(1) Modern estimates of Cicero as a philosopher are usually tepid and apologetic; sometimes, as in the case of Mommsen, even contemptuous. In this paper we shall argue that such depreciatory estimates are narrowly conceived; that Cicero was a philosopher in a more robust and profound sense than his critics are wont to recognise; that Cicero’s forte was in promoting an alliance between philosophy and history, an alliance which brings both philosophy and history to fulfilment. By pointing to the necessity for this alliance, Cicero set the course of what was to be, ever since, the central tradition of European manners and thought, a tradition which is sometimes explicit - as with Edmund Burke and the Comte Joseph de Maistre, but is more often a tacit and unspoken governor.

Cicero’s discussions of the theme are discursive: we can indicate here only some of the principal notes.

(2) The historic constitution. Cicero never wavered in his loyalty to the historic constitution of Rome, that constitution which was his nurse and mentor, that constitution to which he owed a debt of gratitude which could never be discharged. Thus, in the De oratore (I, xliv), he makes the sturdy patriot and guardian of precedent, Crassus, observe:

"Though the whole world grumble, I will speak my mind. It seems to me, I solemnly declare, that, if anyone looks to the origins and sources of the laws, the small manual of the Twelve Tables by itself surpasses the libraries of all the philosophers, in weight of authority and wealth of usefulness alike. And if our own native land is our joy, as to the uttermost it ought to be, ... with love how ardent must we surely be fired for a country such as ours, standing alone among all lands as the home of excellence, imperial power, and good report! (domus est virtutis, imperii, dignitatis.) It is her spirit, customs, and constitution (mens, mos, disciplina) that we are bound first to learn, both because we must needs hold that

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wisdom (sapientia) as perfect went to the establishment of her laws, as to the acquisition of the vast might of her empire."

In all Cicero's excursions into Greek philosophy, this rock-like declaration of Crassus stands firm in the background as a sobering and steadying point of reference. Recollection of the historic principle draws Cicero back from the intellectual hybris by which he might otherwise have been engulfed.

The theme may be illustrated again by the remarks of Cotta, the Pontifex, in the De natura deorum. Cotta listens while the natural theologies of the Epicurean and Stoic schools are eloquently expounded. On being asked for his opinion, Cotta observes drily that, while he himself believes firmly in the existence of the gods, he finds none of the proffered arguments convincing; indeed, the arguments serve only to render doubtful and perplexed a matter which properly admits of no doubt at all (III, iv). No well brought up man has any hesitation on the subject. The true basis for religion is respect for authority and tradition:

"For my part, I shall always uphold the beliefs about the immortal gods which have come down to us from our ancestors, and the rites and ceremonies and duties of religion, and always have done so; and no eloquence of anybody, learned or unlearned, shall ever dislodge me from the belief as to the worship of the immortal gods which I have inherited from our forefathers. I have always held the conviction that Romulus by his auspices and Numa by his establishment of our ritual laid the foundations of our state, which assuredly could never have been as great as it is had not the fullest measure of divine favour been obtained for it." (III, ii).

Cotta is not an intellectual sceptic, but quite the reverse: for what could be more eminently respectable than the auctoritas maiorum? The intellectual sceptics are those who presumptuously reject the traditional beliefs in which they were reared, and vainly treat of the existence of the gods as if it were an open question to be decided ab initio by a process of reasoning. (As there have even been some whose wits have been so disarrayed as to treat of the existence of the external world, not as a playful exercise, but as a genuine open question). Cotta's position is that the path to religion is by nurture; for this there cannot be any substitute. Natural theology might be
an admirable reflective and enriching exercise for one who already believes. The error of the natural theologians is to make natural theology a usurper of belief.2

Whether it be in politics, in manners, or in religion, Cicero holds firm to the primacy of nurture in the traditional constitution. However, though history is magistra vitae (De or. II, ix), Cicero is far from resting content with the passive transmission of inherited custom:

"The most foolish notion of all is the belief that everything is just which is found in the customs or laws of nations. (populorum institutis aut legibus). Would that be true, even if these laws had been enacted by Tyrants?" (De leg. I, xv).

