

Cicero, *On Duties*¹

Book 1: On Human Excellence or Moral Goodness [*Honestas*]²

Cicero presents this, his major ethical writing, as an extended letter to his son, Marcus, who is studying in Athens. It is Cicero's final philosophical work written in the last full year of his life.

(1) My dear son Marcus, you have now been studying a full year under Cratippus,³ and that too in Athens, and you should be fully equipped with the practical precepts and the principles of philosophy; so much at least one might expect from the pre-eminence not only of your teacher but also of the city; the former is able to enrich you with learning, the latter to supply you with models. Nevertheless, just as I for my own improvement have always combined Greek and Latin studies — and I have done this not only in the study of philosophy but also in the practice of oratory — so I recommend that you should do the same, so that you may have equal command of both languages. And it is in this very direction that I have, if I mistake not, rendered a great service to our countrymen, so that not only those who are unacquainted with Greek literature but even the cultured consider that they have gained much both in learning and in judgment [*ad dicendum et ad iudicandum*].

(2) You will, therefore, learn from the foremost of present-day philosophers, and you will go on learning as long as you wish; and your wish ought to continue as long as you are not dissatisfied with the progress you are making. For all that, if you will read my philosophical books, you will be helped; my philosophy is not very different from that of the Peripatetics (for both they and I claim to be followers of Socrates and Plato). As to the conclusions you may reach, I leave that to your own judgment (for I would put no hindrance in your way), but by reading my philosophical writings you will be sure to render your mastery of the Latin language more complete. But I would by no means have you think that this is said boastfully. For there are many to whom I yield precedence in the knowledge of philosophy; but if I lay claim to the orator's peculiar ability to speak with propriety, clearness, elegance, I think my claim is in a measure justified, for I have spent my life in that profession.

Cicero explains why he chooses to treat this topic of duty, i.e., “what is fitting, proper, appropriate”⁴

(4) Although philosophy offers many problems, both important and useful, that have been fully and carefully discussed by philosophers, those teachings which have been handed down on the subject of moral duties seem to have the widest practical application. For no phase of life, whether public or private, whether in business or in the home, whether one is working on what concerns oneself alone or dealing with another, can be without its moral duty; on the discharge of such duties depends all that is morally right, and on their neglect all that is morally wrong in life.

(5) Moreover, the subject of this inquiry is the common property of all philosophers; for who would presume to call himself a philosopher, if he did not inculcate any lessons of duty?

Cicero now outlines what he – and later Aquinas⁵ – present as the four distinct powers or inclinations of the soul that are the bases of human virtues, i.e., of full human excellence (honestas).

(11) First of all, nature has endowed every species of living creature with the instinct of self-preservation,

¹ Based on the 1913 Loeb translation of Walter Miller, a text in the public domain

² Miller translates *honestas* as “moral goodness,” “moral rectitude,” “morally right,” and “morality.” Aquinas uses the term to mean the beauty of excellence in virtue; see *Summa Theologica* 2-2, q. 145.

³ The leading philosopher of Aristotle's Peripatetic School in Athens.

⁴ The Latin term is *officium*, Cicero's translation of the Greek *kathēkon* (“to be fit, meet, proper”).

⁵ Servais Pinckaers devotes a long chapter in *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Catholic University of America Press, 1995, 400-456) to show Aquinas's indebtedness to Cicero. Jean-Pierre Torrell concurs that Aquinas “is specifically indebted to the Stoics by way of Cicero, and it has rightly been asked if it is not in the Roman that he discovered the very idea of fundamental inclinations that first express the demands of the natural law” (*Saint Thomas Aquinas*, volume 2: *Spiritual Master*, Catholic University of America Press, 2003, 286). See also Randall B. Smith, “Understanding the Context of the ‘Natural Inclinations’ and the Natural Law: Thomas Aquinas's Use of Cicero's *De Officiis* in *Summa Theologiae* I-II, Q. 94, A. 2,” *The Thomist* 89 (2025): 459-92.

of avoiding what seems likely to cause injury to life or limb, and of procuring and providing everything needful for life — food, shelter, and the like. A common property of all creatures is also the reproductive instinct (the purpose of which is the propagation of the species) and also a certain amount of concern for their offspring. But the most marked difference between man and beast is this: the beast, just as far as it is moved by the senses and with very little perception of past or future, adapts itself to that alone which is present at the moment; while man — because he is endowed with reason, by which he comprehends the chain of consequences, perceives the causes of things, understands the relation of cause to effect and of effect to cause, draws analogies, and connects and associates the present and the future — easily surveys the course of his whole life and makes the necessary preparations for its conduct.

(12) Nature likewise by the power of reason associates man with man in the common bonds of speech and life; she implants in him above all, I may say, a strangely tender love for his offspring. She also prompts men to meet in companies, to form public assemblies and to take part in them themselves; and she further dictates, as a consequence of this, the effort on man's part to provide a store of things that minister to his comforts and wants — and not for himself alone, but for his wife and children and the others whom he holds dear and for whom he ought to provide; and this responsibility also stimulates his courage and makes it stronger for the active duties of life.

(13) Above all, the search after truth and its eager pursuit are peculiar to man. And so, when we have leisure from the demands of business cares, we are eager to see, to hear, to learn something new, and we esteem a desire to know the secrets or wonders of creation as indispensable to a happy life. Thus we come to understand that what is true, simple, and genuine appeals most strongly to a man's nature. To this passion for discovering truth there is added a hungering, as it were, for preeminence [*principatus*], so that a mind well-molded by nature is unwilling to be subject to anybody save one who gives rules of conduct or is a teacher of truth or who, for the general good, rules according to justice and law. From this attitude come greatness of soul and a sense of superiority to worldly conditions.

(14) And it is no mean manifestation of nature and reason that man is the only animal that perceives [*sentit*] order, propriety, and moderation in word and deed. And so no other animal has a sense of beauty, loveliness, harmony in the visible world; and nature and reason, extending the analogy of this from the world of sense to the world of spirit, find that beauty, consistency, order are far more to be maintained in thought and deed, and the same nature and reason are careful to do nothing in an improper or unmanly fashion, and in every thought and deed to do or think nothing capriciously.

It is from these elements that is forged and fashioned that moral goodness [*honestas*] which is the subject of this inquiry — something that, even though it be not generally ennobled, is still worthy of all honor; and by its own nature, we correctly maintain, it merits praise even though it be praised by none.

(15) You see here, Marcus, my son, the very form and as it were the face of human moral goodness [*honestas*]; “and if,” as Plato says, “it could be seen with the physical eye, it would awaken a marvelous love of wisdom.” But all that is morally right [*honestas*] rises from some one of four sources: it is concerned either (1) with the full perception and intelligent development of the true; or (2) with the conservation of organized society, with rendering to every man his due, and with the faithful discharge of obligations assumed; or (3) with the greatness and strength of a noble and invincible spirit; or (4) with the orderliness and moderation of everything that is said and done, wherein consist temperance and self-control.

Although these four are connected and interwoven, still it is in each one considered singly that certain definite kinds of moral duties [*officiis*] have their origin: in that category, for instance, which was designated first in our division and in which we place wisdom and prudence, belong the search after truth and its discovery; and this is the peculiar province of that virtue.

(16) For the more clearly anyone observes the most essential truth in any given case and the more quickly and accurately he can see and explain the reasons for it, the more understanding and wise he is

generally esteemed, and justly so. So, then, it is truth that is, as it were, the stuff with which this virtue has to deal and on which it employs itself.

(17) Before the three remaining virtues, on the other hand, is set the task of providing and maintaining those things on which the practical business of life depends, so that the relations of man to man in human society may be conserved, and that largeness and nobility of soul may be revealed not only in increasing one's resources and acquiring advantages for one's self and one's family but far more in rising superior to these very things. But orderly behavior and consistency of demeanor and self-control and the like have their sphere in that department of things in which a certain amount of physical exertion, and not mental activity merely, is required. For if we bring a certain amount of propriety and order into the transactions of daily life, we shall be conserving moral rectitude and moral dignity.

The first font or inclination of the soul: the cognitive power – perfected in wisdom, prudence

(18) Now, of the four divisions which we have made of the essential idea of moral goodness, the first, consisting in the knowledge of truth, touches human nature most closely. For we are all attracted and drawn to a zeal for learning and knowing; and we think it glorious to excel therein, while we count it base and immoral to fall into error, to wander from the truth, to be ignorant, to be led astray. In this pursuit, which is both natural and morally right, two errors are to be avoided: first, we must not treat the unknown as known and too readily accept it; and he who wishes to avoid this error (as all should do) will devote both time and attention to the weighing of evidence. (19) The other error is that some people devote too much industry and too deep study to matters that are obscure and difficult and useless as well.

If these errors are successfully avoided, all the labor and pains expended upon problems that are morally right and worth the solving will be fully rewarded. Such a worker in the field of astronomy, for example, was Gaius Sulpicius, of whom we have heard; in mathematics, Sextus Pompey, whom I have known personally; in dialectics, many; in civil law, still more. All these professions are occupied with the search after truth; but to be drawn by study away from active life is contrary to moral duty. For the whole glory of virtue is in activity; activity, however, may often be interrupted, and many opportunities for returning to study are opened. Besides, the working of the mind, which is never at rest, can keep us busy in the pursuit of knowledge even without conscious effort on our part. Moreover, all our thought and mental activity will be devoted either to planning for things that are morally right and that conduce to a good and happy life, or to the pursuits of science and learning.

With this we close the discussion of the first source of duty [*officii fonte*].

Cicero turns to the second power or inclination of the human soul which he calls the “social impulse” that has two parts: justice (sections 20-41) and benevolence (sections 42-54).

(20) Of the three remaining divisions, the most extensive in its application is the principle by which society and what we may call its “common bonds” are maintained. Of this again there are two divisions — justice, in which is the crowning glory of the virtues and on the basis of which men are called “good men”; and, close akin to justice, beneficence [*beneficentia*], which may also be called kindness or generosity.

The first office of justice is to keep one man from doing harm to another, unless provoked by wrong; and the next is to lead men to use common possessions for the common interests, private property for their own.

(21) There is, however, no such thing as private ownership established by nature, but property becomes private either through long occupancy (as in the case of those who long ago settled in unoccupied territory) or through conquest (is in the case of those who took it in war) or by due process of law, bargain, or purchase, or by allotment. On this principle the lands of Arpinum are said to belong to the Arpinates, the Tusculan lands to the Tusculans; and similar is the assignment of private property. Therefore, inasmuch as in each case some of those things which by nature had been common property became the property of individuals, each one should retain possession of that which has fallen to his lot; and if anyone appropriates to himself anything beyond that, he will be violating the laws of human society.

(22) But since, as Plato has admirably expressed it, we are not born for ourselves alone, but our country claims a share of our being, and our friends a share; and since, as the Stoics hold, everything that the earth produces is created for man's use; and as men, too, are born for the sake of men, that they may be able mutually to help one another; in this direction we ought to follow nature as our guide, to contribute to the general good by an interchange of acts of kindness, by giving and receiving, and thus by our skill, our industry, and our talents to cement human society more closely together, man to man.

