

Laelius: On Friendship¹ by Cicero

Setting: Laelius's home

Characters: Laelius and his two sons-in-law: Scaevola and Fannius

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Fond memories

1. Quintus Mucius Scaevola, the Augur,² would love to share his many memories of his father-in-law Gaius Laelius, and never hesitated to call him “wise” every time he spoke about him. As soon as I was wearing my man’s toga,³ my father took me to Scaevola personally, and I never left the old man’s side so far as I was able, and as long as he allowed it. And that is how I began to commit to memory the many things he so shrewdly discussed and put in such a concise and practical way, striving to become more learned by his wisdom. When he died, I sought the company of the other Scaevola, the Pontifex⁴ (who, by the way, I would dare to say is the most outstandingly intelligent and just man in our state). But that is the topic of another conversation. Today I want to talk about Scaevola the Augur.

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A broken friendship

2. Among my many memories I especially recall the time when, sitting at his home as was his custom in his semi-circle of seats with me and a few of his close friends, how he started talking about a subject that was on just about everyone’s lips at the time. Certainly you recall it, my dear Atticus⁵ – all the more so since you were so close to him – how Publius Sulpicius, the tribune of the people, had fallen out from Quintus Pompeius the consul, a man to whom he had been so very close and so very fond – and how great was everyone’s surprise and dismay.

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A talk on friendship

3. And so, once Scaevola had brought that subject up, he went on to tell us in detail about the talk on friendship that Laelius once gave to him and to his other son-in-law Gaius Fannius (the son of Marcus Fannius). This took place just a few days after the death of Scipio Africanus.⁶ I committed all the major points of it to memory, and have set them down here in the order I thought best.

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30 *Form, method and title of the dialogue*

I will introduce characters speaking in their own persons as in a drama, in order to avoid having to say “he said” and “I said” over and over again, and in order that the whole conversation will seem to be taking place right in the reader’s presence. 4. Now, since you, Atticus,⁷ have often tried to get me to write something about friendship, I decided that this talk would be at once worthy of our own friendship and deserving to be publicly known. What I do at your request, I do willingly, and I do it to be helpful to many. However, as in my other dialogue addressed to you entitled *Cato Major: On Old Age*, I had the old man Cato⁸ speaking, because no other person seemed a more fitting character to speak about that period of life than he, who had such a long-lasting old age, and flourished more than all others while in that age – so now,

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¹ Translated by Dr. Gerald Malsbary © 2020; used with permission.

² He was Cicero’s first legal mentor; Cicero attended the elderly Scaevola’s lectures from 90-88 BC. “Augur” was the name for a Roman religious/political office.

³ Until age sixteen, Roman boys wore a *toga praetexta*, a toga with a purple stripe, only worn otherwise by the highest magistrates. At age sixteen they started wearing the regular man’s toga, the *toga virilis*, without purple stripe.

⁴ Second cousin of the Scaevola of this dialogue; consul in 95 BC, and a great legal expert in his own right. Cicero’s personal cultivation of the company of these men can be considered the ancient Roman equivalent of “law school.”

⁵ The addressee of the entire dialogue (as if it were a letter to him) is Titus Pomponius Atticus, Cicero’s closest friend from his school days and “college” days in Athens. Atticus lived in Greece and stayed out of politics.

⁶ Scipio Africanus Minor (185 – 129 BC): the famous friend of Gaius Laelius (*ca.* 188 BC – ?). Scipio will be mentioned repeatedly throughout the dialogue. He died (suspiciously – see note 16) a few days before this fictional dialogue takes place.

⁷ See note 5 above.

⁸ Marcus Cato (also known as Cato the Elder or Cato the Censor), 234 – 149 BC, a great Roman soldier, statesman, and author of a treatise on agriculture.

since older generations have told us that the friendship between Gaius Laelius and Publius Scipio was most memorable, the person of Laelius seemed to me to be the right one to have a discourse about friendship just as Scaevola recalled him doing. Discourses like these, when placed in the mouth of the old men of authority (especially when they are celebrities) bring a certain *gravitas* to the theme and consequently, when I would read over what I wrote, I thought I heard Cato himself speaking, and not me. **5.** But just as in that book Cato the old man speaks to another old man about old age, so here I have written about friendship, in utmost friendship, to a friend. In that work Cato spoke about old age as probably the oldest and wisest man of his day; in this work Laelius will speak about friendship: a man also held to be wise and most excellent, too, in his own famous friendship. I want you to forget about me for a while, and pretend you hear Laelius himself speaking.

This is the scene: Gaius Fannius and Quintus Mucius come to see Laelius right after the death of Africanus; they begin the conversation, and then Laelius embarks on his discourse that is entirely about friendship. You will see yourself in it.

Various ways to be wise

6. FANNIUS [transitioning from some other topic]: ...that's right, Laelius. And there has never been a better man, or a more famous one, than Scipio Africanus.⁹ But you need to realize that everybody's eyes are looking at you: you alone they think of – and refer to – as wise. That happened to Cato, too, and we know that Lucius Acilius was also called wise by our forefathers, each in his own way: Acilius by being considered expert in law, Cato because he had experience of so many different things: in the senate he planned brilliantly, acted consistently, responded intelligently. That is why he virtually acquired the name “wise” as a new last name by the time he was an old man. **7.** But you, Laelius, are wise, they say, in still another way: not only by natural disposition and virtue, but by your studies and learning.

A Roman model of friendship

This is true about you not only in popular reputation but in the opinion of the highly educated, just as at Athens it was not the ones called the “Seven Sages of Greece” who really rank high with those who research these things more carefully, but only the man who was judged “wisest of them all” by the Delphic oracle.¹⁰ These think that you too are wise in that you have the ability to locate all your needs in yourself, to measure all human events by virtue. This is why everybody – including Scaevola here beside me – is asking how you are taking Scipio's death. All the more so, since the last time we met at Decius Brutus the Augur's house for our regular conference on the Nones,¹¹ you weren't there – a meeting you always most diligently attend.

Why did Laelius miss the meeting?

8. SCAEVOLA: Yes, Gaius Laelius, everybody is curious, just as Fannius says. But what I say to them is that I have noticed that you are bearing the death of a great man (who was also your closest friend) with moderation. And how could you not be moved, with your sense of humanity! And so I assured them that you missed the meeting on the Nones not because you were sad, but because you happened to be sick.

LAELIUS: You are so right about that, Scaevola. I would never let personal discomfort keep me from that obligation, which I always performed when healthy – nor do I think that there is such a thing as a “break” from duty for a consistent man.

Laelius corrects Fannius: did something bad happen to Scipio?

9. But Fannius! What you say about me is more than I can see in myself or expect others to see, but you speak in friendship, of course. You're not quite right about Cato: if anybody was wise, *he* was – but actually

⁹ See note 6 above.

¹⁰ Socrates (469 – 399 BC): teacher of Plato; founder of moral philosophy and the dialectical method of inquiry; the Stoic and Epicurean schools both looked to Socrates as the ideal embodiment of moral philosophy and virtue. See notes 13 and 18.

¹¹ In the ancient Roman calendar, the Nones was the ninth day of the month (in all months but March, May, July and October, when it was the seventh).

I prefer to think that nobody has that title. Just think how he bore the death of his son, to say the least – I remember Paulus, and I saw Galus,¹² but their sons were still boys, whereas Cato’s son was fully grown and a well-respected man in his own right. **10.** You should be careful even about putting “Apollo’s wisest”¹³ before Cato: Cato is praised for deeds; the other, for words. As for me, I would like the two of you to think about my situation something like this: if I were to deny being affected by my loss of Scipio, I am sure some philosophers would approve, but I would be lying. I have lost a friend such as I will – probably! – never have again and such as – certainly! – I never had before. But I do not need medicine, really: I can console myself. And I do this most of all because I am not making the mistake that is usually made by those who are grieved at the loss of a friend: I do not think that anything bad has happened to Scipio. In fact, if something bad happened to somebody, it happened to me – and to be terribly anguished by your own discomforts is the mark of someone who loves himself more than his friend. **11.** Who could say that things did not go splendidly for him? Unless he thought he could live forever – and of course he didn’t think that he would – is there anything in the world that a man could rightly long for that he did not actually get?

