Cicero (106-43 B.C.): Statesman, philosopher, lawyer, master rhetorician; loyal friend and theorist of friendship; “martyr” for the Roman Republic

Cicero’s Importance
- Cicero is the first writer to publish a philosophic defense of “natural law” and is the author of the most famous and influential books on friendship and on duties.
- Cicero and his writings were a major influence on the American Founders.
  - As John Adams wrote in his diary: “Labour to get distinct Ideas of Law, Right, Wrong, Justice, Equity. … Study Seneca, Cicero, and all other good moral Writers” (written 1759, when Adams was 24).
  - At the end of his life Jefferson acknowledged that the ideas he expressed in the Declaration of Independence were based on concepts in such foundational “books of public right” as Aristotle and Cicero.
- Augustine points to Cicero as a major influence on his conversion, and he imitated Cicero in his own philosophic and rhetorical writings.
- Aquinas’ own understanding of “moral excellence” (honestas) and of natural law is influenced by Cicero, especially that we are created to know the truth and to live in society (STh 1-2.94, a.2).
- Christianity has from earliest times and throughout the medieval, renaissance, and later eras looked to Cicero’s refined understanding of conscience, humanitas, duty, virtue, and the charitas of friendship in formulating its own vocabulary of human and social excellence.
- Cicero argues that great leaders must be learned in the full range of liberal education because one cannot know a part without knowing the whole of which it is a part.

Cicero’s On Duties: Its Impact as a Core Text of our Western, American Tradition
- Its powerful appeal to heroic “first citizens” and its valuable advice in how to become such have made it arguably the best known classical text not only in medieval and renaissance times but in the founding generations of America.
  - 700 manuscript copies of it exist in libraries around the world – the largest number of any classical manuscript before the invention of printing in mid-15th century.
  - Of books printed before 1600, Plato’s Republic had 9 editions and no translations; Virgil’s Aenid had 20 editions and no translations; Cicero’s On Duties had 91 editions and 10 translations.
- It was the preeminent moral authority throughout the Middle Ages.
  - In 390 St. Ambrose wrote his own version of this book, using the same title and modeling it closely on Cicero’s original; it was the “earliest attempt at a systematic account of Christian ethics, and one of the most important texts of the Western patristic church.” In 407, the Church Father Lactantius wrote a detailed commentary on Cicero’s book.
  - Erasmus, following Pliny, recommended that the young learn On Duties by heart. Erasmus claimed that Cicero surpassed even Plato and Aristotle in bringing philosophy into the city.
  - “In Shakespeare’s day, De Officiis was the pinnacle of moral philosophy … in grammar school” (T. W. Baldwin’s William Shakespeare’s ‘Small Latine and Less Greek,’ 590).
- It was a standard text for many of the American Founders and for succeeding generations.
Cicero’s *De Officiis*¹ (44 B.C.; Cicero is killed in 43 B.C. at 63 years old)

Book 1: *Honestum* (Moral or human excellence; see Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2-2.145 a3)

1-10: Introduction; why this study is “most apt” (2, 4, 13). Three divisions: *bonestas, utilitas* (the useful), and the alleged conflict between them.

11-17: How a character of *honestum* is “forged and fashioned [*conflatur et efficitur*]” (14)

11-14: Roots/fonts/sources in human nature of the four major virtues [but see 2.35 – all one virtue]

12: origin of society: “reason associates man with man for the fellowship both of common speech and of life”; “nature implants in man, above all, a strangely tender love for his offspring”; cp. with 1.50 [role of beneficence], 54-55, 153, 3.27 [*lex naturae*]

15-17: How these four are related to each other; how they can excite admiration

15: Note the metaphor of sculpting, forging the soul into an admirable shape; note also that the four virtues are really interconnected and are actually one (also at 2.35).

17: How do you make sense of Cicero’s paradoxical (contradictory?) statement that the virtues have to do with “increasing influence and acquiring benefits,” but also with “disdaining the very same things”? From what root does such disdain come?

18-151: Four major natural sources/fonts [1.19, 152; 3.72, 96] of *officii/honestum/decorum/*what is apt

18-19: (1) Cognition of truth: the first source of duty, the one most closely related to human nature

2 dangers: treating the unknown as known, too much effort on arcane & useless matters

20-60: (2) Unnamed “social virtue”² and its two major “parts” [*duae partes*]

Why leave this virtue unnamed? Why not follow Socrates and call it “justice”?

20-41: Justice [major disagreement with Plato’s Socrates at 1.28 & 153 on what is “most apt”]

20, 31: 2 principles of j: no harm; maintain society (protecting the common & one’s own)

22: Plato: “we are not born for ourselves alone” [*Ep. 9, 358a*]

23: good faith (*bona fides*) as foundation of justice (see 1.15, 39-40, 124; 2.33, 84; 3.66-70)

23-24: 2 kinds of injustice: infliction of injustice; failure to protect against when one can

24-27: infliction of inj. motivated by fear, greed, ambition for power or glory

28-29: motives for failing to protect

29-33: determining what is just in difficult situations

33-41: justice to wrong-doers, to enemies in times of war, and to slaves

42-60: Beneficence and generosity [cp. *De Amicitia* 50: *benevolenetia* = the font of friendship]

42-45: three guidelines for gift-giving; 46-59: priorities in generous giving

50: reason & speech are the natural principles of fellowship and society, best fostered by beneficence

54-58: duties & bonds of different societies: family, nation, friendship

60: relation of *bonestas, officii, aptus, & ius et societas*

61-92: (3) Great-souledness (*magnitudo animi*) or magnanimity

61: Why this quality is seen as the most splendid

62-65: If not tied to justice, this quality is a vice; courage is “championing the right”

