CHAPTER 1

Introduction

What "new and true" can possibly still be said about Gaius Julius Caesar? A fair question. Even if one were to take a parochial view of the scholarship (for much of the most important work has been published in German), no fewer than four full-scale English-language biographies were published by top-rank scholars between 2006 and 2009, not to mention a weighty (and worthy) *Companion to Julius Caesar* also published in 2009, two interesting introductions pitched mainly to undergraduates and the general reader in 2015 and 2016, and now two book-length studies that emerged in 2017 and 2019 on the coming of the civil war.[1] A "companion" to the writings of Julius Caesar and a new compendium of his works with contextual essays covering a wide range of issues, historical, biographical, and historiographical, have recently appeared as well as an entire book devoted to Caesar's first consulship.[2] Caesar's own account of "his" civil war has recently become an especially fertile field for scholarly activity with the appearance of a new critical edition of the text together with its companion volume and a handful of monographs in English.[3] Since 2006 at least three important books have appeared on the reception of Caesar from the Augustan Principate to his status as a cultural icon today, while his assassination remains an ever-popular subject of books intended for a wider, nonspecialist readership.[4] We now even have a book that contests the traditional diagnosis of Caesar's illness as epilepsy, opting instead for

[1] Goldsworthy 2006; Canfora 2007 (original Italian edition published in 1999); Tatum 2008; Billows 2009; Griffin (ed.) 2009; Stevenson 2015; Wiseman 2016; Fezzi 2019. A new German edition of Gelzer's venerable biography has also recently appeared: Gelzer 2008. Because these volumes generally focus on a nonspecialist readership (not to mention their daunting rate of publication) they do not receive much attention in this book. For their merits and some criticisms see the following reviews: Osgood 2007; Santangelo 2010; Racine 2012; Zampieri 2016; Cornwell 2018.

[2] Grillo and Krebs (eds.) 2017, Raaflaub (ed.) 2017, and Chrissanthos 2019.

[3] Damon's OCT (2015) with Damon 2018 and Grillo 2012; Peer 2015; Westall 2018.

[4] Wyke (ed.) 2006, 2008; Devillers and Sion-Jenkins (eds.) 2012; Woolf 2007; Strauss 2015.

a series of small strokes.[5] The cascade of publications is overwhelming, impossible for any one scholar to master in full. Our culture's appetite for the story of the Roman dictator ensures that it will ever be fed, and doubtless never sated. This bodes well in general for another Caesarian project, but makes it difficult to stand out in such an eye-catching crowd.

This is not yet another biography of Julius Caesar. We have enough of them already, and anyway, if biography is a narrative of character, I doubt whether we have the necessary material to write one.[6] My interest here is not biographical but historical. What is distinctive about this book, I hope, is that it is founded on a combination of two crucial underlying premises, each of them the result of the development of historical scholarship on the late Roman Republic over the past half-century or so (although this analytic work has not always been well represented in the synthetic narratives that continue to be produced), and each of them still somewhat controversial. These are, in brief, the following: (1) that the Roman Republic was not an "oligarchy," as was so long supposed as a matter of course, but a participatory republican political order in which the People were partners with the aristocracy not only in steering political events but, more fundamentally, in determining what the Republic was and should be (which entails further that Cicero, whose voice has tended to shape not only our views of the dominant narrative of the Late Republic but even of the nature of the Republic itself, can hardly be taken to speak for the Roman People, or even for senators as a whole); and (2) that the teleological perspective that (often insidiously) dominates our narratives of both the "fall of the Republic" and that of Julius Caesar's political career is deceptive, and should be consciously challenged at every step. My hope and expectation in undertaking this project, which has proven so much more time-consuming than I originally imagined, is that a careful review of a selection of the key moments in Caesar's political career – many of which have become so encrusted by the standard teleologies and traditional interpretations of the late-republican crisis that it is difficult to see them in a new light – will yield a substantially new picture of this most controversial of ancient Roman historical figures. It should also cast light on the crises of his day, and on the beginning of the series of civil wars that would eventually transform the "Republic" into the "Empire."

Let us briefly review these premises.

[5] Ashrafian and Galassi 2016.

[6] Peter Brunt, whose undergraduate lectures I was lucky to attend in the early 1980s, was fond of pointing out that Cicero was the only Classical figure whose biography, in its full sense, could be written: Brunt 1988: 89.

The so-called democracy debate sparked by Fergus Millar's provocative articles of the 1980s is still percolating through scholarship and has not reached a definitive new orthodoxy.[7] Few have been convinced by Millar's classification of the Roman Republic as "a form of democracy," though of course the argument is bedeviled by the difficulty of defining this procrustean concept in a way that is acceptable to all. However, prevailing opinion among scholars over the past couple of decades generally acknowledges that popular participation in deliberation, decision-making, and ideology construction exerted a far more important influence on political events than had been accepted when we ourselves were students and giants such as Ronald Syme and Ernst Badian presided over what J. North facetiously called the "frozen waste theory of Roman politics." According to that conception, which had a stranglehold over the field at least in the Anglophone world until the revolution prompted by Millar, the People, not only in their deliberative function as participants in public assemblies (*contiones*) but also as *voters* who passed all legislation, elected all magistrates, and delivered a verdict in some trials, could safely be left out of the analysis of republican political life because these were regarded essentially as meaningless formalities (not unlike the lopsided and often near-unanimous "votes" that occur in many authoritarian and totalitarian regimes) whose outcome was determined elsewhere by coalitions of nobles and other powerful senators.[8]

It can fairly be said that this "theory" is dead, but consensus has not settled upon a replacement. On one hand Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp accepts the broad freedom of Roman voters from formal relationships of dependency (e.g. the famous patron-client system) but still sees politics as dominated by the aristocracy, and therefore fruitfully explores *how* the Roman nobility won the "willing obedience" of the citizenry by projecting an image of meritocracy, wisdom, and success that produced a general consensus in favor of noble, even

[7] Millar's classic articles are now collected in Millar 2002, esp. 109–182; his Jerome Lectures (Millar 2002) offer something of a synthesis. The strongest reactions have been those of Hölkeskamp 2010 (although as noted in the text that follows he too shaped an important strand of contemporary scholarship on the Republic, giving special impetus to the swing toward "political culture") and Mouritsen 2017, defending and elaborating on his objections presented in Mouritsen 2001. For the main elements of the view presented here see Morstein-Marx 2004, with further development in 2013, 2015; also see the important, largely complementary work of Yakobson 1999, 2006, 2010, 2014, as well as Wiseman 2009. This is not of course a bibliography of the "democracy debate" as such, which has continued to generate contributions from leading scholars to the present.

[8] North 1990: 278: "Its implication was that voting behavior in the assemblies could be regarded as completely divorced from the opinions, interests, and prejudices of the voters themselves. In form, the popular assemblies still existed, but at least by the second century B.C., when we begin to have some limited grasp of the social conditions within which it was operating, power had been wholly taken over by an all-powerful oligarchic elite."

"oligarchic" domination of the Republic.[9] Henrik Mouritsen, however, minimizes the political role of the citizenry, interpreting the popular assemblies not as actual decision-making bodies but as smallish groups of "Roman gentlemen" enjoying the perks of their leisure by listening to speeches and voting, and predisposed to ratify whatever the promulgator of a bill put in front of them in "a highly formalised and carefully choreographed ritual."[10] This is not the place to engage in detailed rebuttal; for my purpose here, it will suffice to point out that if the senatorial elite enjoyed the kind of "domination" that Hölkeskamp supposes, or had the kind of stranglehold on voting assemblies that Mouritsen believes it did, then we should not be able to count more than thirty occasions between 140 and 50 BC on which voting assemblies forced through "popular" legislation in the teeth of a strong senatorial consensus.[11] Clearly, the People in their constitutional aspect were hardly so deferential and submissive as many scholars have supposed. "Fear of the

[9] Hölkeskamp 2010 is a good entry point in English to that scholar's body of important work on Roman political culture, which may be explored further in Hölkeskamp 2004 and 2017 (summarized in English by Elkins 2007 and Eberle 2018).

[10] Mouritsen 2017: 61, 72, 68, and see the whole discussion of the assemblies as "consensus rituals" (following E. Flaig) at 58–72. Cf. p 72: "Most likely, comitial participation was considered a natural part of the lifestyle of the Roman gentlemen who frequented the Forum on a regular basis. When a bill was to be ratified, they probably obligingly performed their civic duty and spent some hours in the voting pens, conversing with their *tribules*." Mouritsen's views about the "elite" character of the audiences of *contiones* and *comitia* were originally proposed in Mouritsen 2001, esp. 38–62. For criticism see Morstein-Marx 2004: 11–12, 128–136; Yakobson 2004: 203–206; Jehne 2006: 229–232.

[11] Morstein-Marx 2013: 39–42. Obviously I do not accept Flaig's and Mouritsen's interpretation of the voting assemblies as mere "consensus rituals" (see already Morstein-Marx 2004: 124). This fails to take into account that although the final vote on legislation was probably quite predictable come voting day, this was only because a bill that failed to win strong support in the crucible of numerous *contiones* over the three preceding weeks was thereby proven to be very likely to fail at the polls (or to be withdrawn beforehand). While this in a sense transfers the moment of decision to prior *contiones* rather than the actual vote, without the expectation of an upcoming decisive vote those *contiones* would not have the significance that they often did. Similarly, the presidential veto in the United States – also the final stage of the legislative process but one whose influence hangs over the congressional deliberations that precede it – is rarely used: only 3 percent of bills passed by Congress are vetoed even when the body is controlled by the opposing party. This is obviously not because the president's signature is automatic, ritualized, and therefore unimportant, but because the likelihood of a presidential veto has shaped Congress's deliberations all along, and there is usually little point in the cumbersome process of shepherding a bill through both houses if it is known in advance that the president will veto it. The lopsided proportion of signed versus vetoed bills would, taken in isolation, be utterly misleading evidence of the relative (un)importance of the presidential veto. Returning to Rome, while it is evidently true that a Roman bill was unlikely to survive long enough to be voted down by the assembly if it was not backed by the kind of overwhelming popular support that would predictably result in a favorable vote, this was not exactly unheard of: see the four known examples from the latter half of the second century listed by Mouritsen 2017: 59, plus Plin. *HN* 7.117 for another possible case in 63 (but cf. Cic. *Sull.* 65). Given the scarcity of detailed evidence about failed bills specifically (presumably less likely to be reported) and more generally about the fate of bills between promulgation and voting day, this does not seem to be a negligible number.