The ancient models, the mos maiorum, are to be respected, but they are to be received and passed on, not blindly, but intelligently and critically. This is where a philosophic education can be a source of strength. For, starting from the temporal, it raises us to a vantage point above the temporal; it leads us to a grasp of universal standards of judgement; equipped with these standards we can descend to the temporal for its illumination of the temporal. The true philosopher works within the tradition, is prompted by the tradition, for the enrichment of that tradition. It is the mark of the false philosopher that he severs himself from tradition.

(3) The value of philosophy

A work no longer extant, the Hortensius, contained Cicero's principal apology for philosophy. Cicero calls the Hortensius 'a reply to the revilers of philosophy.' (Tusc. II, ii). It must have been a discourse of some power, for St. Augustine in the Confessions (Bk. III) relates how, as a young student at Carthage, he took up the Hortensius, and the work changed his life. It turned him from carnal bondage to the pursuit of wisdom. But, he adds, the philosophy, even of the Hortensius, was not enough; as an interim step it was commendable; the danger lay in being arrested at the philosophic level (an arrestment conducive to Pelagianism).

Despite the loss of the Hortensius, we can gather from other works of Cicero, notably from the Tusculans, the Academics and the Offices, his general estimate of Greek philosophy, and his belief that the time was now ripe for Greek wisdom to be infused more fully into Roman life. In Tusc. II, ii, Cicero writes:

"I encourage all who have the capacity to wrest from the now failing grasp of Greece the renown won from this field of study and
transfer it to this city...

Roman oratory, he goes on, having risen from humble beginnings to its zenith, is now in decline; a career consonant with the general natural law of growth, fruition and decay. "In consequence of these evil days, let it be now the birthday of philosophy in Latin literature." But, in calling Greek philosophy to Rome, let us be discriminating. The dogmatism of the multitudinous Hellenistic schools, especially that of the Epicureans, should be given no lodging in Rome. What is of value is the dialectical philosophy stemming from Socrates and expressed by the Academics and Peripatetics. For the Socratic mode of enquiry approaches the truth by looking at every side of a question (eschewing the doctrinaire, and seeking what Cicero calls probabilia, a term which is best rendered as 'worthy of approbation'). The Socratic spirit enlightens everyday life; it is the philosophy of hearth, home, and city; by it, the Roman tradition of statesmanship will reach its consummation.

In his more rhetorical moments, philosophy for Cicero becomes a quasi-religion (precisely what St. Augustine objected to). Philosophy is the discovery of things sacred and human, as well as of the beginnings and causes of every phenomenon: thereby it gained its glorious name with the ancients. (Tusc. V, iii); it is medicine for the soul (Tusc., III, i); under its ministrations the inborn seeds of virtue ripen; it counteracts the depraving effect of vicious public opinion, and the pretensions of the poets (Tusc. III, ii). When infused with philosophy, the pursuit of civil office, military command, and popular glory, is rescued from vanity. Philosophy is a gift of the gods (Tusc. I, xxvi), and the mother of all the arts. It instructs us in the right worship of the gods, in the reign of justice, in the social bonds which unite men in communities, in temperance, in greatness of soul. It teaches us to see all things above and below, sacred and human. "O philosophy, thou guide, O thou explorer of virtue and expeller of vice! Without thee, what could have become not only of me, but of the life of man altogether?" (Tusc., V, ii).

If such adulation of philosophy exhausted Cicero's resources, there would be good ground for dismissing Cicero as no serious philosopher; its shallow optimism, its Pelagianism, would be ample warrant for St. Augustine's censure. But, in fact, these bursts of enthusiasm do not represent the whole of Cicero. He has other and graver moods, moods which express the deeper character of the man.
When writing composedly, Cicero has an admirable grasp of everyday realities. He holds firm to the conviction that the continuity of custom, the stream of life, the life of the Roman community to which he belongs, is the first essential. Philosophy is a servant, a handmaiden. It should not destroy the sense of historical continuity, but bring it to perfection. Genuine philosophy deepens our appreciation of the models of past time, the mos maiorum. It serves to make us more worthy recipients of the inheritance. Accordingly, Cicero was saved from embracing any philosophic cult, any speculative sect, which set at nought the traditions of the city. He liked to bring men down to earth, their proper habitation; in which he showed himself to be a true disciple of Socrates. Cicero had none of the subtle analytical powers of a Plato or an Aristotle. But he was a discriminating judge of philosophers. Does the proposed philosophy ring true against the anvil of the city's traditional life, does it fulfill the ancient aspirations? If so, then let us welcome it eagerly. If not, then let it be cast out as an intellectual eccentricity, at once foolish and subversive. Or, to put the matter in another way, only the loyal citizen, one devoted to responsible public service, can be a genuine philosopher.

