Cicero on Politics and the Limits of Reason

A prolific philosopher who also held Rome’s highest political office, Cicero was uniquely qualified to write on political philosophy. In this book Professor Atkins provides a fresh interpretation of Cicero’s central political dialogues – the Republic and Laws. Devoting careful attention to form as well as philosophy, Atkins argues that these dialogues together probe the limits of reason in political affairs and explore the resources available to the statesman given these limitations. He shows how Cicero appropriated and transformed Plato’s thought to forge original and important works of political philosophy. The book demonstrates that Cicero’s Republic and Laws are critical for understanding the history of the concepts of rights, the mixed constitution, and natural law. It concludes by comparing Cicero’s thought to the modern conservative tradition and argues that Cicero provides a perspective on utopia frequently absent from current philosophical treatments.

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The Republic and Laws

JED W. ATKINS
For Claire and William
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book emerged from a University of Cambridge doctoral dissertation that was submitted and defended in 2009. Malcolm Schofield directed the dissertation and, prior to that, served as my primary mentor for the Cambridge MPhil program in Political Thought and Intellectual History. From his example and instruction alike, I have learned much about doing research in Greek and Roman political thought, and I am grateful for his support during my time at Cambridge and beyond. Another longstanding debt is owed to Paul Franco and Jean Yarbrough, who introduced me to the history of moral and political philosophy at Bowdoin College. Paul gave me a copy of the Oxford World’s Classics edition of Cicero’s *Republic* and *Laws* late in my undergraduate career; Jean later suggested that I write my dissertation on Cicero. The original dissertation was examined by Christopher Gill and Peter Garnsey, whose incisive comments proved most helpful when I began to transform the thesis into a book.

During the past four years, I have been fortunate to be employed as an Assistant Professor in the Classical Studies Department at Duke University. I am thankful for the support and encouragement of my colleagues as well as the administrative staff. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Diskin Clay, who not only read most of the penultimate draft of the manuscript, but has also been a most generous and supportive mentor and friend.

I have benefited from the comments of a number of readers on earlier drafts of portions of the manuscript. They include Jack Barlow, Keegan Callanan, Diskin Clay, Peter Euben, Paul Franco, Benjamin Keim, Joel Schlosser, and Quentin Skinner. I should also like to thank the Program in Constitutionalism and Democracy, and in particular Jim Ceaser, who twice hosted me at the University of Virginia, where I presented drafts of Chapters 3 and 4. I am grateful for the feedback I received on these occasions.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

David Sedley and Mary Beard read the entire manuscript as editors for the CCS series and provided helpful feedback and corrections. At Cambridge University Press, Michael Sharp and Elizabeth Hanlon provided timely advice and support as the book made its way to press. Annie Jackson handled the copy-editing, and Kate Mertes compiled the indexes. Jenny Slater guided me through the production process.

Writing a book is at times a lonely venture, and one that has made me all the more aware of my dependence on the support of friends and family. The friendships of Keegan Callanan and Benjamin Keim in particular have helped encourage and sustain me throughout the process of writing this book; the selfless love of my parents, Bill and Mary Atkins, has done so from my earliest days. For their unwavering support, and for that of my sisters, Carrie and Hannah, I am most grateful. Most of all, however, I thank my wife Claire and son William, who fill each day with joy. It is to them that I dedicate this book.
For the Latin text of Cicero’s Republic and Laws I have used the following edition: M. Tulli Ciceronis. De re publica, De legibus, Cato Maior de senectute, Laelius de amicitia, ed. J. G. F. Powell, Oxford Classical Texts (Oxford, 2006). The editor has reordered the fragments of Books 3, 5, and 6 of the Republic. When referring to these passages, I have included the standard reference to Ziegler’s Teubner edition after the reference printed in the OCT (e.g., 6.22 = 6.18). For other ancient works, I have generally followed the texts printed in the Oxford Classical Texts series and, for works not available in that series, the Teubner series. Exceptions are listed in the abbreviations provided below or in the first section of the bibliography.

Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. In working on Cicero’s De republica and De legibus, I have consulted the recent translations by Niall Rudd in the Oxford World’s Classics series and James E. G. Zetzel in the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought series. I have also somewhat less frequently looked at the older translations by Clinton Walker Keyes (in the Loeb series) and by George Sabine and Stanley Smith (Republic only). Zetzel’s excellent edition in particular has seen much use (both within the classroom and without) during the writing of this book: I have benefited greatly from both his translations and notes. In order to make this book accessible to as wide an audience as possible while limiting its length, I generally have not supplied complete Greek and Latin texts for primary passages quoted in English. I have, however, frequently included relevant Greek and Latin words along with my own translations. When doing so, I have typically quoted the Greek and Latin as they appear in the texts; e.g., nouns are generally cited in oblique cases. Conversely, when citing Greek and Latin words within my own discussion, I usually refer to them by their dictionary form.
Abbreviated references to classical works follow the abbreviations used in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd edn.). Please note the following abbreviations for Plato’s major political works: *Statesman (Politicus) Plt.*; *Republic (Respublica) Resp.*; *Laws (Leges) Leg.* In the notes, I have generally included abbreviated references to the author’s name along with the title to avoid any possible ambiguity between Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws* and Cicero’s, e.g., Pl. *Leg.* and Cic. *Leg.* Journal titles are abbreviated in the Bibliography according to the conventions of *L’année philologique*. Please note the following additions and exceptions:


