

Cicero college essay



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Cicero, was truly a man of the state. His writings also show us he was equally a man of philosophical temperament and affluence. Yet at times these two forces within Cicero clash and contradict with the early stoic teachings. Cicero gradually adopted the stoic lifestyle but not altogether entirely, and this is somewhat due to the fact of what it was like to be a roman of the time. The morals of everyday Rome conflicted with some of the stoic ideals that were set by early stoicism. Thus, Cicero changed the face of stoicism by romanizing it; redefining stoicism into the middle phase. Of Cicero it can be said he possessed a bias towards roman life and doctrine. For Cicero every answer lay within Rome itself, from the ideal governing body to the place of divination. Cicero does not offer any alternate answers to roman society, which robs him of being truly a unique and bold political philosopher. This is not to say however some of his doctrines are untrue, just that he is somewhat blinded by his roman beliefs and assumptions. The assumptions of Cicero can be noticed when one inspects his view of the ideal governing body, which he expresses through Scipio (in the commonwealth). Although Cicero presents very convincing arguments for a Composite government, clearly his view is possibly only due towards his belief in the roman structure of government. 1 Cicero was limited to roman borders of experience, and this point was best illustrated by his disagreement with Aristotle's writings on the decay of states. Cicero was unable to think on the level of Aristotle's logic. He quite simply used roman history as a mapping of the paths of the decay of states. In contrast, Aristotle understood the underlying forces and influences that transpired when a state degraded. Cicero quite frankly could not understand the forces which Aristotle so eloquently denoted. For Cicero, history offered the only possible paths of outcomes; the forces and behaviors

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played little part on the resulting state. 2 A further point of philosophical belief which Cicero contradicted the stoic lifestyle, is religion. Roman tradition conflicted greatly with stoic doctrine, and the two philosophies could never truly harmonize with one another. This point brought the distinction between the Greek learned world of intellect, and the traditional religious roman patronage. This observation literally draws a line between the two worlds, that of knowledge and reason opposing that of tradition and sentiment. This illustrated that roman was truly unable to fully accept a Greek philosophy based on knowledge and brotherhood, and a great Roman such as Cicero was similarly unable to accept the stoic doctrine as a whole. 3 The philosophy of stoicism originated in Greece, and was based on the order of the universe. Nature to the stoics (universe) was a precisely ordered cosmos. Stoics taught that there was an order behind all the evident confusion of the universe. Mans purpose was to acquire order within the universe; harmonizing yourself with the universal order. Within this notion of harmonizing lies wisdom, sin resides with resisting the natural order (or nature). The stoics also tell of a rational plan in nature; our role was to live in accord with this plan. The natural order was filled with divinity, and all things possess a divine nature. This natural order was god, and thus the universe was god; the Greek and roman pathos were simply beliefs forged by superstition. The stoics also had a great indifference towards life, in the regard that the natural plan cannot be changed. This attitude made stoic's recluse from fame, and opposed to seeking it. One fundamental belief stoics held was in the universal community of mankind. They held that a political community is nothing more than its laws' borders, since the natural laws are universal imposed; a universal political community existed in which all men

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share membership. This interpretation is generally regarded as the early stoic stage, which had yet to experience little roman influence. Upon roman adoption, stoicism went through a romanizing period; an altering of the philosophy to better integrate into roman mainstream. The ideal state of Cicero's; " For I hold it desirable, first, that there should be a dominant and royal element in the commonwealth; second, that some powers should be granted and assigned to the influence of the aristocracy; and third, that certain matters should be reserved to the people for decision and judgment."

4 It is important to note that Cicero loses sight of the international community which Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus taught. Cicero tries to link the universal community of mankind within the borders of roman political thought. This composite state expressed in Scipio by Cicero, is an ideal Rome of the past. The Rex, was the royal element; the senate was the aristocratic influence; The plebs and patricians became the deciding people. By giving this blueprint of the ideal society, Cicero attempted to answer the stoic doctrine of the universal community of mankind. Cicero addressed the pragmantical problems faced by the universal community, by giving it armies, judges and powers; literally giving the community of mankind the powers it lacked through Rome. But what makes this attempt unattainable is the notion of Rome; Rome was a dividing agent. Rome was the polity that divides people; early stoics understood that tradition and politics divide people. Brotherhood of man is not the assimilation of people into Roman mainstream, but in reality the assimilation of Rome into the universal community. Cicero does not understand the spirit in which the universal community of mankind was thought. " It is, indeed, my judgment, opinion, and conviction that of all forms of government there is none which for