People" was a well-known and quite effective phenomenon in the Late Republic, not infrequently prompting the Senate despite its own objections to take action in the People's interest, or preventing it from opposing their will.[12] It was in fact long-established practice, validated by historical traditions such as the fifth-century Secessions of the Plebs, that the Senate ultimately had to yield to a sufficiently strong expression of the will of the sovereign People.[13]

I argue therefore for a nuanced conception of popular engagement in which senators were largely deferred to as experts in the running of the state (what one might call passive acquiescence by the plebs) but, when senatorial and noble failure became salient (e.g. during the Jugurthine and Cimbric Wars of the end of the second century, or again, during the rise of piracy and resurgence of Mithridates in the 70s and 60s), the voting citizenry was often aroused to action, checking (perceived) senatorial incompetence and arrogance and imposing its will on fundamental decisions of war-making as well as legislative remedies for (perceived) domestic problems.[14] Moreover, entirely in keeping with Polybius's tripartite model of this fundamentally divided political system, members of the political elite elected to executive magistracies might themselves break ranks with their social peers in the Senate and turn to the power of the popular assemblies when it seemed expedient, or right and just, for them to do so.[15] These observations suggest a complex model of popular participation in the Roman Republic in which periods of relative quiescence, during which the popular assemblies largely deferred to the superior political wisdom (as it seemed) of their senatorial leaders, might be promptly succeeded by others of "insubordination" and "course corrections" imposed by the voting assemblies, led and often prompted by individual members of the political elite who, usually only temporarily, dissented on

[12] Morstein-Marx 2019.

[13] In pursuit of this end even "sedition" was defensible: Cic. *De or.* 2.199 (M. Antonius speaking): *neque reges ex hac civitate exigi neque tribunos plebis creari neque plebiscitis totiens consularem potestatem minui neque provocationem, patronam illam civitatis ac vindicem libertatis, populo Romano dari sine nobilium dissensione potuisse.* Cicero himself had echoed Antonius's validation of popular "sedition" by reference to the Secessions: Cic. *Corn.* I frs. 48–49. In a famous chapter of the *Discorsi* [I.4] Machiavelli picked up on the idea from a different source: Livy, like Cicero, hardly a revolutionary firebrand. On the People's sovereignty, see n. 23.

[14] See Morstein-Marx 2015: 303–307, where I adjust my earlier emphasis on the ideological domination of the Roman aristocracy through its control of political speech (idem 2004: esp. 279–287) – no doubt a key reason for the usual quiescence of the Roman People during routine times – in order to accommodate the not uncommon instances in which the People, though typically rather deferential to aristocratic leadership, were roused to force major "course corrections" by means of their votes.

[15] This is of course the great truth expressed by Polybius's much-criticized tripartite model of the Roman "constitution," which otherwise tends to be represented in our sources (e.g. Sall. *Cat.* 38–39, *Jug.* 40–42) as a bipolar system consisting of Senate and People.

an ad hoc basis from the majority of their peers and superiors in the Senate. This dynamic bears more than a passing resemblance to the role of voters in today's relatively passive indirect (representative) democracies and republics, and some of the crises the Late Republic underwent therefore bear more than occasional similarities to some of the crises of "democracy" in our own age, making the Roman Republic arguably a more fruitful model for study by modern theorists than the "glories" of ancient Athens.[16]

Along with the thawing of the "frozen waste theory" and the new emphasis now put on the interventions of the popular assemblies in republican politics has come renewed attention to its ideological content, especially the speeches by which political leaders mobilized popular support and the values, principles, and goals that animated such speeches and therefore, presumably, at least in part motivated their audiences to act. T. P. Wiseman has rightly lamented a long, twentieth-century tradition of suppressing "the ideological content of republican politics," though in fact this way of thinking was largely spent by that century's end.[17] In this book I treat ideological issues both at the level of the individual bill or decree (Should there be an agrarian distribution? Should Caesar be recalled from Gaul?) and at the level of higher "constitutional" norm or principle (e.g. Where is the ultimate locus of decision, Senate or People? Must powerful senators be brought down to preserve "the Republic" and defend against *dominatio*?) to be central to the crises of the Caesarian age.

Since I have gone on record diagnosing an "ideological monotony" in the Late Republic this may seem to call for some clarification. The phrase "ideological monotony" was meant to express the demonstrable fact that "a nakedly 'optimate' stance was in straightforward contradiction with the *contio* as a rhetorical setting" but "*not* that all speakers sounded and behaved interchangeably when they climbed onto the rostra."[18] It emphasizes the narrowness of the range of ideological positions that was brought specifically *before the People* and characterizes somewhat negatively the

[16] According to Flower's disarticulation of "the Roman Republic" into six republics, the last of which (in her scheme) *ended* in 60 BC, the Roman Republic was not actually a republic any longer by the 50s (2010: 149), which also happens to be the only period for which we have copious contemporary evidence for the actual workings of the Roman Republic. I do not think this view is defensible on a normal conception of a "republic." On Flower's experiment in periodization see esp. Yakobson 2011: 155–156, and North 2010: 472.

[17] Wiseman 2009: 32. See (along with Millar's seminal works cited in n. 7) already Beard and Crawford 1985: 68: "Roman accounts of politics in all periods, but particularly the age of revolution … systematically present political conflict as being about 'real issues,' about access by the people to the rewards of conquest and the creating of the political means to achieve this end."

[18] Morstein-Marx 2004: 239; 2013: 42–43. For criticism of the idea, which some others have embraced, see Tan 2008, Arena 2012: 79, and now esp. Rosenblitt 2016. Cf. Tiersch 2018 for another approach.

quality of public political argument, for an honest critique of *popularis* principles was essentially excluded by the circumstances of public deliberation. It expresses the fact that "popular" political values and principles went largely unchallenged in the public deliberation in the open Forum that led to decisive votes, which on one hand helped to sustain and reinforce *popularis* ideology, but on the other shifted the gravamen of debate from the public good (relatively uncontroversial) to a question of trust.[19] Yet none of this is meant to imply that there was no serious political argument or contestation in the public Forum, much less within the walls of the Senate. On the contrary, when we have evidence that laws were passed by the People, I assume (unless there are good reasons to the contrary) that a vote of the popular assembly does reflect a conscious choice by voters, not determined but at least informed by arguments that had been made to them, although of course voters were subject to all manner of rhetorical manipulation, and furthermore the institutions themselves were far from transparent mediators of the popular will.[20]

Thus I take seriously the popular perspective on the Roman Republic as revealed by their votes and imposed by the People in the form of laws and electoral choices.[21] And it is evident above all from those numerous occasions when a senatorial consensus was *rejected* by voters in the assembly that these "People" mobilized to impose their will not only where their material benefits were at issue (e.g. grain or land distributions) but where the People's political rights (e.g. the rights of tribunes or the citizen's "due process" right of *provocatio*) were at stake, or corresponding constraints on the power of the Senate (e.g. the reassignment of command of major wars). The very fact alone that these latter categories of strongly supported "popular" proposals outnumber that of material benefits by a ratio of about two to one bespeaks a politically conscious voting population rather than an impoverished and easily manipulated proletariat interested only in "handouts."[22] In word certainly, and often

[19] Morstein-Marx 2004: 204–240.

[20] Morstein-Marx 2004, 2015. But scholars have tended to exaggerate the undemocratic features of the popular assemblies themselves: see esp. Yakobson 1999: 20–64; Morstein-Marx 2013: 32, 37–39.

[21] On the many meanings of "the Republic" see Hodgson 2017 (esp. pp. 46–60 on the "popular" perspective) and now Moatti 2018, whose semantic history of the concept reveals how it was co-opted as an anti-popular instrument by Cicero and other members of the elite. (Moatti 2017 gives an English summary.)

[22] Full argument and evidence presented in Morstein-Marx 2013; cf. 2019: 529–532. The very coherence of the principles involved in this body of "popular" legislation further suggests that it was not simply the wholesale creation of elite politicians jockeying for power (2013: 40–41) – that is that assemblies simply voted for whatever was put before them (Mouritsen 2017: 61, 66), as the elitist interpretation would have it.

in deed, the People were the final arbiters of political decision, using their votes to have the last word on legislation and (almost exclusively) choosing the magistrates and generals to lead them. In this specific sense we may call them "sovereign": even Cicero proclaims before the Senate that the Roman People "held supreme power in all (political) matters."[23] We should finally shed the antiquated notion that a politician's "popular" (*popularis*) stance responding to the interests and needs of the Roman People was in itself fundamentally at variance with the values and traditions of "the Republic."[24]

Something more radical follows from this. Manifestly there are moments in the political narrative of the last two centuries of the Roman Republic when we sense the opening of a yawning gap between what one might loosely call "senatorial" and popular perspectives on the very norms and proper functioning of the Republic: consider, for example, the sharp and fundamental difference between Cicero's oft-expressed view of the Gracchi brothers as subverters of the constitution who were justly struck down without any need for legal authorization and the "popular" one of those voters who flocked from "all Italy" to cast their ballots on the agrarian law, or

[23] Cic. *Har. resp.* 11: *populus Romanus, cuius est summa potestas omnium rerum*. Cf. (in a specifically electoral context) *Planc.* 11: *Est enim haec condicio liberorum populorum praecipueque huius principis populi et omnium gentium domini atque victoris, posse suffragiis vel dare vel detrahere quod velit cuique.* Cic. *Rep.* 1.39.1: *res publica res populi*. Cf. Liv. 25.2.7, 38.36.8; App. *Pun.* 112 (see pp. 11f.). The principle thrice cited by Livy that *quodcumque postremum populus iussisset, id ius ratumque esset* (7.17.12, 9.33.9, 9.34.6) is however probably only a principle to determine the validity of overlapping or conflicting laws, "not a general statement of popular sovereignty" (Crawford et al., *RS* 2.721, Tab. XII.5). For sharp criticism of some scholars' inclination to characterize this as "popular sovereignty" (if used technically, a modern concept anyway) see Hölkeskamp 2010: 12–22 with earlier literature cited at 13n6; also Mouritsen 2017: 15–21 (cf. Lundgreen 2011: 259–272); more favorably, see Straumann 2016: 119–129 and cf. Morstein-Marx 2004: 120n11. As will be clear from Morstein-Marx 2013, I think Hölkeskamp and Mouritsen go too far, overlooking the clear implications of the historical record of 140–50 BC (and before) while exaggerating the practical effects of the various forms of (mostly religious) obstructionism available to the Senate and magistrates. But this argument would usurp too much space here and must be reserved for another occasion.

[24] Morstein-Marx, forthcoming, where it is also noted that the assertiveness of the *populus* is by no means restricted to the Late Republic. (The plebiscites authorizing Scipio Aemilianus's consular election and takeover of the African command take the pattern back to 148, and earlier instances are by no means rare (*lex Flaminia de agro Gallico* of 232 BC, *lex Claudia de nave senatorum* of 218 BC, *lex Valeria* on full citizenship for Formiae, Fundi, and Arpinum of 188: Elster 2003: nos. 77, 83, 156). On *populares*, see Yakobson's recent summary in the *OCD*, with bibliography (2017). Classic discussions include Meier 1965, Seager 1972, and Mackie 1992. Robb 2010 concedes too much to their enemies by glossing the term as "*seditiosi*": see Yakobson 2012 and now Tiersch 2018: 62. Gelzer's description of *populares* in his classic biography of Caesar (first published 1921), clearly shows its age: "The populares sought to achieve a majority in the popular assembly. With this support they intended to replace the Senate and to govern the state from the Forum. In constitutional form, the magistrates were no longer to receive their instructions from the Senate, but to become the servants of the sovereign people" (1968: 14).

those who defaced the Opimian Temple of Concord with a *graffito* characterizing the slaughter as an "act of madness," or those who set up shrines at the locations where the two brothers were murdered.[25] Why should we assume the superior representativeness or legitimacy of Cicero's view, if the Roman Republic was composed not just of "the Senate" but also "the People of Rome" (*Senatus Populusque Romanus*), especially given the recognized primacy of the People in any matter on which they voted? If political legitimacy is ultimately and practically determined by society as a whole rather than a narrow elite, the popular conception of how the Republic worked and was supposed to work appears in fact to have the better historical claim to dominance, however philosophically superior Cicero's more elitist or even Cato's outright oligarchical views might be.[26] This will have obvious implications for our assessment of the clash between Caesar and Bibulus in 59, or the dispute over Caesar's *ratio absentis* that brought on the Civil War.

Correspondingly, the understanding has gained ground over the past couple of decades that Cicero cannot be regarded as the arbiter and touchstone of all things "republican." Late-republican Roman history from about 66 to 43 is often referred to as the Age of Cicero, not without reason. The nearly one thousand letters, fifty-eight speeches, and numerous political, rhetorical, and philosophical essays that come down to us from the pen of this towering figure of Latin literature cast into shadow virtually all of other sources for this period, mostly much later biographies and historical narratives (Plutarch, Suetonius, Appian, all imperial), and even those are frequently influenced by the record Cicero left behind. (Sallust departs our story early with his Catilinarian Debate, but in any case his account of that crisis is itself strongly colored by the Ciceronian tradition.) The only other substantial contemporary source, the war *Commentaries* by Caesar himself, are tightly focused military narratives that, though of extraordinary interest due to the identity of their author, usually only indirectly cast light on events in the capital (with a few, often problematic exceptions). It is impossible to escape entirely the shadow that Cicero casts over the history of this period. Yet we must try.

Here I am thinking not so much of the obvious distortions created by Cicero's personal perspective from a distinct locus of time and circumstance

[25] Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 8.10; *C. Gracch.* 17.9, 18.3. On the graffiti, see Morstein-Marx 2012 and Hillard 2013.

[26] Morstein-Marx 2011: 276–278 and n. 30. To my mind, Drogula 2019 characterizes Cato's political leanings too readily as "traditionalist"; as will become more apparent in Chapters 3 and 4, I consider them *un*traditionally radical and reactionary. His attempt to restrict and redefine traditional military honors such as *supplicationes* and triumphs is similarly untraditional: Segal 2019: 165–226.

that was hardly representative of senators as a whole – that is that he was a "new man" (*homo novus*) whose standing rested not on noble heritage, military achievements, or awesome *auctoritas* but upon his eloquence and his canny political leadership as *consul togatus* in the crisis of 63, subsequently "betrayed" by the "optimates" whose savior he styled himself to be, sent into humiliating exile by a tribune and the Roman People for his violation of law and tradition, later a committed advocate of peace, even of accommodation with a victorious Caesar, and finally a zealous defender of the morality of the assassination and leader of a powerful attack against Caesar's first potential successor. Such a brief résumé alone gives a hint of the specificity of the Ciceronian perspective and how questionable it can be to extrapolate from his many lamentations (or exultation) over current events to senators as a whole; attentive readers of Cicero's letters will be familiar with how remarkably closely Cicero's pronouncements about the "ups and downs" of the Republic (mostly downs) track the vicissitudes of his own personal fortunes.[27] More fundamentally, however, scholars have often been inclined to adopt Cicero's perspective on the very nature of the Republic itself as if in such matters he could speak for his entire society. But it should give us pause to consider for a moment just how dubious it would be to do the same with a modern politician's views, even those of an eyewitness participant possessed of commanding authority such as Winston Churchill, not to mention lesser figures who have nevertheless put their stamp on an age (e.g. Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan). Cicero may fairly be thought of as, on the whole, a moderate senator, as is shown by his arguments in the *De legibus* in support of "popular" institutions like the tribunate or the (mostly) secret ballot, or his strenuous efforts to mediate the looming crisis of the Caesarian Civil War. Yet the Roman Republic was "the Senate and People of Rome" (*SPQR* – a formula interestingly inverted in its first two epigraphic appearances in the second century BC), and an important implication of the resurgence of the People as a political agent in recent scholarship (as described earlier in this chapter) is that the job of defining the nature or norms of the Republic cannot properly be left to senators alone.[28] Scholars raised on

[27] Hodgson 2017: 105–162 traces Cicero's rhetorical self-identification with the *res publica* from the consular orations to the late 50s. See, for example, *Red. pop.* and *Red. sen.*, passim; *Dom.* 73–76, 96–102; *Sest.* 136–147; *Prov. cons.* 2–3, 13–14, 45, and most interestingly, the retrospective exculpation of Pompey and Caesar at *Fam.* 1.9.11–14. Griffin and Atkins 1991: xiii, rightly comment that Cicero's talk of the "loss of the Republic" tends to be "an exaggerated way of expressing disappointment with its present condition" (more or less identical with *Cicero*'s present condition).

[28] *ILLRP* 514, lines 6–7; *AE* 2006.624. Cf. Polyb. 21.10.8. Moatti 2018: 260–269 (cf. 2017: 40–48) provides a valuable review of the history of the formula, noting that it does not appear to be formally fixed until Augustus.

Cicero's doctrines of senatorial hegemony, the common people's deference to their betters, and the need from time to time for the state's "defenders" to eliminate trouble-making demagogues by means of extralegal violence if necessary, may think it quite natural to equate "the Republic" with "dominance of the Senate," but what portion of politically active Roman citizens – the audience of the *contio*, urban political crowds, and voters – would have agreed with them?[29] We should be careful not to ascribe to an entire body politic a clear consensus on such matters. The voice of the Roman People too must be heard, which was not always in harmony with Cicero's.[30]

One of my objectives in writing this book has been to show how a proper integration of the popular perspective into an account of Julius Caesar opens up the possibility of critique and revision of the canonical picture both of the man and of the final years of the Republic that has developed over the years. No longer should the classic Ciceronian-senatorial analytical frame of Caesar's career be adopted as *the* "republican" view, as has been done so frequently, with inevitable distortion of key disputes such as that about the validity of Caesar's consular legislation or his claims and demands in 50–49. Once one internalizes the idea that the "republican system" was in essence an equilibrium of elite power holders policed by defenders of the Senate's authority armed with a dazzling array of obstructionist weapons it is no great step to interpret the rise of Caesar as an existential danger to that system. Instead, I would urge us to be receptive to an alternative, more popular view (but not, perhaps, for all that alien to most senators): that the "republican system" itself traditionally rested upon the community's proper allocation of honor (*honor* also in Latin, or *dignitas*), an essential part of the system of rewards and punishments that Polybius back in the second century had called "the bonds by which alone monarchies *and states* (πολιτεῖαι) are held together."[31] The People's exclusive right to confer honor was the engine that drove the republican "meritocracy," and in such matters they were sovereign. We are told that when the consuls tried to block a popular wave of enthusiasm to elect Scipio Aemilianus consul for 147 although he was some five years below the legal minimum age and at the time only a candidate for aedile, "the *demos*" (the People) cried that "by the laws handed down from

[29] Important recent work on the fundamental principles that animated the Roman Republic includes Arena 2012 (with some caveats sounded by Morstein-Marx 2014 and Steel 2014a) and Straumann 2016: 23–145.

[30] Morstein-Marx 2009: 115–117; 2011: 276–278, 2013; 2015: 303–307; forthcoming. Wiseman 2009.

[31] Polyb. 6.14.4–5: "For where discrimination of this kind happens not to be recognized or is recognized but handled badly, nothing can be administered rationally; for how is it right for the good and the bad to be held in equal honor?" Cf. 6.14.9: "The People give offices to the worthy – the finest prize of excellence in political life." See Morstein-Marx 2009.

