CHAPTER 2

The Sick Body Politic

When Catiline stood before the senate and described the two bodies of the *res publica*, he challenged the assumption of unity at the core of the Fable of the Belly. He compounded his revision of the body politic tradition by announcing his desire to become the head of the people, importing a regally inflected metaphor of command into public discourse. Cicero's consular oratory responded to Catiline in the rhetorical terms set by his adversary. Rejecting Catiline's emphasis on division and doubling, Cicero instead compared the *res publica* to an organism suffering from a prolonged and potentially deadly disease. His medically inspired language drew on an alternative strand of organic imagery that was oriented less towards the structural division between the senate and people and more towards the problem of moral decline. Portrayals of vice as a contagion that had infected Rome's ruling class had become commonplace by the second century BCE, if not earlier. Cicero adapted this tradition to the events of 63 BCE by using the debauched bodies of the Catilinarian conspirators as proof of the figurative contagion they were spreading in the body politic. Framing their expulsion as both a purge and an amputation, he encouraged his audiences to prioritize the health of their political community over the laws by which it was governed. He thereby used the metaphor of the diseased body politic to create a climate of emergency in which radical action seemed necessary to save the Republic.[1]

Cicero's vilification of the conspirators was intertwined with the construction of his consular authority, the precarity of which has been identified as a key problem in the *Catilinarians*.[2] By declaring the body politic sick, diagnosing its ills, and proposing the proper course of treatment, Cicero took on the role of a civic healer. While some have resisted this

[1] For the importance of the Catilinarian Conspiracy to the construction of emergency politics in Rome, see Straumann 2016: 88–100; Golden 2013: 125–33; Drummond 1995: 79–114.

[2] See Steel 2006; Batstone 1994; Konstan 1993; May 1988: 51–8.

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interpretation due to the low status of physicians in the Roman world, Cicero's generalized language points not to the realm of medicine but to that of philosophy, where analogies between the philosopher, orator, and statesman, on the one hand, and the physician, on the other, were common. He drew on this tradition to theorize the relationship between the exemplary statesman and the *res publica* in his oratory. The language of healing was useful because it located him in a position of privileged oversight rather than absolute command, encouraging his audiences to recognize their dependence on his civic knowledge but not mandating their obedience to his will. Able to convey a style of authority that was neither regal nor permanent, Cicero's civic healer fit the paradigm of Roman Republicanism in a way that Catiline's *caput populi* did not. Presenting their rival metaphors in tandem in the *Pro Murena*, Cicero prompted his fellow citizens to consider which model of the body politic was a better fit for the embattled Republic.

Cicero developed this figurative framework to protect a constitution that he perceived to be under threat. By using it to justify the illegal execution of the conspirators, however, he revealed its potential to destabilize the practice of politics instead.[3] The final section of this chapter considers the decade that followed the Catilinarian Conspiracy, which saw Cicero's identification of P. Clodius Pulcher as another Catiline in need of removal from the body politic. Although Cicero criticized Clodius' use of violence as a political tool, he also portrayed violence perpetrated by the *boni* as a necessary cure. Defending P. Sestius and T. Annius Milo for their use of *vis* against Clodius and his supporters, he argued that Rome's laws sometimes stood in the way of its treatment. In this way, he used medical metaphors to circumvent the judicial system in which he expressed faith elsewhere.[4] His rhetoric contributed to a cycle of civic violence that culminated in Pompey's sole consulship, a constitutional innovation likewise framed as a curative remedy. As Cicero went on to portray Caesar's dictatorship in similar terms, he illustrated the utility of disease imagery in justifying individual authority as a solution to civic strife. The intersection of these themes ensured that his rhetoric would outlast the political system it was meant to protect. The next chapter will consider its cooptation by a new generation of thinkers interested in explaining the constitutional arrangement that arose after Actium.

[3] Sontag 1978: 82 identifies this risk in her critique of medical metaphors, commenting, "The concept of disease is never innocent."

[4] Cicero's medical metaphors therefore add a new dimension to recent scholarship on his political thought, which tends to stress its juridical basis (e.g. Straumann 2016).

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Moral Decline and the Sick Body Politic

The metaphor of the sick body politic pervades Cicero's consular oratory, where warnings of figurative pestilences, contagions, and diseases abound.[5] To understand the construction and reception of his imagery, however, it is necessary to address the broader rhetorical tradition in which it operated. We saw in the last chapter how portrayals of *stasis* as a physical malady were familiar in the Greek world by the sixth century BCE. They had grown so conventional by the Classical era that Aristophanes mocked their usage in the *Wasps*, where Bdelycleon declares, χαλεπὸν μὲν καὶ δεινῆς γνώμης καὶ μείζονος ἢ 'πὶ τρυγῳδοῖς | ἰάσασθαι νόσον ἀρχαίαν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἐντετοκυῖαν ("It is a difficult task – a matter of great cleverness and beyond the scope of comedy – to cure a sickness in the city that is both ancient and innate," *Vesp.* 650–1).[6] Aristophanes provides little detail about the etiology or symptomology of the disease that Bdelycleon describes. Nor do other Greek writers, who prefer to describe political ailments in highly generalized terms.[7] Vagueness was rhetorically useful because it encouraged collective recognition of a common threat while sidestepping the disputes and antagonisms that gave rise to that threat in the first place. This principle held true as the Greek tradition made its way to Rome, where nebulous warnings of collective maladies were quickly incorporated into conversations about civic decline.

The last chapter explored Roman nostalgia for the ancestral body politic, the unity of which was positioned in contrast to the factionalism and strife of the present. Writers relied on imagery of splitting and doubling to expose and interrogate the risks of a *res publica* structured around dualities like "senate" and "people," which seemed an increasing threat to the realization of concord. Disease metaphors were part of the same tradition but more explicitly oriented towards the problem of moral corruption. Writers like Varro and Sallust compared avarice, ambition, and luxury to contagions that had infected Rome's governing class. These metaphors allowed them to frame the unfettered passions and the corollary pursuit of private interests as antithetical to the health of the body politic. By leveling this critique against their fellow members of the elite, they complicated the validation of senatorial privilege apparent in many iterations of the mind-body duality. Because they approached civic corruption

[5] See Walters 2020: 27–52.
[6] Biles and Olson 2015: *ad loc.* note the reprisal of "the sickness-theme" introduced in the prologue.
[7] Brock 2013: 69–70 discusses the persistent vagueness of this imagery despite growing interest in medicine.

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as a personal rather than structural problem, however, their metaphors did little to clarify the steps that should be taken to restore the *res publica*. If anything, they insisted upon decline as the natural and inevitable consequence of an organic model of constitutional development.

The persuasiveness of this tradition stemmed from the overlap between moral corruption and physical illness in Roman thought. It was a central tenet of ancient philosophy that vices were diseases of the soul and could be represented in terms borrowed from medicine.[8] In the *Tusculanae Disputationes*, Cicero criticizes the Stoics for continuing to harp on this tired theme, commenting, *hoc loco nimium operae consumitur a Stoicis, maxime a Chrysippo, dum morbis corporum comparatur morborum animi similitudo* ("At this point, too much attention has been paid by the Stoics, especially by Chrysippus, to the similarity between diseases of the body and those of the soul," Cic. *Tusc.* 4.23).[9] Promising to summarize only the pith of their arguments, he compares immoderate desire to a fever (*fervor*) that settles in the veins and marrow (*in venis medullisque*), causing both disease and illness (*et morbus et aegrotatio*, Cic. *Tusc.* 4.24). The "diseases" he goes on to enumerate include avarice, ambition, love of women, obstinacy, gluttony, drunkenness, and gourmandism, all of which have deleterious effects on body and mind (Cic. *Tusc.* 4.26). The only cure is reason, which is called a Socratic medicine (*ratio quasi quaedam Socratica medicina*, Cic. *Tusc.* 4.24). Despite criticizing the Stoics for their excessive coverage of this theme, Cicero frequently approaches the disordered soul through what Ingo Gildenhard calls "the semantic field of pathology."[10] The tangible world of the body vivifies the imaginative world of the mind, clarifying the existential stakes of moral failure.

The relationship between vice and disease was not simply figurative, for it was widely believed that the disordered soul left physical evidence on the body.[11] The idea was commonplace in Latin literature by the second century BCE; as a fragment of Lucilius declares, *animo qui aegrotat videmus*

[8] See Nussbaum 1994 on "the philosopher as a compassionate physician whose arts could heal many pervasive types of human suffering," (3). Whereas she addresses the Hellenistic schools of philosophy, Holmes 2010: 192–227 considers the medical analogies of the Classical era.

[9] See Rabel 1981 on diseases of the soul in Stoic thought, for which the *Tusculane Disputationes* is a key source.

[10] Gildenhard 2007: 168. Graver 2002: 148 locates the utility of such medical analogies in their ability to account for individual variations in character. Just as a body could fall short of the ideal of health in various ways, each of which carried its own level of severity, so the mind could fall short of moral and epistemic ideals in different ways with varying degrees of ethical import.

[11] See Von Staden 1999: 260 for the impact of this belief on Celsus, whom he calls "a 'moral' historian of medicine."

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corpore hunc signum dare ("He who is sick in the mind, we see that he gives proof of it on his body," Lucil. Fr. 678 Warmington).[12] Lucilius asserts that the same principle also works in reverse, so that the sick body impedes the function of the mind: *tum doloribus confectum corpus animo obsistere* ("Then a body wearied by ailments obstructs the mind," Lucil. Fr. 679 Warmington).[13] T. H. M. Gellar-Goad approaches these fragments in relation to the Epicurean tradition, drawing attention to their compatibility with Lucretius' description of the soul as "corporeal in nature" (*ergo corpoream naturam animi esse necessest*, Lucr. 3.175).[14] Seneca crafts a symptomology of his own in the *Epistulae Morales*, where trembling limbs, stiffening fingers, stumbling steps, sluggish muscles, staggering gait, dropsy, indigestion, distended bellies, jaundice, paleness, discolored complexions, intestinal rot, heart palpitations, dizziness, pains in the ears and eyes, headaches, ulcers, and fevers are all listed as "punishments" for luxury (Sen. *Ep.* 95.16–7). Returning to this theme in a later letter, he asks, *non vides, si animus elanguit, trahi membra et pigre moveri pedes? si ille effeminatus est, in ipso incessu apparere mollitiam?* ("Do you not see how if the mind has languished, the limbs are dragged and the feet move lazily? If it is effeminate, how softness appears in one's very step?" Sen. *Ep.* 114.3). The physical manifestation of *luxuria, mollitia*, and other vices meant that medicine was oriented towards the condition of the soul as much as that of the body. Philosophers and poets could therefore assume a place alongside physicians as dispensers of *remedia* in the literary if not practical realm.[15]

The corporeal focus of Roman moralizing carried important consequences for the metaphor of the body politic. It allowed discord to be cast as an ill with its origins in moral decay. This theme takes center stage in Varro's *De Vita Populi Romani*, which portrays vice as a disease that gradually overtakes the *res publica*. Book 1 opens with the ideal of civic consensus, conveyed through imagery of Romulus mixing and blending the tripartite state together.[16] Yet as early as Book 2, which covers the

[12] For analogies related to disease and medicine in Latin satire, see Larmour 2016: 295–320; Kivistö 2009; Freudenburg 2001: 173–83.

[13] Barchiesi and Cucchiarelli 2005: 210 use this passage to frame Lucilius' moral discourse as a medical cure within the text.

[14] Gellar-Goad 2020: 59–61. For the corporeality of the *animus* in Lucretius, see Kenney 2014: *ad loc*.

[15] As Freudenburg 2001: 173 memorably writes in relation to satire, "Persius routinely uses his satiric arthroscope to peer straight into the muscle, veins, and heart of his society."