organizing, distribution of power, and respect for authority is to be compared with that constitution which our fathers received from their ancestors and have bequeathed to us..... The roman commonwealth will be the model; and to it shall apply, if I can, all that I must say about the perfect state.” 5 Clearly Cicero Identifies the perfect state with Rome, he suggested that Rome was the closest thing their was to such an aspiration. The perfect state was the expression and embodiment of the universal community of mankind, to link Rome with the ideal state; was to link Rome with the universal community. The early stoics held that a specific community was nothing more than its laws borders. Thus, arises the notion of a universal community, since we are all under the natural law imposed by the universe. The fundamental problem lays in that Rome could not realistically impose the natural law. Rome could simply impose laws of convention, which it could pass as natural law. This brought about a belief in dual citizenship; one roman, the other universal. But Cicero believed that Rome was the closest manifestation of the common community of man. A very clear bias was present, Cicero forced Roman sentiment on stoic thought; thereby changing it into something less grandiose than the stoics meant by universal citizenship. The accommodating of stoic philosophy into Roman society is very present in the argument of the ideal state. The accommodating brings about the validity of imperialistic Roman virtue. The Roman expansion was part of the divine plan, to draw together a universal community under Roman society. At this point early stoics and Roman virtue conflicted. Roman expansion contradicted stoic indifference doctrine; the natural plan cannot be changed. Yet Roman expansion was rationalized by accepting the belief that it was part of the divine plan. For stoicism to be adopted by Roman some ideals

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had to be compromised. Cicero saw this notion of compromise more so than the idea of the early stoic view on universal citizenship. In using the composite state which Rome possesses traits of, Cicero tried to justify roman conquest. " You will see the truth of what you say still more clearly when you observe the state progressing and coming to its perfect form by course of development natural to itself. You will conclude, in fact, that the wisdom of our ancestors deserves praise even for the many institutions which, as you will find, they adopted from other states and made much better in our state than they had been in the places where they originated and whence they were derived." 6 Within this quotation, Rome's stance as the " perfect form" is brought about due to Roman conquests and adoptions. This was another instance of Roman virtue being rationalized by stoic philosophy. This is a twisting of view points on stoicism, which Cicero did not necessarily do intentionally. Cicero also has a good deal of Roman insight on the decay of states. Stoics contend that reason and logic should have precedence over tradition and sentiment, yet Cicero goes against this somewhat. Cicero chooses tradition and Roman sentiment over logic when discussing the decay of states. However his opinions are belittled somewhat by Aristotle's views on the decaying of a states constitution. A contrast of Aristotle and Cicero on constitutional decay illuminates Cicero's acceptance of tradition. It is important to note the major differences between Aristotle's and Cicero's understanding of terms and powers at work. When Aristotle spoke of a states constitution, he referred to the well being of that state. He took the word constitution in a health sense; in a context of well being. In Aristotle the meaning of well being is implied because the state reflects the well being of the people. The constitution of states become the teachings on a day to day

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basis. The people become a mirror of the states well being. Cicero held the meaning of constitution to be in the form of a legal document. A good constitution for Cicero was something establish by the people for the common good. 7 The forces at work in determining the courses of a deteriorating state are very different between Aristotle and Cicero. Aristotle believes in a behavioral chain of events, pushing a state which has a certain constitution (good or bad) into another constitution (good or bad). Aristotle held that they're are six constitutional forms possible. All likely constitutional forms have either a good or bad alignment. Furthermore, some forms can only arise after another. Finally, all constitutions can be categorized into one, few or many citizens. A simple chart can be made of good and bad, by one, few and many. The constitutions for the good are monarchy (one), aristocracy (few), and polity (many), oppossingly for the bad are tyranny (one), oligarchy (few), and democracy (many). The simple diagram Aristotle illustrated he had an underlying logic. For example Aristotle holds that within a tyranny, certain forces and behaviors take place. If a tyranny exists, all the people become carbon copies of their ruler. The teachings on a day to day bases promote the values imposed by the ruler. In a sense, the populace become “ mini-tyrants” within the society. This is due to the morals being promoted: lies, cheating, hypocrisy, obsequiousness, etc. In such a case the decay, or overthrow of a tyrannical power that has long been established does not become a polity. Rather the citizens reflect their well being, and become what has been promoted; an oligarchy or democracy. Similar logic dictates that a good (well being) people who have a tyrant seizing power would be quick to overthrow him. For Aristotle the governmental arrangements affected people day to day; essentially people mirror they're

