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ABSTRACT

Finding Inspiration (working title)

This essay addresses several topics as suggested in the call for papers, but focuses primarily on leadership obligation in general and specifically on the role of civic responsibility. Essentially the essay considers what many label “service to nation” in the ethical sense and offers some thoughts on how Americans should view this increasingly important aspect in our national life. As the 21st century unfolds, many concerned citizens are alarmed not only about the continuing economic malaise, growing gaps in our social strata and overall direction of our nation, but what many perceive as inadequate and in some opinions, defective executive leadership.

Recent headlines certainly strain our patience with government leaders, business elites and Washington politicians in particular and politics in general. Undoubtedly many Americans question the basic fairness of our capitalistic and overly legalistic system. Public discourse also brings notions of morality to the general outrage that declares “what has happened to our country and its ethical fabric”. There is no shortage of suggested remedies from across the spectrum of social, political and economic thought and punditry. Of course the answer is far from simple, but finding inspiration is not. The real, lasting and renewing answer must reside in how we as a people see moral and ethical leadership. Rather than turning to contemporary sources for this inspiration, we should consult one of the great sources of our basic understanding of civic responsibility. Reaching back to the final years of the Roman Republic and recalling the words of M. Tullius Cicero, we are able to renew our understanding of and purpose for strong ethical, executive leadership as well as the consequences of civic neglect.

Cicero offers the modern citizen much to consider as he witnessed and participated in the declining fortunes of his beloved republic. It is not mere coincidence that two of his great works, *De Officiis* and *De Re Publica*, were composed during this turbulent time. First century (BC) Romans experienced enormous changes in their political, social and economic structures that culminated in the dictatorship of Caesar and followed by years of civil war. Certainly, Romans felt threatened by external forces (Parthian, Gaulic unrest) but the internal, brewing constitutional crises led directly to their decline. It is on this topic that the great orator and statesman devoted his effort to reverse the decline of his beloved republic. His works call upon those attributes that made Roman civilization great and especially urges his fellow patricians to fulfill their responsibilities. He also addresses the duties of ordinary citizens not only to each other but to their country. In Cicero’s opinion there is no relationship “more close, none more dear” than a citizen’s affection and duty towards his country. This relationship is based on “moral goodness” that binds us to each other, our traditions, our laws and to the state.

Cicero, through his masterpieces, provides insight into the decay and eventual demise of one of the great civilizations in the western tradition. This essay suggests he may have much to offer to contemporary Americans as we struggle with our own feelings of estrangement from our constitutional traditions. The essay reviews *De Officiis* and *De Re Publica* and blends some of Cicero’s most poignant thinking into a central theme—a source for the guiding qualities to direct the renewal of America through “moral goodness” and service to the republic—those very qualities that Rome’s executive leadership neglected.

Finding Inspiration: As Americans know only too well the United States faces many problems as we move toward our national tri-centennial. The economic malaise, political and cultural polarization and an overall and general consensus that we are “heading in the wrong direction” clearly are at the forefront of our concerns. There is un-easiness in the land. Our tradition and heritage of national self-confidence seems to be in doubt.

Recent headlines certainly strain our patience with government leaders, business elites and Washington politicians in particular and politics in general. Undoubtedly many Americans are questioning the basic fairness of our capitalistic and overly legalistic system. Public discourse also brings notions of morality to the general outrage that declares “what has happened to our country and its ethical fabric”. There is no shortage of suggested remedies from across the spectrum of social, political and economic thought and punditry. Of course the answer is far from simple, but finding inspiration for the leadership is not. The real, lasting and renewing answer must reside in how we as a people see moral and ethical leadership.

Most agree that references to and sources of ethical leadership will not be found in the media outlets omnipresent in our modern American society. Ethical leadership is more than an occasional act of extending bonuses or a model life outside the office or intermittent acts of courage, or business acumen, or complying with contractual obligations or even being an all-around good and approachable manager. That is because ethical leadership is more than just ethical behavior—as uncommon or common as that might be. Rather, ethical leadership is a lifetime practice that combines intellect, experience, devout service (to a higher goal) and, yes, in a word— virtue.¹

¹ Virtue is a Latin word used in describing manliness, courage, excellence, character and virtue (in our understanding). The Greeks used the *erete*. Using Aristotle’s definition serves best—moral excellence. He viewed moral excellence as achieving the mean between excess and deficiency.

For those who look to the wisdom of the ages, few offer more grist than Cicero through his *De Re Publica* and *De Officiis*.² Though twenty-two centuries separate us, the great Roman orator and statesman provides the inspiration, rationale and personal qualities for ethical leadership in these great classics. He wrote each book for different purposes and audience. Cicero wrote *De Re Publica* to express his views on government, statecraft theory, laws and political leadership. He admired the great Greek philosophers but was especially impressed and influenced by Plato. He styled his *De Re Publica* after Plato's *Republic*, composed in the 4th century BC.³ Nearing the end of his long career, Cicero addressed *De Officiis* to his son as a way to express his views on moral goodness to the wider audience of the Roman people. In these two classics, Cicero offers the modern, troubled American, a source for the guiding qualities to direct the renewal of our nation through moral goodness and service to the Republic—using his beloved Roman Republic as the resulting model of lapsed leadership.