(4) Political tradition and Greek philosophy.

The De republica is Cicero's most ample treatment of the union of Greek philosophy and the traditions of Roman life. Of the two, he insists, the continuity of manners is more fundamental; but those who are entrusted with bearing the tradition are more able to sustain that trust, in new and trying circumstances, if they have a judicious formation in Greek modes of thought. The accent is on 'judicious'. For, as we have seen, in Cicero's estimate much in Greek philosophy is merely speculative, useless, and even mischievous. Socrates, who brought philosophic reflection down to earth, and those Greeks who have caught the Socratic spirit, are the preceptors most worth heeding.

In the preamble to the De republica, Cicero makes his position clear as regards philosophy and the virtue engendered by philosophy. The touchstone is use (usus). Thus he writes (I, ii):

"It is not enough to possess virtue, as if it were an art of some sort, unless you make use of it. Though it is true that an art, even if you never use it, can still remain in your possession by the very fact of your knowledge of it, yet the existence of virtue depends entirely upon its use; and its noblest use is the government of the State, and the realization in fact,
not in words, of those very things that the philosophers, in their corners, are continually dinning in our ears...".

Use, in Cicero's sense of the term, means enlightened practice, application, experience, in the inherited historical context. Thereby one's rational principles bear fruit. Use is to be distinguished from utility. Whereas usus is sub specie aeternitatis, utilitas is associated with mean contrivance and advantage. Utilitas is the degenerate form of usus.

Accordingly, though from a literary point of view the De republica is analogous to Plato's Republic (as the De legibus is analogous to Plato's Laws), the modes of treatment of the theme differ widely. Plato's Republic is professedly a-historical; Cicero, in the De republica, weaves the history of Rome into his dissertation on the principles of politics.

The tone of Cicero's dialogue is set by the words of Scipio (De rep. I, xxii). Laelius has invited Scipio to present his ideas on the Roman republic; he has invited him as an eminent statesman who is known to have weighed the merits of the traditional Roman manners against the more abstract claims of two eminent Greek visitors to Rome, Panaceius and Polybius. Scipio replies by invoking the analogy between the conscientious statesman and the craftsman seeking to perfect his craft. Scipio's guardianship and administration of the republic is a trust handed down by his forefathers. Like the craftsman, Scipio is anxious to perfect himself for his task. Of what use is the Greek learning for this purpose? Scipio is not prepared to accept its ministrations unreservedly, nor to dismiss it out of hand:

"I ask you to listen to me as to one who is neither entirely ignorant of the Greek authorities, nor, on the other hand, prefers their views, particularly in this subject, to our own; but rather as to a Roman who, though provided by a father's care with a liberal education, and eager for knowledge from boyhood, yet has been trained by experience (usu) and the maxims learned at home (domesticis praeceptis) much more than by books".

This declaration from Scipio intimates the subsequent path of the dialogue. Instead of proceeding in the Greek fashion to an abstract and explicit discussion of the structure of the body politic, Scipio goes on to relate the early history of Rome, thereby acknowledging that politics is too deep for complete
formulation, that the depths are best suggested implicitly in a narrative of the concrete events of an actual constitution, viz. the Roman; that a reflective narrative shared by a circle of minds enlivened by a Greek education is the proper way to a truly philosophical understanding.

Scipio having embarked on the historical course, Laelius observes *(De rep. II, xi)*:

"We perceive that you have entered upon a new style of discussion, one which is nowhere employed in the writings of the Greeks. For that eminent Greek [Plato], whose works have never been surpassed, began with the assumption of an unoccupied tract of land, so that he might build a State upon it to suit himself. His State may perhaps be an excellent one, but it is quite unsuited to men's actual lives and habits. His successors have discussed the different types of State and their basic principles without presenting any definite example or model. But you, I infer, mean to combine these two methods; for you have approached your subject as if you preferred to give the credit for your own discoveries to others, rather than, following the example of Socrates in Plato's work, to invent a new State yourself."