(23) The foundation of justice, moreover, is good faith; — that is, truth and fidelity to promises and agreements. And therefore we may follow the Stoics, who diligently investigate the etymology of words; and we may accept their statement that “good faith” is so called because what is promised is “made good,” although some may find this derivation rather farfetched.

There are, on the other hand, two kinds of injustice — the one, on the part of those who inflict wrong, the other on the part of those who, when they can, do not shield from wrong those upon whom it is being inflicted. For he who, under the influence of anger or some other passion, wrongfully assaults another seems, as it were, to be laying violent hands upon a comrade; but he who does not prevent or oppose wrong, if he can, is just as guilty of wrong as if he deserted his parents or his friends or his country.

(24) Then, too, those very wrongs which people try to inflict on purpose to injure are often the result of fear: that is, he who premeditates injuring another is afraid that, if he does not do so, he may himself be made to suffer some hurt. But, for the most part, people are led to wrong-doing in order to secure some personal end; in this vice, avarice is generally the controlling motive.

(25) Again, men seek riches partly to supply the needs of life, partly to secure the enjoyment of pleasure. With those who cherish higher ambitions, the desire for wealth is entertained with a view to power and influence and the means of bestowing favors; Marcus Crassus, for example, not long since declared that no amount of wealth was enough for the man who aspired to be the foremost citizen [*princeps*] of the state, unless with the income from it he could maintain an army. Fine establishments and the comforts of life in elegance and abundance also afford pleasure, and the desire to secure it gives rise to the insatiable thirst for wealth. Still, I do not mean to find fault with the accumulation of property, provided it hurts nobody, but unjust acquisition of it is always to be avoided.

(26) The great majority of people, however, when they fall a prey to ambition for either military or civil authority, are carried away by it so completely that they quite lose sight of the claims of justice. For Ennius says:

“There is no fellowship inviolate,

5 No faith is kept, when kingship is concerned;”
and the truth of his words has an uncommonly wide application. For whenever a situation is of such a nature that not more than one can hold pre-eminence in it, competition for it usually becomes so keen that it is an extremely difficult matter to maintain a “fellowship inviolate.” We saw this proved but now in the effrontery of Gaius Caesar, who, to gain that sovereign power which by a depraved imagination he had
10 conceived in his fancy, trod underfoot all laws of gods and men. But the trouble about this matter is that it is in the greatest souls and in the most brilliant geniuses that we usually find ambitions for civil and military authority, for power, and for glory, springing; and therefore we must be the more heedful not to go wrong in that direction.

(27) But in any case of injustice it makes a vast deal of difference whether the wrong is done as a
15 result of some impulse of passion, which is usually brief and transient, or whether it is committed willfully and with premeditation; for offences that come through some sudden impulse are less culpable than those committed designedly and with malice aforethought.

But enough has been said on the subject of inflicting injury.

(28) The motives for failure to prevent injury and so for slighting duty are likely to be various: people
20 either are reluctant to incur enmity or trouble or expense; or through indifference, indolence, or incompetence, or through some preoccupation or self-interest they are so absorbed that they suffer those to be neglected whom it is their duty to protect. And so there is reason to fear that what Plato declares of the philosophers may be inadequate, when he says that they are just because they are busied with the pursuit of truth and because they despise and count as naught that which most men eagerly seek and for
25 which they are prone to do battle against each other to the death. For they secure one sort of justice, to be sure, in that they do no positive wrong to anyone, but they fall into the opposite injustice; for hampered by their pursuit of learning they leave to their fate those whom they ought to defend. And so, Plato thinks, they will not even assume their civic duties except under compulsion. But in fact it were better that they should assume them of their own accord; for an action intrinsically right is just only on condition that it is
30 voluntary.

(29) There are some also who, either from zeal in attending to their own business or through some sort of aversion to their fellows, claim that they are occupied solely with their own affairs, without seeming to themselves to be doing anyone any injury. But while they steer clear of the one kind of injustice, they fall into the other: they are traitors to social life, for they contribute to it none of their interest, none of their
35 effort, none of their means. Now since we have set forth the two kinds of injustice and assigned the motives that lead to each, and since we have previously established the principles by which justice is constituted, we shall be in a position easily to decide what our duty on each occasion is, unless we are extremely self-centered; for indeed it is not an easy matter to be really concerned with other people's affairs; (30) and yet in Terence's play, we know, Chremes “thinks that nothing that concerns man is
40 foreign to him.” Nevertheless, when things turn out for our own good or ill, we realize it more fully and feel it more deeply than when the same things happen to others and we see them only, as it were, in the far distance; and for this reason we judge their case differently from our own. It is, therefore, an excellent rule that they give who bid us not to do a thing, when there is a doubt whether it be right or wrong; for righteousness shines with a brilliance of its own, but doubt is a sign that we are thinking of a possible
45 wrong.

(41) But let us remember that we must have regard for justice even towards the humblest. Now the humblest station and the poorest fortune are those of slaves; and they give us no bad rule who bid us treat our slaves as we should our employees: they must be required to work; they must be given their dues.

While wrong may be done, then, in either of two ways, that is, by force or by fraud, both are bestial: fraud seems to belong to the cunning fox, force to the lion; both are wholly unworthy of man, but fraud is the more contemptible. But of all forms of injustice, none is more flagrant than that of the hypocrite who, at the very moment when he is most false, makes it his business to appear virtuous.