Tullius and Romulus the People were the judges of elections, and . . . they could set aside or confirm whichever they pleased of the laws pertaining to this matter."[32] (A tribune followed up with a threat to deprive the consuls of the power to hold an election unless they "joined with the People [εἰ μὴ σύνθοιντο τῷ δήμῳ]," at which point the consuls and the Senate folded their hand and gave in.) Similarly, from the "popular" republican perspective, laws of the Roman People that deeply touched their interests could not simply be overruled by a senatorial decree, as notoriously occurred when Cicero executed the "Catilinarian" conspirators – an act illegally authorized by the Senate and legitimately punished by the tribune P. Clodius five years later.[33] An attempt such as this one to interpret Caesar as a republican leader necessarily entails taking the popular element of the Roman republican system seriously. The disinclination to do so in the past has inevitably tended to narrow the scope of interpretation of Caesar's political interventions, implicitly trivializing them from the outset as nothing more than demagogic machinations rather than as responses (typical in principle for Roman elite actors) to the perceived needs and demands of Roman voters, shaped by traditional norms to which virtually all Roman citizens subscribed to a greater or lesser degree.[34]

As will be evident from my emphasis thus far on voters and voting, the "people" I am speaking of in this book are "the People" as a constitutional agent (hence the capitalization) – that is the people who showed up to vote in the assemblies to elect the magistrates who would lead them and pass the laws that would bind them: Polybius's *demos* or Sallust's and Cicero's *populus* or *plebs*, a variable and complex collective correspondingly difficult to define more precisely in sociological terms.[35] Unlike, for

[32] App. *Pun.* 112/531 (148 BC): ἐκεκράγεσαν ἐκ τῶν Τυλλίου καὶ Ῥωμύλου νόμων (kings, to be sure, rather than noted "republicans," but authoritative foundational figures) τὸν δῆμον εἶναι κύριον τῶν ἀρχαιρεσίων, καὶ τῶν περὶ αὐτῶν νόμων ἀκυροῦν ἢ κυροῦν ὃν ἐθέλοιεν. Elster 2003: no. 202, pp. 425–426; see now Lundgreen 2011: 75–78. Similarly, Scipio Africanus is said to have declared, when his candidacy for the aedileship was being blocked (in this case by tribunes) because he was not yet of the required age, that "If all citizens want to elect me aedile, then I am old enough!" Livy 25.2.7, with Beck 2005: 335–336. Chapter 2, p. 60ff.

[33] Tatum's meticulous examination of Cicero's expulsion (1999: 151–166) gives (to my mind) too little emphasis to the crucial principles of law and popular rights involved that made this such an explosive issue.

[34] The crucial step was taken by Wiseman 2009, 2016, although his picture of Caesar is surely too uncritical. Stevenson 2015 strikes a better balance.

[35] There is ongoing argument over who exactly were "the People" represented in our accounts of *contiones* and voting assemblies. For *contiones* see Morstein-Marx 2015: 297 with references. Since laws in this period were typically passed by the tribal assembly, whose structure did not correspond to the timocratic bias characteristic of the centuriate assembly (on which see Yakobson 1999: 20–64), we may assume they plausibly reflected the preferences of the mass of Roman citizens who cast their

instance, the paradigmatic *popularis* politician P. Clodius, Caesar is not known to have possessed an organized urban network that he could mobilize to dominate the streets, the Forum, or the assemblies.[36] Caesar's following, if he had one in a strict sense rather than simply enjoying "popular favor," is therefore impossible to analyze in the kind of fine-grained detail that has been done with Clodius's "gangs." On some occasions it is apparent that he enjoyed substantial support from distinct sectors of society (e.g. the urban plebs or the soldiering class, townspeople, and councilors of Italy), and this will be duly noted in what follows, but in general it should be understood that "the Roman People" most often referred to in this book are the anonymous mass of Roman citizens below the senatorial and equestrian levels of society whose political role was expressed most commonly and significantly in the assemblies of the city of Rome, but also as citizen soldiers and townspeople of Italy on those occasions when they became significant determinants of political events.[37] I do not intend to imply here that the Roman People generally, or in any of these instances, thought and acted as one, and in fact I have written elsewhere of the "fundamental indeterminacy of the Popular Will," with specific reference to the confused immediate aftermath of Caesar's assassination before reflections on the traumatic events

vote. Mouritsen has rightly stressed the statistical "unrepresentativeness" of the voting assemblies relative to the entire citizen body, who resided (after 90) along the whole length of the peninsula (2001: 18–37, 2017: 55–58), but this does not disprove the impression gained from our sources that votes in the legislative assemblies still broadly reflected reasonably well the preferences of the mass of Roman citizens in the city and its immediate environs. It is clear that the results not infrequently conflicted with the majority view of senators, and the relative coherence of the content of "popular" legislation apparently reveals the social distinctiveness of the voters (Morstein-Marx 2013). Since one had to be in or travel to Rome in order to vote, the urban-rural balance of voters is likely to have varied greatly depending on which segments of the citizen population up and down the peninsula were directly touched by the bill under consideration; however, the exclusion of citizens who lived out of the City has in the past tended to be exaggerated. This matter deserves deeper investigation on another occasion, but in the meantime consider the obvious implications of, for example, Cic. *Att.* 1.1.2, *Phil.* 2.76; Hirtius, [Caes.] *B. Gall.* 8.50.2–4.

[36] On Clodius's urban organization based on tradesmen and workmen's groups as well as neighborhood associations centered on the cult of the *Compitalia* (*collegia* and *vici*) see Tatum 1999: 25–26, 117–119, 142–148, and Harrison 2008: 110–116; Courrier 2014: 509–533. On the *vici* see also Lott 2001: 28–60. See Chapter 9, n. 186 for Caesar's suppression of the "new" *collegia* as dictator and other anti-Clodian measures.

[37] For the constituents of the urban plebs, no doubt frequently but not necessarily the dominant element in the assemblies (n. 35), see esp. the rich recent study of Courrier 2014, who discerns a multilayered differentiation of social and economic circumstances behind the stereotyped elite representation of the urban "masses," at the top of which stood a relatively well-off *plebs media*, "not entirely plebeian, imperfectly aristocratic," which formed "a keystone for the entire system" (739); this elite of the urban plebs is likely to have played an important political role in the *contiones* and assemblies of the City. I. Harrison 2008 briefly offers a version of the darker picture that prevailed until recently.

reached a tipping point.[38] It may be possible in the future to develop a more sociologically nuanced analysis of Caesar's constituencies among the varied populations of Roman Italy than is found here, but at present it is often impossible to avoid speaking in rather general terms if we wish to trace the role "the Roman People" played in Caesar's political career.

A second guiding principle of this book is a strong skepticism toward the temptations of teleology and its twin sibling, hindsight. "Historians know the verdict in advance," wrote Ronald Syme, "they run forward with alacrity to salute the victors and chant hymns to success."[39] Nowhere is this professional vice more frequently in evidence than when scholars discuss the end of the Roman Republic. Erich Gruen kindled a firestorm of criticism in 1974 with his carefully crafted argument in *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* that, contrary to what had been taught for centuries, Rome's political system was not on its deathbed in 50 BC.[40] Michael Crawford responded caustically with a review entitled "Hamlet without the Prince":

> It is precisely the possession of hindsight which is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the historian. It is only in the light of what happened and in the course of an attempt to explain what happened that some earlier events emerge as important and some as trivial.[41]

He has a point. Yet doubts also linger when we ponder Syme's "hymns to success." Ernst Badian responded to the Hegelian coloring of C. Meier's *Caesar* with a thought experiment:

> If some . . . mistakes had not been made, and if the luck of the game had been different, the *res publica* would have been saved at that [sc. Caesar's] time, and quite possibly for a long time. We might have had scholars telling us today that the structure of the *res publica*, or mere fate, made it impossible for monarchy to be installed at Rome, however hard men like Caesar, who with all their genius did not see this, tried to do so.[42]

Is this obviously wrong? Can the explanatory power of history really depend essentially on however things turn out, which would seem to reduce it to a circular "just-so story"?

Though far from Rome, it is worth contemplating an actual case where within three decades the "verdict of history" reversed itself more than once.

[38] Morstein-Marx 2004: 151 and later in this volume (Chapter 9, p. 572f.). [39] Syme 1958a: 1.435.
[40] Gruen 1974. See n. 77 of this chapter.
[41] Crawford 1976: 214. David Stockton nodded his assent: "Wisdom after the event is something which historians ought to exercise" (1977: 216).
[42] Badian 1990: 39.

England's first great republican political theorist, James Harrington, published his thinly veiled utopia, *Commonwealth of Oceana*, in 1656, during what would come to be known as the Interregnum, seven years after the execution of Charles I and the abolition by the "Rump Parliament" of both the monarchy and the House of Lords; but as fate or chance would have it, this was only three years before the stunning return of the Stuart heir from France. Harrington explained that crucial changes of the "balance" of property holding in England precipitated by the decline of the feudal nobility and the dissolution of the monasteries under the Tudors constituted the key cause of the Civil War by rendering England unfit for monarchy but ripe for a commonwealth:

> *The dissolution of this government caused the war, not the war the dissolution of this government* [italics original] . . . Oceana [Harrington's fictitious name for England] . . . must have a competent nobility, or is altogether incapable of monarchy. For where there is equality of estates, there must be equality of power; and where there is equality of power there can be no monarchy . . . The balance of Oceana [i.e. between monarchical and popular government] changing quite contrary to that of Rome, the manners of the people were not thereby corrupted, but on the contrary fitted for a commonwealth.[43]

Harrington had shown, he believed, that "the dissolution of the late monarchy was as natural as the death of a man . . . wherefore it remains with the royalists to discover by what reason or experience it is possible for a monarchy to stand upon a popular balance; or, the balance being popular, as well the oath of allegiance as all other monarchical laws imply an impossibility, and are therefore void."[44] He went so far as to predict that if the monarchy were restored in England it could last only a few years.[45]

"Until well into the winter of 1659–60" – that is three years after the publication of *Oceana* – "a betting man would have put money on the continuation of the revolution and of the exclusion of the monarchy," writes a leading scholar of the Revolution, Blair Worden.[46] But the Commonwealth crumbled with stunning swiftness and Charles II returned from exile in France the very next May. Twelve "commissioners" who had signed the death warrant for Charles I were hanged, drawn, and quartered,

[43] Harrington 1656/1992: 56, 60, 61, 62. Interestingly, Erich Gruen's well-known dictum, "Civil war caused the fall of the Republic, not vice versa" (1974: 504), seems to echo (while inverting) Harrington's formula italicized in the text.

[44] Harrington 1656/1992: 62. [45] Hammersley 2012: 545, with 548n53.

