17

On Friendship[1]

Date: Summer or early autumn 44[2]
Dramatic date: 129
Dedicatee: Atticus
Setting: Town house(?) of Laelius[3]
Characters:
C. Laelius (consul 140)
Q. Mucius Scaevola, augur (consul 117)
C. Fannius (consul 122)

OUTLINE

I. *Prologue* 1–5

Dedication and principal character. While studying with Scaevola the augur, Cicero heard him repeat a discussion on friendship he and Fannius had with their father-in-law Laelius. Cicero memorized the main points of that discussion, and it now seems a worthy object to pursue, one that is especially suitable to Cicero's close relationship with Atticus. This book on friendship, therefore, is written by a friend for a friend. Laelius is the perfect choice for principal speaker: (a) his friendship with Aemilianus is well-known; (b) discourses like this one have more weight when delivered by influential and renowned men of the past.

II. *Propositio* 6–15

Fannius: Aemilianus was exemplary, but it is Laelius who, like Cato and Acilius [cf. *Leg.* 2.59] is called 'wise'. Only one Greek deserved that epithet [Socrates]. The Seven Sages do not qualify.[4] Laelius put virtue above all else. How, then, did he bear the death of Scipio? People say grief kept him from the last meeting of the augurs (6–7). *Scaevola*: Failure to attend must have been due to ill-health. *Laelius*: It was certainly ill-health. Personal troubles should never take precedence over duty. Cato, [Aemilius] Paulus (consul 182, 168), and [C. Sulpicius] Galus (consul 166) set excellent examples by the way in which they endured the death of their sons[5] (8–10a). To mourn for Aemilianus is a selfish action, and my grief is mitigated by the belief that he now suffers no evil. His life was filled with success – twice consul, victor over Carthage and Numantia, a devoted family man, just to everyone. And at the end he was blessed with a sudden death[6] (10b–12). Those men [Epicureans] are wrong who say that the soul dies with the body.[7] On the contrary, the soul is eternal, as the forefathers, the Pythagoreans, and even Socrates maintained [cf. *Sen.* 78]. Aemilianus himself believed this, for in *On the Republic* he concluded with arguments on the immortality of the soul [*Scipio's Dream*]. If the souls of good men easily escape the

prison of the body, Aemilianus surely had an easy passage. If, however, the soul dies with the body, there may be nothing good in death, but there is nothing bad either, for all sensation is lost[8] (13–14). Laelius counts his life happy because of his friendship with Aemilianus. They were of one mind in everything, and perhaps some day their friendship will be ranked among the best examples[9] (15).

16 III. *Partitio*
Fannius: That will surely come to pass. I am glad you mentioned friendship and are at leisure, for we would like you (a) to give us your opinion of it (*quid sentias*); (b) to discuss its nature (*qualem existimes*); and (c) to set forth your rules governing it (*quae praecepta des*). *Scaevola*: I agree. Please oblige us.

(17–100a) IV. *Argumentatio* (*Confirmatio*)

(17–25) [a] *Quid sentias*. The subject is a worthy one, but to do it justice one needs the skill of the Greeks, who are able to discuss any subject *ex tempore*. However, here are a few thoughts on it:

17 [i] Friendship must be placed before all human concerns, for nothing else is so in tune with nature.

18–19a [ii] Friendship can only exist among good men (*boni*), men like C. Fabricius [Luscinus] [consul 282, 278], Manius Curius [Dentatus, consul 290, 284, 275, 274], and Ti. Coruncanius [consul 280], whose lives were guided by loyalty, honesty, fairness, generosity, and steadiness (*fides, integritas, aequitas, liberalitas, constantia*) and were free from greed, lust, and effrontery (*cupiditas, libido, audacia*). These men all followed nature, the best guide to a good life.[10]

19b–21 [iii] Goodwill (*benevolentia*), affection (*caritas*), and agreement in all things (*consensio*) must all be present in friendship.
[iv] Virtue is also a necessary ingredient, not the virtue of the Stoic Sage, but that of good men like Aemilius Paulus, Cato, Galus, Aemilianus, and [L. Furius] Philus [consul 136].

