

BOOK REVIEW

Cicero's Ideal Statesman in Theory and Practice. By JONATHAN ZARECKI. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. Pp. xi + 212. Hardcover, \$104.00. ISBN 978-1-78093-295-8.

Neglected for the 20th century, Roman political thought has seen a recent resurgence of scholarly interest, with classicists, political theorists, and philosophers contributing to a cross-disciplinary conversation. Cicero has been of particular importance to this renaissance, and Zarecki has added an important contribution to this scholarship in his original book.

Zarecki's approach can be described as biographical philosophy: rather than interpret Cicero's philosophy and its development by means of Cicero's biography, Zarecki explores the effects of Cicero's philosophical activities on his biography. In doing so, Zarecki makes three broad claims. First, he demonstrates that Cicero's Skepticism affected his account of the ideal statesman, or what Zarecki terms the *rector*-ideal. Second, he argues that Cicero's political thought aimed not at producing "a new generation of statesman," but that the *rector*-ideal "was constructed by Cicero for Cicero" (4; cf. e.g. 11, 91). Third, he suggests that the *rector*-ideal served as "Cicero's rubric" for evaluating individuals such as Pompey, Caesar, and Antony (4).

The book consists of seven chapters. In the Introduction, Zarecki outlines his argument, situating it within existing scholarship on *De re publica* and the *rector rei publicae*. Since Zarecki interprets Cicero through the infrequently used *rector rei publicae* (the term *rector* features only 10 times in Cicero's corpus), he deploys the term "rector-ideal" to capture the concept's "moral, philosophical, and political aspects" (5).

In Chapter 1—"Academic Skepticism and Cicero's Political Philosophy"—Zarecki urges that the *De re publica* be read as a Skeptical exercise, with the *rector*-ideal "an opinion in the Philonian sense" (44). Chapter 2, "Cicero's Philosophical Politics," focuses on the context of the *De oratore*, *De re publica*, and *De legibus*, a trilogy originating "from what Cicero viewed as the failures of the three primary braces of the mixed constitution: oratory, statesmanship, and the law" (46). These works, and the *rector*-ideal, portray a figure whose "*prudentia*, *virtus*, *dignitas*, and *auctoritas*" render him "persuasion embodied" (68). Zarecki then

argues in Chapter 3, “*De re publica* and the Outbreak of Civil War,” that “despite being both unobtainable and theoretical,” Cicero deployed the *rector*-ideal in his political activities and in understanding Pompey, ascribing to him “*temeritas*, *ignavia*, and *neglegentia*,” each vice opposed to a key *rector* virtue. Chapter 4, “*Rex Caesar* and the *Rector*-ideal” centers on the Caesarian speeches, which deploy themes from *De re publica* and hence the *rector*-ideal, enabling Cicero to make sense of and criticize Caesar’s autocracy.

In the final substantive chapter, “The Ultimate Failure of the *Rector*-Ideal,” Zarecki argues that the *rector*-ideal guides Cicero’s portrayal of Caesar in *De officiis*, his portrayal of Antony in the *Philippics*, and his own political action after Caesar’s assassination. Of Cicero’s last months, Zarecki writes, “By bringing the authority of the senate to bear against Antony, Cicero reinstated... not only restored, albeit temporarily, the balance inherent in the mixed constitution, but also exhibited the traits of the *rector*-ideal” (154). The irony is that “Cicero may have failed as a Republican, but he succeeded in living up to the *rector*-ideal” (159).

Zarecki’s book has many virtues: it takes seriously the challenge of interpreting Cicero’s writings across distinct genres. The outcome is valuable partly because it avoids generic constraints on a thinker whose project transcends genre, and partly because it presents a holistic portrait of an individual who is both theorist and practitioner. Also valuable is the *rector*-ideal heuristic, allowing Zarecki to argue that the concepts entailed by the *rector rei publicae* make sense of Cicero’s writing writ large, even when the term *rector* is not used. Rather than present Cicero the philosopher or the politician, Zarecki presents us with a philosophical politician whose ideals guided his practice and were shaped by experience.

One might wonder how successful the *rector*-ideal was in the end. Cicero achieved a limited successful performance of the *rector*-ideal against Antony. Yet the confluence of circumstances that Caesar’s death presented, along with Antony’s status as a polarizing figure, might make the brief reinstantiation of the *concordia ordinum* as much a function of contingency as Cicero’s performance. Did Cicero need an Antony to enact his ideal?

Moreover, in thinking about the value of Cicero’s thought for debates on Roman political ethical and how it can enrich political theory and philosophy more broadly, we may ask: by restricting the *rector*-ideal to “a practical code of behavior for Cicero,” does Zarecki restrict Cicero’s relevance for political theory and philosophy and the book’s contribution to the renaissance of Roman political thought (162)?

This is not necessarily a weakness of the book, which is about Cicero first and foremost. Restricting the implications of Cicero's thought may be a manifestation of what Dean Hammer describes as a Roman philosophical approach that is "almost embarrassingly affective and tangible" compared to Greek political thought (7).¹ Or, it may make a more subtle contribution to renewed attention to Roman political thought, portraying Cicero's thought as akin to what Bernard Williams (2–3) terms "political realism," a form of political theorizing in which we do not encounter "the priority of the moral over the political," instead prioritizing the political itself.² The lessons of Cicero's political theorizing may not be its applicability but how he carries it out: moving from ideal to real, and real to ideal, adjusting concepts in light of practice and engaging in practice in light of concepts.

DANIEL KAPUST

University of Wisconsin-Madison, djkapust@wisc.edu

¹ Dean Hammer. *Roman Political Thought and the Modern Theoretical Imagination*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008.

² Bernard Williams. *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.