

The *rector rei publicae* of Cicero's *De Republica**

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Cicero's answer to Plato's *Republic* was entitled simply *De Republica*, "On the State", but in a letter to his brother Quintus (*Q. fr.* 3.5.1) the author referred to it more fully as being *de optimo statu civitatis et de optimo cive*, "on the best condition of the state and the best citizen". It is generally agreed that the *optimus civis*, or best citizen, is to be identified with the person referred to as *rector rei publicae*, ruler or director or helmsman of the state; and that the almost entirely lost fifth and sixth books of the dialogue were devoted to some sort of delineation of the character and attributes of the *rector*, though the phrase itself occurs as early as Book II. Clearly, therefore, this aspect of the work was a very important one, and our view of Cicero's purpose in this work must depend to a large extent on how we interpret the concept of the *rector rei publicae*. Scholarship on the subject is voluminous; it is unnecessary to record it all here in view of the excellent published survey by P.L. Schmidt (*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* I.4 [1973], 262-334, esp. 326-332); the debate on this particular problem has not been very far advanced since that survey appeared. I believe that the right interpretation was found, in all essentials, by Richard Heinze in 1924 (*Hermes* 59, 73-94). Although Heinze's views have found some acceptance, alternative interpretations still surface from time to time. Not being content to choose between the rival interpretations on grounds of general probability alone,¹ I thought it opportune to re-examine the textual evidence. In fact I had come to the same conclusion as Heinze before reading his article; but I think I also have one or two things to add, which are not made explicit in his discussion.

It is to be noted first that the phrase *rector rei publicae* — which, for brevity's sake, I shall hereafter abbreviate to *rrp* — occurs once before in Cicero's writings. In *De Oratore* 1.211, Antonius is about to argue, in Socratic terms, that there is a peculiar art of oratory, distinct from that of politics or law or literature or any other. If we were asking for a definition of the art of generalship (he says), we should first have to decide who counts as a general and what sort of things a general does by virtue of being one; and under that definition we would

* This paper is a revised version of part of a lecture given at Tel Aviv University, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and at Haifa University, in April 1992. I am vividly grateful for the hospitality I received in all three places.

¹ As e.g. N. Wood, *Cicero's Social and Political Thought* (Berkeley, CA 1988), 178.

include examples such as Scipio or Fabius Maximus, Epaminondas or Hannibal. He then continues:

Sin autem quaereremus quis esset is qui ad rem publicam moderandam usum et scientiam et studium suum contulisset, definirem hoc modo: Qui quibus rebus utilitas rei publicae pareretur augereturque teneret eisque uteretur, hunc *reipublicae rectorem* et consili publici auctorem esse habendum; praedicaremque P. Lentulum principem illum et Ti. Gracchum patrem et Q. Metellum et P. Africanum et C. Laelium et innumerales alios cum ex nostra civitate tum ex ceteris.

If, however, we were enquiring about the nature of that man who has applied his experience, knowledge and efforts to the government of the state, I would define him like this: I would say that a man who knows the means whereby the well-being of the state is achieved and increased, and makes use of that knowledge, is to be accounted a *rei publicae rector* and an originator of public policy; and in this category I would mention Publius Lentulus the *princeps senatus*,² Tiberius Gracchus senior, Quintus Metellus, Publius Africanus, Gaius Laelius and innumerable others both at home and abroad.

Antonius then proceeds to deal in the same way with the professions of lawyer, musician, grammarian, poet and philosopher, before he reaches that of orator. It is, one would have thought, so obvious as to demand no proof, that in this passage, *rrp* is intended simply as the name of a profession, on all fours with that of general, lawyer, musician and the rest. In line with his reference to four eminent military men to exemplify the category of general, Cicero lists by name five examples of the category of *rrp*, all eminent Roman politicians, and also includes "innumerable others both at home and abroad". The only possible sense of *rrp* that fits this context is, quite simply, "politician" or "statesman".