Scipio’s splendid virtues

Here was a man who surpassed, with his incredible virtue, all the expectations that the people had for him as a boy as soon as he became a young man; he never sought the consulship but was elected consul twice (the first consulship too soon, the second, at the right time for him, but almost too late for the republic); a man who overthrew two cities that were most hostile to this country, and in doing so not only put an end to the wars¹⁴ that were going on but even stopped later ones. What can I say about his genial manners, about his piety toward his mother, his generosity to his sisters, his kindness toward his own, his justice toward everyone he knew? You two know about that, of course, but the grief at his funeral shows how beloved he was to the whole country. How could the addition of a few years have helped him, anyway? For, even when one’s old age is not particularly painful – as I recall Cato talking about this with Scipio and me the year before he died¹⁵ – even so, old age must eventually take away that energy that Scipio was still blessed with. **12.** And so, while his life was a life of good fortune and glory, so that nothing could be added to it, the speediness of his death took away his sensation of it. Exactly how he died is difficult to say: you all know what people suspect.¹⁶ But this at least could be said: for Publius Scipio, that was the most splendid day of the many splendid, and happy, days of his life: when, the last day he was alive, at the dismissal of the Senate, he was escorted back to his own house by the Roman city fathers and people (and allies and Latins among them, too). By departing from life at so high a level of dignity, he seemed to be going *up* to the gods rather than *down* to the shades.

Is there life after death?

13. Nor do I agree with those who have now begun to say that the soul dies with the body and that death ends all. The authority of the ancients carries more weight with me – and that means several things: it is why, first of all, our Roman ancestors extended so many legal rights to the dead, which they surely would not have done if they thought the dead were nothing at all. Next, there is the authority of those who lived here and instructed Great Greece¹⁷ with their customs and doctrine (a country now in ruins but then in its heyday); finally, there is the authority of the one judged by the oracle of Apollo as wisest of men,¹⁸ who did

¹² Two Roman nobles who also lost their own sons.

¹³ Socrates. See notes 10 and 18.

¹⁴ The reference is to the Third (and last) Punic War against Carthage (146 BC) and the defeat of Numantia in Spain (133 BC).

¹⁵ An allusion to Cicero’s famous companion piece, the short philosophical dialogue *De Senectute* (“On Old Age”), referred to above (see note 8).

¹⁶ I.e., politically motivated “foul play.”

¹⁷ Sicily and Southern Italy was referred to by the Romans as *Magna Graecia*, “Great Greece.” Cicero is alluding to the great Pre-Socratic philosophers Parmenides, Zeno, Pythagoras, and Empedocles.

¹⁸ Socrates (see notes 10 and 13 above).

not, like most teachers, teach one doctrine one day and another doctrine the next, but consistently taught the same thing: that the souls of human beings were divine, and that when they departed from their bodies, a path to heaven opened up for them: a path that was all the more direct, depending on how just and good the person was in life.

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14. And that was Scipio's own view, too. He was prophetic, in a way: just a few days before he died, when Philus and Manlius were with him, and many others, including yourself, Scaevola, who had come with me, Scipio spent a three-day period on the ideal *Res publica*,¹⁹ which ended with a discussion on the immortality of the soul – a discourse which, he told us, he heard from Scipio Africanus Major himself²⁰ in a dream-vision given him in the night. If it is true that the souls of all the best will escape most easily from the bonds and prison of the body, whose flight to the gods would be easier than Scipio's? That is why I think that anyone who mourns at this event is more an enemy than a friend. But if those other views are closer to the truth – i.e. that the death of bodies is also the death of souls, and no consciousness remains – so, just as there is no good in death, there would equally be no evil. With his consciousness lost, Scipio becomes as if he were never born to begin with ... but *that he was born* is a fact we rejoice in, and a fact that this country will rejoice in, too, as long as it remains in existence.

What Scipio meant to Laelius

15. Consequently, as I said, it has turned out most excellently for him, but not so well for me. It would make more sense for me to leave this life before he did, since I came into it before he did! All the same, I will make the best of my memory of our friendship, so that I could be seen to have lived happily just because I lived with Scipio. I shared with him my concern for public and private affairs; I shared my house with him as well as my military service, and – here is the real power of friendship – I shared with him the greatest agreement of intentions and motivations and thoughts [*voluntatum, studiorum, sententiarum summa consensio*]. And so it is not so much that reputation for wisdom that Fannius just now recalled (especially considering that it is a false one) but rather the memory of our friendship that I hope will prove eternal; in all the ages only three or four pairs of friends are always mentioned, and this is the category to which I would hope to see the names of Scipio and Laelius belong in years to come.

16. FANNIUS: That is of course where your friendship belongs, Laelius. But since you have brought up the topic of friendship, and we are at leisure, you would be doing me (and Scaevola, too, I think) the highest favor, if you spoke about friendship the same way you do about other things when it is asked of you: tell us what you think of it, what kind of a thing it is, and what advice you give about it.

SCAEVOLA: This will be pleasing to me too, and Fannius has beat me to it, when I was trying to talk about it with you. You will be doing us both a favor.

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Laelius begins – with realistic examples

17. LAELIUS: I would not mind at all, if I only had myself to worry about: it is both a noble subject matter and we are, as Fannius says, at leisure. But who am I to speak? What is my skill here? There is that tradition of learned men – Greeks, of course – of disputing extemporaneously about anything posed to them, and that is a great achievement that requires no small amount of practice. Consequently, when it comes to the debate with regard to friendship, you should ask those who profess abilities like that; all I would urge is that you put friendship above all other human affairs; for nothing is so natural to us, or so perfectly suited to all the ups and downs of life.

¹⁹ Literally the “public thing,” or “public affair, business.” This is how the ancient Romans referred to their state and its government.

²⁰ Scipio Africanus Major (234 BC – 183 BC), the victor of Hannibal, was our Scipio's adoptive grandfather. This is also an allusion to the “Dream of Scipio” or *Somnium Scipionis*, another Ciceronian work about a vision of the after-life as a journey to the planets and stars – a work of key influence, for example, on Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

18. But the first thing that comes to mind now is this: friendship cannot exist except among good persons. But I do not take that position to the extreme, as those do who dispute this matter very exactly; they may be right, but they are really too unrealistic for the common good when they insist that no one is good apart from the most wisely learned. Fine – but what they mean by being “wisely learned” is a quality no mortal has ever attained; what we are looking for, really, is something in common use and a part of everyday life. I could not say that C. Fabricius, Mucius Curius,²¹ Tiberius Coruncanius²² – all judged “wise” and “learned” by our Roman ancestors – would in fact be considered wise by those standards. Well – they can keep their title of “wisdom,” as something unpleasant and obscure; at least let them grant that such men were good men. But they will not even grant that! They will deny even the name of goodness to all except the “wisely learned.”

19. Therefore, let us work with a more reasonable standard – what we might call a “thick Minerva”.²³ I mean those who conduct themselves and live in such a way that their reliability, integrity, justice and generosity are proven, and there is no lust or obsession or arrogance in them; they are men of great constancy (as those men I just mentioned in fact were), and since this kind of men are considered good, I think we should rightly call them that, because, as far as is humanly possible, they have followed their best nature as a guide to living well.

Defining friendship – in relation to “society”

As I see it, we are all born into some kind of society, but the more important societies are formed with those who are the closer. Fellow-citizens have precedence to foreigners, neighbors to outsiders: these form a friendship that nature creates. But this isn’t strong enough in itself. Friendship is superior to just being physically nearer, since good will can be absent among neighbors but never among friends. Take away good will, and you cannot call it friendship any more, although you may still be called neighbors. 20. The real power of friendship can be grasped above all by the following consideration: the infinity of social relations formed within the human race by nature can be concentrated into a small space, where real love can exist among two, or a few.

Defining friendship – in the broadest terms, and as exemplified by real persons

For friendship is nothing other than a deeply-felt agreement in all things divine and human, established in good will and love [*cum benevolentia et caritate consensio*]. I would say there is no greater gift of the gods to mortal man, with the exception of wisdom. Some prefer wealth or good health; many others prefer power, honors, or even pleasure – beasts have the last-mentioned as a priority, but even the first things I mentioned – health and wealth – are transitory and uncertain, and reside more in the caprice of fortune than in our own planning. But those who place the ultimate good [*summum bonum*] in virtue act the most splendidly, and virtue produces and contains friendship within itself, nor can friendship exist in any way without virtue. 21. So let us interpret virtue by our habit of life and by the speech we use every day, and let us not measure it, as some do, by the magnificence of words, but let us count as good men those who are considered such: the Pauli, the Catos, the Gali, the Scipios, the Phili. All these men were content with a common style of life – we can leave aside the ones who exist nowhere on earth.

22. Therefore, among men friendship has so many opportunities I can hardly begin to describe them. First, as Ennius²⁴ has it, how can “life be alive,” which does not rest in mutual good will? What is sweeter than to have someone with you, to whom you can say anything you would say to yourself? What advantage would you have when good things happen to you, unless you had someone who could enjoy them just as much as

²¹ Fabricius and Curius (Dentatus) were Roman consuls during the war against the Northwestern Greek King Pyrrhus (280 – 275 BC). Both were great generals, untainted by bribery, who generously shared their war booty, and lived frugal lives as farmers.

²² Coruncanius was the first Roman plebeian to be named “Pontifex Maximus” (ca. 280 BC), and the first to give public legal instruction.