Later, Scipio identifies himself with Laelius' estimate:

"I shall endeavour, if I am able to accomplish my purpose, employing the same principles which Plato discerned, yet taking no shadowy commonwealth of the imagination, but a real and very powerful State, to seem to you to be pointing out, as with a demonstrating rod, the causes of every political good and ill." *(De rep. II, xxx)*

The exercise should lead to that far-seeing prudence which is the ultimate in statesmanship:

"For the foundation of that political wisdom *(civilis prudentiae)* which is the aim of our whole discourse is an understanding of the regular curving path through which governments travel, in order that, when you know what direction any commonwealth tends to take, you may be able to hold it back or take measures to meet the change." *(De rep. II, xxv)*

The words which Cicero here gives to Scipio are
oropbetic: within a few decades the young Octavian, as Emperor Augustus, would display a masterly employment of civilis prudentia.

(5) The new way of philosophy.

In the preamble to Book III of the De republica, Cicero confirms Scipio's sentiments. The mark of genuine philosophy is that it is capable of being the servant of wise statesmanship; indeed, abstract precepts, however excellent, are not philosophy, but only prolegomena thereto; genuine philosophy is to be found in good works, and is far richer than any formulation of which we are capable. The important thing is not 'philosophy' in the abstract, but the quality of the philosopher; and best of all the quality of the experienced and philosophic statesman.

The surviving manuscript of the De republica is fragmentary at this point, but the salient passage runs as follows (De rep. III,iii):

"Wherefore let us admit that those who discuss the principles of living are great men, which is indeed the truth; let us recognise them as learned, and as teachers of truth and virtue, if only we do not forget that another science is by no means to be scorned, whether it was discovered by men who had actual experience with various kinds of States, or was developed through the quiet study of these same learned men - I mean the art of government and the training of peoples, which, in men of ability and good character, calls into being, as it has very often done in the past, an almost incredible and divine virtue."

Let us recognise, Cicero continues, that the best condition is an amalgamation of Socratic learning and the experience of public affairs - as exemplified in such men as Scipio in their combinations of Greek wisdom and the Roman mos maiorum:

"Therefore those who have had the desire and ability to attain both these objects - who, that is, have perfected themselves by acquiring learning as well as by the observance of their ancestral customs, deserve from every point of view, in my opinion, the highest honour. But if only one of these two paths to wisdom can be chosen, even though a quiet life devoted to the study of the noblest arts will seem happier to some, surely the life of a statesman is more deserving of praise
and more conducive to fame...

(6) Experience and philosophic doctrine both merit the name of 'wisdom'.

Cicero proceeds in the preamble (De rep. III, iv) to observe that intellectual learning and practical excellence alike deserve the name of wisdom (sapientia); the first nourishing nature's first gifts to man (natura principia) by way of admonition and instruction, the second by way of institutions and laws. The Greek philosophers have jealously restricted the term 'wise' to those of intellectual attainment. But Rome has produced many men of outstanding character and practical sagacity, who, if not 'wise' in the narrow Greek sense, are certainly worthy of the highest praise. And this for two reasons. In the first place, because it is these men of practical sagacity who have fostered the precepts and discoveries of the intellectually wise. So that (as Aristotle had long before observed), statesmanship is the highest art, since without wise statesmanship the intellectual excellences would be still-born. And in the second place, we must remember that the establishment of a civitas which is stable enough to endure for ages requires by far the highest powers of understanding (consilium) that nature affords. On both counts, then, those whose concern is with institutions and laws are certainly not lower in the ranks of wisdom than those who pursue purely intellectual goals.

(7) The highest wisdom is found in a combination of experience and philosophic doctrine.

The conclusion that emerges from the preamble to Book III of the De republica is that the characteristic Roman and Greek virtues should not be regarded as rivals to one another; for each is one-sided; and the summit of human excellence and wisdom is to be found in their combination. If we should, unhappily, have to choose one or the other, then let us prefer the Roman historical tradition of public service, to the Greek style of philosophic withdrawal from the world. But better far to exercise statesmanship fortified by the mos maiorum and enlightened by the broad intellectual perspective provided by Greek thought at its best, that is Greek thought exemplified in Socrates.

