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Cicero Philosophico-Politicus: Glory, Friendship, Utopia

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Abstract

This dissertation is about three of Cicero’s notable projects in ideal theory in his middle and late periods (between roughly 54-43 BCE). It comes during a resurgence in scholarly interest in Cicero’s contributions as a philosopher. First, I discuss Cicero’s philosophical account of *vera gloria* (true glory) in contradistinction to mere *fama* (fame) in his rhetorical and philosophical works. Second, I present a new philosophical analysis of Cicero’s account of friendship in his dialogue, the *Laelius de amicitia*. Last, I put forth a new interpretation of Cicero’s philosophical project in the *De republica* and *De legibus* (his *Republic* and *Laws*), where I advocate a reading on which Cicero’s *De rep.* and Plato’s *Timaeus* share commitments to a certain methodological approach—what I call “retrospective ideal theory.”

In fact, what further ties each of these papers together is recurrent discussion of this “retrospective ideal theory” in the work of Cicero. Simply stated, retrospective ideal theory is an ideal theory which takes as its models of ideal forms—or puts forward as exemplars—forms which have existed in the past rather than solely forms which *could* or *will* exist at some time in the future (or outside of time). In Cicero’s case, this is seen initially by Cicero’s use of Roman examples to illustrate his theoretical points and his use of Roman heroes and history in the setting of his philosophical dialogues.

But, as I show here, retrospective ideal theory is a theoretical commitment throughout these three works, too. Cicero gives us reason to think that ideal models which have existed provide us better models on which to plan contemporary personal and political reform. This requires us to change our conception of “ideal”—as we are accustomed to think of ideal political forms (and by “political” I mean here to include the realm of ethics, as Aristotle does) as either not possible in the real world, or only possible in some future moment.
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Together, these people and institutions helped produce this work. I, however, take responsibility for any shortcomings contained in it.
Preface

Marcus Tullius Cicero was born about two thousand years ago in a small town outside Rome. In his lifetime, he became a leading senator at Rome, achieved the highest office in the Roman Republic—consul—, and became the most distinguished orator in the history of Roman letters. For as long as Latin has been spoken and studied, he is the first and last word in Latin prose style.

In his youth, he was educated in Greek philosophy by the best philosophers of the day in Greece and in Greek. For all his mammoth achievements in rhetoric and speechcraft, he also wrote philosophy—extensively and throughout his life. The last years of his life he devoted himself almost exclusively to it—his precious *consolatio* in the wake of his daughter’s death and his forced political retirement at the ascendancy of Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, and Octavian (later Augustus). His aim in those last few years was exceedingly (and, ultimately, voluminously) ambitious: To give the Latin language a philosophical dimension through a new Latin philosophical vocabulary and discussion, in Latin, on topics in Greek philosophy.

This dissertation contains three papers on but a fraction of Cicero’s philosophical output. They all revolve around political themes with which he was intimately concerned as a Roman philosopher living during uncertain, dangerous times at the end of the Roman republic: glory and ambition within the city (he outlines an account of “true” glory for the good citizen); the possibility of true friendship (he idealizes the friendship between two famous past Romans while setting forth a unique theory of politically-engaged friendship); and the possibility of a distinctly Roman utopia (he says the ancestral form of Roman republican government is best). Each paper may be read on its own, but I’ve also written short introductions to each (with a longer introduction to begin), connecting themes from across Cicero’s philosophical corpus.
I’ll end this short preface with a brief biographical aside.

I first read Cicero when I was seventeen years old. I came across De officiis in a used bookstore—a weathered old Loeb edition, with dull red binding and a creamy orange dust jacket. I leafed the pages, read, was engrossed, and wished I could read the Latin.

I later learnt Latin, with Cicero’s prose a guiding hand.

What follows is, in one form or another, the result of some ten years’ study on Cicero’s political philosophy.

There have been many debates (both ancient and modern) about Cicero’s merits as a philosopher. Recently, as is well-represented in this dissertation and its bibliography, there has been a renaissance of Cicero studies in academic philosophy and a reappraisal of his philosophical contributions, especially in skeptical epistemology.

Needless to say, this dissertation stands among those works that take Cicero seriously as a philosopher. Ten years’ study has shown me Cicero a subtle, careful, probing thinker about the things that really matter to the life and health of the city.

But I can’t fool myself. Ten years in the company of anyone makes you feel less like a guest, and more like you’re at home. So, let any errors in this dissertation be attributed solely to me—perhaps with sight blurred, at this point, by some affection for my subject.
List of Abbreviations

Cicero’s works

*Acad. Academica.*
*De am. Laelius de amicitia, Laelius on Friendship*
*De rep. De republica, On the Republic*
*De leg. De legibus, On the Laws*
*De fin. De finibus, On Moral Ends*
*De off. De officiis, On Duties*
*De sen. Cato Maior de senectute, Cato the Elder on Old Age*
*Pro Arc. Pro Archia Poeta, In Defense of Archias the Poet*
*Tusc. Disp. Tusculanae Disputationes, Tusculan Disputations*
*Epist. Att. Letters to Atticus*

Plato’s works

*Rep. Republic*
*Tim. Timaeus*

Miscellaneous

*D.L., Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers, Diogenes Laertius*
*Lives, Parallel Lives, Plutarch*

*Acad. Academica.*
*Leg. de Legibus.*
*Long and Sedley, The Hellenistic Philosophers, sourcebook.*
*L&S, Lewis and Short, Latin Dictionary*
*LSJ, Liddell, Scott, Jones, Lexicon.*
*OCD, Oxford Classical Dictionary.*
*OLD, Oxford Latin Dictionary.*
*TLG, Thesaurus Linguae Graecae.*
*TLL, Thesaurus Linguae Latinae.*
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather,


*Requiescat in pace.*

...

**Invocation:**

*Consolation to Marcus Tullius Cicero on the Sudden Loss of his Daughter, Tullia,*

*for Whom He Mourned by Writing Philosophy, in the Shape of an Urn*

O Marce, may Tullia,

thy muse, look favorably

on these my undertakings—

done in and for your memory;

and if you are still restless

in death as you were in life,

may you, Tully, always find thy Tullia

on those cool quiet Elysian fields

where blossoms are not plucked before they open,

where bright fires without oil burn untended, and

where, I hope, fathers may again see their daughters,

and converse in laughter and love ever more.
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Introduction

This dissertation is about three of Cicero’s notable projects in ideal theory in his middle and late periods (between roughly 54-44 BCE). It comes during a resurgence in interest in Cicero’s contributions as a philosopher. First, I piece together Cicero’s philosophical account of *vera gloria* (true glory) in contradistinction to mere *fama* (fame) in his rhetorical and philosophical works. Second, I present a new philosophical analysis of Cicero’s account of friendship in his dialogue, the *Laelius de amicitia*. Last, I put forth a new interpretation of Cicero’s philosophical project in the *De republica*, where I advocate a reading on which Cicero’s *De rep.* and Plato’s *Timaeus* share commitments to a certain methodological approach—what I call “retrospective ideal theory.”

In fact, what further ties each of these papers together is recurrent discussion of this “retrospective ideal theory” in the work of Cicero. Simply stated, retrospective ideal theory is an ideal theory which takes as its models of ideal forms—or puts forward as exemplars—forms which have existed in the past rather than solely forms which *could* or *will* exist at some time in the future (or outside of time). In Cicero’s case, this is seen initially by Cicero’s use of Roman examples to illustrate his theoretical points and his use of Roman heroes and history in the setting of his philosophical dialogues.

But, as I show here, retrospective ideal theory is a theoretical commitment throughout these three works, too. Cicero gives us reason to think that ideal models which have existed provide us better models on which to plan contemporary personal and political reform. This requires us to change our conception of “ideal”—as we are accustomed to think of ideal political

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1 E.g., Powell, Annas, Atkins, Baraz, Schofield, Brittain, etc.
forms (and by “political” I mean here to include the realm of ethics, as Aristotle does) as either not possible in the real world, or only possible in some future moment.

Each of these papers may be read on its own, but I chose each to be read successively after the other in the order here represented for a snapshot of the “retrospective ideal” approach in Cicero’s political philosophy. In his account of *vera gloria*, we see what Cicero thought would constitute the ideal Roman philosophical citizen. In the *De amicitia*, we see Cicero’s putting forward a theory of friendship between two such philosophical citizens. Last, in the *De republica*, we see Cicero’s outlining a state rudder’d by such persons—and principally by the *rector rei publicae*—and its supposed historical analogue (and, ultimately, paradigm) in the heyday of the Roman republic.

The approach adopted in this dissertation is more or less consonant with contemporary philosophical approaches to Cicero: particularly the work of J.E.G. Powell, Jed Atkins, Charles Brittain, Elizabeth Asmis, and, to a lesser extent, Yelena Baraz. That is, my dissertation assumes that Cicero is a philosophically serious thinker, well-versed in the main academic traditions in philosophy viable in his lifetime, and original in his philosophical pronouncements besides. However, in distinction from these authors, my dissertation is the first to set forth a consistent unique methodological approach throughout each of the works discussed here (i.e., the “retrospective ideal” approach). I am also the first to ground this methodological approach in a particular Platonic tradition—one which I trace to Plato’s *Timaeus-Critias* duology.
Chapter precis:

We know that Cicero wrote a philosophical treatise on glory (De gloria), but it has been lost. Nevertheless, I think we have enough in other of Cicero’s writings to get some sense of what his philosophical account of glory would have looked like.

In this chapter I trace Cicero’s account of vera gloria (true glory)—as opposed to mere fama (fame)—in both his philosophical and rhetorical works during his mature writing career (shortly after his consulship leading up to the time of his assassination in the Octavian proscriptions in 43 BCE). I also chart Cicero’s famous boasting of his own political and literary achievements en route to what he might call a “true glory” for himself.

True glory, it turns out, only comes to a good person, whose character is accurately judged by knowing judges (“incorrupta vox bene iudicantium de excellenti virtute”). A virtuous person cares about her reputation not for her own self-satisfaction, but, rather, because she cares about the example she sets for future generations and the future state. Cicero construes ambitio—the traditional Roman character trait befitting capable, promising young men—as a character virtue rather than defect. Young Roman men ought to cultivate (and, as it happens, in practice did so cultivate) ambitio at all stages of education, and in so doing learn to desire political achievement not for falsa gloria—the shallow approval of anyone—but the knowing approval of the wise, like the judges of old whom Roman statesmen can hope to meet at death (according to the vision in the Somnium Scipionis in Cicero’s De rep. 6).

Cicero’s fascination with true glory, I think, in part stems from his preoccupation with developing an ideal retrospective political theory to complement (and contrast with) Plato’s broadly prospective one in the Republic. Cicero’s models (exempla) for political philosophy all
derive from real Roman figures—whether the Scipios, Cato the Elder, Laelius, Brutus—and explaining their “glorious” reputations in terms of the fruits of a virtuously cultivated *ambitio* sets the stage for Cicero’s use of ideal retrospective theory in the *Laelius de amicitia* and the *De republica*.
... non prius laudes contempsimus, quam laudanda facere desivimus. We do not despise praise until we have ceased to do anything praiseworthy.

—Pliny, *Epist.* 3.21

It has been said of Cicero, that had it not been for the taint of vanity inborn in his character, that had he been disposed more toward humility than typical Roman ostentation, that had he less a concern for his posthumous fame, and yet all the more for his present excellence, perhaps he might have been known as nearly perfect, for so heavily then would his many virtues have outweighed his shortcomings. But, so the thought continues, it is simply a matter of fact that throughout his life Cicero was not concerned only with a pure, “philosophical” virtue, but that he was drawn on by her peculiar sometimes reward, that fickle, fleeting thing: *Gloria* (glory).

So ambitious was young Cicero, Plutarch tells us, that he went to the Oracle at Delphi, that he might inquire how he should become most glorious, only to receive her usual reproof: “. . the Pythoness answered, by making his own genius and not the opinion of the people the guide of his life.” And indeed, we find in the writings of Cicero himself examples of his legendary boasting and self-praise: in his letters to his friend Atticus and to his brother Quintus, in his public defamations and defenses, and even in his philosophical writings, he is accustomed to tout his political achievements, especially his quick ascent through the *cursus honorum* as a *novus homo* and his actions surrounding the Catlinarian conspiracy in 63 BCE. And, though at times

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2 Petrarch could be cast as an exemplar of this opinion [REF].
3 The Life of Cicero, V. 1-2, the Dryden translation. Plutarch’s Greek: τὴν ἑαυτῷ φύσιν, ἀλλὰ μὴ τὴν τῶν πολλῶν δόξαν…
4 The *cursus honorum* (“course of public offices”) was the established path through which the Roman politician had to progress if he hoped to one day be consul. It started with the quaestorship at the minimum age of thirty, and ended with the consulship at the minimum age of forty-two. Cicero completed the *cursus* in twelve years, becoming consul in 63 B.C. This was a great triumph, considering not only that he attained the consulship at forty-two, but that he was also a *novus homo*, “a new man;” i.e., he was the first of his family to enter into the life of politics and the Senate.
showing modesty with regard to his literary talents, he nevertheless expects that his readers know him as a quite accomplished orator and stylist.

His political achievements inspire some of his most vivid and forceful language, as we see here in the *De officiis*:

Not to mention other instances, did not arms yield to the toga,\(^5\) when I was at the helm of state? For never was the republic in more serious peril, never was peace more profound. Thus, as the result of my counsels and my vigilance, their weapons slipped suddenly from the hands of the most desperate traitors—dropped to the ground of their own accord!\(^6\)

Ut enim alios omissam, nobis rem publicam gubernantibus nonne togae arma cesserunt? neque enim periculum in re publica fuit gravius umquam nec maius otium. Ita consiliis diligentiaque nostra celeriter de manibus audacissimorum civium delapsa arma ipsa ceciderunt.

And again, we have another example of his gloating from the third speech of the *In Catilinam*, which Cicero delivered after Catiline had fled from Rome and Cicero expected his own triumph:

For all this that I have done, gentlemen, I ask of you no prize for merit, no badge of honour, no monument of glory. I ask only that this day should never be forgotten . . . Citizens, my deeds shall be perpetuated in your memories. They shall be celebrated in the talk of men. They shall wax and pass down the ages, handed on by the written word. I believe the memory of my

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\(^5\) Cicero enters into this discussion with a repetition of his motto at 1.77: “Cedant arma togae, concedat laurea laudi.” Walter Miller renders it thus: “Yield, ye arms, to the toga; to civic praises, ye laurels.” Cicero considers his diplomatic glory, won by oratory, no less great than the military triumphs of the generals.

\(^6\) *De Officiis* 1. 77-78. Here Cicero praises the quashing of the Catilinarian conspiracy during his consulship, achieved almost solely by Cicero’s famous series of speeches, the *In Catilinam*, in which Cicero exhorted the Senate to take action against Catiline and his fellow conspirators, lest the Republic should fall into ruin. The cited passage thus continues: Quae res igitur gesta umquam in bello tanta? Qui triumphus conferendus? Licet enim mihi, M. fili, apud te glorari, ad quem et hereditas huius gloriae et factorum imitatio pertinet.
consulship will live as long as this city survives: which means, I hope, that the term of life for both of them will be eternity.\textsuperscript{7}

\textit{Quibus pro tantis rebus, Quirites, nullum ego a vobis praemium virtutis, nullum insigne honoris, nullum monumentum laudis postulo praeterquam huius diei memoriam sempiteman . . . Memoria vestra, Quirites, nostrae re alentur, sermonibus crescent, litterarum monumentis inveterascent et corroborabuntur; eademque diem intellelo, quam spero aeternam fore, propagatam esse et ad salutem urbis et ad memoriam consulatus mei . . . mihi quidem ipsi quid est quod iam ad vitae fructum possit adquiri, cum praesertim neque in honore vestro neque in gloria virtutis quicquam videam altius, quo mihi lubeat ascendere?}

Such statements give the flavor of Cicero’s tendency toward self-laudation. So it may come as no surprise that Cicero has been criticized, at times rather harshly, and by both classical and modern authors, for what can be seen as excessive boasting and vainglory. Plutarch writes in his \textit{Life of Cicero}: “. . . he was always excessively pleased with his own praise, and continued to the very last to be passionately fond of glory; which often interfered with the prosecution of his wisest resolutions.”\textsuperscript{8} And further, in his \textit{Comparison} of Demosthenes and Cicero: “. . . Cicero’s immeasurable boasting of himself in his orations argues him guilty of an uncontrollable appetite for distinction . . . And at last we find him extolling not only his deeds and actions, but his orations also . . . as if he were engaged in a boyish trial of skill, who should speak best . . .”\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{7} \textit{In Catilinam}, 3.10.26.

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{The Life of Cicero}, VI. 4-5, the Dryden translation. Plutarch’s Greek: ύστερον δὲ λογισμόν ἐαυτῷ διδοích πολὺ τῆς φιλοτιμίας ύψέλευν, ὡς πρός ἀρίστον πράγμα τὴν δόξαν ἀμφιλόμενος καὶ πέρας οὐκ ἄριστον ἔχουσαν.

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{The Comparison of Demosthenes and Cicero}, II. 1, the Dryden translation. Plutarch’s Greek: ἴ δὲ Κικέρωνος ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἀμετρία τῆς περιαυτολογίας ἀκρασίαν τὶνα κατηγόρει πρὸς δόξαν. βοῶντος ὡς τὰ ὅπλα ἐδει τῇ τηβέννῳ καὶ τῇ γλώττῃ τὴν θριαμβικὴν ὑπείκειν δάφνην.
Montaigne goes not so far as to call him altogether insufferable, yet is no less clear in showing his distaste for Cicero and his writing: “As for Cicero, I am of the common opinion, that except for learning there was not much excellence in his soul. He was a good citizen, of an affable nature . . . but of softness and ambitious vanity he had in truth a great deal.”

Perhaps fiercest of Cicero’s detractors we find in the Nineteenth Century among the German classicists. It was Theodor Mommsen, who, in his *Römische Geschichte*, calls him a statesman “ohne Einsicht, Ansicht und Absicht,” nothing more than a “kurzsichtiger Egoist,” without *Überzeugung*, without *Leidenschaft*: but an advocate, and a bad one at that.

But, in contrast to these previous interpreters, it is the purpose of this chapter to defend Cicero from such criticism, which I find to be unwarranted and hasty: for it ignores half the person; it supposes that Cicero was politician only, and that he did not reflect with philosophic mind upon his convictions (and, in this case, his quest for glory); it makes Cicero the young forensic orator or Cicero the consul to stand for Cicero entire.

But Cicero was no mere celebrity, craving fame for fame’s sake; in his writings, I shall argue, we find a reasoned, philosophical account of glory, reputation, and fame. I do not think Cicero followed a blind urge when he hankered after glory and eternal remembrance. In fact, I think it is of pivotal importance to his overall philosophical project—hinging upon a methodological commitment to what I’ve called ideal retrospective political theory—that project

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10 Cicero’s writing is particularly tiresome for Montaigne: “As for Cicero, the works of his that can best serve my purpose are those that treat of philosophy . . . But to confess the truth boldly . . . his way of writing, and every other similar way, seems to me boring . . . If I have spent an hour reading him, which is a lot for me . . . most of the time I find nothing but wind . . .” “Of Books,” *Essais*, Bk. II. Chap. X, Trans. Donald M. Frame.
which I think we find expressed so elegantly in the philosophical works of his last years: viz., philosophical humanism.\textsuperscript{13}

But I will not be content if only I save Cicero from undue insult: for as the following work is mainly a work of philosophy, I will endeavor to present a complete philosophical discussion of gloria in Cicero; a task, I believe, which has only been partly attempted heretofore.\textsuperscript{14}

And thus, in this chapter I hope we shall find that Cicero presents reasoned answers to these sorts of questions: What is glory? Is it desirable or not? If so, what makes it desirable? Is there a distinction between mere fame and glory? Do we require praise to do good, or is the good desirable in itself? Why should we be concerned about our posthumous reputation? Is pursuing glory selfish? And so on.

And further, what I believe we will find in the answering of these questions—from Cicero’s point of view—is that whether or not glory is a desirable thing depends a great deal upon whether or not it serves to better in any significant regard the character of a particular individual. Or, perhaps to be more precise, we will ask the question: Does the desire to be recognized and to be remembered have a corresponding sort of moral excellence, which can be practised and bettered, such as courage and temperance?

It appears Cicero assumes that it does, and that this quality in men is often called “ambition”—ambitio. Thus, in part, it shall be one of the main thrusts of this chapter to show

\textsuperscript{13} I’m indebted to Harold Hunt’s formulation of Cicero’s humanism contained in The Humanism of Cicero (Melbourne University Press, 1954).

\textsuperscript{14} Francis Sullivan’s “Cicero and Gloria,” is the best previous attempt I’ve come across. In it Sullivan takes note of Cicero’s changing views on glory throughout his life, which I also do in this essay. See “Cicero and Gloria,” Francis Sullivan, Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association, Vol. 72, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1941.
that often when Cicero props up glory, he means really to praise its related “virtue”—ambition—and to argue that without some degree of it, moral agents are worse off.

To conclude this introduction I will now lay out the plan for the remainder of this chapter. First, I will trace Cicero’s thoughts on glory from around the time of his consulship in 63 B.C.E. to his death in 43 B.C.E. I shall divide this twenty-year period into three sections, which I have called “early,” “middle,” and “late,” owing not to Cicero’s actual age (Cicero was forty-two in 63), but instead to the general development of his philosophical thought on glory. Thus, in the early period his thoughts on the subject are perhaps most rudimentary, whereas the middle period shows more subtlety, and the late period—shortly before his death—exhibits, on my view, the clearest and most original thinking on glory found in Cicero. I shall pay particular attention to the problem posed by the Somnium Scipionis in the De Republica (a work which falls into my “middle” period), and shall argue that this tension is resolved in later works of Cicero. In the second part of this chapter I will concern myself mainly with defending Cicero’s basic concept of vera gloria from criticism both ancient and modern. Lastly, I will recapitulate the points made in earlier sections, and will endeavor to put forth an account of Ciceronian glory which best exemplifies its nobler humanistic elements and its general place in Cicero’s philosophical project.

A Biographical and Philosophical Note on Cicero

Before I continue, I think it would be helpful for me to provide a basic outline of Cicero’s life before I continue with this chapter in earnest, since, unlike some other philosophers, Cicero’s

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15 That is, if this tension actually is truly worrisome, and that it does present a serious threat to Cicero’s overall thinking on glory. For I shall also argue at some length that perhaps we might see the Somnium Scipionis as presenting no problem for Cicero’s consistency with regard to glory at all.
thought is intricately bound up with his life experiences, especially those of his political career, which was, at times, quite turbulent. I will also briefly summarize some general trends in Cicero’s philosophical writing and thinking (e.g., his opinion of the Stoics), as these will become important later on.

Marcus Tullius Cicero was born in 106 B.C. to a wealthy equine (but, importantly, not patrician) family at Arpinum, a town in central Italy about seventy miles southeast of Rome. From an early age he was marked by his intelligence and curiosity, and Plutarch in his Lives writes that he had become so popular among the other schoolboys that their fathers would come to the schoolyard solely to see the little boy who so excelled in learning and wit. As a teenager he studied philosophy and rhetoric both in Rome, through private tutors such as Diodotus and Philo of Larissa, and in Athens, where he further developed a keen interest for Greek philosophy which would stay with him for the rest of his life. During his stay there he studied with many of the leading philosophers of the day: the Epicureans Phaedrus and Zeno, Antiochus of Ascalon from the New Academy, and the Stoic Posidonius, famed pupil of another great Stoic, Panaetius.

From these mentors Cicero developed a kind of synthesis of Peripateticism, Stoicism, and Academicism, and, though he was “officially” a so-called “New” Academic Skeptic, throughout his life drew from each of these major schools in his philosophical writing. He was always attracted to the severity of Stoic ethics, and the lofty ideals which it set out, but, for the most part, ignored Stoicism’s intricate metaphysics and epistemology, instead adopting the

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16 The Life of Cicero, 2.2-3.
17 Panaetius is perhaps best known as a popularizer of Stoic ethics for Roman sensibilities. He tempered many of its harshest resolutions, but preserved its overall character of austerity and fortitude, which appealed to traditional Roman thinking. He emphasized the supremacy of the political life and the “active” virtues: magnanimity, liberality, propriety, etc. Panaetius’ On Duties (περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος) was Cicero’s principal source in writing his own work, De officiis.
epistemological skepticism of the New Academy which he had learnt through Philo of Larissa: i.e., that although the truth cannot be known for certain in matters of “first philosophy” and the like, that is not to say that we should not strive for the probable in regard to practical knowledge, which has bearing on our everyday conduct. Though his best friend Atticus had Epicurean leanings, and though it is said that he was an editor of the *De Rerum Natura* of Lucretius, Cicero largely rejected Epicureanism, as he thought that it led to contempt of politics, laziness, and a self-centered worldview.\(^{18}\)

Around 80 BCE Cicero’s political career started in earnest, and by 70, he had earned a name for himself through his eloquence and wit as a forensic orator. For the most part he aligned himself with the more conservative factions within Roman politics—the old families of senatorial rank—as he viewed them as more committed to keeping the Roman republic intact.\(^{19}\) In 63, Cicero was elected consul, and shortly thereafter came perhaps the defining moment of his political career. Lucius Sergius Catilina, a destitute and desperate patrician, had decided that after multiple tries at the consulship by peaceful means, the time had come for his acquisition of power through force. When word reached Cicero of the plot, he moved quickly and decisively

\(^{18}\) In general, Romans were deeply skeptical of Greek philosophy which strayed too far from the practical, so naturally off-limits for some Romans were “obscure” matters of metaphysics and epistemology. Indeed, so worried was Cato the Elder that Greek philosophy was serving to render Romans less upright, that he succeeded in having all philosophers banished from Rome in 161 BCE (OCD). Such an expulsion was repeated under the Empire in A.D. 74 and 90 (OCD). For Cicero’s criticism of the Epicureans, see the prologue to his *Republic-Laws, De rep. 1*.

\(^{19}\) This was, in large part, due to Cicero’s hope that with a renewed dominance of the Senate the political problems of the day would disappear, and that Rome would enjoy a new golden age under wise patrician leadership, as it had in the days of yore. This element of Ciceronian conservatism is discussed at length in Neal Wood’s *Cicero’s Social and Political Thought* (University of California Press, 1988), especially chapters five (“Moral Equality and Social Equality”) and eleven: “The shortcomings of Cicero’s panacea are obvious, for too much happened in his century to allow the clock simply to be turned back. The illnesses of Roman society and state were too long-standing and severe for such a cure. He places too much reliance on the balm of structural mechanics and on the resuscitation of senatorial dominance at a time when the ruling class is severely fractured” (Wood 211). See also “Cicero: Politics and Philosophy,” J. M. Carter, *Cicero and Virgil: Studies in Honour of Harold Hunt*, A. M. Hakkert, 1972.
against the conspiracy. Under his leadership Rome successfully averted a disaster, and his handling of the Catilinarians was perhaps his most glorious moment. But his execution of the conspirators without trial eventually led to his exile just a few years later. He never fully recovered from this embarrassment, and his political decline was slow and agonizing.

Throughout the 50’s Cicero witnessed Caesar’s rise to power, and by 49 the Republic had again descended into civil war. Though initially reluctant to choose sides, Cicero finally backed Pompey, thinking that he was the more likely of the two who would restore the Republic if he were to prevail over Caesar. But in 47, Pompey was murdered in Egypt, and Caesar returned to Rome, where he was declared dictator for life. Cicero was pardoned by Caesar, but instead of returning to politics he retired to philosophy in the last years of his life. In 45 and 44, Cicero wrote voluminously, and in a short time wrote such philosophical classics as De fato, Tusculanae disputationes, De finibus bonorum et malorum, and De officiis, as well as treatises not purely philosophical but of philosophical importance: De amicitia, De senectute. After Caesar’s murder in 44, Cicero became increasingly concerned with the possibility of a dictatorship headed by Mark Antony, and in the most dangerous political move of his career he came out of retirement and delivered the Philippics in Rome, a series of speeches which bitterly attacked Antony. When Antony, Octavian, and Marcus Lepidus came together to form the Second Triumvirate, Cicero was proscribed for death at Antony’s insistence. He was beheaded by assassins in the winter of 43, and Antony had his head shown off as a prize in the Roman Forum, where for almost his entire life Cicero had earned his reputation.

Now, it should be explained why a knowledge of the course of Cicero’s life is important to understanding his beliefs about reputation and glory. As I have already mentioned, Cicero’s ancient biographers tell us that for Cicero glory was of the utmost importance from the outset.
As a child he wished to surpass all other boys in learning, and while in Greece studying philosophy he went to the Oracle to inquire how he might become most famous. His early political career is marked by a desire to be great and glorious like the Roman statesmen of old, and during the year of his consulship Cicero had his great triumph over Catiline, which probably increased his fame among the Roman people all the more. As we have already seen in a passage from the *In Catilinam*, Cicero expected (or at least wished) that his deeds would be remembered forever, and thought that this would be the only fitting reward for his defense of the Republic. His unending fame would be his way to cheat mortality.\(^{20}\)

At this point, which marks the beginning of my “early” period, we see a somewhat unreflective Cicero—at least with regard to glory—because, for the most part, his plans for glory through politics have been successful. But over the next twenty years, his political influence diminished, and it seems that in the works I take to be representative of the middle period, the *De republica* and the *De legibus*, Cicero begins to question his previous notions of glory, and wonders whether earthly glory among human beings is worth anything at all. This vexation is particularly evident in the famous *Somnium Scipionis* from the sixth book of his *De republica*, of which the ostensible message seems to be that glory in this world counts for naught, and that the only true reward ever enjoyed by great statesmen is a special place in heaven set aside by the gods.

But, I shall argue, in the late period, which I take mainly to consist of Cicero’s last years in retirement (when he began to compose philosophy systematically; i.e., 46-43 B.C.), Cicero shows that, whatever misgivings he might have had during his composition of the *De republica*

\(^{20}\) This, of course, was a common Greco-Roman idea. The only way in which a person might cheat death was to do such deeds which would make him worthy of remembrance, that he might live “on the lips of men.”
and De legibus, glory is still of paramount concern for him. But by this time it is clear that
Cicero means not merely fame (fama)—being talked about—but true glory (vera gloria).

In the years before his death, Cicero revisits glory—perhaps fearing the oblivion awaiting
him—and develops an account of it which plausibly casts it as a thing to be desired by a good,
noble person. For it describes glory as a thing desired by virtuous people not that they be
remembered for their own sake, but that they be remembered as examples of the human race for
succeeding ages, that excellence and virtue be not lost to time, but that it be preserved for the
descendants of virtuous ancestors, who, with a sense of paternal love, sought to secure as they
could the moral development of their distant children. What pleasure a person derives, then,
from knowing he has achieved vera gloria is not unlike that of a parent when she sees that in the
good rearing of her children she has left the best possible legacy.

Such an account of glory I shall hope to show in the works of Cicero, and so I shall begin
with the aforementioned three-part discussion of his works on glory, divided into what I call the
“early,” “middle,” and “late” periods, which span from around 63 B.C. to Cicero’s death in 43
B.C., and continue thereafter with a philosophical critique of his various arguments, that we
might see whether or not such an account of glory holds up in light of certain critiques.

Cicero’s early thinking on glory: Glory in the De imperio Pompei, In Catilinam, and Pro
Archia poeta

In this section I shall discuss glory as it is presented in three speeches which I find representative
of Cicero’s early thinking on glory and reputation: viz., the De imperio Cn. Pompei, In
Catilinam, and the Pro Archia poeta. Especially valuable for our discussion will be the long
digression that comes in the Pro Archia poeta, which, among other things, discusses the value of
glory—especially literary fame—, ambition, and the benefits of a strong education in the liberal arts. I shall argue that in the *Pro Archia Poeta* we find important precursory sentiments which continue throughout the rest of Cicero’s writings on glory, and which come up again most notably in Ciceronian works which I classify as “late.” Of course, it should be noted that these texts were speeches with a practical function. For example, in the case of Archias the Poet, the *Pro Archia poeta* was meant to prove his Roman citizenship. We must then be careful in assigning Cicero’s actual conviction: surely there were times in which Cicero said things merely to rile up the plebian ranks of the Assembly or assure the Senate of his loyalty. Nevertheless, in the *Pro Archia poeta* especially, I think we find sincere statements of Cicero’s views on glory, and thus I have included it in this philosophical exposition.

From early on Cicero had developed a rudimentary definition of glory: praise from many people. It is not at first clear whether Cicero thought that this praise had to be deserved. On a cursory view, Cicero’s early opinion appears to be that it matters little for what someone becomes famous, but merely that he become famous. Glory, in broadest terms, is popularity with some sort of approval. This, of course, leads to some obvious difficulties. Could a person be glorious if he were praised enough, even though at heart he were vicious and detestable? Surely a man like Shakespeare’s Macbeth would be praised by the many, and paraded as a king; yet who, knowing his treacheries, would wish to still call him glorious? And further what of Richard and the successes of his machinations? He acquires the kingship; but only after a bloodbath. Can that person be said to have achieved any real glory who says in his heart:

> Then, since this earth affords no joy to me
> But to command, to check, to o’erbear such
> As are better persons than myself,
> I’ll make my heaven to dream upon the crown,

Sullivan traces this to the *De Inventione*, 2.55.166., one of Cicero’s first rhetorical works. The relevant Latin phrase is “frequens de aliquo fama cum laude.” “Frequent fame (report) from another with praise.”
And whiles I live, t’ account this world but hell,
Until my misshaped trunk that bears this head
Be round impaled with a glorious crown.\(^{22}\)

And in antiquity we have examples from Valerius Maximus in his *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, which seem to show indisputably that glory, if sought for the wrong reasons or achieved by wickedness, means little. Maximus relates the story of a certain Pausanias, who, desiring to be famous, asks Hermocles how he should catapult himself to glory. When the latter responds that if he should kill an illustrious person no doubt fame should ensue, he straightaway murders Philip of Macedon, thinking that by the murder of a glorious person glory should be transferred to his own person.\(^{23}\) And Maximus goes on to describe another example of this sort of stupidity: “A man was found to plan the burning of the temple of Ephesian Diana so that through the destruction of this most beautiful building his name might be spread through the whole world.”\(^{24}\) This man, though his name is not repeated by Maximus himself, was Herostratos. In some respect, then, Herostratos achieved just what he wished for: that his name be remembered and uttered in years far exceeding that of his death. But who would say he has enjoyed eternal *glory*? Indeed, we may find parallels to this sort of delusion whenever we find men who think that in the performance of wicked or awesome deeds the remembrance—or rather, better, the infamy—which results is a desirable thing.

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\(^{22}\) *Henry VI, Part III*, Act III, Scene II. This soliloquy is spoken by the Duke of Gloucester, who later becomes Richard III, the namesake for Shakespeare’s *Richard III*.

\(^{23}\) *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, 8.14.4. It should be noted that it is a matter of contention why exactly Pausanias murdered Phillip, and that the story here related could be a somewhat elaborate fabrication. Yet the example it serves to show is still relevant.