[46] Worden 1994: 132. Yet historians still tend to frame the story as one in which "various factions [acted] out the hopeless endgame of the interregnum before an inevitable monarchical restoration" (Foxley 2013: 175).

while Harrington himself was thrown into the Tower. (Though soon released, he descended into madness and ill health which plagued him until his death in 1677.) The speed and astonishing ease of Charles's return and acceptance as king "made most men believe," the pious Earl of Clarendon later averred, "both abroad and at home, that God had not only restored the king miraculously to his throne, but . . . in such a manner that his authority and greatness would have been more illustrious than it had been in any of his ancestors."[47] Contemporary royalist historians, Clarendon among them, saw the Stuart Restoration as nothing less than a manifest example of Divine Providence – God's verdict in favor of "divine right" absolutism – with obvious implications for their interpretation of the fall of Charles I and the Interregnum.[48]

Yet the reorientation of "history" to fit the eventual outcome was not yet finished: the manifest "course of history" turned out to depend on where one decided to stop the clock. After the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 put an end to the Stuart line (definitively, as it would turn out), and with it "absolute monarchy," Harrington's arguments could be "revised . . . to fit the new circumstances."[49] So in 1700 the Whig thinker John Toland, publisher of Henry Neville's *Plato redivivus* along with Harrington's *Oceana*, could claim in his preface that the very doctrines Harrington had invoked to demonstrate "that England was not capable of any other Government than a Democracy" were now employed by Neville "to the redressing and supporting one of the best Monarchies in the World, which is that of England."[50] And with the ultimate triumph of the Whigs in the eighteenth century it became perfectly evident for all with eyes to see that the events of 1688 had demonstrated the practical necessity of "limited monarchy" in England. "By deciding many important questions in favour of liberty, and still more, by that great precedent of deposing one king, and establishing a new family, it gave such an ascendant to popular principles, as has put the nature of the English constitution beyond all controversy," wrote David Hume, concluding his famous *History of England* in 1778.[51]

The important lesson for us appears to be that *historical outcomes* cannot supply straightforward retrospective verdicts about the relative weight of

[47] Clarendon 1857: 2:268. [48] MacGillivray 1974: 220n72; Sharpe 2013: chapter 1, esp. 56–68.
[49] Hammersley 2012: 545.
[50] Toland 1700/1737: 551. Neville's latent republicanism shows through often enough to suggest that his "deference [to the regime] is a matter of presentation, not of substance" (Worden 1994a: 148). On Toland's own questionable commitment to the idea of a "limited monarchy," see Worden 1994a, esp. 182–183.
[51] Hume 1778/1983: 6:531. To be sure, Hume had earlier noted that "all human governments, particularly those of a mixed frame, are in continual fluctuation" (5:160).

the various causes that conduce to them. As Jonas Grethlein has pointed out recently, historical outcomes themselves also have a troubling way of changing their significance depending on *the viewer's vantage point in time*: a change of *telos*, or end point, retroactively changes the *teleology*.[52] But how, without begging the question, can a development substantially posterior in time – by years, perhaps by decades, conceivably by centuries – retroactively change the causal structure of an event or process in the past? All that has changed is the point of perspective. And to the objection that one simply *knows more* about that causal structure as time passes (as the "significance" of an event supposedly becomes more evident), what independent evidence would exist to show, with any degree of real conviction, that this newfound "significance" is not itself merely an artifact of the change, just as a river that has jumped its banks and settled into a new course soon makes the new path it has cut the "natural" one to all appearances? Once the state of the world is changed by an event in an important way (say, for the purpose of argument, the assassination of Caesar), causal chains stretch out from that event that appear to lock it in place – not necessarily because of some inherent quality of the event itself, but perhaps rather because *what has happened after it* is causally dependent on it, in what is already a different state of the world.

Like the modern historian Niall Ferguson, then, I would take a leaf from the physicists' "chaos theory" (for not even the scientists believe any longer in Laplacean determinism) and see history, in particular the history of events, as essentially "chaotic" in nature.[53] Although the physical world remains deterministic in theory (twenty-three stab wounds still kill Caesar), in practice historical events are extremely sensitive to slight variations of initial conditions. As I wrote these words, a striking example came in the *New York Times* obituary of Stanislav Petrov, perhaps the most

[52] Grethlein 2013: 6–9, aptly adducing how the early twentieth-century history of Germany changes depending on whether one takes as one's vantage point the economic crisis of 1929 or, alternatively, the Holocaust.

[53] Ferguson 1997, the preface to a volume on *Virtual History*, traces the intellectual history of the determinism debate and espouses a new kind of "chaostory" integrating the fundamental insight from physical chaos theory that even deterministic causation must still leave irreducible unpredictability in outcomes "even when successive events are causally linked" (p. 79). Walter dismisses what he calls "a postmodern chaos theory opening up space for arbitrary choice according to fashion" (Walter 2009: 33). But the deterministic underpinning of chaos theory actually is antithetical to postmodern "fashion": it does not subvert the common understanding of causation, undermine causal analysis, or reject an objective standard of truth. See also now Powell 2013, an entire volume devoted to hindsight and counterfactuals in the history of Greece and Rome, and Gallagher 2018, a history of "the counterfactual imagination" whose rich introduction provides a thought-provoking entry to the debate.

important person most of us have never heard of. On September 26, 1983, Petrov, then a forty-four-year-old lieutenant colonel in the Soviet air defense forces and duty officer at the Serpukhov-15 early warning center, prevented a nuclear war between the United States and the USSR when, five minutes short of the expected time of detonation, he decided that the satellite warning of an incoming missile strike by five Minuteman ICBMs received by his command center outside Moscow was *probably* (!) due to a systems malfunction. "The false alarm was apparently triggered when the satellite mistook the sun's reflection off the tops of clouds for a missile launch."[54] (The story itself was not widely known until it was revealed in a 1998 memoir by the former commander of Soviet missile defense.) To return to Caesar: if Mark Antony had not allowed himself to be turned aside at the door, if brave Marcius Censorinus and Calvisius Sabinus had been more successful in defending Caesar, or if the single death wound identified by his physician Antistius had not met its mark, does anyone really think subsequent history would have been essentially the same?[55] Or, to take a negative example, during the rout of Caesar's men at Dyrrachium in 48, if the panicked soldier who nearly killed Caesar as he tried to rally him had not been intercepted by a bodyguard, can anyone doubt that the course of history afterward would have been substantially different, perhaps drastically so?[56] In historical events, as in chaotic physical processes, a slight variation in initial conditions at particularly delicate moments can produce wildly divergent results, and since those slight variations in initial conditions can hardly be controlled, predicted, or in historical contexts even fully known, we call them "chance." And "chance" in this sense manifestly can have a powerful influence on history. Thus, as Syme suggests in the quotation with which I began this section, the fact that something happened does not mean that it had to happen ("the most elementary teleological error," observes Ferguson), or even that it was *most likely* to happen.[57] There is irreducible contingency in history, and it would actually be a serious *distortion* of history to fail to give it its due.[58]

[54] Sewell Chan, *New York Times*, September 18, 2017: www.nytimes.com/2017/09/18/world/europe/stanislav-petrov-nuclear-war-dead.html.

[55] Antony: e.g. Cic. *Phil.* 2.34 (other sources listed by Pelling 2011: 479). Censorinus and Sabinus: Nic. Dam. *Bios* 96, with Toher 2017: 354. Antistius: Suet. *Iul.* 82.3.

[56] Plut. *Caes.* 39.6–7: "Caesar was very nearly killed"; at App. *BCiv.* 2.62.258 the man is a standard-bearer, perhaps supported by Caes. *BCiv.* 3.74.1.

[57] Ferguson 1997: 79–90 at 87.

[58] Walter's stimulating essay on "'Chance and Contingency" (2009) is now fundamental. I believe my characterization of "chance" differs not in substance from his definition of "Zufall" but only in my emphasis on the inscrutability of actual causation to the human observer.

Whether ultimately for good or ill, humans seem almost "designed" by evolution to overlook chance's role in precipitating events and the developments that unfold from them.[59] We are instinctive pattern seekers and tend to make sense of the world through *stories* – that is narratives – even (especially?) very simple or hackneyed ones, with characters whose motivations we feel we can understand, and which string together in a "meaningful" way the relatively few facts we actually have. "The confidence that people experience," comments the Nobel Prize-winning psychologist/behavioral economist Daniel Kahneman, "is determined by the coherence of the story they manage to construct from available information … It is the consistency of the information that matters for a good story, not its completeness."[60] Narratives are (obviously) constructed on what we happen to know, not on what we don't: Kahneman and his longtime collaborator Amos Tversky dubbed this heuristic *WYSIATI*: "What you see is all there is."[61] We know the end point (the *telos*) that the narrative seeks to explain; in seeking an explanation, we naturally sift through the known prior facts, casting aside those that don't conduce to the chosen *telos* and seizing upon those that do. Furthermore, these facts have often *already* been selected by a process of cultural memory precisely because of their supposed explanatory power in reference to the stipulated *telos.* At each of these stages, those contingencies that *might have been* with equal or greater probability than what actually happened are trimmed off, so to speak, and lost to scrutiny, creating a narrative that is psychologically satisfying but logically circular. Kahneman pithily comments, "Our comforting conviction that the world makes sense rests on a secure foundation: our almost unlimited ability to ignore our ignorance."[62]

[59] "Almost" because, although sometimes vulgarly understood as itself a teleological process, evolution (not to be confused with "social Darwinism") is in fact antiteleological because it refuses to presuppose any ultimate outcome.

[60] Kahneman 2011: 87. [61] Kahneman 2011: 85–88.

[62] Kahneman 2011: 201; see the whole discussion at 199–221. The problem of narrative in the forensic realm has received considerable attention by legal scholars: see Bennett and Feldman 1981; Brooks and Gewirtz 1996; Amsterdam and Bruner 2000; Meyer 2014. On the narrative fallacy, see also Nassim Nicholas Taleb's engaging bestseller *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (2010: 63–64), whose first edition was published in 2007 with implausibly perfect timing, just before the unpredicted market crash of 2008. In an anecdote that touches upon the point I am making here, Taleb describes the historical reading he did in his youth seeking refuge in a basement in Beirut during the first phase of the Lebanese Civil War. Familiar with the great works of the philosophy of history by Hegel, Marx, Toynbee, Aron, and Fichte that postulated a "logic" of history, a direction, Taleb found himself more influenced by William Shirer's *Berlin Diary*: "The journal was purportedly written without Shirer knowing what was going to happen next, when the information available to him was not corrupted by the subsequent outcomes." Readers of this book will think of Cicero's letters, an invaluable resource for precisely this reason.