Pre-Ciceronian Latin, in fact, had no word for a politician as such. Members of the Roman upper class participated in the *res publica* or they did not (the phrase was typically *accedere ad rem publicam*); but there was no noun meaning someone who did this, and those who did so would almost certainly not have regarded themselves as practising a profession. Professions were things like schoolteaching or medicine or music or architecture, and most of them (if not all) were not considered respectable for Roman aristocrats. The concept of politics as a professional occupation might well have been quite new to Cicero's readers, and it is not surprising that some pains are taken in the *De Oratore* to make sure that the phrase *rrp* is understood, by defining it very explicitly and putting it in parallel with so many other examples. The idea (though without the phrase) is introduced similarly in *De Republica* 1.35, for the first time in the surviving portions of that work.³

² This is presumably the only possible meaning of *princeps* in this context.

³ Cf. also *Att.* 8.11.1.

The onus of proof must surely be on anyone who maintains that *rrp* in the *De Republica* is to be taken in a sense significantly different from the sense it bears in the *De Oratore*, which was written so close to it in time. In default of strong reasons to the contrary, Roman readers would surely take it in the same way in the later work as they had done in the earlier. There is, in fact, at least one passage in the *De Republica* in which it has seldom or never been taken in any other way. This is near the beginning of the *Somnium Scipionis*, where Scipio is told that good *rectores* of states go to heaven when they die:

Nihil est enim illi principi deo, qui omnem mundum regit, quod quidem in terris fiat, acceptius, quam concilia coetusque hominum iure sociati, quae civitates appellantur: harum rectores et conservatores hinc profecti huc revertuntur.

Nothing is more pleasing to that supreme god ... than those gatherings of men joined together by law, which are called commonwealths; the governors (*rectores*) and preservers of these came from here, and hither they return.

The word “preservers”, *conservatores*, calls to mind Cicero’s own claim to have saved the Republic; but any conscientious statesman would presumably qualify under the heading of *rectores* for a place in heaven, just as, in Plato’s *Phaedo* (82a-b), those who have practised “political excellence” are rewarded with the best seats in the world to come. This passage has stared commentators in the face since long before the main text of the *De Republica* was discovered, but few apart from Heinze seem to have recognised its connection with the concept of the *rrp*. It looks very much as though this passage was assumed not to count, because it was in the *Somnium*; yet for Cicero the *Somnium* was nothing more (nor less) than the concluding and climactic section of the *De Republica*, and it would indeed be most odd if <*civitatum*> *rectores* here meant something substantially different from *rectores rei publicae* (or *rerum publicarum*) elsewhere in the dialogue.

The concept of *rrp* occurs first in our surviving text in *Rep.* 2.51, and this is where the main problem arises. The context there implies that this is indeed the first time that Cicero has used the phrase in this work; he introduces it with the sort of apologetic fanfare which he reserves for new items of terminology.⁴ Scipio, who is speaking, has given an outline history of the kings of Rome, and has reached the last of them, Tarquinius Superbus, who is taken as an example of how abuse of kingly power leads to tyranny. In contrast to the tyrant, Scipio sets up what the context leads one initially to expect will be the ideal of a good king:

Sit huic oppositus alter, bonus et sapiens et peritus utilitatis dignitatisque civilis, quasi tutor et procurator rei publicae; sic enim appelletur quicumque erit rector et gubernator civitatis; quem virum facite ut agnoscatis; est enim qui consilio et opera civitatem

⁴ Cf. J.G.F. Powell, “Cicero’s Translations from Greek”, in *Cicero the Philosopher: A Collection of Papers*, ed. J.G.F. Powell (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

tueri potest. Quod quoniam nomen minus est adhuc tritum sermone nostro, saepiusque genus eius hominis erit in reliqua nobis oratione tractandum ...