[16] *sed quod ea et propter talem mixtura inmoderatam exacescunt, itaque quod temperatura moderatur in Romuli vita triplicis civitatis* (Varro, *De vita p. R.* Fr. 5 Riposati). The fragment is quite corrupt but conveys the metaphor of blending disparate elements. La Penna 1976: 400, fn. 7 speculates that a reference to the body politic might have fallen out of the text, offering a potential reconstruction as follows: *sed quod ut ea propter talem mixturam inmoderatam exaquiscunt, ita quae [quod] temperatura*

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early-to-mid Republic, this rosy vision has begun to falter: *distractione civium elanguescit bonum proprium civitatis atque aegrotare incipit et consenescit* ("Because of the division of the citizenry, the common good of the political community languished and began to grow sick and aged," Varro, *De vita p. R.* Fr. 66 Riposati).[17] Varro's use of the relatively rare noun *distractio*, which was often used to describe a body being ripped apart, activates the trope of splitting introduced in the last chapter.[18] It denotes the failure of the partnership (*societas*) underpinning a successful *res publica*.[19] This division causes a civic decline that is subsequently figured as the onset of an illness. Because many ancient thinkers understood senescence as a type of disease, *consenesco* reinforces the figurative associations of *elanguesco* and *aegroto*.[20] The next fragment blames this sickness on the pursuit of private interests over public ones: *propter res secundas sublato metu non in conmune spectant, sed suum quisque diversi conmodum focilatur* ("Because of favorable affairs and the removal of fear, they looked not towards the common good, but each separately nurtured his own advantage," Varro, *De vita p. R.* Fr. 67 Riposati). Varro joins Sallust in linking the loss of *metus hostilis* to the fraying of social bonds; as the chasm between personal ambitions and collective ends widens, factionalism takes root in the *res publica*. Defects in the passions, in other words, manifest as ill health in the body politic.[21]

moderatur, in <corpus unum ac solidum coalescunt, in> Romuli <aetate> vita triplicis civitatis <concordia floruit>. Scholars disagree over the components of Varro's tripartite mixture. La Penna 1976: 400 posits the three original tribes of Rome (the *Tities*, *Ramnes*, and *Luceres*), an idea supported by Wiseman 2016: 113; Pittà 2015: 77–8 suggests that Varro might have had the moderation of political forms in mind.

[17] The present tense of these verbs has prompted different explanations; Pittà 2015: 266–8 speculates that they might be historical presents referencing the Conflict of the Orders, while Wiseman 2016: 117 argues that they are more likely to be part of a speech or an authorial intervention related to the end of the Pyrrhic War.

[18] Varro himself links *distractio* to corporeal rending at *Ling.* 7.60.

[19] Cicero uses *societas* as an antonym for *distractio* in the roughly contemporary *De Officiis*, where he argues against fellowship with tyrants (*nulla est enim societas nobis cum tyrannis et potius summa distractio est*, "For there is no fellowship for us with tyrants, and rather the greatest separation," Cic. *Off.* 3.32). Like Varro, he mobilizes a metaphor of the body politic to make his point: *sic ista in figura hominis feritas et immanitas beluae a communi tamquam humanitatis corpore segreganda est* ("So that ferocity and monstrosity of a beast in the guise of a man must be separated from the common body, so to speak, of humanity," Cic. *Off.* 3.32). The resonance between Cicero's and Varro's language is noted by Dyck 1996: *ad loc.* 3.32. See later for further discussion of this passage.

[20] e.g. *senectus enim insanabilis morbus est* ("For old age is an incurable disease," Sen. *Ep.* 108.29). This idea finds early expression in Aristotle (τὸ δὲ γῆρας νόσον φυσικήν, Arist. *Gen. An.* 784b33), on which see Woodcox 2018. For its influence on Roman thought, see Cokayne 2003: 34–56.

[21] See Atkins 2018b: 94, who makes this argument in relation to Sallust. Recent work on Roman political thought stresses the importance of the emotions, which are often left out of contemporary theories of republicanism (e.g. Atkins 2018b: 91–111; Connolly 2015: 4; Hammer 2008: 9–10).

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The fourth and final book of *De Vita Populi Romani* becomes more specific in assigning fault for this crisis. We encountered the first of its organic metaphors in the last chapter, when Gaius Gracchus' judicial reforms were criticized for creating a two-headed community (*bicipitem civitatem fecit, discordiarum civilium fontem*, Varro, *De vita p. R.* Fr. 114 Riposati). Here, Varro's analysis is oriented towards the distribution of power between two rival socioeconomic classes, both of which seek control of the courts. His deployment of disease imagery in subsequent fragments works to different ends. Evoking the specter of a spreading contagion with the verb *invado*, he indicts the whole governing class for its outsized ambition and greed: *tanta porro invasit cupiditas honorum plerisque, ut vel caelum ruere, dummodo magistratum adipiscantur, exoptent* ("Such a great a desire for offices infected most of them that they would hope even for the sky to fall, as long as they captured a magistracy," Varro, *De vita p. R.* Fr. 121 Riposati).[22] T. P. Wiseman draws attention to Varro's use of the adjective *plerusque*, which exempts few from blame.[23] The next fragment ties the elite's desire for power (*propter amorem imperii*) to the onset of bloodstained sedition (*seditionibus sanguinulentis*, Varro, *De vita p. R.* Fr. 122 Riposati). Unrestrained passions, he suggests, produce a form of strife that undermines the wholeness of the body politic.[24] Varro reinforces this idea through his repetition of the rare adjective *sanguinulentus* in the next fragment, which deploys imagery of gangrene to convey the scope of the problem: *quo facilius animaduertatur per omnes articulos populi hanc mali gangraenam sanguinulentam permeasse* ("By which it may be perceived more easily how this bloody rot of disease spread through all the limbs of the people," Varro, *De vita p. R.* Fr. 123 Riposati).[25] These fragments expose the public consequences of moral failure; the degradation of the soul individually translates into the corruption of the Republic collectively. This reading becomes even more likely when we recall that the senate was compared to

[22] Varro's language calls to mind Lucretius' portrayal of greed and ambition in Book 3 of *De Rerum Natura*: *denique avarities et honorum caeca cupido | quae miseros homines cogunt transcendere finis | iuris* ("Finally, avarice and blind desire for offices, which compel miserable men to contravene the boundaries of law," Lucr. 3.59–61). See Gardner 2019: 82 on Lucretius' interest in "the pathologies afflicting a fiercely competitive aristocracy."

[23] Wiseman 2016: 125.

[24] As Euben 1989: 223 writes, "In a corrupt society each part pretends to be the whole; each interest to be the common one; each faction to make its view and voice exclusive." The presence of factions, he continues, "signifies a polity divided against itself, one that can no longer be recognized or act as a single body."

[25] Varro's use of *gangraena*, a medical term borrowed from Greek (on which see Poccetti 2018: 105), finds precedent in Lucilius: *serpere uti gangraena mala atque herpestica posset* ("So that the terrible and spreading gangrene could come creeping," Lucil. Fr. 52 Warmington). Walters 2020: 21 locates this rot "on the political body."

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Rome's *mens* or *animus*.[26] Disorder within the mind of the Republic, Varro suggests, had sickened its body as well.

Varro was not the only one to suggest that the morals of Roman statesmen dictated the health of the political community over which they presided. Cicero makes the same argument in the third book of *De Legibus*, which posits a top-down model of civic health. Urging his fellow senators to set an example for others, he explains, *ut enim cupiditatibus principum et vitiis infici solet tota civitas, sic emendari et corrigi continentia* ("For as the whole political community is accustomed to be infected by the desires and vices of its leading men, so it is improved and corrected by their restraint," Cic. *Leg.* 3.30).[27] In the last chapter, we saw that Cicero located the origins of discord in the senate, whose internal split was mirrored in the citizenry at large. *De Legibus* clarifies the nature of this relationship, identifying emulation as the mechanism through which values circulate in society: *quaecumque mutatio morum in principibus exstiterit, eandem in populo secuturam* ("Whatever change in customs occurs among the leading men, it will be replicated among the people," Cic. *Leg.* 3.31).[28] Able to corrupt or correct civic morals through their behavior (*vel corrumpere mores civitatis vel corrigere possunt*, Cic. *Leg.* 3.32), a small group of men hold the health of the body politic in their hands.[29] Whether this power manifests positively or negatively depends upon their character. Just as Varro envisions an infection spreading from top to bottom, Cicero acknowledges that *vitiosi principes* pour their *vitia* into the political community (*ea infundunt in civitatem*, Cic. *Leg.* 3.32). The solution to bad statesmanship, however, is good statesmanship, and it is here that he focuses his efforts at civic reform.[30] Varro betrays far more skepticism towards the idea that Rome's leading men will cure the corruption that their emotional dysregulation created in the first place.

The organic decline that structures *De Vita Populi Romani* finds parallel in Sallust's roughly contemporaneous monographs.[31] We have already seen how the *Bellum Iugurthinum* uses imagery of a divided and lacerated *res publica* to

[26] e.g. Cic. *Mil.* 90; *Ad Caes. sen.* 2.10.6.

[27] For *inficio* as "to taint, poison, infect," see *OLD* s.v. 4. Morrell 2017: 265 sees Cicero's argument as an effort to ground the concept of glory in virtue.

[28] As argued by Wallace-Hadrill 1997: 9.

[29] Atkins 2018b: 92 draws out the figurative implications of this idea, writing, "Cicero's account of corruption assumes that political leaders are the key to causing and remedying the civic body's infection."

[30] "The only thing that can produce stability in a state, according to Cicero, is the quality of the people who run it," Powell 1994: 24 writes in relation to *De Republica*.

[31] La Penna 1976: 402–3 notes the resonance between Sallust's and Varro's narratives, which were likely composed around the same time (Sallust's reference to Caesar and Cato in the past tense at *Cat.* 53.6 provides a likely *terminus post quem* of 44 BCE, though little else can be said with certainty).

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convey the loss of consensus after the downfall of Carthage. The *Bellum Catilinae* tells a similar story through imagery of disease rather than doubling. It portrays *libido*, immoderate desire that finds expression in the intertwined vices of *ambitio* and *avaritia*, as an infectious agent that corrupts Rome's leading citizens in the aftermath of the Third Punic War.[32] *Metus hostilis* had previously oriented the competitive energies of men towards the common goal of conquest; in its absence, the quest for civic virtue devolves into a baser lust for wealth and power (*igitur primo pecuniae, deinde imperi cupido crevit*, Sall. *Cat.* 10.3).[33] Just as *De Vita Populi Romani* compares *amor imperii* to a sickness, so does the *Bellum Catilinae*. In the place of Varro's gangrenous limbs is a deadly contagion: *post ubi contagio quasi pestilentia invasit, civitas inmutata* ("Later, when the contagion invaded as if a plague, the political community was transformed," Sall. *Cat.* 10.6).[34] Both thinkers use disease imagery to portray the desire for domination over others as a threat to the successful operation of Republican politics. At stake is the ideal of *libertas*, which is only realizable in a community that safeguards citizens from the arbitrary interference of others.[35] With its loss comes the progressive decline of the body politic.

Sallust treats the Catilinarian Conspiracy as one symptom of the civic disease diagnosed in the opening chapters of the text. He stages its progression through the bodies of the conspirators, whose physical deviance signifies the corruption of the *res publica* in microcosm. This deviance is conveyed most explicitly through the trope of effeminacy, which literalizes the loss of civic virtue (*vir-tus*) in the Republic.[36] The emasculation of the conspirators derives from their indulgence in avarice, a poison capable of effecting remarkable gender inversions: *ea quasi venenis malis inbuta corpus animumque virilem effeminat, semper infinita insatiabilis est* ("As if imbued with a harmful poison, it [*avaritia*] effeminizes the manly body and spirit, always unbounded and insatiable," Sall. *Cat.* 11.3). Sulla's soldiers in Asia are the first to fall prey to its influence; Sallust reports that the luxurious locales in which they dwell soften their spirits (*animos molliverant*, Sall. *Cat.* 11.5).[37] Their corruption gradually spreads to other

[32] Earl 1961: 13–5 suggests that Sallust stages a chronological progression from *ambitio* to *avaritia* to *luxuria*, while Conley 1981 proposes that *avaritia* and *luxuria* go hand-in-hand.