5 This must conclude our discussion of justice.

(42) Next in order, as outlined above, let us speak of kindness [*beneficentia*] and generosity [*liberalitas*]. Nothing appeals more to the best in human nature than this, but it calls for the exercise of caution in many particulars; we must, in the first place, see to it that our act of kindness shall not prove an injury either to the object of our beneficence or to others; in the second place, that it shall not be beyond
10 our means; and finally, that it shall be proportioned to the worthiness of the recipient; for this is the corner-stone of justice; and by the standard of justice all acts of kindness must be measured. For those who confer a harmful favor upon someone whom they seemingly wish to help are to be accounted not generous benefactors but dangerous sycophants; and likewise those who injure one man, in order to be generous to another, are guilty of the same injustice as if they diverted to their own accounts the property
15 of their neighbors.

(43) Now, there are many — and especially those who are ambitious for eminence and glory — who rob one to enrich another; and they expect to be thought generous towards their friends, if they put them in the way of getting rich, no matter by what means. Such conduct, however, is so remote from moral duty that nothing can be more completely opposed to duty. We must, therefore, take care to indulge only
20 in such liberality as will help our friends and hurt no one. The conveyance of property by Lucius Sulla and Gaius Caesar from its rightful owners to the hands of strangers should, for that reason, not be regarded as generosity; for nothing is generous if it is not at the same time just.

(44) The second point for the exercise of caution was that our beneficence should not exceed our means; for those who wish to be more open-handed than their circumstances permit are guilty of two
25 faults: first they do wrong to their next of kin; for they transfer to strangers property which would more justly be placed at their service or bequeathed to them. And second, such generosity too often engenders a passion for plundering and misappropriating property, in order to supply the means for making large gifts. We may also observe that a great many people do many things that seem to be inspired more by a spirit of ostentation than by heart-felt kindness; for such people are not really generous but are rather influenced
30 by a sort of ambition to make a show of being open-handed. Such a pose is nearer akin to hypocrisy than to generosity or moral goodness.

(45) The third rule laid down was that in acts of kindness we should weigh with discrimination the worthiness of the object of our benevolence; we should take into consideration his moral character, his attitude toward us, the intimacy of his relation to us, and our common social ties, as well as the services
35 he has hitherto rendered in our interest. It is to be desired that all these considerations should be combined in the same person; if they are not, then the more numerous and the more important considerations must have the greater weight.

(46) Now, the men we live with are not perfect and ideally wise, but men who do very well, if there be found in them but the semblance of virtue. I therefore think that this is to be taken for granted, that no one
40 should be entirely neglected who shows any trace of virtue; but the more a man is endowed with these finer virtues — temperance, self-control, and that very justice about which so much has already been said — the more he deserves to be favored. I do not mention fortitude, for a courageous spirit in a man who has not attained perfection and ideal wisdom is generally too impetuous; it is those other virtues that seem more particularly to mark the good person.

45 (50) The interests of society, however, and its common bonds will be best conserved, if kindness be shown to each individual in proportion to the closeness of his relationship.

But it seems we must trace back to their ultimate sources the principles of fellowship and society that nature has established among men. The first principle is that which is found in the connection subsisting

between all the members of the human race; and that bond of connection is reason and speech, which by the processes of teaching and learning, of communicating, discussing, and reasoning associate men together and unite them in a sort of natural fraternity. In no other particular are we farther removed from the nature of beasts; for we admit that they may have courage (horses and lions, for example); but we do not admit that they have justice, equity, and goodness; for they are not endowed with reason and speech.

(51) This, then, is the most comprehensive bond that unites together men as men and all to all; and under it the common right to all things that nature has produced for the common use of man is to be maintained, with the understanding that, while everything assigned as private property by the statutes and by civil law shall be so held as prescribed by those same laws, everything else shall be regarded in the light indicated by the Greek proverb: "Amongst friends all things in common." Furthermore, we find the common property of all men in things of the sort defined by Ennius; and, though restricted by him to one instance, the principle may be applied very generally:

"Who kindly sets a wand'rer on his way
Does e'en as if he lit another's lamp by his:

No less shines his, when he his friend's hath lit."

In this example he effectively teaches us all to bestow even upon a stranger what it costs us nothing to give. (52) On this principle we have the following maxims: "Deny no one the water that flows by;" "Let anyone who will take fire from our fire;" "Honest counsel give to one who is in doubt;" for such acts are useful to the recipient and cause the giver no loss. We should, therefore, adopt these principles and always be contributing something to the common weal. But since the resources of individuals are limited and the number of the needy is infinite, this spirit of universal liberality must be regulated according to that test of Ennius — "No less shines his" — in order that we may continue to have the means for being generous to our friends.

(53) Then, too, there are a great many degrees of closeness or remoteness in human society. To proceed beyond the universal bond of our common humanity, there is the closer one of belonging to the same people, tribe, and tongue, by which men are very closely bound together; it is a still closer relation to be citizens of the same city-state; for fellow-citizens have much in common — forum, temples colonnades, streets, statutes, laws, courts, rights of suffrage, to say nothing of social and friendly circles and diverse business relations with many.

But a still closer social union exists between kindred. Starting with that infinite bond of union of the human race in general, the conception is now confined to a small and narrow circle.

(54) For since the reproductive instinct is by nature's gift the common possession of all living creatures, the first bond of union is that between husband and wife; the next, that between parents and children; then we find one home, with everything in common. And this is the foundation of civil government, the nursery, as it were, of the state.⁶ Then follow the bonds between brothers and sisters, and next those of first and then of second cousins; and when they can no longer be sheltered under one roof, they go out into other homes, as into colonies. Then follow between these in turn, marriages and connections by marriage, and from these again a new stock of relations; and from this propagation and after-growth states have their beginnings. The bonds of common blood hold men fast through good-will and affection; (55) for it means much to share in common the same family traditions, the same forms of domestic worship, and the same ancestral tombs.