Here there intervenes a large and regrettable gap in the manuscript; but let us get what we can by attending closely to Cicero's words in the part of the text that does survive. The type of ruler who is the opposite of the tyrant is to be good and wise and experienced in matters concerning the well-being and good name of the state, and as it were a guardian and administrator of the commonwealth. This seems uncontroversial. Now come the words: "for in that way let anyone be described who is a *rector* and helmsman of the state." This can easily be slurred over as an example of Cicero's well-known habit of calling the same thing by three or four different names; but in fact it is rather peculiar. There seems to be an argument more or less to this effect: anyone who is a *rector* and helmsman of the state should be called a guardian and administrator of the state; but the good king is a *rector* and helmsman; therefore he should be called a guardian and administrator of the state. This appears to be a pointless tautology. But let us look again. In fact these words do add something. Their function is to establish the existence of a class of persons designated as *rectores* and helmsmen of the state, all entitled to be called guardians and administrators: a category which includes the sub-class of good monarchs *but also includes others as well*. In other words, the argument is that kings can indeed be good *rectores*, but so can plenty of other people; one might instance some of those Romans mentioned in the *De Oratore*, none of whom, I think, was a king.

Consequently, this passage, which has always appeared to be one of the main supports for the idea that the *rrp* in the *De Republica* is a monarch, and one of the main stumbling-blocks for the alternative view, turns out in reality to make very little sense on the assumption that all *rectores* are monarchs, and indeed to be capable of being read as asserting the opposite. If this is granted, the rest of the passage is reasonably plain sailing. We are told that we must keep the idea of the *rector* in mind: "Make sure you recognize this man, for it is he who is able to protect the state by his counsels and efforts. And since this name is not yet very familiar in our language, and the type to which this man belongs will have to be dealt with rather often in the rest of our discussion ...". This is the point at which the manuscript fails us, but not before giving another indication that we are on the right lines. This indication is contained in the phrase *genus eius hominis*. That does not mean "this type of man", which would be *genus id hominum*, but "the type to which this man belongs". In other words we are again being told that the good king is only one of many people who have a claim to be thought good *rectores* or governors.

But why does Cicero make such apparently heavy weather of the introduction of the term *rrp* and its near synonyms? The clue to this may perhaps be found in the words *sermone nostro*. Even the commentary of Büchner, which is in general on the right lines, has difficulty with this phrase. Taken by itself, it

might mean “our conversation”; but the context would then imply that every term that has not yet been used in the course of that particular conversation stands in need of lengthy explanation and definition. This seems unlikely. But *sermo* has another, equally common meaning: “language” (as in “the Latin language” or “the Greek language”). Cicero is more likely to be saying that the term *rrp* is not so far a familiar Latin term.⁵

I have already indicated that the concept it denotes in the *De Oratore* was probably an unfamiliar one. But another deduction now presents itself. Elsewhere, when Cicero refers to terms that are not yet familiar in Latin, he only ever means one thing, i.e. that he is trying to find a Latin equivalent for some term or concept that is current in Greek. What then could be the Greek term for which *rrp* is the makeshift Latin equivalent? If one supposes that the Greek word πόλις or πολιτεία is going to be translated into Latin as *res publica*, one may then ask, as Heinze did (pp. 92ff.), what Cicero is going to do about πολιτικός, the adjective from πόλις, which when used as a masculine noun means a man who occupies himself with politics. The word *republicanus* was not, I believe, invented until the seventeenth century; if Cicero had thought of it he would probably have condemned it as an ill-formed barbarism. If Cicero was going to follow his common practice of using a paraphrase where there was no single-word equivalent (cf. *Fin.* 3.15), he would be quite likely to come up with a phrase such as *rector rei publicae*. Is this, therefore, a Latin equivalent for πολιτικός?