\(^{24}\) *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, 8.14.5. This example is discussed at length in Geoffrey Scarre’s 2001 article “On Caring About One’s Posthumous Reputation” (*American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 38), which presents a variety of fascinating arguments on the subject of posthumous fame and remembrance. I will have more to say of this article later in this paper.
Cicero was no doubt aware of such problems. And though the distinction is not made explicit in the early writings of Cicero, we begin to see Cicero distinguish *vera gloria* from *seeming glory*—mere popularity, *fama popularis*. For glory to have any real meaning, and for it to be worthy of zealous pursuit, it seems that it must come as a consequence of deeds of some merit, and that it should be attached to a person who shows real devotion to his principles. Thus, by the time Cicero penned the *De imperio Cn. Pompei* in 66 BCE for delivery before the Assembly, we see the first stages of Cicero’s development of a *true glory*, which, though it comes not without some pleasure for the person who receives it, is sought after not for one’s own popularity, but from a genuine concern for the welfare of one’s state or family. In simpler terms, Cicero begins to suspect that true glory does not come to those who wish merely to be famous, but to those who endeavor by all means to secure the safety of the state.

At the very beginning of the *De imperio Cn. Pompei*—which was delivered in support of a measure which would put Pompey the Great in command of an expedition against Mithridates, king of Pontus in Asia Minor—Cicero says that the Assembly has ever provided “a road to fame [hoc aditu laudis] which has always been open to every man of merit [qui semper optimo cuique maxime patuit].”25 Notice, of course, that this “road to fame” is not open to everyone, but rather to him who shows real *merit* and quality. Already Cicero has begun to develop the idea that glory is empty unless it come as a result of truly good deeds. Being remembered and being talked about are not enough. One should not strive to live on in the talk of men if this immortality comes at the cost of infamy. And we should also note what Cicero says at the end of the speech, as it shall soon be shown to echo later statements we find in Cicero:

25 *De Imperio Cn. Pompei*, I. 1.
Throughout all the endeavours then, gentlemen, that I have devoted to supporting this cause, I declare that my one thought has been for the interests of Rome. Of trying to win popularity for myself there can be no question . . . And so [but], gentlemen, holding this high office and enjoying all the favours you have conferred, I have decided I must regard my own private interests and advantages as insignificant in comparison with your will, and the welfare of our country, and the safe preservation of the provinces and allies of the Roman state.  

_ quam ob rem, si quid in hac causa mihi susceptum est, Quirites, id ego omne me rei publicae causa suscepisse confirmo, tantumque abest ut aliquam mihi bonam gratiam quaesisse videar, ut multas me etiam simultates partim obscuras, partim apertas intellegam mihi non necessarias, vobis non inutilis suscepisse. sed ego me hoc honore praeditum, tantis vestris beneficiis adfectum statui, Quirites, vestram voluntatem et rei publicae dignitatem et salutem provinciarum atque sociorum meis omnibus commodis et rationibus praeferre oportere._

What is only hinted at here, and what shall be discussed later at length, is Cicero’s idea that a true, selfless devotion to the state is the only thing (besides great literary accomplishment) which can bring lasting, meaningful glory. Though there is some self-interest involved—as Cicero admits—the overriding concern is adequate _service_ to the state. True glory may come to the ambitious person, but his ambition is a desirable quality in him not because it draws him on to being a statesman—but that it draws him to a life of true devotion to others. In a word, there is a distinction to be made even in types of ambition: perhaps between what we might call “mere” ambition—which is often ruthless, short-sighted, and inhuman—and the sort of _virtuous_ ambition Cicero describes. Men by nature are social and wish to help one another: _virtuous_ ambition, rightly developed, only helps a person realize his nature yet more—but on a grander scale. It is the impetus which drives him toward noble endeavors.

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But perhaps we have gone too far. For one thing, the sentiments above expressed do not find full treatment until much later writings of Cicero, and without a further discussion of certain criticisms of the ideas of ambition and glory it may appear that we have yet to treat the subject fully. For, of course, the cynically-minded critic of Cicero could perhaps respond at this point by saying that here he simply uses a bit of rhetorical flourish to hide his inner self-interest. On this view, then, it is solely or predominantly for fame alone that Cicero engages in politics—and less out of a concern for his friends or his countrymen. Such an opinion is, for obvious reasons, hard to refute, considering that at some point we must take the words themselves of Cicero as a sort of representation of his feelings, and if we cannot do that, then we are left with only what we think he must have thought. And, further, it seems in some sense unfair to me to suppose that since many men would not have such selflessness in politics, that no one could harbor such feeling.

But there is a much deeper worry, one which questions the very worth of glory at all. For suppose the critic follows Cicero so far: he admits that there is a difference—though we have yet to show this explicitly—between mere fame and true glory, that there is indeed a sort of praise which we receive for great statesmanship that is unique from the fame bestowed upon celebrities and the like, that even that that sort of ambition necessary for such gentlemanly action is in some sense higher or nobler; but he regardless asks: What use is glory, when it is fickle, and depends on the shifting opinions of the masses?\(^{27}\) What great good is it to be counted wise by the many, when it appears that they are not good judges of character? And not to mention the hope for posthumous fame: Why should we hope for glory after our deaths, when we shall not be bettered

\(^{27}\) I am reminded of some verses from Keats: “Fame, like a wayward girl, will still be coy / To those who woo her with too slavish knees, / But makes surrender to some thoughtless boy, / And dotes the more upon a heart at ease; / . . . Ye love-sick Bards! repay her scorn for scorn; / Ye Artists lovelorn! madmen that ye are! / Make your best bow to her and bid adieu, / Then, if she likes it, she will follow you” (“Fame like a wayward girl” 348).
one jot by it dead in the ground? In a word, why be ambitious, why toil for true devotion to the state, why be selfless even, when it seems that the one just reward that one could receive for such actions—true glory—is by no means assured?

This worry is of particular concern for Cicero, and it is one which it seems he struggled with his entire life. Indeed, in his middle period it seems that he was swayed by this sort of thinking, and for a time concluded that earthly glory counted for naught, and that one could only hope that the gods were just and would not allow the great statesmen to go unrewarded in the afterlife. But for now let the reader remember this concern but not dwell on it, and we shall return to it in a moment.

Cicero’s early thinking on glory begins to mature somewhat after he takes the consulship in 63 (perhaps since he has finally achieved the very best political appointment to which a Roman could aspire), and we see this particularly in the In Catilinam. In the third speech of the In Catilinam we have a prolonged discussion on the topic of true posthumous glory which I drew from earlier in this chapter, in which Cicero asks for “nullum insigne honoris, nullum monumentum laudis” in physical form. That is, he wishes for no great statues of himself to be built nor laurels to be placed upon his head, but rather asks that his triumphs be remembered in the hearts of all Romans for the entire duration of Rome’s existence.28 He goes on later to say that he can fathom no object greater for his ambition than that which he has now achieved: true glory on account of his service to the state in its time of need.

But what do we make of this “development?” For the reader might ask: How has Cicero’s view of glory now progressed in the In Catilinam? By wishing for eternal remembrance, is he not guilty of yet further egoism and vainglory? Could it not be that what we

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28 In Catilinam, III. X. 26.
find expressed in the above-mentioned sentiment is not a sort of noble ambition, but the desire of a person for more fame—who, in most respects, has got the most of it possible in life? In other words, is he merely now wishing to be talked about in death as much as he has been talked about in life?

These seem to be legitimate questions. But it also seems that Cicero, whether it be intentional or not, has begun to face a much deeper worry with regard to his glory. That is, upon taking the consulship, it appears he may have begun to seriously question the earthly fruits and rewards of his *virtuous* ambition. And before he counts all earthly glory to be nothing at all—as we shall see him do in the middle period (or at least *seem* to do)—first he looks toward *eternal*, true glory, which surpasses outward shows of fame and reward (which he no doubt was then receiving), and which continues for as long as the human race survives and is able to speak.

This belief we shall of course return to, as it comes to play a pivotal role not only in the middle period, where it serves as a sort of stepping stone to Cicero’s eventual complete disillusionment with glory, but also in the late period, where it is again adopted by Cicero, albeit with important modifications. But for the time being let us turn to the *Pro Archia Poeta*, which is by far the most important work from Cicero’s early period.

Cicero’s *Pro Archia oeta* (62 BCE), of which the ostensible concern is an adequate defense of the Roman citizenship of the Greek poet Aulus Lucinius Archias, contains within it a famously long digression which seems only loosely to have anything to do with the case of Archias himself. However, fortunately for world literature and for the purposes of this current paper, this digression is one of the greatest apologies ever composed in support of the liberal arts, and in his discussion we find certain sentiments on glory which heretofore we could only guess were his opinions.
Throughout the speech Cicero draws upon his own educational background to help strengthen his arguments for the worth of literature: and one of Cicero’s principal reasons for supporting literature and philosophy is, he says, that it served to make him more upright by giving him examples of noble, virtuous deeds. And not only that: it taught him the importance of glory and honor:

Had I not persuaded myself from youth up, thanks to the moral lessons derived from wide reading, that nothing is to be greatly sought after in this life save glory [laudem] and honor [honestatem], and that in their quest all bodily pains and all dangers of death or exile should be lightly accounted, I should never have borne for the safety of you all the brunt of many a bitter encounter . . . All literature, all philosophy, all history, abounds with incentives to noble action.29

This is a critical passage. Observe what Cicero says: If he had not found out that the only things worth truly striving for were glory and honor, and that it should not matter if to achieve these things death should result, then he would have never engaged in politics and risked his life for his country. This sort of thinking never really leaves Cicero, and it presents the strong prudential reasons Cicero found for the worth of ambition and its most common object, glory.

Cicero begins to wonder whether human beings will ever reach a point where they will engage in politics and subject themselves to the constant scrutiny of both the public and the
ministers of the government if for this they receive no glory, no praise, no recognition in return. That is not to say that Cicero thinks that one should enter politics simply that one be praised and that one achieve glory—the goodness of helping one’s friends and state should be the principal cause—but he worries that if even for our very best and most virtuous leaders we afford not a word of praise, then what shall draw young people in to politics? Would they not question the worth of their endeavor, if for all they do they receive nothing from their fellows to acknowledge it, to say something good of it? In a word, those who enter politics with the right sort of ambition should not seek glory solely, but if they do something which rightly deserves it, and the public remains silent, would not such men question the very worth of the people they have tried so hard to protect? Again, this argument finds fuller treatment in the late period of Cicero, and for now we shall have to be content with simply noting that it represents an important development in Cicero’s thought: he now has begun to wonder whether prudential reasons guarantee the worth of ambition and true glory.

Next, I’ll turn to a somewhat lengthy passage from the Pro Archia poeta, since in it we find some of Cicero’s most elegant and convincing language with respect to glory:

And the more to incline you so to do, gentlemen of the jury, I will now proceed to open to you my heart, and confess to you my own passion, if I may so describe it, for fame [lit., “gloriae”], a passion over-keen perhaps, but assuredly honourable . . . For magnanimity looks for no other recognition of its toils and dangers save praise and glory; once rob it of that, gentlemen, and in this brief and transitory pilgrimage of life what further incentive have we to high endeavour? If the soul were haunted by no presage of futurity, if the scope of her imaginings were bounded by the limits set to human existence, surely never then would she break herself by bitter toil, rack herself by sleepless solicitude, or struggle so often for very life itself. But deep in every noble heart dwells a power which plies night and day the goad of glory, and bids us see to it that the
remembrance of our names should not pass away with life, but should endure coeval with all the ages of the future.\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{atque ut id libertius faciatis, iam me vobis, iudices, indicabo et de meo quodam amore gloriae nimis acri fortasse, verum tamen honesto vobis confitebor. nam quas res nos in consulatu nostro vobiscum simul pro salute huius urbis atque imperi et pro vita civium proque universa re publica gessimus, attigit hic versibus atque inchoavit. quibus auditis, quod mihi magna res et iucunda visa est, hunc ad perficiendum adornavi. nullam enim virtus aliam mercedem laborum periculumque desiderat prae ter hanc laudis et gloriae; qua quidem detracta, iudices, quid est quod in hoc tam exiguo vitae curriculo et tam brevi tantis nos in laboribus exerceamus? certe, si nihil animus praesentiret in posterum, et si, quibus regionibus vitae spatium circumscrip tum est, isdem omnis cogitationes terminaret suas, nec tantis se laboribus frangeret neque tot curis vigiliisque angeretur nec totiens de ipsa vita dimicaret. nunc insidet quaedam in optimo quoque virtus, quae nox et dies animum gloriae stimulus concitat atque admonet non cum vitae tempore esse dimittendam commemorationem nominis nostri, sed cum omni posteritate adaequandam.}

But before we move on from the \textit{Pro Archia poeta}, a few things must still be said about certain of Cicero’s other developments in his thinking on glory in this work, most notably what is expanded upon in the aforecited passage, and which Cicero first describes in the paragraph directly preceding it: it is another of Cicero’s common reasons for the worth of ambition and the desirability of glory: that a desire for glory, and, more broadly, a desire to be famous and praised, is common to all. That is, it is \textit{natural}—or, to be more technical, it is in accordance with man’s nature—to seek praise from his fellows. Thus, when certain persons are found to seek this more than others, it should not draw our ire, but instead ought to alert us to what Cicero suspects, that

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Pro Archia poeta} 11.28-29.
the “highest” souls feel most the “prick” of ambition, which they cannot control, and which
draws them into public life. But to quote the relevant passage from Cicero before we go farther:

Ambition is an universal factor in life [lit., “...trahimur omnes studio laudis”], and the nobler a
man is, the more susceptible is he to the sweets of fame [again, lit., “gloria,” and “...optimus
quisque maxime gloria ducitur”]. We should not disclaim this human weakness, which indeed is
patent to all; we should rather admit it unabashed. Why, upon the very books in which they bid
us scorn ambition [again, lit., “gloriae”] philosophers inscribe their names! They seek
advertisement and publicity for themselves on the very page whereon they pour contempt upon
advertisement and publicity.31

\[
\text{trahimur omnes studio laudis, et optimus quisque maxime gloria ducitur. ipsi illi philosophi etiam}
\]
\[
in eis libellis quos de contemnenda gloria scribunt nomen suum inscribunt; in eo ipso in quo
\]
\[
praedicationem nobilitatemque despiciunt praedicari de se ac se nominari volunt. 
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The latter point is perhaps a good one—although one could hardly argue that it presents an
insurmountable problem for those who think that glory is, at the very best, a thing to be accepted
only reluctantly, and, at the worst, a thing to be avoided entirely—but the first point is,
unfortunately, rather weak. For it seems Cicero has got it wrong at some point. It could, indeed,
be the fact of the matter that human beings, as a whole, desire to be recognized and praised. But
the latter suggestion, that those who are found in politics to be the most fame-hungry and
“susceptible” to the charms of glory must then be the most noble and deserving of glory, smacks
of a particular sort of elitism (of which Cicero was often guilty), which we should be careful to
avoid.32 For this sort of thinking could easily lead to Cicero’s saying that those in politics—

31 Pro Archia poeta, 11.26-27. The thought concerning the philosophers who somewhat inconsistently
write their names upon works eschewing glory is repeated nearly word for word in the much later
Tusculanae Disputationes (a work which falls in my late period) at I. XV. 34-35.
32 Cicero is notorious in the minds of some commentators for his seeming glaring inconsistency when it
comes to the application of some of his loftier ethical principles—for example, that all men ought to be
which, in Roman society, by and large, came from either patrician or equine families of vast wealth—deserved their place there because they simply were those nobler souls, those especially drawn on to public service by the enticements of glory. But, at any rate, despite these misgivings, we shall have to return to this sort of thinking in the late period of Cicero.

And so we shall now turn to the middle period of Cicero’s thinking on glory, which is characterized by a marked shift in his opinions on the subject—and, in general, one could say it represents the low point of his thoughts on ambition and glory and the like.

Middle Cicero: Glory in the Pro Plancio and the De republica

In this section I shall discuss two of Cicero’s works which both date from 54 B.C., and which, I think, are the best examples of the sort of “crisis” Cicero went through in the 50’s with regard to his thinking on glory: viz., one speech, the Pro Plancio, and one of his early philosophical works, the De Republica. During this period there seems to be a remarkable shift in Cicero’s overall attitude not only toward glory and ambition, but to political life in general. The reasons for this are not entirely certain, but a probable cause for this sudden shift could be the deteriorating political situation in Rome at the time. During the 50’s political turmoil returned to Rome, and Cicero would have witnessed both the rise of Caesar and the violent anti-Caesareanism that ran rampant in the Senate; all the while he would have known Pompey had treated equally—to some of his beliefs regarding society, which included that there was, indeed, a natural “inequality” among people. And, in the end, this reputation is deserved: it appears to be an undeniable aspect of Cicero’s thought that although he postulated the equality of all men—since all shared in humanitas—he simultaneously believed that all human societies ought to be divided into classes according to moral “worthiness,” so that the “best” should be given vastly greater amounts of wealth and power than the many who deserved much less. Of course, it is not clear that the ruling classes at any given time are morally superior to those below. But for Cicero, conservative as he is, this is perhaps too much to swallow. An excellent discussion of this can be found in chapter five (“Moral Equality and Social Inequality”) of Wood’s book (which I have had cause to cite earlier), Cicero’s Social and Political Thought (University of California Press, 1988).
similar despotic ambitions, and that the two generals would inevitably meet in conflict. The
general uneasiness of the period probably weighed on Cicero and influenced his writing to a
considerable degree, but, even more, what most likely drove him to eschew glory was the fact
that for the first time in his life he came to understand that his own political decline was
imminent. Roman politics was soon to become a mere contest of arms, where power could only
be won by the sword, and not by the oratory and rhetorical flourish which Cicero idealized. The
Senate was rapidly losing power and the general movement toward populism, embodied by
Caesar, represented the end of Cicero’s vocation as a great orator of the Senate. At this time
Cicero probably felt cheated: for his accomplishments as consul he had not received the glory he
expected, and he genuinely feared that the Republic would soon give way to tyranny. Not only
that, but we may guess that his worry about his posthumous fame grew all the more: for, if the
Republic were to fall, and some other sort of government should arise, and if the people should
be wrongly convinced (as Cicero would no doubt believe) that republican forms of government
were less desirable than despotic ones, could he—i.e., Cicero, who worked so hard to ensure his
good reputation after death—fall on the wrong side of history, and be cast by posterity as a
“republican,” but in a pejorative sense? In short, could his glory be, in the end, subject to
fortune? The result of all this, as one might expect, was a sort of despair, and in the middle
works—especially in the Somnium Scipionis of the De Republica—we see that Cicero has come
to question the very worth of ambition and political life at all. That we may see this, let us turn
to the texts themselves.

The first selection from this period which I shall discuss is somewhat light-hearted in
comparison with the De Republica, and is significant mainly in that it shows Cicero was not
unaware that his ambition and his thirst for glory often got the better of him. And not only that,
it shows—in a sort of jesting fashion—that Cicero learnt not to trust the opinions of the Roman people. The passage comes from a defense speech, the *Pro Plancio*, and it details Cicero’s experience upon returning from his quaestorship in Sicily to the forum in Rome, where he expected no less than to be the “talk of the town.” Though it is a somewhat lengthy passage, I think it should be useful if I quote a good deal of it:

I have no fear, gentlemen, of appearing to have too good a conceit of myself, if I say a word about my own quaestorship . . . At that time I can say with most assured confidence that I thought that my quaestorship was the sole topic of conversation in Rome. I had dispatched an enormous quantity of corn at a time of very high prices; the universal opinion was that I was civil to the financiers, just to the merchants, liberal to the corn-contractors, never enriching myself at the expense of the allies, and that I spared no pains in my official duties; the Sicilians had contemplated the bestowal upon me of unparalleled honours; so I retired from the province filled with the notion that the Roman people would spontaneously lay all their distinctions at my feet. It happened that on my way back from the province I had arrived at Puteoli . . . and I nearly swooned, gentlemen, when someone asked me on what day I had left Rome, and whether there was any news. When I replied that I was on my way back from my province, he said, ‘Why, of course, you come from Africa, do you not?’ ‘No,’ I answered, somewhat coolly . . . ‘from Sicily.’ Hereupon another of the party interposed, with an omniscient air, ‘What! don’t you know that our friend has been quaestor at Syracuse?’ . . . This experience, gentlemen, I am inclined to think was more valuable to me than if I had been hailed with salvoes of applause; for having once realized that the ears of the Roman people were somewhat obtuse, but their eyes keen and alert, I ceased henceforth from considering what the world was likely to hear about me; from that day I took care that I should be seen personally every day. I lived in the public eye; I frequented the forum, [etc.] . . .
Although in this passage we get little of the outright contempt of glory that we shall see in the De Republica, we nevertheless have Cicero reflecting in a jovial manner on his political career, which, until this point he has touted and glorified ad nauseam. What is significant too is his characterization of the Romans as somewhat dim-witted: he thought that his deeds deserved the

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33 Pro Cnaeo Plancio, 26. 64-65, 27. 66.
sorts of praise he expected; yet the Romans, being, on the whole, not excellent judges of
character, were either too ill-informed or simply too ignorant to rightly praise his achievements.
Cicero cast this whole ordeal as a sort of learning experience which made him desire even more
to engage in political life, but one ought to wonder whether Cicero began to view his entire
political career theretofore in such a manner: perhaps Cicero felt that even the glorious deeds of
his consulship had fallen upon a Roman public which could not rightly appreciate them—for
soon after he had “saved” it from certain destruction, indeed, within a matter of a few years, the
Romans seemed willing to allow a complete collapse of the old, senatorial order in favor of a
new form of Roman politics. This might seem to be merely conjecture, but since Pro Plancio
and the De Republica were written in the same year (54 B.C.), we may safely suspect that at least
some of these thoughts were in Cicero’s mind at the time he wrote Pro Plancio. And thus we
shall now turn to the De Republica, that we may further elaborate upon these very thoughts.

The De Republica is a fascinating work, and, save for the Somnium Scipionis, which was
preserved independently from the rest of the piece, the fragments which survive are extant now
only after in the nineteenth century they were discovered on an eighth century palimpsest of
Augustine’s commentary on the Psalms.34 The De Republica takes the form of a dialogue and is
inspired by Plato’s work of the same name, and so it is concerned with generally the same sorts
of questions (though the focus is less broad than in Plato’s Republic): viz., What is justice?
What is the just state? And, most importantly, what is the ideal state? For the purposes of this
paper it is not important that we say much on these matters in particular—though, as would be

34 Somnium Scipionis fared well in the Christian world: its arguments against the “fruits of this world” and
glory on earth and its vision of the afterlife fit in well with medieval Christian thinking. Like Virgil, he
had the distinction of being labelled a “noble” pagan, and was perhaps thought to have experienced a pre-
Christian revelation of sorts, wherein he realized that all his “selfish” vainglory directed toward political
achievement was nothing when compared to the rewards of heaven.
expected from Cicero, the ideal state is a republican one much like Rome—but rather we shall be concerned mainly with the *Somnium Scipionis*, a somewhat enigmatic section of Book VI which details a fictional dream of the real Roman general Scipio Africanus the Younger (or Scipio Aemilianus) before his campaign to destroy Carthage in Africa in 146 B.C. In many respects here Cicero shows his debt to Plato, and, on the face of it, one could simply mistake the *Somnium Scipionis* as a Latinized *Myth of Er*—but the work is decidedly Ciceronian in its character, and at its heart is principally concerned with the value of ambition and glory. In short, the *Somnium Scipionis* shows a Cicero who appears not at all certain that the driving force behind his life—ambition—is a desirable thing at all.

The dream comes to Scipio Aemilianus before his attack on Carthage, and in it Scipio Africanus the Elder relates to him a vision, not only of the afterlife, but of the entire world and the universe, so that Aemilianus might understand that the glory won on earth is nothing, that a reputation earned even in the entire of Rome is worth little, and that the only thing one should seek in this life is to serve the state so as to be rewarded by the gods in heaven. Scipio Africanus begins by telling Aemilianus that men were put on this earth that they should “look after” it during their lives, that they might uphold good laws and protect the state and the natural fellowship of humankind, and that this is reason enough for young people to enter into politics—i.e., that they do their duty:

Human beings were born on condition that they should look after that sphere called earth which you see in the middle of this celestial space . . . That is why you, Publius, and all loyal men must keep the soul in the custody of the body. You must not depart from human life until you receive the command from him who has given you that soul; otherwise you will be judged to have deserted the earthly post assigned to you by God. Instead, Scipio, be like your grandfather here, and me, your father. Respect justice and do your duty [*iustitiam cole et pietam*]. That is
important to in the case of parents and relatives, and paramount in the case of one’s country. That is the way of life which leads to heaven and to the company, here, of those who have already completed their lives . . . .

_Homines enim sunt hac lege generati, qui tuerentur illum globum, quem in hoc templo medium vides, quae terra dicitur, iisque animus datus est ex illis sempiternis ignibus, quae sidera et stellas vocatis, quae globosae et rotundae, divinis animatae mentibus, circulos suos orbesque conficiunt celeritate mirabili. Quare et tibi, Publi, et piis omnibus retinendus animus est in custodia corporis nec iniussu eius, a quo ille est vobis datus, ex hominum vita migrandum est, ne munus humanum adsignatum a deo defugisse videamini. Sed sic, Scipio, ut avus hic tuus, ut ego, qui te genui, iustitiam cole et pietatem, quae cum magna in parentibus et propinquis, tum in patria maxima est; ea vita via est in caelum et in hunc coetum eorum, qui iam vixerunt et corpore laxati illum incolunt locum, quem vides...^{35}_

As Aemilianus and Africanus speak, they are fixed far above the earth, and may look upon any part of it with ease. Aemilianus admits to himself that he feels ashamed that he has cared so much for the world, when now he sees that both it and its nations are tiny and insignificant compared to the great size of the celestial bodies and of the universe. Africanus notices this, and goes on to utter what are perhaps the most striking lines of the entire dream, which seem at all points to completely contradict what we have come to think of Cicero:

Though listening to all this with astonishment, I kept turning my eyes repeatedly back to earth. Thereupon Africanus said ‘I notice you are still gazing at the home and habitation of men. If it seems small to you (as indeed it is) make sure to keep your mind on these higher regions and to think little of the human scene down there. For what fame can you achieve, what glory worth pursuing, that consists merely of people’s talk [celebritatem sermonis hominum]? Look. The

^{35}_De republica, 6.15-16.
earth is inhabited in just a few confined areas. In between those inhabited places, which resemble blots, there are huge expanses of empty territory. Those who live on earth are separated in such a way that nothing can readily pass between them from one populated region to another. More than that, in relation to your position, some people stand at a different angle, some at right angles, and some directly opposite. You certainly cannot expect any praise [lit., gloria] from them.

Haec ego admirans referebam tamen oculos ad terram identidem. Tum Africanus: Sentio, inquit, te sedem etiam nunc hominum ac domum contemplari; quae si tibi parva, ut est, ita videtur, haec caelestia semper spectato, illa humana contemnito. Tu enim quam celebritatem sermonis hominum aut quam expetendum consequi gloriae potes? Vides habitari in terra raris et angustis in locis et in ipsis quasi maculis, ubi habitatur, vastas solitudines interiectas, eosque, qui incolunt terram, non modo interruptos ita esse, ut nihil inter ipsos ab aliis ad alios manare possit, sed partim obliquos, partim transversos, partim etiam adversos stare vobis; a quibus expectare gloriae certe nullam potestis. 36

Cicero (through Africanus) goes on to explain that perhaps glory can be won in Rome, but that it seems unlikely that anyone will ever have fame that reaches from the Caucasus to the Ganges. It seems even that Cicero’s own vera gloria—to which we have already referred so often in this chapter—is not safe from this sort of argument; it, too, means nothing:

Even if the children of future generations should want to hand on in their turn the praises of each one of us which they have heard from their fathers, nevertheless, owing to the floods and fires which at certain times will inevitably afflict the earth, we cannot achieve, I will not say eternal, but even long-lasting glory. And what difference does it make that you should be talked of among people still unborn when you were never mentioned by those who lived before your time—men who were not inferior in numbers and were certainly superior in character?

36 De rep. 6.19-20.
Quin etiam si cupiat proles illa futurorum hominum deinceps laudes unius cuiusque nostrum a patribus acceptas posteris prodere, tamen propter eluviones exustionesque terrarum, quas accidere tempore certo necesse est, non modo non aeternam, sed ne diiturnam quidem gloriam adsequi possumus. Quid autem interest ab iis, qui postea nascentur, sermonem fore de te, cum ab iis nullus fuerit, qui ante nati sunt? qui nec pauciores et certe meliores fuerunt viri, praesertim cum apud eos ipsos, a quibus audiri nomen nostrum potest, nemo unius anni memoriam consequi possit.37

To make matters worse (worse, that is, for someone who is trying to make sense of Cicero’s views on glory), Cicero concludes the advice of Africanus with just the sort of rhetoric which it would seem he would oppose if we are to think he was serious in the arguments he put forth in the Pro Archia poeta:

If, then, you abandon hope of returning to this place where great and eminent men have their full reward, of what value, pray, is your human glory which can barely last for a tiny part of a single year? If, therefore, you wish to look higher and to gaze upon this eternal home and habitation, you will not put yourself at the mercy of the masses’ gossip nor measure your long-term destiny by the rewards you get from men. Goodness herself [lit., virtus ipsa] must draw you on by her own enticements to true glory [ad verum decus] . . . In no case does a person’s reputation last for ever; it fades with the death of the speakers, and vanishes as posterity forgets.38

Though it might seem that Cicero has effectively drained the political life of all its value.39 Aemilianus is convinced by the end of Africanus’ speeches that he ought to continue on in his political career, now that the “illusion” of earthly glory has been stripped away. Now he

37 De rep. 6.23-24.
38 De rep. 6.25.
39 That is, of course, it would seem that Cicero has drained it of all earthly value.
realizes that a real, substantial reward awaits him for his service, not a mere shadow of a thing like a glory.

This seems to be a very curious feature of Cicero’s middle thinking on glory: Cicero realizes that glory’s worth—and, then, too, the desirability of ambition—rests upon shaky ground. In the early period he responded to this by starting to make the distinction between mere popularity won from the masses and a sort of true glory which was a thing deserved by the very few finest specimens of the human race. But in the middle period his thinking tends toward pessimism. Cicero is no longer drawn on by the charms of glory or the delights of fame. He counts all of this to be only an illusion which draws us away from the truth, and argues that virtue ought to be sought for herself alone. No further prize nor further decoration ought a man to require; he ought to simply seek virtue for her own sake. But, for all that is attractive in this general line of argument (indeed, it was convincing enough for Plato and, to an extent, Aristotle, to adopt it) one could say that Cicero’s retreat to an “otherworldly” perspective in the Somnium Scipionis (in which, of course, our deeds and concerns will always seem but trifles) in trying to deal with the problem of glory is an unsatisfying one, because it seems to miss the point. Indeed, Cicero himself (in the early or late periods) would be unsatisfied with sorts of arguments he uses in the middle period, and might argue thus: Surely few, if you would expand our perspective out to the entire universe, would think that the glory won by humans was worth very much; but is that reason enough to abandon it altogether on earth? Are not good things won by ambition? Is it not simply a matter of fact that human beings—being the sorts of creatures that they are—wish to be praised, wish to be recognized, and wish to be remembered after their deaths, and that it is better that they wish for these things, even if, say, glory should not result “absolutely” (so that it
seemed of some worth to gods or other higher beings), than if they did not care for their reputations at all?

Some have seen in the Somnium Scipionis Cicero’s final, total disillusionment with the sham of glory, and have thought that it represents a kind of pitiful confession by Cicero both to himself and to his reader that he finally understands that the greater part of his life has been lived under the influence of an elaborate lie.\(^40\) Others have rather seen it in a more positive light, so that the thrust of the work is Cicero’s reconciliation of the political and philosophical lives. That is, by Cicero’s combining imagery that is normally associated with the philosophical life in Plato and Aristotle (i.e., beholding the entire universe, hearing the music of the spheres, approaching the divine) with the eventual fortunes of great statesmen in the afterlife, Cicero reaffirms the worth of political endeavor. In other words, the fact that Africanus the Elder shows to Aemilianus that the heaven that awaits great statesmen resembles Plato and Aristotle’s notions of contemplation for the philosopher shows Cicero’s hope that one can be both a philosopher and a statesman, or, even further, that both the philosopher and statesman might enjoy the same sort of happiness in the end.\(^41\)

\(^40\) Sullivan mentions, among others, Pierre Boyancé and Ernest Gottlieb Sihler as examples of this opinion. Indeed, in his work, Cicero of Arpinum, Sihler writes: “We meet Stoic elements of thought here [i.e., in the Somnium Scipionis], as e.g. of the periodicity of the cosmic order; but more heavily does Cicero the Eclectic lean on Plato’s Phaedo, Phaedrus, and Republic, when his thoughts turn to the ultimate concerns of this little world and bitter disappointments of sublunar struggles. There is a positively spiritual strain here, and not merely on the surface. Cicero after all had come to feel the suspirium de profundis, ‘All is Vanity.’ We feel it, he was then striving to wean his soul from the consuming ambition of his life-long attitude, at least in a certain afflatus from his Greek reading . . .’” (Sihler 292). See Eccl. 9:11 (KJV): “I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.”

\(^41\) An excellent example of this opinion can be found in Georg Luck’s article, “Studia Divina in Vita Humana: On Cicero’s ‘Dream of Scipio’ and Its Place in Graeco-Roman Philosophy,” The Harvard Theological Review, Vol. 49, Harvard University Press, 1956. Luck’s article is especially helpful for those looking to study Cicero’s possible Hellenistic sources in the writing of the Somnium Scipionis.
Unfortunately I shall have little to say on this latter view, though in some ways I think it has got it right whereas the former seems to me to be flawed. For, on the former view (i.e., the pessimistic one), it is not only glory and ambition that Cicero finds paltry and base, but even politics itself. Though this is an attractive position on account of some of the things Cicero says in the Somnium Scipionis, it is one we must be careful to avoid for reasons I shall now explain. For consider: in Somnium Scipionis 13 we have a quite explicit sentence from Africanus the Elder to Aemilianus, which would seem to show that Cicero still recognizes a value for politics, but simply modifies its rewards. Thus, instead of glory, honor, and a posthumous reputation, the politician ought to focus on otherworldly incentives:

Yet, to make you all the keener to defend the state, Africanus [i.e., Aemilianus or Africanus the Younger], I want you to know this: for everyone who has saved and served his country and helped it grow, a sure place is set aside in heaven where he may enjoy a life of eternal bliss. To that supreme god who rules the universe nothing (or at least nothing that happens on earth) is more welcome than those companies and communities of people linked together by justice that are called states. Their rules and saviours set out from this place, and to this they return.  

In the Somnium Scipionis Cicero does not mean to dissuade able young people from politics—but rather to dissuade them from pursuing glory and honor on earth. He does not even really chastise the overly ambitious soul—but asks him to rather set his eyes on heaven than on earth. In a way, then, we could see the Somnium Scipionis as not anti-political at all: Cicero is still principally concerned with the welfare of the Roman state, and the state of man in general; it is now just that he has changed his mind as to what should lead young people on into politics.