[33] Kapust 2011: 47.

[34] Like Varro, Sallust relies on *invado* to denote the onset of vice (Sall. *Cat.* 2.5, 5.6, 10.6, 12.2, 36.5). See Krebs 2008: 233–4 on the overlapping metaphors of disease and war implicit in the verb.

[35] For liberty as non-domination in Sallust's works, see Arena 2012: 69–75.

[36] See Boyd 1987 on *virtus effeminata*.

[37] Williams 2010: 149 notes that the cities of Asia Minor represent the peak of "softness and effeminacy" in the Roman imagination. On accusations of *mollitia* in Roman moralizing, see Edwards 1993: 63–97. On the complexities of its translation, see Williams 2013.

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members of the political community, who become enslaved to their appetites (*lubido stupri ganeae*) and begin playing the feminine role during sex (*viri muliebria pati*, Sall. *Cat.* 13.3).[38] Foremost among them is Catiline himself, whose sexual misconduct begins as a young man, intensifies with his use of seduction as a recruitment tool, and culminates in the inclusion of women like Sempronia in his ranks.[39] His uncontrollable desires find physical expression in his bloodless complexion, cloudy eyes, and unsteady gait, all of which Seneca later included in his symptomology of vice.[40] The recurrence of similar ailments among his collaborators offers physical proof of the moral corruption lamented in the preface (*corrupti civitatis mores*, Sall. *Cat.* 5.8).[41] The conspirators are not the only ones, however, whose unregulated appetites have dismantled the politics of virtue upon which a healthy Republic depends.[42] Identifying a degradation of morals at nearly every level of Roman society, Sallust makes clear that the suppression of the conspiracy will do little to reverse the course upon which the body politic has been set.

The *Bellum Iugurthinum* is more explicit in its identification of the Roman elite as the source of the moral decay that gives rise to the Catilinarian Conspiracy. Hewing closely to the interpretive framework employed by Varro, Sallust argues that *ambitio* and *avaritia* identified the *nobilitas* as their first targets. Generals soon began to lavish the spoils of war on their friends while driving the families of soldiers from their homes. Their prioritization of private interests over the common good

[38] For the belief that Sulla's army brought a figurative contagion back to Rome, see Walters 2019: 958–9.

[39] Syme 1964: 66 notes that this character sketch renders Catiline "symptomatic of all that was evil at Rome." On Catiline's youthful indiscretions, Sallust writes, *iam primum adulescens Catilina multa nefanda stupra fecerat* ("First of all, as a youth, Catiline had already committed many acts of unspeakable debauchery," Sall. *Cat.* 15.1). On his seduction of his followers, he writes, *scio fuisse nonnullos qui ita existumarent, iuventutem quae domum Catilinae frequentabat parum honeste pudicitiam habuisse* ("I know there were some who believed that the youths who were crowding Catiline's house did not properly value their chastity," Sall. *Cat.* 14.7). On the thematic significance of Sempronia (Sall. *Cat.* 25), see Boyd 1987.

[40] *igitur colos exsanguis, foedi oculi, citus modo, modo tardus incessus: prorsus in facie voltuque vecordia inerat* ("And so his complexion was bloodless, his eyes befouled, his gait sometimes quick, sometimes slow: truly madness was visible on his face and in his expression," Sall. *Cat.* 15.5). Sallust refers specifically to the guilt that followed Catiline's affair with Aurelia Orestilla but correlates the onset of these symptoms with the quickening of the conspiracy (*maturandi*, Sall. *Cat.* 15.3). See earlier on Seneca's physical markers of vice.

[41] Sallust uses fire imagery to convey the fevered minds of the conspirators (e.g. *ad facinora incendebant*, Sall. *Cat.* 13.4; *ut quoiusque studium ex aetate flagrabat*, Sall. *Cat.* 14.6). On their enslavement to their bellies, he writes, *vescendi causa terra marique omnia exquirere* ("They scoured everything on land and sea for the sake of grazing," Sall. *Cat.* 13.3).

[42] On the "politics of virtue" under threat in the *Bellum Catilinae*, see Kapust 2011: 53.

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marked the beginning of Rome's decline: *ita cum potentia avaritia sine modo modestiaque invadere, polluere et vastare omnia* ("And so when power and avarice invaded without limits or restraints, they polluted and laid waste to everything," Sall. *Iug.* 41.9). Foreign warfare had previously provided a reliable mechanism for channeling the competition for glory externally rather than internally. As the fruits of conquest became intertwined with the indulgence in vice, however, the battlefield became another avenue of corruption. Echoing the *mutatio morum* described by Cicero, Sallust stages the spread of avarice from the generals to the soldiers they command: *tanta vis avaritiae in animos eorum veluti tabes invaserat* ("Such a great force of avarice had invaded their spirits as if putrefaction," Sall. *Iug.* 32.4).[43] Festus identifies *tabes* as a favorite word of Sallust, who uses it to convey civic decline in each of his works.[44] Here, it exposes the irony of the plea that the Numidians make at the beginning of the text, when they ask the senate to help them prevent the spread of rot in their kingdom: *nolite pati regnum Numidiae . . . tabescere* ("Do not allow the kingdom of Numidia . . . to decay," Sall. *Iug.* 14.25). What the ambassadors do not realize is that the *tabes* they seek to forestall in Numidia has already infiltrated Rome. Staging its spread from the governing class to the people, Sallust joins Varro in suggesting that rot begins at the top. In this way, both thinkers expose the underbelly of the mind-body duality introduced in the last chapter.

Imagery of organic decay was useful in conveying civic decline because it encapsulated a historical trajectory proceeding from an idealized past to a degenerate present. The contraction of a disease presumed the existence of a body that was once healthy, validating the Republic's historical status as a thriving organism while also denying its claim to that status in the present. Writing in the aftermath of Caesar's assassination, Sallust and Varro were well-positioned to analyze Roman history in these terms. Yet the tradition did not arise in response to the failure of politics in the 40s

[43] Sallust employs nearly the same phrase in the *Bellum Catilinae*, writing, *tanta vis morbi atque uti tabes plerosque civium animos invaserat* ("So great was the strength of the disease and, as it were, putrefaction that had invaded the minds of many citizens," Sall. *Cat.* 36.5). Batstone 2010: 56 draws attention to the ambiguity of his phrasing, which leaves the identity of the infected unclear and thereby produces a sense of insecurity in the reader.

[44] Fest. 490.31 (Lindsay). The *Historiae* locates *tabes* inside the city of Rome itself: *qui quidem mos ut tabes in urbem coniectus* ("In fact, this habit, as if putrefaction, was thrust into the city," Sall. *Hist.* Fr. 4.36 Ramsey). Ramsey 2015: *ad loc.* speculates that the fragment might come from a speech against corruption delivered by Pompey, an intriguing possibility in light of Pompey's representation as a civic healer (see later). For Sallust's role in transforming *tabes* from a medical term into a moral metaphor, see Funari 1997.

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BCE. Quintilian cites a *vetus orator* for the metaphor of lancing the boils of the *res publica* (*persecuisti rei publicae vomicas*, Quint. *Inst.* 8.6.15), while the Sullan historian Claudius Quadrigarius made an oblique reference to the spread of a *cancer*.[45] Cicero disapprovingly reports that the death of Scipio Aemilianus was compared to a civic castration (*morte Africani 'castratam' esse rem publicam*) and that G. Servilius Glaucia was called the excrement of the Curia (*stercus curiae*, Cic. *De Or.* 3.164). Cicero himself began dabbling in the figurative connotations of disease in the 70s BCE, when the unwell body politic made its first appearances in his oratory.[46] Turning our attention to his speeches in the next section, we will see how he mobilized this imagery in the service of a political vision that diverged from Varro's and Sallust's. Rather than use it to hold the elite accountable for the failure of the Republic, he wielded it against rivals like Catiline and Clodius. Identifying them as pestilences in need of expulsion, he suggested that the restoration of civic health depended upon heeding the wisdom of the *boni*.[47] When his language is viewed alongside that of his contemporaries, it becomes clear that the sick body politic served as a locus for competing explanations of political failure in the mid-first century BCE.

Curing the Catilinarian Conspiracy

The last section situated the metaphor of the sick body politic in relation to a moralizing tradition that often took the governing class as its target. Catiline adapted this tradition to his own interests when he described the people as a strong body and the senate as a feeble one, implying that the ill health of the latter was responsible for the Republic's decline. Our knowledge of this speech comes primarily from Cicero's reference to it in the *Pro Murena*.[48] His public recollection of it allowed him to contrast Catiline's

[45] *ut viderent ne respueret verminaret †litteris addiualis†; quod verminatum ne ad cancer perveniret* ("That they should see to it that it did not spew and ache . . . that what ached not progress to a cancer," *FRHist* Fr. 49 Cornell 2013). Walters 2020: 23 suggests that the fragment might refer to a "'political' cancer." Hanses 2011: 153 characterizes the historian as a representative of "Rome's beleaguered nobility."

[46] e.g. *magnam et maxime aegram et prope depositam rei publicae partem* ("the huge and gravely unwell and nearly dead part of the *res publica*," Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.5); *ex quibus rebus maxime res publica laborat, eis maxime mederi convenit* ("It is fitting for them [wise men] to effectively heal the things from which the *res publica* gravely suffers," Cic. *Rosc. Am.* 154); *ut ego qui tela depellere et volneribus mederi debeam* ("I who should expel the spears and heal the wounds [inflicted by the prosecution]," Cic. *Quinct.* 8).

[47] On the shifting meaning of *boni*, see Mouritsen 2023: 15–84; Gildenhard 2011: 74–80; Lacey 1970; Hellegouarc'h 1963: 484–95.

[48] Plutarch also mentions the speech in his *Life of Cicero* (Plut. *Cic.* 14.4–5).

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figuration of the body politic with his own, the elements of which were refined across his consular oratory.[49] In the place of a two-bodied and two-headed organism, the *Pro Murena* describes a deadly disease: *latius patet illius sceleris contagio quam quisquam putat, ad pluris pertinet. Intus, intus, inquam, est equus Troianus* ("The contagion of that crime spreads more widely than anyone thinks, it spreads to many. Within, I say, the Trojan horse is within," Cic. *Mur.* 78). The specter of a contagion, which originates outside the body yet takes up residence within it, facilitates Cicero's negotiation of two contradictory images: intrusion, which implies the existence of an external foe, and concealment, which suggests an internal one.[50] The metaphor thereby enables Catiline's transformation from a Roman citizen into a foreign enemy (*hostis*) worthy of conquest.[51] The utility of such imagery helps explain its prominence in the first and second *Catilinarians*, where it is pivotal to Cicero's construction of his consular authority.[52] In the place of Catiline's head of state is a civic healer whose wisdom enables the restoration of the Republic.

Cicero's descriptions of a sick civic organism take center stage in the first and second *Catilinarians*, which were delivered roughly two weeks after Catiline's speech and two weeks before the *Pro Murena*.[53] Drawing on imagery that would have been familiar to both senatorial and popular audiences, he alludes to the circulation of intestinal threats (*intestinam aliquam cotidie perniciem rei publicae molientem*, Cic. *Cat.* 1.5; *bellum intestinum ac domesticum*, Cic. *Cat.* 2.28) and issues grave warnings about the *salus rei publicae* (Cic. *Cat.* 1.8, 1.11) and *salus urbis* (Cic. *Cat.* 2.27).[54] Whereas Sallust and Varro use such imagery to indict the governing class for its moral failures, Cicero narrows its application to the Catilinarian conspirators.[55] Describing their debauched bodies – glistening with oil,

[49] Although Cicero later declined to include the *Pro Murena* among his consular orations, its rhetoric shares much in common with the *Catilinarians*. On its value as a source of Ciceronian political thought, see Stem 2006.

[50] On the structural tension between these themes, see Hodgson 2017: 126; Konstan 1993: 14; Vasaly 1993: 51.

