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CICERO  
ON DUTIES



*Translated by*  
WALTER MILLER

# CICERO

## DE OFFICIIS

WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY  
WALTER MILLER

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藏书章



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LIST OF CICERO'S WORKS  
SHOWING ARRANGEMENT  
IN THIS EDITION

RHETORICAL TREATISES. 5 VOLUMES

VOLUME

- I. [Cicero], *Rhetorica ad Herennium*
- II. *De Inventione. De Optimo Genere Oratorum. Topica*
- III. *De Oratore*, Books I–II
- IV. *De Oratore*, Book III. *De Fato. Paradoxa Stoicorum. De Partitione Oratoria*
- V. *Brutus. Orator*

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- VI. *Pro Quinctio. Pro Roscio Amerino. Pro Roscio Comoedo. De Lege Agraria Contra Rullum*
- VII. *The Verrine Orations I: In Q. Caecilius. In C. Verrem Actio I. In C. Verrem Actio II, Books I–II*
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- XII. Pro Sestio. In Vatinius
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- XXIX. Letters to Atticus, Letters 282–426
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- XXVIII. Letters to Quintus and Brutus. Letter  
Fragments. Letter to Octavian. Invectives.  
Handbook of Electioneering

## INTRODUCTION

IN the *de Officiis* we have, save for the latter Philippics, the great orator's last contribution to literature. The last, sad, troubled years of his busy life could not be given to his profession; and he turned his never-resting thoughts to the second love of his student days and made Greek philosophy a possibility for Roman readers. The senate had been abolished; the courts had been closed. His occupation was gone; but Cicero could not surrender himself to idleness. In those days of distraction (46-43 B.C.) he produced for publication almost as much as in all his years of active life.

The liberators had been able to remove the tyrant, but they could not restore the republic. Cicero's own life was in danger from the fury of mad Antony and he left Rome about the end of March, 44 B.C. He dared not even stop permanently in any one of his various country estates, but, wretched, wandered from one of his villas to another nearly all the summer and autumn through. He would not suffer himself to become a prey to his overwhelming sorrow at the death of the republic and the final crushing of the hopes that had risen with Caesar's downfall, but worked at the highest tension on his philosophical studies.

The Romans were not philosophical. In 161 B.C. the senate passed a decree excluding all philosophers



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and teachers of rhetoric from the city. They had no taste for philosophical speculation, in which the Greeks were the world's masters. They were intensely, narrowly practical. And Cicero was thoroughly Roman. As a student in a Greek university he had had to study philosophy. His mind was broad enough and his soul great enough to give him a joy in following after the mighty masters, Socrates, Plato, Zeno, Cleanthes, Aristotle, Theophrastus, and the rest. But he pursued his study of it, like a Roman, from a "practical" motive—to promote thereby his power as an orator and to augment his success and happiness in life. To him the goal of philosophy was not primarily to know but to do. Its end was to point out the course of conduct that would lead to success and happiness. The only side of philosophy, therefore, that could make much appeal to the Roman mind was ethics; pure science could have little meaning for the practical Roman; metaphysics might supplement ethics and religion, without which true happiness was felt to be impossible.

Philosophical study had its place, therefore, and the most important department of philosophy was ethics. The treatise on Moral Duties has the very practical purpose of giving a practical discussion of the basic principles of Moral Duty and practical rules for personal conduct.

As a philosopher, if we may so stretch the term as to include him, Cicero avows himself an adherent of the New Academy and a disciple of Carneades. He had tried Epicureanism under Phaedrus and Zeno, Stoicism under Diodotus and Posidonius; but Philo of Larissa converted him to the New Academy.

Scepticism declared the attainment of absolute



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knowledge impossible. But there is the easily obtainable golden mean of the probable; and that appealed to the practical Roman. It appealed especially to Cicero; and the same indecision that had been his bane in political life naturally led him first to scepticism, then to eclecticism, where his choice is dictated by his bias for the practical and his scepticism itself disappears from view. And while Antiochus, the eclectic Academician of Athens, and Posidonius, the eclectic Stoic of Rhodes, seem to have had the strongest influence upon him, he draws at his own discretion from the founts of Stoics, Peripatetics, and Academicians alike; he has only contempt for the Epicureans, Cynics, and Cyrenaics. But the more he studied and lived, the more of a Stoic in ethics he became.

The cap-sheaf of Cicero's ethical studies is the treatise on the Moral Duties. It takes the form of a letter addressed to his son Marcus (see Index), at this time a youth of twenty-one, pursuing his university studies in the Peripatetic school of Cratippus in Athens, and sowing for what promised to be an abundant crop of wild oats. This situation gives force and definiteness to the practical tendencies of the father's ethical teachings. And yet, be it observed, that same father is not without censure for contributing to his son's extravagant and riotous living by giving him an allowance of nearly £870 a year.

Our Roman makes no pretensions to originality in philosophic thinking. He is a follower—an expositor—of the Greeks. As the basis of his discussion of the Moral Duties he takes the Stoic Panaetius of Rhodes (see Index), *Περὶ Καθήκοντος*, drawing also

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from many other sources, but following him more or less closely in Books I and II; Book III is more independent and much inferior. He is usually superficial and not always clear. He translates and paraphrases Greek philosophy, weaving in illustrations from Roman history and suggestions of Roman mould in a form intended to make it, if not popular, at least comprehensible, to the Roman mind. How well he succeeded is evidenced by the comparative receptivity of Roman soil prepared by Stoic doctrine for the teachings of Christianity. Indeed, Anthony Trollope labels our author the "Pagan Christian." "You would fancy sometimes," says Petrarch, "it is not a Pagan philosopher but a Christian apostle who is speaking." No less an authority than Frederick the Great has called our book "the best work on morals that has been or can be written." Cicero himself looked upon it as his masterpiece.

It has its strength and its weakness—its sane common sense and noble patriotism, its self-conceit and partisan politics; it has the master's brilliant style, but it is full of repetitions and rhetorical flourishes, and it fails often in logical order and power; it rings true in its moral tone, but it shows in what haste and distraction it was composed; for it was not written as a contribution to close scientific thinking; it was written as a means of occupation and diversion.

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a b = *codices Bernenses*. Bern. 10th century.

c = *codex Bernensis*. Bern. 13th century.

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*Editio Princeps* : The first edition of the *de Officiis* was from the press of Sweynheim and Pannartz at the Monastery of Subiaco; possibly the edition published by Fust and Schöffer at Mainz is a little older. Both appeared in 1465. The latter was the first to print the Greek words in Greek type. The *de Officiis* is, therefore, the first classical book to be issued from a printing press, with the possible exception of Lactantius and Cicero's *de Oratore* which bear the more exact date of October 30, 1465, and were likewise issued from the Monastery press at Subiaco.

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# **CICERO DE OFFICIIS**

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