would not shirk the task and administer the state by himself”³⁹. Although exacerbated by the unusual circumstances, his attitude here is the same as it was in 59: an urgent exhortation to the senators to assume and share responsibility but also an unhesitating (and this time explicit) expression of his readiness, if necessary, to do it alone. We are hardly surprised that fear and distrust foiled this effort as well.

There followed the Spanish campaign. Caesar’s report is brilliant, dramatic – and highly revealing. At the end, his determined soldiers trapped the enemy, cut them off access to supplies and water, and thoroughly demoralized them. “This was an occasion to do things right,” says Caesar. His army wanted to fight and bring the matter to an end. Not so Caesar, who hoped to settle the conflict without further bloodshed. “Why should he sacrifice some of his men, even for a victory? ... Besides, he was stirred by pity for the citizens he knew must be killed; he would rather gain his ends with them being safe and unhurt”⁴⁰.

Caesar’s soldiers protested in vain but the outcome vindicated his decision. The next day, while their commanders were temporarily absent, the Pompeian soldiers fraternized with Caesar’s and explored ways to reach a peaceful settlement. “The whole scene was one of joy and self-congratulation ... Everyone recognized that Caesar was reaping the benefits of his original clemency and his decision met with universal approval”⁴¹. Yet the Pompeian commanders returned, succeeded in restoring discipline, and killed some of Caesar’s soldiers who had entered their camp; Caesar, on the other hand, welcomed the Pompeians in his own camp and treated them

³⁷ Apollonia: *BC* 3,12,2. Epirus: 3,9; 3,11; 3,34-36; Massilia: 1,35,1; Spain: 2,19-20.

³⁸ Aug. *RG* 25,2.

³⁹ *BC* 1,32,7; cf. RAAFLAUB 1974, 125-149.

⁴⁰ The Spanish campaign: *BC* 1,34-87. Quotes: 1,71,1; 1,72,1-3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 1,74,7.

most generously⁴². A few days later, exhaustion and lack of supplies forced the Pompeian army to capitulate. In the presence of both armies, one of their generals asked for mercy. Caesar responded, repeating the injuries he had suffered, condemning the huge military apparatus that had been put in place to destroy him, and announcing his decision to eliminate the defeated army from the war by discharging it. This was the only condition for peace⁴³.

The speech Caesar claims to have given at that occasion is most remarkable. Except for the enemy commanders, he says, all involved had met their obligation (*officium*): he, Caesar, by refusing to risk great loss of life in winning an easy victory; his army by patiently suffering the other's outrage and sparing those in their power; the opposing army by trying to end the war with a peaceful solution in order to save all their lives. Hence all had acted with compassion; only the commanders, brutal and arrogant, had avoided peace and violated the conventions of truce and negotiation⁴⁴.

We may admire what Caesar did but should not overlook that these claims are quite outrageous. No official truce had been concluded and it was certainly not the *officium* of either army to fraternize and seek a peace accord. In preventing their army from changing sides, the Pompeian generals had done nothing but their duty. Moreover, most of the military measures that Caesar goes on to criticize vehemently as intended to destroy him, had been put in place years earlier – and mostly with his explicit approval. There is no need to discuss this here in detail⁴⁵.

Does this speech, then, merely reflect exaggerated propaganda and an effort to pin all the blame for the war on Caesar's opponents? This is probably part of it but hardly all. Like all the other testimonia for his political strategy, this speech too pursues two purposes. On the one hand, it denounces the self-serving policies of his personal enemies and all the injuries they have inflicted upon him⁴⁶. On the other hand, it appeals urgently to all Roman citizens to support his efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, save the state from harm, liberate it from the clutches of the dominant faction of his enemies, and create a broader base to serve the interests of all. Hence all good citizens have the obligation to avoid or end civil war in order to preserve the common good and save citizen lives: by necessity, this

⁴² *Ibid.* 1,75-77.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 1,78-85.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 1,85,1-3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 1,85,5-10. See CARTER 1991, 210-212.

⁴⁶ See also *BC* 1,7; 1,9; 1,22; 1,32. For a detailed examination, see RAAFLAUB 1974, esp. 113-152; a brief summary in RAAFLAUB 2003, 59-61.

higher *officium* overrules loyalty to a commander who acts against this principle. In other words, if the civil war is recognized as an evil, caused by the machinations of a self-serving small clique, all who tried to end the Spanish campaign without bloodshed did their *officium* as Roman citizens, and all measures that served the purposes of this faction, even if they had originated much earlier and could be recognized as such only from hindsight, had to be interpreted as hostile to Caesar and the true Romans who tried to prevent civil war and bloodshed. At the capitulation of Corfinium, Caesar for the first time announced his principle of leniency, sparing the lives of the captured opponents⁴⁷. Throughout the war, as he presents it, his own army collaborated with him in this noble effort. In Spain, even the citizens in the opposing army did so. Cicero's letters attest to the enormous impact this strategy had on public opinion⁴⁸.

I propose, then, that this speech, like many of Caesar's other statements, is part of a carefully planned political strategy that pervades the *Bellum civile* and that we can trace to earlier years as well – namely Caesar's effort to present himself, in contrast generally to the leaders of the *optimates* in the senate and specifically to the *factio paucorum* of his radical enemies, as a good citizen and leader of a grand coalition of “true Romans” who cared about the common good and the interests of all. This strategy, I argued long ago, expressed itself in three principles that stood in stark contrast to those of Caesar's opponents. They were a direct consequence of his insistence that he was fighting the civil war in self-defense *and* on behalf of the Roman people and the tribunes of the plebs, not against *res publica* or senate but only against his *inimici* who had imposed their will on senate and *res publica*. The first principle was Caesar's persistent quest for negotiations and a peaceful solution, the second the exclusion from this conflict of all those who wanted to remain neutral, and the third his decision to spare and pardon those he captured or who submitted to him⁴⁹.

4. If all this is at least somewhat plausible, we are faced with two problems. One is how to explain the sudden appearance of “Caesar the superior statesman” in the Catilinarian debate in December 63. Such suddenness, of

⁴⁷ Corfinium: *BC* 1,22-23. The entire event (1,16-23) is as dramatically and skillfully narrated as the end of the Spanish campaign or the battle of Pharsalos (3,82-99). All three episodes highlight Caesar's responsible leadership and concern for the lives of his own soldiers and those on the opposing side. The principle of *lenitas*: *Cic. Att.* 9,7C. For discussion: RAAFLAUB 1974, 293-316; 2003, 61-64. On Caesar's *clementia*: DAHLMANN 1967; WEINSTOCK 1971, 233-243; ALFÖLDI 1985, ch. 5; see also GRIFFIN 2003.

⁴⁸ E.g., *Cic. Att.* 8,16,2.

⁴⁹ For details, see RAAFLAUB 1974, esp. pts. 2-3.

course, quite possibly is unrealistic, due to the survival of only a small selection of sources. It would be easier to answer this question if we had not only Sallust but also Caesar's own speeches and other contemporaneous testimonia. Yet, as Christian Meier has shown, the year 63 was crucial in shaping constellations and strategies for many years to come⁵⁰. It may well be that Caesar realized in the course of that year that he needed to appeal to a broader range of constituents and to build coalitions if he wanted to overcome his image as a brilliant and aggressive playboy *popularis* and assume a serious role in the political game, the stakes of which had been raised hugely by Pompey's accomplishments and his massive influence on Roman politics. Moreover, Caesar showed at other occasions too that he was capable of changing his strategy from one moment to the other if conditions demanded a different approach. For example, it seems that after the events at Corfinium in the beginning of the civil war his discovery of the eminent propaganda value of clemency and the realization that in his specific situation this value was difficult to reconcile with liberty prompted him to switch the focus of his propaganda rather suddenly from *libertas* to *lenitas*⁵¹.

The other problem is to explain why Caesar in the last phase of his career dropped the long-term political program and self-presentation I have been analyzing. This program received a boost when Caesar was elected consul for 48, and Mary Boatwright has shown how powerfully this is reflected in the third book of the *Bellum civile*. I also agree with Martin Jehne that Caesar returned to Rome after the first round of civil wars and his unfortunate delay in Egypt with the intention of publishing his work in order to bolster his republican credentials⁵². In September 46, in *pro Marcello*, Cicero still tried to persuade Caesar to commit himself to the restoration of the *libera res publica*. By that time, it probably was too late. The African War changed Caesar's perspectives, he found himself increasingly frustrated in his efforts to get the senate to collaborate in a productive way, and the prospect of a third round of civil war must have deflated hopes that anything major could be achieved within the traditional framework of the Roman constitution. The *Bellum civile* remained unpublished, republican ideas subsided, and autocracy (in whatever form) began to dominate Caesar's thinking⁵³. Since he never formulated his plans, although many believed to know them well, the challenge here would be to analyze the image he promoted of himself in the

⁵⁰ MEIER 1968; 1995, 201ff.

⁵¹ RAAFLAUB 2003; 2007.

⁵² BOATWRIGHT 1988; JEHNE 2000; also BATSTONE, this vol.; but see FERRARY, this vol.