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42 De rep. 6.13.
Indeed, Aemilianus himself is convinced by the end of the dream that he ought to pursue a career in politics, as strange as this might seem to us:

> When he had finished, I said, ‘From boyhood, Africanus [i.e., Africanus the Elder], I have followed in your footsteps and those of my father, and have not let your reputation down. But if, as you say, there is a kind of path for noble patriots leading to the gate of heaven, then, in view of the great reward you have set before me, I shall now press on with a much keener awareness.43

In fine, Cicero, it seems to me, in the middle period is perhaps less genuinely “in a rut” than some suspect; and, further, it seems that he has not lost faith in all that was once important to him: though, of course, the middle period represents a distinct shift in his thought for a time. Rather, what seems more likely to me is that Cicero in the *Somnium Scipionis* shows his debt more than he does elsewhere to Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic thinkers whom he had again begun to read extensively in his times of leisure.44 He seems overly worried that his political life—if its only reward is glory—should seem paltry compared to the ideal life of the philosopher presented by Plato in the *Republic* and by Aristotle in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Indeed, we should not forget that the *De Republica* was modelled on Plato’s work, and that Cicero was no doubt aware that Plato was deeply skeptical of the worth of politics. One only has to bring to mind Plato’s image of the philosophers wisely keeping dry during a rainstorm while the masses (and, presumably, the politicians) toil in it to understand Cicero’s concern. Plato’s hard and fast distinction (at times) between politics—which was the realm of appearances, shows of wealth, and rhetoric—and philosophy—which concerned itself with the truths of matters—certainly weighed on Cicero. Perhaps Cicero began to ask himself whether

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44 If one should question that Plato weighed heavy upon him in writing the *Somnium*, I should point to the verbatim Latin translation of *Phaedrus* 245c-e that occurs at *Somnium* 27.
his entire professional career at the bar had consisted in mere *seeming*, or whether he had made the right choice in choosing a life of politics over a leisurely life of literary and philosophical pursuits (a life, which, it should be mentioned, he surely could have chosen). These seem to me to be the driving concerns behind the *Somnium Scipionis* rather than a sort of general, exasperated despair; and, further, they appear to me to be more a result of his rekindled interest in Greek philosophy than a permanent change in his opinions on glory, ambition, and the political life in general. And I do not believe this is mere speculation, but that the evidence is on my side; for I believe that in the works of the later period—which again exalt the political life explicitly, and exalt it here on earth, not in the heaven of the *Somnium Scipionis*—we find Cicero’s last word on the worth of ambition and glory. To somehow take the *Somnium Scipionis* as Cicero’s final resignation that ambition in this life is worth little is to ignore the entire of his later thinking on the subject. And so I believe it shall be appropriate if now I should turn to those works which I have classified as “late,” that we may finally come to what I think are the definitions of glory and ambition from Cicero with which we should be principally concerned.

**Late Cicero: Glory in the Pro Marcello, Tusculanae Disputationes, and De officiis**

In this final section of our preliminary discussion I should like to trace Cicero’s late thinking on glory and reputation, which above all others is the most representative of his fully-developed opinions on the subject. That I may do this adequately, I shall in this section treat four works which I place in Cicero’s late period (47-44 B.C.): the *Pro Marcello*, the *Tusculanae Disputationes*, the *De Officiis*, and the *De Senectute*. All of these were composed during Cicero’s final years of life, though the *Pro Marcello* stands out as the only oratorical piece I have included from this period. The rest were composed during an extraordinarily short span of time
(46-44 B.C.) in which Cicero wrote almost all of his (voluminous) philosophical works. Across all four works I think we at last see Cicero’s most reasonable opinion develop with respect to glory, perhaps spurred on somewhat by Cicero’s watching Caesar’s triumphs and his subsequent acquisition of great glory (no doubt seen by Cicero as largely undeserved). In the De Officiis and Tusculane Disputationes especially, we see Cicero’s repeated anti-Caesarean sentiments—where Caesar is set up as a man pursuing the unreal, insubstantial fame of the masses, and whom Cicero contrasts with the man pursuing actual “vera gloria”—lead to prolonged discussions of glory and the worth of a good reputation in general. It would seem that Cicero was deeply concerned that a man like Caesar (whom he thought to be well-meaning but sorely misguided in his ambitions) could be thought of as glorious, and thus in part he means to convince us that true glory is not won by mere military prowess.

At any rate, that we may come to see this I shall now treat these four works, beginning with the Pro Marcello.

The Pro Marcello is remarkable in many respects, not the least of which is the audacity of Cicero in its composition. The speech was delivered before Caesar in 46, in support of the pardon of Marcus Claudius Marcellus, former consul and ally of Pompey the Great during the civil war. In the speech Cicero has no obvious legal objective—Marcellus had already been pardoned—yet he takes the opportunity to (at times) heap praise upon the new dictator, while at the same time not fearing to chastise him. Cicero in no uncertain terms urges Caesar on toward true glory, thereby implying that Caesar has not already got it, and that what he was currently receiving from the Roman public was little more than a temporary show. And in the passage I shall now reproduce, we see Cicero begin to touch on some of the larger aspects of glory which we shall see in the De Officiis and Tusculanae Disputationes. He insists that true glory (indeed,
here even one’s “true life”) consists not in the present shows of flattery and laudation which Caesar received, but one’s continued remembrance by mankind. And we see here also a trend in Cicero’s later writings. He repeatedly comes to emphasize the importance of service. Notice that glory is won only after Caesar has paid his country what he owes her. I quote from a lengthy but critical passage:

This phase [Cicero has just been speaking of the phase of “glory”], then, still awaits you . . . .

This is the programme to which you must devote all your energies: the re-establishment of the constitution, with yourself the first to reap its fruits in profound tranquility and peace. And then, if you wish, after you have paid your country what you owe her, after you have fulfilled your debt to nature itself, after your fill of life—then and then only you may talk of having lived long enough . . . . Besides, your great spirit has never been satisfied with the narrow limits by which nature bounded our lives, since it has always blazed with passion for immortality . . . . For your true life, I insist, is the one which shall wax in the memory of all ages to come, cherished by every future generation of mankind and preserved to all eternity. This is the life for which you must put forth your endeavours and display your real greatness. Mankind has long had reason to be amazed by your achievements. But now it is looking for deeds which it may praise. (My emphasis)

The portion that I have italicized will become much more important later. It anticipates a development in Cicero which was not altogether absent in Cicero’s previous writings on glory, but which is perhaps most explicit in the later period (and finds expression in both the De Officiis and Tusculanae Disputationes): namely, that “great” spirits are somehow “pricked” or “goaded on” toward glory. That they, most of all, feel the desire for immortality through the propagation of their name and reputation. This, for obvious reasons, is one of the most problematic elements

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45 Pro Marcello, 9.27-28.
of Cicero’s account of glory. For the end of such thinking could easily result in a sort of political fatalism, where those who have sought out glory in the political sphere could be thought to be those who naturally are more noble and virtuous. This is an unfortunate instance of Cicero’s occasionally extreme conservatism.

But the overall sentiment of the passage above-cited is not so naïve, and we shall see that it somewhat elegantly sums up much of Cicero’s late thinking on glory. For Cicero openly questions the worth of the outward displays of glory Caesar then enjoyed. He urges Caesar on toward a kind of glory Caesar will most likely never experience, a posthumous one. But it is this glory which Cicero insists is the true one, the one of real worth. It is the one won by doing what one ought, what one should do for one’s fellows and one’s country. But it is not a matter of “minimal fulfillment,” but of extraordinary service, of the sort Cicero describes in his exhortation to Caesar in the previous passage. Indeed, in the Pro Marcello we are finally given a new definition of glory, one which positively excludes the sort of “glory” we find in cases of undeserved, popular glory—mere “fama popularis,” mere “celebritas”:

If then, Gaius Caesar, the outcome of your mortal deeds is that, after crushing your enemies, you propose to take your leave of the commonwealth while it is still in the condition in which it finds itself today, you will run the risk, for all your superhuman exploits, of gaining astonishment rather than glory as your reward: if, that is to say, we are right to interpret glory as meaning a brilliant, universal renown earned by mighty services to one’s fellow-citizens and one’s country and the world [si quidem gloria est inlustris et pervagata magnorum vel in suos civis vel in patriam vel in omne genus hominum fama meritorum].

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46 Pro Marcello, 8.26.
For Cicero now the idea of true glory is inextricably bound up with that of true service. One does not become truly glorious if one has not done anything of value for the race of mankind. Cicero is now easily able to distinguish between mere instances of celebrity—say, when someone becomes “famous” for setting a world record—and when someone becomes glorious through his service, either to his country or to the world or to the human race in general. And all the more glorious will someone be, says Cicero, if he not only serves this generation, but succeeding ones as well. Indeed, as we shall see, Cicero thinks that in seeking to serve future generations of people, one indulges in a basic human desire: to look after posterity. As someone hopes to look after his children (even as he is gone) by raising them with right morals, so too does the politician, or any “great-souled” man hope to have aided in the security of posterity by his deeds.

That we may come to see this more fully I shall now turn to the Tusculanae Disputationes, where in the first dialogue we shall come to perhaps the most important statements in late Cicero concerning glory. Indeed, it will be admitted that my interpretation of glory in Cicero relies heavily on passages within the Tusculanae Disputationes. The first dialogue principally concerns the question of immortality, but in this discussion Cicero makes time to discuss glory. He in some sense finally comes to the root of the issue, and describes what he thinks are the psychological impulses for a desire for glory:

. . . . all men are anxious and indeed deeply anxious about what will happen after death. ‘Trees does he sow to be of service to the coming age,’ as Statius says in the Synephebi, and what notion is in his mind except that even succeeding ages are his concern? Shall then a farmer industriously sow trees, no berry of which his eyes will ever see, and a great man not sow the seed of laws, regulations and public policy? The begetting of children, the prolongation of a name, the adoption of sons, the careful preparation of wills, the very burial monuments, the epitaphs—what
meaning have they except that we are thinking of the future as well as the present? ... What
better type of nature therefore can we find among human beings than the men who regard
themselves as born into the world to help and guard and preserve their fellow-men?47

I cannot emphasize how important this passage is to Cicero’s late thinking on glory. We see here
all of the elements characteristic of his eventual last account of glory: that its psychological
causes are prevalent among people in general—and are not in any way detestable or selfish, but
are rather laudable as almost paternal qualities—, that the enjoyment of true (posthumous) glory
comes at no real benefit to the one to whom it is attached (just as the farmer does not see his
trees to grow, but rather can only take pleasure in his sowing their seeds), and that when this
nature (i.e., the nature of, say, “right” ambition) shows itself in particular individuals to an
extraordinary degree, they are in some sense the best specimens of the human race, as they are
the most likely to forego personal interests for the sake of their fellows and for posterity. But in
fact Cicero goes on further in a discussion of the heroes of the Roman state and why they were
willing to sacrifice their lives for its defense:

“Was it that their name should be restricted to the narrow limits of their life? No one would ever
have exposed himself to death for his country without good hope of immortality . . . .

Themistocles might have led a quiet life . . . . I might have done so; but somehow it comes about
that there is in men’s minds a sort of deeply rooted presentiment of future ages, and this feeling is
strongest and most evident in men of the greatest genius and the loftiest spirit.”48

Although again we must be careful in ascribing this feeling necessarily to those currently in
power, the images Cicero gives us is nevertheless attractive. This “deeply rooted presentiment of
future ages” (augurium saeclorum futurorum) does seem to be a legitimate human

47 Tusculanae Disputationes, I. XIV. 31-32.
48 Tusculanae Disputationes, I. XV. 33.
preoccupation. We seem unable to cease our fixation with the future of the race and the health of human society going forward. At the very least the strong desire amongst many within the species to have children, and to effect changes within human society to benefit those children, seems to be strong evidence for the sort of “deeply rooted presentiment” Cicero is talking about. And of course we do not mean a literal premonition of sorts (I do not mean to follow Cicero that far); but nevertheless our preoccupation with the future seems to point not only to a strong psychological impulse toward caring for our posthumous reputations amongst our descendents, but toward our feeling that we owe to our descendents the same sorts of things that our ancestors gave us.

But again I believe it should be of some use if we return to Cicero to further elaborate upon all of this. For there is at least one more passage from the *Tusculanae Disputationes* which is absolutely pivotal, and which should be reproduced in a large portion. It is perhaps the clearest statement by Cicero on glory, and in it Cicero finally makes the distinction between true and false glory completely apparent. And though he acknowledges that he can understand how certain persons are drawn on by the latter, he nevertheless is damning in his criticism of those who follow it. He certainly has in mind the likes of Caesar and Pompey when he writes:

“... then obviously we are tainted with vicious beliefs, and our revolt from nature is so complete that we come to think that the clearest insight into the meaning of nature has been gained by the men who have made up their minds that there is no higher ambitions for a human being, nothing more desirable, nothing more excellent than civil office, military command and popular glory; it is to this that all the noblest are attracted, and in their quest for the true honour which alone is the object of nature’s eager search, they find themselves where all is vanity, and strain to win no lofty image of virtue, but a shadowy phantom of glory. For true glory is a thing of real substance and clearly wrought, no shadowy phantom: it is the agreed approval of good
men, the unbiased verdict of judges deciding honestly the question of pre-eminent merit; it gives back to virtue the echo of her voice; and as it generally attends upon duties rightly performed it is not to be disdained by good men. The other kind of glory, however, which claims to be a copy of the true, is headstrong and thoughtless, and generally lends it support to faults and errors; it is public reputation, and by a counterfeit mars the fair beauty of true honour. By this illusion human beings, in spite of some noble ambitions, are blinded, and as they do not know where to look or what to find, some of them bring about the utter ruin of their country and others their own downfall.”

I should of course not wish to say that Cicero has here given us a decisive view of glory—one completely clear in its exposition. Unfortunately Cicero never gives us anything so rigorous. But here he comes closest to it. Mere celebrity and “public reputation” are disregarded. Indeed, “vera gloria” comes only to those who have won approval from “the unbiased verdict of judges deciding honestly the question of pre-eminent merit” (incorrupta vox bene iudicantium de excellenti virtute). And so Cicero hopes to have answered the criticism of those who say that glory is worth little because it is won from the people, who at times are not good judges of character. Cicero is no longer concerned with the praises won from them. He envisions true glory as that sort of reputation won by someone from other excellent persons, who, presumably, should also be good judges of character. And here he makes it similarly clear that the glories of public office and the triumphs won by generals are not sufficient for true glory. True glory, it seems, comes only after one’s deeds have been dissected by the best judges of character, who, it would appear, Cicero thinks are other virtuous persons, both present and future.

It is significant to note that this general definition of glory continues throughout the rest of Cicero’s philosophical writing, and we see it again in the De Officiis. For example, in the De

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49 Tusculanae Disputationes, III. II. 3.
Officiis we are again met with Cicero’s distinction between true glory and fame won from the people. He emphasizes that people like Caesar have only won a sort of temporary glory. But it is less than glory. It is merely the *fama* of fellow human beings—i.e., the talk of the town, an elevated gossip. Cicero shows that he has some understanding for the type of men like Caesar, for they show the “prick” of ambition better than others, even though they knew not how to use it rightly:

We saw this proved but now in the effrontery of Gaius Caesar, who, to gain that sovereign power which by a depraved imagination he had conceived in his fancy, trod underfoot all laws of gods and men. But the trouble about this matter is that it is in the greatest souls and in the most brilliant geniuses that we usually find ambitions for civil and military authority, for power, and for glory, springing up; and therefore we must be the more heedful not to go wrong in that direction.\\footnote{De Officiis, I. VIII. 26.}

Although it may seem like we have begun to repeat ourselves, it is of pivotal importance that we not forget this fact: viz., that in the late period Cicero finally makes clear the distinction between the fame won through military and political office, and the sort of true glory he has in mind when he talks of those who *actually* bring a noticeable benefit to the human race at large. Cicero makes it explicit (which would have probably been most controversial among politicians of the time) that glory won in the political arena is not necessarily the sort that should be sought after. Persons infatuated by this sort of glory are easily misled into vice and corruption, as they lose sight of what the “true judges” will think of them, and care only for the present approval of the people. And though that present approval may last for some time, Cicero thinks that, in the end,
the truth will come out, and that true glory will “propagate” only for those who actually deserve praise. He writes in the *De Officiis*:

For if anyone thinks that he can win lasting glory by pretence, by empty show, by hypocritical talk and looks, he is very much mistaken. True glory strikes deep root and spreads its branches wide; but all pretences soon fall to the ground like fragile flowers, and nothing counterfeit can be lasting.\(^{51}\)

In conclusion, then, we have seen that in these three works from the late period, the *Pro Marcello*, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, and the *De Officiis*, that Cicero has at last come to a somewhat established and constant view of glory, one somewhat less enthusiastic than his view in the early period (where glory, no matter how construed, seemed of utmost importance), but one whose overall sentiment is not so pessimistic as the views we see espoused by Cicero in the middle period. Cicero certainly does not preclude political achievement from any case of true glory, but by no means counts it a sufficient condition for true glory. True glory, on the contrary, must be won only through true service to mankind, and is bestowed upon someone only by excellent judges of character. Now that we have last come to what I think is Cicero’s most nuanced view of glory, I think we shall now detail some of the possible criticisms of such a view. In such a discussion I think we shall be forced to say that at many points Cicero is simply wrong, but, too, that there are redeemable qualities to the view.

**Critical Considerations on Cicero’s Vera Gloria**

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\(^{51}\) *De Officiis*, II. XII. 43.
I believe that in the previous exposition I have sufficiently shown that it is in the late writings of Cicero where we find his definitive stance on glory, and that in cases where it might appear that Cicero contradicts himself (e.g., when one finds contradictory sentiments expressed in the *Somnium Scipionis* and *Tusculanae Disputationes*), we ought to take the position held in a later work as more decidedly “Ciceronian” than one put forth in an earlier one. Thus, I shall in the next section nearly always mean Cicero’s late account of glory—where *vera gloria* is finally distinguished from mere celebrity and is associated with true *service*, wide renown, and actual merit—when I mean to speak of Cicero’s view. As I said in my introduction, it is not solely the aim of the present work to convince the reader of Cicero’s eventual distinction between *vera* and *falsa gloria*, but, in addition, to critically evaluate Cicero’s *vera gloria*, so we might be able to see, by the end of such an evaluation, whether Cicero is convincing on the matter or not. I shall argue that especially in his discussion of what is necessary for being deserving of true glory, Cicero closely approximates the correct view, and makes valuable contributions to an understanding of *vera gloria*.

Now this “correct view,” as I call it, is not in its full form expressed in Cicero, though I think at many points (as I have already hinted at in this chapter) it seems Cicero’s thinking seems to entail it.52 Such a view holds that indeed there is worth in striving after glory—even if none is actually received—since in doing so one does not exhibit one’s total selfishness and desire for perpetual vainglory (as it could at first appear), but rather in striving after true glory, which follows only after one’s complete dedication to the welfare of others and immense personal sacrifice, one shows a deep concern for not only the preservation of current human society, but

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52 And, as I’ve said before, it could be that my account reconstructs some of what Cicero must have said in his *De gloria*. 
generations far removed from one’s own time; and thus, one shows a particularly sublime sort of selflessness.

To this end I shall lay out what seem to be some of the most challenging criticisms facing a view like Cicero’s, and as I consider them I shall do my best to anticipate how Cicero might be able to respond. For most of them Cicero has more than adequate responses, but for some Cicero will be shown to be in error. After this I will in some sense change the general character of the chapter, as I shall begin to argue in favor of certain aspects of a Ciceronian outlook on glory and shall point to its merits when considered as an element of Cicero’s overall philosophy of humanism. I shall conclude my piece with a short recapitulation and a few final thoughts on the worth of true glory.53

Vera gloria has been defined as, in Cicero’s words, “a brilliant, universal renown earned by mighty services to one’s fellow-citizens and one’s country and the world.” 54 Now one could raise the following worries concerning Cicero’s vera gloria: first, Cicero has been unclear about the conditions he lays down for true glory; second, someone could admit that the account of true glory Cicero presents is attractive, while nevertheless arguing that he fails to give us sufficient positive reasons for humanity’s actively pursuing it; and, lastly, one could question whether Cicero actually gives us an account of glory which makes it an object worthy of one’s ambition separate from virtue, thereby calling into question the importance of a discussion of glory at all.

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53 It will be noticed that in the remainder of this essay I largely rely either on Cicero or other historical authors (e.g., Aristotle and Montaigne) for my representative arguments and counterarguments. This is partly due to the fact that very little has been written of late on the subject. That is not only to say little has been written on Cicero’s vera gloria (that has, to my knowledge, been completely neglected), but that even secondary literature concerning “glory” or “right ambition” is sparse. Two notable exceptions are Geoffrey Scarre’s 2001 essay, “On Caring About One’s Posthumous Reputation,” and Glen Pettigrove’s 2007 essay “Ambitions.”

54 Pro Marcello, 8.26
These worries, in turn, will fall into one of two categories. The general nature of each of these sorts of objections I shall now outline.

The first argues that even with an account of glory as Cicero sets up—i.e., even with *vera gloria*—there is still an underlying worry that one should not go seeking after something so entirely dependent upon the opinions of others. For obviously in normal cases of glory and reputation the opinions of others are paramount; but even for Ciceronian *vera gloria* one must be deemed worthy by the true, good judges of character of both the present and future ages. Whether or not one receives true glory is a matter entirely divorced from oneself. The objector then might say (and the point is a very strong one) that it is not then in the immediate interests of anyone to be overly concerned with his reputation or his future glory, since it is something entirely out of his power as an agent. This objection should have a familiar ring to it, as it is more or less the standard argument against ambition toward glory, and it is usually followed with an admission that the people who bestow glory on someone—usually the public—are not good judges of character, and so to devote one’s resources to achieving glory from an ignorant public is seen as a major folly. This, of course, is Aristotle’s point when in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he says that the magnanimous man will not be concerned with honors won from the common people:

> When he meets people with good fortune or a reputation for worth, he displays his greatness, since superiority over them is difficult and impressive, and there is nothing ignoble in trying to be impressive with them. But when he meets ordinary people he is moderate, since superiority over them is easy, and an attempt to be impressive among inferiors is as vulgar as a display of strength.
against the weak . . . . He stays away from what is commonly honored, and from areas where others lead . . . . His actions are few, but great and renowned.  

The strength of this argument here, however, is not that the merit will not be judged well—for Cicero sets up a condition of good judges truly deciding on the matter (as Aristotle emphasizes the fact that the magnanimous man will seek honors from those with “good fortune” or “reputation”)—but that even to seek glory from those who ought to bestow it is misguided. 

Further, it could be said that Cicero does not even begin to understand the force of this objection when he thinks to have solved the problem by adding the condition that good judges of character are the only ones who can bestow true glory. For Cicero seems to be neglecting the quite obvious counterexamples of widespread deception on the part of political rulers (or at the very least the possibility of such cases). For example, a case could be conceived where one is actually a quite vicious leader—say, for instance, an elaborate propaganda campaign portrayed a king as a man deserving of true glory even though in reality he was brutal and terrible. Say even that he brought great things to the state, and in some sense benefitted it. He could be thought to have served it—i.e., even though he was wicked, perhaps he brought roads and education to the masses—and the state could be successful in widespread deception of the people with regard to his character. Eventually even the good judges of posterity might judge him well, and he might be so praised for as long as the human race survives. What would Cicero say of such a man? Has he achieved true glory? For it seems such a king meets the sufficient conditions for one’s having true glory, and yet Cicero seems unwilling to admit that persons of wicked character could ever be considered truly glorious. Just such sorts of people he considers to be striving

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55 1124b20-26, the Irwin translation. The reader may already notice the similarities between Aristotle’s “magnanimous” or “proud” man and the sort of person Cicero thinks to be deserving of true glory. This I shall address later in the essay.
after falsa gloria, since they are not correspondingly virtuous at heart. Pompey and Caesar he thinks are examples of this sort of delusion—that glory can be won even at the expense of virtue. But if vera gloria is to be, in the end, determined by judges outside the person himself, must Cicero admit that such people may be called glorious?

The second sort of objection will press Cicero on the reasons he gives why we should pursue true glory. Or, in a related manner, this sort of objection will ask Cicero to provide more reasons for why we should pursue true glory, since the ones he gives are insufficient. For one may surely be good and virtuous and yet not glorious. Indeed, one may lead a meaningful, fulfilled life without being glorious at all. Even worse, one may do all the things deserving of glory, and yet, on account of the vicissitudes of fortune, one’s name might be lost to oblivion through the strangest happenings of circumstance. Geoffrey Scarre gives the example of some man in the midst of a battle winning back the standard, but, on account of the confusion, remaining nameless.56 Perhaps he deserves glory; perhaps even he fought to retrieve the standard for it; glory, however, comes to whomever it wishes. If then, glory can never be assured—that is, even if one does all the things necessary for true glory one may never receive it—why should we spend so much of our time and resources in pursuing it? Why not be good, but not strive to be glorious? It is not that, on this view, we ought to be lazy or immoral. It is being argued, rather, that perhaps the desirable choice is not to strive after glory when one may be virtuous without it. In a related way: Why should we prefer ambition over retirement? This line of objection I shall mostly associate with Montaigne, who gives it an especially eloquent treatment in his Essais. But it is one not unknown to Cicero. In fact, it is of pivotal importance

to him that he show that a life of retirement (a life he had the wealth to pursue) be less desirable than one which sought after true glory. And so I shall attend this objection when I come to it with special interest.

I shall now consider the merits of these objections and Cicero’s possible responses to them in the next few pages.

The first, to repeat, is that *even vera gloria is still subject to the opinions of others who might be deceived or mistaken*. I think we find that Cicero could respond to such a criticism in a few different ways, some of which, I think, will be more satisfying than others. Cicero’s initial (and, we might assume, somewhat rhetorical) response is perhaps the least satisfying of the possible Ciceronian responses I shall consider. It is, in the end, merely a statement of Cicero’s belief (and hope) in the power of the truth. That is, as he says in the *De Officiis*, he finds it highly unlikely that a system of widespread deception like the one I detailed in my exposition of the objection would have a lasting effect, and that, he thinks, the truth will eventually “win out.”

We have had reason already to quote this passage, but it has special relevance here:

> For if anyone thinks that he can win lasting glory by pretence, by empty show, by hypocritical talk and looks, he is very much mistaken. True glory strikes deep root and spreads its branches wide; but all pretences soon fall to the ground like fragile flowers, and nothing counterfeit can be lasting. 57

I think we may safely say that Cicero has probably got it wrong here. Perhaps it could be that one’s being *actually* deserving of true glory makes it more likely that one will receive it (this seems very plausible, and it is what I suspect Cicero actually means to say), but it by no means

57 *De Officiis*, II. XII. 43.
looks as though one could not, with propaganda sophisticated enough, effectively dupe even the best judges of posterity into thinking that a vicious person were actually a saint.

But Cicero’s general response to such criticism is in some ways a more nuanced and sophisticated one, and so I shall now turn to it. For Cicero repeatedly acknowledges the fickleness of the public’s (even the educated public’s) view of one’s reputation and the inability for one to be absolutely certain that one’s memory will live on. He is not naïve. But he argues nevertheless for the *efficacy* of believing that one’s memory will live on. In other words, Cicero wants to argue for the “good hope” of believing in the long-lastingness of one’s memory.  Otherwise, he says, why should anyone wish to do anything great or wish to set himself apart from the crowd, if in the end only total oblivion awaits? Can someone really believe that all his toiling is worth nothing outside himself, that it has no lasting effect, and yet still strive and toil all the more?

Cicero makes it no secret he is skeptical that the human psyche is capable of this. In the *Pro Archia Poeta*, a work which comes from Cicero’s earlier period but which I have argued shares much in common with his later works, Cicero sums up this sort of pragmatic response quite nicely and eloquently:

58 When I speak of “good hope” I show my debt to Aristotle’s distinction between “elpis” (hope) and “euphis” (good hope) as astutely explained in Scott Gravlee’s article, “Aristotle on Hope” (*Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 2000). “Elpis,” when used by Aristotle, has the same effect as mere “anticipation,” whereas “euphis” conveys more our sense of the word: hope for good things. Aristotle notes that *euphis* is something you have when you are *confident* about the outcome of an event because of your taking steps to carry it out or your having the ability to effect what you want. Thus, a warrior who is skilled in swordsmanship will have *euphis* with regard to his surviving a swordfight. Cicero’s “good hope” (as I call it) is then the sort of expectation a person has when he has taken substantive steps toward glory: He may reasonably hope for good things if he so orders his life as to be deserving of glory upon his death.

59 Interestingly, there has been a renaissance of this position in contemporary philosophy inspired by the Continental tradition. In *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (2019), Martin Hägglund argues that the secularism of the modern era leads to a reevaluation of the importance of our reputations and effects of our life projects in the world (as lasting monuments of our lives after we die).
For how could we, who undergo the toils and hazards of public life, be spiritless enough to feel satisfied with the idea that, after we have spent not one single moment of our lives in peace and tranquillity, all this effort will go for nothing at the very moment when we die? Many distinguished men have taken great pains to leave their statues and representations behind them. But those are likenesses only of the body, and not of the spirit at all, and so have we all the more reason to feel enthusiastic about bequeathing a similar image of our intellectual and moral personalities as well, to be moulded and elaborated by the very finest talents available? . . . . As for myself, even at the actual time when I was busiest with great matters, I felt I was also diffusing and disseminating a knowledge of those very same deeds throughout the entire earth to be remembered for ever. Perhaps, when I am dead, I shall no longer be able to perceive whether their memory does, in fact, remain . . . . But however that may be, at least I derive satisfaction here and now from the thought and the hope that what I have done will not be forgotten. 

Note, of course, that Cicero at the end of this passage acknowledges the fact that he simply cannot know whether what he has done will be forgotten or not. That is not important. What is important, rather, is that he derives present satisfaction from his hope that his memory will not fade. We find this sentiment echoed at the end of the De Senectute, where Cicero

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60 *Pro Archia Poeta, XII. 30.*

61 Scarre in his article considers the puzzles arising from such a view, and concludes that the “satisfaction” one may feel in thinking about one’s posthumous reputation is due to one’s thinking that fame or glory will give “meaning” to an otherwise seemingly absurd existence (one in which deeds which ought to be remembered often are not and others that ought not are remembered). He writes that “. . . . . one attraction of fame is that the famous tend to be remembered for longer, and live in more memories, than those who have done nothing striking or unusual. For them the onset of oblivion is delayed. Fame also appeals to those who wish not simply to be remembered but to be remembered for a particular deed or achievement, or who lust for ‘glory’ . . . . . This desire, too, reflects a concern with meaning: the aspirant thinks it pointless and demeaning merely to swell a crowd” (213). But, over the course of the article, Scarre adeptly picks apart this view until the proponent would be forced to concede that an excellent, “meaningful” life is neither sufficient nor necessary for glory, and so Scarre concludes that “obsessing” over one’s posthumous reputation is not a particularly fruitful activity. This sort of objection I shall be considering in a later part of this essay, as I think it closely parallels Montaigne’s general line of argument.
acknowledges that he cannot be certain of what shall happen to him after death, but argues that it is better for him that he think that his soul is immortal.\(^6^2\) He writes: “Even if I am mistaken in my belief that the soul is immortal, I make the mistake gladly, for the belief makes me happy, and is one which as long as I live want to retain.”\(^6^3\) Now, admittedly, the force of this type of argument will be closely related to one’s initial feelings of the plausibility of the sorts of arguments Cicero generally gives in favor of glory. One might reasonably respond that for some it seems that the idea of oblivion gives more comfort than eternal remembrance.\(^6^4\) It is, then, not a decisive point that Cicero feels particularly compelled by the “picture” of immortality and true glory, since others feel just as drawn by the competing view. Thus, I acknowledge (as I suspect Cicero might acknowledge as well) that this sort of argument will be to some unappealing to an unacceptable degree. But it is, nevertheless, Cicero’s main response to the question of whether it is damning for his view that one has, in certain cases, very little control over one’s reputation, since, in the end, it is bestowed by others.

Now at this point there may be a more interesting Ciceronian response. Perhaps the “bestowal” itself of true glory is of secondary importance. Perhaps, rather, it is of primary importance that the individual strive as best he can to do what he thinks necessary to be worthy of true glory, so that he could receive it were conditions so set up that he was not forgotten, that his reputation was not falsely slandered, etc. Presumably, then, the problem presented for Cicero’s view would go away. It no longer matters that some are incorrectly called “glorious,” even though in their hearts they are vicious. It does not even, in the end, matter that the judges

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\(^6^2\) As I think is clear from our previous discussion in section IV of this essay, Cicero’s thoughts on glory (especially posthumous glory) are often tied up with his thoughts on the afterlife in general. To flesh out the connection between the two fully is, I think, the subject of another essay.

\(^6^3\) De Senectute, 85.

\(^6^4\) Scarre, for example, closes his essay on this point.
of future ages may be mistaken. It is of consequence only that the individual do what he can to be deserving of true glory both in his own eyes and the eyes of society.

Though I have strayed a bit from Cicero in the previous paragraph, hints at such a view are found in the Ciceronian corpus. And this sort of view is what gives rise to the next sort of objection I shall consider, which now asks why we should think anything of glory at all, if all it sounds like is that we are speaking of true virtue. In short, the objection is that now the Ciceronian has simply given up on glory, and, in the guise of an account of “true glory,” he has finally just admitted that it is only one’s being worthy of virtue that is of importance.

And so I shall now consider this second objection. I think it receives an eloquent treatment in Montaigne, who directly chastises Cicero for what he perceives as the latter’s vainglory and love of talking of himself (as we have spoken of previously in this chapter). He writes in “Of Not Communicating One’s Glory”:

Of all the illusions in the world, the most universally received is the concern for reputation and glory, which we espouse even to the point of giving up riches, rest, life, and health, which are effectual and substantial goods, to follow that vain phantom and mere sound that has neither body nor substance . . . .

And again in “Of Solitude”: “Now, as for glory, the goal that Pliny and Cicero set up for us, it is very far from my reckoning. The humor most directly opposite to retirement is ambition. Glory and repose are things that cannot lodge in the same dwelling.” What Montaigne repeatedly emphasizes is the ephemerality of the so-called good of glory, and the fact that, on his view, one may simply be virtuous and live a quiet life that is just as good as a virtuous life that strives to be glorious. In short, Montaigne thinks that the aspirant to glory is well-meaning but deluded.

