Realpolitik and the Transactional Nature of Cicero's Alliance with Octavian

Cicero was a moral idealist but a political realist. His concept of leadership has more in common with Bismarckian *Realpolitik* than with philosophical idealism. Despite his almost pathological belief in the sanctity and superiority of the Roman *res publica*, Cicero's political theory was always goal-oriented, not ideological; like Bismarck's it was a "means to concrete, practical ends" (Pflanze 1958, 494). It was predicated on the idea of social exchange, both between the elites and the people and especially between the elites themselves. In the political realm this exchange is better termed transactional politics. As Burns (1978, 19-20) defined it, transactional leadership is the exchange of valuable things, broadly defined, between parties who were conscious of the transactional nature of the relationship for a related, though not identical, purpose. In transactional leadership there is no further pursuit of greater purpose; leadership is defined by the ability to be a power broker and to participate in this economy of exchange rather than by the ability to build consensus and provide vision towards which a group of people strive. While the parties involved in such transactions may share a temporary common goal in the pursuit of individual interests, the transactions are not far-sighted or part of a unified set of future objectives. This compares to transformational leadership, in which engagement with others leads to a singular purpose, with competing power bases joined in pursuit of a common goal, as Bass and Riggio (2006, 5-7) have argued.

Even on a philosophical level, Cicero's ideal statesman as depicted in *De Re Publica* engaged in transactional politics with the universe; if the statesman performs his duties, he is rewarded with a place in the heavens (*Rep*. 6.13). The factors that created the ideal

statesman were also those that allowed transactional politics to proceed: the fragmentation of power and the necessity of collaboration, what Cicero termed *concordia*, 'harmony' (*Rep*. 1.49, 2.69; *Har. Resp*. 61) and *consensus*, 'agreement'. Ironically, these same factors would contribute in no small measure to the collapse of the system it supported, as Mouritsen (2017, 164-72) has noted.

Cicero's decision as the Republic broke down to ally with a transactional outlier like Octavian was an astute reaction to revolution and recognition that traditional modes of leadership had become ineffective. Caesar's dictatorship, and more so Antony's *dominatio*, forced Cicero to consider compromising his ideology in favor of the goal of preserving the Republic. Thus, after Caesar's victory in the civil war and the consequent breakdown of traditional power structures Cicero shifted his leadership philosophy from relying on the power of the Senate and the magistracies tied thereto to the power of the individual. Cicero's goal, however, remained the same – the preservation of the res publica. Thus, the alliance with Octavian was transactional politics at its best. Cicero's strategy throughout the *Philippics* tended towards identifying and rectifying ad hoc reactionary problems as opposed to a transformational unified goal beyond the elimination of Antony and the preservation of the pre-civil war political status quo (Dawes 2014). Cicero, like Bismarck, recognized that politics is merely the interplay of power at different levels; even the famous protestation *cedant arma togae concedat laurea laudi* from *Off*. 1.77 is a hope for the subjugation of one type of power to another.

The changing immediate goals of each *Philippic* as well as Cicero's highlighting of Octavian's *privatum consilium* in fact provide confirmation of Cicero's own leadership philosophy. It was Cicero who stepped into the void created by the temerity of the Senate and brought the young Caesar into the fold. It was Cicero who created the opportunity for the young

Caesar to act *privato consilio*, "on his own initiative," but only because Cicero's leadership had provided the opportunity. The relationship between Octavian and the Senate became transactional, and Cicero played the broker in those transactions. Cicero was clear that this alliance was always going to be conditional and temporary (e.g. *Att.* 15.12.2, 16.1.1, 16.8, 16.9). Cicero would give Octavian *auctoritas* and legitimacy, and Octavian would in turn provide the military assets needed to rid Rome of Antony forever. Once Antony was destroyed, the gameboard would reset, as it were, until the next transaction.

Works Cited

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