[51] Straumann 2016: 95 argues that Cicero was the first thinker to theorize how a Roman citizen could become a *hostis* deprived of constitutional rights. Melchior 2010 illustrates Sallust's critique of the misappropriation of this term in the *Bellum Catilinae*.

[52] Batstone 1994 argues for the construction of consular ethos as a primary purpose of the first *Catilinarian*.

[53] Catiline's speech was delivered on September 23, the first *Catilinarian* on November 8, the second *Catilinarian* on November 9, and the *Pro Murena* in the weeks thereafter. For an overview of the circumstances surrounding the dating and delivery of these speeches, see Lintott 2008: 142–8.

[54] Walters 2020: 38–9 notes the centrality of the *salus rei publicae* to the *Catilinarians*.

[55] "Ironically," Berry 2020: 111–2 writes, "Catiline would have agreed that the state was diseased, but he would not have accepted Cicero's diagnosis of the cause."

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resplendent in purple, and put in service of unspeakable sexual acts – at great length, he exploits the commonplace figuration of vice as disease to mark them as infectious agents.[56] He thereby renders Catiline an invader rather than member of the body politic (*hanc tam taetram, tam horribilem tamque infestam rei publicae pestem*, Cic. *Cat.* 1.11; *scelus anhelantem, pestem patriae nefarie molientem*, Cic. *Cat.* 2.1).[57] He employs the same approach with the rest of the conspirators, whose survival is portrayed as mutually exclusive with that of the *res publica*. The strands of this rhetorical framework come together in an extended analogy that marks the culmination of the first speech (Cic. *Cat.* 1.31):

> nunc si ex tanto latrocinio iste unus tolletur, videbimur fortasse ad breve quoddam tempus cura et metu esse relevati, periculum autem residebit et erit inclusum penitus in venis atque in visceribus rei publicae. Ut saepe homines aegri morbo gravi, cum aestu febrique iactantur, si aquam gelidam biberunt, primo relevari videntur, deinde multo gravius vehementiusque adflictantur, sic hic morbus qui est in re publica relevatus istius poena vehementius reliquis vivis ingravescet.
>
> Now, if from such a terrible band of robbers that man alone is removed, we will perhaps seem to be relieved from anxiety and fear for a certain brief period, but the danger will remain and will burrow deep in the veins and viscera of the *res publica*. Just as men ill with a severe disease, when they are tossed about with the heat of a fever, if they drink icy water, at first seem to heal, then are afflicted even more intensely and vehemently, so this disease, which is in the *res publica*, if alleviated by the punishment of that man, will violently worsen as long as the others remain alive.

Cicero warns his audience that Catiline is only one carrier of a disease that circulates more widely than anyone suspects. His punishment might briefly alleviate its symptoms, but it will not eradicate the underlying malignancy.[58] True healing requires the more systemic treatment of all those sympathetic to the conspiracy. What this treatment might entail is not specified, though the participle *vivis* seems to imply execution. Which individual or institution is invested with the power to carry out such a punishment is equally unclear. The metaphor of the sick body politic

[56] *hos quos video volitare in foro, quos stare ad curiam, quos etiam in senatum venire, qui nitent unguentis, qui fulgent purpura* ("I see them flitting around the forum, standing in the Curia, even coming into the senate, men who glisten with oil and are resplendent with purple," Cic. *Cat.* 2.5). See Corbeill 1996: 162 for Cicero's emphasis on the visual markers of the conspirators' vices.

[57] Liong 2016: 348–9 argues that *scelus anhelans* is a medical metaphor that associates Catiline's "crime-ridden breath" with the belabored wheezing of the ill.

[58] Beagon 2002: 130 describes Catiline as "a malignant growth, whose physical remnants may remain deep in the *viscera* of the mother state, even when the main tumour is expelled."

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facilitates such ambiguity. It replaces questions of legality with those of survival, conveying an urgent sense of civic crisis but obscuring the actual steps proposed in response to it.[59] Unsure of his senatorial support and unwilling to state his own position explicitly, Cicero relies on figurative speech to construct an alternative standard of political judgment and action.

In the second *Catilinarian*, Cicero constructs his consular legitimacy in relation to the successful implementation of the remedy proposed in the first speech.[60] Having previously demanded that Catiline purge the city through his departure (*purga urbem*, Cic. *Cat.* 1.10), he now announces the fulfillment of this request: *abiit, excessit, evasit, erupit* ("He has left, withdrawn, fled, burst forth," Cic. *Cat.* 2.1). The medical resonance of these verbs is made explicit through the personification of Rome: *quae quidem mihi laetari videtur, quod tantam pestem evomuerit forasque proiecerit* ("She certainly seems to me to be rejoicing, since she has vomited forth such a horrible pestilence and expelled it outside the walls," Cic. *Cat.* 2.2). It might be the city who carries out the purge, but it is Cicero who sets the healing process in motion. He advertises this fact by assigning curative powers to his consulship: *quos si meus consulatus, quoniam sanare non potest, sustulerit, non breve nescio quod tempus sed multa saecula propagarit rei publicae* ("If my consulship removes these men, since it cannot cure them, it will have extended the lifespan of the *res publica* not for a short period, but for many ages," Cic. *Cat.* 2.11). His conditional combines metaphors of healing a body and propagating a vine. Just as the health of a plant often requires trimming and grafting, the health of a body demands the occasional amputation of unwell parts. He has the apparently exclusive right to perform such surgeries, provided that they are in the best interest of the *res publica*.

In asserting his right to wield the scalpel against his fellow citizens, Cicero constructs an alternative reality in which his magisterial powers are unlimited. He is not only a consul, but also a *dux* and *imperator* on the battlefield created by Catiline.[61] He reinforces this idea as he switches to the

[59] On the "rhetoric of crisis" in the *Catilinarians*, see Wooten 1983: 171, fn. 2. Straumann 2016: 51–2 identifies the *Catilinarians* as a locus of Ciceronian constitutionalism, but his crisis language also obscures questions of legality.

[60] The legitimacy of the statesman derives from his performance of actions that benefit the common advantage of the Roman people (see Atkins 2013a: 140–1). Restoring the body politic to health, an action undoubtedly in the best interest of all its members, therefore confirms his right to act on its behalf. On the problem of consular legitimacy in the *Catilinarians*, see Cape 2002: 143; Konstan 1993.

[61] For Cicero as the *togatus dux et imperator* (Cic. *Cat.* 2.28), see May 1988: 56–7 and Nicolet 1960: 240–3.

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first person and introduces a surgical metaphor that carries overtones of violence. Eliding the legal restraints upon his magistracy, the collaborative nature of decision-making in the Republic, and the precarity of his senatorial support, he lays claim to apparently absolute authority: *quae sanari poterunt quacumque ratione sanabo, quae resecanda erunt non patiar ad perniciem civitatis manere* ("Whatever can be healed, I will heal by any means, but what must be cut off, I will not allow to remain to the detriment of the political community," Cic. *Cat.* 2.11). The mixed constitution and its balance of powers is nowhere to be found in this framework. Perhaps to avoid drawing too much attention to its absence, Cicero retreats from the notion of surgery almost as quickly as he introduces it. Revising his earlier proclamation that the conspirators are too corrupt to be healed, he now expresses faith in the prospect of their rehabilitation: *quos quidem ego, si ullo modo fieri possit, non tam ulcisci studeo quam sanare sibi ipsos, placare rei publicae* ("In fact, if it is in any way possible, I am not eager to punish them so much as heal them, to reconcile them with the *res publica*," Cic. *Cat.* 2.17). Setting up healing as the opposite of punishing, he allows for the possibility of resolution without bloodshed. In the place of the consul's scalpel is the orator's medicine: *deinde singulis medicinam consili atque orationis meae, si quam potero, adferam* ("Then, I will apply the medicine of my advice and oratory to them individually, insofar as I am able," Cic. *Cat.* 2.17). Yet even as he transitions to a gentler model of healing, he continues to foreground his own curative capacities. *Consilium* and *oratio*, after all, are the respective products of his personal civic judgment and rhetorical skill.[62] As remedies that only he can administer, they place the health of the Republic in his hands alone.

By tying his consular authority to his restoration of the body politic, Cicero assumes the role of a civic healer in the *Catilinarians*.[63] His assumption of this role might seem surprising in light of the low social status of physicians, who were often of foreign origin and regarded with contempt.[64] The Elder Pliny reports that Archagathus, the first Greek physician to practice in Rome, was called "the Butcher" (*Carnifex*) due

[62] Steel 2006: 65 suggests that Cicero gives advice (*consilium*) rather than make demands so as not to expose his authority to the possibility of rejection.

[63] Dyck 2008: 134 identifies Cicero's assumption of two roles: "as *dux* in a war or as a physician healing and, where necessary, performing surgery.

[64] Greek physicians made their first appearance in the Roman world in the late third century BCE but occupied a position of lower social status than they did in the Hellenistic East. On the reception of Greek medicine in Rome, see Israelowich 2015: 11–30; Nutton 2004: 160–63; Von Staden 1996, who describes the rise of the *medicus* as "both exciting and threatening," (384).

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to his penchant for cutting and cauterizing.[65] The Elder Cato warned his son against Greek doctors, who were rumored to have taken an oath to kill foreigners.[66] According to Plutarch, however, Cato also compared himself to a physician while running for the censorship. While other candidates promised to use gentle remedies, he argued that the city required a great purge (μεγάλου καθαρμοῦ). Urging his fellow Romans to pick the harshest of physicians (τὸν σφοδρότατον αἱρεῖσθαι τῶν ἰατρῶν), he promised to cut (τέμνων) and cauterize (ἀποκαίων) the lax morals of the era (Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 16.5). The same treatments that tarnished the reputation of Archagathus, Plutarch suggests, were exploited for rhetorical effect as part of Cato's electoral platform. We might doubt the authenticity of his account, but it is telling that he did not regard the physician–patient analogy as outlandish for a Roman statesman to employ.

Whereas Plutarch puts the word *iatros* in the mouth of Cato, Cicero never directly compares himself to a *medicus* in his oratory. Gildenhard suggests that he tries to distance himself from "Greek specialists" by recommending "a process in which everyone takes care to heal himself, to stem the spread of the disease."[67] This argument holds true for much of Cicero's oratory, including the first speech that he delivered as consul.[68] Sounding the alarm of civic disease in *De Lege Agraria I*, he warns, *multa sunt occulta rei publicae volnera, multa nefariorum civium perniciosa consilia . . . inclusum malum, intestinum ac domesticum est* ("There are many wounds hidden in the *res publica*, many destructive plots of wicked

[65] *vulnerarium eum fuisse egregium, mireque gratum adventum eius initio, mox a saevitia secandi urendique transisse nomen in carnificem et in taedium artem omnesque medicos* ("They say that he was a distinguished surgeon, and that at first his arrival was regarded with amazement and appreciation, but that soon, due to the severity of his cutting and cauterizing, his name became 'the Butcher' and his art and all physicians became loathsome," Plin. *HN* 29.12–3). Pliny evidently shared this view, remarking shortly thereafter that physicians often get away with murder: *discunt periculis nostris et experimenta per mortes agunt, medicoque tantum hominem occidisse inpunitas summa est* ("They learn through our plights and conduct experiments by way of our deaths; physicians alone enjoy the greatest impunity in committing murder," Plin. *HN* 29.18).

[66] ἔλεγε κοινὸν ὅρκον εἶναι τοῦτον ἰατρῶν ἁπάντων, καὶ παρεκελεύετο φυλάττεσθαι τῷ παιδὶ πάντας ("He said that this was a common oath among all [Greek] physicians and urged his son to be on guard against all of them," Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 23.3–4). See Von Staden 1996: 382 on Cato's efforts to construct a "positive Roman alternative to Greek medicine" and Nutton 2004: 165 for Cato's paradoxical reliance on Greek medical sources. Gruen 1992: 80 has shown that Cato was in fact deeply engaged with Greek culture, approaching it "not as an enemy of Hellas but as an advocate of Rome."