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63 *Essais* 227.
66 *Essais* 220.
Now Cicero at times responds to this sort of criticism somewhat vehemently. For I think we may safely suppose that in this general line of criticism Cicero sees the tendencies of Epicureanism, which, as we said earlier, Cicero thought a dangerous philosophy, leading to effeminacy and apoliticalization. He begins his *De Republica* with an exhortation toward politics which, again, I think shows his general tendencies in responding to the sort of objection Montaigne would raise. In it he speaks of Marcus Cato the Elder who strove his entire life to help not only his fellows but the Roman state at large:

He might certainly have enjoyed his retirement at Tusculum—a healthy spot within easy reach of town. But that maniac, as those fellows call him, without being compelled by any necessity, chose to be buffeted by these stormy waves right into extreme old age, instead of enjoying the delightfully tranquil life which they [the Epicureans] extol . . . . I simply state this basic fact: nature has given to mankind such a compulsion to do good, and such a desire to defend the well-being of the community, that this force prevails over all the temptations of pleasure and ease. Cicero finds this to be a particularly important point: the great statesmen of any age often *could* have lived relatively leisurely lives, but they *chose* not to do so. Cicero, in numerous instances in the corpus, emphasizes the fact that *he* could have chosen to remain in philosophy. But what he calls the “prick” or “goad” on toward “right” ambition and true glory, and a desire (*cupiditas*) to defend the community, overtake the desire for a quiet life of retirement. At least, so it *should*. And this, of course, is the crucial point. It is not merely that our natures push us toward a life of politics and ambition (for this could be said by the “philosophers” to be a case in which our natures are not to be followed), but that they push us *rightly* in that direction, away from a life of retirement and seclusion which comes *at the expense* of the society in which we live. Retirement

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67 *De Republica*, I. 1.
68 See, for example, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, I. XV. 33.
is, then, contrary to our social duty as humans of a particular society. Cicero numerous times repeats the Platonic dictum—“that man is not born for himself”—and stresses the fact that the life which strives after glory and political achievement is not only more glorious than the quiet life of a philosopher or anyone else who should eschew glory, but that it is better. Better for both individuals and for their society. And so to be spurred on to glory by one’s ambition is not some undesirable urge borne out from one’s defective human nature: it is, rather, the correct pointing of one’s internal moral compass.

Now if it should appear that I have strayed too far from Cicero, I should like to point out to the reader (and to the objector) the following passages, in which I think we clearly see this sentiment expressed. In the first section of the De Republica, Cicero continues to lay out his arguments against the Epicureans and their general eschewal of politics (as well as again pointing to the selflessness of his own pursuits): 69

I could have reaped richer rewards than anyone else from peace, thanks to the various delights of those studies in which I had engaged since boyhood. Or if some dreadful calamity had overtaken the people as a whole, I could have suffered, not any special misfortune, but the same misfortune as everyone else. Yet, being the sort of man I was, I did not hesitate to brave the wildest storms

69 The Epicureans were a favorite target of Cicero for a variety of reasons. First, many of the members of the rival Roman political party, the popularres (Cicero, conversely, was a supporter of the optimates, “the best”), were (at least in spirit) Epicureans. Cicero associated what he saw as their lack of morals with their Epicureanism (Caesar even, it is said, called himself one). But he was not partisan to the point of exclusion: His dearest friend and closest correspondent, Atticus, appears to have been an Epicurean as well.

But perhaps the main reason Cicero seems to give undue treatment to certain of standard Epicurean arguments (especially in his discussions on glory and reputation) is that he himself found certain elements of the philosophy attractive. Indeed, as we have seen, his ideal of the philosophic life often has strong Epicurean undertones: The philosopher’s life is conceived of one that is simple, satiated, and humbly pleasant—without the hustle and bustle of city life or the delusions of public engagement. Cicero is thus often guilty of a somewhat naïve, too stark distinction between philosopher and politician: the philosopher’s life is thought to be nearly worthless to society, while the “great man” of politics is thought to temper this political worthlessness with a sense of ambition while retaining some use of his mind.
and almost the very thunderbolts themselves to protect my countrymen, and, by risking my own life, to win peace and security for the rest. For our country did not give us life and nurture unconditionally, without expecting to receive in return, as it were, some maintenance from us; nor did it engage simply to serve our convenience, providing a safe haven for our leisure and a quiet place for our relaxation.\textsuperscript{70}

In the first book of the \textit{De Officiis}, Cicero considers the separate merits of both the philosophical and political lives (or, less specifically, the “life of retirement” and the “life of service”). He concludes that although the life of retirement is by no means bad or not at all to be sought, it should nevertheless be a secondary path in life, in the end open really only to those who do more service to the state with their “research” and learning than if they were to be politically motivated. For the rest of humankind, if they are able-bodied and intelligent, the course of life most befitting their nature is the life of politics and service. Thus:

\begin{quote}
And, in this matter, neither way of thinking is altogether to be condemned; but the life of retirement is easier and safer . . . while the career of those who apply themselves to statecraft . . . is more profitable to mankind . . . So perhaps the men of extraordinary genius who have devoted themselves to learning must be excused for not taking part in public affairs . . . But if those who have no such excuse profess a scorn for civil and military offices, which most people admire, I think that this should be set down not to their discredit; for in so far as they care little, as they say, for glory and count it as naught, it is difficult not to sympathize with their attitude; in reality, however, they seem to dread the toil and trouble also, perhaps, the discredit and humiliation of political failure and defeat.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

In short, Cicero’s response to Montaigne would be that it is simply not the case that the philosopher (or any other politically-disinclined individual) leads a life just as good as that man

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{De Republica}, I. 7-8.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{De Officiis}, I. XXI. 71.
who devotes himself entirely to politics. It is, rather, that the politician who is truly great—i.e.,
who is truly glorious—leads, perhaps, even a much better life than the philosopher, especially if
we look to the actual contributions of the two individuals to society.\footnote{Of course neither I nor Cicero means to make the naïve point that the philosopher (or, again, anyone else who has chosen “retirement” over political life) has no effect on his fellows. Indeed, the words and writings of a philosopher may have a massive effect on society as a whole. But, nevertheless, it would appear strange to say that, on the whole, it is not the case that great politicians and statesmen have a greater immediate effect on human society than the academics. Real societal power, I think, is found among those with the political means to effect their ends. For better or for worse, the academic must in the end resort to the help of a lobbyist or become one himself.}

Now to my mind Cicero has strong responses to the two criticisms we have now considered. For one, Cicero thinks that human beings are not born for themselves, and that, by nature, human beings are aware of strong reasons why one ought to care about posterity. It seems to Cicero that there is something distinctly inhuman about a complete disregard for one’s reputation. This, I think, is shown in Cicero’s repeated point that even if you cannot possibly think yourself to care about your posthumous reputation—even if nothing of glory appeals to you—you no doubt cringe at the prospect of being thought to have been a liar, a cheat, or a murderer, when you were nothing of the sort. It is this point (of at least some sort of universal regard for glory) Cicero makes when he says in the Pro Archia Poeta:

“We should not disclaim this human weakness, which indeed is patent to all; we should rather admit it unabashed. Why, upon the very books in which they bid us scorn ambition philosophers inscribe their names! They seek advertisement and publicity for themselves on the very page whereon they pour contempt upon advertisement and publicity.”\footnote{Pro Archia Poeta, xi. 27.}

Cicero, of course, is not naïve. He realizes the dangers of a twisted, maniacal ambition. This danger he recognizes in his repeated distinction between \textit{vera} and \textit{falsa gloria}. And he thereby avoids the problems an objector like Montaigne should expect him to have. Cicero does not set

\begin{quote}
“...we should not disclaim this human weakness, which indeed is patent to all; we should rather admit it unabashed. Why, upon the very books in which they bid us scorn ambition philosophers inscribe their names! They seek advertisement and publicity for themselves on the very page whereon they pour contempt upon advertisement and publicity.”
\end{quote}
up the prospect of “true glory” for all people so that they should think that it is achievable for all persons of good character, regardless of luck. This was the sort of picture of glory that Cicero dealt with in the pessimistic reflections of the *Somnium Scipionis*. As we have seen, he repeatedly dispels this unsophisticated notion of glory as the type of myth which drives men like Caesar and Pompey to pursue honors from the common people. They are no doubt ambitious, but ambitious in the wrong kind of way. They desire power and wealth. They do not desire to devote themselves tirelessly to the state and give up self-concern. Cicero is, in the end, an optimist concerning human nature, and he more often than not thinks that people are capable of a particularly lofty selflessness. They are, by nature, social and self-sacrificing. Were they not so gregarious, Cicero writes, they should like most other creatures prefer isolation and *mere* pleasure. But rather humans exhibit more the nature of Hercules:

“... it is more in accord with Nature to emulate the great Hercules and undergo the greatest toil and trouble for the sake of aiding or saving the world, if possible, than to live in seclusion, not only free from all care, but reveling in pleasures and abounding in wealth, while excelling others also in beauty and strength. Thus Hercules denied himself and underwent toil and tribulation for the world . . . . The better and more noble, therefore, the character with which man is endowed, the more does he prefer the life of service to the life of pleasure.”

In the previous discussion I began to hint at what I shall now say a few words on. It could be said that in thinking about ambition there are two obvious extremes, both representing vices—these could be cast, say, as Cicero’s naïve, youthful opinion of glory and ambition (the excess), and Montaigne’s somewhat apolitical, Epicurean contempt of it (the defect)—and that in Cicero we see this sort of Aristotelian paradigm borne out. And in some ways I think this is a

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*De Officiis*, III. V. 25.
view which is eminently plausible and useful when thinking of Cicero’s notion of *vera gloria*. It seems that Cicero is well aware that ambition may easily lead to an unhealthy concern with one’s reputation: but if it is used by the right sort of person in the right way, it is a virtue as a kind of “right” ambition toward true glory. Cicero, of course, also considered the cases of people who are not at all drawn by ambitions. These people he saw as operating with some sort of defect as political creatures.

And though I do not mean to suggest this “Aristotelian” reading of Cicero as a systematic one, it does fit in nicely with the discussion Aristotle himself has in Book IV of the *Nicomachean Ethics* concerning the magnanimous person and “great honors.” In a famous passage Aristotle writes:

> “Magnanimity, then, would seem to be a sort of adornment [crown] of the virtues . . . . The magnanimous person, then, is concerned especially with honors and dishonors. When he receives great honors from excellent people, he will be moderately pleased, thinking he is getting what is proper to him, or even less . . . . But if he is honored by just anyone, or for something small, he will altogether disdain it; for that is not what he is worthy of.”

At any rate, I now feel that I am able to conclude this piece.

**True Glory, Reputation, Humanism**

At the beginning of this chapter I stated my hope that I should show that Cicero was no mere self-serving politician in his thinking on glory—as, unfortunately, he has been miscast by various thinkers throughout history. I believe I have done this. One sees in his account of glory the outlines of his philosophy of humanism. People are born for one another whether they like it

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or not. And in human beings there is a deep paternal instinct which cannot help but look onward toward posterity.

For Cicero there is something sublime in parenthood, in the rearing of children and the inculcation of good morals. He quotes from Statius to express this when he discusses someone looking forward in time, caring for his children and the world in which they will live: “Trees does he sow to be of service to the coming age.”

Cicero does not think someone is glorious for having puffed himself up. He instead advances an account of true glory which precludes those who are especially adept only at self-promotion at the expense of their character. Cicero fears that a contempt of ambition will lead us to forget that there must be paragons for us to model our behavior on. There must be examples of virtue for the betterment of the human race. These models—Cicero thinks—understood this, and so they cultivated their own ambition. Not for themselves—but for us. So that they could help us—make our lives better—and we in turn could help those of the succeeding generation.

Cicero, more than most, devoted his life (and, indeed, his death) to something like the above belief. Plutarch tells us that he was murdered in his sixty-fourth year, decapitated by assassins sent by Mark Antony in the infamous proscriptions of Antony and Octavian in 43 BCE.

His crimes were the *Philippics*, a series of masterful speeches in defense of traditional Roman republicanism—and against Antony. It was perhaps the most decisive political move of his career, save for his actions during the Catilinarian conspiracy. He *could* have remained in his quiet retirement, continuing to write philosophy. Instead he was met by a trained assassin at a summer home in the Italian countryside, where he knelt without protest and was beheaded.

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76 *Tusculanae Disputationes*, I. XIV. 31.
This, in conjunction with his life as both politician and philosopher, secured his reputation—even among those who claimed him as a (political) enemy.

Plutarch tells us: “Some long time after, [Augustus] Caesar . . . . visiting one of his daughter’s sons, found him with a book of Cicero’s in his hand. The boy for fear endeavoured to hide it under his gown; which Caesar perceiving, took it from him, and, turning over a great part of the book standing, gave it him again, and said, ‘My child, this was a learned man, and a lover of his country.’”

CHAPTER 2: CICERO’S THEORY OF FRIENDSHIP IN THE LAELIUS DE AMICITIA

Chapter precis
As we have already seen, many of Cicero’s philosophical dialogues are set in an idyllic past when the Roman Republic is flourishing and the great statesmen of old turn out to be capable philosophers in their own right. In the Laelius de amicitia Cicero has Gaius Laelius give us a more or less rhetorical treatment of friendship, which has frustrated some philosophical readers because of its seeming meandering. But along the way Cicero does give us an outline of a theory of friendship, coming as close as he does to an official formulation in 6.20: “For friendship is in fact nothing other than a community (consensio) of views on all matters human and divine, together with goodwill (benevolentia) and affection (caritate)…” (Trans. Powell).
Other commentators have already laid out much of Cicero’s theory of friendship with varying degrees of success. Some, inspired no doubt in part by the Nineteenth Century Quellenforschung project, have emphasized the Peripatetic resonances in the De amicitia and have conjectured about its relation to Theophrastus’ On Friendship (see, too, Aul. Gell. 1.3 for a classical analogue to this). Others have wondered about its relation to Stoic theories in the work of Chrysippus and Cleanthes (for mentions of these works, D.L. 5.45 and Plutarch, De stoicorum repugnantiiis 1039b). Too, there has been much recent interest in the application of Cicero’s theory in his actual political strategizing—where his correspondence is of particular importance.

But I think it safe to say that the De amicitia has not been well-regarded as theory. The rhetorical flair of the dialogue no doubt lends itself to such a misappraisal. I nevertheless maintain that we stand to gain a great deal if we take the dialogue seriously and attempt to tease out the theory which at times lies obscure beneath the flower of Cicero’s prose. I show not only that Cicero puts forth a consistent and coherent theory of friendship in the De amicitia, but that this theory is not a rehash of either Peripatetic or Stoic theory. It is eclectic no doubt; but nonetheless new:

The novelty consists in this: There is a symmetry to be found in the theory of the De amicitia between ideal friendship (one that exists in the theories of the philosophers and which is characterized by a mysterious wide-ranging and total intellectual agreement) and non-ideal or real friendship (the one that exists in the real world between people and is associated with amor and caritas), and Cicero ingeniously suggests that both are necessary but not sufficient conditions for perfect friendship in the real world.

But that we do not become pessimistic about the possibility of such a rare admixture ever coming about, he particularizes it and gives us an instance of it in the dialogue itself. Thus the
Romanized setting of the dialogue is not an empty eulogy to the past serving only Cicero’s conservatism, but the way in which Cicero tries to show the apotheosis of the very best instances of friendship between people who not only feel great degrees of affection, love, and caring toward another—and happen to live close to one another—but who also share a deep, intellectual sort of kinship as well.

Cicero’s Laelius de amicitia (Laelius on Friendship, outline of contents)

I. Preliminaries.

A. Background on the De amicitia.

Cicero’s De amicitia is a companion dialogue to his Cato Maior de senectute (Cato the Elder on Old Age), both of which feature a main speaker who is asked to discourse on some topic by eager, largely silent interlocutors (similar to some of Plato’s late dialogues). In De amicitia, Laelius is asked to provide his opinions on friendship after the death of his close friend, Scipio Africanus (a great Roman general in the Second Punic War and consul), by the younger Fannius and Scaevola. As with Cicero’s other
dialogues, it is unclear to what extent Laelius is meant to represent Cicero’s own thinking on friendship.

B. Friendship in ancient ethics

Friendship was a central topic in ancient ethics. This may have to do with the puzzles that arise from the seemingly egoistic concerns of ancient moral philosophy. These result in some basic questions: Does the happy person need friends? May he be happy without them? (See Aristotle, bks. VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially IX. 9-12, 11169b3-1172a15). In our case: Will the Stoic sage have friends? With whom will she be friends? I.e., can the sage be friends with non-sages?

C. Cicero’s predecessors on friendship

Both Cleanthes and Chrysippus are reported to have composed their own Stoic treatises on friendship (both entitled “peri philias”), but these are now lost to us (D.L. 5.45 and Plutarch, *De stoicorum repugnantiis* 1039b). An influential Peripatetic version (also entitled “peri philias”), written by Theophrastus (head of the Lyceum after Aristotle), may have been one of Cicero’s philosophical sources in writing De amicitia (D.L. 5.45, Aulus Gellius 1.3). Plato writes on friendship in the Lysis, which, though the discussion in the dialogue leaves Socrates still wondering what friendship might be (223a), was obviously influential on Aristotle and has many parallels with Aristotle’s famous discussion in aforementioned sections of the NE. Aristotle’s conclusion in book IX is that even the self-sufficient happy person will need friends, since he requires company as a political animal (1169b17-22).

II. Cicero’s definition of friendship.
A. Friendship

“For friendship is in fact nothing other than a community (consensio) of views on all matters human and divine, together with goodwill (benevolentia) and affection (caritate)…”

Est enim amicitia nihil aliud nisi omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum cum benevolentia et caritate consensio (De amicitia, VI.20, Powell translation).

B. What it then seems friendship might be

Cicero seems to interestingly suggest that what is essential to true friendship (vera et perfecta amicitia as distinguished from vulgar friendship in VI.22) is not primarily a kind of love shared between the two individuals, but instead some sort of wide-ranging and total intellectual agreement on “all matters human and divine.” On its own, this sounds like a possibly interesting Stoic-inspired account of friendship. Indeed, at some points Laelius seems explicit in saying that what is unique to friendship is this sort of state of complete shared ends and knowledge since goodwill (benevolentia) and affection (caritas, also “fondness”) are already somehow inherent within all human beings and necessary for human beings to live with each other (VII.23). This could be seen as a further spelling out of either the Stoic or Peripatetic position that true friendship only exists between good people (with shared ends in life).

C. A further spelling out of Laelius’s position?

“Therefore, these are the limits [also “goals,” “ends”] (his finibus) which I think ought to be observed, namely: when the characters of friends are blameless, then there should be
between them complete harmony of opinions and inclinations in everything without any exception…” (XVII. 61, Falconer translation).

D. Some problematic words

Cicero’s discussion of friendship is far from tidy. Four closely related concepts also seem to have pivotal roles to play in Laelius’s account, but none is fully explained. These four concepts—\textit{benevolentia} (“goodwill”), \textit{fides} (“good faith”), \textit{amor} (“love, strong affection”), \textit{caritas} (“fondness”)—have a somewhat confusing role to play in Laelius’s actual theory, but the general point seems to be that Cicero thinks (surprisingly) that these four things are necessary for friendship only inasmuch as they are sorts of \textit{enabling} conditions for human friendship. For human society to function at all Cicero seems to think something like these four conditions are necessary, so he needs this further \textit{consensio} to explain the uniqueness of friendship. Here are some representative passages:

- \textbf{Benevolentia} (goodwill). “But if the bond of goodwill be removed from the world, no house or city will be able to stand, nor even will the tilling of the land continue.”
  \textit{Quodsi exemeris ex rerum natura benevolentiae iunctionem, nec domus ulla nec urbs stare poterit, nec agri quidem cultus permanebit} (VII. 23, Powell translation).

- \textbf{Caritas} (affection, fondness). “However, the best way to realise the power of friendship is to understand this, that out of the infinitely large association of the human race, which nature itself has brought together, friendship is something so concenetrated and brought down into a narrow space, that every instance of real affection (\textit{omnis caritas}) exists either between two people, or among a small number (VI. 20, Powell).
- **Fides** (good faith, trust). “The foundation (firmamentum) of that stability and reliability that we look for in friendship, is good faith; nothing is stable which is unfaithful” (XVIII.65, Powell).

- **Amor** (strong affection, love). “For the first thing to bring people together in a relationship of goodwill is love (amor), from which friendship (amicitia) derives its name” (VIII. 26, Powell).

### III. Concerns for this chapter.

Laelius emphasizes that he is talking about true friendship, not friendship among the “vulgar.” This raises a worry: Can Laelius’s good person (and the Stoics’ sage) be friends with normal, flawed people? Does the “universal brotherhood” only extend so far? Recall the troubling Zeno fragment in Diogenes Laertius: “Again, in the Republic he claimed that only virtuous men are citizens and friends and relatives and free men, so that, in the eyes of the Stoics, parents and children are enemies since they are not wise” (D.L. 7.33, I&G 3).

**Cicero’s Laelius de amicitia and True Friendship**

It has been the experience of some readers to find Cicero’s *Laelius de amicitia* a muddled work. At various points the argument becomes difficult to follow, and at others, it seems that Cicero might contradict himself outright.

As I think we’ll see throughout this chapter, the “muddled” nature of the work is a result of both Cicero’s own propensity to digress into rhetorical aside *and* Cicero’s deftly crafting not one, but *two* theories of friendship throughout the dialogue, which he then synthesizes into a unified definition: one of friendship *vera et perfecta*, and one of the friendship that exists among
common people. Together, I’ll show, these definitions of friendship are used to explain a case of realized “ideal” friendship between Laelius and Scipio in the *De amicitia*.

In the first part of this chapter I shall lay out the main competing ancient theories of friendship it seems Cicero was torn between (namely, the Stoic and Peripatetic theories). Later in this chapter I shall hope to show the similarity of Cicero’s theory to the ancient Stoic theories of friendship preserved in Diogenes Laërtius and the *Anthology* of Stobaeus. But I shall also focus on the important differences which set Cicero’s theory apart. To this end, I shall consider an influential contemporary view of the Stoic theory of friendship put forth by Margaret Graver in her book, *Stoicism and Emotion*, to show how Cicero’s “softening” of the Stoic position is even more attractive than the one she considers. Thus, I shall begin with the general description of the Stoic and Peripatetic views and, similarly, Graver’s interpretation of the Stoic position, and then conclude with Cicero’s eclectic synthesis of the two. This eclectic synthesis, I maintain, is then “realized” in the friendship of Laelius and Scipio in the *De amicitia*, evidencing another of Cicero’s attempts at ideal retrospective theory on a political topic (i.e., friendship).

**Friendship in Ancient Ethics and the Stoic Puzzle**

Friendship, and, in general, how to treat *other* people, were popular topics in the moral philosophy of antiquity.77 Indeed, as Powell notes in his introduction to the *De amicitia*, from various Hellenistic sources we have at least seven treatises all entitled *Peri philias* (*On friendship*), from philosophers representing all the major traditions in ancient philosophy.78

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78 See Powell, 3.
Cleanthes and Chrysippus are said to have written on the topic, but both treatises are lost.\textsuperscript{79} Of particular interest for our purposes is the claim of Aulus Gellius that Cicero seems to have been reading Theophrastus’s *On Friendship* in composing the *De amicitia*.\textsuperscript{80} This might in part explain the fractured nature of the work. Cicero may have been reading many different Hellenistic sources when he was writing the *De amicitia*.

A plausible explanation for the popularity of friendship as an ancient philosophical theme is the almost universal *egoist* concerns of ancient ethics: viz., that the principal concern for any ethical theory ought to be the agent’s own happiness. This leads to various puzzles, most of which arise from the repeated claim (from various ancient authors) that the happy person is *self-sufficient*. That is, the happy person is supposed to be a person so constituted so that he does not depend on any others for his happiness, but, as it were, draws from his own cistern. Aristotle was aware of this charge (and mentions it in just these terms in *E.N.* IX.9. 1169b3-10) and later concludes that it would be strange to count that man as happy who, being a political animal, failed to have any deep, meaningful interactions with other human beings.\textsuperscript{81} Aristotle’s discussion was particularly influential among the Peripatetics and is the fullest treatment we have of friendship from antiquity. But it stands in at least apparent stark contrast with the Stoic tradition on the same topic.

The problems regarding the self-sufficiency of the wise man and the question of whether he will have any need for friends are exacerbated in Stoic ethics. The Stoics dogmatically held the position that the only good is virtue and that once someone attained the level of the sage, one

\textsuperscript{79} Again, see Powell, 3. The mention of Cleanthes’ work comes in *Diogenes Laërtius* 7.175 and Chrysippus’ in Plutarch’s *De stoicorum repugnantis* 1039b.

\textsuperscript{80} Aulus Gellius 1.3.

\textsuperscript{81} For Aristotle’s full discussion of friendship, see Aristotle, bks. VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and, for our purposes, especially IX. 9-12, 11169b3-1172a15.
was in need of nothing else. Indeed, the Stoics universal disavowal of external goods makes it difficult to see how they might have a substantive theory of friendship, and it leads to some natural questions. If the Stoic sage is happy by his own powers alone, what need has he of friends?

On a related matter, the Stoics also famously disavowed most types of emotion. Their prescriptive theory concerning the emotions recommends that emotions be purged, and so the emotional attachment many feel to their friends could be cast as irrational and unbefitting the sage. Indeed, if one disallows affection and attachment, how should one ever gain any friends in this world? It seems, at first glance, that if the Stoics are to have a notion of friendship, some sort of feeling (broadly construed) must be present.

But the Stoics did, nevertheless, argue for the existence of friends, but in a sense which may seem strange to us at first. They held that friendship only exists between good people, and that friendship among the common people was impossible:

“For it is impossible for there to be genuine friendship (as opposed to falsely named friendship) without trust and reliability; but since the base are untrustworthy and unreliable and have hostile opinions, there is no friendship among them, although there are certain other kinds of association and bonding which are held together from the outside by necessity and opinions. And they [the Stoics] say that cherishing and welcoming and love belong to the virtuous alone.”

What might seem to us radical was for the Stoics a kind of commonplace: friendship was a relation uniquely true of the wise. This led certain Stoics to adopt views which seem particularly unpalatable for us, as we see in the following passage from Zeno of Citium, founder of the Stoic school:

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82 See Cicero’s Tusculan Disputations, bks. III and IV.
83 The text is from the Anthology of Stobaeus, 2.11m, in Inwood and Gerson, The Stoics Reader, 147.
“[Zeno] said that all those who are not virtuous are hostile and enemies and slaves and alien to each other, parents to children and brothers to brothers and relatives to relatives. Again, in the Republic he claimed that only virtuous men are citizens and friends and relatives and free men, so that, in the eyes of the Stoics, parents and children are enemies since they are not wise.”

It has been the aim of some commentators, namely Graver, to try to soften this stark and, at first glance, implausible view of friendship. Noting that Zeno is the founding figure of Stoicism, she distinguishes between early and late Stoic theories of friendship. She points to a passage from Cicero’s De natura deorum to bring out another feature of what she terms early Stoic thinking on friendship:

“How much better is the attitude of the Stoics, whom you censure! They maintain that the friendship of the wise extends even to the wise men with whom they are not acquainted; for nothing is more lovable than virtue, and the person who has acquired it will be held in our affection no matter where he lives.”

This idea, particularly controversial, is that there is a friendship between wise men even when the persons in question do not know each other. The implication seems to be that the friendship of the wise is less a particular, individualized affection between close sages, but that the relation holds for all who, as it were, share in logos. Indeed, the philosophers Augustine discusses in De civitate Dei seem to be showing Stoic leanings in this respect, for he writes:

“And ‘friends’ here may mean those in the same house, such as a man’s wife or children, or any other members of the household; or it can mean all those in the place where a man has his home,

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84 D.L. 7.32-33 in Inwood and Gerson, The Stoics Reader.
85 Cicero, De natura deorum, 1.122. Trans. P.G. Walsh.
86 This sort of invisible community of the wise brings to mind much of the language of the universal Catholic church, which itself inspired Donne to write in the seventeenth meditation from the Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions: “. . . any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde” (446).
a city, for example, and a man’s friends are thus his fellow-citizens; or it can extend to the whole world, and include the nations with whom a man is joined by membership of the human society; or even to the whole universe, ‘heaven and earth’ as we term it, and to those whom the philosophers call gods, whom they hold to be a wise man’s friends—our familiar name for them is ‘angels.’”

Graver thinks the more radical Stoic view—that somehow all the wise are actually friends with one another at any given moment—is the earlier one. She thinks that in the Stobean account the relation is more plausible. It states that the wise stand in a certain relation with each other so that they are potential friends. They are, in effect, disposed to be friends with one another, were they to be in close proximity. In any case, this still might seem to some to be wanting. And it will be the last thing we discuss before we come to Cicero’s view.

A desired feature for many people for a theory of friendship is that it is particular enough so that someone with the same descriptive features as my friend cannot simply replace my friend were he to pass away or leave me. This I shall call the particularism requirement, and I think it has a succinct and convincing statement in Aristotle’s *Politics*: “Of the two qualities which chiefly inspire regard and affection—that a thing is your own and that it is precious [i.e., unique]—neither can exist in such a state as this [i.e., Plato’s republic, where the wives are held in common].”

Caught between these two traditions we find Cicero. What I believe we shall see in Cicero’s view is a unique take on friendship which combines an important element from the Stoic view (though it seems importantly different) with a general Peripatetic sensibility.

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Cicero’s Theory of Friendship: A Realized Ideal

As I have already said, the Laelius de amicitia is in many ways a hybrid work. Through the dialogue one can see Stoic and Peripatetic elements creeping in at various points, and so one must be careful to keep it all separate. But, for the sake of space, I shall quickly list the main claims from the De amicitia, that we then may discuss them. First I would like to show how they are importantly similar to the Stoic view and then I shall endeavor to show how they are importantly different.

Cicero seems to come closest to providing a definition for friendship in the very first sentence of chapter VI of the dialogue: “For friendship is in fact nothing other than a community of views on all matters human and divine, together with goodwill (benevolentia) and affection (caritate)…” What might Cicero mean here? It seems that he means that friendship is something shared only between those two people who have consensio on certain relevant matters both “human and divine.” This consensio might be spelled out in terms of a total, deep agreement between the two persons on the important facts of life. It is, perhaps, similar to the “concord” discussed by Aristotle in E.N. IX. 6. But it seems deeper than that. From how Cicero goes on to describe the vera et perfecta friendship, it appears that the consensio shared is total and wide-ranging. It might be important not that the two friends share an uninvolved

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89 I shall leave out an extensive overview of the setting and the main action of the De amicitia for the sake of length. I also will be leaving out any extensive discussion of the form of the work or the progression of the arguments. For the sake of space I shall have to consider some of Cicero’s points painfully divorced from their context. As far as dramatic setting is concerned, all that is essential to know is that Laelius, the principal speaker, is asked by two other interlocutors to provide his thoughts on friendship, and he does so in treatise-like fashion. We may safely assume that Cicero, even if he did not agree fully with Laelius, had strong “Laelian” leanings.

“agreement” on matters of scientia, but that they share sapientia, a truly remarkable kind of coherent harmony between each other’s ends. This seems to be the case at any rate when Cicero later writes:

“Therefore, these are the limits [also “goals,” “ends”] (his finibus) which I think ought to be observed, namely: when the characters of friends are blameless, then there should be between them complete harmony of opinions and inclinations in everything without any exception…”

Now this, taken by itself, can sound awfully Stoic. This community of all things shared between the two friends without exception may sound like the theoretical sort of unity described earlier between the Stoic sages of the world and the other rational beings in the universe. And, indeed, it may sound very similar to another passage we have from the Stobean account: “They say that friendship exists only among the wise since it is only among them that there is a concord about the [practical] matters of life; and concord is a knowledge of common goods.”

Similarly, we have from the account of Diogenes Laërtius: “They [the Stoics] say that friendship exists only among the virtuous, on account of their similarity. They describe friendship as a certain sharing of life’s wherewithal, since we treat our friends as we treat ourselves.”

The similarity between these passages and Cicero’s definition shows that some influence was exerted on Cicero from these sorts of analyses of friendship. But these passages may lead us to believe that Cicero’s definition is more Stoic than he means for it to be. For we mustn’t forget what Cicero attached to the end of his definition. It is a qualification which allows Cicero to reintroduce his Peripatetic leanings.

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91 His igitur finibus utendum arbitror, ut cum emendati mores amicorum sint, tum sit inter eos omnium rerum, consiliorum, voluntatum sine ulla exceptione communitas. Cicero, De amicitia, XVII. 61. Trans. Falconer.
92 Stobaeus, Anthology, 2.7.11m. Trans. Inwood and Gerson, 147.
To remind the reader of the qualification: Cicero says that friendship is, as we have said, a community of opinion, a total agreement on important matters human and divine between two people, and feelings of benevolence (benevolentia) and fondness (caritas) shared between the two. This is critically important. Cicero wants to emphasize that it is not only that the wise men, were they in proximity to one another, would feel affection, but that there is a fondness shared between them which is particular. Cicero says of this caritas:

“However, the best way to realise the power of friendship is to understand this, that out of the infinitely large association of the human race, which nature itself has brought together, friendship is something so concentrated and brought down into a narrow space, that every instance of real affection (omnis caritas) exists either between two people, or among a small number.”94

Benevolentia (goodwill) has a role to play as well, but at times it seems that Cicero thinks that benevolentia simply functions as the kind of principle of gregariousness which unites humanity. That is, it explains why people live in societies, why they generally get along, and why they generally wish to do good for one another. Cicero writes: “But if the bond of goodwill (benevolentia) be removed from the world, no house or city will be able to stand, nor even will the tilling of the land continue.”95

It seems that when Cicero is making the distinction between the familiarites sapientum (companionships of the wise) and vulgares amicitiae (vulgar friendships), the distinguishing feature is the consensio previously mentioned.96 He seems to think that goodwill and fondness exist between the vulgar (as he has just shown that it is requisite for the very functioning of society at all) just as they do between the wise, but that these people will fail to exhibit anything

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95 Quodsi exemeris ex rerum natura benevolentiae iunctionem, nec domus ulla nec urbs stare poterit, nec agri quidem cultus permanebit. Cicero, De amicitia, 7.23. Trans. Powell.
96 He makes the distinction at XXI.76 and other places.
close to *consensio*. Nevertheless, *benevolentia* and *caritas* are importantly *necessary* for friendship, though, in conjunction, they are not *sufficient* for it. Cicero is clear that for true friendship there must be a deep, total accord, a harmony shared between two good people—i.e., *consensio*.

What we have seen, I think, is the way in which Cicero hopes to carefully incorporate the Stoic ideal of friendship—shared only between the wise and involving a remarkable kind of harmoniousness—while adding in the affections and closeness that are nearly universally recognized to be requisite for a friendship to exist between two *human beings*. Indeed, this is something which sets Cicero apart from the Stoics from the very outset of his discussion.

He writes that, unlike the Stoics, he believes that there *have* been good men. They are the sorts of men that Cicero likes to write about: the great virtuous Roman statesmen of old. He first mentions Gaius Fabricius, Marcus Curius, and Titus Coruncanius at *De am.* 5.18. He then goes on to list some of the most famous and illustrious families in the Old Republic: the Pauli, the Scipios, the Catos, the Phili, the Gali.

