

## Outline of Cicero's *Republic*

### Book I

- Good men should enter politics (1-12)
  - But they don't because politics is so brutal, especially to people like themselves (3-7)
  - They prefer a quiet, private life of contemplation; they tend to retreat into philosophy (7-8)
  - Politics, on the other hand, is busy, and ruled by manipulative demagogues; it usually takes a national crisis to make good men appear (9-11)

**Cicero's purpose:** *to show the meaning of a republic to persuade good men to run for office, and to show citizens the value of a republic before it collapses into an empire* (12)

- The appeal of the heavens, versus the city (dialogue begins) (13-32)
  - Wonder about the "second sun" (14-15)
  - Scipio's point, that we should be like Socrates: he too was drawn to astronomy, but chose to focus on how the heavens relate to the human things, i.e., how the permanent things relate to the temporal things; hence, we should study politics (15-16; 26-32)
    - Philus: astronomy can be useful, predicting eclipses to dispel superstition, etc. (17-26)
    - Laelius objection: even if we can predict such things, or even understand the wonders of the heavens, they don't tell us *how to live*
- Philosophy should show us what the best form of government is (33-37)
  - Everyone's inclination is to say what's *oldest* and that which is "mine" is best; but philosophy (as an aspect of liberal education) can show us *why* they are, or are not, best
- The simple forms: rule of the many, rule of the few, and rule of the one (39-42)
  - Origins: people form communities out of a natural inclination; they at first end up with aristocracies, monarchies, and sometimes democracies (41-42)
  - Each simple regime has defects, i.e., each one degenerates into its corrupt form; these are the "natural cycles" or revolutions of regimes; hence, the best regime is one that prevents those cycles, or at least contains them, and prevents them from going through violent revolutions (43-45)
  - Strengths and weaknesses of each, and how they both degenerate over time (46-53)

### Strength

**Democracy** has freedom and equality, and despite its crimes (e.g., the majority against the minority), those things are still valuable

**Aristocracy** is the rule of "the best," i.e., nobility and honor; aristocrats care for and defend the people

### Weakness

Because it makes everything equal, democracy has no sense of merit; it punishes nobility, and over time, it can slip into mob rule and anarchy

Aristocracy can degenerate into mere oligarchy, or "the rich"; they can forget nobility