Some ten years before the composition of the De republica, Cicero had expressed similar sentiments concerning the proper alliance of tradition and letters in his defence of Archias the poet, whose citizenship had been challenged. In his opening words, Cicero explains how it is that he personally, though his profession is oratory, yet feels a bond of sympathy with the poet and his art. For no art (including oratory)
can reach its fulfilment without the support of all the other arts. If Cicero has any skill in oratory, he owes it to his association from youth upwards with such gifted men as Archias. "There is a subtle bond of mutual relationship linking together all arts which have any bearing upon the common life of mankind." (Pro Archia i)

After dealing with the details of the case, Cicero returns to the great theme of the unity of the arts, the value of paradigms, the strengthening repose of contemplation, and the issue of the whole in practical activity (Pro Archia vi):

"Do you think that I could find inspiration for my daily speeches on so manifold a variety of topics, did I not cultivate my mind with study, or that my mind could endure so great a strain did not study too provide it with relaxation? I am a votary of literature, and make the confession unashamed; shame belongs rather to the bookish recluse, who knows not how to apply his reading to the good of his fellows, or to manifest its fruits to the eyes of all...

All literature, all philosophy, all history, abounds with incentives to noble action, incentives which would be buried in black darkness were the light of the written word not flashed upon them. How many pictures of high endeavour the great authors of Greece and Rome have drawn for our use, and bequeathed to us, not only for our contemplation, but for our emulation! These I have held ever before my vision throughout my public career, and have guided the workings of my brain and my soul by meditating upon patterns of excellence."

It is true, he goes on, that our forefathers were not men of learning. Their great virtues, which have become our models, were the result of exceptional natural endowment. Indeed, natural gifts without education have more often attained to glory and virtue than education without natural gifts.

"Yet I assert that when to a lofty and brilliant character is applied the moulding influence of abstract studies, the result is often inscrutably and unapproachably noble."

Such Romans as Scipio Africanus and Marcus Cato illustrate the theme. They pursued literature in order to augment their practical merit. But, even putting aside this immediate advantage, the cultivation
of literature for the sake of its delight elevates the whole of life to a nobler plane:

"No mental employment is so broadening to the sympathies or so enlightening to the understanding. Other pursuits belong not to all times, all ages, all conditions; but this gives stimulus to our youth and diversion to our old age; this adds a charm to success, and offers a haven of consolation to failure. In the home it delights, in the world it hampers not. Through the night watches, on all our journeying, and in our hours of country ease, it is our unfailing companion."

(Pro Archia vii)\(^4\)

(8) Cicero's originality

If originality be thought a virtue, then how original was Cicero in his new style of philosophy? Undoubtedly Cicero believed himself to be a pioneer in his bringing together of philosophy and history. As regards the union of philosophy with the Roman historical tradition, the belief was well founded. But as regards the general principle, though Cicero seems unaware of it, he was in fact re-discovering the earlier wisdom of Greek lands. This historical anticipation does not, however, detract from Cicero's achievement; rather it provides that achievement with a happy confirmation by linking Cicero's ideas with those of his most responsible predecessors. Like Cicero, Plato and Aristotle had endeavoured to bring philosophy into the service of the traditional customs of the city; a service in which a critical philosophic understanding would confirm and ennoble custom. In this, Plato and Aristotle are sharply separated from the sophists; for the sophists had no veneration for inherited custom.