Cicero wants to write about friendship between *them*—actual, live good men—rather than the theoretical sages invented by the Stoics. At this point in the dialogue, the *sub*-text of the conversation in the *De am.* rises to the surface. For the conversation between Laelius, Fannius, and Scaevola is *about* the ideal sort of friendship shared between Laelius and Scipio and is precipitated by the latter’s passing. Using dialogical elements, Cicero means to emphasize to the reader the *possibility* of the sort of friendship he means to advocate for—unlike the, ultimately, otherworldly friendship advocated for by the Stoics.

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97 *De amicitia*, 5.18.
98 *De am.* 5.21.
Ideal Friendships in History

Cicero’s view in the *De amicitia* amounts to something more than a hasty mingling of Stoic and Peripatetic theories of friendship. He deftly uses from both what suit his purposes and crafts a hybrid theory of friendship that emphasizes the “human” elements of friendship—the closeness, affection, and love shared between the two persons—while also retaining the sort of mystical, divine kinship possessed by two people who share a complete intellectual overlap on all the matters most important in life, those matters which are necessary for *sapientia*.

By particularizing a Stoic-inspired true friendship to certain eminent friendships in history between “great men”⁹⁹, we see that Cicero desires not only to eulogize the past but also wishes to *apotheosize* the very best instances of friendship between people who not only feel great degrees of affection, love, and caring toward another—and happen to live close to one another—but who also share a deep, intellectual sort of kinship as well. This sort of accord is the most attractive, unique feature offered by the Stoic accounts, and Cicero adapts it appropriately to his own view.

CHAPTER 3:

SCIPIO’S ROME AND CRITIAS’S ATHENS: IDEAL RETROSPECTIVE UTOPIAS IN CICERO AND PLATO

Chapter precis

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⁹⁹ As we’ve seen in *De am. 5*. This theme resonates throughout the entire dialogue, however.
In Cicero’s dialogue the *De republica* (*On the Republic*), the principal speaker, Scipio Aemilianus, says that he resolutely declares (*sic enim decerno, sic sentio, sic adfirmo* “I hold, maintain, and declare”) that no other constitution is in history comparable to that of the ancient Roman Republic, and that he will use it as an example (*exemplum*) in his philosophical discourse on the ideal state (*De rep.* 1.70). These few words have sustained decades of continued controversy among scholars, especially since the rediscovery of a manuscript of the *De republica* in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, both experts and casual readers alike have found fault in Cicero’s supposed “unthinking nostalgia” (to use J.G.F. Powell’s phrase)—a sort of unphilosophical, unfounded confidence in the institutions, constitution, and heroes of ancient Rome.

In this chapter, I defend a new reading of Cicero’s middle period dialogues on political philosophy, the *De republica* (*On the Republic*) and the *De legibus* (*On the Laws*), on which Cicero is guilty of no such glaring intellectual oversight. I argue that Cicero’s *Republic-Laws* set forth a sophisticated ideal political theory in the philosophical tradition of Plato and Polybius in both form and content—and in a more complete sense than has been previously supposed. Indeed, while there has been a trend recently of evaluating Cicero’s *Republic* negatively side by side with Plato’s own dialogue (which is the namesake and primary influence of Cicero’s), in this chapter I point to strong textual evidence linking Cicero’s projects in the *De republica* and *De legibus* with Plato’s in the *Timaeus-Critias*, shedding new light on an important and underappreciated feature of both philosophers’ political philosophy.

I argue that Cicero’s *Republic-Laws* fit into a broader tradition in ancient political philosophy: one which combines a *retrospective* methodology (in opposition to a hasty characterization of Socrates’ “prospective” method in Plato’s *Republic*) with nevertheless *ideal* political theorizing. That for such prominent thinkers of antiquity this combination apparently elicited little confusion brings exciting prospects for historical and contemporary debates on ideal theory in political philosophy.
Plan for this chapter

I will begin this chapter with an outline on Cicero’s treatment of political philosophy in his *De republica* (*On the Republic*) and *De legibus* (*On the Laws*) (together, *Republic-Laws*). The first few sections (1-2) of this chapter will introduce the method of ideal retrospective political
philosophy and the structure and subject matter of the *De republica* and *De legibus*. The second part of my chapter (section 3) will consist in an overview of this project, in which I will propose a new interpretive approach to the *Republic-Laws* and demonstrate, in brief, the strongest evidence for it across both texts.

This approach, stated in barest sketch, is to treat the *Republic-Laws* as companion dialogues which, through the statements of their characters, set forth the makings of a retrospective approach to ideal political theory, in pointed contrast to Plato’s own prospective ideal political theory, as adopted by Socrates and the Athenian in his own *Republic* and *Laws*, respectively. Cicero’s characters in the *Republic-Laws* make use of a new kind of model for ideal political theorizing—namely, the constitution, laws, and statesmen of ancient republican Rome. This approach is evidenced especially, I argue, by the method Cicero himself adopts in structuring the dialogues the way he has and by the dialogue participants’ own statements on method (especially in Books 1 and 2 of the *De republica*).

At the end of this prospectus I hope to have laid the groundwork for a new interpretive schema for Cicero’s middle period political philosophy and have presented a cohesive plan for a viable project on Cicero’s *Republic-Laws*. There, in conclusion to this chapter, I will discuss further what directions I think I could take in connecting the retrospective approach of the *Republic-Laws* with later attempts at retrospective political theory, especially those put forth by Enlightenment thinkers. I think Cicero’s *Republic-Laws* might be a natural ancient companion to

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100 I will mention later my reasons for adopting a similar approach to attributing Cicero’s own view to any of his characters in his dialogue as to Plato in his dialogues in a moment.
101 See SCHMIDT 2001 in Powell’s *Cicero* Supplement (BICS) for a view on how the two dialogues were meant to form a more cohesive, ambitious whole and their genesis.
some of those authors, and a comparison of the two approaches an especially fruitful topic for further study.

**Introduction. Motivation for the present chapter.**

Recent renewed scholarly interest in the philosophical work of the Roman politician, jurist, and philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero has largely focused on the numerous titles which make up his so-called “encyclopedia” of philosophy, a dazzling collection of hastily composed dialogues and treatises on a variety of philosophical topics, dating from the last few years of Cicero’s life, a period (46-44 B.C.) in which he turned to philosophy as a kind of intellectual therapy in his unhappy, forced political retirement. ¹⁰²

Though I owe a great deal to the recent wealth of scholarship on this period in Cicero’s writing life, I want to write, instead, on two less studied works on political philosophy that Cicero wrote earlier in his middle age, the *De Republica* and *De Legibus*—his *Republic* and *Laws*—inspired by, and, in part, in response to, Plato’s own two famous dialogues. My motivation for this is broadly fourfold.

First, the *De republica* and *De legibus* have, on the whole, been comparatively understudied. Owing to the fragmentary nature of both works which has led to numerous controversies in interpretation and longstanding questions regarding the overall structure and subject matter of both books, ¹⁰³ fewer writers have attempted to approach the *Republic-Laws* as part of a cohesive project on Cicero’s part. I endeavor to help fill the gap in this respect. ¹⁰⁴

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¹⁰³ See Rawson (1973) for a good summary of the debate around dating.
¹⁰⁴ Though I am not alone. A recent book, *Cicero on Politics and the Limits of Reason: The Republic and the Laws* (2013), by Jed Atkins, treads much of the same ground. In it, Atkins presents a wide-ranging and careful study of both dialogues and presents what he takes to be the unified aim of the two works. In short, he takes the retrospective elements of the dialogues to be evidence of pragmatic moves on Cicero’s
Second, speaking solely in terms of treatment and page length, together the *De republica* and *De legibus* give us Cicero’s fullest statement on the subject of political philosophy. Indeed, together they contain some of Cicero’s most original and nuanced thinking on philosophy, history, politics, and their interrelation. While later treatises like the *De officiis* (*On Duties*) and *De amicitia* (*On Friendship*) have obvious political implications, none gives a sustained discussion of political philosophy as either the *De republica* or *De legibus* does.\(^{105}\)

Third, to speak for a moment solely from a perspective of historical interest, the *De republica* and *De legibus* could also very well have been the first treatment of their kind on their respective subjects in Latin, and thus the first works on political philosophy in the Western tradition not in Greek.\(^{106}\) This, in addition to their being works by a major Latin philosophical author, pitched directly in response to Plato, make them obvious candidates for further study in the history of philosophy.

Lastly, and, to my mind, most important, they put forth a unique approach to political philosophy—retrospective and ideal, as stated above—which has so far been underappreciated, having been only touched on by a few commentators thus far. It is this approach which I will now attempt to outline in this prospectus.

But, to do this, I think I will first have to provide necessary background on Cicero’s *Republic-Laws* as a preliminary to my discussion of the method for retrospective ideal political theory as presented by Cicero’s characters in the dialogues.

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\(^{105}\) Contra Long in his metaphorical moment: “The *De officiis*, not the *De republica*, is Cicero’s *Republic*” (SEP “Ancient political philosophy”, ref. in Long, 1995). The scope of Cicero’s writing on government and politics in the *DRP* far exceeds that of the *De officiis*.

\(^{106}\) See Rawson in *Cicero: A Portrait*. 

In this section I will give a short summary of both the general structure and contents of both the *De re publica* and *De legibus*, as I think some preliminary remarks in this regard will help lay the groundwork for my interpretive approach to be outlined in the next section (3). In my dissertation itself I plan to devote two chapters to my provisional structuring of the books and fragments of the *De re publica* and the *De legibus* (the general structure of which is less controversial), as I think my approach hinges on consideration of the entirety of both works.

Here, on the other hand, I will not defend an in-depth reading, but instead discuss contents of the *Republic-Laws* relevant to my overview of retrospective ideal political philosophy in section 3. I will start with the *De re publica* and continue on to the *De legibus*.

The *De Republica*, or, *On the Republic* (also, *On the State, On the Public Affair, On Government, On the Constitution*)\(^{107}\), is a dialogue in six books on political philosophy, inspired by, and, indeed, sharing a title with, Plato’s *Republic*.\(^{108}\) As will be seen from the preliminary listing of the topics of Cicero’s *De re publica* below, the work, like Plato’s *Republic*, is wide-ranging and about many things.\(^{109}\) In further similarity to Plato’s *Republic*, the discussion of

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\(^{107}\) Rawson 1973: “*De re publica*” untranslatable, but best approximation for its two usages: “On the State and Society.”

\(^{108}\) Cicero’s Latin translation of Plato’s Greek treatise, *Politeia*, gives us the traditional title of Republic for Plato’s work.

\(^{109}\) This is simply to say that in the same way it would be a mistake to say Plato’s *Republic* is solely about the education of the philosopher-king or about the Callipolis, so is it mistaken to claim, owing to the poor state of the text in certain portions of the *De re publica*, that it is solely about the ideal form of government exemplified by the Roman Republic (because of the content of the comparatively better preserved books 1 and 2). This, I think, has been the unfortunate mistake of many previous interpreters. While I also spend more time on Cicero’s discussion of the ideal form of government and the Roman state, I do so, I think, for good reason: Marcus (his possible mouthpiece in the *De legibus*, draws repeated attention to the principal importance of the discussion of state and laws, [refs.]).
these questions takes the form of a (somewhat) organic question-and-answer philosophical
dialogue over the course of six books.

The *De republica* takes the form of a conversation between Scipio Aemilianus Africanus
(the younger Scipio), a famous Roman politician and general and victor over Carthage in the
Third Punic War, and other members of the so-called “Scipionic Circle,” most notably his trusted
confidant, Laelius. The dialogue is broken at three points, at the beginning of every two
books, where Cicero writes a preface in his own voice. These prefaces stand as a Ciceronian
innovation to the Platonic dialogue form, which serve as his main literary influence in the
dialogues.

As mentioned above, it is a work that we have in fragmentary form, and what is extant
makes up a little over a third of the original text. Before 1821, only the excerpted *Somnium
Scipionis* (“Dream of Scipio”) from Book 6 and scattered fragments—especially in the work of
Nonnius and Augustine—survived. But in that year Angelo Mai, the head Vatican librarian,
discovered large sections of Books 1 and 2 (and to a lesser extent potions of Books 3, 4, and 5)
on a medieval palimpsest, allowing us to get a much clearer picture of the work.

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110 The Scipionic Circle was a supposed group of prominent, cultured Roman politicians—associated, as
the name suggests, with Scipio Aemilianus. The group also supposedly included the Greek thinkers
Panaetius and Polybius, the latter of whom was a Greek historian whose *Histories* advanced a prominent
defense of the so-called “mixed” constitution and sought to explain the rise of Rome in the Mediterranean
world. While scholarly consensus largely discounts the idea of an actual Scipionic Circle, the fictitious
one figures heavily in Cicero’s setting for the dialogue. Indeed, at *De rep.* 4.3, Polybius is mentioned as a
“guest” to the conversation, and at 1.34 Laelius mentions his and Scipio’s spirited discussions with
Polybius and Panaetius on current Greek theory in point of contrast to their own discussion in the *De rep.*
(For details on the traditional view of the Circle, see the *OCD* entries “Scipio Aemilianus Africanus
Numantinus” and “Scipionic Circle” [816-817].)

111 Though, as I shall go on to note, it seems that Plato is almost certainly not his only literary inspiration
in writing the *De republica* and *De legibus*. Heraclides of Pontus and Demetrius of Phalerum (the latter
mentioned by Cicero himself in *De leg. xx*) appear to be strong influences for Cicero writing in the
dialogue genre.
But, to continue on with the subject matter of the *De re publica*. It is a work ordered around certain central questions concerning good governance and its relation to the healthy, happy lives of both citizens and politicians within a state (*res publica, civitas*). These questions turn out to be (I list them in the order in which they are treated in the text, and with corresponding book number): What is the best form of government (*optimus status civitatis, constitutio, forma rei publicae*) (Book 1)? How has the actual state (*res publica*) of Rome embodied this form of government in both its origins (*origines*) and its later era of constitutional maturity (Book 2)? Is injustice required for a city to be a city, or, instead, is justice required (Book 3)? What is good education and what role do Roman custom and tradition have to play in it (Book 4)? Who is the ideal statesman (*prudens, rector rei publicae*) and how is he educated (Book 5)? How will he lead and why will he enter politics at all (Book 5)? And, lastly, how will he respond to a political crisis, and will he be rewarded for his service (Book 6, *Somnium Scipionis*)?

Famously, after Book 1’s initial discussion of the ideal constitution—in which it is agreed that the mixed constitution, sharing in monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy is best—Scipio declares that the ancient Roman Republic exhibits this ideal form of government. Book 2 concerns just how the Roman Republic grew into its ideal constitutional arrangement—careful and prolonged analysis of Roman history and institutions up to that point is offered. Book 3 offers something of a thematic break—as it seems to have contained a more or less independent discussion of justice and injustice, in Carneadean style—but discussion of Roman history and social customs seemed to have been resumed in Book 4. Books 5 and 6 transition from discussion of the *res publica* to the *rector rei publicae*—his education, what he would do in a crisis, and his apotheosis.
I shall have reason to discuss some of the answers to these questions in more detail in section 3. As seen above, we are fortunate to have enough evidence to develop some sort of cohesive idea of the work—even if conjectural. Thus, in my dissertation I will present a possible structuring of the entire work—drawing on all available evidence—which aims to make sense of the contents of the *De re publica* in terms of structure, plan, and overarching themes. As is to be expected, this will consist in large part in showing how the retrospective approach to ideal political theory is followed throughout the work and how the *De re publica* anticipates and is confirmed by the subject matter of the *De legibus*.

But, to continue with the present task, I will now give a brief summary of the contents and structure of the *De legibus*. The *De legibus* (or, *On the Laws*) was, we think, written sometime later than the *De re publica*, though the precise date for the work is controversial. It, too, is written in the dialogue form, but without the attendant Ciceronian prefaces. Rather, as with some of Cicero’s other dialogues, characters based on Cicero himself and his friends populate the *De legibus*. The dialogue participants are Marcus (i.e., Marcus Tullius Cicero), his brother Quintus, and his dear friend, Atticus. Together they undertake a discussion to legislate for the best constitution discussed in the *De re publica*, and they do so, broadly, in two parts.

In the first part, Marcus puts forth a theoretical account of the nature of law—syncretic by design, so as to appease both the Academic and Stoic schools—and identifies law with universal right reason, emphasizing too, in agreement with Stoic doctrine, mankind’s part in a divinely ordered plan (1.23, 42). A universal justice underlies true, good laws which issue from

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112 Some place it as early as 52, some as late as the “encyclopedic” period, i.e., around 46. The *De re* is thought to have been written around 54.
113 Atticus says that they are now legislating for the previously discussed best state at *De leg.* 1.15, and Marcus does so at 1.20 and 2.14.
114 *De leg.* 1.37-38.
nature, and injustice arises from the perversions of particular, misguided peoples (1.43-44).

Later, echoes of Stoic cosmopolitanism populate the concluding chapters of Book 1, where the mind’s ascent to a realm of universal order—shared with the gods—is described; again, from this place of a universal, communal wisdom, where our true nature resides, issue true law and rules of conduct amongst human beings (1.61-63).

Further independent theoretical discussion along these lines follows at the beginning of Book 2, but then the discussion between Marcus, Quintus, and Atticus changes. Marcus begins to give positive pronouncements on the law for the ideal constitution described in the *De rerum natura*, and what follows are laws concerning religious rites and institutions (Book 2) and the system of magistrates (Book 3) that closely mirror ancient republican Rome’s existing institutions. Similar to how we saw the Roman constitution serving as *exemplum* of the ideal constitution in Books 1 and 2 of the *De rerum natura*, so do we now see the laws themselves of the Roman *res publica* serving as *exempla* of ideal natural law in the *De legibus*.

3. The method for retrospective ideal political philosophy in *Republic-Laws*.

In this section I will introduce and briefly discuss what I take to be the method for ideal retrospective political philosophy in Cicero’s *Republic-Laws*. As stated above, despite the natural pairing of the two texts, there have been few attempts to bring the *Republic-Laws* together into a single, cohesive project on political philosophy. Showing that they both follow a shared methodology, I think, would go a long way in resolving interpretive puzzles surrounding the dialogues’ intended aims and impact. On my view, it is not simply that this shared methodology finds clear, independent expression in each text, but that together the two, in their
fragmentary state, complement one another, and the *De legibus*, in a sense, fills out the project introduced in the *De republica*.\textsuperscript{115}

While, owing to the nature and length of this prospectus, I cannot go on into exacting detail on how I think this method is borne out through the entirety of the two dialogues, I would like to briefly highlight a few passages in *De republica* 1 and 2 where I think we have the clearest statements of this retrospective ideal approach for political philosophy. After I have presented and briefly discussed these passages, I will note what work needs to be done in my dissertation to fully treat the topic.

At this point we come to the first of the central programmatic passages in *DRP* 1 and 2 that I will consider. At the end of Book 1, Scipio tells Laelius and the other dialogue participants that, as a result of their conclusions from the preceding philosophical discussion on the three simple forms of government in Book 1, he thinks the mixed constitution is the best form of government. We might expect Scipio to continue his discussion and further elaborate on why he thinks the mixed constitution is best, but, instead, at this point in the dialogue, he stops himself. He first reveals that he thinks he knows of an example of state which embodies the best form of government—which, as he will say resolutely, Rome does—and then starts to explain how he will use this fact to help him adequately accomplish the task Laelius set out for him in Book 1.

Scipio says:

However, I’m afraid that you, Laelius, and you, my kind and learned friends, may get the impression that in talking like this I am setting myself up as a preacher or a teacher instead of collaborating with you in a joint inquiry. So I shall move on to matters which are familiar to everyone, and which indeed we have long been working towards. I hold, maintain, and declare

\textsuperscript{115} Indeed, I think Cicero’s explicit references to this effect in the *De legibus* speak to this complementing.
(sic decerno, sic sentio, sic adfirmo) that no form of government (nullam omnium rerum publicarum) is comparable in its structure (constitutione), its assignment of functions (discriptione), or its discipline (disciplina), to the one which our fathers (patres) received from their forebears and have handed down to us. So, if you approve (because you wanted me to talk on a subject which you yourselves knew well), I shall describe its nature and at the same time demonstrate its superiority. Then, after setting up our constitution (nostra re publica) as a model (exemplum), I shall use it as a point of reference, as best as I can, in all I have to say about the best possible state (de optimo civitatis statu). If I can keep this aim in view and bring it to a conclusion, I shall have amply fulfilled, I think, the task which Laelius assigned me (De rep. 1.70).

While we are given much of the general idea of a retrospective ideal political philosophy here, further confirmation is given as we continue on in Book 2, when Scipio begins his long historical and anthropological analysis of the Roman people.

It is here where I think Cicero, through Scipio and Laelius, starts to make his stance with respect to Greek, and especially Platonic, approaches to ideal political theory more clear. He thinks that they, ultimately, differ from his own approach with respect to methodology. Namely, they do not set out a clear example or model of an ideal state which has existed in fact to ground their discourse (though, in the case of Plato, a clear model is used—it just happens to be a future city, to-be-hoped-for). Contrary to how many other commentators have approached the De Republica, it is in this respect that Scipio and Laelius remark on the uniqueness of their discussion over Greek ones.\(^\text{116}\) To show this, I will start with a discussion of a passage from

\(^{116}\) Cp. De rep. 1.36 where Scipio says that he does not seek to show his opinions are better than previous Greek ones.
Scipio’s introduction to his historical discourse and then discuss at greater length a passage from Laelius’ summary of Scipio’s method, where I think we see it best explained.

Scipio begins his retelling of the history of the Roman people by first mentioning Cato the Elder, a famous Roman senator and general, who wrote a work on Rome’s foundation and the history of the towns of Italy called Origins (Origines). Scipio says:

Accordingly in my discourse I shall go back, as Cato used to do, to the “origin” of the Roman people (I gladly borrow his actual word). Moreover, it will be easier to carry out my plan if I describe for you the birth, growth, and maturity of our state (nascentem . . . crescentem . . . adultam), which eventually became so firm and strong (firmam atque robustam), than if I deal with some imaginary community (quam si mihi [rem publicam] aliquam . . . finxero), as Socrates does in Plato (apud Platonem Socrates) (2.2-3).

Here we have the first explicit mention that Cicero gives us through Scipio that the method he means to assume in the De Republica is in contrast to Plato or any other Greek philosopher. He notes that his discourse on the ideal state will be better served by interludes on Roman history and cultural development—following a narrative course of birth, adolescence, and maturity in the Roman state—than if he restricts his discussion to an “imaginary community” (Rudd’s loose translation) as Socrates does in Plato’s Republic. This point of contrast is made even more clear in the comments Laelius delivers later in Book 2, which we will consider now.

It is at this point that we find the fullest statement of Cicero’s method in the De republica, delivered through Laelius in response to Scipio.

Scipio begins:

You appreciate, then, don’t you, that it was thanks to the good sense (consilio) of one man [Romulus] not only that a new people came into being but that, when he departed, it was not a baby crying it its cradle, but rather a youth on the verge of manhood.
Laelius: Yes, we are aware of that, and also of the fact that at the outset you are using a novel method of exposition [nova ratione] which is not to be found in any Greek treatise (in Graecorum libris). The doyen [princeps] of writers [Plato] on this theme chose a stretch of virgin territory (aream . .. praeclaram) where he could build a state to his own specifications (arbitratu suo). It was a remarkable state no doubt, but quite out of touch with men’s lives and habits (. . . sed a vita hominum abhorrentem et moribus). His successors have presented their opinions about types and systems of political organization without reference to any definite model or form of constitution (sine ullo certo exemplari formaque rei publicae). It looks to me as if you intend to do both. For [1] in your opening remarks you prefer to attribute your discoveries to others rather than, like Plato’s Socrates, to claim them for yourself; [2] in talking about the site of the city you discuss in theoretical terms [ad rationem] what Romulus did by chance or necessity; and [3] instead of wandering from one state to another you confine your discussion to a single example. So carry on as you have begun. As you work your way through the other kings I fancy I can foresee the emergence of a fully-fledged state (perfectam rem publicam) (2.21-22).

Here, as I have alluded to already, we have the retrospective ideal method for political philosophy laid out in its clearest expression.

The method Laelius notes in Scipio’s speech, in short, is a sort of inversion of the more familiar Platonic project of ideal political philosophy: he suggests that, in contrast to Plato’s prospective method, which assumes an imagined scenario of a new city’s founding on an unoccupied tract of land by the dialogue participants (who turn out to be a very specialized set of people, namely, philosopher-founders), the philosophical treatment upon which they’ve embarked is instead at least in part retrospective. As Socrates does in Plato’s Republic, Scipio and Laelius want dialectical political philosophy that is informed by a model (whether of the city, constitution, statesman, or laws). But rather than assuming, as I think many do, that this
model is to be sought in a distant, hoped-for future, Laelius notes that Scipio has proposed a new kind of model for their philosophical treatment: namely, one preserved in history.

The De legibus, I think, gives us a similar picture. Earlier discussion in the dialogue is of a familiar sort of abstracted, theoretical discourse on natural law. Then, as the dialogue shifts into actual pronouncements on law, something closely resembling existing Roman legal code is offered. While in the case of the De legibus we have less in the way of elegant summaries of the method employed in the De republica, the method is exhibited nevertheless, I think, in its treatment of topics and this sudden transition from natural law into its model—namely, the Roman laws for the Roman republic in its constitutional maturity.

There are limitations to the picture I’ve just presented in the De republica and De legibus. In my dissertation I will need to make the connection between the method I’ve sketched here and the fragments of the later books more clear. While the account of social customs and education in Book 4 might fit naturally within the schema I’ve proposed—of Cicero’s using a backward-looking model to complement his theory throughout the De republica—much of what remains of Book 5 and 6 must be better explained in my account. In my dissertation I hope to show how discussion of the statesman may in fact fit in with the retrospective method. In fact, Cicero’s choice in setting and styling for the dialogues may be strong evidence in favor of the retrospective approach in this regard—i.e., as model constitutions and laws are exemplified by the Roman state, so too perhaps are the very characters themselves made to exemplify ideal statesmanship in their philosophical discussion on the republic and laws.

With the basics of the ideal retrospective approach now outlined, I would like to transition to my concluding section, where I would like to highlight a few possible historical analogues to Cicero’s Republic-Laws in another period.
Retrospective ideal political philosophy and the Enlightenment; Retrospective ideal political philosophy and Hegel

While, as I have said earlier, something like the prospective approach to ideal political philosophy is quite common, and, I think, assumed by some, a retrospective approach is not isolated to Cicero’s *Republic-Laws* by any means. I am especially drawn to strong parallels between the method we find in the *Republic-Laws* and in the work of certain Enlightenment thinkers—namely, Montesquieu, Vico, and Burke.\(^{117}\)

I begin with Montesquieu. Certain strong resemblances between the work of Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of the Laws* and Cicero’s *De legibus* have been noted, if not given full exposition. It has been remarked that Montesquieu’s discussion of natural law closely follows Cicero’s in the *De legibus*, and further similarities are likely.\(^{118}\) Further, Cicero figures prominently in Montesquieu’s *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline*. If Montesquieu adopts something like that one given expression in Cicero’s *Republic-Laws*, inclusion of Montesquieu in my dissertation could be very beneficial.

Vico’s *New Science* presents an intriguing possibility for an Enlightenment analogue to Cicero’s *Republic-Laws*. Vico stands at the beginning of the Enlightenment tradition, and his *New Science* makes liberal use of Greek and Roman history to develop a universal science of politics. There may be some indirect resemblance between the anthropological analysis of *De rep. 2* and Vico’s *New Science* which could prove useful.

\(^{117}\) It should be noted that any influence will largely be *indirect*, as the *De republica* was largely lost in the eighteenth century, and the *De legibus* not widely read.

\(^{118}\) See, especially, MacKendrick, 276-278.
Lastly, Edmund Burke has often been described as a modern analogue to Cicero—both in
details of his career and in his published work.\textsuperscript{119} The \textit{Reflections on the Revolution in France}
have something of the flavor of Cicero’s \textit{Republic-Laws}—an attentiveness to history, an
underlying trust in institutions and tradition—but whether Burke’s \textit{Reflections} and Cicero’s
\textit{Republic-Laws} work on the same methodology in any substantive sense would, again, I think, be
a good question for a further study.

In this chapter I would like to pursue these connections further, and see whether Cicero’s
\textit{Republic-Laws} might be a natural ancient analogue to retrospective ideal political philosophy in
the Enlightenment era. I think this would not be solely of historical interest, but would perhaps
help in illuminating the approach within both groups of thinkers.

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In this chapter I outlined a plan for my discussion of Cicero’s treatment of political philosophy in
the \textit{Republic-Laws}. Contrary to the findings of previous commentators, I argue that the
\textit{Republic-Laws} differ from other ancient treatments not primarily in theory, but in approach or
methodology. In the \textit{Republic-Laws}, I think, Cicero sets out an outline for a retrospective, and
nevertheless ideal, approach for political philosophy. This is borne out in both statements on
method in the \textit{De republica} (especially books 1 and 2) and \textit{De legibus}, and in the sequence of
contents of both works. In my dissertation I hope to defend this reading at greater length and
sophistication. At the end of this chapter I pointed to possible later figures I could discuss in my
dissertation to better situate Cicero’s \textit{Republic-Laws} within a broader retrospective tradition in
ideal political theory.

\textsuperscript{119} Again, see MacKendrick, 281-283.
Scipio’s Retrospective Utopia in the *De republica*

Recent scholarly literature on Cicero’s philosophical writings has largely focused on those many works which Cicero wrote near the end of his life, between the years of 46 and 43 B.C., a period, for him, characterized by a coupling of incredible philosophical and literary output and intense personal despair and professional ruin, and for Rome, by Caesar’s assumption of the perpetual dictatorship and the oncoming of a second devastating civil war.\(^{120}\) I want to talk about a work on political philosophy that Cicero instead wrote earlier in his middle age, the *De Republica*, composed, according to one of Cicero’s own notes, when he “held the rudder of the state” as consul in the midst of (the Catilinarian constitutional) crisis in 63 B.C.\(^{121}\) My reason for this is not solely dramatic.\(^{122}\) The *De Republica* is Cicero’s fullest statement on the subject of political philosophy.\(^{123}\) It could also very well have been the first treatment of its kind on the subject in Latin, and thus the first work on political philosophy in the Western tradition not in Greek.\(^{124}\) It


\(^{121}\) *Sex de re publica, quos tum scripsimus cum gubernacula rei publicae tenebamus* (*De Divin.* 2.3). This passage is also quoted in Clinton Keyes’ introduction to his translation of the *De Republica* and the translation used here is his (2). Scholarly consensus dates the actual composition and publication of the *De Republica* a good deal later, to between 54 and 51 (publication in 51), based on correspondence between Cicero, his brother Quintus, and Atticus in the *Epistulae* (give citations). While I do not mean to present an argument here for an earlier dating, Cicero’s comment in the *De Divinatione* is striking and should at least open us up to the possibility that Cicero had drafted some of the *DRP* during his consulship (cf. J.P. Richarz, *De politicorum Ciceronis librorum tempore natali* [Würzburg, 1829], cited in Keyes 2).

\(^{122}\) Though the *De Republica* is one of the few great works on political philosophy written by a powerful politician in his prime.

\(^{123}\) Contra Long in his metaphorical moment: “The *De officiis*, not the *De republica*, is Cicero’s *Republic*” (SEP “Ancient political philosophy”, ref. in Long, 1995). The scope of Cicero’s writing on government and politics in the *DRP* far exceeds that of the *De officiis*.

\(^{124}\) See Rawson in *Cicero: A Portrait* (ref).
contains some of Cicero’s most original and nuanced thinking on philosophy, history, and politics, and puts forth a unique approach to ideal political theory, which, to my mind, has so far been underappreciated.\footnote{That is not to say that the \textit{De Republica} itself has been overlooked. A book-length treatment (Atkins) considers the \textit{DRP} and its relation to Plato’s \textit{Republic} (indeed, also the \textit{De Leg.} to the \textit{Laws}) at length. (Also note Asmis’ recent articles on Cicero’s ideal state in the \textit{Rep.}, Annas on the \textit{Leg.} and the \textit{Laws}. Powell’s introduction to Niall Rudd’s translation, Powell’s article on Cicero’s reading of Plato’s \textit{Republic.}, etc.) Also, Raphael Woolf’s recent \textit{Cicero: The Philosophy of a Roman Skeptic} (Routledge, 2015) has a chapter on “the best form of government.” But I do think that so far these interpreters have missed (not focused on) a central feature of Cicero’s thinking on political philosophy. Namely, that Plato’s (and other Greek philosophers’) approach was \textit{fundamentally misguided} (or maybe, [in a sense] \textit{incomplete}?) in failing to adopt an “exemplary” (as in Latin, \textit{exemplum}) retrospective method which Cicero both sets out in the \textit{DRP} and tries to follow in the text itself. They have so far asked in just what way is Cicero’s Roman Republic ideal? Cicero seems to point to a broader concern with Platonic method.}

The method he proposes, in short, is a sort of inversion of the more familiar Platonic project of ideal political philosophy: he suggests that, in contrast to Plato’s \textit{prospective} (theoretical) method, which assumes an imagined scenario of a new city’s founding on an unoccupied tract of land by the dialogue participants (who turn out to be a very specialized set of people, namely, philosopher-founders), a good philosophical treatment of ideal politics is instead at least in part retrospective. Cicero wants an approach to dialectical political philosophy that is informed by an analogue in history, one that uses as its model for its proposed reforms an ideal state in the past. Why Cicero thought that this was important, and, why we, after some reflection, might think this plausible will be my subject.

In this chapter I will sketch, in outline, Cicero’s method both as found in the text itself and for political philosophy more generally in the \textit{De Republica}. I will show both what the method is and how Cicero means to follow it in writing the \textit{De Republica}. I will do so based on a reading of important programmatic passages which dot the main argument and action of the
Cicero in the *DRP* is developing his own coherent, and, to his mind, *new* original approach to political philosophy, and that he does not merely follow in the footsteps of his main philosophical influences. Cicero himself says he is embarking on a task not yet tried by any of the Greek philosophers, and so I will consider how Cicero’s method in the *DRP* compares to other ancient Greek thinkers, especially Plato. Once I have dealt with the interpretative difficulties sufficiently, I will turn to a discussion of the appealing aspects of Cicero’s approach, in light of a somewhat common negative first reaction to certain of its features. I will close with some notes on what I think some of Cicero’s underlying reasons are for his retrospective approach, which, I think, would also benefit from further study.

But in the interest of sensitivity to my audience’s previous exposure to both Cicero the person and to his philosophical works, I think it would be good if I began with some preliminary remarks on Cicero’s biography and literary output, and a fuller summary of the argument and contents of the *De Republica* itself, both that we may begin to see certain elements of Cicero’s method in the text itself and that we get a broad overview of the dialogue’s unique features.

**Preliminaries: Cicero’s biography and work; the character of Cicero’s philosophical writings; summary of the *De Republica***

Marcus Tullius Cicero was born in 106 B.C. at Arpinum, a country town about 70 miles southeast of Rome. He was the son of a Roman knight (*equites*), and so, upon entering Roman politics, he was a *novus homo* (or, “new man”), having not come from a patrician family.