²³ From Minerva, the Roman equivalent of Athena, the goddess of inspired skill. A “thick Minerva” (*Minerva pinguis*) is something like “unpolished” or “rough and ready” skill.

²⁴ Early Roman epic writer and philosopher (239 – 169 BC)

you? And it is difficult to endure hard times without someone who would bear them more seriously than yourself. Finally, the other things which are sought after are each good for some different end: wealth to use, personal resources to be cultivated, honors for praise, pleasure to cheer us, health to be without pain and to make use of your body's abilities – but friendship has within it very many things, present no matter where you turn, excluded from no place, never at the wrong time, never disagreeable. In fact, we really do not even use water or fire (as they say) in more places than we do friendship, and I am not speaking here about the common or low-grade kind of friendship (although even that too is pleasant and helps us), but about the true and perfect type, such as was the friendship of those very few I mentioned. Friendship makes good times yet more splendid, and takes some of the weight off of unfavorable times, by sharing them.

Appreciated all the more in its absence

23. Friendship contains many great advantages, and it is no wonder if it gives everyone a good hope [*spes*] shining into the future, and does not allow one's spirits to flag or fall. When you look at a true friend, you look at a kind of image of yourself. Absent friends are present, the weak are made stronger, and – although it is very difficult to say this – dead friends are still alive. When the living honor, remember, or simply miss their departed friends, their death becomes a blessed event, and the life of the survivors becomes noble. If you removed the bond of goodwill from the world, no home or city could stand, no farms would stay in cultivation. And if this is not clear enough, the power of friendship and harmony can be perceived when its absence brings dissension and discord. What house so stable, what city so strong that cannot be overturned to the foundations by hatred and disagreement?²⁵ This is how we can judge how much goodness lies in friendship. **24.** A certain Greek philosopher²⁶ from Agrigentum is known for his inspired poetry about how everything that exists and moves in the universe is brought together by friendship and taken apart by discord.

Evidence that friendship is a universal value

But all mortals understand this and know it from experience. And so, if there is ever an instance of a friend having some obligation to confront the dangers or share the dangers of a friend, who does not praise that to the skies? You could hear the shouts recently in the theatre in the new play by my friend and guest Marcus Pacuvius. When the king didn't know which of the two was Orestes, Pylades²⁷ claimed he was Orestes to be put to death in his friend's place, but then Orestes kept insisting he was the real Orestes. The actors received a standing ovation, even though it was fiction – what if it had been a true happening? The true nature of things is easily revealed this way: when people who cannot do such things themselves, judge it was rightly done by others.

That is what I think I can say about friendship; if it seems to you that there is anything else to say (and I think there is a great deal more), ask those who talk about such things.

Laelius "coerced" to tell more

25. FANNIUS: But we would rather hear about it from you; even though I have asked those others and heard what they had to say very willingly, somehow the thread of your speeches is easier to grasp.

SCAEVOLA: You would insist on that all the more, Fannius, if you had been there in Scipio's gardens the day we had our discourse about the *Res publica* – he was a great supporter of the cause of justice against Philus' finely detailed arguments!

FANNIUS: It must be easy for a very just man to defend the cause of justice.

²⁵ Cf. Mt 12:25.

²⁶ Empedocles (flourished ca. 460 BC) was famous for his doctrines of *love (eros)* and *strife (eris)* as ultimate metaphysical principles causing the cyclical composition and decomposition of the cosmos.

²⁷ They were cousins: Orestes, the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, was sent away to be raised with Pylades, son of Agamemnon's sister Anaxibia and of King Stophius of Anaxibic.

SCAEVOLA: So what would you say about friendship, then? Wouldn't it be easy for someone to talk about friendship who has the greatest reputation for keeping a friendship with the utmost constancy, trust, and justice?

- 5 26. LAELIUS: This is coercion! What does it matter what reasons you give? You are certainly forcing me: especially when it comes to such a good thing as this, it is difficult to resist the desires of my sons-in-law, nor would it be fair to deny you.

The source of friendship – is it something negative or positive?

- 10 So then, very often, when I have thought about friendship, I have been accustomed to ask this question: is it because of some weakness or lack that friendship is sought, so that by giving and receiving strengths and abilities, we get from each other what we could never do for ourselves? Or rather, is the essence of friendship something else – something more primary and more splendid and more resulting from nature as such? Love [*amor*] – from which the word friendship [*amicitia*] gets its name in Latin – is what leads us when it comes to enlisting goodwill: for assistance is received even from those who are cultivated through a
15 seeming friendship that is only temporary; in friendship nothing is feigned, nothing phony; and whatever it is, it is something true, something freely willed. This is why it seems to me that friendship arises from nature as such, rather than from some neediness: from application of the mind, along with a kind of love, rather than from thinking about how much advantage the relationship might bring.

- 20 *Goodness itself is attractive*

27. And just what I mean by this can be noticed even in certain beasts which love their own offspring for a certain period of time, and are so loved by them in turn that the affection is visible; this is even more evident in the case of man – first from that affection [*caritas*] which is between children and parents, which cannot be destroyed except by the wickedest crime; secondly from that similar feeling of love that arises when we
25 find someone we agree with in nature and way of life, and we seem to see in that other person a shining light of goodness and virtue. 28. Nothing is more loveable than that virtue, nothing attracts us more to love someone, especially considering that for these very reasons (goodness and virtue) we can come to love, in a certain way, even those we have never seen. Who could not seize fondly on the memory of Gaius Fabricius or Mucius Curius,²⁸ whom we have never seen, and who does not hate Tarquinius Superbus, Spurius
30 Cassius, or Spurius Maelius?²⁹ We fought with two foreign generals for control of Italy: Pyrrhus and Hannibal. The first we do not hate very much because he was good; the second we will always hate because of his cruelty. 29. But if goodness has such power that we love it even in those we have never met, or what is more significant, that we love it even in our enemies, why wouldn't our souls be really impressed when we see the virtue and goodness of those with whom we live, day in, day out?

- 35 *Does love come from neediness?*

- Although love is confirmed by favors received, by common interests recognized, and by regularly doing things together, once you connect these things with that original motion of the soul and affection, an amazing degree of goodwill begins to glow between you. Now if this is what, according to some, comes
40 from weakness, so that everybody is only looking to acquire from another what he lacks himself, such philosophers leave friendship with a very lowly origin, and not at all what I would call "noble," since they maintain that it comes into the world through lack and need. If that were the case, the less somebody thought they had in themselves, the better suited they would be for friendship. 30. But it is not like that at all: in fact, the more someone has confidence in himself, and the more he is strengthened in virtue and wisdom so
45 that he has no pressing needs, and realizes that all he really owns resides within himself – this is the person who will excel the most in finding and keeping friendships.³⁰

²⁸ See note 21 above.

²⁹ Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome, was driven out when his son committed rape (510 BC); during the first century of the Republic, Spurius Cassius (485 BC) and Spurius Maelius (440 BC) were both executed for trying to become tyrants.

³⁰ For the naturally powerful attraction of goodness, see passages in Cicero's *De Officiis* such as 1.17, 98, 102; 2.32.

So what do you think, then? Did Africanus *need* me? Not in the least, by Hercules, nor did I need him, in that sense. But I had a certain admiration for his excellence, and he on his part, perhaps because he had a certain impression of my ways, liked me. Meeting often increased our goodwill toward each other, and although many big advantages followed from our association, no motives for our liking each other were produced by some hope of getting those advantages. **31.** For just as we are generous and kindly to others not to exact gratitude from them (nor do we do people favors and “charge interest,” but we just naturally are inclined to be helpful), just so friendship is not something we are led to by the expectation of making a profit; we think it worth seeking because the whole enjoyment of it consists in the love itself.

Natural origin means a noble, permanent origin

32. Those who refer all things to pleasure, in the manner of beasts, will greatly disagree with these observations, and it is not surprising, since those who throw away all their thoughts upon such a low and contemptible thing as pleasure are incapable of contemplating something so magnificent and divine. And so, let those who think that way be removed from the discussion, and let us be clear ourselves that the feeling of love and affectionate goodwill come naturally into existence, once there has been a recognition of goodness. Those who seek this apply themselves and move closer, in order to experience and enjoy the ways of the one they have begun to love, so that they might be peers and equals in their love, readier to do good things than to ask for them, and nobly compete with each other in this way. This is how the greatest advantages can come from friendship, with a natural origin that is truer and more serious than anything based on a deficiency. If mutual advantage is what stitches friendships together, those friendships would dissolve whenever that condition changed; but since the nature of things cannot be changed, true friendship will last forever. There you see the origin of friendship – unless you care to add anything.

FANNIUS: Keep going, Laelius; and I speak for Scaevola, too, since he is younger than I am.