Kahneman's disconcerting observation must be kept in mind when historians, as we inevitably will, protest with Crawford that hindsight is *necessary* in order to explain and understand the significance of events or changes. Historians as a class have a deep-seated "aversion to contingency" precisely because it threatens to undermine what we are after all trying to do – that is to *explain* the causes of things.[63] Knowing what happened afterward is indeed a very useful clue. But historians are not always humble in the face of what *we don't know* about the various causal strands in play in immensely complex interaction – of "our almost unlimited ability to ignore our ignorance" in typical WYSIATI fashion. Take, for instance, the almost universal opinion (so it seems) of experts that although the Caesarian Civil War of course did not *have* to break out in 49 (why not in 48, or 45, or 42?), still *some* such cataclysmic event would necessarily have brought down the Republic within a few years anyway.[64] I do not think anyone could really claim to know this with confidence or certainty. What we do know is that in 49 a civil war began that, in addition to whatever damage it wrought in itself, began a cycle of tightly linked civil wars that persisted – intermittently, but with great violence – for nearly two decades, including extraordinary traumas such as the assassination on the Senate floor, by men whose lives and fortunes he had spared, of a man whom many, perhaps most, living Romans thought of as one of the greatest heroes in their history; two battles on the Macedonian plain between two of the largest Roman armies ever assembled (some two hundred thousand legionaries); in Italy itself the proscription of perhaps three hundred senators and *equites* and the slaughter of many of them as they tried to escape; a revolt against the Triumvirs' expropriations, then Perusia starved into surrender, burnt (apparently by one of its own citizens), and its leaders subjected to savage reprisals.[65] Institutions do not run by themselves; they are animated by civil norms which rarely survive civil war (in itself the most extreme violation of civil norms imaginable) without crippling damage.[66] "War is a harsh teacher," and the civil wars of 49–31 appear quite sufficient in themselves to destroy the Roman Republic as a constitutional order – or to

[63] "Aversion of the historian to contingency": A. Heuß, cited by Walter 2009: 33. Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote of "the universal striving of human reason toward the annihilation of chance" (ibid., 36). See also Jehne 2009a: 147.

[64] See most recently Jehne 2009a, with a refinement of Meier's theory of an unstoppable "autonomous process" (esp. pp. 144–149; cf. Jehne 2006: 7–9). This serves as a kind of rebuttal to Walter 2009 in the same volume. Cf. Bleicken 1998 for a classic "political-structural" explanation of the "fall of the Republic."

[65] The whole tragedy is well told by Osgood 2006, with brilliant use of triumviral poetry to illuminate its psychological effects.

[66] On institutions and constitutional norms, see further Chapter 10.

transform it into something else.[67] Those who insist that the Republic could not have long survived even had the civil war of 49–45 not occurred overlook the tight causal nexus that binds that war with those that followed over the twenty-odd years to come – in particular, the violent emotion unleashed by Caesar's assassination under conditions that encouraged vengeance by Caesar's veterans, supporters, and heir – and to fall back on what seem to me to be entirely debatable counterfactual arguments of their own to defend their claim that the Republic's institutions and norms *would have failed* shortly (perhaps within a generation or so) even without the Twenty Years' War.[68] (The counterfactual mode seems inescapable even for those who shun counterfactual history.)

"Do not use this argument to avoid trying to learn from history," warns N. N. Taleb, quite rightly.[69] Hindsight is often invaluable; the danger is one of unreflective, simplistic reliance on hindsight, not that it is necessarily, inevitably deceptive. What is required above all is careful attention to those counterfactual possibilities (those, that is, of which we become aware: many, perhaps most, will be "submerged" below our vision) that suggest very different outcomes, and a healthy skepticism about the "grand narratives" that are often constructed on too little evidence in the usual WYSIATI fashion. In other words, we should always be prepared to exercise salutary skepticism against what may appear to be simply obvious. In fact, the unique nature of history, rooted in an unrepeatable past, *requires* us to be especially alert to the "alternative histories" that might have spun out from small changes in initial conditions (typically a human decision of some kind). The fact that historical inference (at least about events and their causes and consequences) cannot be tested against repeated experiments as is routine in the natural sciences means that the *only* test of our inferences will often be the care and sometimes the caution with which we assess the probability of outcomes different from the one that in fact ensued.[70]

Here a fraught methodological problem arises: if we allow consideration of counterfactuals, then what limit exists to control our most fanciful

[67] Βίαιος διδάσκαλος: Thuc. 3.82.2.

[68] See e.g. Jehne 2009a: 158–159, who also cites in support the alleged absence outside the "upper class" and especially the senatorial order of any strong interest in maintaining the traditional form of the Republic – a claim I dispute in what follows, pointing first to our recently heightened appreciation of popular participation in the political life of the Republic generally, then to the popular support manifested for legislation dear to the hearts of the Roman plebs in 59 and 58, later the widespread support for Caesar's (hardly revolutionary) claims at the outbreak of the civil war, and finally the manifest displeasure of the urban plebs with his arbitrary removal of the tribunes in 44, to name perhaps the most telling instances.

[69] Taleb 2010: 120; cf. 84 and the digression on history at pp. 195–200.

[70] Similarly, Walter 2009: 44–45, citing an essay of Max Weber.

speculations? Ferguson argues that to make an intellectually respectable basis for entertaining counterfactuals we should limit ourselves to those that are in fact considered in our evidence.[71] But this seems too limiting even for Ferguson's own argument, and applying this standard to ancient history would surely be too arbitrarily restrictive since the source material is so lacunose.[72] This would be to make counterfactual inferences too heavily dependent on the often arbitrary survival of evidence: they would spin out almost solely from the letters of Cicero. Counterfactuals such as "What if Cato in 62 to 60 BC had not simultaneously alienated both Pompey and Caesar as well as the *publicani* (publicly contracted tax gatherers) and their advocate, Crassus?" or "What if Bibulus had not resorted to an unprecedented theory of obstructionism against Caesar in his first consulship?" seem to me to be perfectly acceptable scenarios to contemplate, though I know of no ancient source that happens to attest explicitly to these alternatives. Counterfactual scenarios should indeed be limited to those that can be reasonably defended as realistic alternative possibilities – usually a human decision that evidently, given all our surviving evidence and our always incomplete knowledge of circumstances, might very well have gone the other way. Some of the charm of ancient history perhaps resides in the greater freedom granted to its practitioners not merely as a courtesy but of necessity.

More serious consideration of historical contingency as an antidote to our pattern-making instincts may help to put the whole story in a new light. A thought-provoking example from another historical period is Ferguson's rebuttal of the "hindsight bias" of traditional accounts of the outbreak of World War I. Today "everyone knows," it seems, that World War I was inevitable, a result of the entangled system of alliances that bound the major belligerents inescapably to war once the spark was applied

[71] Ferguson 1997: 86: "We should consider as plausible or probable *only those alternatives which we can show on the basis of contemporary evidence that contemporaries actually considered.*" (Author's emphasis.) This of course implies that "we can only legitimately consider those hypothetical scenarios which contemporaries not only considered, but also committed to paper (or some other form of record) which has survived – and which has been identified as a valid source by historians" (p. 87).

[72] Ferguson's own argument: "By narrowing down the historical alternatives we consider to those which are *plausible* – and hence by replacing the enigma of 'chance' with the calculation of *probabilities* – we solve the dilemma of choosing between a single deterministic past and an unmanageably infinite number of possible pasts. The counterfactual scenarios we therefore need to construct are not mere fantasy: they are simulations based on calculations about the relative probability of plausible outcomes in a chaotic world" (1997: 85). But "plausible" historical alternatives need not be only the ones explicitly acknowledged by authoritative sources. If, however, plausible historical alternatives can also be ones reasonably *inferred* on the basis of persuasive evidence (as, apparently, in Ferguson's argument about the stock market and World War I [see n. 73]), then we are in agreement.

by the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand. In such a frame, naturally, one takes more interest in the tangle than the spark. Yet, like today's nuclear deterrence, the point of the entanglement was precisely to prevent war. In a paper published in 2006 Ferguson asked why the bond market, which like other financial markets was highly risk-averse, was much less affected by the acceleration of the war crisis in summer 1914 than one would think if war was seen as truly imminent by lots of very smart people with skin in the game.[73] The answer must be that the risk of a major European conflict was generally perceived as low, controlled precisely by the system of alliances. "War, when it broke out in the first week of August, 1914, did indeed come as a surprise even to well-informed contemporaries. It was not the long-prophesied Armageddon depicted in so many histories."[74] As Ferguson and later C. Clark pointed out, the tangle of alliances was no "Doomsday Machine": the Austro-Hungarian Empire's aggressive response depended on the signals it received from Germany; Germany might, if better informed or less eager for a showdown, have assessed more accurately Russia's likelihood of intervening to defend its Serbian "brothers" on largely sentimental grounds; Serbia's government, by rejecting Austria's ultimatum, gambled everything on Russia's willingness to face a war with two major European powers; Russia's efforts at the very last moment to avoid the armed conflict with Germany that would result are well known; and so on, right down to the question whether Britain would, when the stakes were so high, truly honor its alliance with France or actually throw itself into the conflict if Belgium's neutrality were violated.[75] Ferguson and Clark move us away from a largely impersonal "structural" explanation of the outbreak of the war to one that stresses specific human decisions – human choices – made under conditions of radical uncertainty. It was not inevitable that a Balkan conflict would fail to be contained as earlier ones had been but would instead explode into a catastrophic world war. "Mistakes were made," and what in retrospect seems so notable is not how decision makers were trapped in a prison of their own making but how eagerly most of them embraced war as a solution.

To return at last to Rome, probably few today would still be so influenced by the impersonal, deterministic paradigm as to agree with Baron Montesquieu's famous dictum: "If Caesar and Pompey had thought like

[73] Ferguson 2006. See also Ferguson 1999, esp. chaps. 1–5. [74] Ferguson 2006: 72.

[75] Ferguson 1999; Clark 2013. "I will not be responsible for a monstrous slaughter" was Tsar Nicholas II's comment upon receiving an anxious telegram from his cousin Kaiser Wilhelm II on July 29, prompting him to countermand the decision for general mobilization – only temporarily, as it turned out (Clark 2013: 512).

