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**Self-Interest, Friendship and Co-operation in Ciceronian Ethics**

In the application of virtue ethics to Roman philosophy there is a useful comparison to be drawn between the Stoic concept of co-operation, outlined in Cicero's *De Finibus* 3, and the aspects of self-interest and expediency explored in *De Officiis*, particularly in book 3. Further evidence from *De Amicitia* for virtuous practice under threat from claims of friendship shows the links and conflicts that assailed Roman concepts of morality in theory and practice.

Writings on virtue ethics over the last ten years indicate ways in which a study of the foundations of acceptable models of behaviour is particularly relevant to Roman assumptions and practices. Although Roman moral philosophy is grounded in Greek antecedents and often follows them closely, the ethical works of Cicero have a particular relevance to the social politics of his time. The three texts chosen here fit well into this framework. The theory in *De Finibus* 3 is of initial self-interest extending outwards through co-operation to a consideration of political and even cosmic responsibilities. *De Amicitia* examines the possible claims of friendship over morality in the demands of the *alter ego*, whereas the temptations of *utilitas* compared with *honestas* in a variety of social and political contexts are analysed in *De Officiis* 3. The Roman slant to Stoicism which interests Cicero in these writings is directly relevant to modern virtue ethics on three counts: (i) there is the aim of providing an ultimate explanation for moral actions that is virtue-centred and bound in with human rationality, (ii) the unity of apparently different virtues as aspects of wisdom in action points the way to a solution of problems concerned with defining and classifying individual virtues, and (iii) the character-based theory of moral agents and their conduct takes on a new significance.

*De Finibus* 3 is the most extended Latin text on ethical theory to have survived. Self-interest is there linked to self-preservation but, with the emergence of reason, the shift from acting according to nature to a wisdom-based 'art of living' points the way to human well-being. In *De Amicitia* the concept of friends as moral agents working together for each other's good is developed as intermediate between self-interest and co-operation; and, despite the competitive nature of Roman politics in the late Republic, it is suggested that the application of ideal friendship in a wider perspective could benefit the general good. Although co-operation looks like the antithesis of self-interest, these texts bring them together in the common themes of human rationality, the character of the agent and the motivation for virtuous action. The agonising over moral choices vividly illustrated in the earlier *De Officiis* shows the need for a secure foundation in the theory of virtue ethics.

***Brief Bibliography***

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