33. SCAEVOLA: Right you are. Let’s hear some more.

Why many friendships do not last

LAELIUS: Listen then, my good men, to what Scipio and I used to talk about so very frequently with each other on the topic of friendship. Now, despite what I have just been saying, Scipio used to say that nothing was more difficult than for a friendship to survive all the way to the last day of one’s life. This is because it often happens that friends don’t want the same thing, or that they don’t agree about the *Res publica*; Scipio often used to say that men’s characters change either because conditions change or just because they get older. He used to illustrate that by the image of the teenager coming of age: the great loves of youth are set aside as soon as you outgrow your *toga praetexta*.³¹ **34.** But even if friendships last into the next stage they can be destroyed in the meantime by some contention caused by getting married or by the existence of some good thing that both friends cannot share. But even if their friendship lasts longer, it can still collapse if they get into some competition for honor: no disease is more dangerous for friendships than the desire for money (in the majority of cases) or the pursuit of glory and honor among the upper classes, so that the greatest hatreds can emerge between the greatest (former) friends. **35.** For the greatest disputes start – often for good reasons – when a friend asks for something that should not be asked for: to minister to the other’s pleasure, say, or help him carry out some injustice or other. When the friend refuses, even though his refusal is right, he is accused of betraying the law of friendship by the one he refuses to obey. The other who dares to ask the favor claims, of course, that he would do anything himself for the sake of his friend; by such complaints not only are old-time friendships often obliterated, but new and eternal hatreds are often produced. Scipio used to say that since such doom as this threatens any friendship, successfully avoiding anything like that not only depended on wisdom but also on a kind of blessing of fortune.

³¹ See note 3 above.

How far should you go in helping your friends?

36. So then, why don't we begin, if you don't mind, by investigating how love can grow in a friendship. If Coriolanus³² had friends, were they obliged to raise their arms against their country along with him? Did the friends of Vecellinus³³ or of Maelius³⁴ have to help them in their attempts to get sole power? 37. We saw that when Tiberius Gracchus was aggravating the *Res publica*,³⁵ he was deserted by Quintus Tubero³⁶ and his contemporaries and friends; but not so Gaius Blossius! – a guest with your family once, Scaevola – he approached me once (when I was in a meeting with the consuls Laenatus and Rupilius) to ask me if I would forgive him, because he thought so highly of Tiberius Gracchus that he would do anything he wanted him to do. And this is what I said: “Would you set fire to the Capitol if he asked you to?” “He would never ask me to do such a thing,” he replied, “but if he did ask me, yes, I would do it.” What a thing to say! By Hercules, he did do such a thing, or even worse, since he did not just go along with Tiberius Gracchus and all his rashness, he led the way for it: not just as a fellow traveler but as a commander! In the same madness he fled to Asia in terror at the investigation into his activities, joined up with our enemies and finally paid the just price for what he did to the *Res publica*. So there is still no excuse for sin [*peccatum*] if you sin for the sake of a friend. Since confidence in the existence of virtue in another is what brings about friendship in the first place, it is difficult for your friendship to remain if you depart from virtue.

Friendships, although never perfect, can come close to the ideal

38. But if we were to decide it was right to give our friends whatever they wanted, or ask from them whatever we wanted, and if we had perfect wisdom for doing this, there would be no problem. But we are speaking about those friends who stand before our eyes, the ones we actually see, or the ones we remember, well known to the life we all share. Our examples must come from such as these, and especially from those who come to closest to wisdom. 39. We see that Papus Aemilius was friends with Luscinius (according to tradition) – that twice they were consuls together, and were colleagues as censors.³⁷ At that time also – so public memory has it – Manius Curius and Tiberius Coruncanius³⁸ were very close to them and to each other. Therefore we cannot suspect in the least that any of these men demanded from the other something that was against a sworn oath, or against the *Res publica*. What good would it do, in the case of these men, to say that if they had demanded something of that nature that they would not have been able to get it, since they were very holy men³⁹ who felt it was equally wrong to ask or to get such things?

Other friendships, far from ideal

But Gaius Carbo and Gaius Cato followed Tiberius Gracchus, and although Tiberius's brother Gaius did not at all follow him at first, he is now most keen to do so.⁴⁰ 40. Let this be a law of friendship, then: that we neither ask for shameful things, nor do them if asked. It is, indeed, a shameful excuse – an unacceptable excuse – to say “I did it out of friendship” whether against the *Res publica* or in the cause of any other kind of wrong-doing.

³² An early Roman war hero who gathered an army and marched on Rome itself when the people did not elect him consul. See the play *Coriolanus* by Shakespeare.

³³ Probably another name of Spurius Cassius, see note 28 above.

³⁴ See note 28.

³⁵ 133 BC, four years earlier than the dramatic date of the dialogue.

³⁶ For Quintus Tubero see note 68 below.

³⁷ This was in the years 282 BC and 278 BC.

³⁸ See notes 21 and 22 above.

³⁹ The Latin words used are *sanctissimi viri*: note the pre-Christian usage of the word. For the Romans, the state itself was sacred, as were those who served it by leading.

⁴⁰ Carbo was suspected of assassinating Scipio (see note 6 above); Gaius Gracchus, who attempted to continue Tiberius Gracchus' radical reform campaign, would himself be assassinated in 122 BC, about seven years after the dramatic setting of this dialogue.

Rule of Rome by the senate increasingly weakened by the tribunes

In fact, Fannius and Scaevola, we are placed now in a position from which we can see rather far into the future of the *Res publica*. The way of our ancestors has already been turned aside somewhat from its track.

- 5 **41.** Tiberius Gracchus tried to seize regal power, and in fact did seize regal power for a few months; had the Roman people ever heard or seen anything like that? What those friends and acquaintances who followed him even after his death did to Publius Nasica, I cannot speak of without tears. We put up as best we could with Carbo, because of the recent punishment of Tiberius Gracchus; but I cannot predict what to expect for the tribunate of Gaius Gracchus. For one day slides into the next, each one more prone to violence, once it gets started. You have seen in the elections how much of a decline there has been: first in the Gabinian Law, 10 then two years later in the Cassian Law.⁴¹ It seems that the people has been divided from the senate, and that the greatest issues are being decided by the impulse of the multitude; more will be learning how to do such things than how to resist them.

The reason for mentioning this

- 15 **42.** Why do I mention this? It is because without company, nobody tries such things. The good need to be instructed, that if they should, by chance, unknowingly become involved in friendships like this, that they not think themselves to be so obliged that they cannot leave their friends when they are doing some great wrong; for those who do such things, equal punishment must be exercised both on those who follow and 20 those who lead the way in such impiety.⁴² Who was more famous or more powerful in Greece than Themistocles?⁴³ As general, he kept the Greeks free from enslavement to the Persians, but when he was sent into exile because he was envied, he did not put up with his country's ungrateful behavior as he should have; he did the same thing that Coriolanus had done to us twenty years earlier.⁴⁴ Neither could find someone to help them defeat their own fatherlands; both ended up taking their own lives. **43.** Such an agreement of malefactors must not only not be cloaked by the excuse of "friendship," but should be countered and 25 defeated by every punishment there is, so that nobody thinks it acceptable to follow a friend when that friend brings war to his own country. Now that this process has been set in motion, I would not be surprised that that will sometime happen; my concern for the country after I am gone is just as great as it is for it now.

- 30 **44.** So let this be set down as a holy law of friendship, that we should ask our friends to do noble things, and do noble things for our friends, and not even wait for them to ask us; let there be eagerness to do it, and no hesitation. Let us dare to give our counsel freely; let the authority of friends who persuade us be especially strong; let that authority be used for admonition – admonition that is both public and sharp, if the situation calls for it – and let it be obeyed, if given.

35 *An objection to friendship: it only causes anxiety*

- 45.** Now, I believe that there are certain rather astonishing doctrines held by some (whom, I hear, are admired philosophers in Greece – and there is no doctrine too strange for them to defend with all their cleverness): they say that excessive friendships should be steered clear of, to an extent, in order that a single person not be too anxious about a lot of people; that it is enough and more than enough to worry about his 40 own affairs, and that it is bothersome to be too involved with the affairs of others; that the most comfortable way is to keep the reins of friendship as loose as possible, so that you can tighten them up or loosen them as you see fit; that the most important thing for a happy life is peace of mind, which someone cannot enjoy as long as he is anxious for many others. **46.** Apparently, others maintain (and in a much less human way, as I mentioned before) that friendships should be sought for purposes of protection and assistance rather than for benevolence and affection; thus the less power or strength one has, the more he should seek friendships; his 45

⁴¹ In 139 BC, voting by secret ballot was introduced by the tribune Aulus Gabinus, and in 137 BC the ballot was extended by a law of Lucius Cassius to juries in criminal trials; in our day of course, we would be inclined to see these as democratic improvements rather than concessions to mob-rule.

⁴² Note again the Roman religious language associated with political life.

⁴³ The Athenian statesman who led the defense against the Persians in 480 – 479 BC, but was ostracized in 470.