[67] See Gildenhard 2011: 130, who argues against "the metaphorical portrayal of the statesman *as* a *medicus*." Walters 2020: 34 agrees that such a comparison "would compromise the authority (*auctoritas*) of the speaker and threaten to undercut the persuasiveness that medical imagery otherwise imparts."

[68] May 1988: 50 notes that Cicero's speeches against the agrarian law illustrate "in more than a nascent state the persona that would emerge into full light with the eruption of the Catilinarian conspiracy."

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citizens . . . the sickness is within, intestinal and internal," Cic. *Leg. Agr.* 1.26). This passage confirms that Cicero did not deploy disease imagery solely in response to Catiline; he began wielding it against populist proposals as soon as he assumed office. Here, however, he invites the whole senate to partake in administering a cure: *huic pro se quisque nostrum mederi atque hoc omnes sanare velle debemus* ("Each of us on his own account should want to remedy this and all of us should want to cure it," Cic. *Leg. Agr.* 1.26).[69] By the time he delivered the *Catilinarians*, this collaborative model of healing had yielded to one focused on his own curative capacities. A rhetorical framework that could be construed in relation to elite consensus was instead reoriented towards the construction of his consular authority.

The inspiration for Cicero's civic healer can be traced back to Plato, many of whose dialogues stress the compatibility of the political and medical arts.[70] In the *Statesman*, the Eleatic Stranger develops an extended comparison between the statesman and physician to deny that the consent of the governed is necessary for just rule. A physician cures men whether they are willing or not (ἐάντε ἑκόντας ἐάντε ἄκοντας ἡμᾶς ἰῶνται), applying harsh treatments like surgery (τέμνοντες) and cautery (καίοντες) if they prove most efficacious (Pl. *Plt.* 293b). His legitimacy derives from his possession of true medical knowledge, not the permission of his patients.[71] Likewise, the statesman equipped with true political knowledge has the right to use violent remedies like execution (ἀποκτεινύντες) and exile (ἐκβάλλοντες) so long as they improve the city (Pl. *Plt.* 293d). What matters in both cases is the technical expertise of the practitioner, which serves the sole criterion of legitimacy.[72] Although this model could be applied to any form of rule, the Eleatic Stranger orients the conversation towards kingship. In doing so, he foregrounds the authoritarian implications of an analogy that denies the ruled any say over the actions of their ruler(s). Naturalizing an extreme hierarchy of command and obedience,

[69] Many other examples of this communal model of healing can be found in Cicero's early oratory. In the *Divinatio in Caecilium*, he suggests that the only remedy for the sick and nearly dead *res publica* (*hoc remedium est aegrotae ac prope desperatae rei publicae*) is for the most honest, upright, and diligent men to defend the authority of the courts (Cic. *Div. Caec.* 70).

[70] On Cicero's philosophical engagement in his oratory, see Steel 2022; Baraz 2012: 128–49; Gildenhard 2011: 3–6.

[71] On this passage, see White 2007: 104–5 and Stern 1997: 268. The physician analogy in the *Statesman* is not necessarily representative of its role in other Platonic dialogues, as noted by Weiss 1995: 219. On its function elsewhere, see Lane 2010: 188–91; Rosen 2005: 31–33; Moravcsik 2000; Cross and Woozley 1964: 46–49.

[72] As Schofield 2006b: 176 writes, "all that matters in a statesman is that he rules with expertise, whether or not those ruled accept his rule willingly or unwillingly, are rich or poor, and whether or not he governs in accordance with laws or otherwise."

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medical metaphors play a central role in the construction of what Malcolm Schofield calls "an absolutist model of political rule" in the *Statesman*.[73]

The influence of the Platonic tradition upon Cicero is evident in *De Republica*, where Scipio assumes that the primary purpose of the physician–patient analogy is to justify sole rule.[74] In fact, he declares that he will avoid using this example in his defense of monarchy because it is so commonplace: *tum magis adsentiere, Laeli, si ut omittam similitudines – uni gubernatori, uni medico, si digni modo sint eis artibus, rectius esse alteri navem committere, aegrum alteri, quam multis – ad maiora pervenero* ("You will agree even more, Laelius, if I may pass over analogies – namely, that it is better to entrust a ship to a single helmsman and a sick person to a single physician, rather than many, assuming they are skilled in their arts – in order to proceed to greater examples," Cic. *Rep*. 1.62). The repetition of *unus* confirms the traditionally singular focus of these analogies.[75] Both recur in the next section to illustrate the utility of sole rule during emergencies (Cic. *Rep.* 1.63):[76]

> sed ut ille qui navigat, cum subito mare coepit horrescere, et ille aeger ingravescente morbo, unius opem implorat, sic noster populus in pace et domi imperat et ipsis magistratibus minatur recusat appellat provocat, in bello sic paret ut regi; valet enim salus plus quam libido. Gravioribus vero bellis, etiam sine collega omne imperium nostri penes singulos esse voluerunt . . .
>
> But just as a sailor, when the sea suddenly begins to roughen, and a sick man, when his disease worsens, implore the aid of one man, so our people wield power during peace and at home, threatening their magistrates, disobeying them, appealing to other officeholders and the popular assembly, but in wartime obey them as if a king; for safety prevails more than willfulness. In fact, in more serious wars our people have even been willing to concede all power to one man without a colleague . . .

Scipio cites the *medicus* and *gubernator* to validate the deference of the Roman people to their magistrates in wartime. Comparing their obedience to royal subservience (*ut regi*), he confirms the monarchical resonance of these analogies. Although they can operate in the context of collegial

[73] Schofield 2006a: 325. Lane 2021: 214 modifies this claim by stressing the care of the ruled as the end towards which the ruler works, on which see further later.

[74] Zetzel 1995: *ad loc.* 1.62.1 identifies Plato as a philosophical precedent for Scipio's medical analogies.

[75] For Cicero's adaptation of the traditionally singular helmsman metaphor to the parameters of Republican politics, see Mebane 2022.

[76] Drawing on Schmitt 2005 [1922], Agamben 2005 and Agamben 1998 establishes emergency politics as a key theme in the study of contemporary republicanism. See also Honig 2009 and Kalyvas 2008, as well as Straumann 2016: 63–117 and Lowrie 2007 on emergency politics in the Roman Republic specifically.

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governance (*ipsis magistratibus*), they are better suited to the exceptional authority of the dictator.[77] While the dictatorship had fallen out of usage by the Late Republic, however, the need for exemplary leadership during moments of crisis remained.

Within *De Republica*, the ideal statesman provides a solution to this problem.[78] Envisioned as a complement to and guarantor of the mixed constitution, the *rector* possesses authority rooted in civic knowledge rather than elected office.[79] In this sense, he exemplifies the model of statesmanship proposed by the Eleatic Stranger. His role in political affairs is likewise justified through the physician–patient analogy: *ut enim gubernatori cursus secundus, medico salus, imperatori victoria, sic huic moderatori rei publicae beata civium vita proposita est* ("As a favorable journey is the goal of the helmsman, and health that of the physician, and victory that of the general, so the happy life of citizens has been laid out before this guide of the *res publica*," Cic. *Rep.* 5.8).[80] Scipio compares the ideal statesman to a helmsman, physician, and general, three models of authority that share the prioritization of a higher good: a safe journey, the restoration of health, and a victory. Although these roles are typically occupied by only one person at a time, the number of statesmen guiding the Republic is less important than their shared commitment to wisdom. Scipio makes this clear when he asks, *si enim sapientia est quae gubernet rem publicam, quid tandem interest haec in unone sit an in pluribus?* ("For if wisdom is truly what steers the *res publica*, why then does it matter whether it exists in one person or many?" Cic. *Rep.* 3.47).[81] Approaching

[77] On the exceptional yet nebulously defined powers of the dictatorship, see Wilson 2021: 156–88.

[78] The bibliography on the ideal statesman is vast. Reitzenstein 1917 interpreted Cicero's ideal statesman as a proto-*princeps*; Meyer 1918 suggests he signified Cicero's sympathy towards the restoration of monarchy; Pöschl 1936: 117–9 sees him as a philosopher-king. Scholarly opinion subsequently turned away from this view and towards that of Heinze 1924 and Powell 1994, who describe the ideal statesman as a model practitioner of the political art akin to Plato's πολιτικός. Asmis 2005: 410 argues that the ideal statesman is "a type that admits multiple tokens," while Ferrary 1995: 53 suggests that "*rector* is a neutral term and can designate a statesman in any kind of régime." That the *rector* should be linked to sole rule in some fashion, however, is an idea that has also seen recent revival. Stevenson 2005 argues for Cicero's interest in reviving the dictatorship, while Lintott 2008: 236 describes "the concept of monarchy . . . being reconciled with republican values." Zarecki 2014: 9–11 provides an overview of debate and himself stresses the practical motivations that lay behind Cicero's construction of this ideal.

[79] See Asmis 2005: 409, who writes, "This statesman has no separate political office; his sole qualification is his political wisdom."

[80] The same three metaphors recur in *De Divinatione*, where Cicero writes, *medicus morbum ingravescentem ratione providet, insidias imperator, tempestates gubernator* ("By means of reason, a physician foresees a worsening disease, a general an ambush, a helmsman storms," Cic. *Div.* 2.16).

[81] Zarecki 2014: 89 suggests that Scipio's metaphors of statesmanship "illustrate the benefits, indeed the necessity, of having a single recognized *rector* working to ameliorate a particular crisis."

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political authority primarily as a question of virtue, Scipio suggests that the care of the body politic ought to be entrusted to whomever is best equipped to heal it. Whether one or several people meet this criterion depends upon the circumstances at hand.

Cicero builds upon Scipio's argument in the first book of *De Officiis*, which identifies Plato as the inspiration for his medical metaphors. He urges those who oversee the *res publica* to remember the following Platonic precept: *ut totum corpus rei publicae curent, ne, dum partem aliquam tuentur, reliquas deserant* ("That they should care for the whole body of the *res publica*, so that, while attending to one part, they do not neglect the others," Cic. *Off.* 1.85). He refers to these civic caretakers in the plural (*qui rei publicae praefuturi sunt*), confirming that the physician–patient analogy remained useful in the context of collegial governance. A patient might only receive treatment from one physician at a time, but a body politic can have a multiplicity of healers. What mattered is not their number, but their shared commitment to a model of statesmanship rooted in the ideal of civic care. In linking the command of the statesman to his care of the citizenry, Cicero's approach to Plato approximates that of Melissa Lane. She argues that the *dunamis* of the Platonic statesman "is directed solely to caring for – or one might fairly say serving – the good of those over whom he rules."[82] The legitimacy of his command depends upon its orientation towards the well-being of others, mitigating the authoritarian implications of the analogy. Jed Atkins makes a similar point in his reading of *De Officiis*; while the physician–patient relationship assumes "asymmetries of knowledge and authority," it is also rooted in the pursuit of the shared goal of health.[83] A physician who harms his patient violates the terms of this agreement and forfeits his claim to legitimacy. These considerations do not negate the absolutist ends towards which healing metaphors could be put, but they illuminate a meaningful constraint on their usage in Cicero's political philosophy.

Cicero's philosophical approach to the physician–patient analogy sheds light on the rhetorical persona that he constructs in his consular oratory. *De Republica* and *De Officiis* might have been composed long after his consulship had come to an end, but they reprise many of the themes worked out in his speeches from 63 BCE. Foremost among them is the belief that exemplary statesmanship provided a viable solution to the decline of the body politic. Just as *De Republica* envisions a *rector* presiding over the Republic like a physician over a patient, the *Catilinarians* portray Cicero as a civic healer able to diagnose, treat, and cure the corrupted

[82] Lane 2021: 214. [83] Atkins 2019: 478–9.