22–4 [v] A friend is an *alter ego*.[11] He makes pleasures more enjoyable and burdens more bearable. The strength of this bond is illustrated in the belief of a certain Greek philosopher [Empedocles of Agrigentum, fl. 440], who held that the universe is drawn together by friendship (*amicitia, philotês*) and destroyed by discord (*discordia, neikos*). Men praise examples of this attachment, e.g. recently a theatre audience applauded Pylades, who was willing to die for his friend Orestes.

25 Fannius and Scaevola urge Laelius to continue, expressing interest in the thrust of his argument, which differs from that of other philosophers[12].

(26–61) [b] *Qualem existimes*

26–32 [i] The origin of friendship. Friendship (*amicitia*) does not arise from need and weakness but from love (*amor*) which is derived from nature itself.[13] It can be seen in animals as they care for their young, or between parents and children. It also springs up between two men of similar customs and character.[14] Virtue is most lovable and instils in us a fondness even for worthy people we have never met, e.g. Fabricius, Curius and even Pyrrhus. Negative *exempla*: Tarquinius Superbus [reigned 534–510], Sp. Cassius [consul 493], Sp. Maelius [d. 439], and Hannibal[15] (26–8). Advantages may indeed result from a friendship, but they are secondary and are generated by the goodwill which comes from a love of virtue. True friendships, however, such as that of Aemilianus and Laelius, are not formed for profit but from mutual admiration. Some men [Epicureans] disagree with this and make the origin of

friendship ignoble.[16] They must be disregarded. Need and weakness (*inopia, imbecillitas*; also *utilitas*) do not make permanent relationships; nature, being eternal, does (29–32).

[ii] Extent and conservation of friendship. (33–55)

[1] Dangers to lasting friendship. Rivalries occur – in love, politics, and money matters – which break up a friendship. Immoral requests are also destructive. And sometimes men's characters change under the stress of hard times and old age. 33–5

[2] How far should *amor* go in friendship? (36–48a)

Let no one ask a friend to do anything shameful (*turpe*) or do it himself if asked. This is especially true of those who act against the state, e.g. Coriolanus [in 491], Sp. Cassius (cf. 28), Maelius (cf. 28), Themistocles [in 471], or Ti. Gracchus.[17] Blossius of Cumae received his just deserts for supporting Gracchus. It is never just to sin for a friend.[18] Certainly Aemilius Papus [consul 282, 278] and C. [Fabricius] Luscinus or M' Curius and Ti. Coruncanius never did. Ti. Gracchus, however, found friends to do his bidding: C. [Papirius] Carbo [consul 120], C. [Porcius] Cato [consul 114], and his own brother [tribune 123].[19] This indicates how rapidly the political situation is deteriorating. The Gracchi are only one example. Add to that the extension of the secret ballot, and the stage is set for revolution. More than ever now, alliances of wicked men should be punished, for no one should be allowed singlehandedly to destroy his native state.[20] 36–43

Friends should be involved in each other's affairs. They must give good advice to one another and accept it in turn. Certain philosophers [Epicureans] maintain that close friendship is a bad thing, for it prevents a man from living a happy life, which they define as 'freedom from care' (*securitas*) (44–5). Other philosophers [Cyrenaics; cf. 51], who insist that protective aid (*praesidium, adiumentum*) is the basis of friendship (cf. 26–32), make that relationship attractive only to the weak: the poor, the unfortunate, and women (46). But life without friendship is no life at all. Avoiding anxiety is not worth the loss. Even Virtue is troubled somewhat when rejecting and despising vice, e.g. evil, lust, cowardice. It is not iron-hard [as the Stoics maintain] but expands and contracts with pleasure and pain. Therefore, anxiety for a friend should not deprive life of friendship, just as trouble and care should not deprive it of virtue (47–48a). 44–48a

[3] Virtue in friendship. Virtue must be present in friendship, for it draws good men together. The goodwill engendered by this friendship of good men benefits all mankind, for it is the nature of virtue to serve (48b–50). Those who say that the basis of friendship is its usefulness [Cyrenaics; cf. 46] are wrong; the advantages which may result from a friend's desire to help are secondary to the pleasure derived from the love which inspired that service (51). 48b–51

[4] The importance of friendship. Love and friendship are more important than wealth and power. Tyrants may be surrounded by so-called friends, but when they fall from power they see how few they really have, e.g. Tarquinius Superbus. Why do they value things above friends? Material possessions will eventually belong to the strongest, but true friends will remain a permanent possession. 52–5

[iii] The limits of friendship. Four false views: (a) a friend must be treated as another self;[21] (b) absolute reciprocity must prevail in friendship; (c) the love 56–61

easily spotted. Others are clever (*callidi*) and hard to detect. Even the mo serious and steady men will have to be on guard against them, for flatterer can make a fool out of his unsuspecting victim. See what he do to the silly old men in comic plays [cf. *Sen.* 36].