⁴⁴ In 489 BC, Coriolanus, in exile, attempted to defeat his own city of Rome.

is how it happens that women seek the protection of friendships more often than men, poor ones more than the affluent, ones in crisis rather than those considered happy.

But anxiety and concern are signs of a good soul

- 5 47. O glorious wisdom! These people might as well take the sun and moon from the sky as remove friendship from life. There is no better or more pleasant gift from the gods than friendship. And what is that “peace of mind”? It is attractive in its appearance, but in reality it must be banished from many places. Nor would I agree to not doing something or putting something aside you have already started; if we avoid concern, we avoid virtue too. For this is necessary when some good concern spurns and hates what is
10 contrary to it, in the way goodness hates evil, self-control hates indulgence, courage hates cowardliness; t14 his is why you would see just men grieving most of all over unjust things; brave men over cowardly acts and modest men over intemperate acts. This, therefore, is the mark of a well constituted soul, that it rejoices over good things and sorrows over the opposite. 48. Consequently, if grief of soul affects someone who is wise (which certainly will occur unless we think that all humanity is absent from such “wisdom”⁴⁵), why would
15 we take all friendship out of life just to avoid having anxieties? If all disturbance of mind is gone, what difference would there be between – I wouldn’t say not just between some farm animal and a human being, but between a human being and a tree trunk or block of stone or some such thing? Nor must we listen to those who maintain that virtue is something harsh, or made of iron: as in many other things, so in friendship, virtue is something gentle and malleable, so that it expands with the good things of the friend, and shrinks at
20 his discomforts. And so, the anxiety which must so often be felt for a friend is not so strong as to remove friendship from life, no more than virtues are to be rejected, just because they bring some discomforts and inconveniences.

What is good loves what is good

- 25 But since, as I said before, a friendship appears when there is some sign of virtue that shines out, to which a kindred soul turns and attaches itself – and when that happens, love will necessarily arise. 49. For what is so absurd as to be delighted by so many empty things like honor, glory, splendid houses, clothes, or body-styling, but not be delighted by the goodness of a soul that can both be loved and (so to speak) love one back? Nothing is more pleasant than the reward of someone’s goodwill, or than the back and forth
30 exchange of interests and acts of favor. 50. And what if we add something else, too – which can rightly be added – that nothing draws and attracts to friendship so much as similarity? Of course it will be granted that the good love the good and that they keep them close to themselves, as joined by nature or relationship. Nothing seeks its own like, or even seizes on its own like, more than nature. And so, Fannius and Scaevola, I am sure that there is a necessary benevolence of good persons toward good persons, and that is the origin of
35 friendship in the nature of things. And this same goodness belongs to the masses. For virtue would not be something inhuman, gross, or arrogant when it protects all the peoples of the earth and looks after their interests, – it certainly would not have such a function if it was repulsed by the affections of the crowd.

“Services rendered” are incidental to friendship

- 40 51. Those who pretend that friendships arise from mutual rendering of services appear to me to take away that loving core of friendship. A service rendered by a friend does not bring as much pleasure as the love, pure and simple, of the friend. Then that which comes from the friend is pleasant, if it comes with an eagerness, and friendships are so far from being cultivated merely for the sake of pressing need, that those who are richest in resources and wealth and in virtue above all (the greatest insurance), are the ones who
45 need another person least and also the most giving and generous. And yet I would not deny that friends do need things at times: how else would our affections have been strong, if Scipio had never needed my efforts at home or on campaigns? But it is not friendship that follows favors, but favors that follow upon a friendship.

⁴⁵ As with the excessively theoretical philosophers mentioned earlier in the dialogue.

Wealth cannot buy friendship

52. Therefore we must not listen to those men abounding in pleasures who will discourse about a friendship which they do not have either in practice or in theory. By the faith of gods and men, who would prefer to be swimming in an abundance of material things and to live having everything to loving someone and being loved? This is the life of tyrants, of course: where there can be no trust, no affection, no confidence in any steady goodwill; where everything is suspect, or cause for anxiety – **53.** who can love someone he fears, or by whom he thinks he is feared? Such persons are frequented only for a while, and with pretense, but if they fall from power, as often happens, then it becomes clear how lacking they were in friendship. Tarquin was reported to have said that when he was in exile, he could tell which of his friends were loyal, and which not, when he could no longer do favors – for either category. **54.** And yet I am puzzled how he could have had any friends at all, with all his arrogance and tyrannical behavior. And just as this man's character could not procure him true friends, just so the wealth of many powerful men makes genuine friendships impossible for them. For not only is fortune blind – she also usually makes blind those who she embraces with good luck, so that they normally become carried away by snobbery and pride, and nothing is harder to put up with than someone with a lot of good fortune but little wisdom. And you also can see examples of people who had perfectly good character beforehand become changed by prosperity, high office or power – they reject old friendships, they indulge in new ones. **55.** But what is more foolish than – although they could do so much with their wealth, their resources, their power: all the things that money can buy they can have, such as horses, servants, fine clothes, expensive housewares – they cannot have friends, the best and most beautiful “housewares” that life can provide. They can get everything else, but do not know whom to get it for, or a reason why they should work. The other things belong to the winner, the one who has the most power to get them, whereas friendships are everyone's stable and certain possession, so that even if you still have the things that we might call the “gifts of fortune,” a life that is barren of friends and their attention can never be pleasant.

Analysis: three views of friendship, based on a narrow concept of “equality,” rejected

56. But enough on that topic. We now have to establish the ends of friendship and define it or determine its boundaries. I know of three views of it in circulation that I cannot accept: 1) that we should feel toward our friends exactly what we feel toward ourselves; 2) that the goodwill we have for our friends be identical and equal with what they have for us; and 3) that one should be valued by one's friends to the exact same measure one values himself. **57.** I cannot agree with any of these opinions.

The first one is certainly not true, that someone should be just as animated toward his friend as he is to himself. Just think of how many things we do for the sake of friends that we would never do for ourselves: to ask for something from somebody who is unworthy to be asked; to beg for things; to take someone to task rather harshly and energetically – not a noble thing to do just for ourselves, but quite noble to do on behalf of a friend. There are many ways, in fact, that good men compromise their own comfort or allow themselves to be compromised, for a friend's advantage more than their own.

58. The second doctrine defines friendship by an equality of duty and willingness. But this is to reduce friendship too narrowly and cheaply to an arithmetical sum, so that the ‘count’ of favors done and received has to be equal. True friendship seems to me to be something richer and more abundant than this, not this careful ‘watching’ to make sure we aren't giving more than we are getting. We should not be afraid of something not working out, or falling to the ground, or that somebody seems to be getting more out of the friendship than the other.

59. The third definition is the worst – that somebody should be valued by a friend at just the value one sees in oneself. Sometimes one friend's mind will be more downcast than the other, or will have a more fragmented hope. Then is not the time for the other to be just the same as the friend feels himself to be, but to work on raising up the other's spirits, to help him pull his hope together, and think better thoughts.

Friendship with an “escape clause”?

Therefore another definition of true friendship must be established, after I mention something that Scipio used to blame most of all. He used to say that no saying more poisonous to friendship could be found than “love in such a way that someday you will be ready to hate.” He could not bring himself to believe that Bias⁴⁶ had said that, who was reputed to have been one of the Seven Sages of Greece – he thought that this had to be the opinion of somebody who was impure or grasping or who wanted to have everything under his own control. How can anybody be a friend to someone who thinks he will become his enemy? That means you would be wishing and hoping that your friend would sin as often as possible, to give you more reasons to blame him, and on the other hand you would be annoyed, sad, or envious about all the things he did right. **60.** That’s why this precept, whoever said it, is effective only for destroying friendship. What should be taught is this: we should exercise such great diligence in securing friendships, that we never begin to befriend someone whom we could at some later time come to hate. And if we did not make a very good choice, Scipio thought that we must simply be patient rather than think about hatred.

But friendship cannot excuse everything

61. I think that we make use of these standards, so that not only the character of our friends will be better, but also that there will be community in all things, all plans, and all willing, without exception, so that, if by any chance it should happen that our friends seek our help in something they want to do that is less than just – something involving our life or our reputation – we must stop accompanying them on their journey, in order to keep something very shameful from happening. For there is a limit to which friendship can be an excuse. Reputation must not be neglected, nor ought we think that the goodwill of our fellow citizens is an insignificant tool for getting things done: it is disgusting to acquire their goodwill through flattery and indulgence in everything. We must never give up on excellence as something that attracts the affection of the people just by itself.

