

Marcus Tullius
CICERO

Ethical Writings

ON MORAL DUTIES, ON OLD AGE, ON FRIENDSHIP



Essential Classics of Liberal Studies



全国百佳出版社
中央编译出版社
Central Compilation & Translation Press

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TRANSLATED BY ANDREW P. PEABODY

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Ethical Writings
(On Moral Duties, On Old Age, On Friendship)
Translated by Andrew P. Peabody

BOSTON: LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY, 1887

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

西塞罗三论: 英文/(古罗马)西塞罗(Cicero, M. T.)著.
—北京: 中央编译出版社, 2010. 8
ISBN 978-7-5117-0464-1

I. ①西… II. ①西… III. ①英语—语言读物②伦理学—文集 IV. ①H319. 4: B

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2010)第133460号

西塞罗三论(英文版)

出版人	和 龔
责任编辑	韩慧强
责任印制	尹 琚
出版发行	中央编译出版社
地 址	北京西单西斜街36号(100032)
电 话	(010) 66509360 (总编室) (010) 66509405 (编辑部) (010) 66509364 (发行部) (010) 66509618 (读者服务部)
网 址	www.cctpbook.com
经 销	全国新华书店
印 刷	北京中印联印务有限公司
开 本	880×1230毫米 1/32
字 数	345千字
印 张	13.125
版 次	2010年11月第1版第1次印刷
定 价	30.00元

本社常年法律顾问: 北京大成律师事务所首席顾问律师鲁哈达
凡有印装质量问题, 本社负责调换。电话: 010-66509618

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INTRODUCTION

There are two systems of ethical philosophy, which in every age divide speculative moralists, and are recognized with a more or less distinct consciousness in the conduct of life by all in whom the moral sense has attained mature development. They are, indeed, in different ages and by different writers stated more or less explicitly, in widely varying terminology, and with modifications from culture, religion, national character, and individual proclivities. They are, also, sometimes blended by an eclecticism which cannot wholly transcend the lower, yet feels the intense attraction of the higher sphere. One system is that which makes virtue a means; the other, that which makes it an end. According to the one, we are to practise virtue for the good that will come of it to ourselves or our fellow-beings; according to the other, we are to practise virtue for its own sake, for its intrinsic fitness and excellence, without reference to ulterior consequences, save when, and so far as, those consequences are essential factors in determining the intrinsic quality of the action.

Of course, this general division admits of obvious subdivisions. The former system includes the selfish and the utilitarian theory of morals,—the selfish making the pursuit of our own happiness our duty, and adaptation to that end



the sole standard of right: the utilitarian identifying virtue with benevolence, accounting the greatest good of the greatest number the supreme aim, and beneficent utility the ultimate standard of duty. The alternative system, according to which virtue is to be practised, not for what it does, but for what it is, includes, also, various definitions of virtue, according as its standard is deemed to be intrinsic fitness, accordance with the aesthetic nature, the verdict of the moral sense, or conformity to the will of God. These latter theories, widely as they differ, agree in representing the right as having a validity independent of circumstances and of human judgment, as unaffected by the time-and-place element, as possessed of characteristics connate, indelible, eternal; while the selfish and utilitarian schools alike represent it as mutable, dependent on circumstances, varying with time and place, and possessed of no attributes distinctively its own.



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In Cicero's time the left and the right wing in ethical philosophy were represented by the Epicureans and the Stoics respectively, while the Peripatetics held a middle ground. The Epicureans regarded happiness—or, according to their founder, painlessness—as the sole aim and end of moral conduct, and thus resolved all virtue into prudence, or judicious self-love,—a doctrine which with such a disciple as Pliny the Younger identified virtue with the highest self-culture as alone conducive to the happiness of the entire selfhood, intellectual and spiritual as well as bodily; but with Horace and his like, and with Rousseau, who professed adherence to that school, afforded license and amnesty to the most debasing sensuality.