But of all the bonds of fellowship, there is none more noble, none more powerful than when good men of congenial character are joined in intimate friendship; for really, if we discover in another that moral goodness on which I dwell so much, it attracts us and makes us friends to the one in whose character it seems to dwell.

⁶ More literally: "the starting point of the city and the seedbed so to say of the republic" (*principium urbis et quasi seminarium res publicae*)

Cicero turns to the third power or inclination of the soul: "great-souledness" (magnitudo animi) – which he prefers to the usual "courage."

(61) We must realize, however, that while we have set down four cardinal virtues from which as sources moral rectitude and moral duty emanate, that achievement is most glorious in the eyes of the world which is won with a spirit great, exalted, and superior to the vicissitudes of earthly life. ...

(62) But if the exaltation of spirit seen in times of danger and toil is devoid of justice and fights for selfish ends instead of for the common good, it is a vice; for not only has it no element of virtue, but its nature is barbarous and revolting to all our finer feelings. The Stoics, therefore, correctly define courage as "that virtue which champions the cause of right." Accordingly, no one has attained to true glory who has gained a reputation for courage by treachery and cunning; for nothing that lacks justice can be morally right.

(63) This, then, is a fine saying of Plato's: "Not only must all knowledge that is divorced from justice be called cunning rather than wisdom," he says, "but even the courage that is prompt to face danger, if it is inspired not by public spirit, but by its own selfish purposes, should have the name of effrontery rather than of courage." And so we demand that men who are courageous and high-souled shall at the same time be good and straightforward, lovers of truth, and foes to deception; for these qualities are the center and soul of justice.

(64) But the mischief is that from this exaltation and greatness of spirit spring all too readily self-will and excessive lust for pre-eminence [*principatus*]. For just as Plato tells us that the whole national character of the Spartans was on fire with passion for victory, so, in the same way, the more notable a man is for his greatness of spirit, the more ambitious he is to be the foremost citizen [*princeps*], or, I should say rather, to be sole ruler. But when one begins to aspire to pre-eminence, it is difficult to preserve that spirit of fairness which is absolutely essential to justice. The result is that such men do not allow themselves to be constrained either by argument or by any public and lawful authority; but they only too often prove to be bribers and agitators in public life, seeking to obtain supreme power and to be superiors through force rather than equals through justice. But the greater the difficulty, the greater the glory; for no occasion arises that can excuse a man for being guilty of injustice.

(65) So then, not those who do injury but those who prevent it are to be considered brave and courageous. Moreover, true and philosophic greatness of spirit regards the moral goodness to which nature most aspires as consisting in deeds, not in fame, and prefers to be first in reality rather than in name. And we must approve this view; for he who depends upon the caprice of the ignorant rabble cannot be numbered among the great. Then, too, the higher a man's ambition, the more easily he is tempted to acts of injustice by his desire for fame. We are now, to be sure, on very slippery ground; for scarcely can the man be found who has passed through trials and encountered dangers and does not then wish for glory as a reward for his achievements.

(66) The soul that is altogether courageous and great is marked above all by two characteristics: one of these is indifference to outward circumstances; for such a person cherishes the conviction that nothing but moral goodness and propriety deserves to be either admired or wished for or striven after, and that he ought not to be subject to any man or any passion or any accident of fortune. The second characteristic is that, when the soul is disciplined in the way above mentioned, one should do deeds not only great and in the highest degree useful, but extremely arduous and laborious and fraught with danger both to life and to many things that make life worth living.

(67) All the glory and greatness and, I may add, all the usefulness of these two characteristics of courage are centered in the latter; the rational cause that makes men great, in the former. For it is the former that contains the element that makes souls pre-eminent and indifferent to worldly fortune. And this quality is distinguished by two criteria: (1) if one account moral rectitude as the only good; and (2) if one be free from all passion. For we must agree that it takes a brave and heroic soul to hold as slight what

most people think grand and glorious, and to disregard it from fixed and settled principles. And it requires strength of character and great singleness of purpose to bear what seems painful, as it comes to pass in many and various forms in human life, and to bear it so unflinchingly as not to be shaken in the least from one's natural state of the dignity of a philosopher.

(68) Moreover, it would be inconsistent for the man who is not overcome by fear to be overcome by desire, or for the man who has shown himself invincible to toil to be conquered by pleasure. We must, therefore, not only avoid the latter, but also beware of ambition for wealth; for there is nothing so characteristic of narrowness and littleness of soul as the love of riches; and there is nothing more honorable and noble than to be indifferent to money, if one does not possess it, and to devote it to beneficence and liberality, if one does possess it.

As I said before, we must also beware of ambition for glory; for it robs us of liberty, and in defense of liberty a high-souled man should stake everything. And one ought not to seek military authority; nay, rather it ought sometimes to be declined, sometimes to be resigned.

(69) Again, we must keep ourselves free from every disturbing emotion, not only from desire and fear, but also from excessive pain and pleasure, and from anger, so that we may enjoy that calm of soul and freedom from care which bring both moral stability and dignity of character. But there have been many and still are many who, while pursuing that calm of soul of which I speak, have withdrawn from civic duty and taken refuge in retirement. Among such have been found the most famous and by far the foremost philosophers and certain other earnest, thoughtful men who could not endure the conduct of either the people or their leaders; some of them, too, lived in the country and found their pleasure in the management of their private estates. (70) Such men have had the same aims as kings — to suffer no want, to be subject to no authority, to enjoy their liberty, that is, in its essence, to live just as they please.