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elements of the *res publica.* Although this imagery cast Cicero as Catiline's foil, it was motivated by a similar impulse to theorize the authority of the statesman within an organic tradition that granted him no special role. Cicero's civic healer was less controversial than Catiline's head of state because it had been adapted to the paradigm of Roman Republicanism. It connoted a model of authority that was grounded in civic wisdom, oriented towards the common good, and functional in the context of collegial governance. The ends towards which Cicero put the metaphor, however, illuminate its risks. Identifying certain members of the body politic as threats to its longevity, he made the extralegal execution of Roman citizens seem both necessary and urgent. Although it soon became clear that this treatment only intensified the civic ills that had given rise to the plot in the first place, Cicero's belief in its propriety never wavered. In fact, it only intensified.

Shortly after his consulship came to an end, Cicero delivered a speech in defense of P. Cornelius Sulla that afforded the opportunity to establish his "official" version of the events of 63 BCE.[84] Reactivating a now familiar set of images, he compares the Catilinarian conspirators to a disease that had to be forcibly expelled to save the body politic: *ex magnis et diuturnis et iam desperatis rei publicae morbis ista repente vis erupit, ut ea collecta et eiecta convalescere aliquando et sanari civitas posset; neque enim est quisquam qui arbitretur illis inclusis in re publica pestibus diutius haec stare potuisse* ("From those serious and chronic and already irremediable diseases in the *res publica*, there was an eruption of violence, and only after it was gathered and expelled was the political community finally able to heal and be cured; and in fact, there is no one who believes that it could have survived much longer with those pestilences enclosed in the *res publica*," Cic. *Sull.* 76).[85] Cicero constructs a neat narrative in which the Republic was sickened by the corrupted conspirators and revived by their deaths. His resounding proclamation of a cure might lead us to think that Rome no longer required medical intervention. Yet Cicero abandoned neither this symbolic system nor his authoritative role within it upon the completion of his consulship. Proceeding to identify a new collection of political enemies as

[84] Pieper 2014: 52–8 illustrates the importance of the *Pro Sulla* in Cicero's post-consular self-fashioning, where he sought to influence collective memory of his time in office.

[85] I follow the text of Berry 1996, who emends *confecta* to *collecta*. *Confecta* is typically understood as a digestive metaphor, but this interpretation does not fit with the image of a "disease being concentrated together (*collecta*) and purged, a common means of treatment in the ancient world; once the suppuration (the Catilinarians) had been drawn off, the patient (the state) could return to health."

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pestilences whose existence threatened the survival of the Republic, he argued that curative violence was more necessary than ever. The potentially damaging effects of this rhetoric came to the fore as civic strife brought politics to a halt in the 50s BCE.

Violent Remedies

The last section framed Cicero's consular oratory in response to a series of assumptions: that the Republic could be productively compared to a body, that this body had grown perilously ill, that the source of its illness was the Catilinarian conspirators, whose own bodies had been sickened by vice, and that the best remedy was their expulsion from the *res publica* by whatever means necessary. Offering a diagnosis and proposing a proper course of treatment, Cicero used medical terminology to establish his political legitimacy. The execution of the conspirators without trial, however, gestures towards the potential harm of actions validated in such a way. This problem becomes our focus in the final section of this chapter, which explores how medical metaphors could be used to justify acts of violence that weakened institutions like the courts and assemblies. When Cicero began identifying men like Clodius as malignancies upon whom surgery could be performed even by private citizens, he contributed to the destabilization of the Republic during the 50s BCE. Two signs of this political dysfunction were Pompey's sole consulship and Caesar's dictatorship, both of which were justified as curative remedies. As the ideal of the civic healer became linked to their unprecedented positions in the *res publica*, the utility of disease imagery in validating sole rule began to emerge.

Cicero crafted his post-consular persona in relation to his prolonged struggle with P. Clodius Pulcher, the radical tribune who masterminded his exile in 58 BCE. Clodius bears much of the responsibility for the violence that came to dominate Rome's urban and electoral landscape during these years.[86] Although Romans had long granted violence a legitimate role in the settling of private and public disputes, Clodius' adoption of physical force as "a standard weapon of the political armoury" marked something new.[87] Using armed gangs to intimidate enemies, encourage mob actions, and influence voting, he exposed the fragility of a civic community no longer governed by consensus on the basic rules of

[86] For Clodius' role in the escalation of public violence during the 50s BCE, see Tatum 1999: 146.

[87] Lintott 1999 (1968): 193. He notes that while Roman tradition had long tolerated the use of violence in the settling of public and private disputes, the late Republic saw a "surge of violence" that became difficult to control (4).

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the political game.[88] Cicero confirmed his own awareness of the risks posed by politically motivated violence in *De Legibus*, the idealized law code of which mandates the total absence of *vis* from civic life: *nihil est enim exitiosius civitatibus, nihil tam contrarium iuri ac legibus, nihil minus civile et immanius, quam composita et constituta re publica quicquam agi per vim* ("Nothing is more destructive to political communities, nothing so contrary to justice and the law, nothing less civil and more barbaric, than the use of violence in an organized and established *res publica*," Cic. *Leg.* 3.42).[89] Theoretically, Cicero understood violence to be incompatible with the law and antithetical to justice.[90] When it came to decision-making in Romulus' dregs rather than Plato's *Republic*, however, his approach proved more equivocal.[91]

Cicero began to shift the figurative framework that he had used against Catiline to Clodius as early as the Bona Dea scandal in 61 BCE.[92] Writing to Atticus, he explained his participation in the trial as an effort to cut back the license of Clodius and his followers (*resecandae libidinis*) and heal the political community (*sanandae civitatis*, Cic. *Att.* 1.18.2). His terminology signals the reprisal of the surgical metaphor used to such dramatic effect in the second *Catilinarian* (*quae resecanda erunt*, Cic. *Cat.* 2.11). Although no longer in possession of a magistracy, he still possesses the civic wisdom that allows him to perform treatments on the body politic. This motif becomes more explicit in later letters; reporting how Clodius' gangs intimidated him on the Via Sacra, he comments, *ipse occidi potuit, sed ego diaeta curare incipio, chirurgiae taedet* ("That man [Clodius] could have been killed, but I am beginning to cure through diet, I am tired of surgery," Cic. *Att.* 4.3.3). The relative privacy of correspondence created a space for him to acknowledge the limitations of violence as a political tool. Although he maintained his right to perform surgery, he also admitted the futility of armed conflict

[88] Hölkeskamp 2010: 40 argues that the rules of the political game dictated what could and could not become "'politicizable' issues in a given socioeconomic system."

[89] Dyck 2004: *ad loc.* notes how Cicero's tricolon conveys the negative effects of violence on three interrelated entities: the *civitas*, its laws, and the behavior of its citizens. Lintott 1999 (1968): 132 calls the sentiment "unexceptional," yet also unable to be supported by any specific statute in the Twelve Tables or elsewhere. Cicero had begun articulating variations of this view by the late 70s BCE (e.g. *vis ea quae iuri maxime est adversaria*, "Violence is that which is the complete opposite of the law," Cic. *Caecin.* 5).

[90] Connolly 2015: 34 argues, "Violence, because of its imperviousness to resistibility, represents for Cicero the end of politics." On Cicero's perception of violence as legitimate when in service of the civic community or the status quo, however, see Duplá 2017: 185.

[91] As Cicero wrote of Cato, *dicit enim tamquam in Platonis* πολιτείᾳ, *non tamquam in Romuli faece sententiam* ("He gives his opinion as if in the *Republic* of Plato rather than the dregs of Romulus," Cic. *Att.* 2.1.8).

[92] See Riggsby 2002: 165 on Cicero's portrayal of Clodius as "metaphorically a second Catiline."

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with his opponent. That his scalpel might prove not only ineffective, but even harmful, is a possibility also confronted in the earlier letter: *in re publica vero, quamquam animus est praesens, tamen vulnus etiam atque etiam ipsa medicina efficit* ("But regarding the *res publica*, although I am as ready as ever, the medicine itself nevertheless keeps inflicting a wound," Cic. *Att.* 1.18.2). Cicero draws attention to the potentially fraught boundary between harming and healing. It was not only that a change in dosage might transform a medicine into a poison, but that the difference between surgery and butchery was a matter of personal rather than collective judgment.[93] In the absence of an objective standard to decide between them, Cicero had to persuade his fellow citizens that his figuration of the body politic was the correct one. This task only became more urgent after he suffered the humiliation of exile, which signified the public rejection of his consular persona.[94] Despite the reservations expressed in his letters, he returned to Rome with a renewed commitment to vilifying Clodius as a new carrier of Catiline's contagion.

In his *post reditum* oratory, Cicero explores the paradoxical idea that violence is both the disease from which Rome suffers and the cure for its ills. He foregrounds its harmful effects on the Republic in *De Domo Sua*, which opens with the portrayal of Clodius' tribunate as a deadly plague (*illum pestiferum et funestum tribunatum*, Cic. *Dom.* 2). Clodius himself is repeatedly figured as a pestilence (*funesta rei publicae pestis*, Cic. *Dom.* 5; *importuna pestis*, Cic. *Dom.* 26, *portentosa pestis*, Cic. *Dom.* 72), as are his allies (*rei publicae pestibus*, Cic. *Dom.* 24).[95] Despite lacking practical knowledge about the mechanisms by which diseases spread, Cicero describes Clodius infecting everyone he touches: *qui aliqua se contagione praedae, societatis, emptionis contaminaverunt* ("All those who have contaminated themselves in some way through the contagion of plunder, partnership, and purchase," Cic. *Dom.* 108).[96] One of the primary symptoms of this contagion is the unlawful use of physical force, which is

[93] The distinction between a remedy and a poison was often a matter of dosage rather than material, an idea famously integrated into the post-structural analysis of Derrida 1981. For hellebore as a "medicine-poison" that becomes a literary trope, see Bartsch 2015: 84–92.

[94] As van der Blom 2010: 301 points out, Cicero's exile proved that his version of the events of 63 BCE had failed to persuade.

[95] Clodius is also figured exacerbating an ulcer on the groin of the *res publica* (*in hoc ulcere tamquam inguen existeres*, Cic. *Dom.* 12). For *inguen* as a swelling on the groin, see *OLD* s.v. 1.

[96] Romans may not have been familiar with germ theory, but they did notice that illnesses were transmitted through social proximity. "This point is worth emphasizing," Gardner 2019: 27 writes, "since it tacitly allows that disease might be communicable between kin and compatriots, and thus threaten the stability of relationships within the larger civic body."

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portrayed as a form of madness: *haec furiosa vis vaesani tribuni plebis* ("This crazed violence of an insane tribune of the plebs," Cic. *Dom.* 55). Its damaging effects on the political process are illustrated through imagery of a body that has been beaten and battered (*civitatemque fractam malis, imminutam ac debilitatam, abiectam metu*, "the political community, shattered by ills, impaired and debilitated, cast down by fear," Cic. *Dom.* 25), its viscera plundered (*pecuniam . . . ereptam ex visceribus aerari*, "the money ripped from the intestines of the treasury," Cic. *Dom.* 23) and blood drained by henchmen like Aulus Gabinius (*helluatus tecum simul rei publicae sanguine*, "Gorging along with you [Clodius] on the blood of the *res publica*," Cic. *Dom.* 124). The bloodied corpse of Rome reinforces the normative idea that a healthy body politic is one in which violence plays no role.