The Stoics regarded virtue as the sole aim and end of life, and virtue is, in their philosophy, the conformity of the will

and conduct to universal nature, - intrinsic fitness thus being the law and the criterion of the right. Complete conformity, or perfect virtue, is, according to this school, attainable only by the truly wise; and its earlier disciples, while by no means certain that this ideal perfectness had ever been realized in human form even by Zeno, the great master, yet admitted no moral distinction between those who fell but little short of perfection and those who had made no progress toward it. The later Stoics, however, recognized degrees of goodness, and were diligent expositors and teachers of the duties within the scope of those not truly wise, by the practice of which there might be an ever nearer approach to perfection. This philosophy was, from Cicero's time till Christianity gained ascendancy, the only antiseptic that preserved Roman society from utter and remediless corruption.

The Peripatetic philosophy makes virtue to consist in moderation, or the avoidance of extremes, and places each of the individual virtues midway between opposite vices, as temperance between excess and asceticism; generosity between prodigality and avarice; meekness between irascibility and pusillanimity. It admits the reality of the intrinsically right as distinguished from the merely expedient or useful; but it maintains that happiness is the supreme object and end of life, and that for this end, virtue, though essential, is not sufficient without external goods,—so that the wisely virtuous man, while he will never violate the right, will pursue by all legitimate means such outward advantages as may be within his reach.

The New Academy, whose philosophy was a blending of Platonism and Pyrrhonism, while it denied the attainableness of objective truth, maintained that on all subjects of speculative





philosophy probability is attainable, and that wherever there is scope for action, the moral agent is bound to act in accordance with probability,—of two courses to pursue that for which the more and the better reasons can be given. The disciples of this school accepted provisionally the Peripatetic ethics.

Cicero professed to belong to the New Academy, and its ethical position was in close accordance with his nature. Opinion rather than belief was his mental habit,—strong opinion, indeed, yet less than certainty. His instincts as an advocate—often induced by professional exigencies, not only to cast doubt on what he had previously affirmed, but with the ardor of one who threw himself with his whole soul into the case in hand to feel such doubt before he gave it utterance—made the scepticism of this school congenial to him. At the same time, his love of elegant ease and luxury and his lack of moral enterprise—though not of courage when emergencies were forced upon him—were in closer affinity with the practical ethics of the Peripatetics than with the more rigid system of the Stoics; while his pure moral taste and his genuine reverence for the right brought him into sympathy with the Stoic school. Under no culture short of that Christian regeneration which is less a culture than a power could he have become heroically virtuous; under no conceivable influence could he, such as he was in his early manhood, have become grossly vicious. He believed in virtue, admired it, loved it. His aesthetic nature was pre-eminently true and pure. His private character indicates high-toned principle. In an age when all things were venal, no charge of corruption was ever urged against him, even by an enemy. He neither bought office, nor sold its functions. Associating familiarly with well-known convivialists, who

regarded a wine-debauch as always a welcome episode in the pursuits whether of war or of peace, we have no vestige of a proof that he ever transgressed the bounds of temperance, and there is not a word in his writings that indicates any sympathy with excesses of the table. Living at a time when licentiousness in its foulest forms was professed without shame and practised without rebuke, we have reason to believe that he led a chaste life from his youth; and though as an advocate he was sometimes obliged to refer to subjects and transactions offensive to purity, and in his letters there are passages which might seem out of place in the correspondence of a Christian scholar of the nineteenth century, it may be doubted whether in all his extant writings there is a single sentence inconsistent with what a purist of his own age would have deemed a blameless moral character.

He has been, indeed, charged by some of his biographers with motives of the lowest order in the divorce of the mother of his children after a union of thirty years, and his marriage with a young heiress, his own ward. But by the best standard that he knew, though not by the Christian standard so profligately ignored and outraged in our own section of Christendom, he was more than justified. His wife was no little of a virago, had wasted a great deal of money for him in his absence, and had willed property under her control in such a way as to give him just displeasure; and it appears from his letters that he exercised the then unquestioned right of divorce solely on these grounds, with no specific marriage in view, and that the alliance which he actually made was preceded by overtures both to and from other candidates for that honor. Moreover, the charge of mercenary views in this marriage is negated by its





speedy dissolution on his part, with the sacrifice of the entire and large fortune which it brought to him, on the sole ground that his bride had manifested unseemly satisfaction in the death of his daughter Tullia, whom she regarded as her rival in her husband's affection.