So, while this desire is common to men of political ambitions and men of retirement, of whom I have just spoken, the one class think they can attain their end if they secure large means; the other, if they are content with the little they have. And, in this matter, neither way of thinking is altogether to be condemned; but the life of retirement is easier and safer and at the same time less burdensome or troublesome to others, while the career of those who apply themselves to statecraft and to conducting great enterprises is more profitable to mankind and contributes more to their own greatness and renown.

(71) So perhaps those men of extraordinary genius who have devoted themselves to learning must be excused for not taking part in public affairs; likewise, those who from ill-health or for some still more valid reason have retired from the service of the state and left to others the opportunity and the glory of its administration. But if those who have no such excuse profess a scorn for civil and military offices, which most people admire, I think that this should be set down not to their credit but to their discredit; for in so far as they care little, as they say, for glory and count it as naught, it is difficult not to sympathize with their attitude; in reality however, they seem to dread the toil and trouble and also, perhaps, the discredit and humiliation of political failure and defeat. For there are people who in opposite circumstances do not act consistently: they have the utmost contempt for pleasure but in pain they are too sensitive; they are indifferent to glory, but they are crushed by disgrace and even in their inconsistency they show no great consistency.

(72) But those whom nature has endowed with the capacity for administering public affairs should put aside all hesitation, enter the race for public office and take a hand in directing the government; for in no other way can a government be administered or greatness of spirit be made manifest. Statesmen too, no less than philosophers — perhaps even more so — should carry with them that greatness of spirit and indifference to outward circumstances to which I so often refer, together with calm of soul and freedom from care, if they are to be free from worries and lead a dignified and self-consistent life.

(73) This is easier for the philosophers; as their life is less exposed to the assaults of fortune, their wants are fewer; and, if any misfortune overtakes them, their fall is not so disastrous. Not without reason, therefore, are stronger emotions aroused in those who engage in public life than in those who live in

retirement, and greater is their ambition for success; the more, therefore, do they need to enjoy greatness of spirit and freedom from annoying cares.

If anyone is entering public life, let him beware of thinking only of the honor that it brings; but let him be sure also that he has the ability to succeed. At the same time, let him take care not to lose heart too readily through discouragement nor yet to be over-confident through ambition. In a word, before undertaking any enterprise, careful preparation must be made.

(74) Most people think that the achievements of war are more important than those of peace; but this opinion needs to be corrected. For many men have sought occasions for war from the mere ambition for fame. This is notably the case with men of great spirit and natural ability, and it is the more likely to happen, if they are adapted to a soldier's life and fond of warfare. But if we will face the facts, we shall find that there have been many instances of achievement in peace more important and no less renowned than in war.

(85) Those who propose to take charge of the affairs of government should not fail to remember two of Plato's rules: first, to keep the good of the people so clearly in view that regardless of their own interests they will make their every action conform to that; second, to care for the welfare of the whole body politic and not in serving the interests of some one party to betray the rest. For the administration of the government, like the office of a trustee, must be conducted for the benefit of those entrusted to one's care, not of those to whom it is entrusted. Now, those who care for the interests of a part of the citizens and neglect another part, introduce into the civil service a dangerous element — dissension and party strife. The result is that some are found to be loyal supporters of the democratic, others of the aristocratic party, and few of the nation as a whole.

(86) As a result of this party spirit bitter strife arose at Athens, and in our own country not only dissensions but also disastrous civil wars broke out. All this the citizen who is patriotic, brave, and worthy of a leading place in the state will shun with abhorrence; he will dedicate himself unreservedly to his country, without aiming at influence or power for himself; and he will devote himself to the state in its entirety in such a way as to further the interests of all. Besides, he will not expose anyone to hatred or disrepute by groundless charges, but he will surely cleave to justice and honor [*honestas*] so closely that he will submit to any loss, however heavy, rather than be untrue to them, and will face death itself rather than renounce them.

(87) A most wretched custom, assuredly, is our electioneering and scrambling for office. Concerning this also we find a fine thought in Plato: "Those who compete against one another," he says, "to see which of two candidates shall administer the government, are like sailors quarrelling as to which one of them shall do the steering." And he likewise lays down the rule that we should regard only those as adversaries who take up arms against the state, not those who strive to have the government administered according to their convictions. This was the spirit of the disagreement between Publius Africanus and Quintus Metellus: there was in it no trace of rancor.

(88) Neither must we listen to those who think that one should indulge in violent anger against one's political enemies and imagine that such is the attitude of a great-spirited, brave man. For nothing is more commendable, nothing more becoming in a pre-eminently great man than courtesy and forbearance. Indeed, in a free people, where all enjoy equal rights before the law, we must school ourselves to affability and what is called "mental poise"; for if we are irritated when people intrude upon us at unseasonable hours or make unreasonable requests, we shall develop a sour, churlish temper, prejudicial to ourselves and offensive to others. And yet gentleness of spirit and forbearance are to be commended only with the understanding that strictness may be exercised for the good of the state; for without that, the government cannot be well administered. On the other hand, if punishment or correction must be administered, it need not be insulting; it ought to have regard to the welfare of the state, not to the personal satisfaction of the man who administers the punishment or reproof.

(89) We should take care also that the punishment shall not be out of proportion to the offence, and that some shall not be chastised for the same fault for which others are not even called to account. In administering punishment it is above all necessary to allow no trace of anger. For if any one proceeds in a passion to inflict punishment, he will never observe that happy mean which lies between excess and defect. This doctrine of the mean is approved by the Peripatetics and wisely approved, if only they did not speak in praise of anger and tell us that it is a gift bestowed on us by nature for a good purpose. But, in reality, anger is in every circumstance to be eradicated; and it is to be desired that they who administer the government should be like the laws, which are led to inflict punishment not by wrath but by justice.