governments alignment. Cicero uses a different rationale than did Aristotle, and in so doing conflicted with early stoic doctrine. Cicero believed that the pattern of governmental decomposition laid in the past. By looking within Rome's past, Cicero hoped to understand the possible propelling factors which led states to behave in a certain fashion. However, Cicero did not attempt to understand the factors too deeply but rather he relied to mush on the roman historic path as a blueprint. Cicero offered no real comprehensive logic behind his pattern of possible outcomes. Early roman history (tradition) tells of a series of seven kings, and the last, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, was a tyrannical rex. In the first part of Cicero's diagram a monarch is in place, which can only be followed by a tyrant. After Lucius Tarquinius Superbus overthrow the senate and patricians played a decisive role. The rex's position was abolished and two consuls were elected annual ridding Rome of monarchical and tyrannical rule. This brought Rome into the age of a republic, shortly after the senate gained powers and showed aristocratic traits. Cicero's diagram almost perfectly shadowed the events described. After the seventh tyrannical rule, there are two possible outcomes in Cicero's diagram, either a democracy or an aristocracy. Cicero's logic is that he knew of the senate gaining power historically, yet he also knew of the struggles in the republic between the aristocratic party and the popular party. Cicero understood that the powers could have been gained by the masses just as easily as the aristocrats. It is noteworthy that Cicero did not take the peoples well being as Aristotle did. For Cicero, a good aristocracy could seize power, or rather a bad mob could seize power over the government. Cicero did not contend (as Aristotle did) that the populace mirrors the government. Cicero's diagram loses more strength in its argument as it progresses. Cicero

believed a democracy could then only be followed by an oligarchy or an aristocracy. The first aristocracy could only be followed by an oligarchy; At this point it is hard to comprehend Cicero's logic. Cicero, when describing his logic is not systematic or organized, and clearly his Greek counterparts were more convincing. As a stoic Cicero held far too much esteem to the past and traditions of Rome, as the major part of the second book of the commonwealth is dedicated to that notion of the roman tradition. It is easy to see how a man such as Cicero transfused his sentiment of roman accomplishments into a rationalized logic. The point on roman tradition can more carefully be examined, and reveals another aspect in which Cicero changed stoicism. Early stoics did not have a patronage in the ancient roman or Greek sense, rather they believed in the universe being full of divine reason. Thus, the stoics adhered to the universe and divine plan as god. Most ancient Greek philosophies denied the existence of traditional gods and pathos. A conflict arised between the Greek world of the intellect and the Roman world of traditional sentiment. On the subject of divinity Cicero had a dual nature to his beliefs. On one hand he spoke dispassionately on the inability of the gods to exist, on the other hand he made great oratories to Jupiter and the other gods who he believed helped and guided the state. 8 Cicero gives an example of the roman sentiment on religion, which we hear through the mouth of Cotta in De Natura Derum: " I will always defend, and always have defended, the traditional Roman religious opinions, rites and ceremonies, and nothing that anyone, learned or unlearned, says will move me from the view I have inherited from our forefathers about the worship of the immortal gods. On any question of religion I follow men who held the office of pontifex maximus, like Coruncanius, Scipio and Scaevola, not Zeno,

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Cleanthes or Chrysippus.... I have never held that any branch of traditional Roman religion should be despised, and am persuaded that Romulus be establishing the auspices and Numa by instituting our sacred rites laid the foundation of our state.”⁹ It is important to note that at this point in time Rome was in crisis of religious belief. Cicero often took the stance of disclaiming Roman divination, yet as a statesman he returns to his Roman attitudes. In *De Legibus*, Cicero hesitatingly shows his support for the notion of divination. “If the gods exist, and guide the universe and care for mankind and can give us indications of future events, I see no reason for denying divination”¹⁰ Greek though was kept in a different light in the Roman mind, apart from the day to day beliefs and lifestyles of Rome. Rome and Cicero were unable to accept the early stoic doctrine as a whole, especially in light of religious beliefs. Philosophy to Romans was an adopted import from outside Rome, thus not fully accepted. This is another point which conflicted with stoicism, it proved that politics and tradition do divide men. A distinction is evident between Cicero’s philosophical works and his non-philosophical writings and oratories.¹¹ On the matter of immortality of the soul, Cicero was in accordance with Plato rather than early stoics. The early stoics preached that the soul and body survive, yet not within a sense of capacity. By this they meant the soul was together with the universal worldly soul; which forsook the premise of reward and punishment. This may be due to Cicero the man, rather than Cicero the philosopher. Cicero cannot be faulted for not relinquishing his roman traditions, after all Cicero was also a man of the state. The attitudes of other senate members and the general populace forced him to keep these sentiments. But this showed he was only slightly stoic or only sympathetic towards stoic teachings, his primary

