

Justice, Not Happiness: Cicero's Political Theory

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Roman political thought for a long time was perceived as purely derivative of Greek thought. This has changed, and the nature of the Roman contribution to ancient political theory has recently become the focus of much scholarly interest. The Roman statesman and thinker Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) provides an interesting link between ideas, institutions and action on the ground and he is therefore for good reasons at the center of much of the rapidly expanding literature on Roman political thought. Cicero was deeply influenced by Greek philosophy, especially the skeptical New Academy, some aspects of Stoicism, Roman law, and Polybius's constitutional thought. Cicero used these ideas to formulate a strikingly original answer to the problems that the crises and collapse of the Roman Republic, which he lived through and ultimately lost his life in, raised. Cicero's political theory is very different from that of Plato and Aristotle and original in its insistence on the importance of a particular conception of law for the state. Perhaps most importantly, Cicero was distinctive in that his political theory was not dependent on a eudaimonist framework. Cicero, I argue, developed his political and legal ideas without reference to ethics understood as a theory of the good life.