⁵³ For an overview of current views on the *Bellum civile*, see RAAFLAUB 2009. For an excellent overall interpretation, BATSTONE - DAMON 2006.

last two years of his life and to examine in what ways and why it differed from that of previous years. I leave this to others who have worked much more intensely on these issues than I have⁵⁴.

In conclusion, my re-examination of the shifts in Caesar's propaganda and self-presentation reveals a more complex picture of Caesar's political thought and goals. Even if Cicero and later authors offer much confirmation, there can be no doubt that in Caesar's own (and naturally quite partisan) presentation this aspect is over-emphasized. I am far from denying Caesar's responsibility for the civil war and I am well aware that the concept I have analyzed, of a "grand coalition," seems to have become especially prominent and important when it served Caesar's interests well. Yet especially in the *Bellum civile*, and most of all in its first book which perhaps was written soon after the events⁵⁵, this concept is so pervasive that it is hard not to take it seriously as a crucial component of his political strategy. We see now that its roots go back to much earlier struggles. And it indeed served interests that were much broader than Caesar's own ambitions. It suggests that Caesar was able to think beyond the narrow limits of senatorial contention and to recognize the need to create a broader base of collaboration in order to resolve the urgent problems of the time.

As suggested above, the inspiration probably came from C. Gracchus's and Livius Drusus's failed attempts at basing large-scale and complex reform on broad coalitions⁵⁶. In Caesar's case, the formulation, let alone realization, of such ideas remained general and tentative, and was obscured by continuing tensions and more civil wars⁵⁷. Apparently he soon – too soon? – despaired of collaboration and restoration and began to think of different solutions – which does not mean that his earlier efforts to reach out and build coalitions were not meant seriously and based on good insights. On the other hand, it is also clear that the senate leaders did not lack opportunities to overcome narrow group interests, to reintegrate Caesar, and to prevent the uncontrollable escalation of power struggles and violence. True, the obstacles that prevented them from recognizing – and even more from desiring to realize – such possibilities were formidable: power structures, hierarchies, and mentalities steeped in long-standing traditions, enormous ambitions and egos, profound hatreds and enmities, deeply entrenched interests

⁵⁴ See n. 57 below.

⁵⁵ MACFARLANE 1996 offers intriguing observations to support this view.

⁵⁶ For a recent analysis, see LINKE 2005. For overviews in English, see, e.g., LINTOTT 1994; GABBA 1994; KONRAD 2006.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of Caesar's political plans, reforms, and his "new state," see JEHNE 1987; 2005, and this vol.; RAWSON 1994; MEIER 1995, 510ff.; URSO 2000; GARDNER 2009; FERRARY, this vol.

of groups and individuals, a detrimental and perhaps irreparable loss of common ground, and, not least, Caesar's independence, self-reliance, impatience, tendency to react to resistance with anger and violence, and, ultimately, lack of diplomatic skills – or at least of a determined preference for compromise and patiently crafted diplomatic solutions. In some ways, it seems, he was his own worst enemy.

It may well be, though, that his adopted son, who both emulated him and needed to distance himself from him, and who was vastly superior as a diplomat and politician, found in Caesar's strategies a crucial source of inspiration for his own policies⁵⁸. He started out, like Caesar, by claiming to liberate himself and the *res publica* from the oppression of a *factio paucorum*, only to drop *libertas* soon and forever from his political arsenal⁵⁹. *Clementia* was one of the virtues inscribed on the shield that senate and people set up in his honor in the Curia Julia⁶⁰. I referred earlier to his great coalition against Antonius. In the beginning, his policies and reforms were also tentative, based on trial and error; by necessity, some of his measures, reactive rather than pro-active, corresponded to those taken by Caesar⁶¹. All this needs more thought and elaboration, but if Augustus had died in 23, as he almost did, his political *achievement* – as opposed to his *proclamations* and *grand gestures* concerning the “restoration of the republic” that clearly were a response to the failure of Caesar's ultimately more open and radical departure from republican traditions – might cause no less ambivalent and uncertain assessments than Caesar's.

At any rate, based on our analysis it might be justified to conclude, in response to the challenge posed by this volume's title, that Caesar was at least to some extent both a visionary and a precursor.

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⁵⁸ On Augustus and Caesar, see, e.g., MEIER 1980; KIENAST 2001; TOHER 2003; ZECCHINI, this vol.

⁵⁹ RAAFLAUB 2007.

⁶⁰ Aug. RG 34,2; cf. 3,1-2.

⁶¹ Most conspicuously, of course, those taking care of the needs of the veterans and the urban population of Rome. For overviews, see CROOK 1996a, 1996b; relevant chs. in BLEICKEN 1999; KIENAST 1999, and for ideological aspects, GALINSKY 1996.

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