

BOOK REVIEW

Cicero's Practical Philosophy. Edited by WALTER NICGORSKI. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012. Pp. xiii + 313. Hardcover, \$42.00. ISBN 978-0-268-03665-2.

This collection of papers is a useful starting point for those seeking to get an insight into current trends at the cutting-edge of Ciceronian studies. The collection does not form a full or comprehensive account of Cicero's "practical philosophy"—his ethical and political thought—in all its dimensions. Rather it offers various snapshots into certain key aspects. Further, the collection is not an introduction to core elements of Cicero's practical philosophy. It aims at a more advanced readership: the papers all require a fairly solid grounding in the history of republican Rome, Cicero's life and career, and Greek ethical and political theory; moreover, a good working knowledge of Latin is essential since not everything is translated. It must be said that in some ways events have overtaken this collection, which is the result of a 2006 University of Notre Dame symposium, as a number of major publications dealing with aspects of Cicero's philosophical and political thought and practice have appeared since then. Nonetheless, all the papers are fresh and make valuable contributions to the state of debate.

In his paper "Cicero's *De Re Publica* and the Virtues of the Statesman," J. G. F. Powell helpfully brings to the fore Cicero's ongoing preoccupation with the topic of the leader in the context of the republican mixed constitution. Powell stresses the importance of the four cardinal Platonic virtues—wisdom, justice, temperance, and fortitude—in Cicero's crafting of the partially extant dialogue *De Re Publica*, and the paper offers a coherent account of the overall structure of the work.

Malcolm Schofield, in his paper "The Fourth Virtue," offers a punchy discussion of Cicero's treatment of the virtue of *moderatio* (temperance) that increases in particular our understanding of the *De Officiis*, Cicero's great final philosophical work. Among other things, Schofield puts *decorum* in its proper place, stressing that for Cicero much of our practical ethical and political conduct is not

merely a matter of “doing what is right” but also managing the impressions we make on others.

In his paper “Philosophical Life versus Political Life: An Impossible Choice for Cicero?,” Carlos Lévy provides a broad overview of a topic that exercised Cicero’s thinking for many years. The paper offers a taste of the scope of Cicero’s personal struggles with the issue, and it demonstrates well how the topic permeates a wide range of Cicero’s writings—letters, speeches, dialogues, treatises.

Catherine Tracy, in her paper “Cicero’s *Constantia* in Theory and Practice,” explores the tension between Cicero’s commitments to Academic skepticism, which advocates adapting one’s opinions and actions in accordance with the evidence or the circumstances, and the practical political virtue of *constantia*, firmness or resolve in the face of new pressures and developments. Tracy’s discussion is enlightening, and she illuminates helpfully the ways in which Cicero struggled in both his theoretical works and his speeches to craft an image of his *constantia*.

In her paper “Cicero and the Perverse: The Origins of Error in *De Legibus* 1 and *Tusculan Disputations* 3,” Margaret Graver looks at Cicero’s treatment of the theme of moral perversion—how to explain errors and wrongdoing. The general Stoic pedigree of Cicero’s thinking is stressed, but Graver shows how certain distinctly Ciceronian additions are made to the basic Stoic framework.

In “Radical and Mitigated Skepticism in Cicero’s *Academica*,” Harald Thorsrud explores the nature of Cicero’s skepticism. The paper provides a concise overview of the nature of Academic skepticism and its relationship with Stoicism, and it usefully shows how Cicero’s epistemological concerns link in closely with his ethical and political thought.

David Fott’s detailed and engaging paper, “The Politico-Philosophical Character of Cicero’s Verdict in *De Natura Deorum*,” examines Cicero’s theological thinking in dialogues such as *De Natura Deorum* and *De Divinatione*. Fott is particularly good at highlighting how Cicero saw such matters fitting into a wider ethical and political scheme. Among other things, there is useful discussion of Cicero’s distinction between religion and superstition, the nature of Cicero’s skepticism, and the acuity, care, and subtlety with which Cicero treated a range of socially and politically sensitive issues.

In his paper “Between *Urbs* and *Orbis*: Cicero’s Conception of the Political Community,” Xavier Márquez offers an engaging analysis of Cicero on the political community. He contrasts Cicero’s thinking with earlier Greek traditions of thought and stresses the synergies with modern thinking on the nation state. Key

aspects of Cicero's thinking are demarcated clearly, and plenty will be of wide interest to both classicists and contemporary political theorists.

In "Cicero on Property and the State," J. Jackson Barlow tackles the issue of private property. It has long been acknowledged that Cicero has interesting and valuable things to say about property rights and the role that economic and ethical concerns over private property play in the development of political organizations such as the state. Barlow provides a discussion of Cicero's thinking that shakes up existing views in the literature by stressing Cicero's concern to mitigate an unhealthy fixation on property, in particular of the sort that led to ongoing civil strife in the Roman republic.

In addition, Walter Nicgorski's 1978 paper, "Cicero and the Rebirth of Political Philosophy," is reprinted as an Appendix; there is a Bibliography that can serve as a reasonable starting-point for further research; an Index that is clear and sufficiently detailed; and a list of cited passages of Cicero.

Taken as a whole the collection has a number of virtues. The papers are concise, well-written, and well-argued: the theses are clear and often form ambitious challenges to received views. The range of critical approaches on display—there are papers from classicists, Latinists, philosophers, political theorists—showcases well the fruitful ways that Cicero can be tackled and how inter-disciplinary scholarly endeavor can be mutually informative and rewarding. The collection achieves its aim of bringing Cicero himself to the forefront: all the papers focus on innovative and sophisticated aspects of Cicero's politico-philosophical thought and practice. In particular, the contributors resist becoming too hung up on worries about Cicero's Greek sources for various things, or the ways in which his own thinking in places can be characterized as, for example, essentially Stoic or Academic. This helps give the book coherence and focus, and at the end of the collection one has the strong impression that Cicero was a genuinely first-rate intellect and philosophical thinker who deserves close study and a wider appreciation amongst philosophers and political theorists alike, thus amply meeting the editor's goal in organizing the collection. So, in sum, *Cicero's Practical Philosophy* is a good collection of papers into selected aspects of Cicero's politico-philosophical thought and practice that will be of value, in particular, to those seeking to engage with recent developments in Ciceronian studies.

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