It was easy for Cicero to make this argument in *De Domo Sua*, where the violence at stake was that perpetrated by Clodius and his followers. He faced a more difficult situation in his defense of Publius Sestius, an ally who had been charged with *vis* after recruiting his own gang to facilitate Cicero's recall from exile.[97] Cicero justified Sestius' use of armed supporters in the assembly on the grounds that it was the only remedy available to counteract the rapidly spreading Clodian pestilence. Far from perpetrating *vis* against the *res publica*, as the *Lex Plautia* required, Sestius used physical force on its behalf.[98] Stressing the salutary effects of such force, Cicero tells his audience, *reliquas illius anni pestis recordamini – sic enim facillime perspicietis quantam vim omnium remediorum a magistratibus proximis res publica desiderarit* ("Remember the other pestilences of that year, for you will then perceive very easily how great a dose of all sorts of medicines the *res publica* sought from the next year's magistrates," Cic. *Sest.* 55). Walters draws attention to the dual meaning of *vis omnium remediorum*, which evokes both the potency of a prescribed medicine and the actual force that Sestius employed on Cicero's behalf.[99] Shifting the persona of the civic healer from himself to his ally, Cicero argues that Sestius used his tribunate to treat the *res publica* to the best of his abilities (*ut adflictae et perditae rei publicae quantum posset mederetur*, Cic. *Sest.* 31).[100] Endorsing the use of violence to achieve this aim, he validates extralegal treatments performed in the best interest of the body

[97] On the street violence between Sestius and Clodius, see Tatum 1999: 180. Lintott 1999 (1968): 61 suggests that the events of 57 inured Cicero to the use of violence for the vindication of his interests.

[98] Because the *Lex Plautia* forbad the use of *vis contra rem publicam*, the legal issue at stake was not only whether Sestius had used violence but whether he had done so against the interests of the Republic. On the shifting concept of *vis* in the 50s BCE, see Craig 2001: 114–6; Riggsby 1999: 79–119; Lintott 1999 (1968): 107–24.

[99] Walters 2020: 45.

[100] Fantham 1972: 128 notes that *adflictus* enables overlapping metaphors of diseases and wounds.

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politic. The problem, of course, was the subjectivity of this standard of judgment on the political battlefield.

Although Sestius occupied the tribunate when he confronted Clodius, his legitimacy as a healer does not derive from his elected office. Cicero argues that even private citizens have the right to perform surgeries when necessary to save the Republic. Claiming this prerogative for himself, he asks, *contenderem contra tribunum plebis privatus armis? Vicissent improbos boni, fortes inertis; interfectus esset is qui hac una medicina sola potuit a rei publicae peste depelli* ("Should I have fought against a tribune of the plebs with weapons, although a private citizen? The good would have conquered the wicked, the strong the weak; he would have been killed, who by this medicine alone could have been kept away from the destruction of the *res publica*," Cic. *Sest.* 43).[101] He implicitly invokes the *salus populi* to legitimize the murder of a sacrosanct tribune by a private citizen.[102] He was not the first to do so; statesmen had been citing this principle to justify the abuse of tribunes since the Gracchan era.[103] Whereas Tiberius Gracchus and Lucius Saturninus had been killed under the contested authority of the *senatus consultum ultimum*, however, Cicero was now arguing that anyone could take the law into his own hands to expel an infectious agent.[104] Far from questioning the use of physical force, Trying to resolve the ambiguity of "he," which refers to Cicero. He felt compelled to explain why he did not use it himself.[105] He legitimized this more extreme form of vigilante justice through the *vis–medicina* analogy, which reframed a conflict between rival political visions as an existential

[101] Kaster 2006: *ad loc.* notes the fusion of two recurrent metaphors: the embodied commonwealth and political opponents as a plague.

[102] Winkler 1995: 30–5 stresses Cicero's role in the construction of *salus* as a political concept, which was perhaps most famously articulated in the maxim *ollis salus populi suprema lex esto* (Cic. *Leg.* 3.8). Dyck 2004: *ad loc.* describes the phrase *salus populi* as "virtually Ciceronian property."

[103] Cicero used this argument in his defense of G. Rabirius, who was brought to trial in 63 BCE for his role in the death of the tribune L. Appuleius Saturninus nearly forty years earlier (see Cape 2002: 131–2).

[104] On the debated constitutional force of the *senatus consultum ultimum*, see Giovannini 2012; Lintott 1999: 89–93; Lintott 1999 (1968): 149–74; Mitchell 1971; Ungern-Sternberg 1970; Guarino 1970. The debate goes back to the Romans themselves, who fiercely disputed the legitimacy of actions performed under its sanction. Lintott 1999 (1968): 149 suggests that the conflicting values of the Roman constitution prevented a definitive solution to the problem. For its polarizing effect on public discourse, see Arena 2012: 204.

[105] Lintott 1999 (1968): 61. Cicero expreses concern over the escalation of strife if he were to act as a private citizen: *cui denique erat dubium quin ille sanguis tribunicius, nullo praesertim publico consilio profusus, consules ultores et defensores esset habiturus?* ("In short, did anyone doubt that tribunician blood, particularly if shed without public authority, would have consuls as its avengers and defenders?" Cic. *Sest.* 43).

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struggle over the fate of the body politic. After all, what good were the laws if they impeded the survival of the Republic?

The utility and danger of medical imagery lay in the ease with which it could be coopted in the service of nearly any political end.[106] Cicero and his adversaries could justify diametrically opposed actions as those necessary for Rome's healing. This is exactly what happened at Sestius' trial, which offers a rare glimpse into the rhetoric used by those on the other side. Cicero reports that the prosecutor P. Albinovanus urged the jurors to be severe in their course of treatment: *et cohortari ausus est accusator in hac causa vos, iudices, ut aliquando essetis severi, aliquando medicinam adhiberetis rei publicae* ("And the prosecutor dared to urge you in this case, judges, to finally be severe, to finally apply a medicine to the *res publica*," Cic. *Sest.* 135). Portraying Sestius as the source of the Republic's ills rather than the deliverer of its cure, Albinovanus identifies a guilty verdict as the proper remedy. Cicero refutes this claim by portraying Sestius as a healthy limb whose amputation would be akin to an act of butchery: *non ea est medicina, cum sanae parti corporis scalpellum adhibetur atque integrae, carnificina est ista et crudelitas* ("That is not medicine, when the scalpel is applied to a healthy and sound part of the body, that is butchery and cruelty," Cic. *Sest.* 135). Both speakers agree on the basic premise that the body politic has fallen ill but offer contrasting diagnoses and courses of treatment. It is Clodius and his supporters, Cicero argues, who deserve to go under the knife: *ei medentur rei publicae qui exsecant pestem aliquam tamquam strumam civitatis* ("They heal the *res publica* who cut out some sort of pestilence, as if a growth on the political community," Cic. *Sest.* 135). *Struma* refers to scrofula, an infection of the lymphatic glands from which P. Vatinius, a witness for the prosecution, was known to suffer. His physical deformity serves as evidence that Clodius' allies are the real malignancies.[107] The jurors evidently agreed in this case, acquitting Sestius on all charges.

Nearly ten years after Cicero began comparing Clodius to a plague in his letters to Atticus, his enemy was finally killed in a skirmish with T. Annius Milo's gang. Like Sestius, Milo was brought to trial on charges of *vis*.

[106] Catullus describes a speech that Sestius delivered against Antius as "full of poison and pestilence" (*plenam veneni et pestilentiae*, Catull. 44.12), confirming the ubiquity of this rhetoric in the electoral and judicial battles of the 50s BCE. Skinner 1987: 232 suggests that Catullus slyly mocks Sestius for overworking this phraseology in his oratory.

[107] Corbeill 1996: 55 writes, "Vatinius himself becomes a parasitic growth, one that plagues the state . . . Such a condition requires obvious and immediate treatment: radical surgery." See also La Bua 2019: 254–5; Bonsangue 2013: 62; Kaster 2006: *ad loc*.

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Speaking in his defense, Cicero argued that extralegal measures were sometimes necessary when the laws lacked strength.[108] The failure of the legal system to curb Clodius' gangs illustrates this principle: *aliter perire pestis illa non potuit; numquam illum res publica suo iure esset ulta* ("That plague [Clodius] could not have perished otherwise; the *res publica* would never have punished him by its own law," Cic. *Mil.* 88). Although Cicero elsewhere identifies the courts as a cure for the corruption of the Republic, here they are part of its malaise. Their weakness requires civic health to operate as its own standard of judgment, one capable of legitimizing illegal actions by framing them as beneficial to the common good.[109] In this way, medical terminology is used to circumvent the laws to which Cicero proclaimed allegiance in other contexts.[110] The judicial failure of the *Pro Milone*, however, indicates the limitations of the imagistic framework that he constructed. Unable to persuade the jurors that Clodius' murder was medicinal in nature, he was forced to confront the fact that his view of the body politic was not shared by all.

The *Pro Sestio* and *Pro Milone* implicate Cicero's rhetoric in a cycle of violence that peaked in the rioting following Clodius' funeral. The unrest prompted the senate to grant Pompey an unprecedented sole consulship, a solution that acknowledged the weakening regulatory power of the Republican constitution.[111] Because comparisons of exemplary statesmanship to healing were now a familiar fixture of public discourse, they could easily be applied to Pompey. The circulation of such rhetoric is suggested by its appearance in Appian, Plutarch, and Tacitus. Appian writes that the senate invested Pompey with this office because they recognized that the current crisis demanded some sort of cure (τοιᾶσδε θεραπείας, App. *B Civ.* 2.23). He attributes similar language to Pompey himself, who claimed that he had been called upon to heal the city (ἐς θεραπείαν τῆς πόλεως ἐπικληθεὶς, App. *B Civ.* 2.28).[112] Plutarch suggests that Pompey's critics

[108] Cicero had already begun justifying Milo's actions in these terms in the *Pro Sestio*, where he suggests that life and liberty had to be defended by force when the laws failed (*si leges non valerent*, Cic. *Sest.* 86). On the duty of the *boni* to employ violence in response to the disintegration of law and order, see Wood 1988: 189.

[109] In this sense, Cicero employed a conceptual framework drawn from natural rather than public law, on which see Hawley 2022: 164–5; Straumann 2015: 140, 171. On the construction of legitimate violence in the *Pro Milone*, see Duplá 2010.

[110] Wiseman 2012: 137 comments, "For him, the 'body politic' metaphor had evidently superseded the traditional idea that the laws were the guarantee of Roman liberty."

[111] The extent to which Pompey's sole consulship marked a turning point is disputed. Flower 2010: 31 argues for a "breakdown of the political order," while Gruen 1974: 154 denies "the failure of Republican institutions."

[112] Appian reports in his own voice that Pompey restored the sick city to health (νοσοῦσαν ὁ Πομπήιος τὴν πολιτείαν ὀξέως ἀναλάβοι, "Pompey quickly restored the diseased political community," App. *B Civ.* 2.25).

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couched their disapproval in these terms as well: οἱ δὲ κομψότεροι τὸ τῆς πόλεως ἡγοῦντο παρεωρακέναι τὸν Πομπήϊον ἐν τύχαις οὔσης, ὧν ἐκεῖνον ἰατρὸν ᾕρηται καὶ μόνῳ παραδέδωκεν αὑτήν ("The cleverer critics thought that Pompey disregarded the condition of the imperiled city, in light of which it had selected him as its physician and had handed itself over to him alone," Plut. *Pomp.* 55.3). Tacitus echoes this sentiment when he writes that Pompey's remedies were worse than the transgressions they targeted: *gravior remediis quam delicta erant* (Tac. *Ann.* 3.28.1). While we should always exercise due caution in using Imperial sources as evidence of Republican political language, the recurrence of the same imagery across three authors drawing on different source material suggests its historicity.[113] There is therefore good reason to believe that Pompey's unprecedented magistracy was validated and contested in relation to the ideal of the civic healer.

Cicero provides contemporary evidence for the circulation of this rhetoric in the *Pro Milone*, which locates Pompey in the curative role that he had once occupied himself. After describing Clodius' alleged plot to kill Pompey, he asserts, *cuius in vita nitebatur salus civitatis* ("The well-being of the political community rested upon his life," Cic. *Mil.* 19).[114] Had Pompey died (*occidisset*), Rome and many other nations would have fallen alongside him (*concidissent*). Naturalizing the dependence of the Republic on its foremost statesman, he addresses Pompey as a surgeon and compares his troops to a scalpel: *sed quis non intellegit omnis tibi rei publicae partis aegras et labantis, ut eas his armis sanares et confirmares, esse commissas?* ("But does anyone not understand that all the sick and withered parts of the *res publica* have been entrusted to you so that you may heal and strengthen them with these arms?" Cic. *Mil.* 68).[115] Just as Cicero figures the death of Clodius as a *medicina*, he suggests that Pompey must be willing to use *arma* against the corrupt parts of the Republic.[116] His surgical metaphor

[113] See Wiseman 2012: 135.