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126 The fact that these comments are scattered throughout the *De Republica* has contributed to the method’s obscurity, I think.
Nevertheless, through his personal ambition and working his way up through the *cursus honorum* (“course of honors,” traditional Roman succession of offices), he eventually entered into the class of the senatorial elite, becoming consul, the highest political office in ancient republican Rome, in 63 B.C. In his youth, he studied philosophy abroad and at Rome with numerous leading philosophical figures of the day, including the prominent Academics Philo of Larissa and Antiochus of Ascalon. He excelled in oratory which eventually helped make him Rome’s greatest jurist, and his prose style is still considered the pinnacle of Golden Age Latin. He became textbook reading in rhetoric and philosophy both in Ancient Rome and throughout the Latin-reading West (true even to this day), which helped make him one of the best preserved authors from antiquity.

But for all his literary achievement, he also stands to us as our best primary source for the doctrines of the main Hellenistic philosophical schools. In the last years of his life he wrote voluminously on philosophy, as political circumstances had deteriorated to the point that he could no longer participate in politics as he once had. Civil war, followed by Caesar’s dictatorship, left Cicero, an old-line republican conservative, with no choice but to retire into the philosophical life.

Much of Cicero’s philosophical work, both from this later period and the time earlier when he wrote the *De oratore* and the *De republica*, share important common features. For one, Cicero, like Plato, wrote dialogues. Also like Plato, Cicero populated his dialogues with complex characters with varied intellectual approaches and philosophical allegiances. Unlike Plato, sometimes Cicero himself features as the principal speaker, and many of his philosophical works include prefaces written in his own voice as an introduction to the dialogue. The *De Republica*, though it comes to us in a fragmented state, is perhaps the most richly set and written
of Cicero’s dialogues, the work in which it seems Cicero tried his hardest to equal “the master,” *(magister)* Plato.

The *De Republica*, or, *On the Republic* (also, *On the State, On the Public Affair, On Government, On the Constitution*)\(^{127}\), is a dialogue in six books on political philosophy, inspired by, and, indeed, sharing a title with, Plato’s *Republic*. (Cicero’s Latin translation of Plato’s Greek treatise, *Politiea*, gives us the traditional title of *Republic* for Plato’s work.) It is a work that we have in fragmentary form, and what is extant makes up a little over a third of the original text. Before 1821, only the excerpted *Somnium Scipionis* (“Dream of Scipio”) from Book 6 survived. But in that year Angelo Mai, the head Vatican librarian, discovered large sections of Books 1 and 2 (and to a lesser extent potions of Books 3, 4, and 5) on a medieval palimpsest, allowing us to get a much clearer picture of the work.

The *De Republica* takes the form of a conversation between Scipio Aemilianus Africanus (the younger Scipio), a famous Roman politician and general and victor over Carthage in the Third Punic War, and other members of the so-called “Scipionic Circle,” a group of various prominent cultured Roman politicians, around the year of xx (140s?) B.C.\(^{128}\) (This group also included Panaetius and Polybius, a Greek historian and friend to Scipio whose *Histories* advanced a prominent defense of the so-called “mixed” constitution and sought to explain the rise of Rome in the Mediterranean world.) The dialogue is broken at three points, at the beginning of every two books, where Cicero writes a preface in his own voice. These prefaces stand as a Ciceronian innovation to the Platonic dialogue form, which Cicero consciously sets up as a model. There is indeed also broad thematic overlap between Cicero’s *De Republica* and

\(^{127}\) Rawson: “*De republica*” untranslatable, but best approximation for its two usages: “On the State and Society."

\(^{128}\) OCD, “Scipio Aemilianus Africanus Numantinus” and “Scipionic Circle” (816-817).
Plato’s *Republic*, as evidenced in the shared conceptual treatments on the ideal state and statesman, the interrelation between education and political systems, and the value of the political and philosophical lives.

Now, while the work is heavily influenced by Plato’s *Republic*, it is important to note even for a short moment (given what some commentators have said), that is not “based” on it. It is instead a work that is *in response* to it. Cicero in the *De Republica* aims to give a treatment on the best state that *corrects* for inadequacy he sees in Plato’s methodological approach to the subject. As we will see, this inadequacy is spelled out in terms of Plato’s lack of a real-world model that has existed for his reforms as described in the *Republic*. Cicero, in contrast, proposes a method for political philosophy which at once produces substantive pronouncements on the best state, statesman, system of education, etc., but which demonstrates each of these with constant reference to the ideal state set in the past. It is in this sense why I have labelled it a “retrospective” approach. I believe we are now at a point where we can transition into our consideration of the central programmatic passages from Cicero’s *De Republica*.

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**Central passages on method in the *De Republica* 1-2**

The unique, and, at least at first, perhaps strange, retrospective character of Cicero’s *De Republica* is apparent from the outset. At the closing of his preface to Book 1, leading directly into the beginning of the main run of the Scipionic dialogue, Cicero makes a telling admission as to how he views his own work. He writes, in his own voice:

> [T]his account which I am about to give is [neither] novel [nor] original. I intend rather to recall a discussion that took place within a group of people who at a particular time were the wisest and
most distinguished of our countrymen. This discussion was once reported by Publius Rutulius Rufus to you and me in our youth, when we were spending several days with him in Smyrna.\textsuperscript{129}

Cicero does not mean here to have us think that the dialogue which follows is a report, word for word, of what Scipio, Laelius, and the others in their group discussed on holiday in Italy. Cicero, here, does use fiction for a desired rhetorical effect.\textsuperscript{130} However, from the beginning we see that Cicero himself (and Scipio later in the dialogue) repeatedly stress that the main content of the discourse is itself not new. Cicero emphasizes this by claiming to merely report a discussion he heard about as a boy about Scipio’s famous conversation; Scipio, Cicero’s literary construction, later, by claiming merely to set forth and further illuminate the laws, precepts, and constitutional structure of ancient Rome when asked to discuss the ideal state. Interestingly, however, as we will see, it is precisely in this commitment to provide a non-innovating and “retrospective” approach to political philosophy that Cicero identifies his main philosophical contribution and correction for Plato’s deficiencies.

After an initial discussion on astronomy and the value of politics among the dialogue participants, the main subject of the \textit{De Republica} is reached when Laelius, interrupting the introductory remarks, asks Scipio to discuss the best form of government (\textit{optimum statum civitatis}). He thinks it natural to ask Scipio about this, as, he says, Scipio is both an accomplished statesman in his own right, and so ought to know something about the nature of politics and forms of government, and that he is also practiced in discussing political theory with his friends, the historian Polybius and the philosopher Panaetius (\textit{DRP} 1.33). Scipio accepts, but

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{DRP} 1.8.13. Powell’s translation with my slight revision for readability. “You” and “me” are Cicero and his brother Quintus, respectively.

\textsuperscript{130} Though, importantly, it is not all that implausible that a conversation like this might have occurred. Polybius and Panaetius, one an accomplished historian and other a Stoic philosopher, were both part of the “Scipionic Circle,” which serves as good evidence of the sophistication of Scipio and his associates. Cicero is not developing a setting which is at all outlandish.
notes that he does not wish to approach the topic as other Greek theorists have already (1.36). Instead, from the outset, he emphasizes that he will discourse on the best state in the manner of one of the “toga-wearing” people (namely, Romans), who, though given a liberal education, has been brought up more by experience (usu) and household sayings/maxims (domesticis praeeptis) than through books (litteris) (1.36).

From *DRP* 1.37-69, Scipio more or less continues in a familiar, abstracted theoretical discussion on the ideal constitution. Similar but not identical to Plato (?) and Aristotle, he considers three basic forms of government, namely, democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy.\(^{131}\) He remarks on the benefits and demerits of each in relation to property distribution, freedom, equality, stability, and says (with some reservation) that he thinks monarchy of the simple forms is best. He then arrives at the conclusion shared with (older) Plato (maybe not, rule of the aristocracy in the *Rep.*, maybe more amenable in the *Laws*: Council/Assembly), Aristotle, Polybius (and [it seems] other Greek philosophers) that the so-called “mixed” constitution, which incorporates something of each of the simple forms in its structure of political offices and powers, is best (ref).\(^{132}\) The two main reasons he gives for this (in short) are that it is the fairest (most equal) and by far the most stable of all forms of government.

At this point we come to the first of the central programmatic passages in *DRP* 1 and 2 that I will consider in this chapter. We might expect Scipio to continue his discussion and further elaborate on why he thinks the mixed constitution is best. Instead, at this point in the dialogue, he stops himself, and suggests that his treatment of the topic so far has been incomplete. He first reveals that he thinks he knows of an example of the best state—which, as

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\(^{131}\) Though Plato, in the *Republic*, considers five basic regimes: aristocracy, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, tyranny. Aristotle on the simple forms?

\(^{132}\) Ref., *DRP* 1.
he will say resolutely, turns out to be Rome—and then starts to explain how he will use this fact to help him adequately accomplish the task Laelius set out for him. Scipio says:

**DRP 1.70**

However, I’m afraid that you, Laelius, and you, my kind and learned friends, may get the impression that in talking like this I am setting myself up as a preacher or a teacher instead of collaborating with you in a joint inquiry. So I shall move on to matters which are familiar to everyone, and which indeed we have long been working towards. I hold, maintain, and declare (*sic decerno, sic sentio, sic adfirmo*) that no form of government (*nullam omnium rerum publicarum*) is comparable in its structure (*constitutione*), its assignment of functions (*discriptione*), or its discipline (*disciplina*), to the one which our fathers (*patres*) received from their forebears and have handed down to us. So, if you approve (because you wanted me to talk on a subject which you yourselves knew well), I shall describe its nature and at the same time demonstrate its superiority. Then, after setting up our constitution (*nostra re publica*) as a model (*exemplum*), I shall use it as a point of reference, as best as I can, in all I have to say about the best possible state (*de optimo civitatis statu*). If I can keep this aim in view and bring it to a conclusion, I shall have amply fulfilled, I think, the task which Laelius assigned me (1.70).

There are many things to note here. First, it is a somewhat unexpected move on the part of Scipio to introduce the state of Rome (*res publica*) as the best of all. So far he hadn’t suggested that that was his aim. So presumably he thinks it not absurd to suggest that Rome, compared to all other states, exhibits best the features of the mixed constitution which he has just discussed. Cicero perhaps is expecting this very response from his Roman readers, who may have been predisposed to remark on the mixed nature of the Roman constitution.

Second, we have the first introduction of the language of the “*exemplum.*” Here Scipio emphasizes that he will *as best as he can* use the model (or “example,” *exemplum*) in what he
will say about the best state. There seems to be a focus put not on just the educative or illustrative usefulness of the model, but rather that it is important that as best as he can he ought to use the model at all points in his succeeding discourse.

Cicero seems to be suggesting that a treatment on the best state that excepts such an example is in some sense incomplete or less good than it could be (non-ideal). But in Book 1 this methodological point is only hinted at in Scipio’s closing programmatic statement we have just considered. This suspicion, I think, is confirmed when we start to look at further programmatic statements in Book 2 of the De Republica, where Scipio begins his long historical and anthropological analysis of the Roman people. It is here where I think Cicero, through Scipio and Laelius, starts to make his stance with respect to Greek, and especially Platonic, approaches to ideal political theory more clear. He thinks that they, ultimately, suffer from a methodological defect. Namely, they do not set out a clear example or model of an ideal state which has existed (in fact) to ground their discourse. Contrary to how many other commentators have approached the De Republica, it is in this respect that Scipio and Laelius remark on the uniqueness and superiority of their discussion over Greek ones. To show this, I will start with a discussion of a passage from Scipio’s introduction to his historical discourse and then discuss at greater length a passage from Laelius’ summary of Scipio’s method, where I think we see it best explained.

Scipio begins his retelling of the history of the Roman people by first mentioning Cato the Elder, a famous Roman senator and general, who wrote a work on Rome’s foundation and

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133 Cp. DRP 1.36 where Scipio says that he does not seek to show his opinions are better than previous Greek ones.
the history of the towns of Italy called *Origins* (*Origines*). He (consciously) sets up the method he means to adopt throughout much of Book 2 as Catonian rather than Platonic. Scipio says:

**DRP 2.2-3**

Cato used to say that our constitution was superior to others, because in their case there had usually been one individual who had equipped his state with laws and institutions . . . Our own constitution, on the other hand, had been established not by one man’s ability but by that of many, not in the course of one man’s life but over several ages and generations. He used to say that no genius of such magnitude had ever existed that he could be sure of overlooking nothing; and that no collection of able people at a single point of time could have sufficient foresight to take account of everything; there had to be practical experience over a long period of history (*usu ac vetustate*).

Accordingly in my discourse I shall go back, as Cato used to do, to the “origin” of the Roman people (I gladly borrow his actual word). Moreover, it will be easier to carry out my plan if I describe for you the birth, growth, and maturity of our state (*nascentem . . . crescentem . . . adultam*), which eventually became so firm and strong (*firmam atque robustam*), than if I deal with some imaginary community (*quam si mihi [rem publicam] aliquam . . . finxero*), as Socrates does in Plato (*apud Platonem Socrates*) (2.2-3).

Here we have the first explicit mention that Cicero gives us through Scipio that the method he means to assume in the *De Republica* is in contrast to Plato or any other Greek philosopher. He notes that his discourse on the ideal state will be *better served* by interludes on Roman history and cultural development—following a narrative course of birth, adolescence, and maturity in the Roman state—than if he restricts his discussion to the purely theoretical realm of an “imaginary community” as Socrates does in Plato’s *Republic*. This point of contrast is made
even more clear in the comments Laelius delivers later in Book 2, which we will consider in a moment.

After Scipio invokes Cato’s name at the beginning of Book 2, he begins his discussion on the history and anthropological origins of the Roman people. He resists ascribing the sudden success and growth of the Roman people and country to chance or fortune, and instead insists on repeated mention of the “wisdom” (sapientia), “exceptional imagination,” (2.5) “careful foresight” (excellenti providentia) (2.10), “achievement,” and “success” (Latin terms with refs) of Rome’s legendary founder, Romulus. Indeed, his foresight is meant to be apparent in a number of his decisions.

For one, he is credited with choosing a perfect place on which to found Rome, in that he chose a place close to the sea but not bordering it. The complexity of this choice is conveyed by Scipio’s exhaustive listing of the considerations which go into picking the perfect placement for a capital city and its port in sections 5 through 10 of Book 2 (proximity to the sea invites moral laxity and viciousness, cf. Plato’s Laws). Further, Romulus is also credited with the two “founding principles” (“foundation stones,” duo firmamenta rei publicae) of the Roman state (rei publicae), the Senate and Auguries.

We may begin to see the pattern of Cicero’s treatment of historical Rome through the examples discussed from the reign of Romulus. Cicero, thinking that the current success of the Roman state could be no accident, surveys Roman history with an eye toward rationalizing it and explaining its successes in terms of the wisdom and foresight of its founders. This is not

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134 Cf. DRP 2.30. Roman success not by chance, but by good sense and discipline.
135 Cp. DRP Book 1 fragment on Carthage: there must be some explanation for success.
136 Remember to note that this brings up a tension: Did the founders have to engage in a kind of two-way, retrospective political theory? Or were they more the visionary types? It seems like Cicero could say both and still be all right. If they were visionary types, they just were right about stuff and now we follow
to say that such political wisdom could not be so repeated in our times, but that, Cicero thinks, circumstances were such that in a unique moment in history, perhaps not replicable in the current day, Romulus (and as we see later, the succeeding Roman kings and political actors) was able to exercise wisdom and foresight setting up the Roman state.

But why does Cicero take such pains to vindicate Rome’s origins and ground its successes and development in a rational story? It is because, as we may now expect, that he wants us to take seriously the notion that the republican Rome which predated Cicero by a few generations, upon reaching its constitutional maturity, was in fact the best state for human beings. Sensitive to the charge that Roman economic success and military triumph were some sort of historical accident or aberration (brought about by brute, stupid military superiority), Cicero means to use examples from Rome’s history and constitutional development not as evidence to its humble beginnings, but to the good sense and foresight its founders must have had.

Scipio concludes his discussion of Romulus’ achievements with a reference to their place in the developmental story of the Roman republic. It is at this point that we find the fullest statement of Cicero’s method in the DRP, delivered through Laelius in response to Scipio. Scipio begins:

DRP 2.21-22, Central Text [2]

Scipio: You appreciate, then, don’t you, that it was thanks to the good sense (consilio) of one man [Romulus] not only that a new people came into being but that, when he departed, it was not a baby crying it its cradle, but rather a youth on the verge of manhood.

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137 A possibility considered by Polybius and others in the Greek world.
Laelius: Yes, we are aware of that, and also of the fact that at the outset you are using a novel method of exposition [*nova ratione*] which is not to be found in any Greek treatise (*in Graecorum libris*). The doyen [*princeps*] of writers [Plato] on this theme chose a stretch of virgin territory (*aream . . . praeclaram*) where he could build a state to his own specifications (*arbitratu suo*). It was a remarkable state no doubt, but quite out of touch with men’s lives and habits (*. . . sed a vita hominum abhorrentem et moribus*). His successors have presented their opinions about types and systems of political organization without reference to any definite model or form of constitution (*sine ullo certo exemplari formaque rei publicae*). It looks to me as if you intend to do both. For

[1] in your opening remarks you prefer to attribute your discoveries to others rather than, like Plato’s Socrates, to claim them for yourself; [2] in talking about the site of the city you discuss in theoretical terms (*ad rationem*) what Romulus did by chance or necessity; and [3] instead of wandering from one state to another you confine your discussion to a single example. So carry on as you have begun. As you work your way through the other kings I fancy I can foresee the emergence of a fully-fledged state (*perfectam rem publicam*) (2.21-22).

Here, as I have alluded to already, we have the method Cicero envisions laid out in its clearest expression. I will address each of the claims made by Laelius here, as they make up the heart of my interpretative approach to the *De Republica*, namely, one centered on Cicero’s claim (through Scipio and Laelius) that he puts forth a treatise on the best state that exceeds its predecessors in its superior methodology.

First, Laelius gives fuller expression to Scipio’s earlier comments on the superiority of his method to Plato’s and *expands* the criticism to the whole of Greek philosophical and historical writing. He calls into question the “blank slate” approach to political theory that Plato uses in the *Republic*, and even makes a substantive criticism of it. He suggests, as he makes
clear later in Book 2, that it is perhaps “to be hoped for,” but not itself feasible. But the real point of this criticism is made clear in the succeeding line, where he charges subsequent Greek philosophers with failing to provide a *definite* model, exhibited in history, as a referent to their theorizing. Scipio’s mode of exposition, obviously, is not defective in this way, as Laelius notes. His discussion of the best state makes liberal use of examples from Rome’s own cultural history, and his treatment, once Rome has been introduced as the ideal, does not stray far from her actual political arrangement.

Nested within his discussion of the benefits of such a method there appear to be three distinct advantages Laelius (and perhaps Cicero) see in approaching ideal political philosophy in this way. The first is a certain degree of intellectual humility which Scipio, and, indeed, Cicero, strive for. Laelius says that Scipio’s method allows him to acknowledge the incredible debt he has on any knowledge of statecraft to his ancestors and political forebears, and allows him to resist the charge of “novelty.”

The second is that Scipio, by taking Rome as his ideal, is able to employ a mode of historical writing that allows him to make sense of Roman history with “theory” (literally, *to reason* (*ad rationem*). While Laelius here says that what Romulus did was perhaps either of chance or necessity, Scipio himself made clear that decision and fate coincided in Rome’s near miraculous ascent and Romulus’ achievements.

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138 This is made clear at *DRP* 2.52. Ultimately this line of Cicero’s thinking—substantive criticism of Plato’s ideal in the *Republic*—will have little treatment in this essay. He does seem to think that the Callipolis suffers from infeasibility (2.52), but at other points he makes it clear that he does not mean to surpass Greek thinkers in their positive theorizing on the best state (1.36, other refs).
Third, Scipio simplifies his discourse by only discussing one ideal constitution, namely, Rome’s, rather than many. Cicero may have in mind Aristotle’s (perhaps) largely correct but unwieldy *Politics*, where a number of constitutions are considered.139

Interestingly, none of these particular advantages to retrospective ideal political philosophy as laid out by Laelius, I think, appeal to us in any special sense outside of intellectual curiosity. In a moment I will return to what we might, after all, think plausible about Cicero and Scipio’s method.

But first I think it bears repeating, and in a fuller sketch, what Laelius has proposed as the unique method for political philosophy which Scipio has developed and which, for the purposes of this chapter, we will take as Cicero’s view on the matter.

Cicero proposes a “retrospective” approach to ideal political theory in contrast to Plato’s broadly prospective one: he thinks that an *exemplum* of an ideal *past* state ought to be combined with current philosophical speculation for a political theory to be satisfactorily suited to real-world reform. Further, the history and anthropology of the ideal state serve as important vehicles for examples for a complete philosophical treatment of ideal politics. Ideal political theory, as such, has not been devalued, but rather, on Cicero’s view, must be tied down and informed by an honest study of history which will yield insight into the best past state. This state, which turns out to be ancient republican Rome, ought to serve as both test and inspiration for independent conclusions of theory in the abstract. The developmental history of Rome, given its great

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139 Cicero, in the *Tusculan Disputations* and *De officiis*, seems to endorse a principle quite unlike anything in contemporary philosophy: he seemed to have thought that if a philosophical view or treatment resisted elegant expression it wasn’t in fact a good philosophical theory or treatise. This position is the subject of an article by X in *Philosophia Togata* (1 or 2?). His thinking here, then, might be something along the lines of a criticism of a more exhaustive approach to compiling and researching constitutions as something which resists simple, elegant treatment in a philosophical dialogue (which counts as a reason against its ultimately turning out to be the right theory/approach).
success and unprecedented political influence, can further be used to approach a description of the ideal state in its progress toward perfection.

For as strange as this method sounds—(and perhaps, on its face, simply absurd)—I think Cicero stands on at least surer footing than at first it seems. It is important to bear in mind that in Cicero’s time it was an open and serious question just how Rome, once a backwater village on the edge of the Greek world, rose to political prominence in just a few short centuries.\textsuperscript{140} Cicero, perhaps admirably, is trying to give an explanation for this that not only is more satisfying than an explanation solely by accident but also, fortunately for him, serves as the basis for his political theory.

His insistence on the practical importance of placing the ideal city in the past is also noteworthy. By instantiating the best state in a culture of historical fact and definite time and place, he insists on the real-world possibility of his ideal. While this is a matter of perennial debate with reference to Plato’s \textit{Republic}—namely, whether he actually thought the Callipolis, his best city ruled by philosopher-rulers, could be realized—Cicero is vulnerable to no such objection. The optimistic twist of his thinking on the best state is that human beings, already, in a nearly miraculous moment in their history, came together in an ideal political arrangement.

There is another way of spelling out Cicero’s “retrospective” insight which lessens some of the stranger features of his method. We might think that the central point he makes, which is blurred by his insistence that the ancient Roman republic was the best state, is one about the enduring importance, and, indeed, irreplaceability, of certain past institutions and governmental structures. The success and endurance of these, Cicero thinks, is far better understood in terms of human wisdom realized in each successive moment of history than a cycle of human

\textsuperscript{140} See Polybius. More secondary refs.
incompetence interrupted only by chance occurrence of good fortune. We might think of the
United Nations as an excellent example of what Cicero wants to show us. While imperfect, the
aims, organization, and achievements of the UN are without precedent in human history. It arose
out of two world wars and the greatest moral catastrophe the world has ever seen, but it, as an
institution, may have only been possible in such a moment of total moral crisis. Cicero invites us
to consider not only the present, or the distant, hoped-for future, as the candidates for the fullest
actualization of human political potential, but moments in the past as well—not unlike the short
period of extraordinary international unity which produced the UN.

But there still remains the deeper question of why Cicero thought ideal political
philosophy requires the sort of model he suggests as the complement to abstracted theory. It
could be thought that Cicero has merely given us many reasons to think that theoretical
discussion will be merely helped by the historical, anthropological, and sociological insights of
his method. Cicero’s ultimate reason for choosing the method he has in the De Republica relies,
I think, on a broader view about history, philosophy, and politics and their interrelation, which is
expressed, though in a compressed and obscure way, in Cicero’s preface to the De Republica. I
will now close this chapter with a final section on this passage. In it, I think we begin to see
Cicero’s perhaps more radical stance with respect to the priority of history and politics to
philosophical speculation, and the beginnings of a deeper understanding of a kind of Ciceronian
philosophy of history.

The Preface to Book 1 of the De Republica: Ciceronian Philosophy of History in outline.

Unde pietas? Unde religio? Iustitia, fides, aequitas?
At the very beginning of the *De Republica*, the manuscript begins mid-sentence, and it becomes clear that Cicero is writing in his own voice in the preface to the whole work. He is engaged in a defense of the practice of politics against the “philosophers”—used both to refer to philosophers in general and, in a pejorative sense, to the Epicureans in particular—and argues that able-bodied and intelligent young persons should not be dissuaded from the political life. He has in mind especially the Epicurean charge that the politician exhibits special unsoundness of mind in giving up a quiet life voluntarily for the life ordered around political office and honors. They go so far as to call that person a *homo demens* (lit., “mad man”). He appeals to patriotism and honor and the inborn urge to excel in virtue and to acquire the recognition that comes with political office (1.1), but he then does something unexpected.

Cicero, far from continuing his attack on Epicureans alone, makes a series of general arguments against philosophers of any stripe. In defense of politics he attempts to make philosophy seem, at least with respect to the ethical and the political, secondary. He writes:

*DRP 1.2-3 [4]*

For nothing is laid down by philosophers—nothing right and honorable at any rate—which has not been brought into being and established by those who have drawn up laws for states. Where does devotion (*pietas*) come from? Who gave us our religious observances (*religio*)? What is the source of law, either the law of nations or this civil law of ours (*ius gentium aut ius civile*)? From where did justice, good faith, and fair dealing (*iustitia, fides, aequitas*) come? Or decency, restraint, the fear of disgrace, and the desire of praise and honor (*pudor, continentia, fuga turpitudinis, adpetentia laudis et honestatis*)? Or fortitude (*fortitudo*) in hardship and danger? Why, from those men who have taken these values, already shaped by teaching, and either established them in custom or confirmed them in law. In fact Xenocrates, one of the most illustrious philosophers, when asked what his pupils got from him, is said to have answered “to
do of their own free will what they are compelled to do by law” (*ut id sua sponte facerent, quod cogerenitur facere legibus*) (1.2-3).

This is a striking passage. We must be careful not to misunderstand Cicero’s meaning here and assume that he argues for a kind of morality by convention. In this passage he is defending the practice of politics against “philosophical” criticism from the Epicureans and other philosophers who think that engagement in politics is evidence of an insane person. Epicurus and his followers are reported to have believed in the conventional nature of morality, so it seems exceedingly unlikely that Cicero, well-versed in Epicureanism, would mean to argue for something like that here.\(^{141}\) Instead, he seems to suggest that far from only having a certain temporal priority over philosophers, certain politicians, especially early on in human history and cultural development, have a certain intellectual superiority.\(^{142}\) As Cicero makes dramatically clear, he thinks that our terms for certain moral virtues are themselves fixed by a sort of ancient decree from wise founding politicians.

How this relates to the need for the method that Cicero proposes for political philosophy in the *De Republica* should be starting to become clear. Philosophical speculation on ethical and political theory, as such, is already heavily indebted to its history, in the form of politicians, even wiser than the philosophers, who are the ultimate source for our thinking. This makes the study of history—and, especially for our purposes, the study of history side-by-side with ideal political theory—not merely an augment to philosophical speculation, but an essential part of it. For if, as Cicero suggests, there really was a time when politicians—namely, the legendary founders of the cities—arrived at the kind of first principles of ethics and politics, we have no choice, if we wish to be intellectually honest, but to study them through the work of their statecraft. It is as if

\(^{141}\) Ref for Epicurean view.  
\(^{142}\) Cicero makes it explicit that they possess greater wisdom (*sapientia*) later in the paragraph at 1.3.
Cicero imagines what it would be like for us to be living in the generations succeeding the foundation of the Callipolis in Plato’s *Republic*: it would simply not make sense to question the institutions and constitutional make-up of the Callipolis in its prime. Cicero, we could say, imagines what political philosophy in such a world would look like.

But this is only a sketch. I hope to consider this at length in a future study. Cicero seems to be working within an understanding of history which seems distinctly different from our own, but which perhaps has at least some resemblance to other conceptions in the history of philosophy. Indeed, some have remarked on the “proto-Hegelian” character of Cicero’s *De Republica*, leading at least one scholar to title his work Cicero’s “philosophy of history.” But many of these focus on the supposed blind statism of the *De Republica*, where whatever Rome did in its history is meant to be interpreted as the highest actualization of human potential, no matter how cruel or terrible. Cicero is not, however, guilty of such “unthinking nostalgia.” In the portions of Books 1 and 2 that are extant, Rome’s achievements are both simultaneously used as inspiration for and carefully measured against philosophical argument on the best state. It is, I think, a difficult balance, but not one Cicero failed to appreciate.

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**Cicero’s Ideal Retrospective Political Philosophy**

The major theme of this chapter has been to suggest that perhaps it is less fruitful to study the precise nature of Cicero’s ideal as expressed in his discussion of the Roman republican state than his methodological approach, as this mistakes the central focus of the *De Republica* as primarily about a *new* positive contribution to abstracted ideal political theory as such. That is, the mistake

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143 See Finley, *Cicero’s Philosophy of History*.
144 Powell, introduction to the English translation of the *De Republica*. 
lies in the assumption that Cicero means to give us a *new* best state when he presents us with the model of the Roman constitution. Rather, I think the point Cicero tries to make is more a methodological one. And this methodological point, which I have considered at length in this essay, in turn relies on Cicero’s broader views on philosophy, history, and their interrelation. In fact, as I have suggested, it appears that Cicero does indeed seem to work from something like a *philosophy of history* that shows sophistication not unlike Hegel’s, but which I have only sketched in outline.

In the next sections I will connect this approach to one of Plato’s own in the *Timaeus*-Critias.

**Scipio’s Rome and Critias’s Athens: Utopian Mythmaking in Cicero’s *De republica* and Plato’s *Timaeus***


In addition, Cicero’s Scipio and Laelius explicitly talk as if they’re treading on distinctly un-Platonic ground. Scipio says that “it will be easier to carry out my plan if I describe for you the birth, growth, and maturity of our state (*nascentem . . . crescentem . . . adultam*), which eventually became so firm and strong (*firmam atque robustam*), than if I should imagine a state (*quam si mihi [rem publicam] aliquam . . . finxero*), as Socrates does in Plato (*apud Platonem Socrates*)” (*De rep. 2.3*) (cp. Plato’s *Republic*). Laelius shortly thereafter follows along similar lines (*De rep. 2.22-23*).
Such might be the case if we restricted ourselves to Plato’s *Republic* alone. But in this paper I present a companion to Scipio and Laelius’ discussion in De rep. 1 and 2 from a perhaps unexpected place in the Platonic corpus: the prologue of the *Timaeus*. The method for ideal political theory adopted by Socrates and Critias there, I’ll hope to show, looks like a forerunner to Scipio’s approach at the beginning of the *De republica*.

In this paper, I first briefly review relevant portions of Books 1 and 2 of Cicero’s *De republica*, where Cicero’s Scipio discusses the ideal constitution and proposes ancient republican Rome as its *exemplum*. Second, I present and examine the introductory discussion on Ancient Athens at the beginning of Plato’s *Timaeus* (17a-28b).

But what’s the distinctly philosophical payoff? Sketched in these complementary passages, I think, is an outline for a particular kind of approach to political theory—(one proposed as novel by Cicero’s Laelius, but, as this talk hopes to show, with an interesting forerunner in Plato): what I’ve called *retrospective ideal political philosophy* (which I’ll contrast with *prospective* ideal political philosophy). I’ll not delve into this much in this talk, but I think it is the style of political theory that both Cicero and Plato flirt with in the *De republica* and *Timaeus* (if not fully realized), respectively.

**Scipio’s project in *De republica* 1 and 2**

To begin, then: In this first section I will briefly introduce Cicero’s *De republica* and discuss Scipio’s use of ancient republican Rome as the *exemplum* of the ideal constitution in *De republica* 1-2.

The *De republica* is a philosophical dialogue in the style of Plato on ideal government.
In it, Laelius, one of the dialogue participants, asks Scipio—someone who is both successful and practiced in politics and himself learned—what he thinks the best form of government (\textit{optimus status civitatis}) is (which, as it turns out, will make up the subject matter of Books 1 and 2).

Scipio accepts, and from \textit{DRP} 1.37-69, Scipio more or less continues in a familiar, abstracted theoretical discussion on the ideal constitution. He remarks on the benefits and demerits of each of the simple forms of government in relation to property distribution, freedom, equality, and stability. He then concludes that the so-called “mixed” constitution, which incorporates something of each of the simple forms in its structure of political offices and powers, is best (fairest and most stable).\textsuperscript{145}

We might expect Scipio to continue his discussion as he has and further elaborate on why he thinks the mixed constitution is best. Instead, he stops himself, and suggests that his treatment of the topic so far has been incomplete. Scipio says:

\begin{quote}
. . . I shall move on to matters which are familiar to everyone, and which indeed we have long been working towards. I hold, maintain, and declare (\textit{sic decerno, sic sentio, sic adfirmo}) that no form of government (\textit{nullam omnium rerum publicarum}) is comparable in its structure (\textit{constitutione}), its assignment of functions (\textit{discriptione}), or its discipline (\textit{disciplina}), to the one which our fathers (\textit{patres}) received from their forebears and have handed down to us. So, if you approve (because you wanted me to talk on a subject which you yourselves knew well), I shall describe its nature and at the same time demonstrate its superiority. Then, after setting up our constitution (\textit{nostra re publica}) as a model (\textit{exemplum}), I shall use it as a point of reference, as best as I can, in all I have to say about the best possible state (\textit{de optimo civitatis statu}). If I can
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{DRP} 1.
keep this aim in view and bring it to a conclusion, I shall have amply fulfilled, I think, the task which Laelius assigned me (1.70).

Scipio seems to be suggesting that a treatment on the best state that excepts such an example is in some sense incomplete or less good than it could be. (And, as I think we’ll see, this point is echoed in Socrates’ desire toward the beginning of the *Timaeus.*) But in Book 1 this methodological point is only hinted at in Scipio’s closing programmatic statement we have just considered.

This suspicion is confirmed when we start to look at further programmatic statements in Book 2 of the *De Republica*, where Scipio begins his long historical and anthropological analysis of the Roman people.

He means to put forward a political treatise that differs with respect to methodology from that adopted by Socrates in Plato’s *Republic*. This methodology (which I’ve called a kind of retrospectively-oriented ideal political theory) consists in this: his characters set out to combine both i) abstracted, ideal philosophical discussion on the best constitution with ii) an historical instance of the constitution so described.

This is made even clearer in the last two passages from Cicero’s *De republica* that I’ll present today.