How to select good friends

62. But – since I have to keep returning to Scipio, who was always speaking about friendship – he used to complain that people were always very concerned about all the things they had: that they were able to say how many sheep or goats they had, but not about how many friends; that they put effort into acquiring things like that but were very careless in choosing friends, and didn’t have in mind what the signals and signs should be looked for to know which persons to judge as good for friendship.⁴⁷

We should choose firm and sure and stable persons. There is a great shortage of such. And it is difficult for someone to choose without experience, and the experience is acquired only in friendship itself! Hence friendship runs ahead of judgment, and removes the power that experience can lend to judgment. **63.** Just as a good chariot driver will test his horses, so a wise man will govern his power of goodwill, so that friendship, in a way, can test the character of one’s friends. In some cases, a small financial matter can show how unserious some people are; but others who are not affected by something small may need a larger issue to be revealed.

Rival goods to friendship

If there are some who think it disgusting to prefer money to friendship, where will we find those who do not prefer honors, high offices, military commands, positions of influence, and wealth to friendship, so that if all these things were on one side, and friendship on the other, would not many rather prefer the former? For human nature is weak when it comes to saying “no” to power: even if some get it by neglecting friendship, they think that that fact will be overshadowed by the important reason they have for neglecting the friendship. **64.** Consequently true friendships are very difficult to find among those who are actively engaged in the affairs and high offices of the *Res publica*. Where will we find someone who would put a

⁴⁶ One of the semi-mythical “Seven Sages” of Greece (Socrates was not included here).

⁴⁷ Parts of this sentence seem to be translated directly from Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* 2.4.

friend's political advancement before his own? Or – to put that to one side – how serious, how difficult does companionship in disaster seem to many? It is not easy to find someone who would descend to them. Although Ennius was so right to say, “A certain friend is found in an uncertain situation,”⁴⁸ nevertheless there are two things that give confirmation of levity or weakness: when you are slighted in prosperous times, or deserted in evil times. But the one who can show himself to be serious, constant, and stable in friendship in either situation – him we judge to belong to a most rare type of man, almost a divine type.

The best criteria, again: constancy, goodness, affability

65. But trust [*fides*] is the foundation of that stability and constancy we seek in friendship; for nothing is stable that is untrustworthy. Someone should be chosen to be a friend who is simple [*simplicem*], sociable [*communem*], and agreeable [*consentientem*] – that is, someone who is moved by the same things – all of which pertains to fidelity. A multiple and twisting genius cannot be faithful or trustworthy. We should add to this that he not be delighted by accusing or by believing accusations. All these things pertain to what I have been calling constancy. And so, what I said at the beginning is true: friendship cannot exist except between the good. It is the quality of a good man, whom we may be permitted to call “wise,” too, to hold onto these two things in friendship: first, that there be nothing feigned or pretended (it is more noble to hate openly than to hide your feeling behind your countenance); second, not only to drive off accusations of others but to not even be suspected of misdeeds, always thinking that some misdeed has been done by the friend. **66.** There should also be a certain affability of speech and behavior, which is no small “preservative” of friendship; sadness and severity in all matters makes for seriousness, but friendship must be rather more easy-going, open, and sweet, and inclined to all kinds of companionship and availability.

Old friends? New friends?

67. But there is a certain difficulty here: whether new friends ought to be preferred to old ones, as we prefer younger horses to older ones. Such hesitation is beneath the dignity of a human being, for we ought not “have our fill” of friendships, as we do with other, material things. The oldest ones, like good wine, ought to be the mellowest, and it is a true saying that “many a peck of salt” must be eaten together for there to be a friendship. **68.** New ones, of course, if they bring the hope of the fruits of a trustworthy future crop, are not to be despised, but still a place must be reserved for the old; great is the power of time and habit. Just as in the case of the horse I spoke of, as long as nothing else is the matter, anybody would gladly prefer to use an older, more accustomed one, rather than a new and untrained one. This applies not only to animals, but also to the inanimate, since we have more enjoyment in the places, such as the mountains and forests, where we have spent a longer time.

Friendships with superiors and inferiors

69. But it is most important in a friendship to be able to be “equal” to an inferior. For often there are certain excellences, such as Scipio was in our circle. He never placed himself higher than Philus, than Rupilius, or than Mummius, never higher than friends of a lower class; but to his brother Quintus Maximus, who was his elder, and a completely excellent man, he behaved not at all as toward an equal, but as to his superior, and he wanted all his friends to be great just in themselves. **70.** This is something that everybody should imitate, so that if they have attained any excellence in virtue or intelligence or gifts of fortune, they could share them and communicate them to the others. If they were born to rather humble parents, and should have neighbors who are less in intelligence or honors, they let them increase their wealth and lend them some of their honor and nobility; as in mythical stories, when heroes are raised in servitude because of ignorance of their actual parentage, and then they are recognized to be the children of kings or gods, they still have affection for the shepherds they believed so long to be their parents; and this is all the more to be done in the case of real and true fathers: for the greatest enjoyment of talent and virtue and all excellence is gained, when it is given to another. **71.** Therefore, just as those who hold a higher place in the close bond of friendship ought to lower themselves to be equal to their inferiors, just so, inferiors ought not be sad about being outdone by their

⁴⁸ *Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur*; for Ennius, see note 24 above.

friends in genius or good fortune or prestige. Many of these make some complaint or blame their friends, and all the more so, if they think they have done something dutifully or in a friendly way and with some effort on their part; this is an annoying kind of persons who grumble about the services they “have” to perform, whereas the ones who benefit from such services ought to remember them, not the ones who did them! 72. Therefore, just as those who are superiors ought to descend in friendship, thus in a certain way they should raise up their inferiors. For there are some who make friendship painful when they think they are being despised; which does not generally happen except in the case of those who really believe they should be despised. Those who think this way ought to be lifted up, not only with words but with deeds. 73. But only so much must be given to each person: first, only as much you are able to give, and second, as much as the one you love and are helping is able to receive. For, no matter how much you excel, you will not be able to bring all your friends to the highest honors; though Scipio was able to make P. Rupilius a consul, he could not do the same for his brother Lucius. But for whatever you are able to confer on someone, be sure that the other is able to accept it.

On outgrowing some friendships

74. In general, friendships must be judged only after minds and hearts have been strengthened and confirmed with age: if we loved to hunt or play ball together when we were young, this does not mean we will have the same friends we used to love because they had the same interests. This is the rationale for why nurses and schoolteachers should expect great affection, by right of what they did for us long ago, and certainly persons of that sort should not be neglected – but again, that is something different. Unless we keep the difference in mind, stable friendships cannot endure; for different interests follow from different characters, and the dissimilarity takes apart friendships; for no other reason are good persons unable to be friends with bad, and bad persons unable to be friends with good, except that the difference of character and interests that stands between them is as great as it can possibly be.

On being held back by friendship

75. And it is also good advice for friendships, not to allow excessive goodwill to get in the way of the important needs of friends – which is something that often occurs. To refer to myths again, Neoptolemus could never have participated in the conquest of Troy if he had given an ear to the tearful pleadings of Lycomedes who had raised him, and was trying to prevent him from going to the war. Often, big things happen which make us have to say goodbye to our friends, and if someone wants to keep such things from happening because he cannot easily bear losing you, he is weak and soft in nature and for that very reason not very just in his friendship. 76. In every situation you must consider both what you ask a friend to give and what you allow yourself to give when asked.

On “laying aside” some friendships

There is a certain kind of crisis that sometimes has to occur when friendships are dissolved (we are now of course talking about the common kind of friendships rather than friendships of the wise). The character faults of friends often spill out either against their friends or against others who will let the friends know about it. Friendships like that need to be removed by backing out of the habitual familiarity, and as Cato used to say, should be unstitched rather than torn away, to prevent some intolerable injury from occurring that would force you, or make it morally obliging for you, to reject your friend and separate suddenly. 77. On the other hand, if a certain change of character or interests takes place, as generally happens, or if there is a disagreement in political parties (I am speaking, remember, about common friendships, not the special friendships of the wise), one must be careful that “laying aside” a friendship does not look unbecoming. Nothing is more morally disgusting than waging war against someone who used to be your friend. As you know, Scipio removed himself from the friendship of Quintus Pompey, for my sake, and, because of conflict within the *res publica*, fell out with my colleague Metellus; in both cases he acted seriously and moderately, and without any bitter offense. 78. Consequently, we must first strive that there not be any discord between friends, but if that doesn’t quite work, the relationship should appear to just die away, rather than to be snuffed out. So we must take care that friendships not be metamorphosed into great enmities, which

generate quarrels, name calling, and attacks. If the old friendships are tolerable, they should be kept, and this is one point in favor of an old friendship, that the one who *accuses* is held to be at fault rather than the one accused. In general, the one caution for all these vices and discomforts, the one *proviso*, is not to begin to love too quickly, nor to love the unworthy. **79.** The ones worthy of friendship are the ones who have something loveable in themselves: a rare type – but of course all great things are rare, and there is nothing more difficult to find than something perfect of its kind and in every respect.