responsibility lay towards Rome; not stoicism. Due to his primary responsibility being the state, Cicero's adoption of stoic religious view was simply not possible. The stoic lifestyle is that of an emotion vacuum, this appealed to Cicero. In truth Cicero may have thought embracing stoicism would cure his worldly pains. Namely the loss of his daughter Tullia, whom he obviously loved very much. Equally stoicism may have given him escape during his time of exile from Rome. But early stoics had certain fundamental traits of comportment, which in some instances of his life, Cicero as a roman and a person abolished. One trait at practice was the stoics aversion to violence stoics as Cicero also shared this disgust. In addition stoics also avoided and scorned personal glory. However Cicero had a very different demeanor towards this type of behavior. The quest for glory on a national and personal level was a widely held feature of roman disposition. It was intensely present within Cicero's temperament, the posterity of his and his family name was an abnormally great desire. Cicero's family name was relatively unfamiliar in Rome. Plutarch tells of a tale which although may be untrue conveys the right idea of Cicero's desire for glory; 12 " Cicero himself is said to have given a lively reply to his friends on one occasion. When he first entered politics, they said he ought to drop or change the name. He said that he would do his best to make the name Cicero more famous than names like Scaurus or Catulus. (Plutarch, life of Cicero I)13 In a letter to his son Cicero admitted that sometimes his sentiment for glory and tradition provided a better direction than the life of philosophy. " One should know what philosophy teaches, but live like a gentleman." 14 Cicero displayed an air of Roman vanity, which denies him of being a true early stoic. As such Cicero's aspirations are of a Roman political life, not that of a stoic good life.

Cicero either consciously or accidentally, permanently changed early stoicism into its later identity; middle stoicism. Cicero did not agree to everything stoicism taught, he sought to accept what had merit and what was true to him. At times this proved to contradict Cicero's ideas, he was part skeptic, part stoic and all roman. Some of Cicero's peers reject his seemingly over-acceptance of Greek philosophy. Yet Cicero believed he could strike a balance between the two worlds. By his exhortations on the composite state Cicero attempted to create a common accord between the roman state and the universal community of mankind. To say the romanization of stoicism was an abuse upon early stoicism is an inaccurate assumption. Cicero made the survival of stoicism possible by rendering it more appealing to roman society. At the same instance Cicero was trying to answer the early pragmatic problem facing such stoic topics as the universal community of mankind. Although he may not have been true to the stoic ideal (spirit of), Cicero made a genuine effort to answer the philosophical dilemmas present in stoicism. It is unfortunate that Cicero's historic bias deprived him from being placed on the same footing as Aristotle. Cicero's view of the decay of states to be nothing more than a reoccurrence of history, but he did seem to understand too well the powers at work. However Cicero did not see past the roman republic of the day. The aspect of stoicism that Cicero cannot accept, is religion. Perhaps because of his daughter's death, the inner pain he must have felt to believe she was too much to bear, as such, this influenced his position. This must have made him decide that the stoic belief in this instance to be unacceptable. Cicero the statesman knew that disbelief in roman religion and tradition was an unwise course of action. Tradition and the gods gave Rome its strength, intelligence and

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resolve. To discredit the gods was to discredit Roman society; something Cicero would never do. But this drew a line into how far Cicero would have believed in stoicism; Cicero would believe in stoicism so long as it did not weaken Rome's strength and integrity. For Cicero, stoicism was something to be admired, read, and used. But stoicism was still a Greek philosophy, something the roman heart could never truly digest very well. This may have been Cicero's attitude to a certain extent; however it certainly was the belief of his contemporaries. Evidence exists that Cicero did not follow stoic lifestyle in his day to day ambitions. His glory seeking made him less respectful as a philosopher, a damage inflicted by Roman sentiment. Cicero took beliefs, attitudes, doctrines and logic to form his own inner philosophical temperament. Regarded as stoic because he sympathized with that philosophy, Cicero modified earl stoicism to form a hybrid with roman tradition. By adding tradition, patriotism, and roman virtue, Cicero reshaped the landscape of stoa's philosophy. In essence Cicero was a Roman philosopher. 1 Cicero, Marcus Tullius. On the Commonwealth (New York: The Bobb-Merrill Company Inc, 1929) 150-151 2 Cicero, Marcus Tullius. On the Commonwealth (New York: The Bobb-Merrill Company Inc, 1929) 140, 144, 148, 154-194 Roman, Medieval, and Renaissance Political Philosophy, Prof. Dr. M. W. Poirier; lecture notes 3 M. L. Clarke. The Roman Mind; Studies in the history of thought from Cicero to Marcus Aurelius (New York: Norton and Company Inc, 1968) 60-61 4 Cicero, Marcus Tullius. On the Commonwealth (New York: The Bobb-Merrill Company Inc, 1929) 151 5 Cicero, Marcus Tullius. On the Commonwealth (New York: The Bobb-Merril Company Inc, 1929) 151-152 6 Cicero, Marcus Tullius. On the Commonwealth (New York: The Bobb-Merril Company Inc, 1929) 169 7 Cicero, Marcus Tullius. On the <https://assignbuster.com/cicero-3911-words-college-essay/>

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