Now, Plato wrote a dialogue called *Politicus*, devoted to analysing the character of the ideal Statesman. This work was preceded by a delineation of the type of the Sophist, and apparently was intended to be followed by a *Philosophus* which would do the same for the Philosopher. Aristotle also, it seems, wrote a work on the “best citizen”, unfortunately lost to us. But Cicero must clearly have had it in mind when writing the *De Republica*, since he refers to it (in the letter mentioned at the beginning; cf. also *Fin.* 5.11) as a precedent for his own writing on the state and the best citizen. Cicero had himself just written *On the Orator*, and in that work had shown himself acquainted with the Platonic and Socratic method of defining the art of the orator, general, politician and so forth in terms analogous to the arts of music or grammar or medicine. he was to do so again later, even more explicitly, and with an allusion to Plato’s Theory of Ideas,

⁵ That the word *rector* itself is ancient could be presumed from its occurrence in ordinary Latin with the meaning “steersman” (of a ship or chariot, etc.), although examples are hard to find before Cicero; the earliest recorded by the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* appears to be Catullus 64.204. Although *rector* is cognate with *rex*, it is very clearly not *rex*; a *rector* is anyone who *regit*, and *regere* need not imply absolute or single-handed rule. Indeed, the traditional English translation “rule” is itself too strong for *regere* in many contexts; “direct”, “guide”, “govern”, “manage”, or “control” would be better.

in the *Orator*. The *De Republica*, we should remember, is not just about the state but also the Best Citizen. It would not be surprising if in such a work he set himself to define the character of the ideal politician, in the same way as he had done for the orator in *De Oratore*. Plato's πολιτικός, and doubtless also Aristotle's, is an ideal ruler, someone who knows the art of governing, just as (say) a doctor is someone who knows the art of medicine. Cicero's *rrp* is the same sort of man. It may have been a recognition of the importance of this aspect of the *De Republica* that led Cicero's friend Caelius to refer to it as *tui politici libri*.

The extent of Cicero's dependence on the lost work of Aristotle cannot, of course, be assessed. As for Plato's *Politicus*, Cicero never refers explicitly to it as he does to the *Republic*; but he may have had some acquaintance with it, and at any rate it may have had some influence on the tradition of Greek political theorising that Cicero followed. In particular, the classification of constitutions in the *Politicus* may be thought in some respects to be nearer to Cicero's than that of the *Republic*. In that work, as is well known, five types of constitution are recognised: monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny. In the *Politicus*, this classification is discussed and superseded by a sevenfold one, in which there are three acceptable constitutions (monarchy, aristocracy, democracy); three bad ones (tyranny, oligarchy, mob rule); and one other, the ὀρθὴ πολιτεία or "right" constitution, in which the state is ruled by one πολιτικός or perhaps by a few πολιτικοί who are masters of the art of ruling, and who govern not according to laws (which Plato considers too blunt an instrument to deal with all possible situations) but according to their true knowledge of the art. The idea that there are three possible good constitutions and three corresponding corrupt ones is of course most familiar from Aristotle, and becomes more or less standard thereafter; but its ultimate source seems to be Plato's *Politicus*. Later, and most famously in Polybius, one finds the idea of a mixed constitution that combines elements of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. Cicero is well aware of this, and counts it as a seventh type alongside the canonical six, better than any of them and exemplified in the historical Roman constitution. It is quite wrong to try to identify the mixed constitution, or any other existing one, with the ὀρθὴ πολιτεία of the *Politicus*, because the latter is not a constitution at all in the normal sense of the word; it is a state of affairs in which the government is in the hands of people who are experts in the art of governing. Yet Cicero's message, ultimately, is not too different from the message of this part of the *Politicus*.