100b–104 V. *Peroratio*
The discussion returns to the friendship of good men (*boni*). Virtue personified and praised as the maker and preserver of friendship (*concili conservat*). The basis for friendship is love, a product of virtue, not need advantages. This is what attracted Laelius, while still a youth (*adulescens*), to old men: L. Aemilius Paulus, Cato, Galus, Scipio Nasica Corculum (consul 162, 15 and Aemilianus' father-in-law, Ti. Gracchus [consul 177, 163];[36] to men of own age: Aemilianus, Philus, Rupilius, Mummius; and to the young: Scaev and Fannius, Q. [Aelius] Tubero [tribune 133], P. Rutilius Rufus [consul 105] and A. Verginius. In Aemilianus, Laelius found the perfect friend. They agre on all things, shared all things. Though Aemilianus is gone, the memory of th experiences makes the loss endurable, and the time of suffering will be sho since Laelius is now an old man.[38] There is also comfort in the thought th Aemilianus is not really dead, for his virtue lives on and will affect even futu generations. Laelius ends the discussion by urging his sons-in-law to consid nothing preferable to a friendship based on virtue.

1. General considerations: Matius

Friendship is a term used to represent relationships on several differe levels.[39] It is therefore necessary to examine its various meanings a the importance of each in Cicero's life, for any discussion of Cicer originality in this essay must rest in large part upon the influence t bond of friendship had on him, especially during the period of composition.

The word was then, as now, most commonly employed very loosely. the broadest use of the term a stranger might be called a friend mer to show goodwill.[40] Early Americans often used this mode of addr when meeting Indians. Secondly, Romans making ceremonial vis (*salutatio*) might be called *amici* out of courtesy, since high-ranking a influential men would not have taken kindly to the term 'client'. Final the word 'friend' might refer to legal and political opponents just modern lawyers and politicians do today. It is used to avoid perso quarrels and to make political fence-mending possible. At the mid-te Democratic Convention in 1978, one politician remarked to a facti leader, 'I'm embarrassed that I would ever find ourselves on the oth side from you. I know where my friends are.' To a reporter explained, 'I want to make [sic] nice to him, so that when we beat th we'll stay friends.'[41] Cicero claimed he was still a friend of Antony ev when openly criticizing him (*1 Phil.* 11–12). Attacks could be made, b the courtesies must be observed. Failure to follow this rule could costly, as Cicero found out.

The second level of friendship involved a much closer perso relationship. It usually was of long duration, could develop only amo

relatively few people, and was based on common interests which could prevail even over political differences.[42] The bond between Caesar and Cicero survived the rupture caused by Cicero's exile and even the ultimate disaster of civil war.[43] The best example of this relationship, however, is the friendship between Cicero and Matius.[44] Matius, a fellow equestrian, was one of Cicero's oldest friends. In the 50s[45] Matius secured a place for Cicero in Caesar's inner circle (*ut me diligeret, coleret, haberet in suis*) and was again of great help to Cicero both during and after the Civil War. The ensuing peace enabled the two men to enjoy at last the *consuetudo* Cicero felt was so necessary to friendship (*Amic.* 29) and they spent much time together in pleasant conversations. However, after the Ides of March a rift developed. In an April letter to Atticus (14.1.1), Cicero criticized Matius for his condemnation of Caesar's assassination and his elation (*gaudens*) at the disaster he predicted would follow. In May Cicero again complained (*Att.* 15.2.2), this time because Matius was helping to underwrite the games Octavian was planning in Caesar's memory. This carping must have continued through the summer and have eventually reached Matius, for Trebatius informed Cicero in August that Matius felt he had cause for complaint (*querella*). Cicero promptly wrote a letter to Matius and attempted to allay his suspicions. He reviewed the history of their friendship and insisted that he would never do anything to disrupt it, for Matius had always shown loyalty (*fides*) and constancy (*constantia*). He maintained that he had always defended Matius against any detractors, and did not hold with the view that Matius must be blamed for putting a personal relationship before loyalty to the state. Matius' reply contained a strong pledge of continuing friendship coupled with a spirited and heartfelt justification of his political actions and his friendship with Caesar (*Fam.* 11.28).