Here Cicero treats the fourth power or inclination of the soul: acting in a "fitting" or decorous way

(93) We have next to discuss the one remaining division of moral rectitude. That is the one in which we find considerateness and self-control, which give, as it were, a sort of polish to life; it embraces also temperance, complete subjection of all the passions, and moderation in all things. Under this head is further included what, in Latin, may be called *decorum* (propriety); for in Greek it is called *πρέπον*. Such is its essential nature, that it is inseparable from moral goodness; for what is proper is morally right, and what is morally right is proper.

(98) To us nature has assigned the roles of steadfastness, temperance, self-control, and considerateness of others; nature also teaches us not to be careless in our behavior towards our fellows. Hence we may clearly see how wide is the application not only of that propriety which is essential to moral rectitude in general, but also of the special propriety which is displayed in each particular subdivision of virtue. For, as physical beauty with harmonious symmetry of the limbs engages the attention and delights the eye, for the very reason that all the parts combine in harmony and grace, so this propriety, which shines out in our conduct, engages the approval of our fellows by the order, consistency, and self-control it imposes upon every word and deed.

(99) We should, therefore, in our dealings with people show what I may almost call reverence toward all people — not only toward those who are the best, but toward others as well. To neglect [*neglegere*] public opinion implies not merely self-sufficiency, but even total lack of principle. There is, too, a difference between justice and considerateness in one's relations to others. It is the function of justice not to do wrong to them; of considerateness, not to wound their feelings; and in this the essence of propriety is best seen.

With the foregoing exposition, I think it is clear what the nature is of what we term propriety.

(100) Further, as to the duty which has its source in propriety, the first road on which it conducts us leads to harmony with nature and the faithful observance of her laws. If we follow nature as our guide, we shall never go astray, but we shall be pursuing that which is in its nature clear-sighted and penetrating, that which is adapted to promote and strengthen society, and that which is strong and courageous. But the very essence of propriety is found in the division of virtue which is now under discussion. For it is only when they agree with nature that we should give our approval to the movements not only of the body, but still more of the spirit.

(101) Now we find that the essential activity of the soul [*animorum*] is twofold: one force is appetite (that is, *ὁρμή*, in Greek), which impels a man this way and that; the other is reason, which teaches and explains what should be done and what should be left undone. The result is that reason commands, appetite obeys.

Again, every action ought to be free from undue haste or carelessness; neither ought we to do anything for which we cannot assign a reasonable motive; for in these words we have practically a definition of duty.

(102) The appetites, moreover, must be made to obey the reins of reason and neither allowed to run ahead of it nor from listlessness or indolence to lag behind; but people should enjoy calm of soul and be free from every sort of passion. As a result strength of character and self-control will shine forth in all

their luster. For when appetites overstep their bounds and, galloping away, so to speak, whether in desire or aversion, are not well held in hand by reason, they clearly overleap all bound and measure; for they throw obedience off and leave it behind and refuse to obey the reins of reason, to which they are subject by nature's laws [*lege naturae*]. And not only minds but bodies as well are disordered by such appetites.

5 We need only to look at the faces of men in a rage or under the influence of some passion or fear or beside themselves with extravagant joy: in every instance their features, voices, motions, attitudes undergo a change.

(103) From all this — to return to our sketch of duty — we see that all the appetites must be controlled and calmed and that we must take infinite pains not to do anything from mere impulse or at random,
10 without due consideration and care.

*Cicero addresses the pressing issue for each person: How do we determine **our** particular duty in life?*

(107) We must realize also that we are invested by nature with two roles [*personis*]⁷ as it were: one of these is universal, arising from the fact of our being all alike endowed with reason and with that
15 superiority which lifts us above the brute. From this all morality and propriety are derived, and upon it depends the rational method of ascertaining our duty. The other role is the one that is assigned to individuals in particular.

(113) It is each man's duty to weigh well what are his own peculiar traits of character, to regulate these properly, and not to wish to try how another man's would suit him. For the more peculiarly his own a
20 man's character is, the better it fits him.

(114) Everyone, therefore, should make a proper estimate of his own natural ability and show himself a critical judge of his own merits and defects; in this respect we should not let actors display more practical wisdom than we have. They select, not the best plays, but the ones best suited to their talents. Those who rely most upon the quality of their voice take the Epigoni and the Medus; those who place
25 more stress upon the action choose the Melanippa and the Clytaemnestra; Rupilius, whom I remember, always played in the Antiope, Aesopus rarely in the Ajax. Shall a player have regard to this in choosing his role upon the stage, and a wise man fail to do so in selecting his part in life?

We shall, therefore, work to the best advantage in that role to which we are best adapted. But if at some time stress of circumstances shall thrust us aside into some uncongenial part, we must devote to it
30 all possible thought, practice, and pains, that we may be able to perform it, if not with propriety, at least with as little impropriety as possible; and we need not strive so hard to attain to points of excellence that have not been vouchsafed to us as to correct the faults we have.

(115) To the two above-mentioned roles [*personis*] is added a third,⁸ which some chance or some circumstance imposes, and a fourth also, which we assume by our own deliberate choice. Regal powers and military commands, nobility of birth and political office, wealth and influence, and their opposites
35 depend upon chance and are, therefore, controlled by circumstances. But what role we ourselves may choose to sustain is decided by our own free choice. And so some turn to philosophy, others to the civil law, and still others to oratory, while in case of the virtues themselves one man prefers to excel in one, another in another.

(117) Above all we must decide who and what manner of men we wish to be and what calling in life we would follow; and this is the most difficult problem in the world. For it is in the years of early youth, when our judgement is most immature, that each of us decides that his calling in life shall be that to which he has taken a special liking. And thus he becomes engaged in some particular calling and career in life, before he is fit to decide intelligently what is best for him.