Cicero argues that some constitutions are inherently better than others and that the Roman one is best of all; but even the Roman constitution, as history has shown, is not insured against disaster and revolution. Any state can be brought low by bad government (cf. *Rep.* 1.69; 3.41). The only thing that can produce stability in a state, according to Cicero, is the quality of the people who run it; they need to be good men skilled in the art of government, who know how to

deal with any situation that may arise. Thus (as is said in the first book of the *De Republica*) a monarchical state will be well governed when its king is a good man skilled in the art of government; but as soon as the king ceases to be such a person, the state turns into a tyranny. An aristocratic state will be well governed when the aristocrats, *principes* or *optimates*,⁶ are good men skilled in the art of government; otherwise it will degenerate into oligarchy. A democratic state might in theory be well governed, but it is unlikely that a whole people would ever consist of good men skilled in the art of government; hence Cicero is sceptical about this alternative. The Roman compromise may work well, because, although a certain amount of power is entrusted to the people as a whole, the business of government is carried on by a relatively small number of men. The members of this governing class, as a largely hereditary élite, can be properly educated and prepared from childhood for the business of government; but they will not govern solely by virtue of their membership of this class. They must be elected to office by the people on the basis of their personal capacities. When they become magistrates, their powers will be limited not so much in extent as in time; and there is scope for extraordinary powers and commands to be granted to individuals in times of crisis. The safety of the Roman state can from time to time depend on one man, who may be officially a consul or a dictator, but could even be a man without public office but in a position of supreme informal influence enabling him to direct public policy. To this extent, and to this extent only, Cicero's conception of the *rrp* is monarchical. The good man skilled in government can only operate effectively if he has some *locus standi* within the constitution. But there is never any suggestion that the Roman constitution should be altered to provide a permanent or semi-permanent position for such a man. To take this view is to confuse categories. *Rrp* means "statesman"; it is not the name of a specific post, but the name of a profession or occupation. I might say that I want my university to be run by conscientious academics, or that the university is well run when its Vice-Chancellor is a conscientious academic; but I do not for that reason expect to see an advertisement in the papers saying that the University intends to proceed to an appointment to the post of Conscientious Academic.

There are two further factors that may pull us back in the direction of a monarchical *rrp*. One is what one must assume to be the original meaning of

⁶ Heinze observes, quite rightly, that the word *princeps* in the *De Republica* never has any other sense than "one of the *principes*", i.e. a member of the aristocracy. Cf. esp. 1.34 and 5.12 (= fr. ap. Aug. *C.D.* 5.13). Cicero's usage probably allows for one man to be *princeps civitatis suae* in the sense of "the foremost man in the state"; in *Fin.* 5.11 it is said that Aristotle and Theophrastus discussed the proper character of a *princeps civitatis*, probably about equivalent to *rrp* in *Rep.*; but the idea of a single *princeps* along Augustan lines is doubtless alien to Cicero's thought. Note too the proper meaning, uncontaminated by political tendentiousness, of the word *optimates*, "aristocrats".

rector, a steersman. There is usually only one helmsman per ship, and one driver per chariot. Cicero uses the Platonic parallel with the helmsman a number of times. Is he not, therefore, thinking of a monarchical scheme in which there is only one *rrp* per state? Surely not. The image of the Ship of State is commonplace and implies nothing definite about the constitution. In the *De Divinatione* (2.3: written 44 BC) Cicero could say that he wrote the *De Republica* while he sat at the helm of the state, even though during that period he held no magistracy (except, at the end, the governorship of Cilicia) and was simply a senator of consular rank. Second, Cicero's Platonic models, and probably his Aristotelian ones as well, apparently laid more emphasis on the single ruler and freely used the word βασιλεύς (or βασιλικός "kingly character") to refer to their ideal ruler. It is not, indeed, surprising that Plato and Aristotle should talk more about kings, since they had more dealings with actual monarchs and did not have to allow for the Roman fear of *regnum*; yet even so, although Plato in the *Republic* talks of kingship as the best form of government, there is clearly a plurality of Guardians in his ideal city. As long as Plato's *Republic* was kept in mind one could not think too exclusively of a monarchy. Both in Plato and in Cicero, the ideal ruler, who has knowledge of the art of government, can function equally well as a king or as one of a number of Guardians or *principes*.