Cato, others would have thought like Caesar and Pompey; and the republic, destined to perish, would have been dragged to the precipice by another hand."[76] But Erich Gruen's controversial judgment that "Civil war caused the fall of the Republic, not vice versa" now no longer seems as radical as it once did.[77] Gruen's battle against the distortions of hindsight was timely, coinciding broadly with growing rejection of the nineteenth-century scientistic assumptions that had dominated hitherto. This is not the place to offer a résumé of the problems of the transformation of the Roman Republic, which demand to be revisited now that views of the nature and political culture of the Republic have significantly changed.[78] For the purposes of this introduction it is enough to say that this book is written in the spirit of Gruen's great work in the sense that it proceeds from profound philosophical skepticism toward the oft-repeated claim that the end of the Republic was imminent and inevitable. None of this is to deny preemptively that one could construct a plausible argument that various destabilizing conditions (periodic institutional dysfunction and frequent political violence, rural poverty, and powerful armies filled by supposedly disaffected peasants under the control of fairly unconstrained generals) made an imminent, serious explosion in 50–49 BC possible, if an occasion for serious political conflict supervened.[79] My point is simply that this should not be lazily assumed on the obviously fallacious principle of "what happened had to happen," but proven by better empirical arguments, which I think despite Gruen's challenge has still not actually been done.[80] In the meantime, it remains an open question whether the transformation of the Republic into

[76] Montesquieu, *Considerations*, chapter 11.

[77] Gruen 1974: 504. See Walter 2009: 28–31 for a review of more recent German scholarship that aligns well with Gruen's basic perspective (Baltrusch, Welwei, Girardet, Botermann, and, it seems, Walter himself). Contra, however, Jehne 2009a in the same volume).

[78] A brief synthesis in Morstein-Marx and Rosenstein 2006. Flower 2010 is to my mind too formalistic an exercise in historical periodization (see n. 16).

[79] The past two decades have been especially fertile for scholarship on demography and the agrarian question in the Late Republic, together with their effect on rural economy and society, in particular the state of the peasantry that supplied manpower to Rome's armies. The debates may be traced through Rosenstein 2004, De Ligt and Northwood 2008, Roselaar 2010, De Ligt 2012, and Kay 2014. The bibliography is extensive, the findings highly controversial, and at this time of writing they cannot be said to have yielded firm conclusions that would affect interpretation of the causes of the Caesarian Civil War (see Chapter 10, p. 605f.). Against the common, related assumption that late-republican legions were little more than quasi-mercenary "private armies" bound mostly by personal loyalty to their commander, see already Gruen 1974: 365–384, and the cautions expressed by Brunt 1988: 257–259; more recently, Morstein-Marx and Rosenstein 2006: 630–633; Keaveney 2007: 16–35; Morstein-Marx 2009 and 2011. See further Chapter 9, n. 190.

[80] Morstein-Marx and Rosenstein 2006: 629–635. Further bibliography in Walter 2009: 27–28n2. I note again that this book does not purport to resolve this much larger problem, but, I hope, to contribute to the debate.

the Empire is more meaningfully attributed to the ravages of twenty-odd years of nearly continuous civil war, as suggested earlier in this chapter, than to any inherent weaknesses of those institutions before the cycle of civil war began in January 49.

The Civil War itself is often treated as a nearly inevitable consequence of Caesar's tumultuous first consulship in 59 – yet, if we are going to trace the roots of that traumatic conflict so far back, it is more plausibly seen not as the result of systemic failure but of the aggressively inept prior decision by Marcus Cato to take up an uncompromising "scorched-earth" line of opposition against not just Caesar (a relatively minor figure at the time), but simultaneously against Pompey the Great at the zenith of his power and influence.[81] Even so, as this book will show, numerous opportunities to prevent the explosion that came in January 49 were rejected by those intent on a violent confrontation; Cicero and the many senators who to varying degrees sought to resist the "rush to war" demonstrate that there was nothing inevitable about it. Nor can we assume that the Caesarian Civil War of 49–45 irreparably harmed the Republic rather than the much more atavistic descent into blood vengeance unleashed by the treacherous, savage killing of Caesar on the Senate floor by his friends and those whose lives he had spared. Moral outrage made this a particularly potent fuel to drive cycles of bloodshed.

A second teleology that scholars have found even more irresistible (and neatly intersects with the first) concerns Caesar's own career and goals. Syme's comment about historians "knowing the verdict in advance" is doubly true, and doubly dangerous, for any student of Gaius Julius Caesar. The conception of Caesar as an aspiring autocrat who spent his life scheming to achieve that goal has over the centuries achieved something like the status of a cultural archetype (it is commonplace to compare US presidents to Caesar – with the intent to damn, not to praise them), and like all archetypes, this construct is hard to get out of our heads even as we approach the sources with what we feel is an open mind. As nearly all people think they know (and have thought they knew since the beginning of republican political theory), Caesar "marched on the Republic" and is widely held responsible for destroying it, while his heir and great-nephew Octavian is often seen as having completed his project of transforming the state into a stable autocracy.[82] The biographical tradition of Plutarch and Suetonius – both writing a century and a half after the fact, when the

[81] Drogula 2019: 107–127.
[82] See e.g. Machiavelli, *Discorsi,* 1.10, 1.17, 1.29, 1.34, 1.37, etc. See Christ 1994; Baehr 1998.

"verdict of history" had shaped their very world – expressed what would prove to be a highly influential teleology according to which Caesar was seen as seeking autocracy from the very beginning of his political life.[83] On this view, the end determines the beginning, rather like Tacitus's notorious portrait of the emperor Tiberius but without the dissimulation. This teleology dovetails perfectly with the other story about the "fall of the Republic," which in its traditional version assumes that the Republic "had" to fall about now, with monarchy as the only viable "solution." In fact, they reinforce each other, for Caesar is made to "see" the Republic for the anachronism it was and to strive actively to realize the necessary monarchic solution. A more recent twist on this old line has been to accept the former proposition but to deny that Caesar had any specific solution.[84] And while it is true that contemporary scholars have been much less disposed to tell Caesar's story as if its ending sets the goal toward which everything before it tends, I suggest that only by making full use of the revival of the "republican" paradigm in the study of the Roman Republic that has taken place over the past few decades can we banish the ghost of the old teleology.

A notorious utterance put in Caesar's mouth by the imperial biographer Suetonius illustrates how difficult it is to extricate ourselves from the deeply entrenched view that he was at some point (before or after the Civil War) frankly committed to the suppression of the Republic: "The Republic [or 'a state'?] was nothing, a name without substance or form" (*nihil esse rem publicam, appellationem modo sine corpore ac specie, Iul.* 77). This shocking statement (and Suetonius certainly means it to be shocking) is often solemnly quoted by first-rate scholars as a kind of revelation of Caesar's innermost thoughts: Matthias Gelzer, for example, ended his great biography with the quotation and a reflection on it, and nearly all modern biographers find the saying irresistible even as they acknowledge reservations about its authenticity.[85] Others have devoted considerable ingenuity to decoding what Caesar actually meant.[86] But we need to ask a more basic question: Who reported the alleged statement? Suetonius in this case happens to tell us, and the information turns out to be extremely relevant: T. Ampius Balbus, ultimately one of Caesar's bitterest enemies, a known adherent of Pompey and his legate in the Civil War whose partisan

[83] See Chapter 2. [84] Meier 1982.

[85] Gelzer 1968: 333. Biographers: e.g. Canfora 2007: 138; Billows 2009: 283n7; Stevenson 2015: 171.

[86] Most notably Morgan 1997 – a brilliant tour de force which carries little conviction because it treats Ampius as an honest witness. Morgan rightly observes that the meaning of *res publica* is not restricted to a "republican political system" or "the (Roman) Republic" (see e.g. Cic. *Rep.* 1.39–44), which in itself undercuts the "anti-republican" interpretation that is often placed on the utterance.

pamphleteering (presumably around the beginning of the conflict) was so strident that it earned him the epithet *tuba belli civilis*, "war-trumpet of the Civil War."[87] In 46, the date of our last good evidence (a letter to him from Cicero), Balbus was hoping for Caesar's pardon, having now turned to a safer, laudatory variety of literary activity; it is likely that one followed soon thereafter.[88] Whether Balbus's purported revelations (he is not known ever to have been close to Caesar) were published in a kind of propaganda tract during the outbreak of the Civil War or, as some think, only after Caesar's assassination, it should be clear that no real weight should be given to this allegation by a notoriously outspoken enemy.[89] There was a lively market in slander and invective about the powerful in late-republican Rome. Caesar proved to be a specially attractive target, but not even Cicero was spared denunciations such as "tyrant," "king," or "butcher."[90] Scholars of ancient rhetoric have learned not to take this kind of thing literally and we should too.[91] Perhaps biographers and historians have been so taken with the Caesar quotation because it fits their preexisting conception of the man – which it then, circularly, buttresses. Once that interpretation of the man is itself in question, however, it can offer no independent support or illumination.

This book offers a different view: that Gaius Julius Caesar saw himself, and was seen by many if not all of his contemporaries, as a great *republican* leader – a powerful combination, as Rome had seen before especially in the Scipiones, of patrician pedigree, "popular" politics, and stunning military achievement, with values and goals consistent with ancient republican canons of *virtus*, *dignitas*, and *gloria*, who measured himself and was

[87] Cic. *Fam.* 6.12.3. Pompey's support for his failed consular bid and trial in 55: Cic. *Planc.* 25; Schol. Bob. 156 St; Cic. *Leg.* 2.6. We lose the scent of his civil war activities after 48 (*Att.* 8.11B.2, Caes. *BCiv.* 3.105.1), but unlike many other Pompeians his pardon did not come until late in 46 (Cic. *Fam.* 6.12; cf. 13.70 and Chapter 8, #61). This suggests some special offense that set him apart, and from Cicero's letter it seems evident that this must have been connected with his having served as the *tuba belli civilis.* See also *FRHist* no. 34; also see Chapter 9, n. 218.

