**CICERO**

**On Duties (De Officiis)**

**Book I**

25. In fine, let those who are to preside over the state obey two precepts of Plato, — one, that they so watch for the well-being of their fellow-citizens that they have reference to it in whatever they do, forgetting their own private interests; the other, [54]that they care for the whole body politic, and not, while they watch over a portion of it, neglect other portions. For, as the guardianship of a minor, so the administration of the state is to be conducted for the benefit, not of those to whom it is intrusted, but of those who are intrusted to their care. But those who take counsel for a part of the citizens, and neglect a part, bring into the state an element of the greatest mischief, and stir up sedition and discord, some siding with the people, some with the aristocracy, and few being equally the friends of all. From this cause arose great dissensions among the Athenians, and in our republic it has led not only to seditions, but also to destructive civil wars. Partiality of this kind, a citizen who is substantial and brave, and worthy of a chief place in the state, will shun and abhor, and will give himself wholly up to the state, pursuing neither wealth nor power; and he will so watch over the entire state as to consult the well-being of all its citizens. Nor will he expose any one to hatred or envy by false accusation, and he will in every respect so adhere to justice and right as in their behalf to submit to any loss however severe, and to face death itself rather than surrender the principles which I have indicated. Most pitiful in every aspect is the canvassing and scrambling for preferment, of which it is well said by the same Plato, that those who strive among themselves which shall be foremost in the administration [55]of the state, act like sailors who should quarrel for a place at the helm. The same writer exhorts us to regard as enemies those who bear arms against us, not those who desire to care for the interests of the state in accordance with their own judgment, as in the case of the disagreement without bitterness between Publius Africanus and Quintus Metellus.[1](http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/cicero-on-moral-duties-de-officiis#lf0041-01_footnote_nt063)

Nor are they to be listened to who think that anger is to be cherished toward those who are unfriendly to us on political grounds, and imagine that this betokens a large-minded and brave man; for nothing is more praiseworthy, nothing more befitting a great and eminent man, than placability and clemency. Moreover, in free states and where all have equal rights, there is a demand for courtesy, and for a soul superior to petty causes of vexation, lest if we suffer ourselves to be angry with those who intrude upon us inopportunely, we fall into irritable habits equally harmful and hateful. Yet an easy and accommodating temper is to be approved only so far as may be consistent with the strictness demanded in public business, without [56]which the state cannot be administered. But all punishment and correction ought to be free from personal insult, and should have reference, not to the pleasure of him who administers punishment or reproof, but to the public good. Care also must be taken lest the punishment be greater than the fault, and lest for the same cause some be made penally responsible, and others not even called to account. Most of all is anger to be eliminated in punishment; for he who enters on the office of punishment in anger will never preserve that mean between too much and too little, of which the Peripatetics make so great account,[1](http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/cicero-on-moral-duties-de-officiis#lf0041-01_footnote_nt064) and rightly too, if they only would not commend anger, and say that it is implanted by nature for useful ends. On the other hand, it is under all circumstances to be shunned, and it is desirable that those who preside over the state should be like the laws, which are led to inflict punishment, not by anger, but by justice.

26. Again, in prosperity, and when affairs flow on as we would have them, we should with the utmost care avoid pride, fastidiousness, and arrogance; for it is the token of a frivolous mind to bear either prosperity or adversity otherwise than [57]moderately, and pre-eminently praiseworthy is an equable temperament in one’s whole life, the same countenance and the same mien always, as we learn was the case with Socrates, and equally with Caius Laelius.[1](http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/cicero-on-moral-duties-de-officiis#lf0041-01_footnote_nt065) I regard Philip, king of the Macedonians, though surpassed by his son in achievements and in fame, as having been his superior in affability and kindness. Thus the one was always great, the other often very mean, — so as to give good ground for the rule of those who say that the higher our position is, the more meekly we should carry ourselves. Panaetius, indeed, tells us that Africanus, his pupil and friend, used to say, that as it is common to give horses that, from having been often in battle, rear and prance dangerously, into the hands of professional tamers, that they may be ridden more easily, so men, when at loose reins in prosperity, and over self-confident, should be brought, as it were, to the ring[2](http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/cicero-on-moral-duties-de-officiis#lf0041-01_footnote_nt066) of reason and instruction, that they may fully see the frailty of man’s estate, and the fickleness of fortune. Still further, in the extreme of prosperity, especially, [58]resort is to be had to the counsel of friends, and even greater authority to be given to them than under ordinary circumstances. In such a condition we must also take heed lest we open our ears to flatterers, and suffer ourselves to be cajoled. In yielding to sycophancy, we are always liable to be deceived, thinking that we deserve the praise bestowed upon us, whence proceed numberless mistakes, men who are inflated by self-conceit becoming the objects of coarse derision, and committing the most egregious eccentricities in conduct. But enough on this point.

From what has been said, it is to be inferred that the most important affairs, and those indicative of the highest tone of spirit, come under the direction of men in public life, their official duty having the widest scope, and extending to the largest number of persons; but that there are and have been many men of great mind in private life, engaged in important investigations or enterprises, yet attending to no affairs but their own; while others, no less great, midway between philosophers and statesmen, are occupied with the care of their property, not, indeed, increasing it by every means in their power, nor yet depriving their friends of the benefit of it, but rather, whenever there is need, giving freely to their friends and to the state. Property thus held should, in the first place, have been fairly obtained, and not by any mean or offensive calling; then it should show itself of service to as many [59]as possible, if they only be worthy; then, too, it should be increased by industry and frugality, and should not lie open to the demands of sensuality and luxury rather than to those of generosity and beneficence. He who observes these rules may live in splendor, dignity, and independence, and at the same time with simplicity, with integrity, and in friendly relations with mankind.

27. I have now to speak of the only remaining division of the right, embracing modesty, which gives a certain lustre to life, temperance, discretion, serenity of soul, and moderation in all things.