Yet there were heights of virtue beyond Cicero's scope. He was wholly destitute of the martyr-spirit. He was much of a Sybarite in his habits. His many villas, furnished with equal taste and splendor, gave him the sumptuous surroundings and the aesthetic leisure without which he could not regard even virtue as sufficient for his happiness, and times of enforced absence from wonted pursuits and enjoyments were filled with unmanly complaint and self-commiseration. He loved applause, suffered keenly from unpopularity, and vacillated in his political allegiance, sometimes with the breeze of public opinion, sometimes with his faith in the fortunes of an eminent leader. He often worshipped with manifest sincerity the ascending star, and had little sympathy with fallen greatness. He was thoroughly patriotic, would have sacrificed for his country anything and everything except his own fame, and coveted nothing so much as opportunities like that afforded by the Catilinian conspiracy for winning celebrity by signal service to the republic. He had, too, large and profound wisdom as a statesman; but his best judgment generally came too late for action, so that had he derived a surname from classic fable, it would have been Epimetheus, not Prometheus. As an advocate he was supple and many-sided, yet he always impresses his reader with his sincerity, and probably a prime element of his pre-eminent success in the courts was the capacity of making a cause his own, and throwing into it for the time genuine feeling

and not its mere eloquent semblance.

His lot was cast in an age when only an iron will could have maintained, along with the conscious integrity which, as I think, characterized Cicero's whole life, the perfect self-consistency which no stress could bend or warp. When we compare him with his most illustrious contemporaries, it is impossible not to assign to him a preeminent place both as to private virtues and as to public services. It is only when we try him by his own standard that we have a vivid sense of his deficiencies and shortcomings.

Cicero's only son, with the heritage of his name, Marcus Tullius, seems to have inherited few of his father's distinguishing characteristics, and not improbably may have borne, in some respects, a close moral kindred to his high-spirited mother. He was impetuous, irascible, headstrong, brave as a soldier, and though indolent except when roused to action, not without ability and learning. At the age of sixteen he served with great credit in Pompey's army. After the defeat of Pharsalia he was sent to Athens to complete his education. He fell there into habits of gross dissipation, being led astray by one of his teachers. He, however, yielded to his father's earnest remonstrances, expressed great grief and shame for his misconduct, and entered upon a regular and studious course of life, winning high credit with Cratippus his teacher, and receiving warm commendation from his father's friends resident or sojourning in Athens. He subsequently fought with distinction under Marcus Brutus, and after the battle of Philippi joined Sextus Pompeius in Sicily. Returning to Rome when peace was concluded with the Triumvirate, he was an object of special regard with Augustus, and after



holding several offices of lower grade, became his colleague in the consulship. He afterward went as proconsul to Asia Minor, where his name drops from history, which but for his father might never have found place for it.

When it appeared that Brutus and Cassius had effected nothing for the republic, and Antony was becoming all-powerful in the state, in the spring of 44 b. c., Cicero, deeming his life insecure, left Rome, and spent the summer successively at several of his villas in Western Italy. He beguiled his disappointment and sorrow at the issue of public affairs by philosophy and ethics, and this summer seems to have been, at least for posterity, the most fruitful season of his life, being the epoch of the completion of his *Tusculan Disputations* and his *De Natura Deorum*, and of the composition of several of his smaller treatises. In June of that year he says, in a letter to Atticus, that he is writing for his son's benefit an elaborate treatise on Morals. "On what subject," he asks, "can a father better write to a son?" In the latter part of the summer he started on a journey to Athens to visit his son, but was recalled by the intelligence of a probable understanding on amicable terms between Antony and the Senate. Deceived in this hope, he repaired to Rome, and pronounced his first Philippic against Antony in the beginning of September. In November he writes again about his ethical work, tells Atticus that he has completed two books and is busy on the third, and announces and explains the title. The work was completed before the end of the year.

Cicero's time was a period of eclecticism in philosophy, especially so among the cultivated Romans, with whom philosophy was not indigenous, but a comparatively recent importation. Cicero himself was pre-eminently a lover of



philosophical thought, study, and discussion, and probably was more intimately conversant with the history of opinions and the contents of books in that department than any man of his time; yet he seems to have lacked profound convictions on the subjects at issue among the several schools. Thus in the *De Officiis*, while he repeatedly professes his adherence to the New Academy and the Peripatetic doctrine of morals, he bases his discussion on the Stoic theory, and intimates very clearly that he thought his son safer under the rigid discipline of the Stoic school than under the more lax though wise tuition of his Peripatetic preceptor. It is as if a Mohammedan, while recognizing the divine mission of the Arab prophet, were to write for his son a treatise on the ethics of the New Testament as better adapted than the moral system of the Koran for the training and confirming of a young man in the practice of virtue.

