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(Review) Republicanism, Rhetoric, and Roman Political Thought: Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus

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Tatum's Caesar is not going to be a popular choice among secondary school teachers, since most of what is on the Advanced Placement syllabus is not in his reader. For an intermediate college class, however, particularly one more interested in theme and history rather than being strictly author centered, there is a lot here to recommend.

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Daniel J. Kapust, *Republicanism, Rhetoric, and Roman Political Thought. Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. viii + 196. Cloth (ISBN 978-1-107-00057-5) \$85.00.

In this book, Daniel Kapust examines "the ways in which conflict, liberty, and rhetoric were depicted and theorized by Rome's three greatest Latin historians: Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus" (6). Rather than offer an overarching thesis, the book, which stems from the author's doctoral dissertation in the department of political science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, maintains that these three ancient historians each conceived of a different societal role for rhetoric in their works.

The first chapter situates Roman republican thought in the context of late twentieth-century political theory. Kapust focuses his attention chiefly on the neo-republican thinkers Philip Pettit and Quentin Skinner. Although Pettit favored a less historically grounded approach, both men have championed Roman political thought as the source of later, especially early modern European, republicanism and thus the wellspring for their own criticisms of liberalism and communitarianism. Given the importance of Roman republicanism for contemporary theorists, Kapust asserts that the political ideas of Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus warrant fresh and detailed analysis.

Chapters 2 and 3 turn to Sallust, whom Kapust labels "an antagonistic republican" (25). Though Hobbes maintained that Sallust was, like him, distrustful of rhetoric and a potential opponent of participatory politics, Kapust contends that this is mistaken. On the contrary, he argues that Sallust recognized the benefits of conflict in society, provided that such competition was anchored in regard for the common good. Sallust did not disesteem conflict itself, but rather lamented the selfishness and avarice that the destruction of Carthage in 146 BC introduced to Rome. According to the historian, Kapust argues, "healthful antagonism" appears to require "the fear of enemies" (47). Conflict needs the proper channeling, Sallust thought, and in the absence of serious adversaries, formerly beneficent competition among Romans gave way to acquisitiveness and self-promotion. Yet this does not mean that Sallust considered a perpetual enemy necessary for

the flourishing of the Roman Republic. Through an examination of the debate between Caesar and Cato in the *Bellum Catilinae*, Kapust contends in chapter 3 that their “rhetorical antagonism serves as a vehicle for expressing social and political antagonism” (54). For Sallust, rhetoric could take the place of *metus hostilis* in providing the tension requisite for the Republic’s blossoming.

Chapter 4 discusses Livy, whose views on rhetoric and liberty are in marked contrast with Sallust’s. Whereas Kapust’s Sallust favored an agonistic republicanism, his Livy was a stalwart proponent of consensualism. “Livy’s republic,” Kapust writes, “is a hierarchical community, bound together by goodwill and generated through the virtuous behavior of elites, which is in turn observed and evaluated by the many” (84). Rome’s leaders must win over their inferiors in a manner that suggests the relationship between an orator and his audience. This means that Livy, *pace* Machiavelli, ultimately promoted a Ciceronian conception of rhetoric’s role in society.

Just as Kapust stresses the import of consensus to Livy, he views prudence as paramount to Tacitus, the subject of chapters 5 and 6. To demonstrate this, Kapust first turns his attention to the *Dialogus*. He argues against equating Tacitus’ views on oratory with those of Maternus in the work, and believes that Tacitus deemed Maternus’ dismissal of rhetoric foolish. Rather than see him as pining for the halcyon days of the Republic, Kapust regards Tacitus as “centrally occupied with finding some middle ground between withdrawal (or foolish opposition) and cooptation, and is thus concerned with the practice and cultivation of prudence” (114). Tacitus’ father-in-law, Kapust stresses, provides a model of prudence in the *Agricola*: his actions demonstrate to readers how one ought to act as a member of the elite in the Empire.

In chapter 6 Kapust expands this argument, contending that all Tacitus’ historical works possess the same didactic function. The portrayal of various emperors in Tacitus’ histories, he maintains, signals the importance of prudence in political life. Kapust links Tacitus’ historiographical concerns to those of Imperial elites: “The dilemma of the imperial historian,” he writes, “is to navigate between flattery and excessive criticism, just as the dilemma of the ambitious Roman seeking fame and glory was to navigate between servility and futile displays of opposition” (149). The book concludes with a brief epilogue that recapitulates some arguments and highlights the importance of Sallust’s, Livy’s, and Tacitus’ political thought for contemporary theorists interested in rhetoric and republicanism.

In many ways this excellent monograph comes across as the work of a political theorist, rather than a classicist. Most obviously, Kapust, though comfortable with Latin and Greek, refers almost exclusively to secondary source material in English. This naturally limits Kapust’s command of modern scholarship. One imagines, for example, that Walter Jens’s article “*Libertas bei Tacitus*,” *Hermes* 84 (1956) 331–52, would have proved especially helpful, though familiarity with numerous other works could have aided Kapust’s project.

The book's approach to texts often seems untethered from the historical circumstances surrounding their creation. In his chapters on Sallust, for example, Kapust does not focus on the ways in which Sallust's personal biography may have influenced his thought. Similarly, his discussion of Livy's views is not informed by the fact that we do not possess any of his historical narrative past 167 BC. If we had only the later books of *Ab urbe condita*, our impression of Livy's political ideas may have been quite different. In places Kapust seems to promote readings that are too simplistic—and too sanguine. Although one can conclude that the *Bellum Catilinae*'s debate between Caesar and Cato demonstrates the valuable role that rhetoric could play in saving the Republic, we should not forget that by the time Sallust wrote both these men were dead, the victims of real antagonism, not the rhetorical kind. The career of Tacitus' Agricola surely serves as an exemplar for future statesmen, but the historian himself highlights its unfair ending, thanks to the machinations of Domitian. In short, Kapust, ever on the hunt for the useful role of rhetoric, may underplay the tragic cast of these works.

Any of the book's limitations, however, are easily overshadowed by its obvious strengths. Kapust is a writer of extraordinary clarity and this makes *Republicanism, Rhetoric, and Roman Political Thought*, despite the complexity of its ideas, comprehensible to a wide audience. The book is logically constructed and expertly organized; nary a sentence seems out of place. Kapust's expertise in political theory offers much that is valuable to his examinations. The readings of later thinkers inform the book's discussions of the Roman historians, and Kapust ably demonstrates the strengths and shortcomings of these assessments. Most importantly, he never ceases to propose intricate and thoughtful explications of his subjects. Though some of Kapust's arguments may fail to convince, his book will remain an essential source for scholars focused on the political thought of Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus.

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Michael C. J. Putnam, *The Humanness of Heroes. Studies in the Conclusion of Virgil's Aeneid*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012. Pp. 183. Paper (ISBN 978-90-8964-347-6) \$25.00.

This all too brief volume is the product of a series of lectures delivered by Putnam at Amsterdam and Leiden in the autumn of 2009; the press is to be congratulated for providing an international audience with the rich fruit of those talks in the Netherlands. Six chapters are bookended by