He wrote *De Re Publica* in response to the political turmoil then engulfing Rome. He undoubtedly believed that he needed to remind his patrician friends of their responsibilities in defending the Republic. Rome in the 1st century BC was engulfed in a severe constitutional

² *De Re Publica*: Generally translated as On The Commonwealth or The Republic (*publica* also is used in translating: the state, people, public). *De Officiis* generally translated as On Service or On Duty.

M. Tullius Cicero (106 BC – 43 BC) came from a well-to-do family from Arpinium (about 50 miles south of Rome). Like other ambitious Romans, he pursued the *cursus honorum* serving as a military officer, quaestor, praetor and finally elected consul around 66 BC. He had a long and distinguished career in law, politics, and literature. After Caesar's assassination in 44 BC, the second triumvirate (Antony, Octavia and Lepidus) proscribed his name and Antony's agents murdered him in 43 BC as he was attempting to escape to Greece.

³ Plato's purpose was more expansive than Cicero's effort. Using his famous dialogue technique, Plato (through his Socrates) answers whether or not it is better to be just or unjust. As part of this overall discussion, Plato provides the inspiration and logic in his dialogue concerning the ideal city (state) and how to govern and who should lead this polity.

Plato (c. 428 BC – 348 BC) considered the greatest of the classical Greek philosophers. He founded the Academy and broke with the tradition of using the Sophists to educate the young men of Athens. He was a pupil of Socrates and uses his revered mentor in his dialogues as the voice of logic, reason, and unending questions in seeking the essence. Plato is perhaps most famous as the founder of the western philosophical tradition. He provides us with concepts treating "the good", forms, ideals (ideas), philosopher-kingship, and metaphysics.

crises resulting in the dictatorship of Caesar. The economy stagnated due to the concentration of wealth in a patrician oligarchy. Over the years, Italian small farms had been replaced by ever-larger plantation agriculture (owned by wealthy Romans). This led to massive displacement of the Italian yeomanry with slave labor; while thousands of unemployed Italians migrated to Rome. Rome's population was easily distracted by cheap spectator entertainment and public benefits financed largely by military conquest. Civic responsibility went into steep decline.

De Re Publica takes the form of a philosophical dialogue among several Roman aristocrats over a three day religious holiday at the country estate of Scipio Africanus. If we are to believe Cicero, this conversation is based on actual events several years prior to his composition. In this dialogue Scipio, describes the “discussion carried on by men who were at a certain period the most eminent and wisest in our republic.” The work is divided into six books with portions omitted as lost or unintelligible.

It opens with Scipio inviting and welcoming his guests during the holiday. A discussion ensues concerning a celestial phenomenon which the reader learns is an eclipse. The conversation ranges from its religious significance, to its social meaning, and finally to its role in Roman history. Eventually, Scipio informs the group that the eclipse is a physical phenomenon and any significance stems from man's imagination. Scipio explains that knowledge of this and other natural phenomenon as well as man's nature and habit are necessary for good leaders. He addresses the need for the state to have well-prepared leaders who not only serve in times “of emergency” but serve the state throughout its life. He considers virtue the highest attribute and the vital ingredient for the perseverance of the Republic.

Book I continues with Scipio's guests urging him to continue the discussion by “giving his opinion on the best form of government”. He begins by defining a commonwealth and different

forms of government. The three best forms are kingship, aristocracy and democracy. Scipio goes into a lengthy explanation on the advantages and disadvantages of each. Essentially all three are prone to degenerate into corrupt forms: A monarch becomes a despot; aristocracy becomes oligarchy and democracy a mob. Eventually, his audience urges him to name the best. He answers that a mix of all three. In his view, a good king possesses the affection of the people; the aristocracy has wisdom and the people have freedom.⁴

Cicero, through Scipio, uses the Roman state as the best example of the best government; if not the ideal. To do this, he reaches back to Romulus and the founding of Rome. He provides his guests with a history lesson on Rome's early years of kingship and then courses through the republican years. He leaves his readers to ponder Rome's decline and "what has happened to our nation".

Scipio devotes much time and concern to discussing the commonwealth, which he defines as "the property of the people". He also addresses the laws that govern the commonwealth and describes these laws as the "bond which unites the civic association". He places great emphasis on this and the importance of equality for all citizens under the law. He leaves the reader with the rhetorical question—"For what is a State except an association or partnership in justice"?

