Jean Bodin’s *Six Books of the Republic* (1576) was arguably the single most important work of political and legal philosophy produced in the sixteenth-century, and the greatest contribution to these subjects by any French Renaissance author.\(^1\) Although virtually all research on this work has been confined to the original French edition, subsequently many times reprinted. I believe that the time has come to read the French text side-by-side with the Latin translation made ten years later in 1586 by the author himself. Despite the fact that the organization of government, or politics (*la politique*) occupies the central, although not exclusive, place in both versions, the Latin translation never uses *politicus* in any of its substantive or adjectival forms, not even as the equivalent for the French adverb *politiquement*. This is all the more remarkable given the crucial part played by the *République* in the creation of modern political language.

Here I wish to call attention to Bodin’s self-translation in order, first to emphasize, and then seek to understand, his decision to use a set of Latin terms that bypass the vocabularies hitherto used to designate everything political in both French and Latin. So far as I know, the terminological differences between Bodin’s two versions have not been previously noticed, even by Bodin specialists. In order to bring my discoveries to their attention, I concentrate, in this short paper, on identifying such differences of terminology between these two treatises, rather than attempting to choose among the possible reasons for them. My own detailed explanation of variations in the terms used in the two versions will be found in the bilingual critical edition of the *Six Books of the Republic*, which will print the two texts, side by side, that I am preparing for publication. Other students of Bodin can be counted on both to assess my theories and to propose alternatives to them.

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\(^1\) For an introduction to Bodin’s life and work, see my article, published in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford University, 2010), also available online: [http://plato.stanford.edu/](http://plato.stanford.edu/).
French or Latin?

Why did Bodin choose French for the first edition of the République? In my view, his immediate purpose was to aid the French monarchy in restoring peace. The Latin edition had another goal: to enable Bodin to reach a wider and more intellectual audience, European in scope. In 1576, after more than a decade of civil wars in France, which was still being buffeted by “the storm that torments the ship of state,” Bodin wrote:

For my part, having nothing better to offer, I present here my discourse On the Republic, in the vernacular (popular) language. I do so in part because the wellsprings of the Latin language, already [nearly] exhausted, will dry up completely, if the barbarism of the civil wars continues; in part, so as to be better understood by all ‘natural’ Frenchmen, that is, by those who have the desire and will to see this Kingdom restored to its original splendor, flourishing again in arms and in its laws. [First dedication in French to Du Faur de Pibrac, 1576].

In other words, Bodin wished to speak to the “natural” French, those who both loved their country and feared that in this period of hostility, Latin would soon be forgotten and its sources dispersed, as had occurred during the barbarian invasions. But why did he decide to translate his work into Latin, a task he must have begun almost immediately after the appearance of the French version? Here again, Bodin furnished an answer in his own words. These are cited from Bodin’s Latin preface of 1584, passages to which Anglophone readers have not previously had access.2

Because I wanted to be understood by everyone, and especially by the nobility, which in our country has also been very influential [and perhaps also ignorant of Latin], I thought that I should first use the “langue populaire.” The rivers of Latin have been polluted by the civil wars, as have the smaller streams and their very sources. Nor had I originally thought that I would write again in Latin at a later date, for it did not occur to me that I might have the time required to weave the second cloth a second time.

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