The political differences between Cicero and Matius kept their friendship from the highest possible level, one in which there was complete accord in all things without exception. Such was the relationship between Cicero and Atticus.[46] Their lifelong friendship persisted in spite of a lengthy separation (from 88 to 65 when Atticus lived in Greece), which was fuelled by hundreds of letters (sometimes more than one on the same day) and long, chatty visits. Their mutual goodwill was strengthened by complete harmony and reciprocal services. Atticus was Cicero's publisher and his financial adviser as well as a competent source of historical information. They shared both joys and sorrows, Atticus giving concrete evidence of this by loaning Cicero 250,000 sesterces during his exile and trying (unsuccessfully) to have a temple dedicated to Tullia as some consolation for the bereaved father. Cicero responded by dedicating two of his most charming works to him. *On Friendship* is a tribute to their consummate compatibility.

Thus it is evident that the paramount need for the observation of courtesies, the disturbing rupture of friendship over political differences, and the comforting reliance on the ultimate friend all were

brought home vividly to Cicero during the trying time after the Ides
March. That they were influential in the design and content of the ess
On Friendship will be discussed below.

2. Sources and originality

Indisputable evidence for borrowing from Greek writers is extreme
limited. One source was a (lost) treatise on friendship by Theophrast
But it was available to Gellius, who remarks (*Noct. Att.* 1.3.10) that 'Cice
seems to have read this book when he too was writing on friendship'
Reid points out that there are also one or two direct imitations of
Socratic dialogue on friendship recorded by Xenophon (*Mem.* 2.4.1,
Amic. 62).[48] Whether or not he borrowed from any other author w
wrote on the subject can only be conjectured. Friendship was a popul
subject among philosophical writers, and Cicero was certain
acquainted with these works, either at first hand or through the
intellectual conversations of which he was so fond. It was the topic
Plato's *Lysis* and the theme of two books (8–9) in the *Nicomachean Eth*
But there is no proof Cicero borrowed directly from these works, ev
though there are, for instance, parallels with Aristotle's works, e.g. t
alter idem (*EN* 1166a23; (*Amic.* 80); the need for mutual goodwill (
1156a1–6; *Amic.* 20, 22); the sharing of joy and sorrow (
1171a21–b19; *Amic.* 22). However, many of Aristotle's quotable quo
had become commonplace maxims and this could easily account for t
similarities.[49]

As for Roman sources, Cicero as usual drew on poets and playwrigh
(e.g. Ennius and Terence) for suitable lines and quoted Cato whene
the subject made it appropriate. He no doubt consulted Atticus
historical points,[50] and the oral tradition cannot be discounted.[51]

However, the most important source for *On Friendship* was certai
Cicero himself – his own writings and his own experiences. He h
already touched upon the subject in earlier works (e.g. *Inv.* 1.
2.166–8; *Leg.* 1.12.34; *Tusc.* 5.23.66), and the references to *amici* a
amicitia in his letters are legion. The essay *On Old Age* provides as ma
as 81 comparisons of content, vocabulary, and grammatical constr
tion. The similarities are probably only natural, since the two works w
written only a few months apart, had nearly the same dramatic d
(150, 129), and a common *dramatis persona* in Laelius.[52] In addition,
temporary excitement of the Ides of March and the possibility
returning to an active political life faded rapidly, and Cicero fou
himself in the same limbo during the middle of 44 as he had been
previous winter.[53] He therefore took comfort in writing on two subj
which must have been occupying his thoughts – his advancing age
was 62) and the strains which political alliances had put on friendship

The need for the basic courtesies of friendship was very much
evidence during the upheavals of 44. In *On Friendship* 23 Cicero rega
them as essential for the well-being of the state, which could so easil

overthrown by hatred and dissension. It was nip and tuck in the real world as well, and what Cicero advocated in theory he put into practice. On 2 September he delivered the *First Philippic*, in which he avoided personal abuse and maintained that bonds of friendship still existed between himself and Antony. The problems arose when Cicero forgot his own advice. No reconciliation was possible when his attacks became scurrilous, and Antony never forgave him.