This treatise, then, may be regarded as an exposition of the ethical system of the Stoics of Cicero's time, yet with a special limitation, purpose, and adaptation. It is not designed for the ideally perfect philosopher, nor for a candidate for that exalted position, but for one on the lower plane of common life. It therefore defines not the moral consciousness of the truly wise man, but the specific duties by the practice of which one may grow into the semblance of true wisdom. Nor does it purport to be a compendium even of these duties. It is simply a directory for a young Roman of high rank and promise, who is going to enter upon public life, and to be a candidate for office and honor in the state. It prescribes the self-training, the social relations, and the habits of living, by which such a youth may both deserve and attain distinction and eminence, and





the respect and confidence of his fellow-citizens. Of course, many of the details in this treatise were of merely local and transient import and value; but its underlying principles are in such close harmony with the absolute and eternal right that they can never become obsolete. At the same time, the division and arrangement of the treatise give it, so far as I know, the precedence over all other ethical treatises ancient or modern. The division is exhaustive. The arrangement is such as to leave an open space for the insertion and full treatment of any topic within the scope of ethical philosophy.

The First Book treats of the Right. The right consists in accordance with nature, with the nature of things, with the nature of man. Hence is derived its imperative obligation upon the human conscience. Its duties are evolved from man's own consciousness. Man by his very nature desires knowledge, and craves materials for the active exercise of his cognitive powers. He is by his birth, by his instinctive cravings, by the necessity of his daily life, a gregarious being, a member of a family, of society, of the state, and as such cannot but recognize justice, including benevolence, as his imperative duty. He postulates distinction, eminence, a position from which he can look down on earthly fortunes as beneath him, and can sacrifice all exterior good for the service of mankind and the attainment of merited fame. He has also an innate sense of order, proportion, harmony, which can satisfy itself only by practical reference to the due time, place, manner, and measure of whatever is done or said. Hence the four virtues of Prudence or Wisdom, Justice, Fortitude or Magnanimity, and Order, Temperance, or Moderation. These virtues in their broadest significance include all human obligations,¹ and form a series of divisions, under one

or another of which may be classed every specific duty. Under each of these heads Cicero shows what was demanded by the highest sentiment of his time from a youth of spotless fame and of honorable ambition.

The Second Book has Expediency, or Utility, for its subject. Outside of the province of duty or of things required there is large room for choice among things permitted,—consistent with the Right, yet forming no part of it. The question that underlies this Book is, By what honorable methods, other than the discharge of express duty, can a young man secure for himself the favor, gratitude, assistance, and—in case of need—the suffrages of his fellow-citizens? This Book has its proper place in a treatise on morals, because it is the author's aim throughout to discriminate between the immoral and the legitimate modes of obtaining reputation and popularity.

The Third Book deals with the alleged or seeming discrepancy between the Expedient and the Right. Cicero denies the possibility of such mutual repugnance, and maintains that whatever is expedient must of necessity be right, and that what is right cannot be otherwise than expedient.

In this translation I have attempted to give, not a word-for-word version of the Latin text, but a literal transcript in English of what I suppose that Cicero meant to write in his own tongue. I have not used his moods and tenses in the instances in which our English idiom would employ a different form of the verb. I have not infrequently omitted the connective and illative words that bind sentence to sentence, in cases in which we should use no such words.² In the few obscure passages I have sought the aid of the best commentators, but have generally found them hazy or ambiguous in their interpretation where there was any room



for doubt. I may have made mistakes in translating; but if so, it has not been for lack of close and careful study, with the help of the best editions which I could procure for myself or find in the Harvard College Library.

I have used Beier's text as the basis for my translation, and have preferred not to deviate from it even where a different reading seemed to me intrinsically probable; for in every such instance Beier gives satisfactory reasons for his preferred reading, and destitute as I am of the needed apparatus for textual criticism, I cannot but regard his judgment in such a case as much better than my own.