In the first passage [text number for handout] Scipio begins his retelling of the history of the Roman people. Scipio says:

Accordingly in my discourse I shall go back, as Cato used to do, to the “origin” of the Roman people (I gladly borrow his actual word). Moreover, it will be easier to carry out my plan if I describe for you the birth, growth, and maturity of our state (*nascentem* . . . *crescentem* . . . *adultam*), which eventually became so firm and strong (*firmam atque robustam*), than if I deal
with some imaginary community (quam si mihi [rem publicam] aliquam . . . finxero), as Socrates
does in Plato (apud Platonem Socrates) (De rep. 2.2-3).

We had a glimpse of this passage earlier. Here, Scipio says that his discourse on the ideal state
will be better served by interludes on Roman history and cultural development—following a
narrative course of birth, adolescence, and maturity in the Roman state—than if he restricts his
discussion to an “imaginary community” (Rudd’s loose translation) as Socrates does in Plato’s
Republic.

This point of contrast is made even clearer later in Book 2, the last of the passages we’ll
look at from the De republica.

Scipio begins:

You appreciate, then, don’t you, that it was thanks to the good sense (consilio) of one man
[Romulus] not only that a new people came into being but that, when he departed, it was not a
baby crying it its cradle, but rather a youth on the verge of manhood.

Laelius: Yes, we are aware of that, and also of the fact that at the outset you are using a novel
method of exposition [nova ratione] which is not to be found in any Greek treatise (in Graecorum
libris). The doyen [princeps] of writers [Plato] on this theme chose a stretch of virgin territory
(aream . . . praeclaram) where he could build a state to his own specifications (arbitratu suo). It
was a remarkable state no doubt, but quite out of touch with men’s lives and habits ( . . . sed a vita
hominum abhorrentem et moribus). His successors have presented their opinions about types and
systems of political organization without reference to any definite model or form of constitution
(sine ullo certo exemplari formaque rei publicae). It looks to me as if you intend to do both. For
[1] in your opening remarks you prefer to attribute your discoveries to others rather than, like
Plato’s Socrates, to claim them for yourself; [2] in talking about the site of the city you discuss in
theoretical terms [ad rationem] what Romulus did by chance or necessity; and [3] instead of
wandering from one state to another you confine your discussion to a single example. So carry
on as you have begun. As you work your way through the other kings I fancy I can foresee the emergence of a fully-fledged state (*perfectam rem publicam*) (2.21-22).

Here, as I have alluded to already, we have the retrospective ideal method for political philosophy laid out in its clearest expression.

The method Laelius notes in Scipio’s speech, in short, is a sort of inversion of the more familiar Platonic project of ideal political philosophy in the *Republic* [importantly *not* an inversion of the project I think contained in the *Timaeus*]: he suggests that, in contrast to Socrates’ *prospective* method adopted in the *Republic*, which assumes an imagined scenario of a new city’s founding on an unoccupied tract of land by the dialogue participants (who turn out to be a very specialized set of people, namely, philosopher-founders), the philosophical treatment upon which they’ve embarked is instead at least in part retrospective. As Socrates does in Plato’s *Republic*, Scipio and Laelius want dialectical political philosophy that is informed by a model (whether of the city, constitution, statesman, or laws). But, rather than assuming that this model is to be sought in a distant, hoped-for future, Laelius notes that Scipio has proposed a new kind of model for their philosophical treatment: namely, one preserved in history (this view is shared with Asmis 2005).

As I’ll endeavor to show in the rest of my talk, similar motivations appear to underlie the introductory exchange of speeches in Plato’s *Timaeus*. Contrary to Scipio and Laelius’s emphasis on contrast with Plato and Socrates, I’ll try to show that an account quite like Scipio’s is contained in the prologue of Plato’s *Timaeus*. There, Socrates, in contrast to his stance in the *Republic*, is desirous of an example of an “actualized” ideal city—and this city turns out to be Ancient Athens.

**Central passages in prologue of the *Timaeus***
The prologue of the *Timaeus* has long puzzled scholars. But much of this debate has surrounded whether in fact the city described by Socrates and his companions—Critias and Timaeus—is the same city described in the *Republic* or not.\(^{146}\) Comparatively little attention has been paid to the things Socrates says about ideal political theory toward the beginning of the conversation, and little as well about Critias’ description of an ancient, idealized Athens. (Comparatively much more has been said about the Atlantis described in the *Critias*!)

In this second section of my talk, then, I’ll present a few surprising passages from this introductory exchange in the *Timaeus*. What I think we’ll see is a surprising similarity to the project outlined by Scipio and Laelius in *De republica* 1 and 2.

I’ll begin with a passage where Socrates reflects on the ideal city they’ve just discussed the day before (I’ve seen this called the so-called “city of yesterday” in the literature) and asks Timaeus and Critias for a new kind of portrait of the city. He wants to see the city “in action,” instead of its being static as it was the day before. He says:

**Passage 1. Socrates asks for a portrait of the city “of yesterday” at war [paragraph breaks my own]**

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Socrates: All right, I’d like to go on now and tell you what I’ve come to feel about the political structure we’ve described. My feelings are like those of a man who gazes upon magnificent-looking animals, whether they’re animals in a painting or even alive but standing still, and who then finds himself eager to look at them in motion or engaged in some struggle or conflict that seems to show off their distinctive physical qualities. I felt the same thing about the city we’ve
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\(^{146}\) Annas 2011, in bibliography. Francis Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology* paraphrase: “Plato is not a slave to his own fictions. He could have devised many different conversations on the ideal city.”
described. I’d love to listen to someone give a speech depicting our city in a contest with other cities, competing for those prizes that cities typically compete for. I’d love to see our city distinguish itself in the way it goes to war and in the way it pursues war: that it deals with the other cities, one after another, in ways that reflect positively on its own education and training, both in word and deed—that is, both in how it behaves toward them and how it negotiates with them. (Tim. 19b-c)

Socrates says Timaeus, Critias, and Hermocrates, uniquely versed in both philosophy and politics, are just the sort of people to take up this challenge (as an aside: this, too, has interesting resonance in the philosophical work of Cicero—as we’ve seen, Cicero often refers to his unique talent in philosophical reflection on politics to consist in just this sort of expertise).

Passage 2. Socrates asks Timaeus, Critias, and Hermocrates to take up the challenge.

So that leaves people of your sort, then. By nature as well as by training you take part in both philosophy and politics at once. Take Timaeus here. He’s from Locri, an Italian city under the rule of excellent laws. None of his compatriots outrank him in property or birth, and he has come to occupy positions of supreme authority and honor in his city. Moreover, he has, in my judgement, mastered the entire field of philosophy. As for Critias, I’m sure that all of us here in Athens know that he’s no mere layman in any of the areas we’re talking about. And many people whose testimony must surely be believed assure us that Hermocrates, too, is well qualified by nature and training to deal with these matters. Already yesterday I was aware of this when you asked me to discuss matters of government, and that’s why I was eager to do your bidding. I knew that if you’d agree to make the follow-up speech, no one could do a better job than you. No one today besides you could present our city pursuing a war in a way that reflects her true character. (Tim. 20a-b)
Critias breaks in and changes the tenor of the conversation in an unexpected way. Similar to how Scipio broke off from philosophical discussion in the *De republica*, Critias interrupts the conversation that began yesterday with an elaborate story of Ancient Athens and its contest with Atlantis. He says it’s a strange one—but that it’s also *true*.

Passage 3. *Critias introduces the story of Ancient Athens and Atlantis.*

Critias: Let me tell you this story then, Socrates. It’s a very strange one, but even so, every word of it is true. It’s a story that Solon, the wisest of the seven sages, once vouched for… The story is that our city had performed great and marvelous deeds in ancient times, which, owing to the passage of time and to the destruction of human life, have vanished. Of all these deeds, one in particular was magnificent. It is this one that we should now do well to commemorate and present to you [Socrates] as our gift of thanks. In so doing we shall also offer the goddess a hymn, as it were, of just and true praise on this her festival. (*Tim.* 20e-21a)

Critias then relates a story supposedly told to Critias’ father, Critias, through his father, Dropides, who heard the story firsthand from Solon. The story tells of a conversation between Solon and a wise Egyptian priest in which the priest tells Solon about the founding of Ancient Athens. In it, Ancient Athens and Egypt are compared and lauded, both being said to have been founded under Athena’s dual love of war and wisdom. (*Tim.* 22d-24d) In addition, the priest mentions some similarities in societal structure, especially in the division of social classes—e.g., the elevation of a priestly class, the institution of a warrior class, a class of artisans, etc.

Critias then remarks on the marvelous agreement between the philosophical conversation of the day before—among Socrates and the others—and the story related by Solon of ancient Athens. Supposedly (though we’re not given a full picture of what that story from yesterday
looked like), the city decided upon as ideal by Socrates and the others looked just like the city of
Ancient Athens described by Solon!

[Critias:] What I’ve just related, Socrates, is a concise version of old Critias’ [Critias’
grandfather] story, as Solon originally reported it. While you were speaking yesterday about
politics and the men you were describing, I was reminded of what I’ve just told you and was quite
amazed as I realized how by some supernatural chance your ideas are on the mark, in substantial
agreement with what Solon said. (Tim. 25e)

And again [passage title]:

Passage 4. Critias’ project. Transition to Timaeus.

[Critias:] We’ll translate the citizens and the city you described to us in mythical fashion
yesterday to the realm of fact, and place it before us as though it were ancient Athens itself (check
Greek). And we’ll say that the citizens you imagined are the very ones the priest spoke about, our
actual ancestors. The congruence will be complete, and our song will be in tune if we say that
your imaginary citizens are the ones who really existed at that time. (Tim. 26c-d)

Socrates: Well, Critias, what other speech could we possibly prefer to this one?... And of course
the fact that it’s no made-up story, but a true account, is no small matter. (Tim. 26e)

Critias then outlines his own project and begins to hand off the conversation to
Timaeus—the cosmological account of the universe and the human body and soul that we’re all
more familiar with. Critias promises to come back to the topic of his speech once the adequate
groundwork has been laid by Timaeus (compare the order of topics in the De republica—ideal
theory followed by a mythological history of the ideal city).

And so I’ll close with a final passage from the prologue to the Timaeus:
Critias: We thought that because Timaeus is our expert in astronomy and has made it his main business to know the nature of the universe, he should speak first, beginning with the origin of the world and concluding with the nature of human beings. Then I’ll go next, once I’m in possession of Timaeus’ account of the origin of human beings and your account of how some of them came to have a superior education. I’ll introduce them, as not only Solon’s account but also his law would have it, into our courtroom and make them citizens of our ancient city—as really being those Athenians of old whom the report of the sacred records has rescued from obscurity—and from then on I’ll speak of them as actual Athenian citizens. (Tim. 27a-b)

**Ideal retrospective political philosophy**

What, then, is this approach to political philosophy that I’ve mentioned earlier in my talk and which I think is underlying the presentation of these two twin ancient utopias in Cicero’s *De re publica* and Plato’s *Timaeus*? To put it briefly:

Cicero and Plato’s characters in the first two books of the *De re publica* and the prologue to the *Timaeus* seem to consider a “retrospective” approach to ideal political theory (in pointed contrast to Plato’s broadly prospective one in the *Republic* [i.e., the city in speech, the Callipolis, is one that is to be hoped for by the city’s founders at some future moment]): they propose that an *exemplum* of an ideal past state ought to be combined with current philosophical speculation for a political theory to be, in a sense, *complete*. (Both suggest that by using models of states that have already existed that somehow we’re better able to witness the features of the ideal city.)

Further, the history and anthropology of the ideal city (even if playfully mythological) serve as important vehicles for examples for a more complete philosophical treatment of ideal politics. This state, which turns out to be ancient republican Rome in the case of Cicero’s *De
republica, and Ancient Athens, in the case of Plato’s *Timaeus-Critias*—ought to serve as both test and inspiration for independent conclusions of theory in the abstract.

**Conclusion**

But this is only a sketch. The main purpose of this section was not to delve in depth into ideal retrospective political philosophy as an approach to political theory, but rather to bring Cicero’s *De republica* into dialogue with Plato’s *Timaeus* owing to striking methodological similarity. The result, I think, is convincing evidence that the conversation between Scipio and Laelius in the *De republica*, in which ancient republican Rome is proposed as an exemplum of the ideal constitution just then discussed, is not as entirely un-Platonic and novel as it might at first seem (and which both Scipio and Laelius make it out to be). Rather, in fact, there seems to be a striking analogue to it in the prologue to Plato’s *Timaeus*, where Socrates asks that an ancient Athens, not Rome, be seen invigorated and enlivened—a task unfinished, but hinted at in the unfinished *Critias*. 
APPENDIX: Plato’s Ideal Cities

This appendix provides greater context and depth to my discussion of Plato’s mention of the “city of yesterday’s discourse” and Ancient Athens constituting ideal cities in the *Timaeus-Critias* and its relation to Cicero’s own discussions in *De republica*. That portion builds on my larger view that Plato sets out a number of possible ideal regimes (both retro- and prospective) across his corpus (and that these are not just in the *Republic-Laws*). This appendix contains further evidence from Plato’s *Timaeus-Critias* fitting it within the retrospective tradition (more than I could develop in the main body of the dissertation).

**The Republic-Laws relationship**

Many contemporary commentators begin their discussion of Plato’s *Laws* with questions about its relationship (or lack thereof) to Plato’s other monumental work of political philosophy, the *Republic*. This tendency is by no means new—Aristotle does precisely this in *Politics* II, showing an interest in the very same sort of questions—and it is understandable approach for a variety of reasons. Philosophical readers naturally hope for consistency first and foremost from Plato, but as a second-best they want a reasoned account for the changes that occur across the
dialogues and a story (often of progression) of how the dialogues might all fit together, despite outward appearances of a lack of cohesion.

Christopher Bobonich’s thorough study of Plato’s later political philosophy in *Plato’s Utopia Recast* attempts just such a project. It begins from the outset with a rejection of the dominant traditional interpretation of the *Laws*. This account (somewhat simplified) is that the *Laws* is a treatise by an older, more sober-minded Plato on the practical application of the ideal theory first discussed in the *Republic*. On this view, differences between the two dialogues are generally attributed to the adaptation of the *Republic’s* political program to the imperfect real world, where the chances of rule by an elite class of philosopher-kings seem increasingly remote, and to an overall increase in cynicism on the part of Plato.  

While the intricacies of Bobonich’s own interpretation of the *Republic-Laws* relationship will not be the main focus of this essay, one of his principal insights (or a version of it, slightly modified) will be the basis for much of the interpretation I shall advance here. Bobonich draws our attention to what he calls the most famous passage of the *Laws*, which comes in Book V at 739a3–740a2. In it, the Athenian summarizes his repeated point that what he, Megillus, and Cleinias have undertaken in the discussion of the *Laws* is the project to map out, and draft the laws of, the “second-best” city—i.e., that the best they can hope to achieve is a city run perfectly well for human beings living now, as they are. Many have taken the “second-best” city comment to be referring to Magnesia’s inferiority to the Callipolis of the *Republic*. But, as Bobonich

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147 Saunders more or less holds this view, arguing that there is in fact no relationship between the political theories of the *Republic and Laws* because they are “two sides of the same coin.” See especially his “Plato’s Later Political Thought” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (CUP 1993) and his introduction to his Penguin translation of the *Laws* (London 2004). This traditional view is often heavily reliant on speculation concerning Plato’s personal life in the time between his composition of the *Republic* and the *Laws*. I shall avoid the issues concerning Plato’s *Letters*, from which most of these interpretations draw heavily.
notes, it may not be so simple. For directly after the “second-best” mention, the Athenian goes on to explain how in the very best city even those things “by nature” private—eyes, ears, hands—would somehow be joined, and the community (so it would seem) would be a complete, perfect union. This, of course, would not have been possible even for the philosopher-kings in the Callipolis. This city is for “gods or the children of gods,” out of reach and unsustainable for human beings. Nevertheless, both Socrates in the Republic and the Athenian in the Laws say that we should craft real-world constitutions using this model.

Bobonich’s treatment of the passage is opposed by varying extremes. Most (following the traditional interpretation) have read the passage in such a way as to refer back to the ideal city of the Republic. But many of those commentators have ignored the Athenian’s remark that such a city is possible only for gods or children of gods. Others, however, are very much aware of the strangeness of this comment, but feel compelled nonetheless to make it fit with the traditional interpretation. André Laks, for example, does not draw from the strange “total unity” of the ideal city described in the Laws passage the conclusion that the city of the Republic is not being discussed. Rather, he asks the further question just why it is that the citizens of the Callipolis have turned out to be either “gods or the children of gods,” the very best citizens of any kind of community, full-stop. This can seem to be an incredible result. I shall argue for an interpretation which avoids it.

148 Even if we do not take the passage literally (as I do here, for reasons which will become in a later section of this essay), it should still be noted that the complete communism this passage seems to suggest is also not found in the Republic. There, only the Guardians share everything in common, while the producers and foreign merchants are allowed some amount of private property.

149 Laws 739d5.

150 That the unattainable ideal ought nevertheless to be our aim in founding a city is a common (and repeated) shared theme throughout both the Republic and Laws.

Outlines of the interpretation

I shall advance an interpretation of the *Laws* V passage which agrees with Bobonich at a foundational level—in that I reject the best city described in *Laws* V to be obviously the *Callipolis* of the *Republic*—but which neither relies on his developmental view of Plato’s thought nor is in any significant *outright* tension with any of its particulars. For my concern in this essay is broader and my interpretation more general: it has to do with how we should understand Plato’s attempts at idealization in political philosophy in general. I shall argue that if we take into account other (much less studied) ideal cities described in the dialogues—but, importantly, ideal cities or states that are said to have existed, could exist, or might exist sometime in the future—we see that in *every* discussion of an implementation of an ideal state in the actual world (including the Callipolis) there is a “give and take” between absolute perfection and realizability: in essence, each attempt by Plato to craft an ideal city represents a kind of “second-best,” another instance of Plato’s trying his hand at the project of ideal political philosophy.\(^{152}\)

But so that my meaning is not distorted: this does not mean that no comparisons can be made, and that no ideal city is better than any other. Further, I am not to be understood so as to say that Plato does not in fact have an *optimal city*, i.e., the very best conceivable one. I am not advocating a kind of relativism. I am simply arguing against views which take it for granted that

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\(^{152}\) In the past forty years or so there have been a number of excellent articles which have gone against the trend of ignoring Plato’s other ideal cities. These seem to have been inaugurated by Christopher Gill’s pioneering studies in the 1970’s. The two main pieces are his “The Genre of the Atlantis Story,” *Classical Philology* 72 (1977): 287-309 and “Plato and Politics: The *Critias* and the *Politicus*,” *Phronesis* 24 (1979): 148-167. Other articles treating the topic are to be found in the bibliography and throughout this essay.
the Callipolis of the Republic, namely, the practical application of the ideal in the context of that dialogue, gives us Plato’s one, true, definitive account of the ideal city and that every other bit of Plato’s touching on politics either deviates from, or corrects, or largely adopts, or is in fact identical with the Republic picture. Were such an argument to be made—that is, for what counts as Plato’s absolutely ideal city, his utopia—I think one would have much surer foundations arguing that the aforementioned inherently strange “city of gods” represents such an optimal Platonic political arrangement.

Part of my argument will be that such views—those that assume that, for example, the Callipolis is Plato’s utopia, full-stop—arise when the following fact is not taken into account: viz., that there are many factors which complicate Plato’s ideal political theorizing in the Republic and elsewhere, factors which are often either conflated by other scholars or ignored altogether. These further conditions on Plato’s ideal cities resist simplification and make it exceedingly difficult to construct a coherent account of just what exactly it means to say, with Saunders for example, that the Callipolis and Magnesia are in fact the same city, viewed under different aspects. Or, for that matter, to say the contrary as well: that the Callipolis and Magnesia are distinctly different ideal cities of Plato. I shall hope to show that views of this sort are both hopelessly complex in their own right and far less plausible interpretations of Plato besides.

My view is by its very nature pluralistic. It admits of numerous interpretations of the relationships between the ideal cities described in the work of Plato. It is also a view which allows us to conceive Plato as exercising considerable freedom both as a philosopher and a prose stylist. He is not bound, for example, to the ideal city discussed in the Republic throughout the rest of his written work. Ancient Athens and Atlantis, described in the Timaeus, may be
standalone ideal cities; and the so-called “city of yesterday,” again found in the *Timaeus*, is not necessarily a summary view of the city of the *Republic*. On that city in particular and its relation to the Callipolis of the *Republic*, Cornford’s thinking aligns closely with my own: “No doubt Plato was thinking of the contents of that part of the *Republic* and intending his readers to recall them; *but he was not the slave of his own fictions*. There was nothing to prevent him from imagining Socrates describing his ideal state on more than one occasion.”

As we shall see over the course of this essay, these occasions are indeed numerous in the works of Plato. In the *Timaeus* alone there seem to be three or four cities which vie for the appellation “ideal,” each more or less approximating Plato’s rough political ideal. In the *Republic*, many forget that the Callipolis itself is the second attempt at the ideal city after an initial city proposed by Socrates. That city, which occurs at 372a-c, known as the “city of pigs,” is both described as “healthy” and “true” but is only found wanting because of certain unavoidable facts about human nature. The resulting city, which takes account for “luxuries” and the multiplicity of human desires, is the Callipolis.

By my reckoning there are at least seven distinct ideal cities described in the work of Plato: i. The city of pigs (*Republic*), ii. The Callipolis (*Republic*), iii. The “city of yesterday’s discourse” (*Timaeus*), iv. Ancient Athens (*Timaeus*), v. Atlantis (*Timaeus-Critias*), vi. Magnesia (*Laws*), vii. The city of the gods or children of gods (*Laws*). In sum, my view is that if anything we should take Plato at his word in *Laws* V and think that only the seventh city, the city fit for gods, represents his best city and it hardly can be said to be a city for human beings. The others all make important concessions to accommodate certain unavoidable facts about human nature.

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153 Cornford 4. My emphasis.

154 I shall draw from Donald Morrison’s “The Utopian Character of Plato’s Ideal City” (*Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic*, 2007) to argue for this.
A large portion of this essay will be interpretive by necessity. I shall start with the Republic, and afterward I shall treat the cities of the Timaeus-Critias. I shall discuss the Laws last. But before I begin the main thread of this essay, I will first return to the controversial “second-best” passage from the Laws and explain the interpretive difficulty presented by it in more depth. These comments will lead me into a point concerning the word “utopia” and its usage with respect to Plato’s political philosophy and an outline of some of the criteria Plato considers when he describes a perfect political arrangement, whether for gods or men.

The “second-best” city of Laws V and Plato’s “utopia.”

To begin, then, I will first reproduce the controversial passage from Laws V in full, as it will be playing a crucial role in the main argument of this essay. It comes near the middle of Book V, after the Athenian has already given the Great Preamble to the laws in general and has begun to lay out some specific legislation for the city regarding population and land distribution. This leads him to familiar ground (at least with respect to the discussion of the Republic) because the topic of communism amongst one or all classes of the city again arises. After some preliminary reflection on that topic, the Athenian speaks:

The next gambit in this game of legislation is as unusual as going “across the line” in draughts, and may well cause surprise at first hearing. But reflection and experience will soon show that the organization of a state is almost bound to fall short of the ideal. You may, perhaps—if you don’t know what it means to be a legislator without dictatorial powers—refuse to countenance such a state; nevertheless the right procedure is to describe not only the ideal society but the second and third best too, and then leave it to anyone in charge of founding a community to make a choice between them. So let’s follow this procedure now: let’s describe the absolutely ideal society, then the second-best, then the third. On this occasion we ought to leave the choice to
Cleinias, but we should not forget anyone else who may at some time be faced with such a choice and wish to adopt for his own purposes customs of his native country which he finds valuable.

You’ll find the ideal society and state, and the best code of laws, where the old saying “friends’ property is genuinely shared” is put into practice as widely as possible throughout the entire state. Now I don’t know whether in fact this situation—a community of wives, children and all property—exists anywhere today, or will ever exist, but at any rate in such a state the notion of “private property” will have been by hook or by crook completely eliminated from life. Everything possible will have been done to throw into a sort of common pool even what is by nature “my own,” like eyes and ears and hands, in the sense that to judge by appearances they all see and hear and act in concert. Everybody feels pleasure and pain at the same things, so that they all praise and blame with complete unanimity. To sum up, the laws in force impose the greatest possible unity on the state—and you’ll never produce a better or true criterion of an absolutely perfect law than that. It may be that gods or a number of the children of gods inhabit this kind of state: if so, the life they live there, observing these rules, is a happy one indeed. And so men need look no further: they should keep this state in view and try to find the one that most nearly resembles it (739a1-739e1).  

Some things worth mentioning from the outset: Although Plato gestures at a “third-best” state, he in fact never returns to the topic, at least not in the Laws. We might think that he has a gradation of “best states” in mind, similar to that one which he introduces in Republic VIII. But that would be of course merely conjectural.

At any rate, in the Laws it seems clear that Plato is mainly concerned with the second-best city, the sort of city which always keeps the ideal in view, but is responsive to change and

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155 I will use the Saunders translation for the Laws throughout.  
156 Viz., the four increasingly bad cities which approximate in one way or another the ideal city: (i) timocracy, (ii) oligarchy, (iii) democracy, (iv) tyranny.
the vagaries of the sensible world. As we see in the progression of the dialogue, there is a
contant tension in the Laws between this best city—the ultimate ideal—and the “second-best”
approximation. But to what exactly is Plato referring when he speaks of the ideal city? Is he, as
the traditional interpretation supposes, gesturing back to the Callipolis of the Republic, and
unambiguously so? Or is he, rather, simply referring to that very city which he has just described
in the passage cited above?

As already mentioned, Bobonich makes a strong case for the latter interpretation. For
one thing, even though it is a striking feature that both this passage and Republic 424a share even
the same proverb (“malista koina ta philôn poieisthai”), the extent to which communism is to be
implemented far exceeds that of the Callipolis. As Bobonich notes, communism, in the
Republic, extends only so far as the Guardian class does. Indeed, the kind of unity that the
Athenian describes in the Laws passage is greater than anything that we saw even amongst the
Guardians of the Republic. There is a strong implication of impossibility here: the physical
bodies of this city’s inhabitants are themselves one. Ears, eyes, limbs are by some unifying
principle one and the same. It shall be the contention of this essay that this city, if any,
represents a singular ideal for Plato. For it is the only city which does not make important
concessions to certain unavoidable facts about human nature or political society in general.
Interestingly, this “city of gods” may have an analogue in the Republic to which we will return
later, but which, as it happens, turns out not to be precisely the ideal city known as the
Callipolis.

157 See, for instance, Rep. 464a-b.
158 In my section on the Republic I will consider the resonances from Republic 462-464 (the city will act
and feel as if one) here.
159 Viz., Rep. 500b-c where Socrates mentions the perfectly just community of “things that are.” I shall
return to this in my section on the Republic.
Some confusion may result if I do not at this point clarify some of my approach. Why is it that I think that this so-called “city of gods” in *Laws* V cannot be a legitimate ideal human city? And thus that it cannot refer to the Callipolis of the *Republic*, which Socrates emphatically says is the best possible city for human beings? Because it is strictly impossible. That is, something in its very constitution—its internal makeup—makes it impossible to implement in a society of human beings.

Now the sense in which other commentators have used “utopia” has often been ambiguous. I shall make it clear that when I speak of “utopia,” I mean to describe a state that it is, in the above sense, strictly impossible. A utopia may, for instance, rest on a contradiction, or it may call for something from its citizens or class of citizens which is outside human capability. This makes it so that the state can never even come about. Utopias, by their very natures, cannot ever be founded. It ought to be a condition for a city to be founded in the real world, then, that it is—in the barest sense—possible.

Much has been made of this condition. But bare possibility (as I shall call it) is but one of the many factors which influence Plato’s ideal political theory: the extent to which the cities he describes are perfect political communities depends on more than that they are not, strictly

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160 I will provide a list here of references to the numerous passages in the *Republic* where Socrates mentions the bare possibility of the Callipolis.
161 This of course has been noted by others (Berlin “The Decline of Utopian Ideals in the West” 2013, Burnyeat 1992, Morrison 2007).
162 I realize that it may seem that I am making an unwarranted stipulation. But much confusion has surrounded just what it means to talk of utopian politics, for instance. Accordingly, from the outset I shall adopt the most traditional sense of “utopia,” dating to its coinage by Thomas More, where it literally means “no-place.”
163 Strauss, in his *The City and Man* (Chicago 1964), tries to identify internal contradictions of this sort in the Callipolis to argue against its ever coming about. The most famous of these contradictions is the supposed unwillingness of the philosophers to rule. I find this approach flawed for various reasons, but that is the subject of another essay. It only bears mentioning that this kind of “internal contradiction” worry is only one kind of cause for practical impossibility: the remaining others I shall go on to mention in the coming pages.
speaking, a utopia. The full (though not exhaustive) list is as follows: (i) *bare possibility*, (ii) *realizability*, (iii) *sustainability*, (iv) *ideality*, (v) *optimality*. If we conflate these distinct concerns (as I think many have), we run the risk of fundamentally misunderstanding Plato. For the natural tendency is to think that Plato means to discuss really only *bare possibility*—that is, just whether or not the city rests on a constitution that is self-contradictory—and once it is made clear that the Callipolis, for example, of course *can* exist (even if only in highly rare situations) and that it is, to a certain extent, *ideal*, some then draw the inference that the Callipolis *is* Plato’s ultimate ideal community. Yet, if we keep in mind the expanded list I have proposed, this is simply not so. I shall take pains to explain just what I mean for each term.

**The Five Conditions**

When I say for a city that it is (i) *possible* (and often Plato seems to mean it in just this sense, though he too is ambiguous at times and is himself a cause for confusion), I mean to say nothing other than that the city is *not strictly impossible*. That is, for instance, an internal contradiction does not prevent it from *ever coming about*. This is contrasted, if only slightly, with what I shall call a city’s (ii) *realizability*, which is how and to what extent it can be *realized* in the world, as it is now, with the sort of human beings that exist. For example, Plato’s Callipolis of course seems *possible*, but Socrates’ important qualifications on just what sort of possibility that is make it seem as though it is *exceedingly unlikely to ever be realized*. Socrates makes it clear, for instance, that the Callipolis *might only* come about *from divine intervention* or *by mere chance*: viz., that somehow the kings of today should turn out to be philosophers or vice versa.\(^{164}\) Another, separate concern is the (iii) *sustainability* of any given ideal political

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\(^{164}\) See, for instance, *Republic* 498e-501e.
arrangement. In both the *Republic* and *Laws* (and *Timaeus-Critias* and *Statesman* for that matter) we see Plato’s this, separate from possibility and realizability: namely, whether the Callipolis (or any ideal political community) can be *sustained* as a practical political constitution, and by what means (for example, censorship of poetry and of the theater, noble lies, rules regarding the play of children, etc.).

The entire of *Republic* VIII is deeply concerned with how and why the Callipolis (an enlightened aristocracy) might devolve into timocracy, and so result in an ordered descent from aristocracy into tyranny through stages. This casts doubt on the Callipolis’ being Plato’s absolutely ideal city: a *perfect* politeia, rather, would seem to have the quality of *everlastingness*. That is, given its noble founding, were a state perfect, it seems reasonable to suppose that it could be *sustained* by human beings into perpetuity. But *none* of the ideal cities of Plato have *this* characteristic: that is, *unless* we talk about the divine “city of gods” from *Laws* V.

But to continue with our list. Given the stipulated sense I have established for “utopia,” namely, that a utopia is to denote a sort of political arrangement which is *strictly impossible* for human beings (either because it demands of the human spirit or body the impossible), the last two considerations I shall discuss, *ideality* and *optimality* must be carefully explained so as not to confuse. When I speak of a city’s (iv) *ideality*, I mean only to refer to the fact that it is in important respects *greatly superior* to the cities of today, as they are. It is in this sense that I call all of Plato’s attempts at describing cities better than his or our own, *ideal cities*.165 The

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165 I understand that there is a very natural sense in which we use the term “ideal” which seems in conflict with my stipulated usage. One might say of a situation (even a very good one) that it is “better, but not ideal.” This is to largely equate *ideality* with *optimality*. I want to resist the temptation to resort to this usage of the word “ideal,” and I think that it essential that we do not conflate the two. I aim to use the term in a broader sense, one which corresponds better (I think) to contemporary debates concerning the usefulness of ideal and non-ideal theory and, more importantly, to some of Plato’s own language in the dialogues.
Callipolis, Magnesia, Ancient Athens, Atlantis, and the city of pigs all share this general feature.

Even Plato’s common gestures toward the political situation of Sparta often border on a description of an ideal city (see, for example, Protagoras 342a-343c). This is not yet to talk of whether these cities can or cannot exist and for how long and under what circumstances. Those considerations are met by a city’s (i) possibility, (ii) realizability and (iii) sustainability.

Lastly, when I shall discuss a city’s (v) optimality I shall, as expected, say something as to whether it is the very best city there could be. It is this condition for Plato’s ultimate ideal for a community which I think all the ideal cities fail in one way or another. But I do not think that this point is trivial. Rather, I think it essential to our understanding of Plato that we realize that even the Callipolis and of course Magnesia fail to be Plato’s optimal city. When we see that Plato’s perfect political arrangement—his optimal state—is strictly impossible for human beings, but is, as it were, only possible for “gods or the children of gods” in the Laws, and, as I shall go

In the debate surrounding ideal versus non-ideal theory in contemporary political philosophy, “ideal,” I take it, when used of a political theory, is meant to capture the fact that the theory in question suggests a political arrangement which is (broadly construed) better than existent states because of certain ideal conditions assumed in the foundation or construction of that arrangement. Plato’s fictitious cities all share this common feature: they are conceptualized cities; cities for the sake of argument. They have certain important idealized conditions which allow them to function at the very least in a conceptual space, even if they are not feasible as actual cities in the world. Similarly, I think when we say that Rawls, for instance, in A Theory of Justice is engaged in ideal theory, we do not mean to say that that state described therein is perfect, full-stop. Rather, we mean to say that it incorporates certain structural features which are either extremely difficult, or, perhaps, currently impossible, to implement in today’s society, without saying much about other structural features he could have incorporated which make the realizability of his ideal more or less plausible.

There are perhaps other words which capture some of what I mean when I say “ideal.” I want to say something like that the city is fictional, that it is mythological, that it is theoretical, that it is conjectural, and so on. For when I say that a city described in Plato is ideal, what I am really trying to capture is the sense of the original Greek phrase used throughout the Republic (but first at 369a3) to describe the project undertaken therein—viz., that they are to found a “city in speech” (polis en logoi). Later in the Timaeus this becomes the city in myth (polis en muthoi). Grube, in his 1972 translation of the Republic, translates “polis en logoi” as “city in theory.” But the meaning may be even more broad and less overtly philosophical: en logoi may have the force simply of “in words” or “in ideas,” as opposed to the cold practical facts of political reality. My choice to call my condition “ideality” is a rough estimation of the meaning of en logoi, and I ask the reader to resist his temptation to read “ideality” every time as synonymous with “optimality.”
on to mention, only possible for the mysterious “community of the Forms” in the Republic, we see the error of some very influential approaches to Plato’s political philosophy. Plato’s Callipolis, just like his later Magnesia, is a second-best city, adjusted at various levels for the limits and capacities of the human being.