⁷ Here Cicero chooses a theatrical term; see sections 114-115 for his continued use of this metaphor.

⁸ See section 107 for the first two: our universal role as a rational being and our particular role with our particular qualities.

(119) There is one class of people that is very rarely met with: it is composed of those who are endowed with marked natural ability, or exceptional advantages of education and culture, or both, and who also have time to consider carefully what career in life they prefer to follow; and in this deliberation the decision must turn wholly upon each individual's natural bent. For we try to find out from each one's native disposition, as was said above, just what is proper for him; and this we require not only in case of each individual act but also in ordering the whole course of one's life; and this last is a matter to which still greater care must be given, in order that we may be true to ourselves throughout all our lives and not falter in the discharge of any duty.

(120) But since the most powerful influence in the choice of a career is exerted by nature, and the next most powerful by fortune, we must, of course, take account of them both in deciding upon our calling in life; but, of the two, nature claims the more attention. For nature is so much more stable and steadfast, that for fortune to come into conflict with nature seems like a combat between a mortal and a goddess. If, therefore, he has conformed his whole plan of life to the kind of nature that is his (that is, his better nature), let him go on with it consistently — for that is the essence of propriety — unless, perchance, he should discover that he has made a mistake in choosing his life work. If this should happen (and it can easily happen), he must change his vocation and mode of life. If circumstances favor such change, it will be effected with greater ease and convenience. If not, it must be made gradually, step by step, just as, when friendships become no longer pleasing or desirable, it is more proper (so wise men think) to undo the bond little by little than to sever it at a stroke. (121) And when we have once changed our calling in life, we must take all possible care to make it clear that we have done so with good reason.

But whereas I said a moment ago that we have to follow in the steps of our fathers, let me make the following exceptions: first, we need not imitate their faults; second, we need not imitate certain other things, if our nature does not permit such imitation; for example, the son of the elder Africanus (that Scipio who adopted the younger Africanus, the son of Paulus) could not on account of ill-health be so much like his father as Africanus had been like his. If, then, a man is unable to conduct cases at the bar or to hold the people spell-bound with his eloquence or to conduct wars, still it will be his duty to practice these other virtues, which are within his reach — justice, good faith, generosity, temperance, self-control — that his deficiencies in other respects may be less conspicuous. The noblest heritage, however, that is handed down from fathers to children, and one more precious than any inherited wealth, is a reputation for virtue and worthy deeds; and to dishonor this must be branded as a sin and a shame.

(122) Since, too, the duties that properly belong to different times of life are not the same, but some belong to the young, others to those more advanced in years, a word must be said on this distinction also. It is, then, the duty of a young man to show deference to his elders and to attach himself to the best and most approved of them, so as to receive the benefit of their counsel and influence. For the inexperience of youth requires the practical wisdom of age to strengthen and direct it. And this time of life is above all to be protected against sensuality and trained to toil and endurance of both mind and body, so as to be strong for active duty in military and civil service. And even when they wish to relax their minds and give themselves up to enjoyment they should beware of excesses and bear in mind the rules of modesty. And this will be easier, if the young are not unwilling to have their elders join them even in their pleasures.

(152) Now, I think I have explained fully enough how moral duties are derived from the four divisions of moral rectitude. But between those very actions which are morally right, a conflict and comparison may frequently arise, as to which of two actions is morally better — a point overlooked by Panaetius. For, since all moral rectitude springs from four sources (one of which is prudence; the second, social instinct; the third, courage; the fourth, temperance), it is often necessary in deciding a question of duty that these virtues be weighed against one another.

(153) My view, therefore, is that those duties are closer to nature which depend upon the social instinct than those which depend upon knowledge; and this view can be confirmed by the following argument: (1)

- suppose that a wise man should be vouchsafed such a life that, with an abundance of everything pouring in upon him, he might in perfect peace study and ponder over everything that is worth knowing, still, if the solitude were so complete that he could never see a human being, he would die. And then, the foremost of all virtues is wisdom — what the Greeks call σοφία; for by prudence, which they call
- 5 φρόνησις, we understand something else, namely, the practical knowledge of things to be sought for and of things to be avoided. (2) Again, that wisdom which I have given the foremost place is the knowledge of things human and divine, which is concerned also with the bonds of union between gods and men and the relations of man to man.⁹ If wisdom is the most important of the virtues, as it certainly is, it necessarily follows that that duty which is connected with the social obligation is the most important duty. And (3)
- 10 service is better than mere theoretical knowledge, for the study and knowledge of the universe would somehow be lame and defective, were no practical results to follow. Such results, moreover, are best seen in the safeguarding of human interests. It is essential, then, to human society; and it should, therefore, be ranked above speculative knowledge.

15 **Why did Machiavelli consider Cicero the greatest of foes on the following issues?**

Issue	<i>On Duties</i>	<i>The Prince</i>
1. excellence in virtue, <i>honestas</i>	1.12-17	ch 15
2. generosity, <i>benevolentia</i>	1.42	ch 16
3. love vs. fear	1.12	ch 17
4. fox & lion: deception & force	1.41	ch 18
5. keeping one's promises, <i>fides</i>	1.23	ch 18

N. B.: *Prince* 15: effective rulers must be prepared to act immorally; otherwise downfall is inevitable

⁹ That Cicero's ultimate metaphysical foundation for ethics is the order established by the divine, review sections 50-53 and 88. At 3.28 Cicero states that the gods "have established fellowship between human beings"; at 3.23 he states that "nature's reason is the law of gods and men."