This partnership is based on the natural order: men who "are superior in virtue" should lead their fellow citizens and that these "weaker" citizens should willingly follow. Scipio goes on to

⁴ Cicero was not the first writer to set a model for constitutional decline. He was greatly influenced by the Greek writer Polybius (200BC) who as a slave in a patrician household keenly observed Roman politics. He was impressed by and explained Rome's dominance as the result of its constitution. As part of this project he set a six-part model of constitutional circular behavior—beginning with Kingship. Eventually the Kingship will pervert into a Tyranny. When conditions become so bad, the aristocracy will rise-up and take government stewardship from the Tyrant. Eventually the aristocracy corrupts and devolves in an Oligarchy. The Oligarchy will eventually become so burdensome and citizens will rise-up (rebel) and form a Democracy. Democracy, failing to meet expectations will pervert into mob rule which sets the conditions for the rise of the "man on a white horse" to save the people as a King.

admonish his listeners that the rich or well-born are not necessarily the best rulers. Again, he emphasizes the role of virtue in choosing rulers.

In Book III, Scipio turns to the nature of man. Basically, this is a debate over whether the best rulers should be men of theory and high minded principle or men possessing the practical knowledge necessary for successful statecraft. Again, he uses predecessors to compare these points of view. Scipio pits Greek “devotion to political theory” against the Roman practical approach to government. He concludes that the Roman example is the best, since it takes into account man’s nature. The best rulers are men who possess “the union of experience in the management of great affairs with the study and mastery of those other arts.” The “other arts” refer to an earlier discussion meaning knowledge and learning. Basically, Cicero, through his Scipio, is suggesting ability and good character (virtue) combined with experience, theoretical learning and education.

Cicero concludes that earthly duty is issued to virtuous men by God and cannot be easily avoided. Leaders should concentrate on serious matters of state. Petty human concerns have nothing to offer the great meaning of life since they are transitory by nature. But, ever-lasting “glory and heaven” are attainable through virtuous service to the state and its constitutional fabric. Scipio responds by vowing “if indeed a path to heaven, as it were, is open to those who have served their country well, henceforth I will redouble my efforts, spurred on by so splendid a reward.” It seems Cicero, through Scipio, encourages virtuous men to serve honorably the state and the republic in these and all times. They will be rewarded if not in the earthly life, then in the after-life where they will be numbered among the champions of the republic and gods of the people.

In *De Officiis* the great orator is concerned with civic virtue and citizen responsibility to the Republic. He composed his thoughts in the form of a father-to-son discussion. Apparently he believed his son needed encouragement in his studies while attending classes in Athens. He either created or took the opportunity to expand his audience to include his fellow Roman citizens. In a lengthy and matter-of-fact writing style, Cicero discusses what appear to be disconnected topics: To name a few: physical courage, sanitation, winning popularity, and friendship. Wise counsel from the wisest of parents. However, the essence of *De Officiis* is what he terms as Moral Goodness—excellence in why and how we think and act.⁵

Cicero divides *De Officiis* into three books; Books II and III address the perils of moral rectitude (correctness) when in conflict with expediency. Though these are interesting, it is in Book I, that the great Roman details and defines the guiding theme—Moral Goodness. These pages contain the philosophical bulk and rationale that inspires ethical leadership. As in *De Re Publica*, some words have evolved in subtleties of meaning as a result of changing perceptions and attitudes; however the essence of Moral Goodness is clear and unmistakable. Cicero advises his son (and by extension the Roman people) that Moral Goodness is essential to leadership and vital for republican government.

His fatherly advice (to his son Marcus) involves four “cardinal virtues”. In Cicero’s translated words from Book One:

All that is morally right rises from some one of the four sources: it is concerned either 1) with the full perception and intelligent development of the true; or 2) with the conservation of organized society, with rendering to every man his due, and with the faithful discharge of the obligations assumed; or 3) with the greatness and strength of the noble and invincible spirit; or 4) with the orderliness and moderation of everything that is said and done, wherein consist temperance and self-control.

⁵ Cicero uses the Latin word *honestus* when writing about Moral Goodness. There are several translations and depending on the context can mean worthy, honor, high rank, integrity. Obviously, our version of honesty stems from this word and is incorporated in Cicero’s usage.

Modern readers will recognize and could (with imagination) assign Cicero's Moral Goodness to the four Christian virtues of Prudence, Justice, Humility (restraint) and Fortitude.⁶

These virtues are the root system for Moral Goodness and moral rectitude; that is moral correctness in thought, behavior and responsibility. He further states that "No phase of life...can be without its moral duty; on the discharge of such duties depends all that is morally right, and on their neglect all that is morally wrong in life." Cicero was deeply serious in the duty that attaches itself to these virtues; in his view the value of life and the life of republican government depended on the faithful and competent discharge of duty—what we would label "service to nation". In these he sees the philosophical underpinning of republican government—in which his beloved Rome was quickly deteriorating.⁷

Cicero went to great lengths to admonish "his son" about the dangers of lapsed virtuous leadership in governing the Republic. He even called upon Plato to add even more weight to the serious nature of his belief system. He writes to his son that "Plato was correct when he expressed that we are "not born for ourselves alone, but our country claims a share of our being"; inferring that virtuous men have an unavoidable duty (*officiis*) to their country.