A true friend is like another self

But many people do not see anything good even in human beings beyond what they can profit from, and they especially like their friends the way we like cattle: the ones from whom they hope to get the greatest proceeds. **80.** That's why they don't have that most beautiful and most natural kind of friendship – sought just for its own sake – nor even set a good example to themselves of what kind of thing, and of how great a thing this power of friendship is. For each person loves himself, not to get some kind of return on the investment of his love for himself, but simply because everyone is dear to himself. If this principle could not be translated into friendship, there would be no such thing as a true friend, because a true friend is like another self. **81.** But if this appears among beasts whether in air or sea or land, whether tame or wild – first, that they love themselves (in this respect they are like all living things), and second, that they seek and look for other living things of the same kind as themselves to be closer to, and they do this with longing, and a certain human-like love, all the more, then, does this take place by nature in the human being, who both loves himself and seeks for another whose soul he could combine with his own in such a way as to become one instead of two.

The right order for building a friendship that lasts

82. But many people get it wrong, and are, I would say, rather arrogant in wanting to have a friend be what they themselves cannot be, and want to get from their friends what they do not have to offer *them*. But the right thing to do is, first, be a good man, and second, seek out someone like yourself. In such as these that stability of friendship is confirmed to exist, which we have been talking about all this time: when men, joined by goodwill, are masters over the desires to which the rest are enslaved. They will have joy in fairness and justice, will do everything for each other never asking each other for something that is not right or noble; they will not only spend time regularly together and enjoy being with each other – they will have respect [*verecundiam*] for each other, too. If you remove respect from a friendship, you remove the most beautiful part of it. **83.** So it is a deadly mistake to think that all kinds of desires and sins are allowed in friendship. Friendship has been given us by nature to be an assistant for virtues, not to be a 'buddy' in vices, so that what lonely virtue could never do – reach the highest things – in company with another virtue, it can. For those who have this kind of society, this must be considered the best and most blessed company there is, leading to the ultimate good of nature. **84.** This, I say, is the society in which everything can be found that everybody considers worth seeking: dignity [*honestas*], high repute, tranquility of soul, joy – what makes life happy, and without which life cannot be happy. Since, then this is the greatest and highest thing, if we want to have it in our lives, we must put work into becoming virtuous, without which we cannot acquire friendship or anything else worth having, for that matter. If people have neglected virtue, they will think they have friends, but realize their mistake as soon as some crisis brings them to the proof of experience. **85.** Therefore (and it bears repeating) you ought to love *after* you have made your judgment, not judge after you have already started to love. Negligence hurts us in many matters, and most of all in the choosing and cultivating of friends. We get advice backwards, "and do over what has already been done," as the old proverb has it: involved as we are in the back and forth running-about of daily life, we suddenly have to break off a friendship when some offense occurs.

A universal good, unanimously praised – in contrast to other goods

86. This is why such great carelessness, in a matter so necessary, should be absolutely rejected. Friendship is the one thing in human affairs, the value of which everybody agrees upon unanimously. Whereas virtue itself is condemned by many (said to be mere showing-off or self-advertisement), and many

despise wealth, who are content with little and happy enough with plain food and clothes, and as for prestige – which so many burn to possess – how many there are who condemn it, and think nothing more trivial and meaningless! There are so many things that are admirable to some people but are nothing to others. But not friendship. Everybody thinks the same way about it: whether they are devoted to politics, academic pursuits, devote their leisure time to business pursuits, or are even totally addicted to pleasure – without friendship, they would say that life is not worth living, at least if someone wants to live as befitting a free person. **87.** Friendship spreads its tendrils like a vine through everyone's lives, not letting any age or mode of life be free of it.

10 *Man – the animal that “shares”*

In fact, if anyone is so harsh and wild of character as to hate or flee human society – such as we have heard about Timon of Athens⁴⁹ – even such as he had to have someone nearby upon whom to spew his bitterness.⁵⁰ This truth could be illustrated especially, if you could arrange for some god to come and snatch anyone of us far way from this crowded scene of humanity, and place us somewhere where we could have an abundance of all the goods that nature can supply, but with no sight of another human being.⁵¹ Who would be so iron-hard as to stand such a life, where solitude would sap the joy out of every pleasure? **88.** I think that what I have heard older men saying, as handed down to them by the men who lived before them, as the constant teaching of Archytas of Tarentum:⁵² if someone could mount into heaven, and gaze upon the entirety of the universe and the beauty of the stars, then even that sight would not be enjoyable, unless someone else were there, someone with whom to share the exquisite joy. Thus our nature does not like anything isolated, and always strives to have some support, a support that is all the more welcome, the closer the friends who provide it.

Truthfulness and the duty of friendly correction

25 But even though that same nature declares with so many signs what it wants, seeks, and needs, nevertheless we are somehow deaf to nature's cries and do not listen to her warnings. Many and various are the shapes friendship can take, and many causes of suspicion and offense can arise, which it is the business of the wise man to manage in various ways: some you can avoid, some you can ameliorate, some you must just put up with. One kind of offense must be lessened, in order to keep both the help and trust of your friend, for friends must often be admonished and corrected, and such corrections must be accepted if they happen in a kindly way, **89.** but somehow, what my friend Terence the playwright wrote in his *Andria* remains true: “Servility creates friendship, truth creates hatred.”⁵³ Truth is annoying if hatred is born from it: hatred is poisonous to friendship. But servility is more annoying by far, because by indulging in the friend's sins, it allows that friend to fall: the blame is great for someone who spurns the truth and is driven to lie through his servility. So all diligence must be applied here: first, to make sure that the advice lacks any harshness, and second, to make sure that the correction lacks any trace of insult. In serving one another, however, (and I am using Terence's notion of *servility* very freely here), let there be companionship – let sheer conformity (the handmaid of vice) be far away, something unworthy not only of a friend but of any free man. There is one way of living with a tyrant, and another way with a friend. **90.** Someone whose ears are so closed to the truth that he cannot hear it, even when his friend tells him the truth, is too far gone. As Cato's well-known saying has it: “Some of us are better served by our bitter enemies than by our seemingly sweet friends. The former usually tell the truth, the latter never do.” It is ridiculous that the ones who are corrected do *not* feel the annoyance they ought to feel, and *do* feel the annoyance they should not: they are

⁴⁹ A famous misanthrope (human-being-hater) of ancient Greece; also the subject of a Shakespeare play.

⁵⁰ Plutarch (*Life of Antony*) tells the story that Timon had one companion only, a certain Apemantus, and that once, when the two were dining together, and Apemantus said, “What a pleasant party!” Timon replied, “It would be, if you weren't here.”

⁵¹ The main character of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* comes to mind.

⁵² A philosopher/disciple of Pythagoras, visited once by Plato, and credited with founding the science of mechanics.

⁵³ *Andria*, 68. Terence (195 – 159 BC), the playwright whose Latin style is considered among the finest, was an older contemporary of Laelius and Scipio. He was a manumitted slave from Northern Africa.

not anguished about having sinned [*peccasse*], but about being corrected. It should go the opposite way: to feel bad about the misdeed, and be glad about the correction.

Flattery

5 **91.** And so, just as advising and being advised is a mark of true friendship, and treating the other person easily, not harshly; accepting the other patiently, not stubbornly; in the same way there is no worse disease for friendships than adulation, flattery, and total assent. No matter how many different names there are for it, it must be known for what it is: a vice of lightweight persons, deceivers – of people who say all things for the sake of pleasure, and nothing for the sake of truth. **92.** But *any* pretense about anything is wrong (it destroys or adulterates true judgments) and is absolutely hostile to friendship. It destroys truth, without which friendship has no meaning. This is so, because if friendship is like the power of a single mind made out of many, how can friendship ever happen if one of the friends' minds is not one and the same, but something changeable and shifting and multiple? **93.** For what is so bendable and devious as the mind of someone who changes not only according to the reason and will of another, but also according to his every nod and look? As Terence put it in one of his plays: "When somebody says no, I say no. When somebody says yes, so do I. So finally, I just told myself to agree with everything."⁵⁴ This is the character Gnatho speaking.⁵⁵ To keep a friend like that is utter foolishness. **94.** But there are many "Gnathos" around, of much higher prestige than the comic character, with big reputations and in high offices. Their flattery is all the more obnoxious since they add authority to their vanity.

An example of countering flattery in the political arena

20 **95.** To distinguish such "charming" friends from true ones, to really know the difference, requires just as much diligence as it does to distinguish anything phony and pretended from something real and genuine. A popular assembly, even though it comprises the most politically inexperienced persons, is still usually capable of judging the difference between a "popular" i.e., a flattering and superficial citizen, and a citizen who is constant, serious, and solid. **96.** Think of what charming flatteries Gaius Papirius poured into the ears of the assembly not very long ago, when he was trying to pass that law for the re-election of the tribunes.⁵⁶ We persuaded them against it, but I would more gladly speak about Scipio than about myself – immortal gods! How serious he was! What majesty in his speaking! You could really call him a *leader* of the Roman people, and not just their companion. You both were there, you have the text⁵⁷ of his speech: the law was rejected by the votes of the people. And to talk about something I myself did, you may recall how, when Quintus Maximus, Scipio's brother, and Lucius Mancinus were the consuls, how popular seemed Gaius Licinius Crassus' law about the election of the priesthoods: he was trying to transfer the co-choosing of the college of priests to the people, and he was the first to face the Forum when speaking before the people.⁵⁸ **97.** Even so, piety to the immortal gods easily put a stop to his "bribing" speech, when I made the defense. But that took place when I was Praetor, five years before I was consul – so the cause was won by force of argument more than by the authority of the consular office, which I did not have at the time.