66-67: 2 components = despising external goods & doing great deeds

68-73: the magnanimous, tranquil soul has contempt for passing goods

74-84: comparing great military deeds with great civilian deeds; qualities of soul needed for either

85-87: obligations for statesmen; Plato’s 2 precepts: guardian of people’s good, not leader’s; entrusted with care of whole body-politic, not one part (85)

88-89: anger vs. habit of affability in the magnanimous soul; punishing without anger

90-92: Advice continued from 1.68-73

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¹ Common translations of *officiis* are: “what it fitting or appropriate,” “duties,” “obligations” – as determined by the nature and particulars of one’s life. In *De Finibus* 3.20, Cicero explains that *officium* is his translation for the Greek *kathēkon* (“to be fit, meet, proper”). See *De Officiis* 1.4: “on the discharge of ... duties depends all that is *bonestas*, and on their neglect all that is morally wrong [*turpitudine*, “ugly” or “shameful”] in life .”

² Paraphrased at 20 as “the reasoning by which the fellowship of men with one another, and the communal life, are held together” (“*ea ratio qua societas hominum inter ipsos et vitae quasi communis continetur*”); designated as “what is suited to bonding men together” (“*quod ad hominum consociation accommodatum*”) at 100; as “the common bond of union and fellowship of the whole human race” (“*communis generis hominum conciliatio et consociatio*”) at 149; and as “the community and fellowship of gods and men with each other” (“*deorum et hominum communitas et societas inter ipsos*”) at 153. See also 3.28: “the fellowship between men which the gods have established” (“*Ab illis [deos] enim constitutam inter homines societatem evolutur*”).
93-151: (4) **Decorum:** What is fitting or apt or seemly for a human being’s excellence

93-100: What it is [synonymous with honestas: 1.94, 107, 2.32]
101-151: Four factors determining appropriate action, i.e., decorum/what is fitting/“apt”

101-7: (1) the nature of man and its implications (first & foundational factor)
107-14: (2) one’s particular nature (second factor); its variety; precepts that follow
115: (3) what chance imposes
115-21: (4) what one chooses – esp. one’s “most apt” role in life & good friends (120)
122-49: what is appropriate to age (youth, old age) or position in society; in dress, deportment, speech, one’s house; 122: youth is for training in toil & endurance
151-52: appropriate and inappropriate professions and obligations
152-60: Comparison of these four “parts” of honestum and why duties arising from our sociability are “more apt” to our nature than those duties arising from knowledge (153 esp).

Book 2: **Utile** (What is truly useful for a life ordered to human excellence)

1-10: Introduction: defense of his engagement in philosophy; why he leans towards the Academic School
9-10: That utile is inseparable from honestum
11-20: After the gods, man is most useful help to man – or the greatest enemy to man
11-16: human art, labor, & cooperation needed even to use inanimate materials or animals
17-18: why virtuous leaders are needed to foster cooperation/society
19-20: role of fortune & why human cooperation is imperative
21-29: Reasons people seek others’ support; why they submit to another’s rule and power; the best motive as love not fear. 27: with justice and fides, Rome protects, not oppresses
30-85: How a person acquires the support and honor/esteem of others
30: first & most necessary are faithful friends; 31: See C’s book on friendship (De Amicitia)
31-51: Reputation for good will, trust, virtue (esp. justice) constitute esteem of true glory
32: true glory is what is most loveable; 35: unity of virtue (in this section on glory!)
52-64: Beneficence or liberality by giving money[On dangers of glory: 1.26, 62-8, 83-4]
52-60: warnings; avoiding extravagance; choosing well which projects to support
61-64: factors to consider in giving to individuals
65-85: Beneficence or liberality by service
65-71: services rendered to individuals, esp. through law and rhetoric; factors to consider
72-85: services to society; state’s special need to protect property (73, 78-85) & impartial justice (83)
86-87: Health and money as useful goods omitted by Panaetius [Cicero’s best source]
88-90: Comparison of useful things introduced

Book 3: **Apparent Conflicts between Honestum and Utile**

1-13: Introduction (philosophy provides principles for a “consistent & honest life,” 5)
14-18: Sage’s “perfect” completion of duties vs. everyman’s fulfillment of “intermediate” duties
19-32: Natural fellowship’s “rule of procedure” (formula:19-20, 81; regula:3.74/5, 1.110, 2.59)
to follow in treating apparent conflicts: “do no harm to another” is a law of nature 4 (21-22) since
injustice destroys society, fellowship, and the body politic (32)
40-120: Apparent conflicts between utile and these “parts” of honestum:
40-96: Justice [See esp. 69 for the “bond of fellowship” existing between all human beings]
vs. the apparent usefulness to oneself (40-2), friends (43-6), or city (46-9)
vs. dishonest: in buying & selling (50-7), business deals (58-64), contracts & law (65-72),
men held to be good (73-88), condemns Plato’s Gyges example (77-78); cases posed by
Stoic Hecato (89-92) and situations when circumstances change (92-5)
Note esp: selling grain (50-3) or a house (54-5) or estate (58-60); treatment of tyrants (83-85)
96: Summary of prudence and justice
97-115: Magnanimity as exemplified in Regulus & with oaths sworn with an enemy
116-120: Decorum rejects hedonism/Epicureanism because pleasure cannot be used as a guide
to decorum or justice -- or to goodness, generosity, friendship, or the honorable
121: Final exhortation to his son

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3 A Roman term for proper legal procedure
4 lex naturae used five times: 3.27, 30-31 69; 1.102