Thus Aristotle, in the Ethics, is no less insistent than is Cicero on the emptiness of claims to wisdom and virtue unless they are employed in use, an employment which pre-supposes loyalty to the milieu of a tradition of manners. This is but one instance of Aristotle's endeavour, throughout his writings, to hold together the eternal and the temporal. Socrates' dialogue with the personified laws in the Crito expresses sentiments of gratitude and loyalty to the historic constitution in unison with Cicero's Crassus, Scipio and Cotta. The pre-eminence of the sapientia of the statesman who is not only intellectually educated but is at the same time steeped in his city's mode of life and widely experienced in its affairs, is a theme running through Book vii of the Republic, where it is illustrated figuratively by the return to the Cave.
How was it that Cicero, as a diligent student of the ancients, missed this deeper kinship with Plato and Aristotle? In the case of Aristotle, the reason is obvious. It was due to the historical accident that the Aristotelian treatises which we now possess were unknown to Cicero - those treatises, principally the Ethics and the Politics, in which Aristotle seeks to detect and delineate the timeless phusis in its incarnation in the historic nomoi of the Greek city-states. As regards Plato, the reason is different: The Dialogues are composed in so eutrapelic a style that Plato's profound respect for the historical evolution of the polis, and for the authority of tradition, has to be sought well beneath the surface. (Except occasionally, notably in the Crito, where it emerges into clear view). Cicero was well aware that Socrates had brought philosophy from heaven down to earth; but he was not aware of the extent to which Plato had carried out this incarnational principle. If Cicero was blind to the mos maiorum in the Platonic Dialogues he is in good company. For even to the present day, Plato is commonly taken to be an a-historic metaphysical visionary.

(9) Cicero's achievement and defeat.

Here lies the importance of Cicero's robust rediscovery of the truth that the highest wisdom lies in joining philosophy with history, phusis with nomos; that only a citizen can be wise; that only he who is loyal to his patria can be fully a person. A principle which might otherwise have remained in cloistered seclusion is with Cicero, shouted from the house-tops. The sophist, however subtle his arguments, is immediately unmasked by this test; all men may know him by his infidelity to the historic constitution which nurtured him. The sophist has no patria, he belongs nowhere, he is something less than a man.

The espousal of the patria, however, left Cicero in a quandary (as it did too with Plato and Aristotle). On the one hand, he was convinced, the only path to wisdom is in fidelity to one's patria; the sophists' rejection of the patria leads to destruction. On the other hand, his philosophical reflections on the universal moral law, coupled with the demands of Rome's imperial responsibilities, led him away from parochialism in the direction of a citizenship of the world - one of the considerations, we may suppose, which prompted him to give a guarded approval to Stoic doctrine. Cicero was torn between two allegiances, and he seems never to have found a solution.

We must look forward to the next age for a reconciliation, a reconciliation achieved by taking a higher point of reference. In the theory and practice of
Christendom, citizenship is conceived as hierarchical. Christian universality does not destroy local allegiance, but grows out of it, and perfects it. Whereas the sophists moved on a plane below the patria, the Christian philosophers sought their universality on a plane above the patria, a plane which comprehended and confirmed the patria. The Christian philosophers rescued allegiance to the patria from parochialism and raised it up to honourable service. They could achieve this transformation because their religio, for the first time in the world's history, was truly synoptic.

Cicero was reaching out to a genuine universality, but lacked the means to attain it. Though he was frustrated through no fault of his own, his starting point was sound.

Cicero's proclamation concerning the indispensable role of the patria ensured that the philosophia perennis, on this vital point of political principle, would be ready at the service of the Fathers in their task of building up the order of Christendom.

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NOTES

1. Quotations from Cicero's works are from the Loeb editions.

2. The matter here brought forward by Cicero is one of perennial concern. Is natural theology a handmaiden to belief? Or is it superior to belief? The former has ever since been the way of orthodoxy. The latter, the way of 'rationalism' in religion.

3. The challenge thrown down to Socrates in Rep. ii requires him to abstract from the temporal in order to dispel the contagion of utility. The a-historical character of the subsequent discourse is thus a conscious artifice designed to achieve a set purpose. The Republic is not intended to be a treatise on politics, but only a prolegomenon thereto. Cicero, in blaming Plato for his abstract treatment of politics, seems not to have noticed the stylised terms which Plato had set for himself.

4. Cicero's sentiments may be compared with the reflective words of a great modern historian on the use of history: "It is the tale of the thing done, even more than its causes and effects, which trains the political judgement by widening the range of sympathy and deepening the approval and disapproval of conscience; that stimulates by example youth
to aspire and age to endure; that ennobles us by the light of what men once have been, to see the thing we are, and dimly to descry the form of what we should be. 'Is not Man's history and Men's history a perpetual evangel?' " - G.M. Trevelyan, Clio Rediscovered.