40 **97.** On the public stage – which is what the popular assembly is – where there is so much room for fictions and insinuations, truth can still win the day, provided it is brought into the open and explained: what then should happen in friendship, which depends entirely upon truthfulness? As they say, "unless you can see

⁵⁴ *Eunuchus*, 252–53.

⁵⁵ "Gnatho" means "jaw" in Greek.

⁵⁶ Gaius Papirius Carbo (see note 39 above) was trying (in 131 BC) to get Tiberius Gracchus re-elected in order to ensure the success of certain reforms. (The bill eventually was passed, but after the date of this dialogue, when Scipio was no longer living).

⁵⁷ Unfortunately, this text was not passed down to posterity.

⁵⁸ The *rostra*, or speaking platform decorated with captured ship-prows (*rostrum*, "beak"), had first been set up pointed toward the senate house and popular assembly space (*comitium*) but at this time they were turned to face the huge area of the Forum.

your friend's soul or you let him see yours,"⁵⁹ you cannot be confident or know anything for sure— not even the fact of loving or being loved, since you don't really know what is going on.

The dangers of flattery, as seen in Roman comedy

- 5 And yet, such flattery, although deadly, cannot really hurt someone unless the person welcomes it and enjoys it. This is how it comes about that the one who opens his ears the most to flatterers is the one who flatters himself and gets his greatest enjoyment from that. **98.** As a rule virtue is fond of itself, knows itself best, and understands how loveable it is. But I am not speaking here of virtue but only the *impression* of virtue. Many people do not really want to *have* virtue as much as they want to *seem* to have it. These are the
10 victims of flattery: when fictional talk is to their liking and they make use of it, they consider that vain speech as proof of their own excellence. Therefore this friendship is not friendship, when one does not want to hear the truth, and the other is ready to lie. Even in comedies the flattery of hangers-on would not strike me as being funny, unless they are talking to those "braggart soldier" types.⁶⁰ So, when one of those soldiers said, "Did Thais feel grateful to me?," the hanger-on said, "*Terrifically* grateful, sir!" when it would have
15 been enough to say, "Yes, very grateful."⁶¹ Consequently, although this charming vanity is influential only upon those who hunt for it or invite it, nevertheless, some of the more serious and steady persons need to be warned as well, to be on the lookout not to be taken in by it. **99.** You have to be fairly stupid not to detect someone doing it openly: it's the clever and well-disguised way of doing it you have to watch out for very carefully, lest it work its way in. For example, someone doing it is not very easily noticed when he flatters
20 while showing opposition, and, pretending to quibble over something, is really just playing along, until he finally "gives in" – this lets the victim think that more is going on there than really is. What is more disgusting than to be fooled like this? You must take special care not to let it happen, as in the comedy: "How you deceive me and twist me about so elegantly – more than an old fool in a comedy!"⁶² **100.** These are the silliest characters on the stage – the type of the gullible, thoughtless old man.
- 25 But somehow in my talking I have strayed from the topic of "friendships of complete human beings" or of "wise men" (intending "wise" here in the way it can properly be said of human beings) to the topic of the less serious friendships. Let us return therefore to the former topic and attempt a conclusion.

That which spans generations

- 30 Virtue! Virtue, I tell you, Gaius Fannius, and you, Quintus Mucius: virtue is what creates friendships and keeps them. *That* is where things harmonize, where they grow stable, where they endure. When virtue rises up and reveals its light, seeing and recognizing the same thing in another, it moves toward that other and takes it into itself – then there blazes up something called love and friendship. To love a friend, in fact, is nothing other than to have affection for someone you love with no neediness, or special benefit sought,
35 even though benefits will flower from a friendship without your seeking them. **101.** This is the goodwill I had, when I was a young man, for those great old men Lucius Paulus,⁶³ Marcus Cato,⁶⁴ Gaius Galus,⁶⁵ Publius Nasica,⁶⁶ Tiberius Gracchus⁶⁷ (my friend Scipio's father-in-law).⁶⁸ This is also the goodwill that

⁵⁹ Origin unknown.

⁶⁰ The "braggart soldier" (*miles gloriosus*) was a stereotypical character in Roman comedies – there is a play by Plautus (254 – 184 BC) under that title.

⁶¹ Terence, *Eunuchus*, 391–12. Dante, who knew and loved the *De Amicitia*, puts Thais the courtesan in the circle of flatterers in Hell (*Inferno*, 18, 133–35).

⁶² A line from a lost play by Caecilius Statius (d. 168 BC). Like Terence, he was a freed slave and wrote about forty plays (surviving only in fragments like this one).

⁶³ Lucius Aemilius Paulus (d. 160 BC) was conqueror of Macedonia and the natural father of Laelius' friend Scipio.

⁶⁴ Marcus Porcius Cato (234 – 149 BC), also known as Cato the Censor, or the Elder Cato, was a prominent military and political leader, who also wrote a treatise on farming that survives: *De Agricultura*.

⁶⁵ Gaius Galus was a friend of Lucius Paulus and famous for his knowledge of astronomy.

⁶⁶ Publius Scipio Nasica, a famous jurist, was second cousin to Scipio Africanus Minor.

⁶⁷ Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus (d. 154 BC) was married to Cornelia, the sister of Scipio Africanus Major; Tiberius and Cornelia were the parents of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, the famous radical tribunes.

⁶⁸ This Scipio (i.e. Laelius' famous friend) was married to Sempronia, the sister of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus.

shines out more brightly still among contemporaries, such as between myself and Scipio, and Lucius Furius, Publius Rupilius, Spurius Mummius.⁶⁹ And then in turn, as an old man I have found repose in friendship of younger ones such as yourselves or such as Quintus Tubero,⁷⁰ and I am delighted also by the friendship of the still younger men Publius Rutilius and Aulus Verginius.⁷¹ Since our life and our nature is so made up
 5 that every generation comes from the one before, we must most of all hope that we reach the finish line, as they say, “along with the horses that were with us at the starting gate,” **102.** but, on the other hand, since human life is so fragile and perishable, we should always be looking out for someone we can love and be loved by. For when love and goodwill are missing, all pleasure is taken away from our life.

10 *Immortality*

And that is why Scipio lives, and will always live, for me, even though he has been snatched away from us so unexpectedly. I loved the virtue of that man: his excellence has not been snuffed out, nor does it exist in my eyes only – who held it, so to speak, in the palm of my hand – it will keep on shining for those who live after. Nobody will ever undertake great things of the mind or great hopes of the heart who will not want
 15 to have his memory and image before them as a model. **103.** Of all the things that nature or good fortune has given me, I have nothing to compare with the gift of friendship with Scipio: in it, I found agreement about the *Res publica*, advice about personal affairs, and delightful repose for my soul. I never offended him in the slightest way, as far as I am aware, and I never heard him say something I had rather not have heard. We shared a house, a life in common, our military expeditions, our leisure travels. **104.** And then what could I
 20 say about our studies, always finding out about something or learning something new together – that’s how we spent all our free time when we were not in the public view. If my memory of all those things had died when he died, I would not be able to endure in any way the loss of that most close and beloved man. As it is, though, those things are not dead – in fact, they are taking on new life and are growing in meaning, in my memory and contemplation. And even if I had been stripped of them, even my age brings me one
 25 consolation: I cannot go on for very long in this state of deprivation.⁷² Anything that does not last that long can be tolerated – even a big thing like this.

Well – that is what I had to say about friendship. I encourage you to hold virtue on such a high level that friendship (which cannot exist without virtue) is the most outstanding thing there is – *virtue excepted*.

⁶⁹ Lucius Furius (Philus) was consul in 136 BC; Publius Rupilius was consul in 132 BC; Spurius Mummius was not as prominent in political life. His brother Lucius Mummius conquered Greece for the Romans in 146 BC, as consul.

⁷⁰ This man appears in Cicero’s *De Re Publica*. He was Scipio’s nephew, a grandson of Lucius Paulus. He was praised earlier in the dialogue for separating himself from Tiberius Gracchus and his excesses.

⁷¹ Publius Rutilius Rufus was consul in 105 BC and appears in the *De Re Publica* as well. Aulus Verginius was a prominent lawyer and legal expert.

⁷² Laelius was in his late fifties in 129 BC, the dramatic date of this dialogue.