

Model Man: The Ciceronian *Prudens* and Aristotelian φρόνησις

Cicero's *De Re Publica*, which the author describes to his brother Quintus as the search "about the best condition of the State and about the best citizen" (*Q. fr.* 3.5.1), was perhaps as ambitious an undertaking for the Roman state at the time as it is now a fragmentary text for modern scholars to interpret. Despite the prevalence of lacunae and homeless fragments of the text preserved in later authors' works, certain principles of Cicero's investigation into the ideal condition of the state and its ideal citizenry can be discerned, and various reconstructions of the dialogue format help us to map out the train of thought from fragment to fragment in order to get a fuller sense of what Cicero's entire work presented (Powell 2012). Building off of this platform for reconstruction, Jed Atkins (2013) offers up an interpretation of the dialogue's form which suggests that the dialogue works as a vehicle for conveying ideas as well as a kind of protreptic for philosophical enquiry which outlines and strives for a coherent political philosophy for Rome. Comparing it with Plato's *Republic*, however, Atkins ultimately suggests that Cicero ceded that this philosophy would be decidedly limited in effect or implementation, based on the difficulties of the endeavor.

This paper seeks to challenge this conclusion, which does injustice both to the central points of Cicero's confessed project and to the historical situation of the publication of the dialogue. When situated among his correspondence and his other philosophical works, particularly his *De Oratore* and *De Finibus*, Cicero's project can be more profitably viewed as an elaboration on ideas not from Plato's *Republic* but from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially the concept of *phronesis* or "practical wisdom." By attributing *phronesis* or *prudentia*, its Latin equivalent (Zetzel 1999), to his ideal statesman, the *rector rei publicae*, Cicero shows the truly transformative abilities which this philosophical and political program could have when

implemented by someone who could achieve the level of wisdom and virtue for which Cicero advocates.

As evidenced by his own correspondence at this time, Cicero imagined his dialogue as providing a direct answer to the political crises of the 50's BCE (Asmis: 2005). In his correspondence with his brother and another dialogician, Varro, he discusses the composition of the dialogue, and he laments the current state of Rome while also seeking to use his work as some sort of political corrective (*ad Q. fr.* 3.5.2; *ad fam.* 9.2.5), using such language as to lead Dorothea Frede (1989) to suggest that the dialogue was intended to promote a specific political course to right the perceived misstep of Rome under Caesar.

Though a student of the Academy, his adherence to the later Academy's skepticism could even lead to the questioning of Platonic thought and political science (Sedley: 1989). Cicero's intellectual commitments left him free to embrace truth wherever he found it, even in the work of Plato's student and Cicero's model for dialogues, Aristotle (Nelsestuen: 2016). Using Jonathan Barnes' (1997) analysis of Aristotle's prevalence in Rome and Cicero's encounter with Aristotelian texts specifically, as well as Cicero's views on Peripateticism expressed in the aforementioned works, we will find a model that borrows from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, particularly in the figure of the *rector rei publicae* or *prudens* mentioned throughout; further, as Robert Radford points out, the introduction to *De Re Publica* reads as a response to Aristotle's lament about the state of politics at the end of the *Ethics*. Working under this model of Aristotelian practical wisdom and virtue, particularly in light of Cicero's confessed practical commitments, I argue that Cicero's political project is not, as Atkins claims, one of resignation in the face of unreason, but rather a model to be embraced and implemented by the virtuous statesmen who can be trained to inculcate the *hexis* of Aristotelian virtue.

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