[88] Safer literary activity: Cic. *Fam.* 6.12.5: *in virorum fortium factis memoriae prodendis.*

[89] Morgan 1997: 24, likes the idea that Ampius wrote only after Caesar's assassination, but since we know he was blowing the war trumpet for the civil war and that he had earned that title before 46, there seems to be no good reason to deny that the notorious phrase belongs then. It is tempting but fallacious to associate one piece of evidence with another (i.e. Ampius's further, perhaps simultaneous allegation that Caesar said it was stupid of Sulla to lay down the dictatorship and his assumption of the *dictatura perpetua* in February 44: see Chapter 9, n. 218) simply because they would go well together.

[90] Suet. *Iul.* 49–50, preserves a precious sampling of the anti-Caesarian invective tradition. On Cicero, see Cic. *Dom.* 75; *Sest.* 109; *Vat.* 29; *Sull.* 21–22; cf. *Phil.* 2.12–19; [Sall.] *Inv.* 3, 5–6; Dio 46.1–28.

[91] See Nisbet's wry remarks on the tradition (1961: 192–197); see Craig 2004, with lists of invective topoi.

measured by his contemporaries against models of leadership *in the past* rather than yet-unknown forms of autocracy that lay in the future (or, more precisely, in at least one of the indeterminate possible futures: the one that actually occurred).[92] Everyone will probably agree that Caesar possessed exceptional talents – he was an exceptional general, an exceptional speaker, even an exceptional writer, and by all accounts an exceptionally attractive personality, friend, perhaps even lover – but we should not suppose, for all these qualities, that he enjoyed a unique historical standpoint outside his time and place in the story of the Republic, exceptional foresight into the "course of history" and the imperial future, or an unconscious grasp of the movement of the Hegelian *Weltgeist* to give birth to "an independently necessary feature in the history of Rome and of the world."[93] Those who find it difficult to square Caesar's ultimate elevation to the "Continuous Dictatorship" shortly before his assassination with a pre–Civil War career dedicated to distinguishing himself as a republican leader might ponder the even more paradoxical trajectory followed by Oliver Cromwell in and after the English Civil War. An unexceptional Member of Parliament for the borough of Huntington, Cromwell would become the military leader of the armies of Parliament against the king's violation of the traditional English "constitution," eventually see to his execution, and die, shortly after refusing the crown, as Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland – virtually an absolute monarch. He professed an apparently quite sincere Puritan conviction that he had at every turn acted according to Divine Providence, but it is perfectly clear that he had not contemplated the removal, much less the execution, of the king, not to mention his own replacement of that monarch (though not as "king"), much before those events actually confronted him.[94] Events have their own logic and open up possibilities that had never been contemplated, and would probably have been vehemently rejected beforehand.

In general, as the criminal courts do, in this study I have tried to be as resistant as I am able to "character evidence" – that is the very human tendency to feel we *know* somebody's character traits well enough to treat

[92] Many great scholars before me have led the way for substantial portions of this book. I wish to note especially the debt of "my Caesar" to Erich Gruen (esp. 1974, 2009), Kurt Raaflaub (1974), Hinnerk Bruhns (1978), and, despite our divergence on many crucial points, Martin Jehne, with his large body of important work on Caesar, beginning with his still-fundamental dissertation on "'Caesar's State" (1987a). I have also often found myself in broad agreement with the approach of Zecchini (2001). Of recent biographies in English, Billows (2009) takes a comparable view but goes astray by overemphasizing Caesar as a "party man" of the "*populares.*"

[93] Hegel 1847/2001: 44. [94] See Bennett 2006; Gentles 2011.

that acquaintance as evidence in its own right when we interpret that person's actions. People often feel they know Caesar quite well: an example, more explicit than most but not entirely unrepresentative, is Ridley's suggestion that we can be sure, "if we know anything about his personality," what would be Caesar's choice among the alternatives he faced before crossing the Rubicon.[95] One suspects that "we know" this because in fact that is what happened. But there is a good reason why the Common Law places such tight restrictions on "character evidence": what we think we know about the character of a person who is not our intimate may be nothing more than prejudice, or wrongly inferred from the result, or – in the context of historical study – a *communis opinio* so long established that it seems hardly open to question. We must not, I insist, allow assumptions about Caesar's "natural" inclinations, which are so easy to draw from hindsight and are inevitably but fallaciously colored by his assumption of the "permanent dictatorship" shortly before his assassination, to guide or determine our interpretations of his many actions and decisions over the two decades (roughly) that preceded that moment.

Much as I would like to establish a definitive new interpretation of Caesar as a historical figure, a more realistic goal for what follows would be to induce my readers to join me in a kind of thought experiment whose purpose would be to prompt a radical rethink by removing the encrusted patina of a hoary dominant narrative so persistent and enduring that it is hard even to envision any alternative, much less summon the will to challenge it. I hope to dismantle the tired, but still largely dominant dichotomy between Caesar and "the Republic" so that it may become possible to see him more clearly and accurately as a representative of Roman republican traditions of leadership in a regime combining popular power with aristocratic achievement. Caesar offers an illuminating test case for current debates about popular participation and the complex construction of republican legitimacy from popular as well as senatorial perspectives. These debates have been conducted thus far in a somewhat abstract way removed from the course of events; by painstakingly following Caesar's tumultuous career we can put them to a more satisfying empirical test and reveal their explanatory power in a connected series of concrete historical moments.

The focus on Caesar, even in relation to the Roman People, will seem misguided to some. Let me try to reassure them. This book is not a covert

[95] Ridley 2004: 152. Jehne 2009a: 142n4, is rightly cautious: "It is debatable how much we know about Caesar's personality." See n. 6 of this chapter.

plea for a return to nineteenth-century "great man history" according to which "all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world."[96] Caesar and his political choices are of course very far from constituting the whole story of the transformation of the Roman Republic into the Empire, even of the crises of the 50s and 40s. Yet the experience of our own times may well convince us that men and women with their hands on the levers of power have often managed to wreak enormous havoc with institutions and human lives, and if that is so then they probably have also sometimes done some good. The hopes invested and the passions unleashed in our own national elections appear to prove that on the whole we are convinced that it actually does matter who is put in charge, even though we surely all recognize that deep, impersonal forces create the landscape in which leaders must operate, often blindly. But Julius Caesar played a central role in the crises of the 50s and 40s, and therefore a fresh look at his decisions and actions should cast considerable light on those crises, though it will of course not suffice alone as an explanation. This cannot be, and is not intended to be, a political history of the last two decades of the Republic: the actions of other major players, including his eventual rival Pompey as well as Cicero and Cato, are examined here only where they clearly impinge upon Caesar, and larger or deeper social and economic issues, interesting and important as they are, are subject to the same criterion of inclusion. A full reexamination of the transformation of the Republic (perhaps overdue) would require a much more comprehensive approach than I am able to offer here. Yet surely Caesar's role is an important part of that story, and I hope that when that comprehensive reexamination comes this study will prove useful.

The eight chapters that follow are arranged in a chronological series but are not intended to form a connected biographical narrative. They focus on key *historical* rather than biographical moments that I believe to be central to the interpretation of Caesar as a republican political leader; you will read little or nothing here about his famous capture by pirates or his controversial and paradoxical ("if we know anything about his personality") dalliance with the twenty-one-year-old Cleopatra in Egypt while the die-hard Pompeians regrouped in Africa. Various interesting topics that intersect with Caesar's story must here be laid aside in order to preserve my intended focus: you will have to look elsewhere for an examination of his attitude

[96] Carlyle 1911: 1 (lectures delivered in 1840).

and policy toward the Empire and the newly conquered domains east and west, including his many colonial projects, his Gallic or civil war campaigns, his qualities as a military tactician or strategist, his opinions on correct Latin usage or his (often alleged) Epicureanism, or the general topic of religious innovation, including the evolution of ideas about the deification of political leaders.

The book falls fairly evenly into two unequal halves broken by the coming of the Civil War in 50–49. I devote four chapters to each of these halves. In Chapters 2 and 3 I trace Caesar's rise as a patrician senator attentive both to popular and aristocratic traditions of the Republic up through his famous intervention in the Catilinarian Debate and its controversial aftermath; in Chapter 4 I examine his consulship of 59, which is frequently seen as the beginning of the end, setting the Republic on its inevitable course to self-destruction, and in Chapter 5 I turn to his activities in Gaul as seen from the vantage point of the Senate and People in the capital.

The second half of the book revolves around the Caesarian Civil War, whose influence on the fate of the Roman Republic was undeniably powerful if not determinative. First, in Chapters 6 and 7, I examine the development of the crisis that led to the war and the confusing "phony war" in Italy that ensued after Caesar returned to Italy, when despite the notorious "crossing of the Rubicon" it remained unclear for months whether a civil war was truly on. In Chapters 8 and 9 I look at Caesar's actions as leader and victor in the Civil War – first the famous but often misunderstood policy of "clemency," then his actions upon his return to Rome after the conclusion of the civil wars, which most scholars regard as forcefully foreclosing all hope of return to functioning republican government. I shall suggest that Caesar's focus in the months leading up to his assassination was on making the necessary preparations for his imminent Parthian war on an extremely tight time schedule rather than on constructing an autocracy, implicitly abolishing the Roman Republic. But I shall also argue that his preoccupied inattention to growing discontent, at both the popular and the senatorial levels, with the arbitrary actions he took toward this end made him vulnerable to an assassination that was justified, whatever the actual motives of perhaps sixty-odd conspirators, on plausibly "republican" grounds.

Caesar remains a fulcrum in Roman history, the nexus between the two great eras we refer to as "the Republic" and "the Empire." When we study the Republic we always have Caesar in mind as the end point to which we seem to accelerate; when we examine the Empire we are always casting

a glance back at his example and precedent. This I believe sufficiently justifies the kind of thorough reexamination offered in these pages. Caesar is deeply implicated in arguments about republicanism and tyranny, and the "fall of the Republic" is often blamed on him. He stirs strong passions even today, which are likely to be provoked by the mildly revisionist spirit in which this book is written and which will grate on some as "apologia." Due to Caesar's centrality in the narrative of the very late Republic, the material that underpins the traditional views is extraordinarily copious, and a large mass of source material is itself buried by the accumulation of centuries of scholarly interpretation. An alternative view of a "republican" Caesar must be built up incrementally over a series of chapters, and I respectfully suggest that readers judge the coherence and plausibility of the whole only once the account is complete.