Cicero does make it clear (and in this respect also he is at one with Plato) that the next best thing to the ideal constitution is a benevolent monarchy. This view has seemed surprising in a Roman, and perhaps for that reason has loomed larger than it should have done in discussions of the *De Republica*. But there is another point to be remembered. The *De Republica* is a dialogue. For Cicero to express such ideas in his own person might indeed have been provocative or misleading. But in the dialogue they are attributed to an idealized Scipio who is clearly much more of a Platonist than his historical counterpart probably was; and we must not forget the reasoning behind them. If the success of government depends on the quality and expertise of the governors, then in a monarchy it clearly depends on the quality of one man alone. By the simple laws of probability, one is more likely to find one reasonable man in power than to find a whole ruling class of aristocrats, let alone a whole citizen body, who are all flawless specimens of the *rrp*. However, by the same token, monarchy is the form of government that is most prone to go wrong. A change of ruler, or a change in the character of the ruler, will have consequences that are both immediate and disastrous (and let nobody suggest that Cicero did not envisage the possibility of a good ruler becoming bad).

Because of the precarious character of monarchy, Cicero prefers the mixed constitution. The Roman arrangement provides for its magistrates to have virtually the powers of a monarch, subject to collegiality and temporal limitation, and thus provides ample scope for a good ruler to exercise his qualities. On the other hand, bad rulers can be removed relatively easily before they have done too

much harm. The Roman senatorial order ideally functions as a reservoir of good and prudent *rectores rei publicae*, or in plain English, of statesmen, any of whom can take the helm when required;⁷ of course some are more outstanding than others, and in that category Cicero would no doubt name Scipio, Laelius and the rest of the heroes of the Roman Republic on whose virtues he never tires of dilating. On the other hand Cicero was only too aware that this was an ideal picture, and that recent reality did not come up to these high standards; one has only to read the end of the first book of the *De Republica* to see that this is so.

It is now clear why so much of the *De Republica* had to be about the ideal statesman, the *rrp* or the *optimus civis*. In modern English the words "good citizen" perhaps have a rather bland if not negative sound; being a good citizen is a matter of obeying the law, performing one's (usually quite limited) public duties and not annoying the neighbours. The connotations of *optimus civis* are very different. Cicero's Best Citizen is a person who displays political excellence, πολιτική ἀρετή, in the highest degree; in other words, a statesman or governor, who contributes fully to the running of the *res publica* and achieves personal eminence within it. The novel aspect of Cicero's message (novel, that is, from a Roman point of view) is the Platonic point that there are certain specific forms of knowledge, experience, skill and moral qualities that such a person needs in order to excel and in order to serve the state. It is not possible, according to Cicero, for just anyone to decide to plunge into politics and make a success of it by the light of nature;⁸ politics is a profession requiring both innate qualities and appropriate training, and it is the calibre of those who practise it that determines the health of the State.⁹ The precise form of the constitution is a matter of secondary importance, though some forms may be more conducive than others to the exercise of good government. Any constitution, even the Roman one which is in itself predisposed to stability, can become corrupted or changed. What matters is that the state should be ruled by good *rectores rei publicae*; and it is these who are rewarded with eternal life in the heaven of the *Somnium Scipionis*.

It should be obvious, in view of what I have said, that I do not think Cicero wrote the *De Republica* in order to put forward concrete proposals for the alteration of the Roman constitution, and that the question whether he had a particular individual in mind, such as Pompey or himself, when delineating the *rrp*, is basically misconceived. Furthermore, the idea that Cicero in some sense prefigured the Augustan constitution seems to die hard.¹⁰ Yet his views on actual or

⁷ Cf. *Rep.* 2.67.

⁸ *Rep.* 1.10-11.

⁹ This essential point is made by W. Nicgorski, "Cicero's Focus: From the Best Regime to the Model Statesman", *Political Theory* 19 (1991), 230-251. I am grateful to Prof. Nicgorski for sending me a copy of his article, the tenor of which coincides very much with my own views.