Now that we have established these criteria for determining to what extent each of Plato’s ideal cities express perfection in politics, I should like to show how they ought to be applied to the study of Plato’s ideal cities. Now I shall finally be coming to the large interpretive section of my essay. I shall take as my representative examples the city of pigs and Callipolis in the Republic, the “city of yesterday,” Ancient Athens, and Atlantis in the Timaeus-Critias, and, lastly, I shall discuss once more the city of gods and Magnesia in the Laws. It is my hope that the new interpretive scheme I have suggested shall bear fruit from even a cursory overview of some of the main relevant features of the ideal cities of the Republic, Timaeus-Critias, and Laws.

The ideal cities of the Republic. The city of pigs and the Callipolis.

It goes without saying that some will be scandalized by the very suggestion that there might be more than one ideal city described in the Republic. But it will be the purpose of this section to argue for just such a position. For, as we shall see, if we but keep in mind just what the project of the Republic is said to be in its opening stages (after the opening engagement with

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166 For example, we have Popper’s extreme view that the Republic was “meant by its author not so much as a theoretical treatise, but as a topical manifesto” (Popper 1945, Vol. I, 153 [quoted in Annas 1981, 185]). This might be taken in various ways, but if the meaning is that Plato meant for the Callipolis to represent a possible, realizable, sustainable, ideal (or maybe even optimal) city then I think Popper is mistaken for certain.

167 As I have already had reason to mention, I shall draw have reason to draw (indirectly) from my reading of Donald Morrison’s “The Utopian Character of Plato’s Ideal City,” in The Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic (Cambridge, 2007). Although I share many of the sentiments of his article, I shall argue for an interpretation which is slightly less radical.
Thrasymanchus), interpretations in line with my own seem to naturally follow. It is only when we “skip ahead” to the Callipolis that we start to think that it is the only city in the Republic with a claim to being the greatest of the ideal cities mentioned in that dialogue. But, as I have already said earlier in this essay, if we look carefully at the so-called “city of pigs” described in Book II, we see that for many reasons it may have a stronger claim to being the best ideal city put forth by Plato in the Republic.

But let us turn to the text. The main project of the Republic starts in Book II after Glaucon and Adeimantus have taken up Thrasymanchus’ position, and press Socrates to provide them not only a “theoretical argument” that justice is better than injustice, but to “tell us what each itself does, because of its own powers, to someone who possesses it, that makes injustice bad and justice good …” and further: “Don’t, then, give us only a theoretical argument that justice is stronger than injustice, but show what effect each has because of itself on the person who has it—the one for good and the other for bad—whether it remains hidden from gods or human beings or not.” Socrates is at first taken aback by Adeimantus’ demand and is unable to respond. It is only out of a desire to always defend justice that he decides to muster up his strength for an attempt to answer Adeimantus. He then makes his famous suggestion in 368c that the interlocutors try to find justice in the city to aid their search, since this “enlarged” justice will be easier to see, and may say something about the justice they seek to describe in the human soul. They all agree to this undertaking, and it is at 369a3 that we have the first mention of a “city in speech” (polis en logoi). Shortly thereafter Socrates gives his founding principle of any city. Unlike Aristotle, who thought that human beings were naturally gregarious, political

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169 See my note 19.
animals, Socrates thinks that it is *bodily need* which brings human beings together into large associations. Socrates says: “I think a city comes to be because none of us is self-sufficient (*autarkēs*), but we all need many things. Do you think that a city is founded on any other principle than this?”170 This fundamental principle will be of critical importance in the next few pages. For, as we shall see, it is precisely just *what sort* of needs we imagine human beings will have which will determine the rest of the course of the dialogue of the *Republic*. And, to speak to my interpretation, this shows Plato from the very beginning not simply concerned with giving an account of the *optimal city*. Were he to be engaged in such a project, he probably would just *stipulate* the needs and wants of the human populace of his city. Rather, from the outset he is concerned *not* just with optimality and bare possibility, but also *realizability* and *sustainability*.

Socrates then goes on to describe the various needs of his small ideal city and goes on to list their meager and modest wants. His first attempt at a city is one which fulfills really only the very basic human needs—food, shelter, occupation—and adds to the classes of the city based on those needs. He lists builders and craftsmen and farmers without mentioning any “higher” pursuits. According to his purpose set out 368c, having arrived at the just city, he asks where the justice and injustice are to be found. Adeimantus is at a loss. Socrates then gives his famous description of this quaint and modest ideal city:

> First, then, let’s see what sort of life our citizens will lead when they’ve been provided for in the way we have been describing. They’ll produce bread, wine, clothes, an shoes, won’t they? They’ll build houses, work naked and barefoot in the summer, and wear adequate clothing and shoes in the winter. For food, they’ll knead and cook the flour and meal they’ve made from wheat and barley. They’ll put their honest cakes and loaves on reeds or clean leaves, and,

170 *Rep.* 369b7-9.
reclining on beds strewn with yew and myrtle, they’ll feast with their children, drink their wine, and, crowned with wreaths, hymn the gods. They’ll enjoy sex with one another but bear no more children that their resources allow, lest they fall into either poverty or war.\(^{171}\)

Glaucon immediately worries that this city has no delicacies. He worries about the realizability of such a state amongst people now, as they are. We must be careful to distinguish this from a worry about the very possibility of such a state, as we may be tempted to do. If Glaucon’s worry were the more serious one, that this city is strictly impossible, then there would need to be something about the city which demands of human beings something which they are simply incapable of doing (whether because of their psychology or physical limitations). But he is not making that kind of objection. He is rather imposing the standards of human beings as they are now in the Greek world at the time—living in a society with wine and gambling and prostitution—and raising a worry about whether they would be satisfied in living in such a city. He thus raises a question about realizability, given the already decadent desires of a common Greek city.

This is surely the force underlying the charge Glaucon next hurls at Socrates: “If you were founding a city of pigs (\textit{huôn}), Socrates, … wouldn’t you fatten them on the same diet? … If they aren’t to suffer hardship, they should recline on proper couches, dine at a table, and have the delicacies and desserts that people have nowadays (\textit{nun}).” Glaucon worries that \textit{he} will not be satisfied living in such a city or any of his fellow Greeks, for that matter. It is not that he thinks that such a city is strictly impossible, but that it is not a city in which he could live human life the way \textit{he} has lived it. Socrates, realizing this, respond in the following telling manner:

\(^{171}\textit{Rep. 372a3-c1.}\)
All right, I understand. It isn’t merely the origin of a city that we’re considering, it seems, but the origin of a luxurious (truphôsan) city. And that may not be a bad idea, for by examining it, we might very well see how justice and injustice grow up in cities. Yet the true city (alēthinê polis), in my opinion, is the one we’ve described, the healthy one (hugiês tis). The things I mentioned earlier and the way of life I described won’t satisfy some people, it seems, but couches, tables, and other furniture will have to be added, and of course, all other sorts of delicacies, perfumed oils, incense, prostitutes, and pastries.¹⁷²

There are numerous important things to mention here. First, notice that Socrates realizes that the challenge Glaucon has brought to his city really only affects its real-world realizability nowadays. Glaucon has not given Socrates a reason to think that the “city of pigs” is strictly impossible, or that it is not in fact the best, or that it could not be sustained. Socrates explicitly says at 372d1-3 that this city could in fact be sustained (perhaps ad infinitum) since this lifestyle would be passed peaceably from one generation to the next. But such is only for the healthy city, which Glaucon has said he does not want.

To meet Glaucon’s worry, Socrates introduces a whole host of new pleasures and diversions for the populace. But it must be kept in mind that Socrates does not do this in deference to Glaucon’s legitimate point. Rather he jokingly refers to the fact that now he must stop talking about the “true” and “healthy” city and start talking about the “luxurious” city. The implication to be drawn is an obvious one. Socrates willingly allows Glaucon to shift the conversation away from this particular ideal city because it will not satisfy Glaucon, and also because it just so happens that if we consider luxurious cities of this nature we will see justice and injustice more clearly.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Which of course could speak to the amount of injustice in the city. There is more of it so it is easier to see.
Though I have yet to put it in explicit fashion, it should be obvious to the reader already how this “city of pigs,” seen so disparagingly in the eyes of Glaucon, actually represents itself as a legitimate competitor to the later Callipolis. This city, though simple, is described by Socrates as both “healthy” and “true,” and his portrayal of life in such a city is idyllic and eminently attractive. Indeed, of all the ideal cities Plato describes in his dialogues, this city is the one which seems the most sustainable and perhaps the best one for human beings in their most innocent state. It is of course also ideal because it assumes a kind of well-ordered, peaceful beginning in time and neighboring cities of calm temperament. Nevertheless Socrates is not telling of a city in which people could not live under any circumstances. He has rather described one where they could live lives quite different from our own.

And this is the point that is lost on so many commentators of the Republic. The city of pigs represents a political ideal which, though far from our own way of life, is, as Socrates says, not, for that reason, a bad city. Glaucon’s worry is more legitimate if he were saying something to that effect. Rather, he asks that the ideal city be more like our own cities. And this is what causes the quick proliferation of vice in the city and what ultimately requires an army to protect the wealth of this new luxurious city, and further commanders of that army, and eventually guardians and rulers. Indeed, what many forget is that the Guardian class (and so philosophy) itself grows out of the luxuries of the city. People could live a quieter, simpler, more modest life (as Socrates says). And it would be a healthy and true life. All Socrates is saying with regard to the Callipolis later in the Republic is that should you choose to have a luxurious city, the Callipolis is possible and best.

But we now may naturally transition to our discussion of the Callipolis, and especially the conditions of possibility and optimality with regard to it.
In the next section my focus will shift a little. In the previous section I was concerned mainly to show that the city of pigs is a legitimate competitor as an ideal city to the Callipolis. The main point of this exercise is, I think, to challenge some of the orthodoxy surrounding the Republic, which, on my view, is too quick to identify the Callipolis with Plato’s best city. In this section I want to show some of the “give and take” that I mentioned in my introduction between possibility and ideality in the Republic. Some seem to think that this is a phenomenon only of the Laws. I, however, want to show that the Republic, in the discussion of both the city of pigs and the Callipolis, is concerned with the very same tension. That is, we see the very same tension that we find later in the Laws concerning a city’s possibility, realizability, sustainability, ideality, and optimality.

I shall move ahead considerably in the dialogue to Book V, after many of the most substantive and radical proposals of the Republic have already been laid out and Glaucon and Adeimantus are now considering them. Socrates mentions repeatedly that the city they have described up to this point is both possible (dunatos) and best (aristos). But Glaucon and Adeimantus still have their reservations. They agree that some of the most radical proposals—e.g., the community of wives and children—are in fact best (or, beneficial), but they worry that they are not possible. And they worry if the possibility requirement is not met (which again can either be our bare possibility or realizability requirements), then the best city is not really best at all because it is unhelpful. And at this point Socrates does something strange and which ought to catch our attention. He replies (at least in this first instance) to Glaucon and Adeimantus’ worries not with a response, but evasion. He says:

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But do me this favor. Let me, as if on a holiday, do what lazy people do who feast on their own thoughts when out for a solitary walk. Instead of finding out how something they desire might actually come about, these people pass that over, so as to avoid tiring deliberations about what’s possible and what isn’t. They assume what they desire is available and proceed to arrange the rest, taking pleasure in thinking through everything they’ll do when they have what they want, thereby making their lazy souls even lazier. I’m getting soft myself at the moment, so I want to delay our consideration of the feasibility of our proposal until later. With your permission, I’ll assume that it’s feasible and examine how the rulers will arrange these matters when they come to pass.175

About fifteen Stephanus pages later, Socrates does revisit the issue of realizability, but only after he is once again compelled by Glaucon to do so. And we see in Socrates’ response to Glaucon’s question the deep tension he feels between these two criteria. He calls them at various points the twin “coalition” of arguments that he will have to face. And this “possibility challenge” (which according to our criteria is more accurately called the “realizability challenge”) is the one Socrates has the most trouble dealing with. Now my point in mentioning all this is that we can see from the fact that Socrates takes this challenge so seriously that he is concerned, from the outset, with whether or not this particular constitution is realizable in the real world. There is a way in which this has been lost in some discussions concerning the Republic. Plato, in the Republic, is concerned with the very same questions concerning realizability that he is later in the Laws. The Callipolis does not represent for Plato an ideal which does not take into account certain unavoidable facts about human nature (as we have seen in the transition from the city of pigs to the Callipolis). Plato, at every point of discussion of the Callipolis in the Republic, is concerned with both its ideality and realizability. It is, as I have had to reason to say in the

175 458a-b5.
introduction, for that reason also a second-best city. It strives toward the optimal state of things in important ways and often succeeds, but also often fails. There is a give and take here which must be noted.

But again I think my point will be more clear if we turn back to the text. When Socrates finally revisits “possibility” (in his terms; our “realizability”), he makes a few concessions which appear upon a first reading, but which eventually speak as well to my interpretation. For when he responds to Glaucon’s repeated request to show that the city they have been describing is indeed possible, he says something which immediately creates a great gulf between the absolutely optimal city and the one which could be realized. The point is a subtle one, so it is best if I reproduce the passage now and in full:

Do you think that someone is a worse painter if, having painted a model of what the finest and most beautiful human being would be like and having rendered every detail of his picture adequately, he could not prove that such a man could come into being? … Then what about our own case? Didn’t we say that we were making a theoretical model of a good city? … So do you think that our discussion will be any less reasonable if we can’t prove that it’s possible to found a city that’s the same as the one in our theory? / Not at all. / Then that’s the truth of the matter. But, if in order to please you, I must also be willing to show how and under what conditions it would be most possible to found such a city, then you should agree to make the same concessions to me, in turn, for the purposes of this demonstration. … Is it possible to do anything in practice the same as in theory? Or is it in the nature of practice to grasp truth less well than theory does, even if some people don’t think so? … Then don’t compel me to show that what we’ve described in theory can come into being exactly as we’ve described it. Rather, if we’re able to discover how a city could come to be governed in a way that most closely approximates our description, let’s
say that we’ve shown what you ordered us to show, namely, that it’s possible for our city to come to be.\textsuperscript{176}

Now the emphasis of all this is a subtle point, and Socrates is in fact saying many things. For one, he is emphasizing once again that the absolutely optimal city will be \textit{more or less} approximated by any actual city. \textit{Any} city which came into being would only be a more or less rough approximation of the city in speech. This could of course be taken in many different ways. But the point I would like to focus on, and one which is often lost, is that Socrates’ most ingenious innovation (and the hallmark of Plato’s political theory) \textit{comes after} this concession—viz., that for a city to ever be just, it must either be ruled by philosophers or the philosophers themselves must become rulers.\textsuperscript{177} This is \textit{precisely} to say that the Callipolis \textit{is not in fact the city in speech}. It is a second-best approximation of it, for Socrates has just said that when he means to say that it is \textit{possible} (and then goes on to describe \textit{just how} it would be possible, viz., that there would need to be philosophers who rule or kings who philosophize) is that it \textit{approximate the best city very closely}.

This leaves some of the previous discussion of the Callipolis ambiguous (the description of the city before the introduction of the philosophers), but Socrates could not be more explicit that all of what follows after this discussion of possibility are not conditions which guarantee the real world existence of the Callipolis—\textit{conceived as the optimal city}—but conditions which guarantee some sort of approximation of it. Philosophers, so conceived, are just what Socrates says they are. They are the \textit{easiest route} to a good approximation of the optimal city. But they do not in fact guarantee \textit{the optimal city itself}.

\textsuperscript{176} Rep. 472d5-473b. My emphasis.
\textsuperscript{177} Rep. 473c9-d5.
Now this truly optimal city which I have been describing is, I think, only hinted at in the *Republic*, but, as we shall see, plays a more substantial role in the *Laws*. I think the mention of it in the *Republic* which is most striking comes later in Book VI. There Socrates describes *what* the philosopher continually has before his mind. And it is *this* community, I think, which Plato thinks is the ideal, rationally ordered, political community. It is the mysterious unity and oneness of the diverse and multiple Forms—the objects of the philosopher’s thought. *This* city is the only one which does not make important concessions to unavoidable facts about human nature. Socrates says:

> No one whose thoughts are truly directed towards the things that are, Adeimantus, has the leisure to look down at human affairs or to be filled with envy and hatred by competing with people. Instead, as he looks at and studies things that are organized and always the same, that neither do injustice to one another nor suffer it, being all in rational order, he imitates them and tries to become as like them as he can. … Then the philosopher, by consorting with what is ordered and divine and despite all the slanders around that say otherwise, himself becomes as divine and ordered as a human being can.\(^{178}\)

Socrates then goes on to describe the philosopher’s function as a member of the political community. He is a “painter of constitutions,” and while at his easel he is at once looking to human beings and then to the Forms, and back and forth constantly as he paints. The implication, of course, is there is never *full* representation of *this* ideal. The metaphysics of the Forms are never reflected without blemish onto the painting the philosopher is making. Again, Socrates:

> And I suppose that, as they work, they’d look often in each direction, towards the natures of justice, beauty, moderation, and the like, on the one hand, and towards those they’re trying to put

\(^{178}\) *Rep.* 500b-d.
into human beings, on the other. And in this way they’d mix and blend the various ways of life in
the city until they produced a human image based on what Homer too called “the divine form and
image” when it occurred among human beings. … They’d erase one thing, I suppose, and draw in
another until they’d made character for human beings that the gods would love as much as
possible.  \(^{179}\)

Now the emphasis on the inadequate representation of the philosopher’s activity (viz., taking
account of the nature of the Forms and painting them into men) is doubled when we remember
once again that even the philosopher-king is a sort of approximate \textit{ad hoc} solution to the problem
of realizability Socrates introduced earlier, and which Glaucon and Adeimantus repeatedly bring
up as an underlying worry with regard to Socrates’ “city in speech.” Socrates made this clear
when he said that for his city to be possible, it was enough for him to show Glaucon and
Adeimantus conditions which would bring about a city which would most closely \textit{approximate}
this ideal city they had been constructing, \textit{as if} that answered the question. In essence, when they
asked him to tell them whether or not the city he was describing was possible, he said that he
would avoid such a question, and rather show them that a \textit{similar} city was possible.

My treatment has been somewhat long-winded and the point I am trying to make is one
that becomes easily confused. The main point to realize from the above discussion is that even in
the \textit{Republic} we are given only an approximation of the optimal \textit{polis}. The “second-best” nature
of Magnesia is not unique to it. This phenomenon is shared with the constitution of the
Callipolis as well. This is \textit{not} to say that we cannot then compare the merits of both
constitutions. But it helps move us away from thinking that the Callipolis represents Plato’s
definitive word on politics, and that Magnesia of the \textit{Laws} should always be viewed as a distant

\(^{179}\) \textit{Rep.} 501b-c1.
second. Indeed, as I shall hope to show in the next section of my essay on the *Timaeus-Critias*, it seems that there are even more competitors to the Callipolis of the *Republic*, viz., Ancient Athens and Atlantis. My treatment over the next two sections (on the *Timaeus-Critias* and *Laws*) will be more brief, as much of the substantive parts of the interpretation have already been put forth in this section.

The ideal cities of the *Timaeus-Critias*. Ancient Athens and Atlantis.

In this next section I shall discuss the ideal cities described by Plato in the *Timaeus-Critias*. The remarks I have on these cities will be of particular importance for my interpretation. For, on my view, they show that Plato is committed not to the exact details of the Callipolis as his one optimal political arrangement. I think the discussions at the beginning of the *Timaeus* and later discussion we have in the *Critias* speak against that very view. In the previous section we were reminded of Plato’s famous image of the philosopher as a painter of constitutions—not unlike Plato himself. In this section I think we shall see some different paintings of the optimal state—with different colors and textures, as it were—but nevertheless still attempting the same sort of approximate project Plato began in the *Republic* when he started to discuss the Callipolis.

Three distinct cities are mentioned at the beginning of the *Timaeus* (perhaps four), but I shall focus especially on the “city of yesterday’s discourse” and Ancient Athens. In the introduction to the *Timaeus*, Socrates is trying to have his interlocutors help him remember what they had discussed the day before. They were meant to have remembered and rehearsed speeches about what Socrates had said, but they need Socrates’ help to remember these things. He goes on to give an enigmatic summary of the main points (*en kephalaiois*) of this city, which
looks similar to the *Republic* in important ways, but also strangely different.\(^{180}\) In the description of the city there are producers and Guardians once again, and these Guardians are said to be harsh against their enemies and gentle with their friends, and that they must be both philosophical and spirited.\(^{181}\) But there is nothing like the elaborate discussion concerning the philosopher-kings we find in the *Republic*. There is rather just the barest discussion about the qualities these Guardians must have to be good protectors of the city. And this transitions into the even stranger speech by Socrates after these preliminary comments. But in it we see once again Plato’s returning to questions of realizability and sustainability for the state he described in the *Republic* (or something similar to it). Socrates says:

> All right, I’d like to go on now and tell you what I’ve come to feel about the political structure we’ve described. My feelings are like those of a man who gazes upon magnificent-looking animals, whether they’re animals in a painting or even alive but standing still, and who then finds himself eager to look at them in motion or engaged in some struggle or conflict that seems to show off their distinctive physical qualities. I felt the same thing about the city we’ve described. I’d love to listen to someone give a speech depicting our city in a contest with other cities, competing for those prizes that cities typically compete for. I’d love to see our city distinguish itself in the way it goes to war and in the way it pursues the war: that it deals with the other cities, one after another, in ways that reflect positively on its own education and training, both in word and deed—that is, both in how it behaves toward them and how it negotiates with them.\(^{182}\)

Socrates then goes on to say that he is not qualified to deliver such a description, and that he needs the help of more politically savvy individuals. His other interlocutors—Critias, Timaeus,

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\(^{180}\) These similarities have led many to believe that the *Timaeus* is meant as a natural sequel to the *Republic*. That is, that the conversation of the *Timaeus* actually takes place the day after the conversation of the *Republic*.Cornford (1937) in his introduction argues forcefully against this view.

\(^{181}\) *Tim.* 18a.

\(^{182}\) *Tim.* 19b-d. Throughout I shall use the Zeyl translation (Indianapolis 2000).
and Hermocrates—he thinks will be able to help him achieve this task. This begins the whole action of the dialogue, where Critias gives more of an introduction (concerning Atlantis and Ancient Athens) and Timaeus eventually gives his long aside on the origin of the universe and of the human soul, and finally Critias returns to his discussion of Atlantis. But what is important to notice in the abovementioned passage is Socrates again showing his concern for the realizablity of the Republic picture: and not the optimal picture. His concern is with the city in outline (en kephalaios), the rough picture of the political ideal. This is why he can either mention or not mention the philosopher-kings in all their detail because any time he begins a discussion of his political ideal it is already a rough practical application of the impossibly (for human beings) perfect community of the Forms.

Socrates wants to see the Callipolis (or a city like it) alive and twitching in stories of its engagement in warfare and politics—precisely not as a static city in speech. That city (the truly optimal one we have had reason to mention, the city of the Forms) cannot be the subject of the speeches of Critias, Timaeus, and Hermocrates. That city doesn’t engage in warfare. That city doesn’t change. That city doesn’t move. What Critias can help Socrates to realize is a more or less accurate representation of what it would be like for the Callipolis (or a city like it) to move and to twitch and to run and to struggle (like the animal Socrates asks to see in the above passage). And he gives that in the coming pages.

A little later in the introductory portion of the Timaeus, Critias remembers an old story he heard from his grandfather about Solon, who met with an Egyptian priest who told him about Ancient Athens and its constitution. Solon was surprised to learn that Ancient Athens struggled with a mighty power in the Atlantic (now lost in the ocean) named Atlantis, and how it was able to save all of Greece from this power. Critias mentions all this by way of a remembrance that
was sparked because of things Socrates had said in his speech (and this theme will be picked up on later). Critias says that this priest told Solon about the political arrangement and customs of Ancient Athens, and they happen to be very similar to the city described in “yesterday’s discourse.” Critias relates how Solon heard about how Athena herself was for a time the leader of Ancient Athens and was responsible for their laws and the good political structure that the city enjoyed. Critias says (while relating the speech of the Egyptian priest):

The goddess instructed us just as she first instructed you in the regions where you live.

Furthermore, as for wisdom, I’m sure you can see how much attention our way of life here has devoted to it, right from the beginning. In our study of the world order we have traced all our discoveries, including prophecy and health-restoring medicine, from those divine realities to human levels, and we have also acquired all the other related disciplines. This is in fact nothing less than the very same system of social order that the goddess first devised for you when she founded your city, which she did once she had chosen the region in which your people were born and had discerned that the temperate climate in it throughout the seasons would bring forth men of surpassing wisdom. And, being a lover of both war and wisdom (philosophos), the goddess chose the region that was likely to bring forth men most like herself, and founded it first.

Shortly after this remarkable speech, Critias says that he was reminded of it after Socrates’ own speech the day before, which “by some supernatural chance” lined up almost exactly with Critias’ memory of what his grandfather had told him Solon said. This is of course surprising for a number of reasons. If the city of yesterday’s discourse, the city in outline, described at the beginning of the *Timaeus* is the Callipolis of the *Republic*, then there are significant

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183 See *Tim.* 25e-26a.
184 *Timaeus* 24b-e.
discrepancies. In the Republic there is no mention that Athena was the founder of Athens, nor that the Callipolis just turns out to be Ancient Athens. These claims are unique to the Timaeus.

And if we are in the grip of the orthodoxy I have mentioned before (which holds the Callipolis to be Plato’s optimal city, full-stop), the discrepancies are even more disturbing. Why does Plato not mention the philosopher-kings, if they are so essential to that optimal city, the Callipolis? Why does he say that the city of yesterday’s discourse (and Ancient Athens by implication) described in the Timaeus (which is lacking philosopher-kings) is then the most divine?

My view, as I have said numerous times, is specifically tailored to accommodate for these worries. It is by its very nature pluralistic. On my view, Plato is not committed to the Callipolis’ turning out to be the optimal city, but rather that it is an ideal city amongst many others. Depending on the context of the dialogue in which he is writing, Plato will be more or less concerned with bare possibility, sustainability, or realizability of an ideal city. In the Timaeus, his novel way of addressing concerns pertaining to realizability is to suggest that the ideal state has already in fact existed. He dispels worries concerning his ideal theory by placing it into a realm of fact, namely, the past. Plato is almost explicit about this in 26c-e. The city Socrates described in the day preceding the Timaeus just happens to be the city Critias remembers told by his grandfather. This might be easily dismissed as a rhetorical move, but Socrates emphasizes that it is in fact true (26e) and precisely not a fairytale. It is easy to interpret Plato as being rhetorical here. But if we take him seriously, I think the implications are far more interesting.

There is an interesting parallel here in the Republic and Laws. In both of those dialogues the conversation is forward-looking. There is a city to be founded. Whereas in the Timaeus, the position is more conservative: The ideal city of that dialogue has already flourished. But it also was not sustainable—just as Atlantis is shown to be in the Critias.

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185 Plato is almost explicit about this in 26c-e. The city Socrates described in the day preceding the Timaeus just happens to be the city Critias remembers told by his grandfather. This might be easily dismissed as a rhetorical move, but Socrates emphasizes that it is in fact true (26e) and precisely not a fairytale. It is easy to interpret Plato as being rhetorical here. But if we take him seriously, I think the implications are far more interesting.
Indeed, one can apply my interpretation in a very similar way to the Critias, though I shall not do so here because most of what is pertinent to my current interpretation is to be found in the beginning of the Timaeus. But in the Critias we have yet another analysis of an ideal city (Atlantis) which to varying extents is governed well and reaches high levels of political perfection, but also deviates in important ways from the community of the Forms described in the Republic. Most notably, like Ancient Athens in the Timaeus, Atlantis is governed by a set of divine laws from Poseidon—and similarly is unable to sustain itself when it begins to deviate from the laws.

Though my discussion of the Timaeus-Critias has been somewhat abbreviated, the important points for my interpretation have been put forward. We have seen how the “city of yesterday” and Ancient Athens present problems to the traditional view concerning Plato’s Callipolis. They instead speak to an even greater level of depth and nuance in Plato’s discussions of ideal cities. They speak to a pluralism about Plato’s ideal political theory. Ancient Athens especially is a competitor to the Callipolis. It seems, in all important respects, ideal in the way that the Callipolis of the Republic is ideal. Except rather than having philosopher-kings at its helm, it has but one philosopher, the goddess Athena. In the Republic we have an aristocracy. In the Timaeus we have an enlightened absolute monarchy.


In some ways my final section on ideal cities in Plato will be anti-climactic. For I have already had reason to mention a great deal about the Laws. We have already discussed Magnesia and the “city of gods or sons of gods” in outline. It is that city, I have argued, which represents Plato’s optimal city, and it is (at the very least) analogous to the community of Forms described in the
Republic. And, as it turns out, my view about how we ought to read Plato’s other ideal cities is in fact precisely the view Plato himself adopts in the Laws as the most sensible approach when listening to someone discuss ideal political theory. My view, if anything, is that we take the hermeneutical principles Plato himself gives us in the Laws for reading and interpreting ideal political theory and apply those to his other dialogues.

For the five criteria I set out earlier in this essay are but approximations of the concerns Plato himself raises over and over in the Laws. He worries just how realizable his ideal constitution is in Magnesia. This leads him to long discussions about the smallest minutiae concerning statecraft: the geographical placement (Crete) of the city, its access to minerals and resources, the very nature of its people and founders. He then is constantly concerned with the sustainability of his constitution—and writes passionately and convincingly about the dangers of change for any kind of political ideal.  

In this section I shall but review a few of the most pertinent passages from the Laws for this interpretation. But, bear in mind, I am not now trying to put forth a novel approach to the Laws. I am rather just putting forth what Plato himself says concerning his own political theory. These are the remarks I find most telling and which I have tried to read back into the Republic.

Toward the beginning of the Athenian’s project in founding Magnesia in the Laws, the Athenian pauses to address concerns surrounding his method. He says:

But there’s a lesson here that we must take to heart. This blueprint as a whole is never likely to find such favorable circumstances that every single detail will turn out precisely according to plan. It presupposes men who won’t turn up their noses at living in such a community, and who will tolerate a moderate and fixed level of wealth throughout their lives, and supervision of the

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186 Esp. Laws 797a-799a.
size of each individual’s family as we’ve suggested …. “My friends, in these talks we’re having, don’t think it has escaped me either that the point of view you are urging has some truth in it. But I believe that in every project for future action, when you are displaying the ideal plan that ought to be put into effect, the most satisfactory procedure is to spare no detail of absolute truth and beauty. But if you find that one of these details is impossible in practice, you ought to put it on one side and not attempt it: you should see which of the remaining alternatives comes closest to it and is most nearly akin to your policy, and arrange to have that done instead. But you must let the legislator finish describing what he really wants to do, and only then join him in considering which of his proposals for legislation are feasible, which are too difficult.\textsuperscript{187}

Throughout the \textit{Laws} we feel this tension between the absolutely optimal city (which I have identified with the city of gods) and what is practically possible. The tension is \emph{even} stronger than what we find in the \textit{Republic}. But in the \textit{Laws} it is much more explicit that \textit{any} human city will be a rough estimation, a mere \textit{representation} of the optimal city. Statecraft, by its nature, is incompletable. Later the Athenian says: “You know how painting a picture of anything seems to be a never-ending business. It always looks as if the process of touching up by adding color or relief (or whatever it’s called in the trade) will never finally get to the point where the clarity and beauty of the picture are beyond improvement.”\textsuperscript{188}

At this point I risk redundancy if I repeat my position too often. Most of what I have to say concerning the \textit{Laws} has already been said in my previous sections. What I would like to focus on again is its relation to how I have read the \textit{Republic} in this essay. My main argument throughout has been that we can look at the argument of the \textit{Republic} in a way very similar to that of the \textit{Laws}. Indeed, this has been my meaning when I have repeated the claim that \textit{both} the

\textsuperscript{187} \textit{Laws} 745a-746d.  
\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Laws} 769e-770a.
Callipolis and Magnesia are second-best cities. Contrary to views which aim to drive a wedge between the Republic and Laws, on my view, the Republic is not a project of ideal theory that is insulated from practical concerns. It does not give us one picture of what the ideal state would look like—upon which we then may base our interpretation of the Republic-Laws relationship. Similarly in the Laws this process of “touching up,” of adding more color and texture to our rough approximation of the ideal is never finished. Neither the Laws nor the Republic are definitive in that way.

I think we have now reached the point where I can begin to conclude this essay.

Concluding remarks

Throughout this essay I have advanced an interpretation which is admittedly radical, but, as I have hoped to show, more plausible than the traditional approach to the Republic and Laws, and, more generally, to Plato’s political theory. I have tried to show that Plato’s concerns in the Laws are in fact shared throughout the dialogues, and that the Laws is not uniquely a dialogue concerned with the real-world application of an absolutely optimal political arrangement. Rather, I hope to have shown that this is in fact essential to the Republic as well. Especially in my section on the Republic I have advanced readings of the sequence of the arguments which lend themselves to my interpretation.

There may be lingering questions about my motivations in adopting this approach to Plato. The first, of course, is that I think it is the more accurate approach to Plato as a simple matter of hermeneutics. The discussion in the Republic seems carefully crafted to lead to what I have called a pluralistic rather than monistic interpretation when it comes to human ideal cities.
The matter, of course, is different if we are in fact looking for Plato’s *optimal* city. This, I think, is something like the community of Forms in the *Republic* and the city of gods in the *Laws*.

But I am also motivated by another concern. I do not let it color my hermeneutical approach—rather, my hermeneutical approach has led me to see this further worth to my general view. If we adopt what I have called the orthodox view—which can encompass a whole host of views—about Plato’s *Republic*, where the Callipolis represents Plato’s one single ideal city, we may be naturally left appalled by some of its proposals. We must only conjure up images of babies being taken away from their mothers at birth and weak ones being euthanized to be not enthralled by Plato’s discussion, but horrified by it. This, I think, is what can and *should* result from a reading in line with Popper’s. If we view the *Republic* (or *Laws* for that matter) as *definitive* proposals for real-world political arrangements, we have to wonder whether we should just reject Plato altogether.

But my view, the pluralist view, avoids this. When we criticize Plato we do not have to reject his entire approach, rather, we only must take issue with what he thought (in various dialogues) to be the right sort of approximations of a political optimality. We can imagine ourselves at the very same easel and with paints and oils of our own, and end up with “paintings of constitutions” of a very different nature from those we find in Plato. We have new paints now—new vocabularies which are relevant to us—but the same sort of political problem that Plato faced in his own time. The lasting thing Plato gave us was a hermeneutical approach for reading his proposals—that they are *necessarily* second-best proposals.

In the *Republic*, Plato mentions that the philosopher will continually look back to the “divine form and image” (*Iliad* 1.131) of a human being to “mix and blend” the ways of life until he found the best sort of man possible. *This* is the dominant image of the *Republic*. 
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VITA

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