Cicero felt so strongly about moral obligations that he devoted much to this topic and its role in the well-being of the nation. He begins by investigating friendship—which he classifies in different citizenship levels. He describes the various inter- and intra-connected relationships that comprise the state. He begins with the bonds of our common human condition, then tightens the bonds in communities at large; personal friendship among/between men; and finally familial

⁶ The three Christian virtues generally accepted as Faith, Hope and Love and are often considered along with Prudence, Justice, Humility and Fortitude as the foundation for a "good" life. Terms like Tolerance, Courage are implied in these terms.

⁷ A decade after Cicero's death in 43 BC; the Roman republic would transition to the Augustan principate (monarchy in all but name).

kinship. All these relationships involve trust and mutual extension of “moral goodness” to each other. The degree of “closeness or remoteness” among these levels depends on the physical and philosophical relationship and, as such, guides our responsibility. The closer the union; the higher the obligation. Eventually, Cicero prioritizes these relationships in terms of duty owed.

All these relationships build into the well-being of the state. In Cicero’s view there is no relationship “more close, none more dear than that which links each one of us with our country.” He believes the family (husband, wife, children), certainly the source of individual happiness, is much more; it is the foundation of civil government and is in essence the “nursery of the state.” It is not only the source of revenue, manpower and other contributing factors to state functioning; it is in the moral goodness within these relationships that provides practical support to the state and the philosophical foundation of the republic.

It seems odd that in writing *De Re Publica* and *De Officiis*, Cicero does not explicitly address executive leadership as a separate topic. He does not provide a list on the proper functioning of government operations in the form of a leader’s “how to” list. Rather, he provides the “why”. He often references past statesmen in Rome’s glorious past—that is, the preceding centuries when the Roman Republic was created and maintained until its dissolution. Cicero’s fellow patricians in the Roman Senate would certainly recognize these figures. In Cicero’s day, the Roman Senate formed the political elite from which the Republic’s magistracies originated. The great Roman families provided the executive leadership beginning with the overthrow of the Tarquinii kingship, established the Republic and led the expansion and refinement of Roman political, legal and military institutions. As such, these families became the seed bed of executive leadership and authority in the political life of the Republic. Consequently, Cicero’s political philosophy does reach the leadership through the conduit of the Senate—perhaps akin to a

philosophical outreach for wisdom, moral rectitude and virtue. He urges them to accept their class responsibility and promote virtuous men for the survival of the Republic.

To the modern reader, Cicero must seem obsessed with his topic. *De Res Publica* and *De Officiis*, could certainly be understood as a political testament on the general subject of proper citizenship and government. Book I (*of De Officiis*) also addresses wisdom and justice; the need for fortitude and compassion in war as well as other positive characteristics, but all of these lofty attributes rely on virtuous leaders and their performance in executive office. If he was obsessed, he had ample motivation. Cicero witnessed and participated in the political life of a dying republican government and was deeply concerned. Certainly, his angst was in part due to his aristocratic status, his wealth, his philosophical sentiment, and gentle nature. But his genuine concern for his beloved republic and Roman civilization in general provided the basis for his belief system and impulse for his work—“For there is no other occupation in which human virtue approaches more closely the august function of the gods than that of founding a new State or preserving those already in existence.”

We, as contemporary Americans should hope (and demand) that our executive leadership—business, government, military—embrace and display the same genuine concern for our *Res publica*. These leaders, in a sense, as modern surrogates for Cicero’s patriciate should accept their responsibility and not only adopt but lead through their influence and example the virtues that have thus far created and maintained American greatness in its full form.

These include demonstrated success in executive leadership as defined by professional, business or organizational codes; a deep sense of justice within the Judaic-Christian context and tempered by our founding documents; and finally, personal humility and prudence through a lifetime pattern of volunteer service. This is much to ask of a modern, secular society; but the

civic virtue missing in the waning days of the Roman republic is now required in our American republic.

Between Cicero's day and ours, obviously there are more dissimilarities than similarities made evident through the passage of time and advancements in political/social theories. And just as obvious—the basic need for enlightened and effective governance remains unchanged. The pressures, intensity and scope of challenges facing our government leaders in their responsibilities match in magnitude and criticality the pressures, intensity and scope facing the Roman senate in Cicero's time. The tools and means may be different, but Cicero's call for inspired leadership and virtue still provide the direction needed in America's *Res publica*.

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