[114] Cicero used the same phrasing in regard to Scipio Aemilianus' planned dictatorship: *tu eris unus in quo nitatur civitatis salus* ("You will be the one upon whom the welfare of the political community depends," Cic. *Rep.* 6.16). See Weinstock 1971: 169 on this trope in Cicero's thought.

[115] Clark and Ruebel 1985: 68, fn. 30 suggest that Cicero might be alluding to the inscription on the statue of the Elder Cato in the Temple of Salus, which celebrated him for restoring (ἀποκατέστησε) a political community on the brink of collapse (τὴν Ῥωμαίων πολιτείαν ἐγκεκλιμένην καὶ ῥέπουσαν, Plut. *Cat.* 19.3). The possibility is intriguing in light of Cato's association with healing in Plutarch's *Life* (see earlier).

[116] Cicero began exploring Pompey's curative abilities in the *In Pisonem*, where he portrays him removing spears lodged in Rome's body by Piso: *principe Cn. Pompeio referente et de corpore rei publicae tuorum scelerum tela revellente* ("While Gn. Pompeius, our foremost citizen, was bringing forward this motion and ripping out the spears of your crimes from the body of the *res publica*," Cic. *Pis.* 24).

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simultaneously justifies the investiture of a single statesman with extraordinary powers and validates his mobilization of the army against his fellow citizens. These interrelated themes illuminate how Cicero's metaphorics contributed to the destabilization of politics in the 50s BCE. They look ahead to the role that the sick body politic would play in Rome's impending cycle of civil war and the novel constitutional arrangements that arose from it.

Pompey's own role as a civic healer ended abruptly in the civil war of 49–8 BCE, which saw his ignominious death on the Egyptian coast. Yet the rhetoric used to justify his position soon found a new home in the defense of Caesar and his unusual series of dictatorships and consulships.[117] Despite Cicero's personal distaste for Rome's new leader, he still found it politically advantageous to depict him healing the wounds of civil strife in the *Pro Marcello*.[118] Acknowledging that both sides in a war must perform actions that are outlawed in peace, he urges Caesar to restore the civic community to its prior condition: *quae quidem tibi nunc omnia belli volnera sananda sunt, quibus praeter te mederi nemo potest* ("In fact, it is all these wounds of war which now must be healed by you, which no one is able to cure except you," Cic. *Marcell.* 24). Cicero tasks Caesar with healing the wounds that he himself recently inflicted.[119] He thereby casts Caesar as both the harmer and healer of the body politic, a paradoxical status made possible by his victory in a civil war. Insofar as this role is occupied by one man and one man alone, Caesar's autocratic position is laid bare to the audience.[120] Like the rest of the *Pro Marcello*, this passage encapsulates an uneasy mix of praise, exhortation, and criticism that resists easy interpretation.[121] What is clear, however, is that the model of the civic healer had begun to be mobilized towards more explicitly authoritarian ends.[122] This trend

[117] Gardner 2009: 60 characterizes Caesar's legal position during these years as haphazard and improvised rather than part of a premeditated plan. The implementation of the perpetual dictatorship marked a turning point (see Jehne 1987: 15–38), but was perhaps not the autocratic watershed often described (see Morstein-Marx 2021: 532–9).

[118] For the "awkwardly submissive position" in which Cicero found himself in 46 BCE, see Hall 2009: 89.

[119] Tempest 2013: 274–5 draws a parallel between the healing imagery of the *Pro Marcello* and *De Republica*, suggesting that Caesar plays the role of a physician in the manner of the ideal statesman.

[120] However we think of his legal position, Caesar had clearly begun to be elevated "above and beyond the established structure of Roman governmental institutions," (Morstein-Marx 2021: 537).

[121] Dyer 1990 sees the speech as an implicit exhortation to tyranny, while Winterbottom 2002 interprets its praise as genuine. Connolly 2011: 162 invites us to embrace the contradictions of the speech and view it as an exploration of "the delicate transition between resistance and submission to Caesar."

[122] On the *Pro Marcello* as an important precedent for Imperial panegyric, see Manuwald 2011.

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would hold true as a new governing system in need of justification emerged from the wreckage of the Republic.

There is good reason to think that Caesar's role as a civic healer went beyond the confines of Cicero's oratory. In the *Epistulae ad Caesarem*, Ps.-Sallust uses the same language as part of a direct address to Caesar, declaring, *Namque aut tu mederi potes aut omittenda est cura omnibus* ("For either you are able to find a cure or a cure must be abandoned by all," *Ad Caes. sen.* 1.6.4). His phrasing is so close to Cicero's that it might only confirm his familiarity with the *Pro Marcello*.[123] Yet Stefan Weinstock collates suggestive evidence for Caesar's association with *salus*, including a potential plan to erect his statue in the Temple of Salus and the eventual oath *per Salutem Caesaris*.[124] A coin type was also circulated around 49 BCE that displayed *Salus* on the obverse and *Valetudo* on the reverse, though scholars dispute whether it was created to commemorate Pompey's recovery from illness or Caesar's victory in the civil war.[125] Either way, it confirms the association of a leading statesman with not just *salus*, but the more explicitly medicinal *valetudo*.[126] Caesar was well-positioned to exploit this tradition due to a long-standing connection between the Julian *gens* and the cult of Apollo Medicus, whose temple in Rome was dedicated by an ancestor in 431 BCE.[127] He likely did so by holding the *Ludi Apollinares* at his own expense in 45 BCE and perhaps facilitating the rumor that his grandnephew Octavian was the product of a liaison between Atia and Apollo.[128] Within a generation, the political resonance of Apollo Medicus would come into fuller view.

Whatever representational strategies might have been used to justify Caesar's perpetual dictatorship, they were cut short by his assassination in

[123] For both texts as examples of *suasoriae*, see Santangelo 2012: 42–3.

[124] Weinstock 1971: 167–71.

[125] *RRC* 442/1a-b (Crawford 1974). Walters 2019: 962–3 notes that if the coin commemorates Pompey's recovery from illness, it confirms an overlap between the body of the statesman and the body politic. If it commemorates Caesar's victory, it figures his reforms as a restoration for the ailing *res publica*.

[126] For the medicalized sense of *valetudo*, see Boyce 1959.

[127] Livy reports that the cult of Apollo Medicus arose in 433 BCE, when Romans responded to a plague by vowing a temple to him on behalf of the health of the Roman people (*pro valetudine populi*, Liv. 4.25.3). It was dedicated two years later by the consul Gn. Julius (Liv. 4.29.7). This temple – the only one dedicated to Apollo in Rome until the Augustan age – foregrounded his curative capacities. Dedications were made to him as a bearer of health (*salutaris*) and provider of medicine (*medicinalis*), while the Vestal Virgins addressed prayers to *Apollo Medice, Apollo Paean* (Macr. *Sat.* 1.17.15). See Miller 2009: 28 and Graf 2009: 73, who writes, "The Romans regarded the god basically as a healer."

[128] Suet. *Aug.* 94.4. Weinstock 1971: 14 suggests that Caesar was behind the story of Octavian's birth, writing, "It was the divine legitimation of his succession, and the divine ancestor was Apollo, the god of the Gens Iulia." Gurval 1995: 100–2 argues that the story more likely originated after Actium.

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44 BCE. Cicero promptly transitioned from describing him as a civic healer to a cancerous growth in need of amputation. *De Officiis* classifies tyrants like Caesar as a *genus pestiferum* that must be excised from the body politic to ensure its survival: *etenim, ut membra quaedam amputantur si et ipsa sanguine et tamquam spiritu carere coeperunt et nocent reliquis partibus corporis, sic ista in figura hominis feritas et immanitas beluae a communi tamquam humanitatis corpore segreganda est* ("For just as certain limbs are amputated if they themselves begin to lack blood and, as it were, life, and harm the remaining parts of the body, so that ferocity and monstrosity of a beast in the guise of a man must be separated from the common body, so to speak, of humanity," Cic. *Off.* 3.32).[129] Cicero argues that Caesar merited amputation from the body politic by pursuing a course of action that violated the common good.[130] Implicit in his analysis is the assumption that a statesman must have acted against the interests of his community to qualify as an infectious agent. This principle imposes a meaningful constraint on his construction of medical metaphors in *De Officiis* and other treatises. In the oratorical realm, however, he rarely made the philosophical underpinnings of his imagery explicit. The absence of such context allowed the sick body politic to become a highly flexible symbolic system, one that could be put in the service of ends that he undoubtedly detested.

The eighth *Philippic* provides a fitting point of conclusion for the story told in this chapter. Reprising the imagistic framework of the *Catilinarians* for the last time, Cicero designated Antony, the current consul, as a rotting limb in need of amputation: *in corpore si quid eius modi est quod reliquo corpori noceat, id uri secarique patimur ut membrum aliquod potius quam totum corpus intereat. Sic in rei publicae corpore, ut totum salvum sit, quicquid est pestiferum, amputetur* ("If in a body there is anything of a sort that is harmful to the rest of the body, we allow it to be burned or severed, so that one member might perish instead of the whole body. Accordingly, in the body of the *res publica*, in order that the whole is safe, whatever is pestilential must be cut out," Cic. *Phil.* 8.15). Invoking the common good to justify violence against a magistrate invested with *imperium*, Cicero once again sought to circumvent public law through disease imagery in the name of political expediency. Although only a private citizen, his right to prescribe this course of treatment derived from his possession of the civic knowledge necessary to save the body politic.

[129] Volkmann 1954: 470–1 persuasively argues for the emendation of *humanitate corporis*, which makes little sense, to *humanitatis corpore*, a solution followed by Dyck 1996: *ad loc.*

[130] I thank one of the Cambridge referees for raising this point. On the intersection of natural law and political philosophy in *De Officiis*, see Hawley 2022: 15–61.

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His tendency to prescribe surgeries that further destabilized the practice of politics, however, confirmed the risks of yielding collective judgment to the wisdom of a single statesman. For as the Republic plunged into another cycle of civil war from which its constitution would not recover, Cicero's failure to heal the *res publica* became difficult to deny.

The downfall of the Republic marked the realization of a fear that Roman thinkers had been expressing for many years. Warnings of civic disease, as we have seen, played a role in the earliest of Cicero's speeches. By the time that the First Triumvirate was formed in 59 BCE, he could write to Atticus, *nunc quidem novo quodam morbo civitas moritur* ("Now, in fact, the political community is dying from some sort of novel disease," Cic. *Att.* 2.20.3). Five years later, he confirmed the prescience of his predictions in another letter: *amisimus, mi Pomponi, omnem non modo sucum ac sanguinem sed etiam colorem et speciem pristinae civitatis* ("Dear Atticus, we have lost not only the all the vigor and blood but even the color and appearance of our former political community," Cic. *Att.* 4.18.2). He was joined in his gloomy prognostications by Varro and Sallust, both of whom compared Rome to an organism slowly succumbing to infection. Legend held that even Caesar participated in this conversation about civic mortality, declaring after his victory over Pompey, *nihil esse rem publicam, appellationem modo sine corpore ac specie* ("There is no *res publica*, only a name without body or form," Suet. *Iul.* 77).[131] Roman writers did not use the term *res publica* to signify a specific constitutional form, so this sentiment should not be viewed as a declaration of the end of the "Republic."[132] It does, however, suggest the death of the body politic in which Caesar and his peers had come of age. In acknowledging its demise, Caesar prompted his fellow citizens to consider what might arise in its place. Over the next century, Imperial writers reimagined Rome's shape in response to this question.

[131] The anecdote comes from T. Ampius, a Pompeian partisan whose enemies called him "the trumpet of civil war," (*tubam belli civilis*, Cic. *Fam.* 6.12.3).

[132] See Hodgson 2017: 163–220 for Caesar's engagement with the concept of *res publica*.

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