¹⁰ See Schmidt, *ANRW* I.4, 331-2 for the *status quaestionis*.

attempted monarchy when he saw it in practice were most decided; and his first reaction on seeing the young Octavian in 44 BC was that he could not be a *bonus civis* (let alone *optimus*!). Cicero might, indeed, have been horrified if he had lived to see the Augustan system as it eventually materialised. What Augustus Caesar thought of the *De Republica* is another matter; there is no knowing whether he may not have seen in it some form of justification for his own methods. That is the sort of thing that frequently happens to books when they are let out into the world; but such considerations are irrelevant to the reconstruction of Cicero's original message.

In its more immediate historical context, the *De Republica* was the victim of a horrible irony. It was published in the late 50's BC, perhaps as late as 51, when Caelius wrote to Cicero attesting its general popularity. Two years later, Caesar crossed the Rubicon and Rome was in a state of civil war. Cicero's idealised picture of the Roman Republic, and his warnings about political instability and the dangers of tyranny, had not the slightest effect in averting this disaster. One might therefore think that the book was something of a failure. Yet it is unlikely that Cicero was so idealistic as to think that his writing would have any immediate political effect in Rome. In literary and intellectual terms its value was to be more lasting; and if I am right about its central message, it was an expression of what is after all a true principle: that good government can happen only if there are good governors, for whom the duty of ensuring the people's welfare comes before the desire for personal power.

Postscript

The two readers who reported on the above article both raise interesting points, on which I should like to comment briefly here, while leaving the article itself as originally submitted. One of them, who revealed himself as Professor John Glucker, was unconvinced by the idea of a direct link between *rector rei publicae* and the Platonic πολιτικός, and desired a closer source in contemporary or near-contemporary Greek philosophy or political theory. He points out that the word πολιτικός is not to be found in Polybius, who expresses the same or a similar concept by means of the words προεστῶτες or ἡγούμενοι. I suspect that Cicero would have seen these words as equivalent to his *principes* rather than *rectores*, and thus too specifically aristocratic or oligarchic for his purpose; I do not see why he should not have gone directly back to Plato and Aristotle for the more "neutral" word πολιτικός, since after all the *De Republica* as a whole looks back to Plato's *Republic* as a literary model and contains a number of direct allusions to Plato, and he refers in *Q. fr.* 3.5.1 to Aristotle's work on the "best citizen" as a precedent for his own *De Republica*. Of course, Cicero would also have been familiar with Greek political theory nearer his own time, which may well have influenced his thinking, and in which, indeed, there may possibly

have been a more immediate source for the *rector* than Plato or Aristotle, but it is difficult to be certain since the evidence is so incomplete. As Professor Gucker points out, there may be an interesting similarity between what Polybius says about the causes of constitutional changes at 6.5-9 and Cicero's view of the matter as interpreted in this article. These matters deserve further investigation, but I do not think they have an immediate effect on the plausibility or otherwise of my main argument. If the *rector* is not Plato's πολιτικός, he is something very like it, and probably at least belongs ultimately to the same tradition of political thinking.

The other reader asks why the phrase *rector rei publicae* does not occur in Cicero's later writings. There are, in fact, other examples of technical or semi-technical terms introduced by Cicero in a philosophical context and thereafter abandoned by him (e.g. the word *beatitudo* in *N.D.* 1.95). The phrase was, as he himself says, *minus tritum sermone nostro* and therefore could not be introduced without preparation even in a philosophical context; one would expect it to occur in later works only as part of a direct allusion to *De Republica*. The question then becomes that of why he did not revert to the political ideas of the *De Republica* in later works (he was happy to allude to it as a source of arguments on morality or the fate of the soul). The answer must be that there was no context for them either during the civil war, under Caesar's dictatorship, or in the political crisis after the Ides of March. The later philosophical works contain only occasional veiled allusions to political matters, and the letters and speeches of this period belong to a very different world from that of Cicero's ideal statesman.

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