The strain in his relations with Matius is also reflected here. If Julius Caesar was indeed the model for Cicero's portrait of Tiberius Gracchus, as has been suggested, then surely Matius can be found in the loyal Blossius. Matius did not desert Caesar either, even though he strongly disapproved of civil war (*Fam.* 11.28.2). This, of course, is a crucial problem in Cicero's discussion: just how far should a friend's loyalty go (36–43)? He argues there is no justification, no excuse, for sinning on behalf of a friend (37). Sins in general are dishonourable, but especially unconscionable are those against the state (40). No one must think it is proper to follow a friend who wages war against his own country (43).[54] And in 77–8 he sadly advocates an end, but a gentle one, for friendships which have foundered on the rock of political differences. In spite of these strong feelings on the matter, however, Cicero was reconciled with Matius. This, too, is explained in the essay: 'Nothing is more discreditable than waging war on someone with whom you have been intimately connected' (77).[55] And surely he had Matius in mind when he wrote that friends must not be suspicious of one another (65; cf. *Fam.* 11.27.6). He added that friendships are enhanced by a certain charm (*suavitas*) of speech and manner (66), using the same word he had once chosen to describe Matius (*suavissimus* [*Att.* 7.15.2]). And in 67 he emphasizes that the oldest friendships are the best, another clear reference to Matius.

But Matius was not the only one with whom Cicero had a long-standing relationship. The passage surely also applies to Atticus, whose friendship, as we have seen above, remained steadfast throughout the vicissitudes of Cicero's political and private life. In dedicating the work to Atticus, Cicero tells him that in Laelius he will recognize himself (5)[56] and, in describing the highest association which can exist among men, he includes all the traits which characterized their own relationship: total accord of purpose, interests, and opinions (*voluntas, studium, sententia* [15]; *communitas omnium rerum, consiliorum, voluntatum* [61]); mutual goodwill (20, 22) and services (26, 29);[57] the frank and gracious exchange of true advice (44, 90);[58] constancy and loyalty (*constantia, fides*; 64–5); the perfect match of souls (*alter idem*; 80). The summing up by Laelius of his relationship with Aemilianus (103–4) is a beautiful tribute to Atticus' friendship with Cicero.

It is this personal and practical aspect, this purely Roman perspective, that gives the work its originality. Leaving theory for the most part to the Greeks, Cicero again, as in his essay on old age, makes the subject relevant to his everyday world and to ours. The popularity of this

treatise through the ages gives ample testimony of this,[59] for the to has continued to intrigue thinking men – Plutarch, Montaigne, Bac Milton, Jeremy Taylor, Tennyson and Emerson. Inhabitants of t modern world may go farther and travel faster, but such technologi advances make the age-old problem of personal relations even mo significant and much more difficult. A mobile society puts almo impossible demands on friendship but the need is still there.[60] O recently the *New York Times* (27 January 1986) printed an article Margot Slade on this very subject entitled 'The ebb and flow of frien which stated that shared interests and activities[61] remain necessa ingredients of friendship. It went on to say that some of us are still ab to maintain longer-lasting friendships because the friendship was on reciprocal and could be so again. However, the article stressed that friendship should involve non-obligatory interaction' (people should g together because they want to, not because they have to) and conclude that friendships end because 'people don't put energy into [them]'. No of this is new to readers of Cicero, who knew that friendship neede work to survive ('Nothing is more difficult than to continue friendship the end of life' [33]). Long before the *New York Times* article declared th friends don't die with a bang; they just fade away, Cicero was advocatin that friendships which had to end should be unravelled gently, not to abruptly (76), should burn out rather than be stamped out (78).

It gives one pause to think that our swift-moving, computer-oriente world, of which we are so proud, has not come very far in 2,000 years i the area of human relations. Perhaps the very speed at which we live destroying any chance we have of establishing the kind of rapport wit another human being that Cicero realized was so important to the ver soul of our existence. His essay *On Friendship* addresses that very bas need in all of us – the need for true friends (86) – and therein lies i eternal relevance and poignant charm.